

BY WENDY RUBICAM

PHOTOS BY CARRIE REISER

The Real *Rock of Love*

Ever dream of marrying a rock star? Kristi Gibson shares the details of her day-to-day life with fiancé Bret Michaels, and making their long-term relationship last

Last year, the world watched as legendary rocker Bret Michaels fought through a series of life-threatening medical emergencies, including brain and heart surgeries. Along with receiving excellent medical care, Michaels credits the support of family with giving him the motivation needed to reclaim his life and emerge stronger than ever. The woman by his side throughout his ordeal was Kristi Gibson, who received a marriage proposal from Michaels, which aired on the final episode of his reality show, *Bret Michaels: Life as I Know It*, in December of 2010.

The press was abuzz with news of the proposal, but for Michaels and Gibson, who live with their two daughters in Scottsdale, day-to-day life continued as usual.

"I had the ring before, and we've been together 17 years," Gibson says. "We love each other just as much, and maybe just the title 'the fiancée' instead of 'the girlfriend' might be different, but other than that it's just the same," she declares.

With a busy family life and Michaels on tour this summer, the couple hasn't made wedding plans. Gibson expects to fly off somewhere for a simple wedding on the beach at some point, but says, "Right now we're just living day-to-day."

Talking with Gibson about life with a rock star is much like chatting with a girlfriend about what makes relationships work. Thinking back to when she met Michaels, who was already a celebrity as the lead singer of Poison, she confides, "I knew that music is his first love, and going into it I knew I loved him for who he was. You know how some people go into a relationship and they try to change the person? I never tried to change the person."





Like any woman whose significant other travels for business, Gibson enjoys the rhythm of spending time apart and then happily reuniting with Michaels. "I'm a very independent person, and obviously so is he, so when he goes out on the road—this might sound weird—but I actually enjoy it," she admits. "I love my space, I love my freedom...he's the same way."

Gibson says the couple has common interests in music, outdoor living and animals, as well as sharing the same sense of humor. "We get along so great because, I think, we're best friends and we understand each other, and even after 17 years we still have awesome sex," she says openly. "Best friends, great sex...what more do you need?" she says, laughing. "I've gotta keep up with a rock star—come on now!" she jokes.

The couple has created an oasis on their 6-acre Scottsdale ranch, and Gibson says they love enjoying the outdoors year-round, whether it's riding dirt bikes, playing basketball, or hosting parties on their sand volleyball court.

"We're homebodies," she admits. "It's funny, but even when Bret comes home we don't go out a lot. If we do, we'll go down to Maestro's and eat and then come home and watch a movie," she says.

Everyday life for Gibson is much like that of any stay-at-home mom in Scottsdale. She is up early to take care of her two dogs

Back at home, she's cleaning up the house and taking care of the family's pet rats, which she says are "very cool" pets.

every morning, then get the girls up and off to school. Health and fitness have become a priority for the couple, and Gibson regularly heads out to Pinnacle Peak for a morning hike or to The Village to work out.

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"I am the biggest animal lover," she confesses.

It's clear that she enjoys her days at home and her role as mom. "I'm very fortunate that I've got a great life. I wouldn't want anyone else to raise my kids, and I'm enjoying raising the kids myself," she says. Her goal as a parent is to bring up strong girls. "I don't want them to be followers. I want them to be themselves, not be afraid to follow their dreams, and just be nice—treat people with respect."

Gibson is the family organizer and keeps Michaels on time for the girls' important events. "I'm always early. He's always late," she says affectionately, as she admits that she tells him to arrive about 45 minutes before the event actually starts so he will get there on time.

"He's more of a free spirit than I am. I'm a free spirit, but I'm an organized free spirit, if that makes sense," she says of her responsibilities as a mom.

These days, Gibson is enjoying watching Michaels in his role as a dad and seeing

the girls show definite signs of following in his footsteps. Michaels and

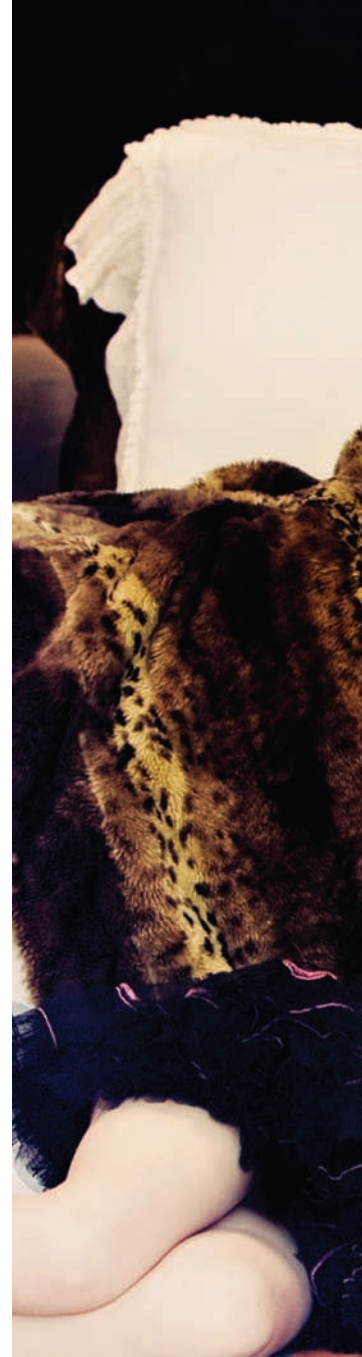
the girls are featured on the recently released album, *KIDZ BOP Sings Monster Ballads*, singing a new version of "Every Rose Has Its Thorn."

"I love watching him perform," she says of Michaels. "He's just got so much energy, he gets the crowd going. Now it's neat to watch the girls because they go out onstage for the last song and they sing with him...it's just really cool to see."

Like most moms, Gibson puts family first, but has learned to take care of herself and allow for a little "me time." Aside from relaxing at home, she enjoys massages at Body Solutions in Scottsdale and getting out to shop for some of her favorite looks.

Gibson describes her style as a cross between rocker and hippie. "I love jeans, killer, killer high heels and sexy shirts," she says, describing her favorite fashions.

She loves Gucci, Frankie B. Jeans, Haute Hippie and Christian





Louboutin shoes. "I've got a thing—you know how people have handbags or whatever? Mine is shoes. I love shoes, the higher the better," she confesses.

She says Michaels teases her about her shoe collection, asking, "Where do you wear those—to Safeway?"

She admits that she sometimes has to remind herself to change out of her comfy, at-home clothes when heading out, but loves putting on a pair of 6-inch spike heels and jewelry designed by her friend, Jacqueline Nerguizian. "She's designed so many cool pieces for me. It's unreal! She's so much fun," she says.

Gibson will be putting on heels and jewelry this summer for some of Michaels' concerts, saying that she'll pick out some fun cities to travel to with the girls. July was booked for family relaxation at a resort in Maui. Sounding again like a close friend, she admits to booking a hotel rather than a condo for the vacation. "Throughout the school year, I'm the one that's here, cooking and doing everything.

I thought we could get a condo, but then I'm cooking, I'm cleaning. I'm gonna go and just not make my bed and have someone else make it, order food...I'm going all out!" she says with a laugh.

Michaels performs in Arizona in October at the Arizona State Fair, and Gibson is looking forward to finding more time to volunteer in the near future. The couple sponsors a horse at Camelot Ranch, which teaches horsemanship for children and adults with disabilities, and they are also creating a music and hospitality room at St. Joseph's Barrow Neurological Institute, where Michaels received treatment last year.

"The more I can help out and volunteer, donate, whatever I need to do to help the less fortunate, is awesome. I love the feeling," Gibson says of settling back into the Scottsdale life she loves. "We've lived everywhere—Nashville, L.A., Vegas, Vancouver—all of these places, and I think Scottsdale is probably my favorite place."

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