



RUSSELL'S AUTOGRAPH CORNER

Name: Russell Roland Molina (Russ)

Zodiac sign: Scorpio: passionate, moody, and...moody (hehehe)

School: University of the Philippines, Los Banos (Buko pie! Buko pie!)

Fave children's books:

- *There's No Such Place as Far Away* by Richard Bach
- *The Giving Tree* by Shel Silverstein
- *Bru-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha, Bru-hi-hi-hi-hi-hi* by Ompong Remigio
- *May Alaga Akong Puno* by Carla Pacis

Russell's own children's books:

- *Madyik Silya ni Titoy* (writer)
- *Sandosenang Kuya* (writer)
- *Uuwi na ang Nanay kong si Darna* (illustrator)

Awards:

- 2001 PBBY Illustrator's Prize
- 2002 PBBY Writer's Prize
- 2002 Creative Guild's Ad of the Year (an advertising award for radio)
- I also won an Awit Award once for a song that I wrote. Hehehehe.

Any special someone? Yep. I have a girlfriend. She's my #1 critic and #1 fan. I run a lot of ideas by her before I even start writing.

WRITER Q&A: Russell Molina



Candid and *kwela* Russell talks to *Star Teacher* about his award-winning storybooks, and how working in an ad agency is similar to writing for kids.

Q When did you start writing and drawing?

A My parents, together with Ernie, Bert, Big Bird and the rest of the "Sesame Street" gang, helped a lot in inspiring me to write and draw. Week-ends were spent in front of the TV drawing cartoon characters. It started there, I think. It all started in "Sesame Street." And once in a while, I go back to visit.

Q Of the books you've done, do you have a favorite?

A I enjoyed doing them all, but I particularly like *Madyik Silya ni Titoy*. The idea came to me while I was on my way to the office. Traffic. Hot heads all around. I glanced outside the window and saw this kid in a makeshift wheelchair—bike wheels, a wooden chair, and a lot of recycled plastic. The craftsmanship caught my eye. The kid's smile caught my imagination.



Here's a kid with a disability and a happy disposition. People should be more like him. I should be more like him. As soon as I got to the office, I wrote the story. His story. I enjoyed the experience.

Q You're also a Creative Director in an ad agency. Can you tell us about the work you do?

A We do commercials, print ads, radio ads. The spots that you see on television and the jingles that you hear on the radio, *kami ang may kasalanan nun*. I just work on one account now...Globe ("Diak Maawatan"!)

Q How does being a Creative Director compare to being a writer and illustrator?

A Actually there are a lot of similarities:

1. Both tell a story (about a product, value or service)
2. Brevity is key. If you can deliver your message using shorter words, *mas maigi*. Kids have a short attention span, commercials run for only 30 seconds.
3. Pictures help. Advertising is fast becoming a visual world, pictures do wonders for a story too.
4. Know your audience. (Who are we talking to? Reach out to them. Doing a laundry soap ad for moms or writing a storybook for kids? You really need to know them more before even attempting to talk to them).

Q How do you stay creative?

A I go out. Ride the bus. Walk. Play. Experience the world. Talk to people. I don't discriminate. I think you can learn a lot just by listening to people—their dreams, their problems, their worries, their goals, their *tsisimis*. The best stories are real stories. *May kurot sa puso. May totoong balakbak. May tunay na luba.*

Q Don't you ever run out of ideas?

A Ideas sometimes come unexpectedly. That's why I have a notebook ready wherever I go. If I see something interesting (like an elephant in the middle of Araneta Center or a blind man singing rock tunes), I write it down. I don't want to forget a scene or an image that might help trigger an idea for a story or a commercial. You just have to keep your eyes and ears open. Ideas will come. Let them in.

Makati teachers get to meet Russel and quiz him about his love life, among other things, at an SAS Teacher Training Workshop.



In *Sandosenang Kuya*, you have twelve different kuyas of all shapes and sizes. Are these characters based on real-life people?

When I do storytelling sessions in orphanages, I observe. I talk to the kids. I play with them. Draw them. They teach me a lot. They are my *kuyas*, the kids. I based my characters on them.

Q Did you have any teachers who encouraged you to write or draw?

A "You write well, you should be a writer." A teacher told me that. He encouraged me to write. He made me believe in myself and in what I can do. Sometimes you need to hear that. You need that pat on the back. Kids need all the encouragement they can get.

Q How do you feel when you meet kids who say they've read your books?

A I love it. I enjoy the interaction. Kids sometimes come up to me and offer alternative endings for my books. "Why not make him fly?" They give a lot of stories too. Real or made up. They inspire me. They give me a reason to write.

Q Any future books in the works?

A Yes. I'm writing one story now. It's about a blind man singing rock tunes in the middle of the city. Suddenly, an elephant...

LANGUAGE BOOSTER

Puzzling Plurals

The skinny on "homeworks" and other "stuffs"

Although English isn't our first language, we've all learned to be experts at pluralizing even those words that tormented us in grade school—like *children*, *feet*, and *mice*—with no logic to them at all. We all did the drill, turning words ending in *y* to *ies*, breezing through *parties*, *candies*, and *doggies*.

But still, Tagalog is so much easier! Pinoy pluralize everything just by adding the word *mga* before the noun. How much simpler does a rule need to be? This is probably why we seem to have such a difficult time with English words that actually don't need to be pluralized. Many of us have made this mistake at one point or another, making us sound awkward and maybe a little bit foolish.

It's easy to remember which words don't need to be pluralized if you think of them as "noncount nouns": things that can't be individually counted and are seen a whole. Some noncount nouns are obvious, like *milk*. You don't say "I drank some milks." It's also quite clear that you don't declare "You showed a lot of courages when you rescued that baby."

Other words are trickier. Take a look at these:

DO YOU SAY...	OR IS IT...
We moved a lot of furniture.	We moved a lot of furnitures.
Please submit all your homework.	Please submit all your homeworks.
We talked about different stuff.	We talked about different stuffs.
Please stop your chatter now.	Please stop your chatters now.

Even though the sentences in the right column look fine, it's better to use the ones at the left, because *furniture*, *homework*, *chatter* and *stuff* are all considered—you got it—noncount nouns. Most noncount nouns have a quantity word or phrase before them, like *a lot of*, *some*, *many types of* or *some*. Just think of it as the English version of the Pinoy *mga!*

Other noncount nouns at a glance:

- Information
- Medicine
- Meat
- Bread
- Equipment
- Mail
- Jewelry
- Luggage
- Baggage
- Clothing

So remember: never say "stuffs" again!