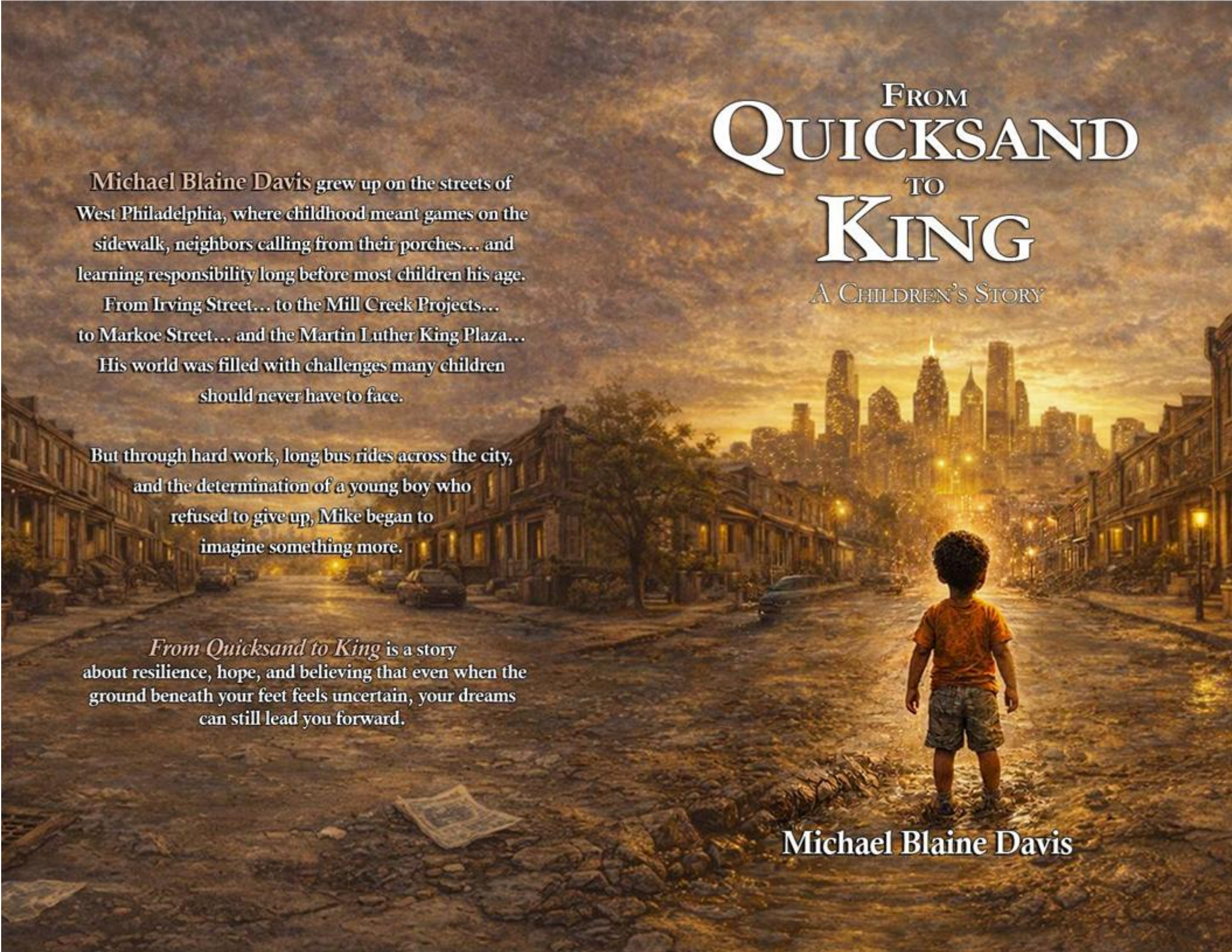


A young boy with curly hair, wearing an orange t-shirt and camouflage shorts, stands with his back to the camera on a cobblestone street. He is looking down a long, straight street lined with brick buildings. In the distance, a city skyline with several tall skyscrapers is visible against a dramatic, orange-hued sunset sky. The street is wet, reflecting the warm light of the setting sun. A newspaper lies on the ground in the foreground.

FROM QUICKSAND TO KING

A CHILDREN'S STORY

Michael Blaine Davis grew up on the streets of West Philadelphia, where childhood meant games on the sidewalk, neighbors calling from their porches... and learning responsibility long before most children his age.

From Irving Street... to the Mill Creek Projects... to Markoe Street... and the Martin Luther King Plaza...

His world was filled with challenges many children should never have to face.

But through hard work, long bus rides across the city, and the determination of a young boy who refused to give up, Mike began to imagine something more.

From Quicksand to King is a story about resilience, hope, and believing that even when the ground beneath your feet feels uncertain, your dreams can still lead you forward.

Michael Blaine Davis

CHAPTER 1

PAGE 1 - IRVING STREET — WHERE THE STORY BEGAN

Long before he was your Pop-Pop, he was a tiny baby boy named Mike, born in West Philadelphia in 1957.

He didn't know it yet, but his life would be filled with lessons about courage, hard work, and believing in himself.

In the beginning, he was simply a baby held safely in his mother's arms — a little boy with a whole world waiting ahead of him.

And like every child...

his story was just beginning.



PAGE 2

Mike grew up in West Philadelphia, where the streets were lined with row houses and neighbors knew one another by name.

Children played games on the sidewalks, music drifted from open windows, and people sat on their porches talking long after the sun went down.

It was a place full of life, laughter, and strong families.

And it was where the little boy who would one day become your Pop-Pop first began to discover the world around him.



PAGE 3

Mike's first home was on Irving Street in West Philadelphia.

When his mother came north from Kentucky searching for a better life, she joined her older sister Aunt Wilma and her husband Uncle Robert, who were already living in Philadelphia.

Their house became the place where Mike's early childhood began.

Inside those walls was a home filled with family, love, and the sounds of children growing up together.

The house was always full of people — friends and neighbors who felt like family too.

Everyone looked out for one another, and the block was never quiet for very long.

For young Mike, it felt like the whole world lived right there on that street.



PAGE - 4 A/B

The sidewalks on Irving Street were Mike's playground.

Kids ran up and down the block playing games that sometimes lasted until the streetlights came on.

Laughter echoed between the row houses, and every day felt like a new adventure.



PAGE - 4 /B

To Mike, those were some of the happiest days of his childhood.

Mike wasn't the only child in that house.

His cousins lived there too.

There was Robert Jr., who was seven years older and quickly became the big brother Mike looked up to.

Linda was five years older, and James was just two years older than Mike.

Together they filled the house with energy, laughter, and the kind of memories that stay with you forever.



PAGE 5

Of all his cousins, Robert Jr. held a special place in Mike's life.

Being seven years older, he often looked out for him and showed him the ropes of growing up on Irving Street.

To young Mike, Robert Jr. wasn't just a cousin.
He was the big brother he admired and tried to learn from.

Outside on the block, Mike played games in the street with the other kids his age.

Inside the house, life was busy.

There were younger brothers and sisters to help watch over, and always something that needed to be done.

Even when Mike was still very young, he was learning something important about family —

everyone had a role to play.



PAGE 6 A (IMAGE STRETCHES ACROSS TWO PAGES)

Back then, little Mike didn't know
how important those early days would be.

All he knew was that Irving Street
felt safe.

The house was always full
of voices, footsteps, and laughter.

Mom and Aunt Wilma moved through the kitchen
like conductors leading an orchestra,
making sure everyone had something to eat.

Uncle Robert, strong and steady,
carried himself like the captain of the ship.



PAGE 6 B (CONT'D)

Mike followed his cousins everywhere.

Robert Jr., the oldest, felt more like a big brother than a cousin. Linda and James were always nearby too, turning ordinary days into adventures.

To young Mike, the world felt big and exciting.

But most of all... it felt whole.

Those early years quietly planted something inside him — a picture of what family was supposed to look like.

And sometimes, the pictures we see when we are very young stay with us forever.



PAGE 7 — FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL

Mike was getting older now.

Soon it was time
for his very first day of school.

He walked down the sidewalk proudly,
holding his lunch pail in one hand
and his mother's hand in the other.

They were headed to
Samuel B. Huey Elementary School,
just around the corner.

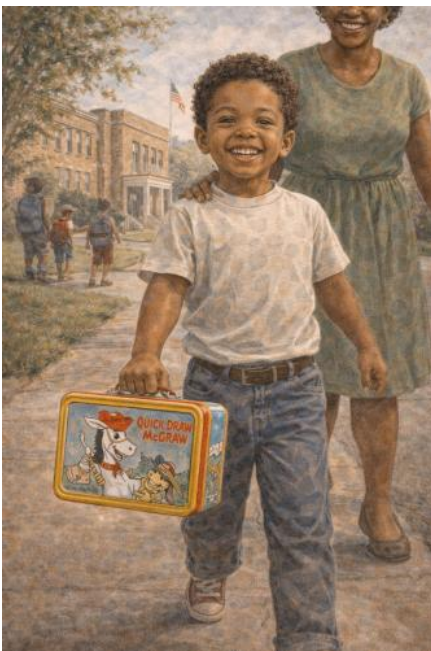
Everything felt new.

New teachers.
New lessons.
New things to learn.

This was no ordinary day.

It was Mike's first day of school.

And he felt like a big boy now.



PAGE 8 — HOMEWORK WITH AUNT SADIE

Sometime later after school Aunt Sadie was helping him with his homework at the dining room table.

The house was quiet.

Everything felt normal.

Mike had no idea that in just a few moments, everything was about to change.

Sometimes ordinary days...are the ones that change everything.



PAGE 9 — SMOKE BEGINS

Then suddenly, something was wrong.

A strange smell filled the room.

Smoke began to curl out from the closet behind where Mike was sitting.

An electrical fire had started inside the wall.

Things began to happen very quickly.



PAGE 10 — THE FIRE ON IRVING STREET

Soon the whole block knew something was wrong.

Sirens filled the afternoon.

Fire trucks rushed onto Irving Street.

Neighbors came out onto their porches.

Bright orange flames flickered against the brick houses.

Mike watched as firefighters climbed ladders and fought the fire.



PAGE 11 — LEAVING IRVING STREET

Mike was only five or six years old.

He held his mother's hand and watched the fire from across the street.

Smoke filled the air.

The place where he had lived...

the house full of family and memories...

was gone.

After that night, they could not stay on Irving Street anymore.



CHAPTER 2

PAGE 12

A few days after the fire, everything began to change.

Boxes were packed.

Furniture was carried out of the house.

Mike stood quietly and watched as the moving truck was loaded.

The home where his childhood had begun on Irving Street was now behind him.

Soon his family would be moving to another street in SouthWest Philadelphia.

A place called Markoe Street.



PAGE 13 - MARKOE STREET

The house on Markoe Street was different.

It was smaller.

Money was tight, and life began to feel harder than it had before.

For the first time, Mike started to see that not every road in life is smooth.

Some roads feel more like quicksand.



PAGE 14

At home, everyone had to do their part.

Money was tight, and every dollar mattered.

Mike understood something even as a young boy.

If he wanted life to get better...

he would have to help make it better.



PAGE 15

Mike's new home on Markoe Street
was very different from Irving Street.

Money was tight,
and space was small.

Mike and his little brother Bill
shared a bed.

His sisters, Donna (Sis) and Tina,
shared another room.

The house was old,
and sometimes things were hard.

But families do
what they must
to make it through.



PAGE 16 - COAL FURNACE

The house was heated by a coal furnace in the basement.

Every day someone had to shovel coal to keep the fire burning.

Many times, that job belonged to Mike.

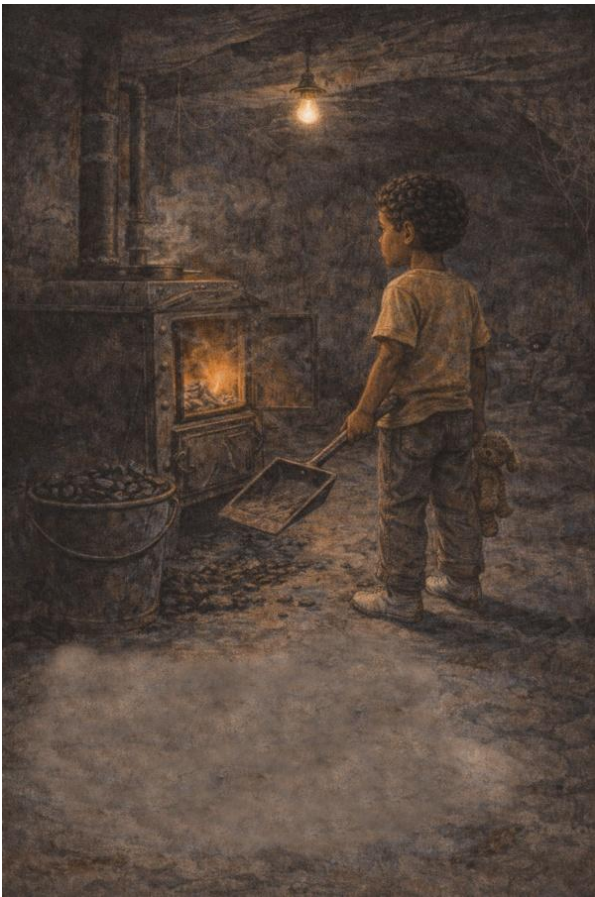
The basement was dark, and sometimes he was scared.

But he did it anyway.

Because even as a young boy, he was learning something important.

Sometimes life asks you to be brave before you feel ready.

After all, he was told that he was the “Man of the House”. That made him feel responsible. Even though he didn’t know what that meant.



PAGE 17 - QUICKSAND

Quicksand pulls you down if you stop moving.

The harder life became, the more Mike felt that pull.

But even as a young boy, he had already made up his mind about something important.

He was not going to sink.



PAGE 18

Not long after moving to Markoe Street, Mike decided he wanted to help his family.

Even though he was still just a young boy, he believed he could do something.

So Mike began working at a small neighborhood store called Leon's Market.

He was only eight or nine years old.

The work wasn't easy.

But every day he showed up ready to do his best.

Because deep inside, Mike already understood something important.

If life felt like quicksand...

then the only way forward was to keep moving.



PAGE 19

Life on Markoe Street meant everyone had responsibilities.

Even as a young boy, Mike had work to do.

While other kids were outside playing games...

Mike was working.

He didn't complain.

He simply did what needed to be done.

Because deep inside, Mike believed that hard work was the way out of the quicksand.



PAGE 20 - PHILADELPHIA GENERAL HOSPITAL

The #42 bus rolled to a stop at Philadelphia General Hospital.

Mike stepped down onto the sidewalk and looked toward the doors.

Another day of work was beginning.

To himself he quietly thought,

“Another day, another dollar.”

And with that, Mike headed inside.



PAGE 21 – BACK TO IRVING STREET

Not long after Mike started at Anna B Shaw Jr. High School and working at Philadelphia General Hospital, something unexpected happened.

He asked if he could move back to Irving Street.

The house where many of his earliest memories had begun was still there.

And this time, he wasn't returning as the little boy who once played on the sidewalks.

Now Mike had a job.

He had responsibilities.

And each day he rode the bus across the city to work at PGH.

Irving Street was home again —
but Mike was beginning to grow into the man he would become.



PAGE 22

Because Mike was the youngest, everyone looked after him.

Linda helped him when he stumbled.

James made him laugh.

And Robert Jr. — well, Robert Jr. kept a careful eye on him.

Not in a bossy way.

In a big brother way.

Sometimes Robert would say things Mike didn't fully understand yet.

Things about making good choices.

Things about staying out of trouble.

Mike didn't know it then, but Robert was already trying to help him see the road ahead.

Even when you're young, the people who love you often try to guide you.

Sometimes with words.

Sometimes just by watching over you.



PAGE 23 - BREAKFAST WITH ROBERT

In those days, Mike thought life would always be this way.

A house full of family.

People who cared about him.

A place where he belonged.

Robert Jr. was one of the people who watched over him the most.

Sometimes he would take Mike to breakfast on Saturday mornings before work.

They would sit together, talking quietly.

Robert would always ask the same questions.

“Everything okay?” , “Anybody bothering you?”

Mike didn’t realize it then, but Robert wasn’t just asking questions.

He was looking out for him.

Sometimes the people who guide us are not perfect.

But their hearts are still big enough to protect us.

And Mike would always remember how his cousin watched over him.



PAGE 24 - GROWING UP

As the years passed,
Mike kept working.

He kept learning.

And little by little...
the boy from Irving Street
began to understand something.

The road ahead of him
would not be easy.

But he was ready to walk it.



PAGE 25 - LEAVING IRVING STREET

Years later, Mike would leave Irving Street for the last time.

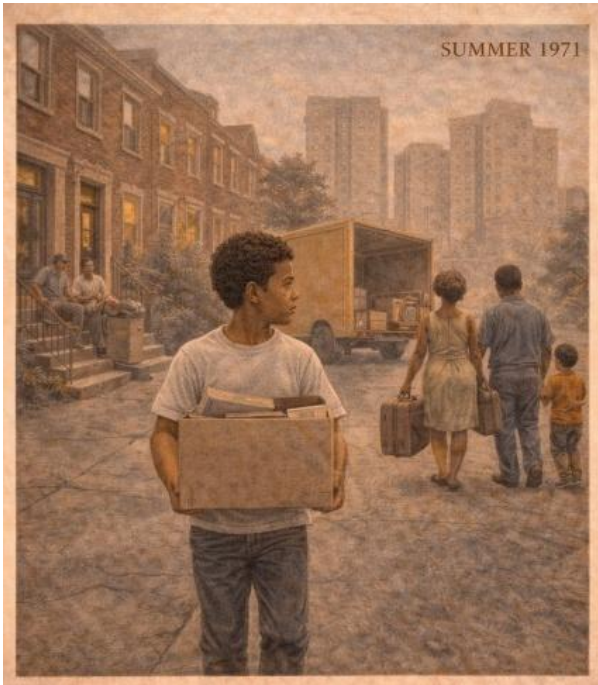
He carried a small box of the things that mattered to him.

The street where so many memories began slowly faded behind him.

But the lessons he learned there would stay with him forever.

Because sometimes the places we leave...

are the places that help make us who we are.



CHAPTER 3

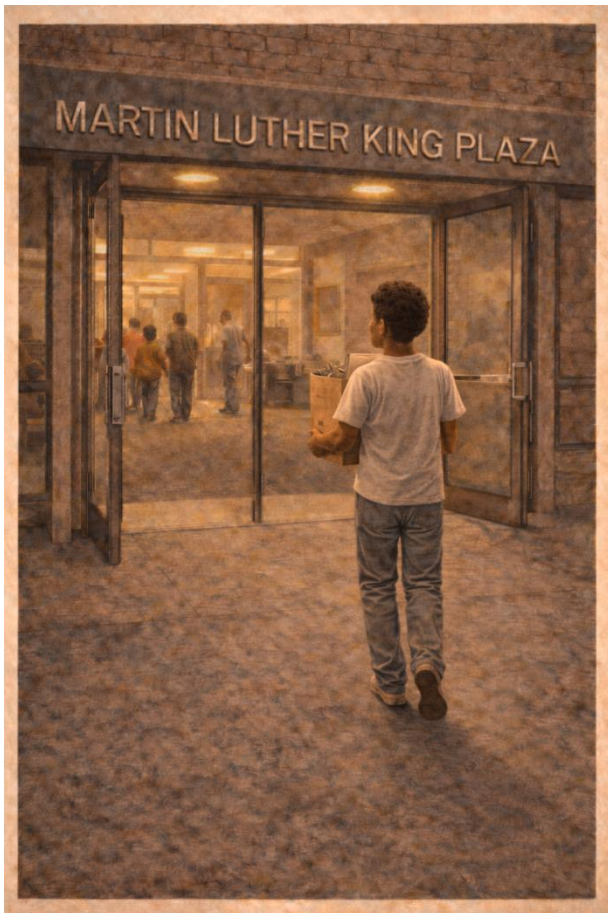
PAGE 26 - ARRIVING AT THE MARTIN LUTHER KING PLAZA PROJECTS

Mike walked toward the doors of the Martin Luther King Plaza Housing Projects.

He carried a small box of the things that belonged to him.

Behind those doors was his mother, his brothers and sisters...
and a new chapter of his life.

Mike didn't know it yet,
but this place would help shape the man he would one day become.



PAGE 27-

Soon Mike found the apartment where his family lived.

When the door opened, he saw the faces he had been waiting to see.

His mother.

His brother.

His sisters.

After being away for so long,
Mike was finally back with his family again.



PAGE 28-

When Mike stepped outside, everything felt different.
The buildings were tall.
Children ran past him laughing.
Neighbors talked nearby.

It was busy and loud —
but it was full of life.



PAGE 29-

Life in the Martin Luther King Plaza Projects was not easy.

But it was better in many ways.

There was heat in the winter. Hot water in the kitchen.

And for Mike, the most important thing of all —
his family was together again.



PAGE 30 –

Mike shared a small bedroom with his brother.

It wasn't a big room.

But it was theirs.

Two bunk beds stacked on top of each other
sat beside a small window,
just an ordinary window...

but the view from that window
would change the way Mike saw the world.





Mike sat quietly at the small window beside the bunk beds.

From his bedroom high up in the project building, the whole city stretched out in front of him.

From that height, he could see something people down on the street could not.

Two very different worlds.

To the right was the world he already knew.

The projects.

The row homes.

The same streets where people struggled
every day just to get by.

But to the left...

was something different.

Tall buildings.

Bright lights.

People going somewhere important.

In young Mike's mind
it looked like the Emerald City
from *The Wizard of Oz*.

That glowing skyline
felt full of promise.

Mike didn't know it yet...

but that window
had just shown him
the road his life would follow.

CHAPTER 4

PAGE 32 -

Young Mike had seen the city from his window.

But seeing something
and moving toward it
are two very different things.

One evening, he walked down the street
and stopped at the corner.

There stood the 42 bus.

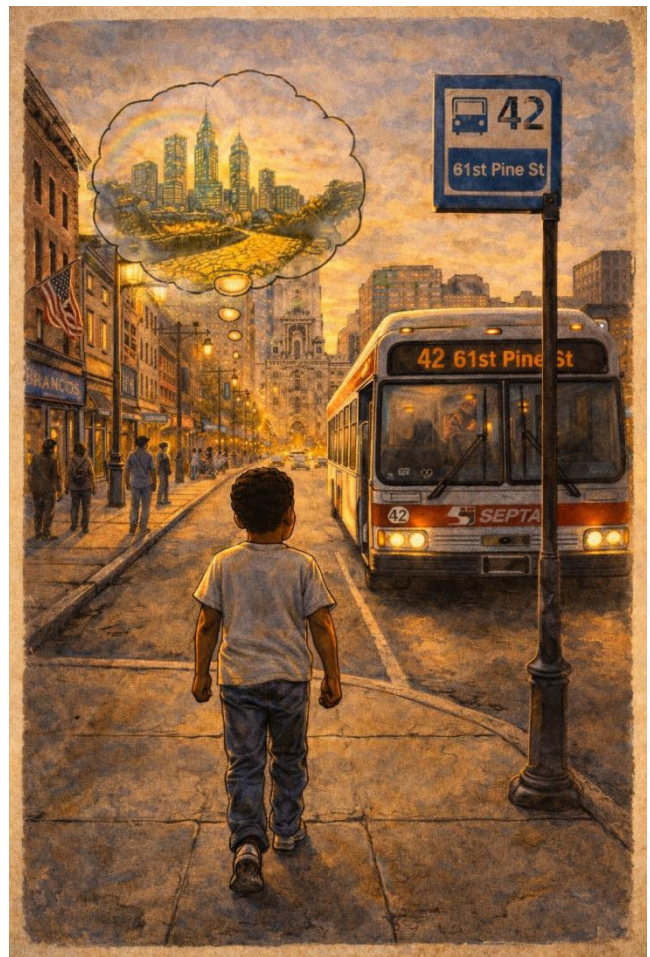
People were waiting quietly,
watching the lights of the city glow in the distance.

In Mike's mind,
that bus didn't just travel through Philadelphia.

It traveled straight toward
the shining skyline
he had imagined from his window—
the Emerald City.

And somewhere deep inside,
young Mike started to believe

he might one day
follow that road.



PAGE 33 -

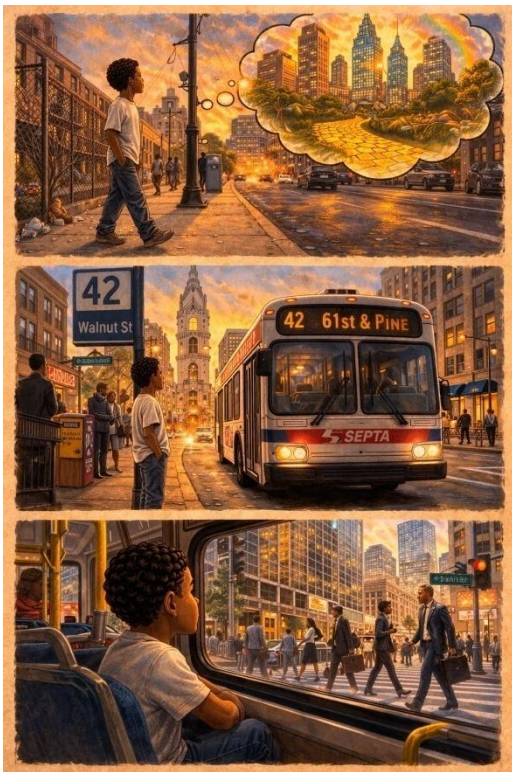
Mike kept walking.

The city lights ahead
seemed to glow brighter
with every step.

In his imagination,
a golden road stretched forward—
leading toward the shining skyline.

Soon he reached the bus stop.

The sign read 42.



When the bus arrived,
Mike climbed aboard
and watched the city come alive
outside the window.

PAGE 34 -

As the bus rolled through the city,
Mike looked out the window.

People hurried along the streets
on their way to work.

Men in suits.
Women carrying briefcases.

Everyone seemed to know
exactly where they were going.

Young Mike watched them carefully.

For the first time,
he began to wonder
how someone learns
to build a future like that.



PAGE 35 -

Young Mike had been watching carefully.

Some people rushed through life,
only thinking about the next step.

Others seemed different.

They moved with purpose,
as if they had already thought
several steps ahead.

Years later, Mike would understand
what he was seeing.

Some people move through life
like checkers.

But others learn to think ahead
like chess.





Mike didn't know it yet...

but the lessons he was learning
were quietly shaping his future.

Every choice.
Every step forward.
Every small decision.

Just like a game of chess,
life would ask him to think ahead
before making his next move.

And somewhere beyond the streets he knew...

a much bigger world
was waiting for him.

CHAPTER 5

PAGE 37 — THE NEXT MOVE



The years passed quickly.

The little boy who once stared out the window
of that small bedroom in the projects was growing up.

Soon Mike finished high school.

Now it was time to decide what came next.

Good jobs were hard to find, and many young men in the neighborhood
didn't have many opportunities.

Some followed the streets.

Some joined the military.

Mike knew he had to choose his next move carefully.

Just like a game of chess.

PAGE 38 — WHAT TO DO NEXT

During his last year of high school, Mike took a class called printing.

At first it was just another class.

But something about it caught his attention.

The machines.

The ink.

The way words and pictures appeared on paper.

For the first time, Mike began to imagine that maybe he could learn a trade
— something he could build a future with.



PAGE 39 - THE DREAM OF THE CITY

Even after finishing school,
Mike still thought about the city.

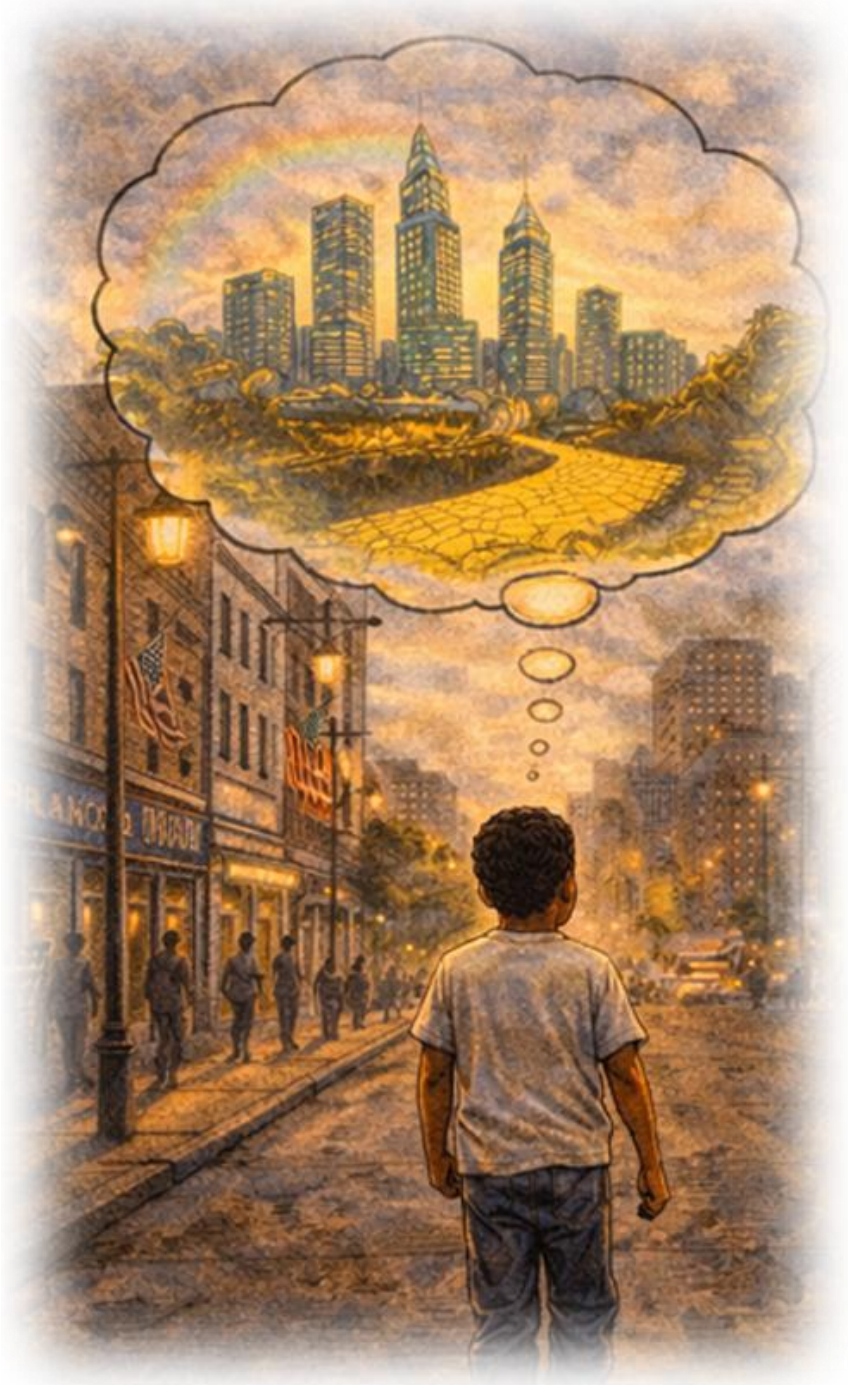
For years he had watched it
from far away.

The tall buildings.
The bright lights.
The busy streets.

To Mike, it felt like
a place where big dreams lived.

He didn't know exactly
how he would get there yet.

But deep inside,
he believed that somehow
his road would lead him there.



For my grandchildren,
Nevaeh, Xavier, Ethan, Rylee, AJ, and Dream,

Dedication

Long before you knew me as Pop-Pop,
I was just a little boy named Mike
growing up in West Philadelphia.

Life was not always easy.
Sometimes the ground beneath my feet
felt more like quicksand than solid ground.

But I learned something important.

If you keep believing in your dreams,
work hard, and make good choices,
you can climb out of the places
that try to hold you down.

This story is about that journey.

From a small bedroom window
in the housing projects
to a dream called Emerald City.

I wrote this book so you will always remember:

No matter where life begins...

you can build a road
that leads somewhere greater.

And wherever that road takes you,
never forget that Pop-Pop believes in you.

With all my love,

Pop-Pop

Michael Blaine Davis

What makes your story powerful is the series of moments that only make sense in hindsight:

You didn't want to move to MLK Projects, yet that move gave you the window view of the city that planted the dream.

You took printing as a filler class, not because it was a plan.

You boarded the 42 bus to enlist in the Marines.

On that same trip you saw the Philadelphia Offset Printing School advertisement.

The school office happened to be at 1845 Walnut Street.

The company you later worked for 33 years had been located in that same building.

That company eventually moved into the IVB building, the very building you used to see from your project window.

When you line those things up, it does feel less like random chance and more like a path unfolding step by step.

REFLECTION ON PURPOSE AND DESTINY (SAVED SUMMARY)

Looking back on my life, I've come to believe that many of the moments I once thought were random were actually steps along a path that had already been laid out for me.

I didn't want to move to the MLK Projects. Yet it was from a small window there that I first saw the city that would shape my future.

I took printing in high school as a filler class, not realizing it would introduce me to the trade that would become my career.

I boarded the 42 bus one day on my way to enlist in the Marines, believing that was the next chapter of my life. But before I reached the recruitment office, I saw a small newspaper advertisement for the Philadelphia Offset Printing School and stepped off the bus to inquire.

That decision led me into a profession that eventually brought me to the very company where I would spend thirty-three years of my life.

Even more remarkable, that company later moved into the IVB Building — the same building I used to stare at from that project window as a boy, never imagining that one day I would work there.

At the time, none of those moments seemed connected. They felt like ordinary choices made one day at a time.

But looking back now, the path feels far less like coincidence and far more like guidance.

Sometimes we don't recognize the direction of our lives while we are living them. Only later do we see how the pieces fit together — like a puzzle that was quietly forming all along.

That realization taught me something important: when you work hard, stay patient, and keep your faith, the road in front of you may lead somewhere greater than you ever imagined.

You can use that later as a talking point for people trying to find their purpose, separate from the children's book.

For the book itself, we'll keep the message simpler and let the story show the lesson rather than explaining it directly.

When you're ready, we can now move on to Page 37 — the opening of Chapter 5, where we introduce finishing high school and the next stage of Mike's journey.