



Roselle and Perry Como view life placidly.

by Joseph N. Bell

WHEN PERRY COMO was asked whether good luck had much to do with his success in show business, he answered: "Right now I have about everything money can buy. But money can't buy peace of mind or good luck and these I've always had. These things are for everybody, not just for me. Take it easy, enjoy yourself, don't press too hard, and you'll get your share of breaks—just as I always have."

This is Perry Como's philosophy. He lives by it, and it has done well by him.

Como's accomplishments probably are unmatched by any other entertainer for either variety or success. He presides over one of the most popular programs on television; he's a top recording star, and has to his credit 11 gold records, each signifying the sale of a million copies of a single recording; since his early days with Ted Weems, he has been one of America's top popular singers, he has made several successful motion pictures and has packed customers into theaters and night clubs.

And it's all been easy. Not in the sense that years of hard work weren't involved, but easy because Perry took it that way. He cultivated and attracted good luck. He was willing and available when it turned up, and undisturbed when it didn't.

That's why Perry Como is known in show business as a "nice guy." The relaxed personality the audience sees is no sham. He's really that way.

For example, casual attire is almost a mania with Perry, and he detests any clothing more formal than a sport shirt and a pair of slacks. But when he was named "Personality of the Year" by the Variety Club of Washington, D.C., he had to accept the award in a tuxedo because the presentation dinner was formal. He bought the tux under protest. "Where will I ever wear it again?" he asked.

Before the dinner, he toured the children's polio ward at a Washington hospital and sang for the kids. He was especially impressed by one four-year-old, and questioned hospital authorities about him. Perry was told the boy's parents

were pathetically poor and unable to meet his medical expenses.

That night at the award dinner, Como told the guests about this youngster, then peeled off his tuxedo and auctioned it to the highest bidder—with the proceeds to go for the care of the young polio victim. The tuxedo brought in more than \$2,500. Thus Como helped the boy and got rid of the hated tuxedo in one triumphant operation!

IN SPITE OF his fame as a television performer, Como's most spectacular success has been in records. His first, "Good-bye Sue," was made in 1943. His first record to sell a million copies was "Till the End of Time" in 1945. In a single week during 1946, 4,000,000 Como recordings were turned out, surpassing the output of any artist in history. Como records are still going strong today, and average about 4,000,000 sales annually.

The main difficulty is finding time to select and make the recordings. Como's schedule would have him flat on his back if he were disposed to the jitters which affect many performers.

His week usually begins on Tuesday, when he takes care of business not connected directly with his weekly television show. Big entertainers are no longer just entertainers—they're business tycoons, too. Como probably exemplifies this as well as anyone in the entertainment field.

He maintains two Manhattan offices—one a suite in Rockefeller Center, the other a Fifth Avenue penthouse. Each Tuesday, ensconced in one of his skyscraper suites, Como handles a confusing jumble of song pluggers, musicians, song writers, producers discussing future shows, recording executives, publicists, and other assorted fringe operators in the entertainment business. Most of his recordings are also made on Tuesday.

On Wednesday, rehearsals begin for his Saturday night show. These sessions start about noon and are likely to last far into the night. Wednesday and Thursday rehearsals take place in a grubby, time-stained, six-story building on the wrong side of Rockefeller Center. Passers-by seldom are aware of the millions of dollars' worth of talent wandering in and out of this down-at-the-heels building.

Upstairs, in a rehearsal hall not much larger than your living room, Como meets his cast for the first time and begins running through his portion of the show. On another floor, the production numbers are already in rehearsal.

The early stages of a Como show are informal, uninhibited, occasionally hilarious, and inevitably confusing. I watched while he clowning through the script with two husband-and-wife teams—Roy Rogers and Dale Evans, and Ernie Kovacs and Edie Adams. Como's easy manner is infectious. Everybody seemed to be having a good time.

On Friday afternoon, the show moves to the Ziegfeld Theater where the telecast originates. Rehearsals Friday night last as late as necessary to polish the show—which never appears to bother the tireless Como. Saturday brings more of the same—practicing until about 5 p.m. when an "on-camera" dress rehearsal takes place. Then there's just time to eat before the nation-wide telecast begins at 8 p.m., Eastern Standard Time.

SUNDAY AND MONDAY are Como's days at home—and he isn't fooling. The

Comos live in a rambling, comfortable house far out on Long Island. Perry is one entertainer who not only demands but receives privacy so far as his family life is concerned. The Como home isn't palatial, but it's spacious and comfortable, including a garden, an outdoor grill, and a playroom which Ronnie Como—a freshman at Notre Dame—has outgrown, but David, 10, and Terri, 11, still find useful.

Mrs. Perry Como was once Roselle Belline of Canonsburg, Pa. She met Perry at a wiener roast, and they were married a few years later when he had built his tiny barber shop in Canonsburg into a tidy operation that netted him \$125 a week. That was almost 25 years ago, and the Comos are still happily married. Chances are pretty good that they will continue to be for quite some time!

Perry and Roselle break most of the rules for show-business personalities. Their family life is happy and reasonably private.



Formula for Success

"Relax: good luck is for everybody," is the philosophy

that has guided him throughout his spectacular career.



Perry makes rehearsals seem easy, and is as much a favorite with guest stars like Ginger Rogers as with fans.

They are seldom seen in the "right" places with the "right" people. Although they know practically every "big name" in the country, their closest friends are people you've probably never heard of. And Perry consistently refuses night-club or theater engagements that will keep him away from his family.

Roselle is blonde, petite, and pretty. Perry, at 45, looks 10 years younger, although he has to fight the paunch which comes so often from good Italian cooking. By far the most striking feature about Perry is his eyes. Dark brown and vibrantly expressive, they reflect the light, humorous, easygoing nature of the guy behind them. When he isn't "on-camera," he wears a pair of pinched glasses far down on his nose, giving him the look of a bemused and indulgent bookkeeper.

As I watched his TV dress rehearsal, he broke up the cast a half-dozen times by ad libbing lines or clowning—while producers and technicians who were trying to time the show threw up their hands in despair. But there were no nerves among the performers, and when the show went on the air, it had that same easygoing, amiable quality.

He insists, "I'm not relaxed—just tired." But his actions belie his words.

THE SEVENTH SON of a Pennsylvania miner, Perry Como (that's his real name) passed up the mines to become an apprentice barber when he was 14. By the time he got out of high school, he was ready to open his own shop, where he cut hair and serenaded patrons at the same time.

He serenaded them so well that they persuaded him to audition for a popular Cleveland band. When he was offered a job as vocalist, Como had to make the first of several decisions to confront him in the years ahead: security, comfort, and a regular income among his friends in Canonsburg or the never-never land of show business?

Como took the singing job with misgivings, then graduated to a vocalist's role with the Ted Weems band. When the Weems group broke up in 1942, Perry had had enough of one-night stands, so he

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