

# The Healing Power Of Nature



Sally (left) and best friend Rosie

## After years of suffering debilitating back pain, Sally found a way to transform her wellbeing

**W**hen Sally Nye from Cambridge hit rock bottom and her friend, Rosie, took her out for a walk, she had no idea of the impact this simple action would have on her life.

Sally's symptoms began when she was 18 and studying for her A-levels, when she suddenly felt an excruciating pain in her leg. It turned out to be a slipped disc, which she treated with physiotherapy.

Then seven years later, shortly after moving in with

her now husband, Dan, she felt her back go.

"I woke up one day and I couldn't bend, my back was like concrete," she recalls.

Sally underwent various tests and saw different osteopaths and chiropractors. She even went on a back pain management course, but the pain didn't subside.

"The advice was to stay active, exercise gently and eat healthily – I was doing all those things, but it wasn't responding," she says.

If she stood up for any length of time, she would be in agony and would take her a week to recover.

Her job as a geography teacher at a secondary school became increasingly difficult, yet she didn't want to give it up. She wanted to get married and get on with her life.

Sally lived with back pain for five years. Then in 2006, a scan finally revealed the cause – she had a prolapsed disc which was impinging on the nerve in her leg and



After a fruitful day gardening





needed urgent surgery.

While it was a relief to get a diagnosis, she was getting married in three weeks, so the surgery was postponed and she had an epidural to enable her to walk down the aisle.

"I remember wearing heels and trying to walk nicely," she recalls. "By the evening, my back was really bad."

To her joy, the operation was a success and Sally went on to have three children, Archie, Effie and Flora.

Then in 2014 her symptoms returned. This time, the pain was on a whole new level.

"I was walking down a hill. I put one foot forward and I'll never forget it; the pain through my legs was awful," she says.

Sally could no longer walk or stand up straight and had no option but to give up her job.

"I had three young children, aged seven, five and three, I felt

The charity makes good use of surplus seeds



fusing her back and sacroiliac joints. The surgery to fuse her spine left her in so much pain, she had to have it done again nine months later, then a third time three days later.

The pain, pressure and expectation she felt as a mum was overwhelming.

"In 2019, I was suicidal and ended up having to go to a psychiatric hospital," she says.

feel better," recalls Sally.

In 2019, Sally had a spinal cord stimulator implanted into her spinal column which worked by blocking pain signals. It not only alleviated a lot of the pain, it gave her hope. She was able to do more with her children and, inspired by Rosie, she began spending more time in her garden. As the weeks went on, Sally realised

support each other in their mental and physical wellbeing.

Together with Rosie they created the charity Cultivating Change, donating hundreds of bundles of veg and flower seeds to individuals, families, schools, charities and community allotments.

The response was amazing.

"So many people struggle with mental health or chronic pain. I want to show them the positive impact being outside in nature can have. I want to give people hope," she says.

One of her happiest moments was finding two people who lived in the same street and the charity connected them.

Sally is also hoping to inspire future generations and has drawn on her teaching skills, leading workshops and assemblies in schools.

Although Sally suffers back pain every day, she has learned how to manage it and her focus now is helping others.

"Rosie saved my life so now, to be running a charity together is quite special," she says. "You never know where life can take you, so you should never give up on it." MW

## "So many struggle with mental health or chronic pain. I want to give people hope"

my life was over," she says. "I couldn't drive them to school or do their tea, it was really hard. I had amazing support from family and friends, but I felt like I'd lost my purpose."

Between 2015 and 2019, Sally underwent seven major back operations, including

"I struggled massively with anxiety and depression and found it hard to see a future."

Her old school friend, Rosie, visited regularly and took her out in the wheelchair.

"She'd always say, 'Come on, we're going out' because she knew it would make me

the more time she spent outside, the better she felt.

"I started walking up the road to the trees and the pond, going a bit further each time," she says. "Just being able to walk and get out gave me such a sense of achievement. It helped put everything into perspective."

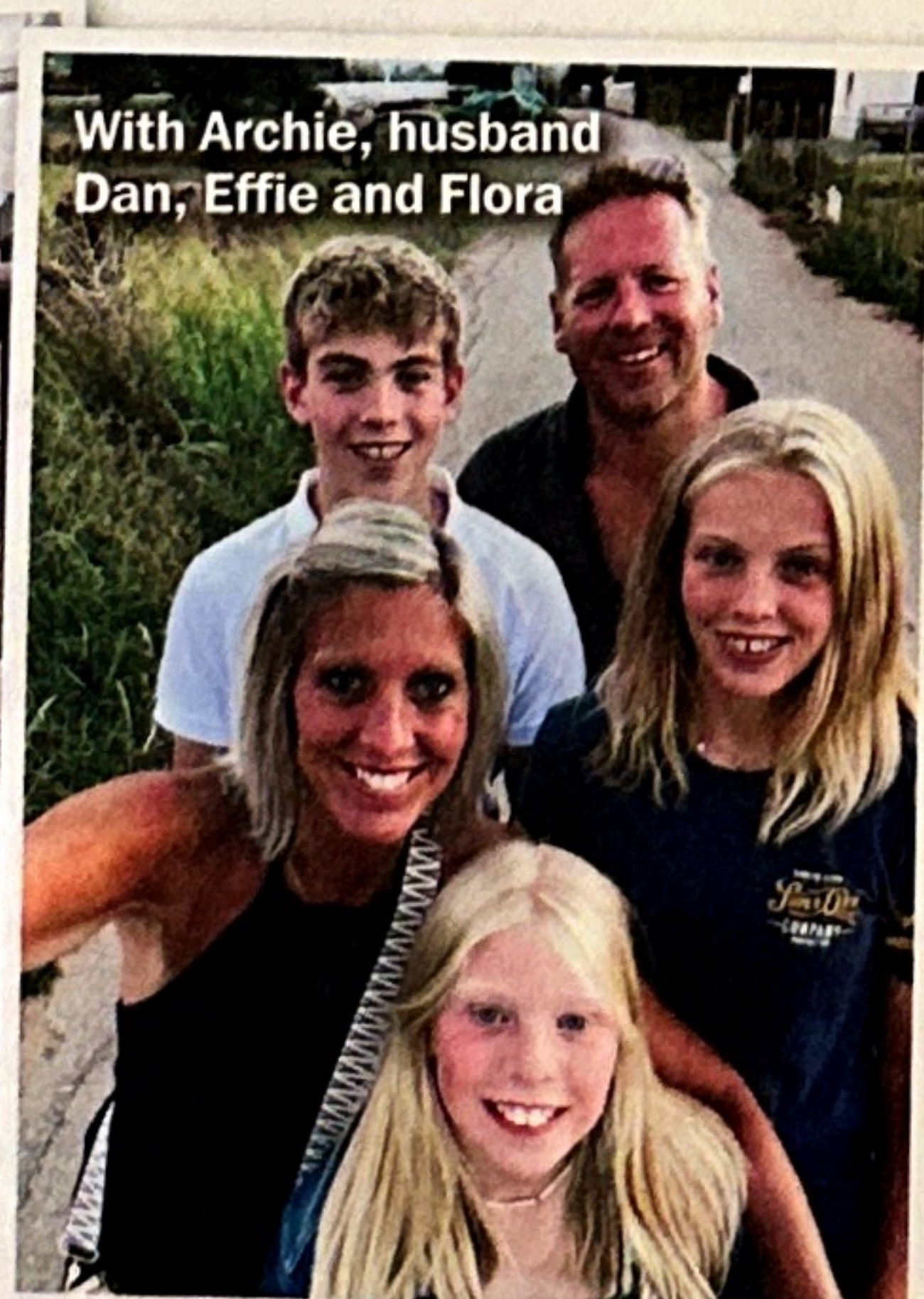
Realising the impact of the great outdoors on her wellbeing, Sally wanted to share her experience and support others.

Her husband, Dan, runs a seed company, and when Sally found out there were a lot of good quality seeds going to waste, she came up with an idea – to create a community of growers across the country, who could share their stories of success and failure and

◆ **Cultivating Change is a Cambridgeshire-based charity that provides seed donation to support mental health and wellbeing.**  
cultivatingchange.co.uk



Days out with a wheelchair



With Archie, husband Dan, Effie and Flora