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The Murder they called a Suicide: 19 year old Christopher Kalonji

Tiny - Posted on 06 March 2017

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On January 28, 2016, 19 year old Black Loved One, Christopher Kalonji, was in a mental health crisis and needed help. His PTSD was in a flare up, and he became so anxious and distraught that he called 911 himself, requesting medical assistance.

Instead of getting help, police arrived and separated his family and friends from him, escalating the situation, and even called in a SWAT team. Instead of providing help, police killed Christopher in his own home, where he had lived with his parents for 15 years. Christopher Kalonji did not commit suicide, as was stated on the coroner's report and on his death certificate.

Christopher was murdered by Sgt. Tony Killinger and Deputy Lon Steinhauer of Clackamas County sheriff's office, with impunity.



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[Christopher Kalonji has a big brown afro and a sweet baby face, he is seated in a blue camping chair and is wearing a green jacket. Photo courtesy Irene Kalonji]

Christopher Kalonji was born in Israel, in the city of Nahariya, to loving parents, his mother Irene, and his father Antoine, also called Tony. Irene and Tony were both born in Ukraine, which was then the Soviet Union. Tony's father was from the Democratic Republic of Congo, and his mother is Jewish and from Ukraine. Irene's father is from Tanzania, and her mother is from Ukraine.



[Irene Kalonji, the mother of Christopher Kalonji is standing at the one year anniversary gathering of the death of her son, at the elementary school he attended. She is wearing her son's Justice pin and a t-shirt with his photo with angelic wings stretching out. She is holding a Love & Disability Justice for Christopher Kalonji protest sign, she is surrounded by people.]

Christopher was the youngest child, with one older brother named Joe. The family migrated to the U.S. when Christopher was 6, they settled into a modest apartment in Oak Grove, Oregon, where Christopher lived out the rest of his life. Christopher went to elementary school right across the street from their home, at Concord Elementary School. Everyone in the neighborhood knew Christopher. Christopher was really proud of his ancestry, of his name, he was proud to be born in Israel, and to be Jewish. He wore his hair in a big, natural afro. He was well-liked, he liked himself, he had a lot of friends, and this carried him into high school.

"I had a memory with Chris, my junior year at Putnam," says Ben E. Miller, at the one year memorial for Christopher, held at Concord Elementary School on January 27, 2017. "He came into school, English 11 class, a little late, but that's okay, I've done that. Several times," says Ben, and there is laughter from the crowd gathered remembering Christopher.

Ben continues, "He (Christopher) sits down, he only sat a couple of seats from me, and he starts going through his backpack. And he just yells 'Oh my G-d, there's a spider in there!' And he's shaking his backpack out, he gets the spider out and Jarmar, our English teacher at the time, grabbed some paper, ya know, getting it out. And as soon as the teacher leaves the room to go throw the spider out, Chris says, 'Arachnids are the biggest pain in the ass!'"

The group listening to the story laughs. "That's the first time I ever heard Chris use a scientific word like that. Just Sayin!" the crowd laughs again and then Ben gets very serious.

"When people go into a mental health crisis, I know, from me having a lot of hurt in my life and depression, where I wanted to just give up; when people from, like my church, showed me love... I feel like if people would have shown the same kind of love toward Chris, the events that took place on January 28, 2016 probably wouldn't have happened." Ben has become emotional, and Irene puts her arm around him.



[Black & white drawing/protest poster of Christopher Kalonji that says "Love & Justice for Christopher Kalonji. 19 years old forever, February 19, 1996 – January 28, 2016, REST IN POWER." There are hearts around Christopher's face and it says "Mental Illness is not a Crime!!!! DISABILITY JUSTICE NOW #blacklivesmatter drawing by Lisa Ganser]

Christopher was intuitive. He was intelligent, charismatic and he had an open and full heart. He told jokes, he was incredibly funny. Christopher was a smooth talker. He could bullshit. He was down to help anyone. He was kind. He had fun. He made mistakes. He was a good listener. He took time for people, for anyone. He helped people.



[a sweet snapshot of 9 year old Christopher Kalonji looking over his shoulder fondly to the camera. Chris is fair skinned with reddish brown curly hair and a small soft smile. Photo from 2005 courtesy Irene Kalonji.]

Christopher was especially informed when it came to his rights, he knew the law.

"Chris was my best friend," says Grace Michael, who goes by "Misha." Christopher was one of the first kids at Putnim High School to talk to Misha. "He came up to me in gym class, in P.E. class and he said, 'Hey, are you Russian?' He spoke in Russian to me. And I said, 'Yeah, how did you know?' Because Chris had this big afro, he didn't look like a Russian guy at all. It was pretty cool." The two exchanged names and became fast friends. Christopher took Misha under his wing and introduced him to many people. He would translate for him, helping Misha to become fluent in English.



[photo of Christopher Kalonji and Grace "Misha" Michael walking in the hallway at school together. Misha says that Chris was his closest friend, they were together often. This is the only photo Misha has of them together. Christopher has a big natural afro and is wearing a backpack, Misha's hair is short and he's wearing sunglasses on his head. Photo courtesy of Misha Michael.]

"Christopher gave me my confidence. I would not be the person I am today without him," said Misha. The two were confidants. Christopher was very skilled in knowing the law and his rights, and supported Misha through traffic court. Christopher could recite the first 10 amendments by heart. Misha tells a story of when Christopher had a run in with the law.

Chris had been hanging out with friends, in Portland, and they were drinking in public. Some cops came up and asked for their IDs and Chris asked 'am I being detained?' The police didn't respond right away, so Chris, who knew his rights, said 'well i guess not' and started walking away. The police then responded 'Yes, you are being detained.'

According to Irene, the police got mad that Christopher knew his rights, and they threatened him with a gun. His friends were there watching, and the police singled Chris out for knowing his rights, for not being properly subservient, not passing the "attitude test." The police escalated the situation, and wouldn't show their badges, so Chris took out his cell phone and called 911 and said "There are police here not showing their badges, they won't tell me their badge numbers. They won't identify themselves and they are scaring me, I am fearing for my life."

While Christopher was calling 911, the police radioed in, saying "it's us, it's us!"

The police were not amused and said to Christopher, "you think you're smart, huh?" They forcefully grabbed him and put handcuffs on him, and said they were arresting him for "unlawful calling of 911." They then seized and searched his backpack. They found a knife in Christopher's backpack, but in the police report they said that it was in Christopher's pocket, beefing up his bogus charges to include carrying a concealed weapon.

"The police are lying, Chris knew the rules. That knife was in his backpack, not in his pocket," says Irene.

Before those Portland police officers forced Christopher Kalonji into the squad car, they slammed his head onto the car. It was at that moment that everything changed for Christopher.

Chris knew he was being wrongfully arrested, that he had been profiled. He knew his rights, and he thought that would protect him. He had even called 911 himself to report the police who were violating his rights. He wasn't prepared to be assaulted.

Chris didn't confide in his mother about the police terror he experienced until a week before his court appearance, but she could tell something was wrong. He had been withdrawn and acting strangely for the month leading up to his death, isolating in his room, his parents said.

"The last month of his life, Chris barely left the house. He wouldn't leave the house by himself," says Irene. "I tried to talk to him. It was a nightmare. He was so scared." Irene did not know that he was so triggered about an upcoming court date, and she didn't yet know about the assault.

In retrospect, Irene thinks Christopher was doing a good job taking care of himself, he was riding out being triggered while alone in his room, away from people, reducing the risk of harm. He was removing environments that might be triggering for him. He was newly Disabled and without tools, and he was taking down time in the safety of his home, in his room.

A couple days before the scheduled court appearance, Christopher's new psychiatric disability, caused by the police, flared up even more. He was becoming paranoid, and things were not making sense. "They are going to kill me," he told his parents. Christopher feared that the police were going to take him into custody and kill him, and that his mom would never know how he died.

Christopher told his mom he was afraid to go to the upcoming court date on January 28, 2016. "They beat me on the head," he told Irene. "I have PTSD." He was having a hard time telling what was real, he kept clicking back to that moment the police smashed his head against the police car. "I don't know what's going on with me. They are watching me, mom. They are coming to kill me."

Christopher Kalonji was afraid of the police and afraid of going to court, and for good reason. He had been profiled for loving how he looked and being proud of who he was, for being mixed race and Black. He was assaulted and detained by police for knowing

and exercising his rights. He was falling deeper into the trauma, in his fear and distrust of The System. He told his mother he could not go.

On the day of the court appearance, January 28, 2016, Irene told Christopher, "You know Son, let's go together. I want to go with you, I want to be with you."

And Christopher said "No. No, Mom. If I go to court they will put me in handcuffs and put me in jail and kill me, and you will not know the truth about my death." It was on this morning that his flare up was in a full blown mental health crisis. His mind was spinning, he was so scared, he wasn't making sense and he was yelling.

"This fear Chris had, it was unbreakable," says Irene, with tears in her eyes. "It's so hard to tell this story again. They've told so many lies in the media."

Irene needed help to de-escalate Christopher, so she called Tony, her husband, Christopher's father, who was at work. The two tried to talk with Chris, but there was no calming him. He was convinced the police would kill him. Irene and Tony called a number of people, friends and mentors of Christopher's, people who loved him. They were trying to get support for their son as quick as they could. One of the people who came over was Christopher's martial arts instructor, who Chris admired very much.

The 911 timeline is unclear, and ultimately, it was Christopher Kalonji who called 911 on the day he was killed. He called for medical help. He knew he was in trouble, he was panicked, and he requested medical help for his mental health crisis.

Just as Christopher agreed he would talk to his martial arts instructor, police arrived. The police instructed all family and friends away from the home. The police narrative, which was amplified in the corporate press, conflicts directly with the experience of those who were there. The police narrative says that "his family retreated to a safe location." The truth is that the police made the family and friends of Christopher leave. They would not let Tony, Christopher's father, stay to de-escalate. They also made Christopher's martial arts instructor leave. The family was whisked away by police. While they were being forced away from Christopher, Irene told the police "Please do not kill my Son."

The police narrative says that a mental health unit was called in and were there talking with Christopher, and because that didn't work, a fully armed militarized SWAT team was called in.

"We were not hostages, we were never threatened, as was in the media," says Irene.

Christopher's family had been doing everything to de-escalate and now they were separated from him, and Chris' life was in the hands of those he feared most, the police.

At about 11:20am shots were fired, and this panicked Irene. She was told not to worry, that it was just tear gas. It was at 11:20am that Christopher was in fact shot in the chest and arm by police gunfire. The police narrative says shots were fired because they saw that Christopher had a weapon. The family disputes this claim.

"I don't believe he had the gun out. And even if he did have a gun in his hand, which I do not believe, he was no threat. We told the police we have guns. My son knew his rights, he was smart, he would not harm anyone and he did not want to die," said Irene. "He was so afraid."

The police used their knowledge that this family owns guns to work against Christopher.

It informed their Use of Force while there, and it justifies their abuse of force after the fact. It is still unclear if Christopher handled a gun while he was in his room. It's also unclear what happened because all civilians were ordered away from the Kalonji home.

The police narrative is suspect in the same way the Portland police searched and found a knife in Christopher's backpack and reported that it was on his person. There were guns in the Kalonji home. None of those guns were fired.

While the bullets that killed Christopher came from the weapons of two police, Sgt. Tony Killinger and Deputy Lon Steinhauer of Clackamas County sheriff's office, the police still leaked to the media that they were not sure if Chris had shot himself. They inferred that he did, when he did not. None of the weapons inside the Kalonji home had been fired, but the lies in the mainstream media can never be erased.



[green sidewalk chalk says "Christopher Kalonji" with a heart lovingly drawn around his name. Under the heart it says Clackamas County and Oak Grove, OR]

Timeline of January 28, 2016

- 7:35am CCS Clackamas County Sheriff Department respond to 911 calls to the Holly Acres Apartment complex and claim they called in a behavioral health unit
- Police narrative says a 2.5 hour conversation with the BHU does no good, and a SWAT team is called in
- 11:20am Police narrative says Christopher is "brandishing a rifle" and shots are fired by police. It is at this time that Christopher sustained two bullet wounds, one to the arm and one to the chest. After this, for over four hours, police say that Christopher Kalonji is "not complying with orders" to come out of his home. They are still yelling for him to get out. They use tear gas, they break windows, they use explosives on a door. Police are destroying the Kalonji's home while Christopher is not being subservient and is bleeding to death. There is an ambulance on site.
- 3:45pm Christopher is "taken into custody" and transported to the hospital.
- 4:30pm At the hospital Irene pleads with doctors to tell her how her son is doing, and they confide in her that Christopher is dead. They tell her they were able to revive him three times. They tell her that he had no chance because he had lost too much blood before arriving to the hospital.
- 7:30pm CCS department updates their initial press release to say that Christopher is dead.

While Christopher had been shot by police, in both an arm and in the chest, at 11:20, it was not until 3:45pm that he was transported to the hospital. He was allowed to bleed out for over four hours.

At Christopher Kalonji's funeral, it was raining, and Rabbi Rachel Joseph presided. There was an open casket, and Irene and Tony stood in a tight embrace for much of the gathering honoring Christopher's life.

"Jews don't grieve silently or privately," said Rabbi Joseph. "We grieve outwardly and publicly. Our tears are important... Blessed be the Judge of Truth. Stories are what keeps (Christopher's) memory alive... to share stories... Grief is for the living. Everybody here is a piece of the puzzle. That's all of our job. To keep Christopher's memory alive and to do his life Justice and to carry it on. To keep telling people how important he was and how amazing he was," she said.

"Chris was really good at talking to people, he had this gift. He was so persuasive. He was so smart. I was always telling him, man, I have a feeling I'm going to read about you some day, like in an encyclopedia or somewhere," says Misha, pausing to reflect. "I only had one picture of me and Chris together, just that one time... I wish I had taken more pictures with him."



[a sweet photo of Christopher Kalonji and his older brother Joe. They are smiling and holding each other tightly arm in arm. Joe's hair is short and he wears an Oregon Youth Challenge jacket, while Chris has a big natural afro. Photo courtesy Irene Kalonji.]

The death of Christopher was not the end of the Kalonji family's struggle. The damage the police caused to their home, including their child's spilled blood, initially sent the family staying with a friend. "If our friends had not helped us, we would have been without a place to stay," says Irene. The community also offered financial support for the funeral via a crowd sourced fundraiser.

The police ransacked the apartment after Christopher's death. They confiscated computers, searching for any piece of evidence they could find so they could blame Christopher for his death. The temporary stay away from the Kalonji's home of fifteen years became permanent, when the management company (the very office that the corporate media suggested was the "safe place" for the family to be while Christopher was being killed) served an eviction notice.

To add insult to injury – the death of their youngest child and being displaced from their home – the Kalonjis were then served a \$15,000 bill from the management company for the damage the police caused to their apartment.

Irene went to the Clackamas County Sheriffs with that bill, who refused to pay. She was told that it "wasn't in their budget."

When the Kalonjis got copies of the coroner's report, it said that Christopher died because of police gunshot, and it also said that the cause of death was "suicide." Christopher's death certificate also says that his cause of death was "suicide."

Christopher Kalonji was targeted for police terror because he was a smart, mixed race, young, Black man with a big natural afro. Christopher Kalonji was killed because he knew his rights and he exercised them. He could recite amendments from heart, and he practiced the second amendment, the right to bear arms. Christopher Kalonji did not want to die on January 28, 2016. He was experiencing psychosis and in a PTSD mental health crisis, a Disability caused by police. Christopher was self aware, he knew he wasn't well, and he stayed in his home, where he felt the most safe. Even in the safest of places, with an impending court date, Christopher was not safe from those he feared most. He was deathly afraid of the police, and for good reason. Christopher needed love,

he needed de-escalating, compassion and a conversation. Christopher Kalonji did not get help that day, instead he was murdered by police.

You can support the Kalonji family's Justice struggle by signing and sharing this petition "Justice for Christopher Kalonji" at <https://www.ipetitions.com/petition/justice4CK>

This article is dedicated with love & hope to Joe Kalonji, Christopher's older brother.

Joe writes, "One thing I never imagined, is losing my little brother before getting out of prison. Chris was a person of knowledge, always looking things up and learning. He was never the one to swing first in a fight that would be me, but him, he was always the one trying to help people, take care of people, leave people knowing something new everyday. He wasn't perfect as a person – no one is perfect, but to me he was the perfect brother. One thing I feared the most in prison, is growing old without my little brother. The love & joy we had shared will always be in my heart and thoughts.

I love you, Chris. And what you thought will always be with me."

Lisa Ganser is a white Disabled genderqueer artist and activist living in Olympia, WA on stolen Squaxin and Nisqually land. They are a sidewalk chalker, a dog walker, a copwatcher and the daughter of a momma named Sam.

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