

“The Florida Project”

By Helen Lutz

A couple of years ago my husband and I had the pleasure of joining our daughter’s family in Disney World. Seeing Disney World, definitely a magical place, through our grandson’s eyes was extra special. We are so blessed.



“The Florida Project” tells the story of the lives of several children living in the shadows of the magical Disney World complex. Some of us are fortunate enough to find accommodations in the Disney resorts – the Grand Floridian at Christmas with the walk-in gingerbread house in the lobby is amazing. However, some children, like little six year old Moonee (Brooklyn Prince), live their lives in a lavender and pink castle budget motel outside the resort. Some tourists stay for a week seeing Disney World on a budget while others like Moonee and her 20 year old something mother Halley (Bria Vinaite) are pretty much full time residents at the rate of \$35 a night.

Kids see the world differently than adults – and that’s a good thing. It’s summer vacation and Moonee isn’t dreaming about a visit to the resort, instead she’s enjoying running wild with her little friends Scooty (Christopher Rivera) and Jancy (Valeria Cotto). From sun up to sun down they race through parking lots, have spitting contests on cars and beg tourists to buy them ice cream cones. Playing here, there and everywhere, the children are free and easy – and unsupervised. Yes, there are alligators around and should Moonee ever catch one for a pet, she’ll name it Anne, never giving a thought to it catching her. Vacant buildings are filled with fun things to do, how about starting a fire in the fireplace; what harm can it do?

On the other hand Halley struggles to just get by day-by-day. She’s fortunate that Scooty’s mom, Ashley (Mela Murder) works as a waitress in a local diner; Ashley ‘sneaks’ food out the back door for Moonee and her mom. While scrounging food and ice cream are fun pastimes for Moonee, just finding rent money becomes more and more difficult and dangerous for Halley.

The gatekeeper of the purple palace is Bobby, played by Willem Dafoe. As the motel manager he requires rent be paid, paints the place, does his best to make repairs all while keeping a watchful eye on the little ones – predators are not welcome. Neither are the police or child protective services, but they also have a way of showing up, much to Halley’s dismay.

“The Florida Project” paints the world in much different colors than the ones I know. We see those with so much less who struggle to live every day. Have their poor choices placed them in the dire positions in which they find themselves? Mostly yes, and we see the effects that their poor choices have on the innocent little ones – it’s pretty bad when you can’t even work as a stripper anymore.

The story line for this film is intriguing as it is told mainly through the eyes of little Moonee. Young Brooklyn Prince does an amazing job of portraying the precocious six year old. Director Sean Baker never sinks to preaching at us or politicizing Halley’s situation, but let’s us dwell on the differences between their world and ours. The movie is not mainstream and isn’t for everyone, but has its own charm. On a scale of one to four Hart Beats ... I give “The Florida Project” TWO 1/2 HARTS. The ending will steal your Hart.