

Joe the King

US : 1999 : dir. Frank Whaley : : 83 min
 prod: : scr: Frank Whaley : dir.ph.:
[Noah Fleiss](#)
 Val Kilmer; Ethan Hawke; John Leguizamo; Karen Young; Austin Pendleton; Max Ligosh;
 James Costa; Camryn Manheim; Amy Wright

Ref:	Pages	Sources	Stills	Words	Ω	8	€	M	⚡	Copy on VHS	Last Viewed
5712	6	2	21	1,240	3	3	3	-	-	No	unseen

Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide
 2001 review:

"A 14-year old boy's life is one long, losing battle. With a drunken, irresponsible father (Kilmer) and an absentee mother (Young), he's descended into a life of theft and antisocial behaviour. He's not really a bad kid, but there is no relief, and certainly no hope, in sight for him. Actor Whaley's writing-directing debut is a vivid portrait of working class life, but is so dismal it might be retitled "THE 800 BLOWS".
 ** "

Amazon.com website sample customer reviews
 (no attempt has been made to improve their grammar):

"This has got to be one of the great underrated indie movies of 1999, but then Whaley has always been one of the great underrated actors, one of those actors who disappears so completely in a role he doesn't get the same name recognition as the showboats. The spare, powerful screenplay is shot with a powerful visual sense – note the schoolyard and classroom scenes are exactly child eye-level, as opposed to most childhood memory scenes, shot downward from an adult eye-level. Even the light and texture evoke childhood.

The details speak volumes. Little moments – the tampon, the girl at the roller rink – resonate, and the big moments are controlled and done without self-pity or melodrama. The performances director Whaley got from the actors are fantastic. Stars disappear into their roles. The

children... the boys who play Joe, his brother, and the friend (Ray?) show not a sign of self-consciousness. Their dialogue rings so true. This is a surprising and wonderful movie that came out in a year when everyone was asking "what's going on with boys?" This movie says a lot about boys without the heavy-handed style of Hollywood. Odd that none of the reviewers have picked up on that. Unbelievable that this movie was shot in under a month. Director is one to watch."
 – tartcity, Alberta, Canada

" "JOE THE KING", written by actor Frank Whaley ("SWING KIDS", "PULP FICTION") debuted him this time as director in this independent film that takes place in upstate New York (actually filmed on Staten Island). This movie, told about a young boy's struggle for survival in a world that has the odds stacked against him, is a powerful and moving movie. The young actor playing Joe, Noah Fleiss ("JOSH AND S.A.M.") proved to be a very wonderful actor. Other actors included are Val Kilmer, Ethan Hawke, John Leguizamo, Camryn Manheim, Karen Young, and countless others. Despite the not so good reviews and ratings given by film critics, I believe that this movie is a very unique, interesting, and nicely put together movie.

The DVD version is very interesting because of a special feature included in it, which is a commentary made on the film that is narrated by Frank Whaley, his brother Robert Whaley, and snippets [sic] by actor and friend of Whaley's, Ethan Hawke. The whole movie is replayed in

this feature, but this time with their voices | in the background, offering each person's







individual opinion about each and every single scene, as well as behind-the-scenes information. Frank Whaley's witty humour provides for laughs throughout the commentary. All in all, this was a wonderful movie... that just happened to be filmed in my school! "

– Staten Island, N.Y.C.

"This movie is well done, the young actors make it good. Val Kilmer is great as the father but i think i like the sons the best. joe will do what ever it takes to help out his family and so does his brother they dont have what other kids have but they still live the best they can. the director deserves a lot of credit for taking chances, and going against the norm and showing the boys the way BOYS are. i am talking about the underwear scenes, no stupid boxers, but boys in what other directors are afraid to show BRIEFS. it was a good story and i highly recommed this movie " – Michigan (who only uses capitals when SHOUTING)

"This is a sad, sad, story. It is about a boy, who at 14, his life is already shown to go nowhere. The irony in the movie is that no one can save him, no matter how much they try. It seems his fate is all ready decided. The boy makes a few bad decisions and it seems to show that he'll stay on that same path forever. Whaley does a wonderful job with this movie. It's not a story about the kid (Joe) but a story

of many real-life children in the same situation. We see the story through the eyes of Joe (played very well by Noah Fleiss) as he navigates through every day life. The boy has no role model, and his family is the one to blame. His constantly drunk and abusive [*sic*] father (Val Kilmer in perhaps his most touching role ever) offers no support. Neither does his mother, who seems to be in a never-ending state of shock. And then there's his older brother, who constantly ditches him.

We have sympathy for Joe because he's not a bad kid, he's just doing bad things. Others try to influence him such as a school counsellor (Ethan Hawke), and fellow worker (John Leguizamo), but to no avail. Joe seems to be beyond help. Joe is eventually caught after stealing some money. The sad part is he stole the money to pay off one of his father's loans, and buy his mother new records. (The previous records were broken because of his father's rage.) The final scene between boy and father is one of the most moving I've seen in awhile. "

– Eric Pack, Lockbourne, Ohio

No further information currently available. So many words, so little information. Whaley joins a very long line of directors who chose to make their debut feature a warts-and-all portrait of childhood, among them some of the finest films in the archive. But this one travels on the tail of so many factory-made TV movies and domestic "abuse" melodramas that it would require talent indeed to inject any freshness into the alcoholic-dad = kid-gone-wrong paradigm. It also begs the interesting question whether an individual is more than the sum of his deeds: whether Joe, spiralling into street crime and "antisocial behaviour", could reasonably expect society to discount his actions in recognition of his unexpressed potentials. At age 14 the blame discharges partly to his worthless parents, but in a few years he will be held entirely to account for himself, and rightly so.

The stills here illustrate a surprisingly graphic schoolroom spanking scene for a 1990s film, and one suspects that a "body double" must have been employed for the overhead shots. After all, people are being arrested these days simply for viewing naked boys on the internet (it is all lumped under the term "child pornography") and the studio would have been very alert to its own peril. Nothing else is currently known of Noah Fleiss.

See subject index under [ALCOHOLISM / DRUGS](#), [CORPORAL PUNISHMENT](#), [CRIME / DELINQUENCY](#), [SCHOOL](#).



Source for all frame grabs – The Movie and TV Spanking Page (something of a specialist in the field)