

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of:

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FIRE ON BOARD THE *ISLAND LADY*
PORT RICHEY, FLORIDA
JANUARY 14, 2018

ACCIDENT NO.: DCA18FM010

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Interview of: ALESA MEADORS
Surveillance Officer

Wednesday,
January 24, 2018

APPEARANCES:

CWO [REDACTED]
U.S. Coast Guard

[REDACTED]
U.S. Coast Guard (Civilian)

BETH FIFER, Company Representative
Tropical Breeze Casino

STACY FALCONE, Company Representative
Tropical Breeze Casino

JAMES CARLSON, Attorney
Hamilton, Miller & Birthisel

I N D E X

<u>ITEM</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
Interview of Alesa Meadors:	
By CWO [REDACTED]	
Error! Bookmark not defined.	
By Mr. [REDACTED]	15
By Unidentified Speaker	19

I N T E R V I E W

1
2 CWO [REDACTED] -- with U.S. Coast Guard. This is [REDACTED] [REDACTED]
3 who's also with the Coast Guard. We're going to interview you
4 today regarding the 14th of January vessel fire aboard the *Island*
5 *Lady*. We're going to record it so that we can concentrate on what
6 you way, and we don't have to write everything down.

INTERVIEW OF ALESA MEADORS

7
8 BY CWO [REDACTED]

9 Q. So, to get started, do you still live on [REDACTED] ?

10 A. Yes.

11 Q. Okay. Good. And can you tell me your educational background
12 and work background?

13 A. I've been with the company overall for 18, 19 years,
14 somewhere around there. I've been to college -- I mean, high
15 school diploma, then went to community college for like a year and
16 a half. And then after that, that's when I started working for
17 the company was shortly after that. I didn't get my -- I was
18 going for my associate's, but started of working full-time, and
19 then --

20 Q. During the 18, 19 years, what was your position?

21 A. Started off as cashier and then went to cage supervisor, and
22 also surveillance.

23 Q. And -- okay. So I see you're surveillance. And how long had
24 you performed surveillance?

25 A. I'm not exactly sure. Maybe, guessing, 6 years, maybe. I

1 could be like a year or two off.

2 Q. And when you say 18, 19 years, was this continuous
3 employment?

4 A. I was gone for approximately a year in -- somewhere in the
5 middle there.

6 Q. Okay. On the 14th of January, can you walk me through your
7 workday?

8 A. We go to the shuttle. I was sitting downstairs with two
9 other employees and we were just, you know, talking on the way
10 out. Oh, yes, and I was sitting -- okay, here's the bar --

11 Q. Here's the bow.

12 A. Is that the bar?

13 Q. This is the bar area.

14 A. Oh, okay.

15 Q. This is a --

16 A. Oh, yeah. So, I was -- we were sitting right over here,
17 right here.

18 Q. So you were right here?

19 A. Um-hum.

20 Q. So you're indicating port side -- port quarter, and let me
21 see what that says -- seating. It says port quarter seating.
22 Okay.

23 A. Yeah. I was sitting there with two other employees. And
24 then we noticed about -- right when we got not too far outside the
25 channel, we just noticed smoke right outside the window. And we

1 were just -- you know, we seen the smoke and was like, okay,
2 that's not good. And then shortly after, you could see and you
3 could smell the smoke. And then one of the deckhands, I'm not --
4 I can't remember which, who it was, but they had came and said
5 everybody upstairs.

6 So everybody, you know, went to the top deck. And then I
7 went to the bridge. And I was in there with the captain, you
8 know, seeing what was going on. And he said -- then a deckhand,
9 you know, ran up. I know, he was kind of in a panic, you know.
10 And I remember just saying calm down, you know, just calm down.
11 You need to -- you just stay calm. You need to keep everybody
12 calm and you need to stay calm. And he's like it's not good, it's
13 not good.

14 Q. Do you recall who the deckhand was?

15 A. Tyler.

16 Q. Okay, Tyler.

17 A. Um-hum. And then, so he ran down. And then shortly after,
18 him and another deckhand came up. I'm not 100 percent if it was
19 Shawn or not. I think it was Tyler and Shawn.

20 And then at this point, we had already taken the fire
21 extinguisher -- because I had seen the fire extinguisher and by
22 this time there was just smoke --I mean, it was to the -- it was
23 really bad at this point.

24 And so I, you know, I asked the captain, I'm like, do I need
25 to get this fire extinguisher ready, you know. And he's like,

1 yeah, go ahead and get it off there. So I got it off of there and
2 I'm like, okay -- I'm like, do you want me to pull the pin? And
3 he said, yeah. And he came over here. He pulled the pin out.
4 And I said okay, what do you want me to do? And he's like, I'm
5 not sure. He's like, I'm going to have to run downstairs. Then I
6 went to the side of the boat to look over to see if there was
7 anything I could spray. And it was just so -- there was just so
8 much smoke. And at this time the deckhands came up again, and the
9 captain took the fire extinguisher and gave it to them and then
10 they ran downstairs.

11 And I know at some point, I'm not sure when, but the captain
12 did say, watch the boat; I've got to run downstairs. He ran
13 downstairs really quick, came back up. And that's when he said,
14 okay, everybody's got to get off. Off the bow; off the bow now.
15 I was like, okay.

16 And then we just, pretty much, everybody was just going to
17 the bow, to the side, wherever they could get to, to jump off.

18 Q. And where did you jump off or --

19 A. At the bow.

20 Q. -- how did you depart?

21 A. The bow. I jumped off.

22 Q. Do you know approximately at what point you jumped off? Were
23 you -- do you recall the people in front of you or the people
24 behind you?

25 A. I really don't recall. I do know that Tyler was in the water

1 and he was coaxing everybody, come on, the ground's soft, you're
2 okay, it's good. And he did -- I threw him my purse. He caught
3 my purse. And then I just remember I was right after there --
4 after that. And I got my purse and then I had my phone, so then I
5 called 911. And there was -- I know at this point there was still
6 people jumping off, you know. I don't know, I mean -- I just -- I
7 don't know. There was just people jumping. It was kind of -- it
8 was just panic.

9 Q. Okay. When you first noticed the smoke, you said you were on
10 the port quarter right here?

11 A. Um-hum.

12 Q. Could you tell where the smoke was originating from?

13 A. All I could tell is the smoke was just coming this way. The
14 smoke was just coming this way.

15 Q. So you were probably looking out one of these windows --

16 A. Yes.

17 Q. -- only on the other side? Right? Because you would have --

18 A. Yes. We were on this side.

19 Q. -- been back here?

20 A. Yes.

21 Q. On the port side? But so, on this aspect, I can see the
22 vessel's starboard windows.

23 A. Um-hum.

24 Q. So approximately where here were you?

25 A. About -- I'd probably say the second window. Second, third

1 window in.

2 Q. From the stern?

3 A. On that opposite --

4 Q. Okay. On the port side?

5 A. Yes.

6 Q. And from your vantage point you could see the smoke coming,
7 and it appeared to be coming actually forward of your position?

8 A. Um-hum.

9 Q. Could you tell if it, maybe, if there was a vent on the
10 opposite side, would it be coming from there?

11 A. I have no idea.

12 Q. Did you ever happen to look over the stern? Could you tell
13 if it was coming out of the exhaust parts?

14 A. I -- no idea. Don't know.

15 Q. What about when you're up on the top deck, and you said you
16 looked over to see if there was something you could put out, could
17 you tell where the smoke was coming from at that point?

18 A. At that point, I mean, I was right here. I was standing
19 right here.

20 Q. So you're pointing to the starboard bridge wing?

21 A. Yes. And the smoke was just billowing up from here. It was
22 coming up like that.

23 Q. And you could not make out the origin?

24 A. No. I couldn't see flames. It was just smoke. And you just
25 couldn't -- it was even hard to see in front of you; it was so bad

1 at this time. Yeah.

2 Q. Do you recall the colors of the smoke? Or as you first saw
3 it, did it change color?

4 A. I remember there being white and black. I know when I was
5 walking to the bow, I remember it was just black. I couldn't see
6 in front of me at that point. But I do recall white smoke
7 earlier. It was colorful. It was -- you know, it different
8 color, I don't know, white, black.

9 Q. At any time did you see smoke inside the passenger salon
10 area, the inside of the ship?

11 A. I'm pretty sure that's -- I'm pretty sure the smoke was
12 coming in and that's when they said out. I'm not a hundred
13 percent sure if it was coming through the hatch or not at that
14 time. I really don't know. But I remember smelling the smoke.

15 Q. Was it so much where you couldn't see? Or was it --

16 A. No.

17 Q. -- maybe a haze?

18 A. Yeah. Not -- it wasn't -- if there was any in the -- in the
19 bottom, it was the light, very light at that point. But you could
20 smell it. But it seemed like it was going quick. I mean, like,
21 you -- smoke there just -- the smoke was getting worse and worse
22 by the second.

23 Q. Were you -- did you ever witness any of the crew members go
24 into the engine room?

25 A. No. I did not.

1 Q. On the way out did you hear a safety -- was there a safety
2 message played?

3 A. I can't remember that day, but I would say almost positive.
4 I mean, it seems like he -- the entertainer, he always does a
5 safety announcement. Yeah. But I can't remember -- recall
6 specifically that day. But if I had to guess, I would say yes.

7 Q. And at what point did you know there was an emergency on
8 board?

9 A. When the captain said everybody off the bow. Yeah.

10 Q. So this was after everyone had already went to the upper
11 deck?

12 A. Yes.

13 Q. And so when you left the salon, did you -- where did you --
14 where -- what was your location for the most part?

15 A. After I went up top, I went into the bridge.

16 Q. And so now -- and you indicated -- did you transit the aft
17 stairs and go up or did you go to the forward stairs?

18 A. I came here, and then went up --

19 Q. Port side?

20 A. -- went up those stairs, yep. Right there.

21 Q. And when you transited this area, was the smoke -- how would
22 you describe the smoke?

23 A. I honestly don't recall.

24 Q. So while you're in the pilothouse, what do you see?

25 A. Just the smoke coming up from here, coming up the side. Just

1 smoke, lots and lots of smoke.

2 Q. Do you recall anything on the console of the pilothouse? Was
3 there alarms? Were there radio calls?

4 A. Seems like I did hear an alarm. I really -- I can't be too
5 sure. It was kind of crazy. I don't want to say yes and then,
6 you know, and maybe I didn't. But I can't remember anything on
7 the radio. Maybe there was. I don't know. I really can't
8 recall.

9 Q. Fair enough. Fair enough. And are you -- do you recognize
10 this chart or actually this channel? This is Durnkey Key [sic].

11 A. Okay.

12 Q. Durney Key. Sorry. Durney Key.

13 A. Um-hum. And this is where we come out.

14 Q. Yes, ma'am.

15 A. Um-hum. And that's the dock. Yeah.

16 Q. So approximately where did you first see the smoke? And the
17 vessel is sitting right here right now.

18 A. Um-hum. I don't know. I would say -- I'm guessing -- is
19 this where they're saying he turned around? Because I'm not --

20 Q. People have said that the vessel turned around in this area.
21 Yes. Do you recall where the vessel turned around?

22 A. I just know it wasn't very far from the point. The smoke, I
23 don't -- I'm not exactly sure. I mean, somewhere in here. I
24 mean, I know it wasn't -- I know it wasn't long after that we seen
25 the smoke that he turned around.

1 Q. Okay. So -- and then, so now I'm going to shift gears onto
2 the *Tropical Breeze*. As surveillance, what's your -- what are
3 your duties and responsibilities?

4 A. Watching cameras, watching tables, employees, logging just
5 different information, you know, that goes on throughout the day.

6 Q. In the event of an emergency, what are your responsibilities?

7 A. To make sure everyone's -- me, being surveillance, I'm the
8 very bottom. First, you know, to make sure everyone's -- it's the
9 bathrooms right outside surveillance, make sure everyone's out of
10 the bathrooms. Because that's -- I'm in the corner. So first is
11 the men's and the women's. So first, make sure everybody's out of
12 there. And then go up, you know, go up to the top, the second
13 floor, and just try to get everyone together, and whatever
14 emergency we are having.

15 Q. And have you had any emergency training or firefighting,
16 flooding, abandon ship training?

17 A. We did, like, fire drills, I would say 10 years ago. So 10,
18 maybe 13, somewhere around there. I know that, you know, the
19 Coast Guard would come out, and every department had to be on the
20 boat. And, you know, each department had their own list of
21 responsibilities. This is when I was just cashier at the time.

22 Q. Okay.

23 A. And so I, you know, I did have that training. And as -- you
24 know, at the time when I was cashier, we had a list of our own
25 rules or -- set list of what we were supposed to do. And, you

1 know, places where we checked first, and then the doors that we
2 head out.

3 Q. And your last drill, just to be clear, was approximately 13
4 years ago, that you recall?

5 A. Somewhere along -- yeah.

6 Q. Did you have any injuries?

7 A. Just the smoke. Bruises.

8 Q. Is your hand one of them?

9 A. No. That's my birthmark.

10 Q. Oh, I'm sorry.

11 A. I get that all the time.

12 Q. So just bruises and inhalation?

13 A. Um-hum.

14 Q. Did you have -- did you get treated for inhalation?

15 A. Yeah, they -- I got some prescriptions to try to clear it up.

16 Q. Did you take any photos or videos that day?

17 A. No.

18 Q. So you've worked there 18 to 19 years. So I don't need to go
19 that far back, but, you know, in the recent time, have you ever
20 gotten on board either the *Tropical Breeze* or the *Island Lady*,
21 actually headed out the channel to go gaming, and then had to turn
22 around due to a casualty and come back to the dock?

23 A. On the *Breeze* I cannot -- I can't recall, since we've had the
24 *Breeze*. No, I can't recall on the *Tropical Breeze*. I mean,
25 maybe, you know, on the -- maybe 15 years ago on the other boat,

1 yeah. But specifically on the *Tropical Breeze*, I can't recall.

2 Q. What about the *Island Lady*?

3 A. I was rarely on the *Island Lady*. I usually would take the
4 *Breeze* out in the morning, and take it back in. But anytime I was
5 ever on the *Island Lady*, no.

6 Q. And that leads me to my next one. So how often do you work?

7 A. Thursday, Sunday.

8 Q. Okay. So Thursday through Sunday.

9 A. Just Thursday and Sunday.

10 Q. Oh, just Thursday and Sunday. And that's pretty consistent?

11 A. Um-hum. Until like the past month or so, with --

12 Q. Oh, yeah. And you do a full shift; you're on as long as
13 there's gamers on board?

14 A. Yeah.

15 Q. I assume, since you're surveillance. Okay. And have you
16 heard any rumor or do you know how the fire started?

17 A. I have no idea. The only thing I've heard is, I mean, the
18 engine room. And just coming from the floor, so everybody's
19 speculating it came from the engine room.

20 Q. And are you aware of any mechanical issues with the vessel?

21 A. No.

22 Q. All right. Thanks.

23 BY MR. [REDACTED]

24 Q. When you boarded the vessel, it was right at the main dock
25 with the passengers?

1 A. Um-hum.

2 Q. So I imagine you've probably taken lots of trips on this
3 vessel, in and out, in and out.

4 A. On the casino boat, not the actual shuttle. Not very often
5 would I be on the shuttle.

6 Q. How many times do you think you've been on the shuttle, then?

7 A. Maybe, maybe 10 to 15 times.

8 Q. On the *Island Lady*?

9 A. Yes.

10 Q. Why would they make you go out -- just out of curiosity, why
11 would you go out with the casino boat and not with the shuttle?

12 A. Usually the casino boat leaves in the morning, at 11. So we
13 had -- you know, we had showed up at 11 to go out on the casino
14 boat but there wasn't -- a handful of passengers.

15 Q. Okay. So potentially --

16 A. Like seven passengers.

17 Q. -- there could be passengers leaving out on that? Okay.

18 A. Right. Yes. But not that day. Not enough people showed up,
19 so we came back later. And I think the tide was -- tide issues.
20 They had to go ahead and get the casino boat out there so we could
21 -- so we can come out at 3:30 on the shuttle.

22 Q. So did you hear anything out of the ordinary on it?

23 A. No.

24 Q. The engines were running when you came on board?

25 A. Yeah, I'm assuming they were. I don't recall when he, you

1 know, fired it up or if it was running when we already boarded.

2 I'm not sure.

3 Q. When the vessel leaves, it leaves and it goes out the channel
4 slowly; we'll call that idle speed.

5 A. Um-hum.

6 Q. On the return trip, did it operate at the same speed as it
7 went out?

8 A. After he turned around?

9 Q. Um-hum.

10 A. I don't think so. It seemed slower, just in my opinion.
11 Maybe he was going slower so he could, you know, beach it on the
12 sand. I -- I'm not sure.

13 Q. So at one point Captain Mike said to take the helm.

14 A. Um-hum.

15 Q. So you stood there and you got the ship's wheel. Where are
16 the throttles? There are usually two sticks that stick up that
17 control the speed of the engine. Are they to the right or to the
18 left of the wheel?

19 A. I don't recall. I was just keeping it right in between the
20 markers, best I could.

21 Q. The throttles, did you recall how many of them there -- that
22 are there that control whether the boat goes forward or backwards?

23 A. Pretty sure there's two.

24 Q. Do you remember their positions relevant to each other or any
25 position of them?

1 A. No. I don't recall.

2 Q. You told Mr. [REDACTED] you heard an alarm. What did the alarm
3 sound like?

4 A. It just seems like I heard beeping. I'm assuming it was an
5 alarm.

6 Q. So it was beeping, not a prolonged --

7 A. I'm not a hundred percent sure. But I don't recall --

8 Q. How about any warning lights or any lights that you saw that
9 may have been out of the normal?

10 A. I'm not sure.

11 Q. How many times do you think you've been on the bridge of that
12 particular boat?

13 A. Probably maybe 8 to 10 times.

14 Q. So, when you look at those 8 to 10 times, and the one time
15 that you were up there driving it, are there any other things that
16 you've seen that may be askew from the other 8 to 10 times that
17 maybe I didn't ask you about?

18 A. No. I didn't -- I mean, I didn't notice anything.

19 Q. You said you jumped off the bow of the vessel?

20 A. Um-hum.

21 Q. I imagine it's up there in the --

22 A. Yeah. Right by the -- under the flag.

23 Q. Did anybody else jump off when you were up there?

24 A. I remember the waitress was with me, Joanna, and then she --
25 she jumped shortly after me and we walked together to the shore.

1 Q. Do you know who jumped before you?

2 A. I'm not sure. Maybe Tyler. Because I know he was already in
3 the water. I just remember seeing Tyler, and he was just trying
4 to get everyone off and catch them when they came down or --

5 Q. Anybody -- do you remember anybody jumping after Joanna?

6 A. Oh, I know -- there was just people jumping. I --

7 Q. None that you can name?

8 A. No. No.

9 MR. [REDACTED] That's all I have.

10 MR. CARLSON: Nothing.

11 CWO [REDACTED]: Thanks for your time.

12 MS. MEADORS: Okay.

13 CWO [REDACTED] Appreciate it.

14 MS. MEADORS: No problem.

15 MR. [REDACTED] Oh. I'm sorry. If I --

16 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Please.

17 BY UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:

18 Q. One more thing. Can you go over one more time for us the
19 interaction between you and captain when he had you watch or take
20 the helm. I mean, what was that interaction that day?

21 A. It was kind of -- I mean, it was to the point where the smoke
22 was, you know, it was -- almost panic time. And I was, like, you
23 know, what do I need to do? Just tell me what I can do. Can I do
24 anything? That's when I just, you know, grabbed the fire
25 extinguisher, and then he's just -- he's like -- I just remember

1 when he had to run downstairs, he was like -- he said, you can get
2 -- I need you to take the wheel. And I was like, oh, I don't
3 know. And he's like, you got it. He's like, you got, you got it.
4 He's like, just stay be the markers. And it was just idling. You
5 know, we were very -- just barely moving when he had went
6 downstairs. And I just remember when he came up, that he was
7 like, it's time.

8 Q. When critical events like that happen, sometimes people say
9 time slows down or time goes faster. That said, how long do you
10 think he was off the bridge, to the best of you recollection?

11 A. Maybe a minute. Not long at all.

12 Q. Did the vessel beach while you were at the helm? Or did --

13 A. No. No. He came up and took it. Yeah.

14 I remember asking him. I was, like, are you going to beach
15 this thing?

16 Q. He said yes?

17 A. Yeah. He was calm the -- he was very calm the whole time.
18 Yeah.

19 Q. When you had the helm, where were the people?

20 A. On the back, on the top, up here.

21 Q. Still on the top. Okay. They weren't transitioning to the
22 bow by that point? Thank you.

23 FEMALE SPEAKER: Thank you, Alesa.

24 MS. MEADORS. You're welcome.

25 (Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD


IN THE MATTER OF: FIRE ON BOARD THE *ISLAND LADY*
 PORT RICHEY, FLORIDA
 JANUARY 14, 2018
 Interview of Alesa Meadors

ACCIDENT NO.: DCA18FM010

PLACE:

DATE: January 24, 2018

was held according to the record, and that this is the original,
complete, true and accurate transcript which has been transcribed
to the best of my skill and ability.



Karen Coen Brooks
Transcriber