



# Why did Anna Bright die?

Her parents and a police detective see an undeniable link to a popular teen drama.

BY REBECCA DAVIS

“I’M SORRY. But this has to happen. ... I love you.”

Written on a piece of white copy paper, those are the last words Joseph and Patrice Bright received from their daughter.

Fourteen-year-old Anna Bright killed herself April 18, 2017.



“I came home like any normal day,” Joseph told *AFA Journal*.

He sent his 11-year-old son Samuel inside to change clothes for baseball practice while he walked the dog.

“All I remember is I looked back and Samuel was running up the street ... screaming and crying to the top of his lungs: ‘Anna’s dead!’

“He said, ‘Daddy, I don’t know if I’m seeing this in my mind. I don’t know if it’s real, but she was in the tub, and it looked like blood was all around her.’”

Joseph’s heart started pounding; his immediate thought was to text her; she always had her cell phone.

He texted her. No response.

They ran back to the house and rushed inside screaming her name.

No answer.

“I went to the bathroom, and the door was about a foot open. I pushed it open, and there she was,” Joseph said.

Assuming she had been murdered, he grabbed his phone and called 911.

In no time, neighbors, policemen, investigators, and first-responders flooded the cul-de-sac of their quiet Alabama neighborhood.

Exactly an hour after Joseph had texted Anna, his wife Patrice, who had mistakenly left her cell phone at home that day, returned from work. Not knowing what was going on, she drove into the chaos.

“About the time I was getting out of the car, I saw Joseph,” Patrice told *AFA Journal*. “He was coming across the lawn, and he had a police officer under each arm – almost carrying him, so I knew something had happened to the kids.

“I got out of the car, and Joseph yelled across the lawn: ‘Anna’s dead. Somebody killed her.’

“[I]t felt like somebody had taken a 2x4 and smacked it against my legs,” Patrice said.

She fell to the ground.

Their minds were flooded with questions, then fear that Anna’s killer was still out there somewhere.

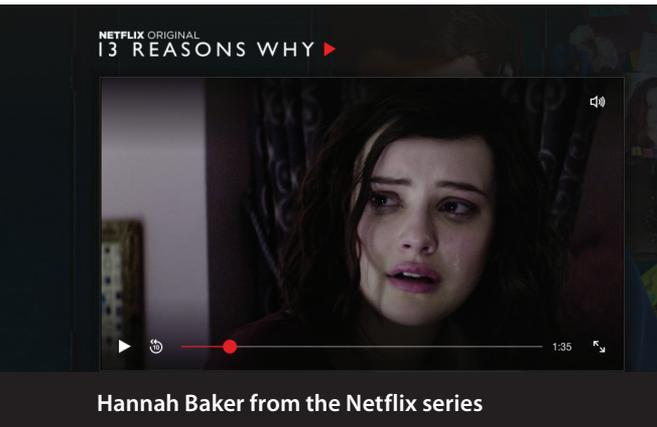
“Who told you that somebody killed her?” a police officer asked.

Joseph had noticed spent bullet casings on the floor in front of the tub, so he concluded that his daughter had been murdered.

The lead detective said, “Mrs. Bright, *she* did this.” He also said she mimicked the suicide from the Netflix series **13 Reasons Why**.

Viewing records retrieved afterward revealed that, unbeknownst to her parents and without their permission, Anna had binge-watched the first season of **13RW** just two weeks prior to her death.

The show was popular among her peers and even filled the text messages sent back and forth between Anna and a friend during the days leading up to her suicide.



### The show

Less than a month after its March 2017 release, **13RW** quickly became Netflix’s most tweeted about show at the time with more than 11 million tweets. Fans are anxiously awaiting the second season, speculated to release in spring 2018 and include a mass school shooting.

The first season of the series is based on a young adult novel written by Jay Asher. Both the novel and the series revolve around the suicide of teenager Hannah Baker who leaves behind 13 cassette tapes that blame 13 different people as the reasons she ended her life. The tapes are her means of revenge, her power over them after death.

Targeted at teens, the Netflix series is rated TV-MA for mature audiences only; it is full of gratuitous profane language, excessive drug and alcohol use by high school students, homosexuality, empty friendships, bullying and violence, graphic sex including two rape scenes – one likened to soft porn, and a full-on, raw, very real and gruesome three-minute depiction of a teenage girl committing suicide.

Yet teens are drawn to it – immersed in it and, in ways, controlled by its haunting darkness.

### The impact

“Young people do tend to be drawn to dark things, especially if we are not giving them something or Someone better to be drawn to,” Julie Lowe told *AFAJ*. Lowe is a counselor and faculty member at Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation.

The show’s creative team, among them Pulitzer Prize winner Brian Yorkey and superstar Selena Gomez, claim that **13RW** is positive in purpose, bringing an anti-bullying message and an awareness of mental illness and teen suicide. However, statistics suggest otherwise.

Citing a study published in *JAMA Internal Medicine*, The Washington Post reports “Internet searches about suicide were significantly higher than expected” within the three weeks after the release of **13RW**.

The Post quotes the authors of the JAMA study: “Our analyses suggest **13 Reasons Why**, in its present form, has both increased suicidal awareness while unintentionally increasing suicidal ideation. The most rising queries focused on suicidal ideation. For instance, ‘how to commit suicide,’ ‘commit suicide,’ and ‘how to kill yourself’ were all significantly higher.”

Overall, online suicide queries increased by 19% during the first 19 days after the release of **13RW**.

According to San Diego State University public health professor John Ayers, “Past studies have validated that Internet searches mirror real-world suicide rates, so suicide rates have likely gone up as a result of this program.”

### The response

Psychiatrist Dr. Fadi Haddad believes the show distorts the realities of teen suicide and depression, thus leading to copycat suicide attempts – some that →



Some of my colleagues in the ER say ... they see kids now saying, “I told my mother I’m going to be Hannah Baker.”

DR. FADI HADDAD,  
PSYCHIATRIST, IN  
TIME MAGAZINE



## How the story of Anna Bright’s death came to AFA

Patsy Howell’s letter detailing the death of her granddaughter Anna Bright as it was related to **13 Reasons Why** was brought to my desk.

I called Mrs. Howell to acknowledge I had received her letter and to express my condolences to her. She was heartbroken, polite yet adamant that something must be done about this show and that AFA must do it. The way she connected with AFA is what her daughter Patrice Bright

calls a God moment.

“My dad had gone to the post office, and he looked in the trash can and there was an *AFA Journal* in there,” Bright said. “I know it was meant for him to find it.”

Mr. Howell had seen a story on the cover of the September 2017 issue that piqued his interest, so he pulled it out of the trash and took it home. Mrs. Howell then found a brief story about **13RW** on the inside. She read it and wrote a letter to

AFA. She connected me to her daughter, and several months later I found myself, along with a film crew from American Family Studios, in the living room of the Brights’ home listening to them share their story in an effort to save lives.

*AFA Journal* and AFS produced a short online video that shows the power of media as told through the death of Anna. The video is available at [afa.net/netflix](http://afa.net/netflix).

— REBECCA DAVIS



## RESOURCES

- ▶ “13 Reasons Why” – blog by Julie Lowe that gives 13 reasons life is worth living, [ccf.org](http://ccf.org)
- ▶ “13 Reasons Why, and Its Unintended Consequences” – blog by Brooke Fox, [foxlevineandassociates.com](http://foxlevineandassociates.com)
- ▶ Minibooks by David Powlison available from [ccf.org](http://ccf.org) 800-318-2186
- *I Just Want to Die: Replacing Suicidal Thoughts with Hope*
- *Grieving a Suicide: Help for the Aftershock*

fail and some that are fatal.

*Time* magazine quotes Haddad: “Some of my colleagues in the ER say ... they see kids now saying, ‘I told my mother I’m going to be Hannah Baker.’”

Many accuse the show of glorifying suicide as an act of revenge, a viable option, thus encouraging teens who find themselves in desperate or similar situations to do the same.

Social worker Brooke Fox calls it “a tutorial on how to complete the act of ending your life.”

Bella Herndon and Priscilla Chiu, both 15-year-olds from California, took their own lives just days after watching the series.

A 23-year-old Peruvian man, Franco Alonso Lazo Medrano, also committed suicide and left behind recordings that mimicked what Hannah did in **13RW**.

While there can be no objective proof, the Brights are confident that **13RW** led to their daughter’s death.

### The similarities

The similarities between the lives and deaths of Hannah and Anna are chilling and too many to list in detail.

Hannah left behind a set of recordings; Anna left behind a journal that included seven letters written to specific people.

On the days of their deaths, both Hannah and Anna came home from school, put things in order, and changed into comfortable clothes before ending their lives in a bathtub full of water. Hannah used a razor blade to slit her wrists; Anna shot herself in the head (something her favorite character Alex did during the last episode of Season 1.)

The major difference: Hannah is fictional and her decision was played out as part of a script; it was reversible because it was fake.

Anna’s decision to end her life was real, the outcome permanent, and the effects on her family devastating. She chose “a permanent solution to a temporary situation,” Joseph said.

### The outcome

“It’s just hard for us to accept,” said Joseph, a former pastor who, alongside his wife, raised their children in a loving, God-fearing home.

San Diego State University professor John Ayers believes: “For me, as a data-driven public health scientist, I see this troubling data as a strong call to action. The show must be taken down.”

**TAKE ACTION AT:**  
[afa.net/netflix](http://afa.net/netflix)

Anna hid her struggles well. She was a self-taught artist, musician, writer, photographer, and vocalist. She was a beauty queen, a cheerleader, a scholar, and a friend to those who needed befriending.

“She saw no fault in people,” Patrice recalled. “She was precious. She could do anything.”

But on the inside she was fighting a deep, dark battle of which her parents had no idea and to which her peers paid little attention. She hid it behind her smile and quirky personality.

Her parents later found out that after watching **13RW**, Anna and her friends joked about suicide. Anna even told them at the lunchroom table one day that she was going to kill herself. No one took it seriously because it fit right in with the light-hearted conversations about the show.

Young people become desensitized to the content in the show, especially when they binge watch it. When they immerse themselves in it for 13 hours straight, it becomes their everyday reality, the norm.

“Although these activities and beliefs may be normal for some adolescents, these programs create a distorted sense of what is typical for American teen culture and set a bad precedent for the average teen/preteen who is watching,” Lowe explained.

The influence of media is powerful, especially when it feeds the innate sin in one’s heart.

“What you watch, what you take in, what you listen to is so important, and you need to guard your heart,” Joseph said. “We’re in a spiritual battle.”

“We know for a fact that our home was invaded by darkness,” Patrice said. “However anybody wants to look at it, it was a spiritual battle that was lost, but it wasn’t the eternal battle that was lost.”

There is hope and that hope is Christ, manifested by resting in Him, trusting Him with the lives of our children, and being faithful to point them to the One who saves, and, as Lowe said, to the “One who fights on their behalf.”

“We must choose to take up the sword of the Spirit and to fight the battle of faith each and every day for the Lord’s honor and glory,” Patrice said. “Because that’s the life that’s truly abundant and worth living.” 