

Jodi Vaughan



Elayne Moore was born in Balmain, West Sydney, on 25 April 1950 to Edith and Arthur. She remembers her father playing harmonica and spoons. Her parents separated when Elayne was 8 years old and one day welfare officials turned up at their home to find 4 year old Allan attempting to feed his one year old sister, the house in a mess and Maureen and Rhonda unkempt with hardly any clothes or shoes. Elayne and her three younger siblings were made wards of the state.

In her first foster-home the father beat her, locked her in darkness and tried to drown her until a neighbour complained to *Social Welfare*. Nobody believed her when she had asked for help! Her second home at Shellharbour was a vast improvement. Nana Moore and her husband were retired and already looked after their granddaughter. They encouraged Elayne to learn piano, tap dance and sing and although she did well at *Kiama High School* they allowed her to leave at 15 and work in a milk bar. When Nana Moore died her eldest son and his wife took care of Elayne until she was 18. At 16 she attended a dance and mentioned to her date that she could sing so he bet her she couldn't. The following week she got up on stage and sang *He's Got the Whole World in His Hands* and the band, *The Tornadoes*, invited her to work with them. The *Australian Tornadoes* are still touring Australia, having backed many great vocalists including Johnny Devlin, and visited New Zealand for the 2006 *Best of the Best* show. A year later she appeared on the *New Faces* television show singing a Julie Rogers song.

At 19 she married Gary and they had two children; Jodie and Paul. A local talent agent suggested that she should adopt a stage name so she chose her daughter's name without the 'e' and 'Vaughan' just turned up. So Jodi Vaughan it was! When Gary and Jodi split up in 1975 she met Greig Slight and three months later they flew to Tauranga for Greig's brother's 21st birthday. Jodi got up to sing with local band *The Doug Ryder Convention* at the *Meeanee Hotel*. Greig soon scored a job as a gardener at the *Otumoetai Tavern*, Jodi picked up work as a bartender and, six months pregnant with Lissa, she came second in the national TV talent show *The Entertainers*. Country guitarist and promoter Gray Bartlett happened to be watching and phoned to see if she would be interested in singing on the *Touch of Country* television show with him and Brendan Dugan. Hell Yeah!!

Greig and Jodi moved to Auckland and after baby Lissa was born Jodi performed around Auckland with Brendon and Gray and toured the Bay of Plenty and Hawkes Bay then Gray scored her a recording deal with *EMI* and produced her 1978 debut album, *Jodi Vaughan*. That year was British comedian Reg Varney's successful tour but the trio were plagued by bad luck when the group's truck caught fire near Whanganui with all their costumes and instruments on board then she and other cast members were robbed backstage at the *Wellington Opera House*.

Gray secured her a spot on the *South Pacific Television* show, *Touch of Country*, then in 1980 the first broadcast of *TVNZ's That's Country* was shown and Jodi was on her way. She still found that she was being passed over by other contemporaries so she decided to start writing her own songs. She bought a second hand piano for \$150 and had instant success with her first two creations, *Tennessee Saturday Night* and *Honey Wine*, which appeared on her 1982 duo album with Brendan, *Fairweather Friends*. *Honey Wine* was a finalist in that year's *APRA Silver Scroll*.

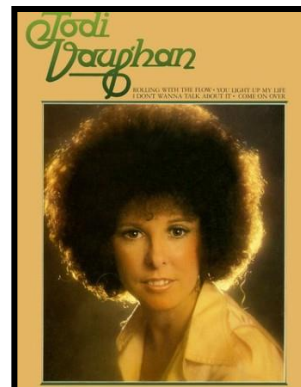
She was voted *Most Promising Female Vocalist* at the *RIANZ Awards* and the album received *Best Country Album* and *Best Duo Album* awards. She had to stand on two beer crates to drape herself over the shoulder of the 1.9 metre high Dugan for the cover shot. (Wonder why he didn't just sit down! Oh well, that's county!) The single *No Fool like an Old Fool* reached #12 and spent 10 weeks in the *NZ Top 40*.



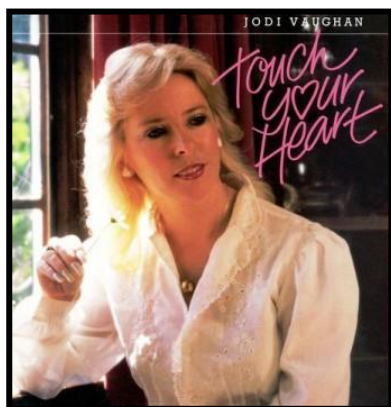
You can watch her on the 1981 *Royal Variety Performance Show* at the *St James Theatre* in Auckland in front of Queen Elizabeth and during episode 2 of the short lived 1987 *Dixie Chicken* television show. Go to *NZ on Screen*.

Jodi had managed to track down her brother Allan in Australia and when a three day gig was booked there she decided to try and find her sisters. The *Mike Walsh Television Show* was doing a series on fostering and adoption and invited Jodi to sing *Reunited* then talk about her life. The next day she returned to the show and met her mother Edith along with sisters Rhonda and Maureen plus all of Jodi's nieces and nephews.

In 1983 Brendan Dugan was given 48 hours notice to leave *That's Country* by executive producer David McPhail after pointing out publicly that Suzanne Prentice's manager, Trevor Spitz, was also the show's producer which may have accounted for Suzanne getting the lion's share of appearances on the show. Jodi and Gray quit in support stating that they had no confidence in Spitz. Questions were then asked in Parliament about double standards and *Actor's Equity* became involved until a full-scale *Commission of Inquiry* acquitted the trio. She was the only one of the three to rejoin the cast for the final series. The *Nashville Network* in the USA refused to renew its contract and the show finished in 1984 creating a rift in the country and western community that took years to heal.



In 1983 she cleaned up at the short-lived *NZ Professional Country Music Recording Awards*, scooping *Top Female Vocalist*, *Best Songwriter* and *LP of the Year* for *Fairweather Friends*. In the early 1980s Jodi, Brendon and Gray toured the United States 8 times. She received a 1984 *Air NZ Arts Award* to visit Nashville and a song writing grant by the *QE2 Arts Council*; Ray Columbus paid for the flight. Brendon and Jodi performed at the *Fan Fair Festival*, appeared on *Nashville Now* and toured New York and Florida.



Jodi's 1984 album *Rodeo Eyes* included five of her own songs and she toured New Zealand again then scooped the *RIANZ* awards with *Top NZ Female Country*, *Top Song Writer*, *Best Country Single* and *Best Country Duet*, sharing *Hey, Paula* with rocker Tom Sharplin.

Another setback occurred when Jodi's hour-long television special was caught up in a *Musicians' Union* ban over wages and conditions, then she developed throat problems becoming unable to speak after a show and having to lower the keys to her songs. Just before Christmas she underwent an operation to remove nodules from her vocal cords.

Gray, Brendon and Jodi split in 1985 with Brendon opting to go it alone with manager Lew Pryme. In 1986 Jodi opened for Mexican-American singer Freddy Fender who had a huge hit years earlier with *Before the Next Teardrop Falls* and *Wasted Days and Wasted Nights*. His manager offered to tour Jodi through the USA.

Just before she left, her album *Straight from the Heart* was released with Ken Lemon standing in for Dugan. Things went quickly pear shaped when the manager set her up with an all-girl band at a lesbian bar that included a drummer who spat tobacco and trashed her kit at the end of the night. One night the *Ku Klux Klan* appeared in the audience and Jodi was out of there! A 36 year old woman without a green card was never going to appeal to the big agents although she did manage to record an album in Houston which was eventually released in 1992 as *The Houston Texas Sessions*.

She returned heavily in debt and discouraged in November 1987. By now Jodi had realised that she was never going to crack the American market so she took a day job at *Gilmour's* warehouse on Auckland's North Shore. She and Greig drifted apart and they separated with Lissa staying with Greig who had the support of his family to help look after her. The next two years were fairly quiet vocally except for her taking the lead role in the *Hamilton Operatic Society's* 1988 musical, *The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas*. Her fifth solo album *Loads of Country Lovin'* was released in 1990 with most of the material self-written.



Promoter Ian White reunited Jodi, Brendon and Gray on a hugely successful *Together Again* tour that broke box office records nationwide and was eventually extended from 19 to 35 concerts. The self-named album hit #1 on the *NZ National Charts*, beating all overseas contenders. However Mr White was less than honourable and gambled the takings, purchased a house in Rotorua and built up a collection of fancy cars. Eventually he was chased by the *IRD* and bankrupted, then he flew the country leaving the artists without their final week's performance fees. Jodi had to sell her home to cover the debts but on a more positive side she won the *1991 Top NZ Songwriter Award* and a shared an *Ampex Golden Reel Award* for the album.



She moved to Taupo, took a break from showbiz then in 1993 she settled in Hamilton and put together a vocal trio with Celine Toner and Barbie Davidson, calling it *Girls Talk*. Celine's husband Barry Green marketed the group and soon they were working constantly in the corporate world, opening for Kenny Rogers, Ricky Skaggs and *The Little River Band*. You can see them performing on the 1995 *Time of my Life* TV special with Sir Howard Morrison. In 2002 Celine and Barry moved to Auckland and the group retired.

Jodi is a delight to work with and has a very profound attitude to life, believing that if you follow your dreams all will work out in the end. What doesn't kill you makes you strong and that there is a clear pattern in life if you look back with an open mind. As a pretty young mother of two children living in a state house in Sydney, not even knowing where New Zealand was, she kept singing through the highs and lows until the whole country fell in love with her. She still lives in Hamilton and after 23 years is still with *Mainfreight*, who allow her time off to perform with her own band or tour with various groupings of former *That's Country* stars such as Suzanne Prentice, John Grenell, Patsy Rigger, Eddie Low and the *Hamilton County Bluegrass Band*. Gray has produced a series of highly successful local country music tours with Gray, Brendon and Jodi providing the backbone of them: *Together Again - The Reunion Tour* (2004), *Highway Of Legends Tours* (2005, 2006, 2008) and the *True Legends Tour* (2012).

In 1982 she was named *Most Promising Female Vocalist of the Year* and a decade later was awarded a 2004 *Scroll of Honour* by the *Variety Artists Club of New Zealand*, which also held a roast for her at the *Papatoetoe Cosmopolitan Club* in February 2012. In 2019 she received the *VAC Pacific Entertainment Top Female Vocalist Award* and in 2023 she became the 60th *VAC Benny Award* recipient.

