

Beverly Hills Madam Elizabeth Adams Dies

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Elizabeth Adams, the bawdy Beverly Hills madam whose lavish and lucrative prostitution network catered to a private world of millionaire businessmen, movie stars and Saudi Arabian sheiks, has died of heart complications. She was 60.

Adams died at 7 p.m. Saturday at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center, where she had been in intensive care after recent open heart surgery, said Peter L. Knecht, a Hollywood lawyer and friend. With her were her son, Scott, his girlfriend, and a handful of close friends.

"We all held her hand when they took her off the life support," Knecht said. "This was the passing of a legend. Because Elizabeth Adams was the mother superior of prostitution. She was one of the richest women on earth. The world came to her. She never had to leave the house. She was like Hugh Hefner in that way."

For years, the millionaire madam known to clients and friends as "Madam Alex" kept a little black book that was said to catalogue the sexual secrets of many of the city's most important men.

Using the alias Alex Fleming, she ran an international prostitution network dispatching charming young women to pricey Beverly Hills hotel suites, Europe and Caribbean cruises--for fees that ranged from \$300 for two hours to \$2,000 a day.

To those who knew her, she was as constant as she was colorful, always ready with a good tidbit of gossip and a gourmet lunch for two. She entertained, even after her conviction on pandering charges, from the comfy depths of her blue four-poster bed at her home near Doheny Drive, surrounded by knickknacks and meowing cats, which she fed fresh shrimp from blue china plates.

In recent years, however, her health began to fail. A diabetic, she had a night stand full of medicine. Visitors were regaled again and again with her extravagant reminiscences of years gone by--the boom years with the dignitaries to whom she referred as "my Arabs," the starlets who would have gone nowhere were it not for her. Cackling gleefully, she would ring for more lamb chops and demand that her aide of the moment--usually an attractive young woman--vouch for the truth of her memoirs.

But her most notable topic in recent years was her relationship with Hollywood madam Heidi Fleiss, who had been her Gal Friday before going into business on her own and becoming a rival in what Adams, with typical panache, had dubbed "the Whore Wars."

"She stole my business, my books, my girls, my guys." Adams would rail at the mention of Fleiss' name. Fleiss, for her part, would later insist that she simply was a better businesswoman than her mentor. Nonetheless, it was Adams who, after about 25 years in the vice business, got mere probation for her crimes, while Fleiss was convicted on state charges, sentenced to three years imprisonment and then slapped with a federal prosecution to boot.

Born in Manila of Filipino, German and Spanish heritage, Adams was by turns a florist, a mother, a widow and an antique shop owner. By her own account, she was approached by a local "English madam" to buy out her client "book," or list of customers.

"I had a good run," she once said, referring to the enterprise she likened to a dating service.

She was known for playing a motherly role to the aspiring actresses, pinup girls and moonlighting college students she referred to as "my creatures"--in the end making an average of \$100,000 each month, her cut of 40% for each referral.

Acting as an informant and passing on her high-profile "pillow talk," Adams managed to stay off the police blotter. Then, in 1988, detectives built a case to convict her of pandering.

Said her lawyer, Anthony Brooklier: "She was, how can I say it, classy. When she first hired me she thought I was too young to take her case. I was 43. She said, 'I'm going to give you some gray hairs by the time this is over.' She was right."

Even the police officers who pursued her mourned the madam's death.

"It's like losing a friend," said Fred Clapp, a retired LAPD vice officer. "In all the years we played cat and mouse, she never once tried to corrupt me."