



# A Freewheelin' Time: A Memoir of Greenwich Village in the Sixties

By Suze Rotolo

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**“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.

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### Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

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*)  
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From [Booklist](#)

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

Review

"A delightful surprise . . . [Rotolo] gracefully captures Greenwich Village as an enchanted lost world."  
—*Entertainment Weekly*

"A portrait-of-an-era . . . through [Rotolo's] eyes, we see Dylan as a unique artist on his way to greatness."  
—*People*

"Artist Suze Rotolo pays rollicking homage to a revolutionary age." —*Vogue*

"Exhilarating . . . a moving account." —*New York Times*

"A perceptive, entertaining, and often touching book about a remarkable era in recent American cultural history, about a way of living, of making art, that couldn't have happened at any other time or in any other place." —Stephanie Zacharek, *Salon*

"Telling her own story more than Dylan's, Rotolo writes with the lightest touch . . . She makes her own textures, so what is left out doesn't feel as if it's missing, and what is left in maps the territory she wants to

bring into view." —Griel Marcus, *Interview*

"Poignant . . . full of quick, deft sketches of key characters." —*Guardian*

"What a wonderful kid [Suze Rotolo] must have been—brave, openhearted, keenly observant and preternaturally wise, able to rise to the challenge of loving a genius like Bob Dylan and knowing when to let go. I'm glad I finally got to meet her in these pages." —Joyce Johnson, author of *Minor Characters*

"Suze Rotolo digs hard and deep. Then she strolls, frets, and paints a gorgeous picture of a singular place and a time that was simpler but all tangled up. Best of all, she's a natural writer who puts the beguiling voice, skeptical brow, shining eyes, and conductor's hands I know right before you on the printed page. What's her secret?" —Sean Wilentz

"A welcome, page-turning perspective conspicuously absent from the plethora of books on Dylan and the folk era of the 1960s: that of a woman witnessing it all from its cultural and political epicenter." —Todd Haynes, screenwriter and director of *I'm Not There*

"There have been a lot of books written about Greenwich Village in the sixties, and I've probably read all of them. What makes Suze's story so special is that she grew up in this neighborhood and she still lives here. She knows these crooked streets intimately, and they know her." —Steve Earle

## **Users Review**

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#### **Christi Ross:**

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**Dixie Love:**

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**Dorothy Saunders:**

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