



Named the “King of the Blues” and rated number three on Rolling Stone Magazine’s list of 100 greatest guitarists of all time, BB King passed away on May 14th, 2015

Riley B King was born in 1925. His parents split up when he was only four years old and he went to live with his grandmother. She took him to church every Sunday where he joined the gospel choir. The preacher, Reverend Fair, introduced Riley to the guitar and taught him some basic chords. His Aunt Mima got him listening to old Blues records. Riley started to relate more to the Blues genre of music after losing both his mother and grandmother as a child.

At the age of 17, Riley became a tractor driver and sang and played blues guitar on street corners for extra cash. One day he broke his boss’ tractor and was scared to face him, and took off with only \$2.50 in his pocket. Riley fled to Memphis and searched Beale Street for his cousin Bukka White, a famous blues singer at the time.

They spent 10 months jamming in White’s apartment. White played slide guitar where he slid necks of glass bottles up the instrument’s fret board. King couldn’t duplicate this technique and wasn’t into playing chords, so he developed his own style of vibrating and bending strings to make his guitar sing. He was inspired by T-Bone Walker, the first blues musician to play the electric guitar. BB King’s guitar solos later influenced musicians like Jimmi Hendrix, Eric Clapton and Stevie Ray Vaughn.

At the age of 23, Riley became BB King (short for “Beale Street Blues Boy”), when he hosted his own radio show, **The Sepia Swing Club**. He played songs by African American musicians and sang and played guitar on the air. From then he started recording singles and formed a band which toured the Chitlin Circuit. This circuit of juke joints and clubs in southern-eastern United States were considered the only possible touring sites for Blacks from the 1940s until the 1960s. BB’s band averaged 275 one-night shows a year. In 1956 alone, they played 342 concerts.

Extensive touring cost BB both his marriages, which inspired him to write two famous blues tunes: ***Woke Up This Morning*** and ***The Thrill is Gone***, his most popular hit.

When a White blues guitarist, Mike Bloomfield, rose to stardom in 1965, he credited his instrumental talent to BB King. From then on, BB was not restricted to playing small locations along the Chitlin Circuit. He began to tour high profile venues across the country and eventually the world.

Although BB thought he was going to retire at the age of 80 and played a ‘farewell tour’, he continued to perform until right into his 90s. He has collaborated with a range of artists from George Coleman and Bobby Bland (his former band mates) to U2 and Eric Clapton, and is a successful record producer, song writer, singer and guitarist.

### FAST FACTS

**NAME:** Riley “B.B.” King

**BORN:** September 16, 1925, Itta Bena, MS, USA

**DIED:** 2015 in Las Vegas, USA

**STYLE:** Blues, Blues Rock, Soul Blues, R&B

**INSTRUMENTS:** Guitar, Vocals

### IMPORTANT WORKS

*The Thrill is Gone, Three O’Clock Blues, Lucille*

### FUN FACTS

Since 1949, BB King has named each of his guitars Lucille...

One night, he was playing at a dance hall when two men started fist fighting, knocked over a kerosene lamp, and started a fire.

After evacuating, BB realized he’d left his guitar inside and he ran back in to rescue it, almost losing his life.

He found out that the two men had been fighting over a girl named Lucille. King decided to name his guitar Lucille to remind himself never to act foolish like the men that were fighting.