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Joe Gere said he died on the afternoon his twelve-year-old daughter Brenda disappeared. It was left to Brenda's mother Elaine to sustain her stricken family, search for her missing child, and pressure the authorities for justice. From the first minutes of the investigation, suspicion fell on Michael Kay Green, a steroid-abusing "Mr. Universe" hopeful, but there was no proof of a crime, leaving police and prosecutors stymied.

Tips and sightings poured in as lawmen and volunteers combed the Cascades forest in the biggest search on Northwest history. Years passed with no sight of the blue-eyed girl or the bright clothes she'd worn on the day she disappeared, but Elaine remained undaunted.

Salt of the Earth is the true story of how one woman fought and triumphed over life-shattering violence and how she healed her family-and herself.
Salt of the Earth is the true story of a courageous woman who survived a hellish twentieth-century nightmare. Mob violence, injustice, kidnapping, murder, and suicide were the black holes in the awful astronomy of Elaine Gere's life. Somehow she had to summon the courage to endure: to honor her beloved dead and to rebuild the shattered lives of the sons who depended on her strength. Jack Olsen has been lauded for his psychological insights into the most violent criminals in such previous masterworks as Doc, The Misbegotten Son, and Predator, but he has never overlooked their victims. By viewing the world through the eyes of Elaine Gere and her devastated family, he finds the core values that enabled them not only to survive and flourish, but, in the end, to triumph.

Gilbert Taylor: In the annals of humanity, the Gere family is unexceptional and ordinary--unless one looks as closely at their lives as Olsen does. A boomer-age couple, Joe and Elaine Gere move between California and Idaho a dozen times on their roller coaster ride of solvency and bankruptcy and have three children. Much the steadier spouse, energetic Elaine always manages to land a clerical federal job wherever Joe moves the family. The wanderlust ensues from Joe's first career misfortune, as a cop disabled during a melee with a mob. His relatives thought that incident started his slide toward suicide, and his addictive (regrets of hitting her and promises to reform) abuse of Elaine demonstrates the complexity of Joe's insidious demons. But he holds on, Elaine remaining loyal, until another bolt from the blue--the kidnapping and murder of their 12-year-old daughter. Here Olsen is at his dispassionate, yet concerned, best, introducing the subplot of the suspect's life (a wife beater), the course of the investigation, and the ultimate denouement of the case. In this mass-media age, many women will identify with, and perhaps be inspirited by, Olsen's fine chronicle of the Gere family.

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