

What's wrong with Harbin Hot Springs

By Christopher J. Musser

Harbin Hot Springs can be a nice place to visit, but you might not want to work there if you understand their culture, or how they treat their employees.

Working there is to discover its seamy side: a predatory cult that cheats many of their guests and employees, and encourages illegal and dangerous behavior.

How would I know? I'm a former department manager and member of the board of Solutions for Today, one of the non-profit corporations responsible for operating Harbin-related enterprises.

Harbin management is very good at controlling the release of negative information about their "church," however all of the following is true.

Harbin employees enjoy no employment or residential security (or retirement), endure institutionalized sexual harassment, support ineffective money-for-sex workshops that seek to rob vulnerable guests of their hard-earned dollars, and subject themselves to dangerous working conditions.

On October 12th 2010, while working as the Computer Department Manager and part-time pools employee, I reported to Harbin management that my staff and I were being sexually harassed in the workplace by the then 77-year-old founder, Robert Hartley, (aka "Ishvara"), and another 70-year-old female employee.

When he called us for computer help, Ishvara would answer the door to his house naked from the waist down, and usher members of my staff, (one man 19 years old, the other 29), into his bedroom where his computer was located. They would then have to close 35 tabs of pornography in Internet Explorer before they could even get started. After that, when they kneeled down to unplug his PC before bringing it back to the office, he would pull out his keyboard and start typing on it with one hand, grab their heads with his other hand, and pull their heads into his naked crotch!

The 70-year-old woman couldn't keep her hands off of us when we went to her home to fix her computer, even though we repeatedly told her we weren't there for a massage.

I had previously reported multiple instances of sexual harassment to management, but never filed a claim with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission because I was assured that the problems would be solved.

However, soon after reporting Ishvara's actions, I was removed from my management job, told I "wasn't a good fit for Harbin," when I asked to be transferred to another department, and finally banned from visiting Harbin altogether, where I relaxed, meditated and exercised, not long after the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's 2-year statute of limitations expired for filing a claim.

In the meeting about Ishvara, I was promised harassment problems would be solved. However, nothing changed; how could it? It's been 40 years since Ish bought Harbin Hot Springs, and if this behavior has gone on since then without change, it must be institutionalized.

Make no mistake about who is in charge, either: Ishvara "sold" the property he purchased in 1972 to a non-profit corporation that he set up, Heart Consciousness Church, which board he manages. He has carefully delegated the day-to-day administration of the enterprise to "managing directors," although the real control occurs in the non-profit corporation.

I was appointed to the board of Solutions for Today before making my harassment claim, and when he appointed me, Ishvara advised, "You won't have to do anything." This was an understatement. He holds a *five-minute* board meeting once a year, on the last day of the year, for each of 5 or 6 of his non-profit corporations whether they are "active" or not, doesn't require or even expect attendance by board members, and tells you the decisions he's made if you do show up. There's no meaningful discussion or ability to question his decisions. This, in spite of the fact that "Nonprofits are required by law to have boards (as are for-profit corporations) in order to hold the organization

accountable to the public,” and “the board, and its members, can be held to account by government officials (the state Attorney General and the IRS, among others) and can be sued for failing to meet their responsibilities.”

Link here: <http://www.idealists.org/info/Nonprofits/Gov2>

Sexual Harassment

Harbin’s business model is in direct conflict with the law.

Harbin is a bastion of “polyamory,” the practice of loving as many people as you want to. Harbin hosts the yearly meeting of the “World Polyamory Association.” Here’s the link to their website: <http://worldpolyamoryassociation.net>.

And here’s a link to the definition of polyamory on Wikipedia:
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polyamory>.

Please note:

“Polyamory means ‘loving more than one.’ This love may be sexual, emotional, spiritual, or any combination thereof, according to the desires and agreements of the individuals involved, but you needn't wear yourself out trying to figure out ways to fit fondness for apple pie, or filial piety, or a passion for the Saint Paul Saints baseball club into it.”

It’s about sex, not love. It’s about having as much sex as you want to, as often as you want to. It’s about “abundance.”

David Edick and Sanna Durk, who managed the Human Resources Department, once told me, “Polyamory is the primary reason people come to Harbin,” and, “The residents are testing you,” when I told him we were being sexually harassed in the workplace. However, they’re attorneys, *they should know better*.

Most people aren’t into one-night stands or having multiple sexual relationships at the same time, *by law that can’t be required by any employer in America*.

I’m monogamous; the thought of making love to a woman who’s having sex with other people at the same time as me whom I may or may not know, especially

people who are bisexual (a prevailing sexual orientation at Harbin), is offensive to me and threatening to my health. And it doesn't matter who employs you or whether they call themselves a "church," either, although, be advised that when you enter Harbin for the first time you are required to join the "Heart Consciousness Church" by paying \$30 a year.

Ishvara has his enterprise set up this way because, along with the tax advantages, once you're a member of his "church" you lose many of the rights you would enjoy if Harbin allowed members of the public to visit. He assumes the right to control your access or revoke your membership without review, a function of the church elders—the officers of the non-profit, aka the managing directors, who report to him—even though he solicits visitation by advertising to the public at www.harbin.org and other venues.

Here are some more things that are wrong with Harbin:

Happiness

After you've been at Harbin for a while you'll discover residents and extended family (regular guests, outside employees, workshop staff, etc.) seem to commit suicide more frequently than the general public.

The staff member who replaced me was "partners" with a female resident whose previous male "partner" had killed himself at Harbin a few years before, and a supervisor of mine had received medical treatment for suicide issues in the recent past.

A frequent guest and close friend of many of the residents killed herself in 2012, and I've heard reliable accounts of many more.

Why are people in what some call "paradise," so unhappy?

Maybe the following can help explain this.

Free Love

Love is only free at Harbin if you're young and have a great body. And young, naked women are "coin of the realm" because they're the ones everyone else

comes to see and hookup with, bringing in most of the guests, and therefore most of the money, too. And to purchase 3 surrounding ranches totaling hundreds of acres for many millions of dollars, like Harbin recently did, requires an awful lot of money.

The average age of the residents and other employees of Harbin Hot Springs is 55, and Harbin experiences great difficulty attracting and keeping younger workers. I wonder if this is because they are expected to become “poly” and have sex with the many Harbin managers who attend the quarterly Harbin sex parties at Middletown’s Twin Pines Casino Hotel?

Here’s their website: <http://hedonsalon.wordpress.com>. This site is maintained by a member of the Harbin security team. This sex party is regularly well-attended by department managers and other staff.

Sadly, it is fairly common to see young couples come to Harbin to live and work, but soon after they arrive they break up, and most of the time end up leaving, victims of a culture that disparages commitment in relationships. Here residents have no problem getting married and then picking up on other people in the pools or dances, without the knowledge of their spouses.

I was friends with a female resident who seemed to be as surprised as I was when we saw her husband in the warm pool a few months after their wedding, nude, making out with a woman I had never seen before. Leave it to say this woman’s marriage didn’t last long, and I believe she may still be dealing with emotional problems stemming from this man’s lack of character.

I was friends with several young women who told me they had “primary” and “secondary” sexual relationships. I don’t know how well many of these relationships worked, but, like I said, I don’t want to be either, because I’m no woman’s number two boy. And I won’t be a “primary” because I know that means there’s some poor schmuck out there who’s her “secondary,” and I don’t like the karma, or the exposure to venereal disease.

Yet I enjoyed friendships with several attractive female residents in their 50’s, 60’s, and older, who confided to me they hadn’t made love to another human

being in years, despite being surrounded by thousands of people who come to Harbin looking for sex.

Then there's Ishvara and other staff members harassing employees. I wondered why he wouldn't just call up one or more of his many lovers and have sex with them? After all, studying massage, Kundalini Yoga and Tantra for many years must have exposed him to many loving relationships. What about "abundance?" But I never saw Ishvara, or many of the older residents, with a lover, and I came to realize the truth of the matter: polyamory isn't a big option when you're 77 years old; they just aren't interested any more (I'm 64, believe me, I know.)

So there's the farce of polyamory and abundance. Doesn't work real well as you age, not for me or most of the other residents I knew who frequented the pools and grounds. Female residents will tell you it's harder for them than it is for men. Abundance is a fable Harbin advances to make more money, so be prepared to be disappointed if you're looking for love, especially if you're over 50, out of shape physically, or looking for more than a one night stand.

The guest pass to Harbin Hot Springs says nothing about a requirement to become polyamorous to join the "church," and when you're interviewing, nothing is mentioned about becoming polyamorous to be a better "fit," either.

And there are some token couples, too, just to demonstrate that monogamy is an acceptable choice. Two Managing Directors once trumpeted to me the fact that they'd counted "23 monogamous couples" among the thousand or so residents and regulars at Harbin. Heck, there's that many in the front pew of any Christian church. However, within a year or two of this claim, many, if not most of these relationships, had already failed.

After you've been at Harbin for a while, you'll find the pools and grounds are frequented by prostitutes. After you earn their trust they'll give you their cards, and tell you their rates!

Massage

Every book I've ever read on massage has a chapter on ethics. Here are several quotes from "Mosby's fundamentals of Therapeutic Massage," by Sandy Fritz:

"Sexual Impropriety and Sexual Abuse: The therapist will not date a client.

"Whatever the behavior of the client, it is always the responsibility of the massage therapist not to engage in sexual behavior.

"Sexual Abuse includes: Therapist-client sex, whether initiated by the client or not.

But if I had a dollar for every time I watched a "therapist" use his massage skills to seduce a woman in the warm pool in the dead of night, I'd be a very rich man, indeed.

The ethics of therapeutic massage require the therapist to adopt a doctor-patient relationship with his or her clients. Yet therapists regularly use the pools for pickups.

I watched one young Harbin masseur give a "therapeutic" massage to a naked woman he had just met (she asked him his name) for hours one night, using every trick in his book to bring her into a blissful state. They left the pools at 1 am, naked, holding hands. It doesn't matter where they went, either, because before they got out, they were humping against a wall.

When I mentioned this to Human Resources, because I was studying massage, and I was confused about Harbin therapists' violating the ethical prohibition against dating, they said, "Yeah, we're trying to stop that behavior."

Really? *They've been trying to stop this behavior for 40 years?* Why don't they just make a rule: "No dating clients, or anyone you've massaged, first?"

They don't have the balls.

The Pools:

The pools can offer a beautiful, relaxing soak. However, that's where the predators hang out, and they can also be very dangerous, too. I've heard

residents call them “The sewers of Harbin.” People die in the pools, and on the grounds, maybe one a year on average. The combination of water over 115 degrees Fahrenheit, 24-hour access and water over your head, lend themselves to people passing out while either in the water or nearby.

Why are there no lifeguards?

To be a regular guest of the meditation pools is to watch ambulances repeatedly pull up at all hours of the day and night to treat and transport to a hospital someone who has had a medical emergency related to soaking in the hot springs.

Harbin management has evidently decided to rely on the South Lake County Fire Department for their rescues; after all, the response time is probably less than 10 minutes, *when they’re not busy somewhere else*. But 10 minutes can cost you your life when there’s water in your lungs, or you slip and fall and hit your head on concrete, and this happens *regularly*.

Why isn’t there a Doctor or Nurse on duty?

Drugs

Although a Harbin rule is, “No drugs or alcohol allowed,” I frequently worked alongside residents who were stoned on the job. Sometimes in summer clouds of marijuana smoke roll down the hills into the pools. Many guests have told me they take ecstasy and other drugs before they soak in the pools. A former *security department manager* was well known for taking psychedelic drugs while at work, and for *selling* drugs, too. I tried my best to talk with him once when we were both on the job, but he could barely construct a sentence.

Why are there no drug tests for employees in positions of responsibility?

A 24-year-old resident, Joshua Ochoa, died in June, 2012 at Harbin, after being struck in the head on the job *with a sledgehammer* (not wearing a helmet, as required by OSHA) and suffering a concussion. He passed out for an extended period of time *on Harbin property*, within 24 hours of being injured, yet he was never taken to a hospital. Although he died several months later at a Harbin-owned house, and his autopsy determined that he had overdosed on methadone,

(self-medicating for the painful headaches he was suffering), he was being supervised by a man who was not only a Managing Director but a Medical Doctor, *or at least he tells everyone he is.*

Why didn't this man drive Joshua to a hospital, where he would have gotten a medical evaluation that could have saved his life? And how did a medical doctor not notice this man was high on drugs?

Many Harbin residents work in the illegal drug industry to supplement their wages. I know residents who have large "grows" in their houses or are employed during harvest season as "trimmers." These aren't small operations for personal use, either. These are large commercial operations that make them tens of thousands of dollars a year and attract violent crime. At least 10 people have been murdered in the last several years in Sonoma and Lake Counties over conflicts related to large marijuana grows. There have been 10 shootings *in the last 3 months* in Lake County related to marijuana grows, including a shooting on Thanksgiving, and the shooting death of another man on Christmas Day. Obviously these people don't pay taxes on their income, like you and I do, too. This is one way that the residents of Harbin Hot Springs get society (you and me) to subsidize their employment, with the tacit approval of management.

Control

Residents are on a very tight leash at Harbin because becoming a resident is to give control of your job *and* your living situation to Harbin Management. A resident in good standing can pay as little as \$260 per month to live in Harbin housing, either on property or in one of the many houses they own in Middletown, or nearby. There's absolutely no security in this situation, though, because Harbin management can inform residents they've been terminated, have to vacate in 30 days, and not even give them a reason, even after many years of employment (and this happens).

This can be especially tough when all the friends you have are there, and you're no longer allowed on the property your only friends occupy.

Management regulates resident access to the property and pools, and therefore their employment, with “complaints,” many of them anonymous.

Soon after I was hired several managers told me my access to the pools, where I worked as well as exercised and soaked, was in jeopardy because a woman *I barely knew* told them I was staring at her at a dance, and *I reminded her of a man who had raped her*.

I tried to explain that, not only was I *not* staring at her, and had never raped her, but I had *never raped anyone*. It didn’t matter. Don’t bother trying to contest a complaint from a young woman (see above, “coin of the realm”). When I was banned I wasn’t told anything about the nature of the complaint that was the reason for their decision, or even if there *was* a complaint. They don’t have to tell you jack, even if you’ve slaved for them for years; you’re just gone.

Fraudulent Workshops

Harbin hosts many training sessions, such as “Skydancing Tantra,” where you can learn how to “Experience God” by masturbating in front of the other people in the workshop for only \$500, meals and lodging included. An accounting manager confided in me one time she “didn’t know how Harbin got away with this,” because it sure seems like prostitution, doesn’t it?

Here’s a link to the State of California statues on prostitution:

http://www.shouselaw.com/engaging_in_prostitution.html#1.1/

Please note: “Prostitution means engaging in sexual intercourse or any lewd act with another person in exchange for money or other consideration.”

We seem to be skirting the law a little bit here, don’t we? I guess this hangs on the definition of “lewd.” Of course, once you become a member of the church, a requirement to enter Harbin, you can’t think anything is “lewd,” can you?

Then there’s “Energy work.”

You can spend many thousands of dollars at Harbin to become, for example, a Reiki Master, or “Soul Life Coach.” Here’s a description of the course from one of the vendors of the Reiki workshops:

“Within the training, I am teaching students all levels of Reiki, and how to apply Reiki in hands-on, distant, and coaching practices to help create a *sustainable livelihood*” (emphasis mine).

From <http://www.meetup.com/Sonoma-County-Reiki/events/89848052> and <http://awakeningheartsschool.com/slc12.html>

COST: Tuition: \$1,000 per Module, \$250 non-refundable deposit, administrative and materials fee, \$500 Coaching program with Certified Soul-Life Coach.

Tuition Total: \$ 3,750.00! (*emphasis mine*).

Room and board: Approximately \$100/day for 3 week-long retreats

Room and Board Total: \$2,100 (\$700/retreat)

TOTAL COST: \$5,850! Of course the meals and lodging are supplied by Harbin; that’s their cut, along with the additional benefit of increasing their customer base.

Completion of this course will qualify a person to perform “energy work” over the telephone for \$75 an hour or more, thereby giving them a “*sustainable livelihood!*”

However, look up “Reiki” in Wikipedia:

“The concept of *ki* underlying Reiki is speculative and there is no scientific evidence that it exists; a 2008 systematic review of [randomised clinical trials](#) concluded that "the evidence is insufficient to suggest that reiki is an effective treatment for any condition. Therefore the value of reiki remains unproven."^[4] The [American Cancer Society](#)^[5] and the [National Center for Complementary and](#)

[Alternative Medicine](#)^[6] have also found that there is no clinical or scientific evidence supporting claims that Reiki is effective in the treatment of any illness.”

Here, read for yourself: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reiki>

Six thousand bucks seems like a lot to pay for something that doesn't work, doesn't it? But they promise “healing,” and a “sustainable livelihood,” among other benefits.

You can probably find a class to learn how to masturbate at Harbin for less than a thousand dollars, however, I did meet a couple of women who told me they would let me lie down and masturbate while they squatted over my open mouth and peed in it, for only \$200 an hour.

(Funny, I always thought that should be *free*.)

These people are spiritual charlatans looking for suckers.

Religion and Spirituality

Harbin promotes itself as a center of love and harmony, yet there is open antipathy to Christianity, despite the occasional decorated tree at year's end.

I met a number of staff members who confided in me they had chosen Jesus Christ as their personal savior, yet in the years I spent working and soaking in the pools, where people enter with their hands pressed together, immersing themselves in water to pray in front of a beautiful altar, I never saw anyone make the Sign of the Cross; no one dared.

Jesus' only rule was to love everyone, including your enemies, and he was known to associate with prostitutes. What could me more Harbin?

Yet award-winning Muslim poets at Harbin events recite poems denigrating Catholics and other Christians.

Harbinites venerate the “Divine Feminine,” and there is a program to certify women as “Goddesses,” (see “coin of the realm,” above.) Sorry men, no way to become a “God” at Harbin.

Many of these “Goddesses” have swamis and other mentors who teach them things like: “Men are most relaxed when they have hardons,” and “There’s no need committing to love another person, instead, you should make a commitment to love everyone.”

Single mothers at Harbin will swear to you they’re raising their children without fathers because “It’s better for them.” 10-year old boys will break a piñata at their birthday party and have to separate the *rubbers* from the *candy!* (I was there).

Stories about managers at Harbin who fired people because they wouldn’t, or stopped having sex with them, are legion.

And I’ve read enough Tantra books to understand that one of the accepted manifestations of “Divine Feminine” is “whore.”

Who would you rather worship, a man who preached loving everyone and died thinking his death would help you get to heaven, or a whore?

No contest.

People who need help

Femininity rules at Harbin Hot Springs; in fact that’s one of the problems. More than a few men should “man up,” but they won’t assert themselves because they’ve gotten lost opening themselves up to their feminine side and can’t find the way back (or they’re afraid of getting fired).

More than a few women I met at Harbin Hot Springs told me they had been sexually abused in the past.

Statistics tell us approximately 30% of women in America have been abused by family or friends, and I have personal knowledge of sexual and physical abuse in several families when I was growing up, and later on as an adult.

These victims need our understanding and assistance, and it is to our credit, and society’s, if we engage them in a loving and positive way and support them in their path to a more fair future.

However, I question if giving them a job and pressuring them to have sex to keep it is a solution to their problems.

I question if charging them \$650 (meals and lodging included) to take “Healing the Father Wound,” is a solution; some of these women are living out of their cars.

I question if masturbating a man they’ve just met in a Tantra class for \$500 (meals and lodging included) is a solution for them.

I question if inspecting the genitals of a naked man while that man’s wife is watching from 10 feet away in a HAI class (\$400, meals and lodging included) is an answer to that woman’s problems.

I question if empowering them to become “Tantric Dominatrixes,” and charge \$200 an hour to abuse people sexually and breakup their marriages is the solution to their problems; this is just shit rolling downhill.

I think this is a way to really “soak” them.

That’s what’s wrong with Harbin Hot Springs; I could go on, but I don’t want to bore you.

Save your life, your mind and your money, and soak somewhere else, at least until they clean up their act.

And if you do accept a job from this collection of sex and drug addicts, dope dealers, prostitutes, frauds, incompetents and just plain clowns, don’t say I didn’t warn you.

If you’re a resident of Lake County you need to ask yourself whether you want a business like this influencing your children and community.

This letter copied to:

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission

The Better Business Bureau

The Lake County District Attorney

The Internal Revenue Service

The California State Attorney General

The National Certification Board for Therapeutic Massage and Bodywork

The California State Massage Therapy Council

by Christopher J. Musser, 12/30/2013