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## Straight verdict splits client, family

The Associated Press

BLACKSBURG, Va. — Fred Collins III won his freedom and his lawsuit, but he lost his home in the process.

Last month, Collins, a Virginia Tech sophomore, was awarded \$220,000 in damages from Straight Inc after a federal jury decided the drug-rehabilitation program held him against his will for 133 days.



Collins said however, Fred Collins er, that after he fled the program his parents, who have become believers in Straight, disowned him. He said his younger brother, George, who is still in the program, won't speak to him.

"I tried to talk with them around Christmas and they didn't want to have anything to do with me," he said of his parents in a recent interview. "They still

don't want to have anything to do with me. They think I'm a crazy drug fiend or something."

Straight's techniques and accomplishments have been praised by national anti-drug groups and received wide attention after Nancy Reagan lauded its efforts during a visit to its St. Petersburg facility. The program claims to have grown from 300 clients to 800 since 1976 with a budget of \$1.5 million a year.

Collins' parents declined to comment when contacted. However, during the trial in U.S. District Court in Alexandria, the father testified his son "is no longer a part of his family (because) he chose to leave ... It is my earnest hope that someday, when I am assured he is drug-free, I hope that we can reconstruct a family relationship."

Collins said his parents paid about \$6,000 or \$7,000 for their two children to participate in the program.

Like many teen-agers, Collins and his

younger brother didn't always agree with their parents. Both admitted during the trial that they smoked marijuana and hashish together.

In January 1982, concerned with George Collins' continuing drug use, his parents enrolled him in Straight.

Six months later, after finishing his freshman year at Virginia Tech, Collins said he went to the Straight facility at his parents' request, knowing he would be interrogated and "checked out." He had quit smoking marijuana a year before, but he wanted to see his brother, he said.

The visit began what he now calls a nightmare. During the trial, Collins testified he was physically and mentally abused during his four months at Straight.

The jury agreed Collins had been held against his will and awarded him \$40,000 to compensate him and \$180,000 to punish Straight. The jurors did not find that he was mentally and physically abused.

William Oliver, Straight's executive director, said Collins' allegations "were grossly exaggerated" and Straight will appeal the verdict.

"The jury vindicated me," said Collins. The jurors "let me know they believed what I said ... It's going to hurt (Straight). They're going to think twice about going out and kidnapping an adult.

"The only reason I sued was so they would not kidnap me back. That's what I feared most," Collins said.

A half dozen other young people testified at Collins' trial or have filed suit against the organization. The lawsuits pending against Straight include one filed by a Lakeland mother who claims tactics used by Straight drove her 19-year-old son, Michael Davis, to a mental hospital.

But other participants testified Straight broke them of their drug dependency and turned their lives around.

Collins said there was no therapy at Straight.