

# DOLLY PARTON

GIFTED STORYTELLER

No one in country music is like Dolly Parton, and she planned it that way, beginning with her appearance: piles of artificial hair, layers of makeup, and sparkly costumes. Her style was inspired by a woman in her hometown; as a child, Parton thought the woman was glamorous. Beneath Parton's wigs and rhinestones, you will find one of the most gifted songwriters in music. "I've always been misunderstood because of how I look; don't judge me by the cover 'cause I'm a real good book," she sings in her song "Backwoods Barbie."

Though famous as a performer, actor, and businessperson, Parton said, "I've always prided myself on being a songwriter more than anything else." She has written more than three thousand songs, drawing from her childhood, her emotions, and her faith; and of those, she has recorded close to four hundred.

Born in the tiny Smoky Mountain town of Sevierville, Tennessee, on January 19, 1946, Parton was the fourth of twelve children raised in a home without running water or electricity. She wrote her first song, about her corn-cob doll, when she was five. She started playing guitar at seven, and began singing on radio and TV when she was ten. Some people laughed at her high school graduation, in 1964, when she announced that her plan was to go to Nashville to be a singer and songwriter. She left the next day.

In Nashville, singer Bill Phillips scored Top Ten hits with two songs Parton co-wrote. As a recording artist, Parton's "Dumb Blonde," released in 1966, was her first hit. In 1967, her soprano voice caught the ear of country star Porter Wagoner, who hired her for his televised music show. They



became one of country's biggest duos, but Parton became even more successful after going out on her own in 1974.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Parton began crossing over into the pop music world and appearing in movies and on TV. This move angered some people, who thought that she was abandoning country music, but in 1999, Parton released the bluegrass album *The Grass Is Blue*. The album was a return to the music she grew up hearing. Outside of music, Parton also created the Imagination Library, which has given more than 100 million books to kids around the world. Dollywood, her amusement park in Pigeon Forge, Tennessee, has created jobs and made millions of dollars for to the region where she was raised. After wildfires devastated part of the same region in 2016, Parton raised money for people who lost their homes.

Dolly Parton was elected to the Country Music Hall of Fame in 1999.

## SOURCES

*American Songwriter; the Boot; the Guardian; In Their Own Words: Songwriters Talk about the Creative Process* by Bill DeMain; *Performing Songwriter*