

# Liz's Story

**Interviewer: Alison Cornyn**

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I'm one of seven. I'm the baby girl. In 1968 my grandmother died and that same year my mother had tuberculosis, so she was hospitalized, and my father stopped coming home. So, the Catholic Guardian Society stepped in, took us all, and sent us all to homes. I was like eight years old. They sent my oldest two sisters together, they sent the three boys together, but they sent me to a home all by myself and I did not like it, so I rebelled.

I kept beating people up, running away, and when I was twelve years old the judge said I was remanded because I was 'an incorrigible kid' and he sent me to Hudson State Training School for Girls — and that was February 1971. They put you on a bus, off you go — upstate somewhere. We had to surrender all our clothes. We had to wear white bras, white panties, and a pink wraparound dress. The different cottages were by age. There was a flim-flam mattress with bunk beds where you sunk in the middle. Not everyone was mean there. There was Ma Petersen, Ma Vernez — that's what we had to call them — Ma. I had Ma Perkins — I loved her, she was cool. It was a home away from home, but then you know, you hear rumors of one of the night staff creeping in the girls' rooms and doing things. There were sexual shenanigans going on with the girls experimenting. Some of the older girls would abuse the younger girls and make them do sexual acts. I don't remember anybody doing anything to me because I was crazy when I got mad because if you fuck with me I'm going to try to kill you — it made me an animal that carried me to a lot a lot of years. There were cliques—different cliques that you were with. We had to be hip, so I was slick — 'Slick, Sly, Wicked, and Wide' — that was the name of our group. Some of the girls were there because of unwanted pregnancies. Some of them were there because they were being sexually molested at home. We were there because nobody wanted us. So, our common bond was that we felt rejected.

I ran away from Hudson State Training School for Girls four times. The farthest I got was when I ran away from the administration building. I was actually able to hitch a ride and get dropped off at the Port Authority, but I got arrested right away. At that time I was a cutter. I was cutting my arms; I slit my own throat. Because when you feel like you're in a world where nobody loves you — you have no reason to be around — 'Nobody loves me? okay, fuck all of you,' and that's when I became 'Crazy Lizzie,' — it's not something I'm proud of now -- I'm just letting you know the mindset. I could go back there in two minutes — to how I felt. It took me a long, long time to understand that I'm not there anymore, but those feelings are just as real today as they were then.

I have a poem that I wrote that says:

High heels and pantyhose,

what does it matter? I'm twelve years old.

What does it matter? The things I've seen—more than most at seventeen.

What does it matter that my eyes are black? Obviously, I deserved that slap—or was it a kiss? I can't remember the cause of this.

Perhaps I stood, and then I fell and winded up in a grown-up hell.

For sex and drugs, that's what we did.

Twenty years later it matters, you see, to the child within me that's finally free.