



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on April 3, 2015

Indiana Pizzeria Closed, Owners Threatened for Opposing Same-Sex Marriage

A small-town Indiana pizzeria has been forced to close its doors, and its owners' lives have been threatened — all because a local television station decided to drum up a story where none existed.

The trouble began when South Bend TV station [WBND](#) sent reporter Alyssa Marino out into the wilds of the Hoosier State to get people's reactions to the state's recently enacted Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA) that, despite the fact that it is practically the same as existing statutes in several other states and at the federal level, has drawn the ire of the allegedly tolerant cultural Left.



“Only on ABC 57 News tonight,” intoned anchor Brian Dorman as he began the March 31 broadcast. “We went into small towns looking for reaction to the Religious Freedom Act. We found one business, just 20 miles from a welcoming South Bend, with a very different view.”

That business is Memories Pizza, a nine-year-old restaurant in Walkerton (population 2,200). Its owners, the O'Connor family, are devout Christians and make that plain by posting Bible verses and Christian symbols in their pizzeria.

The O'Connors were quite literally minding their own business when Marino dropped in to ask them their opinion on the RFRA, yet co-anchor Colleen Bormann, picking up the introduction from Dorman, declared that “tonight,” the restaurateurs were “standing up for their religious beliefs.”

In fact, as [Scott Ott](#) of PJ Media pointed out, “Memories Pizza didn't blast out a news release. They didn't contact the media, nor make a stink on Twitter or Facebook. They didn't even post a sign in the window.... They merely answered questions from a novice reporter who strolled into their restaurant one day — who was sent on a mission by an irresponsible news organization.”

That news organization plastered “Restaurant denies some service to same-sex couples” across the bottom of the screen during Marino's report. But nowhere in the report is it alleged that Memories Pizza has denied service to anyone. Indeed, Marino stated that the O'Connors told her “if a gay couple or a couple belonging to another religion stepped into their restaurant to eat, they would never deny them service” — though she saved that for the very end of her report.

The only service denial mentioned in the entire story was a purely hypothetical and unlikely situation almost surely brought up by Marino, not the O'Connors: a request to cater a same-sex wedding reception.

“If a gay couple came in and wanted us to provide pizzas for their wedding, we would have to say no,” Crystal O'Connor said.



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Marino later tweeted that the O'Connors had "never been asked to cater a same-sex wedding."

In other words, only if the O'Connors' pizza joint is asked to cater such an event — something that has never happened and probably never will — will they deny service to someone. And that is the extent of the "story."

Of course, the report was padded with other tidbits, such as that the O'Connors favor the RFRA, don't think it's targeting any particular group of people, and have the quaint, old-fashioned idea that they live in a society where they are free to act on their faith.

"We're not discriminating against anyone," Crystal O'Connor told Marino. "That's just our belief and anyone has the right to believe in anything."

Same-sex marriage proponents may comfort themselves with the knowledge that Crystal O'Connor is young and may yet be persuaded to change her position. However, noted Marino, Crystal's father, Kevin O'Connor, is "set in his ways." Proof positive is that he thinks homosexuality (and, for that matter, heterosexuality) is a chosen behavior, something the Left is convinced no enlightened American believes in 2015.

"That lifestyle is something they choose," he told Marino. "I choose to be heterosexual. They choose to be homosexual. Why should I be beat over the head to go along with something they choose?"

How did Marino just happen to discover the one business whose owners would give her the story her boss wanted? Marino's explanation, as relayed via Twitter: "I just walked into their shop and asked how they feel."

The [Daily Caller](#) got little more elaboration from the TV station:

"We were talking to different businesses, and somebody suggested 'let's pop in to Walkerton,[']" an employee at ABC57's news desk told The Daily Caller News Foundation. From there, she said, the news crew found the O'Connor's [sic] business and successfully obtained an interview. The business presented an easy target for reporters looking to find a business uneasy about gay marriage, as it is festooned with dozens of items testifying to its owners' faith.

In short, while the station may not have specifically targeted Memories Pizza, they knew what they were looking for and realized they'd found it when they came across the O'Connors' establishment.

Soon after Marino's report was broadcast and posted on the station's website, the story "went viral," and the O'Connors soon took a spot next to Indiana Governor Mike Pence in the Left's rogues' gallery. Social media was filled with opprobrium for these two heretofore unknown Christians.

"Meanwhile," wrote Ott,

over at Yelp.com, more than a thousand "reviews" of Memories Pizza rapidly accumulated, quickly overwhelming the positive comments from actual customers who like the pizza, the hospitality and the small-town charm. Folks who never heard of Walkerton attacked Crystal O'Connor's business, her morality and her Lord. Many of the remarks included racially charged descriptions of genitalia and sex acts. "Reviewers" also posted pictures of naked men, of Adolf Hitler shouting "Ich habe ein pizza" (I have a pizza), and of Jesus gesturing with his middle finger. Over on Facebook, the restaurant's 5-star average rating rapidly plunged to one star, as non-customers slammed away at Crystal's little business.

Then the death threats began — "a lot of" them, according to conservative radio and TV host Dana



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Loesch.

“Loesch’s claim seems to [be] backed up by a (now-deleted) tweet by [Marino], which showed a South Bend Police Department car parked outside of Memories Pizza,” reported the [Daily Caller](#).

In addition, a girls’ athletic coach at Concord High School in Elkhart, Indiana, was [suspended](#) after tweeting, “Who’s going to Walkerton, IN to burn down #memoriespizza w me?”

“Terrified. They [the O’Connors] are terrified,” Lawrence Billy Jones III, a contributor to Loesch’s show, told [WBND](#).

Memories Pizza has been closed for the time being; and the O’Connors, fearing for their lives, aren’t going to show their faces in public for a while, either.

“I don’t know if we will re-open, or if we can, if it’s safe to re-open,” Crystal O’Connor [told](#) Loesch. “We’re in hiding basically, staying in the house.”

Perhaps the only good to come out of this situation is the discovery that many Americans — despite the Left’s dominance of the conversation about the RFRA — stand with the O’Connors. On Wednesday, Loesch’s program created a [GoFundMe](#) account “to relieve the financial loss endured by the [O’Connors’] stand for faith.” The account, whose initial goal was \$25,000, has, as of this writing, raised over \$400,000 from more than 13,000 contributors. It won’t undo all the damage done by WBND’s hit piece, but it may at least demonstrate that liberty-loving Americans aren’t going down without a fight.



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