Suzanne's story – Rainbows and roller coasters

Suzanne surrounded by Christmas presents, December 2025

Suzanne with Big Bird at the Sesame Street Circus – Elmo's Circus Dream – 2022

Sometimes a room is someone's world. If you pay attention and look about at its contents, it can tell you a lot about the person who occupies it. Suzanne's room, which is in a shared SIL house in Newnham she has lived in since January 2024, has a plethora of clues about what she likes and what makes her happy. The wall behind her bed is a cascade of rainbow coloured floor-to-ceiling tinsel streamers. It provides a perfect backdrop for Suzanne to preside over a room she has filled with fantasy and colour, rainbow colours, with the colour pink her favourite.

Although largely bed-bound, Suzanne regularly escapes into the worlds filled with some of the characters she loves to read about or watch on TV. On one wall in her room are pictures she has carefully coloured-in of Bluey, Pooh Bear, Marshall out of *Paw Patrol* and Lil Vinz from *Fashion Club*. They surround a big 'Help Olaf find his nose' poster, featuring characters Elsa, Anna and Olaf from the animated film *Frozen*. Suzanne is planning to use this contemporary version of 'Pin the Tail on the Donkey' at her next birthday party on 2 November.

Other preparations for Suzanne's birthday are well underway too. She has a guest list in mind and she is in the process of making envelopes for the party invitations she will distribute to members of her support staff – Tilly, Angie, Lee, Susie, Kylie, Issy, Laura, Jacquie and Carolyn – and to her friend Oliver and his carer Sherry, who she met at Independent Services, St Michaels' Social Club.

Suzanne likes to help bake sweet things, particularly carrot cakes and shortbread biscuits she decorates with hundreds and thousands. But for her birthday she will order a rainbow cake with Areil and Flounder Fish from the *Little Mermaid* and two candles, a 4 and a 5, to go on top. She will also order in party pies and sausage rolls to create a birthday feast for her guests.

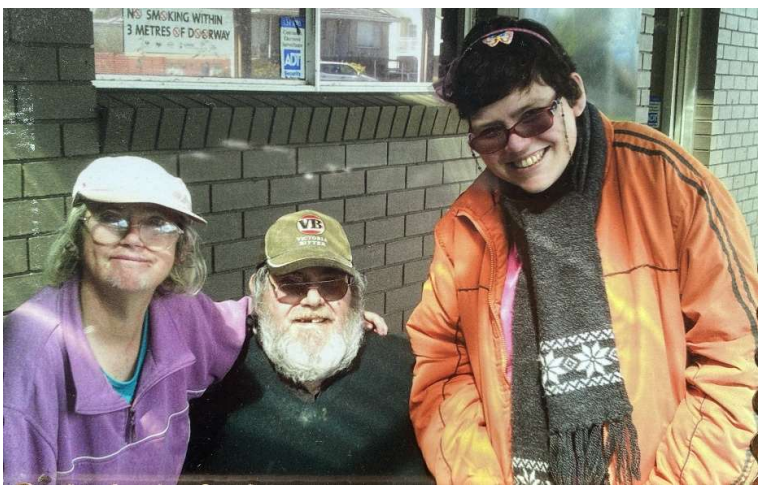
One guest Suzanne is hoping to see at her birthday party is Oliver, who lives in a SIL house in Newstead. 'I've known Oliver since going to St Michael's Day Care where we played games like Hangman, UNO and Bingo,' says Suzanne. But she hasn't attended St Michaels Day Care for a long time- not for nearly three years at least, as she spent a year in hospital before going the house in Newnham. In her mind she thought she went to Oliver's 35th birthday party in July 25, but that wasn't the case, so she hasn't seen him for a long time. Nevertheless, she is optimistic that she will see him soon and says she will 'probably go back to St Michaels when I'm up out of bed.'

Suzanne was not always bedbound. When she was growing up in Launceston as the eldest of four children – a brother and two sisters who now live in Melbourne, Suzanne lived actively in the world. She attended St George's Special School in Ravenswood where she remembers enjoying borrowing books from the library. Two of her favourite books were *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*, and *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*; she loved how the caterpillar turned into a multi-coloured butterfly.

There are photos on shelves in her room that capture her getting out and about as an adult too. One photo shows her on a rollercoaster ride at Dreamworld in Queensland, in another she is standing next to Big Bird at a Sesame Street Circus in Melbourne Suzanne did not have any pets when growing up, but on another wall in her room, amidst her clothes, jewellery and stuffed toys is a fish tank with a fish called Chloe. She has since acquired a baby catfish called Nemo to keep Chloe company and to help clean the glass of the fish tank.

The remaining wall in Suzanne's room is covered with medication charts that are either filled in with stickers, or waiting to be filled in. Each chart is different, and each chart recognises her achievements and offers a reward when completed with stickers. It might be a new coat, a new dressing gown, a musical jewellery box, a light up disco ball, sheets and pillowcases or craft items, like magic pens. Receiving rewards plays a big role in why Suzanne likes where she is living.

Most would find a life lived in four walls limiting. But as inferred in a Japanese expression that 'a man/woman is whatever room he/she is in', people have a capacity to adapt and embody different roles and characteristics as determined by the social and physical contexts they encounter: For Suzanne, her room is whatever she wants it to be.



Suzanne with her parents Judy and Kerry Trotter

At Dreamworld, Gold Coast, 2022