

# American MASTERS

20  
years

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press information

*Woody Guthrie timeline*

A Production of  
Thirteen/WNET  
New York for PBS

## ***AMERICAN MASTERS Woody Guthrie: Ain't Got No Home***



*In 1956, a disoriented Woody Guthrie was sent to Greystone Park Psychiatric Hospital, after a run-in with police. Guthrie suffered from Huntington's Disease – often misdiagnosed and largely misunderstood. At Greystone, his psychiatrist wrote: "A very sick man. Very sick. Delusional! He says he has written more than a thousand songs! And a novel too." Guthrie had, of course, accomplished all that and more during a short but intensely productive life, a life thoroughly explored in **AMERICAN MASTERS Woody Guthrie: Ain't Got No Home**, which premieres Wednesday, July 12 at 9 p.m. (ET) on PBS (check local listings). Below is a timeline of major events in the songwriter's life:*

### **July 14, 1912**

Woodrow Wilson Guthrie is born in Okemah, Oklahoma to Charley and Nora Guthrie. His father named him for the man the Democrats had just nominated for president.

### **1919**

Clara Guthrie, Guthrie's sister, dies after catching fire during an argument with her mother.

### **1920**

Oil discovered nine miles east of Okemah. New business sharks move into town and Charley Guthrie can't compete – loses most of his money.

### **1927**

Nora Guthrie sets fire to Charley. She's taken to the state mental hospital. Charley goes to his sister's in Pampa, Texas. Guthrie remains in Okemah. Family is scattered.

### **1929**

Goes to Pampa to be with his father. Finds a guitar in the back room of a drugstore where he works and his Uncle Jeff shows him how to play.

### **1930**

Nora Guthrie dies at age 44.

### **Early 1930s**

Guthrie plays in several bands, learns to paint, and earns money at numerous odd jobs, including fortune telling and sign painting.

Guthrie, Cluster Baker and Matt Jennings form a group called the Corncob Trio.

*-more-*

**1933**

Marries Mary Jennings, Jennings's younger sister.

**1935**

Huge dust storm blows into Pampa, inspiring Guthrie to write his first great song, "Dusty Old Dust (So Long It's Been Good to Know You)."

A daughter, Gwendolyn Gail Guthrie, born in Pampa.

**1936**

Travels with his paintbrushes, but soon makes more money with his guitar. Develops a repertoire of songs from all over the country and connects deeply with the people he meets, identifying their family's tragedies with his own.

**1937**

Second daughter Sue is born. Guthrie is in California.

Appears on radio station KFVD and eventually performs with Maxine Crissman on the "Woody and Lefty Lou Show." Receives 1,509 fan letters in one month.

Mary and the two kids come to California.

**1938**

Radio show ends. Sets out on the road again.

Goes to the Central Valley to examine the condition in which Dust Bowl refugees are living. Becomes politically involved and writes angry political songs.

Writes "I Ain't Got No Home," a clever parody of the fundamentalist sensibility in the Carter Family's popular "Can't Feel At Home."

Sings at his first Communist Party rally.

**1939**

Begins writing "Woody Sez" for *People's World*.

Writes "The Ballad of Pretty Boy Floyd" with the famous line "some will rob you with a six-gun and some with a fountain pen."

Son Will Rogers Guthrie born.

Leaves California. Drops Mary and the children in Texas. Continues to New York.

**1940**

Writes "This Land Is Your Land" in response to patriotic pop tune "God Bless America."

"Grapes of Wrath Concert" in New York. Meets Pete Seeger, Alan Lomax and many others in the New York folk scene.

Alan Lomax records Guthrie for the Library of Congress.

Guthrie records *Dust Bowl Ballads* for RCA Victor.

Performs on a pilot of Alan Lomax's CBS radio show "Back Where I Come From." Leads to weekly appearance.

Mary and kids join Guthrie in New York City.

After arguing with radio sponsors, Guthrie packs up the family and takes them to California.

Almanac Singers form: Pete Seeger, Lee Hayes and Millard Lampell.

### **1941**

Begins working for the Bonneville Power Authority, writing songs for a documentary film about dams along the Columbia River, writing roughly 26 songs in 30 days.

Returns to New York. Records two albums for the General Label with the Almanac Singers.

Almanacs tour country, playing at union halls and rallies. With millions of workers on strike, Guthrie finds a new audience and a new purpose.

Almanacs rent a townhouse near 10th Street and Greenwich Avenue. They hold Sunday afternoon concerts called hootenannies. Almanacs welcome new members, including Bess Hawes.

Pearl Harbor attacked. Guthrie re-tools songs to support the war effort.

### **1942**

Guthrie and the Almanac Singers appear on nationally broadcast pro-war radio show. They are then denounced for their ties to communists and are blacklisted.

Falls in love with dancer Marjorie Greenblatt, married but living apart from her husband.

Begins writing the memoir that will become *Bound for Glory*.

Marjorie discovers she's pregnant, goes to Wilmington to live with her husband until she has the baby. Guthrie finishes memoirs.

### **1943**

Daughter Cathy Ann born.

*Bound for Glory* published to excellent reviews.

Guthrie picks up Marjorie and their daughter, brings them back to NYC.

### **1944**

Joins the Merchant Marines; sets sail along with Jim Longhi and Cisco Houston.

Records hundreds of songs for Moe Asch.

Sails again with Merchant Marines. Ship is torpedoed.

**1945**

On V-E Day, Guthrie is drafted into the Army.

Marries Marjorie at City Hall during two-week furlough.

Discharged. Goes to live with Marjorie on Mermaid Avenue, Brooklyn, where he begins to write children's songs, with Cathy Ann as a kind of collaborator.

**1947**

Disc Records releases *Songs to Grow on: Nursery Days*.

Cathy Ann dies after being very badly burned in a fire.

Son Arlo Guthrie is born.

Travels to Chicago for the first People's Songs national convention.

**1948**

Son Joady Ben Guthrie is born.

**1949**

Writes "Deportees." Some see this as his last truly great song.

Pete Seeger, Lee Hayes, Fred Hellerman and Ronnie Gilbert form the Weavers and cross over to pop music success. They sing several Guthrie songs.

**1950**

Daughter Nora Guthrie is born.

**Early '50s**

Seems to be falling apart; is aimless, sloppy, appears to be drunk often and is undependable to an extreme. Travels to California, Florida and Oklahoma but is often unwelcome.

**1951**

While recovering from a ruptured appendix he has a series of visitors, including Jack Elliott, who becomes a close friend and traveling companion.

**1952**

Incorrectly diagnosed with schizophrenia at Bellevue Hospital; released.

Enters Brooklyn State Hospital. Diagnosed with Huntington's Disease, a hereditary degenerative nervous disease.

Goes to California.

**1953**

Divorced from Marjorie.

Marries 20-year-old Anneke Marshall, who is pregnant.

**1954**

Records for the last time in New York. Session includes Sonny Terry, Ramblin' Jack Elliott and Brownie McGhee.

Anneke gives birth to Lorina Lynn Guthrie.

Guthrie and Anneke separate.

Checks himself back into Brooklyn State Hospital.

**1956**

Benefit concert held at Pythian Hall in New York for Guthrie's children.

Is picked up by the police in New Jersey and sent to Greystone Park Psychiatric Hospital in Morris Plains, where he remains for five years.

Charley Guthrie dies.

**1961**

Bob Dylan visits Guthrie in New Jersey hospital.

Series of articles about Guthrie appear in *The New York Times*, *The Village Voice*, *The New York Post*, *Melody Maker*, *Time* etc., heralding a second wave of the folk revival. Guthrie is a role model.

Marjorie moves Guthrie back to Brooklyn State Hospital. Although divorced, she takes care of him.

**1967**

On October 3, Guthrie dies.

Marjorie helps found the Huntington's Disease Society of America.

*AMERICAN MASTERS Walter Cronkite (w.t.)*  
*Timeline*

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