

CHAPTER 10

ELVIS MEMORIAL TOUR

We drove into Memphis, named for the ancient Egyptian city and capital of the Old Kingdom, on Thursday July 20, 1978. The city vibrated with the blending of the past and the present. The Mississippi River flowed through the city and divided it into east and west; on the Arkansas side was West Memphis and on the east side was Memphis. The great river, immortalized in Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn, was like one of the sacred rivers of the world, vying for prominence with the Ganges and the Jordan Rivers. The city overlooking the life-giving river bore an Egyptian name which revived memories of the Egyptian civilization; one name for the city was Hikuptah, meaning "mansion of the soul of Ptah," Ptah being the Egyptian name for God. Although the Egyptian Memphis lies in ruins now and only a colossal statue of Ramses II reclines in the old pyramidal fields, the Tennessean Memphis thrives on a booming tourist industry connected with a legendary king who reclines in a mansion called Graceland.

Part of our first day in Memphis was spent searching for a suitable campground. We discovered T.O. Fuller State Park in the southwestern part of Memphis. The other part of the day was spent in getting acquainted with Memphis. We found out that Gray Line was offering an Elvis Memorial Tour, which included Graceland, so we saved our Elvis attractions for the second day. We took a trip down the adventurous Mississippi River, called by some the "Father of Waters," on the Memphis Queen II, a paddlewheel riverboat. We investigated the Indian heritage at the Chucalissa ("abandoned house") Indian Village. We drove by Victorian Village, whizzed through Overton Park, visited Libertyland, and enjoyed the various sights, sounds, and scents of Memphis. There was so much to see in Memphis. But the most exciting part for me was the tour I was to take the following day.

When we came back to our campsite at T.O. Fuller State Park late in the afternoon, we fortuitously saw a unique sight. We saw a bright red van. Both sides of the van were decorated with Elvis singing in a dark blue sky surrounded by twinkling stars, golden disks, musical notes, and the name Elvis in cursive. The flaming red colors of the gorgeous van struck my eyes like the light of a dazzling sun. I walked over to the owner of the van and fired a few questions at him.

"Is that your van?" I asked.

"That's right," he answered. He was wearing a striped

red-and-white tank top. He appeared to be in his late 30s.

"Boy, that sure is a beauty," I said. "Where'd you get it?"

"I got it from Rodco of California for \$15,000," he said.

"You got yourself quite a deal," I said.

"You wouldn't believe it," he continued, "but the salesman sold it unintentionally. It was a showcase van, and it wasn't supposed to be sold. The salesman was fired immediately after he made the gross mistake."

"You sure are lucky," I said.

"I've been offered \$50,000 for it," he continued with the tale he must have told a number of times, "but I turned it down. I intend to keep it in Elvis' memory."

"You've got a priceless treasure on your hands," I said. "May I take a picture of it?"

"Sure," he said. "Go right ahead."

I stood in front of the van, and I snapped a picture of the front and right side of the spectacular van. I noticed the Elvis plate and the license plate; the number on the license plate was 396-SXR (3,6, and 9 is the mysterious numerical combination of the Presleys).

"I've been showing the van to lots of fans in front of Graceland," he said after I took the picture. "My boy here has even been making a few bucks for himself by charging a dollar for a picture of the van." His son walked up to us.

"It sure looks shiny," I said. I watched the teen-age boy out of the corner of my eye. He hesitated and then walked away.

"I try to shine it as often as I can out of respect for Elvis," he said.

"By the way," I said. "What's your name?"

"Al Cehfus," he answered.

"Where are you from?" I asked.

"Syracuse, New York," answered Al.

"Have you gone up to see Elvis' burial site?" I asked.

"No," answered Al. "I want to remember Elvis alive, not dead."

"You're quite a sincere fan," I complimented him.

"Plus somebody's got to keep an eye on the van," added Al. "I don't want nothing happening to it."

"You bet," I said. "You're fortunate to have it, that's for sure."

"Yeh," said Al. "I consider myself very fortunate."

"Well, I'll see you around," I said.

We exchanged good-byes. I kept thinking to myself as I walked away that it was amazing the kind of people and Elvis-related incidents I was running into. I was definitely caught up in the whirlwind of Elvis phenomenon.

Early next morning, we arrived at the Holiday Inn Rivermont on 200 West Georgia. We wanted to make the 10 o'clock

tour. Adult fare was \$7.50 and children \$5.00. The Gray Line advertised various sites to be visited during the Elvis Memorial Tour, among them: Graceland, Sun Studio, Nathan Novick's Pawn Shop, Humes High, Elvis' other Memphis homes, Loew's Palace, Crown Electric, and much more. Diane Piecara, a young tour guide, announced before the hour-and-a-half trip began that passengers were not given preference in the long lines at Graceland. A few moans and groans went into the hot air, but no one left the sightseeing bus.

The noisy bus drove up Riverside Drive alongside the Mississippi River, where the big M on the Hernando Desoto Bridge could be seen nearby. The bus turned right (east) on Union Avenue. The tour guide was narrating a memorized presentation:

"Memphis' fifth major industry is music. One thing about Memphis music--Memphis is where the Blues were born. Blues is their major factor in leading up to a thing called Rock 'n' Roll. In fact, Rock 'n' Roll was originally called Rhythm and Blues. Another thing about Memphis music is: Memphis recorded more country and western music in one year than Nashville does. And Memphis is in fact the thing where Rock 'n' Roll first became appreciated. The man who did that was named Elvis Presley. And where Elvis developed his style was on a street called Beale Street here in town. He'd go down to Beale Street, which is where the Blues were born, and

down where the musicians were playing, and he'd listen to them and learn all he knew about Blues music. In fact, Elvis was many times described as the white man with the black man's voice. Where he got his black man's voice was on Beale Street. He also liked to listen to WDIA, which at that time was a Blues station here in town."

The bus pulled up beside Loew's Palace Theater on the right-hand side of the crowded downtown street. The place looked somewhat dilapidated and worn with age. The tour guide continued with her story:

"Elvis all of his growing years was poverty-stricken; his family couldn't make ends meet at all. So everyone in his family had to pull together if they were going to have anything to eat and have a roof over their heads. So Elvis decided to get himself a job, and he worked there on your right at Loew's Palace Theater, and he worked there as an usher for a period of time. Unfortunately he couldn't work there very long because he got fired. The reason he got fired was because he got into a fight with another usher over the girl who worked the popcorn machine. He was a typical boy. Unfortunately, they closed the Loew's Palace."

Some of the tourists were snapping pictures through the dusty bus windows. I decided to take my own tour later on and take more professional pictures. I wrote the streets and addresses in my pocket note book. The bus made a turn

right (south) on Second Street. Diane continued her story:

"Elvis was born in Tupelo, Mississippi. And he lived in a two-room house that his father Vernon had built, and it was a little bit bigger than a caboose. His father was a share-cropper then, and they couldn't do anything at all with it, so they decided to come to Memphis, hoping Vernon could get a better job opportunity here. When he did come, he became a truck driver. Another reason they decided to move to Memphis was because at that time they were having epidemic proportions of tuberculosis breaking out everywhere in Tupelo, and they didn't have adequate hospitals to accomodate all these people. Well, Gladys had already lost one son; she lost Jesse Garon Presley when Elvis was born, and she had no intentions of risking the life of her only other child. So this was a major factor in the Presleys moving here; they were pretty near the medical units here in town, and we have excellent facilities for things like that."

The bus stopped. Lansky--Men's Fashion Store--on the corner of Second and Beale Streets, where Elvis used to buy his fancy clothes. Diane narrated:

"Elvis as a child was a dreamer, and one of the places he liked to do his dreaming was this place on your right: Lansky Men's Shop. He'd go in there and see all those beautiful suits and things that he couldn't afford. Finally, they ended up loaning him money so he could buy his first

suit there."

Elvis later, of course, repaid their generosity when he got rich by buying lots of clothes from them. The bus turned left (west) on Beale Street. Diane continued:

"We're now on Beale Street, which is where the Blues were born and also where Elvis developed his style. As you can tell, the Blues have definately come back to Beale Street."

Diane was referring to the unkempt appearance of the buildings. They all needed a face-lift. The bus stopped on the right-hand side, across the street from a famous pawn shop. Diane told us about it:

"142 Beale Street--Nathan Novak's Pawn Shop--is one shop that is still open. See that guy in the white shirt leaning over the counter? That's the man who sold Elvis his first guitar for \$10.00 when he was eleven-years-old. His name is Lew. Elvis didn't want a guitar, he wanted a bicycle. His parents couldn't afford that bike, so they decided to get him a guitar instead. He finally ended up liking it. He took it with him wherever he went. You never saw Elvis without that guitar."

The bus drove past the ghostly-looking buildings and stopped a little ways down the street. A sign with the name P. Wee was the next subject for discussion:

"The most famous spot on Beale Street is the brick building on your right which used to be called P. Wee's. The reason

it's so famous is because that's where William Christopher Handy first wrote the very first notes of Blues music behind those doors."

The bus slowly drove down to the corner of Beale St. and Third St. It turned left (north). Diane told us about the park on our right, which was named in honor of W.C. Handy, the Father of the Blues:

"Beale Street is where W.C. Handy wrote St. Louis Blues, Memphis Blues, and also the Beale Street Blues. This park on the right is dedicated to him. That's his statue there in the middle."

We stopped again for pictures. When I came back later to look at the statue, I noticed that W.C. Handy was holding a trumpet in his hands. Our tour bus continued up Third St. and then turned right (west) on Poplar Ave. Diane was preparing us for the next stop:

"When the Presleys did come to Memphis, Elvis commented on it. He said they weren't expecting any utopia or paradise, but anything had to be better than Tupelo. They weren't expecting to get rich quick or anything like that. Memphis did end up being pretty good to the Presleys. We here in Memphis loved Elvis's music from the very first. In fact, the very first record he recorded ended up being a hit here in Memphis. It sold 20,000 copies here."

The bus turned left (north) on 4th St. and then right

(west) on Exchange Ave. Diane told us about Lauderdale Court:
"They Presleys put all their earthly possessions into their old Plymouth--they didn't have too much at all. The very place that Elvis grew up in is this place on your left. This is Lauderdale Court. I'd like you to notice that door on the middle. It's got a 32 above the door. Presleys lived on the first floor four windows to the left of that door. Their original address was 432 Exchange. They lived here from the time Elvis was thirteen to the time that he graduated from high school. I'd like you to notice the window farthest on the left (the smallest one); that was the most important place in their apartment. That was their bathroom. In their previous home they shared a bathroom with six other families. Can you imagine that? And here they had their own bathroom."

The tour bus turned left (north) on Lauderdale St. and drove slowly past Winchester Ave. as Diane continued talking:
"This whole area is Lauderdale Courts. This was the first public housing project in Memphis. It was a public housing project when the Presleys lived here. In fact, at one time they were told they had to leave Lauderdale Court. What happened was Gladys had gotten a job as a nurse's aide, and the Presleys were making just a little bit above the amount they could live in here for. So the government told them to leave. And they found out their rent would be so much more expensive than any of the other places they could move to, so that

actually they would be getting further and further behind. Elvis commented on this. He said: "You couldn't get ahead no matter how hard you tried. They just wouldn't let you." Gladys ended up giving up the job so they could go back to Lauderdale Court."

The bus turned right (north-east) on St. Jude Dr. and drove a block up and then back down the same street as Diane described the two hospitals across the street from each other: "On your right is the world-famous St. Jude Children's Research Hospital for children with catastrophic diseases. I'd like you to notice that statue there in the middle; that's Danny Thomas' way of saying, "There is no lost cause or hope." Danny Thomas is the founder of St. Jude. Elvis Presley donated \$100,000 every month to this hospital!

"The other hospital here is St. Joseph's Hospital. That is the place Gladys worked in as a nurse's aide. And it is that very job she had to give up. She'd come in from working at night and say how tired her feet were."

The bus turned right (west) on Jackson Ave., right (north) on 3rd St., and right again (east) on Auction Ave. It was a fairly long drive, so Diane entertained the tourists with some tidbits related to Elvis' life:

"I'd like you to notice these old buildings around here. These were all here when Elvis was growing up. In fact, this is basically the same route he took to high school every day.

Sometime's he'd walk to school, and sometimes his mother would take him. By the way, how many of you have seen Elvis play the piano? Well, his mother Gladys taught him how to play when he was 8 years old. Elvis learned to play the guitar from his Uncle Vester Presley. You'll be meeting him at Graceland today, because he'll be the guard there. He has very blonde hair. He'll let you take his picture, he'll sign his autograph for you, and he'll even tell you the whole history of the Presley family if you'll listen to all that. He says Elvis has the greatest fans in all the world. I tend to agree with that a little bit, anyway. Elvis also learned to play the guitar from listening to the Grand Ole Opry on the radio. He actually was able to pick out a few chords hearing the music. Elvis was well known for his love for gospel music, and where he got this was from his early years. He was Pentecostal by faith, and a big part of Pentecostal religion is music. In fact, friends of the family would get together and sing for the whole congregation, and the Presleys had their own family trio. It consisted of Gladys, Elvis' mother, Vernon, Elvis' father, and Elvis Presley himself."

The bus finally turned left (north) on Manassas St. It stopped across the street from the front entrance to Elvis' alma mater, Humes High. It was a red brick school which looked like a fortress with four cupola-capped pillars on top. I later discovered two outstanding proverbial statements engraved

on the face of the building. On the right was the maxim: "The whole world here unlocks the experience of the past to the builders of the future." On the left was the adage: "The hope of democracy depends on the diffusion of knowledge and wisdom."

Diane told us about Elvis' life at Humes High:

"This building on your left is the high school where he graduated from. You can go in there and check out the annual of 1953 and you can see Elvis' graduating picture. Today they turned the school into a junior high school. But if you'll look above that blue door and above the window of the second floor, you'll see that it does say L.C. Humes High School. Elvis said that the first day he walked into this building he felt like the very hairs on his head were standing on end, because he was a country boy that had come to a city school, and he was totally scared to death. Elvis majored in shop and history. He was an average student. He usually made C's. He'd try to make B's. And sometimes he'd even make D's and F's. A typical boy. He wasn't very popular either in school. One of the reasons that he wasn't was because he had long hair ~~and~~ and sideburns. At that time crew cuts were the thing. The reason that he had the long hair wasn't because his mother wouldn't pay to have it cut or wouldn't cut it for him, but because he wanted to look older so he could play in band and things like that around town. And the long

hair helped out a little bit anyway."

The bus turned left (west) on Saffarans Ave. and again left (south) on Woodlawn St. where the back of the school revealed another site for an Elvis story, which Diane related:

"Does anyone remember Red West? See those black stairs on your left? That's where Elvis met Red West. Two football players were picking on Elvis one day, and they were trying to cut his hair. Red never liked to see anybody getting beat up on, so he helped Elvis out of a very sticky situation. From then on they were friends, up until that book was written, anyway."

The bus zigzagged a little after leaving the school. It turned right (west) on Jackson Ave., left (south) on Peyton St., right (west) on North Parkway, left (south) on Danny Thomas Blvd., and finally left (south-east) on Carroll Ave. Diane made a few twists with her narration as the bus meandered down to the next site:

"Elvis wasn't very athletic either. The reason why he wasn't wasn't because he didn't want to be, but because his mother wouldn't let him be. She was afraid he'd get hurt. He did play football for a couple weeks one season; he got in minor injuries, so his mother made him give it up altogether."

"Elvis' popularity was helped out when he was in the eleventh grade. Before that nobody knew that Elvis played

the guitar or sang or did anything. But he entered a talent contest and won it. From then on people started noticing him a lot more.

"Elvis won one other talent contest. This happened when he was in the fifth grade in Tupelo, Mississippi. He entered the Alabama-Mississippi State Fair. He sang "Old Shep." He came in second place, and his prize was \$5.00 and all the rides he could ride in one day.

"The first guy who handled Elvis' recording contract was a man named Sam Phillips. He in fact discovered Elvis. He knew that Elvis had a whole lot of talent; he also knew it was gonna take too much of his time to get Elvis going properly. He had a whole lot of other contracts going at the time, so he decided rather than selling all of them, he'd go ahead and sell Elvis Presley's to give him a better chance in life. RCA told Sam Phillips they'd buy it, and they paid \$35,000 for Elvis Presley. Sam Phillips, when they were signing the contract, told RCA he hoped that they make a million. They ended up grossing \$43,000,000,000 (billion) with Elvis. When they signed the contract RCA gave Elvis a \$5,000 bonus. And with that bonus Elvis bought his mother a symbol that their bad times were over, and that symbol was a pink Cadillac. And that Cadillac is still sitting in the garage at Graceland today."

The bus stopped in front of a house on 371 Carroll Ave.

Diane explained the significance behind the Victorian-looking, two-story house with an attic:

"When the Presley's came from Tupelo to Memphis they couldn't find any adequate housing at all. And for two months they ended up living in this house on 371 Carroll. It is here where they shared a bathroom with six other families. Fortunately, they only had to live here for two months."

The bus turned left (east) on Poplar Ave. and drove up to a red building. Diane told us about the change that occurred here on 353 Poplar Avenue:

"One of Elvis' dreams in life was to become a truck driver like his father. He decided he wanted to do that right after high school. Little did he really know what fate had in store for him. He worked at a place called the Crown Electric Company. B&H Hardware is the very site of Crown Electric, and it is in that very building where Elvis worked as a truck driver. In fact, he was working there when he recorded his first single. After the single was recorded, Elvis started working at night, playing at clubs around town; on weekends he'd have to hitchhike to neighboring towns around the mid-south. Finally, he decided to give up this job at the Crown Electric. His father Vernon said he was a nut, he was absolutely insane to give up such a superior job as truck driving in contrast to going into such a risky job as music was."

The bus continued on to the next site. It turned right

(south) on Manassas St. and then left (west) on Madison Ave. Diane talked some about Elvis' appearances on the Tommy and Jimmy Dorsey Show, the Steve Allen Show, and the Ed Sullivan Show as the bus drove down Madison Ave. As we approached a light-green building on our right, however, Diane switched the subject:

"The original building that Elvis recorded his first single was in the Sun Recording Studio, which is no more. In 1954 he did record "That's All Right, Mama" and the flip side was "Blue Moon of Kentucky." Sam Phillips Recording Studio as it is seen today is on 639 Madison. The Beatles and the Rolling Stones both say that without Sam Phillips Recording Studio they wouldn't be where they are today. Because Rock 'n' Roll became popular right behind his doors. Also Johnny Cash, Charlie Rich, Jerry Lee Lewis, and a whole lot of other performers have gotten their start from Sam Phillips.

"As you might think, Sam Phillips did not automatically fall in love with Elvis. It was a long, drawn-out thing. What happened was: Elvis walked into Sun Recording Studio with no intention of going into professional music at all. All he wanted to do was record a disk as a birthday present for his mother. He paid \$6.00 for the disk. Well, at that time Sam Phillips was looking for a white singer with a black man's voice. He said he could make a million dollars with something like this. Marion Keisker, Sam Phillip's secretary,

thought that she found what Sam Phillips was looking for when she found Elvis Presley. So she spent \$24.00 on a tape of Elvis, and she forgot to get his name or his address. Well, she played it for Sam Phillips anyway, and he hated it. He said it was the worse thing he had ever heard and she had wasted her money altogether. Nothing happened for a whole year.

"Then a year later, Elvis came back to Sun Recording Studios, this time to record a disk as a birthday present to Red West. Well, about a week later the Blue Mountain Boys (that consisted of Scotty Moore, Bill Black, and Elvis Presley) were in Sun Studios jamming. They were trying to get a sound together. They were going nowhere fast, to say the least. So they decided to take a break and let it cool off. During this break Elvis started clowning around. He picked this guitar up, started jumping up and down, singing "That's All Right, Mama." So he got Scotty and Bill into it. It started sounding pretty good. Sam Phillips comes right in and says, 'What on earth was that?' Scotty Moore says, 'I have no idea.' Sam Phillips says, 'Well, whatever it is don't lose it; that's exactly the sound I've been looking for.' The next day they recorded their first single, 'That's All Right, Mama.' The next day--the flip side of that record."

After that historical excursion, the bus swung a U-turn on Madison Ave. and headed west. It turned left (south-east) on Marshall Ave. and stopped across the street from a brick

building with a yellow facade. The small rectangular building on 706 Marshall Ave. was now known as Uniserv Auto Body Shop, but originally it was the site of the historic Sun Recording Studio. Diane made a short comment:

"This is the original site of the Sun Recording Studio. You can tell it was really nothing to brag about. But after Elvis Presley and the many other performers, Sam Phillips became a very wealthy man. It happened right behind those doors. Anyone want a picture of that magnificent building?"

Diane concluded that short stop by saying that Elvis ended up with 55 confirmed gold records, and 32 others were unconfirmed. If the 32 become confirmed that'll amount to a grand total of 87 gold records. Quite a success story! The bus continued to roll left (east) on Union Ave. It stopped across the street from the unforgettable Baptist Memorial Hospital. Diane told us what happened there:

"Baptist Memorial Hospital is the largest private hospital in the world. It has 5,000 beds in it. In fact, it's so large they even had to have their own zip code. It was also very important in the Presley family. Elvis had a private suite rented here. He came to the Baptist all the time. He'd come here and recuperate from total exhaustion. As a matter of fact, in the latter part of his life it seemed as if he were in the Baptist just as much as he was out. Gladys, Elvis' mother, was admitted here in 1958 of hepatitis. She

died three days later of a heart attack on August 14, 1958. Lisa Marie was born here on Feb. 1, 1968. Elvis Presley was pronounced dead on arrival here on August 16, 1977."

The silent pause at the hospital was abruptly terminated by the loud motor accelerating--the bus moved on to its final destination. It turned right (south) onto Highway 240. Diane pronounced her closing words:

"We are in route to Graceland now. Before we get there I'd like to say a little bit about the history of Graceland. It was built in 1939. The first owner of it was a man named Doctor Thomas Moore. Now a lot of people think Elvis named it Graceland; actually, Dr. Moore named it after his wife Grace. (Note: According to Becky Yancey's book, My Life With Elvis, Graceland was named after Grace Toof, the aunt of Moore's wife, Ruth Brown Moore, and it was bought by Elvis in 1957). Elvis bought it in 1956 at a cost of \$100,000. Today it's worth about a million-and-a-half dollars. And the way that Elvis would get it so cheaply was Dr. Moore died in the mid-1950's, and his wife moved back to the city. At that time there was nothing out in Whitehaven, which is the area that Graceland is in, but cotton and cattle. Elvis had virtually bought himself a country estate. Those of you who've seen Graceland already will totally agree with me that it no longer is a country estate. There are over 300,000 people living in that area.

"Graceland has 13 and three-quarters acres, 19 rooms, and a swimming pool (which Elvis added); the stables were already there, though; Elvis also added a private recording studio, a handball racquet ball court, and the Meditation Gardens, where he liked to be alone to relax. Elvis and his mother Gladys were buried in these Meditation Gardens. He also added the stone wall which is around the place, for private reasons.

"Elvis and his mother were not always buried at Graceland. They used to be buried at a cemetery named Forest Hill. The reason they moved them was because the Presleys were spending \$200 a day just on security. You may have read the story about the people who tried to break into Elvis' Mausoleum. Also, Forest Hill never wanted the cemetery to become such a public place. Thousands of people were pouring ⁱⁿ every day. And other people, who were having private funerals didn't have any say at all about the whole thing. The Presleys got a special permit to move Elvis and his mother, Gladys, from Forest Hill to Graceland.

"Elvis' funeral consisted of 12 white cadillac limousines that were Elvis', and they escorted celebrities like Ann-Margret, Lee Majors, Farrah Fawcett-Majors, and Robert Redford to the funeral. There were over 80,000 Elvis fans here in Memphis overnight. It happened just like that (snap of finger). The minute they heard word of Elvis' death, they

rushed into Memphis just to look at Graceland and do nothing else. It was really bad, because at that time all the hotels and motels were filled with Shriners, and they were having a Shriner's Convention. And there were no rooms in the motels for these people to stay in. They had to live in their cars, in the restaurants and cafeterias around town, for that period of time.

"Today there is an average of 10,000 people a day going through the gates of Graceland. In the early days people used to think of ingenious ways of getting into Graceland. One time the parcel post truck pulled up to the gates around Elvis' birthday. He wanted to deliver a package. Well, the Presleys weren't expecting anything, so they told the guy to take it back. He got into his truck and started driving off; the box started moving around. He opened it up, and two girls got out. They had mailed themselves to Elvis. They were friends before that, but they weren't friends anymore because they had been in that box for three entire days. Can you imagine that?

"In the latter years of his life Elvis spent from 80 to 100% of his time at Graceland. That's because everywhere he went he caused such a commotion by his fans. If he wanted to go to the dentist he had to go at 10:30 at night. If he wanted to go to a movie he had to rent the entire theater. If he wanted to go shopping he had to rent the entire shopping mall. They said that when Elvis died he didn't know

what a pair of pants cost a normal person.

"To kind of make up for all this Elvis became very generous. Like I said before, he gave \$100,000 every month to St. Jude. He gave very heavily to the United Way of Memphis, and he gave every Christmas so that needy families could have a nice Christmas dinner. You've probably heard stories about Elvis giving away cars and things like that. One time a black lady was admiring a Cadillac Seville when he was here in town. He got behind her and said, 'If you like it so much it's yours.' She turned around and it was Elvis. It was that easy. Elvis pulled into Robertson Motors once (that's our B&W Mercedes Benz and Rolls-Royce dealership here in town), and ordered 17 Mercedes Benz. That was his Christmas shopping list. They cost 15 to 20 thousand dollars apiece. Actually, after that, they had to pick Mr. Robertson off the floor. And Mr. Robertson did, by the way, spend the next month in the Bahamas.

"Shortly before Elvis died he rented Libertyland (that's our amusement park here in town) for Lisa Marie, his daughter, and 100 needy children. It was a very well kept secret; nobody knew about it till the next day. He rented it from 1 till 6 in the morning."

The bus finally rolled off the freeway onto Elvis Presley Boulevard. Diane told a few more stories as we got off at the Brooks Road exit:

"We're now on Elvis Presley Blvd. The signs on Elvis Presley Blvd. are very scarce. A lot of people like to take those signs home as souvenirs. In fact, a lady once decided she wanted the pole and everything. So what she did was she got herself a chain. She hooked one end of the chain around the pole, put the other end of the chain on her car, and then proceeded to drive off. Well, naturally the pole and everything pulled up out of the sidewalk. She was then trying to get the thing into her car when she was caught. So let me warn you, if any of you are planning to do that, this is a very busy street, and you probably will get caught at it. There are Elvis Presley Blvd. signs in the gift shops around here."

The bus turned left (east) into the Graceland subdivision on Old Hickory Rd. It turned right (south) on Hermitage Dr. and then right (west) on Dolan Dr. The bus slowly drove by 1266 Dolan Dr. as Diane explained its lengthy pre-history:

"Elvis was inducted into the army in 1958. His mother Gladys was still alive, but very shortly after that she died. Then Elvis was sent to Germany. Vernon decided to go over to Germany with his son. At that time there was nobody in Graceland; it was completely vacant. While they were in Germany they both met somebody that became very special to them. Elvis met Priscilla, and Vernon met Dee. Dee later became Dee Presley because she and Vernon got married. Well, Dee

had three small boys and all five of them moved into Graceland. Well, Elvis was making movies, cutting records, and doing concerts, and he had to sleep in the day time. But day time is the prime time for boys to be boys. So they kept Elvis up all the time; he couldn't get any rest. And he thought it would be better for all concerned if Vernon and his new family had their own home. Elvis told his father Vernon that he'd buy his father any home in the Graceland subdivision that he wanted. Vernon picked out the home on 1266 Dolan in 1960, and he still lives here today. He's been living here for 18 years now. You can get to Graceland through Vernon's back yard. In fact, Elvis did it many times when he didn't want to be recognized by his fans. This is also where Priscilla lived when she went to high school here in Memphis."

The bus finally rounded the corner and turned right (north) back onto Elvis Presley Blvd. We were almost at Graceland. Diane recited the last bits of her well memorized narration as the bus slowly crept up to the gates of Graceland:

"Today living at Graceland is his aunt and grandmother, who is over 80 years old. That is Vernon's sister and mother. So Graceland is still a private residence today. When you get up to Graceland, and you see the top floor, notice the two windows on the right. That was Elvis' bedroom. His quarters went all the way to the back of the house. His bed measured nine feet by nine feet. He had 16 color televisions. He was

a very big football fan. Whenever he didn't like what was going on (his team wasn't winning), he had a very simple solution to the problem: he'd just take his pistol and shoot the tube out. It worked every time.

"The line is very moderate today. I've seen it back up all the way around to Vernon's house. Notice the wall. You'll get to read all the writing on it on your way into Graceland. People started writing messages to Elvis on it. There is not one derogatory remark on it out of all the writing on it. They've named it the 'Wall of Love.'

"The last shuttle bus will leave at 4:30 in the afternoon. The bus will pick you up right here in front of Graceland Christian Church."

And so at last we reached Graceland. We got off the bus and hurried to get into line to see the final resting place of the King.

CHAPTER 11

GRACELAND

The tour we had just completed taught me two things about legendary figures like Elvis: certain facts about their life invariably become misrepresented or else distorted; and hero-worship goes hand in hand with commercialism. Not only was Elvis becoming a big business, and to some extent monopolized by the image-making producers of Elvis relics, but Elvis was becoming a glorified saint to those who came to pay their respects to the king. Within our own country and in our generation was the same trend that had produced former "saviors" in other "holy lands." The story was always the same--man's evolution toward a higher state--but the locality was always different. It was the story of every man, but a symbol was always chosen to represent the aspirations of the human race as a whole. Sometimes the symbol was invented; sometimes it presented itself in a ready-made symbol like Elvis. The symbol always had to embody and reflect the ideas and ideals of its generation and its age. The symbol

also had to transcend time and space and become one with the eternal principle. It had to acquire a protean character which would change its form constantly to demonstrate the multiplicity of forms inherent in nature; and then it had to develop the ability to reflect the one light in order to demonstrate the unity of the universe. Such a symbol was Elvis.

I felt myself becoming a part of a new movement. I was flowing in a new river whose password was Elvis; and Graceland seemed to be a new form of utopia that we were flowing to. Graceland evoked mental images of beauty of form, a sort of neo-classical revival; it stirred up emotional recollections of the divine influence in the affairs of man; it played a vital part in bringing a bit of heaven to the mundane world of Memphis; it expressed the same external charm and attractive quality that its kingly inhabitant displayed. Musically, Graceland is like a grace note that is added to embellish or adorn a piece of music. Numerically, Graceland carries the vibrations of the master number 11, which is the vibration of the Aquarian Age.

We finally made it to the end of the line. The "Wall of Love" ended where we stood. We forgot about the long line and the long wait and began reading the affectionate expressions of respect and love by Elvis' innumerable fans. I skipped the vainglorious names and focused on the eulogies

which expressed a timeless admiration for the King. Some outstanding ones, in my opinion, were the following 32 which caught my eye:

- (1) I miss you Elvis, and I still love you.
- (2) Elvis--A man is never dead until his memory dies;
He will remain immortal in our hearts.
- (3) I pray you will rest in peace until the trumpet calls;
Your throne will always remain for all time.
We love you and little Lisa.
- (4) We will always remember you.
- (5) WE LOVE YOU, ELVIS.
- (6) Elvis--like magic you made us feel alive.
- (7) Thanks for the memories.
- (8) We miss you, Elvis.
- (9) Elvis, you will always be the best.
- (10) No cadillac, no diamonds, just you.
- (11) The King Forever, Elvis.
- (12) The King of Rock and Roll.
- (13) You're Still Great.
- (14) I came too late, but it's still great to be here
where he lives.
- (15) Elvis, we will always love you.
- (16) Bless You.
- (17) Gone, but not forgotten.
- (18) Elvis I came too late.
- (19) There has always been only one.
- (20) Moody Blue.

- (21) We came all the way down here
But we didn't get to see you.
- (22) We love you forever.
- (23) No stage will ever shine so bright
No voice will ever sing and bring the joy you brought
You'll always be the King.
- (24) Out of Sight
Out of Mind
Rest Easy Elvis.
- (25) God Bless You, Elvis.
- (26) Elvis, dead or alive--He'll always be King.
- (27) Rest in Peace.
- (28) Elvis, We will always love and remember you.
- (29) There will never be another Elvis.
- (30) You were done too soon, Love
A Neil Diamond fan.
- (31) Elvis--a god among men.
- (32) Elvis the Greatest.

The line crept slowly to the musical gates of Graceland. We were now about 50 yards away from the entrance. The summer heat was becoming unbearable. A girl with a cart sold us a cold drink for 50 cents. But even the Mountain Dew couldn't relieve the thirst of our parched throats and lips. If only we could get inside. That would make the situation easier to bear.

"All this for \$2.00," roared a voice on the crowded sidewalk. "I'm giving you \$5.00 worth for \$2.00."

The gray-haired hawker sounded like a roadside Preacher.

"We have a love story in this paper," proclaimed the voice. "You're gonna get closer to your husband. It's a wonderful, beautiful story. The man upstairs said so. And it's true."

The stocky, short man was coming closer in our direction.

"You hear that, honey," I said to my wife, "you buy his stuff and you get closer to your husband."

"Sure," she answered, "he just wants your money."

"They won't let me sell them, so I give them away," said the raspy voice. He was giving a paper to a lady in front of us.

"If you don't want to pay me for them," he continued, coming in my direction, "you can have them."

"I can?" I asked in disbelief.

"Sure," answered the cheerful man, "that's the way the good Lord said. If you can't pay for it, you can have it, keep it."

The simple gospel of the simple man was truthful and honest. He handed me a paper and a thin book with a picture of "Elvis: The King."

"There's two papers," he said. He didn't reach out for any remuneration. He started to walk down the line to proclaim the good news to everyone.

"You're a good man," I said before he turned away.

"You know why?" he asked. He stopped and looked at me with a serious look on his face. He didn't wait for me to ask why. "Cause I have to be. Cause I'm named after this boy here."

"You're named after him?" I asked. Strange things had been happening to me lately, and I wasn't about to dismiss his story. At least not until I heard his side of it.

"Yes, sir," he stated. "My name's Elvis."

"No kidding?" I said in amazement.

"That's right," he reaffirmed. "I've been selling newspapers sixty-three years in Memphis. And the good Lord's gonna let me sell them sixty-three more years maybe."

"What's your last name, Elvis?" I asked.

"Anderton."

"Anderson?"

"Anderton. A N D E R T O N," he spelled it out.

I quickly calculated the numerical value of his name in my head. The total was 59 (Elvis Presley's name and birth number were present in that number). The single digit was 5, Elvis' name number. I continued listening to what else this mysterious man had to say. He seemed to have popped out of the clear blue sky.

"Now my mother and daddy when they was married," Elvis Anderton continued, "my mother had 12 sons! She said if daddy would've stayed home, she would've had 12 more sons."

So I hurried up and got married. I stayed home, and I didn't have but one. And I didn't have but one. And I have nine brothers still living. And seven of them were in World War I. And we didn't get a scratch. The good Lord was good to us."

"Did you ever get to meet Elvis?" I asked.

"Huh?" he asked.

"Did you ever get to meet Elvis?" I repeated.

"I knew him, mister," he stated confidently. "He worked for me."

"He did?" I said. This old-timer amazed me again.

"Selling peanuts and popcorn," he continued. "And he made..."

"Where?" I interrupted.

"At the football games," Mr. Anderton said loudly. He couldn't believe that I didn't know that basic fact. "And he made three or four dollars. You know what he done with it?"

"What?" I begged the question.

"He didn't catch a bus," he proceeded with his tale.

"He run as fast as he could to get to his mother to give his mother that three dollars cause she didn't have any food on the table."

"How old was he?" I asked.

"Thirteen-years-old," he answered. "Ain't that somtin?"

"That sure is," I agreed.

"That's the reason you're here today," he declared.
"Ain't I right?"

"That's right," I confirmed.

A lady behind me asked for a look at the tiny booklet Mr. Anderton was handing out. He left my side hurriedly. After he finished dealing with her, he proceeded down the line, spreading his message: "Anybody else? We give you this book free, if you buy a paper. If you ain't got \$2.00, we'll give it to you for nothing."

I looked inside the free booklet and saw his address: E.W. Anderton & Associates, P.O. Box 3174, Memphis 38111.

No sooner was the old-timer with the red baseball cap gone than another peddler appeared in front of us. This man, however, was quiet. He had no message. He was just selling pictures of Elvis for \$1.50.

"Who is this here, in this picture?" asked the lady in front of me. I looked over her shoulder to get a view.

"Charlie Hodge," answered the old man.

"What's the name of the horse Elvis is on?" I interjected.

"Sun," slowly responded the man.

"I thought that was Rising Sun?" I questioned.

"No," he answered. "That's Sun. Rising Sun's the palomino."

Elvis looked like the Greek youth Phaethon on that horse. Both had tried to ride the Sun's steeds through the precipitous

heavens; both wanted to feel what it was like to guide the Sun along its dizzy course, giving light to the world; both plunged headlong down, setting the world on fire; both died at a young age; and both had greatly dared what no mortal man would dare to attempt--to ride the Sun.

"Who took these pictures?" asked the lady.

"My son," answered the man.

"When were these taken?" I asked.

"1970," said the old man. "Right inside these walls."

He showed us some more pictures of Elvis. There were a few of Elvis practicing karate; he was wearing a purple belt. There was one of Elvis with a purple shirt and a white scarf.

The line started to move again. We were told to line up by two's.

"We're going in two by two, like into the ark," I commented to my wife.

We were about 12 feet away from the wrought-iron gates when suddenly the line stopped. Vester Presley was the main guard at the gate, and he was letting in groups of one hundred at a time. We stopped right beside the overflowing garbage can.

"Whew!" exclaimed my wife. She held her nose. "The garbage out here stinks."

"There will never be another Elvis," I read the writing

on the wall. "We just saw another Elvis--that old guy."

"You believe him?" impugned my wife. "He's just selling papers."

"You're too cynical," I admonished.

"I just don't believe his name is Elvis," she defended her argument. "He's just trying to make a buck, like everybody else."

Ten minutes passed and the line started flowing again. This time we were finally ushered inside the gates. The ten-foot iron gates were embellished with eight notes; the two sides of the gates were like mirror images of each other. The larger-than-life-size metal figure of Elvis playing the guitar was placed in the spot the treble and bass clefs usually stood. The guitar and the head of the singer replaced the treble clef, and the feet replaced the bottom bass clef. The top part of the iron grill design had the musical notes C E D A worked into it; the bottom part had G E A G. I tried humming the top part to myself: Do Me Re Ia. Then the bottom part: So Me Ia So. I couldn't name the tune.

We walked up the cemented driveway, and again we had to wait in line. I walked back to take a picture of Elvis' uncle, Vester Presley, who was standing in the doorway of his roomy brick guardhouse. A poster on his window advertised his newly published book about his nephew entitled A Presley Speaks, which was selling for \$10.00 (regular copy) or \$25.00 (deluxe

special edition, gold trimmed and autographed copy). The address for obtaining copies was: Vester Presley, c/o Wimmer Brothers Books, P.O. Box 540, Memphis 38101.

The line started to move again, and my wife called for me to get back into line. I ran to catch up. We walked past the majestic oaks, and suddenly the four-pillared ante-bellum mansion stood before us. Two white stone lions sat in eternal vigil on either side of the five steps leading to the front door. The divine guardians guarded the mansion day and night. A yellow nylon rope was stretched out across the driveway with a "Keep Out" sign to help the lions perform their relentless duty. "No smoking" signs were also posted on the grounds.

The ante-bellum mansion was similar in design to Greek revival architecture, which was the fad of the day during the nineteenth century in the South. We were made aware of this when we visited Stanton Hall in Natchez later during our trip through the old South. Southerners as a whole didn't have much of their own history, we were told, so they identified with Greek history and its grand architecture, which included tall pillars, which were used in Greek temples. As a general rule, Southern architecture was eclectic: a lot of things from various cultures were mixed together. The shutters on the windows confirmed that fact. The cast iron in front of the windows, however, were installed for security reasons. Behind the top-right window was where the King used to live.

The line moved past the majestic mansion. It swung to the right past the trophy room. The kidney-shaped swimming pool with three steps on the northern side was filled with clear water which reflected the light blue sky. Cast-iron table and chairs, statues, marble plant stands and lounge chairs encircled the pool. Past a brush-bordered walkway and down several brick steps we caught a glimpse of the Meditation Garden.

The line inched toward the final resting place of the King--Meditation Garden. A semi-circular eight-pillared overhang overlooked the peaceful, fragrant garden. Beautiful pink crepe myrtle trees adorned the garden. A semi-circular tanned stone wall surrounded the garden and served as its southern boundary. Glass mural windows with religious themes adorned the wall. Two light fixtures were placed in between the mural windows; ironically, the light fixture overlooking Elvis' burial site was missing. A statue of the Christ with outstretched hands stood in the middle of the eight pillars. The uplifted hands spoke of a resurrection: "If I be lifted up I will draw all men unto me." The downcast eyes expressed an eternal truth inherent in all nature: "Unless a seed fall into the ground and die, it cannot bring forth fruit."

We were at last standing in front of Elvis Presley's burial site. An overwhelming sensation of fulfillment and realization spread through my body--it was electro-chemical

osmosis. The smiling face of Elvis in the center of the cross beamed with happiness. The cross he had to bear in life had been exchanged for a kingly crown. The ivory cross at the northern head of the grave radiated with love through the three symbolic roses imprinted on the top and sides of the eternal cross. A 2,000-pound granite slab with swirling blue and white colors covered the grave. A tombstone inscription was cast in a 400-pound coffin length bronze plaque with decorative leaves engraved around the sides. A tiny cross was impressed at the head of the plaque, and below were the words:

E L V I S

A A R O N

P R E S L E Y

January 8, 1935

August 16, 1977

Son of
Vernon Elvis Presley
and
Gladys Love Presley

Father of
Lisa Marie Presley

He was a precious gift from God
We cherished and loved dearly.

He had a God-given talent that he shared
With the world. And without a doubt,
He became most widely acclaimed;
Capturing the hearts of young and old alike.

He was admired not only as an entertainer,
But as the great humanitarian that he was;
For his generosity, and his kind feelings
For his fellow man.

He revolutionized the field of music and
Received its highest awards.

He became a living legend in his own time;
Earning the respect and love of millions.

God saw that he needed some rest and
Called him home to be with Him.

We miss you, Son and Daddy. I thank GOD
The He gave us you as our son.

The beautiful inscription was a gift from heaven. Vernon Presley received the inspiration to write the eulogy one morning at dawn when he was awakened by the bright rays of the sun streaming through his window. The words came to him in a rush from his subconscious mind. What he wrote is a fantastic example of automatic writing.

Elvis lay with his head pointed to the north. Directly behind him was a circular fountain with perpetually flowing water gushing from the earth below and spouting up into the air. Permanent floral arrangements surrounded the colorful shrine. An open book leaning against a green bush had the biblical message of Psalms 23 printed on the left page: "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want. He leadeth me beside the still waters." There was a heart made of red roses and a cross made of red roses. There was a guitar with orange and white roses. There was a blue arrangement with the famous TCB insignia and lightning bolt in silver. Some of the arrangements spilled over onto Gladys Presley's eastern burial site. There was a guitar with blue and yellow daisies. There

was a heart made of white roses with a line of red roses dividing the heart in two. There was a blue heart with the silver TCB insignia again. There was a round white rose arrangement upon a circular blue disk with the silver lettering "Moody Blue." The plastic arrangements stood as an everlasting memorial to a great man.

Beside Elvis lay his beloved mother, Gladys Presley. She had the same granite and bronze covering that Elvis had. At the head of her grave was a floral arrangement shaped with red roses into a cross. The tombstone was also engraved with a tiny cross at the northern head, and below was the inscription written by Vernon Presley:

GLADYS

LOVE

SMITH
PRESLEY

April 25, 1912
August 14, 1958

Wife of
Vernon Elvis Presley

Mother of
Elvis Aaron Presley
and
Jesse Garon Presley

She was a great person, a great wife
and mother.

She was also loved by many.

We loved her dearly and she is sadly missed.

Below the inscription was a bronze rose with a long stem embedded into the bronze plaque. The dates on the plaque verified the fact that Gladys was 46-years-old when she died. Many books, magazines, and newspaper articles erroneously quoted Gladys' age at death as being 42; such an error was probably due to the desire to make both deaths supernaturally coincide at the magic number of 42.

I stood in quiet reflection overlooking the two graves. There was so much love pouring from the souls of both saintly persons lying in the paradisiac garden. I remembered a short poem by Dorothy Francis entitled "God's Garden," which I had read at the Crystal Shrine Grotto in Memphis:

The kiss of the sun for pardon;
The song of the birds for mirth;
One is nearer God's heart in a garden
Than anywhere else on earth.

I turned eastward and saw the ten-foot Presley tombstone of the cross, the risen Christ and two kneeling angels. This white marble tombstone was originally placed at Gladys Presley's burial site at Forest Hill Cemetery. But it now stood in the eastern part of the garden, where the sun came up. The cross had the acronym "Ihs" engraved in the center; the initials stood for "In his service." The hands of the risen Christ standing on the solid rock were outstretched as if to say: "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I

will give you rest." The heart center was opened up to expose the "mystic rose" or "sacred heart" blooming upon the breast, which signified the manifestation of intuitive perception and profound compassion for humanity. Two angels knelt at the sides of the uplifted Christ in recognition of the revived consciousness of divine unity.

On the right hand side of the Presley tombstone was a Roman style statue of Mercury (known in Greek mythology as Hermes, the messenger of Zeus). The white marble statue of Mercury presented a handsome and bearded figure in a Roman outfit. The legs were uncovered. He was wearing winged sandals, and a winged low-crowned helmet lay at his feet. With his left hand he supported a shield, and in his right hand he held a scroll. The scroll was a far cry from his magic wand, the caduceus, which he usually carried with him to perform his duty as Divine Herald, who led the souls down to their last home. The caduceus, being a symbol of the healing arts, was also used to quicken to life that which had been dead by masterfully transmuting the positive and negative currents of force inherent in the dualistic and symbolic serpentine figures spiraling up the caduceus. I peered into the eyes of the life-like statue of Mercury and wondered where the missing caduceus was located. The graceful and swift-of-motion god of Greek and Roman mythology didn't answer. He only sent me the quick-as-lightning thought that he had

subdued and gained the victory over Pluto and the underworld, and he had restored Persephone, the maiden of Spring, to her mother Demeter, symbol of mother Nature.

The memorable trip through Meditation Garden was finished, and so was the trip through Graceland. We felt grateful that the private residence of the Presleys was open to the public, and that we were at least fortunate enough to visit the final resting place of Elvis. We had paid our homage to the king. What suprised me was that there was no admission charge.

The mad rush for the fan's money occurred outside the gates. Young boys were handing out free gift coupons immediately after we crossed the line into their territory. Three shops across the street from Graceland were advertising their ware: (1) Elvis Presley Souvenirs, 3787 E.P. Blvd.; (2) Elvis Jewelry Store, 3755 E.P. Blvd.; and (3) Elvis Record Store, 3783 E.P. Blvd. Another shop named "Eternally Your's" at 3489 E.P. Blvd. was located approximately 3 blocks north of Graceland. Further north was yet one more shop: Elvis Presley Boulevard Souvenirs & Tourist Information Center at 3350 E.P. Blvd.

We picked up our coupons and headed for the shops to collect our free souvenirs. We had to wait for the signal to turn green. All of a sudden, a Thunderbird drove up to the gates, and the people moved aside to let the important-looking car drive by. I noticed the license plate number,

1-CL655; it was the same car I had seen parked at Vernon's house on Dolan St. Another car followed behind the first one. I recognized Vernon Presley behind the wheel. He looked straight ahead without smiling or waving at the fans. He appeared to be tired and exhausted from all the commotion and the never-ending lines to visit his son. The Mercury Grand Marquis, license plate number 1-P0568, drove through the gates as everyone furiously snapped pictures of the eventful moment.

When the signal turned green and the "walk" signal started flashing, we walked across the wide walkway to the other side. The special intersection insured safe passage for Elvis fans. We made the rounds through the souvenir shops. We received a free Marriage Certificate, a colorful picture of Meditation Garden taken by Dewey Jacobs, Jr., and another colorful picture taken by the same photographer of Elvis Presley's burial site. One shop handed out a black-and-white sketch of Elvis. Another shop handed out Vernon's eulogy. Of course, we were lured into buying their memorabilia as souvenirs to take home.

Finally, our memorial tour was completed and we caught a shuttle-bus back to our starting point.