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9 TRUTH AQUATICS, INC. AND
10 GLEN RICHARD FRITZLER AND DANA
11 JEANNE FRITZLER, INDIVIDUALLY AND AS
12 TRUSTEES OF THE FRITZLER FAMILY TRUST
13 DTD 7/27/92

14 UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
15 CENTRAL DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA

16 In the Matter of the Complaint of Truth)
17 Aquatics, Inc. and Glen Richard Fritzler and)
18 Dana Jeanne Fritzler, individually and as)
19 Trustees of the Fritzler Family Trust DTD)
20 7/27/92 as owners and/or owners *pro hac vice*)
21 of the dive vessel CONCEPTION, Official)
22 Number 638133, for Exoneration from or)
23 Limitation of Liability)
24)
25)
26)
27)
28)

CASE NO. 2:19-cv-07693-PA-MRW
**TRUTH AQUATICS, INC.,
GLEN RICHARD FRITZLER
AND DANA
JEANNE FRITZLER,
INDIVIDUALLY AND AS
TRUSTEES OF THE
FRITZLER FAMILY TRUST
DTD 7/27/92'S ANSWER TO
CLAIMANT/RESPONDENT
SHRUTI DEOPUJARI'S
CLAIM**

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20 Come now Plaintiffs TRUTH AQUATICS, INC. AND GLEN RICHARD
21 FRITZLER AND DANA JEANNE FRITZLER, INDIVIDUALLY AND AS
22 TRUSTEES OF THE FRITZLER FAMILY TRUST dtd 7/27/92 (“Petitioners”),
23 and in response to Claimant/Respondent Shruti Deopujari’s Claim, admit, deny
24 and allege as follows¹:

25 1. In response to Paragraph No. 1 of the Claim, Petitioners are without
26 knowledge or information sufficient to form a belief as to the truth of the

27 _____
28 ¹ Claimant/Respondent Shruti Deopujari is referred to herein as “Claimant
Deopujari,” or simply as “Claimant.”

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1 allegations contained in said paragraph, and on that basis deny each and every
2 allegation contained therein.

3 2. In response to Paragraph No. 2 of the Claim, Petitioners respond that
4 the Paragraph contains allegations and conclusions of law to which an answer is
5 not required. To the extent an answer to those allegations is required, Petitioners
6 respond that they are without knowledge or information sufficient to form a belief
7 as to the truth of the allegations contained in said paragraph, and on that basis deny
8 each and every allegation contained therein.

9 3. Paragraph No. 3 of the Claim contains allegations and conclusions of
10 law to which an answer is not required. To the extent an answer is required,
11 Petitioners respond that they are without knowledge or information sufficient to
12 form a belief as to the truth of the allegations contained in said paragraph, and on
13 that basis deny each and every one of them.

14 4. Petitioners lack knowledge or information sufficient to form a belief
15 as to the truth of the matters alleged in Paragraph No. 4 of the Claim, and on that
16 basis deny them.

17 5. In response to Paragraph No. 5 of the Claim, Petitioners respond that
18 the Paragraph contains allegations and conclusions of law to which an answer is
19 not required. To the extent an answer to those allegations is required, Petitioners
20 admit and allege that they were the owners and/or owners *pro hac vice* of the
21 CONCEPTION within the meaning of 46 U.S.C. Section 30501, *et seq.* With
22 respect to the remaining allegations in Paragraph No. 5, Petitioners respond that
23 they are without knowledge or information sufficient to form a belief as to the truth
24 of the remaining allegations contained in said paragraph, and on that basis deny
25 such allegations.

26 6. In response to Paragraph No. 6 of the Claim, Petitioners admit and
27 allege that on August 31, 2019, the CONCEPTION departed the Port of Santa
28 Barbara with six crewmembers and thirty-three passengers on board for a three-day

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1 voyage. Petitioners deny the voyage commenced on a Monday. As to the
2 remaining allegations contained in Paragraph 6, except as expressly alleged and
3 admitted, or denied, Petitioners are without knowledge or information sufficient to
4 form a belief as to the truth of the remaining allegations contained in said
5 paragraph and on that basis deny them.

6 7. In response to Paragraph No. 7 of the Claim, Petitioners respond that
7 the Paragraph contains allegations and conclusions of law to which an answer is
8 not required. To the extent an answer to those allegations is required, Petitioners
9 admit the CONCEPTION was a “seagoing vessel” for purposes of 46 U.S.C. §
10 30502.

11 8. In response to Paragraph No. 8 of the Claim, Petitioners admit and
12 allege that the CONCEPTION had three decks, that the pilot house and primary
13 crew’s quarters were located on the vessel’s uppermost or sun deck, that the galley
14 and salon were situated on the main deck and that the main sleeping quarters were
15 located on the lower deck below the main deck. Petitioners deny all remaining
16 allegations in Paragraph No. 8 of the Claim.

17 9. In response to Paragraph No. 9 of the Claim, Petitioners admit the
18 CONCEPTION was equipped with an onboard electrical system that was powered
19 by diesel generators.

20 10. In response to Paragraph No. 10 of the Claim, Petitioners admit and
21 allege they allowed passengers to use the CONCEPTION’s electrical system to
22 charge lithium battery-powered electronics. Except as expressly admitted or
23 alleged herein, Petitioners deny all remaining allegations in Paragraph No. 10 of
24 the Claim.

25 11. In response to Paragraph No. 11 of the Claim, Petitioners admit and
26 allege that the CONCEPTION’s galley was located on the main deck one level
27 above the vessel’s main sleeping quarters. Petitioners deny the allegation that they
28 equipped the vessel’s galley with a “battery-charging station.” With respect to the

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1 remaining allegations in Paragraph No. 11, Petitioners respond that they are
2 without knowledge or information sufficient to form a belief as to the truth of the
3 remaining allegations contained in said paragraph, and on that basis deny such
4 allegations.

5 12. In response to Paragraph No. 12 of the Claim, Petitioners deny the
6 allegation that the vessel was equipped with a “battery charging station.”
7 Petitioners are without knowledge or information sufficient to form a belief as to
8 the truth of the remaining allegations contained in said paragraph, and on that basis
9 deny them.

10 13. In response to Paragraph No. 13 of the Claim, Petitioners admit that
11 on September 2, 2019 there was a fire on the vessel. Petitioners are without
12 knowledge or information sufficient to form a belief as to the truth of the
13 remaining allegations contained in said paragraph, and on that basis deny each and
14 every one of them.

15 14. In response to Paragraph No. 14 of the Claim, Petitioners are without
16 knowledge or information sufficient to form a belief as to the truth of the
17 allegations and on that basis deny them.

18 15. In response to Paragraph No. 15 of the Claim, Petitioners are without
19 knowledge or information sufficient to form a belief as to the truth of the
20 allegations contained in said paragraph, and on that basis deny such allegations.

21 16. In response to Paragraph No. 16 of the Claim, Petitioners respond that
22 the Paragraph contains allegations and conclusions of law to which an answer is
23 not required. To the extent an answer to those allegations is required, Petitioners
24 are without knowledge or information sufficient to form a belief as to the truth of
25 the allegations contained in said paragraph, and on that basis deny such allegations.

26 17. Petitioners deny each and every allegation contained in Paragraph No.
27 17 of the Claim.

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1 18. Petitioners deny each and every allegation contained in Paragraph No.
2 18 of the Claim.

3 19. In response to Paragraph No. 19 of the Claim, Petitioners are without
4 knowledge or information sufficient to form a belief as to the truth of the
5 allegations contained in said paragraph, and on that basis deny each and every
6 allegation contained therein.

7 20. Petitioners deny each and every allegation contained in Paragraph No.
8 20 of the Claim.

9 21. In response to Paragraph No. 21 of the Counterclaim, Petitioners
10 admit that Glen Fritzler was an owner and/or owner *pro hac vice* of the
11 CONCEPTION within the meaning of 46 U.S.C. Section 30501, *et seq.* Petitioners
12 deny that Glen Fritzler lied.

13 22. Petitioners deny each and every allegation contained in Paragraph No.
14 22 of the Claim.

15 23. Paragraph No. 23 of the Claim contains allegations and conclusions of
16 law to which an answer is not required. To the extent an answer to those
17 allegations is required, Petitioners admit and allege the stairway at the forward end
18 of the vessel's main sleeping quarters and the escape hatch at the aft end of the
19 main sleeping quarters provided egress to the vessel's galley/salon. Petitioners
20 deny the vessel CONCEPTION was defectively designed. In response to the
21 remaining allegations contained in Paragraph No. 23, Petitioners respond that they
22 are without knowledge or information sufficient to form a belief as to the truth of
23 the remaining allegations contained in said paragraph, and on that basis deny each
24 and every allegation contained therein.

25 24. Petitioners deny each and every allegation contained in Paragraph No.
26 24 of the Claim, and deny that the vessel was unseaworthy in any respect.

27 25. In response to Paragraph No. 25 of the Claim, Petitioners admit that
28 the stairway at the forward end of the vessel's main sleeping quarters and the

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1 escape hatch at the aft end of the main sleeping quarters provided egress to the
2 vessel’s galley/salon. Petitioners are without knowledge or information sufficient
3 to form a belief as to the truth of the remaining allegations contained in said
4 paragraph, and on that basis deny each and every allegation contained therein.

5 26. Petitioners deny each and every allegation of Paragraph No. 26 of the
6 Claim.

7 27. Petitioners deny each and every allegation of Paragraph No. 27 of the
8 Claim.

9 28. Petitioners deny each and every allegation of Paragraph No. 28 of the
10 Claim.

11 29. In response to Paragraph No. 29 of the Claim, Petitioners deny that
12 they “caused and/or contributed” to the “tragedy and the damages” alleged.
13 Petitioners are without knowledge or information sufficient to form a belief as to
14 the truth of the remaining allegations contained in said paragraph, and therefore
15 deny them.

16 30. Paragraph No. 30 of the Claim re-alleges and incorporates by
17 reference the allegations set forth in Paragraphs Nos. 1-29 of the Claim and, as
18 such, Petitioners incorporate by reference their responses set forth in Paragraphs 1
19 through 29 above, as though fully set forth herein.

20 31. Paragraph No. 31 of the Claim contains allegations and conclusions of
21 law to which an answer is not required. To the extent an answer to those
22 allegations is required, Petitioners admit and allege that they were and are the
23 owners and/or owners *pro hac vice* of the CONCEPTION within the meaning of
24 46 U.S.C. Section 30501 *et seq.* Petitioners are without knowledge or information
25 sufficient to form a belief as to the truth of the other allegations contained in
26 Paragraph No. 31, and on that basis deny such allegations.

27 32. Petitioners deny the allegations contained in Paragraph No. 32 of the
28 Claim.

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1 33. Petitioners deny the allegations contained in Paragraph No. 33 of the
2 Claim, including each of its subparts.

3 34. Petitioners deny the allegations contained in Paragraph No. 34 of the
4 Claim.

5 35. Paragraph No. 35 of the Claim contains allegations and conclusions of
6 law to which an answer is not required. To the extent an answer is required,
7 Petitioners respond that they are without knowledge or information sufficient to
8 form a belief as to the truth of any factual allegations contained in said paragraph,
9 and on that basis deny each and every allegation in Paragraph No. 35, including
10 each of its subparts.

11 36. Petitioners deny each and every allegation contained in Paragraph No.
12 36 of the Claim.

13 37. Petitioners deny each and every allegation contained in Paragraph No.
14 37 of the Claim.

15 38. Petitioners deny each and every allegation contained in Paragraph No.
16 38 of the Claim.

17 **PRAYER FOR RELIEF**

18 No response is required to Claimant/Respondent’s Prayer for Relief. To the
19 extent a response is required, Petitioners deny that Claimant is entitled to the
20 requested relief, or any relief whatsoever, from these Petitioners.

21 **AFFIRMATIVE DEFENSES**

22 **FIRST AFFIRMATIVE DEFENSE**

23 Claimant/Respondent’s Claim, and each cause of action thereof, fails to state
24 facts sufficient to constitute a cause, or causes, of action as against Petitioners.

25 **SECOND AFFIRMATIVE DEFENSE**

26 Claimant/Respondent’s Claim fails to state a claim, or claims, upon which
27 relief can be granted.

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THIRD AFFIRMATIVE DEFENSE

Any and all acts, happenings and/or damages, if any, referred to in Claimant/Respondent’s Claim, were proximately caused by and/or contributed to by the negligence of Decedent and therefore, Claimant/Respondent is completely barred from recovery herein or, in the alternative, under the doctrine of comparative negligence, the negligence of Decedent is imputed to Claimant/Respondent such that it reduces her/his/their right to recovery by the amount which said negligence contributed to the incident alleged.

FOURTH AFFIRMATIVE DEFENSE

If any injuries and/or damages were sustained by Claimant/Respondent, which is expressly denied, they were caused solely and/or proximately by the natural progression of Decedent’s pre-existing medical conditions over which Petitioners had no control and for which Petitioners are not liable.

FIFTH AFFIRMATIVE DEFENSE

Claimant/Respondent’s injuries and/or damages, if any, were caused or contributed to by the negligence of third parties whose identities are presently unknown to Petitioners, and Petitioners’ liability, if any, should be reduced by the proportion caused or contributed to by such persons.

SIXTH AFFIRMATIVE DEFENSE

Petitioners aver as a separate and complete defense that in the event Petitioners are found liable for the claims asserted, which is denied, Petitioners are entitled to indemnification and/or contribution from any other responsible party(ies).

SEVENTH AFFIRMATIVE DEFENSE

Claimant/Respondent is barred from asserting the claim or cause(s) of action herein against Petitioners by the doctrine of estoppel.

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EIGHTH AFFIRMATIVE DEFENSE

Claimant/Respondent is barred from asserting the claim or cause(s) of action herein against Petitioners by the doctrine of waiver.

NINTH AFFIRMATIVE DEFENSE

Petitioners allege that any injury, damage or loss suffered, if any, was caused in (whole or in part) by, attributable to, and/or sustained as a result of the unreasonable, unforeseeable and totally inappropriate purpose and improper use made by Decedent of the vessel and premises alleged in the Claim.

TENTH AFFIRMATIVE DEFENSE

Petitioners allege that Decedent knew or should have known of the risks and hazards inherent in being a passenger on the subject vessel, as well as the magnitude of said risks and hazards and thereafter knowingly and willingly assumed those risks, which assumption bars Claimant/Respondent’s Claim, or reduces his/her/their damages accordingly.

This Affirmative Defense was stricken in the Court’s Order, dated January 27, 2020 (Docket No. 45). To the extent the Court’s ruling in that Order constitutes “the law of the case,” and, as such, the Order striking this affirmative defense applies to the case overall, to this Answer, and to the Claim to which it responds, Petitioners hereby reserve their appellate rights with respect to that ruling on this defense.

ELEVENTH AFFIRMATIVE DEFENSE

Petitioners are informed and believe and thereon allege that in the event Claimant/Respondent should establish any liability on the part of Petitioners, which liability is expressly denied, Petitioners may not be obligated to pay sums representing a proportion or percentage of fault not their own, but that of Decedent, Claimant/Respondent, other parties to this action and/or third persons not parties to this action. Petitioners are entitled to an adjudication and determination of the respective proportions or percentages of fault, if any, on the part of Petitioners,

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1 Claimant/Respondent, other parties to this action (including those through whom
2 they claim), and third persons not parties to this action pursuant to the doctrine of
3 comparative negligence and the Fair Responsibility Act of 1986, codified in Civil
4 Code Section 1431-1431.5.

5 **TWELFTH AFFIRMATIVE DEFENSE**

6 Petitioners allege that, on information and belief, Claimant/Respondent’s
7 alleged injuries and/or damages, if any there were, were caused by or aggravated
8 by Claimant/Respondent’s failure to use reasonable diligence to mitigate them.

9 **THIRTEENTH AFFIRMATIVE DEFENSE**

10 Claimant/Respondent’s Claim and each cause of action therein are barred by
11 the defense of primary assumption of the risk.

12 This Affirmative Defense was stricken in the Court’s Order, dated January
13 27, 2020 (Docket No. 45). To the extent the Court’s ruling in that Order
14 constitutes “the law of the case,” and, as such, the Order striking this affirmative
15 defense applies to the case overall, to this Answer, and to the Claim to which it
16 responds, Petitioners hereby reserve their appellate rights with respect to that
17 ruling on this defense.

18 **FOURTEENTH AFFIRMATIVE DEFENSE**

19 Petitioners claim the right to exoneration from liability for the losses,
20 damages and personal injuries sustained by Claimant/Respondent, all as alleged in
21 the Claim, and Petitioners allege that they have a valid defense on the merits to any
22 and all such other claims as may be filed arising thereunder. Notwithstanding that,
23 Petitioners further claim the benefit of limitation of, or exoneration from, liability
24 as provided in 46 U.S.C. § 30501-30512, *et seq.*, and the various statutes
25 supplementary thereto and amendatory thereof. Petitioners allege further that if
26 there was any fault on their part, or on the part of any person for whom Petitioners
27 are responsible, all of which are denied, Petitioners’ liability should be limited to
28 the amount or value of Petitioners’ interest in the said vessel, and the pending

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1 freight. Petitioners further allege that the injury complained of by
2 Claimant/Respondent occasioned or occurred without the knowledge or privity of
3 Petitioners herein and without any fault, neglect, want of care, or design on the part
4 of Petitioners, and that said vessel was at the commencement of the tour tight,
5 staunch, seaworthy and strong.

6 **FIFTEENTH AFFIRMATIVE DEFENSE**

7 Petitioners cannot be held liable for punitive damages because no Plaintiff,
8 nor the officers, directors or managing agents of any Plaintiff, committed any
9 alleged oppressive, fraudulent or malicious act, authorized or ratified such an act,
10 or had advanced knowledge of the unfitness, if any, of the employee or employees,
11 if any, who allegedly committed such an act, or employed any such employee or
12 employees with a conscious disregard of the rights or safety of others. Cal. Civ.
13 Code §3294.

14 This Affirmative Defense was stricken in the Court’s Order, dated January
15 27, 2020 (Docket No. 45). To the extent the Court’s ruling in that Order
16 constitutes “the law of the case,” and, as such, the Order striking this affirmative
17 defense applies to the case overall, to this Answer, and to the Claim to which it
18 responds, Petitioners hereby reserve their appellate rights with respect to that
19 ruling on this defense.

20 **SIXTEENTH AFFIRMATIVE DEFENSE**

21 Claimant/Respondent is not entitled to recover any punitive damages, and
22 any allegations in support of a claim for punitive damages should be stricken,
23 because California’s laws regarding the acts and omissions alleged are too vague to
24 permit the imposition of punitive damages, and because any award of punitive
25 damages in this action would violate Petitioners’ constitutional rights under the due
26 process clauses of the Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments to the United States
27 Constitution, and the excessive fines and cruel and unusual punishment clauses of
28 the Eighth Amendment of the United States Constitution, as well as other

1 provisions of the United States Constitution and the California Constitution.

2 **SEVENTEENTH AFFIRMATIVE DEFENSE**

3 Petitioners cannot be held liable for punitive damages because Petitioners
4 did not engage in oppressive, fraudulent or malicious conduct toward Plaintiff.
5 Cal. Civ. Code §3294.

6 This Affirmative Defense was stricken in the Court’s Order, dated January
7 27, 2020 (Docket No. 45). To the extent the Court’s ruling in that Order
8 constitutes “the law of the case,” and, as such, the Order striking this affirmative
9 defense applies to the case overall, to this Answer, and to the Claim to which it
10 responds, Petitioners hereby reserve their appellate rights with respect to that
11 ruling on this defense.

12 **EIGHTEENTH AFFIRMATIVE DEFENSE**

13 Petitioners allege that there is no cause or support for an award of punitive
14 or exemplary damages against these answering Petitioners and furthermore, that
15 Claimant/Respondent’s claim for punitive or exemplary damages violates
16 Petitioners’ right to substantive and procedural due process as provided in the Fifth
17 and Fourteenth Amendments of the Constitution of the United States and the
18 Constitution of the State of California.

19 **NINETEENTH AFFIRMATIVE DEFENSE**

20 Petitioners allege, on information and belief, that Claimant Shruti Deopujari,
21 and/or others claiming through decedent, lack standing to pursue the claim or
22 claims for relief alleged in the Claim.

23 **TWENTIETH AFFIRMATIVE DEFENSE**

24 Petitioners allege that, on information and belief, Claimant Shruti Deopujari,
25 and/or others claiming through decedent, are barred from recovering both loss of
26 support damages and lost future earnings damages as prayed for in the Claim.

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TWENTY-FIRST AFFIRMATIVE DEFENSE

Petitioners allege that the Claim fails to join one or more necessary and/or indispensable parties as required by Fed. R. Civ. P. 19.

TWENTY-SECOND AFFIRMATIVE DEFENSE

Petitioners allege, on information and belief, the claims, relief and/or damages claimed by Claimant Shruti Deopujari, and/or others claiming through decedent are subject to and/or limited by the provisions of the Death on the High Seas Act 46 U.S.C. 30301, *et seq.*, and/or the uniformity principles set forth in *Miles v. Apex Marine Corp.*, 498 U.S. 19 (1990), and/or General Maritime Law.

TWENTY-THIRD AFFIRMATIVE DEFENSE

Petitioners allege, on information and belief, that they are entitled to the benefit of each and every term of the agreement(s), contract(s), and/or disclosure(s) that exist(s) by and between the parties to these proceedings, or those by, under or through whom they claim, including any waivers, releases or limitation of liability, or exonerating language contained therein.

TWENTY-FOURTH AFFIRMATIVE DEFENSE

Petitioners presently have insufficient knowledge or information on which to form a belief as to whether Petitioners may have additional, as yet unstated, affirmative defenses available for Petitioners' benefit(s). Petitioners thereby reserve herein their right to assert additional affirmative defenses in the event discovery indicates that such affirmative defenses would be appropriate.

WHEREFORE, Petitioners pray that Claimant/Respondent Shruti Deopujari's Claim be dismissed with prejudice; that judgment be entered for Petitioners and against Claimant/Respondent; that their answer herein be deemed good and sufficient or, alternatively, that should any judgment be rendered against Petitioners, that the amount of said judgment should be limited to the value of Petitioners' interest in said vessel and pending freight; that Petitioners recover from Claimant/Respondent their costs of suit incurred herein, and; for such other

1 and further relief as the Court may deem just and proper under the circumstances.

2 Dated: February 3, 2020 GORDON REES SCULLY MANSUKHANI, LLP

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