

## As I was saying



Jack Hilsher

There once was a man in the 30's who was part standup comedian, part musical comedy and movie star, and part newspaper columnist, with heavy political overtones in all these pursuits. Will Rogers was his name.

Nowadays Mort Sahl, Mark Russell, or Jackie Mason are as close as you're going to get to Rogers. And my friends, that ain't too close at all! None of them could even carry one of Mr. Rogers' bags. Nor are his audiences and they do have their narrow cliques of admiring fans - nowhere near the size of Rogers's legions. He was admired and listened to, and read, and quoted on a worldwide basis.

In 1948 a 3¢ commemorative U.S. stamp honoring Rogers was issued and the announcement said, "His down-to-earth opinions on current events were discussed throughout the world and his famous words, 'I never met a man I didn't like,' are typical of his character."

Those eight words are also typical of the Rogers' outlook on life (I don't want to call it philosophy exactly, but that is probably what it was) for they come from a longer statement which in itself is equally as revealing of the man: "I have often said in answer to inquiries as to how I got away with kidding some of our public men, that it was because I liked all of them personally, and if there was no malice in your heart, there could be none in your gags, and I have always said I never met a man I didn't like."

## The great Will Rogers, a consummate commentator

From 1926 to 1935 Will Rogers wrote a daily column which appeared in over 400 newspapers, easily the most-read column of the time. It was usually printed in a box and titled "Will Rogers Says" and if this subject matter once again discloses my column fixation, so be it.

Many, if not most, of his comments on then-current affairs and conditions could be printed today with appropriate name changes, and be just as pointed, thoughtful and humorous as they were back then. Can you imagine, for example, what Rogers would be able to do with Slick Willie, Queen Hilary, Newt, OJ's Dream Team, etc., etc?

Bryan Sterling, a Rogers authority who edited many books and movies about Rogers, called him "both Indian and cowboy (his grandmother was part Cherokee), both serious writer and comedian, both movie star and political analyst."

That last talent brings to mind one of the subjects most often targeted by Rogers...Congress, or as he called its members, "our hired help." He said, "We all joke about Congress but we can't improve on them. Have you noticed that no matter whom we elect, he is just as bad as the one he replaces? They meet tomorrow. Let us all pray: Oh Lord, give us strength to hear that which is about to be inflicted upon us. Be merciful with them, oh Lord, for they know not what they're doing. Amen."

And what about his talent for prediction, without it even being called that? Example: "Women are not the weak, frail, little flowers that they are advertised. There has never been anything invented yet, including war, that a man would enter into, that woman wouldn't too. I wouldn't be a bit surprised that it won't be no time till a woman will wind up in the

senate. 'Course until now, there has been no need for anything resembling a woman in the senate, especially an old woman, for there is more old women in there already than there is in an old ladies' home. But they been in there on a pension and they are awful nice old fellows and they don't do any particular harm. 'Course they don't do any great good, either."

It will soon be sixty years since Rogers, with friend and famous pilot Wiley Post, took off in Wiley's plane on a 500-mile trip to Point Barrow, Alaska. He had never been to Alaska and was looking forward to the visit.

Post, who had set many records with his former plane, the WinnieMae, including two round-the-world flights, planned to fly a secondhand Lockheed Orion. He had installed a new 550-hp engine, too powerful for the small plane, and replaced the wheels with pontoons, making the plane nose-heavy and difficult to handle. Rogers had to get in the back when they landed to counterbalance the nose-heaviness.

These changes were their undoing. Weather forced them to land to ask directions from watching Eskimos, and after a steep takeoff they banked sharply and plunged 50' to the water. Both pilot and passenger were killed.

Paula Love, curator of the Will Rogers memorial, said, "I contend that nothing could be written about America during the 1918-1935 period without including Will Rogers, because he spoke on the events as they happened, day by day. Reading Will Rogers gives one the best history of America during this crucial period, told in that inimitable Rogers manner, sparked with spontaneous wit and wisdom, and set down in a style that all can understand and enjoy."

America lost a one-of-a-kind.

## J.W.J.



John W. Johnson

Sen. Phil Gramm, Democrat turned Republican senator from Texas, is running for President. Speaking to him a few weeks ago in Washington was akin to being in a high windstorm, and trying to hang on for dear life while being buffeted with his ideas of how government should work—such an experience has been called "Grammstanding." Someone has also said of Gramm that a mirror has yet to be built large enough to contain his self-image. Perhaps so, but the following is most certainly true. Gramm has said: "I believe government is the problem." At the same time Gramm was educated through a National Defense Fellowship and, at least in part, by his father's GI insurance—both of which he later voted to cut. Gramm severely chastised Texas Senator Lloyd Bensten as Bensten ran for President, without resigning as a Texas Senator—precisely what Gramm himself is doing now. Gramm has criticized both President Clinton and other Democrats for not serving in the military, but Gramm himself avoided military service through exercising five separate student deferments. Think about it, and hold other candidates to the truth as well

Based on crime, pollution, social, political and economic conditions, the best that an American city could do in a worldwide ranking was Boston, which finished 30th; whereas our supposedly backward neighbors to the north, Canada, had three of the top ten cities, Ottawa, Montreal and Toronto. And if this nation doesn't improve its worker productivity (when compared to the rest of the world) we will be lucky to place a city in the top 100 in the next 25 years.

Spring is here, as will be evi-

## Gramm speaks with forked tongue, and other oddities

denced shortly by more and more young persons riding bicycles. Beginning Feb. 27 of this year, all children under 12 must wear a helmet while riding a bicycle. Helmets are also required for children who are riding in a bicycle restraining seat, or in a trailer being towed by a bicycle. Head injuries are the leading cause of death in bicycle accidents. In neighboring New Jersey, bicycle injuries dropped by 65 percent and fatalities by 60 percent, within a year after the helmet law was passed in that state. Nuf said.

Can you believe that taxpayers have paid for a child molester to have a penile implant? A Navy veteran who served four years in prison following his 1990 conviction for molesting 5 and 7 year old girls, received a penile implant at a VA Hospital, following his release from prison. VA officials say the man's treatment was related to his service and he was legally entitled to the operation. If that's true, then the law needs to be changed.

It is both wrong and stupid for U.S. Secretary of Transportation Federico Pena to call for the dropping of a rule requiring alcohol testing of truck drivers and other transport workers before they begin their jobs. Pena says he wants the rule dropped because random testing of such drivers is also done. Of course, he made his remarks in a speech at the National Truck and Bus Safety Summit in Kansas City. Wonder what office he's seeking?

Sen. Arlen Specter's 20 percent flat tax proposal makes sense. The plan is a so-called "revenue neutral" which means that the actual tax rate would be determined by how much money is needed to match current revenue. While the idea of a simple taxing system strikes fear into the hearts of accountants and IRS employees alike (at least the many thousands of them who would be unnecessary were a flat tax system to become law), such an idea is long overdue. It would elimi-

nate all of the tortured-logic loopholes now governing the system. This would mean that everyone would pay the same rate above a certain income, and a postcard sized form would be all that's necessary to file your taxes. However, both the civilian and governmental vested interests in keeping the status quo will fight such a change, and that means a great deal of citizen pressure will be needed. Or the election of a president who has a plan to do just that.

It would be wise for the GOP not to write off President Clinton in the next election. The President is sufficiently astute to realize, based on the historical election last November signaling a massive shift to the political right, that he and his administration's only chance for survival into another term is to shift with it. He will need to, (and has seriously begun), putting the GOP on the defensive by repositioning and redefining himself. And since politicians have long known the general laziness of electorate, and that image (versus substance) reigns supreme, Clinton will exploit his incumbency, hoping to pick off the Republicans one by one as they carp and fight among themselves for the GOP presidential nod.

And you may want to add these to your list of reasons why the legal system (read the open ended, contingency fee, tort system), needs to be reformed. How about the 300 pound man who had a stomach stapling operation, and who sued his hospital because they permitted him to go near a refrigerator, whereupon he popped his staples. Or how about the man who sued a Florida municipality because, and while it had posted signs for dangerous jellyfish and undertows, none were posted for sharks, which had bitten him. And finally, how about the woman who sued a soft drink manufacturer because she cut her lip and broke some teeth, trying to remove a bottle cap with the aforementioned.

## Library news

### Library displays a unique soap collection

By NANCY KOZEMCHAK

The Kick-off party for the 49th annual Back Mountain Memorial Library Auction will be held on Monday, June 5 at 6:30 p.m. at Yesterdays in Trucksville. There will be a preview of some of the antiques that will be sold during the auction. The cost of the party will be \$20 per person and reservations must be made before May 30. There will be limited seating available. Reservations with payment should be made at the library or by calling Ernie Ashbridge, chairman of the party, at 696-2046.

The display case at the library is featuring a collection of soaps borrowed from Mandy Ptashinski age 11, who is in 6th grade at Lehman Jackson School. The display shows many collectible soaps from all over; such as, Elvis from Graceland; various figures from Avon; a six pack of soda; a fudgecicle, soap on a rope and many kinds of animals. There is a selection of Christmas soaps including

bears, santa, snowmen and a Christmas tree.

Included with the display is a pitcher to hold water for washing when using the soaps; a doll holding a teddy bear soap; a fish bowl with fish soap; a bowl with fruits and nuts; a bed in a basket; a large life saver, baskets with soap, a soap crayon, sea shells, a grouping of rabbits, and a pelican. Mandy began to save soaps about five years ago mostly because she loved the colors and the smells and also because they were cheaper than collecting diamonds. These colorful soaps will be at the library until May 30th.

The Book Club will meet at 1:30 in the community room at the library, on Monday, May 15. All Book Club members are invited to attend and guests are welcome. Book Club members enjoy reading and sharing their book reviews with other members. A warm thank you to Marvan Daily who donated a hand painted light switch cover and a

cheery towel for the room.

New books at the library: "Ladder of Years" by Anne Tyler is a beguiling novel of a 45-year-old woman, the mother of three almost-grown children, who on a sudden impulse walks away from her marriage, hitches a ride into the unknown, and settles in a strange new town to invent a new life. What propels Delia Grinstead to take off like this? Whatever, she goes wearing only her swimsuit and her husband's beach robe and finds a new life.

"Stitches in Time" by Barbara Michaels is a fascinating tale of suspense and the super-natural. The quilt captured Rachel Grant's imagination. An antique bridal quilt, which appeared under mysterious circumstances in the vintage clothing shop where Rachel worked. It was beautiful, mesmerizing...eerily fascinating. She little dreamed that it might hold secrets better left undisturbed. The heirloom carried a sinister legacy into the present.

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