

I THINK I FELL IN LOVE

It happened rather unexpectedly one Saturday morning – the day that Elvis Presley re-entered my life. My daughter and I were laboring to move a rickety, antique dresser with an attached mirror that I had since childhood from my attic to her new home. I notice some yellowed fragments of Scotch tape left on the glass by something I'd taped to it long ago, and in that moment I again "saw" Elvis staring back at me from those fragments. Instantly I remembered, as if it were yesterday, consciously deciding to put away my Terry Lee dolls forever in order to take a giant step toward becoming a "grown-up." At the age of thirteen I was still miserably torn between my two worlds – playing with dolls while simultaneously trying to relate to my more sophisticated friends who were already wearing bright red lipstick. I had long been ready to leave the little girl behind and begin the alluring journey into womanhood, but I'd needed a special person to help me take that difficult first step.

I remember hearing my first Elvis songs on the transistor radio I'd been given for Christmas. Our whole family had gathered for dinner on TV trays to see him gyrating on Ed Sullivan's Sunday night television program. And, suddenly, I had feelings and yearnings I had never known. Like millions of others, I became obsessed with the weird surge of electricity that the sound of his mere voice created in my friends and me no matter where we were. With my allowance I bought 45 rpm recordings of "Love Me Tender," "Teddy Bear," and "Don't Be Cruel." That music was like a new language being sung to me by a wild, wonderful, beautiful man who had the courage to be like no one but himself, and it touched my heart. I think I fell in love.

I bought magazines with stories about Elvis and read them late into the night under the covers. I meticulously cut out and taped little black and white tabloid photos of him posed in every conceivable way onto my dresser mirror. My mother was horrified at my un-childlike behavior; but I, like countless budding teenage girls at the time, had found the musical icon who would escort me into another place. Elvis was the man to walk with me over the threshold into adulthood, and my dresser mirror, before which I stood to look at myself each morning before school, became my shrine.

And so, on that day of laborious furniture moving, I smiled at those forgotten memories and began to tell my daughter the story behind the indelible tape markings that served as a permanent reminder of how Elvis Presley had shaped my life. Now I am a woman with mature responsibilities and grown daughters who have their own lives and loves, but that day I was a teenager again, revisiting my relationship with Elvis. I had not thought about him in a very long time, but as with any "first love," it took precious little to trigger instant memories and evoke long-forgotten feelings.

In all the years between, I have remained close to my Southern roots, and as I shared my memories with my daughter that day, I realized that Elvis, for all his fame and despite his public persona, had never left his either. At heart, Elvis was forever a country boy who had a deep connection to his Southern home and who craved simple meals with family and friends. He loved his mother's home cooking-the comfort foods that nurtured and connected him to his familial taproot..

And so, as a cookbook developer, it seemed perfectly natural for me, that moment of nostalgia, to imagine what it would have been like if had been able to serve Elvis Presley a meal at Graceland's table, and then to wonder what other members of his fandom would have served the King of Rock and Roll.

Thus, communication with Elvis Presley Enterprises, Inc., soon followed, and we entered into a publishing partnership dedicated to capturing the collective imaginations of people just like me-those eternal fans who also would have give absolutely anything to have served such a meal or just to break bread with him. Together we went on a mission to honor the memory of Elvis Aaron Presley through some good cooking prepared as if for him. We put out the call for favorite recipes; we found obscure stories from well-known and not-so-well-known admirers; we searched the photographic archives for fan images; e even pretended to serve Graceland's table by staging exquisite food photography in his home- all for no other reason than to create a book written from the hearts of his fan base.

Now it is your turn. We ask you to partake of this fine food and fellowship and to imagine that Elvis Presley had e-entered your own life as you sit at your dinner table. Today, more than ever, we need such nurturing times together. And, like those markings on my mirror, Elvis will never be erased from our memories.