



## An Interview With the Creator of Unclipped Adventure

### Description

Recently we spoke to the enthralling Tegan Phillips of [Unclipped Adventure](#), we asked her a few questions regarding her unique style, inspiration, recent success and some advice for those of you a tad more artistically inclined. This is what she had to say.

**So I'll dive right into it, can you give us some background on yourself, where you're from ? How you got into illustration and cartooning? When did you first feel the pull of your creative muse?**

*My name is Tegan Phillips, I'm a cartoon-maker and sometimes endurance adventurer currently living in Cape Town, South Africa.*

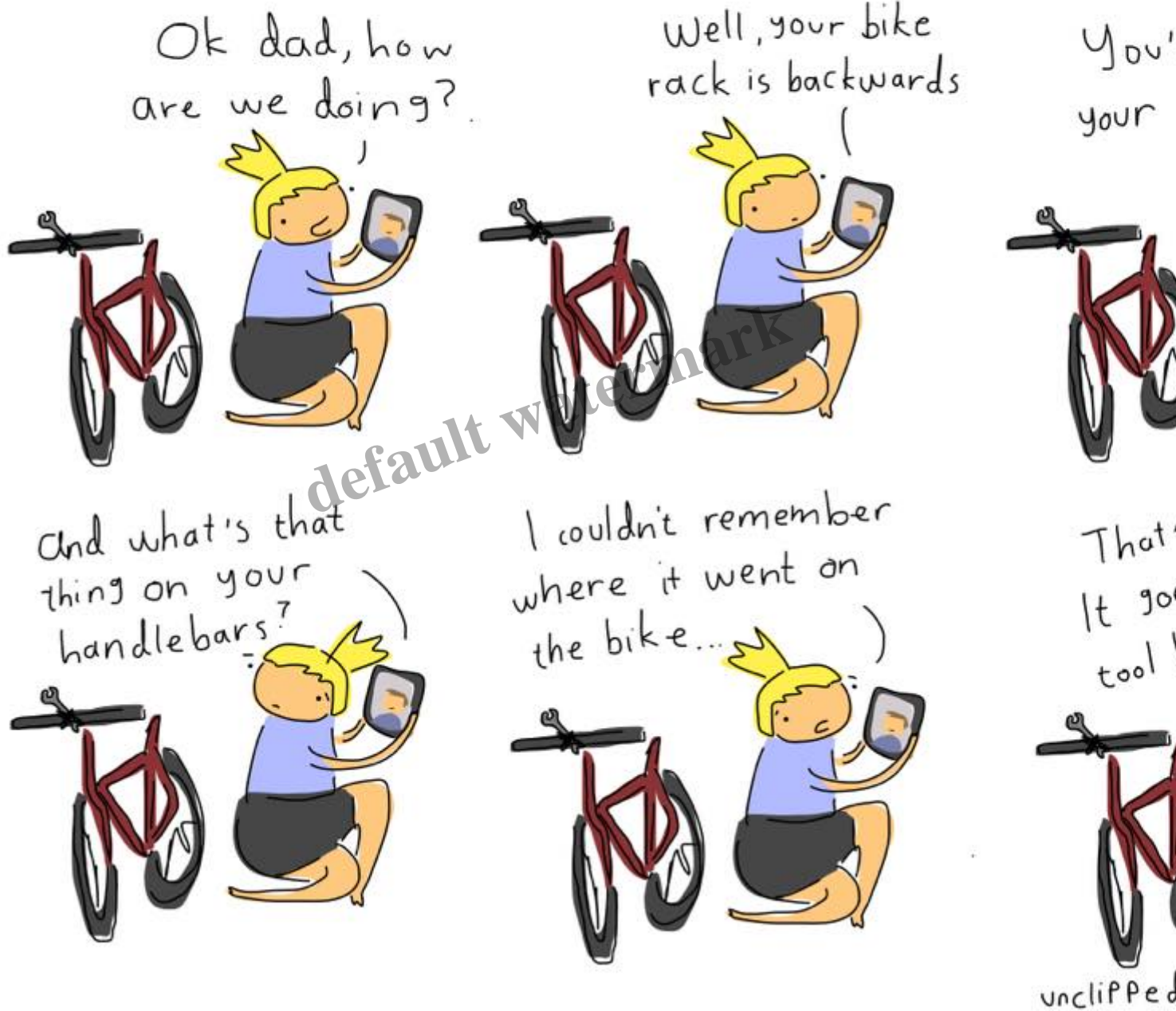
*I first got into cartooning by entering a competition to win a touring bicycle and gear in England (that's like a bicycle with bags that strap on it with a sleeping bag, tent etc so you can ride around whole countries being totally self-sufficient). Entrants had to say why they should get the bike and what they'd do with it, and some people were saying really cool or hectic things like they want to ride through jungles to raise money for partially handicapped animals (or something like that) and I just wanted to slowly pedal down to Spain (which isn't very far away from England). So I thought if I drew the entry as a cartoon rather than just writing it I would have a better chance of winning. And it happened that I got lucky and the competition judge thought so too.*

*I hadn't really drawn cartoons before (I was just finishing off a BA in law and politics) and I'd never done any kind of cycle touring at all. In fact I only had a few months of any kind of cycling experience. But sometimes you just have to say "F\*\* it" and go for it, and that was one of those times. I recorded that whole trip in cartoon form, like a kind of cartoon travel blog, and the next year I was given the opportunity to carry on cycling and making cartoons for a year (cycling through Africa with my family). After that it just seemed like making cartoons was a more fun way to spend my days*

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than trying to be a lawyer. I wouldn't have been a very good lawyer.

# Fun with bike-building



**How long does it take you to do a piece? Is there a routine you follow for the creation of each one? Where do you start your creative process?**

*It varies a lot. When I started cartooning I had no training, no ideas or expectations or consistent style – I just drew black and white scribbles on my iPad and they'd take a matter of minutes. As the months went by, I started experimenting with more colour, shading, detail, and buying new software and styluses and that sort of thing. As much as I'd hoped to avoid losing originality, I became very*

*influenced by the other webcomics like “The Oatmeal”, “XKCD”, “Cyanide and Happiness” and a few others. Probably my biggest influence was “Hyperbole and A Half”, from an art and a humour point of view. So I went from at one stage taking a week to draw each cartoon to the simpler style that I’ve kind of settled on now, where a cartoon can take anywhere from 10 minutes to three hours.*

*That Zuma one that people seemed to enjoy took me about 20 minutes – I was already asleep in bed, I heard my parents mumbling in the lounge saying Zuma had resigned, so I quickly took out my iPad, drew the cartoon, posted it and went back to sleep.*

*The ones that take longer are ones where I’m trying to get a particular facial expression, I take a whole lot of photos of my face in the exact expression and work for ages trying to get the exact positioning of the eyeballs, the eye shape and that sort of thing. It can be a challenge working with so little detail, to still capture the exact face that might be saying I’m kind of grumpy but also secretly satisfied and maybe I’m holding back a giggle.*

**Coffee(and tea) seems to be quite prevalent in your work, is it as much a part of the process as it is the final product?**

*So I feel like I’m kind of outing myself here but I don’t really drink coffee. Caffeine makes me shaky so I use a kind of sign language to order decaf at restaurants and hope that nobody around me notices.*

*Tea, yes, I drink quite a bit of tea. Lots of cocoa. It’s not even that I enjoy it that much, it’s more like when you work for yourself it’s so darned easy to procrastinate so as soon as I get to an email that I don’t want to start writing or a face that I don’t know how to draw then the kettle starts calling. “Come to me,” it says. “Making warm beverages is productive,” it says. And I humbly obey.*



Ordinary tea



Ginger tea



Abilitea



Ice tea

**Are you a funny witty person in social settings or do you save it for your work?**

*I generally avoid social settings. If unavoidable, I stand in the corner by the cake and don't make jokes at all.*

## What tools do you use?

I've always drawn on an iPad mini (except for that first cartoon entry, that was on an iPad one, the iPad equivalent of a Nokia 3310). I generally use a stylus, I've found the Adonit stylus range is really good for digital art, but sometimes I just use my finger or, when desperate, a homemade stylus.

I've used a lot of different drawing apps, currently I use Autodesk Graphic as my main drawing app for regular cartoons and I use Adobe Draw for more detailed 'artsy' pieces. Once I've done the cartoon I'll either just upload it to social media from my iPad or I'll send it to Adobe Illustrator, where I can put it into different formats (if I'm using it for merchandise, for example) and play around with it a bit more.

I've found that never having studied any of this has been useful in that I've been able to go in without any ideas about the 'standard process' (most of my cartoonist friends still draw on paper first) or standard software/tools. I've just been able to do what works for me, no more no less.

## Do you draw full-time or is there another job? Do you make a profit off of your artwork? Or is it more the pleasure of creating stuff that people enjoy?

For the last two or so years it's been mainly drawing and/or adventuring full-time, with a few other jobs on the side. I've done maths teaching, working in shops, caring for cool old people – those types of things. From the cartooning side my main money has come from commissions for individuals/publications, and more recently I've started producing merchandise with the idea of getting a merchandising business up and running that I can eventually manage remotely.

It's definitely been a challenge to figure out how to design a lifestyle where I can be making things that I love and contributing in the ways that I want to while also getting enough money to be able to do the things I enjoy (like bicycle travelling). I'm definitely not 100% there yet, but I'm further than I was when I started, and I have to say that despite the serious emotional challenges along the way it's been such a worthwhile mission. I reckon that all twenty-somethings should consider taking this time we have as youngsters (yes, I know your friends are getting engaged, no, that doesn't make you old) to try lots of different things and make lots of mistakes – later on the consequences might be too serious to stop us.

WHEN IT'S 11PM AND YOU'RE  
HE'S FORGOTTEN VALENTINE'S  
BUT THEN HE SURPRISES Y

**course of one week – did you ever expect it to be this successful? Has anything come of this success?**

*That cartoon was pretty much just luck and good timing, I got it out just as the news was breaking. I definitely got some good contacts through it and publicity never hurts a creative, so from that perspective I'm glad for how it turned out.*

*That said, I've come to learn that "viralness" and content quality are in absolutely no way linked, as proved by many viral things on the internet and also my most successful cartoon ever, which was a pie chart breaking down the contents of an average voice note. There wasn't even any drawing in it. So I generally ignore how well or otherwise something does on social media, and instead I feel really pleased about a cartoon when I feel like there's some concept or idea that's meaningful to me that I manage to convey with pictures and words and humour. When I get feedback that one of those types of cartoons has impacted somebody in any way, that gives me a really good feeling.*

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When you say goodbye but it  
out you're going to the sam

## Do you have advice for fellow creatives? Tips for artists who'd like to be successful?

*I can't speak on behalf of anybody else, but I know from my own experience – even though I'm doing what I love more than anything – I consider quitting the creative life at least once a day. When I decided to pursue a path as a creative, I kind of anticipated that there will be challenges, but nothing really prepared me for the onslaught of self-doubt and insecurity that comes with putting yourself out there – your true, vulnerable self through your creations – on a daily basis and hoping that in some way you're doing that is making the world a richer place. I'm guessing that the creatives who make it aren't necessarily the ones who have the most talent or the most support but it's those who are able to push through that insecurity consistently (consistency is huge) and develop some kind of really strong self-belief to get you through the dark days. If you do it for long enough you're given little signs every now and then that you're on the right path, it's all going to be worth it, that type of thing.*

*Also, things like a personal routine, self-care, practising discipline everywhere you can, fighting perfectionism and other tricky tendencies, prioritising your health – these things shouldn't be neglected. To make this your life it helps to think of yourself as a kind of creative warrior; keep yourself strong and ready for when things get yucky.*

## Finally, best and worst part about being a South African?

*Best part: growing up surrounded by a lot of different cultures, getting to learn that anybody's culture is just that, it's culture. I think growing up in places where there's no diversity can lead to a view that how you are, how you live, is the same for everyone in the world. That's a very limited way to exist.*

*Worst part: I wouldn't say it's the worst part but definitely the most challenging part for me about identifying as South African is that it's a very complicated identity. It's loaded. Thank goodness we have an abundance of really talented local comedians play a part in helping us to figure ourselves out, otherwise I think we might explode with the seriousness of it all.*

**Thank you for your time and your work, please continue creating what you create, sometimes something as simple as chuckle from a witty cartoon or animation is all we need to brighten our day!**

[smiling face emoticon] [thumbs up emoticon]

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