

# NEWS

## DOLLY PARTON RELEASES ANTI-BULLYING CHILDREN'S ALBUM

*The country singer discusses her career in music and the idea of giving back*

**D**olly Parton is a national treasure. The country singer released her first album 50 years ago. Since then, Parton has starred in movies and been nominated for two Academy Awards, both nominations in the Best Original Song category — one for the hit “9 to 5.”

Her accolades don't stop there. Parton has also earned Emmy and Tony nominations; she's a National Medal of the Arts recipient and one of the most successful country singers of all time.

A new first for the 71-year-old singer-songwriter came earlier this month with the release of her first children's album, *I Believe in You*. All proceeds from the album will benefit Parton's Imagination Library, a nonprofit she started 20 years ago that mails free books to children from birth to age 5.

To date, the Imagination Library has served one million children in four countries. In 2013, the Eugene Imagination Library program began.

Recently, this reporter participated in a phone press conference with Dolly Parton in which all reporters were allowed to ask only one question — with the added suggestion that we refrain from small talk.

Despite the strict guidelines, each reporter said, “Hello, how are you,” and Parton took time to say, “Hi,” and return the question.

Parton's inspiration behind the new album? Bullies.

“Well, all the bullies in this world, which I do not like at all,” she said. Parton and her siblings were poor growing up. “We always had to wear ragged clothes,” she said. “We often got made fun of and it was never funny.”

“Especially now,” Parton continued, “people are trying to teach children not to be bullies; that it hurts, and it don't feel good. And how would you feel if it happened to you?”

In the song “Makin Fun Ain't Funny,” the singer's lyrics spell out right and wrong, with children accompanying her during the chorus. The song's first verse — “Don't do this / making someone else feel small to make yourself look big / if you can't be big / don't belittle someone else / that's not the thing to do” — along with its overall anti-bullying message, is “for little kids,” Parton said, “but it's also for grown-ups, too.”

Parton started the Imagination Library 20 years ago, fueled by her belief in the empowerment of literacy. “I actually did it in honor of my father who was never able to read or write,” Parton said. Her dad was proud to be involved and “lived long enough to see it doing well, and he got such a kick out of people calling me the book lady.”

She continued: “I think it's important because if you can learn how to read, you can educate yourself about any subject. You don't have to have money if you can't afford to go to school.”

BY CORINNE BOYER

Parton's generosity has made it possible for Eugene to establish a local Imagination Library program. It's the largest in Oregon, Eugene Public Library Director Connie Bennett said. “Literacy is one of the most important skills for a preschool child to learn for success in their life, and the American Pediatric Association has come out with that as one of the crucial things for young children to have,” she said.

One of the biggest reason children don't read is because they don't have access to books, Bennett said. “So by mailing something directly to their home with their own name on it is incredibly powerful at breaking that barrier down so that the busy caregiver or parent has something right there. They don't have to make a trip to the library. They don't have to wait for grandma to send a package.”

Started in 2013, Eugene's Imagination Library Program has reached nearly 4,000 children — but 8,000 children are eligible to sign up for the program, according to Eugene Public Library Foundation Executive Director Monica Wilton. The foundation provides local funding for the Eugene Imagination Library program; the Dollywood Foundation requires a local nonprofit funding source.

“One of the reasons they found that people don't sign up is they think it's too good to be true,” Wilton said. “People understand that there's no catch. It's really good and it's really true.”

To sign up for the Eugene program, children have to live within the Eugene Public Library service area, they need a mailing address, and they need to be under age 5.

Parton said she's been blessed and thinks it's her duty to give back. “I really think that once you are in a position to help, you definitely should help. You get a good feeling when you feel like you're doing something for somebody else,” she said. “Whether you're paying your tithes or whatever, if God's been good to you, be good to other people. That's how we spread the love around.”

One reporter asked Parton to tell the story of her first guitar. When she was growing up, she said, she was always singing. Parton's uncle owned a little Martin guitar that she just loved.

“When he saw how serious I was about my music, he gave me his little Martin guitar, and it was my treasure,” she said. “I left it at home when I was 18 years old. I put it in the loft — it was beat up — and when I got money, when I got rich and famous, I was going to fix it up. [But] the loft burned out of our house and burned up my little guitar. So I only have the neck of that one. But I have collected Martin guitars over the years, the baby Martins.”

As Parton talked about topics from her songwriting process — she carries a notepad everywhere — to knowing she wanted to leave her hometown and see the world, she recounted the extraordinary details behind the success of the song “I Will Always Love You.”

“That song is so deep-seated in my heart and in my soul,” she said. It was written for Porter Wagoner, a country singer Parton worked with early in her career.

“We had one of those relationships we were so much alike that we couldn't get along or we were so much different that we couldn't get along,” she said of Wagoner. “I wrote that song to try to say here's how I feel. I'll always love you, [but] I have to go; I have to leave.”

Years later, Parton sent the song to L.A. She said “Kevin Costner and his secretary loved the song,” but she never heard back from anyone about using it. Parton said she didn't know that Whitney Houston had recorded her song.

“I was on my way home and I turned the radio on and all the sudden I heard that a-cappella part, and I was like ‘Ooh, what's that?’ — I knew it was something familiar,” she said.

“By the time it dawned on me what I was hearing when she was into that chorus, I had to stop the car cause I almost wrecked. I mean I thought my heart was gonna bust right out of my body. It was the most powerful feeling I've ever had.”

Parents can sign their children up for the Imagination Library through the Eugene Public Library or at [usa.imaginationlibrary.com](http://usa.imaginationlibrary.com). ■



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