1 05-450 Sutherland vs. HYC, Inc.

THE COURT: All right. Ladies and gentlemen, so we've reached the point in the trial where I'm going to instruct you on the law that will apply to the deliberations that you are about to engage upon.

6 Now, first let me say, because when in every 7 trial when I start to give instructions jurors pull 8 their notebooks out and get their pens ready because 9 they're ready to start taking notes, let me tell you 10 off the bat that you don't have to take copious notes 11 on my charge because it's my practice to send in a written copy of my jury instructions into the room with 12 13 you. So you'll have that with you. You can take notes 14 if you wish, but I don't want you to feel obligated to do so. It's one thing that I find from discussing 15 matters with jurors, they find it extremely helpful to 16 17 have a written copy of the instructions in the jury 18 room.

Also, keep in mind that the instructions are as I give them to you orally and that the written copy sent into the jury room is intended to be a guide. You'll find that my instructions given from the bench are almost exactly as written because I use a lot of care in preparing them, but sometimes I do ad lib a bit, and the instructions as given from the bench are

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1 the official instructions.

SUTHERLAND-JURY CHARGE 4-22-08 So before I give you instructions on the law that applies to this case and your duties as jurors in this case, I'll just take a moment to summarize the case for you.

Now, remember that in what I'm about to say and 6 in all of my instructions to you, what I say is not 7 8 evidence in the case, and it is not intended to imply 9 in any way that I hold any opinion about the validity 10 of the claim being made in this case or any defense 11 asserted by the defendant, and I'm going to speak to 12 you more about your obligations with respect to all of this in a few minutes. 13

So there's only one claim in this case before you and that is that the plaintiff, Lynn Sutherland, claims that she was injured as a result of the failure of the defendants to warn her of a dangerous condition, namely, the danger posed by the turning block on the 12-meter yacht named HERITAGE.

20 On August 21, 2004, Lynn Sutherland was a 21 passenger on the HERITAGE, which was owned by the 22 defendant, HYC, Inc., and captained by the defendant, 23 Jeffrey Barrows. During the charter cruise, Lynn 24 Sutherland suffered a severe injury after her hand came 25 into contact with the turning block. She maintains

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that the defendants, HYC and Jeffrey Barrows, failed to warn her of the danger posed by the turning block. The defendants maintain that the turning block was an open and obvious danger for which there was no duty to warn; and in the alternative, defendants argue that SUTHERLAND-JURY CHARGE 4-22-08 6 appropriate warnings were given satisfying any duty 7 owed by them to the plaintiff.

8 You must keep in mind as I give these 9 instructions to you that there are two defendants in 10 this case, HYC and Jeffrey Barrows. You must decide the case as to both defendants. And while I give you 11 these instructions, keep in mind that they apply to all 12 13 of the parties regardless of whether I at various times may use the singular defendant versus the plural 14 15 defendants.

16 So now that you've heard all the evidence and 17 the arguments of the attorneys, my duty is to instruct you on the law that applies to this case, and it's your 18 19 duty to find the facts from all the evidence that has 20 been presented in this case; and to those facts, you 21 will apply the law as I give it to you. You must 22 follow the law as I give it to you whether you agree with it or not. You must not be influenced by any 23 24 personal likes or dislikes, any opinions or prejudices 25 or sympathies of any kind whatsoever. That means that

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you must decide the case solely on the evidence that is
 before you. You recall that at the beginning of the
 trial you took an oath promising to do so.

Now, in following my instructions, you must
follow all of them and not single out some and ignore
others. All of my instructions are equally important.
And also, you must not read into these instructions or
into anything that I may have said or done during the
trial any suggestion as to what verdict you should

return. That is a matter that is entirely up to you.
Now, the evidence from which you are able to
decide what the fact are consists of three things: The
sworn testimony of witnesses; the exhibits, which have
been received into evidence; and any facts to which the
lawyers have agreed or stipulated to.

Now, there are certain things -- as you recall I told you at the beginning of the trial, there are certain things that are not evidence and you may not consider them in deciding what the facts of the case are, and I'm going to list those for you now.

First, arguments and statements by the lawyers are not evidence. The lawyers are not witnesses. What they have said in their opening statements and their closing arguments and at other times during the trial is intended to help you interpret the evidence, but it

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is not evidence. If the facts as you remember them
 differ from the way the lawyers have stated them or
 described them, it's your memory that controls.

Second, questions and objections by lawyers are 4 not evidence. Attorneys have a duty to their clients 5 6 to object when they believe a question is improper under the Rules of Evidence. You should not be 7 influenced by any objection or by the Court's ruling 8 9 upon it. Keep in mind, as I told you before, if an 10 objection was overruled, you treat the answer as you would the answer to any other question; and if it was 11 sustained, you disregard the question. 12

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So thirdly, in that regard, any evidence that I

SUTHERLAND-JURY CHARGE 4-22-08 ordered to be excluded or stricken or disregarded by you is not evidence and must not be considered. Fourth, anything that you may have seen or heard when court was not in session is not evidence. You're to decide the case solely on the evidence that was received during the trial. Now, evidence may be direct or it may be

Now, evidence may be direct or it may be
circumstantial. Direct evidence is the direct proof of
a fact such as the testimony of an eyewitness.
Circumstantial evidence is proof of one or more facts
from which you could find that another fact exists.
You should consider both kinds of evidence. As

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1 a general rule, the law makes no distinction between 2 the weight to be given to either direct or circumstantial evidence. It is for you to decide how 3 much weight to give to any evidence. Direct evidence 4 can prove a material fact by itself. It does not 5 require any other evidence. It does not require you to 6 draw any inferences. A witness's testimony is direct 7 evidence when the witness testifies to what he or she 8 saw or heard or felt. In other words, when a witness 9 testifies about what is known from his or her own 10 personal knowledge by virtue of his or her senses, what 11 she sees or touches or hears, that is what direct 12 evidence is. The only question for you is whether you 13 14 believe the witness's testimonv.

A document or physical object may also be direct
evidence when it can prove a material fact by itself
without other evidence or the drawing of inferences.

SUTHERLAND-JURY CHARGE 4-22-08 18 You may, of course, have to determine the genuineness 19 of the document or the object.

20 Now, circumstantial evidence is the opposite of 21 direct evidence. It cannot prove a material fact by 22 itself, rather, it is evidence that tends to prove a 23 material fact when considered together with other 24 evidence and by drawing inferences. You remember the 25 simple example I gave to you at the beginning of the

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1 trial about getting up in the morning and looking out 2 the window and seeing everything was wet and from that 3 inferring the fact that it rained overnight. Not all circumstantial evidence presents such a clear and Δ simple and compelling inference. The strength of the 5 inferences arising from circumstantial evidence is for 6 you to determine, and it's for you to decide how much 7 weight to give any evidence. Inference from 8 circumstantial evidence may be drawn on the basis of 9 10 reason, experience and common sense. Inferences may not, however, be drawn by guesswork, speculation or 11 conjecture. 12

13 The law does not require a party to introduce 14 direct evidence. A party may prove a fact entirely 15 upon circumstantial evidence or on a combination of direct and circumstantial evidence. Circumstantial 16 evidence is not less valuable than direct evidence, and 17 18 you're to consider all the evidence in the case, both 19 direct and circumstantial, in determining what the facts of this case are and in determining your verdict. 20 21 Now, during the trial you've heard reference to

22	the terms "examination under oath" or "deposition", and
23	you have viewed a number of witnesses in this trial by
24	video deposition, and you've heard depositions read
25	into the record from the stand. These terms mean sworn

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testimony given under oath by a witness before the
 trial began.

Now, to the extent that you've heard such deposition testimony, you may give it the same credibility or weight as live witness testimony; that is to say, whatever credibility or weight, if any, that you think it deserves.

8 Now, in deciding the facts of this case, you 9 have to decide which testimony to believe and which 10 testimony not to believe. You may believe everything 11 that a witness says or part of it or none of it at all. 12 In considering the testimony of any witness, you may 13 take into account a number of factors in making a 14 determination as to the credibility of that witness.

15 First, the opportunity and the ability of the witness to see or to hear or to know the things that he 16 17 or she testified to; second, the witness's memory; 18 third, the witness's manner while testifying; fourth, 19 the witness's interest in the outcome of the case and 20 any bias or prejudice the witness may have; fifth, whether other evidence contradicted the witness's 21 22 testimony; and sixth, the reasonableness of the 23 witness's testimony in light of all of the evidence. One of the defendants, HYC, Inc., is a 24 25 corporation. The law makes no distinction between

1	corporations and private individuals, nor does it
2	distinguish between the size or type of business in
3	which a corporation engages. All persons, including
4	corporations, stand equal before the law and are to be
5	dealt with as equals in this case. At all times, you
6	should consider treating this matter as an action
7	between persons of equal standing in the community, of
8	equal worth in holding the same or similar stations in
9	life or in the community. Corporations act through
10	their agents and employees.
11	Now I'm going to instruct you on the specific
12	law that applies to Lynn Sutherland's claim against HYC

12 law that applies to Lynn Sutherland's claim against HYC
13 and Jeffrey Barrows.

14 In this case, as in most cases, the law places the burden of proof on the plaintiff. The fact that an 15 injury occurred does not by itself mean that the 16 defendants were negligent. With respect to the 17 plaintiff's negligence claim, the plaintiff has the 18 19 obligation or responsibility to prove that the 20 defendants acted negligently. In order for the plaintiff to prevail on her claim, she must prove three 21 22 things or what the law refers to as elements. 23 First, that HYC and Jeffrey Barrows were 24 negligent; second, that Lynn Sutherland was harmed; and

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 was the proximate cause, a proximate cause of the harm.
 The plaintiff must prove all three of those Page 8

third, that the negligence of HYC and Jeffrey Barrows

3	things in order to prevail. If the plaintiff has
4	failed to prove any one or more of those three things,
5	then you should return a verdict for the defendants.
6	The defendants, on the other hand, have no
7	obligation to produce evidence. They are not required
8	to disprove that which the plaintiff claims to be true.
9	The burden is on the plaintiff to prove each of the
10	elements of her negligence claim. I'll speak more
11	about that and those three elements in a few moments.
12	Now, in addition to imposing the burden of proof
13	on a plaintiff, the law also requires that the proof
14	offered in support of any given claim reach a certain
15	level or standard. In this case, that level of proof
16	or standard of proof is proof by a preponderance of the
17	evidence. Plaintiff has the burden of proving by a
18	fair preponderance of the evidence, that is, by the
19	greater weight of the evidence, the facts necessary to
20	support her case. Because the plaintiff is advancing
21	the proposition that the defendant should be held
22	responsible for harm caused to her, it is she who has
23	the responsibility of producing evidence that leads you
24	to believe what she claims is more likely true than not
25	true. The defendants, on the other hand, have no

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2 plaintiff's claim.
3 You may recall from the beginning of the trial
4 that I think I described the simple way of measuring
5 the preponderance of the evidence standard and that is
6 to envision an old-fashioned scale. Plaintiff has to Page 9

obligation to produce evidence concerning the

7 make that scale tip somewhat in her favor. 8 If the scales are evenly balanced or tip in the 9 defendant's favor, then the plaintiff has not met her burden of proof. But if the scale tips in the 10 11 plaintiff's favor, even very slightly, then she has met 12 her burden of proof. 13 You'll recall that the preponderance of evidence 14 standard as I explained in the beginning of the trial is different than the criminal standard of beyond a 15 reasonable doubt. That standard has no application in 16 17 this case. 18 Now, in order to determine whether the 19 defendants were negligent, that is the first element of the claim, you must first decide whether the defendants 20 21 owed the plaintiff a duty of care to warn her about the 22 turning block. A defendant has no duty to warn a 23 person about a dangerous condition if that condition is 24 open and obvious. A dangerous condition is open and 25 obvious if a reasonable person having the skill,

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experience, and knowledge of the plaintiff would
 appreciate its dangerousness.

If a condition is not open and obvious, the defendants have a duty to warn of the danger. If a condition is open and obvious, the defendants do not have a duty to warn of the danger unless the circumstances are such that the defendants should have anticipated the harm that could result even to one to whom the danger would have been obvious.

If you find that the condition was open and Page 10

11 obvious, and that the circumstances were such that the 12 defendants would not have anticipated the harm to the 13 plaintiff, then you must find for the defendants. 14 If, however, you find that the condition was not 15 open and obvious, or if you find that it was open and 16 obvious, but circumstances were such that the 17 defendants should have anticipated the harm, then you 18 must go on to decide whether the defendants warned the 19 plaintiff of the danger of harm. 20 Now, a maritime defendant has a duty to warn 21 passengers regarding the presence of conditions on 22 board a ship that are dangerous and that otherwise would not be known or appreciated by passengers. This 23 24 duty of care requires the defendants to act reasonably 25 in light of all the circumstances presented, including

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1 the risk of injury.

2 What is reasonable care will depend on the 3 circumstances and may be greater in some cases and 4 lesser in others. The more the circumstances of injury 5 involve risks peculiar to maritime activity as opposed 6 to risks that can be encountered in daily life, the 7 higher the degree of care must be in order to be found 8 to be reasonable care.

9 Also, the degree of care required by the
10 reasonable care standard varies with the level of risk
11 in the particular situation. The greater the risk of
12 harm, the greater the required level of care.
13 Therefore, you must examine the circumstances of the
14 charter sail and the plaintiff's injury and decide

whether or not the defendants acted in a reasonably prudent way in light of all those circumstances and the level of risk presented and, specifically, whether the defendants warned the plaintiff regarding the danger of harm.

20 Now, if you decide that the defendants did not 21 owe a duty to the plaintiff to warn her of the danger 22 posed by the turning block or that the defendants 23 warned her of the danger, then your deliberations are 24 over and you must return a verdict for the defendants. 25 However, if you decide that the defendants did act

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negligently by failing to warn of the danger, then you
 must decide whether that negligence was what the law
 refers to as the proximate cause of the plaintiff's
 injuries.

Negligence is the proximate cause of an injury 5 6 if it appears from the evidence in the case that the 7 conduct alleged to be negligent, here the failure of 8 the defendants to warn the charter passengers about the 9 turning blocks and to keep their hands clear of them, 10 was a substantial factor in causing the injury and that 11 the injury was a direct result or a reasonably probable 12 consequence of the negligence.

13 If you find that the defendants were negligent 14 and that their negligence was a substantial factor in 15 causing the injury, or that the injury was a direct 16 result or a reasonably probable consequence of the 17 negligence, then your verdict must be for the 18 plaintiff, and you must determine what amount of Page 12

19 damages the plaintiff is entitled to as compensation 20 for her injuries.

Now, if you find that the defendants had a duty to warn the plaintiff about the turning block and that the defendants failed to do so and, further, that the defendants failure to warn was the proximate cause of the plaintiff's jury, then the next question that you

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must answer is whether the plaintiff's own conduct
 contributed to her injury. This is what is sometimes
 referred to as comparative negligence or contributory
 negligence.

The defendants here claim that the plaintiff's 5 harm was caused in whole or in part by her own 6 7 negligence. A passenger on a vessel has a duty to use the care that a reasonably prudent person would use 8 9 under the circumstances. Therefore, to sustain their 10 claim that the plaintiff was comparatively negligent, 11 the defendants must prove by a preponderance of the 12 evidence that the plaintiff failed to exercise the amount of care that a reasonably prudent passenger 13 14 would under the circumstances and that such a failure 15 was a factor in bringing about her injuries.

Now, if you find by a preponderance of the evidence that the defendants were negligent and that their negligence was a factor in causing the plaintiff's injuries, and you find by a preponderance of the evidence that the plaintiff was negligent and that her negligence was a factor in causing her own injuries, then you must determine what percentage of Page 13

fault is attributable to the defendants and what
percentage of fault is attributable to the plaintiff.
You will then report these percentages on the verdict

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form that I'm going to give you to take with you into the jury room, and they must total 100 percent. You're not to make any reductions in the amount of damages that you award to the plaintiff. I will decrease the amount of damages you have found, if any, by the percentage by which you find her negligence contributed to her own injuries.

8 Now I'm going to instruct you on damages in the 9 event you reach that issue. Now, because this is the 10 only time that I have to give you instructions on the 11 law, I do need to explain to you the law that you will 12 apply with respect to the issue of damages even though 13 I do not know whether you will find the defendants 14 liable at all.

15 The fact that I am instructing you on the issue 16 of damages, or, for that matter, instructing on 17 contributory or comparative negligence and the fact that evidence was received in this case on the issue of 18 19 damages does not indicate any view by me that you should or should not find in favor of the plaintiff on 20 the issue of whether the defendants were negligent and, 21 22 therefore, liable, but I need to give you these instructions now so that you will have them if you 23 24 reach the issue of damages.

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Now, a plaintiff bears the burden of proof to

1 show the existence and the amount of her damages by a 2 preponderance of the evidence. This does not mean that she must prove the precise amount of her damages to a 3 mathematical certainty. It means that she must satisfy 4 5 you as to the amount of damages that is fair, just and reasonable under all of the circumstances. Damages 6 must not be enlarged so as to constitute either a gift 7 or a windfall to a plaintiff or a punishment or penalty 8 9 to defendants. The only purpose of damages is to award 10 reasonable compensation. You must not award speculative damages, that is, damages for future losses 11 12 that, although they may be possible, are unlikely to occur. If you should award damages, they will not be 13 14 subject to federal or state income taxes, and you 15 should, therefore, not consider taxes in determining 16 the amount of damages.

Now, the first category of damages is reasonable medical expenses. You may award plaintiff a sum to compensate her for the cost of any medical care that she has received and that was reasonable and necessary to treat her hand injury.

The second category of damages is lost wages and earning power. You may award the plaintiff a sum to compensate her for any earnings that she has lost from the time of the incident to the present, and any loss

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of earning power that you find from the evidence she
 will probably suffer in the future as a result of the

SUTHERLAND-JURY CHARGE 4-22-08 3 defendant's negligence.

In determining the amount of future loss, you 4 5 should compare what the plaintiff's health, physical 6 ability and earning power were before the accident with what they are now; the nature and severity of her 7 injuries; the expected duration of her injuries; and 8 9 the extent to which her condition may improve or 10 deteriorate in the future. The objective is to determine the injury's effect, if any, on future 11 earning capacity and the present value of any loss of 12 13 future earning power that you find the plaintiff will 14 probably suffer in the future.

In that connection, you should consider the plaintiff's work life expectancy, taking into account her occupation, her habits, her past health record, her state of health at the time of the accident, and her employment history.

20 work life expectancy is that period of time that 21 you expect the plaintiff would have continued to work 22 given her age, her health, her occupation and 23 education.

24 Where a plaintiff claims lost future earnings,
25 the plaintiff has a duty to mitigate her losses. If

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you should find that the evidence establishes a reasonable likelihood of a loss of future earnings, you will then have to reduce this amount, whatever it may be, to its present worth. The reason for this is that a sum of money that is received today is worth more than the same amount of money paid out in installments SUTHERLAND-JURY CHARGE 4-22-08 over a period of time since a lump sum today, such as any amount you might award in your verdict, can be invested and earn interest in the years ahead.

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10 You have heard testimony concerning the 11 likelihood of future inflation and what rate of interest any lump sum could return. In determining the 12 13 present lump sum value of any future earnings you 14 conclude the plaintiff has lost, you should consider only a rate of interest based on the best and safest 15 16 investments and not on the general stock market, and 17 you may set off against it any reasonable rate of inflation. 18

19 The third category of damage is pain and 20 suffering and mental anguish. You may award a sum to 21 compensate a plaintiff reasonably for any pain, 22 suffering and mental anguish and loss of enjoyment of 23 life that you find the defendants' negligence has 24 caused her to suffer and will probably cause her to 25 suffer in the future. Even though it is obviously

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difficult to establish a standard of measurement for 1 these damages, the difficulty is not grounds for 2 3 denying a recovery on this element of damages. You must, therefore, make the best and most reasonable 4 5 estimate that you can, not from a personal point of view, but from a fair and impartial point of view, 6 7 attempting to come to a conclusion that will be fair and just to all of the parties. 8

9 Now, the final element of possible damages that
10 may be awarded upon the finding for the plaintiff here

SUTHERLAND-JURY CHARGE 4-22-08 11 is called prejudgment interest. Such an award is 12 within your sole discretion as the triers of fact in 13 this case. The purpose of prejudgment interest is to 14 make the plaintiff fully whole or compensated. As you 15 know, the incident that is at issue in this case occurred on August 21, 2004. If you should find for 16 17 the plaintiff, you may decide that the plaintiff has 18 not had the benefit of any money you award for loss of 19 earnings up to the date of the trial and so has not 20 been able to earn interest on it. You may, in your 21 discretion, award prejudgment interest from the date of 22 the interest of past lost earnings, medical expenses and pain and suffering. The rate of interest you apply 23 24 may range up to, but not exceed, the maximum legal rate of 12 percent. 25

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1 Now, when you begin your deliberations, you 2 should elect one member of your group to serve as the 3 foreperson of the jury. The foreperson will preside over your deliberations and speak for you here in 4 court. You will then discuss the case with your fellow 5 jurors to reach an agreement if you can do so. Your 6 7 verdict must be unanimous. Each of you must decide the case for yourself, but you should do so only after you 8 9 have considered all of the evidence, discussed it fully 10 with your fellow jurors, and listened to the views of your fellow jurors. Do not be afraid to change your 11 12 opinion if during the course of the deliberations the discussion persuades you that you should. On the other 13 14 hand, do not come to a decision simply because other

15 jurors think it is right. 16 Now, if for some reason it becomes necessary 17 during your deliberations to communicate with me, you 18 may send me a note through the marshal signed by the 19 foreperson. No member of the jury should ever attempt to contact me except by a signed writing, and I will 20 21 communicate with any member of the jury on anything 22 concerning this case only in writing and only here in 23 open court.

SUTHERLAND-JURY CHARGE 4-22-08

Now, sometimes during deliberations jurors want
to hear testimony read back. Keep in mind that this is
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a -- while it is possible, it's a time-consuming and 1 2 difficult process; and generally, in a relatively short 3 trial such as this one, your collective memories should be sufficient with respect to any questions about the 4 5 evidence. But if for some reason you feel that you need to have testimony read back, then you need to 6 7 consider your request very carefully, and you need to be as precise as possible with respect to what you wish 8 to hear. 9

Now, I have prepared a verdict form in this case 10 11 for you to use during your deliberations, and you will 12 see that the verdict form contains a series of 13 questions, eight questions. It is fairly straightforward, and it tracks the instructions that I 14 15 have given you. I'm going to walk through the verdict 16 form with you and make sure that you understand the instructions on it. 17 18 First question is: Was the turning block a

SUTHERLAND-JURY CHARGE 4-22-08 19 dangerous condition, which was open and obvious to a 20 reasonable person with the plaintiff's skill, education 21 and experience? 22 You may answer that yes or no. If you answer it 23 yes, you go to question two. If you answer it no, you skip question two and go to question three. 24 25 Question two then reads: If you answered yes to 23

question one, were the circumstances such that the 1 2 defendants had a duty to warn about the danger? 3 Again, yes or no. If you answer yes, you go on 4 to question three. If you answer no, you stop. Question three asks: If you answered no to 5 6 question one or yes to question two, did the defendants 7 warn the plaintiff about the dangerous condition? Again, yes or no. 8 9 If you answer yes to that question, then you 10 If you answer no to that question, then you go stop. to question four. 11 12 Question four asks: If you answered no to 13 question three, was the defendant's failure to warn the 14 proximate cause of the plaintiff's injury? 15 Again, yes or no. If yes, you go on to question five. If the answer is no, you stop. 16 17 Number five asks: If you answered yes to question four, did the plaintiff's conduct contribute 18 19 to her injury? 20 Again, yes or no. And if yes, you go on to question six. If no, you go on to question seven. 21 22 So if you answer question six, that is you Page 20

23	answered yes to question five, then what percentage of
24	damages is attributable to the plaintiff's and the
25	defendant's negligence?

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And if you're on this question, you'll see a
 percentage for a plaintiff and a percentage for
 defendant. Those numbers must add up to 100 percent.
 And then you get to question seven. It lists
 the various categories of damages I just instructed you
 And question eight asks you a question with
 respect to prejudgment earnings.

The reason I'm walking through this form with 8 you is I want to point out to you to pay very careful 9 10 attention to the instructions. If you answer the 11 questions and then it says stop, then stop. Okay? If 12 not, then go on to where it tells you to go on. This 13 is the foreperson's responsibility to make sure you're 14 filling this form out correctly. All right? I don't want to have to get a form back from you that doesn't 15 follow directions and then figure out how to send you 16 17 back into the room to fix that. All right?

So ladies and gentlemen, after you've reached a unanimous agreement on the verdict, then, as I think I said, the foreperson will fill this out, date it and sign it, and then advise the Court that you're ready to return to the courtroom with your verdict.

All right. That completes my instructions toyou.