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Lawrence Money takes tea with Patricia, Lady Harewood on her return to the town that knew her as Bambi Smith, musician, model and muse.

the big profile



the COUNTESS RETURNS

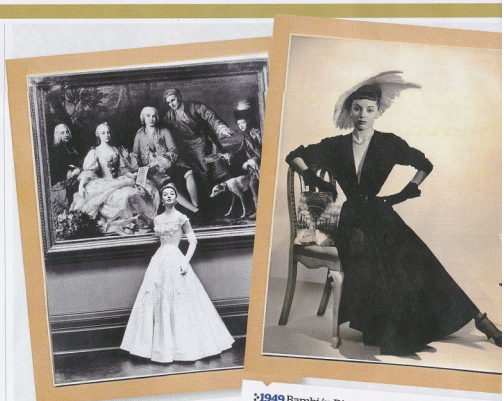
With 86 adventure-packed years on the clock, Melbourne-born Patricia Lascelles – widow of England's seventh Earl of Harewood – was reassured recently by one of her grandchildren that there was much more to come. "Granny," said the youngster, "you can have lots more lives after you're recarbonated." The countess – now addressed as Patricia, Lady Harewood, under Britain's intricate titles system – laughs heartily. Surely that deserves a place in the malapropism Hall of Fame. It is her large and close-knit family that has kept up her spirits since her husband, George Lascelles, died in July 2011. What a love story it was. Divorcee Patricia Tuckwell's passionate affair with the then-married Earl of Harewood in the 1960s, a son to him, George's divorce from first wife, Marion, and marriage to Patricia. Then half a century of mutual adoration. "We were very blessed that we met at all and we were absolutely the right ones for each other," says Lady Harewood. "A friend once said to me that she didn't envy me anything except my marriage. George and I never had to wonder whether we loved each other. We had 52-and-a-half years together."

Famously, they met by chance in 1959 at an airport terminal in Milan, waiting for an Air France flight to Paris. Patricia, a former orchestral violinist who became a photographic model named Bambi Shmith, was on her first trip to Europe to see brother Barry Tuckwell, a prominent musician who now lives in country Victoria. George was the first grandson of King George V and the royal family did not approve of this liaison, which Patricia at the time described as both "enormously rewarding" and "stressful". Unlike the ill-fated Duke of Windsor earlier, George and Patricia stayed in England and, says the countess, were re-embraced by society after their marriage in 1967 which took place in Connecticut, US, due to complications for George in the Royal Marriage Act. "We were never 'cast out' as the papers claim," she says.

Two years ago, George died suddenly, only five days before the marriage of their son, Mark. "The wedding was scheduled the day after George's funeral," says Lady Harewood. "He was 88 and had a bad heart but it was still a shock. We had to decide whether to go on – everyone was gathered for it. We did and that was right." Lady Harewood says one young man wrote to her, saying how wonderful it was that hers was the last face George saw. Yes, it was but, obviously, there is deep grief. Lady Harewood keeps a verse tucked away in her diary, a sort of widow's mission statement, which she found in the London Times. "I show it to every widow I know," she says.

Please do not ask if I am now recovering
Or if I see the light at the tunnel's end.
Nor speak about relief - or burdens lifted.
And, worst of all, new starts.
Please, please don't ask if I am getting through –
Have come to terms, or find my life
is back on track.
Of course I live each day to each
and gladly smile
My coping, to "prepare a face to meet
the faces that you meet".
What else is there to do?
In any case, you would not want
to know the daily loss that lasts eternally.
Just, please, don't ask.

So one does not ask, but the countess has certainly "prepared a face to meet the faces" at Melbourne's Windsor Hotel on this cool and cloudless morning. She is bright-eyed, remarkably youthful and oh-so tres elegante – you can see why George was smitten all those years ago. "Half a century out of the Australian sun does help," Lady Harewood



1950s The art of opulence
Jacopo Amigoni's 1750 portrait of the singer Farinelli and friends at the NGV is the backdrop for Smith in silk shantung.

1949 Bambi in Dior
Bambi Shmith wearing a Dior cocktail dress photographed by her first husband, Athol Shmith.*



Left A portrait of Patricia by Athol Shmith signed with his nickname, Winkie.* **Below** Patricia, Countess of Harewood at the Windsor Hotel in Melbourne earlier this year.

says. She was born Patricia Tuckwell at a hospital in Dandenong Road, Prahran, called Quisisana. "It wasn't until I learnt some operatic Italian that I realised Quisisana means 'here is health'." Lord Harewood, a first cousin of the Queen, was a giant of England's opera world, managing director then president of the English National Opera, founder of the Opera North company and Opera magazine and editor and co-author of the opera-goers' bible, Kobbé's Complete Opera Book.

Lady Harewood was a serious musical talent in her youth, winning a place as a violinist in the Sydney Symphony Orchestra at age 16. Her father had been a theatre organist, which required constant relocation. "Thirty homes in 20 years," says Lady Harewood. They were the days when the organist and theatre organ would rise grandly out of a pit in the floor and, when her father began losing his hair, Lady Harewood recalls her mother putting black boot polish on the bald spot. "His head was the first thing the audience saw," she says.

Her natural beauty stood out – Patricia and friend Maureen Jones were at a Sydney tram stop one day when they were approached by magazine editor Iris Dexter to do some photographic modelling. "Maureen wasn't interested but I thought it would be rather fun," recalls Lady Harewood. "So they took some pictures and put me on the cover of Woman's Day." It was through modelling that she met and married, at age 21, Melbourne photographer Athol Shmith. "Back then modelling was a much gentler career than it is now," she says. "It was great fun."

She opened her own business, the Bambi Smith (without the h) Modelling School, and abandoned her musical career. Partly, that was due to her family. "My parents and grandmother forbade me to marry Athol," she says, "and the instrument I played on was a good Italian violin belonging to my grandmother. She said, 'If you marry that man, I'll have to have the fiddle back.' And I said, 'Right!' And gave it to her. But when our son Michael was born, you wouldn't believe it, a large parcel arrived through the post. It was the violin and not well packed at all. Miraculously, it survived and there was a note reading, 'You win – Granny'. However, it was a bit late to start again. I eventually sold it to violinist Brenton Langbein for one of his pupils."

The Tuckwell family's objection to Athol, who became one of Australia's most celebrated photographers, was not particularly personal. "You could safely say that whatever there was to be against, my parents were against it. They were not the easiest. I doubt there was anyone of whom they would have approved." But the marriage did not last – Patricia was unhappy and left. "Do you remember that story of the couple who are 99 years old?" she asks impishly. "They go to a lawyer and say they want a divorce. 'Why now?' asks the lawyer. 'Well,' they said, 'we thought we'd wait until the children died.'"

Regrettably, the split with Athol kept the countess separated for some years from son Michael, now a senior writer for The Age. "I came out see him when he was 13 and tried to persuade his father to allow him to come and see me but he wouldn't – so in the end

Portraits of a lady

From Melbourne model to lady of the manor



1953 "Famous model and housewife..."
Bambi Smith adds glamour to domesticity in this advertisement in The Australian Women's Weekly. Son Michael makes a cameo appearance.



1981 Home on the estate
The Harewoods in the West Yorkshire grounds of the 18th-century Harewood House, built by Henry Lascelles from his fortune in the West Indian sugar trade. The house has special status as a designated museum.



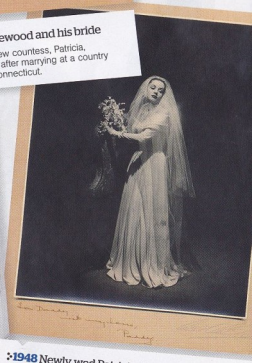
1967 The Earl of Harewood and his bride
Lord Harewood and his new countess, Patricia, arrive at Heathrow Airport after marrying at a country estate in New Canaan, Connecticut.



1951 Another night out...
on Melbourne's social circuit.



1954 Shining example
In modelling mode in a paper taffeta cocktail dress with sunray folds by Chambrelent Couturier.



1948 Newly wed Patricia Smith
The bride photographed by her first husband, Athol Shmith, in his Collins Street studio on their wedding day. The inscription from Patricia to her father reads, "For Daddy, with my love, Paddy".*

I wrote Michael a letter saying that, when he was ready, when he could, there was an air ticket and me at the end of it – and the minute Michael was able to, that's what he did. I think that one of the first rules in life is: if you want to keep someone, let go." A woman of strong will and wisdom is the countess, a trait she shared with her husband. One of her sayings is: "Everything matters but nothing matters as much as all that."

The Tuckwell family circle in which Lady Harewood was raised was small and, she says, "not particularly loving" but she now finds herself in a family that swarms about her in affectionate platoons. "I remember a couple of days after George died, in my quite-small sitting room, there were 15 people, two dogs and a baby, all being loving, which of course was wonderful." Home for the Harewoods is the spectacular 104-room Harewood House, built more than 250 years ago in West Yorkshire. In the manner of most great English estates, it has been opened to the public to ensure its survival. In Lady Harewood's words, she "lives over the shop" – in a spacious apartment sectioned off from the public tours and home to the earl and herself during their years together. She remains there still and enjoys "the best view in England". The 8th earl of Harewood, David, eldest son of George and first wife Marion, has a separate abode elsewhere on the estate.

> 'I'd say, 'Listen here, blessings to be counted ... Here we are in this beautiful house, lovely family, lovely people looking after us. We have most of our marbles and above all, we have each other.'"

Because of George's failing health, the couple did not travel much in recent times. "Until I came to Australia, I had not been on an aeroplane for years," says Lady Harewood. "People would say, 'Poor you', but I really didn't want to travel. George used to say that he was absolutely ready to die and I hated that. I'd say, 'Listen here, blessings to be counted. If we were not so well off we would be in an old people's home. But here we are in this beautiful house, lovely family, lovely people looking after us. We have most of our marbles and above all, we have each other.' And he'd say: 'I know all that!'" However, they both attended Prince Philip's 90th birthday in June 2011, a month before George died. "It was the last thing we went to together," says Lady Harewood. "The Queen and Prince Philip were extraordinary. Their strength and stamina. Of course, they were having a wonderful time which helps your adrenalin – but they're like that anyhow!"

George Lascelles inherited the Harewood estate when his father, the sixth earl, died in 1947 but it was beset by death duties and taxes. He sold off two-thirds of the land, leaving 5000 acres, and auctioned off various goods and chattels and several valuable paintings. Now Harewood House is on a solid business footing, managed by a trust and boasting a website that offers tours, shopping, art exhibitions, 100 acres of garden and even an "adopt-a-bird" scheme. "The male curassows at Harewood," notes the website quaintly, "have looped tracheas to increase sound resonance. They are forest birds and need their calls to be heard far and wide through dense forest."

It has been eight years since Lady Harewood was in Melbourne and, driving back from a lunch with friend and former model Diane Masters, there was scarcely a building she recognised. "We realised, to our horror, that we had first met in 1947," says Lady Harewood, who was enrolled at age six at Toorak's Loreto Mandeville Hall school but was withdrawn two days later because she was considered too delicate. "I had governesses after that and it was not until I was 12 and we moved to New Zealand that I first went to school. My education was patchy."

Her marriage to George opened her eyes to sport. He was a long-time president of the Football Association and Lady Harewood says she took to the game immediately. "George was president of the English Football Association when we won the World Cup," she says, "and also when we lost it in Mexico." However, cricket was another matter. On the second day of one match, Lady Harewood had The Times crossword inside her scorecard – but the ardour grew and she is a proud patron of the Yorkshire Cricket Club. "To my surprise," she says, "I have become something of a sporting icon there."

Now, approaching her ninth decade, Lady Harewood is kept busy with family, both in England and Australia. It has indeed been an amazing life so far, one that reads like a movie script. "But if you have lived it," she says, "you don't really realise until someone says so."