



NEW REVELATIONS IN CALIFORNIA ABUSE CASE

INSIDE THE HOUSE OF HORRORS

Details of the torture endured by the Turpin children stun a Riverside County courtroom

By CHRISTINE PELISEK and STEVE HELLING



The case broke open Jan. 14, when a 17-year-old escaped the house and called 911.

Speaking in hushed, frantic tones, the 17-year-old girl pleads for help from the 911 operator. “I live in a family of 15 people, and our parents are abusive,” she says. “Two of my sisters are chained up.” Responding to the dispatcher, the teen’s quavering voice sounds like that of a much younger child—and she has trouble answering basic questions. “I don’t know what medication is,” she says at one point. “We don’t really do schools. I haven’t finished first grade, and I am 17. We live in filth.”

As the sounds of the call played out in a packed courtroom June 20, onlookers listened in stunned silence, some staring at David and Louise Turpin, the parents of the desperate caller, who are accused of chaining and starving 12 of their 13 kids. David, 56, and Louise, 50, are charged with 12 counts of torture, seven counts of abuse of a dependent adult, six counts of child abuse and 12 counts of false imprisonment. (Both have pleaded not guilty.)

The case has shaken even the most seasoned investigators. Inside the Turpins’ foul, trash-strewn suburban home in Perris, Calif., children were chained to beds and furniture and denied food even as their parents ate and taunted them. During the preliminary hearing, prosecutor Kevin Beecham told the judge that the Turpins “conditioned the children over a decade of physical torture and abuse in a way that is unimaginable.”

With each new detail released in the case, authorities—and the public—are getting a clearer view of the hell that the children endured. The oldest daughter, who was 29 years old, weighed only 82 lbs. at the time of her parents’ arrest. One of the adult male children was 39 lbs. underweight, and the oldest daughter suffered from “severe protein caloric malnutrition, numbness and weakness in extremities,” as well as “severe skeletal abnormalities,” D.A. investigator Wade Walsvick testified. Her preteen sister was so malnourished that her mid-upper arm “was equivalent to [that of] a

4½-month-old,” testified investigator Patrick Morris, who added that the girl had liver damage due to malnutrition and “social dwarfism—a stunted growth damage due to living in an environment that is abusive or neglectful.”

The alleged abuse was psychological as well. In their police interviews, several of the children described Louise Turpin as a volatile and violent figure. Misbehavior such as stealing food or non-compliance with the family rules was often met

‘WE LIVE IN FILTH. SOMETIMES I CAN’T BREATHE’
—17-YEAR-OLD VICTIM

with angry tirades and name-calling. The 17-year-old daughter told authorities that Louise referred to her and one of her sisters as the “devil,” according to Riverside County sheriff’s deputy Manuel Campos. “When she heard her mother call them the devil, it really bothered her and hurt her a lot.”

During his closing arguments, Beecham described the escalation of abuse in the Turpin home starting in Texas before the family moved to California. “The physical abuse started with slapping and hitting,” Beecham told the court. “They would place the children into cages. If that didn’t work, they would face [being forced into] a dog kennel, where they couldn’t stand.” When not being abused, said Beecham, the children were completely neglected by their parents. “They were left to fend for themselves,” he said, “in the tender years of their lives.”

As the case against their parents progresses, the children are starting new lives. The seven adult Turpin kids live together in a home in rural California, according to their lawyer. (Authorities won’t confirm the locations or conditions of their six siblings.) Despite their horrific abuse, the Turpin kids are resilient—and insist on being known as survivors, not victims. “They are in a good spot,” says their uncle Billy Lambert. “They have a lot more freedom now. It’s a step in the right direction.” ●

AGONY & ABUSE
None of the 13 Turpin kids (above) was fad enough, and all but two had severe muscle wasting, the witnesses testified as Louise and David Turpin (in court June 20) looked on.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT: FREDERIC J. BROWN/AFP/GETTY IMAGES; IRFAN KHAN/LA TIMES/GETTY IMAGES/2