

LIONHEART

THE JOEL LOMNICK STORY



VOLUME 2

A PUBLIC SNEAK PREVIEW

Before the Road Opens Again

This ten-page edition presents selected first-person excerpts and condensed transitions from the developing second volume. It introduces the voice, emotional weight, humor, contradictions, and movement of the story without replacing the full manuscript.

Volume 2 begins where Volume 1 ends: with me leaving Rochester in 2007 and trying to build a new life in Troy, New York. From there, the story moves through Albany, Schenectady, and Richmond, Virginia, arriving at July 2026 with the work of becoming still unfinished.

Dates, names, sequence, and wording may continue to change as the full manuscript is revised and verified.

Content note: This preview includes grief, housing instability, relationship trauma, identity conflict, and references to childhood and family hardship.

"I did not leave Rochester empty-handed. The ghosts packed themselves."

Lionheart: The Joel Lomnick Story, Volume 2

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

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2007 - TROY, NEW YORK

The Chrysalis

By 2007, Rochester had become both sanctuary and sarcophagus. It had raised me, educated me, embarrassed me, protected me, and nearly suffocated me. Rochester had given me family, culture, Gospel Ensemble, NSBE, African drum and dance, engineering, radio, chosen brothers, and enough grief to require its own moving truck.

So I left.

I arrived in Troy with a new engineering position, a U-Haul full of mismatched furniture, and the dangerous belief that changing cities might change me. The hills were steeper. The winters were colder. The buildings looked like they remembered every factory that had closed and every family that had packed up and gone somewhere warmer.

Troy did not look like reinvention. It looked like old brick, narrow streets, complicated parking, and rent due on the first.

The apartment I shared with someone I loved like family became part home, part therapy office, part creative studio, and part emergency command center. Books leaned against recording equipment. Candles burned beside vision boards. Gospel music competed with television, work complaints, food wrappers, and arguments about who had used the last of something without replacing it.

We were two Black men trying to make adulthood look intentional. Most days, it looked like improvisation.

We were not simply sharing an apartment. We were trying to become people we had never seen modeled.

JULY 2008 - GRIEF CROSSES THE THRUWAY

When the Phone Rang

My mother died in July 2008.

There is no clever opening for that sentence. No Deadpool joke. No engineering metaphor. No gospel flourish strong enough to make the words less final.

Cathy Lomnick - the woman who had kept boys fed on numbers that did not add up, who could help other families find housing while fighting to keep our own household from collapsing, who survived poverty, illness, judgment, and nearly everything else life threw at her - was suddenly gone.

Death did not arrive like the movies. There was no perfectly scored montage. There were telephone calls, arrangements, decisions, relatives, unfinished conversations, and that strange administrative cruelty grief brings with it.

One month later, a musician I had come to regard as a brother lost his mother too. Grief fused us together. I became manager, promoter, strategist, cheerleader, driver, adviser, protector, believer, and occasionally the person asking why absolutely nothing had started on time.

I poured myself into helping somebody else become visible. Partly because I believed in him. Partly because helping him gave me somewhere to put the love that no longer had a mother to receive it.

The world expects paperwork from you while your heart is still trying to understand the word never.

2008-2014 - ALBANY AND SCHENECTADY

Grief Learned to Dance

Albany taught me that grief could wear church clothes.

I entered a historic Black congregation carrying engineering credentials, gospel experience, cultural ambition, and enough unresolved pain to power the sanctuary for a month. I sang, served, created programs, supported ministries, and learned how influence moved through a church long before anyone admitted politics had entered the room.

Church gave me purpose, but it also gave me another stage on which to perform fine. The sanctuary was sacred. The people inside it were still people. That distinction cost me several lessons.

Culture remained one of the places I returned to when words could not hold everything. African drum and dance brought rhythm back to a body that had become too accustomed to bracing for impact. When the drums started, I did not have to explain my resume, my grief, my sexuality, or my family. I only had to listen.

Writing became another form of movement. I created characters bold enough to say what I still whispered. On paper, I could rearrange the world. Real life had no such respect for outlines.

There was laughter. A lot of laughter. Because Black people can turn a near-disaster into a story before the tow truck arrives.

Albany did not make me peaceful. It made me rooted enough to keep becoming.

JULY 9, 2011 - NEW YORK CITY

Brotherhood Became Work

In 2011, I entered Iota Phi Theta Fraternity, Incorporated, looking for brotherhood, tradition, Black male connection, and a place where men could challenge one another without pretending we were invulnerable.

I found those things. I also found meetings. Many, many meetings.

Fraternity life gave me brothers, ritual, responsibility, history, and another complicated room in which identity could be both affirmed and concealed. I learned the five foundational principles - Scholarship, Leadership, Citizenship, Fidelity, and Brotherhood - and slowly learned that reciting principles was much easier than building a life around them.

Crossing into Iota connected me to my line brother Gary Washington, I-Rise, and placed me inside a tradition larger than either of us. Brotherhood is not always sameness. Sometimes it is the decision to keep showing up after the easy similarities run out.

Titles came later: Advisor. Strategist. Webmaster. Vice Polaris. Intake leader. Mentor. The dependable brother with the documents, graphics, website access, historical context, backup plan, and probably a charger.

Over time, I stopped judging chapters by how loudly they performed loyalty. The real question was whether the organization could protect younger men, survive leadership transitions, and leave something useful behind.

The letters looked good on jackets. The principles looked better in practice.

2014 - RICHMOND, VIRGINIA

The Floor Vanished

I arrived in Richmond in 2014 with a promised job, a U-Haul full of belongings, and a gas tank full of faith. Then the job disappeared.

No onboarding. No desk. No clean explanation that made the situation less devastating. The professional floor I expected to stand on simply vanished.

For approximately six weeks, my car became bedroom, confessional, sanctuary, closet, dining room, and war room. Planet Fitness became my bathroom. My retirement account became oxygen. Parking lots became strategic decisions: bright enough to feel safe, dark enough not to attract questions.

I told almost nobody. Pride can be a survival tool until it becomes another locked door.

Homelessness did not erase my degree. It made the degree feel like an accusation. How could a man with an electrical engineering education, years of experience, leadership credentials, church history, fraternity brothers, and a professional wardrobe be sleeping in a car? Easily, apparently.

My younger brother helped me secure an apartment. Then came a contract engineering position in Charlottesville. The commute was punishing. The pay was low. The work was fragile. But even an exhausting road could feel like proof that the ground might eventually hold.

My car became bedroom, confession booth, sanctuary, and war room.

THE RICHMOND YEARS

The Rooms That Gave Me Back to Myself

Richmond became a collection of rooms. Not every room was safe. Not every room lasted. But several gave pieces of me back.

The church balcony became a place where technology and ministry met. Wires, cameras, microphones, computers, livestream software, sound checks, and Sunday worship all occupied the same sacred space. Media ministry was not decoration. It was connection.

The dance floor returned joy to my body. West African drum and dance carried memory. Line dancing carried laughter. Community could be built one count at a time - five, six, seven, eight - without requiring every movement to become a metaphor for trauma.

Sometimes a grapevine is just a grapevine. Sometimes joy does not require a dissertation.

Mentoring gave the work a future tense. Sitting with Black boys, college students, younger professionals, fraternity members, engineers, and emerging leaders, I recognized brilliance that often arrived disguised as silence, humor, anger, nervousness, overconfidence, or I am good.

I could not rewrite my childhood, but I could help somebody else enter adulthood with more preparation, vocabulary, documentation, backup, and encouragement than I had.

Mentorship was sitting beside someone in the mess and saying, Let us figure out the next part.

LOVE, HOME, IDENTITY, AND VISIBILITY

The House Inside Me

Richmond gave me love. Not one clean, uncomplicated version. It gave me relationships that felt like rescue, relationships that felt like home, and relationships that revealed how often I had confused being needed with being safe.

I had learned how to build households before I learned how to rest inside them. I knew how to cover bills, encourage dreams, solve emergencies, organize plans, and make room for people in transition. But building a home is not the same as occupying one. Loyalty is not the same as fear. Being useful is not the same as being cherished.

For years, I treated bisexuality like a private technical condition: real, consequential, and never to be discussed outside a controlled room. Respectability provided protection, but it also required reduction.

I had to stop editing myself so aggressively that only the most publicly convenient version survived. Masculinity did not disappear when tenderness entered the room. Faith did not evaporate because questions remained. Leadership did not require emotional starvation.

As the walls between the rooms of my life came down, engineering, Lomnick Professional Services, Lionheart, church media, fraternity leadership, mentoring, and cultural work began to appear as one life instead of unrelated identities.

I spent years believing legitimacy would arrive when somebody handed me the right title. Instead, legitimacy came through repetition: showing up, learning the work, documenting the work, repairing what failed, teaching what I learned, and helping another person see a path.

I did not become fearless. I became less willing to abandon myself.

JULY 2026 - THE STORY REMAINS OPEN

Still Building. Still Healing. Still Becoming.

Volume 2 is not a victory lap.

There is no final scene where every debt disappears, every relationship becomes healthy, every health concern resolves, every project succeeds, and the PE license descends from Heaven surrounded by a choir of angels holding NCEES-approved calculators.

That would be convenient. It would also be a lie.

Survival, success, service, intimacy, faith, ambition, health, money, grief, leadership, and legacy do not resolve in a straight line. Some chapters remain active. The man at the end of Volume 2 has not solved himself. He has simply become more honest about the work.

The road from Rochester to Troy, from Troy to Albany, from Albany to Richmond, and from survival toward legacy has been funny, painful, spiritual, technical, romantic, reckless, generous, expensive, healing, frustrating, and occasionally held together by prayer, a full tank of gas, and the last available credit limit.

In other words, it has been mine.

"The road continues beyond the last page."

Lionheart: The Joel Lomnick Story

Volume 2 - Work-in-Progress Preview

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