

= Death of Leelah Alcorn =

Leelah Alcorn ( November 15 , 1997 ? December 28 , 2014 ) was an American transgender girl whose suicide attracted international attention . Alcorn had posted a suicide note to her Tumblr blog , writing about societal standards affecting transgender people and expressing the hope that her death would create a dialogue about discrimination , abuse and lack of support for transgender people .

Assigned male at birth and given the name Joshua Ryan Alcorn , she was raised in a conservative Christian household in Ohio . At age 14 , she came out as transgender to her parents , Carla and Doug Alcorn , who refused to accept her female gender identity . When she was 16 , they denied her request to undergo transition treatment , instead sending her to Christian @-@ based conversion therapy with the intention of convincing her to reject her gender identity and accept her gender as assigned at birth . After she revealed her attraction toward males to her classmates , her parents removed her from school and revoked her access to social media . In her suicide note , Alcorn cited loneliness and alienation as key reasons for her decision to end her life and blamed her parents for causing these feelings . She committed suicide by walking out in front of oncoming traffic on the Interstate 71 highway .

Alcorn arranged for her suicide note to be posted online several hours after her death , and it soon attracted international attention across mainstream and social media . LGBT rights activists called attention to the incident as evidence of the problems faced by transgender youth , while vigils were held in her memory in the United States and United Kingdom . Petitions were formed calling for the establishment of " Leelah 's Law " , a ban on conversion therapy in the U.S. , which received a supportive response from U.S. President Barack Obama . Within a year , the city of Cincinnati had criminalised conversion therapy . Alcorn 's parents were criticized for misgendering Leelah in comments that they made to the media , while LGBT rights activist Dan Savage blamed them for their child 's death and social media users subjected them to online harassment . They defended their refusal to accept their child 's identity and their use of conversion therapy by reference to their Christian beliefs .

= = Life = =

Assigned male at birth , Alcorn was given the name Joshua Ryan Alcorn . She eventually rejected this forename , and in her suicide note signed herself " ( Leelah ) Josh Alcorn " . She was one of several children . Describing herself as being raised in a conservative Christian environment , she and her family attended the Northeast Church of Christ in Cincinnati , and had been featured in a profile of that church published in a 2011 article in The Christian Chronicle .

According to her suicide note , Alcorn had felt " like a girl trapped in a boy 's body " since she was four , and came to identify as a transgender girl from the age of fourteen , when she became aware of the term . According to her note , she immediately informed her mother , who reacted " extremely negatively " by claiming that it was only a phase and that God had made her a male , so she could never be a woman . She stated that this made her hate herself , and that she developed a form of depression . Her mother sent her to Christian conversion therapists , but there " only got more Christians telling me that I was selfish and wrong and that I should look to God for help . " Aged sixteen , she requested that she be allowed to undergo transition treatment , but was denied permission : " I felt hopeless , that I was just going to look like a man in drag for the rest of my life . On my 16th birthday , when I didn 't receive consent from my parents to start transitioning , I cried myself to sleep . "

Alcorn publicly revealed her attraction to males when she was sixteen , as she believed that identifying as a gay male at that point would be a stepping stone to coming out as transgender at a later date . According to a childhood friend , Alcorn received a positive reception from many at school , although her parents were appalled . In Alcorn 's words , " They felt like I was attacking their image , and that I was an embarrassment to them . They wanted me to be their perfect little straight Christian boy , and that 's obviously not what I wanted . " They removed her from Kings High School

, and enrolled her as an eleventh grader at an online school , Ohio Virtual Academy . According to Alcorn , her parents cut her off from the outside world for five months as they denied her access to social media and many forms of communication . She described this as a significant contributing factor towards her suicide . At the end of the school year , they returned her phone to her and allowed her to regain contact with her friends , although by this time ? according to Alcorn ? her relationship with many of them had become strained and she continued to feel isolated .

Two months prior to her death , Alcorn sought out help on the social media website Reddit , asking users whether the treatment perpetrated by her parents was considered child abuse . There , she revealed that while her parents had never physically assaulted her , " they always talked to me in a very derogatory tone " and " would say things like ' You 'll never be a real girl ' or ' What 're you going to do , fuck boys ? ' or ' God 's going to send you straight to hell ' . These all made me feel awful about myself , I was Christian at the time so I thought that God hated me and that I didn 't deserve to be alive . " Further , she explained , " I tried my absolute hardest to live up to their standards and be a straight male , but eventually I realized that I hated religion and my parents . " On Reddit , Alcorn also disclosed that she was prescribed increasing dosages of the anti @-@ depressant Prozac . In concluding her post , she wrote , " Please help me , I don 't know what I should do and I can 't take much more of this . "

Alcorn 's computer was recovered near the site of her suicide . It contained conversations showing that she had planned to jump off the bridge that overlooks Interstate 71 days before the incident , but then contacted a crisis hotline and , as told to a friend , " basically cried my eyes out for a couple of hours talking to a lady there " .

= = Death = =

Prior to her death on December 28 , 2014 , Alcorn had scheduled for her suicide note to be automatically posted on her Tumblr account at 5.30pm. In the note , she stated her intention to end her life , commenting :

I have decided I 've had enough . I 'm never going to transition successfully , even when I move out . I 'm never going to be happy with the way I look or sound . I 'm never going to have enough friends to satisfy me . I 'm never going to have enough love to satisfy me . I 'm never going to find a man who loves me . I 'm never going to be happy . Either I live the rest of my life as a lonely man who wishes he were a woman or I live my life as a lonelier woman who hates herself . There 's no winning . There 's no way out . I 'm sad enough already , I don 't need my life to get any worse . People say " it gets better " but that isn 't true in my case . It gets worse . Each day I get worse . That 's the gist of it , that 's why I feel like killing myself . Sorry if that 's not a good enough reason for you , it 's good enough for me .

She expressed her wish that all of her possessions and money be donated to a transgender advocacy charity , and called for issues surrounding gender identity to be taught in schools . The note ended with the statement : " My death needs to mean something . My death needs to be counted in the number of transgender people who commit suicide this year . I want someone to look at that number and say " that 's fucked up " and fix it . Fix society . Please . " A second post appeared shortly after ; titled " Sorry " , it featured an apology to her close friends and siblings for the trauma that her suicide would put them through , but also contained a message to her parents : " Fuck you . You can 't just control other people like that . That 's messed up . " An additional , handwritten suicide note reading " I 've had enough " was found on her bed , but then thrown away by Alcorn 's mother after police made a copy .

In the early morning of December 28 , police informed news sources that she had been walking southbound on Interstate 71 near Union Township when she was struck by a semi @-@ trailer just before 2 : 30 am near the South Lebanon exit . She died at the scene . It is believed that Alcorn walked three to four miles from her parents ' house in nearby Kings Mills , Ohio , before being struck . The highway was closed for more than an hour after the incident . An investigation was launched by the Ohio State Highway Patrol , while Alcorn 's body was transported to the Montgomery County coroner , where an autopsy was scheduled . The truck driver was uninjured in the incident and was

not charged with any criminal offence by police .

Within 48 hours of the posting of her suicide note , it had attracted 82 @, @ 272 views , and by the morning of December 31 it had been reposted on Tumblr 200 @, @ 000 times . The Boston Globe described it as a " passionate post " . The suicide note was later deleted after Alcorn 's parents asked for it to be removed , and the blog was made inaccessible to the public . According to the family minister , the Alcorn family decided to hold the funeral privately after receiving threats . Alcorn 's body was reportedly cremated . The Ohio State Patrol completed their investigation into Alcorn 's death on April 30 , 2015 , officially ruling it a suicide .

= = Reaction = =

= = = Criticism of Alcorn 's parents = = =

On December 28 at 2 : 56 p.m. , Alcorn 's mother , Carla Wood Alcorn , posted a public message on the social media website Facebook , stating : " My sweet 16 @-@ year @-@ old son , Joshua Ryan Alcorn , went home to Heaven this morning . He was out for an early morning walk and was hit by a truck . Thank you for the messages and kindness and concern you have sent our way . Please continue to keep us in your prayers . " Carla Alcorn 's post was subsequently deleted , and her Facebook account was made private . The Alcorn family publicly requested that they be given privacy to grieve in a statement issued by the Kings Local School District . In that statement , staff from Alcorn 's former school , Kings High School , declared that " Joshua Alcorn was a sweet , talented , tender @-@ hearted 17 @-@ year @-@ old " , adding that counselors would be made available to students affected by the incident . A moment of silence was held in Alcorn 's memory before a Kings High basketball game on December 30 .

Some of Alcorn 's sympathizers publicly criticized the teen 's mother , Carla Alcorn , for misgendering her daughter in the Facebook post announcing Leelah 's death . Some individuals ? termed " the Internet 's self @-@ appointed vigilantes " in The Washington Post ? subsequently doxed and harassed Carla via her Facebook account " in revenge " for Leelah 's death . On Twitter , American gay rights activist Dan Savage argued that Alcorn 's parents should be prosecuted for their role in bringing about their daughter 's death , commenting that through their actions they " threw her in front of that truck " . He cited the successful prosecution of Dharun Ravi following the suicide of Tyler Clementi as a legal precedent for such an action . He added that legal action should also be brought against the conversion therapists who had counselled Leelah , and suggested that the Alcorns should lose custody of their other children .

Carla Alcorn responded to such criticism in an interview with CNN , stating " we loved him unconditionally . We loved him no matter what . I loved my son . People need to know that I loved him . He was a good kid , a good boy . " Although acknowledging that Leelah had requested transition surgery , Carla stated that she had never heard her child use the name " Leelah " , before reiterating her refusal to accept her child 's transgender status , adding " We don 't support that , religiously . " She expressed concern that users of social media thought her to be a " horrible person " , but defended her actions in dealing with her child , stating that she had banned Leelah 's internet access to prevent her accessing " inappropriate " things . In an email to Cincinnati @-@ based channel WCPO @-@ TV , Leelah 's father Doug Alcorn wrote , " We love our son , Joshua , very much and are devastated by his death . We have no desire to enter into a political storm or debate with people who did not know him . We wish to grieve in private . We harbor no ill will towards anyone ... I simply do not wish our words to be used against us . "

Writing for Salon , Mary Elizabeth Williams commented that " it would be cruel and inaccurate to suggest that Carla Alcorn did not love her child " , but added that Carla 's statement that she " loved him unconditionally " revealed " a tragic lack of understanding of the word ' unconditionally , ' even in death . " People magazine quoted Johanna Olson , Medical Director for the Center of Trans Youth Health and Development at Children 's Hospital Los Angeles , as stating that " Did Leelah 's parents love her ? Yes , I 'm sure they did . Did they support her ? No , they didn 't . And that 's a tragedy . "

Mara Keisling , the Executive Director of the National Center for Transgender Equality , was quoted in The Independent as stating that the blaming of Alcorn 's parents was unhelpful , adding , " Despite the great cultural and policy advances transgender people have made , there is still a lot of disrespect , discrimination and violence aimed at us . And being a child or a teenager of any kind today is very difficult . "

= = = Tributes , vigils , and activism = = =

The day after Alcorn 's suicide note was published online , Chris Seelbach , the first openly gay councilman on Cincinnati City Council , shared it as part of a Facebook message in which he stated that her death showed how hard it was to be transgender in the U.S. His post was shared over 4 @ , @ 700 times and raised increased public awareness of the incident . By December 30 , Alcorn 's death had attracted worldwide attention . News outlets across the world had picked up the story , and the hashtag # LeelahAlcorn had topped Twitter . According to British newspaper The Independent , the incident " triggered widespread anguish and raised a debate about the rights of transgender people " , while the U.S.-based Boston Globe stated that it " served as a flashpoint for transgender progress in 2014 " .

On January 1 , 2015 , the Cincinnati @-@ based LGBT rights group Support Marriage Equality Ohio hosted a vigil for Alcorn outside Kings High School . A candlelight vigil in Goodale Park , Columbus was held on January 2 by a group called Stand Up 4 Leelah . A further vigil was organized by both The Diverse City Youth Chorus in partnership with the Cincinnati chapter of the Gay , Lesbian and Straight Education Network at the Clifton Cultural Arts Center for January 10 . The vigil location at the Clifton Cultural Arts Center was moved to the Woodward Theater , to make way for a larger setting . The venue was attended by nearly 600 supporters .

A January 3 vigil was scheduled for Trafalgar Square in London ; an organizer was quoted as saying that " [ Alcorn 's ] death was a political death . When a member of our community is brutalised at the hands of oppression we must all fight back " . Those who spoke at the event included politician Sarah Brown and novelist and poet Roz Kaveney . Marches were carried out in honor of Alcorn in both Northwest , Washington , D.C. and Queen Street , Auckland on January 10 . The same day , a candlelight vigil was held in New York City 's Columbus Circle . A memorial protest against conversion therapy and in memory of Alcorn took place in Lynchburg , Virginia on January 24 , 2015 .

Among the transgender celebrities who publicly responded to the incident were Janet Mock , Andreja Pejic , and Laverne Cox , while the musician Ray Toro released a song , " For The Lost And Brave " , in dedication to Alcorn . Jill Soloway , the writer of television show Transparent , dedicated her Golden Globe Award for Best Television Series to Alcorn . During Diane Sawyer 's interview with Caitlyn Jenner ( then Bruce ) , which confirmed Jenner 's transgender identity , Alcorn was mentioned by name and the message " Fix society . Please " was broadcast .

The Ohio Department of Transportation put up signs on the interchange of Interstate 71 South and Ohio State Route 48 in Warren County , where Alcorn died , to show that a group adopted that part of the road in memory of Alcorn .

Carolyn Washburn , editor of the Ohio newspaper The Cincinnati Enquirer , stated that the incident " raises important issues we hope will prompt conversations in families throughout our region . " Washburn had also received letters that derided the newspaper 's use of Alcorn 's chosen name in covering her death . When contacted by The Cincinnati Enquirer , Shane Morgan , the founder and chair of transgender advocate group TransOhio , stated that while 2014 witnessed gains for the trans rights movement , Alcorn 's death illustrated how " trans people are still being victimized and still being disrespected " , highlighting the high rate of transgender people who had been murdered that year . Since the incident , TransOhio received letters from parents of transgender children describing how Leelah 's death had affected them . Morgan stated that while he understood the anger directed toward Leelah 's parents , " there 's no excuse for threats to the family . "

Allison Woolbert , executive director of the Transgender Human Rights Institute , informed The Independent that Leelah 's case was " not unique " ; the newspaper highlighted research from the

US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention indicating that LGBT youth are about twice as likely to attempt suicide than heterosexual , cisgender teenagers . Newsweek similarly placed Alcorn 's suicide within its wider context of transphobic discrimination , highlighting that the Youth Suicide Prevention Program reports that over 50 % of transgender youths attempt suicide before the age of 20 , and that the National Coalition of Anti @-@ Violence Programs recently published a report indicating that 72 % of LGBT homicide victims in 2013 were transgender women .

= = = Leelah 's Law = = =

A Facebook group called " Justice for Leelah Alcorn " was established , while a petition calling for " Leelah 's Law " , a ban on conversion therapy in the United States , was created by the Transgender Human Rights Institute to raise awareness of the psychologically harmful effects of such practices ; by January 24 it had 330 @,@ 009 signatures , and was named the fastest growing change.org petition of 2014 . A second appeal demanding the enactment of " Leelah 's Law " was posted to the We the People section of WhiteHouse.gov on January 3 , 2015 which garnered more than 100 @,@ 000 signatures as of January 30 . In response to the petition President Barack Obama called for the banning of conversion therapy for minors . Under the Twitter hashtag # RealLiveTransAdult , many transgender people posted encouraging tweets for their younger counterparts , while other hashtags , such as # ProtectTransKids , and the term " Rest in Power " , also circulated on Twitter . A change.org petition was set up calling for Leelah 's chosen name to be included on her gravestone , which gained over 80 @,@ 000 signatures . On January 6 , Adam Hoover of Marriage Equality Ohio remarked that , since the request of having Alcorn 's chosen name on her gravestone seemed " like a slim possibility " , they would be raising money for a permanent memorial arranged as a bench , tree and commemorative plaque . In April 2015 , President Obama responded to the petition seeking to ban conversion therapy inspired by Alcorn 's death with a pledge to advocate for such a ban .

In December 2015 , Cincinnati became the second U.S. city after Washington D.C. to ban the practice of conversion therapy outright ; council member Chris Seelbach cited Alcorn 's suicide as an influence in the decision , stating that " She challenged us to make her death matter , and we 're doing just that . "