

Dale Evans Finds Her Happiest Trail

There's no marriage in heaven, but one has to wonder if maybe God allowed an exemption for Dale Evans and Roy Rogers, Christian entertainers who warmed hearts for decades with their wholesome Western movies, cowboy songs and gospel music. Evans, who wrote her trademark song "Happy Trails to You" in 1951, died of heart failure Feb. 7 at her home in Apple Valley, Calif. She was 88.

"We take comfort in knowing Dale and Roy are together again, riding happy trails into the sunset," cowboy singer Too Slim told the Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN). Rogers died in 1998 at age 86.

Evans and Rogers both were evangelists at heart. "She was one Hollywood personality who truly lived what she preached," longtime friend Johnny Grant told CBN. "She was a strong supporter of the family and religion."

Evans was born Frances Octavia Smith on Oct. 31, 1912, in Uvalde, Texas, and attended high school in Osceola, Ark. She began singing on local radio stations in Memphis, Tenn.; Louisville, Ky.; Dallas and Chicago, where she also became well-known for her singing with several big band orchestras.

She reluctantly agreed to a radio station manager's suggestion to change her name to Dale Evans because it was easier to

pronounce. In 1942, she earned a screen test for the movie Holiday Inn. She didn't get the part, but ended up singing with the nationally broadcast Chase and Sanborn Hour. She next signed a contract with Republic Pictures—the B-movie home of Roy Rogers.

The two starred in the 1944 film The Cowboy and the Señorita. "I liked him," Evans said in a 1992 interview. "We hit it off because he's so much like my brother. I mean, Roy's like I am, and that's it."

They starred in more cowboy movies and were married in 1947. The couple recorded more than 400 songs—their most recent album being Many Happy Trails recorded in 1985. Their TV career blossomed when The Roy Rogers Show ran from 1951-1957.

Evans wrote the gospel music standard "The Bible Tells Me So" in 1955 and said her years of participation in Christian evangelism were "the most meaningful, the most enjoyable part of my life."