

Convinced 'Conviction' is the real deal



Conviction

Rated R

4 bagels out of 5

By Howie Nave

When I look back on this year in movies (my Best of/Worst of comes out in late December) I know already that some of my favs were based on true stories or were bio pics. Maybe because true life trumps fiction or you know the characters are real people. It's amazing the human spirit can overcome practically any adversity.

Hilary Swank has starred in real life based movies such as "Amelia," "Million Dollar Baby," "Iron Jawed Angels," "Boys Don't Cry," "Cries Unheard: The Donna Yaklich Story" and now "Conviction" where Swank again turns in a powerful performance. It's a little predictable knowing the eventual outcome, but like most things, the journey is usually the best part.

Swank virtually channels Betty Anne Waters, a high school dropout from Ayer, Mass., who grew up in a series of foster homes with no stability other than that of her older brother,

Kenny, (played convincingly by Sam Rockwell). Her only semblance of family life is her brother, so when he's convicted of a 1983 murder Betty sets out on a journey to do anything to prove him innocent. She believes that he's been wrongfully accused of murder. It doesn't help that a few corrupt individuals bent on making sure he never sees the light of day divvy small-town justice out. Without giving too much away, the murder victim was responsible in part for Kenny's predicament in life so it seemed only natural that Kenny would be the prime suspect.



Hilary Swank and Sam Rockwell in "Conviction".

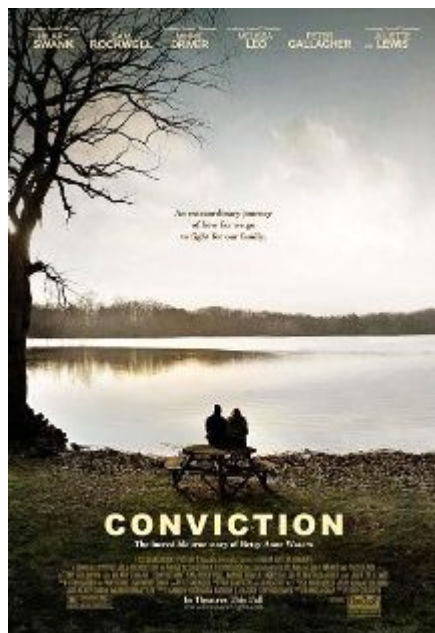
It's ironic that Betty's drive to lift herself out of her predicament happens when her brother is incarcerated and her journey starts from getting her GED to eventually getting through law school where she meets her best friend and colleague Abra Rice (Minnie Driver) that things start to rev up in a dramatic fashion. Another driving force during this time is the introduction of attorney Barry Scheck (Peter Gallagher).

The timing looking back is incredible, and had DNA not found its way into the national spotlight, things would have been dramatically different. Rockwell captures the troubled personality Kenny; revealing his hotheaded attitude that only strengthens the case for the prosecution. He's no angel. That's evident by crooked Officer Nancy Taylor (played by

Melissa Leo) bent on putting him away.

There's a lot of white trash here and it's hard at times not to pigeonhole people, even Betty. But outward appearances can be deceiving and soon you find yourself believing you can't just judge everyone by one broad stroke. Swank's passion in her character is Oscar worthy and she stops at nothing and lets no one misdirect here even when the roadblocks placed in front of her at times are insurmountable.

The cast of "Conviction" is outstanding and you know you're watching a good movie when you forget that the actors are playing real people; some you loathe and have to step back emotionally knowing that they are just acting. Case in point: Juliette Lewis as a low life, sub-human who is just evil and you want to just yell obscenities at her on the screen but then that wouldn't be a good thing to do now would it?



I walked away from this movie wondering why can't we have more lawyers like Betty? Granted she became one with only one purpose in mind, but to know you're right and can't be denied is pretty powerful stuff. Director Tony Goldwyn uses his cast wisely balancing the emotions created and building the tension to the point of boiling over and then slowly pulling back to let a few cooler minds prevail and in the process taking us along for the ride that is well worth the price.

"Conviction" is rated R for language and some violent images and clocks in at 1 hour and 45 minutes.

Howie Nave is host/emcee/manager of The Improv at Harveys. You can hear him Monday-Friday 6 to 10am on KRLT FM-93.9.