

The survivor who came in from the cold

KAREN VAN ROOYEN

BEING on *Survivor South Africa: Santa Carolina* brought back a lot of "fond" childhood memories for GiGi.

The winner of the reality series grew up in Paarl in the Western Cape and spent a lot of time hiking with her family, but nothing could have prepared her for life on the island.

"You don't see how hungry we really are and what conditions we slept under. Hanna and Sade would sleep nearly on top of the fire. That's how cold we were," GiGi said on Friday.

Speaking to the Sunday Times at her Atholl home, GiGi recalled some of the highs and lows of being on the island.

"Those last three days, we were so glad to be going home," she said.

"All I could think about was a Bar-One. I've never been so hungry or cold. We knew it was 27 days and that we had a cut-off, but there are a lot of people in South Africa who live like that every day."

The 42-year-old, who studied drama at the University of Stellenbosch, trained in ballet and ended up in the exotic dance industry.

Today she owns the Lollipop Lounge in Randburg, Johannesburg. *Survivor* was never

part of her plan.

"When I heard I was going on *Survivor*, I had very short notice. I had to train the receptionist in two weeks, she was following me around the club with a pen and paper," said GiGi.

The businesswoman's strategy going into the show was to keep a low profile and she quickly figured out that it was not a game of strength, but one of character.

"I was very quiet and in the background. There were more interesting people and they were leaving. And there's GiGi and she hasn't taken her clothes off and she's still here," she said.

"I never ever thought I would win *Survivor*."

GiGi said she believed that her opponent in the final round, Ashley Hayden, underestimated her — and finally lost out because she broke so many alliances.

And comedian and jury member, Kaseran Pillay, who admitted to having a childhood crush on the blonde continuity presenter, voted for GiGi instead.

"Because Ashley screwed me, I voted for GiGi. I got the sense that Ashley had screwed one too many people," said Pillay.

GiGi will hand over a R500 000 cheque to her chosen charity, Houghton Hospice, tomorrow.



SURPRISE WINNER: GiGi never thought she would win *Survivor South Africa: Santa Carolina*