

## My Story: pathway to illustration

Growing up, my family had two shoe shops in country South Australia. My dad painted posters for the shops, mainly lettering but he decorated them by painting funny little old-time characters. I liked to copy comic-book characters, and maps, but, really was much more interested in making contraptions in the shed.

My home town, Woodside, was close to an army barracks, where soldiers were training to go to war in Vietnam. From inside our classroom we heard the rattle of machine guns on the rifle range while Iroquois helicopters d-d-d overhead, practicing fast landings and take-offs. Out of school mates and I mucked around at the local rubbish dump, finding excellent stuff to use in our pretend combat; helmets, rucksacks, ammo boxes, bullet-riddled targets, stretchers. It was hardly an artistic upbringing but there was lots of imagination and play. And plenty of football.

My big sister, Maire, who even as a small kid had always been wonderfully skilled at drawing, left home to go to the South Australian School of Art. As a teenager I liked to visit the Art School when down in the city. It smelt of oil paint. The pictures actually smelt grown-up. And it sounded great. There I grew to love listening to the Blues. Sort of story telling music. Later I was able to follow in my sister's footsteps. It was either that or the Army.

I studied graphic design, photography, illustration, but typography (lettering), was my main interest. We were also made to draw naked people in life drawing classes. I slowly grew to like drawing. It was much funnier, or at least more fun than typography.

A school project was to illustrate a children's story. It was a struggle, but turned out ok. I sent it to a publisher in Sydney. She rejected it, but encouragingly added in her letter, 'If you ever come to Sydney, drop by.' I hitchhiked up there almost immediately. This eventually led to my first picture book.

I have been a freelance illustrator since 1976. For some of the early years I had part time jobs; dishwasher, cleaner, rustscraper (the job was to scrape rust off the Sydney Harbour Bridge). Later I worked doing advertising illustration - groan! And lastly spent enough time doing television animation (on [Here's Humphrey](#)) to realise both advertising and animation were not for me!

One particularly interesting job was working as a nurse aide in a hospital for the elderly. In that role I was able to observe the frailer human body, different from a life drawing session. This whole experience of nursing has stayed with me and I reckon has influenced the direction of my work.

I live with Erica in Melbourne. We have four grown up children between us. And five grandchildren.



Dad's work ...  
1955



Calendar  
Illustration  
'My Childhood'  
Omnibus Books  
1983



This strange poster  
got me into Art School!  
Perhaps it was the nice  
lettering? Or maybe the  
odd thinking behind it?  
1971

An example  
of much later  
advertising work.  
Young & Rubicam  
1991  
(A parody of  
Toulouse Lautrec)



How McDougall  
Topped the Score  
by Thomas E  
Spencer  
Art School project.  
1973



The Sydney Harbour Bridge  
1974