

said Raccuglia, 83, a long-time private civil attorney. "If you could have seen what these ladies looked like. We couldn't even identify them. ... The only reason he's living today is because jurors believed life imprisonment meant life imprisonment."

But, the only juror known to be still alive told the Tribune she regrets her decision to convict Weger. In what she called her first interview since the trial, 92-year-old Nancy Porter said she found the confession implausible and the idea that an unarmed Weger — who stood a thin 5-foot-8 — could overpower three women unlikely.

Still, after a six-week trial and hours of deliberations, Porter said she gave in to the will of the other 11 panelists.

"I was the holdout (juror)," said Porter, of LaSalle, a recently retired hospital billing clerk. "Everyone else wanted to go home and I finally said, 'Oh, OK.' I didn't change my mind, but I was getting pretty dirty looks so I gave in. I've been sorry ever since."

Porter also said a sheriff deputy in charge of sequestered female jurors broke the rules in sharing incriminating information about Weger's past and other details not allowed into evidence at trial. The jury convicted Weger but voted against the death penalty.

The prisoner review board is expected to vote on Weger's latest parole request Thursday in the state Capitol in Springfield. For years, he failed to glean a single vote in his favor. Then, in 2012 and 2013, several board members inexplicably supported his release. Weger nearly won his freedom that latter year, when the board was locked at 7-7. With expiring terms and vacancies, members change periodically. In the past two votes, Weger has received less backing. Nine members voted in favor to deny parole last year, with only four dissenting in his favor.

If a confession or expression of remorse will win him his freedom, he'd rather die in prison, Weger

told the Tribune.

"Why should I say I committed a crime that I never committed?" he said of his parole hearing. "I'll stay in prison the rest of my life to prove my innocence before I'll make any deal with any of you crooked people."

There have been many twists and turns in the case. His request for DNA tests on hair found in the victims' fists and blood on Weger's fringed leather coat was stymied in state court in 2004 after it was learned the items had not been properly preserved. In 2007, then-Gov. Rod Blagojevich denied Weger's request to either pardon him or commute his sentence to time served.

Weger told the Tribune during the Dec. 6 interview that if he ever is a free man again, he'd like to spend what time he has left with his family. That includes a daughter in LaSalle County who said she believes her father is an innocent man who has managed to stay sane while "hoping, praying