

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 was strip-searched after almost every visit. The searches were supposed to be random or intelligence-led but it always seemed to be her. Maybe because she was polite and would not complain. She was an easy target.

"There was an incident when they

were training female officers and they chose Katie to be strip-searched. She was absolutely distraught after that because she was made to stand naked while they had a conversation.

**"Myself and her brother went to see her on the 3rd. As soon as we got into the visiting hall, we knew there was something wrong.**

"She was exhausted looking. She had big shadows under her eyes.

"We were sitting at a table with a female prison officer. I asked Katie what was wrong and she said there had been trouble in the hall that morning and that girls had been put on report.

"Being a mum, I said, 'Well, I hope you had nothing to do with it,' and she got upset and said she hadn't. She

said she was really frightened. She named another prisoner who she said she was scared of, who had been threatening Katie.

"I said, 'You've got to report this to some of the prison officers, Katie.'

"She said she couldn't because she was frightened of the officers too.

"She said she had not been able to sleep for three nights because of the shouting and berating and bullying coming from the other cells beside her.

"The abuse was partly because of the hair but also because she just wasn't like them. I don't want anyone to think that I am saying Katie was better than these girls but she was exhausted."

Katie had already asked to be moved to a quieter cell – a request which had been denied by the prison.

Instead, she remained in a room where she was exposed to the barrage of screamed insults. Crucially, despite some history of self-harm and multiple signs of distress, it was not a "suicide-proofed" cell as, remarkably, Katie had not been deemed a risk.

Linda and Scott tried to lighten the mood of the conversation. Scott joked that he could bring industrial noise-cancelling headphones. He tried to cheer Katie up by talking about what she might do once she was home.

Linda, who is also an honorary clinical associate professor at Glasgow

University, said: "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**

**DRIVEN TO SUICIDE** Pages 4&5

# 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

## THE LAWYER

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





**CAMPAIGN**  
Katie's parents  
Stuart and  
Linda Allan  
**Pic** Garry  
F McIarg

