

► Stephanie Yap

This is a weekly series featuring children's books. This week, Adeline Foo talks about how she got started writing children's books

WHEN the taxi driver drops you at children's book writer Adeline Foo's house in Serangoon, he asks if it is a preschool.

The front garden is covered with a rubber floor and is filled with colourful playground equipment. Enter the living room, and you discover that part of it is a playroom for the Foo's three children - Benjamin, six, Tessa, three, and Jeremy, 19 months.

"We would like four children, but right now, I don't think we could handle another, even with my parents' help," says Mrs Foo, 36, whose husband Sek Min is a director of airport management at the Civil Aviation Authority of Singapore.

They moved into the house about 1½ years ago to be near her parents, who live across the street.

The writer, who is head of corporate affairs for the National Community Leadership Institute, published her first book last year under the Media Development Authority's First-Time Writers And Illustrators Publishing Initiative.

Titled *Ben's Friends From The Rainforest*, it is about her son's encounters with lizards and monkeys.

This month, she released her second book, *Secret Hoarder*, which sees Ben and Tessa taking on a squirrel. Both books are illustrated by Straits Times artist Prudencio Miel Jr, 43.

Why did you start writing children's fiction?

When Ben was going on four, he didn't like reading, so I decided to write stories where he was the hero.

Also, when his sister was born, he would sometimes disturb her, and my first stories for him were actually an intimidation tactic.

At that time, we lived in a condominium that was still undergoing construction, and there was a mobile toilet downstairs. I told him about this creature, Igor, that lived in the toilet. After I suggested bringing it home and letting it share his bed, he started behaving.

I wrote the story and got a friend to illustrate it, but I don't think I will publish it as it would scare kids.

How did you start writing about native wildlife?

My first book was inspired by our first house, near Lower Peirce Reservoir. It was on the edge of a jungle, and a lot of creatures would come into the back-



PHOTO: ASHLEIGH SIM

CHILD STARS: Adeline Foo, with her children (from left) Jeremy, Benjamin and Tessa. All three kids are featured in *Secret Hoarder*.

yard, including changeable lizards which are often mistaken for chameleons.

Our neighbours also told us about a group of monkeys which would hold hands when they crossed Upper Thomson Road, and cars would stop for them. I never saw them, but the legend went around.

For the second book, I was inspired by my workplace, which is beside Kent Ridge Park. I used to see a squirrel in a tree just outside my window, so close I could see its orange belly.

I am signed on for three more books with the publisher. I have written one about a snake, but it still needs a lot of work. I have another about a butterfly that is with Miel right now, being illustrated, and it should be out in August or September.

You have to start children young for them to understand the conservation message. For example, it is very simple to tell them through stories that we have to protect the trees, otherwise the squirrels will have no home.

But if you just send them off to clean beaches when they are in primary school, children are very resentful as they don't understand its importance.

Ben's Friends From The Rainforest (\$12 without GST) and *Secret Hoarder* (\$14.50 with GST) are available at major bookstores.

