

Introduction to “Boy Named Sue”

This is the first part of a famous American song:

My daddy left home when I was three,
And he didn't leave much to *Ma* and me...
Just this old guitar and an empty bottle of *booze*.
Now, I don't blame him cause he run and *hid*,
But the meanest thing that he ever did
Was before he left, he *went and* named me 'Sue'.

Vocabulary

1. *Ma* – Slang – Mother
2. *booze* – Slang – Alcohol
3. *hid* – Past tense of “hide”
4. *went and* – Slang – Did something.

Questions

1. What is the name of the person in this song? Who gave him his name?
2. How does the singer feel about his name? Why?
3. What part of this verse tells you his feelings?
4. What do you think about the singer's father? What kind of man is he?
5. What do you think the song will be about?

This is the next part of the song:

Well, he must of thought that is was quite a joke,
And it got a lot of laughs from a lots of *folk*.
It seems I had to fight *my whole life through*.
Some gal would *giggle* and I'd get red,
And some guy would laugh and I'd *bust his head*.
I tell ya, life *ain't* easy for a boy named 'Sue'.

Well, I grew up quick and I grew up mean,
My fist got hard and my *wits* got *keen*.
I'd *roam* from town to town to hide my shame.
But I made me a *vow* to the moon and stars
That I'd search the *honky-tonks* and bars,
And kill that man that give me that awful name.

Vocabulary

1. *folk* – People
2. *my whole life through* – Slang – All my life
3. *giggle* – Laugh a little bit.
4. *bust his head* – Slang – Hit him in the head
5. *ain't* – Slang – Isn't

6. *wits* – Can think quickly
7. *keen* – Very sharp or fast
8. *roam* – Go from place to place
9. *vow* – Promise
10. *honky-tonks* – A cheap bar with dancing

Questions

1. How was the singer's life?

2. What kind of man is the singer?

3. Why do you think the singer's father named him “Sue”?

4. What does the singer want to do?

5. Now what do you think the song will be about?

A Boy Named Sue

sung by Johnny Cash, written by Shel Silverstein

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And he didn't leave much to *Ma* and me...
Just this old guitar and an empty bottle of *booze*.
Now, I don't blame him cause he run and *hid*,
But the meanest thing that he ever did
Was before he left, he *went and* named me 'Sue.'

Well, he must of thought that is was quite a joke,
And it got a lot of laughs from a lots of *folk*.
It seems I had to fight *my whole life through*.
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Well, I grew up quick and I grew up mean,
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But I made me a *vow* to the moon and stars
That I'd search the *honky-tonks* and bars,
And kill that man that give me that awful name.

Well, it was Gatlinburg in mid-July
And I just hit town, and my throat was dry.
I thought I'd stop and have myself a *brew*.
At an old *saloon* on a street of mud,
There at a table, dealing *stud*,
Sat the dirty, *mangy* dog that named me 'Sue.'

Well, I knew that snake was my own sweet *dad*
From a worn-out picture that my mother'd *had*,
And I knew that scar on his cheek and his evil eye.
He was big and bent and gray and old,
And I looked at him and my *blood ran cold*,
And I said: "My name is 'Sue!' *How do you do!*
Now you *gonna* die!"

Ma - Mother

booze - Alcohol

hid - Past tense of "hide"

went and - Did something

folk - People

my whole life through - All my life

giggle - Laugh a little bit

bust his head - Hit him in the head

ain't - Isn't

wits - Can think quickly

keen - Very sharp or fast

roam - Go from place to place

vow - Promise

honky-tonks - A cheap bar with dancing

brew - Beer

saloon - Bar

stud - Poker card game

mangy - When a dog loses its fur

dad - Father

had - Owned

blood ran cold - Get very mad

How do you do! - How are you?

gonna - Going to

Well, I hit him hard right between the eyes,
And he *went down*, but, to my surprise,
He come up with a knife and cut off a piece of my ear.
But I *busted* a chair right across his teeth
And we *crashed through* the wall and into the street
Kicking and a' *gouging* in the mud
and the blood and the beer.

I tell *ya'*, I've fought tougher men,
But I really can't remember when,
He kicked like a mule and he bit like a crocodile.
I heard him laugh and then I heard him *cuss*,
He *went for* his gun and I *pulled mine* first,
He stood there lookin' at me and I saw him smile.

And he said: "Son, this world is *rough*,
And if a man's gonna *make it*, he's gotta be *tough*,
And I know I wouldn't be there to *help ya' along*.
So I give *ya'* that name and I said good-bye.
I knew you'd have to get tough or die,
And it's that name that helped to make you strong."

He said: "Now you just fought *one hell of a fight*,
And I know you hate me, and you got the right
To kill me now, and I wouldn't blame you if you do.
But *ya'* ought to thank me, before I die,
For the *gravel in ya' guts and the spit in ya' eye*
Cause I'm the *son-of-a-bitch* that named you 'Sue.'"

I got all *choked up* and I threw down my gun
And I called him my pa, and he called me his son,
And I *come away* with a different *point of view*.
And I think about him, *now and then*,
Every time I try and every time I win,
And if I ever have a son, I think I'm gonna name him
Bill or George! Any damn thing but Sue!

I still hate that name!

went down – Fall down

busted – Broke

crashed through – Break through

gouging – Hit someone in the eye
with your thumb

ya' – You

cuss – Say bad words

went for – Reached for

pulled mine – Pull out your gun

rough – Difficult

make it – Live

tough – Strong

help ya' along – Help you grow up

one hell of a – Very strong

gravel... – How strong you are

son-of-a-bitch – Bad words

choked up – About to cry

come away – Leave, go away

point of view – What you believe

now and then - Sometimes