

RIVER'S ON THE RUN

WITH THREE NEW FILMS READY TO ROLL, RIVER PHOENIX IS FLOWING ON A SURE AND STEADY COURSE.

Seventeen-year-old River Phoenix is somewhere near Houston, Texas. He's driving through the South in a motorhome with his mother and father and the entire Phoenix tribe (Rainbow, Leaf, Liberty, and Summer). He's just completed a nonstop round of moviemaking and is finally able to kick back, put his feet up, forget about work—and talk to *SPLICE*'s James A. Baggett.

River just wrapped work in Miami and New York on Sidney Lumet's *Running on Empty* (due out later this year), with Judd Hirsch, Christine Lahti, and girlfriend Martha Plimpton (they met while filming *The Mosquito Coast*). In the film, he plays 17-year-old Danny Pope, the musically gifted son of fugitive parents on the run from the FBI.

Right now, River's gearing up for the release of his long-awaited feature film, *A Night in the*

Life of Jimmy Reardon, with Meredith Salenger, Ione Skye, and Ann Magnuson. Right after that—hold your breath—he will star in *Little Nikita* as Jeff, a teenager who is convinced by an FBI agent (Sidney Poitier) that his parents may be KGB agents delivering secrets to the Soviets.

In this first half of the interview, River talks about acting, his music, and the hazards of fame. Be sure not to miss the next *SPLICE*, when River talks about his favorite books, how he develops his movie roles, and working on *Running on Empty*.

What's the most difficult part of working on a film for you?

I don't really see it as a difficult thing. The transitions are always hard, evolving into your character and then abandoning that character when you leave the film.

Those

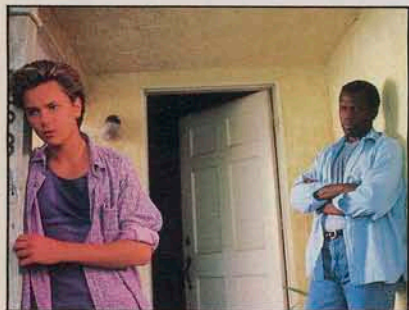


Irresistible
River
in a scene
from *Little
Nikita*.





Len Hekel



River with
Meredith
Salenger in *A
Night in the
Life of Jimmy
Reardon*
(top), in *Little
Nikita*
(above), and
with Martha
Plimpton in a
scene from
*Running On
Empty* (above
right).

[transitions] are hard on my own personal life. That's the hardest concept for me. But, from an actor's point of view, you can only take it so far as a negative environment. It's hard for me to isolate my environment from a character's so that it doesn't spoil it, it doesn't dilute it. You know what I mean? So I have to know the difference between both characters *and* know when to have one going and the other one on pause. I mean, you can't get rid of certain things. You can't change your voice and you can't change your looks that much. You have to use different propulsion, different forms of thrust or power, different things that you draw from. Like in my own life I would react to something totally different than my character because my own memory should be different than my character's memory.

How have your ideas about acting changed since you first started?

They haven't changed as much as formed. My ideas have formed. I've grown into my ideas.

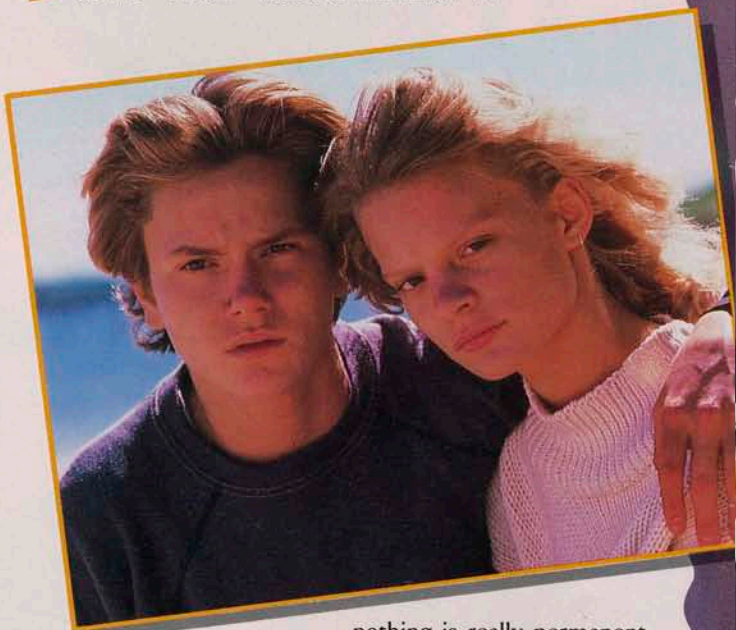
Tell us about your music.

I have played guitar off and on since I was five. I love composing songs. But it's like a hobby, really. I have a little four-track studio and I make little mini-demo tapes. I still think it would be fun to have a garage band, someone to gig around with and have fun with because I love doing it.

How would you describe your music?

I really write for my taste. I'm not writing for the top 40 set. I don't want to extend myself and I don't want to get into it because it's the thing to do, because Don Johnson or Bruce Willis did it.

"IT'S SO EASY TO GET SIDETRACKED AND SO INVOLVED IN THE MIRROR AND THE MAGAZINES..."



What kind of music do you listen to?

I appreciate so many types of music. Lately I've been really into a lot of the older stuff. And lately I've been getting into the 80s kind of new-wave invasion. I take time and I concentrate on a certain kind of music. I really get into it, then I get out of it, and find something else.

I've got all of the U2 albums on CD. I like U2 a lot. I like bands that aren't synthetic, that look like they belong together, that have an organic force. The Police have that. But I like a lot of different music.

What's the best advice anyone has ever given you in terms of your career?

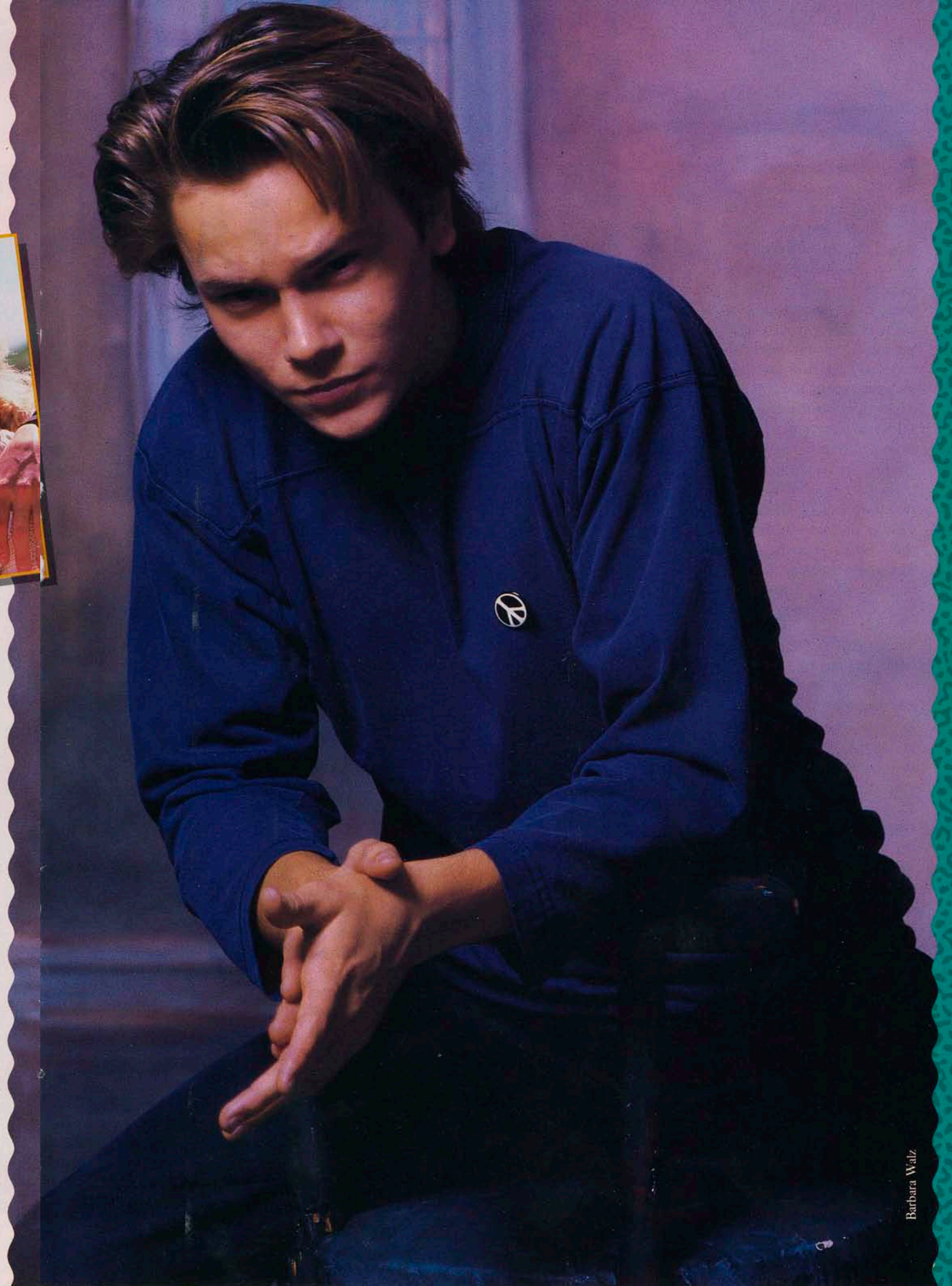
I don't really look at it as a career. There is a part of me that gets into the business mind. It's so stupid for me to really get into that because

nothing is really permanent. In a way, it's a stage that I'm going through.

I guess, as far as advice, I get a lot of input from my parents. I guess a good thing I try to keep in mind is not to get lost. I try not to get caught up in the whole scene and get carried away. It gets intense out there sometimes. It is so easy to get sidetracked and so involved in the mirror and the magazines that it carries you away into some la-la land that isn't really real. It's too bad because I know I am a figure for many people out there who are real people. But many people have this big kind of plastic-synthetic image of me. So I try to at least be real.

As you're becoming more recognizable, do you find it difficult to lead a "normal" life?

You really can't judge a book by its cover. Although not everyone does. A good example: I was in New York,



Barbara Walz

and after rehearsal two photographers came up to me and asked if they could take my picture for their kids or something. When I left the building, they were out there with these big cameras. I said, 'Oh God, what are you doing here?' The reason I don't like to do that kind of thing is because I don't want to be in every magazine. It's not part of the art. They kept trying to get me to pose for these pictures, so I did. And they kept going and going. It wasn't like a back stab, but it was deceitful the way they worked it out. When I went to adjust my glasses, my hand slipped on my nose. I ended up in *People* magazine looking like I was picking my nose or flipping them off or something. It's funny how a picture can hide your intentions. They want glamour, what the hell!

What do you do when you're not working on a project?

Well, right now we're just traveling around the country in a motor home. We like to go camping. I'm beginning to mess around and find different hobbies and get together with friends. I'm really enjoying it. I'm unwinding. I finished filming in Miami, then I went to West Palm Beach. From there, we drove right up the center of Florida, through Louisiana, into Texas. I am going to start a garage band, though. I have a friend who is a drummer and a bassist and we enjoy messing around.

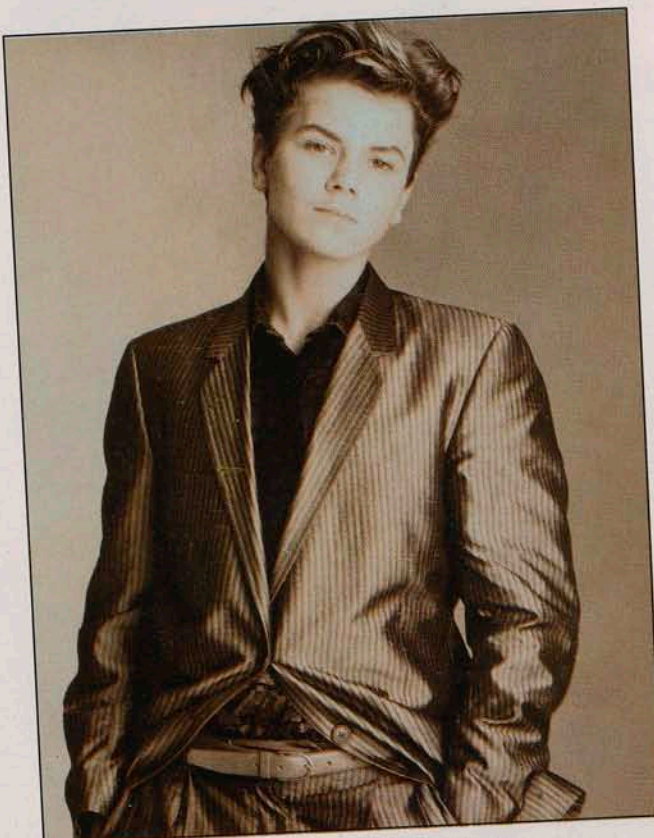
Is it difficult for you to keep friendships going when you travel so much?

It is, but I talk on the phone to friends. Still, it's not the same thing. It's not like hanging out and going to the mall and that stuff. In many ways I'm kind of sheltered. ♦

...to be continued next issue.

WIN THE CLOTHES OFF RIVER'S BACK!

"A NIGHT IN THE LIFE OF JIMMY REARDON" SWEEPSTAKES



Imagine Tom Sawyer with sex appeal. Now picture him in a Chicago suburb in 1962. This is River Phoenix in *A Night in the Life of Jimmy Reardon*. He's got 36 hours to confront life's most awful truth—responsibility. But it's hard to settle accounts when his girlfriend has dumped him, his father has disinherited him, and an older woman has seduced him. It's the wildest night a young man could ever live and love through.

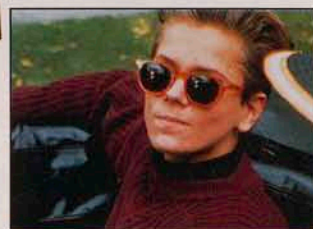
Thanks to 20th Century-Fox, SPLICE has some of the actual articles of clothing and accessories that River wears in the long-awaited *A Night in the Life of Jimmy Reardon*. To be eligible to win any of the incredible souvenirs on this page send your name and full address on a postcard by April 15, 1988 to: SPLICE/ "Jimmy Reardon" Sweepstakes, 10 Columbus Circle, Suite 1300, New York, NY 10019. Enter as many times as you like, but each entry must be mailed separately. Winners will be drawn at random and notified by mail.

Grand Prize Winner will receive the actual shiny, striped designer suit — and a narrow black tie — worn by River Phoenix in the film.



First Prize Winner will receive the black-and-white varsity jacket (made of wool and leather) also worn by River in the film.

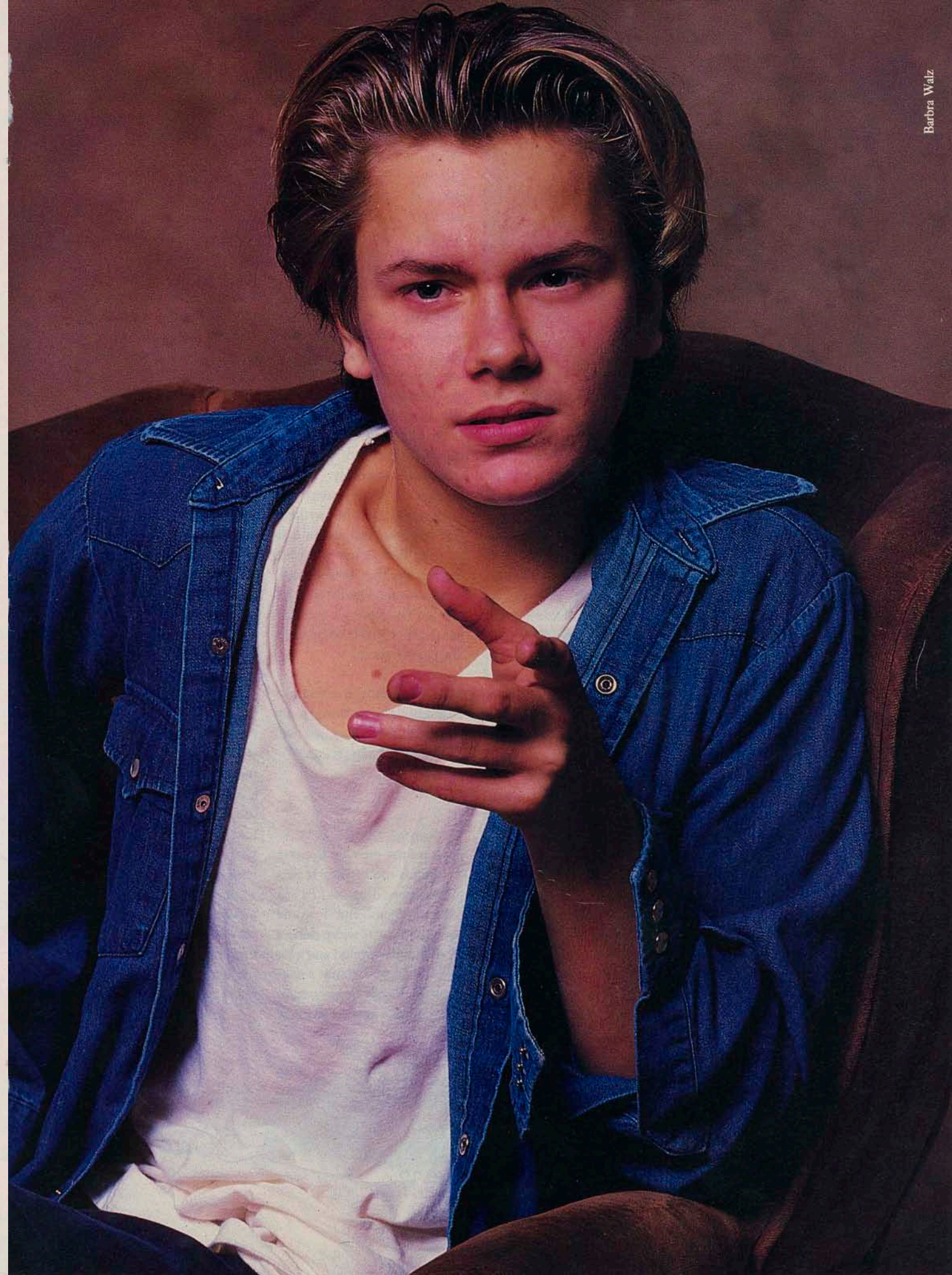
Second Prize Winner will receive the actual ID bracelet worn by River—engraved with the name "Jimmy."



Fourth Prize Winner will receive the black turtleneck and maroon sweater worn by River in the film.

Fifth Prize Winner will receive the actual pair of tortoise-shell sunglasses sported by River in the movie.

Twenty-five Runners-Up will receive copies of the movie novel *A Night in the Life of Jimmy Reardon*, courtesy of Signet Books.



RIVER "TRYING TO FEEL COMFORTABLE" WITH HIS CO-STAR MARTHA PLIMPTON ON THE SET OF THE UPCOMING FILM *RUNNING ON EMPTY*.



What can you tell us about your character in "Running On Empty".

I've been trying to forget all that stuff because I'm traveling all over the place right now. But in the movie, this kid doesn't stay in one place too long. So, he is always adapting to new neighborhoods, new schools, and new friends. He doesn't have an official relationship. He's always kind of alone. They change his hair color and everything about him. He's very off balance and doesn't know who he really is because he is constantly being forced into adapting to new and strange situations.

How much input do you require from a director?

I can't have the same vision as the director because the director knows the script from a different perspective. He's looking through the camera and I'm in front, looking at it from my point of view. You have to adjust to a lot of perspectives. Besides the

character you're working with, the camera is another character. The camera is always there and it has a certain way of expressing itself. It's like a person. It's the audience's perception.

Sidney [Lumet] is so honest. A lot of directors have to manipulate you to get something out of you—or *they* think they do. But Sidney told me where he wanted me to go and I found the proper mood to get myself there.

How is it working opposite a friend like Martha Plimpton?

It was cool working with someone that I had worked with before. I thought it was great. Everyone was so comfortable on the crew. It was like family. But it really doesn't matter. Most of the time I was looking at it through inherited perspective. It wasn't River trying to feel comfortable with Martha. It was my character, Danny, trying to feel comfortable with her character, Lorna

Phillips. It was fun because the audience knows stuff [about my character] that she doesn't know. It was really great. Martha is the kind of actress you want to work with. She's just cool. It's especially cool when you know someone and you get to see them in a different way. It was really a good experience.

Like on the set of *Mosquito Coast*, too. A lot of the movie was cut so much, but she was down there for four weeks. I just like her style. I like the way she acts. She is so good with her part, that it makes it all the more real. There can be disadvantages to knowing someone previously. Sometimes it can work against you because you can't be anything else but who you are to that person. But luckily it didn't happen like that. It went really smooth and I credit it to her acting. You have to see the movie, then you'll know what I'm talking about.

Was there any incident in your own experience—or in the Phoenix family experience—that helped you with your role in "Running On Empty?"

Like I said, I don't like drawing from my own life because it reminds me of me. It gets things messed up and I can't separate them. But I would have to say that we've done a lot of moving around and a lot of changing. There's something to a family that you have to experience in order to know

how to make it look real. I have that advantage.

Do you ever worry about whether or not you're going to leave this planet a better place?

That's a good question. Right now, I do. But it depends on the motive. What is the movie's purpose? It is doing what it does to be outrageous and to get the audience to spend money to go see it? Obviously, all movies want to make money because they put a lot of work into them. And they don't want to *not* make their money back.

I think about me being a part of a movie as a vehicle, about leaving the audience with something, about not robbing them of their emotions and leaving them sitting in the corner. I deal with a part as maybe helping to influence the world in a better way. There's a fine line between living up to your morals and trying to be a good example and trying to leave this planet a better place.

Sometimes I do get really scared that I might jerk away from my original intentions of what I can do once I got into the position that I'm getting into. My whole family's goal, too, is to be part of something basically good, even though you can destroy yourself and your mind and the people around you because you get so involved with your work. I feel very lucky that I can do a job that financially will take care of me and allow me to live so many of my passions. ♦

—James A. Baggett

"My whole family's goal is to be part of something good."

EXCLUSIVE SPLICE INTERVIEW PART TWO

RIVER'S

On The

RUN

With two new movies ready to roll this spring, you'd think 17-year-old River Phoenix would be gearing up for some major publicity. Instead, he's been soaking up the sun with his family in Florida, taking time out from work to survey his career. He knows that a quick rise to the top in Hollywood has risks built into it. First up on his schedule is the long-awaited 1950s coming-of-age adventure A Night in the Life of Jimmy Reardon, with Lone Skye and Meredith Salenger. Also this spring, look for River in Little Nikita, with Lucy Deakins and Sidney Poitier. And later this year, River stars as Danny Pope, the musically gifted son of fugitive parents on the lam from the FBI, in Sidney Lumet's Running On Empty (with Christine Lahti and Judd Hirsch). In the last issue of SPLICE, River talked to James A. Baggett about acting, his music, and the hazards of fame. In this second half of the

interview, River discusses his fears, reading habits, and what it's like to work opposite his girlfriend Martha Plimpton.

Do you ever get scared as an actor?

The only time I really get scared as an actor is when I'm in a movie theater and the people around me are watching a movie that I star in. I saw my movie [*A Night in the Life of Jimmy Reardon*] twice. The movie is good, but it's so hard to watch myself.

What's your favorite thing about being an actor?

Well it's not going to premieres and sitting down in the audience to watch myself! I guess it's filming a movie, developing a character, and working with the director. Really seeing it come a long way. Working with the dailies [a day's worth of unedited film footage]. Just seeing things

come to life. It's an incredible feeling because you are taking something off the page and bringing it to life.

Do you read a lot?

To be honest with you, no. I'm the type that wants to read, but I have very little patience for sitting down. I've got to be really intrigued or really into something. I've been involved in reading scripts lately.

But I really liked *The Prophet* by Kahlil Gibran and I want to read *Catcher in the Rye* again. Did you know my parents named me River after reading Herman Hesse's book *Siddhartha* [about a man in search of the river of truth]?

Have you ever been intimidated by anyone you've worked with?

Well, Harrison Ford [who played River's father in *The Mosquito Coast*] is a very wise

man, very smart, and in many ways brilliant. But he's still a person. With Harrison Ford, I can imagine many people going like 'Harrison Ford! Like oh my God!' I didn't know that he was like some big symbol. It's kind of weird.

On the audition, I was very perceptive. I usually just kind of stand back. I'm very neutral in the beginning. I have to feel the situation out. I'm not intimidated, really. But I'm intimidated by dishonesty. When you know somebody is lying about something and you have to work with them, then you feel uncomfortable. But when you're with somebody who inspires you, it almost rubs off on you. You feel as secure as they are. You're working together. On a movie, you immediately try to gel with everybody. It becomes a driving force.

Continued