

Rodriguez would be released from prison. When he was sentenced to prison for a third violent assault in 1980, I thought he was gone forever. This has driven home the point that sexual assault is a crime with life-long impacts."

Shirley immediately began fearing for her father and sister's well-being. Her father still lived in her childhood home, and her sister lived only a block away from their dad. Crookston is a relatively small town, and she knew it wouldn't be hard for Rodriguez, now a registered Level III sex offender, to find her family.

Once again, Shirley felt vulnerable. She began wondering if she was truly safe from his reach. Kevin couldn't help but notice his wife's fear.

"Although she didn't want to show it, she was visibly upset," says Kevin. "We talked about it for days. And then, she just seemed to tuck it away. She went about the business of caring for the horses and her work."

Five months later, Shirley received a call from her sister, who told her it was believed that Dru Sjodin, a coed from the University of North Dakota, had been abducted from the parking

lot of a Grand Forks shopping mall. The mall was only 23 miles west of Crookston.

The sisters recognized the circumstances surrounding Sjodin's disappearance and immediately suspected Rodriguez. Shirley began an Internet search for any available information and found a phone number for leaving tips about the missing girl.

"I knew from my own professional work that during the investigations of crimes involving multiple jurisdictions, important clues are often missed because the agencies don't always see the bigger picture," says Shirley. "I was afraid they wouldn't search the Minnesota sex offender list. So, two days after her disappearance was reported, I called to let them know about Rodriguez."

Authorities won't say if Shirley's tip resulted in the eventual search of Rodriguez's car and home. However, Grand Forks investigators found enough physical evidence to arrest Rodriguez and charge him with kidnapping. Tragically, Sjodin's body was found west of Crookston, very close to Shirley's childhood home.

In early May of this year, a federal grand jury charged Rodriguez with the kidnapping and death of Sjodin. North Dakota officials dropped the state kidnapping charges against Rodriguez and moved the case to the federal court. If convicted, he could face the death penalty.

Rodriguez's arrest resulted in much national attention for the Iversons. Shirley was interviewed by the press nearly 100 times and appeared on most of the major news programs, including ABC's *Good Morning America* and CBS' *The Early Show*. Throughout each interview, Shirley remained dignified and, although prod-

ded by the interviewer, refused to discuss retribution. Instead, the rock-steady horsewoman continued to champion the cause of victims' rights and advocacy.

Amazingly, despite the constant interruptions by the press, Shirley maintained her focus on her professional life, marriage and farm. In fact, her closest friends weren't even aware of her involvement in the Sjodin case or her distant past. Eventually, however, the news did get out.

Julie Clark, a fellow Oregon Paint Horse Club member, had called on Shirley and their visit was interrupted by the unannounced arrival of a media crew. Kevin chased the crew off and Shirley explained to Clark about recent events and her past.

"Of course, our hearts immediately went out to her," says Julie's husband, Ed. "I worked the Portland police sex crimes unit for five years, and Julie is a former parole officer, so we knew how tough it can be. But I will tell you, if that news crew hadn't shown up, no one would have known. She's a strong, wonderful woman with a lot of class."

Not surprisingly, Shirley's resolve is stronger today than ever before. She is busy helping to establish an organization that will empower victims, provide education about sexual violence and increase awareness of the conditions that promote the development of sex offenders.

While Shirley's story testifies to the impact sexual assault can have on a life, it also serves as an example of how deep, emotional wounds can heal. In Shirley's case, the restorative power came from her horses. Today, she celebrates life with Kevin, her horses and friends.

Speaking of the use of horses in the healing and empowering process, Shirley concludes, "I absolutely believe horses are an untapped resource for helping victims of sexual assault. While working with my horses, I was able to work through the heartaches and hardships, and find a purpose.

"Horses helped lead me out of that dark world I was in and back into the light." ■■■■

*Today, Shirley finds restorative power in her involvement with Paint Horses and the farming life.*

