

Doc Watson



Good morning, y'all. The rain is upon us. It's fine, it's appreciated. In fact, I'd be real disappointed if everything I planted this year died for lack of water. It's just that I'm on a strict budget. When the water bill gets up in the triple digits I get a haughty memo from the executors of the [TackyToo](#) estate. "No, they don't want the plants to die, no they don't want me to have to re-buy and plant everything, no they don't want the park to erode into craters of red clay like Copperhill, Tennessee." "They just want me to honor the spirit of my Daddy's conservative values".

Well, as previously pointed out, Daddy's conservative values are best encapsulated in the phrase, "he wouldn't pay a nickel to watch Jesus on a trampoline". Daddy's "conservative values" were a direct result of his willingness to throw it all away on the roll of a die, or the arm of a pitcher or quarterback. The more he "saved", the more he had to bet. The closer we lived to poverty, the less he had to worry about maintaining a standard of living. Daddy's gambling prevented him from recognizing his full potential, and who knows, perhaps being happy. Gambling is every bit as destructive as drinking or drugging, don't let anyone tell you different.

Sorry about that little trip down memory lane. What got me pointed in that direction was listening to the radio in the office of the Rec room while I waited out a rain storm. I was listening to WNCW out of Spindale, and they were doing a Doc Watson special. You really can't think of Doc Watson too much without thinking of his son Merle and their relationship. I guess that got the whole "father and son" thing going, and me longing for something better than I had. Where would we all be now if my Daddy and I had been able to work together on something positive like Doc and Merle did? Certainly not where we are today.

It is easy for me to romanticize the Watson's lives as being charmed, even though Doc was blind and Merle died at the age of thirty six. Arthel, or "Doc" as he would later become, lost his sight before his first birthday. He attended North Carolina's school for the visually impaired and grew up on a farm outside of Deep Gap, North

Carolina. He used his first earnings to buy a cheap guitar from Sears, which he learned to be proficient enough on to busk on street corners with his brother. Doc had "skills" as they say, and proceeded to become one of the best flatpickers of all time. Displaying a great diversity, Doc taught himself songs that were traditionally fiddle tunes to play on his electric guitar. He played piano and the banjo, and often accompanied himself on a harmonica while he sang. Doc could do it all musically, and passed it down to his son Eddy Merle.

Merle, was named after Doc's two favorite singers, Eddy Arnold and Merle Haggard. Doc's son Merle played on Doc's first solo album, recorded in 1964 when Merle was just fifteen. Doc and Merle added a bass guitarist and began playing as a trio in 1974. The "Watson" trio toured around the world during the late seventies and early eighties. During this time they recorded fifteen albums and brought their unique style of country bluegrass folk acoustic music to millions of fans. In 1985, Merle died in a tractor accident on his family farm. The details of Merle's death are like one of those insurance commercials were they portray a chain of events that seem implausible when held up separately. [The gruesome details can be found here.](#)

Two years after Merle's death, "Merle Fest" was inaugurated by Doc in remembrance of his son. It is a country bluegrass folk alternative music extravaganza held each year at the Wilkes County Community College in Wilkesboro, North Carolina. Last year's attendance was over 70,000 fans even though both of the headliners are now gone. It is an amazing legacy to a father son team of fabulous musicians. Through the miracle of YouTube, we can experience Doc and Merle together again doing Doc's most famous hit, "Tennessee Stud". That's Merle on the other acoustic guitar.