

A Journey to Freedom

The days seemed to never end, just one after the other. The ship I am on is the Prince of Wales, a ship for convicts who were seen as animals. Eleven were sent months ago in hope that the new land will be a new beginning for some, but hardship for others.

I would be weary on the ship when storms seemed to thrash around us, the humid weather sticking and hot, the rain seeping in from above deck. I had a good friend though, someone who would try and have a laugh when we had them storms, names Elizabeth, call her Lizzy though. We would huddle together, creating wild stories as if we were our younger selves, with our rusty chains dangling from our hands and feet.

The stories made me yearn for my fam, for my ma, pa and two brothers that were grabbed in a house fire, the pain unbearable when it happened. I lost everything that night, with no relatives to run to for protection.

Lizzy lost her fam to scarlet fever, both of us having to live on the streets and survive on what we had, just to be caught for small crimes. Me, larceny. Lizzy, burglary.

But I had to, something the officials will never understand as I was sent to Old Bailey Jail, but now on the ship to a new land. Something I never expected.



Prince of Wales Convict Transport (Marine artist Frank Allen)



An engraving of the First Fleet in Botany Bay at voyage's end in 1788, from *The Voyage of Governor Phillip to Botany Bay*.^[43] *Sirius* is in the foreground; convict transports such as *Prince of Wales* are depicted to the left.

That was until one morning; I hear voices above deck yelling, “Land ho!” meaning finally, there is land. I was thrilled to finally get off the ship, yet a soldier walks below decks and yells, “you are all ordered to stay below decks until the first light of dawn tomorrow!” My smile drops as Lizzy squeezes my hand and laughs “finally!” which I could not help but grin to.

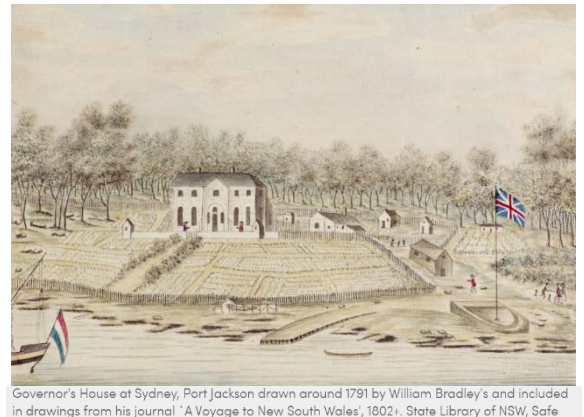
As the first light of day appeared, the soldiers came down, taking us into the fresh air, with our eyes to only see... a long piece of untouched land. There was nothing.... As we hit shore, I watch figures dart between trees as women are expected to make tents. I

look over at Lizzy, at a loss for words. “It’s just empty,” she said, confused by her own words, “empty,” even softly.

I see out of the corner of my eye, a small dark chocolate, naked boy observing me from behind a bush. I approach him cautiously, looking into his deep brown eyes, noticing a shallow and long scar on his upper arm. I reach out my hand, but “young lady, get away from that mongrel!” yells a soldier. I pull my hand away as the boy scatters into the trees towards four others, one having a deep and long diagonal scar on their back. I hear the sound of a sword and walk back to Lizzy head down. But as the day turned into dusk, I wondered why that mattered so much.

The next morning I lost Lizzy. It was a warm day as a soldier talked to us about domestic work, Lizzy responding with laundry, me sewing. My ma taught me as I watched her sew clothing for officials, a dream in my eyes that I wish to do, yet diminished as I was caught. He gestured to a tent for Lizzy and me, a canvas tent in front. But as he said those words, reality sank in. I grabbed Lizzy, holding her, as I yelled, “no, please, you can’t!” as Lizzy started to shout the same thing. It seemed then life slowed down, as the soldier in front grabbed me, ripping me from Lizzy while another snatched Lizzy as she thrashed and screamed. I watched her turn into a figure, as my cheeks were raw from tears.

My mind was racing as I moved from one tent to another, my eyes filling with tears, the pain heavy in my heart. As I was shown to a tent, I dropped to the ground and cried for hours, the tears rolling down the glass of a jar of buttons.



Governor's House at Sydney, Port Jackson drawn around 1791 by William Bradley's and included in drawings from his journal 'A Voyage to New South Wales', 1802. State Library of NSW, Safe

The next months were a blur from that day, with firstly being moved to a smaller working house near the Governors, taking the jar of buttons with me. The gruelling labour turned the house into a second prison, as my hands became fragile, my hunger for freedom growing and my love for sewing diminishing.

Smallpox, a disease spreading around Sydney Cove did not make life easier. It came fifteen months after we arrived, as news spread of it taking people by the dozens with seventy percent of the natives dying, me praying that the boy survived. We were ordered to stay inside, distant from the world as I learnt that people were covered in small red dots, or lesions, big blisters filled with pus, the disease making people look like dotted paintings.

It was fatal for a few long months, but the disease seemed to die down. However, the talk didn't. One morning I overheard the girls talking slurs of how the natives deserved to die, which made my blood boil. And before words escaped my mouth, I slapped the laundress so hard in the face, the sound rioted off the wall. I stood there shocked at what I did, until I was grabbed by a soldier and commanded to stay in my room with nothing for a day. When he walked out the room, I let the tears roll down my face while not regretting what I just did.

As the days went by, news from an official granted me trips to the blacksmith, to collect swords for soldiers. It was an opportunity of freedom, which on my first trip, allowed me to spot the boy running through the trees. I called out, hoping he would stop, which he did. He slowly walked towards me and handed me something cold to the touch, yet smooth and round. It was a stone, with a black fingerprint on it. I looked at him, happy to see him alive as he thrusts his hands open, expecting something. I reach into my pockets and fish out a button, a deep blue like the ocean. He looked at it, then at me, and spinned around me smiling and laughing, which I couldn't resist myself.

When I watched him walk away, I seemed happier. It started a friendship between us, a connection through our small gifts while on my blacksmith journeys. He was my friend, my escape from reality, a reality with catcalling, slurs, and being grabbed. The first time being grabbed, I punched the

person in the face and ran back to a working house I thought was safe, crying myself to sleep as the pain clawed at me.

I appreciated the joy he had, which distracted me from my horrible life. So then I started to sneak him bits of food, the first time giving him food confusing him, until he hands me a fish in return, something I wondered how I was going to fib about. However, consequences were met one night by a soldier. A sickening slap that left me crying in my room, broken and torn. I wanted to leave this life, to be free, but I was afraid.

One day though, I decided I wanted to give the boy a heart-warming gift, to show my gratitude of our visits. When we met further up the road, I handed him a basket of food containing flour, rice, bread and salted meat. His eyes lighted up as his friends came closer, baffled just like him. He handed me a massive fish with two fingerprint stones. As they were saying farewell to me, I looked at them, yearning for love and friendship. I decided then, I will escape tonight, or when I can. I will find him and live a life full of adventure and freedom, I just had to take a chance.

I smiled as I turned my back to him, walking as I “bang!” I stop, dead in my tracks. I drop everything and yell “no!” as I run to him, his lifeless body soaked in blood. My eyes capture a farmer, gun in hand, which makes my knees hit the ground and grab him close to me, his friends in shock. His blood was dripping down my clothes, my tears rolling down his face until I hear “young lady, get away from that mongrel!” yells a soldier. I look at his friends, desperate to take him away. They get the message. They grab my clothing, pulling me up and pushing me through the trees with soldier’s on our tail. I grab my scarf, putting it around his chest as the boys turn me down paths deep in the bush. Then they stop. I catch my breath, looking up to see a group of natives, one I notice with a deep scar on their back, and realised... this is his people.

They take him from my arms, their faces in agony as I stand there, looking at my hands covered in his blood, which makes my heart ache. I look at the riverbank, filled with stones the boy gave me, my tears never ending. Two women approach me, curiously looking at me, yet motioning towards the buttons in a small hole. The buttons I gave him, like treasure in his eyes. I nod my head, showing them a stone as they embrace me.

They walk away after a few minutes, leaving me with endless questions. A mistake by a farmer for stealing food thought to be his, something I did, yet not shot for. So why was I so different...? Was it because I was a European and not one of them...? Why...? Then I realised... We took their only land, slaughtered them like animals, treating them like pests as we took everything from them, giving only pain in return. I look over to watch the native’s starting a fire, digging a grave with tools I have never seen, and one grabbing animal skin from an overhanging tree. I took the opportunity to go up to the native, showing him a stone the boy gave him and before I knew it, I was given the skin, shown what to make and sat down to sew. I sewed with my heart, the bone like needle taking over my hands, the love returning.

Then I hear humming as the natives come together, two natives sliding the boy’s body into the grave, his body curled up in the soft dirt. A woman beckons me to come closer, taking the skin off me and laying it on the boy. As I come closer, the feel the warmth of the fire and a gentle song arise, as a woman each side of me grabs my hands, saying putuwà to me, something I wish to understand, but can feel. I felt connected to this ritual, as I watch two natives putting stone tools

inside the grave. I let my hands feel for a button, and show the women, who motion me to put it in. As I bent over his body, it felt right to give him one more treasure, a gift of friendship I wish continued. I whispered “goodbye” as I walked back slowly while red and yellow dust was sprinkled over him. I watched him being buried as sparks in the fire lifted into the sky. Then I told myself this... I will gain their trust, build a relationship with the natives, work with them, learn their language and explore with them. It may take a while to form a friendship, but I could wait until I earn their trust... I felt free and connected with them. I looked at the moon as tears rolled down my cheeks, alive and free.



Aboriginal people fishing and camping on Merri Creek. Tinted lithograph by Charles Troedel, 1864 from *Souvenir Views of Melbourne and Victorian Scenery*, Melbourne, 1865. Held in the La Trobe Collection, State Library of Victoria. Now in Public Domain. This copy scanned from 'Jack of Cape Grim' by Jan Roberts (1986)

Bibliography Annotations:

Bibliography:

The First Australians, Episode 1, “They have Come to Stay” SBS on Demand, First Episode Date, October 12, 2008.

Annotations: The video documentary explored the arrival of the First Fleet to Australia, and the conflict between the Aboriginals and Europeans during the first years.

Unknown. “Fact Sheet: Aboriginal Burials” www.aboriginalvictoria.vic.gov.au Unknown, Web. 3 August 2020. <<https://www.aboriginalvictoria.vic.gov.au/fact-sheet-aboriginal-burials>>

Annotations: It explains characteristics, traditions, how Aboriginal burials are produced, and facts about the importance and threat of Aboriginal burials.

Unknown. “The Eleven Ships” www.firstfleetfellowship.org.au 2013, Web. 3 August 2020. <<https://firstfleetfellowship.org.au/ships/eleven-ships/>>

Annotations: It explains the 11 different ship sent from England, and what each ship was called and used for.

Unknown. "Convicts" www.firstfleetfellowship.org.au Unknown, Web. 3 August 2020.

<<https://firstfleetfellowship.org.au/first-fleetfirst-fleet-convict-database/>>

Annotations: Gives the list of convicts who were on the First Fleet and information about age, occupation, ship allocation, name, crime/sentence, gender and outcome after their arrival to Australia.

Unknown. "1788" www.migrationheritage.nsw.gov.au 2010, Web. 3 August 2020.

<<http://www.migrationheritage.nsw.gov.au/exhibition/objectsthroughtime-history/ott1788/index.html>>

Annotations: It discusses information about the First Fleet and some details on the arrival to Australia.

Unknown. "First Fleet facts for kids" www.kids.kiddle.co 2020, Web. 3 August 2020.

<https://kids.kiddle.co/First_Fleet>

Annotations: The information talks about the First Fleet Journey, and the facts about what happened during the journey, and also states information about the arrival and initial start to this new colony by Europeans.

Unknown. "Smallpox Epidemic" www.nma.gov.au 2020, Web. 3 August 2020.

<<https://www.nma.gov.au/defining-moments/resources/smallpox-epidemic>>

Annotations: The information discusses the smallpox epidemic during the period in Australia, what happened, what it looked like and the effect it had on the Europeans and Aboriginals.