

area of victim advocacy. She began doing speaking engagements. Her program, *Journey to Recovery*, addresses the difficult healing process that follows a sexual assault.

Professionally, Shirley is an administrator of social services for the State of Oregon. She has spent her entire ca-

reer focusing on the services that empower women. Her work on assisting women to become self-sufficient and leave the welfare roles received national attention in the 1990s.

"Understanding trauma and its far-reaching effects has been a foundation for my career in social service," says Shirley. "That empathy has been a core motivation in my daily work."

More than anything, Shirley has challenged the stigma associated with being a victim of sexual violence.

Shirley's newfound awareness corresponded with another significant event in her life—the beginning of her involvement with horses. She purchased her first horse, "Chico," a 7-year-old American Saddlebred gelding, when she was 34 years old. She purchased her first Paint Horse, Amazing Class, a 1992 sorrel overo mare, three years later. Although she had never ridden a horse as a child,

Shirley had dreamed of owning one. The purchases proved to be an important step in her healing and return to normalcy.

"The role horses have played in my recovery has been significant," says Shirley. "When working with horses, you're forming a relationship with an animal that's the size of a Volkswagen, and it's listening and responding to you. You're making this emotional connection with something that's so physically powerful. It's very hard to put into words just how empowering the experience is."

After buying her horses, the first fear Shirley had to confront was that of being in dark and isolated places. It was necessary for her to spend time in a dark barn or on a seemingly out-of-the-way trail if she hoped to work with and ride her horses.

"If you're going to be around horses," says Shirley, "you're going to be around men in dark barns, out in a rural setting. And when out riding, you might find yourself alone in a seemingly remote area. In a matter-of-fact way, my horse forced me to face those fears."

Having never ridden before, horses also helped Shirley learn to set goals and realize success. Conquering the



*(Left) Shirley has spent her entire professional career working to improve the rights of sexual assault victims.*

*(Below) Shirley met Kevin while he was serving on a local youth commission. The couple has been married 10 years.*

