

Texas Personalities

Dale Evans

Dale was born Frances Octavia Smith, October 31, 1912 in Uvalde, Texas—a place of birth that would be quite significant later in her career. At age fourteen, Dale eloped with her high school sweetheart. A year later, she found herself in Memphis, Tennessee a single parent, pursuing a career in a field she had always loved—music! She landed a job with local radio stations (WMC and WREC, for all you trivia buffs) singing and playing piano. A brief stint at radio station WHAS as staff singer proved a landmark event as it was here she became Dale Evans. Initially, she used her married name; Frances Fox then changed to Marian Lee. Marian Lee was rather like a "Nom de Song" used by young singers just getting started. The station manager, a man by the name of Joe Eaton, thought the name trite and trendy. He informed her that he was changing her name to Dale. She protested that this was a boy's name but he told her of a beautiful actress of the silent film era whom he had admired named Dale Winter.

As Dale Evans, she ultimately reached Chicago, home of great music and talented bands. She became a vocalist with a number of different "big bands" and was featured soloist in such notable hotels as the Blackstone (Balinese Room), the Sherman (Panther Room, along with jazz legend, Fats Waller), the Drake (Camellia Room) and the Chez Paree Supper Club. Anson Weeks hired her as vocalist for his orchestra just as they began a major tour to the West Coast. After a two-month stand at The Coconut Grove, Dale left the Orchestra and returned to Chicago where she was hired as staff singer for radio station WBBM, the local

CBS affiliate. Talent scouts from Paramount Studios discovered her and arranged a screen. test in Hollywood for the movie, Holiday Inn, starring Fred Astaire and Bing Crosby. Dale's dancing wasn't quite up to Astaires', so she didn't get the part. Her agent, however, showed her screen test to 20th Century Fox studios where she received a one-year contract. This resulted in only small parts in two pictures, Orchestra Wives and Girl Trouble. Dale then signed with the top ranked Chase and Sanborn Show which was broadcast nationwide. Featured as regulars with Dale were Don Ameche, Jimmy Durante, Edgar Bergen (Candice Bergen's father) and Charlie McCarthy. Weekly guests read like a Who's Who of the entertainment industry.

had one child together, Robin,



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actress
Roy
Roger
wife



This exposure caused Republic Studios to sign her to a one-picture contract (Swing Your Partner) with a one-year option. The option was exercised and she was cast in several contemporary movies and one John Wayne western in which her singing was featured.

Herbert Yates, head of Republic Studios was inspired by the successful stage play, Oklahoma, and decided to expand the female lead in westerns and adopt this format for one of his biggest stars, Roy Rogers. Dale, he reasoned, had a large following and reputation as a singer and, being from Texas, could surely ride 'n rope. His reasoning proved correct on the former but somewhat suspect on the latter. Nevertheless, history was made and destiny seemingly fulfilled in 1944 with release of The Cowboy and The Senorita—the first of 28 films they would make together. This on-screen team became an off-screen team on New Year's Eve, 1947. They were married on the Flying L Ranch in Davis, Oklahoma, where they had just completed filming Home in Oklahoma. The owner of the ranch, when he learned they were to be married, offered the ranch as a wedding site.

An instant family was formed. Dale had her son, Tom, and Roy had an adopted daughter, Cheryl, and birth children Linda Lou and Roy Rogers, Jr., "Dusty", from his first wife, Arline, 'who had died after Dusty's birth. Roy and Dale

whose death from complications associated with Down's syndrome inspired Dale's classic book, Angel Unaware. The family swelled with the addition of Mary Little Doe (Dodie), of Native American heritage: John David (Sandy), a battered child from an orphanage in Kentucky; Marion (Mimi), their foster child from Scotland; and Debbie, a Korean War orphan whose father was a G.I. of Puerto Rican ancestry.

The family lost three of the children tragically: Robin (as mentioned above), Debbie, in a church bus accident when she was twelve, and Sandy of an accidental death while serving with the military in Germany.

In 1950, Roy and Dale developed their own production company and began producing their half-hour television series, The Roy Rogers Show, that ran until 1957. These episodes have been translated into every major language and, at any given time, are likely being shown somewhere in the world. The same is true of their movies.

They have set appearance records in virtually every major arena in the world, including Madison Square Garden in New York City, the Houston Fat Stock Show, Los Angeles Coliseum, Chicago Stadium, Harringay Arena in London, Toronto's Canadian National Exhibition, and many state fairs and rodeos. Among the many honors of which Dale was most proud are: California Mother of the Year

(1967);

The Texas Press Association's Texan of the Year (1970); Cowgirl Hall of Fame (1995); Cardinal Terrence Cook Humanities Award (1995); and her three stars on The Hollywood Walk of Fame.

Full retirement proved an elusive concept for Dale, as she and Roy were as visible as ever, despite accepting only an extremely limited number of engagements. Dale continued as a best selling author and always seemed to have at least one book in development. There was also her weekly television show A Date With Dale for Trinity Broadcast Network. It, too, was translated into all the major languages and shown worldwide. And then there is The Roy Rogers -Dale Evans Museum in Victorville, California which vividly chronicled their lives, and the values and ethics that represent the basis of their worldwide appeal. Her "quality time" was spent as matriarch to a small nation of sixteen grandchildren, 30+ great-grandchildren. She died on Feb. 7th, 2001.