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## PAIN THAT MAKES US STRONG

by: **MARISOL AQUINO**

“Ma! Ma!!!” He tries to reach his mother’s hand, but her mom cannot get it because she was swept away by the strong current from the floodwater caused by Typhoon Ondoy.

He was about to jump to save his mother when the rescuer stopped him from doing what he planned. “Sorry, but it is impossible now to save your mother.”

He tried calling his mother but only heard the rain and the flowing water. Ismael and the other evacuees arrived at the evacuation site where thousands of families were already staying. They were served with hot soup right away to warm their chilling bodies.

However, Ismael could not eat as he was still thinking of his mother. Guilt was eating his subconsciousness as he relived what had happened earlier. *If only I held her firmly, she would not have been swept by the water. If only he knew how to swim, she would never drown. No, she was not drowned. She was able to grab a tree. She is saved. I hope she is alright...*

Different scenarios play in his mind, but no matter how he tries, what prevails are the negative ones. He was fidgeting; he wanted the storm to pass, and he wanted to look for his mother; he was 19, a third-year college student, and still had a lot of plans with his mother, and one thing was for sure: he could not afford to lose his mother.

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At that moment, he found himself uttering a prayer for the safety of his mother. He was not religious compared to his mother, who attends church daily, prays novenas and rosaries, and is a member of different religious organizations. Over the years, it is the first time he saw himself saying a prayer... for his mother.

“Lord, please hear me. Please save my mom... Please...”

Sleep did not visit him that night, so he entertained himself by staring blankly at the people at the evacuation site. Families who can still laugh even after the storm damages their homes and properties, children who keep playing, not knowing what exactly is happening, and rescuers who never tire of helping people stay in their homes. The site is either satisfying or displeasing to him.

The following day, broadcasting companies and other private institutions arrive to give the evacuees relief goods that will last for days, feed their empty stomachs, and provide clothes that will keep them warm.

Based on the news, waters from different areas in Manila were starting to subside. Hearing this, Ismael decided to start looking for his mother after he ate his breakfast. So, right after he ate, he left the evacuation site to start looking for his mother. Water is still at knee-length height, but it does not stop him from looking for his mother.

He was now in their area. He tried calling his mother, but he did not hear any response. Their neighbors were also checking their homes and starting to clean their homes. He keeps on walking in the flood water, calling for his mother.

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“Ismael! Your mom!” He saw Jasmine, her neighbor, calling him six feet away. He rushed towards her, surprised to see a lady floating to where they stood.

He was unable to react when he saw his mother lifeless in front of him. It took him minutes to process what was happening, and that was when he fell to his knees. He cannot feel his body. All he can feel is pain. Tears started to fall from his eyes.

His mom left him.

“What’s your biggest what ifs?” He returned from his reverie when he heard what the writer asked him. He was now a well-known filmmaker whose works were acclaimed internationally, and he recently bagged awards at the New York Festivals for his documentary film.

He smiled at the writer, “What if I could save my mom? Will I be happier? What if I saved her that night? Will she be proud of me?” he shared. “So, do you consider your mother your biggest inspiration to be a filmmaker?” the writer follows up.

“No one else. She is my mother, and I will not be here without her.” He said without hesitation. The interview finished after they took some photos of him. Afterward, the writer and her team said they were goodbyes, and he was left alone in his office.

It has been raining for almost two days, but today’s rain differs from yesterday. The same rain that took the life of his mother 15 years ago. He sips the now-cold coffee on his table, watching the rain fall from his window. Moments later, he decided to go home before the flood water rose.

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As he was traversing his way home, there were already waters in some areas, but people still did not smell danger as children enjoyed playing in the floodwater like a swimming pool.

Hours after he arrived home, his phone kept vibrating as he got a notification from the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC) that Manila was under a red rainfall warning caused by Super Typhoon Carina and Habagat.

He looks out his window. He cannot see clearly because of the heavy rain but knows the water is already outside. He goes down the stairs, and his housemaid rushes towards him. "Sir, there is a family outside asking for help. Should I let them come in?" upon hearing this, he went outside and saw the hip level had flooded. He opens the gate of his home for the family and asks for help. "Come in," he briefly said.

When the family was inside, he told his housemaids to fetch towels and care for their needs. He called for Manong Ato and told him to prepare for the rubber boat. His visitor heard this, and the man volunteered to come with him.

When the rubber boat was prepared, they used their time effectively and started their mission to save their neighbors living in low-lying areas. The water level quickly rises from the hip level to the neck.

"Help!!! Somebody help us!" They heard someone asking for help from the rooftop of a house. They went there and found a family drenched in the rain. "Please help my mom; she cannot stand." Having a soft heart for mothers, Ismael rushed to where the lady was and

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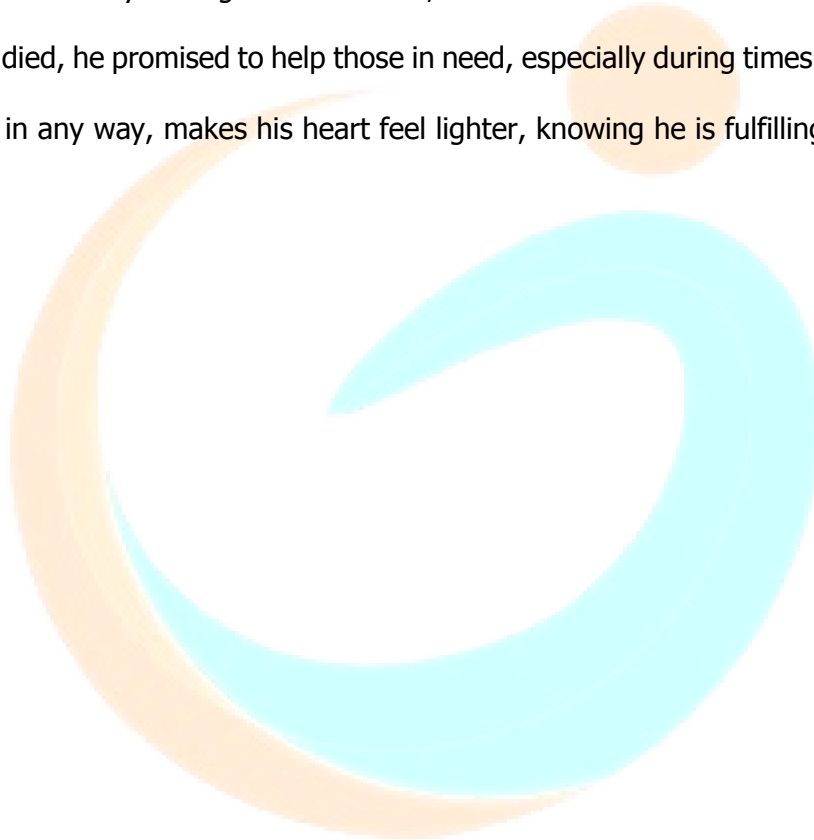
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carried her to the rubber boat. They successfully rescue the family and welcome them to his home. They went back and rescued other families around their area that needed help. They continued rescuing the next day as the flood water reached above head height, and he could not risk the lives of the people who were with him.

The incident 15 years ago was dreadful, but this made him to be a strong individual. After his mom died, he promised to help those in need, especially during times like this. Saving people's lives, in any way, makes his heart feel lighter, knowing he is fulfilling his promise to his mom.



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