Woody Guthrie's national anthem turns 80

This land is your land, this land is my land,
From California to the New York Island.
From the Redwood Forest,
to the gulfstream waters
This land was made for you and me.

—Woodrow Wilson "Woody" Guthrie,
Feb. 23, 1940

"This Land Is Your Land," called an "alternative national anthem" when added to the Library of Congress National Registry, turned 80 this month.

Despite its age, it keeps growing, most recently as the theme in TV ads for the new Harrison Ford film "The Call of the Wild" and still sung by children at school events and around campfires.

It was born after the Okemah, Okla., native had gone to California to escape the Dust Bowl and Great Depression, met actor Will Geer and his wife, and hitchhiked to New York to visit them, arriving in a Feb. 16, 1940 blizzard.

Seven days later he scribbled out memories of his beautiful but sad observations, "As I went walking that ribbon of highway."

Woody fought fascism in World War II's Merchant Marine and Army, first recording the song during a brief April 1944 leave. Released in 1949, it's now the shining symbol of his prolific work.

Al Aumuller/*New York World-Telegram and the Sun*

He wrote "This Land" at 27, and thousands more songs until failing health slowly silenced his pen and guitar. He died in 1967. His 108th birthday is July 14.

His work celebrated natural beauty and fought for a better life for the poor and low-income workers.
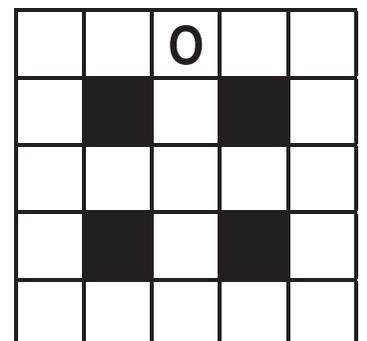
"I hate a song that makes you think that you are not any good," Guthrie said, words recalled by Geer (now famous as Grandpa Walton of the classic TV show).

"I am out to sing songs that will prove to you that this is your world...no matter what color, what size you are..."

Cross Five

Place these six words in the crossword grid:
Reedy, Ocean, Songs, Woody, Words, Yayas

Activity: Find words in your newspaper that describe your image of This Land we call home. Visit the Woody Guthrie Center in Tulsa.

For the Kid in You

UNLOCK YOUR INNER CHILD

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