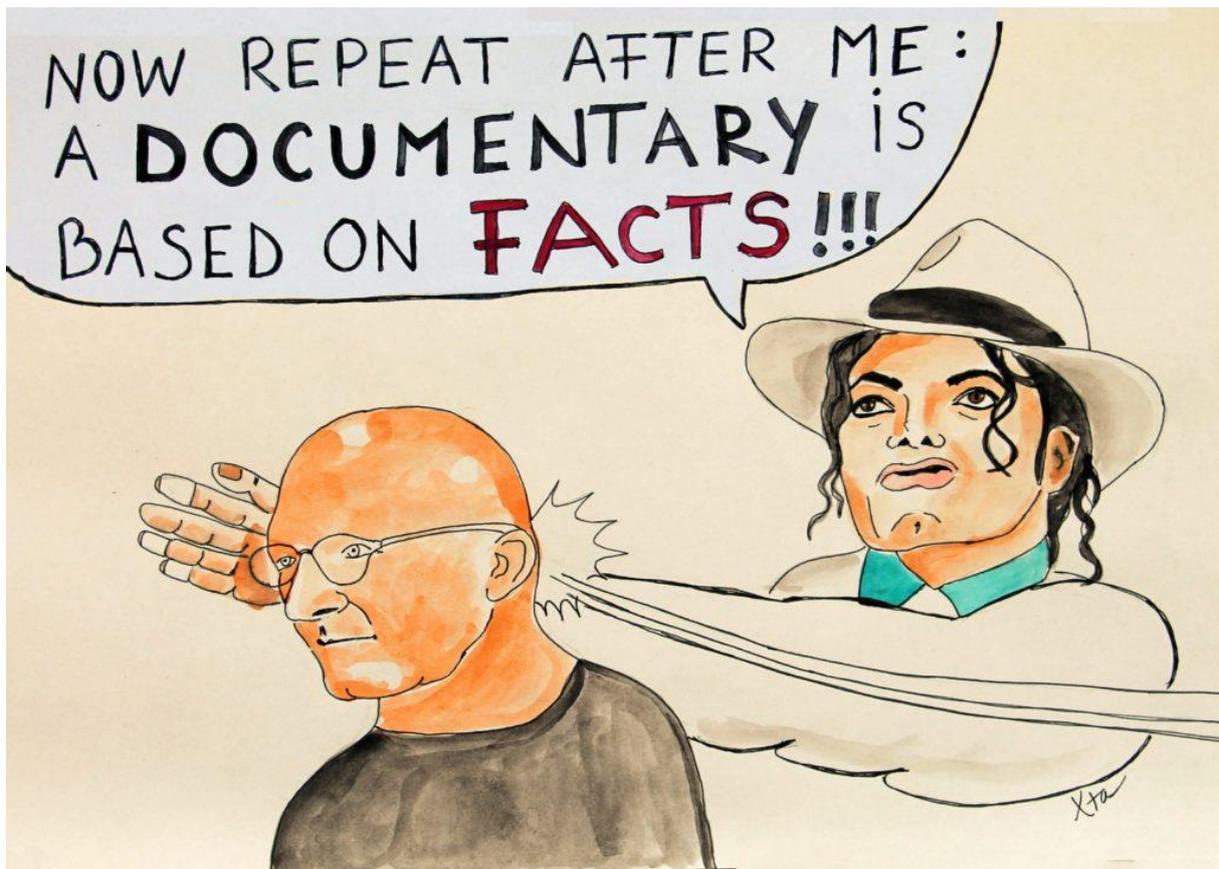


Leaving Neverland Exposed: The Devil is in the Detail (by Damien Shields)



'You don't know! You weren't there!' This is an argument commonly made by people on both sides of the debate regarding the allegations of child sex abuse that have plagued pop superstar Michael Jackson for 26 years and counting.

It's an argument that would hold strong in most cases – especially historical cases of alleged child sex abuse, where physical evidence is almost impossible to come by. And it's the argument that the director of the polarising new film *Leaving Neverland* has used when responding to those who say the allegations made against Jackson in his film are false. But when it comes to those allegations, not only does the 'you don't know, you weren't there' argument fail to hold strong, it can be shattered into a million pieces.

I watched *Leaving Neverland* when it aired. I didn't want to, but as a journalist, a Jackson researcher and someone who intended to comment on the film, I felt I had to.

The film created mass hysteria on social media when it premiered at the Sundance Film Festival in January of 2019. From there, *Leaving Neverland* aired around the world, including on the two networks that co-funded the film's production – HBO in the U.S. and Channel 4 in the U.K.

Prior to seeing it, I wrote an article titled '[What the media refuses to tell you about Michael Jackson, Leaving Neverland & the allegations of child molestation](#)'. In the article I noted that those who'd seen the film were using words like 'powerful' and 'compelling' to describe it. I was highly skeptical about whether the film could truly be 'powerful' or 'compelling'. I felt this way for two reasons. Firstly,

because I've conducted more than a decade of exhaustive research on Jackson's life, and have never discovered evidence of crimes against children. And secondly, because I knew the accusers—Wade Robson and James Safechuck—had major credibility issues and a huge financial motive to lie. Both men have been suing Jackson's Estate and companies for years—Robson since 2013 and Safechuck since 2014—each seeking millions upon millions of dollars. Their lawsuits have been thrown out of court twice so far. They're currently on their third appeal.

Nonetheless, I watched *Leaving Neverland* like everyone else.

The storyline captivates you, beginning with an aspirational tale of how these two young boys came to meet and become friends with their idol – the biggest star on the planet. And then, 40 minutes into the four-hour film, the boys, who are now grown men, start discussing the alleged abuse. In detail. And I have to admit that yes, it *is* 'compelling' and it *is* 'powerful' – just like everyone says it is.

In my objective opinion, from the outside looking in, Robson and Safechuck come across as believable. Many of Jackson's fans disagree, asserting their belief that it's obvious that the two men are lying. But that's because Jackson's fans know these cases inside and out. They've studied the thousands of pages of publicly available court transcripts, depositions, legal motions, sworn declarations and more. No one wants to be a pedophile apologist – no matter how talented a singer and dancer the accused is. Because of this, many of Jackson's most dedicated fans have done their due diligence in assuring that their support is not wasted on someone who can be proven to be a monster.

But to a viewer who hasn't researched the details of the allegations, and who isn't aware about the credibility issues and financial motives of Robson and Safechuck, it must seem like a slam dunk. If the allegations made in *Leaving Neverland* are the truth, then Jackson really is a monster.

But the allegations made in the film are *not* the truth. In fact, much of the film is the antithesis of the truth. Moreover, the credibility issues and financial motives of the two accusers were completely ignored in the film, as were the barrage of glaring inconsistencies and contradictions that destroy their entire narrative. The evidence that you'll find when properly researching the allegations against Jackson is not incriminating – it's exculpatory.

A number of the allegations levelled at Jackson in *Leaving Neverland* are flat-out lies. There is no other word for them. And despite a handful of tenacious researchers and journalists uncovering explosive new evidence which proves these claims are lies, the vast majority of mainstream media has danced around the issue or ignored it completely.

And while the dust seems to have settled in the months since its initial release, with the tenth anniversary of Jackson's death upon us, you can bet that *Leaving Neverland* will rear its ugly head again as the world mourns Jackson and weighs up the allegations made against him. And when it does rear its ugly head, keep this article in mind.

Herein I will outline *Leaving Neverland's* most significant lies, while highlighting a series of other crucial facts, witnesses, inconsistencies and contradictions that Dan Reed neglected to include in his film. And at this point I should warn you: this article is long. It's almost 8,000 words and will take most people approximately an hour to read. But if you've already invested four hours into watching *Leaving Neverland*, the least you can do is spend another hour learning about how you've been lied to.

We'll start with the biggest and most obvious lie of all – one which throws the entire narrative of *Leaving Neverland* into disarray and completely destroys the credibility of both director Reed and accuser Safechuck.

When James Safechuck makes the 'powerful' and 'compelling' allegation that he was abused in the train station at Jackson's Neverland ranch, he is lying.

'You don't know, you weren't there,' some will say in response to such a statement. And it's true that I wasn't there. But I *do* know. How? Because neither Jackson nor his accuser were there either. And how can I say this for certain? Because the train station Safechuck claims Jackson abused him in did not exist at the time.

In a sworn declaration made as part of his multi-million dollar lawsuit against Jackson's Estate and companies, Safechuck explicitly states, under the penalty of perjury, that he was sexually abused by the King of Pop between 1988 and 1992. Never before 1988, and never again after 1992. In *Leaving Neverland*, Safechuck claims that during the early stages of this alleged abuse period he and Jackson had sex "every day" in an upstairs room at the train station. "It's kind of like when you're first dating somebody and you do a lot of it," says Safechuck with a laugh in *Leaving Neverland*.

But recently published documents have blown Safechuck's allegation of daily sex in the train station to smithereens. Permits granted by the Santa Barbara County prove that construction of the train station was not approved by the local authorities until September of 1993 – four years after Safechuck alleges he was abused "every day" in it.

In an embarrassing brain fade, director Dan Reed made the ridiculous insinuation via Twitter that Jackson could have built the train station years before he received the Santa Barbara County's permission to do so, making Safechuck's allegation of daily sex in the station possible.

So, to be absolutely certain that Jackson didn't build the train station years before he received the county's permission, British journalist and Jackson biographer Mike Smallcombe contacted Steven Starr, a photographer who took a series of aerial shots of Neverland via helicopter on August 25, 1993. These images prove beyond any doubt that the train station did not exist at the time Safechuck 'powerfully' and 'compellingly' claims in *Leaving Neverland* that he was abused in it. Smallcombe double-checked that August 25, 1993 was in fact the true and accurate date of the photographs in question. "That date is accurate," confirmed Starr, adding: "I have a few of the original slides and that's the date stamp."

Furthermore, construction of the train station was not completed, and the building was not opened, until the middle of 1994 – half a decade *after* Safechuck claims he and Jackson had sex "every day" in it, and at least two years after Safechuck swears, under the penalty of perjury, that his abuse at the hands of Jackson had completely ended.

It must be accepted that Safechuck is lying when he says Jackson abused him in the train station. It simply cannot be true. And having confirmed that this key element of Safechuck's story is an outright lie, how can we trust anything else he says in the film, or as part of his multi-million dollar lawsuit? The answer is simple. We can't.



Safechuck claims Jackson abused him from 1988 to 1992, including at the Neverland train station. The Neverland train station was not built until 1994.

Leaving Neverland's director, Dan Reed, has come under extreme scrutiny from Jackson's fans and a handful of journalists for seemingly failing to fact-check when making the film, and for allowing such a blatant lie to feature so prominently in it. Reed has since been forced to agree that there is no doubt regarding the construction dates of the train station.

But rather than graciously concede that he failed in his basic duties as a documentary filmmaker, Reed has attempted to turn on the journalists who *have* done their jobs properly. In a bizarre tweet to Smallcombe, who was instrumental in exposing Safechuck's train station lies in the UK press, Reed brazenly asserted that while the train station construction dates could not be disputed, the date that people have wrong is the date that Jackson stopped abusing Safechuck. And despite Safechuck swearing under the penalty of perjury that Jackson stopped abusing him in 1992, Reed insists that Jackson *did* abuse him in the train station, essentially implying that the abuse occurred on an unspecified date at some point *after* the station opened in mid-1994.

And so, in order to rescue his discredited film, Reed's only available defence is to accuse his own star witness of perjury, trapping *Leaving Neverland* in a sort of journalistic purgatory, whereby its director must beg his audience to both accept Safechuck has lied under oath and simultaneously invest in and believe everything he says.

Worse still for Reed, in his haste to apologise for the train station story, he apparently unwittingly upended the entire narrative of his film. The message of *Leaving Neverland*, unquestionably, is that

Jackson preyed on young boys and then dumped them when they hit puberty, replacing them with younger models. In this sense, the film parroted Safechuck's own sworn statements in his ongoing demands for money – the same sworn statements where he repeatedly testified under oath that Jackson never touched him after 1992.

By rewriting the story to now include Jackson molesting Safechuck in the train station, Reed and Safechuck destroy their own narrative arcs. For the entirety of 1994 (while the station was being built) and into 1995, Jackson resided between New York City, where he was recording his *HIStory* album, and Graceland in Memphis, Tennessee, where he lived with his wife, Lisa Marie Presley. Therefore, by the time Safechuck could have been on the ranch at the same time as both Jackson and his train station (mid-1995) Safechuck would have been 17 years old and six feet tall – physically larger than Jackson himself.

Since making his abuse allegations in 2014, Safechuck has consistently claimed that the alleged abuse ended in 1992, at the age of 14. Safechuck says that this is because beyond 1992 he had become too big and too old to satisfy Jackson's alleged pedophilic interest in prepubescent boys. Safechuck even claims in legal documents, and in *Leaving Neverland*, that in 1992 another boy, Brett Barnes, replaced him, insinuating that Barnes went on to become the singer's next victim after Jackson lost interest in Safechuck. But Barnes, who was not given the right of reply by director Dan Reed, took to social media to refute the insinuation.

"Not only do we have to deal with these lies, but we've also got to deal with people perpetuating these lies," said Barnes via Twitter. "The fact that they fail to do the small amount of research it takes to prove these are lies, by choice or not, makes it even worse."

Barnes also engaged an attorney to demand that HBO remove his image and likeness from *Leaving Neverland*, and even threatened to sue them for allowing such a salacious suggestion to be included in the film.

But wait, there's more!

While we are still on the subject of James Safechuck and his inability to tell the truth, let's take a look at another of the highly contentious elements of his constantly changing story – when and how he claims to have realised he was allegedly abused, and how and why it affects both the narrative of *Leaving Neverland* and the validity of his multi-million dollar lawsuit against Jackson's Estate and companies.

In his sworn declaration, Safechuck claims that in 2005 he told his mother, Stephanie Safechuck, that Jackson had abused him. This narrative is somewhat supported by a scene in the *Leaving Neverland* film where Stephanie claims that she 'danced' when she learned that Jackson had died on June 25, 2009. "I was so happy he died," she says, adding that her thoughts were: "Thank god, he can't hurt any more children." However, in another document, Safechuck abandons the claim that he told his mother he was abused, instead stating that he only told her Jackson was "not a good person," without providing any explanation or context. This is the version of events that Safechuck himself goes with in *Leaving Neverland*.

Since the film's release, director Dan Reed has taken it upon himself to speak on behalf of Safechuck and Robson in media interviews to promote it.

In one interview, Reed explains how it is "incredibly obvious" to anyone who has seen *Leaving Neverland* that Safechuck did in fact tell his mother in 2005 that he was abused. "He told her 'Michael abused me' in 2005," says Reed. "That's clear in the film," adds Reed, to anyone who "watched the film with both eyes and ears open."

But I can tell you, after having sat through the four-hour film several times—with both eyes and ears open I might add—that Safechuck makes no such claim in it.



By his own admission, Reed knows next to nothing about Michael Jackson. And despite making a film about their subject matter, Reed clearly hasn't properly studied the sworn declarations that form part of Robson and Safechuck's lawsuits against Jackson's Estate—he didn't even *mention* the lawsuits in his film—and cannot talk about their claims without undermining or contradicting them.

In the very same declaration that Safechuck swears he told his mother about the alleged abuse in 2005, he contradicts himself by also swearing that it wasn't until 2013—when he saw Wade Robson discussing *his* alleged abuse in a televised interview—that he first realised he was abused. Further contradiction arises when Safechuck claims that it wasn't until he had the "help of a therapist" that he was "finally able to begin to recognise that he was a victim of childhood sexual abuse."

That's *three* versions of *one* story! In carefully written legal filings! Sworn under the penalty of perjury! Safechuck and his lawyers just cannot seem to get their story straight.

When appearing in Oprah Winfrey's TV special *After Neverland*—in which Winfrey interviews Safechuck, Robson and Reed about the film and their stories—Safechuck goes with the notion that "it wasn't until Wade came out" in 2013 that he realised he was abused. "I was really suffering, I couldn't sleep at night," says Safechuck, who explains that he had been overcome by feelings of anxiety in the period before Robson announced his multi-million dollar lawsuit against the Jackson Estate. "And then when I see Wade come out, you go 'Okay, maybe there is a reason for this.' And if there is a reason for this, now I can figure out what to do about it. But you don't think it's abuse."

What isn't mentioned in *Leaving Neverland*, in any of Safechuck's legal filings, or in Winfrey's *After Neverland* special is that on April 26, 2013—three weeks before Robson appeared on television to announce his allegations and lawsuit against the Jackson Estate—[the Safechuck family business was sued for around \\$1 million](#) for alleged failure to pay two of its shareholders any profits during a three-year period from May 2010 to May 2013.

On May 14, 2013, Safechuck's father, James Snr., was served legal papers regarding the lawsuit. Safechuck's mother, Stephanie, who appears in *Leaving Neverland*, is named in the papers as a co-conspirator. Two days later, on May 16, 2013, Robson gives his televised interview. Four days later, Safechuck, during a May 20, 2013 therapy session, claims that he now realises that Jackson abused him too. From there, Safechuck joins Robson's lawsuit. To this day both men continue to seek millions upon millions of dollars from Jackson's Estate.

Safechuck's statements that he was "really suffering" and "couldn't sleep at night" at the time Robson appeared on television could be attributed to the fact that his family was being asked to come up with almost \$1 million in alleged unpaid dividends. At the very least, it was a convenient time to 'realise' he was abused. And Safechuck's statement that he could "figure out what to do about it" can also be viewed through a different lens considering the timing of this revelation. While a lawsuit being filed against his family's business is not proof that Safechuck made up the alleged abuse, it certainly has to be considered as a motive for not only him but also his family to lie, which we have already established is the case regarding the train station.

Since we are on the subject, let's discuss Wade Robson's even more bizarre and convoluted explanations as to how and when he 'realised' his alleged abuse.

"This is not a case of repressed memory," announced Robson in his 'coming out' interview with Matt Lauer on The Today Show on May 16, 2013, adding that he "never forgot one moment" of what Jackson allegedly did to him. Robson goes on to claim that Jackson "performed sexual acts on me, and forced me to perform sexual acts on him" for seven years—from the age of 7 until he was 14—and that although he remembered every little detail of it, he was psychologically unable and unwilling to realise that he'd been abused.

Robson claims in *Leaving Neverland* that despite not realising that he himself was a victim, he "knew in his gut" that a then-13-year-old Jordan Chandler was being abused by Jackson. "I knew it was true," claims Robson in the film. Chandler is the boy whose father infamously accused Jackson of molesting his son in 1993, filed a civil lawsuit against the singer, successfully extorted \$20 million from him, then refused to cooperate with authorities during their criminal investigation. Robson says that when the authorities approached him during the Chandler investigation in 1993, he couldn't allow himself to "go there," conceding that he understood sexual contact between an adult and a child was wrong, but

didn't want to discuss it. Then-11-year-old Robson convincingly denied knowledge about sexual contact between Jackson and *any* child—himself included—when the police interviewed him.

Robson also gave a powerful television interview at the time in which he again demonstrated his understanding that sexual contact between an adult and a child is wrong. "I think it's sick," said Robson of the allegations being made against Jackson, adding: "I know Michael well enough to know that he wouldn't do anything like that. I know that for a fact."

In addition to his television interview and his sworn testimony as part of the criminal investigation in 1993, Robson convincingly denied the abuse in private for more than two decades. Not a single individual—friend or foe—has come forward with claims that Robson confided in them that Jackson had abused him. To the contrary, countless people from Robson's personal and professional life have claimed that Robson freely and openly defended Jackson in private conversations with them. According to Robson's mother, Joy, he "laughed and said it was ridiculous" when she asked him directly if Jackson had ever abused him, adding: "He would look me in the eye time and time again and tell me that nothing ever happened."

But Robson now alleges that Jackson forced him to lie in all of these situations, claiming the pop superstar threatened they'd "both go to jail for the rest of [their] lives" if anyone was to find out about their alleged sexual relationship.



Since filing his multi-million dollar lawsuit against Jackson's Estate in 2013, Robson has maintained that he "didn't realise" what he and Jackson were allegedly doing was wrong. Robson claims that it wasn't until a therapy session in 2012 that he was finally able to 'realise' that he'd been abused. This is the same story Safechuck gives in one of his multiple 'realisation' narratives.

In Robson's case, the notion that he didn't 'realise' what he and Jackson were allegedly doing was wrong contradicts his claim that Jackson told him they'd "both go to jail for the rest of [their] lives" if anyone found out about it.

Moreover, Robson himself demonstrated that he knew—not only as a child in 1993, but as an adult ten years later in 2003—that such behaviour was wrong. When asked in a November 26, 2003 interview whether anything sexual had ever occurred between he and Jackson, then-21-year-old

Robson adamantly stated: "I never had that experience and I hope that it never happened to anybody else."

Eighteen months later, Robson took the stand as the first defence witness in Jackson's 2005 criminal trial. Despite now claiming that he "never forgot one moment" of the abuse Jackson allegedly inflicted on him, Robson withstood a detailed line of questioning by Jackson's defence attorney, Thomas Mersereau, and withering cross-examination by seasoned prosecutor Ron Zonen. Robson was asked numerous times, in numerous ways, by both the defence and the prosecution, whether any inappropriate physical contact had occurred between he and Jackson. Robson was steadfast in his response to each and every question, no matter how it was put to him, that nothing had occurred.

So it beggars belief that Robson—as a 22-year-old man, testifying under oath, in a court of law, as part of a criminal trial in which Michael Jackson stood accused of sexually abusing children—had not yet realised that the sexual activities he now alleges he and Jackson had engaged in, were wrong.

Another contradiction of Robson's claim that he "never forgot one moment" of what Jackson allegedly did to him arises when analysing his story about the very first time he says he was abused.

Between late 2012 and early 2013, shortly after 'realising' he was abused and shortly before he filed his multi-million dollar lawsuit, Robson attempted to write a book. In return for the book, which would detail his alleged abuse, Robson wanted a "large amount of money," according to Alan Nevins, the Los Angeles agent that Robson used to shop the book concept. In the manuscript for the proposed book, which Robson desperately tried to hide from Jackson's Estate when suing them, it was discovered that Robson's unpublished version of events was different from the version he detailed in his multi-million dollar lawsuit.

In the book, Robson claims that in January of 1990, he spent two nights at Neverland with his family, and that with their parents' permission he and his sister, Chantal, slept in Jackson's bedroom along with the pop superstar. It's important to note that Jackson's bedroom is enormous – it has two levels and is the size of a small house. Robson claims in the book manuscript that nothing "out of the ordinary" happened during those first two nights. Robson then goes on to claim that after those first two harmless nights, the entire Robson family went to the Grand Canyon, but without him, leaving then-7-year-old Wade all alone with Jackson at Neverland. It was then that Robson alleges that Jackson began abusing him. "The first night after my family had left, Michael began to fondle my penis over the top of my pajama pants," says Robson in the proposed book.

The manuscript was pitched to Harper Collins, Pan Macmillan, Sidgwick & Jackson and a host of others, but no publisher was interested. When it became clear that Robson had failed to land the lucrative book deal he'd hoped for, he sued Jackson's Estate for millions of dollars.

But when Robson was deposed as part of that lawsuit, the credibility of his claims—both those written in his book manuscript and those made in his lawsuit—began to fall to shreds.

When questioned about his book, portions of the manuscript were read to Robson. He was then asked to confirm whether what he had written about the first time he was allegedly abused was consistent with what he remembered. Shockingly, despite claiming in media interviews that he "never forgot one

moment" of what Jackson allegedly did to him, Robson conceded in his sworn deposition that he actually could *not* remember. "Yeah, I don't really remember," Robson testified.

Yet in *Leaving Neverland*, Robson sits in front of the camera and tells a 'powerful' and 'compelling' story about a time period which he testified, under the penalty of perjury, that he does not remember. "I don't really remember" and "I never forgot one moment" are two polarising positions to take when making an allegation as serious as child sex abuse – especially when the person you are accusing is dead and unable to defend himself.

Emails disclosed as part of Robson's lawsuit also reveal that prior to suing Jackson's Estate, Robson was communicating with his mother and asking her to fill in huge blanks in his memory.

Moreover, in sworn declarations as part of that lawsuit, and in direct contradiction of his book manuscript, Robson alleges that despite his sister being in the same room as them, Jackson began molesting him on the second night of that first weekend at Neverland – prior to the Robson family's trip to the Grand Canyon.

Robson then backtracks on his own sworn testimony. In *Leaving Neverland*, Robson tells a version of events in which the first time Jackson allegedly abused him was the first night he spent alone with Jackson while his family toured the Grand Canyon.

This repeated change in events is problematic for a number of reasons.

For starters, only one version of the story, if any, can be true. That means that either way, in one or both versions of the story, Robson *must* be lying. But which version is a lie? The answer is that *both* versions are lies. And if we take Robson's sworn statement at face value—that he 'doesn't really remember' that first trip to Neverland—we have to dismiss his version of those alleged events altogether.

So how can we determine what really happened at Neverland during and after that first weekend? The sworn testimony of Robson's mother gives us the answer.

When Robson's mother, Joy, was questioned in connection with the Chandler case in 1993, she was asked whether her son had ever spent time alone with Jackson at Neverland. "My son has never been to the ranch without me up until this year," she answered. This categorically contradicts the claim Robson makes in his book manuscript, in his multi-million dollar lawsuit, and in *Leaving Neverland* – that his family left him alone with Jackson for five days while they visited the Grand Canyon in January of 1990.

Robson himself testified in Jackson's 2005 criminal trial, under the penalty of perjury, that the only time he had ever been at Neverland without his mother was on one occasion in 1993. So if Robson had never been left alone with Jackson at Neverland prior to 1993, how on earth could Jackson have had abused Robson for five consecutive days at Neverland in 1990? The answer is simple. He couldn't have. Robson's mother corroborates this twice more, in two separate sworn statements given 23 years apart. In 1993, she testified that her family had gone to the Grand Canyon for five days in January of 1990. "We went to the ranch for the first weekend, and then we left and went to the Grand Canyon, and we toured," she explained, adding: "We came back to the ranch for the following weekend." When asked

to specify who had gone to the Grand Canyon for those five days between weekends, Robson's mother said: "My family". There was no mention of Wade skipping the family trip to stay at Neverland with Jackson.

In a separate deposition, given in 2016—three years after her son filed his multi-million dollar lawsuit against Jackson's Estate—Joy Robson was asked again, very specifically, about who had gone to the Grand Canyon for those five days. "You and your kids and your husband and your parents all went on a tourist trip to the Grand Canyon?" she was asked. "Yes," she responded, confirming that her "whole family," including Wade, had visited the Grand Canyon in January of 1990.

Collectively, these pieces of evidence establish that the allegation made by Robson in his book draft, in his multi-million dollar lawsuit and in *Leaving Neverland*—that he was sexually abused for five consecutive days in January of 1990 at Jackson's Neverland ranch—is simply impossible.

That makes Wade Robson a liar.



And I'm not the first person to call Robson a liar. In fact, the trial judge who assessed Robson's multi-million-dollar lawsuit against Jackson's Estate threw his entire case out of court after finding that he had lied so egregiously in his legal filings that no right-minded person could take anything he says seriously.

While several lies have been identified in his legal filings, the dismissal of Robson's case centres around one particularly outrageous lie. In his sworn declaration, Robson states that he was unaware of the existence of The Estate of Michael Jackson until he filed his lawsuit against them in 2013.

The filing of Robson's cash-grab lawsuit relied on the alleged 'fact' that Robson did not know Jackson had an Estate. If Robson *had* known, the statute of limitations would have prevented him from filing his lawsuit altogether, because he had waited too long after Jackson's death to do so.

But Robson's alleged lack of knowledge about the existence of Jackson's Estate wasn't a fact at all. It was a bold-faced lie. And he got busted for it. But how?

In 2011, Jackson's Estate was preparing to create a Cirque du Soleil production based on the pop superstar's music and dance. That same year, Robson tried to land the lucrative role as the director of the production.

In February of 2011, Robson was informed by his agent that he would need to get the Jackson Estate's approval to be hired by Cirque. Robson then called Jackson's Estate and arranged a face-to-face meeting with John Branca, one of the Estate's two co-executors.

In May of 2011, Robson expressed that he had "always wanted to do this show, badly," in an email to a Cirque executive. Begging for the job, Robson added: "I know I am meant to do this show. I am passionate to do this show. I want to make it amazing for me, for you, for Cirque and course, for Michael."

Two months later, in July of 2011, Robson claimed in an interview that he had been hired to produce the show, saying: "I'm starting on a Cirque Du Soleil Michael Jackson show ... it's an opportunity for me to give back to his legacy ... and to make sure that it's done right and that it really represents his essence."

But the following year it was decided by the Jackson Estate that Robson was not the best man for the job. Instead, they hired Jamie King to direct the Cirque show. Unsuccessful in his attempts to be hired, Robson began to claim that Jackson had molested him as a child. This led to Robson's failed attempt to obtain a "large" sum of money for a book deal, which then led to him suing Jackson's Estate for millions upon millions of dollars – all while claiming that he didn't know the Estate existed.

When the judge discovered that Robson *did* in fact know that Jackson had an Estate—because Robson's emails revealed so; and because Robson had met with the Estate in a bid to be hired by them—the judge threw Robson's entire case out of court because no reasonable fact-finder could believe Robson's sworn declaration.

We are more than 5,000 words into this article, and we haven't even covered all of the known, provable lies told by Robson and Safechuck in their lawsuits and in *Leaving Neverland*. I'll attempt to brush over a few more, before shifting my focus to Dan Reed and Oprah Winfrey.

One of the lies not yet mentioned was also discovered in Robson's sworn declaration. In it, Robson made the claim that he was "unable to continue performing and directing in any manner or capacity whatsoever" due to the alleged abuse inflicted on him by Jackson. Robson demanded that Jackson's Estate compensate him for loss of income. But his absurd claim can be easily disproved simply by reviewing a [list of the performing arts projects](#) Robson has been (and continues to be) involved in during the period he claims he was "unable" to work in this field "in any manner or capacity whatsoever".

Robson also lies in *Leaving Neverland* when he claims to have been forced to testify in Jackson's 2005 trial. Robson claims that he did not want to defend Jackson, but that once he received a subpoena he realised he had no choice and decided to go along with it. But there is one problem with this claim. According to private investigator Scott Ross, who interviewed Robson on behalf of Jackson's legal team to determine his credibility as a defence witness, he did not receive a subpoena. "I would like to see the subpoena he never got," said Ross in an interview following the release of *Leaving Neverland*. And how does Ross know Robson never received a subpoena? I asked him: "Because I am the only person who would have served him."

Another lie told in *Leaving Neverland* comes from James Safechuck.

Safechuck tells a story about how Jackson allegedly called him and asked him to testify in the same 2005 trial that Robson testified in. But Safechuck says he refused. "I said no, and he got really angry at me," claims Safechuck in the film, adding that Jackson "threatened me with his lawyers, and said that I had perjured myself years ago. And that he has the best lawyers in the world and that they were going to get me."

These claims are problematic for two reasons.

Firstly, long before the trial had even begun, the judge in the case ruled that testimony regarding Safechuck would not be allowed. He was a 'non-entity', meaning that the prosecution could not reference him in their case against Jackson, thus Jackson would have no need for Safechuck's testimony in his defence. But despite this provable fact, Safechuck delivers a 'powerful' and 'compelling' recollection of events that never happened – just like when he claims he was abused "every day" in a train station that did not exist.

Secondly, Safechuck's claim that Jackson threatened that his lawyers would "get" him because he had "perjured" himself is ludicrous. Some quick context: During the Chandler investigation in 1993, Safechuck wrote a sworn declaration stating that Jackson had never abused him. It is this sworn declaration that Safechuck claims Jackson threatened him over. The reason the claim is so ludicrous is simple. For Jackson to accuse Safechuck of committing perjury, Jackson would literally have to say to Safechuck: 'I abused you and you lied about it in your sworn declaration.' But Jackson always vehemently insisted on his innocence. And Safechuck claims he did not realise he was abused until 2013.

Moreover, why on earth would Jackson send his lawyers to "get" Safechuck if Jackson *had* in fact abused him? Why would Jackson want to expose Safechuck as a 'perjurer' if doing so would require Jackson to admit, in court, that he *had* abused Safechuck? This bold-faced lie from Safechuck is one of the most nonsensical of all. Yet director Dan Reed included it in his film and HBO broadcast it for the whole world to see. No skepticism. No scrutiny. Just plain nonsense.

Another fictitious narrative that made headlines made during the mainstream media's one-sided promotion of *Leaving Neverland* is that Jackson abused Robson and Safechuck "hundreds and hundreds of times" and that the abuse occurred "every single time" they were together.

This notion originates from a suggestion made by BBC reporter Victoria Derbyshire during an interview with Robson and Safechuck. "Do you know how many times he abused you?" she asked both men of their alleged abuse at the hands of Jackson. "It's countless," they responded. "So that is hundreds and hundreds of times," suggested Derbyshire. Both Robson and Safechuck agreed that figure was accurate.

But Robson's mother's sworn testimony is that whilst the Robson family, including Wade, went to Neverland approximately 40-50 times over a 14 year period, Jackson was almost never there. Joy Robson estimates that Jackson was physically there, in the presence of the Robson family, including Wade, on only four occasions. Wade Robson's former girlfriend of more than seven years (Jackson's niece, Brandi Jackson) and her brother (Siggys Jackson) corroborated Joy Robson's testimony, agreeing that Jackson was almost never at Neverland when they were.

Wait a second! Wade Robson was dating Michael Jackson's niece? For more than seven years? Why wasn't any of this in *Leaving Neverland*? Perhaps it's because the circumstances surrounding their relationship raise additional questions about Robson's credibility.

Robson met Brandi Jackson in 1990 on the set of a photoshoot for a footwear commercial they appeared in together with Michael Jackson. Eighteen months later the pair met again – this time on the set of Jackson's 1991 "Black Or White" short film, in which they also appeared.

According to Brandi, Wade "developed a crush" on her during their brief encounters as kids, and asked Michael to set up a situation where they could see each other again. Jackson obliged. "My uncle invited Wade, his mom and his sister, as well as me and my brother, to the ranch," Brandi recalls. "So we spent about five to seven days there, just getting to know each other. We got closer in this timeframe, and at the end of the trip he asked me very kindly if I would be his girlfriend. It was just a very sweet thing." Brandi insists that at all stages throughout her time with Wade, their relationship was 'age-appropriate' – starting out with nothing more than simple hand-holding and progressing naturally throughout their teenage years. Once the relationship reached adulthood, Brandi says, she lost her virginity to Wade. The relationship ultimately ended a year later, when Wade cheated on her with Britney Spears—who was dating Justin Timberlake at the time—and others.

What does all this have to do with Robson's allegations that Jackson abused him for seven years? In the scheme of *Leaving Neverland*, which Dan Reed purports to be a documentary, it has a lot of relevance.

Firstly, the fact that Robson asked Jackson to set him up with his niece, and that Jackson obliged, completely contradicts narratives put forth in *Leaving Neverland* and elsewhere, that Robson was romantically in love with Jackson, and that Jackson discouraged Robson from having relationships with women.



And secondly, Brandi and Robson's relationship was ongoing during *and* after the period in which Robson now alleges he was being abused by Jackson. Despite being able to offer important insights regarding Robson during that period; despite being able to expose several timeline discrepancies not addressed in the film; and despite being able to identify a number of other red flags with Robson's constantly changing story, Brandi Jackson was not contacted by Dan Reed during the making of *Leaving Neverland*. Neither was her older brother, Siggy Jackson, who was also present for several Neverland trips with Wade and the Robson family, and who has since referred to them as "opportunists".

"The fact that HBO and its producing partners did not even deign to reach out to any of these people to explore the credibility of the false stories Robson and Safechuck told violates all norms and ethics in documentary filmmaking and journalism," said Howard Weitzman, attorney for the Jackson Estate. Speaking of opportunists, let's talk about Oprah Winfrey for a moment.

As mentioned earlier in this article, Winfrey aired her own TV special called *After Neverland*. Broadcast immediately after *Leaving Neverland* aired on HBO, *After Neverland* featured interviews with Robson, Safechuck and Reed, set in front of a live studio audience of people said to be survivors of child sexual abuse.

Oprah Winfrey has long been an advocate for victims of childhood sexual abuse, having produced 217 episodes of The Oprah Winfrey Show on that one subject alone. In the opening moments of *After Neverland*, Winfrey explains that she was so impressed with how Dan Reed presented the allegations of child sexual abuse against Jackson that she called him and said: "Dan, you were able to illustrate in these four hours what I tried to explain in 217 [hours]."

Winfrey acknowledged that "people all over the world are going to be in an uproar" about *Leaving Neverland* and her promotion of it, and that people will continue to question whether Robson and Safechuck are liars or not, but that it doesn't matter to her because the theme of the film "transcends Michael Jackson." Winfrey then stated that if viewers of *Leaving Neverland* become more aware about how child sexual abuse happens—even if Jackson is innocent—then "some good will have come of it." Winfrey is not wrong when she says that the *theme* of *Leaving Neverland*—child sex abuse—transcends Michael Jackson. Of course it does. But *Leaving Neverland* itself, jam-packed with provable lie after provable lie, does not transcend Jackson. It's merely a blip on the map of Jackson's legacy as the most beloved and biggest-selling musician in the history of popular music.

In early promotional interviews, director Reed told the story of how the idea for *Leaving Neverland* first came to be. Reed was having breakfast with Daniel Pearl, a commissioning editor at Channel 4. They were discussing the biggest and most controversial topics they could make a documentary about. Pearl suggested "the Michael Jackson controversy" might be a good topic.

But in Reed's own words, he "didn't know anything about the Michael Jackson story." So Reed put a researcher on the job, who trawled Michael Jackson fan forums for a few weeks, and came back with some notes about Robson and Safechuck's twice-failed lawsuits against Jackson's Estate and companies. Reed then contacted their lawyers, and the rest is history.

Despite *Leaving Neverland* being born out of a conversation that centred around the notion of doing 'the Michael Jackson story,' Reed will tell anyone who'll listen that his film is not about Michael Jackson. But it is. In fact, if Jackson's name was not associated with *Leaving Neverland*, the film would not have been funded and co-produced by HBO and Channel 4.

Finally, while we are on the subject of Channel 4, I want to bring attention to the *Factual Programme Guidelines* section of Channel 4's *Producers Handbook* – written to ensure that the network's filmmakers are held to the highest possible journalistic standards.

The guidelines dictate that production teams should remain unbiased in their reporting, and that they should "review, challenge and [be] suitably skeptical of all evidence and contributors motives." In the case of *Leaving Neverland*, this rule was completely thrown out the window.

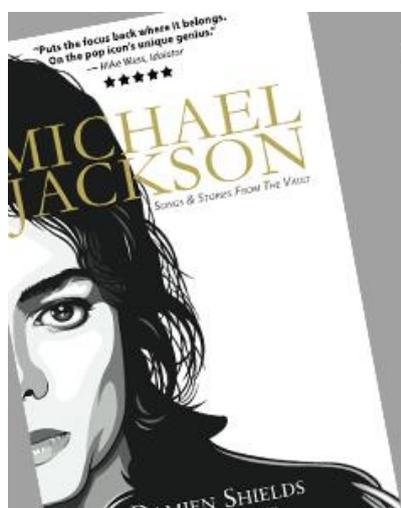
As award-winning investigative reporter Charles Thomson so beautifully articulated when speaking out about the film's journalistic failings, the glaring omission of the details surrounding Robson and Safechuck's multi-million dollar lawsuit against Jackson's Estate and companies is the equivalent of "interviewing a pharma lobbyist for a news story on health and not mentioning that they're a pharma lobbyist." Thomson added that "even the staunchest Jackson hater would have to admit that failing to mention both men's massive, ongoing financial incentive to lie is dishonest and misleading."

Jackson Estate attorney Howard Weitzman also pointed towards the mounting legal costs of Robson and Safechuck's failed lawsuits as further potential motive for their decision to participate in the film. "The Estate spent years litigating with Robson and Safechuck, and had four different lawsuits by these two men dismissed with prejudice," said Weitzman, adding that "Robson owes the Estate almost seventy thousand dollars in court costs, and Safechuck owes the Estate several thousand dollars as well."

Another portion of Channel 4's *Producers Handbook* specifies that "the truth must not be sacrificed for the sake of a more entertaining programme if this means cheating the viewer." The guidelines then go on to reiterate that "it is never acceptable to represent something as having happened that did not." Yet, as thoroughly detailed in this article, the truth *was* sacrificed during the production of *Leaving Neverland*, and things—like Safechuck's blatant lie that he was abused in a train station that didn't exist—*were* represented to have happened when, in fact, they did not.

Channel 4 and government-approved broadcast regulator Ofcom are yet to answer my question as to how a film that so egregiously violates their *Factual Programme Guidelines* was allowed to go to air in the first place.

Damien Shields is the author of *Michael Jackson: Songs & Stories From The Vault*—a book that details the King of Pop's creative process and dissects the anatomy of his craftsmanship. The book is available in physical and digital formats via [Amazon](#) and [iBooks](#).



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