

Fess Parker

THE BALLAD OF



*Born on a mountaintop in Tennessee,
Greenest state in the land of the free,
Raised in the woods, so's he know ev'ry tree,
Kill him a b'ar when he was only three.
Davy, Davy Crockett, King of the Wild Frontier.*

- From the American folk tune, The Ballad of Davy Crockett

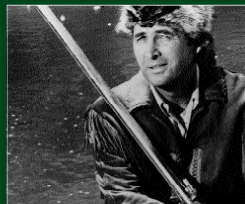
You might reckon Fess Parker, tall and Texan, would want
him for lunch some b'ar. You might s'pose Fess Parker, as good-
lookin' as a Hollywood picture star, might 'a showed up at the
cafe in a coonskin cap, totin' his rifle called "Ol' Betsy" and let-
tin' 'a valet parking deal with his dugout canoe.

Show me how much you know about Fess Parker, the actor
known as TV's two most famous American folk heroes, Davy
Crockett and Daniel Boone.

Fess Parker, you see, won't be ordering bear because he's
one to watch his weight.

And Fess Parker, you better believe, won't come to lunch in
a dugout canoe because why? Not when these days it's a
Citation Jet he flies.

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Fessin' up over lunch – small tuna salad, sliced tomato, cottage cheese, and “not too big!” – Fess Parker narrates the tale of his adventure-series life as actor, aviator, winter, businessman, dad. Totin' the twang of his San Angelo, Texas youth, the long-time Santa Barbaran and passionate U.S. history buff can't really help it. Even these many years since the '50 when he donned Davy Crockett's deerskins to fight for “justice due every red-skinned man” Thursdays prime-time for Walt Disney, and in the '60s he shouldered Ol'



Betsy through 165 episode-hours of Kentucky wilderness exploits as Daniel Boone for 20th Century Fox, Fess Parker is just...well, shoot, we'll say it: He's just



mightily akin to these two icons of America's popular imagination. Though you have to reckon he's too bashful – or something – to admit it.

“I’m lazy, I s’pose,” he draws, taking a squeeze of lemon in his diet ice tea.

Here he’s referring to the logbook he hasn’t kept up since 1960 when he got his “multi-engine ticket” and proceeded to fly himself to work and through retirement in, variously, a Piper Apache, Aztec, Cherokee, Comanche 250, Cessna 210, 172, 182, 337,

340A, Twin Bonanza (“my favorite, a big ol’ beast where I had plenty of comfort”), and a Citation. Though the untitled hours are up there, for awhile now the devoted family man has traveled with a safety pilot because his best, most memorable flying adventures are “the ones,” he laughs, “I’ve survived.”

He is retired now from acting, but in a way Fess Parker the University of Texas grad whose fire of a desire to participate in WWII as a bomber pilot was put out by the military (“I was too tall”) has in his own life

carried on the Davy Crockett legend. *Davy, Davy Crockett, King of the Wild Frontier*

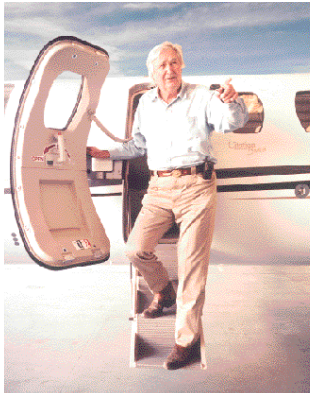
Fess, Fess Parker, king of...well, in Santa Barbara county it's king of Fess Parker's Doubletree Resort, Fess Parker's Wine Country Inn & Spa, and Fess Parker's Winery & Vineyard. An astute businessman who is partner in numerous hotel properties, works a “little cattle ranch,” and presides over at least 2,218

acres of some of the Santa Ynez Valley's most valuable vineyard lands, Fess Parker's accomplishments are as impressive as Crockett's were when he fought single-handed the *Injun War*, *Til the Creeks were whipped and the peace was in store*. Not bad for an unassuming, soft-spoken local legend whose face and manner My Little Margie and the thugs of Dragnet alike could love, as did TV audiences when he starred as these featured players.

Aw shucks, acts Fess Parker in a typi-

cally low-key performance. “It’s pretty simple. I just want to have fun every day!”

After lunch – “no, no; no dessert, just coffee for me” – Fess Parker sets out, not a dugout canoe but in his “Lincoln on steroids,” the Hummer that was a 75th birthday gift from his son Eli, partner with his daughter Ashley in Fess Parker's Winery & Vineyard. His wife of 42 years, Marcella, whom he met when she was singing at the then-popular Los Angeles hot spot, the Town House Hotel at Wilshire Boulevard, has 80 acres of the most precious Fess



Parker vineyard named for her – a parcel of the fabled Sierra Madre. Great for bumping along the hilly, oak-resplendent vineyard trails of spectacular Santa Ynez, the Hummer has a 14,000-lb winch up front that “I use for nothing,” laughs the former wilderness hero who could fell the wildest charging whatever with nothing more than Daniel Boone's crude, whittled spear, “I would hate to have to try and figure it out.”

Bumping along, Fess Parker continues to ‘fess-up: About how John Adams, by



Davy McCullough is just the best book. “You get a wonderful sense of your country,” he says with obvious awe of the U.S. statesman whom he considers a “national treasure.” “You get a sense of the human capacity for living an unbelievably exemplary and successful life.” What’s so compelling about the book, he adds, “is that it is so staggering, the immediacy of our past – how far we’ve come in our democratic ability to manage ourselves.” With Old Glory proudly waving under the words God Bless America on his website, fessparker.com, patriotism flows as freely in the blood of Fess Parker as it did when Davy Crockett courageously faced his fate: *To the Texas plain he had to go, their freedom was a fightin’ another foe, and they needed him at the Alamo*. Oh, he could rest on his character's laurels of having took over Washington so *I heard tell, and patched up the crack in the Liberty Bell*, but Fess Parker today enjoys a passion that arguably is as big a gift to the country: to bottle the best syrah, pinot noir and chardonnay (among other ultra-premium varietals and blends) wine lovers have ever savored. Already since its first release in 1995, raves, gold medals and ratings in the 90s are clinging to the Fess Parker label as tenaciously as Daniel Boone stuck to his cave on the waters of the Shannan after his daring escape from capture by Chief Black Fish and his son.

And perfecting the greatest personal lesson he ever learned from his first boss, Walt Disney – i.e., the importance of establishing a brand identity – Fess Parker is having fun, every day! creating in Santa Barbara county a wonderful homage to a man whose identity evokes the folk heroes of the American character, a character ever as charismatic as deerskins and a coonskin cap.

“That’s why I’ve plastered my name all over everything and am trying to get out of the way so that my son and daughter, those who are actually running the show, are recognized.” Like Walt taught him of a proud and creative name, “it’s the greatest asset, that.”

Page 21: Fess Parker as Daniel Boone.
Top: Fess Parker, Jimmy Dean and Ed Ames watch for British soldiers in the Daniel Boone episode “The Impostor.” All three actors have gold records for their singing talents (Parker for “Bawling, Went Betsy”).
Bottom: Fess Parker as Davy Crockett.