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Mr. Worldwide, and No, It's not Pitbull

I started attending an eccentric church called [Church @ No. 71](#) that goes back to the basics of Christianity - gathering in a home to talk about Jesus, but for now, through Zoom. It is a safe haven for a hybrid of unique personalities to ask questions and share their insights. Among its attendees is Colin Mills, a white man living in Tondo, Manila. He spoke in fluent Filipino with a distinct fusion of accents. In his reflections, he often mentions creative and specific approaches to the world's problems, referencing his time in different countries. Intrigued by the deeper context behind his stories, I found myself wanting to have a better understanding of what he does and where he has been.

"Colin has been around, and by around, I mean around," Jon Soriano, or Pastor Jon to the members of the Church @ No. 71, said. And it turns out that there is someone who fits right into the tagline Mr. Worldwide aside from Pitbull. The iconic tagline is emblematic of Colin's life experience: his idiosyncratic accent is a product of the diversity he's been exposed to in the last 46 years of his life.

Colin grew up in Melbourne with an Australian father and a French mother, exposing him to two entirely different cultures. Much of his childhood was spent outdoors while attending school. In the mix of all of that, he also discovered his first love: music.

Most of the time, the case is that you are either passionate or gifted. Colin is both. At 13-17, he was invited to participate in a program for gifted musicians where participants would take additional classes for music ranging from instrumental lessons to rehearsals outside of school hours. He continued his musical endeavors as he took up higher studies in Music at the

Conservatorium of Music at Edith Cowan University, notwithstanding his emerging professional career as he began to play a few gigs with a band and teach others how to play musical instruments.

“I figured that if I can have fun and make a living at the same time, that’s what I would do,” he says. And he made good on that promise because that’s what his post-university life looked like, but then came an unexpected twist: he encountered Jesus. This led him to intern at a Church located in Perth, describing it as a great learning time on how to relate to others, while also building his confidence in speaking and running programs. He also read a lot. Like, a lot. “My mentor would joke that I was going to read through his whole library!” he heartily shared.

But the adventure of his life was just about to begin when he made a fortuitous decision to move out of Australia. Going back to his French roots, he went to France to pursue further studies in Music focusing on honing his artistic expression. Not long after, he found himself exploring even farther horizons outside the comforts of first-world countries he was accustomed to.

However, living in Southeast Asia was a result of fortuitous events. He was open to visit, yes, but he didn’t imagine himself living so far from home. 13 years ago, he was deciding where to go on holiday based on a coin toss. The choice happened to be Malaysia. From thereon, numerous doors and opportunities opened sparking his move. Then it just went on from there. He found himself living in different countries within the region over the next few years of his life. Similar to his taste in music ranging from jazz to African work songs, his work was eclectic as it was an integration of both his passion and purpose - in his case, it was music and community development. In Malaysia, he co-founded a recording studio for professional musicians, but also for refugees who were passionate about music while working hand-in-hand with university

students on professional development. In Thailand, his work centered in the community of [Khlung Toey](#), known to be one of Thailand's biggest slum areas. In his time there, he worked at a local foundation and started an English school called Life Learning Centre specifically designed for people from that community. He also ran a small music studio intending to break down economic barriers and stereotypes by welcoming all kinds of people to record in their studio in Khlung Toey. "After visiting and meeting other people [from the community], people would often say that they were no longer scared to interact with these people," he mused.

Three and a half years ago, he moved to Manila after five years of regularly visiting to connect with people in different communities, one of which is his now-wife of three years, Jena Diwa-Mills. "I met Colin in one of the monthly gatherings of [Lilok Foundation](#) in Quezon City back in 2015. It was not until a year of working together on projects [mostly in Malaysia] that we ended up together," Jena shared.



Colin Mills on his wedding day in 2017. Photo by Bernard Mills.

His life in the Philippines has been more centralized on community work. “I work alongside people running a foundation and have conversations with them around what equitable and just relationships look like. We also have conversations around what more wholistic models of giving might look like and how we might empower people,” he shared. Right now, he and his wife started a mini urban farm, a soap business, and a herbal tea company, donating its harvest and proceeds to people in need in response to the pandemic.

“I just do whatever I can to meet the demands of the situations going on around me,” he concluded. But where to next? He doesn’t know. Having been to opposite sites of the globe with a better understanding of the worldviews of different cultures, he says he wants to focus on the here and now. All he knows is that he wants to continue fulfilling his life mission: to be a proactive and inclusive social justice warrior and Jesus follower.