

BB sister act puts Nadia in the spotlight



by Marie Clair

SHE'S ON
YOUR WAVELENGTH

LIKE half of the country, I tuned into Big Brother to see 27-year-old Portuguese transsexual Nadia Almada take the top prize.

"I am now accepted by the public as a woman," an emotional Nadia said after emerging from the BB house, teetering in high heels, mascara streaming down her face.

Good for her, I thought. But on reflection, I had to ask: was it really good for her, or had I just been caught up in the TV moment. Was I celebrating a victory for liberal acceptance or something else?

Nadia, formerly a boy called Jorge, moved to Britain at 19 in pursuit of a sex change. The final operation was completed nine months ago, and then she applied to be a contestant on the show.

Channel 4 executives must have been rubbing their hands with glee when her application form landed on their desk. Here was a surefire headline grabber for the latest series of the reality show.

Nadia knew what she wanted from the programme - to be seen as a woman and by as many people as possible. She had a purpose and that made her unique amongst her fellow contestants. For Nadia, entering the house wasn't about vanity, stardom or riches, but the end of a journey.

She wanted the confusion and misery of being a woman trapped in a man's body to disappear. As the show's presenter, Davina McCall, said, "For you, Big Brother was all about acceptance".

We, the viewers, knew far more about Nadia than the unsuspecting people she shared the house with. They appeared not to guess that she was a post-op transsexual, which almost suggests that they did accept her as a woman.

So did we accept Nadia? Did you vote for her? Did you see a woman, or a man who had undergone a sex change?

Personally, I think the British public did not accept Nadia as a woman. I think that, just like me, they voted for her, because they saw the following: a larger-than-life, hot-headed but warm-hearted, still-slightly-butch, transsexual.

Although we might not like to admit it, many of us see transsexuals as fascinating individuals. Just like our Victorian ancestors did, all those years ago, when the travelling freak shows came to town, and they stared and pointed at the bearded lady.

If Nadia wants to remain famous following the show, she will have to exploit her unique selling point.

But that, of course, will work against the kind of real acceptance she craves.

And so ends a fairytale: boy meets girl inside himself, boy becomes girl, girl becomes star (briefly), girl finds boy and gets married. A victory for equality, compassion, understanding and a new flexi-sex Britain in which there will be no more gay-bashing, and transsexuals will have their new identities recognised in law.

It's a nice thought - but you and I know that's not going to happen. I wish Nadia all the happiness in the world, but I wouldn't try to quit the fags just yet, love. The road ahead could be a lot rockier than the one you've just trodden.