

HOMERANGE ON THE RANGE

It's 45 minutes to the nearest Wal-Mart. There isn't a gas station for miles. Some of the country roads aren't even listed on a map.

And that's just the way Blake Shelton likes it. "I *wanted* to live out here because it's so far away from everything," says Blake, standing in a field on his 460-acre property in Centerville, Tenn. "My favorite thing about this place is, I can do anything out here I want to – within reason. And it's *my* world. There's nobody out here to answer to but myself."

Well, that's not entirely true. Blake also shares his slice of paradise with 60 chickens, 15 ducks, 20 hogs, several guineas, two dogs – and one fat turkey named ... Turkey. The bird greets visitors by wobbling across the front yard, feathers proudly displayed.

"I got Turkey in Arkansas last year," explains Blake, laughing at the sight of his plump pet trying to walk faster than his little feet will carry him. "I was out on the road playing a show and bought 12 baby turkeys, each about four inches tall. I brought 'em back home and one by one they started disappearing. Then I figured out there was a fox getting them. So by the time they were grown I only had two left. Now I'm down to the one.

"But nobody messes with Turkey now because he's so big. I don't think even a coyote would mess with him. Sometimes I think he'll outlive me. And he has it better than I do – all he does is stand around and eat. Eats, gobbles and stands in the shade, 24 hours a day!"

But there's no such rest for Blake. "When I'm home, it's nonstop," says the Oklahoma native, who hires a caretaker to look after the place while he's on the road. "There's *always* something I need to be doing. Once you get one thing finished, something else happens. For example, we finally got some ponds built and then we had this big flood that broke the dam on a couple of them. So now we've got to start all over. I've learned that if you buy this much property, you've got a lot of responsibility that comes with it, too."

In the entertainment world Blake's a rising star, but here

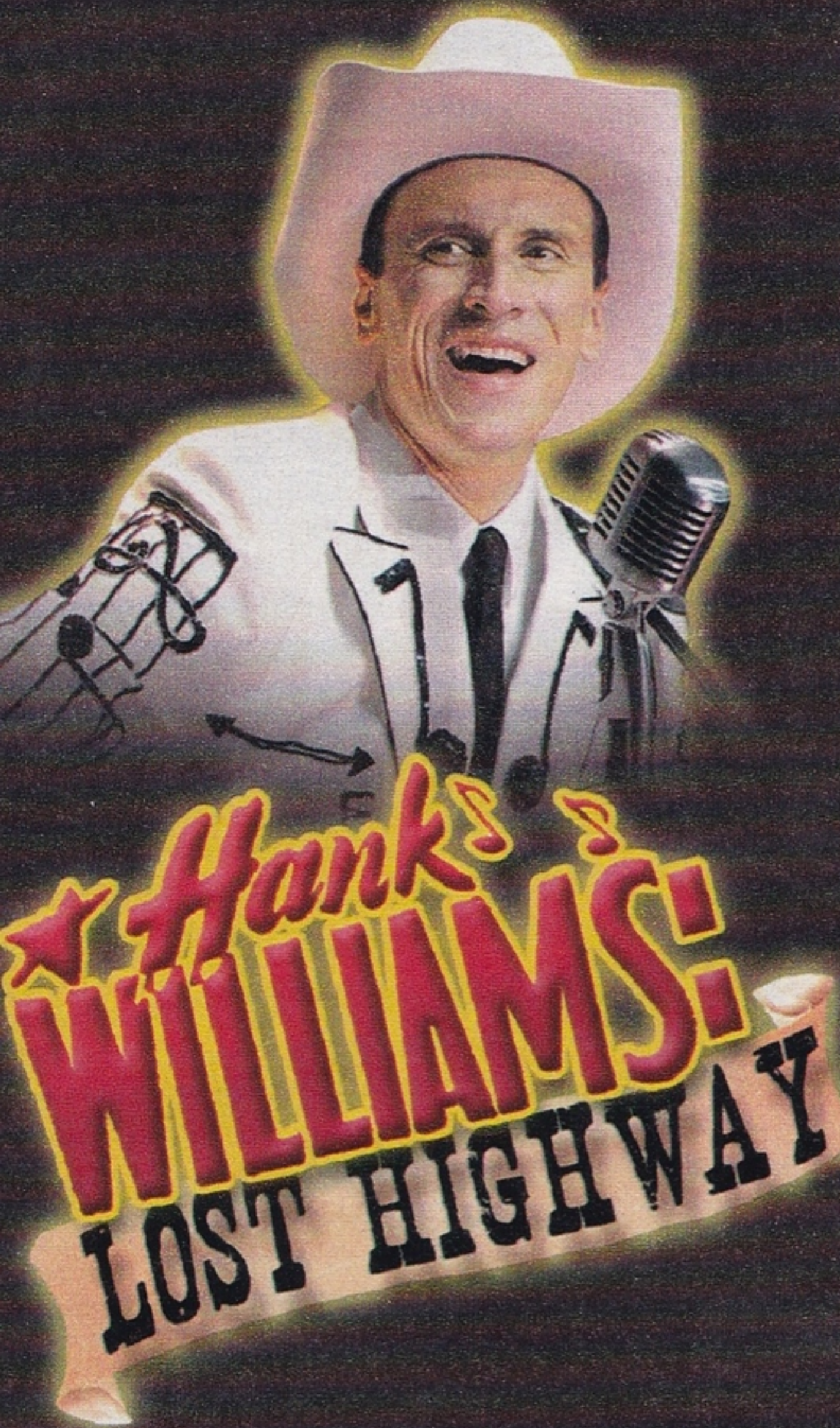
When Blake Shelton comes off the road, he finds a slice of heaven waiting for him on his sprawling Tennessee farm

Story by Wendy Newcomer

Photos by Tim Campbell



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Blake Shelton

on the farm he's just a regular guy. "I normally wake up about 8, go outside and have a cup of coffee with the chickens and feed them," he says. "Then I'll make sure the ducks are all there. Then I'll get on the four-wheeler and go check on all the hogs and make sure they're all still there, too. And I've also got all these crops — corn, soybeans and all kinds of stuff. I normally end up working on crops when I'm here."

**... sometimes
I think I want
to go back to
Oklahoma ...**

It's no coincidence that hardworking Blake selected "Heavy Liftin'" as his new single.

"The song talks about the kind of lifestyle I live now," explains Blake, "and not being afraid to get dirty and work hard and do whatever you should do as a man. Besides that, I love the feel of the song. I love Travis Tritt, Waylon Jennings and Hank Williams Jr. — and there's a lot of those influences in the melody.

"I heard 'Heavy Liftin'' for the first time last summer and decided then that I wanted to put it on the album. It just sounded like something I felt comfortable singing — and it shows a side of what I do that people haven't heard yet."

"'Heavy Liftin'" is the up-tempo, rocking side of my music that I haven't been able to release to radio until now," adds Blake, who's scored big hits with ballads like "Austin" and "The Baby." "That's the main reason I'm excited about getting it out there — it's a new phase for me as an artist."

The newly engaged Blake will go through yet another phase when he marries his fiancée, Kaynette Williams. But wedding bells aren't likely to chime any time soon. Blake's not getting cold feet — it's Kaynette who has her reasons to hold off.

"We're still waiting to find out when she's going to get her braces off," explains Blake. "That's got to be the first time this has ever happened to a wedding — being postponed because of somebody having braces!" he adds with a laugh. "Especially for *this* long."





Blake's out-of-the-way haven feels like heaven. "There's nobody out here to answer to but myself," he declares.

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Bonding with his pet turkey – and with fiancée Kaynette Williams.

Blake Shelton

She's had 'em for about two years, but the orthodontist just

doesn't want to give a date for sure yet, because according to him, her teeth are still not ready. Kaynette says she's had to deal with them for two years – she doesn't want to deal with them for the rest of her life, every time she looks at the wedding pictures!

In the meantime, Blake's planning on hitting the road hard, opening around 40 shows for fellow Oklahoman Toby Keith. "This tour is something I've needed desperately," says Blake frankly, "because I'm at a point in my career where I've accomplished a few things – but I still need another big break, as far as getting in front of a lot of people.

"I've got a lot of respect for what Toby has to say in his music and where he stands as a person," he adds, "and I hope he has the same for me. It's going to be a learning experience for me because Toby's continued to build over the past 10 years, until he became this guy who has this incredible, long string of hits behind him. He's not a flash in the pan – he has a long, sustained career. That's something I hope I can do."

Blake takes a deep breath as he surveys the vast land in front of him.

"I think I'll be here for a long time," he predicts, "but sometimes I think I want to go back to Oklahoma and get a place there. The only time I ever have thoughts of leaving is when I'm out on the road. When I'm actually here and it's a nice day, I don't think I ever want to leave."

