

Sally, Sex and the Suburbs

Happily married and a mother of two, Sally Harris gave up a career in nursing to act out explicit sexual fantasies on her own website. Clever girl.

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On a Wednesday evening last month, a 35-year-old woman called Sally Harris put on the following clothes: pale pink suit, little skirt, cream lace-top hold-ups, a see-through white chiffon blouse, silver bra and silver thong. At 10pm, she moved to the computer in the corner of her bedroom, put on a microphone headset, turned on her digital camera and prepared to share her sex-life with an anxious world.

Most Wednesdays there's a theme, and tonight's was Flirty Secretary Goes For Job. She put on some borrowed glasses. She began to speak, and blew kisses to her camera. 'Feeling ever so horny today, have been all day,' she said. Her internet audience typed back their enthusiasm, and told of their plans for the weekend. Sally's responses were punctuated with encouragement and laughter, and occasional flashes of her stocking tops. Then she said, 'Shall I tease you, G? Shall I come and work in your office?' Not long after this, events began to take their natural course. 'I have done webcam without getting anything out,' she tells me the next day in the front room of her small north-west London semi. 'Though obviously the majority of the time it does get horny. Actually, it is very rare that I don't get undressed. Being watched turns me on big-time, which is why I do it. Last night, I took my jacket off, took my blouse off, kept my skirt on, took my knickers off, took my bra off. I had a request for a specific toy, but I got three out.'

Webcam night usually lasts from 10pm to 11pm, but last night she found it hard to shut down until 11.30 pm. 'I passed the interview,' she says. 'In fact, I got offered several jobs.'

Sally Harris has been doing these internet broadcasts for well over a year, but they are only a part of her busy nocturnal adventures. Her website offers an internet chat session four nights a week, and features a great many pictures and descriptions of sex sessions with her husband and their friends. On the first of these pages, she has composed a manifesto, an introduction to what she calls her Diary of a Sex Kitten. 'I'm not a porn star or a model,' she writes. 'I'm just a girl with a healthy sexual appetite who wants to share my experiences and learn by yours... People should be free

to explore their own sexuality without the fear of negative stereotyping or social exclusion... I have always had a very liberated attitude to sex and don't believe in setting myself boundaries (apart from consent, of course). Whatever experiences you've had, your desire to have free uninhibited passion and explore and fulfil some of your fantasies will be respected here.'

It's a commercial concern. To chat with Sally and watch the live broadcasts you have to become a member, and there are several payment options. You can join for a day or a month or six months, and you can pay for your site password by cheque or premium-rate phonecall, but the most popular route is the monthly credit-card payment of \$19.99, processed by a company in Florida. Sally says that if she could run the service for free, she would, but fast internet bandwidth costs \$150 a month, and then there's all the software and the new outfits and stockings to consider, not to mention the cost of keeping her two children in Frosties and Adidas.

Recent fantasies have included dressing as a waitress, Lara Croft and a devil for halloween. A few weeks ago, after several requests from members, she also dressed as a nurse. She felt a little uncomfortable with this. Sally was a nurse for 14 years, first with the NHS and then privately, but she gave it up because of low pay, high bureaucracy, poor morale and a pager that went off all through one Christmas. For a while, she set up her own local community care company, but abandoned it when the lure of exhibitionism proved greater. 'The choice was, do I go around north-west London bathing 80-year-old people for the rest of my life, or do I earn a living from something I really enjoy and do anyway?' Only dressing as a nurse for the webcam left her with mixed emotions: it drove the guys wild, she tells me, 'but I found it slightly difficult to feel like a sex kitten in it and to resist going round taking temperatures and plumping up their pillows.' She grew up in Hertfordshire, enjoyed ballet, did well at school, and after basic nurse training specialised in isolation work and tropical medicine. She took a break to have her children, now aged eight and 10, and returned to work as a matron in a nursing home. She derived great satisfaction from one-to-one and terminal care, but felt swamped by the ceaseless demands of management and inadequate budgets. One skill in particular she would later put to a different use: 'I think because of my nurse's training, I feel I'm able to talk about anything to anyone.'

She met her husband, Jon, when they were both at school, and the two have been a couple for 17 years. He's had a number of jobs - video and CD distribution, a juggling and kite business - and recently graduated from the London School of Economics with a degree in economic history. He helped Sally establish her community care company at the same time as he was registering several internet companies, including one called NaturalSex (primarily because he considered it a marketable name). He'd been on the

internet since 1995, and found he was drawn to 'swinger' and amateur sites run on a non-exploitative basis; the more real the sex, the more attractive they became.

'Eventually, I got enough confidence to go up and look at the sites that he was telling me about,' Sally remembers. 'We joined a few together, and I put a few messages on, and got really horny emails back, which turned me on. And then I would have horny chats with people, and that would turn me on even more. But there was still nowhere out there that really felt right for me.' The couple have had an ambitious sex-life since they met, and it was partly through their involvement with another woman that their own site took shape. At the nursing home, Sally used to work with a friend whom we shall call Jane. 'I always had a very open relationship with her - always talking about what we got up to and what we fancied.' Jane had recently broken up with her partner and wanted to experiment.

'My hidden agenda has always been to get two women with me in the same bed,' Jon tells me. [With Jane] I knew something was going to happen at some point.'

The site initially featured both Sally and Jane, with Sally doing all the writing. Jon blundered through the technical side, secure that any traces of amateurism would aid authenticity. He bought some webpage creation software, found a host in America that handled adult sites, and spent £500 on a decent digital camera. The first pictures, a peculiarly hi-tech brand of Readers' Wives, went up on the internet in July 2000, and membership recruitment was swift. Surfers were alerted by links from other sites, and by the placement of free photographs on a site in Holland; these photos would lead to Sally and Jane's homepage. They believe their pictures were viewed by half a million people in the first month. 'I had some amazing statistics,' Jon says. 'I could practically tell the surfer's shoe size from them. You could see who was looking at the pictures from government buildings, and British Telecom engineers absolutely loved the site. They were on it all night. People imagine the internet is an anonymous place, but it's not.' People joined from all over the world, but those who renewed the following month were mostly from the UK, and, as far as Sally and Jon can tell, mostly aged between 30 and 50. Jane stopped participating after about six months, when her new boyfriend objected, a decision that caused some alarm. 'I got very nervous that members would leave when she left,' Sally says. 'She's much bigger than me [she cups her hands over her breasts]. I had a crap body image, and it's still not great. But I didn't lose any members at all and I had some really supportive notes.'

The Harrises say they currently have between 60 and 70 regular members, providing them with about £650 a month after costs. Even nursing pays more than this, so they are working on ways to improve the 'stickiness' of their site - converting their vast amount of page-views into paying

customers. They have considered boosting their income by the popular method of accepting banner advertising, but they decided this would cheapen their look and reputation, and might suggest that they were linked to a larger, more exploitative organisation. Jon has a wide-ranging and academic attitude towards the selling of sex and the promiscuous lifestyle, and Sally's site is only the most visible and graphic product of this (he acknowledges that his theories have not yet found a way of diminishing the woman's role in the selling of sex). 'NaturalSex's purpose is to aid in the awakening of British sexuality,' he writes ambitiously on one of his several text sites, alongside musings from Hayek and Freud. After several attempts, he has recently developed a mission plan. 'NS wants to sell what as many people as possible will perceive as "an experience of sexual relations between people who have created that experience in a situation where there existed a harmony of wants". Bit long-winded, though.' His theories on monogamy will not be to everyone's taste. 'Just because you have great sex with one person doesn't mean you can't have great sex with someone else, too. There are a few pieces of music which I absolutely love - that doesn't mean I stop listening to other music. If I eat the most delicious meal I've ever eaten, that doesn't mean I want to have the same thing each and every time I eat in the future. We get bored - it's part of our nature. So, the sad truth is also that monogamous marriage and the infinity of sexual desire are incompatible.'

In the early days, Sally received some emails questioning her very existence. 'A lot of them think that there's a man behind it - they can see the pictures are real, but that could just have been someone else posing. When I got in chat they thought I was a man, although that doesn't really happen now.'

In fact, something else has happened. Sally has become a personal friend to many of her members, often communicating with them outside normal chat hours. 'There is an element of me being their mistress,' she says. 'If they've had a bad day at work, they normally let me know. A lot of people have told me they've become more confident. Quite a few of my members have a more active sex life than I do now, and that wouldn't have been the case before they joined. But I also have guys emailing saying: "I've never had sex, but I want to." But do they really think that the best thing is to meet someone like me?' Occasionally, there are also members' meetings in pubs, although these do not become orgies. 'Nothing beyond flirting,' their host says. 'Or occasional flashing.'

What accounts for Sally's appeal? Loneliness perhaps, or maybe nervousness. But it may be something else: a desire to meet people with similar appetites in a friendly and generous environment. Her site does not have the alienating brutality of much internet pornography, and there is no hint of victim culture. Neither is it fetishistic; indeed its warmth and

suburban normality is part of its allure. And then there's the baser appeal, an old-fashioned fulfilment of male fantasy. 'Saying "I like your tits" to a woman you don't really know isn't something you usually get to say in the normal course of your life,' Jon observes. 'They'd think you were some neanderthal and maybe you'd get a slap. But in internet chat it's different. When Sally is feeling horny, that's the kind of thing that turns her on. She's quite submissive.'

'If someone's in chat who's quite dominant, then that can be fun,' Sally says. 'But they must be confident and know what they want. It's no good someone sitting there telling me to "do something really rude".' One member, a man nicknamed Large, tells me that since meeting Sally his sex life has improved 'no end, and my wife is also benefiting from my new-found enthusiasm. We talk a lot more openly about sexual matters and our likes and dislikes, and together we are exploring our sexual boundaries like a couple of 20-year-old lovers.' He has yet to tell his wife about the cause of his new passions. Since discovering Sally's site in January, Large has become a close friend. 'She is devoted to Jon and her children,' he says. 'She will always go that extra mile for friends and strangers in trouble. I sometimes go along with Sally when she is meeting people for the first time, and it is a joy to watch her put nervous young men and sometimes older men, at ease.'

Sally has a few British competitors on the internet. Jon mentions women called Kate, Janey and Jo Jo. 'But it's nothing like America. Over there, they see it as a career path.' In the United States, membership is often paid for through a 'wish list'; the host will have a list of things she wants - books and CDs from Amazon.com perhaps, or clothes from Banana Republic - and your password arrives not long after her goods are delivered.

The Harrises are involved in other adult pursuits. At the end of November, they are throwing a house party for 80 couples at a friend's house in Essex. Admission is £50 per couple, for which they get booze, nice lighting and a conducive atmosphere; Jon says he will be spending hundreds of pounds to get the house feeling right. There will be many people they know from the swinging scene, and some newcomers recruited through their and other websites. Sally will play host, and hopes to keep her hands off the guests.

'I'll try to make sure that people visiting for the first time won't be completely scared,' she says. Jon adds: 'Some people go and don't do anything, but then have sex on the back of it for weeks afterwards.'

They speak of this as if it is the most normal thing in the world. Sally walks around crossing something off a list of domestic chores. They make tea and try to keep their cat off the furniture. It's strange recognising that furniture from their internet photographs. 'There's probably some sort of sex party going on every weekend within a short drive of where you live,' Sally says. I wonder what their kids know about their lifestyle and their source of

income. 'Probably more than we think,' Jon answers. 'They know that we run a site for adults. It's not an issue for them. They think we're boring old farts.'

'I'm not ashamed of anything I do,' Sally says, 'and when they start to ask more, I'll try to be honest with them. I think they should know that I enjoy my work, and how extremely lucky we are to have a happy, secure family.' They are more concerned about telling their parents. 'They don't know,' Sally says. 'They know I'm not working as a nurse, they think I'm just at home. But I'm dreading telling them. I've put it off and put it off to the point where I've almost fooled myself that they don't need to know. But I'm not trying to hide it, and I'm not embarrassed by it. My brother knows. I'll tell them before this article appears. It will be hard for me, and I'm not sure how they'll react.' She says people have pigeon-holed her as the archetypal good girl: 'You know - nurse, mum, college, marriage, two children - ask Sally, she'll do it. People have a very high regard for nurses, and people generally would have a very low regard for someone who runs an adult site, but I'm the same person.'

Jon's father is not alive, and he has yet to tell his mother. 'I'm doing lots of other things as well. But my mum has a brilliant attitude. She knows that I'll pursue whatever I do in a good way. I don't think she'll have a problem with it.'

In the future, the couple hopes to branch out into other internet businesses. They talk of campaigning, and Sally is only half-joking when she talks of standing for Parliament. 'I can't do this for ever, for obvious reasons,' she says. 'But I wouldn't like to set myself a time limit. Doing the site has been a phenomenal thing for me - the awakening of my sexuality, dealing with other people's perceptions and experiences. I've had so much fun, and I can't see myself ever regretting it.' She's already writing a couple of books about it. 'One of them is about what really goes on in people's sex lives in suburbia,' she says. 'People seem to find that fascinating.'