

TOM JOAD

(Woody Guthrie/tune: "[John Hardy](#)") (1940)



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Seen the pitcher last night, Grapes of Wrath, best cussed pitcher I ever seen.

The Grapes of Wrath, you know is about us pullin' out of Oklahoma and Arkansas, and down south, and a driftin' around over state of California, busted, disgusted, down and out, and a lookin' for work.

Shows you how come us to be that a way. Shows the dam bankers men that broke us and the dust that choked us, and comes right out in plain old English and says what to do about it.

It says you got to get together and have some meetins, and stick together, and raise old billy hell till you get your job, and get your farm back, and your house and your chickens and your groceries and your clothes, and your money back.

Go to see Grapes of Wrath, pardner, go to see it and don't miss.

You was the star in that picture. Go and see your own self and hear your own words and your own song.

Woody Guthrie, in one of his *People's World* columns (1939-'40), reprinted in Woody Sez, New York, NY, 1975, p. 133.

I wrote this song in New York. It was the night that I saw the moving picture, "The Grapes of Wrath" by John Steinbeck. If I could only think of [the name of the friend](#) that lived in that apartment I would sure like to thank you. You are friendly and wine is good. And this is on a Victor record.

Woody Guthrie, American Folksong, New York, 1961 (reprint of 1947 edition), p. 25.

Anything worth discussing was worth a song to Woody.... I remember the night he wrote the song "Tom Joad." He said, "Pete, do you know where I can get a typewriter?"

I said, "I'm staying with someone who has one."

"Well, I got to write a ballad," he said. "I don't usually write ballads to order, but Victor wants me to do a whole album of Dust Bowl songs, and they say they want one about Tom Joad in **The Grapes of Wrath.**"

I asked him if he had read the book and he said, "No, but I saw the movie. Good movie."

He went along to the place I was staying -- six flights walking up -- on East Fourth Street. The friend I was staying with [JERRY OBERWAGER] said, "Sure, you can use my typewriter."

Woody had a half-gallon jug of wine with him, sat down and started typing away. He would stand up every few seconds and test out a verse on his guitar and sit down and type some more. About one o'clock my friend and I got so sleepy we couldn't stay awake. In the morning we found Woody curled up on the floor under the table; the half gallon of wine was almost empty and the completed ballad was sitting near the typewriter.

And it is one of his masterpieces. It's a long song -- about six minutes -- and it compresses the whole novel into about twenty verses. It doesn't cover every detail, but it gets an awful lot of them.

Pete Seeger, The Incomplete Folksinger, New York, NY, 1972, p. 44.

Lyrics as recorded by Woody Guthrie, RCA Studios, Camden, NJ,
Apr 26, 1940, released on "[Dust Bowl Ballads](#)," transcribed by
Manfred Helfert.

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Tom Joad got out of the old McAlester Pen;
There he got his parole.
After four long years on a man killing charge,
Tom Joad come a-walkin' down the road, poor boy,
Tom Joad come a-walkin' down the road.

Tom Joad, he met a truck driving man;
There he caught him a ride.
He said, "I just got loose from McAlester Pen
On a charge called homicide,
A charge called homicide."

That truck rolled away in a cloud of dust;
Tommy turned his face toward home.
He met Preacher Casey, and they had a little drink,
But they found that his family they was gone,
He found that his family they was gone.

He found his mother's old fashion shoe,
Found his daddy's hat.
And he found little Muley and Muley said,
"They've been tractored out by the cats,
They've been tractored out by the cats."

Tom Joad walked down to the neighbor's farm,
Found his family.
They took Preacher Casey and loaded in a car,
And his mother said, "We've got to get away."
His mother said, "We've got to get away."

Now, the twelve of the Joads made a mighty heavy load;
But Grandpa Joad did cry.
He picked up a handful of land in his hand,
Said: "I'm stayin' with the farm till I die.
Yes, I'm stayin' with the farm till I die."

They fed him short ribs and coffee and soothing syrup;
And Grandpa Joad did die.
They buried Grandpa Joad by the side of the road,

Grandma on the California side,
They buried Grandma on the California side.

They stood on a mountain and they looked to the west,
And it looked like the promised land.
That bright green valley with a river running through,
There was work for every single hand, they thought,
There was work for every single hand.

The Joads rolled away to the jungle camp,
There they cooked a stew.
And the hungry little kids of the jungle camp
Said: "We'd like to have some, too."
Said: "We'd like to have some, too."

Now a deputy sheriff fired loose at a man,
Shot a woman in the back.
Before he could take his aim again,
Preacher Casey dropped him in his track, poor boy,
Preacher Casey dropped him in his track.

They handcuffed Casey and they took him in jail;
And then he got away.
And he met Tom Joad on the old river bridge,
And these few words he did say, poor boy,
These few words he did say.

"I preached for the Lord a mighty long time,
Preached about the rich and the poor.
Us workin' folkses, all get together,
'Cause we ain't got a chance anymore.
We ain't got a chance anymore."

Now, the deputies come, and Tom and Casey run
To the bridge where the water run down.
But the vigilante thugs hit Casey with a club,
They laid Preacher Casey on the ground, poor Casey,
They laid Preacher Casey on the ground.

Tom Joad, he grabbed that deputy's club,
Hit him over the head.
Tom Joad took flight in the dark rainy night,
And a deputy and a preacher lying dead, two men,
A deputy and a preacher lying dead.

Tom run back where his mother was asleep;
He woke her up out of bed.
An' he kissed goodbye to the mother that he loved,
Said what Preacher Casey said, Tom Joad,
He said what Preacher Casey said.

"Ever'body might be just one big soul,
Well it looks that a-way to me.
Everywhere that you look, in the day or night,
That's where I'm a-gonna be, Ma,
That's where I'm a-gonna be.

Wherever little children are hungry and cry,
Wherever people ain't free.
Wherever men are fightin' for their rights,
That's where I'm a-gonna be, Ma.
That's where I'm a-gonna be."

