

**Script written for a recorded address from the Sisters on Guam
for the Sisters of the Milwaukee Province.**

Note: The original is a photocopy of the original typed script, and some words were blurred and illegible.

“This recording, made on Dec. 16, 1962, by the School Sisters of Notre Dame on Guam at the request of Mother Provincial Mary Antonice, is addressed to all of our dear Sisters in the States and to our friends – benefactors all – who have shown great concern and unparalleled generosity following the disastrous Typhoon Karen which struck Guam on Sunday, November 11, 1962.

Although the toll of lives was low – only nine persons died – the overall material destruction was unbelievably extensive. The population of our island is roughly 61,000 persons, half of whom are military and civil service personnel. The damage to military installations was heavy in spite of the fact that all Air Force planes from Anderson Base in the north were evacuated the day before the typhoon invaded us and flown to safer quarters on other island bases. Civilian property losses were likewise heavy: hardly a roof survived and countless families became homeless overnight.

Typhoon warnings were first broadcast as early as Thursday, Nov. 8, but we Sisters at Yona did not hear them. On Sunday, November 11 – the memorable Sunday of our ordeal and survival – the radio announced Condition One, which means that Guam was in the direct path of the hurricane. All day Sunday the strong, driving rain battered against our buildings at St. Francis, Yona. The radio reported ocean wave breaking against our shoreline as high as eleven feet. Men from our parish began to board up the east side of our convent Sunday morning. By evening it was clear that no storm was ever like this before. Rainwater was pushing through locked window-louvres into our rooms, and the Sisters kept busy mopping it up. At 7:15 p.m. we held Night Prayers in the chapel, after which the Sisters dispersed to various parts of the house. The noise was mostly a roaring and a clatter, but suddenly a new noise immediately over our heads froze us to attention. The tin roofing began to tear over the Sisters’ Community Room. Sister Superior Therese led us into the chapel.

QUESTION: Sister Therese, would you please tell about the hours when the typhoon was at its worst here at St. Francis Convent in Yona?



Sr. Therese Becker

SISTER THERESE [BECKER]: At first we knelt in the chapel pews and prayed aloud one rosary after another and sang hymns in English and Chamorro. But when the thunderous impact of parts of other buildings came crashing against our convent and the splintering of glass became more frequent, some Sisters huddled close to the altar, while others hugged the concrete walls, and those who could, crawled under the chapel pews – anywhere to get protection from flying glass. It was hard to determine exactly where things were happening, because the terrific noise was all around us, inside the house and outside.

Some outside doors were the first to go; they were torn off and blown away. I looked up at the chapel ceiling. A large part of it was no longer there; neither was the roof – I saw only the gray sky through the rafters. I heard someone say now was the lull in the storm, and that Karen would turn around and



Sr. Mary-Roman Obremski

come back from the opposite direction. I began to take out the glass window-louvres on that side. Others helped me and we laid them on the floor next to the wall. I called all the Sisters into our small sacristy, which at least had a roof. The Sisters in there had been “spelling” each other for hours holding a large statue of St. Joseph while they leaned against the trembling outside door. We rode out the rest of the storm in this tiny room – all 25 of us.

Toward dawn some of the Sisters went scouting with a flashlight to determine the extent of the damage to the rest of the house. The kitchen, pantry, and dining-room were fairly dry, so the whole family moved into this area. Our chances for staying alive seemed better as the winds and noise diminished, so we changed into dry clothing, issued whatever blankets were available, and after a snack, settled down to a few hours rest at about 5:00 a.m. I slept on top of one of the tables, another sister lay on the food counter, others in chairs. The bedrooms were not safe because of the continuing rain. Through the goodness of God we had survived the most destructive typhoon in the history of Guam.

S. MARY ROMAN [OMBREMSKA]: Thank you Sister Therese. Sister Eucharita, I think you and Sister Magdalena [Cruz] are the stars of this next scene. Would you pick up the story, please, from the time we all met in your kitchen?

SISTER EUCHARITA [CRUZ]: About four o’clock in the morning after the typhoon, we served hot cocoa and chicken-noodle soup, and Japanese crackers, also called typhoon crackers. Thank God, we still had our gas stove. The Sisters fell asleep in the refectory. In my bedroom there were five Sisters asleep on one bed. I was one of the five. We were awakened by Father Alvin who came to find out how the Sisters made out. Later in the morning the whole Aspiranture moved in with us. We weren’t sorry. They brought all their deep-freeze food along, including 7 turkeys. We had turkey for three days in a row, even for breakfast. Food wouldn’t keep because electric power was cut off. So for Thanksgiving Day Dinner (eleven days after the typhoon) we had turkey again, but this time it came from the Army Field Kitchen and was cooked by the men. We Sister-cooks had only to prepare the rice and vegetables and apple pie for 48 of us. So you see, we didn’t starve. About three days after the typhoon some families from the Naval Base and other places outside of Yona brought us drinking water, canned foods, clothing, bed linen and soap. After the rain stopped, some Sisters went down to Manengon River to do our laundry a few times, because of the limited water supply. The very first water we received came from a fire truck going around the village. Most of our water at this time came from a rain-water reservoir from my aunt’s ranch in Camp Witek. Later we got water from a fire hy-



Sr. Eucharita Cruz

drant outside our auditorium; this was pure and came through pipes from Fina Dam, a Navy plant. Later, when Navy power was re-established, then the good ladies made ice and brought it over in quart-sizes. We were also invited to do our laundry in their homes in Apra Heights and the Naval Base, which we did several times. Mostly the Sisters did their own washing like gypsies. During the two weeks that the Aspiranture group was with us, all 48 of us, we ate our meals in two shifts. The rule was – No leftovers, please!

S. MARY ROMAN: Thank you, Sister Eucharita. You and the other Sister house-keepers took very good care of us, with some help from the Red Cross of course. Now – Our Sisters and friends in the States are probably wondering how we could be of help directly to the people of our village of Yona. As soon as we ourselves got out from under, we Sisters helped in the rationing of Red Cross food and clothing supplies, registering typhoid shots, and in just being around when a helping hand or a friendly word were needed. Sister Mary Benjamin is better prepared to give us some particulars concerning the health clinic erected in our school. Sister Mary Benjamin –

S. MARY BENJAMIN [MASTALERSKA]: I helped our school nurse, Mrs. Dolores Benton, and Navy Corpsman, Tom Rancour, with inoculations. They gave about 3,000 typhoid shots, while I administered about 300 penicillin and tetanus toxoid injections. I soaked the feet of about 90 patients for nail punctures. I also treated 45 babies with high fevers due to exposure. There were many deep wounds to be cleansed first and then referred to the Naval Hospital for sutures. For instance, one man who was hurrying to arrange a shelter for his family was struck in the foot by a piece of coral rock, and his heel was completely sheared off. Helping at our aid station made me realize how very well off we Sisters were by comparison.



Sr. Benjamin Mastalerska

S. MARY ROMAN: Thank you, Sister Mary Benjamin. As you we can well imagine, the life on our compound centers around our church. Sister Cynthia, who lives there in the sacristy when she not in the convent or in school, is an apt witness of what happened to our church of St. Francis during the typhoon. Sister Cynthia.

SISTER CYNTHIA [BORMAN]: On the second day after the typhoon we went over to Church to salvage vestments and altar linens. The whole roof of the church was off, except over the sacristy. Pews were piled up by the wind as for a bonfire. Of the 9 large statues, all were broken except 3 – St. Francis, St. Anthony, and the Infant of Prague. The altar was completely stripped of everything except the tabernacle which was screwed on to the altar. The sacristy was a mess of glass and overturned furniture. Even the locked cupboard doors were blown open. So everything inside the drawers was soaked and the colors faded. For two weeks I spent whole days there salvaging; then I had to wash, dry and iron everything. On the third day after the typhoon we had Holy Mass on the stage of our auditorium. The men of the village moved the side altar and some of the church pews into the auditorium. Later the Marines transported the large altar and the rest of the pews. The red vestment which had been laid out for the next day's Mass did as much damage as the water. The red dye



Sr. Cynthia Borman

ran down into the cupboard drawers and ruined a lot of linens. Now the sacristy cupboards are being used for schoolbooks and for storing unbroken glass louveres. The rest of the church on the sides serves as a storage area for tables and school desks. The sacristy is now also serving as the Yona Dispensary, Nurse Benton's headquarters.

S. MARY ROMAN: Thank you, Sister Cynthia. On the same score of devastated sacred places, here's Sister Mary Florian's account of the convent chapel, the most badly damaged part of the Sisters' house. Sister Mary Florian.

S. MARY FLORIAN [JAEHN]: Even though the Marines put back the missing parts of the roof, they couldn't do anything about the holes in the roof, the ceiling, and the broken louvers which admit so much dust and dirt into the chapel at all times, that there's a dustcloth in each pew, so the Sisters can dust up each time they use the chapel. The wooden stations of the Cross which were removed during the typhoon are back on the walls, but warped. For days after the typhoon we had to keep bailing out water which poured in through the roof like Niagara Falls every time it rained, and that was often. The altar backdrop was soaked and shrank. We must keep the altar covered with a piece of plastic when not in use because water still drips from the rafters. It's so breezy because of all the holes, that we haven't used the three chapel fans at all since Karen.



Sr. Florian Jaehn

We had to haul out the pews the day after the typhoon in an effort to save them from being ruined by rain. The glued tiles on the floor are coming unglued at every turn because of the days and nights of being submerged in water. I had a frightening moment or two during the typhoon when the tabernacle key fell off the altar, and was temporarily lost in the half-dark. But we found it. We had removed the altar-stone beforehand, but after the typhoon when we wanted to replace it in the altar, the wood around the opening had warped so badly that it had to be filed down first, before the altar stone could be put back. And tar! It keeps dripping from the exposed roofing where the Marines patched it up. Somehow it reminds me of a phrase I read somewhere about "God living in a stable."

S. MARY ROMAN: Thank you, Sister Mary Florian. In one of our letters from the States a Sister remarked that she had heard that we were so badly off that we had to wear civilian clothes instead of our Religious garb. Essentially this is not true. However, had you seen us the first few days after the typhoon, you might have wondered what Order in Heaven's name we did belong to. Well, Sister Jean Ann will tell you about that. Sister Jean Ann.

SISTER JEAN ANN [CRISOSTOMO]: There's one thing about starch: it doesn't stand up under a steady downpour of rain. We couldn't wash or iron our regular wimples. All of our white habits were wet and couldn't dry in the continuous rain. Our shoes fell apart or shrank after several days of walking in rivers of water. So you'd meet Sisters wearing black or white kimonos, zoris, bedroom slippers, and our off-the-face driver's veil. For two days Sisters Mary Roman and Florian cut down and sewed our unstarched wimples to be short and round like dress-collars, and the whole community switched over to these. The Sisters at Agat had to resort to the white plastic material from



Sr. Jean Ann Crisostomo

Clorox bottles to use as makeshift wimples. Later all the other missions wore the Yona style short, round wimples. Pairs of grey pumps and brown oxfords, donated before the typhoon, were now being worn by the Sisters. Sister Therese took the prize for informal dress by wearing her black Stateside woolen habit with a white cincture. We were copiously covered (as Nuns always are) except that nothing was exactly according to regulations. At the present time all the Sisters on Guam are wearing a sort of miracle wimple made of Dacron, the gift of Mother Antonice. It's drip-dry material which resists dust and stays clean for days; the spots can be sponged off easily; it's lightweight, and looks beautiful on everyone. May God reward you, Mother Antonice, and the kind Sisters who sewed these wimples.

S. MARY ROMAN: Typhoon Karen, just like a woman, had to create wardrobe problems. Thank you, Sister Jean Ann. And now we have a longish narrative about our school problems at St. Francis. Sister Justina, the principal, will outline some of the complications involved in a wholesale wreckage of over 20 classrooms. Sister Justina.

SISTER JUSTINA [DREXLER]: Out of a total of 27 classrooms only 7 could be termed inhabitable now. Parts of the auditorium and cafeteria roofs came off. We were surrounded by the rubble of trusses, glass, wood, overturned desks and cupboards, tangled electric wires – all open to the frequent down-pour of rain, and blown about by the wind, especially the tin. With the help of the Marines, we cleared as much of this as possible. Our school premises were used by the Army and Marines for tents, Field Kitchen, and inoculation Center, and even as police headquarters. The school office escaped major damage, so the School nurse and her family moved in to live there. Six classrooms and a lavatory were used by families to live in for two weeks. Families were saved by taking refuge in the auditorium stage area.

My Amateur Radio station which had been in operation for only a month escaped damage, except for the antenna which had been taken down for safety, only to be badly damaged by falling debris. For over a week five Marines scrounged for the necessary parts to re-assemble it. Of our two automobiles, the Dodge station-wagon is a total loss, crushed by fallen beams from the school building. Our Ford was tucked away under the cement school-porch, so it escaped with minor scratches. This now is our only means of transportation on business trips to Agana, and for catechizing excursions.



Sr. Justina Drexler

On November 26 we re-opened school in half-day sessions, the Sisters alternating in using the same classrooms. Our auditorium triples as church, classroom, and study hall for children awaiting transportation. Here also we held our December P.T.A. meeting right on schedule. Roughly half of our books were lost either in school or in the children's homes. Concerning our pupils, more than 95% of them came back on the day school re-opened. Even though our school situation is far from adequate, many of our children are better housed and fed while in school than they would be in their own homes. For instance, one family of 7 are living in a cave. Another of 14 persons is crowded into a 3-walled shell covered over with pieces of tin. Many others are doubling up with more fortunate relatives. Some are still living in the tents put up by the Marines three weeks ago.

Since the island was under martial law, a strict curfew was imposed from 8:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m. The

police, established in their headquarters outside our auditorium policed a 3-village area every hour. The Red Cross still has a representative here to help villagers with their food and clothing problems. To counteract the danger of epidemic following a condition of lack of drinking water and no sanitation facilities, plus the inevitable refuse lying about – the Navy cooperated with the Government of Guam Sanitation Department and came with huge trucks that sprayed our premises from time to time. A Marine Corpsman furnished the Sisters with cans of DDT and bottles of insect repellent; our screens were down, the doors were off their hinges, so the mosquitoes and other little and big beasts had a field day in our house. Cats, dogs, and roosters were all over the place.



Sr. Frances Therese Gibson

In the first days following the hurricane, all sorts of Top Brass visited us, surveying the damage – the Acting Governor, Navy and Air Force officers. Military helicopters were constantly overhead, taking photographs of our compound and its destruction. As one news editor said, “Weather has proved a harsher foe than war to the people of Guam.” While the Marines were here for three weeks a color guard raised our school flag for the first time since the typhoon. The flagpole was bent almost to the ground. They straightened it, raised the flag, while all of us stood at attention. It was reminiscent of the famous Iwo Jima group.

S. MARY ROMAN: Thank you, Sister Justina. Did you purposely forget to mention our school library – just to spare my feelings? I should introduce myself as a librarian without portfolio. We lost almost all of a total of [difficult to read, looks like 2,000] books, not counting the ones that had been drawn from the library. Three years of hard, routine work of accessioning gone with [illegible]. “I’ll Cry Tomorrow.” Here’s a happier note: The United States Marines, 3rd Battalion, 4th Marines – the Pioneers from Hawaii; [illegible] men who came first with the most help. Sister Frances Therese, will you please take it from there?

S. FRANCES THERESE [GIBSON]: This group came to Guam mainly for guard duty, but volunteered to clear our [illegible] of debris, and accomplished the most urgent task – that of repairing the convent roof. After three weeks of heavy work in the tropical sun and rain, they were recalled to Hawaii. On their last day with us the Sisters arranged a Thank You program in their honor. Part of it was a skit patterned on The Teahouse of the August Moon. The chief character of Sakini became Joaquin, and the title was renamed, THE MADHOUSE OF THE NOVEMBER TYPHOON. Sister Ann Patrice was Joaquin. Sister Ann Patrice.

(Sister Frances Therese reads all stage directions for skit).

S. FRANCES THERESE: We also sang a parody which we’d like to sing for your now. (The Isle of Debris).

S. MARY ROMAN: Before you disappear, Sister Frances Therese, please give us a report on the lost Holiday Fair which was to have been held the weekend after the typhoon.

SISTER FRANCES THERESE: (your own answer)

S. MARY ROMAN: We've spent so much time on events here at St. Francis, Yona. We'd like to hear from Sister Valentia who will describe what transpired at Notre Dame of Guam Aspiranture down in the village of Yona. Sister Valentia, please.

SISTER VALENTIA [KAROLCZAK]: All clocks stopped at 3:45 p.m. on Sunday, Nov. 11, and today, Dec. 16, they are still on Typhoon Karen's time, because we still have no electric power. From then on we seemed to be an excellent target for the whirling winds. Before the typhoon hit us, our electric power and water supply were shut off, so we got out our kerosene stove. Two gentlemen appeared from nowhere and lit it for us. Now candles and kerosene lamps were the vogue.



Sr. Valentia Karolczak

At 7:30 the roof on the Sisters' Convent left. Sister Ellen Jean [Klein], our sacristan, lifted the tabernacle with the Blessed Sacrament and placed it in the Aspiranture proper. For the next three hours there was loud public adoration. And when the roof on this building disappeared, we took the tabernacle, like the Ark of the Covenant, and placed it in a cold hotlocker on the first floor. At this moment the windows were cracking all over the house. We five Sisters, 8 Postulants, and 10 Aspirants took refuge in the corridors and bathroom. Between 11 and 12 p.m. the blowing of the winds became like one steady, strong jet. Tin pieces of roofing whirled all around us. About 5:00 a.m. four boys from the village came to check on our safety, and brought over the kerosene stove from the other "bombed out" building.

We then had sandwiches. We had no sleep that night. Father Alvin came about 7:30 a.m. – took one look and ordered us to move to St. Francis convent. The mattress parade began. We had another breakfast in our new home. The mattresses were arranged high but not dry on the Sisters' Community Room desks and that's where most of us slept for the next two weeks. Meanwhile the Marines replaced the pieces of tin roofing over the Aspiranture building and built a shack for our laundry and kitchens, as they described it – "with spit and a shovel" – because they had no adequate materials.

S. MARY ROMAN: Thank you, Sister Valentia. And now Agat has a sorry tale to tell. Sister Mary Elsa, the Superior of our Agat mission, will give you a picture of their effort for survival. Sister Mary Elsa.

SISTER MARY ELSA [METTERNICH]: (from other paper)

S. MARY ROMAN: That was Sister Mary Elsa. Thank you, Sister Mary Elsa. Our more slightly fortunate cousins from Barrigada would like to tell you about themselves too. Sister Mary Romuald, the Superior at San Vincente, Barrigada.

SISTER M. ROMUALD [NEDWECKA]: (from own paper)

S. MARY ROMAN: And that was the report from Sister Mary Romuald of Barrigada, bringing to a close an account of our missions on Guam in the wake of Typhoon Karen.

We'll take your minds off these sad events now by sharing with you the joy of having with us Mother Mary Antonice, our Provincial Superior from Mequon, Wisconsin. Mother pulled out of her sleeve, seemingly, a wonderful Christmas celebration for us today, providing a feast, games and presents, besides the countless crates of food and clothing which she sent ahead before she arrived on Guam. When Sister Mary Eric express this tribute, Mother Superior, she is saying it for all of us.

SISTER MARY ERIC [MILITZER]: (speech)

S. MARY ROMAN: Here's a song, too, Mother, which was written especially for you. (FLOW GENTLY, SWEET AFTON parody)

SMR: This song was requested by Mother herself: THE STATESIDERS' SONG

SMR: Our last offering is saying Goodbye to Mother Antonice is this hymn to Our Lady in Chamorro, asking her to accompany Mother safely over the miles back to our loved Mequon Motherhouse.

Hymn: Santa, Santa, Santa Maria."