



(4.13.19) <http://www.cmt.com/news/1805336/caylee-hammack-shows-off-her-roots-in-exultant-family-tree/>

## **CAYLEE HAMMACK SHOWS OFF HER ROOTS IN EXULTANT “FAMILY TREE”**

**Get High School High Watching the CMT Premiere of Hammack’s Retro-Inspired Video**





It's safe to say that Caylee Hammack has one of the wildest life stories of any rising artist at the moment, and there is no doubt she's born for a life in music.

When she speaks, one can instantly visualize the South Georgia red dirt clay, the tall pines, monoculture and small-town values of her native Ellaville. John Berry and Luke Bryan were among the first artists to catch onto her talent early before she moved to Nashville to pursue music professionally.

"Luke actually heard my music through his mom LeClaire in Leesburg," Hammack tells CMT.com. "She made him listen to my music at some point, I think I was 17 when he called me. He said, 'This is Luke.' I was a little bit shot, and I was like, 'Look, I live in South Georgia, and I know 58 Lukes. Which Luke are you?' He goes, 'Luke Bryan.' I literally was like, 'Oh, [expletive]. The important one.'

"He told me, 'You've got good songs. You've got a great voice. You just need to move to Nashville,'" she adds. "That was pretty much the gist of the conversation. About 10 minutes later, we hang up, and he calls right back. He goes, 'I need to talk to your dad,' because he wanted to apologize to my father. 'I just told that your not-even-legal-yet daughter that she needs to move 400 miles from home and follow her dream. I shouldn't have told her to move away, but I think your daughter needs to move to Nashville. My dad forever now loves Luke Bryan because of that."

Completely cut out for adventure, the 25-year-old has played some of the roughest honky-tonks in her native South Georgia. She had a two-pound tumor removed from her spinal muscles when she was 16; the same age she was when she put her first band together. She moved to Nashville at 19, lived out of her car in a Target parking lot parking for a few weeks and scored her first steady Nashville gig on Lower Broadway with a fake ID. She landed her publishing deal with Universal Music Group after two-and-a-half years of performing local writers' rounds and Lower Broadway gigs as if they were part of a never-ending tour.

She had just finished recording her debut single, “Family Tree,” when she lost her Nashville home to an electrical fire while she was out of town on a writers’ retreat with Brothers Osborne, Eric Paslay and Tenille Townes.

“I got a call the third morning from my neighbor,” Hammack recalls for CMT.com. “I thought she was calling to borrow my lawnmower again. And nope. She said Caylee, ‘Your house is on fire.’ And Tenille Townes, it was the first time we had ever really met, she just held me as I cried and listened on the phone to how all my stuff was burning up. Her and Natalie Osborne sat there, held me, and we all sweated in our fleece pajamas because we were on the patio. We were just holding each other and crying.

“That house was one of those situations where I thought it was the biggest curse of my life, but it was the biggest blessing. After that, I met my manager. While my entire personal life was falling into ruins around me — clumps of soggy, melted things — I met someone who was going to lead me toward what I wanted.”

Co-written with Troy Verges and Gordie Sampson, “Family Tree” is the first of many signature songs to come from Hammack, and it has an enviable opening line that most creatives wish they’d written: “Sister smoked all the camels in the county last week / Sneaking in, smelling like nicotine.” From there, Hammack exalts the family memories that built her down to the Tupperware parties her mom used to host when she was a child.

“I just started talking about these little tangible things, these little tiny quirks that the people I love have,” Hammack says of writing “Family Tree,” “how my dad cannot stay awake through an entire football game, yet we listen to it on loud in case he misses something. Slowly but surely, ‘Family Tree’ just fell out of the sky.

“To have that as my first single, considering it’s all about my family, and it is the song that helped me build my Music Row family, and it was the first song that I truly got to be myself in and let myself be heard, it means the world to me.”

Hammack will [tour](#) with Dierks Bentley, Miranda Lambert and Brothers Osborne later this year.