

Knowing Nature through Numbers

(Original)

Christel Jirah Codilla

(Age 16, Philippines)

Ormoc City Senior High School, Leyte

I am living my second life.

It is not a metaphorical nor poetic use of the English language. Simply put at that, I am living my second life. November 8, 2013 must have sent the world shivering at the advent of a Category 5 super typhoon. To this day, Typhoon Haiyan is considered the strongest landfalling tropical cyclone, with maximum sustaining winds at 315km/h, killing at least 6,300 people, and costing \$2.86 billion worth of property damage.

These were numbers the rest of the world knew, but to the survivors like me, these were numbers that we saw.

These were numbers I went through when I almost lost my family, and when I fearfully closed my eyes—hands trembling, heart failing—to tell the Almighty that I needed more time.

These are numbers I remember. Numbers that haunt me, live in me, and most of all, remind me that beyond all things, we still are made in and for nature.

Satish Kumar said, “When human beings consider themselves to be the masters of the earth and have dominion over it, they are more likely to abuse and exploit it.” I find it appalling that we often exclude ourselves from nature, defining it as something explicit, something outside of us. It seems like we have forgotten that we are living on a living organism, that we are part of it.

When Typhoon Haiyan swept Leyte off of the Philippine map in a matter of hours, I truly understood what it was like to feel nature. At 5 AM, I heard it. At 6 AM, I saw it. And at 12 NN, when the winds finally calmed, I was one with nature. Night of that day, my country fell silent. No sound was heard from the people of Leyte. The sky was dark and gloomy, but with the roof of our house off, it was the only thing I stared at. Being completely in the moment made me say, “I accept my punishment.”

You see, we humans have thought too highly of ourselves. Truly, we have distinct

qualities that make us stand out from other species, but we, in return, lack the qualities that they have. Each species of this earth, humans and non-humans, “contribute in their own specific way, for the totality of existence.” Therefore, all life has fundamental value. This is a point all of us religiously neglect, which is why we abuse nature.

The typhoon, ultimately, was a reinforcement made to let us remember that above all else, we are not superior over the earth. It does not speak, but it lives and moves. The moment we consciously experience the beauty and integrity of what keeps life together, we begin to accept it as our teacher.

We have been learning “about” nature, but we never truly invest ourselves in it to learn from it. We have failed to realize that nature is what we are supposed to be. It is what makes us human. Neglecting this fails the purpose of our breathing. We look at the earth like we own it; we see it every single day but we never ponder on it.

I have learned after the disaster, when I spent most of my time reflecting and observing what made me breathe, that there’s so much more to what we see, and that it is our calling to understand them. It is our obligation to be like them. Above all, nature is a symbol of humility, acceptance and patience. Every time I looked at the night sky, it dawned on me that darkness is necessary to appreciate light. When the trees started growing again, I realized the importance of non-resistance. They did not complain when they were uprooted by the storm, instead, they accepted their fate and obeyed. These are values we should possess that cannot be learned through books.

What the rest of the globe does not know is that I do not regret the numbers. Super typhoon Haiyan brought us victims to a whole new world of deep understanding and relation to nature that we pledge to share to you. In return, I hope you find yourself in nature just as I did.