MUM ON HER LAST MEETING WITH TRAGIC DAUGHTER AND ANGER AT JAIL’S GOVERNOR OVER HER DEATH

When we left the prison, a warden asked what was wrong. I got upset and said that I was really worried about Katie’s safety. I told her all about the bullying. She said not to worry, she would sort it out. The next morning police came to the door and told me Katie was dead.

Brendan McGinty

When Linda Allan visited her daughter Katie in Polmont prison on Sunday, June 3, she felt an instant sense of alarm.

Katie’s nature had always meant she protected her mum from the worst of the distress she was being caused inside HMP & YOI Polmont.

But today Katie couldn’t hide it. Nobody could.

The long blonde hair which had made her stand out almost as much as her exemplary academic record was gone. Stress-induced alopecia had caused 80 per cent to fall out. The rest she had shaved off.

An appointment with a prison-appointed GP to deal with the condition had only made Katie even more distressed.

Linda, a strategic professional adviser for the Scottish Government, and her son Scott immediately noticed the dark circles around Katie’s eyes.

They were a sign of sleepless nights caused by a stream of shouted taunts from neighbouring prisoners.

Katie had become a target because she was different. Because she said please and thank you. And also because of the hair loss.

Then there were the strip searches.

Katie believed she was being forced to strip naked after almost every visit and found it humiliating.

Her mum surmised that Katie’s compliant nature was making her daughter an easy target for the wardens to reach their strip-search quotas. Katie wasn’t going to offer much resistance where others might.

On one occasion, she had been strip-searched in front of six staff as part of a training exercise. The wardens and trainees conversed as if she wasn’t there.

Against this background, the prison visit on that
bright summer Sunday was particularly worrying, even against the desperate standards they had experienced since Katie had been sentenced in March.

It was a difficult, distressing conversation for Linda with her beloved daughter, who was due to be released on a tag in less than a month. It was to be their last.

Linda said: "A few weeks into her sentence, Katie suffered from alopecia, which was triggered by stress. She started to lose her hair. Katie had lost it all by the time she died.

"She was bullied and tormented all the time by some of the other girls in her hall.

"When you read the Talk To Me strategy for suicide risk in prison, it has clear guidelines on the points at which people should be reassessed.

"But here we have a young woman who is distressed and petrified and whose hair has fallen out, who has been bullied as a result – all acute signs of extreme stress – and nobody thinks to assess her mental health."

"The strategy also says that there should be another reassessment after a court appearance."

"Katie had appeared in court by video link on May 29 to withdraw her appeal against sentence but was never reassessed.

"She had lost 80 per cent of her hair and shaved it all off. She was eventually allowed to see a specialist but afterwards was even more upset. She said she had been treated like a piece of meat.

"But on most of the visits, Katie did her best to hide it all from us. Katie smiled – until the day before her death.

"One thing to bear in mind, Katie might do once she was home. I don't want anyone to think she was mentally ill or anything."

"When Scott and I left, the prison officer asked what was wrong. I got upset and said I was really worried about Katie's safety.

"I told her what had happened. She said, Don't worry, and that she would sort it out.

"The next morning, police came to the door and told me Katie was dead. I was on my own. I phoned my husband Stuart to come home. We had to drive up to the school, get our son out of class and tell him.

"Then we had to go and tell my mum and dad."

"The next day, we had to go to Falkirk CID to read the note Katie had left.

"At that point, Katie's death was being treated like any other suicide."

"I told the police about all that had happened on the visit."

"We had to go to Edinburgh, to Cowgate, to view the body. We were told that if there was a delay with the post-mortem, we might never see her again.

"The note said she was sorry, that she couldn't go on, that she was sorry for letting Stuart, Scott and I down. Prison just wasn't for her and, to be honest, she was really frightened about coming home. That was it. She hadn't signed it or anything.

"The following Friday, we went to see the governor. We met governor Brenda Stewart and Donald Scott, the chaplain."

"I have never met anyone as breathtakingly incompetent as the governor of Polmont prison.

"The first question we asked was who had legal responsibility for the safety of the prisoners in the establishment.

"I think it was four times we asked before she eventually admitted it was her.

"We asked who she had spoken to who was on duty the night Katie died. She said she had not spoken to anybody.

"We asked who in her senior
management team had spoken to anybody. She said none of them.

“We asked who was responsible for speaking to people the night Katie died. She said it wasn’t her job to talk to anybody.

“We asked about what had happened and, in response, she read a statement from Katie’s personal officer.

“Katie had gone back to the hall after our visit. The female officer went back too.

“Everybody was locked up and Katie was allowed out to speak to her. She was really distressed. They spoke about what was wrong.

“They said that they thought the best thing would be for Katie to move to the adult prison the following day.

“They had previously dismissed this as an idea, saying it would be too dangerous for her.

“They caused a young woman in a high state of distress even more distress, then simply locked her up for another night of torment.”

“Katie was bullied and tormented all the time by some of the other girls in her hall.”

Student was pulverised by the system

Human rights lawyer Aamer Anwar has backed the family of geography student Katie in his role as rector of Glasgow University.

He said: “The family have never stepped away from the reality that Katie deserved to be punished by the law.

“But surely there was an alternative sentence which did not involve prison? This wasn’t a violent offence and it was clear this was a one-off.

“The story the family have to tell about Katie’s treatment in prison is horrific.

“They are not prepared to wait years for the Lord Advocate to produce an FAI with empty words of apologies which fails to apportion blame. “Katie was pulverised by the system and the people who had a duty and responsibility to look after her failed her. If they had a conscience, they would have resigned by now.

“Katie should be alive today. The family want to see real change, not empty soundbites.”
TREASURED PHOTO  Linda with her daughter Katie

SUPPORT  Rector Anwar
CAMPAIGN
Katie’s parents
Stuart and Linda Allan
Pic Garry F McHarg