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Compensation agreed for widow of jobcentre member killed in crash

A DWP member received a significant compensation settlement after her husband – also a member who worked in the same jobcentre – was killed in a head-on car crash.

Richard Watson, 57, had worked at the DWP in Skegness for more than 35 years when he was killed in October 2020 by an uninsured driver with high levels of methadone in his system. He had gone for a drive to pass the time while waiting for his wife Sandra to come out of a hospital appointment, because he couldn't accompany her due to Covid rules at the time.

Richard and Sandra had been married since 1989, after meeting at work in what was then the DHSS office in the town.

Richard – known by friends as 'Watty' – also served for 32 years as a RNLI lifeboat volunteer at Skegness. His latter years were spent as coxswain before he retired from the station in 2019, by which time he had been involved in saving 246 lives. He was a keen sportsman, including playing hockey for the East Midlands civil service team.

After Richard's death Sandra was represented by PCS via Thompsons Solicitors, who helped her reach a negotiated settlement from a scheme to compensate victims of uninsured drivers. The complex case also involved a pensions specialist to assess the loss of two types of civil service pensions.

"After the crash, the police brought round some information, including on solicitors. I was having a think about it when it popped into my head that Richard had been in the union. I called PCS and asked if they could help with the claim because I'd been quoted quite a lot of money by insurance companies. When they said they could do it at no cost, I nearly fell off the chair," she said.

"When you are in the depths of despair you're just not thinking straight. I hope other members might remember reading this if they ever need the union to help them too," added Sandra, who's now back at work at Skegness jobcentre.

Sandra praised her solicitor, Peter Magee, for making the complicated process “so easy”. “He put me at my ease, which is what you want in those circumstances.”

The day before the accident – in which the other driver was also killed – Richard and Sandra had returned from a walking trip to the Lake District on their 31st wedding anniversary. During the holiday Sandra had slipped and broken her wrist, and on the way home they called into their local hospital to take in the x-rays. “But they asked me to come back the next day, 1 October. It was a beautiful, sunny morning. We got to the hospital and Richard couldn’t come in with me... so I walked away from the car and I looked back and could see him smiling at me, and that was the last I saw of him.”

When a police officer came to find her with the news, she said she “knew” he was gone because he hadn’t been answering her calls. “The only time he wouldn’t pick the phone up to me was if he was out on the lifeboat.”

He’d only recently retired from the RNLI station to spend more time with Sandra after she’d had breast cancer.

“He was really proud of his lifeboat career. He served for two years on the Thames lifeboats at Tower Bridge as well as all the years at Skegness. The crew were absolutely devastated. He’d been part of the station. He was there every day; even after he retired, he’d go from work to the boathouse. It was in his blood.”

“It was humbling to read some of the comments people sent in letters and cards after he died. He made a difference.”

Thompsons Solicitors said Sandra’s case showed “the pivotal role of specialised legal support” in securing just compensation for members who are impacted by road accidents.