

# Stand by Me (1986)



**Directed by** Rob Reiner

**Writing credits** Stephen King (novel) Raynold Gideon (screenplay)

**Genre:** Adventure / Drama / "Coming of Age"

**User Rating:** 7.9/10 (21,190 votes)

**Runtime:** 89 min

**Country:** USA

**Language:** English

*Stand By Me* is a sweet and affecting film about the darkness at the edge of town that must be faced before four young boys can move on to the new challenges that junior high school will bring them.

The story is narrated by the adult Gordie Lachance (based on the young Stephen King and played by Richard Dreyfuss), a successful writer who recalls the summer of 1959 when he was twelve years old in the small Oregon town of Castle Rock. Gordie (Wil Wheaton) and his friends Chris Chambers (River Phoenix), Teddy Duchamp (Corey Feldman), and Vern Tessio (Jerry O'Connell) have their own little tree house where they play cards, smoke cigarettes, and crack jokes. It is the end of the summer and they need a really great adventure. When Vern tells them that he heard his brother talking about seeing the dead body of a boy who's been missing for a few days down by the railroad tracks, they decide to locate the corpse and become heroes in the eyes of the townsfolk.

Gordie is still mourning the death of his older brother and resents the way his parents have treated him as an "invisible boy" since the tragedy. Chris, who's been abused by his father, has been labelled a bad kid by everyone. Teddy's father is in a mental institution, and Vern gets no respect. For each of them, this two-day trek is a test of courage, physical stamina, and friendship.

Their journey takes them down the railroad tracks to a junkyard where they encounter an angry man. While crossing a railroad bridge over a river, they must literally run for their lives when a train appears around the bend. Over a campfire in the woods, Gordie tells a story he's created about a fat boy who takes out his revenge on a town at an annual pie-eating contest. Later in the evening, he breaks down and reveals to Chris how hurt he is by his father's lack of love for him. His friend affirms Gordie's storytelling talent and counsels him to be patient with his dad who doesn't really know him.

When they finally locate the corpse of the missing boy, a group of Castle Rock thugs led by Ace (Kiefer Sutherland) show up to challenge them; they want to take credit for finding the body. Gordie stands by Chris in a show of strength. The two boys — in the presence of fear and a threat to their own lives — come of age together.

There are some great performances from the young cast, many of whom have grown into fully-fledged adult actors today: Wil Wheaton (Gordie), Jerry O'Connell (Vern), Corey Feldman (Teddy)... but the stand-out performance has to be River Phoenix (Chris) as the kid from the rough family, judged on his family's actions rather than his own. It is easy to forget that the four leads were only about twelve years old when *Stand By Me* was shot. Their performances put many by adult actors to shame.

*Stand By Me*, with its Oscar nominated screenplay, is both hard-hitting reality and 50s nostalgia. **It deals with its subject of childhood friendships well, ultimately leaving viewers with the question: does any adult ever have the kind of friendships they had when they were twelve?**

**Stephen King** wrote the novella *The Body*, on which *Stand By Me* is based. It is one of the four stories in the collection *Different Seasons*. It is not a horror story and far from what the public associates with the author's name. The characters are based on real people, and their feelings and dialogue are close to King's personal experiences. The story itself is not. A college roommate told him about an incident involving the search of a dog that had been struck by a train. King said this about his version of the story:

"I wrote a story about these kids who walk down a railroad track to find the body of a boy. I didn't think anybody would be interested in going to look at the body of a dog... I took a lot of things that I had felt when I was a kid and put them into the main character... Never believe a writer when he seems to be offering you autobiography, because we all lie. We all edit and we say, well, this is what happened... So it's mostly a lie."

Stephen King was reportedly deeply moved by the picture, saying it was perhaps the only one to really capture the human flavor of his writing. He sadly noted that his three friends from that time period in his life had all died, unable to see themselves and their impact on the screen.

