



LORETTA
LYNN &
FAMILY

Down-Home *for the* Holidays

At 84, she's still on the road and in the studio, but come Christmas, the Coal Miner's Daughter from Butcher Holler focuses on family and tradition

By EILEEN FINAN

Christmas with Memaw!

"All the kids, grandkids and great-grandkids come here," says Lynn (with 4 of her 24 great-grandchildren). "I put stoppers in my ears!"

Loretta Lynn's multigenerational brood is in full holiday spirit as they surround her, gamely singing classic Christmas carols while posing for pictures. Their matriarch, meanwhile, makes up new renditions ("Jingle bells, jingle bells, ho, ho, ho, ho, ho!"). "Memaw," explains granddaughter Tayla, 40, "does her own spin on everything!"

That's as true today as it was more than 50 years ago when the Kentucky-born singer shook up the Nashville scene with songs like "Don't Come Home A-Drinkin' (With Lovin' on Your Mind)" and the once-banned divorce tune "Rated X." Since then, the 84-year-old has been lauded with Grammys,



**'What's age
got to do with it?
I ain't ready to
lay down and die.
I can probably
outwork anyone
in Nashville'**

—LORETTA LYNN

Country Music Association Awards (including Entertainer of the Year in 1972, a first for a female artist) and a Kennedy Center Honor, but she doesn't take kindly to a suggestion that she rest on her laurels. "If I can't sing, throw me off the stage," Lynn says. But until then, "I ain't going nowhere."

Case in point: Despite a nasty fall in August that hospitalized her, Lynn will play a half dozen dates on the road in December. "Mom feeds on the love of all those fans," says daughter Peggy, 52. Adds Lynn: "I feel great." This year alone she released two new albums: *Full Circle*—her first since 2004's Grammy-winning *Van Lear Rose*—and *White Christmas Blue*, which celebrates a season that's close to her heart.

"When I was little, I never heard of Thanksgiving, and we didn't celebrate birthdays," Lynn says of her childhood in the hills of Butcher Holler, Ky. "Christmas was the one special day of the year." After her coal-miner father would kill a hog ("We didn't often get



LIFE, LOVE AND COUNTRY

1. "It was rough," Lynn says of her early days on the road away from family. "I don't advise it to any mother." 2. Despite their "little fights," husband Doo, who died in 1996, "meant everything to me. Still does." 3. "I don't have to work now, but I love to," says Lynn (filming *CMA Country Christmas* with Jennifer Nettles and Trisha Yearwood).

fresh meat"), little Loretta might get a doll hand-stitched by her mother from old socks. "I was about 10 when I got my first real doll," she recalls. "It was used, and Mommy bought it for 25 cents. That was about the greatest Christmas in the world."

These days Lynn can afford to spoil every one of her 4 children, 20 grandchildren, 24 great-grandkids and 3 great-great-grandkids, most of whom flock to her Hurricane Mills, Tenn., ranch home for Memaw's chicken and dumplings on Christmas Eve. But when the singer was a rising country star in the '60s and '70s, Christmas was a rare respite from the road. "I'd try to make it home for the holidays, but sometimes I was late," she says of touring when her children were young. "Sometimes I'd cry, but I had to work." Says daughter Cissie, 62: "She paid a big price to take care of all of us." At times she'd be gone so long she'd mix up twins Patsy and Peggy. "I'd say, 'Hey, twin, come here.' I'd have to look at them right straight in

the face before I could tell them apart." It's a memory that still pains her. "You never catch up the lost time," she says.

More painful still: her family losses, including oldest son Jack Benny, who drowned in 1984, and oldest daughter Betty, who died of emphysema in 2013. "When I lost my son, I figured I'd die," Lynn says. "I didn't think I'd make it through the funeral. And not a day goes by that Betty isn't on my mind. It's something you never get over."

In 1996 she buried her husband, Doo, whom she married when she was just 15. In many ways the two "fit like a glove," says daughter Patsy, 52, but as portrayed in her 1976 autobiography, *Coal Miner's Daughter*, theirs was a tempestuous union ("He never hit me one time that I didn't hit him back twice," she once said) — and Lynn didn't hesitate calling out her spouse's infidelities in song. "He'd take the money the songs would make

and run all the way to the bank, so he was happy!" Lynn says with a laugh now. At home Doo made the rules. "Mom would have to ask to be excused from the table, just like us kids," Cissie recalls. But, says Patsy, "songwriting was Mom's escape." And with songs like "The Pill," she became something of a feminist icon. "Women loved that," Lynn says of the tune about birth control. "It was something they couldn't say.... But they could play the record and say, 'Listen to this.'" Says Patsy: "Mom liked to be controversial. And she was totally ahead of her time."

Lynn still enjoys stirring the pot. "When she gets mischievous, her little feet start moving and you can see that sparkle in her eye," says Peggy. "She's full of life." That spark reappears as she recalls trying marijuana for the first time

recently. "I got glaucoma, and they gave me one of these cigarettes," she says. "I took one smoke off of it, and it hit me right here in the chest. I like to have died!

'Am I a feminist? At times, I guess maybe. I don't take no bull from nobody'

—LORETTA LYNN

Glaucoma is just going to have to take over." She does, however, indulge in a few vices: Peanut brittle, slasher films ("She's like a kid who loves the thrill," says Patsy, "and then she can't sleep!"), ice cream and tabloids are favorites. Cuddled in bed

in her pj's, the singer will page through the *National Enquirer* "and believes it all!" says granddaughter Emmy. "Except when it's about her!"

After all, Lynn has always been best at writing her own story—and she's not done yet. "I've got 90-something new songs I've already cut," she says, vowing to release more albums starting next year. "I ain't tired and I ain't gonna quit." ●



The Lynn Kin

"Everybody holds hands and prays before the meal," says granddaughter Tayla of holidays in Hurricane Mills. "It's love and hugs and good food."