

**Your on the
Street Reporter**



Uyless Black

Looking for Elvis (I)

**Your on the Street Reporter
Looking for Elvis
Report One**

April 20, 2005

Hello from Your on the Street Reporter who has embarked on a quest to find Elvis. This report will document my investigations into Elvis's presence in the cities of Nashville and Memphis, Tennessee.

My rock and roll synapses started to fire up when the investigative team of Reporter and Reporterette crossed the state line and entered Tennessee from Virginia. One of our stopovers was Nashville where we planned to visit the Grand Ole Opry, the shrine of early country music. Another stop was the Graceland Mansion in Memphis, the former home of Elvis Presley and his family, and the temple of early rock and roll.

Growing up in New Mexico, I was spoon-fed country music. We New Mexicans are proud of our country music heritage. Any listener of country music knows the country musicians are light-years ahead of other styles of music in writing profound verse. Even their song titles are replete with philosophical meanings. Some samples are listed below:

- You're Right, I'm left, She's Gone.
- Drop Kick Me, Jesus, Through the Goal Posts of Life
- I'm Walking the Floor Over You.
- May The Bluebird Of Paradise Fly Up Your Nose.
- Take This Job and Shove It, I Ain't Working Here No More.
- My Heart Don't Need Eyes.
- I'm The Only Hell My Mama Ever Raised.
- You Two-timed Me One Time Too Often.
- You Ain't Woman Enough To Take My Man.
- Don't Come Home A Drinkin' With Lovin' On Your Mind.
- Shut Your Jam, And Eat My Jelly.
- You've Just Stepped In From Stepping Out On Me.
- Old Flames Can't Hold A Candle To You.
- The Hurtins' All Over...All Over Me.
- I Got Over You When I Found You Under Him.
- I've Been Flushed From The Bathroom of Your Heart.
- Get Your Tongue Outta My Mouth Cause I'm Kissing You Goodbye.
- I'm Hanging Out With My Hangover, While He's Hanging Out With You.

They are insightful titles, indicative of reflection on the part of the song writers. The verse is even more impressive, one that, laments lost love, celebrates every facet of the humble and/or dissipated life in America, mentions mama often and sometimes papa, throws in a word or two about an old whitewashed church, extols the lonely, yet romantic lives of truck drivers, criminals, musicians (*especially* musicians), and farmers. This musical summary of life is often presented, not in multiple numbers, but in a single song.

Because of my reverence for country music, we decided to attend the Grand Ole Opry and purchased tickets for a show later in the week. Now, it was time to look for Elvis.

The Search Begins

Legend has it that Elvis is still alive. There are countless stories of his sightings---like viewing a comet cross the sky---transitory and fleeting. He is often seen “leaving the building” in countless locations around the world at the same time, as if he possessed the same parallel processing qualities as Santa Claus.

After a couple days in Nashville, which I designated as the warm up city to Memphis, I decided to conduct a search for Elvis, but not necessarily the real, physical Elvis. I would settle for encountering the spirit of Elvis. An ephemeral presence would satisfy my needs. Or for that matter, an icon of Elvis would suffice: an impersonator, a statue, or a wax figure. Consequently, during my stay in Nashville, I looked around for Elvis, his spirit, and other manifestations of his greatness. (By the way, who dubbed him the King? I'll wager it wasn't Prince.)

I asked a few people if they had seen the King, or if they knew of anyone who had come across him. One such encounter was with a street person who had approached us while we were leaving the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum in Nashville. He asked, “Any chance of a little money for some gas? My family and I are stranded outside of town.”

His street-person persona was suspect. No shopping cart, no disheveled looks. He was well groomed. Exhibiting a cropped beard and clean clothes, he held a cell phone in his hand. Of interest to me was the story of his owning a car (not to mention a cell phone), a first in my encounters with street people. Notwithstanding my doubts about his story, I decided to engage him, “On one condition. Only if you can tell me where Elvis is.”



Figure 1. Elvis & me.

He paused, then gave me a funny glance. Perhaps he thought I was a street person in disguise (I had several shopping bags in my hands). Whatever, he bade goodbye and began to walk away, probably looking for a less-wary tourist.

No matter, because earlier in the day, I had found a statue of Elvis on Broadway Street in downtown Nashville. So I gave the highway robber...eh, highway person some money.

An Image of my Idol

The Elvis statue was located in front of a store in downtown Nashville. It was an amazing likeness to the King, and I asked Holly to snap a photo of the two of us, as shown in Figure 1. It was my first documented evidence of my (successful) pursuit of Elvis, his monuments, trinkets, and nostalgic artifacts. I was making progress.

Your on the Street Reporter

Your on the Street Reporter Looking for Elvis Report Two

April 21, 2005

Hello. Your Reporter is on the streets of Nashville, still looking for Elvis.

The Wax Museum

In my defense, while in Nashville I did not spend all my time devoted to Elvis tasks. The city offers too many other attractions to allow one to be one-dimensional. On several occasions, I enlarged my cultural horizons:

- We toured an authentic reproduction of Fort Nashboroug, the first settlement leading to the present-day Nashville. I wandered around the buildings, thinking the Tennessee pioneers must have been the prototypes for Randy Newman's *Short People* song, then I encountered a sign informing me the buildings, chairs, etc. had been scaled-down from their actual sizes.
- We visited the State Capitol, where I searched unsuccessfully for any tribute to Al Gore Jr. Fat chance, he lost his own home state in the Presidential election. Actions: lose your home state and invent the Internet. Results: you deserve Florida chad and Supreme Court machinations.
- We spent several hours at The Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum. Shortly afterwards, in a state of nostalgic frenzy, I purchased twenty-five CDs of old-time country artists.¹
- We also spent half a morning touring the Nashville countryside looking for a golf course recommended by our hotel concierge (the Hermitage Hotel, which I recommend), who had entered the incorrect ZIP code into her computer keyboard, thus thwarting MapQuest's quest to provide us an accurate map to the course. This one-digit error resulted in our driving around for two hours, finally stopping at a dead-end road, which terminated into the Cumberland River. Had I not braked abruptly, we would have tested Toyota's claim of building water-fast SUVs.

I read in the local Nashville papers that we could visit a wax museum located near Opry Land (a giant complex just outside of downtown Nashville containing a large hotel, a shopping mall, and the "new" Grand Ole Opry Theater.) I like wax museums, especially the Madame Tussauds Wax Museum in London.

¹ To make certain I am allowed back into New Mexico, I must emphasize I am loyal to the country music cause, so I wish to also emphasize that these albums were from very old timers. But try as I do, I just can't make it through a Jimmie Roger's album.



Some of you on this mailing list may recall a Christmas card I sent out many years ago. It is reproduced in Figure 2. The caption on the card was, “Merry Christmas from Uyless Black and Friends.”...The folks at Madame [Tussauds](#) Museum were not amused with my pose. But it was a big hit with my friends and relatives. Anyway, back to the wax museum in Nashville.

Figure 2. Some friends and your reporter



Expecting to experience a fine time admiring the craftsmanship of talented wax sculptors, off we went. Of course, I was also expecting to find more Elvis curios, most likely an Elvis wax figure. I met with success. Early in our tour of the wax museum, we came across a display of the King, shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Still looking for the real thing.

A Tribute to Elvis.

After leaving the wax museum, we walked to a nearby restaurant to have dinner. There we imbibed in a feast of pork BBQ, piles of french fries, salad with scoops of ranch dressing, beer, and several tablets of Lipitor, beta blocker, and aspirin. Not yet (visually) satiated, we then proceeded to another area of Opry Land to top-off the evening: An Elvis impersonator nightclub act...two hours of uninterrupted Elvis music...sung by a virtual Elvis. Was this living or what?!

And there’s more. The show was located in a theater associated with and adjacent to the Ernest Tubb Record Store. The line to the theater entrance snaked-through this store. (For the country music illiterate, Ernest Tubb was a popular singer some fifty years ago). In addition to Ernest Tubb records, books, napkins, table cloths, pictures, cups, shot glasses, wall dishes, drinking glasses, condoms, T-shirts, caps, hats, etc, his tour bus was also on exhibit (but not for sale, as it

held up the roof of the record store).

The notations of Ernest Tubb, ET, and Ernest were written over almost every surface on and in the bus. The lobby announcer proclaimed, “While you’re waiting in-line for the show, don’t forget to visit Ernest Tubb’s tour bus. Yes, Ernest Tubb actually rode in this bus.” ...As if there might have been some doubt about this fact.

The Elvis impersonation act was entertaining and well done. Elvis was performed by John Beardsley. After the virtual Elvis sang his last song, he jumped from the stage, ran down the center aisle, and exited the room at the back of the theater. During this action, the announcer informed the audience, “Ladies and Gentlemen, Elvis is leaving the building! No, just joking; he will be in the theater lobby to await your visit, where you can buy his new CD and receive a free, personally-autographed picture of him singing *Heartbreak Hotel*.”

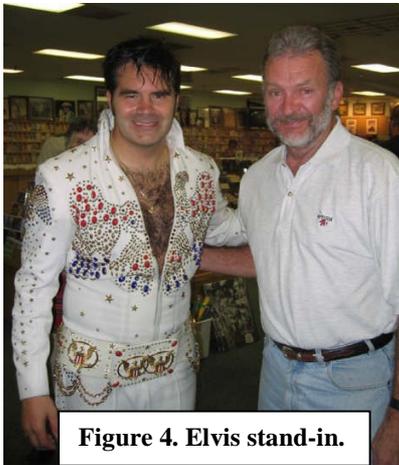


Figure 4. Elvis stand-in.

I had another opportunity to gather more artifacts and add yet another Elvis experience to my collection of Nashville adventures. The result is shown in Figure 4.

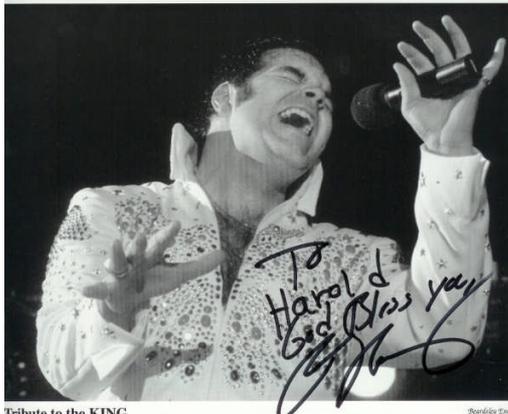
Everyone in Nashville has a CD “just out,” or one “scheduled for release next spring.” I know of no exceptions...well perhaps the street person, but it seems all other humans in the city are musicians. The person who parked our car at the hotel was a musician with a new CD. So was the hotel bartender, so was Mr. Beardsly’s wife who also had a CD for sale at his show.

I don’t exclude the hotel concierge who entered an incorrect ZIP code on her keyboard. If she is indeed a musician, I hope for her sake (and those who listen to her music) that she is not a pianist.

After buying Mr. Beardly’s CD, I queued in the picture autograph line, holding my CD and my virtual Elvis picture. Upon approaching him again, he thanked me for the purchase and asked, “Anything special you would like for me to write? And what is your name?”

“No, nothing special, and my name is Harold.”

He did not ask me how to pronounce Harold, or how to spell Harold. Without any hesitation whatsoever, he penned on the picture, “To Harold, God Bless You. John.” Why “Harold?” Because the queue to John was long, and I did not think it a good idea to spend a lot of time explaining how to spell my name, or alternately, risk having my picture maimed with an incorrect spelling of my real name. My treasured virtual Elvis artifact is illustrated in Figure 5.



Tribute to the KING
The Years 1953-1977
by John Beardlev

Boarding East
www.boardingeast.com
email: info@boardingeast.com
toll free: 800-800-8000

Figure 5. Virtual Elvis's autograph.

Whew! It had been a full day. And I had had my Elvis fix. Time for a change of pace: The Grand Ole Opry, the subject of the next report.

Your on the Street Reporter

Your on the Street Reporter Looking for Elvis Report Three

April 22, 2005

Hello. Your Reporter is back again on the streets of Nashville. Taking a break from the Elvis search, we took in the Grand Ole Opry.

The Grand Ole Opry

I was initially luke-warm about seeing this show, but after a couple days of country music culture saturation, I had changed my mind, and was looking forward to the performances of some country singers.

First, a word about the new Country and Western musicians at this show. Many of the singers were young and sang a meld of folk, rock, and country, with a bit of jazz and gospel occasionally thrown in for good measure. The only type of music omitted from their repertoire was classical. The male vocalists were especially popular with the young females in the audience, and Reporterette and I found their music to our liking.

The old musicians, such as Porter Waggoner, Little Jimmy Dickens, and the Osborne Brothers, represented the old Opry singers. I occasionally listen to Bluegrass and especially enjoyed the Osborne Brothers. But our favorite of this group was Little Jimmy Dickens, shown in Figure 6 (He is located behind the relatively big guitar and situated under the relatively big hat). He told more stories than he sang, but they were amusing and the audience was reluctant to let him leave the stage.



Figure 6. Little Jimmy Dickens (located behind the guitar and under the hat, at center stage).

Preparing for Memphis

Because our Nashville excursion was coming to a close, I had begun to prepare for our visit to Memphis and Graceland. Consulting the tourist guides, I discovered a hotel named The

Heartbreak Hotel was located across the street from the Graceland mansion. Great, it presented an opportunity to soak up more Elvis essences, as well as a chance to stay in a hotel with the identical name as one of my favorite Elvis songs.

I called this hotel to make a room reservation. After the preliminary salutations, I cut to the chase, “I read where you have ‘theme rooms,’ based on Elvis’ songs. What are the rates for these rooms and for your regular rooms? By the way, do you have a Heartbreak Hotel hotel theme room? ”

How does a theme room hotel have a room with a theme of itself? It’s like a picture of the same picture of the same picture...of the same picture... and so on. But I was too caught up in the moment to ask about this complex concept. The reservationist responded, “Yes we do have a Heartbreak Hotel room, and the theme rooms are \$400.00 a night. The other rooms are \$100.00.”²

My relatives tell me I am generous (read wasteful) with money. I do not pause at paying an exorbitant fee for something that justifies being exorbitant, say, a hotel room with heat. But a difference of 4:1 in room cost differential struck me as financially and logically inconsistent. I would have been willing to pay *relatively* more for the theme room, but four times as much? My reply was, “Upon my arrival, I would like to check out the theme rooms. If they are sufficiently suffused with theme, I will take one of them.” Once again, logic and reason triumph over ignorance and the lack of a sense of relative proportions.

The Heartbreak Hotel

We left Nashville, and made our way to Memphis. After a few hours on the Interstates, we pulled up to the Heartbreak Hotel, shown in Figure 7. It turns out we did not opt for a theme room. The hotel lobby, bar, hallways, restaurant, gift shop, public phone booths, public restrooms, and sleeping rooms were sufficiently suffused with the theme of Elvis. Any more visual or audio simulations of the King would have led to Presley overdose.

To gain an appreciation of the universal presence of Elvis at the Heartbreak Hotel, I snapped a few pictures of our hotel room and the lobby walls. Figure 8 shows three of them, two of which were placed above our beds in our room.

In addition, the hotel showed Elvis movies 24 hours a day on one of the TV channels. For the more somber guests, Fox News and CNN were also available to remind us an occasional channel search to their programs would dampen or eliminate any happy feelings we might have gained after watching *Viva Las Vegas* for the fourth time.

² For ease of reference, the figures are rounded. The theme rooms were actually \$469.00 per night.



Figure 7. The Heartbreak Hotel.

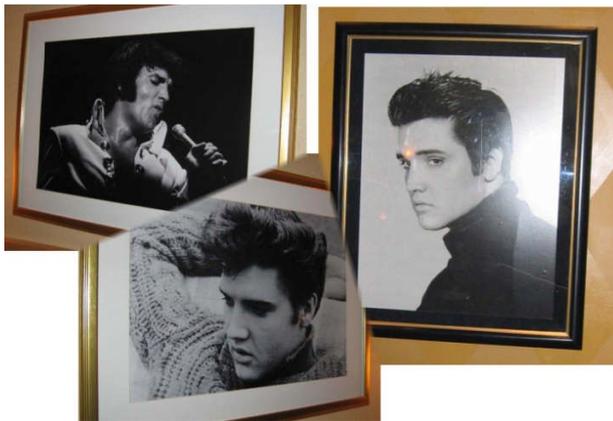


Figure 8. Pictures of Elvis in our hotel room and lobby.

Lucky for us, during our stay at the Heartbreak Hotel, we were driven to a local restaurant in a pink Cadillac limousine, courtesy of the hotel and restaurant. What living, if only for a short while: Limo service with a chauffeur---to and from a BBQ café---to consume yet more BBQ and cholesterol-lowering drugs.

More later on Elvis and country music in Nashville and Memphis.

Your on the Street Reporter

**Your on the Street Reporter
Looking for Elvis
Report Four**

April 23, 2005

Hello. Your Reporter is still in Tennessee. Here is the final report from this part of the country.

Flashback to Nashville

After returning from our luxurious jaunt in the pink Cadillac limousine and the BBQ meal, Holly and I settled into our hotel room for a cerebral night of watching Elvis movies. *Jailhouse Rock* was playing and I was looking forward to watching the choreography associated with the title song (which I think is one of Elvis' better stage performances).

However, we remembered the CMAs were on TV that evening. For you aspiring, yet still ignorant country music intellectuals, CMA are the initials for the Country Music Awards. I did not know this fact until I visited the Grand Ole Opry building in Nashville earlier in the week to pick up our tickets for an evening show. The ticket clerk informed me the reason the regular Opry performances were being held in the Ryman Theater (and not the Grand Ole Opry theater) was because, "The CMA is in town!"

I committed a C&W *faux pax*, "What do the initials CMA mean?"

From the look on the clerk's face, I might just have asked what the initials of U.S.A. meant. She looked at me for a moment, most likely wondering how on earth I was actually on earth---while holding in my hand two important representations of the good things in life: I was about to purchase T shirts celebrating: (a) Hank Williams, and (b) the *Hee Haw* TV show.

To clarify the reasons for my purchases: I like Hank Williams music and I think the *Hee Haw* program was one of the most brilliant productions of continuous, *deliberate* self-parody to be seen on television. That stated, it is still difficult for me to watch the show because the self-parody sometimes seems sad: self-validation though self-mocking is usually not an effective prescription for emotional growth. But then, the performers were aware of their situation---so who cares if they don't?

However, I did not intend to wear the Hee Haw shirt because I had purchased it as a present to, and joke on one of my fine friends, an urbane, sophisticated intellectual, reared in the liberal enclaves of Northwest Washington, DC. A man who would prefer to be seen walking down Pennsylvania Avenue unclothed rather than wearing a Hee Haw shirt.

Anyway, I sulked away from the righteous clerk with my two T-shirts, and as I mentioned earlier, Holly and I watched the CMA program. During this show, we learned that Alan Jackson is a very popular country singer, the only thing some of the new country singers possess remotely akin to country music is their twang, and the verse of country (its bedrock for existence) is still alive and well. We liked the show, even though we longed for an occasional

