

## CHAPTER 7

# DOCUMENTARY FILMING OF MEMORIES

This section is contributed by Wee Li Lin, one of Singapore's most prolific filmmakers with some 10 short films as well as two features, *Gone Shopping* (2007) and *Forever* (2011), under her belt. Li Lin's memory project, *Singapore Country*, is a documentary on the genesis of *Singapore Cowboy*, the hit song by Matthew Tan, Asia's most accomplished country singer. Watch the film at [www.singaporememory.sg/showcases/22/contents](http://www.singaporememory.sg/showcases/22/contents)

## INTRODUCTION

A visual format combining storytelling with moving images and sounds, film (or video) is an excellent documentation tool for memories. Within the film genre, documentaries are especially suitable for memory collection because they are factual records of events, people and places. Documentaries also often involve interviews with people, thus recording their reminiscences, points of views and emotions. This chapter provides a guide to making documentaries using basic equipment and tools.

## WHAT YOU NEED

The basic equipment needed include a video camera, a tripod for mounting the camera and a microphone. For editing, you need a computer and video-editing software. If you have a bigger budget, you can add lighting and sound equipment for higher image and sound quality.

### Equipment and tools checklist

- ✓ Video camera (or digital camera or smartphone with a video function)
- ✓ Storage cards
- ✓ Batteries
- ✓ Tripod
- ✓ Microphone or digital sound recorder
- ✓ Computer with built-in video editing software such as Windows Movie Maker and iMovie. Free downloadable software available at <http://www.nchsoftware.com/videopad/index.html?gclid=CKWaxKjKkrkCFXFe4godLREA0Q>



Optional: lights (recommended for indoor shooting or at places where lighting is dim)



The filmmaking process is divided into three stages: pre-production, production and post-production.

## PRE-PRODUCTION

### 1 Choose a topic

**Think about the topics you are familiar with** or passionate about; it could be a person, place or event. For example, if you are a music fan, you could make a film about a Singapore band. If your grandfather ran a provision shop, you could interview him about how people shopped in the past and document the old-style provision shops remaining in Singapore.

### 2 Research

**Conduct your research** at the library and on the internet. Ask around for recommended people to interview. Select people to interview. Conduct pre-interviews with your interviewees to find out more about the place or event and how they were involved. At this stage, you should also determine your story angle. Materials such as old photos and video footage will help you tell a more complete story, so don't forget to seek them out and ask for permission to include them in your film.

### 3 Assemble your crew

**Get your friends and family** to pitch in. The key roles in the production are the director, cinematographer/camera operator, sound and film editor. During the shoot, each person should perform only one specific role.

#### SINGAPORE COUNTRY – shot list

#### Sample shot list

##### Day 1 shot list

##### Location 1: STAGE

- 1a Wide shot side track of Matthew performing "Singapore Cowboy" on stage
- 1b Mid shot track in of Matthew performing "Singapore Cowboy" on stage

Courtesy of Wee Li Lin

### 4 Outline your story

A documentary **script is usually written after all the footage is shot**, but it is useful to write an outline before the shoot (see sample outline on page 56). The outline should have a beginning, middle and finale; it should include the characters, their goals and problems, and how these will be resolved. Plan the interview questions: Ask open-ended questions that will draw out more information and emotions.



Various shot sizes from *Singapore Country*. TOP: Medium shot; BOTTOM: Wide shot.

Courtesy of Bobbing Buoy Films

### 5 Plan your locations and shots

With your outline you can now **plan your locations and shots**. Decide if the interviews will be conducted indoors or outdoors. Plan to shoot on-location at the places related to the memory you are collecting.

You also need to list down the B-roll shots, which are footage other than the interviews, such as buildings and daily life. The B-roll shots can be used to illustrate the interviewee's or narrator's voiceover.

Determine the types of shots you want to capture; for interviews, medium shots are suitable, while a variety of shots, such as wide, medium and close-ups, will make your film visually more interesting.

It is useful to have talent and location release agreements. Let your interviewees and location owners know how you will be using and disseminating the film before they sign the agreements.

Once you have secured the filming venues and interviewees, determine your filming locations and arrange your interview appointments accordingly.

#### SINGAPORE COUNTRY Outline

#### Sample outline

##### Main cast:

Mathew Tan (interviewee)  
Adrian Pang (interviewer)

##### Prologue (1.5 min)

Montage of fans of Matthew talking about what he means to them  
- featuring Wan, Donavan, the dancing ladies and Doug  
- background music: *Singapore Cowboy*

##### ACT 1 (Beginning)

- a) Mathew talks about his journey from choir boy to cowboy. He mentions his choir master and watching *Durango Kid*.
- b) Mathew talks about the appeal of country music, and how he's also known as Hank Tan (include Hank Williams' photo).
- c) Mathew talks about how he relates to the song *Coal Miner's Daughter* and growing up in Serangoon in an atap house (include photo of Matthew in front of his atap house, one of his album covers).

##### ACT 2 (Middle)

- d) Mathew talks about how his band started as HILITES (include more old photos).
- e) Mathew talks about the birth of Matthew and The Mandarins

Courtesy of Wee Li Lin

## PRODUCTION

### 6 Begin filming

**Shoot the interviews and B-roll footage.** For the interviews, set up your camera on a tripod so that the shots will be steady. Connect the microphone to your camera if it has a mic input. If not, use a digital recorder or a laptop to record the audio, which you can sync with the images at the editing stage. Place the microphone or recorder as close as possible to your interviewees when they are talking.

## POST-PRODUCTION

### 7 Review the footage and write the script

Look through the footage and **write the script.** Choose footage that will tell a compelling story. Write the script complete with the interviews, narrator's voiceover (if including), B-roll shots and other materials, such as old video footage and photographs.

### 8 Editing

Using the script as a guide, **edit your footage** using video-editing software such as Windows Movie Maker (PC) or iMovie (Mac). At this stage, add royalty-free music, sound effects, the title and credits. You may choose to include subtitles in your documentary.

### 9 Upload your documentary film

Ensure that your film is in one of these formats: AVI, MOV, MP4, WMV (20MB per file). Follow the step-by-step instructions and **upload your film onto the [singaporememory.sg](http://singaporememory.sg)** portal.

Alternatively, you can save your film into a DVD and **mail it to:**  
**Singapore Memory Project**  
100 Victoria Street #14-01  
National Library Building  
Singapore 188064  
Attention: Azlin Aziz

## SAMPLE FILMS

(videos accessible via Internet Explorer)

*Singapore Country* by Wee Li Lin

*Water Heritage Memories*

*Let's Play* by Writemind Productions Pte Ltd

*Games We Played* by Little Red Ants

## MORE ON DOCUMENTARY FILMMAKING

### Books

*Documentary Storytelling: Creative Nonfiction on Screen* by Sheila Curran Bernard

*Making Documentary Films and Videos: A Practical Guide to Planning, Filming, and Editing Documentaries* by Barry Hampe

*Filmmaking for Dummies* by Brian Michael Stoller

### Online

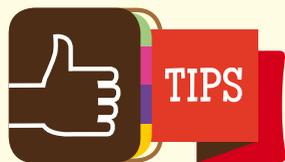
*How to Make a Documentary*

*Documentary Interview Tips*

*Making Documentaries*

*Interview Techniques for Documentary Filmmakers*

*6.5 Ways to Start and Finish a Documentary Film Project*



### TIPS

- Get to know your subject matter well; you can't tell a great story if you don't know it well yourself.
- A compelling story can only happen with a compelling character. Develop the characters, i.e. your interviewees, in your documentary well.
- Be respectful but also be willing to dig deep to uncover and discover things. This is not investigative journalism but it's about unearthing and excavating things that may be long buried. So be determined!
- Always shoot more than you think you need so that you have more footage to work with. It may be a hassle or difficult to ask your interviewees to return to shoot additional footage.
- Listen to the quality of the audio before you begin actual shooting. If there is too much background or ambient noise, move your interviewees to another location.
- Take note of the lighting at your location, as lighting can affect the mood of your story. A white cardboard can be used to bounce light to the shaded side of an interviewee's face.



## SHARING OF PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

### LIM JUNDA

Lim Junda is a motion graphics designer. He made *Haircut*, a short film on one of the last remaining street barbers in Singapore, for a cinematography class during his Motion Graphics and Broadcast Design diploma course at Nanyang Polytechnic. His film is featured on the Singapore Memory Project portal at [www.singaporememory.sg/showcases/4/contents](http://www.singaporememory.sg/showcases/4/contents)

### How did you decide on *Haircut*?

My teammate, Ian Chua, and I were at Sungei Road, a place in Singapore with lots of character and heritage. We stumbled upon a street corner, where elderly men get their hair cut by another elderly man. And we knew that was it — that was the story we were going to tell.



### Can you tell us about the filming process?

We tried to be as unobtrusive as possible when we were filming, in order to capture the calm and laid-back atmosphere, which is vastly different from the fast-paced lives most of us lead now. These elderly men helped make Singapore what she is today; we wanted to subtly pay tribute to them through the film.

### What was the most difficult challenge?

It was getting the permission to film. We put aside our fancy equipment and went inside with the most harmless-looking camera. At first, the barber and his patrons were unwilling, but they agreed after we promised not to be a hindrance. We filmed quietly from our seats at first. Then, when they got comfortable with our presence, we moved around the space to capture more.

### What did you find most memorable about the experience?

It was the owner's smile when we were done filming. We took some photos of him cutting hair and made a collage for him. Sitting there also let me take a step back from my own busy life; the peace and serenity calmed me down.

### What advice do you have for someone using film to document memories?

Many people may think that they cannot produce their shots if they don't have a certain piece of equipment. That is true only to a certain extent. Equipment only aids the process; don't let it restrict your storytelling and creativity.



Stills from *Haircut*.

