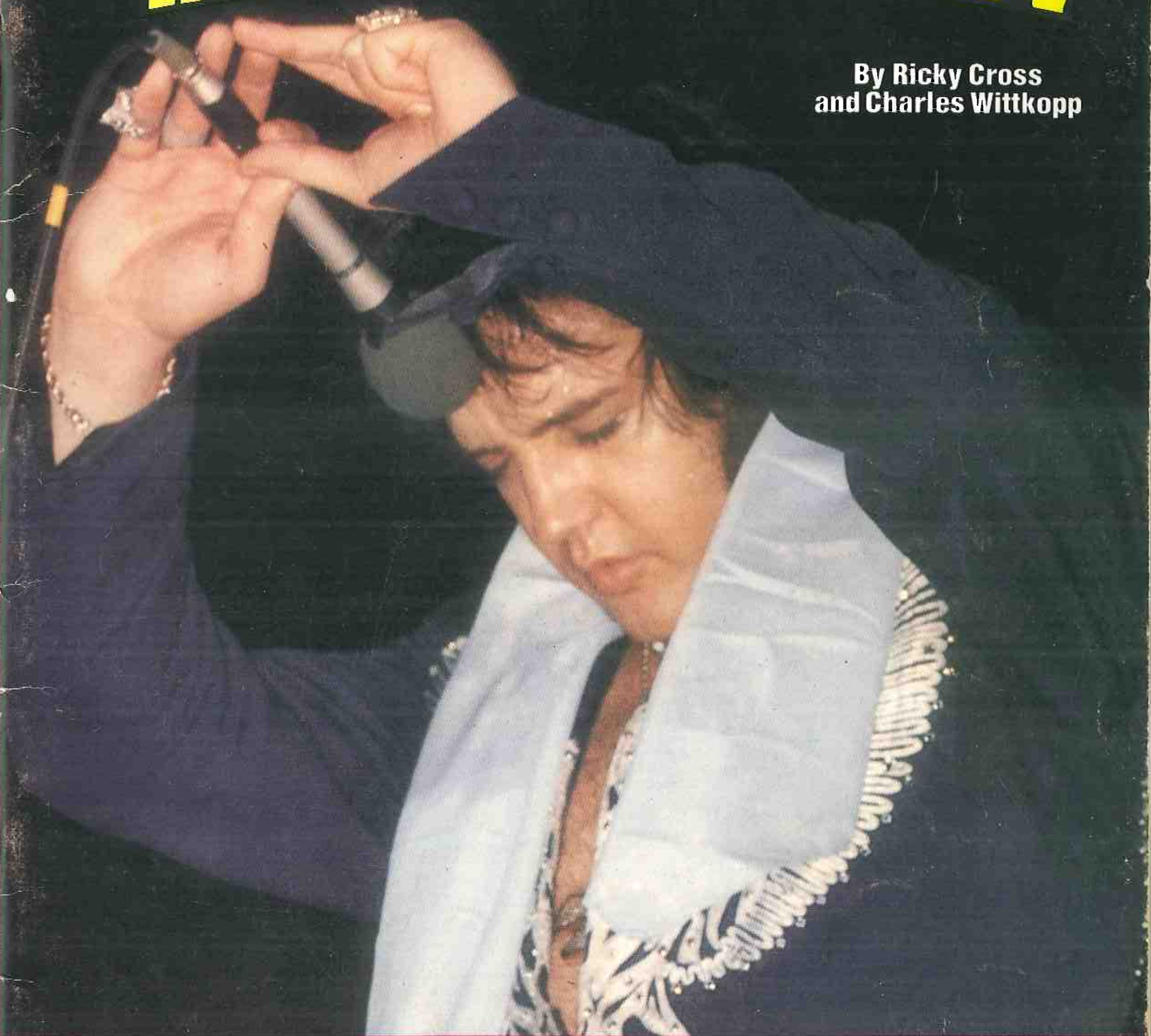


# ELVIS IN TIDEWATER

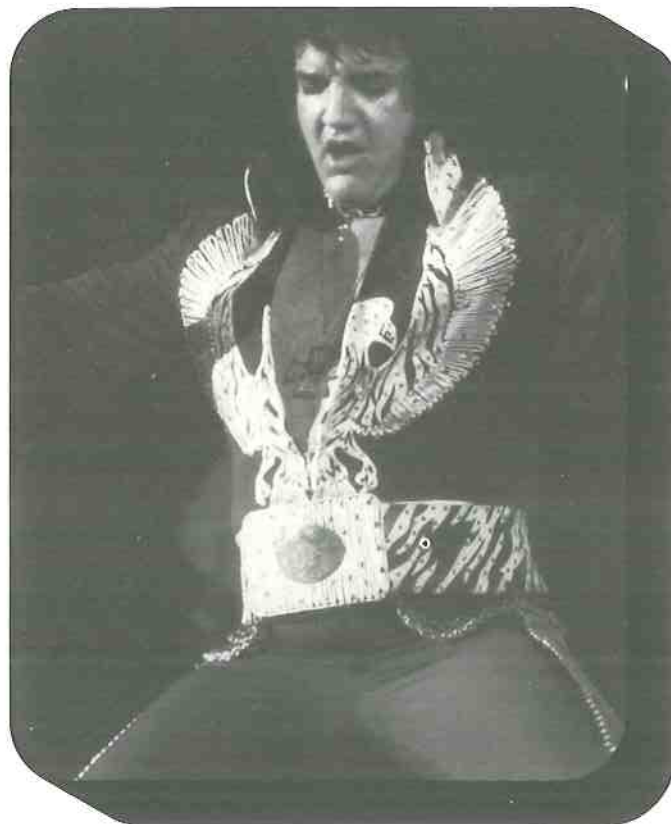
By Ricky Cross  
and Charles Wittkopp



NEVER BEFORE PUBLISHED PHOTOS OF ELVIS  
IN HIS SEVEN VISITS TO THE TIDEWATER AREA.

**ELVIS IN  
TIDEWATER**

# ELVIS IN TIDEWATER



Ricky Cross  
and  
Charles Wittkopp

**Donning**  
**Virginia Beach/Norfolk**

**This book is lovingly dedicated to  
"Our Mom" Betty Wittkopp**

**and to all those fans  
with instamatic cameras**

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# Contents

<b>1955:</b>	
A Norfolk First .....	7
Who Is Alvin Preston? .....	11
<b>1972:</b>	
Elvis Returns .....	14
<b>1974:</b>	
The King's Coming .....	18
“This Place Looks Like A Spaceship” .....	21
<b>1976:</b>	
A Prestige Act .....	25
<b>1977</b>	
The King Is Gone .....	29
Acknowledgements .....	32



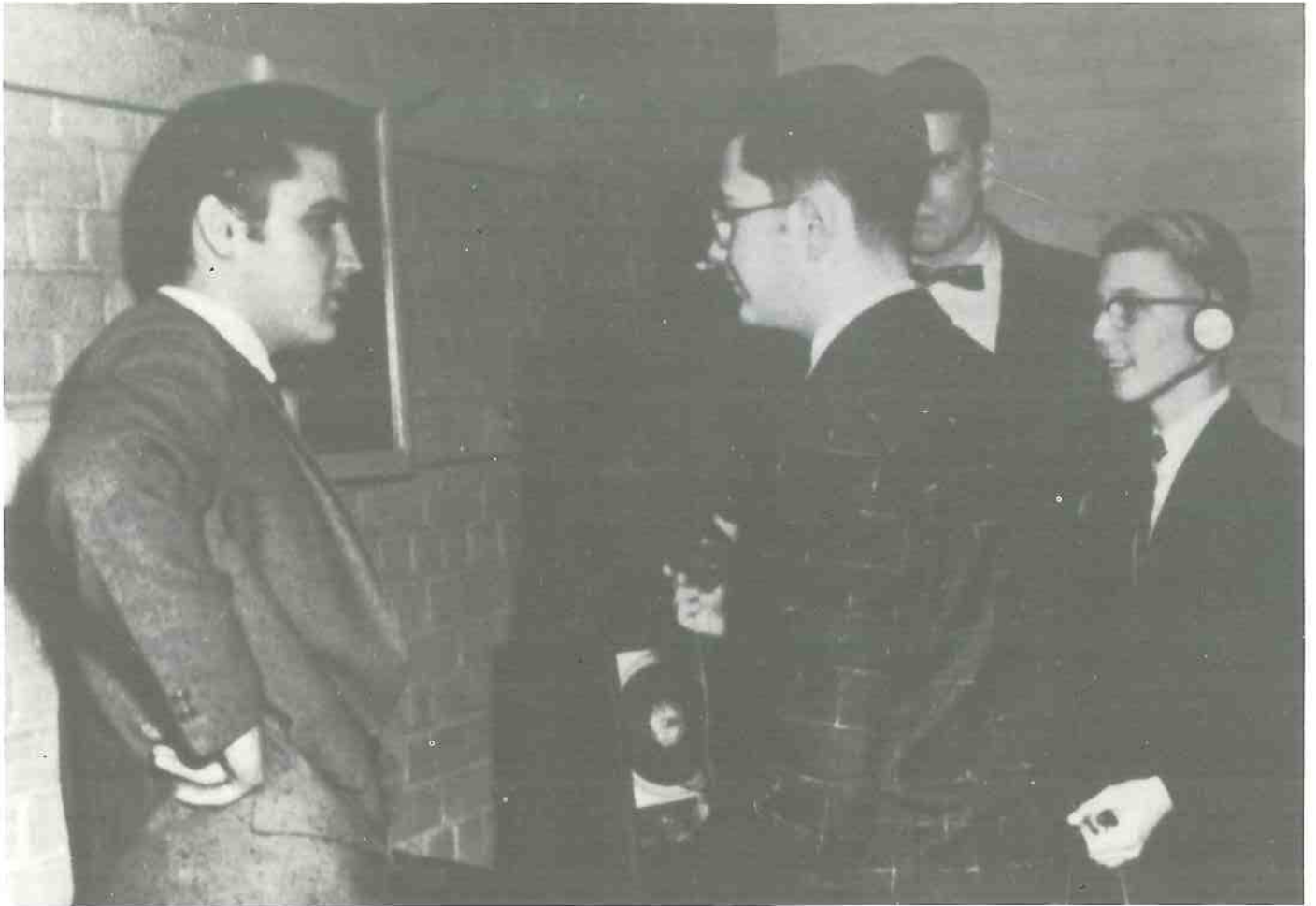
*Evenings performance, 1972*



*Elvis with the owner of Stoney's Bar-b-que*

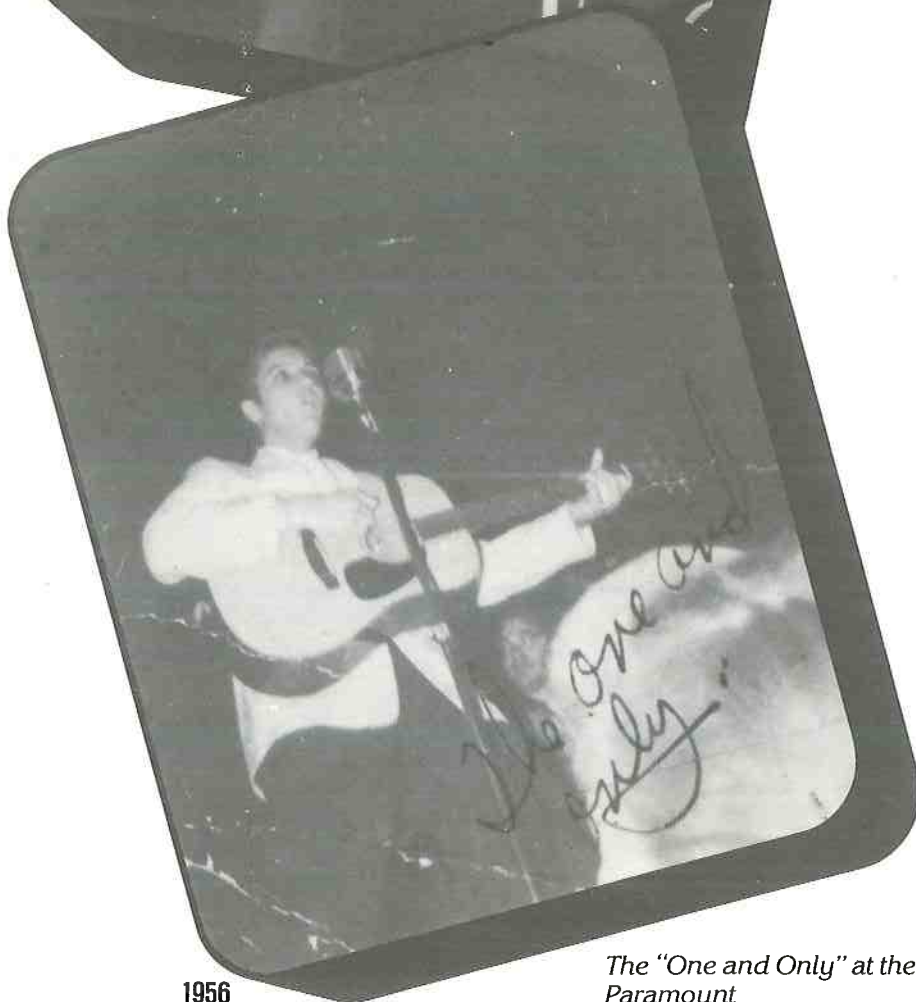
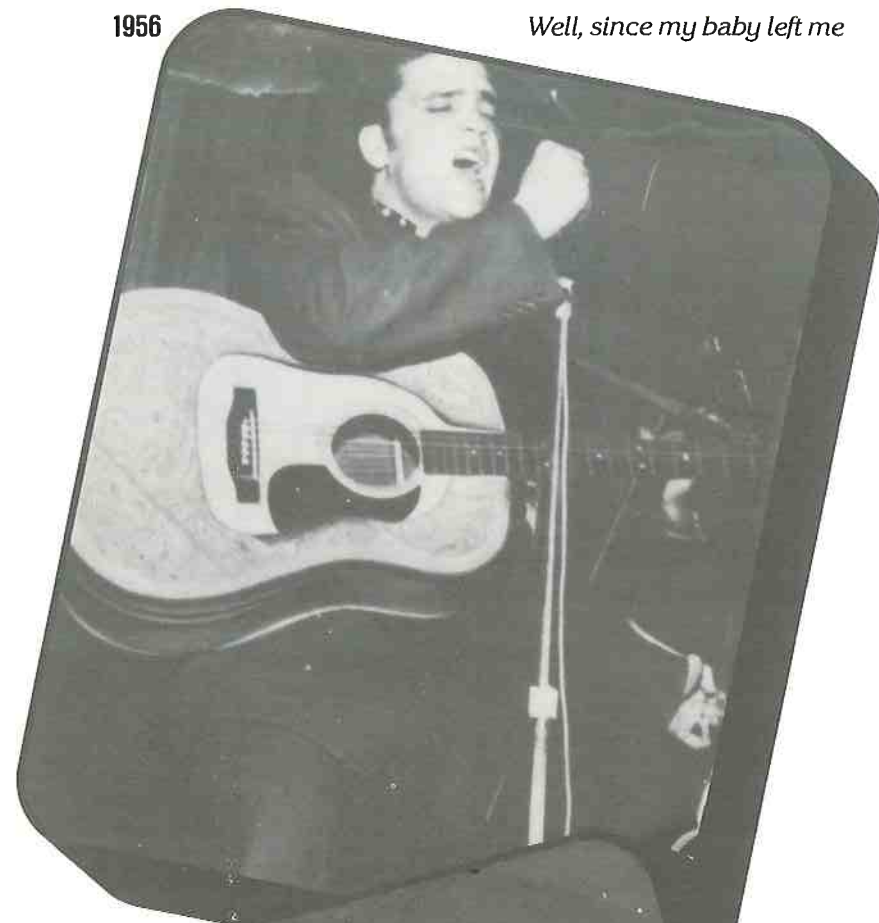
*Visiting Oscar Smith High School*

1956



1956

*Well, since my baby left me*



1956

*The "One and Only" at the Paramount*

# 1955:

## A Norfolk First

It was 1955. Do you remember the year? It was in the middle of those fabulous fifties when the phrase "gas shortage" was a thing of the future. You could buy four dozen eggs for \$1.29, ham for 59¢ a pound, and a movie ticket for half a buck. It was also the year America gave birth to a new form of music: rock and roll.

A year earlier, the first and most successful country music station, WCMS, appeared in the Tidewater area. WCMS was responsible for many of the live shows presented at the Norfolk Arena and the surrounding theaters. These live shows appeared on the average of once a month, a practice that has continued somewhat, over the last twenty-five years.

The Norfolk Arena is a legend within itself. Built in 1943, it served the community as USO headquarters for servicemen. At the return of peace in 1945, the municipal auditorium started a career that would span over thirty years and entertain more than six million people. It still serves Norfolk, under the operation of the Parks and Recreation Department.

On May 15, 1955, the Supreme Allied Commander, Admiral Wright, hosted fifteen ambassadors to the NATO Council to tour our Naval Installations while WCMS played host to a group of country and western stars at the Norfolk Arena.

It was on this fateful Sunday in May that the city experienced a "real first," the arrival of Elvis Aaron Presley to the Norfolk stage.



The story of Elvis is not an unfamiliar one. The truck driver turned singer was just beginning to carve his pathway in the unreliable music world. In his hometown of Memphis, Tennessee, he was well known as the white man with the feel and voice of a black rhythm and blues singer. His first record, "That's All Right Mama," had done fairly well in the southern regional states. It was time for him to learn the ropes and hardships, as well as the pleasures, of life on the road.

Red Gwynn, who worked for WCMS, acted as stage manager for the night's show. He handled all the necessary details and duties to see that the show went smoothly.

The newspaper billed the show as "Hank Snow's All Star Jamboree." Fourth on the bill was an unknown: "ELVIS PRESLEY with BILL and SCOTTY."

According to Gwynn, Elvis made a bigger impression on the audience than anyone really anticipated. "I remember Elvis backstage. He was a very quiet, shy boy, completely different from his act on stage," recalls Gwynn.

Joe Hoppel, morning disc jockey for WCMS and local celebrity, was also backstage during the show. "He simply stole the show. The audience didn't want him to leave. He played every song he knew twice. That was twelve. After twelve tunes he said, 'That's all I got, folks,' and left the stage. It was unbelievable." He broke every string on the guitar, which belonged to Hank Snow.

Earlier that day, Elvis and other performers on the show were interviewed live by Ted Crutchfield, a WCMS disc jockey better known as "Teddy Bear." At the time, the station had been playing a Sun record entitled "Blue Moon of Kentucky," then much more favored than the flip side, "That's All Right Mama," a rock-a-billy tune. The interview was taped on a 16-inch recording disc. The disc, still in Crutchfield's possession, has decayed with age and can no longer be played.

Hank Snow's manager at the time was Colonel Tom Parker, who also managed Eddy Arnold. Even though Elvis was managed by Bob Neal, it was Parker who traveled with the group. He was undoubtedly keeping an eye on this new singing sensation named Elvis Presley. Ultimately, this led to one of the most successful and enduring partnerships in show business history.

Elvis' first major tour was coming to an end as he left Norfolk. Even though he was not the major attraction in those days, he surely wasn't forgotten. This was proven four months later. Elvis Presley was definitely moving up the ladder of success. By early summer, his new record, "Baby Let's Play House," was on the national charts. He now owned a Cadillac and his own custom guitar, and, when he returned to Norfolk, his name was at the top of the bill. The bill now read, "Return Engagement by POPULAR DEMAND: ELVIS PRESSLEY." His name was misspelled on the advertisement.

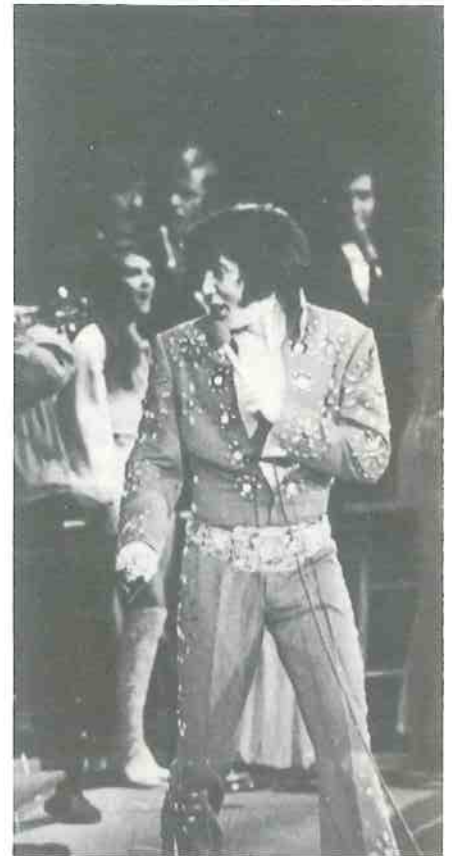
Elvis returned to Norfolk for two shows on September 11th, and for one show on September 12th. The gyrating motions that pinned the name, "Elvis the Pelvis," on him was ever again present on the arena stage. Once again, Elvis captivated and excited the audience.

Bob Turner, then a thirteen-year-old youngster, was allowed backstage as a go-fer. He would get refreshments for the performers who didn't leave the backstage area. Bob struck up a friendship with Elvis while Elvis was waiting to go onstage. Elvis asked Bob where he could get a quick bite to eat. The only close place open was the bowling alley across the street. Turner and Elvis went alone.

A comical incident took place while they were waiting for their order. A drunk or near-drunk man passed them as a jukebox played an Elvis record. The swaying gentleman remarked to them, "That guy sure can sing."

Elvis grinned from ear to ear and

The famous "Burning Love" suit







1972

*Filming the movie, "Elvis On Tour"*

replied, "Yeah, I like him."

After the first show, during the autograph session, Elvis signed everything from Juicy Fruit gum wrappers to hands. In the process he also lost his shoelaces and tore his shirt.

Elvis asked Turner if he could stay for the second show. Turner had to first call his mother for permission to stay. Elvis gave Turner five dollars to get him a pair of ten-cent shoelaces. Bob bought the shoelaces from People's Drug Store on Granby Street, and was allowed to stay for the second show.

The only snacks available at the arena were not enough to feed the entertainers, thus presenting a problem for the promoters. The shows were generally held on Sundays, which made catering virtually impossible. Frequently, Rodman's Bar-B-Que of Portsmouth was used, but tonight the owner of Stoney's Bar-B-Que offered to open the place for the show people. Most, including Elvis, decided to accept. The hungry caravan piled into two cars and headed for the restaurant on Bainbridge Boulevard.

Unless spoken to, conversation from Elvis was seldom. "He was too busy eating," reports Gwynn.

Later that night, Elvis and Jimmie Rodgers, son of Hank Snow, started playing grabass. Elvis' shirt was torn, and he had to borrow another.

Talk shifted to the night before, when Elvis, Scotty, and Bill came into town by way of Military Highway. During those traveling days, Elvis was known to be full of anxiety and after-show jitters. Often, he walked beside the car to help himself get tired in order to get some sleep. As a prank, the night before, Elvis had thrown the ignition keys out the window. He didn't tell of his prank until they reached the Bel-Aire Motel. They finally found the keys after spending most of the night looking for them.

The party continued later, back at the motel's pool.

The next day, September 12th, Crutchfield rented two convertibles,

for publicity purposes, from the now defunct Norfolk Motor Company. His idea was to have a motorcade going through Norfolk to advertise the last show. In one car was to be Hank Snow, and in the second car would be Elvis. Placards were placed on the doors. Snow and his band refused to participate, and went to a movie. The big plan ended with the two groups yelling back and forth at each other while cruising Granby Street.

Later that year, WCMS decided to make a change in their format. This caused some dissension among the disc jockeys. Most decided to quit, including Crutchfield.

In early 1956, Elvis was again in Tidewater for a show in Newport News. Crutchfield made it a point to see him again. The purpose was to spread the word that he needed a job. (A couple of weeks later, Elvis mentioned him to the manager of WBKF in Jacksonville, Florida. In turn, the manager hired Crutchfield over the phone.) Ironically, this is the same show that Elvis experienced his first on-stage nervous breakdown.

The next and last contact Crutchfield had with Elvis was a telegram he received from Hollywood in 1957. In the telegram, Elvis thanked him for having an Elvis Presley Day on the radio.

These seemingly insignificant visits to Norfolk by Elvis were part of the foundation, the cornerstone to the building of his style, stage presence, and apprenticeship to fame and fortune.

It is also remembered that when paid for the troupe's performances, Colonel Parker was heard to remark, "You rooked me once, but never again." It didn't matter; Elvis wasn't to appear in Norfolk again until July 20, 1975, twenty years later.

*Arriving at Patrick Henry Airport*



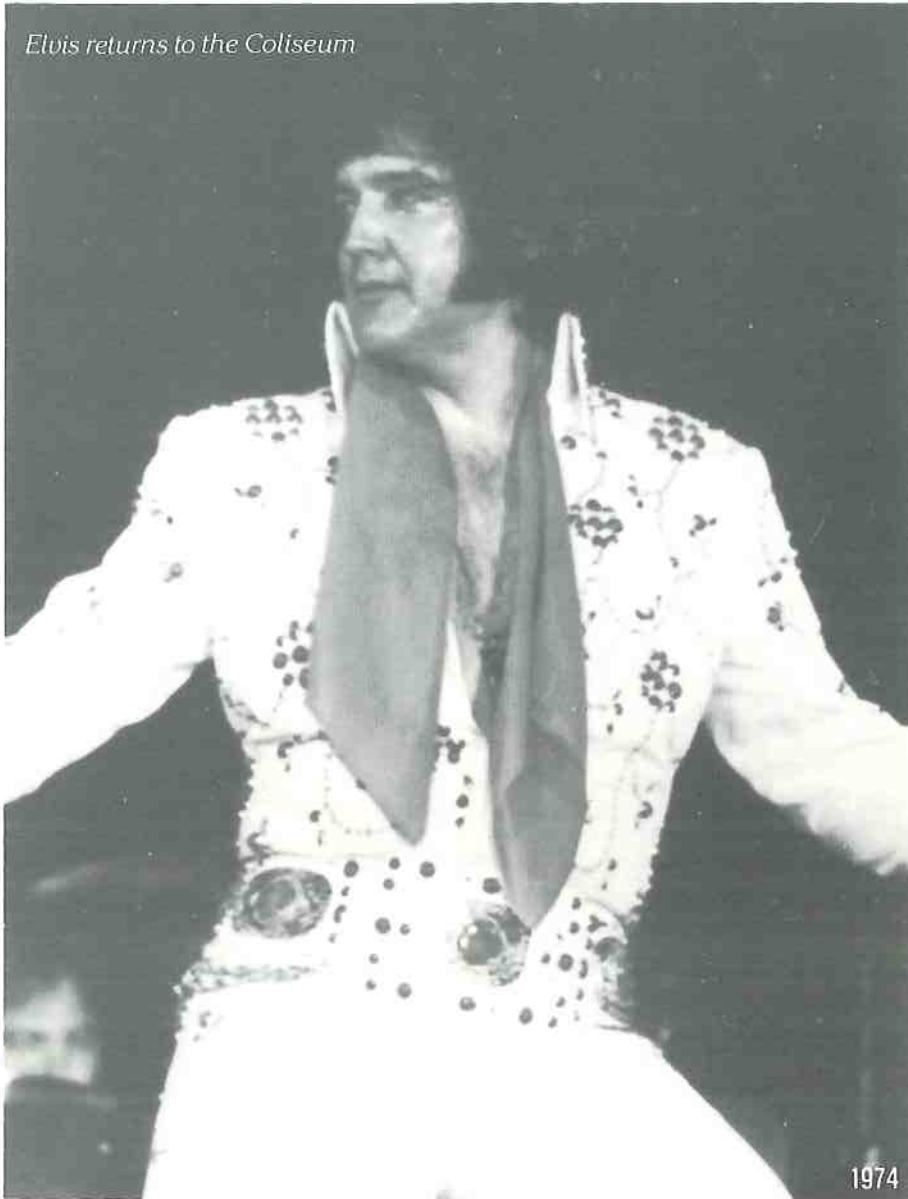
1974



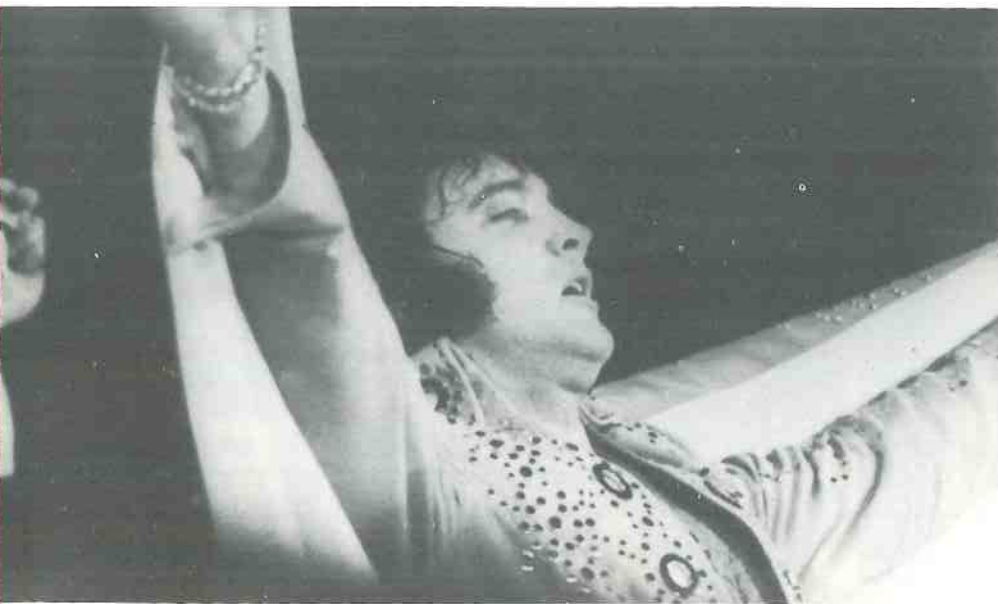
1974

*Leaving the Holiday Inn for the show*

Elvis returns to the Coliseum



1974



1972

# Who is Alvin Preston . . . ?

1956. It has long been known in the music world as "The Year of Elvis Presley."

And indeed it was!

In the last year Elvis had been learning the ropes, as we mentioned earlier. Only this year would be special, extra special.

In the fall of 1955, a contract was negotiated by RCA Records to buy (from Sun Records of Memphis, Tennessee) and have control of Elvis' talent.

The deal was the brainchild of Colonel Tom Parker, who by now had a contract of his own, one declaring him Elvis' personal manager. The association between RCA and the Colonel was not an unfamiliar one. The record company had handled his previous clients, Hank Snow and Eddy Arnold. For the price of \$35,000, which was considered a silly price for any singer in those days, Elvis would in turn generate billions of dollars of business for RCA over the next twenty-two years.

In January of 1956, Elvis, who'd just turned twenty-one, was signed by CBS to perform on Jackie Gleason's Stage Show, starring the legendary Tommy and Jimmy Dorsey as hosts. The contract called for six appearances beginning January 28th and ending March 24th, skipping two weeks in February. Note that all of Elvis' television appearances in the fifties were recorded live; even more interesting is the fact that CBS was the first network to show Elvis coast-to-coast, and twenty-two years later



they would be the last.

In between the Dorsey shows, Elvis toured the east coast on a rigid and exhausting schedule, via automobile.

On Monday, February 13th, two days after his third performance on the Dorsey show, Elvis appeared at the Paramount Theater on Washington Avenue in downtown Newport News.

Days before, advertisements informed us that Elvis was the most talked about personality in the last ten years of recorded music. Columnist Earl Wilson was calling him, "... the new Johnny Ray!" and the Paramount Theatre had him booked for three big shows, at 4:30 p.m., 7:00 p.m. and 9:00 p.m. An extra show was added at 11:00 p.m., due to large ticket demand.

Also, on what was now called, "The Elvis Presley Show," you could see and hear Justin Tubb, The Louvin Brothers, Benny Martin, Mother Maybelle, and June Carter. Admission prices were 85¢ for the matinee and a whole dollar for the two evening shows. A far cry from modern day concert prices.

In a small advertisement, Dave Garven, then owner of the Paramount, described a telephone conversation with his booker. When asked if he'd like to play Elvis Presley, he replied, "Who is Alvin Preston?"

Mr. Garven soon found out.

Advance ticket sales were the biggest in the history of the Paramount. His phone was ringing constantly—people wanting to buy tickets to see Elvis.

From the moment Elvis walked on stage, it was pure pandemonium. Songs remembered by most interviewed include "Blue Suede Shoes," "I Was the One," "Shake, Rattle and Roll," "Tutti Frutti," "Money Honey," and his first number one hit song for RCA "Heartbreak Hotel."

Judy Aumon, of Hampton, recalls a conversation with Elvis after one particular show. "I followed him into the Sanitary Restaurant across from the theater. I walked up to him and

said, 'You sure do sing good,' and he answered, 'Oh shit, it's nothing.'"

Incidentally, it's pretty well known among Elvis circles that Mrs. Aumon is a close and dear friend of Dee Presley, Elvis' stepmother. Their friendship dates back to when Mrs. Presley lived with her first husband in Hampton. Some say she even attended one of the shows at the Paramount.

It's also rumored that Elvis received a traffic ticket for driving backwards on Washington Avenue. Though several people interviewed confirmed this, proof could not be substantiated. Traffic records in Newport News date back only as far as 1959.

Mike Parnell of Portsmouth remembers a unique introduction to a song. "I forget the name of the song itself, but Elvis said, 'Good evening, ladies and gentlemen, this is my latest escape, uh, release.'" It got quite a laugh.

The show was definitely a success, both for Elvis and the Paramount. Owner Dave Garven, a longtime friend of Colonel Parker's, received a Smithfield ham from the Colonel, a token of appreciation for a job well done.

Mr. and Mrs. Jerome Gordon of Hampton were also close friends of Elvis. Mr. Gordon was once owner of the Palace Theatre, also in downtown Newport News, and recently renovated by Whisper Concerts of Norfolk.

Aside from remembering his first visit here to the Peninsula, Jerry and



1974

# 1956

his wife Mabel were fortunate enough to visit him on the set of *Wild in the Country*, in California:

"We enjoyed it, to say the least," report the Gordons. "We were in California at the time, and we happened to tour the studios at the same time he was filming *Wild in the Country*, with Tuesday Weld. Between shots I asked the director if he minded if we spoke with Elvis; he didn't see why not, so we spoke with him for about an hour. We discussed many things, including boating, which we've enjoyed for many years and Elvis pulled out a picture of a mahogany speedboat, like you would one of a child. Elvis was very proud of his boat."

"He was a very nice boy," remembers Mable Gordon, "he really seemed to enjoy talking to us. Jerry wasn't as appreciative of Elvis at the time like I was, but he was really sold after this visit."

Though the Gordons saw him in person several years later in Las Vegas, they never had a chance to speak with him again.

By appearing in the theatres, Elvis certainly didn't hurt his chances of being noticed by the "big guys" in Hollywood. There was a practice among theatres in the fifties that soon came under scrutiny of the government. Mr. Gordon explains: "At the time, Hollywood had franchise theatres. For example, MGM had interest in Loew's, 20th Century in the Fox theatres, and Paramount, of course, had the Paramounts. These franchises were used to showcase the respective studio's newest films. The Justice Department later broke this monopoly up."

A local podiatrist remembers Elvis in a shoe store on Washington Avenue. He reportedly joked with them and signed autographs for those who recognized him. Elvis' old shoes were left behind, another souvenir given away to the fans.

Several young ladies who enjoyed the shows that evening were in trouble at home. After the last show, buses were no longer running, thus

leaving many teenagers without a way home and out past curfew. All the more reason for parents to hate their beloved idol.

Before leaving the Tidewater area, Elvis made one final stop, Oscar Smith High School. Miss Aurelia I. Leigh was principal of Oscar Smith in the spring of 1956. For the last year their school had been the first and only one in the state to have a radio station on the premises. Their call letters were WFOS-FM.

Her day was interrupted by a nice looking young man who introduced himself as Elvis Presley. Not being completely oblivious to rock-n-roll, she recognized the singer immediately.

"I was quite proud to stop what I was doing to give him a tour of the school and radio station," remembers Miss Leigh. She introduced him to the boys on radio and went back to work.

"I don't remember even why he came by, but I do recall a photographer, so it must have been some type of promotional tour."

Before a 1978 article in the *Chesapeake Post* appeared, only Miss Leigh and a handful of others knew of the visit by RCA's fastest-rising singing star.

Elvis went on to accomplish many things in the rest of the fifties, including several more television appearances, more gold records, four motion pictures, and a stint in the United States Army.

It would be an entire generation before he returned.



"Hello Norfolk"

1975

# 1972: Elvis Returns

Sixteen years had now passed since Elvis last visited the Tidewater area. From the moment tickets went on sale, to the day of the concerts, we all had a chance to sit back and reminisce.

So much time had gone by so quickly. Elvis was now a long-established superstar; he had thirty-three movies, hundreds of gold records and many incomparable feats to his credit. We had followed his career from the beginning, and we all felt "we knew him when."

We missed him in the army, cried when his mother died, screamed when he married and rejoiced at the birth of his daughter. But why not? He was a member of our family too!

It was this strange feeling of relation that kept us close to him over the years.

And now he was coming home.

At least one local man knew of his every planned move in 1972, a Lt. Doran, with the Hampton Police Department. When first approached with the duty, Lt. Doran was anything but ecstatic about it. He explains, "When I was first assigned to work for Presley, I had some negative feelings. I wasn't much of a rock fan and I'm still not, but when I met the gentleman and saw how he and his organization handled themselves, I was most impressed."

Elvis arrived at Patrick Henry Airport in the midst of very tight security. His plane landed in the early morning hours on April 9th, a practice that continued on his tours until his death.

A small trailer had been



1975



positioned on the airfield to accommodate Presley if he needed it. After a few brief moments in the trailer, the Presley entourage headed for the Holiday Inn on Mercury Boulevard. But not until Elvis had autographed the wall inside.

Again security was tight at the hotel. Lt. Doran saw to it that Elvis was well guarded, well taken care of, and had his much-needed rest and privacy. What really impressed Doran though was Elvis' concern for the policemen. "He was just as concerned for the people who worked for him temporarily as he was for those who worked for him permanently. He personally made sure that we, the officers, had a room to relax and food to eat during our shifts. Even as he was leaving the hotel, he took time to stop and talk with the officers on duty."

It was also noticed that there was no vulgarity or any unusual demands as with some rock groups. The entire organization was like a well-oiled machine. Each person knew his or her place, and kept to it.

Early in the day the coliseum began to fill. People of all ages were in the audience. The crowd wasn't mostly teenagers as it had been in 1956. When you looked around you could see children, teens and many women, as well as older people. Elvis was for all to enjoy, not just one segment of our society.

You also saw movie cameras. We were soon told that Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer was filming the concert for an upcoming movie entitled *Elvis, Standing Room Only*. The movie, Elvis' thirty-third and last, was a mixture of the entire tour. A tour that started in Buffalo on April 5th, and would end in Albuquerque on the 19th. A fifteen-city tour, with nineteen concerts, all sold out months ahead.

The title of the movie was later changed to *Elvis On Tour*.

Meanwhile, backstage, a dream was coming true for a Portsmouth family. Roy G. Barnes recalls, "When we first heard Elvis was coming to town, we wanted to give him some-

thing on behalf of the city of Portsmouth. It was decided to give him the official symbol of our city, the Merrimac tie clasp."

Mr. Barnes, his wife Frances, thirteen-year-old son Glen, and seven-year-old daughter Shannon, were ushered through seven levels of security to Presley's dressing room. The Merrimac pin was presented "as a token from Portsmouth Mayor Jack P. Barnes and the citizens of Portsmouth." Barnes is a nephew of the former mayor.

"We found Elvis a humble, meek and appreciative person," Barnes said. It's also remembered that when Barnes started to explain the story of the *Merrimac*, Elvis interrupted and said, "You don't have to explain it to me, sir, I'm a southern boy."

Outside, the electricity in the building could definitely be felt.

The women chattered loudly and proudly walked around, showing off new outfits and hair-dos. The men squirmed and adjusted cameras and binoculars, many still sporting duck-tails.

The atmosphere was intense.

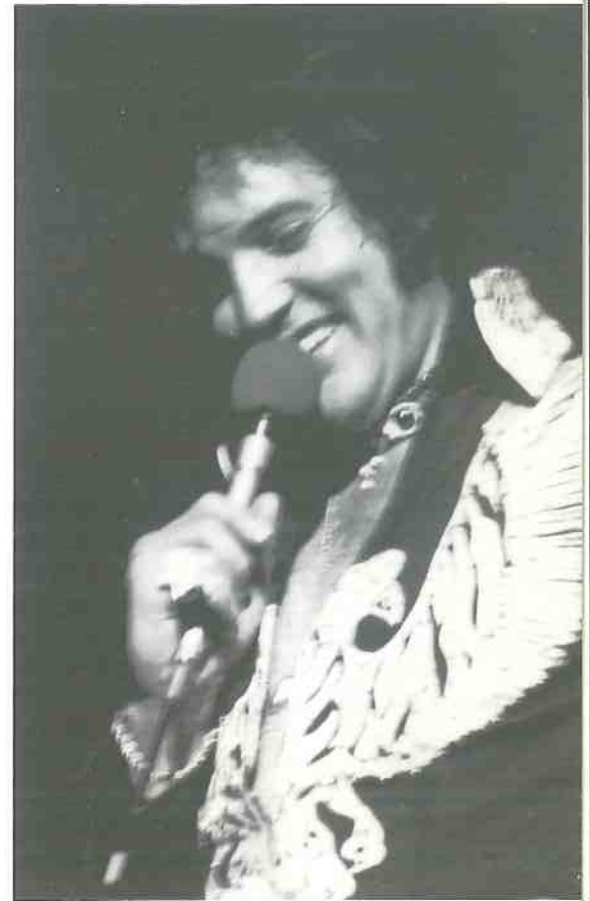
When the first notes of the thunderous "'2001 Space Odyssey" began, it was hard to believe you were actually going to be in the same room with Elvis Presley, at last!

He was slim, handsome, and full of energy. Much make-up was used due to the filming of the movie. He wore the now-famous "Burning Love" jumpsuit, red in color with a silver-lined cape that seemed to fly behind him as he walked onstage. He sang old and new songs using a wide range of words and music.

He teased, tantalized and kissed the women. As the *Daily Press* reported the next day, "... who else but Elvis could have them screaming from the rafters one second and calmed to pin-dropping silence the next?"

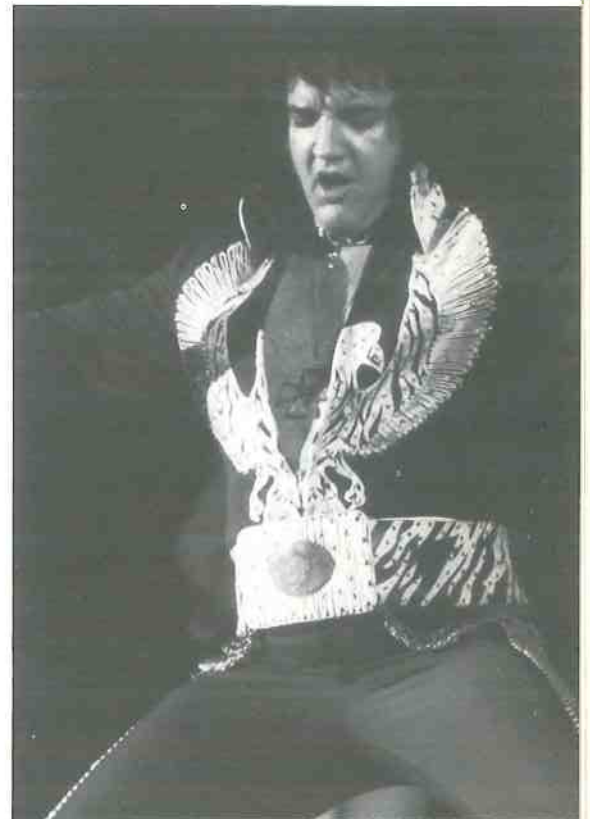
All too soon the show was over.

By the time the announcer informed us that "Elvis has left the building," Presley had already left



Sunday afternoon at the Scope

1975



1975

and returned to the Holiday Inn to rest for the second show.

Back at the hotel, it's reported that he rested, sang, and played the guitar to kill time. Another interesting note is that about five minutes after Elvis left for the coliseum, Lt. Doran answered the phone in the suite. He recalls the conversation.

"When I answered the phone, the caller introduced herself as Mrs. Presley. I explained who I was and informed her that Elvis had just left for the evening's show. She requested that I let Elvis know she had called and hung up. I relayed the message through Colonel Parker."

For the night show at 8:30 p.m., the parking lot began filling early. Again the electricity and excitement prevailed everywhere. An almost carnival-like atmosphere filled the air. Souvenirs were for sale at booths all around the coliseum. Hawkers were selling everything from programs to pictures to pennants.

Meanwhile, backstage, Elvis once again received a visitor. A young *Times Herald* reporter, Nina Banner, was allowed a brief interview with the superstar. Elvis stood waiting in the locker room he chose to use instead of the star's dressing room. He was already costumed for the show.

Elvis told her his greatest contribution to entertainment had been in making people happy. He was also enjoying touring again. The interview had to be very brief, and Ms. Banner soon realized it was over as she was being hugged by the star.

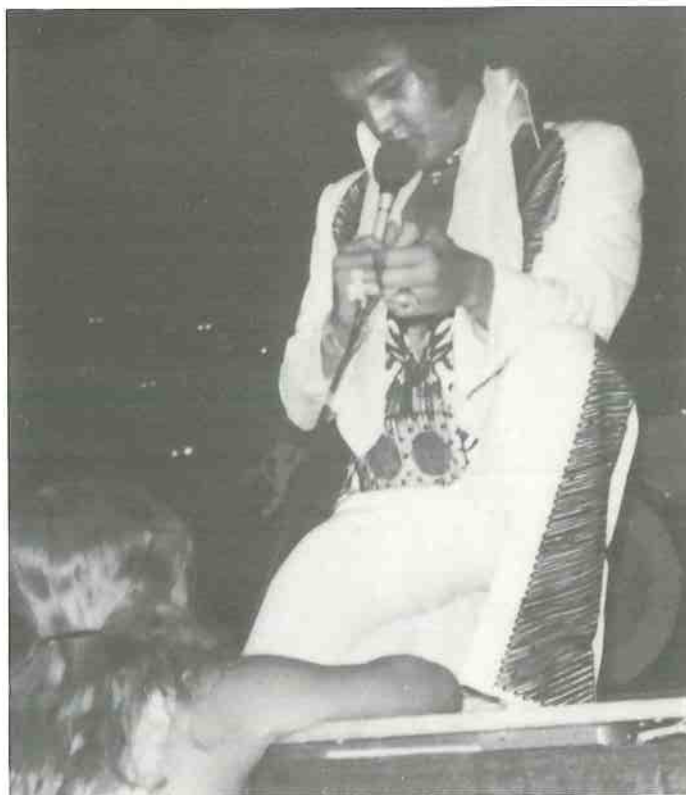
After what seemed like an eternity of acts for the first half of the show, there was an intermission, and a loud groan was heard throughout the coliseum.

Twenty minutes later the lights went down, and once again Elvis Presley, the King of Rock and Roll, took the stage.

He truly fulfilled the image pictured in everyone's mind. He wore a beautiful powder-blue jumpsuit with silver studding across the chest and shoulders and down each bell-bottomed leg. The suit was



Backstage, wearing police badge



1975

1975

Elvis serenades

# 1972



carefully tailored to accent slim hips and broad shoulders. It was dramatic, with a V-shaped neck open to the waist, high standup collar, and a matching white silk-lined cape. A white and gold decorated hip-hugger belt accented the area which had gained him earlier fame.

He could have just stood there and the audience wouldn't have cared. Even when he did just stand there for a second, the audience screamed and cheered themselves hoarse.

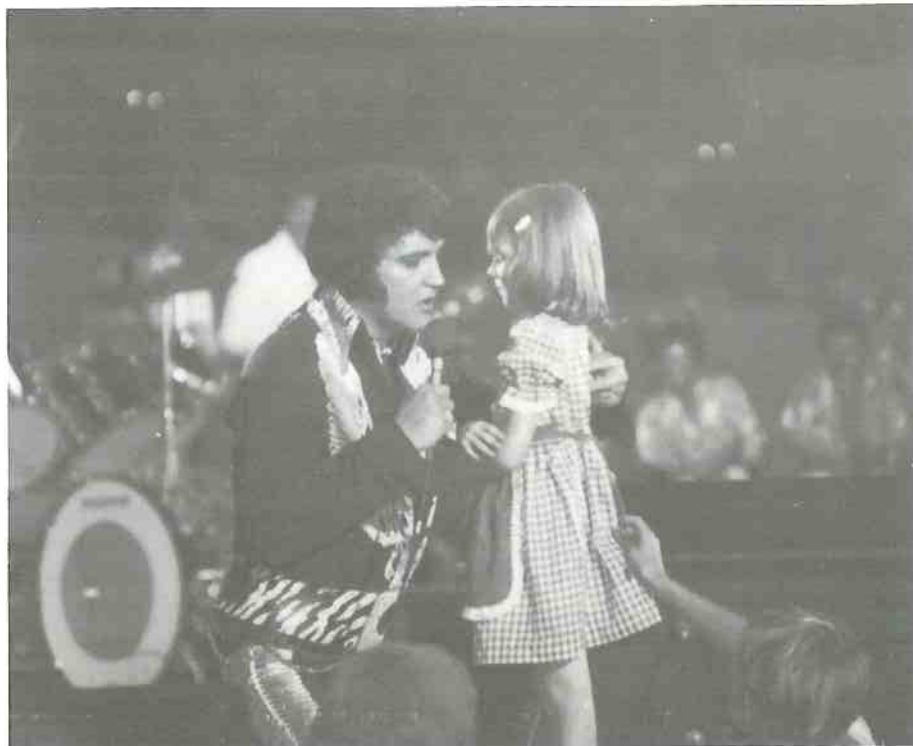
He was truly a sight to behold.

The highest priced tickets were \$10.00 each. For a mere \$10.00, you could see and hear perhaps the best known entertainer of any generation.

One of the more outstanding moments of the concert was when Elvis asked his back-up group, J. D. Sumner and the Stamps Quartet, to sing one of his favorite gospel songs, "Sweet, Sweet, Spirit."

There, in front of 12,000 people and an entire movie company, Elvis bowed his head in reverence, seemingly giving thanks to the god who had guided his life and career. (Incidentally, this scene can be viewed in his last movie.)

It would be another two years before Presley would return to Tidewater and again to the Coliseum.



*A Tender Moment*

1975

Songs in order as performed:

Matinee Show:

*See See Rider*  
*Proud Mary*  
*Never Been To Spain*  
*You Gave Me A Mountain*  
*Until It's Time For You To Go*  
*Polk Salad Annie*  
*Love Me*  
*All Shook Up*  
*Teddy Bear*  
*Don't Be Cruel*  
*Jailhouse Rock*  
*One Night*  
*Hound Dog*  
*Help Me Make It Through The Night*  
*Bridge Over Troubled Water*  
*Love Me Tender*  
*Suspicious Minds*  
*American Trilogy*  
*Heartbreak Hotel*  
*For The Good Times*  
*How Great Thou Art*  
*Lawdy Miss Clawdy*  
*Big Hunk Of Love*  
*Funny How Time Slips Away*  
*Can't Help Falling In Love*

Evening Show:

*See See Rider*  
*I Got A Woman*  
*Never Been To Spain*  
*You Gave Me A Mountain*  
*Until It's Time For You To Go*  
*Polk Salad Annie*  
*Love Me*  
*All Shook Up*  
*Teddy Bear*  
*Don't Be Cruel*  
*Are You Lonesome Tonight*  
*I Can't Stop Loving You*  
*Hound Dog*  
*Bridge Over Troubled Water*  
*Suspicious Minds*  
*For The Good Times*  
*American Trilogy*  
*Love Me Tender*  
*Big Hunk Of Love*  
*How Great Thou Art*  
*Sweet, Sweet, Spirit (Stamps)*  
*Lawdy Miss Clawdy*  
*Can't Help Falling In Love*



# 1974:

## The King's Coming

The beginning of 1974 was not happy. The "energy crisis" was upon America. The lines at gas stations started to lengthen, and President Nixon was considering resignation. Watergate was a much-discussed subject, often the butt of twice as many jokes. Inflation threatened; recession and unemployment rose. The nation was indeed in turmoil.

It couldn't have started out any better for Tidewater Elvis fans.

On January 12, 1974, four days after Elvis' thirty-ninth birthday, it was announced that Elvis Presley would return for his second appearance at Hampton Coliseum. The decision to return was based largely on the success of his 1972 shows. With no weekend dates available, Monday, March 11th, at 8:30 p.m., was scheduled for the "King" to come to Hampton. At this, with 128 more seats than in 1972, Elvis would surpass his own attendance record. This accomplishment was simple for Presley. Only a year earlier, he had performed a concert via satellite from Honolulu, Hawaii. The one-man show, taped January 14th, was beamed to numerous countries. It broke all existing television records. The album alone sold over two million copies.

But life for Elvis wasn't all records and triumphs. In the fall of 1973, Elvis and Priscilla had chosen to end their six-year marriage. Amicably and quietly.

This, we, the authors, believe, was the beginning of the end.

Tickets were sold by mail order



1975

*His famous karate stance*



1975

only, as deemed by Elvis' long-time manager, Colonel Tom Parker, who, incidentally, had almost total control over how the operation was run.

Advertising and radio spots were totally non-existent. It was the Colonel's plan that he could sell out the entire tour by word of mouth, which he did. The Colonel felt that distributing the tickets by the postmark on the letter was the fairest way for everyone concerned. The tickets, priced at \$10.00, \$7.50, and \$5.00, sold out in a matter of days.

The tour started in Tulsa, Oklahoma and ended seventeen days later in Richmond, Virginia. Originally scheduled to close in Memphis, Tennessee, on the 17th, the Richmond Coliseum had couped him for still another show on the 18th. All shows were sold out.

The *Elvis Live at Graceland* album was recorded on this tour.

Again, preparation for the Elvis show was quite extensive. Very few people actually knew when Presley and his entourage would arrive in town. Once the announcement was made that Presley was coming, Colonel Parker took the wheel and handled most of the details, leaving the coliseum with very little to do. He called the area several times, checking on the building, airport, and hotels.

Bill Fogel, of Red Carpet Limousine Service, was hired to pick up Elvis at the Patrick Henry Airport. According to Fogel, Parker came into town early in the day and was immediately taken to the Holiday Inn where Elvis would again take up residence.

A local police officer, Lt. Jim Samples, had been in charge in 1972. Parker was quite impressed with him. After he arrived at the hotel, the Colonel learned that another man had been picked for the job.

He was quickly replaced by Samples at the Colonel's request. Samples then worked with Elvis' chief of security, Dick Grob, to make sure that all aspects of the show were handled with supreme

precision.

When Elvis Presley came to town, there seemed to be a special magic in the air, even days before he arrived. Newspaper articles, with short bios on his life, were printed, television broadcasts and a unique advertisement which read, "Elvis concert, Elvis, 'SOLD OUT,' THANKS, THANKS, THANKS."

One of the more prominent radio stations, WGH, held a week-long contest. The first caller who



1975

correctly identified the Presley song playing won a free album. At the end of the week, the forty winners were eligible to win two free concert tickets. Response to this contest was incredible. (Incidentally, one of the authors won this contest.)

Security was very tight for the Presley show. During the course of the concert, Elvis had at least twenty-five Hampton policemen around the stage, while his own security force also totalled that number.

According to *Times Herald* reporter Lynda Cooley, "... the performance was surrounded with security that would keep the Shah of Iran, Henry Kissinger and Patricia Hearst secret backstage."

Commenting on Elvis' arrival in the Hampton area, Police Chief P. G. Minetti said, "It's so secret, I don't

even know.”

With the rain coming down, loyal fans were filling up the parking lot hours before showtime. Many had as much as half a mile to walk. People of all ages came to an Elvis Presley concert, from young children to their great grandmothers, and every race, age, and nationality in between.

At Colonel Parker’s request, no one was allowed inside the coliseum without the price of a ticket. This included news photographers, reporters, and other important persons connected with the coliseum.

Andrew Greenwell, who has had a great deal to do with the coliseum since it’s conception, was also denied entry. He explains, “On the night of the concert, I happened to be next door having a drink with a friend. He mentioned he’d like to see Presley perform a song. I approached the ticket taker and explained who I was. He said he was sorry, and politely refused. I went in anyhow.”

Greenwell is presently director of the facility.

An Elvis concert was like no other on Earth. Excitement built up in the concert hall until the roofing seams almost split. His Hampton show was no exception.

It started slowly with opening acts—a comedian with cornball humor and Elvis’ back-up group singing a few disco and gospel songs—all of which the audience accepted and responded to politely.

After the intermission, it was clear who the audience wanted to entertain them.

Most Elvis concerts started off the same, and this was no exception. About twenty minutes into the intermission, the lights were again dimmed. The tension grew to great heights as the “2001 Space Odyssey” began to play. Elvis walked onstage, looking tanned, slim, and as handsome as Cinderella’s prince.

He was dressed in a white jumpsuit studded with gold chains and turquoise stones, and opened the

show with his traditional “See See Rider.” Although a guitar was placed around his neck when he first walked out, he removed it two songs later, without having touched the strings.

The concert, very similar to the “Graceland” album, brought the audience from the highest highs, with “How Great Thou Art” and “American Trilogy,” to the mellow sound of “Help Me,” with an almost joking rendition of some of his old songs like “Teddy Bear” and “All Shook Up.”

Elvis’ gyrations were somewhat less than days of old, but he could still show his old movements when he wanted to, as he did with his version of “Polk Salad Annie,” which sent the audience into a frenzy.

Elvis laughed, joked, played tricks on the band, and seemed to be much more relaxed than during his 1972 performances. When the end came, he sang, “Can’t Help Falling In Love,” and left the stage, with tremendous audience reaction continuing long after Elvis had left the building. As was true of his 1972 shows, and like all his live performances, Elvis did no encores.

Elvis would return to the Tidewater area, to Norfolk in 1975, and to Hampton in 1976, but things would be different. Although the fans would keep coming, Elvis’ 1974 show at the Hampton Coliseum would be the last performance where he would be able to give a hundred percent of himself.

March 11, 1974, Evening Show:

*See See Rider*

*I Got A Woman*

*Love Me*

*Trying To Get To You*

*All Shook Up*

*Steamroller Blues*

*Teddy Bear*

*Don't Be Cruel*

*Love Me Tender*

*Johnny B. Goode*

*Hound Dog*

*Fever*

*Polk Salad Annie*

*Why Me Lord*

*Suspicious Minds*

*I Can't Stop Loving You*

*Help Me*

*American Trilogy*

*How Great Thou Art*

*Let Me Be There*

*Funny How Time Slips Away*

*Can't Help Falling In Love*



# "This Place Looks Like A Spaceship"

On January 8, 1975, Elvis quietly celebrated his fortieth birthday.

It had been twenty years since his first RCA recording and his career was still going strong. Even though Elvis had turned forty, this did nothing to stop him from doing what he loved most: touring the country.

He would continue touring very rigorously through 1975; however, the extensive roadshows were starting to take their toll on Presley. He was hospitalized four times in 1975 for problems ranging from exhaustion to stomach ailments and eye irritation. It was also rumored that his age and weight were bothering him.

Through all this, his schedule never slowed.

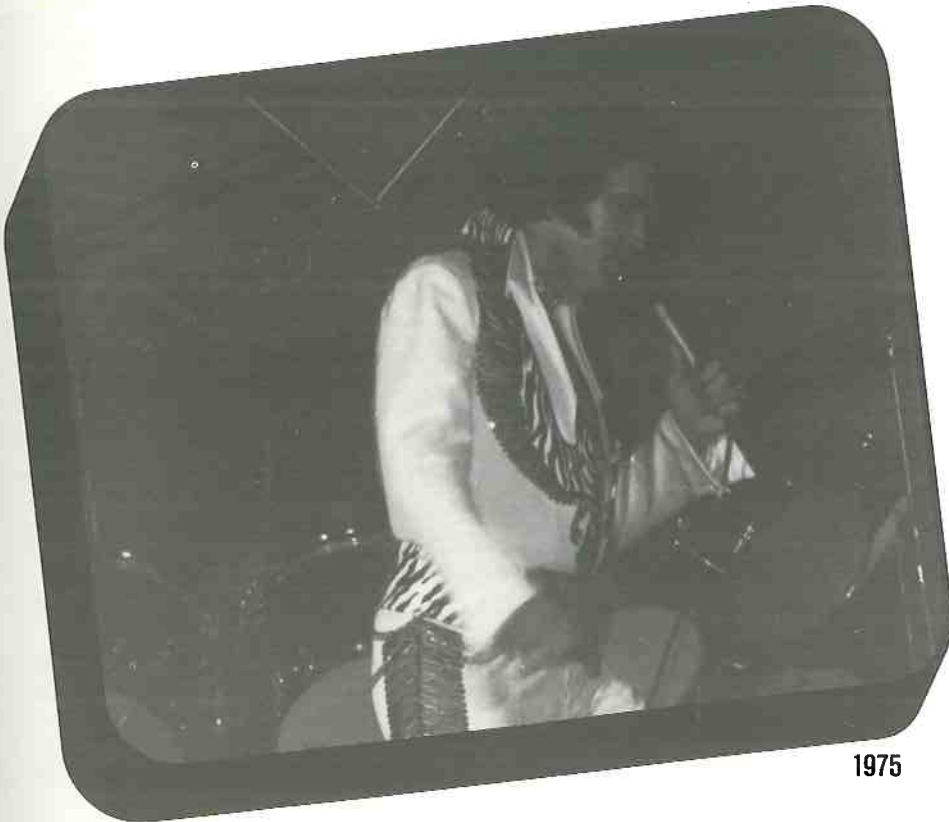
During 1975 several small newspaper accounts appeared almost weekly. A local newspaper, *The Ledger Star*, faithfully reported up-to-date details of Elvis' stays in the hospital and his acts of generosity.

Most of the tidbits included a report about his giving away more new cars to both friends and strangers. There was a benefit concert given in Jackson, Mississippi to aid tornado victims in that state; the extensive and expensive remodeling of one of his four luxury jet liners; and a get-well call Elvis received in the hospital from former president Richard M. Nixon.

Even when Elvis split his pants somewhere in the country, the news reached Tidewater the very next day. The local newspapers were well aware of and sympathetic to the fact



1975



1975

that Tidewater was definitely "Elvis Country."

In March of 1975, Scope director C. E. Bell announced that Elvis Presley would appear in Norfolk Scope the afternoon of July 20th. Bell said during a morning press conference that Presley's appearance here would highlight one of Scope's best entertainment years.

The signing of Presley to the Norfolk date took a solid year. The tickets were to be sold by mail order, at the Scope box office, and at all Video Seat locations. Ticket prices for the performance would be \$5.00, \$7.50, and \$10.00.

With the show scheduled for 2:30 Sunday afternoon, learned Tidewater fans knew they were guaranteed an evening performance, a hint some regret not realizing to this day.

The announcement of the play-date surprised many veteran concert-goers. It was a well-known fact that Elvis did not visit the same area twice inside a two-year period. It seems overexposure was not a problem to Colonel Parker and tour management.

The tour was Elvis' third of the year. It started in Oklahoma City on July 8th and ended July 24th in Asheville, North Carolina. Twelve cities, with twenty-one shows, in seventeen days.

The man in charge of local security was Sgt. Sidney Cherry.

On Saturday, July 19th, while working on his garage roof, Cherry's wife received a phone call. Refusing to call her husband down from the roof, she told the caller she would take a message. "Tell him I will arrive in Norfolk in forty-five minutes," the caller identified himself as Colonel Tom Parker.

Sgt. Cherry and the Colonel discussed security arrangements over dinner that night at Johnny Lockhart's Seafood Restaurant on Tidewater Drive.

Early the next morning, Elvis' private jet landed at Piedmont Aviation, adjacent to Norfolk International Airport. He was quickly taken to the Sheraton at Military Circle Shopping

Center. Elvis stayed on the entire second floor, not the top floor of the hotel, as previously believed.

While Elvis slept before show time, crowds gathered in front of Scope's doors, anxiously anticipating the show ahead of them. Once again fans were subjected to the opening acts' chance to warm the audience. An hour and ten minutes later, Elvis' entrance music hinted at his arrival.

Dressed in a navy blue jumpsuit trimmed in silver with a large silver eagle embroidered on the front and back, Elvis strolled out to the lone standing microphone at center stage.

Elvis' appearance had indeed changed in a year's time. He had gained noticeable weight in the stomach, and his face was puffy and pasty-looking. Elvis, always the trendsetter, sported a neck choker, reminiscent of the Bobby Sherman era.

According to Mal Vincent, a local entertainment editor, "He broke into 'See See Rider,' and upon finishing, asked Esther, a member of the Sweet Inspirations, what time it was. Learning that it was 3:40 in the afternoon, he replied that it was nighttime to him. "I just woke up," he said. "In my life, night is day."

After singing "Big Boss Man," Elvis stated, "This place looks like a spaceship." Later, with flashbulbs flashing, he stopped a song to add, "I told you we were in a spaceship; we're taking off."

There was one special moment for a special little girl. Eight-year-old Linda Berry was hoisted onto stage by Scope ushers. At the moment Elvis was facing the crowd in the opposite direction.

On a quick double-take, Elvis noticed her. "What do we have here?" his voice echoed. As he knelt down in front of her, Elvis realized the little girl was blind.

Suddenly, a very solemn look came over his face. He then removed the scarf from around his neck and kissed it. He then touched both of her eyes before putting it



*Elvis clowning*

1975

around her neck. Elvis whispered something to her and hugged her. Before 11,000 people Elvis' expression showed complete humility and compassion.

To this day, she has never told what he said. She usually answers, when asked, "It's between me and Elvis."

During the show, several people in the first rows persistently yelled for Elvis to sing his latest single, "Promised Land." Elvis, realizing where he was, unsuccessfully attempted to remember the words. The lyrics in the song mention Tidewater and Norfolk, Virginia.

Members of the Return to Sender Elvis Presley Fan Club, who occupied choice seats, presented Elvis with a handmade quilt, which he draped around his shoulders and displayed proudly.

After singing "Can't Help Falling In Love," Elvis was whisked out of the building and taken back to the

Sheraton.

Bill Fogel and Red Carpet Limousines were once again called upon for transportation during Elvis' Norfolk stay. Several diversionary tactics were used to throw off fans. Fogel explains, "To confuse the crowd who'd gathered at the Sheraton, two limos were used. One car was backed up to the kitchen loading dock and one car was parked at the front mall entrance to the Sheraton. For the afternoon show, I was stationed in the car by the kitchen, while Elvis used the one out front. Upon returning from the first show, it was decided to switch the procedure for the evening show."

Simple, but it worked.

After the first show, all limousine drivers were told to stay on the same floor with Elvis, and not to leave. Too much depended on them, they were told.

There was a buffet of every kind of food imaginable from which they



could choose. Cases of beer and soft drinks were at everyone's disposal. Sgt. Cherry's room was directly adjacent to Elvis', and he sat in there to bide the time. After a while, Elvis came out of his room, wearing a blue velvet bathrobe and the boots he wore onstage earlier, unzipped. It seemed to the men that Elvis was restless and wanted to talk to someone other than the people always around him.

A conversation started, and someone asked the right question when he mentioned karate. "Elvis' eyes really sparkled," remembers Cherry. "He asked us to form a circle, while he demonstrated some techniques."

At one point, Elvis asked his stepbrother Rick Stanley to hit him in the stomach as hard as he could, it didn't seem to phase Elvis in the least.

Sgt. Cherry suggested to Elvis that he tour the naval installations while he was here. Elvis politely declined.

It was also at this point that Elvis showed off his collection of police badges. "He had some from almost all fifty states, including a federal narcotics badge from President Nixon," reports Cherry. Later in the day, an unknown officer gave Elvis a sergeant's badge to add to his collection. He wore it during the entire evening performance.

The 8:30 p.m. concert was much the same as the earlier show, even at the risk of looking choreographed. More scarf giving and gift receiving took place. Elvis also surprised the audience with an error-free "Promised Land." Evidently, he had learned the words between shows.

During his show, however, some tension did grow between Elvis and some of his back-up people. Elvis joked to the audience that the Sweet Inspirations' breath smelled like catfish. He later stated that if they didn't like it, they could get their ass off the pot. With this, two of the Sweet Inspirations and Kathy Westmoreland left the stage, leaving the third Sweet Inspiration, Myrna

Smith, sitting alone. Elvis walked over and handed her his star-shaped diamond ring. Reluctantly, she accepted it.

After the show, en route to the airport, Elvis' temper was running high. He was heard to say that the Sweet Inspirations were fired, and were to be replaced by the Raylettes, Ray Charles' back-up singers. Joe Esposito, Elvis' tour manager, later calmed him down, and the Sweet Inspirations were back on stage with Elvis the next day.

When Elvis left Norfolk, he was over \$200,000 richer. Statistically, gross receipts totalled \$218,905. Audience attendance came to exactly 22,889 emotionally exhausted, but satisfied, people.

This was his only appearance at the Norfolk Scope Arena, although Scope officials were negotiating at the time of Elvis' death.

Mary Dissen, a local reporter who reviewed the concert, would later write, "... it's hard to feel awe in the presence of a national institution, sort of like if Mount Rushmore suddenly started singing. And Elvis, who sells out houses in minutes, is definitely a national institution."

Matinee Show  
*See See Rider*  
*I Got A Woman/Amen*  
*Big Boss Man*  
*Love Me*  
*If You Love Me Let Me Know*  
*Love Me Tender*  
*All Shook Up*  
*Teddy Bear/Don't Be Cruel*  
*Hound Dog*  
*The Wonder of You*  
*Polk Salad Annie*  
 Introduction of band  
 TROUBLE  
*Why Me Lord*  
*How Great Thou Art*  
*Let Me Be There*  
*Funny How Time Slips Away*  
*Mystery Train/Tiger Man*  
*Promised Land*  
*Can't Help Falling In Love*

Evening Show  
*See See Rider*  
*I Got A Woman/Amen*  
*Love Me*  
*If You Love Me Let Me Know*  
*Love Me Tender*  
*All Shook Up*  
*Teddy Bear/Don't Be Cruel*  
*Hound Dog*  
*The Wonder of You*  
*Polk Salad Annie*  
 Introduction of band  
 TROUBLE  
*Why Me Lord*  
*How Great Thou Art*  
*Let Me Be There*  
*Funny How Time Slips Away*  
*Little Darlin'*  
*Mystery Train/Tiger Man*  
*Promised Land*  
*Can't Help Falling In Love*

# 1976: A Prestige Act

1976



The summer of 1976 was to be a very special one for some very special people in Tidewater. On Wednesday, June 16th, an announcement in the *Times Herald* read, "Elvis Presley, 'the King of Rock 'n Roll,' returning to Hampton Coliseum." The show was scheduled for August 1st at 2:30 p.m. Andrew Greenwell, who had just been appointed permanent director of the coliseum, also announced that tickets would be priced at \$12.50, \$10.00, and \$7.50. Tickets were up two-fifty from last year's Scope appearance.

News of the concert spread fast, as rumors of Elvis' appearance had been running rapidly through the area for some time. The coliseum box office had been receiving calls for a week, some from as far away as New York, New Jersey and Kentucky. This problem was due largely to the fact that the Richmond Coliseum had already signed Elvis to a June 29th show. At first that seemed to be his only Virginia appearance.

Earlier that year, some people waiting in line to get tickets to see other performers had become unruly and had caused some damage to the coliseum parking lot. Due to this, security was beefed up for the fans waiting in line to receive tickets for this show. The ticket buyers were required to wait in line outside the coliseum parking lot on a side street.

As fans began to line up on the street, police did what they could to control the crowd and make sure all



1976

*Looking tired*

went well as everyone prepared for a long night. Devoted Elvis fans didn't mind losing a few hours sleep to get tickets that seemed worth more than gold.

Early Thursday, June 17th, the faithful began to arrive, even though the tickets would not be sold until Friday at 10:00 a.m. They sat on lounge chairs, blankets, in their cars, and on the ground. Elvis music was playing and many wore Elvis attire (T-shirts, belt buckles, etc.). They ate picnic lunches, took turns going to fast food restaurants, and playing frisbee. Although it would be hard for a non-Elvis fan to understand, these people were actually having a good time and all seemed to be going well.

Around 6:00 a.m. Friday morning, the crowd seemed to be growing restless. All were coaxing the police into letting them go to the box office doors, which seemed half a mile away. The police held their ground, and refused the crowd's demands.

About 6:30 a.m., a lone man was seen darting across the parking lot towards the box office. Upon seeing this, a woman yelled, "There goes someone." The police lost control, and the crowd began stampeding across the parking lot. We'd like to note here that the writers of this book were among that crowd, and led the pack to the box office. Arriving at the doors first, and quite tired from the run, they met for the first time. A friendship was formed that day because of Elvis Presley; however, it is a friendship that far exceeds the world of Elvis, one that has touched our lives greatly and one that will never be broken.

Four lines formed in front of the box office, and the afternoon newspaper carried pictures of seemingly endless lines. For those far back in the lines, a glimmer of hope came later that day. Due to the tremendous response for tickets, a second show was added while people were still getting in line for the first. The lucky ones who happened to be getting their tickets for the first show at

that time got the choice seats for the second show, scheduled for July 31st at 8:30 p.m.

Andrew Greenwell did most of his dealings with Tom Hulett of Concerts West. Although the newspapers denied it, negotiations had been set up earlier to start the wheels turning for a second show if the need was sufficient. It was, of course, and between 2:00 p.m. and 3:00 p.m. on Friday, June 18th, the decision was made and the second show was punched into the computers.

Fans had red eyes, tired feet, and high spirits as they came away with their priceless tickets. Six weeks before Elvis even walked onstage, the first cheers for him could be heard.

It seemed for a while prior to this show, the coliseum had not been getting many name acts. What a change of pace and what excitement there was to be bringing Elvis Presley to town. It meant good business to the coliseum as well as much satisfaction for the many Elvis fans in the area.

Greenwell remembers well that the day tickets went on sale, everything was monitored and closely watched. He seemed glued to his desks with phone calls and paperwork. A "prestige act" such as Presley's was a good one to get. It's the best business there is for a building that cost \$2,500 daily to operate.

Greenwell remembers that Colonel Parker did sell radio spots and newspaper ads this time to be one hundred percent sure that the tickets were sold by showtime.

Colonel Parker would, of course, come to town before the concerts to arrange for hotel accommodations and other necessities to ready the area for Presley. He had done this throughout Elvis' career and would continue these procedures through the very last concert tour.

As far as setting up the stage was concerned, there were never any unusual demands by the Presley organization. The most important thing was that Elvis preferred to



enter the stage from the rear, because it was easier to get in and out of the building—a precaution he took for both the safety of himself and his fans.

When Elvis came to town, excitement seemed to fill the air. Hampton was no different, and Presley fever was in full swing. Local radio stations played Elvis songs and his movies were played at the local theaters. Elvis imitators also visited the area to satisfy the fans who could not afford to get their hands on tickets to see the real thing.

As concert time drew near, enthusiasm was running high. One local car dealer even had a contest where the winner received a ride to the August 1st performance (two tickets included), as well as a champagne dinner for two.

Lt. Doran, who had been with Elvis during his previous two appearances in Hampton, was in full charge this time. He picked up Presley at the airport, this time using an unmarked Matador rather than a limousine. This was another request from Colonel Parker.

On July 31st, the *Times Herald* contained an article entitled "Portrait of the Artist as an Aging Fantasy," and it was not flattering to either Elvis or his fans. There was an unspoken feeling floating about that something might be seriously wrong with Elvis. This, of course, made no difference to the thousands of people who came to see "The King" perform. Only concern began to grow.

Lt. Doran recalls how sick Elvis looked, and that a doctor had accompanied him on this particular tour. Before the Saturday evening performance, Doran was requested to drive one of Elvis' men to a local pharmacy to pick up a prescription. Doran explains, "The prescription was for a stomach ailment. I know this because I'd taken this type of medication before."

Finally show time had arrived. The parking lot was a familiar scene, with crowds of people arriving long before the doors were open. Once

inside, that familiar feeling of electricity filled every corner of the building.

Director Greenwell, who was standing not far from Elvis, remembers how sick Elvis looked. "He was overweight and looked very tired; he didn't seem to have much life in him. Once the house lights went down, and the music began to play, Presley stepped out of the room and stood a few feet from the steps to the stage. As the tempo of the music grew, and the excitement level of the audience rose, a tremendous transformation seemed to occur in Elvis. His eyes grew bright, color came to his face, and the power of the audience seemed to all at once fill his body." Seconds later, Elvis was led up the steps to entertain his adoring kingdom.

On Saturday evening, July 31st, Elvis wore a white jumpsuit with an ancient Egyptian eagle embroidered on the front of the costume. The large belt that surrounded his waist depicted the presidential seal, the sleeves were made of a lighter material, giving Elvis the look of a majestic cavalier.

Interestingly enough, the jumpsuit had been dry-cleaned earlier in the day at Sanitone Cleaners, a local cleaners located in the Riverdale section of Hampton. It's known that strands of material were pulled from the costume and kept as keepsakes.

On Sunday afternoon, the suit was the same, except that the sleeves were white and the jumpsuit itself was blue.

He opened both shows with the usual "See See Rider," and continued with a repertoire of songs that hadn't changed much over the past few years. What had changed though was his physical appearance. He was bloated beyond normalcy.

Both Saturday night and Sunday afternoon, Linda Thompsen, Elvis' live-in girlfriend at the time, was in the audience and gladly signed autographs.

Once the opening acts and intermission were over, the first notes of

1976



*After the show, arriving at the Sheraton*



1976

Linda Thompson, signing autographs



1976



Elvis' suit at the cleaners

1976

Richard Strauss' "2001: A Space Odyssey" were heard.

The car which brought Elvis to the coliseum arrived just minutes before he was to walk on stage. Rather than wait in the dressing room, Elvis and his people elected to wait in the locker room commonly used by the local hockey team.

Although his movements were limited, the audience responded with every twitch of an eye or shake of a leg, and even though he didn't or couldn't shake as much as he once had, his voice was in excellent condition.

Being the bicentennial year, one of the highlights of the shows was when Elvis performed a singing-recitation version of "America, the Beautiful." As the song ended on a high note, nearly 12,000 people stood with emotional patriotism that seemed to be not only for the country, but for Elvis as well. Everyone was behind him, and he felt it.

Other highlights included his version of "How Great Thou Art," and a concert favorite, "Hurt," commanding a range of notes that would make an opera singer wince. Before introducing the members of his band, Elvis sang a short version of "Return To Sender," giving in to the persistent yelling of the Return

To Sender Fan Club. Apologizing, Elvis announced, "We haven't rehearsed that one in a while."

After Elvis sang his closing number, "Can't Help Falling In Love," the audience was enthusiastic and completely satisfied with the show, but everyone knew something was wrong and probably wondered how much longer he could continue at this pace.

One more instance of Elvis' politeness is recalled. After each show, a glass of ice water was placed on the dash of the car, to help Elvis cool off. Only this time, the water, placed there shortly before, was gone. When apprehensively told of this, Elvis simply replied, "That's okay, I'll wait till I get to the hotel." Other performers have been seen and heard to completely hit the ceiling.

Reviews for the concerts were mixed. They ranged from, "The King Still Has Magic," to "Elvis—For The Way He Was." No matter what the critics thought, Tidewater still loved him.

Mal Vincent, local entertainment editor, summed things up best when he wrote, "An Elvis Presley concert is a sociological phenomenon worthy of study. There is nothing quite like it in Western civilization. The fans are definitely not yet ready for the Elvis Presley legend to become a myth."

Saturday Evening  
See See Rider  
I Got A Woman/Amen  
Love Me  
If You Love Me Let Me Know  
You Gave Me A Mountain  
All Shook Up  
Teddy Bear/Don't Be Cruel  
And I Love You So  
Jailhouse Rock  
Fever  
America the Beautiful  
Early Morning Rain  
What'd I Say  
Johnny B. Goode  
Love Letters

Hail Hail Rock and Roll  
Hurt (twice)  
Blue Suede Shoes  
How Great Thou Art  
Funny How Time Slips Away  
Can't Help Falling In Love

Sunday Afternoon  
See See Rider  
I Got A Woman/Amen  
Love Me  
If You Love Me Let Me Go  
You Gave Me A Mountain  
All Shook Up

Teddy Bear/Don't Be Cruel  
And I Love You So  
Jailhouse Rock  
Fever  
America the Beautiful  
Return To Sender  
Early Morning Rain  
What'd I Say  
Johnny B. Goode  
Love Letters  
Hail Hail Rock and Roll  
Hurt (last line twice)  
Hound Dog  
Funny How Time Slips Away  
Can't Help Falling In Love



# 1977:

## The King is Gone

Only the myth did begin.

On August 16, 1977, the Tidewater area was stunned by the news that Elvis Presely was dead at the age of forty-two.

It didn't take long for the word to circulate throughout the cities. Jammed telephone lines and constant reminders from local radio and television stations informed us of the latest news from Baptist Memorial Hospital in Memphis.

Ironically, earlier in the morning, a few members of the Return To Sender Fan Club had appeared on the "Dick Lamb Show," a local television talk show, happily promoting their flea market for a charity benefit to be held later in the week. Some even possessed front row seats to Elvis' concert in Roanoke, scheduled to be held on August 24th . . . only to learn later that both events would be cancelled.

Several fan club members, having no place to go, grouped together at the home of Pat Thompson, then president of the club, to mourn their idol.

Bruce Rader, a reporter for WAVY-TV, taped interviews with many of the fans to be broadcasted on the evening news later that night. The testimonials were the same: tearful fans pledged undying love and faithfulness to their king.

Meanwhile, record stores were mobbed by people demanding Elvis albums. Not just requesting his latest recordings, but his earlier ones as well. For the first time Frankie's Got It, a record store in downtown Norfolk, didn't. The

*Giving away his scarf*



1976



1976



*Shaking hands goodbye*

# 1977

report was the same all over: Elvis Presley stock was completely depleted.

By 5 o'clock that evening several top radio stations in the area decided to drop their original format and declare it "Elvis Night."

On country music station Honey Radio, disc jockey Vickie Burton, better known then as "Rosalee," consoled listeners with Elvis records. Only her quiet sobbing and choked words between songs betrayed the real feelings felt throughout the Tidewater area.

A public memorial service was quickly planned and held at the Friends Meeting House in Virginia Beach. Eulogies, poems, and prayers were offered in praise to the world's brightest star, Elvis Aaron Presley.

Media coverage continued for several days, offering different rumors and reasons for his sudden death. We didn't care; all we knew was that our friend was gone, forever.

Since that Tuesday afternoon in August, many things have been accomplished and donated in the name of Elvis Presley. Charity projects, including bake sales, bazaars, raffles, donations, and flea markets, have been instrumental in helping several needy institutions and families.

The Return To Sender Fan Club

has worked untiringly towards these goals. They have succeeded in obtaining expensive equipment for area hospitals and cash donations totalling several thousand dollars. Those who have benefitted from this generosity include the American Heart Association, Muscular Dystrophy, Chesapeake General and the King's Daughters hospitals. They even personally redecorated the Holiday House, a school for mentally handicapped children. . . all in the name of Elvis Aaron Presley.

If anything, one must admit, whether you liked Elvis or not, a lot of good and kindness was generated because of this man.

Annual conventions are held both locally and nationally, to congregate Elvis fans. You can buy, trade, or sell memorabilia that has done nothing but increase in value and collection over the years. Elvis' back-up group, the Stamps Quartet, friends, and even his relatives have graced these meetings with their presence.

Efforts to have a National Elvis Presley Day have been met with both success and failure. Though no United States president has penned such an honor, local mayors have. On January 8, 1981, Elvis' birthday, the cities of Williamsburg, Portsmouth, Newport News, Hampton, Virginia Beach, Chesapeake, and Norfolk officially proclaimed it "Elvis Presley Memorial Day." Local radio stations helped celebrate this event with many contests and prizes.

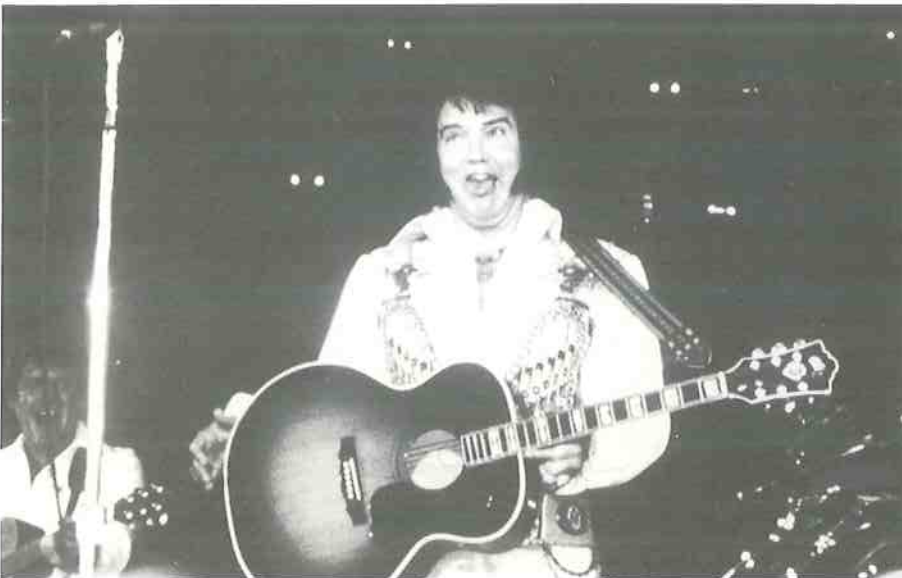
Trips to our nation's capital by area fans to picket the White House still have failed to achieve an honor so richly deserved.

Since Elvis' death, fans have been bombarded nationwide with offers to buy everything from Elvis ash-trays, liquor decanters, posters, watches, and even life-size busts of their idol. Several books, released by friends and family, have revealed the private side of Elvis' life. The latest of these is by Elvis' personal hair-dresser, Larry Geller, entitled *Elvis: His Spiritual Journey*. The most discouraging of course, are the



Every picture, perfect

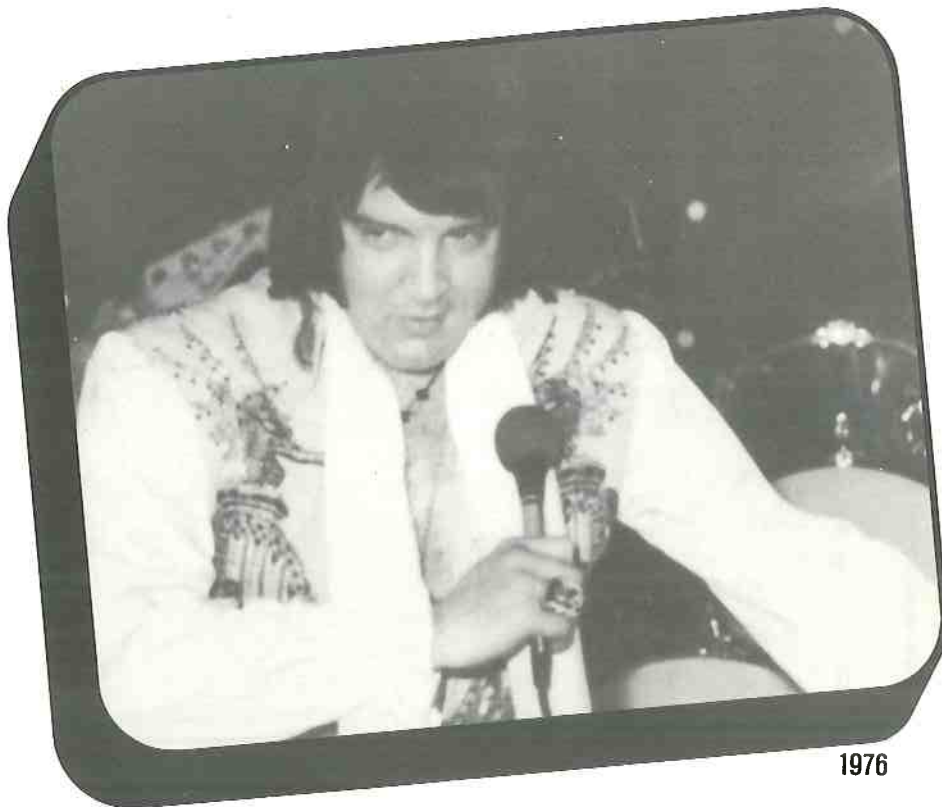
1976



books that profess to tell the true and sordid side of his life. Some buy them, others choose to ignore them. Whichever category you may fall in, please remember this: what Elvis Presley did behind the walls of Graceland was done in private. It was the only time in his life he could enjoy complete privacy and secrecy, if necessary. He preferred to keep the burden and cost of his fame to himself. Unlike the contemporary rock stars of this generation, here he influenced no one.

On August 16, 1978, a plaque was placed in the lobby of the Hampton Coliseum to commemorate Elvis' visits here. Thanks to the efforts of the Friends Thru Elvis Fan Club and the Canadys of Hampton, this plaque reminds every visitor to the auditorium of the five separate shows performed here by Presley. But the real reminder will be the memory of all the shows he performed here since that first in 1955, at the Norfolk Arena.

For these memories Elvis, Tidewater will always have to cherish.



1976

## Acknowledgements

Many thanks to the people who gave us their time and granted interviews.

Joe Hoppel of WCMS, Red Gwynn, Ted Crutchfield, Bob Turner, Dave Garven, Judy Aumon, Jerry and Mabel Gordon, Mike Parnell, Miss Aurelia Leigh, Lt. Doran, Roy and Frances Barnes, Bill Fogel, Sgt. Cherry, Andrew Greenwell, Norfolk Scope officials, Craig Canady, Pat Thompson, Carol Wheeler, Mr. and Mrs. Terrell; the local newspapers, the *The Ledger Star*, *The Daily Press*, *The Virginian Pilot*, *The Times Herald*, *The Chesapeake Post*; and the reporters who filed reviews and interesting columns about Elvis Presley, especially Larry Bonko.

Many, many thanks go out to the Return To Sender Elvis Presley Fan Club.

And to Lee Cross, who lost his typewriter on this deal.



## ELVIS IN TIDEWATER

Elvis Presley made seven visits to Tidewater Virginia over a twenty-two-year period. His first was in 1955, one of the first roadshow appearances he made early in his career. It was fourth billing in "Hank Snow's All Star Jamboree," sponsored by WCMS Radio. In this fascinating remembrance, the inside, behind-the-scenes story of Presley's visit is told, accompanied by many never-before published candid photos. *Elvis in Tidewater* is a marvelous addition to Presley memorabilia, and an interesting story in its own right.



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