

Cynthia 's Story

Interviewer: Alison Cornyn

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The reader is asked to bear in mind that s/he is reading a transcript of spoken word, rather than prose.

My name is Cynthia Boykin 'B o y k i n'. I am a survivor. And I was at the Training School from December 1972 and I got out of the system in November of 1973.

I was sent to the Training School in 1972; I was 15. Before that, I grew up in Newburgh, New York, which is a very impoverished area. The people that were raising me, my mother, and everybody else's mother during that time were running from Jim Crow. See America can't lie about the systems that were set up to destroy black people. They didn't give us proper education. We didn't have proper living conditions. Even if we had good education, our living conditions were bad. You know they had urban renewal so they would snatch where we were living then and put us someplace else and put us in these schools that were predominantly white so we didn't fit in. We didn't have money. We looked bummy. Our situations were not good. I was the oldest of eight children; five sisters younger and two brothers. Right before I went to Hudson we lived over what they call a juke joint. So in the front, it seemed like a little penny store but in the back, there were drugs – people playing cards. I mean I've seen this lady, that she was a drunk and she would just like be laying on the floor with her legs wide open with no clothes on. That stuff was very traumatic to see as a child. As a child, I shouldn't have had to see that. We had like an upstairs-downstairs. I would have to be the one who would stay awake, to make sure when some of the people who were there downstairs drinking would come upstairs, would make sure they went to the bathroom and not try to slip in there with any of my sisters or brothers. Because I had to be that person because I had experienced sexual molestation when I was probably about three. My mind always goes back to that. That's why I had to be this protector – of my sisters and brothers.

So I had a lot of responsibilities and as I was growing I really didn't want those responsibilities. I got angry, which led to by the time I was twelve years old, picked up some bad friends that was nearby. Aand then the process started, around the 7th grade; not doing what I was supposed to; fighting which led me into the New York State system. I think I was on probation before I was even sent to Hudson, but it got me started with the whole penal system; you know being truant, getting in trouble, actually being pregnant by the time I was 15, having an abortion. Everything just went way out of control.

I think it was a man who was driving. There was a female with him and I don't know – they might have been probation – that took me up there. Maybe they were part of the state but I remember it was a state car. I don't remember a lot- it was country, I remember it being country. It felt like a nightmare. It just felt like my life was being pulled by other people. My circumstances caused me to be in this system now. And when I got up there I realized, "What the heck am I doing here?" Because I what? Didn't go to school? I was like a fool and getting high? Living in that cottage it was different, They had these long baggy dresses that we would wear like your great-grandmother would wear, like a housedress. They looked like housedresses. And black and white oxford shoes.

The staff were very nice. The people that were there, those women that were there, were so encouraging to me. Cause they were like my mother, They reinforced what I knew because inside of me, all that stuff that was on the outside, inside of me was a successful woman. I didn't have to make it. And I know that. But I thank God that I did. I thank God that I got out of Newburgh in the time that I did.

My name is Cynthia Boykin. Today I am a successful businesswoman, I'm a mother, a grandmother, a survivor, and um I'm happy in my life today. I'm blessed to be alive with my right mind and able to do the things that I'm passionate about and God has called me to do.