

Allen attorney A. Don Crowder shoots, kills self

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er's wife with an ax. Ms. Montgomery claimed self-defense in the slaying of schoolteacher Betty Gore.

Mrs. Crowder said she was at home Tuesday when she heard the fatal shot about 7:40 p.m. She said she thought her husband had gone to the bathroom, and when she went to check on him, she found he had locked himself in his weight room. He talked to her through the door.

"He said that he had too much pressure on him," she said.

Earlier in the evening, he had

made her promise that she would publish a book he had written — a murder mystery — but she said she didn't think her husband was suicidal.

"He said, 'I love you.' ... He must have told me that 10 times," she said.

Mr. Crowder's death shocked those who knew him and cast a pall over the Collin County Courthouse on Wednesday.

"We lawyers have a high-stress profession," said attorney David Haynes of McKinney. With a "personal crisis in your life, you sometimes get to the point where you're not thinking as clearly as you should. People do desperate things. It's tragic."

Jim Mattox, a longtime friend and former law partner of Mr. Crowder's, was stunned.

"It's hard for me to believe that anybody in good health and with a lot of loving friends would do something like that," he said. "But for Don, it's even harder to believe. He's always been a real take-charge, upbeat individual. He was like a brother to me."

Mr. Crowder graduated from Southern Methodist University law school with Mr. Mattox in 1968 and was a successful personal-injury lawyer when he took on Ms. Montgomery's defense. The case catapulted Mr. Crowder into a bitter-sweet kind of fame.

Mr. Crowder recently told a

newspaper in McKinney that the pain-stricken faces of the victim's family "still haunt me."

"They didn't understand that I had a job to do," he said in the McKinney Courier-Gazette. "A lawyer's job is to win if you can. ... I feel guilty about a lot of things, but practicing law isn't one of them."

A former boxer and SMU football player, Mr. Crowder was drafted by the National Football League's Washington Redskins, but an eye injury sent him back to law school.

He was a tenacious fighter in the courtroom, according to those who went up against him and those who worked alongside him.

"He was a very passionate person about things he believed in," said Dallas attorney Frank Jackson. "He had a highly developed sense of justice, and that carried over into his practice."

Active politically, Mr. Crowder was chairman of the Collin County Democratic Party in 1983 and made an unsuccessful bid for governor in 1986. In the mid-1970s, he served on the Lovejoy school board and was later elected to the Lucas City Council.

Mr. Crowder's generosity was something that came up repeatedly during recollections from employees, friends and kin.

"The guy had an absolute heart of gold," said Matt Goeller, a former Collin County prosecutor. "He was the kind of guy, if there was an underprivileged kid or poor kid in

Allen who couldn't afford new cleats or a new jersey, Crowder had an open tab at an athletic store in Allen and kids could go in there and put it on Don's tab if they were poor."

"I think Donnie is a guy who climbed a lot of mountains," said his brother, Dale Crowder, an accountant in Garland. "It could be that in recent years he'd found he'd already reached a peak, in that regard. Life didn't hold for him what it once did, maybe."

Carol Crowder, Mr. Crowder's ex-wife to whom he was married for 28 years, said, "He didn't want to grow old. ... He wanted to be able to do everything he did when he was 20."

Memorial services for Mr. Crowder will be at 10 a.m. Saturday in the Turrentine-Jackson-Morrow Funeral Home Chapel in McKinney. Visitation will be from 7 to 9 p.m. Friday at the funeral home. In lieu of flowers, memorials may be made to the Don Crowder Athletic Scholarship Fund, Allen Independent School District, in care of Steve West, P.O. Box 13, Allen, Texas 75013.

In addition to his wife and brother, survivors include his parents, Alton D. and Tynie Crowder of Dallas; sons Jimmy Crowder of Grapevine and Austin Crowder of McKinney; daughters Rhonda Henslee of Corpus Christi, Cristy Crowder Franks of McKinney and Brooke Crowder of Denton; and four grandchildren.