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At the start of 2023, Zamboanga City was battered by floods that have never been seen in decades, caused by a mere low-pressure area that wasn't supposed to bring record-breaking rains down from the sky.

While my family was doing fine and only had to deal with the inconvenience of brownouts and water interruptions, hundreds of thousands of people in the port city weren't as lucky. For those who remember basic Philippine geography, Zamboanga City is supposed to be a type 3 city—this means that while there are light monsoon rains and thunderstorms from May to October, the period between November and April is supposed to be quite dry.

Within a few hours, torrential rains flooded the runways of the Zamboanga City International Airport to the point that it had to shut down. Then came the kicker: The entire portion of the national highway within the city proper was inundated in knee-deep water, and to top it all, two bridges that connect Zamboanga to the rest of Mindanao and the country have suffered extensive damage.

In economic terms, that's equivalent to tens of millions of pesos worth of damage and lost productivity.

On the human side of things, thousands of people have been forced to abandon their homes and stay in evacuation centers at the beginning of the year. Knowing that everyone was still reeling from the effects of the global pandemic, those hit by this disaster would have been completely terrified.

This was not the first time that it happened as a more severe disaster took place in 2022: Many portions of the city have been covered in neck-deep water; animals such as dogs, cats, pigs, and even cows were forced to swim in the floods to save themselves, while the rivers overflowed—drowning bridges and cutting access from one part of the city to another.

When my Kuya and Ate sent pictures and videos of what was happening in the city, I gasped in shock. Many of the places were flooded two meters deep, which was more than enough to drown most people, swimmers included. Given that the city was supposed to have outlets, both natural and man-made, to drain the water out to the vast expanses of the Sulu Sea, the effects of the storm served as a testament to its unexpected severity and strength.

It made me wonder: How did the weather look back in the day? Was it more destructive? Or was it more forgiving?

Once upon a time, an announcement of a typhoon usually meant suspension of classes and/or work for one or two days; it was a rather manageable routine as long as the rivers didn't overflow. For us kids, it meant that we could spend our days watching "Doraemon," "Mobile Suit Gundam SEED," "Slam Dunk," or the latest anime/cartoon show in peace; alternatively, we could all go out and play in the rain.

Indeed, there was predictability in the weather back then.

Today, each low-pressure area advisory usually brings chills down everyone's spine; there's no way to know whether it will suddenly become a supertyphoon, cause all the rivers to overflow, or bring winds and rains of the century that would send roofs flying in the sky and roads drowning in neck-deep water.

The typhoons seem to be racing to break a record, whether in the amount of rainfall, wind velocity, or extent of damage—as if hell-bent on causing chaos and destruction in their path.

You don't anymore know how the weather will go: There could be harsh and unappealing heat in the morning, heavy rains at noontime, and dry, cold winds at sunset. The weather could even change every six hours or so.

Even on days when the weather is supposed to be more predictable, it can be two extremes: heat that would make you feel as if you are in a sauna, and rain that quickly fills up the streets and makes you wonder what kind of sin you did to deserve this kind of downpour. I don't remember when the weather started to become extremely scary, but I do also think that it's not too late to replant trees, take care of our environment, and simply be more responsible with the way that we interact with nature on this little planet that we call Earth.

Sometimes, I think that the record-breaking droughts and wildfires worldwide as well as the history-making storms that we are experiencing in our part of the world are a way to remind us that we are not supposed to abuse this planet, but rather serve as its stewards and use it responsibly and in harmony with the millions of other creatures and lifeforms.

It's simply heartbreaking to see lives lost simply because we didn't properly do our job as stewards of this planet.

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