

Neverland (Undated Stories and Information)

[Rolling Stone \(January 9, 1992\)](#)

The Seven Dwarfs are singing. Their voices are floating out of speakers hidden among the trees and lush flora surrounding Michael Jackson's mansion, in Neverland Valley — his 2700-acre, \$22 million oasis in the Santa Ynez Valley, an hour north of Santa Barbara, California.

"Michael's very own Xanadu," as his friend director John Landis puts it.

At Neverland Jackson has created a secluded and secure environment far from businessmen, attorneys, managers, music-television-channel VIPs and even members of his immediate family. Here he can stand in front of his house and the only sounds to hear are the birds in the oak and sycamore trees and, of course, the Seven Dwarfs. And if he chooses to gaze past the expansive lake that stretches out in front of his three-story Tudoresque country home, past the lush green lawns and neatly manicured flower beds, the bronze statues of young boys beating tambourines or playing toy accordions, he sees simply a peaceful hillside dotted with oaks. In any direction, as far as the eye can see, lies Michael Jackson's Magic Kingdom. "Sure he's a little afraid of people," says choreographer Vince Paterson. "When you have people that, from the time you're a little kid, want you, they want pieces of you, they want your clothes, they want your hair — you're going to get nervous around people."

But here at Neverland, protected by armed guards that patrol the grounds around the clock, Jackson doesn't have to be around people. And he never has to grow up.

Though Jackson is now a thirty-three-year-old man, his associates and friends say he still has the interests and enthusiasms of a child, and at Neverland he has created the ultimate child's playground. "Being with Michael is like being in Santa's workshop," says Paterson.

Santa has been working overtime at Neverland. One can ride a turn-of-the-century C.P.

Huntington amusement-park-style train that holds several dozen passengers. Hop on board and it will take you from the main house out past an Indian village (tepees, full-size replicas of Native Americans, a totem pole and campfire), a two-story fort (complete with hefty artillery that shoots water) and an amusement park (including a carousel with custom-made, hand-painted animals, a Ferris wheel, a three-story-high slide and a heart-stopping ride called the Zipper).

Continue on and you'll see the \$2 million-plus Neverland Cinema complex (where *Cape Fear* is playing tonight, according to signs posted at every stop along the train's route). Walk in and feast your eyes on the candy counter, filled with every kind of popcorn and confection imaginable. On either side of the large main projection room you'll find separate glassed-in viewing rooms, complete with beds for children who are ill.

Ride past the zoo, with its horses and zebra, buffalo and chimpanzees, ostriches and swans, deer and llamas. And the zonkey (a cross between a zebra and a donkey). And let's not forget the three giraffes.

Or go boating in the lake. You can choose between a swan boat, a canoe and a red dinghy. Perhaps you're up for playing some kind of electronic game. The rec building contains two floors of arcade games ranging from Sega's Time Traveler hologram unit and Galaxy Force Version 2 to Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles and something called Ghosttown.

At night, Neverland looks like it has been sprinkled with a kind of high-tech fairy dust. Out by the amusement park, for instance, Jackson has had white lights installed up the trunk and on the

branches of the oak trees. As these lights flash on and off, glittering trees appear to materialize before one's eyes, only to vanish. A winding yellow-brick road (with recessed gold-colored lights) leads to the amusement park, which is lit against the black sky. Back at the house, the lake, the statues and the wood and stone buildings themselves look like set pieces from a fairy tale.

Amid this magical environment, Jackson will sometimes get in the outdoor Jacuzzi, remove a large piece of stone that conceals a TV and VCR and, sitting beneath the stars, watch one of the hundreds of videos that are stored in his tape library upstairs in the main house.

Jackson frequently has children over to play. According to his personal spokesperson, Bob Jones (who first worked with Jackson at Motown when the singer was a member of the Jackson 5), these regularly include "busloads" of underprivileged and terminally ill kids (such as the late Ryan White), as well as young personal friends of the superstar.

"When the children are here, sometimes they get so excited they just can't go to sleep," says Lee Tucker, who helped design Jackson's movie theater and serves as his projectionist. "I'll get a call at 2:00 a.m. sometimes: 'Lee, can you show such-and-such movie?' Neverland isn't about kids going to sleep at a certain time. The kids really run the place when they're here."

Jackson is extremely fond of children. Those who know him believe that one reason he can relax with kids is that he truly believes they like him for himself, not because he's a big star. As one associate observed, "If you're under three feet tall, you can have complete access to Michael Jackson."

Jackson's house is exquisitely furnished. The main floor includes an oak-paneled library stocked with rare editions of classics by Charles Dickens, Mark Twain and dozens of others. The spacious living room houses a Bo-sendorfer custom-made rosewood piano and numerous rare art pieces, among them a Raymond Bigot sculpture of a rooster and chickens. There is a roomy den with a Bouquet Canyon stone fireplace, a fully equipped professional kitchen and a spacious dining room with its own fireplace. Down a hall is Jackson's bedroom, which is off limits to most visitors; it looks out onto a garden enclosed by a six-foot-high stone wall.

While the main floor would make an English lord feel right at home, the upstairs is, like the grounds of the estate, filled with the stuff that children dream about. There is a doll bedroom, a large room with a canopied bed that is crowded with dozens of dolls. Many more dolls, some with sad faces, some smiling, peer at you from every nook and cranny. A three-story, elaborately furnished doll house containing miniature figures sits on one side of the room. *Wizard of Oz* plates and jack-in-the-boxes, each featuring Dorothy, the Scarecrow, the Tin Man or one of the other primary characters, have been placed on shelves. There is an old-fashioned typewriter with a piece of paper in it on which someone has typed: "And all we want for Christmas ..."

Sitting on an end table is Shirley Temple Black's autobiography, *Child Star*.

Another room is jammed with children's games and toys. There are coloring books and crayons, a gun that shoots soap bubbles. A table full of trucks and cars and spaceships. In front of a window stand life-size cutouts of Batman and the Joker. *Simpsons* characters are everywhere. A narrow staircase leads up to the train room, half of which is filled with an elaborate Lionel set. In addition to the trains on the track, there are more in unopened boxes on the floor. Another part of the room is covered with race-car tracks. Standing against the walls are larger than life Bart Simpson cardboard cutouts and *Roger Rabbit* displays, along with an *E.T.* video display

packed with copies of the tape. Peter Pan and Mickey Mouse and Bambi quilts lie on the floor. "The kids have slumber parties up here," says one of Jackson's employees as he takes me through the house.

["Park World Online" \(July 23, 2009\) \(archived\)](#)

Over a 15-year period from 1990 to 2005, entertainer Michael Jackson operated a personal amusement park on his California ranch with a ride arsenal that, at the time, would have been the envy of several smaller park operators. He also had a zoo, petting zoo, reptile barn and alligator pond to entertain guests. Park World takes an exclusive look at Neverland Valley.

"I was Michael Jackson's personal ride consultant and developer for the private Neverland Valley Amusement Park at his 2,600 acre ranch near Los Olivos, California," says Robert E (Rob) Swinson, who at the time was the national sales manager for Chance Rides, Wichita, Kansas. "Phase 1 of Michael's amusement park project commenced in June 1990 when the site for the new park was 'bare dirt' and we worked closely together to June 1993 developing this long-time dream. Since the age of 17, Michael had dreamed of building his own private amusement park for 'the children of the world' – especially underprivileged, handicapped and terminally ill children – thus his wonderfully exciting and beautiful creation, Neverland Valley Park!"

"Michael wrote a personal note to me in May 1992 on an amusement ride catalogue – 'To Rob, The Maker of Dreams. Love Thanx Michael Jackson.' Few were so closely involved inside Mike's trusted and personal 'inner circle' of close associates and friends that included, Marlon and Miko Brando, Elizabeth Taylor, David E Nordahl and Norma E Staikos, Michaels former executive administrator. I was blessed and very fortunate to have shared personal moments with all of them."

Allan ("Big Al") Scanlon was the director of maintenance at Neverland Ranch. He bought many of the rides at Michael's direction and was responsible for their operation. Jackson eventually bought 18 rides between 1990 and 1997. They included six rides from Chance including a Carousel, Sea Dragon, two-mile-long CP Huntington train, Wipeout and two Zippers (in 1987 and 1990 respectively). There were also four Zamperla rides including a Turtle Train, Lolli Swing, Samba Balloon, and Dumbos/Dragons. An Eyerly Spider arrived from Roger Jourdan's Michigan Adventure. There was a Ferris wheel from Eli Bridge, a Slide by Manco, a Zierer Wave Swinger, a Bumper Car building by Majestic Manufacturing with 20 bumper cars, Hampton/SBF Jeeps, SBF Western Train, the Dragon Wagon roller coaster from Wisdom, and a refurbished mile-long Crown steam train named Katherine after Jackson's mother.

"Michael Jackson's most personal favourite was the Chance 'Zipper' because it was wild," recalls Lance Brown, Jackson's ranch manager from 1989 through to 1993. "Michael liked spinning at the top up to three times if he hit it just right. Michael's most popular ride with the kids was the Sea Dragon because they could ride it together. He'd put his hands up in the air with all the kids as it was coming down and back up with everyone squealing!"

"Vans would bring small groups of children from Make-A-Wish up to Neverland Valley Ranch," adds Brown. "A lot of them were handicapped. Michael liked watching as we'd put them on the carousel with an adult, riding with them and making these kids forget their disabilities – their faces would light up like Christmas trees!"

“Michael held an annual ‘Family Day’ for ranch employees and their families to show his appreciation,” Brown notes. “They rode rides at the amusement park, visited his zoo and petting zoo, reptile barn and alligator pond. I want people to know Michael Jackson was a very good person. Michael gave of himself in a way the general public doesn’t know about. Michael was very generous with what he had and loved sharing it with the children. He really enjoyed seeing their reactions and giving them the opportunity to see and do things not normally available to them – having a day in Neverland!”

“Michael was so excited when a new amusement ride arrived. He would give his input where the ride was to be set up and he wanted the undulating lawns around the park for the kids to roll and tumble down. Michael was definitely a kid at heart! Neverland Valley Ranch was his private escape, but I don’t think he ever came back after the second ordeal [2004-2005 lawsuit].”

“The only other time I believe Michael Jackson was happier than when we created his teenage dream, Neverland Valley,” concludes Swinson, “was having three children of his own! Michael Jackson and I shared some of his lifetime’s most enjoyable personal moments and experiences.”

Andrew Wilson, martial artist, “Broken Heart Stone: World’s Most Famous Hand Print, Michael Jackson - King of Pop”

Several years before the televised [martial arts] events [starting in 1998], I received a phone call asking if I was Andrew Wilson. It was quite an interesting conversation. The guy on the other end of the phone asked me a series of questions, and somehow it seemed more like an interview. I was asked if I knew where Neverland Ranch was. I told him, “No” and asked him what kind of ranch it was. “What do you grow?” I inquired. He laughed and then asked me, “Say man, don’t ya know what Nev-Aland Ranch is all about?” I responded with “No, why...is it a government ranch or something? What do ya grow?” I told him that I grew up in Boys Town, Nebraska, and when someone tells me ranch, I assume they are talking about a real live ranch...you know...with animals and crops. He found that amusing to say the least, I’m sure. After conversing with me, and finding either approval or humor in my answers, he gave me directions for how to find this ranch called, Neverland. I was clueless and obviously one of the very few people on the planet that absolutely did not know where Neverland Ranch was...or more important...what Neverland Ranch was all about.

I remember driving up to the gated entrance of Neverland. They were expecting me of course. After I was questioned, and showed my ID, I was allowed to drive down the long entrance leading into Neverland. As I was driving slowly and cautiously onto the property, I was looking for farm animals and of course, crops. I was trying to evaluate the surrounding landscape of this so-called ranch. I realized it wasn’t at all your average ranch...Still clueless; I was escorted into a beautiful home at the end of the road. Whoever the gardener was, I gave him a 10.00 rating. The place was beautiful. To my dismay, no crops, no farm animals; so much for my expectation of a Nebraska style ranch.

Once inside I noticed the staircase and some ornate decorations that brought a lot of appeal to the home. I was thinking, okay, somebody wealthy obviously lives here. I was told to wait in the front entrance area. I was left standing in the entrance as the workers who accompanied me in, tended to whatever responsibilities were more important than I was at that moment. With my

arms behind my back, I casually drifted over to a mannequin that had a red jacket. You know, the kind of jacket exactly like Michael Jackson wore in Thriller. I thought that it was pretty interesting. Then I noticed in the back corner, this robot-like thingy which was either the real deal or a great copy-cat from the movie ET. The robot had its finger pointing at the sky just like in the 1982 movie ET, which starred Henry Thomas and Drew Barrymore. Next to it were several other mannequins wearing Michael Jackson garments. The mannequins looked exactly like Michael, from what I remember.

Meeting Michael

Wandering around like a lost child in the front lobby area, I made the find of the day. I saw a huge painting leaning against the wall. It was quite awesome. The painting must have been about 8-9 feet long horizontally. It was a painting of Michael Jackson being crowned King of Pop. It was painted in three sections, the middle section being the tallest, almost life-size, where Michael held a sword with both hands. As I remember, the sword was pointing downward. From each side, he was being crowned King of Pop. One side he was getting a crown, and the other side, a sword was touching his shoulder. I heard a rumor later that it might have set a record for the highest price paid for a living portrait.

As I was admiring the painting, I happened to catch from the corner of my eye, a white 3-level cabinet which had a slew of sequined gloves on each level. I went over and looked at the beautiful sequined gloves and admired them for a few minutes. And yes, I couldn't help it; I touched a few of those sparkling beauties. In my absolute naïveté, I was thinking that someone must be a serious Michael Jackson collector that lives here. I went back to look at the painting again. I noticed that in the lower right corner of the canvas there was a hole. Perhaps it was caused by someone who may have either kicked the canvas by accident, or somehow damaged it when moving the painting. Reality set in. Once again, I glanced at the sequined gloves, and then back at the painting ...“Hmmm....wait a minute,” I murmured...“Oh Boy...”

About this time I started laughing at myself, quietly thinking...OMG... Michael Jackson lives here for goodness sake! I got a bit nervous, needless to say. No sooner than I was thinking it, I looked around and asked one of the staff members which happened to be approaching me, “Pssst...hey...does Michael Jackson live here...yeeesh?” The “Yesssss...” answer came from someone above looking down over the balcony, followed by a chain reaction of laughter by Michael Jackson himself and a few of his staff members. There he was, the King of Pop, enjoying the fact that somebody on this planet did not know what Neverland was, or who lived there! It was an amusing moment, that's for sure...ha.

After the enjoyable introduction event, I said with a laugh, “Oh boy, someone is getting a royal beating over the hole in that canvas;; I just know it...woahhh.” I will say that Michael was so well natured, if he was upset about it, nobody would have known. I had lived in Hollywood in years past, and had met a number of celebrities from time to time. My martial arts accomplishments had opened doors for me that would have otherwise been closed in that regard. I had been invited to meet with the Vice President of MCA Universal and had lunch with several big name actors and actresses at Universal's lower basement. I must say that Michael was so different, so real, and so down-to-earth refreshing and wonderful. It's not hard for me to spot a phony or a person that seems to schmooze for their benefit. Michael was not one of those at all. I felt very comfortable and not intimidated in his presence whatsoever. It was very cool.

In the course of my interactions with the staff members at Neverland, we eventually planned a doozey of a secret birthday surprise for Michael. We were organizing an awesome martial arts event that included some of the top competitors in the country at the time.

Ed Parker, the father of American Karate, was Elvis's bodyguard and trainer. He opened the door for Bruce Lee in Hollywood. Ed asked me to perform Kung Fu demonstrations at his famous International Championships in Long Beach, California, no less than four years in a row. One of my best demonstrations was a blindfolded double nunchuckau weapons demo that ended with a high kick, breaking a 2ft X 2ft board at 12 feet in the air. Afterwards, Linda, Bruce Lee's widow, had signed the board for me at the Internationals. What we were planning for Michael at Neverland was going to be a real wow-zer with myself and other top martial art practitioners.

The contacts that I had in the martial arts were far reaching, and I knew Michael would have been very impressed and excited at the outcome of his awesome surprise party. Some of the staff from Neverland had come to my home on the Central Coast here in California and we had carefully mapped out all the details. Unfortunately, because of timing and scheduling, it didn't work out as we had hoped it would. We never had a chance to follow through with finalizing Michael's big birthday bash at Neverland with some of the world's top martial artists...rats!

Chris Cadman, author. "Michael Jackson the Maestro"

Michael's steam train was called 'Katherine' after his mother.

A smaller train on the property also ferried children and their parents to his specially created zoo.

With acres of land with beautifully created flower beds, streams, lakes and ornaments around the ranch, Neverland had the inspiration of Disneyland with an amusement arcade, a huge Ferris wheel, Octopus, Carousel, Zipper, Pirate Ship, Wave Swinger, dragon wagon kiddie roller coaster, Super Slide, and bumper cars.