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## Kidnap victim Natascha Kampusch: 'When it's quiet and I'm by myself - then the flashbacks come'



Natascha Kampusch has written a new book, a decade after escaping the hands of her kidnapper CREDIT: JOE KLAMAR/AFP

By [Nick Harding](#)

18 APRIL 2017 • 10:25AM

The old car magazines are still neatly stacked in a mahogany unit in the lounge. Damp wallpaper flakes off the kitchen walls. Marble tiles collect dust in the half-finished bathroom. Cold, and neglect permeate the rooms, still filled with the possessions of the former owner. The house is stuck in time, abandoned hastily long ago.

Tucked away in a quiet suburban Austrian backstreet, this is the [house of horrors where Natascha Kampusch was enslaved for eight years](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/08/23/austrian-girl-in-the-cellar-reveals-she-still-visits-her-former/) (<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/08/23/austrian-girl-in-the-cellar-reveals-she-still-visits-her-former/>). She was snatched from the street on her way home from school at the age of 10; in the decade since her escape, the property has remained largely untouched, aside from the infilling of the cellar where she was imprisoned.

It remains an eerie time capsule, left as it was on August 23, 2006, the day Natascha fled and her kidnapper, Wolfgang Priklopil, threw himself under a train.

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## “I did not cry after I escaped. There was no reason to be sad”

Natascha Kampusch

The large, detached building was awarded to its former prisoner as compensation for the ordeal she suffered. “The house itself cannot hurt me, only the memories of what happened here can,” says Natascha, now 29.

The property was in Priklopil’s family for several generations, but its macabre history, coupled with the fact that there are no planning permissions for the extension he forced Natascha to build, means she is stuck with it.

After years of physical and mental abuse, Natascha was both terrified of, and reliant on, her captor. The electrical technician was the only human she had contact with and he coerced her through fear; on occasions, many years after she had first been enslaved, Priklopil took her out and they even went on a short skiing holiday. But she was never out of his sight, and was too scared to call for help.

Eventually, after being starved one morning - one of Priklopil’s preferred means of control - she fled through the weed-choked back garden while he was on the phone.



Freedom, however, has not been easy as Natascha might have hoped. In years since she escaped, she has flitted between “projects” including making jewellery and even hosting her own short-lived chat show, and has been stalked by “crazy people with crazy intentions. They wrote me letters with inappropriate content describing things they wanted to do to me... Eventually my mum got a restraining order against [one]. It went on for several years.”

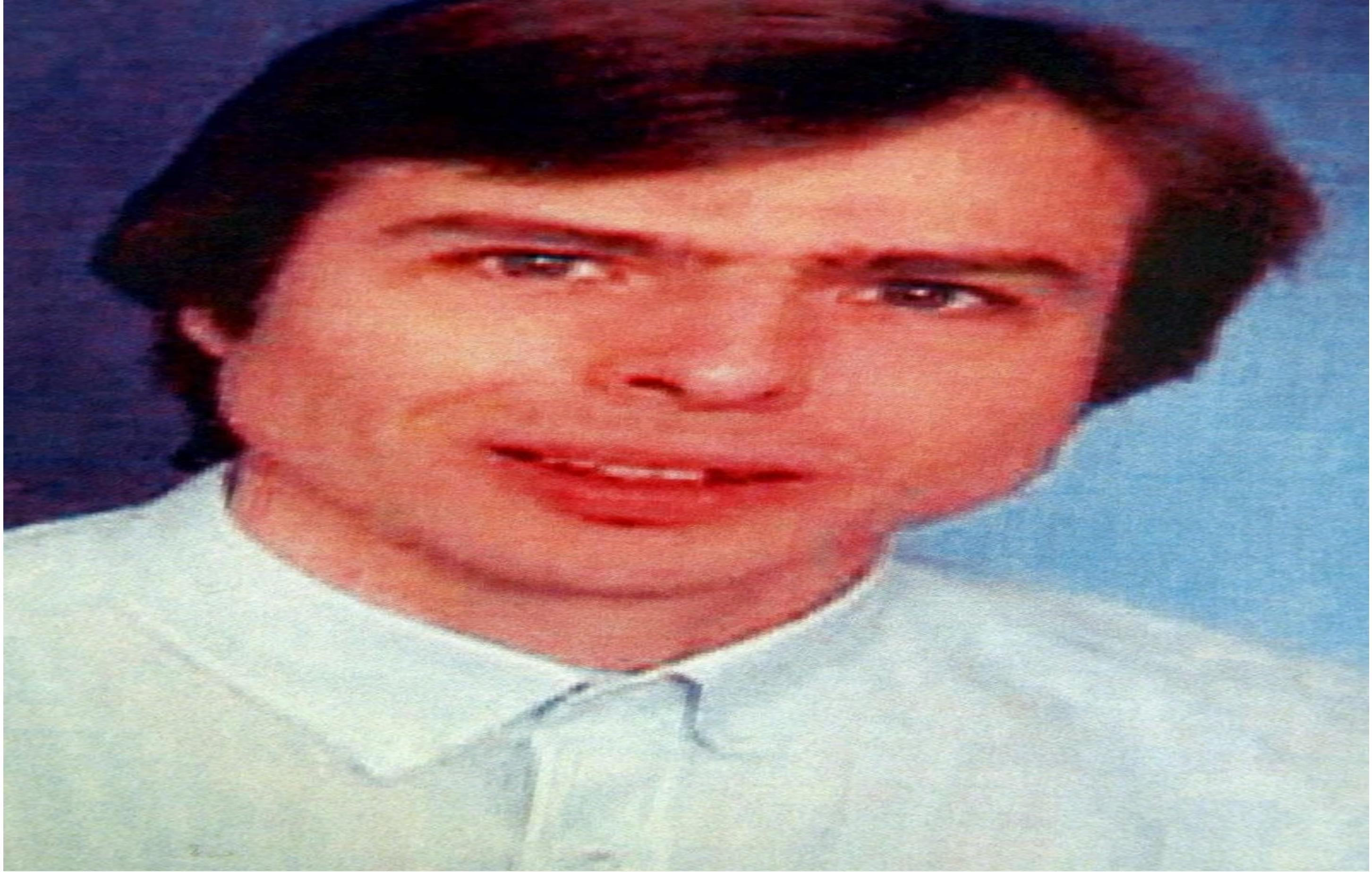
The attention has made her wary of relationships.

“It is difficult to trust anyone,” she admits. “There have been rumours that I found my first love with several people. None are true but it makes it hard to go anywhere with anyone male in public.

“At the moment, [relationships are] not important.”

Her feelings about Priklopil, who was 36 when he took her, are complex. For much of her life he was the only adult she knew and while he beat and raped her, he also fed, clothed and tutored her.







Wolfgang Priklopil CREDIT: APA

In a statement issued shortly after her escape, she said: “I did not cry after I escaped. There was no reason to be sad. In my eyes his death was unnecessary. He was a part of my life. That is why I do mourn him.” The public were shocked at her seemingly benign reaction; Natascha received hate mail and was trolled online in its aftermath.

In her new book, *Ten Years of Freedom*, she describes visiting his body at the morgue after his death. “I had only one person I was close to for many, many years. On whom my survival depended.

“You can’t just simply banish someone that you have spent eight and half years of your life with from your memory.”

Today, Natascha has regular therapy and counselling sessions to come to terms with her past, sometimes up to three times a week. She has also been diagnosed with PTSD. “It is like a physical disease. It can be exhausting,” she says. “When it is quiet and I’m by myself the flashbacks come. I always need to be doing something. I can’t sit somewhere and relax.”

[Since fleeing Priklopil’s grasp \(http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/austria/7983464/Natascha-Kampusch-autobiography-I-was-beaten-and-forced-to-share-a-bed-with-kidnapper.html\)](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/austria/7983464/Natascha-Kampusch-autobiography-I-was-beaten-and-forced-to-share-a-bed-with-kidnapper.html)she has been stunned to find herself at the root of myriad conspiracy theories.



Natascha Kampusch in 2016 CREDIT: JOE KLAMAR / AFP

One suggested that Natascha had given birth to his child, which had then either been buried in the garden or handed to an accomplice to be raised in secret. An investigator even approached a school and asked for items containing the DNA of a pupil he believed to be the child - the pupil’s mother filed a complaint, and proved she was the mother with a DNA test.

Natascha’s case has been investigated on three separate occasions, the last of which took place in 2012; it has proved “harder to move forward” when she is constantly made to look to the past. The investigating team’s results - which had included assistance from FBI experts - mirrored those of the previous investigations: that Priklopil acted alone.

Despite this there have been further suggestions of cover-ups. Last year, a book claimed Priklopil had been murdered by accomplices and his body had been thrown under a train to destroy evidence.

Natascha sighs: “Sometimes people want to make money from my story. They want to do harm to me, not just for their own profit but to push me down. The world is not full of nice people.”



**“He tore me away from the door, saying, ‘So you see. The world out there doesn’t want you anyway. Your place is here and only here’”**

Natascha Kampusch

Her family has also struggled to cope with the ongoing conjecture. Natascha has spent time re-establishing relationships with her parents, although relations remain strained with her father after he cooperated with a book that questioned the official version of events.

"All these theories surfaced. My father was very easily influenced," she says. "Those early days were filled with lots of emotions on both sides. Things are still difficult with my father. My mother is a tough person and is in a good way.

“When I escaped, they expected the girl that had been taken from them, but I was adult. They went through pain, too.”

In *Ten Years of Freedom* Natascha, who learnt English by listening to pop stations in the cellar, talks about the struggles she has faced since her escape and admits that life is sometimes harder now than it was when she was a captive. The starvation she endured during captivity has led to a difficult relationship with food. Currently, she is unhappy with her weight.

“I am heavier, physically,” she says. “And that’s the big problem, more than the mental issues.”



The house where Natascha was imprisoned for eight years and which she now owns CREDIT: STAMBERG/APA

She has been involved in several charity projects, including campaigning for animal rights group PETA, and donated money to the family of **Josef Fritzl, the Austrian monster** (<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newsttopics/joseffritzl/4991581/Josef-Fritzl-trial-how-he-was-finally-caught.html>) who kept his daughter captive in a cellar for 24 years and repeatedly raped and impregnated her.

Natascha also recently became involved in a campaign in Austria to raise awareness of the plight of refugees. “I met a family from Aleppo in Syria,” she says. “I can identify with them, they come from a place where they are under attack and threatened.

“I know how it feels to be an outcast.”

In spite of the difficulties, she is trying hard to defy a **life so long filled with trauma** (<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/austria/9877092/Natasha-Kampusch-says-she-contemplated-suicide.html>).

“One of the worst scenes during my captivity was when [Priklopil] shoved me, wearing only a pair of panties, half-starved, covered in bruises and with my head completely shorn, in front of the front door and said, ‘Come on now, run. Let’s see how far you get,’” she writes in her book.

“I was so humiliated and filled with shame that I couldn’t take a single step. He tore me away from the door, saying, ‘So you see. The world out there doesn’t want you anyway. Your place is here and only here.’”



Natascha continues to move forward, but what happened inside that door make the memories, and the house itself, hard to ever fully leave behind.

*10 Years of Freedom by Natascha Kampusch is published by Dachbuch Verlag GmbH (£10.99). To order your copy for £9.99 plus p&p call 0844 871 1514 or visit [books.telegraph.co.uk](http://books.telegraph.co.uk) (<http://books.telegraph.co.uk/Product/Natascha-Kampusch/10-Years-of-Freedom/20869103>)*

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