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Sally Geeson (second from right) with the cast from *Bless This House*, (from left) Peter Butterworth, June Whitfield, Sid James, Carol Hawkins, Robin Askwith, Diana Coupland, Terry Scott and Patsy Rowlands

Sally's comeback

The *Bless This House* star **Sally Geeson** had a string of television and film roles in the 1960s and 1970s but left the limelight behind to concentrate on motherhood. Now she plans to return to acting

Beautiful and bubbly, Sally Geeson was perfect for the role of the innocent girl-next-door in TV sitcoms such as *Bless This House*, in movies and on the stage.

The actress, who was born in West Sussex, became a household name in the 1960s and 1970s as she won roles in movies such as *Carry on Abroad* and *Carry on Girls*, and appeared in a series of TV plays before starring as Sid James' daughter, also named Sally, in the long-running television sitcom *Bless This House*.

When the series ended in 1976 following Sid James' death, she faded from the public gaze to concentrate on motherhood.

But now Sally is planning to return to acting. "I'd never really given up," she says. "During school holidays, I continued to keep my hand in with acting, with voiceovers and DVD commentaries. I really love being back in acting and would love to get a role in a comedy TV series."

Now 65, Sally began her acting career at the age of seven. Born in Cuckfield, she is the younger sister of the actress Judy Geeson, the star of films including *To Sir, With Love* (1967) with Sidney

Poitier, *10 Rillington Place* (1970), with Richard Attenborough and John Hurt, and *The Eagle has Landed* (1976), with Michael Caine, Donald Sutherland and Robert Duvall. Judy moved to Los Angeles in 1984 and will appear in the US horror movie *31*, due to be released this year.

Their parents had lived in Littlehampton during the war, where their mother worked in the library, and then Burgess Hill, before the family moved to Barnes in South West London when Sally was seven.

The sisters were enrolled full time at the ages of seven and nine in the Corona Academy Stage School, where their contemporaries included the actresses Susan George and Francesca Annis, and Robin's Nest star Richard O'Sullivan.

Growing up, Sally was cast in films, television plays and commercials, making an appearance at the age of 14 in TV's *Armchair Mystery Theatre*. Tall and slim, she also modelled, posing for the iconic Sixties fashion photographer David Bailey and the society photographer Patrick Lichfield in stylish locations including London's Carnaby Street.



Sally Geeson/
Picture:
Helen Jones

During what she describes as "exciting years", Sally was cast opposite Norman Wisdom in the 1969 film *What's Good for the Goose*, followed by *The Oblong Box* and *The Cry of the Banshee* with Vincent Price and Christopher Lee, and *Mr Forbush And The Penguins* with John Hurt. On television, she appeared in *Strange Report* with Anthony Quayle and in the BBC police drama series *Softly, Softly*.

"I was a child actress for a long time – and in every commercial going," says Sally, who now lives in Surrey. "I was in toothpaste commercials for Pearl Drops and for Head & Shoulders shampoo – I had one of those faces that was little girly and young. I was the advert girl, while Judy did an awful lot of television."

"There was a lot of television work going in those days and we would just go from one production to the other, bumping into the same familiar faces all the time. We were working actors and earning a living, and we were all friends. We all knew each other and would meet going from job to job. It was a very social life, a celebrity life not like today."



Sally Geeson with Norman Wisdom in *What's Good for the Goose* in 1969

"As far as I'm concerned, I had a great time." It was in 1971 that Sally was cast in *Bless This House*, the ITV sitcom starring Sid James as a travelling stationery salesman. Married to Jean, played by Diana Coupland, the couple struggled to understand their teenagers, Mike (Robin Stewart) and Sally. It ran for six series until the death of Sid James in 1976, with Sally also appearing in the film version of the series as well as two *Carry On* films during its run.

"When I first met Sid, he was very well dressed and such a laidback sophisticated man," recalls Sally. "I thought, 'Wow – I was not expecting that'. He did have this boyish charm and was quite a giggler. And he did not like swear words."

Bless This House was produced by William G Stewart, who would go on to host the Channel 4 gameshow *15 to 1*, and he and Sally married in 1976.

"I took a break from acting to concentrate on motherhood," says Sally, who has three children, Barney, now 38 and working for an advertising company, Hayley, 35, and a

doctor in Chichester, and 27-year-old Chris, who works in the City. "There was a two-year period when we lived in Sydney, Australia, coming back to London in between, and when we came back to London, I carried on being a mum, acting occasionally."

"Our parents moved to Brighton, so we visited Sussex all the time."

Sally's marriage to William ended in 1986, and in 1993, she made a completely different change in direction and began a career in education, training to work with children with special needs, including children with autism and Down's syndrome.

"I thought I would do that for a short time," says Sally, who has one grandson. "But I did it for 15 years. It was a challenging job and I grew to love it. I found it immensely happy and rewarding."

During school holidays, Sally kept her hand in with acting, voiceovers and DVD commentaries for films she had appeared in, and made personal appearances. She also supports Cancer Research UK, and appears in a video single along with other singers, actors



Sally Geeson in 1974



Sally's sister, the actress Judy Geeson

and representatives from the charity, with all proceeds going to the charity.

But Sally left education in 2012 following an accident and returned to acting in 2013, appearing as the Good Fairy in Bill Kenwright's production of *Beauty and the Beast* at The Theatre Royal, Windsor. She also became brand ambassador for Anglian Home Improvements, appearing in their TV commercials and performing voiceovers.

"I'm waiting to see what happens now," says Sally. "I would love anything that came along. I'm open to ideas."

● **To find out more about Sally Geeson, visit sallygeeson.com.**