

# The Secret Life of Bees (PG)

Nine members enjoyed the tender, sentimental but at times difficult to watch Secret Life of Bees. Based on the book of the same name by Sue Monk Kidd, the low budget movie has an ensemble cast of music stars and known actors, all of whom took low rates to ensure that the film got made. Adapted by the writer director Gina Price-Bythewood, the film stars a young Dakota Fanning as Lily Owens, who - as a four year old — accidentally shot and killed her mother. As a fourteen year old, celebrating the signing of the Civil Rights Act in 1964, she leaves her home with Rosaleen, an African American maid, fleeing from an abusive father and racial tensions in her South Carolina home town.

They end up in Tiburon, a small town identified on trinkets kept by her mother, and find their way to the home of local beekeepers the Boatwright sisters. August Boatwright (the superb Queen Latifah), her sisters June (Alicia Keys) and May (Sophie Okonedo), take in Lily and Rosaleen despite Lily's obvious lies. What follows is a tender revealing of the role August played in Lily's mother's (Mary) life, the difficulties of being African American during the sixties, issues of mental health, and the power of faith. At the end of the film, Lily's father finds her but, confronted by August, June and Rosaleen, and met with refusal from Lily, reluctantly decides that Lily is better off with the Boatwrights.

The film is beautifully shot, well acted, and all the main characters — both female and male — fleshed out nicely, including T-Ray (Lily's father) played by Paul Bettany, Neil (June's boy friend) played by Nate Parker, and Zach (August's assistant and Lily's teenage love interest) played by Tristan Wilds. The incidents of racism in the film are difficult to watch but also feel slightly underplayed, in that we felt that the real situations would have been much worse than those portrayed.

Ultimately, an uplifting film, despite the darker moments.