Elvis Presley Speaks!, 1956

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Read his own story in his own words.

Elvis Says:

"I've thought I've been in love, but mostly I've played the field. I enjoy dating more than anything. Is that wrong?"

"I like a girl who's fun to be with, who enjoys just going out and looking around."

Plus: 100 New Pictures
TOLD FOR THE FIRST TIME—ELVIS'S FULL, INTIMATE STORY, IN HIS OWN WORDS AND THOSE OF HIS CLOSE FRIEND ROBERT JOHNSON.
ELVIS PRESLEY SPEAKS!

"He gives the impression of having a lazy manner—but he's coiled like a steel spring."

That's just one of the revealing, close-up views you'll get of Elvis in the story that starts on page 6.

"Why do I have four Cadillacs? I just like cars," Elvis explains. That's not the real explanation—his generosity. He bought one for every member of the family."
ONE EARLY SUMMER DAY in 1958, a tall, dark youngster with glossy, tousled hair and a strangely engaging mixture of quick friendliness and shyness walked into the office of Sun Record Co. in Memphis, Tenn.

He looked around for a moment curiously, then asked:

"Anybody looking for a singer?"

It was lunch time, and Sam Phillips, president of Sun, was out. Mrs. Marian Keisker, his assistant, looked up from her desk and asked:

"Who are you?"

"I'm Elvis Presley," the young fellow answered, smiling. "I want to make a record."

No one then, including 18-year-old Elvis or Mrs. Keisker, would have thought of this moment as having any significance.

Yet out of it came one of the most amazing success stories of our day, a rags-to-riches fable which rivaled anything Horatio Alger ever wrote, a true-life affirmation of the American tradition that anyone who can dream and work hard enough can come from nothing to success.

Out of it came a living legend at 21—Elvis Presley—who almost overnight was to become known as one of the most colorful personalities of our day, who was to excite millions to admiration and bring down such vilification and misinformation and half-truths and outright lies in print as have been hurled at no other entertainer of our time.

There are several Elvis Presleys.

There is the Elvis who is presented, in varying degrees of condemnation and some praise, by those who write about him—Elvis the legend, with four Cadillacs and the "wiggle."

There is the youth with searching, brooding eyes and the strangely exciting voice who can stir his audience to an intensity of pleasure which erupts in screams and violent adoration, the artist whose records sell millions and whose presence is box office magic, who is expected to gross close to a million dollars this year.

There is another youth—the friendly, laughing, generous and yet strangely complex Elvis whom his family, friends and associates know.

"Kind of hard to keep my hair combed right ...."
"like," he told me later. "I had been singing all my life, and I was just curious what it was like."

He had no music, was carrying the battered guitar he had made his companion since he was 18.

"The first record I ever made was 'My Happiness' with 'That's When Your Heartaches Begin' on the other side," Elvis remembers. This record is still in existence, a collector's item if it could be bought.

It cost $4 for Elvis to find out how he sounded. In the studio as he sang, Mrs. Keisker said, was a lady with her sailor son. Sam Phillips came in before the record session was completed. It took about 15 minutes.

"Listen to that boy sing!" said the sailor's mother. "My, he has a sweet voice."

Mrs. Keisker and Phillips agreed with her. It was a sweet voice, albeit untrained, thin without background, and he did unconventional things with it.

When Elvis walked out with his prized record, to carry it home to his parents, Mrs. Keisker and Phillips looked at each other and nodded. They saved it—and forgot all about the boy.

Several months later, though, he came back. He wanted to make another record, this one for his mother. This time both Phillips and Mrs. Keisker were there and listened as they recorded "Casual Love Affair" and "I'll Never Stand in Your Way."

Both were sung in an odd mixture of country ballad with pop style. Slow, reedy, with the faint background guitar—but again with the odd lyric sweetness. I believe, however, few could discern in it what Elvis was to do later.

"I had never sung anything but slow music and ballads in my life at that time," Elvis told me one night in the den of his new home, as his parents played the record. It is scratched from wear, and Mrs. Presley listens with a wisp of a smile on her face.

After Elvis left Sun Records that day, Mrs. Keisker picked a slip of paper from the desk and laughed. "It was in Sam Phillips' handwriting, and said: "Elvis Presley—good ballad singer. "Then she added, "Save this," and put it in the files.

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That's the same thing the other note said, she told him.

But it took the hand of chance to bring Elvis back to the studio again, an extraordinary coincidence which played an almost miraculous part in shaping his destiny. Without it, he might still be driving a truck, or working in electrical supply, or on a production line.

Phillips and Mrs. Keisker, ever on the search for new talent, had brought back from a Nashville visit a demonstration dub of a song called "Without You."

It had been sung by a Negro singer, and they couldn't find out who he was. It was a ballad, and Phillips thought it had something. But who would sing it?

Despite their good intentions, and their "save it" notes filed away, Elvis didn't enter their minds as they mulled over possibilities.

"Then, just by chance, Mrs. Keisker bumped on the street into the sailor's mother who had been present and remarked on how sweetly Elvis sang so many months ago.

"Whatever happened to that boy?" the sailor's mother asked Mrs. Keisker. And to her Elvis owes a lasting debt of gratitude.

Mrs. Keisker went back to the studio and asked Phillips, "Remember Elvis Presley?"

"Yeah," said Sam, musing. "Yes, indeed. Get him on the phone."

Mrs. Keisker called Elvis at Crown Electric Co. By this time, he was joking, he had been promoted to the front office.

"They had taken him out of a truck and had him answering the phone," Mrs. Keisker said. "I guess it was the practical thing to do, because I know most of the calls must have been for him anyhow.

"I asked him at his convenience to come see us. "I turned around and there was Elvis coming through the door. He almost knocked me down coming in. He flashed that smile at me, and you'd
have thought M-G-M had just asked him to star in a super movie. I don't know how he got there that fast— he surely didn't come in a truck.

Elvis turned out to be a dismal flop singing "Without You." He would smile a wry smile and slap his thigh and mock himself: "I hate him, I hate him... anyone who can sing like that I hate."

Somewhere, probably still unknown, there is a young Negro who might be discovered overnight if he could prove he made that record Elvis likes so much. Sun wants him.

By this time, however, Phillips had become really interested in Elvis. While Phillips’ Sun label was small and without large distribution at that time, he had been for several years very successful in presentation of new talent which he had discovered himself—so-called race artists, whom the general public didn't know but whose names were familiar in every colored cafe and tavern with a juke box. And something about Elvis fascinated Phillips, although he didn't know how to catalogue him.

Phillips sat Elvis down and made him sing.

"I guess I must have sat there at least three hours," Elvis recalls. "I sang everything I knew—pop stuff, spirituals, just a few words of something I remembered."

Phillips sent Elvis to Scotty Moore, a guitarist he knew, and said: "Work with this boy."

Then happened one of those strange coincidences which have figured so often in Elvis’ career. Scotty Moore lived just across the street. He had been playing rhythm and blues for years before the so-called rock 'n' roll craze.

They worked together hour after hour, with Elvis wracking his brain for all the songs he thought he might do well.

"I don't think any of us was too impressed with the other," Bill Black said, his broad face breaking into his infectious grin. "We just happened to like each other. Actually, I think Elvis intended to use my brother on the fiddle if he got a chance to make a record."

The trio assembled in the recording studio and went to work for Sam and Mrs. Keisker. Again they went through everything Elvis could remember.

"Then, somehow, a song popped in my mind that I had heard a long time ago," Elvis said. He tried "That's All Right, Mama."

"And all at once it was there—the drive, the spontaneous and fantastic vocal effects, the something."

Sam and Mrs. Keisker felt it. Elvis, Bill and Scotty knew they were going, but they didn't know how well until later when they heard a playback.

"We couldn't believe it was us," Bill said.

They backed it up with "Blue Moon of Kentucky," a song Bill Monroe, the famous country singer, had composed and made famous many years ago.

Sam Phillips was excited. They just had the dub, but he burned to get it played. He turned over in his mind which disk jockey to try it on, then on a hunch went to WHBQ to see Dewey Phillips, who had been playing rhythm and blues for years before the so-called rock 'n' roll craze.

Dewey put "That's All Right, Mama" on the air, and the plaintive, soaring voice with its odd inflections went out into the night.

"That'll flat git it," said Dewey, who has been talking all his own. "Yessir, that'll flat git it."

That was in July of 1954. Within a week, Sun was struggling with a backlog order of some 6000 records for this unknown new artist, and they didn't have a commercial record pressed.

Something tremendous had begun to happen. Sam Phillips and Marian Keisker realized it. Elvis didn't. He was just hoping. He had been hoping a long time.

Ever since he used to sit on the front stoop of his home and watch the handsome cars go by and turn and say, "One of these days when I'm grown I'm going to have two Cadillacs sitting out in front of my place."

"One of these days when I'm grown I'm going to have two Cadillacs sitting out in front of my place."

Ever since the days when he used to turn to his parents and tell them, with the tender, unselfconscious affection which belongs only to the very young: "Mama and Daddy, one of these days I'll build you a pretty brick house, too. Just wait and see."

Let's go back and see...
CHAPTER TWO

Childhood... the magic years... Tupelo... then Memphis and Humes High... Elvis can look back on his life and say, without jest, "the first 20 years are the hardest."

Last May we were sitting in the dining room of the New Frontier Hotel in Las Vegas. It was a late atmosphere of luxury, and Elvis by this time had begun to break into the really big money. He was well-groomed, his clothes were informal but expensive, his general appearance was that of a very prosperous person, and he already had the reputation of being a young man with many Cadillacs and expensive tastes.

I made some joke about his living on the fat of the land, and he took it seriously—it is only my more serious statements which he will honor with one of quick yelps of delighted laughter— and said:

"You know when I first began to get some money, I bought a lot of things I had always wanted. Like cars."

"My father saw we never went hungry, but—well, you know I never had a lot.

"I did some of the things I never could do before—and believe me it has been fun."

No, Elvis never had a lot, in some respects, and yet he seems to have been singularly fortunate in others.

But let's go back—to Tupelo, Miss., and the beginning.

Tupelo is a farming community, present population close to 12,000, in North Mississippi about 100 miles from Memphis.

Vernon Presley, Elvis' father, grew up on his father's small farm near Tupelo. He didn't have much formal schooling, got thru about the fifth grade.

"I had as good a chance as anyone," Mr. Presley said, "but I just didn't like school."

At 17 Vernon Presley married his 15-year-old sweetheart, Gladys Smith, and started trying to earn a living for them.

"I farmed cotton for a while. Then I did different jobs by the day. I was on the WPA for three years and got to be a carpentry foreman.

"Our house wasn't much. It was a little two-room shotgun house I built myself, with some help from my daddy."

The plumbing was the old-fashioned kind—outdoors.

In that little shack on January 8, 1935, just two years after Vernon and Gladys married, a thin squall announced that a new life had come, and 17-year-old Gladys Presley cuddled her son.

It was twins—identical twins—but something went wrong. One died just a few minutes before birth. He was perfectly formed," Vernon Presley said, "but something happened. We were awful broke up about it."

And so Elvis came into the world without the brother he might have had, and who might have helped round out that restless, searching, constant need for companionship which is part of him.

Vernon and Gladys had the names all picked out for their twin boys. "We wanted something which would sound a little alike," Mr. Presley said. "Elvis is my middle name—I don't know how I happened to get it. We named the boys Elvis Aaron and Jesse Garon—the names just seemed to go together."

When Elvis was a year old, one of the most terrible catastrophes in the record books struck nearby—the Tupelo Tornado, which killed hundreds, ripped the town apart, smashed its heart.

The twister passed a mile away from the Presley home, and the Presleys thanked God while grieving for friends.

"Nothing beats home cooking!"

—Elvis having a snack at home.
Singing together at home.

Now, why'd you bring that up?
—Pop Presley's just cracked a joke about the new car.

The storm didn't directly affect Elvis, but it was in the atmosphere of chaos and ruin and rebuilding nearby in which he spent his early years.
Otherwise, he lived the normal, carefree happy life of most boys in small towns.
From the beginning, there was something about him which attracted people. The house was always full of laughing, playing children.
"He was just a regular boy," Mr. Presley said. "He played all the kid games, and he'd come home all skinned up and with his clothes torn sometimes.
"He could always talk to people, and he was never shy. He had a way of getting along with others, and he'd go out of his way to avoid trouble. If one of his friends got mad, he'd give him his toys to try to get..."
baseball and football was his favorite game. "But he didn't get in many lights."

"There was one time, tho. . . . Elvis was about 7 at the time, and there was one little bully boy who was running over him. I told Elvis, 'Son, I know you're not scared of him, but you've got to let that fellow know it, too."

"The bully came over to our house and made some trouble, and Elvis whipped him good. He never did have any more trouble."

"Elvis has always been strong. When he got a little older he got a kick like a music. Sometimes when we'd just be playing around he'd hit me a lick on the shoulder and it would make me numb all over."

Mrs. Presley kept a good watch over her son. They grew into a close-knit family, mutually dependent, finding pleasure in their own company.

From the earliest years Elvis was fascinated by music. The Presleys belonged to the Assembly of God Church, and when he was 2 or 3 he used to slip from his seat by his parents and toddle up to the choir, clap his hands in time as they sang.

The family sang often together—religious songs. Elvis got his first girl friend when he was about 9—and that's just what she was, a girl "friend."

Caroline was a couple of years younger, the daughter of the pastor of their church, Rev. James Ballard. The Ballards had lived nearby and for a time, when a difficult occasion arose, even lived in the Presley's modest home for a few days. The Ballards later moved to Jackson, Miss., and the last Elvis heard of Caroline Presley was attending a college in Texas.

He still remembers with affection the confidante and playmate of his childhood. He saw her once later, in 1953 at the famous country music festival, Jimmy Rodgers Day, in Meridian, Miss., when Elvis was honored as the artist who had done the most for country music that year.

When he was 9, Elvis won his first singing honor. Principal Cole of the Tupelo High School asked Elvis to enter an amateur contest. It was held in connection with the Tupelo Fair, and broadcast over Station WELO.

Elvis sang "Old Shep," a sentimental country music song, and his father, driving a truck miles away, swelled with pride as he heard the sweet, boyish, uncertain soprano. There wasn't any musical background. Just Elvis. He won fifth prize.

"I still remember it," Elvis said. "Caroline and I rode every ride at that Fair that night."

Mr. Presley's brother, Vester, and Mrs. Smith's brother, Johnny Smith, both played a little guitar.

"They didn't know much, just a few chords, but Elvis used to sit and watch and they taught him some cords," Mr. Presley said.

Elvis fell in love with the lovely fragments of sound which came from the stringed box. He bought his first guitar when he was 13, paid $12.95 for it, priced it more than anything he had ever had.

He is a self-taught musician, doesn't read music. "I don't know A flat from a minor," he told me once, "and neither do the boys in the band. I guess scotty and Bill can read music a little, but not enough to figure out a piece. We just get an idea, work it out until we come out with something which we like."

Elvis kept that same $12.95 guitar until after his first record had clicked and he had begun to make several hundred dollars a week for personal appearances.

Then he traded it in for a new one, and still gets peeved at what happened. He bought one which cost $175. "The man gave me $8 on mine on the trade-in. Then he tossed it in a waste basket. Shucks, it still played good."

The guitars Elvis now uses cost about $800, and he has then them encased in hand-tooled leather jackets.

He juggled that old guitar with him everywhere, trying for new sounds, growing excited when he got what he wanted.

As a child, Elvis felt the need of having people around him always, either friends of his family. "He wanted a brother or sister bad," Mr. Presley said. "That was just one of those things that couldn't be. Sometimes you wonder, when you see other families with several kids, why it couldn't be the same with you. Hard, we spent a lot on doctors trying to change it, but there wasn't anything we could do."

Mr. Presley had worked at a variety of jobs—working on defense projects, day labor, driving a truck for a wholesale grocer.

"Elvis has tried for a dollar all his life," he said. "Seems like there never was a time when we weren't in debt."

"But even if we didn't have anything much, we saw somehow that he had his. He always had a good Christmas, with trives and pedal cars and little guns. "And we always kept him dressed as well as we could."

But, said Mr. Presley, "I believe for the biggest part of his life he always knew he was going to do something."

When we didn't have a dime, he used to sit on the doorstep and say, 'One of these days it'll be different.'"

"When one of these days" finally came, when Elvis first began to make a hundred dollars or so on his first Texas tour, he sent home a money order every night after he got paid, with a little note saying what he wanted done with it.

The note that came with the first money order Elvis sent home, said Mr. Presley, read:

"Take this and pay off every debt we've got. It isn't enough, I'll send some more."

When Elvis was 14, his father decided they'd have a better chance in Memphis. They moved into a little room, the three of them, while Mr. Presley looked for work.

"We hit it pretty hard. His mother and I both walked the streets with snow on the ground. We just had to tough it out."

Soon after that, however, Mr. Presley found work with a precision tool company, and they moved into an apartment in Lauderdale Courts, a public housing project.

The government ruling was that any family which made more than $500 a year had to move.

They lived there for three years, while Elvis was going to school at Humes High.

All three of them worked. Mr. Presley eventually went with a paint manufacturer. Mrs. Presley had a job in a curtain shop, then worked hard hours on her feet at the coffee urn in Britting's, a huge downtown cafeteria. She was a nurse's aide for three years at St. Joseph's Hospital in Memphis.

Elvis mowed yards for a time, altho it was tough competition in a field dominated by grown Negro yard boys.

"I got him this hand mower," Mr. Presley said. "The first evening he came in and sat there with a frown on his face and laid 50 cents out. Then all at once he broke out laughing and pulled a handful of change out of his pocket, and he had about $7."

"That never was a lucky bone in him."

Elvis was a hungry boy—not in a literal sense, perhaps, but it was a hungry part of town where the dollar came hard and went fast, where the clothes on your back were credit at some side street shop, where lunch money was counted in pennies.

The teachers at Humes High, a dedicated group of people, recall when times were hard and they donated several dollars of their own inadequate pay each month to help put a little more food on the students' lunch trays.

Humes is in the hungry part of town—the tough part of town.

But Elvis, who liked everyone, had a toughness all his own.

And the boy from the country melted easily into this strange new life.

Humes High School is a three-story, block long structure of dull brick, sprawling in the old north end of town, hard by the business district, close to the factories and heavy industries.

The single-family homes about it are old and 

Elvis shopping . . . . "If you want to get ahead, you gotta be different," he says.
weatherworn, and there is a heavy concentration of ancient large homes turned into rooming houses and flats.

Public housing projects, such as Lauderdale Courts, where Elvis lived, helped rehabilitate the neighborhood considerably.

There are some children of middle income families sometimes referred to as underprivileged; in other words, poor.

For all that, Humes is a good school. Many of its students have become prominent businessmen and civic leaders, and it has produced its share of athletes and scholars.

But, as Miss Susie Johnson, who has taught there 30 years, said: “When one of our boys or girls does something special, they should put an extra gold star after his name, because our children have farther to go to make it than most.

“Our children have to be lifting on their own bootstraps. Elvis was always lifting. I had him in my home room when he was in the ninth grade.

“He was a gentle, obedient boy, and he always went out of his way to try to do what you asked him to do.

“He was a boy who needed friends, and he made them. Because of his background his English was atrocious, and I don’t know whether he’ll ever be able to improve it enough. But as a boy, he had a warm and sunny quality about him which made people respond.”

Miss Mildred Scrivener was his 12th grade home room teacher, and also in charge of the annual variety show at the school.
Whenever he's in town, Elvis still frequently drives by to see her. Last Christmas he pulled up in his Cadillac and presented her with an alarm clock. She recalls:

"Elvis always liked to entertain. We used to have him sing at all our home room parties."

"Then one year we had the big variety show, and I suppose there were more than 50 on the program. I told the audience there were too many for any to take an encore, but the one who pleased the audience most could have an encore.

"Well, it turned out to be Elvis. I don't think he had a bigger thrill since than he did that night. The delighted look on his face. The next year he was out of school, but I sent word to him and invited him to come back and be my guest artist, and he did.

"The songs he sang then were slow, hillbilly ballads, and there was something plaintive about them.

"Whenever there was anything like a Red Cross drive or something similar, he was always willing to do more than his share.

"We have a little religious service each day, and he was always quiet and intent during it, and he seemed religious. I don't recall that he was ever what you call a ladies' man when he was in school. He wasn't a top student, but he made it without worrying me.

"Once I asked him what he wanted to be, and he scratched his head and said, 'The only thing I really want to do is to sing!'

Once, on one of his little visits with his old friend, Miss Scrivener gave him a little talking to.

"Elvis, it seems that whenever anyone becomes successful in the entertainment world, there are all sorts of pressures put on them to change themselves. The girls go to Hollywood, and pretty soon they're all wearing their hair the same and they look the same. Now, Elvis, it's none of my business, but I wouldn't let myself be like everybody."

Elvis smiled and said:

"Think I'll just keep my sideburns, then."

Elvis used to lug his guitar to school with him. He kept it in his locker during class, but had it out at lunchtime, strumming away.

When Elvis first entered Humes he wore his hair cut short, often in a crew cut or butch.

"I always thought he looked real nice with his hair short," his mother said.

Elvis began growing the sideburns when he was 16. For a time he had both sideburns and a crew cut.

Recently as we were chatting at his home, I asked Elvis:

"How about the sideburns, what's the story?"

Elvis cocked his head, fingered one of his trademarks and grinned broadly:

"It's really simple," he said, "but no one seems to understand it.

"When I was a boy I used to think that sideburns and a mustache would make me look older. I couldn't grow the mustache, so I settled for sideburns. I don't like them now as well as I used to, but
there's nothing I can do about it. Sometimes something like that can change your whole appearance."
And right now Elvis can't take any chances. A newspaper as a stunt printed pictures of Elvis with "clean-cut young man."
Back in the mail from Elvis' fans came a tremendous "No!"
"For goodness sake mind your own business. We like him the way he is," was one typical response in a letter.
Red West, one of Elvis' old friends from Humes High, says: "When he was in school Elvis used to take quite a bit of kidding about those sideburns. He never seemed to mind much, tho. He was regular, and everyone liked him."
A psychology class at Memphis State College recently devoted a week to a study of Elvis' personality, as interpreted by the class from what they knew of his work and his background.
The consensus was that his desire to be himself is so extreme that it has been both helpful and harmful to him.
The sideburns were his declaration of independence, his rejection of conformity to the environment which at the same time nursed him and stifled him. Perhaps he was kicking out blindly, as an infant kicks aside its swaddling clothes. And perhaps he held on to them against ridicule for the same reason that many mature nonconformists grow beards.
While he and his friends played in the streets and stood on corners, the big, shiny, rich world rolled by in big, shiny, rich cars. All right, he wasn't big and he wasn't rich, but by gosh he could grow sideburns if he wanted to.
Perhaps he was a rebel with a cause he didn't fully understand.
Elvis would probably laugh at this concept.
His mother had always given him close supervision. Now, in the close-knit community of Lauderdale Courts, with him beginning to grow up, it wasn't possible for her to watch him so closely.
Elvis ran with the boys. With the girls, too.
The boys were restricted in their pleasures, because pocket money was hard to come by. Many of the children at Humes work after school, to earn their spending money, help pay for their clothes, help out at home.

"This is Mama's cooking . . . corn, peas, ham. Good!"
under age. He was on his own then, doing odd jobs when he could find them, loafing with the gang.

In the long, hot summer afternoons they cooled in the shade of trees and watched the big cars go by. At dusk they engaged in boisterous horseplay, or played games in which the savagery of body contact left them bruised but somehow relieved, pleasantly tired.

Boxing is the one great leveller. A boy who is handy with his fists can feel himself equally armed against anyone on equal terms, and Humes was a Golden Gloves hotbed. A good boxer could get his picture in the paper, get that inner satisfaction and reassurance which comes from thinking:

"I am somebody."

Elvis never approached the proficiency of some of his friends. He liked the rough sportiveness of standing up and trading blows, but he didn't have the killer instinct.

He has superb natural co-ordination, as evidenced in the lithe grace with which he handles his body. He developed an odd and typically nonconformist boxing style.

But, for the benefit of those who had seen Elvis as a sort of Pied Piper of the Juvenile Delinquents, Elvis stayed out of any serious trouble.

He was never before Juvenile Court, and his school record is clean with the exception of one little incident his father told me about. He was found in a neighborhood store when he should have been in class.

Hookey, no less, if someone wants to make an issue of it.

"What really happened," his father said, "was that Elvis got started off late one morning. When he got to school he didn't want to go in the middle of the class, so he was just waiting for the first class to get over and go into his next class.

"When they told me about it, I explained, and they understood, and it was the only time. It was our fault that he was late."

"Until I came to Memphis," Elvis said, "I had never been to the movies. I liked them a lot."

So when there was an extra quarter, Elvis sometimes went to a neighborhood show with his friends.

"Here I am in the
Humes High School ROTC."

"Always, somebody's got a guitar around,"—Elvis and his old friend Disk Jockey Dewey Phillips.
Their home on Alabama Street.

Third home—bought by Elvis when he began clicking.

That was about it. So what was left? The streets. Exploring. Looking about.

Sometimes with his friends, sometimes alone, Elvis would head for Main Street, where the windows, the bustle of moving traffic, the hurrying crowd, gave him something to watch and wonder about.

He made sort of a headquarters out of the North Main Firehouse, sitting around talking with the firemen, listening to them. Often he carried his guitar with him. Sometimes he’d lean up against a lamp post and look out at life passing by, strumming and singing softly to himself. Thinking.

In his senior year he got a job at Loew’s State Theater as an usher, along with Red and some of his other friends. “I made $15 a week,” he said, “and I was darn glad to get it.”

What more natural for a boy who liked movies and needed money, in an economy which said a boy was too young to work in some businesses but didn’t tell him how to get the things he needed? This meant working at night, on downtown Main Street.

Elvis saw the street late, with the signs glowing, and to this day it holds a spell over him. There’s rarely a night when he’s in town when he doesn’t make a once over of the street, to see if anything has changed since he saw it last, even tho that may have been just last night.

Early in school Elvis had become interested in girls, and when he could he had a date. At the risk of staining a page in someone’s memory book, it should be said that he went with many girls, not with just one, mostly apparently just looking for companionship.

When his old friend, Miss Scrivener, read in the papers about the rumored romance between Elvis and Mrs. Judy Powell Spreckels, former wife of sugar heir Adolph Spreckels, Miss Scrivener knew right away it was just a lot of posh.

“Why I remember when Elvis came over to school to be our guest star,” she said. “He came up and put his arm around me, and there was some little girl with him and she was wearing a ring Elvis had given her. I asked her, ‘Does this mean you’re engaged?’ and she said, ‘Oh no, nothing like that. Elvis just had the ring and said he wanted me to have it.’”

Elvis graduated and went to work for Crown Electric Co. driving a truck. He got to work with some of his friends. They worked installing wiring, and he delivered the supplies to them.

He had noticed the Sun Recording Service sign, and there came that day when he walked in and asked to make his record so he could hear what he sounded like.

He was making $40 a week—pretty good for a 19-year-old—and getting a kick out of earning his living, but there was still that restless, wondering something which had been with him since childhood.

Also, in some of the neighborhoods where he drove his truck, he saw and went into homes such as he had never known existed, except in the movies.

Then came that fateful phone call from Sun.

“’I was an overnight sensation,” he said. “A year after they heard me the first time they call me back and I make a record.”

Well, what happened after they made that first record wasn’t exactly overnight, but it was pretty fast. That night Sam Phillips took the record down to WHBQ Disk Jockey Dewey Phillips; he caught Dewey, who can be contrary, in a good moment.

Dewey put it on the turntable and there spinning out into the night, went a strange, rhythmic chant. . . .

“Well, that’s all right now, Mama. . . .
"Let's take a break - I'm tired!"

"How's business?" - Elvis chats with cashier at Loew's State, where he once ushered.

"That's all right now, Mama...
Dewey got excited and the phone started ringing.
Dewey called up Elvis and said: 'Come on down here, I'm playing your record.' Elvis got up and went.
That same night Sam Phillips took the record down to a country music disk jockey, Sleepy Eye John, who had quite a following on WHHM, and Sleepy Eye played "Blue Moon of Kentucky."
"That's All Right" was a strange mixture of Negro field jazz with a country inflection. "Blue Moon of Kentucky" was more in the conventional country music vein, altho it had an odd drive also.
Versions differ on what happened next. Sleepy Eye himself, who later left for Albuquerque, N. M., disclaims any credit for having helped discover Elvis, but he does have the distinction of having played the "Blue Moon" side first.
One source tells me that Sleepy Eye didn't care for it, and that it probably wouldn't have been played had it not been that he left on vacation next day and a substitute sitting in for him found the platter laid out and kept it spinning.
But things were spinning fast for Elvis, too. Record royalties get paid twice yearly. Here was Elvis with a record which people seemed to like. Sun had a back order for 6000 copies within a week. And Elvis was like a kid stretching for an ice cream cone held teasingly out of his reach.
"I'm a singer now," he thought. "I've got a record.
But how do you go about being a singer, even if you've got a record, with no money and no one to sing to?
Bob Neal gives this account of Elvis in those early days:
"At first we had a big problem getting his records played.
"Rhythm and blues disk jockeys refused to play them because they said they were country music, and the country music disk jockeys said they were r&B. Elvis went thru some sections for personal appearances at much lower rates than he had been making, just to get a following, and this led to a demand for his records.

"He is a talented, friendly young fellow, actually just about like most kids his age. He worries about offending anyone, especially hates the thought that people might think he has the big head.

"I remember one day he was standing in front of my record shop on Main Street, and some boys passed by. Elvis' name was becoming known then, and the boys were apparently a little awed by some of the stories they had heard about the money he had begun to make, because they just barely nodded and looked at him sideways and kept on going.

"Elvis watched them for a minute as they went on up the street and when he turned to me there were tears in his eyes, and he said: 'What's the matter? those fellows went to school with me, and they were my friends, and they didn't even stop to talk.'

"Elvis needs friends. Sometimes he gets real lonesome, because the more popular--the bigger--an artist gets the more lonesome he gets.

"And up there at the top it's real lonely. 'I've never seen him when he wasn't nervous going on stage. But, and this may seem an odd thing to say about an entertainer, he has a tremendous competitive spirit. He was always up against the tops on these tours, and he always wore himself out trying to outdo them.'

"Good night, hon." - Elvis and Barbara Hearn, whom he's known off and on for three years - a real pal.
My own personal relationship with Elvis goes back to that fall of 1954, shortly after his first record was played, and forgive the personal intrusion but it may help explain why I am in his corner and have been from the beginning:

It would be nice to be able to say that I heard Dewey Phillips play “That’s All Right, Mama” and instantly told myself, “This boy is a big story.” But it didn’t happen that way. I am out of the jazz age of the Dorsey’s, Lunceford, Armstrong, Goodman, and if I heard the record at all it was thru a glass, darkly. It didn’t register.

But the Miss Susie Johnson mentioned earlier as Elvis’ ninth grade home room teacher is my favorite aunt, and she hounded me continually to do something about him because he was “one of my boys.” And from listening to her thru the years, somehow I had identified myself with Humes, thought I knew something of the spirit of the school, and how much the success of one of her boys meant to her.

My 14-year-old daughters, who wouldn’t even listen to my Lunceford or Goodman, had fallen hard for Elvis’ record, and my wife, who is strictly long hair in her tastes, had also somehow been finding it interesting. Because of the semi-personal tie—he was one of Aunt Susie’s “boys”—we began to pay particular attention when the record came on, especially in the car where the daughters dominated the radio dial. And

"Think it easy work?" - Elvis puts everything he has into every performance. See the perspiration on his chin?

Mostly Elvis drives himself, but on long jumps he flies and his bandsmen drive the car.
"Now, what'll I wear this afternoon?"

gradually, I went thru a musical re-orientation, and something of the different quality in Elvis' two songs began to reach me.

There even came that day when I found myself anticipating hearing it with pleasure after it was announced, and then realizing, "By gosh, this is something new and exciting. It's not like all the other country music you hear, and it's not like the rhythm and blues. It's something completely apart." I began collecting information about him and found that there really was an overlooked story right under my nose. I met Elvis in January 1955, about six months after release of "That's All Right" and "Blue Moon."

The headline on the story was:

SUDDENLY SINGING ELVIS PRESLEY ZOOMS INTO RECORDING STARDOM.

Lest you think I am trying to take credit for having discovered Elvis, let's correct that impression right away.

Actually, Elvis never was "discovered" in any ordinary sense of the word; he just happened. But he was to go thru a series of occasions when he was "discovered" by this person or that. Sam Phillips and Marian Keisker had discovered him. So had Dewey Phillips. So had Bob Neal. So had the lady with the sailor son. And so had the audiences. He was already making more money than he had ever seen before in his life.

The story was, however, the first large-scale public acknowledgement that Humes High's boy, Elvis, the son of Mr. and Mrs. Vernon Presley of 402 Alabama Street, was making a bit of a splash.

He, Bill and Scotty had already traveled some 25,000 miles on personal appearances within the past couple of months.

A typical week's schedule for them then ran like this: New Orleans, Friday; Shreveport, Saturday; Memphis Auditorium, Sunday; Ripley, Miss., Monday; Alpine, N. M., Friday and Saturday.

That meant pretty good traveling for a beat up Lincoln, and sleeping in the car on overnight jumps.

Sun had brought out two new records, "I Don't Care" and "Good Rockin' Tonight," plus "Milk Cow Blues" and "You're a Heartache."

Elvis was a big, good-looking, good matured, polite strangely dressed boy.

"Got my own office," he told me proudly. "Elvis Presley Enterprises."

But Mr. Neal's more experienced hand was on the tiller, and so they began granting the picture requests at the modest handling fee of 25 cents each. On mass orders, they cost 8 cents.

At that time Elvis was being billed as "the hillbilly cat," and he dressed sharply, with sporty shirts, drape jackets and pegged pants, even tho Scotty and Bill wore the traditional semi-uniform of cowboy shirt, cowboy belt and tie affected by most country music outfits.

His records were still being listed in the ckw charts of the trade publications.

A lady photographer had gone with me to get a picture of Elvis, Bill and Scotty, and sat around listening while we talked. When we left, I asked her:

"What about him?"

"Well, I don't know what it is, but he's got something," she said. "If I were a little younger..."

Trying to put down my confused impressions of this youngster, who acted with such casual and cheerful naturalness, and who yet was so obviously not natural in his appearance and dress, I described him at the time:

CHAPTER FOUR

The fire had started already. In the space of just a few months, as the result of his personal appearances, he was already getting from 60 to 75 letters a day from impressed young ladies who had seen him in some wild part of Texas or Arkansas and who ardently desired his picture to keep them company in the lonely months until he next came that way.

"We sent them out free at first," he said. "He was grateful that anyone wanted a picture of him."

"Quit holding back, Red!" - Elvis loves sparring. Red West is one of his closest friends.
"Hi.s eyes arc darkly slumbrous, his hair sleekly long, his sideburns low, and there is a lazy, sexy, tough, good-looking manner which bobby soxers like."

It may not be literature, but the description still stands, with one qualification. He does sometimes give the impression of being lazy of manner, but actually he's a coiled spring ready to unwind.

The story ran with a three-col picture at the top of the first page of the second section, and while, as I say, Elvis was already on his way, it did have an effect. His first record was still selling steadily, but there had been a lull in airing it locally. Elvis was being practically ignored by every deejay except Dewey Phillips, and he wasn't riding it too hard. But that night there was an Elvis revival on the air, and a lot of people who didn't normally keep up with what went on in the country music circuit learned for the first time that we had a genuine phenomenon in our town. Also, used for exploitation purposes, reprints of the story helped build Elvis as a personality in towns he hadn't played before.

Things had been moving fast, but now they got faster. Elvis got his first Cadillac, a pink one, 1954, and the bookings got bigger.

Some writers have said that Elvis has already had six Cadillacs, including the first two wrecked. That is not the case. The first one didn't wreck, it burned.

Bob Neal says it was a crisis in Elvis' mind.

"There wasn't a thing Elvis could do about it," he said. "They were driving from Hope, Ark., to Texarkana, when the brake lining caught fire. They pulled it over to the side of the road, but they didn't have any way to put out the fire, and the car was a total loss. Some truckers came along and helped, but it wasn't any use.

"Elvis called me about 2 or 3 o'clock that morning, greatly shaken. 'I've ruined my car, it's the end of my career,' he said. I calmed him down, but he was really miserable about it."

No one who knows him has ever questioned Elvis' personal courage. Once in Midland, Texas, when they were making their second tour thru there, they stopped at a motel with a big swimming pool.

Bill and Elvis went swimming. Bob Neal, an expert water sportsman himself, said that Elvis is not a good swimmer.

"Elvis is not even a passable swimmer," Bob said, "and he couldn't swim any better than Bill."

"But without hesitation he went in after him, trying to wrestle Bill in to the edge. Bill was getting panicky and grabbing, and there could have been trouble except that a guard saw them and went after them and pulled them both in."

"Elvis was all right, but Bill was full of water. But I think that it is indicative of Elvis' character that he didn't even have to measure the situation, he just went right in and did what he thought had to be done."
Altho he is not a good swimmer, never having had an opportunity to learn as a boy, Elvis is fond of the water. Neal, who keeps his own boat, taught him to water ski. He tried to get on top of that water once or twice and couldn't make it. The third time he did get to the top, just seemed to have natural balance and fast reflexes and picked it up quickly. He became pretty good.  

Later Elvis brought some of his friends down to see him perform on the water and urged them to try to emulate him.  

His humor is usually boisterous, and when one of his friends would take a spill and whack the water Elvis would practically roll on the floor of the boat laughing.  

"On the road," says Bob, "I've seen hundreds of instances of Elvis' generosity. Like picking up the bill for the whole table after eating. I know on many occasions he has gotten gifts for various people for no particular reason. He'll see a trinket, think of someone back home and buy it."

Neal says that much has been written about Elvis' eating habits is a lot of nonsense. There have been stories that he eats nothing but pork chops and mashed potatoes, including for breakfast, and there were reports early in his career that he would go for long periods without eating while he was all wrapped up with some idea about his music, then come out of it abruptly and gorge on seven or eight hamburgers and three malts at a sitting. "That's not true," Neal says. "His appetite is strange, but not in the way it has been described. He is finicky about his eating. He doesn't eat regular meals.  

"He gets fond of various things at times. Once he got a craving for bananas and cream, along with a sandwich or soup, or sometimes a hamburger. For weeks, it seemed, he would have a dish of bananas and cream almost every time he ate.  

"He does not eat steaks, largely, I think, because
he was brought up under conditions where there wasn't much beef on the table very often, and I think perhaps he has a subconscious feeling about it.

"For breakfast he'll eat a couple of eggs fried so hard you can practically hammer them, and several orders of bacon. He likes pork. Mostly, he lives on sandwiches, hamburgers, snacks and special treats like ice cream."

"In New York several times, music publishers have entertained him with parties where there has been elaborate food, lavish buffets, and stuff like that, and he has told me he had to hold himself down to keep from leaving the table."

In his relations with the men from that other world he says, "but although he didn't reflect it I believe he was awed on first meeting them. Things he has told me let me know that at first he was scared by the big town and the big people."

Since childhood, Elvis has been a restless sleeper, a night prowler. Neal shared rooms with him often on the road and says he sleeps uneasily.

"After a show, he is always under tension... He can't just go to his room and go to sleep. Rarely have I seen him go to bed before 2:30 to 4:30 in the morning."

"There's very little he can do at that time of night in some of these towns. He looks for people to talk to, tries to read sometimes, frequently has a date. Sometimes he just gets out and drives around by himself."

"He is a good driver, but fidgety and nervous on the highway. On long jumps, he would play the radio very loud, start singing and dancing, or rather tapping his foot, just to break the tension."

"He never missed a show in all the time I had him. The closest he came was when the first '55 Cadillac got wrecked at Texarkana. They had done a show in New Orleans, got paid off late, got a speeding ticket on the way. Time came for them to show, and they weren't there, so the other performers kept working."

"Then Elvis called and told about their having a wreck about seven or eight miles from town."

Elvis didn't wreck this Cadillac, either. Scotty was driving, passing a pick-up truck which pulled to the turn. Scotty chose a ditch. No one was seriously hurt. In many ways, Elvis was a very easy performer to handle, Neal says. "He seemed to respect the judgment of the people advising him, but there is a hard-grained stubborn quality in him. You counsel him, he will agree to do something, and then, at the next show he doesn't do it. Ask him about and he'll say, 'I'm sorry, I forgot'."

Neal's observations concur with my own in one important respect—that Elvis is a person of extreme character opposites. "He is really a shy, ingrown sort of personality, but when he goes on stage or under certain circumstances when he is around people he becomes the complete extrovert."

"Before he goes on, he'll pace back and forth backstage. But when he goes on, it's like turning on a light."

"His performance often depends on audience reaction. There may be a quiet audience—one which is enjoying the show, but not doing a lot. This worries Elvis, and he keeps working harder and harder to bust them loose."

"About the celebrated wriggle, Neal has this to say: "Ever since he started, he has been doing a sort of little bop dance, a rhythmic wiggle with his legs."

"Soon after the first of the year one of his legs in one number got going round and round in a corkscrew motion. It got such a roar from the crowd that he kept it and enlarged on it."

"When he does something and the crowd reaction is loud and enthusiastic, it stays in his act and he improves on it, trying to get those screams and squeals which assure him that he is going over."

"Altho Elvis has long since been Victor's and out of the Sun fold, Mrs. Keisker grows indignant when she hears some of the gossip which grew up. "He's still a country boy at heart—and his idea of a good time is to drag Main Street with a pretty girl sitting by him in a pretty car," she says indignantly.

"I'm sorry, I forgot.
Bob himself helped arrange the next step in Elvis' career—and a most important step it was.

He got together with Col. Tom Parker, who manages Elvis today, and they came to terms.

Col. Parker is one of the country's most colorful behind-the-scenes personalities, a shrewd businessman, with contacts from coast-to-coast.

He had the know-how to get Elvis something besides the regional recognition which had been his.

On Nov. 22, 1955, I was able to announce in my column in The Memphis Press-Scimitar: "Elvis Presley, 20, Memphis recording star and entertainer who zoomed into bigtime and big money almost overnight, has been released from his contract with Sun Record Co. of Memphis and will record exclusively for RCA Victor."

Both Sun Phillips and RCA Victor officials said at the time that the money involved was believed to be the highest ever paid for a contract release of a country-western recording artist, which is how Elvis was still being considered.

What made it more unusual was that Elvis, still only 20, had only one more year to go on his contract with Sun.

Billboard reported the price was "a reported payoff of $40,000." Phillips told me, "That's close enough."

With the contract, Victor got rights to five unreleased Sun labels, including "I Forgot to Remember to Forget," which was then No. 4 on the country-western best-seller list.

Involved in the deal besides Col. Parker, Neal and Phillips was Coleman Tiley III of RCA Victor.

Col. Parker also arranged for establishing Elvis Presley Music, a publishing firm, in conjunction with Hill and Range Music Inc. of New York City.

There was a great deal of snickering in some record industry circles at the deal. This was really taking a chance.

But Col. Parker, Victor and Elvis had the last laugh.

Elvis told me: "One of the luckiest things that ever happened to me is when Col. Parker took me over."

He has deep respect for his manager and obeys him implicitly—about most things.

Col. Parker had brought up such personalities as Eddy Arnold and Hank Snow, whom he still manages, and also handled Gene Austin in Austin's comeback. He knew every trick of the trade, and things began happening fast.

Elvis got discovered a couple of times more.

In a Rock 'n' Roll series on INS, it was reported that: "At a disk jockey convention in Nashville last November, some talent scouts for RCA Victor 'discovered' long, narrow, cold-eyed, hot voiced Elvis."

Col. Parker landed Elvis a five-time deal on the Tommy and Jimmy Dorsey tv program on CBS, Stage Show, and CBS began giving Elvis a build-up as Tommy Dorsey's "discovery." Dorothy Kilgallen's column carried an item on Dorsey's "discovery."

Well, it was good for Elvis, but it happened after both Billboard and Cash Box had named Elvis "most promising new singer" of the year in the clow field in their annual disk jockey polls, and after he had been presented the award as the singer who did the most for country and western music at the big Jimmy Rodgers Day celebration in Meridian, Miss., and after Country-Western Jamboree, another trade publication, revealed that Presley got 250,000 votes in a readers poll and was "New Star of the Year."

And overnight, several million viewers also "discovered" Elvis for themselves.

At the time I announced Elvis' appearance with the Dorsey's in my column on Jan. 27 of last year, this anecdote appeared: "Elvis Presley will play his second most important engagement this year when he appears with Tommy and Jimmy Dorsey on Stage Show.

"Did I say this is Elvis' second most important
engagement? What, then, was the most important?

"Well, Elvis will get big money and a big audience for his appearance tomorrow night. He jumped almost overnight from very moderate circumstances into a large bundle of money for a boy his age.

"Elvis' most important engagement was two weeks ago. Humes High had a Father's Night Show. A male beauty contest, with each home room's champion marching up on the stage to the accompaniment of appropriate music. Very big deal.

"You know who was the star of the Humes High Father's Night Show? Elvis! Sang about 10 songs—all for free—and had the time of his life."

The fire kindled back at the Eagle's Nest, on the road from Plytheville, Ark., to Carlsbad, N. M., with intervening Texas points, had begun to spread. Elvis got up on the Dorsey's show and poured it on. The first week it got a big hand.

By his second engagement things were sizzling, with a full brigade of bobby soxers squawking and screaming in ecstasy, trying to get to this new idol when he came off stage. The panic was on.

The doorman at CBS-TV's New York Studio 50 was quoted: "I haven't seen anything like it since Johnnie Ray and Frankie Sinatra, and I'm not sure I saw it then."

It was during this period that Elvis' popularity shifted significantly. Here he was, recognized as a cew artist, appearing with a popular band. What had happened?

Never previously had a cew artist successfully made it over to the pop side. Eddy Arnold, who had probably sold more records than anyone besides Crosby and Como, never did it. Red Foley did it on a single, with "Chattanooga Shoe Shine Boy," but it didn't last.

But all at once Elvis was no longer a country star—he was also a rhythm & blues star and a pop star. He introduced "Heartbreak Hotel" and "I Was the One," his first Victor production, on the Dorsey show.

"I Was the One" is still his favorite of all he has recorded. Strangely enough, it was the one which caught on at home, on the Memphis charts. "I Was the One" became the top tune overnight with Memphis disk jockeys and retail sellers, while "Heartbreak Hotel" was little played. It was not until some time after "Heartbreak Hotel" was recognized as a runaway best-seller that it edged past "I Was the One" and made No. 1 in Memphis.

Elvis' singing of "Blue Suede Shoes" also is acknowledged by Carl Perkins to have helped in his astonishing sale of that record. Elvis had it on an album, but not as a single. Carl's record had got off to a fast start, and with the boost it sold a million for wily Sam Phillips of Sun, who had Carl in reserve when he let Elvis go on to Victor's greener fields.

Looking back over my notes on that first Dorsey appearance:

"Presley puts intensity into his songs. Over-emotional? Yes. But he projects. He 'sells.' Elvis has definitely arrived.... But you can't throw that much into something without it telling. It'll wear him out. It will exhaust him emotionally and physically. He's 20 now. If he's wise, he'll slow down a little and live another 20 years."

A few months ago in Jacksonville, Fla., he collapsed. According to the musicians—Bill, Scotty and D. J. Fontana of Shreveport, drummer, who joined them on their second Texas tour and has been part of the team ever since—Elvis worked terribly hard that night.

Before the performance, I was told, two other performers on the same bill had been talking about how they were taking the show. Elvis, tensing and nervous, walked out to show them what was what.

After the show they walked to the car with their instruments, he got in the car and passed out cold.

"We took him to the hospital," Bill Black said, "but he was back at the hotel the next morning. Just put on his clothes and walked out. Said he couldn't
"This is me, way back when..."

—Elvis on Feb. 5, 1955

when he was

known as The Hillbilly Cat.

Elvis and Liberace at Las Vegas... Elvis has done for guitars what Liberace did for pianos.

Elvis in his new three-wheel foreign car. He bought it as a gag.

Yes, somebody’s always gotta have a guitar around!

Elvis and old friend Leon Quinley.

sleep over there.” Fans had even tried to get into
his hospital room.

I asked Elvis recently if he didn’t think he had
been burning the candles too much at both ends and
reminded him of the Jacksonville experience.

“I was just over-exhausted and got too hot,” he
said. “I had hot flashes and got dizzy.

“The doctor warned me if I didn’t slow down a
little I might have to lay off for two years.

“He told me I do more work in 20 minutes on
the show than the average day laborer does in an
eight hour day.”

And what are you doing about it?

Elvis smiled, a little sheepishly: "I feel all right
now, and I don’t think about it when I’m doing all
right.

"Heartbreak Hotel" was going like wildfire, and
so was everything else Elvis had recorded. It was
selling strong not only in this country, but also in
Canada. It edged up and up, and then Elvis’ first
album began to make entertainment news.
"C'mon, Red, let's go." - Elvis stopped by to pick up Red West for dinner.

It jumped into first place in Billboard's album chart, was destined to stay there for months.

But already the Presley fire had begun to strike some sparks, and there were some letters beginning to come out in about Elvis' now famous dance.

From the beginning of his national exposure on tv he has been controversial. I received several reasonably worded and intelligent sounding letters from viewers who thought his dancing was, to put it polite-ly, extreme. One or two even came right out and said "vulgar" and "obscene."

They say a prophet is without honor in his own country, but Elvis' schoolmates and friends must have stood by him to the last man.

I heard any severe criticism of him, and most of it was to the effect that few people are so generous and friendly and pleasant.

A woman who had known him many years and recalled how he used to buy clothes on credit at her husband's store said this:

"He's a grand boy. I'm 55, and I grew up in the jazz age. We never thought much about the Charles-ton or the Black Bottom. I don't like rock 'n' roll, but Elvis is different.

"They talk about juvenile delinquency... Here's a boy who didn't have much except what was in himself, and I think he has done a pretty good job of lifting himself. He just has rhythm in him, and it has to come out. He's full of life, and already I can see the rough edges being smoothed out. That dance he does... nobody said anything when Marguerite Piazza did 'St. Louis Blues.'

"Last Christmas I saw Elvis do something. The Salvation Army kettle at Main and Beale wasn't getting any money. Elvis watched the people passing by for a while, then he went over and put a bill in. Then he began to cut up and tell the people, 'Let's help the poor people have Christmas dinner. And people began to smile and the money started dropping. He just made them feel good. Give the boy a break. Memphis will be proud of him.'

The storm continued to rage, and intensified after Elvis' first appearance with Milton Berle at San Diego. That was a pretty poor show, because it was staged outside on a carrier flight deck, but it was there that the Elvis cooker started steaming.

Two turnaway audiences of 5000 paid $15,000 to hear him sing eight songs in the San Diego Arena, in addition to those who saw him on the Berle show.

It was as tho some of Frankie Sinatra's old black magic had settled down on Elvis' shoulders. The arena manager had to call out police and a platoon of Shore Patrol to handle the mob of adorers who pursued Elvis to his dressing room.

It was after this that Producer Hal Wallis signed him. He had given Elvis a screen test several weeks previously, as the result of Presley's sensational reception on the Dorsey show.

Elvis on impulse called me one afternoon from El Paso. This was shortly after he had signed the contract, and he was excited about it.

"I took an acting test, not a singing test," he said. "I wouldn't have been interested in just singing in movies."

He was mauled pretty badly at El Paso. They had already started trying to get at him at close quarters, and he considered himself lucky to have a shirt on his back. "One girl took a swipe at me and really clawed my side," he said. "It stung pretty bad for a while."

Love throwing those balls. . . . Elvis is a real sharp-shooter.

Altho he was already on his way to becoming a legend, Elvis' rise had been so rapid that some people hadn't caught up with it.

In some Midwestern schools, one of those recurrent rumors cropped up that he was dead, and the students were reported so upset that they weren't going to school.

A newspaper called Paramount to check the report that Elvis had died, and a studio publicity man said: "Who in the hell is Elvis Presley?"

In June the AP out of New York queried the Memphis office to the same effect, is Elvis dead? That night I saw him and asked him to comment on the query, from the wire service ticker machine. He read it over carefully, put it down and sat for a moment, then broke out laughing.

"If some people had their way maybe I would be," he said.

Still later in June, United Press queried on a report that Elvis had been secretly married for two weeks to the daughter of a nationally prominent financier and industrialist.

It seemed absurd, but those things have to be checked out. Just two nights before Elvis had been
happily dating an old Memphis girl friend, but now he had left on tour.
A long distance call to Col. Parker in New York brought a chuckle from him. "He hasn't got hitched unless he did it in the last hour or so."
Further checking revealed that the financier mentioned had three daughters—all happily married.
Still another frequent rumor is that Elvis is on dope.
"I don't even smoke, and I've never drunk anything alcoholic," he said. "Furthermore, I don't ever intend to."
One way such rumors get started. A New York columnist carried an item about an unidentified "rock 'n' roll king" who was, this columnist told us authoritatively, being watched by two detectives because his manager was afraid that his orgies with weed and women would erupt in scandal. A few days later, in the same column, there was an item to the effect that "Elvis Presley has to have guards on stage at every appearance." Some reasoned it was the same person.
One heart-broken youngster—poor, misguided child—wrote that this couldn't be anyone but Elvis, because he was undisputed rock 'n' roll king, but that he would have her undying devotion all her days, dope fiend or not.

CHAPTER SIX

In between engagements, Elvis was now chartering planes to get back home at every opportunity.
Inside one year, he moved his family three times. They had moved from the public housing project, Lauderdale Courts, because the combined income of his parents had reached more than $3000, and were living in an apartment in an old house on Alabama Street, in the same old neighborhood, when Elvis got out of high school.
The first thing he did when he began to get some money was move them to a comfortable, moderately new brick home on Getwell, a pleasant home. Elvis didn't know then quite how fast his stock was going to rise, tho. And just a few months later, after touring all over Memphis, they chose a home in a fashionable section of town on Audubon Drive.
And by this time he had two Cadillacs to put in the driveway—just as he had promised he would have in those days when he used to sit on the front stoop and watch the world go by.
He also had a spare—just for the road.
In May Elvis faced another big test—Las Vegas. Col. Parker had booked him into the New Frontier's Venus Room.

Elvis was barely old enough to be allowed in the place. Twenty-one is the age limit.

The Las Vegas date focused further attention on him nationally. Therefore, the press hadn't paid much attention to him except to give him bad local notices wherever he played.

Now, all at once, he wasn't just a barnstorming oddity. This was the real bigtime.

Life Magazine carried a spread on him captioned: "A Howling Hillbilly Success," reported his salary at $12,500 a week for his two weeks at the New Frontier. Other reports put it at $10,000. Actually, it was somewhat less than that. The press agents out there fudge a little. But it wasn't much less.

By now his records were accounting for half of all Victor's sales in the pop field, and that was against a formidable stable which included some of the biggest names in the business, including Mr. Como.

Winchell trumpeted: "Elvis Presley has stolen the thunder from Johnny Ray & Co. The hottest thing to hit the teen-urge set."

But Las Vegas was different from Kansas City and Wichita and Memphis, went the speculation.

In the New Frontier's plush salon, Elvis faced a different kind of audience, super-critical sophisticates, wondering boredly what this youngster who had somehow got himself in the headlines had to offer.

No teenagers.

No screams to herald his entrance, no frantic shouts...

Just cold silence, surmounted by the inevitable hum present wherever alcohol is used internally.

He was in a $40,000 floor show with Freddie Martin, the night club darling of the West Coast, whose honey smooth music came from 28 silken throats.

Elvis took a typically dramatic stance, whanged on that old gee-tar, stomped with his foot, and it was: "A one for the money, a two for the show, three to make ready... and "GO, CAT, GO..."

Elvis' legs went into stuttering, squirming movement, those dark-rimmed eyes were fixed on infinity, his long hair flopping over his forehead, his body almost rigid with emotional intensity, yet throbbing like a high-powered car with the gas set wide open and the brake set tight.

But these cats were too tired to go, they were already real gone.

Elvis has been to see an uncle who works in a Memphis factory. That's his distinctive walk.
Wrist-watch Elvis is studying was a gift after his smash hit in Las Vegas.

Because the teen-agers couldn’t see the regular show and were clamoring to be appeased, the management put on a special Saturday afternoon show. The carnage was terrific. They pushed and shoved to get into the 1000-seat room, and several hundred thwarted youngsters buzzed like angry hornets outside.

After the show, bedlam! A laughing, shouting, idolatrous mob swarmed him: he fled to the insufficient sanctuary of his suite. The door wouldn’t hold them out. They got his shirt, shredded it. A triumphant girl seized a button, clutched it as though it were a diamond.

A squadron of police had to be called to clear the field.

A dazed older woman who had been bowled over in the teen-age tidal wave was discussing it incredulously at a bar, over a glass of medicinal beverage, to calm her jangled nerves:

"My gosh what those kids did to the ladies room! Lipstick all over the walls . . . baskets turned over and the paper strewn around . . . it looked like a wrecking crew had just finished." Elvis laughed about it. "Shucks," he said, "it wasn’t near as bad as some of the times. Like when they threw rocks in the bus windows so they could grab at me and try to get autographs. The roughest was in Texas. I got scratched all over my back.

Elvis says the later occasion when wire services carried stories about his show being stopped before it was over when the kids charged the stage, and Drummer D. J. Fontana being thrown in the pit, were exaggerated. "There wasn’t any pit there," he said. "And if I finished my song, alohi I did get out in a hurry. I made a new door where one should have been.”

How does Elvis feel about this violent affection from his fans?

"Well, I have to defend myself, but honestly I love it. They’re the ones who like me, and they’re just trying to show it.”

Time Magazine covered Elvis at Las Vegas, and I was worried about what they might do, because Elvis is a wide-open target for any writer who wants to flex his sarcasm. But Time was remarkably light on him, in comparison, even made a complimentary remark on his lower register. Most writers who really get close to Elvis are inclined to be kind to him.

The trouble is, he’s gun-shy. But he earnestly explained that there had been a mix-up on the Alnic Mosby appointment, that he didn’t know anything about an appointment with her. They got together later in Hollywood and she did a feature on him.

Elvis played to packed houses every night in the Venus Room, and in a town of celebrities he was a celebrity. He had a high time there, sauntering thru the hotel, by turn laughing and carefree, or with his thoughts turned inward, and everywhere he passed a rustle of conversation followed him, like the wake of a boat.

In the bars, in the lounges, in the lines waiting to get in to see him, one heard: "Is this Presley kid really all that good? . . .” Or, "I just don’t understand what he’s got myself. . . .” Or, " . . just plain dynamite.”

At Las Vegas with Elvis as valet-companion was his cousin, Gene Smith. Gene’s duties are somewhat vague, but he’s supposed to take care of the clothes. Mostly, tho, it seemed that Elvis just wanted some company.

Elvis in a night club is somehow strange. He doesn’t drink or smoke, and he told me he doesn’t dance either, aside from what he does in his act.

Mrs. Keisker once told me that soon after Elvis made his first record, he went to Nashville with her and Sam Phillips, and that they went to a roadhouse where Sam wanted to scout some talent.

"There was some drinking at neighboring tables.” Mrs. Keisker said, "and it wasn’t a very nice place. Elvis leaned over to me and asked if it would be all right for him to go out and wait in the car.

"He told me, ‘My mother didn’t raise me to be in a place like this.”

One thing about Las Vegas pleased Elvis: it never goes to sleep. He had company during those long night hours, and night had become like day to him.

He roamed around, caught some of the shows, especially the Four Lads, whom he likes a lot. He never dropped a nickel in a slot machine while he was there.

"It don’t appeal to me,” he said. "I’m trying to save. “You know when I first began to get some money, I bought a lot of things I had always wanted. Like cars. My father saw we never went hungry, but—well, you know I never had a lot.

"Got it that time!” - Elvis scores a strike at the fair grounds.
"I did some of the things I never could do before—and believe me it's been fun.

You ask me what I like to do now... Well, I'm just having fun when I get the time, but I don't have much time. Like this afternoon, I'm going over and ride the little scooter cars in the amusement park.

"I guess I enjoy dating more than anything. Is that wrong? I think I'd be crazy if I didn't. I like to take a girl out and look around and have fun."

Elvis spent most of his spare time riding the scooter cars. He rode the little cars every hour he was free in Las Vegas, spent over $100 on rides for his friends, some girl friends and himself.

Elvis is fearful that his friends will think he has been changed by what happened to him.

"I want the folks back home to think right of me. Just because I managed to do a little something, I don't want anyone 'back home to think I've got the big head."

But he knows in his heart that some things have changed.

"I can't just do like I did."

At Las Vegas, the hotel announcing system was calling his name almost constantly. Long distance from all over the country. Girls, and some women old enough to be his mother.

So there has to be a buffer of people around him—an entourage to give him some free time, protect him from the girl who was just sitting and thinking about him and just had to call him up and sure, you remember me, Elvis, I was the one in the blue dress that night, you gotta remember.

His sleeping and walking hours are turned upside down by his work, aside from his own inability to sleep easily.

Elvis Presley enterprises have become big business, and there has to be some time for talking with his manager, Col. Tom Parker, and making decisions. He has to look over new music possibilities.

In his first year, Elvis did remarkably well. In his second, he will gross between $800,000 and a million dollars.

About $10,000 a week goes to him.

Is he saving?

"Yes, I'm saving. My money goes in the bank, and every three months we make a payment on my income tax. I'm not spending it all.

"I couldn't live the rest of my life on what I've got—not the way I want to live—but I could go quite a few years."

The pressure on the job is terrific. He becomes intensely nervous from lack of sleep and strain. He is alternately intensely interested in something, or quickly bored.

Does he realize that other stars have glowed, then burned out?

"Sure, I know. It may not last forever. But this didn't happen all at once. Since the beginning, when I first began, it was just the same. The only difference, the crowds are bigger now."

"I know it can end, but it won't happen all at once, either. I can always make a living on the road."

"What I really want, tho, is to be a good actor."

What kind of music does he like other than his own?

"All kinds. I like Crosby, Como, Sinatra, all the big ones. They had to be good to get there. I've always been kind of partial to Dean Martin. I like the Four Lads.

"And I'm real partial to good religious quartets—like the Stamps and the Blackwood Brothers. They've loved that kind of music ever since I was a boy, and especially if there's a real good bass singer."

"I'm going to record some religious music one of these days."

Elvis barely made it to the gas station. He has an absentminded habit of leaving engine running wherever he parks.
"How does it look? Okay?"

CHAPTER SEVEN

From the beginning of the time the press began to pay attention to Elvis, it was almost unanimously hostile. The reviews in cities where he played to big houses lashed him for his movements, derided his voice.

But it was not until after his second appearance with Milton Berle that the full storm broke, and he was described in language such as has seldom been used about a public figure.

To a certain extent, this was Elvis' own fault. His advisors, Col. Parker and others interested in his welfare had urged him to modify his dance, altho he continued to insist that all he was doing was "wriggle some."

But criticism was nothing new to Elvis. He had been kidded as a boy about his sideburns and stubbornly held on to them. Now he sometimes cuts down on the movements which had earned him such contemptuous abuse from columnists and critics as "a male burlesque dancer," "a sort of Jane Russell with sideburns" and similar phrases.

But there are contradictory impulses in Elvis. He longs for respect and response, but the most positive affirmation of this to him is in the screams of his audience, and so here goes that writhing movement again.

"The trouble is," said one friend of Elvis, "that he doesn't think he's going over unless they're tearing the house down, and he'll just keep working on them till he has them doing what he wants. He doesn't realize that a lot of people just want to sit and enjoy his singing."

It was understandable that newspaper critics would, for the most part, be critical of Elvis as an artist. Those well enough established to be critics are usually in at least early middle age, they grew up in the jazz age or they are upper middle to high brow in their musical tastes.

To such, music such as Elvis makes was not understandable, and they took the classic assumption that because they didn't understand it no one else did, and it was therefore automatically bad.

They couldn't understand the teen-agers' devotion to Elvis, and forgot the rumblings of their own elders about the corruption of jazz, the shimmy, the Charleston, the Black Bottom and the jitterbug in their own day.
Most of them are not fans of country music to begin with, and rock 'n' roll was completely beyond their ken.

They measured Elvis by their own background and what they expected of music, rather than for what he is, what he has accomplished, and what his music represents.

Such an honest reviewer as Jack Gould in the New York Times described him as "a rock and roll variation on one of the most standard acts in show business, the virtuoso of the hootchy-cootchy."

The Journal-American's Jack O'Brien: "He can't sing a lick, makes up for vocal shortcomings with the weirdest and plainly planned, suggestive animation short of an aborigine's mating dance."

Charles Mercer of the AP, tripping on the same yardstick used by others, challenged Steve Allen as to why Allen had booked him after the Berle show. "He has no talent," charged Mercer.

Who defines talent? What is it? It was not Elvis' dancing which made "Heartbreak Hotel" a runaway best-seller, which received Billboard's Triple Crown Award twice in succession for topping all three charts—Popular Music, R&B, and Country Music in sales, juke box play and disk jockey play.

Elvis' records were off like a shot before the people who bought them ever saw him.

At this writing "Heartbreak Hotel" has almost reached the top as best-selling record in England, and Elvis has never been there and they've never seen him on tv.

But while the critics were deriding him and the rock 'n' roll movement in general, many musicians who don't even play that type of music were cheering. "I think the kid's great," says old Jazz Man Tony Pastor.

Someone said, "But I don't understand him."

"You don't have to understand," Tony said. "All you've got to do is listen. The kid's got something in him, and it's got to come out the way he wants it. He's expressing himself, just the way a musician expresses himself with his instrument."

Burl Ives, the darling of the high brows, was asked what he thought about Elvis and rock 'n' roll.

"I've got about 50 of the new rock and roll records and I play them all the time. A lot of people are knocking this Elvis Presley guy. Why, I think he's all right..."

Mr. Ives wears a beard and has for many years.

Elvis came along when there was already a strong upswell of indignation in some quarters about the moral aspects of rock 'n' roll, and Elvis became a target for their wrath.

Of the uproar over rock 'n' roll in general, Sammy Kaye said: "Some years ago when the teen-agers began to Lindy Hop, there were persons who called them lunatics and delinquents. I have no doubt the same reception greeted those who first danced the fox trot."

As a matter of fact, the Atlantic Monthly in August 1862 carried an article about an afternoon waltz at the Harvard commencement. It said:

"Waltzing is a profane and vicious dance-always. When it is prosecuted in the center of a great crowd, in a dusty hall, on a warm midsummer day, it is also a disgusting dance. Night is its only appropriate time. The blinding, dazzling gaslight throws a grateful glare over the salient points of its indecency—waltz as many as you may, spotless maidens, you will only smut yourselves. It is one of itself unclean."

To a psychiatrist who termed rock 'n' roll "a communicable disease appealing to adolescent insecurity," Benny Goodman and Paul Whiteman both answered by inviting him to compare scrapbooks, showing how similar charges were made against them years ago for "allegedly corrupting the youth" of their day, first with jazz, then with swing.

Psychiatrists theorized, but the dance musicians, fallen on hard times, knew what had happened and were all in favor of it.

Rock 'n' roll wasn't new. "Shake, Rattle and Roll," one of the early hits of the current rock 'n' roll movement, was published in the early 20s by W. C. Handy and was written by a white man from New Orleans. Rock 'n' roll music had been played in Negro cafes and taverns to the exclusion of almost all other types of music throughout the South for two decades—only it formerly went by the term "race" music. Then it became "rhythm & blues."

As long as 15 years ago, rock 'n' roll was outselling all other types in most Southern cities, even tho the white people didn't hear it much.

Then came radio stations which presented this music for Negro audiences.

Meantime, two things had happened in so-called "pop" music.

The record strike of the last decade kept musicians from making records for more than a year. The big dance bands began to fade out, and vocalists made records with harmonica background or vocal background.

Record music became for listening, instead of for dancing.

World War II and the Korean War came, and mil-
lions of boys were training and fighting in the years when they might have been dancing.

An entire generation forgot how to dance. But dancing is one of man's primitive instincts.

Suddenly the youngsters discovered rock 'n' roll. It had a dance beat.

CHAPTER EIGHT

His singing is something unique to himself. His singing is something unique to himself.
The critics have noted that Louis Armstrong sings as he phrases on a trumpet, that Sinatra's style was influenced by the trombone of his early Dorsey days.

Elvis, with his broken syllables and strange vocal effects, uses his voice like the guitar he has carried since he was a boy. If the critics had looked at it for what it was, an uncultivated but genuine music, on the level with folk music, and if they had looked at it without preconceived prejudices, they might have come to some different conclusions.

But Elvis took a beating in print.

"I don't like it but I have to expect it, I guess," he said.

He shrugs it off—but he has every unkind, bitter, cruel word he has ever come across about himself in a scrap book.

His mother and father keep it for him.

And seldom has there been such a wholesale disregard for the power of the press. The press criticized, and Elvis was the No. 1 attraction in the country-

stage, records, tv.

One thing which may interfere.

"I'm I-A in the draft," Elvis said. "I'll go when I have to, of course, but I would like a little more time the way things are. It'll be quite a drop—from $10,000 a week to $74 a month."

Elvis may have to improve his vocabulary. He knows it, and he is acquiring some polish as he rubs against a world bigger than the one he grew up in. He uses a double negative occasionally, and he drops his g's.

Elvis does not talk, in my opinion, like the caricature of hillbilly and hepcat whose jargon has been placed in his mouth so often. He talks so naturally that, unless you're just looking for something freakish, ordinarily you wouldn't think a whole lot about his occasional lapses in grammar.

The Army might possibly be the best thing which could happen to Elvis, altho how his nonconformist personality would fit in is a question. But it might give him some time to rest, think, learn self-discipline. He might even enjoy it.

Right now, home still means more than anything to Elvis.

"I'm just a home boy at heart," he says.

And a typical gesture of his generosity was his recent donation of his services free for a big charity show in Memphis. With Col. Parker's concurrence, they picked out July 4—one of the biggest days in the year for them—and canceled out another date in order to play it.

Then Elvis went one further.

"I've got a ring," he said. "It's a pretty good ring—$600—with my initials in diamonds. Do you suppose if I gave it as a door prize, it would help us make more money?"

Elvis doesn't write often, but calls his mother and father several times a week. One night when he was playing in Virginia, there was a terrific storm, and he called three times to be sure everything was all right back home.

He still identifies himself with his old neighborhood, his old friends.

"Not long ago," said his father, "a little 15-year-old girl had a heart attack and dropped dead at one of the schools. Elvis saw it in the paper. She was just a child when he knew her, back in Lauderdale Courts, and he hadn't seen her in several years.

"But he sat around all that night thinking about it. He woke us at 3 in the morning and said he just had to have some company it was worrying him so."

In some ways Elvis is very naive. He likes to read mysteries occasionally, but very little else. He can't sit still long enough. He wants to be on the go.

He'll charter a plane just to get back home a few hours earlier.

His old friends don't have cars, so Elvis gets in one of his Cadillacs and goes to get them, brings them over to his house. It's headquarters for a whole gang of boys. They stage boxing matches on the patio, play pool in his den.

Outside, there are usually anywhere from two or three to a few dozen of his young admirers standing

Elvis and Barbara
about in the yard on the chance that he'll show himself. He does. He has a natural courtesy for everyone—this day says "Yes, sir" and "No, sir" to anyone a few years older than himself.

We were sitting in his newest Cadillac the day he got it while he tried out the air conditioning when a group approached.

"Let me get rid of these little girls," he said. He didn't say it impatiently or unkindly. He opened the window, said, "Say, can I have your autograph?" before they even got their mouths open.

One dusk, with about a dozen youngsters clustered about his patio, he gave an interview to two young ladies, ages 18 and 14, who wanted to write it for their Elvis Presley Fan Club magazine.

"Who's my favorite actress?—Lassie," he said with a straight face, watching them out of the corners of his eyes. Then he broke into laughter.

By the time he was thru, the entire crown of youngsters had made themselves completely at home, were borrowing the telephone, going into the house for water.

"This goes on all the time," Mrs. Presley says she doesn't mind much.

"After all, they like my boy," she said.

But it does get discouraging when they call long distance or knock on the door at 3 a.m.

The phone is unlisted and the number has been changed frequently, but the number somehow leaks out.

"The most expensive thing I've bought is our home," he said.

It is a very nice home—in about the $40,000 class—but far from lavish or pretentious.

But the most important thing about it is that it's home.

That's why he put those Cadillacs in the driveway.

The Golden Boy of Song—Elvis Presley...

Young man, riding on a cloud...

Reaching out for a star...

Hoping it won't turn out to be a brass ring.

There just happened to be a guitar in the clothing store—so, naturally, Elvis obliged with a song.

"Now you kids be good!"—Elvis gives a goodbye handshake to some fans.

The text in this magazine was written by Elvis Presley's close friend, Robert Johnson of the Memphis Press-Scimitar.

The exclusive photographs of Elvis were taken by Robert Williams of the Memphis Commercial Appeal.

It's simple to join Elvis' Fan Club

Just write to:

ELVIS PRESLEY

MADISON, TENNESSEE

—and mention this magazine!
End of a perfect day......
Elvis seeing Barbara home.
"I didn’t take a singing test when I had my screen test. It was an acting test. I wouldn’t be interested in the movies if it just meant singing and beating my guitar some more. What I really want more than anything is to be a good actor.”

“I guess I’ve thought I’ve been in love but mostly I’ve played the field. I’ve had several very close girl friends I just like to be around because they’re fun.”

“Marriage? I’m sure one of these days I will get married, but it’s a sort of silly question—it’s not something you can just sit down and plan; you don’t figure it out, it just happens to you.”

“What is most important of all is that the folks back home think right of me.”