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Natalie Maines

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Taking the Long Way

Natalie Maines – A Woman in Full Bloom

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Photos courtesy Natalie Maines and PMK/HBH + The Weinstein Company

AT 32, NATALIE MAINES IS A WOMAN IN FULL BLOOM.

She radiates confidence; however, that confidence did not come easily to her. She is a woman who says what she means and means what she says. She knows what she values, and is not afraid to stand up for her beliefs. She is a wife and a mother who is committed to being a role model for her children. Having faced a firestorm and assault on her character and career that would have cowed most, Natalie Maines has courageously dealt with everything that has come her way, and is stronger for it. In her own words, "I definitely feel like a woman now. I have a strong sense of doing what I feel is right, and I want to pass that along to my children."

On March 10, 2003, the Dixie Chicks - Natalie Maines, Emily Robison and Martie Maguire - had a number one single and were the largest selling female group in music history. Ten days earlier, the group broke a concert sales record by moving \$49 million worth of ticket sales in a single day. Their first two albums - *Wide Open Spaces* and *Fly* - sold more than 10 million copies apiece. They were on their *Top of the World Tour* promoting the album *Home*, which had sold six million copies. The girls were the darlings of country music radio, having received four Grammys for *Home*, including Best Country Music Album, as well as numerous Country Music Awards. That evening in March, a single statement by Natalie would not only change her life, but chart a new path for the group.

During a concert at Shepherd's Bush Empire Theater in London, Natalie remarked between songs, "We do not want this war, we do not want violence. Just so you know, we're

ashamed the President of the United States is from Texas." Though the remarks were unplanned, she felt she needed to say something after having seen the protests in the streets of London the day before.

What she could not have foreseen was the controversy and firestorm that would follow. Country music stations banned the Dixie Chicks from the airwaves. Some listeners went as far as crushing their CDs under tractors, gathering CDs in trash bins and collecting them to be burned. The remarks were taken out of context, wildly changed and exaggerated. The group was labeled as traitors, Communist and unpatriotic. They were repeatedly maligned for "not supporting the troops." Singer Toby Keith displayed a mock photo of Natalie with Saddam Hussein, calling the group "Saddam's Angels." Having always considered themselves patriotic Americans, Natalie, Martie and Emily were stunned by the response. They were also angry at the ensuing assault on their First Amendment rights and on their characters, an assault fueled by right-wing special interest groups and ultra-conservative country music fans.

Of the comment and the beginning of the controversy that would dominate her life for the next three years, Maines said, "We were just very naïve. Our manager, Simon, told us that it would all blow over in three days, tops. I believed that when we explained what I had said, people would get it. I never imagined that it would get to the point it got to. It was bigger than what I said. Their attacks were on our character...on who we were as people. That is when I realized that this was

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huge and it had nothing to do with what I really said."

Far from causing a rift, the ensuing struggle strengthened the close bonds of friendship within the group. Beyond their musical ties, the three women share bonds of motherhood and marriage, having seven young children between them. Their characters and reputations are important. Their closeknit support of one another is evident in the interviews that followed "the incident," as Natalie refers to her controversial statement. "Emily and I could have pressured Natalie to apologize, and I was so proud that I had that inner strength - that nothing is as important as standing up for what you believe in," said McGuire. Emily also made her support clear in an *Entertainment Weekly* article from May 2003: "Natalie's comment came from a place of frustration that we all shared."

Thrown into a whirlwind of insult, false innuendo and accusations, how does a young woman of 28 find herself strong, confident and in full bloom both personally and creatively just three years later? She learns about herself, trusts her gut, draws on lessons learned from her parents, and puts words to her feelings. Then she goes out and performs. Never the type of women to "Shut Up and Sing" (the title of a just released documentary chronicling the three years following Natalie's statement; see p. 56 for a review), the Dixie Chicks went into the studio to create their most autobiographical and personal album ever. *Taking the Long Way* would be their first album with songs written or co-written entirely by the group, and would cover a lot of topics and personal territory. Despite a lack of radio airplay, the album, released in May, has received critical acclaim and gone platinum.

"The album was total therapy," said Natalie. "I'm way more at peace now. Writing these songs and saying everything we had to say makes it possible to move on."

Natalie has always had a defiant, strong-willed personality. Standing up for her beliefs is a quality she attributes to her parents. Raised in Lubbock, Natalie is the daughter of Grammy-award winning musician and producer Lloyd Maines. She showed interest in music at an early age, singing, playing a variety of instruments and following her father into studio sessions and concerts. A favorite family tale has it that young Natalie was banging on a piano while the family was visiting friends. Her father and mother repeatedly asked her to stop, but a determined Natalie persisted. Finally Lloyd issued an ultimatum: either Natalie would "stop immediately, not one more note"

The Dixie Chicks featured on the cover of the May 2003 issue of *Entertainment Weekly*. Photographer James White catches the controversial exclusive.



or she would visit the bathroom with her father to receive a spanking. Her father laughs when he recalls his small daughter looking him right in the eye and defiantly playing just one more note before leaving the piano. He hastily left the room so that Natalie would not see him laughing. "One thing I got from my parents that is intertwined in my music and my personality is honesty. They taught me to do what I wanted and to do the right thing. They were happy that I was strong-willed," said Natalie. "Now that I have kids of my own, I realize how very clever my parents were. They watched out for me and my sister, but they let us learn about who we were. That gave me a strong sense of who I was and what I believed. Just like standing up for myself now, in the face of blatant lies, I feel proud of myself and that

I didn't back down. I know that I did what was right."

The title track, *The Long Way Around*, speaks to Maines' somewhat unconventional style. With lyrics that taunt: *my friends from high school, married their high school boyfriends, moved into houses with the same zip codes where their parents live*; reveal attitude: *wouldn't kiss all the asses that they told me to*; and are personally honest: *guess I could have been easier on myself, well I never seem to do it like anybody else*; the song shows Maines for what she is: an individual, confident enough to go her own way and to stand up for herself when necessary.

Maines has faced obstacles several times during her career. The group took on industry giant Sony over questions of payment, settling only after a 10-month legal battle, and produced their third album, *Home*, with her father Lloyd Maines on their own label, Open Wide Records, a Sony imprint. The final terms are legally undisclosed, but reportedly fell in the Dixie Chicks' favor. The lawsuit was contentious, but, having gotten what they wanted, the Chicks stayed with Sony. A recently released documentary, *Shut Up and Sing*, chronicles the group's journey and growth from March 2003 to the release of their latest CD. It gives insight into the joys and

Natalie Maines showed interest in music at an early age, singing, playing a variety of instruments and following her father (pictured far right with him on horseback) into studio sessions and concerts.



sorrows of 'taking the long way.'

Through the music, it is evident that Natalie and the group found themselves. Beyond politics, the material that emerges on *Taking the Long Way* is a snapshot into their lives and the things that mean the most to them: marriage, children, family, loyalty and career. Maines laments that "Country music has traditionally had a social edge, with Loretta Lynn talking about the pill and Tammy Wynette about divorce. They were topical and progressive. These days, country music wants to play it safe. It is difficult to talk about anything with any weight." Far from playing it safe, the new CD was produced by legendary rock producer, Rick Rubin, who encouraged the group to experiment with a new sound that wouldn't be boxed into a single genre. "I felt like they had a lot to talk about, and it would be a good time for them to talk," said Rubin, quoted in the group's biography. "It was really like a new start for their career. Up until now, people loved them in a very surface way. This was the first time people took them seriously - in one stroke they went from loved artists to serious artists."

Among the serious subjects addressed on the album is infertility. Between the three women, the brood has seven children under the age of 6. Although Natalie's children (Slade, 5 and Beckett, 2) were conceived without problems, she watched the struggles of both Emily and Martie. Both suffered years of infertility, going through surgeries and in vitro fertilization as well as the roller coaster emotions and uncertainty that accompany the process and uncertainty. The lyrics of *So Hard* could apply to many situations; some in particular address the heart of the desire to conceive: *It felt like a given. Something a woman's born to do. A natural ambition to see a reflection of me and you. And I'd feel so guilty if that was a gift I couldn't give and could you be happy if life wasn't how we pictured it.*

Marriage has also been an element of Natalie's coming into full bloom as a woman. Married to actor Adrian Pasdar since June of 2000, she places a high priority on her relationship and acknowledges the stress children and career place on both partners. Maines is committed to balance. Of Pasdar, she simply said "I met the person I want to spend the rest

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of my life with. Ultimately I want to do everything I can to make this relationship work." *Baby Hold On* gives a glimpse of what that takes: *Good morning ... let's kick the babies out of bed. How'bout you and me instead? Hanging on, not up and gone.*

The couple split their time between Austin and Los Angeles, but with Pasdar's role on NBC's *Heroes* and Slade entering preschool, they now live in Los Angeles full-time. It is evident that the support of her husband during her recent career transition and redirection has been invaluable to Natalie. *Easy Silence* is a beautiful love song with the focus on that support: *When the calls and conversations, accidents and accusations, messages and misperceptions paralyze my mind. Busses, cars and airplanes leaving, burning fumes of gasoline and everyone is running and I come to find a refuge in the easy silence that you make for me.*

Watching just a few minutes of *Shut Up and Sing* leaves no doubt that Natalie is an über-mother. Whenever possible, her children travel with the group and Slade definitely has his mother's ear for music. The pressures of touring weigh heavily on Maines. "When this tour didn't sell out, I contemplated whether it was worth it in terms of my family. We make sacrifices as wives and mothers and I couldn't rationalize being away from Adrian and the boys. Slade goes to school everyday now and I want to be with them. All of us have young children now and we may want to spend more time writing and recording and less on tour." Again, her music reflects Maines' sentiment about her children. In *Lullaby*, she asks: *How long do you want to be loved? Is forever enough, is forever enough?* The song *I Hope* sends out a prayer and a caution: *'Cause our children are watching us. They put their trust in us. They're gonna be like us. So let's learn from our history and do it differently. I hope for more love, more joy and laughter. I hope you'll have more than you ever need.*

A subject that almost certainly has not previously been addressed in the lyrics of a country song is Alzheimer's disease, but in *Silent House*, that's exactly the topic being discussed. Natalie was troubled and touched as she watched her grandmother slip away.



