

HEART OF GOLD

Log Line: In 1968 an American army deserter struggles as a fugitive in the mountains of British Columbia sheltered by a sect of Russian pacifists, while back in Texas his estranged girlfriend goes underground as an antiwar activist bent on sabotage.

Short Synopsis: In 1968, a deserter from the U.S. Army flees across the border to the mountains of British Columbia, where he is sheltered by a Doukhobor family and struggles to adjust to life as a fugitive. Meanwhile, back in Texas, his girlfriend joins the underground war resistance. Their stories are told through letters, archival film and docu-drama footage.

Long Synopsis: In a letter to her estranged boyfriend Michael, Texas student Mary-Bob recalls the crisis he and his friends face as they finish college under threat of being drafted and sent to Vietnam. To her surprise and his, he ends up enlisting -- and she furiously breaks off with him.

After a violent incident in boot camp, Michael goes AWOL and heads across the border into the mountains of British Columbia. There he is sheltered by a family of Doukhobors, a sect of Russian-speaking pacifists, and struggles to make a life for himself, alone and still illegal in a foreign country.

In a parallel story, framed as part of a documentary film on the peace movement, Nikolai Kalachoff recounts his own history as a Doukhobor activist whose resistance to assimilation has led to his imprisonment and the loss of his family. Now he lives with unresolved trauma about his actions in the past, and spars with his teenaged nephew Koozma, who wants to break out on his own.

Meanwhile, Mary-Bob and her friends are becoming increasingly active in the anti-war movement. At first their street theatre and guerilla antics are exhilarating -- but they quickly escalate in a dark and dangerous direction.

Michael must decide whether to continue living underground or attempt another risky border crossing to gain legal status in Canada. Meanwhile, in a spiral of escalating violence, Mary-Bob must confront her own moral choices and choose her sacrifices.

Heart of Gold unfolds through a mix of archival, dramatic and dream imagery, framed by the letters that Mary-Bob and Michael are writing to each other but cannot send, since both are on the run.

It is not only a dramatic film, but also a record of a dramatic period in history. Filmmaker Patricia Gruben uses archival footage, music, radio interviews and still photos of war, protests, popular culture and Doukhobor history to depict the film's historical context and the artistic process of reconstruction.