

BREAKTHROUGH
STARS



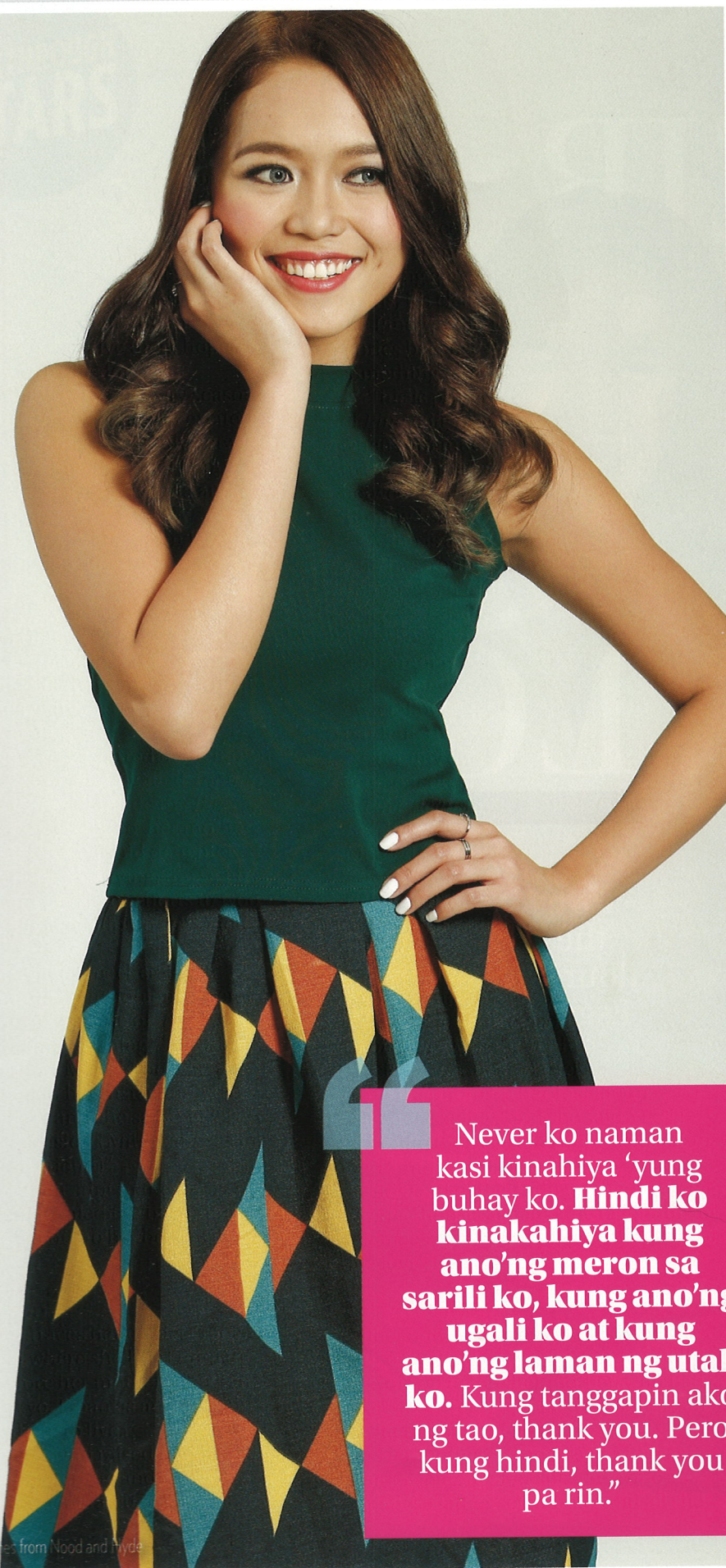
in Tommy: Uniqlo
in Mihor: Nood and Hyde

THEIR Big LOVE

Pinoy Big Brother has seen several love teams develop while inside the house. Not all of them have flourished—but this one of Tommy Esguerra and Miho Nishida has so far beaten the odds and turned into a real-life one

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“Never ko naman kasi kinahiya ‘yung buhay ko. **Hindi ko kinakahiya kung ano’ng meron sa sarili ko, kung ano’ng ugali ko at kung ano’ng laman ng utak ko.** Kung tanggapin ako ng tao, thank you. Pero kung hindi, thank you pa rin.”

Whether they care to admit it or not, Filipinos are typically drawn to anything that has to do with love. From the outstanding box-office performance of romantic comedies to the loyal (one might even say fanatical) following generated by onscreen love teams, it’s clear—to say the least—that the Pinoy audience latches on to love stories because these give them hope and something more to live for.

This is probably why, in every season of *Pinoy Big Brother*, viewers get excited when romantic sparks start to fly between two housemates, which is what happened between *PBB 737*’s Miho Nishida and Tommy Esguerra.

Miho is a single mother from Japan who has trouble speaking English. Tommy is a Filipino-American model who can’t speak straight Tagalog. Together, their hilarious exchanges were a hit among *PBB 737* viewers, and it wasn’t long before they developed their own following, with fans calling their tandem “ToMiho”.

Tommy and Miho starred in their own segment on *It’s Showtime* called *ToMiho: A Love Realiserye*. Set inside the *Big Brother House* where Miho, her mother Mercedes and five-year-old daughter Aimi are temporarily staying, the segment followed Tommy’s valiant efforts to woo Miho the traditional Filipino way and win her heart.

Their story finally reached the expected happy conclusion on December 19 last year, in an episode of *It’s Showtime*, with the hashtag #ToMiho:The Decision. Co-host Mariel Rodriguez posted a photo on her Instagram account, saying, “and she said YES!!!! #ToMihoTheDecision (Miho said Yes to be Tommy’s girlfriend)”.

The end of their stint in the *Pinoy Big Brother* house signaled the beginning of what has turned out to be their own real-life love story.

Survivor Mom

Miho, now 23, traces her modest roots to Angono, Rizal where she lived until the age of two before her mother, who had worked in Tokyo, Japan as an entertainer, brought her there to live.

Her mother—who raised Miho as a single parent after she and Miho’s Japanese father separated—did all she

could to provide for her daughter, but there were times that the little girl wanted more than her mother could give.

Miho found herself sometimes longing for her father's presence. *"Nu'ng bata kasi ako, naiinggit ako kapag nakikita ko 'yung mga kaklase kong kasama 'yung mga mommy at daddy nila, tapos sabay silang kumakain,"* she shares. *"Hinanap-hanap ko rin 'yung tatay ko noon pero hindi naman to the point na masyado akong malulungkot."*

As Miho came of age, she developed a rebellious streak in her teenage years, choosing to spend more of her time partying with her friends rather than focusing on her studies.

Eventually, she dropped out of school. *"Siguro nasiyahan lang akong kasama ang mga barkada,"* she explains. *"Wala talaga akong hilig mag-aral noon."*

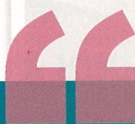
When she was 16, Miho faced one of the biggest challenges a teenage girl can ever go through in her life: getting pregnant before she was even ready. Upon finding out that she was indeed expecting, Miho first revealed the news to Asami, one of her closest friends. But when changes started taking place in her body and the pregnancy started to show, she was forced to tell her mother.

At one point, Miho confesses, she floated the idea of having the baby aborted. *"Sixteen lang ako noon at ang nasa isip ko, kung sarili ko nga hindi ko maalagaan, paano ako mag-aalaga ng bata? Kaya naisip ko talagang ipalaglag na lang kasi sa Japan, paulit-ulit nilang ginagawa 'yun. Pero sabi ng mommy ko, masama raw 'yun. Huwag daw ako gumaya sa mga Japanese. Doon na lumakas ang loob ko na ituloy na ang pagbubuntis ko."*

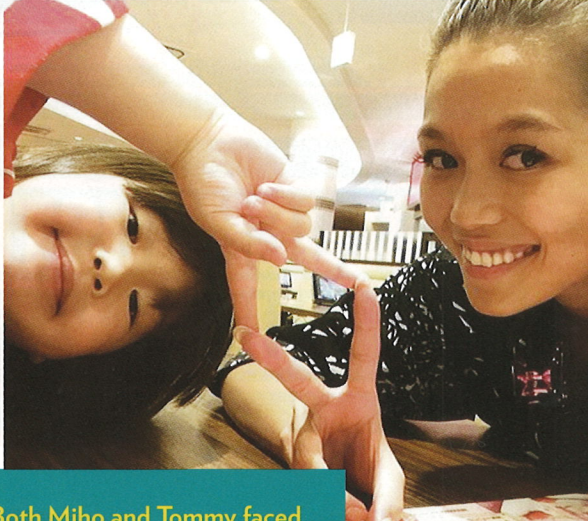
Eventually, she chose to keep the baby, but it wasn't a trouble-free life. In her desire to provide comfortably for her daughter, Miho worked as an entertainer at night, while her mother opted to stay home to take care of Aimi. Miho says: *"Siyempre, mas maganda kung 'yung nanay mo ang nag-aalaga sa anak mo para safe at palagay ang loob mo"*.

She tried working at clothing stores at one point, but the pay just wasn't enough, so she went back to working as an entertainer.

Despite all the hardships that came with being a single parent in her teenage years, Miho tells *StarStudio* that Aimi



My stint in PBB taught me a lot of important life lessons, especially forgiveness. **Forgiveness is a big thing.**



Both Miho and Tommy faced tough challenges before *Pinoy Big Brother*. For Miho, it was becoming a teenage mom at 16, and raising her daughter Aimi, now five years old. For Tommy (here in undated childhood photos), it was coming to terms with not having his father around. So in a way—and because of that common ground—it became easy for them to gravitate toward each other. They became each other's protector, comforter and confidante and leaned on each other. That tight bond helped propel Miho to victory as *PBB 737's* Big Winner.

proved to be a big blessing and changed her in ways she didn't expect.

"Dati kasi, wala talaga akong pakialam—wala akong kinakatakutan, basta kung saan ako masaya, doon ako. Pero nung lumabas na si Aimi, doon na ako natutong mag-isip kung paano ko bubuhayin ang pamilya namin. Sobrang pasalamat ko kay Aimi kasi naging matino ako dahil sa kanya."

Then one day, Miho's mother saw the TV plug for *Pinoy Big Brother's* call for auditions on The Filipino Channel (TFC) and urged Miho to audition.

Miho, however, wasn't interested in the beginning. *"Ang sagot ko pa nga noon sa kanya is 'wag na kasi mas gusto kong magtrabaho na lang. Feeling ko kasi, hindi naman ako makukuha. Pero sa bandang huli, naisip ko na ring puwedeng makatulong 'yun sa pamilya ko. Gusto ko na rin kasing mag-iba ng work."*

But eventually, she decided it couldn't hurt to give *PBB* a chance and went to audition to become a housemate. And while others may have felt nervous about revealing their life story before a screening panel that would decide their fate during the auditions, Miho was not the least bit afraid to bare her soul.

"Never ko naman kasi kinahiya 'yung buhay ko," she stresses. "Hindi ko kinakahiya kung ano'ng meron sa sarili ko, kung ano'ng ugali ko at kung ano'ng laman ng utak ko. Kung tanggapin ako ng tao, thank you. Pero kung hindi, thank you pa rin. Basta nandiyan ang nanay ko at ang anak kong nakaintindi

sa akin, okay na ako."

Hot heartthrob

Tommy, who grew up in the United States, is no stranger to struggles in life either, as his biological father left their family when he was still very young.

As Tommy relates, "He left because he just couldn't do it. He didn't want these kids because to him, these kids are heavy baggage." From that point on, Tommy rarely ever saw his father again.

Like Miho's single-parent mother, Tommy's mother was a hardworking woman who had to work two or three jobs just to make ends meet.

But that changed when his mother remarried. "My stepfather told my mom, 'You don't have to work again. Just be with your kids. Take care of them, raise them and I'll work for the family,'" he shares. "Basically, from when he met my mom until now that's what he's been doing. He held on to his promise."

With such a father figure in the picture, things gradually got better for

Tommy, who describes himself growing up as a nerd who liked to play video games. "I don't like sports," he declares. "I play video games and I make games. I'm actually a computer programmer."

Apart from video games, Tommy—even from his earliest years—was a romantic who believed in love. The first time he ever fell for a girl when he was in 7th grade. He was in an on and off relationship with her that lasted until after high school.

"She would come and then leave whenever she wanted. Because I was too in love with her, I accepted it," Tommy reveals. "But to make a long story short, she hooked up with my best friend and it broke my heart. I was destroyed. After that, I didn't feel like California was my home anymore because the girl I was in love with and my best friend broke my trust."

After everything that transpired, Tommy tried to move on with his life but it proved to be very difficult for him.

He went to college for a year and made new friends but at the end of the day, he still wasn't genuinely happy. "My friend and that girl lived just by me. Both are connected to my family. Her mom is super close to my mom and she comes over almost every day to my house. So that time, I was just like 'I don't want to be here.' And I thought one day that I wanted to go do something else with my life."

That's when his parents introduced the idea of him going to the Philippines to try his luck in showbiz as an actor or model.

He worked as a model for two years. But in those two years, Tommy never bothered to learn Tagalog or develop his skills in acting, singing and dancing, thinking he had little chance of becoming an actor.

But when the chance to become a *PBB* housemate came along, he thought it was too good an opportunity to pass up and went for it. Little did he know it would change his life.

The PBB Experience

Pinoy Big Brother did change a lot of things for Tommy and Miho.

In Miho's case, she found herself being toughened by the experience. To survive inside the house, she steeled herself emotionally during every eviction night. Miho would always expect to be the one evicted.

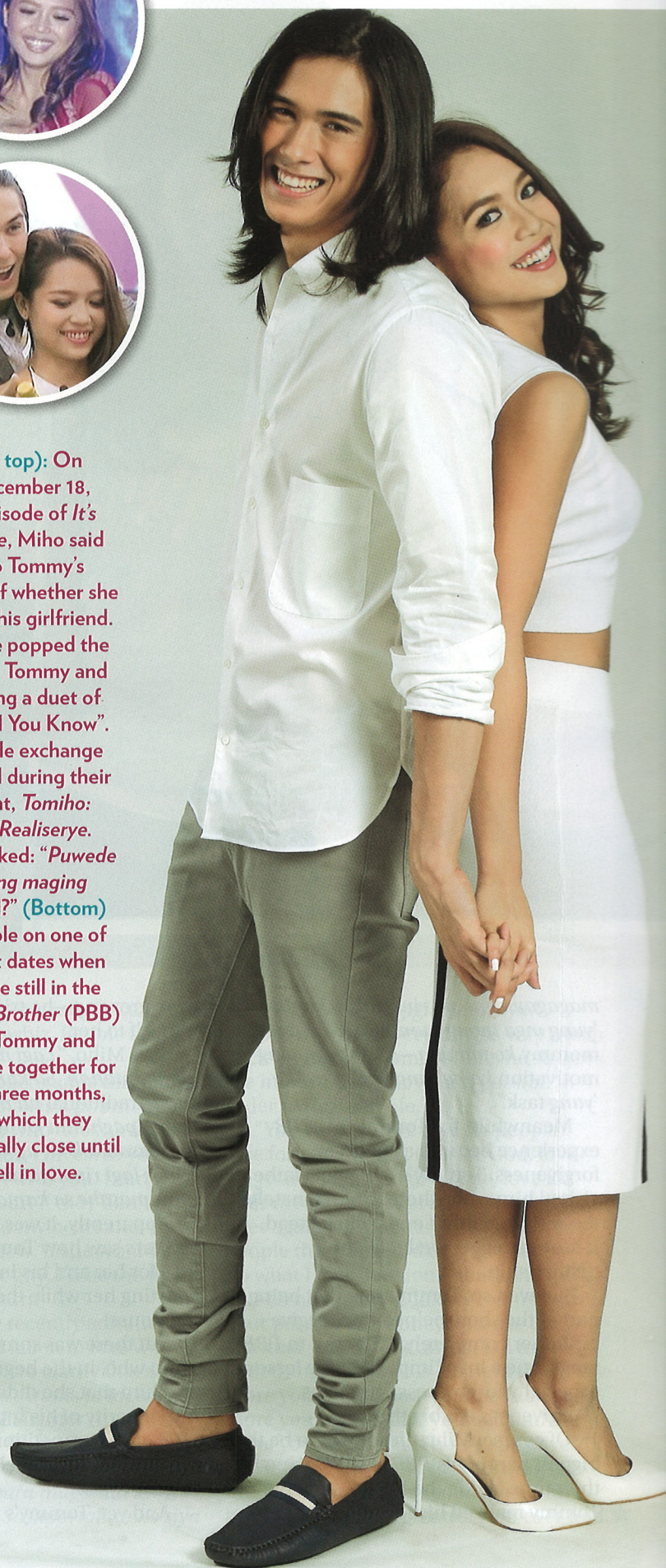
"*Araw-araw akong nagdadasal noon kasi siyempre, competition 'yun,'*" she reveals. "*Lahat puwedeng mangyari sa loob ng bahay, eh, kaya lagi akong nakahanda. At saka naisip ko rin na sa libu-libong nag-audition, nagpapasalamat ako na napili ako. Kaya kung ako man 'yung matatanggal, thank you pa rin kasi nakapasok naman ako sa bahay ni Kuya.*"

Dubbed as the "Sexy Mommy ng Japan", what may have endeared Miho to the show's followers is that throughout her stay, she tried to show her authentic self. She also proved to be a reliable housemate and tried her hardest to accomplish the tasks given to them.

One such task Miho remembers is when they were required to dance for 13 hours straight. She says, "*Inisip ko noon kung papaano ko kakayanin kasi siyempre, magugutom ka, mauuhaw ka at sasakit ang katawan mo. Pero natutunan ko na kahit sobrang ayaw na ng katawan mo pero kung 'yung isip at puso mo gustong-gustong kayanin,*



(Inset, top): On the December 18, 2015 episode of *It's Showtime*, Miho said 'Yes' to Tommy's question of whether she would be his girlfriend. Before he popped the question, Tommy and Miho sang a duet of "How Did You Know". The whole exchange happened during their segment, *Tomiho: A Love Realiserye*. Tommy asked: "*Puwede ba kitang maging girlfriend?*" (Bottom) The couple on one of their first dates when they were still in the *Pinoy Big Brother* (PBB) house. Tommy and Miho were together for almost three months, during which they became really close until they fell in love.





magagawa mo pa rin. Naisip ko rin 'yung mga taong humihila sa amin ng mommy ko pababa—sila ang naging motivation ko habang ginagawa ko 'yung task."

Meanwhile, for Tommy, his *PBB* experience became a lesson in forgiveness. Tommy's biological father visited him while there. Unfortunately, the meeting didn't end well. Instead, it drove a bigger wedge in their relationship.

But even so, Tommy says that being part of the show helped him forgive his father completely. "My stint in *PBB* taught me a lot of important life lessons, especially forgiveness," he states. "Forgiveness is a big thing."

Of course, Miho turned out to be the biggest part of his *PBB* story. During their time inside the house—and as Tommy realized his feelings for her

were growing—he tried hard to endear himself to her.

Says Miho, "*Lagi niya akong kinakantahan. Sa kanya ko naranasan 'yung traditional na pantiligaw—'yung ipaghihila ka ng upuan, 'yung ipagsasandok ka ng kanin bago kumain. Tapos lagi rin niya akong hinahalikan at minamasahe sa kamay."*

Apparently, it was not just for show. Viewers saw how Tommy professed his love for her and his intentions to start courting her while they were still inside the house.

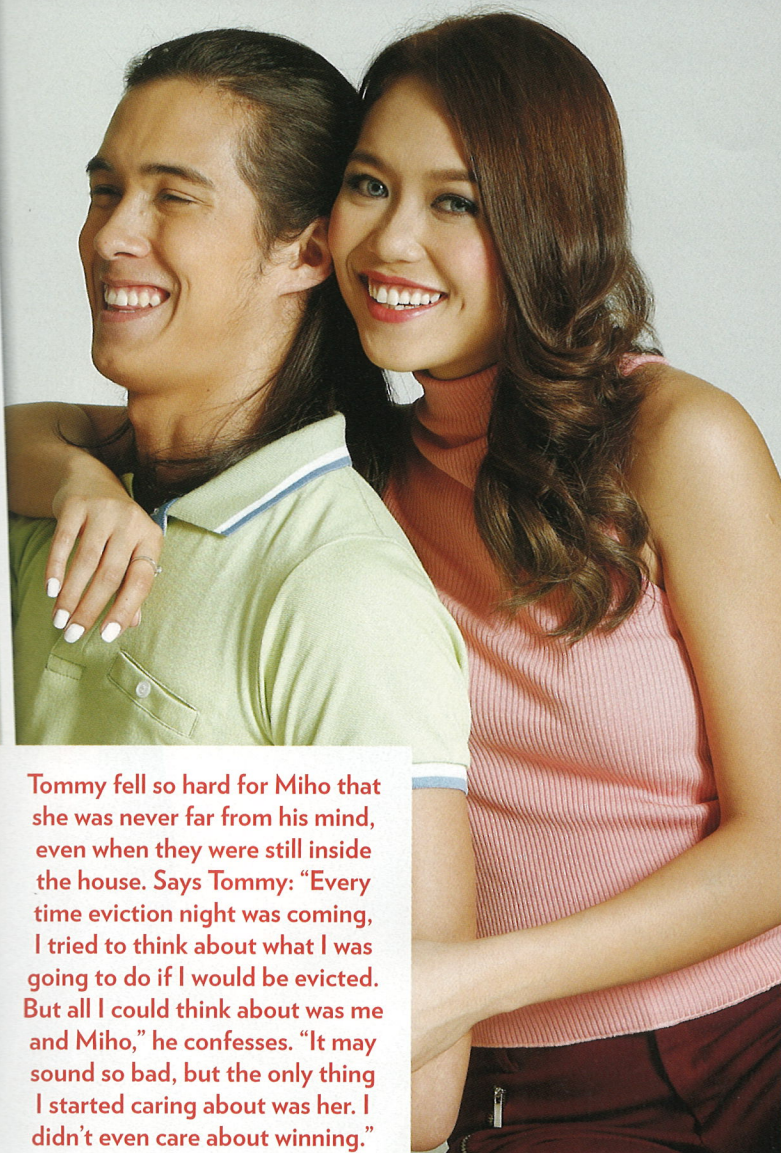
But there was some resistance from Miho who, in the beginning, flat-out told him that she didn't want to believe the sincerity of his intentions. It was, after all, a competition and she initially thought he was merely putting on an act to gain votes.

And yet, Tommy's feelings were

apparently real. He says that for him, the highlight of his *PBB* experience was definitely meeting Miho and spending time with her there.

She filled his thoughts constantly. "Every time eviction night was coming, I tried to think about what I was going to do if I would be evicted. But all I could think about was me and Miho," he confesses. "It may sound so bad but the only thing I started caring about was her. I didn't even care about winning. We weren't even dating yet but the thought of her forgetting about me once we're out of the house hurt so much. I unintentionally dreamed about our future—us getting married, where we are going to live, where we are going to travel, what would I buy for her. I just felt this overwhelming desire to be with her."

Their tandem caught the fancy of the



Tommy fell so hard for Miho that she was never far from his mind, even when they were still inside the house. Says Tommy: "Every time eviction night was coming, I tried to think about what I was going to do if I would be evicted. But all I could think about was me and Miho," he confesses. "It may sound so bad, but the only thing I started caring about was her. I didn't even care about winning."



fans. The ToMiho fan base helped Miho finish the season as the Big Winner, garnering a whopping 81.96 percent of the total votes, the highest winning percentage ever recorded since season one.

This, Miho notes, was unexpected, since from the beginning, she didn't think that an ordinary girl like her stood a chance. As the Big Winner, Miho took home P1 million in cash, house and lot from Camella Homes and an Asian Tour package courtesy of Von Dutch. Tommy came in second and finished as Miho's runner-up.

Love wins

Now that they are back outside in the real world, Tommy is very much aware that having fallen in love in an 'artificial' environment like *PBB*, there are people who may not believe that his feelings for

Miho are genuine, especially because, as he says, "This is showbiz. People fake it to make it."

Of course, he understands this but at the same time, he makes a point: "You can't hurt someone who doesn't fall for you because they don't invest in you and their heart isn't with you. I can't break someone's heart if they don't give it to me. I gave Miho my heart and she can break it, you know. If she would go and find another guy, I'll be the one who's going to get hurt."

And while Miho recently admitted that she has indeed fallen in love with Tommy, she is quick to clarify that as of the moment, she just wants to focus on her career and her daughter Aimi, who she has high hopes for.

"Gusto ko mag-aral siya nang mabuti at makapagtapos para maganda ang kinabukasan niya. Susuportahan ko siya

kung saan siya magiging masaya."

But now that everything is very much back on track in Tommy's life, he stresses the importance of love and passion in order to thrive in life.

"You should have love for people, love for your family, love for God, love for your health and of course, love for your dreams," he expresses. "Even if it goes against my better judgment or what people think I should do, I'm going to do what I love. Passion—that's the word! You do not have the luxury to throw away your passion for money because that's spiritual suicide. We all just fall in love with things and that is life right there. The more you get to know your passions, the more you understand yourself and the more you understand how to be alive."

With the way things are turning out, the ToMiho love story could go on to become one of the greatest *PBB* ever told.★