

# Sally & Finbar Hawkins

The Paddington actress and her older brother, an author and film producer

## Sally

I sort of fell in love with Finbar as soon as I was conscious of him. He was everything I ever wanted to be, and still is. He's just such an impressive human being and he happens to be able to do everything I can't — including speaking eloquently to people and making sense. He was always very verbose — language comes naturally to him, as does writing. The fact that he has just written his first book makes me proud of him. I love literature too, but for a long time I struggled to read. I was kind of dyslexic... and a bit of a tit. So I looked up to Finbar and, as a child, I followed him around everywhere. I'm sure I was probably an irritating ball of baby.

All my cultural references came from him. I was very much a girl and he was very much a boy. My bedroom was pink and covered with flowers; his was dark and black. The poster on his door came from the film *Alien*: "In space no one can hear you scream". It was fascinating to watch him become a moody teenager. I also found his friends fascinating, these other boys from his school. Very pretty, too, some of them.

I'd been a fan of cheesy pop, so it was Finbar who got me into the cool stuff: everything from the Ramones to Goldfrapp to DJ Shadow. And it was him who first sat me down to watch a Mike Leigh film, *Secrets & Lies*, and said: "You've got to watch this." He was right. When Mike Leigh later gave me my break in acting [in the 2002 film *All or Nothing*] he was very proud.

Finbar is an amazing artist. I remember his A-level art, an incredibly detailed work on animals that looked as if he were a prodigy of Leonardo da Vinci, or Caravaggio. To have an ability like that... I was just, like, wow! My art, in comparison, looks like it's been done by a drunk spider monkey. If he wants to master something, he'll master it.

When he left for university I must have been about 13. That devastated me. I found being a teenager difficult and struggled to know who I was. I think I probably still do. But when he came back I'd found my

calling — drama — and was more who I wanted to be. He has always been supportive of my work and he knows that, while I love it, I've never been very comfortable being well known. He knows how unequal the industry is, how much I've had to fight to get equal pay with my male co-stars.

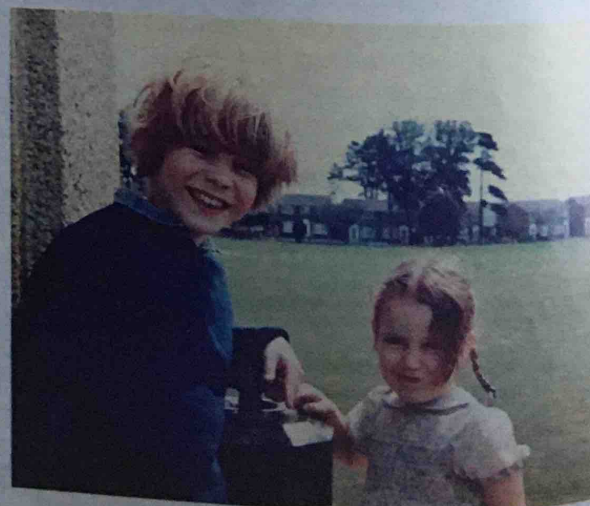
When I appeared in the *Paddington* movies my niece and nephew were still pretty young, and I was worried how they would react. It must do something strange to a young child, to have an auntie in the public eye. I hope they're OK with it. It's testament to Finbar and my sister-in-law, Abby, just how balanced and brilliant they are. They came with me to the premiere of *Paddington 2*. I always find those red-carpet scenarios the most terrifying thing in the world — I forget to breathe — so to have them there to protect me was wonderful.

Me and Finbar have always been able to make each other laugh. When we get together we just giggle. He can make me hysterical. I'm sure that must be insanely irritating for others to watch, and be outside of, but for us it's lovely. It's like being teenagers again.

## Finbar

I have a strong memory of my dad picking me up early from school on the day Sally was born. At home my mum was on the sofa, cradling the baby, and next to them was this huge box covered in tinfoil — the go-to wrapping paper for us — and I was told that Sally had bought me a present, an Action Man tank. I remember

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Above right: Finbar, 49, and Sally, 44, in Greenwich Park, a favourite childhood haunt. Right: together in 1977



**“When he left for university I was about 13. That devastated me. I found being a teenager difficult”**



thinking that this was a nice gesture from my parents, but that they really didn't have to do this; I was excited to have a sister. That said, it was nice to get the tank.

There's five years between me and Sally; my mother had had a couple of miscarriages, hence the age gap. I was always very protective. When friends came round I'd try to stop them from crowding around the cot so that they wouldn't breathe on her too much.

We grew up in Greenwich and Blackheath [in southeast London] and both of us went to private schools in Dulwich. My parents were teachers, but then they started writing and illustrating children's books full-time. They had a very strong work ethic.

There's a running gag in the family that Sally's first word was "Rada". She may not have taken to the academic side of school so much, but once she saw what she could do in terms of acting it became all-encompassing. She had a real determination about her. For example, Mum took her to the circus once, and when the ringmaster asked if anyone in the audience would like to come up, he'd barely finished his sentence and she was already there. Later she was in an Alan Ayckbourn farce the school put on.

We grew up watching films together and I now work in the film industry myself, as a creative director at Aardman, so to see Sally acting in the films of directors we both admired so much growing up — people like Mike Leigh, Woody Allen, Guillermo del Toro — has

been amazing. Whenever we talk I always want her to tell me everything: what was it like on set, what her co-stars are like. Sally will be the first to say that a lot of shit goes on in her industry, and she has probably had a lot to put up with, but she's very strong and assertive. She has that same stubborn drive our father has.

I don't think we've ever been competitive, but we certainly rabble-rouse for one another, always encouraging the other. I've long wanted to write children's books, and it was Sally who paid for me to go on a writing course specialising in children's fiction. That's why I've dedicated my first novel, *Witch*, to her.

We don't see each other as often as we'd like because she's often away filming, but we talk all the time and she comes to visit us regularly. She's a terrific aunt to my two children, always arriving with gifts and lots of nonsense and free stuff she's picked up, like gift bags from the Oscars. My kids were thrilled when she landed the part of Mrs Brown in the *Paddington* films. That was hugely exciting for them, but then it was for me too. We may be older now, but I still feel terribly protective of her. If you want some time with Sally you'll have to come through me first ■

### STRANGE HABITS

#### Finbar on Sally

She absolutely loves to spend ages on presents and gifts, and will write these long, lovely messages in her spidery, funny handwriting

#### Sally on Finbar

He likes blue jackets. It's a bit of a thing. He has many blue jackets, all very similar, and yet the perfect one is still out there, he thinks

Interviews by Nick Duerden  
Photograph by Anna Batchelor

Sally Hawkins's latest film, *Eternal Beauty*, is out now. *Witch* by Finbar Hawkins is also out now (Zephyr £12.99)