

Cortez High School: From Alice Cooper to a Travel Agent's Tales

During the 1986-1987 school year, Cortez High School stood as a beacon of academic and extracurricular activity. Located on 33rd Ave and Dunlap in Phoenix, AZ, it was known for its spirited student body, dedicated faculty, and vibrant campus life.

Academics and Achievements

Cortez High School maintained a strong reputation for academic excellence. The curriculum provided students with a solid foundation, preparing them for college and career paths. Honors and AP courses were available, offering ambitious students an opportunity to challenge themselves.

Student Life and Activities

Beyond the classroom, Cortez offered a wide range of clubs, sports, and activities. From the marching band to the debate team, students had plenty of ways to get involved. Athletics were also a significant part of school culture, with teams competing at high levels in regional and state championships.

For those who attended during the mid-'80s, Cortez High School was more than just a place of learning—it was a community. Friendships were forged in classrooms, on the football field, and at school events. The memories made during those years remain cherished by alumni who look back fondly on their time at Cortez.

Whether it was the pep rallies, the late-night study sessions, or the school spirit that filled the hallways, Cortez High School in 1986-1987 was a special place that shaped the lives of many.

Notable Alumni

One of Cortez High School's most famous alumni is rock legend **Alice Cooper**. His time at Cortez may have been short, but his legacy left an impression on the school.

Cortez High School in Phoenix, Arizona, may not be the most famous high school in the country, but it produced at least one legendary figure: Alice Cooper. The godfather of shock rock, Alice (born Vincent Damon Furnier) went from a kid in the Phoenix suburbs to a rock icon known for his theatrical stage performances, dark lyrics, and eye-catching makeup.

But Cortez High School had another notable alumnus—me. While I didn't go on to revolutionize rock music, I did carve out my own unique path. I was the first in my family to graduate from high school, and that alone was a pretty big deal. From there, I stumbled into a career in the travel industry, a world filled with corporate deals, NBA players, and a whole lot of perks—if you knew how to work the system.

From Airline Ticket Courier to Corporate Travel Agent

It all started with an office class that landed me a job at a travel agency delivering airline tickets. Things took an unexpected turn when I wrecked my car on the job. With no wheels, I wasn't much use as a courier, so they put me to work inside the office instead. That's when I started staying late, learning the computer system, and slowly proving that I could handle more than just ticket deliveries.

When one of the agents left and the agency found itself short-handed, I stepped up. Before I knew it, I was officially a corporate travel agent. Not just any travel agent, but one of the best. Eventually, I became the top corporate sales agent in Arizona for America West Airlines, handling travel arrangements for executives, celebrities, and even NBA players.

Well, technically, I didn't deal with the NBA players themselves. I mostly spoke with their wives. Some of them flirted with me, but let's be honest—these were women married to millionaire athletes, and I was making \$8 an hour. They were out of my league.

The women I actually made progress with? Corporate secretaries, young female travel agents, clients, and the cute girls who worked in the building. Being a young, straight male in an industry that was 90% female (and 9.5% gay) gave me a serious advantage.

The Frequent Flier Hustle: Free Flights Everywhere

One of my best travel industry hustles was signing up for every airline's frequent flier program. Back then, most people didn't use those programs unless they were hardcore business travelers. So, every time I issued a ticket, I quietly attached my own frequent flier number to the reservation.

It wasn't long before I had hundreds of thousands of miles racked up—enough for free flights all over the world. I even got two Continental Airlines World Passes as a gift. These allowed me and a friend to fly anywhere in the world for a year, making five major stops. I always dreamed of going to Europe and Australia, and this was my golden ticket.

The only problem? Even with free airfare, I still had to pay for food and hotels, and on an \$8-an-hour salary, I could barely afford gas. So, despite having the ability to fly anywhere, I didn't have the money to actually enjoy those destinations. A classic case of "so close, yet so far."

Luxury Resorts, Fake Snacks, and Free Parties

One of the biggest perks of working in the travel industry was the Familiarization Trips (or "Fam Trips"). These were almost like free vacations, except I had to tour resorts while I was there. Not a bad trade-off, considering I got to stay at top-tier resorts in places like Cabo and Vancouver.

Since I had insider access, I could also score free resort stays locally. My friends and I would book a room for two and request extra room keys. Then, six or eight of us would crash there and party. Sometimes, the resorts had free buffets with open bars at the pool. We lived it up—all on the house.

At one fancy resort, we found a wet bar in the room, but everything was insanely overpriced. Running to the store wasn't an option (we had the munchies), so we got "creative."

- We drank the whiskey and replaced it with water and Coke.
- Vodka? Replaced with water.
- Peanuts? Replaced with gravel, through a hole in the bottom of the can.
- Every single soda, snack, and mini bottle? Meticulously counterfeited.

The only thing we couldn't fake was the Baileys & Cream—it had a fancy wax-sealed bottle. That one we left alone. Or so I thought. Someone in our group stole it, and I ended up getting charged \$23 for it. That was the only item we actually paid for.

During these trips, I also met plenty of young female travel agents and resort employees. Let's just say I had a few romantic weekends—but it was all a bluff. I was just a broke guy who knew how to finesse the system.

Almost Working for the L.A. Raiders Cheerleaders

Later, when I moved to California, I briefly worked as a temp agent for the L.A. Raiders Cheerleaders. That gig had serious potential—until it didn't.

The woman in charge said I reminded her of her brother, who had recently passed away. Every time we talked, she got emotional and teary-eyed. Eventually, she told me, "This just isn't going to work out," and that was the end of that. Talk about bad luck.

The One Straight Guy in a Female-Dominated Industry

Being a young, straight male travel agent in Phoenix during those years was a blast. The industry was overwhelmingly female, and I was one of the few guys around. That meant opportunities—both professional and personal—were everywhere.

I met a lot of women as a travel agent, but the NBA wives? That was just casual flirting. The real connections happened with corporate secretaries, young female travel agents, clients, and all the cute girls in the building.

It was a fun time, full of ridiculous schemes, free trips, and just enough adventure to keep things interesting. Looking back, I wasn't getting rich, but I was definitely living well for \$8 an hour.

The Lost Boys: A Year of Chaos, Love, and Parties

A Breakup, a Move, and an Unfinished Chapter

When I moved back to the family home, it wasn't just about a change of scenery—it was an escape. My breakup with Jill had been inevitable. She was too promiscuous, too bitter, and too tangled in my life long after I wanted her gone. The worst part? She clung to my best friend's family, which meant I could never fully get rid of her.

But the move wasn't just about Jill. My older brother had gotten himself a six-month, government-sponsored vacation, and his house needed someone to keep it from slipping away. All I had to do was cover the mortgage. Between me and Joseph, we made it work—though life was always a challenge.

What started as a simple arrangement quickly turned into something else. My adopted younger brother, Dave, and his best friend, Ace, were on the street, needing a place to crash. They couldn't afford rent, so I let them stay on the couches in exchange for pitching in however they could. That usually meant food—of questionable origin. Sometimes it meant showing up with car stereos and other "donations" to cover expenses.

Before long, the house was filled with a rotating cast of misfits. At any given time, six to eight kids were living there. Most weren't even legally independent. Dave and I were the only ones who had gotten emancipated—he was only 15, which was ridiculously young to be a legal adult, but I walked him through the process so he could stay in school.

We were, in every sense, the Lost Boys.

And in a fitting twist, we were obsessed with *The Lost Boys* movie. We watched it religiously as part of the "Phoenix Film Society" party group. That film was practically our anthem.

Too Cool for Drama (But Not for Drama Girls)

The high school wanted me in the drama department. I had a reputation—people knew my name, and my adopted brother was in the program. But I didn't need the credit, and I wasn't interested. That didn't stop me from making appearances, though. The instructor sometimes needed a break, so I taught a few workshop classes. I was a "special guest," even though I was a student myself. An upperclassman with a solid reputation, I was treated with more respect than the average high schooler.

One of my many distractions was Paula, the office girl. She looked conservative but had a wild streak a mile wide. She had a habit of dating older men, so she was no stranger to sneaking around and passionate encounters. We met when I was registering as an emancipated student. She realized I could sign myself out of class whenever I wanted.

So she started showing up and pulling me out of class.

Sometimes, she'd come to my class for other students, but she'd give me a little wink. Other times, she was there for me, playing it completely official as she pulled me out of my most important class—the one I needed to graduate. The teacher never suspected a thing. The moment we were out the door, we'd jump in my car and head back to the house to fool around and play house.

Paula wasn't a girlfriend. Just a friend—with benefits.

Later, I'd almost get caught fooling around with her.

The Apartment, the Almost-Caught, and the Mystery Girl

Eventually, I moved into an apartment. Guess who lived a few doors away? Paula. She was always flirting, always wanting to stop by. More than once, she "coincidentally" showed up right after one of my breakups, ready to console me.

One day, she had just left my place when there was a knock at the door.

I figured she must have forgotten something—or wanted to stick around longer. But when I opened it, my steady girlfriend was standing there.

Had they passed each other on the stairs? They couldn't have missed each other by more than seconds!

My girl wanted to make up with me, and to show me some love and affection. What do you think a 17-year-old teenage boy would do? Exactly. It was an amazing day—until I pulled a pair of underwear from between my sheets and said, "Don't forget your underwear."

She froze. "Those aren't mine."

Panic. My brain scrambled for an excuse. "Uh... my brother must've had someone in my room."

She let it go, but the flaw in my story? My brother's girlfriend was much larger. And those were very tiny underwear. I was lucky she didn't press further.

But for all the casual flings, there was one girl who stood out.

It started with notes on my windshield.

"I think you're hot!" signed with a heart and the name Jolynn.

I parked on the side of the school, where hardly anyone else parked. I never saw anyone leave them. One day, I asked a gorgeous, tall, skinny blonde in tight red pants if she'd seen anyone around my car. She blushed, but said no.

I only wished someone as stunning as her would be the one leaving the notes.

I started asking around. Did anyone know a girl named Jolynn? Finally, a girl in my history class said she did. She promised to point her out.

Between classes, we walked through the hall. She suddenly turned and silently, frantically motioned toward a girl ahead of us.

It was the blonde in the red pants!

I played it cool, and later introduced myself. Jolynn became my girlfriend.

She was everything Jill wasn't—hotter, thinner, younger, and better in bed. Jill still lingered around my best friend's family, even parading around a new boyfriend she hoped would make me jealous. I didn't care.

Jill, Chuck, and the Ultimate Irony

One night, a knock at the door.

It was winter. Cold. Raining.

Jill had gotten kicked out of her place and had nowhere to go. She begged me to let her stay—with Jolynn and me (and the rest of the Lost Boys).

Against my better judgment, I said yes.

Then she said, "My boyfriend, Chuck, is in the car. He has nowhere to go either."

So, there they were—staying in the bedroom adjacent to mine. And every night, Jill got to hear the passionate sounds of Jolynn and me.

That went on for weeks before she finally found another place to stay.

Later, Jill spiraled. Joseph started dealing drugs, and Jill became a junkie. I'm pretty sure they hooked up on occasion, but I never asked. Hopefully, Joseph got what he could out of it.

The Party That Became a Legend

We had a lot of parties.

One of the most epic?

I planned a small gathering—just the 23 cute girls in my office class, Joseph, me, and my two "missing" best friends, Greg and Chris who had been avoiding me, pretending they couldn't find me so they could hold onto my priceless film memorabilia.

By 8:00, the party was still dead.

Someone said, "You want more people? I'll get more people."

Next thing I know? 300 people.

By night's end, we had a rager. I had a line of 21-year-old women outside my bedroom door waiting to "party" with me. Meanwhile, Greg and Chris—who had screwed themselves out of amazing times—remained virgins for the next decade or more.

That year was wild.

Life was crazy. Girls were young and friendly.

We were the Lost Boys.

Final Thoughts

Cortez High School set the stage for everything that came after. I didn't become a rock legend like Alice Cooper, but I did carve out my own wild and unpredictable path. From gaming the airline system to partying at luxury resorts to (almost) working with the Raiders Cheerleaders, those years were packed with stories.

And while I never did make it to Europe or Australia, I learned an important lesson: sometimes, life's best experiences don't come from money—they come from knowing how to live.