

Manila Women's Forum

A Network of Women Professionals

July 2002

Zambokids

By Penny Poole

When Karika Bridgers and her husband Don began giving gifts to children of the Mindanao conflict, she never dreamed it would fast develop into a vibrant NGO with a web presence and hundreds of people committed in many countries.

"We wanted to get involved in a more personal way than sending a check to the Salvation Army every Christmas," she told the MWF meeting in May. "We had no idea what it would become."

Karika, whose background is mathematics and biology, admits to being slightly overwhelmed by the "Zambokids" project's overnight and burgeoning success. She confided afterwards that "I've always done fun jobs." These have included ski patrol, and sign making, as her still old calling card hints.

It began when her husband Major Don Bridgers, an active US military officer stationed in Manila, was assigned to handle logistics for the Balikatan exercises in Zamboanga City. In addition to his work, he had another assignment from his family: to

find a worthy recipient for their modest charitable pursuits. During his first trip to Zamboanga, he called his wife from the courtyard of the Reception and Study Center of Children, a mixed religion orphanage, to tell her he'd found the place.

The center houses 40-50 child victims of the Mindanao conflict, from newborn to age 13. More than half are less than one year old. They came as foundlings, some on the front doorstep, left there overnight, and some plucked from garbage cans. When the Bridgers first visited the orphans, many of the newborns were double-bunked for lack of space. With family and friends who were interested in helping, the couple formed a loose, informal project called Zambokids, and their first contribution to the center was six cribs to ease the overcrowding.

Through their families and friends, and the magic of word-of-mouth, interest in the project grew swiftly. Humanitarian International Services Group, a Colorado-based NGO, offered to step in and handle the logistics of donations from abroad and medical supplies were purchased from Medical Resources International.

Before they knew it, Zambokids had a website where needs are listed, and news is posted. Because of the military nature of Don's post and national interest in the American presence in Zamboanga, they have received significant

coverage in the public media as well as in the military press.

Karika committed a good deal of her MWF presentation to applause for individuals in Zamboanga who had helped, and expressed her particular admiration for the women who work in the orphanage.

"They care for the children when they are sick, teach them to read and write, and right from wrong," adding that the children are also given the precious element of hope in a seemingly hopeless world.

Painting a picture of her own emotions stimulated by the poverty that many of us have become desensitized to through overexposure, the native born Alaskan lost her composure once, when telling the tale of one orphan, baby Omar. The boy had hydrocephalus (water on the brain) that could have been treated with a simple shunt procedure,

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Karika Bridgers with two Zamboanga orphans

Next MWF Meeting

When: Monday, July 22, 2002, 6:30 p.m.

Where: Megan Meline's home, 10C Splendido Gardens, H.V. dela Costa corner Leviste Street, Salcedo Village, Makati.

What: Rene Olbes, author of the book "The Philippines, Then and Now" will talk about preserving Philippine culture and how small events in the 1890s shaped huge changes that we see today.

Bring: A contribution to the potluck dinner.

Next meeting: August 19, 2002



Voice of the Chair

Safety Training for All Women

By Lisa Kircher Lumbao

I received the following article by e-mail (no author included) but thought it contained good advice for all of us, whether as a reminder or first-time advice.

To: All Women
Subject: Safety Training

If you are ever thrown into the trunk of a car, kick out the back tail lights and stick your arm out the hole and start waving like crazy. The driver won't see you but everybody else will. This has saved lives.

Last night I attended a personal safety workshop, and it jolted me. It was given by an amazing man, Pat Malone, who has been a body guard for famous figures like Farrah Fawcett and Sylvester Stallone. He works for the FBI, and teaches police officers and Navy SEALs hand-to-hand combat. This man has seen it all, and knows a lot. He focused his teachings to us on How to Avoid Being the Victim of a Violent Crime. He gave us some statistics about how much the occurrences of random violence have escalated over the recent years, and it's terrible. Something like 99% of us will be exposed to, or become a victim of a violent crime. Here are some of the most important points that I got out of his presentation:

1. The three reasons women are easy targets for random acts of violence are:

- (a) Lack of Awareness. You *must* know where you are and what's going on around you.
- (b) Body Language. Keep your head up, swing your arms, stand straight up.
- (c) Wrong Place, Wrong Time: Don't walk alone in an alley, or drive in a bad neighborhood at night.

2. Women have a tendency to get into their cars after shopping, eating,

working, etc, and just sit (doing their checkbook, or making a list, etc). *Don't do this!* The predator will be watching you, and this is the perfect opportunity for him to get in the passenger side, put a gun to your head, and tell you where to go. *As soon as you get into your car, lock the doors and leave.*

(a) A few notes about getting into your car in a parking lot, or parking garage. Be aware: look around you, look into your car, at the passenger side floor, and in the back seat.

(b) If you are parked next to a big van, enter your car from the passenger door. Most serial killers attack their victims by pulling them into their vans while the women are attempting to get into their cars.

(c) Look at the car parked on the driver side of your vehicle, and the passenger side. If a male is sitting alone in the seat nearest your car, you may want to walk back into the mall, or work, and get a guard/policeman to walk you back out. *It is always better to be safe than sorry.* (Better paranoid than dead.)

3. *Always* take the elevator instead of the stairs. (Stairwells are horrible places to be alone and the perfect crime spot).

(a) Do not get on an elevator if there is a weirdo already on there. (Of course bad men don't always look bad).

(b) Do not stand back in the corners of the elevator, be near the front, by the doors, ready to get off or on.

(c) If you get on the elevator on the 25th floor, and the Boogie Man gets on the 22nd, get off when he gets on.

4. If the predator has a gun and you are not under his control, *always run!*

(a) Police only make 4 of 10 shots when they are in range of 3-9 feet. This is due to stress.

(b) The predator will only hit you (a running target) 4 in 100 times. And even then, it most likely *will not* be a vital organ. *Run!*

5. As women, we are always trying to be sympathetic: *Stop it!* It may get you raped, or killed.

(a) Ted Bundy, the serial killer, was a good looking, well-educated man, who *always* played on the sympathies of unsuspecting women. He walked with a cane, or a limp, and often asked "for help" into his vehicle or with his vehicle, which is when he abducted his next victim.

(b) Pat Malone told us the story of his daughter, who came out of the mall

and was walking to her car when she noticed two older ladies in front of her. Then she saw a police car come towards her with cops who said hello. She also noticed that all eight handicap spots in the area were empty. As she neared her car she saw a man a few rows over calling to her for help. He wanted her to close his passenger side door. He was sitting in the driver's side, and said he was handicapped. He continued calling, until she turned and headed back to the mall, and then he began cursing at her. In the meantime, she wondered why he didn't ask the two older ladies, or the policeman for help, and why he was not parked in any of the empty handicap spots. As she got back to the mall, two male friends of hers were exiting, and as she told them the story, and turned to point at the car, the man was getting out of the back seat into the front, and the car sped away. *Don't get caught in this trap.*

6. Tips to saving your life, if you have gotten into a violent situation:

(a) *React immediately.* If he abducts you in a parking lot, and is taking you to an abandoned area, *don't let him get you to that area.* If you are driving, react immediately in the situation, and crash your car while still going 5 mph. If he's driving, find the right time, and stick your fingers in his eyes. He must watch the road, so choose an unsuspecting time, and gouge him. It is your *only* defense. While he is in shock, *get out.* (This sounds gross,

The Manila Women's Forum

The Manila Women's Forum (MWF) is a cross-cultural network for women. It provides opportunities to build friendships, to talk to women of various cultures, and to share information about resources. Our meetings are intended to provide intellectual stimulation and lead to personal and professional development. All women are welcome to join. The current officers are **Lisa Lumbao**, Chair, Programs, and Newsletter. **Penny Poole**, Programs, Newsletter. **Beulah P. Taguiwalo**, Newsletter. **Ruthie Dy**, Treasurer.

Cost of membership is P300 per year. Members receive a copy of the current mailing list in addition to the newsletter, which is also sent to non-members. A contribution is collected at each monthly meeting: P20 for members, and P40 for non-members. Please contact Lisa Lumbao at Tel. 818-2887 or 813-0168, or at lumbao@mozcom.com for more information about MWF.

but the alternative is your fault if you do not act.)

(b) *Resist* — Don't go along with him: run, if you are able: *Don't ever give up!* You do not want to get to a crime scene.

7. Always keep your distance when walking past strangers on the street or in dark areas.

8. *Get a cell phone.*

(a) There are packages for \$19.95 a month that allows you to program only 911 into the dialing out program. (This is an alternative for parents who say it is too expensive for their kids to have a cell phone.)

9. *Breakdowns:* Make every effort to avoid this by *always* keeping your car in good working order.

(a) If your car breaks down: *lock your doors.* You better have a cell phone to call for help.

(b) If you don't have a cell phone: (shame on you) keep a blanket, warm clothes, a pair of boots, and a flashlight in your car always, for emergencies.

(c) If it's noon on a business day, you may want to put your hazards on and walk to safety.

(d) If it's 2 a.m., put on your warm clothes, and walk to a lighted area. You are a perfect target if you are sitting in your car broken down. Predators search the highways for easy targets like you.

(e) If you're on a desolate road: walk away from the car (in your warm clothes) and go to some bushes, or some area *away* from your vehicles. It will be cold, and uncomfortable, but you *do not* want to stay in your car, and there are no psycho bogeymen waiting in the bushes who knew you were going to break down there and then.

10. Physical defenses that we can use against the violent predator:

(a) The *eyes* are the most vulnerable part of the body. Poke him there. *Hard.* It may be your only window of opportunity.

(b) The neck is also a vulnerable spot, but you *must* know where to grip, *and have the strength* to cut off his breath.

(c) The last place is the *knees.* Everyone's knees are very vulnerable, and a swift kick here will take anyone down. *A cautionary note about these things. If you do not do these

things right the first time, you are in trouble, because it will only anger the individual, and that anger will be *taken out on you.* I'm not saying don't attempt them (it may be your only hope), but be forceful when you do.

11. If you are walking alone in the dark (which you shouldn't be) and you find him following or chasing you:

(a) Scream "*Fire!*", and not "help". People don't want to get involved when people yell "help", but "fire" draws attention because people are nosy.

(b) *Run!*

(c) Find an obstacle, such as a parked car, and run around it, like Ring Around the Rosie. This may sound silly, but over the years, five women have told Pat Malone that this *saved their lives.*

(d) Your last hope is getting under the car. Once you are under there, there are tons of things to hold on to, and he will not be able to get you out and will not come under for you (most likely). Usually they give up by this point. The catch here is that *you must practice getting under the car.* You must have a plan (he will have one); know if you will be going on your back, front, from the side or back of the car. It must be practiced.

12. Never let yourself or anyone that you know be a "closer" in any type of business (bar, store, restaurant, gas station). Pat knew Danielle, who was a girl that just died from being shot point-blank by some kids while she was closing at the local gas station. He talked with her the night before she died, and asked whether it ever scared her to close alone. She said yes, but said "I'll be all right, Pat. I'll be all right." She wasn't.

Our world is not as safe as we pretend that it is, and living in our fantasy worlds *will* get us in trouble, sooner or later. Pat Malone said again and again that the women who die *every minute* from violent crimes expected to go to bed tonight, and get up tomorrow. No one expects it, but we must be prepared and aware so that *we have a plan. Be prepared to act! And act hard! Have a plan!*

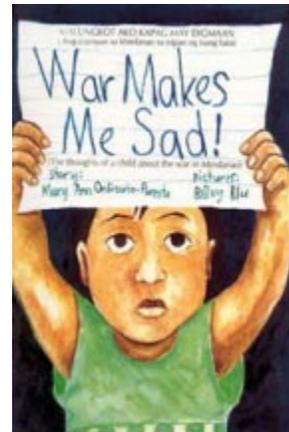
I would encourage you to pass this on to all women, not just your friends and family, but everybody. We all need to hear it. ■

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Selected and Edited by Beulah P. Taguiwalo

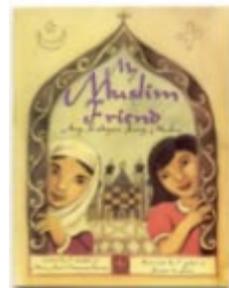
Speaking of Zambokids...

Here's something I found that connected children, books, and war-torn Mindanao for me.



War Makes Me Sad is a children's book written by Mary Ann Ordinario-Floresta. It is about an innocent child who narrates her real life experience regarding the war between the Muslim and Christian people in Mindanao, and she appeals for peace and prayer. The story gives the reader a sense of the kind of pain a child goes through in times of war — the same thing that many children go through in many place around the world.

Mary Ann has written and published several children's books, mostly about Mindanao. She also runs a school for children in her home province. Below is another of her books, *My Muslim Friend*, beautifully illustrated by Filipino artist Joanne de Leon.



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costing about \$500. Karika raised the funds in a few days, but Omar died the day the money arrived. "I can still see his face," she struggled to say without weeping.

Statistics on the island of Basilan are not good for poor children. Three children die there every day from water-related diseases. Forty percent of children in the Philippines are affected by first or second degree malnutrition.

"What do I do?" said Karika. "I help, in very little ways and in any way I can."

Zambokids has so far donated tens of thousands of dollars worth of equipment, medical and educational supplies, clothes and toys to the orphaned children of Zamboanga. Donations of money and medical supplies have poured in from their Colorado Springs affiliate, as well as from the 1st Special Forces Group in Japan, and the Humanitarian International Services Group. Cash donations have gone to purchase items such as emergency lights for power outages, ceiling fans, cribs, and an electric washer and dryer.

"Peace Packs" were provided by Girl Scouts U.S.A. from troops in the U.S. and in Manila. These are backpacks chosen by individual girl scouts and filled with school supplies and other personal gifts and an accompanying handwritten note. These go directly to the school age children and Karika personally supervises their distribution. Basic needs required continuously are

toys; first aid medical supplies; medicines like fever reducers, antihistamines and decongestants; baby formula; children's books and clothing; chalk and school needs (notebooks, writing implements, etc.).

Karika's success with her project is particularly inspirational because of the short time period in which all this happened. She and her two elementary school age boys have only been in Manila since November. Certainly gives one pause. What have you accomplished so far this year?

To see learn more about Karika's Zambokids, visit <http://zambokids.tripod.com/>.

Connections

"Speech is a powerful tool, and whenever we have the opportunity to speak in public, we have the power to make huge differences."

Karika, I haven't yet told you what transpired after your talk, but it has changed my life dramatically.

As a result of divine serendipity, a woman sat next to me that evening whom I hadn't met. In fact she's never come before and that night she thought she'd stay home because of allergies. But something pushed her to attend, and we struck up a conversation and exchanged cards,

like one does at such an evening.

Because of your story dealing with orphans, and because I asked you a question about expats possibly fostering some of the children in Zamboanga, she called me the next day with a story of a baby about to lose his foster parents because of a health emergency.

That boy, 2-year old Aryan, is now a member of my household, officially fostered through DSWD. (She called Tuesday, and Aryan came the following Monday).

Not only that, the story goes on. Because the mother is in jail, we went to visit last week and met a woman from Ghana who's been there 10 years and is having trouble connecting with the outside world because her embassy is in Malaysia. Because of further conversations with that first MWF woman who knew the story and wanted to help but wasn't sure where to begin, Amnesty International is now involved and has begun writing letters on behalf of the Ghanan woman - the first positive movement and hope for her in a decade.

So you did a lot more than you were aware of that night!

I'm sure you have your own stories about further connections that were made by your single talk. Speech is a powerful tool, and whenever we have the opportunity to speak in public, we have the power to make huge differences. People like you demonstrate that time and again.

— Penny Poole, Member, MWF

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