

VOGUE

AUG

THE AGE ISSUE

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love me do

In 1964, Penelope Rowlands's Beatlemania landed her in the pages of *The New York Times*, and got the attention of her distracted mother.

the band's hotels with other similarly obsessed girls. I've chased after autographs, any possible souvenir, including a square of fabric from John Lennon's boxer shorts that I bought for a dollar from an ad in a fan magazine. The thought that this might be a hoax crossed my mind, but only briefly. I knew for a fact that this cloth had once touched a Beatle's flesh. Somehow I could tell.

When I opened the *Times* and saw the photo, after school in my family's crowded apartment on Manhattan's Upper East Side, it could have been a thrill. But it distinctly wasn't. I prayed that my mother wouldn't see it, but no sooner was she home from her job at St. James's, our family church, than the phone rang with friends passing on the news. By the time my new stepfather—I couldn't bring myself to pronounce his name—came home to our apartment for the first time, I was well on my way to being grounded for the next 20 years.

It was the first day of their—our—new conjugal life. They'd headed off on their honeymoon the week before, leaving us children in the care of our maternal grandmother. Racing off to Bucks County, Pennsylvania, with a man we scarcely knew, my mother called out, "Be sure you don't go down to the Beatles' hotel while I'm gone!"

I ignored her, of course. I couldn't have done otherwise, for George Harrison was the most important person in my life. A photo that ran in *Vogue* in January 1964—their first mention in this magazine—shows him as he was then: 20,

jocular, glossy-haired. I fell in love with him in that image. I knew that George would understand me as no one else did—and that I would do the same for him. Loving him was more than just a feeling. It came with a future, a life. I'd imagine us making the scene together in Swinging London—the locus of everything that mattered then. I kept his picture in a cheap gold frame from Lamston's and kissed it every night.

To get to the hotel, I took the subway down to Times Square, then a tawdry area of sex shops and roaming sailors on leave. It felt illicit—indeed it was. With my mother and that man safely away, I was free to take my place among the

The article, written by Gay Talese, ran in the September 21, 1964, issue of *The New York Times*. Titled "Beatles and Fans Meet Social Set," it described how almost 4,000 "hysterical teenagers, who should perhaps have been home in bed or doing their homework," had gathered at the Paramount Theater in Times Square the night before. Arriving hours before the band was due onstage, they "screamed and squealed at everything."

A photograph shows a row of young women doing exactly that behind a banner reading, BEATLES PLEASE STAY HERE 4-EVER. The girls have an operatic look: They could be a row of divas, mouths open wide in song, arms flung dramatically wide.

I'm standing dead center in the photo, pushing forward, a frenzied expression on my face. I'm flat-chested, freckle-faced, and curly-haired—a very young thirteen. For months I've been screaming and squealing every chance I get. I've snuck into

BOWLED OVER
THE AUTHOR
FELL FOR GEORGE
HARRISON THE
MOMENT SHE SAW
PETER LAURIE'S
1964 PHOTOGRAPH
IN *VOGUE*.

TEENAGER IN LOVE

pack, my sisters in screaming, girls who, in my memory, look remarkably alike, with the straight hair I envied, ribbed poor-boy sweaters, and knee-high boots.

When I arrived, they were talking excitedly among themselves. John—someone was sure of it—had been sighted on the eighth floor. We stared up, and waited. Whenever we saw a shadow move or a curtain ripple, we'd shriek.

We'd been screaming together, all over New York, for the past six months. Just weeks earlier, we'd waited in a quiet frenzy at Forest Hills Tennis Stadium, where the brightly lit stage looked silvery in the humid late-summer night. When the Beatles walked out, four tiny stick figures in the distance, we rose as one. We heard only a chord or two. Mainly there was this enormous roar, and we were part of it. After 30 minutes or so, the figures retreated, the stage went black, and we emerged from our collective trance. I was hoarse for days.

SCREAM TEAM
THE PHOTO FROM THE NEW YORK TIMES FEATURING THE AUTHOR (CENTER, IN WHITE CARDIGANI) AND HER FELLOW FANS.



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His opinion counts for nothing, but I'm buoyed up just the same. "I can't believe Maurice Chevalier told you you were beautiful," my friend repeats all the way home on the Madison Avenue bus. But the best is yet to come. A day or so later—miraculously—I come

Why did we scream? In my case, it seems clear. My world was closing in, My American mother had brought us to New York from England, yanking us out of an unhappy marriage, just a few years before. And lately she'd become unrecognizable, sipping bourbon with her new husband every night in a ritual they called "the Cocktail Hour," and laughing at things that didn't seem funny at all. I'd slink past them, hoping not to be noticed, yet craving attention in a way that felt almost physically like pain. I'd head for my room, a shrine to the Fab Four, its walls covered with pictures from fan magazines (including my favorite, which offered an "A to Z on Gorgeous George"). Enveloped by the Beatles, in love with George, I was safe.

In my free time I roam the city in quest of one band or another. One Sunday, my best friend and I, waiting outside the Broadway theater where *The Ed Sullivan Show* is taped, find ourselves, anticlimactically, face-to-face with an elderly French singer. We ask for his autograph, but in truth we couldn't care less. Standing around us are girls wearing tweed caps over their long black bangs. With their black cycliner and Kabuki-esque makeup, they've got the Look, the one that I, in spite of my white lipstick and mod touches, never quite pull off. They don't look our way as we chat with this creaky Frenchman whom no one has come to greet. He signs his name twice, once for each of us, and when he's done he fixes me with a long stare. "You're beautiful," he says, with a twinkle in his eye that I later learn is legendary. "You're not like them," he adds, still twinkling, inclining his head toward the cluster of girls. And then he is gone.

across the lead singer of Gerry & the Pacemakers walking briskly with an entourage in the hallway of a midtown hotel. "Are you getting married?" I ask, falling in step beside him, in response to a rumor that's flashed among us girls. "If you'll have me," he teases, then steps into an elevator and disappears. I soar. Gerry is from Liverpool—our Mecca—and his "Ferry Cross the Mersey" is played every other minute on WABC radio. Joke or not, his proposal is valuable currency at school, where my life is deteriorating daily. I daydream through classes; my report card is a series of C's and worse. When I'm told I'll have to repeat a grade, it doesn't matter to me at all.

By the next summer, when the Beatles return, everything has changed. My mother has come back to Earth, and my stepfather, while never quite beloved, has at least been integrated into our lives. And I'm newly sophisticated. With my faux Courrèges dress, ivory tights, and matching white lipstick, I, too, have the Look.

Once again I take my place in the volatile crowd, this time at Shea Stadium. The ant-size figures emerge. They play "Can't Buy Me Love," but all we hear are the opening chords. I scream, but only intermittently. Suddenly, it all feels embarrassingly young.

Today, decades later, the Beatles are revered throughout the world. But they were never adored as directly, and as simply, as they were by us, the very first wave of Beatlemania, who chased them down streets and hotel corridors and drowned out just about every word they tried to sing. There were thousands of us, each one was unique, but the arc of our passion was the same. There was a time for us when the Beatles were everything. But then—as we had to—we moved on. □