

# 'My bond with man who sto

Kept as a sex slave for eight years, 18-year-old Natascha Kampusch is taking her first tentative steps towards freedom. But can her tragic life ever be normal again?



Natascha's kidnapper, Wolfgang Priklopil



The suburban home that became a prison



Natascha is escorted out of the police station on 23 August

**T**HEY ENJOYED THE most sinister of bonds – a bizarre power game in which a 44-year-old man who had abducted a 10-year-old schoolgirl kept her locked up as a sex slave in a home-made dungeon.

The facts of the abduction are shocking enough – but since Natascha Kampusch made a break for freedom, the twists and turns in her amazing story have made headline news on a daily basis.

Instead of a tearful reunion with the parents who'd mourned her disappearance for eight years, there came news of a bitter family rift with Natascha now refusing to see or stay with them.

Rather than condemn the paedophile who stole her

childhood and adolescence, Natascha has cried tears of loss at his death and spoken almost warmly of the bond they shared.

And now, following rumours that she's pregnant with her captor Wolfgang Priklopil's baby, Natascha wants to be given the grim house where she was held captive as compensation for her ordeal.

Pale and skeletal after years trapped in a 6ft by 10ft dungeon, Natascha finally escaped the evil clutches of her "jailer" on 23 August this year, when he was distracted on his mobile phone as she vacuumed his car. She stumbled to a neighbour's, who called the police.

Natascha had disappeared at 7am on her way to school in Vienna, Austria, on 2 March 1998, after a row with her mum. The little girl didn't notice the white minivan closing in on her. It was driven by communications technician Priklopil, who

snatched her into his vehicle.

"He said: 'Keep still. Lie down, or something is going to happen to you,'" recalled Natascha. "He told me if he hadn't kidnapped me that day, it would have been the next."

He drove her back to his home in the suburbs, protected from the outside world by security cameras and alarms, and put her through a small hole in the cellar floor. This led to the windowless, soundproofed cubicle where she would spend the next eight years of her life.

Her disappearance sparked Austria's biggest-ever manhunt and years of futile police investigations.

But as time passed, a bond grew between her and her captor in what psychologists call Stockholm syndrome, where a hostage exhibits loyalty to the hostage-taker.

"Daily life mostly started with a joint breakfast," said Natascha.

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The tiny cell where Natascha was held captive

Following her escape, the ghostly pale teenager was reunited with her tearful father Ludwig Koch, 50. Sobbing as she hugged him, Natascha asked if he still had her favourite toy car, to which he nodded.

"I never gave up hope," he said. But he was tormented by the visible signs of his daughter's ordeal.

"Natascha is emaciated with very white skin and bruises over her entire body. I cannot bear to think where they came from," he said.

Her mum Brigitte, 55, who's divorced from Natascha's dad, was equally overwhelmed.

"She looked at me and I saw straightaway it was my little girl," she said. "I opened my arms and called her 'my little mouse,' and she said 'Mama.'"

But as the manhunt for Priklopil began, he escaped in his red BMW and committed suicide by throwing himself under a train.

The world expected Natascha to feel relieved, but instead she was upset. But how could she mourn the man who'd stolen her childhood? The answer is Stockholm syndrome.

"He was her only contact for eight years," explains family psychotherapist Phillip Hodson.

"This man brought her up. He saw her through puberty, explained periods, spots, body changes. He was her jailer and

"He was not working most of the time. Then there was housework, reading, television, talking, cooking. That's all there was, year in and year out, and always tied in with the fear of being lonely. Every single day I asked him to let me go."

Priklopil provided books, radio and videos for Natascha, who says she refused to play the victim.

"He was not my master," she explained. "I was just as strong as him, but he would, symbolically speaking, sometimes be my support, and sometimes be the person who kicked me."

For seven years Natascha never left Priklopil's home. But then, a few months ago, he allowed her to spend short periods in his garden and even took her on shopping trips, warning her against trying to escape or shout for help.



Natascha aged 10, just before she was kidnapped



**'Natascha has bruises all over her body. I cannot bear to think where they came from' Dad Ludwig Koch**

punisher, but he was also her step-parent, teacher, caregiver and conversationalist. He decided if she lived or died. If she rejected him, there was nothing left for her."

Police revealed that Priklopil had sexually abused her, but that Natascha was in denial.

"In her mind she did everything of her own free will," explained Austrian police inspector Sabine Freudemberger.

Natascha issued a strange statement after her release, in which she said she hadn't

"missed out," and that her captivity had protected her from "smoking, drinking and bad friends."

But experts say there is no way her relationship with Priklopil was a healthy one.

"He had to possess someone to have a relationship, and she had to manipulate him to stay alive," says Phillip Hodson. "How will she ever have a normal relationship? He didn't just steal her past, he stole her future too." ■

By Pilar Canas