

Compensation award for car crash girl sets personal injury record at £23m

Agnes Collier suffered spinal injuries of utmost severity and her mother was killed in accident in Gloucestershire in 2009

Caroline Davies

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Karen Hood was killed by the careless driving of Anthony Norton, then a BMW executive. Photograph: Picasa

A teenage girl paralysed in a car crash in which her mother was killed is to receive £23m compensation, thought to be record damages.

Agnes Collier, now 17, a pupil at Cheltenham Ladies' College, suffered spinal injuries "at the very highest level of severity", which left her with no use of her legs and little function in her arms after the accident, on the A436 in Gloucestershire in March 2009.

Her mother, Karen Hood, 48, a teacher at Cheltenham College Junior School, was killed and her older brother, Rufus, suffered a serious head injury, from which he has made a good recovery.

Agnes's father, Dominic Collier, 57, an investment banker, and her stepmother, Jannene, were at the high court in London for the approval of a damages award against the insurers of Anthony Norton, the motorist who caused the accident when he pulled out of a side road, causing the family's car to be hit by an oncoming lorry.

In November 2009 Norton, 48, of Andoversford, Gloucestershire, pleaded guilty to causing death by driving without due care and attention. He was sentenced to six months' jail, suspended for a year, was banned from driving for 18 months and was ordered to do 300 hours' unpaid community work.

Norton, who worked for BMW, resigned from his job after the accident because he could no longer face driving. At his sentencing hearing, Collier and his daughter gave a statement saying they did not want to see him imprisoned.

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Agnes's counsel, William Norris QC, told Mr Justice MacDuff she was a "truly remarkable young lady" and a very bright girl who had done astonishingly well in returning to school and taking her AS-levels. She had done wonderfully at school, although with the need of a scribe to do her work she felt she had not achieved the results and career she had hoped for, though she aspired to go to university.

"Her determination is extraordinary," Norris said, "but she has been blessed with a family who are thoroughly supportive, and her stepmother has been a tower of strength."

Ben Browne QC, for the insurers, said the tragedy had hit the entire family, of Naunton, near Cheltenham. It had started with the grievous blow of the loss of a devoted wife and mother, and, he added: "On top of that, they had to contend with the injuries to Agnes, which were at the very highest level of severity."

"It is difficult to imagine how the family was going to cope with those terrible blows coming together, but it is enormously to their credit that they have coped and managed to give Agnes a quality of life which would have been really unimaginable in the early days following this tragedy."

"Mr Collier and his new wife have succeeded in rebuilding a family which was so shattered."

After the hearing, the family's solicitor, Paul Paxton, of Stewarts Law, said the award would be worth £23m over Agnes's lifetime. Composed of a £7.25m lump sum plus annual payments of £270,000, it is believed to be the highest ever for personal injury, topping the previous record, of £12.2m.

He added: "While it is a lot of money, Agnes's needs are great." She would have those needs for the rest of her life, he said.

"The family want to be able to move on with their lives now this chapter has closed."



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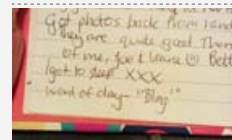
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