

Will Rogers

Doris “Coke” Meyer speaks about her great-uncle, Will Rogers, Oklahoma’s favorite son.

Chapter 1 – 1:10

Introduction

Announcer: Oklahoma’s favorite son used to say, “My ancestors didn’t come over on the Mayflower, but they met the boat.” Will Rogers, who had a rich Cherokee heritage was born in Indian Territory in 1879. He was killed nearly 56 years later in Alaska Territory when an experimental airplane crashed. Will Rogers was many things, an important writer, a philosopher, a wit, an actor, a skilled horseman and roper. He was known to his family as Uncle Will. In this interview, you will hear the grand niece of Will Rogers, Coke Meyer, talk about Uncle Will at home and his love for his family, ice cream and chili, his horses and Christmastime. President Franklin Roosevelt said of his death, “Will was an old friend of mine, a humorist and beloved by all.” Will Rogers was known everywhere for his gentle humor and as the ambassador of good will. Now, Coke Meyer’s remembrance of her Uncle Will is preserved through the generous funding of our sponsors who believe in preserving Oklahoma’s legacy one voice at a time on VoicesofOklahoma.com.

Chapter 2 – 9:55

Early Will Rogers

Coke Meyer: I am Doris Lane Meyer. My nickname is Coke. More people call me Coke than Doris. I was born in Chelsea, Oklahoma, in Rogers County that was named for my grandfather, Clem Vann Rogers. I was born November 12th, 1919, so I am getting along in years young people.

John Erling: You must be 89 years old now—you just celebrated your birthday?

CM: Yes I did.

JE: Tell us where we are today.

CM: Today we are in the lodge house at the gate of the Will Rogers Memorial in Claremore, Oklahoma. This memorial was built by Oklahomans after Will Rogers was killed in a plane accident in Alaska. He was killed in 1935 and this beautiful limestone building was built and opened in 1938.

JE: Today it's being used for guests?

CM: Yes, this lodge is used for guests and people that come to study Will Rogers' life legacy here at the memorial. They offer it as a courtesy and the people who stay here give them something back instead of having to stay at a hotel.

JE: Tell us how you are directly related to Will Rogers.

CM: My grandmother, Maud Rogers was the second daughter of Mary America Schrimsher Rogers. Will was their baby boy, and the last of their eight children. My grandmother and Will were brother and sister. She was almost like a second mother to him. His mother died when he was 10 years old. He wasn't happy out at the ranch without his mother there, so he spent a lot of time out in Chelsea, Oklahoma. It was known as Indian Territory then. He lived with his sister Sallie Rogers McSpadden. She was the oldest of that family. My grandmother Maud was the second oldest and then Will was the baby of the family. They always helped see to him (look after him) and considered him part of their family. The way that they brought him up, he wasn't really a little brother, he was more like one of their

JE: ~~He lived~~ children and his mother, but when his father remarried...

CM: He wasn't as happy. No one could take the place of his mother.

JE: Right. So he was not really raised by his father?

CM: Not that much. His dad paid bills to send him to school and all of that, but his dad really turned it over to the two older daughters to do a lot of that early development and raising of Will.

JE: Where did Will Rogers go to school?

CM: He went to school in Oologah until he was 10 years old, then he went to school in Chelsea. The school was about 4.5 miles from his Aunt Sallie's home. He rode his pony back and forth to school. He went to a subscription school on Cherokee Land in Chelsea.

JE: How old was he then?

CM: He was probably in third or fourth grade. He went to a few others, but he ended up at the Kemper Military Academy in Missouri. That was his last formal education.

JE: Did he go there through high school?

CM: No, it would probably be through eighth or ninth grade.

JE: Why didn't he continue on with further schooling?

CM: He was very bored with it. He got in trouble all of the time because he was always using his rope and doing something he shouldn't. He learned so fast that he was bored with school. He would get (understand) the lesson and retain it, and then he didn't want to sit

there and work and act like he was busy. So he would get busy doing mischief. He said he had more demerits than he could ever work off. So he wrote his sisters and told them how badly he needed \$10. The sisters didn't know that each of them had gotten the same letter asking for the \$10. So he got \$20. He had a little money with him and he took off for Amarillo, Texas to go to the XIT Ranch, which was owned by a friend of his dad's. When he got there, they recognized him and knew who he was. He said he came out to get a job. They hired him on at \$30 a month plus room and board. He stayed in the bunkhouse just like all of the other cowboys. He worked every day on that ranch. The owner of the ranch wrote Will's dad here in Claremore and asked what he should do with him. Will's dad said to let him keep working and see just how hard it was to be a cowboy.

JE: I guess they needed to do that to see if he really liked that or not?

CM: Right.

JE: How long did he last at the ranch?

CM: I'm not sure of dates or any length of time. He came back here and went back to the home place ranch. Some tenants were living there. He didn't like living there with them and he wasn't a very good cook anyway, so he and his cousin Spi Trent built a cabin on the ranch. They built the cabin and a little corral for their ponies. They were living out there. They had a pot of beans boiling all of the time. They were always running around. He was dancing and doing rodeos a little bit—just having a pretty good time. One morning, Spi was getting breakfast and Will was supposed to go get the water and bring it back. He didn't come back. Finally Spi went down to the corral and he said, "Will, what in the world are you stalling around about?" Will said, "Well, I am teaching my pony, Comanche, how to open the gate so I can just whistle for him and he will open the gate and come and I won't have to walk down here." Spi said, "I doubt that will ever work, but come on and eat!" So he gave up on the pony and left and went back to the cabin and ate. Then a day or two after that, there was a terrible prairie fire. They saw the smoke and ran over there to help fight the fire with the neighbors. The fire got out of control. It started to go toward his corral and his horses were in there. He was worried about that. So he told them, "I'm leaving!" He ran back toward the cabin and the corral. He got back there and the smoke was so thick he could hardly see. But Comanche, his pony, had opened that gate and had driven the horses out. They kept going back in the barn because that is where they felt safe, but he finally got them all driven out. Will just hugged his horse and told him "Thank you."

JE: Isn't that an amazing story.

CM: He loved horses and he loved all animals, dogs and cats and everything. They always had pets for their children. When he was in on the vaudeville in New York and on the circuit that went out of there in the summertime, they went all over to perform in big cities. They had a pony for him to ride and he had Teddy that he used as his horse onstage. Teddy had

some special stocking shoes made so he wouldn't slide on wooden stage floors. His buddy would rush in on horseback. Will, would rope him with one or two ropes, or whatever his trick was. He would use that horse in his act. They all traveled in the coach on the train when they moved from city to city. They would get the horses out and every morning they would ride them wherever they could. He loved his horses.

JE: He sure did. What were the names of his horses?

CM: Comanche was the name of the horse that saved the other horses. He had a horse named Soapsuds and he had Teddy. Teddy was the little pony that his friend rode in the act on the vaudeville stage. Soapsuds was one of his last and favorite horses. Today we have a statue of Will on Soapsuds on the grounds of the Will Rogers Memorial. The second one is down at the Will Rogers Center in Fort Worth, Texas. Amon Carter had it made. There's also another one in Lubbock at Texas Tech. I found out when I went to Fort Worth in April 2008 that Amon Carter had it placed there but he never had a formal dedication or a formal ceremony for it. No one was ever, in his opinion, good enough to unveil that. He wasn't going to unveil it himself, because he put it there. So finally along comes Ike Eisenhower. Amon Carter decided that he was the man to unveil it. Eisenhower was born in Texas and he led us through the war and all of that. So he asked him if he would come and unveil it and he agreed. So they had a very formal ceremony and Eisenhower unveiled Will Rogers and Soapsuds in that park in front of the Will Rogers center.

JE: So it sounds like that was the way it should have been done anyway?

CM: Yes.

Chapter 3 – 7:40

Will Moves to California

John Erling: When you were born in 1919, Will was 40 years old. He was in the process of moving his family to the West Coast?

Coke Meyer: Yes.

JE: As we get to be 6 or 7 years old then our first impressions begin. Do you have early memories of Will or recall something that happened?

CM: My grandmother's house had three stories and a basement. The attic was completely floored with hardwoods. Uncle Will had his trunks sent out to Granny's to have her store them before they left for California. As kids, we would go up to the attic and open these trunks and play and put on shows. We would put the posters up and we would clomp around in the stocking shoes that were made for Teddy the horse. That's an early

recollection, but it's really more about his things than about him. He did come to my grandmother's house and to Chelsea a lot before he left for California. He and Aunt Betty both would come. They were married in 1908.

JE: So, you remember Will as being a family man?

CM: Yes.

JE: Talk to us about how he would come and talk to the children.

CM: He was so giving about it. He always made us talk to him rather than him talk to us. Once in a while, we would ask him to please tell us about his travels. He would if we pressed him a little bit about it. Mainly, he wanted to know how we were doing in school and how our sports teams were doing in school.

JE: Would he bring you gifts?

CM: He and Aunt Betty would send beautiful clothes to us girls. They would come in these big boxes. They would be sweaters they bought in Scotland with plaid skirts and all. Betty would send us beautiful things from the big stores in California. Her sister lived with them. Aunt Dick was Aunt Betty's sister. She was kind of a governess for the kiddos. Aunt Betty always had only an hour or two hours' notice before she would have to start packing to go on a trip. With Aunt Dick living there with them, they could just pack their bags and away they would go. He never did want them to fly together. She always went by train, or later, by plane, as planes got better. He had two or three scrapes in airplanes, but he never wrote them up or anything because he didn't want anyone to think that that wasn't the way to go. He really believed in aviation. He was great on women flying. He thought that was so great. He helped with the Powder Puff Derby. They were a bunch of ladies who had their own plane. They financed themselves or had a sponsor. They had a race from California to Ohio. Every day they would take off and land. They would time their airtime to see who could get there the fastest. Whoever got there the fastest would win. He called it the Powder Puff Derby because these women when they got to a town there were all of these photographers and newspaper people...the girls were always powdering their noses and trying to look nice before they got out of the plane and had their picture taken. (Chuckle)

JE: That term must have originated with Will, because we still have powder puff derbies and car races and all of that.

CM: Yeah, he started that.

JE: Amelia Earhart would have been a part of that.

CM: Yes she was. She was a prominent one in the race. I don't believe she won it. He followed her career all the way. Also, he appreciated and thought Charles Lindbergh was the greatest ever. He just thought the sun rose and set on that young man. He thought he had done such a wonderful feat flying to Paris from New York in a plane by himself.

JE: Did they interact?

CM: Yes. That came about because of Morrow. He was the Ambassador to Mexico. Uncle Will went down and visited with him and Charles Lindbergh was there. So then Lindbergh and Anne Morrow, the daughter, married. They had a little boy and they visited them in New York quite often. In fact, they were there just a day or two before the little boy was kidnapped.

JE: Will and Betty were there?

CM: Yes and the little boy hung on to Uncle Will and later he said, "Oh I wish I would have known and I would have just kept him and hugged him and taken him home with me."

JE: Just a few days later the boy was kidnapped?

CM: Yes, there was so much publicity on that. Later, they offered the Lindberghs the ranch if Charles and Anne wanted come out there and get away from people. They went out and stayed about a week at the ranch so no one knew where they were.

JE: In California?

CM: Yes. Aunt Betty had come home for something and Uncle Will was off someplace. One of the boys was home, but they kept it very private for them so no one could bother them. It gave them a chance to revive a little bit.

JE: Did Will ever want to be a pilot himself?

CM: I don't think so. The first time he went up with Mitchell in Washington, D.C., he said he could barely open his eyes and look around he was so scared. But he overcame that pretty quickly. The government gave him rights to fly on mail planes. He would pay for his way by stamps and weigh himself in with his overcoat and his typewriter. He always carried that typewriter, an old beat-up Underwood in a little case. He would always pay for all of that and put himself on a mail plane. He also had the right to fly with the Air Force or the Navy or whoever had a plane going someplace he wanted to go. He could ride on those, too.

JE: Because he had come to the national attention of everybody.

CM: Yes.

JE: He was a great columnist and of course he was big on the radio and the government saw this and decided to help him on his travels.

CM: And he was big with each president. He really got to know them and he wrote about them and he appreciated their problems because it's a job running this country. Even now we see how much more of a job it is.

JE: Herbert Hoover and Franklin Delano Roosevelt, did he go to the White House?

CM: Oh yes, he even stayed there a time or two that I know of. Roosevelt came to California when he was campaigning and asked different ones to introduce him. No one wanted to introduce him. Uncle Will said, "Well, I'll do it." So he introduced Roosevelt and his son

Elliott. Uncle Will had tried to sign up as a kid to get in with the Rough Riders with Teddy Roosevelt.

JE: Is that right?

CM: Yeah, he did. They turned him down. He was too young and he couldn't do it. (Laughter)

Chapter 4 – 7:27

Movies and Hotel

John Erling: Will was starring in Hollywood films from 1929 to 1935. He appeared in 21 feature films. You were 10 to 16 years old then. Do you remember the first movie you saw of Will?

Coke Meyer: We saw some silent ones at one of the theaters in Tulsa. But the one he was in after we moved to Bartlesville was his first talking role in a movie. My dad took us all as a family to that movie together. If we wanted to go back to see a Will Rogers show a second time, we had to use our allowance to buy a ticket. We never had free movie tickets for anything.

JE: I believe his first talking role was a version of Mark Twain's novel *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*.

CM: That one showed a lot of technique. All I remember about that one was the eclipse that saved his life. He knew it was going to happen because he had a little pocket calendar thing. He saved his life by having an eclipse of the sun.

JE: Other films he was in...*Young As You Feel*...*Judge Priest*...*Life Begins at 40*...do you remember seeing those?

CM: Yes. Those were fun.

JE: I imagine when you were around town as a youngster, that everybody knew that you were related to Uncle Will? Did that give you some celebrity status yourself?

CM: It did because I could go with any crowd. I favored a lot of football players and lived on the wrong side of town so to speak. I had all types of friends who came to the house. It was just a melting pot there.

JE: Did he talk about famous people he had met? Or did you meet famous people because of him?

CM: I met several because Paula Love was the manager at the Will Rogers Memorial after 1938. She always made a point on his birthday to have a big parade and have a famous person as the parade marshal. She brought a lot of different Hollywood people. She brought Bob Hope and we would get to come here to the lodge and sit and visit with them after the parade.

JE: Do you remember talking to Bob Hope?

CM: Yes, we all shook hands and visited.

JE: You remember listening to Will on the radio?

CM: Yes, I do.

JE: Tell us about how he had a hard time staying within the time frame of his programs.

CM: (Laughter) He would start talking about something—he would just talk and talk. Then he would get on to the next thing and talk. He didn't really follow any notes, so he didn't have his talks timed. The station was having a problem with this. They decided that they would get an alarm clock. If he was in the middle of a sentence, he was supposed to stop when that alarm clock went off. Those were called his alarm clock speeches. They worked very well. He was doing them on Sundays. The ministers all across the nation were having trouble with having Sunday night meetings. So they set their meeting times for earlier on Sunday so everybody could get home to hear Will Rogers. We have a statue in the Will Rogers Hotel here that has the alarm clock at his feet and he is standing talking into a microphone.

JE: The Will Rogers Hotel in Claremore is still here today. Your Uncle Will was very proud of that wasn't he?

CM: He really was. He said he thought that was more complimentary than any marquee he had ever had on Broadway. They usually put him as the headliner on those marquees. He said, "Besides, it is six stories high and nothing is higher than three stories in London." So he thought he beat them out because he had a six-story high building. He talked about it in some of his articles. The hotel had radium baths and people would come from all over to take those for health. He was very proud that it was there and that it was benefitting people.

JE: You live in the Will Rogers Hotel?

CM: Yes, I live in the Will Rogers Hotel now. It went into disrepair and the Rogers County Historical Society took it over. They put it under the West Plains organization out of Minneapolis. They have senior citizen apartments and rent them to people. I remember Will had a room in the southwest corner. Every time he came that room was always available. He would meet people and invite them to come to the hotel to visit with him and they all knew where he stayed. People started to come and line up to visit with him. We would be there as kids and playing on the mezzanine and we would go downstairs and eat in the coffee shop. Our family would all know that Will was going to be in town. They would have a round robin and call each other on the phone and tell each other he was coming. Sometimes 30 family members would be there. We would all meet at the coffee shop in the hotel, but it's no longer there.

JE: I guess the way you were able to keep up with Will was listening to him on the radio obviously and through his newspaper columns. Do you remember reading them and do you have any of them saved?

CM: Yes, I kept up with him that way. I do not have any of the columns. I just have the books that have all of them in it. When I lived in Arizona in the 1970s, it was really interesting

because there was a man on the staff of the Arizona Republic Newspaper in Phoenix. He pulled up articles from Will Rogers and ran them in his paper every day. They were just as timely as if he had just written them.

JE: That's amazing.

CM: It was! That young man really spent a lot of time to find the columns that really fit the day in the 1970s as much as they did the day they were written.

Chapter 5 – 7:04

“Uncle Will”

John Erling: Uncle Will had a ranch in California, but first of all, he had a ranch here outside of Claremore?

Coke Meyer: Yes, that was called the birthplace ranch because that was where he was born. His dad had that through the Cherokee Nation. You had the right to build on it and he had all of this extra land to run cattle on. He and the neighbors all ran cattle—then they would have a big roundup, separate their cattle and then brand them and let them run again, or fellows would get together and they would drive them to Kansas City to market. Later on, when the railroad came, the railroad, to Uncle Will, took away all of the cowboy era, because they had to build fences to give the railroad the right of way. They had to cut through farms and ranches. That was the beginning of breaking up the Old West.

JE: Because the cowboys didn't have to go out herding as much and using the horses and really working the ranch.

CM: Yes, they could drive them and pen them up and put them on railroad cars. One time Uncle Will and his cousin Spi were in Kansas City after they had had a trail drive and sold cattle up there. They had been out running around and Uncle will decided to go back to the hotel early and go to bed. When Spi came in later, he blew out the gas light in their room. They were so close to being asphyxiated that...(pause) Uncle Will was sick for a long time after that. Someone in the hallway passing by smelled it and realized that it was coming from their room. The manager came and unlocked the room and pulled them out. They were almost gone. Spi recovered better, but Uncle Will was still pretty sickly. His dad sent him to Hot Springs and had him take baths and rest and recuperate over there quite a while.

JE: This was at a hotel in Kansas City?

CM: Yes, see they still had gaslights at that hotel and the boys were used to coal oil lamps. They just blew it out like they would have done a coal oil lamp.

JE: So they blew out the flame instead of turning off the gas?

CM: Yes. So the gas was just escaping in that room. It was an awful close call for him.

JE: How old was he when this happened?

CM: Probably 21 or 22 or 23.

JE: So it took some time for him to get over that?

CM: Yes. It took him six, or eight or 10 weeks to get back to normal.

JE: You talked earlier about gifts that they gave. What about Christmas? Were Uncle Will and Betty known for giving?

CM: Yes, they were wonderful to the family. He would himself personally write checks and sign them for the older teenagers and great nieces and nephews and to his nieces and nephews. He would pass the checks out at Christmastime. He had a nephew of Aunt Betty's, Bruce Quisenberry who acted like a secretary and did take care of a lot of things for him. He helped book his time and kept his calendar.

JE: We always hear about the humor of Will Rogers and how he was funny. Did he bring a humor back home when he visited? Was he funny around the family?

CM: Not especially, no. He just carried on ordinary conversations with all of us. He didn't try to be funny. He was just so natural. He was a true uncle and it was just like he was part of your family.

JE: Do you remember him smiling a lot?

CM: Oh yes, he was always happy.

JE: I talked to Henry Zarrow in Tulsa and I brought up the name of Will Rogers. He said, "Yes, I remember talking to Will. My father and I visited with Will at a house where Will's niece was living."

CM: Yes, that was with my Aunt Estelle in Tulsa.

JE: Okay, and for some reason Uncle Will didn't like where the house was and he wanted to sell the house according to Henry. The price for the house was \$2,500 and Will said to Henry's father, "I'd like to sell it for \$2,500." But the older Mr. Zarrow said, "I can't come up with that kind of money." But he owned a grocery store—so Uncle Will said, "Can you raise \$500?" He thought he could do that. So Uncle Will negotiated a deal. He said, "All right, in the next couple of years, if you can provide a couple thousand dollars' worth of groceries for my niece and her husband, that will take care of the \$2,000. If you will do that, then we will have a deal." Mr. Zarrow's father said, "We'll have a deal."

CM: That's probably when they first moved to Tulsa and they lived on Independence and that neighborhood ran down.

JE: Mr. Zarrow said that when Uncle Will would visit he would stand on the front yard and that people would gather and listen to him talk.

CM: Yes, and he never would run from it or acted short with anyone that walked up and

wanted to talk to him. He always talked to them like they were old buddies. That was a really good trait for someone that was famous and could say, “Well, I can’t be bothered right now.”

JE: Yes. He was the most widely read newspaper columnist and he had the nation’s most-listened-to-radio broadcast. In 1934 he was the No. 1 Box Office draw. At the time of his death he ranked second to Shirley Temple. Then there’s an interesting story, he was going to play the lead in Eugene O’Neill’s stage play *Ah Wilderness!* – but because of the “facts of life” talk between Will’s character and his son, he decided not to take that role and that was what freed him up and allowed him to fly with Wiley Post that summer in 1935.

CM: Isn’t that something?

JE: Yes.

Chapter 6 – 6:15

Frank Phillips – Henry Ford

John Erling: Tell us about his relationship with Wiley Post.

Coke Meyer: He and Wiley met through Mr. Hall out of Oklahoma City first, and then later through Frank Phillips. Mr. Hall got a hold of Wiley, because Wiley had built a plane because he had had an oilfield accident and he received a settlement of \$3,000. So Wiley took the money from the settlement and built the plane.

JE: Who was Mr. Hall?

CM: He was an oilman that connected with Wiley. He flew places to do oil leases. Wiley signed on with him to be his pilot and take him around. Mr. Hall thought Wiley did not have a very good plane, so he bought a better plane for Wiley to fly and named it Winnie Mae for his daughter. Mr. Hall wasn’t really using the plane very much. Somewhere along the way, the plane really belonged then to Wiley Post. Wiley went to Frank Phillips in Bartlesville who was starting to make aviation gasoline at his company, Phillips Petroleum. So Wiley, started using this new gas and flying the Phillips executives around where they needed to go. Uncle Will was friends with Frank and the other Phillip brothers, so he came to visit often and stayed out at Woolaroc Ranch some. It’s a wonderful building and animal preserve mostly. It’s about 3,600 acres.

JE: Yes! Did you ever go up there with Uncle Will and visit the Phillips family?

CM: One day I was there with Uncle Will and I went to the mansion in Bartlesville and I played with Betty Phillips, their granddaughter while Uncle Will visited with Aunt Jane and Uncle Frank. Everybody in Bartlesville called the Aunt Jane and Uncle Frank because they

operated like family. They gave us all tickets to the circus. They gave us a silver dollar and candy at Christmastime. They were both so generous and so wonderful to Bartlesville.

JE: Did you make these trips alone with your Uncle Will?

CM: No, my dad always took us in the car. Most of the time my sister and I got to go because we were the two oldest.

JE: But you distinctly remember the Phillips family and how kind they were?

CM: Yes. They were good friends with Uncle Will and Aunt Betty. They would get together in New York if they were going to be there at the same time. Aunt Betty and Uncle Will got to be very well acquainted with Harvey Firestone and his wife and Henry Ford and his wife. All three families went to upstate New York one time for about a week. They each had a cottage and the kids played and did things and the women visited and the men visited. She said those were lovely days and the ladies were so nice and gracious to her.

JE: Did he become better friends with Henry Ford?

CM: Yes, he did. Henry Ford was in Detroit of course and the baseball team was there. Uncle Will would call and say, "I am going to be in Detroit tomorrow and I want a seat in your box." Henry Ford would say, "You always have a seat in my box." He would get there and sure enough a lot of times Henry would take off of work to be sure he was there in his box to meet Will. They would visit and watch the ballgame, but mostly talk back and forth. They were close friends. He wrote about Henry and the Model T. He asked him one time, "What's the cheapest you could sell the Model T for?" Henry said, "Well, I could give the Model T away if they would just buy all the parts to replace and repair it." (Chuckle)

JE: Was Will a sports fan?

CM: Yes, especially of the rodeo. He kept up with all kinds of people. The night before he left they went to a rodeo.

JE: The night before he left on his final trip in 1935?

CM: Yes, to Seattle. He loved to work cattle. He would make a point to arrange his schedule so he could go out to the XIT or to another ranch there and he would work cattle for a couple days out in the pen. He would rope them and pull them over to be branded. He worked as hard as anybody. The cowboys used to laugh because Will would call that a vacation! (Laughter)

JE: Will wasn't a particularly big man was he?

CM: No, he wasn't very tall and he certainly was not overweight. He was all muscle. He did the Texas Skip 100 times every morning just to warm up. That's where you spin the rope and you are jump in and out of it. He did that just for exercise and to keep in good condition.

JE: He did the Texas Skip every morning?

CM: Yes! If he missed it in the morning, he would do it when he came home from the studio. He helped build his own polo field. In polo, it takes a lot of dexterity to ride and not fall

over while reaching for the ball and fighting each other over the ball with those long sticks.

JE: So he was active in the sport of polo?

CM: Yes, very active. He had a polo field built on his ranch there in Santa Monica. He would have athletes come from all over, even the East and they would divide themselves up and have polo matches. He had his boys help and play polo with them a lot of times if they were around.

Chapter 7 – 4:19

Will's Children

John Erling: Let's talk about Will's children. Can you name them for us?

Coke Meyer: Will Junior was the oldest. He was out of college when his dad was killed. He was working for the *Beverly Hills Citizen* newspaper at that time. Uncle Will had bought the newspaper building where they published it. In the basement was a big vault. Aunt Betty had clipping services from all over to send every little word that appeared in newspapers about Will Rogers. It included any of his pieces that were read on air or newspapers or magazines. The clippings were sent there and filed and stored in the vault—so Will Junior helped with that some. Then, the next child was Mary. She was a beautiful girl. She wanted to get into acting on her own. Said she was going for summer stock out in Maine. She and Aunt Dick were living in a cottage there. She was in a play in the round and they were in a rehearsal at the time of Uncle Will's crash. As kids, Uncle Will taught them all to ride horses and to rope and to love the outdoors. He had the love of the outdoors instilled in all of his children. Then Jimmy was the next son. He was in a military school over in New Mexico. So Uncle Will took a bunch of people from California over and they had a big polo match at his college there in New Mexico at one time. Then the youngest was Freddy. He got diphtheria and died. That really did crush Uncle Will. He took that very hard because he lost his mother and he lost his son and he was so attached to the children. Jimmy Rogers and I were closer. He was easier to talk to and down to earth—exactly like his dad. I felt closer to him. He said one time, "Coke, you know my mom said all along that she had four kids to raise because dad was just like another kid." Will never did discipline the kids much. It was always Betty's job. She had to be the one.

JE: Will Junior looked a lot like his father didn't he?

CM: Yes, he did. He was in the movies one time with him. He did commercials, too. He was more studious. Jim was more like his dad...mischievous and wanting to go someplace all

of the time and get into something. He had his own ranch and raised his children. Will had three grandchildren that were Jimmy's children. The oldest is Tim Rogers. He lives in Tennessee and has a ranch. The other one is Betty. She is married and has a family in California. Then Chuck Rogers is in New Mexico now. He left Arizona and has built a ranch and a home in New Mexico. They never got to know their grandfather. Chuck came one time and spent almost three weeks here at the memorial in Claremore to read about his grandfather. Their dad had never told them very much about him. Jim wouldn't brag on his dad or who he was. He wouldn't let people know who he was unless someone else told.

JE: You are the last remaining family member who has firsthand memories of Will, is that true?

CM: That's right. The other cousins and all of my dad's generation are gone. His sister Sallie was the last of the children to die of the original Rogers family.

Chapter 8 – 7:14

August 15, 1935

John Erling: The day Will Rogers died was August 15th, 1935. He was 55 years old. He died in a plane crash in Point Barrow, Alaska along with Wiley Post. How did you first hear about his death?

Coke Meyer: We were at home in Bartlesville. It was a hot morning. We had all the windows open and a little fan running. No one had air conditioning yet. They called on the phone and asked for my dad. My dad got on the phone and they told him they were hearing some stuff about Will Rogers on the AP wire coming from Alaska. My dad said, "Turn on the radio! Something is going on in Alaska with Uncle Will!" We turned on the radio, but nothing was on there yet. Then, about 15 minutes later, they interrupted the radio program to say there had been a crash in Alaska with Wiley Post and Will Rogers and they would have more info later. My dad got there and he was reading the AP wire as it came across. He called back to the house and said, "It's true. Uncle Will and Wiley crashed and they were both killed. We will need to go to California, so start getting things ready." My mom called our sitter that we used and she called a friend to go get my sister at the Girl Scout Camp. They brought her home. Then neighbors started coming and food started coming. People were offering to do anything they could. Everybody was crying and feeling the loss—it was a real loss for everyone.

JE: You were 16 at the time—so you understood and felt the loss personally yourself at that time?

CM: I sure did.

JE: This was because he was the biggest national personality that the nation had ever seen. Everybody read his column and listened to his radio programs. He was of course in movies and in vaudeville. Those of us who can remember when JFK died can kind of understand what it was like when Will died. The world just came to a stop.

CM: Everybody just thought that he was part of the family because he was so well known in all of his fields. If you didn't know him for one thing, you knew him for another. I think that's why people felt the loss like they did almost like it was personal.

JE: He was 55, but he had lived a full life.

CM: He lived faster and more furious than anyone. He probably lived a double-life in those times.

JE: Do you remember his funeral? They had the big funeral for him in California is that true?

CM: Yes. They had his casket out for public viewing and thousands and thousands of people were lined up to see him all day. Then he was taken to Forest Lawn. Forest Lawn had a mausoleum and a cemetery. Aunt Betty had him put in the mausoleum so she could move him if she wanted to. Aunt Betty and the family went the night before to the mortuary and they opened the casket for the family only. They got to see him dressed in his blue starched suit. They felt much better having seen him. They had the funeral at the Forest Lawn Chapel. It had to be by invitation only because it only held about 200 people. Then they had a public memorial service in Claremore at the airport. Will had opened the airport here with a lot of fanfare. He had talked Harold Getty and Wiley Post into coming up for the opening of it. They had already made their "8 days around the world trip", so they were very famous at the time. They brought a crowd and so did Will for the airport opening, but the day of Will's funeral, the crowd was twice the size. It was so big. Roosevelt talked about Will on the radio.

JE: President Roosevelt addressed the nation about Will's death?

CM: Yes. He talked about what he meant to the nation and to the world. It was a beautiful tribute and so were all of the other tributes, which were also broadcast over the radio.

JE: So the funeral was broadcast?

CM: Yes, and they broadcasted some from Forest Lawn, but mainly in Oklahoma they had full coverage of the public Claremore memorial service tribute.

JE: You were there?

CM: Yes, my friend and her mom and dad took me. It was so hot in that hangar at the airport, but no one ever said a word about it. There wasn't a dry eye in the place.

JE: The plane that they flew in was actually built by Wiley Post?

CM: Yes.

JE: It was kind of a hybrid plane, because he had put two planes together and he had added the pontoons to this plane?

CM: Yes.

JE: So then when they had landed in Alaska and they were going to take off again—there were those that thought that perhaps those pontoons caused the plane to be nosy-heavy.

CM: Yes. In a seaplane you have to take off level and just barely get any altitude. The weight of those pontoons brought the plane down they think.

JE: Will had his typewriter with him of course?

CM: Yes. He had already written his Sunday piece—so it was published right then. Then he had two other daily pieces he had written because he was going to be out of pocket by being in Point Barrow, Alaska. Then he knew he would be able to write it the next day. Those were the only times probably that he ever wrote stuff ahead.

JE: Did he bring along food on the plane?

CM: I found out how he had planned and packed and all. He took crackers and cans of chili. He loved that. He could live on beans and chili his whole life if he could get it. He didn't pack many clothes because they were going to have to sit way back in the back of the plane almost in the fuel area to balance the plane. He and all of their duffel bags were back as far as they could get.

Chapter 9 — 3:16

President Roosevelt

Announcer: Today in every section of the nation Americans are thinking of the city of Claremore, Oklahoma—the birthplace of an American who was beloved by millions, the late Will Rogers. His philosophy and his own particular type of humor live on in the minds of many who knew him personally, and those many more who read his words, listened to his voice and watched his image upon the motion picture screen. Today in Will Rogers' Oklahoma hometown, a large audience has gathered to participate in the dedication of a new Will Rogers Memorial. In Hyde Park, New York, the President of the United States interrupts the business of the day to speak—not only to that Oklahoma gathering, but to the larger audience throughout the nation whose thoughts are in Claremore. As the ceremony in Claremore, led by the governor of Oklahoma, awaits this message from the summer White House, the president is seated in the library of his Hyde Park home, ready now to take part in the memorial dedication for his old friend Will Rogers. Ladies and Gentlemen, the President of the United States.

President Roosevelt: Friends of Will Rogers, this afternoon we pay grateful homage to the memory of a man who helped the nation to smile. After all, I doubt if there is among us a more useful citizen than the one who holds the secret of banishing gloom, of making tears

give way to laughter, of supplanting desolation and despair with hope and courage, for hope and courage will always go with a light heart. There was something infectious about Will Rogers' humor. His appeal went straight to the heart of the nation. Above all things, in a time grown too solemn and somber, he brought his countrymen back to a sense of proportion. With it all, his humor and his comments were always kind. His was no biting sarcasm that hurt the highest or the lowest of his fellow citizens. When he wanted people to laugh out loud, he used the methods of pure fun. When he wanted to make a point for the good of all mankind, he used the kind of gentle irony that left no scars behind it. That was an accomplishment well worthy of consideration by all of us. From him we can learn anew the homely lesson that the way to make progress is to build on what we have, to believe that today is better than yesterday and that tomorrow will be better than either. Will Rogers deserves the gratitude of the nation, so it is fitting that the dedication of this memorial should be a national event, made so by the magic of radio. The American nation to whose heart he brought gladness will hold him in everlasting remembrance.

Announcer: The President of the United States speaking from the library of his home in Hyde Park, New York had broadcast this message to the audience in Claremore, Oklahoma where the Will Rogers Memorial is today being dedicated, and to the radio audience throughout America in whose memory Will Rogers still lives.

Chapter 10 – 6:09

Statehood

John Erling: He loved chili. Do you remember that here in Claremore too when he would come home?

Coke Meyer: At the Pocahontas Club...the girls that were in his neighborhood back in 1899 started a social club called The Pocahontas Club. The boys wanted to join the club too. They told the girls that they ought to be members because they took the girls on all the picnics and to swimming parties and dances. The girls agreed that about nine boys could be honorary members. Uncle Will always said that he was an "ornery member." When he would come back to town the club members would do like our family. Everyone would call each other on the phone. All of the wives and husbands and everybody would come. They had to have the get together over a drug store here in Claremore, because that was the biggest place to hold all those people. They would have beans and corn and ham and everything. He loved coming to that and they (the people) all loved him and Aunt Betty. One time he came in full Indian regalia. He had on a long headdress and

white buckskin on with fringe and everything. He even painted his face. They were all astounded. They all said that was the best time they had because he cut up and acted like a fool and they had never seen that side of him before because he had always just been Will.

JE: How much Cherokee would he have been?

CM: Three-quarters I guess. His mother actually had as much or more Cherokee in her as great-grandpa did.

JE: The club was called?

CM: The Indian Women's Pocahontas Club—it was started by some girls that lived out by the ranch when they came home in the summer from boarding school. See, there was money in the Cherokee Nation. These people all lived in nice houses and dressed well. These girls were all sent off to school. The men would go to market in Chicago or Saint Louis or Kansas City. They would bring home beautiful clothes for their daughters and wives to wear when they dressed up to go to church or just anyplace. The Club carried on and Will really was proud of his Cherokee heritage. I think he really was more proud of that than anything. He was also proud of his dad, because his dad served on the constitutional committee for the state of Sequoia. We were going to have two states in Oklahoma. We were going to have Oklahoma territory and Sequoia. Sequoia was going to be on the East, North and South of the state. Oklahoma territory was going to be to the West. Well, there was no way that anyone in Congress was going to let us have an Indian state because they were wanting to do away with the Indians anyway. They said “no way” so that fell through. They had it all written up and sitting as a bill in Congress, but Congress put everything on top of it, so they never could get down to getting that bill called on the floor.

JE: So Will's father supported the state of Sequoia?

CM: Yes, he did. He was on their commission to make their Constitution. Then he saw the handwriting on the wall. He became kind of unpopular because he wanted it to be one state. He thought that if Oklahoma turned into two states that we would get moved out West. He said, “We would have another Trail of Tears as bad as the first one.” So he tried to get his people to support statehood, which they did. They all signed up for the Dawes Commission census. A census had to be taken first in Oklahoma before they could take over as the state, because they were going to have to allocate land back to the Indian people. No matter what tribe was here, they had to allocate land back to them—but they still have leftover land. That's what precipitated the land runs and what made the white settlers come to the state. We had land left because they gave us little pieces of land. Even the way they gave out pieces of land was such a mess. They gave my dad land in Nowata. They gave my aunt land over in Jay County. Another aunt had land down in Tahlequah. Her land was in closed. You had to go through a neighbor's property to get to

her land, so she never had any use of it. They farm it and use the land all around her land because they know that land is never going to be claimed. Then another aunt received land down in Ramona someplace.

JE: The state of Oklahoma was formed in 1907. Do you remember if he was part of the State Constitution Committee?

CM: He was part of the Oklahoma Constitution then, because he was well known. He had been a judge in the Cherokee Nation and he had always been prominent in the political side of things. They put him on the Oklahoma Constitution Committee. He took a lot of his material out of that Sequoia Constitution and instilled it in the Oklahoma one. He had a great influence in the Constitution of Oklahoma. Then because he was the oldest member on that constitutional committee, take decided to name the counties that were to be formed after the names of the people that had served on the commission to make the Constitution. They formed 77 counties. So he got Rogers County named after him. He saw that in the drawing of the county they didn't include Chelsea. His two daughters lived in Chelsea and that was his second home. He went to Chelsea every weekend to stay with the girls. So he made them redraw the county to include Chelsea in Rogers County and take it out of Nowata County.

Chapter 11 – 4:04

Will's Father

John Erling: So it's very understandable why Will was very proud of his father.

Coke Meyer: His father was very stern with him. He always paid his dad back for everything his dad did for him. During that trip around the world, he sent money for his own life insurance premiums faithfully to his dad because he didn't want his dad to have to pay for it.

JE: Did his father get to see him in vaudeville and was he supportive of him?

CM: Yes, he did. He got to see him in Washington, D.C. He looked at the house and counted the people. (Laughter). He knew what they had paid to go see him. He said, Will, you are working too cheap!" (Laughter) That's when he appreciated that his son was really special. It had not impacted him that much until he saw him in D.C. how he was playing and how he was followed and how people were paying attention to him.

JE: Do you recall when Will's father died how old Will was?

CM: Grandpa died in 1911 and Will was born in 1879, so Will would have been 32 when his father died.

JE: By that time he was becoming known to the nation?

CM: Yes!

JE: So then his father got to see that he was pretty special?

CM: Yes, he was proud of him. Uncle Will and Aunt Betty got married in 1908. They had been married three years when grandpa died.

JE: As you think about your Uncle Will, how would you sum up his life? What would you like to say about him?

CM: Oh boy. His life had so many facets to it that it's hard to say.

JE: Maybe in terms of his family?

CM: He was so giving and loving. He gave his sisters Buick sedans back in the 1920s. He rebuilt my Aunt Sallie's house when her house burned down. He was such a good person and so family oriented. He was such a humanitarian. He also lived by the Golden Rule of do unto others—because he was always the first to do for other people that he knew. He worked with the Mulhall family and their Wild West show for a while. He told a dear friend one time to make sure that Mr. Mulhall came to see him when he was going to be close by. He was told that Mr. Mulhall was not doing too well, but he said, "I really have to see him." So they had Mr. Mulhall brought to the auditorium. Uncle Will went out on the steps of the place and visited with Mr. Mulhall out and away from the crowd. He put a wad of money in his pocket...that's why he especially wanted to see him in person. The family was told that later by the dear friend who brought Mr. Mulhall to see Will. He told us that story after Will was gone.

Chapter 12 — 7:24

Never Met a Man

John Erling: Will was famous for saying that he had "never met a man that he didn't like."

Coke Meyer: Will Junior made the comment about that. He said that his dad really liked everybody. What he meant by that was that until they proved differently, he was going to like them. But if they didn't measure up, then he was free to not like them.

JE: What about you...you were 16 when Will died. Tell us about your life after Will died.

CM: I kept in touch with Paula here. I married in 1939. Then in 1946 I moved to Caney, Kansas. My husband and I owned Meyer Greenhouse and it was a big operation of five buildings that were all made of glass.

JE: What was your husband's name?

CM: James W. Meyer. I called him Jim. He and I married in Sedan, Kansas in 1939. We had two children. We wholesaled to Bartlesville and Skiatook and Collinsville and Tulsa. We had

such a big range of growing area that we could wholesale and retail. We had a really good little business. We did business in Wichita too. Anyway, we kept in touch with Paula. Every November 4th, I would quit work in Caney and come down to Claremore. Paula would tell me ahead who was coming.

JE: You are talking about your children?

CM: Yes. I had two sons. We would come every November 4th—that's how I would meet all of these famous people who were marshals for the parade. People would tell me what Will meant to them. They would share their stories about him and I would share mine with different people. One of them was Rudolph and his violin when he went to Cherry Vale, Kansas to the Lion's Club. He taught the school kids and he gave a little program in the school auditorium. We drove over from Caney to attend this program. We got there and he was so good. He was running overtime and he said, "By the way, this watch was given to me by Will Rogers when I was in the Will Rogers Follies. He was such an influence on me. He encouraged me as a foreign person to keep doing what I was doing and telling me how important it was." After the show, he said he would welcome those that wanted to talk to him. My husband Jim wanted to go talk to him. I didn't want to, but my husband convinced me to go tell him who I was and that Will was my uncle. Once we told him who we were, he asked us to stay so he could have more time to talk to us. He invited us back to his room at the motel because he said he had something to give us. So we did that. We were visiting with him and he said, "I haven't eaten a bite since noon. I never eat before I entertain because I am always uptight and nervous about how my performance might be." I guess that's common in show business no matter how big somebody gets. Rudolph had some things to give me and then he put us on his Christmas card list. We got beautiful Christmas cards from him with a little note with it from then on. One time when Uncle Will was first out on the lecture circuit on his own...he had a quartet. The quartet sang and entertained and then Will would talk and then they would do another number. It was so popular in Tulsa that they had 300 people all on the back of the stage. Here he was talking to all of the people out front and turning around to talk to the people in the back. The lobby was full, all of the aisles were full—it was packed. People were even hanging outside on the street to hear him. Anyway, he walked around the block two or three times before he did that performance. He was so scared because there were so many people. He thought—what can I say to these hometown people? He got through talking and there was a break and two little girls brought a big bouquet of flowers to him. He had tears in his eyes. He said, "I have never had anything like this happen." He was so tickled. They wanted him to talk longer and he went overtime. He said, "I've got to sit down." He sat down on the apron of the stage and talked for another 45 minutes. All these people were standing and listening to him and not one of them ever left the whole time he talked.

JE: Were you there?

CM: No, my mother and dad were. He had invited many family members to Bartlesville for the first night performance, then the family all followed him to Tulsa and to Ponca City and Wichita. Then all of the family went home from Wichita. This was planned with the family ahead of time. He paid for all of the family's expenses to travel to these towns so he could be there to visit with them. That was a big deal for the family. He was just doing his monologues and people just loved him. They told him later to lose the quartet because nobody wanted him to have a time out. They wanted to hear Will talk the full time.

JE: So he talked for a couple of hours to them?

CM: Oh yes. His show would be an hour and half with the music, but then he would sit down and talk more.

Chapter 13 – 4:45

Friends of Will

John Erling: So now, you're 89 years old as we sit here talking to you. You are healthy. You drove here to the lodge at Will Rogers Memorial. Why do you think you've been able to live to be 89?

Coke Meyer: Well, I guess I do everything in moderation. I've never smoked. I've never drank really other than a social glass of wine or a beer. When my husband was mowing the grass and got through we might split a beer or something. I think it's my attitude. I have always been upbeat. I've always said I am not going to worry about this because I've got to wait and worry about something big. I use that as my motto I think—that I will wait until something big happens before I am going to worry. My dad and mom were always happy people. My grandmother, Will just loved her. She would bring all the ladies things from Kansas City. She had a Halloween Party at her house every year for all of the kids. She would wear a witch's outfit and meet them at the door and lead them up to the attic, which was all decorated with cobwebs to be spooky. She would pass out peeled grapes and tell the kids they were eyeballs. She was just something else.

JE: What was her name?

CM: Her name was Maud Rogers Lane. Will's sister and our relatives also had a great sense of humor and a lot of insight into people and common sense. It was inbred I guess.

JE: Despite the fact that the whole world knew Will Rogers as a great showman and a great commentator and in movies, when he would come home to his family he was just Uncle Will?

CM: Yes. His sisters called him Willy. All of his cowboy friends called him Bill—they never

called him Will Rogers. He had a lot of good old cowboy friends. In California, that's the kind of entertaining they did. Charles Russell and Remington and other artists would come and visit. Fred Stone was one person that Will really loved. He was like a brother. Uncle Will met him in New York. He covered for Fred in a play one time when Fred was injured and couldn't perform. That was a big gift I will tell you. Fred came out to the ranch and he and Uncle Will played golf together. He had built a little 3-hole golf course up near the house. He never did like golf personally, but he would get out there and hit a ball and carry a club around. He wasn't a golfer. But he wanted that for his friends who came and visited. His friendships meant a lot to him. He and Ziegfeld never had a contract signed—it was just a handshake.

Chapter 14 — 6:00

Will Rogers Real Estate

John Erling: When Will died, he left a lot of money.

Coke Meyer: Well, he left a lot of mortgages too because he had bought a lot of property that he was paying off in California.

CM: He bought miles of Malibu Beach. Then after he died, people were coming in and they were blocking the public access to the beach by building houses. Betty and the boys then left a large portion of their Malibu Beach property to the state of California to make it a public park from then on. They were given instructions to make it not sell it or break it up into smaller properties.

JE: His money was then placed in a trust and it didn't all come down to relatives?

CM: No, it didn't. Aunt Betty had to get her lawyers and realtors and her boys together and decide what they wanted to keep. The boys deeded it all over to the state of California, so it is a state park, one of 300.

JE: If Will Rogers showed up now and sat down in this chair, what do you think you would say to him?

CM: Oh gosh—I wish he was alive a lot of times. I think if he was alive today, he would straighten some young people out. I think he would be just as ordinary as ever. I don't think he would have changed a bit. He was a magnet for people. Once he would get to visiting with people, he would make them do the talking and then he would get the public's viewpoint on things so that he could pass it on. That was important. He told us one time, "I get so bored with these banquets with the same old food. If I get into town, if I can beat the mayor picking me up, I will get a cab and go to the local restaurant." He

liked to go to the mom and pop place in town to sit down and have a bowl of chili and talk to the local people or pick up the local paper there. He liked to do that because then he knew what kind of a town he was in. He knew what was going on before he went down and talked at their banquet. He said that way he could pick at the chicken dinner they served and not really have to eat it. (Laughter) He liked ice cream too. When he would type out his articles on his portable typewriter at my Aunt Estelle's house in Tulsa, we would all pile in the car. He would get out and take his telegram in and send it off. Then he would come out and we would go to an ice cream store. He would always order his sundae and dad's and they would go sit over at a table and visit. Then he would watch us kids try to make up our minds as to what kind of treat we were going to have from Uncle Will. We would get what we wanted and then sit down and poke each other and visit and laugh and talk. He enjoyed seeing us and enjoyed his ice cream just like we did. My grandmother always had homemade ice cream for all of us. She had a dairy farm so she had all the cream and butter and milk in the world.

JE: It all came down to him just being Uncle Will.

CM: Yes, absolutely. It made us realize that he was special—but he wasn't special. He was so down to earth and so ordinary. He was a lot like my dad. I just didn't think of him being that famous.

JE: Thank you so much.

CM: I get so mouthy...(Laughter)

JE: No, you're not mouthy! (Laughter) That's what's so special about you. You can talk about him and you have such a wonderful memory.

CM: When Uncle Will would come and visit my parents, back when they were just a young couple in Chelsea, my mom was up on everything. She was from San Antonio and she had seen all of the vaudeville shows. She would get up there with him and sing a duet. Her mother and sister would play the piano for them. They did that just as a family out at my grandmother's any night that he would be there.

JE: Will was singing?

CM: Yes, he would sing. He didn't have an especially good voice, but he loved to sing. I am sure he sang to the cattle all of the time, cowboy songs and all and old favorites. (Chuckle)

Chapter 15 — 5:05**Will & Betty**

John Erling: Did Will play any instruments?

Coke Meyer: He was learning to play the banjo. When he went to pick it up at the Oologah Station, Aunt Betty was there. That was the first time he saw her. He forgot to pick it up and take it home. He was just looking at her and she was so beautiful. He was so surprised to see her there that he got flustered and he just turned around and got on his pony and went home. He had to go back the next day to pick it up. (Chuckle)

JE: Why was Betty at the Oologah Station?

CM: Her brother-in-law and sister were managers of the Oologah Station. They put the freight on and off the trains. She was there that summer visiting them. Uncle Will got a friend and her daughter to invite them all over for a taffy pull and told them to bring that pretty girl he had seen. My grandmother had a big house party for her. Aunt Betty was coming and the girls were all standing out there and the boys were out in the barn and all over the place with their saddle blanket and their saddle. They had a dance upstairs in the attic. He knew Aunt Betty was coming on the train so he went to Vinita to meet her. She was sitting by some gentleman. They were already there sitting in coach. He didn't ask that man to move and he didn't make Aunt Betty move and find a new seat. He rode in the back on the last seat in the car I guess and that's how they rode back from Vinita. But he went up there on purpose to meet her. They had an eight-year courtship.

JE: Oh!

CM: They would write letters back and forth.

JE: Because he was traveling so much.

CM: Yes and because he lived here and she lived in Arkansas. He had a terrible time convincing her that he was a legitimate wage earner and that he could make a living for them. She and her sisters all thought oh boy, he's an Indian and a cowboy and now he's trying to be an actor. Those people didn't have very good names. Her family was well thought of. They were beautiful girls. Everybody knew them in Rogers, Arkansas. He had a time getting her convinced. Every time that they were going to quit and come back to Claremore to the ranch, then he would get another offer for more money and they would stay a little longer. They ended up having a home in New York City across the street from Fred Stone.

JE: Rogers, Arkansas—is that named after anybody in the family?

CM: I don't think so. Will just decided it was November and he was going to take Betty back with him weather or no. So they hurried and had a wedding at her mother's house. His sister and family all went over to be there for the wedding. They got on the train after the wedding

and went to New Orleans and then they went right back to New York. He just loved showing her every place of every town they went in. He worked an afternoon show and an evening show. He had his mornings free and he was a morning person. He would get up at 4:30am or 5am. He thought everybody ought to get up then and get the day started. She would get up and they would have a half a day of sightseeing or whatever. She said it was a whole different life than she ever would have imagined. He was so proud of her. He loved to meet people and show her off. He enjoyed showing her where he had been.

JE: She had a good personality for that too didn't she?

CM: Yes, she did. She was very quiet. She always stood in the background, but she always was supportive of him. She was the one that said, "You get out there and tell what's in that paper you read every day." She was a darling. She came back after his death as often as she could.

JE: Thank you very much. You are a special lady. You are a special person and we are fortunate to have you be here so long.

CM: Thank you. I am glad to be here. I wonder sometimes if that's part of why I was left around because my older sister moved and married and lived in Texas, so she missed out on this. But I lived close enough where I could drive from Caney, Kansas to here in Claremore.

Chapter 16 – 9:25

Will on the Radio – 1931

Will Rogers: Now don't get scared and start turning off your radios. I'm not advertising or trying to sell you anything. If the mouthwash you are using is not the right kind and it tastes sort of like sheep dip, why you'll just have to go right on using it. I can't advise any other kind at all. And if the cigarettes that you are using, why if they don't lower your Adam's apple, why I don't know of any that will. You will just have to cut out apples, I guess. That's the only thing I know.

Now, Mr. Owen Young asked me to annoy on this program this evening. You all know Mr. Owen D. Young. You know, he's the only sole surviving wealthy Democrat, so naturally when a wealthy Democrat asks me to do anything I have to do it, see? Well, Mr. Young, he's head of the Young Plan. He's the originator of the Young Financial European Plan. He's head of the Young Men's Temperance Union, and originator of Young's Markets, and Young Kippur. And was the first Democratic child born of white parents in Youngstown, Ohio.

He started the Young Plan in Europe. That was that every nation pay just according to what they could afford to pay, see? And, well, somebody else come along with an older

plan than Young's plan, and it was that nobody don't pay anybody anything, and course that's the oldest plan there is. And that's the one they are working under now. That's why we ain't getting anything from Europe.

So when Mr. Young asked me to appear why I said, "Well, I'm kind of particular. Who is going to be the other speaker? Who else is on the bill with me?" And he said, "Well, how would Mr. Hoover do?"

Well, I slightly heard of him, you know, and I said, "Well, I'll think it over." So I looked into Mr. Hoover's record and inquired of everybody, and after I had kind of thrown out about two-thirds of what the Democrats said about him why I figured that I wouldn't have much to lose by appearing with Mr. Hoover, so I'm here this evening appearing on the bill with Mr. Hoover. So now I expect you won't hear any more of "Amos and Andy"; it will just be Hoover and Rogers from now on.

Now we read in the papers every day, and they get us all excited over one or a dozen different problems that's supposed to be before this country. There's not really but one problem before the whole country at this time. It's not the balancing of Mr. Mellon's budget [Secretary of the Treasury]. That's his worry. That ain't ours. And it's not the League of Nations that we read so much about. It's not the silver question. The only problem that confronts this country today is at least 7,000,000 people are out of work. That's our only problem. There is no other one before us at all. It's to see that every man that wants to is able to work, is allowed to find a place to go to work, and also to arrange some way of getting more equal distribution of the wealth in the country.

Now it's Prohibition, we hear a lot about that. Well, that's nothing to compare to your neighbor's children that are hungry. It's food, it ain't drink that we are worried about today. Here a few years ago we were so afraid that the poor people was liable to take a drink that now we've fixed so that they can't even get something to eat.

So here we are, in a country with more wheat, and more corn, and more money in the bank, more cotton, more everything in the world; there's not a product that you can name that we haven't got more of than any other country ever had on the face of the earth, and yet we've got people starving. We'll hold the distinction of being the only nation in the history of the world that ever went to the poor house in an automobile. The potter's fields are lined with granaries full of grain. Now if there ain't something cockeyed in an arrangement like that then this microphone here in front of me is, well, it's a cuspidor, that's all.

Now I think that perhaps they will arrange it, I think some of our big men will perhaps get some way of fixing a different distribution of things. If they don't they are certainly not big men and won't be with us long. Now I say, and have always claimed, that things would pick up in '32. Thirty-two, why '32? Well, because '32 is an election year, see,

and the Republicans always see that everything looks good on election year, see? They give us three good years and one bad one. No, no, three bad ones and one good one. I like to got it wrong. That's the Democrats does the other. They give us three bad years and one good one, but the good one always comes on the year that the voting is, see? Now if they was running this year why they would be all right. But they are one year late. Everything will pick up next year and be fine.

These people that you are asked to aid, why they are not asking for charity, they are naturally asking for a job, but if you can't give them a job why the next best thing you can do is see that they have food and the necessities of life. You know, there's not a one of us has anything that these people that are without it now haven't contributed to what we've got. I don't suppose there is the most unemployed or the hungriest man in America that hasn't contributed in some way to the wealth of every millionaire in America. It was the big boys themselves who thought that this financial drunk we were going through was going to last forever. They over-merged, and over-capitalized, and over-everything else. That's the fix that we're in now.

Now I think that every town and every city will raise this money. In fact, they can't afford not to. They've got the money because there's as much money in the country as there ever was. Only fewer people have it, but it's there. And I think the towns will all raise it because I've been on a good many charity affairs all over the country and I have yet to see a town or a city ever fail to raise the money when they knew the need was there and they saw the necessity. Every one of them will come through.

Europe don't like us and they think we're arrogant, and bad manners, and have a million faults, but every one of them, well, they give us credit for being liberal [meaning generous].

Doggone it—people are liberal. Americans, I don't know about America being fundamentally sound and all that after-dinner hooey, but I do know that America is fundamentally liberal.

Now I want to thank Mr. Gifford, the head of this unemployment, thank Mr. Young, and I certainly want to thank Mr. Hoover for the privilege of being allowed to appear on the same program with him because I know that this subject is very dear to Mr. Hoover's heart and know that he would rather see the problem of unemployment solved than he would to see all the other problems he has before him combined. And if every town and every city will get out and raise their quota, what they need for this winter, why it will make him a very happy man, and happiness hasn't been a steady diet with our President. He's had a very tough, uphill fight, and this will make him feel very good. He's a very human man. I thank you. Good night.

Chapter 17 – 0:29**Conclusion**

Announcer: You have just heard Will Rogers in his most famous 1931 radio talk known as Bacon, Beans and Limousines, which is available in our bookstore along with suggested reading about the life of Will Rogers. You also heard Coke Meyer, the grand niece of Will Rogers share fun memories of her Uncle Will. Our founding sponsors are proud of Oklahoma's most famous son and are proud to preserve his legacy and our state's legacy on VoicesofOklahoma.com.