

Full Text

MADE PERFECT IN WEAKNESS

All of us have our own disabilities, Roselle's was just more obvious but she has and will always represent what it means to go beyond one's limitations. Let's listen to the story and figure out what Roselle's disability is and how did she power through it.

Made Perfect in Weakness is part of the Modern Hero Stories, a series of stories under Sandaang Salaysay about the lives of great and honorable Filipinos. Brought to you by Arete and Ateneo de Manila Basic Education in partnership with The Bookmark, Inc. and Role Players, Inc. Written by Didith Tan Rodrigo and will be read to us by Stephanie Ann D. Chua, Ivy Baggao, and Adriane Ungriano.

The grade three classroom was buzzing. It was time for the multiplication flash card drill and everyone wanted to recite. Ms. Sugay, the teacher, held the flash card high above her head. "OK, class, what is the product? Raise your hand if you want to answer."

Students waved their arms in the air.

"Yes, Gabby!" the teacher said.

"36!" Gabby said.

"Correct! OK, next problem! What's the answer? Yes, Nina!"

Nina replied, "45!"

"That's right! OK, next problem! What is the answer? David!"

"70!" David called out.

"Good! Next question ... ,,

The teacher called the students in the class one by one.

She called everyone except Roselle. Roselle, the girl in dark glasses, was silent. She never raised her hand. She did not say a word. She could not volunteer to answer, because she did not know the question.

Roselle was blind.

The flash card drill frustrated her. She had memorized the multiplication tables. She could recite them by heart. But flash cards, really? How exactly was she expected to read them?

The individual work discouraged her even more. She had to practice math using a special board with holes for pegs. Students inserted pegs into the holes. The position of a peg represented a number or a math operation. If Roselle dropped a peg on the floor, she had to get on her hands and knees and grope around to find it.

"I hate math!" she cried to her parents.

Her parents sighed, "What can we do?"

One evening, Roselle's father was watching TV. As he changed channels, he saw a documentary program on the education of blind children in Canada. He saw that, instead of the peg board, the children used a tool that looked like an abacus.

The next day, Roselle's father went to a foundation that helped blind students. "Can you help us buy this abacus for Roselle?" he asked. The foundation imported the abacus for her.

When it arrived, Roselle brought the abacus to class and learned to use it quickly.

Roselle's father also spoke to Ms. Sugay and asked her to read out the flash card problems to give Roselle a chance to recite.

By the time she was in grade 4, Roselle had become so good that her school sent her to math competitions against sighted students from other schools. She won contest after contest and began to think that maybe she did not hate math after all.

However, other people did not like Roselle and her success. Students and principals from other schools were suspicious of her. "How could she compute so quickly and accurately?" they whispered. "She must be cheating!"

"That abacus probably has a built in calculator!" one teacher said.

"Yes," another teacher agreed. "She's probably pressing numbers somewhere and then reading the answer!"

At the end of one contest in which she won, the judges refused to give her the medal. "You do not deserve to win," the head judge said, sending Roselle home empty-handed.

Suspicion followed her for years. When she was in third year high school, her school sent her as its contestant to a major quiz bee. Half way through, one district superintendent stopped the contest.

The superintendent shouted at Roselle, "You should not use your abacus!

That would be cheating!"

Roselle replied, "OK, Ma'am. I will not use my abacus. However, the sighted students should not be allowed to use pens and paper either. All of us should be able to compute mentally.

"Oh no," the superintendent protested. "That would not be fair!"

Roselle listened and waited, hoping that someone else would speak up for her. No one did.

Roselle agreed to not use the abacus during that competition, but it did not matter.

At the end of the contest, the judges announced:

"... And in first place with a total of 460 points: Roselle Ambubuyog!"

Roselle grew to love math and science, but when it was time for her to apply to college, she chose business and management courses.

She did not think she would succeed in math if the university community was not supportive and or if the people around continued to put her down.

Then one of the major universities in Quezon City reached out to her. They had

their entrance examination translated into Braille. They offered her a scholarship. Their president even met with her personally.

"Roselle," the president said. "Your entrance test math scores were some of the highest we have ever seen. Why don't you major in Math?"

Roselle almost laughed. "In math?" she thought. "All these years, people doubted me and were suspicious of me, all because of math. Why would I take math now?"

Yet here was a school that believed in her and her abilities. Perhaps this time, math would be different.

Roselle enrolled in that university. Four years later; she graduated with a BS Mathematics degree, with highest honors, and was named valedictorian of her batch.

When reflecting about these honors, Roselle said, "All of us have our own disabilities, Mine is just more obvious. I can represent what it means to go beyond one's limitations, with determination, perseverance, the help of others, and the grace of God."

Source: *Made Perfect in Weakness*. Didith Tan Rodrigo. The Bookmark, Inc. 2014.

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