

## **Seabiscuit**

Rated PG-13

*“Seabiscuit”* is a wonderful movie about true life events that inspired our country at one of its lowest points. The film is based on a best selling book by Laura Hillenbrand and tells the story of Seabiscuit: a race horse that overcame incredible odds to triumph over the unbeatable horse, War Admiral. However, this story is much more than a fancy yarn about a horse. Seabiscuit came to symbolize the average American in the 1930's - people who were down on their luck due to the Great Depression and just needed a chance to prove themselves.

Like the majority of Americans at that time, the main characters all experience poignant tragedies. Charles Howard, played by Jeff Bridges, struggles with the death of his son and breakup of his marriage to later pour his energies into horse racing. He hires a misfit trainer, Tom Smith (played by Chris Cooper), who talks him into buying Seabiscuit, a sorry looking horse who looks like he couldn't outrun my pet cat, Arthur. Charles is then convinced to let “Red” (played by Toby Maguire) be his jockey. Red is a hardened young man, plagued by feelings of abandonment, yet he has a natural gift with horses. Forced to fend for himself since age 17, he is a good jockey, but his wild temperament finds him in the boxing ring on more than one occasion and his hostilities grow. Charles and Tom show great compassion towards Red, and he learns that the world is not such a bad place. He also learns true friendship.

Like Red, Seabiscuit once hated the world. He was gentle by nature and enjoyed eating and sleeping more than racing, so he was considered to be lazy. He was physically beaten into racing, but when his owner decided Seabiscuit was a failure he used the horse for training purposes. Seabiscuit's role was to lose against other horses so as to instill confidence in them. It was under Tom's careful training and nurturing that Seabiscuit began to be known as a race horse. When the world found out about him, Seabiscuit became a celebrity and in 1938 he was the number one newsmaker, ahead of Franklin D. Roosevelt and Adolf Hitler.

The role of Tom Smith is especially pivotal in that he understands that every horse - like every person - has a purpose, even if it is not to be a race horse or a show pony. This philosophy is what allows Seabiscuit to become a winner, and Red to tame his own demons. One of the greatest lessons of the movie comes when Tom states, “You don't just shoot somebody when he gets beat up a little, do you?” In our disposable world, this message is as important now as it was then. Far too often we “throw out” or discount someone's life because something minor or little has gone awry. From Tom we learn that there is value in all things.

Despite the human frailties in each of the main characters (including Seabiscuit), each portrayed a tenderness and gentleness that enabled them to look for the best in others. They did not let outside appearances overshadow their heart and passion. In a spiritual sense, they had faith in the goodness of others and did not give up on each other when they were down. Instead, in their heart they held on to the possibility that the other could

succeed. They were not fair-weather friends. The movie calls the viewer to run races worth running, to believe in people's hearts not their appearances, and to never give up on God's plan for you.

It is important to remember that the events depicted in this movie took place after the Great Depression and at the beginning of World War II when our nation was filled with fear, doubt, and discouragement. Folks did not have "extra" pride and Seabiscuit galloped into the hearts and souls of Americans to show them that good things can come to those who believe. It did for the horse and it did for America.

*By Natalie and Curt Levang*