

Old-Time Hero

By D.H. Coop

In the 1940s, the hero always rode a white horse or wore a white hat. Radio programs like *The Lone Ranger*, *Sky King*, *Red Rider*, *Roy Rogers* and my favorite, *Hopalong Cassidy*, were on the radio once a week. The hero was presented as an individual that always did the right thing and had no character flaws. The episodes ended with the hero riding off into the sunset with everyone waving goodbye.

The programs were sponsored by one product, which was part of the program. Decoder rings, badges and official documents were collectable items that made one a member of the select group of special agents for various programs. You could collect items by sending in parts of the package or digging into the package itself to find a prize.

I had all types of Hopalong Cassidy shirts, a hat and a pair of his white-handled six-shooters and holsters. When I wore them, which was every day, it would invariably start an argument with my friends over whose hero was the best. Then one day came the big chance to prove my hero was the best there ever was in the world. Roy Rogers was in a downtown department store to meet his fans. This was bigger than Christmas, and my grandmother took me down to see him.

I showed up with my Hopalong hat, shirt and two six-shooters with the plan to outdraw Roy Rogers. I stood in the long line with others dressed in outfits that showed that they were Roy fans and knew they would be surprised when I outdrew Roy. As I waited in line with each step closer, the expectation grew about how I would say to him "Draw!" and reach for my six-shooters.

The line moved, and I could see him standing with hay bales on the floor stacked on each side. He stood there, shaking hands with each fan and giving them a signed picture. Then, as I got closer, I noticed it was Roy and his horse, Trigger.

I had not expected to see Trigger. When it was my turn to talk to Roy, I could not take my eyes off Trigger. The next thing I knew, I was being handed a photograph of Roy Rogers and Trigger, and out the door we went. I had not outdrawn Roy Rogers with my Hopalong Cassidy six-shooters. I had not even touched them, but I had seen Roy and Trigger. I did not feel I had let Hopalong down—I felt rather proud that I had met Roy and his horse.

I did see Hopalong Cassidy in person when he was the grand marshal of the Rose Parade. Both of these childhood heroes developed a sense of manhood that stayed with me over the years. They taught me to do things because they are right to do and that we need to work together to protect the weak. I miss the idea of old-time heroes!