How does one exit the sex industry after a decade as a Mistress? Rather easily, actually, as I went from Pro-Dom to Pro-Fessor in less than a month. But I need to digress for a moment. Before emerging as Mistress J on 27 February 1998, I was a lecturer at the University of Waikato in New Zealand. My Ph.D. is in adult education and I convinced the head of the Department that studying the sex industry from that perspective would be a great research focus. Eventually my study narrowed to 'How women learn to work safely in the industry', looking specifically at peer support and mentorship. As well as New Zealand I also did field research in Thailand, Vietnam, Fiji and the Philippines.

The turning point was when I interviewed Mistress Margaret, a Dominatrix in Auckland. She invited me to help with a session in her dungeon: it was as though I'd come home. That I'd found my vocation. And it is a story that turned into a book – *Private Theatre: Personal observations and revelations of a dominatrix*.

So, at 45, I resigned from the university, did a dungeon apprenticeship and spent the next ten years declaring that it was the best career choice I'd ever made. The dungeon was my ticket. It gave me the freedom, the income and the interesting people that I craved. It is a story that turned into a book – *Private Theatre: Personal observations and revelations of a dominatrix*.

During this time I decided to leave, signs of the economic recession had taken hold of the economy. I may have read...

...and then there were those who bought textbooks and genuinely wondered if I had ever been there at all. I have no idea how many people have asked me this question. It is a question that I have asked myself many times.
Even though I have the financial acumen of a three year old, it didn't take much to figure out that inner-city living with high overheads and an income that is based on discretionary spending isn't the best financial position to be in.

When I started working, Mistress Margaret and I often used to discuss our 'best-before' dates. I never knew exactly what the age was going to be, but it was going to be exiting on a high and on my own term. One only has to look at the politicians who hang around for too long to be inspired to leave at the appropriate time. Besides, I'm a control freak and 'decision by indecision' has never been a problem for me. And a 'Decade of Domination' has a nice ring to it. How could I turn the recession situation around to my advantage? So many of my pretty boy middle-management clients were being made redundant. And they had expensive wives, kids in private schools, a mortgage and a couple of vehicles to support. It made me glad I forgot to get married, have children or save any money.

In preparation for my move, I gave my artwork to friends, sold my books and let's face it, I didn't have much of an emotional attachment to my filing cabinets. I shipped 20 kg to Canada and sent my paper files to the archives at Flinger's University. A friend in Brisbane bought my dungeon as a complete package so I know it has gone to a good home where it will be well used.

During my academic research one of the problems sex workers identified was exiting the industry. How do you account for your time? What qualifications do you have? Who are your referees? It was time to put my theories to the test, to live my politics.

Shortly after landing in Casablanca I got a local SIM card for my phone, hooked up to the internet, had business cards printed and found a place to live. Moroccans are exceedingly generous so I had a lot of help in that regard. In downsizing and simplifying, all I wanted was a simple, clean, efficient, and comfortable small studio apartment. And that is exactly what I have. Compact, sunny and low maintenance. It is on the third floor and I can stand at the window and look down on the soap opera of Moroccan life that plays out every day on the street below me. A perfect perch for a voyeur.

Once settled, I started looking for work. Before leaving Sydney, I organised my referees, in case anyone wanted to check on my work history. So I bought a one-way ticket to Casablanca and left Sydney with two suitcases, a carry on and a computer bag.

Even though I have the financial acumen of a three year old, I don't
The transition from Pro-Dom to Pro-Fessor was seamless. As I used to tell my clients who wanted to be caned, but not have any marks, 'Have a cover story ready and nobody will ever ask you.' Within a month I started working at an international school that targets the corporate market. Curiously the clients I see as a Pro-Fessor are of the same social strata as the ones I saw as a Pro-Dom. Technically I'm a sub-contractor to the institution so I intend on seeing private English students and teaching effective writing for Business English. The web site, the cards and the casual references to work I've done made it all so terribly easy. Oh yes, and my two quotation books that came out last year also helped. Mind you, so does being 55 and wearing corporate type clothes.

My ad-Vice? Cover your bases. You can always say you are a student. Great – but take a few classes to back it up. Work an afternoon a week in a boutique and you can claim ‘retail experience’. Clients can be wonderful referees – so long as you give them something to work with. ‘Yes, Melissa, did some short term event organising for me’ sounds better than ‘Yeah I used to see her once a fortnight.’

One of the problems of the sex industry is that workers often enter it when they are young. Hey, we all go through that phase of ‘youth’, of being invincible.

The problem arises when you aren't so young anymore and want to exit the industry. All of a sudden there is a desperate clucking of stress. But that doesn’t have to be the case if you plan ahead:

1. Cover your tracks. Have a part-time something else work that you can talk about with non-industry people.
2. Get some sort of qualification. You can be a student for a long time, but get a piece of paper at the end of it.
3. Sort out the people who will act as your referees when you’re applying for non-industry jobs. And give them the information they need to do it properly. Decide on the cover story and have it ready in case anyone asks. I long ago decided that if I was snapped I would simply say ‘had gone underground to write a book about being a Dominatrix’. A touch far fetched perhaps, but it was still viable enough to be believable.

Having made a seamless transition, it is amusing to get phone calls and emails from former clients who miss me. In Casablanca I have a flock of adoring young men who help me with all sorts of things. What amuses me is that they don’t understand the principle of Domination/submission, but they do enjoy being adored. In Casablanca I have a rock of sophistry, but I was still viable enough to be believable.

My ad-Vice? Cover your bases. You can always say you are a student.