

## DOLLY PARTON'S IMAGINATION LIBRARY

# 'The Book Lady'

Dolly Parton opened the 2019 Legislative Summit in Nashville, Tenn., with an onstage discussion of her Imagination Library project, which distributes books to children each month until they turn 5.

Parton talked about books, her dad, women in the workplace and her seemingly boundless energy in this interview with *State Legislatures* magazine.

### What's the most surprising thing that's happened to you as a result of the Imagination Library project?

Well, how big it has grown and how fast, and how much people have really taken to it. ... Now it's like up to 125 million

[kids]. So that's a wonderful thing.

### Your dad was the inspiration for this. Can you tell us a little about him?

Well, my dad, like so many country people, the hard-working people, especially back in the rural areas, my dad never had a chance to go to school because he had to help make a living for the family. And so, Daddy couldn't read and write. That always bothered him.

So when I got ready to start the program ... I thought I'm going to do this for my dad and I'm going to bring him along with me to help me with that. So, he got to live long enough to see

it really take off and start doing good, and so he loved it when the kids called me the Book Lady. He was prouder of that than saying that my daughter's a star: 'My daughter's the Book Lady.'

### I saw "9 to 5" in 1980 and think of you being in the #MeToo movement before it was cool. What do you think about women's role in the workplace now?

Well, you know, I never was hindered by the fact of being a woman. I just always had a lot of confidence in myself and I grew up with my mom and five sisters, my aunts and my grandmothers—very strong women that really kept it all going. And it never crossed my mind that I couldn't do anything that anybody else could do.

My first RCA album was called "Just Because I'm a Woman," and I wrote that song back in 1966 and it was: My mistakes are no worse than yours just because I'm a woman, and it talks about like how men want to ... get out and they run around and they do whatever, and when they want to get married they want an angel. Well, it's not like that.

All these songs that I wrote that were empowering women—I'm glad that I did that and it's still holding up today.

### I've read that you read about 50 books a year. Where do you find the time?

I love books and I'm not a big television person. I read while other people watch TV. You always find time to do the things you love. But I read myself to sleep at night. If I wake up in the middle of the night and can't get back to sleep, I read myself back to sleep. When I

wake up in the morning if I'm really into a book, I finish that before I get up.

### If you could invite three authors, living or dead, to dinner, who would they be?

Well, that's an interesting question because I love all the great writers. I love the classics. ... Lee Smith is my favorite Southern writer and we got to be friends, so I'd definitely invite her because we would have good things to talk about. And if I was going back to the old ones ... probably Charles Dickens. I love all of his things, but I love "A Christmas Carol," and I love it so much that I have written a musical called "A Smoky Mountain Christmas Carol," and Scrooge is a man in the Appalachians that runs all the coal mines. It's about all the poor Appalachian people. ... It's going to be touring probably this Christmas.

James Patterson writes a lot of gore and mystery, but I love his books. I'd like to ask him how he and Bill Clinton got together to write a book together—like to see if he might be interested in writing one with me.

### You've written several books. Do you think of yourself as an author, country music star or legend?

Well, I'm an entertainer and, of course, I love my songwriting more than anything else. But I'm just kind of the whole package. I'm not great at any of it, but I'm good enough ... but I'm great enough at all of it to make it all work.

*This interview was conducted by Ed Smith, NCSL's director of content, and has been edited for length. The full interview is available at [www.ncsl.org/magazine](http://www.ncsl.org/magazine).*



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Dolly Parton onstage at the 2019 Legislative Summit in Nashville.