

# Long Long Time Ago

Some endings are new beginnings

2

Set in the early years of Singapore's independence, this sequel to *Long Long Time Ago* traces the journey of a typical Singaporean family living in a kampong.

The story revolves around the life of widow Zhao Di as she struggles to provide for her family amid the rapid changes in the country. She inadvertently inherits her father's farmland after her two brothers reject it in favour of better jobs. She takes on the back-breaking work of rearing pigs and labouring in a coal factory to make ends meet. In spite of events that threaten to break her down and tear her family apart, Zhao Di remains indomitable, and the bonds that the family forged with friends and neighbours in the kampong enables them to make the most out of the government's expropriation of their land for development.

Relive the many challenging moments Singapore faced as it emerged from being an underdeveloped nation and transformed itself into the city it is today through this beautifully illustrated book.

Long Long Time Ago

我们的故事 2

Marshall Cavendish Editions



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With the Support of



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## Introduction

I was born in a Chinese village in Kampong Chai Chee in 1960. In 1976, the government expropriated the land and we were relocated to HDB flats. At that time, my siblings and I were very excited about the move as we would no longer have to venture out into the dark to use the kampong toilet at night or take a shower with icy cold water drawn from the well.

There were so many new things for us to discover when we moved to our new flat that we hardly thought about the old kampong. Yet, my father would still return to our old house every now and then, something which my siblings and I could not understand then. We even made fun of him, saying that he was ungrateful and would rather yearn for the broken old house than appreciate the comfort of modern living.

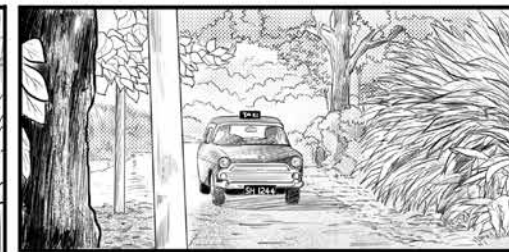
Over the years, however, my siblings and I began to miss our old kampong and attempted to make a visit. But by then, we discovered that we could no longer find the road that led to the kampong...

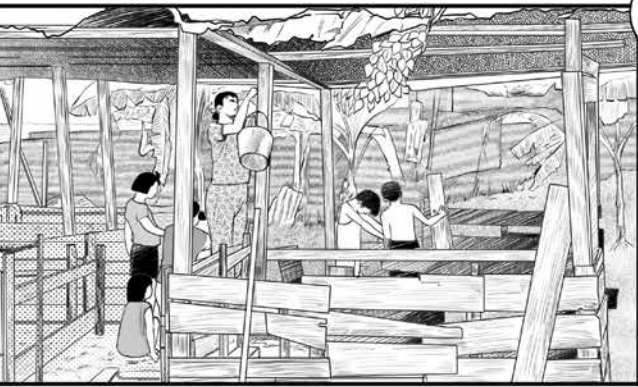
As I age, I find that my yearning for those old kampong days of my childhood has grown stronger, but I am only able to relive those moments through old photographs and in dreams. The kampong lifestyle and daily routines we were once so familiar with are but a thing of the past. Whenever I get the chance to talk to my children about kampong life, they are always excited to listen to my stories, but they will never be able to experience for themselves what life was truly like then.

Hence, *Long Long Time Ago* is my attempt at recording events of the past and of life in the kampong, but not just through what I remember, but through stories collected from others as well, so that generations after us can have a glimpse of what kampong life was like.

To all who have contributed to this production of *Long Long Time Ago*, be it the movie or book, in one way or another, thank you! May we always celebrate the Singapore spirit with an appreciation and understanding of our past and work towards a brighter future together.

After the flood, mum took over grandpa's farming licence and stopped selling soybean milk. We worked hard to build a pigsty at the front of the house and although we used only old wood to build it, the pigsty looked new when it was completed.





That was quick! They're almost done building the pigsty!



Father and Ah Xi helped, so they managed to get it done more quickly.



Mum, will we be able to survive just by rearing pigs? We don't even have any pigs in our pigsty.



Why not? I'm going to Ninth Aunt's place tomorrow to get money from the tonfine fund. I can then buy some piglets.



What are our three rascals doing there?



They have nothing else to do at home. Let them be.

I don't want them to raise pigs when they grow up.

**What are you boys doing? Don't meddle in people's affairs.**



When the piglets mature and reproduce, we can sell the new piglets to earn money. You girls should work hard and help out.



We can also take on odd jobs and earn a few hundred dollars a month.

Or we can grow our own vegetables and rear chickens. We won't starve.



I told you not to help! Go do your homework.



I'm sorry...



It's okay.



I'm more concerned about the time when we have to move to live in HDB flats. We can't grow our own vegetables or rear pigs and chickens. We will really starve then.



We're comfortable here. Why do we have to move to live in flats?



The government is developing our country. It's also good to live in flats. We won't need to worry about fires.

The Bukit Ho Swee fire a few years back was horrifying.

All the straw and wooden houses were razed to the ground. Thousands of people were left homeless...

Sis!

There's a hole in the roof. Why haven't you fixed it?

Are you waiting for the house to become a pool before you mend it?

I'll repair it right now.

Mum, Uncle Kun lives here too. Why can't he repair it himself?

Yes, why?

That evil woman ran away with all our money!

She looked honest, but it was all a show!

Ninth Aunt has disappeared!

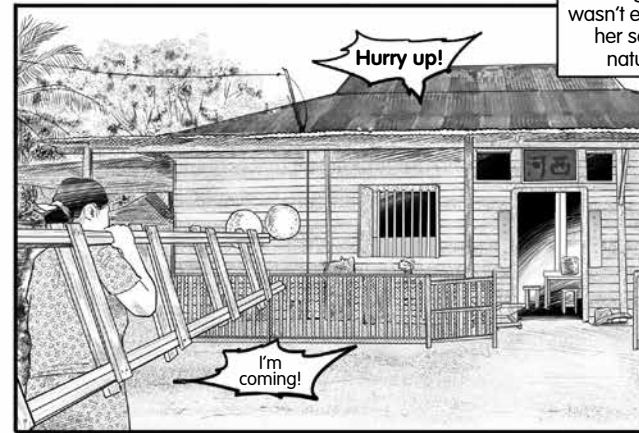
What?



We are family. We should help one another. We must not be calculative about such matters. Understand?



We won't need to bother about leaking roofs when we live in flats.



Hurry up!

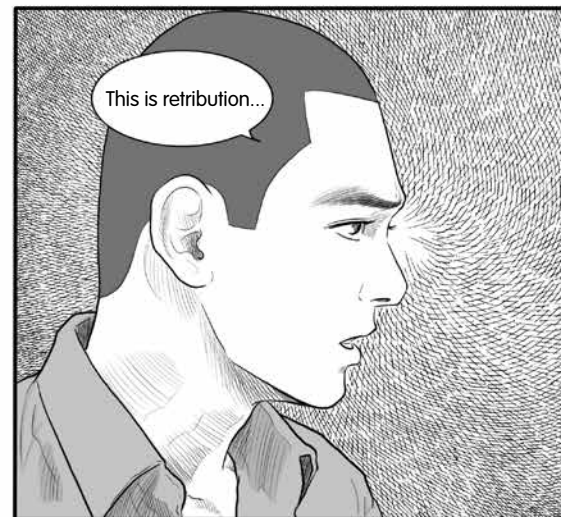
I'm coming!

Although mum wasn't educated, her selfless nature...



...left a deep impression on us.





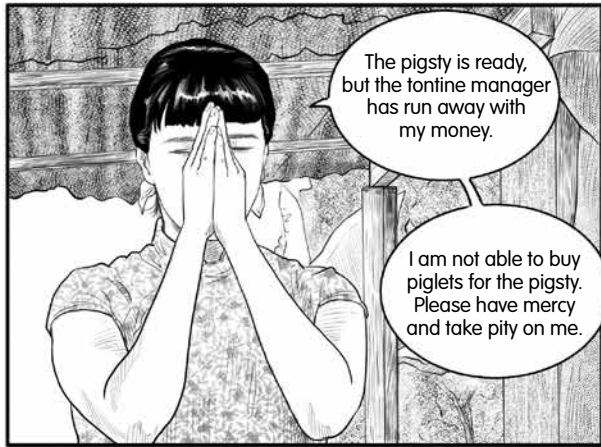


Goddess of Mercy...



There are pigs in the pigsty!

The goddess granted my wish!



The pigsty is ready, but the tontine manager has run away with my money.

I am not able to buy piglets for the pigsty. Please have mercy and take pity on me.



Please grant me a few pigs...

Grunt, grunt.



Squeal.



No, mum...

They're from Ah Long!

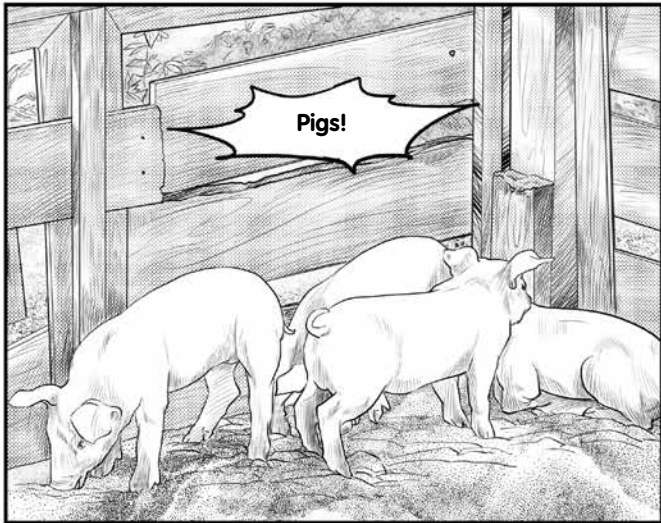
No? Then where did the pigs come from?



Ah Long?



Squeal.



Pigs!



It was the Goddess of Mercy who asked me to bring you the pigs.

Ha!



You bought these pigs?

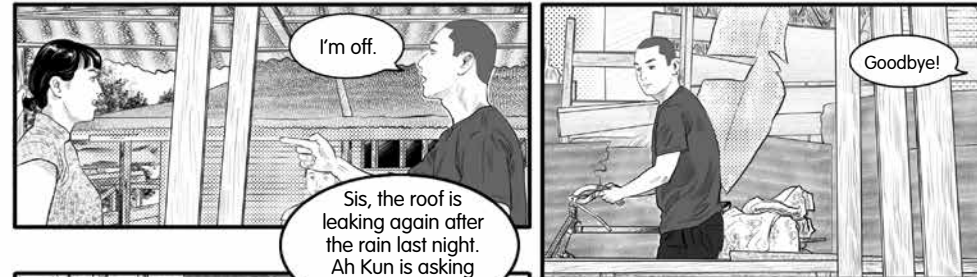
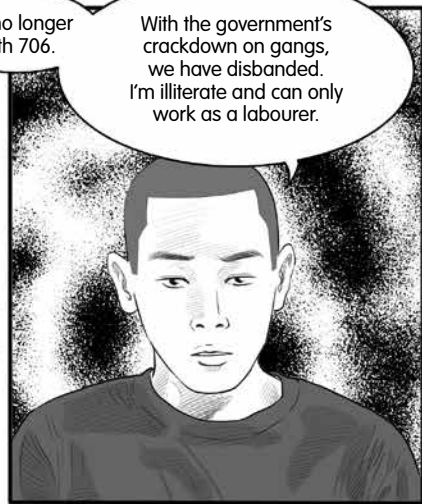


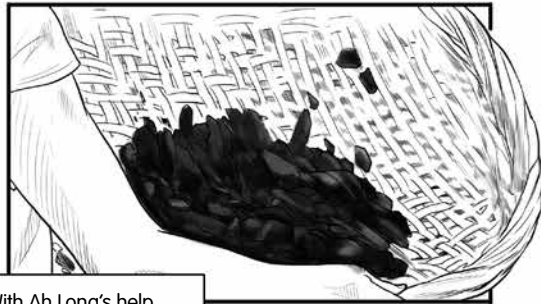
The sow that my family rears just gave birth to a dozen piglets.



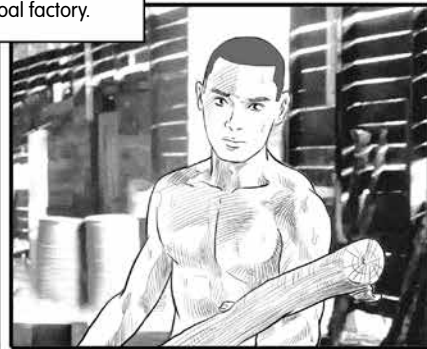
Ah Long...







With Ah Long's help, mum started working at the coal factory.



After school, my younger sister and I would do the housework and tend to the farm.



At night, after completing our homework, we would even take on some small tasks to supplement the family income.

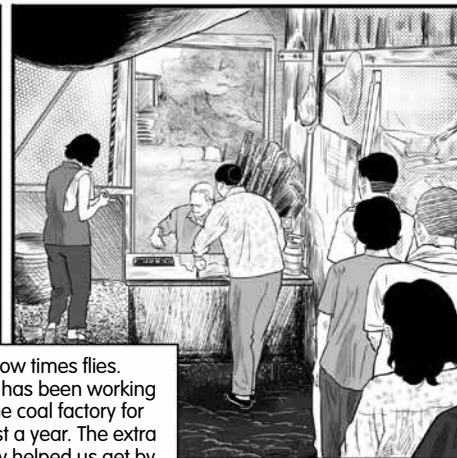


Here's your pay.

Ah!



Thank you!



How times flies. Mum has been working at the coal factory for almost a year. The extra money helped us get by.



I'm home!



Shock!



At times, in her hurry to return home, mum would forget to wash up and her appearance would be rather frightening.