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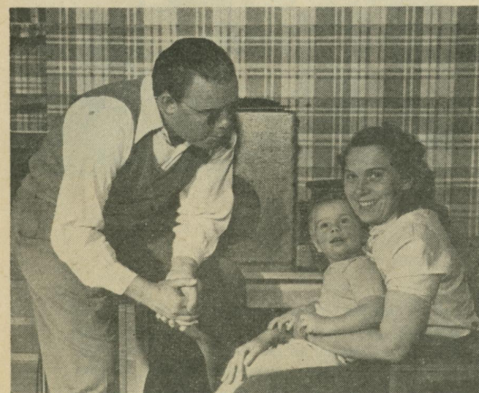
Below—Bing Crosby cocks an ear to the trills that roll off Fred Lowery's tongue. After this guest-starring radio performance Fred had an offer of a new job—teaching Bing to whistle.



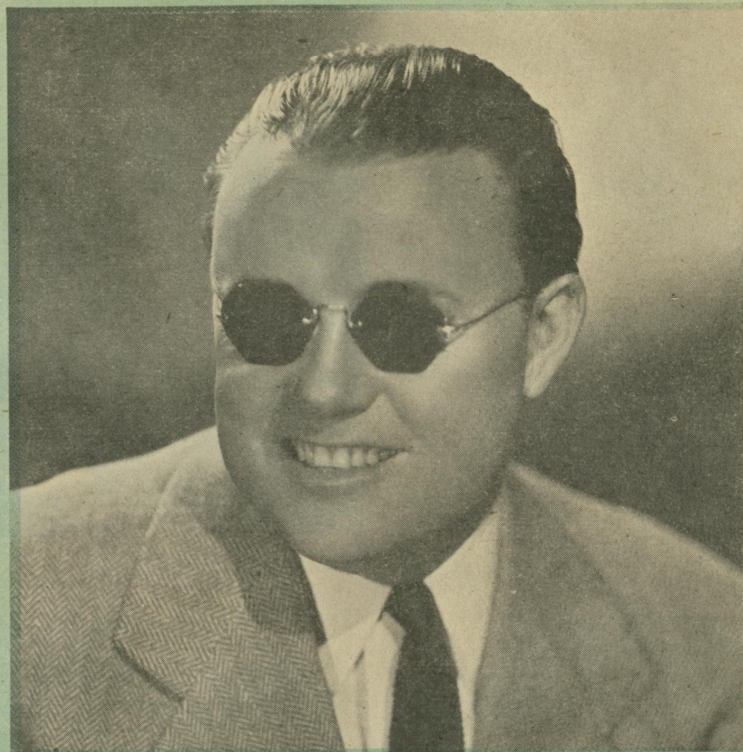
Below—Fred (at mike) and singer Dorothy Rae, who has teamed with him in radio shows, theater engagements and tours of veterans' hospitals, meet some of their record fans.



Above—Fred's young son, "Scooter," thinks it's wonderful to have a dad who can whistle. On this occasion he demonstrates his appreciation by signing the check for the dinner.



Above—Married eleven years, Fred still whistles at his wife, just as he did when he used to serenade under her window, to the delight of all the girls in the dormitory.



Whistler in the Dark

On the radio and in theaters and night clubs all over the country, Texas' Fred Lowery has whistled his way into the hearts of audiences he cannot see

By NORTH BIGBEE

IT was a football-weekend in Dallas and the night club, like every other spot in town, was jam packed. Half of the Oklahoma-Texas college crowd was celebrating its victory and the other half was trying to forget its defeat. The customers were noisy and indifferent as the tall, heavy-set young man in dark glasses stepped to center stage and started whistling a light classic.

Slowly, table by table, the crowd quieted, until there was hardly a sound except the clear, trilling notes. Before the whistler had finished, scattered applause broke out, then spread like a grass fire before a high wind.

Fred Lowery's face broke into a wide smile as he listened to the cheers of the audience he could not see, and stamping feet echoed the crowd's demand for "More! More!"

Before I left the club I asked the owner to take me backstage.

"They certainly like Lowery's act," I commented.

"It's not just the act," the white-haired showman said. "It's Fred. He makes everybody in the house feel that they're his personal friends."

For fifteen years now, Fred's warm-hearted personality has come to millions through radio and television, and from the stage. Most Americans within dialing distance of a radio have heard him on Horace Heidt's and Vincent Lopez' various shows and as guest-star on dozens of other national programs. In his stage and night club ap-

pearances, literally millions have welcomed him—from Broadway's Capitol to Houston's Metropolitan, and from Miami's Royal Palm Club to Denver's Last Frontier.

Equally popular as a recording artist, he lives in a home paid for by the royalties from a single disc, "Indian Love Call." Recently Columbia brought out eight of his long-time favorites in a Lowery album, "Whistling for You."

But regardless of how or where they hear him, listeners feel that they know Fred personally. This pleases Fred even more than the recognition he has received from the headliners in the entertainment world (Bing Crosby asked him for whistling lessons after he guest-starred on a Crosby program, and Bob Hope once introduced him as "the greatest whistler in the world today"). The approval of his audiences is all the more important to him because he is blind—more important than the fame or money his whistling has brought him.

In seeking a normal life for himself, Fred realized very early that instead of giving in to his handicap he must struggle all the harder to compensate for it. He learned to whistle because of several handicaps.

"I might be selling pencils on the corner," he told me, "if I hadn't been orphaned at an early age and if my grandmother's farm hadn't been so poor that it had no well."

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Whistler

(Continued from page 12)

After losing his widowed mother and his sight in an epidemic when he was two, Fred and his three sisters went to live with their grandmother on her farm near Jacksonville, Texas. One of the daily chores was to fetch water from a neighbor's well two miles away. As a small boy Fred enlivened the dusty trip by imitating the birds along the way.

By the time he was seven and had entered the State School for the Blind at Austin, he was whistling all the time. It was here, at the age of 19, he heard a program of whistling by a traveling entertainer, Ernest Nichols. As the youth listened he thought, *if he can earn a living whistling, maybe I can, too.* When Nichols asked if anyone in the audience whistled, the entire student body shouted, "Lowery!"

The superintendent called Fred to the stage. Hesitantly he started "To a Wild Rose," but he soon forgot his self-consciousness and was gilding it with trills and double notes.

Nichols was so impressed that he stayed to give the youth a lesson.

"Constant whistling has strengthened your lips and tongue until you're already doing things I'll never be able to do," he said. "Just keep whistling, and some day you'll entertain the world."

Nichols' encouragement spurred Fred on, and his music teacher, Marguerite Richter, got him records of great whistlers like Charles Kellogg, the bird imitator. Fred determined to make whistling his career.

His technique improved so much that in the spring of 1929, Miss Richter persuaded the Wednesday Morning Music Club of Austin to sponsor his first concert. The program, heavy with classics, made enough money to take him to Chicago for a try at radio. He got kudos in the newspapers but no job.

The next winter was really tough. Leaving school to devote himself to whistling, he sold can-openers door-to-door, throwing in a melody as a premium. After that there was a brief job as the whistling page boy of the Texas Senate, then he went to live with his sister in Dallas. There he whistled himself into a tryout on WFAA's "Early Birds." The tryout brought 2,000 letters and won him his first professional job.

After three years as WFAA's "Texas Redbird," Fred took off for New York with a thin wallet and a thick sheaf of recommendations. He didn't get very far. The few sustaining programs he could get were not enough to keep him up in New York. He was rapidly running out of money when he finally won an audition with Rudy Vallee who, quick to recognize talent, gave Fred a chance to whistle "The World Is Waiting for the Sunrise" on his program. The next day, Winchell reported that "an unknown whistler, Fred Lowery, stole the show." But it still didn't get him a steady job.

Fred had clung to a \$20 travelers' check for an extreme emergency, and the time had come to use it. Nervously he countersigned it and presented it to the manager of the hotel where he was staying.

"The signatures aren't the same," the hotel man said, "You've put an extra 'o' in 'Lowery'."

"But I'm the same fellow," Fred

protested, unwilling to admit the reason for the error.

The manager shrugged. "I can't cash it. Maybe Jere Buckley, at the Guaranty Trust, will take a chance."

Fred told Buckley of his turn-down by the hotel man. The banker glanced at the check, then studied the face before him.

"You look like a good boy," he said. "I'll give you the money."

He dismissed Fred's thanks, but he couldn't get the young man off his mind. Soon he telephoned: "A friend of mine, Clara Belle Walsh, knows everybody in show business. I'm going to tell her about you."

As a result Fred was invited by Mrs. Walsh to entertain a party of theatrical and concert notables she had assembled at the Plaza. After his Chopin nocturne, applause rocked the room. When it died, a rich voice asked, "Will you do a duet with me—say, 'Home on the Range'?"

Fred whispered to Buckley, "Who's he?"

"John Charles Thomas."

Fred experienced his only violent attack of stage fright. "I've hitch-hiked hundreds of miles just to hear him, gone without meals to buy his records. I can't whistle with him."

"Sure you can," Buckley said. "Give it everything you've got."

The effect of the duet was so impressive that the banker realized anything else Fred did would be anticlimax.

"Let's get out of here," he said.

"You'll be hearing from me," Mrs. Walsh told Fred at the door.

Two days later Fred went to work for Vincent Lopez. Soon he began to meet prominent people—among them Fritz Kreisler, for whom he whistled the violinist's "Caprice Viennois."

Kreisler was so impressed with Fred's musical ability that he made a special whistling arrangement of "Old Folks at Home." This and "Caprice Viennois" are in Fred's album, "Whistling for You."

After four years with Lopez' band, Fred had an offer from Horace Heidt which he passed up out of loyalty to the man who had given him his first chance. But six months later when the band moved to a New York night club, Lopez reluctantly had to let Fred go. The club's operator refused to use the whistler.

"People don't want to see a blind guy whistling when they're eating dinner," the showman insisted.

For three months it seemed that nobody else wanted a blind guy. Then Heidt, who had just opened at the Biltmore Hotel, telephoned Fred and invited him to try out on the supper program. A single number, "The World Is Waiting for the Sunrise," stopped the show. Over the cheering, Fred heard the band leader shout, "You're hired!"

Heidt soon began to feature Fred on his shows and later took him to Hollywood. It was in California in 1938, during the filming of "Pot of Gold," that Fred took one of the most important steps of his life. With money in the bank, a steady job and hopeful future, he sneaked off to Las Vegas between takes and married his long-time sweetheart, Grace Johnston from Jacksonville, Texas. Fittingly, Fred had courted and won her by whistling at her.

Fred has consistently refused to regard his handicap as a bar to a happy, normal life. The only outer sign of his awareness of it is a refusal to discuss it. Even talking with others who are blind, he refers to

it reluctantly as "impaired vision."

Because he refuses to capitalize on his handicap, few radio and record listeners know about it. And he is so surefooted that many people in his night club and theater audiences never guess it. He has trained himself to be virtually self-sufficient. He memorizes voices and his superkeen hearing enables him to recognize friends at a distance or pick them out in crowds. As a newspaperman who interviewed him commented, "If you didn't already happen to know Fred is blind, you wouldn't find it out from being around him."

That's true not only because of the way he gets about, but because he is utterly free of self-pity or bitterness. His disability seems to spark a warm friendliness, an eager—almost exuberant—interest in other people.

With his own fight for a normal, happy life won, Fred began hunting for ways to help others achieve the same goal. For years he devoted all his leisure to entertaining the handicapped, and, after the war, disabled veterans.

While he was with Heidt, Fred had teamed with a singer, Dorothy Rae. After Heidt demobilized his Musical Knights, the pair built their numbers into an act of their own. They gave their first show for veterans at Ashburn General Hospital at McKinney, Texas, the week they opened their act in Dallas.

Because of his own disability, Fred wasn't sure whether he had helped or hurt the men's morale. He was jubilant when, a few days later, a letter came from the commanding officer, stating, "The show you put on really lifted our patients."

Prior to Dorothy's recent marriage, the team gave shows at more than a hundred service and veterans hospitals, rehabilitation centers and convalescent homes.

But Fred thinks it is he who owes the disabled veterans thanks.

"The boys give me the lift, instead of the other way around," he says.

He still whistles all the time, off stage as well as on. On tour he whistles in his hotel room, and he whistles on the streets, to the delight of passers-by. He enjoys playing practical jokes with his whistle, his usual victims being the birds. During a recent visit to a Chinese restaurant in New York a canary was singing in a cage near his table. Fred whistled canary rolls, flutes, bells and glucks until the bird finally gave up in the face of competition and slumped on his perch.

Fred grinned. "I sure loused up his act," he said.

In spite of his personal happiness and professional success, Fred has one unfulfilled ambition.

"I remember when we kids from the blind school used to get into the big Austin concerts for a quarter," he said. "We sat way back or over on the side. Well, the next time I'm down there I'm going to hire the best auditorium and orchestra in Austin, and give a full evening's concert of whistling for those kids. Maybe I'll let some other folks come, too, but this will be mainly for those who are now where I used to be. And they'll have the best seats in the house for free."

"Everybody with a handicap has some talent that'll help him rise above it. Maybe some of the youngsters there will get an idea or an urge to find and use one of their own, to make up for what they lack."

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