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A House of Hope Christmas Story

'I never had a best Christmas'

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LOWELL — It gets “pretty crazy” at times at House of Hope, says Margie Anaya. That’s what happens when 18 mothers and 25 children live under a single roof.

Margie is 23, a mother of three children, ages 7, 4 and 3.

She wonders what Christmas will be



like in
the
house,
where
there

are two Christmas trees, one in the living room another in the playroom.

On a morning with plentiful fresh snow, four kids in the playroom poke around in a tub filled with the stuff, shoveled in from outside.

Save for the privacy of her family room, Margie shares things with the other “random people” in the house. The bathroom, kitchen, laundry, fridge, the TV.

“There are 18 families here, and we share everything.”

Margie and her brood have been here six months, since she left a Lawrence apartment she shared with her younger sister for four months.

“We couldn’t get along,” she says. “We clashed. I had nowhere else to go. No family support.”



Margie Anaya, 23, with her children, from left, Nylisha, 7, Reynaldo, 3, and Asshia, 4.

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Margie is one of eight children who spent most of her youth in foster homes.

Now, Margie and her children live in a single room at House of Hope. Each has a bed.

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This is what her Christmases have

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Mom determined to make holidays happy for her kids

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been: "Hurtful. I don't have a bond with my family, or a home for my kids. Christmas should be a family gathering, but it has not been that way. If I had the type of family I wish I had, I wouldn't be here."

This Christmas, she will cook House of Hope's communal holiday meal — pork, rice, green beans, potato salad and a cake.

"It will be for everybody who is here, but half the families will be gone somewhere else that day. So it is for whoever is left."

The man in her life, the father of her youngest child, will be out of prison in February. He cared for her like no one else has, she says. He cares for her other children as if they were his. His family is good to her, she says.

"We talk every day. He's hurt that I am here and because he can't help me."

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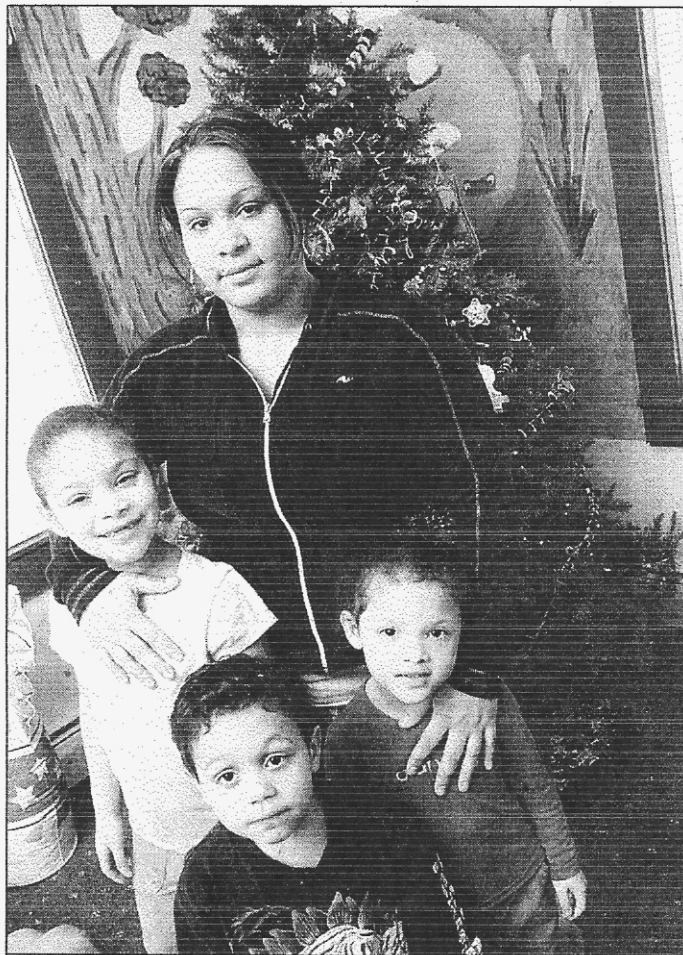
In her youth, Margie ran. Born in New York City's Brooklyn and raised in Lawrence, Margie left school in eighth grade.

"I was in foster home, and I got tired of being mistreated by people who were not my siblings. I was a good girl, a straight-A student. But I was 13, on the streets."

She maintains contact with her birth mother, "but it is not how I want it to be." Her father is deceased.

At 15, Margie was pregnant, scared and ashamed. She does not believe in abortion and was determined to keep her child.

"I didn't know what to do



Margie Anaya with her children, from left, Nylisha, 7, Reynaldo, 3, and Asshia, 4. Anaya says she's never had a happy Christmas, and she's determined to make the holidays happy for her three kids.

SUN/ JON HILL

and didn't want to explain it to people. So I ran to New York."

She returned to Lawrence when the father of her child left her.

"I wish (more fathers) understood that as mothers, we go through a lot. We don't just walk away from these situations that happen day in and day out. They are not stepping up to the plate. There's a lot of mothers in here that don't have support

from the fathers."

How many do?

"I have never seen one."

Last year, an incident at Margie's apartment got her in trouble. She doesn't want to talk about it, other than to say it didn't involve her directly. But it happened in the place where she held the lease.

"I am not a bad person," she says. "I want to move on with my life."

She tries. In September,

she completed a six-week certified nursing assistant (CNA) program at Middlesex Community College. She is working toward her GED there weekdays.

She wants to become a fully certified nurse, working with elderly clients.

"They need as much attention as a child. A lot of elderly are mistreated and don't have family to care for them. It would be good to let them know someone cares about them."

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Asked to recall her best Christmas, Margie gazes outside. Snowflakes flutter to the ground. A plow drives by and throws brownish slush on the white piles in front of the house.

"I never had a best Christmas. I was not with a family. Not with my brothers and sisters. But the best part of Christmas is just being with my children."

Tomorrow, she will be. She has picked out a few gifts for them and donors have supplied more packages to the 18 families at House of Hope, as well as for 75 past clients, according to Marianne Staid, House of Hope's program director.

"All I want is to make it comfortable," says Margie. "I don't care so much about me, but I want to see the kids smile. I want them to be happy."

"This is the hardest life I've lived, right now. I am glad to have a roof over my head and people helping. I am lucky and grateful for that. There are people who sleep on the street."