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Super Capitana

For three-months in 2009 we lived in a remote rice paddy seven thousand miles from our home in Virginia Beach, Virginia. We had been married for four-years when we began living with a Peace Corps host family in the Philippines, headed by our host mother, Capitana Nordy Picar Icaro. After a few weeks of living with Nordy, we realized that our host mother had super powers that none of our fellow volunteers had found in their host mothers. We began to wonder if she might be a superhero.

Great superheroes have two things going for them: 1) they have cools names; and 2) they have cool superpowers. Nordy had both. In our home, she was "Nordy," but in the community, she was "Capitana," a name people loved to call out across the rice paddies as she performed her tasks as barangay captain. Capitana's superpower was also cool. We soon learned that she could manipulate time.

One night, the Capitana's emergency cell-phone rang out through the house. She had prepared dinner in time to dash into her Capitana outfit, complete with flashlight and umbrella, before fragmenting into the monsoon rains outdoors. Our jaws dropped as we noticed how quickly her flashlight jumped from paddy to paddy in bursts of speed that seemed inhuman. Similar efforts on our part would have left us face down in mud and covered with frogs.

Seconds later it seemed, she returned. Her victory against the world of villainy complete, she spoke in the humble tone of a superhero that has saved the community from devastation. "Singing videoke within 50 meters of a church is against the law, so I had to stop it," she said nonchalantly. For Capitana, shutting down illegal videoke outfits at warp speed was all in a night's work. Empty church – saved. Peace and harmony – restored.

The Capitana's powers seemed endless. She would simultaneously buy our favorite foods, solve the community's problems, raise a son, kill a chicken, and build custom plastic lawn furniture for washing laundry by hand. During Typhoon Pepeng, she slaughtered and cooked a baby goat that had died of hypothermia while also staging relief supplies for the members of her community. She was always everywhere; her two cell-phones calling out to her with "Cshh, paging the owner of the black BMW" ringtones. The phones were the key to her superpowers, and she kept them close at all times.

Despite her many heroic feats, Nordy's true heroism was in being the perfect host mother. She used all her powers of motherly love, and all her respect for us as a married couple, to ensure that our first months in the Philippines would be comfortable. She would gladly give up things, from electric fans to a bedroom, to ensure our comfort. In our eyes, Capitana will always be Nordy, our heroic host mother who opened her house to us. She reached out to two strangers from a far-away place and invited us to join her family. She trusted us completely in a place where villains sing pop songs in the night and superheroes bounce across muddy rice paddies to save the day.