



personality By CHET FLIPPO

THE PROBLEM WITH CRYSTAL

IF WHITE LIGHT and white heat could melt an audience, then the well-dressed sport sitting in front of me at ringside in the Chicago Stadium would have melted right out of his navy blazer and run down the drain at the first sight of Crystal Gayle. He almost leaped out of his loafers when the Gladiator whiter-than-white spotlights knifed through the darkness and crisscrossed on her as her road manager, Billy Vaughn, led her up to the white-carpeted runway to the stage in the square. And the sport seemed to be beating his hands into hamburger, applauding as Crystal took a turn around the stage, prancing like a thoroughbred.

She was no more than six feet from him when she knelt and picked up the pink rose he had thrown. The Gladiators zeroed in on her white-on-white jump suit and the reflection was blinding enough to virtually short out my Sunsensor glasses: The lenses seemed to be popping and fizzing. Mr. Sport, who had definitely not come here to see the headliner, Kenny Rogers, went all wavy-faced when Crystal Gayle looked him right in the face and gave him a 90-watt flashbulb of a smile, then abruptly turned on her purple high-heeled slings and whirled away with a saucy toss of her brown hair that reaches within an inch of the back of her knees. The sport was long gone even before Crystal nodded to bandleader Charles Cochran and the band, down in the middle of the square, that she was ready to kick it out with *Gone at Last*.

She threw back her head, arching her spine, and her high notes—astonishingly powerful coming from a body that's 5'2" tall and weighs 97 pounds—rang off the steel rafters. Spotlights back-lighted her as she tossed and whirled her cascade of hair in what became an exercise in PG-rated eroticism. The sport was beginning to bear an alarming resemblance to a cocker spaniel: sitting up and panting, moist-eyed, and just waiting for a look from its owner. *Devotion*.

When she sang *When I Dream*, she seemed to be floating through a fairy tale and, for the inevitable applause, she dreamily folded her hands beneath her chin and her riveting cobalt-blue orbs roamed through the front rows like a sensuous laser. (If she affected me that way, I refuse to tell you the sorry state the sport was in by that time. And she had one more show to do that night.)

Later, deep within the Stadium's winding bowels of tunnels, guards

*fans and record companies may be confused
over just who and what she is, but crystal gayle
has never had a doubt*

were turning whole crowds of sports away from her dressing room, which on other nights held Chicago Black Hawks. When Crystal came down the hall with her husband-manager, Vassilios "Bill" Gatzimos, in the fluorescent glare, she looked surprisingly *smaller* than life. She had scrubbed off her stage make-up and—beautiful though she is—I was surprised to note a slight facial imperfection or two. She was wearing a puffy red-and-white-striped sweater and tight jeans tucked into knee-high boots. She received some well-screened backstage fans with a smile that can only be called dazzling and posed for pictures with them and answered the obvious questions: She's been growing her hair for 14 years and will cut it someday; she and sister Loretta Lynn are "close," though they don't see each other often; her next project is doing songs with Tom Waits for the sound track of Francis Ford Coppola's *One from the Heart*.

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When she was off to the bus, a custodial Silver Eagle named Sally Rose, on the 12-hour ride back to Nashville home. She didn't wait around to meet Kenny Rogers. She was more interested in finding out if, in fact, this town was the place where she'd first seen the Rolling Stones perform. Memo: Call Crystal Gayle *country*.

How can she sing like an angel, behave like a temptress, make grown men want like dogs at the very sight of her and win over music critics like she's knocking down bowling pins, why isn't she named Crystal Gayle a household name? Why does she have to open for Kenny Rogers? Just what *is* the problem? I'm afraid that question is a whole lot more than to answer. Crystal presents the music industry (as well as the listening public) with a problem equivalent to that posed by the colthlete who letters in all sports: If you're pro, what's his specialty?

Loretta Lynn's baby sister, Crystal Lynn, came out of a family that is as hard-core country-and-western as you'll find; yet she grew up preferring rock 'n' roll. Her first love was C&W, but as fast as she learned to play the business, she became

didn't understand.

Crystal herself hasn't always helped her cause, either. Never exactly courting the press, she is a very private person who has become known as a difficult interview. On top of all that, music-industry stories abound of her obsession with controlling her own career, from hand-picking her appearances to exasperating art directors by slowly screening as many as 1200 color slides before finally approving one for an album cover. A control freak, some say. The Iron Butterfly of Nashville is another term that's been thrown around. But such buzzwords are too simple to explain her and her appeal, which even she can't explain.

Brenda Gail Webb (now known as Crystal Gayle) was born on January 9, 1951, in Paintsville, Kentucky. She was the eighth of eight children born to Ted and Clara Webb. Ted, you'll remember, was a coal miner (*vide* the movie *Coal Miner's Daughter*) who had already con-

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Crystal—I mean Brenda—was seemingly one of those dangerous, overly quiet, obedient and polite children who are just waiting for a chance to bust out of the mold.

"She was singing before she was walking," her mother says of her. Brenda selected both her career and her husband before she was graduated from high school. Even then, she didn't say much. It was what she *did* that mattered. Watching as her glamorous sister became a star, she decided to become a singer, too, and was working the Lions Clubs and the like while still jailbait.

After high school, Brenda got Loretta not only to audition her for her own record company but to write songs for

he remembers. "I had Loretta's brother and another sister, and then Brenda came along and we talked to her and gave it a whirl, and at that time, the company was going through a change. We had fairly good luck on the first record or so."

For her first single, Loretta, a prolific songwriter, gave Crystal *I've Cried (The Blue Right Out of My Eyes)*—which got as high as the number-23 slot on the country-and-western charts in September 1970. Loretta also wrote a couple of other early Crystal Gayle songs, *Sparklin' Look of Love* and *Mama, It's Different This Time*. Those Decca songs sound, in fact, a lot like Loretta Lynn, or like someone who is unhappily trying to sound like her. Underneath, though, you can hear a pop singer trying to burst out.

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"When I started," Crystal says, "Loretta didn't want me to record country songs at *all*, because she always told me that I could sing a lot of things. She wanted me to have a different sound from her. Which was very good for me." So Crystal went on the road and played every dive she could get booked into. She couldn't afford a band and played with pickup musicians who knew the basic chords to *Help Me Make It Through the Night* and *Let Me Be There* and *Snowbird*. She got a Dodge van and played county fairs and anyplace else that would have her.

"Decca never let me have an album when I was with them," Crystal would tell me later. "We had singles. They put everything together and, at that time, I didn't have a say in what I would record. And it was *very* difficult. It's terrible going in and not really having the freedom to sing what you really like. That's why, when the time came, we just parted. I didn't want to stay and I'm sure they didn't want me to, either."

"The rules in country music were kind of changing at that time, too," says Bradley. "Under the old rules, with a Patsy Cline or a Loretta, you could take three or four years to develop them. Under the new rules, the companies expected action a little quicker.

"And, of course, Crystal was trying to do something completely different. She

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husband, Mooney, to a brief stint with a Los Angeles firm, finally settling on self-management, ostensibly in her husband's name. Even after her pop success with *Brown Eyes*, she continued to have C&W hits such as *Why Have You Left the One You Left Me For?* and *When I Dream*. Then Columbia snatched her away from U.A. and she hit number one with *It's Like We Never Said Goodbye* in 1980.

But after that, she became becalmed. The hits weren't coming and the reason was that nobody—least of all her marketers—knew how to market her. Country? Pop? Album-oriented radio? What? She was recording increasingly sophisticated rhythm-and-blues-tinged pop music that had barely a prayer of getting air time on a country station.

Gambling is what rescued her and a lot of other Nashville singers. The casinos in Las Vegas, Atlantic City, Reno and Tahoe finally ran out of guaranteed draws named Frankie or Shecky. That's when they discovered they had a whole new audience that would rather have Willie or Dolly or Crystal, anyway.

The marquee changer at Harrah's in Lake Tahoe asked me how many Ls there were in Crystal. He was rising on a cherry picker and juggling large marquee letters, taking down DON RICKLES and putting up CRYSTAL GAYLE. I had just emerged from a stretch Lincoln limo that had conveyed Crystal, her husband, her bandleader and me from the Reno airport. Crystal was met at the door of Harrah's by a committee that lacked only a brass band. I told the marquee guy to "L-L-L, yes, use all your Ls." He didn't seem to appreciate that.

Getting to Crystal's suite at Harrah's could've been an all-day job if she hadn't wanted you there: The entire floor was locked off and a guard was stationed outside the elevator. Finally, Crystal buzzed me into her digs, an incredible simulation of an Alpine suite—a room so woody that you got splinters just from walking in the door. Tyrolean hats should've been standard issue.

When I got there, Crystal was curled up in an overstuffed armchair. She was wearing tight jeans and a short-sleeved blouse and she was barefoot. She had tied her hair up into a bun.

As she toyed with her hair, I thought of some things several of her male fans had told me they'd like to do with her hair in kinky fantasies; one would like to be hair-whipped in bed. "My hair

does get real heavy," she was saying. "It feels better on top of my head. What do you want to drink?"

She laughed the dry, brittle laugh she laughs onstage when she's nervous and doesn't know what to say. She mixed me a drink and poured herself a glass of mineral water and we sat down to watch the sun set over Lake Tahoe.

"Let me read your palm," Crystal said impulsively, and she jumped up and grasped my right hand. In the best interest of my own interests, I couldn't refuse. She stroked my palm and I haven't felt too many things that felt better. She closed her eyes, then frowned.

"What is it?" I asked. "Am I done for?"

"No," she said, but she wasn't smiling. "Just be careful, that's all."

"What do you mean?"

"Just be careful. There could be an accident." She opened her eyes and looked at me in a way that I suspected was sympathetic.

I was a little alarmed. I knew that her mother had been credited with having psychic powers, and so had Loretta. I decided to mix another drink. "Crystal," I said as I was pouring, "do you have magic powers? You seem to do a lot of eye-control things with your audiences and your mother is supposed to be strong in a lot of psychic areas."

"Oh, yeah," Crystal said, "she definitely is strong. And if I wanted to go into the study of, ah, certain things, I'm sure I could. My sister Loretta is really into it. But for me—well, you've got to know mentally what you're dealing with and if you're really not prepared to study it and if you're only just going to play with it, it's not good."

That was all she wanted to say on the subject. As I refilled her glass, the thought occurred to me that maybe Crystal wasn't being purposefully vague with her answers; maybe I just didn't understand what the hell she was saying.

Once I had regained my composure and my seat, I tried to move on to firmer ground. "Why don't you write more songs?" I asked her. "Everybody knows you as a song stylist, but you and Bill have written some good songs together."

She seemed nervous. "Success and time," she said. "We used to be able to sit at home and just play our guitars and sing. Now we've had to put things aside, and we keep talking about how we want to just. . . . We've got a lot of ideas, a lot of things started. Bill is very good

with words—I always wanted him to do poetry." She laughed her nervous laugh and sipped her mineral water.

Is there ever a conflict in her mind, I wondered, between being Brenda and being Crystal? What does Bill call her, Brenda or Crystal? Which is which? Brenda Crystal Gail Gayle Webb Gatzimos swirled the ice cubes in her glass and looked out over the lake for a moment before answering.

"Well, Bill calls me Crystal and Brenda. It's still the same person, but you can say that being an entertainer and being a person means being two different people, but not really in the sense of two personalities."

"But is it like just switching a name tag from Brenda to Crystal?"

"I think sometimes I want to be Brenda, and then at other times I want to be Crystal."

"What's the difference between the two?"

"Oh," she winked, "Brenda will eat anything and everything." She laughed and got up to walk around the room for a moment before continuing. "And Crystal, Crystal will watch her diet. I don't know. I'm a mixture today. I really didn't have any say in the name change; the record company insisted on it. But later, I started really disliking the name and I wanted to go back to my real name. If you'll notice, on one of my first albums, on a song Bill and I wrote, *Beyond You*, in the credits, I spelled my name G-A-I-L. That was because I was fixing to change it back to the original spelling. And then the next step was going to be going back to Brenda. I was getting closer. I really don't remember who talked me out of it."

"Did you ever take Bill's last name?" I asked.

"No," she answered, turning serious. "It was just something that I really started feeling weird about—having a different name, you know. My driver's license already said Brenda and my records were saying Crystal and it just didn't feel comfortable. I really felt at the time like I was two people, and it was very hard for me. I don't think people understood—I felt I was trying to be somebody I wasn't. And changing it to Crystal—I felt like, well, I must think I'm a star or something. It is a pretty name and one of the reasons my sister picked it was because she thought it was bright and shiny and she thought that's what I was."

She laughed prettily. "Every now and then, one of the guys in the band will say, 'You're Brenda today.' I don't know how they know or *what* they know. Maybe if I'm a little crazy, I'm Brenda."

That evening, in Harrah's South
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"It effectively shatters any sexual or merely sensuous tensions that have linked her with her audience."

Shore Room, the Crystal Gayle who had been fairly reserved as Kenny Rogers' opening act out there in Country Music Land was nowhere around. *This* Crystal Gayle was *hot*. In an off-the-shoulders sequined black tube top and tighter-than-tight black pants and black slings, she looked and moved like an enticing, shiny switchblade knife. When she moved into Billie Holiday's *What a Little Moonlight Can Do*, she became desirably sinister and it occurred to me that I couldn't think of another singer who could do as much as she could with an audience while saying practically nothing at all between songs. Or of another one who could spend so much of her stage time facing her band and offering her viewers a display of swaying hair and tight pants. Not that that sort

of thing *weakens* the performer-audience bond, except that Crystal still hasn't learned how to talk to an audience beyond the "How are you?" level. ("I've always had problems in my mind with being out on the stage," she would tell me later. "It's like I'd rather sing; I used to not want to talk at all.") If ever there were unlimited and unrealized potential in a performer, she has it.

Toward the end of her show, she unleashed her strength with *When I Dream*, a throaty, full-bodied, erotic ballad that spells out much of her appeal: "I can put my make-up on and drive the men insane/I can go to bed alone and never know his name/But when I dream, I dream of you/Maybe someday you will come true."

Crystal's final encore is always *Rocky*

Top, a lightweight, get-'em-on-their-feet country version of an applause sign. It's also the closest thing she does to a traditional country-and-western song. It effectively shatters any sexual or merely sensuous tensions that have linked her with her audience.

Between the eight-o'clock "dinner show" and the 11:30 "cocktail show," she shed her black pants in favor of a tan terrycloth robe and sat sipping hot water in her dressing room. She caught me by surprise with a question: "Can you tell the difference of my hair's effect here with that show in Chicago?"

Until then, I had forgotten that after the Chicago show, I had asked her if she'd ever seen a video tape of herself performing. She said she hadn't and wanted to know why I asked.

"Your hair," I'd said. "It's down to your knees now and you should see it when it's back-lighted and you start whipping it around. I mean, it's very *exotic*."

She'd laughed nervously and waited for me to continue. "Crystal, it drives some of that crowd *nuts*. I don't know if you know that, but you should be careful. There were guys out there just salivating."

"Oh," she'd said, "I really haven't talked to anybody who's said quite *that*."

But now here she was, backstage at Harrah's in Tahoe, asking *me* about the relative hair effect. And really wanting to know. "Well," I said, "it really doesn't work as well here, because you're not back-lighted and not as close to the audience and your hair doesn't really stand out against the black outfit. By the way, that black outfit—"

"Oh," she said, "those are spandex pants. They look like you're poured into them, but they're so comfortable that you could do sit-ups in them."

"Dressed like that, do you feel like a sex object, or do you think people *think* you're a sex object?"

"I think there are probably some who do. The outfit might look a little *sexy*, but I don't know, because it's hard for me to look at myself that way. I don't really think I am in that sense. That's not something I've tried to pursue."

The building at 1308 16th Avenue South in Nashville doesn't look like the sort of high-powered studio from which comes high-powered pop music. Those studios usually look like flying saucers on the ground. But 1308 is a two-story, quasi-Victorian brick building approximately the color of Dijon mustard. What front yard there is includes a dry moat with a bridge across it. Stray dogs like to hide under there.

There is no sign to identify 1308 and no need to. If you have to ask, you have no business there. There *is* a little box by the front door and a little sign that



"Tits and ass! Tits and ass!"

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This is a comfortable sportsman's billed cap. Black mesh (air cooled) and adjustable to any size head, with an official "Jack Daniel's Field Tester" patch on the front. Guaranteed to shade your eyes and start a lot of conversations. My \$6.50 price includes postage and handling.



OLD-TIME RIVERBOAT PLAYING CARDS

Both of these decks are prettier than a painting, and so is the antique tin card case. Each card is a bit larger and thicker than normal—like those used on riverboats in the 1890's. There's a black and a green deck—both with an antique gold "distillery design." The face cards are reproduced from 100-year-old artwork. So it's a real unusual set of cards for the serious player. Twin deck in antique case: \$8.50. Postage included.



JACK DANIEL'S SQUARE GLASS SET

Mr. Jack Daniel was the originator of the square bottle for his whiskey and always wanted to have a matching square glass. Well, here it is! This hefty square glass (each weighs 14 ounces) is the perfect companion to a bottle of Mr. Jack's finest. The inside is rounded to make drinking a pleasure and the original design is fired on for good looks and durability. My \$15.00 price for a set of 4 glasses (8 oz. capacity) includes postage.

Send check, money order or use American Express, Visa or MasterCard, including all numbers and signature. (Add 6% sales tax for TN delivery.) For a color catalog full of old Tennessee items and Jack Daniel's memorabilia, send \$1.00 to the above address. In continental U.S. or A. call 1-800-251-8500. Tennessee residents call 615-759-7184.

says you can deposit tapes in it. In Nashville, if you put up a shingle that says you're a recording studio, you won't merely get demo tapes 24 hours a day, you'll get Woodstock on your front lawn. Sixteenth Avenue has a constant parade of strange-looking people clutching guitar cases that usually have fresh Greyhound bus stickers on them.

On the day I was there, that odd building with the columns and the moat had Crystal Gayle's fire-engine-red Mercedes parked outside it while she worked on her latest album in her studio of choice. Namely, Jack's Tracks, a.k.a. 1308. Jack Clement, a protégé of Sun Records founder Sam Phillips, built it before moving on to other things. Phillips, of course, built the first rock-'n'-roll studio—Sun—on Union Avenue in Memphis and knows a thing or two about studios. Size never did impress him: Sun was the size of a studio apartment.

Crystal's producer, Allen Reynolds, met me at the door of 1308 and took me on a tour. Reynolds came out of Memphis and knows Southern funk the way only Memphians and Orleanians do. As he led me into Jack's Tracks' studio proper, dog-legged and never more than about 15 feet across from pine-plank wall to wall, he was exuberant. "I love this room," he said. "Doesn't it sound pleasant?" Indeed, it did. One's voice sounded warm and resonant and seemed to hang in the air for a second. "Sam Phillips fell in love with this place. He told Jack to plow under his other studios; he said they weren't worth a goddamn, but this place was worth a million bucks. He got so emotional he kissed Jack on the cheek!"

Reynolds had written modest hits in Memphis (remember *Five O'Clock World* by the Vogues in 1965?) and recorded on his own before staking his career on Nashville rather than Memphis. He produced Don Williams' first records, and then they parted ways. About the time Reynolds was adrift, Crystal Gayle was signing with United Artists after her departure from Decca. U.A. called Reynolds in to see if he could do any producing.

"I had heard Crystal before, but not enough to be really familiar with her," said Reynolds. "We went in and all we were authorized to cut at the time was a single, so we did *Wrong Road Again*. It went well and by the time we did the first album, I was feeling pretty excited about her. When I first heard her, I thought she had a good voice, but dynamically it was real uneven. She hadn't had that much studio experience.

"But we recorded a thing on that first album that she and her husband wrote, called *Beyond You*, and after we cut that, I remember calling them at about 10:30 at night, telling them they ought to come over and hear it after we had mixed it. I remember telling her she

should set her sights real high, that she could be as good as she wanted to be. I was really impressed with her."

Reynolds has often been called Crystal Gayle's Svengali, especially after *Don't It Make My Brown Eyes Blue* established her as a pop star in 1977. What is not readily apparent is that *no one* tells Crystal Gayle what to do. U.A. didn't like *Brown Eyes* as a single release—not, at least, until it was number one on the country charts and number two on the pop charts. She had picked it in spite of the record company.

"I'll tell you what," Reynolds said. "she is *really* smart. Her instincts have always been good and I've always trusted her. Part of that—her caution and care—is just Crystal wanting to preserve her freedom and independence. And part of it is that her professional standards are very high."

Back in the control room, Reynolds played the mix of Crystal's version of Bill Withers' *Lean on Me*, which came out with a reggae touch and a very fresh sound. It isn't what you commonly think of as a country song, which may well be Crystal's biggest problem with record companies and public alike, both of which seem to like categories.

Reynolds says it's mainly the record companies that think categories. "It's generally been a problem to get the foreign offices—New York and L.A.—to respond to artists like Crystal," he said. "That's old hat, though. Like with Don Williams: Companies would say, 'Oh, they hate country music in England.' But Don Williams took England by storm."

Has Crystal Gayle's potential audience been reached yet? What is her audience?

"I don't know," Reynolds said. "I've been to meetings of record companies where Engelbert Humperdinck's name comes up and everyone says, Oh, he's not hip. Well, I'm not a huge Engelbert fan, but that particular album they were dismissing sold platinum. Now, *by God*, that audience is worthy of our respect. You're fuckin' stupid if you can't see that. But I see this attitude time and again. What it all boils down to is a tremendous lack of faith in people out there on the street. After ten years of the rock syndrome, it's hard for the record labels to believe that that's the big audience. But that's the country-music audience extended. That's Middle America. That's where I sit. The record label thought *Brown Eyes* was a mistake. It was gimmickless, straight ahead, soulful and classy, and that's all it takes. That's what record companies have a hard time with. I think they're finally waking up with Crystal.

"There's a possibility that our music hasn't been dead on," Reynolds continued, "but I'm hoping for better things out of this new album. I'm forever impressed with her, forever *amazed*. I think this girl is one of the premier

singers of our age. I would present her to any audience."

In a little while, the lady herself swept in, wearing a white cable-knit sweater and tight jeans, her hair swinging. She poured herself some coffee and sat down to spend an afternoon of listening to background singers put a "Holly-lu-ya" chorus on a song called *Hollywood*. She sang along with a line she really likes: "I know an aging English star/He's very good on vintage wine and jazz guitar."

A few blocks north of Jack's Tracks, Gayle Enterprises, Inc. is slowly remodel-

ing a two-story mansion. Over the past year, the interior has been modified to include a recording studio, a TV wing, a kitchen, general office space and a small attic apartment/office for Crystal.

"Is this going to be an empire?" I asked Crystal as she pulled the red Mercedes into the lot behind the house.

"Yeah," she said. "It'd be nice to get more acquisitions than *me* working out of here." Then she broke into song: "We shall overcome."

In a few minutes, we were sitting in what will be Bill's front office. He was sorting through his mail, trying to find a lost plane ticket.

"When was the last time you took a vacation?" I asked Crystal. "It seems as if you work nonstop."

She stopped to think and looked at Bill, who had also stopped to think. "Three years?" she asked.

"Four years," Bill said, "except for Christmas, when we visit family, and that doesn't count. We've had vacations *scheduled*. One year the China offer came through. There's always something that comes up."

I asked Crystal if she ever planned to have children. Much laughter. Bill said he hoped maybe *I* could get an answer out of her. Crystal finally said that maybe someday she might *think* about it. "I just had three nieces for a week," she said. They swapped affectionate glances.

What would happen, I wondered, if Bill decided to go into practice with the law degree he earned several years ago? Who would be Crystal's manager?

"That bridge hasn't been crossed," Bill said.

Crystal laughed. "Well, I don't worry about it."

"Crystal's never believed in the necessity of having an official manager," Bill said, still rummaging through his mail.

"Well, for *some* people, yes," Crystal said.

Bill turned to her. "But you're the type that needs to know what's going on around you."

Crystal's eyes blazed. "Well, *yes*," she said. "Because *I don't want someone else telling me what to do*." We all paused, were quiet for a moment. Then Bill went back to his rummaging. I asked Crystal what she likes to do when not working.

"Ah," she sighed, "it's been a while. Except at Christmastime, I'm *always* working. I like to just, oh, get things done around the house. Read and rest."

"But you're your own boss," I said. "You can tell yourself to take time off."

"Yes, I can. But then something comes up that I *want* to do. I don't need two weeks somewhere. I can go to Hawaii and a week is about all I can take. Then I want to get back to solving problems. Have you heard the album?"

"Only once. What's that line about the child in the woman? I've heard it only once."

"I like that. That's in *The Woman in Me*." She sings: "You'll never break the woman in me, but you might hurt the child."

"Is that a personal sentiment?"

"Oh, I think a good many women can relate to that. A lot of women stand up under a lot of pressure. I really like the lines 'I could cut my hair and walk out of here so fast/Let the silence tell you that I'm grown up at last.' Women, in their own way, in their own little corner, they can let the child come out, which

"Oooh"

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a lot of people do when they break down. It's going back to an inner self.

"Myself, I don't show a lot of emotions outwardly. Some people can cry at the drop of a hat and I've *never* understood how they can do that."

"Does it take a lot to bother you?"

"For crying, yes. I look at it this way, because my mother was strong like that. A *strong* woman. She never broke down. I could stay together in any emergency."

"You seem to," I said. "You control your career, down to selecting pictures."

She laughed. "Yeah, I like to be in control. I pick my pictures, I bill myself on my album covers as director." She laughed easily. "I mean, if you're that involved with it, you're the one they're gonna first complain about. I love that Rick Nelson song where he sings, 'You can't please everyone, so you gotta please yourself.' Because that's true. You've got to be true to yourself. Don't lose your identity, your own self, because you'll never get it back. I *fought* for my own identity." Her blue eyes blazed.

Bill Gatzimos, Crystal's husband of ten years, met her when she asked him to dance in high school in Indiana. They seem perfectly matched: She's determined and he's flexible.

One night when I was with them in Tahoe, he came over to me backstage and offered me a chew of R. J. Gold Chewing Tobacco, which appears to be his only vice. In a business where managers (and husbands) are usually manic, Gatzimos is amiable, albeit efficient.

"Are you," I asked him, spitting some R. J. Gold runoff into his portable spittoon, better known as his Dickie cup, "ever bothered about being called Mr. Crystal Gayle?"

He spat a brown stream of Gold. "Oh, I don't know what people think of me. Some people must think that. But I'm pretty secure with myself. Crystal's a great talent and I've enjoyed helping her and I still have my whole life ahead of me, in whatever career I choose. Crystal's the type of person who has excellent instincts and who wants to be in as much control of her own situation and her own life as possible. At this point, the best decision has been to help her career. I honestly *don't* know what's gonna happen from here. We'll play things by ear."

Later, we went out into the South Shore Room to watch Crystal's last show. Up there on the stage, she was wearing an astonishingly low-cut white dress that showed off her long hair to its best advantage. Not to mention her cleavage. Bill took copious notes, which he good-naturedly refused to show me. "Confidential," he said. I remember thinking he was beginning to look like Mr. Sport. But then, maybe I was, too.



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