

## MORRISON, SAMUEL FERRIS

October 7, 1941-April 11, 2002

The gym at Wheatland Junior High School is usually filled with students who cheer while athletes sink baskets, their tennis shoes shuffling across polished floors.

But Tuesday afternoon, there was a somber silence across the gym as friends, teachers and students came to say goodbye to the school's principal and his wife.

Hundreds attended a memorial service for Kathryn and Samuel Ferris Morrison. She was 53. He was 60.

The couple died last week in apparent murder-suicide, each from a single gunshot wound. Local police are treating Mrs. Morrison's death as a homicide, Sgt. Randy Chesser said.

She suffered from multiple sclerosis and had been in a wheelchair for nearly 30 years. She had been a teacher for a brief time while in town until the illness cut her career short.

Both were well respected in this farming community of 3500 people north of Cheyenne.

The Rev. Delbert Dick spoke about them during the service. He was surrounded by more than a dozen bouquets of colorful flowers, another silent tribute to the couple.

Dick and his family lived next door to the Morrison's for nearly 30 years. He told stories about the couple that came from people who knew them.

"How many who are here had Mr. Morrison as a teacher?" he said as hundreds of hands shot up across the gym.

Many hands also went up when he asked whether they had Mrs. Morrison as a teacher.

"How many remember Mr. Morrison in regards to erasers?" he asked, smiling as people smiled.

Friends and students said after the service that Morrison would sometimes good-naturedly toss chalkboard erasers at students who didn't pay attention in class.

Morrison taught history and social studies at the school for nearly 30 years. He had been the school's track coach and once it's athletic director.

He was principal for the last year and had announced his resignation effective at the end of the school term.

"We have a lily in our flower bed that Kathy gave to us," Dick said. "It's something we'll cherish even more."

One memory he told was about a faculty pie-eating contest. A teacher teased Morrison, saying the length of his nose might interfere with his eating.

In playful response, Morrison tossed a pie at him. The other teacher ducked and the pie landed on a seventh-grade girl.

Dick said Morrison's met when they were young teachers in Wheatland. She was a vocal teacher who had graduated from a college in South Dakota. Morrison took her to a faculty picnic. They were married in 1971.

Mrs. Morrison was devoted to the Wyoming chapter of American Association of University Women. She was named an Outstanding Young Woman of America twice-in 1976 and 1979.

The couple's grown son, Ian, had a song, "Because You Loved Me," played in their honor Tuesday as he sat quietly in the front row surrounded by others.

After the service, mourners filed out quietly. Paula and Craig Henderson of Wheatland were among them. Mrs. Henderson knew Mrs. Morrison from the early 1980's when they were both in AAUW.

Mr. Morrison was an excellent teacher, the Hendersons said.

"Two of our three kids had him in social studies," Paula Henderson said. "He was very willing to learn about the students and to work with them on a one-to-one basis."

The Morrisons were "inseparable," Craig Henderson said.

"He took time out of his principal's job to go home to help her," he added. "What happened, I guess we'll never really know."

Terri Williams Yeadon, 37, is a Wheatland native who had Morrison for a history teacher when she was in the eighth grade.

"He was great," she said.

Two of her three children have had him for a teacher.

"He was awesome," said Ann Yeadon, 15. "He got me into really liking history."

Morrison also sparked their interest in long-distance running. Mrs. Yeadon said she took up the sport when she was in school and now her daughter is on the track team.

Terri Yeadon said Mr. Morrison was a "pillar of the community." She said she wished the administration had called off school Monday because children need time to mourn. The community is in shock about what police say has happened, she said.

"It's really hard for me to believe because of the way he was," she said. "He was happy-go-lucky."

If what happened occurred like the police have said, she said, it was "more an act of compassion."

What happened on April 8<sup>th</sup> "does not fit with him," Ann Yeadon added.

Michelle Francis, 15, said Morrison was "one of the best teachers."

"He was a good man, a good person," she said "His life revolved around (Mrs. Morrison.)"

Tony Fuller teaches math at Wheatland Junior High and had taught with Morrison for 29 years.

"He was great," he said. "He was very much a tradition."

Fuller said Morrison cared for his wife, making sure she had everything she needed before he went to work. He went home at lunch.

Fuller said there was tremendous pressure in the principal's job and with his wife's illness.

"I don't think the public realizes the pressure a principal is under," he said.

What apparently happened was out of character, he added.

"He wouldn't share his troubles," Fuller said. "I wish he would have."