

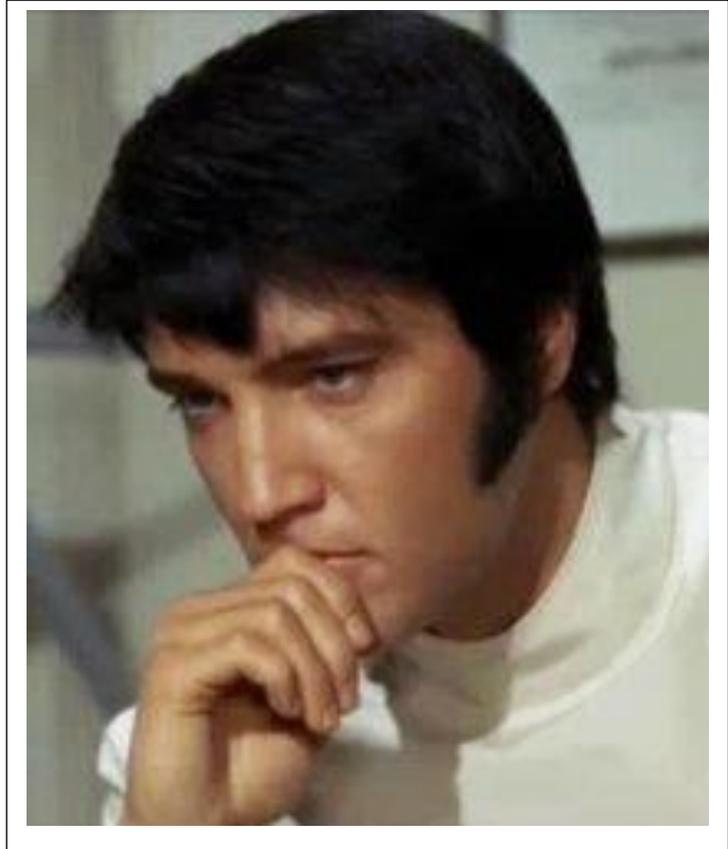
Elvis Gospel Fan Club Quarterly Newsletter 2020-2

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Editorial

Dear Gospel Fan,

We are sad to hear news of the passing of Loanne Parker on 9th May (see last page) also of Dick Grob on 22nd April in Las Vegas. Dick worked as head of security for Elvis for 10 years, from 1967 to 1977. He was not only a personal bodyguard, but also a friend of Elvis. He wrote about his time with Elvis in his book "Safe and Sound."

The photos above are from *Change of Habit*. More about the film in these pages.

Mother Dolores Hart who starred with Elvis in *Loving You* and *King Creole* is to be a guest on the Conversations on Elvis event during Elvis week in Memphis in August There will also be an Elvis Gospel Homecoming concert with Donnie Sumner, Ed Hill and Larry Strickland; plus Terry Blackwood and The Imperials.

Production on Baz Luhrmann's Elvis biopic in Australia has been suspended indefinitely after the Warner Bros. project was hit by Tom Hanks' positive test for the coronavirus in April. The Australian director did, however, commit to returning to the production as soon as possible. "All going well, we have a passionate conviction to be back here on the Gold Coast, picking up where we left off as soon as the time is right," he wrote. The as yet-titled biopic was in preproduction on Australia's Gold Coast when Tom Hanks and his wife, Rita Wilson, tested positive for COVID-19. The couple, both 63, are out of the hospital and continuing to self-isolate at a rented home in Australia.

I do hope and pray that you are coping well with all the disruption this Covid 19 virus has caused. Whatever the situation we know that the Lord is with us, desires only the best for us and will complete the good work he has started in us.

God bless you, *Madeleine*

Interview with William A. Graham Change Of Habit Director

By: David Adams Source: Elvis Australia April 19, 2020

William A. Graham was an American television and film director. Graham directed episodes of many TV series including The Fugitive, Twelve O' Clock High, The Big Valley, Batman and Ironside. Graham was the director of Elvis Presley's final acting role in a motion picture, Change of Habit, in 1969.



Q: Tell us how you were approached to direct Elvis in Change Of Habit.

A: I was under contract to Universal at the time and they'd been throwing different things at me and I'd been saying that I wanted to do a feature and they'd promised to give me a feature. But so far I'd done just television movies and episodes of some of the series. Then along came the Elvis picture, which kind of surprised me, 'cause I didn't think that Elvis was exactly the right casting for that movie. But I read the script and I thought, with a little rewrite we could make something nice out of it. So I said, 'Okay, here we go'. I met Elvis and we got along, and so that's how I got on the movie.

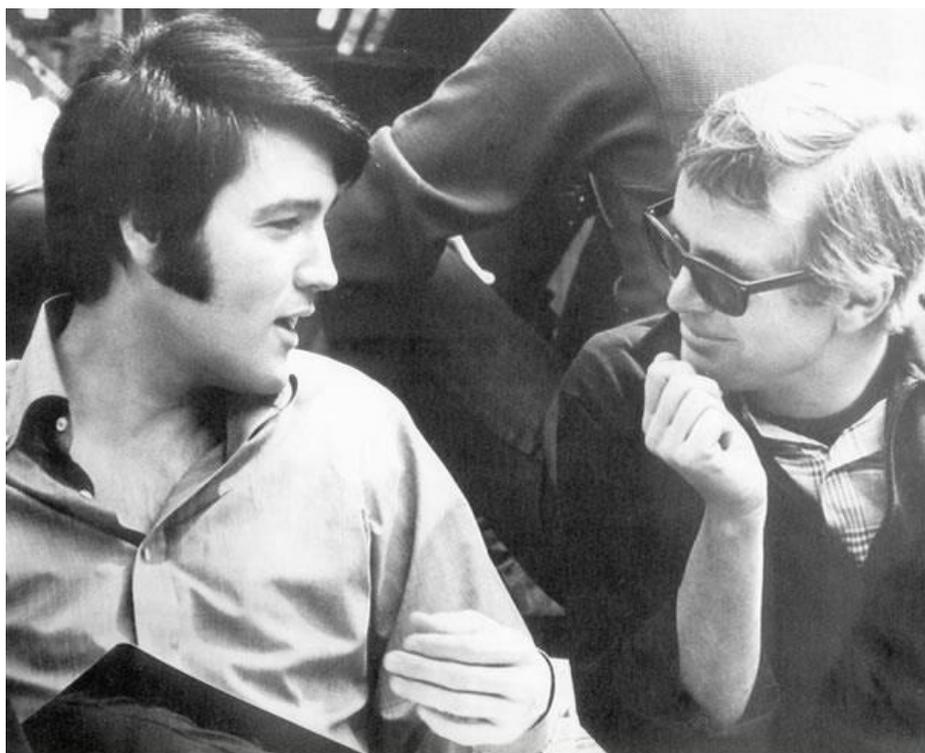
Q: How was your first meeting with Elvis like?

A: I was kind of nervous about meeting Elvis. I was in awe of him, like so many of us were. But to my surprise, he turned out to be very approachable, very easy to talk to, and we got along just fine.

Q: So Elvis really put you at ease.

A: He put me at ease. And of course, he had the approval over the director and I guess he thought I was okay, so he said, 'Let's go ahead and, and use Billy'.

So I started working with Elvis. I went up to his house and we were running some scenes in the movie and I found that he could handle humor quite well and he could also handle a fight scene. He could do an argument very well, very believably. But in certain other areas, like if it was a love scene or if there was some subtlety that was called for he was a little self-conscious. So I decided that we could do some work in that area. So I started teaching him some of the elements of what they called The Method, some of the things that I'd learned at the Neighborhood Playhouse. For example, acting is reacting. You know you don't just think up how you're gonna read your line, you listen to what the other actor is saying, and you react from that. Acting is real behavior in imaginary circumstances. And it's very useful when you're preparing a scene to do some improvisation where you take the situation in the scene, but instead of using the scripted dialogue, you play the scene as if it's a scene in your own life. And this opens you up to giving a more believable performance.



Elvis Presley with Change Of Habit director William A. Graham.

Well, Elvis really enjoyed that and he responded to the input he was getting from me and we did all kinds of things. We did improvisations. We did what they call simple action problems. An example of this would be Priscilla would be in the bedroom taking a nap. Now Elvis' assignment in this scene would be to sneak into the bedroom, to crawl on his hands and knees around the foot of the bed and go up and see if he could steal her gold Rolex off the bedside table without her waking up. So we did things like that. Well, the Colonel got wind of it and one day he called me into his office and he said, 'I hear you've been going up to Elvis', Sonny'. And I said, 'Yeah, that's right. I've been working with him. We've been working on the acting and he's really coming along very well'. So he said, 'Well listen, Sonny', he said, 'Let me tell you something. We make these movies for a certain price and they make a certain amount of money, no less and no more'. So he said, 'Don't you be goin' for no Oscar, Sonny, because we ain't got no tuxedos'. And so that was my reprimand. And so I kept on going up to see Elvis, but the Colonel was a little bit suspicious of -- that we were gonna take the movie off in a little bit different direction from Elvis' normal stock in trade, and we did.

Q: So do you think that Colonel Parker didn't really want Elvis to really expand as an actor, to get more serious roles, then?

A: Oh, I don't know. It's just that he had something going that Elvis was doing and doing successfully and I think he didn't wanna mess with success. You know, he didn't wanna alter the formula.

Q: What do you think of Elvis as an actor?

A: I think he had some real potential. I think that if he could have worked some more on it and if he could have gotten better scripts, I think he could have been a perfectly good actor.

Q: What was the tone on the set with Elvis and the other cast?

A: The tone was very comfortable. Elvis was wonderful to work with. Elvis was the nicest man I ever met in my life. He was the politest man I ever met. He called everyone sir or ma'am, you know, starting with the crafts serviceman with the guard at the gate, all the way up to the head of the studio. Everyone was sir. He was very responsive to direction. He didn't show any of the kind of ego, the kind of temperament that you would expect from a big star -- and he was a big star. He was wonderful with the crew. He didn't like to go into the commissary at lunchtime because people would pester him for autographs, so very often he would eat in his trailer. And then quite often he'd come out and sit around on the set and bring out his guitar and he would sing and play for us. You know, he'd play some of the old favorites like 'Hound Dog', or 'Blue Suede Shoes' and this was wonderful for us. This was really a thrill.

I'll tell you something else that happened to him shooting. We were shooting this musical number on a merry-go-round where he's taken this little girl to the park and he takes her on the merry-go-round and she's riding around and Elvis is singing to her. Well, she was a very young girl and she could only work for a few hours a day with us getting into all kinds of penalties and overtime. So when it came time to do Elvis' close up the little girl wasn't available to do the offstage. Also, you know, her attention span was not that great. So Elvis said to me, 'I always feel better when I'm singing a song if I can look at somebody and if I can sing to somebody'. He says, 'I wonder if you would mind standing beside the camera and let me sing to you when I do my close-ups'. So I had Elvis Presley sing a song directly to me in a movie, and that was quite a thrill.

Q: The little girl had a problem and was mistreated by a doctor on the set?

A: Well, no, there wasn't a doctor on the set, and I don't think she was actually autistic, but that was what she was playing. And we had gone up to see a doctor up in San Jose who had way of treating autism that he called rage reduction and it was very controversial. Not everybody believed in it. I mean people still believe that there is no treatment for autism. Mary Tyler Moore was very concerned about the way we were doing this. It involved Elvis holding the child in his arms and letting the child struggle because she felt contained, you know, and going into a rage, but he would still hold her and continue to hold her until finally, she would quiet down. And this doctor up in San Jose said he had treated many children successfully and had them recover from autism using this technique.

Q: Do you recall Mahalia Jackson coming to the set?

A: Yes, as a matter of fact, and I had worked with Mahalia Jackson when I did 'Sunder, Part 2', Mahalia Jackson appeared on that show singing. But yes, we were very excited to have her come to the set.

Q: Did any fans from the Universal tours get a chance to meet Elvis while he was shooting?

A: Well, we try and keep the fans at a distance, you know, and but sometimes Elvis would make himself available. You know, he was very good about things like that. He understood the importance of fans and the fact that you have to -- he wasn't standoffish in any way. So once in a while, he would sign autographs or talk to the fans, when they would come around. But the tours, in general, didn't come through our set.

Q: Thank you for taking the time out to remember it.

A: Well it was a favorite, what a favorite of mine, and I'm very proud of the fact that in the Elvis Encyclopedia there's a picture of me and Elvis with his new haircut. And it also mentions in the caption that I was one of Elvis' favorite directors. And the article says that if Elvis had met me earlier in his career that it might have taken a different turn. So I feel good about that.

Q: Do you have anything you'd like to tell the fans?

A: Only that of all the people I've ever worked with in my entire life, and I've been a director for 47 years, Elvis was the nicest man I've ever worked with.



Elvis with Mahalia Jackson and Barbara McNair who played Sister Irene pictured here on the set of *Change of Habit*. Mahalia came on the set to ask Elvis if he would participate in a fund-raiser that she was going to organize.



Darlene Love (pictured above) and the Blossoms sang *Let Us Pray* in the movie *Change of Habit*. The Blossoms also sang with Elvis in the Gospel section of the '68 Special. Darlene says that they would chillout, singing with Elvis. "Yes! Whatever song he knew - 'Amazing Grace' or 'River of Jordan' or 'Heaven Is a Wonderful Place' or 'Sweet Hour of Prayer'. We called them hymns of the church. There was another one called 'Pass Me Not, O Gentle Savior'. The Blossoms were known for their harmony. We'd harmonize with him. There's something we had with Elvis that others didn't have. It was fun to be wanted by someone like Elvis Presley.

The Man Who Shot Elvis - Ed Bonja

Here is an interview with Elvis' principal photographer Ed Bonja (1970-1975). This interview by Tracy Bymoem was conducted at the Elvis Festival in Bad Nauheim, Germany 2012 where Elvis lived while in the army.

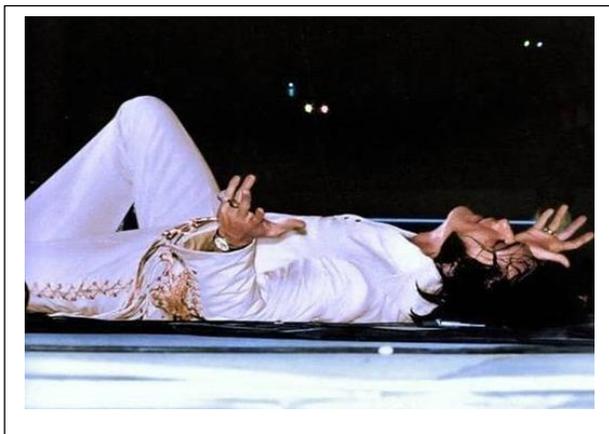
A young Ed Bonja found himself in a room face-to-face with the King of Rock. They spoke about football and life and of course, Elvis left a lasting impression on this young man who went on to become his tour manager and photographer between 1970 and 1977. It was a moment, that to this day, Mr Bonja, will never forget.

'I'm still coming to the realisation, even now, how incredible that was', Mr Bonja said.

'Being around him was something I can't even express, it was constant excitement, he had a charisma about him like no one else I ever met, you can feel him walking into the room, it hits you right in between the eyes, he was a just an amazing person',

Mr Bonja's uncle, Tom Diskin, was friends with Elvis' manager Colonel Tom Parker. The connection meant Mr Bonja was given a job working as a secretary for Elvis in 1964 during the shooting of the movie *Girl Happy*

'A few weeks after the movie finished, Elvis came by one night to the Colonel's apartment and we spoke for about 20 minutes', Mr Bonja said. 'He was so gracious, we were talking about football, he said 'you look like you play football', he told me about his team and how they were going to play Ricky Nelsons team next Saturday in a park and that I should go down'.



When Elvis and the Colonel made the decision to start doing live concert tours again in 1970, Colonel asked Mr Bonja, his brother and cousin to help out anyway they could. During this time he captured some of the most historical images of Elvis which form part of an exhibition at Sydney Univeristy.

'It was real easy to photograph him because he was so good looking, so emotive, he had such strong expressions when he sang, he was so easy to photograph because he was just so darn good-looking',

Mr Bonja clocked off the Elvis Show in May of 1977 after being physically and mentally drained. 'I could see it in him (Elvis) as well, as everyone else could and when I heard the news (of his death) I was home in LA', Mr Bonja said.

'I don't think there will ever be another person like Elvis, ever, in my lifetime or anybody elses' lifetime and he's going to live on forever', Mr Bonja said. (Ed Bonja passed away September 2019. We met him at an Elvis Weekender in Bridlington. He was a gentle person and we bought a copy of the photo to which he is pointing)

Plans for Elvis' Circle G Ranch as an Historic Designation

Thanks to Ron Maxey Memphis Commercial Appeal for his article from which I have taken this information



Buddy Runnels stands in front of a 50-foot-tall cross on the Circle G Ranch, which he bought in 2014. (Photo -Stan Carroll/The Commercial Appeal)

On December 13, 2019, the National Park Service added the Circle G Ranch to the National Register of Historic Places. Developers hope the designation, which has been in the works for about a year, will help keep a focus on the property among the Elvis faithful as the slow process of converting the ranch into a tourist destination proceeds.

Capitalizing on the start of Elvis Week activities up the road at Graceland, a public "Day at the Ranch" on 8th December drew a crowd of curious fans for a sneak peek at the grand plans for the Circle G. Conceptual plans for the restoration project were on view. Davage "Buddy" Runnels Jr., a Destin, Florida-based real estate developer, bought the ranch in 2014 and announced plans to redevelop it over time as a tourist destination to complement Graceland.

The 231-acre tract at Miss. 301 and Goodman Road fell into disrepair over the years since Presley's death. Previous promises to redevelop the site never materialized, but Runnels outlined a long-term vision that includes preserving the Honeymoon Cottage where Elvis and Priscilla spent part of their 1967 honeymoon, as well as preserving the stables, a 14-acre lake and a prominent 55-foot-tall cross.

Lee said after the historic designation, the next step in restoration is probably the addition of an RV park to accommodate the many visitors developers hope to draw.

"We'll have a better timeline (on the RV park) as soon as we receive the historic designation," Lee said. "It won't be your average RV park. It'll be more upscale, with maybe little fireplaces and things for people to do rather than just a random hookup."

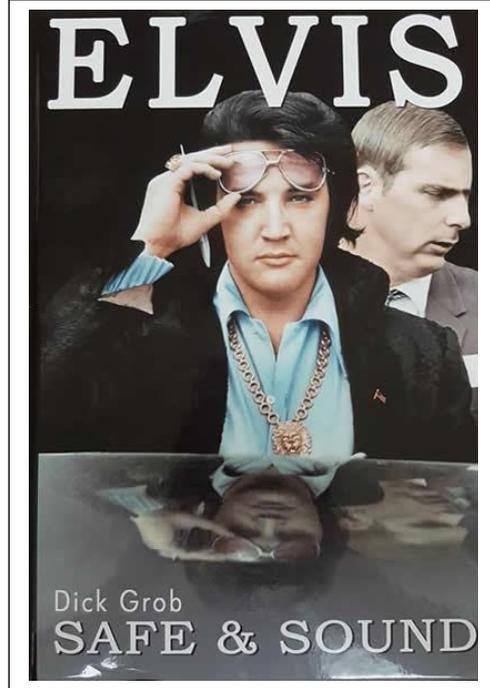
The RV park will use only a small portion of the property, however. Other things developers are working on include infrastructure development on roads on the property and public roads in the surrounding area, as well as dealing with a massive gas easement that runs through the middle of the property.

The vision initially outlined by Runnels, which he hopes will take shape over a number of years, calls for a destination venue for hordes of Elvis fans worldwide who come to visit Graceland. Runnels envisions hotels, housing, senior living, shopping and other amenities to join the restored cottages, stables and outdoor music venue around the lake.

Plans also call for housing a memorial to children killed in the Holocaust, the Unknown Child Holocaust Exhibit.



Elvis and Priscilla at the Aladdin Hotel in Las Vegas after their wedding May 1, 1967.



Horn Lake Miss. – Update on developments for Circle G Ranch

FOX13 News by Tom Dees

Jeff Cole, an entertainment consultant for Circle G Ranch, spoke to FOX13 over the phone about the big plans for the ranch. He said there is a major museum now in the works that Elvis and music fans will love.

"There are a lot of last-minute negotiations with things, but the Rockabilly Hall of Fame museum is part of the planning phase of Circle G Ranch, and it's in development," said Cole.

Cole said the museum will include a concert hall that will seat 3,800 to 5,000 people.

In addition to the museum, the Old Pink Restaurant building on the property could be turned into a studio for a rockabilly podcast.

"Currently, we're in talks about doing a potential podcast for rockabilly and including the Louisiana hayride, which was the launching pad for Elvis. It's a natural place for a studio," said Cole.

There is a chance that the honeymoon cottage that Elvis and Priscilla stayed in will wind up as part of a home makeover show as well.

"There is a show on a television show now on a major network that is in the process of striking a deal with one of the reality shows and refurbishing the cottage back to the era when Elvis and Priscilla had it."

Development on the property has not started yet because the historic designation of the property has taken some time and caused some red tape, according to Jeff Cole.

Loanne Parker dies, age 84

Loanne met the Colonel when he was negotiating the contract for Elvis Presley at the International. The Colonel was so impressed with her business skills he asked RCA Records to hire her for the upcoming Elvis Presley tour in 1969. Following the tour, Loanne and the Colonel continued to work together, fell in love, and married in 1990. They were devoted to each other and after his death in 1997, Loanne proudly promoted the truth and complexities of the Colonel's legacy as Elvis' manager. Loanne loved Las Vegas and enjoyed telling numerous stories of the city's golden years. She would often play host to some of the Elvis Presley fan clubs that would visit Las Vegas each year, charming them with her many personal tales of that impressive era. She wished everyone could have experienced an Elvis concert, saying "Elvis had a magnetism and aura that was indescribable." Loanne was a guest at many Elvis events and a great friend to Graceland.

Elvis tribute artist Todd Berry of Columbus Ohio was born blind, but God gave him the voice to sing like Elvis and give pleasure to many.