

lifestyle *makeover*

popular strip clubs in Johannesburg. GiGi's mission was simple: to raise awareness of the show-girl industry. "People have this perception of show girls; that they are somehow being taken advantage of. This isn't true, at least not at my club. My girls are all local. They are businesswomen. They don't want to take your husbands away; they are there to earn money, to do a job. It takes dedication to dance for hours and to keep your body that way," she says. "They are the true survivors."

GiGi isn't who I thought she would be, and to be honest, my own preconceived ideas were rapidly squashed as she spoke. She is a businesswoman who talks of empowerment, rather than degradation or victimisation. She speaks of women who are single mothers and students putting themselves through university.

GiGi is happy with her 'new' body shape post *Survivor*. And while the others admitted to trying to eat their body weight in sugar and fat, GiGi says her body is back to the shape it was when she was still dancing. "I like my weight," she says, patting her non-existent belly happily. But, she agrees with Ashley's sentiments that the show is as real as it gets – short of actually living on the streets; that it gives you a new perspective on life and what you have.

For her, the life-lesson she learnt while being on *Survivor* was to sit quietly and listen. "I tend to judge

people very quickly. I speak out first, and listen later." But, she adds, this has now changed. "I learned to sit on the sidelines and watch the game play out." She admits that she allowed the true GiGi to shine through, and to a degree, that can make you feel vulnerable – particularly if you are used to building up walls around yourself.

She adds quietly: "I did do something very stupid, though. One of the challenges involved asking personal questions that we had to rate – and the question was, 'Who is flying under the radar?'. I put my name down, thinking that everyone would as well. But, they didn't, and all of a sudden I wasn't flying under the radar anymore." It's this vulnerability, blended with her underlying strength that make GiGi so endearing. And perhaps that's why she and Sade bonded so well during the show as they share similar traits.

Sade laughs when she talks of GiGi: "She is nothing like I expected," she remarks. Sade is one of those people who immediately puts you at ease – what you see, is what you get. "I am me, either you like it or you don't," she says, waving her hands up and down her petite body. At our interview, she is sporting a Mohawk: "I shaved it for cancer awareness. Seemed like a good idea at the time," she adds, shrugging her shoulders. But she manages to pull it off – the style suits her personality.

She tells of her worst day on the island, when it all became just too much and she says she started crying, and couldn't stop. "It was GiGi who sorted me out. She told me very nicely to suck it up and carry on going – and I did. That's what helped me through."

And, she says, being one of the three remaining women, they needed to trust each other. "Perhaps a little too much," she admits, shrugging her shoulders. "I should have rather trusted my instincts," she shares, her voice trailing off as she reflects on her game plan.

What this experience has reminded her, is to always trust her gut. "This experience hasn't changed me – but it has made me more aware of who I am." The game has re-enforced the deep strength she has inside of her that she says she had lost along the way. "Pretty much anything that could happen, has happened to me. My mother left when I was 16, I have been mugged, held at knifepoint, held at gun point." But, she shares, it took this experience, this journey of self-discovery, to realise just how strong her character really is.

For all three women, the experience of taking part in *Survivor* was more than just a game, more than just a reality show, and more than just raising awareness for their chosen charities – it was a social experiment revealing who they really are and what they can achieve. It was life changing. ■

GIGI AND SADE

'It was GiGi who sorted me out. She told me very nicely to suck it up and carry on' – Sade



GiGi (left), who is trained in ballet, jazz, mime and piano, and holds a Bachelors degree in Drama from the University of Stellenbosch, picked Hospice Houghton as her charity to support. Sade (right), who has been nominated five times for the People's Crystal Awards for Favourite Youth Presenter, chose Childline as her charity of choice.

