

# GF teacher 'Mr. O' gave life to learning

English teacher Melvin Olauson dies at age 42

By Mike Brue and Sally Thompson  
Herald Staff Writers

To his English students at Grand Forks Community High School, he was "Mr. O."

Straightforward and honest with students, but compassionate. A guy who could joke with students just as easily as he could lay it on the line, often while holding a cup of coffee in one hand. Mr. O gave his students nicknames, such as "Big Red" or "Digger," then gave them reasons to enjoy books, reading and good writing.

"The guy you hate to love," student Darrel "Digger" Griggs said during his graduation speech in May, "but you really love to hate."

No one laughed harder when Griggs said it, he recalled Thursday, than Mel Olauson.

Melvin D. Olauson, 42, of 611 Chestnut St., died Wednesday, July 5, 1995, in United Hospital, Grand Forks.

Olauson also taught English at Grand Forks Central High School. But Community High School was a



**Melvin Olauson, 42,** was an English teacher at Grand Forks Community High and Grand Forks Central High schools.

unique venue — an alternative school for students searching for success in a non-traditional setting. Olauson worked hard to provide them with a path, colleagues and students say.

"A very caring teacher, he worked very well with our kind of student and related to them very well," said David Godfread, Community principal.

Perry Nakonechny, a Community teacher, said Olauson "was always looking for newer things or

better ways to help students learn and excel." For example, Nakonechny recalled, Olauson made extra effort to learn about the school's computer hardware and software in order to help his students use it to their utmost. Other teachers even sought his advice about computers, he said.

Community counselor Marilyn Korbach called Olauson "absolutely one of the neatest persons I've ever met." She added, "Whenever you went into Mel's classroom, it was alive."

Nathan Nordstrom agrees. "His classes were the loudest, the most laughing," recalled Nordstrom, who was a student at both Central and Community.

Olauson had "kind of a crazy sense of humor. Acted a little tough, but you knew he cared," Nordstrom said. And "he gave me the freedom to learn on my own."

Griggs recalled how he "just clicked" with Olauson when they talked about authors such as Edgar Allan Poe or William Shakespeare. It made Griggs more willing to read the works of more authors, and learn about them, too, he said.

Mr. O was "one of the best (teachers) I had, 'cause for me personally, he came down to my level to teach me. . . . I only had one or two classes with him, but during

the time I did, we really — I don't know — had the closest relationship a student and teacher could have. It was more like a friendship."

Colleagues said Olauson also was a dedicated family man with close ties to Immanuel Lutheran Church. Olauson, who was chairman of the church's Christian Education Committee, "was concerned about the spiritual growth of all families," said Robert Drees, congregation president.

To Olauson, his own family's priority "is to do things together whether it's ballgames, concerts, church or vacations," he told the Grand Forks Herald in 1993, in a story about raising boys. Olauson and his wife Audrey had four.

"I'm married to a guy who does way over 50 percent of the homemaking," Audrey told the Herald. Mel also did "95 percent of the cooking," she said then. He called it therapy.

His cooking prowess didn't go unnoticed at Community High School. Whenever the school had potlucks, Mr. O brought hotdishes that he made himself.

Melvin David Olauson was born April 21, 1953, in Valley City, N.D., the son of Melvin J. and Annette (Winkels) Olauson. He grew up and attended schools in Fingal, N.D., and graduated from high

school there in 1971. He graduated from Valley City State College in 1977 and taught in Tolna, N.D., for two years. He worked as an insurance agent in Fargo and Grand Forks, after moving to Grand Forks in 1984. He was an English teacher at Central High School and Community High School for five years. He was working on a post-graduate degree at UND and had served in the North Dakota National Guard for nine years, where he had reached the rank of captain. He married Audrey Quanbeck on April 23, 1977, in McVie, N.D.

She survives along with his sons, Christopher, Anthony, Nicholas and Timothy, all at home in Grand Forks; father, Fingal, N.D.; brothers, Shawn, Fingal, and Terry, Oriska, N.D.; grandparents, Olaf Olauson, Valley City, N.D., and Mike and Olivia Winkels, Valley City, N.D.

He was preceded in death by his mother, and a grandmother.

Services: 2 p.m. Saturday in Immanuel Lutheran Church, Grand Forks.

Visitation: 4 to 7 p.m. today, with a 7 p.m. prayer service, in Amundson Funeral Home, Grand Forks. The family prefers memorials to Grand Forks Community High School.

Burial: Memorial Park Cemetery, Grand Forks.