

**DALE  
EVANS  
ROGERS**  
**1912-2001**



**ENTERTAINER  
TURNED  
COWGIRL  
ICON**

Oklahoma's own 'royal wedding' occurred on New Year's Eve 1947 when Dale Evans, Queen of the West, married Roy Rogers, King of the Cowboys, near Davis, during a movie break of "Home in Oklahoma". The marriage was Rogers' third and Evans' fourth but it lasted for 51 years.

Dale Evans was born Lucille Wood Smith in October 1912 in Uvalde, Texas. She was renamed Frances Octavia Smith while an infant. Frances was "a born showoff who loved to dance around the house". In 1919, her family moved to Osceola, Arkansas, where she mostly lived with her physician uncle and learned to play the piano.

At fourteen, she eloped with Thomas Fox and had a son Tom. Her husband decided he was too young for marriage so single parent Frances moved to Memphis, where she sang and played piano at local radio stations. In 1930, she changed her name to Marion Lee, but her radio station manager suggested Dale Evans for its simplicity.

Dale's marriages to August Johns in 1929 and Robert Butt in 1937 also ended in divorce. While singing in Los Angeles with the Anson Weeks Orchestra, she auditioned for "Holiday Inn". Her agent told her to pretend to be 21 (not 28) and claim 13-year-old Tom as her younger brother. She didn't get the part, but 20<sup>th</sup> Century-Fox signed her anyway.

Her break came as a vocalist on the radio show "The Chase and Sanborn Hour" with ventriloquist Edgar Bergen. She soon signed with Republic Pictures, and was cast opposite Roy in "The Cowboy and the Senorita". The 1944 movie was so successful that they made 28 features together. When a Hollywood columnist broke the news about Tom being Dale's son, she had already told Roy.

When they married, they already had four children: Tom, Cheryl, Linda and Dusty. In August 1950, their daughter Robin was born with Down's syndrome. The doctors suggested institutionalizing her, but they refused. Robin died in 1952. Devastated, Dale wrote the book "Angel Unaware", which became a best-seller in Spring 1953, helping families understand the blessings of these children.

Soon after, the Oklahoma County Council for Mentally Retarded Children was renamed to Dale Rogers Training Center in her honor. Today, it is Oklahoma's largest community vocational training and employment center, training or employing more than 900 disabled adults.

From 1951 to 1957, Dale and Roy starred in 100 episodes of the wildly popular NBC series "The Roy Rogers Show", ending each show with their theme song, "Happy Trails", written by Dale. The couple also adopted Dodie, Sandy, Mimi and Debbie. Unfortunately, Debbie was killed at age 12 in a church bus accident and Sandy died accidentally at 19 while serving in Germany.

Roy died in July 1998 at age 86, followed by Dale in February 2001 at age 88. From childhood, Dale Evans wanted to become an entertainer. She was known for her singing, acting, songwriting, love of children, Christian evangelism – and lasting fame as a cowgirl icon.