

An interview with a victim

Editor's Note:

This is the third in a series about rape and violence. The first of the series began September 26 and covered several homicide cases. The number of Natives who are subject to ugly and criminal acts is unusually high. The following deals with the psychological aspect.

By **MARILYN RICHARDS**
(c) Copyright 1979

Her hands are clasped tight across her knees. Her thick hair is held severely at the nape of her neck by a rubberband. It is unwashed and untrimmed. The oversized man's plaid shirt, the carpenter style pants and mountain boots, though common Alaskan attire, also seem to purposefully conceal her sexuality.

She avoids eye contact during the meeting. Though we have met several times before, perhaps, it is my imagination because I know she is a rape victim, I notice she has changed and is different than when I have seen her before. Even when talking with the Troopers there were pauses and hesitation in saying "certain words" even in their legal context. Though some answers seemed to be half finished they were fully understood. I reminded by of Sgt. Joe Friday on television's old "Dragnet" series, "just the facts." Just

talking about rape one is still embarrassed. And though there shouldn't be, the victim still feels ashamed and guilty.

I try to be understanding, and wait to nurture a feeling of sisterhood. Any attack on any one single woman is an attack on all women. I feel sympathy and empathy. I remember how difficult it was when my former college roommate was attacked, not raped, in a dorm shower. Every day was full of fear and dread, which still continues for my friend who coped with life by taking tranquilizers, not counseling. The girls never went to the bathroom and showers alone, furniture was moved daily to barricade the doors. Some slept with knives, and if no one could accompany anybody on trips to eat, to the library to study or even to classes, these were missed. The paranoia continued endlessly. So did nightmares. After hours of looking at college driver's licenses and military photos, "he" was never

found and is still out there. Perhaps still attacking.

This victim is from a large Eskimo family. She traveled from her village to a smaller river village to complete a government study. There she stayed with family friends. "I slept on the couch but woke up with my father's friend putting his hand over my mouth. I screamed. He hit me and hit me. And I screamed and screamed. His wife must have heard me. She was practically in the same room. I couldn't sleep and when the morning came, they didn't look at me or talk to me and I took the first plane out."

"I told my mom and she hit me. Said I seduced him. Now my old man can't understand why I never come home to visit my family or anything. He thinks I am a bad daughter." The village where the rape occurred does not have a policeman or a magistrate and the nearest Trooper is 400 miles away. I am shocked because I know this victim and more angry because I know the rapist. I can't tell the village or his occupation which would eas-

ily identify him, but maybe that's what he needs.

The rapist is a "successful and nice family man", respected by

many, including the victim's father. The woman is called "a drop out and failure." And when she walks, it's with her head down.

Why rapes go unreported

There are two major reasons why many rapes are unsolved or unreported.

The delay in reporting a rape is one. The delay also raises the speculation that the victim is "getting even" with a boyfriend.

The victim usually know her rapist which could also result in her reluctance to report the crime. He may be a neighbor, friend, an acquaintance at work or even a relative. He is white, age 15 to 37 years. In most legal definitions of rape, actual sexual intercourse does not have to be completed.

Woman-hater may be an extreme adjective but the rapist

wants to humiliate, control and have power over the woman. The rapist uses intercourse or bodily harm as a psychological and physical weapon.

Law enforcement officials estimate only one in 20 rapes are reported and only a fraction of that number are apprehended and convicted. At a criminal code revision hearing last year, one victim said, 'you have to be either masochistic or psychotic' to report a rape and go through the legal process. If those words only partially reveal her scars, think of the thousands of "walk-ing wounded", the unreported.