



**A SHOCKING STORY
OF SURVIVAL**

ESCAPE

FROM

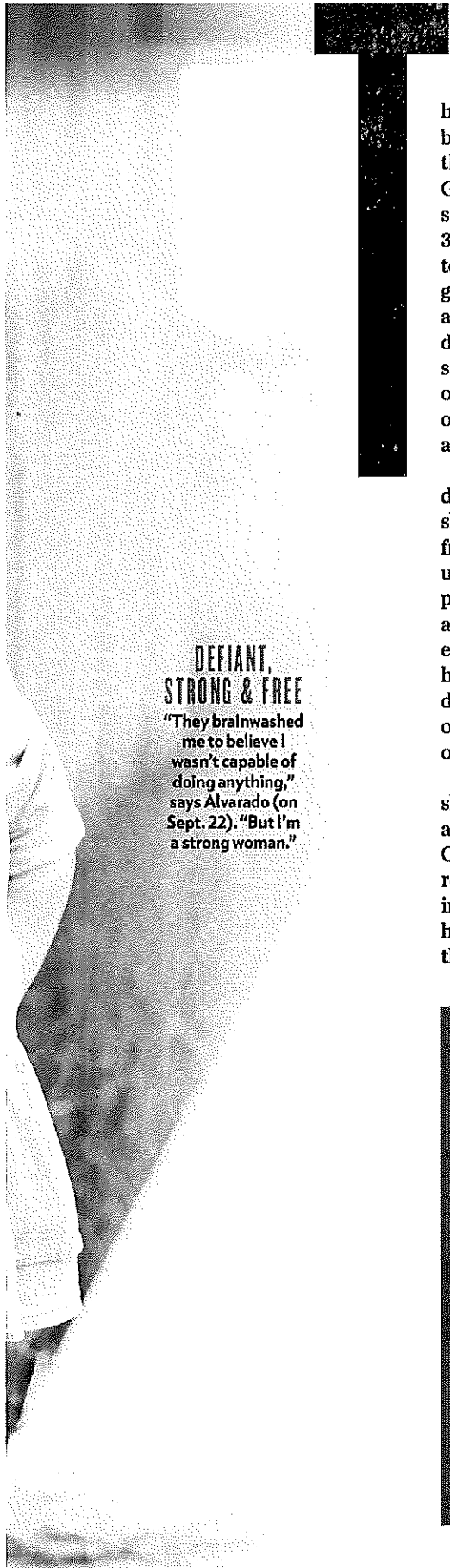
HELL

Abby Alvarado suffered 17 years of horrific sexual abuse at the hands of her aunt and uncle. But the power of love—and her own inner strength—gave her the courage to break free

By **JOHN DODD** and **CHRISTINE PELISEK**

Photograph by **EANN MÜLLER**





**DEFIANT,
STRONG & FREE**
“They brainwashed me to believe I wasn’t capable of doing anything,” says Alvarado (on Sept. 22). “But I’m a strong woman.”

The local weatherman had predicted rain, but as Abby Alvarado strolled through the paths of San Antonio’s Botanical Garden recently, she saw nothing but sunshine. Posing for photos, the 30-year-old giggled while a stylist touched up her makeup and burst into a goofy grin every time she glanced over at her husband, Rudy. “Knowing that I don’t have to be scared anymore,” she says, “feels like the weight of the world has been taken off my shoulders. I feel like a superhero.”

Certainly Abby has faced down more evil than anyone should have to. For 17 years, from the time she was just 8 until the age of 25, she was physically and sexually abused by her uncle and eventually forced to bear him and his wife three children they claimed as their own. “I was a hostage in my own house,” she says.

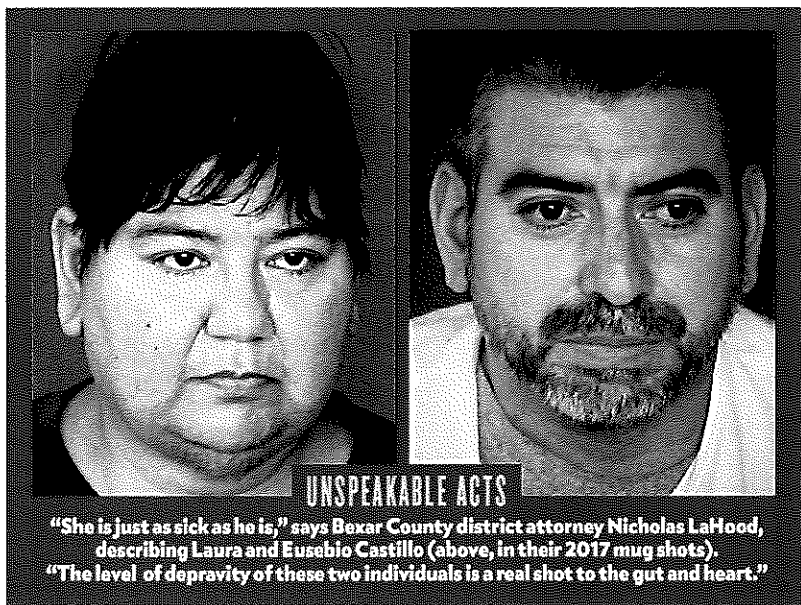
Finally, in 2014, with help from Rudy, she was able to escape with her children and help bring her abusers to justice. In October her uncle Eusebio Castillo, 48, received five life sentences after pleading guilty to 10 counts of sexual assault; his wife, Laura, 47, pleaded guilty to three counts of sexual assault and was

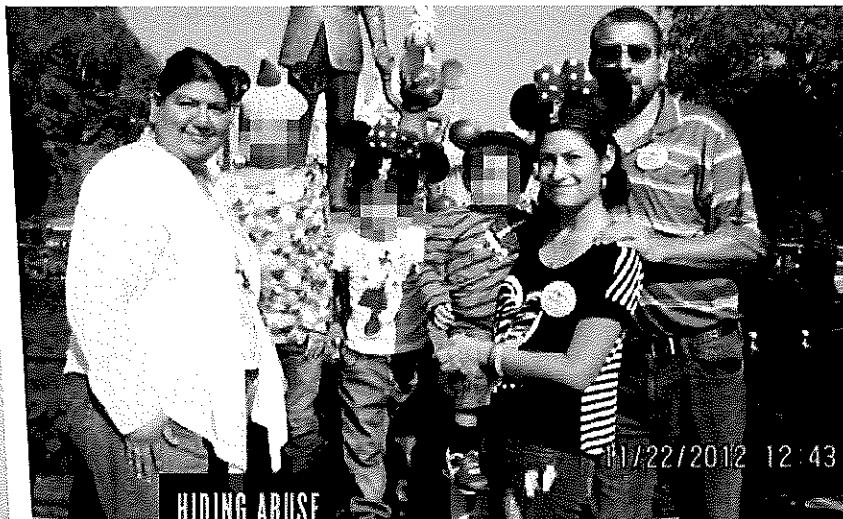
sentenced to 33 years in prison. “These two people are just pure evil,” says Bexar County district attorney Nicholas LaHood. “She [Alvarado] was so beaten down for years to not speak out that her energy and courage is really nothing short of heroic.”

Abby felt anything but heroic as a frightened 8-year-old in 1996, when she, along with her older sister and younger brother, was removed from their mother’s care by child-protective services in San Antonio. “Our mother had a drinking problem,” says Abby, whose father didn’t live with the family. The three siblings were sent to Honolulu to live with their mother’s half brother Eusebio, then a sergeant in the U.S. Army, and his wife, a child-care worker. “I didn’t want to leave my mom, but I thought living in Hawaii sounded like an

adventure,” recalls Abby. Within a month of the move, however, her adventure turned into a nightmare. Eusebio began creeping into her room at night, climbing up into her bunk bed and molesting her. “Afterward he would threaten me,” she says. “He’d say, ‘Don’t tell anybody. Just keep this to our-

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HIDING ABUSE IN PLAIN SIGHT

"The whole time I was always scared about what he might do to the children or to me," says Abby (left, and during a trip to Disneyland in 2012 with the family). "I was just so confused and depressed all the time. I never believed I had any strength."

selves." Abby told her aunt anyway, she says, "but she didn't believe me."

After two years the family relocated to Houston, where the abuse slowly got worse. "If I ever told him no," she recalls, "he would get mad, get his belt and spank me with it." While her siblings—who, she says, were initially unaware of the abuse—lived a fairly typical childhood filled with friends, sleepovers and sports, Abby was allowed to leave the family home only to attend school. But around age 13, she struck up enough courage to tell her best friend that Eusebio had begun raping her. The girl told her mother, who immediately called child-protective services. But before an investigation could be launched, the Castillos fled in the middle of the night. "We just packed everything up in the truck and left," says Abby. They soon began moving from one small Texas town to another, and Abby found herself even more isolated. "I was constantly

being watched," she says. At one point Eusebio even got a job as a janitor at her high school so he could keep an eye on the shy, introverted teenager.

When Abby turned 16, her ordeal took an even darker turn: The couple called her into their bedroom to inform her that they wanted children of their own. And because Laura had fertility issues, they had decided that Abby would have a baby for them—one they would raise as their own. "I said, 'No, I'm not going to do it,'" Abby recalls. "And they both said, 'You're going to do it. There's no discussion.'" About 14 months later, in 2005, the high school sophomore gave birth to her first child, a daughter. Whenever anyone at her school asked who the father was, Abby says, she told them it was "some random guy from another high school." At her graduation ceremony three years later, she was pregnant again, giving birth not long afterward to another daughter, followed by a baby boy in 2011. The Castillos claimed all three as their own. "I was so confused," she recalls. "I wanted to love my babies because they were mine, but at the same time I didn't because of who the father was."

In 2013 the family moved to San Antonio, where the Castillos began making claims that Abby's oldest daughter was a saint with the power to cure a range of diseases, including cancer.

THE SCAM OF THE 'MIRACLE CHILD'



Crowds began flocking to the Castillos' backyard shrine in San Antonio in 2013 after Laura claimed that her daughter—who was actually Abby's child—was a saint with the power to heal diseases.



"It was all just a scam to make money off of people," says Abby. "My daughter would get freaked out by it, but they told her they'd buy her a Barbie or candy [so she would] go along with it."

REVIOUS PAGE: LOCATION: COURTESY SAN ANTONIO SPANICAL GARDEN; HAIR & MAKEUP: MARIE GOMEZ/GENOVA; STYLIST: TINA ANNE BOHNDORFER/PAUS SHOPS; BEXAR COUNTY JAIL (2); THIS PAGE: COURTESY/LOCOWISE FROM TOP LEFT; COURTESY ASB; ALVARADO; SHAN SANCHEZ/DA81709

Before long, crowds of believers were flocking to a shed behind the couple's home to be blessed by the child (see sidebar). Among the curious was factory worker Rudy Alvarado, who had heard about the backyard shrine through his parish church. At the site he saw Abby standing with two of the children and introduced himself. "I see Abby and I see a little bit of a tummy, like someone has after they have a baby," says Rudy. "So I asked her, 'Are these your kids?'" Abby—who lived in constant fear of the threats Eusebio regularly made against the children—lied and told him no. But Rudy wasn't convinced, and over the next few months he looked for ways to run into Abby at the shrine or in the neighborhood. "I knew something was wrong," he says. "It was just putting the pieces together." As their friendship grew, Rudy finally persuaded the brainwashed, frightened young mother to share her secret with him and eventually with the police.

In June 2014 Abby and her kids fled the Castillo house and moved in with Rudy, an assistant manager at a mailing company, and his mother. It would be almost three more years before the police arrested the Castillos—the couple had gone on the lam when Abby left—but being free of their influence gave Abby the courage she needed to confront them. At Eusebio's Oct. 23 sentencing she even stood up in court to address him, saying,

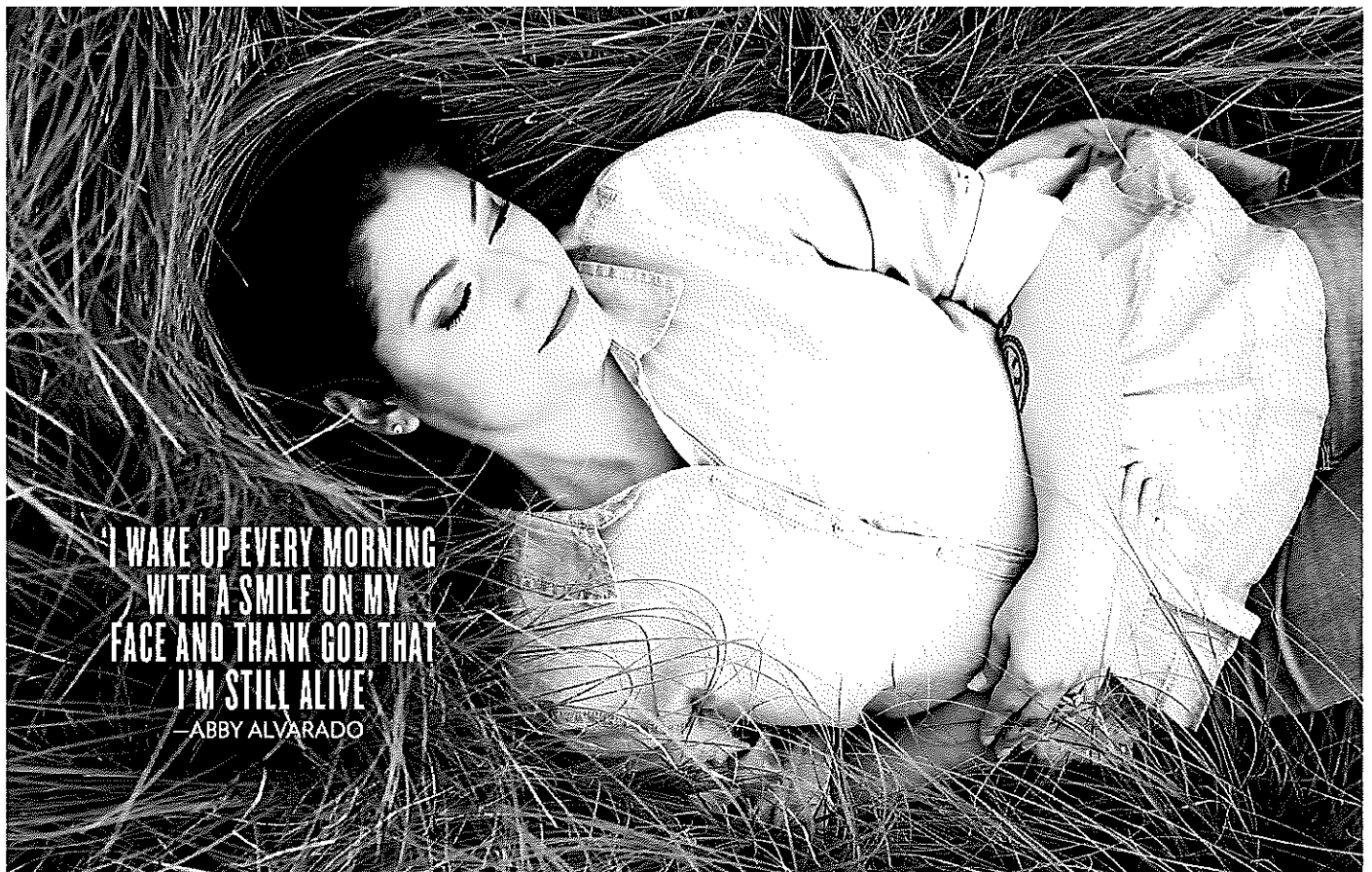


A LOVING BOND

"By the time I met her she looked like she had no life left in her," says Abby's husband, Rudy (with her in San Antonio on Sept. 22). "I just did what I could to get her out."

"You were a monster." Says Rudy: "I tell her that she's brave and strong, because she is."

Abby, who married Rudy in March 2015, admits that she's still getting used to her freedom. She is estranged from her brother, who, she says, sided with the Castillos when Abby accused them, and seldom speaks about the case to her sister, who does believe her, she says. But now she finds joy raising her children along with Rudy's two daughters from a previous marriage and the baby they had together almost three years ago. "I don't want people to feel sorry for me," says Abby. "I want people to hear my story and learn from it. That's why I'm sharing it." ●



**I WAKE UP EVERY MORNING
WITH A SMILE ON MY
FACE AND THANK GOD THAT
I'M STILL ALIVE**
—ABBY ALVARADO