

LIONHEART

THE JOEL LOMNICK STORY



VOLUME 1

A PUBLIC SNEAK PREVIEW

Before the Roar

This ten-page edition presents selected first-person excerpts and lightly condensed transitions from the completed first volume. It introduces the voice, emotional weight, and movement of the memoir without replacing the full book.

Names, events, and experiences are presented as remembered by the author. Selected for public preview by the author.

Content note: This preview includes descriptions of domestic violence and childhood trauma.

In my world, survival wasn't a choice; it was the rent you paid just to keep breathing. Survival came with non-negotiable codes passed down to keep Black kids alive in a world that was not built for us.

My biological family was my first pride - the cradle and the crucible, lifting me one moment and testing me the next. Love showed up in discipline, and protection meant you never faced the storm alone, even when the storm was coming from inside the house.

Engineering eventually gave me something the chaos could not: structure. Systems, circuits, and logic did not lie. If you wired it right, the lights came on, and that honesty felt like relief. But no degree, paycheck, or title could answer every question at home. Identity, faith, ministry, and mentorship kept pressing their way into the same life until all of it braided into one name: Lionheart. Strong but not stone. Tender but not weak. Scarred but not silent.

"This is not the whole story. It is just the opening roar."

1981 - ROCHESTER, NEW YORK

The First Blueprint

I was born Joel Maurice Lomnick in Rochester, New York, with lungs strong enough to make nurses wince and a mother tough enough to raise me with grit, faith, and the discipline she carried from earning an accounting degree.

My mother, Cathy, could hold the world up on a small salary and still make you feel like royalty. She helped people find homes while fighting to keep one steady for her own boys.

My father, Wilfred, was a complicated man - an electrician, carpenter, and Army veteran who carried brilliance in one hand and volatility in the other. Loving him meant holding your breath, waiting to see which version of him came through the door.

Our house on Stanley Street was crowded, loud, funny, and vibrantly alive. Family meant sharing space, food, secrets, and sometimes discipline. In that house, I learned how to read a room, find a corner of peace, and shine with almost nothing.

Survival was not an extracurricular activity in our household. It was the curriculum.

"Family was the cradle and the crucible."

NOVEMBER 6, 1995 - STERLING STREET

The Night Childhood Ended

“The world split in two.”

November 6, 1995. A Monday night. My brother Jasen and I were asleep when my mother's scream sliced through the dark: “JOEY! JASEN! HELP!” We ran down the hall, and when we reached her room, the world split in two.

My father was on top of my mother with a butcher knife in his hand, and her shirt was already blood-soaked. My brother froze in terror, but for me, fear did not matter - survival took over.

I launched myself at my father's back and started swinging, fully aware he could turn the knife on me at any second. One thought crystallized in my mind: if I die tonight, I die saving my mother. So be it.

The police report reduced everything to a few bland words, failing to capture the blood on the sheets, my little brother sobbing in the doorway, or the moment my childhood ended.

The next morning, I went to school with my mask firmly in place: the good student, the athlete, the jokester. Nobody knew I had fought my own father to keep my mother alive the night before.

AUGUST 1999 - ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

Trash Bags and Mini-Fridges

August 1999. My mother, brother, and I rolled into RIT like we were staging a heist. Everything I owned was stuffed in trash bags, beat-up suitcases, and taped boxes, while white families around us unloaded U-Hauls filled with matching dorm sets and mini-fridges.

My mother carried exhaustion, pride, and the unspoken question of how long we could afford this. Hauling my life up four flights of stairs to a roommate with neatly folded clothes was my first taste of independence: trash bags versus mini-fridges.

Then the first red D landed on my desk. Joel “Most Likely to Succeed” Lomnick stared at it like it belonged to somebody else, realizing that physics, calculus, and programming demanded languages I had not yet learned.

I could go entire days without seeing another Black student in class. But when I finally found Unity House, it felt like breathing again. The music, spades tables, and familiar food reminded me that I was not only a dot in a lecture hall - I was part of a people.

ALANA became a place to breathe.

“Trash bags versus mini-fridges.”

GOSPEL, NSBE, AND BLACK BELONGING

“Gospel gave me spirit, and NSBE gave me strategy.”

The Rooms That Kept Me Alive

If Unity House gave me family, Gospel Ensemble gave me sanctuary. I entered my first rehearsal expecting to watch, but instead, the room shook with harmony, laughter, and survival.

Students packed shoulder to shoulder, turning sterile campus walls into a cathedral. The ensemble became a training ground for leadership, where I moved from assistant director to president and blended technology with community. Carrying that legacy felt heavy, but holy.

NSBE taught me another critical form of survival: how to organize, prepare, advocate, and leave the door open behind me.

Together, those rooms helped keep me in school long enough to become the engineer everybody had predicted - and the leader I had not yet imagined.

2003-2007 - RHYTHM AND PUBLIC VOICE

The Drum Spoke First

The first time I entered a West African drum and dance rehearsal, the room felt older than the building. The drums were not background music; they were instructions.

Every rhythm told the dancers where to land, when to answer, and how to become part of something larger than themselves. I learned to stop protecting myself from the moment and let the rhythm move through me.

Performance became another kind of engineering - timing, structure, and trust - except this system sweated, shouted, laughed, and remembered. Rhythm became memory, language, and ministry.



On Sunday mornings, WITR gave me another room. The studio was no bigger than a dorm, but behind the microphone, it felt infinite. Elders requested songs, mothers asked for prayer, and gospel traveled into kitchens across Rochester. I learned to let silence breathe and trust that my voice could carry people.

"The drums were not background music; they were instructions."

2005 - ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

A Degree and an Empty Seat

"Grief has a way of tinting even the brightest days."

Graduation should have been a mountaintop, but grief has a way of tinting even the brightest days.

My grandmother Marzell died weeks before I finished RIT. I walked across the stage as a first-generation engineer carrying the Lomnick name onto a diploma, but one of the people I most wanted to see it was gone.

The degree proved that I had survived the equations, the isolation, the financial strain, the failures, and the expectation that I would become the success story everyone had predicted.

But achievement did not erase absence. The celebration carried an empty seat.

ACHIEVEMENT

ABSENCE

INHERITANCE

2005-2007 - CORN HILL CROSSROADS

The Promised Land Never Arrived

I moved into a new loft in Corn Hill, expecting the family to celebrate. Instead came painful whispers questioning why I lived somewhere so expensive, while I was already helping with the mortgage, car note, and schoolbooks.

The loft was proof I had survived, yet the promised land never arrived. Kodak was collapsing, and engineering work gave me discipline but not direction. Rochester had given me culture, survival, and voice, but it was also suffocating me.

The degree had opened a door, but it had not handed me a map. Achievement had changed what people expected from me without changing how much grief, obligation, and uncertainty I carried.

By 2007, I understood that staying could become another kind of surrender.

"The loft was proof I had survived, yet the promised land never arrived."

THE ROAD TURNS EAST

Same Unfinished Heart

Volume 1 ends at the edge of departure. By 2007, Rochester could no longer hold every version of me.

The family story was unfinished, and faith was complicated. Engineering had given me a profession, but not yet a home inside myself.

I left my Corn Hill loft in the care of someone I loved like a younger brother, packed what I could carry, and pointed my life toward Troy.

**New city.
New household.
Same unfinished heart.**

"The road continues in Volume 2: The Reinvention Years."

Volume 1 - Completed Memoir

Volume 2 - The Reinvention Years