

NATIONAL PRESS CLUB LUNCHEON WITH DOLLY PARTON

SUBJECT: SINGER/SONGWRITER DOLLY PARTON WILL ADDRESS A LUNCHEON

MODERATOR: SYLVIA SMITH, PRESIDENT, NATIONAL PRESS CLUB

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DONNA LEINWAND: (Sounds gavel.) Good afternoon and welcome to the National Press Club. My name is Donna Leinwand. I'm a reporter with *USA Today* and I'm the president of the National Press Club.

We're the world's leading professional organization for journalists. And on behalf of our 3,600 members worldwide, I'd like to welcome our speaker and our guests in the audience today. I'd also like to welcome those who are watching on C-Span and listening on XM Satellite Radio.

We're celebrating our 100th anniversary this year, and we've rededicated ourselves to a commitment to the future of journalism through informative programming, journalism education, and fostering a free press worldwide. For more information about the National Press Club, please visit our website at www.press.org.

We're looking forward to today's speech, and afterwards, I'll ask as many questions from the audience as time permits. Please hold your applause during the speech so that we have as much time for as many questions as possible. For our broadcast audience, I'd like to explain that if you hear applause, it may be from our guests and members of the general public who attend our luncheon, and not necessarily from the working press.

I'd now like to introduce our head table guests and ask them to stand briefly when their names are called. From you're right, Bob Edwards, host of *The Bob Edwards Show* on Sirius XM Radio, and the host of *Bob Edwards Weekend* on Public Radio International; Marlene Hall, a freelance music writer; Bill Theobald, a correspondent in the Gannett News Service, Washington bureau, covering Tennessee; Susan Whittaker, commissioner of tourism for the State of Tennessee, and a guest of our speaker.

Skipping over the podium thing, Angela Greiling-Keane, chair of the Speakers Committee and a reporter for Bloomberg News. Skipping over our speaker for today--

DOLLY PARTON: ...(inaudible) (Laughter.)

MS. LEINWAND: We'll get to you. I promise. Sylvia Smith, *Ft. Wayne Journal Gazette* and immediate past president who organized today's event. Thank you very much, Sylvia. (Applause.) Dale Ditmanson, superintendent of Great Smoky Mountain National Park, also a guest of the speaker. (Applause.) Andrea Snyder, consumer news editor at Bloomberg; Mindi Wood, press secretary for Congressman Mark Souder of Indiana; and Jeff DuFour, columnist and editor-at-large for the *Washington Examiner*. (Applause.)

People who don't know anything about country music know Dolly Parton. They might also know Willie Nelson or Garth Brooks, but they definitely know Dolly Parton. Dolly Parton has been performing, dare I say it, for more than 50 years. But-- (Applause.) But that's because she really did start in grade school. She was on the radio and on a Knoxville, Tennessee program when she was still a child. And that's when she knew what she wanted to be, and that was a star.

Dolly Parton didn't create the country music crossover, but she is one of the most successful, if not *the* most successful country music star to become mainstream hit machines. She's had her own TV variety show. She's performed in movies, including *9 to 5*, and my personal favorite, *Steel Magnolias*. She has also-- Yeah, other people like that one, too.

She is so well-known that when she created the Dollywood Theme Park, she never had to worry that people would ask, "Dolly who?" In recent years, she's become a philanthropist. Her Imagination Library provides a book of the month to preschoolers in her home country, Sevier, Tennessee.

Four years after she launched the Sevier County program, Dolly came to the Press Club and announced that the Imagination Library was ready to go

nationwide. In that speech nine years ago, almost to the month, Dolly said her foundation would underwrite the Imagination Library in counties in Missouri and South Carolina. She challenged communities to come up with money to open Imagination Libraries of their own.

In 2007, she launched the British version. Now in more than 700 communities, each child receives a book a month until age 5. As Dolly Parton said at the 2000 National Press Club luncheon, “You can’t make parents read to their children. But you can take away the excuse that there are no books in the house.”

And now she’s become the ambassador of the Great Smoky Mountain National Park as it celebrates its 75th anniversary. The Smoky Mountains are the heart and soul of many of Dolly Parton’s songs. In fact, she once said, “The Smokies are part of my DNA.” So it’s fitting that Dolly Parton is lending her name to the region that birthed her and the essence of who she is.

She wrote an album entitled *Sha-Kon-O-Hey* which is the phonetic spelling for the Cherokee word that means “land of the blue smoke.” The rights to the album will be donated to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park during the 75th anniversary year. The album goes on-sale tomorrow, and we’re hoping to get a little taste of it today. That’s a hint. Please give a warm National Press Club welcome to Dolly Parton. (Applause.)

MS. PARTON: Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Well, now I know why Billy Joel only spoke two minutes because you told everything I was going to say. Anyway, I want to let you know that I’m very proud to be back here again. The last time I was here, as she mentioned, was in 2000. And I stood here and told you that we were open to really expand on the Imagination Library for anybody that was interested.

‘Course you know back then, when we started it, we were in Sevier County. It actually started in my hometown. And we wanted to make sure that all the children in our area had books from the time they started-- from the time they were born till they started kindergarten, they got a book a month. Well, that did just great. And then of course Governor Bredesen, Phil Bredesen, our Tennessee governor, got onboard. And so we went all over Tennessee with it.

And now we’re happy to say, because of you folks that helped us get this all started, we are in 1,000 communities, three countries now. And I think we will have mailed out approximately 20 million books. So that’s a pretty good start, so. And we’re very proud of all that. And I’m proud to be called The Book Lady.

As a matter of fact, when I got the idea for the Imagination Library, my father and many of my own relatives didn't get a chance to get an education. And my own dad never actually went to school. He couldn't read nor write. But there were 12 of us children. And my daddy worked like a dog to make sure that he fed us. And daddy had a, you know, real hard time with the fact that he couldn't read and write.

So when I started this program, which is one of the reasons I wanted to put books in the hands of children, my dad was so proud of me. My dad passed away just a few years back. But he got a chance to see the Imagination Library do good. And he was so proud to have children call me The Book Lady. That's what they called me. They all think that I bring these books and that I put them in the mailbox myself, kind of like Peter Rabbit, which, that makes me feel good. And everywhere I go now-- This is not just for underprivileged children. These books are for all children, because there are a lot of folks with money that don't pay attention to their children and they don't get a chance to read and write.

But anyhow, everywhere I go, little children always say, "Thank you for the books, Ms. Dolly. Thank you for the books." So that makes me feel great. So actually I am very, very proud of that. Now that was the last time we were here. And like you had mentioned, I'm here now to talk about the fact that I am going to be the international ambassador for the 75th anniversary of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

Now a lot of people don't know it. But the Great Smoky Mountains National Park is the most visited national park in The United States. People say, "Are you sure about that?" I say, "Yes, I am." Because we get about 10 million people a year. And 'course I grew up at the foothills of the Great Smoky Mountains way back there in the woods. 'Course we were just kind of part of the park. We used to always see the bears get-- come down on our property, you know, from the Park. A lot of people would kind of go up and kind of hunt the bear. But we thought it was a great thing that every now and then we'd get to see the bears. So we really felt like we were part of the Park.

And of course some of the most beautiful things in the world you'll see there in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. So when they asked me if I would be the ambassador, I said yes in a New York minute. We're close to New York. But anyhow, I've always been the ambassador, always proud of my home, and proud to talk about the Smokies.

So we actually are going to be doing some wonderful things this whole year. And one of the reasons we're here, need the press so much is to bring attention to the Great Smoky Mountains, because we want to bring all sorts of people there. We've got lots of festivities from Cherokee and also Pigeon Forge,

Gatlinburg, Sevierville, all the areas around us. And of course we've got wonderful things. But same as it was back 75 years ago when FDR founded the Park, still free. And this day and time, free's good, ain't it? We need it.

But anyhow. So I'm going to be taking part in that. And as she was saying, Shaconage, who means "land of blue smoke", the Cherokee Indians-- 'Course I've written all the songs for a play that talks about when people were moved out of the Smokies to make room for the Park. So I've written eight new songs for that. And that's going to be one of the big things at Dollywood, which is my theme park up there, so. And all the money from that CD, as Donna mentioned, is going to be going to friends of the Smokies where we can actually kind of help with all the programs in the Park. So I'm very proud that I have that to do.

Actually, we have-- I made a bunch of notes, but I never do look at them. I tried to, but always get caught up in the people. Actually, Dale Ditmanson is our superintendent of the Parks. You want to just kind of wave there? You can stand up. You'll hit the ceiling, though. And of course Susan Whitaker is-- you know, is from our tourist-- commissioner of tourism there in Tennessee. And we've worked together for many years, even back as far as Dollywood. Now we work with the Governor. So we've got lots of wonderful things planned for that.

But anyhow. So we're going to be doing different songs little later on tonight. I think we're going to do a show and I think all of you are invited. I'm going to actually do some full songs. I didn't bring a band here because I couldn't. But I thought it might be fun to make you work a little bit.

So anyhow, I'm very proud of all the songs in it. And I wrote a song, the Cherokee song, which they're proud of, "Sha-Kon-O-Hey." And you're going to have to help me. I'm going to sing a little bit of that one for you. So I want all of you to kind of just bang on your table there.

[performance]

I wish I'd have had you on the record. Anyway. The whole song goes and it talks about the Smokies and talks about, like, the Cherokee Indians and all the things that they do and all their spiritual side. I think I had it in the wrong key, but I did as good as you did. (Laughter.) Anyway. So I thought you might get a kick out of knowing kind of what that is. So we called the whole musical that.

Anyhow. Let me see what I wanted to say that I didn't. Wow. Think I said about everything. We're going to have a bunch of questions. She was afraid I was not going to have anything to talk about. I took pictures with most of you people out there, didn't I? Because I know some girl said, "Oh, tell that story about when you was little and how you come to look so cheap." (Laughter.)

I said, "Well now, don't you get on me. It costs a fortune to make somebody look so cheap." It's why I say I have to keep working. So I've always been glad. But seriously, talking about growing up in the Smokies and the things and the people that influenced me, not just the beauty, but the people. And I did take my look from a serious place.

It's a country girl's idea of glam. It's one of the songs that actually is from the Broadway musical *9 to 5*, which is going to open in New York on Broadway on the 20th of April. So any of you that's out doing that-- Anyway. She said, "Tell that story." I said, "Well, it's the truth."

There was this woman in our hometown. Whenever we did get to get out of the mountains there and get to go to town, which was very seldom, but if somebody had a toothache or had to go to the doctor or somebody had to take one of their kids to town, well, you'd just kind of get to walk around while your daddy went over to the courthouse and played checkers or-- and your mama went to the A&P or daddy went to the courthouse and peed. (Laughter.)

Anyway. I would just look around. And I'd watch all the people. And one of the most beautiful women I'd ever seen in my life used to walk up and down the streets. Now, she was beautiful. I didn't know what she was. I didn't care. My daddy thought she was pretty. So did my uncles and my brothers and all the other men around there. And I used to-- She had this, you know, mop of beautiful yellow hair, red lipstick, red fingernails. And she used to wear high-heeled shoes that had a clear heel. And inside the heel, little goldfish. There were. There were little plastic goldfish. And when she talked, those little fish would just swim around.

And you can only imagine a little kid like me because all I could do was strike a match and paint my eyebrows and paint my lips with pokeberries and medicines, whatever I could find to try to look good. So anyway, I would look at her and I'd just think, she is the prettiest thing I'd ever seen. And every time I'd say that, whatever woman I was with would say, "Oh, she ain't nothin' but trash."

And I thought, "Aha, that's what I'm gonna be when I grow up." And I know that I look like it, but it's my idea. It's a country girl's idea of glam. And that's one of the lines in the song, "Backwoods Barbie" that I was talking about. But it's those kind of things that kind of mold you and shape you, wherever you're from. You kind of remember those things. And thank god for those wild berries that grew up there in the Smoky Mountains, too.

But anyway, real proud to be here. I'm always proud to be part of you. And I want to thank all of you for being good to me basically through the years.

Every now and then, I'll get a bad story in the tabloids. We were just talking about, I said, "Well, usually those things are based on a thread of truth." But those are frayed so bad by the time you get to it, you don't know what's true and what's not. But we don't worry about them. That's not you anyhow, right?

So anyway, thank you for having me. And I think that we're going to do some Q&A, question and answer. So ask me anything you want. And if I don't know the answer, I'm gonna make it up and you'll never know the difference. (Laughter.)(Applause.)

MS. LEINWAND: Someone wants to know about the town tramp. Can you tell [simultaneous conversation] us--

MS. PARTON: ...(inaudible) your first question.

MS. LEINWAND: My first question was about the town tramp.

MS. PARTON: That was that lady that asked me that.

MS. LEINWAND: She wants to know if you've had any contact with her since you've become a star. And what does she think about your copying her look.

MS. PARTON: Well actually, I was just a kid and she was an older woman then. And she's probably dead and gone by now. But I won't say her name to protect the guilty. But she was a great inspiration to me. I thought she was a good woman, no matter what they said.

MS. LEINWAND: Can you tell us a little bit about how the Smoky Mountains influenced your music and the way you think about the world?

MS. PARTON: Well, everything about the Smoky Mountains influenced me. As I was mentioning, there's-- I don't know if I said it, but there was 12 children in my family, six girls and six boys, just country people. And my grandpa was a Pentecostal preacher. So religion was a big part of my growing up days. And I think I got my faith and my strength, so to speak, and still don't do anything without praying and asking for direction.

So I think the fact that people believed in each other, people believed in god and just being brought up in that beautiful part of the world, it did influence everything that I did, and still to this day, from the things I eat and the way I think and the way I feel. And I write a lot of that in the music that I write. It's true that everybody should be proud of wherever they're from. But I think I happen to be

from one of the most beautiful places in the world. And I've been everywhere, so. I'm influenced by all that stuff.

MS. LEINWAND: A lot of folks want to know what you're going to be doing next. So are the rumors of a Dollywood Europe true?

MS. PARTON: Well, we talk about all sorts of things. I don't know of anything going on with Dollywood in Europe at this time. But don't put it past me. Because we would like to expand. And of course we're very proud of Dollywood. It's such a natural setting, since it is my home, for me to have started Dollywood there. And if all things go good, which, you know, they are so far, we've been very, very lucky. We're going into our 24th season, believe it or not. And of course we try to give back. We love--

I knew when we started it, it would be a smart move on the money end. But it also created so many wonderful jobs for the people in our area that needed the work. And the whole area has really grown. And I'm very proud of all the good things that come out of Dollywood. And I do make good money. But as I mentioned, I need it. (Laughter.)

MS. LEINWAND: Can you talk a little bit about how the recession is affecting Dollywood? And do you think that all those folks that you do employ will be able to keep their jobs?

MS. PARTON: Well, we certainly hope so. And of course it's hard to know what's going to happen. We're all in the same spot with all of that right now. And we did have lots of plans to expand and to do a lot of new things. And we actually now are just kind of holding off just a little bit to see what is going to be going on with the economy. But we still do believe that people still gonna be getting out and wanting to entertain their families. And I think when the weather breaks, hopefully we'll still get a-- you know, a lot of people come through. We'll certainly know how to entertain them.

And we have certainly, like everybody, been affected by it some. But so far, we're holding our heads above the water and we're trying to not lose any jobs for any of our people. Because we're very devoted to our staff.

MS. LEINWAND: What's the latest news regarding the *9 to 5* Broadway musical?

MS. PARTON: Already told 'em. (Laughter.)

MS. LEINWAND: The song *9 to 5* became an anthem for working women. What do you think the impact has been on the country's working women?

MS. PARTON: Well actually, it has been a-- had an impact on just people in the workplace in general. And what's great about the *9 to 5* musical, what I didn't tell you, they actually did keep it centered in the early '80s, late '70s and early '80s, even the clothes and all that. You know, some of the best comedy in the musical and the dialogue comes from talking about things that are going to be in the future, which are already now kind of fun, like, "Oh, did you hear they're coming out with something called White-Out," or stuff like that, something as silly as that.

But anyhow, actually I think that it has really opened a lot of doors for women. I was always very proud to be a woman. I've always been very lucky that I worked hard. And being a woman has served me well. (Laughter.) Well, it has. And I'm proud. I know a lot of women are not that lucky. But I grew up with six brothers, my dad, and my uncles. So I always said, I look like a woman, but I think like a man. And somehow that's served me well.

But I really think that women are treated with a lot more respect. We've still got a long way to go. And I'm just proud to be a woman and proud to have a job myself and proud to be able to provide a lot of jobs for women at our-- in all of my businesses. And certainly I think *9 to 5* is going to have a new surge of energy with the musical. And we're going to be inspired by that.

MS. LEINWAND: What inspired you to turn *9 to 5* into a play?

MS. PARTON: Well, it wasn't my idea. In fact, I was shocked when they came to me after almost 30 years the movie had been out. And we actually filmed the movie in the late '70s. It came out, I think Christmas of '80, somewhere in there I think. And I thought it was gone. Except everywhere we go when we're traveling, every hotel we go into, we turn on the TV in our motel room, *Steel Magnolias* or *9 to 5* is playing. It's, like, good lord. Is that never gonna die?

So I was out in L.A. exactly four years ago. I was doing a special with Melissa Etheridge for CMT. And we were doing a show. And I had a little break. And I was walking backstage and Bob Greenblatt, who is the producer, came to me and said, "Well, we're thinking about making *9 to 5* into a musical. But we think it wouldn't be right if we didn't ask you to do the music, since you wrote the original song, "9 to 5". Would you be interested?" I said, "Well, I don't know." I said, "I've never done that sort of thing before. But I could give it a try. Let me

think about it.” I said, “You’re going to basically keep it the way that the movie was?” And he said, “As best we can, we’re going to try to keep it like that.”

So I went home. I said, well, let me see what I can do based on what I know about the movie, since I did love it. It was my first movie that I’d ever made, knew all the characters, all the parts. So I went home, spent two weeks writing a bunch of songs that I thought might work, and sent them out. And they loved them. They said, “We think you can do it.”

So since then, we got it all ready to go. And we debuted it out in L.A. at the Ahmanson Theatre for six weeks. And it got great reviews. And now we’ll see if the economy holds up. Everybody’s a little leery about that, too, on Broadway. But if everything goes well, we’re going to be opening. And we’ll see how it goes.

MS. LEINWAND: Are there any movies in your near future? And I won’t ask about a sequel to *Steel Magnolias*.

MS. PARTON: Well, I wish we could do a sequel to a lot of those great movies. I don’t have anything in the works at the moment as far as movies. I’d love to have a good script. I get a lot of junk coming through. But it’s been a long time since I’ve had anything that I thought I’d really want to do.

But I’m writing a bunch of children’s things. I want to work on-- I have a children’s book coming out, actually, in June, called *I Am a Rainbow*. And it’s about all the different colors and moods of children, and just people in general, like red being anger and jealousy being green and pink and, you know, all those things. So it’s really kind of talking about that. And I do want to possibly do some television. And if a good script comes along, I’d love to do it. But so far, nothing.

MS. LEINWAND: Well, we’ve got lots of questions about music. So country music has never been more popular. But much of it now is indistinguishable from top 40. Would you like to see country radio make room again for bluegrass and other forms of traditional country music?

MS. PARTON: Well, I love all kinds of music. Certainly my first loves are mountain music, acoustic music, bluegrass, country and gospel. And of course being one that’s been in this business, as you were mentioning, since I was a little kid-- I started singing when I was about ten years-old back in Knoxville on the Cas Walker Show, a man that owned a bunch of supermarkets. And all that music was really country, bluegrass, and gospel.

And of course I moved to Nashville in 1966. And since then, I’ve done some of everything. I’ve been very blessed. I’ve won almost every award that

they had to give in country music, and many awards outside of that, which I'm very honored and proud of every one of them. But it's the rewards that I get just being able to be in the business. And of course I would love to have them play my records, some of us older artists on country radio. Certainly I'd love to hear more country and bluegrass music.

But music is going to always be there, because music is the voice of the soul. And it doesn't matter what kind of tag you put on it, we're going to all be singing and we're going to-- I'm going to always be country. But hopefully I can do other things and have been blessed by being able to.

MS. LEINWAND: What's your favorite song that you wrote?

MS. PARTON: Well, that one's easy. Well, I have some that I favor more, because they've made me more money. I'd have to say in that respect, "I Will Always Love You" probably the one that's made the most money. But I get asked that a lot. I've written at least 3,000 songs since I've been doing this. Since I was seven years-old, I started playing guitar and writing songs, and singing when I was ten, making records when I could get enough money together. My uncle, Bill Owens, and I used to travel around doing different things.

But all through the years, of all the songs I've written, the little song, "Coat Of Many Colors" is a true story from my childhood about a little raggy coat that mama made for me out of scraps because she didn't have enough of one piece of material to make a coat. And she had some quilt scraps, because she used to make all our coats.

And she told me that story about Joseph in order to make me not be ashamed of it, or have some sort of pride in the coat. But I went to school thinking I looked like Joseph. And obviously I did not, because all the kids laughed and said, "It's just rags." And I went home crying and telling mama, "They said I was poor," and all that. And mama said, "You're not poor. There are a lot of people in this world lot worse off than we are. We got love. We got kindness. We got understanding. We got a lot of stuff that money don't buy." And it's sort of like a line from a song, it's called, a man can make money, but money cannot make a man. And I believe that's true. So that little song represents family, my own philosophy and it'll always be dearest to my heart. (Applause.)

MS. LEINWAND: So could we hear a little bit of it?

MS. PARTON: "The Coat of Many Colors"? Okay, everybody. (Singing.) You don't want me to sing a capella. But anyway. It's the little song (Singing.) And then if I sing the rest by myself, I'll start to cry. So that's that. (Applause.)

MS. LEINWAND: Are there any musicians you would dearly love to perform with whom you haven't?

MS. PARTON: Well, no. Actually because I figure if I want to bad enough, I will get around to it. There are some great, great people. I have been blessed to be able to work with so many great people in my lifetime. And things just kind of happen as they're supposed to. In fact, just last week, I went back in the studio with Kenny Rogers who is one of my dearest, best friends. We've always had such great success together, like "Islands in the Stream". But he just recorded a new album, asked me if I'd come and sing a little song with him. And we did. So I don't know when that's coming out, but that was a big thrill. So those things just kind of fall into place. But there's so many great ones. Hopefully one day I'll get to sing with everybody.

MS. LEINWAND: What's the difference between writing lyrics as a young, decidedly not rich wannabe star, and a globally recognized entertainment empire that you've become?

MS. PARTON: Well actually I still write my songs for the same reasons and from the same place that I always did. Of course it's always nice to be able to-- you know, to write what you know and still kind of love it. But I always said, I had to get rich in order to sing like I'm poor. So I would have done it. I would have always been writing songs and singing. And I would still be making records. We'll always do it, even if I had to sell them out of the-- you know, the back of my car, which I've done that in the past. But I still write songs because I love to. I get commissioned to do songs now and then, just like the "Sha-Kon-O-Hey". I had a reason to write that. And Paul Couch, and the folks at Dollywood had basic ideas that they wanted, said, "We want this theme to be that and be that."

So they gave me inspiration. I'm skilled enough through the years that I can do that, just like the *9 to 5* musical. But what I love to do as a songwriter is to just either have something come right into my heart and into my mind, be able to sit down and work with it, or to write down great ideas, then get a couple of weeks off, and go up to my old Tennessee mountain home, my old home place which I bought back years ago and made into a sweet place for all my family to go for, you know, family reunions, Christmas, holidays, and all that.

So one of my best things to do is to lock that gate on the old mountain home and go up and take my guitar and write a bunch of songs.

MS. LEINWAND: Which of your songs is the most technically difficult to perform? And which is the most emotionally challenging?

MS. PARTON: Well, “Coat of Many Colors” as I mentioned is the most emotionally challenged because I know every night, you know, how your moods vary from time to time? And if things are going on in your family, if somebody’s sick or if there’s trouble or you’re just feeling down, you know, that song kind of takes on different things. Like, when my mom was sick and before she passed away just a few years back, and right after she passed away, it was all I could do to get through that song. And sometimes I would just be crying while I was doing it. So that one to me just touches me in so many places for so many reasons.

But one of the songs that’s always kind of the hardest to sing is a song called “Here You Come Again” because it’s a song that was my first main-selling record. But the melody and the chord structure to that song is a challenge to me. It’s just a different chord structure than I would normally write. And I did not write that song. A lot of people think I did. That was written by Barry Mann and Cynthia Weil that have written some of the great, greats songs in the pop field.

But that one, I just took on and thought, “Well, I’ll do it.” And somebody said, “Well, a monkey could have sung that and had a hit.” I said, “Well, a monkey did.” (Laughter.)

MS. LEINWAND: What’s on your iPod?

MS. PARTON: My what? (Laughter.)

MS. LEINWAND: Who are your all-time favorite songwriters?

MS. PARTON: Well, you mentioned Willie Nelson earlier. And of course some of my very, very favorite people, writers in country music are Merle Haggard and Willie Nelson and some of the-- Harlan Howard, guy that was not known as a singer, but one of the great, great writers. There’s so many great people. But as far as outside the music business, I understand you had Billy Joel here some time back. And he’s one of my all-time favorite writers, songs like, “(I Am) The Entertainer” which I worked up and do sometimes in my show. I recorded one of his songs also in my bluegrass album and did like a bluegrass version. Anyway.

So he’s one of the my great-- my favorite writers. So there’s just tons of them. I’m a fan of songs more than I am just writers. I’m one of those people that I’ll listen to the radio, I like a certain song, and look to see who wrote it. But I admire anybody that can do it that well.

MS. LEINWAND: So what have you been listening to lately?

MS. PARTON: Myself. [singing] Actually I've been working so hard. I don't have time to-- I never was really a big fan of listening to other people's music because I always had so much to do of my own, I didn't really have a chance to-- you know, to get that into music. When I do get a minute, I like to read and I read everything from whatever's on Oprah's Book Club, from *New York Times*, the bestseller list, religion. I just love to read.

MS. LEINWAND: "I Will Always Love You" is considered the number one love song of all time. How long did it take you to write it.

MS. PARTON: Not very long. That song came straight from my heart. I used to work-- From 1966, for seven years, I worked with the Porter Waggoner Show. And I told Porter when I started work with him-- I had just come to Nashville. I had planned to be my own star. I hadn't planned to team up with a group and just be *the* girl singer in somebody else's group.

But the money was so good. And Porter had the number one syndicated television show at that time. And it was just too, you know, hard to pass up, because the girl that had been the show, part of his show for years, had decided to get married and leave the show. So he offered me a good deal. And I said, "Well, I will stay for five years, and then I have to, you know, go, get out on my own after that."

Well, we were very fortunate. And he really gave me my first big break. And I'll always be thankful for that. But when it got time for me to go, well, he didn't want to hear none of that. So we fought like you wouldn't believe. And I kept saying, "But I told you. I have to go because I don't want to just be your girl singer from now on." So anyway, we bickered back and forth. And he was going to sue me and he did. And that was after. And he sued me for a million dollars, which it took me years to make. I didn't have it then.

So anyhow, I thought, well, there's no way this man's going to listen to me, because he was stubborn as a mule. And I'm a little stubborn myself. So I thought, "Well, he's not going to listen to me." So I went home and I thought, "Well, I'm grateful to this man. I do love him in my way." It was one of those love/hate relationships. You must have had those partners, friends, whatever.

And so I sat down, probably to answer your-- first part of that question, how long did it take me. Probably within two to three hours I wrote, "I Will Always Love You". And I wrote it based on the fact that I wanted to go. I'll always love you. I'll always be grateful, but I'm gone.

So I took it back the next day and I said, "Porter, just sit down. And just don't talk. Just listen." So I took my guitar and I sung the song to Porter. And he

said, “Well, okay. You can go, providing I get to produce that song because that’s the best song you ever wrote.” And so he did produce it and it did soften things between us. I did go on to other things. And Porter and I stayed friends through the years. And we worked out all those other problems. And Porter passed away last year, and I was with him the day that he passed. So we were-- we stayed dear friends. (Applause.)

MS. LEINWAND: I guess he ended up getting his million dollars.

MS. PARTON: And I got mine, thanks to Whitney Houston.

MS. LEINWAND: Tell us about the book you’re writing. What age are you aiming at? Do you find writing a book harder than writing a song?

MS. PARTON: Well, it’s easy to write children’s things because there’s eight children in my family younger than me. And I’ve got all these nieces and nephews that I’m very devoted to. So I think like a child. And I want to eventually get-- like I say, get into-- heavy into the children’s world, because that’d be a great way to spend my second childhood, which is coming. Anyway. But the book that I mentioned before that’s coming out in June, it’s called *I Am A Rainbow*. It actually was tailored for the children, like, from birth to our Imagination Library age, till five years-old. And it’s simple and it’s sweet and it’s-- I wrote it almost like in rhyme.

But I do have other children’s stories that I will be writing. And they actually-- The first children’s book I had, they illustrated and made “The Coat of Many Colors” into a children’s book. And it was one of the big selling books several years ago. But I do want to write more. It doesn’t take me long to write the children’s things. But I guess it all depends on how involved I get with it. But that’s what’s going on with this particular one.

MS. LEINWAND: What song of yours was the most surprising hit?

MS. PARTON: Well, I don’t know. The one I was talking about that was my changeover, after I left Porter, when I said-- and when I decided that I was going to go out on my own and find big-time management-- This was back in, I guess, 1962, ’63, when I decided that I wanted to go to L.A. I got on a plane, went out there to talk to some managers. And I said, I want to be my own star. And I want to, you know, have management. I want to do some movies. I want to do some other things. So I did take on the management.

And through that, they brought the song, “Here You Come Again” to me. So I would have to say that that was the song that really kind of changed

everything, you know, for me. And I think that was the question. What was it again? I get to talking and I forget what I'm saying.

MS. LEINWAND: The surprising hit.

MS. PARTON: The surprising-- Yeah. No. Yeah. It was a surprise, but a good one, because everybody was saying-- That's what I was trying to make the point, everybody was saying I was making a mistake leaving country music, and that I was making a big mistake to leave Porter's show, and that I was going to fall on my face. Porter told me that more than anybody else at that time. And so when "Here You Come Again" came out, and it-- It sold a million right away. It was, like, "Yes!" I was, like, "Thank you, god." Because I was, like-- It was, like, proving a point. But it saved me.

MS. LEINWAND: You've managed to keep control of your business empire and employ just about everyone in Sevierville. Where did your business savvy come from?

MS. PARTON: Well, I have a lot of great people around me. I take a lot of credit for a lot of hard work that a lot of other people do. But I love thinking business. I dream up all kinds of stuff. I'm a creator and inventor, and then I have to depend on smart people to carry all that out for me.

But my daddy, even though he didn't get an education, he was one of the smartest people I've ever known. And he managed to just maneuver things around. He could just, you know-- He was a good horse trader, although he wasn't trading horses. You know the term. He could trade anything and bargain with anything, and actually found a way to make it. So I always-- I get my creativity from my mama's people, because all of my mother's people were musicians, singers, writers. And they didn't like to work at anything but that if they could help it. But my daddy's people, you know, were just-- They really worked hard, sweat of the brow, back, hands, whatever it took.

So I always think I got my daddy's work ethic and my mama's creativity. And it's turned into a, you know, good thing for me. So I like being part of ...(inaudible). Well, how many questions are you going to ask me? (Laughter.)

MS. LEINWAND: Well, you could sing if you'd rather do that.

MS. PARTON: No, not without music [simultaneous conversation].

MS. LEINWAND: Have you been involved in efforts to protect Great Smoky Mountains National Park from environmental threats? What should be done to improve the air quality there?

MS. PARTON: Well, same as everywhere. I mean, we're all dealing with that. They call it the Great Smoky Mountains because of the haze they say that comes off of the vegetation and stuff there. And now, though, with the factories and all the smog and everything else, it's getting some different colors. But it's still the Great Smoky Mountains. That's another thing — we hope to be able to preserve the mountains and do anything that we can to save them. But it's same all over. Everybody needs to kind of work together, trying to see what all we can do all over the world to, you know, stop all the greenhouse gases, or whatever they're calling, and try to take better care of our environment. We're just screwing ourselves royally, ain't we?

MS. LEINWAND: As an artist, what are your concerns about some of the newer forms of piracy? Has it affected your Foundation's funding?

MS. PARTON: Now what was that again?

MS. LEINWAND: People stealing your songs.

MS. PARTON: (Laughter.) I didn't(?) know(?) you said Dollywood. Well, you know, you always want to preserve all the work that you do, and you try to, you know, keep-- have some basic rules that everybody should follow. But of course you don't want all your stuff just being scattered around. But they're working very hard to try to get all that under control. And I'll be right there, helping them any way I can.

MS. LEINWAND: As a Southerner who has made a point of confronting racism, what do you think of President Obama's election?

MS. PARTON: Wow, I think he's great. And I'm very excited about the new energy and everything that's going on. I just hope that he can help us during this time, because we know we're in a bad place. In fact, I was out on tour when everybody was campaigning, when Hillary was running and all. I thought, yeah, it'd be great to have a woman in the White House. And I thought, well I don't know if it's such a good idea. Every 28 days, those terrorists better run deeper into them woods, because all I can say, if we get a woman in there, but-- But somebody said to me, "Well, you know what? You just got such a big mouth and you just know how to talk to people. Did you ever think about running for President?" I said, "I think we've had enough boobs in The White House." (Laughter.)

But hopefully Obama ain't gonna be one of 'em. So I think, as with all our leaders, we should pray for him and support him in any way we can, and hope that everything goes good. I'm looking forward to it. We're a great country. We've

been through lots of bad things in this-- you know, in our lifetime and through many lifetimes for a lot of people. But anyhow. I'm hoping that things are going to get better. I'm praying for him.

MS. LEINWAND: You overcame personal challenges to become a big star and an international financial success. What lessons have you learned that might help many Americans struggling to make it through today's economic crisis?

MS. PARTON: Lord, I ain't one to know what to do about all that. I mean, I just hope that things go well. I just try to take care of my own family, my own self, and do everything I can to try to watch the money. Now, I didn't think about that too much, like none of us did, you know, a year or so ago. But I'm being cautious as I think everybody should kind of take inventory and see how we can save and how we can better help with everything. We're going to have to help each other. And as I say, I hope things get better. And if not, we're still going to have to kind of buckle down and do what we can to-- you know, to get through this thing. We're a great country. We're a great people. I think we'll be all right.

MS. LEINWAND: Have you had enough politics? You want to go back to music?

MS. PARTON: I ain't no more without music.

MS. LEINWAND: All right. What was it like getting the Kennedy Center honor?

MS. PARTON: Well, that was one of the greatest honors of my whole career. You never know how you're going to wind up when you get in this business. You just hope to have your dreams come true. I always dreamed of getting out onstage, traveling around, having nice clothes, having enough money to make it and be able to do good things for my people. I always prayed that I'd have enough to share and enough to spare. And I've been blessed with that.

But what was the question again?

MS. LEINWAND: Kennedy Center honors.

MS. PARTON: There's...(inaudible). But anyhow, when you start out, I was saying, you kind of forget, you know, what you're doing. And you don't know if you're going to build character. You don't know if people are going to like you. So many people wind up and they have a bad reputation. And I've just always kind of tried to stay true to me, and try to do my work the best I could, try to treat people decent. So when they honor you like that, you think, well, I guess

I've done all right. And it's always a great honor when people say that I have inspired them and that I've done enough to merit something like that. It's always great to get up there with all the big people and think for a minute that you might be one of them.

MS. LEINWAND: So you clearly have a great sense of humor. So I'm wondering what the funniest thing you've ever read about yourself.

MS. PARTON: Well, there's been lots of crazy things. I know my husband always gets a kick out of stuff in the tabloids. I don't really follow all that stuff that close myself. But every now and then, he'll, if he's been out to the supermarket, he'll come back and throw a tabloid on and say, "Well, looks like you and-- I see where you and Burt Reynolds had another baby," or he'll have, like-- There was one where Burt was holding a dog, like a little pug bulldog, which we had at the time. And he said, "Is this"-- Because it was the one my husband and I had at the house. He said, "Is this Burt's baby," said about our dog. I said, "No, that one's ours."

But they just say everything, and you never know what they're going to say. Or they'll say, you know-- They'll say that I'm having an affair with some, you know, teenage boy. And the same-- The next day, I'm-- in one of the tabloids, I'm in bed with a bad back because my boobs are so heavy I can't carry them around. And I won't get surgery. I'm going to be crippled and I'm-- It's, like, they're always, like, saying something. I thought, boy I wish I was doing all these things. But anyhow. You just kind of have to look at it. I get some of my best comedy out of reading the tabloids.

I always say, I know that they make paper out of wood. I just hope they use recycled paper. I'd hate to think they cut down good trees for that crap.
(Applause.)

MS. LEINWAND: Aside from having a dog baby with Burt Reynolds, what would you like your legacy to be?

MS. PARTON: Well, I would like to be remembered and thought of as somebody that did what I wanted to do and followed my dreams and proved that dreams can come true. And I would like for people to think that I didn't just keep it all for myself, that I really did enjoy my life, enjoy my work, enjoy myself, and enjoyed being a part of a bigger thing, to where I was in a position to be able to help, just like we're doing with the Imagination Library or working with the Park, place that I'm very, very proud of. So I want people to think of me as somebody that did care and did try. (Applause.)

MS. LEINWAND: How can your fans help you with your Imagination Library?

MS. PARTON: Well, we actually will take any donations that anybody wants to give. But we actually have been very blessed with all that. We have wonderful people. And lot of people ask me how that's funded. The Rotary, very helpful to us, United Way, all local sponsors, a lot of people in the communities get together with that. And of course anything that we can do-- Every year, I try to do benefit shows, and anything that I can do to help, we put money in the fund. But like all causes that's worthwhile, people do make donations. It gets to be a part of people's hearts and they feel like, "Well, this is a good thing. This makes me feel good." So as I say, we take donations. And any help that anybody can give us in any way, we appreciate.

MS. LEINWAND: Please tell us about the most influential book you read as a child.

MS. PARTON: Well now, somebody set that one up, didn't they? Actually the first book that we give through the Imagination Library is the little book of *The Little Engine That Could*. And that's the first book. And that actually was a book that I remember as a child. And I do think that it is so important for children to believe in themselves and to think that they can do anything. And I always say that I believe that really worked on me because I think now that I am a little engine that did. So there's bunches of us out there. (Applause.)

MS. LEINWAND: If you could sing only one song for people to remember you by, what would it be?

MS. PARTON: "I'll Always Love You" I guess. Can I sing that and have you hush now? (Applause.) Actually, are we finished? We can be, can't we--

MS. LEINWAND: You're close to being finished.

MS. PARTON: Oh, you mean you go right down to the letter?

MS. LEINWAND: Yeah, we go right down [simultaneous conversation]--

MS. PARTON: Okay, well, ask me some more--

MS. LEINWAND: No, no, no. You can sing and then we'll-- Sing. (Applause.)

MS. PARTON: I'll do that last.

MS. LEINWAND: All right. Well--

MS. PARTON: And you have to ...(inaudible).

MS. LEINWAND: I have some crazy questions here, too. Somebody wants to know how you feel about all kinds of cross-dressers and female impersonators wanting to be Dolly.

MS. PARTON: How do you think I feel? (Laughter.) Just like the woman I told you about, there's a lot of little boys that want to look like me when they grow up. And who am I to stop them? Anyway. I think it's a great compliment when people want to dress up like you. It's like Halloween. I mean, you see Dollys everywhere.

One time, years and years and years ago, back when I was kind of in the heat of my career, there's an area in California down on Santa Monica, there's a lot of guys that dress up, you know, like that. So I thought, "Well, I'm going to dress up like me and I'm going to go down there with them." So I over-exaggerated. I got my wig bigger. I made my beauty mark bigger. I had it all exaggerated, things. And they were holding a Dolly look-a-like contest. 'Course now, all these drag queens, you know, they're usually about six foot four. And here I am, like this.

And so I went down. I was riding up, down the street, walking up and down the street, you know? And nobody paid any attention to me. And went in, in a little place where they were holding the, you know, Dolly look-a-likes. I walked up onstage. I walked through. Nobody paid any attention. There were several boys that looked more like me than I did. So I don't mind. If they have fun...(inaudible).

MS. LEINWAND: Okay, we are almost out of time. So before we get to our last song instead of question, we have a couple of important matters to tell you about. First of all, I'd like to remind our members about our future speakers. On February 18th, we have Ben Bernanke, chair of the Federal Reserve system. So those of you who didn't get to ask Dolly your economic questions can save them for him.

MS. PARTON: Yeah, by all means.

MS. LEINWAND: On February 23rd, we have Fred Smith, the CEO of FedEx. And on March 2nd, we have Vivian Schiller, the CEO of NPR. Second, because you are a writer and you have an autobiography and some children's

books, we'd like to present you with an application for membership to the National Press Club. (Applause.)

MS. PARTON: You think I'd fit in?

MS. LEINWAND: Absolutely. And we've got this lovely National Press Club mug.

MS. PARTON: Oh, great. I needed a cup on the bus this morning. I thought, well, I got this old styrofoam cup. So now I'll have coffee with you in the morning. Thank you. (Applause.)

MS. LEINWAND: Thank you. And I won't ask a last question if you'll sing.

MS. PARTON: Actually, I didn't bring any music or anything to sing. But I do again want to thank all of you for being such a great audience and sitting there listening to me. I feel like I kind of rambled around a little bit. But I had fun, always being with you. And, you know, if there's anything else you want to know, ask her. She knows more about me than I do. But I will head on out, because tonight, I'm sure most of you are coming over for the Sha-Kon-O-Hey, where we're doing the stuff, doing some of the songs from the musical, talking more about the Smoky Mountains. So I'll see you over there. We'll actually be doing some songs with some tracks that we brought along that has some real music.

And so we'll see you there, and thank you so much. And I guess I could just say [singing]. Thank you. (Applause.) Thanks.

MS. LEINWAND: I'd like to thank you for coming today. I'd also like to thank National Press Club staff members, Melinda Cooke, Pat Nelson, JoAnn Booz and Howard Rothman for organizing today's lunch. Also thanks to the NPC Library for its research.

The video archive of today's luncheon is provided by the National Press Club Broadcast Operations Center. Many of our events are aired on XM Satellite Radio and available for free download on iTunes, as well as on our website. Non-members may purchase transcripts, audio and videotapes by calling 202.662.7598 or archives@Press.org. For more information about the Press Club, please go to our website at www.press.org.

Thank you very much and we are adjourned. (Applause.)

END

