

A child's guide to THEN AND NOW: Datsun Tran tells the story behind each page.

1. Then. Knock, knock, knock. We hide under the table.

This image is based on many stories I heard from family friends and refugees, rather than a specific happening for my siblings when they were living in Vietnam before I was born. My siblings were hidden upstairs in a locked room, but I painted this image for storytelling purposes. Usually the children were always hidden if there was a knock on the door, or soldiers inspected my family's home during the war.

2. Now. Knock, knock, knock. We open the door to welcome our guests.

This scene is a depiction of Lunar New Year Eve. Offspring and their families are encouraged to visit parents with presents, red packets and traditional flowers like orchids and lucky bamboo during this festival. I guess the boy in this image is based on mine and my brothers' experiences of welcoming guests as they arrived. I wanted to highlight the contrast of what a knock on the door meant during war and during peacetime.

3. Then. I blow out the candle so no one will see we're home.

During the war, my family needed to hide from dangerous people at night, so they'd be careful that lights weren't shining out from our home.

4. Now. I light a candle to honour my ancestors.

This scene is based on how we celebrate the Hungry Ghost Festival. This happens for two weeks during the seventh month on the Lunar Calendar. We light incense and candles to honour and light the way for the spirits of our ancestors.



5. Then. I take the orange and hide it to share with my brothers and sisters.

This is based on a story from my Mum when some of my siblings and their friends hid a couple of oranges to share with the children when they couldn't go out to get food properly. All the kids made sure everyone got a fair share.

6. Now. I prepare the dim sum to share with our neighbours.

This is based on my own memory of my parents cooking traditional foods and we shared them with some of our neighbours. It made me so happy that these people appreciated the food and it was a real celebration of our culture.

7. Then. The smell of food is a distant memory.

This is based on when my family were in the Phillipines in an immigration processing centre. My parents have been poor, and they've been rich, but they've never been hungry until they were in the Phillipines. The locals cut off the water supply at some point and my parents and friends had to dig a well by themselves for water. Also, my mum talked about making some sort of gruel with just flour and water to survive.

8. Now. The smell of char siu bao means the feast is ready.

This is my experience of childhood. Some of my favourite memories were when my Mum made char siu bar, har gao and siu mai. It meant a family gathering and a feast!

9. Then. Bang, bang, bang. I hide from the sounds so they can't hurt me.

During the war, banging sounds in the sky meant bombs or guns were going off, so everyone had to hide.



10. Now. Bang, bang, bang. We count the colours that light up the sky.

Growing up, all the firecrackers and skyrockets we played with during Lunar New Year Eve were some of my happiest memories. It meant all the family and friends I didn't get to see too often would be there and we'd be running around the park at night, happy and care free. It was also one of the first times I remembered learning about the lingering trauma of gunfire for some of my friends who survived the war.

11. Then.

The boats that carried Vietnamese refugees to new lands were often very small and struggled to safely pass through the rough ocean. It was a scary journey, and some boats did not reach safety.

12. Now.

Have you ever visited the beach with your family in the evening? This family are having what looks like such a peaceful time. It must be a big feeling to look at the wavy ocean from the safety of the land, when you once were out in a little boat, hoping to reach a new shore.

My Mum longed for the safety of land so badly, she has never really recovered from her journey over. The ocean has terrified her ever since leaving Vietnam. I've shown the family at the beach during night time, mainly because I wanted to show another Chinese Festival, the Mid-Autumn Festival which is about family reunion. They are gazing at the moon because traditionally, it is said that you can share a moment with a loved one who can't be with you when you look at the moon. I wanted this as the final image, because the Moon acts as the link to family, and so many families and friends have had to adapt to separation during displacement.

13. The Front Cover

During the Chinese Lantern Festival, people let go of red lanterns to symbolise a letting go of your past self. So I have the boy in the blue handing his past self his red lantern to help him on his way.

