I joined CARE in 1985. I was hired by Rudy Von Bernuth to become a program budget manager, someone within the Program Department to talk budgets with those folks in the Finance Department. Fortunately, I was immediately seconded to Rick LaRoche and the Finance Department for training. Six months later, during the annual budget process, the Program Department director, Beryl Levinger permanently traded my FTE to Rick for a half-time position plus $20,000. I thought she could have held out for more. I worked for Rick for the next 11 years.

In 1989, I was slated to become ACD/Finance for CARE India, then under the direction of Ron Burkard. Two months before my departure, my assignment was changed and instead I was directed to open a new office in Manila, Philippines to be known as CARE Overseas Finance Office. The concept of the office was the brainchild Country Director Stan Dunn. The office would hire and utilize Filipino trained accounting personnel to provide financial training, oversight, and assistance and data processing to CARE Country Offices worldwide. For the next six years, the CARE Manila office, as it came to be known, would provide better customer service, at lower cost, than a US based CARE Finance Department.

Corazon Aquino was swept into the Presidency of the Philippines in February 1986 by the events of the People Power Revolution, or the EDSA Revolution. The revolution was a series of nonviolent mass street demonstrations in the Philippines. It has been said, the revolution was the inspiration for subsequent non-violent demonstrations around the world including those that ended communist rule in Eastern Europe. The protests were the culmination of a long resistance by the people against the 20-year authoritarian regime of then president Ferdinand Marcos. The majority of the demonstrations took place on Epifanio de los Santos Avenue, more commonly known as EDSA. The demonstrations involved over two million Filipino civilians as well as several political, military, and religious figures.

By September 1989, when I arrived in the Philippines, President Aquino had consolidated her control over the country and international businesses were starting to expand their investment in the inexpensive Filipino labor pool and operating environment. The CARE Manila operation was to be separate from the CARE Philippines offices, but I used the CARE Philippines office, located within the walls of the old Spanish city (known as Intramuros) to conduct interviews of potential finance staff for the soon to be opened Overseas Finance Office in area of metro Manila known as Makati.

Stan Dunn was the Country Director of CARE Philippines. The ACD position had recently become vacant due to the resignation of Joe Wambach. In mid-November, Stan and his wife Rosadela left on home leave. A very competent National staff would operate the CARE programs in Stan’s absence, but to represent the expatriate nature of CARE country management (at that time) and to sign the checks as needed, I was nominally put in charge of CARE Philippines.
Other than signing checks, one of my first functions as in-charge was to attend a 7am breakfast at the US Embassy recreational compound known as Seafront. A visiting dignitary visiting from Washington wanted to meet the American NGOs. The dignitary was Elliot Richardson, probably most famous for his refusal, while he was Attorney General during the Watergate scandal, to fire Special Prosecutor Archibald Cox. I did not get to talk to Ambassador Richardson because his staff dispersed the breakfast group just as we were starting. The date was December 1, 1989.

Rebel airplanes had just bombed and raked the Malacanang Palace and three television stations in an attempt to overthrow President Aquino. The two main military camps in Manila had also been attacked by helicopter gunships. Principal roads in Manila were blocked and vehicle traffic, almost thick every hour in Manila, was sparse. I was able to drive back to the relative safety of my house which was not near any military bases or television stations.

There were battles in various parts of Manila between the rebel and loyal soldiers. At the onset of the coup attempt, the rebels had seized Villamor Airbase, Fort Bonifacio, Sangle Airbase, Mactan Airbase in Cebu, and portions of Camp Aguinaldo. At the time, the Philippines was home to 40,000 US military personnel and dependents on six bases including Clark Airfield and Subic Bay Naval base. The USS Midway and the USS Enterprise were also in the vicinity. I suspect the rebels expected to gain control of the country quickly and then solicit US support for their new regime. But the Aquino government did not fall in those first 24 hours. Then she appealed to the US government for military assistance. It came in the form of air support. The United States provided a continuous canopy of the F-4 fighter jets with the known orders to shoot down any rebel aircraft that became airborne. The rebels who had quickly obtained air superiority in the early hours of the coup were now grounded. By December 3, the rebels abandoned, or lost all of the military bases they had occupied. The main force of the rebels in Manila retreated to a section of the city called Makati. There, they occupied 22 high rise buildings including the Mandarin Oriental and Intercontinental Hotels.

The house to which I retreated on December 1 is located in Makati. Although, it was a safe refuge on December 1, by December 2, it had become quite dangerous. My wife (then five months pregnant), my one-year old son, and our house guest, Charles Zumbro, spent four days hunkered down, listening to government forces trying to dislodge the rebels. The street in front of the house was neutral, but the street behind the house was rebel controlled. We thought the government forces were gaining ground when the tank fire intensified. We only learned afterwards, the rebels controlled those tanks. We stayed in our house until we received word there would be a major government attack and it would come through our residential section. We joined a small caravan of vehicles under Canadian flag and fled. The government attack never happened. The rebels had the advantage of the high ground (high rise buildings) and the numerous hostages from the five-star hotels. On Day 7, a truce was negotiated that allowed the rebels to march back to their military barracks with their arms. Colonel Gregorio Honasan, one of the leaders of the coup, although imprisoned for his involvement, was later pardoned and he eventually became an opposition senator.
The CARE Overseas Finance Office was born amid this turmoil. December 1, 1989, the day the coup started, was scheduled to be the first day of employment of the office’s first Accounting Manager, Milagros Almeda. The office did not open that day or the following week, due to, as Charles Zumbro noted, excessive lead in the air. Mila did start employment on December 4, reporting to the CARE Philippines office which was miles away from the Makati standoff. Despite the fact I did not appear in the office for her first week of employment, Mila just celebrated her 20th anniversary with CARE.

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