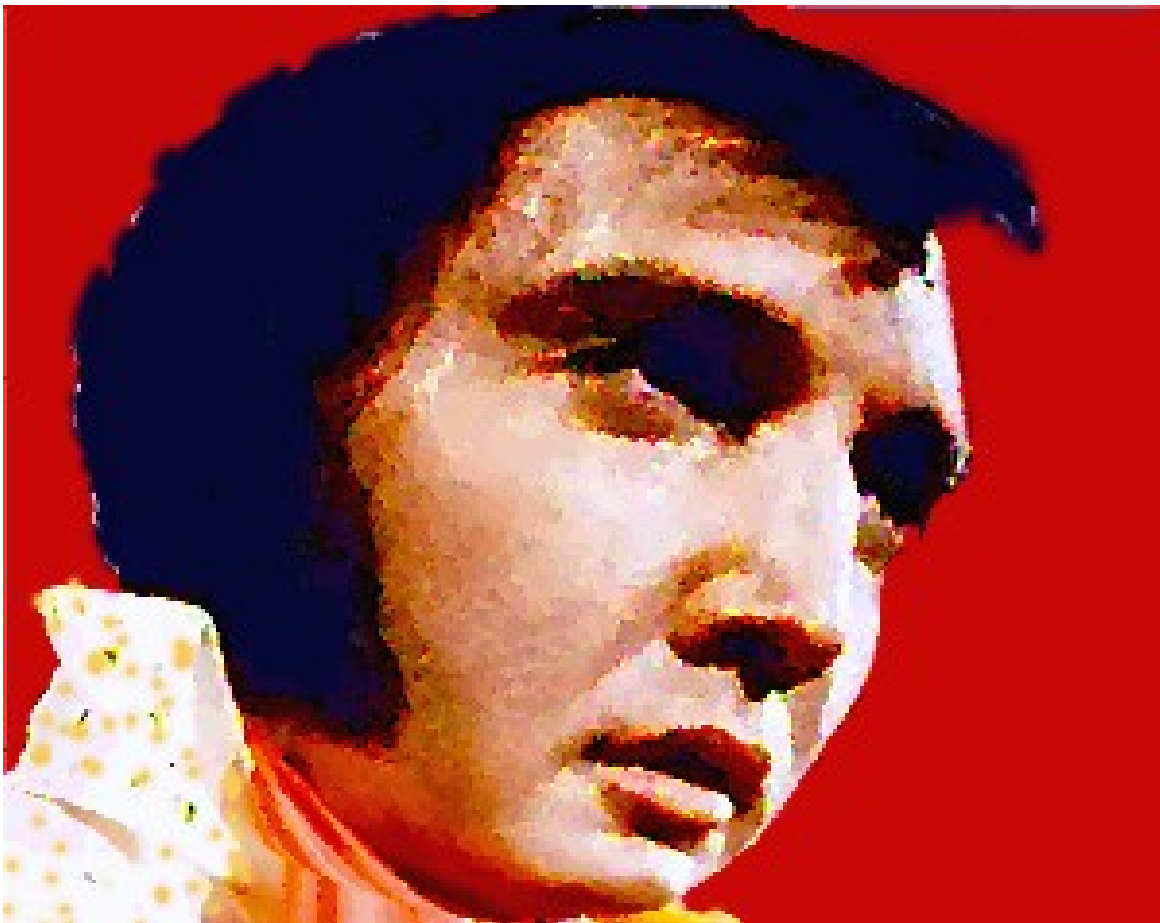


We get many You Ask, We Answer letters, but this unusual one both asks the questions and then makes all the nasty answers. We won't identify the writer except that he/she is a 70-year-old online author and columnist on a big city newspaper. If Elvis fans ever got the name, murder could happen. Here's the letter:

Q: Just why is Graceland, this cornpone castle of the late hick squawker, who drank, drugged and gobbled until he exploded at age 42, treated by the flaky faithful as some kind of shrine like those of Lourdes, Jerusalem or Mecca? It isn't as if the former occupant ever turned water into wine or promised 72 post-mortem virgins to now or never suicide martyrs.



Presley reached the heights ... or depths ... of popularity as the first white guy to steal the singing style of considerably more talented African-American performers who had been doing it for centuries. He topped that thievery off by being the first male performer to do a hip-switching burlesque bump and grind that eventually gave inspiration to the Chippendales, Madonna and Michael Jackson's crotch-grabbing.

Almost every day of the year, tourists flock to Graceland. They're there to mark the anniversary of Presley's death or birthday or to celebrate his first peanut butter and banana sandwich. The big Presley mansion in a Memphis, Tennessee, suburb, is the destination of thousands of fervent tourists. They wait for hours in sweltering, humid, mosquito-infested Southern discomfort for their turn to tour the mansion and/or buy overpriced Chinese-child-labor-made Elvis souvenirs in the gift shop.

One elderly fan, who had been in line for most of a hot August day, managed to attain dubious sainthood recently by dropping dead of heat stroke right there on the hallowed grounds. Or maybe it was just his way of speeding up the ultimate meeting with his idol.

I visited the Holy Graceland Shrine with some friends recently. We all come away disappointed at the banality of it all. We felt like barefoot pilgrims who schlepped wearily away from Shangri La, after discovering it's nothing more than a nursing home for senile Himalayan monks.

But, make the trip if you like visiting a gaudily gussied up Ante Bellum cracker mansion and enjoy seeing overstuffed furniture that resemble to late overstuffed singer. Plus fight your way through gap-toothed mobs buying cheap souvenirs depicting hallowed moments from the life of Elvis, by all means, make your pilgrimage to Graceland.

Further, if it's a lifetime special occasion for you and your beloved 13-year-old bride-to-be, you can get married at the Graceland Wedding Chapel and honeymoon in one of the mirrored-ceiling suites at the Heartbreak Hotel. Would you ever believe Memphis tries to out-Vegas Vegas in cheap thrills? And could such a romantic occasion ever possibly be so... so... idiotic ... I mean ... idyllic?

A: How could we possibly answer such a long, long angry letter, except to give a lame approval to the writer. Hey, writer, you have a right to your own opinion, you mean-spirited, tin-eared, brain-challenged old coot!

Does anyone want to submit an agreement or rebuttal?