

ROY & DALE (CONTINUED)

my family. I love life.

"When I'm traveling to speak or do a concert, people help me, which is nice. Not only that. When I get on a plane, I just take myself a deep seat and say, 'Lord, I am with you, whatever. If you want to turn this plane upside down, that's your business. If you want to get me where I'm going, that's your business, too.'"

Dale and Roy have pacemakers and monitor their health carefully. "I walk," she says. "We have a big house. I walk when I have to make connections on the plane. I also take vitamins, a LOT of vitamins. I do the best I can to eat right. Right now, I'm on a gout diet. I have a gouty form of arthritis, so I'm restricted to two ounces of red meat, twice a week. I don't miss the meat. I can have cheese for protein instead. I'm a great cottage-cheese person. The diet's working. I AM feeling better. And I take medication."

"Dale tells me I don't eat enough to keep a bird alive," says Roy, smiling. She looks at him affectionately. "I weigh 158 and that's low for me. I guess I used to be 165, 170 when I was working all the time. But when you get old and don't do the exercise you did, the physical work, what do you have to burn up? I just can't eat very much. I fill up quick!" He laughs cheerfully.

"I also take several types of vitamins, and I have certain pills that my doctor gave me for my heart situation. I don't do anything to push things since this last close call. And we don't drink or smoke. Neither does Dusty."

Dale excuses herself for her next appointment, and I ask a final question. Is being flexible important to stay young?

"Oh, yes," she says quickly. "We try to stay flexible in our everyday living. You don't



know everything. You might think you do, but you don't. To me, life is a growing process."

"And a learning proposition," says Roy.

"I think we're supposed to learn as long as we live, as long as we have breath," she adds.

I ask to take a photo and immediately they move together like synchronized swimmers, striking a pose with their heads nearly touching, smiles bright and natural. Roy wants to show me the warehouse. "Come on back and take a look. It's got everything you can think of." He leads me through rows of shelves holding movie reels, record albums, clothes, and

gifts from fans: baseball bats, hats, artwork, and that huge get-well card that Roy likes so much.

Then he takes me to the museum, past the yellow convertible, letting one hand trail affectionately along the side. He put 100,000 miles on that car, one of about 50 that he owned in his lifetime, from sports cars to station wagons.

Do you always wear a western hat? I ask.

"When you're taking pictures, I do," he smiles broadly.

That's all your own hair, isn't it? I venture.

"Yup," he says. "Do you want to feel it?" He gives me a mischievous grin and takes off his hat, ruffling his hair. We both laugh.

What do you think of today's young people? I ask.

He heads back to the office, turns serious and shakes his head. "A lot of them are in big trouble," he replies. "It depends a lot on how they were raised. If they didn't learn right from wrong when they were little, they're going to choose whatever they want to do when they get to be teenagers.

He settles back into the sofa. "That's what moms and dads are for. There are a lot of single-parent kids that don't have the golden time they need when they're little. A lot of them end up in serious trouble. I feel sorry for them.

"I don't know what the answer can be except the way that Dale and I feel about our church. If you don't get the right guidance at home, at least you get it from your minister at church."

He doesn't like the amount of sex depicted on television.

"There are a lot of pictures on TV I wouldn't even want Trigger to watch!" he exclaims, laughing and shaking his head. "It seems like the only thing left in the world is sex on some of those shows. They always talk about it, and a lot of kids are too young to know about those things.

"They're going to learn about it sooner or later, because they're human beings," he goes on. "But it's confusing to them when they're little. They hear it and try to put two and two together. Sometimes they get in trouble experimenting with something they don't know anything about. It's rough on the kids who don't get guidance from their parents."

Roy's voice becomes loving when he speaks of children.

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"We used to play a lot of shows for children in hospitals and orphanages," he recalls. "We adopted four children and a foster child. We also had a child of our own named Robin. She had Down syndrome and lived for two years.

"Dale wrote a book about Robin, called Angel Unaware. That book brought little Down syndrome babies out of the backroom," he says with pride. "We played a lot of shows, at Madison Square Garden, the Chicago Stadium, and before that book, you very seldom saw a little Down syndrome child in the audience.

"After the book came out, we saw those children ALL OVER THE PLACE. So it opened up the doors. A lot of people were ashamed of their Down syndrome babies, but we loved ours and maybe they did, too. They was helpless about doing something about it. So we decided we would keep Robin and do something about it."

Dale has written 22 books on family, religion, spirituality, and personal guidance. She also hosts a weekly television talk show Date with Dale on Trinity Broadcasting, a Christian cable network.



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Roy's hearing aid begins to squeal again. "I've got a story to tell you about these little things," he says, removing both hearing aids carefully and placing them in the palm of one hand. They look like small peanuts.

"This friend of mine was telling a friend of his, who made them, about me. Well, he came over and wanted to make a pair for me. I said I didn't need any. I didn't have anything to compare it with, you know. This was about three or four years ago.

"Dale had been telling me, 'Honey, you should get some hearing aids or something.' I said, 'If you would finish telling me the story before you start walking two or three rooms away, I could hear you!'" He laughs. "She said, 'Well, you're using that as an excuse.' I said, 'Okay.' What could I do?"

"So when this guy offered to make me a pair, I said, 'Okay, let him think I need them.' He called me after each pair and asked, 'How do you like the hearing aids?' I said, 'All right.'

But I didn't put them in. I'd put them in for a little bit and then take them out.

"After about the fifth pair, I was beginning to get a little embarrassed. So when he called to ask how I was doing, I decided that I was really going to give him a chance. I put my hearing aids in and got 'em tuned up pretty good because I didn't want to be doing this in church. I got in there," his voice assumes a tone of wonder, "and I heard EVERY WORD the minister said." He laughs hard. "I didn't get sleepy or anything.

"When the choir started, I thought that I was in the middle of the Cincinnati Symphony!" He pronounces it "Cincinnati."

He's been wearing them ever since. "They're small, you can't hardly see them little things. They have a teeny battery that lasts about a week and then you just get another one.

"These hearing aids open up a whole new world," he says.

"It's like a blind person getting a pair of glasses. The world comes alive."

Are you still singing? I ask.

"Yes, I made a recording last year," he replies. "It was a big surprise to me. When I was honored at the Country Music Awards about three years ago in Nashville, they suggested that

I make some records. I told 'em, 'I'm retired, I don't sing anymore.'

But they heard me sing someplace and they wanted me to do an album.

"Well, to make a long story short, I made one, and it's still going." He sounds pleased. "I don't read music, so I had to memorize the songs. They got them to me early enough and I learned six new songs. Then I took some of the old songs, and I wrote a new one, because it sort of hits my time and place, meeting people out here in the museum."

Without my asking, he starts to sing.

*I feel like I've grown up with everybody
that's alive and a kickin' today.*

*If it wasn't for you, there wouldn't be no me,
That's exactly what I always say.*

*I want to thank you for the many years of fun and the
love that always comes my way.*

*I feel like I grew up with everybody that's alive and
a kickin' today.*

"Then," he says, "I do a little yodel. Second verse."

*When I made my first picture, 'Under Western Stars,'
They really were exciting days.*

*Old Trigger was four and I was 26,
It wasn't work, just play.*

*Back in '39, it only cost about a dime to see a
western every Saturday.*

*I feel like I've grown up with everybody that's alive
and a kickin' today.*

"I do another little yodel. Third verse.

*It was a wonderful time for the kids growing up in
an era learning right from wrong.*

*They used to ride the range on the little stick horse
singing a happy song.*

*Many years have passed, they've all grown up,
The kids are married and moved away.*

*But if they keep coming by singing, 'Happy Trails,'
They are alive and living today.*

"And I yodel once more.

His voice is clear and precisely on key. The song, "Alive and A Kickin' Today," is featured on the album Tribute, with country music singers Willie Nelson, Randy Travis, and Clint Black. Roy stays in touch with them all. "I'm raising some offsprings of Trigger, Jr., and I just sold one to Randy Travis.

He just talked me out of it," he jokes. "I was keepin' it for myself, but I liked old Randy and he wanted it so bad that I let him take it!

"You know," he says, "I love to drive, too! My dad had an old Model T that I loved to drive. The last 40 or 50 years with Dale flying all over the place to all these shows a jillion times, things are booked so close together, there is no WAY you can drive," he says. "So you fly most of the time."

"Dale and I were talking, and she said her Aunt Estelle, who's 86 years old, had been sick and couldn't come to Dale's family reunion last year in Texas. Aunt Estelle's got a great sense of humor. I talk to her on the phone every once in a while. She's been to California and I just love her.

"Well, right after my birthday, right after we had a big Thanksgiving party, I says, 'Honey, let's get in the car and drive down to see Aunt Estelle.' Dale says, 'You're kidding, aren't you?' You know, it's 2,000 miles.'

"No, I like to drive," I said. So she said, 'Great.'

"We got ready and drove, and in two days we're in Crowell, Texas. The highways were unbelievable." His voice is tinged with awe. "You know the roads today, they're all free-ways. You have to drive so fast, because the truck drivers would run over you if you didn't." He laughs. "We spent two or three days with Aunt Estelle and had a wonderful time. Then we came back by Carlsbad Caverns in New Mexico. Dale had never seen them, I'd seen them a couple of times. We visited a cousin she had in Phoenix, Arizona, and then came on back home. We was gone ten days and had a wonderful time." He smiles to himself and becomes quiet.

I realize that Roy is tiring, so I get up and thank him for their time.

"That's all right, honey," he says, shaking my hand firmly.

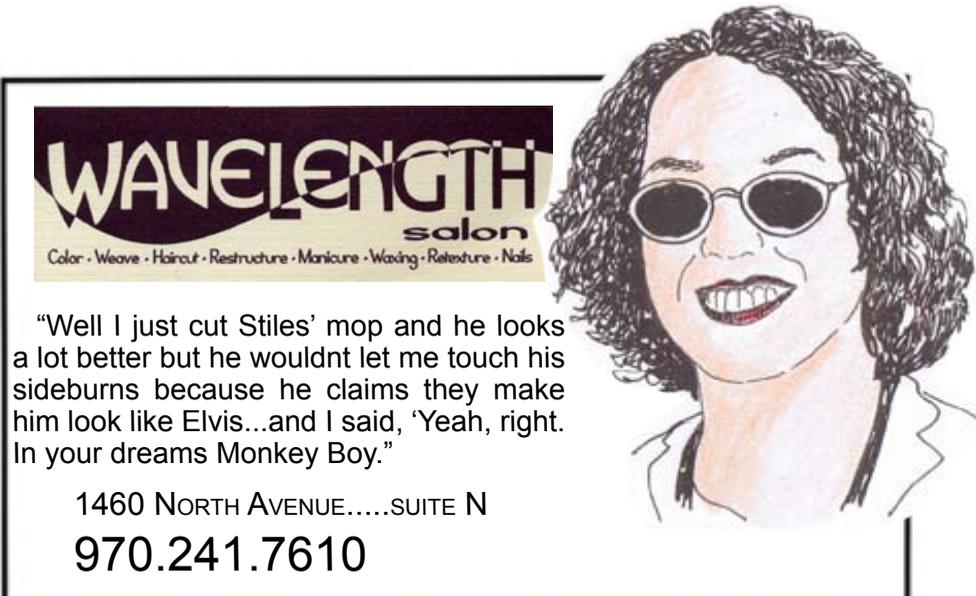
"It was a pleasure. I hope you have time to go through our museum. It's full of interesting things."

I do and it is. Especially the long yellow Lincoln Continental convertible that Roy likes so much.

ANNE SNOWDEN CROSMAN lives near Sedona, Arizona. She teaches memoir-writing at Yavapai College's OLLI (Osher Lifelong Learning Institute), and is the afternoon host for "All Things Considered" on KNAU, Arizona Public Radio

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