



JUDICIARY OF  
ENGLAND AND WALES

**R V HANNAH BONSER**

**11 JULY 2012**

**SHEFFIELD CROWN COURT**

**SENTENCING REMARKS OF MR JUSTICE CRANSTON**

1. On 14 February this year Casey Kearney was murdered while going on a sleepover with a friend in Doncaster. She was 13 at the time; if she had lived she would just have turned 14. She was a year 9 pupil at McAuley High School in Doncaster and was doing particularly well. She wanted to be a film producer. She lived with her mother, Mrs Day, and the family in Rossington, Doncaster. Her family have been in court throughout the whole of the trial. They have behaved with enormous dignity despite having to listen to the details concerning the horrific death of their beloved Casey and facing the attention of the press.
2. In their victim impact statements both parents tell of the devastation caused by Casey's murder and how their lives and that of their families have been changed forever. As Casey's mother, Mrs Day says, life will never be the same again and they will never come to terms with what happened. "Casey did not deserve this. She had done nothing wrong".
3. What happened? Casey had alighted the bus just after 1pm and was on the way to her friend's house, through Elmfield Park in Doncaster. Her last text message to her friend, the last text message she was ever to send, as she walked towards the northern entrance of the Park, was "XD", in other words she was excited. Casey walked south through the park. She reached the fountain in the park and started to walk south along the path.

4. Coming the other way on the same path, was the defendant, Hannah Bonser. That morning Hannah Bonser had purchased two kitchen knives at Boyes Store in Doncaster. As they approached each other Hannah Bonser stabbed Casey with the 16cm knife she had, once in the abdomen with at least moderate, perhaps severe, force. Casey had been stabbed suddenly, without warning, catching her completely unawares. She did have the presence of mind to call 999, but all she could say was “I’ve just been stabbed”. She was moaning and breathing heavily, and tried to speak but couldn’t say any more.
5. People in the park came up to help and comfort Casey, and the police, a paramedic and the ambulance arrived. Casey was given attention in the ambulance. Doctors and staff at Doncaster Royal Infirmary conducted an emergency operation and made numerous attempts to stop the bleeding. However, the knife had caused rapid and catastrophic blood loss and Casey died later that evening.
6. Why had Hannah Bonser done this to Casey, a young girl, a complete and wholly innocent stranger? We still do not know. Twenty minutes after killing Casey Hannah Bonser rang the bell at Rethink, which is the other side of Town Fields, in Doncaster and is a project which assists those with mental health problems. Rethink had provided Hannah Bonser crisis accommodation the previous month.
7. Hannah Bonser appeared normal, not distressed or upset, as if nothing much had happened. She told the Rethink staff that she felt she had done something “silly”. She had stabbed someone in Elmfield Park, someone she did not know, she thought a person in her twenties. When asked why she had done it she said she was hearing voices, a male voice telling her to do evil things and dragging up things in her past. She said that she had been unwell for quite a long time.
8. The Rethink staff called the police. Hannah Bonser was taken to the College Road police station at Doncaster. A consultant psychiatrist assessed her that evening as being fit to be detained and interviewed. She was cooperative with him but appeared somewhat bewildered, surprised at what had happened. She told him that she knew that she had stabbed a girl in the park with a knife

although she did not know why she had done it. She did not think that she had any intention of harming anyone although she could not really remember what had happened. She had been hearing voices in her head ranting and raving.

9. Just after midnight, the police told Hannah Bonser that Casey had died and that she was to be charged with murder. At that point there was a change in Hannah Bonser's demeanour and she said to the police "you're joking". At one point she appeared visibly upset.
10. The next day, when she was interviewed by the police, when asked what she had done the day before, up until the time of her arrest, she said that she got out of bed, got dressed, went to get some money and bought some food but then, she said, her head had gone blank. She then asked to consult her solicitor who told the police that she was clearly unwell, hearing voices telling her to do things and decided she did not want to answer questions. So she didn't tell the police what had happened.
11. During her trial we heard expert evidence from two psychiatrists. For the defence Dr Shubsachs prepared a meticulous report. In interviews with her he asked Hannah Bonser about 14 February when she killed Casey. She said that bad thoughts were being put in her head in place of good ones. However, she told him she could not remember buying the knives, being in Elmfield Park that day, or killing Casey. Dr Shubsachs diagnosed Hannah Bonser as schizophrenic but observed in his report that her amnesia was unusual. Later in his report he says: "I found the matter of her claimed memory loss strange".
12. We do know that Hannah Bonser has had a troubled history. Her mother was an educated woman, who became obese, reported as being 30 stone at one point. She died when Hannah Bonser was about 10. Because of his own illness her father was unable to cope and she and her brother spent time in foster care. Her father died when she was 16. When 17 years old, in 2002, she complained of hearing voices, was admitted to St Catherine's in Doncaster and was diagnosed as having an emotionally unstable personality disorder. On a second admission later that year she was diagnosed with mental and behaviour disorder due to

abuse of cannabis. There was then regular contact with out-patient psychiatric services, and the prescription of medication, until 2007.

13. From late 2007 until mid 2011 she seemed to have functioned without recourse to mental health services. In 2011, however, there was a qualitative change in her presentation. That was noticed by her friends. In early October 2011 she was sectioned under the Mental Health Act while in London, the UCL doctors taking the view that she was psychotic. On return to Doncaster she spent 5 days in St Catherine's and was discharged. In the following months she took several overdoses. In the early New Year she said that she was a danger to herself and others, but denied any intent to harm. She then spent 7 days in crisis accommodation at Rethink. On her discharge she reported some improvement. She was then in contact with Rethink's outreach services until the day before she murdered Casey.
14. The jury have found Hannah Bonser guilty of murder. That means that she will be sentenced to imprisonment for life. However, I have to fix the minimum period before the Parole Board can order her release. I emphasise that the term I fix is the minimum period.
15. To fix the minimum period I must begin with a starting point. In my view the 25 year starting point is appropriate in this case. Hannah Bonser took the kitchen knife to the scene and used it to murder Casey.
16. Having adopted the 25 year starting point it is then necessary to have regard to any aggravating and mitigating factors. The only aggravating factor was Casey's vulnerability, her young age. However, I accept Mr Fish QC's submission that although Casey was vulnerable she was not targeted as a vulnerable person.
17. Let me turn to the mitigating factors. To my mind there are four. The first is that this was a random attack so there was no premeditation in the ordinary sense. Secondly, Hannah Bonser is of good character and possibly emotionally underdeveloped. Thirdly, Mr Reeds QC did not put the prosecution case on the basis of an intention to

kill from the outset. Fourthly, and most significantly, Hannah Bonser suffers from a mental disorder or mental disability. I accept the submission of both Mr Reeds QC and Mr Fish QC, that the more significant the mental disorder the greater it will be as a mitigating factor. By their verdict, the jury have decided even if it was mental disorder such that it substantially impaired Hannah Bonser's ability to understand what she was doing, to form a rational judgment or lose self-control, it did not provide an explanation for her murdering Casey.

18. Taking all these factors into account, it seems to me that the appropriate minimum term in Hannah Boner's case is 22 years.

19. Hannah Bonser: I sentence you to life imprisonment with a minimum period of 22 years, minus the time you have spent in custody.