



PRISCILLA PRESLEY

A PORTRAIT OF AN ICONIC LIFE

Priscilla Presley's life is fascinating in its breadth and scope. Her life in the public eye began at age 14 when she met Elvis Presley while her U.S. military Dad was on assignment in Germany. The impression that the confident - yet vulnerable Elvis - made on young Priscilla was scintillating. The date was September 13, 1959. Elvis returned to the U.S. and the couple stayed in telephonic contact. Two years later, in 1962, through persuasive phone calls from Elvis to her parents, they agreed to let her visit Elvis for 2 weeks. She flew out to L.A. and finally in 1963, Priscilla's parents agreed to let her move back to America with the promise from Elvis that he would insure that she finished her education; furthermore, she would be staying with his father and step mother. Shortly before Christmas 1966, Elvis proposed to Priscilla and they married on May 1, 1967 in Las Vegas. On February 1, 1968, their only child, Lisa Marie Presley, was born and Elvis and Priscilla began their journey as devoted parents. Life in the rock 'n roll fast lane was challenging in many respects, but Priscilla, the adaptable survivor, prevailed while holding on to her core identity.

STORY BY DIANA LYLE ☞ PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHRISTOPHER AMERUOSO

Although Priscilla and Elvis divorced in 1973, they remained very close up until the time of Elvis's death. In 1979, after the death of Elvis's father, Priscilla became Co-Executor of the Presley Estate - which at the time - was burdened by the enormous cost of the upkeep of Graceland. Faced with a gloomy accounting sheet, Priscilla's entrepreneurial skills swept into swift motion and she formulated a business plan that would turn Graceland into a moneymaker for the legions of Elvis fans. In 1982, Elvis's iconic home was opened to the public - thanks to Priscilla - and the Presley Estate was transformed into one of the most successful business enterprises. Most importantly, Lisa Marie Presley's trust was well taken care of - and Elvis's legacy would stay intact - something her father would have wanted. The Presley Estate consists of the Graceland Mansion; a world-wide licensing program; merchandising; music publishing and television and video projects.

After opening a successful boutique of 7 years with her business partner, Priscilla began her theatrical training with famed coach, Milton Katselas. She became the national spokeswoman for Wella Balsam hair products and she made her television debut as co-host of the ABC program, *Those Amazing Animals* with Burgess Meredith. When she landed the major role of Jenna Wade on the internationally-popular CBS TV series, *Dallas*, she became an instant audience favorite. During her 5 years on that top-rated television series, Priscilla became one of the show's most popular leading ladies. Her versatility as an actress proved itself repeatedly thereafter. In the box office smash hit, *The Naked Gun: From the Files of Police Squad!*; *The Naked Gun 2 1/2*; and *The Naked Gun 331/3: The Final Insult*, Priscilla's comedic talents became an integral part of the hilarious *Naked Gun* cocktail. She has also guest-starred on TV's *Melrose Place* and *Touched by an Angel*. As a result of her appearances, the programs enjoyed their highest-rated episodes in their seasons. She has starred in the movie, *Breakfast with Einstein*, as well as the Showtime original movie, *Hayley Wagner Star*. She has served as Executive Producer on the feature film, *Finding Graceland*, and she's appeared in back-to-back episodes of ABC's TV comedy series, *Spin City*.

In the 1990s, Priscilla launched her 4 signature fragrances, *Moments*, *Experiences*, *Indian Summer* and *Roses and More*. She has been the Ambassador of the *Dream Foundation* for 10 years, helping to fulfill the dreams of adults battling terminal diseases. Most recently, Priscilla put her creative talents to good use by designing and launching the *Priscilla Presley Collection*, a jewelry line that has taken off on QVC.

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The gorgeous creations are eclectic and inexpensive. She also partnered with H-Studio which will launch her furniture line in 2012.

But what is remarkable about Priscilla Presley is that throughout her extensive journey, this gracious lady has kept her integrity and her dignity intact. A vastly compassionate human being, she has traveled every corner of the world, preferring to listen and learn - rather than speak. Her sensitivity is one of the most beautiful aspects about her. 2012 marks the 35th anniversary of Elvis Presley's untimely death... and had they still been married, this would have been Priscilla's and Elvis's 45th wedding anniversary. In this exclusive interview, Priscilla Presley gives us a rare glimpse into a life that is nothing short of epic.

WHEN YOU THINK BACK TO THE INCREDIBLE LIFE THAT YOU SHARED WITH ELVIS, WHAT ARE SOME OF YOUR FAVORITE AND HAPPIEST MEMORIES?

PRISCILLA: The Holidays - specifically Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year and the 4th of July - were all at Graceland. It was always a celebration with close friends and family. I also have many memories of our travels: Hawaii was one of our most favorite vacation spots. Elvis loved the gentle and welcoming souls of the Hawaiian people. For me as a young girl, that period was a very unpredictable time and I had to be prepared for all the changes and be spontaneous for all the travel. It was a case of just being ready!

HAVE YOU ALWAYS BEEN VERY ADAPTABLE LIKE THAT?

PRISCILLA: I do think that it's one of my strengths. My father was in the military so we were always moving and I was always changing schools. We would live in a place no longer than 3 years before we'd be uprooted to a new place. It was a lifestyle that certainly prepared me for the world of rock 'n roll and in that sense the life I had with Elvis seemed very normal to me.

WHEN YOU FIRST MET ELVIS PRESLEY (AND YOU WERE IN GERMANY AT THE TIME), WHAT WAS THE FIRST IMPRESSION HE MADE ON YOU?

PRISCILLA: That impression was what we are now calling the X factor. Elvis had it all. The impact he made on me as a 14-year-old girl is something I've never experienced since. He had this empowered charisma that was beautiful. He exuded confidence - yet he was vulnerable. I've never experienced anything as powerful in another human being.



YOUR SAVVY BUSINESS STRENGTHS HAVE BEEN PROVED TIME AND TIME AGAIN...AS HAS YOUR LEVEL OF INTEGRITY. ELVIS'S FATHER, VERNON PRESLEY, APPOINTED YOU CO-EXECUTOR OF THE PRESLEY ESTATE. YOU'VE BEEN CREDITED WITH TRANSFORMING THE PRESLEY ESTATE INTO A PHENOMENALLY-SUCCESSFUL ORGANIZATION. WHAT HAS BEEN THE MOST IMPORTANT MEMORY OF ELVIS THAT YOU WANT KEPT ALIVE?

PRISCILLA: Preserving Elvis's memory means a lot to me and my family. Our objective is to continue to monitor and be involved with everything that Elvis Presley Enterprises has been able to do so far. The challenge has been when others get involved. They see just today and the moment – and not the long-term vision.

HAS THAT BEEN YOUR IMPORTANT CONTRIBUTION: SEEING THE LONG-TERM VISION?

PRISCILLA: I see beyond the immediate profit. It's important to have known who Elvis was and what he would have wanted his legacy to be. He was very authentic in nature and in who he was. I've tried not to go against that. I've had to keep reminding myself of the vision in 10 or 20 years time but I also have to face the reality that the world is changing and it's not the same as it was 35 years ago. The industry has changed enormously and oftentimes people who are working within a company or music label are there today and gone tomorrow. There may be other interpretations of Elvis's legacy but we have to keep the goals pure. My family's and my passion is to honor who Elvis truly was as a human being and never lose sight of that for the sake of the purity of his legacy.

YOUR CURRENT BUSINESS SUCCESSES INCLUDE: PRISCILLA PRESLEY JEWELS (EVIDENTLY YOU WERE THE ONE WHO CAME UP WITH THE IDEA FOR ELVIS TO WEAR THE FAMOUS BIG BELT BUCKLE ON STAGE...SOMETHING WHICH BECAME HIS TRADEMARK). TELL US ABOUT THIS JEWELRY LINE AND ABOUT YOUR CURRENT PROJECTS.

PRISCILLA: Design and being creative has always been a part of me. I had my own boutique in Beverly Hills, Bis & Beau, and I had a very supportive partner. We were so ahead of our time that I see designs that are out today – that we had back then. That was the beginning of being able to create, and losing myself in all that creation. It's been a love of mine for a long time and it started with furnishing. In my excursions I discovered Soho in New York. When Elvis began appearing on stage in Vegas, I did a lot of research in trying to find new things for him – and one of the items was the leather belt with the brass buckle. I brought that home and Elvis loved it. That belt became the prototype of what Bill Belew, his designer, used in nearly all of his shows. Leather wrist bands were also new at that time and I purchased them, as well as other pieces of jewelry. On one particular flight that Elvis and I were on – we were in the middle of a thunder storm – and he said to me he'd like to give his inner circle a special gift – so I helped him and with his guidance, designed what became known as the TCB necklace. With my current Priscilla Presley Jewel line, I have made it a point to make the pieces affordable and accessible to every woman who loves jewelry. The line has done very well on QVC – which reaches all ages. The jewelry designs are eclectic because of my own love for so many different styles, and some are inspired by my own personal collection as well.

THERE HAVE BEEN MANY RUMORS CIRCULATING ABOUT A POSSIBLE DALLAS REMAKE WITH THE ORIGINAL CAST MEMBERS (INCLUDING YOUR FAMOUS PART - JENNA WADE). IS THIS, IN FACT, HAPPENING?

PRISCILLA: Yes, it is. I went to Larry Hagman's birthday party (aka J.R. Ewing) a few weeks ago and Linda Gray was there as well as other Dallas cast members. Everyone is very excited about it and they are getting ready to go to Dallas to start filming. Hopefully Jenna Wade will come back. I'm certainly looking forward to it and I think that the characters and the story line are as relevant today as they were back then.

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Priscilla and Elvis on their wedding day. Photo courtesy of Elvis Presley Enterprises





WHAT ENRICHES YOUR LIFE IMMENSELY?

PRISCILLA: My family first and foremost. My close friends whom I've had for many years; I love getting together with them and sharing all that we are going through. My daughter (Lisa Marie) moved to England and she couldn't take her bull dogs with her so I have inherited them and I've added them to my family of 3 dogs. My home is full with Boston Terriers, French Bulldogs and British Bulldogs and they give me a lot of pleasure. I've learned to relish the simple things in life and my pets have really enriched me. Also important to me is traveling and learning about different cultures, not only for my own character enrichment, but humanity's.

HAS TRAVELING MADE YOU MORE TOLERANT OF OTHER CULTURES?

PRISCILLA: Most definitely. It's expanded my life enormously as I learn about other cultures and religions. It's taught me to have more compassion and with that comes tolerance. When I visit a country I realize that I'm a guest there, and when I return to America, I come back with such gratitude for all that we have here. My hope is that we don't lose the essence of what made America great.

YOUR FAVORITE PLACES IN THE WORLD?

PRISCILLA: I fall in love with most of the places that I visit for different reasons. I really love Australia and the people there. I also love Italy and the Italians' zest for life. Their lives are so full; no matter what hour of the night it might be, Italians are gathered with their friends and family, enjoying the art of conversation while celebrating their love of food, good wine and life. Then there are the quaint little villages in Italy. I love that aspect about Paris too: being able to walk through all the nooks and crannies and find those wonderful old shops with their sense of artistry. I love the French people, their language and I really get along well with them. But it's hard to pinpoint a specific favorite because I also love London. I tend to dive into whatever culture I'm visiting and enjoy its unique richness.

HOW IS LISA MARIE DOING IN ENGLAND?

PRISCILLA: She's outside of London, although she travels into London frequently. She's enjoying it very much although she does miss some of the things she loved to do here. I do go back and forth and visit with her and the children.

WHAT HAS LIFE TAUGHT YOU?

PRISCILLA: Life has taught me to be willing to experience anything. Life throws out many challenges and I've learned that it's how we handle them that makes the difference in our future and those around us. We have a tendency to react with our emotions too quickly and then we regret the consequences. Life has taught me tolerance and patience; metaphorically speaking, nothing is in stone; anything can change.

YOU DO SO MUCH GOOD WORK - INCLUDING BEING AN AMBASSADOR FOR THE DREAM FOUNDATION - WHICH FULFILLS TERMINALLY-ILL ADULTS' WISHES. IS THIS A VITAL PART OF YOUR JOURNEY IN LIFE - GIVING BACK?

PRISCILLA: It is. I'm very privileged to be involved with the Dream Foundation and I'm very close with their Founder, Thom Rollerson, and I try to help him in whatever way that I can. This is a big part of my life.

MICHAEL JACKSON HAS BEEN GONE FOR 2 YEARS. DO YOU HAVE ANY THOUGHTS/FEELINGS ON THAT TOPIC THAT YOU'RE COMFORTABLE SHARING WITH US?

PRISCILLA: I watched the trial of Conrad Murray. The price of fame can be extremely detrimental because it comes with unrealities. You can pretty much get whatever you want - even if it's to your detriment. It's vital for any famous person to surround themselves with people who have high levels of integrity. At the end of the day, the celebrity has to hold on to his/her own ethics and morals because the people around them are never going to disagree with them - especially when there's money involved.

WHAT IS YOUR IDEA OF A WONDERFULLY RELAXING DAY - AND WHAT DO YOU ENJOY DOING?

PRISCILLA: I enjoy being with my mother and father. I'm very fortunate to still have them in my life. We have big family dinners together on Sundays and I get to see my 3-year-old twin granddaughters when they're in town. They love coming over to visit nana (their great grandmother) and nona (me). We have come to the conclusion that we would rather surround ourselves - watching them play and interact with all of us - than watch television.

YOUR WISH FOR THIS WORLD.....

PRISCILLA: Peace - which is what I believe everyone else would like. Understanding and tolerance requires patience; sometimes things don't happen as fast as we want them to happen. I don't believe in war. It accomplishes nothing and leaves behind a trail of destruction. I'm far more concerned that we learn to understand other people's cultures so that we're not so quick to brand them as 'the enemy'. I know it's very complicated but the way we're going about it is not working. My wish for humanity is that we strive to be more compassionate towards one another. I'd like to see people in power with purer hearts and fewer agendas.

OF ALL YOUR CONSIDERABLE ACHIEVEMENTS...WHAT ARE YOU MOST PROUD OF?

PRISCILLA: The fact that I have survived (that thought is accompanied by Priscilla's laughter). There have been some difficult challenges, but what I am particularly proud of is that I've held on to my sense of integrity; in this day and age, I'm concerned about the breakdown in morality, ethics, high standards and quality. It appears that what it comes down to is - higher ratings, lowering of standards - and greed. I'm proud that I was raised by parents who instilled values in their home - raising 6 children at that! Now we call it 'the good old days'. Am I dating myself? Of course I am! (laughter ensues). 🌱