

## FOND MEMORIES OF ELVIS

by Barbara Lee

Elvis would always say "I love you, honey," or if I said it first, he would respond: "I love you, too." I adored him. He taught me the importance of faith and that "faith the size of a mustard seed could move mountains." He taught me not to claim any illness or anything bothering me so, therefore, I would not *own* it. His caring and compassion was sincere, heartfelt. He spoke often of his beloved momma and how the void he felt was always strong. He spoke of the hurt caused by those around him, close friends and even family members who did things behind his back that he later learned about. The pain he endured from those he trusted had been real and unbelievably disheartening. He was alive during Red and Sonny West's book, "Elvis, What Happened," and was stunned that two he had trusted implicitly had hurt him so bad. In 2007, having been invited down to Memphis by a local fan club to give a lecture on the Presley family history, I encountered Sonny West during a book-signing for his more recent tell-all about Elvis. My husband and I, and Susanna Leigh, one of the Elvis girls with us that day, stood at the head of the line and to the side. There weren't many people in line so I felt compelled to let loose in defense of one very dear to my heart. When I told Sonny that I was a cousin of Elvis, he abruptly replied: "I never saw you at Graceland!" To which I replied: "No, because I was not there!" This was followed up by me with: "How dare you sit there and make more money off of Elvis' blood, sweat and tears! Didn't you do enough damage with your last book?! You have no idea how bad you hurt Elvis!" Sonny didn't say a word, but stood up, packed up his books, and with his female body guard beside him, left in a huff. Certainly, Elvis never went off to them about it; he was too hurt. Revenge was sweet for the horrible dissecting of Elvis in "Elvis, What Happened?" and other horrible accounts of his personal life that seem to crop up every now and then. Will they ever let him be? To put it bluntly, the man was NOT a drug addict. Yes; he was very ill, and when I told this to Sonny West, he laughed then remarked: "He was not sick!" An afterword to Sonny, who is now gone: "Sonny, Elvis was ill more

than you ever knew. Although you probably know it now, you made his life on earth a living...*hell!*"

The attitude of some who "lived" at Graceland toward those who did not is ridiculous and absurd. It seems that if one mentions having been a friend or relation of Elvis, who hadn't been with Elvis at Graceland, these folks declare you non-existent or a liar. Such as it was with Sonny West, and with Billy Smith who contacted me and accused me of not being related to Elvis. Imagine that! Not to worry, Billy; yes; I am a cousin, through several different lines, and was close to him. I am grateful and humbled to have known him, loved him, and will continue to remember him and cherish him until we meet again in the hereafter.

*"I'm finer than a frog hair split three ways,"* he would laugh after I asked how he was doing. He spoke about Ginger (whom he called "gingerbread") and said he wanted to marry her. He had given her a beautiful diamond engagement ring (I cannot fully recall the price he quoted, but I believe it may have cost around \$10,000 at that time). Ginger, too, recently wrote a book about her time with Elvis and made quite a return from the sales, with encouragement from her sister, Rosemary, whom Elvis also spoke of. His pet name for her was "poundcake." 😊 Oh, Elvis had plenty to say about many he knew; some of it good, some not so good. By the Way, the nick "Evis," he told me, was actually the way his father pronounced his name. I decided to keep up the tradition.

*"Catch ya later alligator..."* was sometimes my sign off to which he would reply: *"After awhile crocodile..."* and follow with that most unique and catchy laugh that can never be duplicated. It was his alone. He was "the great cusser"...wow! If he was hot, every other word was a cuss word. How many times he would rave: *"I should have slapped the sh-- out of him..."* if he was upset with someone. (laughing to myself) I started to believe that Elvis Presley created *swearing!* Often times he would say, *"Elvis is not a god, just a man who knows The Word,"* or *"Elvis is not the king, there is only one King...Jesus Christ!"* He could quote the Bible from memory and apply certain passages to any given situation. Elvis Presley was an original, all the way. He became an inspiration to me in many ways.

Most times during our conversations, which lasted sometimes an hour or two, Elvis would break out into song, sometimes an entire song in accapella, sometimes only a few lines. It was always a blessing to hear him sing, and how honored I was to be privy to the private concerts since, at that time, I could never attend his public concerts due to my mother's ill and failing health and other situations in my life. He understood and felt bad, thus, he would give an impromptu one here and there which was always appreciated and for which I was always grateful.

If he didn't like a topic of discussion, he would either change the subject or...sing! Two of the songs he sang most to me were "*Are You Sincere*" and "*I've Got A Thing About You, Baby*." The rest of the times he would sing Gospel tunes, always beautifully done. He and my dad were a lot alike. Both of them were fans of Hank Williams tunes, which both sang perfectly. Elvis liked to sing some of Hank's tunes, and was a great "yodeler!" His yodeling intrigued me to the point I would ask him to show me how to do it, which I could never master. Remembering that he often sang "Mamma Tried," makes me sad, as I am sure it devastated him for many years. He sympathized and understood about my mother as he shared his stories of the pain of losing his so very young. Gladys Presley was 42 when she died, and my beloved mother was 38. We shared that special bond between us as my own mother passed in 1972.

Elvis enlightened me about many things unknown to me. Once he told me that Jimmy Velvet was not only a friend, he was a *cousin*. It wasn't a surprise, then, to see Jimmy present at my lecture in 2007, expressing his interest in the Presley name having originated with two "S's. Jimmy had Vernon's drivers license, and on it Presley was spelled "*Pressley*." How happy Jimmy became after I explained the origin of the name.

Though he was disappointed with the behavior of certain family members, Elvis never spoke bad about family, at least not in our conversations.

He made every phone call a vast experience of wisdom and humor. He'd joke, tell stories, and give outstanding imitations of Popeye and others. Sometimes, I

could feel an off day, a sadness about him, and a more quiet reserve. He often spoke of a cabin by a stream or river where he'd like to live; quiet and removed from everything. He discussed politics of the day at times, though he refused to bring up political views at his concerts or in public. I used to call him "the wise man," and he'd laugh and sing out with "...*wise men say...*" and laugh again. He was, indeed, wise. He believed that politics had no place in entertainment and would be livid with what is going on today with Hollywood and the entertainment industry. He wasn't fond of Hollywood then, and he certainly would be appalled with it today.

Regarding karate, Elvis taught me some moves I should be acquainted with to protect myself, and he explained in great detail, however, today, I cannot recall exactly what they were, only one specific detail involving the throat. Shamefully, I never wrote these instructions down!

Elvis was a compartmentalizer. He kept his friends and family members either close, or to himself in various places; many being unknown to one another. Not sure why he did that, but he did. He also kept tabs on people, distantly, of course. You had earned his trust completely if he said to you: "*You never lied to me,*" as he said to me several times after trying to catch me at telling tales. He was a stickler about honesty and trust, and very few around him proved their worth to him in either manner. He spoke highly to me of a very small few, especially, of our mutual cousin, *Mackey Hargett*, whom Elvis truly respected. Mackey had become a fixture at Graceland and like a second-son to Vernon and brother to Elvis. Mackey had lost his dad in WWII; father and son having never met. Vernon stepped in and became like a surrogate father to Mackey whom has always since recalled his memories of Vernon with grateful affection. Elvis knew Mackey was different than the rest of the cousins and had great respect for him, especially in seeing how Mackey treated Vernon.

One very distant cousin whom Elvis met briefly, angered him fiercely. That would be *Jerry Presley*, whom even while Elvis was alive, thought he was the second up and coming King of Rock and Roll, just as he continues to believe to this day. Jerry did not impress Elvis and he said as much. I felt his fury over the

audacity of this person to try and mimic him. Over the last few years, Jerry has pulled some fast ones in trying not only to emulate Elvis, but to say he was someone he was not and push that falsehood even into book form! I met Jerry in 2007 and he said he wanted to talk to me about the Presley family history, though he quickly slithered away at the end of the lecture. He knew, as I did, and as Elvis had known, that this person was a “*liar*” and a fraud. To this day, Jerry Presley makes his living attempting to replace the one and only *King of Rock and Roll*, which he never will be.

It was clear that Elvis preferred the humble and regular guy persona to that of being the King of Rock and Roll and idol. He did not adjust well to fame or to public scrutiny, and was very bitter about situations and unpleasanties in Las Vegas. There are other details here I shall not divulge for he would not have wanted them discussed. He tried to get away from the hustle and bustle of his life as an entertainer. It was a taxing and unnerving place to be, and Elvis preferred his down-time alone or in the company of those he felt most comfortable with. Sometimes I felt this haunting loneliness about him; that he was reaching out for sincere friendship in the comfort of just being able to be himself.

I had spent many years undertaking the contacting and admonishing of those frauds who have claimed to be either Elvis, himself, or children of Elvis, thereby, confusing fans and causing turbulence in the Elvis psyche. While it has been established that Elvis dabbled in affairs and may even have had a child or two out of wedlock, he did mention to me someone, in a certain context, whom, as an adult, now deceased, revealed something similar to what was hinted at by E. The said person was none of those who have come out publicly and forced themselves upon the Elvis scene. Elvis once relayed that his Uncle, Vester Presley, had had other children, though he never mentioned any such thing regarding his father, Vernon. A few years ago, I came to know a man whom said he was Vester’s illegitimate son, and I tend to believe him because he is the likeness of Patsy Presley and her son, Jimmy Gambill, although Patsy has never, publically, acknowledged the affiliation.

Recalling that Elvis asked if I sang, and I said *"somewhat,"* or *"I try,"* he asked me to sing a few lines of a song, which I did, and told me I had a very pretty voice, which, to me, was a true honor...*Elvis Presley* telling me that I had a "pretty" voice!

There are so many memories of this man who changed my life forever just by calling and talking to me for hours. He never actually responded to my question of how he knew me or how he knew that we were related, but, somehow, I believe he may have known of my father who was the relation to Elvis. My father did know that he was related to Elvis.

Then, there are the moments which are better left unsaid. Elvis' fans need to look beyond the scope. Elvis made the history, not his ex-wife, Priscilla, who created the empire. If Elvis never had his footprints cemented at TCL (formerly Grauman's) Chinese Theatre, why should his ex-wife? It would have been more of an honor to have Priscilla bring a pair of Elvis' boots to be cemented in memorium, a fitting tribute to Elvis to become part of that honor.

As Elvis once said, *"Truth is like the sun. It can hide for awhile, but it always comes out."* God Bless you, cuz, and rest well in that cabin by the river where the the light of God always shines.