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2207 seymour avenue cleveland ohio

CLEVELAND, Ohio -- Five years after three women were freed from a life of hellish captivity in Ariel Castro's Seymour Avenue home, residents of one of Ohio's most infamous streets say they feel like their lives remain on display.Cars roll up and down the once-quiet street at all hours of the day, and every few Sundays, a coach bus full of invaders rumbles into the neighborhood and stops at the un-mowed field now full of trash where the house of horrors once stood.On-lookers press their faces and phones against their windows hoping to catch a glimpse of where Amanda Berry, Gina Dejesus and Michelle Knight spent those torturous years in Castro's homemade prison. And they stare at the residents, like Anthony Westry, Rafael Peres and Danny Rodriguez, who mill about their daily lives."It's like being a monkey in a cage," Westry, who has lived in his family's home for 30 years, said while he emptied out a sleeve of seasoned French fries onto the ground for Rodriguez's six-month-old black-and-white pit bull, Foreign.The others nodded in agreement as Foreign finished her fries.Seymour Avenue was the epicenter of the media universe for roughly a week in May 2013. Satellite trucks and spotlights filled nearly every vacant plot of land as reporters beamed their live shots at all hours of the day. But now the street where one of the most extraordinary crimes in Cleveland's history unfolded resembles any ordinary street in any struggling neighborhood in any city that is full of struggling neighborhoods.Its residents watch as resources pour into other pockets of the city. They watch out for each other, know each other's schedules and can tell you the best time to catch a particular person before they go to work. And to those they watch drive by to get a glimpse at the street's darkest moment, they want you to know that they're not defined by it."We don't want to be the people that people point at anymore," Westry said.A trash bag snagged on the bushes where Ariel Castro's house once stood on Seymour Avenue.The PsycheMany people wondered after the women were unshackled how neighbors could not have known what Castro concealed in his home. The question caused some soul-searching among Seymour's residents, who now say they are much more closely connected than before.The black party-like barbecues, made famous when Charles Ramsey declared in a viral interview that he used to eat ribs and listen to salsa music at barbecues with Castro, continue on the weekends, they said. They drink, they smoke a little marijuana, or both, and they're always willing to share.The neighbors keep a close eye on one another. It took less than 10 minutes for Peres to approach a cleveland.com reporter taking photographs and to quickly round up several other residents. As the group discussed life after Castro, Westry said there were probably people in at least two other homes watching the conversation through their windows. The neighborhood is especially protective of daughters now, the men agreed. "If you have a daughter, you have to be like glue," Westry said.Peres, a 64-year-old Cuban native who said he lived in California, Texas and Oklahoma before settling in Cleveland 17 years ago, said the shock of Castro's crimes brought the neighborhood closer."It's the only neighborhood I've ever been in where everybody knows my name," Peres said on the porch of his home after taking a sip from a bottle of Wild Irish Rose.A few minutes later, a passing van honked and a man leaned out the passenger window and gave Peres a friendly holler. Peres returned a wave.Rafael Peres says Seymour Avenue is "the only neighborhood I've ever been in where everybody knows my name."While the heart of Tremont has boomed with commerce and countless high-priced condominium projects, this part of Tremont has experienced little redevelopment. Someone dressed up a pair of formerly run-down apartment buildings on the east end of Seymour Avenue near Scranton Road. There are talks of building a condo-style development on the other end of Seymour on West 25th Street, and replacing the shuttered corner bodega run by Castro's late uncle Julio "Cesi" Castro -- once dubbed the "mayor of W.25th Street" -- with a Mexican restaurant.Ramsey has moved away and the blue house he once lived in is in foreclosure.But little else has changed in five years, including the field where Castro's house and two adjacent homes once stood.When the homes were razed in August 2013, city officials floated several ideas for the space, including a row of townhouses. Tremont West Development Corp. agreed to manage the land for five years before turning it back over to the city. Executive Director Cory Riordan said.City spokesman Dan Williams told cleveland.com that there are no plans in the works to transform the lot.But on a recent morning, butterfly decorations lay in the planted flower bushes as the breeze flaps empty trash bags snagged on the limbs. Empty bottles of Stella Artois and coconut rum, and discarded packs of cigarettes dot the grass in front of the bushes.Justin Rose owns Capitol Auto Group, a small car lot that is the only business along this stretch of Seymour Avenue. He wants to see a playground or basketball hoop put in, so long as Berry, Dejesus and Knight sign off on the plans.Anything would be better than what it is right now, he says. "It's a big nasty field where you can find people sitting in the back shooting a bag of heroin," he said. "What really is it?"Two birds frolic in the flower bushes planted where Castro's house once stood.The SpectacleWhat it is, others on the street said, was a spectacle that brings in onlookers from around the country.Rose said he has seen countless out-of-state license plates, and some from Canada, on cars as they cruised down the street."A lot of them are afraid to get out of their cars," Rose said.The field and the street have found their way into many people's macabre lists of must-see Cleveland attractions.A woman visited the city with her family from Baltimore in the summer of 2013, before the homes were torn down, and among photographs she posted to Facebook of her and her family at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Cedar Point were three photographs of the boarded-up and fenced-in home that was the site of so much grief and pain for the women."ARIEL CASTRO'S HOUSE!!! This is where the MONSTER lived!!! 2207 Seymour Ave." the caption read. "Last stop before the Pro Football Hall of Fame!!!"Two years later, in July 2015, another Facebook user posted a photograph of the street signs at the corner of Seymour Avenue and Scranton Road with the caption, "Look where I was."In May of 2017, a woman uploaded a video on YouTube of her visit to Castro's home as part of what she called her "serial killer, true crime obsession."She spoke in the car ride over to Seymour. She forgot Dejesus's and Knight's names. As the car rolled up to the field, she realized that the home had been torn down and was visibly upset. She opened the passenger door before the driver fully stopped the car and walked toward the planted flowers."These people probably think I'm a creep," she said from behind the camera. "But they're probably used to it, huh?"They are used to it. And they're tired of it."I just want the community to know that we had nothing to do with that," Westry said. "We don't condone it. We're just normal like everybody else. We want to raise our children to be as productive as possible. We just want to be normal again."To comment on this story, please visit Friday's crime and courts comments page. Standing outside the boarded-up, two-story house where Ariel Castro held her and two other women for a decade, Cleveland kidnapping survivor Michelle Knight released dozens of yellow balloons on Wednesday -- as heavy construction equipment began to tear to the ground the house that was her prison.Knight, wearing a rosary around her neck, said a prayer and hugged representatives from the county prosecutor's office as she was accompanied down the street by a small group of Guardian Angels."Nobody was there for me when I was missing, and I want the people to know, including the mothers, that they can have strength, they can have hope, and their child will come back," Knight said.The balloons represented children who were abducted and never found, Knight said, and she said her visit had a simple message: "There is hope for everyone."Neighbors cheered and clapped as the backhoe began ripping into the roof of the house just before 7:30 a.m., with members of Dejesus' family out front, WKYC reported. In the cab of the backhoe as it took the first chunks out of the facade was the aunt of another victim, Gina Dejesus."It felt great," said the aunt, Peggy Arida.Castro, 53, abducted Michelle Knight, Dejesus and Amanda Berry and kept them against their will at the white-washed home at 2207 Seymour Ave. until Berry kicked her way through the front door in May and escaped with the young girl she bore in captivity. On Aug. 1, Castro was sentenced to life behind bars without parole plus an additional millennium after pleading guilty to a 937-count indictment that included counts of rape, kidnapping and aggravated murder."He's going to sit in the bowels of prison now the rest of his life, the rest of his days, in fear himself of the other prisoners. It's fitting," Cuyahoga County Prosecutor Timothy J. McGinty said at a press conference on Wednesday.The demolition came right on time for a community eager for brighter days -- including Castro's uncle Julio, 77, who told NBC News after the house was torn down that it opened "another chapter" for his family.Knocking down the house was "definitely the right thing," the uncle said. "It's just sad because it's another one of our neighborhood homes." "It has been a shock to the neighborhood," said local Pastor Horst Hoyer. The bells of his Immanuel Evangelical Lutheran Church, which stands less than half a block from the house, rang as it came down on Wednesday. "I've been here 57 years, but we never got so much publicity. It was a quiet block."The house's final demolition followed a trying period for residents of Seymour Avenue, who endured having their street closed by police and flooded by reporters, with some neighbors uncertain of whether they would be called to testify in a criminal trial, said Ward 14 Councilman Brian Cummins. "We know that it's going to be several years for this level of trauma to subside to any degree," Cummins said. "We know that there's not going to be any interest in investing in the street immediately."There is no definite plan for how the Castro property will be used after the last brick and plank are carried away in trucks on Wednesday, a process that Cummins said should take less than a day."We're expecting to have a very thoughtful process in terms of what the future of this vacant lot may be," Cummins said.The house has had a fence around it and a police officer stationed outside since the women escaped.Knight, 32, who gave a defiant statement at Castro's sentencing hearing, also revisited Seymour Avenue on Friday to thank residents for their support, neighbor Altagracia Tejada told NBC News. Knight told her that she hopes a garden is planted over the house's footprint once it's torn down, Tejada said."She didn't say a lot, she thanked us," Tejada said.Castro himself is likely the only person in Cleveland -- or Ohio, or the U.S. -- who doesn't see his home as a hideous black blot on the city.In the rambling monologue Castro delivered at his sentencing hearing, he gave his description of the building where prosecutors said he repeatedly raped and tortured the women, restraining them with chains and nailing closet doors over the windows: "We had a lot of harmony going on in that home." "I am not a violent person," Castro said in court. "I simply kept them there without them being able to leave."Knight had another word for his house of horrors: "I spent 11 years in hell."Pictures displayed by investigators in court on Thursday showed the heavy curtains Castro hung throughout the dimly lit house, as well as chains dangling from the walls and a bedroom, full of stuffed animals and other children's toys, that was shared by Berry and her child.Two local companies offered to raze the house pro bono, NBC News affiliate WKYC reported. Castro agreed as part of his plea deal to hand over more than \$22,000 to Cuyahoga Land Bank to cover demolition costs. Officials offered the money to the three women. McGinty said, but they said they wanted it to go to the neighborhood."We didn't want some kind of gruesome or macabre shrine, if you will, that would get gawkers and curiosity seekers," Joseph Frolik, director of communications with the Cuyahoga County Prosecutor's office, told WKYC. Officials plan to give the community some time to think about what they might want to do with the lot."What we want is folks to have a cooling off period, a chance to catch their breath after all the emotion of the last 90 days," Frolik said.Castro and his family had deep roots in the neighborhood, residents told reporters in May, as Cleveland celebrated the seemingly impossible reemergence of the three girls who had been the subject of ongoing searches throughout the years.Uncle Julio Castro said he has owned the Caribe grocery store about half a block down from his nephew's house for the past four decades. A great uncle of Dejesus told NBC News at the time that the two families used to have parties at the store.Castro was a musician who had played with several local bands, according to a sentencing memo filed by prosecutors in July.But they all said they had no idea what went on inside his home. Now it's time to patch up the neighborhood, Hoyer said, even as some residents question how they missed what was going on for so long."There's anger, there's guilt feelings," Hoyer said. "I want to build up the image of the neighborhood, which has been unjustly judged as a bad neighborhood."Two of Castro's children, Angie and Anthony, who spent several years at the house as children in the 1990s, returned there with Cleveland police on Monday to save personal items before the demolition."There were a lot of personal photos in the house, and they were able to find those things -- some of the mementoes they had of their mother, as well," said Castro's attorney Craig Weintraub on Monday. "They were amidst a lot of junk that's in that house."Related: Our work is not done: Cleveland kidnabp victim makes first public appearance -- in paradeAriel Castro victim Michelle Knight: Your hell is just beginning"Life is tough, but I'm tougher!" Cleveland kidnapping victim writes as diaries detail Ariel Castro's cruelty Reuters/Landov (3) On Aug. 22, 2002, 21-year-old Michelle Knight (now known as Lily Rose Lee) was late for an appointment with a social worker to discuss custody of her son when she heard a male voice, "Want me to give you a ride?" asked Ariel Castro. She knew his oldest daughter and said yes. It was a decision she would regret for a long time. Authorities admitted they used limited resources to look for Knight, and she was removed from the National Crime Information Center database after 15 months. Less than a year later, on April 21, 2003, the day before she turned 17, Amanda Berry was walking home from work when she also accepted a ride from Castro. She called her sister to let her know she had a ride. Berry knew another daughter of his and agreed to visit with her -- but she never saw her. A week later, an unknown male used Berry's cell phone number to call her mother and told her, "I have Amanda. She's fine and will be coming home in a couple of days." The following year, Castro offered a ride to a third person, Gina Dejesus, who was headed home from school. Like the rest, she knew one of his daughters, Arlene, who was the last person to see Dejesus before she disappeared. Castro used this as a ruse to get Dejesus to his house, telling her he was dropping her off at home. She was the youngest, at age 14. Bill Pugliano/Getty; Inset: AP Berry, Dejesus and Lee were chained and locked inside Castro's boarded-up home at 2207 Seymour Ave. in Cleveland. They were deprived of food and basic hygiene. Instead of having access to the restroom, they were given buckets to use. Dejesus and Knight were chained together and shared a room on the top floor. Berry lived separately, and on Christmas Day in 2006, she gave birth to a daughter. While she remained in chains most of the time, Castro occasionally took their daughter outside. Knight became pregnant five times and miscarried after Castro abused her in an effort to terminate the pregnancies. On May 6, 2013, Berry broke through the boarded front door of Castro's home with the help of her neighbor and ran across the street, where she frantically dialed 911. "Help me. I'm Amanda Berry," she said. "I've been kidnapped and I've been missing for 10 years and I'm -- I'm here. I'm free now." When police arrived, they discovered Dejesus and Lee hiding inside the house. Castro forgot to bolt the door shut when he left to have a meal with his family. In their first appearance following their escape, the trio released a joint video and expressed their gratefulness for the public's support. "Everyone who has been there to support us has been a blessing," Berry said. They shared that they reunited with their families and were staying positive for their future. However, the three women were not yet ready to speak to the media and were hoping for privacy. "The three women still have a strong desire for privacy," said James Wooley, an attorney for Berry and Dejesus. "They do not want to talk about their ordeal with the media or anyone else. This cannot be stated strongly enough. We thank everyone for the privacy and courtesy shown to Amanda, Gina and Michelle over the last few months and ask that this continue." Tony Dejak/AP The day that Berry escaped from Castro's home, Castro had left to have lunch with his family and forgot to lock the door. Police arrested him as he returned. On Aug. 1, 2013, Castro, 53, was sentenced to life in prison plus 1,000 years for his guilty plea to 937 criminal counts in the case, including kidnapping and rape. A month later, he was found hanging dead by a bed sheet inside his prison cell. In 2014, a year after her escape, Knight released Finding Me. The New York Times bestselling memoir described the rape, torture, near-starvation and isolation she endured for more than 10 years. "Everything in the house was unexplainable," Lee told PEOPLE at the time. "It happened. I don't know the reasons why." However, she emphasized that she does not want to be seen as a victim, but rather, as a survivor. "I don't dwell on the past. I really try to look forward," Knight, told PEOPLE. "I want to be remembered as a victor, not a victim." Courtesy Penguin In their New York Times bestselling book, A Memoir of Survival in Cleveland, written with Mary Jordan and Kevin Sullivan, Berry and Dejesus described their daily lives and living in constant fear. "He was always watching us," Dejesus, said about Castro. "Before the door opened, your heart was just beating real fast." Berry added, "You didn't know why he was coming up the stairs or what was going to happen." The book also shared how the women found moments of joy and normalcy among their decade of torture. They shared how when Castro was at work or out, they would dance and watch The Vampire Diaries together. "We would watch the show and then for two hours afterward, we would talk about what's going to happen next week," Berry said. But then Castro would come home, Dejesus said. "He would walk up the stairs and just ruin our whole day." Elinor Carucci Family) to help families left waiting after loved ones have been abducted. In 2022, the nonprofit helped 59 families. Dejesus and her family travel around the country to teach law enforcement how to work with families with missing relatives. "I want to help families because my family didn't have anything. They didn't get help." I Dejesus told PEOPLE in 2018. "My parents didn't have people actually helping them do the flyers and stuff. We could actually help other families with all of that instead of them worrying and freaking out." Deborah Feingold, Knight told PEOPLE in March 2023 that she planned on hosting "Tragedy to Triumph: An Evening with Michelle Knight," a dinner and raffle to raise money for her nonprofit group, Unleashed Animal Rescue, on May 6, 2023, which is also the tenth anniversary of her rescue. "Ever since I was a little girl, I always wanted to take care of animals -- especially with my traumatic past with my childhood and what I went through in the house of horrors. I endured watching countless, sweet, precious animals being abused by Ariel Castro. They were starved, beaten and left for dead," Knight exclusively told PEOPLE. "So I am standing up and being a voice for these precious animals. I found that when I was helping animals, in return, animals were helping me." Some people, like Ariel Castro of Cleveland, Ohio, have committed acts so evil that it's difficult to think of them as anything other than monsters. A rapist, kidnapper, and torturer, Castro held three women captive for about a decade before they were able to break free. Angelo Merendino/Getty ImagesAriel Castro pleads to Judge Michael Russo during his sentencing on August 1, 2013 in Cleveland, Ohio. Castro was sentenced to life without parole plus 1,000 years for abducting three women between 2002 and 2004. "I'm not a monster, I'm sick," he told the judge. "I'm a happy person inside." The house at 2207 Seymour Avenue, where he held the women, long had a palpable aura of suffering. Drawn window shades concealed the terror that went on inside, but even so, some neighbors, like James King, remembered that the house "did not look right." How did Castro's victims end up here? And why did he kidnap them? Ariel Castro's Beginnings Ariel Castro, born in Puerto Rico on July 10, 1960, didn't begin his horrific activities overnight. It all started with his abusive relationship with his wife, Grimalda Figueroa. The two shared a rocky marriage. She left him in the mid-1990s, after Castro subjected her and their four children to death threats and physical abuse, breaking his wife's nose and dislocating her shoulder twice. One time, he beat her so hard a blood clot formed on her brain. A 2005 court filing said that Castro "frequently abducts [his] daughters" and kept them from Figueroa. In 2004, while working as a bus driver for the Cleveland Metropolitan School District, Castro left a child alone on a bus. He was fired in 2012 after doing the same thing again. Despite his volatility, his daughter Angie Gregg had thought of him as a "friendly, caring, doting man," who'd take her out for motorcycle rides and line his kids up in the backyard for haircuts. But that all changed when she found out his secret. "I wonder this whole time, how he could be so good to us, but he took young women, little girls, someone else's babies, away from these families and over the years never felt enough guilt to just give up and let them free." The Cleveland Abductions Ariel Castro later claimed that his crimes were those of opportunity -- he saw these women, and a perfect storm allowed him to snatch them for his own agenda. "When I picked up the first victim," he said in court, "I didn't even plan it that day. It was something that I planned...that day I went to Family Dollar and I heard her say something...that day I didn't say I was going to find some women. It wasn't in my character." Yet he enticed each victim with cliché tactics, offering one a puppy, another a ride, and asking the last for help finding a lost child. He also took advantage of the fact that each victim knew Castro and one of his children. Michelle Knight, Amanda Berry, And Gina Dejesus Michelle Knight was Castro's first victim. On August 23, 2002, on her way to a social services appointment about regaining custody of her young son, Knight couldn't find the building she was looking for. She asked several bystanders for help, but no one could point her in the right direction. That's when she saw Castro. He offered her a lift, and she recognized him as the father of someone she knew, so she agreed. But he drove in the wrong direction, claiming he had a puppy at his house for her son. The passenger door of his car lacked a handle. She went into his house and walked up to where he said the puppies were. As soon as she reached a room on the second floor, he shut the door behind her. Knight wouldn't leave Seymour Avenue for 11 years. Amanda Berry was next. Leaving her Burger King shift in 2003, she was looking for a ride when she spotted Castro's familiar-looking van. Like Knight, she'd remain in his captivity until 2013. The last victim was 14-year-old Gina Dejesus, a friend of Castro's daughter, Arlene. She and Arlene's plans to hang out fizzled, and the two went their separate ways on a spring day of 2004. Dejesus ran into her friend's father, who said he could use help finding Arlene. Dejesus agreed and went with Castro back to his house. Ironically, Castro's son Anthony, a student journalist, wrote an article about the missing family friend in the wake of her disappearance. He even interviewed Dejesus' grieving mother, Nancy Ruiz, who said, "People are watching out for each other's kids. It's a shame that a tragedy had to happen for me to really know my neighbors. Bless their hearts, they've been great." The Early Days Of Captivity Wikimedia CommonsBefore it was razed, 2207 Seymour Avenue was a house of horrors for Ariel Castro's victims. The lives of Ariel Castro's three victims were filled with horror and pain. He kept them restrained in the basement before he let them live upstairs, still sequestered behind locked doors, often with holes to slide food in and out. They used plastic buckets as toilets, which Castro rarely emptied. To make matters worse, Castro liked to play mind games with his victims. He would sometimes leave their door open to tempt them with freedom. When he inevitably caught them, he'd punish the girls with a beating. Meanwhile, instead of birthdays, Castro forced the women to celebrate their "abduction day," commemorating the anniversaries of their imprisonment. Year after year went by like this, punctuated by frequent sexual and physical violence. The women locked away on Seymour Avenue watched the world go by, year after year, season after season -- they even watched the royal wedding of Prince William and Kate Middleton on a small, grainy black-and-white TV. The three women learned a few things in this time: how to handle Castro, how to get a sense of what was happening in the house, and how to hide their inner feelings. They sensed that above all, he was a sadist who craved their pain. They learned to mask their feelings at all times, to keep their turmoil hidden. They passed years this way until something changed. Amanda Berry realized the years of rape had made her pregnant. What Each Woman Faced From Ariel Castro A look inside Ariel Castro's Cleveland house of horrors. Ariel Castro in no way wanted a child in his horrific arrangement. He had Berry continue with the pregnancy, however, and when she went into labor, he forced her to give birth on a kiddie pool to avoid making a mess. Knight, who had a son of her own, assisted in the delivery. Once the baby arrived, healthy as any other, they cried with relief. The women lived as if in a dollhouse, together yet separate, and always at the hand of the man in control who came and went as he pleased. Michelle Knight was typically kept with Gina Dejesus, but as the most rebellious of the group, Knight was often in trouble with Castro. He'd punish her by withholding food, restraining her to a support beam in the basement, and by frequent beatings and rapes. By her count, she was pregnant at least five times, but none came to term -- Castro wouldn't let them, beating her so much she suffered permanent damage to her stomach. Meanwhile, Amanda Berry was kept in a small room locked from the outside with her child, a daughter named Jocelyn. They'd pretend to walk to school while still trapped in the house, Berry trying her best to maintain any sense of normalcy. Berry even kept a journal of her life in the house and recorded each time Castro assaulted her. Dejesus faced much the same fate as the other two women. Her family continued to search for her, unaware that the girl was not far from home, locked away in the house of a man they knew. Castro even ran into her mother once and took a missing person flyer she was distributing. In a sarcastic display of cruelty, he gave the flyer to Dejesus, with her own face mirrored back, yearning to be found. Escape At Long Last In 2013 Amanda Berry's frantic 911 call moments after she escaped. It seemed like the women's imprisonment would never end. Year after year, any hope they had of seeing freedom dwindled. Then finally, on a warm day in May of 2013, about a decade after the kidnappings, everything changed. To Knight, the day felt eerie, as if something was bound to happen. Castro drove to a nearby McDonald's and forgot to lock the door behind him. Little Jocelyn went downstairs and ran back up. "I don't find Daddy. Daddy's nowhere around," she said. "Mom, Daddy's car is gone." For the first time in 10 years, Amanda Berry's bedroom door was unlocked and Ariel Castro was nowhere to be found. "Should I chance it?" Berry thought. "If I'm going to do it, I need to do it now." She went to the front door, which was unlocked but wired with an alarm. She was able to stick her arm out through the padlocked storm door behind it and began screaming: "Somebody, please, please help me. I'm Amanda Berry, please." She was able to flag down a passerby, Charles Ramsey, who helped break down the door. Ramsey then called 911, and Berry pleaded: "I've been kidnapped, and I've been missing for 10 years, and I'm free now." She begged the dispatcher to send police to help her fellow prisoners at 2207 Seymour Avenue. When Michelle Knight heard the banging on the ground floor, she was convinced Castro had returned and had caught Berry in her flight to freedom. She didn't realize she was finally free from Castro until the police stormed the house and she fell into their arms. Knight and Dejesus followed the officers out of the house, blinking in the Ohio sun, free for the first time in a decade. As Knight later recalled, "The first time I was actually able to sit outside, feel the sun, it was so warm, so bright... It was like God was shining a big light on me." Amanda Berry and Gina Dejesus give an interview to the BBC. The End Of Ariel Castro The same day the women earned their freedom, Castro lost his, arrested for aggravated murder, rape, and kidnapping. He testified on his own behalf during his trial. Equal parts defiant and repentant, Castro painted both himself and the three women as equal victims of his sexual addiction. He claimed that his crimes were not nearly as bad as they sounded and that his victims lived in some comfort with him, as willing partners. "Most of the sex that went on in that house, probably all of it, was consensual," the delusional kidnapper argued in court. "These allegations about being forceful on them -- that is totally wrong. Because there were times where they'd even ask me for sex -- many times. And I learned that these girls were not virgins. From their testimony to me, they had multiple partners before me, all three of them." Ariel Castro's full testimony during his trial in 2013. Michelle Knight testified against Castro, using his name for the first time. Previously, she'd never refer to him by name to keep him from having power over her, calling him only "him" or "the dude." "You took 11 years of my life away," she declared. Castro was sentenced to life plus 1,000 years in prison. He lasted little more than a month behind bars, in conditions much better than what he subjected his victims to. Ariel Castro committed suicide on September 3, 2013, by hanging himself with the bedsheets in his prison cell. Life After The Cleveland Kidnappings Gina Dejesus speaks out five years after being freed from Cleveland abduction by Ariel Castro. After the trial, the three victims went about rebuilding their lives. Michelle Knight went on to write a book about the ordeal titled Finding Me: A Decade of Darkness before changing her name to Lily Rose Lee. She got married on May 6, 2015, the second anniversary of her rescue. She hopes reunite with her son, who was adopted in her absence, when he comes of age. She's still sometimes reminded of her horrific ordeal. In a recent interview she said, "I do have triggers. Certain smells. Light fixtures with chain pulls." She also can't stand the smell of Old Spice and Tommy Hilfinger cologne, which Castro used to cover himself with. Meanwhile, Amanda Berry hopes to find love and marriage. She lives with her daughter, Jocelyn, and has adjusted to making her own decisions in life. She also recently worked on a TV segment about missing persons in Northeast Ohio. Gina Dejesus, the last of Castro's victims, wrote a memoir with Berry of their experience together, called Hope: A Memoir of Survival in Cleveland. She also joined the Northeast Ohio Amber Alert Committee, which helps find missing people and supports their families. Dejesus and Berry are not in contact with Knight. According to Knight, "I'm letting them go their own way and they're letting me go my way. In the end, I hope that we get back together again." As for Ariel Castro's home on Cleveland's 2207 Seymour Avenue, it was demolished a few months after the revelation of his crimes. Dejesus's aunt got to man the excavator controls as a demolition claw took the first swipe at the house's facade. After reading about Ariel Castro and the Cleveland abductions, read about the story of abusive mother Louise Turbin, who helped keep her children imprisoned for over a decade. Then, learn about Sally Horner, who is said to have helped inspire the infamous book Lolita.

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