

# Town & Country

Queensland

## A golden era of travel for outback girl

By **PENELOPE ARTHUR**

**I**T was a time when air travel was still regarded as glamorous. A time before body scanners and security regulations when only the rich, famous and fortunate saw the world from the sky.

A time when the stewardesses were considered the supermodels of the day – when being a stewardess earned you instant respect and opened doors to possibilities never dreamed possible.

For a young girl from outback Queensland, an opportunity to join one of the world's greatest airlines during this golden time of air travel was life-changing.

It saw her spend 13 years in London and allowed her to see the world and meet some famous characters along the way.

Years later, Libbie Escolme-Schmidt has put her experiences down on paper along with the recollections of hundreds of other “girls” from that era.

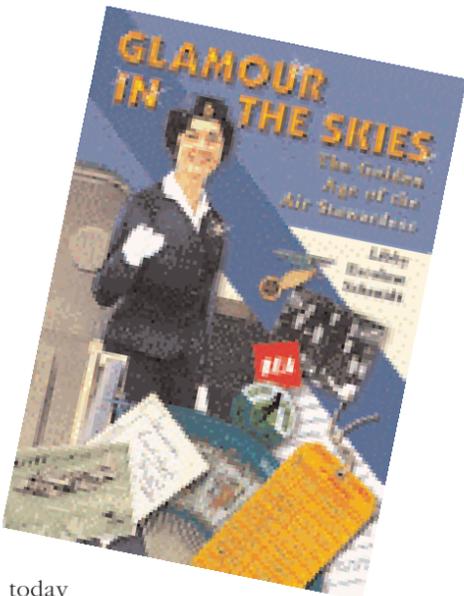
Titled *Glamour in the Skies*, Libbie's book is packed with many anecdotes, ranging from administering oxygen to passengers flying over the Andes, to serving French champagne on Concorde.

Covering training, sexual discrimination, disasters, passengers, glamorous stopovers and other temptations, *Glamour in the Skies* presents the changing times in air travel through the eyes of the stewardess and offers the perfect tribute to the girls who walked the skies.

Now living in Brisbane, Libbie says her book is a celebration of a time in air travel that no longer exists.

“The book is a history of British Airways stewardesses from the 1930s to 1980 when the jumbos came along and changed the face of travel forever,” she said.

“It is not meant to be a comparison to



today because that kind of travel just doesn't exist any more.

“This was a time when we offered guests a cigarette after taking off and we carved the roast right in front of the passengers – you wouldn't be allowed on a flight with a knife now.”

Libbie grew up at Cunnamulla where her mother practised as one of Queensland's first female pharmacists and her father worked as a grazier.

The family moved to Toowoomba where Libbie completed her education at The Glennie School before heading off to university to study education.

Libbie's adventurous spirit was evident even at a young age, taking her to Papua New Guinea where she spent her first year teaching.



Libbie Escolme-Schmidt is now living in Brisbane.

Libbie said her father promised he would match any savings she made that year to help her achieve her dream of travelling the world.

“I can still remember Daddy's chair scraping on the floor as he reached to get his cheque book when I told him how much I had saved,” she said.

“Three weeks later I was off to London.”

Not long after arriving in London, Libbie decided to apply for a stewardess position with the British Overseas Airways Corporation (BOAC), later to become known as British Airways.

It was 1964 and around 1000 girls a week were applying for 10 precious positions.

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# Stewardesses tell stories of the skies

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"I think I was fortunate because it was a time of major expansion with the wonderful 707s coming on line in air travel," she said.

"Everything in life is just timing."

Much of the time Libby was working as a BOAC stewardess was spent in first class.

Most of her work was on round-the-world flights visiting places such as New York, Montreal, Toronto and Hong Kong.

She said it was an exciting time to be working with an airline because many of the superstars of the day used commercial flights.

"We had all the pop groups like the Beatles but I particularly remember a few like the wonderful actor Trevor Howard who was just like he was in *Brief Encounter*," Libbie said.

"I also had Rod Steiger and Sir David Frost many times as he flew back and forward from London to New York doing his show.

"Another thing I really remember about that time was the old captains who were all mostly ex-war pilots.

"They were wonderful pilots who had flown bombers and spitfires.

"They had a true feeling for what they were doing and knew how to 'sniff the air' as we used to say in those days."

After several years as a stewardess, Libby moved to middle management with BOAC – a job that put her feet on the ground in London for another decade.

It was then that her adventurous spirit took hold once more and she moved back to Australia to marry a grazier from Wyandra in western Queensland.

While she loved her time at Wyandra, Libbie said she yearned for her life in London.

"I think when you go from public life where you are in the midst of all that to somewhere isolated like Wyandra it's a bit of a culture shock," she said.

"I missed the job enormously."

When her children headed to boarding school, Libbie moved back to Brisbane and soon after launched a management consultancy business.

She spent 20 years running her business providing management skills to professional women, all the time drawing on her experiences from the BOAC.

"That was a great self-development period for me and when I started tapering back my work in the last few years I started to think about the book," she said.

"I spent over three years researching – sending out hundreds of surveys to women who had worked as stewardesses during that period."

Libbie said the many hundreds of women who returned their surveys spent hours providing valuable information and recollections from their time in the skies.

"I really wrote it because some of the ladies are now in their 80s and 90s and I knew that if I didn't get their stories I was going to lose



them forever," she said.

"My eldest lady is 92 – it is amazing but they recall the past far better than the present."

*Glamour in the Skies* was released in England in May last year to huge acclaim.

It is now available in Australia through all Mary Ryan bookstores or online at amazon.com



The Felicity's Wish Foundation committee will host a fundraiser on February 5, at Cloudland in Brisbane. Pictured are family members Virginia Wilson, Rob Purcell, Gabe Byrnes, Damian Purcell and James Purcell.

## Felicity's Wish to help community

**F**ELICITY Purcell died in 2008 at just 33, after a year-long battle with breast cancer.

Yet her family and friends are ensuring her memory is not lost and helping those facing similar hardship, by creating the Felicity's Wish Foundation.

The foundation is hosting its second annual fundraising cocktail party, at Cloudland in Brisbane on February 5, at 7.30pm.

The event will be hosted in the Rainbow Room and features live entertainment and a celebrity auction. The cost is \$140 per person and includes canapés, bubbles, wine and beer.

The evening will also feature the release of the

song *I Miss You by Salty Dog*, written especially for the Felicity's Wish Foundation.

Felicity was a passionate young woman and the Felicity's Wish Foundation aims to continue that passion in the many avenues that were significant to her.

Felicity was born in Toowoomba, on February 5, 1975, the youngest child of Maurice and Coral Purcell, Texas.

After being educated in Toowoomba she undertook a Bachelor of Nursing at the University of Southern Queensland. Nursing became her career and passion.

Felicity began her career as

a paediatric nurse and as a result she was very enthusiastic about caring for sick children, working with community organisations and the many aspects of breast cancer. As a tribute to Felicity's commitment to her career, a bursary has also been established through USQ to be specifically directed to financially assist first-year nursing students originating from rural or remote areas. Bring a group of friends and support a great charity as the evening promises to be a wonderful night, with an array of fabulous live and silent auction items and great entertainment.

◆ For ticket information head to [www.felicityswish.com.au](http://www.felicityswish.com.au)

## Governor to give rural views

QUEENSLAND's 25th Governor, Penelope Wensley AO, has a strong and very personal connection to Rural Queensland. As the patron of AgForce's 'Every Family Needs a Farmer' campaign, Ms Wensley is promoting a better understanding of the critical role farmers play in our domestic food chain.

As a former diplomat, she is equally dedicated to improving the understanding of the role that Queensland farmers can play in the global challenge of eradicating hunger

and providing a reliable, 'clean and green' source of food for the rest of the world.

Ms Wensley was born in Toowoomba, her grandfather was a timber industry pioneer on the Atherton Tablelands, and her Nambour born husband Stuart McCosker, who obtained his first degree from Gatton College, is a veterinary surgeon. Her brother-in-law is the legendary long serving rural journalist Malcolm McCosker from *Queensland Country Life*.

Drawing on the knowledge

and insights gained from her long and successful diplomatic career representing Australia's interests internationally and promoting Australian exports, Ms Wensley will address the Rural Press Club on February 12.

The event starts at 11.45am with lunch at 12.15pm in the United Service Club, 183 Wickham Terrace, Brisbane. The cost is \$65/person, or \$480 for a table of eight.

◆ Book via the Rural Press Club website [www.ruralpressclub.com.au/event.cfm?event\\_id=56&page\\_id=3](http://www.ruralpressclub.com.au/event.cfm?event_id=56&page_id=3)

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