

Suzi: 'By going out into the unknown, I did something I never thought possible'





# When I grow up I want to be...

It's easy to let life get in the way of our most treasured childhood ambitions - but these four women show that with determination, courage and hard work, we can overcome any challenge to achieve something amazing

PHOTOGRAPHS NEIL COOPER

**'Now I know that I'm strong enough to handle anything'**

## EXPLORER

*It was a landmark birthday that inspired Suzi Searle, 50, to take the trip of a lifetime*

Everything in my life was going smoothly as my 40th birthday approached - a bit too smoothly for my liking. My interior design business was going well, and my husband and I had a nice flat, but I wanted to shake things up, to do something exciting. I'd wanted to go on a round-the-world trip ever since I studied geography at school, and would sit and look at an atlas for hours, imagining what all these places were like - so I decided it was now or never.

I knew my husband wouldn't want to backpack at our age, but he was mad about his motorbikes, so I realised that would be a way to get him on board. I was hopeless on the bike at first, but eventually I got my licence, and we spent a year planning. We set off in December 2002, feeling nervous and very excited.

We did have some disasters, like when my husband had a crash on the west coast of Africa - fortunately he wasn't badly hurt. The good times more than made up for that, though, travelling through Europe, India, Namibia and Kashmir, where the spectacular view of the snow-capped Himalayas brought tears to my eyes.

Coming home two years later felt very strange - I kept wearing the shorts, T-shirt and jumper I'd worn during the trip. It made me realise how little you need to have a happy life. I was much more relaxed, at ease with myself, and confident - we overcame so many setbacks, I now know there's always a way to make things work. Although my husband and I have grown apart in the past few years and are getting divorced, and that is scary, I believe I'm strong enough to handle anything. By going out into the unknown, I did something I never thought possible, and I'm not frightened any more.