

THE AUTHORS SHOW – Education

Author: Rodo Sofranac

“Yes, Rodo is My First Name!

Ja trebam do kupim dva tikete za Beograd,” (I need to buy two tickets to Belgrade.) I told the ticket agent at the Jugoslav Air Transport (JAT) office in Podgorica, Montenegro.

“To košta sto-dvadeset euro,” (That’ll cost 120 Euros) he responded.

“That will be fine,” I nodded and handed him the money.

“Molim te kako se zoviš?” (Your name, please?) he asked.

“Rodoljub Šofranac,” I answered.

The agent lowered his head, typed out the ticket, and then handed it to me.

Then the agents said, “Štoje nju ime?” (What’s her name.)

“Susan”, I replied.

“Kako se to piše?” (How is that spelled?), he asked.

I spelled Susan for him. Once again he lowered his head, typed out her ticket, and then handed it to me. With that, we had our tickets for the beginning of our return trip home.

As I turned to show the tickets to Susan, she said excitedly, “Do you realize what just happened?”

I thought about the money, date and time of the flight, and wondered if I made a mistake.

“What happened?” I asked her.

“This is the first time in the forty plus years we’ve been together that I heard you use your full name, in Serbian.

“What was cuter,” Susan said giggling, “the ticket agent didn’t even ask, ‘Which is the first, and which is the last name? What kind of name is that? How do you spell that? Where did you get that name?’ You just said your name once. He asked no questions, gave no side comments, and made no mistakes.

“Instead,” she said with a roar, “ he asked how to spell Susan. What a hoot! I love it!”

Most of us can’t recall our primary language acquisition. For various developmental reasons, we can retrieve almost no memory from very early childhood. I had the fortune and challenge to start learning what became my third and dominant language, English, when I was eight years old. My parents knew even less English than I did. The schools in the United States at that time—mid 1950s—didn’t have the understanding we have today about early language development. They obviously also didn’t have the programs to accommodate different needs, at least in inner city Cleveland.

Oh the trials and tribulations that came out of this. Like thinking that the Pledge of Allegiance was a morning salute to our principal. Her first name must have been Justice, because her last name was Furlong.

It was up to me to figure out the best, most effective tools and techniques to master my third language. And because I can remember it, I can share how it happened to me. The blessing is it gave me the ability to empathize with other language learners. The fact is, every human being is a language learner, at least once in their lifetime.

Evidenced-based academic research coupled with personal experiences in the diversity of cultures and languages allows me to present some of the best practices—rhythm, rhyme, and repetition—to help the young child on the road to literacy and life-long success.

I have worked with young children for over 45 years, as a teacher, translator, and mentor. I’ve also found a lot of interest from adults whether they are learning English later in life, enhancing their language skills or knowledge in general! I continue to learn, teach, write, and have fun with words, especially telling stories.

But much more than any academic practice, there is the joy of sharing our human experience, to interact in the most unique human attribute, language expressed through the written word. Wow! What a gift we humans receive! I always tell learners, that's what separates Rodo from Toto. Thanks to the written word, young Rodo can pick up where old Rodo left off. Unlike Toto, Rodo is not dependent on instinctual traits to plot his course.

The numerous stories I have told and written, the seven books I have published all focus on the opportunities to share life, develop constructive relationships, to upgrade our behavior.

Although my books have been labeled as "children's literature", many other authors have expressed, "There is no such thing as children's literature." People of all ages and various language bases, all those young at heart, on five continents have enjoyed and hopefully grown from the stories. Most gratifyingly, it has helped them articulate their own stories.

What began as a difficult and frightening journey, bouncing from one country, culture, and language to another, and then another, has given me the confidence and sense of purpose to help others as they navigate their journeys.

With that background information, I present to you my seven offerings of literature:

The Red Tail Tale on the Arizona Trail - Rowen, a young, red-headed explorer, and Rojo, a clever, red-tailed hawk meet, bond, and experience a wonderful adventure on the fascinating Arizona National Scenic Trail.

Polly and the Peaputts – Meet Polly Poppop, and learn about her family, friends, and their village, Peaputt Place. See how Polly and the Peaputts live, love, laugh, and smile. In this episode, Polly and her friends discover understanding, acceptance, and forgiveness.

Polly and the Peaputts Pull Together – Excitement from the Peaputts and their creative efforts to extract a strange "root" leads to lessons of acceptance and cooperation from the smallest member of the community.

Polly and the Peaputts on the Move – The Peaputts are a very lively bunch, and they all have different ways of moving around. Some, like Polly's newest friend Kikiriki, have more of a

challenge. In this latest adventure, there's a fun two-Putt race that Polly and Kikiriki want to join. Can Polly and Kikiriki enter? Can they win?

Find Your Nose - Rhythm, rhyme, and personalization of the learner's name make for lots of fun! This book gives the child, or other language learner, the opportunity to interact while discovering the names and functions of various body parts.

My Maddy, Ma Daddy - In this book's episodes, Maddy and her daddy help each other work and play, learn and teach, laugh and cry, because that's the way they share their love for each other. (This book is available in English and Spanish editions.)