



## TOBY KEITH: BOLD SONGWRITER



Toby Keith had a commanding voice and a gift for clever writing. He found a unique style with songs such as “How Do You Like Me Now?!” and “I Wanna Talk About Me” as well as songs about the courage of the American people.

Toby Keith Covell was born on July 8, 1961, in Clinton, Oklahoma. Keith received his first guitar at age eight and spent summers working at his grandmother’s bar in Arkansas, sometimes playing with the house band. After working as a rodeo hand in high school, he followed in his father’s footsteps working in the oil fields and later played semi-professional football for the Oklahoma City Drillers. At age twenty, he began leading the Easy Money Band and spent much of the 1980s playing throughout Texas and Oklahoma performing country and rock music.

Toward the end of the decade, Keith started to make regular visits to Nashville to share his original songs. A fan who was a flight attendant gave a producer one of Keith’s tapes. Within days, the producer flew to Oklahoma to see Keith perform and immediately offered him a contract.

Keith released his debut album in 1993, and the first single, “Should’ve Been a Cowboy,” was his first #1 hit. Like most of the songs on the album, the song was written by Keith. His sixth album, 1999’s “How Do You Like Me Now?!” marked a new bold image that would define Keith in the public eye.



After the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks—and the death of his father, an army veteran—Keith wrote “Courtesy of the Red, White and Blue (The Angry American)” in twenty minutes. In it, he called for payback on those who had struck America. Originally, he performed the song only for servicemen and women, but he was urged by that audience to record and release it. It rocketed to #1 in July 2002. As he expected, the song caused immediate controversy. According to Keith, its lyrics led to a disagreement that led him to back out of a television special.

However, the song was embraced by many, and it created a bond between Keith and the U.S. military.

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### LISTEN

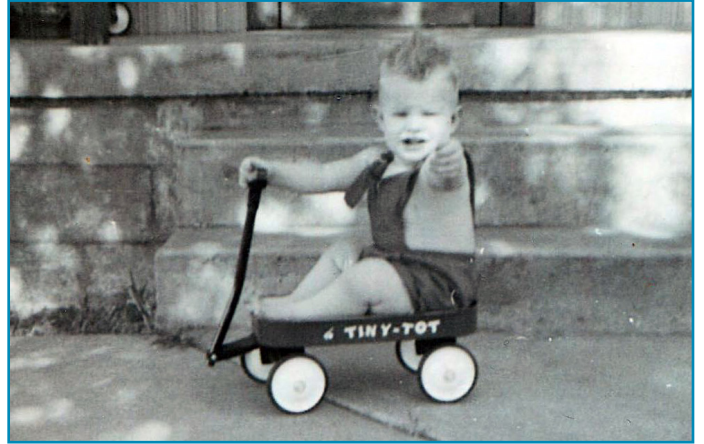
“Should’ve Been a Cowboy,” “Don’t Let the Old Man In,” “We Were in Love”

## TOBY KEITH: BOLD SONGWRITER (CONTINUED)

He went on multiple USO tours over the course of two decades, doing nearly 300 shows for more than 250,000 service members.

In 2021, Keith was diagnosed with stomach cancer and made the news public the following year as he canceled his scheduled shows. Keith returned to the stage in 2023 and gave an impressive final televised performance on The People’s Choice Country Awards. Keith sang “Don’t Let the Old Man In”—a song he wrote years earlier for a movie. “Don’t let the old man in,” Keith sang. “I wanna live me some more.”

He died February 5, 2024, at age sixty-two. Keith was elected into the Country Music Hall of Fame three days before he died.



### CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING

1. Name three different jobs Toby had before he was a successful performer.  
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2. Circle the phrase “controversy” in paragraph 6. Underline the clue words and phrases that help you understand the meaning of the phrase.  
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3. Why do you think Keith’s song “Courtesy of the Red, White, and Blue (The Angry American)” caused controversy?  
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