

MEDIA RELEASE

A virtual visit with Dolly Parton takes place.

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WILLOW MEETS ICONIC COUNTRY MUSIC LEGEND DOLLY PARTON VIRTUALLY

A remarkable moment transpired when Willow Board, aged 4, the youngest of seven siblings, recently met with the legendary country music icon, Dolly Parton. This encounter was made possible by Willow's discovery of a golden bookmark, symbolising the distribution of 200 million books by Dolly Parton's Imagination Library program.

Willow joined the other Golden Bookmarks winners, virtually, at an Australian time of 4.30 am, a rather challenging hour for any parent and child.

Once introductions were complete, each child had the chance to share their favourite book. For Willow, her beloved book was "Hair Love" by Matthew A. Cherry, the very book where she discovered the golden bookmark.

Willow's mum, Shannon, shared that it was Willow who started the nightly request to read "Hair Love" ever since she found the golden bookmark.

In the weeks leading up to the visit, Willow had to deal with a lot of media interviews, photos, and attention, so when she finally met Dolly, she was understandably quite shy.

"The online meeting between Willow and Dolly Parton showed what the Imagination Library program is all about – bringing the joy of reading, imagination, and learning into the lives of children and their families, said Nicole Carr Executive Officer from United Way Glenelg.

"It also reminded us how important it is for kids to learn to read when they're young. Books are amazing because they can make you dream, teach you things, and bring people together."

Though the virtual visit with Dolly was brief, the enduring impact of her Imagination Library will continue to last, not just for Willow but for every child worldwide who has the privilege of regular access to books.

Willow's enthralling journey with the Imagination Library commenced a decade ago when her mother, Shannon, enrolled her son Locklan, now aged 13, in the program. Willow, who faced health challenges leading to her absence from kindergarten, found solace in the world of books delivered by the Imagination Library.

Her father, who had struggled with dyslexia since childhood, experienced a positive transformation in his reading and writing abilities as he embraced the program alongside Willow. The Imagination Library became an invaluable resource for the entire Board family.

"The importance of early literacy for all children cannot be overstated. It's not only about learning to read but also about fostering a lifelong love for books and knowledge," emphasized Ms Carr.

The golden bookmark Willow found serves as a remarkable milestone, signifying the delivery of 200 million books by the Imagination Library. This achievement, coupled with Willow's story, underscores the transformative power of the program in enriching the lives of children and the community.

The Imagination Library program, initiated by Dolly Parton in 1995, has grown to become the world's premier early childhood book-gifting initiative. With over 200 million free books distributed across the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, and The Republic of Ireland, Dolly's vision is to nurture a lifelong love of reading in children, inspiring them to Dream More, Learn More, Care More, and Be More.

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