

# THE NAKED TRUTH



*Just Out*  
goes on a  
strip search  
for Portland  
skin

by Marc Acito  
Photos by Marty Davis

*Warning: Do not read this article if you want to continue viewing male strippers as sex objects without lives, opinions or brains.*

**P**rostitutes and drug addicts. That's what comes to mind when you think of male strippers, isn't it? I mean, beyond the thoughts we can't print here. Well, I spent countless hours talking with Portland's male strippers (that's just me, y'know—work, work, work all the time), and what I discovered definitely will surprise you. In the immortal words of Donna Summer, these guys work hard for the money.

But not hard where you'd like them to be hard. The wording of Portland City Statute 14.36.010 is pretty vague in a legalistic way, but it's commonly understood that although male strippers can get naked on stage, they cannot get aroused or simulate sex acts.

Once naked, they also are prohibited from coming into physical contact with customers, or any of the furniture the patrons use, presumably for health reasons. Because most strippers are independent contractors and not employees, those who break these rules—as opposed to the bar itself—risk being fined by the Oregon Liquor Control Commission.

There are more strings attached—G-strings to be specific. Because a thong exposes the dancer's buttocks, by law that qualifies as nude. To limit the physical contact, tips are supposed to be slipped into the G-string on the hipbone only.

The dancers take groping in stride. "Most of the groppers only give a dollar," one dancer tells me. "I'd have less of a problem if it were a 10 or a 20."

But those regulations are nothing compared to the house rules posted in the basement of Silverado, the gay-owned nightclub across from Jake's Famous Crawfish on Stark Street. Imagine for a moment being greeted at work with signs reading: "Wipe your ass and wash your feet. Deodorant helps, too," and "Don't hunt for pussy." Suddenly, that request to wash out your own coffee cup sounds pretty reasonable by comparison, doesn't it?

## The Nightly Nudes

**S**ilverado's dancers perform 10 minutes out of every hour from 10 p.m. to 2 or 2:30 a.m., so there's plenty of time to talk, particularly for those younger than 21, who are prohibited from the barroom floor. Some of the older dancers refer to the basement as "Romper Room"; the management even has installed a Sony PlayStation down there so the Young and the Restless have something to do between sets.

Tonight 19-year-old Chance is asking the DJ to play "I Want to Fuck You in the Ass" for his next set. He refuses, not on moral grounds but because the song is too slow. After 9 p.m. the management wants all music clocking in at no less than 132 beats per minute.

"How 'bout 'Shut the Fuck Up and Dance?'" Chance asks.

"Sure, no problem," the DJ says.

Some patrons complain about Silverado's penchant for teen dancers. "Watching the young skinny ones makes me feel like a pervert," one guy tells me. "I feel like I should be grading their shop projects or buying them a sandwich."

But finding someone willing to dance nude for tips tends to attract a young talent pool. Go figure.

A lot of the younger dancers can't wait to turn 21 so they can visit with the customers between sets and boost their tips. Some of the older dancers, however, think the kids have it easier because they tend to attract the older, wealthier patrons.

Estimates vary, but a male stripper can earn anywhere from \$50 to \$300 a night in tips, which he, not the club, is required to report to the government.

Most start stripping to get out of debt, and most have day jobs—some you'd expect (carpenter, personal trainer, student, house cleaner), some you wouldn't (secretary, retail store clerk, used-car salesman). Some have children to support.

Hanging out in the dressing room of a strip bar is definitely as much fun as it sounds. Raven, an African American dancer with a smooth hairless gymnast's

body, comes downstairs and strips off his G-string about two feet from me. Out flops something that looks like a penis, only bigger. I try to continue asking questions, but my speech becomes random and disjointed, like I've got Tourette's.

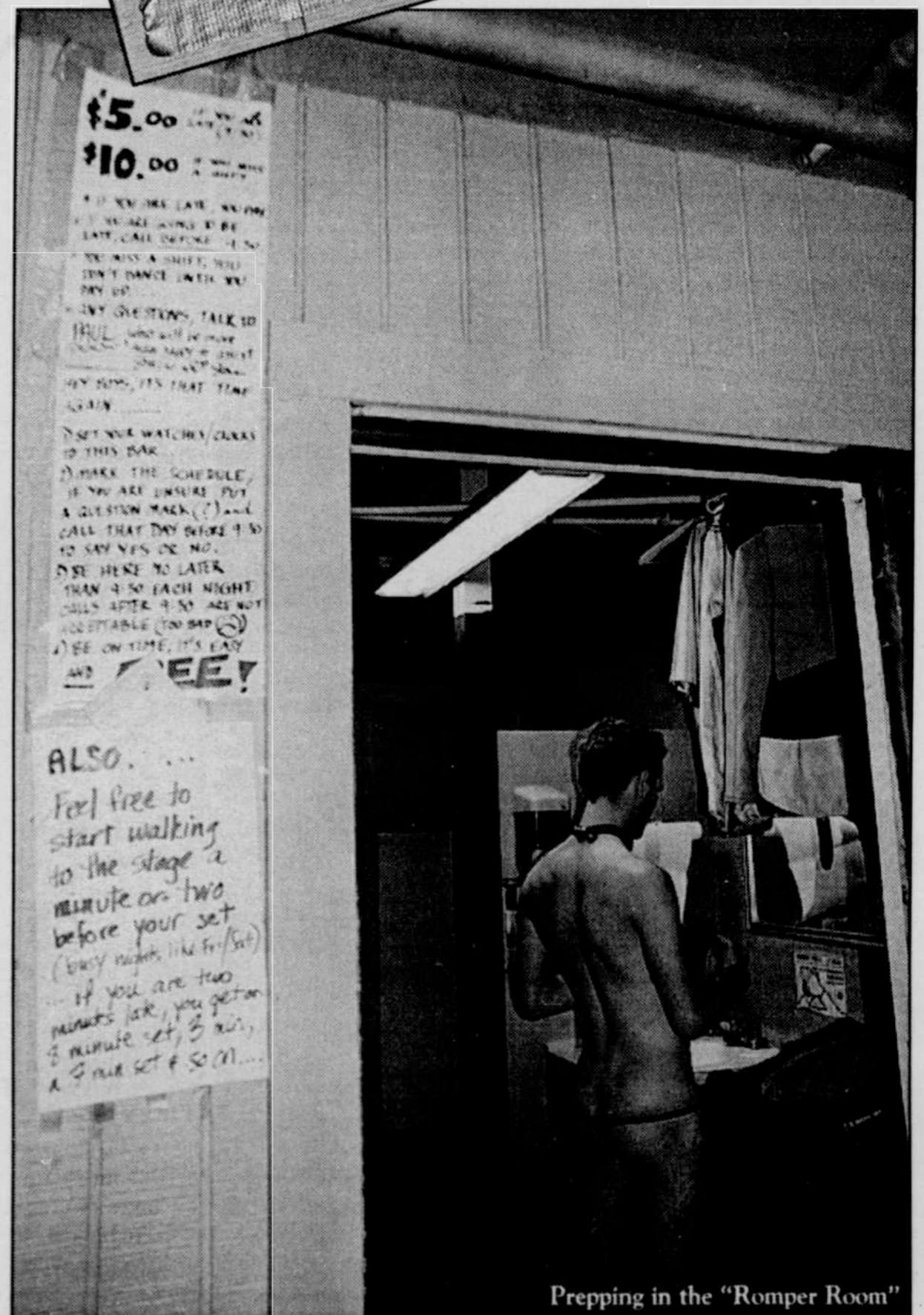
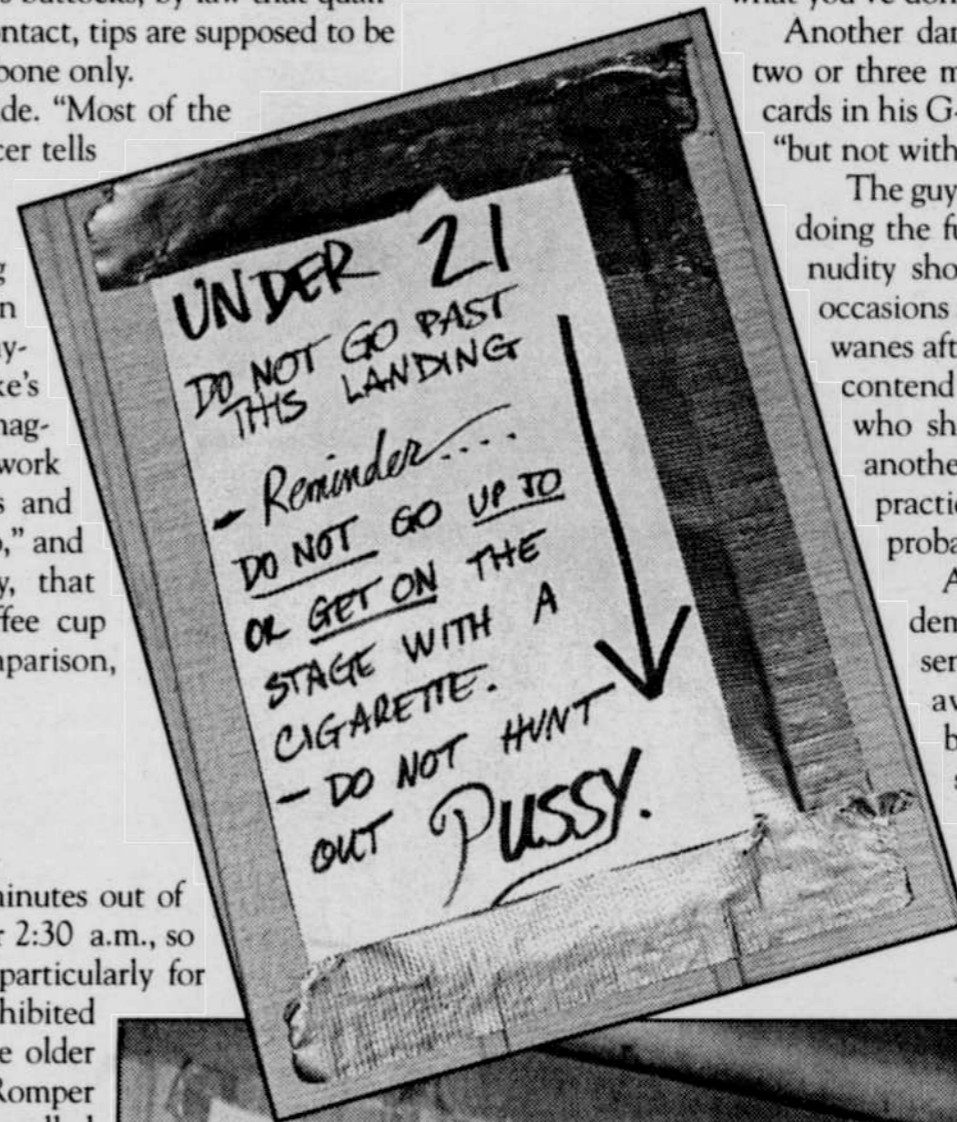
I'm further distracted by the very personable and energetic JR, a beefy 24-year-old blond who is training for bodybuilding competitions. He lets me rifle through his gym bag (have I mentioned how much I love this assignment?), and I pull out a half-dozen G-strings, each no bigger than a change purse, which I suppose is appropriate considering cash gets stuffed into it.

JR pulls a piece of paper out of his crotch and hands it to me. It's from "Zion City" and reads, "It doesn't matter who you are or what you've done/Jesus died for everyone!"

Another dancer later tells me he's had two or three ministers stick their business cards in his G-string on various occasions, "but not without groping me first."

The guys express a range of views on doing the full monty. Some think that nudity should be reserved for special occasions and that audience attention wanes after they've seen it all; others contend tips are higher for those who show what they've got. Still another dancer takes a completely practical approach: "If it's cold, I probably won't get naked."

Although I'd say strippers demonstrate a more positive sense of body image than your average person (who can blame them?), they are still self-conscious about various perceived flaws, particularly the kind those of us who work clothed rarely have to worry about.



Prepping in the "Romper Room"