



Malibu Rotary Club Surfwriter

July 14, 2010

**Official Newsletter of the Rotary Club of Malibu
Malibu Rotary Club President Christopher Bauman**

Edited by Dr. John W. Elman

Pictures by Dr John W. Elman and Will Rogers State Historic Park

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- **Check Calendar on Malibu Rotary website MalibuRotary.org**
- **Malibu Rotary Club Website: www.MalibuRotary.org**
- **Rotary International Website: www.Rotary.org**
- **Rotary District 5280 Website: www.rotary5280la.org**
- **Rotary District 5280 “Rotarians Doing Business With Rotarians” Website: <http://yp5280.org/>**

- [RI President \(2010-2011\) Ray Klingensmith](#)
- **Rotary District 5280 Governor (2010-2011): Doug Baker**

**Lester Wood Talks
about
Will Rogers—
The Man and the Park**



Attorney **Lester Wood** spoke to the Malibu Rotary Club some time ago about a financial vehicle for seniors called a Reverse Mortgage. Lester wears several other hats. He is the immediate Past President of the Palisades Optimist Club, a former Rotarian, and is a docent at Will Rogers State Historic Park in Pacific Palisades, where he leads up to ten tours per month. He is also a board member of the Will Rogers Ranch Foundation, non-profit organization dedicated to honoring the legacy of Will Rogers. He boards his horse, Scout, adjacent to the park and frequently rides him on the trails and in the arenas.

At the Malibu Rotary Club meeting July 14, Lester talked about the background and life of Will Rogers and also about the park, which was the family home and estate that the family deeded to the State of California in 1944.

Will Rogers The Man



Will Rogers was the most beloved American ever. He came to fame in the 1920's as a trick lariat roper in vaudeville but was one of the best-known multi-media celebrities

([American cowboy](#), [comedian](#), [humorist](#), [social commentator](#), [vaudeville](#) performer, author, columnist, radio host, philosopher and [actor](#)) by the time of his death in 1935.

He traveled around the world three times, made 71 [movies](#) (50 [silent films](#) and 21 "talkies"), wrote more than 4,000 [nationally-syndicated](#) newspaper columns, and became a world-famous figure. By the mid-1930s, Rogers was adored by the American people. He was the leading political wit of the [Progressive Era](#), and was the top-paid movie star in [Hollywood at the time](#).

Wikipedia notes that his earthy anecdotes and folksy style allowed him to poke fun at gangsters, prohibition, politicians, government programs, and a host of other controversial topics in a way that was readily appreciated by a national audience, with no one offended. His short aphorisms, couched in humorous terms, were widely quoted; one example is his well-known quip, "I am not a member of an organized political party. I am a Democrat." He introduced Franklin D Roosevelt at the 1932 Democratic National Convention.

Will Rogers was born November 4, 1879 on the [Dog Iron Ranch](#) in [Indian Territory](#), near present-day [Oologah, Oklahoma](#). His parents, were both [Cherokee](#), and Rogers himself was 9/32s Cherokee. Rogers quipped that his ancestors didn't come over on the [Mayflower](#) but they "met the boat."

Lester illustrated some of the history of the Indian Territory, and noted that some of tribes, like the Cherokee Nation, were considered to by "Civilized Tribes," meaning they tried to assimilate into the American culture around them. Despite this, all the Indians were forced, in 1830, to move to the Indian Territory in what was known as the "Trail of Tears" where so many of them died.

Rogers was the youngest of eight children. The father, Clement V. Rogers, was a leader within Cherokee society. Clement Rogers achieved financial success as a rancher and used his influence to help soften the negative aspects of white acculturation on the tribe. The father had high expectations for his son and desired him to be more responsible and business-minded. Will was more easygoing and oriented toward the loving affection offered by his mother Mary rather than the harshness of his father. Because young Will wasn't the student that his father wanted him to be at home he was sent to a Military Academy in Missouri. Rogers was a good student and an avid reader of the *New York Times*, but he dropped out after the 10th grade. He claimed he was a poor student, saying that he "studied the Fourth Reader for ten years." He was much more interested in [cowboys](#) and horses. A former freed slave who worked for his father taught him to rope and use a [lariat](#).

Rogers worked the Dog Iron Ranch for a few years and earned money as a cowhand in Texas. Near the end of 1901, he and a friend left home with aspirations to work as [gauchos](#) in [Argentina](#). They went to New Orleans to get on a boat going to Argentina. When they got to New Orleans they discovered there was no boat, going to Argentina, and they ended up going north to New York, managed to some how find a route to get to Argentina in May 1902, and spent five months trying to make it as ranch owners in the Argentine [pampas](#). Unfortunately, Rogers and his partner lost all their money, and in his words, "I was ashamed to send home for more," so the two friends separated and Rogers sailed for [South Africa](#). While working on ranch in South Africa Will heard that a traveling American Wild West show was coming to the area, and Will met a got a chance to audition for Texas Jack, and launch his show business career as a trick roper in "Texas Jack's Wild West Circus." Will later wrote:

“He ([Texas Jack](#)) had a little Wild West aggregation that visited the camps and did a tremendous business. I did some roping and riding, and Jack, who was one of the smartest showmen I ever knew, took a great interest in me. It was he who gave me the idea for my original stage act with my pony. I learned a lot about the show business from him. He could do a bum act with a rope that an ordinary man couldn't get away with, and make the audience think it was great, so I used to study him by the hour, and from him I learned the great secret of the show business—knowing when to get off. It's the fellow who knows when to quit that the audience wants more of.”

Grateful for the guidance but anxious to move on, Rogers quit the circus and went to [Australia](#). Texas Jack gave him a reference letter for the Wirth Brothers Circus there, and Rogers continued to perform as a rider and trick roper, and worked on his pony act. He returned to the United States in 1904, and began to try his roping skills on the American vaudeville circuits.

On a trip to [New York City](#), Rogers was at [Madison Square Garden](#) when a wild steer broke out of the arena and began to climb into the viewing stands. Rogers quickly roped the steer to the delight of the crowd. The feat got front page attention from the newspapers, giving him valuable publicity and an audience eager to see more. William Hammerstein came to see his vaudeville act, and quickly signed Rogers to appear on the Victoria Roof—which was literally on a rooftop—with his pony. For the next decade, Rogers estimated he worked for fifty weeks a year at the Roof and at the city's myriad vaudeville theaters. Although Rogers was a remarkable trick roper, it was the talking that he did while roping that really made him popular.

In 1908, Rogers married Betty Blake, and the couple had four children: [Will Rogers, Jr.](#) (Bill), Mary Amelia (Mary), James Blake (Jim), and Fred Stone. Bill became a [World War II](#) hero, played his father in two films, and became a member of [Congress](#). Mary became a



Broadway actress, and Jim was a newspaperman and rancher; Fred died of diphtheria at age two.^[3] The family lived in New York, but they managed to make it home to Oklahoma during the summers. In 1911, Rogers bought a 20-acre (8.1 hectare) ranch near Claremore, Oklahoma, which he intended to use as his retirement home, for US\$500 per acre.

In the fall of 1915, Rogers began to appear in Florenz Ziegfeld's *Midnight Frolic*. The variety revue began at midnight in the top-floor night club of Ziegfeld's *New Amsterdam Theatre*, and drew many influential—and regular—customers. By this time, Rogers had refined his act to a science. His monologues on the news of the day followed a similar routine every night. He appeared on stage in his cowboy outfit, nonchalantly twirling his lasso, and said, "Well, what shall I talk about? I ain't got anything funny to say. All I know is what I read in the papers." He then made jokes about what he had read in that day's newspapers. The line "All I know is what I read in the papers" is often incorrectly described as Rogers's most famous punch line, when it was in fact his opening line.

His run at the *New Amsterdam* ran on into 1916, and Rogers's obvious popularity led to an engagement on the more famous *Ziegfeld Follies*. At this stage Rogers' act was strictly physical, a display of daring riding and clever tricks with his lariat. He discovered that audiences identified the cowboy as the arch-typical American--doubtless aided by Theodore Roosevelt's image as a cowboy. Rogers' cowboy showed an unfettered man free of institutional restraints, with no bureaucrats to order his life. When he came back to the United States and worked in Wild West shows, he noticed that audiences were just as fascinated by his frontier, Oklahoma twang. By 1916, a featured star in Ziegfeld's *Follies* on Broadway, he moved into satire by transforming the "Ropin' Fool" to the "Talkin' Fool". At one performance, with President Woodrow Wilson in the audience, he improvised a "roast" of presidential policies that had Wilson, and the entire audience, in stitches and proved his remarkable skill at off-the-cuff, witty commentary on current events. The rest of his career he built around that skill.

Hollywood discovered Rogers in 1918, as Samuel Goldwyn gave him the title role in *Laughing Bill Hyde*. A three-year contract with Goldwyn, at triple the Broadway salary, moved Rogers west. He bought a ranch in Santa Monica and set up his own production company. While Rogers enjoyed film acting, his appearances in silent movies suffered from the obvious restrictions of silence. He made 48 silent movies, but with the arrival of sound in 1929 he became a top star in that medium. With his voice becoming increasingly familiar to audiences, he was able to basically play himself, without normal makeup, in each film, managing to ad-lib and even work in his familiar commentaries on politics at times. The clean moral tone of his films led to various public schools taking their classes, during the school day, to attend special showings of some of them. His 21 talking films featured Will with the top actors and directors of the day.

Rogers demonstrated multiple skills, and was an indefatigable worker. He toured the lecture circuit. The *New York Times* syndicated his weekly newspaper column, 1922-35. Going daily in 1926 his short "Will Rogers Says" reached forty million newspaper readers. He wrote frequently for the mass-circulation upscale magazine *Saturday Evening Post*, where Rogers advised Americans to embrace the frontier values of neighborliness and democracy on the domestic front while remaining clear of foreign entanglements. He took a strong, highly popular stand in favor of aviation, including a military air force of the sort his flying buddy General [Billy Mitchell](#) advocated.

Rogers began a weekly column, titled "Slipping the Lariat Over," at the end of 1922. He had already published a book of wisecracks and had begun a steady stream of humor books. Through the continuing series of columns for the [McNaught Syndicate](#) between 1922 and 1935, as well as in his personal appearances and radio broadcasts, he won the loving admiration of the American people, poking jibes in witty ways at the issues of the day and prominent people—often politicians.

From about 1925 to 1928, Rogers traveled the length and breadth of the United States in a "lecture tour". (He began his lectures by pointing out that "A humorist entertains, and a lecturer annoys!") During this time he became the first civilian to fly from coast to coast with pilots flying the mail in [early air mail](#) flights. The [National Press Club](#) dubbed him "Ambassador at Large of the United States." He visited [Mexico City](#) with [Charles Lindbergh](#) as a guest of U.S. Ambassador [Dwight Morrow](#). Rogers gave numerous after-dinner speeches, became a popular convention speaker, and gave dozens of benefits for victims of floods, droughts, or earthquakes.

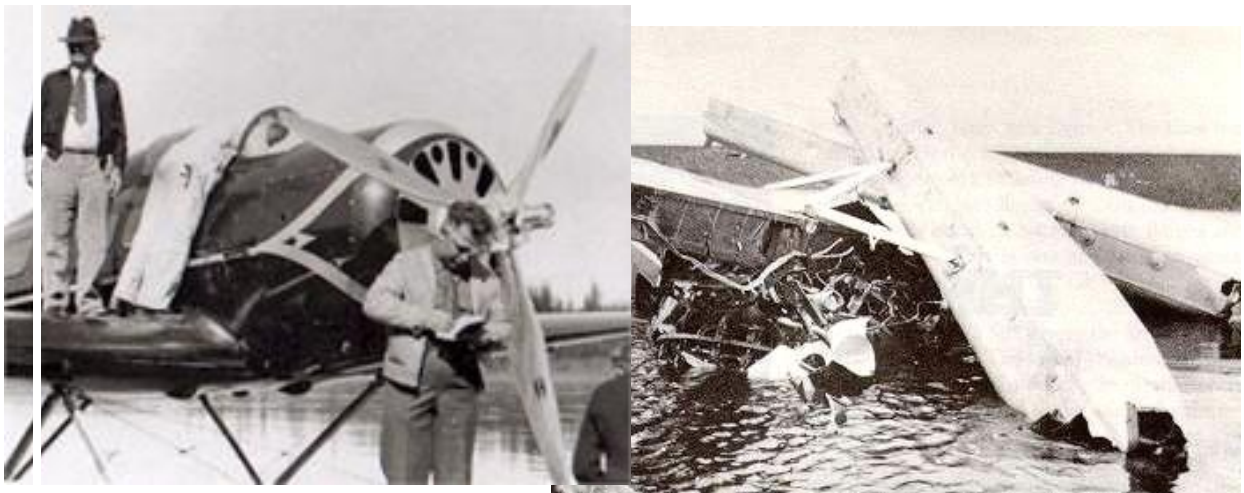
He made a trip to [the Orient](#) in 1931 and to [Central](#) and [South America](#) the following year. In 1934, he made a globe-girdling tour and returned to play the lead in [Eugene O'Neill's](#) stage play *Ah, Wilderness!* He had tentatively agreed to go on loan from Fox to [MGM](#) to star in the 1935 movie version of the play; however, his concern over a fan's reaction to the 'facts-of-life' talk between his character and its son caused him to decline the role—and that freed his schedule to allow him to fly with [Wiley Post](#) that summer.

Rogers became an advocate for the aviation industry after noticing advancements in Europe and befriending [Charles Lindbergh](#), the most famous aviator of the era. In 1935 [Wiley Post](#), an Oklahoman, became interested in surveying a mail-and-passenger air route from the West Coast to Russia. He attached a Lockheed Explorer wing to a Lockheed Orion fuselage, fitting floats for landing in the lakes of Alaska and Siberia. Rogers visited Post often at the airport in Burbank, California while he was modifying the aircraft, and since he was not going to do the *Ah,*

Wilderness! movie that he had originally scheduled for this time he asked Post to fly him through Alaska in search of new material for his newspaper column. When the floats Post had ordered did not arrive at Seattle in time, he used a set that was designed for a larger type, making the already nose-heavy hybrid aircraft still more nose-heavy.

After making a test flight in July, Post and Rogers left Seattle in the Lockheed Orion-Explorer in early August and then made several stops in Alaska. While Post piloted the aircraft, Rogers wrote his columns on his typewriter. Besides his other accomplishments Will Rogers was perhaps one of the first to use a “laptop” on a plane. Before they left Fairbanks they signed and mailed a [yacht club burgee](#) belonging to South Coast Corinthian Yacht Club. The signed Burgee is on display at South Coast Corinthian Yacht Club in Marina del Rey, California. On August 15, they left Fairbanks, Alaska for Point Barrow. They were a few miles from Point Barrow when they became uncertain of their position in bad weather and landed in a lagoon to ask directions. On takeoff, the engine failed at low altitude, and the aircraft, uncontrollably nose-heavy at low speed, plunged into the lagoon, shearing off the right wing and ended inverted in the shallow water of the lagoon. Both men died instantly. Malibu Rotarians had a chance to hear an aural recording of the autopsy of that crash during Bill Wishard’s program in April, 2008 in which Bill’s father interviewed the doctor who performed the autopsy.

Everyone was stunned by the crash. Strangely Will Roger’s daughter Mary was appearing in a play in New York in which the father of her character in the play dies in a plane crash. Below are the last pictures of Will Rogers and Wiley Post and the plane that crashed in a lagoon in Point Barrow, Alaska on August 15, 1935.



Will Rogers State Historic Park in Pacific Palisades, California



When Will Rogers started to make movies in Hollywood he lived in a house in Beverly Hills. In 1922 Will bought the property above Sunset Boulevard commanding a view of western Los Angeles, Santa Monica and the Pacific Ocean. In 1926, he built a polo field on the land. He built a cabin on the property in 1927. In 1928 Will, his wife Betty, and their three children - Will Jr., Mary, and Jimmy - moved to the ranch, and the home was enlarged to its present size of thirty-one rooms. At one time the area of the ranch property totaled 347 acres. Will was a great polo player and had a family polo team. The ranch became the place where Will Rogers could relax with his family and friends, pursuing his favorite pastimes of riding and roping.



At the time of his death in 1935, Will Rogers' ranch consisted of a 31-room ranch house, a stable, corrals, riding ring, roping arena, polo field, golf course, and hiking trails.

The family sold some of the adjacent property, and when his widow, Betty, died in 1944, the 186 acre ranch was deeded to the state of California to become a state park. It came with no endowment and at first the state didn't want to accept it. A \$3 million renovation was done starting in 2003. A major restoration of the historic Will Rogers home

was completed in March 2006. Lester has invited us to a private tour of the park and home.

Other News and Guests from July 14 Malibu Rotary Club Meeting

Kevin Boling pointed out that trash pickup and recycling at the Will Rogers State Historic Park in Pacific Palisades, California is done by United Waste Management Systems. Kevin Boling hopes to demonstrate his barbecue talent as well as raise money for the Malibu Rotary Club at the Kiwanis Chili-Cook off.

Jerin Renfro, the Pepperdine MBA student who works for Boeing was again a guest at the July 14th Malibu Rotary Club meeting.



Next Week—Club Assembly Led by Malibu Rotary Club President Chris Bauman

The previous week Malibu Rotary Club President Chris Bauman told us he wants to “Get back to basics.” He handed out printed documents of the Principles of Rotary as well as “What is Rotary?” He was going over the Charity Budget of the Malibu Rotary Club and the places where checks were given: Biosand Filter in Ecuador, Malibu High School Scholarship Awards, High School Singing Competition winners, shelve at Malibu Library. For the coming year he wants the club to continue those local community activities that have been done in the past—the Middle and High School Singing Competition, the sponsorship of Thanksgiving Dinner for Homeless with SOS, the high school scholarships, supporting the Clean water projects, etc., but also to have the quarterly fellowship dinner meetings, such as the one he and his wife hosted in June.

He also noted how Dean Baird and the Malibu Rotary Club had been instrumental in having 8 Rotary Foundation Ambassadorial Scholars from Pepperdine study abroad in past years (generally sponsored by their home clubs). He also talked about the five areas of service in the Malibu Rotary Club’s participation in each one:

1. Club Service

2. Vocational Service
3. Community Service
4. International Service
5. New Generations

The July 21st meeting will be a Malibu Rotary Club assembly where some of the club plans will be discussed.



Project TRIUMPH (Today's Revolution Is Understanding; Make Peace Happen) is a grassroots effort to bring Arab and Jewish teenagers together in the spirit of collaboration to build a shared vision for a peaceful future. The program was conceived

by Ilan Magdali of the Newbury Park Rotary Club. It brought 10 teenage Arab and 10 teenage Jewish students from Israel to a leadership camp in Simi Valley where they all learned to work together, develop leaders skills before returning to Israel to use what they learned back home. Most of us feel helpless in trying to find a solution to the constant war in the Middle East, but at least this program is trying to do something. Initially sponsorship of this program had been mostly from the Newbury Park Rotary Club and Rotary Clubs in District 5240 and private and corporate donors. Malibu Rotary Club was the first Rotary Club in Rotary District 5280 to support the project.

Pictured above are the students who were hosted in 2008 as they visited Malibu on their way to the leadership camp. Today the program no longer is bringing the students to the US. There is a partnership with the Rotary Club of Haifa and one in Italy to get Jewish and Arab students out of Israel to a place where they can learn to work together and apply this when they return to Israel. A new Pilot TRIUMPH project is being developed. It concentrates it's efforts on the students in the City of Acre in Israel as a year long program with Jewish and Arab students working together making a video documentary that strives for lifelong results. The new Pilot TRIUMPH project is a non-profit organization with Leon Berg, as its CEO.

If you would like to help with Project TRIUMPH you can contact Shoshana Brower at shobrower@gmail.com or Leon Berg at Leon.Berg@gmail.com.



Malibu Rotary Club Supports BioSand Filters in Ecuador

Malibu Rotary Club voted to send \$500 to the Rotary Club of Pontiac Michigan to help build and install BioSand Filters in Santo Domingo De Los Colorados, Ecuador. As was noted by Carol Cousineau, who, along with husband Ron brought the project to our attention, after installing the first BioSand filters in Ecuador (and pictured left), "That money would be matched by the next District Grant, which we have been assured we will get. So, for instance \$500.00 would become \$750.00.

The filters and two 5 gallon safe water containers per unit, cost around \$60.00 each, so a donation of \$500.00 would provide 12 families of five or more with 20 gallons of water each day - enough for drinking, cooking, brushing teeth, bathing and washing clothes! The filters are expected to last at least 50 years

without the need to add any expense except chlorine - available and inexpensive. That means each family will have more money to provide more nutritious food for their families, since they don't have to pay for propane to boil their water. It will mean more time to spend with their children, rather than boiling or foraging for firewood. With great improvement in the health of all the family members, fewer cases of diarrhea and stomach flu from bad water and parasites, the parents will better be able to hold down a job and provide for their families, children will be able to attend school more days and have a better future.

We are excited about this project because we anticipate that this is just the beginning. All over Ecuador, there are families struggling to survive, with a high infant mortality rate, because of bad water. This successful project will be a shining example and model. Rotary is the perfect vehicle for getting the word out about BioSand and accomplishing the goal of providing safe drinking water for the world. **BioSand** is one of the four methods of purifying water recommended for Third World Countries by the World Health Organization. (We have researched the others. Since they provide only a small amount of water for drinking, are small and ceramic, so more susceptible to breakage or deterioration, or adding so much chlorine that the people won't drink it, the concrete BioSand is by far the best choice for all but mountainous areas, where a more expensive plastic version of BioSand is an alternative.)"

For a while it looked like the matching grant process was not going to happen. When Malibu Rotarian Bill Wishard visited Ecuador in March, 2010, he was able to meet with Ecuador Past District 4400 Governor, Juan Prinz, to get project back on track.

Upcoming Programs

July 21, 2010 Club Assembly

July 28, 2010 Joe Ditzel Clean Comedy: "Joe Ditzel Has Some Problems"

August 11, 2010 [Scott Wagenseller](#) Chairman of the Board of the Malibu Chamber of Commerce and head of Gates Security

September 8, 2010 Bob Brager "Update on Legacy Park"

Please see Malibu Rotary Club Website www.maliburotary.org for latest Calendar and future speakers