

Jill Martin

This is Kansas Profile. I'm Ron Wilson, director of the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development at Kansas State University.

Jill Martin seems to have been born with a love for music. At the age of two, she was walking around singing songs in her rural Kansas home. That love of music would lead to a music career in Nashville, and ultimately to another love in her life. Special thanks to Newman University in Wichita and writer Jayden Gregory whose article was used with permission for this story. It's today's Kansas Profile.

Last week we learned about Kansan Logan Mize who went to Nashville to pursue a musical career. Today we'll meet Jill Martin who also made such a journey.

Jill Martin grew up at Andale, a rural community west of Wichita. Andale is a community of 928 people. Now, that's rural.

Jill loved music at an early age. "I think I drove everyone in my family crazy because I was constantly singing around the house," Jill said. As a little girl, she discovered Whitney Houston.

"I remember listening to (her) album in the second grade and I asked my dad how she got her voice to do a run, and he told me, 'She probably practiced a lot,'" Jill said. "I can remember listening to that specific song over and over until I could do it."

Her vocal abilities continued to grow. By the fourth grade, she was performing solos. By the seventh grade, she was singing in weddings with a band called The Martinaires. While with the band, she discovered her knack as a country singer and learned the classic country songs that she continues to love.

Jill attended Newman University in Wichita. She joined a local band called "Annie Up" and toured the Midwest performing with the group. After graduation, she made the big move to Nashville, Music City USA.

In Nashville, she auditioned for a local TV show. She didn't make it as a contestant, but something else happened: She met a guy named Logan Mize.

As we learned last week, Logan Mize also grew up in small town Kansas near Wichita and went to Nashville for a music career. Logan and Jill met in Nashville in 2008 and were married in 2010.

Professional music careers seem to have their twists and turns. In 2005, Jill had auditioned unsuccessfully for the television show American Idol. She decided to try again in 2010. After a successful audition, she earned the "golden ticket" – a yellow paper from the show saying that she had advanced to audition at Hollywood Week, where judges select the finalists who will appear on tv.

"It was such a great experience and it really made me realize what type of artist I want to be and what kind of artist I do not want to be," she said. Jill did not advance beyond the Hollywood round, but she did achieve something much greater. On the day she was sent home from the show, she learned she was expecting. Talk about twists and turns... "God had a better plan for me," Jill said.

Logan and Jill now have a little boy named Lincoln. As he has grown older, Jill has resumed her musical career.

In January 2013, she recorded a very personal debut album, Jill Martin. "The songs on the album were so personal for me," she said. "I wrote them with my husband

about my life. It's scary putting it out there, but I feel like if you are honest in your songs people will relate to them.”

Relate they did. The album reached number 24 on the iTunes music chart and was also featured in Billboard magazine, reaching number two on the Heatseeker chart – a remarkable accomplishment for an independent artist. The album received a number of rave reviews on iTunes and five out of five stars. “It was a dream come true,” Martin said.

For more information, see www.jillmartinmusic.com.

Jill Martin seems to have been born with a love of music which took her all the way to Nashville. There she also fell in love with Logan Mize. We salute Jill Martin, Logan Mize, and all aspiring small town Kansas musicians for making a difference with their creative talents. We love it.

For the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development, this is Ron Wilson with Kansas Profile.