



AFVN Reunion Rock

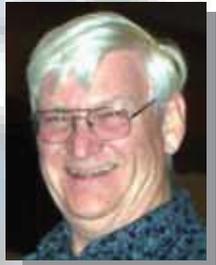


Volume 1, Issue 1

November 2012

Far too many deaths among our ranks.

Many of our great friends and compatriots had left us. **Cal** and **Jack** and **Gary** the most well-known among them, but not by any means the most important.



By Ken Kalish

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From the most fit to the most ailing, we looked over our shoulder to see whether the *Styx* boatman was gaining on us. He was, of course. I thought we had much to lose if we did not gather to recognize one another's accomplishments and to recreate our community of friendship, so I began to push my tiny resolve against the deadly inertia of resistance to change.

It was March 7th of 2011, immediately after Lila and I got home from visiting **Joe** and **Mary Ciokon** out in **San Diego** that I posted this preliminary planning outline in the AFVN newsgroup:

"So now, people, it is time to organize. We keep saying things like "Maybe we should think about getting together next year," or "Let's go down and check out Dickie's back 40 next year," but let's face it folks, we don't have that many "next years" left.

That was driven home to me with **Cal's** death. Therefore, as self-designated **HMFIC**, I must begin to solicit input. Of course, I've already ruled out **Park**

Rapids in January and **Brownsville** in August. However, neither **Kiska** nor **Key West** are sufficiently central locations. How do we make it work? Glad you asked! Every civic-minded one of us will help.

Site team (reports to self-designated HMFIC):

Volunteer(s) will solicit suggestions. Selected city must be easy to access via air, railroad, and highway. That rules out **LA** and **NYC** because no sane person would drive there. It also rules out **Plevna (Alabama)** and **Gackle (North Dakota)** because neither has AMTRAC or air service. Come to think of it, **Gackle** also has only three streets.

Lodging guru (reports to self-designated HMFIC):

Once that lazy site team gets off its butt and comes up with a city, volunteer(s) will identify a clean (no bed bugs or cucarachas), mid-price range primary HQ and lodging facility that is ADA accessible and which offers at least three of the

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Wednesday... Where is everyone? Let's get started!!!

Photos by Steve Wiltsie & captions by Ron Hesketh

By Dick Ellis



A taste of Dickie's MOONSHINE by Ron & Joyce



OK Tom, I promise I'll give you some "Shine" too!!



Ah Chris, are we going to let Dixie get away without letting us taste the 'shine'?

Arriving after lunch on Wednesday I began to search around the area to see who looked like an AFVN'er. (somehow you can just tell. Plus, all the Navy guys on board had on Navy hats!)

Meeting several coming and going, I finally introduced myself to **Sgt. Major Jim White**. Jim's story has always fascinated me on the net, living in **Japan** for the past 30-years. We struck out for lunch and an attempt to give Jim a taste of "modern America" we hit the near-by **Sonic**!

As I was "eye-balling" one of the young car-hops, yes, they have car-hops at Sonic Jim and you pull up and shout your order into a speaker just like the old days.

Anyway, as I was surveying the local scenery, I heard Jim squeal in delight. "*Root beer, I don't know the last time I had a root beer,*" so we proceeded to order a Sonic burger and a foamy. "*The Japanese don't like root beer,*" Jim said, "*They think it taste like medicine.*" For the next hour and a half, I proceeded to interview one of the nicest gentle-men I have ever known. (I separate gentle-men here because he is of course a gentleman and a gentle man.)

What a fascinating hour talking with someone who had lived and taught a great part of his life in another country and even learning their language. I wouldn't have the guts!

The crowd had started to gather. **Preston Cluff** from **Anchorage**, who made a living out of his incredible knowledge of sports. Press had arrived several days before to visit friends in the area. **Bill** and **Scooter Altman** who were starting to pull things together in the hospitality room. **Rev. Mike Kumm** and **Janet** had driven in from **Southern Illinois**. A familiar face here, a strange face but a failure name there....we were coming together.

In the AFVN Hospitality room, things were coming together also. You are not a real broadcaster, engineer, technician, or even admin guy if you don't appreciate watching **Tom Fowlston** at work. Tom had brought with him a truck load of AV equipment from his company in

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Everyone (continued)

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Texas and began to hook it all together. For the next four hours we viewed old films, CD's and photos. It was, "share a 40-year old memory" time and we all chipped in! If you can imagine Dickie with a 32-inch waist, 70-lbs lighter and with jet black hair, you get the idea!

Hey, look, **Don Fox** shifted the hair from his head to his chin! Wow, I remember **Bill Altman** being taller, **Chris Noel** has the same hair style!

Thursday was spent getting everything together. That is, do a little shopping, do a little touring, along with doing a little visiting. The crowd scattered in all directions. That evening **Dickie** sponsored a social hour with snacks of southern chicken salad, pimento cheese and a couple of un-labeled jars on the table. Needless to say, most of us will not suffer a common cold this winter nor need a flu shot!

Everyone presented their souvenirs and **AFVN** items on display. Everything from a **VC** flag to P-38 can openers, old photos, hats, badges and pins. Every **AFVN** item know to man was spread out for all to see and talk about. It was all coming together!

The American Forces Vietnam Network....remember when?

Some Displays



The beverage table was available to all



Far Too Many (continued)

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following: free breakfast, complementary meeting/socializing space, free airport shuttle, in-house or co-located dining facility, free parking, grandkid-friendly stuff, close alternative (cheaper) lodging, free everything for self-designated HMFIC.

Activities committee (reports to self-designated HMFIC):

Solicit free concert from *Boston Pops Orchestra* or *White Snake* or similar easy listening group. Arrange for fun stuff like liar's night, sock hop, sumo wrestling, Playboy playmate Jell-O wrestling, booger toss contest, local business freebies. Arrange deepest possible admission price reductions at local attractions like nursing home tours, cemetery excursions, and mortician's funeral planning seminar.

Registration crew (reports to self-designated HMFIC):

Solicit and collect reservation data and payments. Open IRA account with said funds in the name of self-designated HMFIC. "HMFIC (reports to Mrs. self-designated HMFIC): Stay out of everyone's way and collect wealth as detailed above."

Buy-in was something akin to the speed of flowing molasses down a Nome street in February. October of 2011 was too close for good planning. October of 2012 was far enough in the future, but too far for some of us. Then, on May 27th of 2011, **Clem** left us. He was a powerful part of the AFVN experience for me and my contemporaries. The next day I wrote Connie a note in this forum:

"A good heart has left us – and what a perfect time for having done so. His departure comes too soon, yet even at this late hour his life lends a different flavor to Memorial Day because now, in this period when all of the ceremonies are finished and the night wraps its arms around us, we can look away from events designed to remind us of the many and concentrate upon the personal few." "Each of us has

a pantheon of departed heroes and comrades we visit every now and then. My own still has a few open spots, though not so many as existed an hour ago."

With his departure, **Clem** moved many of us to recognize our own mortality. We began to participate in earnest.

Our Generous Volunteers

Bill and **Scooter** took it upon themselves to find us a location and a good deal. I volunteered to handle logistics and finances, signing a personal guarantee of \$17,000 in revenue for the hotel because I believed in our "family."

Dickie went for his favorite activity, the hospitality room. **Bob M.** began to beat the bushes. Several folks offered up location suggestions, and just about everyone with an interest in a reunion began to promote their favorite site. There were some ruffled feathers in this stage of the planning, but camaraderie overcame hurt feelings and we settled on *Memphis*.

After that it was time to come up with a reunion website (poorly done by yours truly) and lots of event "stuff." Negotiations resulted in transportation arrangements being solidified two whole days before registrants began to arrive. Our tour reservation at *Sun Recording* got lost, and that visit was finalized two hours before we arrived at their door. Near calamity, but a miss is as good as a mile, right?

The generosity of our fellows, both those who joined us and those who did not, allowed us to make sure everyone who wanted to attend could do so. Bravo Zulu! The smallest donation was \$5, the largest \$1,000.

What I regret most about our gathering is not an event or a setting, but rather the number of us who wanted to attend but could not do so for health reasons. Heart problems, a stroke, cancer – those evils did their insidious

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Far Too Many (continued)

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best to deter us. Each of us pushed through those barriers as best we could. Even **Ron Stone** decided to join the stampede, although he did cheat a little bit by doing so in his four-wheeler.

Where Next?

And so, with a final accounting in place, we must all give serious consideration to doing it again. I know that some of us felt pushed to **Memphis** and so did not participate, and for that I am heartily sorry. Not for the venue, but for the absence of our compatriots.

Memphis was chosen by reduction vote. It was central, though not so central as the geographic center of the contiguous 48 states near **Lebanon** in **Smith County**,

Kansas at 39°50'N 98°35'W. I think the closest drive for any of us was from **Atlanta**.

Autumn and spring are good times of year for we “senior citizens” to gather. The tourist rush is over or not yet begun. **San Diego** is no longer in desert mode. The rains have either not yet begun or have finished for the year in **Washington** – both state and D.C. Temperate weather dominates the great Midwest. Halloween, Thanksgiving, Christmas, Chanukah, and New Year’s will eat up our free time for the next three months. Let’s start a discussion in January, our own version of “Next year, in Jerusalem!” We have a small cash carry-over, seed money for an on-site visit prior to signing a contract.

Anyone want the job of self-designated HMFIC?



Our headquarters hotel...a former training facility for Holiday Inn management

47 Years Later...What an Experience

Being only a part-timer and participating at such an early stage in the development of the Armed Forces Radio & Television scheme of things, I really didn't know just what to expect when I finally decided that Joyce & I would be able to attend the reunion.

I was really looking forward to seeing, once again, some familiar faces and reminiscing about the times we had back in the *Brinks* studio. When we arrived on Wednesday I was pleasantly surprised to find **Bill**



With Bill Altman

Altman with his lovely bride “**Scooter**” and we immediately held our own brief reunion. I had also been looking forward to talking to the likes of **Sturgess Dorance, Bob DeRogi** and **Frank Vehorn**, but that was not to be.

One bright spot, though, came when we were able to “Skype” **Bob Nelson**. That was a real highlight for me. WOW, 47 years later and we were able to take advantage of technology to once again discuss old times.



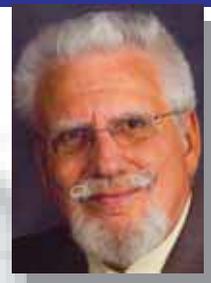
Jean LeRoy's Meal

turned out to be a real blessing for **Joyce** & I because the girls really hit it off right away. **Jean** loved his meal so well he even wore some of it on his clothing (see included picture)

I had previously indicated my desire to eat at *Interstate BBQ* in Memphis and, lo & behold, **Jean LeRoy** and **Clarice** had read my post and decided they wanted to try the barbequed spaghetti there as well. That

The sprockets were so worn (and the rubber bands in the old projector weren't holding up well) that it rendered the film almost unusable.

By Ron Hesketh



There were so many new names and faces there by Thursday that my time was spent in “meet & greets”. It was really interesting to see some of the old 16 mm filmstrips that were brought. What **Dickie** forgot to mention in his article is that he had brought an old film of an interview he had with a lesser-

known country singer from *Nashville*.

The sprockets were so worn (and the rubber bands in the old projector weren't holding up well) that it

rendered the film almost unusable.



Chris Noel

Never fear; **Ken Kalish**, the problem solver, came to the rescue. **Ken** was able to find a studio in Memphis that could convert the 16 mm film into a DVD, so **Dickie** & I and a beautiful “round eye” named **Chris Noel** hopped into my car & headed there. The guy in the studio was just as happy to talk with us as we were getting the film converted. He acted as though he was in the company of celebrities (of course that was true!!) as we told old war stories about AFVN happenings and discussing the interview and “fake piano playing” by **Dickie**. (you must ask him about that sometime) Thank you, **Ken**, for once again coming to the rescue.



Holley Watts Presents

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47 Years (continued)

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We were also blessed with the presence of two “Doughnut Dollies” by the names of **Nancy Smoyer & Holley Watts**. They even brought a video of their own & shared it with us. What a heart-warming and sometimes tear-jerking experience that was. Thank you girls, it was well worth it. Thank you, **Holly**, for your



Inside Blues City Cafe



With Jean LeRoy (L)



The Ciokones (top)
The Kalishes (L)



participation in this moving event.

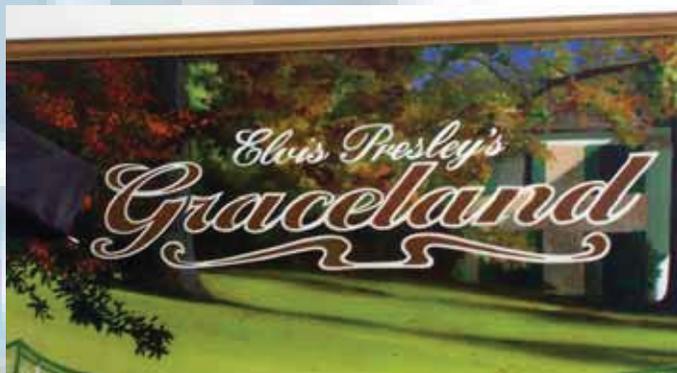
Thursday night

found us eating ribs and barbeque at the **Blues City Café** in **Memphis**. It was located on **Beale Street** right across the street from **BB King's** club. We all stuffed ourselves and then walked it off on the surrounding streets. I had the opportunity of re-visiting the **Gibson Guitar** factory just a block away where, some nine years ago I was responsible for all the computer and phone system installation when it was first built.



Now comes Friday

and our trip to **Graceland** and **Sun Recording Studio**. We were on our own at **Graceland** and toured at leisure.



At **Sun**, however, we were blessed with an excellent and very involved tour guide who presented us with a most comprehensive dissertation on the equipment back in the day (funny that some of the units were recognized by the “old codgers” in our group) and a detailed description of the recording sessions held in the studio. The studio itself is still in the same condition as it was back in the days of **Elvis, Johnnie Cash, Jerry Lee Lewis** and the like.

We needed Saturday

to recoup our strength from the activities Friday night and prepare for the catered dinner. In the days and hours preceding the dinner, numerous items had been donated for the raffle to help defray the costs incurred (I'll refer to some of that later). I had made two clocks, **Dickie** made and donated a number of knives, **Jim White** donated a 5-book volume of collectible WW II stamps

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2012 Reunion...A Pictorial (Wednesday)

Photos by
Ron Hesketh
& Steve Wiltsie



2012 Reunion...A Pictorial (Thursday)



47 Years (continued)

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The elegant entrance to Graceland



*Does anyone recognize this?
Upstairs at Sun Recording Studios*



The table spread was fantastic!

The AFVN Reunion Rock

complete with detailed descriptions, **Ken Kalish** donated two patriotic blankets, **Chris Noel** donated a couple autographed books and a DVD and many more items too numerous to mention. In all, we had 27 different cups set up to place the raffle tickets as one chose.



Our beverage selection was excellent!

And what a dinner we had! The festivities were initiated by a prayer from our own appointed chaplain, **Mike Kumm**, and then it was off to the races for the food. At this time it is worth noting about the plethora of spirits (not the ghostly kind) that were prevalent all during the reunion and the table full of it was very present at the dinner. Thanks to all who participated. I know of a couple names, but will resist listing them because I know I would leave one or more out.



Dickie's knives & moonshine

Then came time for the raffle results. I'm not sure who bought the most tickets. There were a couple guys that were in a perpetual race to the table with money in hand, just trying to out-do the other.

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47 Years (continued)

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Forest Brandt speaks

What was really ironic was that the stamp book volumes were won by none other than a postal employee, **Marcia Nelson**, wife of **Jerry**, and the CD I donated of my gospel quartet, **Tuned To Revival**, was won by our preacher, **Mike Kumm**. Now, if that doesn't beat all. I refer you to the montage of pictures for the rest of the raffle results.

out how to do it. Thank you **Nancy Smoyer & Holley Watts** for the laughs.

In conclusion

All of this would not have been possible but for the efforts of **Ken Kalish, Bill & Scooter Altman** and a number of their helpers. As **Ken** pointed out in his article, a number of our midst owe him a debt that probably can not be repaid for the money collected so that those who couldn't otherwise afford the trip were able to attend and experience the joy of meeting their friends and co-broadcaster family. Since I ran the raffle, I can tell you that at least \$550 was made for that effort and I know there was more donated. Why, we even have some seed money available to do this again.



Jerry Nelson & I all tied up!



Chris Noel leads a song

We were all given the opportunity to speak of our experiences while in Viet Nam and many took advantage of this and gave some excellent accounts of their tours. One very inspiring piece was given by **Forest Brandt**. Also, **Chris Noel** led us all in singing **Delta Dawn**.



A news team reunites
(L to R)
Bob Morecook, Joe Ciocone,
Rod Carlisle

Near the end I even made myself available for a few laughs by trying to escape from a set of

cloth handcuffs that tied me and **Jerry Nelson** together. I really felt stupid, especially the next day when I figured

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Our tour bus

Friday's Tours



Boarding

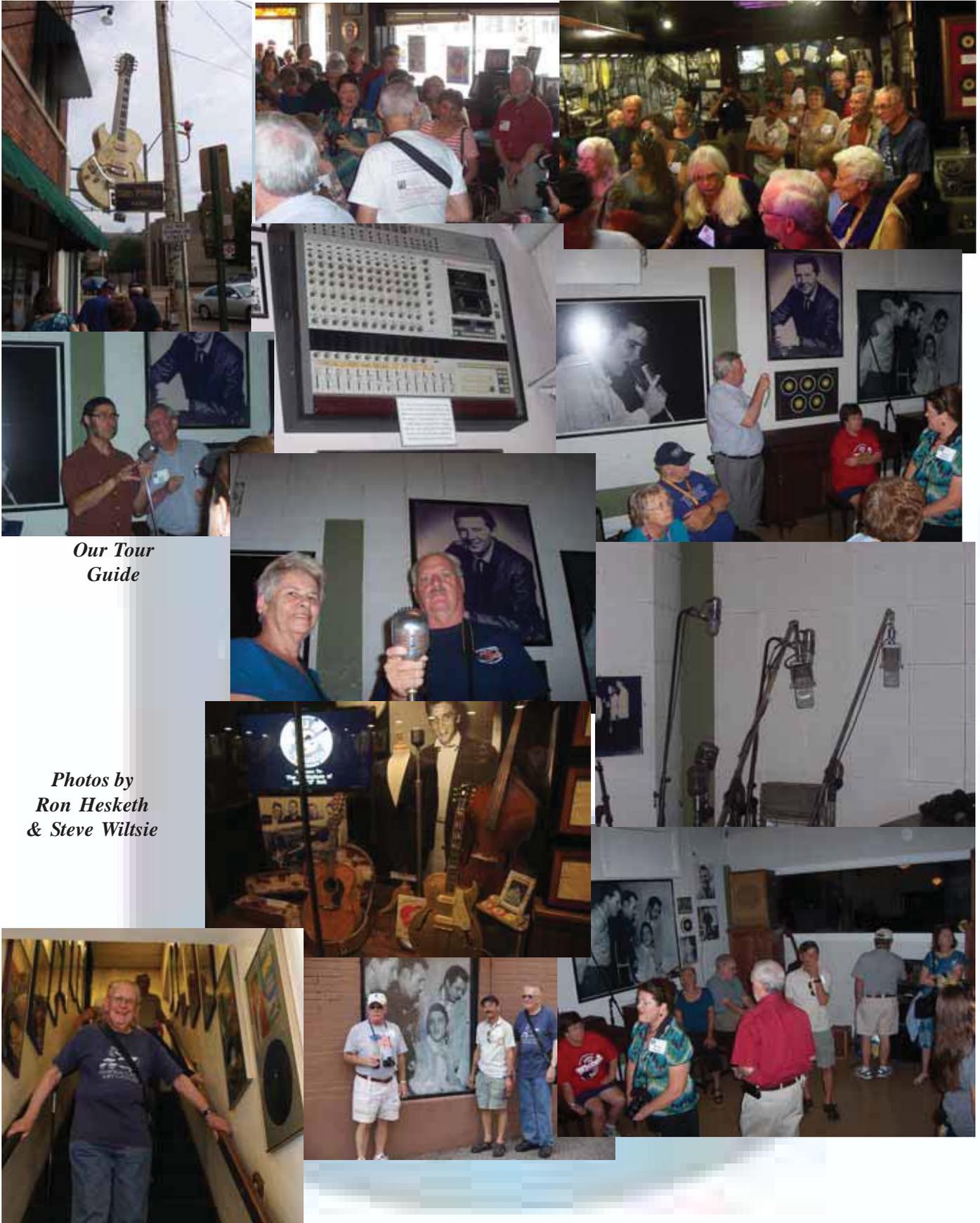


Graceland & Sun Studio



Photos by
Ron Hesketh
& Steve Wiltsie

Graceland & Sun Studio



Our Tour Guide

*Photos by
Ron Hesketh
& Steve Wiltsie*

Saturday Dinner & Festivities



Bob Morecook presents a special commemorative silver coin to Ken Kalish in honor of his work arranging the 2012 reunion

47 Years (continued)

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PLEASE, lets do it again.

What if we plan a 5-day cruise? The cost per person would not be much more, if even that much, than it was in *Memphis*. I believe we can get a free room for each 15 rooms reserved. That savings can be spread out amongst all those who attend.

I have seen some cruises out of *Tampa*, for example, a *Carnival* cruise on November 12, for five days to Cozumel & Grand Caymen is \$279 per person for an inside cabin and \$319 per person for an ocean view cabin. (and that includes FOOD) If we have 30 cabins reserved and get two free, we could reduce that amount even further. Most all cruise lines also offer discounts for past guests, veterans, etc. Just a thought, but we must consider doing this again. What a blast!!

Thank you all & enjoy the newsletter. It is the least that I can do for this distinguished group.



2012



(L to R) STANDING: Forrest Brandt, Steven Ashley (partially hidden), Doug Jennings, Gary Brill, Ray Profeta, Jerry Nelson, Mike Sullivan, Morrie Beitch, Mike Jackson, Steve Wiltsie, Jean Leroy, Dick Ellis, Randy Stone, Rod Carlisle, Mike Kumm, Don Dornburg, Joe Ciocon, Bob Morecook, Prescott Cluff.

SITTING: Tom Fowlston Nancy Smoyer, Chris Noel, Holley Watts, Jim White, Don Fox.

ON THE FLOOR: Steve Smith, Ken Kalish, Bill Altman, Ron Hesketh

Photo courtesy of Doug Jennings