



Fred Stone and Katharine Hepburn in a tense moment in their new picture



DANCE for HEALTH —Fred Stone

Dorothy Stone, when a mere child, learned her famous father's dance routines by watching him from the wings as he performed on the stage

By Alice L. Tildesley

Famous Actor Credits Dancing for His Recovery After Having Most of His Bones Broken in an Airplane Crash—His Daughters Agree With Him



"DANCE for health!" This advice has the fervent indorsement of Fred Stone, famous actor, acrobat and dancer, and of his three pretty daughters, Dorothy, Paula and Carol.

It comes very close to home with them, for both Dorothy and her father have taken the prescription.

"Let me tell about Dorothy," said Paula, a tall, graceful, shining-eyed young thing topped like a candle flame with amazing red hair. "She is older than I am, so I don't remember it personally, but this story is a legend in the family. When she was little, she was so frail no one expected her to live to grow up. Daddy and Mother worried over her terribly. Every time she sneezed they looked for the end."

"When Dorothy was 5 years old she loved to stand in the wings at the theatre and watch Daddy dancing on the stage. One week-end he came home from traveling with the show to find her very much excited."

"Got a surprise, Daddy!" she told him.

"Presently she came downstairs, dressed in one of his old suits and virtually swallowed up in it, and amazed him by doing an excellent imitation of him in some of his dance routines. She had never had a dancing lesson, but she was very good. Daddy was so impressed with her talent that he began to teach her himself. She began to grow stronger from that day."

"When she was 7 he invited one of the Tiller girls in his company to spend the summer on our ranch with us and teach Dorothy what she knew. The Tiller girls were a troupe of English dancers who were considered the tops at that time—something like the Albertina Rasch dancers over here. This girl's name was Dorothy White, and she used to come to the ranch summer after summer living with us and teaching all three of us ballet and esthetic dancing. Daddy taught us tap dancing. Our Dorothy became well and strong and Carol and I were never ill."

"DANCING is the open road to health," declared Fred Stone. "In my mind, it's next in importance to an education."

"Dancing stimulates you mentally as well as physically because you must learn and remember your routines. It is much better than doing daily dozens, because bending down to touch the floor, rolling around on the floor and shooting your fists ten times this way and ten times that way gets awfully tiresome. Pretty soon you find yourself getting out of doing your exercises today because you don't feel like it, or you're too busy or something."

"It's different with dancing, because a dance routine is interesting. It's stimulating and it makes you happy while you're doing it."

"Take a boy or girl who is round-shouldered. When they learn to dance well, they straighten up. They must straighten up in order to be applauded."

Next thing you know they are naturally straight."

He was silent for a moment, then a sudden smile broke that rather sad, wistful expression of his.

"That thing works the other way round, too," he confessed. "I used to do a scarecrow dance—maybe you remember it?—in which I was utterly limp. I seemed not to have a bone in my body. I never stood erect. I always slumped over just as a rag doll might slump."

"The dance was a big hit. But I did the thing for four years nearly every night. At the end of the time I was so stoop-shouldered I had to wear braces for a while in order to straighten up. When I realized what had happened, of course, I went in for the kind of dancing that would help me and I cured myself. But it goes to show what'll occur if you don't watch out."

"I began to dance when I was a child, when my brother Ed and I were together in show business," Mr. Stone recalled. "We started in as acrobats, me doing a high-wire ascension act and Ed, in a little clown suit, doing tumbling in the circus ring. Then we got with a show that had dancers who did clog steps, so we decided we must learn to dance, too."

"My father made clogs for us himself, wooden soles shaped to our feet with red leather uppers pegged on. We watched the other fellows until we caught the rhythm and then we made up new steps for ourselves when we ran out of steps we picked up."

"Wherever we went in those old circus days we'd hunt up dancers. There were no dancing schools then, like there are now. You had to dig out the stuff the best you could. I remember we'd come into an Arkansas town and hear about a Negro who was a dancer. We'd track him down and either pay him for his steps or trade the steps we knew with him."

The "Dancing Stones" have won fame in motion pictures as well as on the stage. Here we see Fred Stone and his daughters, Carol, Paula and Dorothy

"One time, when I was with Montgomery in the Montgomery-and-Stone days, we were playing St. Louis, Montgomery came to me, all excited, and said: 'Fred, there's a dancing fella in this town does all his stuff sittin' in a chair!' Well, right away we headed for the place where he was s'posed to sit. It turned out to be in the back room of a saloon, but he wasn't there. He came in, pretty soon, all pale and scared-looking. We told him we'd pay him for his routine, and he didn't say a thing. Just sat down and began to shuffle and tap like this—"

Mr. Stone illustrated from the armchair he occupied, his lively toes and heels clicking rhythmically.

"Before he'd got more'n started, in came the police and out the back way went the Negro as if he'd been shot from a gun. Nobody ever heard of him again."

"As I went along, from circuses to vaudeville, from vaudeville to musical shows, I kept thinking up new steps and inventing new routines. My mind got accustomed to working along that line. I could see a routine in anything, an idea for a new dance anyway I looked. They are there, you know, in the strut of a fowl, the swoop of an airplane, the way a duck waddles, in a man with a hoe, or a kitten with a string."

"About the most famous dance Montgomery and I ever did was the boxing number in the 'Red Mill.' I got the idea from working in a gymnasium. James

J. Corbett was a member of the gym and used to work out there. He was a friend of mine, so I'd watch him. One day I told him that the footwork in boxing was just like dancing. So I taught him some dance steps and he taught me to box. The more I learned about boxing, the clearer I could see what a knockout a boxing number would be in a show. So I invented one."

In the dance, Montgomery knocked me out, I went over backward, did a neck spin, slid across the stage on my head, then slid across again on my arm and finally came upright. At the end, I was knocked backward again, went head over heels, like this, and came up in time to take a bow."

The gray coat had been slipped off as he talked and during the last sentence he did a cartwheel backward across his living room floor, coming up to take an easy bow.

The actor himself was not so quickly discouraged. "That's all they know about it," he muttered, and as soon as bones began to knit he set about doing what dancing exercises he could manage after a while he was walking."

"But, of course, you'll never dance again," he was warned.

AND here he was doing cartwheels with all the agility of an acrobat of 20!

"Dancing will do most anything for you," he confided, putting on the neat gray coat again. "If a person suffers from insomnia, best thing he can do is take up dancing. It will give him a good healthy fatigue that will induce sleep."

"If you have that unhealthy 'I'm so tired' feeling, best way to get rid of it is to go in for an hour or two's dancing every day. It'll stimulate circulation, burn up the clogging fat, fix you up fine."

Health is not the only benefit to be acquired from dancing, according to the Stone family.

"Grace and poise are other assets," said Mr. Stone. "If a girl is self-conscious she'd better learn to dance. She'll soon lose that fault. When she is a good dancer, she will have become certain of her equilibrium, she will know how to carry herself, and so she will become

sure of herself. You can't learn to dance without becoming sure of yourself."

"I don't remember the time I didn't dance," Paula said, her yellow dress bright against a dull green chair. "When I was 4 I made my first public appearance with Daddy at a benefit for an orphan's home. I wore a little cowboy outfit made exactly like his, and I did everything he did. No doubt I was pretty terrible, but I loved it, and everybody was very nice to me."

"After that I often danced in things for charity. Daddy liked to have us do that, but somehow he never thought of us going on the stage. Dorothy did it first, then four years ago I had my chance, and two years ago my little sister Carol made her debut. Carol likes dramatic stuff, and she's really very good. I saw her do a dramatic scene the first time she appeared on the stage, and she was marvelous. I suppose I shouldn't sit here saying my sister is marvelous, but it's the truth."

"I am thrilled by dancing. I'd rather dance than do anything else."

"I can't remember ever having had to think of my arms and legs, or ever being at the awkward age, as people call it, and I'm sure it's because I've always danced. Ever since Dorothy White came to the ranch when I was 2, I've had dancing lessons."

"Here in this house in Hollywood there's a big back room that we have fixed up with dancing pictures on the walls and scarcely any furniture. That's where I rehearse my dances. We go with the nicest crowd! While I'm rehearsing, the girls come drifting in—Anne Shirley, Patricia Ellis, Anita Louise, the two Durkin girls—and they watch me and then begin to dance, too. I teach them the steps I've been learning and the routines, and do we have fun?"

"It's good for an actress to learn to dance, even if she never intends to do it professionally, because it teaches her timing, rhythm and poise."

"THEY didn't have dancing schools when I began," Mr. Stone took up the conversation, reminiscently. "We had to pick up our steps and invent them and elaborate and so on. Why, my kids can do things I couldn't have begun to do when I was their age! No place for me to go to learn."

"You see, first off, I wanted to be an acrobat. I remember when I was 7—8—somewhere about there—and my brother, Ed, was twenty months younger, we lived in a little town in the Mid-West. One day an acrobat came to town. He was dressed in a costume with spangles on it, and he strung a wire up high between two four-story buildings, got up on it with a balance pole and walked the wire."

"While he was walking the wire I noticed that some of the spangles kept falling off his thighs and dropping down into the road, and after he'd done his stuff I ran out into the road and picked 'em all up. I had pretty near a handful when I got through."

"Then I went home and ran to my mother, holding the spangles between my two hands."

"Oh, mom!" I cried, "sew me some tighties on these! I want to do a high-wire ascension!"

"So she got a pair of long red stockings—ladies' stockings that came way up my thighs, and she made a little pair of black velvet trunks and sewed 'em to the stockings. Then she sewed the combination on to a little red undershirt I had. There were just enough spangles to make two rows around the place where the stockings met the trunks and to go around the neck of the undershirt. And there was my outfit."

"My father made me a trapeze in the back yard, not very high, but high enough so I could learn to walk the wire and not kill myself when I fell off. "Acrobatic training helped me learn to dance, just as dancing might help another fellow to learn acrobatics."

Copyrights