

FADE IN:

EXT. BAKER HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

SUPERIMPOSE OVER ACTION - COLUMBUS, GEORGIA 1971

It's your typical morning like any other large high school in America. The courtyard is crowded with the hustle and bustle of hundreds of teenagers walking across the lawn or just hanging out, sitting on the lawn. A few kids sit on the steps of the building smoking cigarettes, while others gather in the parking lot revving up the engines of their hot cars. Cheerleaders in their uniforms sit on grass giggling, gossip, while the Army ROTC guys stand rigidly straight gathered around the flagpole getting ready to raise the American flag.

CUT TO:

INT. HIGH SCHOOL HALLWAYS - DAY

Looking down a long, wide hallway into the dimly lit recesses of the old building, there is row after row of lockers and classroom doors. It's eerily quiet, when out of the lonely silence we hear a CLANKING SOUND against the lockers coming down the hall. TILT UP towards the far dark-end of the hallway and we see the shadowy thin figure of FRANKIE BUSH (17), slowly making his way down the hall. Walking is very difficult for him, walking with a cerebral palsy type of gait, dragging his stiff left leg, in an awkward shuffle of unsure footsteps. He has a very bad scoliosis posture, severely curved leftward in almost a "C" shape, hunched-over at his shoulders. Every other step he stops a moment and leans against the lockers, taking an exhausted deep breath. He continues moving, keeps going, making his way down the long hall. His face and bright eyes are just about to come into view, when SUDDENLY there is the BLARE of a harsh sounding FIRE ALARM and the classroom doors BURST OPEN! Hundreds of teenage kids spill out into the hallways, hurriedly rushing in a line, quickly filling the hallways like sardines in a tightly packed can.

Several TEACHERS try keeping the evacuation orderly. At first the kids are joking around like it's just another fire drill until someone notices smoke seeping up from the floor. A VOICE in the crowd SHOUTS OUT "THE AUDITORIUM IS ON FIRE!" The laughter and joking quickly turns to a wave of panic, pushing and shoving sweeping in every direction.

TEACHERS

Okay everyone stay in line! Keep moving, keep moving!

The air thickens with smoke and the kids began to cough and choke as they make their way outside. Quickly the building empties to a lonely silence and WE HEAR coming from the blinding smoke, now at a much more frantic pace, the continued CLANKING SOUND, echoing down the hall.

CUT TO:

EXT. BAKER HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

CONTINUED:

From the center of the old brick building huge flames shoot up into a beautiful sunny sky. More hot fire FLASHES from the windows of all three floors. It is an old brick building built in the 1940s with no sprinklers or elevators. Five large fire trucks with SIRENS BLAZING make their way between the cars parked on both sides of the long horseshoe driveway that is the main entrance to the school. A couple of LOUD EXPLOSIONS blow out more windows shooting glass past the heads of firemen trying to get into the building.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. HIGH SCHOOL STAIRWAY - LATE MORNING

An old ceiling fan circulates the pungent heat of the unairconditioned stairwell. From behind in our POV Frankie is slowly moving himself up the stairway by leaning into the handrail exhaustingly pulling himself up the stairs. The back of his shirt is soaked through with the stain of sweat as he leaves our sight fading up the stairs out of view.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

The TEACHER (55) is a retired, hard nosed Army colonel that tries to run his classroom as though he were still in the Army. The classroom is packed with about 35 kids just coming in sitting at their desks.

TEACHER

Okay class let's settle down and get out your books. Remember. This is a sociology class not a social gathering.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

FRANKIE opens the door standing awkwardly in front of the entire quietly seated class already in progress. He is like a deer caught standing alone in the headlights of a car. CLOSE ON FRANKIE'S FACE. For the first time WE SEE his storytelling bright hazel eyes and face, a good looking boy with a determined personality that has a countenance about him that commands your attention. The TEACHER stands in front of his desk quickly turning around towards the sound of the classroom door opening. He's not happy that Frankie is interrupting his class...

TEACHER

Don't even think of coming in here unless you have a pass from the Office downstairs!

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FRANKIE

I just came from downstairs - my last class was all the way on the other side of the building. You gotta go 'round the long way 'cause of the new construction in the auditorium 'cause of that fire last month.

TEACHER adamantly keeps pointing towards the door motioning Frankie back out the door way. Frankie turns around and leaves pulling the door shut behind him.

INT. SCHOOL OFFICE - FRANKIE STANDING AT COUNTER - DAY

MR. LINER (30) very 1970s hip, friendly and energetic ENTERS THE ROOM. He sees Frankie standing at the counter noticeably upset, waiting for someone to help him.

MR. LINER

Hey Frankie! What's up Buddy?!

Mr. Liner makes his way behind the counter.

FRANKIE

Hi Mr. Liner, I just need a late pass for Col Haye's class. I mean I'll betcha' I was only a minute late, sometimes other kids are really, really late and he... I ain't askin' for anybody to cut me any slack or anything like that, but I'm tellin' ya he just don't want me in his class.

MR. LINER

Don't worry about it chief, I'll write you a pass. And don't about old Col. Hayes he just needs more fiber in his diet.

He writes on a notepad and hands Frankie the note.

MR. LINER

Frankie, you still seeing the orthopedic docs out at Fort Benning? What do they say? Do they think they might be able to help you?

Frankie crumbles up the note and shoves it in his pants pocket. WE SEE that his right hand and arm is a little smaller and weaker than his left side, but he handles everything with no problem. He is a very proud and somewhat shy person that does not want to put any unnecessary focus attention on himself.

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FRANKIE

I've been goin' out there couple times a week for physical therapy. They want me to go all the way to Minneapolis, Minnesota where they have this famous scoliosis clinic where they put these new type of steel rods in your back.

MR. LINER

Man, that's cold country! What's your folks think?

FRANKIE

I ain't told them I've been seein' any new doctor 'cause my last operation didn't go so good it was pretty hard on my mama. I don't want her always have to be worrin' so much about me with my dad going back again to Vietnam. I only got one more year before I graduate and get my diploma, she'd really like that. She would be real proud of me. So I'm tryin' to hold off for as long as I can.

He smiles and turns to head back out the door.

FRANKIE

Okay Mr. Liner, thanks, I'll see ya in class tomorrow!  
(turning back more upbeat)  
Oh, guess what Mr. Liner? I got a job three nights a week singin' and playin' my guitar down at Dingelwood Pizza On Call. Ten bucks a night and all the pizza I want. I'll get you a pizza!

Mr. Liner winks back giving Frankie the supportive "thumbs up!"

EXT. DINGLEWOOD PIZZA ON CALL - ESTABLISHING - NIGHT

PUSHING IN through a large storefront window, Frankie is sitting on a barstool in a little dimly lit pizza joint with a guitar strung over his shoulders and a microphone plugged into a little amplifier sitting next to him. There are only six people in the entire place, one of them is Mr. Liner with an attractive woman (28) and a little boy (8).

CUT TO:

EXT. MARTIN ARMY HOSPITAL FORT BENNING - ESTABLISHING - DAY

INT. EXAMINING ROOM - DAY

Frankie sits upright on an examining table while two doctors (38) and (45) in their traditional white coats look over some horribly curved spinal x-rays. Their faces puzzled almost a solemn hopelessness as they turn out the backlighting for the x-rays.

CUT TO:

EXT. FAIRVIEW HOSPITAL MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA - DAY

Snow is coming down hard and a bitter cold northern wind is howling around the buildings. Large drifts of snow five feet high are all alongside the curbs of the roads in every direction around the sprawling complex, connected by a network of indoor skyways. The landscape of the hospital is beautifully decorated with Christmas lights and decorations. People are coming and going into the hospital trying not to slip on the icy patches of the sidewalk.

SUPERIMPOSE OVER ACTION: MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA 1972INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Frankie is flat on his back in a hospital bed next to the window in halo traction (four steel pins/screws protruding from his skull attaching a round steel halo looking object with all kinds of small ropes and pulleys connecting it to several bags of weights hanging over the head of the bed. Protruding from both knees, going all the way through, are two more steel pins with more pulleys and weights hanging over the end of the bed, literally stretching his spine like an old medieval torture rack). There is a little Christmas tree on the table and Christmas cards and photographs are hanging all over the wall. Standing in the corner is the same guitar we saw him playing in the pizza joint. A hospital bed trapeze bar is hanging just over his head with a microphone and a little mistletoe strategically attached, it's obvious that he has been in this room for a long time.

FRANKIE

(on the telephone)

No mama, I'm okay, really I am. Mama next Friday they're onna be doin' the second operation that's when they put in those steel rods. The next time you see me mama ya' won't even recognize me I'll be standing so straight... No Mam they ain't said nothin' bout that stiffness.

Moving down the bed Frankie's legs are in tightly fitting flesh color Ted stockings to help avoid blood clots. Passing all of the traction paraphernalia that surrounds his body WE MOVE IN CLOSER on the steel pins that go through his knees as we:

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - LATE NIGHT

ROXI (18), beautiful with big blue eyes, basic Scandinavian blond beauty enters the room. She's wearing faded tight blue jeans with a nicely fitting "in all the right places" sweater. She walks over to Frankie's bedside that's placed next to a large window.

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ROXI

Hi can I help you? I was just on my way home from getting off work and I saw your call light on above your door. Do you remember me? I'm Roxi, I told you I would come and see you when they were putting the halo on you. Now do you remember?

Frankie's eyes open wide as though his entire world suddenly just became a lot brighter. Points at his neck.

FRANKIE

Well I just have a little pain in my neck from this thang, stretchin' me so darn much but I'll be okay, really I don't want to bother you on your way home.

ROXI

No bother if you need something for pain I can go tell the charge nurse. Or I have some time if you would like me to rub your neck for a while?

Frankie is obviously smitten with this girl and loving the attention. He may be confined to his bed in traction, a little shy and self-conscious, but he has normal raging hormones just like any other 17-year-old teenage boy. He smiles up at her with a mischievous grin...

FRANKIE

Mam, if you're givin' me a choice on whether or not I want to have another needle stuck in my rear end, or have you rub my neck, I like your idea much better!

ROXI

Okay, but I need to sit on the side of your bed to get around the halo, you better not try anything funny.

She smiles in a joking flirtatious manner.

FRANKIE

Don't worry, I'm harmless, but you might want to watch out for that mistletoe hangin' on my trapeze bar, I mean, you just never know about us Southern boys...

She sits on the side of the bed carefully avoiding the traction, but noticeably takes a moment, pausing to look up at the mistletoe as she begins massaging Frankie's neck.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - EARLY SUNRISE THE NEXT MORNING

CONTINUED:

The early morning sun is coming up through the window next to Frankie's bed. Roxi still sits on the bed looking a little tired caringly holding and rubbing Frankie's hand.

ROXI

...Frankie, I really don't want to go but we've been up talking all night long and I have to be back here for work this afternoon for the three o'clock shift. I really do need to try and get some sleep. But I promise I'll come back during my breaks and after work. But after me being in here now over six hours, I don't think that the charge nurse is going to let you be one of my patients. She can be a real bitch.

Frankie can't move his head or neck from the traction. All he can do is look up at the ceiling and that mistletoe hanging from his trapeze bar above his bed. He squeezes her hand a little tighter.

FRANKIE

...I understand, really I do, but ya' thank maybe??

His eyes slyly look up at the mistletoe with an irresistible smile. Roxi smiles back and leans in giving him a gentle but long deep kiss.

CUT TO:

EXT. HILTON HOTEL DOWNTOWN ST. PAUL - ESTABLISHING - MORNING

SUPERIMPOSE OVER ACTION - THREE YEARS LATER

INT. EXT. ELEVATOR DOORS OPENING - FRANKIE

...steps off the elevator walking directly into a big black HOTEL SECURITY GUARD that has been waiting for the elevator. Frankie's back and posture does now look much improved from when we saw him in high school, but it is still obviously very severe and he still has that stiff right leg cerebral palsy type of walk. He is still very thin and looks very nervous.

FRANKIE

Excuse me, I didn't mean to run into ya'.

HOTEL SECURITY GUARD

What floor you looking for my man? I don't think you're supposed to be up here on this here floor.

CONTINUED:

CONTINUED:

FRANKIE

Well, I'm not sure, is the presidential suite on this floor?

INT. HOTEL HALLWAY - FRONT OF ELEGANT DOUBLE DOORS.

Frankie stands nervously in front of the double doors with a gold plaque that reads "Presidential Suite." He starts to raise his hand to knock on the door suddenly stops himself, pausing a moment, pressing his ear up against the door. He raises his fist for a second time but then again chickens out, quickly putting his hand back down by his side. This is a torturous decision; he cannot make up his mind. He turns back away from the doors and takes a couple steps leaving, but then makes a dead stop in his tracks and takes a deep breath. He turns back around and goes back to the double doors. One more brief time he puts his ear to the door, then slowly raises his hand and knocks very lightly, almost as though he was hoping it would not be heard. He only waits about 30 seconds and almost relieved that no one answered, he turns to walk away. Just as he turns away THE DOOR OPENS and there standing in the doorway in his stocking feet, wearing jeans and a casual shirt is JOHNNY CASH (45). He looks tired as though he has just been woken up from a deep sleep. He looks curiously at Frankie's, he's still half-asleep.

JOHN

Yes, can I help you?

John holds the door cautiously open, his large frame towering over Frankie. Turning back around, Frankie looks up to John in almost a speechless awe and reverence.

FRANKIE

Hi Mr. Cash...I'm Frankie Bush the guy ya' called a while ago. I sure hope I didn't wake ya'. You said on the phone that if I could make it down here to the hotel today I could meetcha. But I don't want to bother ya' I'm sorry I got here so early.

INT. EXT. SIDE DOOR FROM THE NEXT ADJOINING ROOM OPENS

It's ARMONDO (47) Czechoslovakian, John's personal security guard. He's checking out what's going on.

ARMONDO

John is everything okay out here?

JOHN

Yeah Armondo everything is fine.

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CONTINUED:

Even though John has reassured Armondo everything was okay he still stands by within arms-length from Frankie watching over the situation.

JOHN

...Frankie you're not botherin' me son. I just though I told you to come down this afternoon; it's only about nine-thirty. I really need to get a little rest before my shows tonight. Just come on back about four o'clock this afternoon after I've gotten some sleep. I'll see ya later...

John slowly shuts the door and Frankie is left standing looking as though his entire world has just crashed. Armondo still stands there waiting until Frankie leaves. Frankie is really embarrassed and beating himself up for getting there so early in the morning. He chokes back the disappointment, turns to walk away sees Armondo.

FRANKIE

Would you please tell Mr. Cash that I really didn't mean to bother him so early, 'cause I probably won't be coming back today...I really don't think that he understands why...I mean, I was just hopein'...

ARMONDO

Why do you say that? He told you to come back.

FRANKIE

Yes Sir, I know, but I really feel like I just blew it by not coming here at the right time he asked me to in the first place. It's my own fault, but I would appreciate it if you would just tell him that for me.

He starts walking and makes it about ten feet back down the hallway WHEN THE DOUBLE DOORS REOPEN and there stands Johnny Cash once again motioning Frankie with his hand to come back.

JOHN

Frankie come on back son, I guess I got a few minutes since you're already here.

Frankie stops dead in his tracks hearing the sound of that legendary baritone voice that is known throughout the world calling his name. He turns back around with a smile from ear to ear walking quickly as his legs will carry him back towards John standing at the door.

FRANKIE

Really!?? I sure appreciate this Mr. Cash, really I do.

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CONTINUED:

John opens the door wider and Frankie enters a luxurious two-story suite. The door closes behind them and Armondo with an approving smile looks down the hallway one last time as he closes his door and goes back inside his room.

EXT. MINNESOTA STATE FAIR - OUTSIDE GATES - LATE AFTERNOON

Thousands of people pass through the entrance gates under a large billboard that reads: "1976 MINNESOTA STATE FAIR"

EXT. MINNESOTA STATE FAIR FAIRGROUNDS - DAY

It's another sweltering hot summer day. The fairgrounds are alive with the hustle and bustle of crowds of people. There are Kids with balloons; young couples walking holding hands; people laughing, some carrying stuffed animals. A few elderly men and women sit on benches with handkerchiefs, wiping sweat from their forehead, complaining about the intense heat. An occasional person in a wheelchair rolls by. Every other man woman and child is eating or drinking something.

ANGLE ON - FRANKIE

Frankie goes through the turnstiles coming in the main fair entrance gates, paying for his ticket to get in. He senses stares from people he passes and feels very self-conscious.

CUT TO:

ANOTHER PART OF THE FAIRGROUNDS - SEVERAL MINUTES LATER

Frankie's shirt soaks with sweat walking in the blazing humid heat. He stops at a corn dog stand to rest and get a quick bite.

ANOTHER PART OF THE FAIRGROUNDS - A FEW MORE MINUTES LATER

Frankie is only a few hundred feet from the grandstand ticket booth. He tries to walk faster, but the harder he tries the more his right leg shakes and stiffens from spasticity. Every garbage can, lamp post and bench that he comes across is something for him to lean and rest on for a couple minutes then he moves on.

FROM FRANKIE'S POV as he gets deeper into the fair grounds the crowd of people is becoming more massive, closing in all around him. He looks up and sees, in the distance, the sign above the ticket booth which reads: "TONIGHT JOHNNY CASH." IN THE BACKGROUND Johnny Cash is heard singing live from his grandstand concert.

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Frankie walks up behind a big tall, thick-necked JOCK with his cheerleader girlfriend and two hang-on buddies, with their girlfriends, all laughing, drinking their beers blocking his way.

FRANKIE

Excuse me, but could y'all please let me 'round?  
I'm in a real big hurry!

The jock doesn't turn around. This guy is the perfect example of a macho jerk. He puffs on a cigarette while his muscular steroid arm hangs around his girlfriend's neck.

FRANKIE

EXCUSE ME PLEASE, let me go by!

The group just keeps going, ignoring Frankie.

FRANKIE

HEY! I JUST WANNA GET 'ROUND YOU GUYS!  
COME'ON, AIN'T NO CALL TO BE JERKS!

Turning around the Jock arrogantly shouts back!

JOCK

OKAY, LITTLE GUY, YOU WANNA GO? GO! Oh, sorry I  
didn't know you were so messed up my little man.

With a degrading gesture the Jock and his girlfriend holding each others hands, lift their arms like a drawbridge. The jock nods his head arrogantly motioning Frankie to go under. FRANKIE MAKES A MAD DASH under their arms, but his dragging right foot snags on a large electrical cable on the ground, he trips and falls face down, hard!

Lying in the dirt, Frankie's body trembles in excruciating pain. Slowly he turns over, curling up, gasping for breath. A crowd of people quickly gather, including the Jock, who bends down looking at Frankie, quivering on the ground.

JOCK

Hey guy, you all right? Sorry dude, I didn't know  
you were crippled! I thought the way you walked all  
bent over, you were just gettin' a buzz on like us.

He takes a deep breath, fighting the pain and embarrassment.

FRANKIE

I'm okay, I'm okay... I'm NOT crippled!

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A kindly OLD LADY leans down and gently strokes his forehead.

OLD LADY

Son, do you need a doctor?

FRANKIE

No, uh - no Ma'am...I'll be fine in a minute.  
But thank ya for askin'.

Turning over onto his stomach, Frankie pushes himself up onto his hands and knees. Wobbly and shook up, he takes another deep breath and slowly stands. He brushes off his clothes and continues walking towards the ticket booth.

EXT. GRANDSTAND TICKET WINDOW - A MINUTE LATER - TICKET GIRL

TICKET GIRL

Can I help you?

FRANKIE

Yes Ma'am! Could I have one ticket for the Johnny Cash show please?

TICKET GIRL

Sure, that will be \$8.00. But the first show has already started.

FRANKIE

That's okay!

He reaches in his pocket and pulls out only three dollars.

FRANKIE

I guess I spent most of my money on parkin' and getting' in the fair. Oh yeah, I got somethin' to eat back yonder...

TICKET GIRL

I'm sorry sir, but the tickets are eight dollars.

He pauses for a beat, frustrated and desperate to get into the show.

FRANKIE

Look Ma'am, I know ya ain't gonna believe this, but-cha see, Johnny Cash called me on the phone this mornin', and he invited me down to his hotel where he's stayin'. Well, you see, when I got there we talked for a while and then he personally asked me to come backstage tonight!

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TICKET GIRL

I'm really sorry, but I don't have the authority to just let people...

Wiping pouring sweat from his forehead, Frankie cuts her off.

FRANKIE

Ma'am, come-on, please gimme a break! There's gotta be somebody 'round here that can call backstage.

Annoyed she points to a small building near the grandstand entrance.

TICKET GIRL

The main office is over there...

INT. GRANDSTAND OFFICE BUILDING - LATE AFTERNOON

It's a small, dingy room. Fans blow hot, pungent air on two middle-aged men sitting at their desks. The FIRST MAN is very fat and sloppy, gnawing on a candy bar, licking melted chocolate from his fingers. The SECOND MAN is very well groomed and looks very professional. He's talking on the phone as Frankie enters.

FIRST MAN

What can I do ya for buddy?

FRANKIE

Yes Sir, I really do need some help, and I ain't got much time!!!

FIRST MAN

Well all right chief, whatcha need?

FRANKIE

I really need somebody to call backstage and tell Johnny Cash that Frankie Bush is here, tryin' to get in his show. But I, uh...

The SECOND MAN pulls the phone away from his ear, curiously listening and looking at Frankie.

FIRST MAN

Wait a minute, hold on chief! just calm down a minute. Was there supposed to be a guest pass at the ticket booth?

Frustrated, Frankie slams his hand down on the desk.

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FRANKIE

NO! I already told the girl out front I just met Johnny Cash at his hotel a few hours ago. He said he would listen to me sing if I came backstage tonight. I guess I just got so excited I forgot to ask him for a pass or anything like that. Please Sir, I just gotta get into the show...

The SECOND MAN hangs up his phone and looks at the first man.

SECOND MAN

Hey, I'll call backstage for him...

Frankie walks to the second man's desk as he dials the phone.

SECOND MAN

(into phone)

Hello, Bob! Listen, I have a young man here named "Frankie Bush." And he says "Johnny Cash" is expecting him backstage tonight. He says Mr. Cash wants to hear him sing. Frank-kee Bush! Yeah, that's right. Listen, do me a favor. Can you ask Mr. Cash, or his manager, if they have ever heard of the boy? Yeah, just try and get back to me P.D.Q. All right, thanks...

He hangs up the phone and looks at Frankie.

SECOND MAN

Son, that's 'bout all I can do.

FRANKIE

Thank ya for callin'. I really do appreciate it.

The first man opens another candy bar looking at Frankie with a disbelieving smirk on his face.

FIRST MAN

So, the JOHHNY CASH is your good buddy, huh?

FRANKIE

No Sir. I can't say we're good friends. 'Member I told ya I just met 'im a few hours ago?

FIRST MAN

Yeah, yeah sure, I know, I know...

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The second man's phone RINGS!!

SECOND MAN

(into phone)

Hello!...Grandstand...Yeah Bob, sure, I understand.  
Yeah, okay...thanks.

He hangs up the phone and turns back to the first man, who is now beginning to stuff his fat face with potato chips.

SECOND MAN

Hey, fat boy! You're gonna have to hold down the fort. Mr. Cash personally wants to see this man backstage, as soon as his first show is over.

THE FIRST MAN'S FACE - COMPLETELY DUMBFOUNDED!!

The second man stands up, grabs some keys from his desk drawer, and walks around to Frankie.

SECOND MAN

Well, let's go! You don't want to keep Johnny Cash waiting, do you?

EXT. BACKSTAGE AREA - SEVERAL ANGLES - NIGHT

There is the normal backstage, "big star" commotion going on. Roadies, stagehands, reporters, photographers, musicians, etc. all rush around. Almost everyone is wearing a special backstage pass.

Two uniformed security guards stand by a backstage entrance. Another uniformed security guard is at the foot of the backstage steps that lead up to the stage. Several motorhomes used for dressing rooms, and a greyhound bus are close behind the stage. A black limo, with a chauffeur waits by one of the motorhomes. Johnny is on stage singing.

Frankie and the second man pull up to the backstage area in an electric golf cart. LOU (47) "all business", Jewish man with glasses and grey hair, walks towards the golf cart to Frankie. Along the way he stops and gives people instructions. He's obviously a busy man who has authority. A man that knows how to get things done...and does!

LOU

Are you Frankie?

FRANKIE

Ye-, yes Sir.. that's me.

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Lou points to a large black motorhome Park behind the stage.

Lou

Frankie, I'm Lou Robbins, John's manager. John wants you to wait over there by his motorhome. He's gonna try and see you for a few minutes as soon as he's finished with his first show. You can see things are real hectic back here, so just go wait over there and John will be off stage in 'bout 10 minutes.

Lou quickly walks away. Frankie starts pulling himself up from the cart. IN THE BACKGROUND the music and applause from the live concert are now louder than ever. Frankie turns to the man driving the cart.

FRANKIE

Thank ya Sir...for all your help...the ride...and everything.

The second man is overwhelmed by the sheer determination and guts. He sees Frankie is tired and having a difficult time getting up and out of the golf cart.

SECOND MAN

Son, believe me - it's been my pleasure. Would you like some help getting out of this thing?

FRANKIE

No thank ya Sir, I got it - no sweat.

SECOND MAN

Hey Frankie, good luck son.

Frankie starts towards the black motorhome. He notices more curious stares from people as he walks, but now he is so excited it doesn't matter anymore.

CUT TO:

EXT. FRONT CENTER STAGE - JOHNNY AND JUNE CARTER CASH - NIGHT

Johnny in his legendary style has his guitar hanging down around his back. He and June hold hands singing "If I Were a Carpenter."

EXT. BLACK MOTORHOME - NIGHT - FRANKIE

Frankie stands in front of the motorhome, waiting patiently, in awe. His eyes are glued to the backstage steps, waiting for that first moment Johnny appears.

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A ROADIE walks up to the motorhome carrying a basket of fruit.

ROADIE

Hi! Would ya like some fruit?

FRANKIE

No thanks. I'm just waitin' for Mr. Cash to come off the stage.

ROADIE

OH! Well, he's singing his last song right now.

He carries the basket of fruit on into the motorhome.

SEVERAL INTERCUTS BETWEEN THE FRONT CENTER STAGE AND FRANKIE

EXT. FRONT CENTER STAGE

Johnny is winding up his last song.

EXT. JOHN'S MOTOR HOME - NIGHT

Frankie waiting nervously by the motorhome.

EXT. FRONT CENTER STAGE - NIGHT

Johnny takes a final bow as WE PAN the audience of EIGHTEEN THOUSAND cheering Johnny Cash fans.

EXT. JOHN'S MOTOR HOME - NIGHT - FRANKIE

The roadie comes back out the door and points to the backstage steps.

ROADIE

Here comes John now..

In the background we hear roaring applause as the MC's voice comes over the loud speakers...

MC

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for coming to the show. Johnny's second show begins in one hour!

Johnny comes down the backstage steps. He's instantly mobbed by fans, newspaper and television reporters. Flashbulbs from cameras go off in his face from everywhere. Security guards try to hold people back as he makes his way graciously signing autographs and shaking hands.

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John sees Frankie in the foreground, waiting patiently by his motorhome. Politely he breaks away from the fans and reporters. He walks towards Frankie like family he hasn't seen in years. Walking beside him are Lou and a security guard. John reaches out and warmly placed one of his hands on Frankie's shoulder.

JOHN

Hi Frankie, did you see the show?

Johnny Cash is a mountain of a man next to Frankie, more than a foot taller. Frankie looks up at him with total reverence.

FRANKIE

No Sir, I had a couple little problems gettin' in here... But I brought some sheet music of a song so you could hear me sing!

Frankie pulls out a few sheets of crumbled paper that are stuffed down in his shirt and starts to hand them to Johnny.

JOHN

Frankie, I'm real sorry son, but I'm just not gonna have time to listen to you sing tonight.

Frankie's face turns from euphoria to disappointment and heartbreak. He looks up to Johnny, fighting back tears of rejection and frustration.

FRANKIE

Yes sir, I-I understand. But do ya think maybe if I can ever get to Nashville, you might be able to listen to me sing just one song?

JOHN

Sure I will. I'm just real busy tonight with all the reporters, interviews and everything. Do you write songs too?

FRANKIE

Yes sir, I write lots of songs, but I didn't wanna pitch my songs to ya, I just wanted ya to hear me sing. You see, I believe some things are just meant to be, and I really believe it's meant to be that you hear me sing. I guess it just ain't meant to be tonight.

Johnny is giving Frankie his undivided attention.

CONTINUED:

CONTINUED:

FRANKIE

Well Sir, I guess I'd better be goin'. I gotta job singin' at a restaurant in Minneapolis...and I really can't afford to lose it. Sure has been great meetin' ya. And I really do appreciate you callin' me and everything.

He shakes John's hand and turns to walk away.

Johnny stops him by placing his hand on Frankie's shoulder. He doesn't want him to leave. Frankie turns back and looks up...

JOHN

Frankie, hold on a second. Have you ever sang in front of any audience before?

FRANKIE

Yes sir, I started when I was 'bout sixteen, singin' in a pizza parlor. I made ten bucks a night, and all the pizza I could eat. And I've sang at a bunch of lounges, restaurants.

JOHN

Well, Frankie, then why don't you just go ahead and sing a song on my next show here tonight. I'll introduce you after I sing "The Ragged Old Flag."

Frankie's eyes open wide and his mouth slightly drops open. He can't believe what he's hearing.

FRANKIE

Really?? You mean, sing, on your show right here tonight?

JOHNNY CASH

Yeah, really...Now you just give my piano player your music and I'll see you on stage in a little while.

FRANKIE

Yes Sir...but uh...Mr. Cash, I, uh...

JOHNNY CASH

Call me John! "Mr. Cash" makes me feel old.

FRANKIE

Yes sir. Well, I just wanted you to know that I really do appreciate this and I promise, I ain't gonna let you down.

CONTINUED:

CONTINUED:

JOHN

I know you won't.

Johnny turns and walks off through the crowd of people.

Suddenly, Frankie remembers that he forgot to ask Johnny something and starts running back after him, calling his name.

FRANKIE

JOHN!... HEY JOHN!

Johnny hears Frankie calling and turns back, waiting for him.

Frankie out of breath catching up with John's long walking strides.

FRANKIE

Excuse me Sir... I mean John... but, but could I ask you to do me a big favor?

JOHN

Frankie, I'm really kinda rushed right now son.

FRANKIE

I know, and I really hate askin' ya, but remember I told ya I gotta job singin' at a place outside Minneapolis? Well, ya see if I don't show up tonight, I could lose it. But if you could give my boss a call, I'm sure I won't get in any trouble. I really do need my job at this place. It's only gonna last a couple weeks. Most jobs I get are kinda rough, but this new place is not so bad.

Johnny looks around. He's rushed for time, but does want to help.

JOHN

What's the phone number?

FRANKIE

I don't remember the number, but I'm sure information has it. The name of the place is the Dockside, and the owner's name is Bill Mortson.

Johnny turns to the SECURITY GUARD walking beside him...

JOHN

Is there a telephone somewhere around here I can use?

CONTINUED:

CONTINUED:

SECURITY GUARD

There's not one close by that can call outside the fairgrounds, but if you don't mind walking I can get you to one.

JOHN

Well, let's get goin'. The boy's got a show to do.

Johnny turns back to Frankie with a "don't sweat the small stuff" kind of smile.

JOHN

I'll go give your boss a call, so don't you worry about anything.

Johnny walks into the distance as GEORGE LATHEN, the director of all the grandstand entertainment, runs to his side. He's not in all happy about what he just heard Johnny telling Frankie.

GEORGE

John, are you really going to have that kid back there sing on your next show here tonight??

He looks back over his shoulder at Frankie, who's walking towards the piano player, who is coming down from the stage.

JOHN

Yeah, why?

They walk faster... George trying to keep up with John, he's worried.

GEORGE

Well, John, can he really sing?

JOHN

He says he can!

GEORGE

You mean -you've really never even heard him sing before?

They keep walking George can barely keep up with John's long strides.

JOHN

Nope! I just met him today...

George has a petrified look on his face.

CONTINUED:

CONTINUED:

GEORGE

Now John, you know we're expecting 'bout seventeen thousand people for your second show.

JOHN

I know! It's gonna be a good show.

George is becoming irritated because John isn't really listening.

GEORGE

John..well...uh you know the fair can't be held responsible if he hurts himself while on the stage. And I really don't think the audience wants to see a pity show anyway. I mean, but John, what if he can't sing? It could be a real mess, I mean a damn disaster!

They come to a phone booth.

JOHN

Look, I believe this boy has come into my life for a purpose. He's only asked me to hear him sing and nothing else. And I'm gonna give him that chance. I don't think you have anything to worry about. So if you'll excuse me, I have to make an important call.

Johnny steps into the phone booth.

INT. TELEPHONE BOOTH - JOHNNY CASH - NIGHT

JOHN

(into phone)

Could I please have the number of the Dockside Restaurant?

EXT. BACKSTAGE STEPS - ONE HOUR LATER - NIGHT

Frankie slowly walks up the backstage steps, his left hand grasping firmly onto the rail to steady his balance. He stumbles on one of the steps quickly catching himself. IN THE B.G. Johnny sings on stage...

FRANKIE POINT OF VIEW - FROM BACKSTAGE WINGS

Looking out on stage, the bright spotlights beam down on Johnny. His custom made black suit, gambler style with embroidered roses, glistens with character. By all standards, it's easy to see why he is one of the most legendary and respected performers of our time.

CONTINUED:

CONTINUED:

The band is really getting into the music, especially the drummer. Johnny moves to the side of the stage and the spotlights follow him. Thousands of people in the grandstand now become more visible and are an overwhelming sea of excited faces of all ages and walks of life.

Frankie looks down at the stage floor. He sees his walk to the front where he'll be singing is about twenty feet. But it's going to be a dangerous walk over more electrical cords and cables that cover parts of his path. If he should trip and fall over any one of these cords or cables, all of his efforts would end as an embarrassing disaster!

There are several empty equipment cases, stenciled with "Johnny Cash" on them. Several stagehands and musicians are rushing around. Except for an occasional stare or polite hello, no one is paying much attention to Frankie. No one backstage, (except Lou and George) knows that Johnny is going to be calling Frankie on stage to sing.

Sitting on one of the equipment cases listening to the music in the background, Frankie gazes into the night sky, silently praying, his thoughts drifting back to his childhood.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT: SMALL BRICK RAMBLER STYLE HOUSE - SUNSET

SUPERIMPOSED OVER ACTION - GREENVILLE, SOUTH CAROLINA 1965

MOVING IN on the small one-story brick house. There is one old pickup truck with no tires jacked up in the front yard. An old stray cat is living in the back with her litter of kittens. In a dirt-floored carport and driveway there is another old Rambler station wagon sitting up on blocks with all of its wheels removed. Three old dogs sleep lazily under the carport next to a tool chest while a broken screen door swings slamming into the side of the house. Old beer cans and empty cigarette cartons lay scattered around the trashy yard.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

A WOMAN (50) with badly dyed brown hair and wrinkled skin of an unhappy alcoholic sits rocking angrily in her rocking chair. She mumbles battling to herself reading a Bible. Next to her on the end table sets a half empty bottle of vodka and a glass of orange juice for a chaser. A 38 police special sits next to an overflowing ashtray of cigarette butts and ashes. One lit cigarette burns away, filling the room with the stinch of smelly cigarette smoke. She reaches over taking a drag off the cigarette HACKING a horrible sounding mucus filled cough. Finally, catching her breath, she takes another drag, and washes it down where the vodka and orange juice. She continues rocking angrily babbling...

CONTINUED:

CONTINUED:

WOMAN

Those damn niggers better not come 'round here  
tonight 'cause I'll blow their asses back to Jesus!

She rocks faster now even more drunk.

INT. FRANKIE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Frankie now (10) sits on his bed wearing a cumbersome looking back brace strumming on a cheap old Sears & Roebuck flattop guitar. HE HEARS the WOMAN'S DRUNKEN VOICE YELLING to him from the living room.

WOMAN

FRANKIE STOP PLAYING WITH THAT DAMN GUITAR AND  
GET YOUR BUTT TO BED, RIGHT NOW!

Frankie stops looks up yelling back defiantly.

FRANKIE

I DON'T WANNA GO TO BED RIGHT NOW, I'M TOO EXCITED  
'BOUT SUSIE AND JOHN COMIN' BACK HOME FROM GERMANY  
TOMORROW... THEY BEEN GONE OVER THREE YEARS...

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The woman now sloppy drunk suddenly stops rocking. She curiously listens for a moment. Wobbly she stands up putting down the Bible and grabs the gun sitting on the end table. She walks staggering out of the room down the hallway towards Frankie's bedroom. As she walks down the hall FROM HER POV she sees the open bedroom door where Frankie sits on his bed still playing with his guitar. She comes to his bedroom door and glares at Frankie, her eyes red and swollen.

WOMAN

DIDN'T I TELL YOU TO GET TO BED?!

Frankie looks up startled with complete fright and panic in his eyes. She now stands in his doorway glaring back at him, holding the gun in her hand. Violently and drunkenly she begins yelling, slurring her words incoherently. He nods his head back at her in heart-pounding, submissive agreement. Turning back around, she walks across the hall into a darkened bedroom, stumbling against an old four-poster bed. Staggering she continues to an open window and SCREAMS out violently in a drunken delusional rage! She wildly shoots the gun through the screen, firing six rapid shots into the empty darkness. Frankie runs from his room terrified and sees her falling onto the bed. Standing in her doorway, helplessly he looks at her passed out, drool slowly running down her chin, still babbling to herself in her sleep.

CUT TO:

EXT. SMALL BRICK RAMBLER STYLE HOUSE - NIGHT

Going into the house through the broken screen door is in ARMY CAPTAIN (24) wearing a full dress army uniform, standard military crew cut he's in good shape with very broad shoulders. He opens the door for Susie (24) a beautiful long haired very classy looking blonde dressed reminiscent of the late Jackie Kennedy in her younger days.

INT. FRANKIE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Frankie is peacefully asleep wearing a little T-shirt and pajama bottoms, no brace. SUSIE enters the room quietly closing the door behind her and lays down next to him in the bed lovingly wrapping him in her arms trying hard not to squeeze him to tightly.

SUSIE

Frankie, Frankie baby wake-up I'm home, mama's never going to leave you again I promise.

Frankie waking in a groggy haze wipes the sleep from his eyes as he rolls over and cannot believe who he is seeing next to him. HE HUGS SUSIE TIGHTLY excited talking a hundred miles an hour.

FRANKIE

Susie! Is it really you?! Is it really true?  
You are really my mama not just my sister?!

He scrambles to sit up but won't let go of her hand. He gets up to his knees on the bed and throws his arms around her again and WE SEE Susie with her arms around him lovingly running her hands down his back and suddenly a smile on her face turns into great concern.

SUSIE

Frankie yes, it's true Honey and I've missed you sooo much. Now turn around I want to see your back a minute. Your grandmother never told me that something was wrong. Let mama see...

CUT TO:

EXT. COUNTY COURTHOUSE - DAYINT. JUDGES CHAMBERS - DAY

Behind a large desk sits a stately looking JUDGE, white hair with a refined Southern-gentleman accent. He's casually dressed in a white shirt and tie. Susie and the Army Captain sit in front. He is looking at a folder of paperwork. His eyes glance back and forth from the folder to looking at Susie and the Army Captain, who is in his dress uniform, loaded with accommodation metals. He's sizing them up.

CONTINUED:

CONTINUED:

JUDGE

I have to be honest with you Mr. and Mrs. Bush Frankie has been living with his grandparents now for the past 10 years. Everything he knows his school his friends his doctors even his pet dogs are all right here and you are asking me to move the boy to live in a trailer park off of Fort Rucker Army base in Ozark, Alabama.

He looks back at a paper on his desk undecidedly scratching his chin then looks up directly at Susie.

JUDGE

Mrs. Bush I can tell that you love your son very much. And your husband here states that he is willing to legally adopt your son being that his biological father was killed in a automobile accident when Frankie was only a year old. Why don't we try a six-month trial period and see how it goes.

CUT TO:

EXT. MOBILE HOME TRAILER - NIGHT

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

SUPERIMPOSED OVER ACTION COLUMBIA, SOUTH CAROLINA, 1969

Frankie sits on the living room floor wearing a back brace watching television when on the television screen turning around out of the darkness is Johnny Cash doing the opening for his ABC television variety show saying "hello I'm Johnny Cash." Frankie looks fascinated his eyes focused on the television. He calls for his mother...

FRANKIE

Mama Mama come look at Johnny Cash on TV he's a big big guy... just look how straight he stands mama with his gitar. I had a dream that I was gonna meet him someday... You think I will mama?

Susie, Frankie's mother comes running into the living room and sits on the floor next him.

Susie with a beautiful smile gives Frankie a hug.

SUSIE

Honey I know you will accomplish anything that you set your mind to, your my son.

CUT TO:

EXT. BACKSTAGE - MINNESOTA STATE FAIR GRANDSTANDS - NIGHT

Lou briskly comes up the steps to Frankie sitting on the case looking into the night sky where now storm clouds are moving in and the wind is beginning to pick up.

LOU

Frankie, John will be singing "The Ragged Old Flag" next, then he'll be introducing you. So be ready.

Lou walks back down the steps, leaving Frankie nervously alone. Frankie is scared to death, and he shows it.

He tries to massage his leg with his hands, to relax his spastic cramps. But the more nervous he becomes, the worse the spasms get. The worse the spasms get, the greater the chance that he might trip and fall, again, like he did coming into the Fairgrounds.

EXT. FRONT STAGE - NIGHT

Johnny sings the last few words of "The Ragged Old Flag." It's a stirring, powerful, patriotic ballad. As the song comes to an end, the entire grandstand stadium shakes and rumbles with the THUNDER of applause and cheers.

BACKSTAGE WINGS - FRANKIE AND LOU

Frankie stands next to Lou. His entire body shakes with stage fright. Suddenly, a big gust of wind blows Frankie slightly off balance, knocking him into Lou's arms. They both look up at the pitch black sky, filled with dark storm clouds.

The wind continues to blow, picking up force by the minute. A downpour of rain could begin at any moment, which would stop the show before Frankie gets his chance to sing.

FRANKIE

Sir, if I trip over somethin', please don't worry, 'cause I'll just get up and start goin' again. I'm used to fallin' down. But if I don't get back up before the show's over, you might wanna come and get me!

Frankie's smiles but Lou, all business, with no expression, says nothing. He isn't too crazy about Johnny having Frankie sing on the show.

CUT TO:

EXT. FRONT OF STAGE - NIGHT

The strong, humid winds blow through everyone's hair and clothes. Johnny and each member of the band glance up with concern at the storm clouds hanging low in the night sky. The audience applause wildly!

JOHN

Thank you ladies and gentlemen, thank you very much.

He makes a bowing gesture then another quick glimpse at the dark skies quickly moving in over the grandstands.

JOHN

Folks, today I received a telegram telling me 'bout a young man that's been wanting to meet me, so I could hear him sing. Well, my time ran short and I never got the chance. But I really do want to hear him, so I've asked him to sing a song tonight! So please welcome...  
FRANKIE BUSH!

ON FRANKIE

Frankie comes out from the backstage, heading towards the front where Johnny stands waiting, holding out his own personal microphone to give him. Frankie's nervousness makes it more difficult for him to walk. His right leg is so stiff you would think it was made of wood. The twenty feet he has to walk seems more like twenty miles, climbing up a mountain against the wind.

THE AUDIENCE

The audience gives Frankie lightly polite scattered round of applause.

FRANKIE

Frankie takes a few steps and clears the first electrical cords.

THE AUDIENCES

The excited faces of the audience quickly turn to looks of sympathetic curiosity for the young man they see limping onto the stage.

The toe of Frankie's right shoe catches and snags underneath the very last remaining electrical cable. He stops abruptly just before he is about to trip and fall. Very carefully he slowly reaches down and pulls his right leg out from underneath the cable and continues walking on until he reaches the front of the stage where Johnny is waiting.

CONTINUED:

CONTINUED:

Johnny sees Frankie is as white as a ghost from fear. He leans down and hands Frankie his personal microphone, whispering in his ear:

JOHN

Frankie... you okay?

Johnny places a comforting hand on his shoulder.

FRANKIE

Yes sir, I mean John I'm gonna give it my best shot!

Johnny gives Frankie a bright smile and then walks to the back of the stage. He still has absolutely no idea if Frankie can actually sing or turn out to be an embarrassment. Johnny Cash has graciously given the spotlight of his entire show over to Frankie, a young man he just met, wanting to give Frankie the opportunity to have his dream.

THERE IS DEAD SILENCE THROUGHOUT THE GRANDSTAND STADIUM. The blinding spotlights make it impossible for Frankie to see the thousands of eyes that are beading down on him. But he can sense the thousands of eyes, and he knows the audience must be feeling uncomfortable and awkward by seeing him struggle while walking out on stage. He realizes that he must break the ice with the people or they will never see past his physical appearance and focus their attentions on his singing, which is all he really wants. Honest recognition of his talents and abilities not sympathy or pity.

Frankie's stronger left hand is planted firmly on his hip, trying to keep himself straight as possible. His right hand holds the microphone so tightly that his fingers are turning blue. He looks into the blinding lights slowly bringing the microphone to his mouth:

FRANKIE

Folks, I, I guess y'all can tell I'm a little nervous. And I know when y'all saw me walkin' out here slow and everythang, you probably thought it was real hard for me. Well, gettin' out here was really purty easy. But if y'all don't like my singin', it's gonna be real hard GETTING' OFF HERE FAST ENOUGH!

The audience laughs and applauds loosening up feeling more at ease.

FRANKIE

Anyway, John said if I do a real good job, He'll buy me a black suit, just like his!

The audience now really cuts loose with laughter and more applause.

CONTINUED:

CONTINUED:

Johnny stands in the background chuckling and smiling, going along with Frankie's joking adlibs.

FRANKIE

Ladies and gentlemen, there is a song that truly means a lot to me. And I would like to sing it for y'all. I sure hope you like it.

EXT. SIDESTAGE - THE PIANO PLAYER

In a hurried rush, the piano player looks over Frankie's sheet music trying to keep the wind from blowing it off his piano. He plays a few chords as Frankie begins to sing the song, "You Gave Me A Mountain."

Almost like magic the audience is spellbound. Frankie's voice is dynamic. Deep and rich, filled with power and emotion. If you closed your eyes, you would swear that you were hearing the great pop ballad voices of Elvis, Johnny Cash and Frank Sinatra all combined into one but still one of a kind in his own special way and style.

FRANKIE

... /Lord, this time you gave me a mountain/  
/a mountain, Lord, I may never climb/...

He gives and gives... The audience is captivated by the power of the deep rich voice that they hear coming completely unexpected.

EXT. THE BACKSTAGE WINGS - NIGHT

Lou, George Lathan, roadies, security guards and almost everybody backstage look out from the wings in amazement of the voice they hear coming from Frankie on stage.

PANNING THE ASTONISHED LOOKS of thousands of people in the audience, they are moved and greatly inspired. Surprised faces with mouths actually dropping open and eyes filling with tears, not one person is talking, THEY ARE ALL LISTENING. Over this we hear Frankie putting his heart and soul into the song. With only piano accompaniment he is taking the audience on a journey that they will never forget. And, from the look in Johnny's face he will never forget Frankie.

EXT. SIDESTAGE - THE PIANO PLAYER

The piano player looks up into the sky at heavy storm clouds moving in. A sudden gust of wind comes up, sweeping Frankie's sheet music off his piano, across the stage. He keeps going, hoping that Frankie's voice will cover any missing chords.

CONTINUED:

**My screenplay is a true story based on my life. If you are a literary agent or production company listed with the writers Guild, and would like to read my screenplay in its entirety, please contact me at [JstFrankie@aol.com](mailto:JstFrankie@aol.com) or through the "contact Frankie Link" on my web site. The completed screenplay is 138 pages and I'll be happy to respond to your request promptly.**

**Thank you very much for taking the time to read these first 30 pages about my incredible life in my screenplay "Frankie's Dream!"**

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Frankie Bush". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

**Frankie Bush**