



## Woody Guthrie: A Life

By Joe Klein

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A biography of the influential American folk singer, Woody Guthrie, who lived a life on the edge of tragedy but inspired a generation of songwriters, including Bruce Springsteen and Bob Dylan.

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### Woody Guthrie: A Life By Joe Klein Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #361740 in Books
- Brand: Klein, Joe
- Published on: 1999-02-09
- Released on: 1999-02-09
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.20" h x 1.10" w x 6.10" l, 1.15 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 512 pages

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### Editorial Review

#### Amazon.com Review

Before he became Anonymous, author of the political novel *Primary Colors*, Joe Klein wrote this intelligent biography of America's legendary folksinger-activist. Klein's first book may not have created the fuss that *Primary Colors* did, but it attracted the attention of no less a celebrity than Bruce Springsteen, who used to cite it with respect during concerts before singing Guthrie's most famous lyric, "This Land Is Your Land." Klein's unearthing of two politically radical verses usually omitted from that song is just one instance of the solid research underpinning his vivid narrative of Guthrie's often tragic life (1912-67). Before Woody turned 15, his sister died in a fire and his mother was committed to an Oklahoma insane asylum with a mysterious disease he later learned he inherited; Klein's chilling description of Huntington's chorea is one of the book's strong points. Its heart is a full rendering of Guthrie's restless wanderings across Depression-era America, which fired his lifelong radicalism, and a scrupulously unsentimental account of Woody's oft-sentimentalized personality. He may have been a genius and a staunch advocate of the common people, but Guthrie was also a bad husband, neglectful father, and difficult friend, as Klein shows. He pays Woody's life and music the tribute of assuming they need no sanitizing, and this biography is all the more interesting because of it. --Wendy Smith

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