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Crystal Gayle co-hosts
NBC's country music
awards show



Crystal Gayle

THE COAL MINER'S OTHER DAUGHTER IS TOUGH

That's how Loretta Lynn's baby sister has managed to forge a successful singing career of her own

Robert Phillips



She's the coal miner's other daughter, the baby of the family, the one with the Niagara of straight brown hair that falls to her ankles in one grand cascade; the shy, blue-eyed one whose tearful soprano has made her a colossal show-biz star even though nobody is quite sure into what pigeonhole (country? pop? blues?) to squeeze her.

Crystal Gayle doesn't mind. A lady with mostly Cherokee Indian and Irish blood coursing through her veins doesn't worry about other people's orderly little categories; if she feels like singing "Cry Me a River," or Kurt Weill's "One More Time," or essaying a Billie Holiday lick or a Hoagy Carmichael ballad, it comes just as naturally to her as the hard-country sounds of her sister the legend, Loretta Lynn, the original coal miner's daughter and a founding mother of American country music.

Here is Crystal Gayle, sitting in her private quarters atop a refurbished residential dwelling that's headquarters for Gayle Enterprises, Inc., right there on a street called Music Square East, the epicenter of Nashville's booming country-music industry. The brilliant red of her knitted sweater, lipstick and nail polish against the alabaster skin creates the impression of a delectable, sexy peppermint stick. In a nearby room is 9-month-old Catherine Claire Gatzimos, breast-fed moments earlier and napping peacefully.

"People tell me: 'But you can't be Loretta Lynn's sister. You don't look like her, you don't sound like her.' I tell them, 'Well, there's only one Loretta Lynn, and I'm not her.' At the start of my career, Loretta was a big influence on me musically, and that wasn't good for me. As soon as I could, I put some space between us professionally." In the late '70s, she was named Female Vocalist of the Year a total of four times by both the Country Music Association and the Academy of Country Music, and her 1977 recording of "Don't It Make My Brown Eyes Blue" not only won a Grammy Award, but rose to No. 1 on →

Crystal Gayle, Mac Davis and Charlie Pride are co-hosts of "The 19th Annual Academy of Country Music Awards," on NBC, May 14, from 9 to 11 P.M. (ET). Check local listings for time and channel in your area.

By Neil Hickey



Ralph Dominguez/Globe Photos

L.-r.: Proud mother Clara Webb Butcher, in 1980, with daughters Loretta Lynn, center, and Crystal Gayle.

the country charts and No. 2 on the pop charts, and has become a kind of pop-country standard. She was the first country performer to sing in China when she went there with Bob Hope in 1979.

The fact is that Crystal Gayle (born Brenda Gail Webb) was 8 years old before she ever met her sister Loretta, because Loretta married in her teens and moved away from the family homestead in Paintsville, Ky., to become the country superstar portrayed by Sissy Spacek in the film version of her best-selling autobiography "Coal Miner's Daughter." And when Crystal was 4, the family moved out of Paintsville to Wabash, Ind., because her father had black-lung disease and couldn't work in the mines any more, which explains why her accent is Hoosier and not Southern.

At Wabash High, she met and soon married a slender, easygoing youngster of Greek descent named Vassilios "Bill" Gatzimos and decided to have a whack at being a country singer. Gatzimos recalls those days: "I was a student at Indiana University when we got married. On weekends, we used to tour all the small clubs in the area, and Crystal would perform with local pickup bands with little or no rehearsal. We were raw kids. The first year, we netted \$3000."

Loretta, who had children older than Crystal, helped her baby sister get a recording contract with Decca. That's when the name change happened, because Decca already had a female singer named Brenda—Brenda Lee—so Brenda Gail Webb became Crystal Gayle after she and Loretta spotted a Krystal hamburger stand one day. It took her until 1976 to make a No. 1 country single ("I'll Get Over You"), but most of that time she was trying to break out of the country mold by widening

her repertoire.

To this day, Crystal Gayle hasn't completely resolved that identity problem, but she handles it mostly by ignoring it—singing what pleases her; and, moreover, she has attained that plateau where only a few country artists, such as Kenny Rogers, Dolly Parton and Willie Nelson, reside, that of a "crossover" artist whose work appeals to a wider audience, and who can attract large crowds to the showrooms of Las Vegas, Lake Tahoe, Reno and Atlantic City.

Still, Nashville is, by choice, her headquarters and home; she and Bill Gatzimos live modestly in a simple, one-story, 30-year-old house on 8 acres that's 15 minutes from their office. "It's no mansion on the hill," says Gayle. "I see so many people in our business spending every →



The coal miner's other daughter's daughter, Catherine Claire, with parents Bill Gatzimos and Crystal Gayle.

Fay Fattman

penny they make to live the high life." They own two five-year-old cars, and occasionally splurge on a quiet vacation.

That urge toward moderation extends to her career: she plays only 80 to 100 dates a year, rather than the more than 200 that many country stars attempt, with the accompanying exhaustion from travel. Thus, she's certain she'll never have the sort of drug dependency—on amphetamines and tranquilizers—that afflicts many stars who try to squeeze in too many one-night stands. Pill-taking is "all around me—everywhere," says Gayle. "That's what happened to Loretta [in the early days of her career] from being on the road so much. To rest, she had to check into a hospital. I don't want that to happen to me. I like being in control of myself. I don't need the feeling that pills give you."

In fact, somebody once called Crystal Gayle a control freak—an iron butterfly

whose demure exterior cloaks a stern determination to have things her own way. She confesses, demurely, that there might be some truth in that. "I have a temper. It doesn't come fast, but when it does... I like people to be honest, and not tell me something because they think that's what I want to hear." If her 31-year-old husband (she's 33) "had the quick temper I have, we might not have gotten this far. He takes things easier." She figures it's her Cherokee blood—of which she's very proud—that sets her on the war-path.

Wabash was basically a better place to live than Paintsville, although Gayle thinks that maybe moving there at age 4 is what caused her to grow up so shy.

"Going from the hills of Kentucky to a big, modern city..."

A what?

"Well, Wabash had about 13,000 people. That was a big city to me. I remember as a kid how I always wanted to run and hide because my mother, who was proud of my singing, used to ask

me to sing whenever company came to the house. In the very beginning, it was very difficult for me to perform. It took a long time to get over that period."

She thinks that having Catherine Claire has helped her on-stage confidence a lot, because now the career is no longer the most important thing in her life. And since the baby travels everywhere with her—to concerts at casinos and county fairs—the logistics and the planning leave her less time to fret about her performance.

Crystal Gayle is still a puzzlement to people eager to pigeonhole her. Actually, she's not really so hard to figure out. She's just your basic 5-foot-2, 97-pound Cherokee-Irish woman with a shy grin and a will of iron who's swathed in 5 feet of brown hair and who sings like an angel and looks like a movie star.

Now don't that make your brown eyes bloo-ooo-ooo? **END**