

★ Family Values: Kurt, Courtney & Frances Bean

Michael Azerrad

Guzman, Photographer

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“Extraordinary people doing a most ordinary thing” is how rock journalist Michael Azerrad sums up the images in Guzman’s *Family Values*. Drawn from a fall 1992 photo session for *Spin* magazine, this collection captures grunge rock legends Kurt Cobain and Courtney Love in an unusual milieu: hanging out at home with their one-month-old baby Frances Bean.

At the time of the shoot, Cobain was overwhelmed by newfound stardom as his band Nirvana ruled the charts, and he and Love had gained notoriety for their drug-fueled lifestyles. Responding to critics who claimed the couple was the very opposite of American “family values,” the photographs were intended to show that they could be loving, responsible parents.

Guzman combines studied portraits and appealing offhand moments. The family lounges in their bedroom and living room, the parents exhibiting looks of exhaustion and love. Notoriously camera-shy, Cobain opens up whenever he shares the frame with Frances Bean, while Love pokes fun at the naysayers, displaying the words “family values” in magic marker across her belly. Interspersed with these intimate visuals are images from around the house, including charming bric-a-brac like Cobain’s collection of toy monkeys. A shot of crumpled-up clothes spilling out of bedroom drawers and onto the floor hints at the chaos in the family’s lives that lingers outside the confines of the shoot.

The overall mood is contemplative instead of brash, chilled out instead of strung out. Azerrad’s introduction contextualizes the sessions, while Guzman’s afterword is a glimpse at what it’s like to handle a celebrity shoot. While a sense of loss hangs over the photography—Cobain committed suicide a few short years later, and Love continued to battle her addictions—*Family Values* is a compelling snapshot of a peaceful moment in a rock star life.

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