

Foolish: Bea Yell

As the eldest of three girls, my parents lectured me on setting a good example to my younger siblings. I was careful to comply, but as a teenage art student there were some things I couldn't resist and had to hide from them.

This included lipstick, eye shadow and perfume, all officially banned until we turned eighteen. But my classmates and I haunted the upmarket department store in the city on our way home to drench ourselves with expensive French scent for free and try all the different colours available in eye shadows. My favourite was turquoise.

Anxious to keep me under control, my mother would inspect me before I left the house. I had to look 'respectable' or she felt she was failing in her duty as a single parent while our father was away at sea. She was happiest when all four of us were home before nightfall.

One night, our big brother came with me to an art students' dance in the Old Gaol in Darlinghurst. He got bored and left early. I stayed with a very naïve and foolish group who went down to notorious Kings Cross for a cup of coffee at the Arabian cafe where the witch Rosaleen Norton was said to hang out at night. But it must have been too early for her and we left, disappointed.

I shared a taxi home with the daughter of a high court judge and arrived home at 3.50 am to find my mother distraught.

'Where have you been? I've been so worried about you; I didn't know whether to call the local police or Interpol. I thought a taxi-driver might have driven you into bushland. You could have been murdered!'

It took me quite a while to calm her down. Scary! I hadn't thought of that. I hoped my friend had got home safely. Next morning I apologised for being so foolish.

In spite of my battles with both parents and my good example, my sisters followed a rock band around Sydney. They gave our poor, long-suffering mother a ton of worry and many sleepless nights.