

Troy artist draws police sketches for county

By SUZIE ROLLINS

Back in the late '60s when a murderer was grabbing cops off the streets of Ann Arbor and Ypsilanti, Barbara Martin got her start assisting in the search for criminals.

An Eastern Michigan University art student at the time, Ms. Martin, a petite brunette, had the same stature as the killer's prey. Like other university women, she was frightened.

Although a composite drawing of the killer was published, it was so sketchy that it wasn't of much help in finding the suspect.

"I was looking at the drawings (of the killer) the police were running in the newspapers, and I just wasn't satisfied. I wanted to try drawing composites," she said.

"So I called the Washtenaw County police and told them I was willing to give it a try. That's how I got started as a composite artist."

Her drawing was used in helping locate John Norman Collins, who was

subsequently convicted of one of the murders.

From there, she became a regular composite sketch artist for Washtenaw police, the Ypsilanti police and the EMU campus police, until she graduated in 1971.

"Then I came back to Oakland County and tried to establish a practice with law enforcement agencies," she said.

"I sent letters to police agencies and offered my services as a composite artist free to them. I did it so I could establish my ability."

By 1972, she was drawing sketches of rapists and armed robbers for many police departments, including Troy. She also taught art in a Berkeley middle school and adult education.

"I worked on a free-lance basis for police departments, charging \$10 a drawing," she said. "I also did courtroom artwork for WWJ-TV, Channel 4."

After making a name for herself, Ms. Martin raised her prices. In July, she

began working for the Oakland County Sheriff's department. The Composite Drawing unit, in which she works, is part of the department's Technical Services department. She does composite drawings on request from police departments.

"I saw enrollment was declining and the teaching staff would soon be cut so I decided to go to work with my first love — 'police work,' the 31-year-old added. "I love being involved with police."

COMPOSITE DRAWING isn't miracle work, she said.

"People always expect you to go into a room with the victim and come out in a few minutes with a perfect sketch," she added. "It just doesn't work that way."

However, Ms. Martin said she's never returned from an interview empty handed.

"I never came out without a drawing in my 11 years at it," she said.

To begin, Ms. Martin and the victim sit down together and talk about the victim's attacker. Did he have a long nose? A plain nose? A wide mouth? Round eyes?

She does a pencil drawing and has the victim select hair color and style samples from a book given her by a cosmetologist.

"The victim guides and corrects me to the careful placement of the features," she said.

As a police artist, Ms. Martin studied anatomy to assist her in facial drawings. She also has spent time consulting plastic surgeons on bone structures.

"If someone tells me her attacker had high cheek bones I know he will have a deeper eye cavity than someone without high cheek bones," she said.

EYES ARE USUALLY the first feature she draws on the face.

"Once I get the eyes in position I travel down the face from the center of the pupil and then I have the mouth width," she said. Mouths are only as wide as the distance between the two pupils.

"After you get the basic features down, the person generally tells you their judgments which puts flavor into the character," she said.

Drawing a composite takes Ms. Martin anywhere from 45 minutes to a 1½ hours. No particular type of person is easier to capture, she said.

"It's only easier when you have an excellent witness."

Ms. Martin meets with the victim or witness, as soon as she is called in by the investigating police. Many times they discuss the attacker in a hospital emergency room.

"I like to get with the victim as soon

as I can before she gets a chance to watch television or read magazines and gets the feel of other images," she said.

The mind has a tendency to fill in the gaps with something acceptable or something it's seen recently.

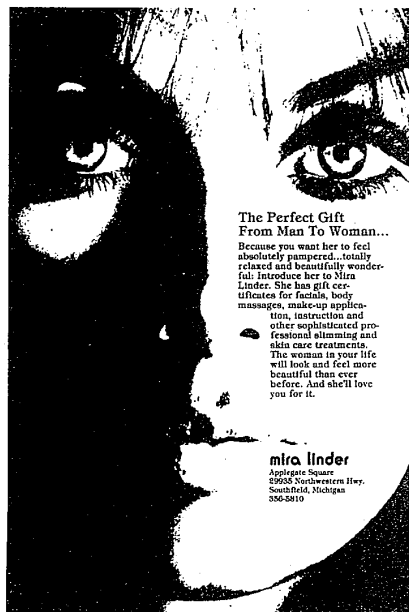
"I try hard to be sensitive and key into what people are telling me. I try to listen well."

THE MOST DIFFICULT assignment the artist ever had was when several men held up a chain restaurant and locked the employees in a freezer.

"There were several employees who all had contact with the robbers. First I had to determine how many robbers there were and who saw which person. It was a big job," she said.

When interviewing many victims, she tries to keep them apart until she gets a firm idea about each person's description.

The best advice Ms. Martin can give an attack victim to get a general impression of the attacker.




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