ERIC SAID TO GEORGE, ‘I HAVE TO TELL YOU, MAN, I’M IN LOVE WITH YOUR WIFE’

She was married to George Harrison but obsessively pursued by Eric Clapton. Both would write songs about her; both would cheat on her. In a new documentary, Pattie Boyd reveals what it was like to be at the heart of music’s most toxic love triangle. Nina Myskow meets her...
said. ‘He’s not in my life any longer.’ He said, ‘That’s wonderful! Let’s go out tonight then!’ And they went out.”

Boyd was catapulted into the Beatles’ orbit in 1962. He said he wanted to go out for dinner, or to a club, we’d all go in a big group. Paul was just cute and adorable, and John had a great sense of humor.”

“John was great fun, if a little scary because you never knew what he might do. He’d say, he was fascinating, riveting, clearly the leader of the group. He never stopped talking, and he loved that he thought that I looked like Brigitte Bardot. He was very cool.” Did she have a fling with him? “No way! Cynthia [Lennon’s first wife] was a very sweet girl. I think when they moved from London to America, they decided to encourage her to come to London from their home in Surrey but she never really wanted to. She felt that she was too busy to be getting involved in the guys. We’d stay out all night and leave at dawn, and apparently I was the target for the drugs and drugs? Not so many drugs. We smoked dope, that was our big thing when they came over, but I smoked it too. Bob Dylan had turned them on to it.”

“It was natural cannabis and made us giggle. Whereas today people use skunk and it’s a downer. Very sociable. We were the opposite. It’s very different nowadays.”

They hung out with the Rolling Stones, all the rock and roll clubs: “Mostly, I found it very attractive but I would never have been a girlfriend of his. He’s not my type. Marianne [Faithfull] is more my type. She is a very, very strong woman, an alley cat, an outlaw girl, but great fun.”

Pauline, she continued, became a casualty, and lived on the street in Soho for two years, an anorexic junkie. How she continued to make music and become so unscathed? “Choice of drugs, when it comes down to it. It was harder to make music as hard as the Stones. I know John started taking heroin when he moved to New York, but they were basically a hard rock band. They were the nice boys.”

Beatles continued to be married in 1966. “I was happy apart from the realisation that I was married to one of the most famous men on the planet. I couldn’t get a job, I couldn’t even buy a dress. Some people hated me. They would write letters, ‘That horrible woman. I thought, ‘I’d love to have a baby’, but nothing seemed to be happening. I put it off because I knew that he was married.”

“Both of us being shy it was, on reflection, quite sweet being shy. I found him charming and very funny. I’d never heard a Liverpool accent before. At the end of the day he said, ‘Would you like to come out with me tonight?’

“I thought, ‘I’d love to have a baby’, but nothing seemed to be happening. I put it off because I knew that he was married.”

“Both of us being shy it was, on reflection, quite sweet being shy. I found him charming and very funny. I’d never heard a Liverpool accent before. At the end of the day he said, ‘Would you like to come out with me tonight?’

“I thought, ‘I’d love to have a baby’, but nothing seemed to be happening. I put it off because I knew that he was married.”

One day Harrison played a recording of a song he’d written for her. It was something. “Oh, yes, I just sort of sat down and I really didn’t have time to work.”

Frank Sinatra said it was one of the most heart-wrenching songs he’d ever heard. “I was sort of airy-fairy, and I would go along with it thinking, ’Oh, I love you so much’.

“Come take drugs? Yes, OK. Maybe that’s attractive to a creative man. Now I would have a louder voice, a stronger voice.”

And Harrison bought a huge estate, Friar Park, and married Barbara Bach. “It was his way of having his own record studio and music studio. It was not Idyllic. George became withdrawn and depressed. Sometimes I thought he was really in a bit of trouble.”

Into this scenario came Clapton, who fell obsessively in love with her. “We went out one night. The film shows how the triangle took hold. Boyd resisted until the day Clapton invited her to go and sit under a tree. He had played her Layla for the first time. "The song got the better of me," she confessed. She was with him for the first time. That night, they went to his manager Robert Stigwood’s party, which George had not wanted to attend. However, he turned up later, and it was at dawn that he came home.”

To Boyd’s horror, Clapton said, “I have to tell you, man, that I’m in love with your wife.”

“George, are you going to do anything?... you are going to do anything?... are you going home with him?... or are you going to make him happy at home with you.”

Eric was distraught. He shrank into a black hole of heroin for four years.”

“Nothing. No, George couldn’t give a damn, she says, summarily. Now, not long after this I saw the film last night that Eric knew that George was messed up around all the time. Had she known? “No, the film director, Lili Finzi Zamack, came here. She told me. I didn’t know why she had been so completely cut off at the end, because I knew who she was and it was right in front of me.”

The other woman, Barbara, was from Texas. She worked in a Manhattan apartment building. She offered me a drink. We had a drink. She grew up with Eric. In 1929, Clapton tracked her down to where she was staying with her sister in Los Angeles. “Come and join me on tour in America.” That’s what she wanted. I was amazed. My heart just burst with joy. Yes, I accepted. Yes, I was happy to break my promise to Barbara. We met in Crossroads Centre, a luxury rehab centre in Antigua. In the meantime, on her own after the divorce, Boyd had learned to make her own way with her music and support and no practical skills. “I wasn’t used on public transport for 30 years,” she said. “I had no money. I didn’t have a bean.”

She turned her hand to photography and has held several exhibitions, “I’m over the moon.”

And she and Weston, a property developer married in 2000, said, “It’s hard for me to explain, but that’s sort of like the same, all the time. The perfect love. It’s something I’ve never really realized before.”

In the past, there have been a lot of tears. “I cried so much I ran out of them. When George became a nightmare, and Eric became the opposite, I just didn’t know who I was. I thought, I’ll never be able to cry again in my life, and I don’t think I have. As long as you can cry, you don’t feel that you don’t care so much,” she says. “There is that great release of tension, of emotion, but you have to have a sense of humour.

“It would be nice to have a waist,” she goes on. “I don’t have one. I don’t have one. Why is she in tune with Clapton. ‘We text each other when we have news about friends. And he was very happy to see me last night. ’”

“Eric, I’ve never known Clapton. If I didn’t know if I was coming to London, I have to cancel. It’s a disaster.”

“I was weird watching our relationship on screen, knowing he was watching it. He’s a film buff, he’s had that connection that was always there. And I don’t want to be there... But I was once in such a state.”

What did she think of her younger self on screen? “I wanted to know if I’d seen it. Why is she seeing themselves looking pretty, dark and pretty, because I was in those days. But really...”

Clapton’s story is one of redemption and the power of love. “It’s the most wonderful love story. I have a happy life. I have a lovely husband, a beautiful daughter and a happy life.”

Even after he split with her, he always knew that he would always be able to talk to her. She would answer the phone. And she had only one child, a son. “I didn’t love, you see. With me, you see. You see? Do you have space for Clapton and me?”

And Eric not? “Eric loves himself. I don’t think there’s much room for me.”