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MY FAMILY

The Jacksons

The complete saga of the world's most dazzling legend, told by the woman who knows it best.

KATHERINE JACKSON

With RICHARD WISEMAN



MY FAMILY, THE JACKSONS
Katherine Jackson with Richard Wiseman

Simon & Schuster
ST. MARTIN'S
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Acknowledgments

My special thanks to my children and my nephew Tony for adding their voices to my story.

Thanks, also, to Rich Wiseman and his wife, Ginny, for assisting me in the preparation of the manuscript.

DON'T STOP 'TIL YOU GET ENOUGH!
MY FAMILY, THE JACKSONS
TELLS IT ALL—FROM THE WOMAN
WHO KNOWS THEM BEST

- ★ Michael as a toddler, dancing to the sound of the washing machine
- ★ How Diana Ross took the Jackson Five under her wing
- ★ The facts behind the family's quitting Motown—and why Jermaine remained
- ★ Randy's amazing stage comeback after his 1980 auto accident
- ★ The world-conquering "Victory" tour
- ★ A mother's reaction to LaToya's controversial appearance in *Playboy*
- ★ Special close-ups of Michael: his reclusive lifestyle, his love for animals, his plastic surgery, the making of *Thriller*—the biggest-selling album in history, his fiery Pepsi-Cola filming disaster, his record-setting solo tour, and more
- ★ Janet's sudden rise to superstardom
- ★ The rise of the third generation of Jackson performers
- ★ And much more—told straight and in Katherine's and her children's own words

My Family

THE JACKSONS

KATHERINE JACKSON

With RICHARD WISEMAN

■ SMP ■
ST. MARTIN'S PAPERBACKS

For eons of time I've been gestating
To take a form, been hesitating.
From the unmanifest this cosmic conception
On this Earth of fantastic reception.
And then one fateful August morn
From your being I was born.
With tender love, you nurtured a seed;
To your own distress you paid no heed.
Unmindful of any risk and danger,
You decided upon this lonely stranger.
Rainbows, clouds, the deep blue sky,
Glittering birds that fly high;
Out of fragments you've made me whole.
From these elements you've fashioned my soul.

Mother dear, you gave me life;
Because of you, no struggle or strife.
You gave me joy and position,
You cared for me without condition.
And if I ever change this world,
It's from the emotions you've unfurled.
Your finest feelings I can hear,
Your compassion is so sweet and dear.
I can sense your faintest notion,
The wondrous magic of your love potion.

And now that I have come so far,
Met with every king and every czar,
Encountered every color and creed
Of every passion, every greed,
I go back to that starry night.
Without fear for muscle and might,
You taught me how to stand and fight
For every single wrong and right.
Every day without a hold
I will treasure what you've molded.
I'll remember every kiss;
Your sweetest words I'll never miss,
No matter where I go from here.
You're in my heart, my mother dear.

Mother, I love you.

M. J.

Do you know how petals on some flowers are so soft to the touch that they feel like a down pillow? Well, my mother is like one of those flowers. She is so soothing, so sweet, so beautiful.

—Rebbie

She's given us so much love that we've become her. We're very easy, quiet, and soft-spoken, just like her.

—Jermaine

Our mother is more than a mother to us. She is also our friend.

—Jackie

Sometimes I look at my mother and just start crying, only because I'm filled with joy and pride at being her daughter. She's just beauty to me, the most incredible lady that I will ever know.

—Janet

Whatever I decide to do with my life, my mother knows that I will succeed, and she tells me so. Every once in a while a son needs to hear that.

—Marlon

There's not a person in the world like my mother. Everyone who meets her who's my age or younger winds up calling her Mother, because she's got a heart of gold.

—Tito

Putting God first in her life gave my mother the strength to overcome life's obstacles. She's spread that strength throughout the family. She's kept us all together. She's the backbone.

—Randy

My father, Prince Scruse, worked as a Pullman porter for the Illinois Central.



In 1952, when this photo was taken, Joe was a member of a singing group in Gary called the Falcons. He drew in the mustache and sideburns!



Me at age 16.

Michael at 3. Look at those big doc eyes of his. The people who claim Michael's had surgery on his eyes should see this photo.





Jermaine and Tito played Little League ball for the Katz Kittens, a team sponsored by Gary's then mayor, Martin Katz. Jermaine and Tito are to the right of Mayor Katz.



Jermaine, Tito and Michael one Sunday in 1963 after we returned from Kingdom Hall.

Michael at age 7.



A 1961 family portrait. Bottom row: Michael, Marlon and LaToya. Top row: me, Joe, Rebbie, baby Randy, Tito and Jermaine. Jackie snapped this picture.



The Jackson Five make one of their first demonstration recordings in 1965. From the left, Jackie, Tito, Marlon, Jermaine and Michael.



Jackson Five PR shot, circa 1972.



I made many of the Jackson Five's early outfits, but the only suits I made for them were these. And I told myself afterward that I'd never do it again! It was too much work, and the boys grew out of these suits so fast.



The boys with Ed Sullivan. Mr. Sullivan reminded them that their talent was a "gift from God." He also gave them some good advice: "Save your money."

Janet at 5.



In Japan with Janet, 1985. Janet shopping and greeting fans.



Janet in kindergarten.



LaToya in Japan in 1987 for the start of Michael's world tour. She accompanied him on his Japan dates.



Joe and Randy, 1972. When Jermaine left the Jacksons in 1975, Randy became a full-time member.

In 1985, *Essence* magazine named me their woman of the year.



With Terrie Williams, *Essence* director of PR, and Susan Taylor, editor, at the reception.



The Jacksons, 1983.



Joining me that day were, left to right, LaToya, Janet, Rebbie, Marlon and Marlon Jr., Randy, Jackie, A&M Records' John McClain, and Tito. Jackie holds the trophy that *Essence* presented to me. The inscription on it reads "...for victoriously upholding the value of the unified family and for being a radiant example of how spirituality moves mountains."



Michael and I also visited with my father and my step-mother at their Indiana Harbour home.



Joe and I have been married for 41 years.

Jackie and son,
Sigmund, 1977.



Tito, DeeDee and their sons, Taj and Taryll (top row),
and Tito Jr.



Marlon and Carol
in 1985.



With Joe, Jermaine and Margaret Maldonado in 1987.



Michael with some of his nieces and nephews at Family Day at Tito and DeeDee's in 1986. Family Day is a long-time tradition in the Jackson family.



Randy, Marlon and Michael prepare balloons for the grandkids at Family Day.



Marlon, Randy, Janet and Randy's friend Bernadette Roby, at Family Day.



In April of 1988, Michael and I returned to our Gary neighborhood where we visited with our former neighbor, Marie Gunn. Marie's granddaughter was so upset that she couldn't be there to meet Michael that Marie told her she'd hold up her picture for our photograph together.

There's always been an oddball, someone different in the family. And I'm that person.

----LaToya in 1985

LaToya nude in Playboy?

I was shocked when I heard the rumor. My daughter may have been different from her eight brothers and sisters in some ways -- she was the moodiest of my kids, for example -- but in terms of her dress and manners, she'd been so conservative that she'd once dropped a friend who had begun wearing low-cut tops and skirts with slits in them. "She looks disgusting like a hooker," LaToya remarked at the time. "I don't want any part of her."

But the longer I thought about the Playboy rumor, the more I feared that it was true. The LaToya I saw in early 1989 was not the LaToya I thought I knew.

I couldn't help but recall her 1988 engagement at Trump Plaza in Atlantic City, when she danced for the first time ever in a sexy, suggestive way. Watching her from the audience, I was surprised and, I admit, a little taken aback.

"Jack told me that I had to change my image if I want to make it in the business," LaToya said when I questioned her about her new show.

"Jack" was Jack Gordon, her smooth-talking manager. Her transformation had begun at the same time that he entered her life in 1987 with an offer for her to host a music video show that he had in the works. At the time LaToya was a confirmed homebody and mama's girl

"Toya, you stay under me too much," I'd say. "You should get out of the house more."

"But I don't like what's out there, Mother," she'd reply. "Besides, you're my best friend."

Gordon's music video show never materialized, but he remained on the scene, showering LaToya with flowers and gifts.

REBBIE: When I was at the house, I'd hear my sister talk about Jack all of the time. Supposedly, he wanted to marry her, and she had refused, but he had obviously succeeded in getting her attention.

Gordon begged my husband, Joe LaToya's manager, to allow him to co-manage her; he claimed that he had ideas for how to revitalize her stalled

recording career. He kept pestering Joe until Joe finally asked LaToya, "Is this what you want?" She said it was, so her father agreed to share management responsibilities with Gordon.

The next thing I knew, Gordon had my homebody of a daughter travelling the world. No sooner would they return from business in Japan than she'd announced, "Oh, I have a photo shoot to do in Austria," and she and Gordon would be on the next flight out of Los Angeles. While a part of me was happy that she was getting out into the world at long last meeting new people, the turnabout in her new way of life was so sudden and dramatic that it left me confused.

It wasn't until later, when I saw Jack Gordon for what he was -- an opportunist -- that I understood his strategy in booking LaToya in far-flung corners of the globe. He was attempting to distance my naive, trusting daughter from her family, literally and figuratively, so that he could become a dominant influence in her life.

Jack Gordon changed overnight in his attitude toward Joe and me. His first act of defiance was in refusing to report to Joe's business manager as Joe had requested. After he and Joe argued over this, Gordon made the outrageous claim to Frank Dileo, my son Michael's manager at the time, that Joe had attempted to strangle him.

Jack, I was in the room with you two, and you know that Joe never touched you!" I exclaimed.

"He laid his hand on my shoulder! He laid his hand on my shoulder!" Gordon replied excitedly.

The public learned just how successful Gordon had been in tearing LaToya away from the family when, in March 1988, People magazine reported that LaToya had moved to New York City with Gordon and cut her professional ties with Joe. "Jack's a salesman," LaToya was quoted as saying. "He throws a good pitch and he delivers. Anyway, he's doing better than my father."

Adding a sensational touch was Jack Gordon's own parting "pitch" to Joe: "I love Joe like poison."

Even though LaToya continued to talk to me almost daily on the telephone, our relationship deteriorated. It seemed like LaToya had been taking lessons in the Big Lie from Gordon.

I had raised my children to tell the truth always, so I was disappointed in her for indignantly denying to me that she had decided to write a competing,

“tell-all” book about the Jackson family, even after I heard that Gordon had taken her around from publisher to publisher in New York.

“No Mother, I’m not doing a book. I don’t know how these rumors get started,” she said again a few weeks later, after I learned that she had signed a book deal for more money than my son Michael had relieved for his autobiography, *Moonwalk*.

LaToya never did admit to me that she was writing a book. I had to read about it in a newspaper in early 1989. “Michael’s book is nice but very light,” she was quoted saying. “There will be a lot of things in my book that weren’t in his.”

REBBIE: The ironic thing is, if anyone else in the family had even hinted at doing a book to compete with Mother’s, LaToya would have been the one running her mouth about how wrong that was.

LaToya denied to me that she had disrobed for a Playboy photographer as emphatically as she had denied that she was writing a book. I’m sad to say that, once again, I learned the truth from the media.

REBBIE: I can truly say that my sister’s book and her Playboy spread have hurt the family very badly at heart. Very badly. Everybody is hurt, including the grandchildren. I was personally so embarrassed that there were moments when I said to myself, I wish I was on another planet. I felt like crying when I went out in public, afraid that someone would recognise me and ask me about LaToya.

In her interviews promoting her nude spread, LaToya defended her actions: “I have to live my life for LaToya and not for my family.” But she made a bad situation worse when she claimed that Michael -- of all people -- had approved of her decision to pose nude.

Michael denied to the family that he’d done any such thing. He had given LaToya his new phone number because he was sensitive to the fact that she was “out there all alone.” But after she misquoted him he refused to take her calls. “I can’t talk to her when she continues to lie like that,” he said.

Shortly after the Playboy issue with her face on the cover hit the newsstands, LaToya appeared on “Donahue.” “My parents laid down certain rules, and one of those rules, of course, was you were not to leave home unless you were married,” she claimed, as a way of rationalizing her rebellion. She didn’t mention the fact that our “rule” was never enforced, and that Michael, Marlon, and Janet had moved out before her as single people.

After the broadcast, I received a call from someone who had witnessed the “Donahue” taping. “Get your daughter away from her manager,” she said. She told me how Jack Gordon had made a nuisance of himself before the show by insisting that Phil Donahue ask LaToya leading questions of a negative nature about the family.

Needless to say, rescuing my daughter from Gordon had been the family’s aim ever since she had moved to New York with him, and even before it was reported in the national press that Gordon had run a brothel and served time in prison for trying to bribe the Nevada State Gaming Commission. But by then Jack Gordon has done a great job of brainwashing LaToya, because she refused to believe anything negative about his past or his motives, and nothing I nor her brothers and sisters could say would persuade her to return home to us.

Mixed in with my rage at Jack Gordon was a feeling of guilt. Maybe I sheltered my children too much, I’ve thought many times since, and not educated them enough about sharks out there waiting to take advantage of them for their own financial gain.

I’ll never forget the scene in LaToya’s dressing room in Atlantic City in 1988 immediately following one of her performances. There LaToya was, hot and sweaty, her hair in need of attention. And there was Gordon barking at her, “Hurry up! Go downstairs!” Vanna White was there, and he was insistent that LaToya pose for a picture with her immediately.

My daughter Janet, who also witnessed Gordon’s outburst, broke into tears.

“How dare you talk to my sister like that!” she exclaimed.

“She’s going down those stairs!” Gordon repeated.

After she left the room, Janet turned to LaToya. “Toya, how can you put up with that kind of treatment?” she asked.

"When you're tired you don't care what happens, "was all LaToya said.

REBBIE: The LaToya situation in 1989 was like a mystery. What’s the next episode? I kept wondering.

The public is probably asking that same question today about the Jackson family.

Even as the media were covering LaToya’s rebellion, they were still feasting on rumors about Michael’s private life, reports of Jackson “sibling jealousy,” and tales about how Joe and I are alienated from most of our kids.

“What a sorry family these Jackson’s have become,” I imagine people are saying today. “They couldn’t handle their rags-to-riches success.” If I depend on the press for all my information on my family, I’d come to the same conclusion.

But I’m able to see our story with a perspective that is lacking in an “Entertainment Tonight” sound bite, or an error-filled article in one of the tabloids.

Here is the Jackson family story that I’ve lived.

1 DREAMING

I am four years old. I am running down the road with my cousins, rolling a big iron hoop with a wire I hold in my right hand. I am running in the midst of cotton fields as far as my eyes can see, and laughing. Feeling free

That’s one of my earliest memories of life in tiny Rutherford, a town in eastern Alabama that doesn’t even exist anymore.

My grandparents and great-grandparents were cotton farmers. Their ancestors were slaves. One of them, Great-great-grandfather Kendall Brown, was renowned for his singing voice. His voice would ring out above all the others during Sunday services in the little wooden church he attended in nearby Russell County. His voice was so strong that, in the summer, when they threw open the wooden windows, it rang throughout the little valley in which the church was nestled. Well, maybe singing talent is in our blood, I thought when my mother related this story to me.

Taking into account my family’s distant past, it seems only fitting that my parents, Prince Scrusse and Martha Upshaw, tied the knot on the Alabama holiday known as Emancipation Day -- May 28, 1929. They were attending one of the celebrations in the park when they decided to slip away and get married.

I was the first child, born May 4, 1930, in the little house they were living in at the time in Barbour County, about ten miles from Rutherford. By the time my sister Hattie, was born, in September of the following year, we were living in my dad’s mother and father, Prince and Julia Scrusse, in their big, wood-frame house in Rutherford.

My father was a muscular man, warm and loving, and very good-looking. He worked for the Seminole Railroad, and in his spare time he helped out my grandfather on his farm. My mother was as pretty as my daddy was handsome, and equally loving. She hated to have her picture taken, so I don’t

have any photos of her when she was young. But I still remember her warm eyes and smile. She had a tiny gap between her top two front teeth, just like me.

We lived in Alabama only until I was four, but I have a few vivid memories of our life there. Being in a poor rural area, we didn't have any of the standard household conveniences. We pumped our water and used kerosene lamps. For entertainment, we had little more than our Victrola; I remember listening to Cab Calloway records on it.

As for Rutherford itself, my main recollection is of people riding in on horseback to pick up their mail at the little post office. Sometimes they'd trade eggs for stamps, or for other items at the general store. Rutherford was one of the little towns that time forgot.

It was Daddy's hope for a better job that led us to board a train for Indiana, which, because of the steel mills, was a popular destination at the time for poor black families from the South. We had a friend in East Chicago, at 4906 Kennedy Avenue, so that became our first address.

For a four-year-old country girl, it was a shock moving to the "big city," and the biggest shock of all for me was living amongst so many white people - Poles, Hungarians, Italians, Irishmen. The nice thing about it was that everybody got along with one another -- the whites with other whites, and whites with blacks. In fact, my only taste of discrimination in East Chicago occurred years later, at Washington High, which held separate swim days and proms for black students. None of the blacks fought these rules at the time. We just figured that was the way it was supposed to be.

Daddy worked in the steel mines for a while, then went to work as a Pullman porter for the Illinois Central. It was less than a year after we moved from the South that he had my mother divorced. My mother took Hattie, and my daddy, who soon remarried, took me.

As much as I loved my father, it was a terrible trauma for me to live under a different roof from my mom and, especially, Hattie. By then my younger sister and I had become inseparable.

Evidently my mother hated the situation as much as I did. When I was nine she kidnapped me. The next thing I knew, she, Hattie, and I were back in Rutherford, living with an uncle.

Daddy tracked us down. He wrote us, sent Hattie and me a big box full of toys and clothes at Christmas, and, a few months later, told my mother, "You

can come back now. I'll let Katy live with you." Soon after that, we returned to East Chicago.

I was happier living with my mother and Hattie, but I still felt so sad at being raised in a broken home that I vowed one day that if I ever got married, and especially if I ever had children, I would always seek to stay with my husband. I wanted my children to be reared by both of their natural parents.

Even after my mother married my stepfather, John Bridges, she worked very hard. She'd be out the door of our apartment at seven in the morning, a half-hour before Hattie and I left for school, some she could catch the bus to Muncie, Hammond, and the other cities in which she worked. Cleaning houses for a living, she wasn't about to clean our apartment when she had two daughters, so that job fell to us. Hattie and I grew up knowing the meaning of hard work.

As a holiday approached, my sister and I would be especially busy. We'd have to give the apartment a general cleaning, moving all the furniture, scrubbing under everything. My least favorite chore was taking the lace curtains down and washing, starching, and stretching them with those old curtain stretches we had. Gosh, I used to hate doing that.

It would all be worth it when the holiday arrived, however, and Mother had presents for us. Even on the Fourth of July, Hattie and I would get a new dress.

Working as hard as both my mother and father did, I doubt that they had much time for dreaming. If they did hold any dreams close to their heart for themselves or their children, they never shared them with me or Hattie.

I, by contrast, was a nonstop dreamer.

My number-one dream was to become an actress. In the forties, you could buy a pad of notebook paper with a photograph of a motive star on it. I always bought more pads than I could use. Hattie and I attended scores of Saturday matinees at the Mars Theatre, as I followed the careers of my favorite actresses -- Deanna Durbin, Kathryn Grayson, Barbara Stanwyck, Peggy Ryan, Jane Withers.

My other dream was to be a singer.

I grew up singing in the local Baptist church. Hattie and I also sang in the school choir through junior high.

But my dream was to sing country-and-western songs. I loved country music because of the fact that many of the songs told a story, and also because I thought, and still believe, that next to black music soulful music there is.

My father introduced me to country music. He loved to tune in to the “Supertime Frolic,” out of Chicago, and “The Grand Ole Opry.” He’d noodle around with his old box guitar, playing the songs he’d learned from the radio, and Hattie and I would sing along with him. Hattie and I would also sing together as we walked to school, or when we were doing the dishes. “Shut up that singing!” my stepmother, Mattie, no country music fan, would exclaim. “You got that music on the radio and then I have to listen to your mouths!”

Of course, I never did make history by becoming the first black country music star. There was something holding me back polio.

When I contracted it, at the age of one and a half, it was called infantile paralysis. My parents, living in the rural South, didn’t know what that was. So when I woke up one morning and couldn’t use my left leg, they thought it was because of the way my father grabbed my leg a couple of days earlier to prevent me from falling off the edge of their bed.

The doctor they took me to in Montgomery didn’t know what was wrong, either; the only thing he did for me was fit my crooked leg with a wooden brace. It was not until we moved to Indiana that my parents received the correct diagnosis. My leg was operated on twice at the Memorial Hospital for Children in South Bend, when I was seven and sixteen. For follow-up treatment after each operation, my father would carry me in his arms to the South Shore Station, and then, after we arrived in South Bend, the last six blocks to the hospital. That was love.

I had to wear a brace on my leg for seven years. I also had to wear an elevated shoe. It embarrassed me so to get up in front of the class to give oral reports because I feared that my classmates would notice that one of my legs was shorter than the other and make fun of me. You know how children can be so cruel.

In fact, the kids did tease me about my elevated shoe. “Your wearing your mothers shoes!” They’d say and laugh, as I’d burst into tears.

“You leave my sister alone!” Hattie would scream if she was around. She was my protector, always ready to go to battle for me. “I’m okay, Hattie,” I’d tell her. “Let them go.” But, inside, the teasing was killing me.

Feeling so different made my shy and withdrawn, nothing at all like my outgoing sister, who was the proverbial life of the party. To this day, I shy

away from crowds and parties. When I go out, I almost always wear pant suits because I'm still embarrassed by the fact that my left leg is shorter than my right. I'm also self-conscious of my limp to the point where a few years ago I asked a television crew that was filming at the house not to shoot me walking. I remember LaToya's looking at me that day and saying, "Mother, I never noticed that you limp." My limp was no big deal to my family, and it shouldn't have been to me. But it was and still is.

Luckily, my shyness as a child didn't extend to boys. Together with Hattie and a few girl friends, we founded a club in high school called the Blue Flames, after the Woody Herman song of that title. Once every month or two we'd hold a "blue-light party" in somebody's home and invite our friends over to dance to R&B records by the likes of Little Milton and Memphis Slim. With the twenty-five-cent admission we charged we were able to save enough money to buy ourselves a nice gift at Christmas.

But making spending money was secondary to meeting boys. I had already set my sights on the kind of man I wanted to marry: I wanted him to be a saxophone player. I thought saxophone players were sexy.

It was at a house social put on by someone else that I first laid my eyes on Joe Jackson.

Even though he was the new boy in town, I'd already gotten the lowdown on him from friends. He'd moved in with his mother, after having lived in Oakland, California, with his father, a schoolteacher. He was already out of school and looking for a job in one of the steel mills. And, I'd heard, he was very handsome.

As I watched Joe mingle outside the building where the dance was being held, I had to agree. He was with a bunch of kids, but to me he stood head and shoulders above the others. He was so handsome with his gray eyes and copper-colored skin, in fact, that he literally took my breath away. I had no idea whether he played the saxophone, and I didn't care.

I didn't dance with him that night, but when I saw him at another blue-light party, he noticed me and we danced a lot. I couldn't do fast dancing because of my leg, so we danced to the slower songs. I don't think he knew that I had a crush on him, and of course I didn't tell him. Nowadays, it seems, girls often make the first move -- I can't believe how aggressive many young girls are today. But back then, no matter how much a girl liked a boy, she wouldn't let him know. It wasn't considered ladylike.

Soon afterward, Joe married another girl, much to my disappointment. But their marriage lasted less than a year. "Guess who likes you?" Hattie said to

me one day after I'd heard that he'd been divorced. "That boy Joe Jackson. He told me to tell you." But I didn't allow myself to get enthused.

That Christmas Joe showed up at my door. I was the one who answered the knock and my mouth flew open upon seeing him standing there. He handed me a present -- a rhinestone necklace and matching bracelet and earrings -- and we made a little small talk, and he left. I knew then that he truly did like me.

"He's a very nice boy," my mother offered.

Two or three days later Joe called and asked me out.

"I'll think about it," I replied; that's what girls were programmed to say.

He phoned again the next day and asked, "Have you come to a decision?"

I told him that I had, and that it would be okay.

He arrived at my door dressed in a suit. He had just bought a Buick and we drove in it to the Roosevelt Theatre in Gary, where we saw a movie.

Before long we were going steady. Not only did I think Joe was handsome, I liked his manner. He was on the quiet side, kind of cool--acting.

There was a lot to do on dates. We could go to the movies or dance, walk to the park at night, or ride around. Gradually, Joe opened up about himself.

His parents, Samuel and Chrystal Jackson, had met in a one-room schoolhouse in Arkansas -- Sam was the teacher, and Chrystal, then fifteen, was one of the students. Joe was their first child, born on July 26, 1929, in the town of Fountain Hill. Two brothers and two sisters followed. Sadly, one of his sisters, Verna, died when she was seven. Like me, she had polio.

Sam and Chrystal were both strong-willed and strict. Growing up, Joe was made to tow the line. His parents were not ones to spare the rod.

As a boy, Joe was a loner. More than once the school bell rang to announce the start of school, but, instead of entering the schoolhouse, Joe would take off in the opposite direction, spending the day by himself.

When he was in his early teens, his parents divorced. Sam later moved to Oakland, taking Joe with him. Meanwhile, Chrystal moved to East Chicago with Joe's brothers and sister. Several years later, Joe decided to join them, leaving behind his father, who was by then on his third marriage. (Years later, Sam and Chrystal remarried. Today they live in Arizona.)

While I found Joe's past of interest, I was fascinated to hear talk about his future. I especially liked the fact that he was a dreamer, too.

Like me, he envisioned a new life one day in California. "Kate, one day I'm going to take you there," he'd say. He was boxing in the Golden Gloves at the time, and he may have been thinking that his fists would be in his ticket out of the steel mill. That was one dream I didn't encourage. I didn't think boxing was any way for someone whom I cared about to earn a living.

For my birthday, Joe had his mother bake me a bundt cake. In the middle he placed a present, a ring containing an emerald, my birthstone. Six months later, November 5, 1949, we were married by a justice of the peace in Crown Point. Joe was twenty; I was nineteen.

Instead of living in a fancy ranch house in Hollywood with palm trees in our front yard, we settled for a two-bedroomed wood-frame house in a all black neighborhood of Gary. Ironically, the house was located on the corner of a street called Jackson.

Its price was eighty-five hundred dollars. To make the five-hundred-dollar down payment, we borrowed two hundred dollars from my father.

I was delighted to be a homeowner. I didn't mind that the only furniture we had were a sofa, table, stove, and refrigerator. The sofa had a fold-out bed, and we slept on it for two months. In March my mother gave us a bedroom suite.

With me already expecting and with a monthly mortgage payment of sixty dollars to contend with, we decided to have our child at home to save money. My mother, Joe's aunt, and the doctor were there. So was Joe, but he wouldn't come into the room. Later he told me that he was outside peeking through the window.

I stayed in labor from Saturday night until three A.M. Monday, May 29, when I finally gave birth to my daughter Maureen.

I'll never forget my first look at her: I was horrified.

"I've ruined my child!" I exclaimed. Her head was shaped funny, like a cone; she looked like the old cartoon character Denny Denwit. But the doctor assured me that she was fine, and that her head would become more rounded in time.

Joe had wanted a boy. "Well, maybe the next one will be a boy," he said. But I could tell that he was proud of his girl as he held her for the first time.

As for me, giving birth to Maureen -- or Rebbie, as we would soon start calling her -- changed my life instantly. All of a sudden I felt “grown up.” And, try as I may to describe the love I instantly felt for her, I can’t, because it is indescribable.

I gave Joe the boy he wanted a year later. At the time I was visiting with my mother in East Chicago, and I announced to her that I would go to St. Catherine’s Hospital the next day -- May 4, my twenty-first birthday -- and have my baby. That’s what I did.

Joe was ecstatic. He insisted on naming his son himself. When I heard his choice, Sigmund I thought, My child is going to hate wearing that name, but if it makes Joe happy Luckily, Joe’s father, Samuel Jackson, came from California four days later and he immediately began calling our son “Jackson boy.” Before long we had shortened that nickname to Jackie Boy and then, finally, to Jackie. (As it turned out, Jackie liked his given name well enough to name his son Sigmund.)

With two children to support now, Joe became more motivated than ever. While he continued with his job as a crane operator at Inland Steel in East Chicago, he began moonlighting with his brother Luther and three other men in a singing group they’d founded, called the Falcons.

I didn’t learn that Joe loved to sing, too, until after we’d gotten married. My happiest memory of our first Christmas was singing Christmas carols together on snowy evenings as we lay across in bed.

Joe however, was not a country music buff like me. His music was R&B. I was surprised to see that he played the electrical guitar, too. I had once dreamed of marrying a musician, and without realizing it I had.

Joe didn’t have to tell me what his goals were for the Falcons. It was clear just from hearing him and the others talk in our living room that he wanted the same things I’d dreamed of myself as a would-be entertainer: fame and fortune.

The Falcons rehearsed regularly in our house, honing their a cappella versions of the current R&B hits in four-part harmony. They also wrote their own songs. One tune Joe played was titled “Tutti Frutti.” Soon after he wrote it, Little Richard released a different song with the same title and had a hit.

The group played a number of dates around Gary, backed by a hired band. One of them was at the Pavillion in Gleason Park. I felt proud watching them perform that night as people danced in the open air, obviously enjoying the music.

But while the Falcons created a few ripples on the local music scene, their success was short-lived. The group all but disbanded when one of the members, Pookie Hudson, quit to form Spaniels. That group went on to record "Good Night, Sweetheart, Good Night," a song that Pookie co-wrote with the artists and repertoire man at their record label, VeeJay Records. The Spaniels' version wasn't a hit, but the one recorded by the McGuire Sisters made a Top Ten.

After the Falcons broke up, Joe continued to take his guitar out of the hallway closet and play for fun. But he didn't attempt to form another group. The family was growing and he really didn't have the time or even the energy now to pursue his dream.

Little did we know that in a few years our children would reawaken the dreams in each of us.

2 A FAMILY GROWS ON JACKSON STREET

Originally, Joe announced that he wanted one child, which I couldn't understand. He was one of five children, and his father was one of twenty. "Well, I want three," I replied. Growing up, I missed not having a brother, and I figured that if we had three kids that chances were good that I'd have at least one son. But, by the time we had our third child -- Toriano, or Tito, born October 15, 1953, at Mercy Hospital in Gary -- Joe and I enjoyed being parents so much that we wanted an even larger family.

Also, I found pregnancy to be very easy. I never felt better than when I was pregnant I never had morning sickness. I never knew that I was pregnant until I missed my period. Sometimes, if I wasn't watching the calendar, I'd be into my pregnancy a month or longer without feeling anything.

Jermaine, our fourth child, was born on December 11, 1954.

LaToya came next. She was born on May 29, 1956, six years to the day after Rebbie entered the world. At seven pounds, twelve ounces, she was my biggest baby.

Less than a year later I was back in the hospital, this time giving birth to twins, Marlon and Brandon, on March 12, 1957.

They were two months premature. As I was hauling a heavy pail of oil into the house for our space heater, my water broke. Joe wasn't at home at the time, so one of his cousins rushed me to hospital. Forty-five minutes after I was admitted, Marlon was born. He weighed four pounds, five ounces.

The doctor was leaving the room when the nurse cried out, "Wait a minute, there's another baby in there!" The doctor placed the stethoscope on my stomach and listened for a moment. "I'll be darned, there sure is!" He exclaimed. This was the same doctor who had examined me during my pregnancy; he had not detected the fact that I was carrying twins!

"Well, she's too tired to deliver," the doctor announced. He began to pull Brandon out with a pair of forceps. I was sedated, but I recall thinking, He's going to do something to my child. He's going to hurt him.

After Brandon was born, I recall hearing him cry very faintly. Eight hours later he died.

Joe's mother broke the news about Brandon to my children, and they felt badly. When Chrystal mentioned that I had been crying, they felt even worse. "Well, we do have one baby," Rebbie said between sobs, So Mother shouldn't be crying."

Since I had to remain in hospital for five days, I couldn't attend the funeral. Chrystal hired a professional photographer to take pictures of Brandon, but he lost the film. I never did get to see my son.

Suffering through the loss of my child and Marlon's premature birth, it was a joy to bring Marlon home finally from the hospital four weeks after his birth.

My experience with Marlon and Brandon didn't dissuade me from getting pregnant again. The following year August 29, I gave birth to another boy.

I remember that day well because my water broke while my neighbor Mildred White and I were driving over to see the new grammar school under construction, Garnett Elementary.

"Oh, my God, Mildred, I can't sit in your car like this!" I exclaimed.

"Girl, don't worry about it," Mildred said, turning the car around.

At my request Mildred drove me home. I called my mother and she and my stepfather drove me to Mercy Hospital.

Shortly after I got there, I began having contractions. Later that night, my son was born.

"I want to name him," my mother said. I hated her first suggestion: Ronald.

“How about Roy, then?”

“Oh, my gosh, Mama, no.”

She thought for a little while. “I’ve got it -- Michael.”

“That’s it,” I said.

By then I was used to seeing my babies born with funny looking heads, so I wasn’t alarmed by Michael’s. The two other things I remember about him as I held him in my arms for the first time were his big brown eyes and his long hands, which reminded me of my father-in-law’s.

“I bet I was an accident!” Michael has teased. He wasn’t, but after he was born, I did decide to take a break from childbearing --after eight births in eight years I felt I deserved one -- and go to work part-time as a sales clerk at Sears. Randy, our next child, didn’t arrive for another three years, on October 31, 1961. Almost five more years elapsed before I gave birth to Janet, on August 16, 1966.

One reason why Joe and I went ahead and had Randy and Janet is the enjoyment the older children got out of having other babies to fuss over.

“We have so many kids -- why do we love having another?” I’d ask my older children. Most kids, I thought, didn’t appreciate the extra competition for their parents’ attention. “We just love babies,” they’d reply.

They really demonstrated that fact when Janet was born.

“I have a baby sister! I have a baby sister!” Michael shouted as he went running from door to door on Jackson street.

Michael and Janet would be fated to become best friends; they remain extremely close today. But in the early months of Janet’s life, all of their brothers and sisters doted on her. Rebbie, for one, took her out so often that her classmates began insisting that Janet was actually her baby.

One of my joys in being a parent was watching my children develop their own personalities.

Responsible Rebbie was my number-one support around the house; “a mother’s image,” in the words of her brother Jackie.

By the age of six she was changing diapers and doing some of the feedings. By the age of twelve she was ironing, washing, housecleaning, and cooking.

“It was a role I just feel into, being the oldest,” she said.

Jackie was the tease.

REBBIE: He loved to aggravate his younger brothers. When my mom was out and I was running the household, he'd always be popping them, bumping them on their heads. Then he'd run into the bathroom and lock the door before I could get my hands on him. Cookie-making was a real trial when he was around. If I turned my back for a minute in the kitchen, Jackie would be into the batter, eating away.

Ironically, outside the house, Jackie was my shy one. I remember him one time sneaking to a party through the alley behind our house because I made him wear a suit and he was so afraid that his neighbor friends would see him.

Jermaine was the mama's baby. Even at the age of five, he was my shadow.

This was understandable. When he was four, he contracted nephritis, a serious kidney disease. He had to be hospitalized for three weeks.

The day we admitted him to the hospital he screamed and screamed as Joe and I left his room. Suddenly the screaming stopped. When we got to the elevator we were amazed to see him standing there! He had escaped from his crib, run down the hall, and somehow gotten in front of us. It broke my heart to have to leave him.

Jermaine was also the tattletale.

JACKIE: If we'd done something we didn't want Dad to know about, we'd give Jermaine a cookie and make him promise not to tell. And he'd say, "I promise." But as soon as my father walked in the door, he'd go, "Dad ,! and spill the beans, anyway. Sometimes he'd even make up things!

REBBIE: If Jermaine happened to be the one at fault, he'd put it on everybody else. That's when you know he was the culprit. Another thing I noticed about him was that, while he was a stutterer, he never stuttered when he was trying to explain his way out of spanking.

Tito was a tinkerer.

When he'd get a toy, he had to take it apart and then try to put it back together. By the time he was ten he was fixing the iron, toaster, and radio. He saved us a lot in repair bills.

He and Jermaine, who were best friends, loved to scrounge around for bicycle parts in the local junkyards and build their own bicycles and go-carts.

JERMAINE: Our bicycles looked like mountain bikes do today; they didn't have fenders. We took pride in the fact that they lasted longer than the fancy bikes you'd but in the stores.

Tito even loved my Maytag wringer washer. If he was around when I was doing the wash, he'd ask if he could take over for me. He especially enjoyed putting the clothes through the wringer.

LaToya was my quiet child.

She was the kind of little girl a grandmother would love. In fact, she was my mother's heart; during the summer she'd spent a lot of time over at my mother's house. When you'd clean her up, LaToya would sit on the couch like a little lady. If someone sneezed at dinner, she'd cover her plate. I did that, too, when I was young.

Janet, by contrast, was a tomboy. By the age of two she had the nickname Squirrel because she loved to climb on the furniture and on the boy's bunkbeds.

Like a lot of little kids, she also loved to get in bed with Joe and me at night, which Joe didn't like. So, being a clever little girl, she would wait until her father was in a deep sleep before quietly crawling into the room and climbing into bed on my side.

JANET: While my sisters were getting their hair and nails done, I grew up climbing trees with my brothers, playing baseball, and swimming.

I had a hard time getting Janet to wear dresses to kindergarten; she always wanted to wear jeans. To this day, she dresses like a tomboy. She'll show up at the house in army boots, blue jeans with patches on them, an oversized T-shirt, and her hair scuffed inside a cap.

"Janet," I'll say, "wear some earrings or put on some lipstick. People are going to mistake you for a guy."

Randy was my argumentative one. Rebbie nicknamed him Little Professor because he loved to debate. If one of his friends said the ball was red, Randy would say it was green just to be difficult.

Marlon was probably the most determined and competitive of my kids. He and Michael played the typical childhood games: checkers, cards, jacks.

Almost always Michael would win. But Marlon wouldn't be deterred; he'd keep playing a particular game with Michael until he beat him.

That leaves Michael, an amazing child.

It dawned on me that Michael was no run-of-the-mill kid one day in 1960. I was standing in front of my washing machine, checking the load, when I happened to turn around and see my one-and-a-half-year-old son practically under my dress tail. He was holding a bottle and dancing ... dancing to the rhythmic squeak of my washing machine.

In addition to his precociousness as a dancer, Michael was spunky and mischievous beyond his years.

REBBIE: Michael wasn't even two yet when one day he took aim with his baby bottle as my dad was walking across the living room, heaved it, and hit him on the head. I don't think my dad was hurt so much as shocked that his infant son had beaned him.

By the age of three, Michael's mischievousness had taken a defiant turn. After Joe spanked him one day for misbehaving, Michael hurled a shoe at him. Joe saw it coming, and ducked; otherwise, Michael would have scored another direct hit.

REBBIE: When my mom asked him to do something -- say chore -- that he didn't want to do, he'd mutter something. "What did you say?" Mom would ask, raising an eyebrow. But Michael wouldn't reply. "Come here, boy!" she'd demand.

Then the fun would begin. Michael would tear off for the bedroom, with Mom in pursuit. He'd slide under the bed and grab onto the springs. My mom would try to pull him out, but she couldn't. Neither could my brothers. She'd have to wait him out.

A half hour or longer would pass. Finally, Michael would get out from under the bed, dust himself off, and saunter back into the living room. Sometimes my mom would have forgotten about his misbehaviour; other times she would have the brothers pounce on him so that she could finally chastise him.

JACKIE: Michael was just as good at evading my dad. One second my Dad would have Michael in his arms, preparing to spank him; the next second Michael would be five feet away and my father would hit nothing but air. Michael was almost impossible to hold down. He was like a worm, squirming all the time. He was too much.

Sometimes, Joe would get so angry at Michael when he succeeded in evading us. But other times we couldn't help but laughing. "What's with this kid?" we'd say.

I asked that question regarding some of Michael's other personality traits as he was growing up. There was the matter, for example, of his generosity. Occasionally it went too far.

One day when Michael was in the second grade I couldn't locate a piece of my jewelry. "What happened to my bracelet?" I finally asked the kids.

Michael looked up and replied nonchalantly, "Oh, I gave it to my teacher."

I didn't punish him because I thought it was nice for him to want to give. But I didn't instruct him: "Don't do it again." But Michael didn't listen, and more of my jewelry disappeared.

He'd also nose around my mother's jewelry and keepsakes. You know how particular grandmothers are. They have their stuff arranged just so, and they don't want the grandkids in it. She and Michael would have the biggest fights when she'd catch him.

I'd also get reports from his brothers concerning his nosiness.

"Mother, when we were at so-and-so's house, Michael just had to know what was in their drawer," one of them would say. "When they left the room he opened the drawer and look inside."

MARLON: He hasn't changed. We were backstage somewhere during the Victory tour when Michael walked into a man's office and started nosing around. "Michael, get out of those drawers!" we told him.

He's well known for snooping in his brothers' stuff, too. One day he was over at Randy's. Randy had to go somewhere, and after he left, Michael started opening some of his drawers. In one of them he found a note: "Michael, don't go in here with your nosy self!" Michael laughed and laughed.

I don't want to give the impression that the young Michael was a nonstop mischief. He also had his endearing side. When Rebbie graduated from high school, he bought her a bottle of nail polish at the corner store. He'd also buy little presents for his neighborhood friends.

His first goal in life must have been to own a candy store because he loved to play storekeeper. After Joe began giving him and his brothers a

weekly allowance, he would spend every cent of it on candy and gum. He'd come home with an armful of it, take a board and two bricks and place them in the doorway to the boys' bedroom, place a cloth over the board, lay the candy on top of it, and sell it to his brothers and sisters and friends for the same price he'd paid for it.

Michael was also a serious candy-eater and gum-chewer. Before he opened his "store," he'd save his pennies so that he could purchase bubble gum at the concession stand at the Little League ball park behind our house. One night, however, he couldn't find his penny for gum and he was so upset he started crying. "Mother, do you know what happened to my penny?" he asked. I knew the answer when I saw Marlon happily chewing away on a wad of bubble gum nearby.

Michael and Marlon were "running buddies."

MARLON: Because we were about the same height, people thought we were twins. Besides playing games together, we'd go roller-skating up and down the driveway, play basketball, and ride our mini-bikes.

JACKIE: They also used to get up in the middle of the night, grab a couple of broomsticks, and play Army Man. They'd poke the broomstick out the window, and "shoot" at the cars driving by.

Michael also liked to race his brothers and neighbor friends down the block, run in the sprinklers during the summer, and play stickball. All this, of course was just normal kids' stuff.

But Michael's singing and dancing were never kids' stuff.

The first time I heard him sing was in 1963. Jackie, Tito, and Jermaine were singing a Motown song in their bedroom for the fun of it when all of a sudden I heard a fourth voice join in. It was Michael -- at the age of four -- picking out his own part, and singing the part as clear as a bell.

"You know what, Michael has a nice voice, good enough to be a lead singer," I told Joe that night.

Two years later, Michael demonstrated the fact in public for the first time, singing "Climb Ev'ry Mountain" a cappella at a Garnett Elementary School assembly. Joe's father and I were in the audience, and it was something to see hard-nosed Samuel Jackson burst into tears the second that Michael began to sing in his sweet pure voice. I was matching him, tear for tear. Michael was so poised; not nervous a bit. A natural even then.

Michael's dancing was no less advanced. By then he had developed the footwork of a miniature James Brown. He would watch "Soul Brother Number One" do one of his trademark spins or twists on television and then perfectly execute that move himself in out living room.

By the time the Jackson Five began performing in Gary talent contests in 1965, Michael was choreographing their numbers. During rehearsals, one of the brothers would say, "We don't have a move for this part of 'My Girl.'" Michael would pipe up, "Okay, let's do this" Then he'd demonstrate a move that was so fresh and stylish that the older brothers, who still towered over him, would look at one another and shake their heads in disbelief.

Michael, you're just a baby, I remember thinking, and you're the one giving the instructions!

Michael was also the one doing all the dreaming.

"Someday I'm going to live in a castle," he announced one day to his second-grade teacher.

3 STIKING TO THE PATH

There was no confusing our house at 2300 Jackson Street with a castle.

With it's two small bedrooms, living room, kitchen, and bathroom, it wasn't much bigger than a garage.

Yet I don't think any of the children really felt deprived growing up in such a cramped space.

JERMAINE: To me, small is beautiful. Sharing a small house is one of the reasons why the Jacksons are a close family today.

The simple mathematics of our living situation -- eleven human beings, a two-bedroomed house -- made us a curiosity in the neighborhood. Joe's co-workers at Inland Steel were fascinated by the size of our family, too.

"Joe, you've got so many kids you probably have to sleep in shifts," they'd tease.

So how did we fit nine kids and two adults in a tiny home? It sounds like a riddle, doesn't it?

The answer: with a little ingenuity.

The boys got one of the bedrooms. We bought a triple bunk bed for them. Tito and Jermaine slept in the top bunk, Marlon and Michael in the middle one, and Jackie in the bottom. So they'd have a little bit of privacy, Tito and Jermaine and Marlon and Michael would lie on different ends. When Randy was old enough, he slept on the second couch in the living room.

JERMAINE: Sharing a room with my brothers was the greatest. We'd talk at least an hour together before going to sleep. We would all be in our bunks, and we wouldn't even have to look at one another to hold a serious conversation.

Joe and I got the other bedroom. It was just big enough for a bed, dresser, and chest of drawers. When we had a baby, we somehow managed to squeeze in a bassinet, too.

The girls slept on a fold-out couch in the living room. Rebbie, in fact, never had her own room.

REBBIE: A girl I knew across the street shared a bedroom with her sister. I used to think, Wow! That must be nice having a bedroom that's half your own. But I never regretted not having my own room. My attitude was, Well, I have something my friend doesn't have: the love of my mother.

On occasion, Rebbie did get to sleep in my bedroom. When Joe worked the swing shift -- and he often did to earn the extra dollar an hour -- she and LaToya would pile in the bed with me. "I'm sleeping with Mother" I'm sleeping with Mother!" they'd exclaim. Sometimes one or two of the boys would, too, even though I had only a double bed.

Having only the one bathroom meant the imposition of "The Fifteen-Minute Rule" in the morning. If someone -- usually Jackie -- was in the bathroom longer than that, he'd hear about it from his brothers.

One bathroom also meant shared baths. When Jackie, Jermaine, and Tito were young, I'd bathe them together.

Michael and Marlon were also bath mates. When they were three or four, respectively, they starred in my favorite bathtub story. One summer night I couldn't locate them as I was filling the tub. Thinking that they were outside playing, I went and called for them. But they weren't outside, either. Concerned, I returned to the house to look around again. They were still nowhere to be found.

Finally, I poked my head into the bathroom. To my relief, that's where I found them. They'd entered the bathroom when I was outside looking for them, gotten into the tub -- and fallen dead asleep.

Our kitchen would have been cramped even if we didn't have our chrome dining room table and chairs in there. Eventually I had the wall separating the kitchen from the utility room knocked out to give me more room to maneuver.

Our living room was just large enough for our two couches, two chairs, TV, and stereo.

As for our garage we didn't have one. That meant in wintertime Joe had to scrape ice off the windshield of his Buick every morning.

There was another riddle to our life at 2300 Jackson Street, and it went like this: How does a big family make do on a small income? And I mean small. I remember looking at Joe's earliest weekly paychecks from Inland Steel and seeing that it was in the amount of fifty-six dollars. The answer, of course, was that Joe and I cut every corner we could.

For our first five years in Gary we didn't even have a telephone. A neighbor, Margaret Penson, was kind enough to let me make and receive calls on her phone.

Going out to dinner and the movies was out of the question. We did finally manage to buy a television on the weekly installment plan in 1953, and the TV became our main form of family entertainment in the evening.

Most of our money went toward the necessities: clothes and food.

I made some of our clothes myself: mainly shirts for Joe, and sister-and-brother outfits for Rebbie and Jackie when they were little. When I shopped it was usually at the Salvation Army.

I'd walk over there many a morning in the spring and summer through the latest donations. Sometimes Jackie, Tito, and Jermaine would come with me. I enjoyed their company, but I liked having their fast legs even more; the first people through the door got the best selection. With my limp, the other ladies would fly by me, so I depended on the boys to get to the "new" shirts and pants first.

JERMAINE: Of course, sometimes we'd run right past the clothes section and go upstairs, where all the sports equipment was kept.

Hand-me-downs were a fact of life. I recall one particularly well-worn coat, a cute little Chesterfield with a brown-velvet collar, and a cap with a

snap under the chin. Originally it belonged to one of the sons of my sister-in-law's sister-in-law. After he outgrew it, Jermaine got to wear it. When Jermaine outgrew it, I gave it to my sister-in-law so one of her sons could wear it. When he outgrew it, I got it back for Marlon.

As for food, we grew what we could ourselves. Our garden was located on a lot that my stepfather owned in Gary. Joe did the planting and I did the picking.

We also bought directly from farmers in nearby Crown Point. Joe, our oldest children, and I would pick what we wanted: pears, corn, string beans, and many other vegetables. It was fun. What wasn't fun was all the shucking and canning that the kids and I would have to do. Just the sight of a canning jar or freezer bag would make Rebbie sick to her stomach.

Of course, we also shopped at the grocery store. I bought the staples -- flour, cornmeal, yeast, sugar, eggs, rice, and beans -- and made our meals from scratch. After we bought a freezer, Joe would also try to get a good buy on a side of beef for the winter.

We ate simply. One of the kids' favorite foods for lunch were rolls dropped into deep fat and fried. The children would shake the rolls in a bag with sugar, then eat them with tomato soup. Another lunch staple was egg sandwiches. A dozen eggs yielded enough egg salad for everyone.

For dinner, mackerel croquettes with rice was popular. I couldn't afford salmon.

For desert, we'd splurge on homemade peach cobbler, sweet-potato pie, and the kids' favorite: fried apple pie.

Usually we had enough food on hand. But there were some close calls.

REBBIE: As many a payday rolled around, food was a scarce commodity in our house. More than a few times we would come home for lunch on dad's payday, only to find the cupboard bare. Sometimes, we'd spend most of our lunch hour waiting for dad to return after chasing his check. Somehow, he always made it home before we had to return to school on empty stomachs. He'd hand us some cash, and we'd run down to the corner store to buy that wonderful loaf of fresh Wonder Bread, and a package of lunch meat. And we would get to eat.

Sometimes, however, there wasn't a payday to bail us out. From time to time Joe was laid off.

We could have gone on welfare, but I would rather have scrubbed floors and Joe would rather have picked potatoes -- which is exactly what he did when he was out of work. We'd eat potatoes every which way: baked, stewed, fried, and boiled.

During crunch times we weren't above sticking our hand between the cushions of our couch and feeling for change that someone might have dropped. Once, when there was no food in the house, we found a quarter, enough to buy a loaf of bread.

Groping for lost change is one of my more poignant Gary memories. I have several others, each tied to the fierce Gary winter.

Our house was poorly insulated. Our only protection from the cold was a little space heater and, later, a furnace. And our oven. On particularly cold nights, you could find the kids and me in the kitchen, with the doors closed, sitting in front of the oven. It was the warmest spot in the house.

Jermaine hated to venture into the freezing cold so much that he'd occasionally pull a ruse to stay home from school -- a ruse I didn't find out about until just recently.

JERMAINE: After walking out the front door, I would simply go to the back of the house, climb in the window that I'd just opened in our bedroom, and spend the day sleeping, reading, and eating candy in our closet. Sometimes, Tito would join me. It beat freezing to death walking to school.

The children weren't anymore thrilled about Joe and me leaving the house in winter.

When Joe worked the early shift at Inland Steel, they'd always wake up at four A.M. to the sorry sound of Joe's Buick heating up outside.

After I took my job at Sears in the late fifties, Jackie would stand glumly at the window as I left in the morning.

JACKIE: Tears would come to my eyes as I watched my mother walk down the street, braving the bitter cold and the snow. I'd follow her with my eyes as long as I could, hoping that she wouldn't slip and fall.

Not all of my winter memories are poignant ones, however. After a snowfall, Jermaine and Tito would take their shovels door to door, offering to clear off walks and driveways. They'd contribute their earnings to the family pot, and the money would buy us dinner for several days. Because I couldn't hang out the wash in winter, the older boys would transport it to the laundromat on their sled and dry it there.

My children's help wasn't limited to the winter. Each of them did his or her part around the house year-round to help the Jackson family get to the next day, the next week.

While the Jacksons crammed a lot of love into our too-small house, Joe and I lived in fear of the dangers that lurked outside our door.

Shortly after we moved to Gary, we heard that a boy had been stabbed to death in a bathroom at Roosevelt High School, which was located just around the corner from us. From then on, we were haunted by the tales of Gary children going bad: fighting, taking drugs, getting girls pregnant.

We constantly worried about raising our children in such an environment. If we didn't feel right about who we saw hanging around in the park behind our house, we wouldn't permit our children to play outside. When we did let them out, one of us would keep an eye on them from the house, always alert for signs of danger.

As important as it was for us to keep our kids physically separated from bad influences, we knew that the only way to bring them up right. I found special inspiration in teaching from Proverbs: Raise your child the way you want them to go, and when he grows up he won't depart from that path.

To me, bringing my kids up right meant, first and foremost, letting them know that they were loved. I suspected that Gary's teen-aged toughs were striking out in anger, in part because they didn't get the love they needed when they were growing up.

Even though it was hard for us to make ends meet on Joe's paycheck alone, I don't regret not going to work myself until after Michael was born, and then working only part-time. I don't believe that there is any substitute for a mother's full-time care during a child's first years. I made a point of spending time with my kids every day, showing them in words and hugs how much they meant to me.

I also believe it's important that parents allow their children to live at home as long as they wish to. "I'll be glad when my kid's eighteen -- I'm throwing him out," I've heard parents say. My attitude is: Why do you want him to leave? Let him stay. He doesn't have to be a baby -- he can still be independent. One of the reasons the world is the way it is today, I feel, is because parents want their children to become independent too early in life. The children don't know how to handle their freedom, and they get into drugs, robbing, stealing, and killing. As for me, I would have been content if my kids would have stayed with me forever. I'm just a mother who overly loves her children.

But a mother's care, I knew, was not enough to ensure that my children would stick to "the path" as they grew up. So Joe and I also worked to instill in our kids a love of God, as well as a respect for authority -- ours.

With religion I took the lead.

I've always felt close to God. Even as a young child I said my prayers every morning, always thanking Him for giving me a new day. It wasn't until 1960, however, that I found a religion that I felt I could devote my life to, a religion that has filled my life with an underlying sense of peace to this day.

It all started with a knock on my door. The visitor was a field worker with the Jehovah's Witnesses.

In a way I had been waiting for that knock for fourteen years, ever since as a twelve-year-old I was invited by my next-door neighbors to sit in on a Bible lesson taught by a Witness. I learned more about God in that one lesson than I had in all my Bible studies to that point. I was especially interested in what the teacher had to say about death, taking us to the Bible to back up the Witnesses' claim that when man dies he knows and feels nothing.

Well, you know how excited children get. I went home that day, exclaiming, "Mother, there's no such thing as hell, burning for ever and ever!"

But my mother didn't want to hear it. "That's not true," she said, "and I don't want you to study there."

After that I began searching. I had already had a bad experience in the Baptist church that my mother and I attended: The congregation learned that our minister was having a relationship with a woman who lived across the street from us. Half of the congregation stayed with the minister; the other half, including my mother and me, started a new Baptist church.

After Joe and I got married I began attending a Lutheran church with my children. But I learned that the pastor there was guilty of the same transgression as my former Baptist pastor. "I don't want to follow some leader who's doing wrong himself," I said to myself in disgust. "I have to find a religion that takes God's Word more seriously."

So when I opened my front door and saw the Witness on my porch, I was respectful. I invited her in.

That first day, she, Joe, and I talked for an hour. What especially impressed me was the fact that, like the teacher had done fourteen years earlier, she took us to the Scriptures to back up each statement she made. Among the subjects we discussed were the Witnesses' belief in the approaching Armageddon, and

the need for believers to be teachers like Jesus, taking the Word from door to door. At the end of the meeting, Joe and I agreed to begin Bible studies in our home.

Ironically, my teacher originally thought that Joe would be converted before me. Joe was enthusiastic and we would go out together in "field service," the term Witnesses use for taking the Word from door to door. But one day he stopped his studies. "I'm not really ready," he explained. I accepted that. Becoming a Witness is an obligation, and it wasn't right for Joe to get baptized if he wasn't willing or able to commit himself fully.

I, however, pursued my studies with diligence. In 1963, three years after the first visit from the field worker, I was finally baptized. My baptism took place in the swimming pool at Roosevelt High, which the Witness had had rented out for the Assembly.

The good thing about Joe's getting involved to the degree that he did is that he understood what the Jehovah's Witnesses are all about. So he not only supported my baptism, but also made a decision to expose Witnesses' teaching to our children. I did that by conducting the Bible studies in our living room, as well as by encouraging the children to accompany me to meetings at Kingdom Hall. But I was careful not to force the religion on them. When they were older I wanted them to come in because they wanted to be Witnesses.

However, regarding the Witnesses' belief the Christmas, Easter, Thanksgiving, and Halloween are pagan holidays, I felt that I had to go with the teachings in our household. With Christmas, especially, that amounted to a big change for us.

Like many families, a Christmas tree, presents, and a big meal had been a tradition in our house. I would stay up all night Christmas Eve preparing supper. I would cook a turkey with all the trimmings, a ham, collard greens, string beans, macaroni and cheese, salad, and, for desert, sweet-potato pies and Joe's favorite: banana-nut cake. I would usually still be in the kitchen at five A.M. Christmas Day, when the kids would wake up and come running into the living room to open their presents.

While we continued to celebrate Christmas in a scaled-down way for several years, the children understood that in the future they would get fewer and fewer presents. Finally one year I informed them, "This year we're not going to have a tree, we're not going to exchange gifts, we're not going to celebrate Christmas in any way." They were good about it, because by then they had begun to get interested in the teachings of the Witnesses.

As for establishing a sense of parental authority in our home, I can summarize Joe's and my attitudes in a few words: I was strict; Joe was stricter.

I got my strictness from my mom. She made rules for Hattie and me to follow that at the time struck us as downright mean. Chief among them was her rule that we be home from our blue-light dances no later than ten P.M. If we weren't back on time, we'd look up at ten-fifteen or ten-thirty and see her standing there. "Why aren't you home?" she'd demand in front of everyone.

"Oh my goodness, we forgot," we'd say meekly, whether we had to or not. We'd be so embarrassed.

However, turn the calendar ahead to when it was time for Joe and me to lay down our rules for our kids, and we were even stricter than my mother had been -- setting a nine P.M. curfew. However, I was flexible. If it was a warm summer's night, and the kids just wanted to stay outside, I'd let them -- as long as I was outside, too, sitting on the porch or visiting with a neighbor.

As a disciplinarian, my main message to my kids was: "I will treat you with respect. I will not yell at you or threaten you. All I ask for in return is for you to treat me with respect." One thing I can't stand is a sassy child.

REBBIE: I was fifteen at the time. Mother and I were moving our washer from the service porch into the kitchen next to the sink. She kept telling me, "Push! Push! Push!" I was pushing as hard as I could, and, in a moment of exasperation, I finally blurted out, "What do you want me to do -- push it through the sink?!"

Well, she smacked me so fast for saying that.

Nowadays when you spank a child a little bit too much, the public calls it child abuse. However, I favor corporal punishment -- even for a fifteen-year-old. God knows that when I misbehaved as a teen-ager, my mother didn't hesitate to take me to woodshed.

I believe that children should be made to fear misbehaving, to think, If I do this, or don't do this, I'm going to have to answer to my mother and father.

As it turned out, I didn't have to spank my children very often. Usually they were good around me, and, since I have a mild temper, anyway, it took blatant misbehavior to get me angry. Even when I did get angry I sometimes did no more than bite my lip, which in later years tickled my kids to no end. "Kat's mad -- look at her!" Michael would say. "Kat" is his nickname for me.

Joe, by contrast, was excitable. Occasionally, I felt that he hit the kids too hard, or too long. In those circumstances I would ask him to ease up.

Sometimes I kept news of the children's misbehavior from him if I thought that he might react in a way that I did not approve of. I once bought a new dial for the television so he wouldn't know that one or more of the kids had broken the old dial and, worse yet, hadn't owned up to the deed. In that situation, his method would have been to line up the kids and spank them all. (It wasn't until years later that Rebbie confessed that she and Jackie had been the culprits. Jackie had wanted to watch a sports event, while Rebbie insisted on a "fantastic love movie," and they kept turning the dial until it broke.)

I also strongly disapproved of one other method of Joe's: scaring the children to make a point. More than once Joe donned a Halloween mask and climbed through the open window in the boys' room as they were playing. Each time the kids thought Joe was a burglar and ran screaming into the living room.

"Joe, how can you scare the kids like that!" I'd exclaim.

"Kate, I've told you and the boys time and again to keep your windows locked at night," he'd reply. "I was just letting you know how easy it is for someone to break into our house. Next time it might be someone else."

(Even if Joe was sincerely trying to make a point, the fact is that he did get a kick out of giving people a start, including his wife. He wasn't above ducking into the mop closet and grabbing my hand when I reached in for the mop. "Joseph, you make me sick when you do that!" I'd exclaim.)

Joe was tough on the kids in other ways. He decreed that our two oldest children, Rebbie and Jackie, couldn't date; and he made it hard for the children to stay home on a school day. There were times when one of the children would complain, "I'm sick and I don't want to go to school."

Joe would reply, "Bring out the castor oil."

And if the children insisted on staying home, he would make the kid take it.

Years later, Jermaine would confess to me, "Mother, many a day I went to school sick because I just didn't want to drink that castor oil."

I'm not going to pretend that Joe's child-rearing techniques and strong-arm ways were popular with the kids. To this day there is disagreement among the children regarding Joe's methods.

MARLON: I don't think there's a need for spanking. I believe in firm talk instead. It's that moment of hurt you inflict on a kid that changes his mind.

In the majority of families in our neighborhood, the kids got beat; it was the system. You'd be outside playing with your friends and, if something wasn't done, here would come your father with a belt. Bop, bop, bop. You'd run into your house crying, and your friends would be laughing. The next day it would be their turn, and you'd be the one doing the laughing.

However, the majority of my kids have come to understand or even approve of Joe's disciplinary methods.

JERMAINE: I am glad our father disciplined us the way he did. The reason we turned out the way we did is because my mother showed us all the love, while my father kept us in line. If we had gotten only love, we would have been spoiled, and we would probably have gotten into trouble by stealing or doing something else illegal, because we would have been used to getting everything we wanted.

JACKIE: Yes, my father was strict, but I don't believe he was too strict. Raising six boys in Gary, how could he be too strict?

It's interesting that the media doesn't seem interested in knowing about the nice things my father did for us, like taking my brothers and me camping and fishing on the weekends.

TITO: Or on Saturdays taking out his boxing gloves and giving us and some of our neighbor friends boxing lessons in the front yard. "You boys have to be able to defend yourselves," he'd tell us.

REBBIE: Or showing us in various little ways that he loved us, such as by coming home from work with a big bag of doughnuts when he worked the swing shift. Or by making ice cream for us. Before it got too polluted in Gary, he'd go outside and scoop up the fresh snow to make it with.

TITO: For what he wound up doing for my life, I think my father is one of the greatest men in the world -- no matter how he did it. I'm happy now. Life is not just your childhood.

As committed as Joe and I were to raising our kids the right way and watching out for their safety, we knew that we couldn't fully insulate them from the dangers in Gary. The knowledge that one or more of them might become an innocent victim of a violent crime ate at us. Finally in 1960 we decided to move.

But where to go? Our California dream was still alive, but we didn't have the money to finance a scouting trip there.

Eventually, we settled on Seattle. We'd heard how beautiful the city was, and the sister of a friend offered to put us up while we looked for jobs.

I told my mother of our plans, and she agreed to stay with the children while we were away.

Our good-byes to our children were upbeat. I heard later that tears didn't start rolling down their cheeks until we were out the door.

I had a few tears myself when Joe and I were on the road. I had never been separated from my kids before and I hated to leave them. But I was happy, too, knowing that our life in Gary was drawing to an end.

Fifty miles out of Gary, however, our Buick started acting up, and Joe had to pull over to the side of the road.

"We blew an oil gasket," he announced grimly after peering under the hood. "I'm sorry, we're going to have to turn back."

I was stunned. "I knew it was too good to be true that we were going to Seattle," I said.

Joe was able to get us home in the Buick. When the kids saw us pull into the driveway, they came running out of the house. They were overjoyed that we'd returned.

We didn't have the money to fix the Buick. "Well we'll just stay in Gary. It's not the time to move," we said.

But the following year wasn't the time, either -- we just couldn't muster the energy. Nor the next year. Nor the year after that. In fact, it wasn't until the Jackson Five was on the road to success in 1969 that we were finally on the road out of Gary.

Looking back, I'm glad we stayed, crime worries and all. Had we gone through with our move, the boys wouldn't have sung around the house as much as they did because it would have been safe for them to play outside. Joe and I wouldn't have been as motivated to develop their budding talent as singers and dancers because we would have gotten better jobs. And we wouldn't have met the people who helped my boys launch their career.

In short, I wouldn't be writing this book because the Jackson family's success story wouldn't have happened.

4 THE ROAD TO MOTOWN

The roots of the Jackson Five can be traced to a broken down television. The year was 1955. The TV in question was our old black-and-white Muntz.

Our repairman, Mr. Willis, came over and tried to fix it, but to no avail. "I'm afraid I'm going to have to keep it awhile," he said.

Mr. Willis wound up keeping our television more than "a little while." But it was my doing.

"Don't bring it back yet," I told him after it had been repaired. "I don't have the money to pay you." Joe and I were in a financial pitch at the time.

By then we were a family of six -- Rebbie was five; Jackie four; Tito, two; and Jermaine an infant. Depending as I did on the TV for their entertainment in the evening, I was suddenly faced with the challenge of keeping my children occupied in some other way.

What I decided to do was sing with them. I figured I could manage a few songs while I ironed, sewed, or washed the dishes.

I began teaching them the tunes that I'd sung with my daddy: "Cotton Fields," "She'll Be Coming 'Round The Mountain," "Wabash Cannonball."

The kids loved our singalongs from the first day. Even tiny Jermaine would bop in his chair to the sound of our voices blending together.

JACKIE: The first time I heard my Mother really cut loose on a country song, I was impressed. Gosh, she can really sing, I thought. That's how it all started for my brother and me -- harmonizing behind her.

Our living room singalongs became a Jackson family tradition. However, I never dreamed for a moment back then about teaching my children to perform together -- nor even in the early sixties, when the "Motown Sound" began to vie with the likes of my favorite country songs for the children's attention.

JACKIE: Motown Records exploded with a sound that everybody -- black and white -- loved. It was a sound that brought people together.

Motown certainly brought my older children together by the radio. They had their ears glued to WWCA every day, listening for the latest releases by the new Detroit-based record label founded by songwriter-producer Berry Gordy.

REBBIE: We'd also hang on to the deejay's every word plugging an upcoming appearance in Chicago by the Miracles, the Temptations, or one of the other Motown groups. We'd die wanting to see them, although of course we couldn't afford to. Still, the more fevered the deejay's pitch, the more hyped up we'd get.

As soon as the children heard a new record, they'd pool their nickels and dimes, or beg me for some change, and rush down and buy it at the little record store across the street from Roosevelt High.

Naturally, when they brought the single home they'd want to put it on the stereo immediately, and dance to it in their stockinged feet. I was happy to allow their living room "sock hops," especially after I'd just waxed the Formica-tile floor. Their dancing would keep the floor shiny for days!

REBBIE: We were also really into the dances: the Jerk, the Mashed Potato, the Walk, the Pony, the Four Corners.

Long before we'd ever heard the word Motown, Rebbie and Jackie were dancing stars in the neighborhood. When they were five and four, respectively they began winning dance contests at neighborhood block parties.

Rebbie so loved dancing that she'd dance around the house all day after finishing her cleaning chores. "Mother, how can you just sit there?" she said to me more than once when a particularly good Motown song came on the radio. "Don't you feel you have to move?" She's the same way today. When a stagehand brought her a chair at one of Michael's Madison Square Garden concerts in 1988, she said, "No, I'm gonna be dancing." She danced in the wings for the entire concert.

In fact, with the exception of Marlon, all of my children seemed born to dance. Marlon had to work very hard on his dancing, which paid off because today he's an excellent dancer, too.

But my older boys weren't content just to the Motown songs. They wanted to sing them, as well. And they would, among themselves, in their bedroom.

JACKIE: At first, Tito, Jermaine, and I would just fool around, trying to learn the songs off the radio. But all of a sudden we got good -- good enough so that people who were passing by our house would stop and listen to us, sometimes even sit down on the lawn. We had the window screens in by then, and they could hear us real well because we'd make a lot of noise. Once we captured their ear, we knew we had something going.

They captured my ear, too. Rebbie's, as well.

“Mother, look at my arms -- I have goose pimples just listening to them sing!” she exclaimed one day. Another day I found her crying by their door because she thought their harmonizing was so beautiful.

As I mentioned, the worsening crime situation in Gary ironically played a role in their development as singers. Many times Joe and I had to “ground” our kids, not because of anything they’d done wrong, but because we had spotted undesirable types milling around in the park behind the house. Jackie, Jermaine, and Tito often made the best of those times by continuing to hone their versions of the current Motown hits in their bedroom.

Some evenings, when it was safe to do so, they’d sing outside on the corner, under the streetlight.

JACKIE: We loved to sing outside, we could get great harmony because of the echoes.

They got better and better.

“Mother, we’re going to be on TV, just like the Temptations,” they announced to me one day.

When four-year-old Michael began adding his voice to their vocal mix, I started thinking, Well, they do seem to have potential

I was enthused enough about their singing to ask Joe to give them a listen. Because Joe had been working two shifts a day at the time -- the swing shift at Inland Steel and the day shift at American Foundries -- he hadn’t even heard them sing yet.

But Joe didn’t seem very receptive. “Kate, I don’t have the time right now,” he said.

Joe, however, did get a taste of his boys’ musical talent when he heard eight-year-old Tito play the guitar for the first time. There’s a story about how Tito came to “audition” for his father.

Joe had a rule that none of his children could touch his guitar, which he kept in a case in the hallway closet. But Tito began taking out the guitar, anyway, while Joe was at work, and teaching himself how to play on it. “You know what your father said,” I’d scold him when I caught him. But I never forced Tito to put the guitar back because I inwardly approved of his initiative. I also praised his budding guitar talent to his father, who promptly gave Tito a box guitar.

Tito and Joe's brother Luther would play together when Luther came over to visit. My son improved steadily.

Then one day Tito broke a string. Not having the money to buy a new string, he decided to take Joe's guitar out. I saw him do it, but I didn't say anything.

Tito then promptly broke a string on Joe's guitar. He put the guitar back in its case in the closet and braced himself for the consequences.

When Joe saw the broken string, he immediately confronted the boys.

"Who did this?" he demanded, holding up his now five-string guitar.

"Tito," the brothers immediately replied.

At that moment I spoke up.

"I gave Tito permission to take out the guitar," I lied.

Joe glared at me.

"Why did you give him permission when I told the children they couldn't touch the guitar?" he raged. "You're encouraging him to disobey!"

Joe turned to face Tito. "Tito, sit down," he commanded. "I want to see if you can play the guitar."

Tito calmly proceeded to perform some of his favorite riffs. Joe couldn't disguise his shock.

"Boy, you can play," he said.

Soon afterward Joe came home from work holding a surprise gift for Tito behind his back: a shiny red electric guitar

"Honest, Joe -- the boys have talent!" I told him once again. "I want you to listen to them!"

Finally, Joe "auditioned" them as well.

"They can sing," he agreed afterward. "But," he added, "I still don't have time to work with them."

Soon after that I got a call out of the blue from a woman named Evelyn Leahy that confirmed my belief that the boys had something good going

musically. Somehow she had heard that they sang, and she asked me if they would be interested in performing at a children's fashion show that she was going to stage at a department store in Glen Park, a suburb of Chicago. I said I would check with them to see; they hesitated for about one second before saying "yes!" Up until that time, the only singing that they had done for others was for relatives in the home of one of Joe's cousins.

I then had a fateful exchange with Evelyn Leahy.

"What do the boys call themselves?" she asked. "I want to include their name in the flyers."

"Oh, we haven't come up with a name yet," I replied. "But I've been thinking about the Jackson Brothers Five." Marlon wanted to be in the group, too.

Evelyn Leahy thought for a moment. "How about the Jackson Five, instead?" she suggested.

"You know, that sounds much better."

Miss Leahy asked the boys to prepare three songs of their choosing. While the boys rehearsed the tunes by themselves, I appointed myself their costume designer. I decided to dress them in black pants and red shirts with "J5" and an eighth note embroidered in blue on the breast pocket. Cecille Roach, a Jamaican lady who lived down the block, did the embroidery work for me.

On the day of the fashion show, we piled into Joe's and his brother Luther's cars and drove to Glen Park.

We weren't sure what to expect when we got to the department store. As it turned out, the setting wasn't quite impressive as I would have liked for the boys' public debut: A stage had been set up in the middle of the store, and there wasn't a folding chair in sight. The audience of shoppers would have to watch the program standing up.

Sharing the bill with the boys were a couple of other child acts. After a boy-girl dance team performed, it was the Jackson Five's turn.

Among the songs they did was a current hit, "Doin' the Jerk," by the Larks. Jermaine sang lead, while the others sang the background vocals. As for their instrumentation, Jermaine played the bass line on Joe's guitar; Tito strummed on his electric guitar; Jackie hit the tambourine; and Michael banged away on the bongos. Marlon danced.

JACKIE: I was embarrassed. I just wasn't prepared to perform in a department store in front of my friends, including a couple of my little girlfriends. All of a sudden, we were into our first song, and I saw the shoppers converging on us, staring up at us. It was all a little bit bizarre.

As Joe and I stood in the audience, I could tell that Joe was nervous. As if he was coaching them, he silently mouthed the words to each of the songs.

As for me, I wasn't nervous. Just proud. And just a little bit excited, thinking that maybe, just maybe, this was a start of something big for the boys.

Embarrassed or not, the boys did fine. The crowd rewarded them with a hearty round of applause at the end of their set.

"Before long, you'll be performing in nicer places," I found myself saying to them on the way home.

Soon afterward Joe's sister-in-law Bobbie Rose Jackson made a suggestion fated to put the Jackson Five on the musical track.

"Why don't you get these kids on the talent show at Roosevelt High?" she said. A graduate of Roosevelt, she explained that the annual show was made up of primarily of Roosevelt students, but the younger entrants were welcome, too. Strange as it may seem, that was the first I'd heard about the show, even though Joe and I now lived in the neighborhood for fifteen years. I soon learned that the show was part of a citywide program designed to identify promising young talent. Winners from the Roosevelt show and talent shows held at other high schools around Gary competed in the Annual Talent Search held at Gilroy Stadium. The search yielded Gary's number-one young musical act of the year.

I was all for having the Jackson Five compete. So were Joe and the boys.

Two months later, Bobbie Rose called to inform me the auditions for the talent show would be held soon. The boys went to work.

They were all business.

"Who can we find to play the drums?" they asked. Just bongos and tambourine, they decided, wouldn't do as percussion this time. A neighbor boy, Milford Height, had just gotten a set of drums, so they recruited him.

Although Joe had by now expressed his desire to start working with the boys, he was still too busy to be much of a help. So I offered a pointer or two to the boys while they rehearsed themselves.

For their two numbers, they decided on “My Girl,” a big Temptations hit at the time, and a tune that they wrote themselves to introduce each of the brothers. The latter song was designed primarily as a showcase for the dancing talents of six-year-old Michael.

As the boys practised their set, I made the time to design another set of costumes. I decided on white shirts with red bow ties, red cummerbunds, and black pants. I bought the shirts and made the cummerbunds.

The Jackson Five passed the audition at Roosevelt with flying colors. They must have made a big impression on the competition, too.

JERMAINE: Finally the day of the talent show rolled around. We were about to go on when we decided to double-check our instruments, to make sure they were in tune. To our shock we found that the guitars and bass had been tampered with; they were way out of tune. “Someone doesn’t want us to win,” I said. We quickly retuned the instruments, and waited in the wing for our name to be called.

The boys opened with “My Girl,” with Jermaine singing lead. The applause was loud and sustained. Then the boys launched into their original tune.

JACKIE: When we had the crowd exactly where we wanted them, Michael laid down his bongos, took centre stage, and proceeded to do James Brown. He tore the house down.

That night we were thrilled to return home with the first-place trophy. We didn’t have the money for an all-out celebration, but we happily made due with an ice cream feast.

Making the Jackson Five’s victory all the more special to us was the fact that the boys had won out over a host of talented acts. Deniece Williams, one of the other performers on the bill, was fated to hit the top of the charts herself years later with “Let’s Hear It For the Boy.”

REBBIE: I think the talent shows had a lot to do with our neighborhood -- and all of Gary, for that matter -- becoming a hotbed of strong young talent. Teachers were always encouraging kids to audition. When one group of kids got involved, others did, too, because they didn’t want to miss out -- the old competition father. So performing became the thing to do in Gary.

Also, the kids didn’t lack for inspiration: The Motown Sound was definitely in its heyday. As I watched the show, I was struck by the fact that

almost every one of the acts had a Motown flavor. Everybody, it seemed, was scheming on becoming the next Temptations.

JACKIE: Music, everyone figured out, was the ticket out of Gary.

Thinking back, I'm glad the boys had stiff musical competition in their own backyard. It made them work harder from the start to gain recognition.

A few months after their triumph at Roosevelt High, the Jackson Five won the Annual Talent Search. Once again Michael stole the show.

His moment of glory came during the boys' rendition of the Robert Parker hit, "Barefootin'," on which Michael sang lead. During the instrumental break, he suddenly kicked off his shoes and did the darnedest barefoot dance around the stage.

JACKIE: To come up with an idea on the spot like that, at his age I just couldn't believe it.

REBBIE: Besides his obvious talent, the thing that struck me about Michael at the time was the fact that he didn't have any inhibitions. In a setting like that, most seven-year-olds would get shy. But Michael's attitude was: "I'm gonna go out there and do it!"

The Jackson Five's victory earned the boys their first press: a write-up, with photo, in Gary Post Tribune. I clipped out the article and pasted it in my brand-new scrapbook. By now harboring the same dreams of musical fame and fortune for the Jackson Five that I once harbored for myself, and, later, for Joe and the Falcons, I hoped that someday that scrapbook would overflow with articles about the Jackson Five.

As for Joe Jackson, he made his thoughts about his and his boys' future known when he prepared a tape of the boys' performances to send to his brother Lawrence, who was stationed with the air force. Joe recorded this prediction: "These boys are going to take me out of the steel mill."

Yet, the several years that the Jackson Five spent chasing a record deal and professional stardom were fated to be tense ones. I worried that the boys wouldn't be "discovered" in time.

The boys are novelty now, I thought in 1966, when Jackie, Tito, Jermaine, Marlon, and Michael were still only fifteen, thirteen, twelve, ten, and eight years old, respectively. When they get a little older, people are going to expect to do onstage what they already do now as children.

Joe heard the career clock ticking, too. But at the same time we both wanted to be very careful with the boys and not rush into a management deal, for example, that we might later regret. In the end, Joe decided to take control of the Jackson Five's fledgling career himself. Having had a taste of show business, Joe felt that he could do just as well, if not better, than any outside manager.

He certainly moved ahead quickly and decisively. One of his first decisions was to invest in an array of equipment for the boys: more guitars, amplifiers, and microphones.

"Joe, if we're going to go further into debt, I'd prefer adding on a bedroom or two," I complained. I had, in fact, been saving my Sears paychecks for the purpose of putting some money down on a remodeling job.

But Joe was insistent: "Sacrifice now and let me buy the equipment, and someday you will be able to have a new house and more." I gave in.

But I vigorously opposed another one of his ideas: changing the Jackson Five to the Jackson Four. Joe didn't want Marlon to be in the group.

REBBIE: Marlon just wasn't as coordinated with his dance moves as the other brothers. No matter how hard he worked at it -- and he'd work three, four, five times as hard as the rest of them -- he just didn't seem to have it. He would be in tears all the time trying to learn the moves.

At the time, Marlon was the least talented singer, as well. His lack of singing ability bothered Joe even more than his dancing.

"If I keep him in the group, he'll just mess up the harmony," Joe told me privately.

"Joe you can't do this," I replied. "Even if Marlon just stands there onstage and moves his mouth to the words, he's got to be in the group." I wanted musical success for my boys, but not at the cost of having one of them emotionally scared for life.

This time I won out. But it's a fact that Marlon never sang a word as a member of the Jackson Five until the boys began recording for Motown.

Joe put the boys on a formal rehearsal schedule. They rehearsed on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. If they had a show coming up, Joe adjusted the schedule accordingly.

On a rehearsal day, the boys would have their instruments set up in the living room by four-thirty P.M. , when Joe returned from work. I'd have

dinner on the table, we'd eat, and then Joe and the boys would rehearse for the next two hours. If Joe had to work late, I'd run the rehearsal in his place.

Sometimes things didn't go smoothly.

REBBIE: Occasionally Joe would try to get Michael to sing, or do something he didn't feel like doing, and Michael wouldn't cooperate. He had a little bit of an attitude sometimes; by then he knew that he was very important to the group as its lead singer.

In the beginning, Joe would grow furious with Michael, even spank him. But a spanking would always backfire. Michael would then be too upset to continue, and the rehearsal would have to be called off. So Joe would try a different approach.

REBBIE: What he and the older brothers would do is try to laud him on, play to his little ego. Sometimes that would work!

It was one thing for Michael to dream of someday living in a castle. It was another thing for him and his brothers to understand that it took discipline and sacrifice to achieve a dream. They were still so young.

JACKIE: Dad would tell us "Just keep up the good work. You're going to make it. Keep going." But sometimes as we rehearsed we'd see the neighbor kids pass by outside on the way to the park carrying their bats and gloves, and I'd want nothing more than to be outside with them, instead.

The boys, however, could see that many hours they spent on their music yielded results. They became all but unbeatable on the Gary talent-show circuit. The only contest they ever lost, at Horace Mann High, was judged by children who, I suspect, were tired of seeing the Jackson Five win all the time. Whenever the boys would enter a contest, they'd hear the other acts grumble, "Oh, the Jackson Five are competing. We might as well drop out."

With nothing left to prove in Gary, Joe dropped the Jackson Five into a bigger talent pond, Chicago. Chicago boasted one of the premier talent shows in the Midwest: the Sunday night amateur contest at the Regal Theatre.

The Regal was a famous theatre. All the Motown stars had played there, all the R&B greats. What made the Regal's talent show so special was the fact that three-time winners were invited back to the Regal not only to perform on a super talent show with all the other multiple winners, but also to appear on the same bill with an established star.

I stayed at home with my other children the first night the Jackson Five took the stage at Regal. Finally late into the evening the phone rang. "Hi,

Mother, it's Jermaine," the voice on the other line said. "We won, and we thought that you might want to know ." My next two Sundays were replays: my nervous anticipation followed by a matter-of-fact victory call from one of the boys.

The Jackson Five eventually won the Regal's championship talent show, too.

The Regal wound up placing the boys on the same bill -- albeit seven acts removed -- as one of the hottest R&B acts of 1967: Gladys Knight and the Pips. The group had just released a little ditty called "I Heard It Through the Grapevine."

The boys, Joe, and Joe's assistant, Jack Richardson, returned home from the concert weary but jubilant.

"Man, those Pips were some stepping fools!" Jack exclaimed to me.

"No kidding, Kate, they're really good," Joe said. "But the boys were just as good."

After the Jackson Five's Regal triumph, Joe looked around and saw there was still one more talent-show mountain for the boys to climb: winning the amateur-night competition at Harlem's Apollo Theatre. He and Jack drove the boys to New York in our Volkswagen van to scale the mountain.

Because the Jackson Fives reputation had preceded them, the Apollo entered them directly into the "Superdog" finals, their most prestigious amateur event. Once again the brothers won.

"When we tore it down at the Apollo, we finally felt that nothing could stand in our way," Michael wrote later.

Indeed, their career now showed signs of really taking off. Before the Apollo, their only professional gigs had been their debut club date, at a small Gary tavern called Mr. Lucky's, for which they earned all of eight dollars plus a hatful of tips; and dates at a few Chicago nightspots. (Regarding the Chicago gigs, I didn't know that some of these clubs had strippers on the same bill until I read Michael's autobiography. Joe and the boys obviously didn't tell me because they knew what I'd say.) But after their Apollo victory, Joe landed the services of a New York promoter, who began booking concerts for the boys on weekends and during school vacations.

MARLON: The promoter teamed us with a number of other young acts that were on the way to making it the O'Jays, the Emotions, the Vibrations and the Delfonics. Usually an established star headed the bill; we played a lot of

dates with Jerry Butler for example. But sometimes, it was just us up-and-comers.

We traveled to Philly, New York, Kansas City, St Louis.

We made all those runs by VW van.

TITO: I loved the idea of being on the road, of not being in Gary. Anything new was exciting to all of us. We didn't care that we had to sit on our equipment for hours in the back of the van as Dad or Jack drove to the next show. We didn't know any different.

The only time I accompanied the boys to an out-of-state date was when they performed at a club in Milwaukee. Two things stand out in my mind about that night: the shocked looks in the audience when people saw how young the Jackson Five were, and the polished, professional performance the boys staged.

The great thing about graduating from two-song talent-show appearances to hour-long sets was the boys' chance to stretch out artistically, to offer a mix of ballads and rockers, to master the art of pacing.

TITO: We always knew the latest songs on the radio. When something new came out from Motown or Aretha Franklin, we'd be on it with a snap of the fingers. We constantly moved our show around, often taking requests from the crowd.

Each Jackson Five show, however, had its staple numbers, guaranteed crowd-pleasers. Among them: Jermaine's rendition of "Stormy Monday," and Michael's version of "Tobacco Road." Also, Michael always had his feet in the spotlight during a James Brown song

Michael continued to astound the family with his dancing talent, and especially his ability to invent sensational new moves in mid-solo onstage. Many times the first words out of Joe's mouth when he returned from a weekend gig would be, "Guess what Michael did this time?"

As much as I approved of the Jackson Five's hitting the road to increase their exposure, it was hard for me to be apart from them and Joe so often. Like a typical mother, I worried that they'd get in a car accident on an icy highway somewhere.

While I kept the home fires burning, I continued to remain involved in the boys' careers by making their costumes, often with Rebbie's help. My biggest, and final, undertaking was making matching suits for them.

One day a peddler came around selling shiny forest-green material. "Gee, this will make nice suits for the boys," Joe remarked.

"Yeah?" I said. "Who's gonna make them?" My handiwork had been mainly limited to cummerbunds and vests.

"You," Joe announced. "You can learn."

Joe went ahead and bought the material, and I bought a pattern and took on the project.

I ran into a few problems. There's a PR photo of the boys dressed in the suits, and you can see that I had a hard time finishing off the back of Tito's jacket. But all in all I did an okay job. The frustrating thing was that the boys outgrew a month's worth of my work in no time. "Next time, Joe," I said, "take the boys to a tailor."

By the middle of 1968, the Jackson Five were earning up to six hundred dollars a gig. I remember thinking, My goodness, my boys are making a lot of money now. It was enough for us to buy our first color television, a new washer and dryer, a new sofa, new lamps, and a new table for the living room.

(The boys also continued to play Gary and Chicago dates, but for less money. I still have a bounced check for three hundred seventy-five dollars from a Chicago deejay, the boys' "payment" for a Chicago show he promoted.)

By then the Jackson Five had already had a record released, on a tiny Gary label called Steeltown. Joe had decided that it would be a good experience for them to go into the studio and cut a couple of sides, just to see what would happen.

Steeltown provided the songs; the "A" side was "Big Boy," a cute little boy-girl tune. The sessions took place at Steeltown's downtown studio on a couple of Saturdays.

One day soon afterward, Joe, the children, and I gathered in our living room with our ears to the radio. We'd been informed that WWCA would debut the record at a certain time, and, sure enough, it did. The moment we heard it we all cheered.

"Big Boy" went on to sell no more than a few copies -- it's a collector's item today. Yet, the feelings of joy and pride I felt in hearing the Jackson Five for the first time on the radio are indescribable.

So by 1968 my boys were seasoned, and ready for stardom. They just hadn't been "discovered" yet. And they kept growing.

"Joe, we've got to get them a recording contract before they get too old," I fretted.

Joe had been trying. Various record-label scouts had shown interest in the Jackson Five, but nothing had come of their talks with Joe.

As for Motown, seemingly the logical company for the Jackson Five to record for, Joe had sent the company's founder, Berry Gordy, a tape in 1966. But it had been returned three months later, and we had had no further contact with the label.

The boys really needed a break.

Finally, in August they got one. A producer for the "David Frost Show," who had somehow gotten the word on the boys, called Joe and invited them to appear on the show. It would be the Jackson Five's TV debut.

The offer came a few days before the boys were scheduled to perform at the Regal Theatre with Bobby Taylor, a Motown singer with whom Joe had become friendly. Joe decided that he and the boys would do the concert, then fly to New York immediately afterward to do the Frost show.

When he and the boys were traveling, Joe was good about keeping in touch with me over the phone. However, he didn't call me from Chicago to let me know how the Regal show had gone.

Worried, I put in a call to New York. But they weren't there.

Finally, Joe did call. But not from New York. Detroit.

"What happened?" I exclaimed. "I've been scared to death."

"I canceled the Frost show," Joe explained excitedly. Bobby Taylor wanted to take us to Motown to audition, and we decided to go. We've all been sleeping on the floor at Bobby's. The boys have already auditioned -- Motown even filmed it. We haven't been offered a contract yet, but, judging by the smiles on everyone's faces, Kate, I know it's going to happen!"

5 MAKING HISTORY

Two months after the boys' audition at Motown, they were invited to return to Detroit to perform at a party at Berry Gordy's house. Joe and I figured that

Mr. Gordy wanted to see who he was going to be signing. He hadn't been present at the audition.

It turned out that the party was no ordinary winging. As the boys began their show in the pool house, they looked out over the audience composed of virtually every artist on the Motown Records roster: Diana Ross, Smokey Robinson, Stevie Wonder, and members of the Temptations and Four Tops.

The boys had met some of the Motown stars along the concert trail, but never had they performed for such a star-studded audience.

JACKIE: It was nerve-wracking. Scary.

MARLON: But when we saw that everyone was smiling and into the show, it started to get comfortable. It got real comfortable afterward when everyone came up to us and said, "Great show!"

Among those delighted with the boys' show was Mr. Gordy. While Joe and the boys were in Detroit, he signed the Jackson Five to an exclusive recording contract for Motown Records.

I was overjoyed. Not only did the Motown deal mean possible stardom for the Jackson Five, but it also meant certain escape from Gary for the Jackson family.

In the eight years that had passed since our would-be move to Seattle, the crime problem in Gary had gotten worse and worse. Youth gangs such as the Undertakers and Kangaroos were creating a constant menace.

We hadn't been immune from the violence. One night in 1967 as Joe was unloading the van outside a hall that the boys were scheduled to perform in, he was surrounded by a handful of toughs who tried to snatch the drum stands away from him. When Joe resisted, they pummeled him about the face, chest, and arms with the stands before fleeing. Somehow, Joe and the boys, who had screamed and cried throughout the assault, collected themselves, and the boys went on with the show. I didn't hear what had happened until they returned home.

Joe was in obvious pain, but he refused to go to the emergency room. When he finally gave in two days later and sought medical attention, he learned that he had suffered a broken jaw and hand. He had to take pain medication and wear a cast on his hand for weeks.

Tito also had a close call.

TITO: I was walking from school for lunch one day. I had a dime in my pocket, which was like heaven -- bubble gum money. Anyway, this guy approached me and asked me to give him my lunch money. I told him that I didn't have any money, that I was going home to eat lunch. "Then I'm gonna blow your brains out," he said, pulling a gun on me and cocking it.

I went into a nervous wreck. I ran screaming. He didn't shoot.

Joe happened to be home, so he took Tito back to Beckman Junior High after lunch and reported the incident. The boy was found; he had also committed a burglary at the school.

While Joe and Tito were with the principal, he pulled open a drawer and showed them a collection of guns and knives. "This is what we got out of the lockers during a search," he said.

From 1967 on, I wouldn't permit my older children to attend school on the last day of the year. That was the most dangerous day in Gary junior and senior highs, a day when grudges that had been held for months were settled -- usually violently

I'll never forget watching one of the neighbor kids strut down the street on one of those last days, swinging a couple of chains.

"What are you doing with those chains?" I asked.

"If there's gonna be a fight, I'm gonna have a good time, too," he said.

If I had my wish, we would have gotten enough money from Motown to move out of Gary immediately. In reality, Motown didn't pay us an advance. Moreover, they didn't wind up recording the boys for a year. We were forced to stay put at 2300 Jackson Street.

When you have a dream, waiting is the hardest thing in the world to do. Every day seems like a year.

"Just give up Joe, and try another company," I'd say disgustedly whenever the waiting got too hard. "Motown's not going to come through."

Each time Joe would call Motown, and each time he'd hear the same promise: "We're going to do it. Just wait. Be patient."

We weren't patient, but we did wait. Joe and the boys kept busy doing gigs. It was during this period that my oldest child got married, on November 30, 1968.

Rebbie who had been baptized as a Jehovah's Witness the previous year, married another Witness, Nathaniel Brown, whom she had met at Kingdom Hall when she was eleven and he was twelve.

Many mothers would have been overjoyed at having their daughter marry a religious young man. But I was heartsick; I cried a bucket of tears for two weeks. I didn't want to lose her.

REBBIE: My father took it hard, too. In fact, it was so hard for him to see me go that he couldn't bring himself to give me away. My grandfather, Samuel Jackson, escorted me down the aisle.

What really hurt me, however, was the fact Jackie, Tito, Jermaine, Marlon, and Michael didn't attend the wedding; they had a performance that night at the Regal Theatre. I really wanted them to be there. I regret the fact that they weren't to this day.

My dad did make the necessary arrangements so that he could attend, and that made me feel good.

I don't think that Rebbie's marriage would have been as traumatic for Joe and me if Rebbie and Nate had decided to live nearby. I could have comforted myself by saying, "I haven't lost a daughter, I've gained a son." But a month after they were married at Kingdom Hall, they moved to Kentucky. They went for the best of reasons, to do missionary work. But I couldn't help feel that not only had I lost a daughter, but I'd also lost a son.

Finally, in August 1969, the call came from Motown. After the boys did some preliminary studio work in Detroit with Bobby Taylor, they were told to pack their bags for Los Angeles. Motown had begun the process of moving its headquarters to L.A., and that's where the company wanted the boys to do their serious recording. California!

"We're on our way. We're on our way," Joe kept saying, as if he couldn't believe this sudden new turn in the family's fortunes.

But Joe and I weren't any more excited about the boys' recording on the West Coast than they were.

JERMAINE: Even before there was the Jackson Five, my father used to tell us, "Someday, I'm going to take you to California."

We'd always reply, "Sure " We just couldn't believe that something that grand could ever happen to us.

One of the ironies of my life is that, years later, I lived next door in Brentwood to James Garner, the star of Maverick,” our very favorite TV series when we were growing up. I had to get his autograph, tell him how my brothers and I had dreamed of one day moving to Hollywood.

How sweet it was for Joe, who was still on the payroll at Inland Steel, to give his notice. Then he, Tito, Jack Richardson, drummer Johnny Jackson, and keyboards player Ronny Rancifer drove to Los Angeles in our new Dodge Maxivan. Jackie, Jermaine, Marlon, and Michael flew out a few days later. It was only the boys’ second trip on an airplane, the first being a flight to New York for one of their appearances at the Apollo.

Motown was still searching for a house to rent for the family, so it put Joe, Jack, and the boys in temporary accommodations. I was amazed to hear those temporary accommodations happened to be the Hollywood Hills home of Diana Ross. Diana and the boys became attached immediately.

MARLON: The time spent at Diana’s was one of the best times of my life; we got to do whatever we wanted to do. Diana was a kid in some ways, too.

We’d just tear up. Boy, we had fun! Diana, Michael, and I would go swimming all day. To encourage our interest art, she bought paint supplies, including several easels that she set up in the living room.

But more often than not, our painting sessions would turn into big paint fights. We really did a number on her white shag carpet.

Of course, the bulk of the boys’ time was spent in the recording studio. In addition to Bobby Taylor, writer-producers Freddy Perren, Deke Richards, Hal Davis, and “Fonce” Mizell had been assigned to work with them. At Motown this group was collectively known as the Corporation. Needless to say, they were in the business of producing hits.

For the Jackson Five’s first single, Berry Gordy and the Corporation selected a song that Freddie Perren had originally written for Gladys Knight and the Pips. The Corporation produced a version of it, and then Mr. Gordy himself took the boys back into the studio to rework it. The boys wound up spending more time recording that song than all the other songs on their debut album combined.

I received an advance copy of the single. With great anticipation I placed it on the turntable.

Was I disappointed!

Oh my God” How does Motown think it’s going to sell something like this? I said to myself. By then I thought I was pretty good at picking hits, and the record didn’t seem to have much going for it. I thought that the tracks were too crowded, and that the producers hadn’t brought out the boys’ best vocal qualities. They had lead singer Michael and the others yelling, instead.

The song was “I Want You Back.”

As “I Want You Back” was being released in October, the Jackson Five made their network TV debut on “The Hollywood Palace.” The guest host was none other than Diana Ross, making her farewell appearance with the Supremes. I watched with baited breath from my living room in Gary, with LaToya, Randy, and Janet at my side.

After she and the Supremes opened the show with a melody from the Broadway musical Hair, Diana took the microphone.

“It’s wonderful to return as your hostess,” she said, “especially tonight, when I have the pleasure of introducing a great young star who has been in the business all of his life. He has worked with his family, and when he sings and dances, he lights up the stage. Here he is, Michael Jackson and the Jackson Five!”

Having been told about the “mod” costumes that Motown had designed for the boys, I had expected to see them take the stage in stripes and polka dots. Instead, they were handsomely attired in suits that Joe and I had bought for them in Indiana.

They began quietly, performing the ballad “Can You Remember,” which was designed to appear on their first album.

“Now we’d like to do our very first release on Motown,” Michael announced, looking straight into the camera. “It’s on sale everywhere!”

With that, the Jackson Five launched into a rousing version of “I Want You Back” that earned them a round of thunderous applause and, I imagine, the attention of viewers from coast to coast.

Over the next several years the boys would perform on many more network shows. But none of their ensuing TV appearances was as special to me as their first appearance on “The Hollywood Palace,” because it was their first. Millions of people have the same dreams as my family but they never come true, I thought as I watched them. And here my family’s dream is coming true, and right before my eyes.

After the show ended, however, I felt sad and tearful. I'd already been separated from them and Joe for two months and I missed them terribly.

Finally in November, I got my call to come out with the rest of the kids. Motown had found a home for us off Sunset Boulevard on Queens Road in the Hollywood Hills.

I had never traveled by plane, and didn't know what to expect. A friend of mine who had flown before fueled my anticipation by describing how her plane had taken off on a cloudy day but had finished its ascent high above the clouds, in bright, beautiful sunlight. "My goodness, that's amazing!" I exclaimed.

LaToya, Randy, Janet, and I had the same experience on our flight. With Gary's polluted air, it had been some time since I'd seen such a blue sky.

Joe headed the welcoming party at Los Angeles International Airport. Also there to greet us were his brother Lawrence, who was still in the air force; a friend of Lawrence's; and Jack Richardson.

I chuckled at the sight of Joe and Jack. They were decked out in the look at that time -- huge Afros, loud shirts, bell bottoms, and high-heeled shoes. Funny as they looked, I was happy to see them.

"Welcome to California!" Joe said.

I have vivid memories of the trip from the airport into Hollywood. I had never seen a palm tree before. When I saw a line of them just outside the airport, I was thrilled.

The boys had told me about another amazing sight in L.A.: the rows of little "lights" on the freeways. They were referring to the orange reflectors marking each lane, something that we didn't have in Gary. As we drove through the night toward our rented home, I watched as they reflected in our headlights. I even thought that was a beautiful sight.

Driving along the Sunset Strip had been a lifelong dream. My dream, however, hadn't included the presence of hundreds of hippies. This was during the "hippie movement," and they were everywhere, even lying on the sidewalk.

We made a left off Sunset and drove up the hill to the house. From the yard I paused to look out over Los Angeles. The view of the city was the most beautiful sight I had ever seen.

The kids were inside. After we got through hugging and kissing, they turned and said, “Mother, we want you to meet Diana Ross.”

Diana, who happened to be visiting, approached me.

“I’m so happy to meet you,” she said. “Your children have talked so much about you.” Then she hugged and kissed me, too.

When I woke up the next morning, the birds were singing and the flowers were in bloom.

I can’t believe I’m in California, I thought. Finally I made it. Finally I’m here.

To celebrate my LaToya’s, Randy’s, and Janet’s arrival, Joe and I decided to take the family for a drive up the coast in the Maxivan.

During the Gary years, the word vacation had barely been in our vocabulary. We had gone on a couple of camping trips to the Dells in Wisconsin, and visited Joe’s brother Lawrence in Massachusetts and his parents in Arizona. That was it.

Because of the fact that the boys needed to be back in the studio in a few days, we didn’t get farther than the San Francisco area. Still, it was great getting away together and playing tourist for one of the few times in our lives. Little did we know that our brief trip would be our last honest-to-goodness vacation as a family.

Motown staffer Tony Jones gave me one of the earliest hints of the roller-coaster ride that was ahead for the Jackson family when he announced to me, “Your children are very lucky boys.”

“Why do you say that?” I asked him.

“Well, they’re going to be real big stars,” he replied.

“How do you know for sure?”

“Because Mr. Gordy is taking a special interest in them.”

Actually, by then I had learned of Berry Gordy’s interest in the boys firsthand. A few days after my arrival in Los Angeles, he came over to the house to introduce himself to me, and to tell me of his high hopes for the boys. I found him very warm and friendly, and younger than I thought he would be, considering his great success in the music business.

Of course, Tony Jones's words were fateful ones. "I Want You Back" made it to number one on the pop charts -- so much for my expert critique. The only thing I could figure out at the time about the record's success was the fact that it was a new sound, a new style, a new "thing."

The following spring, the boys' second single, "ABC," also hit number one. So did their third single, "The Love You Save," and their fourth single, "I'll Be There."

No act, we were told, had ever achieved number-one hits with its first four releases. The boys, to Joe's and my astonishment, had made recording history.

MARLON: You'd think my brothers and I would have been stunned, or jumping for joy. But we weren't; we were still so young. Our attitude was, "Four number-one records -- great!" But we couldn't touch or feel a number-one record, so we really couldn't comprehend it.

Adding to the unreality of our situation was the fact that while the boys' records were riding high on the charts, we were still months away from receiving our first royalty check from Motown. The only money we received from the company in the late fall and winter of 1969 was one hundred fifty dollars a week, for food. Considering that I had thirteen mouths to feed -- the Jacksons', Jack Richardson's, Johnny Jackson's, and Ronny Rancifer's -- that wasn't a lot. It was a good thing that I had a lot of experience in stretching a dollar.

MARLON: I'll tell you when we knew we'd become stars -- when we went on tour and saw the fans. That was reality.

Motown put the boys on the road shortly after the release of the first single, and kept them there through much of 1970. From their first performance as Motown's newest superstars, they played to venue smaller than an arena.

I saw them at the Forum in Inglewood, and couldn't believe my eyes and ears. The arena was packed with eighteen thousand kids, and every one of them, it seemed, was screaming. I could imagine the boys' having a hard time even hearing themselves sing, and yet they put on a great show. Watching them, I felt so proud -- proud because they had become something, proud because I had had a hand in their success. I also suddenly felt very thankful for all those hours of rehearsing they'd done in the living room, all those talent shows they had participated in, all those concerts in which they had served as the opening act. They were well prepared when good fortune tapped them on the shoulder.

The Forum date was also memorable for an upsetting reason: The show had to be stopped at one point when dozens of girls rushed onto the stage, forcing the boys to run for cover. All I could think of at that moment was the fact that my youngest kids up there, Marlon and Michael, were still only thirteen and twelve years old, respectively.

MARLON: After a while it seemed like the fire marshal had become part of our show. Many nights the local marshal would have to stop the show after the second or third number because people were either in the aisles or rushing the stage.

Rebbie witnessed Jackson fan hysteria when she and Nate traveled one hundred fifty miles from their home in Murray, Kentucky, to Memphis to see the Jackson Five's performance at the Coliseum. As she rode to the show with her brothers, she recalled seeing two girls who had spotted their limo pulling on each other so hard that she thought they were going to tear each other's clothes off.

At the concert itself, Rebbie spent most of her time turning around and looking into the faces of the screaming girls than she did looking at the stage. "I couldn't believe that people could act that way over somebody," she told me later. "It was as if they didn't even want to hear the show!"

After the last note of the show sounded, the brothers went into their post-concert plan of escape, dropping their instruments on the stage and running to the limo, which they immediately began to exit the Coliseum. Rebbie recalled that a few of the fans were too fast for them, however. Several jumped in front of the limo, while a couple even climbed on top.

That scene was tame compared with the riotous welcome the boys received from ten thousand screaming fans at London's Heathrow Airport during their 1972 European tour.

MARLON: The security wasn't what it should have been. So many young girls surrounded our Rolls-Royce limousine that we couldn't move. Finally, we had to evacuate. After we did, the fans succeeded in tipping the limousine over.

Meanwhile, we were attacked as the police hustled us off. We were choked and grabbed, our hair was pulled It was truly frightening.

The Jackson Five's television appearances also played a key role in their lightening-fast rise to superstardom. They appeared on "The Ed Sullivan Show" (three times), the Tonight Show," "The Jim Nabors Hour," "The Flip Wilson Show," "American Bandstand," and "Soul Train."

Of all of them, the “Sullivan” show appearances were the most meaningful. Like millions of Americans, we’d spent our Gary years glued to “Ed Sullivan” on Sunday nights. We loved the fact that Sullivan booked all the big Motown acts -- the Supremes, the Temptations, Marvin Gaye, Smokey Robinson and the Miracles, the Four Tops. When the kids heard that a Motown act would be appearing on the next show, they’d be counting down the days, and then on Sunday the hours until “The Ed Sullivan Show” came on.

MARLON: Ed Sullivan flubbed his lines a bit when he introduced us the first time; he also confused our names. But he really loved us. “Your show is great,” he told us afterward.

Michael and I were fascinated by the fact that Sullivan chose to walk down five flights of stairs from the dressing rooms to the studio rather than ride the elevator. One time we waited for him backstage to see how long it took him to make the trip. I recall the answer so well: fifteen minutes.

As important as touring and TV performances were they were no more crucial to the Jackson Five’s success than was the press. Within a few months after the boys’ rise to stardom, they were written about in Time, News-week, Life, Look, The Saturday Evening Post, and Rolling Stone.

Meanwhile, the fanzines went wild. Every time I’d go to the market, it seemed, I’d see one or more of the boys on the cover of either Right On! or Soul. Often, entire issues would be devoted to the Jackson Five.

Part of Berry Gordy’s genius was in marketing a separate identity for each of the boys: Jackie, who had once considered becoming a professional baseball player, was “the athlete”; Tito was the mechanic; Jermaine was the heartthrob; Marlon was the one who loved to dance (by then, through sheer dedication, he had developed into one of the group’s better dancers); Michael was the super-talented baby brother.

The boys began receiving a tremendous amount of fan mail. Motown had to hire additional help to answer it. It arrived daily by the bags.

Each boy received about the same amount of mail. Being the oldest, Jackie was regaled by more romantic letters than the others. Tito, meanwhile, received numerous compliments for his guitar-playing and singing voice. He had the lowest voice among the boys.

The cutest single fan letter I remember reading was not directed to one of the Jackson Five, however, but to Randy, who was eight at the time. Randy happened to have been photographed with his hair cut quite short, and a young

girl who saw the photo in a magazine wrote to tell him how sexy she thought he was because he had a “bald head like Isaac Hayes”!

The boys handled their sudden superstardom better than I could have hoped. They were justifiably proud of their success, but they didn't let the success go to their heads. If Joe and I had detected one or more of them getting too big of an ego, we would have talked to them. But we just never had to.

This doesn't mean that Joe and I didn't have our worries about the children at the time. Even before we moved to California, we were concerned about the influence that our hired drummer, Johnny Jackson, might be having on them.

While we had been careful to save much of what the children earned in Gary, giving them an allowance of two or three dollars a week, Johnny's parents had apparently permitted him to spend as much of the money that he earned drumming for the boys as he wanted. By the age of fifteen, he was driving his own car and dressing in expensive clothes. We also heard he was staying out late, and he had taken up smoking cigarettes. “I might have to let Johnny go,” Joe told me one day. “My boys are going to want to have the same things and do the same things as Johnny, and I can't allow it.”

But we liked Johnny and didn't want to deprive him of the experience of coming to California with the boys, so we came up with what we thought was an ingenious solution to the problem: invite Johnny to California on one condition -- that he move in with us.

Johnny agreed. Living under our roof in Los Angeles, Johnny Jackson suddenly found that he had to follow our rules.

We did have one serious talk with our boys following our move to California. The subject was drugs.

To the best of our knowledge none of our boys had ever touched drugs. But we were scared to death that they might be tempted to, after being shocked to discover that drugs were in even more widespread use among Los Angeles youths than among Gary youths.

In our talk, we made note of the recent overdose deaths of Jimmy Hendrix and Janis Joplin, adding, “This is what can happen if you take drugs. Anyway, God does not want you to mess up your bodies with that stuff.”

They listened, and agreed. In fact, they remained so opposed to drugs that when they learned that a drug ring was operating at the private school that

they were attending at the time, they informed the police and the ring was broken.

Unaffected as they were by their fame, they were proud to share their humble roots with their fans. That's what they did in their 1971 TV special, "Goin' Back To Indiana."

As the cameras rolled, the boys returned to Gary in a helicopter that landed on the football field at Roosevelt High School. Hundreds of fans were there to greet them, despite the fact that temperature was five below zero.

Of course, the boys dropped by our old home. They were greeted by a sign that the city of Gary had placed on the lawn, reading: WELCOME HOME, JACKSON FIVE, KEEPERS OF THE DREAM.

JACKIE: All of a sudden the house looked real small. I lived in this? I thought. Growing up, it seemed like a mansion to me.

Other highlights of the trip included receiving the key to the city from Mayor Richard Hatcher, as well as street signs reading JACKSON 5 BOULEVARD. But what the boys hoped would have been one of the biggest highlights of the trip, seeing some of their old friends again, turned out to be a disappointment. Their friends couldn't accept the fact that they hadn't changed as people.

JERMAINE: They were touching our hands, screaming and yelling, treating us as if we weren't real. We kept saying, "Hey, we're still the same people you went to school with!"

6 ADJUSTING

I had an experience similar to my boys' the first time I returned to our old house in Gary, which one of Joe's cousins was renting. Many of our old neighbors dropped in to visit, but Mildred White, the neighbor I was closest to, didn't. I was puzzled, so I went over to see her.

"See, Louis, she hasn't changed!" she exclaimed to her husband as soon as she saw me at the door.

"Changed what?" I said. "Mildred, what are you talking about?"

Mildred liked the boys' old friends, had apparently assumed that since the Jackson family's fortunes had changed so much, we had to have changed as people.

Being treated differently by old friends and neighbors was only one of the adjustments that the boys and Joe and I had to make after the Jackson Five became famous. Getting used to the boys' schedule was the biggest adjustment, for them and for me.

MARLON: When we were trying to make it, life was hectic. Once we did make it, life was even more hectic.

We'd come home from school and have a split-second to grab a bite. Then it was off to the studio. We'd record a song a day at Motown. If we were lucky, we got home early enough to do a bit of homework before we fell asleep. It was like this every weekday.

Then on Saturday we rehearsed.

TITO: I didn't have a moment to reflect back then. Do you know when I got a moment? After the Victory tour in 1984. I can't remember a day without "doing it" before then.

When the boys weren't recording or rehearsing, it seemed as if they were touring. Between 1969 and 1972, they toured throughout the United States, and in Europe, Africa, and Japan.

So that they wouldn't fall behind in their studies, they had a traveling tutor, Rose Fine. Before they would leap on a trip, the boys would get their assignments from the teachers; Mrs. Fine, too, would confer with each of their teachers so that she knew where each was in a particular subject area. Then when they were on the road she would have all five of them report to her hotel room first thing in the morning for two or three hours of study. Her room became a latter-day version of a one-room schoolhouse.

To my pleasant surprise, the boys, who were all above-average students back in Indiana, made even higher grades in California. Much of the credit for that would have to go to Mrs. Fine, whose devotion to the boys knew no bounds. "I feel like I was their mother in another life," she once told me, and, in fact, she acted like a second mother to them on the road. She accompanied them on their sight-seeing and shopping trips, and even tried to see to it that they went to bed at a reasonable hour. The boys loved her.

I did, too. I only wished at the time that I could spend as much time with my sons as she did; even though I still had LaToya, Randy, and Janet at home with me, our house seemed empty without the boys. Some people might not like having relatives drop in on them for extended stays, but when our relatives started flocking to California in those early years I welcomed them with open arms. I wanted their company.

I might not have felt so lonely if I had had neighbors with whom to build friendships. But in California, I soon learned, people tend to keep themselves. I didn't even see kids riding their bikes down the street or chasing one another around, which I missed. They stayed on their own property, just like their parents. I remember thinking one day, My goodness, you might as well have built me a house in the middle of a cemetery.

It was so hard for me making the adjustment from lively Jackson Street to a quiet L.A. neighborhood that I couldn't stand staying at home. I had to get out each day, even if just to go to the park and read. When relatives were in town, I'd gladly show them the sights. I got to know every nook and cranny of Disneyland years before Michael.

Even when the boys were in town, I might only get a glimpse of them each day because they kept such long hours in the studio. Their hectic schedule eventually forced an end to the Jackson family tradition that I cherished most: having dinner together.

I did my best for a while to keep the tradition alive in L.A., cooking the usual big meal. But I got tired of throwing out the food when the boys' sessions ran over-time, so one day I just stopped cooking dinner altogether.

A second major challenge that the family had to face was adjusting to our new status as "public figures." For the boys that meant dealing with fans not only at their concerts and at airports, but also literally whenever they poked their heads out their doors.

TITO: Even back at the hotel after a show we weren't out of the fans' reach. Although we always had security people at each end of the hall, the girls would manage to bust through if they saw one of us leave our room to visit one of our brothers.

The fans became a part of my life, too. From time to time, our doorbell would get a workout. I'd open the door and see as many as seven young fans at a time staring back at me.

I'd always let them in, serve them drinks, and answer their questions. In my mind it was the polite thing to do. It was also the way my mother had raised me. (My mother practised what she preached to me. When a fan from New York tracked her down in Rutherford, Alabama, where she'd gone back to live with my stepfather, she allowed the fan to live with them for three months.)

When Motown rented another house for us on Bowmont Drive in Beverly Hills, a less accessible address, I thought that I wouldn't see as many fans. I

was wrong. They'd hike up from Sunset Boulevard and camp outside our gate. Again I wouldn't turn them away.

Even after we moved into our own house in Encino I managed to keep an "open-door" policy for a while, even though my patience was finally wearing thin. The problem was that many of the fans would take advantage of my hospitality by sitting in our house for hours, figuring, I'm sure, that if they sat there long enough one of the boys would walk in the door. I was too polite to suggest to them, "Don't you think you should go?"

Finally, one of them would say, "Well, I guess we better leave."

But by then it would be midnight, and I'd be worried for their safety. "You can't go out there by yourselves," I'd say, and I'd wind up driving them all home.

What are you doing? I finally asked myself one morning. These girls are never going to stop coming around if you keep letting them in and driving them home. From then on I did my best to ignore them.

Still, I told myself at the time that I'd rather host sweet young fans in my house than be approached in public by rude strangers.

Shortly after my photo got out for the first time, I was recognized at a Pic 'n' Save.

"What are you doing shopping at a place like this?" a woman asked me.

"The same thing you are," I replied after I'd gotten over my momentary shock.

I shied away from having my photograph taken after that, because I just felt more comfortable staying in the background. Even at the market when I spotted one or more of the boys on the cover of a fanzine, I would just quietly take the magazine and place it in the cart. Proud as I was of them, it wasn't my way to nudge the person next to me and say, "Those are my boys."

I don't want to give the impression that all of the changes that my children and I had to make in L.A. were difficult or traumatic ones. We had the happy task, for example, of adjusting to the fact that we had ample money for the first time in our lives.

When the royalties finally started flowing in, and it became clear to us that our financial worries were over after twenty years of pinching pennies, I felt a huge sigh of relief. Just knowing that the money was there for our wants and needs made our lives so much easier.

REBBIE: After I had my first child, Stacey, in 1971, my mother came out to Kentucky to visit. Personality-wise, she was the same. But what I noticed about her, and really liked, was the fact that her stature had changed. Now she could afford to dress nicely, to wear pretty jewelry. She had a new more sophisticated look.

We all indulged in the purchase of new clothes. I bought a blue pant suit at a little boutique on Fairfax Avenue. The boys bought leather pants and jackets. We also had tailors come to the house to measure them for those denim-patch suits that were so popular at the time. Joe and the boys would wear them to their concerts, as well as to other performers' shows. The suits were pretty sharp-looking at the time, but you look at them today and they seem awful.

The only one of us who immediately made a large purchase was Jackie, who bought his first car: a 1970 Datsun 280Z. Since he was nineteen, he had Joe's and my blessing. Of course, Tito and Jermaine wanted cars then, too, but Joe and I told them they would have to wait until they graduated from high school.

So what did we do with our money? The majority of the income went into the boys' individual savings accounts. Some of it went into "the pot," a fund from which the boys could draw on when they got married and wanted to put a down payment on a house. The rest of it went to Joe as their manager, and to themselves in the form of a weekly allowance.

Regarding the pooled funds, Joe and I didn't want the money just to sit around in savings accounts, so we made a few investments on behalf of the family.

One of our investments was in apartment houses. We bought two two-hundred-twelve-unit complexes in West Covina; and two in Tarzana, one with two-hundred-twelve units as well, the other with one hundred ninety-six. When we sold them in the late seventies, we realized a handsome profit.

Another investment we decided to make was in a house for the family. After living for two years in the two homes that Motown had rented for us, we felt that it was time to leave our own place.

At first, we limited our search to Hollywood; and idea of being close to Motown and the recording studios was appealing to us. But then we became attached to the idea of buying a hilltop home in Bel-Air with a view if the city.

Our real estate agent push a particular Bel-Air home. To prove his claim that it was good to buy, he drove us into the San Fernando Valley one day, to

a house in Encino that was for sale for about the same price: one hundred forty thousand dollars. The agent didn't think the Encino house compared to the Bel-Air one because the Encino home was on flat land and didn't have a view.

But we happened to like the Encino house better. We loved the fact that it was situated on nearly two acres, with eighteen lemon, orange, and tangerine trees, and a place for the boys to play basketball.

The house itself was attractive. It was a California ranch style, one story, with six bedrooms, a sunken den, and five bathrooms. We especially liked the glass-walled living room, which was bathed in light.

That was the house we wound up buying. We moved into it on May 5, 1971, the day after my forty-first birthday.

The children still had to share bedrooms: Jackie roomed with keyboards player Ronny Rancifer; Tito with drummer Johnny Jackson; Jermaine with Marlon; Michael with Randy; and LaToya with Janet.

On Jermaine's seventeenth birthday, a thirteen resident "moved in" -- Rosie, the boa constrictor. She was a gift from Jermaine's girlfriend, Hazel Gordy, Berry Gordy's daughter.

This was one more adjustment I had to make in L.A.: the boys' exotic new taste in pets. Although we'd had a couple of dogs, they weren't content with dogs any more. They wanted snakes.

Rosie became a favourite playmate of theirs. They'd walk around the house with her curled around their necks. They also liked to tease their friends by pretending to sic Rosie on them.

I recall Johnny Jackson's waking up in a start one night, screaming, "Mother, there's something crawling on my stomach!" Sure enough, it was Rosie. A couple of the boys had taken her out of Jermaine's aquarium that afternoon and had forgotten to return her. She'd been on the loose downstairs.

Rosie lived but a couple of years. After she died, the boys bought a second boa constrictor. Like Rosie, he liked to sun himself in the trees in our backyard.

"You don't turn a snake loose like that!" I'd exclaim.

"But he needs to get some exercise," they'd argue.

Well, one day he got more exercise than the boys bargained for. When they went outside to look for him, he was gone

I didn't dare tell the neighbors.

7 SOLING

Considering my boys' fascination with exotic creatures, I guess it shouldn't be surprising that one of them scored a number-one hit in 1972 with a song about a rat. The song was "Ben," from the movie of the same title. The singer was Michael.

"Ben" was Michael's third hit as a solo artist, following on the heels of "Got To Be There" and his cover of the old Bobby Day tune, "Rockin' Robin." It was Berry Gordy's idea that he and a couple of the other boys also record on their own. (Jermaine had a Top Ten hit himself in 1973 with his version of Shep and the Limelites' 1961 hit, "Daddy's Home.")

I know that being given the opportunity to record "Ben" was a dream come true for Michael. Not only was it a beautiful ballad -- if you didn't know that Ben was a rat, you never would have guessed -- but, also, Michael just happened to adore rats.

I recall having dinner with the family in a restaurant one night and watching Michael as he picked up crumbs from his plate and dropped them in his shirt pocket. "Michael, what are you doing?" I finally asked him.

At that moment a rat poked its head out of Michael's pocket, and I had my answer.

Michael bred rats while we lived in Beverly Hills. We lived in an area where there was a great deal of vegetation, and I'd see big brown rats scurrying through the ivy and bushes from time to time. After a while, I was surprised to see the rats seemingly change color; some were partially white, a few totally white. Then it dawned on me that Michael was letting his white rats out into the yard, and they were mating with the wild rats.

I never confronted Michael about his breeding project, but when we moved to our Encino house I informed him, "Your rats are not coming with you."

In addition to liking rats, Michael loved magic. At the age of twelve he would blow his entire three-dollar weekly allowance on magic tricks.

He also loved to draw and paint. Two of his favourite “subjects” were Charlie Chaplin and Mickey Mouse; his sketches of them adorned a wall of his bedroom in our Encino home.

Like a typical kid, Michael also had his fears, the worst of which was flying during a thunderstorm or lightning.

REBBIE: After my brothers’ concert in Memphis, they were supposed to catch a flight to Atlanta. Everybody was ready to leave the hotel, but they couldn’t locate Michael. They looked everywhere. Finally they found him -- hiding in a closet. He had heard that a thunderstorm was in the offing.

The next time Rebbie saw her brothers was some months later, in Nashville. Rebbie brought along her six-month-old daughter, Stacey, whom Joe and the boys hadn’t met yet. Michael was so delighted to see his niece that he climbed into her crib to play with her after which they both promptly fell asleep.

And yet while Michael acted like your average kid in many ways, when I watched him sing “Ben” on the 1973 Academy Awards show I was once again reminded of the fact that, professionally speaking, he was savvy beyond his years.

I can’t imagine a more nerve-wracking situation in show business than performing on the Oscars show. Yet fourteen-year-old Michael appeared to be no more nervous singing “Ben” that night than he had been singing “Climb Ev’ry Mountain” at Garnett Elementary School in the first grade.

Even the comment he made to me after the show -- “Ben” was fated to win the Oscar for Best Song -- smacked of a seasoned pro: “Mother, did you notice that in his acceptance speech the writer of “Ben” didn’t thank me for singing the song and helped to make it a success? That he didn’t even mention my name?”

Fourteen was a rough age for Michael. In 1972 he watched with mixed feelings as Tito started a trend among the older brothers by getting married. By 1975, Jermaine, Jackie, and Marlon had also tied the knot.

“A part of me,” Michael confessed in Moonwalk, “wanted us to stay as we were -- brothers who were also best friends “

REBBIE: Actually, I think Michael resented his brothers’ getting married and moving out of the house -- on both a personal and professional level. Professionally speaking, Michael didn’t see how he and his brothers could build effectively on the strong musical foundation that they had established if

the brothers didn't remain one hundred percent focused on the Jackson Five, like him.

He didn't say this in so many words. Even as a young teenager, Michael found it difficult to express the way he felt, especially if his opinions would cause unpleasantness or pain. But he did make statements from time to time that clued me in to his true feelings -- i.e., how he was losing another writing partner when one of the brothers moved out.

At the same time that Michael was fretting about his brothers and the future of the Jackson Five, he was suffering through the usual teen traumas: a growth spurt, a voice change, and a bad case of acne. But with Michael's being in show business, these traumas were magnified.

Regarding his clear falsetto, people had been telling us for years, "What are you going to do when Michael's voice changes?" It was as if the success of the Jackson Five had been totally dependent on his falsetto.

As it turned out, Michael's voice wasn't affected too much -- high voices run in our family -- but at first he didn't even want to accept the fact that it had changed at all. "You know, Michael doesn't want to give up his voice," LaToya said to me one day. "He has to, but he's still trying to sing high."

But whatever worry he had about his voice paled next to the shame he felt about his acne. In contrast to Jermaine and Marlon, who took their acne in stride, Michael was so embarrassed by the bumps on his face that he didn't want to leave the house. When he did, he kept his head down. Even when he talked to me, he couldn't look at me in the face.

I was worried sick for him. I took him to a specialist, but there wasn't much that the doctor could do to help.

Michael's acne disappeared eventually, but the changes that it seemed to have wrought in him became permanent. He was no longer a carefree, outgoing, devilish boy. While he would still occasionally join his brothers for a basketball game in the backyard ("How can you be this good when you hardly ever play?" the brothers would always ask Michael in amazement), he was now quieter, more serious, and more of a loner.

I could see the new Michael in the photographs he was taking. While LaToya and I enjoyed going to Lion Country Safari to shoot the animals, Michael preferred to stay around the house photographing flowers and dewdrops delving into his own world

8 STRUGGLES

Of my boys' marriages, the one that caused the biggest stir in the media was Jermaine's.

To many, his marriage to Berry Gordy's daughter, Hazel, in December 1973 symbolized the marriage of two pop families, underscoring the strength of the Jackson Fives-Motown bond.

The wedding, held at the Beverly Hills Hotel, was spectacular. Among the two hundred guests were a Who's Who of Motown artists and such friends of the Gordy family as Coretta Scott King.

The theme was Winter Wonderland. There were one hundred seventy-five white doves in cages, seven thousand white camelias, and mounds of artificial snow. Jermaine wore a white tuxedo, and Hazel wore a white gown covered with pearls and trimmed in whit mink.

Rebbie, LaToya, and Janet were bridesmaids; Tito, Marlon, and Michael served as ushers.

The highlight of the ceremony was Smokey Robinson's performance of a ballad he'd written especially for the bride and groom.

However, little did the public know that while Jermaine and Hazel were saying their "I do's," Joe and some of the boys were considering a "divorce" with Motown records.

At issue was just how much creative freedom Motown was willing to allow the boys. Motown didn't want to yield any control whatsoever in the studio, while the boys wanted to exercise some say over the selection of songs they recorded, as well as how the songs should be produced. By then they had begun writing their own songs, and recording them in our home studio. Their role model was fellow Motown artist Stevie Wonder, who'd succeeded in winning artistic control from Motown several years earlier, and who'd continued to score Top Ten hits for the label.

Joe and I discussed the Motown situation frequently; it weighed on his mind. But whenever he broached the subject of artistic control with Berry Gordy, he was rebuffed. Mr. Gordy didn't feel that the boys were ready to write and produce their own records. One day Joe got fed up.

"I have to start working on getting the boys to another label," he confided to me. "Motown is stunting their growth. I want them to be able to develop and exercise all of their talents.

There was a special event in the Jackson Five's career that Joe and the boys did have complete control over in 1974: the group's Las Vegas debut. Joe booked the two-week engagement at the MGM Grand to show the world that the Jackson Five were more than a Motown recording group.

"Now we've got to put a real show together," the boys agreed. They and Joe knew that their rock show wouldn't play to an older, sit-down crowd.

Among their ideas was a pop-hits medley in which the brothers, each seated on a stool, would take turns soloing on the likes of "By the Time I Get to Phoenix" and "Killing Me Softly (With His Song)."

The single best idea they had was to involve their sisters and Randy in the show, giving them their first taste of the stage, while letting the audience in on the fact that Jackie, Tito, Jermaine, Marlon, and Michael weren't the only talented Jackson children.

For Randy, the chance to perform with his older brothers was a dream come true.

REBBIE: When his brothers would go out on the road in the Gary days, Randy was always the boy left behind. And he didn't like it. He took up the bongos, my father told him that when he mastered them he would allow him to join the group.

That was all that Randy needed to hear. He banged on those bongos night and day. "Can I join now?" He'd ask dad almost daily. But he wasn't ready yet. Each time that my father would shake his head no, Randy would act as if his wings had fallen off.

RANDY: At the time I did feel left out being the youngest boys. But I don't feel negative about it; I think God has His special way of dealing with us.

Being the only boy at home many times gave me the chance to get into myself a little bit. The family considers me the most individualistic of the children, and that's the reason why.

While I was without my brothers a lot I wasn't really "alone." I had a house full of instruments. Beginning at the age of eight, I taught myself how to play them. I started with the piano. Then I worked my way to the guitar, the bass, and the drums.

More than once I woke up in the middle of the night and decided to get up to check on the children, only to find Randy missing from his bedroom. Each time I finally located him in the recording studio, practising.

For Randy's segment, Joe and the boys decided to team him with Janet and have them perform a medley of songs made popular by duos: Sonny and Cher's "I Got You, Babe," Jeanette MacDonald and Nelson Eddy's "Indian Love Call," and Mickey and Sylvia's "Love Is Strange."

Michael made an inspired suggestion: "Janet's always clowning around, doing funny impressions. Let's work in her impression of Mae West somewhere."

We found just the right spot in "Love Is Strange," where Sylvia says to Mickey, "Come here, loverboy."

As for LaToya and Rebbie, it was decided that each would dance, LaToya in the tap-dancing segment, Rebbie during her performance of the old Peggy Lee hit "Fever," with Michael and Marlon.

Unfortunately, because of a freak accident, the only appearance that Rebbie wound up making onstage at the MGM Grand came at the end of the show, when the children took their bows. The night before the engagement began, she was walking down the stairs into the hotel's casino holding Stacey's hand, when Stacey suddenly jumped down a couple of stairs. Rebbie had to lurch forward, and, in doing so, she wrenched her ankle. She was heartbroken that she wasn't able to perform.

As it turned out, that was the only disappointment with the engagement. "This is the best show I've ever seen in Vegas!" dozens of audience members exclaimed to Joe and me during those two weeks. Everyone knew who we were because the children made a point of introducing us from the stage, always against my objections.

The children performed two shows a night every night, and I didn't miss one of them. "Don't you get tired?" my kids would ask me. "Why don't you stay in tonight?"

"I don't get tired watching you," I'd always reply. I'm reminded of the old Southern saying, "Every crow thinks her crow is the blackest."

Well, I think every mother who has kids onstage likes what they're doing and wants to support them. To this day, if I'm on the road with one of my children, he or she can expect to see me in the audience every night.

Wanting to make myself useful during the Las Vegas engagement, I began taking notes of each performance and after the show, sharing my comments with the children. "Michael, why don't you hold this particular note longer?" I would suggest. Or: "Janet, how about changing that dance move of yours a

little bit?" The kids loved hearing my feedback, so much so that my post-concert critiques are a family tradition to this day.

As for the children's Las Vegas show, the highest of the high points was Janet's Mae West imitation. Night after night, she stole the show with it, the little ham. I knew then that she was destined for a career in show business, too.

"Your life is like a ship," Michael likes to say. "You're the captain of it. The way you steer it is the way that it is going to go."

We were the captains of our ship in Las Vegas, and everything worked out beautifully. But back in Los Angeles, Motown was still steering the Jackson Five's recording career. After the Las Vegas triumph it became even harder for Joe to accept that fact.

However, the more Joe talked about leaving Motown when the boys' contract ran out in 1976, the more apprehensive I got.

"If we leave Motown, then nobody, including you, will have a job," I pointed out.

"Kate, that's not true," he replied. "I know we can get a better deal at another record company."

Joe began talking with other companies. Berry Gordy caught wind of what he was doing and dispatched Motown executive Ewart Abner to New York City -- where the boys were performing at the time -- to meet with Joe. The message that Mr. Abner carried with him was that Mr. Gordy "doesn't care what it takes, he just wants the boys to stay with Motown." But by then Joe's mind was made up -- the Jackson Five would sign with a new label willing to allow the boys the opportunity to record some of their own songs.

That new label turned out to be Epic Records, one of the companies owned by CBS Records.

"Well, your decision to leave Motown wasn't such a bad idea, after all," I told Joe after he'd accepted Epic's offer.

The only problem was that Jermaine had decided that he didn't want to leave Motown.

Married to the daughter of the president of his label his brothers were leaving, Jermaine was in a difficult position. If he decided to go with his brothers to Epic, he would upset Hazel and Mr. Gordy. If he decided to remain at Motown as a solo artist, he would upset Joe, me, and the boys.

In the end, Jermaine upset his family.

When Jermaine explained to Joe and me that he felt he owed his primary allegiance to Motown for giving the Jackson Five its first break, Joe was incensed.

“It’s my blood running through your veins, not Berry Gordy’s!” he stormed.

When Jermaine added that it was Mr. Gordy “who put steaks on our table and teeth in our mouths,” I spoke up.

“We were already eating steaks in Gary. And while it is true Mr. Gordy loaned us the money to get caps for the teeth that Jackie and Tito had chipped, he’s recouped that money hundreds of times over.”

But Jermaine’s decision was final, and the Jackson family suffered through its first split ever.

MARLON: Actually, I respected Jermaine’s decision. He had to do what he thought was best for his life.

I just didn’t like the way he went about things, and I’ll tell him that today. We had one of the family shows to do in New York, out in Westbury. On the day of the show, he informed us he wasn’t going onstage, because Berry Gordy had told him, “Don’t do the show.”

I remember the rest of us saying, “Okay, then, if that’s the way you feel, fine. But we’re going to show up.” We recruited the best player in the orchestra to do the gig with us.

For several months following his decision, I was the only one whom Jermaine would call. He knew that I would listen to him, and I did. I told him that I understood the tough position he was in and that I loved him just the same for the decision he had made even though inside I was still hurting about it.

“Well, I hope my father and my brothers don’t have any hard feelings about what I’ve done,” he said during one conversation. I told him that they didn’t. But the fact is that six months went by before they started speaking to one another again.

Making that period in our lives all the more difficult was Motown’s decision to sue CBS Records and the Jacksons for twenty million dollars over the group’s departure. In its suit, Motown claimed that it had been damaged insofar as Epic Records had announced the boys’ singing nine before the

group's contract with Motown was due to end, thereby hurting sales of its 1975 Jackson Five album, *Moving Violations*.

Motown also won a court injunction preventing us from using the name "Jackson Five" any longer. This concerned me even more than the price tag on the suit.

"How can Berry Gordy keep the name when he didn't even name the boys," I asked Joe naively.

The answer: Motown had included a clause in the contract giving it ownership to the name. It was in the "fine print" and we missed it!

The dispute with Motown hit a real low point when the company's vice-chairman, Michael Roshkind, threatened to form a "new ... Jackson Five. We can do anything we want with [the name]," he said. "There are/were forty thousand Jacksons running around, and we not only made five of them stars, we put them in their own house, paid for their education -- and worked a full year with them before their first record."

That was hardball.

All of the boys felt the impact of Jermaine's departure from the group. Yet the first time the boys performed without him -- at the family show in Westbury -- they won four standing ovations. Marlon sang Jermaine's old parts splendidly, Randy beat the tar out of his bongos, and Michael sang and danced with greater abandon than ever.

Joe didn't waste any time getting the boys' into the studio to record their first album for Epic. The company selected the well-known writing-producing team of Kenny Gamble and Leon Huff to work with my children. Gamble and Huff had written hits for a number of artists, and proceeded to write one for the boys: "Enjoy Yourself." I really liked that song as well as the entire album, entitled simply *The Jacksons*. Gamble and Huff's sound was mature, and classy.

I enjoyed *Going Places*, the second album the boys recorded with Gamble and Huff, even more. I particularly liked the message song, "Man of War," a plea for peace. Motown had steered the boys away from that kind of material; the term "black power" was in vogue in the early seventies, and I'm sure Mr. Gordy didn't want my sons to be associated with any song or statement that could be misconstrued as sounding political or, worse, militant. At the time, I agreed. However, by 1977, singing message songs was, in my mind, another example of my boys' maturation.

Unfortunately, the public didn't share my enthusiasm for either The Jacksons or Going Places. Sales were disappointing.

TITO: All of a sudden people were telling us that our career was finished.

We also heard how foolish the boys had been to leave Motown. However, Motown didn't exactly seem to be performing wonders with Jermaine at the time.

My Name Is Jermaine, his first solo album since leaving his brothers, was a disappointing seller, despite Berry Gordy's pledge to the press that Motown was going to make him a superstar. Jermaine's single, "Let's Be Young Tonight" flopped.

My boys have had a long run, a longer run than I ever dreamed of, I thought at the time. Could it be that what the "experts" are saying is true? That they're through?

Michael didn't doubt himself or his brothers for a second.

"Don't worry, Mother," he told me when I voiced my concerns to him. "We'll be back on top again."

Joe and the boys had a plan.

Joe and Michael disclosed that plan at a meeting one day in 1978 with Ron Alexenburg, the CBS Records executive who signed the Jacksons to Epic. The plan was simple: The boys would work their way out of their recording slump by writing and producing their third Epic LP themselves.

Their argument to Mr. Alexenburg was just as simple: "Gamble and Huff have given the group their best shot, but things haven't worked out. We can do better."

Joe and Michael weren't asking the CBS Records executive to make a total leap of faith in granting them their wish. Mr. Alexenburg could hear the boys' development as songwriters and producers in the four songs they had contributed to the two albums they had recorded with Gamble and Huff. The boys were especially proud of "Different Kind of Lady," a group collaboration. They had to fight for its inclusion on Going Places -- despite their initial words to the contrary, Gamble and Huff never really showed much interest in the boys' songs -- so the boys felt a special satisfaction when the song became a popular track in discos.

To our delight, Ron Alexenburg granted Joe's and the boys' wish. He made only one request: that CBS staffers Bobby Colomby and Mike Atkinson

be allowed to oversee the project as the album's executive producers. Joe and the boys agreed.

RANDY: We as humans don't know our abilities. The only times that we ever seem to stretch ourselves is when we're tested. During our own album was the greatest test for my brothers and me.

The boys didn't lack for material. They'd been writing songs since early in their Motown career and, according to Tito, "storing them in our personal bank." They had also a good deal of hands-on experience recording demons of their tunes at the studio we had at the house. By then, Jackie, Tito, and Marlon had also built studios in their homes.

MARLON: We went into the studio with attitude, "We'll show everybody that we're not washed up."

The album turned out to be true group effort. Five of the eight songs were co-written by all of them. The boys also developed a clever way to "mix down" each of the songs together.

MARLON: A couple of us would get first shot at mixing a certain song. When the mix was done the rest of us would listen to it with our fresh ears, making whatever changes that we felt were needed. We repeated that process for each of the songs, and it worked out great.

The fruit of their labor was *Destiny*, released in the fall of 1978. It was praised by critics as the Jackson's musical coming-of-age.

I loved it. But from my first listening, I felt anxious. Will Epic promote it? I wondered. How will the record buyers get the word that this is a great album? I grew even more anxious when the album's first single, "Blame It on the Boogie," the only song the boys hadn't written flopped.

RANDY: We told CBS, "No, no, no, don't put out 'Blame It on the Boogie'; put out 'Shake Your Body own to the Ground),'" which Michael and I had written. But CBS loved "Boogie"; also, I think they still didn't believe in us one hundred percent.

Happily, "Shake Your Body" became the album's second single. It did very well, peaking at number seven on Billboard's pop chart.

RANDY: Actually, that song should have been number one. It sold two million copies, a great figure for a single. But I don't think pop radio or the press was ready to accept our return just yet.

But the public was. *Destiny*, in the end, sold "double platinum."

As Destiny rode high on the charts in the first months of 1979, the Jacksons performed in Great Britain, Europe, and Africa, the first legs on their world tour that year.

What an apt, positive title for their album, I thought as I reflected on the boys' return to the pop limelight.

As it turned out, Destiny happened to be a word that could also apply to Michael's re-emergence as a solo talent.

9 STARTING SOMETHING

I'll never forget the lecture that LaToya, Janet, and I received from Michael one day as he happened upon us relaxing in front of the TV.

"Don't you know you're just wasting precious time?" he scolded. "Get up and do something! Write a song I feel guilty just sitting around when I know I can be doing something."

Michael wasn't about to sit around and feel guilty in the late seventies. Even though the Jacksons were at a crossroads in their career, the group alone couldn't contain his growing ambitions any longer. The Destiny album, in fact, was sandwiched between two challenging solo projects.

The first was his portrayal of the Scarecrow in *The Wiz*, the black-oriented version of *The Wizard of Oz*.

Michael had talked about becoming an actor ever since the early seventies. He'd performed in a number of skits during the Jacksons' summer-replacement TV series in 1976, but found that work unfulfilling. *The Wiz* was much more to his liking.

Michael had seen the Tony Award-winning Broadway version of *The Wiz*. He had followed with interest Motown's purchase of the film rights, even as the Jacksons were leaving the label.

When Diana Ross was named to play Dorothy, Michael had further incentive to land a role in the movie; he'd been in love with her ever since he and his brothers had been her houseguests. "You're not pretty until you start looking like Diana!" he would tease LaToya and Janet.

The fact that we were still being sued by Motown at the time did make Michael wonder about his chances of winning a part in *The Wiz*. But with Diana's encouragement he went ahead and auditioned in front of director Sidney Lumet for the role of the Scarecrow. To Michael's delight, Mr. Lumet loved his audition and chose him for the part.

Being involved in *The Wiz* was so exciting for Michael. I remember him giving out little enthusiastic yelps as he read over the script in his bedroom. He was particularly thrilled to be working with such an esteemed director as Mr. Lumet, whose credits include *Serpico*, *Midnight Express*, *Dog Day Afternoon*, and *Twelve Angry Men*. He made that fact known to everyone around the house. "Everyone" at that time included Joe and me, as well as LaToya, Randy, and Janet.

Because they still lived at home, Michael, Janet, and LaToya were especially close. Somehow, Janet and LaToya had the ability to turn my increasingly private, driven son into the lighthearted Michael of old -- if only for a little while.

They loved to play practical jokes on one another. Michael especially enjoyed tormenting LaToya with fake spiders and tarantulas. He'd place one of his plastic creatures atop the phone in her room, call her, and listen for her shrieks. Knowing how particular she was about her room, he'd also delight in charging through the door and bouncing off her bed, with its white-satin sheets.

"I'll teach you to be so picky!" he'd exclaim amid her furious screams.

Having been informed by Michael that he was so proud to be working with Sidney Lumet, LaToya conceived the revenge prank of all time.

One day shortly before Michael left for New York to begin filming, he received a call on his private line from "Mr. Lumet's secretary." Mr. Lumet was in the neighborhood, the voice announced, and would be stopping by in five minutes to take him out to dinner.

Michael didn't know what to do first; he wasn't dressed, and his room was a mess. Somehow in five minutes he made himself presentable, tidied up, and ran from door to door informing everyone excitedly, "Sidney Lumet is coming to take me to dinner!" He then sat down and waited for our security to inform him that Mr. Lumet had arrived. And Waited. I sat with him; I, too, believed that the director was coming.

Finally, LaToya confessed, "Michael, Sidney Lumet isn't taking you to dinner. That was me on the phone!"

I've never seen Michael so angry. He dragged LaToya outside and wet her from head to toe with the hose.

So that Michael wouldn't be alone in New York, his partner in pranks accompanied him. I also paid a visit. I not only wanted to see how Michael was doing, but I wanted to see what life was like on a movie set.

I observed the shooting of the scene in which Nipsey Russell, who played the Tin Man, sings "Slide Some Oil to Me." That scene was reshot so many times that day that I finally lost count. I left the set with a new respect for the hard work that actors have to do.

Michael had to show his fortitude on the set even when the cameras weren't rolling. For example, he had to endure daily four-hour makeup sessions to become the Scarecrow. While I couldn't see how anyone, especially hyper Michael, could sit still for that long, he didn't mind at all. One of the reasons why he liked being made up each day, frankly, is because his complexion was still causing him grief.

After the day's scenes were shot, Michael would have his makeup removed, and his eyes would be red and his skin blotched. One day as he was leaving the set, some fans waiting outside commented, "Hey, that guy's on drugs!" Michael patiently explained that he didn't touch drugs, that he had been wearing makeup all day.

Michael also had to contend with freezing weather. He told me about a huge dance scene at the World Trade Centre in which dozens of the six hundred skimpily clad dancers got so cold that they quit on the spot. And yet, Michael claimed, the cold didn't bother him. Undoubtedly, he'd been toughened up by all those Gary winters.

Diana Ross was a big support throughout the shooting. Michael referred to her as "my mama" on the set. She made a habit of checking in on him in his dressing room each morning. However, there were some moments during the dance rehearsals when Diana was probably pretty upset with Michael. Michael learned his dance moves so fast from the choreographer that he wound up unintentionally showing up everyone else, including Diana.

"Michael, wait a minute!" she'd have to tell him. "Don't do it so fast. You're making me look silly!"

The Wiz had its Los Angeles premiere in Century City. It was my first film premiere, and it was everything I thought it would be: stars, glitter, and cheering fans.

Unfortunately, the movie itself received a rough reception from the critics, and it bombed at the box office. The only Academy Award nominated that The Wiz received was for the film's cinematography.

Yet there was a silver lining for Michael: Even the harshest reviews contained praise for his performance. The scene in which his Scarecrow descends from his pole in a wobbly yet graceful manner was singled out as one of the movie's highlights.

But I know that the review that mattered most to Michael was Sidney Lumet's: "Michael is the most talented young person to come along since James Dean -- a brilliant actor, a phenomenal dancer, one of the rarest talents I've ever worked with. That's no hype."

Michael regarded *The Wiz* as a great learning experience. But even if his involvement had been a disaster in every other way, it would have been worthwhile for one reason: During the filming he met the man fated to help him make recording history.

Their meeting occurred in comical fashion. Michael was doing a scene in which he had to pull a piece of paper from his straw and read the contents, a quote. When he got to the author's name, Socrates, he mispronounced it as "Soh-crates."

"Soc-ruh-teeze," a man standing nearby whispered helpfully.

That man, whom Michael had not formally met yet, happened to be Quincy Jones, composer of the movie's score.

Michael and Quincy developed a close relationship on the set. It was natural that Michael would make contact with Quincy when, in 1979, he decided to record a solo album "to show that I can make it on my own, that my talent doesn't depend on anyone else."

According to Michael, he only wanted Quincy Jones's ideas about whom he should ask to produce the album. Michael didn't want the added pressure of trying to produce his solo album himself.

"I'll tell you what," Quincy said after a pause. "Why don't you let me do it?"

Michael and Quincy had seemingly done it all in the music business, producing pop hits dating back to Leslie Gore's "It's My Party" in 1963; playing trumpet in Ray Charles's band; fronting his own jazz band' composing the scores to such movies as *In the Heat of the Night* and *In Cold Blood*; and serving as the musical director for the "Roots" TV miniseries.

But when word got out that Quincy would be working with Michael, one of our music-business friends cautioned Joe and me, "Don't let Quincy do it."

He doesn't know dance music, and, besides, he hasn't had a hit with the other people he's produced lately. He's bound to mess Michael's career up."

We passed this information on to Michael, but Michael was unconcerned. "I think Quincy and I can work well together," he replied. That gradually became evident.

Because Quincy hadn't had a great deal of experience with dance music, he encouraged Michael to co-produce the three songs that he wrote: "Don't Stop 'Til You Get Enough," "Working Day and Night," and "Get on the Floor" (co-authored with Louis Johnson).

I especially liked the unusual percussion touch that Michael added to "Don't Stop 'Til You Get Enough" -- the sound of sticks hitting pop bottles. Jackie and Randy were the designated bottle boppers.

The first time I heard "Don't Stop," I thought it had the sound of a number-one hit. But I had mixed feelings about the title.

"Michael, you know that those words can be interpreted in more than one way," I pointed out.

"If you think of it in a dirty way, it'll mean that, Mother," Michael replied. "But that's not what I meant."

Quincy revealed his ear for a great song by bringing Michael several tunes written by Ron Temperton, who had worked with fellow Epic act Heatwave. Among them was a medium-tempo "Rock with You" and the song fated to be the album's title tune, "Off the Wall."

Also knowing how much Michael enjoyed singing ballads, Quincy found a good one in Tom Bahler's "She's Out of My Life," which Quincy did an equally good job in orchestrating.

Off The Wall was released in the summer on 1979. Heralding its release was the the album's first single, "Don't Stop 'Til You Get Enough," which made it to number one in September.

"Rock With You," the second single, hit number one as well. Its four-week reign began in December and ended in January, making it the first number-one song of the eighties -- a good omen, I thought.

"Off The Wall," the album's third single, and "She's Out of My Life," the fourth, also hit the top ten.

With all those hits propelling it, Michael's album became a smash. It remained on Billboard's Top Ten for seven months, eventually selling five million copies in the United States alone. It also ranked at the top of the charts in Great Britain, Australia, Canada, and Holland. Suddenly, Michael Jackson, solo artist, had become a worldwide superstar.

Michael was ecstatic. A devoted reader of the trade magazines, he'd come into my room toting a stack of them, sprawl across my bed, open the magazines to the charts, and track the progress of his album and latest single with me.

And yet Michael's delight with the reception that *Off The Wall* received was tempered, in the end, by disappointment. Driven as he is, he not only wanted to win the public's recognition, but also that of the media and his peers in the music business. In his eyes, he didn't succeed on the latter two fronts.

Regarding the media, Michael's dream had been for a while cover story in one or more of the consumer magazines. He even phoned various magazine editors himself to pitch his story. But he didn't receive any offers.

"I've been told over and over again that 'black people on the cover don't sell our magazines,'" Michael fumed to me one day. "Mother, just wait. Someday these same magazines are going to be begging me for an interview."

Michael showed the same defiance the day in January 1980 when the nominations for the twenty-second annual Grammy Awards were announced. Even though he had recently won in three categories at the American Music Awards, which, unlike the Grammys, are voted on by fans, he was nominated for only a single Grammy: Best R&B Performance (which he wound up winning).

"I can't believe it," Michael said, tears in his eyes, after he learned of the Grammy nominations. "But it's okay. My next solo album is going to be so good the Grammy voters will have no choice but to recognize it."

10 THE LONG HEARTACHE

Until I read Michael's autobiography, I had no idea he considered *Off The Wall* period to be one of the most trying in his life, a time when he felt so lonely and isolated that he'd walk around the neighborhood looking for someone to befriend.

I do recall Michael's having a difficult time making friends his own age. He had tried, but a couple of boys had been nasty to him -- out of jealousy. Michael thought.

REBBIE: Also, Michael was hurt by Randy's decision to move out at that time. He and Randy were very close, and did a lot of writing together.

RANDY: After I moved out, we stopped collaborating, which shook everybody up in the family. "You're such a great team!" they said. But for me it was a blessing in disguise. Looking back, I had depended on Michael a lot. He was "the singer," and I felt that all I could do was play and arrange good music. I didn't know that I could sing, too, because I hadn't tested myself.

Despite these personal setbacks, Michael seemed to me to be happy. Extremely driven and increasingly private, but happy.

However, as I reflected on that period of time, I realized that I wasn't in a good position to "read" Michael, or any other person, for that matter. I was going through a hard time of my own.

In 1975, my mother suffered her first stroke. It partially paralyzed her throat for a while and permanently affected her memory. She was still able to visit me and the family in California for the first time that year, but it was sad for me to see her in a weakened state. She had always been so strong and vibrant.

In 1976, she had a second stroke, after which she gradually got worse and worse. By 1978, she was at times incoherent, but she still traveled to Los Angeles that year. There was a pressing reason for her to make the trip -- to attend the funeral of my sister, Hattie.

Even though Hattie had moved to Lorraine, Ohio, with her husband, Vernon Whitehead, Joe's stepbrother, in the sixties we had remained as close as two sisters could be. While Joe and I were struggling in Gary, she would write me, sometimes including a dollar or two in the envelope, even though as the mother of eight herself she couldn't afford it. When the boys were just starting out as the Jackson Five, Vernon, who worked in a Cleveland steel mill, got them one of their first club gigs. It was their way of getting us to come visit.

After we moved to California, five of Hattie's kids eventually followed, so Hattie had a good excuse to spend part of her year in California. Whenever we were together, she'd have me laughing. Hattie never changed; she was always the life of the party. My last memory of a healthy Hattie was of her trying to interest me in watching sports on TV. She and her boy Courtney would literally jump for joy and run around the room every time their favorite football team scored a touchdown. "Come on, Katy, come and enjoy the games with me!" she'd plead.

Hattie was back in Lorraine when she got sick. Because she was a Christian Scientist, she didn't tell anyone at first. When she couldn't keep her illness a secret any longer, Vernon and I pleaded with her to go to the hospital. But she refused, even though her health continued to worsen.

Finally, I decided to fly to Cleveland. One of Hattie's daughters brought her in a wheelchair to the airport to meet me, and we flew back together to Los Angeles.

Despite the objections of several of her kids who were living in L.A., I had Hattie admitted to a hospital. But before the doctors could even diagnose her condition, the children checked her out and admitted her instead to a Christian Science nursing home.

Two weeks later she died. To this day, I don't know what she died from, or whether she could have survived the illness if she had sought medical treatment. These are painful questions for me to live with.

Unfortunately, in 1981 I wasn't very well equipped to deal with the loss of my sister and my mother's decline. I was already several years into a marital crisis with Joe.

For two people who are so different from each other in temperament -- Joe is moody, excitable, a loner; I'm the opposite -- we had enjoyed many harmonious years. In fact, in our first two decades together, our marriage had been in danger only once. That crisis had occurred shortly after we were married, when Rebbie was still an infant.

One day Joe had returned from working the swing shift at Inland Steel, and had gone to bed. Rebbie was already asleep in her crib. I went into the backyard to hang some clothes on the line, saw my neighbor Edna Humphrey in her backyard, and walking over to chat with her. A few minutes later, Joe stormed into the backyard in his pajamas.

"Why don't you come in and see about the baby?!" he yelled. "She's screaming."

Joe returned inside. I was a few feet behind him.

"I didn't know she had awakened," I said.

Suddenly Joe lost it. He wheeled around and struck me on the right cheek. My cheek went numb.

Enraged, I grabbed the first thing I could get my hands on -- a ceramic bottle warmer -- and flung it at him. It shattered on his right arm, slashing him just above the elbow.

“Look what you did to me!” he yelled, holding his arm as blood dripped on the floor.

“The nerve of you to hit me!” I screamed. as I tried to get him to stand still so I could examine the gash.

I phoned Joe’s mother, who took him to the emergency room. The cut required stitches. Joe also had to wear his arm in a sling.

“What happened to you?” his co-workers asked him the next day.

“I got in an accident,” was all Joe would say.

That was the first and last time that Joe Jackson struck me.

As ugly as the incident was, I managed to put it behind me. Our marriage was young and otherwise good, and we were starting to build our family. In addition, I was committed to keeping my childhood vow to stay with my husband, so that our children would be reared by both of their natural parents.

I recall our ensuing Gary years with fondness. While it might have been tempting for some men to walk away from the kind of responsibilities that faced Joe as a breadwinner, he never quit on me and the family. He was also committed to keeping the Jacksons together.

After the young Jackson Five began to win local acclaim, Joe and I had more than our kids to hold us together; we had a dream. When that dream came true in California, and the Jackson family was the toast of the pop-music world, Joe and I shared something else: a very special personal success story.

And yet I knew that California was a completely different environment from Gary. “If a woman can keep her husband in California, she’s a good one,” I’d heard. With Joe in show business, I knew that he would have ample opportunity to cheat if he were inclined. But I didn’t believe he would. I didn’t believe he’d risk all that we’d worked for as a couple. I didn’t believe it right up until I got a call from a friend in 1974, informing me that Joe was having an affair.

I knew the girl in question. A friend of the family’s had brought her over to the house once, and after that she had started coming around by herself. Originally, she had been interested in Jackie.

I was devastated. A part of me wanted to serve divorce papers on Joe the next day. But another part of me didn't want to see him go because of all the years we'd had -- even though I didn't think I could ever forgive him for what he'd done.

I remained in this muddle state for longer than I'd care to admit: During this period I heard rumors of other affairs. But I still couldn't bring myself to file for divorce, even though a couple of times I came close. I kept thinking back to the vow that I'd made as a child about sticking with my husband through thick and thin for the sake of my kids. Plus, I had to admit to myself that I had no stomach for fighting, or for ugliness.

REBBIE: My brothers and sisters and I knew what was going on, but my brothers didn't impress me as getting involved -- they were so wrapped up in their work.

But what my father did got to me. There were times when I couldn't stand being in his company, because I'd start thinking about his affair.

I don't know how my mother hung in there all those years. She didn't need that heartache with everything she had to deal with being a mother and mother-in-law, supporting the children's performances, getting involved in the business end of things. It was too much.

I encouraged her to leave him. I knew that he was damaging her spirit, that she couldn't possibly have peace of mind.

In 1981, I finally did file for divorce. But, to my amazement, Joe wouldn't move out.

"I don't want you anymore," I told him. "You've got to leave."

"I'm not going anywhere," he said. "I'm your husband and you're my wife, and that's the way it's always going to be."

My attorney told me that I could get a restraining order against Joe, and, if he still refused to leave the house, have the police forcibly remove him.

I was stuck between a rock and a hard place. Even though I wanted Joe out, I didn't want to "go public" by having him physically removed. I knew that the press would jump on the story, and I couldn't bear the publicity. So I decided to continue living with Joe temporarily, albeit in different rooms, while I proceeded with my divorce suit.

It was the strangest of times for me. Some days just the sight of Joe would fill me with anger. Other times I found myself talking to him as if nothing ever happened between us.

Looking back, I know that, deep down, I wanted to forgive him. It's my nature. Although I've gotten angry at myself at times for being so forgiving, a part of me sincerely believes that a person hurts herself more than the person she's feuding with by holding a grudge. Also, I subscribe to Christ's teaching on forgiveness. How many times, He said, do you forgive a person? Seventy times seven as many times as it takes.

I think you know what I'm building up to: I eventually withdrew my divorce suit.

But I'm not going to pretend that suddenly everything was the way it used to be between Joe and me. Because it wasn't.

11 TRIUMPHS

One of my difficult years with Joe, 1980, was made even more trying when one of my sons were nearly killed.

We'd be lucky: Up until that year only one of the children had been involved in a serious accident.

Marlon, six at the time, was struck by a car.

MARLON: Michael had given me a penny and I was on my way to the corner store to buy some bubble gum; in those days you could get two pieces for a cent. And, I guess I didn't know how to cross the street.

I heard what had happened from two neighbor children.

"Your little boy got run over!" one of them yelled.

"Yeah, and I think he's dead!" the other exclaimed.

I nearly fainted. After I collected myself, I rushed to the hospital, where I learned that Marlon had suffered a fractured skull. Ironically, the man who hit him was a first cousin of Joe's who had just come up from the South. What a way to meet a relative!

Marlon was in the hospital for three weeks. But, thank goodness, he was fine after that. The only thing that he couldn't do for a while was stand on his head.

After Marlon's close call, a couple of the kids experienced typical boyhood mishaps. Ten-year-old Tito broke his arm playing football. At the same age, Jermaine colided head on with another fielder while chasing a fly ball during a Little League game. "Am I going to die?" he asked Joe and me as we rushed him to the emergency room to have the gash above his right eye sewn up. But the only boy of mine who seemed accident prone after we moved to California was Randy.

It was Randy who, while practising his karate kicks -- in the shower, of all places -- put his foot through the glass at the age of ten. He was on crutches for weeks after he received stitches. It was Randy who, two years later, was attacked by Johnny Jackson's pit bull in our yard. "Michael, he's not going to bite you -- he just wants to play!" Randy exclaimed after Michael, fearing the dog was about to turn on them, jumped on the hood of our Jeep. No sooner had Randy said that than the pit bull sank its teeth into his arm, tearing out a plug of flesh. As Randy ran to the Jeep, the dog bit him a second time, on the heel. Off we went to the emergency room again.

And it was Randy who almost killed himself in the wee hours one morning in 1980 when he lost control of his Mercedes-Benz on a rain-slickened Hollywood street and slammed into a light pole.

A friend of ours happened to be driving by, and he broke the news to me in a four A.M. phone call. He added that he had seen firemen using the Jaws of Life to free Randy from the wreck.

Joe, Michael, LaToya, and Janet were also home at the time, and we were all panicked. We dialed the local hospitals and found him in the emergency room at St. Joseph's Medical Center in Burbank. We then phoned the rest of the family.

We all must have flown to Burbank, because it seemed like five minutes later the entire Jackson family was there.

MARLON: It was hard for us to look at Randy in the emergency room. Shards of glass were still in his hair; the sheet that covered him was smeared with blood. When I lifted the sheet, we saw that both of his legs were smashed from the thigh down. We could see bone.

RANDY: I crushed all of my toes. I broke every bone in my left foot. I broke my knees, my tibia, both ankles, both shins. I cracked my pelvis.

I almost died in the emergency room before my family arrived -- but not from injuries, from a nurse's error. Instead of giving the heroin addict in the room a shot of methadone, she gave it to me. As I don't do drugs, my body

reacted violently. My heart stopped beating and I stopped breathing. They had to work feverishly to bring me back.

“I’ll be all right,” Randy managed to tell us after we joined him in the emergency room. But outside the room, the doctor wasn’t so sure.

“We may have to amputate,” he said. “Even if we can save his legs, I don’t think he’ll ever be able to walk again.”

My heart fell to my feet. “How could Randy live without walking?” I cried. “He’s the most independent child in the family!”

Later that night, Randy was moved from emergency to his room. We were allowed to visit again with him, but he took one look at us and got upset.

“Go away if you’re all going to be crying,” he said. When his doctor tried to inform him of the severity of his condition, Randy said he didn’t want to hear about it.

RANDY: I knew that if I accepted the prognosis that I would never walk again, then I would never walk again. So from the very start I told myself, This isn’t it for me. I will overcome. I’ve always believed strongly in the power of auto-suggestion and positive thinking.

The doctors’ first order of business was stopping Randy’s internal bleeding. After they succeeded in doing that, they went to work on his legs. Six months and seven operations later, he was released from the hospital. Each of his legs were in a cast all the way up to his hip.

He stayed at the house for a while. But then he insisted on returning to his place with his girlfriend, Julie Mijares, which upset me. “How can I look after you now?” I asked him.

RANDY: I was adamant about being in my own environment, where I would not be distracted and where I could read the things that I needed to read. It was part of my recovery.

So, too, was a strict diet that my friend Dick Gregory put me on to strengthen my bones. And I’d worked with a physical therapist specializing in athletes. I believed that if I surrounded myself with athletic people from nine to five every day that it would help me come back.

My therapist was Clive Brewster, who works with the Los Angeles Lakers. I made him believe that I wanted to walk again, that I had to walk again.

Several weeks after I left my mom's house, my girlfriend, Julie, drove me back for a visit. At the time I was still confined to a wheelchair.

"Mother, I want to show you something," I said after she came to the door. As she stood there with tears streaming down her cheeks, I managed to stand up for the first time since my accident.

With Randy's miraculous recovery, it was only fitting that the Jacksons' 1980 album was titled Triumph.

Their second self-produced LP was released in July 1980, while Randy was still in the hospital. For the first time on the Jacksons album, every song was a Jackson original.

Like Destiny, Triumph was fated to "go platinum," selling more than a million copies. Helping the album along was the success of the singles "Lovely One" and "Heartbreak Hotel."

I especially liked "Heartbreak Hotel," one of Michael's compositions. Not only did it have a good beat, good music, and mysterious lyrics, it also had some nice production touches, such as the cello intro and the cello and piano coda. This was the song in which Michael first started to experiment and stretch his boundaries as a songwriter.

It was the boys' custom to tour in support of a new release, but because of Randy's continuing convalescence, the Triumph tour was postponed.

Randy's therapy continued for months. After his casts were removed, he worked on bending his legs, braving severe pain. Then, with the help of a walker, he took his first step and his second and his third. After he started walking, he was able to exercise more vigorously, and swim. After a while, he was able to use a Nautilus machine, and could bicycle and play basketball.

In July 1981, he was able to tour.

JERMAINE: After we saw how determined Randy was to walk again, the brothers didn't doubt for a moment that he'd perform again with us.

The postponement of the Jacksons' tour worked to the boys' favor in that it allowed them to devise their most elaborate show to date. At the time, rival groups like Earth, Wind & Fire were experimenting with ambitious productions, and the boys didn't want to be out-done. It was shades of their old Gary talent show competitiveness.

Inspired by the movie *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, Michael designed a space-age set for the show. The longtime magic buff also enlisted magician Doug Henning to plan the show's special effects, the most stunning of which was Michael's disappearance in a puff of smoke at the end of "Don't Stop 'Til You Get Enough."

"Michael, how on earth does that trick work?" I asked him after trying in vain to figure it out.

"I can't tell you, Mother," Michael replied. "It's a secret."

My favorite moment of the Triumph tour, however, was far less spectacular, although magical in its own way. It came on opening night at the Memphis Coliseum, when Randy, dressed in medieval armor began the show by leading his brothers onstage. Seeing him perform only sixteen months after his doctor said he might never walk again made Randy's personal "Triumph" complete.

The Jacksons went on to perform in thirty-five more cities. The tour yielded the boys' only in-concert album, *The Jackson Live!*, recorded at Madison Square Garden. That two-record set serves as a musical reminder that the Jacksons' and Michael's triumph had actually been more than a decade in the making. Among the selections is a medley of the Jackson Five hits, Michael's "Ben," such Jacksons hits "Shake Your Body (Down to the Ground)," "Lovely One" and "Heartbreak Hotel," and Michael's hits from *Off The Wall*.

With the Jacksons at their peak as 1982 dawned, Michael decided that it was time once again to seek more triumphs of his own.

12 THRILLS

I saw Michael mostly in passing in 1982 -- it was his busiest year yet as a solo artist. He wrote and produced the Diana Ross hit "Muscles," as a token of appreciation for her friendship over the years. He collaborated with his friend Paul McCartney on several songs. And he narrated *E.T.: The Extraterrestrial*, the storybook LP of the Steven Spielberg film.

These projects would have amounted to a good year's work for some people. But Michael actually sandwiched the projects in between work on *Thriller*, his second solo album for Epic Records. This was the album Michael had earlier pledged to me, that would stand the music world on its ear. Now he was telling me it was going to become the biggest-selling album of all time.

It's not like Michael to set a goal without also laying out a battle plan. In the case of *Thriller*, he knew just how he was going to make it a blockbuster hit: through the use of the best song videos ever.

At the time, music videos were just beginning to come into their own as a record-promotion tool. But Michael had already been a fan of video for a couple of years. In 1980 he and the brothers had made an ambitious eight-minute film utilizing the song "Can You Feel It." The boys screened the video at the beginning of their *Triumph* shows.

Of course, before you can shoot a great video, you have to have a great song. When Michael was at home in 1982, he could usually be found behind closed doors in his room with pen in hand. He'd let me know he was still alive every now and then by letting out a "Whoo!" and clapping his hands -- his way of celebrating a good idea.

After finishing a song that he wanted to use for the album, Michael would record a demo of it himself in the studio next to our garage. Then he'd play the demo for me and whoever else was around, to get our feedback.

One of the first tunes he played for me was "Billie Jean."

My first reaction was disbelief -- I couldn't believe Michael had written such a tough-sounding song. Michael is not the macho type, so I figured that he was making a conscious effort with "Billie Jean" to change his image. I think he felt that his image had become too goody-goody.

Once I recovered from my shock, I heard "Billie Jean" for what it was, a number-one song.

It immediately struck more than a musical chord with me. Michael and his brothers had been plagued by Billie Jean -- or aggressive girls -- ever since the earliest days of the Jackson Five. It had really worried me, to the point where I sat the boys down one day and told them, "Watch out. Any time a girl comes running after you, she's probably not the right one." While the real Billie Jean -- including girls who actually claimed that one of the boys had fathered their child -- had caused the Jacksons grief, the subject matter certainly made for interesting song lyrics.

Michael's demo track spelled "hit," too. When Michael later played the tape for Quincy, Quincy liked everything but the bass part. He tried to get Michael to change it, but when Michael feels strongly about something he can't be moved, and he felt strongly about that bass line. I'm glad he held his ground. Like him, I thought the bass part was one of the best things about the track.

However, I was puzzled when Michael played me his demo of “Beat It.” Even though I knew Michael was a big fan of the movie *West Side Story*, I thought, Why would he want to write a song about two gangs choosing each other off? It took a few more listenings before I realized that the lyrics actually contained a positive message. True bravery, Michael was claiming, is settling differences without resorting to violence.

Michael filmed videos of each song. I saw the “Billie Jean” video first and thought it was mysterious and stunning to watch. But, as good as it was, it wound up taking a backseat to the “Beat It” video.

It was Michael’s idea to hire actual Los Angeles gang members to appear as extras. The video began with shots of these young toughs preparing to rumble, and it didn’t look as if they were acting.

The tension builds as the two gangs edge closer and closer to full-scale war. Just as the first switchblades slash through the air, however, Michael bursts onto the scene, singing, “It doesn’t matter who’s wrong or right!” Instantly, the gangs are whipped into line -- a dance line” And Michael leads the way with his great assortment of dance moves.

Michael premiered the “Beat It” video for the family in our home theatre. When it was over we stood up, applauded, and hugged him. That’s how fantastic we all thought it was.

As any fan of Michael’s can attest, both “Billie Jean” and “Beat It” were fated to become giant hits for him. They and “The Girl Is Mine,” Michael’s duet with Paul McCartney, kept *Thriller* at the top of the charts for the first few months of 1983.

But by May, sales of *Thriller* had begun to slow. If *Thriller* was going to have a chance of becoming the best-selling album of all time, Michael had to do something to reverse *Thriller*’s slide. He did during the TV special “Motown 25: Yesterday, Today, Forever,” broadcast on May 16.

Ironically, Michael had to be talked into appearing on the special with his brothers. I was one of the people doing the talking.

“Motown did give you and the brothers your start,” I reminded him. “And you’d be performing on the same stage as all the acts you idolized when you were a little boy.”

Michael agreed to think about it. When Berry Gordy paid him a personal visit in the studio one day to do some coaxing of his own, Michael finally said okay. He made one stipulation to Mr. Gordy: that he perform “Billie Jean”

after he participated in a medley of Jackson Five hits with his brothers. “Billie Jean” would be the only non-Motown song on the entire program, but how could Mr. Gordy refuse?

I was excited about the boys’ participation in the TV special not only because it would mark their first appearance together since the Triumph tour, but also because they would be performing again with Jermaine.

Dissatisfied with his record sales, Jermaine had recently left Motown himself. He left a Motown legacy of seven albums released between 1976 and 1982, including his “double platinum” 1980 LP, Let’s Get Serious, featuring the hit single of the same title.

Hazel had supported Jermaine’s decision to ask for his release from Motown. Mr. Gordy added a gracious note of his own when he said that the professional split with his son-in-law “was not only amicable, but wrapped in love.”

Needless to say, the family was delighted to welcome Jermaine back into the group.

The boys rehearsed their segment at the house. One problem they had to deal with was what to do with Randy. I’m sure Randy’s heart sank when he heard Michael declare, “You know, Randy can’t be on the show because he joined the group after we left Motown.” But the boys decided to have Randy walk out during their medley.

I was anxious to get an idea of what they were planning to do onstage, but, watching the boys, “rehearse,” I barely had a clue. This is what had always burned me up about their rehearsals. They’d just stand around as they sang.

“You’ve got to sell yourselves!” I used to exclaim. “We’re going to have a lousy show tonight!”

“We got shy rehearsing in front of you and the other relatives,” they’d always reply.

“Oh? How come your not shy performing in front of thousands of people in an arena, then?”

They had an answer for that one, too: “Because, Mother, those people don’t know us.”

As for Michael’s performance of “Billie Jean,” I had no idea whatsoever about what he planned to do. Not only did he not walk through the song, but he refused to talk about it.

“Motown 25” turned out to be a wonderful show. It was number one in the Niensens, and was destined to win an Emmy.

Among the show’s many highlights: Smokey Robinson performing again with the Miracles; Diana Ross sharing the stage again with the Supremes; the Four Tops and Temptations participating in a mock “battle of the bands” segment; and of course, the reunited Jacksons creating their special brand of excitement.

After the boys’ medley, Michael stood alone in the spotlight.

“Those were the good old days,” he said of the “oldies” he had just sung with his brothers. “But what I really like are the newer songs.”

At that moment, “Billie Jean’s” heavy beat kicked in.

Recognizing the intro, many in the audience were instantly on their feet. Being all of five feet, two inches tall, I had to jump to my feet, too, if I wanted to see anything.

As Joe sprang up next to me, he announced, “Michael just stole the show!”

“Shut up! He hasn’t done anything yet!” I exclaimed.

Michael did something soon enough: the Moonwalk. So this is his surprise, I said to myself.

Contrary to popular opinion at the time, the Moonwalk -- in which the dancer seems to be walking forward and backward at the same time -- was not new. Blacks performed the move in film shorts dating back to the thirties. Michael loves to watch old movies, and he’d studied those shorts.

Michael also loved the films of the French mime Marcel Marceau. Marcel could glide the same way. He was an influence on Michael, as well.

So were the gang members who were then performing the move on the streets. That’s where the term “Moonwalk” originated.

But it was Michael who made the Moonwalk famous during his electrifying performance of “Billie Jean,” a performance that would earn Michael an Emmy nomination himself.

The brothers, who watched Michael’s segment on the TV monitors backstage, couldn’t believe what they were seeing. Michael hadn’t clued them about the Moonwalk, either. He wanted his family, as well as the TV audience, to be surprised.

A few days later, we learned just how big that TV audience was: forty-seven million people. And tens of thousands of them went out hunting for Michael's album the next day, returning *Thriller* to number one on the charts.

By the fall of 1983, *Thriller* had yielded two more hits "Wanna Be Startin' Something" and "Human Nature." As the album's sixth single, "P.Y.T. (Pretty Young Thing)," began to climb the charts in October, Michael made a fateful decision to film a third video. He selected the title tune, Rod Temperton's fun, and spooky, tale of a night spent viewing horror movies.

As visually oriented as the song "Thriller" was, I was skeptical when I first heard of Michael's plans to film it.

"You're not going to be able to top the 'Beat It' video," I said.

"Oh, 'Thriller' is going to be better," Michael replied.

"How can it possibly be better?"

"Just wait," he said confidently.

As it turned out, I didn't have to wait to see the finished product to know that Michael was right. One visit to the set made me a believer. Everywhere I turned I rubbed elbows with an incredibly made-up "monster." The kids are going to love this video, I thought.

At fourteen minutes length, "Thriller" qualified as a mini-movie. It featured a protagonist, Michael, who graphically proves that he's "not like other guys," a shocked and bewildered girlfriend, an unspeakably creepy graveyard scene, and the darndest Monster Mash ever filmed with Michael, of course, getting in his latest kicks.

The "Thriller" video had its world premiere on MTV in December 1983. Soon afterward, *Thriller*, the album, was back at number one. If that wasn't enough excitement for the month, Michael ended 1983 with the number one single in the country: his "Say, Say, Say" duet with Paul McCartney.

Needless to say, when the twenty-sixth annual Grammy Awards rolled around in February 1984, Michael was the heavy favorite to walk away with an armful of statuettes. This time he wasn't disappointed.

We had a tipoff that he would have a big night at the Shrine Auditorium when he won three of four secondary awards that he was nominated for in the earlier untelevised portion of the show.

As he sat in the first row with his date, Brooke Shields, during the “prime time” portion of the telecast, Michael heard his name called for the first time for Album of the Year. After that he was up and down so many times accepting awards -- he won a record-setting eight in all -- that Joe and I didn’t have a chance to say anything to him except “Congratulations!,” even though we were sitting directly behind him.

I was really, really proud and happy for him. I kept thinking, Well, this has made up for Off The Wall. I didn’t even mind the fact that he had shades on for the entire show, the way he’d done the month before at the American Music Awards. It was his image for the night just something he wanted to do. You know how kids are.

Michael knew that a big victory at the Grammys would boost Thriller sales. But I think that even he was shocked when he learned how many more copies the album had sold in the first three months of 1984: seven and a half million.

During the early part of 1984, the song “Thriller” became the album’s seventh Top Ten single, a record-breaker.

But the goal that Michael cared about the most was to have the best-selling album ever. And in the spring of 1984, Thriller had sold more than enough copies to warrant an investigation by the Guinness people.

Their findings were published in The Guinness Book of World Records: 1984: Thriller, at thirty-five million-plus copies sold, had surpassed the Saturday Night Fever soundtrack album to become the number-one-selling album of all time.

Michael’s dream had come true, thanks to a collection of nine great songs, four wonderful videos, two triumphant awards-show appearances, and one unforgettable TV performance.

The question now was: What could Michael do for an encore?

Joe, it turned out, already had the answer.

13 A HARD-WON “VICTORY”

Ironically, when Joe came up with his plan for how Michael and his brothers could spend their summer of 1984 capitalizing on the success of Thriller, he no longer had an official say in their management. In the spring of 1983, his contract came up for renewal, and the boys chose not to re-sign with him.

JACKIE: We told him, "Dad, just let us do it now. I think we can handle it." So he said "okay" and stepped down. Simple as that.

Joe did manage to act "cool" in front of his sons. But in private, he cried. "I can't believe that they're leaving me," he said. "I don't understand."

I cried, too. Even though I still hadn't totally forgiven Joe for his philandering, I felt sad for him having to watch his children go after caring for them for so many years.

Through our tears, however, Joe and I knew that he had been Michael's and the Jacksons' managers in name only since the late seventies.

A man whose "smarts" were of the sweet variety -- he didn't have a high-school diploma -- Joe had made mistakes guiding the boys' careers in the early seventies. There were some bad business deals, some ripoffs, especially concerning the boys' tours.

One of the reasons why it was hard for Joe was that he was an honest man among sharks. "Promoters, agents, and businessmen come to me and they offer me money under the table to do this and that, but I can't operate that way," he told me once. "But other people do."

The boys recognized Joe's weak points.

MARLON: We went to our father one day and said, "You need help." We wanted other managers. His contract hadn't run out, so we asked him to co-manage with the team of Ron Weisner and Fred DeMann beginning in 1978.

It was an uneasy partnership from day one. The relationship became hostile when Joe perceived that he was being frozen out of a decision-making role by Weisner and DeMann.

"You're trying to steal my boys from me, I know it!" Joe accused the pair one day.

Weisner and DeMann denied that they were. But the fact was that Joe's day-to-day involvement with the boys' careers had ceased.

It was with jubilation, then, that Joe greeted the news that the Jacksons had decided not to renew their contract with Weisner and DeMann in 1983.

MARLON: All of a sudden, Weisner and DeMann started to put much of their focus on Michael, which wouldn't have bothered the brothers, except for the fact that we felt they were neglecting the Jacksons in the process. Michael

also got upset with them for other reasons. Next thing I knew, he had fired them, too.

Joe and Weisner and DeMann traded parting shots in the press. Joe talked about “leeches trying to break up” the Jacksons, and declared that the only reason he’d hired Weisner and DeMann in the first place was because “there was a time when I felt I needed white help in dealing with the corporate structure at CBS.”

Fred DeMann, meanwhile, suggested that the problem with Joe might be race-related.

Joe was stung. “If I were [racist], I wouldn’t be sitting here talking to you right now,” he told Time magazine. “If I were a racist, I wouldn’t have hired a lot of people that aren’t black to work for me. If I were a racist, I would be out there trying to put blacks against whites. I’m not that I am just the opposite.”

While Joe spoke the truth, he couldn’t undo the bad publicity that his war of words with Weisner and DeMann had caused. I feel safe in saying that the bad press played a role in the boys’ decision not to renew Joe’s managerial contract.

The amazing thing about Joe, though, is that the man will not give up. If he falls on his face fifty times, he’ll get up each time, dust himself off, and start all over again.

After he got over his setback with the boys, Joe looked around in late 1983,. He saw that Michael hadn’t taken on a new manager yet for his solo work; he saw that the boys as a group hadn’t hired a new manager, either; he saw that Michael’s Thriller was continuing to rack up sales

And he saw an opportunity.

Joe wasn’t thinking small, either. He envisioned the Jacksons starring in the largest-grossing tour of all time, a tour that would play no venue smaller than a sports stadium.

And he would help promote it.

MARLON: Touring again was already running through our minds. But we hadn’t decided on a promoter. Everything was still at the start-start-start stage when my father approached us.

The boys had qualms about working with Joe again. Joe moved fast to win their confidence.

At a meeting with one potential co-promoter and the group's accountant at Jackie's house, Joe was in top managerial form. When the promoter handed the accountant a check for two hundred fifty thousand dollars, Joe snapped, "Give that check back to him!" When the accountant resisted, Joe grabbed the check and tore it up. "We're not going to be undersold," he declared. "This tour is going to make millions, and we're going to get in on the money this time."

Soon afterward, Joe displayed his flair for the dramatic by approaching flamboyant boxing promoter Don King to join him in promoting the tour. King jumped at the opportunity. "With the great success of Michael's album, this tour could gross tens of millions," he enthused. That was exactly what Joe wanted to hear.

Joe's choice for a second co-promoter was equally surprising. Me.

When we moved to California, Joe and I made an agreement. Actually, Joe made it for us. "You take care of the home," he said, "and I'll take care of managing the kids. I don't think you need that headache."

He was right; I didn't. Throughout Joe's tenure as the boys' manager I remained in the background.

But now Joe needed me. He felt that if I was there at his side at the bargaining table helping to ensure that the boys got a fair financial deal, they would feel more secure in letting Joe run the tour.

I said yes. The tour did promise to be a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

All the boys except one were persuaded to work with Joe. The holdout was Michael, who wasn't enthused about going on the road at the time.

In 1981, in fact, he had announced his retirement from touring. "I love being onstage," he said at the time, "but I don't like the other things that go with touring."

"I think it's important to grow, and I've been doing this for so long I sometimes feel like I should be seventy by now."

As serious as Michael sounded, that wasn't the self-described "stage addict" that I knew. Believing that under his facade of reticence lurked a Michael raring to perform again, I decided to try some gentle persuasion. "Just think about doing the tour," I told him. A few days later I brought up the subject again. Sensing his receptiveness, I said, "Michael, I'd like for you to do it. The brothers need you."

“Okay, Mother,” he replied. “If you want me to, I will.”

One of the first announcements regarding the tour was that Pepsi had signed on as tour sponsor.

In return for the fee that the company paid for sponsorship rights, the Jacksons agreed to film a series of TV commercials for Pepsi.

In January 1984, the boys began shooting the commercials at the Shrine Auditorium under the direction of Bob Giraldi. Giraldi had worked with Michael on his “Beat It” video.

On the night of January 27 the cameras were rolling on the boys’ performance of “Billie Jean,” its lyrics recast as a jingle, when Michael suddenly dropped to the floor, his hair ablaze.

I learned of an accident on the set from a friend who'd heard it on a radio bulletin.

“Well, I haven’t heard anything,” I said nervously.

I called the set immediately.

“Michael’s in the ambulance. They’re taking him to the hospital,” said the person who answered the phone.

I couldn’t believe what I was hearing. I asked to speak to Bill Bray, who coordinates Michael’s security.

“Don’t get alarmed it’s not that bad,” Bill said. “Michael will be all right.”

Bill explained what had happened. Michael was descending a short staircase during the explosion of some magnesium flash bombs when he was showered with sparks. Unbeknownst to him, the sparks ignited his hair. Michael kept dancing down the steps until he suddenly felt a burning pain at the back of his scalp. He dropped to the floor and was attended to immediately.

I jumped in the car with LaToya and Janet and we sped over to Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in West Hollywood. We arrived seconds before Michael’s ambulance.

“I’m fine,” Michael told us as he was wheeled by us into the hospital.

Two hours later, at the request of his surgeon, Dr. Stephen Hoefflin, Michael was transferred to Brotman Memorial Hospital, which has a burn wing.

Michael, it turned out, had suffered second- and third- degree burns on a palm-sized area of his scalp. His doctor felt that Michael was quite fortunate that his injuries weren't more extensive. They surely would have been if the sparks had also ignited his costume, the physician said. Dr. Hoefflin began treating Michael with antibiotics and analgesics.

Michael was in emotional as well as physical pain. He didn't feel that the accident would have happened if proper safety precautions had been taken. The two nearest flash bombs, he learned, had exploded only two feet away on either side of him.

And yet, even in his agitated state, Michael owned up to the fact that he'd gotten a secret thrill riding in an ambulance for the first time, its sirens blaring. It was something he'd wanted to do, he said, since he was a little boy.

Michael's accident was all over the late-night news. That night and throughout the next day, hundreds of fans showed up in the hospital lobby with flowers, stuffed animals, and other gifts. The hospital switchboard was flooded with inquiring phone calls.

At Michael's request, Bill Bray brought over a VCR and Michael spent much of the next morning and afternoon watching his favorite videotapes.

Not for a moment did he talk of pulling out of the tour because of his injury. In fact, that evening Michael announced that he was ready to go home.

His doctor pleaded with him to stay in the hospital a few more days, to rest up. But Michael hated the idea of security people having to guard his room, so he insisted that he be allowed to leave.

Three months later, after his burn had healed, Michael returned to the hospital so that Dr. Hoefflin could remove scar tissue from his scalp with a carbon-dioxide laser and stretch a part of his scalp over the burn area.

All in all, it was a traumatic experience for Michael. But something good eventually did come of it: the Michael Jackson Burn Center.

Michael got the idea of lending his name to Brotman's burn unit after visiting with some of his fellow burn patients. He was moved to tears seeing how terribly injured some of them were, and he wanted to do something to help. When he told Pepsi of his desires, the company -- which, I am sure, had been bracing for a lawsuit from Michael, a suit that Michael never filled --

was only too happy to donate one and a half million dollars to the center. The Michael Jackson Burn Center was born.

When it became clear that Michael would be totally healed and fit to perform that summer, tour preparations began in earnest.

It seemed that nothing, however, went smoothly.

By then Michael had hired a new manager, Frank Dileo. Dileo began taking a keen interest in tour details, as did two of Michael's attorneys, Jermaine's attorney, the other boys' two attorneys, the group's accountant, the group's personal manager, and the group's business manager.

I realized that too many chefs had converged in the kitchen when the boys complained to Joe and me about Don King's involvement in the tour. One or more of the aforementioned individuals had whispered in my sons' ears about King, bringing up King's manslaughter conviction and bad-mouthing him for his lack of experience in promoting rock tours.

To placate the boys, Joe and I agreed to seek out a fourth co-promoter. We entertained bids from a handful of people.

We were in the midst of serious negotiations with one of them when the boys' various attorneys began lobbying for the selection of one of several different promoters instead. Suddenly, tour preparations were thrown into an uproar.

I'll never forget one meeting among these attorneys and Joe, Don King, and myself. We sat in one of the attorney's offices from noon until five the next morning fussing and fighting about the tour and how it should be run. I like peace and I don't like arguments, so that meeting killed me. I kept thinking, I could never be in a business like this. It's dog-eat-dog.

It was obvious to me what the attorneys were doing in elbowing their way into decision-making roles on the tour: They were fattening their fees.

"Listen," I told the boys one day, "if lawyers can't keep up a mess, they wouldn't make money. They're not here to make things go smoothly."

"Here you guys are brothers," Joe added. "Talk about the issues yourselves. The lawyers shouldn't even be here. They should be back in their offices, waiting for you to tell them what you've decided."

But the attorneys remained.

Joe, Don King, and I saw the writing on the wall. Don, however, vowed to go out swinging.

“If you want to take this tour away from us,” he told the attorneys, “you’re going to have to pay us.”

He succeeded in getting the three of us a percentage of the tour’s profits. In turn, we agreed to remain with the tour in largely figurehead roles.

Even though the tour was scheduled to start June 22, it wasn’t until the first week of June that the boys’ representatives finally hired a new promoter. Ironically, after weighing offers from several veteran rock promoters, they chose someone who didn’t have any more experience running rock tours than Don King: Chuck Sullivan, owner of the New England Patriots of the National Football League. Sullivan, did, however, have close links with stadium personnel around the country, which was a plus.

Also, Sullivan made an offer that the attorneys couldn’t refuse: a guarantee of almost forty million dollars to the Jacksons for the right to stage the tour.

As tremendous as the offer seemed, it carried a catch. In order to make good on that guarantee and ensure a tidy profit for himself, Sullivan had to charge a high ticket price. The boys didn’t know how high until after the papers were signed: thirty dollars per seat. In addition, Sullivan decided that fans would have to order four tickets -- no more, no less -- and would have to send in their mail order in the amount of one hundred twenty dollars with no guarantee of a specific date, a specific seat, or even a ticket.

The boys had originally discussed a ticket price of between twelve dollars and fifty cents and twenty dollars, with no restrictions on the number of tickets ordered, so they weren’t happy with Sullivan’s ticket policy.

Needless to say, neither were the fans. Even though money orders poured in by tens of thousands, many accused the boys of being greedy. One eleven-year-old from Texas blamed Michael personally. In an open letter to Michael published in a Dallas newspaper, she wrote: “How could you, of all people, be so selfish?”

Michael was crushed when he read the letter. In truth, his participation in the tour had been all about giving -- giving to his brothers, who wanted to tour more than he did, and giving to his and the Jacksons’ fans.

Michael replied to his young fan on July 5, the day before the Jacksons’ tour, two weeks delayed, finally began in Kansas City.

First, he said in a prepared statement, he would ask the promoter to figure out another, fairer way to sell tickets (the four-ticket rule was later dropped). Second, he announced that he would donate his total tour earnings to charity.

Given all the headaches and hassles to the point, it seemed more than a little ironic that the boys' tour, and accompanying studio album, carried the title "Victory."

But as I gazed at a packed Arrowhead Stadium the night of July 6, I found my frustration over the events of the past several months dissipating. The night was warm, the air charged. I can close my eyes and relive the experience:

All I hear is "Jacksons! Jacksons! Jacksons!" It is Jacksonmania. There are kids wearing one spangly glove, like Michael. There are their parents. And there are older people, some of them in wheelchairs.

I talk to one girl in the audience. "You know, my little sister has been sick for five years," she says. "We were looking for her to die. Then during one of the Jacksons' tours, Michael came to visit her in the hospital. And she's still here. We think that Michael's visit had a lot to do with it.

Finally it's showtime. After another one of those opening segments featuring Randy as a knight -- this time yanking a sword out of a stone as laser lights bounce wildly off the blade -- the boys make their entrance. They do so atop a slowly rising platform from underneath the stage. The stage lights behind and in front of them are blinding to my eyes.

When they reach the stage they proceed to walk up the stairs amid the stage smoke to another platform. I hear the clunk! clunk! clunk! of every step coming out of the speakers set inside the towers on each side of the stage.

Now they walk toward the audience, each of them wearing sunglasses. They stand there for a minute, all in a row. Then they raise their right hands in unison and take their glasses off. Funny!

Michael gives the signal with a jab of his gloved hand. Now they go into their dance, and the band launches into "Wanna Be Startin'" Something." the show is on!

As I look down from my seat in the light tower, I focus on each of my boys in turn.

Because Jackie has recently injured his knee playing basketball and can't perform, Randy is trying to make up for him by getting out from behind the keyboards and moving around more. He's the macho type. He has a few little

muscles that he's been working on, and he's strutting around the stage flexing them at everybody.

Tito is a little bit laid back. It's hilarious seeing him move because he's not a dancer. But his brothers are always telling him, "You've got to move!" So there he is with his guitar trying to dance and play.

Marlon is dancing nonstop, enjoying every second.

Jermaine is acting kind of cool. He's dancing a little.

Michael? He's singing, dancing, doing it all as usual. Where does he get all that energy? I think of something he'd often told his brothers: "If we're going to do a show, we've got to do a real good show. We can't half step it."

Their concert features sixteen selections. They range from a Jackson Five medley to songs from Michael's *Off The Wall* and *Thriller* albums to three solos by Jermaine.

As I take in every note, every gesture, every move, I can't help but travel back in time -- to the days when each of my boys was a baby in my arms; to when we struggled in Gary.

Now as I look around again at the sea of people -- forty-five in all, and many of them on their feet cheering and screaming -- I say to myself, So this is the result of all the years we dedicated ourselves to a dream.

The wonderful experience at Arrowhead Stadium was fated to be repeated time and again during the five-month-long tour.

TITO: The Victory tour was the tour that I hated to end. There was a limited number of dates, so every show was special, every last one of them.

I hated for it to end, too. I loved touring. I like seeing new places, and I like spending time with my children. It beats staying home and wondering, How are the boys doing? What are they doing?

The Victory tour was different from other Jacksons tours in that the dates were spread out widely enough to allow the boys to fly home between gigs. Maybe this was how the rumors started that the boys "never" spent time together on the tour, and, thus, must have been "feuding."

In truth, the boys hung out together backstage before and after every show. If anything, I thought they had a little bit too much fun together. If they saw someone they knew, like Bill Bray, the head of our security force, heading for their dressing room, they might form a "firing squad" and, when he walked in,

pelt him with grapes. “That kind of behavior makes me look bad as your mother!” I’d have to tell them.

The boys wanted their road crew, staff, friends, and family to have a good time on tour, too. They personally saw to it that the area underneath their huge stage was turned into a portable disco called Mr. Lucky’s, in honor of that little Gary tavern where they played their first professional gig. During their performances they would sneak peaks through the floorboards at the dance action below.

We did have our serious moments on tour, too. After each performance I’d go backstage to share my observations on how the show had gone. As soon as I’d sit down, one or more of the boys would say, “Shh! Mother’s got something to say.”

Unfortunately, the boys continued to be plagued by tour business.

MARLON: The pain and agony before and after the show would wear on us. No tour is a good experience when it comes to business, but Victory was a more painful tour than most because where there’s more money involved, there’s more people and more greed.

Once the tour began, the main drama offstage was promoter Chuck Sullivan’s counting scramble to make a profit for himself. Stadium venues were dropped and added depending on his failure or success in winning special financial concessions from stadium owners. The changing itinerary reinforced the notion in some people’s minds that the tour was a boondoggle.

In December, the Victory tour culminated at home with six sold-out dates at Dodger Stadium. When the dust had settled from the last dismantling of the stage the boys, Joe, and I could begin to view the tour with some sense of perspective.

We saw a tour that, yes, had caused us all grief at one point or another. But there was a general sense of deep satisfaction with the boys’ show. The audience lets you know if you’re doing a good job. The screaming and cheering, the standing ovations, and the dancing in the aisles that greeted each show told me that the boys had done something right onstage.

Of course, the tour numbers were gratifying. The boys had played to more than two million fans. The total gross had exceeded fifty million dollars, shattering the previous record of thirty million dollars set by the Rolling Stones in 1981.

The boys Victory album had also done great, selling more than two million copies and spawning a Top Ten single, “State of Shock,” featuring Michael’s duet with Mick Jagger.

In the end, I don’t think any of us felt that the Victory tour had been anything less than a victory of talent and perseverance.

And now it was time for the boys to take a break.

For Michael, that meant returning to our Encino home, his sanctuary, and by then probably the best-known celebrity home west of Graceland.

14 MICHAEL AT HOME

When Michael was asked in 1981 if, as a twenty-three-year-old, he was contemplating moving out on his own, he replied, “Oh, no. I think I’d die on my own. I’d be so lonely.”

The next year he gave notice that he intended to remain at home at least a few more years when he announced to me one day, “Mother, it’s time for a new house.”

By then we’d already lived in our Encino home for eleven years. That hadn’t been very “California” of us; Los Angeles residents seemed to move every several years. So I was ready for a change of environment.

Michael, LaToya, Janet Joe, and I looked at some houses. But we were shocked by the high prices. Los Angeles real estate, we learned, had appreciated a great deal since 1971.

“Why move?” we concluded. “Rebuild, instead!”

After rejecting one architect’s plans for a totally new house, we decided simply to remodel our existing house, and add a second story for the bedrooms.

We liked the remodeling plans that a second architect drew up. Since he was also a contractor, we hired him to do the building as well. But to our dismay he tore the whole house down and poured a new foundation! “Do you call this remodeling’?” I asked him. We fired him.

However, we kept his plans. We hired another builder to continue the work.

While the house was under construction, Michael, LaToya, Janet, and I moved into a nearby condo that we own. Joe remained in a guesthouse on the property to help guard against trespassers.

Still, as word got out about the construction, trespassers did occur when he wasn't around. Some of the boys' gold records were stolen from the guesthouse, as were various odds and ends.

One day, Michael, LaToya, Janet, and I happened upon a looting in progress. I don't know who was more scared, the looters or us. They took off in one direction, scaling a wall, while we fled in the opposite direction, back to our car.

After that, we decided to hire a round-the-clock security staff. Security guards are a fixture at our house to this day.

The inconvenience of having to relocate temporarily was worth it when, in 1983, our house was finally finished and we were able to move in.

As Michael had offered to pay for the new construction, his touches abounded.

It was his idea, for example, that the house be English Tudor in style. I'm not fond of Tudor's -- I think they're dark and spooky-looking -- but I went along with him when he agreed to have a lot of windows to bring in the light. The end result is one of the cheeriest Tudors ever built.

As Michael was a big fan of Disneyland, with his own hotel suite at Disney World, many of his ideas were Disney-inspired. For example: his mini-version of Main Street, U.S.A., next to the garage, featuring a candy store and a storefront picture window housing his antique toy and doll collection; as well as the wooden signs containing such hand-carved Disneyesque messages as FOLLOW YOUR DREAMS WHEREVER THEY MAY LEAD.

Michael was so fixated on Disney that he even wanted to reserve one of the downstairs rooms for a mini- "Pirates of the Caribbean" attraction! He went so far as to consult a Disney technician about the project. "There will be a pirate shootout, cannons, and guns," he told a reporter at the time. "They'll just scream at one another and I'll have the lights, sounds, everything."

When I heard about this Disney "touch," I put my foot down.

"We just can't have that, Michael," I said. "It's a little too much."

"Mother, I want it," he insisted.

“Please, we can’t. Let me make a dining room out of that room.”

Michael finally gave in, but he was disappointed.

He did, however, welcome two of the ideas I had for his bedroom.

Since his room had such a high ceiling, I suggested we put in a second floor containing a second fireplace -- he had one downstairs -- and a second bathroom. Michael installed a barber’s chair in that bathroom for his hair cuts.

Michael’s Murphy bed was also my brainstorm. “What are you going to sleep on if you get sick?” I fretted after Michael announced that he intended to sleep in a sleeping bag instead of a bed, so that he would have plenty of room to practice his dancing. The Murphy bed seemed the ideal compromise; when it folded into the wall, you didn’t even know it was there. All you saw was wood paneling.

But the best idea I had for our new house was to have an upstairs den. I was afraid that since everyone was going to have his or her own bedroom and television we wouldn’t be spending enough time together as a family at night.

The den was a hit from the first night. Besides watching TV, the children and I would play various board games, including my favorite, Scrabble, and a game Michael made up in which one player picks two letters and the other players try to think of a name of a celebrity that begins and ends with those letters.

Other special features of the house included an upstairs gym and, downstairs, a game room stocked with the latest video games; a thirty-two-seat movie theatre; and, off the entry hall, the children’s trophy room. Michael took it upon himself to decorate the trophy room’s walls and cases with plaques, awards statuettes, gold and platinum records from around the world, magazine covers, keys to cities, picture discs and the room’s most impressive “award,” a six-foot-long diorama of Snow Whit and the Seven Dwarfs, presented to Michael by Walt Disney World in appreciation, I imagine, for all the free publicity that it had gotten from him.

The trophy room was one room of many that Michael had a hand in decorating.

By then he had become a serious collector of art, especially antique European statuary and ornate bronze and gold clocks. Many of the pieces found their way into the living room and entry-way.

At first I was overwhelmed by them. “I feel like I’m living in a museum,” I told Michael.

Michael was so proud of his pieces that he had pin lights installed in the ceiling, so that at night they could be lit up in an otherwise pitch-black room. He loved the effect, but to me it was scary.

“Turn some lights on!” I’d exclaim when I was trying to find my way around downstairs.

I wasn’t so sure about some of Michael’s other decorating ideas.

In the downstairs den, for example, he placed a huge clock above the fireplace. That clock is going to overpower this room, I thought. In the same room, in one of the walls, he installed a stain-glass-window rendering of a castle. That window is going to make this room look like a church, I said to myself.

Whenever I’d question Michael directly about one of his purchases, he would reply, “Trust me, Mother, it’s going to look real nice.” He’s so confident in his tastes. In the case of the stained-glass window, he was right; it is beautiful. When the sun is shining, the flowers and roof of the castle appear to be lit up.

I know Michael thinks his decorating ideas are better than mine. He just couldn’t warm up to a painting of a little girl I had proudly hung in the dining room, for example. “Every time I look at that little girl, I feel that she’s looking back at me cockeyed,” he complained one day. I studied the girl’s face and, sure enough, she did have a slightly cross-eyed look.

“You know, Michael, you’re right about that little girl’s eyes,” I said.

Not long afterward, I noticed that the painting had been removed. In its place, Michael had hung a painting of a little boy.

There was one decorating project of Michael’s that he was determined to keep a secret.

“Don’t go up in the attic,” he kept warning me. The “attic” was the name we’d given to the two small rooms above the garage. Those were the rooms he was working on.

“Well, I won’t,” I assured him. Even if I had wanted to nose around, which I did, I couldn’t. Michael kept the door locked.

Michael let it be known that he was preparing a gift for the family in those rooms.

One day, finally, Michael said, "I want the whole family over. We're going to have a party. I want to show you what I've done to the attic."

Michael didn't have to twist anyone's arm to get them to show up. By then Joe and the other children were just as curious as I was about Michael's mysterious project.

Michael worked up to the last second on the attic.

Even when we were all gathered in the dining room on the appointed day, snacking on appetizers that his chef, Rane, had prepared for us, Michael was still running around with his workers, trying to put the finishing touches on his special project. Something must have gone wrong because at one point I saw him in tears.

Whatever the problem was, Michael apparently solved it. Finally, he appeared in the dining room looking much happier. Asking for everyone's attention -- Michael is always such a showman -- he announced, "I've got a surprise for you." With that, he silently led us outside and to the door leading up to the attic. Up the stairs we went, single file.

I don't know who was the last in line, but he or she must have been dying in anticipation. Everyone who reached the top of the stairs let out a whoop or a cry.

What Michael had done was transform the two rooms into a photographic version of "This Is Your Life," starring the Jackson family.

"To take a picture," read the message on the plaque that Michael had placed on the wall, "is to capture a moment, to stop time. To preserve the way we were, the way we are. They say a picture speaks a thousand words. So with these photographs I will recreate some wonderful, magical moments in our lives"

Michael had gotten the photos from my personal collection. One day when I wasn't around, he stole into my room, opened the suitcase in which I stored them, and helped himself. The blowups of the shots filled every available inch of wall space.

REBBIE: We were all very amazed, very touched. Michael was watching us to see our reactions; it was obviously so important to him that we liked what he'd done.

By 1985 Michael had also begun to furnish the attic with special personal effects, turning it into a combination Jackson family gallery -- Michael Jackson museum.

Among the memories was a collection of his spangly tour jackets, each mounted in a five-foot-tall Plexiglas case and labeled with the occasion(s) for which it was worn -- i.e., "Victory Tour, Kansas City, Opening Night," "Star on Hollywood Walk of Fame," and "President Regan Visit to White House/Grammys 1984."

In another Plexiglas case, Michael placed a number of his trademark single sequined gloves.

But the most eye-catching "exhibit" had to be his collection of Michael Jackson wax statues -- three of them. One had been presented to Michael by the people at The Guinness Book of World Records, one by the Movieland Wax Museum in Buena Park, California, and the third by Madam Tussaud's Wax Museum in London. They were positioned in various corners, giving visitors the distinct feeling that they were not alone as they toured the two rooms.

Michael enjoyed being in the attic so much that he put a stereo system and his portable dance floor up there so that he could dance amid the memories. The attic became one of his retreats after he returned home following the Victory tour.

But so, too, did his two-story bedroom, and the game room, movie theatre, and gym.

"I'm putting all this stuff in," he said during the house's construction, "so I will never have to leave and go out there."

When Michael and I visited Disney World during one of the breaks in the "Victory" tour, I saw firsthand how difficult it was for him to venture into public as a superstar. Word that Michael Jackson was there that day spread around the huge amusement park like wildfire. Before we knew it we were surrounded by a sea of people. Finally, the Disney World security staff had to map a route for us to get out of the park.

Michael only had to look at the closed-circuit camera to be reminded that any time he chose to leave the house he risked being pounced upon.

When Michael did brave it, he'd occasionally resort to disguises. By 1985 he had collected an array of appearance-altering: funny teeth that show a lot of gum, fake moustaches, glasses, hats, pads to stick in his cheeks and -- his pride and joy -- an inflatable fat suit.

One day I had been startled in the kitchen by a chunky-looking man with a moustache and hat.

“What are you doing in here!?” I demanded. I assumed that the person was a fan who had somehow managed to evade our security force.

“Mother, you don’t know who I am!” a familiar voice squealed in delight.

That was my introduction to Michael’s fat suit.

Having been baptized a Jehovah’s Witness in 1983, Michael started wearing the fat suit along with a few of his facial disguises when he did field service. He soon found out, however, that not everyone was as easily fooled as his mother.

“You know who still recognises me?” Michael said one day, in awe. “The children.”

Michael usually drove himself to Kingdom Hall and his field-service routes. He’d finally gotten his driver’s license in 1981, at the age of twenty-three. Initially he didn’t want to learn to drive.

“I’ll just get a chauffeur when I want to go out,” he said when I began nagging him about getting his license.

“But suppose you’re someplace and your chauffeur gets sick?” I reasoned.

Finally, he relented and took some lessons.

After he began driving, Michael decided that he enjoyed being behind the wheel, after all. The first time he took me for a ride, he ventured up to Mulholland Drive, a winding road in the Hollywood Hills. It was a hair-raising experience.

“I’ve got a crook in my neck and my feet hurt,” LaToya, who was also in the car, complained afterward. “I was putting on the brakes’ with my feet and ‘steering’ the car with my neck trying to keep it on the road. I was so scared!”

It was white-knuckle time for me, too. Michael drove fast. He also had the same habit that I have: driving right up to the car in front and stopping on a dime.

After that, Michael started going out by himself.

“You shouldn’t go out alone,” I told him. “Get Bill Bray to go with you.”

But Michael wouldn’t hear of it. “I’m tired of having security with me every time I go someplace.”

When he began driving, Michael told me that he would never go on freeways; he thought they were too dangerous. So I was shocked one day when Michael suddenly drove us onto a freeway ramp.

“Wait a minute, Michael, what are you doing?”

“I can drive the freeways now!” he said, laughing. He had changed his mind about freeways when he saw just how long it took him to get around Los Angeles without using them.

Michael’s first car was a Mercedes. Then he bought a black Rolls-Royce, which he later painted blue.

It was in the Rolls that he was stopped one day -- not for fans outside the gate, but by a Van Nuys policeman.

“This looks like a stolen car,” the officer said. He didn’t recognise Michael, who wasn’t wearing a disguise that day.

Michael explained politely that he did, indeed, own the car. But the officer went ahead and ran a check on the car, and found that Michael had a ticket outstanding.

The next thing Michael knew, he was sitting in the Van Nuys jail.

Bill Bray bailed him out. I didn’t even know what had happened until he came home.

“You should have asked the officer what a stolen car looks like,” I said after he related his adventure. Perhaps the cop had felt that a young black man didn’t belong behind the wheel of a Rolls.

But Michael was not only put out by the experience, he professed to be happy.

“I got to see how it felt to be in jail!” he exclaimed.

After seeing Michael work hard for several years, I was pleased that he attempted to strike more of a balance between work and play after the Victory tour, even though most of his play had to take place on our property because of his security concerns.

Long an animal lover, Michael spent time with his menagerie, which included Louis and Lola, the llamas; Prince and Princess, the deer; and Winter and Spring, the peacocks. For a while, Michael also had a giraffe, Jabbar, but the neighbors complained, and Michael was forced to board him.

There was one “pet” that adopted Michael. One day he was eating a pecan in the yard when a blue jay swooped down and took the nut out of his hand! Michael couldn’t believe it so he ran into the house for more pecans, held them out, and “Jay” grabbed them, too. From then on Michael and Jay were friends, and Michael would show him off to guests.

The pet that Michael probably doted on the most, however, was Bubbles, his chimpanzee. He had been looking for a chimp for a long time. He was particular -- he wanted one of the rare white-faced chimps.

Finally, Bob Dunn, who raises and trains chimps, found Bubbles for Michael in 1983. Michael got him as a baby, and he was something to see with his little white face. He looked like an imitation chimp, not real.

For the first year of Bubbles’ life, he lived with Bob. But Bubbles would come over to our house for visits. He would sleep in a crib in Michael’s room.

It was eerie for me to watch Bubbles. He would twirl around on the floor with his eyes closed, just like a child. He was smart, too. I remember one day when Michael scolded him about picking some small object off a table. Bubbles retreated to the corner of the room, but he still had his mind on that object. While Michael turned his attention to something else, Bubbles inched his way back toward the table, watching Michael all the time. Suddenly, he grabbed the object and ran back to the corner of the room with it, so proud of himself. He’s too much like people, I thought as I watched him.

While Michael loved relaxing with his pets, he also enjoyed playing the host. By then he’d more or less given up on making friends his own age. More and more he was drawn to people younger and older than himself.

Michael summed up his love for kids in a few words: “They don’t wear masks.”

I’m sure that one of the reasons why he wanted to have a candy store complete with soda fountain was for the entertainment of his youthful guests. Among them were seriously ill or dying fans who’d written to him. The day before a visit from one of them, Michael would call the child himself and take his or her “order” for lunch and a movie.

No matter how ill that child might be, Michael would manage to remain cheerful and upbeat during his or her visit; he’s strong that way. Sometimes, after the child had left, however, Michael would let the tears out that he had been holding in.

If he had a spare hour, Michael also enjoyed visiting with the young fans who congregated outside our gate.

One day, one of our security guards handed Michael three large envelopes that a schoolgirl foursome had brought to the house. When Michael opened the envelopes, he was amazed to see the words, "I love you, Michael Jackson" scribbled ten thousand times on one hundred eighty-one sheets of notebook paper.

The next thing the girls knew, they were sitting in our living room with Michael. He told them how touched he was by what they'd done, asked them how long it took them to do it (seventy-two hours), and gave them a tour of the trophy room, photo gallery, and backyard.

As for his interest in accomplished older people, Michael loved playing the student. Still fascinated with the movies, he especially enjoyed the company of actors.

One of the first movie stars he became friends with was Jane Fonda. Jane invited him to the set of *On Golden Pond* in 1981, and, according to Michael, "We'd just talk, talk, talk about everything politics, philosophers, racism, Vietnam, acting." Another friend he made at the time was Katherine Hepburn. Michael visited her at her New York apartment, and she attended one of the Jacksons' Madison Square Garden concerts.

Michael eventually became close to a number of other actors, including Marlon Brando, Elizabeth Taylor, Fred Astaire, and Gregory Peck. All of them were guests at one or more of Michael's star-studded dinner parties.

Before Michael hosted his first party, I was a little nervous for him. He's never done this before, I thought. I wonder how it's going to go. But Michael turned out to be a good host.

Michael planned his dinners carefully. After the guests arrived, he'd show them to the living room, where he'd serve juice and wine. Then he'd take them on a tour of the grounds, after which they'd all sit down to a dinner prepared by his chef (I'm sure Michael was now happy that we had a formal dining room instead of a "Pirates of the Caribbean" battle scene). Following dinner, Michael would screen a first-run movie.

Once the power went off in the middle of the screening, and Michael was so embarrassed that, the next day, he had Bill Bray buy a generator so that it wouldn't happen again. That was the one and only problem with any of his parties that I recall.

“Mother, you’re more than welcome to join us,” Michael would make a point of telling me on the day he was hosting a dinner. But I’d always decline. In fact, I’d make sure that I was safely upstairs in my room and in bed before the first guest arrived. That’s how shy I am.

But one night I wasn’t even “safe” upstairs. Without warning, Michael walked in with Yul Brynner! I was so angry with him, but, of course, I didn’t show it in front of Mr. Brynner.

As it turned out, Yul Brynner was very nice. After they left I was angrier with myself for being so shy than I was with Michael for having surprised me.

Michael is amazing. I’m not saying that because he’s my son; I really do find him that way. When he is with a celebrity, he “grows up” to their age. But then he has his candy store and his doll collection, and he rolls around on the floor with his nieces and nephews as if he were a child. He’s young. He’s old. As I said, he’s amazing.

I believe that Michael had the room to be more sociable during those years because for much of that time he was doing “quiet” work, mainly writing and business.

In 1985, he collaborated with Lionel Richie on “We Are the World” and also participated in its all-star recording. Income from the song aided the famine relief effort in Ethiopia. That year, Michael also concluded the purchase of the ATV Music catalogue, featuring two hundred fifty-one John Lennon -- Paul McCartney collaborations.

Ironically, it was Paul who first gave Michael the idea of investing in fine songs in addition to fine art. One day during Michael’s visit with Paul in Scotland, Paul handed him a book containing all his copyrights, among them Buddy Holly’s classics. Michael was amazed at Paul’s collection and inspired.

Paul had wanted to buy the ATV catalogue as well, but he dropped out of the bidding long before Michael. I’m sorry if my son’s purchase of ATV meant that he and Paul could no longer be friends.

I’m sure that his conversations with his celebrity friend and other successful people played a role in Michael’s decision to buy the Beatles’ catalogue. Investing is one of his favorite topics. “Joe Louis made a lot of money and he died broke. I don’t want to happen to me,” I recall Michael telling John H. Johnson, the chairman of Johnson Publications, publisher of Ebony and Jet. “Would you share with me what your secret has been in keeping your business successful for years?”

By 1986, Michael's work began to take him out of the house more. He collaborated with Francis Ford Coppola and George Lucas on Captain Eo, the fifteen-minute 3-D film that became Disneyland's and Disney World's newest attraction in September. Michael starred as the young hero who brings light and beauty to a planet run by a villainous queen.

In August, he entered the studio to record his next album.

Writing songs for follow-up to the best-selling album of all time had been a very serious, ongoing project of Michael's since the end of the Victory tour. I helped inspire one of the tunes.

"I want you to write a song with a shuffling kind of rhythm," I said to him one day. I tried to sing to him what I heard in my head.

"I think I know what you mean," he said, nodding.

A week or two later Michael played me the song he'd written.

"That's exactly what I was talking about!" I exclaimed.

"I know." Michael smiled.

The song was "The Way You Make Me Feel."

However, Michael refused to play me any of the other songs he had in the works.

"Please let me hear, please let me hear," I'd beg him.

"No, Mother, wait until the album comes out," Michael would reply. "Be surprised."

Michael, however, was only too happy to tell me of his expectations for his next album. He fully expected it to become the best-selling album of all time.

15 TAKING CONTROL

While Michael was working behind the scenes in 1986, another Jackson -- Janet -- was enjoying success as a recording artist with her third album, Control.

I first encouraged my daughters to pursue a show business career in the early seventies. Frankly, I didn't like the idea of some of my kids' making a lot of money while the others weren't making anything. While I never detected any jealousy on any of the girls' parts toward their brothers, I thought

it would only be natural for them to feel someday a wee bit of envy, and I didn't want to see them hurt.

I also wanted my girls to be known and liked for who they were, rather than for who their brothers were. After we moved to California I was upset to see thirteen-year-old LaToya having a painful time dealing with "friends" who, in fact, were just using her to get close to one of the boys.

"Mother, I found a friend in school today, and she's really my friend," LaToya would often tell me.

"Why do you say that?" I would reply.

"Because she doesn't even know that I'm Michael's sister."

As I've mentioned, Janet and LaToya made their professional debut during the family's 1974 Las Vegas engagement. We later took the same show to Lake Tahoe and New York, giving Rebbie, her sprained ankle healed, the opportunity to make her debut.

Joe and I also saw to it that the girls were included in the Jacksons' 1976 summer-replacement TV series.

Janet was the first of the girls to get a break, and she received it thanks to her exposure on that highly rated show. Norman Lear, creator of "All in the Family," invited her to audition for the role of Penny in another series of his, "Good Times."

I drove Janet to the audition at Mr. Lear's production company, where he auditioned her personally. Janet told me later that the first question he asked her was, "Can you cry?" He then had her perform an improvisation with him in which Janet gave him a tie as a present, which he didn't like. He must have tested her by saying something mean, because she did start to cry. Mr. Lear hugged her and said, "You've got the part."

JANET: On the ride home it still hadn't sunk in what had happened. "Mother," I said matter-of-factly, "I just got the part in 'Good Times' -- do you think we could stop by the toy store and buy me a Barbie dollhouse?"

My mother laughed so hard. "Sure, honey!" she said. That was my present.

During Janet's three-year stint with Good Times," Joe and I kept thinking about how we could also help launch entertainment careers for LaToya and Rebbie. One idea we had was for the two girls to form a group with Janet.

REBBIE: Initially, it was going to be a quarter; Randy was going to be included, as well. I didn't understand how that was going to work because Randy was already a member of the Jacksons. And it didn't. Finally, we decided it should be just the girls.

We did a few things in the studio, but the group never got off the ground. There was some debate between us over who should be the lead singer. Also, my personality and LaToya's didn't click. I'm a very down-to-earth person, and LaToya can be very opinionated and stubborn. Although I really tried to make things work, I got tired of bending.

In 1980, the same year that Janet began playing the role of Charlene in the series "Diff'rent Strokes," LaToya had the distinction of being the first Jackson girl to record an album. LaToya Jackson was released at the end of that year.

It was Joe's idea that she make the record. At the time LaToya was going through a period of soul-searching. She had dropped out of college, where she had begun to work toward a degree in business law, and she wasn't sure what she wanted to do with her life. When Joe first encouraged her to get back on the entertainment track and make an album, she was hesitant. But Joe was persistent and LaToya finally agreed.

The album was painstakingly recorded. Stevie Wonder and Ray Parker, Jr., played on it, and Michael contributed one of the songs, "Night Time Lover," which he also arranged and produced. But neither "Night Time Lover" nor the second single, "If You Feel the Funk," did well. LaToya Jackson spent only a brief time on the charts.

LaToya wasn't discouraged. In 1981, she began working on a new batch of songs at our home studio for her follow-up LP.

As a favor, Janet agreed to sing background vocals on a couple of tracks. She also recorded her own version of one of the tunes, so that she could share her ideas with LaToya on how the lead vocal should be handled.

When I heard the recording, I was impressed.

"Janet has a nice voice," I told Joe. "You should take a listen to her."

Joe did, and he liked what he heard, too.

JANET: My father asked if I would like to start singing again. I never saw myself as a solo artist like my brothers and sisters. "Do you think I'm ready?" I asked him. "What if people don't like my voice?"

“Believe me,” my father said, “you’re ready.”

A&M Records quickly signed Janet, and in 1982 she leased.

None of her brothers and sisters was involved in the recording of Janet Jackson, which was Janet’s decision. “It shows me I can do something on my own,” she said at the time. “People didn’t buy it because Michael sang background or wrote or produced it.

Janet Jackson did well for a first album, selling more than a quarter of a million copies. But neither of her singles, “Young Love” or “Say You Do,” was a pop hit.

On Dream Street, her second album, released in 1984, she did employ the writing/producing talents of Michael and Marlon, but the album didn’t fare as well as her first album.

Suddenly, Janet found herself at crossroads in her young recording career, and at the same time that she was going through changes in her personal life.

REBBIE: The brothers were in the midst of the Victory tour, and my mom was on the road with them. And there was Janet alone at home, having recently graduated from high school. Into the void stepped a childhood friend, James DeBarge, of the singing DeBarge family.

The next thing I knew, Janet had eloped with James in Michigan, where he hails from. I heard it on the radio.

Joe called me on the road and broke the news to me: I was stunned. Knowing how close Michael was to her at the time, I didn’t tell him, fearing he’d become upset. But he heard, anyway, and was shocked.

While the family was concerned that eighteen-year-old Janet had married too young, that worry paled next to a concern that we had about James -- that he was rumored to be a drug-user.

Janet had refused to believe that rumor before she married James. But before long it became obvious to everyone in the family, including Janet, that James did, indeed, have a serious problem in that regard.

I offered to enroll James into a treatment program, and Janet tried to help him, but the problem wouldn’t go away. I felt badly for both of them, but I also worried for our family. None of the Jacksons takes drugs, and we don’t permit any of our employees to take them.

REBBIE: The turning point came one day when Janet and James were out walking, and James suddenly passed out and had to be rushed to the hospital. She had gone through so much by that time trying to rescue James that she now was endangering her own health, risking a nervous breakdown.

Janet agreed to file for an annulment of their marriage in 1985, but it wasn't easy for her; she still loved James. I shared her pain.

JANET: My mother was always there for me when I was feeling lonely and depressed. "Don't hold it inside," she'd tell me. "Let it out. Then let it go. Life is going to be like this at times. You just have to know how to deal with it." Just to hear her say those soothing words, and hold me, meant so much to me.

Janet also had the support at the time of an old family friend, a friend who happened to be in the perfect position to help her keep busy and get her mind off James.

His name was John McClain, A&M Records' new senior vice-president for A&R. He had gone to school with my older sons, and had spent many a night at the house. Janet was like a little sister to him.

From his first day on the job, Janet became John's number-one priority. Like Joe and myself, he felt that it had been a mistake for A&M to package her as a pop act. For her third album, he wanted to see her take more of an R&B direction.

Being a take-charge kind of guy, John also decreed that Janet have a new look to complement her new sound. That meant going on a diet.

Janet had been on the plump side for years. Michael, who can be a merciless teaser, had nicknamed her "Dunk" -- for donkey. "You look like a donkey, you're so big!" he'd razz her.

Janet's so easygoing that she actually enjoyed the nickname. "You could be calling me Dunk at the age of seventy and I wouldn't care," she says.

When she was growing up, Janet had a special fondness for steaks. One day during our Las Vegas engagement, I caught her and her cousin Stacey eating steaks that nine-year-old Janet had managed to order all by herself from room service. If I wasn't at home, the first thing she'd do after returning from school was pop a T-bone steak on the grill.

Under John's watchful eye, Janet managed to trim down considerably. A dance regimen helped. John had also requested that she take dance lessons,

so when it came time to shoot her videos she'd be ready to shake a leg, and look good doing it.

While Janet prepared for her recording work by taking voice lessons -- yet another of John's ideas -- John went about the task of finding just the right producer. He made a bold choice: the team of Jimmy (Jam) Harris and Terry Lewis.

As members of the Minneapolis-based group the Time, Harris and Lewis had been proteges of Prince. After leaving the group, they began writing/producing full-time for the black artists. By 1985, they'd earned themselves a name in the black music and dance market. However, outside that circle, they still weren't well known, so their selection amounted to a gamble for John McClain.

Making Joe, in particular, all the more nervous about Harris and Lewis was the producers' insistence that Janet record in their Flyte Tyme studio in Minneapolis, instead of Los Angeles, where Joe could keep an eye on the project. For a time, Joe resisted.

John resolved the impasse by imposing on Joe to let Jimmy Jam and Terry have their way, arguing that the change in environment would do Janet good, creatively speaking. John later recalled: "Joe said fine, but if it didn't work he would backhand me."

So in August 1985, accompanied by her friend Melanie Andrews, nineteen-year-old Janet left to record the album that would become *Control*. She left not knowing what songs she would be recording. Jimmy Jam and Terry didn't know, either. That was the plan. In their conversations, Janet made it clear that she was tired of having no say in the selection of the songs she recorded or the way that they were recorded. "This time I'm gonna do it my way," she said.

If those words sound familiar, it's because they were fated to become a line in the song "Control," which Janet co-wrote with Jimmy Jam and Terry. The line set the self-assured, even sassy, tone for the entire album, which contained six more of their collaborations, including "Nasty," "What Have You Done for Me Lately," and "When I Think of You."

In addition to co-writing most of the album's tunes, Janet co-produced every one of them. She also played digital keyboards, synthesizers, digital piano, and digital bells. Being involved in every musical decision on *Control* was in keeping with her more assertive stance.

The best news about the “new” Janet, however, was the fact that she’d managed by late 1985 to put her marriage largely behind her and return to her old, jolly self.

JANET: What did my friend Melanie and I do together in our spring time? Laugh. About anything and everything. It didn’t take much to get us going. We could be eating in a restaurant, look at each other with our mouths full, and just bust up!

Usually we hung around the hotel. Our one drive around Minneapolis almost turned into a disaster. Melanie was behind the wheel, and she wound up driving the wrong way on a one-way downtown street. Both of us were yelling as she tried to turn the car around before the approaching cars got to us. It was scary.

Control was released in January 1986.

“People will be shocked when they hear it,” Janet said at the time, “because it’s so different from what I’ve done before.”

But I wasn’t shocked at all; I loved the album. I think it captured her spunky side.

One song, I’ll admit, did give me pause.

JANET: What Mother objected to was the moaning at the end of “Funny How Time Flies (When You’re Having Fun).” One time I watched her run to the stereo and lift the tone arm before the moaning came on. “You’re my baby and I’m not used to hearing you do stuff like this!” she said.

“What Have You Done for Me Lately” was the album’s first single; it became a Top Ten hit. So, too, did the second single, “Nasty,” the third single, “Control,” and the fourth single, “When I Think of You.”

Control eventually reached the number-one spot on Billboard’s album chart. The album, in the end, sold seven million copies around the world.

Janet, of course, was very pleased as she watched her success story unfold. But unlike Michael, who would literally jump for joy at good news about one of his records, Janet wasn’t demonstrative. “My single’s moving up the charts. It made it to number so-and-so this week,” was just about all she’d tell me in a matter-of-fact voice. Michael showed more excitement about her album than she did.

JANET: After my brothers started getting married and moving out, Michael and I became very close. Even as a teen-ager he was crazy about younger children. We did everything together, everything under the sun.

You could say we “split up” around the time Michael’s Thriller came out. It was like, “See you later, Michael.” He was so busy. But we continued to care as much as ever about each other.

Michael was present the night Janet premiered her video for “Nasty” at the house. I feel safe in saying that those few minutes with Michael were the most special time for Janet during her entire Control experience.

JANET: Michael started crying in the middle of the screening; he loved it that much. “Janet,” he said, “I’m so proud of you. This is a hit.

“And it’s only the beginning for you,” he added. “You haven’t reached your peek yet. You haven’t climbed to the top of your mountain.”

16 BAD NEWS

While Control was riding high on the charts in the summer of 1986, Michael finally entered the studio to record his follow-up to Thriller.

That’s where he lived for most of the next ten months. The only times he was away from the studio for any period of time was to film videos for two of his songs.

In July 1987, two weeks after the “final” deadline had passed for him to turn in his album to Epic, perfectionist Michael finally let go of the tapes. It was only then that I got my first listen to Bad.

I did have my immediate favorites: “The Way You Make Me Feel,” and especially “Man In The Mirror.” I love that song’s message: If you want to make the world a better place, take a look at yourself and make a change.

But I had problems with Bad -- three problems, to be exact. The first song was “Smooth Criminal,” the second was “Speed Demon,” the third was “Dirty Diana.” To my ears those songs had an even harder edge than “Billie Jean” and “Beat It.” “Dirty Diana” was particularly difficult for me to listen to. All the guitar screaming! It sounded like noise to me.

But part of the problem was me. I was so in tune with Thriller that I had been subconsciously expecting to hear Thriller II. I should have known by then that Michael is one of those artists who hates to repeat himself, who’s always breaking new ground. After I realized that, I began to open my mind to the album as a whole.

Less than a week after *Bad* was mastered, Michael hosted a party at our house for fifty of the nation's leading record retailers. After the businessmen were given a preview of *Bad* at the Beverly Hills Hotel, a fleet of limousines whisked them to our home.

They toured the first floor of the house and then sat down to dinner in the backyard. Michael appeared with the first course, dressed in the same buckle-studded black outfit that he wears in the album's cover photo. Toward the end of the meal, he circulated from table to table, before excusing himself. As usual, I excused myself before the party even began, contenting myself with an occasional peek from upstairs.

By the time that *Bad* hit the record stores, Michael had already relieved his first good news. After only four weeks on the charts, "I Just Can't Stop Loving You," the album's first single, had become a hit on the adult contemporary, pop, and R&B charts.

Meanwhile, in Japan, the first stop on his first-ever solo tour, tickets to his nine stadium dates had sold out so fast -- within an hour -- that Michael had added five more concerts. Those concerts, too, had sold out almost immediately.

Michael left for Japan as *Bad* was being released. I told him that I'd help keep him posted on how the album was being received in the United States.

I'd expected to give him glowing reports. And, in fact, the first reviews were encouraging. But, all in all, Michael's press was depressing. Instead of focusing on the fact that he had just released his follow-up to the best-selling album of all time and was embarking on his first solo tour ever, many in the media were using the occasion of Michael's re-emergence to dwell on tired gossip.

To be fair, a couple of the stories had been spread by Michael's own people. I'm referring to the silly reports that Michael had slept in a hyperbaric chamber and had made a serious offer to buy the Elephant Man's bones. I didn't talk to Michael about the rumors, so I don't know what role, if any, he had in putting the stories out. But I did watch with dismay as his manager, Frank Dileo played up the stories to the press.

"You shouldn't be spreading stuff like this," I told Dileo shortly before he and Michael left for Japan. "It makes my son look like an idiot."

"Oh, it's good to do it," Dileo replied. "It makes people wonder about him, and this is what we want."

For the record, Michael doesn't own, and has never slept in, a hyperbaric chamber. He lay down in one once, just to see what it felt like, during a visit to the Michael Jackson Burn Center. A photographer took his picture, and the picture got out.

As for the Elephant Man's bones, I have no idea whether Dileo made an attempt on Michael's behalf to buy them. If he did so, he did so in jest. And if by some miracle the London medical center that owns the bones had agreed to sell them, Michael knows me well enough to know that I wouldn't have let him in the house with them.

But most of the Michael rumors were concocted by the press, and were hurtful.

The most tired rumor of all was the one that Michael was gay. I first heard this rumor back in the seventies, when a black magazine claimed that Michael and a woman were vying for the love of actor-songwriter Clifton Davis, and it almost drove me crazy. Why would they print this? I said to myself.

All I can say is, Michael is not gay. First of all, the Bible speaks against homosexuality, and he's very religious. Second, he wants to settle down and get married one day. We've talked about it. And he will.

REBBIE: If Michael were married, the gay rumor would stop immediately. But the press doesn't see him with many women, not taking into account the fact that he's a workaholic. Also, with his eyes and his complexion and the fact that he wears makeup before the camera and onstage, he comes off to the press as looking sort of feminine.

But just being around him and hearing the little things that he says about women tell me he's definitely heterosexual.

As for the related rumor that Michael's taken female hormones to keep his voice high and his facial hair "wispy," the truth is that his voice is genetically high, as is Jackie's, my father's, and my husband's father. Michael's lack of facial hair also runs in the family.

The other Michael rumor that popped up again in 1987 is the one that he's had his whole face remade by plastic surgeons.

Why can't people just love Michael for his music, instead of getting so caught up on what he looks like? I wondered. For the record: As Michael wrote in *Moonwalk*, he's had his nose "done" twice, and a cleft added to his chin, and that's all. The people who delight in comparing "before" and "after"

photographs of Michael don't bother to take into account the fact that he lost a lot of weight when he turned vegetarian and began fasting one day a week.

Frankly, I didn't want Michael to have plastic surgery at first. But being in the business he's in, he wanted to look his best, and I thought, Well, there's nothing wrong with that.

"Michael, I wish you could put a stop to these stories" I told him when I got him on the phone. "Your public relations people don't even seem to be countering this trash with the news about all the good things you're doing."

Michael sounded surprised. "Mother, that's not true," he said. "I'm getting good press." He said that he would send along copies of the articles that his public relations people had supplied.

But even before I received the articles, I figured out what his PR firm had been doing: They'd been keeping the upsetting stories from him. It was up to me, I decided, to keep him informed about everything the press was saying.

"Mother," he said to me after one phone call too many, "it's gotten to the point that when they tell me you're on the phone, I don't want to take the call because I'm afraid that you're going to have something else that's negative to tell me. And it's hard for me to work when I hear these things, because they bother me."

Unfortunately, the stories disturbed Michael to the degree that he wound up penning an open letter to the press from his Tokyo hotel room.

Michael wrote:

Like the old Indian proverb says, "Do not judge a man until you've walked two moons in his moccasins."

Most people don't know me. That is why they write such things I cry very, very often because it hurts and I worry about the children, all my children all over the world. I live for them

Animals strike not from malice, but because they want to live. It is the same with those who criticize. They desire our blood, not our pain.

But still I must achieve. I must seek truth in all things. I must endure for the power I was sent forth, for the world, for the children.

But have mercy, for I've been bleeding a long time now.

I cried when I read his letter. If only the press knew the Michael I know. I thought. So kind, so sensitive; childlike, yet wise.

Michael's letter represented his "final word" to his critics. By the time Joe and I joined him in Japan for his final concerts there, his focus had returned one hundred percent to his tour.

Joe and I were amazed at the stir "Typhoon Michael" -- as the press had nicknamed him -- had caused ever since his arrival ... an arrival chronicled by six hundred photographers. Even the arrival, on a separate flight, of Bubbles drew three hundred photographers!

Every store we looked in seemed to carry Michael Jackson T-shirts and jackets. We also saw his image on shopping bags and posters lining city walls.

During the course of the tour, Michael was the subject of a two-hour prime-time special on the Nippon Television Network. The deal was put together by an old friend of Michael's, Jimmy Osmond, formerly of the Osmond Brothers, and now a concert promoter.

Needless to say, Michael had hordes of young people for company everywhere he went during his stay. His van was mobbed time and time again by screaming, crying fans when he ventured outside his hotel.

Michael sipped tea with the mayor of Osaka, who presented him with the key to the city. In Tokyo he shocked commuters by making a surprise appearance on a bullet train. He was also able to indulge in one of his favorite pastimes, shopping, thanks to the cooperation of store owners who permitted him to browse before and after hours. Among his purchases: clocks, art books, an Oriental screen, and more toys for his toy collection.

Back in his hotel room, he personally passed judgment on every backstage pass and photo. He also quietly saw to it that free concert tickets were dispensed to handicapped youngsters.

One of his tour gestures was moving on a grand scale. When he learned that a five-year-old Osaka boy had been kidnapped and murdered, he announced during his next concert that he had decided to dedicate his tour to the boy's memory. He sent condolences to the boy's family, as well as a contribution.

As for Michael's Japan concerts, they had everything that a fan could ask for: great songs, inspired performances by Michael, and breathtaking special effects. The only thing I felt was missing was Michael's brothers.

I couldn't help but recall that originally the Jacksons' Victory tour was to have been a world tour, with Japan included on the itinerary. But Michael's people had advised him not to extend the tour, and he went along with them.

And yet here I was watching the identical show -- plus a couple of songs from Bad -- that Michael had performed with his brothers three years earlier. Michael had had no choice but to bring the Victory show with him because he hadn't had time to work up a new show.

In place of his brothers, Michael had hired four male dancers. He had also brought along four backup singers.

It wasn't the same -- for me, at least. I didn't realize how strongly I felt about this until after the first show I saw.

"Well, what did you think?" Frank Dileo asked.

"I thought it was great. Michael's always good," I replied. "But it would have been a better show with the brothers."

"Oh, you're crazy," Dileo said.

"No, I'm not," I said, the forcefulness in my voice surprising me. "Each brother had his own personality. They know how to dance and harmonize together. Their voices blend in a special way because they're brothers. So the show would have been better with them."

* * *

From Japan, Michael flew to Australia in November. His five sold-out concerts in Sydney, Melbourne, and Brisbane earned him a second tour nickname, "Crocodile Jackson."

When Michael returned to Los Angeles in December, Bad was still holding down the number-one spot on Billboard's album chart, thanks, in part, to the success of his second single, the title tune.

But even as "The Way You Make Me Feel" became the third single in a row off Bad to hit number one on the charts in January 1988, I had my doubts whether Michael would walk away with one of the top Grammys at the March awards ceremony in New York. I feared that the press's preoccupation with gossip had fueled a Michael Jackson backlash.

My first were borne out as I watched the Grammy show on television. Not only did Michael not win for Album of the Year, he didn't win any of the other awards he was nominated for. The only time he took the stage at Radio City Music Hall during the awards ceremony was to perform.

Afterward, Michael phoned me. “Did you see the Grammys?” he asked.

“I did,” I replied.

“What did you think?”

“Well, I don’t think they were fair.”

“Neither did I.”

Considering what had happened, I was happy that he'd decided to make his first TV appearance in five years on the Grammys. His performance was a reminder that he had acquired his fame not as a media curiosity but because of his God-given talents as a singer and dancer.

Michael was electrifying from the moment he strutted onstage to sing “The Way You Make Me Feel,” his hat pulled over his eyes. I wondered how he could top his performance of that song, which included his full arsenal of twists, turns, and thrusts. But in his second number, “Man in the Mirror,” he found a way. At the climatic moment of the song, he skip-danced across the stage and back, then dropped to his knees in joyful, sobbing testimony.

Bad, in the end, did not set a new sales record. By the summer of 1989, twenty million copies had been sold approximately half the number of copies of Thriller. That was still an awesome figure, however, and it qualified Bad as the third-best-selling LP of all time.

By the time Michael’s world-wide tour ended in January 1989 at the Los Angeles Sports Arena, he had also set a record for the biggest box-office gross ever: one hundred twenty-five million dollars. During his year and a half on the road he performed for nearly four million fans.

From January 1988 on, my nephew Tony Whitehead was one of the approximately one hundred sixty people who comprised Michael’s tour staff. His view from the crew:

TONY: Michael hired me as one of the five carpenters. Together with the riggers, technicians, lighting people, sound people, and band-crew people, we were responsibly for the set.

The carpenters’ specific charge was to make sure that the stage was put together safely for each show. It was a job fraught with tension. If the stage collapsed during the show, people -- including Michael -- could be killed.

That stage was humongous. It filled one end of the Pensacola {Florida} Civic Center, where Michael rehearsed his new show in January and

February 1988. I don't know exactly how long it was, but it took me seven minutes to walk it off. The main stage that Michael danced on was comprised of ten ten-foot-long decks alone.

The tour was organized to a tee. Everyone on the crew received a booklet outlining our schedule. On a particular day we knew where we were playing, where we were staying, who the promoter was, what time the doors opened, and, most important, what time the sound check was. That's when the stage had to be completely set up.

People think when you're on the road you're having a good time. Please, you barely have time for a good time. It took us eighteen hours to get the set up; usually we'd work from seven A.M. to past midnight. I'd be so tired the next day I'd just want to rest.

Then there were the "overnighters." The hardest "day" we had was when we did shows in Indianapolis and Louisville back to back. We set up the show in Indianapolis, then, after Michael performed, tore the set down and loaded it into the eleven set trucks. We left Indianapolis at four A.M. and, three and a half hours later, began putting together the set all over again in Louisville. We finished an hour before Michael was due to go on -- our closest call on the whole tour. My arms were numb.

My schedule and my cousin's were totally incompatible. But even if they were identical I wouldn't have seen him offstage. I didn't even know where he was staying. Michael's hotel address was kept a secret so that in case the crew members were asked where he was by fans, we could honestly say, "I don't know."

In his position, Michael had no choice but to be security-conscious. I knew of at least twelve security people on his staff, but there were more. He had advance teams check out each hotel he was going to stay at and each arena or stadium he was going to play in. And these people were professionals.

Although I never knew where he was staying, I'd hear from a band member what he was doing in his room day after day: writing songs. That's Michael for you; the man doesn't pay social calls. He's always making good use of time.

Usually I wouldn't lay eyes on him until minutes before the show. He had a backstage ritual. He and his dancers and backup singers would huddle around one of the wardrobe people, who'd lead them in prayer. Then suddenly they'd shout, "One; two; three -- let's go!" And, hey, the magic would begin.

No matter how tired I was, Michael's energetic performance and the enthusiastic crowd would lift me up. It wouldn't be long before I'd get this buzzing feeling in my body -- a feeling, really, of amazement.

During the show I wore another hat: prop master. In the darkness between songs, I would be one of several people scurrying around the stage placing or removing stools and other props.

My favorite task was training a huge fan on Michael from down in the "trenches" in front of the stage when he sang "The Way You Make Me Feel" at the end of the show. The fan, of course, would blow his hair and clothes around.

Wherever Michael walked or danced, I'd follow with the fan, which was on wheels. He'd wink at me. I'd wink back. He'd smile at me. I'd smile back.

When he started dancing, I would, too. "It's all I can do to keep from laughing when Tony starts mocking my dancing," he told my aunt.

Actually, I wasn't trying to mock Michael; I was just enjoying myself. This was my moment together with my cousin on the tour. Michael doesn't even know how much that moment meant to me.

I had my special moments on the road with my son, too, after I joined him in late August for the final dates on the European leg of his tour.

I hadn't seen him for months at that point, although we'd keep in touch by phone. One time, when he couldn't reach me, he told our security staff that it was "urgent" that I return his call. When I got his message I was alarmed. "Michael, what's wrong?" I asked him.

"Oh, nothing," he said. "I just wanted to talk."

I was pleased to see Michael looking healthy and rested, even though by that time he'd been touring for almost a year. He'd make a wise decision to perform usually three and no more than four shows a week. Not only did that easy pace keep him fresh, it also helped his throat.

Singing oneself hoarse had been an occasional problem of Michael's. During the 1980 Triumph tour he had had a hard time hitting the high notes during the brothers' engagement at the Forum. Jackie did his best to cover those notes for him, but Michael's hoarseness was evident enough for the reviewers to make mention of -- and for me to cringe in the audience.

It was after that engagement that Joe and I urged Michael to consult a voice coach.

“I was born with this voice. I don’t want to tamper with it,” he protested.

“It’s not to change your voice,” I said. “It’s to teach you how to breathe and sing from your stomach so that you won’t keep getting sore throats.”

Eventually Michael did agree to work with a coach, and he saw that I was right. During the Bad tour, he even invited his coach, Seth Riggs, out on the road with him from time to time to lead him in voice drills. It wasn’t until November 1988, in the midst of his L.A. dates, that swollen vocal cords forced him to postpone any shows. He made up those five dates the following January.

The other key to his good health, I believe, had been his diet. Before Michael had left on the tour, his doctor had insisted that he go on a high-protein diet, including fish, so that he’d be able to keep his stamina up. Michael had reluctantly agreed.

Even before Michael turned vegetarian in the late seventies I’d worried about his lack of interest in food. When the family would go out for hot-fudge sundaes, he’d be the only one who wouldn’t want one. “I’m not hungry,” he’d say. Now, what kid turns down a hot-fudge sundae? I’m ashamed to admit that sometimes LaToya and I would eat two of them a day.

After Michael took Jermaine’s lead and decided to forgo meat, he became even less interested in eating than before. He employed a full-time chef, but I don’t know why he bothered. When she took him his food he’d eat two tablespoons and leave the rest. “If I didn’t have to eat to live, I’d never eat,” he told me.

One day a week Michael fasted. “I’m cleaning my body out, which is a healthy thing to do,” he explained. But instead of laying low that day to conserve his energy, Michael would dance nonstop for two hours on his portable dance floor.

Michael enjoyed having the last word in our arguments about his diet. “You’re always worrying about me being skinny,” he’d say, “but you know what? My doctor told me I was in number-one shape. So stop worrying about me. I should be worried about you. You’re the one who keeps putting all the bad stuff into your body.”

But the Victory tour had gotten the better of Michael physically. He suffered from exhaustion and dehydration. The memory of his illness was still fresh in his mind when his doctor laid down the law about his diet for his solo tour.

I, of course, hoped that after a year of eating three square meals a day, Michael had developed a permanent interest in food. But my hope was dashed the first time we talked after I joined him overseas. Happy as he was with the way the tour had gone to that point, he told me, "I'll be glad when it's all over, so I can start eating the way I want to again. I'm tired of forcing myself to eat."

While I was with the tour, Michael remained characteristically his busy self, often writing and taking care of tour business in his hotel room during his "free" hours. But we did enjoy some special one-on-one times together.

On a free day in Vienna, he hired a driver, and we visited the homes of Beethoven, Mozart, and Strauss, as well as the historic restaurant they gathered in. On another free day, we went shopping, and Michael purchased more statues and paintings. But we had to cut this outing short because he was recognized.

This amazed us at the time, because Michael had been wearing what we both had thought was a foolproof disguise: afro wig and hat, fake moustache, and phony teeth. We later learned that the photos of Michael walking around in public in that very disguise had recently been published in Austria! The photographer happened to be a member of Michael's crew. Needless to say, Michael gave the person the walking papers.

Most of our visiting took place in Michael's hotel suite. After a show, I'd join him for a late supper, and we'd talk. He told me about his especially memorable shows to that point, among them his June 19 concert at the Berlin Wall in front of sixty-five thousand West Germans, and his five sold-out July dates at London's Wembley Stadium.

One of his offstage moments had been meeting Prince Charles and Princess Diana, who attended his July 16 Wembley concert. Michael presented the Royal Couple with a check for four hundred fifty thousand dollars for the Prince's Trust, his proceeds from the concert. The donation was embarked for the redevelopment of the Great Ormand Street Children's Hospital.

While I was with Michael, he continued to make memories. On August 26 and 27 he played his sixth and seventh concerts in his record-setting Wembley engagement. Two days later, he performed at Roundhay Park in Leeds. If anyone in the crowd ninety-two thousand didn't know it was Michael's thirtieth birthday when they arrived at the park, the plane circling overhead towing a banner reading HAPPY BIRTHDAY, MICHAEL let them in on the fact. At every break in the show, segments of the crowd began singing "Happy Birthday." Even though Michael doesn't celebrate birthdays because of his religious beliefs, he stood quietly onstage at one point as the entire

crowd honored him with a thunderous rendition of the song. All Michael said when they were through was a soft “thank you,” but I know that the show of affection from his fans moved him.

Concerts in Germany, Austria, and England followed, but they served as a prelude to the concert that Michael was really gearing up for: his September 11 date at Liverpool’s Aintree Racecourse, the final show of his European tour.

It was Michael’s wish to play Liverpool. “I have always considered Liverpool the home of contemporary pop music by virtue of its being the birthplace of the incomparable Beatles,” he told the press.

Making his Liverpool date loom even more significant was his announcement that it would be his last European show ever, and that he intended to quit doing live performances completely following his world tour. While I didn’t believe for a minute that Michael would never perform again, I did think it was conceivable that he would take a break from performing so that he could pursue other interests.

As it turned out, the Aintree Racecourse concert drew the largest crowd, by far, on Michael’s world tour: one hundred thirty-three thousand Liverpudlians. When I scanned the crowd from the side of the stage before Michael went on, I was astounded by the sight of people, people, and more people everywhere.

Unfortunately, the night also made news because it was marred by violence and injuries.

We had been warned about Liverpool. “You have to be careful there,” we were told. “A lot of people are out of work, and they’re uptight.”

Sure enough, thousands of people without tickets tried to crash the concert, eventually breaking down the makeshift walls that had been erected around the racecourse. Dozens of police on horseback attempted to keep them back, and the scene resembled a battle zone. Inside the track, meanwhile, several thousand people were treated for fainting and minor injuries, a result of all the shoving and jockeying for position among the incredible mass of people.

Violence even erupted in the lighting and sound booth, high above the crowd. The local security people had taken themselves to seat their friends in the choice seats there, seats that had been reserved for Michael’s V.I.P. guests. When one of Michael’s security people asked them to leave, a handful of the Liverpool security people jumped him. The police had to be called in, and they ordered everyone down from the booth except for Michael’s technicians.

Because of the cold weather I remained on one side of the stage, so I didn't see the brawl. But the fighting affected me, too, in that, for security reasons, I was asked by Michael's people to join his V.I.P. guests in making an early exit from the show aboard a bus. I wound up missing the last half of the concert.

Michael didn't learn about what had happened in the crowd and the lighting booth until after the show. Pleased as he was with his show and the reception he'd received from the mammoth crowd, he was quite upset by the injury report and, especially, the violence. If there is anything that Michael abhors, it's violence.

After finishing Europe, there was nothing that Michael wanted more than a few days of peace and quiet in the country before he started his fall swing through the United States. "Mother, I want you to come with me," he said.

I had already been away from home three weeks at that point and Joe was agitating for my return, but I told Michael that I would join him for a day or two. I was eager to visit his new home in the beautiful Santa Ynez Valley, north of Santa Barbara.

Michael had fallen in love with that area of California in 1982, when he and Paul McCartney filmed their "Say, Say, Say" video there. During the filming, Paul and his wife, Linda, rented an incredible property, the Sycamore Ranch. The ranch was nestled on nearly three thousand oak-tree-covered acres, a beautiful setting for the ranch's jewel, a two-story "European country home."

The developer who built the house was obviously a man after Michael's heart. He recruited three dozen European craftsmen to build the house according to exacting Old World standards. The result was a relatively new home that for all its beautiful wood detailing looked as if it had been built in another century.

When Michael visited Paul and Linda at Sycamore Ranch, he fell in love with it. But I didn't realize how much he loved the ranch until he bought it in March 1988.

Adding to my anticipation as we headed out for the ranch after our arrival at Los Angeles International Airport was a curious request that Michael received from one of his employees at the ranch: that Michael phone the ranch a few minutes before we reached the front gate.

"Now, why am I supposed to announce myself at my own home?" Michael wondered.

When we arrived in the early evening, we saw why. There to greet us under the sign reading WELCOME TO NEVER-NEVER LAND -- Michael's new name for the ranch -- were two drivers in top hats atop a carriage pulled by two Clydesdales. Michael had ordered the carriage months ago, and while he was away on tour it had arrived.

Michael and I got into the carriage and we were driven the quarter of a mile to his front door. Awaiting our arrival were the ranch's employees, lined up on either side of the walk. "Welcome home, Michael!" they exclaimed.

As Michael had been on tour for most of the time since he'd purchased the house, he didn't know many of the workers. However, both of us recognized the familiar face of the maids, Bianca, who had worked at our house in Encino. She broke ranks and ran up to Michael and gave him a hug.

That night Michael gave me a tour of the house. The next morning we got into one of his golf carts and he drove me around the ranch. We circled the five-acre lake and cruised over to the barn, where Louie and Lola, the llamas, now live. Then we stopped by the guest houses and game house. He also pointed out where he intended to build a movie theatre, a small zoo, and a playground for his nieces and nephews and other young guests.

Then we headed for the far reaches of the property. We scooted over hills and dales. At one especially scenic spot, we stopped to soak in the view.

It was hard for me to believe that just a couple of days earlier Michael was performing in front of one hundred thirty-three thousand screaming fans half a world away. Now it was just the two of us on a silent morning in the country.

I glanced at Michael. He looked peaceful and content as he gazed into the distance, alone in his thoughts. I felt content, too, knowing that as he neared a turning point in his career, Michael had a wonderful home where he could unwind, drink in the fresh air, and map out his future.

17 A PRESS-ING PROBLEM

Michael's high profile in 1988 kept the gossip mill working overtime. The stories got crazier and crazier: "Michael Jackson to Pump Fancy French Water into Entire House"; "Michael Jackson's Chimp Gets \$Millions in His Will"; "Michael Jackson and Ringo Starr Both Claim They've Seen John Lennon's Ghost!"

But the winner in the tabloids' fiction-writing contest was the article headlined "Hundred of Fans Are Asking IS MICHAEL JACKSON DEAD?" The author of the article put one and one together (the change in Michael's physical appearance over the years, plus his change in image)

and got six. I could only shake my head and laugh at the tabloids' shameless attempts to sell papers.

I wasn't laughing, however, after I picked up a copy of the August 8 issue of People magazine and read its feature on the Jackson family.

"Katherine and Joe Jackson find themselves out of touch -- and often at odds -- with most of their remarkable brood," the magazine maintained. The article went on to portray a "fractious" Jackson family torn by enough internal bickering, intrigue, and jealousy "to supply the plot of 'Dynasty' for another eight seasons."

"So now the press has tired of taking potshots at Michael and has declared open hunting season on the entire family," I said.

Adding credence to the magazine's charges were quotes of Joe's that were critical of Michael.

"We wonder why things have changed like they have, why [Michael] doesn't seem to care about his family," Joe told People. "The few times we've spoken to him, he seems glad to hear from us. But when you talk to other people, they say Michael doesn't want to be involved with his family."

I don't agree with everything Joe Jackson says, and I didn't agree with his depiction of a Michael estranged from the family. Michael had been on the road at the point of nearly a year. I think that Joe rued his words, too.

The Jackson family did not live in a fairy-tale land devoid of strife in 1988. Like any large family, we had our share of problems. For example, Joe's relationship with Michael in 1988 wasn't as good as I think it could and should have been. I read Joe's complaint about Michael as more of a cry of frustration over the fact than anything else.

To figure out what makes a person tick, I think you have to look at his formative years. I was raised by two strict, yet loving parents. Joe, by contrast, was raised by two strict parents, period. Judging by the times that I heard Sam and Chrystal Jackson utter the words, "I love you" -- zero -- Joe didn't hear them often, if ever, when he was growing up. Sam Jackson would show his love for Joe, me, and the grandkids only in the little things that he would do for us in Gary: sewing tears in my children's pants, or buying several pairs of pants for me after seeing me stand out in the cold at the bus stop in a dress.

Having been nurtured and loved, it's second nature for me to express my love to my kids. I can't get off the phone with any of them without saying "I

love you.” But Joe can’t bring himself to open up to the children even though sharing personal feelings is the only way to make a relationship grow.

Ironically, I’ve heard Joe tell his friends how attached he is to the kids, how protective he feels toward them.

“Tell your children that instead of your friends!” I’ve pleaded.

But Joe replies stubbornly, “They know.”

Joe did demonstrate his attachment to one of his sons, Jermaine, in early 1988, when I opposed, on moral grounds, Jermaine’s request that he be allowed to stay temporarily in our house with his girlfriend Margaret Maldonado and their son, Jeremy, following his divorce from Hazel.

“Kate, he’s my son and I’m giving him permission,” Joe announced. “I’ll take full responsibility for allowing him to return.” (Jermaine stayed at home until June 1989, when he, Margaret, Jeremy, and Jourdyn, who was born in January of that year, moved to an apartment in Beverly Hills.)

Not long after Jermaine moved back in, LaToya moved out, making her well-publicized professional split from Joe. That and her decisions to pose for Playboy and write a “tell-all” book about the family were the biggest traumas for the Jacksons in 1988.

Despite these problems, I think that anyone who really knew the Jacksons in 1988 saw a family that was far more close-knit than People magazine gave the Jacksons credit for being.

Regarding the charge that I, as well as Joe, was “out of touch” with our kids, the timing of the article’s publication was ironic. That week, Janet, one of the kids whom Joe and I were supposedly “struggling” to maintain good relations with, showed up at the house with two rhinestone-elephant pins that she’d bought for me in London a couple of days earlier (I have an elephant collection). While it was true that she had decided to take more of a hand in her own management in 1988, thereby cutting her professional ties with Joe, she showed her appreciation to her father for his help over the years by informing me, “I’ll never stop giving Joe his percentage. I just want to do that.”

People in the music business know the truth about my relationship with my kids. When a record-company executive or a business associate has a hard time reaching one of the children, he typically attempts to make contact through me. Also, I am frequently asked to approach a specific child with a business proposition. If I think that the proposition has merit, I present it.

(However, I am careful not to approach the children too often. I don't want them to begin thinking, Uh-oh, here comes Mother again, trying to talk us into doing something.)

The children who live in Los Angeles visited at the house regularly enough in 1988 for Rebbie to refer to the house as "a filling station You fill up on what's going on, then return when you want to know more."

Most didn't have far to travel. Tito and his family live just up the road from Joe and me in a Spanish-style home set on four hilltop acres. Marlon and his family live just around the corner in an English Tudor-style home that was featured in *Ebony*. Jackie lives in a condo that we keep in neighboring Van Nuys. Janet and Randy live in condos in nearby Bel-Air and Westwood, respectively. Jermaine lives just a little farther away than they do, in Beverly Hills.

In fact, outside of Michael, the only child who has a bit of a "commute" to the house is Rebbie. She lives with her family in a comfortable two-story home in Agoura, about a thirty-minute drive.

Of my children living in Los Angeles area, the only one I wouldn't see for weeks at a time was independent Randy. If I started to miss him, I'd call him.

"Randy, you still have a mother and father who love you," I'd gently remind him.

"Okay, Mom, I'm coming to see you!" And he would.

In my one-on-one times with my children, meanwhile, we ran a gamut of activities.

Jackie, the family's premier sports fan, tried to encourage my own building interest in sports. He and my nephew Tony taught me how to follow a football game on television. Jackie also invited me to a number of Lakers basketball games; he has season tickets.

I also attended a Lakers game with Marlon, who has season tickets, as well. But my favorite times with him were spent in philosophical discussions, about life and God. Marlon is a deep thinker.

I also spoke frequently to Rebbie about God and His teachings; Rebbie remains a devout Jehovah's Witness like me. But we also shared a "light" interest, interior decorating. Rebbie did a lot of redecorating of her Agoura home in 1988, and we went out shopping together from time to time.

Janet is an avid games player. She, her boyfriend Rene Elizondo, my nephew Tony, and I spent a number of evenings playing Pictionary and Scrabble in the upstairs den.

Jermaine's a movie buff. He got his hands on many first-run movies in 1988, and invited me and whoever else was around to watch them with him in our theatre.

Because I saw Randy infrequently in 1988, our times together were mainly spent talking at the house. Alluding to his real estate investments -- Westwood condo, Beverly Hills house, recording studio, and beach house -- I loved to tease him. "Randy," I'd say, "you're the baby boy and here you are trying to be a business man. You probably don't even know what you're doing." Randy's got a good sense of humor, so I know I can get away with barbs like that.

I also didn't see Tito as frequently as many of the others in 1988. When he wasn't working in his home studio, he was restoring one of his Model A's or vintage Mercedeses. And when he wasn't doing that, he was off with his family in Big Bear, where he has a cabin, or Oxnard, where he has an oceanfront condo. But the times that we did spend together were very meaningful, because Tito typically sought me out whenever he was hurting or confused about a matter in his personal life or career.

TITO: My mother is one of the few people in my life who I can tell everything to. It's just the way she listens and understands. Her vibes are very good.

JERMAINE: One of the things that keeps us coming back to her is the fact that she's never shown any favoritism. From the most successful children to the ones who are "low on the totem pole," she treats us all the same. It's just like we were still living in Gary.

The children were no more "at odds -- and out of touch" with one another than I was with them in 1988, despite People's charge that the Jackson family was wracked by "sibling jealousy."

REBBIE: As the sibling who's earned the least amount of money in show business, I would have more cause than any of my brothers or sisters to feel jealous. But I don't.

After I moved to California, I loved showing off my brothers' beautiful homes to the friends who came to visit me. My attitude at the time was that I felt proud just to be their sister. I still feel that way.

I'm close to my brothers, and I honestly don't see any jealousy among them, either. I think these charges of "sibling jealousy" arose because the press just assumes that there has to be some because Michael has been so outstandingly successful. But assuming something doesn't make it so.

JACKIE: I'm happy for my brother selling all those albums. I hope he sells a hundred million. He's just paving the way for the rest of us.

In fact, Michael has made a point of extending a helping hand to his brothers and sisters. His offer to write and produce a song for Rebbie, for example, helped her get a recording deal with CBS Records in 1984 ("Centipede," the song he contributed to her debut album, became the LP's title tune as well as a Top Forty pop hit). He helped Jackie by getting CBS's permission for him to record a solo album for Polygram Records. And he really went to bat at CBS for Marlon after Marlon announced his decision to leave the Jacksons and Epic Records in 1985. Michael succeeded in getting Marlon his release after Epic refused Marlon's own request, thereby allowing the opportunity to pursue a full-time solo recording career.

REBBIE: As for the related charge of sibling rivalry in our family, I believe that the press has confused competitiveness with the desire on all of our parents to be successful.

MARLON: One thing about being a child star is that some people aren't willing to have you become an adult. They see you embarking on a solo career after recording exclusively with your brothers for years, and they refer to what you've done as "breaking away" or "tearing apart." They don't recognize your right to grow up, to grow. But if there's no depth, there's no destiny. Everybody is entitled to do what they want to do in life.

TITO: And we don't feud with one another; the press has made that related charge. In fact, if any of the brothers gets into an argument, we can't leave the room without making up.

JERMAINE: You want to know what the bottom line is? The Jacksons are a family we will remain. You have to show unity.

There are two Jackson family traditions that bespeak unity.

One is the Family Meeting, held in either the upstairs den or downstairs trophy room. The meetings are held to discuss business or personal matters that arise affecting one or more of us. Any of the Jacksons may request one.

In 1988, Randy asked for a Family Meeting because someone in the business had been "bad mouthing" him, and he was upset. "Why would he

call a meeting about this?" the rest of us wondered. "People bad mouth each other all the time in the business." But Randy was hurting, and he wanted to share his feelings with us. So we met and listened to him.

In 1988 we also called a Family Meeting to discuss a topic that was of great concern to all of us: LaToya. Much of the meeting was spent devising approaches that we could make to her in attempt to persuade her to part company with her manager, Jack Gordon, and return home to us.

The other Jackson tradition is Family Day. Limited to Joe and me, the children, and the grandchildren, Family Day is little more than your old-fashioned barbecue, with maybe a movie thrown in for entertainment. Business talk is discouraged; Family Day is a time for the Jacksons to drop their work, forget their cares, and be a family again. Joe and I and a couple of the kids hosted Family Day during 1988.

My words'-eye picture of the Jackson family in 1988 wouldn't be complete without a comment on Joe's and my relationship.

People magazine made mention of our crisis, as well as the "rumors of Joe philandering." However, the article's writer was content to let Joe have the final word on us: "We survived. We love each other, and we have children. That's why we're together." That was one People quote of Joe's that I did agree with.

This is not to say that by 1988 I had totally gotten over my deep hurt at his infidelity, because I hadn't. When the painful thoughts came up, I dealt with them. But mostly I was able to keep a positive focus. God knows I have so much to be thankful for in my life.

I had detected one change in Joe by 1988, a mellowing of sorts. While he still had several business projects on the front burner, he was content to stay home much more than in the past. He also made time to do things that he hadn't done in years: cook meals, barbecue in the yard. He really surprised me when he began making the bed in the morning.

When I decided to buy a weekend home in Las Vegas in 1988, Joe insisted on redecorating the spare room next to the pool himself. After he did that he began talking about planting a vegetable garden.

As hard as it was for Joe to talk about his feelings, it occurred to me that his new show of teamwork around the house was his subtle way of telling me that he was happy that we were still together after nearly four decades of marriage.

I don't want to give the impression that Joe had "gone soft." He still hated "I told you so's," as in "Joe, I told you not to talk to People magazine." He still was prone to moodiness. Sometimes he'd still get so mad about something or other that his forehead would sort of rise up and he would change color -- a tip that I should take the day off and go shopping.

Also, let the record show that Joe Jackson still had his devilish side.

The first weekend we stayed at our Las Vegas house, I was talking one night in my bedroom with a friend, Amelia Patterson. A warm, gusty wind was blowing, and the branches of the mulberry tree were casting moving shadows against the curtains; it was a somewhat spooky sight. But Amelia and I got into such a deep talk that I forgot about the shadows.

All of a sudden we heard a scratching sound against a window in one of the french doors. I walked over to the door, peered out, and spied a form crouching in the shadows. I nearly jumped out of my skin!

I took off out of the bedroom like a shot. Amelia was right on my tail.

Of course it was Joe.

18 RETURNS

"Michael, don't you get lonesome out at that ranch by yourself?" I asked him in 1989.

"No, Mother, I don't have time to get lonesome," he said. "I'm always busy."

You know how some people are "morning people," while others are "night people"? Michael remains both. He can't wait to get on with his day. When nighttime comes, you'll find him writing. When he's through working, he's reading in bed, sometimes into the wee hours. Even though I think he could have used a long vacation following his world tour, it just wasn't in his makeup to sit still in 1989.

By the middle of the year, Michael had already begun work on his next album, a mix of new and old songs. But he wasn't the only busy Jackson in 1989. I could have used a program to help me keep track of his brothers' recording projects. Jackie's first solo album in sixteen years, *Be the One*, was released in March by Polygram. By fall, Jermaine had released his third album on Arista Records, *Don't Take It Personal*, and Randy his first-ever solo album, *Randy and the Gypsies*, on A&M.

I have to be honest: While I enjoyed listening to their records, I hadn't been thrilled to see the brothers spending so much of their energy on their solo work.

"You're going to run the risk of flooding yourselves out," I told them when their albums were still in the planning stages. "There will be too many Jacksons out there. People are going to be saying, 'Which Jackson album should I buy this time?'"

"Your focus should be on keeping the Jacksons going. You're much stronger as a group than you are as solo artists, anyway."

Yet I understood the challenge facing the boys in continuing the group past the 1984 Victory album in the face of Michael's commitment to his solo career.

JACKIE: Originally, I thought that Tito, Randy, Marlon and I would return to the studio with Michael after the Victory tour. I wasn't counting on Jermaine being involved because he wasn't signed to Epic. Then we learned that CBS wanted another Michael Jackson album first.

The boys really had no choice but to wait for Michael to record Bad. While they did in 1985, their ranks shrank by one.

MARLON: I called a Family Meeting to tell everyone of my decision to leave the Jacksons. Of course, they wanted to know why. I replied: "I've been doing this for twenty-some years. It's not that I haven't enjoyed being in the group, because I have. But being in the Jacksons is not something that's motivating me right now in my life. I need something that keeps me going, that's more of a challenge. Pursuing a full-time solo career is a real big challenge."

Going into the meeting, I knew how everyone was going to respond. I knew my father was going to say, "No, you can't," which he did -- and continues to do to this day.

I knew my mother was going to be supportive, which she was: "Whatever makes you happy, I'm for it."

And I knew that Michael was going to grill me about my specific plans, which is exactly what he did before declaring, "Marlon, if that's what you want to do, no one is going to stop you."

That was the first time I think my family ever really saw me. I was the person in the family who never said anything, never showed any emotion. It was such a change for me to speak up; and it felt good.

It's true that I supported Marlon; I want each of my children to be fulfilled. And yet I remember thinking during that meeting, What is going to happen to the Jacksons without Marlon, and with Michael doing another solo album?

The answer -- in 1985, 1986, and 1987, at least -- was not much. Jackie, Tito and Randy did cut some tracks in Tito's home studio, but the only Jackson releases during that period were solo albums: Michael's *Bad*, Janet's *Control*, Marlon's *Baby Tonight*, Jermaine's *Precious Moments*, LaToya's *Imagination*, and Rebbie's *Reaction*.

JACKIE: By 1987 it had been two and a half years since the Victory album. Michael still hadn't released Bad, and it finally dawned on us that he wasn't going to be available for the next group album. So we decided, "Hey, brothers, let's do it ourselves."

Finally, in 1988, work began in earnest on a new Jacksons album. Playing a key role, ironically, was Jermaine, who originally wasn't going to participate in the album. To work with his brothers, he had to put his *Don't Take It Personal* album on hold. But that's how important he thought it was to see another Jacksons album in the stores. "We don't want to see the legend of the Jacksons just wash away," he declared at a Family Meeting in 1988.

REBBIE: Jermaine also tried to get the brothers to see that not everybody in the family is a lead singer, that their real strength comes from blending their voices together. To put it simply, Jermaine took Michael's place in the group. He filled the void.

Even though by 1988 a Jackson album was long overdue, Jermaine, Jackie, Tito, and Randy knew better than to rush their work. They had heard the gossip in the industry that the Jacksons were nothing without Michael, and they were intent on proving the skeptics wrong.

Even before the album was released, Jermaine was calling it "by far the greatest piece of material that the Jacksons had ever put together." The thing that struck me about the album when I heard it was its great variety. It was like a musical version of a chef's salad: a little funk a little pop a little easy-listening.

Although I found myself humming several of the songs after only a few listenings, I had an immediate favorite: the autobiographical title tune, "2300 Jackson Street." Co-written by Jermaine, Jackie, Tito, and Randy, and Gene Griffin and Aaron Hall, it features the vocals of every one of my kids except LaToya:

Mom and Dad

They sacrificed their wants and needs
So we could reach the light
Although the times were tough for us
We knew they both worked hard
They gave us all their hearts could give
And still made room for love
We're all united
And standing strong
And still today
We're one big family
2300 Jackson street
Always home
2300 Jackson street
Always home

JACKIE: After the album was finished, Jermaine played a tape of it for Michael at his ranch. Michael couldn't believe how good the album was. Tears rolled down his cheeks as he listened.

He was immediately on the phone to Walter Yetnikoff, the CBS Records chairman. "Don't lose the Jacksons record," he told him. "It's a great record, a number-one record."

With the possible exception of the Jackson Five's debut album, I don't know when the family has more eagerly anticipated the release of a Jacksons album. Finally, in May 1989, nearly five years after the release of the Jacksons' last album, 2300 Jackson Street was shipped to the record stores.

We all watched with great interest as the first single, Nothin' (That Compares 2U)," and the album shot up in the black charts. We had cause for celebration when both eventually made the black Top Ten.

But we were all deeply disappointed when 2300 Jackson Street failed to cross over on to the pop charts.

The boys and Joe and I knew the album had enough strong songs and the sound to merit a crossover. But we also know that an album can't go anywhere when the record company isn't one hundred percent behind it.

Michael continued to exhort CBS Records to promote the album after its release. CBS continued to promise that it would. But it was clear before long that CBS had no intention of giving 2300 Jackson Street an all-out push. The question was: Why?

The answer had to do with the fact that 2300 Jackson Street was the final album that the Jacksons were contracted to deliver to the record label. Instead of really promoting the LP in the hopes of re-signing the Jacksons, as we all thought CBS would do, the company had apparently given up on, or decided against, continuing their relationship with the Jacksons.

“Why would they fatten frogs for snakes?” is the way I put it to the boys. “They're not going to make you big if they don't know whether or not you're coming back with them.”

The fact that 2300 Jackson Street wasn't able to get a fair hearing from the public was a bitter pill for the boys and Joe and me to swallow. I've often referred to the Jackson family story as a Cinderella story, but this was one Jackson story without a happy ending.

Luckily, the family had something positive to focus on during this frustrating period of 1989: the triumphant return of Janet after her own lengthy absence from the recording scene.

I had been prodding Janet to return to the studio almost as long as I had been prodding the brothers. “Jan, you better hurry up and get that album going,” I told her in 1988. “People forget, you know.”

But Janet wasn't concerned. “Mother, there are people who've taken a much longer time than me between albums.”

If Janet sounded as if she was less consumed with her career than, say, a certain brother of hers, she was.

But her more relaxed nature didn't fully explain her long layoff. A movie project that she was going to be involved in after Control didn't pan out, and her negotiations with Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis, the team that had produced and co-written Control, went on for weeks. At issue was their fee.

At one apparent impasse in the talks, Janet considered approaching other producers. But Michael, whom she often turns to for advice, counseled patience. "If you're going good, why change producers?" he reasoned.

A call from Janet to Jimmy Jam and Terry finally got the talks back on track, and in January 1989 she began recording her fourth album in Minneapolis at long last.

Work proceeded very slowly. Like Michael with Bad, Janet had the pressure of trying to compete with a previous smash album.

Work also proceeded very secretively. It was months before I even learned the album's title: Janet Jackson's Rhythm Nation: 1814. Before that the LP only by A&M Records' code name: the "1814 Project."

Finally, in May, the album was ready to be mixed. But Janet's work was far from over. On May 16, her twenty-third birthday, she began rehearsals for an extended video featuring several songs from the album.

The filming schedule was exhausting. Janet reported to the set, a Long Beach warehouse, daily at three P.M., and she filmed until seven the next morning. Of her eight hours off the set each day, two were spent commuting.

The schedule, and the stomach flu, proved too much for her. She spent two days in the hospital suffering from exhaustion and dehydration. I didn't even know that she was sick until after she had returned to work. She never tells me when she's not feeling well; I have to find out about it from one of the other children -- in this case, Rebbie.

The day Rebbie called, I drove down to the set to see Janet. I was relieved to find her looking fine.

I also visited the set one day when Michael was there.

Little did I know when I arrived that Janet had plans for me, namely to film an interview with me for a possible video about the making of her "Rhythm Nation" video.

"Okay, I said."

"Kat, I'm surprised!" Michael exclaimed. "I told Dunk that you wouldn't do it."

"Well, if you're not expecting me to say yes, I won't."

I hardly had a chance to get comfortable in a chair before Janet started fixing my hair and Michael began applying makeup to my face.

“Wait, wait, I hate for you to make a fuss!” I protested.

When I finally got before the cameras, Michael started playing around with the lights.

“Leave the lights alone. They’re fine,” I said.

Everything’s got to be perfect,” Michael replied, continuing to fiddle with them.

(A few weeks later, Michael had a camera crew and interviewer come to the house to film interviews with Joe and me for his private collection on the family. It’s something that he had been threatening to do for years, but which I had kept putting off. I knew that he’d want to ask me a lot of little devilish questions -- he’s real interested in Joe’s courting of me, our first kiss; that kind of stuff. His collection, by the way, continues to grow and grow, and includes not only most of the old family photos, but such keepsakes as the shoes his niece Stacey wore at the age of two, and his nephew Taj’s first diaper. “Michael, you’re just an old pack rat,” I tell him.)

Up until my first visit with Janet on the set, I had heard only one of Janet’s new songs, “Black Cat.” Janet had played it for me because she was especially proud of it. Not only was it the first song she’d ever written completely on her own, but it was also the first rock song she’d ever done.

By June, however, I had heard most of the album -- enough of it, at least, to conclude that Janet had turned away from the sassy sound of Control in favor of a more mature pop-R&B sound. At first I was nervous that she was taking a new direction.

“Jan, the Control sound was a great sound,” I said. “Look at how successful Paula Abdul and Jody Watley have become by recording songs in that vein. Why can’t you at least put a couple of Control-type tunes on the album, just to play it safe?”

“Mother, I think the public is going to like my new sound,” she replied confidently. Janet’s like Michael: When someone else jumps on their wagon, they build another wagon.

The longer I rode on Janet’s new wagon, the more I enjoyed the ride. As I got more into the songs, I was impressed with the fact that they were written with a purpose: to bring people of all colors together through music and dance. Addressing such issues as bigotry, illiteracy, drugs, violence, and the

homeless in her music was a sign to me of Janet's maturation, not only as an artist but also as a human being.

In August 1989, one month before Janet's album was released, "Miss You Much," the first single, came out. Any lingering doubts I had about Janet's changing her sound were erased when the song zoomed to the top of the charts, aided, I'm sure, by her great video. The album was number one by October.

Amazingly, Janet was even less demonstrative about the success of Rhythm Nation than she'd been about the success of Control, she'd fill me in on the latest chart positions. But when I'd call her following the release of Rhythm Nation, she wouldn't say anything about how the album was doing -- she's so unassuming. Her boyfriend, Rene, acted more excited than she did. He was the one who'd keep me informed.

One of the reasons why I was so impatient to see Janet return to the studio and record another album was my desire to see her tour for the first time ever in support of the LP. Her decision not to tour behind Control had raised some eyebrows among members of the press; I recall speculation that she might even be "afraid" of touring. The truth is that she loves to perform, she just didn't want to tour until she had enough high-quality original material to put on a full-length show.

Janet's dancing ability has long been a thing of wonder to me. Being my youngest child, she missed out on her brothers' and sisters' living room sock hops and her brothers' living room rehearsals. By the time she was three, we were in Los Angeles, and the Jackson Five, by then famous, were rehearsing in studios. Oh, my goodness, I remember thinking at the time, Janet doesn't have anybody around the house to inspire her to take up dancing. I wonder what she's going to do when she grows up. Janet never danced as a child.

Turn the calendar ahead to 1986, however, and Janet demonstrated in her Control videos and television performances that dancing ability isn't something that has to be painstakingly developed over the years. It can just be there, in the genes.

I thought for sure that, with those videos and TV appearances under the belt, Janet would get addicted to dancing. I was wrong. After Control, she hung up her dancing shoes. It wasn't until her fourth album was almost finished and it was time for her to begin preparing for her videos that she got "rhythm" again. (As Janet dislikes exercising in general, she wound up putting on quite a few pounds between albums. One of the reasons why I think she collapsed during filming of the "Rhythm Nation" video is the fact that she was subsisting on a measly nine hundred calories a day.)

Janet didn't have to ask me twice to accompany her on the first week of her tour. I met her in Miami, the site of her opening-night performance.

Not having seen her rehearsals for the show -- Janet put her show together in the Pensacola Civic Center, the same venue Michael had used to rehearse his solo show -- I wasn't sure what to expect. I just knew Janet would be good.

She was more than good. Her dancing and singing were fantastic. Some of her moves reminded me of Michael -- they're family, after all -- but many of her moves were distinctly her.

"Jan," I told her backstage, "this was your first time ever onstage alone in concert. But nobody would know it was your first time because you were so professional up there."

"Really, Mother?" Janet replied, breaking into a grin.

The only suggestion I had was something a mother would say. Noting that Janet was writing wet, I told her, "The show is all you, no intermission. How about having your band play a number while you go offstage and rest a few minutes? The only time you're not onstage is when you're changing costumes, and that only takes a couple of minutes."

Janet said she'd consider what I said. But I didn't think she'd wind up tinkering with what was an expertly paced show.

After the Miami show and the several other shows I attended, Janet and I would immediately board her plush Prevost bus and take off for the next city. Janet would receive a massage from her massage therapist and then have something to eat that her cook had prepared. By three A.M. we would arrive at our hotel and then promptly go to bed. Eleven hours later we'd have a lunch call, followed by a three-thirty lobby call, for the ride to the arena. From four P.M. until just before showtime, Jan and I would relax backstage while she had her makeup done. Then, just before taking the stage, Janet would pay a visit to the "meet and greet" room to have her picture taken with local dignitaries and radio people, while I claimed my seat in the audience. It was quite a schedule for a sixty-year-old fan to follow, but it was fun.

Of course, the most fun I had was in watching Janet work her magic on the crowd night after night. Sooner or later, I'd find myself doing with Janet what I'd done with Michael and the Jacksons before her, recalling precious moments from the past: Janet as a two-year-old climbing on her brothers' bunk beds in Gary wrestling with them as a little tomboy. And here she is, I'd conclude, a young lady performing for thousands of people

19 STILL DREAMING

Janet showed the world in 1989 that she was not only a good singer and songwriter, but also a great performer. But as far as she's concerned, she still hasn't reached the top of her mountain at twenty-four. She dreams of performing someday in a Broadway play, as well as in a movie musical.

She's not the only one of my children interested in film. Jermaine, who attended classes at the American Film Institute, wants to direct and produce. He has a producing role in the ABC miniseries about the family, which is currently in production. Marlon, too, wants to produce. "I want to show that black people can make great films along the lines of *Terms of Endearment* and *Out of Africa*," he says.

A dozen years after he co-starred in *The Wiz*, Michael remains keenly interested in the movies, as well. Among the many projects he's considered in recent years was the starring role in Steven Spielberg's planned version of *Peter Pan*. I'm reminded of his interest in that project every time I look at Michael's toy and doll collection at the house and see the *Peter Pan* doll that was made for him. The doll is black and has a Michael Jackson hairstyle.

But even though Michael identified with *Peter Pan*'s leading lost children into a world of fantasy and magic, he decided, in the end, not to pursue the project. It was a question of image. By 1983 he had adopted a tougher, more streetwise public persona.

One of Michael's priorities is in finding just the right movie project. It's a challenge for him; I know he's gone through piles and piles of scripts. I don't see him playing a lover's role, or some macho part. What does that leave? Another musical.

Michael loves musicals. He watches the classic ones like *West Side Story* and *The Sound of Music* over and over again. I'm sure he'd love to do a musical that would rank among the best ones ever made.

While some of my kids look toward films, others remain focused on recording. Rebbie's number-one goal, for example, is to achieve success with her new record label, Motown. She recorded her third and final album, *R U Tuff Enuff*, for Columbia in 1988.

As for the Jacksons, they intended to continue to record and, someday, tour again. As Tito says, "We're every bit as passionate today as we were in the early days. You have to stay hungry."

Ambitious as my kids remain, it does my heart good to know that they care about and want to help those who have the same dreams today that they had twenty-five years ago.

RANDY: I've always loved playing music, but before my automobile accident in 1980 I was just living. I had no purpose. I was born into this family of talented kids, so I never had to struggle like my brothers. My first concert as a member of the Jacksons was in front of eighteen thousand people. I think I was a little bit spoiled. I know that I tended to take things for granted.

The accident changed all that. I think God was giving me a slap, telling me to wake up to myself. From that point on, I've had a purpose. I want to be a role model.

I want to help people, especially those who want to become musicians and artists. I know how difficult it was for my brothers when they were starting out, how hard they had to work. I know that my family wished that someone would reach back and give us a hand. I want to be that hand reaching out to young people with a dream. That's my dream.

If Tito's dream comes true, the brothers will have a vehicle with which to support young performers: the Jackson family's own record label.

TITO: Not only do I see the brothers recording their first future albums for our own record company; I see us branching into recording new talent. I feel that we have an ear for hit records, the ability to produce hit records, and the knack for matching the right producers with the right songs.

Seeing my children involved and successful in their careers, as well as the careers of fledging artists, is only one of my wishes for them. My other wishes are more personal, among them that they continue to steer clear of drugs.

So far, the axiom "Bring up a child the way you want him to go, and when he gets older he won't depart from the path" has worked for Joe and me. The children even held out by keeping a brotherly or sisterly eye on one another. If we hear from one of the kids that one of the brothers, for example, is associating with someone who may not be a good influence, we will call a Family Meeting and talk to that child about his friend.

Knowing the way society is, however, I realize it's still possible for one of my children to get into drugs. The child may even be able to avoid detection by the family initially. But I know that eventually I would find out. And I know exactly what I would do: drop everything, take that child by the hand, and get him or her help. I wouldn't leave the child's side for a minute until he or she was cured. For a mother or father to do any less would be to shirk her or his responsibility as a parent. The child's life could be at stake.

Another wish that I have is one that any loving mother has for her kids: that they continue to enjoy, or find, happiness in their personal lives.

Three of my children, I am happy to say, have been blessed with successful marriages. In 1990, Rebbie and Nathaniel marked their twenty-second anniversary; Tito and his wife, Dee Dee, their eighteenth; and Marlon and his wife, Carol, their fifteenth.

There's no doubt in my mind that Rebbie's and Nathaniel's faith has been the key to the success of their marriage. To Jehovah's Witnesses, the family is very important, and they have devotedly raised their children in the Truth.

I'm her mother so I'm probably biased, but I really do believe that Rebbie is the kind of old-fashioned girl that a lot of men would like to marry but have a hard time finding today. Not only is she a great mother, she's a great cook. And, as I've noted, she learned to wash, iron, and clean at a young age. Nowadays, the average girl doesn't even know how to cook.

A few words about Nathaniel: Over the years he has worked at a sawmill, run a janitorial service, worked for a computer company, owned a driver's training school, and worked as a landscaper -- all in the name of being a good provider to his family.

Tito's and Dee Dee's marriage, meanwhile, has endured because, as Tito says, they're friends first. Also, both of them are easy people, and that helps.

As for Marlon and Carol, they're really happy together because they've worked at their marriage. They respect, love, and understand each other.

However, three of my children -- Jackie, as well as Jermaine and Janet -- have had marriages fail.

I was particularly sad to see Jackie's and Jermaine's marriages come to an end, because there were children involved. Also, each had been married a long time -- eleven and fourteen years, respectively -- and I'd come to love their wives, Enid and Hazel, like my own daughters. They found out shortly after they married into the family that I wasn't a mother-in-law who meddled. After that they treated me like their mother.

(In fact, the wives come to me as frequently as the boys when there was a problem in the marriage. It was easy for me to go back to the boys and talk with them; after all, they're my sons. When the boys wanted me to speak to their wives, I would, although I have to admit that it was harder for me. However, my method was the same no matter who I was talking with. What I

did was take the individual to the Bible to show him of her what I felt he or she might be doing wrong.)

I'm thankful that Jermaine and Janet are currently in stable relationships and look forward to their remarrying. I'm especially anxious for Jackie to get married again. While most of my kids are careful about the kinds of foods they eat, Jackie is a confirmed junk-food lover. I'll worry less about his diet when he has a wife to cook him some balanced meals.

Then there are Randy and Michael, who have never been married.

"Why don't you settle down, and get married, and have a family?" I'm always telling Randy, who's had many girlfriends. "Then I wouldn't worry about you so much."

But Randy still doesn't want to hear it. "I'm not ready to get married yet," he'll reply.

As for Michael, I wish he did have the special someone to share his life with right now; his life would be richer. I think that, deep down, he does, too.

I think the reason why he's had so few relationships in recent years, is that he's been approached so many times by women who are so obviously looking for that pot of gold at the end of the rainbow that he's grown wary. Michael wrote about this type of woman -- I call her a status seeker -- in his song "Dirty Diana."

When Michael was younger he joked that "when the love bug bites me, that's when I'm going to marry." By 1989 he was telling me, "The woman I marry will have to have a lot of money herself. That's the only way I'll know for sure that she's not marrying me for my money."

REBBIE: Even if Michael were to find the "perfect" woman tomorrow, I think that he would be reluctant to subject her to the incredible scrutiny that he's subjected to every day. My brother is the biggest thing in life right now. I was reminded of that fact twice in 1989.

The first time was at a hospital in Panorama City, where my mother's mother was taken in February after she became seriously ill. Michael joined the rest of the family at her bedside, and as soon as the word got out that he was in the building, the room turned into

Grand Central Station. Nurses, technicians, doctors -- even the security man downstairs -- were running in and out, looking up at Michael's face, and asking for his autograph.

Michael also made headline news at the nursery that my husband, a part-time landscaper, does business at. All anybody could talk about for a couple of days was the fact that Michael Jackson had ordered three thousand square feet of sod for his ranch.

Even if Michael's wife did manage to adapt to life in a fish bowl, she'd also have to cope with the reality of Michael attending meetings, and members of his entourage constantly pulling on him. Some of these people, no doubt, would view her as no more than a competitor for Michael's time.

And yet, Michael seems happy. Even though he knows that he will never be able to live a "normal" life, he seems comfortable with his fame. I believe that when he's good and ready to get married, he'll do it, despite the inevitable press uproar.

While I firmly believe that a good marriage promotes happiness, the surest path to inner peace and fulfillment, I believe, is through religion. This is why I also wish that my children will draw closer to Jehovah.

I'm not worried about Rebbie. As she says, "The most important thing in my life is my relationship with the Creator, Jehovah God." She proves it by attending every meeting at Kingdom Hall and doing her weekly Field Service.

Dee Dee, Tito's wife, has also shown a strong interest in studying. She brings their three sons over to the house on a regular basis to read the Bible with me.

But Randy and Janet attend Kingdom Hall only occasionally, and Jermaine, Jackie, Tito, and LaToya not at all, even though LaToya was baptized a Witness several years ago. Marlon and Carol attend a Catholic church.

Then there is Michael's unique situation: In 1987, he left the Jehovah's Witnesses. Michael didn't inform me personally of his decision. When I learned of it, I was devastated. He had begun missing meetings at Kingdom Hall earlier that year, but only because, he assured me, he was so busy finishing Bad and preparing for his world tour.

There was a strong opposition to his “Thriller” video on the part of some Witnesses, even though Michael had an elder on the set during filming to advise him, and even though he ran a disclaimer at the beginning of the video stressing that he was in no way endorsing a belief in the occult. Perhaps the controversy figured in his decision to leave.

But I don’t know that for a fact because I didn’t talk to him about what he’d done. I couldn’t. Witnesses do not discuss spiritual matters with a person who has disassociated himself from the Witnesses, including family members.

But I want to stress that, contrary to published reports, I was not required to “shun” my son. Our relationship is as loving today as it was when he was a Witness. I just can’t ask him, “Why, Michael?”

Two more wishes:

I wish for a reunited Jacksons. I wish that Michael and Marlon would consider rejoining the group, if only on a part-time basis. For old time’s sake. For my sake.

And I dream of a reunited Jackson family.

As much as LaToya hurt the family by posing nude for Playboy and preparing a “tell-all” book on the Jacksons, I long for her reconciliation with us. The Jackson family is not whole without her.

Although many of her brothers and sisters remained in touch with her, LaToya and I didn’t speak from late 1988 until the spring of 1989. It was the longest period of time, by far, that I’d ever been out of touch with one of my children.

The first time she called in 1989, I made a point of not bringing up either Playboy or her book. After so long a silence between us I didn’t want to confront her immediately. But the next time she called, in May, I brought up the subject of her nude spread.

“LaToya, whose idea was it that you pose nude for Playboy?” I asked.

“It was mine, Mother,” she declared.

“Come on, LaToya,” I said. “I know you. I know your personality. You’ve only been around me all of your life. And it was completely out of character of you to pose for Playboy. Why did you do it?”

Silence.

“Toya, why did you do it?”

Her continued silence gave me the answer I really already knew: It was her manager Jack Gordon’s doing. I figured that we’d have the identical conversation if I asked her about her book, so I refrained.

“Toya, from now on,” I said, “don’t let anybody persuade you to do anything that you really don’t want to do. Stand up for what you believe in, and be strong about it.”

Before we hung up, I told my daughter once again that she was welcome to return home.

In September 1989, it was reported to me in the media that LaToya and Jack Gordon had married. While LaToya publicly denied the report, I believed it. But I know deep down that LaToya didn’t marry Gordon out of love. In fact, I heard through the grapevine that people close to Gordon had advised LaToya to marry him so that he would be in a better position to “protect” her from her family.

Protect her from what? I ask. Our love? Our concern?

20 FUTURE CHAPTERS

“Why you?” my father-in-law, Sam Jackson, always used to ask me. “Why your family.

“Dad, would you rather our success happened to someone else?” I’d reply, chuckling.

But it’s a serious question that deserves a serious answer. I wish I had it. While I feel my children’s talent is God-given, I don’t believe that He chose them to accomplish everything that they have in their careers. All I can do is point to the ingredients of our success story: talented kids, committed parents, Gary’s musical environment, a desire for a better life, hard work, and perseverance. And some luck.

It’s still hard for me to grasp the distance that I and my family have come - - it seems much too far a distance to cover in just one lifetime. When I was a child my teachers encouraged my classmates and me to read as many books as possible over the summer, rewarding us with a star in the fall if we read a certain number. As there was no television back then, I managed to do a great deal of reading, especially about children who live in different lands. And I would dream, always I would dream. I would wonder: What is life like in Germany? In Holland? In Japan? And to think that I’ve visited all those countries that I used to daydream about.

It's so awesome for me to contemplate the "big picture" of our lives that I wind up dwelling on moments. Occasionally, when Joe and I are lying in bed at night, one of us will become nostalgic: "Remember when ?" Before we know it, we're reliving one of the countless special moments in our family's past: our kids' living room sock hops, the Jackson Fives public debut at the department store in Glen Park, Illinois Joe will never admit publicly that he can be just as sentimental as I, so I just did it for him.

Thinking back, I'm grateful for my early struggles. As I tell my kids: "You've been truly blessed to have been without in our lives. It helps you to appreciate what you have now, and to understand those who are in the position today that you were once in."

Proud as I am of my children's achievements, a part of me would gladly trade my life today for our life "without" in Gary. Does that sound crazy? It's just that our family is close now, but it was closer then. It's something about the kids' shoveling snow for the neighbors so that we could buy something to eat for dinner. We struggled together, and stuck together. Money makes you independent, and that's the difference. But mothers have to let go of their kids one day, and maybe I just didn't -- and don't -- want to.

I'm still as involved in my kids' lives as they'll let me be. If they get a special yen for a sweet-potato pie or a peach cobbler, they know who to ask. If they're sick, they know who's going to show up at the front door with soup medicine.

Since I love to fuss over my kids, I guess it's only fair play that they fuss over me. Janet especially keeps an eye on me. We have a pool in our backyard, and she's always saying, "Stay away from that pool, Mother. You know you can't swim." If I'm sick, and she finds out, forget it. She'll have her secretary call me and ask me to make an appointment with my doctor, and then call her back to tell her what time the appointment is, so that I'll have to go. And I'll be thinking, My gosh, Janet's treating me like a baby.

While I'm happy just to hear my children say "I love you" at the end of a phone call, they've also insisted on showing their love for me in lavish ways. Every few years they select a day between my birthday, May 4, and Mother's Day to do something extravagant for me (as a Witness, I don't celebrate my actual birthday). In 1984, they really went overboard.

All I was expecting that May night was a quiet dinner with LaToya at the Bistro Gardens in Beverly Hills. When we walked into one of the restaurant's private rooms, however, I was stunned to see the whole family standing there -- including my father, whom the children had secretly flown in from Indiana. "Surprise!" they hollered, as tears streamed down my face. The children had

even hired Floyd Cramer, one of my favorite country and Western artists, to provide the music (I still love country music and enjoy the music of all the current stars).

After dinner, I opened my gifts. They included a beautiful watch, ring, and bracelet. Then I was handed a multicolored streamer. "Just follow the ribbon," I was told. The streamer led me out of the restaurant and right to the front door of a Rolls-Royce adorned with a giant bow.

The kids probably get a kick out of spoiling me because they know I don't like to spoil myself. You can still find me shopping at the local Pic 'n' Save, and even the Salvation Army, where I buy books and an occasional antique.

The one big purchase I've ever made on my own is my Las Vegas house. I bought it in 1988 not only because I wanted a place to go on weekends to escape Los Angeles and the constantly ringing telephone, but also because I wanted to recapture a silence of my life in Gary.

It's just a regular house on a regular street. It's not hidden behind gates; you can walk right up to the front door from the sidewalk. I can look out the kitchen window and see children playing, and cars going by. In these ways the house reminds me of life before the boys became famous. I love it.

I don't want to give the impression that I'm too hung up on the past to appreciate the present and the future. One of the aspects of my family's story that amazes me the most is that there are still chapters to be written.

Not only does each of my children remain involved in show business, but also some of their children are gearing up for lives in the spotlight. One of my kids has already been upstaged by a member of the next generation of Jackson dreamers.

JERMAINE: In 1986 I performed at a racetrack in Belgium where I had a car entered in a twenty-four-hour race. I had my son Jermaine, Jr., then nine, and my daughter, Autumn, then seven, with me, and before I went on, I asked them if they would like to join me onstage; Jermaine loves to dance and Autumn loves to sing. They said they would.

But when I called them out during the show, Autumn was too shy to join me. But not Jermaine, Jr. And he didn't just run out onstage like most kids would in that circumstance; he danced from the wings into the spotlight! The thirty thousand people in the grandstands went nuts. The next day, all the reviews of my show mentioned him specifically how he stole the show from me.

Seeing how talented not only his oldest kids were, but also Rebbie's, Tito's, and Marlon's, Jermaine came up with the idea of having the grandkids perform in Family Day talent shows.

When Joe and I host Family Day, the talent show -- otherwise known as the "show for grandma" -- is staged in our theatre.

JERMAINE: The kids use the guest room across the hall as their changing room. If you were to walk into the room before or during a show, you'd swear you were backstage at a play. Gowns are spread across the bed; everyone's changing costumes. The kids take these shows seriously. They know that their parents and grandparents know what makes a professional performance, and they want to impress us.

Other Talent Show regulars include Tito's children, Taj, seventeen; Taryll, fifteen; and Tito Jr., twelve. They perform together as the Three T's.

TITO: Out of all the grandkids, they're the only ones who started singing when they were tots. They've been "wanting it" since they were knee-high.

Rebbie's two oldest, Stacey, nineteen, and Yashi, thirteen, have also taken the stage on Family Day. Stacey loves to sing, while Yashi loves to dance. Both want to turn professional.

Jackie's son, Siggy, thirteen, has displayed his rapping talent during Talent Shows; his daughter Brandi, seven, has sung and danced.

Marlon's three children -- Valencia, fourteen; Brittny, twelve, and Marlon, Jr., eight -- are also talented dancers and singers.

In fact, my only grandkids who haven't yet gotten an act of some sort together are Rebbie's son, Austin, and Jermaine's sons, Jeremy, Jaimy, and Jourdyn. But give them time: The oldest among them is only three.

Jermaine and his ex-wife, Hazel, were so impressed with the grandkids' performances on Family Day that they hatched the idea for a TV show starring them: "JAM: the Jackson All-American Music Hour." The way that Jermaine and Hazel have planned it, the kids will do takeoffs on their parents and other entertainers, as well as perform their original material.

But even if a snag develops and the "JAM" TV series doesn't work out, there will be other opportunities for the grandkids. There's even talk in the family of forming a new Jackson Five composed of Tito's sons and Jermaine's two oldest, or some other combination of grandkids.

I can visualize myself watching the grandkids perform as professionals someday. I'll be quietly bursting with pride, and I'll be thinking, I remember when they were all babies in my arms