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## JACLYN SMITH

**This Angel still calls Daddy every day, but there's a new beau on hold**

**Crystal Gayle's brown eyes are blue - she's not**

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No flashy wigs, gowns or rhinestones for Crystal. She leaves that for Loretta and Dolly Parton. Crystal's natural, understated sexuality is changing the look and sound of country music.

## Loretta's kid sister is country's new look

By Judith Kinnard

Those aren't tears turning Crystal's brown eyes blue these days. Since winning Female Vocalist of the Year honors from the Country Music Association in Nashville last month, Loretta Lynn's baby sister is the reigning queen of country music.

Loretta's loss of her long-held country crown to her sister does not sit well among Nashville's Old Guard. But Loretta's not complaining. She's an ardent fan who says flatly, "Nobody can sing like her, and nobody's as pretty."

Today, Crystal Gayle is the new look and sound of country. And she's one country girl you can't keep down on the farm. Her torchy gold single, "Don't It Make My Brown Eyes Blue," has given the singer a coveted "crossover" hit, meaning she's making it big on both pop and country charts.

Unlike most country singers who are reluctant to seek the lucrative crossover hit for fear of alienating loyal country fans, Crystal is frank about her goals. "I would be lying if I said I didn't want a crossover. With a crossover you reach more people. And I want to reach more people." With an average of 180 performances a year, she is certainly doing that. These live performances bring in about \$900,000 a year, plus a percentage of the gate. This doesn't include income for hit LPs and singles. Of course, sister Loretta makes three times as much without doing so many one-nighters. But Loretta worked long and hard to get there. Right now Crystal's paying her dues.

"When I was growing up, Loretta was already singing," says Crystal, talking at home during a rare day off the road. Her home is near Nashville, where she lives with her Greek husband, 25-year-old Vassilios Gatzimos (everyone calls him Bill).

At home Crystal wears jeans and simple shirts over her svelte 5-foot, 1-inch, 101-pound figure. She is fresh looking without makeup, but has already adopted her sister's practice of never telling her age. (Ed. note: a cadish researcher reveals that Crystal is 24 and Loretta is 42.)

Crystal Gayle's brown eyes may be blue, but her career is pure gold and so is her marriage



"To me, she's a living legend," says Crystal of sister Loretta Lynn, reportedly 18 years her senior.

Both Crystal and Bill are still trying to get used to her growing popularity. "We had to give in and get an unlisted telephone number last May when we started getting weird calls," says Bill, a second-year law student at Vanderbilt University School of Law in Nashville.

They'll be in the position of many working couples when Bill graduates: searching for a home base that will satisfy both careers. Next summer they plan to try L.A., where, despite her impeccable country credentials, critics say Crystal's honeyed voice and varied singing style already belong.

Her albums, which stay on the coun-

try charts for a year at a time, are as likely to contain a tune by Cole Porter as by a country writer. And her size-five halter dresses and velvet pantsuits, draped by a three-foot cascade of dark hair, give Crystal a sophisticated veneer of understated sexuality rare among the wide-skirted dresses, elaborate wigs and rhinestones worn by her country-music peers.

The difference in style is not surprising. Although Loretta built a fortune on classic country songs and tales of rock-hard poverty in Butcher Hollow, Ky., Crystal's memories are of the Midwest. When Crystal was 4, her family moved to Wabash, Ind., to get her father away from the coal mines. She was the last of eight children, and Loretta had already moved away.

Their father, Ted Webb, died in 1959. Their mother, Clara Webb Butcher, who sometimes travels with her daughters, is considered the "backbone of the family" by Crystal. "Daddy couldn't get a job at first, so she got a job and sent for us. I was so young when we moved from Kentucky that I don't remember anything about it," says Crystal, whose voice has no trace of her sister's Southern drawl. "All I remember is sitting in the backyard in Wabash singing along to Leslie Gore's 'It's My Party.'"

During high school she worked weekends in places she "got into without getting in trouble" because of her age, earning \$20 a night for extra clothes. Her sister's success led Crystal and two other siblings to try their luck in Nashville. "I never considered doing anything else," she says.

So Brenda Gail Webb (Crystal's real name) arrived in Music City at age 17 fresh from high-school graduation. She was armed with a recording contract, a stage name of Loretta's devising (taken from a Nashville hamburger stand) and a single to record.

That contract with Decca Records resulted in little success—either for her or for the brother and sister who had accompanied her—and ended in a parting of the ways in 1973 when Crystal moved to United Artists.

(continued)

"That was a turning point," she says. "I remember starting with nothing and hoping. I remember trying to make the decision: Should I be a housewife or try a career? I didn't decide until I went to United Artists."

For the past two years, Crystal's decision has meant almost total separation from her husband, whom she married in 1971. They snatch days together when she comes into town. He'll put aside his books and take her to dinner or to a movie. They might even go shopping, one of her favorite pastimes. "You should see her at Christmas. She goes wild buying everything

for everybody," Bill says.

"In a way, we're going separate ways," she confesses. "But we both respect what we want to do. I didn't stand in his way when he wanted to go to law school, even if it meant going on the road without him. He sacrificed two years and traveled with me until I could afford a band."

Bill harbors no resentment about the long absences. "I know that she wants to do this. We're both loose with each other," he says. But he remembers a less hectic life fondly. "Now she has eight or nine people on the payroll," he says. "But I can remember

when we'd go on the road, just the two of us in a car."

They are looking forward to some time off over the holidays. "I'd like to join a health spa and get in shape," says Crystal. "I can't seem to get much exercise on the road. I want to be a housewife for a month, to clean the house and put up curtains." She sends a cloud of dust out of the drapes with a shake and points to a sheet covering a window in the back room.

"I'm really looking forward to this vacation. But when it's over, I'll be ready to go back to work thinking it's time to get things going again." □



Riding her own five acres is a treat for Crystal. She's away 180 days a year.



The money from gold records is putting husband Bill through law school.



Crystal's a "crossover" hit—as popular with pop fans as with country.