



# God bless dear Sid

By Katharine Wootton

**B**less This House and Carry On might be as synonymous with the Seventies as bell-bottom pants and Farrah Fawcett, but the legacy of these landmark comedies has definitely lived on, largely thanks to the enduring appeal of one man: Sid James. And one actress who worked with Sid across both these comedies is Sally Geeson, most memorably playing Sid's on-screen daughter, Sally, alongside Robin Stewart and Diana Coupland in Bless This House.

"I first met Sid at Thames Television – the place we called the fun factory because it was such a blast – when producer and director, William G Stewart introduced us to talk about

It's 40 years since we said farewell to comedy genius Sid James. Here Sally Geeson, who starred with him in Bless This House, shares her memories of the gentle star

a new TV series he was planning called Bless This House," says Sally. "I was expecting to meet this Carry On character. But Sid was the loveliest, sweetest man. He just stood up and said, 'Hello, Sal', and straight away we had a rapport that we knew would work.

"Sid was so different in life to many of his characters. He was a quiet, sophisticated man and while he wasn't a joker, he could see the funny side to every situation."

Sally tells how all 72 episodes of Bless This House were filmed in front

of a studio audience. "We'd all be introduced at the start. Every time Sid was announced, you felt the roof was going to come off the studio, people were cheering so much. Everybody loved and identified with him, especially in Bless This House where he was this dad and husband character."

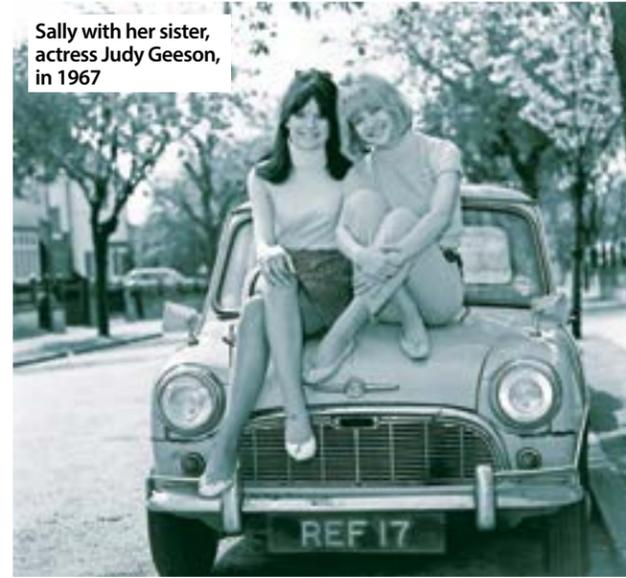
But while Sid loved the public affection, Sally says he was never a show-off. "When we filmed the outdoor scenes of Bless This House twice a year on location the whole area used to shut up shop to line the streets because they loved Sid. He didn't see himself as a celebrity, but just a working

actor like the rest of us. He definitely taught me that this is a job. Getting starry-eyed and affected doesn't work at all. You have to keep your feet on the ground. So he was a very stabilising influence for me."

Sally adds that he was also very serious about rehearsing. "He knew his craft so well and had this incredible ability to make it look completely natural, but it was seriously practised. He was a lot like Norman Wisdom in that way, who I worked with in the early days – a slick, professional performer, but a real natural clown."

As well as Bless This House, Sally worked with Sid again when she appeared in three Carry On films, once as a child and later in Carry On Abroad and Carry On Girls. "Me and my sister (the actress Judy Geeson) adored the Carry On films as children, so it was such fun to join something I'd grown up loving. The best thing about being part of it was that I felt so comfortable, because Sid was there. Funnily enough, despite him being such an icon, I never felt nervous acting around Sid as he was so kind. Because of his brilliant comedy timing, everyone around him had to learn how to do it as well to make it work and Sid would help us all with that. He was certainly a mentor to me."

Sally with her sister, actress Judy Geeson, in 1967



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When news broke in 1976 that Sid had died, aged just 62, after suffering a heart attack on stage at the Sunderland Empire Theatre Sally was heartbroken. "He was such a tonic. When he passed it was just terrible. He died so young – who knows what more he would have given us?"

For Sally, Sid gave her not just years of fun in her acting career and great friendship, he was also responsible for encouraging Bless This House

director, Bill, to ask Sally out on a date while they were filming the series. Not long after, the pair married and went on to have three children together, although they have since separated.

After Sid's death – just four days after the broadcast of the final sixth series – Bless This House came to an end. Sally left acting to pursue a new career working with children with special needs, but returned more

recently with roles in pantomimes and commercial work. But she'll always treasure her very special memories of the irreplaceable Sid James.

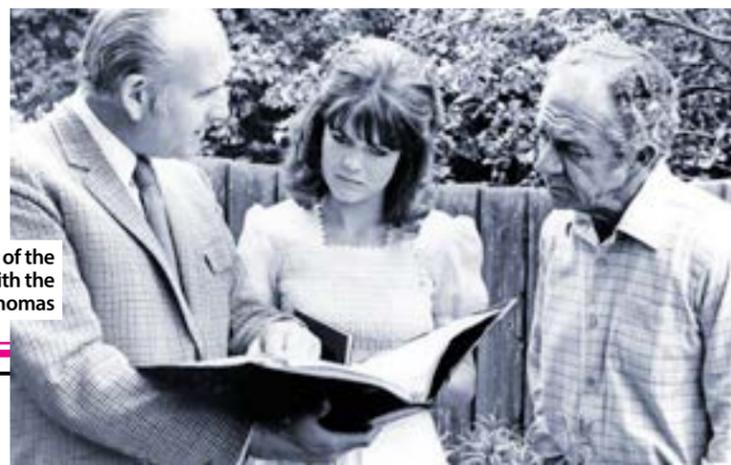


## THE SID FILE

- Solomon Joel Cohen, or Sid James as he would later become, was born in 1913 to Jewish parents in Johannesburg.
- Training as a hairdresser, he served as a lieutenant in an entertainment unit of the South African Army during the Second World War and moved to Britain immediately after the war.
- His first major comedy role was in The Lavender Hill Mob (1951) with Alec Guinness and Stanley Holloway but his big break came working on the BBC Radio series, Hancock's Half Hour



- Sid made 19 Carry On films, usually playing a wise-cracking cheeky chappy, with that trademark laugh.
- He was married three times and had four children – Elizabeth, Reina, Stephen and Susan.



Sally with Sid on the set of the film of Bless This House, with the film's director Gerald Thomas



■ Carry On – The Ultimate Collection, rrp £49.99, is distributed by ITV Studios Global Entertainment and is available now on DVD and Digital Download.

■ Two new Carry On films, Carry On Doctors and Carry on Campus, are set for release in 2017, to mark the 25th anniversary of the last film.



Sally looking back at some photos of her and Sid from the Seventies