

Boy Miraculously Survives Deadly Shooting on Indian Reservation

Twelve-year-old Christian Schuster survived a deadly shooting in North Dakota by feigning death as he lay under his slain brother's body, and an 8-year-old sister was spared because she was down the street sledding on a snowy hill, the family's pastor said.

The Rev. Grant Patterson told The Associated Press that he spoke to the young boy just about an hour after his grandmother and three of his siblings were shot dead Sunday afternoon in their home in New Town, on the Fort Berthold reservation.

Martha Johnson, 64, and three of her grandchildren—Benjamin Schuster, 13, Julia Schuster, 10, and Luke Schuster, 6—were killed, Mountrail County Sheriff Ken Halvorson said. He described a man who committed suicide hours later as a “person of interest” in the slayings.

Christian Schuster saw the man who entered his home but didn't recognize him, said Patterson, **pastor** of the Bethel Lutheran Church in New Town. When the shots rang out, one of his brothers fell on him.

“He laid there and played dead until the shooter left the house,” Patterson said. Ava Schuster, 8, also may have been killed had she been home, the pastor said.

“She was sledding on a hill a block from her house with a bunch of her pals,” Patterson said. “If not for sledding hills, she may also have been murdered.”

The slayings have attracted widespread interest in North

Dakota, where homicides are rare. Only 24 murders and non-negligent manslaughters occurred in 2011.

Halvorson on Tuesday identified Kalcie Eagle, 21, of New Town, as the man who'd committed suicide in nearby Parshall hours after the slayings. Eagle, who lived a block from the Johnson family, stabbed himself Sunday night at a friend's home about 20 miles away.

The FBI is leading the investigation into the deaths because the federal government has jurisdiction over crimes on reservations. FBI spokesman Kyle Loven would not confirm that investigators were looking at Eagle.

He said it was unlikely the FBI would release any information on the shootings or the suicide in Parshall "until all aspects have been nailed down."

The pastor and the sheriff said Christian Schuster notified authorities of the shooting, saying an unknown man had killed his family.

"His brother was on top of him and as soon as he saw the guy leave, he called 911," Halvorson said. "He hung up on the deputy and said he was going in to the other room to hide."

Patterson said the children had been living with their grandparents, Martha and Harley Johnson, for about two months. Their mother had been suffering from some "emotional issues" and moved across the state to the Grand Forks area, he said.

Harley Johnson was out hunting at the time of the killings, Patterson said.

"It's a time of great confusion for Harley, with the storm of events," said Patterson, who believed the surviving children were being cared for by state Social Services. "He's doing the best that anybody could."

Eagle killed himself Sunday night in Parshall in front of a

deputy and a highway patrolman. Halvorson said Eagle walked out of his friend's house and stabbed himself. The sheriff would not say why the officers were at the house.

New Town and Parshall are on the Fort Berthold reservation, home to the Mandan, Hidatsa and Arikara, who are known as the Three Affiliated Tribes.

Johnson and her grandchildren were not tribal members, but Eagle was.

Halvorson said Eagle was familiar to law enforcement officials in the area. He was arrested in March after leading authorities on a 100-mile, high-speed chase in western North Dakota in a stolen pickup truck pulling a trailer, the sheriff said.

Eagle pleaded guilty in August to unauthorized use of a vehicle and was sentenced to a year in jail with 10 months suspended and three years of supervised probation, court records show. He was ordered to pay more than \$45,000 in fines and restitution.

Halvorson described the Johnsons as "very upstanding citizens" who had both recently retired. Martha Johnson was a private pilot and had helped authorities in the region with search missions, he said, noting she also had a concealed-carry gun permit.

"I gave her the test," he said.

Patterson said Martha Johnson was a longtime member of the church, and her grandchildren recently helped serve dinner at a church function.

"They acted like little waitresses and waiters," he said. "They were all nice little kids."

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