

Classmates Recall Elvis Presley's First Visit to Tulsa

E-mails Bring Fond Memories of Seeing the Man Who Would be "The King"

It started early in 1999 when several classmates were exchanging stories by e-mail. One member brought up the 1956 visit of Elvis Presley to Tulsa at the Fairgrounds Pavilion when we were in the 9th grade at our respective junior highs. Others added their recollections and, before we knew it, we had the whole story — much of it anyway.

Elvis released "Heartbreak Hotel" in January of 1956 and came to Tulsa in April. All the girls at school either went or wanted to go to the Elvis concert.

I was recalling this a few days ago while talking to Jo Rita Doerr Cisco and Dave Cisco. So, Dave says, "Yeah, wasn't it Daphne Smithee, who picked up Elvis's chewing gum...after he was through chewing it." "No, No," blurts out Jo Rita, "it was Dolly Gillies, she got the gum."

I can't remember, which one of the girls said that Elvis kissed her hand? She didn't wash it for a week.

But, the event my wife (Barbara Moore Cohea) tells about is all the girls crowding around outside the dressing room of Elvis. There was a window to the room and some of the girls were trying to get a look at Elvis through the window. The next morning their picture is in the Tulsa World newspaper...one of the girls' rear end can be seen as she attempts to crawl into the window. The question is, who was it? My wife recalls that it was none other than Sharalea Shepherd.

Ron Cohea

I remember that event. Unfortunately (Or was it?) I wasn't able to go to the concert either. I had ridden the city bus to school the next day (Cleveland Jr. High) and several of the girls mentioned in the message from Ron met me at the bus stop. One had the gum Elvis had chewed and she had it in a little box. One had a comb he had used and thrown away, and several had been kissed by him on their hand or on their cheek and hadn't washed since then. Several had autographed pictures. In fact I think someone brought me one. Wish I had it now; it might be worth something. One of the other girls in this group was Jackie Alloway who was my best friend at the time.

I also remember that at lunch, when

they played "Heartbreak Hotel," it became very quiet. You may remember that was very rare. And I remember watching him on the Ed Sullivan show on TV while on the phone with Jackie and screaming together when he sang.

Daphne Smithee Harrington

Now, we need to know, who picked up the "Elvis comb" that Daphne Smithee mentioned. Also, just how many really did get a kiss from Elvis? Were taking names here.

Ron Cohea



"Mike, thank you very much!"

Someone forwarded the letters about the Elvis concert and boy! did they bring back memories. Just when you're least expecting it your past sure has a way of popping up! Yes, Jo Rita has a great memory. I did get Elvis' gum and enshrined it in a plastic case. A bunch of us had tickets to the concert and managed to work our way down to sit on the floor right in front of the stage.

I just remember us all screaming and crying and when I turned around and glanced behind me one of the few guys we knew who were present (I think it was Herbie Fowler) was looking at us as if we had lost our minds. (He had a point.) The way I remember it, right after Elvis and the musicians left the stage, Carol Burns and I and some kid

we didn't know made a dive for the stage and the gum which we saw Elvis spit out. I fended off the other kid while Carol grabbed the gum and then we split it. I had it for years but don't know what ever happened to it — wonder if Carol still has hers. Life seems a little simpler now — kids can just buy the T-shirt to show they were there! I didn't get around to the dressing room window (probably too busy retrieving the gum) but I do remember Norma Austin was one of those whose hand Elvis kissed and she wore a white glove to school to protect it. I was a little jealous, but I did have the gum!

Dolly Gillies Jacobs

I actually attended the concert. Val Watkins and I went together and I remember the frustration of there being so many lead-in acts before Elvis ever appeared. When he finally came on stage, it had to have been at least 9 p.m. I remember Val and I counting how many songs he performed and I think it was only eight songs. (Of course that was very early in his career and perhaps that was his entire repertoire.) It definitely was an exciting time.

Dwain Gregory

After reading the notes about Elvis, I have decided to share my Elvis story concerning that particular concert. I had a paper route quite a way out from my home at that time and rode through the Tulsa Fairgrounds on my way back and forth to the route.

While riding through the area on the day of the concert, a customized '49 Ford pulled up beside me at a stop sign and the driver rolled down the window. He asked me where the Fairgrounds Pavilion was located, which was directly behind him. The driver was "the King" himself. In my own stammering, sputtering way I asked if he was in fact Elvis. He answered in the affirmative and handed out the window two tickets to the show that evening, with a "have a good time kid."

My mother, in her infinite wisdom, did not allow me to go see the "vulgar spectacle." I threw the tickets away at that point. Wow, do I wish that I had those tickets now, as they might be worth a couple of coins.

Mike Swaffar