

MARGARET'S STORY

By
Glen Rockwood

Adapted from the one-act play

By
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FADE IN:

Stars slowly appear in a night sky. Theme music. A woman's voice is heard singing Margaret's Song.

WOMAN (V.O.)

Oh, my heart's filled with longing
for the eyes of a child.
The sweet tangled beauty
of a garden gone wild.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. SIGNAL HILL/ST. JOHN'S - NIGHT

YOUNG MARGARET MILLER, a ten-year-old child, sits on a rock as she gazes at the lights of the city.

WOMAN (V.O.)

I've walked through the fire,
found shelter from rain.
Sent dark demons flying
on an outward bound train.

Young Margaret stands and begins to sing along with the woman.

YOUNG MARGARET AND WOMAN (V.O.)

Yes, I've burned those old bridges,
turned my face to the wind.
Searched deep in the heart for
the power within.
I've watched the high moon
as it waxes and wanes,
in hopes of a cure for
a heart filled with pain.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. ST. JOHN'S - NIGHT

MONTAGE -- Video images of the city at night: downtown, where there's traffic and people, and uptown, where the streets are quiet and all is peaceful.

Margaret Miller speaks over the images.

MARGARET (V.O.)

Anyone remember the TV show, *The Naked City*? I used to watch re-runs when I was a kid. Remember how the camera would pan along all the high-rises and streets clogged with cars and people? Then there'd be the announcer...

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

There are a million stories in the Naked City. This is one of them.

MARGARET (V.O.)

Now, I'm not from a big city like New York or Chicago...

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. SIGNAL HILL/ST. JOHN'S - DAY

MARGARET MILLER (40) sits on the rock where Young Margaret sat earlier.

MARGARET

I'm from St. John's, Newfoundland.

MALE VOICE (O.S.)

There's about one hundred and seventy-eight thousand stories in St. John's, a city that's too cold to be naked in.

MARGARET

And this is my story. I wrote it myself. My name is Margaret Miller, and I'm forty years old.

MALE VOICE (O.S.)

You look good, girl.

MARGARET

Oh...well, not too bad, I guess,
all things considered. Anyway, I
was born in '65.

PHOTO of Margaret's PARENTS, circa 1960.

MARGARET

My father died when I was just a
baby. This is the only photo I have
of my real parents. There was six
of us kids all together, and we
were all put into foster care.

PHOTO of Margaret's birth mother, pregnant, smoking a cigarette.

MARGARET

I know who my birth mother is. We
have met up--but only a couple of
times. She's in her sixties now.
When I asked her why she put us all
in foster homes, she couldn't give
me any reason. It was like she
didn't care. I haven't tried to
reach her since.

EXT. MARGARET'S FOSTER HOME--DAY

A small attached townhouse located in the centre of the city.

Margaret stands on the sidewalk, watching CHILDREN as they run past the house. She turns to the camera.

MARGARET

I don't remember where I lived when
I was really young. But I do
remember that from about four to
sixteen I lived in this house with
my foster mother.

BLACK AND WHITE PHOTO of Margaret's foster mother, BERTHA LACEY, mid-twenties,
circa 1970.

MARGARET (V.O.)

My foster mother's name is Bertha Lacey, and she was someone who...well, let's just say she was a difficult person.

MALE VOICE (O.S.)

She was a bitch, Margaret.

Margaret looks away from the camera, a nervous smile on her face.

MARGARET

Yes, well, she was a hard case, all right.

CUT TO:

INT. MARGARET'S FOSTER HOME/KITCHEN - DAY

BERTHA, her face unseen, stands by a worn kitchen chair, holding a large pair of scissors.

Young Margaret, wearing an old dress, her hair long, stares at the scissors. She walks to the chair, her eyes cast downward, and sits.

Bertha's free hand picks up a burning cigarette from a tin ashtray. A puff of smoke hits Young Margaret in the face. Bertha's hand places the cigarette back in the ashtray.

MARGARET

When I was five she told me I was going to start school.

Bertha's hand clutches a lock of Young Margaret's hair and chops it close to the girl's head. She continues chopping and cutting as Young Margaret watches her hair fall to the floor.

A school bell rings.

EXT. AN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - MORNING

The bell continues to ring. Bertha's late-sixties car approaches the school.

Young Margaret stares out the passenger window, watching as a couple of YOUNG STUDENTS rush toward the main entrance.

MARGARET (V.O.)

This is the elementary school I
thought I'd be going to. It was
really close to my foster house.

Bertha drives past the school. Young Margaret turns her head, straining to catch a last glimpse of the school as Bertha turns a corner.

MARGARET (V.O.)

But, on my first morning, my foster
mother drove right past the
elementary school and dropped me
off here...

CUT TO:

EXT. SPECIAL LEARNING SCHOOL - DAY

Bertha's car pulls up in front of the school. The name of the school has been blurred out.
Margaret stands by the entrance.

MARGARET

A school for people who have a disability.

YOUNG MARGARET gets out of the car. She wears ill-fitting second-hand clothes, and her hair is cropped short and uneven.

MARGARET

And, thanks to Bertha, I looked
like the kind of child you'd call a
"slow learner." A lost, dumb child.

The car's motor revs up, startling Young Margaret. Adult Margaret opens the school door and watches as the young girl makes her way toward the entrance.

Young Margaret looks inside the building at the long corridor, then, with eyes cast downward, she walks into the school.

INT. SPECIAL LEARNING SCHOOL - DAY

Alone, Young Margaret walks down the corridor, looking at the pictures on the wall and the closed classroom doors.

MARGARET (V.O.)

If one person could tell me why I
was put in that school, I'd say,
OK, maybe I should have been placed
there.

Young Margaret reaches the end of the corridor and stops walking. She turns slowly and looks back at the entrance.

MARGARET

But there was no reason--no
justifiable reason. Except that
Bertha probably got money for
putting her "retarded" foster child
there.

Young Margaret starts running toward the entrance. The silhouette of a WOMAN TEACHER appears as Young Margaret reaches the door. Young Margaret stops dead in her tracks. She glances at the teacher, then looks away, nervous.

CUT TO:

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Young Margaret sits in a desk knitting an excessively long, multi-colored scarf.

MARGARET

We weren't taught the basics at the
school. There were no classes in
reading, writing, or math. Mostly
it was cooking, sewing, knitting.
There was no homework.
I used to hear the neighbor kids
complain about how much homework
they had. I was never given any.

INT. MARGARET'S FOSTER HOME/KITCHEN - DAY

Young Margaret, standing on a milk crate, washes dishes. She looks out the window, watching the NEIGHBOURHOOD KIDS play on the street.

MARGARET (V.O.)

I wouldn't have had time for it,
anyway. All I did was housework.
There was no time to make friends.
Bertha told me I couldn't have any.
Not much odds, anyway. Everyone
thought I was retarded.

A TEENAGE BOY (14) spots Young Margaret. He nudges his MALE FRIEND (12) and points at her. The friends exchange a few words, then laugh.

Young Margaret looks away from the window. She steps down off the milk crate and sits on it. Dishwater drips from her hands to the floor.

The front door slams shut, and Young Margaret jumps at the sound. She stands on the crate and continues washing the dishes as Bertha's feet appear in the doorway.

Bertha's feet move toward Young Margaret. Bertha's hand takes the girl by the arm and pulls her toward the back door. With her free hand Bertha opens the door and pushes Young Margaret outside.

EXT. MARGARET'S FOSTER HOME/BACK YARD - CONTINUOUS

Young Margaret stands on the rickety back porch, watching as the door is slammed shut and the lock is turned. She looks at her wet hands, and, as she dries them on her clothes, she looks to the cab of an old pick-up truck that sits in the yard.

MARGARET

There were times...more times than
I can remember...when Bertha
wouldn't let me inside the house.

The sound of whispering causes Young Margaret to look toward an adjoining garden. A trio of neighborhood kids stare at her, saying nothing. One of the girls zips up her jacket. Young Margaret looks away, holding her bare arms as she sits on the steps.

EXT. MARGARET'S FOSTER HOME/BACK YARD - NIGHT

Young Margaret turns the doorknob of the back door, but it's still locked. She considers knocking, then decides against it.

She runs to the driver's side of the pick-up and pulls on the door's handle, but can't get it to open. Holding herself tight to keep warm, Young Margaret runs to the other side of the truck. She struggles with the passenger door, but it won't open.

MARGARET (V.O.)

Lots of times when I had to sleep
under a truck cab that was in the
yard.

Young Margaret walks around the truck, wondering what to do. She gets on her hands and knees and begins to crawl underneath the cab of the truck.

Under the cab, Young Margaret, cold and dazed, curls herself up tight. She begins to cry.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. MARGARET'S FOSTER HOME/BACK YARD - EARLY MORNING

The sun is just beginning to rise.

Under the truck, Young Margaret wakes up. She opens her eyes to see a pair of white nurse's shoes. A hand reaches under the cab. Young Margaret takes the hand and begins to crawl out.

She stands to see adult Margaret dressed in a nurse's uniform. Margaret brushes the dirt off the girl's clothes, then points to the back door. Young Margaret turns to see the door open by itself. Bertha is nowhere to be seen.

Young Margaret moves to the door, then turns to say something to Margaret, but Margaret has disappeared.

INT. MARGARET'S FOSTER HOME/BATHROOM–DAY

Young Margaret washes her face in the sink. Bertha's hand holds a cigarette. She drops the ashes in the toilet.

BERTHA

Now, my dear, you know the rules.
What do you say when the social
worker comes today?

YOUNG MARGARET

I don't--

BERTHA

You don't say anything. Leave all
the talking to me...to the big people.

INT. MARGARET'S FOSTER HOME/KITCHEN - DAY

Bertha's hand passes a cup of tea to a MALE SOCIAL WORKER (51).

SOCIAL WORKER

Thank you, Bertha.

BERTHA

As you can see, things are pretty
much the same since the last time
you were here.

SOCIAL WORKER

to Young Margaret)
And how is young Madeline...Marion?

BERTHA

Margaret.

SOCIAL WORKER

(sipping his tea)
Margaret.

BERTHA

She's as quiet as she ever was.
Hardly ever says a word.

SOCIAL WORKER

Wish my brood was like that. You can't shut that crowd up.

Bertha passes him a plate of chocolate-chip cookies.

BERTHA

Cookie?

A hungry Young Margaret watches as the Social Worker helps himself to the cookies. Bertha pours more tea into his cup.

MARGARET (V.O.)

Like most people, the social worker thought I was handicapped because I never said anything. But I understood everything. I just wasn't allowed to express a thought...to speak my mind.

INT. ST. LUKE'S HOME/SOCIAL ROOM - DAY

RESIDENTS of the home play cards and board games and watch TV. Margaret watches a STAFF MEMBER read to a WOMAN IN A WHEELCHAIR (80). She turns to the camera.

MARGARET

I was about fourteen or fifteen when I was put in a new program at the special education school. I was brought here to the St. Luke's Retirement Home where I was taught to do a few jobs. I was restricted in what I could do, though, because I couldn't read.

A MALE RESIDENT in his late seventies leans forward in his seat and places his hand on Margaret's hip.

MALE RESIDENT

Hey, gorgeous. Can I be in your movie?

Margaret removes Male Resident's hand.

MARGARET

Yes. Just keep your hands to yourself.

Male Resident waves to the camera.

MALE RESIDENT

Do I get any money for this?

EXT. MACDONALD'S RESTAURANT - DAY

Margaret, dressed in a MacDonald's uniform, stands in front of the restaurant.

MARGARET

When I was sixteen, I left the special education school, and I got a job here.

INT. MACDONALD'S RESTAURANT - DAY

ANGUS, the manager (49), talks to the camera as Margaret stands at the grill flipping a meat patty and preparing a Big Mac Combo.

ANGUS

I was twenty-five when Margaret first came to work here. Now I'm 49, and I own my own franchise. I remember Margaret was a good worker. She caught on quickly, but there was only so much I could get her to do. I mean, she couldn't read or write.

MARGARET

I was shy, too. That didn't help. I didn't mix all that well with the other workers. My shyness had a way of creating tension. It was my first job. Working here made me realize how little I knew about the real world.

ANGUS

I eventually had to let her go. But now that she's back, asking me to be in her movie...I feel guilty. I wish I had kept her on...helped her out more.

Margaret places a Big Mac Combo on a tray, then passes the tray to Angus.

ANGUS

Margaret, that's perfect!

MARGARET

Thank you, Angus. There are some
"Mac-things" you never forget.

INT. MARGARET'S FOSTER HOME/KITCHEN - DAY

A bottle of alcohol, a box of chocolates, an ashtray, and a glass sit on the table. Bertha's hand, holding a smoke between two fingers, pours a drink.

Margaret, still dressed in the MacDonald's uniform, sits at the table, going through her purse. She takes out a pay cheque.

MARGARET

I couldn't sign my own cheques. The
only way I could cash it was to...

Bertha's hand snatches the cheque from Margaret.

BERTHA

I'll put that in the bank for you,
Margaret.

MARGARET

You get the picture. Now, I worked
five days a week at MacDonald's,
but when I went to the bank to see
about my money, I was told there
was nothing there. And when I asked
about it...

Bertha knocks the cigarette with her finger, and a long ash falls into the ashtray.

BERTHA

You needed new clothes, my dear.
You know how expensive they are.
Besides, it's only fair you
contribute now that you're working.

Margaret picks up the liquor bottle.

MARGARET

Clothes. What a laugh. Every stitch I wore was a hand-me-down or from the Sally Anne store. She wouldn't even give me money to buy take-out. Sometimes I'd get babysitting jobs, and she'd ask for that money, too. I managed to hide some of it, but she'd go through my room and then give me hell for keeping my money from her.

Bertha's hand grabs the liquor bottle from Margaret.

BERTHA

I can't believe I wasted the best years of my life raising a lazy, selfish child.

MARGARET

I tried telling her I needed money so I could do some upgrading, better my skills.

A puff of smoke hits Margaret in the face. Bertha's hand presses the cigarette into the ashtray.

BERTHA

It's too expensive, my duckie. It costs a hell of a lot of money to keep this place running and to keep you fed.

MARGARET

At that time, upgrading cost two dollars a month.

Bertha's slippered feet move to the kitchen doorway.

BERTHA

You'll have to get another job if you need the money that bad.

Margaret watches as Bertha leaves the room, slamming the kitchen door behind her.

MARGARET

By the time I was seventeen, I
couldn't take any more.

INT. SOCIAL SERVICES OFFICE - DAY

EVELYN JANES (47), a social worker, sits behind her desk. She talks into the camera.

EVELYN

I remember the first day Margaret showed up in my office. She was very shy. She couldn't look me in the eye when she talked. But, as the interview went on, I could tell she was gutsy...honest. When she told me she wanted a better life, I believed her. But jobs can be hard to come by in Newfoundland. I graduated from M.U.N. with a degree in social work, but it took me well over a year to get a job with Social Services. I didn't know how Margaret would make it without basic education skills. So I did two things.

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

Evelyn and Margaret stand outside the building, which is located in the centre of St. John's.

EVELYN

First, I got Margaret an apartment in this building. Now, it wasn't *The Ritz...*

MARGARET

But it was home. And I was away from Bertha.
(points to a window)
See that window? That was my apartment. The first time in my life that I felt independent.

EXT. RABBITTOWN LEARNING CENTRE - DAY

Margaret and Evelyn stand outside the centre.

EVELYN

The second thing I did was secure
Margaret a seat here at the
Rabbittown Learning Centre. The
Centre teaches basic education
skills to adults.

MARGARET

I've had a long history with this
place.

INT. RABBITTOWN LEARNING CENTRE/CLASSROOM - DAY

RUBY BARTER, a smart-looking woman of 70, walks around the empty classroom.

RUBY

I was one of the first teachers to
work here at *The Centre*. I
preferred teaching here, with
adults, than in a conventional
school setting. I've had students
in their fifties who can't read.
But I was able to help them and
watch them progress from *Jack and
Jill* to, say, the *Evening Telegram*.

Ruby's walk concludes at the teacher's desk where Margaret is sitting.

MARGARET

Ruby was my very first teacher.
When we met, I was about seventeen,
eighteen, just starting Grade Four.

RUBY

(to Margaret)
I remember your first day. You were
so shy. You hardly said a word. You
were here over a month before I
knew your eyes were blue. But you
were quick to catch on.

MARGARET

I thought I was the dumbest one in the room, at the time.

RUBY

(to camera)

Actually, she was doing exceptionally well. She just didn't know it. After a few weeks, I took her aside and told her she was one of the fastest learners I ever had.

MARGARET

I'll never forget that day. It felt like a revelation to know I had smarts...education smarts. But, at the same time, I felt...well, sad. I had lost so much time. I knew the rest of my life wouldn't be easy. I've been a student here, on and off, for a long time. I almost have my Grade Eleven, but it's been a struggle. There was always some major issue in my life that pulled me away from my studies.

RUBY

Many people who come here have a difficult time holding down a job, maintaining a home, taking care of their families. Sometimes school has to take a back seat. Sometimes they have no choice but to leave.

MARGARET

The apartment Evelyn found for me...I had to give it up, and I didn't know where I'd live. As it happened, I somehow managed to track down my brother, Lorne, who was just back from Toronto.

PHOTO OF LORNE (13).

MARGARET (V.O.)
Lorne was always flying off to
Toronto to sow his wild oats.

CUT TO:

INT. MARGARET'S HOME/KITCHEN - EVENING

Margaret and her brother, LORNE (47), sit at the kitchen table. Lorne sips a take-out coffee.

LORNE
Hey, I worked really hard when I
was there. Jeez, you're making me
sound like I'm an old ram or
something.
(to the camera)
What are ya at?

MARGARET
Now Lorne here has his high school
diploma.

GRADUATION PHOTO of Lorne.

LORNE
Don't ask me how I managed that. I
flunked Grade Nine twice. Thing
was, I hated being stuck inside a
classroom. I likes being on the go.

MARGARET
That's 'cause he drinks too much
coffee. He can't sit still longer
than a minutes.

Lorne takes a sip of coffee.

LORNE
Had my first cup when I was ten.
Been drinking it ever since.
Anyway, I lived in two different
foster homes: one here in town and
the other in Corner Brook. They
were OK. The families were nice
enough, but I always felt like the
"foster child."

Anyway, as soon as I turned sixteen, I took off to Toronto. Now here's the thing about that: In Newfoundland, at that time, you finished high school at Grade Eleven, right? But in T.O., high school went to Grade Twelve. So, technically, I didn't have my high school in Ontario. I was only a high school grad on "The Rock." Anyway, I ended up working every joe job you can think of. And there were lots of them in Toronto back then. I always had some kind of work, and I was always flying back and forth.

MARGARET

(to camera)

He talks fast, doesn't he?

LORNE

I was told I had to tell my story right quick. What do ya want? Anyways, me and Margaret were separated when we were kids--right up to our teens. It wasn't until then that I realized how bad she had it.

MARGARET

We somehow managed to stay in touch, though.

LORNE

We're the only family we got. I'm not married, although I been seeing Cathy, my girlfriend, for about six years. We run a convenience store in North York.

PHOTO of Lorne and CATHY (44), standing outside their convenience store.

LORNE

Me and Margie here, we don't have any contact with our other brothers and sisters. Got no idea where they are or what they're at.

MARGARET

Except for Diane out in Fort MacMurray. We get a card from her and her family at Christmas.

CHRISTMAS CARD PHOTO of DIANE (44), her HUSBAND (50), and TWO TEENAGE CHILDREN.

LORNE

She can keep her friggin' cards as far as I'm concerned.

MARGARET

Lorne!

LORNE

The least she could do is send Chloe a present--all things considered. The kid was sick for almost a year.

MARGARET

(to camera)

Chloe is my daughter. You'll recognize her.

EXT. A FIELD - DAY

Margaret's daughter, Chloe Miller, dressed in Young Margaret's costume, her hair cropped, runs and dances through the field.

CHLOE (V.O.)

My name is Chloe Michelle Miller, and I'm ten years old. Mom said I should speak for myself. Tell my own story.

PHOTO of CHLOE at age one.

CHLOE (V.O.)

She named me "Chloe" because she read the name in a children's book when she was first learning how to read.

SCHOOL PHOTO of Chloe, her hair long, from Grade Four.

CHLOE (V.O.)

I should be in Grade Five, but last year I had to be treated for blood cancer, and I was too sick to go to school, and I had to drop out. Now I got to start Grade Five all over again.

PHOTO of Chloe in a hospital bed, hooked up to an intravenous drip. She has no hair.

CHLOE (V.O.)

The doctor says I'm OK now, but I got to go for tests all the time. It always makes me feel tired.

PHOTO of Chloe in a hospital washroom, looking at her reflection in the mirror as she touches her bald head.

CHLOE (V.O.)

I really loved pretending to be Mom. I didn't know her life was so hard until now. When we did the scene where I got all my hair chopped off...like, I didn't care. It was all gonna fall out, anyway...soon as I started my chemo. It just made the scene more real.

EXT. MARGARET'S HOUSE - DAY

A row of attached rent-subsidized housing.

CHLOE (V.O.)

This is the house where me and Mom live.

INT. MARGARET'S HOUSE/CHLOE'S BEDROOM - DAY

Chloe sits on a single bed surrounded by stuffed animals. Posters and photos adorn the wall, and a portable stereo sits on the dresser. Chloe wears a short, funky hair style.

CHLOE

This is my bedroom. My Uncle Lorne gave me all the stuffed animals. Mom says he spoils me, but I love it.

INT. MARGARET'S HOME/KITCHEN - DAY

A small desk and computer in a corner of the kitchen. Chloe sits in front of the PC carefully typing a document. Margaret and Lorne sit at the table watching her.

CHLOE

Uncle Lorne bought me and Mom this computer. Mom didn't want him to spend all that money, but he did it anyway.

LORNE

The world is changin'. Kids these days, they got to have a computer. Technology moves so fast. Lord knows what people will be using fifty years from now.

CHLOE

(indicates document)
I'm writing a story for school about Mom's movie. Actually, it's not really a "movie." It's a documentary. With re-enactments.

LORNE

(to camera)
She's some smart, I knows that.
(to Chloe)
Are you going to be a famous actress when you grows up?

CHLOE

They don't say "actress" any more,
Uncle Lorne, 'cause it's sexist.
I'm going to be an actor. A woman
actor.

LORNE

(to camera)
See?

MARGARET

She's after picking that up from
Elvis.
(to camera)
Elvis Picco, that is. Not Presley.
You heard his voice earlier in the
film. He's also the guy who's
directing this movie.

CHLOE

Mom...

MARGARET

Documentary.

CHLOE

Elvis cut my hair, too. And I love
it.

EXT. ELVIS'S HOME/DOWNTOWN - NIGHT

Elvis talks as he videotapes the house he lives in and the surrounding area.

ELVIS (O.S.)

Elvis here. I rent a one-room
apartment in the basement of this
house. Been here for about eight
years.

Elvis walks down a path that leads to the back yard and the entrance to his apartment.

ELVIS

I met Margaret about two and a half years ago when I started going to The Learning Centre. Let me tell ya, it took a lot of convincing to get her to make this little film. She only agreed to do it if I talked about myself.

Margaret stands in the doorway waving at Elvis.

MARGARET

I don't want the film to be all about me. I want other people to tell their stories, too.

ELVIS

Margaret may be shy, but she's the most generous person I've ever met. She hardly ever says a word, but everyone likes her.

Elvis's comments cause a sudden rush of shyness in Margaret, and she runs inside the door. Elvis laughs.

INT. ELVIS'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

A variety of lamps, small lights, and candles illuminate the one-room apartment. A laptop computer and speaker system are set up on a desk.

ELVIS (29) sits at the desk. He sports a spiked haircut, pierced ears, and a few tattoos; his clothing is dark, punk and goth like. Margaret stands next to him, opening a bottle of wine.

ELVIS

Yeah, my parents named me after The King. They idolized the man.

PHOTO of a homemade shrine to Elvis Presley

ELVIS

I know the whole Elvis catalogue inside out. I can sing it backwards in my sleep. But when I think about my past I get all twisted up in a knot--even after all these years. So I asked Margaret here to help me tell my story.

PHOTO of ELVIS (10) dressed in a woman's apron and bandanna.

MARGARET (V.O.)

As a child, Elvis loved to stage plays in the back yard with the other kids--mostly the girls who lived in the neighborhood. He loved to dress up, and by the time Elvis got to high school, he looked like this:

PHOTO of ELVIS (15) dressed like Boy George.

ELVIS (V.O.)

There was "Elvis, The King from Memphis," but in school, I was "Elvis, The Queen from Placentia." Trust me, I've heard all the jokes.

MARGARET (V.O.)

When he was in Grade Ten, he went to the high school Halloween dance.

ELVIS

Took me three months to make the costume.

PHOTO of Elvis dressed like Jane Fonda in *Barbarella*.

MARGARET (V.O.)

That night after the dance, Elvis was beaten up by some of the older students. They managed to sneak booze into the gym and were pretty soused by the time the dance ended.

It took Elvis six months to recover. During that time, his parents told him...

PHOTO of ELVIS'S MOTHER, mid-thirties.

ELVIS (V.O.)
(imitates his mother)
I wish we had never named you after Elvis. We've made a mockery of the man.

PHOTO of ELVIS'S FATHER, late-thirties.

ELVIS (V.O.)
(imitates his father)
Maybe we should have named you "Priscilla" instead.

MARGARET (V.O.)
Elvis didn't press charges. But as soon as he finished his physical therapy, he bought a bus ticket to St. John's and said goodbye to high school and Placentia. He hasn't been back since.

PHOTO of Elvis standing behind a bar, holding a beer and waving to the camera.

MARGARET (V.O.)
Elvis worked in cafes and bars and did his best to stay involved with the arts' scene. But he is tired of being a bartender-slash-struggling artist, living in a one-room apartment. He wants to be a full time filmmaker. So, about three years ago, he started classes at *The Learning Centre*. He'll have all his credits in a month or two. He's applying to three Ontario colleges to study film, with the hope he'll be accepted into one of them by next fall.

Margaret pours two glasses of wine and hands one to Elvis.

ELVIS

People tell me that I don't need to go to school to learn about making movies, but I want to go. I want a college diploma.

Elvis indicates his laptop computer.

ELVIS

This is what I'm editing *Margaret's Story* on. The laptop, the digital camera I'm shooting with, and my programs cost me over five thousand. Took me forever to save for it all, but I'm right happy with it. I'm going to submit *Margaret's Story* with my applications.

MARGARET

Just don't forget me when you become a famous movie director.

EXT. AVALON MALL - DAY

A Metro bus pulls up to a bus stop. Margaret and Chloe get off the bus and head toward the mall's entrance.

ELVIS (V.O.)

I don't think I'll be able to capture on video what Margaret is really like. When she appears on camera she's determined to do her best. You'd swear she's been doing this her whole life.

INT. AVALON MALL/DEPARTMENT STORE - DAY

In the dressing room area, Chloe stands in front of a mirror, checking out her new clothes. Margaret adjusts Chloe's pullover so that it hangs properly.

ELVIS

But to know her on a daily basis...I mean, she really is shy. Quiet. She doesn't look at you when she's talking...she looks past you.

INT. AVALON MALL/FOOD COURT - DAY

Margaret and Chloe sit at a table enjoying soft drinks and french fries.

ELVIS (V.O.)

But, for a quiet woman, she is very well liked. That's because she's intuitive and a keen listener. She nods her head, and you know she's absorbing every word you're saying- that she's truly interested. Next thing, you're telling her your whole life story.

INT. RABBITTOWN LEARNING CENTRE - DAY

The classroom is empty. Margaret sits at the teacher's desk.

MARGARET

I've had jobs all over the place...nightclubs, take-outs, domestic work. But I couldn't get past the first rung on the ladder. I was always falling through the cracks. Almost every student who walks through that door has a dream of a better life. I used to think I'd like to be a nurse. Sometimes people would say to me, "Go to school. You're smart. You've got good energy." I loved it that people believed in me, but I doubt that I'll ever be a nurse. It's probably unrealistic. But I think I'd make a good nursing assistant...work in a seniors' home, maybe.

PHOTO of MARGARET when she was a child, about eight or nine.

MARGARET (V.O.)

This is the only photo I have of me as a child. I didn't know I had any rights back then. I didn't even know what human rights were. People made fun of me. They called me handicapped and it stuck. It's hard to get a sense of yourself when you're not guided properly.

INT. MARGARET'S HOME/LIVING ROOM - EVENING

Video footage of Margaret and Chloe in the small room, decorating a table-top Christmas tree. The date on the tape reads "20/12/04."

Chloe wears a nightdress; a stocking cap covers her bald head.

MARGARET (V.O.)

Elvis asked me if I felt bitter about my past. I don't know...I feel more confused than anything...bewildered...I was so nervous when I was a child...afraid. Even now I get this sick feeling in my stomach, and I have trouble sleeping.

EXT. RABBITTOWN LEARNING CENTRE - LATE AFTERNOON

Margaret, Chloe, Lorne, Ruby, Angus, and Evelyn walk into the front door of the building. They carry trays of food, beverages, and bags filled paper plates, napkins, etc.

MARGARET (V.O.)

I've seen a lot of people come and go from this building. Every size shape and color. People with abuse issues, mental health concerns...and lots of reasons to feel bitter.

INT. RABBITTOWN LEARNING CENTRE - LATER

Margaret and Chloe sit on top of the teacher's desk.

MARGARET

But what do you do? You can't go around feeling angry all the time. You got to get on with your life. I got a few good years left in me, and I want to be strong for Chloe. I just wish I had been given a chance. It would have made such a difference in my life. I would have had a career I loved...been more independent.

CHLOE

But then you wouldn't have had me.

Margaret hugs Chloe.

MARGARET

Oh, honey, I'd be lost without you.

THE UNKNOWN STUDENT, a male, early twenties, wearing a paper bag over his head, appears in the shot. A man's face has been painted on the bag; holes for his eyes, nose, and mouth have been cut out.

UNKNOWN STUDENT

OK, that's enough now. This is gettin' too sappy for me.

ELVIS (O.S.)

What are you doing? Get out of the shot!

UNKNOWN STUDENT

(to Elvis, indicating Margaret and Chloe)
It's too sucky, b'y. This is our last day for filming the movie.

We're supposed to be having a party, my son, not a therapy session.

(waves to camera)

Hello. You heard of the Unknown Comic? Well, I'm the Unknown Student. Follow me, Elvis, b'y.

He begins to make his way around the classroom which is filled with STUDENTS of varying ages and backgrounds. Some of the students wear a disguise, some do not. TEACHERS at the school lay out the party favors on the tables.

The Unknown Student presses "play" on a portable stereo. Music. Evelyn places a tray of finger sandwiches on one of the tables. The Unknown Student nods at Evelyn as he helps himself to a sandwich.

UNKNOWN STUDENT

(to the camera)

Some of us are in disguise because we don't want to be recognized. Wouldn't want to shame our families now, would we? We really wanted to be in the movie, though. Show our support.

EVELYN

And eat the food.

UNKNOWN STUDENT

That, too.

He pops a finger sandwich through the hole in the bag and into his mouth.

Students, teachers, and guests talk among themselves as they enjoy the food and music.

MARGARET (V.O.)

Almost everyone in this room helped out with the film in one way or another. Some people worked on the crew; others fed the crew.

Evelyn and the teachers got all our props
and costumes together. And Evelyn,
she also played Bertha, my foster
mother.

Chloe and the Unknown Student dance together.

MARGARET (V.O.)

I guess if my childhood had been
different, I wouldn't have gotten
to know a lot of the students here
at *The Centre*.

The Unknown Student whispers in Chloe's ear. Chloe nods and leads him to a table. She sits him
in a chair and begins to paint a face on the other side of the paper bag.

ELVIS (V.O.)

The Unknown Student...He's in his
early twenties. He has a history of
abuse, therapy, medication, and he
has his Grade Seven. He won't let
me tell any more than that. But
here's the thing: He helped me
produce the film. He managed to
raise three hundred and seventy-two
dollars--on his own now--so we
could make it.

UNKNOWN STUDENT

(to Chloe)

Did you do like I asked?

Chloe nods.

UNKNOWN STUDENT

(to the class)

Hey! I wants ya to meet the missus.

He spins the paper bag around his head. Chloe has painted a woman's face on the opposite side.

UNKNOWN STUDENT

(imitates a woman's voice)

Hello, I'm the girl Unknown Student. Have you met my handsome husband? He's gorgeous! But I'm leaving him for Elvis. I love a man who wears black lipstick and looks like a vampire.

Everyone laughs.

ELVIS

Ha-ha. Funny, dude.

EXT. ST. JOHN'S - DAY

Downtown. Afternoon traffic and pedestrians. Margaret and Chloe hold hands as they stroll along the sidewalk. Margaret looks at the faces of the people around her.

MARGARET (V.O.)

Education is more than just learning to read and write. It's about having pride in yourself...developing survival skills in a world that often seems more cruel than kind.

A BUSKER performs a juggling routine, and Margaret and Chloe stop to watch.

MARGARET (V.O.)

This little homemade movie about my life took a lot longer to make than we thought. I had to memorize a lot of what I wrote, and Elvis kept telling me to look directly in the camera when I spoke. I didn't know if I could do it at first, but it all turned out to be easier than I thought.

The busker calls out to Margaret. He throws one of the balls toward her, and she catches it with ease.

EXT. ST. JOHN'S - MOMENTS LATER

Elvis, dressed in his best dark clothing, stands on a street corner, playing a guitar and singing softly. Margaret and Chloe approach.

MARGARET (V.O.)

I don't regret making this movie
one bit. I don't feel so
embarrassed about my past
anymore...or being a middle-aged
Grade Eleven student. I'll do my
best to make up for lost time. If
I'm patient, I can finish my high
school, then maybe train to be a
nursing assistant. Mind you, I'll
be well on the other side of forty
by that time. People might think
I'm too old to be hired.

Chloe begins singing with Elvis.

CHLOE AND ELVIS

(singing)

Now the night lifts around me,
throws off its black cloak.
And I look for the fire
that lights a new hope.
If the past is a bird
that just never takes wing,
I'll catch it and tame it
and teach it to sing.

EXT. ST. JOHN'S - NIGHT

MONTAGE -- Various video images of the downtown core at night.

MARGARET (V.O.)

Elvis says the lens of a camera
absorbs everything. It takes it all
in. Just like a person's eyes. The
only difference is that many people
only see what they want to see.

They shut out the difficult stuff,
the stuff they can't deal with. But
the lens captures everything: the
good, the bad, and the ugly. I like
that. I want my eyes to be like a
camera's lens.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. SIGNAL HILL - NIGHT

Margaret and Chloe look down at the city lights.

CHLOE AND ELVIS (V.O.)

(singing)

For I've burned my old bridges,
turned my face to the wind.

Searched deep in the heart for
the power within.

And I've watched the high moon
as it waxes and wanes,
in hopes of a cure for
a heart filled with pain.

FADE OUT.