

Merilly J. Ruglas

GRAPHIC DESIGN | ILLUSTRATION | WEB DESIGN | MOTION GRAPHICS

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Merilly Johana Ruglas was born in the valley of San Pedro Sula, Honduras, where she lived surrounded by mountains most of her life. Her parents divorced when she was two years old and her sister, Daffne Brigitte Ruglas, was only one year old. Her mother left Honduras to come to America searching for a better future for her and her children, leaving both Merilly and Daffne in the care of their grandmother. Growing up in a very strict household, Merilly spent most of her free time in her room drawing, writing and watching Japanese animated series. Some of her favorite animated series are *Candy Candy*, *Magic Knight Reyeearth*, *Future Boy Conan*, *Dragon Ball*, *Saint Seiya*, *Sakura Card Captors*, *Kaleido Star* and *Sailor Moon*. It was these animated series that inspired Merilly's early drawings and writings.

At around the age of 14, Merilly saw an animated film about a pig that was a plane-flying hero. She was very impressed by the beautiful scenery within the film and by the fact that she had never seen anything like it before:

"Usually, in most of the early animated films/series, when ever you had talking animals, it was a magical, secret thing that was kept hidden from most of the "human" characters within the animated film/series. But in the film *Porco Rosso*, Porco (The Pig) spoke to everyone, and everyone knew he was a talking pig," mentioned Merilly.

Merilly did not know it at the time, but the film *Porco Rosso* had been done by Hayao Miyasaki who also produced and wrote *Future Boy Conan*, one of her all-time favorite childhood animated series. Miyasaki's work has been most influential in Merilly's life, and Miyasaki has become one of her role models. Some of Merilly's personal favorite Hayao Miyasaki's films are *Spirited Away*, *Totoro*, and *Howl's Moving Castle*; she owns all three of these on DVD. Merilly aspires to someday be able to create beautifully powerful animated films like those of Miyasaki.

Her artistic interests have always been varied, and she has also ventured into the performing arts. At the age of 16, Merilly was offered a scholarship to attend one of Honduras most prestigious dance schools. The scholarship was an invitation to join the school's Flamenco Team which traveled all over Central America participating in dance competitions. In 2001 and 2002, Merilly wrote two comedy plays, *Siempre el Hondureno* and *La Politica Hondurena*. The plays placed in first and second place respectively at the Centro Cultural Sampedrano 2001 and 2002 Comedy Shows. Merilly not only wrote the plays, but she produced, directed and acted in both of them.

At 19 years old, Merilly reunited with her mother in New Orleans, Louisiana. She enrolled at the University of New Orleans as a Marketing major. Merilly hoped that upon graduating from business school, she would be able to find a good paying job that would allow her to pursue her true passions which involved animation and art. The first four years of college were highly influential in

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The readings assigned in her English classes during her freshmen college years allowed her to discover modern, urban fairytales and dark fiction books. Some of her favorite writers are Edgar Allan Poe, Christopher Poalini, Cinda Williams Chima, Melissa Marr, Kristin Cast and P.C. Cast, and Casandra Clare. The book *Tithe* by Holly Black is Merilly's all-time favorite book and it was the first book of this genre that she ever read. *Tithe*, the *Wicked Lovely* series, and *The Mortal Instruments* series are the three major inspirations for Merilly's first screenplay "*Inked Links*."

Merilly was also awarded several academic honors and scholarships during her college years. One of them being her participation in the 2009 F.L.A.M.E. Program funded by the U.S. Olympic Committee, which constitutes the selection of 30 minority students from colleges and universities across the country. These 30 young leaders are selected to attend a three-day seminar at the U.S. Olympic Training Center in Colorado Springs, CO.

In 2010, Merilly was awarded the 2010 UNO SG International Study Award, which allowed her to fully enjoy making the trip to Kyoto, Japan as a participant of the UNO summer study abroad program. Going to Japan and visiting Tokyo was one of Merilly's lifelong dreams. She was able to go into Tokyo Tower and walk through the streets of the city that has inspired so many of Merilly's favorite animated films.

Her fortune completely changed when she encountered a philosophical Buddhist practice rooted in Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhist teachings. She was deeply moved and inspired by this practice's most profound teaching, which says that every single person has innate and infinite potential to become absolutely happy. On September 23rd, 2012, Merilly J. Ruglas joined the Soka Gakkai International organization (www.sgi-usa.org). Feeling empowered and truly encouraged by this teaching, Merilly made the decision to change her life. She enrolled at Tulane University School of Continuing Studies as a Digital Arts Major. This being the first step towards actualizing her career goal of creating her own animated series.

Nowadays, Merilly's love for animation has grown with her. She has become very fond of American 3D animated films. Some of her favorites are *A Nightmare Before Christmas*, *Ice Age*, *Monsters, Inc.*, *Wall.e*, *Madagascar*, *Finding Nemo*, *9*, *Meet the Robinsons*, *The Incredibles*, *Shrek 1-4*, *Coraline*, *How to Train a Dragon*, *Kung Fu Panda*, *Tangled*, *Up*, *Despicable Me*, *Brave*, and *The Rise of the Guardians* among others. She watches as many animated series as she can. *Bleach*, *Naruto Shippuden* and *Blood+* are just some of the ones she has recently watched, and they inspired Merilly to create her character Maka, the female heroine in her own animated series project *Twin Swords*. This animated series is one of her current projects and some of the scenes and themes of the series are drawn straight from Merilly's childhood and life in Honduras.

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"My childhood was rough, and the only things I had back then were the animated series I watched and the characters in them. They gave me hope because they would never give up. They would hold strong until the end, and thus, I did the same. That is what I want to do. I want to create the type of animation that gives people hope."

With this wish deeply carved in her heart, Merilly awaits to be accepted into UCLA's Masters of Arts in Animation program.

Her love for the performing arts has not faded. She currently dances with "Viva Venezuela," a local dance group. She is also part of the SGI NOLA Dance Crew "White Lotus" and she has performed with them in Zulu 2012 and 2013, SGI NOLA Culture Festival 2012 and 2014, and World Peace Day Ceremony at the Capitol Building in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. She has also performed with "Viva Venezuela" during Venezuela's Independence Day Ceremony at the Winston Hotel, the Venezuelan Simon Bolivar Movie release ceremony at Tulane University, and the Venezuelan Documentary Release at Ashe Cultural Arts Center, New Orleans, Louisiana.

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Merilly is now working towards becoming an animator who is able to reach out to people; touching their lives and inspiring them to make a change for the better in both their lives and their communities. She still lives in New Orleans with her boyfriend, Saravut, and their mini-schnauzer, Jasper.