

## THE GENESIS OF THE KING

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## AUTHOR'S BIOGRAPHY



[Lea Frydman](#) began her apprenticeship as a journalist at the tender age of 11 when she wrote her first essay on Elvis Presley. Since then she authored two tribute publications on the King, *Elvis: The Complete Story* (1992) and *Elvis: The Legend Lives* (1997).

After attaining a B.A. in Psychology and Media Studies, Lea focused her talent on writing biographies, film reviews and conducting interviews with Hollywood's elite for countless publications worldwide.

Member of several international writers' guilds, and freelance reporter for the Herald-Sun, Woman's Day, Australia, HELLO! Magazine, England while syndicating her articles worldwide.

Currently, Lea is content manager of: [ElvisPresleyNews.com](#) that has 9 thousand subscribers from 52 nations and author of the ELVIS eBooks titles listed below:

### [WANTED ELVIS! DEAD OR ALIVE](#)

Did Elvis meet his demise in the bathroom at Graceland? Discover the truth behind the death hoax

### [ELVIS: THE COMPLETE STORY](#)

All the facts on the most controversial figure to straddle a microphone since its invention

### [ELVIS PRESLEY CIRCA 1950](#)

Interviews with family, friends, schoolmate & Col Parker explore the birth of a rock idol

### [ELVIS! BELOW THE WAIST](#)

Kiss 'n' tell expose from four women who loved, were wooed & bedded by the King of rock n roll

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Exciting virtual tour includes some 42 never before seen photos from inside the mansion

### [THE GENESIS OF THE KING](#)

As told by recently uncovered, revealing interviews from Gladys & Vernon Presley

## HAPPY DAYS THROUGH THE 50's

Every teenager boy dreams of doing something terrific! Making that sudden and smashing success which will assure his place in the adult world. If he is so rash as to voice that dream he swiftly hears the adult counsel, "Don't kid yourself."



Yet, there was an 18-year-old lad, who lived in poverty, who dared to dream his dream and then one day in the summer of 1953 his dream came true.

At 21 Elvis Aron Presley has become a national legend. Parents gossip about him. Critics argue about him. Rock n roll fans love him. His name showed four hit records simultaneously, all in first place on Top, Tunes and Talent.

His is the fastest selling album RCA-Victor has ever issued. Sales of his "Heartbreak Hotel" are nearing the 2 million-dollar mark and his

Hollywood screen test promises he will further enhance his fame when he becomes a motion picture star.

Most Broadway promoters agree, "This guy tops Sinatra! When bobbysoxers swooned in Times Square, everyone knows that response was hyped for Sinatra had one of the best press agent in the business, Presley hasn't even got a press agent. He's set the first all by himself. The guy's a natural!"

He also is a good son, a good neighbour, and a good citizen of Memphis, his beloved hometown.

Tupelo, Mississippi where Elvis Presley was born is a small city in the heart of the cotton country a Deep South down. It is difficult for a Northerner to understand the depth of the people's troubles after the Civil War. A few of the favored and fashionable surmounted their difficulties and flourished. However others lived in genteel poverty and for most Southern folk all the signs of good living were lost. By the time the Depression of the 30's dumped an extra load on their backs many had found that their only defence was a fierce independence and strong family ties would allow them their only resource and joy.

It was in that setting that Vernon Elvis Presley and Gladys Love Smith fell in love.

"We should have been in school but we eloped," Gladys recalls. "We didn't elope very far. We just went down the road five miles to Vernon and got married," Vernon concludes.

They reiterated their history jointly with terse statements, which complimented each other. But while their words were plain and stripped of romantic overtones the look which they exchanged was eloquent evidence that the bond between them today is stronger than it was when they were runaway school kids.

They make an attractive couple: Vernon is a handsome, wide-shouldered athletic six-footer of 40 whose sandy hair (now turned grey) curls much in the same manner of his famous son. However, it is obvious that Elvis has inherited his mother's coloring. Her once blonde hair (now dyed black for effect) and her velvety blue eyes can both snap and smoulder. Both parents have an unpretentious deep natural dignity. They speak frankly about their lack of formal education but their lively native intelligence makes them intriguing conversationalists.

They have eyes that see. They have ears that listen. And a powerful sixth sense about their the future of their close knit family.

Like all proud parents they love to talk about their son who was born a twin January 8, 1935.

"We had twins," Gladys whispers. "and we matched their names. Jesse Garon and Elvis Aron. Jesse died when he was born. Maybe that's why Elvis has always been so dear to us."

Elvis, they go on to explain, was a family name, handed down from one generation to the next, its origins lost in time. When told that both the Elvis and the Presley family's genealogy remain important in England today they remarked they didn't know that there was a connection.

"I never heard tell of any of my kinfolk coming over from anywhere," said Vernon. "I guess it must have been a long way back. We just seem always to have been here. And it's the same with Gladys' family, the Smiths."

The bond between mother, father and son was always strong. Vernon recalls, "When we went swimming, Elvis would have fits if he saw me dive. He was as afraid something would happen to me."

The crisis of being separated from his father was noted when Elvis was about five years old. "Round where we lived in East Tupelo seems there was a fire almost every night and we'd all go running to see what we could do to help the people," Vernon tells.

Although flames were visible and crackling Vernon was still dashing in and out the house carrying furniture. Gladys takes up the story. "Elvis was sure his daddy was going to get hurt that he screamed and cried. I had to hold him to keep him from running in after Vernon. So I said, right sharp, 'Elvis, you just stop that. He 's all right. Your daddy knows what he's doing.' He quieted right down."

Having once accepted a belief in his father's judgment Elvis has held to it. There is no indication that he went through ever the usual normal period of adolescent rebellion against parental authority. For what may have been substituted as rebellion was channeled against the family's economic situation which often made Elvis' life difficult in teenagehood.

However the love of his parents was not used as an excuse to keep small Elvis from learning right from wrong. "I've spanked him many a time. A child doesn't mind it when his mother corrects him. But his daddy never whipped him," her voice trailed off and in an instant she correct herself. "I'll take that back. "There was a time Elvis stole the Coke bottle. That was one time Elvis caught it."

He hadn't yet started school she explains and their Tupelo neighbours the Harrises adored the blond-headed tyke. "I saw him start back from their house carrying a handful of cookies," his mother explains, "and then he picked up this empty Coke bottle from their porch."

In her opinion a Coke bottle meant cash and candy to Elvis for he had seen other children collect them and take them to the store for refund. It was time to teach a lesson "I asked him if Mrs Harris had given him that bottle." When he admitted she had not his mother issued orders. "You take it right back to her and tell her you stole it." Dejected he trudged off. A moment later the neighbour called across lots to say Elvis had done no wrong. What's more, she had several more he might have. The usually gentle Gladys remained adamant. "He has to learn," she said. "Send him home." At home Vernon waited with a switch.

"His daddy didn't hit him but two three licks," says Gladys, "But none of us ever forgot it."

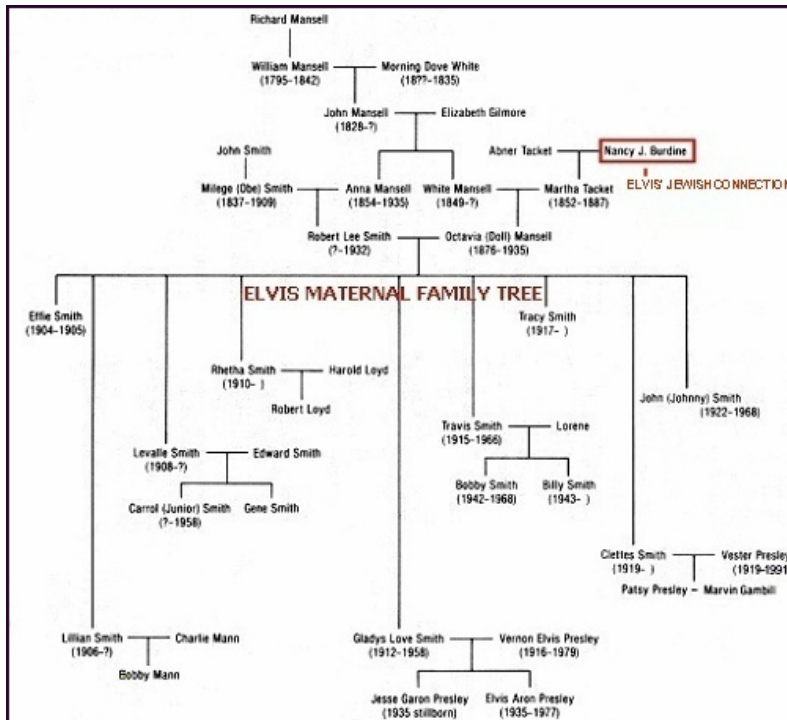


Vernon recalled years later a man-to-man tale they had had on an occasion when a boy they knew had got into trouble “I told Elvis,” says Vernon, “that I’d work for him and buy him everything I could afford. If he had problems he could come to me and I’d try to understand.” I also said, “son if you see anything wrong you promise me you’ll have no part of it. Just don’t ever let anything happens so that I’d have to talk to you between bars. That’s the only thing that would break my heart.”

One of Presley joys from the time Elvis was a toddler was singing together in church. In the First Assembly of God there were no stained-glass masterpieces, no great works of art, and no silver nor gold altar furnishings in the plain little frame building where the Presleys worshipped in Tupelo. No one missed them for within its walls Elvis, his parents and their neighbours found the beauty of holiness.

To them the injunction, “O come let us sing unto the Lord. Let us heartily rejoice in the strength of our salvation,” was no empty phrase, it was a way of life.

“When Elvis was just a little fellow, not more than two years old, he would slide down off my lap run into the aisle and scramble up to the platform. There he would stand looking at the choir and try sing with them. He was too little to know the words, of course, but could carry the tune and he would watch their faces and try to do as they did,” says Gladys proudly.



ELVIS FAMILY TREE

Later the Presleys, Gladys, Vernon and with their small son standing between them became a popular trio sing at camp meetings revivals and church conventions. Elvis' favourite was "I Don't Have to Cross Jordan Alone." Even then," says Gladys "he couldn't stand still when he sang he always had to act out his song."

The impression these fine old hymns made have remained with Elvis. Talk to almost anyone in Memphis today (school friends, teachers, former employers) and inevitably you'll hear the same statement that Elvis is a very religious boy.

Singing was not the only evidence of the Presley's faith. Gladys believed children should play together in harmony "I tried to teach Elvis and his friends not to fight but to be happy, of course once in a while a bully came along and you could see he was going to pester the little folks then Elvis' daddy would have to show him how stand up for himself. And he did."



Like most parents Vernon and Gladys determined that their son wouldn't have to suffer the disadvantages that they had encountered in their lives. When war plants mushroomed around Memphis, Vernon went to the city to work confident his family could soon join him.

Alas that was to come about until much later. Vernon recalls sadly. "Every Sunday I'd tramp all over town looking for so much as a single room. I'd find one and the first thing they would ask, 'you got any children?' And I'd say I had a little boy. Then they'd say 'We don't want any children here and shut the door.'"

Gladys and Elvis were left alone in Tupelo during most of the war years. This togetherness realised a bond between mother and son that was to last till the day Elvis died. Of that time, Vernon said, "I didn't worry none about Elvis I knew Gladys would take good care of his." Gladys answered, "Vernon earned us a good living." But the voices of both reflect the sorrow of their separation.

No gifts held a sufficient thrill for Elvis to make up for not having the day-to-day presence of the father he loved so much. No comforts and no income security could ease the husband and wife's lonely longing.

The end of war work brought a reunion in Tupelo, but job opportunities were limited. Gladys and Vernon determined on a bold change. "We'd been talking about moving to Memphis, but it was sort of hard to work out. So one day we just made up our minds. We sold off our furniture, loaded out clothes and things into this old car we had and we just set out," says Gladys.

Memphis had grown to nearly a half-million population during the war years and was just a hundred miles down the main highway. But it was the big city and the move meant that more than a hundred years of family roots were torn loose. Only one phase of the drastic venture had been carefully planned. "We went on Saturday," says Vernon "We didn't want Elvis to miss even a day of school."

## THE HEADMASTER

That was September 1948. The Presleys found an apartment in Lauderdale Court, a housing project at 185 Winchester. Immediately, Vernon went to the local school Humes High School to arrange with Principal TC Brindley for Elvis' entrance. Brindley who had come into the Memphis school system as a football coach was also new at Humes that year. A kindly man who has the true educator's gift for putting a student welfare ahead of red tape. Brindley remained Elvis' friend and confidant till the day he died. Brindley remembers, "The only credit the school can claim for Elvis' success is that we did not try to compress him into an academic mould. We let him follow his own bent."

For the 14-year-old Elvis the block-long Humes High School with its 1,650 students was the biggest school he had ever seen – it was terrifying.

Vernon remembers, "I set Elvis down at school and I'd no more than got back to where we stayed that there he was so nervous he was bug-eyed. When I asked what was the matter, he said he didn't know where the office was and classes had started and there were so many kids. He was afraid they'd laugh at him. I thought about it a minute and I knew what he meant. So I said 'son that's all right for today but tomorrow you be there nine o'clock and no fooling'."

## SCHOOL CHUMS



Fellow students that year in the eight grade at Humes High School remember little about their first meeting with Elvis. James Yarborough recalls, "It took a while. I suppose he felt sorta lost and left out of things I don't think anybody intended to do that but I remember how it was the first time I changed from a little school to a big one. I felt that everybody else belonged and I didn't."

George Klein, still a DJ at Memphis KWEM radio who in his final year became editor of the paper, the yearbook and president of the senior class recalls exactly when Elvis drew his attention. "We were singing Christmas Carols and you know it's funny I can't tell you another person who was on that say but I know what Elvis did. He sang "Cold, Cold, Icy Fingers". That was a popular tune in the country and western field at the time. I never forgot it. There was just something about the way he sang that stayed with me."

The Presley's financial status during that period was not conducive to making any of the three Presleys feel secure. Vernon was driving a truck while Gladys worked in a curtain factory. Their jobs like their income was spasmodic. Having sold their furniture in Tupelo they also had the added cost of setting up an entirely new household and catering for a teenage son with a taste for outlandish fashion wear. So, as soon as he could Elvis make up his mind to contribute to the household income. A responsibility that last throughout his lifetime that manifested in huge donations to charities fro the sick and needy

## FIRST BOSS MAN

Elvis' first job, ushering in Loew's State theatre, ended explosively. Gladys recalls, "A time came when Elvis was pretty sure that one of the boss was being a sort of stool pigeon and going to Mr Arthur Groom the manager with stories that the other ushers instead of being on duty were sitting down in seats. When Mr Groom called them all on the carpet, Elvis had a pretty good idea where it all started. So he accused this boy of it. Well the boy said something and Elvis said something and the Elvis got mad he hit him. Knocked him down right out in the lobby. Mr Groom got so excited he fired them all."

Later he was re-hired, but today with a showman's wry humor Arthur Groom tells the sequel to that story. "It took my wife to tell me off ... after all these years." They were standing in the lobby Groom explains when Elvis during one of his recent visits home saw them and risked a parking ticket to stop in to say hello. Proudly Art Groom had said, "This boy used to work for me." "And he fired me!" retorted Elvis.

Mrs Groom had looked aghast at her husband and longingly at Elvis' yellow Cadillac convertible standing out at the curb. With a wife's tart candor she stated. "Well all I can say, Arthur Groom is that you'll work a long while before we own a car as tremendous as that one Elvis has out there."

Ushering was the first of Elvis' jobs. Many others followed. They were the kinds of jobs which some boys take to earn date money. Elvis wages however went right into the family fund. Again the Presleys were having a hard time. Gladys wasn't working, Vernon's salary just didn't quite stretch far enough.

"It hurts me to think of his having to work at jobs even now. Besides going to school Elvis worked a full shift from three in the afternoon until eleven-thirty at night at marl Metal Products Company. That's too much for any young boy. It got so hard on him he was so beat out all the time we made him quit and I went to work at St Joseph's hospital," explains Gladys.

His mother's employment at the hospital was to have an effect on Elvis athletic ambitions. Like most boys he wanted to play football. Having his afternoons free from work gave him a chance to go out for practice but it caused worry at home.

Says, Gladys, "They play football for keeps in this town and every time some boy would be brought into the emergency ward with a broken arm or something I'd get just sick for I'd think what if it were Elvis."

Their own crisis came on the day of a fatal football injury. A boy died before he reached the hospital. That night Vernon and Elvis had a talk, "I hate to ask this of you son," said Vernon, "but would you consider not trying to play football? This is getting kinda bad for your mother."

For Elvis it was a conflict between a boys normal ambition to be a school hero versus his personal desire to be a good son. Love of family won out, "I don't want to worry mama, so I dropped football," said Elvis.

## THE NEIGHBOURS



To surmount the problems imposed by the new city the family drew closer together. Sprightly, spirited little Mrs Sophie Foote who was their neighbour at Lauderdale Court gives this picture of the Presleys.

"Now I ain't a one to go intruding on my neighbours but they were my own kin. They're the most wonderful people but it is those that say something bad about Elvis I'd scratch their eyes out."

"Why I tell you of an evening the three of them would sit there on the couch Gladys on one side of Elvis and Vernon on the other and they'd sing church songs. You never heard no one sing like those three. Honey, it would absolutely make your hair rise up."

"Their religion wasn't just singing either. Now there was the time I had to go get my eyes tested and do you suppose Elvis would let me go alone. No siree, he said we got this old jalopy sitting out in front and if you'll ride in it I'll take you."

Mrs Foote paused for a breath before relating a final triumph. "They ain't' stopped looking out for me now that they're prosperous either. Gladys knows that sometimes I just get tired living cooped up here. So she called up one day to ask me to dinner at their house and to some doings. And she said, 'I'll tell you what we'll do, we'll bring you out in the pink Cadillac and bring you back in the yellow one.' Now what do you think of that? First time I ever got to ride in a Cadillac let alone two in one night. But that Elvis he beats them all."

## SAM PHILLIPS

Two oft-repeated stories account for Elvis Presley's first record. One states it was to be his mother's birthday present. Another is the protective statement of a lad who does not choose to reveal his own deepest dreams to the public gaze. "I just wanted to know what I sounded like. Singing for a living was the farthest thing from my mind. I just thought that was a store you could make a record in."

While both stories contribute to the Presley legend of overnight success, a third version holds the reality of inconvenience. Fast as his rise to fame had been you find when you dig a bit deeper that both Elvis and other people worked hard to bring it about. It didn't just happen overnight.

Perhaps the story best starts with Marion Keisker, office manager of Sun Record Company and one of the announcers at the all-woman radio station WHER. Marion's desk is directly in front of the door in the converted store building which had been divided into Sun's small office studio and control room. She says simply, "When Elvis first came in, I wondered if he wanted a handout. We get a lot of drifters here along Union Avenue."



His hair was long and shaggy, she explains, "His clothes were well-worn. He was impatient and ill at ease. He said he wanted to sing.

"What sort of thing do you do?" Marion inquired.

"I can sing anything," said Elvis confidently.

She tried to make it more specific.

"Do you sing popular?"

Elvis nodded.

"Do you sing Western?"

Elvis indicated he could do that.

"Do you sing rhythm and blues?"

"Sure," said Elvis.

It all added up to amateur to Marion, so she told Elvis that the price for a disc would be four dollars and sent him into the studio.

The resulting 78rpm record proved Elvis had told the truth about his range. The only trouble was he mixed them all up together. He chose a slow ballad. In the recording Elvis' singing style changes every eight bars. He swings from a high thin tenor to a resounding bass but most of the time the voice sounds merely undecided. The original record is now worn and cracked today but to his parents it is still the most precious possession to be played on special occasions only.

Weird as the recording was, it had one quality that caught Sam Phillips attention. Sam, the slender, dark-haired intense 33-year-old genius who owned Sun was looking for a sound. He says, "I suppose it was all the Gospel singing Elvis had done that gave me a hint of that special thing."

He had first heard the sound, he explains, back on his father's plantation in Alabama where after the day's work was done the tenant farmers sat on their doorsteps and sang. "Best of all, I liked Uncle Silas Payne, a Negro who was over 90 when he died. He'd put me on his knee and he'd sing to me for hours."

Sam Phillips went on to study music. It is significant that he himself played rhythm instruments, the drums and saxophone. When he finished college he became a radio announcer and in Memphis it was his job to put orchestra broadcasts on the network from a leading hotel. "I reached the point where everything I heard seemed to be manufactured in the same sausage grinder. Every orchestra, every number sounded alike. It bored me, and I assumed it also bored the public."

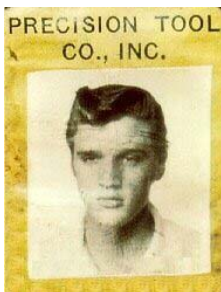
Bored and unfulfilled, Sam Phillips says what he did next failed to make sense at the time, but has since gone down in history as one of the most famous career changes in history. "I was doing all right. I was making one hundred and fifty bucks a week. I had a wife and two children to support but I just quit my job and started this little recording studio."

Sam's particular purpose then was to record Afro-American (called Negro in the 50's) talent. "It seemed to me that they were the only ones who had any freshness left in their music. And there was no place in the South they could go to record. The nearest place where they made so-called 'race' records, which soon was to be called rhythm-n-blues was Chicago. Most of them didn't have the money or the time to make the trip to Chicago."

Infinite patience became his greatest asset for working with amateurs. He says, "It's one thing to watch musicians perform and it's another to get that feeling of excitement into a record. But once you've got it the color of a man's skin doesn't show on a record. White people as well as the Negroes began to buy our recording. They found in them something which was missing in more conventional music."

Although Sam had made little effort to record either white talent or country and western songs up to that point, Sam detected in Elvis Presley's wandering rhythm something that generated excitement. He invited him to return. Says Marion "It must have been a year and a half that Sam worked with him before anything started to happen."

## **DON'T GIVE UP YOUR DAY JOB**



The Presley family fortunes reached a low point during that period. Vernon Presley had injured his back (slipped a disc) and was hospitalized part of the time. Elvis, having graduated from high school, worked first at Precision Tool Company, then at Crown Electric a contracting company owned by James Tipler.

His wife, Gladys Tipler says, "I remember that when she sent Elvis over to see us the woman at the State Employment Office told me not to judge by appearance. If she hadn't, Elvis would never have got further than our door. For with that wild hair and those shaggy sideburns, he looked like the original goon boy. Within a week however his good manners his willingness and his singing in the stock room had own out hearts. Like everyone else we loved the boy. The there was the morning he came in and said shyly that he has given us a plug on the air the night before and the roof fell in."

“We got a big kick out of it, because just a few days before we’d discovered Elvis had carved his name over one of the bins where he worked. When the phone calls came in from people just want to say a word to Elvis as a result of his performance on the broadcast we moved him from the stock room in to the front office to answer the telephone. We thought we might as well since he was getting called out of the stock room every few minutes anyway. While I wasn’t too pleased with his having carved his name in out wooden wall at the time, now it’s one of our proudest mementos of Elvis’ stay with us. Funny how things happen sometimes.”

## THAT’S ALL RIGHT MAMA

Sam Phillips of the Sun Record Company continues, “I’d run across a ballad written by a prisoner in the Tennessee State pen and I wanted a crooner. Elvis toyed around with it I decided he needed a couple of good rhythm men to back home so I called in Scotty Moore and Bill Black and still nothing happened. Then I got the notion of trying some of the old Big Boy Crudup material. Although it seemed incomprehensible to have a white man do those songs, I just got a notion and I called Elvis.”

Steven Sholes at RCA-Victor describes Big Boy Crudup as “a Negro who had a little farm down in the back stretches of Mississippi. He could neither read nor write but he sure could sing up a storm.”

Elvis know the Crudup records well. Sam says, “Elvis lived ten or fifteen blocks away but before I could hang up the phone he came panting in the door. He was so excited he had run all the way. We all worked it over and there was a feel to the session a pleading quality to Elvis’ voice. Crudup’s “That’s All Right Mama” was just right for him. When we cut things happened. I said right then, that I know we had a hit. They turned it into a record. Having covered a black blues singer for on side it seemed only fitting to us Presley’s version of Bill Monroe’s “Blue Moon of Kentucky” for the B-side.

Elvis Presley’s blend of black blues was a strain that some would call rock-a-billy. Its beat so powerful that it would go right to the center of American popular teenage culture.

## TWO PHILLIPS ARE BETTER THAN ONE



What to do with the record after the discs came back from being pressed was another problem. Says Sam, “We were up a gum stump so to speak. The white disc jockeys wouldn’t touch what they regarded as a Negro ‘s music and the Negro DJ’s didn’t want anything to do with a record made by a white man. It wasn’t a western and it wasn’t a pop tune. There wasn’t any ready-made place for the song.”

Sam and Dewey Phillips (no relation) were spiritually connected. If Sam was a man who subscribed to very few Southern conventions then Dewey openly flaunted them.

There he was in Memphis the only DJ who specialised in rhythm and blues. Dewey Phillips, whose self-description is, “I’m just a country boy myself,” had broken into Memphis radio with a little midnight rhythm and blues quarter-hour, which had grown in popularity until it had become an important show on WHBQ. ‘When Sam brought over that record he told me he had the best cotton-pickin’ record you ever heard and he wasn’t wrong. It sure was the big beat.”

Dewey Phillips was raised in Adamsville, Tennessee. As a boy he loved listening to black music although his elders had assured him that it was devil worship. As a child of 10 he had visited Memphis to sing in a Baptist church choir. The supervisor of the choir left strict instructions, not to order room service and the other was not to venture to Beale Street. Dewey immediately took off to Beale Street and discovered the rich landscape of black life and music. After serving in the army he returned to Memphis and after having got fired from every job, landed a fifteen-minute DJ spot with WHBQ.

Soon he was the conduit that hip white Memphis teens tuned into, one of them being Elvis Presley. As politicians keep the street and school and parks segregated at night Dewey Phillips integrated the airwaves.

One of the few persons who didn't hear "That's All Right Mama" that first fateful night when Dewey spun it was Elvis Presley. His mother says "He fixed the radio and told us to leave it on that station and then he went to the movies. I guess he was just too nervous to listen."

It was about 9.30 when Dewey called. "Mrs Presley just get that cotton-pickin son of yours over here to the station. I played that record of his the phones haven't stopped ringing since. I want Elvis on the air!"

Gladys Presley's eyes still moisten when she thinks of the evening. "I ran over and I hugged Vernon and I suppose I cried a little bit. Then we both went looking for Elvis."

Gladys strolled down one aisle of the little neighbourhood theatre and Vernon went down the other. When Elvis sitting in the center section spied them his face whitened and he whispered, "Mother what's happened?"

"I told him plenty was happening and all of it good," relates Gladys Presley proudly.

"Elvis went from high school boy to hit entertainer so fast it was hard for any of us to realise the change had come," concluded Sam Phillips.

#### BEFORE THE COLONEL THERE WAS BOB NEAL



One who helped Elvis make the grade was Bob Neal, who at that time also had a disc jockey show. In August 1954, Bob staged an outdoor program at Overton Park, presenting a number of country artists and Elvis.

"Elvis stopped the show," says Bob, "and in the wings my wife Helen who has seem too many entertainers to get very excited about any of them. Grabbed my arm and said, 'Oh, Bob, this boy is different!'"

For the Neals who have five boys of their own, Elvis assumed virtually the status of an older son. In January 1955 Bob became his manager and when their contract terminated the following year it was because of family pressures. "Keeping five boys in line got to be too much for me, with Bob on the road all the time, something have to give," reiterates Helen Neal.

Although Elvis was making a huge impact with teenagers in the Southern State, when Bob Neal approached a leading television talent program it was a different story.

"We made the big plunge in March 1955, and went up to New York. They listened politely and said that the usual 'you'll hear from us' but nothing happened."

However, the fire has started and crowds have begun going wild wherever Elvis appeared on a show. Rock n roll was a big hit with teenagers and Elvis was their number one hero.

One of the thousands of Elvis devotees at the time was Texan, Carolyn Holden.

"It is especially thrilling to me to see him zooming upward on the golden ladder of success, since I had the rare privilege of hearing Elvis make his television debut on the Louisiana Hayride.

### THE LOUISIANA HAYRIDE

"I still remember the chill that ram up my spine as he introduced his revolutionary style of singing to the hillbilly field of music. Later Elvis took his style into pop music and I remember how since that first Saturday night that I heard him sing I have been a fan of his and will listen to him sing at any possible opportunity."

Holden's sentiments rang true with hundred of thousands of teenagers throughtout the Bible Belt. "I remember a comment made by the emcee of Louisiana Hayride, Horace Logan on the first night. He said, 'Elvis you seem to have what the public has been wanting for quite a while... a truly unique and new style of singing that is all your won and the people love it'."

For Elvis' debut on the Louisiana Hayride television program he sang, "Blue Moon" and "That's All Right Mama" his first hit song.

"After only two guest appearances Elvis was signed to the regular cast and after only a few months he had a full 15-minute spot", recalls Logan.

After only 18 months of regular appearance Elvis appeared on the Stage Show.

### TELEVISION



Columns of abuse have been levelled at Elvis for throwing himself into a song. "I just can't help it, when I sing, I move around," confesses Elvis.

This is the understatement of the year! He jumps he gyrates he stomps and he sings. More and more he has had to leave the melody to another guitarist for "I found I broke too many strings while I was performing."

Elvis had broken guitars, attendance records and hit records everywhere except in Las Vegas. "They weren't my kind of audience," Elvis said. "It's the teenagers that dig me."

Incredible as it may seem Elvis was an untried performer a little over a year ago but today his name in on everyone teenager girl's lips.

"You can't tell, tomorrow I might not be worth two cents..." However, that is not how the television executive saw it.

Elvis made several television appearances on the Milton Berle Show, the Steve Allen Show and the Ed Sullivan Show.

On the afternoon of the 5<sup>th</sup> of June, 21-year-old Elvis Presley stood tensed behind the curtain separating him from 200 teenage viewers. Elvis took a deep breath and one more comb swipe through his hair before stepping on stage. Milton Berle introduced Elvis as the hottest entertainer in the country today.

At the sound of his name 200 girls rose up with a roar. Elvis came through the curtain singing "You Aint' Nothin' But A Hound Dawg."

Simply hypnotised by his performance the teenagers vibrated to every bump and grind. The cameraman waited apprehensively watching the rope barrier, which was set as a precaution to protect Elvis from his over zealous fans.

From that moment on Elvis Presley became a name that would never to be forgotten. But it was Ed Sullivan who as the unofficial Minister of Culture that reinvented Elvis from a Southern hick to a national sensation without even trying.

Sullivan was involved in the delicate business of selecting acts to perform live in millions of American living rooms. By his choice he could make any act a hit. "You wanted to know the day Christ died? It was on the Ed Sullivan Show and Ed gave him three minutes," said Mark Leddy who worked with Sullivan. "That's how powerful he was. Ed was the God of television. But Ed was also very, very conservative. He would not book Marlene Dietrich because she appeared in public wearing slacks."

Much to his utter dismay, Ed Sullivan had to concede defeat by the baby boomers' demands and book Elvis Presley for three shows. Not to be outdone completely Elvis was shot only from the waist up.

Steve Allen booked Elvis for the 1<sup>st</sup> of July. But the problem with Allen is he wanted it both ways. He wanted Elvis but on his terms. So he compromised Elvis' act by putting Elvis into a tux, got him to limit his body movements as he sang "Hound Dog" to a live basset hound.

Dewey Phillips called Elvis in New York and pleaded. "You better come home and get straight boy. What in the hell are you doing in a monkey suit? Where's your guitar?"

Elvis Presley trusted his instinct and his fans. Upon his return to Memphis Elvis cut loose with a pure rock-a-billy performance and told his Southern audience. "I just want to tell y'all not to worry... them folks in New York and Hollywood are not going to change me none."

### HOLLYWOOD CALLING

Now, with the contract with Colonel Tom Parker signed, sealed and delivered and after the controversial Ed Sullivan "shot him from the waist up only" and the Steve Allen "singing to a live Hound Dog dressed in a tuxedo" Hollywood came to call.

After a simple screen test that has Elvis lip-sync to "Blue Suede Shoes", Hal Wallis signed Elvis to a seven-year contract.

But before that Elvis did his first and only a television commercial for Southern-Made Doughnuts. It went something like:

“You can get ‘em pipin’ hot after 4 PM  
You can get ‘em pipin’ hot after 4 PM  
You can get ‘em pipin’ hot  
Southern-Made Doughnuts hit the spot  
You can get ‘em pipin’ hot after 4 PM”

It was said that more people paid closer attention to that commercial than any other commercial spot on the entire Louisiana Hayride show.

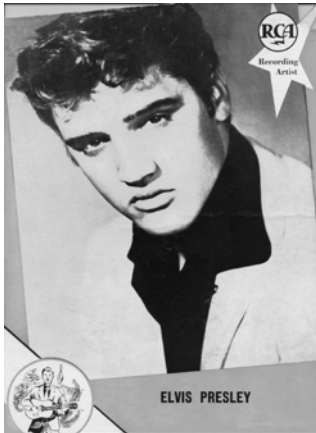
## NICKNAMES

The most famous Elvis turn of phrase has to be “Elvis the Pelvis”. Other nicknames soon followed such as “The Memphis Flash” after his hometown. Elvis was dubbed “The Cat” because of his cool looks and real gone clothes. Fans, also labelled Elvis as “Mama Presley’s Son” and “The Hillbilly Cat” not to forget, “The Memphis Kid”

The unique warble of his voice and the motions which he goes through while singing form a truly delivery which belongs exclusively to Elvis Presley... not to mention the complete Elvis Presley teenage fashion that was echoed by every teen in the USA.

For his Stage Show, Jackie Gleason paid Elvis \$1,250 and called him, “A guitar playing Marlon Brando.”

## THE RCA RECORD DEAL



In November 1955 RCA-Victor signed Elvis paying Sam Phillips \$35,00 for his contract and the master records of the five platters he had made. Elvis was given a cheque for \$5,000.00 and immediately went out and bought his mother a pink Cadillac.

Contrary to their usual policy RCA-Victor then re-issued the records and shortly they were breaking sales records. Elvis Aaron Presley the lad who at eleven had sat with his mother in a cyclone cellar in Tupelo, Mississippi singing until the storm clouds rolled by the youngster who on that troubled day had agreed to accept a guitar when he wanted a bicycle, has at 21 to become one of the USA's top entertainers.

As veterans of the stage and screen admitted at the time “He’s a natural.”

It was no wonder Elvis Presley can sing up a storm and beat out a thunder on his guitar. The guitar was given to him during a thunderstorm.

As his mother, Gladys Presley tells the story it happened on day when she and her 11-year-old son have seen the blackening clouds roll up and they had run for shelter in the cyclone cellar the edge of their yard in Tupelo.

“I suppose it’s a thing no city person could understand and maybe no northern person but we had reason to be scared of storms down where we lived.”

"We'd had seen terrible damage when a tornado struck Tupelo in 1937. It went straight through center of the town smashing buildings right down to the ground. Nearly two hundred people got killed. Living at the edge of the area we narrowly escaped the disaster, but we never forgot it neither.

The storm shelter, a covered excavation some distance from the house, became mother and son's refuge on those blistering hot days when the sky suddenly went black and the deathly stillness of the stifling air was split by the shriek of the howling deadly wind.

"This particular day, Vernon was out on his truck route and just Elvis and I were in the shelter," remembers Gladys. "We started singing of course. That was one way to keep from getting frightened, And we talked about the singing he had done. Particularly how he had won the prize at the Fair."

The chain of events that led to his first prize winning had started at school chapel. It was the custom in their town even in public schools for the day to start with brief devotions. Gladys had heard of her son's part in it when his 5<sup>th</sup> grade teacher came to her and told how proud she should be of her son.

The teacher told Gladys, that on two mornings she had asked if any of the children could say a prayer. There was no response until on the third day Elvis had raised his hand. After saying his prayer he had sung several of the songs that he and his parents were in the habit of singing at home and in church. The teacher concluded, "It was so wonderful I went right in and told the principal Mr Cole about it.

Shortly thereafter Gladys had had a note from Mr Cole asking if Elvis could participate in a music concert planned for the coming Fair.

"I'll never forget that was the day," says Gladys with a smile, "when the man at the gate out at the fairgrounds just took it for granted I was Elvis' big sister and sold me a school kid's ticket, same as him."

On reaching the platform they encountered difficulties. "Elvis has no way to make music and the other kids all wanting to win the prize themselves wouldn't accompany him."



Elvis was equal to the challenge as his mother proudly relates. "Elvis just climbed up on the chair so as he could the microphone and he sang, 'Old Shep'".

"Well he was the last on the program and time ran out but he was the one the crowd wanted so they gave him the prize. "It was a lucky thing that Vernon had a radio in the truck he was driving so he got a chance to hear Elvis sing. We were all pretty happy about Elvis being able to sing that way before five thousand people."

On the day of the storm, however, Elvis was more interested in travel than in music. A small boy's kind of travel was a new bike, which stood tantalizingly in the window of the hardware store.

"There were just two things wrong about him wanting that bike," says Gladys. "First of all I was scared he might get hurt or struck by a car or something like that. I wanted him to be a little bit older before he got his bike. Then there was the cost. It was fifty-five dollars we

didn't have. That was pretty steep. I wasn't working, I'd been sick, there were bills from that and Vernon had about all he could carry."

"I knew that in the window beside the bicycle there was a guitar. You know the way they carry everything in those little stores. That cost just \$12.95. So I said to Elvis wouldn't you rather have the guitar? It would help with your singing and everyone does enjoy hearing you sing."

The eleven old Elvis came to a decision that would change the course of music forever, although he didn't know it at the time. "If you and daddy will buy me the guitar next Saturday I won't ask for the bike for another year," promised Elvis.

Well, Elvis got the guitar and his parents gave him the bicycle too, the following Christmas. "But he always like the guitar best," informs Gladys.

"That pleased me because he'd be content to sit in front of the radio or play the phonograph trying to learn the songs he heard. I never cared how many kids came over to the house, nor how much noise they made, long as I know they were all right that they weren't getting hurt or into any bad mischief".

## **FROM SMALL TOWN TO BIG LEAGUE**

What's it like to be a small town boy who overnight is thrust into the public eye? Everything changes. Perhaps the most radical change of all was Elvis' new lifestyle.

When Elvis was a truck driver he loved to sit around the local ice cream parlor and plug his nickels into the jukebox, and like kids his age he would go to the movies every Saturday night. For Elvis there was also the guitar to help wallow away the hours when money was short. However, since his first single "That's All Right Mama" became a hit Elvis' lifestyle has changed.

Now, Elvis' life revolves around hotel rooms in small towns. In many towns his only view of the place had been a close scrutiny of the airport where he landed or a whirlwind view from a speeding car window of the highway that led him into town.

For instance when Elvis left the show in Oakland at one o'clock in the morning he flew to International Airport in Inglewood, California arriving at four o'clock. It was five before he was settled in the hotel, had his clothes unpacked and was ready for bed. Nine-thirty the next morning Elvis was woken by Tom Diskin his record manager and by ten he'd showered shaved and was dressed ready for his breakfast which was waiting in his hotel room. At 10.30 Elvis was in rehearsal for the Milton Berle show in Burbank. Finishing at five Elvis returned to the hotel room, put on his favourite recordings and started answering fan mail. By eight he had a sandwich and a glass of milk and he was again before the TV cameras, this time for the actual live performance of the Milton Berle Show. By midnight he'd eaten a full meal and was in bed only to be woken in time for an early plane out to Memphis where he was off for a couple of weeks to spend time with his parents.

Life backstage however is far more complicated than this bare outline. It had become so hectic that Elvis was hospitalised suffering from exhaustion. However Elvis laughed at the doctors when they told him he'd be in the hospital for a couple of weeks and he was there only three days. The first two days he rested, the third day he spent pacing up and down like a caged lion, demanding that he be released for he's never felt better in his life.

Elvis rarely sleeps more than three hours at a time. He has a constitution which allows him to completely relax and can sleep sitting up in a train or car refreshed with only a 15-minute

catnap. His travelling companions include his cousin Gene Smith Bitsy Mott with whom Elvis loves to play cards.

Elvis is an avid reader. He is either reading a book or a magazine or the huge load of fan mail that follows him every where he goes. But Elvis favourite pastime is listening to records or the radio.

Elvis loves to have people with him his own age. Bitsy and Gene supply this need for companionship. But unlike may entertainers who have an entourage Elvis does not tolerate 'yes' men around him.

Bitsy rides the dickens out of Elvis. One day when they were rehearsing for a show, Bitsy kidded Elvis about needing a pair of boxing gloves so that they could settle their arguments in short order.

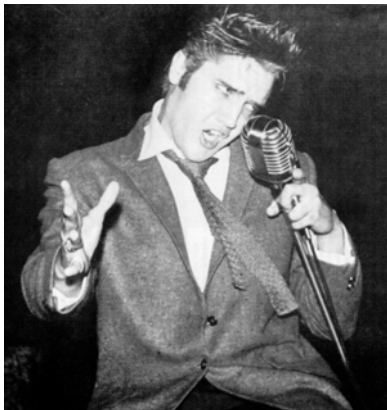
Elvis ducked out of the room as if frightened at the idea only to return 5-minutes later and tossed a pair of boxing gloves at Bitsy. "You asked for them now use 'em," Elvis said. The rest of the evening was spent playing and laughing.

Elvis is completely conscious of the fact that when he is in public he must be Elvis Presley the performer. Although he does like to be interviewed and his shyness at times prevents him giving nothing more than a 'yes' or 'no' he does his best to give every question serious consideration.

Elvis is thoroughly cognisant of being a public figure and knows that this carries with it a great responsibility.

### **ON STAGE A SINNER OFF STAGE A SAINT**

However, Elvis still considers himself a novice with plenty to learn and spends most of his time off the stage tuning his talents.



Elvis may be shy offstage but onstage he is dynamite! Once onstage he becomes jet-propelled and from that moment he starts to sing to the time the iron doors closed his fans scream with delight. Sometimes it is as if Elvis is unaware of the audience, the kids catch him by surprise as he finishes a song. Frequently he will simply stop in a middle of a song as if to ask which song am I singing. By the end of his concert Elvis usually make his way to the back of the stage so that he can make a quick getaway backstage and to his car.

However, this does not preclude him from signing autographs from fans who lie in wait. But when Elvis just does not make it in time and his fans mob him, it is all

Elvis can do to save his clothes and his person.

This boy who doesn't smoke, doesn't drink which gives him a rebellious look, has become the symbol of today's restless youth. Chances are that from this time forward Elvis will emerge as one of the few entertainers that will never lose contact with his audience.

For he knows they love him with a deathless devotion ... and he loves them too.

## EPILOGUE

By September 1956 a year after Elvis exploded into the consciousness of every teenager on the planet he tried to explain the secret of his success to the press.

“I don’t know what it is... I just fell into it, really. My daddy and I were laughing about it the other day. He looked at me and said, ‘What happened, E? The last thing I can remember is I was working in a can factory and you were drivin’ a truck.. It just caught us up.”

By the time Elvis Presley the rock-n-roll icon was transformed into Private Presley, a new generation of teenagers was breaking away from the habits of their parents and discovering their own brand of music and culture. There was nothing the parents could do. These baby boomers were armed with both money and inexpensive appliances. They had no memory of the war or the Depression or political conservatism. They emerged as the first generation 'target' audience that advertisers labeled consumers. With over 13 million of these new consumers, they were the market and Elvis became their first beneficiary.



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