



“I STARTED WRITING SONGS TO GET LAID”

ROB THOMAS

Thomas with son Maison (left); with wife Marisol.



My family moved around a lot when I was young. My dad was in the military. When my parents divorced and he left us, we moved to South Carolina to live with my grandparents. It was difficult not having my father around.

I was a shy kid. I started writing songs to get laid. I didn't know anything about sport or cars, so the only hope I had to meet girls was through music.

I wrote short songs and played them for my mother. They sounded like bad Lionel Richie ballads! They were horrible, but I wrote endlessly. At 21, I wrote the first one I liked, [future hit] '3AM'. It was something I wanted other people to hear.

When I was young, I didn't know there was anything other than country music. In the South, you listened to Willie Nelson, Waylon Jennings, Merle Haggard, Loretta Lynn, and that was it. Then, when I was about 13, we moved to Florida and I discovered New Wave and Punk.

I started out in a band called Tabitha's Secret, which ended up becoming Matchbox Twenty. We signed a record deal and thought we'd made it. But then we spent a year travelling around in a f**king sweaty van, playing crappy venues. **Our label was about to drop us when an Alabama radio station started playing 'Push'.** Back then, radio stations could make

or break an artist. We went to do a show in Birmingham [Alabama] and there were 1000 kids lining up outside to see us. It literally switched overnight.

I don't remember much of our initial success. We drank and did a lot of drugs. I've seen some of our Australian interviews and we were ridiculous. But, at the time, it was fun. I was single for the first three years, so I could go out and do all of those things you think you're supposed to do.

Looking back, I don't know if I'd be as promiscuous as I was. I could have benefited from more 'me time'. But I had a hard time being alone. My therapist says I'm getting better at it, though.

I reached a point where I thought, I don't want to be that guy any more. He was only a caricature of what I do for a living. I wanted to be this guy; I wanted to be a gentleman. You live and learn.

I've been married to my wife, Marisol, for almost 13 years. People ask how we stay together in this business, but I think you just have to want to be there. We're good friends and we get along really well.

There's something about having someone to confide in. Marisol and I have each other, and everything else doesn't really matter. Everything can fall apart – your career, your friendships – but you still have this connection with one person.

My wife has a serious auto-immune disease. It's similar to lupus. She's living with it. You learn it is what it is. She has her good days and then she has her bad days when we just hole up in the house.

My son, Maison, is 14. I was an asshole at his age, but he's a great kid – he must get it from his mom [Maison is Thomas' son from a previous relationship]. He lives with her, so I don't see him as much as I'd like to.

He thinks my work is kind of silly. He sees me putting on show clothes and going onstage to sing and dance, and he rolls his eyes. I say, "Not even this is f**king cool? Come on! Your friends think I'm cool!"

I'm not super-lenient. It's not all 'let's be best friends', but I'm not the typical dad, either. It's his mother who has to drag him out of bed every day and discipline him. I get to be the fun one.

North is Matchbox Twenty's first studio album in 10 years. I did a solo record, we did a greatest hits record and then I did another solo album – that was the plan. I've been on the road or in the studio the entire time.

I'm happy to still be doing this job. I don't know how long it's going to last. I'm just glad to be here.

TIFFANY BAKKER

North is out now. Catch Matchbox Twenty on tour in October. Visit www.livenation.com.au.