

Marie

US : 1985 : dir. Roger Donaldson : Dino de Laurentis : 112 min
 prod: Frank Capra Jr : scr: John Briley : dir.ph.: Chris Menges

Sissy Spacek; Jeff Daniels; Keith Szarabajka; Morgan Freeman; Fred (Dalton) Thompson;
 Don Hood; John Cullum; Lisa Banes; Trey Wilson; Graham Beckel

Ref:	Pages	Sources	Stills	Words	Ω	8	≠	M	♀	Copy on VHS	Last Viewed
5658	2.5	9	1	1,347	3	-	-	-	-	No	<i>unseen</i>



Source: *Speelfilm Encyclopedie*

Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide 2001 review:

"Solid drama about divorcée and mother of three who takes a job in Tennessee state government, then blows the whistle on corruption and finds herself in very hot water. Might be hard to believe if it wasn't true (though knowing the outcome of the case will certainly remove a lot of the suspense). Based on Peter Maas' book; defense attorney Thompson plays himself. Shot in J-D-C Scope. *** "

Speelfilm Encyclopedie review – identical to above

Halliwell's Film Guide review:

"A battered wife leaves her husband and becomes chairman of the Tennessee parole board. An edifying biopic to which the only answer is – so what? From a book by Peter Maas."

Movies on TV and Videocassette 1988-89 review:

"An earnest, unembroidered biopic based on the Peter Maas book about Marie Ragghianti, a woman whose social conscience drove her to crusade against government corruption in Tennessee. After abandoning a degenerating marriage, Marie's life takes on meaning when she's given a job with Tennessee Board of Paroles and Pardons, a position she takes more seriously than the government biggies who hired her would like. **1/2 "

Rating the Movies (1990) review:

“Uplifting drama, based on the true story of Marie Ragghianti, who bravely exposed political corruption in Tennessee’s state government. Spacek stars in the title role and her performance enhances the familiar average-person-vs-big-bureaucracy storyline. The film alternates scenes of critical events with scenes of domesticity to indicate the effect of her courageous actions on her family. Supporting performances are consistently good, with Jeff Daniels, Keith Szarabjka, and Morgan Freeman in key roles. *** ”

The Time Out Film Guide review:

“Marie is a single parent who supports her three kids and invalid mum through college, and braves the medical establishment in diagnosing her youngest child’s illness; then, zooming to speedy prominence as chairwoman of the Tennessee parole board, she single-handedly purges the body politic of the sweaty parasites in its bosom. And it’s all true. Blessed are the pure in heart, but also deadly dull. Spacek is competent as her usual embattled heroine, but Marie could use a few warts, and as hot political exposés go, local corruption in Tennessee seems of less than pressing concern. However, Donaldson directs with fluid, docudramatic urgency, and there are further compensations in the support performances.”

TV Times Film & Video Guide 1995 review:

“The David and Goliath battle between the individual and the state / big business (take your pick) is now a familiar theme in films, so to make another variation on that well-worn theme takes courage. It also takes a good script if the film is to succeed. **"MARIE"** succeeds thanks to a good script and good director (Roger Donaldson) and a strong cast in Sissy Spacek, Jeff Daniels and Morgan Freeman. Spacek is a parole board chairman who, when asked to speed a few parolees through by an aide of the state governor, refuses. She is promptly sacked, but fights her case in court, opening up a big can of corrupt officialdom worms. Spacek as the parole chairman is excellent and Jeff Daniels makes a convincingly smooth aide. Based on a true story, and that adds to the drama, making it a very watchable piece. *** ”

Video Movie Guide 1993 review:

“Sissy Spacek plays real-life heroine Marie Ragghianti, whose courage and honesty brought about the fall of a corrupt administration in Tennessee. Marie is a battered housewife who leaves her cruel husband. Struggling to raise her three children and get an education at the same time, she eventually works her way up to becoming the state’s first female parole board head, and this is where she discovers some ugly truths. Rated "PG-13" for violence and profanity. ***”

Variety Movie Guide 1993 review:

“**"MARIE"** is a powerfully-made political melodrama, the many strengths of which are vitiated only by the relative familiarity of the expose, little-person vs the-establishment framework. Sissy Spacek adds another excellent characterisation to her credits.

Based on a book (*"Marie: A True Story"*) by Peter Maas, tale opens in 1968 with a rough scene in which Spacek and her small kids leave home after she is brutalised by her husband. Five years later, after educating herself further, she gets a job as extradition director and, before long, is appointed chairman of the parole board for the State of Tennessee.

Helping guide her up the twisting stairway of the political system is ostensible friend Jeff Daniels, a close aide of Governor Blanton, who frequently comes to Spacek with overt suggestions that she speed through the parole of certain individuals.

John Briley has set the story down in cogent fashion, and director Donaldson has brought tremendous freshness to its telling. Spacek is right at home with her role while Jeff Daniels is outstanding as her duplicitous associate.”

The Virgin Film Guide review:

“The true story of Marie Ragghianti, a woman who fought corruption in Tennessee, is a powerful film from a book by Peter Maas with a screenplay by Oscar-winner John Briley and a first US assignment for New Zealand director Roger Donaldson. Marie (Sissy Spacek) leaves home in 1968 after being brutalised by her husband. A mother of three, she must struggle as she stays at her mother’s

home, works as a waitress, and puts herself through Vanderbilt University. An old pal, Eddie Sisk (Jeff Daniels), helps her get a job with the state. He's the governor's legal counsel and not without power in the hierarchy, so her job as extradition director is an excellent first rung for her.

It's not long before she rises in the state bureaucracy and becomes a member of the parole board and finally the chairperson of that board. It's not too long before Marie realises that the governor (Don Hood) is using his influence to get some powerful criminals released. The movie could have become a clichéd investigatory picture, as did so many

after Watergate. Director Donaldson keeps matters moving. Spacek is superb and so is Daniels, unaccustomed as he is to the villain's role. But the acting surprise is the work of Fred Thompson, playing himself as the real-life attorney who handled the case for Marie Ragghianti. ***1/2 ”

[no listing in "The Critics' Film Guide", "The Good Film and Video Guide", "The Moving Picture Boy" or "The Sunday Times Guide to Movies on Television"]

Probably of minimal interest to the archive, the identities of the three children are unknown (being, as they are, unmentioned).

A battered wife and single mum who takes control of the state parole board? One could see how some people coming up for parole might think that an unfortunate appointment. So what was the relevance of that opening scene with her husband, if it took place five years before the events of the story? It establishes Spacek's credentials as an Oppressed Woman, that's what. A self-empowered single mother sorting out the corruption men have strewn before her is so on-message it might be laser-guided. And she has a handicapped mother. And she can diagnose the medical condition of her children better than trained (male) doctors. All of this **may** well have been true (though many films claim as much, with a fancy-to-fact ratio of 10-1) but it still reads too conveniently as a gender war polemic, and dovetails with scores of other American titles about courageous mothers battling injustice. The critical consensus is positive however, so perhaps I'm being unfair to it. Morgan Freeman is always worth watching, and there's that nameless pretty brood skulking somewhere in the background.

No subject index categories seem relevant, except possibly **HOSPITALS / SICK CHILDREN**.