

This Land: So Long

“Contrary to myth, the great majority of the people on the roads were neither blown out by windstorms nor tracted out by farm mechanization. In eastern Oklahoma, untouched by dust storms, landlords and bankers were evicting tenant farmers in order to turn patchworks of small farms into vast cattle ranges. “For every farmer who was dusted out and tracted out,” Guthrie came to understand, “another ten were chased out by bankers.” -- p. 134, *Ramblin’ Man*, by Ed Cray

Is there any honor left?

Dust Bowl Blues *Words and Music by Woody Guthrie*

*I just blowed in, and I got them dust bowl blues,
I just blowed in, and I got them dust bowl blues,
I just blowed in, and I’ll blow back out again.
I guess you’ve heard about ev’ry kind of blues,
I guess you’ve heard about ev’ry kind of blues,*

*But when the dust gets high, you can’t even see the sky.
I’ve seen the dust so black that I couldn’t see a thing,
I’ve seen the dust so black that I couldn’t see a thing,*

*And the wind so cold, boy, it nearly cut your water off.
I seen the wind so high that it blowed my fences down,
I’ve seen the wind so high that it blowed my fences down,*

*Buried my tractor six feet underground.
Well, it turned my farm into a pile of sand,
Yes, it turned my farm into a pile of sand,
I had to hit that road with a bottle in my hand.*

If you visit the Route 66 museum in Clinton, Oklahoma, you’ll see some of the classic pictures taken of the Dust Bowl and the Dust Bowl refugees. It only cost me \$5 because I was eligible for the senior discount. Do make sure before you exit into the gift shop you stick around in the last room of the museum to watch all the segments of the Route 66 documentary. You’ll learn more about Route 66 than ‘*standing on the corner in Winslow, Arizona*’ (which, by the way, I have done on an earlier trip). You’ll learn more than ‘*you’ll get your kicks on Route 66*’ (which considering I drove the route alone, I didn’t get).

You’ll learn that Route 66 was the only route toward paradise, or so the Dust Bowl refugees, the Dust Bowl migrants, thought, hoped, prayed. Pack up the jalopy and head west to California.

Folks said goodbye to friends and family a'plenty those days. The season of loss. The season partings.

One very bad day in Oklahoma summed it all up. The day of the black blizzard. April 14, 1935. Black Sunday. A storm of dirt A mountain range of dirt piling up and blowing hard across Oklahoma into Texas.

Farms ruined. Sharecroppers, tenant farmers struggling on their small farms were driven under and driven out. One poor man's ruin is a rich man's opportunity. Soon the bankers drove out the majority who survived the black blizzard so the big-boy, big-pocket corporations could buy up the land for quick crops and livestock production.

For the poor and dispossessed, there was nothing left to do but say: "So long, it's been good to know you..."

"So Long:" Woody Guthrie's signature song. His sign-off song, his theme song for his radio shows and concerts and tavern hat-passing: "So Long, It's Been Good to Know You."

It also is a song easy to improvise, morpho-size, alter-ize, howsoeverwise the singer wanted, given the occasion, a song Woody adapted for many an occasion.

Famers forced out, saying goodbye to everything they've ever known: so long...

Burying a friend afflicted by dirt in the lungs, or him so dead tired from working dead ground he ends up losing to the soil: so long...

Friends heading out on a Liberty Ship as part of the Merchant Marine convoy shipping war supplies to England: so long...

Or a fellow kissing his gal goodbye as he goes off to win a war, "kicking Hitler in his panzers,"and does win a war but the fellow never comes back home to kiss that gal again. He's earned a cross above him in France: so long...

The song may sound a tad cavalier, but not really. All those so longs... The point is that you just have to keep moving on before you get buried by it all.

Makes you think of all friends and lovers, places and times, to whom and to which we've had to leave behind, or just leave: so long, it's been good to know you...

So Long, Its Been Good To Know Yuh (Dusty Old Dust)
Words and Music by Woody Guthrie

*I've sung this song, but I'll sing it again,
Of the place that I lived on the wild windy plains,
In the month called April, county called Gray,
And here's what all of the people there say:*

CHORUS:

*So long, it's been good to know yuh;
So long, it's been good to know yuh;
So long, it's been good to know yuh.
This dusty old dust is a-gettin' my home,
And I got to be driftin' along.
A dust storm hit, an' it hit like thunder;
It dusted us over, an' it covered us under;
Blocked out the traffic an' blocked out the sun,
Straight for home all the people did run,
Singin':*

CHORUS

*We talked of the end of the world, and then
We'd sing a song an' then sing it again.
We'd sit for an hour an' not say a word,
And then these words would be heard:*

CHORUS

*Sweethearts sat in the dark and sparked,
They hugged and kissed in that dusty old dark.
They sighed and cried, hugged and kissed,
Instead of marriage, they talked like this:
"Honey..."*

CHORUS

*Now, the telephone rang, an' it jumped off the wall,
That was the preacher, a-makin' his call.
He said, "Kind friend, this may be the end;
An' you got your last chance of salvation of sin!"*

*The churches was jammed, and the churches was packed,
An' that dusty old dust storm blowed so black.
Preacher could not read a word of his text,
An' he folded his specs, an' he took up collection,
Said:*

*So long, it's been good to know yuh;
So long, it's been good to know yuh;
So long, it's been good to know yuh.
This dusty old dust is a-gettin' my home,
And I got to be driftin' along.*