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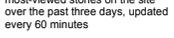
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Remember That Happy Hippie? At 30, Arlo Guthrie Has Done His Own Hard Travelin'

By Landon Y. Jones

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Arlo Guthrie's throat is sore; his voice rasps like a rusty saw. He is recuperating from road fatigue on his farm in the Berkshires of western Massachusetts—his answer to John Denver's Rockies. Suddenly Arlo's wife, Jackie, notices 18-month-old Annie, who four days earlier had suffered a bad fall. Ominous black circles are forming around the child's eyes to go with a lump on her head as big as a walnut. The worried parents carry Annie into their battered Checker cab and rush 20 miles to a hospital in Pittsfield. Amid increasing chaos (the hospital calls in a photographer to record Arlo's visit), a doctor pronounces Annie in no danger. Arlo smiles. "Children," he says later, "taught me what love is."

Arlo Guthrie is 30. The stoned-out child of the '60s now has three offspring of his own. A dozen seasons have passed since he was arrested for littering a Stockbridge, Mass. hillside with Thanksgiving trash. Arlo retaliated with The Alice's Restaurant Massacre, his comical, rambling antidraft protest buried inside a talking blues ("I mean, you want to know if I'm moral enough to join the Army, burn women, kids, houses and villages after bein' a litterbug?")

These days his Dürer locks, floppy hat and loopy grin are memories. The posthippie Arlo is fuller of face, his physique is heavier, his mustache scraggly. An aureole of curly hair is shot through with gray ("You can't see it past the third row," he jokes). The kook who once rhymed motorcycle with pickle campaigned for Fred Harris in last year's presidential primaries. "We didn't think he'd win," observes Arlo pragmatically, "but we had some impact on the party platform." Though he does three concert tours a year, Arlo hasn't sung Alice's Restaurant since 1969 and claims, "I can't remember the words."

For all his wry humor about it, Arlo's coming-of-age is a continuing victory over frightening odds. "It's amazing when you think of what Arlo's been through," marvels John Pilla, his friend and producer. "His father, early success, the movie and that disease. Yet Arlo is compassionate and completely unaffected. He's never sold out his beliefs. He's the strongest person I know."

"Huntington's disease is a hereditary neuromuscular disorder...Death comes not from the disease itself but from complications such as pneumonia, heart failure or infection...The individual will develop symptoms usually after age 30."—Committee to Combat Huntington's Disease

From his father, Woodrow Wilson Guthrie, Arlo inherited a legacy of a thousand folk songs and a 50-50 chance of getting one of man's cruelest maladies. Huntington's disease left Woody sadly handicapped for 15 years before his death in 1967.

Woody's mother also died of the incurable and then-misunderstood hereditary illness (whose U.S. origins have been traced as far back as 1630). One of Arlo's half sisters from Woody's first marriage died of Huntington's this year, and the other half sister is in the early stages. As the oldest of the three children from Woody's second marriage, Arlo is next in the family to be "at risk" (the textbook term).

It is a risk he long ago learned to live with. "What am I going to do?" Arlo asks. "If I think about it now, is it going to make it better?" But, he adds calmly, "I am prepared for the possibility."

It is an autumn night in Philadelphia. Eugene Ormandy's splendidly rococo Academy of Music is filling with rock fans, costumed crazies (including one in a macabre skeleton's mask), Main Line types and parents from Woody's generation who've brought their kids along. Arlo's show is clearly lacking in pop-rock ambience. It is low-key; his backup band, Shenandoah, amiable. No one hawks T-shirts outside. There are no souvenir programs. "Arlo doesn't like commercial stuff," says Pilla with a sigh. "He thinks it's a rip-off."

In the decade since Alice's Restaurant (his single gold record hangs in the

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bathroom) Arlo has produced eight albums, but his real growth has been as a performer of extraordinary intimacy. His rough tenor has deepened. An eclectic Guthrie performance swings from traditional (*Will the Circle Be Unbroken?*) to his own hits (*Coming Into Los Angeles*) to the Stones' *Connection*. Though he once deliberately avoided his father's songs, Arlo now confidently bites out such Dust Bowl ballads as *1913 Massacre* and *Pretty Boy Floyd*.

He also tells crazy stories—whoppers in the tradition of Will Rogers and Mark Twain. These days he's chuckling over "two-million-year-old snarling, smirking, humunguous giant clams" who have tiny feet and "an inland range of 15 miles." Absurd, but wonderfully effective. "Arlo is a great storyteller, just like Woody," says Pete Seeger. "I've heard that story 15 times, never the same way twice." Then Arlo stops talking and resumes playing—on acoustic and electric guitars, banjo, mandolin, harmonica and keyboards—shaking the chandeliers with his favorite Baptist hymn, *Amazing Grace*.

Everyone still calls it Alice's Restaurant even though owner Alice Brock renamed it Alice's-at-Aveloch last year when she closed the once-funky Stock-bridge joint and opened a swanky motel/ restaurant with 150 seats and 10 pages of wines. At 46, the bawdy, roistering earth mother Brock has become a capitalist. At times she resents the role Arlo has given her in life: "Maybe I'd be doin' a lot better," she snorts, "if I weren't still here slinging hash!"

One night early this month Arlo whirled into Alice's unexpectedly—his house is only 12 miles away—with an entourage that soon swelled to 19. The purpose was to celebrate "the most important commitment of my life." That morning he'd driven across Massachusetts to the small St. Francis Chapel in Springfield. In a quiet Catholic Mass attended by Jackie and a few friends, Arlo was invested as a lay brother in the Third Order of St. Francis. As the officiating friar bestowed Arlo's habit, he smilingly referred to him as "a troubadour of St. Francis." To the monks, Arlo is Brother Arlo.

"Until now I'd have been the last person to think it'd go this far," he admits. "I mean, this is more absurd than the litterin' or the draft." But his friendship with two Franciscan brothers from a nearby hermitage (a rural retreat) grew until Arlo felt ready to take "the opportunity to devote my life to something larger than myself." Baptized a Catholic last year (he likes to call himself "a fulfilled Jew"—his mother's religion), Guthrie became a novitiate in the Franciscan secular order after a three-month postulancy.

Rather than live in monastic isolation, Arlo is carrying his religion into his professional life. He's wary of benefits ("a performer can only give so much") but still sings for everyone from Amnesty International to American Indians. Since February, furthermore, two robed Franciscan brothers have toured with him, offering spiritual counseling to troubled youths along the way. Arlo himself sometimes stays overnight at monasteries instead of motels "to get the strength to go back out there again." He abhors the notion (unlike, say, Seals & Crofts) of self-righteously "seeking out pagans to convert. People aren't paying \$5.50 for sermons." Instead, Arlo hopes to do volunteer work in his robes in hospitals and "be available" to others. "This all may be a mistake," he realizes, "but I'm willing to pursue it as far as it takes me."

As a child, Arlo had to live down not his famous last name but his first. (It comes from a character in a school-book.) "I tried to talk Woody out of it," remembers his mother, Marjorie, "but he wouldn't listen." So she inserted "Davy" as a middle name in case her son needed it. Arlo and his younger brother, Joady (named after Tom Joad, the son in Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*), and sister Nora grew up in the Howard Beach area of Queens. (The Guthries' first child died in a fire before Arlo was born.)

Woody was writing songs by the suit-easeful (*This Land Is Your Land*; *So Long*, *It's Been Good to Know Yuh*), though Arlo never knew how famous his father was "until they sang *Pastures of Plenty* in school." Marjorie was a Martha Graham dancer who later started her own company. One of the first to spot young Arlo's talent was blues great Huddie Ledbetter. "Arlo was dancing around and playing the harmonica," Marjorie recalls, "when Leadbelly picked him up, whirled him around and said, 'He's got it!'" Arlo eventually celebrated "the world's first hootenanny bar mitzvah" in the East Village with Woody's folksinging friends. A year later Bob Dylan arrived on his pilgrimage from Minnesota and asked, "Where's Woody?"

Woody was in the Brooklyn State Hospital, dying. At first he had been misdiagnosed as an alcoholic, then placed in a mental ward because Huntington symptoms include erratic behavior and inability to speak. "That was the great tragedy of Woody's life," says Marjorie, founder and president emeritus of the Committee to Combat Huntington's Disease. "Because he couldn't respond, they thought he couldn't understand. He should have been home with us."

After private school in Stockbridge, where librarian Alice Brock and her since-divorced husband, Ray, took in Arlo and a brood of his friends, Arlo went to Montana's Rocky Mountain College. Dropping out six weeks later, he played Greenwich Village coffeehouses until Alice's Restaurant was the surprise hit of the 1967 Newport Folk Festival. Arthur Penn's 1969 movie version, starring Arlo himself, became a bittersweet farewell to the '60s. Now, Arlo says, parts of the movie "make me cringe." He is equally ambivalent about David Carradine's portrayal of his father in *Bound for Glory*. "It was valid," admits Arlo, who had wanted to play Woody himself. "But *The Grapes of Wrath* it wasn't—and it should have been."

Unlike his restless father, Arlo is firmly rooted in Massachusetts. The Appalachian Trail cuts through a corner of the wooded, 260-acre hillside farm that's been his own rural beautification project for nine years. "I don't have any money in the bank," Arlo explains. "Everything I earn goes into this place." The barnyard of assorted cows, goats, dogs and geese is more a children's zoo than anything else. The main crops are fallen trees and backaches. Arlo has installed such nonagrarian luxuries as a four-track recording studio, Jacuzzi and a sauna.

When Arlo is touring in his converted Greyhound "Blunder Bus" (equipped with TV, stereo, CB and fuzz buster), Jackie occasionally brings along the kids—Abe, 7, Cathy, 5, and Annie. Some doctors advised Arlo never to have children because of the possibility of passing on Huntington's disease. If Arlo gets it, his children will then be "at risk." But the disease does not skip generations: If he doesn't get it, they won't. Arlo's reply to the doctors is his credo: "If Woody had followed that advice, then I wouldn't be here at all. I'd rather have 30 or 35 good years and take my chances. I'm glad I'm here. I will endeavor to teach my children to be glad they're here, regardless of what happens."

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