

# VH1 News Presents: Michael Jackson's Secret Childhood

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Dave Walsh: In 1978, twenty-year-old Michael Jackson left New York full of hope. He had proved to himself that he could live apart from the suffocating grasp of his father, and proved to God that he could resist temptation. Michael buried the pain of his childhood deep inside and returned to LA determined to become bigger than the Jackson Five.

Steven Ivory: He'd become a man. This was the cat who was running the show.

J. Randy Taraborelli: Michael had this concept of becoming the biggest star on the planet. And Michael wanted his own lawyers, Michael wanted his own managers, Michael wanted his own record deal.

Dave Walsh: At Epic Records, Walter Yetnikoff convinced Mike that solo success was his best revenge against Papa Joe.

Walter Yetnikoff: He once said to me, "You know I've accomplished a lot. And my father has never told me that he's proud of me." And I became Daddy, and I said, "Come here Michael, let me give you a hug and let me tell you how proud everyone in the pop music field is of you, and the fact is you are the number one pop star in the entire world."

Dave Walsh: By 1980, Michael's 'Off The Wall' album had made him millions. He'd used his fortune to buy Hayvenhurst, the Jackson's Encino mansion. Papa Joe got the cash and Mike got to rebuild his childhood from scratch.

J. Randy Taraborelli: When the son suddenly owns the house that the father is living in, things change a lot.

Steven Ivory: This was the "house that 'Off The Wall' built". It was everything that Mike wanted in a house.

Yvonne Thomas: If somebody had the means to recreate a childhood, you could create a childlike environment and be like a kid in a candy store. Does it really help that emptiness inside? Unfortunately it does not.

Dave Walsh: Michael's desperate vision included everything he never had in Gary, Indiana. And instead of being crammed into a triple bunk bed, Mike built his own wing.

Clip of Michael Jackson at his mansion:

Michael Jackson. Woo-hoo, Aw man, why didn't you guys tell me you were shooting; I'll be right down. One sec, okay?

J. Randy Taraborelli: It was always a lot of fun going up there though. Because you never knew what you were gonna see. You never what kind of wacky Disney character was going to maybe meet you at the gate.

Dave Walsh: If the first step in Michael's delusional spending spree was to create a dream version of 2300 Jackson Street, the next was to fill it with playmates denied him as a child. Cameraman Steven Howell took these rare home movies of Michael's new best friends.

Steven Howell: All of a sudden these three vans drive up and next thing you know, what the—there's the Seven Dwarfs-- you know like you would see at Disneyland--are getting out of the van. And they frolic into his house. At that time I'm going, "This is too wild." The water fountain that's in front of his house is actually his wishing well, so they all went out there and they were doing their little, you know, wish. Michael always said, you know, "Capture the Magic", so I was capturing the magic on film.

Dave Walsh: As a child, Michael shared pets with his siblings. But in his reinvented youth, Michael populated his suburban palace with a 'Noah's Ark' all his own.

Steven Ivory: Everything went upscale, man; you know you went from having a regular old German Shepherd to having an exotic chimp hanging around the joint that wore clothes.

Steven Howell: Mr. Tibbs was their ram. Louie the llama.

J. Randy Taraborelli: You would see giraffes. You know, the neighbors were always very upset, because it smelled bad up there, it did! You know, it's not a zoo, it's somebody's home in Encino.

Dave Walsh: With his millions, Michael could finally buy Katherine Jackson the happiness he thought she deserved. So in 1984 Mike threw his mother the birthday party of her dreams.

Clip of Michael Jackson singing at Katherine's birthday party.

Dave Walsh: Though Michael's generosity was angelic, Katherine's bash violated a Jehovah's Witness taboo.

Steven Howell: You're going, wait a minute, I thought that Jehovah's Witnesses never celebrated birthdays.

Bill Bowen: that's absolutely stunning as far as I'm concerned. If a person celebrates a birthday, they face sanction, because they are doing something that's associated with pagan origins.

Dave Walsh: Katherine soothed her son's guilt by insisting her presents be wrapped in brown paper bags. While his mother had long ago learned to bend the Witnesses' rules when it came to the finer things in life, this was the first time Michael had dared to deceive Jehovah.

Carole Lieberman: Not having those gifts unless they're wrapped in brown paper is similar to the idea of it being it's okay to lie if it's for your image and public relations.

Dave Walsh: Michael's grip on the truth was completely coming loose. So when he was done remaking Havenhurst, he set out on an even more ambitious course, by reinventing Michael Jackson.

Steven Howell: I can only tell you what I know, and what I heard, and what he told me, one was that "I would like to separate myself from the Jackson Five, and become me, Michael Jackson, so in that separation he changed himself.

Walter Yetnikoff: He had a song called Man in the Mirror, Change. That's what he tried to do, he tried to change. He tried to change what he saw in the mirror. He obviously didn't like himself even though he was a big star.

Dave Walsh: In the real world, Michael was one of five singing brothers in a poor Black family. But in the lie he told himself, he was Peter Pan, an androgenous orphan from a lily-white fairy land. Step one in Michael's transformation was to streamline the feature that reminded him most of his father.

J. Randy Taraborelli: I actually saw the brothers sort of ribbing him about it, his nose, and they used to call him 'Big Nose', and I asked Joe about it, "What about Michael's nose?" and Joe said, you know, 'He's got a great nose, his nose is just like mine, he should be proud of his nose.'

Dave Walsh: After claiming that he broke his nose in an onstage fall, Michael spent the early 1980's chipping away at the link to his Papa Joe.

Steven Howell: I saw really fine, fine stitches on the sides of his nose.

Clip of Michael Jackson interview

Interviewer: You're saying you've only ever had one piece of surgery on your nose.

Michael Jackson: Two.

Interviewer: You've had two?

Michael Jackson: As I can remember.

Yvonne Thomas: If somebody was abused, one of the symptoms could be self-mutilation. Cosmetic surgery, especially on the same body part, over and over, this signals to me big time, something is going on here that's not just about wanting to look good.

Dave Walsh: As his face took on an elfin shape, Michael's skin also got lighter in tone. Mike claimed to have a skin disease that turned him from black to white.

Clip of Michael Jackson interview:

Michael Jackson: They're saying I was putting on cream to make myself White. That's not true.

Walter Yetnikoff: I tried to talk to him a couple of times; "You don't need to change your color. No one knows what color you are, no one cares. You're Michael Jackson, you know, you're a pop icon, you don't have to do this." He wouldn't respond. He would just turn his head. He just looked the other way, he wouldn't pay any attention.

Dave Walsh: And while his singing voice was always high, Mike's speaking tone suddenly became a childish whisper.

Steven ivory: The Michael that I've always heard had a fairly deep speaking tone.

Sam Brown III: I hope he doesn't get angry at me for telling you this. But that's his public persona. I remember a time I called him up, he answered the phone and I didn't know who I was talking to. Because he was talking in his normal voice, which is pretty deep.

Dave Walsh: By 1984, Michael Jackson was living his fantasy full-time. But his quest to become the little boy of his dreams had one fatal flaw. Because after all the pain and expense the new improved Mike still lived under the same roof as his old Papa Joe.

Steven Howell: One morning I walked in there, and I don't know if he could've been startled or whatever, but next thing I know Joe had an Uzi in his hand. It's not—cut, okay, take two, it's a fake gun---this was for real.

Dave Walsh: No matter how much he spent, there was no way Michael could escape the grasp of his father. Whatever happened in that tiny house back in Gary, formed a bond stronger than Mike's urge to flee from the man he despised, yet couldn't live without.

Carole Lieberman: Children who have been abused, because they don't want to believe that they weren't loved by their abuser, they make up all these excuses. Well, this person was really showing me love,

Clip of Michael Jackson interview.

Michael Jackson: He's a genius, the man's a genius. I say the man's a genius, he really isxxx

Interviewer: But Michael, he injured you when you were a child.

Michael Jackson: But look what came out of that.

Dave Walsh: Coming up, Michael breaks a dancer's heart.

Tatiana Thumbtzen: There were times that I wanted to end it, there really were. It was that painful, you know. It really was.

Dave Walsh: And later, Michael's unusual interests intensify.

Steven Howell: Hed'd have a lot of parties, and that's all you would see is just like little kids, primarily, you know, little boys.

Commercial break.

Dave Walsh: The years between 1978 and 1984 saw the emergence of a new Michael Jackson. He went from a shy teen with dreams of a solo career to a brash twenty-five-year-old with delusions of grandeur on a scale never seen before.

J. R andy Taraborelli: From the ashes of 'kid star Michael' came this 'different Michael'.

Theresa Gonsalves: Michael started saying things like "I'm gonna be more well-known than God." Lthat was his goal. And that's when I knew he was gone.

Walter Yetnikoff: I could not have a conversation with him which could not revolve around Michael Jackson and his records and his shows and how wonderful he was.

Dave Walsh: Michael's millions had allowed him to rewrite his history and reinvent himself. But behind the shades and sequined glove, Mike was still a lonely soul. Michael's options for companionship were few. As a boy he was scarred by his abusive father's infidelity, and scared celibate by the Jehovah's Witnesses. And if he were gay, both his heavenly father and his earthly mother, would never allow it.

Bill Bowen: Homosexuality is strictly forbidden within the church. There's no coming out. It's not accepted and you can't do it. And you gotta be celibate.

Clip of interview with Katherine Jackson.

Katherine Jackson: No, he's not gay. And this is—I don't know why they keep writing that. I guess it could be because he wears makeup but when you're onstage everyone wears makeup.

Dave Walsh: Michael tried to convince the world he was Peter Pan, a little boy who never grew up. So it seemed logical that his ideal companions would be as innocent as his persona appeared to be.

Clip of interview with Michael Jackson

Michael Jackson: I haven't been betrayed or deceived by children. Adults have let me down. Adults have let the world down.

Dave Walsh: But Michael also coped with his traumatic youth by lying to his god and himself. The true motives for his bizarre interest in children were a mystery, maybe even to Michael.

Yvonne Thomas: Whether one has been the victim, that is a child abuse survivor, or the victimizer, both parties could be attracted to situations where other children are around.

Dave Walsh: Michael's fascination with young boys surfaced in 1974, with pint-sized celebrity Rodney Allen Rippy.

Rodney Allen Rippy: He would call me, and he was interested in what was going on in my little world, you know. And when the 'Off The Wall' album hit, I lost contact with him.

Dave Walsh: Just after 'Off The Wall' was released in 1979, Michael met Terry George, a lonely English schoolkid. Just as with Rodney, twenty-year-old Mike reached out to twelve-year-old Terry by phone. But on the BBC documentary 'Lewis, Martin and Michael', an adult Terry admitted that one of Michael's calls went too far.

Clip of documentary video.

Narrator: But in 1993 two papers ran the story that Michael had been masturbating during one of their phone calls.

Clip of interview with Terry George.

Parts of the story are true. I mean the majority of it is true. Unfortunately, that story tends to focus on that ten-second part of the conversation, well three-minute part of the conversation.

Carole Lieberman: Because Michael's psychological growth is stunted at a pre-adolescent age, his sexuality is stunted. Pre-adolescent boys will have some mutual sex play, some of that is healthy up to a point.

Dave Walsh: In 1983, Michael turned to twelve-year-old Emmanuel Lewis, a TV star who appeared much younger. In public, twenty-five-year-old Mike claimed he saw something of himself in Emmanuel.

Vinny Zufante: He was a young kid. He was xx business. And he wanted to show him a different way.

Dave Walsh: Though he lived at Havenhurst, Michael kept a penthouse apartment in Los Angeles as a secret hideout to escape his family and fans. Steve Howell was there when Mike brought Emmanuel over to play.

Steve Howell: One day I 'captured the moment' of them dancing together up at the penthouse to one of Michael's new songs that Michael dancing, and Emmanuel dancing, doing the 'Moonwalk' and standing up on his toes like Mike would do.

Dave Walsh: At the same time Michael befriended Emmanuel, he was pursued by another teen star, Brooke Shields. Mike endured Brook's aggressive courtship because he knew the publicity would keep him in the headlines.

Joan Ryan, author 'Former Child Stars': Brooke Shields in the late nineteen-seventies, early nineteen-eighties, is huge, she is the model, I mean she was the face of Calvin Klein, or was the rear-end of Calvin Klein whichever.

Clip of interview of Brooke Shields

Brook Shields: We have a lot of fun, because we just joke like we're in kindergarten or something.

Flo Anthony: Brook was very aggressive with him, you know as far as trying to tongue-kiss and all that kind of stuff. At that point in life he really wasn't all that into it.

Dave Walsh: In 1984 Brook bullied her way onto Michael's arm at the American Music Awards. She may have been his date, but Emmanuel was the object of his affection.

Joan Ryan: He literally toted Emmanuel Lewis up to him with his awards, because Emmanuel Lewis was very totable, he's small.

Clip of Michael Jackson at Awards show.

Michael Jackson: And important to me in writing songs is inspiration, and I'm holding one of my inspirations, Emmanuel Lewis.

Dave Walsh: Michael's adoring public didn't think twice when it saw him with his pre-pubescent pal.

Joan Ryan: Michael Jackson's already well into his mid-twenties and you know, if that isn't setting off alarm bells this isn't quite right.

Dave Walsh: Months later, their relationship ended abruptly when Emmanuel's mother caught Mike checking himself and his young friend into a hotel as 'father and son'. As Michael's passion for children grew, his own behavior became more childlike. The combination of Mike's changing appearance and immature antics, gave rise to tabloid stories that he'd 'dove off the deep end'.

Walter Yetnikoff: Michael turned to me--and this is true--and he said "Walter, I have to tinkle, can you take me to the potty?" I mean, I might say, "I have to go to the bathroom, where is it?" but it's a different way of saying, he was saying it like a little kid, "Can you take me?"

Dave Walsh: Any sign of an adult relationship might have quelled rumors about Michael's unusual interest in children. So in 1987, Mike's mother rode to his rescue. Just as she set her son up with Theresa Gonsalves thirteen years earlier, Katherine Jackson pinned her hopes on Tatiana Thumbtzen, a dancer with stars in her eyes.

Tatiana Thumbtzen: Mrs. J. told me that Michael spoke to her during the video one morning and expressed his love for me.

Dave Walsh: The video was from Michael's song, 'The Way You Make Me Feel'. Tatiana played a damsel in distress, and Michael a cad with a crush. Despite their on-screen chemistry, Tatiana was mystified by Michael's method of telling her the way he felt.

Tatiana Thumbtzen: I mean if he's so crazy about me, and he's, this guy's, in love with me, why doesn't he call me, why doesn't he tell me or express, you know, his feelings to me. Why is everyone else telling me but him?

Dave Walsh: But when Tatiana acted on the information Katherine had given her, she came face-to-face with the enigma that Michael Jackson had become.

Tatiana Thumbtzen: I had been invited on tour with Michael, and I took it upon myself to kind of change the routine a bit, something just came over me, and I looked into Michael's eyes, and he did the sexiest thing, he bit his bottom lip, it was like, you know, it was kind of like he was challenging me like, come on, you know, 'show me what you got', and the next thing I know we're locked in a kiss, and his hands are on my hip. I remember backstage when I ran into his mother Katherine, she greeted me with the warmest hug. And the next person—that's pain I'll never forget. His manager Frank DeLeo gave me the most evil look. And that was it—I was off the tour.

Dave Walsh: Tatiana found out the hard way about the demons that drove Michael Jackson. For years Michael's mother had manipulated his love life. But now, Mike had a chance to make a choice all his own.

Tatiana Thumbtzen: I had gone to his trailer to try and talk to him. And I stood there with Ricky Schroder and Alfonso Ribeiro, and they went in to see Michael, and I stood outside waiting. And I never spoke to Michael again.

Dave Walsh: Coming up, Michael's final act of defiance brings his make-believe world crashing down.

J. Randy Taraborelli: Don't tell me what to do, no one ever tells me what to do. And guess what, I'm having even more fourteen-year-olds over.

Commercial break.

Dave Walsh: By the time 'Thriller' was honored with nine grammies in 1984, little Mike Jackson from Gary, Indiana had achieved his boyhood dream and much, much more.

Dick Gregory, humorist and activist: Where else but in America could a poor black boy born in utter poverty in Gary, Indiana, end up being a rich White man? Only in America.

Dave Walsh: Michael's failed marriages and single fatherhood were far in the future. The first allegations of child abuse against him were years away.

Clip of Michael Jackson interview/press conference

Michael Jackson: There have been many disgusting statements made recently concerning allegations of improper conduct on my part. These statements about me are totally false.

Dave Walsh: In 1984, Michael was still basking in the glow of a new face, a new life, a new history; but all the hype couldn't chase the demons that must have haunted Michael's dreams. At the age of twenty-six, Michael was an emotionally crippled young man. Living in a fantasyland of his own creation, and living a life rife with contradictions. By the mid-nineteen-eighties, Michael's unusual interest in little boys was plain for all to see. Yet few questioned the motives of a man who was worshipped by so many.

Steven Howell: He'd have a lot of parties. Disadvantaged kids and boys. And that's all you would see, is just like little kids. Primarily you know, little boys.

Dave Walsh: Mike's access to kids was fueled by his fortune, and enabled by his family and friends, many of whom had a financial stake in his success.

Steven Ivory: Everyone is saying "yes" around him. When everybody wants you to win, for their own particular reasons, then you know, you tend to believe that hey, "maybe I can levitate," you know.

Dave Walsh: Some friends cautioned him about his behavior but the stubborn child still lived inside the man.

Vinny Zufante: I know a lot of people were telling him "stay away, stay away, stay away."

J. Randy Taraborelli: People have tried to tell him along the way, "Don't do that. You'll be sorry if you continue to do this." And Michael would just say, "Don't tell me what to do. No one ever tells me what to do. And guess what, I'm having even more fourteen-year-olds over". I mean Michael's always had this side of him.

Dave Walsh: An abusive father. A strict religious upbringing. Sexual confusion. Money. Power. Fame. The twisted path of Michael Jackson's development is a psychological minefield. Whether it has turned a victim into a victimizer; a man into a monster, is still a mystery. But clues can be found in Michael's secret childhood and the choices he made along the way.

End credits.