

Seatbelt could have made baby's injuries 'worse'

A HEAVILY pregnant young woman was not wearing her seatbelt when she was thrown from a car in a crash that caused a life-changing brain injury to her unborn son, the High Court has heard.

However, little Cian Hammel's injuries could have been even worse if his mother Róisín Hammel had buckled up ahead of the accident less than a week before her due date in 2009, Mr Justice Kevin Cross was told.

Cian, now eight, sued the uninsured driver of the car and the Motor Insurers' Bureau of Ireland. Yesterday, he settled his case for €7.5million compensation.

The High Court heard that

By **Helen Bruce**

Cian's mother Róisín was a 17-year-old Leaving Cert student on the day she accepted a lift on February 3, 2009, to attend a final scheduled scan ahead of the birth of her baby.

She was a rear-seat passenger in a UK-registered seven seater driven by Simon Jordan, whose last known address was Monasee, High Fort, Gorey, Co. Wexford. Ms Hammel did not wear a seatbelt because she felt too big at the time.

It was alleged the driver overtook another vehicle when it was not safe to do so. The car turned over and tumbled into a field at Screen, Co. Wexford. Ms

Hammel 'was thrown out', counsel for Cian Hammel said. The accident caused the placenta to separate from the uterus and after Cian was born, he was found to have suffered a lack of oxygen to his brain. His counsel Rosario Boyle said Cian was cognitively impaired and unsteady on his feet.

The MIBI had initially claimed that Ms Hammel was in part to blame for Cian's injuries because she had not worn a seatbelt. But Ms Boyle said the MIBI had 'accepted and acknowledged' that the outcome would not have been better. Judge Cross approved the settlement, saying that it was a reasonable one.

Dr Mark Dooley



MORAL MATTERS

What good is a selfie when death comes?

NOVEMBER: the month of the dead. Dusk descends shortly after noon as if to remind us of the immortal darkness. We mourn for what can not be revived except through the miracles of memory.

It is up to us to keep alive our dead. They smile at us from the things they left behind, from the world they made. We are their heirs, their testimony to a life well lived.

In the dark days before those of limitless light, November was silent and still. They streamed to the churches to honour the Holy Souls, to give thanks for their lives and for the fact that they gave us life. One month to remember, one month to give thanks.

The dead do not linger but they whisper their secrets – if we listen. Having lived and died, they know much more than we do. They have made mistakes so that we can avoid them.

But now there is no silence, no respect for this month of mourning. We must have light and noise around the clock. We must banish the darkness for fear that we might think of death.

They say the so-called 'millennials' are losing their religion. Some 80% of Irish people between the ages of 18 and 34, say they would be happy without religious belief. The millennials don't do God, but neither do they do death.

No room for spirits or souls in 'Cyberia'. No time for memory or mourning. Who cares what happens beyond the moment?

And yet, isn't Cyberia a shadowland – somewhere half way between life and death?

Millennials have one foot in a spectral world where no-one really exists. Bytes and megabytes, data and digits – people reduced to spooks on a screen.

Still, it doesn't prepare them for death – real death. It doesn't prepare them for loss, for real people losing life. We don't do death anymore, but death is never finished with us.

The leaves that crunch underfoot are symbols of decay and death. Thanks to them we think of loss and of the dark months to come. But what happens if, when you walk, you are plugged into another sphere?

What happens when you don't hear the crunch of dead leaves, when you don't see the dawning of

the early dusk, when sound incessantly penetrates the stillness? Forgetting about the dead means that you cannot learn from the past, that you are disconnected from everything except that precious device. 'Who am I and where do I come from?' is not a question the millennials ever ask.

You don't need religion to think about the dead. We see signs of them all across our world. We look like them, speak like them, think like them. Look in the mirror and you will see them gazing at you.

There is, however, nothing to stop you seeing only yourself. Isn't that what it means to live in a culture of the 'selfie'? Me, myself and I without end.

At its best, religion is about concrete things: silence, darkness, life and death. It lives by the seasons and never forgets that we are merely passing through. Absent generations are mourned and celebrated, their names repeatedly recited in the litany of the saints.

IN religion, nothing is forgotten. We don't forget because the purpose is to give thanks for life, food, shelter, health and wealth. We remember that creation is a gift which was handed down by those in whose shadow we dwell.

The millennials will soon inherit the earth, but they don't do religion or death. November is just another murky month without much meaning. Why mourn when there is no life beyond the threshold of the tomb?

But millennials are not a separate species. They are human beings like you and me, human beings who cannot forever evade the messiness of real life. Someday, they too will have to deal with death and make the most of their memories.

One day, they too will grow old, but will there be any good Samaritans left to love and care for them? Can the good Samaritan survive the culture of the selfie? I doubt it.

So, then, who will love them when they begin to decline? Old age can't be postponed, even by the millennials. Who will stand with arms outstretched when real life begins to make its harsh demands?

Who will mourn them when they go? Who will keep alive their memory by lighting a candle?

Who will weep by their grave in dreary November?

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