

## ROY ROGERS KISSED TRIGGER A LOT

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**It's not often I get to spend the day in bed watching movies but last weekend I had that luxury. The Newport, Oregon Public Library has some great black and white films on DVD and I checked out a few disks, one of which was Roy Rogers fighting for law and order in the west.**

The last time I watched Roy it was the 1950s and I was a child. This time I watched four episodes without a break. I admit I was shocked and riveted.

It's a beautiful sight: Roy Rogers runs up to the back end of a tall horse and leaps on, no need for a saddle or blanket and he's already riding like the wind by the time he wiggles forward to clutch the horse's mane. Roy is spectacular, flying flat out as fast as his horse can run. He hunkers down so his head is level with his shoulders and the only parts of him that move are his thighs as the horse thunders across the limitless prairie. Roy doesn't bob up and down; his arms don't go in and out. This man is smooth! Graceful! The man and his horse are stunning.

And once that horse was replaced with Trigger, Rogers kissed Trigger a lot, but I'm getting ahead of myself.

Aw heck, since the topic of kissing comes up, I'll just say that Roy doesn't seem much concerned with the practice. Western movie women are bossy and arrogant and they might be Eastern-educated, but they don't know nothin' about livin'. At least one citified woman is in each episode, well, until Dale Evans came along.

The women are appreciative about things like, oh, saving them from outlaws or runaway horses and they say things like "Thanks for your help, Boys." Dale Evans isn't citified. She's Gabby Hayes' daughter and she wears pinafores. She would say to Roy, "Round up your boys, Roy," when the adventure got dangerous.

In the early films, Rootin' Tootin' Rogers looks about nineteen years old and even then he was dressed like a dandy in his freshly pressed form-fitting fringed razzle-dazzle open-necked cowboy shirt, skintight pants and silk neckerchiefs, which he changed in every scene. Roy liked to sparkle with his silver studded belt, boots and gun holster that matched his silver studded saddle (which he traded for a bag of oats and twenty dollars in the middle of a Wyoming blizzard while he was traveling the country as a fugitive).

On screen, I watched a perpetually cheerful man with his black hair slicked back so tight it didn't move even in the middle of a brawl on horseback. It turns out Roy had a quick temper when it came to fighting wrongs. He never could pass up a good bout of fisticuffs. The men would slug each other and roll around on the dusty dry earth, but pretty soon the bad guy would give up and both Roy and the desperado would stand and walk away under their own power. The crowd that gathered to watch would pick up and dust off the men's cowboy hats and pat the winner and loser on the back. Those were the days before street gangs, a time before onlookers used guns to settle arguments among friends. When the brawl was over, Roy would say things like, "May the good Lord take a liken' to you." Or, "If everybody told the truth, this would be a better world."

In Roy Rogers movies the bad guys are schemers. They go out of their way to cheat and embezzle the friendly town folk. Bad guys get their jollies by blowing up and destroying trains, dry good stores, the farmhouses of destitute widows. Bad guys treat their women bad, steal from children, pay no attention to property lines and are not as good looking as Roy. Roy doesn't shoot the bandits, and unless they killed each other, no one dies. Bad guys are never ever allowed to wear white hats.

Once Trigger became Roy's main horse, they shared equal billing on the movie credits. They'd give the title of the episode, then "Starring Roy Rogers and Trigger – the smartest horse in movies!" In fact,

Trigger was so well-behaved, he could walk into a crowded children's hospital ward, get up on his hind legs with Roy on his back and dance! And then take a bow! And then Roy would sing a Spanish love song to a young Mexican girl who was despondent and forlorn because she missed her family.

Whenever Trigger stood nearby, Roy had his hand on the horse. Stroking his flanks, his forehead, his throat. Roy had some good scenes where he kissed Trigger on the lips. It must have looked good in profile to the film crew. The man and the horse smile afterwards, looking at the camera.

Roy Rogers was born Leonard Franklin Slye on November 5, 1911. Some reports say he came from Duck Run, Ohio; the official line says he was born and raised in Cincinnati. His father played guitar and his Kentucky-born mother was a singer. Roy dropped out of high school after two years and joined his father at a shoe factory, to bolster the family income.

Roy moved out to California when he was eighteen and took jobs driving dump trucks and picking peaches. He sang in assorted bands, and eventually teamed up with Bob Nolan and Tim Spencer as "The Pioneer Trio." When fiddle player Hugh Farr joined the group, they became the "The Sons of the Pioneers." Their songs included "Cool Water" and "Tumbling Tumbleweeds" and they were an instant hit on radio. Under the name of Dick Weston, Roy worked as an extra in B-westerns and replaced Gene Autry as a singing cowboy in a musical at Republic Pictures when Autry went on strike for more money. Republic gave the newly christened "Roy Rogers" his first starring role in the movie "Under Western Stars" in 1938. Before he was done, he'd made ninety feature-length Westerns for Republic and more than one hundred half-hour TV shows.

A magnificent palomino stallion named 'Golden Cloud' carried Olivia de Havilland in "The Adventures of Robin Hood," but that horse was renamed 'Trigger' when he teamed up with Roy.

Roy never had an acting or singing lesson but he did rent a horse so he could practice looking good in the saddle. He got a pair of six-shooters and practiced twirling, spinning, shooting and fast draw.

By the early 1940s, Roy was huge. His face, neckerchief and silver-studded everything graced lunch boxes, cookie packages, Post cereal boxes, clothing, cap guns and quick draw holsters, child-size guitars, rings, badges, lassos, and musical hobby horses. He was "King of the Cowboys."

In 1944, he was matched with Dale Evans for "The Cowboy and the Senorita," a movie billed as an "Oklahoma"-style musical. Dale and Roy married in 1947 and eventually made twenty-eight movies together. Dale, "The Queen Of The West," was Roy's third wife. The Roy Rogers Show debuted on NBC-TV in October 1951 and re-ran through September 1964.

#### **These are things I didn't know:**

Roy's theme song, "Happy Trails," was written by Dale Evans.

Trigger died in 1965 at aged thirty-three.

Roy Rogers died July 6, 1998 at the age of eighty-eight.

Dale Evans was born Frances Octavia Smith on October 31, 1912 in Uvalde, Texas, and died on February 7, 2001. She was eighty-nine.

#### **Here are the Roy Rogers Riders Club Rules:**

1. Be neat and clean.
2. Be courteous and polite.
3. Always obey your parents.
4. Protect the weak and help them.
5. Be brave but never take chances.
6. Study hard and learn all you can.
7. Be kind to animals and take care of them.
8. Eat all your food and never waste any.
9. Love God and go to Sunday school regularly.
10. Always respect our flag and our country.

Happy trails to you, until we meet again.

