

PETE SEEGER

★
Folk
Singer,
Activist,
AMERICAN
TREASURE

1919-
2019

BEING GENEROUS OF SPIRIT IS A WONDERFUL WAY TO LIVE

Illustration by Grego Anderson

Moments from a Life

By Chip Rowe

1919

Pete is born in Manhattan to Charles Seeger Jr., a Harvard-trained composer with pacifist views, and Constance de Clyver, a concert violinist. He is the youngest of the couple's three sons.

1920

The family sets out in a Model T Ford hauling a homemade trailer to perform classical music in the rural South. Pete's mother ends the trip after she stops her toddler at the last moment from walking into a campfire.



Pete on his father's lap while mom plays the violin

1932

Pete buys a used, four-string (tenor) banjo while attending a private high school in Connecticut but eventually realizes he can't play folk music on it.

1936

Pete hears the five-string banjo when his father takes him to the Mountain Dance and Folk Festival in North Carolina. "I discovered there was some good music in my country that I never heard on the radio," he recalled.

1938

Pete, a member of the Young Communist League, grows disillusioned at Harvard and drops out. His stepmother (his parents had divorced) tells him, "Peter, you have a talent for song-leading. I think you should develop it." He spends the summer traveling with the Vagabond Puppeteers.



Photo by Jennifer Lee Blakeslee

Remembering **PETE SEEGER**

Folk singer and long-time Beacon resident Pete Seeger would have been 100 years old today (May 3), and celebrations and sing-a-longs are scheduled across the country, as well as the release of a box set that spans his career and includes 20 unreleased tracks (see Page 2). We asked those who knew and encountered Pete and his wife, Toshi, to share stories. The contributions have been condensed for clarity and space.

For more photos and memories, see highlandscurrent.org.

Freddie Martin

On a Monday evening, Jan. 27, 2014, the day Pete died at age 94, I opened a letter from him containing the chord chart and lyrics for a song we had worked on together for some time, "Peace Will Prevail." It was based on an ancient Irish air.

In late 2013, Pete asked the song circle at the Beacon Sloop Club to practice civil-rights songs for a citizens' march on the upcoming Martin Luther King Jr. Day. While rehearsing the songs with the Spring Street Baptist Church choir, I realized "Peace Will Prevail" needed a gospel ending, so I wrote Pete.

From his hospital room, Pete had penned a note atop the song sheet, referred to a chord change I had made, thanked me for "working on it" and encouraged me: "You keep on!" It was classic Pete, giving of his spirit and energy to others, giving until the end.

Florence Northcutt

Little did I think some 35 years ago, while on a ferryboat trip from Algeciras, Spain, across to Morocco, hearing a familiar song coming from the loudspeaker and singing along with a number of passengers who knew it as well as I did, that I would one day live in the same community as the song's performer. "We Shall Overcome" reached to the far corners of the world, and its message is as powerful as it was that day during the height of the civil-rights movement.

I feel privileged to have known Pete and to have seen him right here in our city working quietly, consistently and diligently to build awareness about our beautiful river and protecting our environment. He has raised our consciousness in his modest, humble way, and our world is a better place, thanks to Pete.

Erin Giunta

In 2013, I found myself in line behind Pete at the Beacon Natural Market. After he left the store, he got into his sticker-covered green SUV and sat there for a while. That's when I noticed something by my feet: Pete's car keys! I went outside and said, "I think these are yours, Pete." "Thank you," he said. "I thought I was losing my mind." "Not yet, Pete. Not yet," I said.

Later, within a week after Toshi died, I let him go ahead of me in line at Rite Aid. The clerk greeted him with a big smile and, "Hello, Mr. Seeger!" As he waited for the prescription to be filled, I said, "I'm so sorry about the loss of Toshi. I know she was a wonderful person." He took my hand and said, "Thank you. She's the reason I was able to do what I did. It was all because of her."

Sara Dulaney

Having been raised listening to The Weavers, I was excited to learn about 1981 that they would be singing at something called the Clearwater Festival. I made my way, solo, from Manhattan into the wilds of the Hudson Valley on a drizzly day.

I felt moved to write fan notes to each of them. To Pete, I wrote that

my late great aunt, Mabel Spinney, had run a school that he attended in Litchfield and that her sister, my Aunt Milly, had observed, "We never thought he'd amount to anything."



Photo courtesy Sara Dulaney

Pete as a boy at the Springhill School

A short time later, I got a postcard from Pete with a little banjo drawing. He said that Aunt Mabel's school had been one of the most important experiences of his life.

Pete said that Springhill School (now Forman School) encouraged him

to learn in his own way. He took up the job of running the newspaper, and he felt he had a voice.

The last time I saw Pete, he was putting his recyclables at the foot of his road. Pete answered his own mail. He emptied his own trash. And he amounted to something.

Linda Richards

When I was the education director at Clearwater, the nonprofit founded by Pete and Toshi, he called the office one January afternoon to talk about a tent idea he had for that year's Great Hudson River Revival. Pete was always thinking about more ways to get more people involved in *everything*.

As I took notes, Pete asked if I'd like to come over to talk more. "Do you have ice skates?" he inquired. "Ummm ... not *on me*," I replied. "No problem - we have lots of skates here."

So I went over to the Seegers' and ate dinner with Toshi and Pete and their granddaughter, Moraya. Afterward, I went over to the wood stove and saw a mountain of skates. Each winter, Pete would hose down the circular driveway (at 2 a.m.) to make a rink. Pete put on skates and we skated

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1939

Pete takes a job at the Library of Congress in the Archive of American Folk Song. He meets Woody Guthrie when they both play the same benefit.

1940

Through a work connection, Pete performs on radio programs with Guthrie, Josh White, Burl Ives and Lead Belly.

1941

Pete is a founding member with Guthrie of the Almanac Singers, which releases an album, *Songs of John Doe*, that is critical of the draft.

1942

After the U.S. enters the war, the Almanac Singers release a new album, *Dear Mr. President*, on which Pete sings: "Now, Mr. President, / We haven't always agreed in the past, I know, / But that ain't at all important now. / What is important is what we got to do, / We got to lick Mr. Hitler, and until we do, / Other things can wait." ... Pete is drafted into the U.S. Army and sent to the Pacific.

1943

Pete marries Toshi Ota. Their first son, Peter, dies at age six months while Pete is deployed. The couple will have three more children: Daniel, Mika and Tinya.

1948

Pete returns from the Army and, with three friends, forms The Weavers.

1949

Pete and Toshi, who are living with her parents in Greenwich Village, buy 17 acres at the base of Mount Beacon and build a two-room log cabin. Pete joins the Dutchess Junction Volunteer Fire Department, and quits the Communist Party. "I thought it was pointless," he said.



Pete works on the cabin in Beacon, circa 1950.

Photo courtesy Gene Deitch

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Elise Dietrich @djsereia

Moments from a Life



Pete with Woody Guthrie, circa 1950

1950

The Weavers top the charts for 13 weeks with a cover of Lead Belly's "Goodnight Irene." Within a year, the group has sold 4 million records. Pete tells *Time*: "It's not so much fun now."

1952

The Weavers are blacklisted after an informant tells the House Un-American Activities Committee that three of its four members, including Pete, are Communists.

1955

Pete is ordered to testify before the committee.

MR. SEEGER: I feel that in my whole life I have never done anything of any conspiratorial nature and I resent very much and very deeply the implication of being called before this committee that in some way because my opinions may be different from yours, or yours, Mr. Willis, or yours, Mr. Scherer, that I am any less of an American than anybody else. I love my country very deeply, sir.

CHAIRMAN WALTER: Why don't you make a little contribution toward preserving its institutions?

MR. SEEGER: I feel that my whole life is a contribution. That is why I would like to tell you about it.

CHAIRMAN WALTER: I don't want to hear about it.



around to the music of steel drums he piped into an outdoor sound system.

I remember seeing the moon through the trees that cold evening and thinking this was one of those nights you cherish for a lifetime.

Tom Chapin

It began in 1957, near Andover, New Jersey, where we spent every childhood summer. Our Aunt Happy brought out an album called *The Weavers at Carnegie Hall*. We were hooked from the clarion bugle call of Pete's five-string banjo on the first song, "Darlin' Corey."

To our amazement, Grandma Chapin had a five-string banjo in her basement. We bought a copy of Pete's book, *How to Play the Five-String Banjo*. I got a cheap steel string guitar, memorized chords and started using fingerpicks because Harry was so loud on the banjo. At our first public performance as the Chapin Brothers, we played three songs by The Weavers.

In 1975 or 1976, I was backstage at Huntington High School on Long Island with Pete before a benefit concert. A reporter asked Pete: "You've spent your life doing concerts for causes. Has it made a difference?"

Pete thought a moment, then said in his calm, measured way: "I don't know. But I do know that I've met the good people, people with live hearts, live eyes and live minds." This was a quintessential Seeger answer, moving the conversation toward larger issues and the people he believed deserved credit.

Michael Bowman

When I was in college, I got lost hiking between Breakneck and Mount Beacon and ended up in some guy's backyard. A tall man came out asking if I needed help and with a smile pointed me down his driveway toward Route 9D. Only later did I realize who it was.

Jennifer Blakeslee

At the 2013 Strawberry Festival, I asked Pete if I might take his portrait. Afterward I thanked him for everything he'd done for Beacon and the environment, and he said, "Ahhh, but you don't know the foolish things I've done!"



Pete at the Clearwater Festival in 2012

Photo by Tom Chapin

Stacy Labriola

Many years ago Tony Trishka was recording a banjo retrospective and wanted to include Pete. So he invited Pete to come to my husband Art's studio at our home in Garrison. Pete came down from Beacon and regaled the group with hours of recorded stories and did some banjo playing, as well.

After a day of recording, Pete said his goodbyes and headed out. About five minutes later there was a knock and it was Pete with a broken headlight he had found when exiting the driveway. He handed it to us and asked that we recycle it properly. As he left, the engineer on the project, Joe Johnson, said, "There, you have your Pete Seeger story!" Happy birthday, Pete!

Michael Mell

We had just moved to Cold Spring and my eldest son was in grade school at Haldane. At a "Differences Day" celebration in the cafeteria, Pete Seeger walked in, banjo in hand, along with two parents who were musicians, as if it were the most natural thing in the world.

I was gobsmacked. The last Pete Seeger concert I attended was at Carnegie Hall. After that I would occasionally see him, with wool cap and plaid shirt, exiting Angelina's with a pie. I regret never having said hello.

Robert Cutler

In 2012, Toni Bryan and I interviewed Pete at Boscobel. We were

producing an audio tour that included stories about the river.

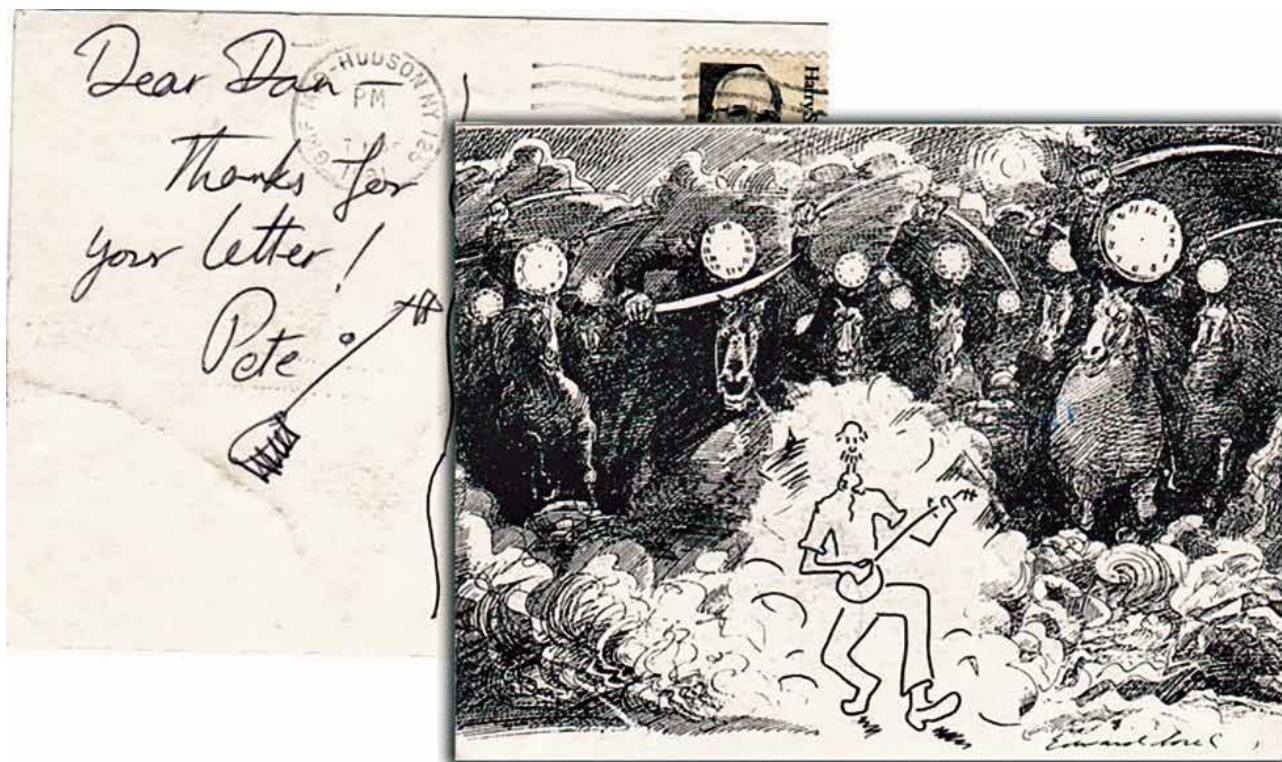
He drove down from Beacon on a snowy day with a banjo in his little black Honda. After about two hours, we had everything we wanted, including a performance of "Waist Deep in the Big Muddy." But as we wrapped up, he asked if we'd like to hear three new verses that Toshi had written for "Turn, Turn, Turn."

There we were, three of us in a tiny room, and Pete serenading us with one of the greatest songs of the 20th century.

Roger Coco

In the early 1970s, I led wilderness trips near the Hudson River for American Youth Hostels. The protest against a proposed pump storage plant on Storm King was in full swing. Pete had sent a postcard with a photo of the Clearwater to the AYH office asking if "Strider" (my nickname) could guide a group of protesters and reporters through the woods and valleys with Pete yodeling and singing against the echoes of the waterfalls of Stag-nun Creek, up and over Butter Hill and to the bottom of Storm King.

I had no idea who he was, and I don't know how he got my name. What would a peace-loving liberal want with an old-time conservative like me? We were lucky that day, there was no trouble. Instead, we stood victorious at the bottom of Storm King, and Seeger whipped a monopoly.



John Cronin

There we were, in Beacon in 1972, and this big boat comes sailing in, and, for God's sake, there's Pete Seeger on the bow, and he yells to the crowd: "We're going to be rebuilding this dock, so I'm looking for volunteers."

I thought, I get to hang out with Pete! The great thing about spending time with Pete Seeger is that being with Pete is pretty much like being at a Pete Seeger concert. If we started slowing down, you know, Pete would start singing a work song or a sea shanty to get us all banging away. When his back got stiff, he would stand up and turn toward the Highlands and start yodeling.

Between all these things, he'd give little homilies. He'd say, "Well, you know, if we all work together, we can clean up the Hudson River." And I thought, this guy is just out of his mind, because this is a damn dirty river, and it's an awful big river, and there's just no way.

He's like a combination of a Pied Piper and a Johnny Appleseed, and you couldn't spend that much time with Pete without him cajoling you into something.

Vickie Raabin

I was lucky enough to have been in several concerts with Pete so he knew me by sight, referring to me as "that little music teacher." I had bought a used banjo and had it sitting in my studio on Main Street when Pete walked by, stopped, came in and started playing it. He fixed the bridge and asked if I minded — of course not! To this day, whenever I get new strings the bridge is always put back the way he adjusted it.

Brent Spodek

If you move to Beacon, or even think about moving to Beacon, someone will

tell you that this is where Pete Seeger lived. When I moved here, I knew where Pete's house was before I knew where the hardware store was.

Although I can't carry a tune, I organize a monthly adult sing-a-long. When I complained to Pete about my lack of musical leadership skills, he said, "It doesn't matter if you can sing; it matters if you can bring other people together to sing."

Steve Sherman

I had gone to the parking lot at the 1992 Clearwater festival and I saw Pete putting something into his car. Toshi drove up in a golf cart (she was running the festival) and I asked if I could take a photo of them. Unfortunately, Pete wasn't in the mood. After I said to Toshi that Pete looked tense, she grabbed his ass, he jumped, and she threw her arms around him.



James Gurney

Besides hearing him play at festivals in the Hudson Valley, my family got to know Pete through a tattered copy of his songbook. In 1991, when my son, Dan, was a 4-year-old budding

accordion player, he wrote Pete a fan letter, and Pete wrote back on a postcard with a drawing by Ed Sorel showing Pete with his banjo outrunning the Horsemen of Time [above]. At his concerts, Pete made every person feel that they had a good enough voice.

Marc Breslav

Pete hated being famous. I ran into him one day at Grey Printing in Cold Spring shortly after the Great Hudson River Revival had been closed in the middle of the day due to lightning.

"Hi Pete," I said.

He grimaced, avoiding eye contact. "How did Clearwater do money-wise with that storm?"

The grimace brightened to a frown. "You know, all we have to do is get a quarter-inch thick rubber carpet for the whole site," he said, still averting his eyes.

"Just have to make sure it's recycled rubber, Pete!"

He looked me in the eye, smiling broadly.

Ellen Gersh

Pete was really involved in the local schools. He played for children because he was blacklisted and couldn't perform elsewhere. He realized that social music was dying, that people don't sing anymore since the invention of the phonograph.

People get caught up in the celebrity of Pete, but he hated people fussing over him. The best way to honor him is to sing and encourage young folks to sing. Also, to join the fight for equality for all people. If everyone put their energies into fighting the fight that Pete did, we would be on the right track.

Tink Lloyd

Pete knew my partner Joziah Longo and me by sight from the many

1955

The Weavers regroup to play a sold-out show at Carnegie Hall. But Pete leaves in 1957 after the other three members agree to do a cigarette commercial.

1957

Pete is indicted on 10 counts of contempt of Congress. He is convicted in 1961 and given a year in jail but the sentence is overturned on appeal.

1959

At the Newport Folk Festival, writer Studs Terkel introduces Pete as "America's tuning fork."

1960

Pete and others popularize the spiritual "We Will Overcome" as the anthem of the civil rights movement. Pete says he changed "will" to "shall" to make it easier to sing.

1962

The Kingston Trio has a hit with Pete's "Where Have All the Flowers Gone?" and Peter, Paul and Mary with "If I Had a Hammer."

1965

The Byrds top the charts with Pete's "Turn! Turn! Turn!"

1966

Pete and Toshi found Hudson River Sloop Clearwater.

1967

The Smothers Brothers ask Pete to perform his anti-war song, "Waist Deep in the Big Muddy," during a taping of their variety show, but it is cut by CBS censors.



Pete Seeger performing at Yorktown Heights High School in 1967

Photo by James Kavallines/LOC

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Moments from a Life

1969

The Clearwater, a replica of a Hudson River sloop, is launched.

1982

Pete performs at a benefit concert for the Solidarity resistance movement in Poland.

1994

Pete receives the National Medal of Arts from President Bill Clinton, as well as the Kennedy Center Honor.

1995

Pete tells *The New York Times*: “I still call myself a communist, because communism is no more what Russia made of it than Christianity is what the churches make of it.”

1996

Pete wins the Grammy for Best Traditional Folk Album for *Pete*. He also is inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame.

2009

Pete and his grandson, Tao Rodriguez-Seeger, sing Guthrie’s “This Land is Your Land” with Bruce Springsteen at Barack Obama’s inaugural concert.

2009

Pete wins the Grammy for Best Traditional Folk Album for *At 89*.

2010

Pete wins the Grammy for Best Musical Album for Children for *Tomorrow’s Children*.

2013

Toshi dies on July 9 at age 91.

2013

Pete is nominated for a Grammy for Best Spoken Word Album for *Pete Seeger: The Storm King: Narratives, Poems*.

2014

Pete dies in a New York City hospital on Jan. 27 at age 94. After his death, he is named the inaugural winner of the Woody Guthrie Prize.



Pete studies posters in 1964 announcing his concerts in Prague.

Photo courtesy Gene Deitch

concerts we had played together over the years [as The Slambonian Circus of Dreams], so he recognized us one day in October 2013 when we walked into the Foundry Cafe in Cold Spring. He had gotten off the train and needed a ride to Beacon, which we were happy to provide. As we drove, and at his home, he gave us an update.

He was doing another edit of his autobiography and had photos on the wall from his whole life. He shared the history of New York as we drove north on 9D, how the quarry at Breakneck Mountain provided the stones for the Brooklyn Bridge, the first trains into New York City, the beginnings of Smithsonian Folkways, the first time he met Martin Luther King Jr. at the U.N. (and saw J. Edgar Hoover drive by in a black limo), being blacklisted and Toshi having to become his booking agent (she built the performing circuit that was the foundation for Baez, Dylan, etc., to tour).

When we asked him what he thought we could learn from him and how to carry on, he said. “If you do what is right, it has an effect not only on the future, but on the past, like ripples in water.” That is the hope he felt just four months before he passed.

Phil Ciganer

In the early 1970s, when I came to the Hudson Valley to open the Towne Crier, I heard Pete Seeger lived in Beacon, and I hoped to meet the great man. Sure enough, when one of our first scheduled performers was detained by car trouble, Pete showed up and volunteered to “fill in.” That, I soon came to learn, was “typical Pete.”

As we got to know each other, I became involved with Clearwater and

Pete’s passion to reclaim the Hudson River. “Phil,” he said, “if you want to change the world, you start at home.”

One year, I helped book Pete at the New Orleans Jazz Festival. As we landed in New Orleans, I worried that I had blundered by bringing a folk icon with his banjo to a loud party of a festival. But sure enough, Pete charmed them immediately with his spirit and won them over with his songs. That’s when I realized how much he had come to mean to us all. Pete was that rare person who lived up to his ideals.



Phil Ciganer with Pete and a painting by Michael D’Antuono that hangs at the Towne Crier.

Dar Williams

Pete and I were doing a fundraiser and before I asked if he thought a recent biography of him had been accurate. He nodded slowly and said, “Yes, but there was one thing that didn’t seem right. He said I worried about my career. I never gave a shit about my career.”

I felt honored when Pete asked me to walk in the woods with him at a Clearwater festival. He wanted to point out the invasive species and alert me to events where people in waders pulled purple loosestrife out of the water. That was the day I leaned about the mile-a-minute vine.

Gene Deitch

Pete was an idealist, his mind sharply focused on brotherhood and sisterhood, and would barely discuss anything else. He was a pure propagandist for his ideals. He referred to himself as a “communist” in the purest Karl Marx sense. I loved him for his purity of heart and his idealism, as much as for his songs.

When he was on a world tour in 1964, about to come to Czechoslovakia, where I have lived since 1959, he felt he would be in a place of like-thinkers, and would be warmly welcomed in a Communist-ruled country. What he didn’t realize was that he was coming into a country that followed whatever was written in the Soviet newspaper, cleverly named *Pravda* (“Truth”).

Pete and his family were assigned to a hotel restricted to Western “capitalist” business people. He never had a chance to meet any Czech officials, and was booked into obscure venues and given virtually no press coverage. Nevertheless, his concerts were packed, due to word-of-mouth and a few posters. Pete was perplexed by the lack of official support, and I had to explain it to him in the most careful way. Ironically, four years later came the short-lived freedoms of the Prague Spring, and a label called Supraphon bought tapes I had made of Pete’s concerts so it could release them as an album.

Robert Murphy

In 1965 Pete was asked to perform a concert in the Beacon High School gym to benefit the scholarship loan fund of the Beacon Teachers Association. The Vietnam War was escalating and Pete was an early and vociferous opponent. A few weeks earlier, Pete had performed a few anti-war songs at Moscow University in the Soviet Union.

Feelings were still raw among some residents about the singer's failure in 1955 to assist the House Un-American Activities Committee. Immediately after the concert announcement, a committee of 12 civic, fraternal and religious organizations formed to stop it, criticizing the board for allowing a "figure of controversy" to appear before impressionable youngsters.

However, the letters that poured into *The Evening News* were about 5-to-1 in favor of the show. Writers invoked principles such as freedom of speech and the right to dissent.

On the night of the concert, Nov. 27, 1965, Police Chief Sam Wood and five officers patrolled the gym. There was no need. No one was there to protest. Instead, it was filled to capacity. Pete sang 25 songs over two hours, including "Old Dutchess Junction" sung to the tune of "Red River Valley," and the concert raised \$3,000 [about \$24,000 today]. Perhaps hearts and minds were changed by this concert, and soon a community was to learn more about Pete and that ... there is a time to every purpose under heaven.

Rob Abbot

In the early 1980s, a friend asked if I wanted to play with him at a folk festival at the Appalachian South Folklife Center. I agreed, although I only knew four or five chords.

I can't remember what songs we played, but I do remember my shock being told we were "opening" for Pete Seeger on the makeshift outdoor stage. I've since learned that Pete played thousands of gigs from such stages, entertaining college students or playing from the back of a flatbed truck for

farmworkers or serenading workers on the picket line.

I am proud to have shared a stage with this gentle man on a hot dusty Saturday afternoon in coal country.

Eliza Nagel

Here is Pete with my dad, Fred Nagel [below] in 2007 at a weekly peace vigil on Route 9 during the war in Afghanistan and Iraq. Pete carried the flag when he crossed Route 9 to sing a few songs with counter-protesters. Their favorite was "This Land is Your Land."



Damon Banks

When we first moved to Cold Spring, my wife and I didn't feel entirely comfortable. There isn't a lot of diversity and the area has a lot of racist/anti-Semitic history.

Pete and Toshi saw me with my bass on the train platform one day, and Pete asked: "Do you live around here? Do you know about the history of this area?" I didn't know who he was, so I rolled my eyes and said, "Yeah, I heard about it."

He began to talk about how, because of his music, his political views and his "friends," this area made it difficult for him to live in for many years. He said he stuck with it because of its natural beauty, his family and the strong friendships that developed. He thought that my presence as a local resident (and an African-American musician/teacher) was a very positive development and it would be great if I "stayed in the neigh-

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Pete with photos he hung on the wall while writing his autobiography

Photo by Michael Bowman

When Pete Seeger Wasn't Welcome

Longtime residents recall Clearwater set adrift

By Liz Schevtchuk Armstrong

Remembered near and far for his folk music and political activism, longtime Highlands resident Pete Seeger nevertheless encountered hostility on the streets of Cold Spring in an era not all remember and few wish to discuss.

At the time, the environmental and civil rights movements had erupted, there were violent divisions over the Vietnam War, and political differences convulsed communities large and small. The unrest hit the Highlands, too.

In 1966, Seeger and his wife, Toshi, created the environmental group Hudson River Sloop Clearwater, which built a replica historic river sloop, launched in 1969 to promote environmental protection.

Barbara Lusk, who lives in Philipstown, worked in the Clearwater office from 1971 to 1973, and sailed with Seeger. On the water, Seeger "was absolutely terrific, very patient" and knowledgeable, she said. "He didn't talk that much about himself" but about the river and sloops, and "he did concerts along the way," inviting the public to sail with him.

Yet early on, the Clearwater was a target of local animosity.

So was Seeger.

On one occasion, several longtime residents said, after problems beset its rudder, the Clearwater tied up at the Cold Spring dock. That night, as the crew rested — but perhaps not with Seeger aboard — an angry band slipped down to the dock and cut the mooring lines, to set the boat adrift and into potential danger.

The vandalism, recalled Marie Early, was a serious transgression that troubled her father, who was mayor in that period.

"Cutting the mooring lines was a national offense," said Early, a current village trustee. "Why no one was prosecuted, I don't know. It was not a pleasant incident. The fortunate thing is no one was hurt."

In a letter to the *Putnam County News & Recorder* in June 1970, Cold Spring resident Yolande Slater Ogilby described a Clearwater concert stop the week before when "once again local yokels caused trouble, cut lines, threw beer cans and stones and used unprintable

language; called the captain and his crew 'Communists' and much more. Peter Seeger got more than his fair share of abuse, as usual. When is this going to stop?"

Jan Thacher lived in a home on Market Street at the time; his family rented rooms to the staff of Clearwater, whose office was then on Cold Spring's Main Street.

"Pete knew he was not wanted in town," Thacher said. "Every time he came, this group [of locals] would make his life miserable. He would hide his car in our driveway so no one would know he was here."

Thacher said friends would drive Seeger to the Clearwater office rather than have him walk the few blocks in the open. Toshi, who sometimes accompanied him, did not generate similar antagonism, Thacher said.

Seeger had been blacklisted, along with other left-leaning public figures, entertainers, and writers during the political persecutions of the 1950s led by Sen. Joe McCarthy and the House Un-American Activities Committee to root out alleged Communists.

After Pete got off the blacklist in the late 1960s, "one of the first concerts he gave was in Cold Spring at the bandstand" along the river, Thacher recalled. "After that, Pete basically came and went as he pleased. However, there were still times when he'd sneak into the village" because of opposition closer to home — his wife.

"Toshi had forbidden sweets, cookies in particular," Thacher said. "I'd often catch Pete exiting The Main Course with a bagful, saying, 'You can't tell Toshi!'"

While Seeger returned to Cold Spring, the Clearwater did not, for years. Because of a village law that banned visiting boats from using the dock, the sloop only returned in 2009, when it, like Seeger, came for the Fourth of July.

Seth Gallagher, who was then mayor, greeted Seeger, assuring him that he and the sloop were welcome in the village.

"Seeger was so important," Gallagher says now. "We were lucky to have him in our community. He did such good, especially for the river. We have him to thank for the much cleaner conditions we have."

borhood.” He finally told me who he was (which blew my mind) and the three of us rode to the Bronx together. That experience inspired us to stay.

Nell Timmer

From 2003 to 2008, I owned a coffee shop in Beacon. Although it was pouring rain on Spirit of Beacon Day in 2004, we saw a hunched-over figure in a yellow rain slicker in the empty lot next door picking up garbage.

We went out to see if the person needed help and there was Pete. He turned to us and said, “You know, if everyone picked up one piece of garbage a day, the world would be a much cleaner place.” Needless to say, we went back inside and returned with our rain jackets and a garbage bag.

Nathalie Jonas and Philip Nobel

Pete came to welcome The Living Room to Main Street in Cold Spring in 2011 and, in the course of the conversation, recited the Gettysburg Address for us.

Joe Neville

It was the spring of 1966 and I was failing high school English. The teacher said, “Even if you pass the Regent’s exam, I will have to fail you unless you do something about it.” For the topic of my final report, I chose American folk music. I had a brainstorm (very rare). Instead of spending hours in the library, I would talk to Pete. My father, Doug, owned the general store at the foot of Mount Beacon. All the “mountaineers” frequented the store, including Pete, so I knew him quite well. I drove up his hill and he was in his yard, holding a handsaw. He said, “Hi Dougie



Bob Dylan and Pete Seeger performing at the Newport Folk Festival in 1963.

Photo by Daniel Gómez-Ibáñez

[everyone called me that because of my dad], what brings you up here?” I told him and he said, “I don’t like that teacher, either; let’s see if we can’t get you an A.” And we did. Thanks, Pete.

Daniel Gómez-Ibáñez

I liked Pete Seeger. He and I corresponded on a couple of occasions, and once, at my somewhat presumptuous invitation in the early 1960s, he came to my high school in Middletown, Connecticut, to give a free concert. He was a big hit with everyone, students and teachers. The idea to invite him came out of a conversation with my music teacher when I asked why she didn’t include folk music as part of the curriculum.

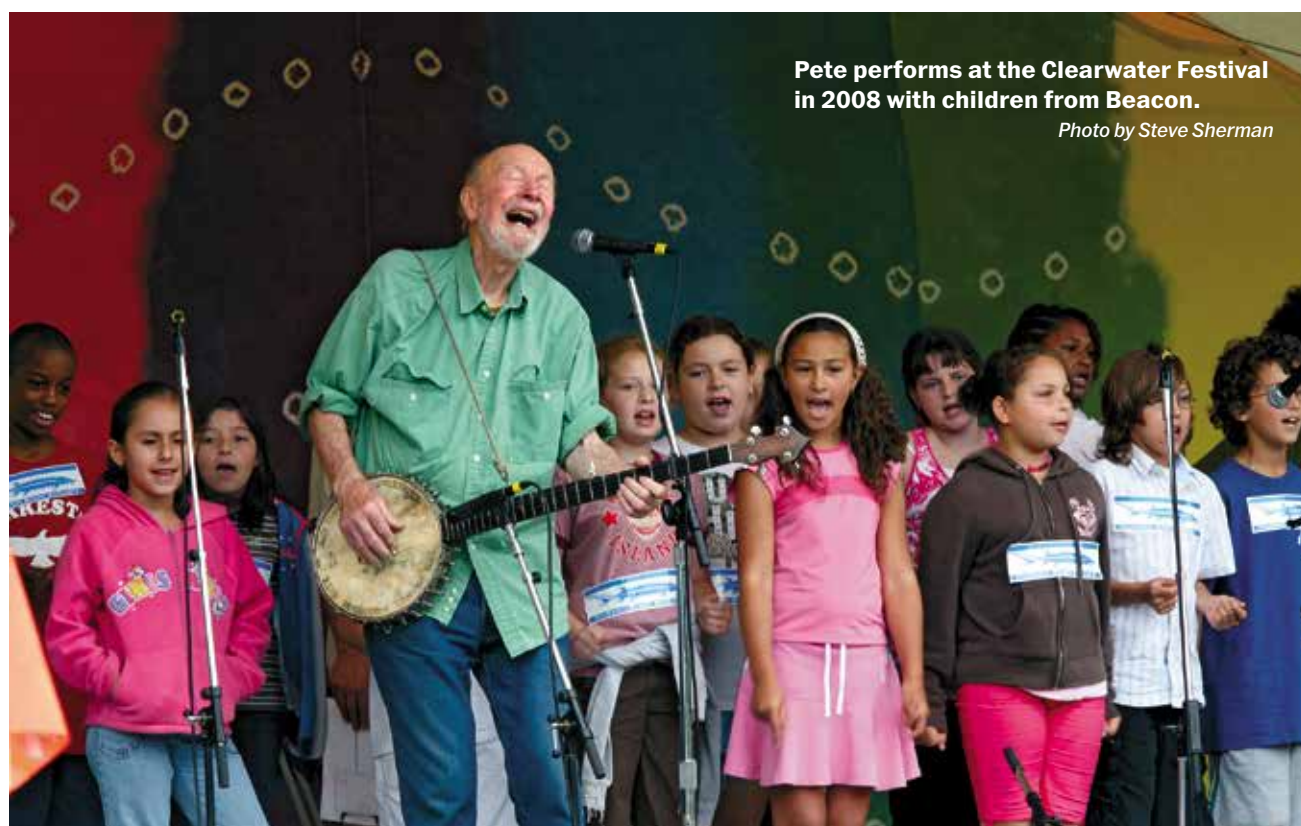
Al Scorch

Pete was born as broadcast radio ushered out the player piano and an infantile record industry played the

role of folklorist in trying to find the latest hillbilly and race hits. He stood up to things that usually break a man: political assassination at the hands of his own government and offers of big money. He left this world a better place but inequality and injustice remain in newer, slicker forms.

A lot of people think Pete was enraged when Bob Dylan “went electric” in 1965 at the Newport Folk Festival but he said he was actually appalled at the sound quality. The P.A. had to be cranked so loud that it began to distort and the vocals were rendered unintelligible. Pete was pissed that a song as good as “Maggie’s Farm” was being garbled to mush.

Another classic Pete moment of unwavering commitment to quality sound is him gently explaining mid-song to a massive crowd that clapping along at Carnegie Hall doesn’t work.



Pete performs at the Clearwater Festival in 2008 with children from Beacon.

Photo by Steve Sherman

Pete Events

ONGOING

☐ Remembering Pete Seeger

BEACON

Howland Library
313 Main St. | 845-831-1134
beaconhistorical.org

The Beacon Historical Society has mounted an exhibit of photos of Pete’s life and times that continues through May. Open during library hours.

FRI 3

☐ Open Mic

BEACON

7:30 p.m. Towne Crier | 379 Main St.
845-855-1300 | townecrier.com

Sign-up begins at 5 p.m. to honor Pete’s life and music.

SAT 4

☐ “Oh, My Gosh!”

BEACON

2:30 – 4:30 p.m. Howland Cultural Center
477 Main St. | 845-831-4614
brownpapertickets.com/event/4220280

This group show will feature works by 34 artists interpreting their experiences with Pete, along with a series of 12 paintings by Dan Botkin inspired by “Turn, Turn, Turn.” It continues through May 27.

SAT 4

☐ Celebrating Pete Seeger’s Centennial

BEACON

8 p.m. Howland Cultural Center
477 Main St. | 845-831-4614
howlandculturalcenter.org

The tribute will include performances of Seeger’s songs by artists such as David and Jacob Bernz, Carolyn Doctorow, Lydia Adams Davis with Annalyse and Ryan, The Rix, R.J.Storm and Old School, and Spook Handy. *Cost: \$15 (\$20 door)*

SUN 5

☐ Pete Seeger Festival

PUTNAM VALLEY

2 p.m. Tompkins Corners Cultural Center
729 Peekskill Hollow Road | 845-528-7280
tompkinscorners.org

The fourth annual event will bring together friends who performed and worked with Pete. Donations will be collected for local organizations that Seeger created. *Free*

SUN 5

☐ Turn, Turn, Turn!

POUGHKEEPSIE

7 p.m. Bardavon | 35 Market St.
845-473-2072 | bardavon.org

The Vanaver Caravan dance troupe will be joined by Maria Muldaur, Happy Traum, Tom Chapin and Seeger’s daughter, Tinya. *Cost: \$35 to \$45*