



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-hi-hi, Bru-ha-ha* 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.



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.

Dummy caption at work in Philippine Science High School in Iloilo. She shares: "I am happy in teaching. I benefit the most from this because I am happy. This is what keeps me going."



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 left column look all right, it's better to use the ones at the right, 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
- Mail
- Help
- Jewelry
- Meat
- Luggage
- Bread
- Baggage
- Equipment
- Clothing

So remember: never say "stuffs" again!

TEACHER'S RESOURCE BOX

War Makes Me Sad!

The Thoughts of a Child about the War in Mindanao

In *War Makes Me Sad*, the young narrator talks about the horrors of being caught in the middle of a war and goes on to write of her hopes and aspirations for peace in her homeland. Here's a teacher's supplement on this SAS storybook to enrich your class discussions. **BY MARGE LOPA PEREZ**

THE HISTORY OF THE MINDANAO CONFLICT

Mindanao has traditionally had a large Muslim population, Islam having been introduced to the island as far back as the 14th century. Muslim, Christian, and other tribal communities had peacefully co-existed in the past, but in the 20th century, many Muslims (or Moros as they're also called) found themselves living in poverty, having been pushed off their lands by immigrants from Luzon and the Visayas. Left with few choices, a number

of residents took up arms. In the early 1970s the Philippine army attempted to restore peace and order, leaving many people dead and villages destroyed.

In 1990, the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) was created by then-President Corazon Aquino. It now includes the provinces of Basilan, Sulu, Tawi-tawi, Maguindanao, Lanao del Sur, and Marawi City.

However, some Muslim groups remain unhappy with the situation and up to today still fight in the region.

THE SITUATION IN MINDANAO

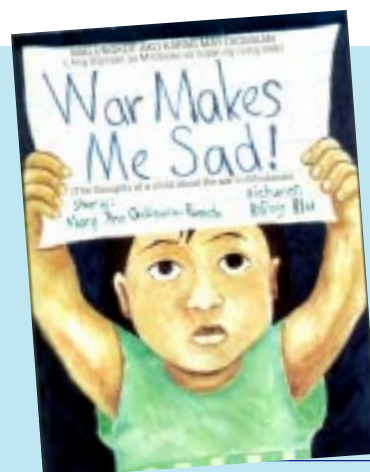
Poverty pervades life in Mindanao, particularly the areas ravaged by war. It's hardly coincidence that the poverty-stricken ARMM is also the most fertile breeding ground for insurgents in Southern Philippines.

SOME FACTS:

- Four of the poorest provinces in the Philippines are in Mindanao.
- While 40% of all Filipinos fall under the poverty line, over 68% of Mindanao's population is poor.
- Most Filipinos live, on the average, to the age of 64. But in the ARMM, the average is 52.
- The ARMM has the highest unemployment rate, the least amount of infrastructure and the largest need for medical and health workers in the Philippines.

THE INSURGENT GROUPS

Many of the most active insurgent groups in Mindanao are Islamic fundamentalist groups who claim they're fighting a "just war," according to Islamic teaching. Islam believes that it's right to take up arms to fight for one's religion. However, Islamic scholars argue that Islam is a religion of peace, and that some of the insurgents are misinterpreting the tenets of the religion for their own purposes.



BOOK INFORMATION:
 Written by Mary Ann Ordinario-Floresta
 Illustrated by Biboy Blu
 Published by ABC Educational Development Center

1 The Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF)

In 1969, the warring Muslim factions in Mindanao united themselves and established the MNLF. The MNLF initially sought the creation of a *Bangsamoro* (which means *homeland*) and engaged in both skirmishes and peace talks with the government. Eventually they amended their demands to accept autonomy within the Philippines.

2 The Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF)

After peace agreements were reached between the MNLF and the Philippine government, thousands of former MNLF guerrillas were left dislocated and jobless. They came to be part of a splinter group, the MILF. They demanded immunity for their guerilla forces; prosecution of military cases of human rights abuses; and the establishment of an Islamic republic. On the other hand, government demanded a stop to all terrorist activities. However, peace negotiations ground to a halt during the Estrada administration.

3 Abu Sayyaf

Another smaller breakaway faction of the MNLF is called the Abu Sayyaf or the "Bearer of the Sword." This group began to make their pres-



ence felt in 1991 with the idea of an Islamic State in Mindanao as their cause for a “just war.” However, their cause has taken the form of banditry and kidnapping for ransom. They have been the prime targets of military operations since they intensified their criminal efforts from 1992 to 1994. These initiatives, which involved a number of foreign nationals, allowed the Abu Sayyaf to grab the world’s attention and to rake in what is believed to be millions of dollars in ransom money. They have also drawn world attention to themselves because of their links to Osama Bin Laden and the Al Qaeda network.

HOW HAS WAR AFFECTED THE RESIDENTS OF MINDANAO?

The armed conflict continues to take its toll on the people, combatants and innocent civilians alike. More than 200,000 people have been dislocated by the war, leading to poverty. And in a vicious cycle, poverty often drives people to arms and to insurgency. ★

ABOUT THE WRITER:

Margarita Lopa-Pérez is a freelance writer with publications on NGOs and social movements in the Philippines. She is currently at work on a Master’s degree in sociology.

SOURCES AND FURTHER READING

- *In the Presence of My Enemies*
By Gracia Burnham and Dean Merrill
- *Under the Crescent Moon: Rebellion in Mindanao*
By Marites Danguilan Vitug and Glenda M. Gloria
- “Notes on the Mindanao Crisis”
By the Balay Rehabilitation Center
www.codewan.com.ph/hrnow/monitor/ids2003_0506_01.htm
- “Moros in the Philippines”
By John Gershman
www.fpif.org/selfdetermination/conflicts/philippines.html
- “2000 Census of Population and Housing”
By the National Census and Statistics Office
www.census.gov.ph/data/sectordata/datapop.html
- “Hussin’s Revolution” by Carlos H. Conde
- “The Failing Province” by Marites Danguilan Vitug
Newsbreak January-June 2003

My favorite BOOK

What are these noteworthy Filipinos and celebrities reading? Take a peek into their bookshelves.



MR. JOHN GOKONGWEI
Chairman
Emeritus, JG
Summit Holdings
Inc.

My favorite book? It’s *Gone with the Wind* by Margaret

Mitchell. I read it when I was 15 years old, and I finished it in two days in a *batel* traveling to Lucena to do buy-and-sell. It was the first book I ever read that wasn’t school-related.



MYRZA SISON
Editor-in-Chief,
Cosmopolitan
Philippines

I love *The Art of Worldly Wisdom: A Pocket Oracle* by

Balthasar Gracian. This book was written 300 years ago, but it’s still so applicable to today’s world. It contains 300 maxims on life. My favorites are #74 (“Don’t be unfriendly...this is the vice of those who lack self-knowledge”), and #273 (“Understand the characters of the people you deal with...to penetrate their intentions”). It’s Machiavellian, but with scruples.



GABE MERCADO
Actor and
comedian

I am a huge Tony Perez fan. I got hooked when I read his *Cubao* series. I have never

read any other author in any language whose characters are as alive and as real as Tony Perez’s. Some people be-

lieve that he actually gets possessed by his own characters as he writes about them. Two of my most precious possessions are the original handwritten manuscripts of *Sierra Lakes* and *Basted*—which Tony sold to me at one of his book launches years ago.



MARK MEILY
Award-winning
writer and director
of *Crying Ladies*

I love reading. I have so many favorite books, but my first fave book is

Moon and Sixpence by William Somerset Maugham. I read the book when I was at a crossroads: Whether I should shift courses from pre-med to fine arts. It was an epiphany book.



AGA MUHLACH
Award-winning
actor

I want to inculcate the habit of reading in my own kids.

Though the twins are still young, Charlene and I have already started reading them storybooks. For a recent storytelling session I had with some public school kids, I chose the book *Klasmeyt*, written by Centeno San Miguel and illustrated by Paul Eric Roca. It promotes good conduct and relations among children. I thought it was a story that school kids could relate to; it’s all about how Leonor, Claro and their classmates stood up against Rigor, the class bully. This delightful tale ends with a surprising twist and a lesson or two on friendship and fighting for what is right.