

YOU, ME, & *B.B.* MAKES THREE

BY pam v. krol PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF caring creations



It is an unfortunate fact of modern life that divorce has become increasingly common. Today, more than 15 million children in the U.S. alone have experienced their parents' divorce. In fact, elementary school teachers concur that divorce is one of the most common problems facing kids today.

"Divorce can be very confusing and unsettling for a child," says Wendy Lokken, the Naples-based author of the new, heart-warming children's book *You and Me Make Three*, designed to help kids cope with the challenges and changes associated with separation and divorce.

The story, which is filled with kid-appropriate, real world examples of family experiences as well as suggestions and advice, is narrated by B.B. the bear, a cuddly and loveable teddy bear character that kids are sure to fall in love with. In addition, an actual B.B. teddy bear comes as a companion to the book, providing a sympathetic "friend" that kids can hug and confide in while they listen along.

"My son Michael came up with the idea of providing kids with a constant companion (bear) that could travel from mom's house to dad's house, after he learned about the Guatemalan concept of worry dolls in school," says Lokken.

Lokken discussed the idea with a long-time friend, Gwendy Mangiamele, who was also going

through a divorce. The two realized that together they could find a way to give kids the kind of information and comfort they needed to feel happier and less confused.

The pair teamed up with Edna Cucksey Stephens of Michigan and Naples-based illustrator, Heather Drescher, and the quartet's new company, Caring Creations, LLC., was created.

Not strictly for kids, the book incorporates tips for grown-ups too, which are taken from a Michigan-based judicial program, to provide information for divorcing parents. The program, entitled SMILE (Start Making It Livable for Everyone), has endorsed the B.B. project. In addition, Maxine Clarke founder of Build-a-Bear Workshops has agreed to manufacture B.B. the Bear.

While the full-scale program will be launched nationally, a pre-launch will be held on March 12 at the Ritz Carlton in Naples. A portion of sales will be donated to the Collier County Education Foundation, the SMILE Foundation and the International Kids Allegiance Network (IKAN).

You and Me Make Three and the bear kit will soon be available in Barnes and Noble, Borders and other premium booksellers across the country. ■

For more information, visit www.bbseries.com or call 289-3817.



Michael and his teacher



Heather Drescher, Gwendy Mangiamele, Wendy Lokken, Edna Cucksey Stephens