

### **Synopsis**

“In his final role, Henry Fonda plays Norman Thayer, a prickly retired professor who visits his Maine summer home with his loving wife Ethel (Hepburn). Soon they are joined by their daughter Chelsea (Jane Fonda), her fiancé Bill, and his son Billy. Norman develops a bond with Billy, providing the framework for a summer in which the Thayers’ strained relationships are finally allowed to heal.”  
(Amazon)

### **Psychological Trends in On Golden Pond**

The Thayer’s are a first name family, which this author found odd as Chelsea calls her father Norman, throughout the whole movie. It appears she grew up calling him Norman, in a cold and uncaring paternal relationship, while Ethel Thayer intensively parented. Norman can be described as a distant father, aloof and uncertain. It is not his finest talent to Parent, as he makes fun of Chelsea repeatedly throughout the Movie, who is palpably hurt by his derogatory comments. Chelsea’s mother, Ethel, implicitly denies this issue affects Chelsea, silently condoning Norman’s bad verbal behaviors towards Chelsea, while ensuring some maternal warmth permeates their relationship.

It is apparent that not all highly educated persons, as Norman Thayer is as a career college Professor, are phenomenal parents. Psychologically, when Norman and Ethel Thayer agree to babysit Billy for the Summer, it is expected they’re going to repeat their same errors from raising Chelsea to adulthood. However, Norman finds the time in retirement to intensively monitor and interact with Billy in a positive prosocial way, demonstrating real bonding over the summer, while Chelsea and Bill elope in Europe. Ethel repeatedly calls Norman “an old poop”, which he accepts without resentment by repeatedly insisting he’s on death’s door at all times, which Ethel denies, even if they’re both truly old and in the end stages of their lives. Norman may also be losing his mental faculties, although it is unclear to this author from the movie an Alzheimers or Dementia Diagnosis is clear.

It is apparent from the movie it takes time and energy to parent successfully. It would surprise this author if Norman freely gave of his time to his daughter Chelsea when she was young, because of their distant relationship. Ethel as mother, was probably Chelsea's sole source of parenting. Under Norman's care and custody, Billy flourishes as an individual and so does Norman in a win-win situation of healthy personal and emotional growth. Ethel, in these regards, remained rock steady as a role model and parent.

It shocks this author Norman would take daredevilish risks with Billy, such as going to "the cove", from where both need rescued by a distraught Ethel later that evening upon crashing on rocks and sinking their boat. This author thought at this juncture of the movie that Norman was going through a mid-life crisis, until he put in perspective his true age, of nearly 80, and true words. It is thus apparent 80 is not mid-life, and the profound difference for Norman is his availability to Parent.

Ethel and Chelsea seem warm together throughout the movie. Norman never assumes a guiding role over Chelsea's life, but in Chelsea's decision to emulate the good, healthy choices and decisions of Ethel, Chelsea does well for herself.

I think that all characters in the movie benefitted at the end from the summer. Norman is enriched by his interactions with the youth, Ethel maintained a use and purpose to all fulfilling her need for meaning in life, and Chelsea and Bill were able to marry in Europe and reclaim Billy for his return to school in the Fall, and their cohabitation in the United States. At the end of the movie, we are left seeing Norman open up with Chelsea in engaging activities, but as adults who obviously never bonded in a father-daughter sense while Chelsea was still a minor. Ethel never abandoned her maternal role over either Norman or Chelsea throughout, and in that regard she serves Norman's interest in satisfaction and happiness, together and separately, and therein he does reciprocate by his consideration and respect of her thoughts, feelings, and words as important, and by prioritizing engaging with her and spending time with her.

Without words to the topic, it appears at the end Chelsea forgives Norman for his detached and distant parenting, and welcomes and accepts their only relationship, their adult relationship.

### **General Trends in Psychology**

Unlike in *On Golden Pond*, most parents who no matter how hard they try the first time around prove to not be great at parenting never become great or phenomenal parents. This is apparent in highly successful women, who may even read parenting books and never become good at it, but return to professional life 18-21 years behind their male peers with no chance to catch up, happy for the experience but never willing to repeat it (by ever parenting again). Ethel seems the perfect parent, but Norman makes a turnaround unlike any which would be generally expected as a trend in psychology.

It's typical grandparents repeat the same mistakes when they become guardians of grandchildren, or other mistakes, which altogether count as just as grievous as in their first attempt to parent their actual children, and this no matter how hard they try. Some people, no matter how studied, or how much time they put into it, are never going to be a great maternal or paternal parent.

It is key that parent's always do their best, not just the legally required minimum, or there's a strong likelihood a failed future is all they're really financially supporting for 18 years.

## Works Cited

Amazon. *Watch On Golden Pond*. 18 10 2021. Open Internet. 18 10 2021.

<[https://www.amazon.com/Golden-Pond-Henry-](https://www.amazon.com/Golden-Pond-Henry-Fonda/dp/B0787FSFTX/ref=sr_1_1?dchild=1&keywords=on+golden+pond&qid=1634555433&sr=8-1)

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*On Golden Pond*. Dir. Mark Rydell. Perf. Katherine Hepburn, Jane Fonda Henry Fonda. 1981. VHS.