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Welcome to her world: a fabulous career, lots of money... and a nagging feeling that she's still not good enough. A revealing interview with Dolly Parton, country's queen.

BY SHERYL KAHN

"You want to know the real Dolly from the bull?" asks Parton. "Listen to the words of my songs."

PHOTOGRAPHED BY RANDEE ST. NICHOLAS; HAIR AND MAKEUP, DAVID BLAIR; STYLIST, DEBRA MCGUIRE; DRESS AND BOOTS BY TONY CHASE; SHOPPING INFORMATION, P. 138

planet LILYWOOD



Honey, you need some fringe and flash." With a once-over, Dolly Parton determines what it will take to turn a black-clad New Yorker into someone who'd fit right in at the Grand Ole Opry. Parton, after all, is an expert at packaging: Decked out in a low-cut black-and-white polka-dot minidress, matching mules and earrings, and hair bigger than the state of Texas, she's every inch the image she's spent more than 40 years creating. "I'm sure I look stupid or trashy to other people," she says defiantly. "Folks say to me, 'Aren't you getting too old to wear that kind of stuff?' But this is who I am—all the paint, powder and polka dots."

This month, Parton will turn 50, a sobering milestone for most women but a mere stepping stone for her. "Fifty may sound terrible, but it doesn't feel terrible to me," she says. "I look at it as a beginning. It's taken me so long to get where I am, to know myself and what I want—and what I don't want is to go out to pasture!"

There seems to be little chance of that. Parton has visions of her Dollywood theme park going global, and she's planning to create children's books, albums and videos.

Yet despite all the brass, sass and ambition, Parton harbors surprising insecurities. She jokes constantly, and a lot of her wise-cracks are directed at herself:

**Parton's shots:
The way she was**



Second grade

Parton's been working on her looks her whole life. "I never thought I was pretty," she says. In grade school, to make herself more glamorous, she wore flour for face powder and pokeberry juice for rouge.



Senior year

"As I got older, the hair got bigger—and other things as well," she jokes. "I don't think my look has changed much."



Freshman year



Sweet 16

Driving down Nashville's Music Row, she spies a billboard heralding her latest album, *Something Special*. "Don't that just figure?" she laughs, noting its location. "Right smack next door to the Piggly Wiggly supermarket!"

Though now svelte, Parton won't let herself forget her "pigging out" period when she carried a hefty 150 pounds on her five-foot frame. "Lordy, I was a hog!"

And while dozens of stores in the city hawk Dolly merchandise (key chains, T-shirts, baseball hats), Parton claims, "I don't feel like a complete success yet. I've got the country thing, but I want to have a consistent streak of really big hits on the pop charts. I've never had that—I go hot and cold." It's been nearly a decade since one of her albums—1987's *Trio*, with Emmylou Harris and Linda Ronstadt—crossed over to the Top 10 pop chart.

Parton also yearns to make her mark in movies—over the years she's had a few successes (*Nine to Five*, *Steel Magnolias*) and a few flops (*Rhinestone*, *Straight Talk*, *The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas*). "I like acting if I understand the role," she says. "Then it comes naturally to me. But I'm no good at bull, so if a role doesn't fit, I can't make it." She's also eager for TV triumphs, perhaps remembering her less-than-successful weekly variety show in 1987–88. She's spent two years developing a sitcom for CBS, about an ex-singer who owns a beauty shop, which she hopes will finally see the light of day this spring. And this month, she begins filming the musical ▶

CELEBRITY CLOSE-UP

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Annie Get Your Gun for a CBS television movie in May.

When reminded of all she has accomplished (countless Grammys and Country Music Association awards, a star on the Walk of Fame, even an Oscar nomination for her song "Nine to Five" and a rumored \$100 million empire consisting of wigs, cosmetics, film production and Dollywood), Parton fidgets in her seat. "I am thankful for everything I have," she insists. "I know how far I've come."

Her background, in fact, is the stuff of rags-to-riches legends: Parton and her 11 brothers and sisters shared a cabin in the Smoky Mountains and wore coats stitched together from swatches of cloth. Her talent and her fiery determination put her, at six, in the spotlight of her grandfather's church choir. Seven years later, she landed a recording contract. "I wanted to be a star," she says. "I just wasn't gonna take no for an answer."

That's still true today. "I'm never satisfied," Parton says. "I have so much energy that if I don't channel it creatively, I turn it on myself and get depressed."

And with that drive and creativity comes an undeniable steeliness. People who think she's a pushover should think again: "I'd hate to think I'm *that* vanilla," she admits. "I try to be friendly, but when people are mean, I just want to say, 'Stick it where the sun don't shine.' Sometimes I do."

Her determination has helped her weather controversy as well. Tabloids have had a field day with her friendship with Judy Ogle (they've been "constant companions" since they were in the Servier County High School Band

Dolly's all-time favorite partners



From top: With her grandfather; Willie Nelson and Kenny Rogers; Minnie Pearl and Loretta Lynn.



together) and have accused her of having affairs with any number of men, including Burt Reynolds (her costar in *The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas*) and country Casanova Billy Ray Cyrus. Her husband of 30 years, Carl Dean, prefers to ignore the talk and stay out of the spotlight; he and Parton are never photographed—and rarely even seen—together.

"People always ask me if I've had extramarital affairs," Parton says. "You can just draw your own conclusions. All I will say is my husband is a wonderful man and we'll be together till one of us dies. I wouldn't want to know if he was having an affair, and he wouldn't want to know if I was."

An admitted plethora of plastic surgeries ("nips, tucks and several sucks") leaves people wondering what is—and isn't—the real Dolly. "I don't itemize," she laughs. "But I don't see the harm in making yourself look better when you're in the public eye. Sometimes I see myself on TV and think, 'What is that turkey jowl hanging from my neck?' or 'I better get my pair off the ground!' That's when I do something about it, and I'll continue to do so as the need arises—or, in my case, falls."

While she won't apologize for her actions or her outspokenness, Parton will admit to at least one regret in her life. "I used to think I wished I had kids," she says. "But now I'm not sure that's what God intended me for. I have a lot of kids that I'm 'Aunt Granny' to in my family, and I think I probably make a better aunt than a momma. This way, there's more of me to go around."

Many of Parton's songs are about regrets: love affairs gone sour, misplaced trust, the man who got away. She's re-recorded three of her hits—"I Will Always Love You," "Jolene" and "The Seeker" (all of which she wrote)—not to wallow in the past but to give them new meaning and, hopefully, a younger audience. "I've lived and loved all the songs on my albums in one way or another," she says. "Writing music is like going to a psychiatrist for me. I just write about my feelings—nothing I experience goes to waste."

Inspiration for future songs may come from an unusual source: the O.J. Simpson trial, which Parton, ▶

the world according to Dolly

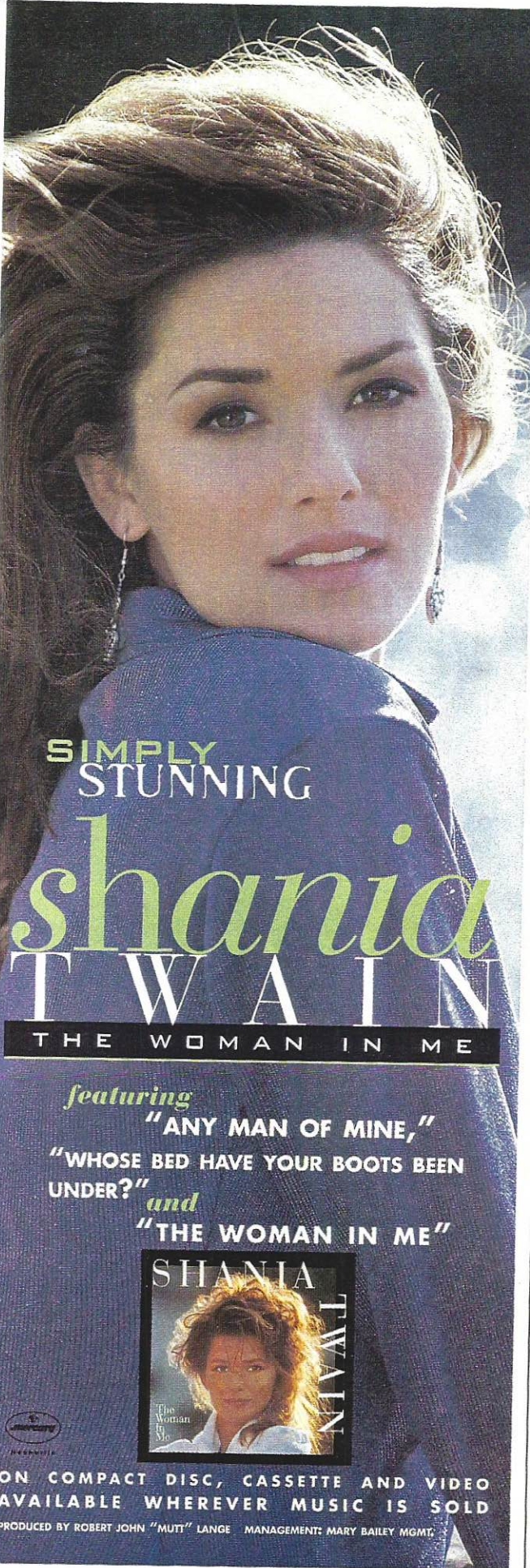
"I'm proud of my breasts—we've made each other rich and famous. I just don't know if they've carried me or I've carried them."

"I believe in my cosmetics line. There are plenty of charities for the homeless. Isn't it time somebody helped the homely?"

"I have agreed to pose nude for *Penthouse* on my 100th birthday. Everybody is going to be sorry."

"I feel that if you are a star, you owe it to your fans to look like one."

—Kate Cavanagh



SIMPLY STUNNING

shania

TWAIN

THE WOMAN IN ME

featuring
"ANY MAN OF MINE,"
"WHOSE BED HAVE YOUR BOOTS BEEN UNDER?" and
"THE WOMAN IN ME"



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CELEBRITY CLOSE-UP

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like most Americans, was glued to all summer. "I would like to write about it—I found it fascinating," she says. "I hate to see people's lives



Author, author! Parton plugging her autobiography and children's book in 1994.

in a mess, but I was intrigued by these lawyers and their games. I think if I'd been on the jury, I would have come to the same conclusion—there's always reasonable doubt. And I believe if O.J. did it, he'll pay anyway. But it did bring many things out into the open, like domestic feuds and racism. I don't think

we'll see racial harmony in this lifetime unless God intervenes."

But Parton puts a lot of faith in her faith: "I'm a very spiritual person," she says. "I believe that God has a reason and a purpose for everything and everyone—and I believe there is life after death, which makes turning 50 or 60 or even 80 not so scary for me. I think this life is the hard part—after that it's pie. You just do the very best you can while you're here and make every moment count." ■

Dolly does Hollywood



Rhinestone

As a music promoter, left, making Sly Stallone shine; swapping beauty-shop talk, below, with Olympia Dukakis.



Steel Magnolias



The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas

Call me madam, above, with costar Burt Reynolds; as a spunky secretary, right, with Lily Tomlin and Dabney Coleman.



Nine to Five

TOP: JANET GOUGH/CELEBRITY PHOTO; BOTTOM, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT: PHOTOFEEST (2); THE KOEAL COLLECTION (2)