

Ways Being a Legal Prostitute Is Weirder Than You Think

We've talked to those working outside the law and the few who ply their trade in legal brothels, and the consistent theme seems to be that it can be an awful job, but only because polite society insists on making it awful.

What do we mean? Well, we talked to another legal brothel worker who walked us through some of the bizarre rules, regulations, and everyday nonsense that pervades every aspect of their lives. It really made it clearer than ever that the concept of someone accepting money for sex just scares the crap out of people:

Right away, the weirdest thing is that you're required to live at the brothel while you're working, purely because the town doesn't want you walking around and being all prostitute-ish around the citizens. That's right -- they basically keep us quarantined there, like a disease. But more on that later.

There are two brothels in my town (Donna's and Bella's), and I've worked at both. It's true that I got into legal prostitution out of desperation, but not like, "starving on the street" desperation. Long story short: Single mom, two kids, owed lots in attorney's fees due to a long custody dispute. No other job would let me make the kind of money I needed to get out of that hole. Now, even though we're literally living there, we're not employed by the brothel -- we're considered independent contractors. So I will come and do a stretch for a few months, then go back home -- like an oil rig worker going to work on some remote site for a few months, because the pay makes it worth it.

I didn't run into real hostility until I went to get registered as a prostitute (yup, that's a thing) in the city of Wells. I went in, and the receptionist at City Hall was literally looking down her nose at me (I'd always assumed it was just an expression before then). Later, I quit working at the brothel in lieu of a rather lucrative job at the bar. I was happy there, but I had to leave that job because so many wives complained about a hooker working there, even though I was a *former* hooker. As we'll find out shortly, people don't think of a "prostitute" as something you *do*, but something you *are*. And what you are is something *dangerous*.

Most folk aren't outright aggressive, but the people who hate us here really hate us. It's kind of crazy: this town exists because of those two brothels. Geoff Arnold (the brothel owner) funds the booster club, plus all the brothels pay local taxes -- those can run about \$100,000 a year. Even weirder, the state of Nevada looks down on us to an unbelievably spiteful degree: legal brothels here are actually fighting for the right to pay state taxes on their combined \$50-million-a-year income. Nevada has, so far, refused to let them.

Maybe it's annoying to the brothel owners that they aren't considered legitimate enough to pay state taxes -- I wouldn't know. But at least they don't have to deal with the bevy of laws that exist just to limit the sex workers' basic human rights. Remember how I said they treat us like a disease that must desperately be contained? Well in one town, the law stated that prostitutes who quit the brothel are required to leave town on the next available public transportation out.

In my town, meanwhile, we're required to be back in our house of employment by 5 p.m. Yep, we have a curfew that applies only to us. If we need to go to the doctor or run errands, we have from 9 to 5 to make it happen. And this is all out of fear that we'll start turning tricks on the corner if left out after dark. (Here's an idea -- if they catch people actually doing that, why not punish them then, rather than pre-emptively punishing everyone in advance?)

I had a friend in town, and I went to hang out with her one night. I went back to the brothel the next morning and everything was fine -- the matron knew where I'd been, and I literally just went to the one house and stayed there the whole time. But the sheriff found out somehow, and he dropped by work just to tell me that if he saw me out after 5 p.m. ever again, he'd arrest me. Not, "If I ever see you out committing crimes after 5 p.m." or "If I ever seen you acting prostituty outside the brothel." No -- he'd arrest me if I ever went outside in the evening hours. Like they're afraid I'm a vampire.

The reason all these weird little restrictions are allowed is because brothels in Nevada can only exist in counties with less than 400,000 people. They are based almost entirely in small towns (sometimes small towns outside cities), and since most of these places are so isolated, the sheriffs have the freedom to enforce whatever wacky unwritten rules they want. And good luck making sense of them. For instance ...

They Enforce a Dress Code -- Even When We're Not on the Job

It makes sense that even a town that has legalized brothels would want to regulate how they advertise - - nobody wants a big billboard with breasts on it looming outside their church every Sunday morning. But if you're a prostitute, they figure that just the act of walking around and being a woman is, in fact, a form of advertising. And that's where things start to get weird.

First, we are not allowed to go out of the house and entice pedestrians or vehicles into our den of sin. But I've seen girls open the window and holler at truck drivers, and that's apparently fine (see, because they did it from within the house). And I can take out the trash topless if I see a truck driver coming, and that's fine, too. As long as we stay on brothel property, everyone's happy(ish). But what if I want to walk to the gas station to buy some cigarettes, with my top on, of course? Suddenly I'm back to living by high school dress code rules everywhere I go, or I risk being arrested. See, because if I'm wearing something too revealing, that's a form of advertising, in their eyes.

Feel free to stop and think about the implications of that for a moment.

Keep in mind, it's not just a limitation on going around nude outside, which would be understandable (since, you know, those rules apply to everyone). Brothel workers have less freedom to dress how they want than the rest of the women in town -- I have to wear layers, even when I'd like to be able to wear a tank top and a miniskirt. Women get to dress that way everywhere else, and no one complains. (Again, this is Nevada, where 30 percent of the state's economy is based on scantily clad women). But if I dress that way as a law-abiding prostitute? Well, I might find myself in jail, because why would I dress like that unless I was trying to entice men into having sex?

And speaking of always being on the job ...

You Live on the Job Site, and You're Always On-Call

Prostitution is exhausting, and it takes a huge toll on my head and heart. I'm seriously recovering from burnout now. My last trip down there was six months, and I was beyond exhausted by the time it came to an end. You might be thinking that's just a natural consequence of the soul-draining business of sex for money. But the sex itself isn't the hard part at all.

The problem is that brothels never freaking close. So when there's business, there's business, and since most workers are only living there a few months at a time for the express purpose of making as much money as possible, we'd better make the most of every chance for cash that comes our way.

We're on the floor from 2 p.m. to 2 or 3 a.m. (yes, we technically have illegal, 12-hour work days). And when my shift is finally over and I try to get some sorely needed sleep? Well, we've got a book, with all our pictures in it that clients can look through. If they pick you, regardless of what you're doing, you're up unless you want to be in trouble with management. It's absolutely exhausting to be told to get up 20 minutes after passing out and have to immediately switch my headspace from "sleeping" to "doll up and screw a guy." Yeah, it's not uncommon for me to sleep for three or four days straight after I get home.

Also -- I'm always playing a role when I'm on the job. I literally go by a different name and have to take up a different personality when I'm there -- not a single girl there is 100 percent themselves at the brothel. I came home after six months, and it took weeks for me to respond to my own name the way I respond to my brothel name. I've worked out a system now: as soon as I leave the house, I call all my friends and have them remind me of my name -- just so I can get used to hearing it again.

And then there's just the stress that comes with living with your co-workers. On one hand, we get incredibly close. But we also piss each other off, too. We have communal bathrooms, and you leave expensive shower and bath supplies in there at your own risk (which is a big deal -- those pricey lotions are helping you do your job). We're not pulling knives on each other, but one new girl did get her ass kicked by one of the veterans, after she became the top booker for the month and decided she ran the place. She didn't last long.

Support Comes From Surprising Places

So, between the harassment from the local cops and barely suppressed disgust from local citizens, who exactly is on our side? Not who you'd think.

We have a group of church ladies who show up once a month with presents for us. I think they come from Salt Lake. It's not all religious stuff, either -- they bring us earrings, jewelry, and bracelets, and every Mother's Day we get flowers and vases. And they do have pamphlets and stuff, but they don't care if you give them a "working" name, real name, or whatever. They just ask if there's anything you'd like for them to pray for, and when they come back, they remember your name.

It's uplifting, especially when you're having a bad week and they show up with cookies. Last year, we each got a big bag of home-baked yumminess and homemade bath salts (no, not the face-eating kind). I know it sounds like this is probably some church group trying to save our souls and that I'm being naive for thinking they're just nice people. Maybe I am -- but they never gave the impression that they were trying to make us feel like a shameful scourge on the community or urge us away from the lifestyle. Even when I'm gone for months, they always remember who I am and ask about my kids and family. It's someone saying "we're thinking of you" when they are under no obligation to do so.

It's not that they support it, per se; it's that they grew up knowing that these brothels exist -- it's part of daily life around here, and it has been since 1971.

On another occasion, I was on the citizens band radio (all of the truckers have them, so we get on there and try to get them to come in, rather than use the illegal prostitutes at the truck stops). It was Christmas Eve, and things are slow around the holidays, so I wasn't expecting much CB action. I got bored and started singing Christmas carols, like "Silent Night," etc. I got done, signed off, and 20 minutes later, the brothel's bartender came up and had a request. I dressed and went down to the bar, and a trucker couple was standing there -- a man and a woman in their late 50s. No, they weren't about to pay for a truly novel threesome. They'd heard my singing, and they wanted to meet me.

"Are you the girl who was on the radio? We wanted to let you know that was really beautiful, and we wanted to tell you Merry Christmas."

And that was it. Nobody is going to make a claymation special out of that scenario, but still, it made my holiday.