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Michael Jackson: The Man and the Legend

SACRAMENTO, CALIF., July 14 (PinoyGlobal) - On June 25, 2009, Michael Jackson, the man, died at the young age of 50. But Michael Jackson, the legend, lives forever, immortalized in the hearts of people all over the world who called him the “King of Pop.”

Michael’s “rags to riches” story has become the dream of young people who saw in him a model of success, a hero to emulate, and an inspiration to achieve their own dreams. To a lot of people -- particularly people of color -- Michael proved that you don’t have to be born rich and powerful to reach the apex of fame. He proved that you only need a strong determination and the strength of purpose to make your dream a reality.

For four decades, Michael awed his audience. The seventh of nine siblings, Michael joined four of his brothers as the “Jackson 5” singing group starting in 1968 when he was only 10 years old. In 1971, he started his solo career. In 1982, Michael became a phenomenal sensation overnight with the release of his album, “Thriller,” which remains the “best-selling album of all time” today. In 1983, he sang “Billie Jean” and performed his iconic moonwalk on television which electrified -- and mystified -- the 47 million viewers. A star was born.

In 1985, Michael, together with Lionel Ritchie, composed “We Are The World,” which they recorded with 44 other artists for the benefit of the starving people of Africa. It was the song that manifested Michael’s humanitar-

ian streak.

Indeed Michael’s humanitarian work and his passion for those in need -- particularly children -- have become the cornerstone of his life. He had given more than \$300 million to charities. In 1984, he donated \$1.5 million to the Michael Jackson Burn Center for Children. In 1988, the proceeds of the sale of his song, “Man In the Mirror,” were donated to Camp Ronald McDonald for Good Times, which was established for children who suffer from cancer. On his 30th birthday, Michael performed in Leeds, England for “Give For Life,” a charitable organization whose goal was the immunization of children. He donated the proceeds of the concert to that organization. The following year, Michael donated the proceeds of one of his shows to Childhelp USA, the biggest charity organization against child abuse. His donation was used to establish the “Michael Jackson International Institute for Research On Child Abuse.”

In 1988, Michael purchased the 2,700-acre Sycamore Valley Ranch and renamed it “Neverland,” after the fantasy island in the story of Peter Pan. It became his home with a private amusement park and a zoo. Growing poor and maltreated by a disciplinarian father, Michael tried to relive a happy childhood which he missed in his early life. And he relived it by sharing it with other children who had experienced the deprivation that he had growing up.

He invited children and their families to Neverland as day visitors. He also hosted children as overnight guests.

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And this was where Michael's worst journey started, a journey that would zigzag through turbulent times for the rest of his life.

In 1993, Michael was accused of sexual misconduct by one of the children he hosted at Neverland. To avoid further damage to his career and reputation, the civil case was amicably settled for \$22 million.

Ten years later, charges were brought against him once again. This time it was a criminal case of sexual child abuse. Michael was indicted on multiple charges and the case was brought to trial. He denied all the charges and claimed that he was the victim of a "failed extortion attempt." On June 13, 2005, the jury found him not guilty on all charges.

However, his exoneration did not repair the damage to his reputation and psyche. He decided to never return to Neverland. In 2006, Neverland was vacated and closed. Michael moved on... and never looked back. It was the darkest part of his life. He was a changed man. His health declined. And he became dependent on drugs.

He continued to devote his time to his three children, Prince Michael I, Paris Katherine Michael, and Prince Michael II, showering them with love -- love that he didn't feel when he was young. Towards the end, his children were the only ones that mattered to him. He probably felt forsaken by the world that he entertained and endowed with his humanitarian endeavors and generosity. He probably felt that success had evaded him -- nay, cheated him! But his brother Jermaine Jackson said succinctly: Michael became a victim of his own success.

On July 7, 2009, Michael was given a memorial service at the Staples Center in Los Angeles. Speakers eulogized the passing of his earthly life and immortalized his memory for all the good things that he did in his life. Queen Latifah called him the "biggest star on Earth." Berry Gordy said, "He raised the bar, then broke the bar." Kobe Bryant said that Michael had set the Guinness world record for "most charities supported by a pop star."

But it was Rev. Al Sharpton who brought the audience to their feet when he addressed Michael's children: "There was nothing strange about your daddy. It was strange what your daddy had to deal with, but he dealt with it." It was a moment captured in the minds of the approximately one billion people who watched the memorial service. It was a moment that would engrave his "legacy of giving" in the heart of the people he touched. It was a moment that would instill

in his admirers the smile that he warmed them with throughout his career. And fittingly so because Michael's favorite song was "Smile" -- which begins with the lyric, "Smile though your heart is breaking..." -- and popularized by his favorite artist, Charlie Chaplin in 1936.

In 1995, Michael recorded a modified version of "Smile" which concluded with the lyric, "That's the time you must keep on trying. Smile, what's the use of crying? You find that life is still worthwhile if you just smile." Indeed, through his smile, Michael lived his life the way he had wanted it to be -- wonderful. And his smile wondered the world.

The last performance during the memorial service was a presentation of a segment of Michael's 50-show European concert, "This is It," which would have made its debut in London in July 2009. The performers sang "We Are The World" as a final tribute to Michael. Michael must have had a premonition that this was it -- his last concert. It was performed for all the world to watch. And he had the best "seat" at the Staples Center... in a gold-plated casket bedecked with flowers and illuminated with a halo of light from above. God must have been smiling when finally Michael was coming home to entertain Him and all the saints, angels, and all the men, women, and children in Heaven who missed his performances on Earth. Indeed, it was a grand finale for the greatest entertainer of all times.

But the greatest tribute Michael received came at the end of the three-hour memorial from his 11-year daughter, Paris Katherine. With a breaking voice, Paris said, "Daddy has been the best father you could ever imagine... and I just want to say I love him... so much." It was a testimonial for a man who had been misunderstood for a lot of things he had done in his short life... from someone who knew Michael best -- his own daughter.