



PJ's – 3608 Spenard Road
Anchorage, AK





PAPA JOE'S WOMEN

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Nancy walks past a bouncer, turns right at the pinball machines and enters a world that's dark with desire. At PJ's strip joint, the lights are low, except for a pulse of blue and red ones that illuminate the show.

The woman on stage is a sultry thing, with the type of platinum blond hair that glows green under a black light. A negligee lies in a heap at her toes. She adheres herself to a fake brick wall and slithers to the floor.

In a barroom filled with chiffon and cleavage, Nancy seems out of place in denim and wool. She looks around for someone she knows. Over by the hot dog rotisserie machine she finds Pillow, wearing Spandex pants, a zebra-striped top and zebra-striped hair. Pillow smiles and gives her a hug.

The two women once worked together at PJ's. Nancy was "Nasty Nancy" back then. Petite. Soft green eyes. Foxy. Men would stuff money down her G-string, buy her drinks and shove mounds of cocaine under her nose. They'd beg to take her home.

Now 31 and a mother of three, Nancy reads parenting books and eats tofu. She didn't come to PJ's to watch women get naked. She felt drawn there. Nancy had just seen the movie "Mona Lisa," a journey into the seamy underside of London and the world of prostitution, mobsters and drugs. In the film, Nancy recognized a facet of her former self that didn't settle well.

During her years as a stripper, she lived on a steady diet of drugs, booze and illusions of love. She quit five years ago. She felt old and spent. With some distance between her life as a stripper and her life as a mom, Nancy returned to PJ's for a glimpse of the world she left behind.

Scenes from the movie danced in her head as she saw Pillow by the hot dog machine. **Seeing Pillow made her flash back on the good times: the holidays spent together, the warmhearted talks with owner Papa Joe, the bartenders' raunchy jokes. The club motto: "Stop that grinnin' and drop that linen."**

Returning to PJ's gave Nancy a chance to reflect. It gave her a chance to think about what she'd learned. "It was like taking a class in human behavior," she says. "You see a very raw side of people. You see what loneliness can drive people to do. You see the different kinds of desperation."

Nancy's father, a researcher and professor, had high hopes for his only daughter. He expected her to go to college. He encouraged her to be an athlete. In grade school, Nancy was in track, gymnastics and swimming. Her dad called her "Sport."

But Nancy lost interest in athletics long before she turned 15. By then, it was more fun sneaking into nightclubs. At high school graduation, Nancy was named valedictorian of her class. But she was also six months pregnant.

"I was promiscuous, to say the least," she says. "My father didn't know what to do with me. He was scared for me and of me. He felt I wasn't accepting of his love and I was accepting of other people's attention. I don't know if the way my father was treating me made me want to go out and get those kinds of strokes from other people or if me going out and doing this stuff made him so standoffish."

Nancy was 22 when she made her dancing debut in a dive called George's Cherry Tree in the middle of a California cornfield. Toward late summer, when cornstalks blocked the view from the highway, she spent most of her shift dancing to an empty barroom. Business picked up again soon after harvest.

Nancy didn't stay at George's long. She moved on to more sophisticated clubs with neon signs in San Diego. She came to Anchorage in 1978 on contract to a club across town. "I walked in;

aaugh, it was sooo sleazy," she says. "It was just old and dark and dismal. And the women didn't look like people you could trust."

Nancy tore up her contract and left the pieces on the bar. A cab driver recommended PJ's. Amateur night was in full swing when Nancy arrived. She got up on stage, yanked off her top and started to dance. Her performance landed her a \$75 prize and a job.

"It was survival," she says. "I had \$20 in my pocket."

Nancy never planned to stay at PJ's for more than three months. But she soon found PJ's to be different from the clubs she worked Outside. She liked the owners and the dancers. The club itself had character. As one of her coworkers put it, "It's a neighborhood bar. It just so happens every now and then a naked woman walks by."

The owners called PJ's "the class strip joint." Then, as now, they booked other types of entertainment, like magicians and top-name comedians. They paid hourly wages, so dancers didn't have to hustle for tips like sharks in a feeding frenzy. PJ's has never had table dancing or the infamous champagne hustle, in which dancers push champagne at exorbitant prices.

Mostly, Nancy liked PJ's because the people she worked with were like an extended family. Many of the PJ's regulars became friends. She married one of the bartenders, and the ceremony was conducted by the bouncer Lanier, a mail-order minister of the Universal Life Church. Papa Joe and just about everyone else from the club came to the wedding.

"Papa Joe was like a father to all the people here," Nancy says. "I could talk to him if something was bothering me. And you got the feeling he really did care."

Papa Joe was Joseph Miljas, a generous old man with a gravelly voice who treated dancers like daughters. He'd invite them to Thanksgiving dinner. He'd bail them out when they were hurting for cash.

Papa Joe was 67 when he was run over while crossing Spenard Road in 1979. Nancy was at PJ's that night. She and the other dancers had begged him to be careful crossing the road.

His funeral, attended by dancers, ex-dancers, customers and prominent community figures, was standing room only. A picture of Papa Joe, taken during a fishing trip in Seward, is propped up behind the bar, keeping watch over the cash register.

Hallie McGinnis, Papa Joe's business partner, took over after the old man died. He's tried to keep the family atmosphere alive. Every year on his birthday, McGinnis invites dancers, ex-dancers, friends and regulars to a party at the club. He covers the pool tables with hors d'oeuvres. He decorates the club with streamers and balloons. He hires comedians. In return, McGinnis gets a face full of birthday cake. It happens every year.

Nancy says her life at PJ's was like a three-year party. It was easy money, she says. And dancing was a way of seeking approval.

"I think the thing that made me feel best about dancing on stage was the total freedom of movement and the expression of the music," she says. "I would forget all about the audience and just find myself moving to the music. I wore my hair so it would come down in front of my face a lot. I'd take my glasses off and I couldn't see past the first row. One of the girls with excellent vision told me she envied me for that.

"Dancing was one thing I could do well," she says. "But it also introduced me to the people who come out at night. A lot of the people who come out at night you don't see during the day because they're doing things they need to do undercover."

Nancy discovered cocaine while working in a club in San Diego. She says she consumed a mountain of it during her years as a stripper. "It's easy to get into and very hard to get out of," she says. "Some people don't. We lost several friends who were killed because they couldn't pay up."

It got to the point where Nancy started the day with a joint and a couple shots of schnapps, tequila or Irish whiskey. "It was kind of a vicious circle," she says. "You'd get high so that you could tolerate dancing around nude in front of people so you could make enough tips . . . to get high some more, because you really can't do that kind of a job straight. At least I couldn't."

The longer Nancy worked as a stripper, the more rejected she felt by the outside world. "It just seemed like something that didn't want me," she says. "At PJ's, I was everyone's dear. I was

everyone's darling. There were very few people who didn't enjoy my company. But it didn't work in the outside world."

In her space act, Pillow looks like a creature that escaped from a kid's nightmare. She wears a helmet with an ominous face guard, black leather leggings, metal-mesh armor and a silver lame G-string. Wielding a plastic laser gun, she dances on stage to eerie symphonic music.

Her bullet belt, stocked with live ammunition, is the first thing to go. She unfastens the buckle, swings the belt around her head and lets it fly. It hits the floor with a "clunk." Long, slinky gloves go next. Then some armor. On the final note, she yanks off her helmet, unveiling a purple mohawk and silver Mylar mask.

Pillow is a PJ's institution. While there's high turnover in the stripping business, she's been around the club off and on for eight years.

Offstage, she's a bodybuilder who can deadlift 325 pounds. Onstage, she's one of the last holdouts of the burlesque era, when a striptease was still a tease. Over the years, Pillow has stripped out of a vampire costume, a sea serpent outfit and a saber-toothed she-beast suit. She's wrapped herself up in a classy red feather boa. She's put on a muscle shirt and ripped Anchorage telephone directories in half.

At one time, she hoped her phone book act would land her a spot on David Letterman's show. She even mailed him a dissected directory. But Letterman never called.

Pillow acquired her name at 16 while working as a stagehand in a San Francisco nightclub. She wore baggy overalls, waffle stompers and a down jacket big enough to hide in. Someone thought she looked like an unmade bed. The name Pillow stuck.

Now 31, Pillow considers her age a badge of survival. She started stripping at an age at which girls normally try out for cheerleading. She was only 17.

"I was drunk. Really drunk. One of the girls lent me a costume. She pretty much had to shove me out on stage when the music started. I had trouble getting the bra off . . .

"It was no big thing. I was just afraid of looking like a jerk. Being fat. Having no boobs. That's what I was nervous about; I never liked my body.

"But I dug being onstage, being a showoff. I loved the spotlight. I always have. "Look mom, no hands.' "

Pillow got by on fake identification until a coworker turned her in and she was fired. Then she ended up at a porno shop, sitting in a window in a skimpy outfit to lure men inside, and dancing on a stage the size of a coffee table. The club, she says, was "sleazy bottomless."

"It was disgusting. The girls were, like, fingering themselves. They were the rejects, the girls that were too old, too fat, too ugly or too young to work in the clubs. I hated it there, but I had to work. I was old enough to work in a sleazy dive but too young to work in a nice club."

While a lot of strippers hide their profession from their parents, Pillow was straight with hers. "We were in this Howard Johnson's. . . . You know how it is with your dad, like you're going to tell him you're pregnant or something? You're sitting there kind of hemming and hawing and fighting back the tears and all that crap. I said to him, "Don't worry about me. I can make a living. I have a profession. I'm a stripper.' My dad kind of choked on his lunch."

In the early '80s, Pillow left the stripping business to pursue competitive bodybuilding. She was Ms. Alaska physique in 1981, and placed fourth nationally in a women's competition in Las Vegas. She would have placed higher, she says, but the judges thought she was too muscular. Muscle & Fitness magazine agreed: "You couldn't say truthfully that Pillow reminded you of the average Cote d' Azur nymphet: She showed too much muscle."

Pillow loved being a celebrity. Bodybuilding magazines called for interviews, and producers cast her in movies. She was in "Pumping Iron II." And in the film, "Girls Just Wanna Have Fun," she got a part hauling a couch and picking up the back end of a car.

But after a couple years of the Venice Beach muscle scene, Pillow became disillusioned. She didn't understand how a bodybuilder could be "too muscular." When she started lobbying against the use of steroids, it cost her some friends. People were starting to badmouth her when they found out she'd worked as a stripper.

Then, some artsy nude photos showed up in a porn magazine without her permission. "It was like one of those transvestite deals, with donkeys and stuff," Pillow says with a grimace. She took heat for that, too.

Pillow dropped out of the hardcore muscle scene in 1984 and returned to PJ's. Her iron-pumping friends couldn't believe it.

"Being on stage and dancing, I really enjoy that more than just about anything. I guess I'm too much of an exhibitionist. It's like, "Hi. I'm Pillow. Come down to PJ's and see my show.

"The rest of this the sleazy stuff that goes on onstage, the weirdos you have to put up with, the cigarette smoke, your ears pounding from the loud music that's just the price you pay to work in a joint like this."

Stripping, Pillow says, is becoming a lost art. It's getting too nasty. During Papa Joe's reign, nudity on stage was fine, but the dancers couldn't exhibit any vitals. If the bouncer, Lanier, saw a compromising pose, he'd boom out a warning over the loudspeaker. Sometimes, he'd jump up onstage and cover body parts with his hat.

In the old days, costumes and choreography were an important part of the show, Pillow says. These days, the only gift some strippers need is a body that's anatomically correct. Even at PJ's, dancers now may be as explicit as they please. Leg lifts. Bend-overs.

"I'm embarrassed by some of the stuff I see," Pillow says. "I've always been proud of myself because I'm a decent show.

"The social interaction that goes on in a lot of the clubs, I mean, it's sex," Pillow says. "It's the covert promise of sex that makes naked women dancing in nightclubs so popular. I'd be lying if I said it was all aesthetics and beauty and entertainment and stuff. That's the kind of fantasy I tell myself.

"I really don't get along with some of the girls. I mean, I get along with everybody in a professional sense. But I don't party with them because I really don't fit into that world. I'm an

athlete. My idea of a good time is getting enough sleep so I can train, and kicking back after a good workout.

"I have a real hard time getting dates because I'm real picky. If a guy does coke or gets drunk, it's an immediate turnoff. Plus, I don't like pencil necks. And, of course, athletic guys who aren't on steroids and don't do coke and pot are few and far between. So, consequently, I have an empty dance card."

Behind a red velvet curtain, down a long corridor lined with discarded clothes, Niki disciplines her hair with a curling iron. Niki's a pretty but hardboiled blonde with a cigarette in her lips. Her red dress is slit to the armpit. Her left shoulder is bare, except for the tattoo beneath her skin a Pegasus, the mythic winged horse that symbolizes poetic inspiration.

Niki marches down the corridor, loads a Manhattan Transfer cassette into a tape deck and steps out on stage. She smiles into space. She lifts up her dress. She exposes a breast. The tapping of her heels clatters against a tired linoleum floor.

When the song ends, she ducks backstage and changes into a black G-string and matching heels. For her next number, Lionel Richie moans about unrequited love. Before it's over, Niki wears only her Pegasus.

Niki came to PJ's on contract this fall. That means her airfare to Anchorage is provided as long as she stays at least 12 weeks. Rent's free, too. PJ's keeps two trailers behind the club for dancers who don't mind lots of rules. Housekeeping inspection is twice a week. Men are banned beyond the front doorstep. Dancers say the owners run the place like Girl Scout camp.

At 23, Niki already has been stripping for eight years. Her dad split before she could walk. When she was 12, her mom's boyfriend tried to seduce her, and Niki's mom blamed her. So she ran away. Then she tried living with an abusive, alcoholic grandfather. By 15, Niki was on her own.

"I couldn't get a job at McDonald's," she says. "I was too young. But I could get a job as a dancer."

"The first time I danced, I cried. I cried my head off. It just scared me. The closest thing I'd had to sex was my mom's boyfriend messing with me (he) tried to, anyway.

"People took advantage of me. They took advantage of my naivete. Like not taking "no' for an answer. When you tell someone "no' 10 times and they don't take that for an answer, you feel you got to say "yes.' "

Niki entered the stripping profession with a latent hatred for men. She bilked them out of their money. She made them think generous tips would get them something in return.

"I'd hustle the hell out of them," she says. "I'd have 20 guys meet me at the greasy spoon down the road, and then I wouldn't show up. I'd laugh all the way to the bank."

Then, for the first time, Niki fell in love. He was in the Air Force, young and handsome, and he wanted to take her away.

"He loved me more than anybody ever loved anybody," she says. "He wanted to marry me and everything. He introduced me to his friends who were like he was. They had wives and children. He kind of taught me that not everyone was like what I thought."

But Niki couldn't handle it. The pressure to conform was too great. And everyone was so straight. So she just disappeared, the way her dad did after she was born.

Today, Niki is cynical. "Men are so sensitive," she says. "You make the mistake of going out and having some fun with them, and they want to marry you. They want to take you away from all this and put you in a log cabin in the woods somewhere where nobody can see you . Every man I ever sit down with says that. Even a guy whose wife is having a baby in two weeks."

Niki does hope to get married someday, settle down and raise some kids. "I don't want to end up like a lot of my friends 40 years old and still taking my clothes off," she says. "I want to be normal." But the transition won't be easy. After eight years of living in strip joints, Niki has a tough time on the outside.

"If you go to the grocery store, you feel like everybody's looking at you," she says. "If I walk in a public building, I feel like everybody's so different. I guess because all you ever deal with are drunk people.

"You feel self-conscious. You're doing something a lot of people don't approve of. You're a deviate. You feel like, if that person knew I was a dancer, would they still be friendly? Would they still smile?"

Connie was a nudist before she was a stripper. From her home in San Diego, the closest public beach was a 40minute drive. But The Swallows Sun Island Nudist Club was only 15 minutes away. So she joined. It wasn't much different than the country club her parents belonged to, she says only it didn't have golf.

"We've been told our bodies are the temple of God," Connie says. "Yet most people feel a real need to cover them up."

Connie says she grew up a happy kid. In school, she studied classical ballet and drama. Now, on stage at PJ's, she seems like a chorus girl in a college production who simply forgot to wear her pants. Her favorite strip tunes are old classics like "Paint Your Wagon" and Frank Sinatra's "The Lady Is a Tramp." Sometimes, PJ's customers sing along.

Connie stripped in San Diego before coming to PJ's in 1983. Down south, her showbiz style was a big hit with older men, young sailors and rich Mexican businessmen. She ended up losing about a third of her tips when the peso was devalued in 1981.

At PJ's, Connie's still a favorite among the older, Lincoln Continental types. But after a night's work, she goes home to her boyfriend, a captain in the Anchorage Fire Department. They share a cozy log house crammed with books, antiques and hunting trophies. He's not the jealous type. And they've very much in love.

Stripping is only one of Connie's interests. She's a founding member of the PJ's ski team. She takes humanities classes at Anchorage Community College. She's been cast in a couple tourist shows, has danced as Seymour the Moose and has taught schoolchildren how to take care of their teeth as the Tooth Fairy during National Dental Health Month.

"I'm an all-American girl as far as I'm concerned," Connie says.

"I like what I'm doing. I wouldn't do it if I was ashamed. I'm pleased to have found a job that's fun, the pay is pretty good, and the work is easy . . . and it fills a creative vent. It's like being paid to party."

One by one, strippers file out on stage. One by one, they ooze out of their clothes. Nancy sits quietly three rows back, sipping ice water with a twist of lemon. "I feel bored," she says of the bar scene she once loved. "Bored silly."

It took years for her to reach that point. For Nancy, the transition back into the real world was slow and painful. "It was like breaking an addiction," she says.

"I think I was really starting to feel the effects of too much alcohol and too many drugs. I remember looking at myself and thinking I looked older than I should. I didn't look healthy. And I was feeling a little bit guilty that I had taken so much time out of my life doing pretty much nothing.

"I knew my time was running out, that I wouldn't be able to do it much longer and feel good about myself. But I didn't know what else I could do. I didn't have any other skills as far as I could see. That's just it; you get into something like that and you forget you can do anything else. You get so caught up in that small little world."

Getting pregnant was the turning point. She says it forced her to quit drugs, drinking and smoking cigarettes. "When I did that, all of the sudden, the bar wasn't that interesting to me anymore. I became less and less interested in what the customers had to say. I was becoming hard to work with, because I wasn't happy and because I was insecure about what I was going to do if I left.

"I just figured out that it wasn't really as glamorous as I thought. You weren't a star if you went up on an 8by13foot stage and danced around with your clothes off. That didn't make you a real important person."

Nancy figures it took about three years to finally leave PJ's behind. She kept filling in for dancers on vacation and stopping by to see her old friends. In the meantime, she found work in a hobby shop staffed mostly with ex-strippers. She calls it her halfway house.

In retrospect, Nancy considers stripping a "worthwhile experience." But she's no longer curious about that lifestyle. "I found out everything I wanted to know about nightlife in Anchorage, Spenard in particular.

"It was fun," she says. "It was like a three-year long party. I could be totally bombed and get paid for having a good time. I could be out of control there and I would fit right in with everyone else. No one was telling me what to do, other than, 'It's your turn next on stage.' "

These days, Nancy spends most of her time at home with her kids and her husband, the PJ's bartender she married eight years ago. She's exploring spirituality. She's taking art classes. The closest she's come to drinking lately was a sip of wine two Christmases ago.

Still, now and then, something aches inside. She misses the dancing. She misses the spotlight. "It was an emotional release for me," she says.

"We go out very seldom now. My husband likes to dance, but he has to get loosened up. And, you know, babysitting's a problem."

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In the mid- to late-70s, Spenard was an urban boomtown. Oil dollars from pipeline construction flooded into the area and strip joints, massage parlors and escort services proliferated. The best known strip joint was PJ's, a topless-bottomless bar right on Spenard Road.

In addition to the urban legends of what went on inside the establishment, there were many cases of the strippers, "dressed for work," dashing across Spenard Road to buy a pack of cigarettes before they had to go on stage.

From *Alascattalo Tales* by Steven Levi

almost everybody's birthday April 1. For many of the Natives, I wrote their name and birthday in their Bibles. Some day an enterprising anthropologist is going to discover that across the western half of the Arctic, all of the old people seemed to have been born on April 1st."

In Tatitlek Narrows, within sight of where the Exxon *Valdez* went aground in 1989, you could have made \$50,000 in 20 minutes—if you happened to be a herring fisherman.

During the April 1990 harvest, the herring were so plentiful that during the 20-minute season, boats averaged a catch of 68 tons apiece. Herring sold for about \$800 a ton. Fish and Game management estimated that the total catch should be 6,900 tons from Prince William Sound and the total tonnage would be caught in 20 minutes.

With a 20-minute season, every second counted. An illegal, 30-second head start had so much financial potential that all the fishermen have to keep an eye on each other. To ensure no one jumped the starting gun, no one was told when the 20 minutes would actually begin. The time was chosen at random.

But when the announcement was made over the citizen band radio, it was as close to a free-for-all as a run on the stock market. Launches roared across the water, dropping seine nets along the way. Then boats began pulling the lines in, tightening the noose. The panicking herring bolted toward the net. Some of the nets filled to overflowing and tons of fish escaped in seconds.

Herring fishing is actually a very risky business. With a season of only 20 minutes, any mistake could be bankrupting. Bad weather or choppy seas has put many a fisherman out of business. A net catching on rocks on the bottom can tear a hole large enough to allow all of the fish to escape.

"It's just like a crapshoot in Vegas," noted Bob Hughes of the *Norma Jo*. "That's herring fishing for you."

Among many other attributes, the northland is famous for its "Alaskan birds." In 1988, lawyer Stephen Routh in Anchorage was dealing with two high-priced investment bankers from a large, prestigious investment firm in New York. They were seated in Routh's office and spending the hot summer afternoon haggling over the wording of a complex contract.

After several hours of formalities, the work was completed. As they were relaxing, Routh asked the New Yorkers if they were planning on staying in Anchorage for a few days to see more of Alaska. No, the bankers replied succinctly and coldly, leaving the clear message that they thought that anything Alaska had to offer was definitely *déclassé*.

At that moment, Routh happened to glance outside. "You might consider bird watching," Routh said. "Why, one of Alaska's most famous birds is right outside my window right now." He indicated his office window.

"It was obvious this guy could have given a s--- about birds," Routh remembered. "But he was being polite so he went over to the window and bent back my levolor blinds."

There, across the street, was one of PJ's "birds," standing outside smoking a cigarette dressed for work, topless and bottomless.

"I've still got creases in my levolors from where this guy bent handfuls of the blinds up and down so he could do some Alaskan bird watching."

Routh believes the men spent the next two days in Alaska, "probably at PJ's."

According to the January 1, 1991, edition of *The International Save the Pun Foundation* newsletter, in November of 1989 a group of traveling musicians encountered an unusual problem on their way to Anchorage. "Since the Alaska Airlines computer [was] programmed to reject any seat holder without a name, researchers will someday discover that in November [of 1990] a Ms. Harp C. Chord flew to Anchorage." Alaska Airlines was contacted for confirmation but declined to reply.

In 1990, the Talkeetna Moose Dropping Festival received an outraged call from an animal rights group in the Lower 48 demanding to know how high the moose was when it was dropped. "About 300 feet," replied an absurd Alaskan at Festival headquarters, "but we drop them on cement."

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IN PERFORMANCE IMPORTING LAUGHS EVER WONDER WHY ALASKA SEES TODAY'S TOP COMEDIANS, BUT YESTERDAY'S MUSICIANS?

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Author: DONNA FREEDMAN Daily News reporter; Staff

According to Jay Leno, there's a secret formula to gauging a comedy venue. "The colder the climate, the better the audience," says Leno from his office in California. "If you go where it's hot and sunny, people have plenty of things to do instead of huddle indoors. It's hard to do comedy where people are sweating."

Alaska has always been cold, but only recently has it become a comedy hot spot.

In the past, the only semi-regular place for comedy was PJ's, the Spenard strip club that brought up a few performers each summer. Yakov Smirnoff and Howie Mandel performed there early in their careers.

Occasionally, a Bob Hope or Bill Cosby would book a well-attended but ambience-free show at Sullivan Arena. Pierce Street Annex began six-night-a-week standup late in 1988, featuring rising young performers from the Lower 48 club scene.

But the real comedy boom began July 16, 1992, when the Alaska Center for the Performing Arts booked comedian Jim Carrey.

Since then, the facility has hosted, among others: Elayne Boosler, Bob Goldthwait, Bernie Mac and D.L. Hughley, Smirnoff, Richard Pryor, Sinbad, George Wallace, Paula Poundstone, Ellen DeGeneres and Larry Miller, Rita Rudner and Mandel.

Most of these shows were promoted by the center, which quite by accident found a cash cow in comedy. The shows are easy to stage, and Alaskans are starved for something new.

"We're no different than the rest of America. People like to laugh," says Greg Carr, who co-produces some of the standup shows at the center. Mostly, that means he guarantees to cover any losses.

He's only had to do it once, when last July's DeGeneres|Miller double bill sold just 1,250 tickets the center needs at least 1,400 butts in the seats to break even. Probably the reason it didn't get them was that DeGeneres and Miller performed on a beautiful Friday evening when Alaskans with no sense of humor went fishing.

According to Carr, the average comedy show earns \$8,000 to \$12,000 for the center.

"It's a great deal. The risk is minimal," he says. "You've got to get one or two people on a plane in Los Angeles, basically."

This is the main reason that Anchorage can get top-name touring comedians. When you bring a rock or concert band to Alaska, you're talking numerous plane tickets, plus freight costs, lodging, transportation and food. Compare that to a comedy show: one plane ticket, one hotel room, one limo, one set of refreshment demands.

"I did Paula Poundstone in Juneau. All she wanted was Pop Tarts and a six-pack of Diet Coke," says promoter Al Barre. "She didn't want hot meals for 15 people and a world of equipment. It's a lot easier."

Roger Swanson, the general manager of Egan Convention Center, is looking forward to more comedy concerts after a pair of successful mid-September shows by Dennis Wolfberg.

"They're real simple: they need a microphone, a glass of water and a single spotlight," says Swanson. "You pay a little more for the artist than you would for other things, but you don't have all the production crap that comes with it: lights, sound, things you could pull your hair out over."

The comedians may be easy to get here, but they aren't cheap. Most of them garner \$15,000 to \$25,000 for a single night's work. Some promoters say that comedians charge more to come to Alaska because of the isolation.

Not everyone agrees. Mark Seward, director of booking at the Alaska Center for the Performing Arts, says he's never had a problem with location: "If (comedians) have the date open and we come to terms on an agreement, where we are is not a factor."

Most comedians fly in a few hours before the show, and some take the red-eye out that same night, although most like to stay long enough to at least get that trip to Portage.

Leno, for one, is philosophical about losing a day to travel: "If you don't go," he says, "you lose that day (of work)."

It's unlikely Leno will be back any time soon: His asking price is now \$125,000 a show.

Locally, comedy fans usually range in age from 20s to 30s; most of them attend as couples or in small groups of friends. Enthusiasm has remained high and sellouts are common.

People stood in line right up to show time hoping that Mandel tickets would be returned. And when comedian Louie Anderson had to postpone a show last summer, only about 10 percent of the ticket holders asked for a refund. The rest are waiting for Anderson's rescheduled performance in February.

If comedy has been a breath of fresh air in Alaska, it's been a change of pace for some of the comedians, too.

"People ask me to go to Pittsburgh. I've been to Pittsburgh," says Rita Rudner from her California office. "I loved (Alaska). I got a little tour, I saw the glacier and a little bit of scenery."

Rudner was approached before, but nixed the proposed date because it was winter: "I drew the line." But she knew she wanted to get here eventually.

"All of my friends who had been to Alaska said that it was really fun, and the audiences were wonderful and the theater was (good)."

Wolfberg brought his wife and one of his children along for his shows in Anchorage and Fairbanks. The three of them saw a section of the trans-Alaska oil pipeline, watched Portage Glacier calve and had a snowball fight.

"We don't have too many snowball fights in Los Angeles," says Wolfberg from his home. He has since talked up Anchorage to his friends in the business.

Still, the bottom line is the dollar sign. The fact that the glacier is calving or the Kenai kings are running is not enough to entice most entertainers north. They're not doing this for fun, after all.

"A lot of people think, 'Just tell them about the scenery and the fishing.' These guys could care less about the fishing," says Swanson. "When they're working, they're working. They don't come up to fish."

How much comedy Anchorage can absorb is anyone's guess. It certainly isn't a cheap evening out: Tickets generally run between \$19 and \$26, although shows at Egan, Pierce Street and University of Alaska Anchorage usually cost less.

"It's not like going to a bar and listening to the band. It's not competitive with a movie or going out to dinner," says Carr. "If you're going to pay that kind of money, you better have fun."

Seward tries to schedule comedians a month apart "to let the next pay period go by," he said. "So people have money to spend on laughter."

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OF WINE AND MOLSON'S - 8 AT LARGE

Anchorage Daily News (AK) - Friday, September 15, 1995

Author: Kim Severson; Staff

Don't know if you caught this week's piece by free-lancer Chad Wilton on Molson Ice's Polar Beach Party in Tuktoyuktuk. Wilton took a big road trip to crash the party featuring Metallica and Courtney Love, wife of dead Nirvana front man Kurt Cobain and the frontwoman of her own band, Hole.

In Wilton's story, Love talked a little about her brief time in Anchorage, where she used to strip at PJ's and the Crazy Horse. ("Pour Some Sugar On Me" was her biggest money maker, she told Wilton.) She praised our Value Village and trashed Chilkoot Charlie's. "That place sucked," she told our intrepid correspondent.

I don't know about you, but I'm both heartened and terrified that Anchorage had a little bit to do with shaping Love, who Metallica's Lars Ulrich told Wilton was "the most conceited person on the planet."

That's it for this week. Thanks for reading.

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STRIPPER CUDDLES UP TO KLINGON CULTURE - TALES OF THE CITY

Anchorage Daily News (AK) - Tuesday, July 6, 1999

Readability: 6-9 grade level (Lexile: 1050L)

Author: Sheila Toomey Daily News Reporter; Staff

At 43, the doyenne of Anchorage dancers is still stripping in public and still dazzling the men in the front row at PJ's with her costumes, her athleticism, her whatever.

But the world of exotic dancing no longer satisfies Pillow's soul, not the way it did back in the 1980s when she beaded elaborate outfits and produced a documentary film called "Bump and Grindstone" that never made it to market because her ex-partner's girlfriend threw out the raw footage while he was in jail.

Two years ago, Pillow went to a science fiction convention in San Francisco "and it changed my life," she said.

She became a "trekkie," and not just any trekkie -- but captain of a Klingon ship called "IKV Hand of Fek'ler."

IKV means, of course, Imperial Klingon Vessel. A "ship" is a Star Trek fan club.

Pillow now routinely appears at community events wearing a fake wrinkled forehead, big hairy sleeves and carrying a metal meq'leth -- a real Klingon sword. Well, it would be real if Klingons were real.

She owns a Klingon dictionary and can speak the Klingon language, having first studied through the mail with a guy who sold cowboy hats in Idaho and has since sold that business to set up in California as a hypnotist.

She also studies through the Klingon Language Institute in Flowertown, Pa., which has a web site, publications and conventions.

Pillow described her club and its activities as "like the Elks or the Rotary or anything else. Doing service and having fun."

Two weekends ago, she helped collect 40 pints of blood for the Blood Bank of Alaska in a "blood feud" at the University Center with a Federation ship called the Crystal Star. Donors got to put on alien clothing and have their picture taken. The stunt pulled in twice as much blood as is usual at the mall, said blood bank spokesman Scott Edward.

In May, she beat Shakespeare in the dead poets division at the Fly By Night Poetry Slam, reciting her own work, partly in Klingon. A Ferengi assistant held up English subtitles.

Over the Memorial Day weekend, at a convention in California, she let herself be auctioned off as a dominatrix to benefit the Make a Wish Foundation.

A couple bought her for an hour. Pillow suspected they had some wrong ideas about what they bought so she told the woman to handcuff the man behind his back.

"I happened to have a roll of duct tape, so I taped him all around the middle of his body, over his clothes." The woman happened to have a leash, so they took the man on a walk around the hotel. Then they tied him to a chair and went dancing. "I managed to get out of there without seeing nothing, doing nothing and touching nothing," Pillow said.

At first, this silliness is puzzling. Consider that Pillow has held the same job in the same town at the same company for more than 20 years. Her address is a trailer in Spenard, her roommates five women, three ferrets and a dog. Offstage, she wears glasses, workout clothes and a no-drugs medallion on a chain around her neck. She rarely uses makeup unless she's putting on a costume or taking one off. Her longtime boyfriend is a computer geek.

Offstage, Pillow is friendly, intelligent and kind of booky talking.

"There's a weird time anomaly going on in Spenard, and the bar world seems to amplify things," she says over juice and a salad at the Middle Way Cafe. She is complaining about "chronic crisis queens" -- people who aren't happy unless there's a disaster pending -- and musing about fans from the old days who bring their sons to see her perform.

"You're the first naked woman I saw besides my wife," one told her.

"I've been hearing about you from my dad for years," said a member of the next generation.

"If you've been in Spenard for 20 years, it seems like 50," Pillow said.

Sometimes she asks herself, "Why am I here? I could be in Vegas as a cocktail waitress, making three time as much money."

Then she'll have a good night on stage, one when she "gets in the zone. It's a high, maybe endorphins. It just sort of happens, where you can do no wrong, where nothing hurts. I couldn't miss a beat on a bet. Everything is crystal clear, perfect. . . . Oh yeah, that's why I'm here. It's the only dope I haven't been able to kick."

Still, she was finding herself "low-carbed and stressed out." The world of Star Trek clubs, costumes and conventions has reinvigorated her, she said. "It seems like a nice lateral shift for me in my creative focus, a better, more fun thing."

She chose to be a Klingon, a ferocious warrior race in the series, because there were more performance opportunities and they give better parties. "Who wants to go to a Vulcan convention and stand around unemotional and try to out-logic people?" she said. "You want to drink and growl and have fun."

Pillow does nothing in a small way. Her furry sleeves are made of real human hair, bought at a beauty supply shop that sells it for hair extensions. Her ship symbol is a claw with purple drops of blood. She made 30 of them from muskrat jaw bones purchased at Black Elk. The captain's badge is beaver jaw.

Pillow attracts attention, even at conventions where everyone is costumed. "It's California," she says of a recent foray. "There's a lot of greenies down there. Not that I have anything against greenies except I don't care for people who throw paint. So they're going, 'What kind of fur is that? . . . Those are bones? Eeew.' "

She talks about having to "crack the books" to improve her language skills before the Klingon Language Institute convention in Las Vegas this month. She has a Klingon font for her computer keyboard and a Klingon verb-noun database for her little hand-held computer. She is quite serious.

"I'm dying to meet a trekkie who speaks Yup'ik," she says. "I want to explore possible similarity in verb structure."

She is scheduled to teach Klingon aerobics at the convention. "It's just my aerobic program with Klingon words," she confesses. "And I yell at them. 'Come on you puny hu-mans!' "

"It's all show biz," says Pillow. "You throw on a costume and you lose all inhibitions."

Reporter Sheila Toomey can be reached at stoomey@adn.com.

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Obituaries

Anchorage Daily News (AK) - Sunday, September 23, 2007

Author: Staff

ANCHORAGE

LANIER HARRISON

July 21, 1948 ~ Sept. 18, 2007

Anchorage resident Lanier Harrison, 59, died of cancer Sept. 18, 2007, at his home.

A graveside service with military honors will be at 1 p.m. Wednesday at Fort Richardson National Cemetery with Russell Harvill and Hallie McGinnis officiating. After the service, a celebration of life will be held at PJ's, 3608 Spenard Road.

Mr. Harrison was born July 21, 1948, in Birmingham, Ala. In 1955, he moved to Alaska and later graduated from West Anchorage High School. He was a Vietnam veteran, serving in the U.S. Navy from 1966 until 1969.

For 33 years, he worked as bar and club manager for PJ's.

Mr. Harrison enjoyed fishing in Seward and relaxing at Big Lake. He was an ordained minister and a member of the American Legion.

His family wrote: "Lanier was a Spenard icon. He managed PJ's for 33 years. Lanier was known for dispensing as many insults as spirits to his customers and friends. He was loved by many and will be missed by all who knew him."

Survivors include his brother, Rondel Harrison of Anchorage; sister, Brenda Mateas of Seattle; aunts, Marion Wiley of Birmingham and Bernice Meane of Anchorage; and a host of cousins.

In lieu of flowers, memorial donations may be sent to Providence Hospice, 3435 E. Tudor Road, Anchorage 99507.

Visit the online memorial at legacy.com

Alaska Ear

Anchorage Daily News (AK) - Sunday, August 5, 2007

Author: Staff

IT'S ALL SPENARD ... For those of you who missed the Jay Leno show Thursday, Anchorage writer Kim Rich shared the following with Ear:

"Jay is interviewing guest Bob Saget and asks what was his worst stand-up gig. He says "PJ's " strip club in Anchorage. Jay says he played there too, and agrees it was also his worst.

"They swap a couple of anecdotes about deep-voiced dancers, guns on the premises and some performer who twirled pie pans on her breasts (or something like that). Then Jay says he even remembers their slogan: "We cheat the other guy and pass the savings onto you."

"Whoops. Sorry Charlie."

So, what's worse? Jay played Chilkoot Charlie's and thought it was a strip club? Or he spent time in both and they've merged into his single worst experience ever?

Compiled by Sheila Toomey. E-mail ear@adn.com. Read old Ears at adn.com/ear.

Caption: Photo 1: Ear logo large_080507.jpg

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Drug charge nets strip club owner home confinement

Author: James Halpin

Updated: May 12

Published February 25, 2010

The federal government has taken over and closed down a landmark strip club in Spenard following the conviction of its owner on a drug charge, according to the U.S. attorney.

PJs strip club now belongs to Uncle Sam under terms of a plea deal with its owner, Hallie Dean McGinnis, 66, who was sentenced Thursday. The government will also take over the establishment's liquor license.

"He used PJs as a front to distribute the cocaine, either through his employees or himself," said Special Assistant U.S. Attorney Christine Thoreson.

The club was silent Thursday evening; a flier in the door said PJs' "Last Call" was on Saturday.

Lisa Norbert, acting chief with the U.S. Marshals Service in Alaska, said the property would likely be sold, though details had yet to be worked out.

"It gets sold one way or another, whether or not it's through a Realtor company or at auction," she said.

The strip club, at 3608 Spenard Road, is appraised for tax purposes by the city at \$575,500 and has a long and storied past.

McGinnis took over PJs after his business partner was hit and killed while crossing Spenard Road in 1979. The strip club was for years home to Pillow, a famed dancer known also for being an intense Star Trek fan.

The location was also popular among dart players. In 1991, the five-member dart team PJ's Bandits, of which McGinnis was a member, won third place in a world competition in Las Vegas.

Things began unraveling in March 2006, however, when federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives agents bought about 2 grams of cocaine from two strippers working at the club. An informant also bought another half-gram from a bartender on May 11, 2007.

According to the plea agreement McGinnis reached with prosecutors, he was the supplier, selling strippers cocaine that they sold -- on the job and off -- or used themselves. An informant bought 4.3 grams from him in May 2007 and ATF agents later searching the place seized drug paraphernalia and 75.6 grams of cocaine they say McGinnis intended to sell at the club.

McGinnis was initially charged with distributing cocaine in addition to maintaining a drug-involved premise, but the distribution charge was taken off the table under the plea agreement.

Following prosecutors' recommendation, Chief U.S. District Judge Ralph Beistline sentenced him to one year of home confinement in addition to the 2 1/2 months in jail he has already served following his guilty plea.

Thoreson said the sentence is in line with the guidelines, based on the severity of the crime and the defendant's criminal history.

McGinnis could not be reached for comment Thursday.

Find James Halpin online at adn.com/contact/jhalpin or call him at 257-4589.

By JAMES HALPIN

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<http://www.adn.com/alaska-news/article/drug-charge-nets-strip-club-owner-home-confinement/2010/02/25/>

PJ's owner faces drug charges - STRIP CLUB: Hallie Dean McGinnis could lose Spenard business.

Anchorage Daily News (AK) - Saturday, June 20, 2009

Author: JAMES HALPIN jhalpin@adn.com ; Staff

The owner of PJ's, a landmark strip club in Spenard, was hit this week with a felony charge of distributing cocaine, and the federal government is seeking to seize ownership of the establishment if he is convicted, according to charges filed in court.

Hallie Dean McGinnis, 65, "did knowingly and intentionally distribute a mixture and substance containing a detectable amount of cocaine," on May 11, 2007, according to the charges, which were filed Thursday.

The charges offer no explanation of how much cocaine McGinnis is alleged to have distributed or to whom. Also unclear was why charges took more than two years to be filed.

A second count in the charging document seeks the criminal forfeiture of PJ's nightclub -- appraised for tax purposes by the city at \$569,300 -- at 3608 Spenard Road if McGinnis is convicted. Federal law allows the government to seize any property used to commit or to facilitate the commission of such a crime, according to the charges.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Stephan Collins said he couldn't comment specifically on the case. The distribution charge can encompass any amount of cocaine and carries a maximum penalty of 20 years in prison, he said.

Anchorage police deferred questions to prosecutors, and the FBI did not return a call seeking comment.

The bar has a long and storied past. According to news reports at the time, McGinnis took over PJ's after his business partner, Joseph Miljas, 67, was hit by a vehicle and died while crossing Spenard Road in 1979.

The strip club was for years home to Pillow, a dancer who once enamored local media with her dazzling dance moves and status as captain of a ship called the Imperial Klingon Vessel Hand of Fek'ler -- meaning, of course, she was in a Star Trek fan club.

The location is popular among dart players. Back in 1991, the five-member dart team PJ's Bandits, of which McGinnis was a member, won third place in a competition against 480 teams from across the globe at a tournament in Las Vegas.

These days, McGinnis is the director and president of the Alaska Soft-Tip Dart Association and continues to hold dart tournaments at the club. The Summer Solstice weighted draw tournament is scheduled for this weekend at PJ's.

The night club remained open Friday and appeared it would remain so until the case is resolved. The charges against McGinnis seek to seize his liquor license if he is convicted.

Shirley Gifford, director of the state Alcoholic Beverage Control Board, said no action has been taken against the establishment and that the board would review the license after the criminal case is finished, regardless of the outcome.

According to court records, McGinnis appears to have no prior criminal history in Alaska. Through his daughter, McGinnis declined to comment Friday.

He remained out of custody, with an arraignment on the charges scheduled in Anchorage for July 17.

Find James Halpin online at adn.com/contact/jhalpin or call him at 257-4589.

PJ'S: Read the charging document.

adn.com/crime

Pillow Talk

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Pillow Talk

Lisa Maloney May 5, 2016

Anchorage Press

Photo by Kerry Tasker

Pillow, the legendary burlesque dancer, bodybuilder and Klingon cosplayer who has called Anchorage home since the pipeline days just turned 60. It's been more than a decade since her last dance, but she still has that edge: The dominance and energy that made her so electric to watch on stage.

She also has a short, feathery haircut, trifocal glasses and a brunch habit. When we met for coffee, she showed off the tiny, steampunk-esque pocket watch with exposed gears that dangles from her vest on a short chain. It's part of her chatelaine or, to put it in crude historic terms, the lady of the house's utility belt.

Pillow's chatelaine has a definite theme: In addition to the watch, the vest also holds sewing needles, felting needles, stitch markers, a TSA-approved thread cutter and a magnifying glass. She puts them all to work volunteering in the wardrobe department of the Anchorage Opera, teaching

arts and crafts to kids (they know her as "Mrs. P"), and making fiber art; a few of her creations are on sale at Modern Dwellers Chocolate Lounge. She even brought a sewing project to our interview.

Pillow obviously enjoys sharing her love of art, but it's just as clear that she's still possessed of the bone-deep passion that drove her to the heights of burlesque entertainment. It's as though she's been searching for a similar outlet since she retired from dancing in the early 2000s, but has never found anything that compares.

"It's the best high I've ever had, when you're doing something and getting the endorphin rush from the sheer kinetics of the exercise, and then you're projecting, and you're getting this cycle where it fills the room, then it comes back," she explained. "The power dynamic of presenting, whether you're dancing naked or you're bodybuilding or you're public speaking or you're acting out a scene or you're doing a poetry slam, it's all the same."

Neither soft nor fluffy

Pillow got her stage name-now her legal name as well-from the down coat that she wore when she worked as a "quippy," unloading equipment and rigging sound systems for rock and roll artists in the '70s. The deliberately oversize coat was covered with duct tape patches and had feathers coming out of it-she looked like the Michelin tire man.

"I'd load the truck, unload the truck, then when they found out my age they'd make me sit in the truck for the rest of the night," she said with a laugh. "I was [also] trying to hide my gender because underage women were treated very poorly in those circles. I wasn't a groupie, I was a quippy. I worked."

In a roundabout way, that work is what led her to dancing. As an emancipated minor with a fake ID, she'd already launched a lifestyle of tackling every opportunity that crossed her path. So when her boyfriend at the time got too drunk to do lights and sound at a strip joint in San Francisco, she showed up to do the job for him.

Pillow did so well that they fired her boyfriend and gave her the positions. She soon became fast friends with the dancers, who were thrilled to see a woman working backstage. It wasn't long before Pillow realized that the dancers were making \$25 to \$35 per night, while she only made \$20.

"I'm going, for another 10 bucks, I can get naked. And they're only working 15 minutes on the hour!" Pillow remembered. She, on the other hand, was putting in seven-hour shifts and could only sneak to the bathroom if she put a long song on to play. So she tried getting onstage and she says she kind of sucked at it-but it was fun, and a lot of people sucked at it back then. "So what? They needed bodies," she said. "It was just this grind-em-up mill."

With the help of Brandy, a fellow dancer who took Pillow under her wing, she kept dancing and started to see some success with "The Act of Love," a partner act that laid the groundwork for her burlesque sensibilities. Max, the man she danced with, was shorter than her, so they couldn't do lifts-instead, they used character play to fill their 15 minutes on stage.

They also had their fair share of mortification; in a few memorable cases, it stemmed from a popular Princess Leia/Darth Vader bit. ("It was the '70s, we didn't know Vader was her father," Pillow reminded me.) Once, Max forgot to put socks on under his boots-so the boots got stuck on his feet. "That show became a real comedy," Pillow recalled to me, still stitching away on her sewing project. "He was sitting on his ass on the floor and I was straddling his legs trying to pull the boot off."

Another time, they had to rush on stage earlier than expected, so Max didn't get to tighten the laces on a leather S&M mask he wore below his Darth Vader helmet. It normally made for a shocking, dehumanizing reveal when he took the helmet off, but in this case it shifted so much that it blinded him and cut off his airway, leaving him stumbling around on stage and missing his marks. Pillow guided him around as best she could and eventually-when their music subsided to a low point-was able to hear him gasping for breath. That show turned into another freeform comedy, she said, which is what often happened if things didn't go right or you just weren't in the mood to be sexy.

Coming to Alaska

Life wasn't always easy in the San Francisco strip clubs, which changed their name every time they were bought or sold. Often, the dancers were housed in dressing rooms that once hosted variety stars-surrounded by fading glory and holes in the floor. When a talent agent wined and dined Pillow during a particularly rough patch in her life, she accepted the offer to come to Alaska.

She worked exactly one shift at Embers on 5th before walking out. She got herself a phone book and a roll of dimes and called around, looking for her friend Brandy, who'd come up from San Francisco before her. No luck. Next, Pillow found herself at the Wild Cherry downtown. It was her first exposure to table dancing and she was aghast.

"You take off your top and you wiggle in the guy's face for five minutes, and you have to do it once an hour because the money goes to the house," she said. "I wasn't gonna have any of it. But what was I going to do?" It was the first of several heartbreaks that would eventually shut her out as the industry changed around her.

Not long into that first shift, two big, scary-looking bikers came into the bar looking for Pillow. They collected her trunk from the dressing room, walked her out of the bar and took her to PJs, a now-defunct strip club on Spenard Road. Brandy had sent them and the owner of the club let Pillow start working that night.

This was in the days of B drinking, a patently illegal practice in which dancers made a cut of the money on whatever drinks their patrons bought, for the dancer or for themselves. But B drinking faded out in favor of the lap and table dances, and dancers began paying the house for the "privilege" of working. Pillow refused to do either-except for a "five dollar special" table dance, in which she held the table over the man's head, one-handed, while she shimmied-and instead made her living through a mix of burlesque shows and waitressing on the side. Through it all, she remained fiercely, adamantly independent.

When the owner at PJs waxed the floor and girls were falling down left and right, Pillow danced in her sturdy, non-slip Red Wing boots. When drunk patrons lay on the rack with a

dollar bill clenched in their teeth, hoping she'd squat over them to retrieve it, Pillow snatched the dollar with a long-handled claw gripper instead. (She still uses the same gripper to get socks out from behind the dryer.) If a drunk pulled the same trick on other girls, Pillow would sneak up and tie his shoelaces together. "They fell for it every time," she told me, laughing so hard I thought she might fall out of her chair. "It was like something out of a Marx brothers movie."

But the industry was changing around her, a series of small heartbreaks. Pillow continued to explore every opportunity she was offered: She modeled, she acted, she appeared in not one but two holograms, and she pioneered bodybuilding for women at a time when the only access to the weight room or competition theater was through the men's locker room.

She was inducted into the Burlesque Hall of Fame, won Exotic World in 1995, and even returned to her backstage roots to help expedite the Exotic World shows several times. But that only gave her a front row seat as the industry shifted away from Bettie Page pinups toward XXX stars: Less art, more sex. The last year Pillow was at Exotic World, the winners staged explicit onstage displays. "It just broke my heart," she told me. I just severed all relationship with them ... I'd be polite if they called, but I never went back."

The final blow came when the owner of PJs installed a pole on the stage in the early 2000s. "I put up with all kinds of stuff," Pillow said. "I put up with table dancing by getting my shows. I put up with everybody else doing pink by not doing pink myself. But ... you put a pole on the stage, you can't move." She held her arm straight out to show much dead space having a pole on stage-or any obstacle, really-creates.

"By taking away my ability to dance ... to not be able to dance was ..." she trailed off and, when I asked, agreed that she'd loved what she did. "And there was no other place to do it, because I refuse to pay to work. Because I will not show pink. I will not table dance. And if I want to sit and drink with somebody, it's because I want to sit down and drink." So she walked away from the one thing she loved the most and didn't dance for more than a decade.

Once an artist, always an artist

Then, in 2004, Kamala Steiner-better known by her stage name, Lola Pistola-co-founded VivaVoom Brr-Lesque, a local burlesque troupe that celebrates body positivity, sex positivity, gender positivity and, above all, the humor of entertainment.

"We have been cultivating a relationship with Pillow for a long time," Steiner told me over the phone. And gradually, over the last couple of years, that relationship blossomed into managing something that Pillow herself never expected: Not only have they drawn her out of retirement, they've also been instrumental in convincing her to go back to Burlesque Hall of Fame this June, where she'll do the runway walk of fame with other burlesque legends, participate in panel discussions, and then perform with other alumni at the end of the weekend.

But first, Pillow is bringing one of her acts back to an Anchorage stage for the first time in 15 or 16 years. This Friday, May 6, she'll perform as part of the graduation showcase for VivaVoom's Burlesque Academy. On Saturday she'll dance again as part of the Powderpuffs show, a once-

yearly event in which VivaVoom's onstage and backstage personalities switch places. Both events are fundraisers to help cover the costs of sending Alaska's very own burlesque legend to the Hall of Fame.

That project she was stitching at through our interview? It was an extension for the original corset from her cyborg costume, one of many gimmicks she developed through the years. By the time one of the Press photographers and I got a sneak peak of her act at tech rehearsal that Sunday, she'd not only finished updating the corset, but added a few new-her cyborg costume is now the most complete it's ever been.

Because Pillow is in two shows, she got two tech run-throughs. The first time, she told us later, she had a terrible case of the shakes-she was running on three hours of sleep, freshly off coffee, and still near-sighted and terrified of falling on a dark stage, a concern that had followed her through her entire career.

The second time, we were there to watch. The students who went first displayed varying degrees of confidence, each gradually growing to fill the stage as she worked past first-time performance nerves. But when Pillow stood by to make her second entrance there were no nerves, no more shakes. Just the electric reality of a talented artist who, once bereft of her most beloved outlet, has found it once again.

Catch Pillow as guest artist at both of VivaVoom Burlesque's weekend shows at Chilkoot Charlie's:
Burlesque Academy student showcase: Friday, May 6, 8 - 11 p.m.

Powderpuffs show: Saturday, May 7, 8 - 11 p.m.

Tickets are \$20 and available at brownpapertickets.com (search for "VivaVoom"). Patrons must be 21 and over; no photography during the show.

https://www.anchorapress.com/news/pillow-talk/article_ee9b4806-6696-5abe-9102-e2306b84720a.html

Site of Former Strip Club Transformed Into Mixed-Income Housing in Anchorage

Cook Inlet Housing Authority a catalyst for change in the Spenard neighborhood.

By Christine Serlin July 16, 2018



Ken Graham Photography

Cook Inlet Housing Authority has revitalized the site of a former strip club in the Spenard neighborhood of Anchorage, Alaska. 3600 Spenard provides 33 units of mixed-income housing and retail space near midtown jobs, shopping, and restaurants.

What once was the site of a notorious strip club is now a 33-unit mixed-use, mixed-income development in Anchorage, Alaska.

Papa Joe's, or PJ's, opened as a gentlemen's club in 1969 in the Spenard neighborhood, which had been known as the red light district during Alaska's oil boom. PJ's transformed into a strip club and then continued to operate as the neighborhood around it started to change.

When U.S. marshals seized the strip club for illegal activity in 2009, local housing provider Cook Inlet Housing Authority (CIHA) purchased the site, which neighbors its offices, at public auction to transform it for the better.

“Spenard is a unique neighborhood. We don’t want to change the uniqueness and grittiness that is part of its history. We definitely want to enhance it and change the negatives,” says Sezy Gerow-Hanson, director of public and resident relations at CIHA. “We want to be part of what is happening in the neighborhood. We are activating space that was vacant and blighted.”

To make its 3600 Spenard development a reality, CIHA purchased and remediated an adjacent site that once housed a gas station and was causing groundwater contamination, acquired the surface parking for the site, went through a replat process, and demolished the former strip club.

KPB Architects created a building design that would fit the oddly shaped site, meet codes, and maximize the number of apartments.

The development, completed in September 2017, includes 20 units for households earning 50% of the area median income (AMI), five units for households earning 60% of the AMI, and eight market-rate units. It also features space for CIHA subsidiary Cook Inlet Lending Center, which specializes in homeownership loans, and an upcoming retail store.

3600 Spenard has been an important addition to Anchorage’s housing stock. The demand for the 33 one-bedroom units was strong, with the development leasing ahead of schedule.

While the population has grown in Anchorage over the past 15 years, very little market-rate rental housing has been built because of the substantial gap between what it costs to build that type of housing and the debt a project can support and the stock of rental housing built in the 1970s during the pipeline boom has begun to deteriorate, according to Jeff Judd, executive vice president of real estate at CIHA.

“Lesser quality and no new development has created a situation where decent affordable housing is really in short supply,” Judd says.

Financing for the nearly \$10.4 million development includes low-income housing tax credits allocated by the Alaska Housing Finance Corp. R4 Capital provided the tax credit equity through a proprietary fund with Anchorage-based Northrim Bank. Northrim provided the construction and permanent financing through a pass-through loan from the Federal Home Loan Bank of Des Moines, which also awarded an Affordable Housing Program grant. The state provided Supplemental Grant Program funds, a demolition grant, and energy tax credits. Additional sources included funding through NAHASDA, a grant from the Rasmuson Foundation, and a loan and deferred developer fee from CIHA.

With higher building costs in Alaska—at least 50% more expensive to build there than it is in many parts of the western United States, according to Judd—CIHA focuses on finishes and materials on the exterior and interior to control longer-term operating costs.

In addition, two alternative energy systems were incorporated into the design. Geothermal wells, which were drilled under the parking lot, provide heating and cooling in the residential units through a closed, vertical loop field and heat pump exchange system. On the rooftop, 70 solar photovoltaic panels have been installed to offset electrical expenses for common areas and outdoor lighting.

“It’s turned out to be a great project in a midtown location that hasn’t seen new construction in decades,” adds Judd.

https://www.housingfinance.com/developments/site-of-former-strip-club-transformed-into-mixed-income-housing-in-anchorage_o