APPENDIX
INTERVIEW WITH RUSKIN BOND

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1. **Interviewer**: How did you create the character called Rusty in your early days of writing? The first three letters of your name and the character are exactly similar. Can you please explain the reason behind it sir?

**Ruskin Bond**: Well, it all started with the *Room on the Roof*, which I wrote when I was very young - 17 or 18 and it was published a couple of years later. When I first wrote *The Room on the Roof*, I wrote it in the first person and when I submitted it to a publisher in England, I was then in England after my school, the publisher suggested that I must put it in the third person and in doing so, I gave myself a name and Rusty was close to Ruskin in a way. So I wanted to fictionalize the story and I changed it from semi-autobiography to fiction and the name would be like an alter-ego. As a boy, nobody used to call me Rusty, everybody called me Ruskin, at school there were other names, not Rusty. So I gave myself that name. So it started with *Room on the Roof*. And later occasionally I used that name when I was writing a first person story, but not always. Now some of the stories now found in the Rusty Series did not have the name Rusty when they were first written. They were written in the first person or even in the third person. When Penguin Books decided to publish the Rusty Series, they took some of my stories in the third person and they used the name Rusty in them. Gradually stories that were not always using the name Rusty did so, for the practical purposes of this Rusty Series. So partly, I am not to be blamed. The
editors wanted to have more Rusty stories. So they used the name to give it continuity.

2. **Interviewer:** You have pointed out that Rusty is your alter ego. Can you please explain, to what extent you have identified Rusty and how did you manage to create Rusty, an ordinary boy to be an adventurous hero of the story?

**Ruskin Bond:** It’s clear that Rusty is me, because I fictionalised his story, invented stories around him, I didn’t want to call him Ruskin. I didn’t want to make the Rusty Series pure autobiography because it won’t be me, as some of the stories like Escape from Java are all made up. In a way I am reliving my youth through the stories but in a way, I am also adding to it, giving myself adventures that would have otherwise not happened. For the sake of the effectiveness of the story, you add certain things and leave others out.

3. **Interviewer:** The stories are different and isolated. Were they written at different points of time?

**Ruskin Bond:** Yes, the stories were written at different points of time and they were all put together in a sequence along with the editor.

4. **Interviewer:** As already discussed, there is a strong association between both the names which constantly reminds every reader about the autobiographical elements. Can you tell me about combining elements of life into fiction, for example Uncle Ken; Ranbir are the characters in your life, and can you explain this?
**Ruskin Bond:** Lot of my stories are autobiographical, but not entirely so. I fictionalise certain events in my life, people I know, few characters are based on real people and I would make a story out of them by changing things around and time can vary. Being a subjective writer, it’s true I write a lot from my own life. My stories have grown out of people I know, my relatives, but they are imagined characters that have been made to appear real. So sometimes this can be confusing. There are stories which are real, others that are imagined and a few others that are a mixture of both. For example, a story like Escape from Java never happened in real, it is pure fiction. I've never been to Java or escaped from it. So I made it like a little adventure story for children and it got included in this Series as a Rusty story. On the other hand, there was an Uncle Ken, even though some people think how you could have such a ridiculous person like that in real life, but he did exist. Some of his stories I had to invent, because he couldn't be getting into so many embarrassing situations. But he is a real character. I took him and created stories around him. My actual grandfather died when I was one or two, but in my stories I am five or six and I am living with him. So the stories are based on what I heard about him from my mother and I wanted to put myself in those stories.

5. **Interviewer:** The reading of Rusty Series aptly fits into bildungsroman narrative. Is it so?
Ruskin Bond: Exactly, that’s the whole point of putting the stories together. The editors of Penguin thought the isolated stories should be put together, because they coalesce.

6. Interviewer: Is the Rusty series similar to the genre of *David Copperfield*?

Ruskin Bond: True, there are many novels which trace the growth of a young hero wanting to be a writer like Joyce’s *Portrait of the Artist* and Dickens’s *David Copperfield*.

7. Interviewer: Like R. K. Narayan’s *Malgudi Days*, your Dehra Dun always beams with life. Can you please comment on this Sir?

Ruskin Bond: Yes, a lot of people compare my Dehra Dun with R.K. Narayan’s Malgudi. He writes about Malgudi, a corner of the world which he knows well.

8. Interviewer: This one is on the question of identity as not just a writer. As your background is mixed (British/ Anglo - Indian) in contemporary times you have seem to have transcended with regional, local, social identity to operate within the realm of writing. We are trying to see what kind of tradition you are trying to fit into.

Ruskin Bond: There were influences other than Dickens that were very strong. Rudyard Kipling’s Kim was read in school but I didn’t appreciate it then, but later was influenced by it. When I was 20, I read *Swami and*
Friends and that was around 1949 or 50, when I left school. Short story writers who bring the countryside in their writing have influenced me.

9. **Interviewer:** Do you associate yourself to any literary tradition?

**Ruskin bond:** I grew upon English literature though I grew up in India. I wanted to emulate in a way the writers I admired. I read in English and wrote in English but the influences around me were all Indian. For school I went to Shimla, which had a good library. I used to spend a lot of time in it when I want to escape from routine matters. So I read a lot. I was a bookworm. Yes, I am a voracious reader. Even when I come home for holidays, I couldn’t afford to buy books but would look for books in library and in second hand bookshops. So I wanted to emulate in a way, the writers I admired. It was the literary tradition I wanted to follow. I read in English and brought in English. The influences were all around me.

10. **Interviewer:** So, Rusty also occupies the same space between his survival and existence rather than establishing his identity. Rusty does not worry more about his identity. He doesn’t want to call himself an English man and separate himself from the Indian locals or he doesn’t want to completely assimilate into the Indian culture, more than that he worried about his survival like how he was going to have a future for him. What is your stand on that?

**Ruskin Bond:** Even in *Room on the Roof* he is not sure where he stands. As time passes Rusty is more at home in his environment, and more sure of
himself and appreciates his double inheritance, both from his English parents and also from his Indian influences. Rusty is quite a pragmatic boy and reflects me. I am not a practical man but very pragmatic, that I learnt to make a living just by writing, I am not good at anything else (laughs).

11. **Interviewer**: This is about the function of children’s literature. It is expected to convey some morals and values. Though your stories do not convey direct morals, from the life and experiences of Rusty, children get positive values. Is it a conscious attempt?

**Ruskin Bond**: I am not consciously trying to teach, but obviously I wanted to impart good principles, to establish certain ethical standards in life that are personal. But I don’t try to point a moral, it might come out on its own, as a theme in the story, but I won’t press it hard. It will be more subtle.

12. **Interviewer**: We are trying to locate value as an important aspect of your writing. What do you have to say on that to the young readers?

**Ruskin Bond**: These stories like Tree lovers I wrote when I was in my forties, when I came to live in the hills. Before that I have been living in cities like Dehra Dun. Soon after I came to live in the hills, I become more conscious of my surroundings and wrote stories like Tree lovers. In my earlier stories, in my twenties they were very romantic. Stories like “The Night Train at Deoli”, “The Train stops and Shamli” I was romantic and I was writing romantic stories.
13. **Interviewer:** In my view of Rusty, I have identified certain values like optimism, being with nature, affirmation, humanism, community life, and the importance of family structure. Do you agree with it?

**Ruskin Bond:** Yeah, optimism is much prevalent in my writing, most of the stories end up in an upbeat note. Things always get better, he (Rusty) is looking forward that he’ll succeed one day and even other characters in the stories are very positive. Yes, family life appeals to him, even though attracted to family structure e.g., Kishen’s family. Even the story 'Thief' elements of looking for the best in human beings, which may not always be there in reality and it’s my nature too, to look for the best in everything.

14. **Interviewer:** You seem to be more comfortable with short stories. Please comment on it.

**Ruskin Bond:** *Room on the Roof* started like a diary and when I went to England I expanded it to a longer journal and then the publisher I submitted to, suggested, why not to turn it into a novel. So, I did, I am basically a short story writer. Even *Room on the Roof* is a novella. I am comfortable with anything between thousand to ten thousand words. Making a living was more important. I used to write to *Shankar Weekly*, *Illustrated Weekly*, etc. Anyway, the short stories have now become a novel. So without meaning to write a novel, I have written a very long one.
15. **Interviewer**: What do you think about the role of a writer?

**Ruskin Bond**: Most writers are individuals. Some are interested in social issues or in current events and others perhaps prefer to write about nature or growing up or the self – the psychological or philosophical point of view. There are writers like Dickens who criticize social conditions that has led in the improvement of the lives of the factory workers in slum area, etc. on the other hand, a writer like Emily Bronte is purely personal and emotional writing.

16. **Interviewer**: The tone of your voice differs considerably between your autobiographical writing and other fictional works. Can you comment on this feature?

**Ruskin Bond**: My life and adventures becomes the subject of my works. As I have got older, life becomes funnier and the element of comic gives more edge to your writing. Autobiographies are more objective, I get a distance between myself and the subject as a writer.

17. **Interviewer**: Do you think that it would be apt to compare Rusty with Ruskin in an autobiographical connotation?

**Ruskin Bond**: Just fine. You can compare autobiographical work with fiction to see where I have used elements from my life in the fiction.

18. **Interviewer**: Just this one question because we are more of literary students and worried about literary aspects of your writing, many of children’s
literature as I pointed out earlier have kept to magic realism, fantasy and all
this aspects. But you seem to have kept a very strong hold to realism and
reality.

**Ruskin Bond:** Maybe I am not so imaginative that I want to write fantasy or
science fiction, although imaginative enough to change reality. I want to see
myself and my characters living in the real world. And I grew up on fiction
that was basically realistic

19. **Interviewer:** Do you also think that fantasy would help children understand
certain aspects of life

**Ruskin Bond:** Yeah, I think so, fantasy is alright, but if you grow up entirely
on fantasy then may be it will be little difficult to face the reality.