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CLARION REVIEW ★★★☆☆ HISTORY

Elvis: Remembering August 16, 1977

Michael Best
Spike Collamore
Softcover $13.99 (123pp)
978-1-4259-1530-8

Almost thirty years ago, America lost its King. Elvis Presley, whose hip shaking worried the parents of teenage girls and whose singing helped introduce rock and roll, died alone in his bathroom on August 16, 1977. His death affected as many people as President John Kennedy's death in 1962, sparking a similar question: "Where were you when Elvis died?"

Collamore and Best have collected eighty-eight letters from fans around the world that answer this question and reveal their memories of the ways that Elvis changed their lives. Most of the writers begin by saying how much they miss Elvis, and some go on to recall special moments they shared with the King at a concert. Some of the letters simply reiterate how deeply devoted the writer is to Elvis, while almost all of the letters show the huge role that Elvis played in fans' lives.

Betty Jo Berger of North Chicago, Illinois, says that "she will always miss Elvis. I will always love him deeply. He is always in my thoughts. Elvis is too hard to forget. Sometimes I feel he is still here with us. Maybe he really is."

Recalling the first time she saw Elvis, Mary Ann Adams of Russellville, Alabama, recalls, "that night I knew what all other fans had known all along: Elvis was a very beautiful guy, and he made each and every one of his fans feel so special."

Sandi Pichon of Slidell, Louisiana apparently followed Elvis's tour circuit from 1972-1977 and got to know him and the members of his entourage. She is ushered into Graceland by Uncle Vester Presley a few hours before the public is allowed in to see Elvis' body. Sandi's friend, Joyce, faints upon seeing Elvis in his coffin, as Sandi stands "staring at the lips I would never kiss again." She sums up the feelings expressed in the other letters in the collection: "A star burned too brightly, burned out too quickly and we were left with the afterglow which has never dimmed."

Regrettably, these fans' notes lack any cohesive structure. Collamore and Best might have at least provided a short introductory section explaining how and why they put together this book and the ways that Elvis lives on as a cultural icon. Yet, allowing Elvis' fans to speak for themselves-no matter how repetitious it gets, does capture a moment in time and will appeal to those thousands of fans for whom the King still lives.

HENRY L. CARRIGAN (July 31, 2006)

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