

Manila Women's Forum

A Network of Women Professionals

February 2006

Filipino Children's Books

By Carol Waddoups

Beulah Taguiwalo, children's book illustrator, and Reni Roxas, children's book publisher, spoke to the group this month and together gave a detailed chronology and description of their backgrounds in Philippine children's literature and the current richness in children's literature topics, stories and illustrations.

Beulah is one of the earliest members of the Manila Women's Forum, having joined way back in the late 1980s when MWF was just founded by Marcia Hamilton. She now puts the newsletter together each month and is the woman behind "Kawomenan" on page 3. Since 1989 she has worked as a freelance illustrator and graphic designer. Her published works include books and other print publications on a variety of

subjects. Her children's storybooks include *Sampaguita* (1991); *Junior Starfish and the Rainbow* (1995); and *Kuwentong Kalikasan Katha Ng Kabataan*, a fully-illustrated anthology of 22 prize-winning nature stories written by children (1999). The latest children's book that she designed and illustrated, *The Christmas Fireflies* by Girl Valencia,

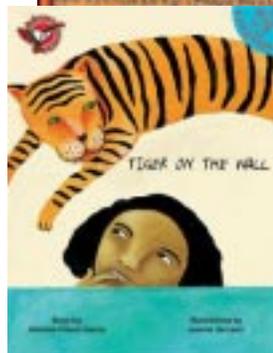
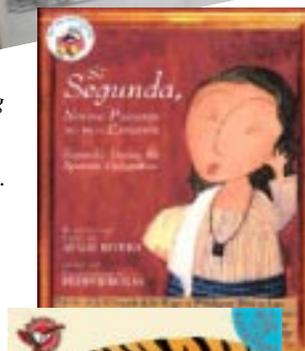
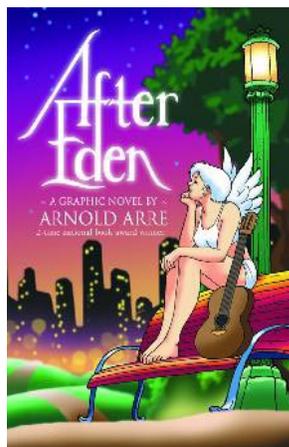
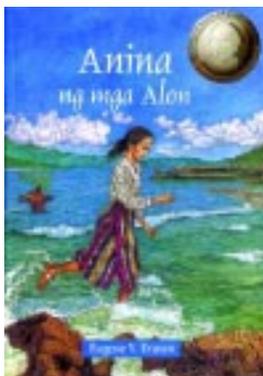
was judged by the Manila Critics Circle as Best Book in Children's Literature in the 2004 National Book Awards.

Growing up in the 1950s and 60s, Beulah's early literature influences were different from those of the typical Filipino school child because although her mother was a public school teacher, she was sent to a Baptist school run by American missionaries. So she grew up reading "tons of American picture books," Bible story books, Junior Illustrated Classics - and Tagalog komiks. She would look at the illustrations for a long, long time and had the early thought, "I want to add to the trove of children's book illustrations."

Beulah was also exposed to what most Filipino children had: *Pepe and Pilar* books, which are the Filipino version of Dick and Jane. There was also *The Philippine Readers*, edited by Camilo Osias and illustrated with black and white drawings by the famous artist Fernando Amorsolo.

(Continued on page 2)

Clockwise from top right: Fernando Amorsolo's illustration of national hero Jose Rizal and his mother in *The Philippine Readers*, Adarna books *Si Segunda Sa Panahon ng mga Espanyol*, *Tiger on the Wall*, *After Eden* (a graphic novel), and *Anina ng mga Alon*.



Next MWF Meeting

When: 6:30 p.m., Monday
February 20, 2006

What: Christina Nelke,
formerly with Save the
Children, will speak about the
International Campaign to
Ban Landmines

Where: Pilar Martinez-
Miranda's house, 5400
Amorsolo, Dasmaringas
Village, Makati

Bring: Something to share
for the pot-luck dinner.

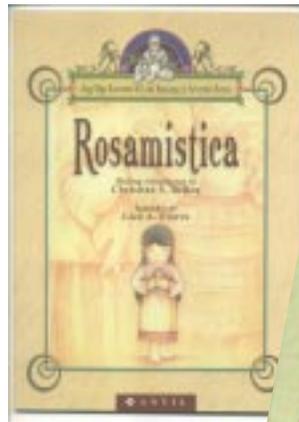
March meeting: 6:30 p.m.,
Monday March 20, 2006

(Filipino... from page 1)

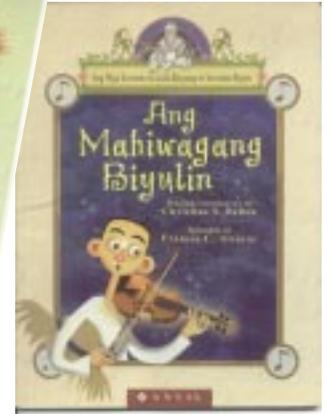
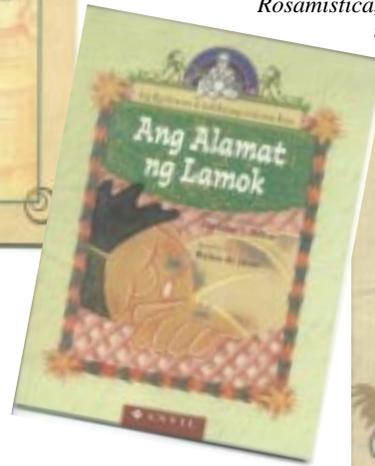
Beulah went on to present on the main Philippine children's book publishers here, in particular Adarna (www.adarnahouse.com). Begun in 1980, Adarna wanted to give nourishment to the child's mind in the same manner that a nutritional supplement of the day called Nutri-bun purported to give nourishment to a child's body. So it set up a publishing house just for children with the aim of promoting Filipino writers and themes, and at a book price affordable to all.

Unique in the sense that it has the largest and most established network of dealers selling their books directly to schools, Adarna House has grown into the country's leading publisher of storybooks for children and manuals for parents, teachers, and daycare workers. Children may choose from over 250 titles – all original stories that focus on Filipino values, culture, history and experiences. Beulah credits Ani Rosa Almario, the founder's daughter, with keeping the publishing house full of new and fresh ideas such as the *Batang Historyador* series which focuses on each period of Filipino history, some of the recent titles that use avant garde illustrations and book design, as well as the *Akat Adarna* series that compiles some of their out of print classics.

Another publisher that Beulah discussed was Anvil Publishing (www.anvilpublishing.com), which spun off from National Book Store in 1990. A six-time winner of the Publisher of the Year award, Anvil has recently come out with the ten-title *Lola Basyang* series by Christine Bellen. As Anvil intended,



Clockwise, from left: Three of the titles from Anvil Publishing's Lola Basyang series: *Rosamistica*, *Ang Alamat ng Lamok*, and *Ang Mahiwagang Biyulin*.



each title retails for only P65 in order to be accessible to as many children as possible. From an interview with Anvil's Publishing Manager Karina Bolasco, Beulah learned that in order to do that, Anvil had to print 20,000 copies of each title. One year after launching, the best-selling title only sold 5,200 copies while some titles sold as little as 1,514 copies. Even with an additional one-time order from the Department of Education's Library Hub project for 5,000 copies of three of the titles in the series, there are still anywhere from 10,000 to 13,000 copies per title to sell. Reason enough, said Beulah, for even Karina to wonder: "Could it be that 5,000 copies is the optimum print run for a children's book

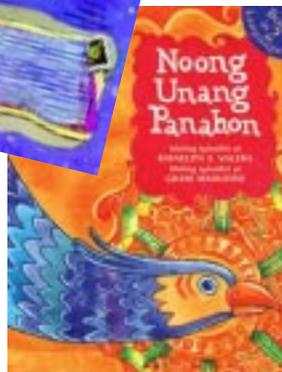
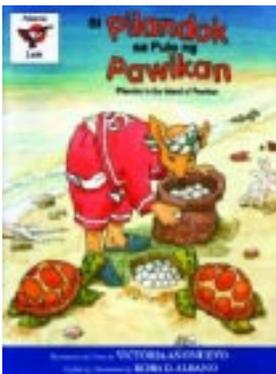
here in the Philippines?"

Beulah illustrated through her Power Point presentation and remarks that children's choices in books have come a long way in her lifetime. She believes that now "anyone can do anything in children's books" because of the web and personal use technologies - great news for the future of the Filipino children's book industry.

Reni Roxas, our second speaker, started out working for CBS in New York but found it an undesirable place to work because "back-stabbing" was the daily norm. So she decided to go into children's books. While heading the children's book promotions department at Walker and Company, she commissioned black American author Patricia McKissack to write *A Long Hard Journey: The Story of the Pullman Porter*, a book that won the prestigious Coretta Scott King Award. With this success she walked up to the executive director of Franklin Watts (a division of the Grolier Company) in the comfort room of a librarian convention and said, "I'm Reni Roxas and I want to work for you." Two months later she did.

Later in 1991 Reni came back to the Philippines with her two-month-old baby and started Tahanan Books for Young Readers, named after the Tagalog word "home" where, through

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Clockwise, from top left. More Adarna titles: *Pilandok sa Pulo ng Pawikan*, *Ang Mabait na Kalabaw*, *Gusto Ko ng Buwan at Bituin*, and *Noong Unang Panahon*



Books, reading, children, and children's books...these are a few of my favorite things!



Here's some items to look at, enjoy, and think about.

KaWoMeNaN

Selected and Edited by
Beaulah Pedregosa Taguiwalo

Books, reading, children, and children's books

“They still believe in God, the family, angels, witches, goblins, logic, clarity, punctuation and other obsolete stuff.”

Isaac Singer (1904 - 1991)
Polish-US novelist, short-story writer, in a speech on why he began writing for children

“From your parents you learn love and laughter and how to put one foot before the other. But when books are opened you discover you have wings.”

Helen Hayes

Nurse Reading to a Little Girl *Mary Cassatt, 1895*

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“Let's tell young people the best books are yet to written; the best painting, the best government, the best of everything is yet to be done by them.”

John Erskine (1879-1951)

“Any kid who has two parents who are interested in him and has a houseful of books isn't poor.”

Sam Levenson

This Is Not a Test

By Aaron Shepard

Printed in Once Upon A Time, Fall 2005. For more resources, visit Aaron Shepard's Kidwriting Page at www.aaronsherp.com/kidwriter Copyright © 2003 by Aaron Shepard. May be freely copied and shared for any noncommercial purpose as long as no text is altered or omitted.

I regret that I no longer permit use of my stories or scripts for educational testing. I'm sorry for any inconvenience.

It wasn't easy to write. I hate to say no to people. And I don't like turning

away money. In fact, it wasn't long ago that I was planning a marketing campaign to sell my writing to test publishers.

But I haven't been able to shake the image of some kid sitting and sweating over one of my stories while struggling to come up with answers to please the teacher. Anxiety, competition, ambition, fear—are these the emotions I want associated with my stories?

I remember hearing Jim Trelease talk about how teachers can and do easily turn kids away from reading by turning it into a chore, a source of information for filling in exercise sheets. In one classroom, a teacher told her students about her reading every night before bedtime and asked why they thought she did that. Their answer: for “practice.” Her students didn't understand that people could read for the pleasure of it.

I want my stories to be sources of joy—not achievement, not approval, not advancement. And yes, I do want teachers to use them—in fact, that's what I aim for. But please, not to deaden the love of reading. Not to make students cringe at the sight of a printed page. Not to make them see story as a tool of control.

And so, I regret that I no longer permit use of my stories or scripts for educational testing. I'm sorry for any inconvenience.

(Filipino... from page 2)

the strong influence of her own mother, she had learned that the love of learning and reading begins.

The first book they produced was an international alphabet book. It bombed. This difficult learning experience convinced them to concentrate on books that celebrate Philippine culture and history, and that is now their niche.

"Publishing is a gamble," Reni said. She then related the anecdote of a publisher who was asked, "What's your next best seller? The publisher replied, "If I knew that, you wouldn't be able to afford my salary!"

The beautiful works published by Tahanan Books were circulated for all to enjoy and were available for purchase at the end of the evening. In her presentation Reni highlighted some of the 100 titles Tahanan has in print including:

First Around The Globe – The Story of Enrique by Reni Roxas which theorizes that because Magellan was killed in Cebu, it was actually his Filipino slave Enrique who was the first person to circumnavigate the globe.

The Brothers Wu and the Good-Luck Eel in 2000, written by Fran Ng and inspired by Reni's own sister Tissa Roxas Tan. This true story explains why a real Chinese family (Tissa's husband's) does not eat eel, which is otherwise a Chinese treat. The book won many awards including the National Book Award.

And there is the perennial best seller *You Know You're Filipino If...*

A Pinoy Primer, selected and edited by Neni Sta. Romana-Cruz and illustrated by Dindo Llana - a must for everyone's bookshelf.

Both speakers left us excited for the future of Philippine children's books and for the chance we have to fill our homes with them.

Beulah Taguiwalo is a member of the Society of Children's Book Writers & Illustrators (SCBWI), where she has been serving as Regional Advisor for the Philippines / South Asia region since 2001. She is a founding member of Ang Ilustrador ng Kabataan (Ang InK), the first and only association of children's illustrators in the country. She also served for four years as Chairman of the Philippine Board on Books for Young People (PBBY), the Philippine section of the International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY) based in Basel, Switzerland.

Reni Singer is the Publisher and Editor in Chief of Tahanan Books. At the recently held Asian Children's Writers & Illustrators Conference (ACWIC) in Singapore, she gave a Power Point presentation entitled "Adventures in Publishing: Growing Publications from Concept to Manuscript to Bound Books and Beyond." Included were images gleaned from Tahanan's publish of over a hundred books published over a span of fourteen years, humorous anecdotes from Reni's 20-year sojourn in publishing, and an

overview of the different stages of picture book production as well as marketing trends in the Philippines. Website: www.tahananbooks.com

"It had been startling and disappointing to me to find out that story books had been written by people, that books were not natural wonders, coming of themselves like grass."

~ Eudora Welty

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, Treasurer, and Newsletter. **Cecilia Leung**, Programs. **Beulah P. Taguiwalo**, Newsletter, Website.

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. 812-3932, Tel/Fax 813-0168, or at lumbao@mozcom.com for more information about MWF.

Visit our website – a work in progress
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