

Crash

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apologized to the family members in court and said she wishes she could take all of their pain and suffering upon herself instead.

The 2005 graduate of Badger High School also said she has found religion since the traffic crash and has committed herself to staying away from alcohol.

"I promise to continue my path of sobriety," she told the family, "and I pray that you can find forgiveness in your heart."

On the night of July 14, Hilgemann had been to a party where she drank several White Claw Hard Seltzer alcoholic beverages. According to court records, she had recently broken up with her longtime boyfriend, with whom she had two children.

She was later found to have a blood-alcohol level of .21 — more than double the threshold for driving under the influence.

Driving west on Main Street toward downtown Lake Geneva, she drifted across the center line and collided head-on with a vehicle carrying Alan and Nicole Garrard and their three children. In addition to the infant with a broken femur, another child suffered a lacerated spleen and a collapsed lung, and the third child suffered a broken facial bone.

Alan Garrard suffered a leg injury in addition to the broken back, while his wife, Nicole Garrard, suffered injuries to her legs and one

foot.

Hilgeman pleaded guilty to three counts of intoxicated use of a motor vehicle causing great bodily harm, each a felony punishable by up to 12 years and six months in prison.

In a plea deal, the Walworth County district attorney agreed to drop a fourth felony count and one misdemeanor.

The defense attorney requested probation, but the prosecutor recommended five years in prison.

Circuit Judge Kristine Drettwan ordered a five-year prison term, to be followed by five years of extended supervision during which Hilgeman is forbidden from consuming alcohol or going inside taverns or liquor stores.

Noting that Hilgeman had no prior criminal record, Drettwan said she still could not be sure that the defendant would not re-offend if set free on probation. There was no criminal history last summer, the judge said, adding: "Look what happened."

Witnesses to the crash reported hearing the loud impact of two vehicles colliding, and then seeing members of the Garrard family lying injured in the roadway.

Both parents and all three children showed up in court for the sentencing hearing, joined by extended family members.

Several family members testified about how difficult their recovery has been, and how it continues painstakingly.

"They have already come a long way since the accident," family member Elizabeth Bas said in a written statement read aloud. "But things will never be the same."

Deputy District Attorney Matthew Leusink said the case has presented the most comprehensive picture he has ever seen of how drunken driving leaves victims' lives in upheaval.

Leusink also told the judge he has never seen so many serious injuries in a drunken driving crash where nobody was killed.

"I was astonished that it could happen — that much carnage," he said.

Hilgeman friends and family members also attended the sentencing and provided written testimonials on her behalf, although none were read in court.

Defense attorney Theodore Kmiec described his client as a hard-working high school graduate who lived as a single mother and had no criminal record. If she were spared a prison sentence, she would pose no danger to the public, Kmiec said.

Throughout the criminal case, Hilgeman has accepted responsibility for the drunken driving incident, and she has shown great concern for the recovery and well being of her victims, the attorney said.

Even on the night she was arrested, when she realized how badly she injured the Garrard family, Kmiec said, her response to police was: "Oh, my god, this is all my fault."