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A Voice of Her Own

Women Who Sing

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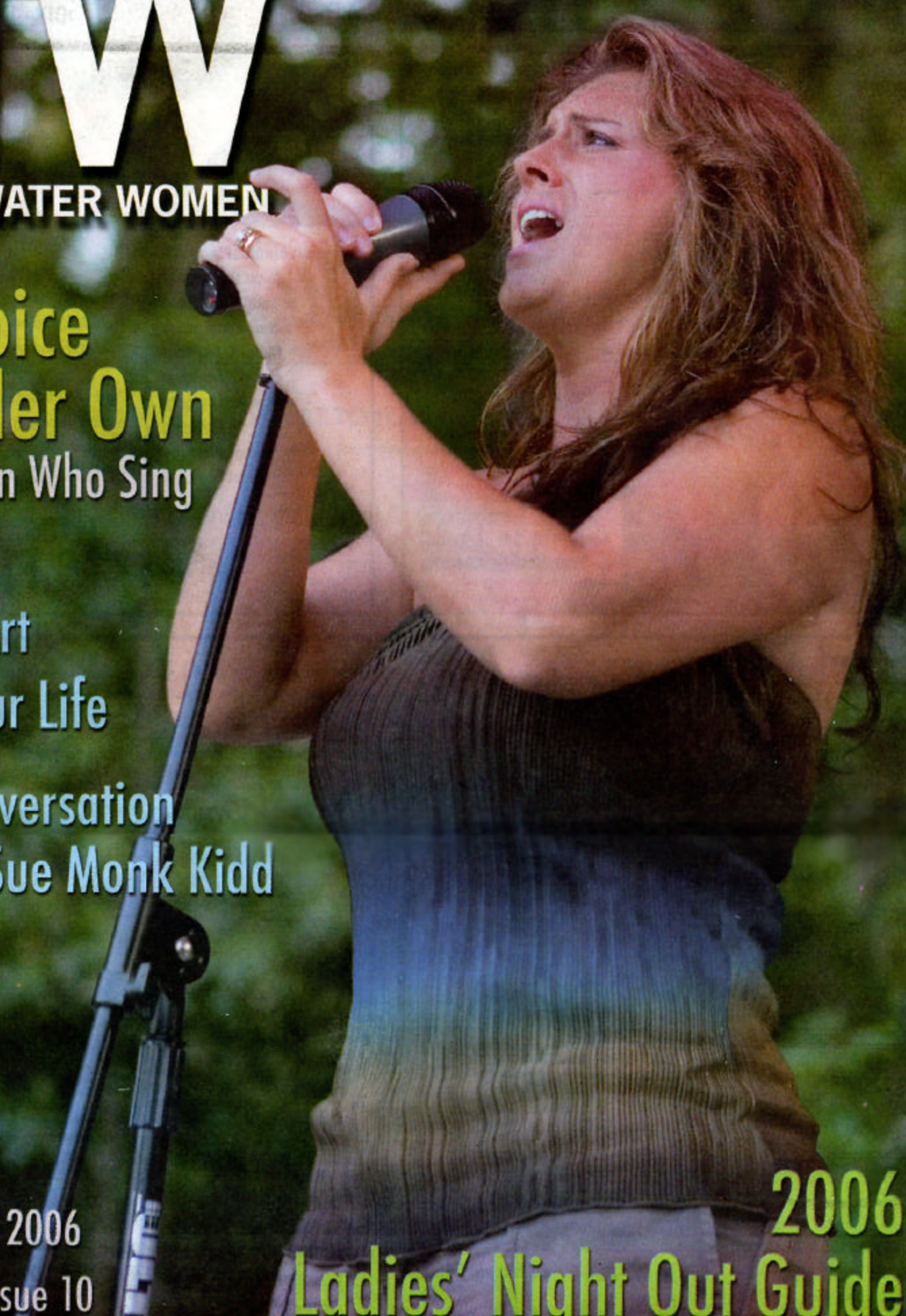
A Conversation
with Sue Monk Kidd

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A VOICE OF HER OWN

women who sing

by Kathleen Fogarty



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hen Heather Edwards was a girl growing up in a Smithfield family with nine siblings, she loved escaping to the barn to sing on her karaoke machine. Her mother and stepfather used to ask each other: "Are you going to tell her?" They thought Heather couldn't sing.

HEATHER EDWARDS

(Photo by Marshall Hoyle)

Through her teen years, Heather kept on singing, even though it wasn't natural for her. She worked to develop her voice and began to steer toward country music. Karaoke opened the door for Heather to be heard beyond the barn. She began singing at karaoke nights in Newport News and Hampton, gaining confidence and creating a repertoire.

Three years ago, a family member sent a demo CD, produced locally, to a Pepsi executive in Johnson City, Tennessee. Heather was hired to sing for more than 50,000 Pepsi employees at a July 4 event. She performed three sets backed up by karaoke tracks and a few songs with a band that had assembled for that show. The experience inspired her.

"When I came back, I said, 'I would love to do that. I want to put something

together and see what's out there,'" Heather recalled.

At first, Heather made a connection online with someone who wanted to produce her with a band. But that didn't work. Instead Heather auditioned a group of musicians and created "The Heather Edwards Band." Even though she still hosts karaoke several nights a week, Heather and the band now take their music to larger stages and clubs.

This year she's competing on the statewide level of the "Colgate Country Showdown" with the potential of a \$100,000 prize. She won the divisional contest in June in Alta Vista, Virginia. Program Director Judy K. Shelton told me that Heather surprised everyone by singing through a thunderstorm. Judy said, "We were very impressed with how she handled herself" and added

that Heather treats every song with originality, even if she's covering a song by Martina McBride or another country star.

Locally Heather's name is becoming familiar to audiences. Her band has performed as the opening act for several nationally known bands at area venues, and she played at the American Music Festival on the Oceanfront this past Labor Day.

Heather's family is slowly adjusting to her promising career. On her CD sleeve, Heather writes that her family is her "first priority." She and her husband, Philip, have three children under the age of ten: Alexander, 8, Hunter, 5 and Abigail (pictured above). Like any working mom, Heather tries to balance her home life with work, though sometimes, she admits it's tough

to get everyone ready for school after a late night singing karaoke. She also says it can be a little challenging for her husband to see her on stage singing to the audience.

"Somebody told me one time that when I get a CD done, I'll have to be seen as this individual that the guys want to look at," Heather said, "and I think, 'No, that's wrong.' We're all in this together, and we never know what the road holds for all of us."

Though the possibility of becoming famous can be enticing for musicians, Heather insists that she's happy with this level of performance. She admits to being delighted to be paid to do something that feels "like I'm on vacation." Her favorite country singer/songwriter is Trisha Yearwood, whom she hopes to meet one day. And if Heather Edwards becomes a country music sensation, she'll try to acknowledge women like her, the ones who are learning the business—the ones she calls "the little people."

At the moment, Heather is looking for songs for a new CD collection. She's most taken by songs that deal with emotions and "real life." That's because she likes to sing songs that touch the heart—with a touch of attitude and a good beat.