

October 01. 2016 8:07PM

Husband of kindergarten teacher found dead has been hospitalized since her death

By SHAWNE K. WICKHAM

New Hampshire Sunday News

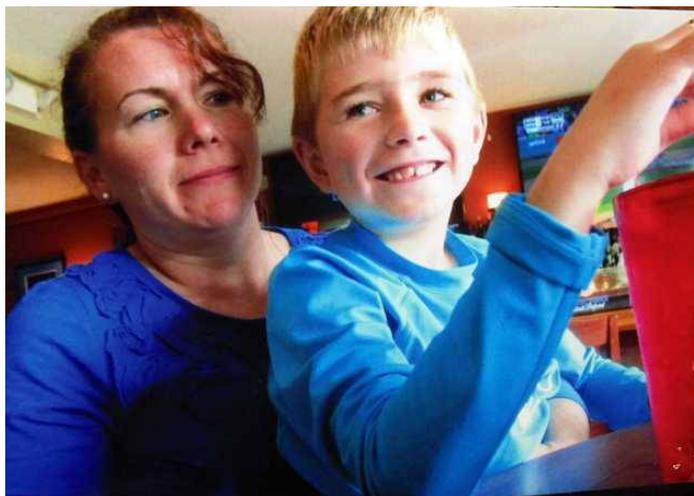
The husband of a Goffstown kindergarten teacher who was found dead in their Dunbarton home on Sept. 1 has been in the state psychiatric hospital for nearly a month, according to a family member.

Elaine Tefft of Bedford said her stepson, Christian Tefft, was taken to Concord Hospital's emergency room the day police found his wife dead from a single gunshot wound. He was hospitalized there for a few days before being transferred to New Hampshire Hospital, where he has been ever since, according to Tefft.

It's been a month since Wendy Tefft died, and investigators still have not determined the manner of her death - whether it was suicide, homicide or accidental - according to Jane Young, associate attorney general.

Elaine Tefft said she knows Wendy did not commit suicide; she was devoted to her 9-year-old son, Holden.

"She would move heaven and earth to be around to take care of Holden," she said. "She just wanted to be safe and she wanted him to be safe."



(/storyimage/UL/20161002/NEWS07/161009933/AR/0/AR-161009933.jpg?q=100)

Wendy and Holden Tefft



(/storyimage/UL/20161002/NEWS07/161009933/EP/1/1/EP-161009933.jpg?q=100)

A photo montage of Wendy and Holden Tefft (Courtesy)

Related Stories

Tefft said Wendy had called her shortly before her death and asked her to recommend an attorney. "She had decided she was going to divorce Chris because life with Chris was becoming unbearable," she said.

"He had serious mental health issues and he would go out of control."

Wendy Tefft was supposed to be at Glen Lake School on Sept. 1, greeting her new students at an open house; she was excited about the new school year, Elaine Tefft said.

But Wendy never arrived at school; police found her body that morning.

Elaine Tefft had brought brightly-colored flowers to her daughter-in-law a few days before school started. "When they found her body, the flowers were on the table next to her," she said.

Elaine Tefft is the widow of Stanton Tefft, a prominent Bedford attorney and philanthropist; she used to work as a paralegal in her husband's law office.

After her husband's death in 2003, she remained close to his son Christian and his family.

The night before the kindergarten open house, Elaine Tefft wanted to visit them and called the house. But Christian answered and said she shouldn't come over, so she asked him to pass on her best wishes to Wendy for the next day, she said.

The next morning, Christian Tefft drove his son to school, something his wife usually did. On the way there, he drove into a ditch, Tefft said.

According to Tefft, a passer-by drove Holden to school, where a teacher noticed bruises and sent him to the school nurse after the boy said he had been in a car accident.

Meanwhile, school officials learned that Wendy Tefft had not arrived for the open house in Goffstown, and called police.

Questions remain unanswered in year after death of Goffstown teacher (/safety/Questions-remain-unanswered-in-year-after-death-of-Goffstown-teacher--09052017)

Science center fund honors teacher; 'nothing new' in probe into her death (/crime/Science-center-fund-honors-teacher-nothing-new-in-probe-into-her-death-06162017)

Months before teacher's death, police removed guns from home (/Months-before-teachers-death,-police-removed-guns-from-home)

NH bishops call for mental health forums (/NH-bishops-call-for-mental-health-forums)

Crowd gathers at Goffstown pub to remember teacher (/Crowd-gathers-at-Goffstown-pub-to-remember-teacher)

Goffstown schools 'devastated' by kindergarten teacher's death; investigation ongoing (/Goffstown-schools-devastated-by-kindergarten-teachers-death;-investigation-ongoing)

When police went to the Tefft home in Dunbarton to do a wellness check, they found Wendy's body, Tefft said; she had been shot once in the torso. "They sealed the house and took Christian into custody," she said.

Dunbarton Police Chief Daniel Sklut confirmed his department responded to a car crash that morning but said he could not discuss details because of the Attorney General Office's ongoing investigation.

Jane Young said Christian Tefft was the driver. "What I can tell you is ... that the police did have contact with him (Christian) prior to them going to the home, in relation to a motor vehicle incident."

Holden is staying with another grandmother, Tefft said, and family members are taking turns caring for him.

Tefft said Wendy met Christian when she was working at the Village Trestle restaurant in Goffstown, earning her way through college. Wendy was 19 years younger; she would have turned 39 last week.

They married in 2003, and their son was born on Christmas three years later.

Family photos show the couple smiling in front of the Christmas tree with their little boy. "That's never going to happen again, ever, ever," Tefft said, her voice breaking.

She's tried to make sense of the tragedy over the past month. "I think they were good together for a long time," she said. "The three of them had a happy life together."

"And that's what's so heartbreaking."

Something happened last fall that changed her stepson, Tefft said. "It's like he fell into a black hole and he couldn't get out."

Tefft said she never saw Christian act violently. But he would "rant and rave and carry on," she said. "He would walk around pacing."

"He kept saying the house was toxic," she said. "It was toxic because he made it toxic."

In January, her stepson called her in the middle of the night, asking her to come get him. "He was hiding in the woods in Dunbarton and he wanted me to come rescue him because 'they' were on his trail," she said. "He was ranting and raving (that) he had done something horrible."

"I kept saying, 'We can fix this.'"

Afraid to confront him alone, she called a male relative, who found Tefft and brought him home.

Her stepson would sometimes bring her boxes of belongings, asking her to keep them safe for him.

Once it was a box full of camera equipment.

He also asked her to take care of his family if he wasn't around. "He would say, 'Promise me you're going to take care of Wendy,'" she said. "I would say 'Of course I will.'"

He had threatened suicide before, one time with a gun, another time taking pills, Tefft said.

Tefft said Wendy had decided to leave; she wanted to get her son out of the house, she said. "She adored him. She knew the house wasn't a safe place."

Wendy had a tough childhood; her parents died young and she took care of her younger brother. She left home when she was 16, Tefft said.

She earned her bachelor's degree, then went on to a master's in education. "She worked so hard to achieve so much, and she had achieved it," Tefft said.

"I can't believe she's really dead," she said.

Tefft said she hasn't talked with her grandson about what happened that day; it breaks her heart to think about it. "Because regardless of what happens, he is going to grow up without his mom."

She wonders what she could have done to prevent what happened. "I feel like I failed her. I really do."

"We really need to do something about mental health," she said.

Tefft plans to establish a fund in Wendy's name at the Seacoast Science Center in Rye, to provide discount admission for low-income kids. It was one of Wendy's favorite places to take her son, she said.

"I don't want her to be forgotten," she said.