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## WHAT *REALLY* WENT ON AT NEVERLAND?

*Distrustful of the State's witnesses, jurors could only wonder:  
was Michael Jackson's home a pedophile's lair?*



*By Julius (Jay) Wachtel.* In 2004, one year after appearing in the documentary, the 13-year old who snuggled with Michael Jackson [was testifying](#) before the Santa Barbara County (Calif.) grand jury:

Q. All right. Tell the ladies and gentlemen of the Grand Jury the conversation? Lean into the microphone and tell them about it.

A. We were laying on the bed and he told -- he told me that men have to masturbate -- well, males have to masturbate or else they won't be able to like - like be normal....

Q. All right, what happened after that?

A. He told me if I knew how.

Q. And what did you say?

A. I said no.

Q. All right. What happened next?

A. He told me that he wanted to teach me.

Q. Say that again?

A. He told me that he wanted to teach me.

Q. All right. Tell us what happened.

A. So we were laying in the bed, and then he started rubbing me.

Q. Rubbing you how?

A. He put his hands down my pants and he started rubbing me.

Q. What part of your body was he touching?

A. My private area.

More than a decade earlier, in 1993, another 13-year old boy had told a similar story:

“Physical contact between Michael Jackson and myself increased gradually. The first step was simply Michael Jackson hugging me. The next step was for him to give me a brief kiss on the cheek. He then started kissing me on the lips, first briefly and then for a longer period of time. He would kiss me while we were in bed together....”

This excerpt (it turns very graphic) isn't from a criminal case. It's from an affidavit in a [civil lawsuit](#) accusing Jackson of having sex with the victim at Neverland and a string of motels. Jackson quickly settled the matter for a cool \$15 million. Criminal charges were never filed, supposedly because the victim wouldn't cooperate with police.

In 2003, beset by heavy debt and litigation, with his career stalled, Michael Jackson agreed to be in a documentary. Released in 2003, Martin Bashir's "[Living With Michael Jackson](#)" didn't have the effect that the singer intended. Depicted enjoying the high life in Neverland, his rococo Santa Barbara estate, and in Las Vegas and Berlin, where he dangled his surrogate newborn out a window, the troubled pop star came across as a profligate spender, hopeless narcissist and questionable parent. Questions about his upbringing unleashed a torrent of self-pity, replete with chilling tales of ghastly physical and emotional abuse by a brutal, domineering father. Seen in that light, Jackson's peccadilloes, including his preference for the company of children, made a certain sense. And that's where things would have ended had the filmmaker not decided, at the last moment, to confront Jackson about certain nasty rumors.

Michael Jackson was not the iconic figure that reactions to his passing now suggest. His eccentricities had alienated many fans. Carried on prime-time TV, the accounts of sleep-overs and his hand-holding intimacy with the boy caused a scandal, forcing authorities to investigate. Jackson fought back with a rebuttal video in which the boy and his family gave glowing accounts of the performer's character and good works. It was during this time that the molestations allegedly occurred. (His mother, Janet Arvizo, testified that Jackson was so determined to keep the family away from police that he forced them to remain in Neverland, warned that "killers" were on their trail and even offered to relocate everyone to Brazil.)

Jackson was charged in a [ten-count indictment](#). Count one accused him and unnamed staff members with child abduction, false imprisonment and extortion. There were also four counts of committing lewd acts on a child under the age of fourteen; one count of attempting to have the victim commit a lewd act on Jackson;

and four counts of administering liquor to facilitate the commission of these crimes. His conviction seemed a foregone conclusion.

Yet the State's case was shaky from the start. Defense lawyers [gathered receipts](#) proving that instead of being held incommunicado, as she claimed, Mrs. Arvizo was shopping up a storm using Neverland credit cards. Defense investigators dredged up evidence that injuries she supposedly sustained years earlier, when a son was caught shoplifting, weren't caused by brutal store detectives but by her former husband. (J.C. Penney's gave her a large cash settlement and dropped charges.) She was also facing allegations (later, charges) of welfare fraud, which in a memorable moment led her to take the Fifth. Jay Leno even took the stand to say he had turned her away from The Tonight Show when it seemed that she was obsessed with money.

Prosecutors were allowed to buttress their case with evidence that Jackson had molested other children. Unfortunately the victim/millionaire whose affidavit is quoted above slipped off to Europe, where he remained for the trial's duration. But another man, the [son of a former maid](#), gave compelling testimony of being molested by Jackson when he was ten. His family, though, had also benefited from a civil settlement, to the reported tune of \$2 million. One of Jackson's former security guards testified that funny things went on between his boss and several kids, including Macaulay Culkin. But when Culkin took the stand he only had good things to say about Jackson: the sleepovers, he insisted, were perfectly innocent.

The [victim's testimony](#) had mixed results. He did say that Jackson masturbated him twice. But he conceded telling his friends and teachers, out of shame, that nothing happened. His testimony that only his mother seemed troubled about living in Neverland badly weakened the prosecution's "abduction" theory. More curiously, he also said that his grandmother told him that men need to masturbate, the same comment he earlier attributed to Jackson.

After four months and 140 witnesses the case went to the jury. A week later they returned their [verdict](#): innocent on all counts. Jurors were of two minds. First and foremost, they loathed Ms. Arvizo. "What mother in her right mind would allow that to happen?" asked a female juror, referring to the sleepovers. They also thought the evidence thin. "We expected better evidence, something that was a little more convincing. It just wasn't there." Yet there was no appetite for simply declaring Jackson innocent. Indeed, one juror, [Raymond Hultman](#), went so far as to suggest the opposite. "I think that Michael Jackson probably has molested boys. But that doesn't make him guilty of the charges in this case."

Blowback was severe. Pundits and mainstream media ridiculed the verdicts and questioned the jury's competency. In a stinging rebuke, the [Los Angeles Times](#) huffed

about Jackson's "weirdness" and "unpalatable taste for the tawdry." (It [later compared](#) his acquittal to those of O.J. Simpson and Robert Blake, attributing them to the vagaries of juror personalities.) In the midst of the furor two jurors went public, suggesting they were now of a mind to convict Jackson. One was Juror Hultman.



Fast-forward four years. Heavily indebted, with his beloved Neverland on the chopping block, Michael Jackson was yesterday's news. But then he did something really outrageous: he died. A media frenzy broke out, the likes of which we haven't experienced since a skinny black guy with a nice smile became Prez. Here's what *Los Angeles Times* media columnist [Timothy Rutten](#) is trying to figure out:

...Yet on cable TV and on newspaper websites, it was all Michael, all the time. So, how did a pop singer heavily in debt and desperately hoping for a comeback, one who hadn't really sold any music for years, one who was best known for his bizarre life, obsession with cosmetic surgery and for the allegations of pedophilia against him, become in death the most beloved media figure since JFK?

Beats me.