

Dorothy Tells About Will's Stuffed Calf

(Editor's Note—This is the second installment of an interview with Dorothy Stone, stage and screen star, on "Will Rogers as I Knew Him." In the first installment Miss Stone reminisced about her childhood memories of the great humorist. She closed by describing how she held little Bill, Will Rogers' eldest son, in her lap when he was a baby. She now continues:)

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NEW YORK, Aug. 20.—"Well, he isn't little Bill any more," she continued sadly, "he's Will Rogers in his own right. He'll be head of the family now, and no finer person could be head of it. Will's son is marvelous; he's a genuinely real person, absolutely unspoiled, and a real man. In spite of his background and all the advantages which he has enjoyed, he has retained all of his father's simplicity and charm.

"Will just lived for his family, and his greatest ambition was that they should all be happy. He would just do anything for them.

"Sometimes he would be putting on his riding clothes, getting ready to go out, or be in the midst of doing something else, when he would suddenly remember that he had promised to take little Mary to the movies or to play ball with Billy. That was enough, and he would drop whatever he was doing to keep his promise to them.

"His devotion to Aunt Betty was constantly touching, and illustrated by the many small ways in which he tried to please her. Last Easter, while she was away, he had his whole ranch done over for her. He planned and supervised everything and was as excited as a small boy. He would say to us:

"Don't you tell her now!"

Not Odd to Them.

"And, of course, we didn't. When she came home she was absolutely delighted with the whole thing. Will led her all around, showing her each improvement, and anxiously waiting to see how she would like it. He grinned broadly each time she praised anything.

"Among the improvements he made was the heightening of the roof of the living room. He had a life size stuffed calf in the living room, and every day, after dinner, he'd practice roping it for hours. The rope would sometimes hit the ceiling, so he had the roof heightened in order to give him more room in which to swing.

"No one ever thought this after-dinner exercise was odd, and the women would sit talking in the room totally oblivious of Will's rope throwing.

"I remember one time when he and my father were roping after we had all finished dinner. My father at the time was wearing his hair very long in order to fit a character he was going to play in the production, 'So Red the Rose.'

"They tossed ropes at the calf in silence for a few minutes, and then,

while his lariat was still in the air, Will said:

"Get you'self a haircut, Fred. You sho' look terrible."

"Without disturbing his aim, Dad answered:

Look Like Fetlocks.

"Can't do it, Will. Need it for my part in this play."

"Shucks, Fred, you can wear a wig. And you suttinly ought to get those bushy eyebrows trimmed. Look like fetlocks."

"All this time they were studiously lassoing the calf, as though it were the most important thing in the world.

"Dad answered:

"Can't wear a wig. Always looks too wiggish."

"Aw no, Fred, I don't think so. You sho' need to get spruced up."

"Watching the two of them working on the much-roped calf, and listening to their dialogue, I suddenly thought that here we were witnessing something that on the stage people would pay almost anything to see. And yet it was an every-day occurrence.

"Will was always lecturing and advising Daddy as though he were his father. And Daddy never failed to listen. The next day, incidentally, he had his hair cut, his bushy eyebrows trimmed and, in general, got all 'spruced up.'

Miss Stone hesitated for a moment and then went on:

"Yet with all his charm and playfulness, Will was essentially a man's man and nothing better illustrates his inner quality of self-sacrifice and courage than the incident of the flood.

Kept Vigil All Night.

"Two Winters ago, there was a heavy, continuous downpour of rain in the Los Angeles area which caused a swelling of the rivers and flooded a great many sections. The water washed away the embankment of the road by Will's house leaving a deep chasm and making the road impassible and exceedingly dangerous. The occupants of any car that went off the road were almost certain to be killed.

"It was New Year's Eve, and the rain was coming down in torrents. But, carrying a red lantern, Will saddled a horse, and, all night long, he warned motorists of the danger and persuaded them to stop. None of them knew who he was—some thought he was a holdup man—others thought he was just a cranky old farmer—but one look at the road and they were offering fervent thanks for his aid.

"Cold, with the water swishing up to his horse's knees, and the rain soaking through his coat, Will kept guard all night. But worse than the physical sufferings was a terrible fear clutching at his heart. All of his children were out at New Year's parties—and he knew that the other roads were washed away."

(End of second installment.)

(In the third installment of this interview, Miss Stone tells of the highly dramatic meeting of Will Rogers and his son the night of the flood, and she begins the diverting story of her partnership with Will in "Three Cheers.")