



Jon

born

Jovi

is more complicated than you think

He's a rock-star mogul and family man, political activist and philanthropist, with a number one album... but he's still spooked by elevators.

By Erik Hedegaard | Photographs By Richard Phibbs

S

Sometimes Jon Bon Jovi can't quite figure out how he got to be known as such a family man. He loves his wife and four kids and wouldn't trade them for anything. But he's a rock 'n' roll star. He has been around rock 'n' roll for 25 years. He has seen some stuff and done some stuff and said some stuff that maybe he's not too proud of. And yet that family-man thing seems to stick to him like glue.

"I mean, family man, what a concept," he said not long ago, somewhat dazedly. "I mean, how'd I end up the poster boy for that?"

Basically how it happened is that there was an opening and he seemed to fit the bill. In his favor, he had his marriage to his childhood sweetheart, Dorothea, which has now lasted 18 years. He had his blue-collar everyman New Jersey roots, never abandoned. He had his looks—strong chin, brilliant smile, gorgeous teeth, perfectly feathered hair. He had that butt, often commented upon but never in a gross way. Plus, he has always stood in contrast to bandmate, writing partner, and notional alter ego Richie Sambora, who in the last year alone divorced Heather Locklear, hooked up with Denise Richards, became a gossip-press regular, and then spent a few days in rehab. Bon Jovi has never been in rehab. He has never been a favorite of the gossip press. He just doesn't get into that kind of trouble. Also, he has always seemed like the most easygoing of rock stars, mostly untroubled, and a genuinely good guy.

As it happens, it was exactly that Bon Jovi who showed up at ABC's studios in Manhattan the other morning to hang out with Barbara Walters and the other girls on *The View*. He was wearing tight, crowd-pleasing jeans and a kind of ratty black T-shirt emblazoned with instructions to TELL YOUR MOM I SAID HI. He semiswaggered onto the stage, one hand hooked onto his belt buckle, and took a seat between prim Barbara Walters and frumpy Joy Behar, crossing his arms but leaving his legs spread confidently wide. The girls yawped and fawned, as is their custom, but quickly moved on to palaver about the Nashville influences running through the new Bon Jovi album, *Lost Highway*, and how glad they were that he didn't go too twangy overboard. Then they brought up the band's new top-10 hit single, "(You Want to) Make a Memory," and craftily used that reference to raise some memories of their own—of Bon Jovi's looks in his early rock years, circa the late 1980s, when he arrived on the scene as a glam-rock pretty boy, shrink-wrapped in spandex, wearing flapping black maxicoats, with his mopsy-topsy hair teased almost to Marge Simpson heights. The girls showed pictures from the era, amidst lots of delirious hooting, and asked Bon Jovi what he thought.

He didn't miss a beat. "The truth of the matter is, those were my baby pictures," he said. "My baby pictures were public. And most people's weren't."

"Well, I think you look great," said Barbara Walters, with such heartfelt, head-shaking, lip-smacking (phony) sincerity that the audience began clapping and cheering.

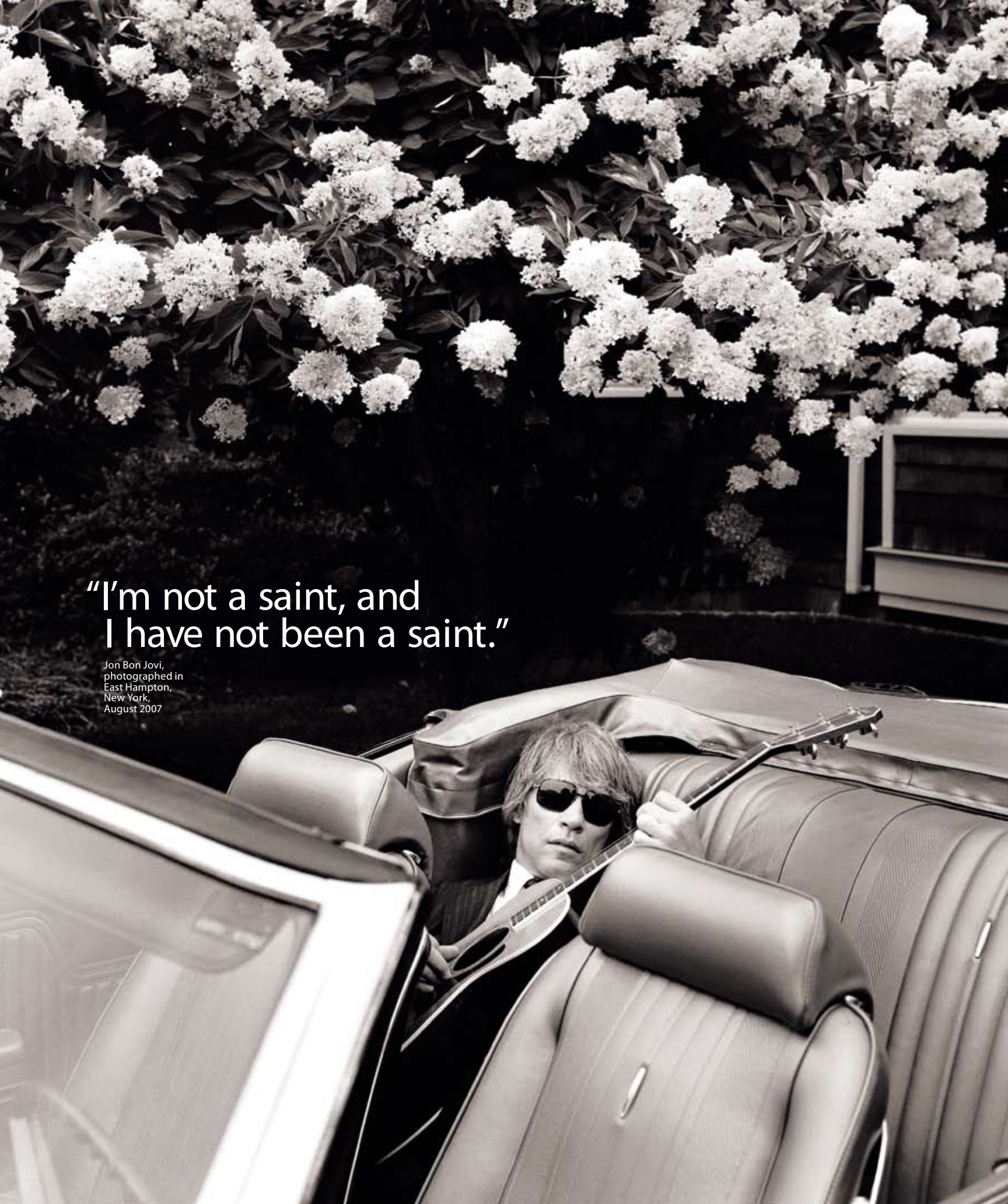
As for Bon Jovi, he just sat there, waiting for the interview to end, so the band could come out and they could play a few tunes. He was nothing if not pleasant and completely true to the idea of Bon Jovi as a swell, easygoing guy, because to a large

degree, that's who he is. But afterward, backstage and away from the cameras, a curious change took place. When someone complimented him on his performance, he rolled his liquid-blue eyes around in their sockets and halfway snarled, "Oh, please," as if to say, "How much more (phony) sincerity can one man take in a day?" (Plenty, it turns out.) And when a member of his crew wanted to know if he was going to be playing electric at an upcoming show, he just shrugged. "I don't care," he said. "If there's an electric there, I'll play it."

This was altogether a different Bon Jovi—a more world-weary Bon Jovi, a slightly crabbiest Bon Jovi, certainly a less guarded and rehearsed Bon Jovi. It was also a Bon Jovi who a moment later bummed a cigarette and ambled out of the ABC building into the sunlight, ready to enjoy all the benefits of the evil weed. Then he hopped into a waiting car and took off. It was midmorning in Manhattan. The rest of the day loomed. He had to go to CNN. He had to go to NPR. Soon, he'd have to field more of the same questions about *Lost Highway*'s country influences, not to mention Richie Sambora's recent stint in rehab, and pretty much he'd find himself giving everyone the same sensible answers. Right now, though, he was looking out the window at the city passing by, and for a while, this Bon Jovi seemed happy enough not to have to say a word.

In his lifetime, he has played more than 2,500 gigs, in more than 50 countries, in front of more than 32 million people, and sold more than 100 million albums, according to an enviable set of statistics that his record company, Island Records, likes to trot out every so often. He first got big in 1986, upon the release of his band's third album, *Slippery When Wet*, which produced three huge crowd-friendly hits: "You Give Love a Bad Name," "Wanted Dead or Alive," and "Livin' on a Prayer." He was 24, still just a kid living out his dreams. The next album, *New Jersey*, spun off a record-setting five top-10 singles. This led to an 18-month-long tour, a massive amount of physical and mental exhaustion ("We were all f--king toast"), a two-year hiatus from Bon Jovi the band, some real bad times, some real good times, a hit solo song called "Blaze of Glory," a return to Bon Jovi the band, and from there, 15 years of weathering various musical storms (grunge, boy bands, etc.) while still managing to stay on top.

Along the way, Bon Jovi carved out a secondary career for himself in the movies, in little-seen independents mostly, such as *Homegrown* (1998) and *Row Your Boat* (2000), and on TV, in shows like *Ally McBeal* and *The West Wing*. Then, last year, he decided to go a little country and came out with "Who Says You Can't Go Home," which turned him and Bon Jovi into the first rock band ever to hit number one on *Billboard*'s Hot Country Songs chart. Anything he has wanted to do, he has pretty



"I'm not a saint, and
I have not been a saint."

Jon Bon Jovi,
photographed in
East Hampton,
New York,
August 2007

IT'S HIS LIFE In 2007, another number one album. Opposite, from left: Jon onstage in L.A. in 1986; with his wife, Dorothea Hurley, in 1990; in Homegrown in 1998; at Live Earth with Al Gore in 2007

much been able to do. He owns mansions in New Jersey and on Long Island and recently plunked down \$26 million on a New York City penthouse apartment with six bedrooms, six baths, three terraces, two kitchens, a screening room, and a gym. In 2000, he went out on the road to support his pal Al Gore and did the same four years later for John Kerry. He is also deeply philanthropic, mainly on behalf of Habitat for Humanity. In 2005, during an appearance on the Oprah Winfrey Show, he spontaneously pledged \$1 million to reconstruction efforts in New Orleans. More recently, he took the arena football team that he co-owns, the Philadelphia Soul, and used its name to establish the Philadelphia Soul Charitable Foundation, which has former president Bill Clinton as a major supporter and is currently rehabbing a block of 15 homes in north Philadelphia.

All in all, then, it has been quite some life, and throughout he has handled himself with the kind of maturity that even at his current age of 45 doesn't necessarily go hand in hand with his chosen profession. Indeed, what he's most proud of these days isn't the music that got him here but the good work he's now doing for others.

"I'll tell you something that has everything to do with it and nothing to do with it," he says one day. "You've heard about the dreaded quarterback disease, where a lot of the famous quarterbacks have kids who are afflicted in one way or another? A wife of one of these quarterbacks—he has a foundation set up—once told me that everyone comes around patting them on the back, telling her husband that he was the greatest back in the day, and then they ask her how their son is doing. She said she has to smile and go, 'He's great.' And then she told me, 'You know what I really want to say to them? He's 18 and I had to change his diaper today. Do you think my husband really cares about yesterday's accolades? He doesn't. He's out here grinning and griping, trying to get money for something much bigger and more important than himself.'

"But, see, those are things I know," he goes on. "I mean, I don't give a f--k that I just sold out 10 nights at the arena." He's beginning to spit his words now, getting a little worked up. "It's just what I do. It's just a job. And I get paid well for it. And I get to wear a T-shirt and dirty jeans. But I don't really give a f--k about the rest of it, because it's a shallow pool, man. When you've been at it this long, you know it's a real shallow pool."

In the beginning, of course, the pool probably didn't look all that shallow. Back then, he was still John Bongiovi, living in Sayreville, New Jersey, a working-class town, exit 124 off the Garden State Parkway. His Italian

immigrant father, John Sr., was an ex-Marine and a barber; his mom, Carol, was an ex-Marine too, and at one time a Playboy bunny at the original Playboy Club, in New York City. He has said, "Mainly, it was a pretty white-picket-fence upbringing, in a real blue-collar middle-American place, in a little two-story Colonial home. There wasn't any great turmoil. I had two parents who stuck it out." By the time he was 13, he knew he wanted to be a rock 'n' roll star. By the time he was 16, he was playing (illegally) in local bars. By the time he was a high school senior, he'd already sung onstage with Bruce Springsteen.

For a short while, he liked drugs and even took it upon himself to deal drugs. "I did the drug thing very young and wised up very young too, because I was into drugs a little too much," he says. "I mean, I was entrepreneurial even then, buying quarter pounds of dope and trying to make a couple bucks. But then, did you ever smoke dope that was laced with PCP and then have that whole summer of hallucinations? It was f--king awful. I was the guy who bogarted the joint all the time, ran right through the screen door, and was like, 'Woah! I f--ked up, man. That's good though. That's why I've never been a drug guy. I've always felt I didn't have the mental stability to handle drugs.'"

By the time he was 18, he was working as a janitor at a well-known New York City recording studio called the Record Plant, which was owned by his cousin Tony. While there, he began laying down demos of his songs, one of which, "Runaway," became a hit on a local radio station. Shortly thereafter, he cobbled together a band, got a record contract, dropped the H in his first name for no real reason, changed his last name at the label's request, and used that name as the name of his new group.

Along the way, for better or worse, his looks have always managed to get tangled up in how he's treated. In 1987, with Slippery When Wet running high on the charts, Rolling Stone ran its first cover story about him, as reported and written by future New Yorker magazine hotshot Susan Orlean. Its



opening lines were: "Jon Bon Jovi's hair is about 14 inches long. Its color is somewhere between chestnut and auburn, and the frosty streaks in it give it a sizzling golden sheen."

"It was heartbreaking," says Bon Jovi today, 20 years later and still smarting. "I mean, what kid doesn't stare in the mirror and sing the Dr. Hook song about being on the cover of Rolling Stone, and then to have that day come when you not only have a record that worked but the record of the year—and the girl just wanted to know 'What are you wearing today?' and 'Wow, that jacket!' and 'Boy, you have great hair' and 'Can I run my hand through it?' I mean, just blow me and get it over with. Let's talk about the f--king songs."

And so it has gone over the years, up to and including that recent appearance on The View. It's one of his crosses to bear, as if there's some kind of law that you can't talk to him without talking to him about his looks.

Oh—and then there's how he looked at the age of 13, which was already pretty good, at least in the eyes of certain older women in his Sayreville neighborhood. "I was in eighth grade, very young, and the guy the MILFs came to see. I was a boy toy. They'd buy you a cheeseburger and you'd go, 'Doh-kay.' The first time, I can't tell you that I thought, This is the greatest thing in the world. I was



JON BON JOVI'S BEST LIST

BEST HOTEL

"The Park Hyatt Tokyo, where *Lost in Translation* was filmed. You can't help but think how right Sofia Coppola got it when she shot there. It has probably the greatest view from a gym anywhere in the world. The Ritz or the George V (the Four Seasons) in Paris for the bar, which I believe was Hemingway's."

BEST CLASSIC RIDES

"My 1978 Datsun 280Z was the first cool car I owned, and it still holds a place near to my heart. I love my 1970 Chevelle. It's blue with white racing stripes...convertible. My kids call this the loud car. It has a brand-new engine. It's loud. I ride it hard. My Harley Custom SofTail sits on the floor of the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. It's the bike I took across the country a couple times in search of Route 66."

BEST BOARDWALK

"Seaside, Wildwood, and Asbury Park, on the Jersey shore. For those of you who never got to experience the boardwalks in Jersey back in the day, I wish I could give that to you."

BEST JUNK-FOOD RESTAURANT

"Go see Mrs. Max at Max's in Long Branch during the summer. Order a hot dog. Everything you need to dress it is on the table. Order the onion rings

and pretend you're a Soprano. Order a really cold root beer. If you have room for dessert, it's all there. You'll see all your favorite Jersey guys' pics on the walls. And oh yeah—tell Mrs. Max I said hi."

BEST LULLABY TO SING A CHILD TO SLEEP

"I make them up in the moment."

BEST WORKOUT

"I was doing Workout 101 for years: treadmill, elliptical, weights. Now I'm going to do yoga. I went for my first time, and I enjoyed it. I'm a 21st-century man."

BEST BOOK

"*The Monk Who Sold His Ferrari*, by Robin Sharma. Let's just say it was one of the most influential books for me, because it talked about how more and bigger is not always better. I came to that realization a decade and a half ago. I bought lots of copies for friends who were in similar situations, some of the guys in the band, other people in our line of work."

BEST JEANS

"Levi's are my favorite, but the truth is I want the Levi's of my youth: zipper, one button, straight legs. There are too many freakin' flavors today. I don't want Rocky Road vanilla twirl, I don't want 99 flavors, I want basics. I wear Lucky's or Diesel now. I sound like a cranky old man, don't I?"

thought, This is the greatest thing in the world. I was like, Wow, is that what just happened? It took a while to start to like it. But it was a daunting task, to have to...I don't know if I'd want my son to have those experiences. My mom wasn't too happy with some of the things she witnessed. It was pretty wild. One good-looking kid and housewives...situations. Anyhow, I'm not going to go into that," he says. "It was a long time ago."

Telling that story, Bon Jovi looks pained, probably because he hasn't told it before and it's more personal than he'd like. The way he is now, he usually keeps a lot to himself, and to himself a lot. Over the years, for example, he has worked steadfastly, and with surprising success, at keeping his family far away from the public side of his life. He'll happily tell you the names and ages of his kids—Stephanie Rose is 14, Jesse James, 12, Jake, 5, and Romeo Jon, 3—but he never reveals much more than that. As for his wife, Dorothea, she has been seen, rarely, but heard from directly, never. All that's known is what Bon Jovi says, mainly that they got married on the spur of the moment in 1989: At the time, he had the number one album in the country, *New Jersey*, and the number one single; he was playing three sold-out nights at the Forum in Los Angeles; he was staying with Dorothea at an old art-deco dream hotel, the St. James Club, and when he pulled back the curtain in their room, there he was, staring right back at them from a billboard. He said, "I got an idea, why don't we go right now?" She said, "You're out of your mind." He said, "Come on. What's better than this, right now, this moment?" And so off they went, to Vegas, to get married, that instant. He has also said that she has a fourth-degree black belt in karate, runs her own dojo, and is fiercely independent. And, by inference, that it couldn't have been easy being married to a guy like him, especially during the early years.

"I've been in one of the biggest rock bands in the world for 25 years, and I'm not a saint, and I have not been a saint. And, Christ, I missed tons of birthdays and school plays. But it's not like Dorothea came in halfway through the movie and didn't know who she got and the divorce settlement is this because of that. She's been in it the whole game. She understands what it means. It's my life, and it is what it is. But, really, I don't look at this week's hot starlet and think about

trading in or trading up. I don't have a mistress on the side or another family across town. You're never going to read that story about me. I have no regard for that whole lifestyle."

And, once again, that's all he'll say about that, which is admirable, given all the celebrity blabbing going on these days. At the same time, though, it sure would be nice to know a little more. Like, what are his flossing habits? And, with his kids, what kind of disciplinarian is he? More...like that.

One thing about Bon Jovi though: He does like talking about moments of big change, and the biggest moment of change in his early adult life took place in 1990, when he and the guys walked away from the band for two years, after their 240-show tour to support *New Jersey*. At that point, all anyone had left to say to one another was "Last night, the waitress looked good" and "Last night, you had the fish and I had the chicken." "So when everybody went somewhere else," says Bon Jovi, "it really wasn't about 'f--k you, I hate you, you stole my money, you f--ked my girlfriend, I'm leaving.' It was, 'I can't talk to you anymore. I need somebody else to talk to besides you.'"

He went to California, to Malibu. He was in a bad way. Fears had started creeping up on him. Suddenly, he found himself scared of elevators. He'd tell Dorothea he was doing great, but she's no dummy. She'd say, "You can't even get in an elevator. You'll walk up a hundred flights of stairs and say, 'I'll race you!' But you know that's not right. That's not normal." For a while, he hunkered down inside his pad. "I was at a crossroads," he says. "I'd achieved what I thought was it, and I was disappointed by it. I was like, Is that it? Well, that sucks. And it's cold and it's lonely and it's depressing, sitting there on your deck, in the middle of one of those gray Malibu summers, gray, cold, and shitty. And then, at 10 in the morning, I'd find guys looking in my fridge, ready to start going again. This one rock star who was trying to be sober, I found him in my pantry drinking cooking wine." He shakes his head and looks morose. "He's dead now. He died of AIDS." And then he says, "Yeah, man."

Eventually, he pulled himself out of his funk, in part by taking on some solo projects, in part because, in 1993, right at the end of the hiatus, he became a first-time dad, and like first-time dads everywhere, he had no choice but to rise to

Continued on page 147

the occasion. Still, he thinks about those years a lot and how they felt. He never wants to go back there. It could happen though. It took a lot for him to get over his elevator fear, but these days, if he gets too tired—maybe because of a grueling schedule tied to the release of a new album—the fear starts to come back (“I’ll race you!”), and then he has to be careful. Just to be on the safe side, a few days ago, he gathered the band together for a little talk. “Don’t let this be New Jersey,” he said. “Don’t let this be that.”

So, really, as it develops, Bon Jovi isn’t exactly the full-time easygoing guy everyone seems to assume he is. In fact, far from it.

“My dominant mood?” he says one afternoon, sitting high atop Manhattan, in a 35th-floor restaurant. “It would seem like borderline crankiness, but that’s not it at all. I’m usually just very pensive and thoughtful. I mean, Richie’s the happy one. He comes in the room and it lights up because he’s there jerking everyone off. I come in and talk black and white, X’s and O’s, dollars and cents. And then I gotta go. Let’s go. And my mind is always rolling with other things, which doesn’t mean I’m not being attentive. I am. But I’m also thinking. Right now, I’m thinking, My wife is down at the apartment, and my team has an important game tomorrow, and I want to know what’s going on with the band, and by the way, we gotta play this club tonight and is Richie going to be okay? And, truthfully, I’m also sitting here thinking, I gotta pee.”

He leaves, pees, and returns.

He’s in a slightly different mood now, and over the next little while he says a few things about himself that are not generally known and actually do go a little way toward rounding out the Bon Jovi picture. For instance: He does indeed floss—“but not often enough.” Also, at home, he’s not exactly a handyman: “The lightbulb goes dead, I throw out the lamp. I don’t know how to fix anything. Hey...I’m a singer!” What he likes to do with his kids is take them to the beach, and on occasion, offer them unsolicited advice: “There’s three things I told my kids. I said, ‘Never leave the house without sunglasses, don’t start your day without coffee, and never, ever own a minivan.’ And then I had them recite that back to me.” And he doesn’t seem to be kidding. He’s a huge cookie fan (“Give me a box of anything and I’ll eat it”) and some kind of happy wino: “A day don’t go by when I don’t want a bottle of wine. Or don’t drink a bottle of wine. I won’t drink it for lunch. I’m not like that. But when I’m done with a day’s work, I’ll be happy to sit in a bar with a bottle. And not share. Haha.” As to matters of personal cleanliness: “If I have a pair of jeans that fit, I’ll wear them every f--king day. I’ll wear them into the ground or until they fall off me.”

He is the family disciplinarian, more or less. “It’s equal,” he says, “but I’m the one with the dad voice, and if you’ve got to use the dad voice, I can bring it out.” He goes on, “And then, you know, you get that one day where each of the kids...where you jack them up against the wall and that’s the last time they do that. I myself got spanked plenty. I got rapped good. I got the belt plenty. But that was a different era.” He pauses. “But, sure. If sometimes you react like that, you don’t say, ‘I’m coming up the stairs to spank you!’ It’s just a quick f--king backhand, and then you go, ‘Goddammit, does that make me a bigger man? No.’ It’s not acting, it’s reacting. I mean, I have a temper. Definitely. I’m not an angry dad. I’m not like that. But you do get your buttons pushed.”

He can’t remember how he pushed his own dad’s buttons, only that he did. “And then I remember the smack or the shot or the, you know, that one day where you’re a teenager and you think you can call him out.” He smiles grimly. “I remember that. Pretty much he sobered me up on that occasion. That did it.”

Then he sits back in his chair, looking a little uneasy, as he sometimes does when he says a bit more than he might have perhaps wished. Some time goes by. Maybe his childhood wasn’t as without trauma as he likes to say it was. Maybe he’s not the world’s most perfect dad. Maybe he’s just doing the best he can, like most guys, which is what he sometimes says: “I do the best I can.”

Soon enough, though, he’s in a car again, buttoned up and quiet, on his way downtown to a meeting, and again he’s looking out the window at the city passing by. It won’t be long before he and his family move here, to start living in that \$26 million penthouse apartment he just bought. “It’s another one of those crossroads moments in life,” he says. “It’s huge. It’s scary. But it’s exciting. I mean, it’s all me. All me. I feel this change. I feel this change a-coming. I got ideas. I got plans. And I need stimulation again that I’m not getting in Jersey. I mean, I’m not unfulfilled in any way. I just need a change. And it’s time.”

What it’s time for right now, though, is for traffic to come to a dead halt. Bon Jovi frowns. If he’s late for this meeting, then the rest of his day will get all screwed up, everything cramming together, possibly leading him to become more pensive than usual, maybe even to a bout of elevator fear. “You want to know why I drink?” he says, half in jest. “This is why I drink. I’m just f--ked.” The car inches forward. A little more. It looks like things might move. But Bon Jovi has already come up with his own solution to the problem. “We should jump out,” he says. “I’d be happy to jump out. We’re just going around the block. What’s the big f--king deal? Come on, man, let’s jump out,” he says, opening the door. “I love that,” he says. “We’re in New York.” ■