Questions:

1. What is your hometown? My hometown is Hayti, Missouri which is about 120 miles from here. But when I was growing up in the 60s and early 70s, it would take about 2 hours to drive here. Now it takes about an hour and 20 minutes because Interstate 55 was not complete. So in some ways it was a much greater distance to get there than it is now. In spite of the fact that Hayti was my hometown, Memphis was always my Mecca for us. When I say “us”, I am talking about my family. We would come here 3 or 4 times a year .
2. If you could move to another city, would you? I wouldn’t, because if I could I guess I would have done it. And the good side of that is my wife and I have been able to do a fair amount of travel and we have been to a number of cities and communities in the United States and enjoyed most of them. But we always enjoy coming back to Memphis. And Memphis to me, it feels like home.
3. If so, what city? NA
4. What neighborhood do you live in? We live in Central Gardens.
5. How long have you lived in Memphis? I moved here in 1981 and at the time I moved here I was to be a management trainee at Goldsmith’s department store, now Macy’s. It was a great experience for me. When I moved here, Goldsmith’s thought I should move out to Germantown. Somewhere out in the suburbs. I didn’t want that. I wanted to live in Midtown Memphis. I wanted sidewalks and trees. My first place to live was on Cooper and Washington, those brownstone apartments. They are still there today. The first apartment that I was shown was the apartment that sits behind Huey’s on Madison. It was quite a rude awakening and fortunately we did not end up living there.
6. How would you describe the City of Memphis in three words? This may sound like a cliché, but a bit funky, a little cool, I think very authentic. I think most people in Memphis are very authentic and genuine. We have our good share of characters. I’m sure a lot of communities do. One in particular, my wife and I don’t know, we only see, when we drive out for the evening, at a certain intersection in Midtown at a bus stop there is a fellow there, we don’t know his name but we call him “the dancing man”. He’s got his headphone on and dancing and listening to whatever music and I always tell my wife, ‘I wish I could dance as good as that guy does.’ He is having so much fun. You can look around you and see all sorts of interesting people like that. Just a few weeks ago I was driving down Union Avenue, there’s a fellow walking down the street strumming a guitar, has a cigarette hanging out of his mouth, just as happy as could be! You go, “wow!”, that’s what I like about living in Memphis. To me Memphis constantly reminds me how special it is through its people.
7. What were your first impressions of Memphis? First impressions I have to go to… let me give you two. My first impression was from when I was a child coming here from Missouri. At the age of 5 or 6. Again, it would take us 2 plus hours to get here because you had to go through all the small communities, around the square, and avoid all the speed traps. And we would park our car on Union Avenue where “Parking Can be Fun” is now. That used to be Brently’s. And we would park there and my Dad would put the parking brake on and I was always concerned that the car was going to roll back into the Mississippi River. But we always had lunch at Griffin’s. Great food. And we would walk down to Goldsmith’s department store which was on Main. And it was there that I rode my first escalator. And in the 50s and 60s when we would go into Goldsmith’s, one of the first questions my mother would ask is “is Elvis in town?” And the clerks would always know; it was either yes or no. There was no question. People knew whether Elvis was in town. And regardless what the answer was, we always had to do a trip to Graceland because I am sure my mother thought she was going to see Elvis standing out in the front yard. Of course, she never did. But when I moved back as a young adult, it was all positive. I loved Memphis. It was a great new world for me, moving from Jonesboro, Arkansas which is essentially a large suburb. Overton Square was still popular then. Of course it has come back since that time. You had a lot of night life, a lot of music, a lot of activity. Downtown was still a little sketchy but it was just a good experience for me, and going back to the people, I liked the people I was associated with. Going to work at Goldsmith’s was a whole ‘nother world to itself and exposed me to a lot of people and experiences I wouldn’t have had otherwise. It was all very positive.
8. What is your current impression of Memphis? Memphis is going through a renaissance. People assume that it has happened over night. It hasn’t; it has taken a number of years. You know that I am associated with the Wolf River Conservancy, were going a Greenway project for the City of Memphis. The vision of this project goes back to the 1970s. So here we are now in 2017, we believe that we will complete the entire project by 2020. A $50 million project, 26 miles long. Some people would say “Oh! It’s happening overnight.” It’s not; it’s been a long, long journey. I think there are a lot of stories like that in Memphis. Things have been planned, work has been done, whether you are talking about downtown redevelopment, whether you are talking about Midtown, whether you are talking about out east. Just a lot of good things coming together, living in the City which is so entrepreneurial, which drive a lot of this economic development, whether it is FedEx, whether it is Holiday Inn back in the day, whether it is AutoZone. All those corporations that we know drive the economy which of course we all have to have a reason for being here professionally. But my impression is that we are truly a renaissance city. Yes we have some issues; the biggest we all know are the poverty and the education which I think goes hand-in-hand which has led to some crime issues. Separate to that, Memphis is a great place to live. Low cost of living, rather easy to get around, getting easier all the time with bike lanes and more walking spaces and greenspaces. All very positive. I love bringing people from out of town and give them a tour of Memphis. There are some usual places you go whether it is Graceland , the Hotel Peabody, and Mud Island, things of that nature.
9. Do you feel Memphis has improved while you have lived here? Absolutely. It has improved immensely. Economically there is more opportunity; people are more bullish on this city. There are always naysayers. What I find more often than not, is what it takes is people from outside the city coming here and see all the good. We, perhaps, see all the bad. We miss the good things; our clean drinking water is a good example. Clean water is a challenge out west, so we should not underplay what we have such as clean drinking water.
10. What is your funniest story about living in Memphis? It would have been in 1987 when my wife and I had just gotten married. We didn’t do a traditional honeymoon because we both traveled together previously. We were staying into Memphis that week and I was moving into her home. It was on a Tuesday and she wanted to go downtown and have lunch on Beale Street. And I very reluctantly went and told her that no one goes to Beale Street for lunch on a Tuesday. But that is what she wanted to do. So we went down there to a bar that had an open air dining area that has been closed since. But it was open then and there was a railing next to the table. No one is there except the two of us. I told her no one would be here. About that time she looks over my shoulder and say “don’t look now but Ringo Starr is walking our way.” So of course I turn around and there is Ringo Starr and Chips Momen are walking right towards us. Ringo approached us, stopped, and said “it’s a good day, isn’t it?” And all we could say was Ringo! Of course it is! Then the two of them continued to walk off. Ringo was in town making a record with Chips. So my wife always reminds me now when I don’t want to do something , about the time when I didn’t want to go to Beale Street and we saw Ringo Starr.
11. If you could change something about Memphis, what would it be? Sometimes the heat in August. Of course we rationalize that because we have very mild winters. Going back to that certain amount of poverty. The education system appears to be improving. I know many people in Memphis send their kids to private school because they feel forced to. But I know there are exceptions, such as Snowden. But if I were to change anything it might be the median income in our community so everybody could enjoy all the amenities we have.
12. This web site only captures a snapshot in time. What would you like someone twenty years from now who reads this to know about you? I think I would like them to know that I am serving as the executive director of the Wolf River Conservancy and this is what I call my encore career. And in 20 years that they might look back on the work we do protecting land primarily that protects our aquifer recharge areas and someone would say that I am glad that the Wolf River Conservancy did that because see what that means to us today. That would be one thing. The other thing is that I would hope that they would look back and see whether they Googled my name and they would see things that would tell a story that perhaps in some small way that I helped make Memphis a better place than what it was when I first got here. And that I was a good person.
13. What is your favorite thing about Memphis? I think one of my favorite things about Memphis is the music and the people associated with the music. One night we were down at Earnestine and Hazel’s many years ago and it was 1 or 2 in the morning and there was a band called the Rhythm Hounds and they were a 7 or 8 piece band. And they started a conga line that danced through the bar and then danced out down Beale Street all the time while playing their instruments. And we were a part of the group that followed them out and then followed them back in. And of course you have Elvis. And then you have Stax. We had the good fortune to go out and have dinner with Rufus Thomas. We had dinner at Paulette’s in Overton Square we went down to BB King’s on Beale Street. We were sitting next to the stage and people wanted Rufus to get up and sing. Rufus got up and sand that night. And then they wanted him to sing Walking the Dog. He wouldn’t sing it. So Rufus sits down and I ask him why wouldn’t he sing Walking the Dog. He says “that’s my money song. I only sing that for money.” So you have those sorts of stories. The whole music in Memphis is cool and even to this day, Bruno Mars. Bruno Mars has done several songs here in Memphis that have been big hits. Bruno Mars was known as the youngest Elvis Impersonator at the age of 3 or 4. So about 25 years ago at the Airport Hilton, which no longer exists, they were doing an Elvis impersonating contest. Bruno Mars was there and we saw him and he did a great Elvis.