

## **Margaret R. Jackson**

---

**From:** UW News Service [jkearns@uwyo.edu]  
**Sent:** Monday, October 19, 1998 7:52 PM  
**To:** John Baldwin; John Nutter; Judy Powell; K.C. Compton; Kathie Cuomo; Ken Griffin; Kerry Drake; KGWN; Kim Reichert; KIMX Radio/Laramie; KING/KOLT/Cheyenne; Kristi Wallin; KRQU/KLDI; L Icenogle/Casper Coll; Larry Stewart; Lois Gelb; Maggie Jackson; Marcia Edwards; Martha Williams; Mike Woolcott  
**Subject:** University of Wyoming News

\$\$\$

UW News - Stories included in this transmission  
10/19/98

1 - MATTHEW SHEPARD MEMORIAL

\$\$\$

MATTHEW SHEPARD MEMORIAL

(The following remarks are from University of Wyoming President Philip Dubois during an Oct. 19 memorial service for UW student Matthew Shepard.)

Oct. 19, 1998 -- Good Evening. Let me thank each of you for being here, and for the tremendous amount of support you have shown over the past 10 days to the family and friends of Matt Shepard, the University community, and the city of Laramie.

As your program indicates, we have attempted tonight to assemble just a few of the literally hundreds of people affected by this tragedy--those personally involved because they were Matt's friends and those who came to be involved as the events of the last ten days have unfolded. I very much appreciate-as does the planning committee-the understanding of the many individuals and groups who wanted to be represented in this program but who also recognized the limitations of time.

A little over a week ago, we gathered on the lawn outside the Newman Center. Joined at that time around a common purpose, we found ourselves united as a community to pray for Matthew, to demonstrate our concern for his family, and to speak out against the kind of hatred and bigotry that found expression in the vicious attack upon him.

When I finished speaking that evening, I stood next to my new friend, Jim Osborn, and realized that both of us were shivering. It was a chilly night, but it seemed colder than it really was. I looked around at the hundreds of men, women, and children gathered there. With each speaker the crowd seemed to draw closer together, perhaps fighting the cold or perhaps chilled by the thought that somehow we might have been able to prevent the attack upon Matt.

We closed that evening with the singing of "We Shall Overcome," knowing in our hearts that Matt would probably not win his battle. He would not overcome.

I was awakened the next morning at 5 a.m. with a telephone call. A news organization was calling me to get my reaction to the word of Matt's death. The reporter's voice was filled with emotion. He had watched this community for several days. He had seen the pain on the expressions of nearly everyone on campus and in town. He knew how much this hurt. But he needed a quote.

I recall only that my mind flooded with an unimaginable mix of personal emotions and professional responsibilities. What must Dennis and Judy Shepard be going through right now? Did I have the authority to lower the flags on campus? How could I get a statement out that would provide comfort and reassurance to our gay students? What would I ever say to my children if I had to tell them that their brother had died?

The rest of this past week has been a neverending repeat of that dreadful morning. Other than the death of my own father three years ago, I cannot remember a week in which I have felt such overpowering sadness.

The sadness of thinking about Matt, his parents, his brother, and his close friends. The sadness of thinking about Matt's gay colleagues, struggling to express simultaneously both their resistance to this violence and their fear that it could have been them in Matt's place.

The sadness of the University faculty and staff who have struggled so hard to create a truly inclusive climate here, only to have others tear down years of work in just a few hours of unspeakable horror.

The sadness of a closeknit community trying to defend itself against ignorance and stereotypes. The sadness of occasionally hearing expressions of such ignorance.

Life is not fair, we've all been told, and this week we lived that lesson again.

But with this sadness have come some small moments of triumph. The Homecoming Parade and the march for Matt. A moment of silence at the football game, broken only by the sound of tears.

The Sunday community vigils and the coming together of this community to "Remember Matthew" on Monday afternoon. Gay Awareness Week, and the courage of our Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgendered Association (LGBTGA) to stay the course and not to let fear ruin their plans.

The leadership of our student organizations, ASUW, the Multicultural Resource Center, the Residence Halls, the Greek Community, and our student-athletes to find ways to express their solidarity and support for Matt and their collective opposition to violence, discrimination, and bigotry-regardless of any personal philosophical differences or religious beliefs they might have about homosexuality.

And the professional and personal involvement of our faculty and staff in counseling students and in three days of teach-ins on campus to demonstrate that education and free expression are the most powerful weapons we have against forces that would divide us as an academic community and as a society.

What now can we do? The answer is not simple, but we must begin.

We must begin by reaffirming that UW and Laramie welcome all people, without regard to who or what they are. We must reexamine all that we have done to cultivate an appreciation of diversity and make sure that we haven't missed a teaching opportunity. We must find a way to commemorate this awful week in a way that will say to the entire state and nation that we will not forget what has happened here.

And, working closely with the leaders of the local community, we must be vigilant in making sure that the climate for those who are different-whether defined by their sexual orientation, ethnicity, religion, national origin, disability, or any other personal characteristic-not only meets the letter of the law but lives up to the standards of our hearts.

I hope that our elected legislators will also seize this moment. I recognize that the question of hate crimes legislation is a matter over which reasonable and thoughtful people who are neither homophobic nor bigoted can and will disagree. No hate crimes statute, even had it existed, would have saved Matt. But Matt Shepard was not merely robbed, and kidnapped, and murdered. This was a crime of humiliation. This crime was all about being gay. No group of people should have to live in this kind of fear.

I speak only for myself and not this University, but it is time our state makes a public statement through the passage of such legislation that demonstrates our values, our commitment to the state motto, and our collective zero tolerance for hatred. Once was more than enough.

All of us have reacted to the events of the last 10 days in our own personal way. Matt meant something different for each of us. That is how it should be. Matt could have been my son. He could have been your brother. He was our friend. All of us will remember him.

\$\$\$