

CHAPTER 2 PERFECT INGREDIENTS TO CAUSE A REVOLUTION

The Birth of Revolution Needs Ingredients

The music that became Rock and Roll was a revolution. While many believe Rock and Roll music was a byproduct, or evolution, of Rhythm and Blues (R&B). It was not!

While the roots of Rock and Roll, as well as the ingredients contained in it, obviously are linked to R&B, the sound which would become Rock and Roll Music would be different. It would combine multiple elements of music which existed in the region at that time.

While Rock and Roll Music clearly evolved from R&B. There is a distinct difference in the sound of Rock and Roll Music compared to traditional R&B. Rhythm and Blues is just that – It is the Blues. By definition, it is sad and depressing. B.B. King would be quoted as saying, "To sing or play the blues, you need to live life" Webster's defines singing the blues "as feeling sad and discouraged[18]".

While Rock and Roll music roots may have been a by-product of R&B as its starting point, it was a far cry from Rhythm and for music that had a robust effervescent, as well as a soulful sound.

A small number of radio station disk Jockeys (DJs) in the region up and down the Mississippi River started to play R&B music to their predominantly young white

listeners. DJs Alan Freed, Bill Randle, and Dewey Phillips began feeding a hungry youth market longing for their own sound.

Was this a perfect storm? Or was it destiny? Combining the cultural repression occurring in the South with the newfound middle-class youth, and the creation of Television, it all created the perfect storm allowing the conception and birth of Rock and Roll music to happen.

It is a fact, prior to 1956, Rock and Roll Music, by definition, did not exist. It was not categorized as its own musical genre, and because of that, it was looped into R&B. (with some Rock and Roll Songs showing up on the Country and Western Charts). The entertainment industry and record companies did not keep separate sales statistics on emerging sounds since, in their mind, Rock and Roll Music was not a separate market.

The burgeoning youth market changed that. In 1954, most American industry felt the youth market was not viable and, therefore, not worth the effort to address. Before the end of World War II, the middle class was just starting to grow. America was still agriculturally based. Manufacturing growth was an "end result" of World War II, when leaders realized factories were the future of this country.

The result was a new market. Coming from a substantially growing, more educated, and stronger middle class. The growth of American manufacturing dominance brought with it a workforce with leisure time and extra cash. Consequently, this also generated a surge in births. Ten years later, the "end result" was the growth of the emerging teen population. An entirely new demographic appeared practically overnight. The new sales demographic, when it arrived, ultimately would be known as the "Baby Boomers."

Baby Boomers would provide a change so profound; they would affect how all music would be sold and marketed and who it was marketed to. It created a redefinition of the existing entertainment industry. Ultimately, as a result, changing the format and content of what was then mainstream music.

Since the youth demographic had never been addressed directly in the past, it was viewed as unpredictable in attracting advertising dollars. Because in the past, it was just that, unreliable. It was virtually ignored and deemed powerless

by those holding the purse strings and budgets of the entertainment industry in the 1950s.

The entertainment industry comprised older, more conservative male executives who saw no reason to indulge in what they saw at the time as a passing fad. Other than Walt Disney, no one else even looked at the youth for anything.

The youth did not have their own radio stations or anyone to push the sound they wanted to hear. Except for a very select few DJs, and some children's stations, this music was considered filler and not mainstream content. To succeed, Rock and Roll Music had to become the primary source, which could only be achieved through a completely grassroots effort.

At the same time, the black listening marketplace, while it did hold a solid 15% of the listening market, and had its own radio stations, was not enough of a market boost to usher in Rock and Roll music. It was certainly not enough alone to tip the scales for any new type of music. However, when the youth listening Market was added, the result tipped the scales and generated an entirely new market.

However, Rock and Roll Music was beginning to gain traction. Rock and Roll Music would utilize influences from R&B, along with other musical genres. Ultimately, the listener would begin to focus on the artist that inspired the music. Explaining why many R&B artists began to become prominent. Later, after the birth of rock and Roll Music was complete, the audience found themselves attracted to older R&B stars. As a result, listeners began to notice the artists who inspired the songs.

In 1954, records of new emerging trends were not maintained, and no mechanism was created to track them. Rock and Roll Music was not recognized as anything but R&B, even though the styles were distinctly different.

It was not like this was done on purpose.

It was not economically feasible to do it any other way. Unlike today, when someone could pop out a spreadsheet in about 40 seconds, everything had to be hand calculated. (Small calculators were not invented yet), big calculators were not on every desk), so people called ciphers would need to add numbers in their heads. Doing this exercise would take a significant number of hours,

possibly days, every time a report was needed. Requiring a significant investment in a musical genre that still needed to be defined or was in its infancy.

To initiate the kind of change required to reclassify the music. Something would need to happen. Something which would set off a new revolution. The music would need to produce sales so significantly large and robust that change would become more than inevitable. Something so profoundly large that a change would be required. But those sales were far from happening. At least, not yet. (Elvis would change all of that)

Even though R&B music was better than what was played on mainstream stations, the large labels left this niche market to independent labels, such as Sun, Atlantic, Delta, and Chess Records. At this point, the large labels could not see enough profit in making that investment.

in time. What seemed to come along in a disorganized fashion, or by chance, was clearly not arbitrary.

Rock and Roll music would become a vehicle used to begin a new cycle. Once ignited, everything else would fall and die in its wake. Obliterating all remnants of the past.

Elvis' appearance would take Rock and Roll music and American culture in a new direction. At the same time, drawing in the newly primed audience of "Boomers" to it like a fly to a flame. Once ignited, that flame took hold, changing our world forever.

Rock and Roll music would unleash the "boomers" along with their new power. Once galvanized together by their music, they would relentlessly continue to other pursuits. In the next twenty to forty years, the "boomers" would go on to promote profound cultural and sociological change in our society. They would promote calls for social justice, and unleash changes so powerful and revolutionary, altering how we looked at ourselves, our traditions as well as our perceptions of each other.

It would become a moment when the youth finally recognized their possible power and effect on the world. As the single spark, Elvis would not only become the face of Rock and Roll music but also become the face of the cultural shift in

our society. He would jump-start Rock and Roll music from what was categorized as a momentary fad into a worldwide force.

Five pieces or ingredients specifically came together during that period between July 1954 and September 1956. All at precisely the right moment in time. If any one of these pieces did not appear, the birth of Rock and Roll Music may never have happened on the scale it did. These ingredients changed the world. When Elvis and his sound appeared on July 5th, 1956, it was an occurrence that can only be described as destiny.

The pieces were:

- 1. The Environment** – People needed to be ready for what was going to happen. Everything needed to be in place.
- 2. Fertilizer** – Dewey Phillips was needed to fertilize the soil. Someone that could form a taste for change. Grooming the audience to recognize the new sound.
- 3. The Producer** – Sam Phillips was another essential ingredient. Someone who would be able to hear the sound and refine it into Rock and Roll. Sam was looking for it. When it appeared, he knew what it was.
- 4. The Salesman** - Tom Parker, knew how to get a product into the hands of the people who wanted it. He redefined selling music and defined branding as a concept. Ultimately, he moved past local audiences to selling the product first nationally and ultimately to international audiences.
- 5. The Product** - Elvis Presley would successfully convert R&B listeners to Rock and Roll. Elvis was the musical catalyst, or the missing link needed to transform the culture.

Was it divine intervention that had Elvis appear at Sun Recording Studio in Memphis in 1954? That could always be debated.

But why were all of these ingredients in precisely the right place and time? What exactly happened on July 5th, 1954? What is rarely discussed were the circumstances that had Elvis to play THAT specific song at that moment. Why were all of these ingredients added one by one? The stage and the time were set. Ripe for a breakthrough. A breakthrough that would occur when a young

teenage truck driver with a guitar and a dream walked into Sun Recording Studios one afternoon

Let's understand each of these ingredients in greater detail one by one.

1. The Environment – For Rock and Roll to be born, it was essential that the ground be fertile for it. People needed to be ready for the change. An environment capable of growing and bearing fruit. The table had to be set with specific ingredients and place settings for each individual to fulfill their roles.

The first piece of the complex puzzle required a solid foundation to cause change. If properly groomed, the right individual could fertilize the soil. Ultimately, with the soil properly fertilized, a mass audience would gravitate toward it. All of the components were already in one place in Memphis – albeit unknowingly – the final necessary pieces would be added, turning the evolution of Rock and Roll Music into a worldwide revolution.

To grow anything successfully, the first ingredient required is a proper fertile soil. Rock and Roll music was no different. Only, the ingredients found in the soil were vastly different from each other. Some of the ingredients were tragically bred in discontent within the region. It seemed to be the case in Memphis and the deep southern region of the United States during the early to mid-1950s.

The deep south region was where most of the soon-to-be Rock and Roll legends appeared to get their foundational training. A region that was ripe and ready for change. The sound seemed to permeate from the soil. However, because of prejudicial tendencies, it was prevented from taking hold.

If anything was true, Memphis was ground zero for change. Also, it was the most likely place for it to happen. Historically, the ingredients of the birth of Rock and Roll came from music buried in the roots of the deep South.

Specifically, Rock and Roll was derived indirectly from the rhythm and blues music of the 1940s, which itself developed from other forms of music, earlier blues, boogie-woogie, jazz, and swing music. But as we discussed, Rock and Roll was not a direct evolution. It took a catalyst, a young truck driver from Memphis, to ignite these ingredients.

Like Arthur Crudup, the source for Elvis' breakthrough song, Rock and Roll music evolved from sounds emanating from the Mississippi Delta.

The sound, which greatly influenced Elvis, also influenced Howlin' Wolf, Buddy Holly, Little Richard, Rufus Thomas, Ike Turner, and Chuck Berry, and others. Many of these pioneers laid the foundation of the genre of music known today as Rock and Roll music.

However, there was a problem staring back at everyone. It would not release itself from the consciousness of the region. Sixty years later, in 2023, it still hasn't. America needed to address the racial problems that permeated and persisted. In 1954, segregation was becoming unacceptable; while in existence in many areas throughout the deep South, Jim Crow laws could not continue. These laws were tearing the country apart from within. Remember that laws segregating water fountains, lodging, restaurants, and bathrooms existed. Even today, remnants of these laws exist in the region's consciousness.

The youth (boomers) of this era led the way. Creating the space for change, they felt this was hypocritical and wrong. The black population was growing, and as a community, they would no longer be ignored. Later in December of 1955, more than a year after Elvis burst onto the scene, Rosa Parks would symbolically kick off the civil rights movement. It would morph into the full civil rights movement in the late 1950s, which would take over the consciousness of our country into the 1960s.

There was an awakening to the inhumanity of all of this.

Was it divine intervention that brought the pieces together at precisely the right moment? It seems highly likely. It was no accident that all of this happened when it did.

Even the birth of Elvis Presley seemed like a divine intervention. He was an unexpected surprise after the birth of his stillborn brother. His parents were not expecting twins. To his mother, he was a miracle from God. Elvis was not supposed to be born. But he was.

2. Fertilizer – An individual was needed to ensure the soil was fertilized and ready. His name was Dewey Phillips. Dewey would do more to shepherd Rock and Roll into existence than anyone in music history. As we would later find, Dewey, was to become more than the person playing the music; he would ultimately become The Midwife of Rock and Roll™.

Dewey was playing the gestation of the music for years. He had earned the trust of his audience. This audience would be substantial and would be necessary once Elvis appeared. Once Elvis was launched, he would talk to him, guiding him as a mentor. Radio, in the 1950s, was the pioneer of social media.

Assisting Sam Phillips and Elvis as a midwife to deliver Rock and Roll music. Dewey sowed the seeds of a musical sound only he and few others even knew existed. Dewey Phillips was a required ingredient to prime the audience. Without Dewey, the entire genre of Rock and Roll Music would be an alien sound to the public. Rock and Roll Music could never grow because it would fall on unfertile ground and die. While the sound might be unique, people had to be primed and ready for it.

Once ready, they could understand what it actually was.

Dewey Phillips was much more than a local Memphis Disc Jockey (DJ); his regional reach was legendary. He was a visionary. Recognizing the long game, Dewey also knew what his audience liked. With a unique talent for hearing a song and knowing if it was more than good, he ruled the airwaves of Memphis.

Forgotten and ignored by history, Dewey Phillips was more than just someone who played records in Memphis. Dewey was, as we would define him today, a major influencer for the entire region, as well as the future of Rock and Roll Music, Artists, and Listeners.

Without Dewey Phillips, we may never have had a coronation.

It could be assumed that Rock and Roll music would have remained a fad, held away from the spotlight, and hidden from sight by the sounds of R&B.

Even after introducing Elvis Presley to the world, he counseled the young upstart. Elvis frequently appeared on his radio show. Speaking with him while he was on the air. Often seen together on the streets of Memphis on Beale Street. Dewey was the first to recognize this sound existed.

People would tell others about the music they heard played on the radio. Before the internet, the real influencers were DJs like Dewey Phillips. Dewey would influence a legion of listeners, who would tell others about what they found.

Until Television arrived, it was the only way to introduce the potential of a new sound. Dewey was one of the primary influencers of Rock and Roll music.

Because Dewey had such a loyal following, his listeners would listen to the songs he played and, almost immediately, move to the record stores to purchase their newest find. Reaction to what he played was seemingly immediate (for 1950s standards). The reaction would manifest itself in phone calls to the station (initial reactions) and the first text media – telegrams. Translating itself into record sales.

Did Dewey have flaws? Yes, he did. Dewey was addicted to painkillers, which later altered his personality and judgment. But that did not happen until later in his life. It happened years after Elvis appeared.

But his early contributions nonetheless cannot be minimized. Everything in Rock and Roll's future hinged on Dewey's initial contribution. Clearly, without Dewey's contribution from fertilizing the environment, The ability to recognize and introduce Elvis to the world. To mentoring the future King. It could be safely assumed Rock and Roll music may never have happened.

3. Producer: Sam Phillips (No relation to Dewey Phillips) was the unique requirement needed to create, cultivate, and define the new sound into what was to become Rock and Roll Music. Sam had been looking for a particular sound for years. But not knowing exactly what that sound (IT) was. Sam was like many producers of early R&B, and Rock and Roll music.

He felt strongly that the future of music would be found in Rhythm and Blues. He literally bet the house on it. Yet as he would painfully find out, R&B on its own was not able to become a commercially viable product.

Unfortunately, the middle-class growth and profitability seen in the white communities in some regions of the US had not permeated to the black communities (such as the Deep South). The growth of R&B music, as producers such as Sam Phillips would realize, was not a money-making venture. Demand for the music was absent. Sam was going bankrupt producing R&B music.

While many of the early songs Sam produced were peripheral hits, none of them were quite IT. In the beginning, Sam was unsure exactly what that sound he was looking for was. He was confident he would know IT when he heard IT.

However, Sam was missing some of the final ingredients needed to create IT.

Ultimately IT was called Rock and Roll Music. Listening and recording many local artists. He would cultivate the music played in the local Memphis clubs and record them in his new recording studio. Sam discovered Howlin Wolf. He produced the first official Rock and Roll song by Ike Turner and Jackie Breton called "Rocket 88", which Sam sold to Chess Records. He recorded many local acts. Cultivating the music played in the local Memphis clubs and recording them in his new recording studio.

Sam looked everywhere, recording and producing songs by a Prison blues group called the Prisonaires; he discovered Rufus Thomas and Little Junior Parker.

None of these artists made it to the top of the charts. No one was making any money. However, Sam was going broke looking for the proverbial needle in a haystack.

Initially, Sam was looking for Rhythm and Blues hits coming from black artists. However, due to the times and habits of the Southern audience, this music was not selling. Not because it was bad but because it was a niche sound. He needed something or someone that would bridge the gap.

That someone (Elvis) walked into Memphis Recording Services one afternoon to record a record for his mother. If not for his assistant Marion Kiesker, Elvis would not have been asked to come back.

Elvis became the missing link to what IT was. Ultimately cultivated into Rock and Roll music. Clearly, without Elvis, Rock and Roll music may never have happened.

As we will see, Elvis was charting new territory. Elvis may not have "invented" Rock and Roll, but his breakthrough performances (both on stage and recording) throughout 1954-1956 were key components of the new musical genre known as Rock and Roll. It was a presentation of music that appealed to the tastes of the younger audience. Despite the upset that this was R&B - Rock and Roll Music is NOT R&B.

4. The Salesman – A product needs someone who would attract the attention it deserves. To become successful. Only one person would have the necessary requirements to fit that mold. His name is Tom Parker.

Derided by many for being a huckster, Rock and Roll Music needed Tom Parker to light the fire. As a carnival barker, Tom Parker would get people to attend his

shows by lighting a fire underneath the feet of chickens to get them to dance. He was called Col. Parker, or The Colonel (which was not his real name – he was never a Colonel in any military). He had the necessary network connections to sell Elvis to the masses. The Col. was not concerned with the music as all of the other ingredients. He was solely concerned with a single person, ELVIS.

Col. Parker's sole desire was to ensure that his client received the maximum amount of publicity and exposure he needed to succeed. Parker would sell out everyone in the equation to suit his needs. The Col had a single motto – "con or be conned."^[16]

The Col. was a necessary evil in Elvis' rise to prominence. He was a marketing genius and the single most reason that Elvis was known worldwide. His ties to RCA Records allowed Elvis to become a worldwide sensation. The Colonel's ties to The William Morris Agency ensured Elvis would be on Television and perform.

No one could sell the product (ELVIS) better than Col. Tom Parker. He was both a blessing and a curse. From 1955 - 1956 - he was the best thing that happened to Elvis. In the next phases of his career and life; that benefit could be debated.

5. The Product –To sell something, even something as ubiquitous as Rock and Roll, someone was needed that could present it to the public. Someone who could persuade people.

The reason for anyone to purchase and spend their hard earned money. A draw of some kind was required. Anthony Robbins says in his seminars, "Human beings do things for one of two reasons to avoid pain or for pleasure.[4]" Elvis was the pleasure in that equation.

No advertising dollars were pushing the music on the public. Elvis Presley's success was a complete grassroots effort, which took place by word of mouth. Many people at the time were starting to play this music. However, it was Elvis' performance of the music that drew people to his appearances and drew people to his records.

Rock and Roll music needed a performer to attract the audience. At first, the product was more than just Rock and Roll music. It was Elvis Presley, the performer. Rock and Roll, at this point, was not yet a viable product until the day Elvis changed history.

People comment that Rock and Roll was the by-product of Rhythm and Blues. It is said that Elvis appropriated the R&B sound, and only because of the color of his skin was he more popular than other black artists at the time. Unfortunately, that statement is way too simplistic to be true. An article from 2019 stated that many black artists were copying Elvis and the trailblazing style.

While It may be true on the surface that Elvis benefitted from his skin color. But, it is also true that Rhythm and Blues on its own was not making money for anyone! It wasn't making money for the producers or the performers. It could be said that the product of R&B morphed into Rock and Roll because R&B was not a sound that had the massive popularity necessary to sustain it. It was a niche sound at best.

The ingredients Elvis would provide were his youth and his drive. It became his momentum. In other words - his success factor. At the same time, while the producer was cultivating the sound, the salesman was creating the Market, and at the same time, someone was fertilizing the soil. Everything was ready for a breakthrough. It was nothing but inevitable if the right person were to appear.

It also did not hurt that Elvis was visually exciting. Elvis' performances were electrifying. Not a single person was left dissatisfied. At the same time, Elvis crossed racial lines, as well. He was appreciated at the time, with many of his fans crossing over from R&B listeners. Elvis' songs would always be found on the R&B charts.

Three-time Heavyweight Champion "The Greatest", Boxer Muhammad Ali, said this about of Elvis' success with blacks in particular:

“We (black people) aren’t going to follow someone unless they’ve got soul – Little Richard, Chuck Berry, Michael Jackson – but the only white boy that had soul, who could sing as good as any of them was Elvis... He had singing ability, he had everything – he was pretty.”^[17]”

As Muhammad Ali described, the face of Rock and Roll had to be special; the face needed to be "pretty." Succinctly, it needed someone who could have immense appeal across all genres and cross the lines and barriers of all races.

Elvis crossed the lines of color not because he was a white man but because he appealed to all sides. He had "soul". Elvis visually appealed to the masses of

prospective customers. He had a very unique Southern personality. He came without airs. Elvis was not a made-up persona. It was who he was.

The catalyst had to be a memorable person. Someone who could handle the mantle imposed upon him. That would not become known for some time. It had to be someone the youth generation would flock to and gravitate towards. He had to be one of their own. As it turned out, Elvis was someone who would outlast the generations of entertainers that followed in his footsteps.

As Dick Clark said, Elvis was a once in a multi-generational individual. Not only would Elvis lead Rock and Roll music, but he would also fall into that unique category of greatness. He would become part of history and American folklore.

Almost seventy years have passed, and the world still listens to his music, and his name is still relevant. Speak to anyone in the entire world, and they would recognize his name today as synonymous with Rock and Roll. Music.

Unfortunately, others that wish to claim the title of King of Rock and Roll overlook the "special sauce" Elvis brought with him. However, looking predominantly at that time in history, there was only one person whose contributions could safely satisfy a claim to the title of King of Rock and Roll, a title he neither sought nor requested.

Elvis Presley, the boy from Tupelo, Mississippi, on the surface, did not have much to offer the world beyond his voice and his dreams. But it turned out to be more than enough. Elvis was not "supposed" to lead a generation. If anything, he just stumbled in. (If you call divine intervention stumbling in!)

Once in, however, he would never let go. The result of what happened was clearly his destiny. On top of everything, it was Elvis' innocence and good-natured personality which came shining through. Elvis, while white, felt more comfortable on Beale Street with black friends, alongside black audiences and black musicians, than he did in all-white venues.

From his audition in July 1954, no one could have guessed the results that were to happen, with many points where it all could have gone off the rails. There was a chance that it would never get started at all. Without the right people in the right place, Neither Rock and Roll music nor Elvis would ever have happened at all.

There were so many people, places, and events that could have stopped everything in its tracks. But circumstances, Elvis' perseverance, and some divine providence allowed it to happen.

Elvis appeared at precisely the right time, in precisely the right place, at precisely the right moment in history. His drive, determination, and humility turned many obstacles into steppingstones. Instead of accepting failure and stopping, he used those comments to move forward, never giving up on his dream.

In two short years, Elvis Presley would change the culture and style of America, the Deep South, and the music industry. Most of all, he would alter our perceptions of each other. Elvis would change and alter the perceptions of the entire nation. He would push forward, breaking the lines of color and acceptance. Quite possibly, influencing the civil rights movement to move forward as well. In hindsight, we can see how the pieces fit. Elvis was a unique historical phenomenon, and he was a real person. Becoming an integral part of our history. Separating myth from fantasy, Elvis altered the world.

It should be noted that Elvis never aspired or called himself a King, nor did he ask to be crowned The King of Rock and Roll. He openly declined the title in many instances, pointing to his faith in Jesus Christ as the only King. This fact made his journey even more special! Elvis never aspired to the title of The King of Rock and Roll. Unlike today's mature advertising market, Elvis did not have corporate sponsors pushing him to his rise to the throne.

If anything, the establishment media was against his popularity. The press would ridicule him, calling him a fad, and someone who could not last. They criticized his dress, his hair, as well as his intentions. Elvis was to become as transparent as anyone could be for a deeply private person. Books written about him even talked about his grooming and lifestyle choices.

Elvis, in 1954 - 1956 did not come with a public relations team or advertising dollars like today's music marketplace. Elvis would ultimately define what was needed to succeed.

Neither Sun Records nor RCA Records spent the kind of money on advertising dollars spent today on any single artist. (Today, upwards of \$200,00 to \$700,00 is spent on a single artist in today's dollars) Advertising budgets did not exist in the

music industry in 1954 and 1955. Sam could not afford promotion, let alone money to press records.

RCA records, while they could have spent money advertising, were not yet all in on Rock and Roll Music, or at least as a genre they would ultimately support. However, unlike Sun Records, they did pump out records to keep up with demand.

Product or artist branding was not invented yet. And it definitely not as a part of music sales. A song would sell or not. People would buy a recording or not. Branding an artist became a by-product of Elvis' success and was actually an invention of Col. Parker.

All of what happened was new territory. Elvis did not have someone who traveled the path he was on. Elvis was the sole individual in the spotlight, and his every move was dissected. Elvis had no one to turn to for advice as he was charting a new course in history. By today's standards, there are multiple people in the limelight at one time, clamoring for attention.

By the tail end of 1956, there was only one single person at that pinnacle. ELVIS.

Considering the amount of scrutiny and focus Elvis generated, he had responded better than most human beings would. Elvis never lashed out at fans; he never took them for granted. Deep into his success, he would come out of his home to meet the thousands that would appear on his doorstep daily. Always saying that at any moment in time, these were the people who made him relevant and could make him irrelevant.

As George Klein (GK), Elvis' longtime friend, relayed to me: If someone saw him on the streets of Memphis, he would never turn someone away. He never looked down on anyone. Was he guarded? Of course! But that was because when you reach that level, there are many crazies out to settle a score that was never communicated.

Today many pop icons think they are too self-important to speak to "normal people ." stories of Rock Icon, who seem to be too self-important to acknowledge fans.

Elvis knew what it was like to be poor and alone. He also admired celebrities. Elvis's singular goal always was to make someone's day brighter, either in person,

on stage, in a movie, or on TV. His humbleness was not an act. It was real. Speaking to those who knew him and had met him, that side of Elvis was real. Success may have caused him to hide out or keep his privacy. He would keep his friends close, people he believed he could trust. But his success never took away his humanity.

Elvis' success, as tremendous as it was, was a complete grassroots effort. His popularity and success came from a sales demographic that was not yet defined. The teen market, which would eventually become the baby boomer generation, was not yet even defined in 1954.

If anything, the odds were a billion to one that Elvis could have achieved what he did. From where he had come from in his life, there was no way any of this could have even been predicted. Elvis did not have a benefactor or someone behind the scenes pushing him to the pinnacle.

Elvis was all alone at the top, as well as during each step along the way. Elvis' popularity as an artist grew spontaneously. Like Rock and Roll itself, Elvis grew from nowhere. His popularity was entirely a grassroots phenomenon.

None of what happened had been or could have been planned. Hollywood would have laughed at this script had it been a work of fiction. They would have scoffed at the plot and said it was too improbable to believe.

More likely, this would be a science fiction plot or some comic book character - similar to those characters Elvis loved as a child.

This book will chronicle the rise of Elvis from nowhere to become The King of Rock and Roll. We will define each person who contributed to Elvis' success in detail. We will revisit what Elvis did and how he did it. We will identify what occurred to ensure his place in history.

Just these two years from 1954 -1956 alone are enough details to chronicle a lifetime of success.

However, Elvis did not stop; he would later go on to not only make music history but to conquer the new medium known as Television. At the height of his music career, he embarked and succeeded in Hollywood, altering American culture along the way.

Later after an absence from the stage of 10 years, he would once again electrify another generation of fans. If anything, Elvis redefined the entertainment landscape multiple times. In the world of celebrity superstardom, there was Elvis, and then there was everyone else.

Since Elvis was a loner, there were very few people who he could call "friends." He kept to himself, with his mother as his sole confidant. I believe this was a hard life for anyone to live. He would be followed and photographed, and he could never be sure who his true friends were. Who was in it for him, or just to be associated with him? Initially, Elvis relied on his mother's judgment (George Klein and Jerry Schilling were two people his mother approved of. They remained loyal even after his death). Finally, Elvis redefined everything that was American Culture, as we knew it, during the mid to late 1950s.

Almost 90 years have passed since he was born. I doubt, however, Elvis himself could have ever believed he would achieve so much. Not as a child from his shotgun dirt floor home in Tupelo, Mississippi; or from his poor home in a black neighborhood Adjacent to Shake Rag in Mississippi, while his father was incarcerated; or from the Lauderdale Courts housing projects in Memphis, Tennessee. Elvis' mother, Gladys, called Elvis her miracle from God, and she felt it was Elvis' destiny to become someone special.

She believed that God had a plan for her son, and she instilled this in him since he was born. But coming from the poorest of the poor, the harsh reality was that success had to be a dream. But Elvis epitomized the American dream. There was no way Elvis could have dreamed his success on this level could ever occur. Even in his childhood prayers, when Elvis prayed to God that he could help his parents never to be poor!

I do not believe that even in his daydreams of Captain Marvel, could he have anticipated what was about to happen in his life. I highly doubt that Elvis would ever have dreamed he could be remembered on the same scale as the comic book characters he read or the movie icons he watched and admired as a child. As a young teenager, he dreamed like many young men. Sitting in the audience of the local movie theater wishing and praying to be somebody. Someone who could remove his parents from poverty.

Elvis prayed deeply and innocently as a poor child from his home in Tupelo. He prayed to find a way he could make enough so that his parents would never experience poverty. There were days in Elvis' childhood when there was not enough to eat. Elvis, even when he became famous, carried his own silverware. In case he was asked to dinner.

No one could know how hard he prayed, but from his own admission, Elvis prayed. Elvis acknowledged his success came from his belief in God and Savior Jesus Christ. Elvis' prayers were answered, as he would say himself, "from his 100% faith in God." Elvis' love of Gospel music was not an accident. To Elvis, his faith empowered him.

It came from the gifts God gave to him. Later in life, with all of his riches and achieving the pinnacle of success, Elvis never forgot God's place in his life, nor the people who helped him achieve his goal – the fans.

Thousands of fans kept vigil outside his first home, on Audubon Drive, in Memphis on a daily basis to get a glimpse of him, and then when he moved, they flocked to the gates of Graceland. He would go outside frequently to meet and talk with them. Not once was it ever reported that he shunned a fan or took them for granted!

From Elvis' perspective, I doubt he truly realized the impact he would have upon the entire world. Especially while all of this was happening, Elvis could never have imagined the fallout from the music he sang or how he performed. Elvis just ached to sing for people; he wanted every show to become memorable. He gave his all in every performance.

I doubt Elvis would ever believe the effects of what he did would ultimately change the world! It was impossible for Elvis to predict, nor would he ever have imagined, that he could usher in a cultural revolution. One of the most peaceful revolutions in human history.

To believe that Elvis could have done all of this, from where he came from in life, would be beyond his or anyone's comprehension. For Elvis, the boy from Tupelo, Mississippi, to believe he would be crowned a King was simply improbable. Elvis never aspired to any throne. Frankly, Elvis was way too humble for that!

While Elvis had believed in himself. He was even surprised at the ultimate outcome. An outcome that has grown even more prominent over the years. As we look at it from the historical perspective it deserves, it becomes more astonishing.

Within just two short years, Elvis embarked upon a legendary and impossible journey. A journey that would result in him to be crowned The King of Rock and Roll. In the next chapters will begin this journey.

I urge you to take it with me as your guide. While we look back on it all. I hope you will enjoy the ride Elvis took from a historical perspective; along with the successes came bumps and points that would have stopped most. At the same time, keep this in mind:

Elvis did this all: With only a guitar and a dream.

CHAPTER 16 THE VERDICT : “IT’S GONNA BE A HIT”

Dewey Hears Greatness, and Tells The World

Sam played the song for Dewey that night several times. After, he patiently waited for the response. Dewey was intrigued, to say the least. Dewey was completely aware of the original song. Over the years, he had played the song many times by Arthur “Big-Boy” Crudup on his radio show, which is where Elvis must have heard it.

Dewey left Sun Recording Studios that night without telling Sam his next step.

"He was reticent, and I am glad he was...If he hadn't been reticent, it would have scared me to death if he had said, 'it's a hit, it's a hit.' I would have thought Dewey was trying to make me feel good.

What I was thinking was, where are you going to go with this? It's not black, it's not white, it's not pop, and it's not country, and I think Dewey was the same way.

He was fascinated by it. – there was no question about that – I mean, he loved the damn record. But there was a question of where do we go from here. " [48]

Both Sam and Dewey kept talking throughout the night. They finished up around 3 am when they both called it a night. It was early the next morning when Sam unexpectedly received a Phone call from Dewey.

Sam recalled the conversation that morning with Dewey almost verbatim:

“ I couldn’t sleep at all last night, man!”

‘Well, you should have slept well. You had so much Jack Daniels and Beer in you!’

‘No!’ Dewey said he couldn’t sleep because he kept thinking about that record. He wanted it for his show (that) night; in fact, he wanted two copies.

And he said we ain’t letting anybody know.’

His reticence was over that day.”^[49]

All Sam could hear in his voice was Dewey saying:

... It’s Gonna Be a Hit!^[50]

Sam waited until Elvis got home from work. He went over and told Elvis that Dewey would be playing his record that very night. Elvis could not take the anticipation. As nervous as he was the previous night, the moment he started strumming his guitar nervously the previous night. This was probably worse. Elvis could not be blamed for his fear at that moment. He did not know what to think. Was Elvis afraid of what would happen next? Was he afraid no x would like it?

At least Elvis had gotten instant verification from Sam, Scottie, and Bill. This time the stakes were higher. Everyone important to Elvis would be listening tonight. His mother, father, aunt Mini, and others. Not only would most of the people Elvis knew be listening to the show. But also, all of the people who listened nightly to the radio. The people listening would not only be people who loved him – Elvis knew he was loved and would be accepted unconditionally by his family.

However, Elvis was most concerned with the people who knew of him but did not quite know him. Those people who used to make fun of him as an awkward teen

in High School would be listening to him. Since Elvis was not the most popular person in Memphis, he had a right to be fearful. Elvis was about to find out if people liked the song. Despite all the hype, Elvis was still only 19 years old – one year out of high school.

There was no way at this point in his life he would have it all figured out. Elvis did a great job of masking his insecurities. However, as important a moment it was to him, he did not want to be around to listen to his song.

Everything Elvis had focused on for his entire life at that point could hinge upon that single moment, and no one could have blamed him if he was terrified. His hopes and dreams were all placed at this moment in time. He did not know what to think. As Elvis later recounted to the Saturday Evening Post.

“I thought people would laugh at me. Some did, and some are still laughing, I guess.”^[51]

He turned on the radio, set the station to WHBQ, and told his parents and family to listen, and then left the apartment. He told his family (Gladys and Vernon), Aunt Minnie, and some of his close friends, that his song would be playing on the radio that night. Elvis did not want to remain for the reaction. He was too nervous. He walked over to the movie theater with his girlfriend Dixie to wait out the storm.

Think for a moment. What could be going on in the mind of a young Elvis Presley? This was the one day in Elvis’ life, when everything would change forever.

Elvis Presley, a Truck driver for a local electric company, had never been a performer before. Elvis had yet to appear professionally in front of a live audience. No one had ever seen this young man on a stage, and no one knew what kind of reaction they could expect. Elvis had sung a few times in the courtyard with his close friends at the Lauderdale Courts apartments.

Also, Elvis performed at the Minstrel show in High School. He failed an audition a year earlier. There was not much in Elvis’ professional resume. This was about all of Elvis’ professional experience top date.

This Elvis was not the polished performer he would ultimately become. Elvis was not remotely close to the performer the world would ultimately remember him to be. *That* Elvis would have to evolve from this moment.

Elvis was yet to appear anywhere, let alone develop into an entertainer. On this night, Elvis, with his recording, had touched off a spark in that little recording studio in Memphis. No one had yet to feel the result of that spark. That night, the spark was only felt within a small group in the Memphis Recording Services. Scottie, Bill, Sam, and now Dewey were the only people who remotely had an idea of what they had heard. However, that was about to change. Dewey was the final ingredient needed to set the world afire.

On July 8, 1954, Elvis Presley was a 19-year-old, that was rightly afraid of the reaction that would come from his peers and contemporaries. Elvis was a loner. Much of his younger years were found around his home with his parents. Mostly beside his doting mother. Elvis did not have any of the popularity he would have later after he became famous. His friends were more distant acquaintances. Besides his mother and his girlfriend, Dixie, no one was very close to Elvis at that time.

Just one year earlier, Elvis had graduated from high school and started to work as a truck driver for the Crown Electric Company. In other words, Elvis was a typical young teenage boy in the mid-1950s, with his life in front of him.

No one, not even Elvis himself, could have been prepared for the events that were to have happened next. Not one of the group who had heard the recording could see the impact that this single song would ultimately have upon the world. At this moment, Elvis just wanted people to “like” him and also like the song he sang. No one could have predicted that the future King of Rock and Roll was about to be born.

Elvis was about to go from obscurity into a world not a single human being on the planet could ever explain or imagine. Elvis’ life from this moment forward would never be the same. The moment Dewey played the acetate recording given to him by Sam Phillips, Rock and Roll would be born. Elvis might not have been the first to record or release a Rock and Roll song, but with the help of Dewey Phillips and his audience, he was the first to move the sound out of obscurity.

Sam Phillips and Elvis Presley, in the little recording studio in Memphis, Tennessee, together conceived the genre of Rock and Roll Music. This night documented the official birth of a new style of music that came from the minds of Sam Phillips and Elvis Presley. Rock and Roll was conceived from within

them; they felt it in their soul. But Rock and Roll music still needed to be born and released to the world.

Dewey Phillips, however, ultimately delivered Rock and Roll to the world. On that night, amid the flurries of calls and telegrams; amid the entire Memphis listening audience; they were realizing they had heard something new and different. The audience was begging Dewey Phillips to play that song repeatedly. Amid the congratulations and the back-slapping that everyone was experiencing in the moment., Amid the congratulations of the moment. At THAT precise moment, Rock and Roll was officially born.

No one knew what it would look like or become, but Rock and roll was born at that moment.

As the birth of Rock and Roll was about to happen, the one obscure person in the Mix was Dewey Phillips. It was Dewey Phillips who ensured Rock and Roll's proper delivery.

Forever, from that point forward, history should recognize a clear fact:

July 8, 1954, was the date Rock and Roll was delivered to the world.

Most importantly as well, Dewey Phillips became the man who delivered Rock and Roll music – Becoming the MIDWIFE of Rock and Roll™

At this moment, Elvis was walking into a new life... So too did Rock and Roll music. They both went blindly and without a script. If lightning hit the night before, what was to follow was the raging fires – eventually, the fallout, and the effects of that fallout would touch every part of the world.

Both Dewey and Elvis remained friends for many years. Until Dewey's death in 1968. With Dewey introducing many of his first hits. Having regular interviews with him in the early days.

Dewey would become an early mentor to the future King, After the first interview Elvis always felt comfortable at the WHBQ studios.

Until Booze and Pills disrupted their relationship, Elvis and Dewey were very close. Elvis was appreciative of Dewey's help early on. Spending time with him on his

radio program, and as we will see with Dewey offering some important guidance. In his rise to prominence.

If July 5, 1954, was the moment lightning struck. No one took notice.

It would not be until three days later that the fire ignited in Memphis Recording Studio would start to catch hold of Greater Memphis and then the surrounding area.

Within a year, those fires would burn out of control around them, becoming an unstoppable force of nature. Months, years and decades later, the world would never be the same - again. This day would become the defining moment in the birth of Rock and Roll music.

Albus Dumbledore declared at the conclusion of "The Secrets of Dumbledore," something quite fitting to describe what just happened.

"Funny thing about memorable moments – They don't seem quite so memorable. – In The Moment!"

CHAPTER 17 DEWEY INTERVIEWS ELVIS

A Nervous Teenager Is the Talk of Memphis

At around 9:30 or 10:00 pm on July 8, 1954, Dewey announced to his audience that he would play a new record that would be released soon by Sam Phillips and Sun Records.

He then said: "It's going to be a Hit! de-gaw" [52]

He followed up by saying, "Ain't that right, Myrtle" (Myrtle was his electronic cow). Myrtle 'Mooed' back in agreement, and then Dewey announced the singer and the song. Dewey not only played the song once but multiple times. He had two turntables going playing it repeatedly throughout his show. There was a pause in the universe at this point. At this single moment, the world waited for a response.

What would happen next ... became legend.

It was the hit everyone knew it could be. However, it was more than that! The phone at the radio station was ringing off the hook. Call after call had come in the switchboard. Messages came in from telegrams. The exact number to this day is debated. Nevertheless, there were enough calls and telegrams that would make a difference in any man's life! Not to mention the life of a young man at the beginning of his adult life and career.

Dewey had introduced his audience and the world to the new sound. However, there was some explaining that needed to be done. Who was this new artist, and where did he come from? Dewey knew he needed to explain to his listeners details about who Elvis was. Also, Dewey wanted his audience to know that Elvis Presley was a real person from Memphis.

Wink Martindale, the legendary game show host was the morning DJ at WHBQ and happened to be in the studio that night. When the phones were ringing, he was asked by Sam Phillips if he would make a call to Elvis' home.

Wink Martindale recalled: They were listening, of course, and they were very excited about the way the audience was reacting to "That's All Right Mama," Elvis' first record. I said, **"Mrs. Presley, Dewey would like him to come down to the studio. He wants to interview him. Where is he?"**

She replied, **"Well, he was so nervous about his record being played. He went to see a double-feature Western. You'll find him at the Suzores Theatre on Decatur Street."**[35] Dewey responded as only he could,

"Mrs. Presley, you get that cotton-picking son of yours down here to the station. I played that song of his, and them birdbrained phones haven't stopped ringing since."[37]

Elvis' Mother and Father immediately went to the movie theater and started walking down each aisle of the theater, looking for Elvis to bring him to the station.

After finding him, they shuttled him to the radio station. Elvis appeared that night at the Chisca Hotel for his first interview.

Elvis told people years later.

"I was scared to death; I was shaking all over. I just couldn't believe it, but Dewey kept telling me to cool it.¡. [this] was really happening" [53]

Dewey prepped Elvis, telling him he was going to interview him live on the air.

Elvis Replied: **"I don't know nothing about being interviewed!" [54]**

Dewey responded.

"Just don't say nothing dirty." [55]

Dewey asked Elvis questions about who he was and where he went to school. Elvis' responses were short **"Humes High."**

Later Dewey would say why he had asked. That question:

"I wanted to get that out (that Elvis Attended a White High School) because a lot of people had thought he was colored." [41]

Dewey ended the interview by thanking Elvis.

After he was thanked, Elvis then asked Dewey when he was going to interview him.

Dewey responded, **"I already have; the mic's been open the whole time. [56]**

Dewey later said when he realized he was on the air, "Elvis had broken out in a cold sweat."

Thursday, July 8, 1954, the music industry, and with it, the entire culture of the United States and quite possibly the world was changed, forever.

Dewey Philips delivered a new sound and a new look at our cultural world with his aplomb and style. After the delivery, nothing could go back to the way it was. The trajectory of history would be forever changed as the firestorm that started was in the middle of it, he was smart enough to realize that there would be some fallout as a result.

Once Dewey was alone, he needed reassurance. Reassurance that he had done the right thing. Even he knew it was a defining moment. Dewey could never have realized that this was a defining moment in history, but it was clearly a defining moment in his life.

Dewey understood the significance of playing this song. Even though he was in the middle of it, he was smart enough to realize that there would be some fallout as a result.

Dewey called his wife, Dot. Dot was the only person in his life who would tell him the truth.[43]

In 1978, ten years after Dewey's death, Dot Phillips recalled that night in an interview with the Trenton (Tennessee) Herald **Gazette** **"I told him I loved it; He went on to say, "Elvis had a hit".**

Dewey cherished that moment with Elvis. He would tell it time and again! [57]