

Elvis is Alive and Well and Living in Philmont

BY REBECCA STOWE



Joe Krein was born in the wrong era, and he'll be the first to tell you that. As you descend the stairs to the basement of his Philmont home, you enter a world of Rock and Roll history, another time really, beginning with the 1950s, when rock was young, to the late 1970s, when the King, Elvis Presley, died.

Joe Krein collects all things Elvis. Seriously. Very seriously.

Krein, who was born in Hudson but who has lived most of his life in Philmont, has been collecting things Elvis for over thirty years, and has one of the most extensive and respected Elvis collections in the country. It's been featured in the books *The Private Life of Elvis* and *The Elvis Handbook*, and was the subject of an episode of VH1's "Rock Collectibles."

The basement—two large rooms plus storage areas—is part museum, part 1950s rec room. Krein has so much Elvis stuff that he's lost count. Everything that Krein collects is, he says proudly, "the real McCoy," things of real historical significance, and almost all of it pre-1977. It's definitely not what Krein refers to as "fan trash"—the towels and plates and "garbage" that was mass-produced after Elvis's death.

To your left, as you come down the stairs, there's a bar—complete with a neon "Joe's" sign. Along the mirrored wall, a bright green banner from a 1974 Elvis concert in Lake Tahoe. In the stairwell, a lighted glass display case filled with memorabilia, including a 1956 Elvis drink-

ing glass (value \$500), two stuffed souvenir hound dogs (\$450-500 each), a rare guitar pick used by Elvis in a 1971 Las Vegas concert, and my personal favorite, an adjustable bubble gum ring from the fifties with a photo of Elvis encased in plastic. But, at \$350, it's out of my price range.

Not that Krein would sell it. Like many collectors, Krein is reluctant to part with things. "I buy to feed my collection," he says, "I'd only sell if I needed the money to feed my family."

In the next room, there's a vintage juke box against one wall, and beige upholstered booths against another. It's like being in a fifties soda fountain, and there's even an Elvis bobby-soxer skirt framed and mounted on the wall. Each booth has its own mini jukebox, and above the booths are some of Joe's prized pieces—an autographed Elvis bubble gum card, uncut proofs for 3-D Elvis buttons, and his personal favorite—Elvis's personal 1960 acetate disc of "GI Blues," with a photo of Elvis in Army fatigues.

At 46, Krein is considered young to be an Elvis collector. He was only 16 when Presley died in 1977, and never got a chance to see him in concert. His collection began with an album and a couple of 45s his grandmother gave him one Christmas when he was 10 or 11 years old. "And it just took," he says. He's been collecting ever since. Krein's wife Darcy, a respiratory therapist at Columbia Memorial Hospital, claims he didn't get really serious until after they were married. Darcy tolerates Joe's collect-

ing—although she doesn't allow anything Elvis upstairs—but there was a time he had to have his packages delivered to neighbors or other family members so she wouldn't find out. "Now, I get a lot of stuff for free," Krein says.

Krein's collecting began as a hobby and is slowly becoming a business. After twenty-five years as an emergency room technician at Columbia Memorial, Krein, who has a form of spina bifida and must wear braces on both legs, had to retire on disability. His collection, as well as his work as a Philmont Village Trustee, keep him busy. He appears regularly on Cruising 93.5 Radio to answer Elvis questions and play some of his rare and unreleased versions of Elvis tunes. He's also working on a photo book for a German publisher, with fellow collector Sue McCasland, due out in 2007. His web site, www.elvis2001.net, features an active Elvis chat room, interviews with various celebrities in the Elvis world, and photos and descriptions of his collection, as well as links to other Elvis sites. He estimates he gets 100-150 hits a day on his site, more on Elvis anniversaries or after he's been on the radio.

Krein views his collection as a legacy he is creating for his children. His sixteen-year old daughter Kelsie is into Elvis, too, and is President of a fan club called The King's Kids. His ten-year-old son, Aaron, however, is a Beatles fan, the same age as his father was when he got hooked on Elvis. But that's okay with Krein. His

love of music, and collecting, is not limited to Elvis. He has an autographed Roy Orbison album cover, as well as autographed Jerry Lee Lewis and Carl Perkins records, and autographs from Dick Clark and John Lennon. Even the family pets get into the act—DJ, the dog, is named for DJ Fontana, Elvis's drummer. The very cultured cat is named Schubert.

Krein sees collecting as his craft. "You've got to be good at your craft. I'm very knowledgeable and I want to turn other people on to collecting," he says, warning that beginners can easily get burned. He shows me an Elvis autograph, which a dealer originally passed off as signed, when it was really a stamp. "He made good on it," Krein says, but there are plenty of people out there with fakes.

One of the best things about collecting, Krein says, is meeting other collectors and Elvis fans. He's become friends with a number of people in Elvis's entourage, including Charles Stone, Elvis's former tour director, Larry Geller, a member of Elvis's "Memphis Mafia," and Elvis's cousin Donna. He's made friends with people all over the world—his web site is translated into French, Spanish and German—and Krein is always delighted when he runs into someone who knows of him.

But what he would really like is to meet some local collectors. "I'd love to have meetings here, sit down and learn and...collect."

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