

## Interview

Once upon a time, a beautiful, shy young woman married one of the world's most eligible and desired men. She became rich, famous and pampered, but this was no happily-ever-after scenario. She soon found out she was regularly lied to, cheated on, and humiliated by the man she deeply loved. Their divorce was headline news and she was roundly criticised by the public and press alike, hounded and harassed. A tell-all by a former "lover" was a best-seller. Nothing she could do was right.

Sounds like the sad saga of Princess Diana, doesn't it? Well, not quite. This is the story of Priscilla Presley.

The parallels between the two are striking. Yet while Diana's future is unknowable, what Priscilla Presley did to reinvent herself – still maintaining her sanity and raising her daughter as a single mother – is nothing short of miraculous. She could have been no more than a footnote to musical history. Worse, she could have become one of those self-absorbed ladies so familiar in Los Angeles, whose days are consumed by gossip, plastic surgery and moping. No, it was by daring to leave the sheltered world that had been hers since the age of 14 (when she met Elvis) that Priscilla finally found her true calling. And herself.

"I can relate to Diana – what she's going through emotionally, and to have to do it in public," Priscilla says. "I've been there. I had to lift myself, to hold my head high and know I wasn't compromising my own integrity. I had to be true to myself, even when I was accused of the most atrocious things – and still am." >

# Elvis & other catastrophes





> We are sitting in Priscilla's home office, she behind her delicate, carved desk while I am engulfed in a huge chair. An assistant brings endless cups of iced tea, topped with sprigs of mint.

"People were very cruel but I could never be a victim," she continues.

"It's easy to feel sorry for yourself, but you have to take responsibility for the condition you're in and stop blaming others. All you can do is follow your heart."

Priscilla, who doesn't look a day over 35, is now 51. A slim, chic red-head, it's hard to believe she's the beehive-teased teenager who married Elvis. Despite the bristling security as I drove up to her Italian provincial-style home in the Hollywood Hills, inside it is all casual elegance. The terracotta tiles, white walls and wood-panelled, antique-strewn rooms are as similar to the gaudy shag carpets of Graceland as a paint-by-number is to the Sistine Chapel. Priscilla works from home so she can be near her nine-year-old son, Navarone, and her live-in lover of 11 years, screenwriter and entrepreneur Marco Garibaldi. She resuscitated the decimated estate of her late husband, and now Elvis Presley Enterprises is worth more than \$100 million. She starred in the hit TV series, *Dallas* and, more recently, *Melrose Place*, and opposite the infamous OJ Simpson in the *Naked Gun* films. She's designing a fashion line, and developing a range of all-natural cosmetics. And she's launching her first perfume, Moments, in Australia. Both it and her second fragrance, Experiences, have been best-sellers in Europe, doing \$90 million worth of business in a notoriously fickle industry since their launch. A third perfume, Indian Summer, is just out in the US.


"Scent has always been important to me because it says so much about a woman," she explains. "It took a year-and-a-half of perfume-induced headaches to find that right combination, something suitable as a permutation of myself. Moments was created during a romantic period. You have to do that in life – create your moments; that was the concept. And the scent has to work. I won't buy something simply because of a name, and I wouldn't want someone to buy my fragrances because of my name, either."

"It wasn't easy, though," she adds with a laugh, "because I'm a Gemini, with two very different aspects to my nature. I have this earthy, adventurous side – the part of

## Elvis & other catastrophes

"I want to look nice for my son, and for my man. I dress up. It helps me think better and feel good about myself."





"I would never put something out, whether fragrance, cosmetics or clothing, that I wouldn't wear myself."

**Early, uncertain steps into public as the King's queen have given Priscilla Presley a steely will to survive. She invited Karen Moline to her LA home to share moments from a most remarkable life.**





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me that just went on a rafting trip down the Grand Canyon with my son. And I have this other, elegant side that loves the fashion industry. It's a constant battle, but it helps keep me balanced.”

Not bad for a woman whose husband never wanted her to have a career. Or study. Or be her own person.

Three years after Elvis fell in love, when Priscilla was stationed with her airforce father and family in Germany, she moved to Graceland. Not only did this shy 17-year-old have to deal with a living legend who spent much of his time bedding his co-stars, but also endless criticism about her appearance and behaviour – criticism from both her beloved boyfriend (or rather, her pill-popping Pygmalion) and his millions of fans.

“Even though I was only 17 when I moved to Graceland, Elvis was a young 24. It was a proper, old-fashioned courtship. No sex. My parents had all the faith in the world in Elvis, and it was as if I moved from one family to another. At the time we met, Elvis was very insecure, still devastated by his mother's death. That was basically the topic of our conversations. The world cannot understand that. I would have made the same decision as my parents, to let me move to Graceland. They didn't want to lose me, and they didn't want to wreck my life. They could have done that, but they knew our romance was *something*.”

*Something* is a rather large understatement. Elvis loved Priscilla, but his talent was equalled only by his narcissism. A comment from Priscilla's 1985 autobiography, *Elvis And Me* (Random, \$12.95), is particularly telling: “While my classmates were deciding what colleges to apply to, I was deciding which gun to wear with what sequined dress,” she wrote. “I was tempted to say to Sister Adrian, ‘Oh, by the way, does gun-metal grey go with royal-blue sequins?’” Still, they married in 1967, finally consummating their long engagement on their wedding night, and Lisa Marie was born exactly nine months later.

As the years went on, Elvis's grandiose behaviour deteriorated as his drug habit grew, and Priscilla finally summoned up the courage to leave. “No one, at that time, had any idea of the reality of his life. But I had to find a way on my own, for my sanity, and for my daughter, who was living in a world that was truly, truly, not right for a child to be brought up in. >

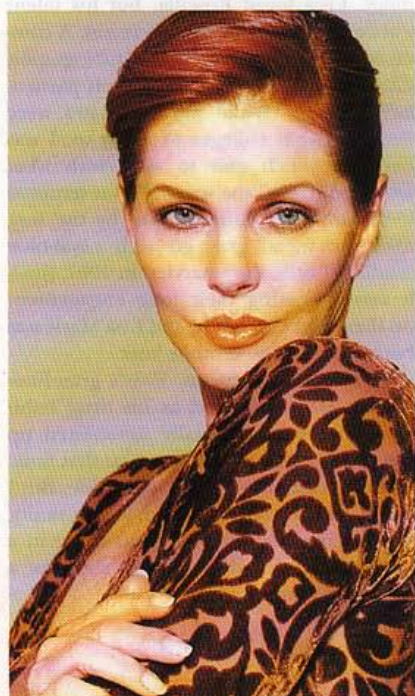


> "I had lived in an unreal, protected world, but it was the only world I knew," she adds. "I think the most embarrassing thing was being 29 and not knowing how to sign a cheque or go to a bank. And then learning how to date!" She laughs.

Priscilla moved with Lisa Marie to Los Angeles, and got her first job in a boutique. They struggled, and then joined the Church of Scientology. "I didn't move out here to conquer, but to find a secure place for both of us, to concentrate on raising Lisa Marie with some stability," Priscilla says.

Only after Elvis' death at the age of 42 did Priscilla finally begin to find her strength. The man who had earned over \$100 million in his lifetime died broke, and Graceland cost \$450,000 a year to operate. Priscilla took over, to protect her daughter's legacy. "Intuitively I knew that world," she explains. "I went all over the US looking at homes that were museums, and realised what I wanted Graceland to be. I wanted it to remain a home. Naturally I was criticised for making it too commercial, but the pleasure it gives to people outweighs that."

About this time, Priscilla began to study acting. But now, after her TV and film success, she no longer has any desire to do it full-time. "I'm perfectly happy doing what I do and what I love best," she declares. "First of all being a mother, but I like creating businesses and new challenges. I don't depend on the movie industry, on getting that *one* part. Now I'm much more interested in producing. And frankly, I can't stand what Hollywood's become." Especially after the OJ Simpson murder trial. Those months of 1994, when coincidentally the murders occurred, are what she refers to as the summer



from hell. Divorced from musician Danny Keough and the mother of Danielle and Benjamin, Priscilla's daughter eloped with Michael Jackson, much to the surprise of the world. And her mother. The daughter of the King marrying the King of Pop was as bizarre as the make-up on Jackson's face. "It was a horrendous period. I didn't want to be seen, I didn't want to give interviews, I was hyperventilating," she says fiercely. The topic, quite understandably, is off-limits. "I was asked so many questions, I felt so exposed, so *overexposed*, and it was like, how much do I give. When will it ever stop? People know so much about me, and I've got to save something for myself."

It's no surprise, then, that Priscilla ferociously guards her family's privacy. How does she protect her family from the relentless scrutiny? Does it ever get any easier?

"It hurts," she says simply. "It hurts me, my family, my son. Everything keeps getting rehashed and brought up, and for what? It's so ridiculous. From the time you're born, all you have is your character and integrity, and they strike at *that*. You spend all this time being the person you are today, you build your life and then you have people who want to tear you down. It's wrong. I'd like to think I have more hope for people, but it's so hard for me to trust anyone," she sighs. "People have said I'm driven, but I'm not; I'm focused. I'm responsible. Making movies is one thing, but the estate has been going on for 12 years now. I delegate well."

And if there's one thing she's learnt from what happened to Elvis, it is the value of delegating – to the right people. "I can no longer have people around me who are always criticising or questioning my decisions," she says. "Not that my people are always 'yes, yes, yes', but I know who to ask: People whose opinions I respect. Not just in

## Elvis & other catastrophes

boys. I was out with him and his little fly-swatter when he was two, catching spiders, and he showed me a world I'd never have known. A world of exploring. He brought out my adventurous side and it's been a wonderful growing process for me.

"He also knows there's some mystique about Elvis, and he asked, 'So what am I to him?'" She laughs, "I want to make him feel special, so I told him Elvis could be his step-father. Lisa Marie's children, Navarone's niece and nephew, are close to his age, and constant playmates. "The love they all share is astounding," Priscilla says, "It's so special. It's even better than siblings because, if they were, I don't think they'd have this kind of love."

In Hollywood, it's also unusual to have a loving, stable and private relationship. Marco couldn't be more different from Elvis. "It's been 11 years of stability and friendship," she explains, "and that was definitely difficult to find. When we met, I didn't even want to be in a relationship. It had taken ages to sort out what I'd been through, where I was going, what was best for my child. It took a long time to get to this place, and I'm not going to have anyone take it away because, let me tell you, it's well deserved. I think I've paid my dues."

Nor does she indulge in typical Tinseltown body-beautiful pursuits. "I have a trainer three times a week; I have to work at how I look," she says. "I don't want to get fat and I have to watch what I eat like everybody else. I want to look nice for my son and my man. Even when I'm here in my office, I dress up. It helps me think better

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my life, in anyone's – who you have around you can build you up or tear you down."

She ought to know, having been burnt by a former boyfriend who told all to a voracious public. "I guess it's fate: I am always associated with controversy," Priscilla says sadly. "All I know is, I can wake up in the morning to a smiling son. And that's the greatest feeling in the world."

She positively beams when she talks about Navarone, her adorable boy who is blithely singing in the next room. "There's an unbelievable difference between little girls and

and feel good about myself. Yes, I am vain. But not so vain it's an obsession. When I look good I feel good. At this age, I know exactly what to do." She laughs.

Sometimes, though, the fame that has dogged her most of her life can be a blessing. "Navarone's dog got out recently and he panicked," she says. "As I'm driving, I see a man and say, 'Excuse me, sir, have you seen a black lab?' And he says, 'No, Priscilla, but if I do I'll let you know'." She laughs heartily. "The dog came back. Everyone's home. We're all alive and well." □