

# Hello Dolly!

## The iconic star shares her outlook on camping... and life.

*RV View*

Monday August 7, 2006

Even in the distance between an audience standing on its feet and the stage bathed in hot spotlights, she's visually spectacular; at barely five feet tall with platinum hair, ruby red lips and a full body profile that's almost aerodynamically impossible, Dolly Parton sets hearts thumping, faces smiling and, quite often, feet stomping.

With her impish smile, an unfettered giggle that draws others into laughter and a Southern accent that proudly proclaims her roots in what is most often called Appalachia, Parton, now sixty, remains as girlish and, in most cases, unaffected, as she was when first appearing onstage more than forty years ago. She is still beautiful, she can still sing and write songs that go on to become platinum sellers and if she's turned a high-school education into a multi-multi-million dollar fortune filled with successful businesses above and beyond her music career, it shouldn't surprise anyone, says Parton. Least of all her critics.

"It takes a lot of money to look this cheap," Parton has joked back and if her penchant for skin-tight clothes, bouffant hairstyles and bright, "look at me!" makeup has spawned hundreds of jokes throughout her many decades in the entertainment industry, the jokes have always been with Dolly, never on her. "I'm not offended by dumb blonde jokes because I know that I'm not dumb," Parton retaliates. "I also know that I'm not blonde."

That Dolly is comfortable with herself and knows herself at age sixty is undeniable, and she wants to make one thing perfectly clear right off the bat; "I'm sixty! Sixty! I don't mind being it, I just don't like saying it." She will also inform you that she doesn't really think about her age because she doesn't have time to get old; she's a savvy business woman, an entertainer still constantly in demand and, she'll brag, a wife to husband Carl Dean for forty years.

None of this success was a given when she was growing up in Sevierville, Tennessee, although in her memoir "My Life and Other Unfinished Business," Parton says that she always had a flair for the dramatic and a love for entertaining.

Born Dolly Rebecca Parton, one of twelve children raised by her parents first in a one-room cabin in Sevierville and then later on a run-down tobacco farm in Locust Ridge, she often tells stories of the great love and camaraderie shared by all the siblings but has also humorously reminisced that it could feel a little overwhelming at times.

"After Momma gave birth to twelve of us kids, we put her upon a pedestal. It was mostly to keep Daddy away from her," Parton joked, but the love that the family feels for one another is almost palpable when she talks about them. In fact, after she and Dean married in 1966, a number of her siblings moved in with them.

But even as a teenager, Parton knew that she wanted to be like one of her beloved butterflies—a good-luck design element that she still uses in her work to this day—and by her early teen years she was performing in nearby Knoxville, recording on a small, independent label and she even appeared at the Grand Ole Opry.

Parton's blossoming as a performer in her teens was matched only by another kind of blossoming...her figure. Parton claims to have always had a love of sparkles, Spandex and fringe and she quickly developed a trademark look that's served her well for nearly fifty years on stage. Not since Minnie Pearl's signature "hat with price tag" has a country performer been so well-known for certain, uh, assets.

Over the years, Parton's not only reveled in the attention her looks have generated but has also learned to gently put off any mean criticism through her bright, quick wit. What at first comes off as completely genuine and self-deprecating has also turned the tables on many a critic or journalist. Quips like "I like to buy clothes that are two sizes too small...and then take them in a little. I describe my look as a blend of Mother Goose, Cinderella and the local hooker!" and "There's a heart beneath the boobs and a brain beneath the wig" only serves to underscore not only Parton's ability to laugh at herself but the shrewd businesswoman who understands that market branding is not only an art but the key to longevity in a fickle business.

And if Parton can joke about her famous bust—reportedly insured for \$600,000—with comebacks like "People always ask me if they're mine. Yes, they are...all bought and paid for," no one can doubt the earning of a successful career that includes everything from Academy Award, Grammy Award, Emmy and Golden Globe nominations to number one songs and two People's Choice Awards for Favorite All Around Female Performer. She was elected to the Country Music Hall of Fame in 1999 and, in a quirky tribute to a woman who often tells stories about the sheep that used to graze in the hills above her childhood home in Tennessee, the world's first cloned animal, Dolly the Sheep, was supposedly named after Parton.

Even at "sixty," Parton is rarely out of the limelight. She's writing a new children's book, crafting the score for a new musical, makes appearances for her Dollywood Foundation and its Imagination Library (children's literacy) project and, this past spring, performed "Travelin' Thru," an original song penned by Parton for the movie "Transamerica" at the Academy Awards. "Travelin' Thru" was nominated for an Oscar in the Best Achievement in Music Written for Motion Pictures, Original Song category but wasn't Parton's first brush with potential Oscar stardom; in 1981, she also saw one of her best-known songs, "Nine to Five" nominated for Best Music, Original Song.

**With a career like that, it's hard to imagine Parton sitting down for five minutes much less taking a vacation strapped in with a seatbelt, but that's just what Parton and her husband do each year in their Roadtrek RV.**

RV View caught up with Dolly and Carl on the road and asked them to share some tips for happy times on the road:

**RVV:** Okay, which one of you is the better driver?

DP: I'm the driver... the back-seat driver, that is! Carl does the driving and I provide the commentary.

RVV: You have the option to travel the world using any mode of transportation out there; why an RV?

DP: I've practically spent my entire life on a bus or an RV. It's private, fun and besides, I haul around a bunch of stuff! If I had to carry all of this junk to a hotel room, it would be time to check out before I even checked in!

RVV: Is there one destination you'd like to recommend to others?

DP: Well, the best places to visit are Pigeon Forge, Branson, Myrtle Beach and Orlando. I'm sure I would still recommend them even if they weren't home to Dollywood and Dixie Stampede.

RVV: Any place you want to go that's still on your "wish list?"

DP: Well, I haven't gone to heaven yet and while I'm looking forward to the trip, it's not time yet!

RVV: What is it that makes the Smoky Mountains so very special to you?

DP: The Smoky Mountains are just a part of me...I have taken to calling it my Smoky Mountain DNA! To me it's special because of its beauty; both the people and the mountains are the most beautiful things in the entire world. There's also a spirit here that I find very unique and it shows through in our music, our food and our families.

RVV: Not unlike your marriage, you've managed to maintain a successful career for more than forty years. Any tips?

DP: I'm more excited about my music and my career today than I was when I started. I've always felt life was an adventure and I can't wait to see what's around the corner. So I guess my tips are (to) stay happy and centered, stay curious about the world and have some fun.

RVV: And how about tips for a forty-year marriage?

DP: Many people seem to think that being married forty years makes Carl and me some kind of experts on marriage; at this point, he's as tired of me as I am of him! Only joking, of course. Really, we just love each other and respect each other. If the truth be known, I'm probably just plain lucky that I met a man like him.

RVV: Tell us a bit about your autobiography...any regrets in writing it?

DP: The book was called "My Life and Other Unfinished Business" and right now I'm focusing on my unfinished business! I have no regrets and wouldn't change a thing about the book. Besides if you keep looking back, you're bound to run off the road.

RVV: What can we look forward to from you?

DP: I often joke about how many kids my momma had—she always had one on her and one in her! It's pretty much the same for me as far as working goes... I'm always working on the next project. Right now, I'm writing all of the music for the Broadway adaptation of "9 to 5." I have a children's book that I hope to release next year and I've been thinking about a gospel album. So stay tuned — there's more to come!