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MOONWALK

By
John Jackson



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CHAPTER

ONE

**JUST KIDS
WITH A DREAM**



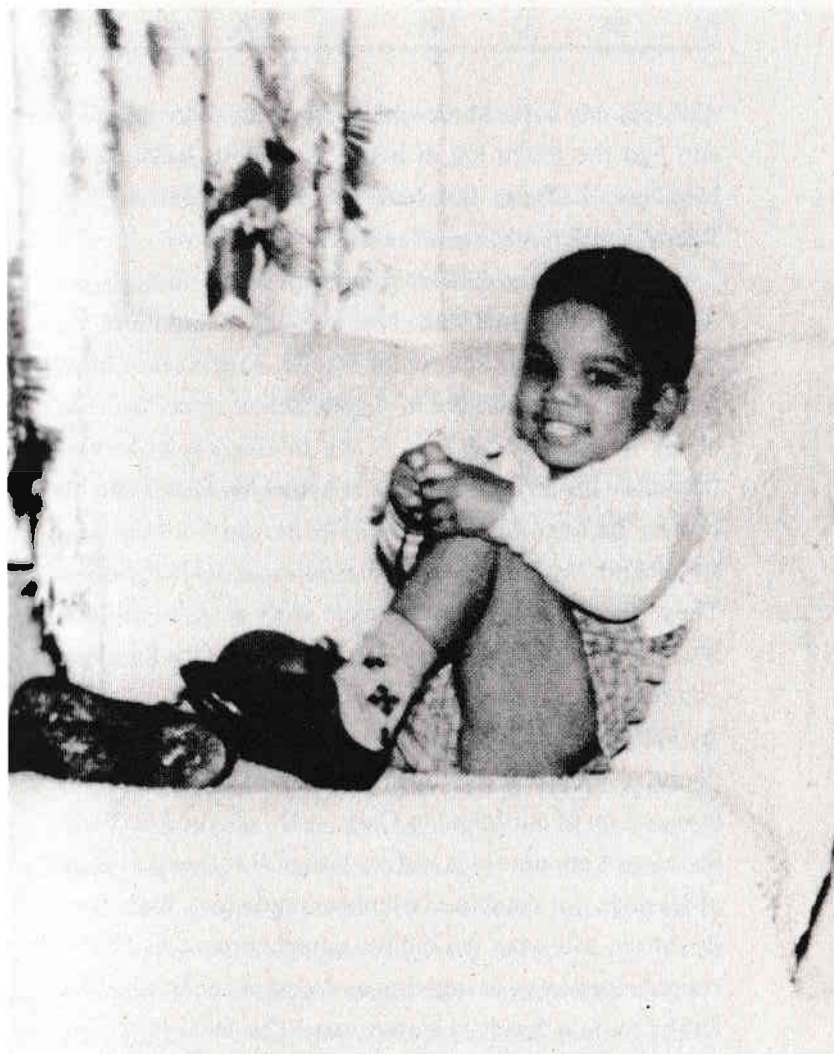
I've always wanted to be able to tell stories, you know, stories that came from my soul. I'd like to sit by a fire and tell people stories—make them see pictures, make them cry and laugh, take them *anywhere* emotionally with something as deceptively simple as words. I'd like to tell tales to move their souls and transform them. I've always wanted to be able to do that. Imagine how the great writers must feel, knowing they have that power. I sometimes feel I *could* do it. It's something I'd like to develop. In a way, songwriting uses the same skills, creates the emotional highs and lows, but the story is a sketch. It's quicksilver. There are very few books written on the art of storytelling, how to grip listeners, how to get



a group of people together and amuse them. No costumes, no makeup, no nothing, just you and your voice, and your powerful ability to take them anywhere, to transform their lives, if only for minutes.

As I begin to tell my story, I want to repeat what I usually say to people when they ask me about my earliest days with the Jackson 5: I was so little when we began to work on our music that I really don't remember much about it. Most people have the luxury of careers that start when they're old enough to know exactly what they're doing and why, but, of course, that wasn't true of me. They remember everything that happened to them, but I was only five years old. When you're a show business child, you really don't have the maturity to understand a great deal of what is going on around you. People make a lot of decisions concerning your life when you're out of the room. So here's what I remember. I remember singing at the top of my voice and dancing with real joy and working too hard for a child. Of course, there are many details I don't remember at all. I do remember the Jackson 5 really taking off when I was only eight or nine.

I was born in Gary, Indiana, on a late summer night in 1958, the seventh of my parents' nine children. My father, Joe Jackson, was born in Arkansas, and in 1949 he married my mother, Katherine Scruse, whose people came from



Imagine singing and dancing at this age.



Alabama. My sister Maureen was born the following year and had the tough job of being the oldest. Jackie, Tito, Jermaine, LaToya, and Marlon were all next in line. Randy and Janet came after me.

A part of my earliest memories is my father's job working in the steel mill. It was tough, mind-numbing work and he played music for escape. At the same time, my mother was working in a department store. Because of my father, and because of my mother's own love of music, we heard it all the time at home. My father and his brother had a group called the Falcons who were the local R&B band. My father played the guitar, as did his brother. They would do some of the great early rock 'n' roll and blues songs by Chuck Berry, Little Richard, Otis Redding, you name it. All those styles were amazing and each had an influence on Joe and on us, although we were too young to know it at the time. The Falcons practiced in the living room of our house in Gary, so I was raised on R&B. Since we were nine kids and my father's brother had eight of his own, our combined numbers made for a huge family. Music was what we did for entertainment and those times helped keep us together and kind of encouraged my father to be a family-oriented man. The Jackson 5 were born out of this tradition—we later became the Jacksons—and because of this training and musical tradition, I



moved out on my own and established a sound that is mine.

I remember my childhood as mostly work, even though I *loved* to sing. I wasn't *forced* into this business by stage parents the way Judy Garland was. I did it because I enjoyed it and because it was as natural to me as drawing a breath and exhaling it. I did it because I was *compelled* to do it, not by parents or family, but by my own inner life in the world of music.

There were times, let me make that clear, when I'd come home from school and I'd only have time to put my books down and get ready for the studio. Once there, I'd sing until late at night, until it was past my bedtime, really. There was a park across the street from the Motown studio, and I can remember looking at those kids playing games. I'd just stare at them in wonder—I couldn't imagine such freedom, such a carefree life—and wish more than anything that I had that kind of freedom, that I could walk away and be like them. So there were sad moments in my childhood. It's true for any child star. Elizabeth Taylor told me she felt the same way. When you're young and you're working, the world can seem awfully unfair. I wasn't forced to be little Michael the lead singer—I did it and I loved it—but it was hard work. If we were doing an album, for example, we'd go off to the studio after school





My father and my mother.

and I might or might not get a snack. Sometimes there just wasn't time. I'd come home, exhausted, and it'd be eleven or twelve and past time to go to bed.

So I very much identify with anyone who worked as a child. I know how they struggled, I know what they sacrificed. I also know what they learned. I've learned that it becomes more of a challenge as one gets older. I feel old for some reason. I really feel like an old soul, someone who's seen a lot and experienced a lot. Because of all the years I've clocked in, it's hard for me to accept that I am only twenty-nine. I've been in the business for twenty-four years. Sometimes I feel like I should be near the end of my life, turning eighty, with people patting me on the back. That's what comes from starting so young.

When I first performed with my brothers, we were known as the Jacksons. We would later become the Jackson 5. Still later, after we left Motown, we would reclaim the Jacksons name again.

Every one of my albums or the group's albums has been dedicated to our mother, Katherine Jackson, since we took over our own careers and began to produce our own music. My first memories are of her holding me and singing songs like "You Are My Sunshine" and "Cotton Fields." She sang to me and to my brothers and sisters often. Even though she had lived in Indiana for some

