



Leap of Faith:
Take chances in life and love
Lesson Learned:
They'll pay off—eventually

Faith Hill hasn't forgotten the thrill of hearing her own voice coming out of her car radio. "I screamed, hollered, cried and called my parents!" she has recalled. "It was a big dream all my life, so the first time was really special."

That was in 1993, when her debut CD, *Take Me As I Am*, flew up the country charts. But even at the age of 3 she was already hamming it up in front of a crowd. "I would stand on the front row of the pew and have my hymnal upside down [and sing] 'Yes, hallelujah!' as loud as I could," she has said.

Faith joined her first band at the age of 17, playing rodeos and parties, and at 19, even though she was terrified, she moved to Nashville, Tennessee, where she worked as a receptionist at a music publishing company. It's hard to believe, but she never let on to anyone there that she could carry a tune. Fate intervened when one writer heard Faith softly singing while she thought she was alone. The coworker saw her potential and persuaded her to record a demo song, which led to a backup singing gig and then a contract with Warner Bros.

Not long after arriving in Nashville, she met a music publishing executive named Daniel Hill who swept her off her feet

Learn from your mistakes; learn from the bad, dwell on the good and you'll be all right.

and she married him when she was just 20. After five years of marriage, however, Faith realized she wasn't married to the right guy. Still, the decision to get a divorce was painful. "It wasn't an abusive situation at all. It was just a situation where I was in a marriage that I wasn't supposed to be in." But clearly that experience has had a huge impact on the way she looks at life. "Everyone has bad days and bad luck. Learn from your mistakes; learn from the bad, dwell on the good and you'll be all right," she's said.

Faith likes to say that her life began when she met Tim McGraw and went on tour with him in 1996. She was seriously involved with someone else at the time. But somewhere along the road as Tim's opening act, that other guy was kicked to the curb. Tim proposed before the tour was over, and later that year, the two married. "He felt just like a great old T-shirt that... you never wanted to take off... I couldn't stay away from him."

They still tour together, but now it's a family affair with their three little girls. When they're home (they have two places around Nashville and a home in California), they're just as normal as everyone else. Dinner is at 5 p.m. and the kids get tucked in by 8. And, oh, yeah, they sometimes do it in the closet.

"We've come up with so many creative ways of making it happen because the kids are always around. And they always just

show up. It's kind of like this exotic thing because it's like, there's the closet, there's the kitchen... What's a bed?"

Leap of Faith:
Facing the past can set you free

Lesson Learned:
Family are the people who love you

Faith has said she's always been proud to be the youngest child of bank-teller mom

We've come up with so many creative ways of making it happen... It's kind of like this exotic thing because it's like, there's the closet, there's the kitchen... What's a bed?

Edna and factory-worker dad Ted, but, as an adoptee, she eventually felt that gnawing desire to know who her biological parents were and why she was given up for adoption at birth. Faith hasn't revealed all the details in order to protect her family, but she does admit that in 1993 she finally met her birth mother after searching for her for three years. "I don't talk to her as much as I'd like, but I think about her every day," Faith has said. "She's a great lady."

And while the experience of finding her biological mom was a positive one, it also made her appreciate the parents and two brothers who loved her unconditionally since she came to live with them as an infant. "I have my problems. I wake up in the morning and I can't stand my hair... [But if] your family is safe and happy and healthy, then everything else pales in comparison."

Of course, that philosophy has been put to the test many times over the course of her life, including when her youngest child, Audrey, was delivered by emergency C-section because Faith's amniotic fluid had disappeared at seven months. Audrey struggled to survive, weighing only 3 pounds, 11 ounces. "We didn't know what the outcome was going to be. It was frightening... We said a lot of prayers," Faith has said. Ultimately the baby rallied to the challenge, just like her namesake mom, and is now a healthy 4-year-old.

Faith and Tim don't deny they have the most fantastic jobs in the world, but Gracie, 9, Maggie, 7, and Audrey are clearly their greatest accomplishments. "I'm there for every event my kids are in," Faith has said. This is the woman who managed to release two platinum CDs and have three kids in five years, all without the help of a nanny. But Faith believes she's just another working mom. "You just never stop going until your head's on that pillow at the end of the day," she has said. "Any woman out there with a career and children knows that."

Leap of Faith:
Don't be afraid to put yourself out there

Lesson Learned:
Get your critics get you down

While Faith is living out her wildest dreams, that doesn't mean every risk she's taken has been without consequences. She suffers her share of criticism, and while she accepts that life in the spotlight has to be lived under a microscope, the barbs can hurt. Faith, like Shania Twain and a number of other artists, has found crossover fame with audiences outside of country music, which has led to charges that she was abandoning her roots and not "country" enough. It's a claim Faith has found a little offensive. "I just want to be respected as an artist that's trying to do great music. I don't want to be pegged as anything. Just an artist. I don't see a crime in that," she has said in response.

And like Tim, Faith is never afraid to take a stand on something she truly believes in—even if she knows it may upset some of her fans. For example, this Southern girl recently went public with her views on the handling of the Hurricane Katrina disaster by the federal government and the White House. "It's a huge, huge problem. And it's embarrassing," Faith has said. And she isn't just a little upset, she's furious. "I fear for our country if we can't handle our people during a natural disaster."

If Faith Hill ever decides to add politician to her jam-packed résumé, Washington, look out! "I feel a responsibility to my fans, especially the young ones," she's said. "Children are easily influenced, and I always want to do things I can be proud to show my kids someday. I don't take on a big responsibility of 'I have to do this for the kids.' It's just the way I am."

We're sure they'll be more than proud.

Five Things That Will Surprise You About Faith

1 She may be the queen of country, but Faith is a little bit rock and roll, too—she's a huge fan of the group Coldplay.

2 She's modeled Versace, Dolce & Gabbana (and just about every other designer), but in her closet you'll also find some ancient sundresses and a pair of red cowboy boots she has worn since she was 13!

3 She has a crazy sense of humor. When she landed a role in *The Stepford Wives*, her first reading was with Nicole Kidman, Bette Midler and Glenn Close, and in it she had to pretend to have an endless orgasm. Even though she was a little bit horrified and intimidated, Faith just jumped right in! "What did I have to lose?" she has said. "It was my initiation, and I passed."

4 The first artist to influence Faith was the King. "My first concert was an Elvis concert, and my first album was an Elvis album. He loved gospel, country and rock and roll. All those things were what he was, and that probably affects the way I make records today."

5 She may look perfect, but she doesn't always feel it. After the birth of her last child, Faith has admitted, she had a hard time getting her body to bounce back. Finally, after months of yoga and four-mile stretches on the treadmill, she is back to her ideal weight.



OPPOSITE PAGE (from top): MICHAEL CAULFIELD/WIREIMAGE.COM; LONDON ENTERTAINMENT/SPLOSH; JOHN BARRIETT/GETTY IMAGES; THIS PAGE: PAUL SMITH/RETNA

the family girl

Faith Hill has managed to handle stardom on her own terms. She isn't about to compromise for anyone (except maybe her kids)

by Lisa Arcella

She's got looks any woman would envy, a voice that has won her a roomful of awards and even a rising career in Hollywood after starring in *The Stepford Wives*. Her Soul2Soul II tour with husband Tim McGraw was a hot ticket this past summer, and her latest CD, *Fireflies*, is her sixth hit record. But after 13 years of performing professionally, the superstar singer clearly knows that show business isn't the most important thing in her life. In her heart, the 38-year-old is still just Audrey Faith Perry from Star, Mississippi—a small-town girl with solid values and an appreciation for family that's been forged through some ups and some downs. These days her feet may be dressed in Manolo Blahniks, but they remain firmly planted on the ground. Life hasn't always been easy for the country singer—she's dealt with divorce, critics, her own baby's life-and-death struggle, as well as the trials of becoming a successful singer, wife and mom. But she's learned some valuable lessons from every step of her fearless journey, and so can you.

SARA DE BOERHETA LTD.

