

CNN Apologizes to Dolly Parton's Family After Passing Off Photo of Impersonator as Late Country Icon

CNN was forced to issue an apology to Dolly Parton's family on Thursday, one day after her death, because it erroneously used a picture of an impersonator while framing it as genuine.

The picture was, in fact, of Las Vegas impersonator and tribute artist named Kelly Vohnn, 58, according to the New York Post.

The gaffe happened on "Laura Coates Live" about 12 hours after Parton passed from cancer, forcing the network to issue a mea culpa.

"We regret the error and apologize to the Parton family," CNN said in a statement.

Vohnn recalled that the photo was taken in December while she appeared on the red carpet at a Las Vegas screening of "Song Sung Blue," starring Hugh Jackman and Kate Hudson.

"I started getting all these texts in from friends saying that I was on CNN, and I couldn't believe it," she told the New York Post.

"I was already heartbroken at losing Dolly because of how much she has given to me as a woman and an artist."



Order Abby Trivett's New Book, "The Power of Suddenly" on !

Vohnn added that it was an embarrassing experience and called out CNN for having "messed up," saying they failed to "do

their research.”

“I thought about calling CNN, but was really consumed by the grief of losing Dolly [and] I just wanted to be at home with my thoughts, raising a glass of wine to that brilliant woman,” she explained.

CNN issued an identical apology to Variety magazine, which stated that the Getty Images photo of Vohnn was taken on Dec. 16, 2025, in Las Vegas at Brenden Theatres inside the Palms Casino Resort.

The photo of Vohnn appeared in a montage of images which reportedly featured five photos of the real Dolly Parton, as CNN correspondent Shimon Prokupecz was reporting on her death live from Nashville.

Parton was considered a country music giant. She was also an actress, author, and philanthropist. Parton died at the age of 80 on Tuesday, according to a video announcement from her nephew.

“My name is Bryan Seaver, son of Cassie Parton. And I’m representing the Parton and Owens family today announcing the passing of my aunt, Dolly Rebecca Parton Dean. Sister, Sis, Aunt Granny to one generation, and Gigi to the next,” he said during an Instagram video post.

“This video announcement is something Dolly asked of me years ago, before I fully absorbed it as a future reality,” Seaver continued. “As her head of security for more than two decades, a role my father, Larry, held before me, I have imagined the heaviness of this moment, but haven’t truly felt it until now.”

He called it an “honor” to deliver the news, but said her passing left family members with “great sadness.” Seaver added, however, that Dolly is now “in the light” with Jesus Christ in heaven.

Parton's death came just months after she cancelled a Las Vegas show in May 2026, when she revealed that she'd been undergoing treatment for kidney stones over the past several years.

It was later confirmed on Tuesday by her publicity team that she'd gone through a "brief battle with cancer."

"Our beloved Dolly Parton spent her life and career bringing joy, laughter, hope and integrity into everything she touched," the statement from her representatives read. "Her unmatched generosity reached the lives of countless people whom she would never meet, yet she was always there to offer a helping hand."

This article originally appeared on The Western Journal and is reposted with permission.