

# Retired Peoria madam: 'I look back and wonder how I did it all

She recalls heyday of Peoria's brothels, as well as their demise

By BILL MITCHELL

Karen Connally, one of the city's last prostitution madams, was shot twice, estranged from her family and able to earn and lose a fortune during her 20-year career. She regrets nothing.

"It was the best way to be," said Connally, who now lives in Florida and goes by her birth name, Alyce Broshe.

She plied her trade from the early 1950s until she quit the business in 1976. Her career included a lucrative five-year stint as a Hollywood call-girl, work as a house prostitute and ownership of one of the country's few "turn-out" houses, specializing in training new prostitutes.

Today she is 57 and lives alone in a small apartment in Tampa. Her left side is partially paralyzed from a stroke.

"I had so much fun," she said. "I made a lot of money, I met interesting people and I was my own boss. Nothing we did hurt anybody."

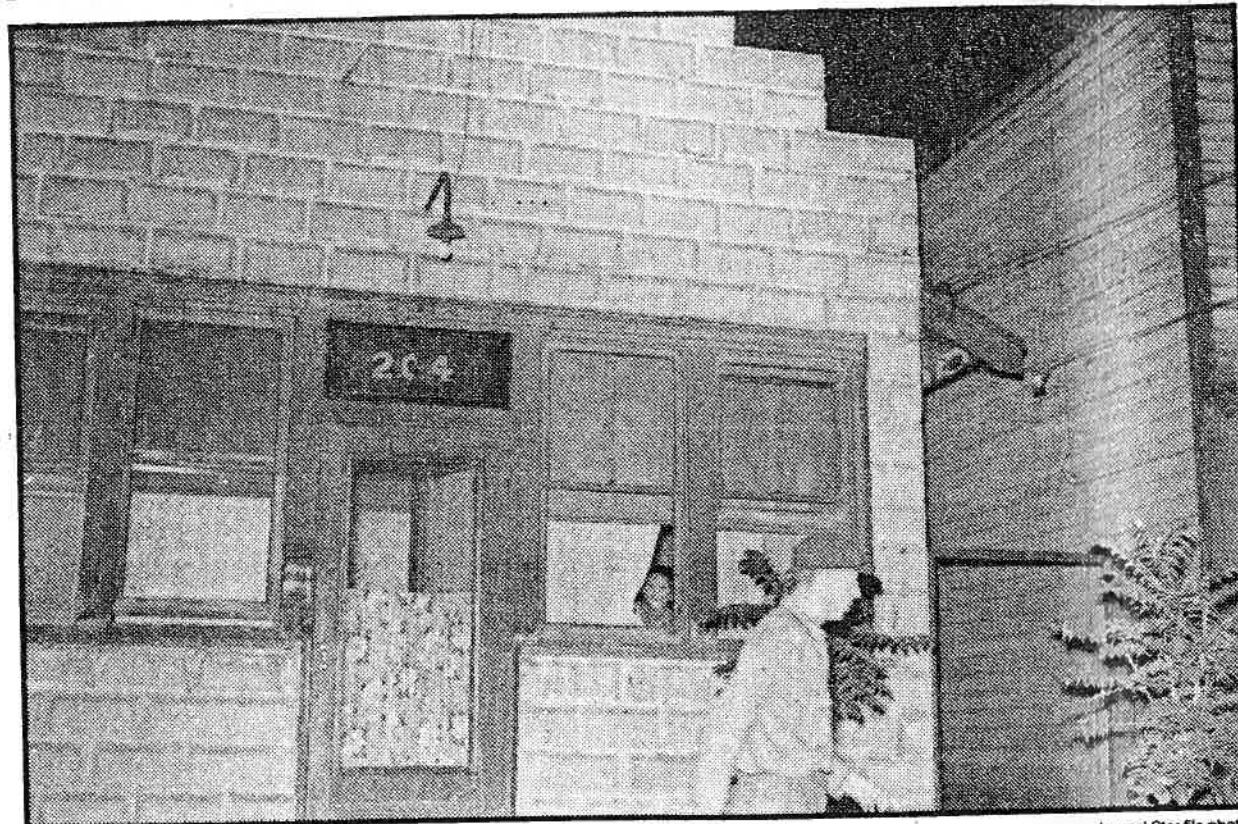
When she left the business in 1976, she struggled to fit into what she calls the "square world." She went back to school, earning university degrees in criminal justice and adult education.

It was to escape the square world that 15-year-old Broshe left a home in which she was subjected to her stepfather's sexual assaults. It was 1950.

She was born in St. Louis in 1934, and her family moved to California just before the start of World War II. Her father died of a brain tumor in 1940.

"I missed him terribly. I think I always have," she said. "He was the only warmth and tenderness I had."

When her father died, her mother went to work and placed Broshe and her younger sister in a foster home. The family was reunited when her mother remarried and decided to return to the Midwest. The man who became Broshe's stepfather was a welder and



Journal Star file photo

This photo of a man leaving one of Peoria's infamous brothels was taken in the 1930s. The city's red light district operated for 50 years. Urban renewal helped put an end to it.

mechanic with little education.

Soon he made advances to Broshe, who was in her early teens. By age 15, she rebelled. When her mother accused her of trying to break up her marriage by telling her of the sexual abuse, Broshe bought a bus ticket to Chicago.

Once in the city, she took a room in a low-rent boarding house and ran errands for bartenders and strippers to earn money. "Organization people" tried to force her into prostitution but she refused.

"That was the last thing I wanted to do," Broshe said. "After what I had learned about sex, I told them I wanted nothing to do with it. You have to remember what things were like for girls at that time. Sex was never discussed at home. Women were not allowed to have good jobs like men had. They could be waitresses or secretaries or teachers but that's all."

Alternative to poverty

When she was beaten by strangers for refusing to sleep with them, she was nursed back to health by a friend she referred to as a "lunch box pimp." It was he who planted the idea that prostitution might be a good job for an at-

tractive, intelligent and homeless young woman.

Her friend brought her to Peoria and introduced her to longtime madam Pam Miller, who set her up as a house prostitute.

From there, Broshe met Harry "Blackie" Jennings, a man with a long police record for gambling, soliciting and other charges. She fell in love with him, and he took her into his stable of prostitutes.

Broshe knew nothing about the rackets. When Jennings began asserting his authority as her pimp, they fought.

Once, he accidentally shot her in the head with a .45-caliber handgun. Surgery to remove the bullet and part of her skull left brain scar tissue that would bring on epilepsy.

Eventually, she returned to her mother's house. But high school life made her feel out of the mainstream and the epileptic seizures didn't help. She started going to school by day and hustling in a nearby city at night.

Her double life was discovered when she was in an accident with a prominent attorney who happened to be married. She went to work in a prostitution house but kept attending a business school, doing home-

work between tricks.

Choices

Her parents, frustrated by her behavior, had her placed in a mental hospital for treatment of her epilepsy, then considered a mysterious condition. She was released on the condition that she remain at home until she was 21 or married.

Broshe tried to fit into the family, but her relationship with her mother and stepfather worsened. Eventually she met a boy at school and got married. She became pregnant almost immediately.

"It was miserable. He wanted me to be the housewife, and I wouldn't take orders from anyone."

She moved back in with her mother and stepfather and divorced three months after the baby was born.

It didn't take long for her stepfather to return to his old ways. She left again, leaving her daughter to her mother.

'Taking calls'

She moved back to California and began "taking calls."

She developed a loyal clientele of businessmen, actors and other big Hollywood names. But she said the dates seldom involved sex. "I was a showpiece, an escort. Men would in-

roduce me as their date for an evening or a weekend. . . ."

As a call girl, Broshe said she would call a bar or hotel when she arrived in a new town to let them know she was available. She would earn anywhere from \$150 to \$200 a night. If she was asked to travel, the price increased.

She even worked at the fabled Mustang Ranch in Nevada for a while and claims she was making \$2,500 a day there.

Eventually, Broshe would try and fail at a regular job and learn that her mother had legally adopted her daughter. The girl was raised to think that Broshe was her sister.

In 1961 she returned to her mother's home for a visit but didn't like pretending to be her daughter's sister. She didn't see any of them again for 14 years.

Back to Peoria

She returned to Peoria, and began working again for Pam Miller while waiting for Blackie Jennings' release from prison.

Eventually she opened her own brothel on Jefferson Avenue, and Jennings joined her. They named the place "Midway House."

But she made some mistakes in her first stab as landlady and was raided often.

The situation wasn't helped by the problems Broshe was having with Jennings. During one fight, she ended up shooting him twice in the back.

While she faced assault and prostitution charges, her house was raided for a seventh time and she was charged with being an operator. Her place was padlocked.

With attorney fees skyrocketing, Broshe was broke and about to lose everything. In desperation, she turned to robbery.

She spent a year in prison for that crime, studying criminal science in a college program.

The end

Pam Miller picked her up at the prison door. She worked briefly for Miller and then took a job as a telephone solicitor. It didn't last, and after another stint working for Miller, Broshe decided to go back into business for herself.

She found a new apartment and specialized in "turn-outs," or new prostitutes who needed to be taught how to hustle and how to treat a "john."

She learned to screen patrons at the door, avoiding

busts by turning away men she didn't know as regular clients. Her policy kept her from being arrested for more than six years.

Things went well until she suffered a series of strokes; the last paralyzed her left side and put her in the hospital. She took on a new partner, who took a chunk of her revenue.

The last straw came when she allowed a former client into her house, not knowing the man had joined the police force. The client led a raid and she was arrested.

The publicity led to her eviction. Her partner took control of her business.

"I was tired, I was sick, and now I could see that I was no longer in charge of my own business," she said. "I decided I wanted out but I had no idea how to do it."

Mental hospital

She met her "bridge" to society in Barbara Heyl, an Illinois State University sociology professor. Heyl, who knew Broshe from a college program, encouraged her to go back to school.

Before she could get very far, Broshe became ill and was told she was suffering a mental breakdown. She was sent to Zeller Mental Health Center.

While there, she learned she was eligible for Public Aid because of her disability. She could attend Illinois Central College and receive a small subsidy.

Broshe went to ICC, then to ISU, where she graduated magna cum laude with a bachelor's degree in criminal justice.

She then enrolled at the University of South Florida in Tampa, where she spent the next three years doing graduate work.

But her old disabilities flared, forcing her to spend the next several years on public assistance between hospitalizations for back surgery and other ailments.

What she has now is her 10-year-old cat, Nuisance, a few houseplants, a coffee pot, a typewriter, crossword puzzles and a tiny black-and-white TV.

Memories and \$422 a month are sustaining her.

"I look back and wonder how I did it all. I'm totally happy now. I'm so broke I don't know what to do, but I have everything I need. . . . I'm satisfied that I did the best I could, and I'm not dead yet."

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