

SEASON OF STORMS



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Typhoons align with Philippines like planes on final approach to Manila Intl Airport

An average year, typhoons hit the Philippines in 9-day intervals, mostly from June to November. Typhoons in the South Pacific Ocean feast and strengthen on warm tropical waters of the Philippine Sea then rudely slam the 7,107 islands with tremendous intensity. Story and photo by David L. Dwiggin

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TYPHOONS ALIGN WITH PHILIPPINES LIKE PLANES ON FINAL APPROACH TO MANILA INTL AIRPORT

By David L. Dwiggin

Arrival of Typhoon Rammason (Bagyo Glenda)

First winds from west and northwest removed electricity and all light about 11:00 p.m. It was now hours later and I'm in a stupor at the window. Darkness curtailed me from viewing origins of dreaded crashing and horrifying crunching outside my window. Typically, the transom offers a hovering panorama of the valley and mountains, however, this instant found me coveting my neighbors in safer dwellings in the valley. I wanted to look but I wanted to shield my eyes from flying debris, specifically glass and tin roofing. Winds were gusting, thrashing and destroying homes, trees, future harvests and undoubtedly tossing roofs far from their walls, and yet, there was probably flooding in the basin too. Thoughts caught me guessing; which of the places would I rather be. Even correct answers seemed to be wrong.

Roofs are made to shield a home from falling rain, not rain cannons blasting a house from all sides. This is my home and my only tools for damage prevention were some towels, four pairs of blue jeans and some floor rugs to save inner walls and ceilings downstairs. As I heard a crash, I ducked or dodged; if the whine and howl of the wind increased to pitches I had never heard, I just shut my eyes and hoped it would go away.

Halftime

Several hours passed and slightly after 3 o'clock a.m. winds broke to a breeze and rain to a trickle. My first years in the Islands, I was relieved to know the storm had passed. How wrong I was! A typhoon's anatomy resembles a hurricane; this was only the eye of the Category 4 storm, halftime.

I affixed my eyes to the valley straining to see something optimistic. I realized one big tree had ducked out of sight. Setting sights to where it had been was difficult but observing it was not on my roof was a relief. Maricel, our housekeeper remarked that our laundry was in the wash area to dry. We hasty converged on the area and grabbed all. We were lucky.

I heard voices outside and unlocked my upstairs doorway to the boulevard. I carried an umbrella and inspected the property; my neighbors were doing the same. Nearest was an entire porch in the street and broken trees lay in the street. I couldn't see well enough to observe a lot. The dogs are security for our home and they usually barked and approached anything that moved past our gates. Now they were in total shock and stayed as far away as possible, hoping they were hidden from any further winds. This was their first big typhoon and they were burying their eyes and shivering. Rain waters were flowing almost in whitecaps as they turned the corner and flowed downward to the shanties at the hill's bottom. I knew there was flooding; I just couldn't see it. Occasional gust kept me hanging near the door and two attempts to locate where the big

tree landed were futile and almost cost me an umbrella. Approximately 45 minutes passed then I had to go inside.

Finale

Initial winds following the eye gave plenty of warning that the rampage would escalate in might. Straight-line winds were more constant and far stronger. The backside was living up to histories. I knew the windows would crash soon. I prayed as I mopped water and glanced outside. I always hated the protective bars on the windows to prevent thieves from entering when away. At this time I felt marginally protected from flying debris. I continued to mop and squeeze towels into buckets. Amazing, with little if no space for rain to enter, we filled and emptied the buckets many times. Winds blew harder and harder and rain pelted the house sounding like bullets hitting a barrel. The walls wobbled and vibrated, could feel the roof lift and drop, outside pressures changed time and again. I had seen so many roofs in streets and elsewhere and wondered when it would be mine. A disheartening thought inhibited my senses; my home was tougher and robust in comparison to the shacks of many inhabitants in the Philippines. Shacks lined the narrow streets at the valley and I knew they were flooded. I mopped and wringed and prayed. The moments were so intense and the hours seemed like a day. I wanted to collapse in my bed but I was too afraid.

At last, after five to six grueling hours, the powerful storm seemed to be weaker and daylight was approaching. As the rain got lighter the picture became cleared; we had mostly endured an unbelievable test of Nature's wrath upon us. Roofs were gone; trees broken like matchsticks, power lines were as Christmas decor hanging on the whole shebang. Topping it all off; I had two roofs on the back of the house. A neighbor lost a roof and it lightly turned over and rested on mine. It had endured enough

Aftermath

My thoughts were scrambled; I had slept for quite some time and finally woke to go to the bathroom. I returned to bed and through an open window beside me, the moon was indistinctly appearing through the clouds. The moment was peaceful and relieving. I thought of how the people of Tacloban had not regarded their warning and thousands of lives were lost. Typhoon Rammusun's powerful fury roared through the Philippines killing 77 to date and more in Hainan and Vietnam across the South China Sea. As I looked to the dark skies I decided it was worthy of a photograph. I carefully aimed capturing the moonlit clouds viewing past debris from the roof of a neighbor on my roof.

Day One - As morning came the horror stories began to surface. Seventy percent of Meralco customers were without power on Luzon Island. During 2006 Typhoon Milenyo smashed the islands leaving flooding and destruction. Power was out for nearly a week. Newspapers quickly offered, "Southern Luzon should prepare for candlelight dinners for the next two weeks.

During the morning hours cell phone providers were nonexistent, batteries were without charge and nowhere to charge them. I realized; we don't know how bad the country was hit and if our friends across town were injured or okay. Trees and debris blocked all streets and no way to check. We had no communication.

Day Two - Kids were still out of school and celebrating, running, jumping, laughing; everyone had food and water. People gathered around downed trees in the streets practically celebrating they were ok. I stepped into the shower and turned on the water. There was no water. At that moment I thought again of Tacloban and all the same news had been broadcast about their sad predicament only last year. We used up our last fresh food hoping tomorrow we may have electricity. I hurried to the bayan (town) to get water. Fortunately there were plenty of supplies on the shelf. Most Filipinos live for the day and daily victuals were not a concern until time come. Many looked at me like, "What's the panic?" I grabbed some bread; some canned goods, some batteries and headed home.

Along the way I noticed damages in other areas and long lines for two ATM locations. I examined locations of others and none were online. It was then a thought; regardless how much money I had in the bank; if I could not get a withdrawal I had bigger problems. Days were unbearable and nights were terribly uncomfortable trying to sleep in the hot humid air.

Day Three – I awakened, not rested; the night was hot and this day seemed hotter. I thought of the situation once again . . . no electricity, no fresh food, no meat, fish or chicken to prepare for our meals. There was no communication, only three hundred Philippine pesos and we had enough canned foods for about two days. I had been noticing the distant slaughterhouse at night; there were no bawls from pigs being slaughtered for the day's market. Three days without electricity only meant . . . any pork; beef or fish could not be trusted as safe to eat. I checked the ATMs again and only two were online. I checked to see if the Cirrus icon was on the signboard and it was. I got in line in the hot sun and an hour later the ATM gave me a message that I should go to my own bank for withdrawal. They did not want my four dollar foreign bank transaction fee. I left.

I traveled by jeepney to Shoe Mart (SM) San Pablo City Mall. I heard earlier that the store had been severely damaged and had been closed despite having auxiliary power. It was definitely damaged and the outdoor patio area upstairs was a disaster area. I stood in line 2 hours and was able to make a bank withdrawal from an American bank. I purchased more canned food products and wen home.

Day Four – Woke with electricity and happy to get everything in order. The trunk of the big tree broke just below the second-story roofline had fallen southward. I called a friend who works here at times and asked if he wanted finish a tree job that the storm had started. He showed up early and I got him started and stayed with him to make sure he was safe. While doing this I was informed that my second electricity circuit had been removed by thieves the night after the storm and we would not have that service until it was repaired.

The city remains with some electricity but most of it still out of service. Family today at the other house dined on spaghetti thinking it was safe. Their afternoon has been a mess as everyone is very ill and a reminded what happens if you eat spoiled food. Another typhoon named Henry is already positioned to hit the Philippines.

The Philippines is subjected to more tropical cyclones than any country in the world and the east coast is sparsely populated because of this fact.