

FLYBACK

Memoirs of a Television Pioneer

James H.T. Fisher

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INTRODUCTION

No! Flyback is not the name for an innovative design of slacks for women.

Everyone familiar with television knows that the picture is formed by a spot of light moving in successive horizontal lines from top to bottom - then returning to the top to begin another scan. The rapid return to the top is called the "Flyback".

Flyback is a necessary preliminary to the tracing of a picture of my life; to the scanning of light and shade, triumphs and frustrations, contacts, adventures and all the things that came together to give birth in Australia to that revolution in social habits called "Television".

Young people may find it difficult to imagine life without television. This story may create the image. It is the account of changes that have occurred in the most revolutionary period of technological development since the world began.

"There rolls the deep where grew the tree
O earth, what changes hast thou seen!

Alfred Lord Tennyson

CHAPTER ONE

The First Decade

Among other things, this is the story of the realisation of a dream over some forty years, in a period of the greatest technological developments known to mankind.

The Australia of my childhood seemed a country populated by people from the British Isles. Certainly in Adelaide there were German names and a few Chinese tradespeople, but they were exceptions. I was only dimly aware of Aborigines in "the outback". Always I was conscious of coming from British stock and although my parents were born in Australia I was brought up to regard England as "home" - a feeling common to many Australians of my generation.

My great-grandfathers James Fisher and James Bath were born in the west of England. One became a postmaster, the other a past-master.

James Fisher, born in July 1811, was the first postmaster in Barrow-in-Furness - the Lancashire town that was to become a great centre for high quality steel production and later shipbuilding. His youngest son, Thomas Coltsman Fisher born in 1854, ran away to sea at the age of 22 and came to South Australia as a merchant seaman in 1877. A year later he married Annie Hodges,

born at the Adelaide seaside suburb of Semaphore. My father, William James Fisher born in 1879, was followed by four brothers and a sister.

James Bath migrated to South Australia with his young bride in 1851. Born in 1831 at Brinkworth, Wiltshire, he had been a schoolmaster at Malmesbury, just east of the Cotswolds. He established his own private school at North Adelaide. In 1867 he was appointed secretary to the Central Board of Education, and in 1883 he gave up teaching to become Secretary to the Minister of Education - thus becoming a past-master. His only son Hubert married Sara Bottrill and they had a son and two daughters - of whom my mother, born in 1881, was the elder.

Mother was christened Mary Marguerita, but was known as "Daisy" all her life. She was a tall, handsome young woman with a mane of thick brown hair reaching past her waist. Her parents were less than enthusiastic about her engagement to my father. They allowed her to accompany her wealthy paternal aunt, Elsie Bath, to England in 1908 to attend the Franco-British Exhibition at the White City in Shepherds Bush, a suburb of London - hoping that the prolonged absence would result in the engagement being forgotten.

Mother retained vivid memories of that trip. On the long sea voyage to England she enjoyed shipboard dancing

to the music from "The Merry Widow", composed by Franz Lehar in 1905 and still popular today. However, she returned from the trip still in love with my father and they were married in 1910 - the year that King George V came to the throne.

They set up home in Alberton and I was born on the fourth of July 1911 - the American Day of Independence, always a good excuse for friendly wisecracks. When I have been asked by female receptionists to give the date of my birth, the combination 4-7-11 has often produced the response "Oh - Eau de Cologne?" I hasten to put them off the scent. "Fischer?" they sometimes ask. "No C," I reply "Long time no C!"

Our home was a turn-of-the-century brick villa in Brougham Place, Alberton, about six miles north-west of the city of Adelaide - a house originally built for the Mayor of Port Adelaide, Mr A.D.R. Tapp, known as "Alphabetical Tapp". Perhaps this inspired my parents to give me three christian names also - James after my great-grandfathers, Hubert and Thomas after my grandfathers.

The house was typical of those built in the Victorian era around Adelaide - a tiled front verandah with wooden posts surmounted by cast-iron lacework supporting a curved corrugated iron roof, a central front door opening on to a long passage with three bedrooms on

the right and the sitting room, dining room and kitchen on the left. The passage widened into a back lobby when it reached the kitchen, opposite my room on the other side. The laundry or "wash house" and toilet were in a separate out-house at the rear.

The house stood on the corner of Brougham Place and Todd Street. A tiny lawn separated the house from a waist-high hedge behind the front fence. Dad was a home gardener, of sorts, but he was a handyman who loved making things. He had built an overhead wooden trellis stretching from the back door down to the "back yard", with fruit trees on the right and a vegetable patch on the left. The backyard had a lawn on the right and a ramp on the left leading up to a vehicle gate from Todd Street. Between the ramp and the vegetable patch dad had constructed a child's swing and a see-saw, and on the other side of the ramp was a fowl yard enclosed by wire-netting. Along the back fence was a wood shed (later to become a garage), a shed for garden tools and equipment, a workshop and a play-house in the back right corner. There was a narrow laneway behind the property, leading to the row of houses on the other side of the block.

As a small boy I was fascinated by heights. I think it began with an illustration by Jessie Willcox Smith in a copy of "A Child's Garden of Verses" by Robert Louis Stevenson, given to me at Christmas 1913 by mother's Aunt Adie Bath. I still have it, inscribed "To dear little

Jim with Aunt Adie's love". The illustration, beautifully coloured, showed a small boy high above the ground in the arms of a great tree, gazing over the gardens of neighbouring dwellings, with the caption -
"I held the tree with both my hands
And looked abroad in foreign lands"

That love of heights has stayed with me all my life, and with it the desire to see those foreign lands. I loved to climb up the strong branches of our apricot tree and pick and eat the ripe fruit, warm from the autumn sun. Never since have I enjoyed so much that exquisite flavour and the softness of the warm apricot flesh. We had a nectarine and a peach tree too, but the apricot was my favourite.

I loved to climb to the roof of our tool shed and sit with my legs hanging over the lane below, gazing at the surrounding houses and yards. Twice, I daringly jumped down into the laneway, flexing my knees to take the shock of landing, but on the second time my chin hit my knees and I bit my tongue severely. I did not try that again.

I also loved popular songs. Passers-by in Todd Street were probably intrigued at the sight of a small boy perched on top of a high fence-post with a bowl of soapy water, blowing bubbles with a white clay pipe and singing -

"I'm for ever blowing bubbles (puff)
Pretty bubbles in the air (puff)
They fly so high, nearly reach the sky
Then like my dreams they fade and die (puff)
Fortunes always hiding -
I look everywhere (puff)
I'm forever blowing bubbles,
Pretty bubbles in the air (puff)

On the trellis dad grew grape vines. He followed the advice of experts in the care and pruning of vines, which produced a wonderful crop of muscatel grapes. In the autumn he dipped the bunches in an alkaline solution and laid them on racks to dry as raisins. He erected a 30 foot flagpole in the backyard and during a drought sank a deep bore for a reliable water supply.

Dad's parents lived at Largs Bay, a beach suburb three miles away. Mother's father died before I was born, but her mother lived at Woodville, two miles nearer the city. I suppose I was somewhat spoiled as the first-born. I had every comfort and my grandparents were also very good to me. My chief discomfort as a small boy was having to wear a "sailor suit" on special occasions, with a square navy collar hanging at the back edged with white stripes and a straw hat with a wide curled-up brim. I hated it, but it was the prevailing fashion.

At the age of four I was sent to stay with my "grannie" at Woodville for a while. When I returned home in February 1916 I was horrified to find my mother in bed with a baby girl in her arms! It took me quite a while to adjust to the idea of having a baby sister. Marjorie,

being four and a half years younger than I, was always "the little sister" until I reached my late teens.

One of my jobs at home was to feed the hens and gather the eggs from the fowl-house. Sometimes I accidentally left the wire-gate open, and a hen or two wandered out. I considered them to be creatures of the lowest mentality, because when I attempted to chase them back they would run up and down along the side of the wire enclosure, squawking madly, quite oblivious of the fact that the open gate was just around the corner. I think this was the first manifestation of my love of logic and my tendency to be intolerant of any lack of logic in others.

There were no washing machines or dryers in those days. We had a visiting washerwoman, a Miss Ashby, who boiled the clothes in a wood-fired copper in the out-house, removed most of the water from the clothing with the rubber rollers of a hand-operated wringer over the sink, then brought them inside to iron with a flat-iron heated on the kitchen stove, after a spell on the straight clothes-line. Sheets were flattened by the long wooden rollers of a spring-loaded mangle in the back lobby. I liked Miss Ashby because she brought me bags of black and white "bullseye" peppermints - rather sticky but long lasting in the mouth.

We had occasional visits from an odd-job man, known as "Wockie". He used to make me toys from pieces of galvanised wire, soldered together.

Mother used to allow me to clean out the remains of a cake mix from the bowl with my finger - a delicious treat; and when she baked a roast there were always strips of warm, spicy crackling to be munched before the meal began. Sometimes in those early days we had dust storms. Clouds of red dust blown down from the cleared properties in the north; so thick that visibility was reduced to a few hundred yards - leaving a legacy of cleaning up for every housewife in the district.

Mother used to take me on shopping excursions to Port Adelaide. She often went to a draper and haberdashery shop in Commercial Road, presided over by an imposing shopwalker dressed in a sombre frock-coat, who greeted each customer obsequiously. Even if you wanted only a reel of cotton he would raise his voice and call imperiously "Habby forward one!!" A shop assistant would hurry to your aid behind the counter. They had a mechanised system of providing change. The assistant would place your money with the bill in a screw-top container, attach this to an overhead wire, pull a cord, and the container would shoot across the store to the cashier who sat at an elevated desk fed by overhead wires from all departments. In a few seconds your receipted bill, complete with change, would come hurtling towards

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your assistant. It was the best part of my shopping excursions with mother.

Houses were lit by gaslight and each evening you would see a lamplighter riding his bicycle from corner to corner, with a lightweight ladder over his shoulder ready to prop it against the extended arms at the top of the next lamp post. When the gas mantles burned out in our own lamps I used to prize the beautifully formed ceramic bases, shaped like miniature coffee tables.

With the coming of electric light we had a wonderful counterweighted hanging fixture, with two globes in flower-like glass shades, that could be pulled down to the desired height above the dining room table.

Motor cars were virtually unknown then. The tradesmen - butcher, baker and greengrocer - brought their wares to your door in horse-drawn carts with elaborate gold-leaf designs painted on the sides. The milkman trained his horse to stop and start as he moved from house to house in the early hours, filling the billy-cans on the doorsteps from a large metal container. We often had visits from Chinese hawkers who carried two multi-tiered boxes slung from a rod across their shoulders.

I can recall nothing of the outbreak of World War I. I was only three years old at the time, but I can

remember browsing over magazines with pictures of activities "at the front" as they called it. After the armistice had been signed in 1918 I can remember waiting with my family at the Outer Harbour for the arrival of a troopship bearing mother's brother, Major Charles Bath, O.B.E. My sister Marjorie was two years old then.

One of my first books was "Mother Goose Nursery Rhymes", delightfully illustrated with the marvellous line drawings of Mabel Lucie Attwell. It contained all the old traditional rhymes that have grown up with the English language. Mother read them to me with great expression, and the pictures had a profound effect on my thinking.

When I visited my maternal grannie at Woodville she often told me stories about Brer Rabbit and his friends and one Christmas mother's sister, Aunt "Tottie", presented me with "Uncle Remus and Nights with Uncle Remus", the book of those wonderful legends of the American Negro slaves in the southern cotton plantations told in their quaint dialect by Joel Chandler Harris.

I still have these books. They are family heirlooms.

As a young girl, mother had very long, very thick and very beautiful brown hair reaching below her waist. As a married woman she wore it in a coiled or plaited bun

at the nape of her neck, and in my early childhood she used to ask me to brush it for her. I remember the thrill I experienced in sweeping the brush down that glistening mane, as she sat in front of her dressing-table mirror beside a window. I think that experience was responsible for the lasting admiration I had for beautiful long hair in women. Mother had it cut off in a "bob" - the fashion which became almost universal round about 1920; and I remember dad being furious with her. She kept the long plait in a drawer for many years.

Mother loved singing. She had a very true and powerful voice and delighted in the songs from the musical comedies of the Edwardian era - The Merry Widow, The Belle of New York, Maritana, Floradora and many more - as well as music hall ditties like "The Man Who Broke the Bank at Monte Carlo". She delighted in a parody of "After the Ball is Over", which went -

"After the Ball is over
See her take out her glass eye,
Stand her cork leg in the corner
Lock up the bottle of dye!
Put her false teeth in the basin
Hang up her hair on the wall -
Then what is left goes to bye-bye
After the Ball!"

I got to know these songs from listening to mother, and the melodies are still in my mind. It never ceases to amaze me that a whole melody can be recalled when triggered by some incident, and replayed from the memory like a tape recording. The recall of an instantaneous

impression - such as a face, a scene, a scent, or a feeling - is wonderful enough, but the recall of a time-sequence of notes is something even more wonderful.

Mother had her pet governing superstitions. Walking under a ladder courted disaster. Crossed knives on the table foretold a family row. Breaking a mirror brought seven years bad luck, and shoes must never be placed on a table nor umbrellas opened inside the house. Spilt salt meant calamity, unless a pinch was immediately thrown over the shoulder.

Proverbs were her guiding light. Once bitten twice shy. A stitch in time saves nine. Take care of the pence and the pounds will take care of themselves, but nothing venture nothing win - and pride goes before a fall. And above all, waste not want not - with a place for everything and everything in its place. A glossary of Wisdom condensed from the ages, and they are engraved on my mind.

My schooling began at Miss Bartlett's Kindergarten in Railway Terrace, on the side of our block facing the railway line. I have little recollection of that school but I know I disliked it. It was followed by a short spell at another kindergarten under a Miss Marjorie Treleaven. She had two very long black plaits. Demonstrating physical exercises for us these plaits

swung rhythmically in time to the piano accompaniment when she leaned sideways. I thought this was wonderful.

Then I went to the Alberton State School at the age of seven. This was on the other side of the Port Road and the associated electric tramline. The Port Road was the link between the City of Adelaide and Port Adelaide - about seven miles long. The tramline ran from Cheltenham cemetery, in the next suburb south of Alberton, to Port Adelaide and on to the beaches of Semaphore and Largs Bay. The trams were quaint little vehicles on a single bogie, bouncing up and down like rocking horses when they ran.

I enjoyed my walk to school. After rain it was always interesting watching the leaves carried down the kerbside gutters, and sometimes a folded paper boat provided added excitement. During the deadly pneumonic influenza epidemic of 1919 yellow flags were hung outside the houses of victims to warn people, because it was extremely infectious and thousands of people died from it. My aunt Margaret, dad's only sister, was one to succumb at the age of 37, soon after her marriage. I can only just remember her as a rather beautiful dark-haired woman.

In those early days, with no radio or television, we had to make our own fun. Hoops were popular - a welded ring of steel, about 24" in diameter, which you bowled

along the streets at a spanking pace with a hooked steel rod. "Hopscotch" grids were often chalked on the tarred footpaths, and at school there were seasons of "knuckle bones", marbles and cherry stones. Cherry stones were collected in season at home and used in games of skill during recess in the school yard. Cardboard faces were set up by some boys, who offered prizes in the form of quantities of cherry stones to anyone who could throw one into the open mouth of the cardboard face.

Lunch was brought at a shop on the other side of the Port Road. Meat pies were one penny each and pasties twopence. I used to buy one and a comic paper with my lunch money, and read as I ate beneath a gum tree in the plantation which divided the road from the tramline.

I can remember watching workmen lay the timber blocks to form the tarred wood-block surface of the Port Road. This was regarded as a great development in road making. Most roadways had been dirt tracks or, at best, surfaced with "road metal". The steam roller was a source of wonder to every small boy, with its clanking and hissing, and it was preceded by a man carrying a red flag!

We constructed immovable "trams" from empty packing cases in our back yard and played drivers and conductors for our passenger friends. Then when the local District Council lopped branches from gum trees in the nearby park

we dragged these home to make a "wurly", tying the cut branches together at the top so that the foliage formed a conical "house" for us to play in - like the temporary shelters made by the Aborigines.

Kite flying was great fun in windy weather. We made our own kites - two thin wooden dowels tied in the form of a cross with a peripheral string joining the ends. This was covered with brown paper and provided with a long tail - bows of rag or newspaper at intervals on a trailing string. By trial and error we developed a size, shape and weight that could be made to fly well. Then came the thrill of controlling the swooping and diving live-thing high in the air, and watching paper "messages" go scurrying up the long cord to land smack at the surface of the kite. A healthy, exciting exercise in the open air.

I remember three other pastimes - tops, stilts and tip-cat. Conical wooden spinning tops had a domed top and a metal-pointed base. Grooves around the body allowed you to wind a cord tightly from bottom to top, finishing with a loop around the finger. Thrown on to a hard surface the top was forcibly spun by the string, and would continue spinning on its tip for a considerable time - to the delight of the owner.

Stilts were made from two inverted empty jam tins, each provided with a long loop of string. Standing on

the two tins, they were held fast against the soles of your shoes by pulling on the loops of string. Walking on these "stilts" made a pleasant resonant sound. The tip-cat consisted of an octagonal bar of wood about four inches long, tapered sharply at both ends and marked with a number on each face. When struck sharply with a stick on the tip at either end, the "cat" would rise from the floor, looping the loop in a high arc, to land with a bang on one face. The number facing up on landing gave the score to the operator. Then someone else had a turn.

All these games gave a lot of pleasure at little cost, and some were even home-made from domestic scrap.

Musical pleasure was obtained from mouth-organs and from the drum and fife band which accompanied the Indian-file march into school after the patriotic salute to the flag.

In those days popular songs were somewhat escapist. I remember "Barney Google, with the goog-goog-googly eyes" and "K-k-k-Katie, beautiful Katie, you're the only g-g-g-girl that I adore." I suppose this was a reaction from the recruiting and sentimental songs of World War I. Recruiting had been encouraged by songs such as -

"Oh we don't want to lose you
But we know you have to go"

and

"Rally round the banner of your country"

The spirits of the troops and their families had been kept up by songs full of homespun sentiment -

"Keep the home fires burning"
"Let the great big world keep on turning"
"There's a long, long trail a-winding"
"It's a long way to Tipperary"
and
"If you were the only girl in the world"

These songs were sung at gatherings and concerts designed to raise money for the Red Cross and to send comforts to the troops overseas. Even today I can remember the tunes and most of the words.

When mother's brother, my uncle Charlie, returned from the war in the middle east he brought many souvenirs which he set up in a front room of my grannie's home in Hughes Street, Woodville. It was known as "Uncle Charlie's Room". He had a ceramic British bulldog, which sat aggressively on the centre of a small "Union Jack" flag on the table. That bulldog was bequeathed to me and now sits in my study.

Charlie purchased an early spring-driven table gramophone, which required frequent winding and used fibre needles of triangular section. These could be sharpened with a special pair of cutting pliers. He had records of most of the popular war-time songs, and I loved to hear them when I visited grannie.

My first playmates were children of neighbouring families, who attended the Alberton State School. Jessie Marsden, who lived on the other side of Todd Street, was my age and we played together a lot. Then there were the Gunn twins, Donald and Douglas, who lived opposite in Brougham Place and Cliff Howe who lived in Railway Terrace. I thought Cliff was wonderful. He was full of original ideas and at a very early age produced a "magazine", with articles written by himself and illustrations. In later life he accumulated a large library of historic films.

At the Alberton State School we had a master who was very keen on Opera. He trained the class to sing arias such as "Home to our Mountains" and the "Anvil Chorus" from Verdi's Il Trovatore, which we sang with great gusto. Dad was a member of the Port Adelaide Orpheus Society which performed oratoria such as Handel's Judas Maccabaeus. Across the road from us lived the Kayser family, with two children rather older than Marjorie and I - Ted and Ella. Ted had a very good boy-soprano voice and frequently sang solos in local concerts. We used to hear him practising, especially on summer evenings when the houses opened their windows to admit the cool air. Ted and I were both members of the choir at St George's Anglican Church, Alberton. We had to wear starched Eton collars, which I hated, with our cassock and surplice. Mother had the job of laundering the surplice and starching the collar. The Rector was the Rev. Ghent, who

walked with a pronounced stoop and wore a black "shovel" hat. Sometimes I was given the job of ringing the church bell for an approaching service, which I considered a great privilege. The bell was hung above the vestry roof and operated by a descending rope.

One year the boys in the choir were invited to sing at a concert in the Exhibition Building on North Terrace in the city. Ted sang a solo and the choir sang "Drake goes West". I can still hear those youthful voices singing -

"Drake is going West, lad!
His ships are in the bay -
Four and twenty sail all told
Ready for the fray!
Oh hear it pass from lip to lip
Drake is off again!
For Drake's away at break of day
To sweep, to sweep the Spanish Main!
So here's to the Spanish Main, and here's to the foe
And here's to Drake and his merry, merry men
Who'll ne'er set foot in Devon again
Til they've laid the enemy low!"

Fighting words for young singers! The rest was less forceful and "Some may sleep their long, long sleep in the Spanish Main" introduced a sober note into the last verse. That was my first public appearance on a stage - and my last as a singer.

Aeroplanes had been used as fighters in World War I and flying was still a novelty in the following years. Captain H.J. Butler, a war pilot, used to offer sightseeing-flights to the public from the Cheltenham Racecourse, and flew the first South Australian aerial

post from Adelaide to Minlaton. There were no established airports near Australian capital cities then, and most planes were bi-planes. At the end of 1919 Ross and Keith Smith of Adelaide with two companions in a twin-engine Vickers Vimy bi-plane made the first England to Australia flight in 28 days - a record that stood for eight years. The Smith brothers were both knighted.

I recall the advent of the automatic telephone. Till then we had magneto phones which required cranking to raise the exchange. A mechanic fixed a box on the wall. This had a mouthpiece, a bell shaped receiver on a hook, and a circular dial with ten holes, bearing numbers 0 to 9 and letters. I asked him what the letters were for. With a solemn face he told me A was for Africa, B for Belgium, C for China, D for Denmark, E for England and F for France. I visualised being able to speak to almost any country in the world! The shape of things to come!

As I grew old enough I was given the responsibility of going by tram to the Port Adelaide Institute on Saturday mornings to change the library books. My family's favourite magazines were The Illustrated London News, The Tatler, The Sketch and The Strand Magazine. Mother loved seeing photos of the Royal Family and their doings, and dad loved the stories in The Strand. I remember him reading the adventures of Sherlock Holmes by Arthur Conan Doyle, which appeared frequently with

graphic illustrations. There was never any risk of my bringing home a magazine we had seen before. I devoured their contents myself, and they gave me a deep desire to see the other side of the world some day.

When I visited the library my walk to the tram down Brougham Place took me past the Alberton Oval - home of the Port Adelaide Football Club - which was ringed with tall trees. As I passed these in the spring I was frequently attacked by nesting magpies, who waited until I passed and then swooped down on me from behind with a sudden buffet to my head and a flapping of wings as they climbed back to wait for their next victim. I dreaded those bird attacks. I couldn't pass the football ground quickly enough!

Then there were the Saturday afternoon excursions by tram to Port Adelaide to see films at the Ozone Theatre in St Vincent Street. This was the heyday of black and white silent films with occasional captions in a decorative frame to set the scene or time and convey information not readily understood from the acting. It was the day of the cowboy-and-Indian westerns, the Fu Manchu horror film, the slap-stick Keystone Cops comedies and the cliff-hanging serials. The matinee audience consisted mostly of school boys and girls who were very vocal in showing their appreciation. A versatile pianist provided musical accompaniment, miraculously changing the character and tempo of the music to suit the action on

the screen. Films were also screened in the evenings at the Alberton Oval, the audience sitting in the grandstand to watch a temporary screen on the playing field. I remember enjoying those warm summer nights with our whole family.

Often in the summer mother would take Marjorie and me for a holiday at Henley Beach. We always stayed at Del Monte, a large private hotel on the Esplanade. Our room opened on to a balcony on the first floor which was wide enough for games when it rained, but to me there were two main attractions. One was the pianola in the ground-floor lounge, with a plentiful supply of rolls of all types of music. The other was the Sunday-night concert by the Tramways Brass Band in the rotunda near the entrance to the jetty. We used to sit at a table on the balcony of a cafe adjacent to the rotunda and look down on the conductor and all those wonderful instruments, as we consumed a milk shake and chocolate-coated icecream. It was a very good brass band and they played marches, selections from musical shows and - best of all - overtures from the Gilbert and Sullivan Operas. There was something magical about that music wafting up from below in the warm air of a balmy summer night. Dad was able to join us on those evenings and it was a great family treat.

Another memorable outing was the visit to the annual Strawberry Fete at the Adelaide Children's Hospital in

North Adelaide. This was held in November and strawberries and cream were served in marquees erected on the lawns behind the hospital. There was always a brass band and a Punch and Judy Show to delight parents and children alike.

Dad had a managerial job with Gamblings, a firm of carriers at Port Adelaide. One of their clients was the Melbourne firm of Smith Mitchell and Co, Malsters. Most of the barley they used in the manufacture of malt was grown on Yorke Peninsula in South Australia. Gamblings had been acting as their agent in inspecting the crops and negotiating purchases, but the volume of work had increased and when I was about nine years old, dad left his job at Gamblings to become the Adelaide representative of Smith Mitchell. It required a knowledge of barley classification, which dad had acquired at Gamblings through visiting the barley growers with Mr Smith or Mr Mitchell when they came to Adelaide during the harvest season.

However, this work was seasonal and it was necessary for dad to have some other business to carry out during the rest of the year. Accordingly he formed an import-company which was registered as The South Australian Trading and General Agency Company - rather a mouthful. I always suspected that dad had chosen this name because he liked the idea of the associated telegraphic address - SATAGAC! He was very proud of this. It was a one-man

show. He had a small office in Divett Street, Port Adelaide, with a sample room lined with shelving and a private secretary, a Miss Tuitt.

Dad had a calendar on the wall of his office, bearing a picture of the American writer Edgar A. Guest and a quotation from his writings which said, as far as I can remember -

"To fashion something yourself, to feel it grow under your hands, and, when you have finished, to say "I made this" - is to live!"

That expressed precisely a feeling I had myself. I loved making things. In this I took after dad, who was an expert handyman.

When mother was ill for a time I went to stay with grannie at Woodville, and while I was there I attended the Woodville State School and struck up a friendship with Doug Loan, son of the Rev. E.C. Loan, Rector of St Margaret's Anglican Church, Woodville. Doug, a year or two older than I, had a standing invitation to play in the large back garden of the home of the Misses Aird who lived in Russell Terrace just round the corner from my grandmother. We built a "pirate's house" in their large mulberry tree, with a wooden platform and a windlass for hoisting up supplies. The leaves we used to feed pet silkworms and we wound the silk they produced on to cards. Doug introduced me to that wonderful childhood fantasy "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland". I begged

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mother to give me a copy for my birthday. Illustrated by George Soper, I thought it the most wonderful and funniest book ever written, and the magic of Lewis Carroll persists after 125 years!

Dad gave me a book called "The Boy's Own Conjuring Book" which I found enthralling. I began to make some of the simple gadgets described, and perform elementary conjuring tricks before my family. The accountant of Smith Mitchell & Co., a Mr Reynolds, paid periodic visits to Adelaide and stayed with us at Alberton. He had two sons, about the same age as myself, and I was invited to spend a week with them in Melbourne during the school holidays. This was a great adventure for me, travelling interstate by train on my own. I was thrilled when dad received a telegram, just before my departure, reading -

"Tell Jim bring his tricks".

I certainly did. I can't remember much about that holiday, except a visit to the Melbourne Aquarium with its performing seals - then adjacent to the Exhibition Building.

I was absolutely fascinated with anything to do with the theatre, and made a model theatre with wood from a packing case. I used cut-out coloured designs for the scenery and characters, which were published in a children's magazine called "Toby" - possibly because it was intended to be a sort of juvenile version of "Punch".

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One day dad proudly drove his first motor car through the double gateway from Todd Street - a Model T Ford Tourer, with running boards on either side, a collapsible canvas hood and detachable side-curtains to keep out the weather when the hood was up. We went for many drives along dusty country roads in that old jalopy. Sometimes we saw another car parked at the side of the road, mending a puncture or in some other trouble, and we would call out "Are you all right?" That kind of camaraderie perished many years ago. Dad constructed a garage beside the fowl yard and I helped him clear that car often.

That was the highlight of my first decade.