

"He did live nearby, and so I knew I wasn't going to be put out of my way," Shirley recalls. "Also, I knew his brother well enough to think I could trust him. So, I naturally agreed to give him a ride."

Only after pulling into the driveway and stopping to let him out did she realize that something was wrong. The old home stood vacant and abandoned. Unbeknownst to Shirley, the Rodriguez family had moved earlier in the year. Sensing that his true intentions had been realized, Rodriguez grabbed Shirley by the throat.

Kicking and punching, she pushed Rodriguez away and tried to get out of the car. But he grabbed her and dragged her back inside. Then he began choking her.

Looking back, Shirley says, "I thought he was planning on choking me until I was unconscious or dead, and so I instinctively faked it."

Rodriguez violently raped Shirley, and then demanded she drive him home. Although she repeatedly tried, Shirley couldn't get her car started and, crying, began to panic. Rodriguez calmly explained to her that the car's shifter wasn't in the "park" position and helped her get the car started.

"Admittedly, a lot of people had a hard time understanding why I gave him the second ride," she says. "But you instinctively do whatever it takes to survive the attack."

After dropping Rodriguez off, Shirley drove straight home. She ran upstairs and awoke her mother. Weeping, Shirley told her what had happened.

The shroud of darkness falls

The Seddon family was active in the town's Lutheran community, and

so they immediately sought the help of their pastor. The minister arrived at the house early in the morning and they briefly talked about what had taken place. Afterwards, the police were called.

Later, at the police station, Shirley endured the mental duress experienced by most sexual assault victims. It was necessary for her to revisit every detail of the assault. Then, her bruised body was examined by a doctor, then photographed by a police officer.

A warrant was issued and Rodriguez was arrested. On October

Exactly a month after he had attacked Shirley, Rodriguez raped a second woman while free on bond. This time he used a knife during the attack. Because he pleaded guilty to both charges of rape, Shirley was spared the ordeal most rape victims must endure—that of a long trial with numerous cross-examinations by the accused party's defenders.

Rodriguez was sentenced to 15 years in a mental hospital (only a few of which he would serve).

Shirley felt scrutinized and blamed for the incident. By her own admission, it was easy to assign responsibility for the attack to her. After all, she left the bar alone, was young and so was considered naïve, and she offered her attacker a ride home.

"A lot of the victim-blaming stems from people trying to protect themselves from the reality of their own vulnerability and the vulnerability of those they love," says Shirley. "We try to protect ourselves by saying, 'There's a reason it happened to her. She made bad choices. Those things would never happen to my wife or daughter, or me.'"

The rape was only the beginning of Shirley's ordeal. The shame, guilt and fear of judgment, as well as the agony of facing the medical and legal systems were overwhelming.

Although she received support from her immediate family, most of her friends didn't know what

to do or say to help. She received no professional counseling or guidance. In the end, she was left alone to cope with the recurring fear and emotional hurt.

"There weren't any rape crisis centers in that part of Minnesota in the '70s," says Shirley. "The Violence Against Women Act hadn't been passed yet, and so there wasn't any



Shirley Iverson's personal experience in dealing with the anguish felt by rape victims has inspired her work promoting victims' rights.

21, the next step of the grueling legal process began when a preliminary hearing was held for the crime against Shirley. During the hearing, the defense attorney tried to find gaps in Shirley's testimony. The task of remembering every detail of the assault while on the stand and under pressure was emotionally exhausting.