

# 'Kings Park': A buried past, revisited

July 25, 2011 by RAFER GUZMÁN / [rafer.guzman@newsday.com](mailto:rafer.guzman@newsday.com)



Lucy Winer, director of the documentary "Kings Park: Stories From an American Mental Institution," could easily be mistaken for a former doctor at the now-defunct state psychiatric hospital. She's 61, with silverish hair, oversized glasses and a thoughtful, nonjudgmental manner.

Actually, Winer is a former patient -- Room 210, the violent ward. As a [Great Neck](#) teenager in the late 1960s, she was committed twice for attempted suicide. A 1967 mug shot shows a very different Winer: dark-haired, angry-eyed, a smile just short of a sneer.

"That was another life, another person," Winer says, describing how she psychically buried her past as an adult. "And that worked for a long time. But when I hit my 40s, it started to not work anymore."

"Kings Park," which screens tonight as part of the Stony Brook Film Festival, is a work of self-therapy in which Winer films herself revisiting the scene of a long-ago nightmare. Though she was never physically mistreated at Kings Park, she describes it as a place saturated with fear and the threat of violence. In the film, one former patient recalls being sexually molested, straitjacketed and hung from a wall hook as a young boy; a former doctor describes a patient death that sounds awfully close to murder.

"If anything happened to you, who would know?" says Winer, who now lives in Manhattan. "The main thing I could do was be polite, not cause trouble and stay under the radar."

By contrast, some former staffers in the film speak of Kings Park State Hospital in almost romantic terms. Originally an 800-acre campus that once housed more than 9,000 patients and employed more than 2,000 staffers, it was practically a self-sustaining village with a cobbler, dairy and swinery. Two former attendants met their wives there; one describes it as "Shangri-La."

In the 1970s, Kings Park fell victim to steady downsizing that ended with its closure in 1996. The film's final third focuses on the challenges former mental patients face on "the outside" -- a term that still slips into Winer's conversation today -- and on the social stigmas that gave rise to places like Kings Park in the first place.

"This is not a film that was made to get back at anyone," Winer says. "My feeling is that we all created this together."

**WHAT** Filmmaker Lucy Winer will attend a screening of "Kings Park: Stories From an American Mental Institution."

**WHEN | WHERE** Monday night at 7 at [Stony Brook University](#)'s Staller Center for the Arts

**TICKETS** \$9

**INFO** 631-632-2787; [stonybrookfilmfestival.com](http://stonybrookfilmfestival.com)