

PROFILE

BY DOUGLAS WILLIAMS



Angels Delight in Ambrosia

Raising small children is fraught with all manner of challenges and parents regularly worry - sometimes unduly, sometimes with good cause. For the expat parent in unfamiliar surroundings these concerns can be accentuated.

For the expat parent hoping for a good wholesome diet for her little cherub these are ratcheted up still further.

Over in deepest, darkest Africa, Cairo no less, many of Nerida Draper's friends and their children had had all manner of stomach upsets. Nerida, originally a primary school teacher was there with her husband, another teacher, and her young daughter, Eliana, and she was worried. "Before we left England we had been living in Richmond, West London. There everything was organic and fresh and clean. I'd really been hoping to provide that sort of food for my young daughter but in Cairo it was almost impossible," says Nerida. For this Australian who grew up in England, however, nothing is impossible.

A friend and long-term Cairo resident voiced the idea of producing purees for babies and this piqued the interest of Nerida. Something of an entrepreneur Nerida's previous businesses included producing children's fairy costumes. Further investigation revealed there

was a massive demand. "Before we'd done anything I was being inundated with calls from people saying they'd take whatever I'd got, it was amazing and very encouraging." And so "baby ambrosia - fresh food for little angels" was born - frozen, freshly-made, neatly packaged, baby food delivered. It did a roaring trade so much so that soon Nerida was ploughing back a percentage of the company's profits into charitable causes.

"There were Sudanese refugees, women with huge families and very little to feed them on so we offered them training," says Nerida. They hired halls and offered nutrition and cooking courses that helped the women make the most of their meagre incomes explaining the benefits of such ingredients as lentils and even couscous.

"Lentils are a 'super-food' - they are gluten free, they are packed with protein and they are easy for children to digest." For time-pressured parents the appeal of baby ambrosia is easy to understand - meal solutions made fresh with quality ingredients in hygienic conditions to tried and tested delicious recipes that kids love. Take the meal from the freezer, defrost either in a pan or microwave and voila, dinner. No flapping around with vegetables and blenders and actually the price is only marginally more than the usual Heinz/Nestle/Gerber.

With her husband, daughter Eliana and now son Aaron, Nerida moved to KL last August and has since established baby ambrosia here. The bubbly, go get 'em early 30s mum is the director of the company here. Her business partner, Leng Swee, is the sister of one of the Cairo baby ambrosia's customers, the mother that is, aunt to the kid... Leng Swee was so impressed by what she heard about the business in Cairo that she was delighted to set up with Nerida here in KL.

"We take the slog out of feeding baby, it's so convenient leaving parents with time to focus on the more important things in life. Added to that parents can have complete confidence in the hygiene and the nutritional value of our food," says Nerida. Baby ambrosia may be small but they have big plans, look out for their recyclable pots in grocers around KL soon, with franchising beyond the current Cairo and KL businesses very much on the cards.

Nerida's top tip for a meal that's guaranteed to please the fussiest of toddlers is potato, spinach, tuna and cheese. Boil diced potatoes, add washed spinach, mix, add tinned tuna and grated cheese. "Or just buy our spinach and potato puree," laughs Nerida.

For more information see www.babyambrosia.com