

“Happy Trails, Pardner!”

Roy Rogers, King of the Cowboys, one of my personal heroes during my childhood, and all-around straight-shooter passed away July 6th. They don't make heroes like Roy Rogers anymore. Compare a Bruce Willis, Mel Gibson, or Steven Segal to Roy Rogers...(!)

His name was Leonard Slye when he came to California during the Great Depression, barely making ends meet by driving a gravel truck and picking fruit around Bakersfield. He eventually landed some singing jobs with hillbilly bands, and he helped found that group that would become the Sons of the Pioneers and which had such hits as “Tumbling Tumbleweeds” and “Cool Water.” In 1937, he auditioned at Republic Pictures for the role of a singing cowboy. The studio already had a stable of cowboy stars, including Gene Autry, but they were looking for someone new...and they liked Rogers, especially his yodeling. Republic started him out at \$75 a week, changed his name to Roy Rogers and sent over 7 horses as possible mounts in his first picture, “Under Western Stars” (1938). He picked the third horse he tried...Trigger...and never looked at the rest. Rogers went on to star in 88 films, all with Trigger. He was the #1 cowboy star in the theaters from 1943-1954. He first teamed up with Dale Evans, a radio singer and actress, for a 1944 film. They were married in 1947, a marriage that was to last 51 years. In all of his films, Rogers always portrayed the same type of character: a straight-shooting cowboy who always did what was right and usually kissed Trigger instead of the girl. He never really retired. He spent most of his later years at his Apple Valley Inn, in Apple Valley, CA, and at his Roy Rogers Museum.

As the 86 year-old Rogers was laid to rest so he could hit the trail for the last time, the IRS descended upon his widow and estate for back taxes [*this was the 'kinder,' 'gentler' IRS recently heralded into existence by Congress and President Clinton*]

