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On Golden Pond
Henry Fonda,
Katherine Hepburn
Cinema World

Heartwarming.

What a horrible term. It's used to describe a child's love for a mongrel, or a particularly nice "get well soon" card. Or an episode of "The Waltons".

Unfortunately, it is also the most precise expression to describe Fonda and Hepburn's film triumph, a movie of such sincerity and sensitivity it leaves the audience emotionally drained, yet newly-filled at the same time.

Fonda is Norman, a gruff 80-year-old retired professor who dwells on his own mortality. Hepburn is his wife Ethel, a spirited dynamo who exudes warmth wherever she goes. The couple return to their cabin on Golden Pond for the 48th summer, which Norman assures us will be his last.

They are joined by their daughter Chelsea (Jane Fonda), whose relationship with her father is a constant battle. When she and her lover (Dabney Coleman) leave for a month in Europe, they leave Coleman's 13-year-old son Billy Ray (Doug McKeon) with her parents.

Between adolescent outbursts and a few fishing trips, Billy Ray tames the ferocious

old man, and Norman gives the "cool kid" a lesson about the real world.

The story line could easily lead to a mushy recital of middle-aged sentiment, but it is saved by an excellent script, exceptional acting performances by Hepburn and the elder Fonda and some fine cinematography.

It's sometimes hard to believe that "On Golden Pond" was a stage play before it was adapted for the screen. Hepburn and Fonda's lines are so perfect for their personalities we tend to forget we are watching two actors — the script fits that perfectly.

Fonda is superb as the crotchety old grump whose fears about aging are translated into clever barbs that bite into those around him. This performance is bound to give Fonda the Oscar for Best Actor, his first for a specific film (He won one last year for "contributions to the art of motion pictures".)

Fonda's performance is surpassed only by Hepburn. The script lets her fully develop her spunky screen personality as she creates a believable, lovable character.

Her constant repartee with Fonda is especially wonderful. Calling him an "old poop" among other terms of endear-

ment, she is the only one who can successfully joust with Norman on his own turf. She understands her husband as only one who has lived with another for half a century can. She calls his bluffs, and helps him through trials of old age.

Another of the stars of the film never sets foot before the camera. Cinematographer Billy Williams stuns us with shot after shot of Golden Pond, with stirring images of beautiful composition and simplicity. Although director Mark Rydell depends on these shots, and Dave Grusin's excellent soundtrack, to develop the atmosphere a little more than he needs to, no one minds. The images, especially when meshed with the music, are quite enjoyable, and the extra emphasis is just a little added attraction, like an extra dab of ice cream on a cone.

Jane Fonda, who returns from Europe to waltz into The Kid's friendly relationship with her father, is also good. Although she doesn't get to develop her character as much as allow others to develop it for her, she finally finds her place in the family, completing the circle of the family and making the experience of Golden Pond a single, unified quest for love and understanding in the face of the painful experience of aging.

"On Golden Pond" is an excellent treatment of aging and the American family. The relationships and emotions are honest and believable, the language clever and realistic, and the personalities well-developed. It should be seen by anyone who is related to an old person or plans to be one someday. It treats the subject of aging with a warmth and optimism that's really... well, heartwarming. **by matt meyer**

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