

Gigi Gatti (Daniela).

"In the kitchen scenes I had to scrub and scrub. I had never scrubbed so much in all my life!"

The character of the Italian Daniela (erroneously spelt Daniella in the scripts) made her first appearance in Ian McCulloch's *A Friend In Need*. She was played by the bubbly Italian Gigi Gatti.

How did Gigi start out in acting in this country? "I studied method acting at The Actor's Workshop in the mid-sixties. Stanislavski's method was very fashionable at the time. I was attracted to it because it enables the actor to enter the psychology of the character in great depth. Since I also have a degree in psychology and have always loved the subject, Stanislavski's method provided for me the ideal approach for working on a part. You create a character, you elaborate all aspects of that person's life and past history, (fears, conflicts, life's aspirations, and so forth) until you are ready to step into your character's shoes. Every movement on stage or set has behind it a specific reason and motivation, and lines are hardly ever learned by heart. Many actors are very critical about this method. It requires a lot of work which might, to some people appear unnecessary, and it does not suit everyone. I've always been fond of acting and singing, ever since I was a little child."

How did Gigi get the part of Daniela in *Survivors* and was this her first television part? "I attended an audition arranged by my agent. I had worked on television, radio and films before then. I met my husband while working on a television series called *Aventurn*, which he directed for the BBC. It was an Italian language series with a 24-part drama in the form of a soap opera. The series was first shown in 1972. I had also done a lot of voice over work."

Was it difficult for Gigi to learn her lines in English? "No, they arose from the character. In *Survivors* I was asked to mix Italian and English."

Gigi's first episode was Ian McCulloch's *A Friend in Need*, directed by Eric Hills, in which young women are being killed by a sniper, who at the end of the episode turns out to be a woman. Does Gigi recall anything of her introduction to the series? "I remember being at Callow Hill, and the house on stilts, and the fact that we had very good weather. It was a nice experience. In the story I had come from Sollihull, I thought they were making the name up and I didn't realise it really existed! I also enjoyed staying at The King's Head in Monmouth. I got on with the other actors very well indeed, and my husband and I got close to Denis Lill and Gordon Salkilld. Denis Lill has worked on several occasions with my husband since. The last time I worked with Denis was on an Accelerated Italian language course, which my husband and I had written. Denis did the voice-over for the introduction to the course. He has a wonderful warm and relaxing tone of voice, frequently reminiscent of Richard Burton's."

Gigi's second story was *By Bread alone* by Martin Worth and directed by Pennant Roberts, which tells the story of a man who had been a minister of the Church of England before the holocaust and has now regained his faith. "Pennant Roberts was wonderful as a director, and very helpful. He got me working in the kitchen, and scrubbing that floor. I don't think I've scrubbed so much since! I remember the transformation I had to undergo in make-up. Off went my mascara, and on went the dark shadow around the eyes and lots of grease in my hair. At first I did not like that much, but then it felt comfortable, because that was the role I was playing and, anyway, I've always preferred character parts, when you don't have to worry about looking pretty or glamorous and can forget yourself. Celia Gregory looked very good, as she was such a beautiful girl. In one of the scenes I recall making a dog collar for the minister. Again I remember that the atmosphere on the set was very good and friendly."

Gigi's third and final episode was *Over The Hills*, written by Martin Worth and directed by Eric Hills, in which Charles attempts to spark a baby boom at the Whitecross community. "I have memories of the party we had on the lawn. I recall that one day, during one of our breaks, I was walking across the lawn with a copy of *Under Milk Wood* under my arm. Terry Dudley was sitting in a deck chair. 'Ah', he said as I approached, 'A girl after my own heart!' I still have his words in my ear. I stopped and wondered why he had said that. He went on: 'You're reading my favourite book.'"

Was Gigi initially contracted for three stories only? "I was travelling a lot at the time. My husband was directing a new series in France, and I would often go with him. That meant that I had to refuse a lot of acting jobs for stage and television at the time. My agent was angry because I kept disappearing, 'Parts don't grow on trees, you know' she once scolded me. In fact I remember coming back from France specifically to do my third episode of *Survivors*. Mike McDermott was production manager at the time. We

had already worked together in some other series, and have been friends ever since. Mike even went to work with my husband on the first soap opera to be filmed in the Soviet Union."

Many people have complained at the quality of video as used on Survivors, and that the series would have looked much better had it been shot on film. Does Gigi share these criticisms? "Well, it was the first days of video. It worked out

cheaper than film and was a very innovative medium at the time. Nowadays the quality has improved so much that it can sometimes be difficult to tell the difference between film and video. I remember Eric Hills doing marathon runs between monitor and cameras. I think the crew affectionately nicknamed him 'The Roadrunner'."

Did Gigi feel that Survivors was an innovative series? "I thought at the time that it was a bit far-fetched. Nowadays it would be much more topical, since there is a more heightened awareness of the damage we are doing to ourselves and the planet. It seems that millions of years of evolution have taught us nothing. The brain has evolved and we are capable of amazing technological achievements. Yet, as human beings, we are fragmented within, and thus we continue to project this fragmentation without, in its most violent forms. Perhaps Survivors was before its time, and the urgency of its message would be more topical now. However I know that the series was well received in many foreign countries when it was first broadcast in the seventies. Personally, when watching it, I found it a bit boring and lacking in conflict. Perhaps I might change my mind if I were to see it again now, 20 years later. I wonder."

Television has changed a lot in the twenty years since Survivors was made. Does Gigi feel that the changes have been for the better? "I think some things have improved, but many have deteriorated. For instance, we have one game show after another, and departments such as Continuing Education are disappearing in favour of output which is in great part promoting mediocrity. There are occasional good quality productions, but these are becoming rarer too. It is all very sad."

Survivors was initially a great success in Italy. Was Gigi, an Italian herself, aware of the show's popularity? "I only discovered about its popularity some months ago, when I went to the University of Turin to do some lecturing. I met a couple of friends there, whom I had not seen for twenty years, since we had lost touch with one another. To my surprise they said they had seen me in Survivors. I heard from them that the series had been successful in Italy."