

CHAPTER 12

CIRCLE G RANCH

After the trip through Graceland (3764 E.P. Blvd. was now firmly etched into our minds), I was emotionally and physically drained. I needed to replenish the chemistry of my body. Big Boy's Restaurant up the street from Graceland was the most appealing place for our hungry stomachs. My three-year-old son enjoyed the presence of Big Boy in the image of a piggy-bank, which we purchased for him to teach him frugality. He also enjoyed the comic books depicting the heroic adventures of Big Boy. My wife and I thumbed through the special edition newspapers which we had received at Graceland. We reviewed the past.

The Commercial Appeal's Wednesday morning news, after the fateful day of August 16, 1977, was headlined by: "Death Captures Crown of Rock and Roll--Elvis Dies Apparently After Heart Attack." On the front page was a picture of Elvis in tinted glasses, collar-length hair and sideburns, and smiling face signing an autograph; Red West stood behind him; a necklace hung around Elvis' neck, revealing a lion's head, symbol

of kingship, aggressive power, and the sun-sign Leo. Another front-page picture captured the moment when a white hearse took the body of Elvis Presley from Baptist Hospital. The inside story of Elvis' unmistakable death was minutely covered, from the discovery of the body by road manager, Joe Esposito, to the story of an estimated 80,000 fans paying last respects. The stories compiled by Commercial Appeal included the outstanding events from August 16-21.

An article about the memorable funeral service on Thursday at Graceland by C.W. Bradley, minister of Wooddale Church of Christ, included a concise synopsis of the man we had all grown to love and admire: "We are here to honor the memory of a man loved by millions. Elvis can serve as an inspiring example of the great potential of one human being who has strong desire and unfailing determination. From total obscurity Elvis rose to world fame. His name is a household word in every nook and corner of this Earth. Though idolized by millions and forced to be protected from the crowds, Elvis never lost his desire to stay in close touch with humanity."

Colorful pictures of the grand finale adorned the center pages of the comprehensive edition. Several articles covered the highlights of Elvis' phenomenal career; there was mention of Ginger Alden's vacation in Hawaii with Elvis in March; and even the deadly nightmare for two visitors struck down early Thursday around 3:30 A.M. by an intoxicated driver was covered.

One curious statement by Ginger Alden about the book Elvis was reading when he died caught my eye: "He went into the bathroom, then closed the door behind him," according to Ginger's visualization of the last moments, "and, presumably, stretched out on a black lounge chair to read 'a Jesus book.' And that was it." Once again, the title of the book was intentionally covered-up.

I rummaged through the special edition of the Memphis Press-Scimitar to uncover the mystery of the concealed book. Linda Thompson, Elvis' girl friend and confidante for five years revealed only a fraction of the truth: "For years and years he read books about God. He once told me, 'I want to know about God, about life, about life after death.' At the time of his death, in fact, he was reading a book about Jesus' skeleton being found." I would have to continue the search.

The headlines of the compilation read: "Memphis Leads the World in Mourning the Monarch of Rock 'n Roll" and below that "A Lonely Life Ends on Elvis Presley Boulevard." The beginnings of a King were depicted, and the life of a true legend was viewed through a lens. In one article, a superb tribute was paid to the King: "There can be no diminishing of the man's position among the stars of the entertainment constellation. He will be remembered as nothing short of a modern god. In some form, he will live forever."

Another article reminisced about a 21-year-old Elvis,

who spoke in a low, soft drawl, was well-proportioned, 180 pounds on a 6-foot frame, and still had adolescent pimples. Even though Elvis admitted he hadn't attended his own church, the fundamentalist Assembly of God, "in quite a while," his concerts were similar in emotional fervor and ecstasy to a revival meeting, and his spiritual viewpoint was gospel truth: "I know this. All good things come from God. You don't have to go to church to know right from wrong. Sure, church helps, but you can be a Christian so long as you have a Christian heart."

Even Elvis' three-minute acceptance speech at the 33rd Annual Congress of America's Ten outstanding Young Men of 1970 included a statement which revealed Elvis' understanding of eternal truths: "These men may be the Kingdom of God." Elvis was one of those men. And, as Gov. Jerry Brown of California puts it, Elvis "had a significant impact on the culture and consciousness of America."

President Jimmy Carter epitomized the greatness of the man with his tribute: "Elvis Presley's death deprives our country of a part of itself. His music and his personality, fusing the styles of white country and black rhythm and blues, permanently changed the face of American popular culture. His following was immense and he was a symbol to the people the world over of the vitality, rebelliousness and good humor of this country. He burst upon the scene with an impact that was

unprecedented and will probably never be equaled."

After the sumptuous and filling meal at the restaurant, we drove north on Highway 51 (from the Tennessee-Mississippi state boundary to South Parkway it is known as Elvis Presley Blvd.). We passed Brooks Rd., where the suburb town of Whitehaven started, and we headed toward Forest Hill Mid-Town Cemetery.

At the office we picked up a map of the cemetery where Elvis was originally interred. Forest Hill on 1661 E.P. Blvd. was a spacious forest with rolling hills and curving roads. We drove past the former burial site of Gladys Presley in Section 9. There was a flower draped knoll behind where the Presley monument used to stand in a pine grove. A section of the marble stand was left behind to mark the spot. Scars were still visible from the unearthing performed for the move to Graceland together with her son. Elvis frequently visited this site while alive and when the marker for Gladys was still there. A standard-size marker had been placed about five feet in front of Christ and the Cross monument reading: Gladys Smith Presley, April 25, 1912-August 14, 1958; "Beloved wife of Vernon Presley and Mother of Elvis Presley, She was the Sunshine of Our Home." This marker was replaced at Graceland with the bronze plaque covering her grave.

We proceeded on our winding journey through the solemn cemetery. In the southwest corner in Section 14 we saw the

four-pillared beige abbey-type mausoleum where Elvis was carried up 4 steps to be entombed in a six-crypt family room of Corridor Z to the right of the foyer. A bronze ornamental door opened into the gray marble crypt. A black curtain covered the crypt. We stood outside the closed mausoleum and reflected on the day that Elvis was laid to rest there in a white suit with dark blue tie and light blue shirt that his father gave him as a Christmas present; on his finger was a ring with the letters TCB and lightning bolts on either side. The black curtain was lifted on October 2, 1977 at 7 P.M. for Elvis' move to Graceland.

After a moment of meditation we drove back down the mile-long narrow winding road. As we passed Section 31A on our right I was suddenly struck by a gleaming white light from a white marble statue on our right. I had to turn around and investigate the mysterious magnetic pull of the statue. I slowly walked up to the more-than-life-size figure of a bearded man with piercing eyes. In his left hand he held the Book of Life and the two-edged Sword of Truth. His right hand was extended upward and his index finger pointed to the One Sun that is "the light of our world." The sign made by the hand flashed in my mind as the same one-finger sign that Elvis used at concerts. I had seen Elvis raise his hands many times during his last TV concert with the index fingers pointed upward. Elvis must have glanced at the

mysterious statue many times during his frequent visits to his mother's former burial site. Who was this mysterious person whose one-finger gesture Elvis imitated?

I looked at the map of the cemetery and it said Paul beside the statue. But somehow the statue didn't look like the traditional description of St. Paul. He was usually described as a man of low stature, bald on the head, crooked thighs, hollow-eyed, with a crooked nose, but full of grace. Somehow the description did not match the heroic figure I was looking at. I later discovered that the statue was the controversial figure of Apollonius of Tyana, a great philosopher and teacher of the first century A.D., and also a writer of epistles. He was described as a person with a firm and strong body, displaying no unmanly softness or delicacy. He looked as if he were moulded from the finest marble; there was not a blemish or mark upon him. He was light and fair, and lithe as the finest athlete. He was six feet tall and weighed approximately one hundred and eighty pounds. His hair was golden red, and was worn short in the Roman style. He had only a suggestion of a golden beard, but allowed it to grow longer during his last years. His face was not soft and feminine; it was finely chiselled and possessed strong, masculine lines; the jaw was well set and square; the forehead high, with a slight bulging which was perceptible more at one time than another. In appearance, he looked like a mixture

of two types. He was almost typically Roman and almost typically Greek, yet conformed to neither perfectly. He was calm, handsome of face, and forceful.

I came away from the spot with an elated feeling of having seen a statue come to life. I had followed my intuition once again and was richly rewarded. I saw a faint resemblance in the description of the Greek philosopher with some descriptions of Elvis. Whatever it was, I was impressed with a feeling that I had stumbled onto something that was connected with the amazing legend of Elvis.

The following day we woke up early so as to see some more sites related with Elvis' life before we headed south into the state of Mississippi. We strolled around Libertyland. Libertyland, by the way, has 11 letters (Graceland has 9). Both numbers figure very prominently in Elvis' life. The amusement park was erected in 1976, America's bicentennial. It was located at Mid-South Fairgrounds on East Parkway. Elvis frequently came here. He apparently last came here on Aug. 7, 1977 with fiancée Ginger Alden and nine-year-old Lisa. The theme park is divided into 3 theme lands: Colonial Land, Frontier Land, and Turn-of-the-Century Land. Fourteen rides rip and roar all over Libertyland, where the slogan is: "Something for everyone at Libertyland." We watched the four-car roller coaster ("Zippin Pippin"), Elvis' favorite ride at the park. We even met Libertyland's own Hound Dog.

Beside the amusement park was the Mid-South Coliseum, where Elvis performed for his Memphis home-town fans. Going east on Park Ave. we ran into Audubon Dr. across from Audubon Park. Elvis lived in a green and white home on 1034 Audubon back in 1956. The beautiful home on the east side of the street between Park Ave. and Haverhill Rd. was now surrounded by towering trees, which Elvis had planted more than 20 years ago. Elvis had originally bought the house for \$40,000. He sold it a year later for \$55,000 after adding a two-car garage in back and an iron fence surrounding the entire property. The house presently had a yellow tinge to it, and its present owner was Ted Chandler.

Going back west along Poplar Ave. we came across Overton Park. We stopped at Overton Park Shell, an open air theater, where Elvis performed at an all-country music show on August 10, 1954. The audience responded to his song, "Good Rockin' Tonight," with hysterical screams. I stood on the hill overlooking the amphitheater and closed my eyes. My thoughts drifted to the moment back in time and space when Elvis stood on that small stage and ignited the world with his music.

Across the street from Overton Park at 1911 Poplar Ave. was the Karate School of Self Defense, which Elvis attended as a pupil. Former instructor of Elvis, Kang Rhee, a 7th degree black belt, was the chief instructor at the Kang Rhee Institute--also known as the Oriental Center, where "Karate

is taught as an art in the traditional Oriental manner." Promotion is based on points and techniques with speed, coordination, balance, focus, timing, confidence, discipline, attitude and manner. Progression is through white belt, yellow, green, blue, purple, brown, red, and finally black belt 1st degree through 10th degree black belt. I stepped inside the center. There I saw pictures of Elvis with instructor Kang Rhee. I noticed the special patch that Elvis wore; it had the familiar TCB and lightning bolt insignia surrounded by three words: Faith, Spirit, and Discipline.

South on Cooper St. at Union Ave. stood the Memphian, the theater Elvis loved and used for his private screenings. It was formerly known as Suzore No.2. This was the place where Linda Thompson met Elvis while she was the reigning Miss Tennessee. She was there one night at one of Elvis' private showings.

We drove past Immaculate Conception Cathedral High School, located on 1725 Central Ave., where Priscilla went to school during her teen-age years with Elvis. Elvis often drove her to the school. We also drove past Patricia Stevens Career College & Finishing School on 1853 Madison St., where Priscilla went to finish her education after high school and before marrying Elvis.

We drove one more time through Elvis' old neighborhood. This time I noticed a building I had not noticed before. The

writing on the window said Blackwood Bros. Records. The small building at 211 Lauderdale St. between Exchange and Poplar must have caught Elvis' eye many times. This was the quartet Elvis wanted to sing with before his own star began to rise. As the story goes, the Blackwood Brothers had a member who thought he was going to leave but then changed his mind. Elvis was disappointed at the time. However, in later years he went on to acquire three other gospel quartets to sing backup for him: Jordanaires, Imperials, and The Stamps. The Blackwood Brothers were the ones who sang at Gladys Presley's funeral service; they sang "Rock of Ages" and Mrs. Presley's favorite, "Precious Memories."

There was one more spot I wanted to visit before crossing the border into Mississippi. It was the Memorial Field at Whitehaven High School, where Elvis played football with his buddies. The football field was located behind the high school on Fairfield Rd. The vibrations and sounds of football players could still be picked up on the thought-waves of bygone years.

There were three ways to get to the Elvis Presley Circle G Ranch. One way was to go on the pink "free bus," which periodically waited for passengers across the street from Graceland. The back of the bus (license number BC 0187) had another suggestion: "Follow me to Elvis Presley Ranch." The other two ways included two different routes one could

take on his own. One route was the Stateline Road Route, and the other route was the Goodman Road Route. The former one involved going $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles south of Graceland to Stateline Rd. and turning right (west), then proceeding 4 miles to Hwy. 301, where a left (south) turn was made, and finally, after 3 more miles, you had to turn left (east) on Goodman Rd. We chose the latter, and we thought simpler, route, since we had to make only one turn 5 miles south of Graceland at Goodman Rd. and then proceed $4\frac{1}{2}$ miles west to the entrance on the left hand side, just before reaching Hwy. 301.

At the entrance on Goodman Rd. there was a golden-colored sign with black letters stating that it was Elvis Presley's Ranch; within a circle was a large calligraphic G. The address of the ranch was designated as P.O. Box 1000, Walls, Mississippi 38680. A \$2.00 fee was charged as we came through the entrance. So this was the place where Elvis became a cowboy and a rancher. The entire place was presently undergoing restoration. It would be another memorial to Elvis.

Elvis' former honeymoon cottage was now turned into a museum and home office of the Graceland Fan Club. The front of the cottage was made of brick. The white pillars and the green shutters on the windows gave the home a colonial look. Inside was the office and museum, where visitors were invited to join the fan club and to enter drawings for items that belonged to Elvis. For \$1.00 I had a chance of winning the

pair of black suede boots that were worn by Elvis during the movie "Roustabout." I decided to look at the showcase of Elvis memorabilia instead. Inside the showcase was the private collection of Elvis' first cousin, Billy Smith. There were two 45 magnum guns; a wallet with the initials E.P.; a turquoise bracelet; a watch and a gold TCB necklace; Elvis' identification tags; tinted prescription glasses; an Indian-design choker; a concert belt with golden disks and blue stones; a macrame and beads belt; Elvis buttons; an Elvis-in-concert picture; another concert belt; a 45 record; a kerchief with the initials E.P.; an autographed Elvis Presley blue scarf; a racquet ball suit and racquet; and several pictures of Elvis.

The main attraction of the cottage was Elvis and Priscilla's honeymoon bedroom. There was still a bed with a bright yellow bedspread standing in the small bedroom.

For the rest of the attractions we had to take a ride on a dirt road to the southeastern part of the ranch. On our left was a lake with an Oriental bridge going across a narrow span of water. In the distance we could see a pink club house and a swimming pool. The pink, Spanish-style club house was plain and simple. The only Elvis memorabilia inside the main room was an impressive prehistoric bird jumpsuit, several concert belts with turquoise stones, two pretty dresses that belonged to Priscilla, and two framed

pictures of Elvis. The large picture of a youthful Elvis was inspiring and moving; the hypnotic eyes with the dark shadows above the eyes held the observer spellbound. There was one other noteworthy item in the long playroom. It was a newspaper clipping on the wall; it was from the Memphis Press-Scimitar, dated Feb. 5, 1955; the headlines stated: "Suddenly singing Elvis Presley zooms into recording stardom."

Outside the club house at the entrance was a blue El Camino Ranch Wagon Chevrolet 327. It was bought in Feb. 16, 1967. Its address was Rt. 9, Horn Lake, Miss., and the dealer was Hoehn Chevrolet Co., 367 Union Ave., Memphis. The serial number was 136807K141530.

A Honda motorcycle that belonged to Elvis was on display on the western side of the club house, with license number ZN-3516, Tenn 1975.

Elvis' white Continental was on display on the eastern side of the building. It was "a gift from the legendary manager" Colonel Parker. It was automatic. It was equipped with an air conditioner and electric windows. The mileage read 73367.

The only other thing left to see at the ranch were the stables, which were surrounded by tall weeds. We passed a barbecue pit alongside the road. The last thing we saw as we drove away from the ranch was a 50 feet tall white memorial cross which needed a new coat of paint.

CHAPTER 13

TUPELO, MISSISSIPPI

We left De Soto County along the alternate route. We had to backtrack past Graceland one last time as we headed east on Winchester Rd. We passed through Memphis International Airport, stopping long enough to take a look at the place where Elvis landed many times and from which he took off many times. At the terminal I noticed the flag of Tennessee for the first time. It had the red, white and blue colors: a red field upon the center of which was a blue circle edged with white; the blue circle contained three white five-pointed stars; at the fly end was a blue stripe separated from the red field by a narrow white stripe.

We turned right on Hwy. 78 and headed south. We left Memphis, Shelby County, and "The Volunteer State." We were finally on our 107-mile trip from Memphis to Tupelo. We started the trip through Mississippi, "the Magnolia State," late in the afternoon. We were planning to get a room in a motel so that we could get dressed up the following morning

in our Sunday-going-to-church clothes. We planned to visit the Assembly of God Church in Tupelo. We would be taking a trip through Elvis' religious past. We would also visit the birthplace and all the other places in Tupelo that were part of Elvis' past. These were the roots from which a flowering tree grew to the heavens and branched out over the country which gave it nourishment. That flowering tree was Elvis.

We had to go through six counties to get to Tupelo: De Soto, Marshall, Benton, Union, Pontotoc, and Lee. The day was overcast with cumulus cloud formations. The humid climate made me feel as if I were in a tropical zone. There was even a tropical scent on the road to Tupelo. As soon as we drove out of De Soto County and entered Marshall County, the 4-lane highway became a 2-lane highway. We drove past the rural towns of Mineral Well, Olive Branch, Miller, Byhalia, Victoria, Red Banks, and Holly Springs. We passed two signs designating the mileage to Tupelo: one said Tupelo 75, and the other said Tupelo 57. Outside of Holly Springs I stopped beside St. Mark's Church to take a picture of the wierd configurations formed by the kudzu vines. We had fun imagining strange monsters, dragons, hound dogs, and other creatures in the natural designs created by the rapidly spreading kudzu vines, which we were told were imported from Japan to contain and control erosion. But the bugs that were needed to control the vine growth couldn't be imported since they also ate

cotton. As a result, the vines were covering the trees and destroying them. It was a strange sight--it was like something out of a science fiction movie.

After we drove through Potts Camp, we saw a sign saying Tupelo 46. We next entered Benton County and the sign said Tupelo 44. After we entered the Corp. Limit of Hickory Flat, the sign read Tupelo 39. Myrtle was next, and Tupelo was now only 32 miles away. Once again the highway expanded into a 4-lane highway as we drove past the 4 exits of New Albany. Outside city limits we were back to the 2-lane highway. After crossing the Tallahatchie River, we were 21 miles away. Wallerville and Blue Springs were behind us as we entered Pontotoc Co. and Sherman Corp. Limit. We were now only 10 miles away. We finally entered Lee Co. We were informed that the next 5 exits were for Tupelo. At the northern outskirts of the city was a "Welcome to Tupelo" sign with an etching of a tree and some prominent buildings.

Turning off on Hwy. 45 (Gloster St.) we saw a sign explaining the origin of Tupelo: "Named for the tupelo gum tree. Located on the first concrete road in the South. Original TVA city. One of the first industrial cities in Mississippi. Home of Private John Allen." No sign of Elvis, yet. We turned left (east) on Main St. (also Hwy. 78 and Hwy. 6) and we proceeded toward East Tupelo. In the distance we could see a silver water tower, which looked like a golf

ball on a tee.

Several blocks before the silver water tower was a four-way intersection with signs directing the Elvis fans to their appointed rendezvous with Elvis' destiny: a humble two-room house where he was born. At the intersection of Elvis Presley Rd. (formerly Old Saltillo Rd.) and Main St. E. was a sign with an arrow pointing to the left (north), to Elvis Presley Park. On the wall of a yellow building standing on the east side of Elvis Presley Rd. was a blue sign with white lettering: Elvis Presley Birthplace Open Daily. Four white arrows pointed northward. On the south side of Main St. E. was a sturdy blue sign with lettering in white again; this was a special sign erected in memory of Tupelo's most outstanding citizen and favorite son. The permanent memorial said: "Elvis Aaron Presley Memorial Highway. The Mississippi portion of U.S. 78 between Tenn. and Ala. is dedicated to his memory. Born: Tupelo, Miss. Jan. 8, 1935, Died: Memphis, Tenn. Aug. 16, 1977." There was approximately 131 miles dedicated to Elvis' memory.

About two-tenths of a mile on the right (east) side of Elvis Presley Rd. was the shrine which millions of Elvis fans would visit in all the years of its existence. It was the birthplace of Elvis Presley. The white clapboard shotgun house was so small that it was hard to imagine how three people could've moved around in it. Even modern mobile homes

were bigger. The rectangular 30X15 house with three doors and six windows was opened from 10-5 P.M. daily. We were too late. We would have to wait until the next day. We strolled around the birthplace, however, and viewed the 15-acre park site. About twenty feet south of the front entrance of the birthplace was a solid green sign with golden lettering:

BIRTHPLACE OF
ELVIS PRESLEY

Elvis Aaron Presley was born Jan. 8, 1935, in this house, built by his father. Presley's career as a singer and entertainer redefined American popular music. He died Aug. 16, 1977, at Memphis, Tennessee.

The same inscription was printed on both sides of the sign.

The following morning we woke up early at the All-American Motor Inn. We watched two Sunday morning programs on TV while we slowly crawled out of the comfortable beds. Channel 6 featured a black spiritual group on the "Jubilee Hour." Channel 3 had several favorite southern singing groups performing "Songs of Praise." The clapping, swaying, and repetitive choral responses of Black Southern Gospel was also part of Elvis' past, and it couldn't be overlooked.

By 10 o'clock we were dressed in our Sunday clothes and ready for church. After a quick breakfast we drove to the First Assembly of God Church, which was located at 206 Adams St., on the east side between Reese and Berry Streets. It

was a fairly new building constructed mainly of red bricks; some sandstone was used for the facade. It was not the original church. We were about fifteen minutes early for the 11o'clock service. I parked my green van in front of the church. It was boiling hot in the van, and I wanted to get out and stroll through the neighborhood that Elvis grew up in. The church was about a block-and-a-half from the birthplace, and I figured the Presley family probably used to walk down Berry St. to the church. I was ready to get out of the van when I looked across the street and saw an elderly lady in a blue dress sitting on the porch.

I realized immediately that I was looking at Mrs. Faye Harris, an old friend of Gladys'. I had read about her in Jerry Hopkins biography on Elvis. I couldn't believe that she was just sitting there as if waiting for me to come and talk to her. I couldn't resist the invitation. My little boy followed me across the street. I walked up the stairs to her modest-looking home on 207 Adams St., and I introduced myself as an Elvis fan.

"May I sit down and talk with you?" I asked after I introduced myself.

"Be my guest," she answered indifferently. She was chewing busily on something. A yellow straw was sticking out of the side of her mouth.

"I've read some about you in Jerry Hopkins book on Elvis,"

I began.

"That Jerry Hooper guy played a mean trick on me," she answered grudgingly. I must have said the wrong thing. "He did that long interview on me, and I thought he was gonna give me something for it. But he never did."

"He did get quite a lot of information from you," I admitted. I tried to get on the good side of her. He could have sent her some reimbursement, I thought.

"He was just using me," she continued. "He was just doing it for personal profit. And there's too many people going around now using Elvis' name for personal profit. It's one thing to carry on his memory, but trying to make some bucks off of that memory is what I don't like."

"Do you think Jerry wrote the truth about Elvis?" I asked. I was trying to act pleasant so that she wouldn't mistake me for another exploiter.

"There's a lot of untruth spread about him," she answered. "But I don't want to say much about that because I don't like to tell people things I know nothing about. As for that Hooper guy, I just don't like it that he didn't give me nothing for all the trouble I went to for his story."

"He should have sent you something," I agreed. "Could I ask you some questions about Elvis?" I changed the conversation to a brighter subject of discussion.

"Go right ahead," she said. Her eyes finally beamed a

smile in my direction.

"What was Elvis like as a little boy when he was growing up around here?" I asked.

"He was like any boy," she answered. She pointed at my little boy, who was playing games with himself by running up and down the stairs. "He was just like your boy there. Just a boy running around. He had his good points and his bad points. He was selfish in certain things and kind in other things. He was loveable, just like I'm sure your boy is loveable to you."

"I know what you mean," I said. I smiled at her understandingly. I was amazed at her homespun wisdom.

She spat out a ball of brown-colored mucus from the porch into the driveway. She continued chewing.

"How about Gladys?" I asked. "Do you think any of the rumors about her drinking problems were true?" I knew I was treading on dangerous ground, and sometimes I wondered if my bravery looked rather foolish to others.

"I don't talk about things like that," Mrs. Harris replied bluntly, "because what she does in her house is her private business, and what I do in my house is my private business."

I was going to change the subject I knew was a mistake on my part, but she cleared her throat as if she wanted to add something. It seemed from the tone of her voice that Gladys might have been depressed during the last year of her

life on earth.

"Her health started going downhill during her last year when I visited her at Graceland," she continued after she spat some more saliva through a gap in her front teeth, "just like Elvis' health started going bad during the last year of his life."

"Why do you think he ended up the way he did?" I asked, trying to leave out any hints of controversial rumors.

"I think if he wasn't so hungry for money he would've ended up a little different," she answered.

"I thought Colonel Parker was the money-hungry one," I said.

"It was both of them" she stated. "They both wanted the money. If Elvis didn't want the money Co-lo-nel Parker would've had to find another man to do business with." She pronounced the Colonel not like the accepted "Kernal," but like the phonetic Co-lo-nel.

"I wanted to ask you about the spiritual side of Elvis," I said, changing the subject to a new dimension. "What was the Presleys' church life like? Is it true they sang as a trio in that Assembly of God Church?" I looked across the street to indicate the sacred spot.

"I never remember the Presley family singing together in church," Mrs. Harris remarked truthfully. "And that church there," she nodded with her head in the direction of

the square-looking church with a sloping flat roof, "that's not the same church the Presleys went to. They moved that church. It's a dark yellow house on Berry St. It's in the middle of the block on the other side," she pointed northeast.

"Who was the pastor when Elvis went to church here?"

I asked out of curiosity.

"His name was Reverend Gaines Mancel," she recalled.

"And the church was not even Assembly of God like most people think. It was called the Holiness Church then. And see this street? It was named for my father, Adams."

What Mrs. Faye Harris was saying was completely new to me. Everybody assumed that Elvis had originally gone to an Assembly of God Church, and here I was getting it first-hand from an old-timer that Elvis actually attended the Holiness Church. I understood how history at times could be distorted and that someone needed to bring out the truth to clarify the picture.

"Do you go to that church?" I inquired. I saw people starting to gather at the church. Cars were pulling up into the sandy lot beside the church. A few cars parked on the street. The cars directly in front of the church belonged to the few who attended Sunday School.

"No, I don't," she confessed. "I go to a Baptist church sometimes. My doctor doesn't want me to walk too far, so I don't get to go too often. He told me to stay out of the sun."

"How is it in there?" I asked, looking in the direction of the church. I was debating within myself whether I should go.

"When they moved the Holiness Church way back when Elvis was still a boy," she answered, "things started going bad. None of us hardly went to church there anymore, not even the Presleys. Gladys was a little, well, she told me she didn't put any confidence in that church."

You mean she didn't have faith in what they preached?" I questioned.

"No, not exactly," she said musingly. "There were certain things happening in the church, certain scandals, that took her away from their faith."

"What do you mean?" I asked inquisitively. "What kind of things?"

"The church changed, just like people change," she expounded. "There was a certain spirit there before. She used to walk into the church and she felt a certain spirit there. But not any longer. I felt the same way. That's why I don't go there anymore, because the same spirit is not there and I can't explain exactly what it is, but I just feel something's missing. Several years ago the church here burned down, and so they built a new one, but it's still the same old spirit."

"Did they speak in tongues in the Holiness Church?" I

asked. I knew that most branches of the Pentecostal denomination, of which the Holiness Church and the Assembly of God Church were offshoots, practiced glossalalia.

She nodded her head. "But, you know, the Bible says you tell a man by his fruits, not by what he says in church," she admonished. I understood what she meant. The fruits signified the actions or the productiveness of a person. In short, action speaks louder than words.

"I believe," Faye continued, "that the Holy Spirit is something that God outpours on every one that believes. It's not just necessarily speaking in tongues as Pentecostals think."

"You're absolutely right," I agreed with her.

"You know, I've been talking with quite a few tourists," Faye said with a renewed smile on her face. "It seems there's a lot of people interested in Elvis just like you."

"He's a beautiful soul," I said. "That's why."

"I had a minister and his wife stayed overnight at my house, even," Faye continued. "I've been also answering letters and keeping correspondence with some folk."

"Do you live by yourself?" I asked. I was trying to be friendly.

"I had two boys about 4 years younger than Elvis," she reminisced. "But they're already grown. I've lost a lot of my family, lately, so I'm kind of alone." She had a stoic

expression of self-sufficiency on her face. She was like a strong tree that had braved many a storm.

"How is life out here in Tupelo?" I asked.

"There's been a few riots occurring in our town and in neighboring towns," she answered. "We've been getting some colored people from Verona that have been causing some trouble here."

"The Presleys lived in another house in this neighborhood, didn't they?" I inquired.

"Yes," Faye answered. "They lived on Kelly Street on the south side down there." She pointed down the street to a house barely visible from the porch.

I noticed it was past 11 o'clock on my watch. I asked Mrs. Faye Harris if I could take a picture of her sitting on her porch for memory of a unique moment in my pilgrimage. She allowed me to take a picture of her, and I thanked her several times for the wonderful chat we had. I finally took my boy's hand and led him across the street where my wife was waiting patiently to go inside the church.

I wondered to myself if I should go inside, especially after what I had learned from Mrs. Faye Adams Harris. I decided to take my chances. It would be interesting to observe how much we had all changed along with Elvis in our thinking about the abstract concepts of Christianity. Not too many people realized that Elvis was an innovator not only in music

and American culture, but also in religion and in deep spiritual truths. His spiritual and inspirational songs reflected that change. In reality, he helped transform the whole face of America.

As I climbed up the stairs I realized I could compare the old theology with the new self-awareness that Elvis and I had experienced. I would meditate on Elvis' thought-process and discover the hidden wisdom of the Bible as he had done. The Rosetta Stone of the sacred language would be applied to the allegorical portrayal of universal processes. The mystery of the universe would once again be uncovered for the enlightened race of supermen. With such a bold undertaking in mind I entered the First Assembly of God Church.

The congregation of about fifty people, who were sitting in old wooden pews, was already singing "When the Roll is Called Up Yonder" when we walked in. That song about the future hope of Christians was followed by another song about the other side: "When We All Get to Heaven." I remembered where Sonny West had said in his book that Elvis once talked about a passage in the Bible which mentioned that a rich man cannot get into heaven, and that Elvis revised the old version with a new one by saying, "Well, the Bible didn't mean it that way, because I'm rich and I'm going to heaven."

After the traditional testimonies, prayer, and offering, the congregation sang two more songs about the other side, "Oh, I Want to See Him" and "Just Over in the Glory Land."

After the announcements, the pastor, Dean Tilley, began his sermon by opening his Bible: "The scripture I'd like to refer to is Genesis the 3rd chapter. Make that Genesis the 6th chapter. Genesis the 6th chapter. We're gonna talk about Noah today. We've heard about Noah so many times. There are things that we're gonna look at and think about because these days remind us a lot of Noah and his days. Genesis 6th chapter, we begin reading with verse 5."

After the tall, thick-set preacher read through the 13th verse, he lifted his eyes upward for a second, then he bowed his head and prayed: "Heavenly Father, bless the reading of Thy Word and anoint thy servant so that he can bring your message to the people, to say the things that I must say, and I give you all the praise, in Jesus' name, Amen."

Then the vociferous preacher began his message: "We know about Noah and the ark and how it was built and everything (According to esoteric wisdom, the story of Noah and his ark was an allegory of the seeds of living things being preserved from one period of activity to its successor. The preservation of seeds was annually illustrated by the laws of nature. This law was applicable in turn to the life-force and life-seed inherent in all forms and vehicles of the visible and invisible world.), but let's go back for just a moment to talk about the beginning of man and what God had done for man. (According to ancient wisdom, the beginning of man

was known as a progression or involution from the realms of spirit or pure energy into the world of densest matter. This cycle of forthgoing started with a sevenfold pilgrimage from the divine source and essence down through increasingly denser substances. The clothing of man began with the four material vehicles that he needed to cover himself with in order to experience the physical world: the mental body, the emotional body, the vital body, and the physical body.) If we go back there we see that 'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.' (The creation was not a one time event or an instantaneous happening out of nothingness, but an emanation from the absolute source which evolved through eons of time and space. Thus, the cosmos and everything in it evolves like an intricate spider's web.) He put these things here for a purpose and for a reason. He made all the animals in the fields and all the birds in the air and all the fish in the sea. All these things God put them here." (Cosmic law decrees that the evolutionary or ascending arc pass through mineral, plant, animal, human and superhuman kingdoms before the return to the source is completed.)

"He made man, then he took a rib from man and made a woman. (The two polarities of positive and negative were formed or differentiated. The masculine and feminine creative potencies are symbolized by the vertical arm of spirit or breath descending and penetrating the horizontal arm of matter or

space. The vertical spinal column and the horizontal ribs represent the impulses of creation in man. With arms outstretched in love and sacrifice, man's whole body makes a perfect cross. In this sense the rose upon the cross symbolizes the newly-formed universe. I couldn't help but think of the ivory cross at the head of Elvis' tombstone with three roses and a picture of Elvis in the center. The divine symbolism that Elvis wanted to share with the world was misunderstood by even his closest friends because their spiritual eye was not opened. Elvis on numerous occasions stretched his hands out in a conscious effort to bring the message of the divine spirit in man to the world.) All of these things we know that God made. And God placed man in the Garden of Eden and prepared a beautiful place." (It would be more appropriate to say that the garden was placed within man for cultivation and tending. The tree of life within the garden is the human body represented by the spinal cord, with the afferent and efferent nerves as branches.)

"It tells us that God would come down in the cool of the day and he would walk with him and he would talk with him, and commune with him. (The divine consciousness was always present within God's manifested creation. Consciousness of immortality was also present in man.) But we know that man sinned. God had placed the forbidden fruit there and he had told them that they could have everything there, but one

thing they were to leave alone. You know the rest of the story of Eve and the serpent; she gave the apple to Adam and all of these things. And because of their sin they were thrown out of the Garden of Eden." (The most misunderstood symbol of the Bible and the most subtle force in the human body is the positive and negative serpentine creative force. The serpent represents the coiled-up spinal energy that either flows upward to heavenly joys or downward to the inescapable fires of the passions of the body. Thus, the experience of biting into life's polarities of good and evil is usually seen as a falling from divine self-sufficiency into a physical dependency.)

"They were placed out upon the earth, to farm and raise the things that they need. They had to work because of their sin. And any type of sin is gonna bring heartache, is gonna bring sorrow. And this is what happened to Adam and Eve. (The evolutionary field had been entered and the drama of recurrent life and death had to be played out. The dual nature of positive-negative or reason-feeling was now under physical law because of misuse. The task was to restore the dual nature to a unified harmony or paradise on earth.) As the sin began to grow and grow and grow, mankind was getting more sinful even than God could begin to stand. But God cannot stand sin at all. But the evil and the sin was growing to such a place that even man's thoughts, everything that he thought upon, was

evil." (Man's divine consciousness was sacrificed at the expense of physical impulses, and the human mind had succumbed to the serpentine energy of animal propensities. It's known as the "beast" within man.)

"And everywhere you looked there was violence. Everywhere you looked there was evil. And you know that's a picture of the world today. You take the situation in our community here in Tupelo and the surrounding towns. These towns are filled with violence. You know what I'm talking about. These things can break loose and there can be all kinds of things, simply because of sin. Because of the evil that is all around us. And it's time that we get a hold of God.

"As it says, mankind was doing what was pleasing in their sight. The Bible says, there was corruption, which means moral decay. This is the type of world we're living in today, which is the same type of world that God destroyed in Noah's day. And if God destroyed them, you better look out, because it'll be the day of judgment. Let's notice, he says here, one verse that we read, he said, 'I will destroy them.' There will come a day when God will laugh in your face. We don't like to think about God like that. That's not the picture that we have of God. But my Bible says there'll come a day when he'll laugh at you. He will mock at you. Because you see, he gave us the opportunity. We have the opportunity many, many, many times. And if we don't do it,

then God is not responsible. We cannot blame God if we go to hell. We can only blame ourselves. It'll be our fault. He said, 'I will destroy them!' And if he destroyed them in that day, the world's thinking that it'll get away with it now. Mankind has not seen anything yet. There will come a time when millions and millions of people are gonna be killed because of the earthquake, the pestilence, and all the things that God is gonna bring upon them." (The literal interpretation of such a passage has made unbelievers of many former believers in God's love. Actually, the earth goes through recurrent cycles of approximately 24,000 years, and each cycle is ended with a renewal--nature's way of cleansing itself since man is usually prone to make a mess of things. The scriptural passage thus directs one to an understanding of the cosmic law of cyclic progression rather than a simple and blind faith in divine retribution. By removing the concealing veil of allegory, parable and symbol, man's faith in eternal truths can be restored, as was Elvis' when he started re-reading the Bible with the keys to the kingdom of heaven within man.)

"But let's notice here, which I think is something wonderful. God has always had faith in people. He's always had someone that would stand true. He's always had someone who could make it in spite of all the odds. It says here in verse 8, I believe, it says, 'But Noah found grace in the sight of

God.' This was one time that there was only one man that found favor with God. Now I don't know what the population of the earth was at that time but all of the rest of mankind, God said, I want nothing to do with. Only one man, and for some hundred or hundred and twenty years Noah stood out there and he built that ark when people laughed at him. They made fun of him. Someone walking down the street would say, 'Hey, Noah, what you doing today? Still building that ark? You know it's not gonna rain. There's never been a flood like that. You know it's not gonna do that.' And they would laugh. He was the laughing-stock of the town. They mocked, they ridiculed him, they persecuted him every way imagine they could. But Noah kept on building. He didn't let them discourage him.

"And let's not let the world discourage us today. We've been proclaiming that Jesus Christ is coming soon. I believe, I'm expecting it, I'm hoping for it this morning. And despite of the world laughs at us and says, 'You've told us that for years. He hasn't come.' That's what they told Noah. 'Oh, we've heard that Noah. You've told us that time and time again. We don't see no rain. We don't see no flood.' Noah said, 'People, it's coming. There's gonna be a flood. God's gonna destroy this earth.' They laughed at him. And that's what people are doing today.

"Like I said a number of times, we like to think about

heaven, we like to preach about God's goodness, but we've got to realize that God is a just God and sin demands punishment. And sin will be punished in one of two ways: either we'll get it under the blood and Jesus will cleanse it or we'll die in our sins and we'll be punished for eternity. Now Jesus paid the price. He took the punishment of sin upon himself. That's our only way to escape this morning, and that's through Jesus Christ. If we neglect that, we are asking for one thing, and that's hell. You can be assured of this: as there is a God in heaven, there is a hell. And people are gonna go there. And the sad thing about it, my Bible says, that hell was prepared for the devil and his angels. Hell was not made for mankind. It says in one place that hell hath enlarged herself beyond measure. You know why? Because man has chosen to go there. Man decides to go to hell. You might say I haven't decided to go to hell. It's either heaven or hell. It's either Jesus or the devil. You have to make a choice, you have to make a decision." (The literal interpretation again demands that man accept a deity that condemns his creation to eternal damnations for sins or imperfections that physical flesh is heir to. To go one step further, the literal interpretation insures forgiveness through vicarious atonement and the elimination of causal law for even the greatest, most heinous crimes against humanity and God. The esoteric teaching presents a view that all men are divinely created, and that the life substance flows through and

sustains the entire universe. The sacrifice of spirit on the cross of matter is the natural process of involution or forth-going after which the evolution or pilgrimage through the physical and dualistic experience of life and its multiplicity of realized dreams finally ends in total absorption with the absolute unity. The journey begins and ends with the sole reality of creation--Light. Even Einstein knew this. The Great Thought recedes into itself and awaits its own renewal. Then after eons of time the cosmic motion picture stirs upon the depths of space and the interplay between light and shadow begins all over again. This is eternal life.)

The preacher finished his message. The altar call was given. No one answered the call. The music played quietly. Suddenly a voice on my right spoke rapidly and plaintively in an unknown language: "He che ka la...ooh sha la...ee ma la ka ya..." There was no response. There was silence as everyone awaited the next phase. The voice reiterated its plea: "Ee ka la ba sha la ba...ee cha ka la si ka la..ooh ka la..." The supplicating tone diminished and stopped. A response came through: "Behold I stand by you. If you will open your heart then I will come in. I will be with you. Come unto me and I will give you rest. I will give you rest. I am Lord of Lords and King of Kings. I want you to be ready to meet me. Come to me and I will give you rest." The interpretation revealed the mystery of the unknown language.

The piano played the final song of the service, "Lord, I'm Coming Home." Dean Tilley gave the benediction. The people filed past the square-faced pastor, who firmly squeezed everyone's hand and gave a wide grin. He thanked us for coming.

Outside the church several teen-agers had already lit up the cigarettes they had been waiting to light up all through the service. The hot summer sun beat down on our heads, and we ran to our van to cool off. But inside it was even hotter. There was no escape from the simmering heat.

We drove to the birthplace and discovered that on Sundays it didn't open till 2 P.M. So we drove down Kelly St. and located the house on 904 Kelly St. that Mrs. Harris had pointed out to me. The white paint was peeling on the house where Elvis lived as a boy. We drove by Faye's light blue house, but she wasn't sitting on the porch anymore. We drove up Berry St. and located the original church which the Presleys attended. It was standing on the north side of the street. The address was 909 Berry St. The warm golden color of what looked like an ordinary house sent my imaginative mind flying on a beam of light to the time when Elvis walked up the steps into his first church. I imagined little Elvis growing up and running around the simple unadorned church with his little friends and cousins. It was a time of innocence.

Since we had all the time in the world we decided to take

a ride up to Priceville Cemetery, the burial site of Elvis' twin-brother, Jesse Garon Presley. I had jotted down the directions from Mrs. Harris: "Go east on Main St. and then north on Feemster Lake Rd." From the birthplace we drove 2/10 mile on Elvis Presley Rd. to Main St. As we waited for the red light to turn green, our eyes were diverted to a souvenir shop across the street called "Tupelo Son." When the light turned green, we turned left (east) and drove 9/10 mile on Main St. E. to Feemster Lake Rd. On our left hand side we passed the Elvis Presley Heights Restaurant on 1213 Main St. and Elvis Presley Heights Super Market right next to the restaurant. At the first stoplight, which was Feemster Lake Rd., we turned left (north) and drove 7/10 mile on Feemster Lake Rd. to Priceville Cemetery. The unmarked cemetery was located across the street from the Priceville Baptist Church. We drove inside on the bumpy dirt road and looked across the fields of graves. Somewhere in a tiny spot on the rolling hills was the unmarked grave of Jesse Garon Presley.

As we turned around and headed out of the cemetery I recalled a story about little Jesse. The story had been told that when Elvis' twin brother died at birth, a tiny casket with the body was set beneath the window on the trunk that belonged to Gladys for mourners to pay tribute to.

My little boy had been listening attentively to my

story about baby Jesse. After I finished my account, he finally began asking questions.

"Why he died?" he asked.

"He couldn't breathe," I answered.

"Why he couldn't breathe?" he asked.

"They didn't have any machines to help him breathe."

"Why they didn't have machines?"

"They were so poor that they didn't have any money to go to the hospital."

"Why they didn't have money?"

"It was hard to get a good job at the time."

"Why he died? He has to be big like me."

"He should be," I answered.

"He has to be bigger. I'm bigger like this." He demonstrated with his uplifted hand how big he was.

"But he didn't grow to be bigger, so he died and was put in that cemetery where we were."

"Why?"

"They had to bury him somewhere, so they put him in the ground."

"Why?"

"Well, where else would they put him?"

He thought for a moment, then said: "In a park."

"In a park?" I laughed amusingly. "That's a good idea."

"With swings," he added.

After the cemetery, we visited Lawhon School on 140 Lake Rd., where Elvis went to school as a kid. The brick building was located south of Main St. and west of Elvis Presley Rd. The other school that Elvis went to was Milam Jr. High School, located on 720 W. Jefferson. He went to school there before the family moved to Memphis.

After lunch we finally saw that it was time to visit Elvis Presley's birthplace. We climbed up five remodeled steps with wooden hand rails. A swinging chair adorned the gray wooden porch. The exterior of the house had been covered with a new coat of white paint. The house used to bear the address of 310 Old Saltillo Rd., but it was now designated under one title: Elvis Presley Park, 306 Elvis Presley Rd. According to the Tupelo Daily Journal, the house itself had not been changed "since Elvis' father, grandfather and uncle built it in the 1930's." The house was presently supported by the East Heights Garden Club.

We paid our 50¢ admission and entered the historic shrine where Elvis was born back in 1935. The front entrance of the house which stood on the east side of the road was the recommended entryway. The bedroom was the first room that we entered. The wallpaper of the bedroom had pretty pink and red flowers with green stems. From left to right we saw the following items: an old radio on a wooden stand; a cast iron bed; a lamp behind the bed; a handcarved wooden rocking chair;

a dresser and mirror; a fireplace with a mantel, above which hung the famous picture of three-year-old Elvis with his parents; and a tiny picture of a guardian angel protecting and watching over a little child. The next room that we entered through a doorway was a combined kitchen-dining room. Our eyes scanned the room from left to right. We saw a brick fireplace wall to which was attached a cast-iron Franklin stove; there was an old wooden chair beside the stove; an antique cupboard stood in the corner; in the center of the square room stood a small table complete with chinaware and cups on top of a vinyl table cloth which matched the diamond-shaped olive-colored wallpaper; an old porcelain stove completed the furnishings. One light fixture with a long string hanging from the center of the hardwood ceiling provided the light.

After exiting through the eastern door, we strolled up the small incline to the Elvis Presley Youth Center. Inside the center was a souvenir shop and a large hall where some meetings were held from time to time. Located in the lobby were certain items of interest to devotees of Elvis Presley. There was a miniature model of Graceland complete with den, main mansion, music room, trophy room, swimming pool, meditation garden, landscape and driveway. Surrounding the model was a white fence along the sides and back, and the wall of love with musical gates in front. Above the model were the

proposed plans of Elvis Presley Chapel by Johnson and McCarty, P.A. Architects and Planners, Tupelo. The proposed chapel was to be built on the present site of the baseball field, which was to be moved north of the birthplace across Reese St. The first thought that struck my mind like a bolt of lightning out of the blue was: the chapel should publish a special Elvis Presley Song Book of gospel, spiritual, and inspirational songs that Elvis recorded during his lifetime. Another item of interest in the lobby was a plaque with the inscription: "Graceland Mansion--Home of Elvis Aron Presley--Made and donated by Vincent P. Ducote, New Orleans, La. 1978." A golden guitar adorned the bottom of the plaque. Below the plaque was a three-and-a-half feet tall pulpit with a brass plate explaining its origin: "Pulpit from First Assembly of God Church of Tupelo. Elvis and his parents attended this church during Elvis' early years. Donated to the Elvis Presley Memorial Foundation in behalf of the congregation by Brother Dean Tilley. Given Jan. 8, 1978." The old wooden pulpit had two cabinet doors which were on a latch. There was room inside the pulpit for storing song books and Bibles.

Inside the souvenir shop we picked up the special edition of the Tupelo Daily Journal dated Aug. 20, 1977. On the front page was a picture of young Elvis in dark clothes standing against a pink background and singing with a guitar hanging around his neck. The picture on the back page showed an old

Elvis in his Indian Chief jumpsuit with a Greek cross hanging around his neck. It apparently was taken at one of his concerts. Below the somber picture with a dark background were the following words in pink print: "The King is Dead." Below those words were the more triumphant words in black print: "Long Live The King." Below those words were the final words in large ~~pink~~ print: "The End."

The special edition viewed the beginnings of Elvis' life in Tupelo, his army life, his friends and women, the fans' reactions and comments, and the closing days of his life in Memphis. An impressive eulogy by a close friend, Mrs. Janelle McComb, contained words that came straight from the heart: "Elvis is gone--yet he lives." Elvis would truly continue to live in the adoration of his millions of fans. Several poems by Helen Steiner Rice were chosen by the sponsors of the special edition; one poem viewed death as a gateway to the Promised Land, and another poem softened the mourner's grief by reassuring everyone that the loved one had been placed "in the Father's Care." The impact of Elvis on our minds and hearts was well worded in the following eulogy: "His lasting eternal flame will burn within our hearts forever." In order to insure the memory of his name, a resolution was passed by Mayor Clyde E. Whitaker declaring "January 8th of every year forthcoming as Elvis Presley Day in the City of Tupelo."

After buying a red pen with a picture of the birthplace

of Elvis Presley for my little boy, we left the Tourist Information Center. We climbed the hill behind the center; we passed the outdoor swimming pool on our left and the baseball field with night lights on our right. We kept climbing eastward past the tennis courts until we finally reached the top of the hill where the red, white and blue bars of the swings were set up. Behind the sanded area for children was a wooded area with a creek and pond where Elvis used to play as a boy. From the top of the hill we could look over the city of Tupelo and over the neighborhood that Elvis grew up in.

As we started to come off the hill, we were sorry to leave the good memories we had shared at the park and birthplace. I felt an emptiness within as I realized that we wouldn't pass this way again for many years. Our pilgrimage to the places where Elvis walked was essentially over. We had seen the beginning and the end. We had seen Tupelo and we had seen Memphis.

As we headed for our van, which was parked on Reese St. beside the birthplace, I noticed a sign behind the community building with a warning in capital letters:

50⁰⁰ FINE
FOR
DRIVING
ON PARK

We had heard that vandalism was a continuous threat to the well-being of the park. As we drove away from the birthplace

we silently prayed that Elvis' love and kindness would always be cherished at his birthplace. We said good-bye to the spirit of Elvis' childhood as we drove down Elvis Presley Rd. past St. Mark's United Methodist Church.

The following morning we were awakened by the birds at Tombigbee State Park. It was time to move on. We made a quick stop at the Lee County Library on 219 N Madison St. I wanted to check out one last detail. I wanted to know the exact date of the catastrophic tornado of 1936, which tore through Tupelo without touching the Presley home. The librarian allowed me to glance through 5 file folders of clippings. The thirty-two seconds tornado occurred on Sunday, April 5, 1936. According to the Wednesday Journal, 225 people were left dead by the spiraling tornado (Jerry Hopkins reported in his biography on Elvis that the tornado killed 216--9 less than the Wednesday account--which means that Jerry was probably reading an earlier account).

We made one last stop before leaving Tupelo. It was at the Tupelo National Battlefield Site on the south side of W. Main St. The cross street was Monument Dr. The central monument in the national park paid the following tribute:

IN MEMORY
OF THE MEN OF THE
FEDERAL AND
THE CONFEDERATE
ARMIES
WHO TOOK PART IN
THE BATTLE OF TUPELO

OF HARRISBURG
JULY 14-15, 1864
WHICH RESULTED IN
A VICTORY FOR THE
FEDERAL FORCES UNDER
MAJOR GENERAL
ANDREW J. SMITH

Two cannons pointed to the north. Several military maps showed the strategy to the Battle of Tupelo and the Western Campaign of 1864. A smaller monument on the western side of the battlefield site had the following inscription:

TO OUR
CONFEDERATE DEAD
THAT GAVE THEIR
LIVES IN BATTLE
HERE ON
JULY 14, 1864
FOR THEIR RIGHTS

[Link to Tupelo photos in the Elvis Album \(#94-117\):](#)

<http://wigowsky.com/images/Elvis/ElvisAlbum.pdf>