



KELLIE PICKLER

Small Town Girl

America just keeps on voting for Kellie Pickler! As an American Idol Season 5 finalist, Kellie Pickler earned a reputation as being cute, honest and well maybe, a little ditzy. “I just say what I’m thinking,” admits Pickler. “And if I don’t know the answer or what it is somebody is talking about, well, I ask. If I didn’t know the answer but acted like I did, well, isn’t *that* playing dumb?” As usual, Kellie makes a lot of sense.

Fast forward almost two years and fans keep voting for Kellie. Her debut album, *Small Town Girl*, was certified Gold just three months after its release and the album has yielded three top 15 singles. The first song “Red High Heels,” went top 15 and as a co-writer, earned Kellie an ASCAP song that was one of the most played songs of 2006 – 07. The deeply personal, “I Wonder,” the song she wrote about her mother, was her next top 15 hit and her performance of the song on the CMA Awards was one of the highlights of the evening.

Her current song, “Things That Never Cross A Man’s Mind,” is top 20 and Kellie found it to be a favorite among the U.S. troops in Iraq when she made her first trip overseas on a USO Tour in December. A documentary of the weeklong visit was turned into an hour special that is running on Great American Country TV. The special was the highest rated show in its debut week.

Kellie performs all of her hits and more on tour. She spent 2007 on tour with Brad Paisley and his “Bonfires & Amplifiers Tour” and 2008 has kept her busy opening for Rascal Flatts. She’s also now performing songs that she’s written for her soon to be released sophomore album.

Working with producer/songwriter Chris Lindsey, Kellie has recorded several songs that she has written and the first single “Don’t You Know You’re Beautiful” from the new project is getting airplay. She’s also written with Aimee Mayo and good friend and fellow artist Taylor Swift. A new album should be ready in late summer or early fall.

It’s a pretty wild ride considering Kellie’s somewhat twisted fairy tale begins at the Stanly Memorial Hospital on June 28th 1986, in Albemarle, North Carolina, a small town 45 minutes from Charlotte. When her parents split up and her mom left, Clyde “Bo” Pickler, Jr. was left with a two year old baby girl. When he was drinking or doing drugs, she lived with her grandparents, Faye and Clyde Pickler, Sr.

“I’ve seen my whole family struggle—with money, with relationships, with alcohol, and I thought there must be a better way. I wasn’t sure how I would get out, but I knew I would.” In school, she dove into every activity that would put her in the spotlight---gymnastics, drama, varsity cheerleader. “I’ve always been comfortable in front of people. I’ve always been the joker, the class clown. Music and laughter is how I dealt with everything. I’d rather laugh about it than cry about it.”

But, her grandmother's death when she was a sophomore in high school left a void in her life and a hole in her heart that has yet to heal. "Of all the things I have been through in my life, the hardest thing I've ever gone through is the loss of my grandmother. She was always there for me, and then she was gone."

Friends alerted Kellie to the 5th season of *American Idol*. "They announced they would hold auditions in Greensboro, North Carolina. So my grandpa Ken and I loaded up and off we went. It was an adventure."

She zipped through the initial phase of auditions---three rounds before she ever got to Paula, Randy and Simon. "By then, the *American Idol* people knew me pretty well, they knew my story. So I had nothing to hide about my background. All I had to do was sing. I did *Since You've Been Gone* and then about 20 seconds of *Broken Wing* and the next thing you know, I was going to Hollywood!"

The flight to Hollywood was Pickler's first time on a plane, and her feet barely hit the ground when she was off and running. "The first week, we call it Hollywood Week, was scary. They were sending a few people home every day. Then there was the top 24, and then when they cut that down to the top 12, we moved into the apartment."

Kellie's vibrant vocals, boundless energy, bubbly personality and refreshing honesty not only won over the judges, but endeared her to viewers as well, and she made it all the way to the top six, before being voted off the show. The next week, I was in New York doing all kinds of press, then I flew to Nashville to meet with [BNA label head] Joe Galante and signed a record deal. The tour started and in between shows, I was recording my album. It was a whirlwind."

She also, for the first time, started writing songs. "I had tried to do it before, but I couldn't figure it out. I was making it much more complicated than it needed to be. Then they put me with Aimee Mayo, and it all came together. She and I are on the same path when it comes to songwriting, and she was such a gift to me. She helped me write what I wanted to say."

The two most poignant and deeply personal songs are *I Wonder* and *My Angel*, written about her mother and her grandmother, respectively. "*I Wonder* was really hard for me to record and sing live," says Kellie. Performing the song has been a source of therapy that has, just recently, seen her able to sing the song without tears.

My Angel, on the other hand, blossoms with love for the woman who planted flowers with Kellie, her beloved grand mother; she seeded Kellie's dreams. "I dedicated the album to my grandmother, and wanted that song to close the record," says Kellie, her smile lighting her face.

With Kellie's own dreams taking root, she reflects on her past and finds strength and inspiration. "What I've learned the last year is that no dream is too big. You can let things bring you down or you can use them to make you stronger. I used everything that happened to me as fuel to get me where I am today. You can't give up on your dreams 'cause sometimes, that's all you have. You should always give yourself the benefit of the doubt."

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