

Free Beer & Sex



My wife and I established one of Australia's first backpacker hostels in Townsville, North Queensland, and ran it for fifteen years. During that time over 100,000 people passed through our doors. Many were out for a bit of adventure and some got more than they bargained for. The stories in this book are based on real incidents: some frightening, others amusing.

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1 Free beer and sex



A friend of mine once claimed that all good backpacker advertising should include the words Free, Beer and Sex. The order wasn't important so long as you squeezed them in somehow.

He wasn't suggesting that the backpacker circuit is a great place to find sex. His point was that the expectation of sex is enough to propel most young males on round-the-world trips.

When I was a young guy, growing up in England, people who ran holiday camps put out a similar message. Some of my mates fell for it and, like other young guys, didn't have the courage to own up to the truth when they got back home. They fantasised about their exploits. The legend lived on and the holiday camps prospered.

Others of my mates hit on a better tactic. They joined a local tennis club or youth fellowship group and met girls there. Their next trick was to get the girls to go to the camps with them. Jive sessions were also highly rated but nothing could beat the peace marches.

To my loss, I never saw the point of trying to "Ban the Bomb". I was too naïve to realise that the marches were about something far more attainable. They provided unparalleled opportunities for getting to know the opposite sex. Big distances were involved and there were overnight stops. So long as the weather was fine, nothing could beat snuggling down in the long grass with a fellow peace activist.

Later, the flower-power thing took off. Making love became a moral imperative that would banish the urge to make war. In Australia, it reached its climax in the alternative lifestyle movement. Groups of young people occupied abandoned farmland and formed communes. Thirty years down the track, some are still with us. It's interesting to see how they evolved and I'll tell you about them elsewhere.

Here, I'm concerned with the young male's universal (or almost universal) quest for physical fulfilment with persons of the opposite sex. Mine was hindered by a fascination for the heavens that caused me to seek fulfilment in the study of astrophysics and other erudite subjects. While I was thus occupied, some of my mates were training as skiing instructors.

They had noticed that a certain sort of female is physically attracted to the sort of male who teaches physical pursuits. On holidays in the Alps, they had seen how people with names like Fritz and Wolfgang were scoring highly in the sport of "après ski" and they saw no reason why they shouldn't join them.

Becoming the sort of male who excites lust is the key to success. Locating a lusting female is all that remains. There is a common belief that foreign women are more susceptible to amorous advances than the girls back home. Unless you come from Saudi Arabia, Yemen and certain parts of the High Himalayas, I'd scrub that idea. If you do come from the aforementioned places, bear in mind that girls who show a bit of bare flesh above a bare knee are not trying to excite male passions. It's the way they dress and normal; healthy males are not unduly excited by it.

A mate of mine got round the problem of finding lusting girls by letting the girls find him. He's now gone to fat but was once slim, bearded and handsome. He was also a diving instructor and an enthusiast for the sport of "après dive". He used to stay in a private room at my hostel when he was not on the dive boats and usually had a companion with him. As he said, it was a matter of numbers. About one woman in fifty found him irresistible. There were so many girls enrolling in the dive courses, he could forget about the remaining forty-nine.

The strategy worked well but had its down side. He began to tire of the sort of female company he was keeping and developed a desire to settle down. Trouble was his fame had spread too far. The sort of girls he wanted as lifelong companions found him entertaining but spurned his advances. In the end, an older woman took him under her wing. He left the diving industry and joined her in the antiques business.

2 Toy boy



It's not a role that would appeal to everyone and not all young guys are cut out for it. Sufficient to say that a demand exists for the sort of company a younger male can provide for an older female.

Strictly speaking, it's not a job but it does have many similarities. There is no formal contract and remuneration comes in the form of financial support. Your companion pays for your meals and accommodation and may even finance the odd plane trip. As with mud wrestling, no work visa is required and you don't have to report gifts to the tax office.

From time to time, we had a toy boy staying at our hostel. They were usually well-spoken young men in their late teens. Most came from English speaking countries but that's not a necessary requirement. Don't worry if you hardly speak the language. No one is going to ask you to give English lessons. Other requirements are far more important.

Getting employed is largely a matter of chance. There are recruitment agencies specialising in male escorts but the job description is different and the title is "gigolo". Gigolos are experienced professionals who provide a service. Toy boys are inexperienced amateurs who receive one.

Most of our toy boys were Australian but a spattering came from the UK and Canada. The typical candidate was bronzed, athletic and unworldly. They gave the impression of having lived a life of total innocence until picked up by a thirty-plus lady from the other side of the world. The term to describe her male equivalent is *sugar daddy*. I like *sugar mamma* but will stick to modern terminology and refer to the ladies as *cougars* ... after the big cat of the same name.

The most memorable of our cougars was Renata. I became aware of her presence when a worried mum from Melbourne phoned to inquire about her eighteen-year-old son, Robin. Mum was unhappy about the company he was keeping and it was a while before she disclosed that Robin had gone off with an older woman whom he'd met at a schoolies party.

At this point, I should explain that schoolies parties are held for school leavers. They are an annual event and of great concern to parents and teachers who worry about older males that gatecrash the parties and prey on young girls. I wondered if anyone was keeping a lookout for older females.

Renata and Robin were on a scuba diving trip when mum phoned. I assured her that they had gone out with a good dive company and were in competent hands but that did little to calm her fears. In the end, I agreed to speak to Robin on his return.

I cornered the young man in the hostel garden, sipping a coke and sarsaparilla and looking totally at peace with the world. There was no sign of Renata.

"How was the diving?"

I asked to get the conversation going.

"Awesome!"

"How did your friend like it?"

"Awesome!"

It wasn't much of a reply and I decided that Robin was a man of few words. But I needn't have worried. He was soon waxing lyrically on Renata's charms. At thirty-five she was almost twice his age. That didn't worry Robin. He was clearly flattered by her attention.

He told me that his friend was a company accountant from Hamburg and she was in Australia for her Christmas break. Renata lived in a fabulous apartment and knew lots of famous people. They'd had a fantastic time together and he'd learnt a lot from her. The last remark came with a touch of shyness and I didn't ask for details.

It seemed that his dream encounter was coming to an end. Renata would soon be returning to Germany. Her company was negotiating a big contract and her financial skills were needed. She boarded a plane a few days later and Robin returned to Melbourne in good health and apparently no worse for wear.

I thought I had seen the last of Renata but I was wrong. She'd enjoyed her stay with us and turned up at Christmas two years running. The hostel was a fruitful hunting ground and she managed to find a young companion on both occasions. Her preference was for fresh-faced young men from sheltered backgrounds.

Not all cougars share Renata's tastes. Some like their young men tough and brawny. Others go for a more delicate model. There are opportunities for most young guys so long as they remember the two golden rules of cougar hunting.

1) Don't brag about your conquests (real or imaginary).

2) Don't pretend to be older than you are.

Remember that the last thing a cougar wants is age and experience.

PS. A friend from Japan tells me that a different sort of cougar stalks her country. The Japanese version goes after adolescent boys but otherwise displays the same features as its Western cousins.

3 Eric's fatal mistake



Many years ago, when I was a student in England, one of my friends joined a golf club. He saw it as a way to meet the right sort of people and advance his love life. I listened with envy as he told me about his progress. On occasions, I even wondered if I should give up rock climbing for a more socially rewarding activity.

The golf club's president had a beautiful daughter and my friend lusted after her. Weeks passed and everything went according to plan. He was invited to the president's home and met the young lady. They struck up a relationship and it was proceeding well when he forgot the basic rules of the game. I never fully understood what happened but it had something to do with "teeing off". As far as I can make out he hit the ball when he shouldn't have. Anyway, the offence was unforgivable and he fell from grace.

I recently encountered something similar at my local surf club. A handsome young fellow arrived from Scandinavia. I'll call him Eric. He was a champion surfer and got to know the club president. In time Eric met the president's daughter, the lovely Natalie (not her real name).

He went to stay with them. There was talk of marriage. Then things went pear-shaped. Eric was out in the surf one day and the perfect wave came along. It rose up and he launched himself into its seductive curve ... forgetting that he didn't have precedence. Another surfer was there before him.

Worst of all, the other surfer was the club president. Perched on her surfboard, Natalie saw what happened and was horrified. Eric had stolen her dad's wave (the technical term is "drop in"). What sort of husband would he make? She revised her opinion of him and gave Eric his marching orders. He ceased to be a live-in boyfriend and is staying in a backpacker hostel again.

4 Mud Wrestling



In another story (Holiday jobs), I describe two sorts of female dance acts. One is performed with the clothes on and the other ends with the clothes off. Mud wrestling provides a halfway house between the two. I was introduced to the sport by some young ladies at my hostel.

The wrestling took place in a local beer garden and was open to female contestants. Prizes were awarded to victor and vanquished alike and preference given to buxom girls in floppy tops.

The prizes came in the form of medallions that could be exchanged for cash at the bar. As the girls said, no work visa was required and there was no need to disclose anything to the income tax office. Before long they were part of the regular act.

One night they invited me along to watch. I arrived at the appointed hour and was shown to a table beside a large plastic paddling pool. I ordered a beer and watched as a woman in black leotards tipped dark powder into the pool. It came in sacks with writing saying it was good for the complexion and removed wrinkles.

The leotard lady smoothed the powder, sprinkled it with water and sloshed it around until it had the constituency of wet toothpaste. By now a large crowd had gathered and more people were streaming in from the street. I was hugely impressed. The hotel had gone bust a few months earlier. The new owners certainly knew how to get things going.

"Ladies. Your attention, please ..."

The leotard lady picked up a microphone and announced that a bath of health-giving organic balm had been prepared for the night's contest.

"The challenger is Helenna from Helsinki!"

She pointed to one of my girls: a big lass, called Joanne, who came from Perth.

"She will be fighting last night's champion ... Priscilla from Paris."

Neither girl was using her real name. That's important in this sort of contest. The aim is to entertain and you shouldn't care a sod whether you win or lose. If you do

lose, just tell yourself it wasn't you but some chump you were impersonating at the time. That's one reason. Another is unwanted fame.

In this age of rapid communication, images flash around on mobile phones. That could cause unnecessary angst when you arrive back home. The mud is there to provide cover for your activities. Don't give the game away by telling people who you really are.

"Ladies. Prepare to show us what you're made of ..."

The crowd went mad with excitement and the girls took up positions on either side of the pool. They crouched like sumo wrestlers then launched themselves at one another. Bodies clashed and mud spattered. They squirmed around, displaying the odd glimpse of nipple but not much else. The bout ended when Priscilla wrapped Helenna's T-shirt round her neck and forced her to concede defeat.

After that everything went smoothly. More of my girls presented themselves and were joined by girls from the crowd. Some were rejected as unsuitable. Others dropped out when they discovered they had to remove their bras. The contest ended and prizes were duly awarded to all contestants.

As far as I know, a good time was had by all. That didn't stop the local women's rights organisation from protesting. One well-known lady picketed the hotel to the embarrassment of some of its older patrons but was ignored by most.

5 Beach boys



In my last story, I wrote about mud wrestling and the young ladies who fought one another for medals that could be exchanged for cash at the bar. The wrestling took place in a local beer hall and was a great success. Strictly speaking, the girls were not employees. They were competitors. That didn't stop them from earning a steady income ... until the women's rights people put an end to it.

The girls were followed by a group of young guys called The Beach Boys. They were local lads, recruited by the lady who managed the mud wrestling and trained by her. They had well-honed physiques and wore the briefest of briefs (known as jock straps in some parts of the world).

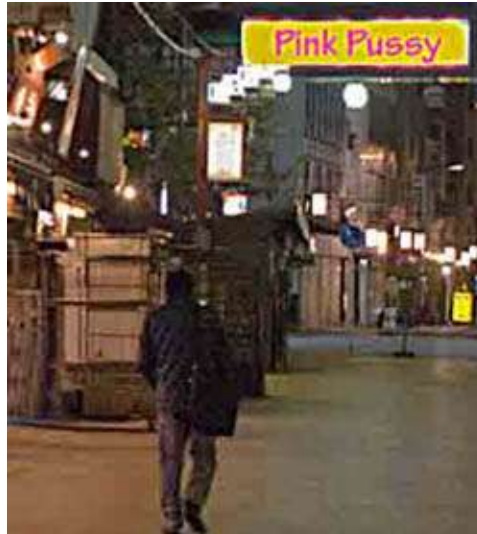
The boys flexed their muscles and pranced around on a small stage beneath flashing lights. Bodies oiled and hairless they hung onto their small item of clothing and looked bashful when female voices shouted for a Full Monty.

Despite the wild acclaim showered upon them by some members of the audience, I can't say I was taken by the Beach Boys' act. That, of course, is a personal view. The boys undoubtedly had their admirers and were very well paid.

If you are planning to travel round Australia and are thinking of putting on something similar, I would advise you to get a manager. A work visa will be required for non-Australian residents and it may be necessary to join an appropriate union.

I'm told that sex is not involved. Indeed, it is strictly out. The aim is to create an image of masculine virility that will excite the ladies in the audience and make them more amenable to the advances of their male companions. The mud girls' act was there for a similar reason.

6 Nightclubs



Some friends once invited me to become a partner in a nightclub. After a careful look at the proposal I decided it wasn't for me. In the process, I learnt a lot about the nightclub scene. In another article, I talk about the sort of competition people can face from rivals who are prepared to take extreme measures to force them out of business. That's one of the hazards of owning a nightclub. Here I'm going to talk about the hazards faced by customers ... male customers.

I don't want to put you off. Some of my friends own nightclubs and I'm sure they run them well. But not all clubs are well run and unfortunate things can happen in the best of places.

As a customer, you meet your first hazard at the door. The posh term is security personnel. Most people know them as bouncers. Some are well qualified. Others are not. It was a problem in the past and it hasn't gone away. I'm amazed that the industry hasn't done something to smarten up its act. We are still hearing stories of undue force and frightening injuries to patrons who refuse to take orders from overweight oafs who think they have a licence to punch and kick. Don't argue with the sods and don't think the problem is confined to Australia. Other countries have an equally bad record.

Incidentally, if you get a job as a bouncer and work in Townsville (where I had my hostel) or any other garrison city, avoid fights with guys with short hair. There's a chance they're in the army and trained to kill. While we were researching our nightclub, a fight broke out in a local club and spilt onto the street. The bouncers fought the army and came off second best. The military police were called in to prevent serious injury and the club was declared off-limits to the troops. That was a disaster for the owners. The boys spent freely and without them the club went bust.

My next remarks are addressed to males in search of female company. Some strike it lucky and find a lonely lady who shares their desire for a harmless one-night-stand. Most don't. The lucky ones return to their beds disappointed but unscathed. The unlucky ones fall victims to a sting ... and that's something to be avoided.

Three basic rules apply:

- * Don't let your hormones rule your head.
- * Beware of fascinating women.
- * Avoid group sex.

One poor guy failed to follow the third rule and found himself at the mercy of a pack of lesbian vampires (see Story 13, below). If you don't believe me, surf the net using *lesbian, vampire, killers, Australia* as tags and see what you get. None of my guests succumbed to that appalling fate but some fell victim to a lesser sting, which went something like this.

Imagine that you and your mates go off to explore the fleshpots of a new town. You fancy a bit of excitement and are drawn to the bright lights of a nightclub. You make your way past the bouncers and reach the reception desk. There's an entrance fee for men but women are let in free. That's encouraging. The club clearly wants to attract unaccompanied girls and you see a group at a table. You join them and soon get talking. Everything goes swimmingly. They're just the sort of chicks you've dreamt of ... no inhibitions and out for a bit of fun.

After a while, they invite you back to their place to watch porno videos and get to know one another better. It's too good a chance to miss and, half-sloshed, you and your mates pile into their cars. After a drive into the depths of suburbia you arrive at a small house. Videos go on and bras come off. The girls start to undress you. One of your mates is preparing for action when headlights appear in the driveway. Vehicles screech to a halt. The front door bursts open and a mob of guys bursts in. They accuse you of raping their wives. Fists fly. The girls flee and you're beaten up.

I was aware of three incidents of this sort when I ran my hostel. There could have been others. It's very humiliating. Definitely not the sort of thing you want to talk about. The victims were usually in their late twenties and stayed in private rooms in the hostel. They were always robbed and their injuries were sometimes severe. I informed my contacts in the local police and was told they knew what was going on but could do nothing until someone was prepared to lay complaints. As far as I know that never happened.

7 Spiked drinks



We had our hostel for fifteen years and, during that time, several of our female guests fell victim to spiked drinks. I can think of five cases but there could have been more. The so-called rape-drug was used on each occasion.

I'm not talking about an aphrodisiac. The girls weren't plied with drinks to break down their inhibitions and make them feel sexy. They were given a drug that rendered them senseless. Worse still, they were so confused that it was impossible for them to work out exactly what had happened. All they knew was that they had been violated and could only guess who had done it. To avoid such a thing happening to you remember the three golden rules:

- * Don't accept drinks from people you can't trust.
- * Don't leave your glass unattended.
- * Avoid getting drunk.

And remember that you can be handed a spiked drink anywhere ... not just in bars. I know one young lady who fell victim to spiking at the office party of a leading international company. The incident occurred in Sydney but could have happened anywhere. Her drink was spiked by colleagues. They were out to humiliate her and succeeded. The problem was to discover exactly what had happened and gather proof. There was a lot of circumstantial evidence but nothing that couldn't be denied. The case would make a good background plot for a novel. Maybe I'll have a go at it one day.

This brings me back to the point I made earlier. Victims are always befuddled. So, if you suspect someone is the victim of a spiked drink, take care of them and make sure the police are called. Bar staff are often reluctant to do this so you may have to do it yourself. Insist on a full medical examination and do your best to see that blood and urine samples are taken before any drugs are discharged from the body.

Girls are particularly vulnerable but guys are not immune. Shortly before we sold our hostel there was a strange incident that took several days to unravel. I was woken in the early hours of the morning by yelling and screaming from one of the private rooms. I pulled on a pair of shorts and went to see what was happening.

As I left my house, three figures emerged from the main hostel building and ran into the street. I figured they were part of the disturbance but had no time to investigate. The yelling was still going on and something had to be done about it.

I entered the hostel and was pleased to see my friend Sean in the corridor. He worked as a geologist's assistant and stayed with us when on leave. Sean was

outside one of the rooms and a torrent of foul language was coming from inside. We banged on the door and told them to "Open Up". When nothing happened, I unlocked the door and threw it open.

We were confronted by a woman I recognised as a local prostitute. She pushed past us and fled, leaving a fully-dressed young man on the bed. He was making a heap of noise and appeared to be hopelessly drunk. We did our best to calm him but without success. In the end I called the police and the guy was taken away.

I thought that was the end of the matter but it wasn't. The next day the young man reappeared claiming I had robbed him of hundreds of dollars. He was in a hysterical state and I had no doubt he believed what he was saying. Inevitably, the police were called again.

Days passed and the young man's mother became involved. With her help, we were able to piece together what had happened. It seems her son was a shy lad who had just finished work on a farming property out west. He arrived in town with his pockets bulging with money and went into a bar where he met some new chums. They spiked his drink and amused themselves at his expense. Their final act was to accompany him back to his hostel room, finding a prostitute on the way. When Sean disturbed them, they fled with the young man's money.

8 Jobs on trawlers



One day a glossy poster landed in the hostel letterbox. It arrived in a cardboard cylinder with a note asking me to display it in the female toilets. This sort of request generally referred to sexually transmitted diseases and came from the Department of Health. On this occasion, it was from the Department of Transport.

I wasn't totally surprised. As a former government officer, I knew that government departments are forever muscling in on one another's territory. Communicable diseases are transported and that was probably how the transport people got in on the act. I unfurled the poster and found that my suspicions were unjustified.

SCREAM !!!

A banner headline yelled at me from above a picture of a young woman cowering on the deck of a boat.

No one will come to your aid!

Other words spelt out the horror of her situation.

It was a warning about jobs on trawlers.

I've had friends who owned trawlers. I got to know them when they cashed in their fishing licences and switched to dive boats. Their behaviour was always impeccable. Sadly, the same cannot be said for everyone who goes to sea to catch fish. The Department of Transport knew there was a serious problem and acted responsibly.

Girls were being raped!

I encountered two incidents in which young women took jobs on trawlers (as cooks) and regretted it. One swam across to a boat on which I was working as a divemaster. The other returned to my hostel in a state of distress.

And it's not just the girls who are at risk. Guys are vulnerable too ... usually in a different way. Imagine you hear about this great fishing job. You can go to sea, get free food and board and have a share in the profits when the catch is sold. The guy who owns the boat said you'd have an awesome time and get rich in the process. It sounds too good to miss. But is it?

First, there's the risk you won't be paid. Working on a trawler is not a fun job and you'll feel more than a little upset if you find your boat had vanished into the great blue yonder when you go to collect your money. As one guy said when booking back into my hostel: "All I got from two weeks at sea was fish-handlers' disease and a badly cut arm.". He was particularly vulnerable because he'd been working without a visa. That can get you deported so there was no question of going to the police. Unscrupulous operators know that.

Second, there's the risk you won't get along with your new mates. There are many tales of crewmembers jumping ship or being abandoned. One poor fellow was rescued by a friend of mine who has a cattle ranch in the northern gulf country (Carpentaria). He found the man up a tree surrounded by dingoes. The guy could have died of thirst or been torn to pieces by the dogs.

9 Hippy communes



Okay. You've joined a commune and people are telling you it's run by a bunch of criminals. They are making out that it's not much different from the motorbike gangs you've read about in the newspapers. Of course you don't believe them. The commune is about saving the planet. You are trying to stop the rainforest from being destroyed by developers who don't care how much damage they do so long as they make money. You set up road blocks and sabotage machinery. It's not surprising the greedy arseholes are telling lies about you. All they want is profit.

I first got to hear about the communes in the Daintree rainforest when I went to visit friends who had built a backpacker resort there. The Daintree is on the coast, between Cairns and Cooktown in Far North Queensland. It is an area of great environmental significance and large parts have been declared World Heritage. I didn't doubt that

there were people who wanted to develop the bits that had not yet been scheduled for preservation. I knew some and had heard their boasts of chopping down any tree that stood in their way. But that didn't mean the protesters were squeaky clean.

As a new development, the resort came in for a lot of flack. The protesters had tried to stop it being built and were harassing people staying there. That didn't deter them from using its facilities when they managed to sneak in undetected.

A couple turned up one evening when I was there and hung around the bar chatting up the girls. They weren't my idea of the average tree hugger. Suavely dressed in dark trousers, silk shirts, medallions and religious charms, they reminded me of the sort of young men who drive fast cars and frequent nightclubs. My friend told me that their usual attire was sarong, headband and little else.

They lived in a makeshift commune in the nearby forest. The leaders were male and Australian. Their followers were predominantly female and many came from overseas. My friend painted a picture of free love, drugs and squalor. I asked how he knew and he said some girls had fled the commune and warned people to keep clear of it.

I returned to my hostel in Townsville, which is 500 kilometres to the south, and forgot about the Daintree for a while. Then I started to hear reports of a battle being waged by environmentalists who were opposed to the construction of a coastal road that would link the Daintree to Cooktown. I could understand their concern. The road would cut through pristine forest.

Soon, the whole thing became highly politicised and accusations began to fly. The protesters were allegedly growing marijuana amongst the trees and trading it. The accusations were vehemently denied. Anyone suggesting such a thing was labelled an environmental vandal in league with the most evil and reactionary forces in the land ... *then bodies started to be found.*

They were cropping up beside roads and the evidence pointed to gang warfare. Drug trafficking was evidently involved. I guess the police had the commune under surveillance and were waiting to gather further evidence. That's normal in drug operations. If you dash in too early, you get the small fry and the big fish escape. When the bodies appeared, they were forced to act.

I might have forgotten about the episode if a young woman had not come to stay in our hostel. She came from Canberra and I'll call her Joan (not her real name). She worked for us while staying in one of our apartments. One day we had a problem with a girl in the female dormitory. She was hysterical and Joan managed to calm her down.

The next day she told me that the young woman was suffering withdrawal symptoms and she'd taken her to the drug rehabilitation clinic at the hospital. It was then that I learnt about Joan's involvement with the drug scene in the Daintree four years earlier.

At the age of nineteen, she'd left stuffy Canberra for a life of freedom in a commune in the rainforest. The noble thought of saving the planet had helped her overlook the failings of her companions who were preaching conservation while chopping down trees to grow pot. She'd told herself the crop was solely for personal use, despite its huge size. She'd ignored the other drugs passing through the commune and she'd been intimidated by the threats and physical abuse that were a way of life in the commune.

Like everyone else, she was detained for questioning when the police raided the place. She convinced them she was not a person of interest and returned to her parents in Canberra. They advised her to enrol in a social welfare course at the

university, arguing that her wayward experience would help her save others. It didn't. Drugs had impaired her ability to concentrate. She found it difficult to study, fell out with her lecturers and quit. For the past year, she'd been wandering around trying to find herself.

10 Ingrid's new friend

Ingrid came from Denmark and was travelling with a young man who went out of his way to say that they were just good friends. His name was Rolf and he acted as her minder. Why he should have assumed that role was never clear to me.

The pair spent several months with us and worked for their beds. Ingrid helped with the cleaning and Rolf did odd jobs. He was reserved. She was decidedly outgoing.

One day a young man arrived at the hostel. He registered under the name of Nickolas and claimed to be Polish. According to Nickolas, his passport and credit cards had been stolen and he couldn't get money until they'd been replaced. He produced a valuable watch and said I could have it as security. In return, I gave him a loan of \$50 and said he could work for his bed.

Not surprisingly, Ingrid took Nickolas under her wing. He told her the story of his unhappy life and secured a sizeable loan. Several days passed and Rolf came to see me.

"Do you know Nickolas is borrowing money?"

I said I'd loaned him \$50 but didn't know about anyone else.

"He's got over \$600 and he's writing cheques ... telling people they can cash them when the bank opens tomorrow."

I said it was Thursday and the banks stayed open late.

Rolf grinned. "Okay! I'll take him there right now."

Rolf was a big guy and could be physically persuasive despite his mild nature. He collected Ingrid and they went down into the pool area where Nickolas was sitting at a table, busily writing cheques. A crowd gathered. People got excited and there was a lot of gesticulating. During all of this, Nickolas remained his usual nonchalant self and didn't seem put out when Rolf insisted they go round to the bank immediately.

What followed went something like this. Nickolas arrived at the bank, under escort, insisting it was closed and they were wasting their time. Needless to say, he got a bit of a shock when he discovered the doors still open. The bulk of his escort remained outside and he entered flanked by Rolf and Ingrid. They marched him to the counter and stood beside him as he presented a cheque.

After that things started to heat up. The cashier examined the cheque and said she would have to see if some transfers had been made. Nickolas said they would come back the next day and the cashier said they should wait. Nickolas started to argue and the cashier signalled to a security guard. The look on the man's face said they were not going anywhere without a fight.

They were shown to a bench in the main hall. Rolf hooked an arm round Nickolas and sat down. Ingrid took a place on the other side and held onto him. A minute passed and Nickolas tried to get up. A struggle ensued and customers moved away. The security guard glanced at his watch but made no attempt to intervene. Finally, after twenty minutes, three police officers arrived. Rolf got up and was immediately arrested along with Nickolas and Ingrid.

They were taken to a police station and questioned individually. It went on for hours. Finally, Ingrid and Rolf were released when CCTV footage arrived from the

bank. The confrontation with Nickolas was clearly recorded and bore out their version of events. They returned to the hostel leaving Nickolas in custody.

I never saw Nickolas again. He was found guilty of various offences and deported. I still have the watch he left me as security. I handed it to the police and it was returned when no owner could be found.

When the wheels of the law finally turned full circle, Ingrid and the other lenders received their portion of the money retrieved from Nickolas. They have Rolf to thank for that. As Rolf said: "Be streetwise. Don't fall victim to confidence tricks and scams. Smooth talking people aren't always what they seem."

11 Veronica's dad



My daughter, Mel, once knew a girl called Veronica (not her real name). They met at uni and shared a student flat together. One weekend, Mel went to stay with Veronica's folks. They lived in a posh part of town and had a beautiful house.

Mel got on well with them. Dad was always joking and telling tales. But a dark cloud hung over him. He had competitors who were jealous of his success and determined to wreck his business. That weekend, one of his nightclubs was firebombed and two of his laundrettes were trashed.

I had problems reconciling nightclubs with laundrettes. The hostel laundrette gave me endless trouble and I could think of no good reason why a nightclub owner would want a string of them. A malicious thought entered my head. Perhaps the laundrettes were laundering money. I put the idea to Mel and she was horrified. Veronica's dad couldn't possibly be doing anything like that.

At this stage, I need to say a few words about money laundering. It's something I didn't give much thought to as an academic and my work with the Australian Government didn't expose me to its complexities. Money laundering is what happens when dirty money from illegal operations is fed down one channel and made to reappear, lily white, at the other end. There are many ways of doing it and the thought of dirty money being laundered in a laundrette was too good to miss.

I made the money laundering remark as a joke and soon forgot about it. Mel didn't. Veronica was a nice girl but that didn't mean her amusing father wasn't up to tricks that ran foul of the law. Mel made enquiries and learnt he was facing criminal charges, which was very distressing for Veronica. I don't know what her dad was doing and didn't follow the case. Maybe he was using laundrettes to launder money. That could have appealed to his sense of humour.

12 Sea change



So you are fed up with your boring office job and want a change. Wouldn't it be nice to live in one of those fabulous tourist destinations where it's summer all year round? How about going into the diving industry? You could buy a boat and take tourists to the Great Barrier Reef. Or you could establish a yachting business in the Whitsunday Islands. You might even set up a backpacker hostel.

Many of my friends in the tourist industry had professional qualifications. Some had worked as accountants. Others had escaped from government offices. Some were failed academics. Most were wandering souls. Few of us realised we could be competing against hardened criminals when we left our cosy middle-class jobs for a more eventful lifestyle.

I'd heard of money laundering but had never given it much thought. Put in simple terms. Money laundering is what happens when dirty money from illegal operations (e.g. drugs) is processed to make it appear legitimate. Just imagine that you set up a business and find yourself competing against people who don't care if they make a profit. Their sole concern is to launder money. They'll undercut you at every opportunity and intimidate your staff.

I got to know a couple who had escaped the stress and strain of the big city for the peace and tranquillity of North Queensland. They'd earned enough as financial advisers to buy a backpacker hostel located in a veritable tourist paradise. Rainforest, tropical islands, scuba diving ... everything you could wish for.

It didn't take them long to realise that all was not well in paradise. Like other hostels, they had a backpacker bus which called at the central bus station. There was, of course, competition for customers. They expected that but what they encountered came as a shock. Hostels were competing to offer the lowest price. One was a huge resort and it was prepared to put people up for free!

Nothing made sense. The resort's previous owners had gone bust. They'd spent a fortune and had failed because there weren't enough tourists to support their lavish project. My friends started to make enquiries. With their professional background, it wasn't difficult to discover what the new owners had paid and how they had raised the finance. A considerable bank loan was involved. There was no way they could service the debt from their takings. The logical conclusion was that they'd soon be bankrupt like the previous owners but that didn't happen. Even with a ridiculously low bed price they stayed afloat.

What about restaurant and bar taking ... could they be sufficient?

That seemed unlikely. If you want to make money from booze and food it doesn't make sense to put up your customers at a give-away price. My friends went round to have a look. They discovered a lot of activity but not enough cash flow to satisfy the

bank. While sipping drinks beside the bar they were recognised by one of the owners and told, in no uncertain words, that they should stop snooping around and clear off.

Months went by and the situation got worse. Fights were breaking out at the bus station and one driver was injured when he was hit by a backpacker bus. The region's reputation as a tourist destination was under threat and the local authorities took steps to calm things down. They called a meeting of the warring parties and picked a hotel as a suitable venue.

The day of the meeting duly arrived and the participants turned up at the appointed hour. It wasn't difficult to tell them apart. The shire council people wore suits and the hostel owners were dressed in the smart casual attire that was fashionable in the tourist industry at the time. They contrasted with the partners in the big resort who wore silk shirts, gold medallions and expensive watches that dangled ostentatiously from their ample wrists. The meeting got off to a bad start and ended abruptly when one of the hostel owners had a beer glass smashed in his face.

The attacker was a senior partner in the resort. A charge of assault was brought against him and he was summoned to appear in court. But, before that could happen, he fled the country to avoid arrest on drug-related charges. Interpol entered the act and he was extradited back to Australia.

As far as I can make out, he and his partners were working a scam that went something like this. The resort was purchased at a time of high inflation with money loaned from the bank. Black money from the sale of drugs was passed off as hostel takings and used to service the debt. Interest payments are tax deductible so nothing was lost to the tax office. If everything had gone according to plan, the black money would have reappeared as legitimate capital gain when the property was sold.

13 Lesbian vampire killers

Okay. There's a movie with a similar name and you don't believe anything like it could happen in real life. So did a friend of mine and she has regretted it ever since.

She was working for a regional TV station and received a telephone call from a colleague. He had a bizarre story about a pack of lesbians who beheaded a man and drank his blood. Some women had been taken into police custody and were being questioned about a headless corpse in a riverside park. He couldn't vouch for anything but she would have a fantastic scoop if the story turned out to be true.

This was back in 1989. I had just opened a backpacker hostel and my friend knew I had contacts in the police. Could I make some enquiries and see what I could come up with?

I phoned around and failed to discover anything. My friend wasn't surprised. The story was too good to be true. It was the sort of false lead that media people give to others as a prank.

Two days later the story broke. It was true and very nasty. Five young women, embroiled in a lesbian relationship, had lured a forty-seven-year-old man to a park on the banks of the Brisbane River with promises of sex. Having got him there, they stabbed him 27 times. The attack was so brutal that he was almost decapitated. Uncorroborated testimony alleged that the ringleader of the group, Tracey Wiggington, drank the victim's blood.

The way in which the police solved the crime was as bizarre as the crime itself. The victim had undressed and a bankcard was found in his shoe ... but it was not his. The

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