

Letter to the Editor: The Pundit Speaks

By Randolph M. Howes, M.D., Ph.D. | March 30, 2014

“Howes' Illnesses of the Famous: Elvis Aaron Presley – Part 3 of 3”

Elvis' friend, Dr. Harry Rosenberg, said, "When Elvis died, they said he had drugs in him. He should have had more, the way he suffered in his last few months. With his condition, he was courageous beyond reason if that's all he had in him." Even with his multiple medical maladies, from March 1976 through June of 1977 (just two months before his death), Elvis gave a total of 149 stage performances. Since reports can be conflicting, proof is difficult to come by but there is adequate evidence for informed speculation on many of Elvis' medical illnesses. In 1997, the NBC network stated publicly that Elvis did not die of a drug overdose, but instead, died of a massive heart attack. It was also reported that he had had three other heart attacks prior to the final one. In 1994, coroner Dr. Joseph Davis reopened the Presley autopsy and stated, "There is nothing in any of the data that supports a death from drugs. In fact, everything points to a sudden, violent heart attack." Popular forensic pathologist, Michael Baden, viewed the situation as more complex: "Elvis had had an enlarged heart for a long time. That, together with his drug habit, caused his death. But he was difficult to diagnose; it was a judgment call." Elvis' personal physician, Dr. Nichopoulos, was quoted as saying, "Chronic constipation killed Elvis." Nichopoulos reported that Elvis had inherited a condition called bowel paralysis, which made defecating difficult. Consequently, "He would get embarrassed," Dr. Nick said. "He'd have accidents onstage. He'd have to change clothes and come back because of the way we were trying to treat his constipation." Treating the problem correctly in the early 1970s would have necessitated performing a colostomy. Elvis didn't want to have anything to do with it. "If they had done the colostomy then, he'd probably still be here," Nichopoulos said. However, I have trouble believing anything Dr. Nick said. NBC said that the three compression fractures in Elvis' spine, at the time of his death, were due to the steroids he took for his enlarged colon. Steroids may have contributed to his swollen appearance in 76-77 when Elvis said, 'I look like hell, but thank God can still sing. It is my salvation so many times.' An estimated 80,000 people lined the processional route to Forest Hill Cemetery. A car plowed into a group of fans, killing 2 women and critically injuring a third. Later in August, there was an attempt to steal "The King's" body, which prompted authorities to exhume and rebury the remains of both Elvis Presley and his beloved mother in Graceland's Meditation Garden.

In the America I love, we say, "Long live the King."

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