

Tales from the crib

MIT assistant publishes her 20th children's book



IMAGES COURTESY OF SALLY LEE
Pages from one of Sally Lee's children's books, "The Tutu Ballet."

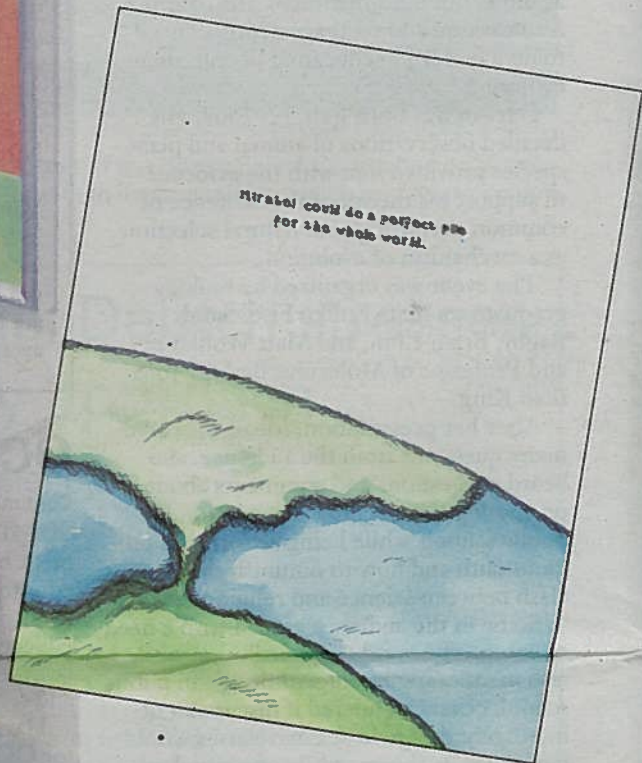


PHOTO / PATRICK GILLOOLY
Sally Lee, an administrative assistant in the Computer Science and Artificial Intelligence Laboratory, poses with one of her children's books and one of her paintings, which can be found hanging throughout the Stata Center.

Anne Trafton
News Office

MIT is home to many published authors, but Sally Lee may be the only one whose target audience is under 6 years old. Lee, an administrative assistant in CSAIL, has just published her 20th children's book, "The Tutu Ballet." Her self-published books, which are available on her web site and on Amazon.com, focus on the importance of accepting yourself and others.

"I'm kind of a kid myself. I'm trying to write books that appeal to kids and not necessarily offer a moral lesson, although they do have a little bit of that," Lee says.

Lee, who started writing and illustrating children's books about five years ago, said she never intended to write so many. After finishing a book, "I always say, 'This is it, I'm not doing another one,' and then I get a new idea," she says.

Though she's relatively new to writing books, Lee has been painting and drawing her whole life. She didn't plan to pursue art as a career, but one of her college professors encouraged her to do so. She painted for a while and did several gallery shows, but found she didn't enjoy it as much as she thought she would.

"Painting is very isolating," she says. "It's kind of a lonely business." She did her first children's book with her mother, then decided to keep at it on her own. When she first started, she tried to get a traditional publisher to produce her books, with no luck. Then she discovered Book-Surge, a company that allows authors to self-publish books through the Internet.

Inspiration for "The Tutu Ballet" came after Lee saw a children's ballet class at the YMCA. A couple of the girls, about 3 years old, were wander-

ing around in circles, having fun and not really paying attention to the teacher.

She ended up writing a book about a ballet class in which each student only wants to practice a particular position. The teacher gets frustrated, until she decides that the best thing to do is to create a dance routine that takes advantage of each student's strengths.

"It's a story about tolerance and adapting but still having a good final result that makes everybody happy," Lee says. "I wanted to stress the joy of doing something with your friends, as opposed to doing it completely perfectly."

Lee, who is deaf in one ear, has also written a 10-book series on a rabbit named Lucy who has the same handicap.

Though her books aren't sold in bookstores, they can be bought on Amazon.com, where dozens of customers have posted positive reviews.

Her colleagues in CSAIL have also been very supportive of her work, she says, and about 20 of her paintings hang in various locations around the Stata Center, including her group's office and CSAIL headquarters.

"Sally livens up the eighth floor, treating us all to sweets and stories, and bringing out the 6-year-old in both students and faculty," said Manolis

Kellis, associate professor of computer science and electrical engineering, whose office is in Lee's group. "Her children's books are relevant, by their simplicity and timelessness, to much beyond her target age group."

Lee, who has been at MIT for 14 years, says she enjoys working in an academic environment because "it allows me to be around a lot of different people and also pursue my own talent, and they are very supportive of that."

For more information on Lee's books, visit www.leepublishing.net.

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Manolis Kellis
associate professor of computer science