

Loretta Lynn: Giving Women a Voice

Loretta Lynn grew up in a poor, rural part of eastern Kentucky, and her early experiences inspired her to write her most famous song, “Coal Miner’s Daughter.” The lyrics begin with her birth in a cabin on a hill in Butcher Holler, Kentucky. Her father was indeed a coal miner, as well as a farmer, while her mother tended to the growing family.

The second of eight children, Loretta Webb was born on April 14, 1932. She married a young army veteran, Oliver “Doolittle” Lynn, while she was still a teenager, and they moved to Washington state so he could find work. They quickly started a family of their own, and Lynn adjusted to young motherhood. But Lynn’s singing around the house caught her husband’s attention, and he began to make bigger plans for her. He bought her a guitar, which she taught herself to play, and he found clubs where she could perform. After studying country lyrics in a magazine, Lynn decided she could write songs, too.

As her audience grew, Lynn was discovered by Zero Records, a small Canadian label. She based her first single, “Honky Tonk Girl,” on a real woman who sat alone and cried as she watched Lynn perform. When Lynn asked her why she was so upset, the woman replied that her husband had left her with their six children to be with a younger woman. From that song forward, troubled relationships became a common theme in Lynn’s songwriting.

When Lynn’s career took off in the 1960s, she was raising six children and coping with a stressful marriage. Confident songs like “You Ain’t Woman Enough” and “Fist City” gave a strong voice to female listeners facing the same challenges. Meanwhile, her humble way of life inspired her 1971 hit “You’re Lookin’ at Country.”



“I guess my life is my songbook, ’cause I only write about what I’ve lived,” she said. “I was never one of those songwriters who could make up some story or write about something that they have not been through. If I had a bad day I would write about that. If I had a good day I would write about that. If my husband was misbehavin’, we all know I would write about that! But that’s just how I am.”

Lynn entered the Country Music Hall of Fame in 1988 and the Songwriters Hall of Fame in 2008.

Sources: *Coal Miner’s Daughter* by Loretta Lynn and George Vecsey; *Encyclopedia of Country Music*; *Honky Tonk Girl: My Life in Lyrics* by Loretta Lynn

LISTEN:

“Honky Tonk Girl”

“You Ain’t Woman Enough (to Take My Man)”

“Fist City”

“Coal Miner’s Daughter”

“You’re Lookin’ at Country”