

Santa Marian Kâmalin

The sun was bright and the air unusually still. It was always that way before a typhoon came, as if the trade winds were holding their breath in anticipation. The stillness raised the hackles of the wild dogs as they sought shelter from what was to come. This typhoon was named Linda. That was also my mother's name. Even though we were on our way to the Basilica to pray for the protection of our island home, I think Momma secretly wished that this typhoon would be spectacular, more powerful than all the rest, as if it was truly her namesake.

As we walked Momma started to tell me, again, the story of Santa Marian Kâmalin, patron saint of Guam and the Mariana islands, whose protection we were seeking. I'd heard it many times before, but the story always comforted me when a typhoon was approaching and Momma liked to tell me stories about the island. She said they were my heritage.

On a morning, long ago, a fisherman was standing in the warm reef waters throwing out his fishing net. A distant storm had tossed the ocean the night before, but with the dawn came calm waters. As the fisherman looked out upon the vast ocean he saw something in the distance floating towards the island. He walked out on the shallow reef towards the image. With the rising sun at his back, he could finally see before him the figure of a woman standing on the water, without aid of a boat or even a raft. The fisherman moved towards the image, but as he approached, she drifted away from him. As the sun illuminated her divine beauty, the fisherman believed that before him was an angel or some other heavenly spirit and he was humbled. The fisherman became aware of his nakedness and knowing that he could not approach a holy specter unclothed he went back to the shore and clothed himself. When he approached her again she came to him, a statue of the sainted mother of Christ. The islanders came out to greet the miracle that had graced their island, the lone survivor of a Spanish ship lost in the night's storm. The statue was taken to the Cathedral-Basilica in the village of Hagåtña where she is forever honored as the divine protector of the island.

As Momma finished the story, other women met and joined us on our journey to the Basilica. Several of the women who walked with us, I knew, were not Catholic, but as Momma explained, "When a typhoon comes to Guam everyone seeks comfort and protection from Santa Marian, Catholic and Protestant alike."

Typhoon Linda hit the island with spectacular force that afternoon, but not a single life was lost. Momma seemed pleased on both accounts.

Many typhoons came to the island during my childhood. When I grew up and moved to the mainland Momma gave me a gold necklace with a charm depicting our beloved Santa Marian of Kâmalin. She told me that it was for protection; that the blessings of Santa Marian would follow her island children wherever they may venture. I have never taken the necklace off, as it has protected me all the days of my life. And I realize that those typhoons taught me a great lesson. I learned to salvage what I could from the storms in my life and came to know what I truly value and what I can never replace.