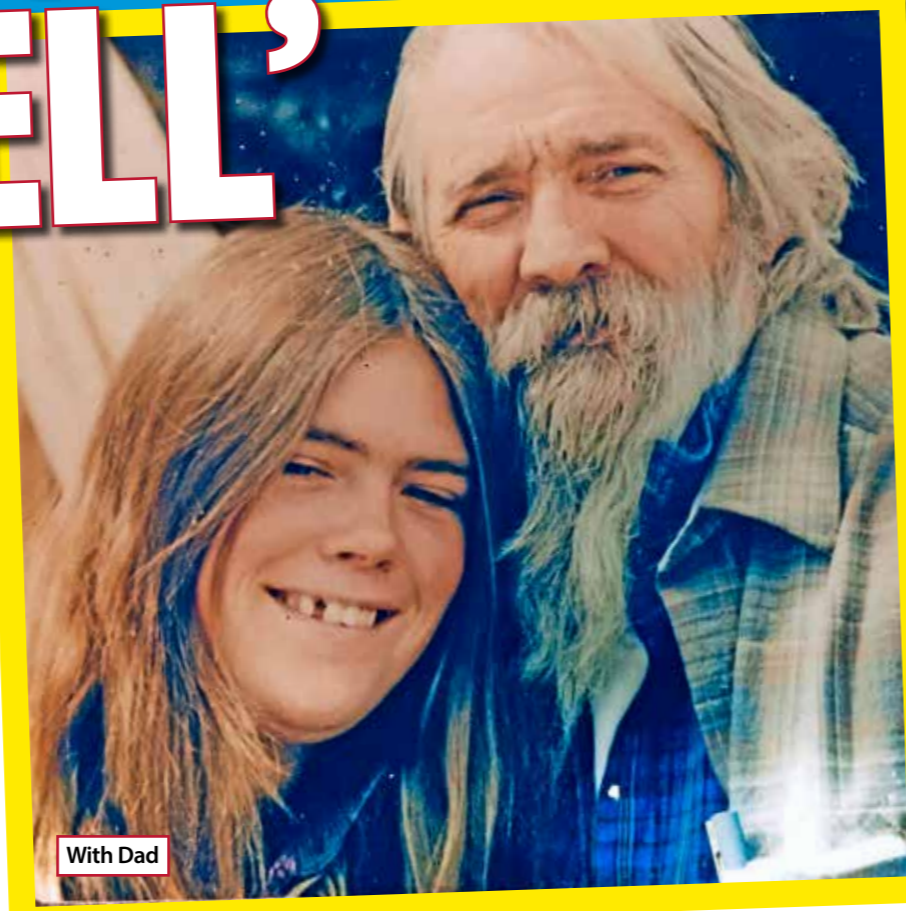
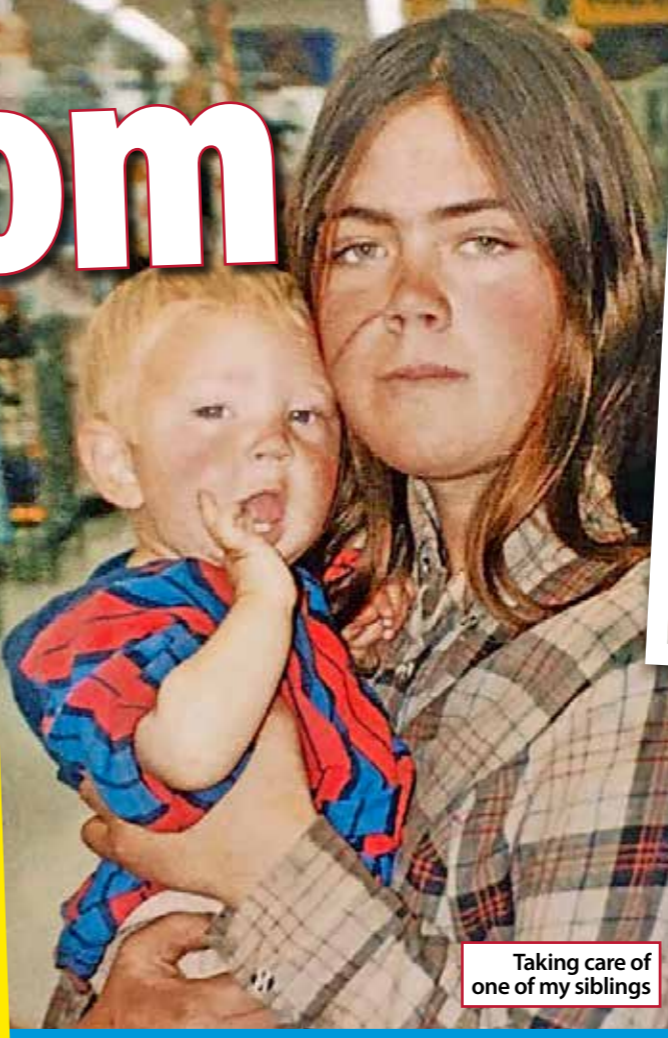


# 'Set me FREE from this HELL'

## When Elishaba learnt just how depraved her father was, she had to escape...



With Dad



Taking care of one of my siblings



There were 15 kids in our family

I hopped on Dad's lap, craving his attention. 'God gives every man one special daughter,' he told me. I was a real daddy's girl. But I was also afraid of him. My dad, Robert Hale, ruled us with his fists and a horse whip, using the Bible as justification. We rarely left our isolated mountain home because he said the outside would lead us to sin. We didn't have TV or radio. The closest my siblings and I got to an education was Dad reading us the Bible.

Even Mum, who'd had me at 17 when dad was in his 30s, was dominated by him, and spent most of her time pregnant. I didn't question anything as a child. Dad, or Papa as he insisted on being called, was like God to me. I thought if I displeased him I'd

go to hell. When I was 19, Dad made an announcement. 'We're going on a special camping trip together,' he told me. 'Your time has come.' We packed up the car, and set off for the woods. But when we got there, Dad pushed me roughly to the ground and raped me. My instincts were screaming that it was unnatural. Afterwards, I stared at him in shock. I felt shame over what he'd done to me.

'If you speak against it, you're speaking against the Holy Spirit and can never be forgiven,' Dad thundered. Believing it was my biblical duty to satisfy him, I became his sex slave, raped daily in the woods or an outbuilding. But one night, he dragged me to his bedroom. Mum was lying right beside me, but he still violated me. Like all of us, Mum lived in terror of his rages and could do nothing.

'God, set me free from this hell,' I prayed. The abuse continued for years. 'If you are a good daughter, then I will not hurt your mother and your brothers and sisters,' he told me. But he would still beat my mum and siblings. When I was 25, my parents and I, and my 14 brothers and sisters, moved

to a remote cabin in Alaska. It was bitterly cold and 14 miles from the nearest town. We survived on benefit payments and what we grew, foraged and hunted for. Desperate for cash, Dad let four of my brothers work as hunting guides. Exposed to the outside world, they gradually questioned his teachings. One day, Dad went berserk. He beat me, then locked me in our shed where he raped me over three days. Finally, Dad let me back into the house. But when my brother Joseph saw me, he was horrified. 'What did he do to you?' he exclaimed. 'It's OK, don't make a fuss,' I begged. But Joseph wouldn't let it rest. 'We all want to hear why

Elishaba looks so beaten up?' he angrily asked. 'Don't you dare challenge me!' Dad screamed as he threw him out. Another brother, Joshua, stepped in before Dad broke his nose.

**'Don't you dare challenge me!'**

Within a few days Joshua and three more of my brothers fled the cabin. I felt emboldened by their escape. When I told Dad that it was wrong for him to sleep with me, he slapped my face. Then he punched me to the ground and whipped me. 'Stop hurting my daughter!' Mum screamed. 'Are you going to be a hero and take her punishment?' Dad sneered. I gave in to spare Mum. Not long after, I knew I had to escape with my youngest sister, Jerusalem, who was 16. 'If Dad catches us, he'll kill us,'

I told her. A few days later, Dad was leaving for town with two of my younger brothers. Jerusalem and I gathered some food together, and loaded up a snowmobile. At first, it wouldn't start, but we found a spare spark plug and headed off. When we finally made it to town, we found our brothers Joshua and Joseph. They took us to the door of a local pastor and his wife. 'But why have you run away?' they asked. I told them about Dad's attacks. When I gave a statement to a police officer, he had to explain the words for my private parts. I didn't know what they were called. Dad went on the run, and was the most wanted man in Alaska before he was caught. The newspapers called him 'Papa Pilgrim'. While he awaited trial, I got used to the real world. I was almost 30 with no life experience. Even though Dad used religion to justify his abuse, I was

comforted by the Bible. It said I should forgive. I tried, but it was so hard. It was even harder to forgive myself. I felt ashamed and didn't trust men. The pastor had a friend, Matt, who helped my brothers adjust. Over time, we became friends and I felt ready to be loved by a man. On my 31st birthday, Matt asked me to marry him, and we married four months later. Meanwhile, in court, my dad Robert Hale admitted his abuse. He got 14 years for rape, coercion and incest, but the following year, aged 67, he died in jail from diabetes complications. Try as I might, I couldn't forgive him. So, I tried reclaiming places where he'd assaulted me. Matt and I went hiking in the Alaskan wilderness where we built new memories. But it still took me another seven years before I was ready to truly forgive Dad. On Father's Day, I visited his grave. 'I forgive you, Papa,' I said before I read him a letter. Afterwards, I felt lighter. Matt and I went on to have two children, Esther and Michael. I threw myself into

motherhood, as well as helping other women heal from their own trauma with my Facebook support group, Unforsaken: Journey of Forgiveness. Years of counselling and mentoring these women made me realise I was ready to make myself completely vulnerable to the world. Yet I knew I needed help to put my experiences on paper. Finding an author, Mike, I started sharing my story with him. Sometimes, I felt like giving up. 'But we've come so far,' Mike encouraged. 'I'm here to help you see this through. Your story matters.' Spurred on, I told him what I went through, and he wrote and wrote. He asked in-depth questions, like where we went to the toilet. Explaining that we had to use

a potty in the middle of the room by our father's chair was a devastating realisation. And having to share that I was sexually abused was heart-wrenching. After years of working on the book, I was finally ready to publish it. When *Out Of The Wilderness* finally hit book shelves, it was a big success. People flocked to my signings and speaking engagements. *I hope this helps others*, I thought. Since then, I've gone through highs and lows. Sadly, after 15 years of marriage, Matt and I divorced. Not long after, I began to feel unwell. At the hospital, a doctor had earth-shattering news. 'You have a brain tumour,' he said. I underwent surgery followed by chemotherapy and radiotherapy. Now I've beaten every obstacle I've faced has made me stronger. Today, I'm focussing on being the best mum I can be, and beating cancer. I'm also working to get my school qualifications so I can become a counsellor or life coach. I've overcome so much, nothing will stop me achieving my dreams.

**'I hope this helps others'**



Michael, me and Esther

**Elishaba Doersken, 48**  
● Elishaba has waived her right to anonymity



Me as a young girl