

# NEVER A STEP TOO FAR

“THERE WAS SUCH  
A GREAT FEELING  
OF BEING ME  
WITHOUT IT  
BEING A SECRET.”



Sally's story is sixty-eight and a half years long – and, so far, it's been one hell of a wild ride with the best yet to come...

There was a moment, eleven years ago, when Sally contemplated suicide. Before she can tell that part of her story, we need to go back along the journey that led to the time where she found herself alone and thinking too much about the possibility of taking her own life...

It all began in a conservative, suburban Melbourne household in the fifties. “My first recollection of dressing was age five. I used to get sprung all the time, but within the family it was a huge secret.”

**WARNING:** This story contains themes of suicide. If this raises issues for you, call Lifeline on 13 11 14



When Sally dressed, she totally relaxed. “It wasn’t just something to do, I actually felt my body release all tension.” So, it was a need, not a fantasy. Her sister would tell their Mum that stuff had gone missing and her Mum would say that she would search her brother’s room. “Mum would find the stuff, acknowledge to me that she’d found it, wash it, put it back in my sister’s room, repeat, repeat, repeat. That was just that never-ending cycle.”

With no internet or mobile phones, she was totally cast adrift. “I thought I was completely alone. I’d ask myself: ‘Am I the only person on the planet who is doing what I am doing?’ It was just a huge secret because we were all so isolated.”

In the 1970s, Sally says she turned “absolutely wild”. It was all about excessive alcohol, excessive drugs, excessively fast cars and excessively loud music. “The 1970s pub scene was unbelievable, you would be so close to the speaker box and you didn’t care.” Between 1970 – 1975 she did not dress once. “I was party central because it provided the release I craved from dressing.”

She danced close to the edge. “I don’t know where I went, but it was so far into the dark. I wasn’t really there, but I was doing some crazy stuff – alcohol, partying and drugs. On reflection I wasted a lot of money.” All in the name of blocking out her true feelings.

She drifted towards Torquay and ran with a wild, reckless crowd. “We used to get absolutely rat-shit faced on cocaine, jump on skateboards, bare feet, no helmets, no protection, wearing just a pair of board shorts and scream down the hills for fun. It wasn’t a death wish, just no sense of fear.” Those years dissolved in a blur and haze of drugs, alcohol, parties and fast cars. Despite her best efforts to numb her feelings, nothing changed internally – she still had her secret need to dress.

“My recklessness wasn’t to finish myself, it was to totally erase part of my life. I now have lots of friends who say the same thing, that they wiped out a number of years for their need to dress. That was life, that was no dressing, that was covering up the huge secret.”

The next chapters of her story include toning down the reckless behaviour a

little, two marriages and two children. Each wedding brought the hope that she had found her ‘place’, but each time the relationship failed. As her second marriage was coming to an end, she also lost the management position she enjoyed.

“I was forced to go on Newstart and that doesn’t pay a mortgage, it hardly pays for

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## “I WAS ALONE IN A STRANGE TOWN, I KNEW ABSOLUTELY NO ONE AND DIDN’T HAVE A CLUE WHAT TO DO.”

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food, a packet of smokes and six cans a fortnight. So, I got a foreclosure notice on the house and just said: ‘See you later, I’m gone.’”

Across the twists and turns of her life, she made her way to Bass Coast in 2006, found some work and began a course in disability studies.

“I was comfortable with myself and with my huge secret, but I was alone. During the course, I became quite comfortable with a few people and thought there was even one I might tell about my dressing.”

She started drinking and dressing to relieve the tensions that were building up from her busy job and spending too much time alone thinking.

“I was alone in a strange town, I knew absolutely no one and didn’t have a clue what to do.”

In desperation, she sought help from the local council and health service websites, but they added to her despair.

“Their websites had absolutely nothing about diversity or Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer (LGBTIQ), and if you’ve got nothing there in the two major organisations in your town, you just collapse.”



This is where the contemplation commenced. “I started thinking about suicide. I had the means – I just hadn’t worked out the where and when.”

Fortuitously, her course also covered a 30-hour module on mental health and one of the days was focussed on suicide. “So, I was sitting there thinking hang on, tick, tick, tick, oh shit here I am. Because of that course, I knew I had to find help.”

Fate and her sister lent a hand. “In the 1970s, my sister worked for a printer and they did some work for a group called Seahorse Victoria who are the longest standing transgender support group in Victoria. She kept asking me why I didn’t think of going to Seahorse. I had said that I

didn’t need to but then, all of a sudden, there I was saying: ‘Oh shit, I really should contact Seahorse.’”

She sent an email and, on June 27 2009, the day after her fifty-eighth birthday, she went to Melbourne and met with Seahorse.

“I remember getting ready, shutting the door from the outside and thinking: ‘Hey, this is cool.’ I was ready. In all my fifty-eight years, I had never been out the front door, or in public with this huge secret.”

The meeting was a success and progressed to public outings with others and then on her own. “There was such a great feeling of being me without it being a secret.”



At a party on Christmas eve, she was enjoying a conversation with a friend about life, being yourself and the journey. Her friend noted that steps she had taken to get to where she was were exactly where Sally was at.

"I said to her straight out: 'On my sixty fifth birthday, which is two years, six months away, I will live as myself. I set that goal date. The year before I retired, in 2016, I started living as Sally full time other than when I was at work – I still worked as a guy up until my birthday. But it was like – two-Nurofen-just-to-be-able-to-put-on-my-work-shirt sort of stuff."

Why did she wait so long to come out? "Because it was my time and I had to take it step by step by step. It's a big journey."

So, on her birthday, 'he' disappeared, and Sally turned up. She changed her name and hasn't looked back.

Sally's key message based on her lived experience of suicide is to talk about it and find your support networks.

"I think we all need to be aware that not enough is spoken about suicide, so we need to be talking about it a lot more. So, if you're contemplating suicide, get support and talk.

## RESOURCES

**Seahorse Victoria Inc** was formed in 1975 as a support and social group for the Victorian transgender community and is the longest running organisation of its type in Australia. – [www.seahorsevic.com.au](http://www.seahorsevic.com.au)

**Transgender Victoria (TGV)** is Victoria's leading body for trans and gender diverse advocacy. We work to achieve justice, equity and inclusive service provision for trans and gender diverse people, their partners, families and friends. – [www.tgv.org.au](http://www.tgv.org.au)

**TRANSCEND** provides parent/carer support, community connection, information, advocacy and fundraising. – [www.transcendaus.org](http://www.transcendaus.org)

**South Coast Inclusion Network (SCIN) Inc.** advocates for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Intersex and Queer (LGBTIQ) people and culture to be acknowledged, affirmed, supported and celebrated. – [www.scin.org.au](http://www.scin.org.au)

**Magic Five Film** – [www.scin.org.au/magic5](http://www.scin.org.au/magic5)

## "SOMETHING MAGIC HAPPENS WHEN YOU HAVE FIVE SUPPORT PEOPLE – YOU WILL SURVIVE."

Even if it's just about the weather and the veggie patch at first, it's talk and eventually the conversation will work its way around to speaking about how shit you feel."

"A great friend and mentor said that if you are LGBTIQ and you tell one person, you'll struggle on, if you've got two people you're better off, when you get to five, something magic happens, when you get to five you will survive."

And Sally is living proof that this is true. Her "magic five" people are key to her life and help her to thrive and support many others, especially in her LGBTIQ community – one that makes up 15% of the population.

"Get the help you need, because like myself, there is a great future. You can survive it all because you've got the lived experience to get through it. I'm a sixty-eight-and-a-half, crazy old chick enjoying life. I've been public speaking to help others for nine years now, sharing my story – not bad for an introvert!"

**#storiesstrong**

## WHO TO CONTACT

**Lifeline 13 11 14**

**Switchboard Victoria  
[LGBTIQ support] 1800 184 527**

**Wellways 1300 111 500**

**Emergency 000**

This article is part of the #storiesstrong suicide prevention campaign which highlights a series of twenty articles developed by a diverse range of people with lived experience of suicide and experts in the field.

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For more information visit [www.gphn.org.au](http://www.gphn.org.au)

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