

Peter's Story

Contribution from the industry

Until recently Peter worked as a sex worker on the streets and in agencies. He talks here about how he started in sex work, his cocaine addiction and how drug use affected his ability to have safe sex.

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Boys

Photo: Boys by Matthew Sleeth

Growing up, leaving home

I left home when I was fourteen. I lived in a country town. I had a few problems with my father; he did not like the fact that I was gay, which is fine. I used to cop a lot of beatings and that sort of thing, so one day when he said he wanted me to leave I actually did. Which I think shocked him more. We have not spoken since.

I moved to my grandparents' place on the Gold Coast, finished my high school education, moved to Brisbane and had a part-time job in a cafe. I haven't been back to my hometown, but I do go back to the town where my Mum is. I visit her a lot. My sister lives there as well but we sort of don't talk, because she wants me to have kids and I don't want to.

My first sexual experience

My first sexual experience happened with my babysitter when I was eight years old. I actually went to stay with him, his wife and kids for a week when I moved to Brisbane years later. But he was a hot guy. He was my next-door neighbour and he used to play rugby and so did I - different grades, obviously. My Dad used to take him and me to footy training and when my parents went out he used to look after my sister and me. We used to just play with each other under the house. He was 15; I was eight. That went on for a while and I had fantasies about him for many years after that. Before I moved to Brisbane I actually wrote him a letter and told him that my father kicked me out and that I was going up to my grandparents and that I would like to catch up with him. Which I did; I stayed with him for a while and we mucked around a bit.

1: How it started

A friend, an older guy I sort of met at a beat, took me to my first nightclub when I was 15. I didn't actually know what a gay nightclub was before then. I sort of met one of the managers at the nightclub and started sleeping with him and used him to get into nightclubs, which was all fun at a young age.

And then I discovered sex work. I was working part-time and going to beats to get sexual activity - at this point it was just personal for me. I was at a beat one day and a guy offered me money to have sex with him and I thought, 'Cool, this is all good - extra money in my pocket'. I was spending a lot going out and buying stuff for myself. And then more and more guys were offering me money so that was pretty good, but I have had pretty bad experiences of it too.

And from there, every night I used to go up to where all the boys used to work along the street in Brisbane and earn a lot of money. Well, back then it was a lot of money!

At the time I didn't really understand what sex work was all about and I think as time goes on and you meet people and you do it, you sort of realise what it and the industry is about. I was questioned by the police several times, because I was so young. They would send me back to my grandparents and I would just go back and make more money.

2: The sugar daddy

But then I sort of met this sugar daddy type guy; which offered me everything. I went back to the Gold Coast with him. He actually offered me a job working at his shop and living in-house, as a sort of house-boy.

For a young 16 year old kid it's great to have everything you wanted; to live in a really nice house on the canal of the Gold Coast, with speedboats, cars, holidays and cocaine, pot and alcohol. He used to have several boys over and several of his friends were the same.

I finished up getting a cocaine habit at the age of 16, which was not a good thing. I went to Thailand with him and that was good, but he was into younger guys and he had a few younger ones there. It ended up being a bad experience to go through, because when I wanted out there were death threats made against my grandparents and all that sort of thing.

Rape

And I was actually raped when I was 16, by a man who was actually a notorious paedophile. He was a convicted paedophile in Victoria, but not in Queensland. I didn't find out until years later.

Detox

When I had my cocaine habit I moved back to Victoria. My Dad's sister and her husband brought me down to Melbourne and I went through detox. I had charges filed against this paedophile and all that kind of stuff. After I got out of detox, I discovered sex work down here in Melbourne and I did that.

For detox I went through an actual detox centre. It was a little bit scary but I suppose, being through what I had been through, and being on drugs sort of shuts you off and you become a very strong and determined person, which I am. Emotionally I was shut off because I was very emotionally hurt, I guess, and sex work was the only thing that gave me money.



3: Sex work

So I worked on the streets of Melbourne for a while, in 1994, 1995 and 1996. Then, in '97, when I turned 18, I worked for an agency. Working with an agency was much better; I got a lot more work and it was a lot more money. I was working on the streets until then because I couldn't work for an agency prior to turning 18.

It's instant money and I think that's what appeals to a lot of sex workers. I mean, if they have a habit, they will quite often go down and do a job, go and score and then come back and work some more. If they don't have habits they may be saving to buy new clothes or a holiday or something else, or for their rent. And quite often you see people who actually only do sex work to get a bed for the night or various things like that.

RhED

I used to go to PCV (Prostitutes Collective of Victoria) which is now RhED. It was where all the workers used to go and there used to be about twelve guys I used to hang out with all around my own age. It was sort of a safe place for us to go during the day and hang out and we used to get our condoms there, and advice if you needed it, which was really good.

Friends

There were about five of us gay guys who used to work together and go out clubbing together. And then everyone went their separate ways. A few overdosed and a few went to Sydney; one of them I still actually talk to, but I only recently caught up with him after seven years.

Why I did sex work

Being so young and because of what I had already been through – the drugs, the rape and the previous sex work - it didn't seem like there were options other than sex work. I believe that anyone at the age of 16, 17 or 18 doesn't really know what options are out there for them, because they are so young. And if you don't talk to the right people...

I also think a lot of people take advantage of younger guys, which is what I have found out over the years. Being a young gay person, you think you're invincible because it is a whole new world. There are nightclubs, drugs, drinking and a lot of guys paying attention to you, which I found good.

Being young and blond, I didn't really understand it back then, but I do now. I never really thought about why I used to get a lot of guys interested in me. I do now know, because a lot of older guys do like the younger blond guys. It's quite funny actually, but as long as you were getting brought drinks, why not? I mean, there's a lot of forms of prostitution I think.

Coming out

I have never had any problems in general with people liking the person that I am and my personality, because I am so bubbly I suppose. That side of coming out and being gay I have never had an issue with. All my friends are actually a lot older than I am. I have never really got along with people my age; I have preferred people that are a lot older. I think that is because I was brought up by my grandparents as well as coming from old-fashioned values.

Sexual health

After I was raped, going through the detox clinic was when I found out about blood tests and all of that sort of thing. I didn't really understand it much. Being a young person, I suppose you don't take it in as much. And you can get a lot more information about it now. The services you can access are a lot better.

When I was working we had regular sexual health check-ups. Back then it was every six months, but when I worked for the agency we had to get tested every month. I'd heard about HIV but I did not know a whole lot about the actual disease, because I had never read anything about it. I did know someone who had it and died, but it was sort of never spoken of. It is possibly only the last five years that I have read a lot of books about it. A very close friend actually died recently of HIV, someone who was a really close and good friend. He was the friend of someone I was in a relationship with for six years.

4: Relationship

That was my first true relationship actually. I met this person when I was 18 turning 19. I met him through someone I knew who had hired some boy at the agency. I used to go up and visit him in the country town he lived in. He lived there and I lived here. And then eventually I moved up. I was with this person for six and a half years.

So I sort of stopped sex work for a while. I had the odd client in the town, which I suppose is not really good from a relationship point of view, but as I found out towards the end of my relationship, he was actually hiring other escorts anyway through the entire relationship and sleeping with a lot of all the younger guys in town. But I had no idea.

He knew I had been a sex worker and he did not like that fact. He was very controlling. I lost a lot of friends through that relationship but then again it opened up a lot of opportunities for me as well. I had a career; I brought my first unit, a brand-new car and went overseas several times.

I don't recommend living and working six days a week with your lover; it does not work. It depends on the person, but it does not work from my point of view. Then again, I look back at that relationship and it was sort of like sex work anyway, because he only got sex if I got something out of it. I shouldn't put it that way; I really fell in love with this person and then towards the end of the relationship I was not 'in love', but I did love him dearly.

End of relationship

And then it got really messy. He got really nasty and things got really bad. I went to work for an agency in Melbourne again to support myself. I had left my job, so I had no income. Having a car and house payments, I thought this is the only way, until I found a job, to get quick money.

The Middle East

So I did that for a while and actually got to go overseas as well, which gave me great opportunities to do sex work in a few countries. It was the Middle East. I was sent over there by the agency, which was fantastic. It was a great holiday – oh God, I had a ball!

It was a working holiday. I had my own suite at the Hyatt Regency, my own chauffeur, and I flew business class. I only fly business class anyway; I won't fly economy. I sort of got spoilt from being in a relationship and working in a business; you sort of travel that way.

Back home

When I got back to Melbourne I worked again for the agency for a while and then I left it, because I was basically working 24 hours, 7 days a week. It got very tiring and I was stressed because of my 'divorce' from my ex; it got very messy with lawyers and stuff. My health went down and I stopped work for a while. I got quite sick actually. I had spent too much time out partying so that I could vague everything out.

Partying is not my sort of scene anymore. I prefer to go to the theatre or go out for dinner; being dined is much better than going to a club and sleeping with a sleazy old person, or young person, who thinks that you will be their boyfriend for two weeks - that is not my thing.

I didn't go back to the agency. I have always had a few clients on the side, so I started to see them and then I met some people who used to or currently worked on the streets. I was going through a rough time, so I sort of went and worked on the streets again.

5: Street vs Agency

That period in my life was so low; that's why I sort of did it. Working on the streets is completely different to working within an agency; it is cleaner and healthier in an agency. Working the streets is different; it is really cold and dismal. You don't actually know what sort of clientele you're getting, and there are people driving around and bashers and you do cop a lot of abuse and get hassled by the police quite a lot – and hassled by other workers too. It can be dangerous in a lot of ways, but it can sort of be good in a lot of ways as well.

It depends on the clients. I have been pretty lucky with my clients, I guess. I find an agency is probably a little bit better to work for anyway because you do have a lot of international guests. It is a little safer than working on the streets. For an agency there is more involved - you do more massage and three-course sex, if you like. Whereas on the street a lot of it is just oral - but then you get the odd couple-of-hours job.

6: Clients and STIs

I have had a few clients that have had sexually transmissible infections and they haven't known what they were. So I have actually told them and then told them more about them and where to go and get check ups - at the sexual health clinic in Carlton. Some of them don't know – a lot of married men don't know what's out there because they don't pick up gay papers or that sort of stuff – and occasionally a gay man, who should know about STIs, doesn't. They are not aware. Being a little bit older, I sort of educate some of the younger workers as well, because a lot of them don't know or are not educated about everything.

7: I hate seeing young people out there

It is actually really sad to see young people out there. I hate it. I hate to see them going through what I have been through. I think it is really sad. You try to help them but you know they are not going to listen. But if you can just educate them about it then I feel a little bit better about that.



I feel it is my duty to educate the younger ones because I have had people do it for me. If I don't do it, no-one else is going to do it, and I don't want young guys to experience what I have experienced, because it is not a nice thing to go through. There are a lot of nasty people out there and there are a lot of nasty workers out there as well who take advantage of the young guys.

I don't approve of young guys working at all, because, on the streets, it is a very dangerous job to do. I think it is wrong. I mean I am not being selfish, but it is not a place for young people to be, they are very vulnerable really. A lot of clients do want the young boys and they cannot really defend themselves and don't know really where to access information and services from.

I am still on the street but I am going to work for an agency very shortly. I don't go to the street a lot because I have a lot of private clients. I have actually got a phone number that I give them and they just give me a call. A lot of them I do day jobs with now, which is really good.

8: Sex, drugs and money

Paid sex is work and personal sex is for pleasure. There is stuff that I won't do sexually for clients, which I prefer to keep for myself – though it can depend on how much money there is. If a client offers me a lot of money to do a certain sexual activity that I would be personally into, I would take that up no problems. But you don't want to know about my own sexual activities!

I think it has changed a lot now because I won't do a lot of sexual things I used to, because I am no longer under the influence of drugs. Being under the influence of drugs relaxes you a little bit more sexually – and I don't think a lot of people actually realise what they get themselves into, because they are either hallucinating or they don't really remember much, especially a lot of the younger guys. I go to saunas and I know there are a lot of guys who have been under the influence of drugs and they have regretted it.

9: Group sex and barebacking

And that was my experience too, especially in group sex, which I am quite fond of. But it is very dangerous. I used to go to a few group parties, which sound really scary if I talk about this, because, yeah, a lot of them don't practice safe sex. I had a scare, a really big scare actually. I went through a low period, only last year, because of the people that I was hanging out with. A friend of mine was having group parties and there would be about 15 guys there; some would be HIV positive and some would not be. It was a mixed age group, there was a lot of drug use – injecting and not injecting – and a lot of unsafe sex, a lot of bare-backing, which I found a lot of guys are actually into now. Barebacking is popular especially in the saunas, which I go to because you never have to see the person again. Which is what I quite like. I mean I would not have group sex if I weren't on drugs. You just couldn't; there is no way, physically – your body could not do it. I suppose there are people that could, but I don't think you could.

Out of it

Anyway, I was very intoxicated and very high on amphetamines at this group party and I was sort of in and out of consciousness and a guy I knew quite well, who was HIV positive, injected me with his needle while I was sort of half asleep and then had unsafe sex with me while I was out of it.

10: Being on PEP

I went to the Alfred Hospital and they gave me PEP treatment. I had that and then I was waiting to see if I was HIV positive or not. Which was very scary. It scared me a lot knowing that this guy had done the same thing to several other young people who are positive now. So that was when I really woke up about safe sex. Being on PEP was not good at all. I was very sick. I think that the stress made me very run down and I was not really well back then at all. It was very stressful not knowing what was going to happen. A good friend of mine, who I had been friends with for years, made a comment like, 'welcome to the club', which I got a bit offended about. He is HIV positive himself. He is quite proud of being HIV and quite proud of having unsafe sex, which I find very sad. That sort of experience opened my eyes a lot. Because I was having lots of unsafe sex for drugs and so were quite a few other people I knew. That is what we used to do – have group parties and you would know that if you had sex with this person you would not need to pay for your drugs.

Working on the street

There are good sides and bad sides to street work, and that is the bad side of it. But I have also met a couple of good clients who have taken me to their own home and I have stayed with them. They give you meals and they buy you clothes and they are very supportive; if I ever need anything I can give them a call. You know, if you need a packet of cigarettes they will buy you a packet, which is fantastic. On the street there are actually a few older clients who have been around for over 20 years and they know every single guy who has worked down there. And they will go there every single night – it's like an old mother's club meeting. It's great because I know them and I stand there for half an hour having a chat with them.

'a leg fetish..'

To work privately I am establishing a client list of my own, which I quite like. Eventually you don't have to work on the streets. You just get lots of calls, which is the best way. And you get to meet all sorts of guys, which I quite like. It is interesting as I find other people's lives quite interesting. You meet some weird characters. Only last night I had a guy who had a leg fetish, which was weird. He just likes legs; doesn't like feet at all!

'Fantasy Man' and 'Nanna Bill'

You get some quite strange characters. The clients on the street have different names. For instance, there is one that has a limp, so he is called 'hop-along'. The workers give the clients names. There is a client who talks really filthy to you, so he gets called 'Fantasy Man' and he knows he gets called Fantasy Man. There is another one we call 'Nanna Bill', because he is like an old Nanna. So they have all separate names and it makes it quite funny. We also have little codes that we work by, but they're secret so I can't give them out. Personally I have never been harassed working on the street. I suppose I'm very lucky in that way. But I also don't go out there to attract attention like that. I always attempt to be polite and pleasant. I have never had a problem with the police, but I know that some workers have. I find it helps not to lie to the police.

Honesty

I am always very honest, even with my clients. I don't even have a false name that I work under. I don't believe in giving my clients a false name because I see them regularly and so I get to know them on a personal level and then you get to keep them as clients for years. I have some clients that I have had for many years. I actually like the sex industry and I'm bloody good at it, if I say so myself. I won't just come out and tell people I am a sex worker, but if I am asked I am honest about it. If they don't like it, well, stiff shit, it is not my problem, it doesn't bother me. I am me and you like me for myself, not for what I do. I have got no shame; sex work has been around for centuries. If someone asked me if I am gay I will say no. I don't sort of say anything. I just tell them labels are for clothing and jam jars. I think that's why I get along with all types of people. I don't just have gay friends or bi friends or straight friends; I have a mixture of people.

The present

About six months ago, I took myself off to a friend in the country, mainly to get off drugs and clean myself up, which was really good. I have just recently come back down to Melbourne. I am doing a bit of street work and I also have a few clients privately. It is just to get a bit of cash to save until I get settled again. I see it in a different light; I respect myself a little bit more. You have to.

The future

I have no intentions of having another relationship ever. Been there done that. It's not that I'm selfish; I don't like someone telling me what to do! I suppose it would be nice to have someone in my life, but Mr Right has not come along yet and I am not really looking either. Unless he has got an income of a million dollars – then I wouldn't mind! Hopefully within the next two years I will be living in Europe. A friend of mine manages a salon in London so I plan to go over there and do hairdressing. I have done a bit of hairdressing in the past. One day I might settle down with a husband and a dog with a white picket fence because you never know. And if sex work comes up again it all depends on the situation at the time. If I am single and I have clients offered to me over there, why not, I say. I have no problem with it. But I wouldn't work in a country area. I know there are agencies up there, but I sort of like to go to my Mum's because it is quiet time. You can get all of your perspectives together. And because my mum and her partner are very high up in the business community, they probably know a lot of people, so I would not work up there. My mum knows what I do and she thinks it is great. She goes, 'Why give it away for free?'

Update

September, 2005

I met someone four months ago. He is a friend of a friend. I came over here for coffee and I never left. We didn't want a relationship; it just happened. I haven't been this happy for years. We're soul mates. We had our Chinese horoscopes done and everything matches up. We're right next to each other in the lucky zone. He's gorgeous! I gave the sex work up that first weekend. He didn't want me to work – he didn't ask me to stop but I didn't want to work, as it's a big strain on a relationship. It was hard at first going without the money but you get over that. And I had to get back into regular sleep patterns – that took a couple of months and then I got some work. I think he's taught me how to love again.

*Peter's story first appeared in the Victorian AIDS Council's Staying Negative website.
Visit www.stayingnegative.net.au for more stories*