IN THE FIFTEENTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT COURT 1 IN AND FOR PALM BEACH COUNTY, FLORIDA 2 CASE NO. 86-6149 (CL) J 3 4 BRENDA E.; SMITH, as Personal Representative of the Estate of LESLIE NICOLE SMITH, deceased, 5 and BRENDA E. SMITH and STEVE 6 SMITH, individually, 7 Plaintiffs, 8 vs. THE STATE OF FLORIDA DEPARTMENT 9 OF TRANSPORTATION, et al., 10 Defendants. 11 12 13 COURT REPORTER'S TRANSCRIPT OF THE CLOSING ARGUMENTS OF THE PLAINTIFF TAKEN 14 BEFORE THE COURT AND A JURY 15 West Palm Beach, Florida Friday, February 23, 1990 16 10:25 a.m. - 3:30 p.m. 1.7 18 APPEARANCES: 19 SEARCY, DENNEY, SCAROLA, BARNHART & SHIPLEY, PA 2139 Palm Beach Lakes Boulevard 20 West Palm Beach, Florida 33409 21 Attorneys for the Plaintiffs BY: CHRISTOPHER SEARCY, ESO. 22 and LANCE BLOCK, ESQ. 23 DAVIS, HOY, CARROLL & ISAACS, P.A. 1655 Palm Beach Lakes Boulevard 24 Forum III Building, Suite 1010 West Palm Beach, Florida 33401 25 Attorneys for the Defendants BY: MICHAEL B. DAVIS, ESQ.

MR. SEARCY: May it please the Court. Folks, I would like to start by thanking each and every one of you for the close attention that you have paid to the evidence in this case. I am sure that the justice system of this country thanks you for the close attention that you have paid to the evidence because we all know that the best way to insure justice is through

the jury system and attentive jurors and justice is what this case is all about.

When you go back in the room today to decide this case you will have awesome power. Juries determine the rights of Senators, Congressmen, rich men, poor men, Presidents. It is -- you embody today the power of our government and you have the unlimited power to right a wrong. Unlimited at least as far as money damages are concerned.

If you could -- if it weren't limited to money. If you could have a magic wand, if you had the power to go back there and say, this is wrong, it never should have happened, it was a comedy of errors.

They put up a piece of junk that was never meant to withstand these conditions and therefore we are going to undo it and we are going to make it like it never happened and we are going to give Steve and Brenda Smith

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their daughter back uninjured, never hurt, that is all that the Smith's would ever want and they would be the happiest people in the world.

But you do have that limitation on your power. You cannot do that. You do have an unlimited power insofar as the rendering of a money damage verdict goes and it's very important that you follow the Court's instructions and follow the evidence that you have heard and paid attention to and follow the Court's instructions and if you do that you will render justice and if anybody back there when you go back to decide this case, if anybody says, gets overwhelmed by the magnitude of the damages here and says, "Well, all the money in the world won't bring her back, " stop them say, Wait a minute. That is not the law. We are supposed to follow the law. And the Court told us that the law is that we are to measure in money damages the fair and reasonable nature

of these damages, the full and total magnitude of the damages and that it should be fair and just in light of all the evidence. And it doesn't matter what that ends up being, we need to follow the law and follow the evidence.

You might have asked yourselves, how is it that of all these people that were called for jury duty two weeks ago and all the people that came in here that I ended up sitting on this jury and there's a saying from the Bible that many are called and few are chosen. Why were you chosen? I chose you because I believed you --

MR. DAVIS: Excuse me, Your Honor, that is an improper statement in front of the jury.

THE COURT: Sustained as to why you chose them, Mr. Searcy.

MR. SEARCY: On the voir dire examination each of you stated that you would follow the law and you would follow the evidence and if the

evidence showed a verdict of great

magnitude you would render a verdict

of great magnitude, whatever that

amount.

Now Lance has talked with you -

Now Lance has talked with you -the way you are going to decide this
case is when we finish with these
closing statements the Court is going
to tell you what the law is.

the is going to instruct you on
the law and then he is going to give
you a verdict form and the verdict
form is going to have six questions on
it and they'll be a little more
lengthy than this but this represents
the gist of those questions and Lance
has talked to you about the first,
what would be the first three
questions, and he has shown you that
on the question of, was the department
of transportation negligent? The
evidence has shown that the answer is
clearly yes.

Was Brenda Smith negligent the overwhelming evidence shows that she

in fact was not negligent and acted as a reasonable mother would act under the circumstances.

And three would be if you were to find Brenda Smith negligent you would answer that that compares the percentage of negligence, but I think you will find that to be inapplicable and not answer that one.

And that brings us to four, the total damages for the wrongful death of Leslie Nicole Smith, total damages of Brenda Smith and total damages of Steve Smith and we also have the personal injury to Brenda Smith.

Brenda's personal injury damages and then Steve's damage as a result of Brenda's personal injury damages. And that is what I want to talk with you about.

What has the evidence showed with regard to the damages in this case?

The evidence -- the evidence has shown that Brenda and Steve Smith had a beautiful, young, tender, precious

little girl that they loved more than their own lives. Their entire lives centered around her. Their whole reason for being was to care for her and love her and nurture her.

You have seen from the evidence that when this incompetently, negligently constructed sign came helicoptering through the air and came through that car like a giant machete and chopped Leslie Nicole Smith's head in half, that it ripped the heart out of Brenda Smith and ripped the heart out of Steve Smith. It exploded their world leaving them to stagger through life like a punch drunk fighter that is out on his feet, is taking a -- is taking one step after another but doesn't know what has happened to him.

as long as they live be the same.

Until one has brought a child into this world and loved that child and hugged that child and kissed that child and nurtured that child and

raised that child and then had that child suddenly torn away from them in a violent, brutal fashion, one cannot fully appreciate the magnitude of the pain and the grief that apparent undergoes.

When Leslie Nicole Smith had her head cut in half by this sign it was a death sentence for Leslie Nicole Smith. And it was a life sentence for her parents.

The evidence has shown you that it was a life sentence of Brenda Smith, multiple times a day.

THE CLERK: Ten minutes, counsel.

MR. SEARCY: Every time she sees or feels the scar on her head, every time she sees her little girl Lindsay Nicole Smith do something heartwarming, something that's beyond her control, just as if they took this photograph out of this envelope, somebody takes this and shoves it in front of her brain, it's been four years. You have heard the doctor,

four years since this happened and there has been no lessening of the living nightmare, no lessening of the frequency, multiple times a day, that is what Brenda Smith sees.

For the rest of her life, 48

years, you have heard the experts, you

have heard the experts Doctor Cheshire

and Doctor Platt who have analyzed

this and who have helped us to get

insight into this and they have told

us that won't ever change.

with professional help and professional therapy maybe we can keep Brenda Smith from ending up in a lifelong psychiatric hospitalization by helping her to understand her feelings and help her to cope with them but that won't ever change.

Steve Smith. A life sentence for Steve Smith. Steve Smith. Look at him when you go back into the jury room, look at him, the love that is reflected on that face is the mirror image of the pain and the devastation

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that he feels.

someone's lost, we have to try to will never -- they'll never be able to get over this pain is because they loved this little girl more than their own life and the strength of that love is now the strength of their pain.

They weren't ever going to stop loving her and they won't ever stop hurting for her.

Steve Smith couldn't talk to his wife about this. You saw the evidence, there was just, for several weeks there was no conversation. The first time there was ever any conversation about this was when Doctor Cheshire took Steve Smith into the hospital and said, Mr. Smith, you need to understand what your wife is going through. She saw your child's face get cut off.

And for the first time Steve

Smith took a look into the window, the big picture window into hell that his wife had been looking through and he broke down and he cried and he screamed and he had a catharsis and he talked with her and that is the only thing that gave Brenda any will to live is that she knew that her husband needed her and came home.

The second time that Steve Smith has really dealt with this you saw.

He hasn't been able to go and see a psychiatrist about this. His testimony, if you will remember was, when he looked into the casket and saw his daughter, that he collapsed, they had to catch him, he could not look into it again. Brenda is sitting up there reading fairy tales to her daughter and he can't even bear to look.

They go out to the grave site and as the funeral's over and he is leaving and he sees them starting to lower that casket, as you recall he

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falls down when the thought hits him that they are going to put his little girl into a hole in the ground and throw dirt on her and he can't -- he falls down on the ground and has to be finally lifted and escorted away from the cemetery. That is the feeling that Steve Smith has.

The overwhelming devastation and destruction of his family. He is not a vocal man but he is a strong, proud man and a devoted man and he was unable to take care of his family, his little girl was brutally killed and he has got to live with that for the rest of his life.

THE CLERK: 15 minutes, counsel.

MR. SEARCY: Thank you.

If evil personified had stayed up for nights and said I want to -- I want to figure out how it is, the worst way I can hurt Brenda and Steve Smith for life? I want to do the very worst thing I can possibly do to them. It could not have come up with a

in half in front of their parents and have them get out, trying desperately against all odds to find somebody to take them to a hospital for their little child whose blood and brains are bleeding out all over them and whose life is going.

Doctor Cheshire said that if a mother has had a child die in her arms she will never as long as she lives forget what that feels like. That is the damage that you need to measure by your verdict in this case.

There's personal injury. The personal injury case, of course, is overshadowed dramatically by the horrible tragedy of this death, and you have seen the scar on Brenda Smith's head.

She's got some other problems

too, but -- and it's not all that -
that is not a horrible scar, the

problem is there's the numbress and

the scar and the problem is that is a

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brand. That is the brand of the incompetence and the negligence and the \injustice of the Department of Transportation and every time she sees that and every time she feels that numbness somebody opens up this envelope and shoves it in front of her face and the court will tell you on the personal injury you should award an amount that will compensate her for her mental pain and suffering over this injury. Her pain and suffering over that injury is the multiple reminders every day of \the living nightmare.

Steve Smith, the law recognizes that if you hurt one spouse you hurt the other. If the wife cries, the husband tastes salt.

Steve Smith, you have heard
Brenda's testimony, she couldn't bear
to touch him for awhile. He couldn't
talk with her, they couldn't go home,
their life has been impaired. They
don't have any joy or happiness in

their life any more. And that is what these elements refer to.

Mary Sue Mathuse, the nurse, 17

years in nursing, seen an awful lot of bad things. You heard her testimony.

Never in 17 years of nursing have I seen anything this bad. She was the one that had to hold Leslie's face on, hold it in place to try to give her mouth to mouth resuscitation while Brenda Smith observed.

THE CLERK: 15 minutes, counsel.

MR. SEARCY: Thank you.

Money damages. It will not bring Leslie Nicole Smith back, we can't do that. That is not within your power but that is the way we keep score. That is the way our society and the way our government keeps score. We don't go out and kill someone else's child, we keep score, money damages, and in this case we cannot bring Leslie Nicole Smith back but we can do justice.

You remember Larry Platt's

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testimony when he talked to you about intensifiers of grief? He said there are things that are known intensifiers of grief. Untimely, violent, preventable. Unjust, in red. Maybe someone was looking in. Unjust. We can't do anything about it being sudden and we can't do anything about it being violent, but we can do something about it being unjust and Brenda and Steve Smith are very interested in that.

This case screams out for justice and they have pursued justice for four years and that is one intensifying factor that you can do something about.

You can erase this one, you can show that this system will give them justice. Please follow the law and follow the evidence and render a verdict for Brenda Smith for five million dollars for the wrongful death of her daughter and for Steve Smith for three million dollars for the

wrongful death of his daughter.

On the personal damages I believe that you should render -- I am going to let you decide that because there's a -- the personal injury damages interveaves so much with the death damage you should assign some amount in addition to the wrongful death verdict for Brenda's personal injury damages and the way it causes the, enhances the intensity of those images. I am not going to make a suggestion I will let you decide that.

This is extremely important. If you follow the law and you follow the evidence and you render a verdict for five million dollars to Brenda Smith and three million dollars to Steve Smith you will be telling the Smiths by your verdict that despite the actions of this bureaucracy of the state with their Wizard of Oz microburst and their \$260,000 -- \$260.00 expert that says that it's all the mother's fault, that despite that

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conduct, the --1 MR. DAXIS: Objection. 2 MR. SEAR\CY: -- the real 3 government --4 MR. DAVIS: \ Excuse me, counsel. 5 Objection. Trying to suggest a jury 6 verdict should be based on matters 7 8 which are outside the scope --THE COURT: Overruled. 9 10 MR. SEARCY: That this government, not through some 11 12 beurocratic agency, but through its jury system, recognizes the magnitude 13 14 of their loss, shares their grief and 15 places great value on the love that 16 they have for their daughter. If you do that, you will give 17 them justice. They can't ever have 18 their daughter back. At least let 19 20 them have justice. Thank you. 21 22 23 24 25

Just muddying it up, hoping you will grasp at a straw and buy something.

You can't do that if you are going to follow the law.

You have got to apply the evidence, the evidence you have before you, and there's nothing to support this comparative negligence claim.

Use your common sense, despite all the experts, you know what -- you know what the facts are here. You have got -- you know what to do with this case.

Use your common sense. By the evidence and the law the judge instructs you go back there and do what is right. Thank you.

MR. SEARCY: Folks, I know you have been here a long time and I am just going to be up here for ten minutes, so if you can muster your courage and your energy to let me say a few things I would appreciate it and then I am going to give you the responsibility I have been carrying on my shoulders and it will be your time

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to go back and to decide the fate of Brenda and Steve Smith. It will be your responsibility and before handing you that very heavy, the heaviest of responsibilities, I want to say a few things about what Mr. Davis has said.

Now I think maybe it's symbolic, if you will notice that the very first thing Mr. Davis did is to try to cover up from your view the pictures of Leslie Nicole Smith. She is what this case is all about and in listening to this evidence and deciding this case and doing justice, don't let the Department of Transportation cover her up or sweep her under a carpet. Decide this case on this law and this evidence and give the parents some justice, some feeling that her daughter's death was not entirely meaningless, some feeling that there is somebody in our system that gives their family, their daughter, their love for their daughter the dignity that it deserves.

Mr. Davis says to you that now you have got to put aside sympathy and emotion. The Court's going to tell you that in deciding this case you should not be unduly swayed by prejudice, passion or sympathy for or against any party and we wholeheartedly concur for that.

You will note that we have not asked anybody for sympathy. We -- they have had sympathy. If they had a dollar for every tear that has been cried, it would be a lot more than eight million dollars.

we are not in here asking for sympathy, we are in here asking for a money damage verdict that measures the full magnitude of the damages to Steve and Brenda Smith, the damages that the Court will tell you is the mental pain and suffering they have undergone every day of their lives for the past four years and the mental pain and suffering they will undergo every day of their lives for the next 48 years

in Brenda's case and the next 40 years in Steve's case.

Mr. Davis has said, well now, the plaintiff in this case has the burden of proof. Well, we have carried that burden of proof: You have heard the explicit testimony of Brenda Smith and of Steve Smith, of the experts who analyzed this, Doctor Cheshire, we brought you Doctor Platt, one of the foremost grief and grieving experts in the world.

We have brought you Mary Sue

Mathuse, Jody Abercrombie, Betty

Jurkowski, her mother, we have shown

you photographs of the damage and we

have clearly by the greater weight of

the evidence by a landslide we have

shown you that this is the worst

damage there can be.

You cannot hurt a human being any worse than this. This is the ultimate hurt. And it's up to you to measure that ultimate hurt and five million dollars for Brenda Smith and three

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million dollars for Steve Smith is my recommendation to you of what that measurement ought to be. It's not limited to that. You have heard it, and there is six of you, you are the collective conscience of this community.

And when you come back, Steve and Brenda are out here, they'll be here for the instructions and they'll be here to look you in the eye when you come back with their verdict and you need to tell them by that verdict that you recognize the magnitude of their loss. If you don't, if you only give them half a verdict, the problem with that is that half justice is half injustice, and they have had more injustice than any two human beings ought to have in a lifetime. And Mr. Davis would have you compound that injustice by an unfair verdict. Please, don't be fooled at this late point. You have listened so closely, you have understood the case all

along. Don't be fooled by any clever arguments. Render a verdict that fully measures the magnitude of their damages.

Now Mr. Davis didn't present one single shred of evidence to rebut the damages of the Smiths. He didn't bring in one psychiatrist, he didn't bring in one grief expert, he didn't bring in one friend or neighbor, he didn't bring in one physician, he didn't bring in one physician, he didn't bring in an iota of evidence to contradict the proof of our damages in any way.

It is totally unrebutted and totally uncontradicted. What did he do? He couldn't even find a dry microburst to argue against this with, so he tried to argue against it in damages and he tried to make up some arguments that don't have anything to do with the law that the Court will instruct you on or the evidence you heard. He got up and he said, well now, I agree that the money can't

replace the child and --

THE CLERK: Five minutes, counsel.

MR. SEARCY: What is that?

THE CLERK: Five minutes.

MR. SEARCY: Thank you. Money won't replace the death of the child and eight million dollars won't make it any better than 16 million dollars or any better than four million dollars. That's -- he is asking you to not follow the law when he makes that argument.

The law is not what will replace the child because all of the gold in Fort Knox will never replace her. And that is wrong. Don't consider that. The judge is going to tell you that what you want to do is you want to render a verdict that will measure the full damages of the Plaintiffs and he will tell you that their damages are their mental pain and suffering over the wrongful death of their child and that the verdict you render should be

fair and just in light of all of the evidence. That is what the law is, that is what the evidence is, and that is what we have argued to you.

Mr. Davis then says that, well now, do you remember Doctor Cheshire said that there's a psychosis and neurosis and anxiety syndrome in that order and that she -- he said hers would be in the anxiety syndrome.

That is not correct.

If you will recall, Doctor

Cheshire said that when she was in the hospital going around in a dark room reading fairy tales to Leslie and singing songs to Leslie, that she was probably closer to psychosis than neurosis.

He has told you and Larry Platt has told you that this -- that both Steve and Brenda have pathological grief. It's beyond their control to ever get better and even with psychiatric help even three times a week psychiatric help they may never

1 get better. They may get worse. certainly would get worse if their 3 quest for justice is thwarted. 4 Doctor Cheshire said that what 5 has happened with them is the most 6 painful of all the psychiatric 7 stressors known to mankind, that a 8 human being cannot be hurt worse than 9 that, he described that she had 10

physical symptoms and physical ailments, stemming from the mental pain and suffering that she suffered. which puts it in an entirely different and very serious category.

He said she has severe stress syndrome and unresolved grief reaction, pathological grief.

Then Mr. Davis argues to you, well now, let's figure out what their medical bills are. We didn't put in -- and he says, well, let's figure out what her medical bills are, and then give them ten times that.

Now the judge is not going to tell you that the wrongful death

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damages have anything whatsoever to do with medical bills. The medical bills would be on the personal injury claim and we didn't even put in past medical bills.

The damages in this case are so horrible that the medical bills in this case pale to insignificance, so if you were to follow Mr. Davis' argument, since we put in no medical bills for the past, then ten times zero would be zero and, according to his argument, you would measure their damages for the four years in the past and for all of the living nightmare they have been through by zero. That does not make any sense.

If you want to play mental games, as Mr. Davis seems to do, then let's take an -- instead of measuring it by medical bills, let's take another irrelevant factor, let's take Vern Roberts who charges \$260.00 an hour, for the mental pain and suffering.

THE CLERK: One minute left,

counsel. One minute left.

MR. SEARCY: And if you do that and you figure 16 waking hours in the day for Brenda and Steve Smith and multiply that by three hundred and sixty-five and then multiply it by 48 years, you are going to find their damages, according to Vern Roberts' standard, to be \$82,000,000, apiece.

And that shows you -- and you can render a verdict for that but we have tried to recommend to you what is conservative and fair and just in the light of all of the evidence, it will be your decision, Brenda and Steve know what we have requested and I hope that your verdict will be in that exact amount or for something more.

We have left to your discretion the amount of personal injury damages above the wrongful death damages.

THE CLERK: Time, counsel.

MR. SEARCY: Thank you very much, folks.

1 THE STATE OF FLORIDA 2 COUNTY OF PALM BEACH 3 I, Alfred D. Miller, Notary Public, 4 State of Florida, do hereby certify that the 5 foregoing proceedings were held as hereinafter 6 7 set out; 8 That I was authorized to and did report in machine shorthand the proceedings in 9 said hearing, and that the foregoing and annexed 10 11 pages comprise a true and correct transcription of my stenotype notes of the proceedings; 12 13 IN TESTIMONY WHEREON, I have hereunto affixed my official signature this 13 Th day of 14 hanch . 1990. 15 16 17 18 19 20 ALFRED D. MILLER, Notary Public, 21 State of Florida. My commission 22 expires October 12, 1993. 23 24