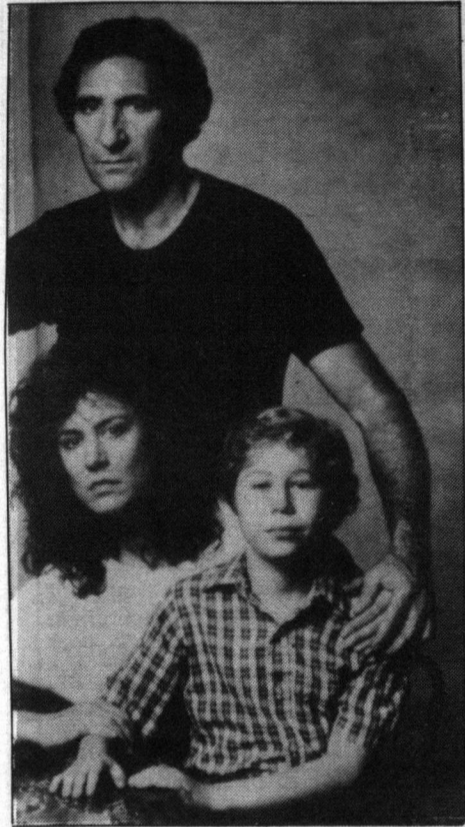


seriously questioned, it was a relief to find this movie to be neither of the two things I expected: (1) a vehicle for the talents of rising young star River Phoenix, or (2) another gritty and inevitably depressing examination of the characters of people still haunted by the Vietnam war. *Running On Empty* succeeds, albeit mostly by virtue of stunning performances from Phoenix (as Danny Pope) and Lahti, but also because it gives an original twist to the Vietnam theme which, although horrifying and fascinating, has really been overdone in the last few years.

Martha Plimpton (last seen in a minor role in *The Mosquito Coast*) is a young actress with considerable talent, and I think that her role as Danny's romantic



Judd Hirsch and family: on the run in *Running On Empty*

interest, Lorna, gives a lot of humour and energy to the movie. Although it seemed that Danny — a sensitive and emotional kid in spite of his unorthodox upbringing — might not be a good match for the sarcastic and abrupt character of Lorna, another strong point of the movie is its realistic feel, for which the actors are largely responsible.

Judging by some of the comments heard on leaving the movie, I suspect that *Running On Empty* will draw a fairly diverse audience. The strong ties of the Pope family will appeal to parents, and the lesser-known but interesting consequences of radical action in the 60's will appeal to those who lived through it, or perhaps were a part of it; it certainly isn't just a movie for young teenage girls obsessed with River Phoenix. Sidney Lumet directs the film, and with movies such as *Dog Day Afternoon*, *Network*, and *The Verdict* to his credit, one can be fairly certain that this movie will have some substance as well.

Despite the somewhat contrived storyline, there are scenes in the movie which really touch base with reality. One part which is charged with emotion and is virtually guaranteed to launch Christine Lahti on the road to stardom is a scene where Annie confronts her father, whom she has not seen in fourteen years due to the family's fugitive status. The obvious conflict between the desire to keep her son close to her, and the need to let him go and develop musical talent at Juilliard in New York City, is too much even for the stately figure that is her millionaire father; as Annie leaves the restaurant, the old man breaks down and brings half the audience to tears as well.

In fact, the emotion of the movie rivals the acting as the best thing about *Running On Empty*. You can cut down the hokey family scenes, and call the story unrealistic; but if you're at least a little bit moved at the end, then you should give the movie a modicum of well-deserved credit.

★ ENTERTAINMENT ★

THIS WEEK AT THE PLANT

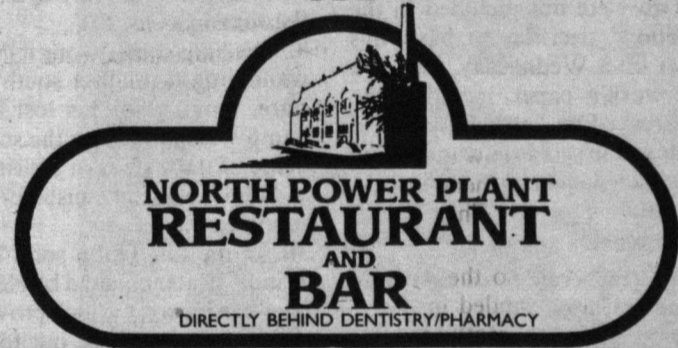


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