

The Other Side of the Lens

By Peyton Garcia

The house was too big to feel cozy. She sat in the dressing room feeling unusually self-aware. Perhaps she should have worn the other cardigan. Her eyes roamed casually over the other girls with their perky breasts stuffed tightly into frilly bras and their slim, top-model waists. She walked to her private room, with its bare walls, and sat down at the computer. She took a deep breath, stripped down to her bra and panties, and entered her screen name for the first time. Jane Donovan* was officially a webcam girl.

At age 26, Donovan came to Colorado after leaving her hometown of Portland, Oregon, with little more than a lot of hope.

She, and two friends from home, planned to stay with an uncle of hers until they found jobs, but it wasn't long until the weeks stretched into months. They were still unemployed and their positive attitudes were becoming hard to maintain.

It was with that notion that Donovan and her friends finally clicked on the Craigslist ad that they'd scrolled past so many times before: "Webcam models for hire!! START TODAY!"

The more professional description is a "model for live adult chat sites", but they're better known simply as webcam girls. It's a flexible job with easy hours, good money, and a self-made schedule. All you have to do is strip... in front of thousands of people... who are watching live online.

Of course, there tends to be stigmas and certain predispositions attached to being a stripper. There is a tendency for people to think that taking off your clothes for money must mean you've hit rock bottom. Why would anyone do that *willingly*?

However, research shows that pornography is one of the leading industries in the world today. The number one webcam site on the Internet, LiveJasmin.com, makes up 2% of the world's Internet usage by itself, which, in the grand scheme of things, is a pretty big deal. For Donovan, webcam modeling wasn't rock bottom; it was the start of a career.

Kodi Lane, who posted the link and hired Donovan and her friends, runs her own webcam house in Longmont, Colorado. She is partnered with Streamatemodels.com, a website that allows young adults pursuing a career in adult modeling to create profiles that are shared on hundreds of erotic chat websites. She works out of her seven-bedroom house, where her 16 current models perform. The models typically work five days a week, at the hours most convenient for them. They come to the house, pick a room, and get to work.

Lane began her modeling career the same way most of her employees begin theirs -- desperate for money. "I was broke," Lane said. "My dad just had brain surgery and we were both out of work. We were about to lose our house and both of our vehicles. I saw the ad on Craigslist and I knew that I could make fast cash, so I moved to Las Vegas and worked for one of the largest webcam studios in the country. I made over \$2,000 in my first week."

It wasn't long before Lane fell in love with her job. With her bouncy, brown locks, her soft caramel eyes, her tiny waist and heart-shaped lips -- Lane was a hit. Through her modeling career she was able to get back on her feet financially, but she continued to model, eventually establishing her own branch in Northern Colorado.

"It's easy," Lane said. "It's actually the easiest job I've ever had. It doesn't feel like work. You make your own schedule and you get paid really well."

While she loves her career as a webcam model, she admits to being fully aware of the consequences that come with being an online stripper.

"People will judge you for anything they can," Lane said. "And technically what webcam models do *is* considered porn," she added. "I was very secretive about being a model for a long time."

Donovan agreed that it is hard to want to tell people what you do for a living. "There's a stigma for any kind of job with a sexual nature, so that was intense to deal with -- wondering what people would say when they find out what you do," Donovan admitted.

While webcam modeling has the misfortune of being judged almost instantly, according to Donovan, there is more to it than even what she expected. "The weirdest thing was that a lot of guys just wanted to talk and not do anything sexual," Donovan said. "One time I had a chat where a guy wanted to watch me put my clothes back on."

Lane conceded to experiencing the same thing in her career. "I got a customer my first month that I started working that ended up giving me over \$250,000 in cash and gifts," she said. "I saw him three times and we never did anything sexual. He thought we were boyfriend and girlfriend and loved spending money on me."

Through Lane's agency particularly, the models are never required to participate in anything that makes them feel uncomfortable. "I feel extremely safe," Donovan said. "You never have to do anything you don't want to do. You can decline requests and even exit out of a chat at any time."

While the profiles that the models create are visible on over 500 live adult chat sites, Lane has all of her models use screen names and their location remains undisclosed.

The models are even allowed to block their profile from certain geographic locations or from certain people.

Lane wants her employees to feel as safe as possible. "Webcam studios can be super sketchy,"

Lane said. "It's a prime opportunity for men to have young girls work for them. My business is 100% female owned and operated. My mother and sister and I run everything. It is safe, very welcoming and a very different atmosphere than other studios I have been to."

Lane sees webcam modeling the same as any other job. "I'm a normal girl," Lane said. "If you saw me, or talked to me, the last thing that would cross your mind is 'I wonder if she does porn?' My friends, family, and Jesus are the most important things in my life." Lane is engaged to her boyfriend of three years; she loves to hike, camp and go boating; and she has two other jobs, one as sales representative at Jared's Galleria of Jewelry, and another as a horse trainer.

"I'm to a point in my life where if people judge me for working outside of the box to support myself and my family, so be it."

Lane, Donovan, and other models look at what they do with pride, and explained that it takes a lot of courage to model. "Being in that situation, you are putting yourself in a position to be objectified and judged," Donovan said. "Everyone scrutinizes themselves, so opening yourself up to outside criticism can be nerve-racking, but all the attention is exciting and a definite confidence booster. If you stay relaxed and just have a good time, it's really fun."

These ladies believe that this type of modeling doesn't have to be what the public has spent so long making it out to be. For people like Donovan, it's a way to make a living, and for people like Lane, it's about loving what you do.

"Don't judge," Lane said. "Be open-minded and accept everyone for who they are and the choices they think are best for them, whether it's webcam modeling or anything else."

**Name has been changed to ensure anonymity*