

FAMILY LIFE

‘The elephant in the room has left...’

SIBLING RIVALRY
RICHARD BURTON

WHEN ELIZABETH Green describes her mother's home, she recalls a shrine to her famous brother, Philip. The long corridors of the high-ceilinged mansion flat in Maida Vale flat contained so many reminders of the Topshop tycoon she jokes she could have run tours there.

But when her first article was published in the *JC* — one that marked the beginning of a series on her adventures on the dating scene — she took it round expecting to share wall space with the pictures and cuttings.

On her next visit, she saw it. Glued to another picture inside a cheap clip-frame and placed high and unreadable above the toilet door. She didn't hide her disappointment. “Why can't it go on the wall,” she asked, “where it can be seen?”

The answer, for her at least, summed up life in the shadow of a famous sibling. “When you achieve something,” she was told, “I'll put you on the wall.”

It's one of dozens of anecdotes in her debut book, *Not in the Script*, a 296-page account of life as a woman who's been there, seen it, done it and is still searching for something to help make sense of marriage, motherhood, divorce and disappointment.

It's one of many revelations but stops well short of a tell-all. Yes, there's the time she sat with her brother's close friends at his wedding celebration, noting to her disappointment that they didn't even know he had a sister. But family angst aside, there's also, as you'd expect, a smattering of yachts, private jets and, inevitably, a celebrity or two.

Like the time Paul Anka serenaded her mother at her 90th birthday party (celebrated on her 89th but that's another story) at the Four Seasons Hotel with a personalised version of his hit *My Way*.

She reproduces the lyrics in the book but also describes a “divide in the room”, one which split family and friends and “all my brother's people”, the movers and shakers she lists as a lord, a couple of knights and the generally wealthy.

Her relationship, or lack of it, is a constant theme throughout but to be fair, she doesn't actually disparage anyone, not her brother, her ex-husband, the graphic designer David Neville, her mother, Alma, who she calls a “woman of iron” or any of her children, Georgia, Jacob and Simon, all of whom have walked parts at various points.

The thrust of it is about her, her childhood in Hampstead Garden Suburb, the death of her father from a heart attack when she was 15, a failed marriage, career choices and pilgrimages to India where she



sought the services of a guru during a hippy phase in the seventies.

Eleven years ago, she took off for a new life in New York, setting up a burger bar which later became a vegan restaurant. It was outside that, in the Manhattan sun, against

a backdrop of honking horns celebrating the Biden win that I asked her if this book represented for her a victory of its own.

“The story isn't about getting revenge or putting the record straight, it's about having a voice,

about standing up for myself,” she said. “My male friends questioned whether it was a good idea but my female ones were very much ‘go for it’.

“But I suppose if you asked me to sum it up, I'd probably say, for years there was an elephant in the room and now it has left. And that in itself is quite a relief.”

The book is about family life but that's really no more than a backdrop, something to bring context to what it's really all about, a woman's, albeit unsuccessful, quest to find lasting love. And she doesn't hold back on that, from her earliest near-sexual encounter aged 14 with a “gorgeous” waiter during a family holiday in Jersey to life as a disciple of Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, the Indian “free love” guru, famous as a star of the Netflix documentary *Wild Wild Country*.

Then there was the fling with a married Indian film director and even youthful indiscretions such as the time she and friends broke into an empty house in Finsbury Park and lived as “middle class squatters” before going on to study sociology at North Western Polytechnic in Highbury and later qualifying as a teacher.

In later life she became an active member of Finchley Reform Synagogue and, having married “out”,

Elizabeth Green (above); (below) with her parents and brother Philip

was well placed to run courses titled *How do you do being Jewish?* with Rabbi Jeffrey Newman.

“It's always been a big part of my life,” she said. “I did Hebrew classes at eight, I grew up in a house where my mother made matzah balls and marble cake, the whole thing.”

So was it a wrench to leave and start a new life in the US? “For years, until three months ago in fact, I kept a base in London, a lovely four-bed Victorian house I bought after my divorce.

“Even now, years after I left, I still miss a lot about London; my organic hairdresser, my kinesiologist and my girl posse. But the good thing is it's very easy to be Jewish in New York, it's in the fabric here. My lawyer's Jewish, so were my business partners and I have an Israeli singer at the restaurant.

“It's all very comfortable. Where else can you turn on the TV and hear someone say happy Chanukah to our Jewish viewers?”

“If I do have one regret it was that I kept waiting for praise I knew would never come. Looking back, it's clear I could have been so much more. Writing the book goes some way to vindicating that.”

Not In the Script: The black sheep in the billionaire's family by Elizabeth Green is available on Amazon