

FREEDOM: Beatrice Yell

At seventeen I was determined to escape my parents' restrictions - 'You can't wear lipstick till you've turned eighteen, home before 10.30 pm, and no smoking'. Even worse was 'you must set a good example to your little sisters'. They also vetted my boyfriends, banning some and approving others I disliked.

I began to save up, working college holidays without a break at the large department store in town, David Jones. In 1958, at twenty, I escaped on the 'Southern Cross' which sailed to Wellington, New Zealand, then Suva, Fiji, across the Pacific to Papeete, Tahiti, through the Panama Canal, then Dutch Curacao and Trinidad before finally docking at Liverpool in Britain.

We caught a train to London, where I shared a flat with three other Aussie girls. Determined to see as many shows as possible in the West End, where for 2/6d or three shillings for tickets in 'the gods' we were able to see famous actors we'd only read about. There was classical music and opera in the Royal Festival Hall, Covent Garden and Saddler's Wells, also the Proms in the Royal Albert Hall. With plenty of party invitations we enjoyed freedom from parental constraints; wonderful.

However, with nothing to rebel against; I found myself living by their rules, more or less. A few months later, a parcel arrived from home containing a man's merino wool pullover and a note from my father 'This is to save you from the foggy, foggy dew'. Of course, it could have come too late.

But after a year of working hard and enjoying London's varied cultural scene, I came down with tuberculosis. Testing positive, I was confined in a ward on bed-rest in Brompton Hospital supervised by strict matrons and hospital staff. After three months they sent me to a convalescent home in the Surrey countryside, which also had stringent rules. Each day began with an injection, then short walks, with the length of these increased weekly and recorded. Every absence was restricted; with special passes issued.

Finally no longer positive, I was officially allowed to escape. I went with a couple of friends to tour the Continent. Liz was recovering from hepatitis so we would stop early and find accommodation for the night. This was for us to rest, have an early dinner, then go to bed. Not exactly freedom, but close enough.