

Wow!

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Inspiration



Mona Giraud: *healing with words*

by Angela Miyuki Mackintosh

There are some people you meet

on the other end of a computer that you can tell have a true heart and a genuine soul. [Mona Giraud](#) is one of them.

I met Mona on the social networking site, [MySpace](#), and instantly felt that she was a gem in a field of not-so-shiny objects. I asked her how the whole MySpace experience has been for her, and she said, "I had an instant connection with you, Angela, even before we wrote to each other. My space has been fine so far. I met a lot of very driven people and people who have passion for what they do."

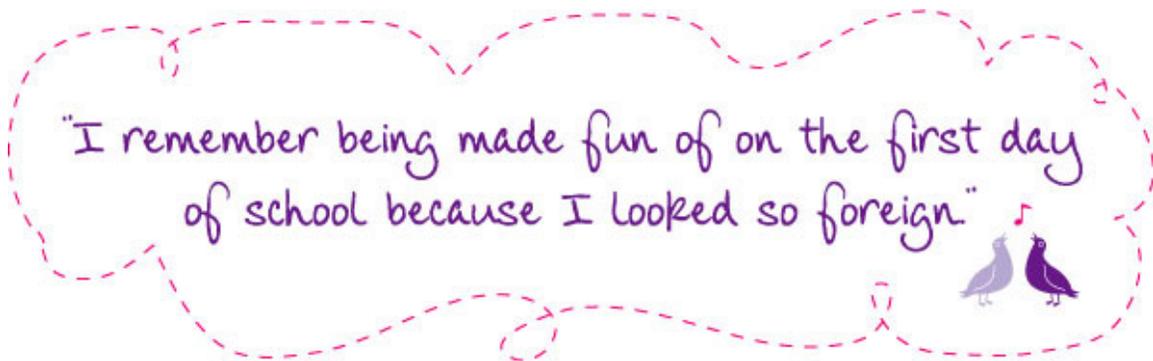
Mona's response wasn't surprising to me, considering her personable emails and the gracious way in which she presents herself, whether it's writing or life.

Mona is the author of a new children's book, [The Imaginative Adventures of Archer Gooseberry Silver: The Heroic Elephant](#), which is a story about an imaginary friend who comes to children when they feel sad or alone. This book was written in part from Mona's work in

the nursing field and serving those with severe mental and physical disabilities.

Talking with her continues to amaze me. She has cared for the elderly and has been a member of Big Brothers and Big Sisters. Mona also represented Egypt in the 2003 Mrs. Globe Beauty Pageant, and earned a B.A. in Broadcast Communications. She paints, dances, writes philosophical poetry and music, and enjoys writing stories that bring healing and understanding for children and adults alike.

I had an opportunity to interview Mona, which confirmed what I'd known all along, she is a breath of fresh air and an inspiration.



WOW: You said that you left your homeland of Egypt, “a land of mystery and magic,” and moved to New York when you were eight-years-old. That’s quite a big move for a kid! Did you experience a culture shock?

MG: My parents were planning to come to the Big Apple before I was born, but it took over eight years for immigration to approve us. I’d always been ready to come to “the land of dreams,” and when we moved to New York, I was extremely happy.

I’m the oldest in my family, so when we arrived in New York, my brother was five-years-old and my baby sister was two-months-old.

Till this day, I'll never forget when the airplane landed in LaGuardia Airport. We arrived at night after an eighteen-hour flight, and when I saw the city lights from the air, it took my breath away. At eight-years-old, I knew my life would never be the same again...

I fell in love with the American culture, the American people, and especially the American music. My favorite singers were Debbie Gibson, Bon Jovi, and Madonna.

Even though I was caught up in a beautiful dream, my brother and I struggled to communicate properly with our teachers and classmates. It was very difficult for us. I remember feeling really sad and alone at times. I remember being made fun of on the first day of school because I looked so foreign.

My brother had it very hard. Kids in his class constantly picked on him and I would always come to his rescue. I was sort of his bodyguard; I would walk behind him when we walked to school and to class.

I was a really sensitive child so when I or my brother was picked on, I would feel it in my heart. I would go home and cry. I didn't understand why we had it so hard...

The great news is the next school year was better for both of us. We both spoke fluent English and we could be more of ourselves, instead of being shy and frustrated.

WOW: Besides your big move when you were eight, you also said that you wrote your first book at that time. Could you tell us what it was about?

MG: Actually, it was around the time when my brother and I were struggling to fit in, that I wrote my first book, *Michael's Magical Pen*.

I felt comforted by creating an imaginary character that did not have any friends... except for, well, his pen. This pen was exceptional; he talked to Michael about his problems and tried to help him. In this short story, I was Michael and I was trying to make sense of pain.

WOW: Why did you choose to write as a boy? Gender hopping is very advanced for a writer and is usually such a hard thing to do!

MG: Angela, I never thought about that before. That's very interesting... I guess it never dawned on me. I think I felt like I could be another human being and express my feelings through that other person who happened to be a boy. I actually never put any thought behind that. I'm sure it means something, though. LOL.

WOW: Mona, it just means you're extremely creative!

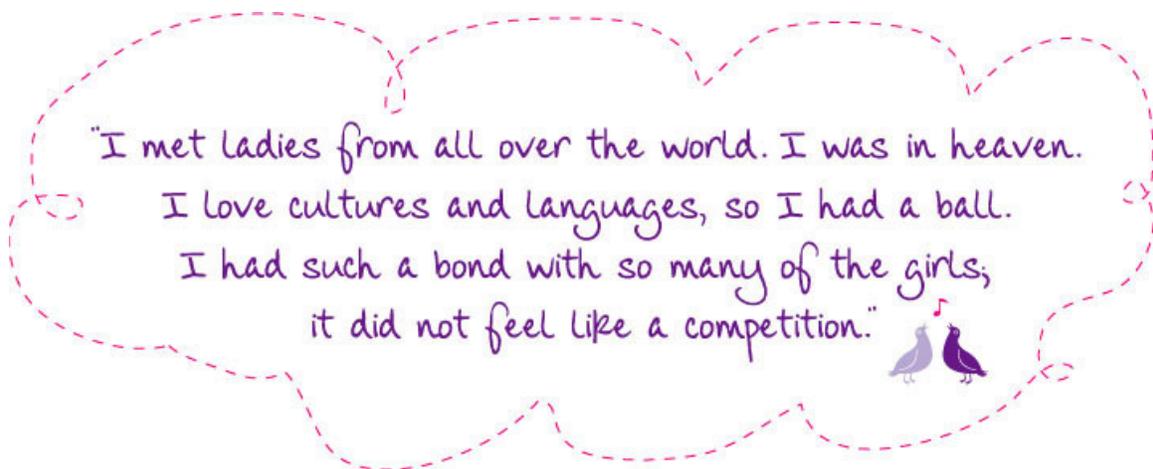
During your youth, you "dreamt of becoming a writer and an artist in all forms." What does that phrase mean to you? And is this sentence the very essence of how you define yourself today?

MG: In Egypt, my teachers submitted my notebooks for a handwriting competition throughout the whole school. I was in First Grade at the time, and won two years in a row for having the most eloquent handwriting in the first three grades. I loved to write and make my writing aesthetically beautiful.

When I wrote Michael's Magical Pen, I felt the love and desire to write stories one day. In art class, I painted on everything. I enjoyed creating. But in class, I struggled to get A's because of the language

barrier. Yet, I remember writing a poem for a homework assignment, and my teacher was so impressed with me that she gave me my paper and said, "Your poem is beautiful. I gave you an A." It was one of a few A's that I got that year, but I knew right then that I was meant to write.

I also taught myself how to play *Happy Birthday* on a hand held piano that my parents bought at a store. The notes were written on it, and there were directions that came with it. I never forgot the notes of *Happy Birthday*, and years later, I was able to play it on a grand piano. I was fighting my tears. I loved anything artistic and hoped to one day make my world beautiful with the expressions of my soul.



WOW: How long have you been nursing? What inspired you to get into that field?

MG: I've been a nurse for ten years this year. I went to a medical magnet high school, Ely High School. I wanted to be in the medical field, but I wasn't sure what I would like to be. At that time, there happened to be a nursing program that just opened up in Ely and I applied for it. To my surprise, I was accepted.

I was extremely excited and thrilled because I knew I was going to use my nursing to bring healing to people. At the same time I launched the first medical magazine the school ever published. It was called, *The Pulse*.

I knew that I wanted to use my knowledge of nursing with my communication skills to help as many people as I could.



WOW: How has helping those with mental and physical disabilities changed your outlook on life?

MG: I was in nursing school from the age of 16. I matured a lot at an early age because I saw the suffering that crossed cultural and religious boundaries.

I know that we are all the same inside; we all want to be loved and cherished. We all hurt deeply and we feel alone at times. So it's really foolish to cause each other pain and heartache. There's a lot of pain in the world without us inflicting it on each other.



WOW: Mona, you are truly beautiful, inside and out. You ran for Mrs. Globe in 2003 and were crowned "Mrs. Congeniality," as well as receiving the "Mrs. Making a Difference Award."

I think that's quite an achievement, because obviously they saw both your beauty and your heart for the things you've accomplished. Could you tell our WOW! readers what the experience was like?

MG: The whole experience was absolutely magical. Dr. Tracey Kemble, the director of Mrs. Globe asked me to represent my country when I applied for it just weeks before. You will not believe me when I tell you I denied her three times. She insisted on my arrival and participation and now, I'm most grateful for that. She had paid for my hotel stay in Palm Springs, California, for ten days. The preparation itself took eight days and on the ninth day the judges voted.

I met ladies from all over the world. I was in heaven. I love cultures and languages, so I had a ball. I had such a bond with so many of the girls; it did not feel like a competition. We joked around so much you'd think we were kids. Everyday was such a special day with them. I learned so much.

The judges decided to let the contestants vote for Mrs. Congeniality and I was shocked to know that I was even a nominee. When I won I dedicated the award to all the girls in the contest and told them that this was their award as well.

I was the only contestant to win two awards and the second one was the Making a Difference Award.

WOW: Mona, I can see you were quite a different contestant than the normal beauty pageant competitor. Your outlook is truly refreshing. You make it sound like a big slumber party! I can see why you were the only one to win two awards.

Could you tell us about the "Making a Difference" award? And how is that judged?



MG: There were other qualified contestants, but I think maybe it was because I was the only nurse in the competition. I also was, and still am an Advocate for four of my patients where I work, which means that I act much like a guardian. I'm there if they need any personal decisions to be made. The Mrs. Globe judges knew that I was trying to publish books for children to help their self-esteem and self-image through the adventurous stories

of Archer Gooseberry.

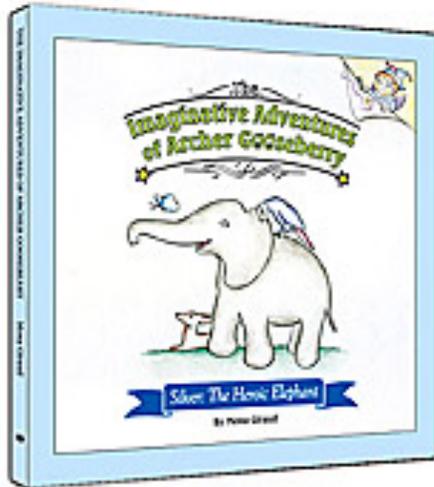
WOW: When I contacted you, you shared with me your frustrations of self-publishing and promoting your new children's book, [The Imaginative Adventures of Archer Gooseberry Silver: The Heroic Elephant](#).

Since this issue is called, "*No One Is Born Published*," I wanted to ask you about your experience with the publishing houses, and why you ultimately chose to self publish?

MG: [The Imaginative Adventures of Archer Gooseberry Silver: The Heroic Elephant](#), is the first book I've published. I tried to find a publishing house to publish this book for years, but since I'm a first-time author, they did not want to take any chances.

I needed to do something else; I needed to publish this book

myself because the message is powerful and needed. I did not want my dream to die.



WOW: Your new book, *The Imaginative Adventures of Archer Gooseberry Silver: The Heroic Elephant*, provides some life lessons that children can benefit from. Can you tell us what the book is about, and what inspired you to write about this topic?

MG: Archer Gooseberry is an imaginative friend that came to the rescue of a sad and lonely little boy named Roger who wore thick glasses. Roger was sad because he looked different. He wanted to be like the other kids and to see without wearing any glasses.

Archer Gooseberry took out his bow and arrow and aimed his arrow to the ceiling and suddenly they were sitting on a branch of the tallest tree in the jungle. Archer comforts Roger by telling him a story about a little elephant named Silver who had a very similar situation.

The Silver story is a heart-warming tale full of adventure, struggles and friendship. After Archer tells Roger the story, Roger gets a different perspective on his situation.

This book was partially inspired by my work with disabled children and adults and partially my own childhood experiences.

I did not wear glasses but I had other weaknesses as a child like



adapting to a new culture and language and making friends. I used some of my personal sentiments to write this book.

WOW: Do you feel it is important for a writer to draw from their own personal experience? And how do you think it makes the characters more real or unique?

MG: I believe it is very important to use some of the author's sentiments in his or her writing. This makes any story interesting and appealing to the reader. I also believe it makes for realistic writing, reading, and makes the reader feel that they can relate.



WOW: The illustrations for your book are whimsical, light-hearted and magical. Who did the illustrations?

How do other authors who want to self publish go about finding an illustrator, or is this an included service

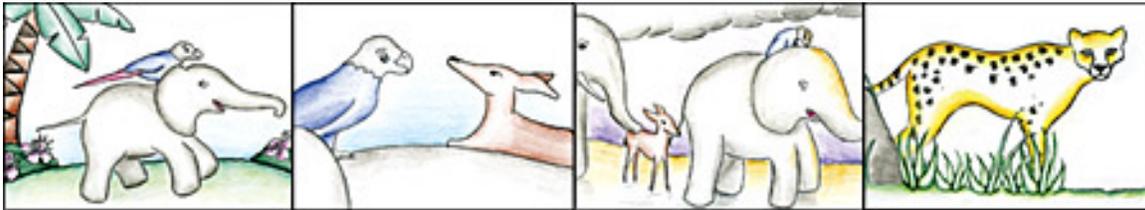
with your publisher?

MG: The self-publishing house and other publishers usually have an illustrator on board to help you make your book beautiful. I actually asked if my husband could illustrate this book. We both worked on the images and worked out the look for Archer and the other characters.

WOW: Congratulations! Both you and your husband are very talented. Did you do all the illustrations in the book, or did you

do a character reference sketch and then the illustrator took it from your drawings?

MG: I spoke to my husband, who happens to be the illustrator for this book, about what I wanted the book and the characters to look like. We worked together on how the book would be perceived and what image we were going for. I was very specific on what colors I wanted in the illustrations and the image creations of the characters. I also did not want full colored pages in the book. We decided to go for a dreamy look. It was a collaboration between the two of us.



WOW: What was it like working together?

MG: My husband is a musician and a graphic artist. We both have very similar interests and hobbies. When I asked if he could draw these images, he was reluctant to do them at first. But when all the drawings were done, he realized how magical those pictures came out.

I was thrilled, because I knew that there were children out there who would be touched, deep within their hearts, from the magical world of art that expresses the healing messages of Archer Gooseberry.

I decided from the beginning that all my children's books will have many illustrations, because the power of imagination and visualization can be so dynamic in the way it helps another person.

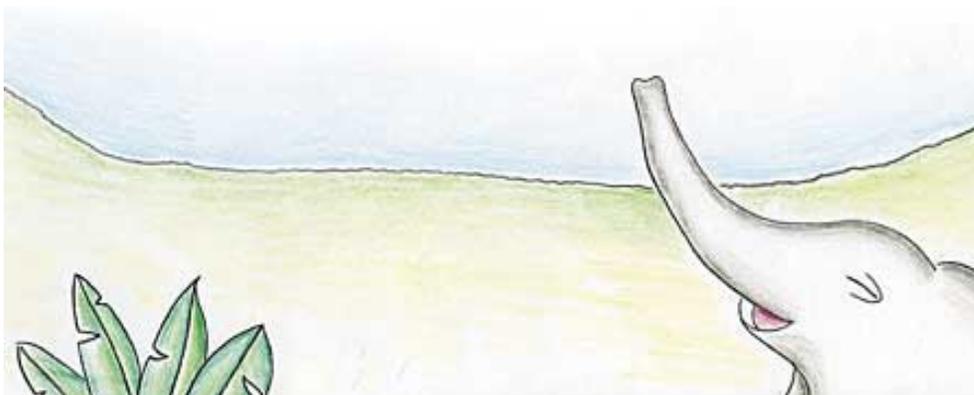
WOW: Mona, what do you hope readers will learn by reading your book?

MG: I want readers to know that we are not alone in our pain and struggles. There are Angels and God who are always there if we need them, and that we are so special and unique. No one in the world has the same fingerprints, retina or even hair follicles as we do. We are an original masterpiece. We need to love ourselves in order to love others.

WOW: You have a lot of wonderful and creative energy; whether it's through writing, painting, philosophical and spiritual poetry, music, or helping others. What's in store for you in the near future?

MG: I'm finishing up two books right now that are not Archer Gooseberry stories, although I'm working on those as well. One is called, *A Little Poetry and A Little Philosophy. For Everyone in the World, For the Young and the Old*. It is written by myself and my nephews who are nine and twelve-years-old. It all rhymes and it's reader friendly. It is full of different philosophies about everything.

The other one is called, *Messenger's Whisper*, and is a poetic spiritual writing with my original oil paintings inside of the book. It is about finding enlightenment.



WOW! would like to thank Mona for sharing her true heart in this interview. To find out more about Mona Giraud, visit her website:

<http://www.monagiraud.com>

Or send her an email at: info@monagiraud.com