



Finding Me: A Decade of Darkness, a Life Reclaimed: A Memoir of the Cleveland Kidnappings

Michelle Knight , Michelle Burford (Contributor)

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The #1 New York Times Bestseller and inspirational memoir by Michelle Knight, whose survival story gripped the world and continues in the forthcoming LIFE AFTER DARKNESS, publishing May 2018.

Michelle was a young single mother when she was kidnapped by a local school bus driver named Ariel Castro. For more than a decade afterward, she endured unimaginable torture at the hand of her abductor. In 2003 Amanda Berry joined her in captivity, followed by Gina DeJesus in 2004. Their escape on May 6, 2013, made headlines around the world.

Barely out of her own tumultuous childhood, Michelle was estranged from her family and fighting for custody of her young son when she disappeared. Local police believed she had run away, so they removed her from the missing persons lists fifteen months after she vanished. Castro tormented her with these facts, reminding her that no one was looking for her, that the outside world had forgotten her. But Michelle would not be broken.

In Finding Me, Michelle will reveal the heartbreaking details of her story, including the thoughts and prayers that helped her find courage to endure her unimaginable circumstances and now build a life worth living. By sharing both her past and her efforts to create a future, Michelle becomes a voice for the voiceless and a powerful symbol of hope for the thousands of children and young adults who go missing every year.

Finding Me: A Decade of Darkness, a Life Reclaimed: A Memoir of the Cleveland Kidnappings Details

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From Reader Review Finding Me: A Decade of Darkness, a Life Reclaimed: A Memoir of the Cleveland Kidnappings for online ebook

Rachael says

Although I read this book I will be refraining from giving it a rating simply because I don't believe in judging a story like this one in 'stars' for how much I 'liked' it.

All I will say is that my heart broke a thousand times over for all four girls and much like Jaycee Dugard and Amanda Lindhout, their stories won't be leaving me.

Eve says

I've honestly been avoiding reviewing this book since I finished reading it. I didn't find the subject matter too heavy (at least for me) or find that it was poorly written. However, I did struggle to connect with the author and as a result to the events.

Knight made headlines in 2013 when she and two other women were rescued from a residential home where they'd been imprisoned for over 10 years. Abducted at the age of twenty-one outside of a Family Dollar store only a few blocks from her home, Michelle comes face-to-face with a real life monster. The unimaginable things she endures are enough to give you goose pimples; how could neighbors and family not have known something was so wrong so close to their proximity?

From what I understand, *Lifetime Movie Network's* adaptation of the "Cleveland Kidnappings" will be airing soon. I'll probably skip it, but if you forego reading Knight's memoir, I'd recommend watching. She is a courageous and strong woman. If there's one take-away message Knight has for readers, it's the following:

"I'm not the first person to go through an ordeal like this...These kinds of stories are big news, but when they fade away, it's easy to forget all the people who are still missing. That's one reason I'm opening up my life in this book: I want everyone to remember those who are lost. And I want to urge you that if you ever notice anything that seems off about a situation—a child who keeps missing school, a woman who doesn't seem able to leave a house—please do call the police and ask them to check it out. Don't worry about seeming foolish if it turns out to be fine...Please, always take the two minutes to make that call."

Cathy Branciforte says

A truly disturbing story, written by a most courageous and amazingly strong young woman who was held

captive in Cleveland along with 2 other girls for 11 years by a disgusting and depraved individual. This was compelling and disturbing at the same time- can't believe that she made it and I wish her and the others nothing but the best, and most of all, some long overdue happiness in her life.

April (The Steadfast Reader) says

First posted on The Steadfast Reader.

Ms. Knight is an exceptional and brave woman. The trauma that she has experienced both in Castro's 'house of horrors' and before her abduction are things that no one should ever have to go through. Her dedication and love for her son are commendable.

The writing in this book does leave something to be desired. I understand that Ms. Knight was not afforded the education that many of us are fortunate enough to receive and that she has faced struggles I can't even begin to comprehend. Here is where I'd like to give a pointed stare at the publishers and possibly Ms. Burford. I think that there probably was a way to write this book - for Knight to write this book - but still allow for editing, revisions, and textual changes to make this book more readable and still retain Ms. Knight's voice. Unfortunately, the weakness of the writing takes a bit away from the power of the story. As it is, the book left me wondering if the publishers (and I'm not saying that they were) might have been capitalizing off of Knight's horrific experiences to make a quick buck.

Still, despite the inexpert writing, Knight communicates the horror of her experiences, the resiliency that she's shown throughout her life, and an amazing capacity for hope, love, and forgiveness. Her willingness to heal publicly, to share her story over many mediums, giving voice to those children and young adults still missing is something that is truly admirable. My thoughts and hopes for Ms. Knight is that she may finally find peace and experience something of a normal life that too many of us take for granted.

Diane Yannick says

Rating this memoir would be like grading birds for the technical proficiency of their songs. Michelle Knight shared her heart and soul with us. Her story is authentic yet imperfect in its delivery. I wouldn't have wanted it any other way. Kudos to her cowriter Michelle Burford for allowing Knight's voice to tell the story in her own way. I close the book with nothing but admiration for her personal courage and daily strength in the face of unspeakable evil.

Before reading this book, I didn't know that Knight's life had been so tough before her abduction. She ran away from both sexual abuse and parental ambivalence about her welfare. Living under a bridge in a trash can was preferable to living in her home. Finding religious sustenance while on the streets no doubt helped her survive her nightmare with "the dude". Throughout the narrative she refers to him as the dude, refusing to give him the respect of a name.

Each of the three girls who were abducted needs to walk her own path toward healing. For Michelle, it is talking, sharing, showing up. For Gina and Amanda, it is a more private walk.

I'm glad Michelle allowed us to share the parts of her captivity that she could bear to share. Eleven years is an eternity when you are being systematically abused both physically and mentally. Amanda and Michelle

were chained together and forcefully raped, experiencing their own pain and each other's. Michelle was starved and beaten so that she would miscarry each of her five pregnancies. Amanda had a daughter who brought a little light to utter darkness. Delusional Ariel thought that he could be a good father, take her out in public and even talked about gaining custody after the girls were freed.

Yet through it all, including near death experiences, Michelle held on to her love of her son Joey. Without this memory to anchor her, I don't think she would have survived. Her only advice to us is, "If you see something, say something." That's the least we can do.

Once freed she said, "If I don't forgive him then it'll be like he imprisoned me twice."

Once caught, Ariel said. " There are people trying to paint me as a monster and I'm not a monster. I'm sick." I can't buy that Ariel. You were a sick monster.

Christine says

Loving and studying everything criminology, this memoir just blew my mind completely out of the water.

To say Michelle Knight's story impacted me significantly is an understatement.

I have been intrigued with the Ariel Castro Kidnappings since their escape in 2013. When I heard that one of the victims had written a memoir I could not resist reading.

This memoir took me two days to finish. Not because I was not enjoying it but because at some points of the novel I actually had to close the book, sit back and just take it all in. The indescribable amount of pain, torture and day to day terror that Michelle Knight and the other victims were subjected to is incomprehensible.

My heart ached for them. To know that this was not just one day but 11 years of constant torture for Knight is horrifying. To know that she was subjected to constant beatings, continuous rapes and starvation by a mad man everyday...I just could not...could not begin to understand...

After reading this I felt completely depleted. This was the first time I've ever felt like that. To have read such horrific actions, indescribable feelings and such heartfelt thoughts through the actual victims experience...heartbreaking. I constantly felt for Michelle.

She lost a lot. The constant beatings, starvation, the multiple forced miscarriages that now prevent her from bearing children, the rapes at all hours of the day, her sense of self, 11 years of her life and the loss of her son. She endured so much and, as readers, we only catch a glimpse. No one can ever begin to understand what she went through. No one.

At the beginning of the memoir we also learn a little bit more about her background. She went through so much as a child and as if that were not enough she had to endure everything Castro put her through. Although the writing to some may seem informal, I believe it was perfectly written by Michelle and her co-author. She refers to Castro as being '*the dude*' throughout her story because she felt that by stating his name she was giving him power over her. Her language within the memoir showed us that through everything that happened to her she came out stronger and willing to move on by sharing her story her way.

I could write on and on about this memoir but I'm not going to. There is so much more that is said in this

memoir that I couldn't even begin to write about. I thank Michelle on her absolute bravery in revealing her story to the public. In doing so I hope it only strengthens her resolve to continue on being free, living life for herself and knowing that she is a powerful and amazingly strong woman. I hope and pray that all your scars, mental and physical, heal.

Be warned this memoir is terrifyingly graphic. If you are brave enough to read this, you will feel many emotions and have your heart break, repeatedly, a thousand times along with Michelle.

Lee says

This is an exceptional true story of the strength of the human spirit. What Michelle endured from this mad and evil creature is so hard to take in. How do you keep going day after day for 11 years, being raped repeatedly every day and plagued by continuous sick mind games that she had to contend with. I feel for her too as once she escaped this hell house there was no family there to give her a hug and console her, she was still on her own. The other girls had their families there to support them and smother them with love. I will be thinking of Michelle for quite a while, what an amazing woman.

Shani says

Although this was very disturbing to read, I have to give the author 5 stars for the courage to publicly speak of her ordeal. I hope this book gives her much help on the road to finding herself.

Dana Burgess says

I was hesitant to pick this book up. I didn't really want to know what happened to any of the women in Ariel Castro's (hereafter referred to as 'the dude') prison. I wasn't after some sensational, disgusting account of abuse and slavery. The deciding factor for me was seeing an interview with author Michelle Knight. What a feisty, down to earth woman! So it was with trepidation I turned to the first page. Michelle starts her story from the beginning - her beginning. We are introduced to a little girl living a life of sadness who, somehow discovers faith and hope and refuses to let either go. She is discreet in her description of the hell she ended up living in for 10 years, which I truly appreciated. In telling her story, she manages to make the abuse understood without having to stoop to specifics. The real story here is how Michelle managed to hold on to her faith, her hope and her true self no matter what 'the dude' did to her. I am in no way saying she didn't have and doesn't continue to have issues to work out - who wouldn't!! But her attitude and fierce will to heal and be happy serve as inspiration to anyone who has ever been through hell; to anyone who has wondered 'why me'; to anyone who has dared to take their life for granted. Michelle's story ends up being an uplifting reminder that we can not only survive, but bloom no matter what happens in our lives.

Wendy Darling says

Astonishing. After reading Hope: A Memoir of Survival in Cleveland, I was curious why the third victim

featured in it so little, although all of the girls seem to be on good terms and wish each other well. In reading this, it's clear that the perpetrator's first victim had already suffered so much before she ever even got into the car with Ariel Castro (bitter poverty, abuse, homelessness, having her son taken by CPS), and that she was isolated from the other girls and treated very differently. It makes total sense to me that she chose to write her own story, and I hope that she and her son have the chance to connect sometime when he's older.

I have such admiration for how resilient all three of these girls are, and how incredibly open and generous and forgiving they all seem to be towards each other and towards what happened to them. The fact that these horrific things happen are just--unimaginable to me, but hearing these stories of survival are both touching and awe-inspiring.

A note the writing: it's remarkably concise and clear-headed, as well as riveting. Both this book and HOPE are well-structured and written, in a way that many of these memoirs are not, so hat tip to both sets of collaborators on helping these girls tell their stories.

Diane says

This is a horrifying memoir. Michelle Knight had a traumatic childhood that included abuse, neglect and molestation, and she ran away from home when she was 15, during which time she slept under a bridge and briefly worked for a drug dealer. In 2002, when she was 21, she was kidnapped by a Cleveland bus driver named Ariel Castro and then held captive in his house for almost 11 years. While she was imprisoned, she was frequently raped, beaten, starved and abused.

During those hellish years, Castro kidnapped two other girls, Amanda Berry and Gina DeJesus, and also kept them chained in the house. Michelle often begged Castro to let her go so she could see her son again (on the day she was kidnapped, she had been on her way to court to see if she could regain custody of her son, Joey) and Castro would often beat her if she started crying. With three kidnapped girls in the house, he said he wanted them all to be a happy family. "I couldn't believe what I was hearing. This warped dude had kidnapped me, beat me, and raped me every day -- and he expected us to be a *family*? I knew he wasn't just sick; he was a total psycho. He was living in his own fantasy world -- and I had to find a way out of it."

The women would sometimes talk about trying to escape, but Castro had rigged the house with elaborate locks and alarms, and he frequently carried a gun and threatened to kill them if they disobeyed him.

"He kept his gun on his hip most of the time, but to be honest with you, he didn't really have to. By 2008 we were trained. After years of being in prison a crazy thing starts to happen: the locks move from off of your wrists and your ankles and up to your brain ... After you've been raped, humiliated, beaten, and chained for so long, you get into the habit of doing what you're told. Your spirit starts crumbling. You start not to be able to imagine anything different. And it feels like your captor is all-seeing and all-knowing."

In May 2013, Amanda noticed that an inner door was left unlocked and she called out to a neighbor, who broke a hole in the storm door so she could crawl out. She was able to call 911 and police soon rescued Michelle and Gina. Castro was arrested and sentenced to life in prison.

"Some of what he said in court made me furious. He talked about his porn addiction and how he was abused when he was a kid. I had heard it all before. Plenty of people get abused, but they don't go out and kidnap three women. I didn't feel sorry for him; I was still angry."

One month into Castro's sentence, he was found dead in his cell, hanging by a bed sheet. It was ruled a suicide. "What a punk! I wanted him to sit in his cell and rot away a little bit at a time for the rest of his life, just like he forced me to do. 'He couldn't even deal with one month of the torture that he put us through,'" Michelle later told Gina.

"Finding Me" is plainly written and the style could be immature, but it was so engrossing that I finished it in just two sittings. However, the book is so disturbing that parts of it made me ill. I would not recommend it to sensitive readers. If you were upset by Emma Donoghue's novel "Room," about a 5-year-old boy and his mother who are held captive in a small shed, then you should avoid Michelle's memoir, because it is a real horror story.

Tori (InToriLex) says

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This was tough to read, I can only imagine the horrible reality that these three girls faced when they were kidnapped by this Monster. I UN-apologetically sobbed three times while reading and I'm in awe at how they could live through hell for ten years. There was more than one time where an observant neighbor could have intervened or would have learned something was wrong by taking a step closer. The monster in this book targeted and preyed on these two girls dehumanizing them over and over as he used their bodies and took away their freedom.

"After years of being in prison a crazy thing starts to happen: the locks move from off of your wrists and your ankles and up to your brain."

I am blown away by how the human spirit finds a way to reach for hope. In the book all three girls used drawing to pass the time, two kept journals. Even though they were beaten, half starved and dying, those journals gave them peace and helped prosecute the monster that kidnapped them. The scenes described are graphic but not overly so. It does describe plenty of upsetting and violent scenes involving rape, so if you can't handle that kind of thing, this is not for you. The chains pictured above are something I kept thinking of when she was describing their daily lives. Michelle and the other two women kidnapped were chained most of kidnapping for over ten years. The depravity and cruelty of the monster that took them knows no bounds.

Michelle's life even before she was kidnapped was filled with hardship. She had to survive poverty, sexual abuse, and be a caretaker to her younger siblings while growing up. If you followed the case then you already know that the monster who did this killed himself not long after being sentenced to life on parole and pleading guilty. The fact that he killed himself rather than facing a life in jail, is really frustrating and makes me angry. But if Michelle can find forgiveness for him, then I find comfort in knowing that they are all alive and free.

“Forgiveness is the only way I can truly reclaim my life. If I don’t forgive him, then it’ll be like he imprisoned me twice: first while he held me in his house, and now even after he’s gone. I’m letting my hatred of him go so I can truly get my life back.”

This a memoir that gives you insight to a horrible tragedy, and it challenges you to appreciate and nourish what you do have in your life. It's not a long book, but it has a lot of people and events packed in that will keep you flying through it. I honestly wished was longer, but this is a wonderful sorrowful account from a very strong woman. Read this with tissue nearby.

“We all go through hard things. We might wish we didn’t, but we do. Even if I don’t understand my pain, I’ve got to turn it into some kind of purpose.”

Julie Smith says

I gave this book a high rating, not because it was a great literary work or because it was such a good story, but because Michelle Knight was an incredible young woman. This was a horrible story and at times a very difficult book to read and yet as in the stories of Louis Zamperini (Unbroken), and Amanda Lindhout, (A House in the Sky), Michelle showed amazing fortitude, hope, courage, love and forgiveness. I would like to think I could survive great hardship if need be, yet I know at my best I couldn't come close to enduring what these people did and then live to forgive the offenders.

Her life was challenging enough before her capture. As a former teacher I remember with sadness, seeing children such as she, who fell through the cracks. Children about whom no one seemed to care. If that was her only story and she rose above poverty, neglect and lack of education, it would be remarkable. Yet her life would become even worse. I prefer not to focus on the horrors that befell her, yet to take from her story, her spirit of resilience and desire to make a difference to others.

The book features many of Michelle's poems written while in captivity and insight far beyond her years or education, regarding moving forward. It is truly a moving story.

Alretha Thomas says

God in the Midst of Garbage and Gore

Yesterday I downloaded a copy of Michelle Knight’s book, “Finding Me.” It’s a harrowing account of the eleven years she, Amanda Berry, and Gina DeJesus were held captive by Ariel Castro. Although Amanda and Gina are mentioned, the story is Michelle’s story and told from her point of view. Like most Americans, I was riveted to the screen when news broke about the kidnappings and Amanda’s escape that led to Michelle and Gina being rescued. A resident of California, I had never heard of any of the three young women nor did I know they had been kidnapped. The tragic incident was something straight out of a horror movie.

After a few months had passed, there was talk about the women writing a book about what they had gone through. Immediately I made a decision that I wouldn’t read any of their books. I just couldn’t bear to read –let alone imagine what had happened over the eleven-year period. However, while searching for my next read, I stumbled upon Michelle’s memoir. Something tugged at my heart, and I knew I had to read her story.

From the first page I was hooked, and I've been hard pressed to put the book down. Fortunately, Michelle does not give graphic descriptions of the despicable, monstrous acts Ariel forced her to perform, but she does talk about the countless rapes and beating she endured. What she went through is beyond heartwrenching. While reading her story, I managed to keep my emotions in check, while wondering to myself where does someone get such strength and determination. How did she survive the beatings, the rapes, the starvation, the forced abortions, and the humiliation? And the horrid list goes on. What is it in a person that keeps them going under such unimaginable conditions?

For Michelle it was her son Joey that gave her the will to keep living. The day she had been kidnapped she was on her way to a court hearing about regaining custody of him. Abuse in the home by her mother's boyfriend led to Joey being put in protective custody. Unfortunately, Michelle never made it to court, but she also never lost sight of her son. She even spoke to him as though he were there with her in the house of horrors.

I mentioned earlier that I was able to keep my emotions in check, but that all came to an end during the twenty-third chapter that Michelle titled "Mustard." It's in this chapter that she reveals how Ariel made her eat a hotdog that was smothered in mustard. At this point, Michelle was practically starving. But she knew she was deathly allergic to mustard and refused to eat the hotdog. Ariel threatened to kill her. In Michelle's mind, she was going to die either way, so why not die on a full stomach? She wiped as much of the mustard off as she could and then bit into the hotdog. Immediately her face puffed up and things went from bad to worse. After a few hours, she was red as a tomato, couldn't feel her tongue or breathe. Gina was chained to her at the time and tried to offer as much comfort as possible. Then Michelle passed out. It was during this time that she said she saw the brightest light she had ever seen in her life and heard a loud voice that said, "It's not your time yet." She said she knew she was in the presence of God. When she came to she was still being held captive, but for the first time she had no doubt that God was real. The following day the swelling went down and she was able to breathe. At the end of the chapter I was sobbing and trembling so badly I had to get off of the elliptical machine I had been working out on.

I was not only crying for what Michelle and the other women had endured, but I was crying out of sadness regarding my overall attitude and behavior. I was crying asking God to forgive me for being so ungrateful at times, for complaining and whining at times. "Why is the gym so dirty?" "Why do women leave hair on the shower floor?" Michelle mentioned in the book, that the first eight months of her captivity, Ariel wouldn't let her take a bath or shower and that the stench was so bad, it made her gag. How dare I complain about hair in the shower! I get to shower. At work, we get a free lunch buffet daily. I often hear others complain when something is served that they don't like and I have been guilty of the same. Michelle once was starved for two weeks. She had lost so much weight the dirty chains Ariel used to strap her to the walls and bed would fall off of her. Here I am, not only am I eating, but doing so for free. I cried and cried, asking God to forgive me for not being grateful ALL the time. I wiped my tears and realized that Michelle's torture had not been in vain—that her book had touched me and reminded me how blessed I truly am. I know that I'm not unique and that it touched me, it's moved countless others. I'm still reading the book and I look forward to the part when the women are set free. Yes, Michelle, God is real and he may not come when you want him to, but he's always on time!

Deanna Evans says

The 5 stars are not because I enjoyed the book. The 5 stars is because someone can go through so much pain and suffering and come out with such a positive attitude.

This book was very hard to read because it's so hard to imagine someone actually living through this hell on earth. I have no words.
