

## Down the Rabbit Hole – episode #2 – Elizabeth's story

[Anon voices] Empathy Museum presents A Mile in My Shoes.

[Three voices, speaking different parts of the sentence in turn] From Boldface and Women in Prison – this is Down the Rabbit Hole, a series of letters and personal stories from three women who access The Beth Centre in London. That's Rita and Elizabeth, and I'm Angel.

[Elizabeth]

I love art. I think through art, you can actually express yourself, express your positive and negative emotions, especially the negative emotions. And also because art connects me with my soul. I believe our souls are free of any limitations of the physical plane. So through art you can actually be free.

So I'm Elizabeth. And you may call me 'Swift Lizzy'. We have correspondences from WIP – Women in Prison. And I thought, well, I can't help receiving mail from WIP, but what if I create something that's... Okay connected to Women in Prison... However, it gives me freedom to be free. So I had the idea: Support Women In Freedom Today – and that becomes 'swift'. And it's a cool name, isn't it?

So Swift Lizzy and all the girls who are out here who are doing artwork, who are creating something – I'm encouraging everybody to use the 'Swift' before their names. Cuz then we are promoting the idea of women in freedom, not women in prison.

I have been in prison of many types. I was actually abused by my adopted mother. The instrument that she picked, her favorite instrument (there were two): my adoptive father's leather belt, and in the old days, the irons – they used to have these rubbery leads. One end would go into the plug in the wall and the other end would go into the iron itself, but it was like pure rubber. And that was her favorite as well. So it was like two weapons that she had against me.

That could be for anything. If I dropped anything, that was a good enough reason to receive the most horrendous beating. Eight nine years of age, we used to go to a class called physical education, which was really sports. And the uniform for tennis actually was pleated white miniskirt and red shorts underneath. And my adopted mother made my skirt knee-level. So I cut my skirt one day. So this is the length I want – the older girls wear that length, that's what I'm gonna have. So I cut it. Did the hem by hand. Ironed it. Off I went. Not knowing that my adopted mother's sister was gonna tell my mother that I actually had cut my skirt and I had gone with a very short skirt to school.

So, oh my Lord. She beat me up so badly that I had marks around my waist and bum for weeks. She would actually not allow me to go to school. She would hide my books, my uniform. Mainly because if I told someone she would be in trouble.

Those physical scars, when they fade, they stay with you. And it was not until much later in life that I realised that a lot of her that was carrying, a lot of complexes, were all to do with those beatings and those scars left by my adopted mother. And it's hard to get rid of them because it's like, you can forgive, but you can't forget.

Looking into a mirror one day, I thought: wow, puffy eyes. You've got yellow skin. Look at that. You've got black heads. And then I decided to look through my eyes and I saw a lot of hurt. I saw a lot of sadness and I thought that can't be you, surely. You peel the layers of the makeup, of all the faults you think you have in your face, you peel the layers of suffering and disappointment, and then you can see the real you. And I thought that's who I am. And that's how the letter came about.

A lot of the suffering I experienced in my early childhood and teenagehood, I had to kind of leave it to one side so that I could use my brains to be productive, you know, learn things and travel to places and meet people, develop myself as a person. I felt it was important. I speak Portuguese, Spanish, Italian, English, and Esperanto. I like to travel a lot. I've been to 23 countries. 350 cities in the world. Now can you imagine how many people did I meet? I've been to US, Australia, I've been to Sweden, I've been to Italy, actually lived in Italy for a year.

*[Recordings of Elizabeth talking overlay so that sentences run into each other]*

The thing that I remember about Bolivia is the friendliness of the people – come on over, relax... The street and see loads of people out... And you go, wow, meat. I mean the Argentina meat. Oh my Lord. From here, I went to Australia, I went to Hong Kong, I went to Belgium.

*[Other recordings fade out– main recording fades back in]*

Uhhhh, I forgot cause I've been to so many. It's kind of hard to remember everything. And then I came to London and within two weeks I met my ex-husband. The funny thing about that is that for two weeks prior to meeting my ex-husband, I dreamt having the most

amazing sex with his men. I couldn't see his face. I could only see from his waist down. Every night I was dreaming about this man, and I'm thinking bloody hell, what's going on with me? And then one day a friend of the family I was staying with, he invited me to his friend's birthday party. And his friend was actually my ex-husband.

I met him and we got on really well. We exchanged numbers. And, uh, when we had sex for the first time was exactly as it was in the dream. And I thought, wow, there must be something to it. He must be my soulmate. So I married him. It didn't work out, but when you come to London, you might not get out. It's like Hotel California. That's what happened to me.

I've been in London now for 35 years and set in roots in the country. It's like, this is my base. In a sense, it gave me a home. And London is a great city because you can find anything.

*[Recordings of Elizabeth talking overlay so that sentences run into each other]*

It's amazing... I mean, if you want to get yourself educated, you can, you have no excuse. London brings me great sense of security... To know that I can actually go and learn Arabic down the road... You don't have to have a car... You just have a bus ticket... Then you go anywhere in London where you like through the day. For me, that's stability.

*[Other recordings fade out– main recording fades back in]*

I've come a long way in understanding a lot of things. Spent hours trying to find meaning. I felt that if I grabbed hold of something or even more than one thing, I would be able to start dealing with all the troubles of my childhood and all the baggage that comes with it.

I was studying yoga, Hindu, Tai Chi, and reading about this, reading about that. Even joined up to Rosicrucians and became a Rosicrucian for a while. And I loved anything to do with God and religion and the beyond I was, yes, let's learn about it. I tried therapy after a while. It didn't work. So I did a lot of searching through religion and trying to find the answers as to why, for example, I had to undergo so much suffering in my life.

I still don't have all the answers. So I suppose the search continues.

In Greece, there is a temple called the Temple of Delphi and there is one simple little phrase that says: "know thy self". And that's where I should continue. I should continue to know myself. If I can just go back to me and know myself, then I will have accomplished something in life.

[Anon voice]

This episode was produced by Jesse Lawson and Nada Smiljanic. Down the Rabbit Hole is a 10-week workshop series and podcast produced by Boldface, in collaboration with Women in Prison.