

A Note from Executive Director, Lisa Zimmers

Influence

Dolly Parton was an American icon. Whether you're a fan of aspects of her life or not, you've likely been influenced by her in some way. Today we think of an influencer as someone who has a large following on the different social media platforms or is paid by a company to sell their products. Dolly was an influencer before being an influencer was an aspiration, title, or a way to make money and certainly long before the internet became the platform it is today.

I've often heard people say that someone wears a lot of hats when they have many responsibilities or interests. Dolly wore a lot of wigs. Her wigs became part of her image as were her makeup, body, curve hugging bedazzled dresses and jumpsuits, high heels, and her voice. Her wigs also represented her music, humanitarian initiatives, business acumen, and kindness and generosity.

Dolly received a great deal of recognition in her life, and she was also awarded many honors. Many of the honors were related to her music. Inductions into the Country Music Hall of Fame and the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, Entertainer of the Year, Grammy Awards, Emmy Awards, Lifetime Achievement Awards, Kennedy Center Honors, Humanitarian Awards, Library of Congress Living Legend... the list goes on and on.

She has been widely recognized for her apolitical stance. Dolly was offered the Presidential Medal of Honor by President Trump twice and President Biden once; she didn't accept either offer. She faced criticism for not endorsing any political party. Many reporters tried to bait her into saying something negative. She never waffled; she told them directly she wasn't in politics, she was an entertainer. She took her job of lifting people up seriously and often used humor to deflect anger and negativity. She had no hesitation in making a joke where she was the punchline.

As much as Dolly's image is emblazoned in minds across the world, her humanitarian initiatives and music will be her lasting legacy. She was widely known for her kindness and generosity. The Imagination Library she created as a tribute to her illiterate father has gifted free books to children since 1995. The program started in her local area in Tennessee then expanded to the entire state. Less than ten years later it grew to serve children across the world from birth to 5 years old. Children who are enrolled in the program receive a book through the mail every month free of charge. I would venture to say the postal service appreciates this effort as much as the children.

During her storied entertainment career, Dolly has been generous with her time in supporting other artists. She always found room on the stage for others. She stayed at the top by lifting others up. Her mentorship, collaborations, and knack for contributing to literary and musical masterpieces are sprinkled across many genres. She has widely been titled as the "Queen of Country", but her influence has spanned beyond music and across the world and that is quite a legacy. Dolly wrote and performed her mega hit, "I Will Always Love You" in 1974. At the time, it was regarded as a breakup song to a romantic relationship. It now seems more suitable as a means to console her fans in her own voice.

Stay true and use your influence for good.