



Joe Camp

Joe Camp is the man behind Benji. He wrote, produced and directed the first of the Benji motion pictures, ignoring industry “experts” who said such a story would never make a good movie. The major studios had no interest and advised him not to bother with the film. Camp moved ahead and when the film was completed, his movie was turned down by every major film distributor in Hollywood. Camp and his partner Ed Vanston had to form their own distribution company and release the picture themselves with Camp personally developing the marketing strategy, writing advertising copy and press releases, and supervising each and every booking. In spite of the many obstacles, the first Benji film was a worldwide success, leading to many more movies and television programs.

Camp has written (or co-written), produced and directed six theatrical motion pictures cumulatively grossing well over the equivalent of \$600 million in today’s dollars, making him one of the most successful independent filmmakers of all time. He has also written or co-written and directed and/or produced four network television specials and a network series; and his book, *Benji & Me* (First Printing entitled *Underdog*) is required reading in many film schools across the country. Written to inspire those who might stop short of their potential, the book chronicles the difficulties experienced in trying to get that first movie off the ground and instills the faith that anyone can make a difference in this world, not only for themselves, but for others as well.

Joe spends much of his time working with the Piney Woods Country Life School in Mississippi. This historically black boarding school educates mostly high-risk kids from families below the poverty level, yet usually sends 100% of its graduates to college, often on full scholarship and financial aid. With Joe’s help, many Piney Woods graduates are attending some of the best colleges and universities in the country, such as Princeton, Harvard, Smith, Williams, Middlebury, Northwestern, Amherst, Emory and Spelman. “Of all we’ve done,” says Camp, “we’re most proud of the things we’ve accomplished for these kids. And the rewards are the greatest.”

Camp introduced the new Benji to the nation after embarking upon a national search in animal shelters across the country. The American Humane Association had announced that the original Benji’s rescue from a shelter had caused more than one million adoptions. Media around the country, local and network, covered the new search and the ultimate selection of a new Benji generating more than 120,000,000 media exposures for the efforts of shelters and rescue groups all across the nation.

Over the years, Camp has been the subject of television, radio and newspaper interviews in more than 100 U.S. cities and several of the international capitals of the world. He has appeared on “Good Morning America,” “Prime Time Thursday,” “The Today Show,” various awards shows, “Entertainment Tonight,” “PM Magazine,” various syndicated shows and has been the subject of articles in numerous magazines, and most nationally syndicated entertainment columns, but today he is still in awe of his own success. “Inside, I’m still a kid sitting in a dark theater in Little Rock, Arkansas, watching Disney’s ‘Song of the South’ with happy tears rolling down my cheeks,” says Camp. “To be able to bring that feeling to others is very special.”