

The Awakening of Melissa Etheridge

'The experience of having breast cancer was an incredible gift'

by Jim Radosta

On paper, Melissa Etheridge's life seems like the stuff of storytelling legend. A Midwest girl chases her dreams of stardom to Hollywood...only to discover the empty promises of fame. A lesbian takes a brave leap out of the closet a decade before Ellen DeGeneres...only to find that her popularity thrives as a result. A health scare nearly derails everything...until a spiritual reawakening puts her on a clear path toward a career high of Oscar gold, familial bliss and rubbing elbows with political leaders. With all of this dynamic material, it would stand to reason that Etheridge can spin one helluva yarn. She puts these skills to use on *The Awakening*, a stunningly candid "concept album" that takes listeners on a journey through her life, from her 1982 arrival in Southern California to her 2004 battle with breast cancer. Now on tour to promote a live CD/DVD version of *The Awakening*—and hard at work on *A New Thought for Christmas*, coming out this fall—the 47-year-old spoke with *Just Out* about a wide range of subjects: medicinal marijuana, ménage à trois, Britney Spears' meltdown, Hillary Clinton's gaffe and much, much more.

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