

Your Say: What Makes for Fantastic Comedic Material

By Adeline Foo

Local author of the popular "The Diary of Amos Lee" trilogy, **Adeline Foo**, has sold 70,000 copies in Singapore alone. Her books have also been gone overseas as foreign publishing rights have been sold to Hachette in India, and Lentera Hati in Indonesia.

The TV adaptation recently aired in January to March 2012 on MediaCorp's okto channel, a ten-episode series comprising live action and animation. Here's what **Adeline** has to say about her experience of writing and then translating the books to the TV screen.

My Beginnings



Adeline Foo, local author of popular children's stories.

In 2008, the National Resilience Division of MICA approached me to write a book on life in Singapore seen from the perspective of a ten-year-old. It was mooted as a commissioned book to be distributed at Singapore Day, held in London in 2009. I first conceptualised the book as a kids' guide book, something along the lines of "What's fun to do in Singapore!" But eventually, the book evolved into a story tracing a boy's journal, seeing his life as he learns to overcome issues facing kids – like dealing with a bully and puberty. The choice of setting the story against social events was in response to several "firsts" unfolding in Singapore in 2008; Singapore's silver medal win in table tennis at the Beijing Olympics, and the holding of the world's first Formula One night race. Putting the boy in the toilet was a tongue-in-cheek interpretation of 'The Toilet. My Sanctuary', something only mothers would understand when we need time out from our children.

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My Motivations

Round about the time I was writing, my husband was offered a chance to relocate to India. It was an exciting decision involving the entire family; although my three kids were dead set against it, and so were my parents! But my husband and I were thrilled. We saw it as a chance to get our kids out of the local school system, and I was also looking for a legitimate excuse to quit work. In a conversation I had with my mother a few days before my husband was to tell his boss his decision, she asked me this, "Are you coming back to Singapore after India?" I tried to laugh off her question, but she saw through me. She suspected that we would take up another offer to relocate further afield after India. I tried to brush off her fears. I assured her that Singapore would always be home, and that I would return home with my kids. But she didn't believe a single word of what I said. I remembered looking at her, and I had an uneasy feeling of seeing myself in her position twenty years from then, asking one of my children, "Are you coming home?" Finally, I asked her, "What are you really trying to say? I promise I'll be back." She didn't say anything. She just cried.

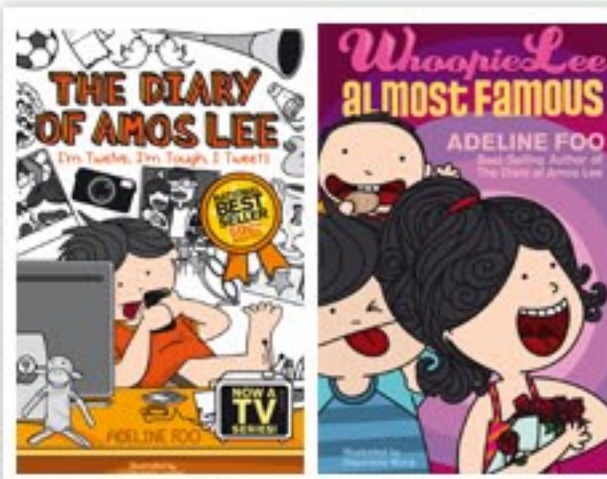
The next day, my mother found the courage to tell me that she wasn't afraid for me, but that she feared her grandchildren would have no recollection of Singapore as home. That took a while to sink, but right there and then, I was frightened.

My mother was right. A large part of our childhood memories is anchored by our growing up experiences. I remember mine vividly. The three-room flat I used to live in, the kids I used to fight with in the void deck, the memory of accompanying my mother to watch street opera and the thrill of following my father to watch an open air black-and-white P. Ramlee film. What would my children remember of their childhood if we chose to uproot from Singapore? Probably a smorgasbord of living experiences in different cities, all of which are only temporal. It was a cold feeling that gripped me that night as I spoke to my husband earnestly about reconsidering the relocation. It was also a selfish maternal instinct to ensure that I would never be put in my mother's shoes, in having to beg my children not to leave me.

Eventually, events overtook us as plans at work changed; my husband finally decided not to leave. But the conversation I had with my mother strengthened the resolve I had in writing Amos' story. I told myself that I would write a book that would resonate with my children; it would be a book true to their experience of having grown up in Singapore.

My Inspirations

The stories were an honest collection of tales gleaned from my husband's and my mawkish growing pains; they were also a meticulous record of what my three children and their friends are going through in school now. If I needed a joke that I couldn't conjure from my own experience, I would look into parenting books and teenage magazines. It's amazing how much we can laugh over other people's foibles; parenting mishaps and teenage angst provide fantastic comedic material. One thing I learnt quickly, there is a common thread that all children identify with in my books, that of pitting themselves as a hapless victim against a neurotic mum; or in projecting themselves as the underdog who would always triumph.



All in the family, a new series of books about Amos' sister ("Whoopie Lee: Almost Famous"), followed the eponymous Amos ("The Diary of Amos Lee").



From left: Adeline Foo, author of The Diary of Amos Lee, with Stephanie Wong, the Illustrator.

My Formula for Success

Two key reasons: true stories that resonate and well thought-through art and book design. Stephanie Wong, the illustrator for the books, has brought her quirky sense of humour into her drawings, which has also lent itself well to being adapted for animation. The decision to take it to TV was in response to schools I had visited, where there are children who couldn't afford to buy books. I thought, since the books are so well received, why not adapt them for TV so that more kids can enjoy the stories, free!

My Highs for the TV Screen Adaptation

I'm heartened that this project had provided internship for two writers and three animators from Tisch. It was a wonderful learning opportunity that got me introduced to the world of TV writing. It was heady and fast paced, but not without its share of heartache.

My Next Steps

I'm planning a new series of books for tweens, as well as fiddling with concepts for adaptation into game apps. Also subsisting somewhere along the second and third lines of priorities are my screenplays which I had written during my time at Tisch. I intend to polish them and adapt them into book material. Maybe one day, they would be adapted into films!



[From left] Ishaan Kumar, Sandhya Prabhat, and Jeremy Chia, the three animators and Tisch classmates who worked with Adeline on the animation for the TV series.