

Movie Review: Sean McNamara's *Soul Surfer*, starring Annasophia Robb, Dennis Quaid, Helen Hunt, Kevin Sorbo, Lorraine Nicholson and Carrie Underwood (video trailer included)

April 7, 2011 at 7:00 am by Tony Allen

It's probably impossible to walk away from [Sean McNamara's *Soul Surfer*](#) without feeling inspired. Based on the true story of [Bethany Hamilton](#) (*Charlie and the Chocolate Factory's* [Annasophia Robb](#)), a brave girl who overcame the loss of her left arm in a shark attack at the age of 13 to go on to become a professional surfer, the film is touching to say the least. As a critic who utterly despises anything that is overly-sentimental, I must say, this film caused me to squeeze out a few tears.

Plain and simple, if you're a fan of touching, feel-good stories, this is the film for you. If you're not, it's still a strong enough movie to keep you sucked in.

Soul Surfer does a quality job of depicting a dramatic story without being corny, which seems to be no easy task for Hollywood. Having a strong cast — including [Dennis Quaid](#), [Helen Hunt](#), [Kevin Sorbo](#) (TV's *Hercules*) and country star [Carrie Underwood](#) in her film debut — doesn't hurt either.

Soul Surfer wastes little time introducing the viewer to the characters before jumping right into surf competition footage. As the film begins, Hamilton and her best friend Alana Blanchard ([Lorraine Nicholson](#), daughter of Jack Nicholson) are getting a taste of what being a sponsored surfer is like as they sort through a rack of free bathing suits. The two friends couldn't be happier, looking forward to their future in the sport. But then Hamilton is suddenly (and I mean suddenly) attacked by a tiger shark during a morning surfing session with her brother Noah ([Ross Thomas](#)), Alana and Alana's father Holt (Kevin Sorbo).

Hamilton amazes everyone with her calmness throughout the ordeal, as she remains in a state of shock on her way to the hospital. Coincidentally, Hamilton's father (Dennis Quaid) is just about to go under the knife for knee surgery when the doctor — who is also a family friend — tells him that his daughter just



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arrived at that very hospital. (Check out my interview with Bethany Hamilton for more on the real-world story behind the movie.)

When she gets home from the hospital, Hamilton begins to realize how difficult it will be just to perform everyday tasks (doing her hair, cutting fruit, etc.). Family and friends are blown away by her quick recovery following the life-threatening ordeal, and by her drive to try and surf again.



Driven by her inner desire for the sport and the love and support of her friends and family, Hamilton figures out a way to surf with one arm, in the process amazing everyone once again. She has her ups and downs throughout the film, but by the end, she is still able to do what she loves most: surf. In addition, her brave story spread like wildfire and she soon became a highly-inspirational figure to people all over the world.

The cinematography in *Soul Surfer* looks magnificent on the big screen. Director Sean McNamara utilizes underwater cams and all sorts of amazing angles to shoot the action, expertly capturing life upon the waves. In particular, watch for the competition scenes between Hamilton and her bitter rival, Malina Birch (Sonya Balmores), which are dramatic and well done. The beach vibe is always present and the visuals add a lot to the film, making it worth seeing on the big screen.

In addition to the excellent photography, Annasophia Robb's portrayal of Bethany Hamilton is what makes the film work. At times, I almost forgot that I was watching an actress play a character, as Robb does a good job handling the landlocked dramatic scenes as well as coming across as a very believable, confident surfer chic. (Stick around during the closing credits for footage of the real Bethany Hamilton surfing and enjoying life with friends and family.)

Fueled by a solid cast, great visuals and an amazing, feel-good story, *Soul Surfer* is an empowering film that does what it sets out to do: inspire people. Viewers will walk away glassy-eyed.