

## **Bereaved – by her abductor's suicide**

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THE first and most important rule of trauma management is to be guided by the patient. While Natascha Kampusch has undoubtedly suffered one of the worst kinds of human incarceration, there is no way of saying in advance what precise effect it will have had.

We do know that children have survived the most grotesque cruelties that adults can devise, from living in the sewage tanks of prison camps to being raised as pigs. In Natascha's case it appears that she passed eight years living in a cellar, believed her surroundings to be rigged with explosives, and was sexually abused. All contact with her familiar world had been lost. Aged 10, on the cusp of pre-puberty, her expectation that the grown-ups who loved her were not only benign but all-powerful was shattered. Wolfgang Priklopil, at a stroke, became her possessor, educator and life arbiter.

Probably the most damaged feelings she will retain as a result will be found in one specific related memory: why could my family not rescue me? It is not a rational thought, of course, but children of 10 do not get to choose such constructs. Her second difficulty will focus on some aspect of Stockholm syndrome because it will have been impossible not to identify to some extent with the jailer who, for better or worse, "brought her up".

A child's principal duty is to survive her parents: if this means learning to adapt to a dysfunctional replacement such as Priklopil, so be it.

Her specialists will need to monitor for specific trauma symptoms including flashbacks and depression, for which there are therapies ranging from simple family love to courses of eye movement desensitising and reprocessing (EMDR).

Both tackle the same issue — how to download memories associated with despair and death safely into natural storage instead of having them continually replayed across the retina.

Natascha must be given the freedom to express the full effects of her ordeal, including the perverse fact that Priklopil's suicide will create in her a sense of bereavement.