

After many fishing trips to Rushcutters Bay in Sydney's eastern suburbs my daddy realised something about me.

I was spending more time staring at the yachts and big boats parked at the wharf, than the handlines he cast into the water for me. My mind was somewhere else - floating across the water of the harbour.

The next day he was due to help his friend do some maintenance on his boat. He had an idea. Daddy got on his knees, looked me straight in the eye - and asked me if I would like to go fishing on his friend's boat the next day.

I leapt into his arms and hugged him as hard as I could. I felt like I was

chosen to go to the moon. It was the best thing that ever happened to me.

I nodded. I said 'yes', but the word never came out.

The old wooden boat was moored in Double Bay and it needed to have some parts fixed. I was invited to fish while they worked.

Tomorrow would be a pre-dawn start. I went to bed at 8:00pm but my fishing trip had already begun. I was on the boat peering into the water. Strange shadows would swim by, both exciting and scary all at the same time. I had goose-bumps and I didn't sleep a wink that night.

The year was 1970. I was a 5 year old blonde kid. Daddy took me by the



hand in the twilight, down to the street corner. We waited for his mate to pick us up. Every pair of headlights that drove by and didn't stop, made me more impatient, like I was busting for a wee.

A car stopped abruptly in front of us, the passenger window rolled down. "Yiasoo Joe" says my Daddy. "Yiasoo Arthur" says Joe.

We got into the car and drive off. I got tossed around the backseat like a

rag doll, but that was normal. Seatbelts were not compulsory then, so the car had none.

"Hey Tony - we catcha some kabooraki today, eh?" Joe was telling me the Greek work for crab. The blonde kid nodded with eyes wide open, unable to speak. We were parking the car before I knew it.

The sun was starting to rise and the sky was a colour I had never seen before. It looked like someone smeared some colours with a giant texta across the sky.

The boats moved on their moorings and the hulls threw shadows on the surface of the calm water. The SHADOWS!

I remembered thinking about them last night as they swam in the water. I

peered over the side of the dinghy as daddy rowed it towards the old timber boat. I could see sea grasses, sand, schools of small fish moving beneath me. Everything was different. I was ON the water, floating, like I was flying.

The world looked different. It smelt different. The air tasted different - sort of salty. There were sounds of seagulls and little bells on the masts of the yachts as they swung like an upside-down pendulum.

I felt naked and vulnerable, in a small bathtub, surrounded by water that was deep, over my head. But I was overflowing with excitement. I was on another planet.

The dinghy bumped the

side of the wooden boat. I was lifted on board by daddy and I froze with excitement. Look at this place. It's a BOAT ! Look at the steering wheel and all the other boat things. I was given a box of hand lines and some fish-heads inside some discarded stockings. Tied to the line, they were cast overboard. Some old bits of bread and cheese were thrown into a thing called a burley bucket and squashed up.

"Tony, the smella the bread bringa the feesh". Joe had a Spanish accent. "Nice-a silver brims, sinappa, yellow-tailer, everyting here". He encouraged me to start fishing, but I hardly heard a word.

The crab line started turning backwards so I was

asked to slowly pull it in. A large blue swimmer crab was rising in the water, flippers wriggling as we played tug-of-war with the stocking. It was amazing to see. The net appeared and went under it, scooped it out of the water and it was dropped into a fish box. I was staring in awe at the writhing crab, as the 15lb line in my hands pulled tight. A flash of silver appeared in the water in the early morning light. I pulled in the fish so quickly that no-one noticed until it hit the deck. A nice fat bream that seemed a meter long to a 5 year old flopped on the floor.

"Ay Arthur, Tony catcha the nice breem.". I finally spoke up for the morning.

"Daaaaad ! Look at that whopper !" My excitement

came out a little loud. My voice had a strange echo effect on the water around the other boats. Even my voice sounded different on this planet.

It was at that point, that no matter how different everything seemed, I felt right at home on the boat. The sea had welcomed me and given me a present. The boat had accepted me as a friend. I had found a world, strange but beautiful, scary but exciting. This is where I belong.....

Forty two years later, I am still the blond 5-year old I was in 1970. The hair is now light brown with grey streaks on the sides. And I often get accused of behaving like a 5 year old - to which I just respond with a 'Thanks'.

Every Friday, my good

The Blonde

Kid

Introducing a heart warming, unashamedly nostalgic feature by a bloke we'll just call Tony. He discovered the boating world back in the 1970s when he was but a young lad aged seven. . . . Now, many years later, he recounts the days gone by, and looks forward to helping his own little youngster(s) appreciate the fishing and boating world which has given him so much pleasure over the years . . .

