

# I survived to help OTHERS

Survivor SA winner GiGi had a personal cause driving her to victory



RIGHT: GiGi with her business partner and friend, Mike Crole, and his daughter, Dani. ABOVE: GiGi and Mike hand the prize money to the grateful staff of Hospice Witwatersrand. From left are Melanie Beresford, Dani, Mike, GiGi, Monica Smith and Alicia Lerm.

**E**VEN in her worst moments on the Survivor island one thought remained in her mind: whatever you do, don't press the red button. The red button, strip-club co-owner GiGi explains, turns off the treadmill in the gym when you go home. And going home was not on the cards for the winner of Survivor South Africa: Santa Carolina. She wanted to *vashyt* to beat 17 others and take home the R1 million.

"I thought about Mike's words so often on the island. 'No matter what you do, never give up,'" GiGi says. Mike Crole is her business partner and fitness instructor who helped her prepare for the island in two weeks.

For Mike it was more than simply supporting his friend: half of GiGi's prize money goes to a cause that's been close to his heart since he lost his wife to cancer 11 years ago.

A FEW days after GiGi, who co-owns the Lollipop Lounge in Joburg, was announced winner she and Mike donated R500 000

to the Hospice Association of the Witwatersrand in Houghton.

They've both been involved with the hospice since 2000, a year after Mike's wife, Shirley (47), was diagnosed with stomach cancer. "She'd complained of stomach ache for two years and doctors had treated her for an ulcer," Mike says.

Shirley eventually consulted a specialist, who diagnosed the cancer. She did not tell her husband and daughters. Only when she started chemotherapy did Mike find out she was riddled with cancer.

Mike contacted the hospice after friends had told him about the organisation. "Shirley was terminal and I couldn't care for her any more," he says.

Two counsellors went to their home to break the news to Dani and Candice, Mike's young daughters. "It was a terrible shock for us," Dani (21) says. "She died two weeks after we were told she was ill."

Counsellors helped the family through those emotional weeks and a nurse came in every day to take care of Shirley.



On the morning of 25 November 2000 her condition worsened and she died two hours after admission to the hospice.

Because the hospice had shown such compassion to his family Mike's strip club adopted it as a welfare organisation. Last year the club donated R26 000. The R500 000 Survivor winnings this year will make a huge difference.

The Witwatersrand branch of the organisation offers medical care and support to terminally ill people in Joburg and Soweto and focuses mainly on Aids and cancer sufferers, staff member Alicia Lerm says.

The cornerstone of the worldwide hospice movement, which has branches throughout SA, is its home-based care service and the doctors, nurses and social workers who visit patients to relieve the burden on their families. Patients who need full-

time care in their last days are cared for at the hospice. It also offers a day clinic for outpatients, a day-care centre for young children, counselling for families and volunteer training.

GiGi says the Witwatersrand branch has about 1 000 volunteers in Joburg and Soweto. The R500 000 she contributed is nowhere near the R30 million it needs each year but it's nevertheless a welcome cash injection.

"It's a wonderful day," GiGi says. "I'm glad I could prove that two such divergent businesses can join hands and work together." □

RIGHT: Mike Crole and his wife, Shirley, before she was diagnosed with cancer in 1999.



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