

ROGER'S STORY

by
Glen Rockwood

Adapted from the one-act play

by
Ed Kavanagh

Glen Rockwood
21 Bristol Street
St. John's, NL
A1A 2E5
(709) 753-4487
E-mail: rockwoodglen@yahoo.ca

FADE IN:

INT. A CIRCUS PERFORMANCE RING - DAY

The circus ring is decorated to look like a classroom, only the setting is surrealistic: oversized desks and tables move around the stage; books of various sizes fly like birds through the air; pencils and crayons march around the circus ring; letters and numbers hang from above, floating like clouds and twinkling like stars.

Attached to a large clock is a teacher's strap, which swings back and forth like a pendulum. The clock strikes nine, and a school bell rings. An AUDIENCE appears.

A RINGMASTER walks into the classroom. His costume is a colorful, clown-like version of a scholar, complete with cap and gown, horn-rimmed glasses, and a red clown nose. He snaps his fingers and the classroom props stop moving.

He points to a piece of chalk. The chalk begins writing words on a blackboard: "Roger's Story."

RINGMASTER

Ladies and gentlemen, presenting
the amazing, electrifying, true
story of Roger Fowler and his
pursuit of an education.

A CLOWN appears, dressed in a circus version of a student's uniform. He, too, wears a red clown nose.

CLOWN

Or, "Where Do I Fit In?"

RINGMASTER

Starring--in person--Mr. Roger
Fowler!

CLOWN

With a supporting cast of millions!

RINGMASTER

Not that many.

CLOWN

Hundreds!

RINGMASTER

With a really *big* supporting
cast...

CLOWN

Of acrobats, fine-line walkers...

RINGMASTER

Double-talkers, naysayers...

CLOWN

Pen-pushers, red-tape spinners...

RINGMASTER

And clowns of all description!
You'll laugh, you'll cry--

CLOWN

But mainly you'll cry. Ringmaster,
take it away.

RINGMASTER

Ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to
Roger Fowler's personal circus!

ROGER FOWLER appears, sitting on a swing, high above the circus ring. Directly underneath him is a wheelchair. The audience applauds as Roger is lowered toward the floor and into the seat of the chair.

RINGMASTER

Welcome, Roger!

ROGER

Thank you. The set is beautiful, by
the way. It's everything I hoped it
would be.

RINGMASTER

I knew you'd like it. Are you ready
to begin?

ROGER

Let's do it.

RINGMASTER

Roger, at what age did you start school?

ROGER

I was nine.

CLOWN

Nine? That's awfully late.

RINGMASTER

Terribly late.

CLOWN

Why so late?

ROGER

(gesturing to his chair)
Open your eyes. I had "medical" problems.

RINGMASTER

Of course you did. Your background?

ROGER

I was born with CP.

CLOWN

Canadian Pacific?

Ringmaster bonks the Clown on the head with a rolled-up, over sized diploma.

CLOWN

Cat pee?

Ringmaster bonks the clown on the head again.

ROGER

Cerebral palsy.

CLOWN

Huh?

ROGER
I was sent to live with a foster
family.

A gigantic hand, similar to the *Yellow Pages'* logo, appears and pats Roger on the head.

ROGER
But I had to go to the Rehab
Centre.

RINGMASTER
For?

ROGER
Rehab. What'd you think?

RINGMASTER
I *knew* that. I meant for how long.
And how old were you?

ROGER
I was five. Sometimes I'd be there
for six months at a time.

CLOWN
Did you go to school?

ROGER
I did.

The gigantic hand picks Roger up, wheelchair and all, and places him in front of an over-sized activity table.

ROGER
I went to Kindergarten. I failed.

Roger opens an enormous coloring book and begins coloring with a huge crayon.

CLOWN
Come again?

ROGER
I failed Kindergarten.

RINGMASTER
Well, Roger, that's an amazing
feat. That deserves a ribbon.

Ringmaster pins a ribbon on Roger. The ribbon bears the letter "F."

RINGMASTER
How did you manage that?

ROGER
Beats me.

He gives the ribbon a woeful look.

ROGER
Maybe my coloring strayed a little
too far outside the lines. Maybe I
ate the silly putty. Who knows?

CLOWN
I love eating silly putty.

RINGMASTER
How long were you at the Rehab
altogether?

ROGER
Pretty regularly until I was nine.
Then I went back to my foster
family.

The giant hand, wearing a shoulder bag, walks directly to Roger.

ROGER
They put me in public school in St.
Philip's.

CLOWN
What grade?

ROGER
Kindergarten.

RINGMASTER

Excuse me? At nine years old? After
four years of school at the Rehab?

ROGER

Uh-huh.

CLOWN

And how was that?

ROGER

Well, I wasn't actually *in* the
classroom at all--not physically.

The hand takes Roger by his shirt collar and pulls him high into the air, away from the
circus ring.

ROGER

You see, that room happened to be
downstairs.

RINGMASTER

What?

ROGER

The classroom was inaccessible.

The hand lets Roger go. His chair hits the floor with a thud.

ROGER

Ow!

GIANT HAND

Didn't mean to rush you, honey, but
I'm off to play bingo with the
alphabet.

The hand flies away. Clown jumps out of the circus ring and
runs to Roger. As Roger talks, Clown grabs the handles of the wheelchair and
pushes Roger around the edge of the ring, looking for a way to get back inside.

ROGER

I just couldn't get to the
Kindergarten class. No one thought
about accessibility back then--not
that things have changed much.

RINGMASTER

So what happened?

ROGER

They put me in the grade one class.

RINGMASTER

But you were doing...?

ROGER

Kindergarten work.

Ringmaster presses a large yellow button. A section of the circus ring opens up, and a small ramp appears. Clown pushes Roger up the ramp and back inside the ring.

RINGMASTER

What was it like there?

ROGER

I felt isolated--separate. I
couldn't participate, couldn't do
gym like the rest of the kids. I
didn't really have much to do with
the other students.

A GIRL STUDENT (6), sitting on a large, flying book, hovers over the circus ring, before coming to rest at a desk. She jumps off the book, sits in the desk, and watches as the book shrinks in size and comes to rest in her hands. She glances at Roger, then turns her attention to the book.

ROGER

And the other kids seemed so
smart...I'd see them reading
stories and being asked
questions...

The GRADE ONE TEACHER enters and addresses the Girl Student.

GRADE ONE TEACHER
Now, I heard that you just read the
story about Cinderella.

GIRL STUDENT
Oh, yes, sir.

GRADE ONE TEACHER
And what's that story all about?

Girl Student improvises and enthusiastic, breathless rendition of the main points of Cinderella. Roger stares at her.

GRADE ONE TEACHER
Well, that just about covers it.

ROGER
I couldn't understand how they did
it. How they could know so much.
Have so much to say.

RINGMASTER
How did the teachers treat you?

ROGER
Oh, it wasn't that they weren't
nice. But they didn't seem to care
if I did any work or not. And
sometimes they were a little...

Grade One Teacher pats Roger on the head.

TEACHER
Hey, Rog. How about those Leafs?

ROGER
I guess they thought that because I
couldn't walk, I couldn't learn.
Story of my life.

CLOWN
So then what happened?

ROGER
I went to Virginia Waters--a school
for kids with disabilities.

RINGMASTER
(cheerfully)
That must have been better.

CLOWN
Much better.

ROGER
In some ways. At least now I didn't
feel so...

The Ringmaster and Clown pulls their chairs up close to Roger.

ROGER
Isolated.

CLOWN
I can feel a big "but" coming on.

RINGMASTER
Definitely a big "but" coming.

ROGER
But...they put me in Kindergarten
again.

RINGMASTER AND CLOWN
Again!

Roger suddenly disappears. Ringmaster and Clown look for him.

Roger reappears back in the Kindergarten class, seated behind the over-sized activity table. He holds the huge coloring book and crayon.

RINGMASTER
That's one...

CLOWN
Two...

Roger draws the number three in the air with the crayon.

ROGER

I've often thought it must be some kind of record. Anyway, I was ten or eleven years old. And you know something?...I was bored with Kindergarten.

CLOWN

No kidding.

RINGMASTER

But, still, that school was better...wasn't it?

ROGER

Worse. There was virtually no emphasis on academic work. If you were disabled...

CLOWN

You couldn't do it.

RINGMASTER

Same old story.

ROGER

Same old story. We did some academics in the morning, but then it was gym, arts and crafts, outings. I don't think the teachers thought we could learn--at least not very much. I was there for five years. And then came the big move.

CLOWN

To?

ROGER

Mount Pearl Central High.

Rhythmic music. Locker doors swing open and STUDENTS holding books and walkmans step into the circus ring.

ROGER

I was sixteen. Times had changed.

The students dance toward Roger. They grab his wheelchair and move him around the circus ring.

ROGER

Walkmans were all the rage. Michael Jackson was at the top of the pop charts. Integration was the buzzword, and I was buzzed right over to Mount Pearl Central high. I went from a school with about fifty students to one with over 1200.

RINGMASTER

Talk about culture shock.

ROGER

It was *quite* the buzz.

CLOWN

But at least you were in a real school.

ROGER

Depends on what you mean by real.

The dancing stops.

ROGER

You see, I had gotten to Grade 6 at Virginia Waters--

CLOWN

(to audience)

There's another "but" coming.

ROGER

But when they tested me at Mount Pearl, they found I was at a Grade 4 level.

RINGMASTER

So where did they put you?

ROGER
Where do you think?

RINGMASTER AND CLOWN
Kindergarten!

ROGER
No, no. The dreaded "SE."

The HIGH SCHOOL TEACHER, holding a sign that reads "Special Education," jumps into the ring. He places the sign around Roger's neck.

A BOY STUDENT whispers to a GIRL STUDENT.

BOY STUDENT
(indicating Roger)
Luh, he's "Special Ed."

GIRL STUDENT
I can read the sign for myself.

High School Teacher shoos the students away, then turns his gaze back to Roger. Roger gives the teacher a weary look.

ROGER
Special Ed...And even there...Well,
I tried to pay attention, but I
knew I was behind. It was the same
old story--isolation. I felt
forgotten.
I remember drawing pictures in my
exercise book to pass the time. I
put up with it for about a year. I
mean, where was I going to go? Then
the teacher came to me one day...

HIGH SCHOOL TEACHER
Look, you're seventeen years old.
You can't come back here.

RINGMASTER
Where did you go?

As Roger talks, a big yellow sun sets. The moon rises and stars twinkle.

ROGER

Well, I wasn't about to give up. Oh yes, I was spunky in those days. So I tried night school. But I always had the feeling that other people thought I couldn't learn. And--I'll admit it--I was beginning to wonder myself. Anyway, it all came to a head one day.

NIGHT SCHOOL TEACHERS 1 AND 2 appear inside the ring, trying to look casual as they peer over Roger's shoulder, then tip toe away.

ROGER

We were working on an assignment. There were a couple of teachers at the back of the classroom.

NIGHT SCHOOL TEACHER 1

What's he doing here?

NIGHT SCHOOL TEACHER 2

He's never going to get this. I don't know what to be doing with him.

ROGER

It was like a knife to the heart. I left in tears.

RINGMASTER

And since then...?

ROGER

At least the circus is over.

Bang! The lighting board is abruptly shut down. Lights out. Darkness. Screams and gasps from the audience.

CLOWN

I hope this doesn't mean I'm going to lose my job. I've got a diploma from clown college, you know.

Work lights cast a stark glare over the circus ring. The classroom props are gone. Ringmaster and Clown's noses have changed from red to black.

A CLEANER sweeps the floor.

ROGER

I've learned not to try so hard anymore. I did some more upgrading- just for myself, really. And I managed to land a job or two...

A SECOND CLEANER places a ticket box on the activity table. Roger wheels himself to the table, ready to sell tickets.

High School Teacher appears. He sees Roger and does a double take.

HIGH SCHOOL TEACHER

Roger Fowler, is that you? I had you for a while at Mount Pearl Central High.

ROGER

Yes. For a while.

HIGH SCHOOL TEACHER

Give me a ticket there, Roger Dodger. Wouldn't mind winning me a skidoo.

Roger and High School Teacher exchange money and tickets. Roger hands the teacher a pen, and the teacher fills out his ticket, then tears it in half.

HIGH SCHOOL TEACHER

Look at you selling tickets in the mall. Sure this is a perfect job for someone like you.

ROGER

Couldn't be more perfect.

HIGH SCHOOL TEACHER

Glad to see you're doing okay. Jeez, all of a sudden I feel right lucky. You better win me that skidoo there, buddy.

High-School Teacher drops a ticket half in the box, then disappears.

CLOWN

So what about now? Are you working?

ROGER

Well, things are a bit slow all around.

RINGMASTER

What do you think should have been done--I mean, to help you.

ROGER

That's a tough one. When I was at Cabot College, I was "assessed." Story of my life. They found I have a problem multi-tasking--you know, keeping track of more than one thing at a time. It's probably got to do with my CP. But it doesn't mean that I'm not talented, that I don't have something to give. I'd like to be a counsellor, work with people with problems I can understand, relate to. I know I can do it. But you've got to have that piece of paper, and, well, that's not going to happen for me. Anyway, at least the circus has left town. Probably just as well...

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. WATER STREET - DAY

Early winter, grey and cloudy. Roger, dressed for the cold day, sits in his wheelchair, watching the traffic. A cab pulls up to the curb. The DRIVER gets out and opens the passenger door.

The Ringmaster and Clown watch from a distance.

CLOWN

(to the camera)

Well, we said we'd make you cry.

RINGMASTER
Who are you talking to?

CLOWN
I'm talking to the...the people?

The Ringmaster whips out a diploma and bonks the clown on the head.

RINGMASTER
They can't see us anymore.

CLOWN
Why?

RINGMASTER
Didn't you read the book I wrote?

CLOWN
I...uh...nope...

RINGMASTER
Everything you need to know is in
that book. You're a lazy clown.

He bonks Clown on the head again.

RINGMASTER
One thing about Roger: he was never
lazy; he always wanted to learn.

CLOWN
Now I feel right guilty.

Ringmaster bonks Clown on the head. Wham! A huge, colorful book, with a picture of the Ringmaster on the cover, lands at Clown's feet. Clown tries picking the book up but it's too heavy.

CLOWN
It shouldn't be this hard to read.

Ringmaster takes a string from his pocket and shakes it. The string jumps from his hand and, in a flash, attaches itself to the book and to Clown's wrist. The book floats upward and follows Ringmaster and Clown as they walk along the street.

INT./EXT. TAXI CAB - DAY

Roger sits in the front seat of the taxi; his folded wheelchair sits in the back. Something in his coat pocket moves. He reaches inside his pocket and takes out a miniature version of Ringmaster's book.

Ringmaster's image winks at Roger, and Roger winks back.

FADE OUT.