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CRYSTAL GAYLE...

No Longer Just
Loretta's Kid Sister

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CRYSTAL GAYLE

No Longer Just Loretta's Kid Sister

One of those unlucky little girls probably lives in your own neighborhood. She's some popular coed's kid sister, plodding through classes at the same neighborhood school where her big sister was head cheerleader and secretary of the student body and homecoming queen. She, unfortunately, never wins much of anything, except maybe hall monitor. And the teachers gossip in the lounge about why she isn't more like her big sister.

That could be how Crystal Gayle, kid sister of Loretta Lynn, felt about her singing career up until about three years ago.

Then one happy school year, the kid sister may start to blossom. When election time rolls around in the spring, her classmates elect her head cheerleader. All of a sudden the ex-wallflower is on her way as a glowing belle in her own right, no longer just lagging behind in big sister's shadow.

Crystal Gayle has definitely begun to blossom. With her records almost always hitting the top ten, and with the number one "I'll Get Over You" to her credit, Crystal is finally shaking the image of "oh, you know, she's Loretta's sister."

Until three years ago, the brown-haired, big-eyed beauty had been on the same record label with Loretta; just another sibling singer older sister was trying to help.

"I felt that people felt I was on the label just because of Loretta," Crystal admits, curled up comfortably on the couch in her record company's office. "I think most of the people who worked for the company I used to be with, the ones who were supposed to be pushing my records, thought that, too. They didn't really think I was any good at all."

In January 1973 she broke away from the company that had been mentally and monetarily immersed in Loretta's career for years, and soon after signing with her current



record label, United Artists, she began to shine — in her own way. And Crystal's way is not Loretta's way.

Outgoing, breezy Loretta, the prototypical coalminer's daughter, as country in music, manner, and accent as they come, has charmed a good part of the USA with her frank, hill-raised candor. But the more delicate and reserved Crystal, who weighs her words cautiously and rarely volunteers more than is asked, did not grow up in Loretta's world.

Before Crystal was big enough to be aware of a sister 16 years older, Loretta had married and moved out of the Webb family house in Paintsville, Kentucky. When Crystal was four, her Dad, afflicted with black lung disease, abandoned the coal fields and moved the family to Wabash, Indiana. In Wabash, Crystal picked up the midwestern inflection in her voice and spent her high-school days listening to popular folkies like Peter, Paul, and Mary.

"I grew up singing every kind of music," she reveals. "I liked Leslie Gore, like everybody did. I'd always get the singles. You know, that's how kids are," she smiles, speaking in an easy velvety voice that's as sexy for talking as it is for singing. Although her words are cushioned by the soft tone, they tend to pour out fast in short, clipped sentences. It communicates a set determination behind her mellow, pleasant manner.

As Loretta's career has unhappily demonstrated untold times, a young star like Crystal needs all the determination she can muster, just for her own self-preservation. It is well known how the enormous pressures and stresses of performing have scarred Loretta's life, making her a repeated hospital inpatient.

"This summer was terribly exhausting," Crystal declares resting her head on her hand, "I didn't get sick where I had to break down and go into the hospital, although that's about what everybody else does

when they want to rest."

Crystal, who spent last summer almost continuously on the road, and who has a heavy touring schedule lined up for early this year, is a high-risk candidate for this crisis-prone lifestyle.

"This summer I thought, you know, this day has to be the last day! I'm not going to be able to go through it. The first show can be fine, then the second one on the same day can be ... uhhh ...," she moans.

"They'll send you out for, say, two or three weeks at a time; you'll be in for three days, and then they want to put you out for another ten days. It's money," she says with a shrug, "but you just have to have that will to say no. And I'm pretty good at saying no."

Until he entered law school this past fall, Crystal's husband, Bill Gatzimos, travelled on the road with her. "Bill enjoys the music business and he enjoys my career," she emphasizes, "but I realize he must have his own career."

Bill didn't want her to go on the road without him until she had someone to travel with her, so this past summer she took along her own bass player and guitar player. But regardless of who's along, road life is tough on the person who's got to stand alone in the spotlight. "If something's really got you down, you can do things like forget the words," she says, "At one performance just recently, I was singing one of my songs, and when the break came I went into a totally different song! I must have been thinking of something that totally threw me off," she suggests with a worried look.

"Like a lot of clubs have carpet on the stage," she continues. "If you're wearing high shoes, you absolutely cannot stand on the stage without falling. You're standing there, and you're legs are going like that," she demonstrates with a wobble of her knees. "You're not thinking about the song; you're wondering if you're gonna fall down or not!"

Unlike the tall, willowly creature she appears to be on TV and on posters, Crystal is surprisingly short — maybe about 5'2". Her most striking features are big blue eyes fringed with smokey black lashes, seductive, but in a wholesome kind of way. Wearing scant make-up and waist-length straight hair parted in the middle, she radiates shiny-clean, fresh good looks.

She pauses a minute, perhaps



reflecting on all her experiences in the music business since she began singing as a schoolgirl with three of her brothers. I am thinking about an article I once read about how Loretta retreats to her cramped room at the back of her bus and drops off to sleep as tapes of her own albums play constantly through the night. "The music business is so one-sided," Crystal eventually says, "I think that's what made Bill go back to school. You know, there's so much more to talk about than just music."

Bill, a college graduate, has introduced her to some fairly heavy reading — authors like Kurt Vonnegut and Herman Hesse. Lately she's been reading Ayn Rand, a philosopher of sorts and writer who places a lot of emphasis on concern with the self and strict self-reliance. "You need some of that," Crystal opines, "Her books just made me think a little. It didn't really change my life, but it made me think," she says, then adds spunkily, "I didn't read it to be told what to do or how to live my life."

Although Crystal is living her life, establishing her image, singing her music, and gathering her fans in a way that is quite different from Loretta's, she speaks of her sister with affection and without rivalry. Ironically, 1976, the first year that Crystal has been nominated for a CMA award (as "Top Female Artist"), was also the first year that Loretta had not been nominated for any award.

Looking down at her hands, Crystal reveals that she was not very happy about that and suggests that sometimes various groups are not always as loyal as they should be. "Oh, you know how those awards are," she says in succinct summation.

And her latest project is a family affair. Crystal found out that Loretta was going to be on Ralph Emery's "Pop Goes the Country" TV show and thought it would be "neat" if a bunch of the family got together. Peggy Sue and Jay Lee Webb will be on with Crystal and Loretta, plus their mother will be making her first TV appearance.

I ask her how she thinks her new-found success makes Peggy Sue and Jay Lee feel, since they are both still struggling along in Loretta's shadow, hoping to become major stars. "Oh, we don't ever talk about it," she says softly. "It's just sort of understood." ●CSR