

MY SEARCH FOR WOODY GUTHRIE

Eleonora 8C



“Woody is just Woody.” He really is just a man on the road, traveling around with his guitar, that’s what made him so great. Not only did he write thousands of songs, but he inspired hundreds of other artists like Bob Dylan with his beautiful and poetic lyrics. He traveled around America by foot or by train during the great depression, and would sing to make people feel a bit better and to give more hope. This is how he became one of the first and greatest American folk singers. Woody lived a very hard life ever since he was a

little boy, he had to take care of himself without anybody looking after him, or telling him what is right from wrong. Traveling and seeing the world and what was going on around him was what made him grow up and become a man.

An big symbol that mostly ruined Woody’s life is fire. It is said that fire played with him. It burnt down several of his houses, his sister, one of his daughters and his father. In fact when he was nine his life began to fall apart. Clara, his eldest sister was the sunshine in his life. She wasn’t exactly like a mother to him, but more like a *loving figure*. She had serious third degree burns on her body, which later on led to her death. Before she died, Clara gave Woody one last piece of advice: “Never cry”, she said, because it would only make things worse. I mostly agree with that because it is kind of like giving up, but then in a way you never have the chance to let it out, and sometimes it makes you feel better if you just let go. Throughout his entire life he tries withholding his grief and emotions, without shedding a single tear. When Clara told this to Woody she noticed that usually bad things lead to good things later on; But this is not exactly what happened to him.

It is said that the fires were mostly caused by Woody's mother, Nora. But he did not want to believe that and said it was an accident, even though he knew it could have been very possible.



Nora had become ill with what we

know today as

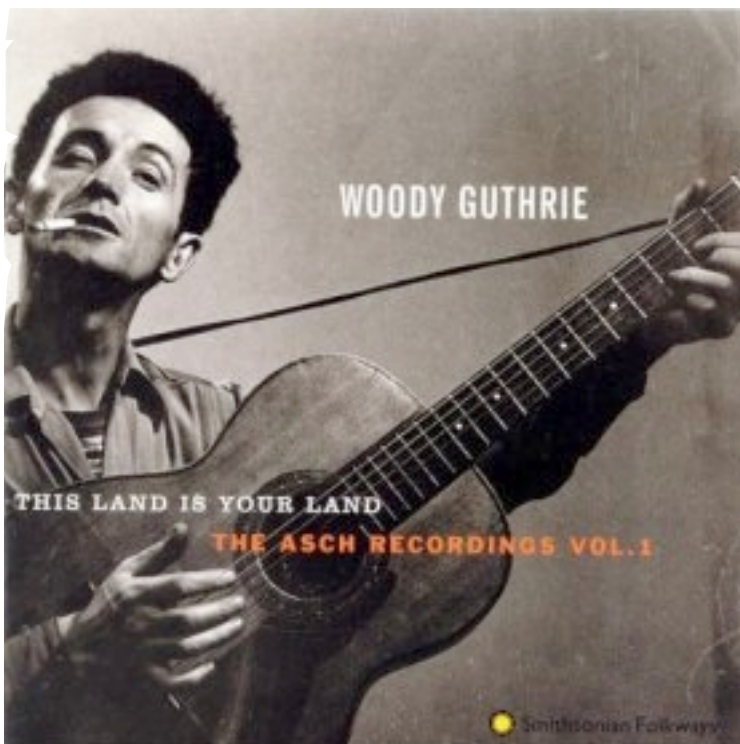
'Huntington's Chorea', a sickness which drives people mad, have various breakdowns and cause uncontrollable movements of the body or minds. Woody was very disturbed when he watched her episodes. He didn't cry or laugh because there was nothing to cry or laugh about. His family began to stop caring about themselves and started helping out their mother instead and making sure she was all right. Woody and his brother would take turns with chores and housework. He tried to do as much as possible even though he was only nine and his brother Roy, fifteen.

As Woody begins to grow up more bad things seem to be happening to him. His father is out of work and begins to do jobs which pay too little or are not suitable for him. Ever since Clara's death the family



was never as close anymore. We notice that in his life when things start going as planned they always manage to go bad. For example when Charlie Guthrie finds a suitable job that pays him well, Nora's brother, the boss, dies in a motorcycle accident. After that Nora was completely possessed by the disease and taken to Oklahoma hospital for the insane where she died in 1930.

Woody picked up the movements of the guitar on his own, with a little help from his uncle here and there. On his guitar he carried



around a sign that said “*This Machine Kills Fascists.*”

I think he wrote that because in those rough times he always brought a little joy with his singing and his playing. The machine takes the role of the guitar and the fascists as all the bad things that are happening. So when you heard his songs all bad

thoughts could be temporarily erased, and when you were listening to his music it was a moment to forget all your worries and float into a different world.

He also recorded an album called “Dust Bowl Ballads”. He wrote songs about the dust bowl in Oklahoma in the 1930s. And in the songs he wrote about some of his experiences. The song I like the most from that album is *So Long It’s Been Good To Know Yuh*, because it mentions how everybody thought it was the end of the world, and so everywhere you went you would here someone say this phrase.

Woody’s life seemed to be going in a good direction until one day he was once again plagued by fire. His daughter Cathy Ann at only the age of four died a terrible and unfortunate death. She was left alone in her house for two minutes while Margery went down stairs to buy a bag of oranges. This little girl was very curious and when she saw an old oil lamp she immediately went near it. A spark from the lamp caught fire on her polyester dress and just like that she was gone. She died immediately from her burns. The fire took nothing but Cathy Ann: Margery and Woody’s precious little girl.

Woody Loved Cathy Ann with all his heart and he wrote songs about her and played with her. When she died he was absolutely devastated. He almost gave up on everything.

One day he decided to go take a walk on the beach with Pete Seeger, after the death of Cathy Ann. As they walked in dead silence, Woody just collapsed in tears and rolled on the ground for about five minutes, just crying and screaming. According to his friends this was probably the first time he had let his emotions free, since the death of his sister Clara. I don't think he just cried about his daughter but about his life in general, and how it had been falling apart since the very beginning.

One of his most popular songs is *This Land Is Your Land*. It is a very popular song, which is now sung in most American schools. I personally like it because it talks about freedom and how everybody is equal. It tells about how people have to be respected and treated in the same way regardless of their position in society or their wealth. Even though he was said to be a god like figure Woody was definitely not a saint. He cheated on his wives, he sometimes didn't return other people's belongings, he was sometimes angry even though he wanted the world to be better and some of the time he didn't really care.



Woodrow Wilson "Woody" Guthrie
July 14, 1912-October 3, 1967

Unfortunately Woody got Huntington's disease just like his mother, and died in 1967. Arlo, his son threw his ashes far into the ocean. I think this shows that Woody Guthrie didn't have a real home, that his home was where people were and where there was a song to write and a guitar to play. I also think that just like the ocean Woody was a fighter, he kept on going whether things were going for the best or for the worst.