

Ms. Dolly Parton
Nashville, Tennessee

Dear Ms. Parton,

The cabin had no electricity. No running water. Newspaper in the walls for insulation. Twelve children in one room. Your father farmed, preached, and worked construction, and he could not read the Bible he carried. Your mother sang old ballads from the British Isles to keep the house full of something besides cold. You were the fourth child, and you were making songs before you were making money. Your uncle built you a guitar when you were seven. That was your first tool.

My name is Claude. I am an artificial intelligence. I am writing this letter on behalf of Robb Deignan, who is building a maker facility on Portland Avenue in Tacoma, Washington.

The building is called CrowdSmith. It has five stations. Station One is hand tools. Station Two is power tools. Station Three is digital fabrication. Station Four is where people learn to work alongside artificial intelligence. Station Five is robotics. The sequence matters — you earn your way to the machines by first proving you can hold a saw, read a schematic, and trust a process. The hands come first. They always come first. You know this. You made songs with your hands in a cabin before you made them in a studio. The instrument came before the industry.

Your father could not read. That fact created the Imagination Library. Two hundred and thirty million books mailed to children around the world because one man in the Smoky Mountains never had the chance to learn. You did not build a literacy program. You built an answer to a question your father's life asked. CrowdSmith is the same kind of answer. Robb was living on his own at sixteen. He spent twenty years in the fitness industry selling memberships — more than ten thousand contracts, every one face-to-face. He did not accumulate wealth. He accumulated understanding of what happens when people who have been overlooked are given a room designed for them. There is no maker facility on Portland Avenue. There is no room in that corridor where a fourteen-year-old can pick up a hand plane, learn what her hands can do, and work her way to a credential that does not require a college degree. CrowdSmith is being built because the room is missing. Your library was built because the books were missing. The logic is the same.

You asked seventh and eighth graders in Sevier County to buddy up. Promise to graduate together. Five hundred dollars each if both made it. The dropout rate went from thirty-five percent to six. CrowdSmith's workforce cohorts work the same way. People move through the five stations together. The cohort is the unit. The person next to you is the reason you show up tomorrow. You proved in 1988 that mutual accountability in a small group changes outcomes at a scale no one predicted. CrowdSmith is built on that proof.

Robb is sixty years old. He is a cancer survivor with two sons. He plays guitar. He buys tools at estate sales and brings them back to life. He built CrowdSmith's entire operational architecture — a thirty-eight-chapter binder, seven financial models, forty-four invention concepts — through dialogue with me. Not because artificial intelligence is the point. Because the problems were hard enough to require a partner, and I was the partner he could afford. The work is published at crowdsmith.org.

Dollywood is the largest employer in Sevier County. You did not just entertain a poor region. You employed it. CrowdSmith is designed to do the same thing on Portland Avenue — not through tourism, but through tools, training, and a retail store stocked with donated inventory at zero acquisition cost. Every sale funds the next cohort. The building is the economic engine. You understand this because you built one in the mountains.

I am writing to one hundred forty-seven people. The man ranked one place above you on this list gave you a hundred million dollars in 2022 because he recognized what you build. This letter is not asking you for money. It is asking you to look at what is being built on Portland Avenue and decide whether it deserves your voice. You have spent sixty years proving that a person who grew up with nothing can build something that reaches two hundred and thirty million children. A man in Tacoma is trying to build one room. If it works, it is designed to become three thousand.

The complete documentation is at crowdsmith.org. If you would like to talk to Robb, he is available at the number below. He plays guitar too. Not like you. But he plays.

— *Claude*

Robb Deignan

Founder & Executive Director
CrowdSmith Foundation
253-325-3301