When Elvis Presley sang “I Can’t Stop Loving You”, he might have been singing it for Jim Curtin. Because Jim just can’t stop loving Elvis – and that has caused him no end of trouble. He is Elvis’s most loyal fan, and owner of the largest privately held collection of Elvis memorabilia. Now, in order to win back the woman of his dreams, he has to get rid of every one of the tens of thousands of items he possesses. But Jim, who is the ultimate romantic, believes it will all be worthwhile.

He first met Renata Ginter when she wrote to him after buying an Elvis calendar he had produced. They met and the rest, as they say, is history. Except, it all began to go wrong because of Elvis. Jim thought he could love them both equally, but Renata had different ideas. Eventually she left Jim, and all he had were his memories of happier times, and his memorabilia of Elvis.

Curtin has tried everything possible to win back his lost love. He has sent flowers and gifts, offered a flawless diamond, made endless phone calls and sent hundreds of letters - to no avail. Renata’s family and friends all told him that in order to have a chance of getting her back, Elvis had to go.

And that is just what Jim has now decided to do. His entire phenomenal collection will be auctioned off in January and is expected to raise approximately $5m. He has been an avid Presley fan since he was a child, and has over 25,000 photographs, 50,000 items of memorabilia, 1,000 reels of never before seen super 8 footage, and 3 costumes worn by Elvis (one of which was given to him personally by the King).

Jim Curtin evolved from being a star struck fan, to a serious collector, follower and finally a friend of the great entertainer.

At first, his love of Elvis was an escape from a desperately unhappy childhood. His father was an alcoholic, and was never able to support his family. Jim remembers moving house over 30 times, on several occasions he came home from school to find the bailiffs had taken all the furniture. As a kid, shining shoes to earn a few pennies, he would hear Elvis being played on the jukeboxes in the bars and cafes where he worked. Jim purchased his first Elvis record – Return to Sender – when he was 12 years old, and after that, there was no stopping him. He bought every record ever released in the US, then discovered different versions were sold abroad, so he promptly started acquiring those.

The first time he saw Presley on stage was November 8th, 1971. Curtin recalls “He was like a god, walking out on stage. He had something no-one else had – sex appeal, style, looks, voice, feeling, he sang from the soul. I knew the guy was unbelievable. The chemistry was so powerful, it overwhelmed me”.
He decided he had to make some special gesture to show the depth of his feelings for Elvis. Despite earning only $99 per week, he designed and commissioned a $2,000 Gibson guitar, which had “Elvis Presley” and 2 crowns inscribed on the fretboard. Young Jim headed to Las Vegas in September 1974 and, with the help of Vernon Presley who had taken a liking to this dedicated fan, spent a magical two and a half hours alone with his hero. Elvis was thrilled with his gift, and played “Baby What You Want Me To Do” to Jim.

Curtin saw Elvis perform 51 times, and shook hands with him 32 times. He remembers every second of every encounter. On March 31st 1975, Jim received the jewel in the crown of his collection – Elvis personally presented him with the white jumpsuit he wore in concert at the Houston Astrodome.

When he tried on the suit, Jim felt a change taking place. “It was something spiritual. Almost like I was related to him. Something I couldn’t explain in words”. Jim began giving Elvis concerts (he insists he is not an Elvis impersonator, but explains his shows are tributes to the great man). “Elvis Presley was the closest you could get to a perfect human being,” Jim says. “I wanted to look like him, sing like him, be like him.”

Jim turned his love of Elvis into a career. He became one of the leading authorities on Presley, has written several books, countless articles, runs fan clubs and publishes calendars, using his vast collection of photos.

But this broken hearted man is willing to give up his life’s passion for Elvis in order to win back the woman he loves.

Renata left him, with a note saying ‘I have decided to go away for a few days…..you have been, you are and always will be, my love.’ She added that when she returned ‘I’ll be the same sweet girl you fell in love with’. That was 3 years ago, and Jim is still waiting for her to come home.

When you meet him, his sadness and loneliness are apparent.

“I live for music, words, song” he says, and speaks of his pain in lyrical terms. He says ‘I’ve died a thousand deaths….cried over 3,000 times. I walk 100 miles a week to shake her off. Walking to the rhythm: I love her, I love her. I can’t sleep. I lost 30lbs, walking, thinking of her, thinking of the love. How do I survive? Loneliness is killing me. When I’m on stage, everyone is hooting and hollering, and I watch them and then all of a sudden I go back to an empty house. At night, the only noise in the house is the tv, or the cracks in the wall.’

Jim believes in love, and he believes love is forever. His life’s mission is to get Renata back, move into a nice house in a good neighbourhood of Philadelphia, and spend the rest of his life making his woman happy.

Will he succeed? Will the auction make Jim not only rich, but happy too? Will Renata return to him when she sees just what he will do for love? Or will there be one more item to add to the catalogue – One Broken Heart For Sale?
Jim 'E' Curtin - Elvis Empire Collection Auction
January 7 & 8, 2006
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