

ALPHABETSOUP

▶ Stephanie Yap

Former corporate high-flier Emily Lim decided to write a children's book after being hit with a rare voice disorder

NINE years ago, Emily Lim was an archetype of the successful career woman, handling transactions worth billions of dollars as a corporate director of business development at Raffles Holdings.

Then, shortly after she got married at the end of 1998, she was stricken with spasmodic dysphonia, a rare voice disorder for which doctors have yet to figure out a cause, let alone a cure.

"I have met with doctors here and abroad, and they tell me they don't have enough data on this," she says,

her pronunciation clear despite the fact that her voice trembles uncontrollably.

"There are various hypotheses, that it is due to the mutation of a gene or the

misfiring of signals from your brain to your vocal chords."

Fortunately for her, her family, friends and employers have been supportive. She continued to work at Raffles Holdings until the end of 2005, when she left on a two-year sabbatical.

"My employers were very compassionate and always treated me like everyone else, giving me all the same chances. But I was there for 10 years, and felt I needed a break to smell the flowers," says Lim, who is in her mid-30s.

She also took the chance to pursue her dream of writing, and signed up



PHOTO: COURTESY OF EMILY LIM

BEAR FRUIT: Emily Lim sees herself in her two bear characters.

for an online course with The Writers Bureau, a British distance-learning school.

Not only has she since had two essays published in *Impact*, a Christian magazine, but she has also written her first children's book, titled *Prince Bear & Pauper Bear*.

About two stuffed toys with contrasting yet intertwined fates, it is illustrated by American artist Neal Sharp, whom she met via *elance.com*, a job site.

She self-published it this month with the help of a grant from the Media Development Authority, under its First-Time Writers And Illustrators Publishing Initiative. It will be available at major bookstores from next month.

How does the story of *Prince Bear & Pauper Bear* relate to your own?

This is the first story I have ever written, and there are parts of me which you will be able to identify in the two main characters.

First, there is Pauper Bear, who thinks no one loves him. But along the way, he experiences goodness and kindness from different people, and is basically given a second chance – just as I have received love and support from so many people.

Then you have Prince Bear, who at first is a lot more fortunate. He resembles me before I came down with my condition, which has been quite a humbling experience.

Who was your first reader?

My six-year-old niece, Annabel. When I first wrote a manuscript, I tried to force it to rhyme because for some reason I thought all children's books should rhyme.

My first draft rhymed so much and had so many difficult words that she couldn't understand it.

She is a very loving child, so she didn't dare to tell me that she didn't like it – but I could tell by looking at her expression.

Then I decided to read some books about writing children's books, and learnt that you shouldn't think you have to rhyme, as that is forcing yourself into a box.

So after several rewrites, I came back and read it to her again. I was so encouraged when she said: "Gu gu (aunt), I like the story, can you read it again?"

Do you plan to write more children's books?

My original plan was to go back to work next year, but I haven't decided what I'll be doing yet.

Obviously, it would be easiest and simplest to return to the hotel industry, as it is something I am very familiar with.

But that said, I have enjoyed learning about the book industry, and hope my future plans will involve an element of writing.

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Prince Bear & Pauper Bear (\$18.69 without GST) will be available at major bookstores from next month.

