



DOLLY PARTON: GIFTED STORYTELLER

No one else in country music is like Dolly Parton, and from the start she planned it that way, beginning with her embellished appearance. She dreamed it up around age ten: piles of fake hair, layers of makeup, and sparkly costumes.

Beneath all of that is one of the most gifted songwriters across all categories of music. Though famous as a stage performer, movie actress, and businesswoman, Parton says, “I’ve always prided myself as a songwriter more than anything else.” In her long career, she has earned a Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award and membership in the Country Music Hall of Fame and the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame. Through it all, she says, she has worked at songwriting “almost every day.” She has written more than 3,000 songs, almost 400 of which she has recorded.

Born in 1946 in the tiny Smoky Mountain town of Sevierville, Tennessee, Parton was the fourth of twelve children raised in a home without running water or electricity. She wrote her first song, about her corncob doll, when she was five years old. She started “writing serious” and playing guitar at age seven and then began singing on radio and TV when she was ten. Some people laughed at her at her high school graduation in 1964 when she announced that she planned to move to Nashville to become a singer and songwriter. She left the next day. Three years later, her soprano voice caught the ear of country star Porter Wagoner, who hired her for his TV music show. Together, Wagoner and Parton became one of



country’s biggest duos, but she became even more successful after going out on her own in 1974.

Parton never learned to read music, so she works with a guitar and an audio recorder. She writes in the early morning, which she calls her “most creative time,”

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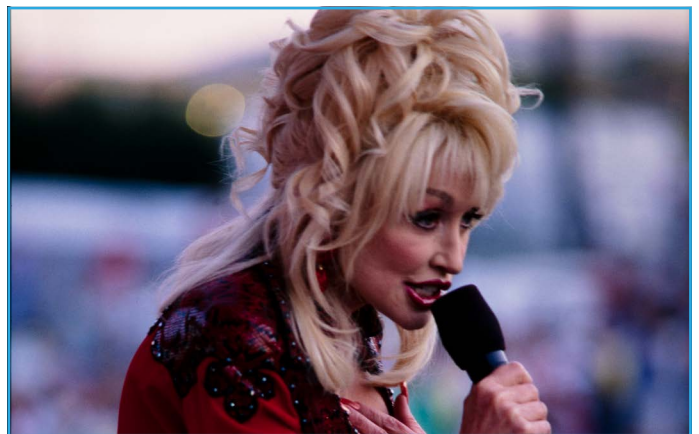
“9 to 5,” “Coat of Many Colors,” “I Will Always Love You,” “Jolene,” “My Tennessee Mountain Home”



DOLLY PARTON: GIFTED STORYTELLER (CONTINUED)

and relies on her natural gift for rhyme. Drawing from her childhood, her emotions, and her faith, she is best known as a writer of story songs. “It’s much easier for me to write the story songs,” Parton says. “Boy, I can tell you a story in a minute.”

The serious and sometimes sad lyrics don’t really match Parton’s appearance—and that’s how she wants it. “The thing that’s always worked for me,” she explains, “is the fact that I look so totally artificial but am so totally real.”



CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING

1. What was the first song about that Dolly wrote? How old was she?

2. Circle the word “embellished” in the first paragraph. Underline the clue words and phrases that help you understand the meaning of the word.

3. Why do you think the author included the fact that “Some people laughed at her at her high school graduation in 1964 when she announced that she planned to move to Nashville to become a singer and songwriter”?

