

CHAPTER 4

ILLUSTRATING MEMORIES

This section is contributed by FleeCircus, aka Lee Wai Leng, a Singapore-based illustrator. She participated in the Singapore and London Design Festival 2007 and was picked by Gryphon Tea and Swiss bank (UBS) to collaborate in a limited-edition artwork. She documented her childhood days in Pulau Ubin and Toa Payoh with an illustrated journal, *My Memory Book* by FleeCircus. Read the journal at www.singaporememory.sg/showcases/6/contents

INTRODUCTION

Picture journalling is the art and practice of documenting experiences with illustrations, sketches or drawings. It is a personal and direct way of recording events and expressing your thoughts and emotions, especially if you are combining illustrations and words. Contrary to popular belief, you don't need to be trained in art or be an artist to start drawing. If you have an eye for observation and a mind for imagination, you are all set for picture journalling.

WHAT YOU NEED

You need only readily available tools and materials — at the most basic, only a pen and paper. It is advisable to use a sketchbook; loose sheets may get lost more easily.





HOW-TO GUIDE

1 Choose a topic

Here are some ways to get ideas: brainstorm with a friend; **talk to people around you and relatives about their stories; list down your own experiences.** My own childhood experiences of playing traditional games such as “five stones” and ice-cream stick boomerangs were the inspiration for *My Memory Book*.

2 Research

If you have decided to document someone else’s memories, conduct an interview with him or her to **get more information** (see chapter on Oral History). If you are documenting your own, write down what you remember about the people, event or place. What had happened? Who were involved? When, where and how did it happen? These details will help you decide what to include in your illustrations.

Go through old newspapers, books or old photos if you need visual references, such as for the type of clothes people wore and how places and objects looked like.

3 Decide on your illustration style and materials

If you are new to drawing, you may wish to **begin with pencil sketches or simple line drawings with a marker.** Decide if you want to add colours, with markers, watercolours or colour pencils, for example.

You need to get materials that are suitable for your illustration style. For instance, if you want to use watercolours, it may be advisable to use watercolour paper to get the right effect.



4 Decide on your storytelling style

Your story can be chronological with a beginning, middle and end, or it can be made up of vignettes — small episodes that explore a theme. You can also juxtapose and do a comparison between the past and the present. For *My Memory Book*, I went with a combination of snapshots and a comparison of then and now.

It is advisable to provide captions or a short story to go with your drawing so that another person can fully appreciate it. Therefore, remember to include details such as dates, names of people and places, together with a description of what the drawing depicts and the context.

5 Begin sketching and writing

Focus on drawing the most significant or unique areas. If you are capturing memories of a place that still exists, you may wish to make your sketches on site in order to capture the details and its sense of place. It is also good to take pictures of the place for reference. You may wish to write the accompanying story to your sketches in longhand — this will give your illustrations a personal and intimate touch.

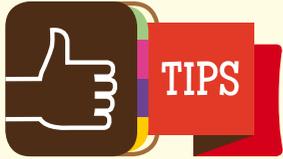
6 Upload your illustrations

Save your illustrations in JPEG or PDF format and **email to singaporememory@nlb.gov.sg**. Include your personal details such as name and contact number and a synopsis of your submission.



Pages from *My Memory Book* by FleeCircus.

Photos courtesy of Lee Wai Leng



- Learn the basics of drawing from books, websites and illustrators. Read up about illustration styles, composition and colours.
- Don't worry about whether your sketches are "beautiful"; what is more important is the story you want to tell.
- Draw with a permanent ink — with a marker or pen, so that you will not be preoccupied with making changes.
- If you get stuck, try one of these drawing prompts: draw in a continuous line, draw with only dots and draw patterns. Focus on words and be inspired by them.
- You can enrich your journal with a collage or montage. Seek out and add small objects, printed matter and old photos that enhance the memory or story.
- You will get better at drawing if you do practise more. When you feel more confident about drawing, begin to think about how you want to compose a page with your drawings and text.

From *My Memory Book* by FleeCircus.



These cakes are indigenous to our country's culture and also history.
My aunts used to make all these cakes and kuehs to sell in Ubin. We had these almost everyday as breakfast. That must be what cemented my fear of kuehs later as I became an adult!

Photos courtesy of Lee Wai Leng

ILLUSTRATION SAMPLES

Moving Forward by Andrew Tan

My Memory Book by Flee Circus

Traditional Toy Making by Lim Qixuan

MORE ON PICTURE JOURNALLING/ILLUSTRATION

Books

Drawing for the Absolute Beginner: A Clear & Easy Guide to Successful Drawing by Mark and Mary Willenbrink

Artist's Journal Workshop: Creating Your Life in Words and Pictures by Cathy Johnson

The Creative License: Giving Yourself Permission to Be the Artist You Truly Are by Danny Gregory

Urban Sketchers Singapore Volume 01: A Book of On-Location Sketches and Drawings Documenting the Singaporean Urban Landscape by Urban Sketchers Singapore

Online

[Urban Sketchers Singapore blog](#)

[OIC@Singapore Cable Car](#)

[Drewscape's blog](#)

[Don Low's blog](#)

[Organisation of Illustrators Council](#)

[Marcus Lim's blog](#)



SHARING OF PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

DOMINIQUE FAM

Dragon playgrounds were typically found in Singapore housing estates in the 1970s and 1980s. Dominique Fam's comic, *Once Upon A Dragon*, tells the story of what one such playground means to a boy at different stages of his life. Dominique, an illustrator by profession, illustrates for advertisements, print and web publications. Check out the comic at www.singaporememory.sg/showcases/29/contents.

Can you tell us more about *Once Upon a Dragon*?

Once Upon a Dragon is a comic about my memories associated with a dragon playground. I hope readers can identify with the experiences in the story; and if they are able to identify with the characters, that's even better. Keeping the art style simple and generic is an effective way to do this. I also thought sequential art is a good way to move the story along.

Why did you choose illustration to document your memory?

I'm an illustrator and I like to draw comics, so my inclination is to use the medium I am familiar with. Could the story be told in written form or with a photo montage? Perhaps. But I felt most confident telling the story using the method that I am best at, so that's what I did.

What was most difficult about the process?

It wasn't difficult trying to recall the memories. It was however a challenge deciding what to exclude. My story centres on the dragon playground, so that had to remain the focus. And because it's a story spanning 20 years but told in only 20 pages, whatever didn't help to move the story along had to be edited out.

Can you tell us about your experience in producing *Once Upon a Dragon*?

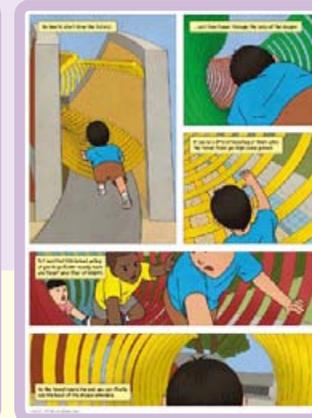
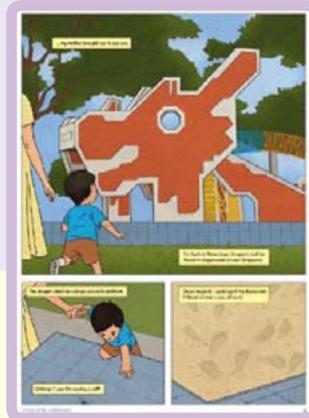
The illustration process took a few weeks, but it took longer to recall the events, and research and plan the scenes. The recalling stage couldn't be done in just a few hours or a few days. I tried to recall by looking at some items from the past or by thinking about them. But sometimes I just had to wait for the memories to come back.

What did you enjoy most about the experience?

It was the opportunity to look at things from hindsight. As we go through experiences, our perspective is often limited, especially when framed by our emotions. But when we look back, we can see things from a wider angle. Being able to write about them years later was an interesting way to revisit the past.



Excerpts from *Once Upon A Dragon*.



Illustrations courtesy of Dominique Fam