



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 in 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 motherhood. 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 how 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, she was discovered by Zero Records, a small Canadian label. She based her first single, “I’m a 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 deserted her and their six children to be with a younger woman. From that song forward, volatile relationships became a common theme in Lynn’s songwriting.

When Lynn’s career took off in the 1960s, she was raising six children and dealing with trouble in her 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.”

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LISTEN

“I’m a Honky Tonk Girl,” “Coal Miner’s Daughter,” “Blue Kentucky Girl”



LORETTA LYNN: GIVING WOMEN A VOICE (CONTINUED)

“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 was elected to the Country Music Hall of Fame in 1988 and the Songwriters Hall of Fame in 2008. She died in 2022, at her home in Hurricane Mills, Tennessee. She was ninety years old.



CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING

1. What is Loretta’s most famous song? What inspired the song?

2. Circle the word “volatile” in the third paragraph. Underline the clue words and phrases that help you understand the meaning of the word.

3. In your own words, explain the title of this essay: “Loretta Lynn: Giving Women a Voice.”

