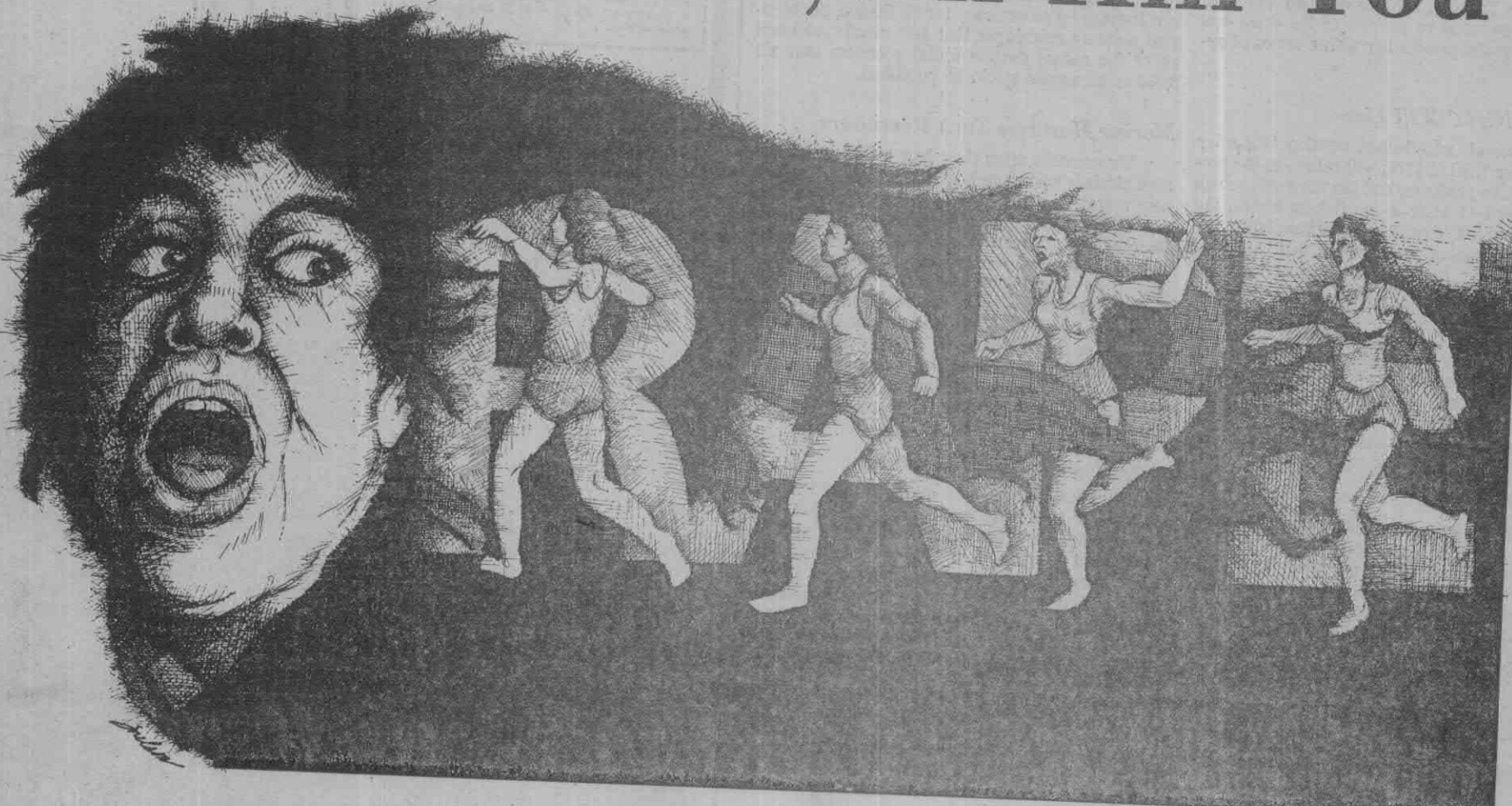


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# 'If You Scream, I'll Kill You'



Staff Artwork—Sheryl Nelson

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Constitution Health and Science Writer

Lauren remembers the time well.

"It was quarter to 3 in the morning, April 16, 1977."

She didn't recite the date so much as she shot it out — staccato — as if she says it often and has it permanently coiled on the tip of her tongue. Actually, she does say it often — to herself. It won't go away. It won't leave her alone.

She was in her bed in her third-floor Midtown apartment, which has locked gates outside. She moved there because "it was such a pretty neighborhood," and she could indulge in long walks without fear.

She went to sleep contented but awakened to the thud of a man landing on her back and the tip of a knife at her throat and the whispered, "If you move or scream, I'll kill you."

Lauren was about to become a statistic.

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The numbers are chilling, and, according to police and rape counselors, the U.S. figures look like this:

- If you are a female, the chances are one in 12 that you will be raped. It doesn't matter how old you are. At the Rape Crisis Center in Atlanta, the oldest rape victim treated so far was 97; the youngest was barely 2 months. About 25

## She was raped, and it took her years to recover. The Rape Crisis Center at Grady Memorial Hospital deals with cases like these.

percent of the Atlanta victims are under age 15.

- Rape, despite stereotypes, is rarely a racial crime, and 83 percent are within the same race.

- Rapes occur anywhere, with about 53 percent taking place in the woman's home.

- Most rapes are planned rather than emanating from the passions of the moment, and in about 60 percent of the cases, the woman had some acquaintance with her assailant. But this does not mean they were friends.

"We had a case," said Melissa Burkholder of the Rape Crisis Center, "in which a woman was picked up twice at the airport by the same taxi driver, and in the course of conversation, she said she was returning from Chicago where she

saw her boyfriend, Jim.

"About a week later, there was a knock on her door and when she asked who it was, the man said he was Jim, and when she opened the door, she was attacked."

- About 60 percent of all rapists are married men who lead outwardly "normal" sex lives.

- In about one-third of all rapes, the woman is physically injured.

And there are other ramifications, but they are not reflected in the statistics.

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The knife was digging into her throat, Lauren said, drawing blood.

"I tried to struggle," she said. "I was shocked. I tried to jump up. I tried to free myself but I couldn't. Then he said it again. 'If you struggle or scream, I'll kill you.' He said it many times. I still hear him saying it.

"I was just numb. I was hurting and terrified. I was never so scared in my life."

He had ransacked the apartment already, taking the \$26 from her purse, scanning her driver's license, learning her name.

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# Rape

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He whispered, "While I'm here, let's have some fun," she said. "I didn't say a thing. That's when I knew what would happen.

"I said to myself that this man is going to rape me, and then he is going to kill me."

She wishes the rest were a blur, but it isn't. She remembers the beady little eyes peering from behind the black ski mask, and the coldness she felt as he began fondling her. She remembers that "I didn't want to live. I felt so violated.

"I knew there was no help coming and I had no free will. This guy was controlling my life and there was nothing I could do about it. My body was numb. I didn't feel anything except total terror."

Which lasted for four hours, during which time she was cut repeatedly with the knife and bitten badly enough to leave permanent scars. It ended at daybreak, when she was forced to escort him to the locked front gate, kiss him goodbye, and let him out.

She ran to a neighbor's apartment, called the Rape Crisis Center and collapsed in tears. The first part of the nightmare was over. But only the first part.

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The Rape Crisis Center, a special service provided by Grady Memorial Hospital, was established in 1974 to serve the physical, legal and emotional needs of rape victims.

It was thought, said Burkholder, that a center was needed to ensure that proper medical treatment was proffered and that care was taken to secure evidence for legal cases.

"Most hospitals will not do rape exams," she explained, "and women who come in after being attacked will be sent to either Grady or Northside."

The center currently treats more than 1,100 women annually, 10 percent of the rape victims in the metropolitan area, according to FBI estimates.

About 90 percent seen at the center report the assaults to the police, but most rape victims make no report at all.

"So often," said Burkholder, the center's coordinator of volunteers, "a rape victim never tells anyone of the assault.

mediary person to talk to," she said. "There were no advocates to go with the victim to the district attorney's office, to the police, to stay with them through the lineup, to help them deal with their family and friends.

"Families," Burkholder said, "are subject to the same prejudices as the rest of our culture, and blame the victim. They tell a woman, 'If you hadn't been out after 11 p.m., you wouldn't have been raped,' or 'I told you not to live alone and you did anyway.'"

"These responses are very hurtful to a rape victim at the very time when she needs the most support. But while you might get that support from the family and friends after an accident or a death, you don't get it from them after a rape. People see it as sex, not as violence."

The center has a core staff and 100 volunteers — two for each shift, with one dealing with the victim's needs, the other with the family's emotional stress.

"Dealing with the victim is not enough," said Burkholder, "as she has to go back to the family eventually, and their reactions are important."

And because of that reluctance to view the raped person as a victim, only about 2 percent ever fully recover from the incident, looking on it as a horrible episode and moving on, picking up the threads of their lives. Most, said the counselor, never have normal relationships with a member of the opposite sex again.

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Lauren was told to stay put until three members of the police department's special sex-crimes unit arrived. They escorted her back into her apartment and talked to her, soothing her as best they could. She had to undress so they could take pictures of her cuts and bruises.

"I felt like dirt," she said, "but I thought this was something I had to do so they could catch him."

An hour later, she was at Grady and escorted through the emergency room by a rape center volunteer. Lauren remembers how the volunteer held her hand and spoke soothingly to her. She doesn't remember her name. There was a test for pregnancy,

venereal disease and pelvic damage (she needed four stitches), and a collection of sperm and blood samples. Scrapings from under her fingernails and hair samples were taken for future court use.

At home again, Lauren showered until the hot water ran out and still felt unclean. She called her boyfriend, and he said he would call right back. He didn't. Weeks later, he told her, "I'm sorry, honey, but I just can't deal with it."

Many people can't. To this day, said Lauren, "my father doesn't know. Nobody in my family knows. They couldn't

help me, and you end up helping everyone that you tell. They feel outrage, shame, disgust and helplessness, and you have to help them get over it."

And she thought it was her fault. "I felt so ugly and violated. I didn't have a period for a year and a half."

She moved out of the apartment. Put on 40 pounds. She wore up to five layers of clothes at a time "so no one could see me.

"I felt unlovable. I felt devalued. For a long time I didn't want to deal with anybody. I was not feeling like a whole female."

She spent a year going to lineups at the police department, hoping to see someone who resembled the masked intruder.

"I would ask the policeman to ask the men to repeat the sentence, 'If you scream, I'll kill you.' It was a joke to the guys in the lineup. I couldn't recognize anything."

So she drifted. Changed her job, her look, her attire, her attitudes. The long walks stopped. The only men in her life were her therapist and the boyfriends of women she was close to. She accepted a date, once, but panicked the next day and canceled it.

Recovery did not really begin until she took a vacation on a Florida beach, 2½ years after the attack.

"My thoughts were drifting around, and it was a nice day, and I realized my body was starting to feel turned on. I was excited.

"I was glad. I said, 'Golly!' and started laughing and clapping my hands and running around the beach and yelling.

"I was feeling, and I had thought I would never feel again. It was wonderful."



Rape Crisis Center's Melissa Burkholder: "So often a rape victim never tells anyone of the assault." (Staff photo — J.C. Lee)

▼ "We try to get everyone to report the rape, and feel it is necessary to help protect other women, but many just do not want to deal with the police and the legal system." Before the center's establishment, "there was no inter-