

名人传记系列 (英文注释版)



Elvis Presley

A BIOGRAPHY

猫王传

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SERIES FOREWORD

In response to high school and public library needs, Greenwood developed this distinguished series of full-length biographies specifically for student use. Prepared by field experts and professionals, these engaging biographies are tailored for high school students who need challenging yet accessible biographies. Ideal for secondary school assignments, the length, format and subject areas are designed to meet educators' requirements and students' interests.

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While the emphasis is on fact, not glorification, the books are meant to be fun to read. Each volume provides in-depth information about the subject's life from birth through childhood, the teen years, and adulthood. A thorough account relates family background and education, traces personal

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SERIES FOREWORD

and professional influences, and explores struggles, accomplishments, and contributions. A timeline highlights the most significant life events against a historical perspective. Bibliographies supplement the reference value of each volume.

INTRODUCTION

To some, he's simply the King. To others, he's the poster child of overindulgent excess. But whether viewed as musical pioneer or tragic figure, Elvis remains one of the most influential performers—and cultural catalysts—of the twentieth century. He is the unwitting bridge between the safe, sexless, Pat Boone-style crooner of the conservative Eisenhower era 1950s and the edgy, counterculture performers like Jim Morrison of the late 1960s who not only exuded sexuality but reveled in it.

Despite laying the foundation for generations of entertainers to follow, Elvis himself didn't adapt well to the changing times. His career peaked and waned over little more than a decade, a surprisingly short window considering the Rolling Stones have stayed culturally relevant since 1962, Aerosmith continues to make cutting-edge music more than 30 years after releasing their first album, and Carlos Santana seems immortal.

But almost from the beginning, Elvis seemed destined to remain identified with—and informed by—a particular era, the result of both circumstance and personality. For as groundbreaking as he was, Elvis was not inherently innovative. While his talent as a performer is undisputed, his ambition only went so far. The joy he found in music couldn't compete with the rebellious lure of drugs. Despite being internationally famous, he was still insecure enough to need the constant affirmation of an entourage and to allow his career and life to be dictated by a Svengali manager whose own power depended on keeping Elvis from exerting his. In the end, he was a larger-than-lifestar without the social, instinctual, or business skills necessary to take command when his life began to spin out of control.

Whether Elvis would have ever become a pop music or cinematic force again—or been relegated to the nostalgia circuit, kept alive in the public eye primarily as tabloid fodder alongside Elizabeth Taylor and Princess Di—will never be known. It's no small irony that by dying young, Elvis became more financially successful than he ever was in life. He also became canonized as a mythic figure—the boy from the wrong side of the tracks who grew up to become King, only to have his reign abruptly cut short. But buried beneath the public image and the hype, the half-truths and the misconceptions, was a tragically all-too-human man-child who had fulfilled his boyhood dreams only to be consumed by them. The intent of this book is to reveal the man beneath the myth and the sometimes heavy price paid for achieving one's goals, so that Elvis's contributions can be appreciated in better perspective and his failings more compassionately understood.

Even though Elvis has permanently left the building, his legacy remains, because for one blinding moment he blazed a trail that left an indelible mark on this country's psyche. But while the icon lives on, what tends to be glossed over is the unlikely story of just how Elvis went from being a sharecropper's son to one of the original American Idols.

Quite simply, we are who we are because of who we were. So to truly appreciate the magnitude of his achievements, and the maddening waste of his self-hastened demise, it's necessary to look in depth at his humble beginnings and the forces that molded Elvis. Only then can his life and career be put into proper perspective.

Unless otherwise noted in the text, all quotes in this book are based on more than 50 hours of interviews conducted with Earl Greenwood, Elvis Presley's cousin and childhood friend who later acted as his unofficial publicist. The quotes are Greenwood's personal recollections of conversations he participated in, overheard, or was directly told about by Elvis and other family members. Additionally, the thoughts attributed to Elvis are based on conversations he had with Greenwood during which Elvis expressed his opinions and feelings on his career, fame, family, and women. The bulk of the interviews were conducted over a three month period from January to March 1989.

TIMELINE: EVENTS IN THE LIFE OF ELVIS PRESLEY

- 1935** January 8—born in Tupelo, Mississippi.
- 1947** Gladys buys Elvis his first guitar.
- 1953** Elvis makes a record of “My Happiness” at Memphis Recording Service for Gladys’s birthday.
- 1954** July 5—Elvis records “That’s All Right, Mama.”
- 1955** March 5—first appearance at the Louisiana Hayride.
Colonel Tom Parker becomes Elvis’s manager in August.
Elvis signs a record deal with RCA.
- 1956** The Jordanaires become Elvis’s back-up band in January.
Signs movie contract with Hal Wallis and Paramount Studios.
March 13—first album is released and sells a million copies.
September 9—appears on the *Ed Sullivan Show*.
November 16—*Love Me Tender*, his first film, premieres.
- 1957** Buys Graceland in March.
Is drafted in December.
- 1958** Is inducted into the army.
Elvis’s second film, *King Creole*, opens in July.
Gladys dies August 14.
Leaves for Germany in September.
- 1959** January 8—is interviewed by Dick Clark via telephone on *American Bandstand*.
Meets Priscilla Beaulieu in November.
- 1960** January 20—Elvis is promoted to sergeant.
March 5—Elvis is discharged from the army.

Earns black belt in karate

- 1961 Performs concert in Hawaii to raise money for the USS *Arizona* monument.
- 1964 *Viva Las Vegas* is released.
- 1968 February 1—Lisa Marie is born.
- 1970 Meets Nixon.
- 1975 Wins final Grammy for album *How Great Thou Art*.
- 1977 Elvis dies August 16.
- 1982 Graceland is opened to the public.

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Chapter 1

THE PRESLEY FAMILY TREE

April 5, 1936, was an unusually muggy spring day, even for Mississippi. The temperature hovered near 90 degrees, and the air was thick and heavy. In her one-room shack, Gladys Presley tried to keep her year-old toddler distracted from the howling wind that shook the building, while keeping herself distracted from the ominous black clouds rolling in overhead from the west.

It stormed on and off all day, ragged lances of lightning creasing the dark gray skies, followed by booming thunderclaps that made the ground bounce. The dreary day turned into a wet, unwelcome night, the rain unrelenting.

In the days before Doppler radar enabled meteorologists to more accurately track storm cells and warn those who may be in their path, all that people could do was watch the skies. At night, all they could do was listen. That evening, as many of the local farmers were preparing to go to bed, an eerie silence blanketed Tupelo.

The wind had died down to a mere whisper of a breeze. Not even the crickets were calling. It was as if the night was holding its breath, waiting. Suddenly a roaring fury dropped out of the sky. The sound was deafening, as if a giant freight train was bearing down on Tupelo. Then it exploded, as powerful—and deadly—as a bomb. It was the sound of approaching death.

Terrified people ran out of their homes—some dressed in nightclothes, some with even less. Running as if their lives depended on it (because it did), people raced toward the safety of storm cellars. Those who dared to look saw a black funnel cloud, slithering like a snake, chasing after them across the fields.

Most made it to safety, but hundreds of others didn't. The tornado ripped a swath of destruction through Tupelo, sideswiping the wealthier neighborhoods but savaging the conclaves of poor sharecroppers, white and black, to the west of downtown. One entire family of 13 was killed trying to ride the storm out in their poorly constructed shack.

In all, more than 200 homes were destroyed, 216 people were killed, and 700 others were injured. Had the tornado not skipped over the downtown business district, the tally would have been even higher. Nobody really knows how many others died that night, because in those days blacks were not included in official tallies. As it was, the Tupelo tornado remains the fourth deadliest in American history.

The same storm cell continued east, producing a number of other tornadoes. One of those tornadoes hit Gainesville, Georgia, the following morning, killing 203 people when it plundered the business district just as the workday was beginning—making it the fifth deadliest on record.

The super-cell storms produced a total of 10 tornadoes across Mississippi, Tennessee, Alabama, Georgia, and South Carolina. Tupelo, ravaged by a rare F5 tornado with winds spinning at over 261 miles per hour (a force that can literally rip the bark off trees), was the hardest hit.

Scores of injured people poured into local hospitals, which were little more than clinics and not equipped to deal with such an emergency. The overflow of injured were put up in the business buildings downtown, including the courthouse and the movie theater, with emergency crews sterilizing their instruments in the popcorn machine.

Years later, Elvis's father, Vernon, would tell people how he had stayed rooted in front of his house to watch the tornado, while Gladys ran with their baby to the safety of the storm cellar. Gladys had another version, telling Elvis what his daddy didn't mention was that he was so drunk he couldn't quite think fast enough to get out of the way on his own. "I had you in one arm and your daddy in the other. I was so mad at him I was tempted to just leave him and let him get blown away." After she dragged her husband to the cellar, Gladys added, he "passed out and slept through the whole thing."

The Presleys were among the lucky—their home was spared and all immediate family members were safe and accounted for. But the story about the killer tornado, which all Tupelo youngsters heard—with ever-increasing embellishments—from the time they could understand language, made an indelible mark on Elvis, who grew up constantly reminded that everything a person owned could be snatched without a moment's notice. And since tornadoes are hardly a rare occurrence in Mississippi, he faced his fears with seasonal regularity.

Every time he was hustled down into the storm cellar, huddling with relatives while waiting for the danger to pass, his imagination would run wild. It didn't help that the cellars were like caves, as they were built into the ground and very spooky, especially at night. Nor did it help that the older cousins would tease Elvis, hoping to scare him even more than he already was. They would tell him that if he sneezed, he could cause the cellar to collapse and bury everyone alive. As usual, Gladys would come to his defense and angrily reprimand whoever was teasing her son.

While the great tornado of 1936 would remain an indelible memory for the Presleys, storms were really the least of anybody's worries, because most of their lives were spent just trying to keep their heads above water. Just as today, in the 1930s Mississippi was America's poorest state, having never recovered from the Civil War. Prior to 1860, Mississippi was the fifth-wealthiest state. But 30,000 men from the state died in the Civil War. Those plantation owners who survived were left bankrupt, partly by the emancipation of the slave workforce and partly because Union troops had left much of the state destroyed.

Not much had changed over the next 70 years. Except for the few big landowners, the majority of people in that part of Mississippi were sharecroppers at one time or another, a life filled with hard work and few rewards. In theory, sharecropping was a good idea. In practice, it was another matter.

The system worked this way: A landowner would give out a plot of farmland to anyone willing to work it. The sharecropper would build a one- or two-room shanty near the parcel of farmland, with the understanding that the landowner would share the harvest's profits at the end of the season.

Unfortunately, even at the best of times there were barely enough profits to go around. For most people, sharecropping was just a way to keep food on the table and a roof over their heads, with little hope of ever saving enough money to buy their own land. Vernon Presley always seemed particularly snake-bit. This feeling was due to circumstances: Elvis was the only child and too young to work in the fields, so Vernon had to work the land on his own; Gladys preferred to find work in the one or two local factories or take whatever seamstress jobs she could find.

Even so, the Presleys were frequently on the verge of going under, and quite often they turned to relatives for financial help. Gladys always accepted food or money gratefully, her voice steady but her eyes betraying the humiliation she felt. She knew better than to promise that the loan would be repaid, so instead she offered to do sewing or other tasks as a form of payback. Gladys never shied away from hard work, although she wasn't afraid to let her family know just how hard she toiled.

Gladys would walk back home with her head held high, but her stooped shoulders and shuffling walk gave away the heaviness of her heart, weighted down by poverty made worse by her husband's easygoing acceptance of it. Although amiable and personable, Vernon was also terribly irresponsible, to Gladys's unending embarrassment and dismay. He lacked ambition and was often laid up with what he claimed to be a chronic bad back, but nobody ever knew from what.

Some suspected it was the mere thought of having to pick cotton—the main crop grown around Tupelo at the time—that gave Vernon a pain. It was literally backbreaking work. As a young boy, Elvis would sit perched in his favorite climbing tree, watching local sharecroppers hunched over as they picked the fuzzy cotton bulbs off the low-lying bushes, their hands bloodied and gnarled.

It's not surprising that Elvis decided very early in life that he was not going to be a farmer—from what he could see, people nearly killed themselves working and ended up with nothing to show for it. But he didn't dream of being famous; his goals were much simpler. He wanted to own a gas station and make enough so he and his mom would be able to get by on their own.

For anyone growing up in the grim days of the Depression, simply having three meals a day was a goal seldom achieved. For someone like Elvis, whose family owned little more than the clothes on their backs, owning his own gas station was a fantasy that, at the time, seemed like an impossible dream. So, had anyone suggested that Elvis would become a famous singer, he would have thought him or her seriously mentally impaired. His family had been farmers and ne'er-do-wells for as far back as anyone could remember, and there was no reason to think the future generations would be any different.

FAMILY TREE

While many of the Presleys were indeed transients, Elvis would have been surprised to find out that his family tree was full of interesting characters. Today it's a given that a person's every movement is tracked by someone, but record keeping, especially in the South, was haphazard at best, well into the twentieth century. Still, it is possible to trace Elvis's ancestry back about 200 years. His paternal great-great-great-great-grandfather, a Scotsman named Andrew Presley Jr., was born in 1754. His father, Andrew Sr., had immigrated to North Carolina in 1745 and made his living as a blacksmith.

Just two weeks after the signing of the Declaration of Independence, Andrew Jr., at age 22, bought 150 acres of land in Lancaster County,

South Carolina, where he intended to settle down with his new wife, a young Irish woman whose name has been lost to history. But the War of Independence interrupted his plans, and Andrew dutifully joined the fight. He still managed to visit home often enough to father at least one war baby.

Andrew had great faith in his new country and was a willing soldier, if not a skilled one. He was a private in the Continental army, and family records indicate that he fought with George Washington during his long tour of duty in the Revolutionary War. According to documents attached to his pension records, Andrew also claimed to know General Lighthorse Harry Lee. The highlight of Andrew's service in the army occurred in 1781 at the battle of Etauw Springs, South Carolina, not far from where he and his wife had settled.

Few history books include this skirmish, but it figured quite highly with Andrew. His brigade fought troops led by General Cornwallis, and the battle is said to have lasted 1 hour and 45 minutes. The Continental army's forces succeeded in driving back the British redcoats, who by this time in the conflict were probably fighting without much conviction. Casualties were light on both sides, and the Americans took more than 500 prisoners.

There's an amusing historical footnote that comes to light in an officer's report that turned up, unexplained, in Andrew's personal papers. Because Andrew was illiterate, he could not have written, or even read, the report, so why he kept it is a mystery. Perhaps it was a memento of his greatest day in battle and the adventure that followed.

During the confrontation, Andrew's regiment overran a building the British were using as a base, forcing the redcoats to flee out the back and into the woods. While searching for possible prisoners, the soldiers came across what must have been the officers' quarters, which were well stocked with quality liquor. As the battle raged outside, Andrew and his cohorts settled back in the safety of the building and drank themselves senseless. It was the beginning of a long-standing Presley tradition.

Andrew stayed in the service until the war ended in 1783. He was 29 years old and needed to support his family now that the army wasn't caring for him anymore. Following in his father's footsteps, he looked up the local blacksmith and offered to work for free to learn the trade. After his apprenticeship ended, Andrew set up his own shop and spent the rest of his life in quiet obscurity. He lived comfortably in retirement off the \$20-a-month pension he received from the government and died shortly before his 101st birthday.

One of Andrew's children was Dunnan Presley, the war baby born in 1780. Dunnan suffered from a severe case of wanderlust and spent half

his life roaming the countryside, although he never traveled more than 120 miles from his birthplace. When he was 20, Dunnan said goodbye to his parents and moved to North Carolina. It can be inferred that the relationship between Andrew, a man who believed in duty and hard work, and his unsettled son might have been strained. Whether Dunnan forfeited his share of Andrew's land by leaving or left because Andrew had no intention of staking him to his own plot is anybody's guess.

In North Carolina, Dunnan earned a living any way he could, taking one odd job after another. He continued to move whenever the urge struck, seldom staying in any one place long enough to establish himself. He never had a penny to spare but did manage to support a family. By the time he was 40 Dunnan had a wife and was the father of two girls and two boys, including Dunnan Jr.

Then tragedy struck. Dunnan's wife died unexpectedly—although typically, the records fail to say why. He remarried in 1830 to a woman more than 20 years his junior. Some quick arithmetic indicates his second wife was not much older than his children. Dunnan and his young bride had three sons over the next 10 years.

In 1836, Dunnan, along with his wife and their children, and his children by his first wife, who hadn't yet moved out on their own, relocated to Georgia, drawn by the belief—completely mistaken—that the government was giving away free land. Despite his bitter disappointment when he found no free handout, Dunnan tried to make a go of it. But he quickly grew disenchanted and uprooted his family again and headed to Polk County, Tennessee.

An 1850 census report paints a sad picture. Now nearly 70, Dunnan was as poor as always. He owned no land, and his net personal property was worth all of \$250. He died later that same year and was buried in a pauper's grave.

Dunnan Presley Jr. was born in Madison, Tennessee, in 1827. Like his father and grandfather before him, Dunnan Jr. was illiterate. On the few occasions it was necessary, he signed his name with an X. Dunnan Jr. was a low point in Presley family history. There's not much good to be said about him. He was a bigamist and twice an army deserter.

Junior's first army desertion dates back to the Mexican-American War, when he was just 20. Joining the army probably seemed like a good idea at the time, but Dunnan Jr. decided fairly soon after enlisting that he wasn't overly fond of being shot at. He was a private in Company C of the Fifth Tennessee Infantry when he went AWOL and took off for home. But he was quickly caught and spent a short time in military jail before being sent back to the front. The government was surprisingly forgiving, because

when Dunnan Jr. was mustered out in 1848, he received two dollars for clothing and a land grant of 160 acres.

In 1861, Dunnan Jr. married Elvis's great-great-grandmother, Martha Jane Wesson, in Itawamba County, Mississippi. Interestingly, the evidence clearly shows that he was already married with at least one child—Dunnan III—with that family living in Tennessee. It also appears that each wife knew of the other.

On May 11, 1863, Junior joined Company E of the regiment of the Mississippi Cavalry as a corporal. Not only was the government generous, it had a short memory—Junior had left his last tenure as a private. He enlisted for a year and received \$300 for supplying his own horse. True to form, Dunnan Jr. deserted the next month. But this time when he took off, he deserted his family as well, leaving Martha and their two small daughters to fend for themselves in Fulton, Mississippi.

All told, Dunnan Jr. was married four times. Whether he was ever divorced is another matter. His last wife, Harriet, was 20 when they were wed in 1882; Dunnan Jr. was 55. They settled in Brown County, Missouri, and Dunnan Jr. died eighteen years later in 1900.

One of Junior's children from his marriage to Martha was Rosella Presley, born in 1862. Whether out of rebellion against her father's bigamist ways, stubbornness, or indifference to social mores, Rosella bore 10 children out of wedlock over a 28-year period. What was equally shocking for the neighbors was that she gave the children her last name instead of the fathers' names.

An unwed mother of 10, Rosella was not able to provide much for her children. They were poor as dirt with no hope of getting anything better. Being bastards, the kids suffered the sharp barbs of disapproval of the local townspeople. Even so, Rosella was considered a caring mother who did the best she could in raising her children. She taught them to be polite and to fear God, and she took them to church every Sunday until they moved away on their own. She died at 63, without ever revealing the identity of her children's father or fathers—even to them.

Rosella's son Jesse was her one problem child who never did learn the fear of God. Jesse Presley, called J. D., was born in Itawamba County, Mississippi, in 1896. As a youth, he was a hellion; as an adult, he was a hard-working, hard-drinking, and hard-living hell raiser who created more than his share of shock and gossip. Whenever J. D. didn't come home at night, it was a safe bet he was either out carousing with some woman of questionable reputation or sleeping off a bender at the local jail.

Growing up, J. D. had always been restless. To him, sitting in a classroom all day was a waste of time. Against his mother's wishes, he left