

# Elvis fan explores the singer's past

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"It was really a lot of fun and I got the point across on who Elvis really was. There's a real need for this type of thing," says Mackie.

Indeed, misconceptions and misunderstandings about concerning Elvis Presley, she insists.

His abuse of prescription drugs and poor health management that ultimately led to his death nearly 15 years ago has certainly tarnished his image and left many people — Mackie included — speculating on his self-destructiveness.

Mackie links it to his poor self-esteem, a deep grieving for his deceased mother and the unrelenting public image and pressures he endured.

"People don't understand he was really just a 'Southern boy-next-door' ... and he grew up poor and was considered 'white trash' in Tupelo, Miss. His family was degraded," she explains.

"When his mother died, he couldn't eat, sleep ... he cried for days and days. He had been so close to her," Mackie says. "So the doctors gave him sedatives that kept him going, got him to stay on schedule. After awhile, he became dependent on them, and in the end, it did him in."

AND WHILE Mackie says that Presley's substance abuse and "what he did to himself" are upsetting to her, her fascination with Elvis has never waned since it began four years ago.

She and her mom, Lois Mackie, both chuckle when they recall how her interest with the Presley persona started. While vacationing with her family in Memphis, Tenn., the then 12-year-old was reluctant to visit the Graceland Mansion.

On her parent's insistence, she went alone, "complaining in the car the whole way there because I had no idea who this Elvis Presley guy was or anything," Mackie says.

Of course, while on the tour, things suddenly changed.

"I still can't figure it out, even today. I don't know what happened, or what it was that turned me on to Elvis Presley but after Graceland, I just started reading books about him and became more and more interested," she says.

Soon after, her collections began to grow. And grow. And grow. In fact, Mackie's bedroom appears to be nothing short of a tribute itself to Presley. Posters, pictures and collectors' plates adorn the walls. Video tapes and audio cassettes, books, photo albums and various other memorabilia line her shelves and fill her closet. Mackie even has Elvis Presley gift wrap.

AS FOR HER most sought-after item, Mackie has her sights set on a Presley autograph, or perhaps some rare pictures.

"Last time I was at Graceland, I saw this personal photo collection that was going for \$150. I'd consider that only if the photographs were original and I'd never seen them before," she says. "Of course, she'll check all that out on her next trip to Graceland which, if Mackie has her way, will be in the next couple of months. She hopes to work as a tour guide for Graceland this summer, and is anxiously waiting for word on her submitted application."

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# Testing concerns superintendent

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HE'S ESPECIALLY concerned because sophomores at the district's three high schools took the MEAP math and reading tests last fall and the state didn't release guidelines for the state diploma endorsement program until February.

Flanagan said students were not aware of the importance of the tests, as they are for college entrance tests like the SAT or ACT. In the past, students were not as concerned about the MEAP test "because there's been no consequence," he said.

Groups representing local school districts, are lobbying Lansing to get the rules changed so they won't affect this year's 10th graders, Flanagan said. "If it doesn't work, we're going to try and find a way," he said. "My philosophy is very strong that ... that we provide opportunities for kids to keep re-taking the test."

"We want our kids to walk out with this endorsement."

But the chances appear dim that state legislators will change any of the rules affecting the class of 1994.

According to State Rep. Jan Dolan, R-Farmington Hills, the state

House has passed a provision asking for a delay to 1995, but it is unlikely the state Senate will pass it. And Gov. John Engler has said he will not sign any delay into law, Dolan said.

Other portions of the House provision may pass, however.

Legislators have suggested that parents be invited, instead of mandated, to participate in the process if a student has not passed the appropriate tests, that the state endorsement be put on a student transcript and not on a diploma; and that a high school completion degree be treated as equal to a diploma.

THE STATE Board of Education sent suggested, draft guidelines to all local and intermediate school superintendents in mid-February, asking them to give input.

Using that feedback, the state board will consider a final recommendation in May and will send more detailed information to local districts in June.

Flanagan said some other administrators have concerns as well, but that "most think it's going to go away — and it's not."

"It's where we are and there's nothing more serious than not having a diploma in 1997," he added.

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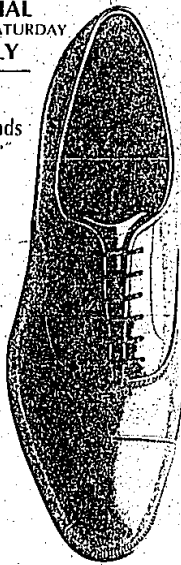
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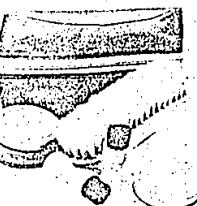
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