

Unlike the TV character he plays, Amos Lee, Lim Chu Yeang cannot keep a diary

akshita nanda

He may play fictional diary-keeper Amos Lee on television but in real life, primary school pupil Lim Chu Yeang finds it impossible to write a daily journal.

The 11-year-old star of the new okto show, *The Diary Of Amos Lee*, which debuted last night, tried last month to keep a diary but ended up filling only a few pages with words such as "Bathed. Bored. Ate. Played."

"I like to read diary stuff but I can't write this kind of style," he tells *Life!* at his family's condominium in Serangoon Avenue 3.

The 10-episode programme he stars in features an untried cast of child actors and is adapted from the best-selling local book series, *The Diary Of Amos Lee*, by writer Adeline Foo. She also wrote the script, which features animated sequences as well as live action.

Episodes air on Wednesdays at 8pm.

Chu Yeang, who is in Primary 6 at Pei Chun Public School, has long been a fan of illustrated journal-style books such as *The Diary Of A Wimpy Kid* series by Jeff Kinney.

Amos Lee rocketed to the top of the list after he read the first three books about an 11-year-old Singaporean school-boy, published by Epigram: *The Diary Of Amos Lee: I Sit, I Write, I Flush!* (2009), *The Diary Of Amos Lee: Girls, Guts & Glory!* (2009) and *The Diary Of Amos Lee: I'm Twelve, I'm Tough, I Tweet!* (2010). A fourth book, as yet untitled, will be published later this year.

"They're very funny," says Chu Yeang, adding that he likes the illustrations by artist Stephanie Wong and relates to the anecdotes about school life in Singapore.

The third of four children and the only son - dad Vincent, 46, is a lawyer and mum Vennessa, also 46, an engineer - he also feels that he has a lot in common with Amos. "We are both going through primary school, we both have best friends, we both have a younger sister," he says.

"But Amos is more determined. I would like to be as determined as him when it comes to getting the thing he really wants."

Perhaps the two are not that different. Amos goes from class wimp to swim champ in the books, while Chu Yeang had never signed up for drama groups in school but leapt at the chance to audition for the TV series after seeing an advertisement on okto in August.

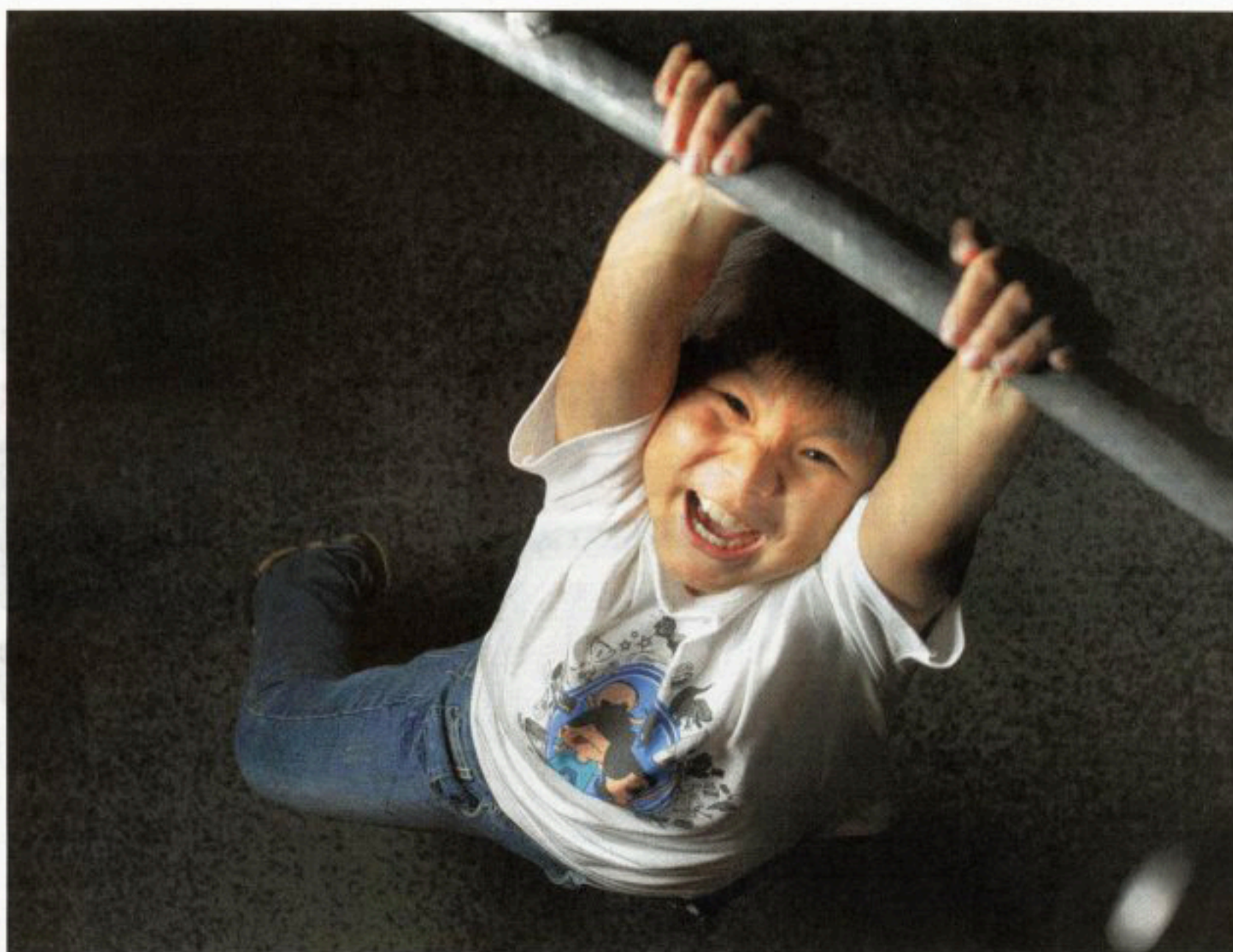
"We were quite surprised that he took this chance and went up on stage," says Mrs Lim, who describes her son as "quiet" and "rarely naughty".

Asked why he auditioned, Chu Yeang says: "It's not every day you get a chance to be on television."

He recalls little of that first audition at White Sands in Pasir Ris. "My mind was blank. I was too nervous, I couldn't memorise my lines."

"He wasn't prepared," agrees his sister Chu Yech, 16, who took him for the try-outs.

Their elder sister, Chu Hsien, is 18 and younger sister Chu Wern is five.



Despite a show of nervousness during the audition for the show, Lim Chu Yeang won over the judges with his cuteness. ST PHOTO: RAJ NADARAJAN

Diary of a child star

Despite his nerves, Chu Yeang managed to impress the casting panel, including director Phillip Lim and writer Foo. In round one, he recited lines while sitting on a fake toilet bowl - Amos writes his diary in the loo - and improvised a speech on body hair.

After two more rounds of auditions, he beat about 150 boys to win the lead role.

Author Foo, 40, found him "adorable" from the start.

"He was pretty nonchalant about what people thought of him or his acting. I could imagine him being bullied or stood up to by the girl they picked to play Whoopie," she says.

The role of Whoopie, Amos' younger sister, is played by nine-year-old Nicole Tandjung.

Director Lim, 47, says Chu Yeang fit his mental picture of Amos, and made an impression because "he was one of the early birds, queuing up for registration with his sister".

More importantly, the boy had "the

temperament to undergo the very intense filming period" over six weeks in November and December.

It was a tough learning experience for the child actor.

He learnt quickly that he had to memorise his lines and turn up on time for shoots, even if this meant waking up at 4am to be on set by 5am.

Any thoughts of glamour soon evaporated as he realised acting was hard work. "It was very difficult at first, you have to be very diligent, you have to memorise the lines," he says.

It was just as hard for the director, who is a bachelor unused to kids and more used to working with experienced adult actors such as Adrian Pang and Lim Kay Tong.

He directed both in the well-known Channel 5 legal drama *The Pupil*.

"It was literally on the job training, teaching them to hit the right marks, where to look and the film set protocol," Lim says of shooting with untried child



Lim Chu Yeang plays Amos Lee and Nicole Tandjung plays his sister, Whoopie, in okto's adaptation of best-selling book series *The Diary Of Amos Lee*. Janice Koh and Jerry Hoh play the parents. PHOTO: OKTO

actors.

"If you watch the series, you will notice how the characters mature, it's also like that in real life as the kids learn how to act and behave on a film set."

One thing he learnt early: Never reward children with chocolate.

"They became very hyperactive, probably from the sugar rush. They were chatting non-stop and jumping around. It drove my director of photography crazy because he could not frame the shot."

However, for Chu Yeang, the treats were the best part of the entire experi-

ence and he says he may now aim for an acting career instead of his first choice: being a blacksmith.

The only downside is the likelihood that he might be recognised by strangers on the street.

"Acting is fun," he says, "but I wouldn't like too much attention on me. Acting is normal, so I can't see why actors are so popular."

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The Diary Of Amos Lee airs Wednesdays at 8pm on okto.