

CITE: Weathering the storms

The Molejon family recovered from the devastation caused by super typhoon Yolanda that hit the Philippines in 2013.

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Super typhoon Yolanda (international name Haiyan) hit the Philippines on November 2013. It caused severe damage in the Visayas region, particularly Leyte, Southern Samar, and Northern Cebu. Yolanda was the strongest recorded tropical typhoon, with sustained winds of 195

mph and gusts up to 235 mph. 11 million people were affected. The death toll was in the thousands and many were left homeless.

"When from Rome, I viewed this catastrophe, I felt that I had to be here," Pope Francis told the people in Tacloban (Leyte), Philippines on January 17, 2015, four years ago today. "I wanted to come to be with you," he said in his homily amid rain, even as another storm was about to hit the island.

San Remigio, a modest town in Northern Cebu was badly hit. The Molejon family was one among thousands of victims. Typhoon Yolanda destroyed their home and swept away their corn produce. The townsfolk of San Remigio earn their living mostly by fishing or farming.

The long trek back to rehabilitation would have been many times harder for the Molejons, were it not for

Arriel, 25, who stepped up to the plate to provide for the family.

Born third among five children, Arriel, from a young age already showed interest in earning a college degree despite his family's financial constraints. "I wanted to become a computer engineer someday so I could help my parents and send my younger siblings to school," Arriel said.

Through the sponsorship of civic groups and help from the local community, Arriel completed a 3-year diploma program in Information Technology at CITE (Center for Industrial Technology and Enterprise) in Talamban, Cebu. Blessed Álvaro del Portillo pushed for setting up this technical school after his visit to Cebu in 1987. The vision was to give young people the chance to earn a decent living and help their families.

Arriel's mentor and adviser in CITE, Engineer Neil Agbay, recalls how diligent his mentee was in completing his course, amidst the challenges of being away from home. "Arriel was a shy type of student, but he worked hard to exceed expectations and was bent on finishing his studies," said Agbay.

After completing 15 months of in-plant training at SSI Opiniology, a sampling and data collection provider in Cebu City, Arriel was employed by the company even before his graduation in 2013. While fending for himself in the Cebu capital, he lived frugally in order to send money to support his family in San Remigio. Then Typhoon Yolanda hit.

This served as an incentive for Arriel to work even harder. Now, he is a senior data processor at Research Now Survey Sampling International

(SSI), a merger of two global leaders in digital research data. With his income, he was able to provide for the rehabilitation of their small farm, the repair of their old house, and now the construction of a new home.

"The people of San Remigio are resilient," says town mayor Mariano Martinez. Throughout these past years, with the mutual help of the townsfolk and the assistance of generous individuals, they were able to start over and rebuild their lives.

Arriel is grateful to divine providence and to all who helped San Remigio weather the storms of life.

As the reconstruction continues, his father Rudy motions to a nearly completed house beside their old home. "Arriel was responsible for building this new house for us," he said with pride.

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