



*FAKE PRINCES.*  
**PHILANDERING  
SPOUSES.**

**THREE-MILLION-DOLLAR  
STUDENT CONDOS  
FULL OF COCAINE.**

**THESE DAYS,  
REALTORS SEE IT ALL.**

# Confessions

**OF A BOSTON REALTOR**

*DON'T BUY  
YOUR NEXT HOME*  
UNTIL YOU READ THESE  
**BRUTALLY HONEST,  
JUICY TELL-ALLS**  
FROM THE FRONT LINES  
OF THE AREA'S SIZZLING-HOT  
**REAL ESTATE MARKET.**

By **MADELINE BILIS** ■ Illustrations by **Kagan McLeod**

With additional reporting by Alice Ferré, Olivia Gehrke, Juliana Kaplan, Eesha Pendharkar, and Casey Russell

## I Showed a Crook Who Was Boss

**B**ecause we deal with the very high-end, we get the weirdos. We had a scam artist posing as a fake prince last year. We had a guy a couple of months ago in his twenties who said he worked for a hedge fund in Greenwich and had a budget of \$14 million.

Why do people make this shit up? We've determined there are three reasons. One is to steal: The typical scam is they would look at a property, say they love it, and write a \$50,000 check as a deposit. We'd put it in our escrow account, and a day or two later, they change their mind and ask for the deposit back. We give them our company escrow check, and of course their check bounces, and they just stole \$50,000 from us. The second reason is to case the place to rob it. But the most common reason is to impress a girl. Think about a guy who wants to impress a honey—"I'm going to look at \$5 million houses; would you like to join?"

That's exactly what happened with this [hedge-fund] kid. We were suspicious and said we needed proof of funds, so he made this fake letter showing he had money at Santander Bank. We knew it was bogus, so we called law enforcement, and they sat in the conference room with me. So we had a decision: Do we ruin this kid's life? They pulled the letter out and asked, "Are you in the habit of sending fake letters?" He wanted to impress his girlfriend. They didn't arrest him, but we called his father and explained what was going on. He probably got his ass chewed out later. —*Michael Carucci, the Carucci Group, Gibson Sotheby's International Realty*



## I Witnessed the Christmas Vacation Attic Scene

**I** had someone fall through the ceiling during a home inspection once. The buyer went up to the attic with the home inspector to take a look at an air conditioning system. As he was walking around, the home inspector told him to make sure he stayed standing on the beams. Then he took a wrong step and went right through the ceiling! When I went into the next room, I saw his legs dangling down from the ceiling, and he was holding onto a beam in the attic by his arms! [Laughs.] He was fine—just scratched up a bit—but he was totally embarrassed. He actually ended up buying the house. He was going to have to fix that ceiling if he didn't! —*Karen Kennedy, Kennedy Lynch Team, Hammond Residential Real Estate*

## I Got More Than I Bargained For

I DEAL WITH A LOT OF international clients, and one of my sellers had six days to get out of the country. It was a student-visa situation after this young lady graduated from BU, and we were getting ready to list her \$3 million condo. Did you have a \$3 million dorm room? Because I didn't. But I love these kids—I shouldn't make fun of them because I love them. The day I showed up with my photographer, the client said, "All right, I've left the keys at the front desk and I'm on a flight tonight, and I'll never be back again pretty much, so you may just need to clean up a little bit." When I walked in she had left behind so much stuff, I mean everything, basically—she left cash, cocaine, a fur coat, a Chanel purse, schoolbooks. So I obviously had to cancel the photography, and when I later chatted with her on WhatsApp, she said, "Please don't tell my dad about some of that stuff. I'm sorry I didn't clean it up; can you just take care of it?" So I said, "Yeah, but what do you want to do with all of this stuff?" And she said, "Do whatever you want with it." So I have a nice TV in my living room now. —*Brian Dougherty, Robert Paul Properties*

## I Made Friends with a Can of Febreze

**T**here's a woman, all her money was tied up in this Brookline property, so she absolutely had to sell. She had done beautiful renovations over the years. The place should have been ideal for 90 percent of the market that was looking for this kind of a unit—except for when they walked in. My colleagues and I spent so much money because we were constantly bringing in bottles of Febreze and scented candles. She had two feral cats that she rescued that were very territorial. It got even worse after we prepped the unit, decluttered it a bit, and moved some things around: The cats didn't like that, and they scented their objections all over the place. She was also a chain smoker. So not only did the place reek of cat pee, it also reeked of cigarettes.

People would walk in and their eyes would brighten up, like, "It looks so good!" You could almost sit there and go, "Three, two, one." And then the smell would sink in. And their facial expression would change 180 degrees. —Sean Preston, *Unlimited Sotheby's International Realty*

## I Do the House-Hunting for My Richest Client

My wealthiest buyers give me free rein to buy and sell homes for them every couple of years. They don't even live in the country, so a lot of the homes they haven't set foot in—these are just investment properties. It's not as uncommon as you would think. Now with FaceTime and all the different technologies that are available, I think people are going to start buying homes more and more without ever stepping foot into them. Things like Google Glass, I have a feeling that's going to be the new way of seeing a property. —Jessica Later, *the JL Team, Keller Williams Realty*

## I Hear About Every Last Heartache

As a broker, we're not only the marketing specialist...we're the therapist, the mediator, the financial adviser, the counselor, the babysitter. We step into several roles in the process of selling the property. I've had clients who shared with me before they shared with their spouse that they were planning to get divorced: "Don't tell my wife, but you have to find me an apartment. I'm going to be moving out." I've been asked to find apartments for the boyfriends or girlfriends of unfaithful spouses. I've had people call me and say, "I have lost everything. I've got to sell my house. Can you help me?" You're involved with people in their intimate life. —Tom Aaron, *Coldwell Banker Residential Brokerage*

## WHAT I WISH MY REALTOR HAD TOLD ME

We really wish we'd known more about appraisals and how they can drastically change the amount you receive for your home at the very end of the deal. The entire appraisal process is so subjective and prone to human error; it really just boils down to the person doing it. After the inspection, our house was appraised for \$50,000 less than the agreed-upon sale price and we ended up selling for \$30,000 less, just kind of feeling screwed. —M.M., *Hingham*

# Amazon Alexa Hosted My Open House

**I** recently sold a super-cute home in Framingham at a fantastic price point. The open house was legit insanity, and we had no choice but to extend it. It was a warmer weekend and I stood on the front steps welcoming our guests, telling them to grab a feature sheet and help themselves to an individually wrapped, house-specific-themed cookie (thank goodness I ordered 200 that weekend!). After four straight hours of an open house and well over 50 groups, the sellers came back into their home. Later that night they let me know that people had been asking their Amazon Alexa questions about the house! Some of the questions included: *Alexa, how many offers are on this house? Alexa, are there any ghosts in this house? Alexa, how many dogs live in this house? Alexa, can you play Kenny G? Alexa, are these cookies gluten-free?* It was absolutely hilarious because you could hear everyone's actual voices asking the questions. If anyone has sold a house recently—go home and check your Alexa log! —Darlene Umina, *Lamacchia Realty*





## WHAT I WISH MY REALTOR HAD TOLD ME

Many houses look lovely in the online photos, but they're often total dumps in reality. I can't tell you how many places we walked through with filthy carpets and amateur renovations that never should have seen the light of day. In this market, I'm glad we didn't sell our home before finding a new one! —*B.Y., Southborough*

## Home Inspectors Crash My Open Houses

I've had open houses where buyers have shown up with home inspectors. They haven't had an offer accepted, and without asking, they're literally going through an open house doing an abbreviated home inspection so that they can make an offer more competitive and write it without a home-inspection contingency. I mean, the polite thing to do is to ask permission, but people don't always do that. It is really nuts, and it's about a \$600 investment for the buyers up front before they even know if they have their offer accepted. It's getting more and more common. —*Josh Muncey, Ellen, Janis and Josh Real Estate Team, Re/Max Destiny*

## I Take Care of Business

I keep Windex, paper towels, and a garbage bag in the trunk of my car. Just in case, because sometimes you go to your open house and you've told your client exactly how you need the house prepared, but their version of clean and organized may be different than yours. I've made and remade beds, I've Windexed windows and stovetops, I've vacuumed and Swiffered, all in the span of 15 minutes before the open house starts. I've picked up a family dog and taken it for a ride in my car before showings. I've baked cupcakes for my open houses. It really is full-service. Whatever it takes, that's what you've got to do. —*Kimberly Andrew, William Raveis*

## I Sold a Cambridge Hippie Pad for 28 Percent Over Asking

We had a unit recently that was an absolute direct throw-back to hippie '60s Cambridge—something that I've only read about. It had come down through the family. It had those paper lanterns strung up using extension cords, and, you know, a mattresses-on-the-floor kind of setup. The kitchen was from the 1930s or '40s; it was that unimproved. But we painted it and we cleaned it up and it was like catnip, because the location was so great. I think we had 16 offers on it and it went for, like, 28 percent over asking. I guess the point is that not everybody responds to or demands stainless steel and glass and granite. It was refreshing to see that there are still folks out there who are willing to take on a project. It kind of appeals to the *This Old House* side of me. —*Bruce Irving, Compass*

# I Found a Dead Body

Once, before an open house in Somerville, I thought somebody didn't take the trash out because I smelled something. Right when I walked inside, I saw a dead guy on the sofa. He's been dead for at least a couple of days. He was apparently watching television—he had a blanket on him. Quite frankly, it looked like he died peacefully in his sleep. The issue was that we had to wait for the coroner to come. It takes hours before you can leave. Plus, the police have to come to make sure there's no foul play. When the coroner shows up, you're not just gonna say, "Oh yeah, there's a dead guy on the sofa. I'm gonna lock up, and uh, here's my phone number." So yeah, I canceled that open house.

—*Anonymous*



## I Walked in on My Client in Bed

I HAD CALLED MY 85-year-old client, who didn't have a cell phone, and left a message on his home machine saying, "Hope I can show your place." He wasn't living there most of the time, so I said, "Unless I hear back from you, I'll assume it's okay." And I didn't hear anything back, so I brought the people in and was running through to turn on all the lights. The bedroom door was closed and I should have knocked, but I didn't. I walked in on him naked in bed with his new wife. He jumped out of bed, and I was like, "Don't move too quickly!" I thought he was going to have a heart attack. I'm still scarred.

—Lauren Holleran,  
Lauren Holleran &  
Team, Gibson Sotheby's  
International Realty

**WHAT I WISH MY REALTOR HAD TOLD ME**

In Boston, price per square foot means nothing. It's all about neighborhood and bedrooms.

—M.R., Boston



## Hockey Players Are My Favorite Clients

**T**hey look so ferocious on those skates, but Bruins players are really the sweetest guys. Usually I rent for them when they're starting out, and then they buy, and then unfortunately after a certain amount of time many of them get traded for different reasons. Usually when they're traded, I'm the second call—the wife gets the first call. I've dealt with probably 12 trades of hockey players. They leave me a note or a gift or they come back and see me when they play in Boston, and it's just so touching, very gratifying to know I helped them. Once, I was talking with Zdeno Chára, and he was saying there are millions of people who play hockey, and such a small amount who make the pros, and then there's a tiny, tiny percent who make the Hall of Fame. Then he said, "I just wanted you to know, you're in the hall of fame of real estate." Best compliment I ever got. —Carmela Laurella, CL Properties

## I Went to the Ends of the Earth (a.k.a. Vermont) for My Buyers

**M**y favorite clients were from Europe, and I worked with them for six months trying to find a house in Newton. We were looking at a lot of very high-end homes, some new construction and some older homes that had been gut-renovated. And they ended up trusting me so much, we hadn't even finished finding them a house in Newton when they told me they wanted to buy a condo on Mount Snow in Vermont. I said, "I love working with you guys, but I'd have to get my broker's license out there." They asked what that would take. I explained that I'd have to take the test and then travel back and forth with them. And they said, "Great, we'll pay for your travel, whatever you need to do to—we want you out here." So I ended up getting my broker's license in Vermont in a couple of weeks and we went shopping. A couple of times they had me go out looking for them while they went skiing. [Laughs.] It was fun. One of the things I love about this business is I'm always learning; I had to quickly get up to speed on the market and pricing and all that. I ended up helping them buy a new-construction townhouse on Mount Snow. —Marie Presti, the Presti Group