



The Girl with Kaleidoscope Eyes

That model, muse and photographer Pattie Boyd has lived, loved and lost is not unique. What makes her story beguiling is that her husbands were ROCK GODS, her world was lived in castles, ashrams and on private jets and her playmates were David Bailey, Ossie Clark and Jerry Hall. Through her pictures we all get to re-live the hedonism and heartbreak.

WORDS *Natalie Shukur*



Pattie Boyd has seen it all and then some. As a model in 60s London she worked alongside Twiggy and Pat Booth, landed multiple magazine covers, and was captured on film by David Bailey, Norman Parkinson and Lord Snowdon. She was the buxom blonde with the baby blues and gap teeth, the “new contemporary face” of 1964.

Then she met and married Beatle George Harrison. She endured kicking and spitting from crazed Beatles fans. She travelled to India with the band on their notorious quest for spiritual enlightenment. Soon after Dylan turned the fab four onto marijuana, Boyd and Harrison were dragged, hand-cuffed, from their home following a drug bust. She witnessed the lads from Liverpool crumble under the intense pressures of fame and fortune.

After Harrison came Eric Clapton. Let's just say there was a crossover period and, according to Boyd, the two men had a guitar duel in her honour. Listen to *Layla* and you'll get the picture. She married Clapton in 1979 and toured the world with him in a haze of brandy breakfasts and private jets. He wrote *Wonderful Tonight* for her. Their marriage broke down in the 80s when he fathered a child with another woman and his addictions got the better of them both.

When Boyd speaks of her extraordinary past, she often uses the present tense. It is as if the memories are so vivid, so enduring, that their bubbles will never burst. With her candid autobiography, *Wonderful Today* released last year, revealing all in fascinating detail, perhaps they will always remain floating in the here and now.

Boyd's memories are destined to remain animated for another reason. Because she didn't just live them, she photographed them. She photographed Harrison

lying supine on a bed in Southern India in 1968, “the last time I saw him looking so relaxed and calm.” She photographed Ronnie and Krissy Wood in the early hours of the morning – still going strong from the night before. She captured Clapton from the side of the stage in all his slow-handed glory. Throughout the intense highs and dramatic lows, what have remained are Boyd's pictures – a window into the private world of the privileged, the experimental and the tremendously talented.

While preparing for the opening of her exhibition *Through The Eyes of a Muse* in Sydney, the adorable and open Pattie Boyd spoke to *Russh* from her Sussex home about meditating with the Maharishi, keeping up with the boys on tour, opening a Pandora's box and how her camera helped her to see the light.

Russh: *I have been devouring your book, it really is fascinating and heartbreaking and everything in between...*

Pattie Boyd: Oh I'm so glad you enjoyed it. I had a really good response. It did very well in America; it reached number one on *The New York Times* bestseller list and it continues to sell. I was very surprised. I thought it would come out and a few of my friends might read it, but I didn't expect it to be received with such enthusiasm.

It must have really taken a lot of courage to write so candidly about your life, re-opening old wounds and sharing such private memories.

Do you know what? I was really taken aback when my sister said to me, ‘have you seen all the stuff about you on the internet?’ and I said ‘No. I never look!’ And I was amazed at how much information was out there. It's extraordinary. It appears that nobody has any privacy. I had done a very successful exhibition in San Francisco, my very first, and I was nervous

“I just thought it was a really weird life! One minute I WAS MODELLING and the next minute I was up to all these MAD CAPERS with all these people.”



about doing that and I thought ‘this might not go down very well.’ I couldn’t tell if my photographs were too personal. Anyway, I got over that and because I had got over that and it felt alright I then thought maybe it’s time to write a book now, because I had been asked by lots of publishers and for years I’d turned it down.

Many of the photographs that have become part of your exhibition were boxed up and hidden away for years and you hadn’t touched them, is that right? What was it like rediscovering them?

Well I didn’t really want to look at the pictures because I thought they would just remind me of times that were really unhappy or very happy, times I will never have back again and it was just opening up an emotional Pandora’s box. I was never sure whether I could do it. Anyway, I suppose when enough time goes by... I thought ‘I’ll just have a look and see what there is’. I didn’t think I’d find so many nice photographs.

Was it around 80 photographs you submitted for that first exhibition in San Francisco?

No, it was about 50. I imagined I might have about three or four, so it was a great surprise.

And I guess at the time you weren’t taking them with the intent of a professional photographer, they were more candid pictures, would you say?

Yeah, I would say they were just historical moments caught in time.

You worked with some of the greats in your time as a model in London – David Bailey, Norman Parkinson, Lord Snowdon. What did you learn from them?

Well I was very lucky to be modelling with really great photographers. During that time I bought a camera and I just got advice from whomever I was working with, it was perfect.

In the book you describe David Bailey as a very sexy photographer, one who gave great direction...

Yes. And also I wanted to know what he saw through the lens and how he wanted me to move.

I was interested in what he was looking for, which was shape as well as design, and he’s very good with lighting. There are lots of components that make up a good photograph.

What makes a good photograph for you?

It’s all about design and light. Light suddenly makes me very excited and I want to photograph a person or an object or an animal... suddenly everything looks beautiful and I want to quickly capture it before it moves away.

Do you ever work in fashion photography?

No. I think fashion photography really should only be done by young photographers. Because they understand, they’re there, they’re in that kind of moment of fashion that keeps changing. When they’re young they sort of really get it.



PAGE 80: GEORGE HARRISON AND PATTIE BOYD, ENGLAND, 1968; PAGE 81: GEORGE, RONNIE, KRISSEY AND KUMAR, FRIAR PARK, ENGLAND, 1974; PAGE 82: GEORGE HARRISON TRIPTYCH, ENGLAND; PAGE 83: ERIC CLAPTON, HOTEL ROOM, 1974.

One of my favourite pictures that you have taken is of you and George by the white fence with the red creeping flowers behind you. It’s so still and composed and peaceful.

Oh, with the roses. I was absolutely thrilled that the roses had come out, finally. I set up my tripod and said ‘George, George, come and stand with me’ and obviously it was taking a long time for the timer to go off because he’s sort of gazing away. I think I look a bit worried about the camera thinking ‘come on, is it going to click or not?’

There are a lot of candid, or paparazzi pictures of you from the 60s and 70s that I just love. They are as iconic in terms of fashion as your modelling shots. How did your sense of style develop?

I always loved a designer called Ossie Clark. Whenever I’d go to his shop it was like dressing up and playing. I did a few catwalk shows for him and he would design things and name the clothes after the model who was wearing them. He was more of a friend and he would design around us as models because we were all friends with him.

You have said that ‘being on the cover of Vogue seriously undermines your ego’. Obviously it was a fun, incredible time for you, but there were a lot of insecurities that went along with it too?

Yes, if you think about the cover of *Vogue*, it’s really fabulous, it’s glamorous, it’s gorgeous, but then... you know, you don’t walk around daily looking like that [laughs]. And then after that you always look in the mirror and see flaws in your complexion or things you don’t really like because it’s not as perfect as a magazine. It’s very difficult for models to remain totally secure in how they look.

I love how you talk about living on diet biscuits and chicken pies as a model and then one day discovering food and cooking and it was a revelation for you.

Yes, it was a relief! [Laughs]. I think lots of girls go through that phase of wanting to be really thin. In those days, in the 60s, we didn’t have the word anorexia, it just didn’t come into anybody’s thinking, but I’m sure we were really anorexic then. There just wasn’t a word for it.

Wow. It’s incredible to think you went through that without ever talking about it. Around that time you began to become interested in spirituality and went on the infamous trip to India with The Beatles to study under Maharishi Mahesh Yogi...

I really enjoyed it. I got a lot out of it and I was totally inspired by what Maharishi said and I was sort of in awe of him really and it was really nice to be with all of the Beatles because, you know,

they were fun and they were taking this seriously. But there was a lot of downtime as well where they would be writing songs and playing music together and during that time they wrote an awful lot of music for *The White Album*.

Is that sense of spirituality something you have carried with you over the years, do you still meditate?

Yes I do, I’m a little bit of a sloppy meditator. I don’t do it religiously every day, but I still meditate.

What is your wildest memory of being the wife of a Beatle?

I remember going to Ireland with George and John Lennon and Cynthia [Lennon] and it’s kind of fun hiding from the press... the hotel manager got into the fun of it and decided that Cynthia and I should be taken back to the airport in a laundry basket so the press didn’t see us. They were desperate to photograph George and me because I was his new girlfriend. I don’t know why we got up to these antics, but anyway, it was fun.

It must have been a bizarre existence. Did you feel like you were in a bubble in a way or did you not really realise at the time?

I didn’t know, I just thought it was a really weird life! One minute I was modelling and the next minute I was sort of up to all these mad capers with all these people.



Especially in the Brian Epstein days, and even after that, there were all these people looking after you and catering to your every whim. What was it like adjusting to normalcy?

After all of that? Well it was really difficult, especially after being married to George and then I was married to Eric. After 20 years of being looked after, it was very difficult to live a normal life. I realised gradually that I had to look after absolutely everything. I'd never really seen an electricity bill or a gas bill and I'd never really put petrol in my car or paid for a car license... all these little things that were normal in people's lives, but never really came into my life because it was all taken care of.

You went on tour with Eric and spent a lot of time on the road... before the wives were eventually banned at some point I think?!

Yes. That was huge fun, I couldn't believe how fun it was, it was like a party every night. But then after a while it's kind of exhausting... and more so I think if you're not contributing to the whole show. At least in the early evening they'd all go off and work and they'd be on stage singing and playing their instruments, but for me, I wasn't contributing in any way, except for taking the odd photograph. So I was just partying. Again, you live in this bubble

and you move around in a big party... onto private jets that move from one city to another and then new hotels, except after a while they all seem very similar. Every city seems like the last one.

You must have lost all concept of day and time.

Yes, you do. And you're in this bubble with all these mad, crazy people that are fun as well, and obviously other people along the road would try and come into our group and they're not allowed too and... I don't know. It feels special and it feels unique, but ultimately it's really exhausting.

And you had your camera with you most of the time, but were there certain moments you could have kicked yourself for not having it on you? Are there images in your mind you would have loved to have caught on film?

There's so many. I can't actually conjure some up now for you, but just generally in life...

A little while ago you were working with your friend Ronnie Wood on a triptych he was painting of a cast of London identities. Can you tell me about that?

I would turn up at his studio and while he did a quick sketch of them, I'd photograph them in black and white and in colour from both angles, so he could use my photographs as reference later on. It was huge fun, because he's so

amusing. He's always funny and witty and would always make me and whoever was sitting laugh.

You worked with Kate Moss and Naomi Campbell on that project. Was it interesting to see how or if modelling has changed or the girls' attitudes were different?

Well those two girls turned up with no makeup on at all and they looked totally relaxed and they looked casual and I was thinking 'oh my god, they're so beautiful'. It was almost as if they took it for granted that they looked so good, but they were so adorable as well.

You have inspired some iconic songs; your new exhibition is called Through The Eyes of a Muse... Did taking photographs help you to reclaim some of your own identity?

I think it did. Sadly for me, to gather back my confidence, I realised I actually could take some quite good pictures that were appreciated by other people as well. At least I wasn't relying on the fact that I was married to people who are well known, I could do something on my own as well.

Through the Eyes of a Muse – The photography of Pattie Boyd, 26 November – 24 December 2009. Blender Gallery, Sydney. www.blender.com.au.