

LORETTA LYNN

GIVING WOMEN A VOICE

Loretta Lynn grew up in a poor, rural part of eastern Kentucky, and her early experiences in life inspired 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 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, when 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 her 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 invited to sign her first record contract with Zero Records, a small Canadian label. She based her first single, “Honky Tonk Girl,” on a real woman Lynn had met whose husband left her with their six children to be with a younger woman. From that song forward, troubled relationships were 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. Bold songs like “You Ain’t Woman Enough (to Take My Man)” and “Fist City” appealed to female listeners facing similar challenges. Meanwhile, her humble way of life inspired her 1971 hit “You’re Lookin’ at Country.”

SOURCES

Country Music, U.S.A. by Bill C. Malone and Jocelyn R. Neal; *Mississippi Historical Society*; *Rock & Roll Hall of Fame*; *Songwriters Hall of Fame*; *Will the Circle Be Unbroken: Country Music in America* edited by Paul Kingsbury and Alanna Nash



Country radio stations banned some of Lynn’s songs about controversial issues, but Lynn continued to write and sing about topics that were important to her. “I guess my life is my songbook, ’cause I only write about what I’ve lived,” she said. “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!”

In 1973, Lynn became the first woman to receive the Country Music Association’s Entertainer of the Year award. A new generation discovered Lynn’s music in 2004, when rock musician Jack White produced her album *Van Lear Rose*.

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