



Name: Augie Rivera (actually, it's Augusto D. Rivera Jr., but I don't use that)

Age: 34

Zodiac sign: Taurus

School: UP Diliman

Fave movies: *Empire of the Sun*, Tim Burton movies, Hayao Miyazaki movies, *Notting Hill* and any movie set in London (Haha! Anglophile!)

Fave books: Mostly kids' books, like *The Wonderful Story of Henry Sugar* by Roald Dahl, *Frederick* by Leo Lionni, *The Selfish Giant* by Oscar Wilde, etc. etc.

Any special someone? Yup! She is Mike Rivera, my wife and co-author of the book *Magnificent Benito and His Two Front Teeth*.

Ambition in life: To publish more books. To get published abroad. To get a bigger place so I can buy a yellow Labrador.

Books by Augie Rivera:

- *Magnificent Benito and His Two Front Teeth* (written with Michelle Rivera), Adarna Books
- Batang Historyador series (historical storybooks children), Adarna Books and UNICEF
 - *Si Diwayen, Noong Bago Dumating ang mga Espanyol*
 - *Si Segunda, Noong Panahon ng mga Espanyol*
 - *Si Juanito, Noong Panahon ng mga Amerikano*
 - *Si Pitong, Noong Panahon ng mga Hapon*
 - *Si Jhun-jhun, Noong Bago Ideklara ang Batas Militar*
- *Burnay, ang Batang Palayok*, Lampara Books
- *Alamat ng Sibuyas*, Lampara Books
- *Kids Deserve a Smoke-free World*, World Health Organization
- *XILEF*, Adarna Books
- "Ang Gintong Habihan" in *Anthology of the 10 Best Children's Stories of the Palanca Awards*, Tahanan Books
- *Sa Ilalim ng Dagat*, UNICEF
- *Ang Bata sa Basket*, UNICEF
- *Alamat ng Ampalaya*, Adarna Books

WRITER Q&A: Augie Rivera

Augie's received so many awards for his children's books, we can't list them all here! Yet he takes time out from his many projects to chat with us about how creates such wonderful work for kids.

Q How long does it take you to write one book?

A *Depende.* A week, a month, some times overnight! For most of my books, I start with the character, then the plot. *Niluluto ko muna siya sa isip ko.* Sometimes, I list down an outline. But *yung* actual story, I plan it all in my mind. *Kapag parang naririnig ko nang nag-uusap ang mga* characters *sa mind ko*, I know it's time to sit down and face the PC. *Pag tapos na ang story, ipi-print out ko*, then I get my red Pilot pen and edit and revise. I love revising.

Q Of all your books, do you have a favorite?

A *Alamat ng Ampalaya*, an original tale that is actually my first book. It came out in 1995, and modesty aside, it's been reprinted several times and is still available in bookstores. A few years ago, it was adapted into a children's operetta by Iskwelahang Pilipino, a Boston-based Fil-Am cultural school.

I also like *XILEF*, which I believe is the first and only Filipino children's book that helps develop a greater understanding and acceptance of children with dyslexia. It's also the first big book of Adarna House.

Nabuo ang idea to write a story about a young boy coping with dys-

lexia *matapos akong mag-author* visit sa Wordlab, *isang eskwelahan para sa mga batang dyslexics.*

Sobra akong naintriga sa kakaibang learning difficulty *na ito, na mas kilala bilang isang* reading difficulty. *Kaya, nag-research agad ako. Nagkataon namang may kaibigan akong may kapatid na seven-year old dyslexic. Ininterbyu ko rin siya. Pagkatapos noon ay tsaka ko binuo si Felix, o Xilef, ang magiging bida sa kuwento ko. Nang ma-approve ng Adarna ang story for publication, naisip naming ipabasa ito sa mga teachers sa Wordlab upang makasiguro kami na accurate ang mga sinasabi sa kuwento* about dyslexia.

Q Are you like any of the characters in your books? When you were growing up, did you have the same experiences as any of your characters?

A Not exactly. But if I can, I do try to put a little part of me in every story that I do. *Mabiyain at mabina din ang loob ko noong bata pa ako*, like

Benito of Magnificent Benito and His Two Front Teeth, but my front teeth were not that ridiculously big! I had a pet goat, too, when I was growing up in Malabon, like Pitong of *Si Pitong, Noong Panahon ng mga Hapon*.



Do you do anything else besides children's book writing?

A Children's television. I was with the award-winning children's show *Batibot* for almost seven years, where I eventually became head writer. I was also head writer of *Alikabuk*, a Fili-

pino program of Eskuwela ng Bayan, a supplementary educational TV program of the Office of the President for disadvantaged public school kids in the barrios. I was also a contributing writer for Disney Singapore and Disney Australia. ★

Augie tells us how the *Batang Historyador* series came to be:

Ang orihinal na konsepto para sa seryeng *Batang Historyador* ay nabuo mula sa isang simpleng kuwentuhan namin ni Alexis Rodrigo, Information Officer ng UNICEF.

Sinuggest ko kay Alexis na gumawa kami ng historical children's books—pero dapat kakaiba sa mga naglipanang historical fiction books na laging tungkol sa mga bayani at mga rebolusyon. Hindi personality-oriented at hindi event-oriented kundi child-centered. Nagustuhan ito agad ni Alexis. Naki-tie up ang UNICEF sa Adarna Books, at na-commission ako as writer.

Ang project: limang historical storybooks tungkol sa limang ordinaryong bata na nabuhay sa limang mahahalagang panahon ng ating kasaysayan. At dahil ang UNICEF ay advocate ng children's rights, kailangan din na ang bawat storybook ay tumalakay sa isang children's rights issue, halimbawa, child labor.

Kaya, tatlo ang mga sangkap ng project, na tatawagin kong KKK: Kasaysayan, Karapatan, Kabataan. At bilang commissioned writer, trabaho ko na pagsama-samahin ang mga sangkap na ito.

Sandamukal na libro ang binasa ko. Nag-interview ako ng mga history professors at mga karaniwang tao na nabuhay noong unang panahon. Inilista ko ang iba't ibang story ideas na bigla ko na lang naiisip habang nagbabasa. Pagkatapos nito, bumuo ako ng story concepts sa bawat era.

Halimbawa: Ang era ay panahon ng mga Espanyol. Ang focus ay right to education. Concept: Tungkol sa isang batang gustong-gustong mag-aral ngunit wala siyang masyadong opportunity dahil mahirap lang siya.

Sabi agad ng UNICEF: "Ay,

maganda yan! Samahan mo na rin ng gender issue!" Advocate din kasi ang UNICEF ng equal rights for the girl-child. Agree naman ang Adarna. Natawa na lang ako. Para kasing umoorder lang sila ng French fries o extra rice. Sabi ko na lang: "Ok. One gender issue, coming up!"

So, ang mga specs sa akin for *Segunda*: magsulat ng kuwento tungkol sa isang batang nabuhay noong Spanish times na magta-tackle ng Child's Right to Education with gender issues on the side. Akmang-akma naman dahil noong panahong iyon ay pambahay lang talaga ang turing sa mga babae. Second-class citizen, o "Segunda."

Para sa *Diwayen*, naka-pokus ito sa isyung child slavery noong panahong bago pa dumating ang mga Espanyol.

Base naman ang *Pitong* sa ilang mga tunay na karanasan ng daddy at mommy ko noong panahon ng WWII. Narinig ko na ang mga kuwento nila noong bata pa ako, pero kinilabutan ako nang marinig kong muli ang mga paghihirap nila noong giyera.

Sa *Jhun-jhun*, bago ang kuwento, nauna kong naisip ang isang image: isang kalye matapos ang isang rally, na punong-puno ng mga tsinelas. Naisip kong i-juxtapose ang larong tumbang preso at ang violent rally dispersals noong 1970s. At ang kuwento ay magpo-pokus sa relationship ng magkapatid. Setting ko: urban poor community noong 1970s.

Sa limang kuwento, ang *Juanito* ang pinakahuli kong naisulat. Ito rin ang pinaka-heavy sa research at pinaka-history based. Base kasi ito sa unpublished 1988 research ni Ma'am Camagay tungkol sa instances ng child labor sa Pilipinas mula pa noong panahon ng mga Kastila.

Maraming salamat sa pagtangkilik ninyo sa mga librong naisulat ko. Nagbibigay ito sa akin ng lakas at inspirasyon na lumikha pa ng mas marami, mas mahusay at mas kapana-panabik na mga kuwento para sa inyo. Sana, ipagpatuloy ninyo ang suporta at pagbabasa sa mga librong likha ng mga Filipinong manunulat!

Augie

LANGUAGE BOOSTER

Say A with a SMILE

Pop quiz! How do you pronounce the following words: *companion, mango, candle, apple, national*?

Chances are, some of you will have answered incorrectly. These words are often mispronounced by politicians on TV, priests giving homilies, and even by boardroom executives.

In Filipino, there's only one way to pronounce a, as in the sentence *napakasarap ng mangga*. You can't go wrong!

But in English, there are various ways of pronouncing this one letter. For example:

- *Father, mart, and star* are pronounced using the Filipino a, or the *short a*.

- *Gay, plane, and haven* are spoken with the *long a*.

- And then there's the *middle a*, which is roughly in between long and short, and can be pronounced properly by saying the *short a* with a smile: try it with *mat, bag, and camel*.

So what about the words in the first paragraph? Although some people pronounce them using the *long a*, the correct way is to say them all with a smile; that is, use the *middle a* as in *mat*.

HERE'S A HANDY GUIDE:

WRONG (using the long a)	RIGHT (say it with a smile)
Com-pay-nyon	Com-pa-nyon
Maing-go	Mang-go
Cane-dle	Can-dle
Ape-ple	Ap-ple
Nay-shu-nal	Na-shu-nal

Note, though that *nation* is pronounced with a *long a*. Just another way of torturing English speakers!

How can we ensure that we're pronouncing English words properly? We need to expose ourselves to the language regularly in order to absorb its intricacies. Watch English-language movies and TV shows, and make it a habit to look up the pronunciation guide of difficult words in the dictionary.