

Heidi Fleiss--The Million Dollar Madam

By Rachel Bell

The Sting

By 1993 Heidi Fleiss, 27, was the talk of Hollywood. She had some of Los Angeles most beautiful women working for her high-end prostitution service, which specifically catered to the elite. She was one of the city's most prosperous madams, netting millions in just a couple years. However, her lucrative prostitution business was under threat.

Many were angered by Heidi's success. Some of her enemies, including pimps and madams of competitive prostitution services, and even some of the women who worked for her, wanted to put Heidi permanently out of business. They figured the best way to do it was to inform the police of her illegal activities, which they often did.

Eventually, the police began to feel pressure to do something about Heidi's business. They devised a plan that would take her off the streets for good. Little did they know that it would cause a nationwide sensation that would propel Heidi into the limelight.

In April of that year, the Los Angeles County Sheriff Department coordinated an elaborate plot, along with the FBI and other law enforcement agencies, to catch Heidi in the act of pandering. The plan involved an undercover Beverly Hills police officer who posed as a wealthy Japanese client looking to procure services. The agent contacted Heidi and arranged for four prostitutes to meet him and several colleagues at a room in the Beverly Hills Hilton. He offered to pay \$6,000 for the girls' services.

Heidi agreed to the arrangement and on June 8 she sent four of her finest girls, as well as 13 grams of cocaine, which was requested by the undercover agent. The prostitutes had no idea what was awaiting them. Jesse Birnbaum suggested in her article *Heidi Does Hollywood* that the police meticulously prepared the meeting room at the hotel, installing hidden cameras and bugging equipment for the sting.

When the girls arrived, the undercover agents pretended to be eager clients, talking about sex with the girls and watching provocative videos. Eventually, each girl was asked explicitly for sex. After the girls unknowingly agreed on tape, a signal was sounded alerting more than 20 officers staked out in the room next door. The agents busted into the room and arrested the prostitutes.

The next day, the police apprehended Heidi while taking out the garbage at her Benedict Canyon home in Beverly Hills. Heidi faced felony charges, which included five counts of pandering and one count of possession of narcotics. She was expected to receive a minimum sentence of three years.

Heidi's arrest shook the very foundations of Hollywood. Around the time she was taken into custody, some of Tinseltown's biggest names feared that she would publicly expose that they procured services from her. It was a scandal of epic proportions that threatened many high-profile marriages and the jobs of some of Hollywood's movers and shakers.

The Days of Innocence

On December 30, 1965, at California Hospital in Los Angeles, Heidi Fleiss was born to pediatrician Dr. Paul Fleiss and schoolteacher Elissa Fleiss. Heidi was raised in a large family with three sisters and two brothers. She had a happy childhood and a good relationship with her parents and siblings.

According to Vicky Allans article *Heidi Fleiss: Hollywood Madam* Heidi's parents enjoyed nature and the family spent many summers hiking and camping throughout the United States. Heidi visited many historical sites, such as the Grand Canyon and the redwood forest, which impressed her. During one of the family trips they visited Hearst Castle in San Louis Obispo, California. Heidi suggested in her biography *Pandering*, that the extravagance of the castle captured her imagination and gave her a glimpse into the world of the rich and famous. It was a lifestyle she would be drawn into years later.

At the age of 12, Heidi earned a reputation in her Los Feliz area neighborhood as a friendly and responsible babysitter. Many hired her to watch their children. Eventually, her service was in such demand that it became difficult to keep up with all of the requests. Recognizing an opportunity to make a lot of money, Heidi began a babysitting service and employed her friends to take over some of the work. It was an educational experience and she learned that she had a knack for business.

Even though Heidi exhibited entrepreneurial talent, she did poorly in junior high and high school. Fearing that her bad grades would prevent her from going to college, she paid students so that she could copy their work. To make matters worse, she became more isolated from the other students because she had difficulty fitting in. Heidi became increasingly frustrated with school and often skipped classes.

According to Pam Lamberts August 2003 *People Weekly* article, when Heidi skipped school she often went to the beach or racetracks where she found solace. Eventually, she dropped out of school in 10th grade. Over the subsequent years she worked at several jobs, including a flower shop sales girl and a waitress. However, Heidi found little satisfaction in her work. She had higher aspirations.

At 19, Heidi attended a party with a friend in Beverly Hills. It was held at Grayhall Mansion, the home of the famous financier bachelor, 61-year-old Bernie Cornfeld. She was impressed with his extravagant lifestyle and was eager to meet the charismatic millionaire. At the time, he was one of the wealthiest men in the world.

At the party, Heidi was introduced to Bernie, and the two got along well. Before long, she secured a job as his personal secretary, answering phones. They eventually began a relationship. Allan suggested that Heidi was determined to live with Bernie, hoping that from then on her life

would be Easy Street. The relationship would change her life forever.

On the Wild Side

Bernie had a great influence on Heidi. He taught her valuable life lessons and business practices. With Bernie, Heidi experienced a lifestyle previously unknown to her: expensive gifts, money and elaborate vacations. Yet, she wasn't completely happy.

Even though the two loved one another, it was difficult for Bernie to be monogamous. He had a weakness for classical beauties, which resulted in numerous affairs. Heidi eventually broke off the relationship. Bernie's daughter Jessica Cornfelds suggested in her article *My Father, The Playboy Who Could Never Have Enough Lovers*, that despite the breakup, they maintained a close friendship until Bernie's death from an aneurysm in 1995.

Following the breakup, Heidi's life changed drastically. She moved back to L.A. and obtained a real estate license. She worked for a prestigious Beverly Hills real estate firm and made enough money to live comfortably. However, it was not the comfort Heidi sought but opulence. She had grown accustomed to the lifestyle she led with Bernie and did not want to settle for less. It was at this time that she met a woman who introduced her to the world of prostitution.

When Heidi was 22, she dated a filmmaker named Ivan Naggy. One evening at a nightclub, Ivan introduced Heidi to a woman named Elizabeth Adams, a.k.a. Madam Alex. Madam Alex, a 60-year-old Philippine native, ran the most prosperous prostitution service in Los Angeles, which catered to the rich and famous. However, she wanted to retire and was looking for someone to run her business for her.

Earlier that year Madam Alex experienced legal troubles and she feared that if she were caught hiring out prostitutes again, she would serve jail time. She believed Heidi was just the person who could take control of her sex service.

Heidi was expected to learn every facet of the trade, which resulted in her prostituting herself. According to a February 2002 interview with CNN's Larry King, Heidi claimed that her actual prostitution experience was relatively short-lived. She quickly rose to the rank of assistant Madam, a job at which she proved to be skillful.

Many of Madam Alex's workers were aging and ordinary looking. One of Heidi's first tasks was to hire a new batch of eager young girls who were more attractive. Most of the girls learned of Heidi's recruiting by word of mouth. Most were in their early to mid-20s, beautiful, energetic and ambitious. Many were friends and acquaintances of Heidi who wanted to take advantage of the opportunity to meet wealthy men and make a lot of money. Almost immediately after the new workers were employed, profits for the service skyrocketed.

Madam Alex's profits rose by approximately 400%, but Heidi made only a small percent of the earnings. Nevertheless, she was able to afford a \$1.6 million house in the Benedict Canyon section of L.A. previously owned by actor Michael Douglas. She lived there with her best friend, Victoria Sellers, the daughter of actor Peter Sellers and actress Britt Ekland. The two threw wild parties at the house, including a birthday party for Mick Jagger. The house got trashed.

Madam Alex and Heidis clients were some of Hollywoods top producers, directors and movie stars, such as Charlie Sheen. Other clients represented the worlds wealthiest and most famous men, including royal figures, heads of state, sheiks and business tycoons. Just when business was at the pinnacle of success, tragedy struck.

Murder

Eighteen-year-old Wendy Tarr moved from her hometown of Collinsville, Illinois, to Los Angeles, hoping to make it big as a model or actress. In 1989, Heidi befriended Wendy and the two spent a great deal of time together. That October, Wendy began a new job renting out apartments in a crime-infested neighborhood in central Los Angeles.

On October 2, a man entered the rental office where Wendy was working, allegedly looking to rent property. The man filled out a rental application and then left the office. According to Heidis book, he returned to the office a short time later with a .38-caliber pistol and tried to rape Wendy. In the struggle, the mans gun went off, shooting her in the face at close range.

When Wendys body was discovered she was immediately taken to County USC Medical Center. Surgeons worked for hours to try to save the young womans life. However, Wendy remained in a comatose state and would never awaken.

At the hospital, Heidi loyally waited by Wendys side for three days hoping her friend would pull through. On October 5, Wendy succumbed to her wounds. Heidi was determined to bring the killer to justice.

Heidi claimed that the police were aware of the killers identity. The man, identified as James Edward Noel, 43, had been tied to many other rape cases before Wendys death.

Taking matters into her own hands, Heidi wrote a letter to the popular television program *Americas Most Wanted*. She appealed to them to air a segment about Wendys case, hoping that it would prompt the police to arrest Noel. They accepted, and it aired on February 5, 1990

Heidis plan was a success. The day after the segment aired on television Noel turned himself in to authorities. He confessed to the first-degree murder and was sentenced to life in prison, with no chance of parole.

Heidi and Wendys family were relieved that Noel was locked away for good. Moreover, Wendys parents were grateful that Heidi went to such lengths to rekindle the investigation. If not for Heidis diligence, it is very likely that Noel would have committed more crimes. Unfortunately, her contribution to Wendys case would be overshadowed by Heidis illegal activities, which later caught national headlines.

In the Money

Heidi returned to work after a six-month break following Wendys death. Yet, when she did go back it was not business as usual. Heidi became angry with Madam Alex for pocketing the majority of the profits, leaving Heidi with only a small percentage of the earnings. Their relationship became volatile and Heidi decided to go into business for herself.

Heidi built up a new high-end prostitution service by employing a fresh batch of stunningly attractive, ambitious young women. Some of the women were aspiring actresses, university students, businesswomen and even a former Miss U.S.A. contestant. Heidi never had to recruit. Women came to her. They often tracked her down at her friend Victorias nightclub, On the Rocks, in downtown L.A, where Heidi spent a great deal of time.

Heidi successfully managed to corner the high-end prostitution market within months of starting her service. In a year, she earned several million dollars. The prostitutes working for her received 40% of the profits they made, including tips. For the most part, Heidi had a good working relationship with her girls.

Heidis reputation and successful business practices gained international attention within elite circles. It was not unusual for Heidi to send her girls abroad to service wealthy customers. Many of the prostitutes traveled frequently to London, Paris and other international destinations, raking in from \$1,500 to \$1 million per customer.

The girls enjoyed the money being lavished on them and the exotic locations because they were able to experience a lifestyle previously unknown to them. Many of the girls had a rare opportunity to meet some of the worlds most powerful men during the parties they attended with their clients. One of the girls even met President George H.W. Bush at a fund raising dinner.

Heidis business flourished. In 1992, she earned enough to buy another house in Los Angeles. It appeared as if everything was going her way, until June 1993 when the police put a stop to her operation.

Deep Trouble

News media from around the world flocked to the Los Angeles Municipal Court, hoping to catch a glimpse of the infamous madam to the stars during Heidis arraignment on August 9, 1993. Heidi retained criminal defense lawyers Anthony Brooklier and Donald Marks to represent her. At Heidis request, a plea of not guilty was entered on all charges. She was indicted a month later.

During the trial that year, Heidis attorneys presented a persuasive argument claiming that officers entrapped her. Their strong argument caused a split among members of the jury. Some strongly believed she had been set up, whereas others believed she had been justly apprehended.

To prevent a deadlock, some of the jurors decided to bargain in the hopes of coming to a mutual agreement. Finally, after four days of deliberation they reached a decision. On December 2, 1994, a grand jury found Heidi guilty on three of the five pandering counts, but innocent of the narcotics charge. Months later, Los Angeles Superior Court Judge Judith L. Champagne sentenced Heidi to three years in prison and a \$1,500 fine.

When Heidis lawyers learned that some of the jurors traded votes to reach a verdict, he appealed for a new trial. During the appeals process, Heidi remained free on bail. While out on bail she immersed herself in her new occupation, selling mens boxer shorts and other apparel at her newly opened store in L.A. aptly called Heidi Wear.

In the midst of the state trial, federal proceedings began against Heidi. On July 28, 1994, a

federal grand jury indicted her on 14 counts of conspiracy, income tax evasion and money laundering. Heidi's father, Dr. Paul Fleiss, was also indicted for having signed a bank loan of \$1 million, allegedly under false pretenses, which was used to finance Heidi's Benedict Canyon home. Heidi and her father entered pleas of not guilty.

Facing both federal and state charges proved to be a tremendous burden on her. In September 1994, she tested positive for methamphetamine and was ordered to a drug treatment center. It would not be the last time she was caught using illegal substances.

In August 1995, a federal jury convicted Heidi on eight counts of conspiracy, tax evasion and money laundering. It was her second conviction in less than a year. Dr. Paul Fleiss received three years probation. Heidi was eventually sentenced to 37 months in minimum-security prison, of which she served 20 months. After striking a plea bargain with the state, she received another 18 months for the pandering charges. Thus, Heidi received a total of three years in prison.

Throughout it all, Heidi never publicly revealed the names of her customers. According to Heidi's book, only two famous clients came to the forefront publicly during the court hearings. They were actor Charlie Sheen and Texas billionaire businessman Robert T. Crow who admitted to using her service. The identity of her other customers was left to speculation.

Prison Life

Immediately before serving her federal prison sentence, Heidi tested positive again for drugs. She was temporarily sent to jail and then ordered to attend a drug rehabilitation clinic. She remained at the clinic until the day she was to be transferred to the federal prison in September 1996.

Pleasanton Penitentiary proved to have life-altering effects on Heidi. According to Duncan Campbell's article *Dont Call Me Madam*, it was a frightening and humiliating experience. She was often harassed by the female inmates, which at times resulted in fights. Heidi was forced to literally defend her life on occasion.

According to Allan, Heidi was pressured to prove her toughness to other inmates by standing up to a female prison officer who remanded her for moving a locker in her cell. In response, Heidi hurled two chairs over the officer's head. In an interview with Allan, Heidi claimed that if she didn't do it there would have been serious consequences and possibly become someone's little prison bitch. The prison was known to have a high percentage of lesbians, some of whom would force girls into having sex.

Heidi ended up spending 63 days in a special housing unit where the more hostile prisoners were confined to small concrete cells for the duration of their punishment. It was not the last time Heidi would be sent there. On one other occasion she was confined there for 47 days for breaking prison rules.

Heidi passed much of her time in prison reading and playing chess with some of the other inmates, most of whom she taught to play the game. Heidi was an exceptional chess player, having won two city chess championships in a row as a child. She also befriended a few of the inmates. During an interview with Larry King, Heidi said she forged a close bond with one particular woman named Sylvia, who was serving time for drug charges. Sylvia, seasoned by

years of imprisonment, gave Heidi advice that helped her through her most difficult periods.

In November 1998, Heidi was released from prison and placed in a halfway house in L.A. for the duration of her sentence. However, she had difficulty getting acclimated to her new surroundings and after several days she expressed a desire to return to prison. It is believed that her reason for wanting to return was due to safety concerns. The authorities approved her request and Heidi eventually returned to Pleasanton to complete her sentence.

Moving On

In September 1999, after three years in the Dublin, California, federal penitentiary Heidi was released from prison. She remained on state parole and federal probation. She was also expected to perform 300 hours of community service, which included her working for seven months at a downtown L.A. soup kitchen.

According to Emily Faraches article *Heidi Fleiss --Broke in Beverly Hills*, three weeks after her release Heidi declared bankruptcy, listing debts totaling more than \$269,000. Nevertheless, with her parents financial assistance, Heidi was able to afford the lifestyle to which she was accustomed. Heidi, with a great deal of help from her parents, bought a new house in Hollywood and a Porsche sports car. Moreover, she changed her image by having cosmetic surgery to her face and bust. Despite her physical changes, Heidi was still the same woman at heart. She was as ambitious as ever, eager to make something of her life.

She worked at a series of jobs, which included a talk-show hostess and sex tips advisor on a popular Web site. She also made a sex tips video with her friend Victoria Sellers in 2001, and the following year she appeared in the comedy movie *Youll Never Wiez in This Town Again*, with Ellen Degeneres. In 2003, she published the long-awaited account of her life titled *Pandering*, which proved to be a big success. Everything was turning out well for Heidi, except her love life.

In 2001, Heidi began dating actor Tom Sizemore, 41, known for his roles in the movies *Black Hawk Down*, *Heat* and *Saving Private Ryan*. She eventually moved in with him and for a period of time their relationship was successful. She claimed in her interview with Larry King that they were happy together. However, it wasnt long before their relationship showed signs of deterioration.

In 2003, Heidi filed charges against Tom for abuse, which resulted in a court hearing that summer. According to Dan Whitcombs article *Ex-Hollywood Madam Heidi Fleiss Sobs in LA Court*, Heidi tearfully stated on the stand that Tom stubbed a cigarette out on her, beat her up, dragged her across the room by her hair and harassed her. Toms lawyers said Tom was innocent and that Heidi was lying. However, the prosecution was able to support Heidis account with evidence, which included pictures of her beaten and threatening answering machine messages left by Tom.

On August 15, 2003, Tom was convicted on six charges, including physical abuse, harassment and vandalism against Heidi. He initially received a sentence of six months in jail. Yet, it was reduced to ninety days in January 2004 following another hearing. Tom was also ordered to attend drug rehab, domestic-violence and anger management counseling.

According to Julie Kellers *E! Online* article, Heidi continues to make headlines, despite a lot of bad publicity. She participated in a USA Networks biography about her life titled *Call Me: the Rise and Fall of Heidi Fleiss*. Moreover, she is in the process of writing several more books. The world has not heard the last of Heidi.

The Stud Farm

Former "Hollywood Madam" Heidi Fleiss says she's bound for a brothel in the southern Nevadadesert that she wants to help remake into a resort featuring male prostitutes serving female customers.

"I am moving to Crystal," Fleiss said Wednesday of a desert crossroads 20 miles north of Pahrump and about 80 miles outside Las Vegas. It features two bordellos and little else.

"I am opening up a stud farm," Fleiss declared from her Hollywoodhome overlooking the Sunset Strip. "I am going to have the sexiest men on earth. Women are going to love it."

Joe Richards, who owns the Cherry Patch Ranch and Mabel's Ranch in Crystal, said he sent a "courtesy" letter Tuesday to inform the Nye County Commission that Fleiss will work for him.

"She's going to be madam hostess of Cherry Patch Ranch," Richards told The Associated Press by telephone. He called her an employee rather than a partner.

There's one possible problem, though. County Sheriff Tony DeMeo said that because Fleiss is a convicted felon, she could be banned from the county's legal sex trade. DeMeo sits with the five county commissioners on a six-member brothel licensing board.

Fleiss, 39, was released from a California prison in 1999 after serving 21 months for money laundering, tax evasion and attempted pandering.

Fleiss was convicted in 1995 of running a prostitution ring in which models-turned-prostitutes were flown around the world to meet wealthy actors and clients who paid as much as \$10,000 for a single meeting.

DeMeo said he'd heard several reports in his three years as sheriff about Fleiss' plans, including a failed proposal by an Australian firm that hired Fleiss in 2003 to promote a 50-room brothel-hotel.

"This is different," Fleiss insisted Wednesday, describing movers packing her belongings and her plan to arrive in Nevada later this week. "I'm moving."

Nye County is among 10 rural Nevada counties in which prostitution is legal under county and state oversight. Prostitution is illegal in Clark County surrounding Las Vegas, and Washoe County around Reno.

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