AVOIDABLE DEATHS NETWORK

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Artwork: Ngo Hoang Anh Linh, *Our Family in the Storm*

Artwork: Pham Diem Quynh, *A Volunteer's Memory of the Flood*

Children and Youths Stories from Vietnam

Avoidable Deaths Network

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This issue is released to mark the International Day for Disaster Risk Reduction, observed annually on 13 October by the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR).

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About the Avoidable Deaths Network
The Avoidable Deaths Network (ADN) is a diverse, dynamic, inclusive and innovative global-local membership network uniting experts, practitioners and researchers. Our primary focus is on avoiding human deaths and injuries resulting from natural hazards, naturally triggered technological hazards and human-made hazards in low- and middle-income countries. ADN exists to empower policymakers, researchers, practitioners and citizens to make better decisions to save lives and achieve sustainable development. Our purpose directly aligns with the first two global targets of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, and we are a member of the Sendai Framework Voluntary Commitments platform.
On 12 March 2023, ADN launched a global public engagement campaign, the International Awareness Day for Avoidable Deaths (IAD4AD). To join or support IAD4AD, please visit https://iad4ad.avoidable-deaths.net/

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Message from the Presidents

The ADN Junior Champion Magazine is a landmark initiative led by Master Arkoneil Ghosh and Miss Anushka Konar. Our editors have grown into powerful agents of change, inspiring children and youths alike through their creativity, commitment, and courage.

We are delighted to launch Volume 6 on 13 October 2026, in alignment with the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction's International Day for Disaster Risk Reduction (IDDRR).

First launched in 2023 under the Future Leaders Scheme, the ADN Junior Champion Magazine provides a vital platform for children and youths to share their stories from the frontlines of climate change, extreme weather, and disaster impacts. Each volume explores a timely theme, guided by subject-matter experts. For this volume, we were honoured to work with Dr. Hang (Flora) Tran from the University of Leicester.

This volume directly aligns with the IDDRR theme, "Resilience Starts at Home." For children and youths, home is everything. It is their world. It is a safe space where they make memories and nurture big dreams. Unfortunately, this is not the reality for many children around the world who are recurrently affected by climate-related disasters or who live in high-risk areas.

In Vietnam, Typhoon Yagi in September 2024 and Typhoon Mayask in July 2026 brought heavy rainfall and flooding to Quảng Ninh Province, affecting the coastal communities of Quảng Yên. These typhoons and floods caused widespread loss of life and extensive damage to homes, schools, farmland, and infrastructure across several provinces of the country.

This magazine amplifies stories of loss that are deeply personal to the 11 young authors, including disruptions to their studies, power cuts, and food insecurity, among other challenges. These stories are often difficult to read without bringing tears to our eyes. However, they also provide an opportunity to understand the impacts of disasters through the eyes of children and youths and, importantly, to take action to mitigate them.

Dr. Tran transformed this tragedy into an opportunity to promote conservation in collaboration with children in Quảng Ninh Province. Even in the darkest times, we must remain hopeful for a better future for our children. Both Hideyuki and I feel a deep sense of responsibility in this regard, particularly as parents of two lovely daughters. One of the authors captured this sentiment beautifully: *"Life was being reborn out of the very ruins around us."*

Our sincerest thanks go to our Guest Editor, Dr. Tran, who worked tirelessly to collect these stories from Vietnam. We hope you enjoy reading the articles and find as much inspiration, courage, and hope in these pages as we did in bringing them to you.

Professor Nibedita Ray-Bennett and Dr. Hideyuki Shiroshita

Foreword from the Guest Editor

Located along the northeastern coast of Vietnam, Quảng Yên is a low-lying delta town shaped by the Bạch Đằng River as it meets the sea. Its landscape is a mosaic of tidal flats, mangrove forests, and aquaculture ponds, and its communities have for generations depended on the rhythm of the tides for their livelihoods, farming shrimp and clams, fishing the estuary, and tending the mangroves that quietly shield the coastline from the sea's worst moods. This same geography that sustains Quảng Yên also exposes it. Sitting directly in the path of the Western Pacific typhoon corridor, the town is routinely struck by tropical storms and torrential monsoon rains that push river and tidal waters over its banks, flooding fields, ponds, and homes alike. In September 2024, Typhoon Yagi, the strongest storm to make landfall in Vietnam in decades, tore through Quảng Ninh province with catastrophic force, and Quảng Yên's coastal communities bore the brunt of its winds and flooding. Less than two years later, in July 2026, Typhoon Maysak again brought heavy rain and flooding to the same shores, a reminder that for the people of Quảng Yên, disaster is not a distant possibility but a recurring feature of life.

Amid this exposure, Quảng Yên also faces quieter pressures common to many of Vietnam's rural coastal towns. A workforce drawn toward larger cities, an aging population left to manage aquaculture and farmland alone, and a generation of schoolchildren growing up with less direct transmission of the hard-won survival knowledge their grandparents once carried all make it harder for hazard experience to pass naturally between generations. These shifts make it all the more urgent that disaster preparedness be actively taught rather than assumed to pass down on its own.

My own connection to Quảng Yên began not with disaster education but with conservation. As a researcher exploring how immersive technologies might support communication around mangrove and estuarine conservation, I began working alongside the staff of Yên Hưng Primary, Secondary, and High School. What started as fieldwork on ecological storytelling soon became something more. In conversation after conversation with teachers, students, and their families, I heard the same stories surface again and again, of homes flooded, of fields lost to storm surge, of the fear and disruption that typhoon season brings each year. These were not stories

volunteered for a survey. They emerged because the hurt was still close to the surface, carried by people who had lived through it more than once.

It became clear that any meaningful engagement with this community could not treat conservation and disaster resilience as separate concerns. The mangroves I had come to study are themselves a form of protection, a living buffer against the very storms these families fear, and understanding one means understanding the other. Working with the teachers and staff of Yên Hưng school, we began to explore how students' own experiences of flooding and typhoons could be brought into the classroom, not as abstract hazard information, but as lived knowledge worth documenting, discussing, and passing forward.

What follows in this issue reflects the early outcomes of that engagement. It carries the voices of students and educators in Quảng Yên making sense of the storms that shape their coastline, and beginning to connect their understanding of environmental protection with their understanding of community safety. It is, in its own modest way, an act of memory, care, and connection between generations, carried forward by young people in a place its people refuse to leave no matter how many times the water rises.

Dr Tran, To Diem Hang (Flora)

Message from the Editors

Dear Readers,

Welcome to the sixth Volume of the ADN Junior Champion Magazine: Children and Youth Stories from Vietnam. This edition brings together the lived experiences and reflections of children and youths affected by the recent floods in northern Vietnam, which disrupted homes, schools, families, and communities.

As editors, we are privileged to provide a platform for these emerging voices. Their stories arise from moments of fear, uncertainty, and sudden disruption, yet they also speak powerfully of courage, care, adaptation, and hope. These are not simply accounts of a flood. They are reflections on what it means to lose a sense of safety, to support one another during a crisis, and to rebuild everyday life after the waters recede.

Across this Volume, the young authors describe how the floods affected the places closest to them. They reflect on their homes, belongings, education, neighbourhoods, and family routines, showing how a disaster can transform familiar spaces within moments. At the same time, their stories highlight the strength found within families and communities, through shared preparation, timely warnings, evacuation, mutual support, and the determination to recover together.

This edition reflects the 2026 International Day for Disaster Risk Reduction theme, **"Resilience Starts at Home."** The home is often the first place where the consequences of a disaster are experienced, but it can also be the first place where preparedness begins. Families can discuss local risks, prepare emergency supplies, identify safe evacuation routes, protect important documents, respond to warnings, and ensure that children, older people, persons with disabilities, and other vulnerable family members are not left behind.

The stories in this Volume remind us that resilience is not created only through large infrastructure projects or institutional policies. It is also built through everyday knowledge, communication, preparedness, and care. It grows when families plan together, when neighbours assist one another, when schools teach children how to respond, and when young people are encouraged to understand and communicate the risks surrounding them.

Children and youths are often described only as victims of disasters. However, the contributors to this Volume show that they are also observers, communicators, learners, and active participants in resilience. They notice changes in their environment, remember how warnings were received, understand the fears experienced within their households, and offer meaningful ideas about how homes and communities can become safer.

More than personal reflections, these stories serve as a call to recognise that disaster losses are not inevitable. The impacts of floods are shaped by preparedness, access to information, the safety of homes, the effectiveness of early-warning systems, and the ability of families and communities to act before a hazard becomes a tragedy. By listening to those who experienced these floods, we can better understand where protection systems succeed, where gaps remain, and why household-level preparedness must form part of wider disaster risk reduction efforts.

We extend our sincere gratitude to our guest editor, Dr Hang (Flora) Tran, for her guidance, expertise, and commitment in bringing this Volume to life. Her support has been invaluable in ensuring that the experiences of children and youths from Vietnam are presented with care, authenticity, and purpose.

We invite you to engage deeply with these stories, to reflect on the experiences of the young authors and the communities they represent. May their words inspire families, schools, communities, governments, and organisations to recognise that resilience does not begin only after disaster strikes. It begins beforehand, through knowledge, inclusion, preparedness, and the choices made within every home.

Arkoneil Ghosh and Anushka Konar

The Historic Storm

Tran Ha My

April 2025 is a time I remember very well. That was when a huge storm hit Quảng Yên, the place where I live. A few days before the storm arrived, the television and phones kept broadcasting news about it. Mum and Dad hurried to secure the doors tightly, cut off some tree branches near the house, and prepared water and extra food. Even so, I still felt very worried because it was the first time I had ever experienced a natural hazard disaster so close and so frightening.

On the night the storm arrived, the wind blew fiercely. The howling sound outside kept me awake. Rain pounded on the tin roof and windows. When the electricity went out, my whole family gathered together under the light of a torch. I felt scared every time I heard a loud bang outside. All I wanted was for morning to come quickly and for the storm to pass. The next morning, when the storm had weakened, I went outside and was shocked by what I saw. Many trees had been uprooted and were lying across the road. Some roofs in our neighborhood had been torn off. Our yard was covered in leaves and broken branches. My family was fortunate and didn't lose much, but many families nearby had a much harder time. Some houses were badly damaged, and some people had to clean up for days before life felt normal again.

The days that followed were very difficult. It was hard to get around, and the electricity and water kept going out. My school was affected as well, so lessons were suspended for a while. However, what I remember most isn't the hardships; it's how everyone helped each other. Neighbors came over to help tidy up. Kind volunteers and rescue workers also came to assist people in sorting things out. I helped Mom and Dad sweep the yard, pick up branches, and do whatever small jobs I could.

After that storm, I realized that natural hazard disasters can occur at any time. Therefore, everyone needs to be prepared in advance to keep themselves and their families safe. I also learned that when times get tough, sticking together truly matters. If people look out for one another and lend a helping hand, the losses become much smaller.

I hope that in the future, there will be more activities to teach students how to cope with natural disasters. I also want to tell my friends: never ignore a weather warning.

Always be prepared and listen to adults. Last year's storm made me feel worried and frightened, but it also taught me to be braver, to appreciate what I have, and to understand just how powerful kindness can be during difficult times.

Source: © Tran Ha My

Tiếp Tế Vùng Lũ / Flood Relief Efforts

Notes by Student: The floodwaters will go down in the end, but people's kindness, sharing and togetherness will always stay behind. That's the most precious thing that flood taught me.

(Grade 5; Yen Hung Primary, Secondary and High School; Quảng Yên)

The Lamp in the Storm and Flood, and a Lesson about Resilience

Ngo Hoang Anh Linh

I was born and grew up in a coastal province in Central Vietnam, a place where every storm season leaves deep scars behind. But perhaps the historic storm that struck my hometown two years ago is the event I will never forget. Just as the storm warning siren kept wailing, the sky turned dark, and the wind shrieked through every crack in the doors, making eerie, chilling sounds. Within just a few hours, the floodwaters rose rapidly, swallowing the whole village road and pouring straight into our yard. Watching that muddy, churning water surge forward, I, young as I was then, could not help feeling bewildered and afraid before the fury of nature.

That storm completely cut off my family's normal daily life. The power went out, the phone signal weakened and then vanished altogether, turning our house into an isolated "island" surrounded on all sides by water. My studies had to stop for a while because the school was deeply flooded, and my books and school things, even though we had raised them onto higher shelves, were still damaged by the damp. The greatest difficulty was that our supply of clean water and food gradually ran out after three days of being besieged by the flood.

In the midst of hardship, family closeness and togetherness were the greatest lifeline. My father waded through water up to his chest to repair the tin roof torn loose by the wind, while my mother rationed every mouthful of clean water and cooked steaming bowls of instant noodles on the one mini gas stove we had left. As night fell, the whole family gathered around the flickering light of a candle, talking together to keep the cold and the fear at bay. When the water finally began to recede, what was left behind was a battlefield of mud and rubbish. But watching the neighbors calling out to one another, some sweeping up, others mending their homes, I understood that life was being reborn out of the very ruins around us. Today, my hometown has turned green again, homes have been rebuilt sturdier than before, and my family's life has settled back down after those stormy days.

Living through that storm and flood, I came to realize that a natural hazard disaster can sweep away possessions, but it can never conquer the human will. The greatest

lesson I have drawn for myself is the spirit of being proactive and never complacent. Should a similar disaster occur in the future, I am certain I would prepare far more thoroughly: from stockpiling backup power and clean water, to equipping myself with basic survival and first-aid skills.

I would like to put forward a suggestion to the community and local authorities: to hold more practical disaster-response drills for young people, and to build a smart early-warning system through mobile apps so that residents can evacuate in good time. The message I want to send to my fellow young people is this: **"A natural hazard disaster is a challenge, but it is also a mirror reflecting the strength of solidarity. Always arm yourselves with knowledge, hold onto an optimistic spirit, and stand ready to share with others, because we, the younger generation, will be the sturdiest shield for our families and our community against every storm life may bring."**

(Grade 6; Yen Hung Primary, Secondary and High School; Quảng Yên)

Rescue Helicopter

Ngoc Duong

One afternoon in September, heavy rain started falling in my town, Quảng Yên. At first, I thought it was just a normal storm, because storms often come during this season in Vietnam. But soon we heard on the radio that a very strong typhoon called Yagi was coming. The wind grew stronger and stronger, and the trees outside our window bent from side to side. Then the river began to rise, and dirty brown water rushed into our street. My parents told my little sister and me to stay inside because the flood was getting worse. I watched the water climb higher until it reached the steps of our house. I had never felt so frightened.

As the storm continued, the water kept rising, so my family decided to move upstairs to the second floor, the highest floor of our house. Many houses near us were surrounded by water too, and some families had to do the same thing. Our neighbors called out to each other from their windows to check if everyone was safe. Suddenly, the electricity went out, so we could not watch the news or use the internet. My father packed a waterproof bag with food, water, medicine, flashlights, and batteries. We tried to stay calm and wait for help on the second floor.

The next morning, the flood was even deeper. From our window, I could see motorbikes almost completely underwater, and pieces of wood floating along the street. Then I saw rescue workers in small boats helping people escape from their houses. Later, a helicopter flew above our neighborhood and lowered a basket to save an old man who could not leave his flooded house alone. Watching the helicopter made me feel hopeful, because I understood that many people were risking their lives to help us, even though we were still safe on the second floor.

We stayed on the second floor for two days, sharing our food carefully and listening to a small battery radio for news. My mother kept telling my sister and me that we were lucky to be safe and dry above the water. Finally, the flood slowly began to go down, and boats came to check on families like ours.

When the water finally disappeared, we went downstairs to find the first floor covered in mud. Many of our books and furniture were ruined, and cleaning took several days. Our school also needed repairs, since some classrooms had flooded. My

classmates told me they had lost school supplies, pets, or fruit trees too. It was a hard time, but our teachers told us to stay strong and help each other. Neighbors worked together to clean the streets and support families who lost more than we did.

This experience taught me that a typhoon like Yagi can arrive very suddenly, so every family should always be ready. We should prepare an emergency bag, listen to weather warnings, and move to the highest floor of our house early if flooding begins. I hope Quảng Yên will build stronger dikes and better warning systems in the future.

To other children, I want to say: never ignore a storm warning. If we prepare early and help one another, we can get through even the most frightening flood together.

(Grade 5; Yen Hung Primary, Secondary and High School; Quảng Yên)

From Loss to Hope

Le Phuoc Thao Uyen

Quảng Yên is a place that often has storms and floods. Every year I hear about storms, so I thought I was used to it. But I will never forget one big flood, when the rain did not stop and the river water rose very fast. That was the first time I really understood how a natural disaster can change people's lives in just a few days. I felt scared, but I also learned many good lessons about sharing and hope.

Before the flood came, it rained all the time, day and night. At first, my family thought it was just normal rain. But then, in one night, the water rose so fast that it flooded our yard, and then it came into the house. My family quickly moved the tables, chairs, the fridge and other important things to higher places. We got food, water, flashlights and power banks ready, in case the electricity went off. When I looked at the muddy water rushing outside, I felt worried and a little scared. I just wanted the rain to stop soon, so everything could be normal again.

The days of the flood were the hardest days. The electricity was cut off to keep us safe, and the phone signal came and went. We could only move around by boat, and the rescue teams and neighbors helped with that. Some families were stuck alone for many days because the water was too high. But even though everyone had a hard time, people still cared about each other. Families with instant noodles shared them with families who had no food. People with boats helped bring old people and small children to safe places. I still remember the soldiers, police and volunteers who went out in the rain and wind to bring food and supplies to everyone. Seeing that made me understand that when things are the most difficult, kindness is what makes us strong.

After many days, the water finally went down, but it left a mess behind. The yards and houses were full of mud, many things were broken, trees fell down, and our studying and daily life were affected. My family and neighbors cleaned the house from morning to night. Everyone was very tired, but we cheered each other on to keep going. Watching everyone work together and help one another, I understood that when people are united, they can get through any difficulty.

After that flood, I learned that natural hazard disasters are something nobody wants, but we can make the damage smaller if we prepare early, listen to warnings, and take care of the environment. I also learned to be thankful for small things, like a full meal, electricity, or a dry house. Most of all, I understood how important love and sharing are between people.

I hope that in the future, there will be more projects to help the people of Quang TRI have less damage from natural hazard disasters. I also hope young people will learn more about how to prevent and deal with disasters, and work together to protect the environment, so we can build a safer community. Natural hazard disasters can bring loss and hardship, but I still believe that with solidarity, kindness and hope, we will always have the strength to get through every challenge and move towards a brighter future.

(Grade 8; Yen Hung Primary, Secondary and High School; Quảng Yên)

Kindness in the Storm

Huynh Minh Thu

Time can make me forget many things, but every time the rainy season comes round, I remember one morning in 2023. I was only eleven years old then, living with my family in Quảng Ninh, and it was the first time I had ever gone through a huge storm, Typhoon No. 1. What stayed with me wasn't just the strong wind or the roads covered in broken branches, but the first real lesson I ever learned about solidarity and love between people.

In the days before the storm hit, all I heard was the adults saying it was going to be a very strong one. Back then, I honestly thought a storm just meant heavy rain and strong wind, and maybe a few days off school. I was actually a bit excited, thinking I'd get to stay home longer. But the morning of 2 August that year changed my mind completely.

I still remember waking up very early to the sound of the wind screaming outside. The windows kept shaking, and every time the corrugated iron roof rattled, I jumped. My parents were busy checking the doors, pulling the curtains shut and telling me to stay away from the glass. For the first time, I saw real worry on their faces, and that was when I understood this storm wasn't what I had imagined at all. When the electricity went out, the whole house was lit only by a small torch. No TV, no internet, I could only sit beside my parents and listen to the wind howling outside. I kept asking my mum, "When will the storm end?" She just smiled, ruffled my hair and said, "It'll be over soon, love". Somehow, that made me feel much calmer.

When the storm finally passed, my dad and I went outside, and what I saw left me speechless. The streets I knew so well were covered in broken branches. Some trees had been uprooted completely and were blocking the road. Several corrugated iron roofs had been torn off by the wind, signs were hanging crooked, and a few houses had lost almost their entire roof. The neighborhood that always felt so lively suddenly seemed silent and empty. But it was in that very scene that I saw the most beautiful thing. Neighbors came out to help each other clean up without anyone even having to ask. The young men worked together to see through fallen trees and clear the road. One woman brought round a pot of hot porridge to share with families

who hadn't had the chance to cook because of the power cut. I helped my dad pick up branches and sweep our yard too, small jobs, but they made me feel like I was helping the neighborhood get back to normal a little faster. That day, I understood that real strength isn't only about standing up to nature, but also about the way people hold on to each other when things are hardest.

Typhoon No. 1 is long gone now. I'm no longer that eleven-year-old girl who just hoped for a day off school whenever a storm was announced. Every rainy season now, I keep an eye on the weather forecast, help my family prepare what we need, and remind my relatives to be careful. More than anything, I've learned that staying calm, being prepared and sharing with others are what really help us get through a natural disaster. A storm can knock down trees and tear off roofs, but it can never wash away kindness. And I believe that as long as people are willing to help each other, even in small ways, we will always have enough hope to start again after any storm.

Source: Photo taken by © Huynh Minh Thu

Aftermath of Typhoon No. 1 in Quang Ninh

(Grade 9; Yen Hung Primary, Secondary and High School; Quảng Yên)

After the Storm, a New Challenge Began

Nguyen Quoc Bao Ngan

If someone had asked me before what the scariest thing about a natural hazard disaster is, I probably would have said it was the fierce gusts of wind, the pouring rain, or the raging floodwater. But after actually living through a major storm myself, I realized that the hardest part isn't when the disaster is happening. It's the days that come after, when everyone has to start rebuilding from whatever is left.

When the storm made landfall, all my family could think about was making sure everyone stayed safe. We shut the doors tight, cut off the electricity, got the torches ready, and huddled together in a small room. The howling wind, the rain hammering against the roof, and the sound of trees snapping outside made everyone uneasy. Nobody said much, but I could tell that deep down, everyone was worried. It wasn't until daybreak, when the wind had finally died down, that we dared to step outside.

What we saw was nothing like the streets we knew. The familiar roads were littered with fallen branches and rubbish. Some roofs had been torn off, and many shops had to close because water had flooded in. Both electricity and water supply were cut off, and even the phone signal kept dropping in and out because of the storm's destruction. Ordinary life had suddenly become far more difficult and inconvenient than I could have imagined. Things I had always taken for granted, like having electricity to use, clean water for daily needs, or a full meal, suddenly felt like things worth being grateful for.

The days that followed are what I remember most. I watched my parents get up early every morning to clean the house. Neighbors who usually just exchanged a few polite greetings each day now worked side by side, sweeping the streets, sawing through fallen tree trunks, and helping families who had suffered worse damage. Some brought over bread, others handed out bottles of water, and some even lent out their generators. No one asked whether they knew the other person well or not, because at that moment, everyone understood that the only thing that mattered was getting through the aftermath of the storm together.

For the first time, I understood that solidarity isn't just something you read about in books. It's when people are willing to help each other even while they themselves

are struggling. I still remember the image of an elderly man sweeping the road in front of his neighbor's house with an old broom, and young volunteers working in the rain to clear fallen trees , so traffic could move again. Those actions may have seemed small, but they warmed my heart amid all the chaos.

After that disaster, my outlook on life changed as well. I used to complain about losing power for a few minutes, or having my plans ruined by a bit of rain. But after that experience, I realized I had grown far too used to having everything I needed, and had forgotten that for many people, an entire home, all their belongings, or their only source of income can vanish overnight. I learned to be more grateful for simple things, like a sturdy roof over my head, a meal shared with family, or a peaceful day without any storm at all.

That experience also taught me that we can't stop natural hazard disasters from happening altogether, but we can prepare ourselves to reduce the damage they cause. Keeping up with weather forecasts, preparing essential supplies, learning basic response skills, and following the guidance of local authorities all matter a great deal. On top of that, everyone should also be more mindful of protecting the environment, since the effects of climate change are making extreme weather events happen more and more often.

Even now, whenever I see a storm warning on the news, I no longer think just about wind speed or rainfall. I think about the families rushing to secure their roofs, the farmers worrying about their crops, and the children who might have to miss school because of the disaster. I understand now that behind every storm, there are countless stories that never get told.

If I could leave a message for other young people, it would be this: treasure the peaceful days, and never take a natural disaster lightly. Equip yourself with the knowledge and skills needed to protect yourself and your family. More importantly, learn to share with those who are struggling. Sometimes, a simple question of concern, a small act of help, or a well-timed word of encouragement can become the very source of strength someone needs to get through their hardest days. Because after every storm, what truly helps people stand strong again isn't just the houses that get rebuilt, but the love and companionship of the whole community.

(Grade 10; Yen Hung Primary, Secondary and High School; Quảng Yên)

When the Red-Brown Water Swept Through: An Eyewitness's Perspective

Pham Diem Quynh

I wasn't born on that sun-scorched, wind-battered strip of land in Central Vietnam, but the volunteer trip I made to Huong Khe, Ha Tinh, at the height of the flood that year completely changed the way I thought about natural hazard disasters. It was a historic flood season, one I don't think I'll ever forget for the rest of my life. For the first time, I witnessed the sheer destructive power of nature with my own eyes, not through a television screen. After just one night of relentless, drenching rain, the water surged down from upstream and swallowed an entire rural area beneath a sea of reddish-brown floodwater. Standing on higher ground, looking down at a village that had been completely cut off from the outside world, I felt suffocated, afraid, and utterly powerless.

During the days when the water was at its peak, people's lives were turned completely upside down. The electricity had been cut off entirely, and the phone signal kept flickering in and out, which made contacting rescue teams incredibly difficult. The only way to get around was to wade through the water or squeeze into one of the small, flimsy canoes drifting between the waves. The most frightening thing of all was the shortage of clean water and food. It broke my heart to see elderly people and small children climbing onto their rooftops and waving for supplies, or families rushing through a meal of nothing more than dry instant noodles snapped in half. But it was precisely in that desperate moment that I saw the full depth of human kindness. Rescue boats from the local authorities and volunteer groups kept cutting through the waves, pushing further into the heart of the flood zone. When the storm finally passed, leaving behind a wasteland of mud and debris, the villagers picked up their hoes and shovels and cleared it all away together. The village has since come back to life, but the scars of that year remain a memory etched deeply into me.

What I remember most vividly is helping clear the mud out of one small house alongside the others. The owner was an elderly woman. Even though nearly everything she owned had been ruined, she still managed a smile and said that as long as everyone was safe, everything else could be rebuilt. That simple sentence

left me speechless. It was then that I realized what truly helps people rise again after a disaster isn't just material aid, but the encouragement and companionship of those around them.

That trip taught me lessons that no classroom ever could. I came to understand that, in the face of a natural disaster, complacency is the most dangerous thing of all. If I ever find myself in a similar situation in the future, I believe everyone should be better prepared: keeping a "survival bag" with a torch, medicine and some dry food stored on the highest point in the house, and local authorities should build more floating houses or sturdy community shelters as flood refuges.

The last thing I want to say to other young people is this: a natural disaster can sweep away houses, but it can never break the spirit of people looking after one another. Let's stop damaging the environment, plant more trees, and equip ourselves with survival skills, because protecting nature is, in the end, protecting our own lives.

(Grade 11; Yen Hung Primary, Secondary and High School; Quảng Yên)

Learning Through the Storm

Lu Trung Son

Natural hazard disasters can strike without warning and change a person's life in ways they never expected. For me, one of the experiences I remember most clearly is the storm that hit Da Nang in 2022. That was during the two years I spent living in Da Nang with my family, and October of that year turned out to be a month I would never forget. It was a powerful storm, bringing heavy rain, fierce winds, and no small amount of chaos to the city. For my family and me, it wasn't just a matter of getting through a few difficult days. It ended up affecting my studies in ways I hadn't really thought about beforehand.

When the storm actually hit, the weather turned genuinely frightening. The wind howled for hours on end, and the rain just wouldn't let up. Roads across Da Nang flooded, making it almost impossible to get anywhere, and in some areas, the power went out along with the internet connection. My family stayed indoors, trying to keep safe and brace for whatever damage might come. I remember feeling anxious that whole time, since I'd never lived through a storm that serious before. Part of me was worried about our safety, and another part of me was already thinking about school and how much I'd fall behind.

That worry turned out to be justified. Because of the storm, schools closed for a while to keep students and teachers safe, so my classes were cancelled and I couldn't attend in the usual way. When we switched to online learning, the unstable internet made it hard to even join a lesson properly, let alone keep up with what the teacher was explaining. On top of that, the power cuts meant I sometimes couldn't charge my laptop or use it at all, which meant certain assignments simply had to wait. Little by little, I found myself falling behind on work I would normally have finished on time.

It wasn't only my studies that were affected, though. During and after the storm, my family had to deal with quite a bit of damage: some parts of the roof and fence needed repairing after the wind, and just getting through an ordinary day became more complicated. Going outside wasn't really safe, and even buying basic groceries was a challenge since many shops had shut. Still, we managed to get through it by

supporting one another, and once the weather cleared, things gradually went back to normal.

Looking back, this experience taught me a few things I don't think I'd have learned otherwise. I realized that being prepared for a natural disaster isn't something to take lightly. It's easy to assume it won't be that bad until it actually happens. I also came to appreciate how much people rely on one another during hard times, and how much easier things become when everyone pitches in. If something like this happens again, I'll make sure to have supplies ready in advance, protect the things that matter most, and plan my study schedule with more flexibility built in.

Going forward, I hope our community, and schools in particular, will put more thought into preparing for situations like this, whether that means clearer emergency guidance or better systems for keeping students learning when in-person classes aren't possible. If there's one thing I'd want other people my age to take away from this, it's to stay calm, stay responsible, and be willing to help others when things get difficult. The 2022 storm in Da Nang was a hard experience to go through, but in hindsight, it also left me a little more resilient and a lot more prepared for whatever comes next.

(Grade 12; Yen Hung Primary, Secondary and High School, Quảng Yên)

Have a Boat!

Le Dang Quang

In late September 2025, Typhoon Ragasa made landfall in Quảng Ninh and brought days of rain that pushed the rivers over their banks, leaving towns like ours underwater for days. We had only moved to Quảng Ninh a few months earlier, after my father took a job as a marine mechanic at the harbour, so I was still learning my way around when the storm hit. I remember the sound most: rain that didn't let up for three days straight, drumming on our tin roof so hard that no one in the house could sleep. By the second morning, the road outside our gate wasn't a road anymore. It was brown water, moving slowly, already past our ankles at the doorstep and still climbing.

That was when my neighbour's son showed up with an old wooden boat, barely big enough for two people, and asked if I wanted to help him check on the houses further along. I sat in front, he sat behind me with a bit of broken wood he used as a paddle, since the real oar had gone missing weeks before. We pushed off right from our own gate. It's a strange feeling, floating past a street sign that still felt unfamiliar and seeing only the top half of it above the water, a place I barely knew yet, already half gone.

Further on, people were wading through with whatever they could carry. Some stood on a pile of broken branches and debris that had washed up against a wall, waiting for someone to come by in a boat. Plastic bottles and bits of wood drifted past us the whole way, and it was quiet except for the sound of the paddle dipping in and out of the water.

By the time we got back, my own family had already started carrying things upstairs. We didn't lose the house, but we lost what had been kept low: sacks of rice, my father's tools, a box of my mother's old letters, and our family's altar photos. Everything within reach got hauled up as high as we could manage, and even then, some of it didn't survive.

For almost a week we had no electricity and no clean water. My mother boiled rainwater she caught off the roof. School shut down, which made sense, since the road there looked exactly like the one in front of our house. My father works as a

marine mechanic at the harbour, and with the boats grounded and the whole area flooded, there was no work for him to do and no way to get there even if there had been. Relatives sent food by boat when they could get through, and that was mostly what we ate.

I was scared the whole time, and I won't pretend otherwise. But I also remember paddling that little boat through our neighbourhood and feeling, for once, like I was doing something instead of just waiting for the water to decide what happened next. Cleaning up afterward took almost a month. Mud gets into everything, and the smell lingers in the walls long after the water is gone.

If I could change one thing, it would be this: know ahead of time which neighbour keeps a boat, and have important belongings stored high before the season turns risky. What actually got people through our street was one neighbour with an old boat and a broken branch for a paddle, more than any plan or warning ever did.

If you've been through something like this, you'll probably still feel scared when it happens again, and that's fair. But you might surprise yourself with what you're capable of once the flood is really at your door. Talk to your family now, ahead of the next storm, about what you'd actually do. The rain always finds its way back here. Somehow, so do we.

(Grade 12; Yen Hung Primary, Secondary and High School, Quảng Yên)

2020 Central Vietnam Floods: Soldiers' Sacrifice

Hoang Tam Binh

1. What happened?

I am a Grade 10 student from a small rural area in Quang Ninh Province. Although I did not experience the historic floods in Central Vietnam in 2020 myself, it is an event that I still remember very clearly. At that time, I was only about nine years old. Every evening, my family watched the news together to follow the weather and flood updates. I remember that Quang Binh, Quang Tri, Thua Thien Hue and Quang Nam were badly affected after several storms and days of heavy rain. The floodwater rose very quickly and caused serious flooding across many areas.

The images on television were heartbreaking. I saw people sitting on the roofs of their houses waiting to be rescued, many children losing their school books, and familiar roads turning into rivers. Even though I was still young, I felt very sad and worried. It was the first time I realised that a natural disaster could change people's lives in just a few days.

2. My story

Now that I am older, I have learned more about the floods through documentaries, news reports and stories shared by local people. Looking back, I understand much better how difficult life was for families living in the flooded areas.

Many homes were completely underwater, and furniture, clothes and other belongings were damaged or washed away. Some families had to stay in schools or community centres because they could not return home. Students were unable to go to school for many days because classrooms were flooded and books, desks and learning equipment had been destroyed. In many places, electricity, clean water and mobile phone signals were cut off, making daily life even more difficult.

What touched me the most was the strong spirit of unity shown by people across Vietnam. Soon after the floods began, the Government instructed different organisations and local authorities to carry out emergency rescue operations. Soldiers, police officers, medical workers and rescue teams were sent to the

hardest-hit areas to evacuate people, search for those who were missing, and provide food, clean water and medicine.

I was especially impressed by the images of soldiers and police officers walking through deep floodwater, rowing boats, carrying elderly people on their backs and holding young children in their arms to bring them to safety. Some of them stayed in the floodwater for many hours to rescue people one by one. Rescue trucks and helicopters were also used to deliver food and other essential supplies to villages that had become completely isolated.

One of the saddest events was the landslide at the Economic and Defence Unit 337 in Quang Tri on 18 October 2020. While carrying out rescue work to help local people, 22 officers and soldiers lost their lives in the landslide. Before that, rescue teams had also worked tirelessly to search for victims after another landslide in Tra Leng, Quang Nam, despite the dangerous weather conditions. Their sacrifice made me feel deeply grateful and respectful towards those who are always willing to risk their own lives to protect others.

In my hometown in Quang Ninh, many people also donated money, clothes and daily necessities to support families in Central Vietnam. My family joined the donation as well. I still remember helping my parents take clothes and other useful items to a local collection point. Although we lived far away from the flooded areas, everyone wanted to do something to help. That experience taught me the true meaning of kindness and sharing. After the floodwater finally went down, I continued to follow the news. Many volunteer groups travelled to Central Vietnam to clean mud from houses, repair damaged homes and help schools prepare for students to return. Life gradually became more normal again, but the loss of family members and property is something that many people will never forget.

3. Lessons and hopes

This disaster taught me that natural hazard disasters do not only destroy buildings and property. They also leave deep emotional pain for many families. I also learned that preparing before a disaster happens is much more important than reacting after it has already arrived.

As a student living in Quang Ninh, where strong storms also happen quite often, I think it is important to pay attention to weather forecasts and prepare an emergency

bag with drinking water, dry food, medicine, a torch, spare batteries, a power bank and important documents kept in waterproof bags. I also want to learn about safe evacuation places in my local area so that I can respond quickly if an emergency happens.

In my opinion, the Government should continue improving early warning systems, strengthening flood protection projects and organising more emergency drills so that people know what to do during natural disasters. Schools should also include more disaster preparedness activities because they can help students develop practical skills to protect themselves and others.

Finally, I hope that young people will never ignore the risks of natural disasters and will always be willing to help others whenever they can. Even small actions, such as donating supplies, joining volunteer activities or protecting the environment, can make a difference. If we all work together, we can build stronger and safer communities for the future.

(Grade 10; Yen Hung Primary, Secondary and High School; Quảng Yên)

The Nights of Blackout

Ngoc Anh

September 2024 is a time that I will never forget. I was born and grew up in a small rural village in Quang Ninh Province. Before Typhoon Yagi made landfall, the whole village became much busier than usual. The loudspeakers in our commune kept broadcasting updates about the storm and reminding everyone to secure their houses, trim trees and prepare enough food and drinking water. My father climbed onto the roof to tie down the metal sheets that might be blown away by the strong wind. My mother bought rice, instant noodles, bottled water, candles and a power bank because everyone expected that we would lose electricity for several days.

My family keeps a few chickens and some pigs behind our house. On the afternoon before the storm arrived, my parents moved the chickens into a sheltered place and made sure the pigsty door was tied shut securely. Normally, our garden is full of the sounds of chickens scratching the ground and sparrows flying down to look for food. However, everything felt different that day. The birds flew unusually low before disappearing, long lines of ants climbed up the walls to higher places, and dragonflies skimmed just above the ground. The sky turned dark much earlier than usual, making me feel both curious and nervous.

By late afternoon, the wind became much stronger. Within a short time, the rows of trees in front of our house were bending heavily to one side. The wind whistled through the gaps around the doors, while the metal roof shook loudly above us. The rain poured down so heavily that I could hardly see across our front garden. When the electricity suddenly went off, the whole house became dark except for the light from a few candles and our torches. I sat close to my parents and could hardly sleep because of the sound of the wind, the heavy rain and objects crashing outside. I kept wondering whether our roof would still be there by the morning.

When we opened the door the next morning, I could hardly recognise the road outside our house. Large trees had been uprooted and were lying across the road, with branches and leaves scattered everywhere. Part of our front porch roof had been torn away, and the garden was covered with leaves and rainwater. Thankfully,

our pigs and chickens were all safe, although they stayed unusually quiet in their pens, as if they had also been frightened by the storm.

What I remember most was the strange silence afterwards. There was no birdsong in the morning like there usually was. Every now and then, I could hear a dog barking or a weak crow from a rooster somewhere nearby. A few days later, when the floodwater began to go down, I noticed many more frogs, toads and insects in our garden. Small snakes also came out from the bushes because their hiding places had been flooded. Everyone had to be very careful while clearing up in case they stepped on one or got bitten.

The days after the storm were not easy. We still had no electricity, and we had to use clean water very carefully. My school was closed for several days while teachers checked the buildings and cleared fallen trees from the school grounds. At home, I helped my parents sweep the garden, collect broken branches and repair the damaged parts of our house. Our neighbours also worked together to fix roofs, cut up fallen trees and clear the roads. Nobody needed to ask for help because everyone understood that the whole village could only recover if we supported one another.

I still remember seeing soldiers, police officers and rescue workers working from early morning until late in the evening. They used chainsaws to remove huge trees blocking the roads, helped families repair their homes and delivered food and other essential supplies to people whose houses had been badly damaged. Their uniforms were soaked with rain and covered in mud, but I never saw anyone complain or stop working for long. Watching them made me feel deeply grateful and full of admiration for people who are always willing to help others in difficult times.

About a week later, the electricity and clean water were restored, and school reopened. Life slowly returned to normal, but the signs of the storm were still everywhere. Uprooted trees, damaged houses waiting to be repaired and messy gardens reminded me of those worrying days.

After experiencing Typhoon Yagi, I realised that natural hazard disasters can happen very quickly and affect not only people but also the animals that live around us. I learned that being prepared is extremely important. We should always pay attention to weather forecasts, prepare food, drinking water, torches, spare batteries and emergency supplies, and make sure our animals are safe before a storm arrives.

If another storm like Typhoon Yagi happens in the future, I will stay calmer, help my parents prepare everything earlier and always follow the advice of the local authorities. I also hope that schools will organise more disaster preparedness lessons so that students can learn how to protect themselves and help other people.

The storm damaged many homes, knocked down countless trees and changed the lives of many families. However, what I remember most is not the destruction. It is my family sitting together by candlelight, my neighbours helping one another clear away the damage, and the soldiers quietly working to help people rebuild their lives. Those memories taught me that no matter how powerful a natural disaster may be, people can overcome it through kindness, unity and hope.

(Grade 10; Yen Hung Primary, Secondary and High School; Quảng Yên)

Artwork: Le Dang Quang, *Xóm nhỏ sau cơn bão / The Lane After the Storm*

Artwork: Ngoc Duong, *Trực Thăng Cứu Hộ / Rescue Helicopter*