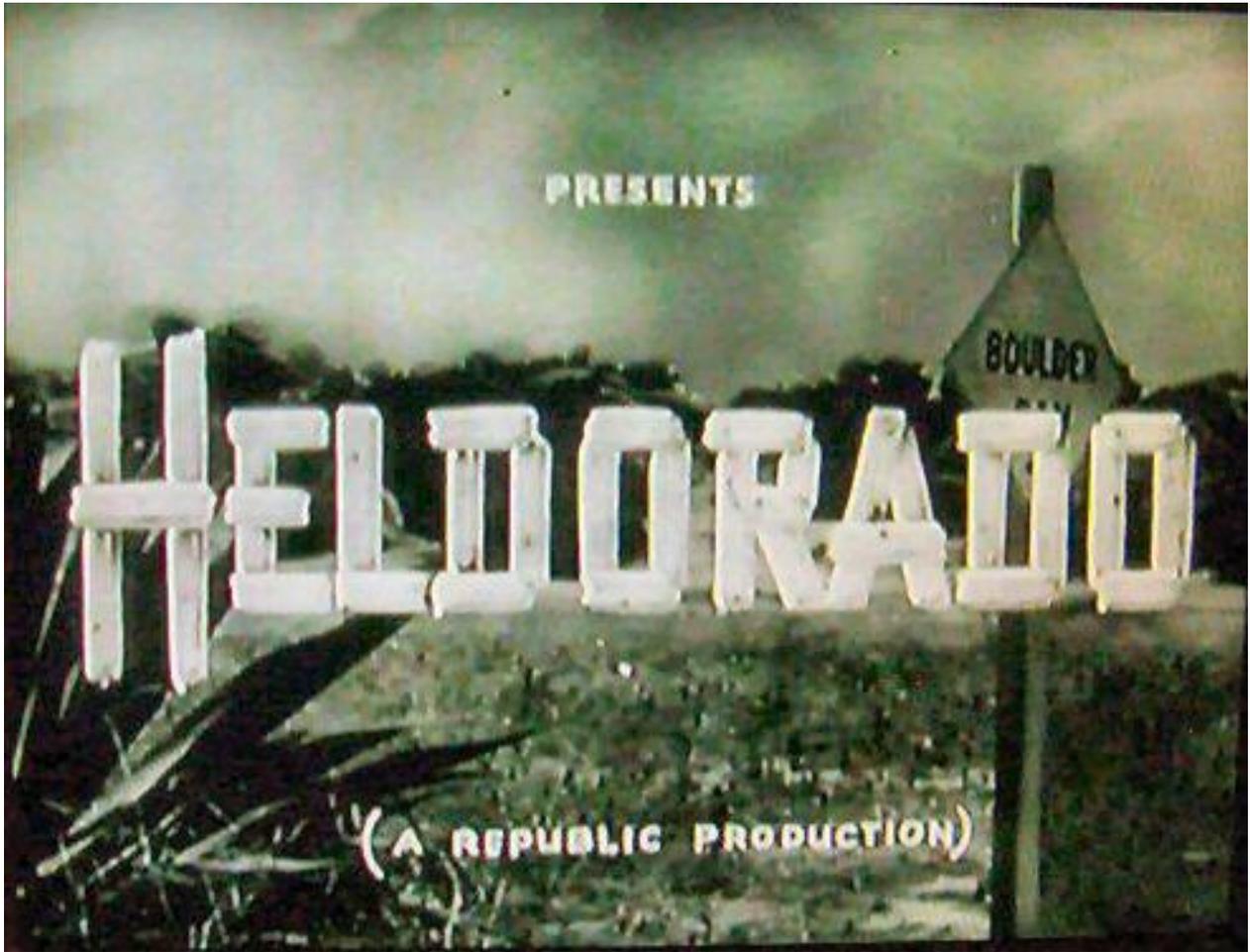


**Heat, Haze,
and
Heldorado:
The First
Encounter**

by Clark N. Nelson, Sr.



**Roy Rogers
as himself**



**Dale Evans
as Carol Randall**



**George 'Gabby' Hayes
as 'Gabby' Whittaker**

It was an evening in May of 1946 when my mother told my brother Larry, 12, and me, 9, to take a bath, then look forward to a trip to Las Vegas the following morning.

Larry and I were excited, since we would be in Las Vegas for the annual *Heldorado Days*, a four-day event from Thursday through Saturday, featuring a carnival, parades down Fremont Street, and a rodeo.

Even though Larry and I were excited, we were also upset by the fact that we'd be taking an extra bath that week, which didn't seem fair. Larry and I took a bath on Saturday night, which was in those days, strange as it may seem, referred to as *bath night*.

We were living within the northeastern rim of the Mojave Desert, and as most individuals from desert climates might recall, water, in most instances, had become a luxury; moreover, according to our parents this was the reason for *bath night*.

However, I've yet to be convinced that our parents adhered to the agenda we knew as *bath night*. Nonetheless, one's personal agenda toward cleanliness and personal hygiene for the remainder of the week was accomplished with a bathroom sink, warm water, a bar of soap, a wash cloth, and a bath towel.

The following examples from that period are absolutely true and serving as benchmarks in time, from that period, with relevance to the value and luxury within a reliable water source:

(1) Sometime around 1955, the syndicated newspaper entry in the *Salt Lake Tribune*, the popular *Ripley's Believe it or Not*, featured *St. George, Utah, 700 consecutive days of sunshine*; and

(2) *Burma Shave* signs could be found along US Highway 91 for hundreds of miles in either direction; the sign I remember most often is this one: *The fish here swim backwards to keep the dust out of their eyes*.

To be more concise, I recall sand storms that *blackened the sky and moved noonday to apocalypse*; especially those sand storms of 1949.

Heldorado Days for 1946 would provide additional attractions. The motion picture *Heldorado* with Roy Rogers, Dale Evans, George “Gabby” Hayes, Bob Nolan and the Sons of the Pioneers, was already in production, with a theme synonymous with *Heldorado Days*.

Roy Rogers was cast as a Nevada State Ranger Captain who was enroute to Las Vegas on horseback, then spotted his pals on the way, who were also looking forward to *Heldorado Days*.

This would be our family’s first opportunity, our first encounter, seeing movie stars in person, albeit from variable distances of 30 to 150 feet, proving relative to parades or rodeo events.

Yet to some degree, in some respects, our dad would be a movie star himself 18 years later, when he did the riding for movie star *Darren McGavin* in the Audie Murphy western ‘*Bullet For a Badman*’, from 1964.

The 135 mile drive down US Highway 91 to Las Vegas was usually a hot one; temperatures of 110F through 115F during the summer months were quite common. Not to be overlooked, the heat and haze rising from the desert floor, the ensuing mirage(s).

Our dad had picked up an old panel truck a few weeks earlier, similar in size to those driven by TV repairmen, or common to deliveries by a local florist.

The only way to beat the heat in that old panel truck was to roll down the windows on the driver and passenger side(s), then hope for the best.

Of course Larry and I were to the rear of the vehicle, seated on a flat surface running the length of the truck, so Larry eventually moved to the rear of the driver seat, while I moved as close to the passenger seat as possible. It was so hot that afternoon, in that old panel truck, that we seemed to be sizzling in a pan like strips of bacon.

At the outset, Larry and I had assumed we’d be in Las Vegas the entire four days, while in reality, we’d be there for only one day, to watch the *Heldorado*

parade(s) down Fremont Street to see the movie stars on floats and horseback, followed by the drive to the rodeo grounds to take in the rodeo events.

The Las Vegas Rodeo Grounds had definitely seen better days; I'm surprised it was still in use in 1946, especially in a place like Las Vegas; moreover, it's been my understanding that a NASCAR track sits on that property today, yet I have no source for confirming that possibility.

Of course our interests that afternoon had little to do with the quality within those rodeo grounds, since we looked forward to watching the performance of Roy Rogers and Trigger, as they circled the arena and waved to the fans; as well as a song by Bob Nolan and the Sons of the Pioneers: *My Saddle Pals and I*.

It would be months before we learned just how fortunate we had been that hot and windy afternoon. One of my dad's best friends, *Edgar 'Ted' Beacham*, was in Las Vegas for the premiere of *Heldorado*.

The crowd watching the rodeo that afternoon was included in a number of scenes, primarily before and after *My Saddle Pals and I*, by *The Sons of the Pioneers*. *Ted Beacham*, who had watched those scenes at the premiere, called and described each of the scenes of our family in the *Heldorado* rodeo segment.

I will begin by placing four frames of our family, from *Heldorado*, beginning on page 6, with all four basically identical. A white circle has been added to the first frame to serve as a template, a guide, in locating the four members of our family.

Those aforementioned four frames will then be followed by two photographs of family members from about the same period.

**** My brother Larry passed away with Hodgkins Disease during the following summer (1947); he was 13 years of age.**



The members of our family using the circle template

My dad can be seen turning to his left with a smile; my mom is seated to his right and is applauding a song just completed by *The Sons of the Pioneers*; the dark-haired

boy to her right is my brother Larry; and I'm the blonde kid at the very bottom looking straight ahead.



A completely different frame, seconds earlier, or perhaps later



Possibly an identical frame to those preceding



Possibly a different look at Frame #1 with the circle template



about 1942

from left to right:

dad

me

Larry

mom



about 1944 from left to right:

Larry

me

Larry's friend

Dick Bracken



Current day I-15 – the Virgin Gorge – headed for Las Vegas

- End -