

# Life Takes Turns

After a painful divorce and professional changes in “the toughest year” of his life, Blake Shelton moves on—with a hit single, his new *Pure BS* album and his relationship with Miranda Lambert.

Story by **David Scarlett**

Photos by **Kristin Barlowe**

“THE FUTURE LOOKS WAY BETTER TO ME RIGHT NOW THAN the past has,” chuckles Blake Shelton as he reflects on the tumultuous year he’s just been through and takes stock of where he’s headed. “I’ve got a single out that’s doin’ really well,” he says of his Top 20 hit “Don’t Make Me,” the powerful debut single from his *Pure BS* CD, due out May 1. “And my personal life is startin’ to fall back into place again.

“I just have a good feelin’. I feel like a huge load has been taken off of me in the past couple of months and I’m just ready to pick up and move on now.”

When Blake talks about a huge load, he’s not kidding. The guy who’s appreciated nearly as much for his quick wit and ready smile as for his great country vocals and riveting videos didn’t have much to smile about last year as he went through some major personal and professional changes.

“Last year was the toughest year

of my life. No question,” declares Blake quietly. “There’s no contest.



“I don’t know if it’s because it’s finally over that I feel really good now, or if it’s because I feel good about everything that happened. I’m not sure. But I can tell you, I’m *really* glad it’s over.”

When Blake looks back on the past year, there’s no question what was the most traumatic event for him. “First and foremost before

anything, my divorce from Kaynette,” he declares of the end of his not quite three-year marriage. “That was horrible. I hated that.

“Then on top of that, I got a new manager, then went out and found some new producers. And that was tough to walk in the studio with somebody besides Bobby Braddock, who basically I credit with discovering me and gettin’ me a record deal, and all things good in the early days. [*Bobby did produce four songs on BS.*]

“But, you know, life takes turns. And sometimes you just gotta go with ‘em. And maybe you’ll find out it was the wrong thing to do on down the road. But I just felt like there were some things that I needed to explore for myself that I didn’t want to look back on someday and wish I had.”

While Blake candidly talks about the challenging times he’s been through—some of which he initiat-







**"Oklahoma is just home and family to me," declares Blake. "And it's hard to get that feelin' anywhere else."**





## BLAKE SHELTON

ed—one that came as a total surprise happened when the usually unemotional Oklahoman first heard a demo of “Back There Again,” a beautiful ballad he later put on *Pure BS*.

“When I first heard that song I was right in the middle of separatin’ from

crazy,” he laughs. “I think our problem is that we’re so much alike.

“I really admire her. I think she’s a badass songwriter and incredible singer. [*Her Crazy Ex-Girlfriend CD is also out May 1.*] She’s a rock star. She really is. And it’s neat for me to be around somebody like her because,

All I can really tell you is I have a lot of fun when I’m around Miranda. We’re just kinda takin’ it slow. But we’re definitely havin’ a lot of fun together.”

Blake laughs about a special cuisine offer Miranda’s dad, Rick—a federally licensed nuisance gator removal officer—has extended. “I’ve not had his

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my wife,” he recalls. “There’s a lot of stuff that was goin’ on inside of me that I guess I didn’t even know about. So I heard that song and had to stop it about three quarters of the way through. And I’ll never forget it . . . it was on my tour bus in Kansas City. And I just had to stop it, man. I don’t cry a lot, but I broke down and just couldn’t stop myself from cryin’. I tried to play it again, and started cryin’ again. It was overwhelming. That’s the first time that’s ever happened to me . . . ever. It was just a big deal to me.”

Blake admits the lyrics in the song hit very close to home. “There’s a lot of truth in it,” he confides.

“It’s not the whole story obviously. But there’s just enough in it that I just couldn’t hold it back.”

While Blake has had huge successes with heart-tugging ballads—songs like “Austin,” “The Baby,” “Goodbye Time” and “Don’t Make Me”—they’re not the kinds of songs he gravitates toward as a listener. “If I’m just driving around listening to songs on the radio, I turn the channel if a ballad comes on,” he chuckles. “I want to hear up-tempo fun stuff. But it seems like when I get in the studio, the magic always happens for me with my ballads.” Fortunately, *BS* contains enough strong ballads and fun up-tempo to satisfy all of his fans.

Blake grins as he explains that he and number-one fan, girlfriend and fellow country star Miranda Lambert, have decided to limit the amount of time they spend together.

“We’ve made a rule that we don’t see each other more than once every two weeks for two or three days, because we drive each other

musically, we couldn’t be more different.

“But you gotta respect her that she knows what she likes. And I’m the same way with what I like. Sometimes it’s bad when we’re driving around listening to music. It’s usually a fight over what station we’ve got on!

“I don’t know where it’s goin’ with us.

**S**ince moving from Tennessee back to Oklahoma, Blake’s taken the hands-on approach to clearing some of his 1200-acre spread. “I’ve got a bulldozer I’ve been

learnin’ to use over the past couple months,” he relates.

“I truly do suck. It looks

like a tornado

has gone through when I’m done

movin’ stuff I want to move! I’ve gotta be sure this music career keeps happenin’ so I don’t have to be a heavy equipment operator. I’d get fired in a second.”

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fried gator tail yet,” laughs Blake, “but Miranda tells me it’s incredible. I don’t know if that sounds good or not.”

But something Blake *does* know sounds good is “The Last Country Song,” the rowdy final tune on *BS* and a song Blake co-wrote several years ago. “When we wrote the song,” recalls Blake, “it had lines talkin’ about George Jones’ ‘He Stopped Lovin’ Her Today’ and John Anderson’s ‘Swingin’? And we thought it would be cool to have *them* sing those lines in the song.”

Long story short, Bobby Braddock called George and John, and they came into the studio with Blake to sing on the tune. “Just being in the studio with those guys at the same time—if you ever want to see me speechless, put John Anderson and George Jones in a room, and I’ll be sittin’ over in the corner just starin’ at ‘em, listenin’ to ‘em visit. It was a pretty big deal to me.”

While “Country” is a huge highlight on *BS*, it’s far from the only fun, hell-raisin’ song. The project’s opening number, “This Can’t Be Good,” is a tune Blake co-wrote that draws heavily on his own experiences. “I’ve just done stupid stuff along the way—things like maybe not comin’ home one night in high school and thinkin’ my dad would just overlook somethin’ like that!” laughs Blake. “You *know* you’ve got a beating comin’, but you just can’t stop yourself sometimes I guess.”

“The More I Drink,” possibly the album’s next single, is already a huge crowd favorite. “This song is just so much fun,” smiles Blake. “And it’s just so true. The funniest things in life are the real things that happen. I see it every night. Whether it’s me bein’ that guy in the song or me onstage watchin’ people out in the audience live that song. You just

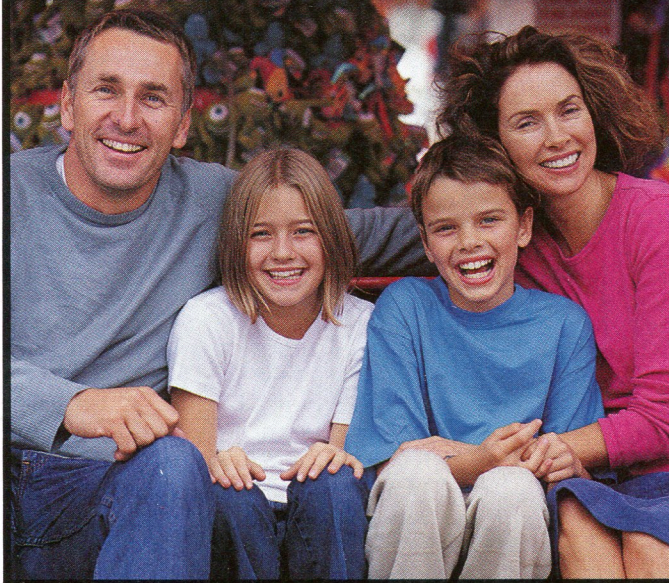


"The funniest things in life are the real things that happen," says Blake.



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gotta laugh at yourself, because alcohol makes you do funny things.

"I can't tell you how many times they've tried to run me out of a karaoke bar 'cause I wouldn't get off the stage! Tracy Byrd is my specialty—I do 'I'm From the Country,' 'Watermelon Crawl,' 'Drinkin' Bone.' I'll do 'I'm From the Country' three and four times a night."

Tracy's been known to do Blake's material, too. "Me and Tracy had a karaoke battle—the Karaoke Grand Nationals—in Oklahoma last year," chuckles Blake. "I think my performance of 'I'm From the Country' stole the show, but his performance of 'The



"Craig Morgan's gonna come out and turkey hunt with me this year, which I'm lookin' forward to," relates Blake. "It's a lot of fun when I get to see special friends like Craig and hang out." And it's good to see Blake having fun again.

As he looks back on the past year, some things in his life have been positive and some have not. But, considering what he's come through, Blake couldn't be happier—with his new album, with Miranda, with his place in Oklahoma and his good relationship with Kaynette, someone he still considers one of his "best friends in the world."

And, in contrast to the lyrics of his

**I really admire Miranda. And it's neat for me to be around somebody like her because, musically, we couldn't be more different.**

Baby' wasn't bad either."

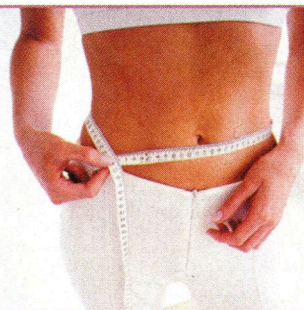
Blake's move back to Oklahoma after living several years in Tennessee was one of the bright spots in his past year. He bought a 1200-acre spread with a hunting lodge on it in Tishomingo, about 30 miles south of

his Ada hometown. "I was just lookin' for a big piece of land that had a lot of wildlife on it. You know me, I was lookin' for the wildlife, and somewhere that I can do my farmin' that I like to do [see sidebar on page 45]," explains Blake, an avid outdoorsman.

tune "It Ain't Easy Bein' Me" from the new album, Blake admits that it's pretty good bein' him these days.

"I don't know if it's more a good feeling about my career or about life in general," he admits. "But I'm in a good place now." **CW**

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