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People **COUNTRY SPECIAL**

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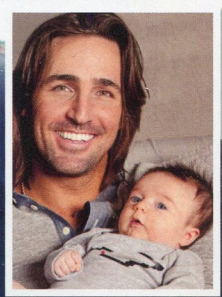


ON
THE
ROAD
WITH
GEORGE
STRAIT

Exclusive!

BLAKE **SHELTON** **GETS PERSONAL**

The singer reflects on his no-secrets marriage and tabloid attacks: 'I feel like a target now'



JAKE
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People SPECIALS

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Photograph by Jeff Lipsky. Groomer: Amanda Craig; Stylists: Trish Townsend & Joseph Turla/Dew Beauty Agency; Prop Stylist: Anna Webb; Shirt: Michael Bastian. Left inset: John Shearer/Invision/AP; Right inset: Erin Patrice O'Brien

JEFF LIPSKY

**PROUD
OKLAHOMA
NATIVE**

BAD*BOY

**GRAND OLE
OPRY MEMBER**

HEARTTHROB

TWITTER KING (2.6 million followers)

THE MANY SIDES

LIFE OF THE PARTY!

of BLAKE SHELTON

JOKES-TELLER

FUNNY, FRANK AND SURPRISINGLY SENSITIVE, THE MULTIFACETED STAR REVEALS WHO HE REALLY IS (WHEN WE'RE NOT LOOKING)

by EILEEN FINAN photographs by JEFF LIPSKY

HUSBAND

(two years in May!)

SMART ALECK

COUNTRY SINGER

TV STAR



ENTERTAINER

(PHOTOGRAPHED IN NASHVILLE
ON FEBRUARY 26, 2013)





BLAKE SHELTON

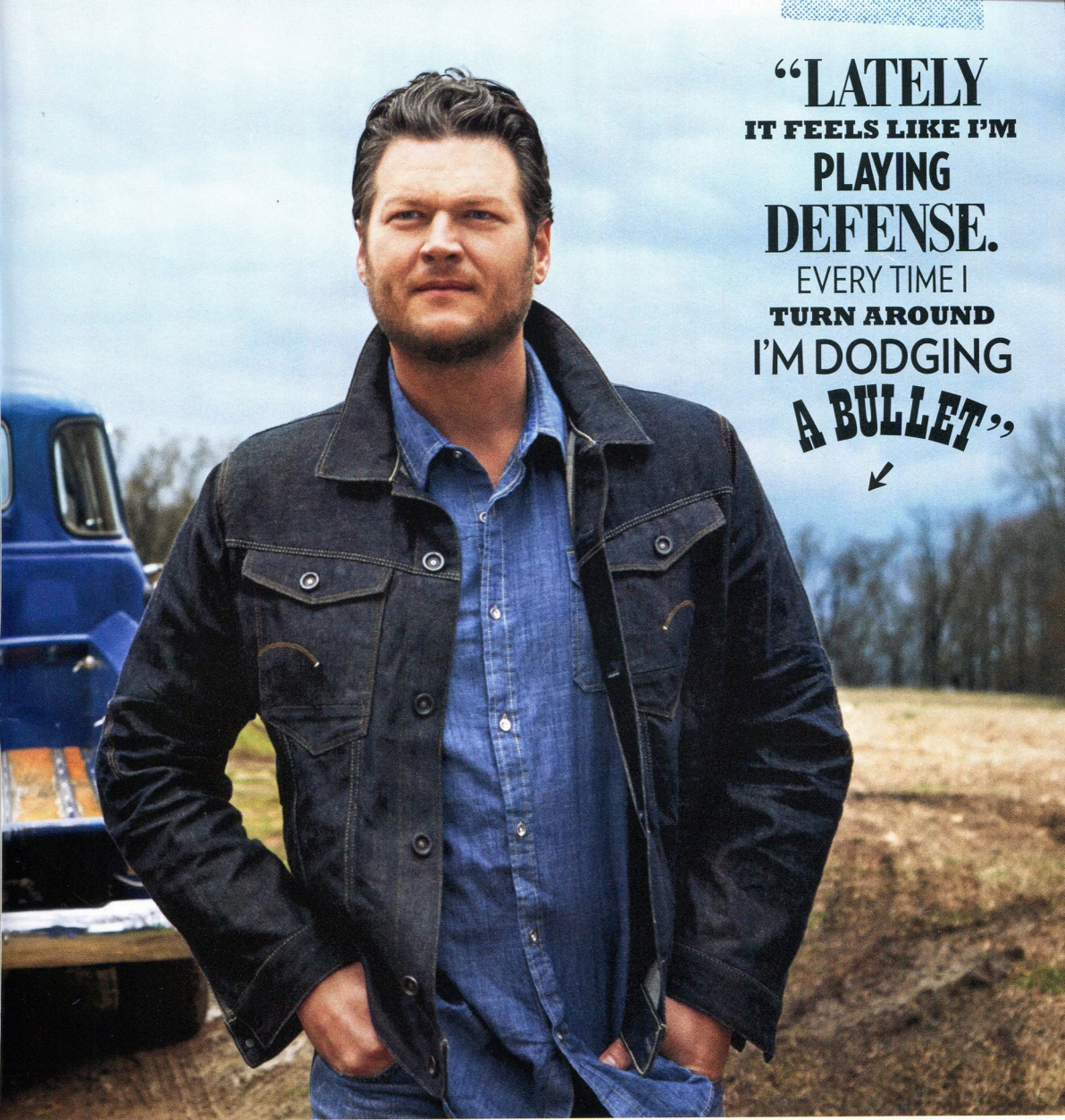
IS AMBLING TOWARD A DRESSING ROOM BACKSTAGE AT THE GRAND OLE OPRY, NODDING AND OFFERING A GOOD-NATURED GRIN TO A GROUP OF WOMEN CLUSTERED IN A DOORWAY WATCHING HIM PASS BY

One blonde onlooker—the mother of another act, it turns out—giggles and swoons as he walks past, grabbing the door frame to steady herself. A few feet down the crowded hall, a pair of young women—relatives of another artist on the evening's bill—approach, hoping for a hug and a picture. Blake supplies both, calling out jovially, “Can you crop out my third chin?” Before the photo's even snapped, an autograph-seeking circle forms around him.

Such is the stop-them-in-their-tracks star power the 36-year-old singer now wields, even in the hallways of the Opry, where country legends are commonplace. With a wicked sense of humor, an equally white-hot wife in Miranda Lambert and a career that boasts 13 No. 1s, a megahit TV show and three nods at this year's Academy of Country Music Awards, the reigning CMA Entertainer of the Year has risen to mainstream celebrity status as he releases his 10th studio album, *Based on a True Story*. . . . But as an Okie whose idea of a good time is spending the morning clearing brush from his Tishomingo farm and the afternoon tending to a burn pile (vodka and Sprite Zero in hand), Shelton still has a hard time believing his own hype. “I spent so many years wishing for these opportunities, you'll never see me running out of a restaurant with my sunglasses and a hoodie on 'cause I don't want to be noticed,” he says. “I just don't take myself that seriously.”



It's a sentiment that runs in the family. Take a recent night out in L.A. after taping *The Voice* when Lambert, Shelton and Shelton's mom went to dinner with fellow *Voice* coach Christina Aguilera and her boyfriend. “I wish I could have videoed that night—my mom, who never leaves Tishomingo, and Christina Aguilera!” Shelton says. As they left the restaurant, paparazzi began snapping pictures, setting off a flare of flashes. “We stepped out and couldn't even see. My mom loved it. She's waving, saying, ‘I'm the mom!’ It's like, how the hell did any of us get here? Me, much less my mom!”



**“LATELY
IT FEELS LIKE I’M
PLAYING
DEFENSE.
EVERY TIME I
TURN AROUND
I’M DODGING
A BULLET,”**



Shelton revels in the silliness of celebrity, chatting amiably with TMZ crews who stop him on the Hollywood streets and delighting (and disgusting) his followers with his frequently profane tweets. But lately he’s been reminded of the pitfalls of fame as well.

Earlier this year, comments he made in a GAC interview—dismissing those who complain modern country music isn’t country enough as “old farts”—set off a firestorm among some of Nashville’s old guard. The singer found himself on the defensive, with some critics even questioning the legiti-

macy of his 2010 Opry induction. “When that blew up, I called my manager, and he said, ‘Everybody pulls for you as long as you’re two steps behind, but the second you’re on top of that mountain, they’re trying to knock you back down,’” he says. “I did feel like the last three or four years people were pulling for me, and the last six months, people are pushing. I just feel more like a target now. I’m not whining about it, but it does make you feel like every time you open your mouth, you can’t be honest anymore.”

If Shelton’s recent visit to the Opry is any indication, that



**"I KNOW
I CAN BE A
SMART
ASS.**

**I CAN'T RESIST
LAYING
IT OUT
THERE"**



rift has healed. As Shelton waited in the wings to take the stage, veterans like Jim Ed Brown and Jeannie Seely came by to wish him well. "We love you," Seely told him. "The truth just hurts some people." Shelton, head bowed, replied, "I'm sorry for it. But I appreciate your saying that."

Even more upsetting to the singer, however, has been seeing his marriage become the stuff of tabloid fodder. With magazines and websites speculating on everything from whether a baby is on the way to claims of infidelity, "I'm just now learning to deal with the lies and with the fact that if you're in the public eye, people are going to take shots at you," says Shelton.

For the record, he says, he and Miranda are doing just fine. "I do think I've got a better handle on marriage now," Shelton says. "Until I'm dead, I know I'm going to be learning about being married to Miranda, but I know what her insecurities are and how to be there for her. I've learned how to approach our marriage as an open-minded listener. When you're dating, it seems like things never get to the real boiling point. There's always that thing in the back of your mind going, 'She can leave.' But when you're married, you're stuck together. And it's important to work things out all the way through, not just put a Band-Aid on it."

One reason their marriage works? Their texts, e-mails and tweets are an open book. "That's always been our policy—here's my phone, go through it," he says. "That's the kind of trust we have. There are no secrets. Go dig through my drawers or my phone or my computer if you feel like you need to. I have nothing to hide. And it's been a really good thing because I don't want her to ever have any doubt."

In consideration of his wife, Shelton has also made a choice in his music videos: He no longer gets the girl. "Since I've been married, I won't go there in a video," he says, pointing to the video for his latest hit "Sure Be Cool If You Did," in which Shelton cheers on his buddies, who hook up with a bevy of hotties at a bar, but the singer leaves alone. "If I was to go there, it

"THERE ARE NO SECRETS. I DON'T WANT MIRANDA TO EVER HAVE ANY DOUBTS"

would be Miranda in a video. I'm not an actor and don't pretend to be. Everybody knows I'm married to Miranda Lambert, and they don't want to see me leaving a bar with a girl. Why would I take this ring off for a video? I'd be insulted by that if I was Miranda, and I don't want to do anything to insult her or hurt her feelings."

As the couple approach their second anniversary in May, Shelton admits he has begun thinking about having children. "That seems to be the next thing that happens," he says. "And somehow from being on *The Voice*, I keep hearing about this persona of me as this father-guardian type figure. I don't see it but it does start creeping into your mind. You start thinking,

maybe those are protective instincts I have."

Both Lambert, 29, and Shelton have insisted that the only babies they're interested in raising at the moment are of the canine variety, "but I do think if and when it happens, I'll be pretty happy about it," Shelton says.

And he's grateful to have had a solid role model in his own father, who passed away just over a year ago. "He was way more to me than I ever knew," Shelton says. "He did everything to make sure my life was in order." That included sorting out the singer's cell phone, changing the oil in his truck and making sure his car tags didn't expire. "To this day, I've never owned a vehicle he didn't find for me. He loved being able to help." His dad's devotion to Shelton and his siblings is the example he hopes to follow in his own life. "Dad's life was his kids," he says. "And when it's time, I want to do it like he did. Twist your focus around and make it about the kids."

For now, though, it's all about Miranda and the music. "There will be a time—and I look forward to it—when this slows down and I'm not going to be the guy anymore. I'll be like, 'Listen, y'all, see that award show? I won that once.' But I'm not ready for that. There's not time to reflect. I look in the mirror and think of all the ways I can be better and what I need to work on. I want to use this up till the tank is empty."

IF BLAKE RULED THE WORLD...

The singer says there are some definite changes he'd make

Farewell to flip-flops

"I don't like grown men in shoes where if there's an emergency they can't help. If you've got on flip-flops in a fire, you're not going to save somebody. We'll have to carry you out."

Manlier tattoos

His own deer-tracks tattoo was mistaken for ladybugs, so Shelton added barbed

wire to man it up. Still, "I have the crappiest tattoo, not only in country music but maybe the world," he said.

Low-impact shopping

"The coolest thing about L.A. is a company that goes grocery shopping for you so I don't have to get off my lazy ass. Miranda found this place you can call and they'll bring ice, beer, anything you want.

That's heaven. I can't think of anything worse than shopping."

Nix the hipsters

"I don't like skinny jeans. I want to see a man ready to get some work done. That's just the grumpy old Oklahoma guy in me."

Antler adoration

"On all my albums, I thank deer. They're my favorite thing that exists. Besides boobies."



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