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**MOVIES** BY LOIS WADSWORTH

Hope Davis gets a fast ride on  
Campbell Scott's bicycle, down a  
beautiful, fall, tree-lined road.



MANHATTAN PICTURES, 2003

**Everyday Rhythms**

Worth seeing twice.

**THE SECRET LIVES OF DENTISTS:**

Directed by Alan Rudolph. Written by Craig Lucas, based on the novella by Jane Smiley. Produced by Campbell Scott, George VanBuskirk. Executive producers, David Newman, Jonathan Filley. Cinematography, Florian Ballhaus. Production design, Ted Glass. Editor, Andy Keir. Costumes, Amy Wescott. Music composer, Gary Demichele. Music supervisor, Jonathan McHugh. Starring Campbell Scott, Hope Davis and Denis Leary. With Robin Tunney, Gianna Beleno, Cassidy Hinkle, Lydia Jordan, Jon Patrick Walker, Kevin Carroll and Kate Clinton. Manhattan Pictures, 2003. R. 104 minutes.

ing evidence of what he imagines to be Dana's infidelity. Then, like the Tom Cruise character in *Eyes Wide Shut* who fantasizes Nicole Kidman's character having sex with the naval officer, Dave becomes possessed by his thoughts and projects images of Dana having wild sex with various men and women.

I have a problem with film reviewers who dismiss movies about home and family as if domestic life were extraneous to the "real" life of the characters. For example, Peter Keogh of the *Boston Phoenix* writes, "Such banalities as the flu and infidelity assail them," of the characters in Alan Rudolph's wonderful film, *The Secret Lives of Dentists*. These particular "banalities" create the tension that fuels this slight, comic vehicle about family life and marriage.

Here's how it works. David Hurst (Campbell Scott) and Dana Hurst (Hope Davis) are dentists who share a practice. They have been married for 10 years and have three daughters. The eldest, Lizzie (Gianna Beleno), is the good girl. Stephanie (Lydia Jordan), the middle child, needs more attention than she gets. Leah (Cassidy Hinkle) is the toddler, who demands total attention from her dad and slaps at her mother.

When things are not great between Dana and Dave, Leah embodies the needs of every other member of the family to be carried around by a strong, loving and protective figure. Hinkle, this very young child actor, has the best and funniest role in the film as the kid who endlessly calls from her crib: "Dad. Dad. Dave." Engaged in a relentless battle of will Dave can only lose, Leah resolutely clings to dad for all she's worth, refusing to be put down to play or to sleep. During the flu that strikes all five family members in five successive days, Dave mentions casually to Dana that Leah has become part of his body. With a little humming, sighing sound, limp Leah laces her arms around Daddy's neck and nuzzles into his body, looking like a plump, warm appendage of sorts. The sight gags are great, and Scott consistently underplays the scenes with the children, creating a seamless, loving presence.

However, Dave becomes testy after see-

*The Secret Lives of Dentists* is a delicious human story to which Hope Davis and Campbell Scott bring their best, most unsentimental work. I loved the musical score as well as the pop selections.

A surly, unsatisfied patient called Slater (Denis Leary) provides comic relief as Dave's imaginary alter ego, who says what Dave is really thinking. Leary plays this comic character for laughs, but in a serious moment Slater asks Dave why he is so committed to this whole wife and kids thing. Marriage can't work, he says. You know that, Dave. But Slater has churned up something more important now, and Dave thinks about his question and gives the perfect answer, which I will not reveal.

I know how much parents sacrifice to raise children, and this surprisingly sweet movie honors intangible but real dreams that don't get lived out. Dana and David hack their way through the tangled undergrowth that represents 10 years of lapsed pruning and daily maintenance. *The Secret Lives of Dentists* is a delicious human story to which Hope Davis and Campbell Scott bring their best, most unsentimental work. I loved the musical score as well as the pop selections.

The film opens at the Bijou on Friday, Oct. 31 with my very highest recommendations. Catch it this weekend, so maybe you will get a second chance to see it on the big screen.

EW

Author Al Sandine's  
**"Plundertown USA:  
Coos Bay Enters  
the Global  
Economy"**

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