

## ULEE'S GOLD \_\_ 10/10

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### *Celebration of the quiet American hero*

Written by Victor Nunez

Directed by Victor Nunez

Peter Fonda ...	Ulysses 'Ulee' Jackson
Patricia Richardson ...	Connie Hope
Christine Dunford ...	Helen Jackson
Tom Wood ...	Jimmy Jackson
Jessica Biel ...	Casey Jackson
Vanessa Zima ...	Penny Jackson
Steven Flynn ...	Eddie Flowers
Dewey Weber ...	Ferris Dooley
J. Kenneth Campbell ...	Sheriff Bill Floyd

It's hard for me to watch Ulee's Gold without a couple of big juicy tears welling up ten minutes into the film. That's approximately when Ulee Jackson (Peter Fonda), working in his garage, is drawn into a reluctant conversation with his seven-something granddaughter Penny (Vanessa Zima) about the men in his platoon in Vietnam, none of whom survived.

"Those were good guys, Penny."

"It's so sad," she says.

"You like sad?"

"No, but sometimes inside it makes you quiet."

That scene and this poignant statement by an adorable little girl give you the essence of the movie: the bittersweet, calm dignity of an honest man's living struggle.

In fifteen minutes through his interactions with people in town and briefly at home, the extraordinarily ordinary person of Ulysses Jackson is established:

He's a beekeeper, pursues the excellence of Tupelo honey, keeps things to himself, has lost his wife, is taking care of his two granddaughters (the teen is difficult), their father is in prison for robbery, their mother abandoned them, Ulee is physically beatup, and his honey harvest is due.

Shortly thereafter Ulee gets a call from his son Jimmy (Tom Wood) insisting Ulee must visit him *now*. Jimmy's wife Helen (Christine Dunford) has told Jimmy's former cohorts in crime, Eddie Flowers (Steven Flynn) and Ferris Dooley (Dewey Weber), that Jimmy hid some money from the heist. They have her jacked up on roofies (Rohypnol), held hostage.

Jimmy pleads with Ulee to retrieve Helen for purely family-value reasons. That's the key decision in the movie, because you see Ulee—he deplores Helen for running out on her daughters—weighing all the consequences. He does the hardest thing he's ever done by doing the right thing.

In an act of immense courage, with a honey crop to harvest, he travels several more hours the next day to rescue Helen. What happens subsequently bears out his worst fears.

Yet through these difficulties the family comes together, Ulee begins to open up to another woman Connie Hope (!) (Patricia Richardson), and each of the Jackson women experience growth or redemption. The scene where Ulee and Connie share tender, illuminating conversation over tea in the kitchen is one of my most memorable moments in cinema.

Peter Fonda won a Golden Globe for his performance as Ulee Jackson. The younger actresses got a couple of nominations and awards for lesser known ratings orgs, and Victor Nunez got nods in several independent film venues for director and writer. True to the prizes, Fonda does make the film.

But I don't think the critics in general have recognized what most fundamentally makes this movie stand out. It's what Ayn Rand would call the hallmark of romantic fiction: a sterling vision of how humans "might and ought to be."

What you see is a freedom-loving man of reason with the highest dedication to his work in the face of government burdens, environmental vagaries, rampant emotionalism, family tragedy, and threats of criminal violence. The resolution is fully satisfying.

A must-see inspirational classic for everyone in the family.