

## Wilderness House Literary Review 17/2

*Charles Hayes*  
**Hard Times**

**F**ollowing a direct hit by Super Typhoon "Rai," known here by its Filipino name, "Odette," and nearly a month without electricity, cheers and hallelujahs are heard throughout the barangay as the lights come back on. At night, just one week before Christmas, the wind and the rain turned this world dark as ink. The sounds of screeching tin roofs smashing against concrete walls and crashing trees crumpling those same roofs created a cacophony of hellish noise that told me that if I stepped outside our cinder block home I could literally lose my head. We had been warned but being an inhabitant of a centrally located Island in the Visayas I figured the storm would be little worse than the one I had experienced many years ago. The palms had wept in the wind and streamed their branches like crape. I had watched out the window of a native structure that shook but held up ok. Being centrally located among many other islands tended to take some of the blow out of that storm so it was tolerable at worst. But "Odette" was different. It seemed to tack purposely along the open waters between the various islands to the interior Island of Cebu, hitting us broadside and landing its full strength up and down the eastern coast. After being in the middle of that fury I will never again have a notion that typhoons can't strike at the heart of this archipelago. And as far out of the typhoon season as December.

Walking around the next day, seeing poles and trees that were snapped like kindling or root structures 10 feet deep pulled from the earth, many laying on flattened houses, I felt chastened for my tendency to play down mother nature's ability to demand respect. That there were not more people killed also called for my respect for the fortitude of these people. My senses told me that there had to be more involved in this than just luck.

Everything became unavailable almost immediately and life really showed a side that emphasized what is important and what we just think is important. Our most valuable possession in a land that loses the means to pump water when the electricity goes turned out to be our hand water pump. I might add that others not as fortunate found emergency replenishment from it as well.

Trials and tribulations, as we know, are part of life but sometimes it seems that things just go overboard in this department. The day after the typhoon, on top of everything else, I was bitten by a stray dog.

I have just finished my series of shots for rabies prevention but that crisis was started with my inability to find the proper medicine for the injections and the worry that caused. But I pushed hard and managed to get on track pronto. However, panic can be closer than we ever imagined. I'll never forget the experience. Mother nature can kill you in many different ways, directly or indirectly. I think we too often forget this when trying to prepare for hard times. It really can be a bother, no doubt.

The electricity has only been back on for a couple of hours now and the relief and good feelings are still warm. The trick right now is to not let this part of the experience grow cold. To somehow keep a pilot light around the cheering and praising in the barangay so that this memory can some-

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how, someday, buttress me and those around me for the future life slams that are bound to follow. Maybe that's just another not so obvious way to follow the old wise prescription for strength: "Gird thy loins."