

She was at various times a Baptist, a Catholic, a Communist, a Buddhist and a Rosicrucian. She was married once but her husband was drowned during the war. She married again and had many an interesting liaison as well, the last one being with a Polish count when she was in her seventies and living in a rude country cottage in the Blue Mountains. She was devastated, briefly, when he moved on.

There was a time when she had roamed the country whilst living with her little son in a horse drawn caravan. Much later, she took herself off to Russia where she roamed a different countryside.

I first met her at my wedding when I was nineteen and she was in her forties. She was a distant in-law who might, at times, have been called an outlaw. Small and birdlike, she wore a deeply plunging neckline . . . a rose placed strategically, if precariously, and her long straight black hair streaked with grey. I was daunted.

Over the years, however, as I grew older and wiser I came to appreciate her free spirit, I discovered just how liberated it was possible for a person to be. What would she do next?

Well, one of the many things she did next, unbeknown to us at the time, was to plan her own funeral . . . a private cremation, followed by a scattering of ashes on Sydney Harbour. She chose the invited guests carefully as she could afford only a smallish motor launch and she had to make sure there was room for the jazz band.

When she died, her plan duly swung into action on a funny old boat that was reminiscent of her rude country cottage. There was wine and there were nibbles and the band played the blues. But, out in the middle of the harbour, as we scattered her ashes the band slid from blues to *When the Saints Come Marchin' In* and the celebration of her unconventional life revved up. The wine kept flowing and we raised our glasses again and again to our extraordinary hostess.

She would have loved it. Come to think of it, she probably did.