

SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY FLORENCE PROGRAM

# VILLAROSSA VOICE

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A woman with long dark hair, wearing a white tank top, blue jeans, and orange Converse sneakers, is standing on a metal ladder. She is painting a large mural of colorful flowers on a wall. The mural features large, stylized flowers in shades of pink, yellow, and purple against a blue background. Another person is visible in the background, also painting the wall.

(re)drawing the future



# SUPERHEROES

by Jenece Claribel Reyes (Syracuse University - Freshman)

*Remember the days when you sat in front of the TV watching cartoons or you read comic books cheering on your favourite superhero? Those days are history for me, yet this weekend I achieved a childhood dream of spending time with some real-life superheroes.*

My name is Jenece Reyes and I am a student at Syracuse University in Florence. As part of the SUP Volunteer program, I joined Zia Caterina on her mission of spreading smiles, happiness, and love to people in need. Well, I should explain who 'Zia Caterina' (or Aunt Cat) is? She is an angel dressed like a fairy who drives Taxi Milano 25 accompanying cancer patients, especially children, to their therapy appointments, and above all bringing joy to their lives.

Zia Cat and I visited cancer patients at the Careggi hospital in Florence on a Saturday. I spent most of the afternoon with a Sicilian man named Giuseppe. He is currently at Careggi fighting cancer for the second time. All of his family and friends are in Sicily, so he was excited to have visitors. Although we were in a hospital, Giuseppe found the strength to focus his energy on teaching me about the importance of theater in his hometown and about the things he enjoyed doing when he was home. It didn't take long for me to realize I had made yet another friend in Florence.



Jenece Reyes and Giuseppe

The next day, when I got into Caterina's super fabulous taxi, we talked about an opportunity for Giuseppe to share his story in the local newspaper. After some "pushing" he agreed. I was moved by Giuseppe's words. He talked about how drastically cancer had changed his life. His adoration of Caterina was evident when he spoke about how she brightened up the life that he was beginning to see as an endlessly dark path. Within a few hours, we successfully put Giuseppe's story on paper as an article which was then published in the Florentine daily newspaper La Nazione.

We were then ready for the next part of Caterina's mission, visiting the Ospedale Meyer, a children's hospital where I met several young people. One in particular amazed me--an eleven-year-old girl named Asia whose mother died a few years ago from cancer. Asia also had cancer and went through chemotherapy. She was able to go home after about a year of treatment. Unfortunately, however, soon afterwards the doctors discovered that she had another form of cancer. Asia is currently in the hospital receiving treatment again. When I met her she was suffering pain from the disease. Nonetheless she still found the strength to greet Caterina and me with a smile. There are so many of us who come into a workplace or classroom and instantly tell people that we are "having a bad day". Personally, I've had days when I justified my bad attitude towards a co-worker with such an excuse. I find it amazing that this eleven-year-old girl was able to put aside her pain and maintain a good attitude.

These people's fight against such a ferocious beast has made me more conscious of the preciousness of life. Giuseppe and Asia have the same characteristics I saw in superheroes when I was a child. They have inspired me to recognize every day as a gift and not to waste my time dwelling on the negatives of life. Visiting with Zia Caterina reminded me that the world is so much bigger than I am. Her philosophy on life amazes me. Her superpowers are not the ordinary superpowers we know from watching cartoons. They're better. Caterina doesn't save lives by fighting crime with physical strength. Instead, she changes lives with love and emotion.