



Liz at age 26

20 - **LIZ**

Woman Who Runs with the Werewolves

*I'm sick of everything, of the life, of the drugs, of sex,
of people. I miss my family. I want love. I want my mommy.*

Time now to meet Liz. A bicentennial baby born in 1976, Elizabeth Anne Gagne was even born on Flag Day. Known on the streets as “Liz,” she long was Connecticut Inmate Number 154637, and then expatriated to become Vermont Inmate Number 77680.

The Rise of Liz

At age 18, Liz gravitated to Willimantic because its dope was plentiful and powerful and cheap. Its notoriety proved so true that she has holed up there for six years. When she first arrived on the street scene, Liz was easily mistaken for a student at the university. The smallest of Connecticut’s State U’s, Willimantic’s campus perches just north of downtown. Liz enhanced her collegiate look with a book backpack but without a book. Her backpack both disguised the monkey on her back and contained the drug works she used to pacify her jumpy monkey.

She long ago left behind that daypack in the car of some john that she had promised to return to, but she had not yet lost that look of youth and innocence. Liz still retained the sort of face that reminded a john in his sixties of his first love in his teens. His was a long and distant memory, hers a long and doleful face. She was always frowning, but if she could have even faked a smile, she might have verged on the beatific. Yet, because she had little to smile about, she seldom smiled.

At 24, she no longer found pleasure even in drugs. Without a smile, she still looked attractive enough from a distance and in the dark. Up close and by the dim dome light inside a car, however, the clearly visible track marks on her hands and arms would scare off even the most jaded of johns. Or should have. But that sight was common among Willimantic janes, all who are injection drug users. The darkened scars of track marks were notches carved on the wooden gunwale of a lifeboat. With each notch, the shipwrecked sailor marked her days adrift while awaiting rescue. But the search party arrived too late. They found her lifeboat empty. Only the notches attested to her plight.

IV drug users perforate their inner forearms first. When those veins collapse, shooters proceed to their hands and fingers, then their feet and toes. Their hand-to-hand combat is a losing battle as they count their remaining years on the fingers of one hand. Long-sleeve shirts substitute for long-term plans. Except in winter, gloves would garner even more notice than track marks. Gloves anyway must come off indoors or in cars where they are left behind, so janes remain barehanded. One of Liz’s street sisters was Ann Marie, Inmate Number 234210. Ann Marie’s thick pasty makeup concealed both her riddled wrists and her blemished face. That was before Ann Marie nodded out and rammed her borrowed car into a commuting college student, abruptly ending his education.

Jailed for motorized manslaughter, Ann Marie now has lots of time on her hands and time to heal those hands. Another colleague, *Ambrosia*, pulled her long sleeves over her hands, turtle-like, and held them into place with her pinching fingers. But not Liz. Liz hid nothing because she simply did not care. Though some of her stigmata were sore and bloody, she apparently suffered no social stigma, not within her small circle of dealers, janes, and johns. Her caste of “untouchables” nevertheless got touched. Her sexual services were still sought.

Though Liz often injected coke with her dope, she was not skeletal, just slender. Just as some fat people remain fat because in their eyes they are thin, Liz remained slender because in her mind she was fat. Like many of Willimantic, Liz’s ancestry was French Canadian but easily mistaken for Italian. Tall, dark, and lean, she had a lanky look. Think Modigliani’s horizontal portraits of an odalisque sprawled across the couch but crowded inside the canvas. Likewise, Liz looked crowded in a passenger seat. And her long and slender arms and hands were covered with long and slender track marks. Elsewhere her skin was fair. Though chronically infected with hep C, her complexion was not yellow, just pale. While other addicts sank into oblivion, Liz remained vibrant and buoyant. Drugs always came first, so she kept her drug works clean and in good working order. She bathed daily, brushed her long hair regularly, dressed smartly, and wore only a scant scent of cigarettes.

Liz shot daily at least eight bags of dope and up to eight bags of coke. She shot the dope because she needed to and the coke because she wanted to. Yet she endured every emergency. And for heroin addicts, every day was an emergency. And every night a catastrophe. Heroin was so abundant in Willimantic that scoring was rarely one of those emergencies. Liz needed only to snap her fingers and heroin was in hand. Bundles of it. To cop powder cocaine, however, she had to exert more effort and walk or bum a ride to Jonathan’s, the Latino club just off Main Street. Jonathan’s welcomed all with valid I.D. While it posted no cover charge for admission, it illicitly levied a drug tax. Druggies there just to score were expected to buy a drink. Yet Liz, like most junkies, skipped the booze. When either the bouncer or the bartender was watching, Liz deposited her three dollar drug tax into a glass on the bar near the entrance. But only if either was watching.

If the Latino club was a bucket of booze, Liz was a drop in the

bucket. She looked at home even though she was one of the few whites and few women there. She was half semisocial butterfly and half antisocial chameleon. Liz was lizard-like because that was what it took to cop drugs. And she made herself look presentable because that is what it took to fund her habit. Though adept at the role of a sex worker, her role was all cigarette smoke and bathroom mirrors. Liz was not a professional prostitute. Liz was only a professional addict. For johns, the jane was all about sex. For janes, the sex was all about drugs. Male obsession and female addiction. Twin terrors governed not by the laws of the state or the feds but by the law of supply and demand.

Liz could excel at whatever task she chose, had she not first chosen to excel at drugs. For six years, she had embraced the streets of Willimantic. She could have done worse. She could have embraced the streets of Bridgeport’s East Side or New York’s South Bronx. Or she could do better. She could have come down off her horse high. But rather than set her sights higher, she remained a destitute prostitute always hankering for her next fix to delay the inevitable hell of withdrawal. To Hindus, life within this earthly existence already is hell. To Buddhists, hell is a state of mind in which desires turn into nightmares. To junkies, their worst nightmare, from which they never wake, is their insatiable desire for heroin.

LIZ speaks:

I was raised on a farm, nice home, good family. In high school, I started getting high, partying all the time, doing coke on weekends, coming home smashed drunk. I moved out three weeks before I was supposed to graduate. I messed up my final exams. I overslept and didn’t give a shit, so I ended up not graduating. I ended up going away. I left my parents a note “Mom, Dad, I’m going, sorry.” Whatever. I ended up going to Boston. I met some people doing traveler’s checks scams. They refund your money if you report them stolen, so they’d double their money. And they were buying heroin. I never did heroin before. I sniffed it, and oh my God I hated it. I got so sick, I kept throwing up.

Later, in San Francisco, I started black tar heroin. It’s sticky, so you really got to shoot it. I loved it. I was buying it every day. I was getting really screwed up. I was shooting crystal meth too. One night, this guy wanted to party. He’d already been drinking and taking pills. I shot him up, and he got really high. We ended up nodding out. The next morning I

woke up, and the guy was bloated, all purple. He was dead. Oh my God! I started throwing up. In San Francisco, it's involuntary manslaughter, so my friends dragged him out to the sidewalk to leave him there.

I was doing so much crystal meth, I'd hardly slept in a week. I was really messed up. I thought the cops heard a girl did it. I thought people were after me, whispering about me. I thought there was this big conspiracy against me. I hid in the subway stations. I just wanted to get away from everybody. Finally, my friend bought me a plane ticket to New York.

Later, still doing dope, I went on tour following the Dead concerts. We were in Indiana. We couldn't find dope. I was dopesick, just kept taking Percocets and Percodans, drinking and drinking. Then I shot dope. That's all I remember. I wake up, there's paramedics all around me. I couldn't breathe. Blood was flying from my mouth. I remember going in and out of consciousness. I was in intensive care for five days. So I get out of the hospital. I go out into the lobby. There's cops there. They say, "You're under arrest for being a common nuisance."

I had just turned 18, no longer a minor. They consider it a misdemeanor. I ended up doing 60 days in this real redneck county jail for the stupidest thing. It wasn't even possession. During the whole time I was in there, I wanted to go home, back to my family, get into a drug rehab program, get my life together. So my mom wired me money. I went back to my mom's house. I got into a program. The whole time, I was doing it for the wrong reasons. I was doing it for my family, not for me.

I was 19, started coming to Willimantic getting dope, driving from my mom's house. When I'd come to Willimantic, I started working the streets. The first time, this young kid paid me good money. I figured it was cool, so I did it more. I started living in Willimantic. I had a habit. That's when I really worked the streets. I moved into the Hotel Hooker. At that time all the girls lived there, streetwalking right in front of the hotel. This dope dealer, he gave me drugs every day, so I no longer had to work the streets. I would drive to Hartford to cop with him. I would hold the stuff, usually 40 bundles of dope, often two ounces of coke. We ended up getting arrested. My parents knew the bail commissioner, so they got me a deal. I ended up going to jail only three months. I got into a program, completed that, had two years probation. I was doing good for a while, went to my mom's house, worked at a pizza shop. This whole time, I was dying to go to Willimantic. So one night, I went. Ended up going back to the same shit, working the streets, all drugged out, everything was crazy.

I was supposed to be going to my probation officer, didn't do that. I violated my probation. I knew I had [arrest] warrants coming. Walter had a big boat down in Mystic. It had a bed, kitchen, everything, so I went down there, hiding out in his boat. I ended up working the streets in New London. In New London, I ended up getting caught in a sting copping dope. So I ended up going back to jail. Walter bonds me out. I came back to Willimantic. I was supposed to go to court, didn't go to court. I was really screwed up. I knew a warrant was coming, I didn't care. It took them a year to catch me.

I had a huge habit. I was so skinny, I weighed like 110. One night I did four bags. It was so good. I was so high. My eyes kept closing. I was nodding out really bad, so I went to get some coke. I was parked on the street. The cop came to my window. The cop said, "Liz, you look really bad. It's time for you to go to jail. You need a rest."

I got 18 months, I did 16, came out on parole, violated that, went back, finished my time, got out. That was nearly two years ago. I used dope the day I got out. I've been on the streets ever since. I'm just out here doing this bullshit. I spent a week in jail last week. They detox you in there. I was so sick in lockup and in court. I got bonded out by Walter. I was detoxed when I came out. But I went right back to dope.

I see myself getting off this shit. I'm ready. My drug counselor, Lia, she's really trying to get me into a good program. I want a change. I'm sick of everything. I'm sick of the people, of the life, of the drugs. Regardless of drugs in my life, there's some things that are important to me, some things that I have morals and values about. Like animals. I fucking love animals. Animals love me too. I used to be completely vegan. I was a vegetarian until two years ago. I used to be into so many things. Now I don't give a crap about anything. Now I don't even know who I am. Lately, I've been finding people to latch onto, but I used to always stick to myself. I just want a friend. I've got no friends. Everyone's dogging me, talking shit about me. This old guy I'm with, Walter, I've been with him for five years. He says how much he loves me. He's always saying, "Love, Love, Love." But he doesn't fucking love me. He doesn't fucking understand anything.

I don't need sex, I'm so sick of sex. Even guys who don't know what I do, when they see me, they hit on me or make some comments. I'm so sick of that. I'm so sick of people. I love my mom. I miss my family. I want love. I want my mommy.

Gone to Pot

Gravity pulls down every object and entropy brings down every high. The higher the high, the harder the crash. Liz crashed hard.

JENNIFER speaks:

We were living together, me, Liz and Jim, in hotel rooms. He was totally in love with me. He was telling me, “It’s too late for me, I’ve become evil. But I want you to do good.” He was taking care of us, supplying us with heroin, everything. Jim was Aryan Brotherhood. I knew how he was getting money robbing people. He made a lotta, lotta, lotta money when he stole. Funny thing is, he’s robbing somebody of their weed, and he doesn’t even smoke pot. Jim wanted me to go to Vermont with him to go get weed, a drug deal. I’m glad I didn’t take that ride. Liz knew right from the get-go that there was going to be a robbery.

Jennifer, who had long been saintly amid so much avarice and vice, admitted, “If you stay on drugs, you have to adapt to your environment. Everyone says you change. I’m seeing now it’s true. I’m learning now, after five years on the streets, that you’ve got to be the bitch.” Jennifer indeed became “the bitch” who bedded down with the devil, welcoming Jim’s gifts of dope. Yet she either worked up enough nerve or rallied up enough sense to refuse that joyride. Because of Jim’s nefarious intentions? No, because he was drug-crazed and sleep-deprived after four days on coke and he was “driving erratically.” Life on the streets clearly had corrupted Jennifer, while Liz, who had begun with less degree of integrity, descended still lower. Still, Liz may have embarked on that trip only because she was coerced by Jim.

James Richitelli, age 51, sought an accomplice because he hated being alone. Likewise, most people would hate being alone with Jim. A convicted felon, Jim had done time twice for burglary and twice again for larceny. While reputed among his clan to be a hitman, he never was arrested for that, so he effectively got away with murder.

On one fine late October day, too late to view autumn’s leafy colors, too early to ski winter’s snowy slopes, Liz left her netherworld of Willimantic and drove to Vermont with Jim. Theirs was not a sightseeing tour but a business trip. Liz rode shotgun in Jim’s Chevy pickup truck because a female in the passenger seat provides good cover for a drug dealer while trafficking drugs. Yet scoring an alleged ten pounds of

marijuana was a ruse. Jim’s real plan was far more serious. Deadly serious. Jim did not intend to pay for any stash in Vermont but rather to rob it. He brought only pocket money and pocketed a loaded handgun. He already had pulled this scam several times with upstate New York pot dealers. He robbed them and threatened their lives unless they led him to their growers, who Jim then robbed too. Though unreported to police, word of the horticultural heists spread throughout the upstate New York underground. So Jim had to strike elsewhere with his venom. While Jim was armed, pot dealers and pot growers in Vermont were mostly aged hippies who generally shunned guns, despite Vermont’s permissive gun laws. His cowardly tactics could never have succeeded with heavily armed coke and heroin dealers like himself.

Meet Trisha, Inmate Number 241405. Trisha was one year younger than Liz and a former lover still fond of Liz. Formerly addicted to heroin, Trisha smoked crack to ward off heroin. The same as did many street girls, Trish conducted sexual commerce with men but professed sexual love for women. When the men they met predominantly were johns, dealers, cops, judges, jailers or parole officers, little wonder such women preferred women.

TRISHA speaks:

Jim was a hitman for Hell’s Angels, a career criminal. Liz was a hippie. To think of her hurting anyone, I can’t fathom it. Me and Liz were best friends. She was the first woman I was ever in love with. I loved her in every way. Me and Liz used to shoot heroin and coke together. We were kids living a fast life. If I could hang out with anyone right now, it would be Liz out here on the streets. It’s hard out here. Easier when you’re with someone who goes thru the same pain. We would cry all the time. I’m no better than the next chick selling her ass for ten dollars. But there will be no one like Liz.

Peaceful hippie or not, Liz admitted that she knew of Jim’s past rip-offs of pot dealers and of his plan to repeat the rip-off on this trip to Vermont. They spent the first night in central Vermont in White River Junction, then on Halloween day proceeded north to the small ski town of Montgomery, just south of the Canadian border. Jim’s purported pot connection must have been a grower 24 years earlier when Jim last knew him, but no longer. An inveterate heroin addict, Jim did not understand

that as most people mature they relinquish the drug use of their youth, especially of pot. Jim the old dog was barking up the wrong tree, out on a limb, stirring up a hornet's nest, and in their defense the hornets stung everyone, including Jim. Expressed in the vernacular, which eerily implies that a drug deal starts out good, Jim's drug deal turned bad. During her interrogation the day after her arrest, Liz fessed up.

LIZ speaks:

Jim got this job he wants to do. He robs pot dealers. He said he needed a pistol, that he didn't need any bullets. He needed it for a showpiece. We went to Vermont. He didn't tell me his plan until the ride up there. He said I didn't need to know. So we went to Tom's house. They gave each other a hug, and Jim introduced me. Tom was cooking dinner for this girl coming over that night. Jim started asking where he could get pot. Tom didn't know. He really didn't know.

You could tell Tom was scared. Jim thinks he is still growing weed. He wanted to rob him of pounds. Jim takes the gun out and cocks it. Jim says, "Start telling me!" And Tom's saying, "Jim, this is crazy." Jim handed me the gun.

Tom had no pot with which to appease Jim. Fearing Jim, Tom tried to subdue him. The two scuffled, rolled on the floor, slugged it out. Tom was proving victorious, so Jim yelled to Liz, "Hand me the gun!" Liz handed the 9mm handgun to Jim. Jim eloquently bid farewell to Tom. "Goodbye, little fuck!" BAM! A shot to Tom's head from point-blank range. One innocent soul dead.

A few minutes later, while Jim was rummaging the house for valuables and those purported pounds of pot, Tom's Halloween night dinner date, Valerie, arrived at the front door. While the active shooter slipped out the back door, Liz greeted Valerie at the front door. Liz engaged Valerie in conversation to stall for time. Hard to imagine what Liz said to explain her presence and Tom's absence. What should Liz have done? Scream in horror? Shout in anguish? Cry in sadness? Groan in agony? Liz should have warned Valerie and told her to get back in her car and flee, and Liz should have fled with her. Except that just around the bend, Jim had the gun.

Jim crept behind the unsuspecting Valerie. First, the creep assaulted her, then BAM! A shot to Valerie's head from point-blank range. The

blast mortally wounded her, but still conscious and lying on the ground, she implored Jim, "Tell my family I love them." Realizing her doom, Valerie pleaded for her life. Jim heeded her pleas by slitting her throat from ear to ear with a pocketknife and then shooting Valerie in the head again. Leaving behind two dead innocent souls, the cutthroat and his assistant assassin fled.

The botched robbery reaped no cannabis but produced two corpses. On the way to Connecticut down Interstate 91, their getaway pickup truck broke down in southern Vermont close to the Massachusetts border. Jim and Liz holed up Sunday night in a motel outside Brattleboro. Jim phoned for rescue from his friend William, a cohort in his previous pot dealer rip-offs. William picked them up on Monday. Their conversation during the car ride home was stifled and evasive, but the getaway driver knew something went dreadfully wrong. Jim commanded William, "Don't ask questions you don't want to know the answers to." William drove them to a hotel in West Springfield to hole up in Monday night. On Tuesday, William was supposed to return to the hotel but instead went to the police to squeal on his passengers. As a felon personally informed of criminal law, William knew he was liable as an accessory to their crimes. Indeed, he later was charged but was sentenced leniently.

Bonnie and Clyde nodded out all day Tuesday. That night, realizing William had absconded on them, they took a taxi from Massachusetts back to Willimantic. Their joyless ride cost \$180. Their first night back in Connecticut, they hid out in a rural town just east of Norwich in the rented house of Liz's sugar daddy, Walter. On Wednesday, a squad of Vermont state police, a squad of Connecticut state troopers, and a SWAT team flushed the troubled trio out of Walter's secluded home. The next day, Jim and Liz were taken into custody by Vermont state police. On Friday, they were extradited to Vermont. Then the two dopesick pieces of shit were flushed down two separate toilets.

Jim Dies

Just before his trial was to begin, Jim pled guilty to two counts of aggravated murder. To exonerate Liz, he tried to take all the blame. "She was so high," he claimed, "she was basically unconscious." At age 52, the fiend was sentenced to life imprisonment with no parole. The judge stated, "I can recall very few people who were as menacing

and as violent as obviously he was. I think that Miss Gagne knew when she came to Vermont with him that he was a monster.” In prison, the monster threatened prison staff and other inmates and flaunted the fact that Vermont had no death penalty. “What could you do to me?” Jim rhetorically grilled the guards.

Vermont prison officials regarded Jim as one of the most vicious inmates they had ever imprisoned. During his short stint in Vermont, he gained notoriety for “defiance and volatility.” He even mounted a foiled attempt to escape. Lacking a maximum security prison, vulnerable Vermont transferred him to a high-security federal penitentiary in Florida. Perhaps Jim suffered heatstroke under the tropical sun. Or perhaps Jim realized that life imprisonment without parole was a life not worth living. Or that addiction without heroin was a life too disquieting to endure. For reasons unknown because he took his secret with him, a year after he pled guilty, in an uncharacteristic flash of profound insight or a rare deed for the common good, Jim hung himself from the top bunk in his jail cell. “Goodbye, little fuck!”

Liz Will Not Die

Just before she was to go to trial as an accomplice to the two brutal murders, Liz copped a deal to a lesser charge as an accessory to the homicides. The prosecutors agreed to the reduction because, despite her long rap sheet, none of her previous crimes were violent. They further averred that she was mentally ill and “suffering from diminished capacity due to drug addiction.” In her defense, she assured the Vermont police and prosecutors, “I’m a prostitute on the streets of Willimantic and I shoot heroin and cocaine. I don’t go robbing drug dealers.”

At age 30, inmate Elizabeth Gagne was sentenced to 13-years-to-life imprisonment after which she may be eligible for lifelong closely supervised parole, supervision about which the prosecutor emphasized, “That is very important, with her history and her addictions.” Liz may emerge from prison a truly transformed woman committed to lasting sobriety and may blossom into the poetess or ballerina or songwriter that she had stifled when she succumbed to drugs. But if not, then once paroled, sooner or later she will surrender to The Drug and then fail a drug test yet again. She thereby will violate her parole yet again. And Liz will return to jail yet again.

Alternatively, during her relapse, she too just might experience an uncharacteristic flash of rare insight and choose to end her suffering. Some overdoses are no accidents. To find an injectable vein in their arms, IV users clench their fists. In their unclenched hand, they several times daily clasp a syringe, their ferry ticket for passage across the River Styx into heroin Hades. That ferry can very quickly rev into overdrive, and any overdose can easily turn that journey into a one-way passage. From the ruinous hell of heroin addiction to the eternal hell of Christian theology, the journey from addiction to deliverance can be short, far shorter than any hell-bent trip from Connecticut to Vermont.



Trisha at age 29

