

Now WE'RE TALKIN

By Helen Marketti



Elvis & Graceland

An interview with Angie Marchese, Vice President of Archives and Exhibits at Graceland.

Angie Marchese admits that she has one of the coolest jobs and many would agree. She has worked at Graceland for 33 years. Her first job at Graceland was as a tour guide when she was a teenager and she loved it so much, she never left. Angie recently took some time to discuss her role at Graceland, the legacy of Elvis Presley, and why overseeing 1.5 MILLION artifacts is not only important but also fun.

"My first memory of Elvis came from my mom. She was a huge Elvis fan and always had his records playing in our house," remembers Angie. "I was only five years old when he passed away. My mom and I were in the car and she pulled over to the side of the road and started crying. She said that Elvis had died. In my mind, I thought that meant we wouldn't be able to listen to any more of his records."

When Angie was a teenager, her father's company transferred him to Memphis, Tennessee. "We had lived in Florida and I thought Memphis was boring. I remember my dad taking us all to Graceland. I had felt very overwhelmed with everything I saw. Then a couple years later, I started working there on the advice from my high school Guidance Counselor."

Angie has held different positions at Graceland over the years. One of the jobs she had was assisting with cataloging Elvis's wardrobe items. "The people I worked with all had backgrounds in Museum Studies so they knew about the proper conservation and preservation of the clothing. For me, however, I had a different perspective. For example, we were working on a vest and I said, 'Oh, this is the vest that Elvis wore in the movie, *Char-*

ro!" (1969). Everyone paused for a moment, then we did some research and sure enough, I was right. As we kept cataloging the wardrobe, I was able to remember events, movies and concerts where he wore a certain costume. It occurred to me that I have the passion for the story that goes along with each piece of clothing. That changed my entire career focus. Instead of going to school for PR and Communications, I decided to major in Museum Studies so I could help care for this magnificent collection and help to tell its story."

Angie reflects on what it is like to work with a collection that belonged to such an iconic figure. "It makes you feel connected. I never met Elvis. Yet I feel connected to him and to his legacy. Everything in the collection is so personal. Everything here has a deeper meaning and it connects you to a person, a human being. Elvis is still gaining new fans because he is still so relevant. Yes, he had great songs, made great movies, and put on wonderful performances. However, here is a man who always kept an authenticity about himself and that's what people fall in love with. He was genuine."

With 1.5 million artifacts, changing exhibits is "easy" as there are always items to choose from.

"Graceland is a time capsule and it is sealed, meaning it's left the way it was when Elvis lived there," explains Angie. "The visitor's complex is what I consider my playground as we have 90 thousand square feet to work with. I think of exhibits that may be fun and interesting for our visitors. One of our recent exhibits is called 'Dressed to Rock' and has over 100 pieces of Elvis's stage wear represented from 1969 to 1977. And out of all the artifacts, I do

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history of each item.”

She continues: “Austin wanted me to email him everything we had of Elvis talking or performing. We became fast email pals. He wanted to dive into who Elvis was and get to know him on a human level, not only the icon. It’s easy to know the star and what their on-stage persona is as an entertainer but you also need to know who they are behind all of that. That’s the Elvis I feel connected to and that’s the Elvis that Austin wanted to connect with as well during his research.”

Since the Colonel was such a big part of Elvis’s life and career, would there happen to be any artifacts that belonged to Colonel Tom Parker? “In the early 90s, we acquired the Colonel’s collection,” said Angie. “He had moved from Madison, Tennessee to permanently live in Las Vegas. The house he left behind in Madison was full of his life. He not only had items from his career with Elvis but also when he worked with Eddy Arnold and Hank Snow. There were also items that belonged to his wife, Marie. We were able to acquire the entire collection. The unique thing about having these belongings is that we can tell Elvis’s personal life story at Graceland and we can also tell his professional life and his time with Colonel Tom Parker. It tells a complete story. I am honored to work at Graceland and be part of Elvis’s legacy in some small way. Elvis always remained true to who he was as a person. He still commands the room.”

August 16, 2022, will mark the 45th anniversary of Elvis Presley’s death. Fans around the world will visit Graceland and participate in Elvis Week (August 9 – 17) to celebrate his life. For more information on Graceland, Elvis Week, and other events, please visit:
www.graceland.com
www.helenrosemaretti.com

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have a favorite. It’s Elvis’s wallet. It’s because it is so personal. In his wallet is a picture of he and his daughter, Lisa. He also has business cards in the wallet, a movie ticket stub and a newspaper clipping of when he earned a black belt in karate. This is what makes him human.”

At the writing of this article, the movie ELVIS is surging through theatres capturing attention, hearts and emotional tears around the world. It is a phenomenal story of Elvis and his manager, Colonel Tom Parker. Elvis is portrayed by actor Austin Butler and the Colonel is portrayed by Tom Hanks. The film, directed by Baz Luhrmann, has given an adrenaline rush to veteran Elvis enthusiasts while gathering up millions of new fans, who are discovering Elvis for the first time. Angie was able to introduce Austin to Elvis by way of many special items at Graceland. “The first trip that Austin made to Graceland, it was just he and Baz. We had met with them and discussed the concept of the movie. I had the privilege of walking Austin through Graceland after hours. I was explaining the history, showing him the house so he could take his time to absorb where Elvis lived. Graceland isn’t just a house, it’s a home. It has character and a distinct feeling,” said Angie. “I took Austin through the archives and pulled out random boxes of items for him to see. We were going through hats, pants, shirts, coats, photos and more. I was sharing the



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