

## Every Day Items Seen During B.B. King's Life

In the early 1940s, while living in Indianola, Riley got work at the cotton gin, repairing the machinery. "Riley's acquisition of new technological skills established a pattern that would stay with him all his life. He became a life-long tinkerer, always on the lookout for new technology and its application. He would make his mark in music by devising ways to exploit the technology of electric guitars and amplifiers. Later, he bought computers and home video recorders; he also surfed the web from his hotel room or his traveling home on wheels." *B.B. King Treasures*, Introduction by Charles Sawyer

1925 – 1935

Bicycle – he used this to go from Lexington back to

Kilmichael to live near his mother's relatives

Hat – he needed this when he worked outdoors

Hoe – used for weeding fields

Cotton Sack – workers used these to collect cotton  
picked from plants



1935 -1943

Guitar (purchased with money given to Riley by  
the Cartledge family)

Wind up Victrola owned by Aunt Mima. She had records of Bliknd Lemon Jefferson and Lonnie Johnson, early Blues singers.



Dress up clothes – to wear for a wedding or to  
go to a night club

Panaram machine – a coin operated juke box  
that played films called "soundies" – an early



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version of a music video.

Farm Tractor – Riley



Radio –



Record Player

Wood stove ( to heat his cabin).

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Radio Station Broadcast Studio microphone

Peptikon Health Tonic – a product that would be advertised on the radio. B.B. King sang a jingle for the tonic, which landed him a job at a radio station and a title as the Pepticon Boy.

Big Red – the first tour bus owned by B.B. King for his band's travel, purchased in 1955.



Lucille – B.B. King's electric guitar

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Entertainer, Rufus Thomas was a member of the entertainment community in Memphis when B.B. King worked at the radio station in this photo from the 1950s.

The Chitlin' Circuit – black night clubs, in and around the south, that booked music groups.

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Club Ebony is in Indianola, MS



### The Chitlin' Circuit

The "chitlin' circuit" is the collective name given to the string of performance venues throughout the eastern, southern, and upper mid-west areas of the United States that were safe and acceptable for African American musicians, comedians, and other entertainers to perform in during the age of racial segregation in the United States (from at least the early 19th century through the 1960's) as well as the venues that contemporary African American soul and blues performers, especially in the South, continue to appear at regularly. The name derives from the soul food item chitterlings. <http://www.rbhalloffame.com/the-chitlin-circuit/>

B.B. King Home Studio – moved in its entirety from his home in Las Vegas



a turntable for playing LP records.

Dark Blue Lucille from B.B. King's home studio.





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Rayovac Lantern – in a reproduction of B.B. King's home. He lived in a cabin with no electricity and has always kept flashlights near him.



Grammy Award Design



Presidential Medal of Freedom

Kennedy Center Honors, 1995

Riley B. "B.B." King (guitarist/singer, born September 16, 1925, Itta Bena, MS) The most touching bluesman of our time, and the most influential electric guitarist ever, the "King of the Blues" sums up his message with some simple advice. "I would say to all people, but maybe to young people especially--black and white or whatever color--follow your own feelings and trust them, find out what you want to do and do it, and then practice it every day of your life and keep becoming what you are, despite any hardships and obstacles you meet.

So hard to follow yet so good to live by, those words also describe the course of the musician's extraordinary career. The obstacles in his path were many: He was born during the Great Depression in the poorest of American states, the son of black farm laborers. Only talent, hard work, and an unstoppable artistic vision can account for King's journey out of the Mississippi Delta, through the roadhouse joints of the "Chitlin' Circuit" in the South to the legendary Apollo Theater in New York, into the recording studio, to the hearts of millions. Praising his "apparently inexhaustible reserve of creativity," as he presented B.B. King with the National Medal of Arts in 1990, President George Bush hailed the blues musician as a "trailblazer, an authentic pioneer who literally helped shape his art form."

Riley B. King (the extra "B" came later and doesn't stand for anything) spent his childhood all over the state of Mississippi. When his parents separated in 1929, the boy went to live with his maternal grandmother in Kilmichael; his mother died when he was nine and, in 1940, B.B. joined his father's new family in Lexington for two years before returning to Kilmichael. He took on farm work in Indianola in 1946 but, after wrecking a tractor, decided his future lay in Memphis, Tennessee. A fan of the bluesman Bukka White, young B.B. looked him up for advice and found himself working as a street

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corner bluesman in Memphis. In 1948 he worked up the nerve to audition for WDIA, a hillbilly radio station that was about to change its format to cater to the black community. He got the job.

He cut his first record in 1949, "Miss Martha King," followed by "Three O'Clock Blues" and "She's Dynamite" in 1951. Both reached Number One in Memphis. By 1955, King decided to put together his own band, and a steady string of hits followed that included "Recession Blues," "Rock Me, Baby," "How Blue Can You Get," "Help The Poor," "Don't Answer the Door," and the immortal "The Thrill Is Gone," which brought the bluesman his first Grammy Award. King's fans by the 1960s included the Rolling Stones--for whom he opened on tour--as well as rockers like Eric Clapton. Still, while his influence could be heard in more than a few rock singles, B.B. King himself remained true to the blues.

With is guitar "Lucille" strapped across his broad chest, King hit the road around 1946 and has not stopped since. He redefined and reinvigorated the blues at a time when rock and roll seemed the only answer to American popular music, and his uncompromising artistry has had a telling influence on both rock and contemporary urban blues. King's tastes range wide but, whatever the source of his inspiration, the transformation leads right back to the blues: His roots in the big church choirs and soulful wailing of the South, they are those of the people who work this country's soil, those too of the millions who live in the great American cities. His unique, easy string vibrato, his heartbreaking singing, and his impeccable musicianship have set him apart even as a generation has grown that--in no small part thanks to B.B. King's example--finds the blues a rejuvenated, vibrant American art form. "We don't play rock and roll," he said in 1957. "Our music is [http://www.kennedy-center.org/explorer/artists/?entity\\_id=3696&source\\_type=A](http://www.kennedy-center.org/explorer/artists/?entity_id=3696&source_type=A) blues, straight out of the Delta. I believe we'll make it on that." He was right. He still is.

Rock and Roll Hall of Fame induction