**Chapter two: The rise of a king**

The ballad “Love Me Tender” prompted a record-shattering million advance orders. Despite the fact that the last TV appearance was filmed only from the waist up, on The Ed Sullivan Show, Presley became a national celebrity. The audience response became increasingly fevered at Presley’s live shoes. His first movie released in 1956 was named after his great hit “Love Me Tender”. From there the next ten years he was busy making twenty movies, all filled with great music, funny and beautiful stories, charming women in dream scenery. Some of them had serious issues but with the same impact in audience.

In time, many of those who slander him began to praise him and appreciate him. He began to earn a lot of money and 1957 was a very rich year for his music. Songs like: “Too Much”, “All Shook Up”, “Let Me Be Your Teddy Bear” made him known around the world. In that year he also bought a big ranch for himself and his parents named Graceland. Presley undertook three brief during that year continuing to generate a crazed audience response. A Detroit newspaper advised the public that “The trouble with going to see Elvis Presley is that your liable to get killed”. But there were also students in Philadelphia and in Vancouver who pelted him with eggs or destroying the stage. Sinatra condemned the new musical phenomenon, in a magazine article he described rock and roll as ugly and degenerated, false, with distractive reaction in young people. Many artist of Sinatra’s age agreed with him, declared that rock and roll is sung, played and written by goons. As a response, Elvis declared that he admired Frank but he must understand that this is a trend, just the same as he faced when he started years ago. In the last mouths in that year he recorded with Leiber and Stoller “Elvis’ Christmas Album”, and that was the best selling Christmas album.

By the time “ King Creole” was released in 1958, Elvis had been inducted into the US forces. It was asserted that the end of Elvis as a pop king came. The critics said “ Elvis is dead”. New songs appeared:” Bye, Bye Elvis”, “All American Boy” or “Marchin’ Elvis”. Although rock’ n ’roll purists mourned the passing of the old Elvis, it seemed inevitable in the context of the 50’s that he would move towards a broader base appeal and tone down his rebellious image. Adults started to like Presley because it was planned to cut his hair and to dress like a civilized person. On Friday, March 28, Elvis was transferred to Texas. In September, Elvis and other 1400 soldiers were sent to Germany. The whole world looked at Presley with other eyes now. He was allowed to live outside the unity, so the army was accused of favoritism. Soon, Elvis’s father and grandmother came to Germany and bought a house. The press was informed that Elvis was to work in the next 16 months in Germany, as a scout jeep driver.

For Presley, the day was starting early in the morning. He woke up at 5 to reach the unit on time, being back home only at 5pm. The days were, in general, very boring. Only the male could make them special (10,000 letters a week). To answer a part of these letters, Elvis hired some secretaries. At June 1, he was promoted 4th grade specialist, which meant that he got $135,30a week. At the end of February, Elvis had no songs in Billboards Hot 100, and that was for the first time in 3 years. He had been away from the music scene and from the recording studios for 2 years, but his record company issued previously recorded material, keeping his image alive.

The Beaulieu family moved from Air Base Bergstrom, Austin, Texas to Wiesbaden, Federal Germany. Considering Presley a hansom and sexy guy, with a melancholic and deep look, Priscilla liked him, but she was not a fanatic. One evening, when she was in “

Eagles Club”, she was asked by Curry Grant, one of Elvis’s friends if she wanted to meet the Rock’ n ’Roll Star. She was only 14 ( 9th grade), but she accepted. On the first date, although impressed, Priscilla felt intimidated by an almost naked, natural size Brigitte Bardot poster. Elvis liked the brunette with blue eyes, and Priscilla was short, feeble, with long and chestnut hair and blue eyes. They dated only 4 months because Presley returned to US.

There was nothing special: they used to go to the cinema or they drove the Presley-Wagen (Elvis’s BMW in German). At that time in his life existed another girl, even if she was living in the Presley house. She was a young governess, “ adopted” by Elvis after seeing the way she was beaten by her father.

While Elvis was in the army, no one proved to be better than him. His patriotism attracted another kind of public, so not only the teenagers admired him. His army behavior was faultless, so he was praised by everybody. One day before leaving Germany, a monstrous press conference was organized.

The return to the musical and film career was marked by a popularity diminution in the 60’s, because of the appearance on the international scene of the Beatles and of other talents from Great Britain. Elvis returned home and received his official welcome with an appearance on the Frank Sinatra show. He had beaten another record, being payed with $125,000 for a 6 minutes appearance. Even if nervous, Presley was polite as usual, addressing him only with “Mr. Sinatra”. Elvis compelled recognition with singing in smoking and not moving too much on the scene.

The change was immediately evident on the series of number 1 hits that he enjoyed in the early 60’s. The enormously successful “It’s Now Or Never”, based on the Italian melody “O Sole Mio”, revealed the King as an operatic crooner, far removed from his earlier raucous recordings “Are You Lonesome Tonight?”, originally recorded by Al Jolson as early in 1927, allowed Presley to quote some Shakespeare in the spoken –word middle section as well as showing his ham acting ability with an over rough vocal. Of course, versions came out: “Who’s Lonesome Tonight?”,” Oh, How I Miss You Tonight” or “Yes, I’m Lonesome Tonight”. Many up-held that Elvis was to quit rock ‘n’ roll. No one confirmed or contradicted. A long period without concerts followed.

The new clean-cut Presley was presented on celluloid “G.I. Blues”. The movie played upon his recent army exploits and saw him serenading a puppet on the chart-topper “Wooden Heart”, which also allowed Elvis to show off his knowledge of German. The

grandiose “Surrender” completed this phase of big ballads in the old-fashioned style. “G.I. Blues” achieved an income of $4,3million only in USA and Canada. In the meantime, Presley started filming “Flaming Star”, a western. His last film at 20’th Century Fox was “Wild In The Country” (1961), the most demanding.

But it was “Blue Hawaii” (1961) that discovered the formula that would be used in his later films, all shot in well known tourist’s locations:” fight for your future, win the girl and live happily ever after”. Elvis’s last live appearances (February 25 and March25, 1961) were in Memphis and in Hawaii: two benefit performances to raise money for the

USS Arizona, sunk during the attack at Pearl Harbor. This explains the extraordinary success of his films, since for many years they would be the only way to see him sing. Billboard classified “ It’s Now Or Never” as the best single of the year. The National Academy of Art and Recordings Science proposed Elvis 5 times for the Grammy award- 3 times for “ Are You Lonesome Tonight” and 2 times for “ G.I. Blues”.

The exceptional career of the King had lost its brilliance. From 1965, Elvis was seen by his fans only in movies. The last time he appeared on television was in 1960, at the Frank Sinatra show, and the last concert was in the spring of 1961.The record sale shown that Presley’s popularity was decreasing. The disks were no longer hitting the Top 10 and none of them was declared the disk of the year from the spring of 1962. Elvis thought his loss of popularity was the consequence of the dozen films; he hated their common subjects and the speed they were filmed with. Elvis was disappointed by the music he sang, too. Even if he never took a special lesson, he had an exceptional musical sense and he loved almost every music type: religious, opera, rhythm and blues, country and rock. He was not interested in jazz.

Elvis was now a married millionaire with a flawless politeness. His wife was expecting a child. He remained at Graceland till the end of January 1968. On February 1, at 8am, Elvis and Priscilla got into a blue Cadillac and drove to the Baptist Memorial Hospital. In half hour, Priscilla was hospitalized. Eight hours later, at 5,01pm, she gave birth to a 6 pounds girl. They called her Lisa Marie. Priscilla remained in the hospital two more days. At Graceland, thousands of greetings were arriving.

In the wake of the Beatles’s rise to fame and the beat boom explosion, Presley seemed a figure out of time. Nevertheless, in spite of the dated nature of many of his recordings, he could still invest power and emotion into classic songs. The sassy “Frankie and Johnny” was expertly sung by Presley as was his moving reading of Ketty Lester’s “Love Letters”. His other significant 1966 release, “If Everybody Was Like Christmas”, was a beautiful festive song unlike everything else in the charts of the period. By 1967, however, it was clear to critics and even to a clear proportion of his devoted following that Presley had seriously lost his way. He continued to grind out pointless movies like “Double, Trouble”, “Speedway”, “Clambake” or “Live A Little, Love A Little”, even though the box-office returns were increasingly poor.

His capacity to register instant hits, irrespective of the material was also wearing thin, as such lowly placed singles as “You Gotta Stop” and Long Legged Woman” demonstrated all alarmingly. However, just as Presley’s career had reached its all-time nadir he seemed to wake up, take stock, and brake free from the artistic malaise in which he found himself. Two songs written by the country guitarist Jerry Reed “Guitar Man” and “US Male”, proved a spectacular return to form for Elvis in 1968, such as Presley’s conviction that the compositions almost seemed to be written specifically for him. During the same year, Colonel Tom Parker had approached NBC television about the possibility of recording a Presley Christmas special in which the singer would perform a selection of religious songs similar in feel to his early 60’s album “ His Hand In Mine”. However, the executive producers of the show vetoed that concept in favor of a one-hour spectacular designed to capture Elvis at his rock’ n ’rolling best. It was a remarkable challenge for the singer, seemingly in the Autumn of his career, and he responded to the idea with unexpected enthusiasm.

The Elvis special was broadcast in America on December 3, 1968, and has since become the most celebrated moments in pop broadcasting history. The show was not merely good but an absolute revelation, with the King emerging as if he had been frozen in time for 10 years. His determination to recapture past glories oozed from every movement and it was discernible in every aside with his leather jacket and acoustic guitar strung casually round his neck, he resemble nothing less than the consummate pop idol of the 50’s who had

Entranced a generation. To add authenticity to the proceedings, he was accompanied by his old sidekicks Scotty Moore and DJ Fontana. There was no sense of self-parody in the show as Presley joked about his famous surly curled-lip movement and even heaped passing ridicule on his endless stream of bad movies. The music concentrated heavily on his 50’s classics, but, significantly, there was a startling finale courtesy of the passionate “If I Can Dream” in which he seemed to sum up the frustration of a decade in a few short lines. The critical plaudits heaped upon Elvis in the wake of his television special prompted the singer to undertake his most significant recordings in years.

On July 31,1969, he played the International Hotel to great public and critical acclaim. This was the first of a series of 57 performances in the 1970s that brought him back to his public. Three excellent singles, “In The Getto”, “Suspicious Minds” and “Don’t Cry Daddy”, made the charts between July and December. Thanks to these new successes, Elvis began an intense and frenetic series of live appearance (over 1000 concerts in 5 years). “In The Getto” hit number 2 in the UK and number 3 in the USA. The glorious “Suspicious Minds”, a wonderful song of marital jealousy, with cascading tempo changes and an exceptional vocal arrangement, gave him his first US chart-topper since “Good Luck Charm” back in 1962. “Don’t Cry Daddy” dealt with the death of marriage. In Vegas Elvis obtained the audience record: 207,494 persons in 6 concerts. At the end of the year, he began his tour, after 13 years.

His come back was well received and one of the live songs “The Wonder Of You”, stayed at number 1 in Britain for 6 weeks during the summer of 1970. There was also a reveling documentary film of the tour:” That’s The way It Is” and a companion album that included contemporary cover version, such as Tony Joe White’s “ Polk Salad Annie”, Creedence Clearwater Revival’s “ Proud Mary”, and Neil Diamond’s “ Sweet Caroline”.

During the early 70‘s Presley continued his live performances, but soon fell victim to the same artistic atrophy that had bedeviled his celluloid career. Rather than re-entering the studio to record fresh material he relied on a few patchy live albums that saturated the market place.

The concert “Elvis: Aloha From Hawaii” from January 14, 1973, was broadcasted world wide via satellite to an audience of a billion viewers. An historic album was made of this concert: the first quadraphonic album to sell more than a million copies. The enormous number of releases during this period obviously came from live recordings.

Presley began to feel trapped in his own myth, becoming a virtual recluse, surrounded by an impenetrable court of relatives, friends and assorted shady characters who wouldn’t allow him to lead a normal life. His divorce from Priscilla in 1973 marked the beginning of the end. Alcohol and drug abuse took over and lead to frequent depressions. Overeating and drinking made him so heavy that he had to resort to exhausting weight loss treatments. These made his condition even worse and on several occasions he needed to be hospitalized. On February12,1977, even with his precarious physical condition, he began a new tour which ended on June 26 at the Marked Square Arena in Indianapolis. The TV special “Elvis in concert” would be taken from this last tour programmed to air on CBS on October 3. Decided to take a rest from performing, he returned to Graceland, his home in Memphis.

But at about 3o’clock in the afternoon on August 16, he was taken to emergency room of Baptist Memorial Hospital, where, at 3:30 pm the doctors declared him dead due to cardiac arrhythmia.