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Stephanie's 'Survivor' Journey Brought Her Family Together After Tragedy

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By John Powell – GlobalTV.com





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Some sign up for Survivor because of their sense of adventure. Some do it because they have that competitive spirit. Some just want the money. Some do it for a variety of reasons.

Stephanie Berger did it for her mother and her family.

John Powell: We only get to see so much of your journey on the show. Is there anything about your journey whether it was a moment with somebody, a strategic play, is there anything that you wish viewers got to see about your journey?

Stephanie Berger: I got the call back from Survivor a week after my mom went into the hospital. My mom passed away seven weeks before we went out and played...That is part of the story of me going out there. I am extremely grateful for the hope and excitement and the ways in which it brought my family together and made them root for something in the face of something really terrible going on. It's a gift to give your family something to be excited about in the face of that.

John Powell: It must have been so difficult to compete under those circumstances. It must have been really hard to put your head in the game because obviously family is far more important than a reality show or anything of that nature. How did you mitigate that?



Stephanie Berger and Jeff Probst at Tribal Council. — Photo: Robert Voets/CBS.

Stephanie Berger: My mom was going to be pissed if I didn't go out there. Are you kidding? (laughs)

She was so proud of me. All she ever wanted for me was to live a big, beautiful, rich life. That's all you ever want for your kids and to get a chance to follow your dreams...It was actually really easy to get my head in the game because it's was a really incredible distraction and I had such a good reason to be there. I had something that was so grounding for me and it's grounded me since. I've experienced really terrible things happening so losing a reality TV game show. It doesn't even rise even to the number one thing that went wrong for me in 2024, right? Okay? (shrugs shoulders).

John Powell: How was watching back last night's episode?

Stephanie Berger: I feel great! I feel really grateful! This is such a cool experience. I am one in a small number of people who can say that they've played survivor. I'm just a fan. I just love this damn show!

John Powell: Well, you did beat out of all those people who applied and you actually got to play. To even be out there is a huge accomplishment in itself.

Stephanie Berger: I'm competitive. I'm somebody who's winning at a lot of the things I do in life so it was good that something took me down a notch and humble me. It's refreshing. It's cool and so much of it is luck, so much of life is luck. It's such a gift to get to play even if it doesn't go the way you wanted it to.

John Powell: It seemed that you and Mary were at the bottom of that social totem pole on your tribe. Why do you think they chose to take you out over, Mary?



Kevin Leung, Stephanie Berger and Mary Zheng. Photo: Robert Voets/CBS.

Stephanie Berger: Oh, I was going to say: Why do you think we were at the bottom? It's because our looks were so fierce. (laughs)

John Powell: Well, that goes without saying.(laughs)

Stephanie Berger: So, Kev is the swing vote, right? Kevin is super strategic. I work in tech so does Kev. We would be natural partners at the office because he's a finance guy and I'm a product person. He had a really tight bond with Mary and when he and he's making that call, right? Then, they kind of threw me under the bus on the puzzle. They're like: 'She messed up the puzzle. Let's get her out of here!' It's a good cover for Kevin to keep his closer strategic partner in Mary who he had a really tight bond with kind of from the jump.

John Powell: We saw how tribal council played out and Sai really came out, scratching and clawing. What was your reaction to that?

Stephanie Berger: My reaction is it was data. This is information that is helping me play my game and helping me make a decision that is the next best strategic decision to make, right? people can talk however they want to talk. That is their gameplay. Everybody is playing a different game. People can have a more assertive style or they can have a more laid back style or they can have a sneaky style, that's why we like to watch the show.

I was just sitting there being like: 'Okay, I'm playing my shot. There's no reason for me not to. That is my best move in this scenario.' My other best move is to throw Kevin under the bus which is what I do...I've heard every single person's name and that was true...The only name I hadn't heard was Kevin and it dawns on you but it's all happening so fast. It's Kevin running the game. Is our Golden Retriever actually a German Shepherd? Maybe Kev is the one to watch here because his name isn't getting thrown out. I'm sitting there like: 'I don't care how people want to talk during tribal. What information does it give me and how does it influence what I want to do?'. Everybody else can do whatever they want but I need to make the right decision for me.

John Powell: You took a lot of blame for the puzzle but in reality if you look at the structure of your tribe, it just your tribe wasn't made for that challenge. Why didn't anybody didn't talk about that?

Stephanie Berger: Well, there's a lot of footage y'all don't see. Kevin makes a little reference in his chat about how we thought we were playing David and Goliath. You're sitting at Ponderosa before the game starts and I saw a lot of beefy men here. Surely, they're giving me one of them? I can't be the muscle on the tribe? Me, with chicken cutlet arms? (laughs)

We were super disadvantaged on that challenge. We got to the puzzle last. I was so proud of how much time we did make up. I think we make a lot of headway. Kevin was really injured. His arm was like fully dislocated in the first challenge, which you guys don't see. They had to cut it for time but his arm is fully dislocated. It gets put back in its socket by medical. So, here we are doing this giant puzzle, these heavy ass pieces, and we only got three hands. We're disadvantaged kind of from the start but we were two of the only people who wanted to do the puzzle. Folks didn't volunteer. They didn't want to...We were really close and we made up so much time. A little bit of difference in our ability to physically do it might have made all the difference in our success.

John Powell: I've talked to people in the past about this but starting with three tribes and so few people kind of jump starts the game immediately. How did you feel about that? Did you feel the pressure?

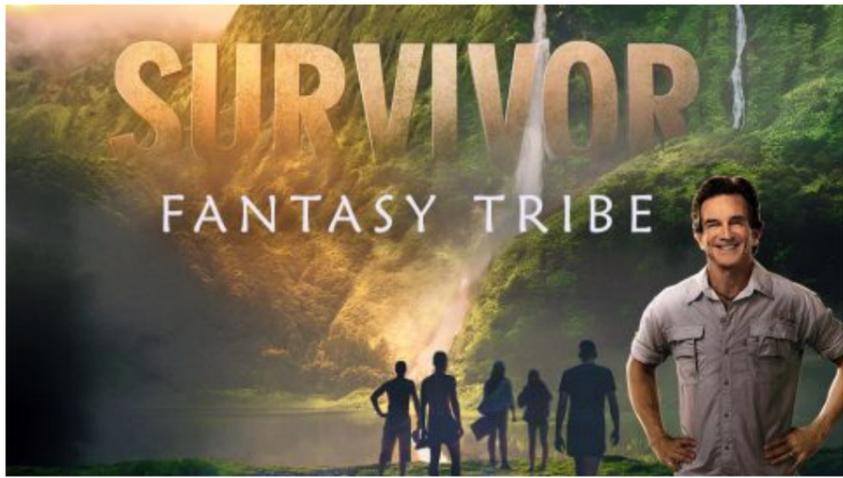
Stephanie Berger: One my hot one of my hot takes, I have so many hot takes, but one of my hot takes is that I think two tribes makes the merge more interesting. I think with three tribes there's only so many dynamics. One tribe either comes in with a majority, with two small two smaller tribes, or it's big, medium, little, or it's two big tribes and one tiny tribe. There's not that many versions of that that. Two tribes, there's alliances within those tribes whereas three there's the numbers just don't shake out that way. I'm a two tribe apologist. (laughs)

I think two tribe formats benefit folks who don't have really obvious advantages at the start but it is hard to play on a tribe that you think is going to go to tribal over and over and over again if you don't lock in and have a group of people, you can super, super trust. That's probably my misstep. I was not locking in with folks but I felt like you build a relationship, and then you lock in, versus you lock it immediately and then you're like: 'Well, I'll see if I like you later.'

John Powell: Last night, you got to see everything that was going on behind your back. What surprised you the most?

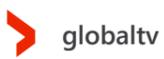
Stephanie Berger: I didn't notice Sai has an idol. That is the key piece of information that had I known it probably would have changed my recommendation to Kevin and Mary, who were the people I was working closest with. It might have changed my willingness to play my Shot in the Dark. I might have actually pushed to split a vote in that situation to flush that idol.

If I go out in the attempt to flush an idol, honestly, I was probably going home anyways, but this gives us a chance to flush an idol and to push people. She either plays it and I go, or we go to a second vote, at which point you say, 'Guys, are we not taking out the person with an idol? Let's go look for it tomorrow. Why are we going to rocks for somebody that you know you've only spent three days with?'. I feel like we could have pushed that a little harder in that scenario but it's information you don't know. You are always operating in absence of data, right?



Survivor 48 Fantasy Tribe

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