

# REMEMBERING ROSALEE

This world bid farewell to RosaLee Carlton Watson on Thanksgiving morning, November 22, 2012. She joined her husband of 65 years, Arthel “Doc” Watson, who died on May 29, 2012, and their son Eddy Merle Watson, who was killed in 1985 in a tractor accident.

RosaLee was born February 5, 1931, in Watauga County, N.C., a daughter of the late Gaither and Lucy Robbins Carlton.

Although RosaLee’s husband, Doc, was an internationally-celebrated musician, RosaLee came from a musical family and had her own musical gifts to offer, including singing, playing the guitar and songwriting.

She performed with Doc Watson during early stages of his career, and she and Merle took turns driving to Doc’s performances around the country. By the late 1960s, Merle joined Doc full-time on the road and stage. The father-son team won hearts throughout the country.

Doc and RosaLee co-wrote and recorded “Your Lone Journey,” one of the most cherished songs in roots music, which has been recorded by John Hartford, Emmylou Harris, and Robert Plant and Alison Krauss on the Grammy Award-winning album “Raising Sand.”

RosaLee’s dad was the great fiddler and banjo player Gaither Carlton, born in Wilkes County, N.C. Carlton, Doc and RosaLee first became known to the world on “Doc Watson and His

Family,” a 1963 Smithsonian Folkways recording showcasing the traditional mountain style that became synonymous with the Watson family. On the album, Doc and RosaLee sang a duet of their mountain ballad “Your Lone Journey.”

Doc told how RosaLee came up with “Your Lone Journey.”

“RosaLee was sweeping the house one Sunday morning when Merle was four and our daughter, Nancy, was two, and all at once she was humming something and she’d stop,” Doc Watson said. “I said, ‘What are you doing, honey?’ She said, ‘I’m a writin’ a song.’ I said, ‘Well, when you hum it next time, I’m going to see if I can figure out a guitar arrangement that goes with it.’”

Doc Watson’s long-time musical collaborator David Holt said, “RosaLee Watson was always sweet and gentle, and yet she was the backbone of the family. The early days of Doc’s career were rough and yet she was always supportive. RosaLee was a loving mother to Merle and Nancy and a hard worker, raising a large garden every year to keep food on the table. Later on, she helped Doc manage the business side of his growing career. RosaLee was a wonderful mountain singer who only wrote one song, and yet it is one of the great songs of all time, ‘Your Lone Journey.’ It will be sung long into the future.”

MerleFest is held every spring at Wilkes Community College



**RosaLee Watson**

in memory of Doc and RosaLee Watson’s son, the late Eddy Merle. RosaLee taught Merle his first guitar chords.

John Cowan, who was friends with Merle and who performs regularly at MerleFest, paid tribute to RosaLee on the afternoon of her death.

“This is a day to give thanks to Doc Watson, his lovely bride, RosaLee, and their wonderful son, Merle, as they are all dancin’ with the angels now,” Cowan said. “Thank you for sharing your souls with us and shining your light onto us and leading us out of our seeming perpetual darkness.”

Cowan continued, “I learned ‘Rough and Rocky Road’ initially from Emmylou Harris’ beautiful rendering of it. I always imagined singing it to

a child as the melody always sounded to me like a lullaby even though the words are pretty melancholy. Once, RosaLee heard me sing this years ago and from that day forward, she would always ask me to sing it for her, which of course, I gladly did.

“RosaLee, as we know, had a lot of tragedy in her life (surely, as we all do). Knowing this, the thing I always remember is that her eyes literally had a spark in them like a lighthouse. God knows how many of us, who in a moment or a season, were guided back to shore by the Watson Family,” said Cowan.

MerleFest Director Ted Hagaman says RosaLee was closely involved with MerleFest from the start.

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When Doc Watson's invitations to musicians for the first event drew a strong response, it was RosaLee who suggested that it become an annual festival.

"A lot of times when we went to their home to discuss the festival, RosaLee would have suggestions for programming ... She and Doc worked together as a team and would discuss things," said Hagaman, a Watauga County native.

"She was a very fine lady. We will miss her but she and Doc are together again and that's the way it ought to be."

RosaLee is buried beside Doc in the Doc & Merle Watson Family Cemetery in Deep Gap, N.C.

She is survived by one daughter, Nancy Ellen Watson of Deep Gap; one granddaughter, Karen Watson Norris of Deep Gap; one grandson, Richard Eddy Watson and wife Annette of

Deep Gap; three great-granddaughters, Candis Amber Watson of Boone, Chelsea Michelle Norris of Blowing Rock and Sarah Elizabeth Norris of Deep Gap; one great-grandson,

Michael Channing Norris II of Deep Gap; two great-great-grandsons, Tanten Webb of Boone and Brennon Kilgore of Blowing Rock; three sisters, Irene Lewis of Boone, Pearlee

Shipley and husband Howard of Lenoir and Marlene Marley and husband Charles of Ferguson; and one brother, Jay Carlton and wife Carrollyn of Boomer.



**Doc and RosaLee Watson**