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# A Freewheelin' Time: A Memoir Of Greenwich Village In The Sixties



## Synopsis

“The girl with Bob Dylan on the cover of *Freewheelin’* broke a forty-five-year silence with this affectionate and dignified recalling of a relationship doomed by Dylan’s growing fame. • *UNCUT* magazine Suze Rotolo chronicles her coming of age in Greenwich Village during the 1960s and the early days of the folk music explosion, when Bob Dylan was finding his voice and she was his muse. A shy girl from Queens, Suze was the daughter of Italian working-class Communists, growing up at the dawn of the Cold War. It was the age of McCarthy and Suze was an outsider in her neighborhood and at school. She found solace in poetry, art, and music • and in Greenwich Village, where she encountered like-minded and politically active friends. One hot July day in 1961, Suze met Bob Dylan, then a rising musician, at a concert at Riverside Church. She was seventeen, he was twenty; they were both vibrant, curious, and inseparable. During the years they were together, Dylan transformed from an obscure folk singer into an uneasy spokesperson for a generation. A *Freewheelin’* Time is a hopeful, intimate memoir of a vital movement at its most creative. It captures the excitement of youth, the heartbreak of young love, and the struggles for a brighter future in a time when everything seemed possible.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

In July 1961, Rotolo, a shy 17-year-old from Queens, met an up-and-coming young folk singer named Bob Dylan at an all-day folk festival at Riverside Church in Manhattan, and her life changed forever. For the next few years, Suze and Bobby lived a freewheeling life amid the bohemians in the

emerging folk scene in Greenwich Village. Rotolo offers brief glimpses of the denizens populating the new music scene below 14th Street in the early '60s and recalls the excitement as writers and musicians like Dylan wandered in and out of each other's lives and apartments, trading music and lyrics to produce a new sound that would change American music. Yet as the woman who's clutching Dylan's arm on the cover of his second album *Freewheelin' Bob Dylan*, Rotolo doesn't give us a very freewheelin' memoir. She offers shallow, almost schoolgirl-like reflections on the man she loved and lived with for three years. In a dull and plodding manner, Rotolo provides no new insights into Dylan, claiming, as have so many, that he is mysterious and enigmatic. In an excerpt from one of her journals, she writes ambivalently that she believes in his genius and that he is an extraordinary writer, but that she doesn't think he's an honorable person. (May) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

One of the most recognizable album-cover images of the 1960s shows a young man, underdressed for the winter in a light suede jacket, leaning into a young woman. Rotolo was that young woman, and in this uneven, overlong, still fascinating memoir, she tells the story behind that photo and her love for Bob Dylan. Rotolo met Dylan in 1961; she was 17, he 20. While Dylan is the bedrock of her memoir—without him, would there be a book?—he isn't the whole story. Rotolo discusses her own background (Italian heritage, Communist parents, inability to fit in growing up in Queens, the craziness and sexism of the era), but the dominant setting is the Greenwich Village folk scene. In informal, conversational style, Rotolo recalls those who made that scene, many of them famous but none more so than the complicated Dylan. Given his formidable presence, Rotolo's adamant refusal to be more than "a string on his guitar" in the book is admirable. The moments when she comes most alive in its pages are the most compelling. --June Sawyers --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

I was disappointed in this book. Although it was somewhat interesting, it didn't seem very perceptive. She spent a lot more time describing her own life as a "red diaper baby" than in telling us much about Dylan which is probably why most people are reading this book. They were both very young during their relationship and I don't think she understood him or herself for most of that time. Also, I don't think that the book was written that well and it was pretty disorganized. I'm guessing that I would probably have been better off to have read Dylan's own autobiography "Chronicles".

i loved this book, getting to know the person in the songs and the relationship, i really liked Suze in reading this book, would've loved to know her, grateful for her sharing of her experience, she was a couple of years dead when i read it, i'm glad she wrote the story while she was still here. Unlike some reviewers, for me, the book was a page turner and did not last long enough, even though i read it slowly and closely. The story is told with genuineness, as the person she is, not who other people want her to be. She's someone who knows how to be true to herself. One of the most heart wrenching parts of the book for me was when she was about 14, her sister, Carla, moved out on her own, and Suze was left alone with their mother, who was an over the top alcoholic and rage-aholic. During that period, Suze endured brutal emotional abuse, the target of wild loud hate-filled rants from which she had no escape, as her tortured depressed mother blamed Suze for her unhappiness. Suze had some support from outside the home, family friends who knew what she was going through and let her come and stay with them for respite sometimes. Like all people, her mother was a mixture and Suze took the best and tried to shut out the worst. Maybe this had something to do with her increasingly difficult reaction to the raucous and chaotic atmosphere involved in being Dylan's girl. She was his first love, and he was hers, their relationship lasted most of 4 years, which is a long time for any first relationship, much less one that had so little privacy, and so many amazing challenges to cope with. Suze grew up lonely and often alone as a kid, she knew and adapted to solitude. She drew on her strengths to entertain and educate herself and to develop her creativity and to evolve her morals and values. It was one of those stories where, even though i know how it's going to turn out, i couldn't help wishing for a different ending, for true first love to triumph and all romantic dreams to come true. The story gives context to Suze's rejection of the relationship with Dylan and moving on to do many other things with her life, in which she surrounded herself with a loving family of her own and continued to develop and exercise her own special talents. It's no wonder Dylan, and then her husband to be, fell in love with her. She has a simple and honest charisma. She gives her experience of the Village at that intense exciting time in history. i had a feeling of her disconnectedness throughout, of an objective observer, keeping a self-protective distance. Clearly, she maintained a limit on the depth of feeling she shared for the most part, she shared what she was comfortable sharing, she shared the person that she shares with the world, drawing the boundaries she chooses to draw. It's a memoir, it's not an expose or tell-all kind of style.

I learned of this memoir after Dylan received the Nobel Prize for poetry and was interested both

because of him, but also because I spent a fair amount of time in the Village during the same era, being just a few years younger than Rotolo and Dylan. It wasn't what I expected (which was an opportunity to indulge in nostalgia). In many ways it is more important as it recollected the McCarthy Era, pre-feminist strictures, the evolution of folk music and the price of fame, both to the artist and those close to him/her. Rotolo, very much a deeply curious autodidact who did not do well in traditional educational settings, writes well and seemingly knowledgeably (one error I particularly noticed is that she referred to Theodore Reich as a psychologist rather than a psychiatrist and psychoanalyst). My major criticism of the book is that it didn't carry me along. My personal interest in the people and times kept me at it but there were times it felt a bit of a slog. Nonetheless, if you stick with it, I think you'll find it worthwhile if you have a general interest in Dylan, the early 60s in Greenwich Village.

When Bob Dylan and Johnny Cash were announced as featured artists in a months long exhibit at Nashville's COUNTRY MUSIC HALL OF FAME, I immediately set out to read the books about the two which I had missed, as well as listen to much of the music. After just a few months, and a half dozen books, I realized what a HUGE task I had undertaken, and this book, which I shared with a young woman from Oregon, Texas and Chicago, was useful to her in understanding the time, the era, and the concept of 'red diaper baby' (one which I learned in Mississippi '64 and after, as so many of the people willing to risk their lives for others in the civil rights movement were children of 'reds' from the thirties, forties, fifties, and later.) Perhaps the most useful function of this beautiful portrait of the 'Old Dylan' musical era, is to give a good intro to last century's more interesting creative folk who gathered from Dakota, to Oklahoma, to New York City, and Mississippi and Georgia in Greenwich Village. (Peter Yarrow, Ian Tyson, Peter LaFarge, 'cowboys of the Village' according to Rotolo, as well as better known folk like Baez, Pete & Mike Seeger, Judy Collins, Dave Von Ronk, Mississippi John Hurt & others) and eventually, one musical genius, Dylan/aka Zimmerman, who eclipsed them all. Now he's connected with Cash in opening up a space in Nashville for the avalanche of folk, rock, and country artists pushing the creative envelope here, the gist of the exhibit at the Hall of Fame, which also is unique in giving a PERSPECTIVE on the artists, Cash and Dylan, from the SIDEMEN, like pianists and guitarists, like 78 year old Charlie Daniels, who made the records, from Blonde on Blonde on. But the Rotolo book is an artistic achievement in itself, in its use of historic photos, drawings, art and its creative layout, showing this lady as a talented artistic person, with photos and graphics that raise it above many other memoirs, and shows her to be an independent person in her own right, and artist, and thus, a really good read,

from a woman we had the good fortune to hear from, before she died. The book is clearly a five star for the memoir genre. Howard Romaine

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