

God and the Ghost of Woody Guthrie



a 2 man play
(copyright 2005)

by
Tom Flannery

CAUTION: Professionals and amateurs are hereby warned that performance of GOD AND THE GHOST OF WOODY GUTHRIE is subject to a royalty. It is fully protected under US and International copyright laws. All rights, including professional and amateur stage rights, are strictly reserved. The stage performance rights to GOD AND THE GHOST OF WOODY GUTHRIE are controlled exclusively by Tom Flannery. No professional or non-professional performance of the play may be given without obtaining in advance the written permission of the author, and paying the requisite fee. Inquiries concerning all rights should be emailed to Tom Flannery / anthracite@rocketmail.com

Lines read by “Young Woody” (except the closing dialog) are by Woody Guthrie
Copyright © Woody Guthrie Publications, Inc.

Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Words cannot be reproduced without expressed permission from
Woody Guthrie Publications

The author would like to thank Michael Smith and Nora Guthrie for their cooperation.

SETTING: Woody Guthrie’s apartment on Mermaid Avenue in Brooklyn. Stage right is a small writing desk with a typewriter on top of it, along with a large jug of red wine. At center stage is a couch and an easy chair with 2 end tables and lamps. One end table contains a picture of Woody’s 2nd wife Marjorie in a frame. The other has a picture of his Mother.

Stage left contains a bookshelf. The room is strewn with old newspapers, books, and musical instruments. Old Guitars, fiddles, mandolins are everywhere, along with empty bottles of Ballentine Ale. Pictures on the wall are a mixture of family portraits and child crayon drawings.

As the curtain is raised OLDER WOODY sits on the darkened stage in the easy chair. He wears ratty jeans, work boots, and a flannel shirt a few sizes too big for his small frame. The silence is interrupted by YOUNG WOODY barreling onstage, dressed the same, singing loudly...perhaps drunkenly. He’s singing “The Great Historical Bum”

Young Woody: (singing)

*I'm just a lonesome traveler, the great historical bum
Highly educated, out of history I've come
I built the Rock of Ages, it was in the year of One
And that's about the biggest thing that Man has ever done*

*I was in the Garden of Eden, that was the year of Two
Joined the Apple Pickers Union, and I always paid my dues
I'm the man that signed the contract to raise the Rising Sun
And that's about the biggest thing that Man has ever done*

*I was straw boss on the pyramids, the Tower of Babel, too
I opened up the ocean, let the migrant children through
I fought a million battles and I never lost a one
And that's about the biggest thing that Man has ever done*

*I licked the daring Roman, I licked the daring Turk
Defeated Nero's army, boys, with thirty minutes' work
I fought a million battles and I never lost a one
And that's about the biggest thing that Man has ever done*

I was in the Revolution that set this country free

*Me and a couple o' Indians, we dumped the Boston tea
I fought the battle of Valley Forge and the battle of Bully Run
And that's about the biggest thing that Man has ever done*

(finishing the song....he puts the guitar down next to the desk and sits down and begins to type. Lights come up on OLDER WOODY....still seated and now smiling at the performance he has just seen)

Older Woody: Ain't I good? *(laughs)*

Dying always brings you back home....so I was sure glad to die....cause I've been rambling so much that I've managed to make myself mighty tired. I can rest now. Of course *rest* differs from one person to the other, so we'll just hafta see.

Plus, dying is the only thing that was gonna get rid of that Huntington's Chorea disease that trapped me in this here body. I thought I could outrun it if I kept on moving, but it wasn't so. They say this Chorea was made specially for me. Gave me my own disease! Whadda you think about that? They called me crazy, they called me schizophrenic....they said Ballentine Ale had finally gotten into my head...

(Stands up and heads over the the desk....where young Woody pulls a bottle of Ballentine ale out of the desk drawer and gives it to him. They toast each other)

They called me lots of things. All I knew was that I was feeling kinda fuzzy all the time. Kinda like feeling hungry in your belly....in your head. Your head is feeling hungry. How do you feed your head? You know? But hell, ole' Lou Gehrig got his disease named after him. I woulda thought that would happen with me, but it still kinda works out 'cause when somebody mentions Huntington's Chorea most people think of me. A legacy is a legacy I guess but I'd rather if something else brought me to mind.

(Older Woody sits in the chair now)

It got me, just like it got Mama, and other Guthries, so I suppose it's best to say they gave us Guthries our own disease. I can't take all the credit.. Strange how that works out ain't it? All I ever wanted to do was to keep moving, and I get laid out on a bed with only my own head for company. Not that my own head ain't purty damn good company, but even I get tired of talking to me after a while.

(pause.....checking the room out some....trying to remember)

Yea.....but I'm kinda like a ghost now I guess...being dead and still talking to you and all. I guess I'm a ghost then. And I got lots to say but I ain't gonna repeat myself none. What I said when I was living is one thing, and what I'm saying now, well, that's another. I'll be getting some help for this here fella when I wanna go way back *(points to "young" Woody, who is also onstage, fiddling with his guitar)*. He knows more than me anyways. I'm kinda old and prone to forgettin' things.

(getting up....takes the guitar from Young Woody...starts to fiddle with it some)

So when I was dying my friends would come over on them last few Sunday afternoons. Some of 'em I even knew. They'd sit and drink pop and eat hot dogs and sing to me. I only listened when they done my songs though.....cause some of 'em do 'em better than I ever could. Old Jack Elliot copied my movements and mannerisms so good people though he had Huntington's Chorea too. He'd be twitching like he's got a bug in his ear.

They was all writing their own stuff....but my voice is what I was yearning to hear....and I wanted to hear it from the outside in...not the other way around. They was all there...Sonny and Jack and Pete and some skinny kid from Minnesota who looked more like me than I ever did. Wasn't sure about his writing back then but he sure could sing it. Guess he could write it too as it turned out. He wrote a song for me. How about that? "Song for Woody" it's called. Good title.

Well now....let's see..

(He goes to the couch and sits down)

"Young" Woody strums the guitar and sings:

*Going down this old dusty road boys
I'm going down this old dusty road
going down this old dusty road lord lord
and I ain't gonna be treated this-a-way*

Older Woody: *(getting up again)* Good lines innit? Kinda summed up what I was doing with my time down on this here cue ball. I seen a lot of things that I wish I hadn't seen, and I made up my mind pretty early that I was gonna do something about that. So I done pretty much as I pleased when I could...but that's a sure fire way to get yourself in trouble at times. Seems the more money someone has the more likable he becomes when he does that kind of stuff. They call 'em eccentric when they got money. They called me a bum 'cause I ain't got none.

I did manage to make some dollars myself...but my pockets always had holes in 'em or something cause it always managed to fall out. Plus, when you ain't got something like money to hold onto you got less worries. Rich people all look constipated 'cause they walk around afraid somebody is gonna take their money away from 'em. Don't see too many poor folks with a problem like that. They may look hungry, but never constipated.

(Looks around the room some, and goes to the picture of his mother)

Mamma. Missed her something awful. I remember when I was 'bout 4 or so telling her that if I was gonna marry I wanted to marry her....and that'd always make her smile. I loved seeing her smile....and if it was me making her smile....well that was all the better.

Nora was her name...and if I got any musical ability it come from her. She'd sit at the piano and play these old ballads....but not just them sissy kiddy songs, but good old fashioned murder ballads too. She saw both sides of the fence....and wasn't shy 'bout hopping over to the other side. Hey kid (*looking at young Woody*). You remember any of those songs Mamma taught us?

(young Woody stops typing and belts these lines out acappella)

*oh....the scene of a gambler
he'd lost all his money at play
took his dead mother's ring from his finger
that she wore on her wedding day
his last earthly treasure, he stakes it
bows his head so his shame it might hide
when they lifted his head, they found he was dead
it's a picture of life's other side*

Older Woody: Never sugar coated anything. Told us about the good along with the bad. You can't learn to see things that aren't there but you can manage to only see what you've been taught is OK to see, and my Ma made sure that wasn't gonna happen to us.

She knew I needed some help 'cause I never had a chance to learn much.....being stuck in school up to 5 days a week while the smart kids were with Mamma Nature on the banks of some creek. What chance that give me? They'd say...."Hey Woody, where was the Declaration of Independence signed?" And I'd say...."well....at the bottom of course."

But she knew about all kinds. But like I said she would play and sing in that high lonesome voice (*Young Woody interrupts by demonstrating..... belting out the line "it's a picture of life's other side" in a gentle mock of his Mother's voice*) Yea...something like that (*rolls his eyes*).The other kids would make fun of...but never when I could hear. So the music came early...and I knew what it could do for you. I knew it was best to say what you had to say...whatever it was....and not worry about dressing it up like some girl's doll or something. So that's what I tried to do when I started singing. And playing this here geetar the same way. Two chords was plenty. Maybe three if you wanted to impress some girl or something....but really anymore than that was just showing off and putting on airs.

(pause.....thinking deep about his Mother now.....it's affecting him. Sits down on the couch)

Nora loved the movies....and would take us kids with her some afternoons.....loved Charlie Chaplin....and listening to her laugh in the dark made me just about as happy as could be. Chaplin was always poor...never had nothing in them pictures, but he always

seemed to be about the happiest person alive...which is what Twain said about Huck Finn too. I think that stayed with me some.

See, in the beginning we had us a big house, and me and my brother and sister Clara could have just 'bout anything we wanted. We was in Okemah Oklahoma.

Young Woody: (*Young Woody stands and delivers these lines as he is crossing the stage. He ends up at the bookshelf...where he examines what is there*) Okemah is one of the singiest, square dancingest, drinkingest, yellingest, preachingest, walkingest, talkingest, laughingest, cryingest, shootingest, fist fightingest, bleedingest, gamblingest, gun, club and razor carryingest of our ranch towns and farm towns, because it blossomed out into one of our first Oil Boom Towns. Small town, and everybody in town has something to say about something or somebody, and you usually knew almost word for word what it's gonna be about before you heard them say it, as we have well known and highly expert talkers on all subjects in and out of this world.

Older Woody: (*standing up now*) But what put the town on the map was what was underneath it (*bangs foot on the stage*)...and that's oil. Oil was the one thing that makes people treat you like a dog or like a human being...depending of course on your circumstances.

Papa didn't know nothing about oil, but he knew that land covered it...so he got himself some land. And with that he built a big house.

Treated money like booze from the still. Pours it out as fast as he makes it. Used to be you'd offer him a drink and he'd throw it in your face. Soon enough you'd offer him one and he'd throw it in his own.

Young Woody: (*Now sitting in the chair...stage left. Older Woody sees him there and promptly goes over the HIS chair...at the desk*) Papa had some money. Could never hold onto it though. Told me once that he was the only man alive who lost a farm a day for 30 days. Others got the oil. Papa got the grease. Told him once that if he ever played the organ for a living he'd have to give that up 'cause the monkey would die.

Older Woody: (*laughing.....remembering..from the desk*) Yup.

And....weeeeeell.....then the fires started.

Fire has been following me around all my life. Not sure why 'cause I never really had nothing against it....but it started in on me even before I was born. They say one day, the big house was gone, and Mamma could never really say what happened.....cept that it took most everything she owned. Don't think she was ever the same after that. My father was planning on making another fortune before the smoke even cleared...that's the way he was. But Nora was a different type. She figured you only had one chance....and that hers was gone. So that day she stood there and watched it burn....and the fire got burned into her eyes.

My big sister was named Clara.... idolized her. “Laugh like me” she’d say. “Don’t cry like Papa and Mama. Be like me. Smile like I smile.”

She called me “Woodblock”.

(staring hard at Young Woody from across the stage....directs these lines at him) “Don’t cry Woodblock. Don’t you dare cry or I’m gonna come over there and give you something to cry about.....”

(silent for a moment...)

She was too much like Nora in a lot of ways though...and they would go at it some days. I stayed out of it....knowing what could happen otherwise.

(Older Woody gets up and sits on the couch)

Young Woody: *(still from chair)* See, Mamma had herself a temper....and someday she turn into something that we didn’t know, scowling and foaming terrible...throwing things across the room, speaking words that I thought only I knew. Her face would twitch and her lips would snarl and her teeth would show. Spit would run outta her mouth and she would start out in a low grumbling voice and gradually get to talking loud as her throat could stand it. Her arms would draw up at her sides, then behind her back and swing in all kinds of curves. Her stomach would draw up into a hard ball, and she would double over into a terrible looking hunch, and turn into another person, it looked like, standing right there before me.

Older Woody: *(from the couch)* Well, when Clara got to be 14, Nora made her stay home from school one day to help her with the housework. Clara had a test that day, and got mighty sore about it. She wanted to go to school....said it she missed the test, she would not make the next grade. Mamma wouldn’t hear of it, and they was screaming at each other so the neighbors could hear. So Clara, knowing how Mamma feels about fire....douses her own dress with coal oil and touched a match to it....trying to scare her. It got out of control, and Clara was running in the backyard, burning up. Mamma just stood in the doorway...unable to move. Don’t think she could believe what she was seeing. Woman next door had to come over with a blanket to douse the flames.

And Clara was burned from her neck to her knees, with the skin hanging off flapping like a kite in the breeze. She kept telling me that night not to cry like everybody else.

Young Woody: She be saying.....”Don’t cry Woodblock Don’t you dare cry or I’m gonna jump outta this bed and start doing a jig any minute.”

Older Woody: I believed her too....but she went and died that night anyway. *(pause)* She made me promise. “Don’t cry Woodblock”. And I didn’t. And I never cried again. From when I was 6 years old I never cried again.

Young Woody: *(surprised....quickly moving to the couch now....they are sitting together)* Is that right?

Older Woody: Yea it is.

Young Woody: *(matter of factly)* Not sure I wanted to know that.

Older Woody: *(annoyed)* Get out of my head then.

Young Woody: *(snapping back)* Stop inviting me.

Older Woody: No fun living alone....

Young Woody: *(resigned)* Ain't so bad.....*(Older Woody continues)*

Older Woody: *(to audience....chidingly)* Kids....

(he continues...standing up. Young Woody remains on the couch....and lies down)

The town had been aware of how Mamma had been acting. Kinda strange....and of course the wagging tongues commenced to solving the crime, saying that Nora burned Clara on purpose....and pretty soon that was the only version anybody ever heard. Papa had to get us outta there...so we moved outside of town some. He wanted to help Nora, but it was too late...although that's not really fair, since it woulda been too late no matter what. Huntington's chorea can't be cured....and I should know...cause it killed me sure as I'm standing here.

(Younger Woody is now lying on the couch, representing the sleeping father)

Well, one night Papa was taking a nap on the couch, with his newspaper spread out on his chest *(grabs a newspaper and lays it across his chest)*. Mama was the only one with him. And she walked over to him with her kerosene lamp...and then...

Well, there was a fire....and Daddy was burned up good. He remembered seeing Nora through the flames....with that same dazed look in her eyes she had when Clara had burned. And they asked him what happened....and he said that nobody would ever know. That's all he said about it. Nobody would ever know. And then they came and took Mama away....to a hospital in Norman.

And then Papa was gone too...off to his sister's in Texas. And I watched them put the stretcher in the car...and drive off. And I was alone.

(Sits in the chair now...watching the couch. Young Woody is still lying there, and now he represents Mother) I only saw Mama one time after that....in the hospital. Doctors said she was suffering from something called Huntington's Chorea. Never heard of it, and

didn't know what that meant exactly. But they said that she would only get worse and worse. There was no cure. That part I remember. They led me into her room. She didn't recognize me. She was so tiny. Looked like a soft breeze'd blow her off that bed. And she was twitching..and the doctor was talking but I didn't hear him. Didn't hear a word he said.

Wasn't my mother laying there....and maybe that's a good thing. She didn't know me, and I didn't know her. But I kissed that trembling head (*he gets up and kisses Young Woody on the forehead*) and then left. Where to though? Let him tell ya..

Young Woody: (*getting up now...back to his writing desk*) Like I said it wasn't so bad being alone. I always managed to get what I needed. Food was no problem. Followed the milk truck in the mornings....getting milk off the front steps. Stealing bread from the baker. Or sometimes I'd just set up shop on the corner, lay my cap down on the ground, and play my harmonica and dance a little jig. I've often said that American's will let you get awfully hungry....but they will not quite let you starve.

Older Woody: (*laughing...remembering*) I remember dancing my little jig...probably couldn't do it justice now....but I remember this old war veteran....smiling at me. He'd be out there everyday right along side me...rattling his tin cup playing his harmonica through a shrapnel hole in his throat. People might look at him kinda sad but he never done nothing but smile at me.....and I'd dance even harder. The harmoniiiiiccccaa breakdown we called it. Gotta pay for the pleasure of seeing me do the harmoniiiiica breakdown (*laughs*) Make yourself useful kid....I'm getting too old for that type of thing....

(pulls a harmonica out of his pocket and throws it to Young Woody. Young Woody catches it and plays it...doing a little jig. The aforementioned "Harmoniiiiiiiiiccccaa Breakdown"! They both laugh, enjoying the moment)

Young Woody: I followed the religious street singers up and down the sidewalk and learnt all the songs they sung. I never did learn how to make tips off of religious folks 'cause the best ones is always broke.

(they share another toast)

Older Woody: Amen to that. (*long pause...lets the beer go down*).

Lets see....I even worked a bit. As a soda jerk for a guy named Shorty. Actually Shorty was in the liquor business but had enough medicine bottles on the shelves that he got away with it. Shorty like to mix it up some with the non-paying customers (*adopts a boxing pose*), and once bit some guys ear off. Lets just say that after that collection became much easier.

I made the occasional banana split, but mostly tended to the 2 oz bottles of Jamaica Ginger under the table. Dime apiece.

Young Woody: Cowhands, circus and carnival folks, showpeople, construction engineers, roughnecks, roustabouts, drillers, pipeliners, line walkers, fast talkers, wheat raisers, cattle grazers, and other kinds of boom chasers dropped in before breakfast to take on a little anti-freeze.

Wrote a song once....(sings these lines)

*Jamaica ginger in a cold root beer
makes your eyes see double and your ears sound queer
It'll paralyze your ding dong too
I'm a jake walk Daddy with the jack walk blues*

Older Woody: Plum forgot about that one...

Young Woody: (*sarcastically*) That's a shocker...one of our finest works...

Older Woody: I got a job painting signs too. I liked drawing and that got noticed some. I was painting the name "Sugar" one day...trying to make it look purty and special, when a guy says to me..."Hey Woody, that don't look like an 'S'"! I scratch my head and says...."Well then....how'd you know it was an 'S'"?

(pauses....scratching his head....lets this line sink in)

Well, I was never much good at working unless I could use words and a geetar. Words are a wonder to me.

(goes over to the desk....where Young Woody is typing away. Rips the paper out of the typewriter and looks at it....Young Woody gets annoyed, and pulls it back out of his hands and loads in back in....and continues to type)

I love playing with 'em...running 'em around the inside of my mouth.....putting 'em on paper just to see what they look like. I wrote on anything. Paper Bags...envelopes....tissues.....beer bottle labels. Couldn't stand to see empty space on a piece of paper....so I'd fill 'em up. Stories....rambin' thoughts. Songs. Even wrote on my geetar...saying "This machine kills fascists"...although I had to scratch it out the first time cause I was purty drunk and spelled "fascists" wrong the first time. Gotta get something like that right. Even found some time between the writin' to get married.

Young Woody: Married a fine Irish girl named Mary and we lived in the ricketiest of the oil town shacks long enough to have no clothes, no money, no groceries and two children.

Older Woody: (*goes to bookshelf....where there is a picture of an old dust bowl scene on top...studies the pic*) April 14th 1935 was a Sunday....hot too...for April. And the sky (*comes to the tip of stage left....looks out towards the audience. This is "outside"*) was

getting blacked and outlined in red...so that some of the religious fellers thought that God had decided to check 'em out for good. But it weren't God...he didn't know the way down here anyway...it was dust. The Great Dust Storm they called it. Thousands of tons of dust came floating down on us. Animals outside choked to death, and me and the wife huddled on the floor with with wet cloths covering our faces. And when it was over if was like being in Buffalo and shoveling out from a storm...only no snow. Couldn't see the hand in front of your face...or a dollar in your pocket or a meal on your table....and the lone lightbulb in the parlor got hazzier and hazzier until it looked like some distant flickering star. Some eastern writer came to town and looked around at what happens when it don't rain for 4 years. Called the place "The Dust Bowl"and the name stuck.

(sits in the chair)

Young Woody: Said to be the place where the oil flows, the wheat grows, the wind blows, and the people owes. Left the land so poor that the grasshoppers has got to hop three times just to break even. You can't even raise on argument on it.

(Stands up and sings "The Great Dust Storm"....using the entire stage. Back to his desk when he's done)

Older Woody: *(still seated)* It was the final straw for some people....who had been hearing about this strange and wonderful place called California where things was green and oranges were orange and there were lots of 'em and lots of jobs. Not much was left...just the dust covering up the tractors....and the only thing that could see through the veil were the bankers...but then they can see through most anything.

Young Woody: *(from the desk)* See....a man might be able to stand the dust alone....he's made out of dust after all, but then you owe the bank money, you can't pay it. You can't get credit. Hell, a banker'll give you an umbrella as soon as it stops raining...but not a minute before. So you have to leave everything behind. You could try to explain it...but the police ain't hired to write history books. They're hired to see that nothing don't hurt you. Even a deputy.

Older Woody: *(stands up....heading towards the lip of the stage....stage left)* Well, I never much needed a reason to pick up and hit the road....so I decided to check out this California. Trouble was we had ourselves a baby girl. Named her Gwen. Teeny we called her. Blond hair like Mary. I loved babies, but looking back I guess I never thought much about how to support 'em. *(now over to the bookshelf....pulls books off and takes them over to the chair and sits)* Dragged poor Mary to the library so we could study up on being good parents...then forgot what I read and hit the road. I'm not much proud of some of the things I've done....and maybe the kids needed a little more from their Daddy. I don't know. I reckon a man could go crazy thinking such things....but I got myself a lot of time these days....and I can't much help it.

I followed the trail.....1500 miles to the Pacific ocean. Hard to remember what I was thinking somedays...

Young Woody: Some relatives had written letters from California telling how pretty the country was. Trouble was I got lost when I got there 'cause I lost the address of the railroad bridge they was living under. But while going through the process of a lookin' for 'em, I looked into the lost and hungry faces of several hundred thousand Okies, Arkies, Texies, Mexies, Chinees, Japees, Dixies, and even a lot of New Yorkies....and I got so interested in the science of migratin' that I majored in it...in a school so big you can't ever get out of it.

Older Woody: (*still seated*) Well, they set up roadblocks to keep us out after a while. Called us "unemployables". So many men were hitching rides back to where they came that I couldn't get my thumb out there....so I had to ride the rails. I figure no use sleeping all night and not getting anywhere.

Young Woody: (*stands up and sings the chorus of "Do Re Mi"*)

*If you ain't got the do re mi, boys, you ain't got the do re mi,
Why, you better go back to beautiful Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, Georgia, Tennessee.
California is a garden of Eden, a paradise to live in or see;
But believe it or not, you won't find it so hot
If you ain't got the do re mi.*

(stays standing....listening)

Older Woody: (*standing now...coming over towards Young Woody*) Now I've heard it said that Woody Guthrie always road the rails, but that ain't so. Truth is, I never liked danger all that much, and them boxcars are about as dangerous as you can get. I seen guys lose legs and arms....not to mention their minds, which I suspect might be even worse.

But I was gonna see about this California....but first I had to get there. Lost everything...my guitar...my paint brushes...on the way. Sold 'em for a bowl of Chilli. And there came a night where I thought it was the end..

Young Woody: (*moving center stage. Lines are delivered quietly...tenderly. This is Woody describing "his people"*) Fell into this restaurant...on a night so cold it'd freeze the balls off a brass bulldog...and they let me mop the place down for some chicken dinner. And when I was leaving the old woman hands me a sack and says, "Here's something extra to take with you. Don't let John know about it." And I walked out the door again, listening to the whistle of the trains getting ready to whang out....John walks over to me and handed me a quarter and said..."here's something to help you on down the road. Don't let the old lady know."

(they stare at each other for a moment....each understanding the other)

Older Woody: *(moving to sit at the writing desk)* So I made it out there and got myself on a radio show...singing the cowboy songs that all the Okies missed so much from home. 'Course I had to tell 'em about myself..

Young Woody: *(center stage)* Well, when I go to write about myself, I can't say much cause I ain't got no material to work on. I'm a Hobo Hilbilly, eating twice a week whether I'm hungry or not. I worked in a lot of places but never heard anybody say they liked what I do until I got in front of this here microbephone. I never drink anything stronger than water for a chaser, and never spend my money foolish unless I'm by myself or with somebody. The dust run me out here and the officers run me into jail...but they was nice to me. They had bars fixed up over the windows so nobody could get in and steal my guitar. I am never surprised or disappointed, for I have no regret or future ambitions. I am a lazy man, and can't help it. Ugly and can't fix it. The country is my home and Los Angeles is just a vase in my parlor. I like poor people because they'll come out winner in the long run. And I like rich folks because they need friendship.

Older Woody: But, know what? Pretty soon I got itching to be back amongst my people again. Being on the radio is fine and all, but I kinda felt funny thinking about people leaning towards that radio speaker waiting on me. Like I was more important than them or something...which ain't true. So I went back on the road...and things had changed.

(up again. Younger Woody goes to the chair stage left and sits)

People from my part of the country are usually a hardworking, quiet sort of people. Not wanting to make any trouble, just hoping to provide. But I saw hard faces now...anger where there was none before. And when your children got big protruding bellies from hunger, dirty from the mud of the migrant camps, and are forced to look at fat armed goons guarding orchards bursting with fruit...well, snapping seems the most sane thing a man can do.

See, 300 men owned 4 million acres of land....and they had a free hand to do whatever they wanted. And us Okies were getting desperate, so they played us off against each other, and you had one family undercutting another....and pretty soon the wages weren't enough to keep the kids fed. You understand how this all works out don't you? And of course when you got all your politicians and police singing the same old out of tune...well that spells trouble.

(moves to the couch and sits) And I can tell you that I was growing tired of it all....and tired of the preachers and the singers telling us to keep quiet....that we would be rewarded in the next life. Hell, I ain't got that kind of patience. Meek my ass. They be telling us to accept what we're getting, the hunger, the disease. Telling us that fighting back was wrong. That is was a sin. Hell, Jesus just 'bout lost his mind in the Temple didn't he?

Heard this song over and over in the camps.. *(sings acappella)*

*This world is not my home
I'm just a passing through
My treasures and my hopes are all beyond the blue*

Whadda you think about that? Bout made me lose my mind. Just passing through eh? Are them rich bankers just passing through too?

Music picked me up....but it brought me down some too. And I started to think about that some... *(takes a long drink of Ballentine)*

Young Woody: *(from the desk)* A news report'll say something once or twice and that's that. But a song says it over and over again. So I hate a song that makes you think your're not any good. I hate a song that makes you think you are just born to lose. Bound to lose. No good to nobody. No good for nothing. Because you are either too old or too young or too fat or too slim or too ugly or too this or too that. Songs that run you down or poke fun at you on account of your hard luck or your hard traveling. I am out to fight those kinds of songs to my very last breath of air and my last drop of blood. I am out to sing sngs that will prove to you that this is your world and that if it has hit you pretty hard and knocked you for a dozen loops, no matter how hard it's run you down, nor rolled over you, no matter what color, what size you are, how you are built, I am out to sing the songs that make you take pride in yourself and your work. And the songs that I sing are made up for the most part by all sorts of folks just about like you. And the songs are awful easy to sing....drunk or sober. I try 'em both ways.

(they share another toast...from across the room)

Older Woody: *(still seated on the couch...deflated by what he is about to talk about)*
And this Irving Berlin...well he got under my skin as much as any. "God Bless America" just seemed like another song that said there wasn't anything you could do about things....just wait and the good Lord would provide when your dead. It seemed to me a song that made you think you was born to lose. And I had to answer to that. So I sat down in a dirty hotel near Times Square called the Hanover House, and I wrote a song called "God Blessed America for Me". Wrote it and forgot about it for 5 years....and then changed to title to "This Land is Your Land". Pete Seeger said he was glad I forgot about it 'cause he thought it was lousy. It grew on him though....he sung it a few times since then.

(getting agitated now....standing up)

And you all know some of the verses, but you don't know 'em all because nobody wants to sing 'em all. There were plenty of 'em...but you only know three. Before I died and when I could still function some I brought my son Arlo out to the backyard and taught him the song so at least he wouldn't forget what it was I was getting at. And about now Arlo's probably the only person in the world who sings it like it's been written. I hear those chest thumpers go at it and damn near wet myself laughing.

(sits on the couch now....as Young Woody sings)

Young Woody Sings:

*Was a big high wall there that tried to stop me
a sign was painted said: Private Property
but on the back side, it didn't say nothing
that side was made for you and me*

*One bright sunny morning, in the shadow of the steeple
by the relief office, I saw my people
as they stood hungry, I stood there wondering if
this land was made for you and me*

*Nobody living can ever stop me
from going down that freedom highway
nobody living can ever make me turn back
this land was made for you and me*

If you make a song that says "The World is Okie Dokie it's Just Me That's Wrong"....they'll pay you more money than you can carry....don't even have to rhyme or make any sense. But if you write something that tells something wrong and how to fix it, of course you're a communist causing a big depression by giving too many hands a job....a wild man running loose with a pocket full of atom bombs.

Older Woody: *(from the couch)* They was talking about making the song the new national anthem....but you can't have a national anthem mentioning hungry folks and the relief office in the land of plenty....so folks just skipped that part. Ribbon of highway.....Endless Skyway...Golden Valley...Diamond Deserts...Wheat fields waving.....now them's worth singing about in the good old US of A. Irving Berlin could be proud of them words. I already told you my Mamma sang about both sides of the fence....and weren't shy 'bout jumping over. When somebody sings something to you it sticks....like good Chilli.

Young Woody: What side are you on? Rich folks who own the newspapers, the banks, the radio, the picture shows, the stores, the land, the houses, the pretty cars, the wax preachers, the policemen who walk the streets and the boys in the army and navy? I know that the other side is my side.

Anyways....they told me I had to copyright the song....so I wrote a little note hoping it would do the trick for them Washington fellers...(pulls the note of of the desk drawer)

"This song is Copyrighted in U.S., under Seal of Copyright # 154085, for a period of 28 years, and anybody caught singin it without our permission, will be mighty good friends of ourn, cause we don't give a dern. Publish it. Write it. Sing it. Swing to it. Yodel it. We wrote it, that's all we wanted to do."

Older Woody: *(standing up....heading towards the front of stage left)* So sing the song. That's what it's there for. But sing the whole darn thing next time.

Soon, like most folks with songs to sing, I found myself in New York City. Never planned on going....just seemed like all the roads led there.

Young Woody: *(walking across the stage, where he joins Older Woody looking towards the skyline. Older Woody then heads back to the couch)* All of the street cars are underground there cause there ain't no more room for 'em on the streets. I wrote a letter to the mayor asking him to paint the cars with a thinner coat so we can fit more of 'em past one another. He never answered though. In Oklahoma they answer ya...which is one of the differences I guess. And the trains are so crowded too. You can't even fall down. Why I'd change stations all the time and come out with a different pair of shoes on. And money people I ain't even seen before. Folks so rich they got cattle in the bank and money out west.

Older Woody: Well.....I flopped *(falling on couch)* with a friend of mine who was paying \$150 rent. I thought that was for the whole year but they says it was for one month. I was glad I was a border with them rates.

Seems whoever built New York City miscalculated a whole bunch....cause the only room in the place is straight up and down. I kept walking into people 'cause I figured all the sights was up there.

Well....I met some people who seemed really tickled with my writing. I'd started my biography and showed it around some. They said it was what I should be doing all the time....just writing. Sometimes that sounded good to me, and sometimes not so good.

Young Woody: *(center stage....makes his way back to the desk as he's speaking)* I've been seeing them poor folks wandering around the country as homeless as little doggies, what I should do is strap on a couple of six shooters and blow open the doors of the banks and feed people and give them houses. Only reason I didn't do that is 'cause I ain't never had the guts. You know....you can get robbed by rich people too. They do it with a fountain pen. And this "national debt". To hear our owner tell it, I'm thousands of dollars in debt to my own self. And so are you. Everybody owes his own self a pile of dollar bills six foot deep.

Older Woody: And I even got a chance to record my songs for the first time. I got to sing and then answer some questions in between and they put it all out on a record. I remember them asking me what kind of toasts we made back in Oklahoma (*YOUNG WOODY finds a new bottle of Ballentine Ale in the drawer and cracks open 2 bottles...handing one to OLDER WOODY*).

*Here's to her, and to her again.
If you can't get to her, let me to her.
I'm used to her.*

(...and they share another toast)

And after giving them all that good stuff, I'm long dead before it ever gets released to the public. I'll never understand the reeee-cording business. *(he heads towards the chair and grabs a book)*

Young Woody: (laughs) Put 'em in the Library of Congress so the Senators can't find 'em. Course they're always in there in case they ever get a few snorts under their vest and want to sing.

Some town Washington. That's where you go to make laws, break laws, rake laws, fake laws, take laws, and shake laws. I think real folk stuff scares most of the boys around Washington. A folk song is what's wrong and how to fix it, or it could be who's hungry and where their mouth is or who is out of work and where the job is or who is broke and where the money is or who is carrying a gun and where the peace is. That's folk and folks make it up because they see that the politicians couldn't find nothing to fix or nobody to feed or give a job too. I can sing all day and all night 60 days and 60 nights but of course I ain't got enough wind to be in office.

Older Woody: *(from the chair...with book in hand)* Us Okies was in the air then, what with Steinbeck's "Grapes of Wrath" being out in the movies. So to New Yorkers I was like Tom Joad on the lam, and they loved it. But them movies cost too much money for some folks, so I sat down and wrote a ballad that told the whole story for the folks that couldn't afford to go..

Young Woody Sings:

*Everybody might be just one big soul
well it looks that way to me
everywhere that you look in the day or night
that's where I'm gonna be, ma
that's where I'm gonna be*

*Wherever little children are hungry and cry
wherever people ain't free
wherever men are fighting for their rights
that's where I'm gonna be, ma
that's where I'm gonna be*

You know, I made my record and got \$300 and thought I was rolling rich. I thought that these here fellers that make records had money coming in all the time, but heck they're about as broke a bunch as you'll find.

Older Woody: Ya know, I was a Communist. Now don't get your knickers all juiced...but back then they was the only people that gave a damn about working folks. You know, left wing, chicken wing, it's all the same to me. But they said I was so left wing that I had to sing 'em with my left tonsil.

(jumps up from the chair now.....center stage)

Truth is I wasn't notorious enough to get hauled before McCarthy and his lap dogs. But I was ready for 'em.....

Young Woody: *(flies from his chair at the desk.....as interrogator)* "Tell me Mr. Guthrie....are you now, or have you ever been, a member of the Communist Party?"

Older Woody: "Well sir...I don't know about being no communist...but I've been in the red all my life"

Young Woody: *(laughing...as himself now)* Wooooee! I remember Pete Seeger testifying.

"Sir, I refuse to answer that question...and I don't care whether it was a quote from the New York Times or the Vegetarian Journal."

(they both laugh heartily at this...)

Older Woody: Some did name names though. Burl Ives for one....I was interested in hearing him sing afterwards...cause I never heard anybody sing while crawling on his belly before.

Shoot, we was involved with the unions...and that was enough. Believe me, that took some guts back then. You folks think that you got unions now. I see even them baseball fellers got themselves a union and even strike sometimes...but old Joe Hill and the Wobblies and the rest of 'em would be rolling in their graves if they seen guys making enough dollars to feed poor cities actually STRIKIN'! That ain't no union, and a true union man working on an assembly line in Detroit or something should let 'em know that you ain't supposed to take the Lord or the Union's name in vain. Union was my religion *(blesses himself)*...my guitar *(gives guitar the papal blessing)* my factory machine, and striking was my way of praying. Perverting the Union is one of them mortal sins....don't you know that?

But being here in New York I finally got a chance to send for the wife and kids, and Mary wasted no time in putting up a for sale sign on the house that said..."For Rent. Gone to New York. Yippee...." Hell, that shack cost me \$25 and I still owed \$5 on it. But I started to get some money now. Mary used to keep 3 \$100 bills in her shoe....I asked her why and she said it was because she could. *(gravitating towards the writing*

desk...fingering all the papers on it) I had radio work....shows and newspaper writin' and songbooks.....everybody was throwing money my way..

Young Woody: I used to sing for them high society people some but always kept my eyes closed 'cause them white shirts and diamonds would blind me. Got so blind that I had to get outta there.

Used to send 'em letters....

(clicks the typewriter to the following 2 lines)

"if you're afraid I wouldn't go over in your lodge or party, you are possibly right. In such case, just mail me \$15 and I won't come."

The sissier, the smoother, the slicker, and the higher polished that you get...the farther you'll get from the truth and the higher wages you'll draw down. They were giving money to me so fast I was using it to sleep under. Money made me more nervous than usual, and anyways you need to be in New York long enough to get good and sick of it. Some of them high collar joints I went to had such a feelin' about them that they just drained my crank case. Then you'd go out and sing for a bunch of working folks and they'd holler and yell and raise so much ruckus that you just know damn well the country was gonna come out right in the long run. The rich folks like to lull their selfs off to sleep and sort of float halfway between a drink of liquor and a tile shit house....and listen to a bunch of songs that's about as close to the real as I am to foreclosin' on a farm.

Older Woody: *(back on the couch)* I started working some with Pete Seeger...my friend. Ain't nobody like Peter, who was purer than a Okemah prom queen virgin and as relentless as a dust storm. The nicest man alive but tougher than an Okie steak. Pete wanted to organize....get workers together in unions to give 'em a collective voice. We wanted the same things....but a fly going past my nose could distract me and lead me to the bus station. He was a bit more...focused.

Spent a lot of time over his apartment, where my kids would come with me and spend entire afternoon's flushing his toilet. Pete decided that he wanted to learn the banjo, and instead of being normal about it he tracks down the best appalachin banjo players in the country...in the back woods of the south...and spends an entire summer sitting on their porches....soaking like a sponge. That's Pete Seeger. He's an institution....and you all should treat him like that too. Don't let him die alone.....*(quiet...uncomfortable..realizes what he just said)*

Young Woody: Like you?

(pause)

Older Woody: Us you mean.

Young Woody: Got each other at least.

Older Woody: More than most kid....more than most. *(collects himself now..heading back towards the desk....talking directly to Young Woody now)* Before I come back to New York I got myself 30 days work at the Bonneville Power Administration.....documentin' in song the building of these great dams. Wrote 30 songs in 30 days...and pocketed the laborer's wage of \$266 and 66 cents. Best value for his money Uncle Sam ever got. Some mighty fine songs come out of me then...

Young Woody Sings:

*Green pastures of plenty from dry desert ground
From the Grand Coulee Dam where the waters run down
Every state in the Union us migrants have been
We'll work in this fight and we'll fight till we win*

*Well it's always we ramble, that river and I
All along your green valley I'll work till I die
My land I'll defend with my life, if it be
Cause my pastures of plenty must always be free.*

Older Woody: *(enjoying the music and memorie)* Loved talkin' to the men, all of whom seemed to be about the size of 2 of me stacked together. They'd feed me their stew, and let me sip their whiskey.

Young Woody: Working man is the most generous folks alive. I played 'em my songs....told 'em that they shouldn't sing like they was rich cause they ain't rich, shouldn't sing like they was satisfied 'cause they weren't satisfied....and shouldn't feed nickels into them music machines to hear about how good things are gonna be on the other side.

Older Woody: And when I was talkin' to 'em some of 'em would break down crying, saying that I was saying things that they was thinking but didn't really know how to get out....and I says, well Mister, I suppose that's my job. And then they'd ask me if I was Mr. Jesus or not, 'cause nobody ever looked 'em in the eye before. I wish I coulda said I was....but I suspect Jesus would be smart enough to ask his Dad for some hair that didn't feel like no brillo pad.

(Young Woody is slightly annoyed....runs his fingers through his hair to counteract this statement....or tries to run his fingers through his hair. As he does his hand gets stuck and Older Woody comes over and silently helps him get it out)

But back in New York we started playing for the unions. All around the country men were striking, and we'd go wherever they were marching. Learned to play my geetar even when the tear gas was floating around.....cause we was always in some purty rough spots.

(back to couch now)

Young Woody: (laughing) Woooooeeee! We played for some hard and tough men, good guys...not a single damn sissy or stuffed shirt anywhere. The worst thing you can do is to cut yourself off from the people. And the best thing is to sort of vaccinate yourself right into the big streams and blood of 'em. Good times. That's what I remember playing for working folks. Wanted themselves a square deal...and like me belived in the Judeo-Christian work ethic..."an eye for an eye, a pint for a pint."

(the share another long distance toast)

Older Woody: (still on couch) Riding in my car....a Chrysler that I got in New York. Gave it to the Farmer's Labor Union in Oklahoma City, but it sure ran pretty. In the mountains me and Peter almost got it to climb a tree.

Heard a joke on the road with Pete....out in the Northwest. You remember it kid?

Young Woody: (he does....jumping up) A Mrs. Smith dies and goes to heaven., and asks St. Peter where she might find her husband, John. St Peter says they got a lot of John Smith's in heaven. "Anything special you can tell me about your husband?" "Well", says Mrs. Smith, "before he died he said he'd love me forever and turn over in his grave if I ever made love to another man." "Oh", said St. Peter. "You mean whirling John Smith."

(they laugh and he sits back down at the desk....typing again)

Older Woody: Then three things happened to me that changed everything. The War came, and I met Marjorie....and then came Stackabones.

(Young Woody is obviously listening now. He reacts to the name with a sudden jerk of recognition. Older Woody goes and picks up the picture of Marjorie from the end table)

Marjorie was a dancer, and a friend of hers wanted to develop some dance moves to my music...so she invited me over to practice some. Trouble was she wanted me to play the same way all the time...kept talking about "timing" all the time, and how I was messing it up. But hell, I weren't brought up that a way!

Young Woody: if I want to take a breath between verses, I play a few extra chords...if I forget the lines and want to remember 'em, I play a few extra chords...and if I want to get up and leave town *(gets up walks across the stage, eventually settling on the chair stage left)* I get up and leave town.

Older Woody: And that was pretty much it for dancing to Woody...although Marjorie got me trying harder at it....made me count..."one two three" between singing.

(singing) "Going down that old dusty road boys"

(bangs his feet 3 times on the stage to keep time)

(singing again) “I’m Going down that old dusy road”

Never done that before, but she’d smile that smile at me and I’dve counted to a hundred if she wanted me to.

What is it about what women can do to you? She’d take me by the hand...offered me the use of her apartment when she was dancing so I could write.

Young Woody: *(interjecting...jokingly)* That ain’t all she offered it for.

Older Woody: Don’t get me started kid. I’m too old...darnit...you distracted me now. Where was I?

Young Woody: *(a little joke)* I got me a member in good standing....

(Young Woody laughs....and Older Woody shakes his head and continues...heading over to the desk now....where he sits at the typewriter)

Marjorie...yes. She said I had to work just like other workers now...and that writing should be my job. If folks come over looking to play some, she’d greet ‘em at the door with a smile and tell ‘em that I was working and that was that. Just scratched my head and smiled. Nobody ever talked to me like her neither. She’d tell me to brush my teeth, I mean really make sure that I did too. She’d get on me if I didn’t get enough pages written. She’d tell me when it was time to leave it we were out. I’d just smile.....loving it I guess. Prettiest thing I ever did see....and the one person I’ll remember after everybody else gets wiped away. She’d give me hell about my drinking some....and sometimes wondered why I didn’t fight back much when she gave me hell. I told her that folks from Oklahoma get mad just like folks in New York, but instead of yelling we just give ya a long cold stare. That made her smile.....and we both forgot what we was arguing about. That’s what tells you you’re in love. When you keep forgetting what it is you don’t like about someone. That does it.

So my little Cathy was born.

I guess I forgot to tell you that me and Mary had split.

Young Woody: *(scratching his head)* Wondering when you was gonna get to that....thought I might have missed something...

Older Woody: I reckon she was tired of me answering her questions by scratching my head and catching a bus. Teacher asked my little girl where she lived and she said “in the car.” So I ran. Busted, disgusted, and not to be trusted.

But with Marjorie we had our little girl Cathy. "Stackabones" (*goes to some of the crayon pics on the walls...pulls one off and looks at it with a smile*) and I figured this was a new start, a new chapter, a new life. New something. Whatever it was I was tired of the old stuff.

(*moves over to the chair now....where he hovers over Young Woody's shoulder*) She come and I stared through the glass at the hospital until they told me staring hours was over. So I wrote her a poem..

Young Woody:

*I felt like most of all things I wanted
was to get a hold of you and to feel how
good and how smooth and how warmsy warmery
your skin is right here and over yonder and down
among your toes and all down along your arm and your
hand and just about all over you
I watned to listen to you guggle and google
and gurgle and geegle and squeak and speak and talk
and say all kinds of growed up words
in your baby language*

Older Woody: (*delivers lines heading back to writing desk*) You might not understand it but Stackabones can. Baby's got their own language, and only a few grownups like me can talk it and understand it. And at the same time my book "Bound for Glory" was published.

Young Woody: Books is like shirts. It takes more folks to sell it than it does to make it.

Older Woody: (*from desk now*) But them literary folks sure said some nice things to me...and I was looking forward to more books. More time with Marjorie and Stackabones. More singing for working folks. Them New York buildings didn't seem so tall anymore...at least I could walk down the street and watch where I was going for a change. I was 30 years old, and I suspect happy as I'd ever been....or ever would be. Weird how you can pick out that moment after the fact eh? Wish you'd known it then....cause maybe you could have done something to make it so it wasn't really so. (*Young Woody is affected by this some. He's quiet...and pensive*) And then, like I said....there was a war on. And the army decided they needed me to kill fascists.....and not just write it out on my guitar....even if I did manage to spell it right....which I figure would have exempted me.

But the army ain't really a place for a geetar picker. So I joined the Merchant Marines. Had to really. Cisco Houston, my friend, was already in 'em and called me a sissy for not joining up. Well, I don't like the sound of that so I joined. Walked on board with my guitar, mandolin, violin, harmonica's, jew's hard, typewriter, pencils sticking out of both

ears, my bag, and six bottles of Ballentine Ale. Mighty thirsty on them ships...or so Cisco told me....although Cisco was thirsty no matter where he was.

Young Woody: (*getting up and coming back over to get his guitar*) It was lonesome sometimes....so much so that I proposed to to three separate see gulls...but them German's always managed to do something to make it interesting...like sending them U-boats after us. I'd tell the boys to sing loud 'cause it confused Hitler and made him shoot crooked. They listened to me too. Sang as pretty as them gulls I wanted to marry. (*sings a verse of The Great Historical Bum*)

*There was a man across the ocean, I guess you know him well
His name was Adolph Hitler, God damn his soul to hell
We kicked him in the panzers and put him on the run
And that's about the biggest thing that Man has ever done*

Older Woody: (*up now...motioning outside*) Got on a ship. The Sea Porpoise was her name. And Hitler came callin' He was like them politicians. Didn't like geetar players. We got torpedoed....and then later it was a mine we hit...

Young Woody: (*suddenly animated..jumping out of his chair....acting it out*) Ship was shaking, trembling, rising and falling. She leans, she slips to one side, the waters rush and foam and slosh around her with such a big noise that my ears hurt. This nervous shaking runs through your blood like electricity and makes you sick at your belly.

Older Woody: A few men where stuck below. So me and Cisco went and pulled 'em out. The guy says..."you came back for me?" and I says...."nah....I left my guitar."

And we got the boys where they needed to be....which was Normandy. There was 3000 of 'em, and watching 'em loading themselves over the side into them transport boats made me wonder how many of 'em wouldn't be coming back. How many of 'em might've had a Stackabones at home like me, and never get to see her pretty little face again, or to talk her language of baby talk again. That's what I wondered. And for the first time I got really scared...never had time to be scared before....but war'll give you all the time you need.....and now I just wanted to go home.

(*back to the couch*) But the army got a hold of me after my time on the ships. Believe that? Got me on VE day.....the day Hitler gave up. He must have seen me a-coming. But soon the army got to counting my kids and found I had an army of my own and let me go.

(*very quiet now...pensive...holding his head some....confused....this is where the trouble starts*) I was beginning to feel kinda.....I dunno.....queer. Confused in my state of mind, a kind of lonesomeness, a nervousness that stayed with me no matter how I set myself to reading or playing my guitar. Without trying to make it seem too serious, it never does get quite straight in my head. And I'd see some of my writing from this time, and I'd go off into wild tangents....and sometimes I couldn't even understand what I was driving at in them letters.

Of course everybody knows now that this is the earliest manifestation of Huntington's chorea, which killed my Mama and was gonna kill me. But because I was pretty confusing normally everybody kinda said..."ah, that's just Woody"...even when it was me and something else that was sharing my head.

(gets up and heads to the typewriter)

My letters got to 50 pages some of 'em...and if I ran out of paper I'd use paper bags or whatever else was laying around. I was getting lonely in the private area too....*(looking at Young Woody)* a member in good standing with *no* club to join...and being away and not being able to have sex with my Marjorie I described it in letters to her which were pretty juicy I say...and then sometimes I'd forget who it was I was writing letters too and I started answering fan mail from some ladies and giving them some juicy letters too and sometimes they'd even write back and say "give me some more of them letters Woody" and so I would and got the feeling that maybe I needed to be doing this....but then I'd catch wind of myself and *(confused now.....)*....aw hell....help me out some kid would ya?

Young Woody: All I can say is that my mind would feel airier after a long session of pen slinging.

Older Woody: *(lets this sink in for a bit)* Yea...that's what I'm getting at.

(back to chair...slumped...home) And finally I was released from the Army and came home....to Mermaid Ave in Brooklyn. To Stackabones....our little Cathy, and I spend much of my time there on the floor with her *(bends over in the chair....miming playing with a child)*....'cause how are you gonna understand a child if you can't see the world the way they see it. And what kind of songs do kids like? Well, songs that speak a kids language, and that's what I aimed to do..

Young Woody Sings: *(young Woody sings "The Car Song" in its entirety...together with all the whoops he can muster. In the midst of it Older Woody even gets up and does a little jig before collapsing back on the chair with a smile on his face)*

Young Woody: *(when the song is over)* Woooooeeeeee! I don't want the kids to be grownup. I want to see the grownups be kids!

(they are both loving this....savoring it....and then reality....and the foot comes down...and the next line is delivered like a sledge hammer)

Older Woody: And then God sent more fire down and took Stackabones.

They say the fire was electrical, and I wasn't home, and Marjorie ran across the street for a few minutes....and Stack was alone. For a few minutes she was alone. And then...

(Young Woody gets up....heads towards the other side of the room....to get away. Stares out the window....restless. No way out)

(still on the chair) When I got to the hospital I could hear her singing her rhymes in the room...and they was feeding her through a tube in her foot *(mimes holding her foot)*...and I took a turn holding it. She smiled at me too, and kept on singing...and me and Marjorie slept on the bench outside her room and we woke up and Stack was dead.

(head back.....looking towards the sky now...quiet) Fire. Dead. More fire. More dead. Who could I complain to? Who did this? Who wanted Stackabones so much that they had to burn her up? I wasn't sure if I wanted to have much to do with somebody like that.

Young Woody: *(still staring out the window....perhaps taking a needed drink)* There has been made in me an open place and an empty spot now, a spot lots emptier than I ever felt it before, a spot so sinking and so empty that I reach around a thousand times a day and grab onto things, old letters, signs, faces, people, pictures, and things, and I try to use all of these things in some way to fill up this hungry and thirsty empty place. (

Older Woody: *(gets up....center stage now. Young Woody moves to the front of the chair and kneels on the ground)* Me and God have a weird kinda relationship. Not sure where Jesus fits into the picture. He had his problems down here same as everyone else, and if God couldn't make smooth sailing for his own son I guess expecting him to give me green grass to lay in with Stackabones was too much. But I look around at what he done, and I figure he didn't try very hard. Most men I wouldn't give a bowl of chilli for. They'll put you down as soon as look at you, and if they seen me buring up wouldn't stop long enough to piss on me....*(suddenly manic....the rest of the paragraph spoken at double speed)* going after money and fame and wine and women and cars that go vroom vroom really loud and them clothes that people wear that make 'em look like bankers out on the town...with the gold and the diamonds and the white shirts and ties glittering so much that the poor folks can't hardly see with the light they be throwing in their eyes. So the poor folks forced to keep their heads down to keep from being blinded and the rich folks shining to much too see what they're walking over.

You telling me this world didn't need somebody like Stackabones? *(begins to tear up...but stops himself)*

Young Woody: *(almost prayer like....to himself as he kneels)* "Don't cry Woodblock....don't cry....Laugh like me....don't cry like Papa and Mama. Be like me. Smile like I smile."

(and then...)

"Don't cry Woodblock.... Don't cry Woodblock"

Older Woody: And then somebody says..."hey, I want to know how people feel about such and such a thing" and they go right to the rich people and ask 'em 'cause you gotta

be rich to have an opinion that matters....don't you know that? Now people might say that what I said mattered some and I wasn't rich....but that ain't so. The way I felt about things didn't matter worth a damn. People might say..."hey, that Woody Guthie wrote that "This Land is Your Land" song" and somebody'll say...oh yea...we used to sing that song in school when I was a kid....and then they move on the whatever comes next. And that's that. And after God takes my mother and sister and daughter from me....he figures..."hell, this here Okie can take more. These guys are tough...at least that's what they always be saying." So he sends me Huntington's Chorea which makes my arms flail and my head spin so that everybody thinks I'm a fallen down drunk..and even then he's not satisfied...just like when he sent old Jesus down.

(sits on couch now)

And he takes my brain...which had been doing some good things...and he starts to eat it up so it looked like some sort of rotten fruit left on the table overnight. And so he left me on some gurney in a mental ward....surrounded by all the others that understand what he's up to. They really get it..you know. That's why they are there. Nobody wants us around anymore.

(Young Woody is still on his knees. You can tell he is scared. Terrified at what's ahead of him)

And God sets me down...and takes away everything....pressing the wine to my lips every once in a while...letting me hear my music being played by the kids....like that Dylan kid. He could really sing it. And I could hear. I knew what was going on around me. I could see everything. I could hear everything. But I couldn't make my head feel like it wasn't starving.....

And I thought about Jesus and God a lot.

I always was straight with both of 'em. Everytime somebody asked me whay my religion was I'd say "all".

What were they thinking? Was Jesus up there asking God to stop.....asking him what purpose all of this served? Did Jesus, who had more in common with Pretty Boy Floyd than some guy with wings and a white robe..did he get mad? And if he did.....did he yell or just give God the good hard Okie stare?

(sprawling on the couch now) I was feeling more and more dizzy. They put me into the hospital, and the doctors stared at me and tried to find out what was the matter with me and they eventually said it was Chorea....'cause they knew my mother died of chorea so it was a pretty simple diagnosis. Don't want 'em thinking too hard and hurting their heads.

They didn't know what to do with me....so they opened the door and turned their heads and I ran.

One more tramp across the country might help clear my head.

Young Woody: (*up now....composed...back at the desk*) Didn't need much money...as my chorea lets me stay dizzy in my head everyday without paying the barman one cent. Could always make money in the whoreshouses....but they'd throw me out 'cause me and my guitar'd be taking all the clients away.

Older Woody: (*smiles at the memory. up now...center stage*) Even met Anneke...who become...for reasons hard to remember now..Mrs. Guthrie number 3. Went down to Florida...and lived in a bus by the swamps. (*pause*)

And fire followed me down there too.....making my right arm hang useless (*flails with the right arm*) when I spilled gasoline on it and it shot up...way past my elbow...took the skin off and stopped me from playing the guitar worth a damn. Seems that hell was following us Guthrie's around...giving us a little taste every once in a while. It was hard to give a damn anymore though. My head just felt dizzy and woozerly. (*to Young Woody...who laughs*) Fire never got my member though. Had enough life left in me to have another baby girl....Lorina Lynn. Another one for the books.

(*pause...quieter now.*)

Another that might hear the train whistle and wonder if her Father might be sleeping under it. You think I'm proud of this stuff? You think this is the way to be? No turning back though. No turning back. Anneke caught some sense in the breeze and took Lorina away...and my Marjorie came back (*speaks to picture now*)....because I was her child. I was her child. Her son. She had to take care of me.

(*now sitting on chair...holding his head*)

What's in my head? Something is there....making me walk crooked...and write crooked, and talk crooked....and see crooked. Crooked crooked crooked. Turn you head to the side and shake your head....see what it's like. Have the cops following you....saying you're a drunk who needs to be locked up....and then you be loving them jailhouses 'cause they get your head out of the rain for the night...and you meet some interesting folks in there. Crooked crooked crooked. Crookedly...and more crookedly.

(*Jumps up. Agitated. Angry*)

Now I wasn't Woody anymore...I was case number 65935. And then them hospital walls closed in....and they locked the doors and windows so all I could do was watch people go by....and talk to the others in my ward....and they loved me 'cause I'd make up songs about 'em all the time and nobody had ever sang songs about 'em before so they thought they was in a better place. And maybe they was. And maybe I was too. Maybe this is where I belonged all the time. Maybe these were my people.

I made friends with them all. (*wanders from one side of the stage to the other....addressing the entire audience....telling them about "his people"*) The guy wearing the Uncle Sam hat...he was the president. The guy who was constantly licking his lips...day and night. Said he ate communists for breakfast. The guy who'd sit and spin on his chair all day 'cause he said he was always being attacked by spiders. These were my people too. All of 'em.

I felt pain...but never as much as in here. I felt joy too...but never as much as I felt in here. I felt everything a man could feel. I was home....and I wasn't going back out on the road again. If I don't see another train again that'd be just fine with me.

This Huntington's Chorea could have me....but it wanted more.

(*back to the couch*)

So it took two daughters with Mary too. Made them shrivel up and die with rotten brains and wagging tongues in their wake, saying "them girls must be crazy.." Both my girls.....dead at 41 years. And you take my boy Bill....and you smash his body into pulp with a moving train. (*screams now*)A Train!!!! You trying to be funny?

(*quiet again*) He was 23. And my girl with Anneke....Lorrina Lynn? You kill her in a car at 19. Nineteen? You teaching me a lesson? That what you trying to do?

So what was the crime? What was it God? Eh?

Whadda ya thinking now that you have to face me....

(*quietly*) You turned on me. Never thought you'd side against the workers....

(*combative again*)

But my arm is working now and my head ain't dizzerly anymore....and my daughters and my son know their Dad and stand with me and we're together all the time and I'm taking care of 'em and they are taking care of me. Marjorie is here too....the whole damn clan. Mother. Dad. And we're singing...and I got Clara....and I'm back rolling on the floor with Stackabones...writing those songs in her own language that even you can't understand. You can't beat me. I'll never cry again. Never. Won't give you the satisfaction.

(*to young Woody*) Good luck kid.....(*he walks off*)

(*For a moment the only sound is Young Woody banging on the typewriter.*)

Young Woody Speaks:

Just thought I'd write you a few more lines tonight on as many different subjects as I can get down in one line. Mainly about a few thoughts that I been thinking about making up songs and stuff like that.

(pulls the paper out of the typewriter....looks it over....puts it down and stands up and runs towards the window)

A little dog just got run over down below in the streets a taxi hit him. I could make up a song about how it sounded to hear the little dog yelping to the little boy a watching out of the third floor window across the street. I had a big dog once and all of the kids played with him and liked him and he would go and get their base ball when they knocked it too far or he would run in their football games and stand around with his eyes shot over and his ears stuck about half way up and his tongue running in and out of his mouth, his head cocked over sideways like and watching the kids shoot marbles. But an old neighbor lady with something haywire in her head went and poisoned the dog and it killed him and the kids all had a big funeral for old pooch they called him and they dug him a nice grave and painted his name on a flat rock and it was a plumb heartbreaking affair. You could write a song about that and it would contain enough of all of the high and low feelings to put it over if the blame was properly placed on the old lady that poisoned the pooch. I think one mistake some folks make in trying to write songs that will interest folks is to try to cover too much territory or to make it too much of a sermon. A folk song ought to be pretty well satisfied just to tell the facts and let it go at that.

You hadn't ought to try to be too funny because if you just tell folks the truth they'll laugh at every other word. The best of all funny songs have got a mighty sincere backbone. These are the old deathbed and graveyard and parted lover songs that I sing more than any others when I need to cheer myself up.

Lots of songs I make up when I'm laughing and celebrating make folks cry and songs I make up when I'm feeling down and out makes people laugh. These two upside down feelings has got to be in any song to make it take a hold and last.

(back at typewriter) Usually I set down and knock off a song in about 30 minutes or a hour. If you got enough reason to write I say that you can knock off two or 3 pretty fair songs a week and a pretty dam good one over the week end. The main thing is to set your head on some subject you want to harp on and haul off and start and you can write 25 or 30 or 500 songs on the same subject if your subject is a helping people. I took as my subject songs that would make people want to help people, and I am now on my 202th -- two oh tooth. I've wrote up songs and tore them up. I bet I tore up more than a orchestra feller could shake a stick at. And lots of folks are making up songs all of the time and they don't know it. I hear so many people coming around me and going on about where you get your words and your tunes. Well I get my words and tunes off of the hungry folks and they get the credit for all I pause to scribble down..

(up again)

You know pretty near it everybody is a making up all kinds of tunes all along but they just don't know about it. You see a lady doing your housework and you'll be a walking around a humming or whistling and you'll mix up about three or four songs that are such a good mixture that you got a brand new song -- but the reason you don't know it is because your mind is thinking about all kinds of stuff like dishes and dust pans and kids and husbands and ice men and the traveling salesman or debts you would like to be able to pay off if you could only raise the money -- and so the tune fades away and that's the last of it..

Music is some kind of electricity that makes a radio out of a man and his dial is in his head and he just sings according to how he's a feeling.

The last stuff you can sing about is what you saw and if you look hard enough you can see plenty to sing about.

I'm as good of a preacher on hungry bellies as I am to sing on a full stomach ache. I've always knowed this was what I wanted to talk and sing about and I'm used to running into folks that complain but I don't ever intend to sell out or quit or talk or sing any different

All I know how to do is to just keep a plowing right on down the avenue watching what I can see and listening to what I can hear and trying to learn about everybody I meet every day and try to make one part of the country feel like they know the other part and one end of it help the other end.

Life is tough. You're lucky if you life throught it.

(long pause.....staring at the audience with a knowing smile)

Take it Easy....but take it

(Woody calls offstage for "older Woody")

You wanna sing one old man?

Older Woody: *(coming back onstage)* Only if it's one of ours....

Young Woody: *(picking up guitar....scratching his head with the guitar pick)* Can I ask you something?

Older Woody: *(pause)* I know what you wanna ask.

Young Woody: I keep forgettin' that we're.....er....

Older Woody: The same.

Young Woody: Yea...the same. Maybe I forget 'cause I'm so much better looking.

Older Woody: Don't get used to it.

Young Woody: So what's it like?

Older Woody: What's what like?

Young Woody: You said you knew what I was gonna ask.

Older Woody: I do...but I never answer a question unless it's asked. Rich folks do that. Working man always waits for the question.

Young Woody: Ok.....what's it like dying then?

Older Woody: Dying? Well.....I didn't care for it myself.

Young Woody: Tell me what else I got ahead of me then....

Older Woody: Well hold on now.....I'll tell you one thing.....being dead you get to meet some of the folks we sung about. I was talking to some of the kids from Calumet Michigan...you know....*(he goes over to the typewriter and finds the song, walks back and pushes the sheet playfully into Young Woody's chest)* the ones that died in that stampede we wrote about? 1913 Massacre.

(Older Woody begins to sing the first lines of the song, and Young Woody picks up the melody on the guitar and strums along)

*Take a trip with me 1913
Calumet Michigan Copper Country
take you to a place called Italian hall
where the miners are having their big Christmas ball*

Proud of that song. Anyway....I sat some of 'em down on my knee. Sang 'em some of the songs I wrote for old Stack. They was looking at me kinda funny too...the way Stack did...like a dog when you make one of them high noises and their ears go up....looking at me like I was too big to be a kid like them...trying to see if I.....if I fit in...you know?

(he sits in the chair now...again miming playing with a child)

And then I'd set 'em down and get right down on the floor with 'em, and things would be alright. *(choking up some now)*.....And this little girl...she got crushed in that stampede there....but she was all healed...just like my head. *(clearing his throat...swallowing hard)* She took my hand and led me over to the corner of the room...didn't say nothing just led me there.....and there was another little girl alone over there.....singing to herself

and coloring the prettiest pictures you even seen (*motions to the pics on the wall*). And she looked up at me and said..."Hi Daddy".....

(choking up....nearly breaking down...but not quite going over the edge. As he nears that edge Young Woody pulls him back with a shout)

Young Woody: (*screaming*) Don't cry Woodblock!!! (*quieter now*) You're not alone anymore. Don't cry Woodblock.

(this does the trick. he's back now...composed)

Older Woody: (*composed now...stares long and hard at Young Woody*) You wanna know if *you're* gonna cry...that's what you want to ask me...right?

Young Woody: Yea....but you ain't supposed to answer 'till I ask.

Older Woody: You won't ask that....

Young Woody: Promised I wouldn't.

Older Woody: Well.....we both did didn't we....(*long pause...scratches his own head*) Not sure it's the right way....but I guess it's the Guthrie way...

Young Woody: Well....I guess that'll have to do...

Older Woody: Well.... (*puts his arm around Young Woody*) The note of hope is the only note that can help us or save us from falling to the bottom of the heap of evolution, because, largely, about all a human being is, anyway, is just a hoping machine.

Young Woody: (*scratches his head...confused*) Did I say that?

Older Woody: We both did kid. We both did. Now we gonna sing one or what?

Both Woody's sing "So Long it's Been Good to Know You" and walk off together.

End of Play