

'SUNNYCREST FARM FOR BOYS'

One-Hour TV Series Drama Series

Written & Developed

by

MICHAEL JACKSON

(Ghostwriter Suzanne Gillis)

TV SERIES TITLE: 'SUNNYCREST FARM FOR BOYS'

ONE-HOUR TV DRAMA SERIES: *'Sunnycrest Farm for Boys'* is a drama that is open-ended with a core cast of returning characters. The backdrop of the farm remains the same and is returned to each week. There are a few other episodes, including the opening to be shot in projects of downtown Philadelphia, the main characters home. There are several stories per episode, which is resolved, but the series storyline, that which does the core-returning cast carry, remains open till the last episode. The time the real-life character of Michael remained on the farm was three years, ages 12-15.

LOGLINE: Based on a true story in the early years of the 1960s when a young African-American boy, Michael Jackson, age 12, is taken from the inner-city projects of North Philadelphia and transported to *'Sunnycrest Farm for Boys'* in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. The three-year-long experience, lead by a Quaker woman, was meant to help destitute African-American boys from the inner cities prepare for better lives. On the farm, Michael meets three other African American boys whom he slowly befriends, and the four boys embark on a three-year journey together experience heartaches, and growing pains, all while adjusting to a world they have no experience of, as well as many heartless older boys on the farm, who are clearly 'bullies' and far more troubled than they are.

SYNOPSIS: The location for *'Sunnycrest Farm for Boys'* is rural Lancaster, Pennsylvania, known as Amish country. The farm and school were originally called 'Sunnycrest Farm for Negro Boys' which was established in the mid-1800 as a place for destitute Negro children who were either abandoned, neglected or orphans. The goal was to keep the children safe while teaching them about Quaker life. There was also an additional school/farm for Negro girls nearby where the boys and girls meet weekly at Saturday night school dances. Various pre-teen/teen crushes form and are broken including some crushes on the Amish girls. Many of the difficult experiences the boys encounter are with 'hardliner' bullies and the teacher/coach, Mr. Williams. Together, Michael and his three friends, Zack, Roger, and Wilbert, learn how to use their own experience to overcome these challenges and how to process the religious spiritual values of the Quakers. Each week brings new lessons is especially for these boys who generally do not trust most adults due to their 'abandoned issues'. With the exception of Michael, who has a real family back in Philadelphia, most of the other boys have never experienced a real family or 'actual' love. The lessons of learning how to trust each other

is also a struggle as their friendship grows and is tested as well. What love, trust and friendship is about, is what is mainly emphasized and dealt with in this TV show.

PRINCIPAL BOY CHARACTERS:

MICHAEL JACKSON – (African American/age 12) – A street-smart North Philly boy from the projects, Michael has natural street-smarts and knack for making money. He likes to dress sharp and spend his money on clothes and has earned \$12 a week as a ‘shop boy’ at ‘Big Momma’s’ (his grandmother) beauty parlor since age six. He knows how to make a buck and how to save it and likes being the best-dressed boy at the farm/school. He is also the nicest kid around, offering to do anything for his ‘friends because he feels guilty being the only boy who was ever loved. Michael is the outsider, who teaches the other boys how to trust each other, despite being abandoned and hurt by others. But trust is a hard lesson to learn and teach which soon forces Michael to learn more patience and how to protect more vulnerable and short sighted new friends, Zack, Roger and Wilbert. Michael’s biggest fear is ending back up in the projects and poor again, and he is determined to be ‘somebody big’ someday, no matter what it takes. But he won’t do it if it means crossing anybody else. In that way, Michael has morals and loyalty, which is what the other boys come to like him best for. Michael is also more than willing to rent a sports jacket to his fellow friends ‘if that floats your boat, so you can impress the girls more’ at the weekly socials.

WILBERT GRAY – (African American/age 12) – An orphan since his grandmother got ill. Wilbert has no idea who his real parents are and his only other family is his three older sisters who are all still too young to take care of him. He doesn’t know where they are either and in all his time at the school, he only got one family visit, from his three sisters. To Wilbert’s advantage, a wealthy family in a wealthy suburb formerly took him in awhile where he learned about the finer things in life, such as fly fishing, playing sports and belonging to a fiercely competitive school. Incredibly book-smart and street-smart, Wilbert has a knack for combining these two worlds, which gives him an advantage over the other boys. He also doesn’t mind showing off and will not hesitate to take on anyone’s ass that crosses him. He seems to do this with such ease, both verbally and physically, that the other boys all look up to him. Wilbert’s biggest fear is that he will never have a family of his own, ever, so he is determined to make his own family someday, and to never ‘dump on them’ the way he was.

ROGER HARRISON – (African American/age 12) – An orphan from day one with no recollection of any family ever. Roger has no past and no future and doesn’t even care to have one. He’s been passed around to families after family and only cares about going to college. Roger thinks education, which comes naturally to him, as he is an ace student in every subject, is his only way out of poverty. He hopes to be a professor someday. He previously lived in an upper-middle-class Catholic family before coming to the farm and

wasn't sure how he ended up there. But he was used to Catholic weekly church services and at the dining table, Roger frequently says grace and blesses himself before eating, which tends to confuse some of the other boys who had no religious life previously coming to the farm or were raised Baptists. But Roger doesn't seem to mind being different or odd. He frequently is off by himself collecting strange Indian arrowheads and archeology finds in the fields, or by the pond while the others are fishing or swimming, collecting plant and pond life, which he puts inside Mason jar. He is fascinated by life but knows little about real family life or making friends. This is one reason why he clings to Michael is that Michael makes him feel safe and protected. This is something he's never experienced before, along with Zack and Wilbert. At the farm, Roger learns how to trust more in other humans.

ZACHERY SMITH – (African American/age 12) – Zachery is a paradox and doesn't say much, but when he talks it sure is 'full on' and to the point. He is often finding time to be alone from the rest of the kids and the farm. Always an orphan, Zack has no idea where he comes from and doesn't seem to care much about it. One thing he does know, "he hates his previous home where they nearly starved him and the six other children to death, who always have to fight about food. He'll never go back there, and would rather die first!" To Zack, 'Sunnycrest Farm' is a dream come true with the best food he's ever had in his life and as much of it as he wants. It's a safe place that he never wants to leave and would live there forever if he could. His independence and stubbornness is a challenge to his new friends Roger, Michael, and Wilbert, who he shares a sponsorship with Miss Stuckland. But because of his frequently 'disappearing acts' from the farm and cottage, the boys don't quite know if they can trust Zack completely with their friendship yet, that is still developing and growing and being challenged. He frequently shows up after being gone for hours, refusing to tell the other kids where he went. They've also seen him be slightly 'abusive' with some of the pigs and chickens and other farm animals, teasing them needlessly and then talking about eating them for 'breakfast.' But for now, Zack is doing his best to stay on course and not get thrown out of the program. But he has yet to earn the full trust of his new friends, Michael, Roger, Wilber until they know more about where he goes when he's wandering off, on his own, and who or what he is doing while he's there. One day they'll figure it out, and Zack's 'secret', but that will be in the second season.

SUNNYCREST FARM & SCHOOL STAFF CHARACTERS

MISS JANE STUCKLAND – (Caucasian/age 60) – A Quaker woman, Miss Stuckland is responsible for the care and welfare of Michael, Zack, Roger and Wilbert, as she is their principal sponsor. Miss Stuckland sees the boys twice a month and takes them out to a fine restaurant, where she teaches them about manners, how to treat women, and talks to them about 'their feelings and their problems.'

MISS MARY CARDWELL – (Caucasian/age 55) – Housemother to the boys who live in her cottage with her. It's ten boys to a cottage and her boys include our four principal characters. Two boys in each room in bunk beds, she hears a lot of stories from the boys about disappointment and pain. Being a Quaker woman, Miss Mary—loves the boys deeply and tries to console them as best she can, but will not tolerate any 'shenanigans' of any kind, which is pretty clear.

MISS BESSIE HARRIS – (African American/age 52) – A large Southern country black woman who was raised at the nearby 'Sunnycrest Farm for Negro Girls'. She loves to cook and take care of the boys as best she can and knows all the boys by names as well as their 'documented' birthdays. She bakes them birthday cakes and sings them songs, makes them feel as loved as she can, knowing first hand what it's like to be an orphan. She also has a knack for killing wild animals and pheasant and serving them up for dinner, which she taught her self to do as a child in the south where she was found abandoned.

MR. GEORGE RIVERS – (Caucasian/age mid-20s) – He is a graduate student at a nearby college and works part-time as a housefather and male counselor to the boys in Michael's cottage. He talks to the boys about 'man things' and changing 'hormones' and also teaches them how to dance and act around the Negro girls at the nearby school and farm for girls. He'll send you up to Coach Williams if you act up and have a discipline problem or he feels that talking isn't the right thing 'to get your 'head right.'

MR. EDWARD WILLIAMS – (African American/age 50s) – A strict math teacher and sports coach. Mr. Williams is a no-nonsense, strict disciplinarian who doesn't have a problem teaching the boys about discipline with his long switch. The boys know not to mess with Coach Williams, and if you do you're clearly labeled 'dumb'. If Coach Williams doesn't get your mind straight, Mr. Amos, the school director will! He'll simply kick you out of Sunnycrest Farm and send you to a home for 'troubled boys' and that will be far worse than anything you can possibly imagine.

MR. JOHN KELLY – (Caucasian/age 40s) – A loveable, jovial Quaker man with a bunch of kids who loves farming. He also teaches agriculture and is the closest thing the boys have to a real 'father figure' at the farm. 'Mr. K' as the boys call him, also doesn't mind driving the boys around in his huge tractor and making them laugh. He doesn't take his job too seriously and doesn't object to having fun, as long as all the farm animals and crops are being taken care of. If not – look out!

MICHAEL JACKSON'S FAMILY MEMBERS:
(Introduced in the first episode and seen only in a few times)

VANODRICT (VAN) JACKSON – (African American/age 32) Michael's headstrong mother who also works as a beautician at Big Momma's beauty salon in Philadelphia. Van recently moved her two sons to the projects, wanting to get away from her parents'

duplex outside Philadelphia. She didn't like living upstairs for the last five years and now wants her independence. Hoping to save up enough money to start her own business and buy her own house – by paying such cheap rent – she didn't realize she was putting her young son's in such jeopardy with the drugs and crime. With two failed marriages behind her, she is determined not to move back in with her controlling parents and seems to have a bit of a dispute going on with her 'mother' Big Momma who wants complete control over her life, and her grandkids. So instead of moving back to the duplex and out of the projects, Van instead agreed to let Michael try living at Sunnycrest Farm after Big Momma pushes Ms. Stuckland into agreeing to her wishes.

LOSSIE MANUAL (BIG MOMMA) – (African American/ age 46) – Big Momma is Michael's grandmother and the patriarch of the Jackson Family. She moved her entire family up to Philadelphia from Jacksonville, FL with hardly any money, and started her own business. She is quite the lady and very talkative and will go up to complete strangers and find out 'all of their business' in no time flat. She's a gabber which makes her fine for a beauty shop owner, but she is also very controlling of her daughter, Van, her two boys, and is particularly attached to Michael. Her longtime husband is also a hard worker and good man, but has a hard time getting a word in edgewise, or winning any arguments.

ESTERBEE (BEE) MANUAL – (African American/age 50) – Bee is Michael's fun-loving grandfather and a firm believer 'in making and saving a buck'. He works hard at his day shift at Dutch Boy Paint Company where he mixes the paint. After work, he likes to dress sharp and hangs around the ladies talking up his 'charms.' He taught Michael about how to sweet talk to the ladies and dress sharp, to get what you want out of them including 'Big Momma' herself. But Bee is not the smartest of businessmen in town and doesn't know how to manage a business the way his wife does. Recently Bee made the mistake of buying up some cheap properties in the inner city with Big Momma's money but he never has time to really 'fix' any of the rundown properties because of his 'day job'. Now the properties are really run down and he has trouble collecting the rent from the occupants. A few times he had to bring Michael along for help to get them to pay and even threaten them. By all means, now he's considered a bit of a slumlord. The only place that really gets fixed anymore is the duplex mostly because Big Momma demands it. Bee likes to use his spare time for buying clothes, impressing the ladies and for having good 'clean' fun, which is mostly about taking joy rides to the country on the weekends in his 1950's classic Buick.

EPISODE OUTLINES – FIRST SEASON

EPISODE ONE – 'LEAVING PHILLY' – In the early 1960s the Jackson family is struggling along with the rest of America to make sense out of the upheaval in the country. President Kennedy is about to be elected and comes to the projects in North Philadelphia to talk to the Negroes about how he's going to help and improve their lives. For a few days, there is no violence in the city, until the Senator from Massachusetts

leaves. Then things return to normal. For Michael's mother, Van, this is no place for them to live, but she is still resistant to moving back into the duplex with her mother Big Momma again with her two small boys. She already works with Big Momma at the beauty salon and that's enough. Not long after, on a weekend drive out to Lancaster, Big Momma comes across Miss Stuckland, who is sitting in a restaurant with three Negro boys about Michael's age.

Big Momma soon starts up a conversation with her, to find out that she runs an agricultural farm and school for Negro boys in Lancaster County, which is run by her and a group of other Quakers. She quickly invites Miss Stuckland to lunch in Philadelphia at Van's home and talks her into taking Michael on at the school. When Michael hears he's about to enter the worst junior high school in all of Philadelphia, he agrees to go to the Sunnycrest farm and school program which he understands will be for three years. But once getting there, he quickly gets cold feet and wants to come back home. A week goes by without his being able to even call home (Saturday's only) and begs his family to come and get him. Meanwhile, they can only come every two weeks to see him on visiting day, so Michael has to wait another whole week to even see them. During that time, he encounters other boys and learns he's the only one at the farm who isn't an orphan. Michael quickly befriends his new cottage and bunkmate Wilbert who bunks with him and finds out the school has a 'secret' fighting field called the 'corn field's where all the boy's fights are settled without the school leaders knowing. By the time his family finally arrives, Michael has had so many 'new' experiences he can't even fathom his leaving his new best friends, Wilbert, Roger, and Zack. Instead, he comes to the conclusion these boys need him more than he does. He decides to stay and protect the boys who have had it far worse off than he ever did, and to join in facing off with older boys who are out to 'get them.'

EPISODE TWO - 'THE AMISH GIRL' - Every morning after Michael gets up, gets dressed for school and does his chores at the cottage, he makes his way towards the dining hall for breakfast with the other boys. There Miss Bessie is busy making their meals for the day and also greeting the local farmers who bring milk from the other farms. Michael notices the same Amish family coming each day to deliver the milk at 6 AM along with a cute Amish girl. Not long he tries talking to her and learns her name. After several attempts to get her alone and talk to her, Miss Bessie and the others take notes of this budding 'attraction' and become concerned. They try to warn Michael to stay away from her, but Michael doesn't listen. One day he is even caught trying to 'kiss her' by Miss Bessie and the Amish girl's father. This might mean they will not bring the milk to the school and that is serious. As Michael persists, not wanting to give up his 'crush' on the girl, he overhears some of the school staff talking about how they read about another older Amish girl who ran off with a local boy. She was immediately 'shunned' by her entire family and the community and was no longer considered to be Amish. She lost her entire family and everything else, and nobody knows whatever became of her. She can never even go back home, ever.

Suddenly Michael is afraid to talk to the little Amish girl anymore. Days go by where the Amish girl keeps coming to the farm with her father and the milk as Michael avoids her. She soon feels rejected by him, which only upsets Michael even more. Eventually, Michael confesses to Miss Bessie that he didn't want to cause harm to her, or her family or risk the milk delivery with her and the farm anymore. It wasn't going to be worth it. She might lose her entire family and Michael could end up hurting the farm by causing a 'scandal' with the Amish community, "if she was to fall in love with him for real someday." Michael learns ultimately that it's better to put the others and the community first instead of yourself and your own feelings sometimes. Meanwhile, the other boys learn some lessons as well, about how to fend for themselves when their best friend is off falling in love with someone. Jealous sets in and in-fighting between the boys about whose a better friend and more loyal. Michael realizes he put himself first too much the past few weeks and apologizes for neglecting his friendship with the boys, over a girl. The discussion then leads to how they will deal with future 'girls' or even 'wives' someday – which could upset their friendships again. The boys laugh about it imagining getting married and having kids someday. They make a pact that no matter what, they will always stay in touch and be there for each other in a crisis, no matter what and no matter how many wives or kids they have. And if they get girlfriends, they'll be there to help each other as well. This 'fits the bill' and they are all friends again.

EPISODE THREE - 'CLARK'S BIG SURPRISE' - After lunch, the boys leave the dining hall to head back class. They are all wearing their sports jackets, ties and school clothes, which are different than after school when they work on the farm. Outside the dining hall entrance stands the newest older addition to the school – a large tall standing bully named WILLAM CLARK, 14. Clark likes to slap the boys as they walk outside, straight across the face and stand there, watching how they react to this. The first time it happens to Michael he is shocked. He joins the other boys, Wilbert, Zack and Roger and asks what he should do about it. Just then, they see Clark slap another boy who is stunned and who also just walks away from him. Later, the boys talk about inviting Clark out to the cornfields to settle the score, and stop him from harassing all the kids, but can't figure out who's big enough or strong enough to fight him. The argument goes on for days as Clark embarrasses more boys. Finally, Michael agrees to do it, but he's a little more than scared since he never fought anyone before in a 'real hand to hand' fistfight.

Wilbert and Zack, who have been in many fights, agree to back him up. After Clark shows up in the field, they have the biggest crowd ever to watch, including all the Amish kids who hide in the corn stalks, watching. After much hesitation and slopping fighting techniques, a bloody Michael finally takes Clark down for the count. He gives up and the fight is over. Days later, Clark is sitting as usual all alone with nobody to talk to. Soon Michael learns more about his story and how he was abused in his former homes. Michael starts to feel bad for Clark and tries to talk to him several times. Clark wants nothing to do with him and walks away. Days later, Michael persists and tries again to 'talk' to Clark. Michael invites Clark to the fishing hole to fish with him and the other boys on Saturday, which greatly upsets the other boys. But after Michael explains to them

that Clark isn't much different than they are, and 'that he's been through a lot of 'shit' as well' the boys start to understand that life for all of them has been hard, and Clark is no different. In the end, Michael wins and Clark agrees to go fishing and swimming with them. The boys learn that not all 'bullies' are bad and they mostly end up that way because they have been badly chewed up too, like the rest of the boys at the farm. Together, they will try and make them understand what friendship is and being able to rely on others, while not being 'hurt' or disappointed anymore. This will be hard, for sure, and may end up with a few more fights and scuffs, but they are all up to the challenge. Together they will make the farm a better place for all the boys, and especially for the 'new ones' who are most picked on.

EPISODE FOUR - 'MISSING WILBERT' - Months go by where the boys are learning a lot about their new surroundings, but don't always seem to be fully adjusting well. It's a constant up and down motion. But when the one who appeared to be adjusting the best suddenly goes missing – the rest start to really worry about their outcomes. After Wilbert vanishes the boys search while knowing they are about to leave soon for the Saturday night social dance with the girls from the other Sunnycrest Farm nearby. But nobody can find Wilbert anywhere. The boys remember Wilbert saying that afternoon at the fishing hole that "he hated being here and would be leaving soon." They all thought he was joking, but he seemed dead serious about it. Michael asked, "If you did leave, where are you go? You can't go back with your grandma's. And you'd only end up being put in another home." Wilbert doesn't care. He's old enough to fend for himself and doesn't need a family. From now he's going to be his own boss and educate himself the ways of kids did in the old days when they were sent off alone into the woods to fend for themselves with nothing but a knife. They either come back alive or didn't, cause nobody cared about them anyways." The boys are frightened by Wilbert's angry talk. They decide to ignore him hoping Wilbert's 'bad mood' will end once they get back to the cottage for tonight's social dance with the girls. But by nightfall, Wilbert is missing.

Back at the cottage, the boys search for Wilbert again and again, but he's nowhere to be found. As Mr. Rivers tries to gather up the boys for the social dance, the boys are finally forced to confess that Wilbert's runoff. Miss Mary immediately calls the police and Miss Stuckland. Two days later, Wilbert still missing as the boys can't seem to focus on their school or farm work at all. Some kids claim Wilbert is dead and that's why the staff won't tell them what's really happen to Wilbert. But Michael, Zack, and Roger know how smart Wilber is and refuses to give up hope. That night Michael is still worried about his friend, so much so that he prays for the first time outside the cottage. Michael begs God, "to help poor Wilbert and make sure he doesn't get killed or have something really bad happen to him. To keep looking after him the way the Quakers always say you do and keep him safe!" Soon after a police cruiser pulls up at the farm producing an exhausted, hungry and disheveled Wilbert. The boys rush out to greet Wilbert, including Miss Mary, Miss Bessie, and Miss Stuckland who are all relieved to see him again safe and alive.

The boys ask Wilbert a thousand questions about what happened and where he was, but Wilbert was so tired he can barely speak to them. Miss Stuckland quickly takes Wilbert to the cottage where she helps him get washed up and dressed for bed. Miss Bessie brings him some hot food and feeds him while - Miss Mary and Miss Stuckland all pray over him, thanking God for his 'safe' return. It wasn't till days later that Wilbert finally talked about what really happened to the other boys at the fishing pond. There Wilbert states "he nearly escaped 'death' several times after some deranged old mangy man picked him up on the interstate, took him out to the woods and nearly cooked him alive in his campfire! I screamed so loud and ran all night till some hippy's found him and took me over to police station. Whatever you do, don't ever trust old men in van!" The worlds mad with sick bastards out there!" The boys are so shocked by this story they aren't even sure if Wilbert is making it up but are too scared to ask more about it. All they know is, they are glad to have old Wilbert back. Wilbert is glad to be back as he never realized what having friends felt like before or being missed by anyone. All the fuss sure made him feel really good, but now he was worried that somehow he was going to be punished for his actions and have to 'pay.' But there was no punishment or bad feelings by anyone. Not even by Mr. Amos the director of the school, who he was sure was going to 'kick him out.' This really surprised Wilbert who never knew what feeling wanted was before. Maybe the farm wasn't such a bad place to be 'stuck in' after all.

MAIN STORY ARC: Each boy learns a lesson in each show which is typically about how to trust each other and their leaders. As they develop this 'trust' they start to open up more about their past experiences, insecurities, and dreams about the future. They also learn how to build better confidence in themselves and that others who are there on the far are not there 'to betray or hurt them'. Their spiritual life and values of the Quaker world plays a huge factor in their learning curve about how to treat each other and depend on each other which is always focused on acceptance and love.

THE CENTRAL MESSAGE: This is a 'feel good' TV Series that focuses on teaching troubled kids about good ethics and values. At its center is the learning about how to trust each other and develop a sense of what 'unconditional love' looks like. Most of the boys know very little about love, trust or family life and have never experienced the spiritual world of Quaker life or its central values. All this 'learning' plays out during the horrors of the civil rights movement, the Vietnam War, the assassinations of Martin Luther King and President Kennedy during the early 1960s.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR MICHAEL JACKSON

Michael Jackson is one of the boys who attended Sunnycrest Farm for Boys from ages 12 thru 15 in the early 1960s. His sponsor was Miss Stuckland who disappeared just before Michael and the other boys she sponsored finished their final third year. Without her financial support, Michael and the boys were dismissed from the school without any

knowledge of what happened to Miss Stuckland. Michael was sent back home to live with his mother who had since moved out of the projects. Michael never forgot his experiences at the Sunnycrest Farm for Boys and today runs a non-profit program for black children in Virginia called 'Think Then Choose Wisely.' The program's mission is to help young black children make better choices about their lives and futures. The program partners with the School of Agriculture at the Virginia State University, and also teaches the children about farming, agriculture and grows healthy, nutritional food. See thinkthenchoosewisely.org for more details. Michael is also the author of an autobiographical book entitled '*To Hell and Back*', which is available on Amazon.