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PRINT POST APPROVED PP241613/00125



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In her metamorphosis from girl-next-door to million-dollar babe, this Aussie model has shown she's more than just a pretty face. Jen Hawkins reveals to Felicity Robinson the reasons why she felt ready to bare all

DAVID GUBERT

for most of us, the idea of appearing naked – and unretouched – on the cover of a magazine is the stuff of nightmares. But when Jennifer Hawkins was offered the chance to bare all for this issue, in support of one of her favourite charities, she jumped at the chance. “I thought, ‘Why not?’” she laughs, leaning back on the sofa of her beachside home in Sydney and throwing her hands in the air.

Admittedly, the 26-year-old former Miss Universe might have less to fear than most. On this perfect summer day, she’s all honeyed limbs and flawless skin, bright blue eyes glinting merrily. But for Jennifer, the decision coincided with a new-found feeling of confidence and *joie de vivre*. She could never have done a shoot like this two years ago, she confesses. “I would have been worried about what people thought, whether it was the right decision – a thousand different things ... But over the past year and a half, I’ve grown into myself, and I’m more confident and comfortable within the [modelling] industry. I did it for the experience ... it felt quite sensual and sexy. I felt empowered.”

And did boyfriend Jake Wall, a fellow model, like the idea, too? Definitely, says Jen, adding that during the shoot, she was texting pictures of herself to him between takes. “He’s excited.”

If Jen has taken a few years to find an “inner confidence”, it’s hardly surprising. She’d only just started modelling, and moved from her home town of Newcastle to Sydney, when she was crowned Miss Universe in 2004. Contest co-owner Donald Trump’s comments that she was “the most beautiful Miss Universe I have seen in many, many years” helped catapult her to fame – and launched a career that has included a role as host of Channel 7’s *Make Me A Supermodel*, the launch of her swimwear line, *Cozi*, and a multi-million dollar deal as the face of Myer.

She has also found herself in the guise of role model to young women. Modelling, she concedes, is fraught with difficulty when it comes to the issue of body image, and Jennifer is keen to emphasise that she’s always eaten healthily and stayed

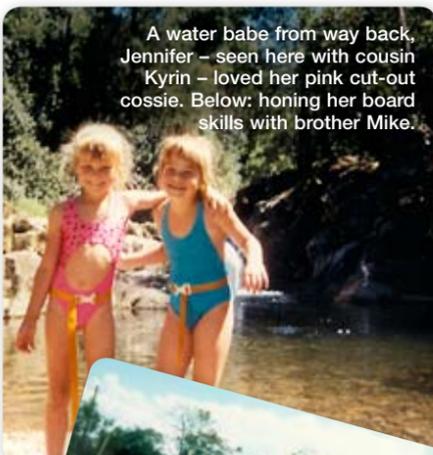
active to maintain her “athletic” figure. It’s a shame, she adds, that young girls worry about their bodies, when “for so many years, later in life, you have to worry about that”. This is why she supports The Butterfly Foundation, which helps young eating disorder sufferers and will receive funds raised through the auction of our cover shot (signed by Jen and beautifully framed). “I like what they stand for.”

In real life, Jennifer is less reserved than she appears on TV, and has obviously considered the messages about health, body image and confidence she wants to

“I did [the shoot] for the experience ... it felt quite sensual and sexy”

convey. Although she enjoyed a happy childhood, playing sport and taking dance lessons, she claims she wasn’t immune to body worries. “My issue was that I was too tall, and slightly too thin,” she admits. She also hated public speaking. “I was quite shy at school and if I was asked to do a speech, I’d make any excuse to get out of it.”

Of course, Jen might have been able to avoid this onerous task forever – had it



A water babe from way back, Jennifer – seen here with cousin Kyrin – loved her pink cut-out cossie. Below: honing her board skills with brother Mike.



not been for the Miss Universe competition. Instead, almost overnight, she was whisked from her life in Australia (“just chillin”, as she puts it) to New York, where she was installed in a new apartment and primed for her first speaking engagement at an HIV/AIDS conference in front of 18,000 people – including then UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan and actor/activist Richard Gere.

“It was crazy!” she exclaims – using a phrase that peppers her conversation, and with good reason.

Yet despite her fairytale win, the sudden change in circumstances proved difficult. “In the first few months, I was homesick; I didn’t know if [modelling] was really for me,” she admits. What’s more, “people thought Jake and I were locked in, but we’d only been going out for a couple of months. I was totally in love with him, but didn’t really know him as a person.”

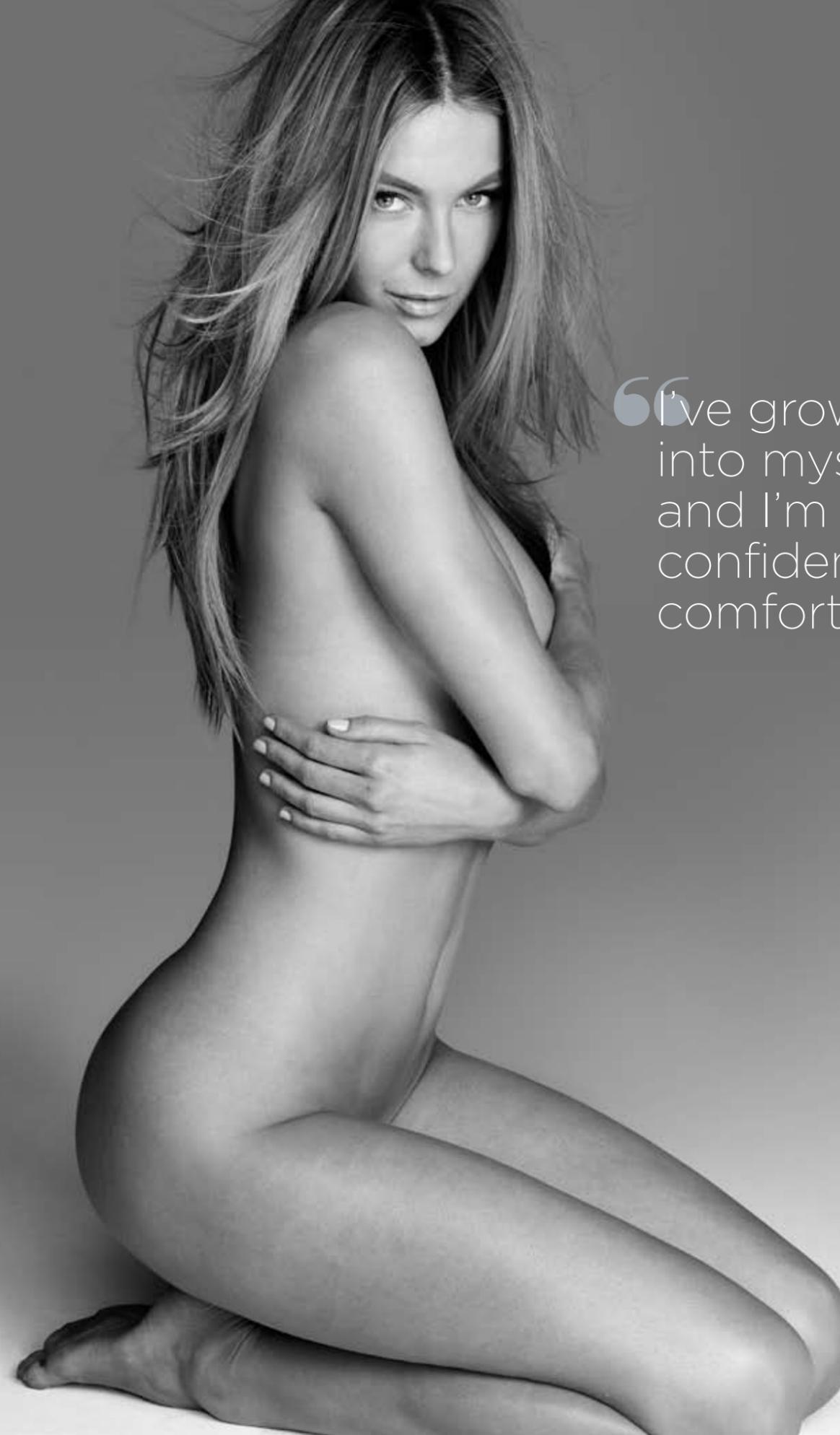
Something of an innocent abroad, Jen was susceptible to unscrupulous people. “I’m not as naive as I was when I first started,” she asserts. “I thought everyone wanted to be my friend, legitimately, and now I know it’s not always like that.”

These initial experiences have left her uneasy at the thought of young girls entering the world of modelling. “These 12, 13 and 14 year olds – they’re a bit too young,” she says. “There’s another side to modelling, and they’re at an age when they should be under their parents’ wing.”

Jennifer also has an interesting take on the furore over the size of catwalk models. It’s little wonder they are seen as presenting an impossible ideal for women, she reasons, if the models strutting the runways are actually only in their mid teens. “The issue is that these girls are so young,” states Jen. “Women look at these 14 year old girls, thinking, ‘I want to look like that,’ without realising they probably *did* look like that when they were 14!”

At her lowest point in New York, Jennifer sought advice from the person she respects most: her mum, who gave her a stern talking-to. “She gave me the biggest kick up the butt and said, ‘This is the most amazing opportunity, ▶

DAVID GUBERT



“I’ve grown into myself, and I’m more confident and comfortable”

get yourself in a good headspace, get over there and enjoy it.' And so I did."

Jen's resilience has certainly proved lucrative. Deals with Myer and lingerie brand Lovable, among others, have helped push her earnings into the millions (in September last year, she signed a new \$5 million, four-year deal as the face of Myer – about \$42,000 a day for a 30-day annual commitment). But she's also worked hard for her success – including keeping her body in great condition.

While naturally slim with model-perfect shoulders, Jen still has to exercise and watch what she eats. That might mean watching Jake tuck into a pizza with no effect on his physique. "He eats whatever he wants!" she laughs. "I have my little indulgences, but I eat quite healthily. I'll have oats in the morning, or rye toast with avocado; a wrap for lunch; and maybe a chicken salad for dinner. If you eat a balanced diet, you're so much happier ... but I couldn't not eat, I don't know how."

Having always enjoyed sport, Jen runs three times a week and does the odd session of yoga and pilates; she keeps her skin glowing by diligently cleansing and moisturising every day. In fact, the opportunity to promote healthy eating and exercise was one of the attractions of this bare-all shoot. "They're the things I love to talk about, and I'm not a stick figure – I thought it would be great to tell women to just be themselves, and be confident."

Perhaps this spirit of acceptance is why Jen found it so hard to judge the young wannabes on *Make Me A Supermodel*. "[The show] was great. It was a different experience and I'd definitely give hosting another go, but judging was something I didn't like, to be honest," she confesses. "I don't like critiquing other people; it's harsh and it isn't me."

What she'd really love is a lifestyle show – "everything that incorporates my lifestyle now". And what a balanced way of life that is, with plenty of travel and time with friends and family, including Jake. If Jen's professional future looks bright, so does her private life. She blushes when asked if Jake is The One – and deflects talk of marriage by stating "we're just having too good a time right now".

But Jennifer admits they're thinking of moving in together this year. "We spend all our time together anyway," she reveals. "We're pretty much addicted." ■



For your chance to bid on a beautifully framed cover shot signed by Jennifer Hawkins, visit www.mariedaire.com.au.

