

## This Land: Mermaid Avenue

There are certain invitations to inspire a smile on your face:

- Would you like another helping?
- Would you like another sip from the bottle?
- Let's take the day off from work and play hooky.
- Come back to bed and let me please you.
- Come, let's spend the day at Coney Island. Let's get a hot dog, or two or three or four.

*Roll on the sand, sand,  
Roll on the sand,  
My sugar lump's dancin', hot in the pan  
Go Coney Island, every woman and man  
Go Coney Island, roll on the sand.*

*Weiners and sodas  
Hot dog and pop  
Feet got no shoes on  
Sidewalks burns hot  
Suntan and windburn  
Traffic a jam  
Go Coney Island  
Roll on the sand.*

Coney Island meant for Woody his second chance at baby days. Coney Island meant the good days of Woody composing children's songs, nursery songs, for the sheer fun of it, composing them for his kids, his 'Songs to Grow On For Mother and Child.'

*One Day Old  
Car Song  
I'll Eat You, I'll Drink You  
Swimmy Swim  
Make a Blobble  
Goodnight Little Arlo (Goodnight Little Darlin')*

3520 Mermaid Avenue. His second wife days. His Marjorie days. "Full flower days," writes his biographer. Before more bad days, the strained days. Before tragedy. Before his Huntington's Chorea took over.

*Grabbing for brass ring  
On carousel spinning too fast*

## Misses his chance

3520 Mermaid Avenue. Happy days. Silly days. God, how much we need them if not to divert us to at least keep us sane, to give us reason to keep on keeping on.

The feel of home and being home.

Though for Woody is was just for a spell, given the man, given circumstances, given griefs. Given the fire in the apartment on Mermaid Avenue. Given the death of their daughter in much the same way by fire Woody's sister died back in Okemah.

Us living in rural Pennsylvania since 1978, we've consistently missed the deli's we enjoyed growing up in Jersey and New York City. Haven't been able to get decent sliced roast beef in decades. By the way, you can always tell when someone is from Jersey because it is simply 'Jersey.' Only outsiders refer to Jersey as 'New Jersey.'

Amish cooking isn't quite as satisfying as the smells and tastes of a crisp fat kosher pickle or an onion bagel slavered with lox and cream cheese, or, for that matter, a spicy taco from the shack near the corner, or a stick of chicken satay or real chili, real jambalaya, real Chop Suey, real pizza folded to devour.

Family style potato salad and Shoofly pie ain't quite the same. They lack a certain international flare and flavor. In a contest between Fasnachts and bagels, it's a Jewish bagel every time.

Okay, yes, I'm biased. I miss the city (which if you are from Jersey can only mean New York City, never Philadelphia). I miss my stone lions guarding the library. I miss Washington Square. I miss buying tulips on Sunday morning at the shop around the corner to take back to my lady in bed. I miss Union Square. So did Woody:

*This union air in Union Square  
Is breathed by many a lung  
Some good, some bad, some sick,  
some well,  
Some right ones and some wrong  
We haven't got a Super Race  
Nor a Godsent maniac  
To make super dupers out of us  
Nor chain nor hold us back.*

For us back in those adolescent days the thrilling invitation that inspired a smile was Coyne suggesting we cut school and join the car caravan to the Jersey shore. Watch Jimmy avoid the traffic light by driving his Volkswagon Bug up on the sidewalk. Jersey shore via Route 9, or you could go quicker if you wanted to pay the tolls on the Garden State Parkway shooting the

coins into the automatic basket-bin while butt-balanced on the passenger side open window, pretending to be Bill Bradley making a jump shot. Down to Seaside Heights for the Boardwalk, the Chatterbox Café, the Carousel and pinball machines, getting suntanned red as lobster admiring all the girls in their delightful bikini's, covering up your teenage admiration with the beach towel. There's something quite fine about the slapping sound of the ocean mixing with the wonderfully self-conscious giggle of girls on parade. Wear your sandals or sneakers to avoid getting splinters.

There comes a time, after the hard and unfair struggle, when you want a reward. When you want a little Mermaid Avenue pleasure. You may not deserve a reward but you sure earned it. However brief.

*Mermaid's Avenue*

*Words by Woody Guthrie, 1950, Music by Frank London (Klezomatics), 2003*

*Mermaid Avenue that's the street  
Where the lox and bagels meet,  
Where the sour meets the sweet;  
Where the beer flows to the ocean  
Where the wine runs to the sea;  
Why they call it Mermaid Avenue  
That's more than I can see.*

CHORUS:

*But there's never been a mermaid here  
On Mermaid Avenue  
No, I've never seen a mermaid here  
On Mermaid Avenue  
I've seen hags and wags and witches;  
And I've seen a shark or two  
My five years that I've lived along  
Old Mermaid's Avenue*

*Mermaid Avenue that's the street  
Where the saint and sinners meet;  
Where the grey hair meets the wave curls  
Where the cops don't ever sleep;  
Where they pay some cops to stop you  
When you hit that Sea Gate gate;  
Where them bulls along that wire fence  
Scare the mermaids all away*

*Mermaid Avenue that's the street  
Where the sun and storm clouds meet;  
Where the ocean meets that rockwall  
Where the boardwalk meets the beach;  
Where the prettiest of the maidulas  
Leave their legprints in that sand  
Just beneath our lovesoaked boardwalk  
With the bravest of our lads.*

CHORUS

*Mermaid Avenue that's the street  
Where all colors of goodfolks meet;  
Where the smokefish meets the pretzel  
Where the borscht sounds like the seas;  
This is where hot Mexican Chili  
Meets Chop Suey and meatballs sweet;  
Mermaid Avenue she's a nervous jerk  
But, still, she's hard to beat.*