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## Leaving the party to hit the books

by Megan Douglass

*Alizé spent three years of her life having fun and enjoying her profession as a stripper, but she also expresses disgust at having spent those three years surrounded by drug addicts, untrustworthy club owners and coworkers and generally unsavory characters.*

Ex-stripper Alizé has instructors from her nursing school begging her to come back. After being a stripper for three years, the academic life proved to be too tedious for her, so she quit after five months. "With stripping, it wasn't like having a normal job. It was like a have-fun-party-type of job. And of course you get to drink while you're working. So, to go from that to everyday, seven hours a day, four hours of homework, I'm just not adjusting well."

Regardless, she says she will give it another try and plans on meeting with her instructors after finishing her sandwich and cherry vodka sunrise. She has the desire to make a life for herself that doesn't involve the "shady" people she knew while stripping. Her five-year-old son plays a large role in her decision to go back to school rather than turn to stripping as well. "Yeah, it's good money, but you know, you have to think about health benefits," she explains.

Her father is Mexican and taught her the basics of the Spanish language. This was how she began her stripping career at the age of 20. Two young men who had just moved to Warren from Mexico found comfort in Alizé's company and her ability to speak their native language. The three quickly became friends.

Alizé says that her friends enjoyed going to one particular strip club in Warren because the owner was Mexican. They would ask her to come with them whenever they went. At the time, she couldn't understand the appeal of going to a strip club. She repeatedly refused until one day when she became tired of them asking her and she went to see what the fuss was about.

She enjoyed herself at the club and became a regular. The workers there would try to convince her to try stripping. Just like with her two friends, she refused until her curiosity couldn't hold out anymore and she put on the stilettos. "I did it for, like, two or three days. I didn't like it then. The place I was at was just a bikini bar. It's kind of hard to make any money in those kinds of places, where you can't go topless or take any clothes off. So, that was it."

It wasn't until three years later that she tried stripping again. She had just had her son and needed money quickly. Knowing that more money could be found in the clubs where the dancers were allowed to show more of their bodies, she went to a topless club, where she fell in love with the job. "I just got to have

fun and dance and make a ton of money and be very sensual," she says.

She had fun with being free to show her body, dancing and drinking at work. The money reeled her in as well. Making around 170 dollars on weeknights and 300 to 400 dollars on the weekends, she wasn't able to picture herself in any other job.

The pole was her favorite part of dancing from the beginning. She found herself to be a natural at the gymnastics involved in lifting herself into the air and keeping her body in perfect poses as she held herself upside down. "You have to have a lot of upper body strength to do it. It keeps you in shape. Oh, but one time I was wearing shoes that didn't have straps and the shoe fell off and hit me right in the head. I had this huge bump on my head. I felt like a dumb stripper for a while," she says as she laughs at her mistake.

Alizé has experience with many different clubs. She has traveled around to different strip clubs to keep up work. If the clients or her coworkers in a particular place weren't up to her standards, she left and found a new place to call home. If she didn't like the amount of clothing she had to wear or if the women she worked with were too mean to one another, she didn't stick around for too long. She worked in clubs in and around Warren, Masury, Cleveland and even for a while in Florida, where she found the rules to be more strict.

"Ohio, depending on which bar you're at, anything goes. Most of the places in Ohio, even if they say there's no touching the dancers, they grind and they touch. You'll find clubs where the girls will give blowjobs and stuff." She continues by explaining that in Florida, the strippers are not allowed to ask a customer for a drink because it is considered soliciting. They can't sit next to a customer without their dancing clothes on because it is considered prostitution and they have regulations on how small their thongs can be. They also have to cover themselves with "pasties." "At least, that's how it is where I was, which is Orlando. So, even the bikini bars were owned by Mickey Mouse. It's harder to make money that way," she says of the town's rules.

Her customers were a mixed bag, and she gets a kick out of sharing the unusual experiences she had with them. She explains that she treated them all to the service-with-a-smile they wanted, even if it made her sick. If she didn't, she would have lost money.

She breaks down the customers into several categories. Many men come in simply to have the attention of a young pretty girl who will sit next to them and listen to their problems. There are other men who want to get their kicks at a club because they aren't getting any excitement at home. There are also the men who want to get excited before going home to their wives, and the men (and women) who want to take home one of the dancers to spice up their relationship with their significant other.

One customer of hers had a foot fetish. She says, "There was one guy who would come in, pay his money, and he just wanted to suck my feet. It was the most disgusting thing! I did it because I wanted the money! I would just think 'Oh this is so nasty!' And I thought it was gross because my feet had been in my dancing shoes, and probably sweaty." She would make 20 dollars from him each time.

Another customer shocked her when he lunged toward her. "I was set up on the sides on chairs and he was gettin' all into it. And he, like, went out and bit my leg. Guys get in a trance, like they're not even there." She got over the shock rather quickly after he apologized to her and gave her 50 dollars extra for his behavior.

Experienced strippers offer novices a bit of the psychology when they first start dancing. "You're a fantasy. At home they have the nasty wife, the bitchy whatever they have. We're just supposed to lead them on without acting on anything," she says.

Alizé says that some dancers do go home with their customers, but she doesn't recommend it. "There was a girl who would always go home with guys, but she

got robbed.”

The money to be made in these "extracurricular activities" is tempting to a lot of the women, but it never was to Alizé. "I kept it strictly as a job. I went there, made my money and came home and did normal things the rest of my time," she says. She worked from 8 pm to 2:30 am. At the time, her son was very young and not in school yet, so she didn't have to worry about waking early to get him to school or put him on the bus. He stayed with her grandmother while she worked. "He started Kindergarten this year, so it would be a little more difficult," she says.

Since Alizé didn't participate in the other activities that bring home extra money, she had to hone her acting skills. "If you're not doing the extracurricular activities, the only way to make it in stripping is with personality. You have to tell these guys whatever it is they want to hear, the stupidest shit you can say. Act like you really care about their problems," she says.

Besides going home with customers, there were plenty of other extracurricular activities occurring, sometimes right in the club. Alizé spent three years of her life having fun and enjoying her profession as a stripper, but she also expresses disgust at having spent those three years surrounded by drug addicts, untrustworthy club owners and coworkers and generally unsavory characters. What she saw and the way it affected the behavior of those involved led her to enroll in nursing school this past May.

"The biggest thing you'll find with stripping, first of all, I'm going to say that about 95 per cent of the girls are addicted to crack or coke. That right there takes up their life. All the money they make, it's not like 'Wow, I made 300 dollars tonight, I can go shopping!' It's like, 'More drugs!'"

The drugs mixed with the alcohol and party-like atmosphere of the strip club did not make for the best girlfriends, according to Alizé. The tension that accompanied this environment along with the desire to be the dancer who brings home the most money resulted in a lot of backstabbing and "catfights" that turned the dancers against each other. Women talked poorly about other women, meddled with each other's relationships and lives and spread rumors of sexual misconduct to each other's regulars. "They're just shady," she explained and "the drugs don't help."

She says that the drugs are what keep most of the women in stripping. They keep the job simply to support their habit. Alizé was never interested in using drugs and considers herself lucky for that, even though it has gotten her into trouble with her "house mom" before.

The "house mom" of the last club she worked in was also seriously addicted to crack. The house mom is the woman who keeps the dancers together by helping with hair and make up and puts together the outfits for them. "If you were as addicted as she was, then you were cool with her. But if not, she would talk trash about you to your customers."

The house mom would tell false stories about Alizé to her regulars, from whom she got most of her money. Along with the decrease in money, the tension between her and the house mom and the discomfort she felt with her coworkers was enough to make her leave. "I just decided that I couldn't stand it no more and I swore I'd never go back there. I don't want to be around her. I don't want to be like her."

Though she has had negative experiences in the stripping business, Alizé still thinks about it a lot and finds it difficult to leave the job she loved so much.

"It's a very, very interesting world. But you can never understand until you actually live it."

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