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SERIES EDITOR: JOHN McRAE

Elvis Presley, for millions of people, was the king, the greatest rock 'n' roll voice of them all.

He died in 1977 ... or did he?

- no one ever claimed his life insurance
- the name on his tombstone is wrong
- no one saw the body

Many people think Elvis did not die in August 1977 - but that is the real beginning of the Elvis mystery!

LEVEL 2

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E.A.R.L. THE ELVIS MYSTERY McRAE

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The Elvis Mystery



JOHN McRAE



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John McRae

Series Editor: John McRae

Edward Arnold

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Chapter 1

Elvis Presley is one of the most famous names in the world. His records are still selling millions of copies every year, and everywhere pop music of all kinds shows his influence.

Elvis was called The King by his millions of admirers. For more than twenty years he was the most important single figure in popular music: even the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, and other rock groups of the 1960s and 1970s said that Elvis was the man they admired most.

Elvis Presley's first big hit record was *Heartbreak Hotel*, in 1956. In the next twenty years he made almost one hundred hit records, and fifteen of them reached the number one position in the British top twenty. He made lots of films, television appearances and concert tours, and became one of the richest and most famous men in the world.

Elvis Presley died, at his home Graceland, in Memphis in the state of Tennessee, on August 16th 1977. He was 42 years old.

Millions of people all over the world were shocked to hear of the death of The King. They did not believe he was dead. They said the man who made rock'n'roll popular could never die. More and more

people believe that Elvis is actually alive today. There is a lot of evidence which, they say, proves he is not dead. There is even a recording of him speaking. Was he speaking after he 'died'?

This is the Elvis mystery – the mystery of one of the most famous, yet also one of the most mysterious men of our time.

Chapter 2

Elvis Aron Presley was born in a small town called Tupelo in the state of Mississippi, on 8th January, 1935. His father, Vernon, and his mother, Gladys, were very close to him all through his life. But perhaps even more important, Elvis was one of twins. The other twin, Jesse Garon, died at birth. But, for Elvis and for his parents, the dead twin was a very significant presence in their lives. The choice of names is significant too. Garon and Aron, the middle names, were so similar that Elvis Aron Presley always said that he felt he was in some way 'a part of Jesse Garon'. And Jesse was also the name of Vernon's father, the grandfather of Elvis Presley.

Elvis very often used his full name, perhaps to keep alive the memory of the twin he never knew. At his home, Graceland, you can still read the name plate – 'the home of Elvis Aron Presley'. His own music company was also called 'Aron Music, Incorporated'. And on a collection of eight LPs his full name is signed as Elvis Aron Presley. The full name will be an important piece of evidence in the Elvis Presley mystery!

In 1971 Elvis Presley, now one of the most famous men in the world, said 'When I was a boy, I was the

hero of the comic books and movies. I grew up believing in a dream. Now I've lived it out.'

Captain Marvel, the comic strip hero, was his greatest hero and Elvis took many elements of his later successful image from that comic book hero. The way he stands, legs apart, with arms, hands and fingers outstretched, all recalls Captain Marvel. The hairstyle too, which became world famous, comes from Elvis's childhood hero. The child is part of the adult in all of us: in Elvis it became part of his identity.

For the teenage boy from Tupelo, the fantasy begins to become reality through his music. Like many people after him, Elvis used pop music to transform himself from an ordinary teenager into a star.

In the 1950s, rock'n'roll was just beginning. Even the name rock'n'roll was new. A disc jockey on an American radio station used the term rock'n'roll to describe the kind of music which came from the Deep South of the United States. This music puts together the rhythm, the beat, the excitement of black soul music – the blues – with the guitar and vocal sounds of white music. It is a mixture, musically and culturally. It contains elements of white 'country' music and black 'gospel' music.

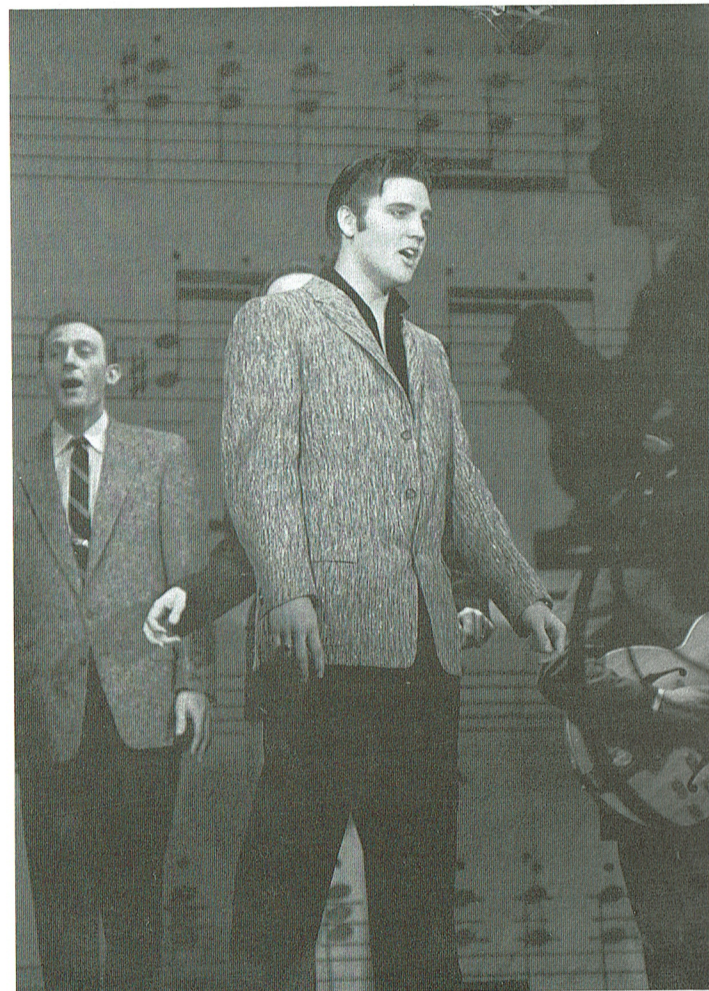
The musical tradition of Elvis was in some ways a very local tradition, a tradition of the South. But, in

the middle of the 1950s, there was a new generation – the post-war generation – of young people. These teenagers were ready for a musical explosion, a revolution in sound and in taste. Elvis Presley was the man who was going to create that revolution.

Chapter 3

Elvis Presley wanted to make a record to give his mother something different for her birthday, so he recorded two songs at Sun Studios in Memphis. In 1953 pop music was not the worldwide phenomenon it is now. Even television was a recent innovation for most people. So Elvis didn't imagine his record at number one in the top twenty. He probably didn't even imagine a future for himself as a singer, apart from in his local area, around Memphis. Certainly, with a record to his name, he could become well known around Tennessee. But rock'n'roll was not yet widely popular, and the kind of music Elvis played and sang was new and unusual. Some people said that it sounded too much like black music. So perhaps it was too unusual to become popular.

Three years after recording these songs for his mother *Heartbreak Hotel* was released and was an instant success. Television and radio stations took the sounds recorded in a small studio in Memphis to all the countries of the world. Young people responded to the rhythm, the excitement in the voice, the touch of sadness and loss in the words of the song. And when they saw Elvis – in photographs, in newspapers and magazines, on television – they



Young Elvis

went wild. His hairstyle and his clothes were copied by millions. His fresh young country-boy good looks, wide eyes and big smile made him attractive. He very quickly became a sex symbol. Elvis the Pelvis, young people called him, because of the way he moved his body.

His style and his movements scandalised the older generation, the parents of the young people who became fans of Elvis. But, of course, what scandalises one generation delights another. When he appeared on coast-to-coast television in the United States, his body movements were considered too sexy. So he appeared only from the chest upwards! The same kind of scandalised reaction happened with the Beatles just eight years later. By then Elvis was the greatest pop star in the world, a movie star, a very rich man, a face everyone knew. His dream became reality, but it was not an easy reality to live with.

Elvis Presley was now a public figure. Everywhere he went there were photographers, television cameras, microphones, journalists. Everyone wanted to know about Elvis. It was more and more difficult for him to remain private, to be with his family, to find friends.

In December 1957, when Elvis went to do his military service, like every other eligible American citizen, he was the most famous GI, or soldier, in the

world. He spent most of his time as a soldier in West Germany. He smiled for the photographers, but the title of a movie he made later perhaps tells something of the real story – it was *GI Blues*. There was always something a little sad about the great success of Elvis Aron Presley. Perhaps it was that ever-present memory of his lost twin, Jesse Garon Presley.

Many of Elvis's songs and movies bring together elements of sadness – the blues – and elements of joy, freedom, celebration and love. *Jailhouse Rock* is set in a prison, *Blue Christmas* is a sad song about a traditionally happy time, *Wooden Heart* is a sad love song, and *Crying in the Chapel* is a ballad with a strong religious feeling. Certainly Elvis had a voice which was perfect for singing the blues. He never forgot his poor origins, and he never left for long the area where he was born.



Jailhouse Elvis

Chapter 4

Elvis, even at the times of his greatest success, was alone. And he could not do as a comic book hero could – turn back into a normal young man whom nobody knows. He could not go anywhere without being recognised. Journalists followed his every move. He could not make friends or have a close relationship with a girlfriend. He was not able to trust people. They only knew Elvis the star. Very few people knew Elvis Aron Presley, the young man from Tupelo.

So, inevitably, Elvis felt close only to his family, especially to his parents. They were almost the only people he could be himself with. His manager, a mysterious figure called Colonel Tom Parker, organised Elvis's public life – his records and films, his concerts and television appearances – and looked after the immense fortune Elvis was making. But it was his family who gave him the security that helped him to live even when he was in his own 'jailhouse', the prison of his own success.

Everything in the world of Elvis Presley was ideal, at least in terms of public success. Million-selling records, Hollywood movies, large cars – all the elements of a glamorous millionaire life-style. Even

military service was not too bad when you were Elvis Presley!

But something happened to destroy the fantasy. On 14th August 1958, Gladys Love Presley died. She was only 45 years old. For Elvis this was a terrible loss. Gladys was one of his very few close friends, one of the protectors of his privacy. No one could ever take her place. Elvis eventually married Priscilla Beaulieu, on 1st May 1967, but the marriage did not last long. Gladys, even after she was dead, remained the most important woman in Elvis Presley's life.

Chapter 5

Between 1958 and 1977, Elvis was the biggest star in the world. He made more money than any singer in history and his records continued to make the number one position all over the world. The hugely successful rock groups and bands of the 1960s and 1970s made a point of visiting Elvis, 'The King', when they toured America. Their success did not harm his, or lessen it. Their admiration of Elvis helped to create the myth and to keep the myth growing.

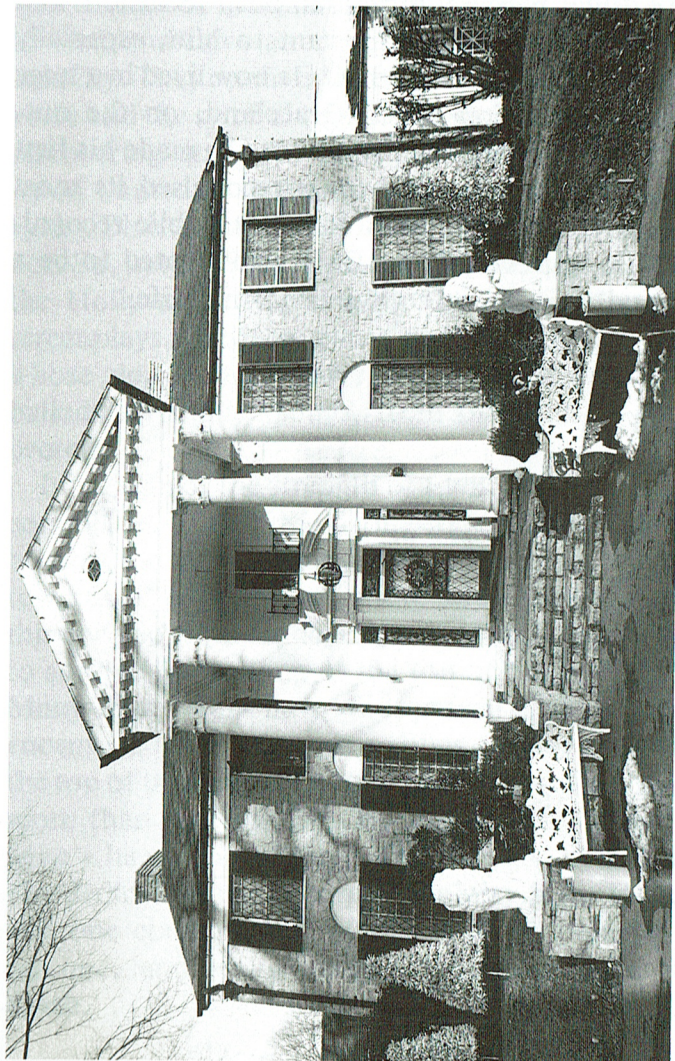
Elvis demonstrated that he could sing a wide range of material. His talent was not just a question of a teenager and a guitar; he worked very hard to develop his voice, his presentation, and his skill as an interpreter of songs. Every songwriter in the world wanted to write for The King, so he had the choice of the very best material. And usually he chose what he wanted to sing very carefully and very intelligently. He expanded and refined his art, becoming a very fine performer in the American tradition – a long way from the raw and inexperienced teenager at Sun Studios in 1953.

His career in the cinema was a little different, but this was more the fault of the Hollywood studio

system than of Elvis himself. His early films are full of fun, and have an air of youthful freedom and anarchy. They confirm the early image of Elvis as the voice and the symbol of a young generation which is discovering and enjoying its freedom. But Hollywood wanted to repeat the same formula again and again. Elvis changed and matured, but his films did not. So, in the 1960s the fans saw two sides of Elvis: the Hollywood star, singing and dancing in poor screenplays, and the aware and developing singer whose voice could move from strong emotional ballads to country songs, from the blues to social protest.

It is a sign of the strength of Elvis's talent, and his commitment, that the Hollywood image did not become the more important one. He began to move towards a more serious, more adult image. It was this conscious career development which helped him to survive for so long at the top of his profession. Many many stars have disappeared after reaching enormous levels of success. Elvis Presley stayed at the top of this dangerous and insecure profession for more than half his life. He saw many changes in taste – he welcomed them, and matured with them. His dedication to his career was very great indeed, and one confirmation of this is the popularity he reached, and still reaches, many years after his death.

As Elvis became more famous, seclusion and privacy became very important to him, especially after the death of his mother. He now lived in a huge luxurious mansion called Graceland, on the outskirts of Memphis, the town where he made his first historic recordings. The town recognised its most famous citizen with gratitude. But public recognition was not everything. Elvis also wanted to be a 'normal' person and to live a 'normal' life.



Graceland

Chapter 6

Elvis was a prisoner of his own success. Graceland became the only place where Elvis was himself. Outside Graceland, he was the public figure, the star, with perfect good looks, with a smile always on his lips, the image of youth for millions of people all over the world.

But Elvis was human too. He had the feelings, the emotions, and the worries of any normal man. Above all, Graceland became a place where he was bored and lonely. He was not able to meet people and make friends like other young men of his age. He began to worry also about his perfect good looks – they could not last forever.

A combination of loneliness and worry, plus the stress of the hard work which was necessary to his career, took Elvis in the 1960s to experimentation with drugs. Many pop stars tried drugs in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, but usually they did it for fun. With Elvis, the drugs were medicine. He took drugs to control his weight; he took drugs to stop depression; he took drugs to help him sleep and then to help him wake up again.

The stress of his career and the stress of his drug-taking almost ruined Elvis Presley. The same pro-

blems ruined many other stars during the great years of pop in the late 1960s and early 1970s. But Elvis was stronger than most people, and he used his strength to fight back against his problems. He was able to recover from dependence on drugs, and he learned from his own experience how dangerous dependence on drugs can be.

He continued to have problems with his weight, however. No one can keep the same figure they had at the age of twenty! And Elvis's audience, his fans, wanted the impossible – he could not be forever the twenty year old that he was in 1955! But he learned how to diet and to control his weight problem. In this way, when he gave concerts or made public appearances, he returned to a sensible weight for his age and height.

Sometimes, back at Graceland, especially when he felt the stress and loneliness of his isolation, he became fat, and he had to diet rapidly to return to his old size. But he learned how to do this without depending on drugs. The problem came back again and again.

Elvis and Priscilla had a daughter, Lisa Marie, born in 1968. She was the object of Elvis's love and devotion, especially after it became clear that his marriage to Priscilla was not a very happy one.

After his experience with drugs, Elvis worked hard to help other people with similar problems. In 1970



Elvis in the early 1970s

President Nixon appointed him a Special Agent of the Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs. This was a very important moment for Elvis. It was official recognition of how he could use his great success and worldwide fame to do good, to influence young people, and to help in the fight against one of the great social problems of his time.

Elvis was fascinated by police work. This again reveals something of his double-sided nature. He felt it was a duty to help people from sadness and misery towards happiness and security. He always recognised in his own life, and in the lives of other people, that unhappiness is present, and that negative elements can easily dominate. But, especially after his own negative experiences, he wanted to show people that these problems can be changed into positive experiences, and that we can live positively even after the worst of difficulties.

In this Elvis showed a great deal of faith – not necessarily religious faith, although he was a Christian, but a strong faith in humanity. He made many records which confirm this, but Elvis's god was a god inside each person. He studied books about religion and about the supernatural. Buddhism, meditation and yoga, psychology and techniques of self-enlightenment, spiritualism, mysticism, and the history of human thought were among the subjects he read about with growing

interest. Again we see a double-sided Elvis – the practical work with police anti-drug units, and the spiritual search for the truth of the universe. Public and private, study and action – these are vitally important aspects of Elvis Presley.

Elvis often went, wearing police uniform, with police anti-drug units in Memphis, becoming actively involved in the fight against drugs. This was one of the few chances he had to see 'real' life, 'normal' people. The work gave him the possibility to escape from the luxurious prison of Graceland, and to make friends with a few people who were outside the world of records, films, and entertainment.

With his marriage ending, his career beginning to repeat itself – the audience always wanted to hear Elvis's old songs, the original Elvis Presley hits – the double life of Elvis became more obvious. Police work became more interesting than entertainment. Elvis could not abandon his audience, his fans. But now he seriously began to question his own existence, to ask himself why he was living the double life of a lonely prisoner and of a social crusader.

Many people now say that Elvis really wanted to escape from his double life. They say he wanted to return to a simple life, to be himself. They say he was tired of being Elvis the Superstar, of singing the old songs again and again. Instead of escaping from

Graceland in secret, to help the police, he wanted to escape for ever, to have one single identity. And to do that, they say, it was necessary for Elvis Presley the Superstar to disappear, so that Elvis Aron Presley could live. They say the only way to do this was for Elvis to organise his own death.

This is where the Elvis mystery begins.

Chapter 7

Usually when someone dies, that is the end. With Elvis, the date of his death – August 16th 1977 – is the beginning of a whole new story.

There are a lot of books which insist Elvis did not die, but they do not explain why. And the facts of his death, unlike the facts of his life, are very confused. Some of these books suggest that because there is very little evidence to *prove* that Elvis is dead, that is enough to show he is alive. Certainly all the relevant documentation is missing, perhaps destroyed, and what remains is mysterious.

The background to the facts and the events after the day of his death lead to the heart of the mystery.

Elvis Presley was found dead by his girlfriend, Ginger Alden, at 2 p.m. on August 16th 1977. The cause of his death is stated as 'hypertensive cardiac vascular disease with arterial sclerotic heart disease.' In simpler words, Elvis Presley died of a heart attack.

But then the story becomes confused. The Medical Examiner's report did not say what the body's weight was. The original death certificate disappeared, and a new one was issued two months later. One certificate gives his weight at the time of death as

170 pounds. The evidence of witnesses and friends of the dead man puts his weight at between 220 and 250 pounds – a notable difference.

The Medical Examiner's report says the body was 'unclothed'. Ginger Alden insists he was wearing pyjamas. She also says she found Elvis with a book beside him. In the inventory of his estate, the list of all his property, not one single book is listed.

Such a sudden heart attack normally means that an inquest, an official examination or an autopsy, takes place. In this case, no autopsy report exists. No police investigation was ever made into the death. The local police considered the case 'closed' even before an autopsy could be made.

When ABC, the American television company, made a programme investigating Elvis's death, it was revealed that an autopsy *had* been made and that 'no gross evidence of a heart attack or an irregularity in heartbeat was apparent, enough to cause death.' Elvis had dental treatment on the morning of August 16th (the day he died), but no traces of novocaine or any other anaesthetic were found in his body.

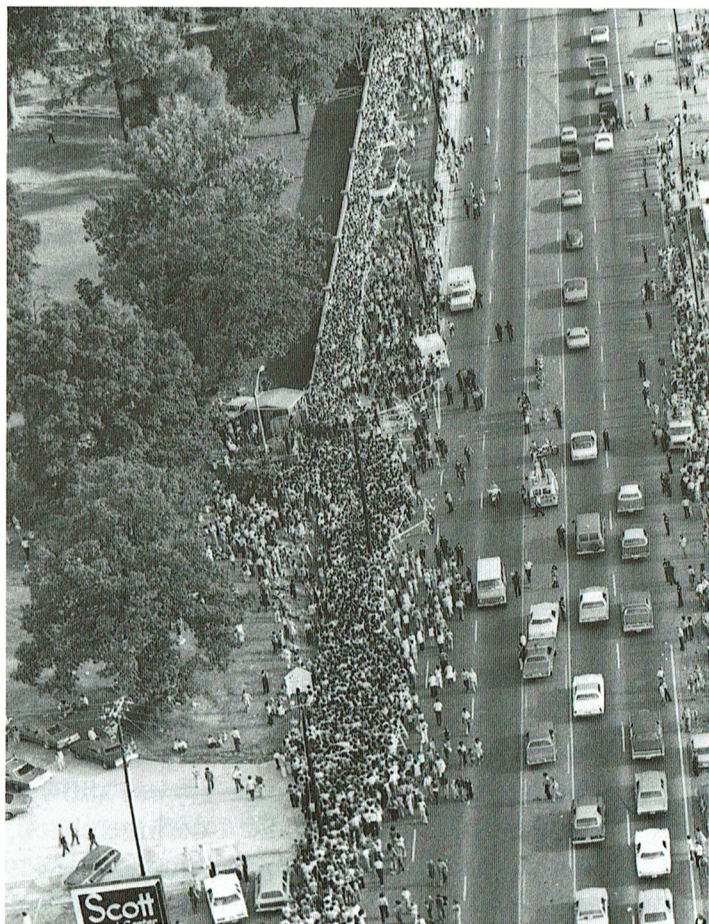
Not long before he died, Elvis Presley had his annual physical examination, as required by the insurance company Lloyds of London. He passed this physical examination *without any problems* and, indeed, played racquetball as normal on the morning before he died. Although he was heavily

insured, no claim for insurance was ever made by his family or heirs after Elvis's death.

The men who carried the body out from Graceland testified that they did not recognise the body as Elvis's.

All this shows that there are different versions of the story. There are variants on the condition of the body, its weight, when, where and how it was found. It is not even clear from some of the versions whether the body was found dead or alive, whether rigor mortis was evident or not, as well as differences regarding its clothing, and the book. All this confusion before Elvis is really dead becomes greater when we come to the funeral.

First, the coffin, or casket, which contained the body was surprisingly heavy – 900 pounds, which is over 400 kilos. People who saw the body in this coffin, either at Graceland or in a newspaper photograph, state it was *not* Elvis Presley. The forehead, nose and chin, they say, were not his, and the white suit the body was wearing was 'cheap', and not Elvis's familiar style. No one, however, was allowed near enough to the body to make a definite check, and the body was buried before his closest friends could reach Memphis to pay their last respects. Most of his close associates were not at Graceland at the time, and some of them believe they were sent away deliberately in the weeks before August 16th.



Crowds at Graceland after Elvis's death

The fans, the groups who loyally supported Elvis for over twenty years, were specifically asked by Vernon Presley *not* to come to Graceland to view the body. The best known group of fans – The Elvis Special – believe that there was a wax dummy in the coffin, with an air-conditioning mechanism (the extra weight) to keep it in condition. They believe that they, and Elvis's friends, were not invited to view the body because the body was clearly not Elvis.

Elvis changed his will not long before August 16th 1977, leaving his money to his daughter Lisa and to his father Vernon.

Some people thought it was strange that a man who was 42 should leave his money to a man 20 years older. Did Elvis know he would die before his father? Another strange thing is that the date on the will was crossed out and changed by hand with no official approval.

Elvis's property was also in a strange situation. A lot of his assets seem to have disappeared just before August 16th, and most of his money was moved from a savings account (which carries interest) to a cheque account. This leads some observers to think there was a deliberate plan to realise Elvis's large cash assets before his death. This small clue could indicate a plot or, at least, a degree of planning in the death.

Similarly, Elvis's personal possessions listed on

the inventory do not include his books (and he read a lot), his jewellery, his clothes (he had a vast wardrobe of clothes of various sizes, both for performing and for day-to-day wear, as well as his police uniforms). Perhaps the strangest omission is that there were absolutely no photographs of his mother, Gladys. Most observers agree that Elvis always had at least one photograph of his mother with him wherever he went, and kept several photographs at Graceland. Why, then, did they not appear on the regular inventory of the house, after his death?

Clearly, the people who believe Elvis did not die think all these possessions disappeared because Elvis himself disappeared, and took his most precious possessions with him. But, just as there is no evidence that Elvis is actually dead, there is simply no evidence to say where his money or his possessions have gone. His father sold one of Elvis's three aeroplanes after August 1977 but, strangely, the other two stayed in service, making a lot of flights. This has naturally added to the mystery!

The movements of Priscilla Presley (Elvis's wife), his daughter Lisa, and his manager Colonel Tom Parker are also considered strange.

Priscilla was in California on August 16th 1977. She says in her book *Elvis and Me* that she heard the news of her husband's death around 12 noon on that day. This must be wrong, since Elvis was found at 2



Priscilla and Lisa at the funeral

p.m. Memphis time, which is noon California time. He was not pronounced dead till he was taken to hospital at 3.30 p.m. (although there are differing reports on this). Priscilla asked for one of Elvis's aeroplanes to come to California to fetch her. The trip takes about four hours each way, so, after the death was official (say about 4 p.m.), the earliest arrival time at Graceland for Priscilla was after midnight.

She says she left California around 9 p.m. (11 p.m. Memphis time), and most observers agree she could not have arrived there before 2 or 3 in the morning. Yet she insists she found nine-year-old Lisa riding around on a golf cart in the garden. A strange time for a child to be doing such a thing! But even stranger the night after her father's death! No one in the crowd outside the gates that night recalled seeing the child in the garden at any time. And why, with crowds and traffic blocking Elvis Presley Boulevard all through the night, did Priscilla not travel by helicopter between the airport and Graceland? There is no photograph or other evidence of her actual arrival at the house after Elvis's death.

Colonel Tom Parker, Elvis's manager, is an enigma. He 'changed his identity', according to one of Elvis's biographers, completely covering his own past (he was of Dutch origin). This story gives credence to those who believe the Colonel

'organised' Elvis's 'death' too. On the afternoon of August 16th 1977, he flew to New York and signed a contract for merchandising of the Elvis name and image. This deal was organised *not* with the Presley estate but with a company in which Colonel Parker and Elvis Presley had shares. After August 16th, the market in Elvis memorabilia and souvenirs became enormous.

Colonel Parker seemed, by all accounts, unmoved at the funeral of the man whose career he managed for over twenty years. Some witnesses say the same lack of emotion was noticed in Vernon Presley. The two men closest to the dead man not showing emotion is not necessarily the sign of a plot or conspiracy, but for many of Elvis's fans it seemed to indicate yet another strange element in the mystery.

They say of Colonel Parker that 'he acted as if Elvis . . . never died,' and that he himself said 'Nothing has changed.' Certainly the Elvis industry did not change – in fact, it grew enormously. The Colonel and Vernon Presley continued to organise it, making more money in two years than in the preceding twenty!

Chapter 8

The facts of the death of Elvis Presley were confused. And even after his death the mystery and confusion grows. Television investigations, newspaper reports, fan club discoveries, and at least six books have discussed the Elvis mystery. And all of them are certain that Elvis Aron Presley did not die at the age of 42 at Graceland, 3764 Elvis Presley Boulevard, Memphis, Tennessee, on August 16th 1977.

Part of the mystery is due to the strange events at the time of his death: the missing documentation; the contradictory reports; the strange behaviour of his wife, his daughter, his girlfriend, his managers, and the other people who were at Graceland at the time. The mystery of the body in the coffin is simply caused by the fact that only one or two people saw the body.

It is, of course, possible that Elvis Presley did die on August 16th 1977, and that there is no further mystery. But Elvis was perfectly healthy, according to his insurance medical examination. There was no trace of a heart problem in the medical report. His insurance money was never claimed after his death. His manager and family carried on their lives as

normal. The people who think Elvis did not die ask these questions:

- Why did the death certificate disappear?
- Why did no one claim his life insurance money – a very large sum?
- Why did so much documentation disappear?
- Where did Elvis's favourite photographs, books, jewellery, and other personal possessions go?
- Why did Elvis's close friends not have the opportunity to see the body or attend the funeral?
- Why was the coffin so heavy and how did it arrive at Graceland so soon after the death?

These questions alone are enough to create a mystery. But soon after Elvis's death a lot of other questions began to make the mystery even more curious.

The first of these is about Elvis's grave and the gravestone. On August 29th 1977 three men were arrested in Memphis for 'attempting to steal the body' of Elvis Presley. The coffin was still in a crypt at a cemetery called Forest Hill in Memphis, where Gladys Love Presley was buried. The men arrested told the police that they did not want to kidnap the body and demand money. They wanted to prove that there was no body in the coffin, or that the body in the coffin was not Elvis's.

After this Vernon Presley arranged to have Elvis's coffin and his mother's remains moved to Graceland. This was not easy, since Graceland was a resi-

dential home, not a cemetery. He had to ask for special permission from the city authorities. Vernon Presley said he wanted to move the bodies to keep them safe in the high security of Graceland. People who don't believe him say his reasons were different: they say he wanted the graves to be in Graceland to prevent the discovery that Elvis's body was not in the coffin. The coffins were officially moved to Graceland on October 2nd 1977, but no one saw them arrive there.

Then the mystery of the graves and the gravestone began. Elvis Presley's grave is in Graceland, and you can visit it in the grounds of Elvis's home. Because of the very close relationship with his mother, he always wanted to be buried beside her. But some people believe that the bodies of Elvis and his mother never reached Graceland. They say that Gladys Love Presley is still in the crypt in Forest Hill cemetery, where she was buried in 1958. And to confirm this theory – together with the theory that Elvis did not die – they point out two very important facts. When Elvis's father Vernon died in 1979 he was buried *between* Elvis and Gladys. Elvis wanted to be buried next to his mother, between his parents, and this did not happen.

Secondly comes perhaps the strangest element in the whole mystery: on Elvis Aron Presley's gravestone there is the wrong name!



The gravestone

One of the most famous names in the world, a name that was familiar to millions of people is *not* the name on Elvis's gravestone. There it is spelled Elvis *Aaron* Presley instead of Elvis Aron Presley. We know how important his middle name was to Elvis all his life, especially in relation to his dead twin brother Jesse Garon. But a mistake can easily happen. If this is a mistake, why is the gravestone with the wrong spelling still there at Graceland after all these years? A new gravestone is not difficult to arrange. It is not expensive, considering the vast Presley fortune. But the wrong name on the gravestone remains. Is it an unimportant point, something that doesn't matter? Not if we remember how often Elvis used his full name, and not if we remember how important his twin brother was to him. 'I am part of Jesse Garon' he said, on several occasions.

Is this a simple spelling mistake which nobody wants to take time to correct? Or is there another explanation? The people who think Elvis did not die are sure that this spelling mistake is deliberate. Elvis, they say, did not want to risk putting his real name on a gravestone. He was religious and superstitious, and to put his name on an empty grave was dangerous. A man cannot escape death; that was not Elvis's idea. He wanted to escape from his life. But he did not want to tempt fate, to give his name to death; that was a risk, a danger, a superstitious fear. So, for

that reason, the gravestone remains at Graceland, and the name of the real Elvis Aron Presley is not on it. His real name is safe. His close relationship to Jesse Garon Presley is safe. For the people who believe Elvis did not die, this evidence of the gravestone and of the position of the graves of Vernon, Elvis, and Gladys Presley is vitally important. No one wants to tempt fate by 'playing with death'. Elvis spent so much of his life positively helping people to avoid the risk of drugs, another form of 'playing with death'. It is, they insist, incredible either that the mistake is not deliberate, or that nobody cares enough about Elvis's grave to change the spelling on the gravestone.

So, people began to talk about an 'organised' death. They called it 'a fake death', 'a hoax', 'a disappearing trick'. They think Elvis deliberately planned his own death, probably with the help of his family and his manager but without the knowledge of most of his friends and associates. Most of his friends and associates were not at Graceland when Elvis died. Some of them did not understand why they had to leave there in the weeks before August 16th. Most of them did not have the opportunity to see the body before the funeral. All of this adds to the Elvis mystery.

The fans and investigators who believe Elvis 'organised' his death say that their idea is confirmed



Fans at Graceland's gates

by some aspects of the Elvis industry. For example, the thousands who came to Graceland and Memphis on August 16th and the following days found large quantities of authorised Elvis merchandise already on sale outside Elvis's home. The 'industry' began immediately, and the strange thing was that there was so much material available. Can this, they ask, be linked with Colonel Parker's mysterious trip to New York? Was all this merchandise already ordered in preparation for Elvis's death?

Another strange fact is that in the United States on August 17th 1977, just one day after the news of Elvis's death, the surprising figure of twenty million records by Elvis were sold. His record company, RCA Victor, admit that this is an enormous number of records. It is certainly more than the total number of Elvis records sold between January 1st and August 16th that year. Why were there so many records ready to be sold? Is this a confirmation that the organisation was prepared for the news of Elvis's death?

Elvis made more than nine hundred recordings. 140 of his records sold more than one million copies. The 'Elvis industry' grew. His death did not stop him being a superstar. Quite the opposite. The record *Way Down*, released immediately after his death, went directly to number one in the top twenty in many countries and the total sales of his records are

now more than one billion, and half of these are since 1977!

Elvis was going to begin a concert tour just after August 16th. He always wore some new costumes on a tour, but this time no new costumes were ordered. And this time the musicians and technicians for the tour did not come to Graceland to practise, prepare, and rehearse. This, according to some people, means that Elvis knew he was *not* going to give these concerts, and was *not* going on this concert tour.

Chapter 9

So, if Elvis Aron Presley is not dead, where is he? What happened to him after August 16th 1977?

As always happens when a famous person disappears, lots of people imagine they have seen him. It is the same with Elvis. There is even a book called *Elvis After Death* which tells of an incredible number of appearances, sightings, glimpses, and visions of the living Elvis Presley. No doubt many of these stories are the product of invention, or of hopeful fantasy.

One well-known story is that the body in Elvis's coffin was the body of an Englishman who looked very like Elvis. He wrote to Elvis explaining that he wanted to meet the man he resembled so much. When he came to Graceland, Elvis invited him to stay, and this man sometimes impersonated Elvis. Only his English accent showed he was not the real Elvis Presley.

This man became very ill with cancer, and received medical treatment at Graceland. Indeed there were some stories in the newspapers that Elvis had cancer in late 1976 and early 1977. But it was the English look-alike who had cancer, and some people believe it was his body in Elvis's coffin.

Another story continues the 'before and after' link

with an impersonation of Elvis. This concerns Elvis's role in undercover drugs investigation. His code name for this work was apparently 'John Burrows'. A man using that name, and closely resembling Elvis Presley, bought a ticket for Buenos Aires at Memphis Airport on August 17th 1977. No further trace of this John Burrows has ever been found. Some people think the Drugs authorities, even the United States Government, helped Elvis Presley to change his identity and disappear. It is something secret agents and undercover policemen have to do sometimes. But isn't it unlikely for Presley/Burrows to take a normal flight, when Elvis Presley owned at least three aeroplanes?

Clearly, if Elvis Presley genuinely wanted to escape from his superstar prison, it is not impossible that someone did actually organise his disappearance, using his false death to try to convince the world he really was dead. But it is difficult to believe stories of his hitch-hiking or going to supermarkets. Perhaps he went to an island somewhere, or to a different luxury house to live anonymously. It is easy to understand the possible reasons for wanting such a change, and it is clear that the circumstances at Graceland make it not impossible that there was a plan to organise Elvis's disappearance. Statistically speaking, hundreds of people disappear and change their lives every year. For someone who is world

famous, like Elvis Presley, it is very difficult to disappear, but perhaps he found the way to do it. Certainly he will have no problems with money, if he is still alive.

His records continue to sell very well all over the world. Graceland is one of the most popular tourist attractions in the United States. 2,000 people a day visit it, a total of 700,000 every year. On August 16th 1987, the tenth anniversary of Elvis's death, 50,000 people went to Graceland. All these visitors bring in more than nine million dollars a year. After the White House in Washington D.C., Graceland is described as 'the most recognisable private home in America'. No one now uses it as a home, but a staff of between 100 and 400 people, depending on the season, continue to manage and run it.

The Elvis industry continues to grow. The first recordings Elvis Presley made for Sun Records are now worth more than ten thousand dollars. Associations of Elvis fans exist in many countries. The largest fan club is in Great Britain; it has 20,000 members, and publishes a monthly magazine. There are about 200 Elvis Presley fan clubs in the USA. So, for all these people, Elvis is not dead!

Chapter 10

The most intriguing pieces of evidence that Elvis could still be alive are a tape recording of a telephone conversation, and a photograph taken at Graceland.

The photograph was taken on January 1st 1978 by a visitor to Graceland, Bob Walsh, and shows a figure in the background who looks very like Elvis Presley, in a doorway of the house, at some distance from where visitors to the grave can go. Many fans believe that Elvis was still alive and in Graceland when that photograph was taken. Others think it strange that he could be in Graceland when he wanted so much to escape. Playboy Magazine bought the rights to the photographs, but never published them, because they 'did not know how to handle the story'.

The tape recording is quite definitely the voice of Elvis, speaking to someone whose voice we never hear. The conversation is about what the speaker has done since his disappearance. He talks of 'hiding', of going first to Hawaii and spending a year on an island, and then of travelling anonymously in a way that he was never able to do before.

The speaker was identified scientifically as Elvis Presley by scientists using a voice print machine.

This analyses the sounds made on tape known to be by Elvis and compares them with the sounds on the new cassette. The voices were the same. The conversation was genuine, and not a mixture of previous sentences and statements; the contents of the tape clearly referred to events *after* 1977. But the mystery remains. When was the tape made? Is it another part of the 'organisation' of Elvis's death? Is it genuine? Why is the voice of the person he is speaking to not on the tape?

The speaker says he is not really hiding now, but that he doesn't know what's going to happen. He likes the idea of singing in public again, but, at the same time, he says it is unlikely that he will go back to something 'that's taken me this long to get out of'.

Is this the real Elvis Aron Presley speaking? When he says he is happy that people remember him, and that he is still angry that a lot of people are making a lot of money from drugs, he sounds like the Elvis Presley of the 1970s. He talks too of loneliness; rich or poor, popular or unknown, you can still be lonely. Of his 'disappearance' he says, 'everything worked just like it was meant to be'. The life-style that he escaped from causes him no regret, but he does not say much about what he is doing now – writing music, playing racquetball, travelling. Is this what Elvis Aron Presley wanted to do for the rest of his life? Is it possible to change your life so much?

For many people, of course, Elvis Presley will never die. Not because of what happened or what did not happen at Graceland on August 16th 1977, but because his music, his records, and his films will keep him alive. He was The King of pop – and The King lives on. The mystery lives on too. Is Elvis Presley alive? There is no conclusive evidence that he is dead. There are a lot of questions and very few answers at the heart of the Elvis Presley mystery.

Glossary

assets valuable possessions

coffin (US casket) the box in which a dead body is buried

crypt small funeral chapel

faith belief

memorabilia items for sale which recall a person

pelvis the hips – the tops of your legs

shocked very surprised

to master defeat, overcome

to tempt fate to invite a negative destiny

trophy prize

will the paper containing a person's last wishes