

WELCOME TO MY WORLD

(recorded by Elvis in 1959)...
Graceland, the home
of Elvis Presley.



Elvis, King of Rock and Roll in a stunning life-size painting at Graceland.

By Cindy Estes

We have always enjoyed our visits to Graceland, at Memphis, Tennessee, so when my husband Eddie and I planned to drive to Multrie, Georgia to the National Farm Show council meeting, a stop at Graceland was a must. Our prior visit to Graceland was the winter of 1984... a few years back. During the '84 visit, we practically had the home and the grounds to ourselves. This visit, however, we were in for a surprise: Elvis Presley's Memphis is rocking.

The original Graceland Mansion was built by Dr. Thomas Moore in 1939 and named after one of his relatives, Grace. Elvis bought the 17,552 sq. ft., 23-room mansion in the spring of 1957, at the age of 22 for \$102,500. He absolutely loved being home at Graceland, and always welcomed his family and friends to his home. It was his refuge from long days on the road performing concerts, and being in Hollywood making movies. He had always told his parents that one day he would buy them a nice home after their years of struggling financially, and that he did. His parents, Vernon and Gladys, also lived in the mansion. Sadly, in August of 1958, Gladys passed away.

Elvis invested an additional \$500,000 in expansions, including the stone wall built around the complex for privacy and security, the gate which represents a book of sheet music, the swimming pool, the racquet ball court, a large wing on the south side of the house which later became the trophy room, and the Meditation Gardens. The Meditation Gardens, constructed in 1965 provided

Elvis a space for relaxation and spiritual reflection. It now is the final resting place and location of the graves of Gladys Love Smith Presley/mother of Elvis (April 25, 1912-August 14, 1958); Vernon Elvis Presley/father of Elvis (April 10, 1916-June 26, 1979); Elvis Aaron Presley (January 8, 1935-August 16, 1977), and Minnie Mae Hood Presley/paternal grandmother (June 17, 1890-May 8, 1980). There also is a small marker in memory of Jessie Garon, the twin brother of Elvis, who died at birth and whom Mr. Presley chose not to move from his resting place in Tupelo, Mississippi.

Priscilla Presley opened Graceland to the public on June 7, 1982. In 1984 we walked through the facilities at our own pace, enjoying every moment to learn more of the history and pay tribute to the "King of Rock and Roll" and his accomplishments. On March 2, 2017, Jack Soden, CEO of Elvis Presley Enterprises, Inc.; Joel Weinshanker, managing partner, Graceland Holdings, LLC, and Priscilla Presley cut the ribbon and opened the \$130 Million enhancement and expansion: **Elvis Presley's Memphis**. The 40-acre experience is a state-of-the-art tribute of displays and exhibits of Graceland archives, Gold and Platinum records, the jumpsuits of Elvis, and the history of rock and roll legend Elvis Presley. This expansion allows for the viewing of many of the archives to be shared by the fans and public.

During our visit in April of 2017, we stayed at the Guest House at Graceland. This 450-room resort is the largest hotel to open in Memphis in 90 years. It is located within walking distance of Graceland Mansion, approximately a half block away which received a Four Diamond rating from AAA. It is tastefully decorated. Those who knew Elvis closely say he always wanted to build a guest house for his friends and now there is one. The Graceland Experience now begins with the purchase of your ticket and then you form a line as you would in Disneyland. The ticket is electronically scanned and you are handed an electronic ipad and earphones for your guided tour, as you board several vans that run back and forth between the museums and the mansion.

It was quite hysterical, as our van of fans were all mature fans who are not exactly experts on the ipads. Our poor guide was quite busy fixing all the requests of "I must of pushed the wrong button". This time we entered the mansion with many other visitors all trying to see and photograph at the same time. Since Graceland



Eddie posing outside the Graceland Mansion in Memphis, Tennessee, in 1984. The house was originally built in 1939.



1984, Cindy in front of the outdoor display of Elvis automobiles and cycles, posing in front of the many vehicles.



The Graceland living room/piano room set off by the beautiful stained glass windows.

opened in 1982, 18 million visitors from all over the world have come to visit and pay tribute to the King of Rock and Roll; approximately 600,000 a year. Many rooms throughout the mansion are the exact same as they were 33 years ago including the living room, dining room, jungle room, pool room, and TV room. However, this visit we were also allowed to view Vernon and Gladys Presley's bedroom, beautifully decorated in purple, and the kitchen, opened to the public in 1995 where we saw an additional stairway leading to the upstairs and a china cabinet containing the exact china as a set my own mother had, and left to me. It is a cherished item of mine and I'm not sure if this set belonged to Gladys or Priscilla, but now must belong to Lisa Maria and her daughters.

We exited through the back of the house and had an entirely different





The Graceland Meditation Garden was built in 1965. It is the final resting place of Elvis and the location of graves of Gladys Presley, Vernon Presley, Minnie Mae Hood Presley, and a marker in memory of Jessie Garon Presley (Elvis' twin brother who died at birth and is still buried in Tupelo, Mississippi.)

entry into the Jungle room, which also served as a recording studio for Elvis, and two of his last recordings were done in this exact room though it is obvious a few changes had to be made to accommodate the demands of the number of increased visitors. Discussions by the tour group proved to be very interesting. One lady told us her sister has come all the way from Germany every single year for 30 years to visit Graceland. Another interesting story provided was of how many people had

sold their homes and moved to Memphis, just so they could visit the Meditation Gardens each and every morning from 7:30 to 8:30, so they could pay their respect to Elvis and his family.

Once we toured the home, we toured the Trophy room/Photograph Gallery, a small white building which served as Vernon Presley's office, an old smokehouse, a stable of horses, the racquet ball court and Meditation Gardens, before entering the vans and returning to The Experience Museum area

across the street from the mansion. We then toured two planes owned by Elvis Presley: the Lisa Marie, a 1958 Convair 880 which Elvis purchased in April of 1975 for approximately \$250,000 (his improvements to the plane, adding his personal touch totalled an additional \$800,000), and much smaller plane, the Hound Dog II, a 1960 Lockheed JetStar plane that Elvis purchased in September of 1975 for approximately \$900,000.

We then began a day-long tour of the Elvis Experience of Museums featuring the Entertainer Career Museum, The Elvis Presley Automobile Museum and Presley Cycles, the Icons Museum featuring the influence Elvis had on other artists and celebrities, the Mystery Train: celebrating Sam Phillips, Elvis' Tupelo, the fairgrounds, the Marty Stuart Collection, the Private Presley and his time in the U.S. Army, Archives Experience, Elvis Fashion and Graceland Soundstage A, where you can enjoy Elvis movies and rock 'n' roll concerts on a big screen theatre. Also throughout the 200,000 sq. ft. exhibit area is a variety of gift shops and dining areas. Sirius Satellite Radio is also located here on this site and was broadcasting live, and we entered to say hello from Kansas. When the ribbon was cut by Priscilla Presley, Jack Soden and Joel Weinshanker, Mr. Weinshanker stated;



The site of Sun Records in Memphis, where Elvis recorded his first song for his mother, "My Happiness". Sam Phillips, owner.



An Elvis wall of Gold and Platinum record awards on display for the public.



On display at Graceland is the suit worn by Elvis at his last performance in Indianapolis, Indiana.

"If you haven't visited Graceland lately, you haven't visited Graceland". We couldn't agree more. Graceland is located at 3764 Elvis Presley Blvd. in Memphis, and is listed on the National Register of Historic Records as of 11/07/91, and a National Historic Landmark as of 3/27/06. It is the second most visited home in America, first being the White House. Congratulations to all involved in the additions, an amazing, tasteful tribute!

Approximately 100 miles southeast of Memphis is Tupelo, the birthplace of Elvis. Elvis was born on January 8, 1935, and spent the first two and a half years of his life in the home he was born in before moving several times in Tupelo. The City of Tupelo has done an excellent job with its museum and tribute to Elvis and his family, which includes the Home of Elvis Birthplace, his Childhood church, Elvis Presley Memorial chapel, Fountain of Life, the Elvis Presley Museum and a theatre. His childhood church was moved to the destination close by his home. Everyone on the site was very welcoming, kind, and had a story to tell. A 'must see' on your visit to Memphis/Tupelo.

Whether you are in Memphis or Tupelo it is apparent that Elvis is still the King. People love him, young and old. He remains a legend, and both are sites of respectful history and tribute. It has been our experience, no matter how many times we visit, to also feel a sense of sadness that he, like his mother, died so very young. He has so much respect and love for his kindness and talent, and all he was able to accomplish in his very short period of time here and a very profound sense of sadness thinking of the 'what if's'. What if he still could have been here, how much more could he have accomplished? Along with the joy and happiness he is missing of knowing how his music impacted so many for so long all over the world... and the joy and happiness he could have experienced as being a grandparent. Really sad.



The city of Tupelo, Mississippi pays tribute to Elvis Presley

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