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I Dance for a Living

Dawn Passar

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I Dance for a Living**

*Dawn Passar**

Often people ask me what I do for work. They are interested about my profession, I guess, but not about me. I tell them that I dance and tease men. I am a stripper, in other words, and I strip right down to my bare brown skin. The only thing that is left on my body is my black high heel shoes and sometimes a thin scarf around my waist. It covers the stretchmarks that were left on my body after I gave birth. Although what the customer really comes to see is not my stomach.

Since stripping is my job, the next question I get asked is how much do I get paid. I don't even mention that strippers are underpaid. I don't get paid at all. I get tips from the customers, and from my tips I tip the manager so he gets off my case and I can do my job. One time, I remember a manager came to the dressing room and gave me some ideas about how the money got spent for maintenance. He boiled it right down to toilet paper and how I must not use too much toilet paper to wipe my ass.

A friend of mine told me the manager said to her it is like being a taxi cab driver, you have to rent a cab. No different! I bet the cab driver never got sent home because he or she was a few minutes late or got suspended for weeks at a time or was humiliated in front of people at work. We do not know how to stop this from happening. It is the well-to-do businessman who knows what button to push to be a success. And I am a worker. Workers know how to work and just want to make a living.

I saw my friend come to work one day. The manager told her she would not be working at the theater any more. She had been working there for three years. She cried and begged him to stay and work on that day. His response was she should have saved tons of money by now and she should not suffer from a layoff with no notice. She left the theater crying

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* In addition to her work as an exotic dancer, Dawn Passar is an accomplished photographer. She submitted the following photographs. They are an attempt to show the working conditions of exotic dancers. These, and several other photographs, were part of an exhibit by Ms. Passar at the *Hastings Women's Law Journal's* symposium entitled *Economic Justice for Sex Workers*, March 1998.

in silence.

A stripping job is easy. Any woman who is willing to take off her clothes can do it, but the shit that comes with it, that's what is hard to take. Stripping has been a longtime profession for women who like to perform and feel comfortable with their bodies. It gets very small recognition for what it is. The reputation of the job is usually negative. This is because no one but us really knows how or what it is like to be truly naked.