

CHAPTER 1

AT HOME WITH THE JACKSONS

'Hey! Who did this? Tito? Jermaine? Jackie? Come here now!'
Joe Jackson was angry . . . and the Jackson children knew that one of them was in big trouble. Someone had gone into their father's room and played his guitar. Now it was broken.

That guitar was special to Joe Jackson. He worked long, hard hours in his job, but he had always had big dreams. He used to play the guitar in a band at local bars and clubs. The band had not succeeded and Joe's dreams disappeared.

Joe soon found out the truth. His son Tito was playing the guitar while Joe was at work. Tito's brothers, Jackie and Jermaine, were singing along with him. When he heard this, Joe hit Tito with his belt.

The boy was still crying when Joe came into his room.

'Let me see what you can do,' Joe said, giving the guitar to his son.

As Tito played and his two brothers sang, Joe saw a different future for the family. In his opinion, you were either one of life's winners or you were a loser. His own band had failed, but he was looking now at another chance for a better life. His children could form a band!



Born in 1958, Michael Jackson was the seventh of nine children. The Jacksons lived in a little house on Jackson Street in Gary, Indiana, a poor city near Chicago, full of factories and thousands of other small houses. Michael later described their home as 'no bigger than a garage'. (Their address later became famous in the song '2300 Jackson Street'.) All the boys slept in one of the two

bedrooms; the family's three girls – Rebbie, LaToya and, later, Janet – slept on sofas in the living room.



As a child, Michael Jackson was very close to his mother, Katherine. Her religion and family were the most important things in life to her. Michael later said that she had taught him valuable lessons about love and kindness. He thought that his beautiful singing voice came from her, too. Michael's feelings for his father were very different. Like the rest of the children, he was afraid of Joseph Jackson. Michael was a shy, quiet child, and he often tried to avoid his father.

At first Michael was not part of Joe's big plan to make a band with his sons; he was still a small child. The young Michael watched as Joe made three of his brothers – Jackie, Tito and Jermaine – practise their music, before and after school. He didn't let them play with other children;

their whole world was the family and their band. Soon Michael's brother Marlon joined the band, too. At the age of four, Michael started singing along with Jermaine. Hearing the boy's strong, clear voice, Katherine knew that he was special. Now she had an idea: 'Why doesn't Michael join the group?' The Jackson 5 were born!

The boys practised hard together – Joe didn't allow anything else. 'He didn't make it fun,' Michael later remembered. Joe became the band's manager and started putting them into talent competitions. Every weekend he drove them to different cities to sing in clubs or competitions.

One thing became clear – although Michael was a quiet boy at home, he was a natural star in front of the microphone. Soon he, not Jermaine, was the band's main singer. Joe could see that Michael's talent was special. Sometimes he shouted at the other boys, 'Do it like Michael!'

Michael hated this. 'I didn't want to be the example,' he once said.

The Jackson 5 became more and more successful, and Joe found a local record company to sell their music. In 1968, the band recorded their first two songs. Neither was a hit, but now the band was playing bigger concerts around the country. Michael always studied the other singers carefully. When James Brown* was singing on TV, Michael watched all of his dance moves. Although he was young, Michael was serious about being the best.



In July 1968, the band went to Detroit* because Motown Records wanted to hear them. Joe knew that this was an

* James Brown was a famous African-American singer in the 1960s.

* Detroit is a city in America. The offices of Motown Records used to be here.



important meeting – Motown had produced some of the greatest ever records by African-American* musicians. The boys played for a group of the company's bosses. When they finished, the Motown people wrote down some notes, and didn't say very much. It was a scary moment – did Motown like The Jackson 5 or not?

The Jacksons had to wait for the answer. The head of Motown, Berry Gordy, had moved from Detroit to Los Angeles (LA). A film of the Jacksons' songs was sent to him. Three days later, a message from Gordy arrived – Motown wanted The Jackson 5! They were on their way!

In 1969, The Jackson 5 and their father moved to Los Angeles to chase their dream of success. The rest of the family stayed in their little house in Gary. In LA the boys lived with their father in cheap hotels, but to Michael the city was beautiful. He and his brothers still went to school, but they spent the rest of their time at work in Motown's LA studios.

* An 'African-American' is a black person who was born in the USA.

At last, Gordy decided that they were ready. He told the boys about his plans for three singles by The Jackson 5.

'They won't only be hits,' promised Gordy. 'They will be number one hits!'

He introduced the band to Diana Ross who was one of Motown's biggest stars. She offered to help the band, inviting lots of important people to a club to see them. The invitation said that the eight-year-old Michael Jackson would perform there. In fact Michael's real age was ten. Diana told a worried Michael that it was a better story for the press this way.



That night The Jackson 5 were a huge success. Dressed in green suits and gold shirts, they performed lots of popular Motown songs. After the concert, a reporter asked Michael his age. He replied that he was eight. He was already learning the rules of the game.

Gordy decided that Michael could learn more from Diana. In October, 1969, at the age of eleven, he went to live with her for a month. She was like a second mother to him, taking him to museums and teaching him about art. When he wasn't working on his own music, Michael studied Diana. How did she sing? How did she dance? One day he watched her secretly as she looked in the mirror and practised.

In later years, Michael said that he had been a lonely child. When he lived with Diana Ross, he missed his real mother and often called her on the telephone. He was living the dream, but there was a price to pay.

'You can't do things that other children do,' he said, later, sadly. 'I didn't have friends when I was little. My brothers were my only friends.'