



"I have never come across anything like this!"

I will not forget the time when cyclone Winston hit Fiji. When the warning came, I started hammering our windows and tried to put a few things away. By evening the rain stormed down heavily, the wind was strong. I watched as the bathroom outside was blown down. I could hear the toilet roof beside my room been lifted by the wind. Quickly I took the tabernacle from our little chapel and called Sr Mareta, that we should leave immediately to seek shelter at the Assistant Head Teacher's

house. Her house is concrete and newly built. By this time the wind was really strong. We were nearly blown away when we stepped outside; I ran with the tabernacle Mareta right behind me.

Another family was already there in Davina's house (Assistant HT). We were soaked to the skin. They gave us dry clothes and I handed over the tabernacle to be put in a safe dry place, by this time the wind was in full force. Water was coming in through the cracks of the doors, windows and ceiling. We were walking in water inside the house. We could hear the corrugated roofing iron been blown about outside, branches of trees breaking and the roaring of the wind was loud and frightening. I have never come across anything like this before. We kept our feet dry by standing on the furniture. Finally after what seemed ages the wind died down. I dozed off and on where I was sitting.

The next morning I went numb when I saw the destruction made by the cyclone, only one wall of our house was standing. Our garden was flat, not a banana tree or cassava was standing.

Broken trees and branches, our furniture thrown about, some broken, mattress, cushions wet and glass everywhere. After some time, I recollected myself and looked around for the phone. It was dry in a cupboard with a few of my clothes.

I tried to contact the Sisters but there was no network, I kept on trying till I got through to Sr Mariana M. in Lami, told her what had happened and asked if the message could be delivered to Sr Lavinia. Then we started to sort things through the debris looking for things that could be saved, before it rained again.

The people from the village had taken shelter in the school during the night, many of their homes were blown away or damaged. The school was now an evacuation centre. Thank God the school building was OK.

By Tuesday morning we were getting ready to go and clean the village church when Sisters Lavinia, Lorraine, Teresia arrived. I thought I was dreaming because there has been no public transport in the past few days. I was so happy and relieved to see them, that I got a little emotional, realizing the effort they made to come and see us, as some roads were still closed. I realized then, I was still in shock. At times I find myself in tears, with mixed feelings but very grateful to be alive. We are really and truly very grateful for the prayers of our Sisters, families and friends here at home and abroad.

An important part of staying together in school was when our Parish Priest came to celebrate Mass. Not only the Catholics attended Mass, our sisters and brothers from other denominations (Methodist, Seven Day Adventist, Assemblies of God and others) came too. We were united as one people, the classroom was full, people also stood outside. Everyone coming together to celebrate life and to give thanks to God for His love and protection.

(Sr Titilia Tupou's account of the cyclone)