

STEPS & STONES



I can't leave home. There's no one to leave.
Home keeps leaving me.



IRIS and HAZEL: Growing Up

Iris (Renée Hackett) and Hazel (Vinessa Antoine) are best friends. They grew up in a small town, Boulevard Crossing, NL, 20 minutes from the abandoned Air Force base. Iris would say a town of used-to-be, sitting in a bank where planes don't fly.

Iris is a singer and guitar player, mainly at the local bar. She paid \$5 to her young friend Jimmy at the arcade for his guitar when she was a teen and has played it ever since. She hangs on her mom's last words "Everyone dies famous in a small town." That's the note her mom Pauline wrote, when she left not for the first time, but for the last time she would see her.

Women inspire Iris; a local girl wins big on Jeopardy, a woman chopper pilot speaks at the base, and Penny has her own bar. But Iris no matter how hard she tries can't seem to be that woman.

Iris hangs on in a town of small moments; plays the Star of the Sea, wins 3rd place, and gets to play weekends as the prize. She comes home every night to Wes. He loves her and is always there.

Iris and HAZEL: Lost Friendship

Iris and Hazel take to the road to play a few gigs. Hazel skips out and takes the bus out west. Never to return to Boulevard Crossing or Iris. Iris longs for something that is hers. All that comes in her wake disappears.

Hazel is different. Hazel always has to go. She doesn't care what hardship is on the other side. She wants out. She escapes an unfit boyfriend at an early age, only to get pregnant by the bar owner Sam. Hazel takes her chances it can't get worse. She abandons Iris.

Iris tries to find Hazel. Her friend Paige shows her a new social media program Facebook, and Iris asks Hazel to be her friend, again, online. She doesn't accept. Lonely takes a whole new turn without Hazel. Iris now has over 400 followers who think her music is pretty good.

In an act of bored rebellion, Iris tells Wes to go home alone one night. She walks by a circus in town and ends up drinking with the men who seem enamoured at first. They give her a free ride on the Ferris wheel then turn on her, taunt her, and burn her guitar in an oil drum as a lark. Iris still on the Ferris wheel is helpless in the sky, enraged. She jumps off the ride, grabs the guitar handle, and storms home.

Iris finally gets closure from her mom; when she finds out she has died after her ashes arrive in an urn in her mailbox with no return address. Iris is forced to reach out to Hazel for support, as she has always been there for her when her mom run away.





Iris and Hazel: Homeowners and Neighbours Again

Iris doesn't play guitar again. She thought singing and playing was her 'thing'. Iris marries Wes and renovates her mom, Pauline's inherited house. She's the first to make it a home. Wes even buys her a new guitar, but she doesn't play. She becomes an office clerk like all the others in her small town.

Hazel moves on and gets a good job, a husband, a fancy car, and a home. She finally comes back to town to care for her dying mother. Iris is swimming at the Harold Hotel, and eyes Hazel on the balcony. Hazel is dressed to the nines. Iris is furious. She reverts to the teenage girl that Hazel abandoned.

The next day Iris walks into her insurance company job and Hazel is her boss. Iris now has to take orders from Hazel. Iris can barely use a computer, let alone fill out insurance claims. She storms out and quits.

Ephram (Andy Jones), Iris's protective neighbour, offers support for both women. His quirky presence is a comfort and annoyance amid their struggles. Ephram looks out for Iris and offers her a job at the post office.

Hazel does return, and encourages Iris to sing again. Participating in an open mic night, she connects with Aggie, a talented young singer who credits Iris as her inspiration. Aggie invites Iris to join her on Idol, allowing Iris to finally embrace her musical passion later in life, while also reconciling with her childhood friend.

Iris and Hazel reconcile as grown women in a small town. Homemakers, married, live two doors apart. It's not their dream, but it's not terrible. They fought as foolish schoolgirls, and in the end, they needed each other. Everyone does die famous in a small town. It's only your best girlfriend who is worth hanging on to. *Steps & Stones* is how two young women grow up and get through, as best friends.

THEME

Dreams aren't always built on success. Dreams when you are young are hope. Iris and Hazel need to know you can make it if you try.

Iris is afraid to leave her small fog-bound town. She has grown up without parents and is tied to her house as a sense of security. Hazel abandons Iris. *Steps & Stones* explores the idea that dreams and ambitions can evolve into different forms of fulfillment. It highlights how past choices shape present realities and how personal growth often comes through when confronting and reconciling one's past.

Iris believes that the burden of youth should fall on adults — she learned this the hard way when her mother abandoned her as a teenager. She can't figure it out, she was an adult as a teenager, working several jobs and getting through school when her mom left. Now as an adult, she is drawn to anything careless to avoid her true feelings. She is humiliated by a group of circus roadies who burn her guitar as a lark while she takes a drunken joy ride on the Ferris wheel. She quits singing and playing guitar. She settles down with Wes who is always there, devoted to her and loves her.

In the end, Iris and Hazel discover that while their youthful dreams may have faded, their friendship remains a vital part of their lives. This film explores themes of acceptance, the impact of past choices, and the significance of enduring friendships.





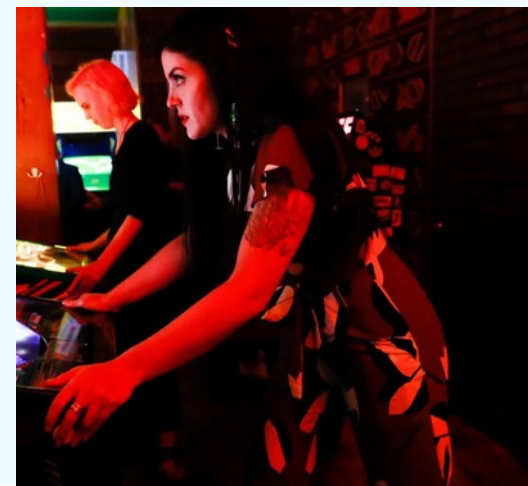
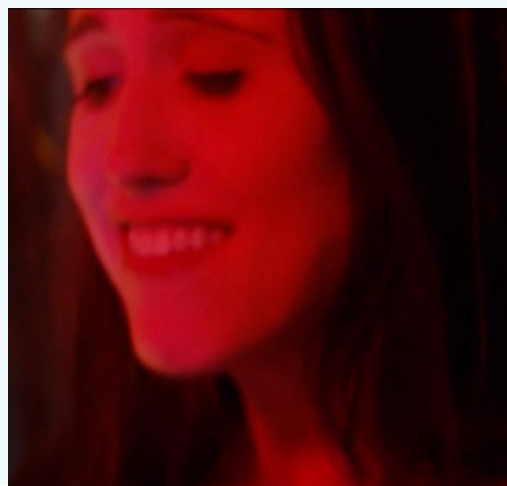


TONE & Mood BOARD

I am fascinated with portraying raw intimate stories of small-town families with a quiet resonance. The feature film, *Steps & Stones*, showcases humour in the face of loneliness and heartbreak, where the character's experience is unique and challenging.

Steps & Stones uses washed-out colours that mirror the necessity in everyday life to find inner strength, even when it seems impossible to carry on through the most difficult of life's challenges.

The palette of Iris and Hazel as young adults is muted and gritty like in the films *Tallulah*, *Uncle Frank*, and *Tender Bar*. When they play in bars, and take the Coachline bus, or go to the circus, the colours are bright reds and purples and saturated with high contrast. There is the chance of bright lights and change in their life.



Rhonda Buckley is a Newfoundland filmmaker with a feminist perspective. She is the writer of the feature films *Steps & Stones*, *InLine*, *Our Joan*, and *Heart Troubles*. An award-winning filmmaker, her short films include *Last Love Letter*, *Surrounded by Water* (FIN, YFF, SJIWFF, FeFF), *Terranova Matadora* (Hot Docs 2016), *Avon Ladies Rural Style*, and *Elfreda*. *Surrounded by Water* was shortlisted for best dramatic short at the Yorkton Film Festival. *Terranova Matadora* screened at Hot Docs in 2016. Rhonda participated in the TIFF Producer Talent Lab with Genie-nominated *Crackie* by Sherry White in 2010. In 2024 Sherry White's film *Blueberry Grunt* was produced by Ruth Lawrence with Rhonda Buckley as associate producer.



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