

Epilogue: This Land

When I tried to explain why I was traveling this cross-country trip and the other person to whom I was talking seemed unfamiliar with Woody Guthrie, I would mention how Woody Guthrie is most famous for the song: "This Land is Your Land." Most then would glimmer from some grade school music class recognition.

Woody wrote this song in New York City in a hotel room on the corner of 43rd and 6th. Some contend it was a fly reply to Irving Berlin's song "God Bless America" for Woody originally named his song "God Blessed America." Less invocation, less boasting, and less grandiose sense of privilege and more appreciation, optimism, and humble gratitude. Real American patriotism rather than the sanctimonious kind, to paraphrase journalist Studs Terkel.

Those of us in Pennsylvania believe we contributed to this song's inspiration. Woody got up close and personal with our Pennsylvania countryside, ground zero of the temperate deciduous zone in all its seasonal glory. The story is that tired of living in Pampa, Texas, he wanted to get back to New York City. It was the winter of 1940. There was a hint of some kind of work from an actor friend. Woody bussed to Pittsburgh. From there he began hitching to New York, crossing the Susquehanna at Harrisburg "as the blizzard ripped along the river bottom." A kindly forest ranger rescued him, the ranger's family fed him, and then they drove him to Philadelphia where he caught the bus to New York City.

He had seen America, felt America, walked America, traveled America.

It remains a shame we don't encourage our grade school children to sing all the verses Woody originally wrote. It was, after all, written as a protest song. God blessed America, if we would but appreciate that. We do note that although he eventually reworked the text omitting the second-to-last stanza, he did share the full restored version with his son, Arlo, before his disease took over and silenced him. Woody silenced but not his songs.

This Land Is Your Land Words and Music by Woody Guthrie

*This land is your land This land is my land
From California to the New York island;
From the red wood forest to the Gulf Stream waters
This land was made for you and Me.*

Bob's playful paraphrase:

*This land...
From Maine to Crescent City, California
From the granite of New Hampshire to the dry
streams of Oklahoma,
From the highline of Montana to the detours of
Salt Lake City
This land is...*

*As I was walking that ribbon of highway,
I saw above me that endless skyway:
I saw below me that golden valley:
This land was made for you and me.*

*I've roamed and rambled and I followed my footsteps
To the sparkling sands of her diamond deserts;
And all around me a voice was sounding:
This land was made for you and me.*

*When the sun came shining, and I was strolling,
And the wheat fields waving and the dust clouds
rolling,
As the fog was lifting a voice was chanting:
This land was made for you and me.*

*As I went walking I saw a sign there
And on the sign it said "No Trespassing."
But on the other side it didn't say nothing,
That side was made for you and me.*

*In the shadow of the steeple I saw my people,
By the relief office I seen my people;
As they stood there hungry, I stood there asking
Is this land made for you and me?*

*Nobody living can ever stop me,
As I go walking that freedom highway;
Nobody living can ever make me turn back
This land was made for you and me.*

*As I was driving the backroads and interstates
I looked ahead and saw the looming Rockies
I walked among the dry grasses of Diablo
Range, the ubiquitous malls of Petco's and
Arby's
This land is...*

*I roamed to where the songs sprang from
There off in the distance the hewn out quarry
The geese necks pumping and trash caught in
the barbed wire of Pampa, seagulls in Salt Lake
City, from the stadium cities to the small towns
with boarded up main street and ramps to the
front doors...
This land is...*

*From Memphis to Nashville the storm blew my
car hard behind the big boy truck
I saw the parched land of Salinas valley
The migrants picking out in the fields
In Geneva Bob and Zack and Mark and
Penelope rested and warmed in loving
friendship...
This land is...*

*As I drove by I saw city limit sign
I saw the sign near the propane tanks saying
'no trespassing'
I listened to the radio about immigration laws
I tapped my passport and new I was fine*

*I saw the mega-churches and the small country
churches...
I saw tall steeples and storefront missions
I thought of my years serving as a pastor and
the calling and the struggle of this land
Is this land made for us all?
Is it? Is it?*

*Yes, Rene at the gas station who put out a roll
every day for the birds to eat...
Yes, John who is training a whole crop of
international journalists to pursue the truth of*

immigration...

Yes, Deborah at the liquor store in Clinton OK who was sad to learn her favorite folksinger at the Woody Guthrie festival had died...

Yes Edgar who brought me my steak who had never heard of Woody before...

Yes, Jessica serving me my sweet tea...

Yes, the waiters at The Plant along the Embarcadero who made sure my wait was pleasant...

Yes, the mechanic of my daughter's significant other who made sure my Miata got the right oil change and tire pressure for my drive home...

Yes, Father Jim who helped me find Diablo canyon...

Yes, the youngest Patel sister who brought to the lobby the newspaper at the Pilgrim Inn...

Yes, you prospective students at SMC on tour and learning not to step on the college seal beneath the dome...

Yes, Alonda and Michelle at La Quinta...

Yes, Maria at the Starkville Rodeway Inn..

Yes, you four sisters bowling at Lucky Strikes...

Yes, Anna who suggested Lucky Strikes would have a better burger...

Yes, Perry with Cherokee heritage at the Woody Guthrie memorial who talked to me about work and fishing...

Yes, the young man in Boardman who filled my car (no self-serve pumps) and told me where I could find the supermarket...

Yes, you young woman who braked quick enough for both of us to avoid a collision with the car that stopped in front of you, both us squealing to a stop on the shoulder in Little Rock...

Yes, you Cathy and Kenyon and Tom who didn't think someone from central Pennsylvania knew about hunting...

Yes, the ranger who taught me about aluminum and the Coulee Dam...

Yes, Dave in Danville, Virginia, who opened up the door of the closed museum and gave lost

me a map...

Yes, Jeff at the End of the Trail who couldn't do enough to help me learn about the Oregon Trail...

Yes, to the unknown trucker who I followed when the hurricane rained hard outside of Memphis and you kept me safe...

Yes, J.D. at Okemah proud of his town and his 81 years there...

Yes, Frank and Lucy the youngest two to die in Ludlow...

Yes, Maria and Juan who shouldn't have died either...

Yes, Anna who only wanted a Christmas Eve party for her miners...

Yes, even you National guardsmen burning down the tents...

Yes, this land is for you and for me...

..if we make it so...

It is, if we make it so.

Well, friends, thanks for riding along with me. Take it easy, but take it.