

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

\*

ACCIDENT NO.: DCA18FM010

JANUARY 14, 2018

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Interview of: JOANNA CLETCHER

Tuesday,  
January 23, 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

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<u>ITEM</u>	<u>I N D E X</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
Interview of Joanna Cletcher:		
By CWO [REDACTED]		4
By Mr. [REDACTED]		18
By CWO [REDACTED]		23
By Unidentified Speaker		24
By Mr. Carlson		25
By Unidentified Speaker		31

1 I N T E R V I E W

2 CWO [REDACTED] Okay. So, if you'll just say and spell your  
3 name real quick and help us out.

4 MS. CLETCHER: Joanna, J-o-a-n-n-a, Cletcher,  
5 C-l-e-t-c-h-e-r.

6 INTERVIEW OF JOANNA CLETCHER

7 BY CWO [REDACTED]

8 Q. And do you still live on, [REDACTED]

9 A. I do.

10 Q. Okay. Good. And so, tell us a little bit about yourself,  
11 your education and employment background.

12 A. Well, I've worked on boats for a year in February. It's  
13 almost been 1 year. I worked at Publix before. Went to high  
14 school.

15 Q. Okay.

16 A. Yeah.

17 Q. And on the 14th of January can you -- what was your position  
18 on the *Island Lady*?

19 A. I bartend on the big boat.

20 Q. Okay. So you're a bartender. And what time did you get on  
21 board the *Island Lady*?

22 A. 3:25.

23 Q. 3:25. What time did you get to work that day?

24 A. Like 3:16, 3:16.

25 Q. Okay. So, just before you got on the *Island Lady*?

1 A. Yeah, about 10 minutes.

2 Q. Okay. And so, walk us through the events from the time you  
3 got on board the *Island Lady*.

4 A. It was just a normal day. I got on the boat. We had a pre-  
5 hire. Grabbed the money out of the chest. Got on the boat. I  
6 was with Michelle and Alissa downstairs until we left. Then I  
7 went upstairs. It was all pretty normal.

8 And then I saw Mike a little bit stressed out, and it just  
9 all kind of went on from there. And -- well, we were in the  
10 channel. Everything was good. He saw the sensor. He got on the  
11 phone. We went through the channel a little bit. We got a little  
12 bit close to marker 1. We turned the boat around. We came back  
13 to the shore. We got everybody upstairs. I mean, obviously,  
14 there was like time in between, but the boat got back to the shore  
15 and that was when people started jumping. Yeah.

16 Q. Okay. Can we back up to where -- what was the first instance  
17 where you --

18 FEMALE SPEAKER: It's okay. Relax.

19 MS. CLETCHER: I hate thinking about it.

20 BY CWO [REDACTED]

21 Q. Yeah, there's no reason to be nervous.

22 A. I just don't like thinking about it. It's okay. I'm okay.

23 Q. Take us back to when did you first notice that there was an  
24 issue on board, there was an emergency, and how did you know there  
25 was an emergency on board and where were you at?

1 A. Truthfully, I was on the bridge. I don't like sitting out in  
2 the thing or being very social. Mike knows that, so he kind of  
3 like has a heavy heart for me, doesn't want to ruin my hair. And  
4 I was sitting there just on my phone, normal day, drinking coffee,  
5 minding my own beeswax.

6 Q. Where were you at on the bridge?

7 A. Just sitting in the back. Just --

8 Q. Behind the captain, to the right or to the left?

9 A. Yeah. I had just smoked a cigarette, came in, was on my  
10 phone and, I don't know, he just looked up and he was talking to  
11 himself. He goes uh-oh, and then he got on the phone and didn't  
12 say anything else really. I'm minding my own business. I didn't  
13 rush. I didn't want to like ask about the situation or anything  
14 because it's not my business. It just kind of like escalated from  
15 there.

16 Q. Okay. So could you hear what he said on the phone?

17 A. No. I wasn't listening.

18 Q. Did you know why he said uh-oh?

19 A. Well, I don't even think he really meant to. I think it just  
20 kind of slipped. I think he was talking to himself. Maybe I  
21 misunderstood him; it just sounded like what he said. I don't  
22 know, that was that. He didn't really say much. I didn't say  
23 anything. I just minded my own business.

24 Q. Could you hear anything? Could you hear an alarm maybe or  
25 could you see an alarm?

1 A. No. Not at first. Not at first. I was sitting there -- I  
2 was just looking at the little dashboard thing. There was one red  
3 light and then that was when he got on phone, I think. And then  
4 he got out some book, this big book. I don't know. He was  
5 looking in a big book at something. And he was on the phone  
6 talking to somebody, and we were going, and I remember the rock is  
7 in the middle of the channel so he didn't want to hit the rock.  
8 And we got out of the channel -- not out of it, but we were  
9 already to marker whatever the first one is, 1. And he turned the  
10 boat around. It started smoking. That was that.

11 Q. Okay. Do you recognize this? This is Miller's Bayou.

12 A. Okay.

13 Q. This is Durney Key.

14 A. So this is the S-turn?

15 Q. Yes.

16 A. No. The --

17 Q. The S-turn would be right here.

18 A. Oh, right there?

19 Q. Yes. The boat is actually currently right about there.

20 A. Okay.

21 Q. So if you were to estimate, where would you say the farthest  
22 down the channel you traveled on the boat?

23 A. Oh, not far. Here -- where's the end of the markers? Right  
24 there?

25 Q. It would be right here.

1 A. Okay. Yeah, we didn't go that far. We were still --

2 Q. And here's Durney Key.

3 A. Durney Key. So we were probably like right here, not much  
4 past it.

5 Q. So it looks like you're pointing to --

6 A. Maybe I exaggerated about marker 1. It wasn't that far.

7 Q. Marker -- looks like 5?

8 A. Yeah. It wasn't -- we weren't far away.

9 Q. Channel marker 5, okay. Good.

10 So I interrupted. So you -- Captain Mike was on the phone.  
11 You were on the bridge. You could see a red light on the dash  
12 board. Then what happened?

13 A. Okay. He was on the phone. He was looking in a book. Then  
14 the sensor started beeping, and that was when he found the  
15 deckhand and then they went downstairs. The deckhands were  
16 looking in the hole, whatever, the engine room compartment.

17 Q. Could you see them or were you still located on the bridge?

18 A. No. I was still upstairs.

19 Q. Okay.

20 A. And I just kind of like stuck my nose in my own business. I  
21 didn't want to like ask any questions or show anybody out. So I  
22 just kind of like just sat there quietly, listened, watched.

23 Q. Did you watch the closed-circuit TV?

24 A. What is that? The --

25 Q. The monitor with all the cameras?



1 A. Yeah. Um-hum.

2 Q. So what could you see?

3 A. Well, the monitor, it looked like it had like a mist on it,  
4 like a water mist, and I said something to Mike. I was like, I  
5 think there's water. And then I was like that was stupid because  
6 it's underneath the boat, so why would there be water. And that  
7 was the only thing -- I was like I think that there's smoke. And  
8 he goes uh-oh. He goes, all right. And the guys came upstairs  
9 and that was that from there. They tried to take a -- like handle  
10 the situation as best as they could.

11 And Mike went downstairs because he wanted to see if there's  
12 a fire because he had this weird feeling that there was fire. So  
13 he went downstairs. He didn't see a fire. And he said that he  
14 just had a weird feeling. So he turned the boat around and we  
15 started heading back. And the boat just starting going, got like  
16 -- and it was just like -- just smoking, not flames at that point.

17 And everybody was upstairs. Everything was fine. The guys  
18 were downstairs doing what they had to do. There is one fire  
19 extinguisher upstairs. Mike just said, you know, if there's a  
20 fire extinguisher somewhere, like, can you and Michelle go get  
21 one? And so, me and Michelle went down the back stairs and we  
22 opened up the back doors and we were just looking around. And we  
23 went back upstairs and that was when Tyler went upstairs and said  
24 that there was fire and -- yeah.

25 Q. Okay. So that's great. So when you transited down what

1 you're calling the back stairs --

2 A. Sorry. I don't know the technical names.

3 Q. No, no.

4 A. These.

5 Q. So these right here?

6 A. Yeah.

7 Q. Can you tell me where, if you looked, could you see the smoke  
8 coming from? Was there any smoke at that point? Did you see --

9 A. At that point no. But when everybody was up here, there was  
10 a girl right here, because Mike had opened both of these doors --

11 Q. Okay. And you're pointing to the starboard bridge wing door.

12 A. Yeah, both of them.

13 Q. Okay.

14 A. Not these ones. The ones that actually go into the bridge.

15 Q. Yes.

16 A. Not these. Just like glass doors.

17 Q. Right. So you are pointing to both the port and the  
18 starboard bridge wing doors?

19 A. Yeah.

20 Q. Got it.

21 A. So he opened those and everybody was on top and there was  
22 this woman standing right in this little walkway right here by the  
23 bridge door, and she had short brown like -- not brown, like gray  
24 blonde, and she said, like, I don't want to freak anybody out but  
25 there's a lot of smoke like coming up from this side of the boat.

1 And like, obviously, Mike had seen it and he was trying to take a  
2 handle on it, but there was just a lot of people and they were  
3 like really scared. So --

4 Q. So when you went to go get the fire extinguisher and you  
5 transited down the stairs on the stern of the vessel, did you see  
6 any smoke?

7 A. No. I went in this door. Michelle went in that door.

8 Q. Okay. And what's located inside these doors?

9 A. Right inside of them there is the bar and then there was all  
10 the tables and the mirrors on the walls and everything. And then  
11 up here it was just like -- I guess you could call it another  
12 little like bar counter thing, but not a bar. It was just the  
13 counter for storage or something. I don't know.

14 Q. And did you have -- could you see the full passenger area in  
15 side of here?

16 A. When I opened the door, yeah.

17 Q. On the main deck?

18 A. Yeah. There was nobody inside there, though, except for the  
19 deck hands.

20 Q. Could you see smoke?

21 A. No. No, it wasn't smoking at that point.

22 Q. Okay.

23 A. Like inside, like off the back and off of here a little bit,  
24 yeah, but it hadn't gone like crazy. Like it was still pretty  
25 early.

1 Q. Okay. And then what did you do?

2 A. I just kind of started packing my stuff in my bag because I  
3 was kind of bracing myself because, I don't know, I'm just like --  
4 I was just thinking of the worst. But it really wasn't that bad.  
5 But I had myself all psyched up. So --

6 Q. Were you able to find a fire extinguisher?

7 A. I didn't, no.

8 Q. So then what did you do?

9 A. Michelle was still downstairs. I went upstairs because I  
10 told Tyler and Shawn to go upstairs because I didn't know what to  
11 do and I didn't know where the fire extinguishers were. And there  
12 was like three or four guys downstairs. So two of them followed  
13 me up. One of them followed me up and went and talked to the  
14 captain.

15 And I remember Tyler ran back downstairs because Mike said to  
16 open the hatch or do something, and he came back upstairs like  
17 just kind of frantic and he was like, there's fire. He goes like,  
18 there's a fire. And Mike said, all right, just calm down; take a  
19 breath. He goes, it's okay. He goes, we're going -- he goes, we  
20 got it; we'll be all right. Okay, it's fine. And he said just  
21 make sure everybody is away from there, like just keep everybody  
22 up here, like get ready because we are going to have to jump.

23 And Tyler went back downstairs and the next time I saw Tyler  
24 was when he was jumping off the front of the boat.

25 Q. So the passengers, can you describe to me where you were at

1 when all the passengers got off the boat?

2 A. Got off of the boat?

3 Q. Yes.

4 A. After they had -- when they jumped?

5 Q. Yes. Well --

6 A. I was -- I was off the boat. I was the third one off the  
7 boat.

8 Q. As --

9 A. Because I was in the beginning. So if I wouldn't have jumped  
10 off I would have held up everybody else. So I just -- I wanted to  
11 get out of the way.

12 Q. So were you on the bow as the vessel came to shore or came  
13 towards the beach?

14 A. Yes.

15 Q. In what location?

16 A. Well, I was up here, and then there's the front staircase  
17 right here, meeting from here to here. And I was going down here  
18 when it was smoking. I had mine and Alissa's bags. And Alissa  
19 was in the bridge. Mike was downstairs because he was trying to  
20 put out the fire thinking that it was smaller than it was.

21 Q. Was the boat on the sand, as far as you could tell, at this  
22 point, or was it still traveling?

23 A. No, it was idling. Just like -- we were basically onto the  
24 beach, basically. But Mike tried to take control of the situation  
25 and he was trying to save everybody, so he just wanted to see if

1 he could put it out really quick.

2 Q. Do you know how he tried that?

3 A. I don't -- no. All I remember -- the last thing, I saw Mike  
4 and then I closed my eyes to the smoke and -- my eyes are closed.  
5 I tripped. I remember I put my hand out and I looked out and  
6 there was Mike again. I don't know how he got to me so quick, but  
7 I remember he drug me through the smoke. And he shot back right  
8 upstairs. Because I was too scared to jump; I said, no, I'm not  
9 going to jump. He said, no, seriously you're jumping. Like  
10 you're jumping, if I have to throw you off the boat. But I was  
11 like, okay, like I guess I'm jumping.

12 And, yeah, I remember Tyler was the first one off the boat  
13 and me and Alissa went down -- Tyler jumped off right here by the  
14 flag, just straight off the front. I went off right here.

15 Q. Okay. And you're pointing to the starboard bow?

16 A. Like the nose.

17 Q. Yes.

18 A. Me and Alissa were both up on the nose. She went off this  
19 side. I went off this side. We went at the same time. I  
20 remember before I went down I handed Tyler my bag so that he could  
21 save my phone so that we could call 911. I think mine and  
22 Alissa's phone were the only survivors. But Alissa called 911  
23 when we got to land, when we were in the water. It was crazy,  
24 crazy.

25 Q. Did you ever look back at the boat and could you see where

1 the smoke was coming from?

2 A. Well, the wind -- the wind was going that way, so it just  
3 kind of like made it all -- it was kind of coming from everywhere  
4 like when we -- like when I was off the boat, it had gotten to the  
5 point that it was so big that it was just a little bit of  
6 everywhere. Like it just looked like it was just like on this  
7 whole side. It was coming out the front door. It was coming out  
8 these back windows. It was just the underneath was on fire, like.  
9 I think it was just this side though, I'm pretty sure. I want to  
10 say it was just that side.

11 Q. So you're pointing just to the starboard side?

12 A. Because I remember looking out and the smoke was all like  
13 just around the right side. But I don't know if it was the wind  
14 blowing it that way.

15 Q. And there was a lot of wind?

16 A. Yeah, I wasn't really paying attention really.

17 Q. Okay.

18 A. I was just more worried about everybody like getting off  
19 safely, you know.

20 Q. So you wouldn't have been able to establish if the smoke was  
21 coming out -- potentially if it was coming out of these vents or  
22 if it was coming out of the transom?

23 A. I have no idea.

24 Q. Okay. Did you take any pictures or a video after you jumped  
25 off the boat or even before?

1 A. Truthfully?

2 Q. Yeah.

3 A. I took one.

4 Q. Okay. Can I see it?

5 A. Yeah. It's before everything really got like -- it's really  
6 not, it's not anything super big.

7 MR. [REDACTED] Just to give you a little background. I was  
8 involved in another investigation where someone had a picture of  
9 the vessel 2 months before it went down and it was a very  
10 important picture. It was very significant because it showed  
11 where certain instruments were. So don't diminish the importance  
12 of the picture. You might have something --

13 CWO [REDACTED] Yeah, you just never know.

14 MR. [REDACTED] Yeah.

15 MS. CLETCHER: I climbed on the land and that was the first  
16 -- I just took one because my mom didn't believe me. I called her  
17 crying --

18 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: So that's early.

19 MS. CLETCHER: -- and she said I don't believe you. I was  
20 like no, seriously. I was like, why don't you believe me?

21 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: That's actually a good picture.

22 BY CWO [REDACTED]

23 Q. We'll just have you text it to me and then that way we'll  
24 have that picture for our files.

25 A. Okay.



1 Q. Okay. So the crew members, as the passengers were getting  
2 off the boat, what did you hear, what did you see?

3 A. Well, after I was off the boat and on land, I was a little  
4 bit traumatized. I didn't really want to look back. I remember I  
5 was on the phone with my boyfriend and I was on the phone with my  
6 mom, and I just kind of told my mom -- I was like, just come pick  
7 me up. Like I just don't really want to be here; I don't even  
8 like really want to think about it. Yeah.

9 But I stayed. I stayed there until a couple hours later with  
10 everybody else because I didn't want to just leave everybody,  
11 because that would have been rude, not caring, you know. And I  
12 wanted to make sure that everybody was all right and that they  
13 found Mike. And I just wanted to make sure everything was good  
14 before I was allowed to leave.

15 Q. Okay.

16 A. At least decent. Not good, but -- you know. Yeah.

17 Q. Yeah. So how do you think the fire started?

18 A. I have no idea.

19 Q. Okay. No rumor, no speculation, even a guess?

20 A. I have no clue.

21 Q. Okay.

22 A. I am so non-mechanical. Anything like that I have no idea.  
23 All I know is fire is fire.

24 Q. Okay. Anything else you feel I didn't cover you'd like to  
25 share?

1 A. No. I think that was it. I think that's all of it.

2 CWO [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

3 BY MR. [REDACTED]

4 Q. You said that you were the bartender on the big boat?

5 A. Yeah.

6 Q. What else do you do on the big boat, just bartending or do  
7 you do anything else out there?

8 A. Oh, no, I just bartend. Unless they're teaching me how to  
9 cook.

10 Q. On the transit out, you said Captain Mike was up on the  
11 bridge and you were up on the bridge too. Was anybody else on the  
12 bridge?

13 A. No. He left the door open and I was sitting out on this side  
14 thing smoking a cigarette. And then when it started getting  
15 really windy, I just kind of like sat down out of the wind trying  
16 to protect my hair. The really means nothing, but --

17 Q. So you were smoking outside?

18 A. Uh-huh.

19 Q. Were you on the right side of the boat or the left side?

20 A. The left. Yeah, the left.

21 Q. When you're out there on the bridge, did you see anything,  
22 hear anything, smell anything that was abnormal that day?

23 A. Everything was totally normal. Mike made coffee. He's like,  
24 hey, girl, I made your coffee, girlie. I was like, all right,  
25 thanks. Because it was cold that day. He was like, I figured

1 you'd be shaking like a leaf. I was like, well, thank you.

2 Q. When you came back in, did the door get closed?

3 A. No. No. That one he usually keeps open unless it's cold,  
4 like really, really cold and he's freezing, which is not very  
5 normal.

6 Q. So I think earlier you said you boarded the boat, I think, at  
7 3:25, 3-ish. We'll just call it 3-ish.

8 A. Uh-huh.

9 Q. And you said Mike seemed a little stressed?

10 A. No.

11 Q. No?

12 A. No, no, nothing.

13 Q. What was going on the boat when you boarded? Was it a normal  
14 day, everyone just preparing the boat?

15 A. Yeah, just normal. Yeah, normal. Me and Mike usually joke  
16 around. Like, I don't know, we talk. So we're friendly, friends,  
17 whatever. He said he made coffee. So I went and got coffee.

18 Q. So when you boarded the boat, on the shuttle boat, do you  
19 have any responsibilities on the shuttle boat as that boat goes  
20 out?

21 A. To be on my best behavior.

22 Q. Okay. Anything else?

23 A. Not really.

24 FEMALE SPEAKER: She can't help it.

25 (Laughter)

1 BY MR. [REDACTED]

2 Q. You said that a deck hand came to the bridge to talk to the  
3 captain.

4 A. Tyler.

5 Q. It was Tyler?

6 A. Yeah. Tyler was up and down, up and down. Jon came up one  
7 time. I really can't even remember. Everything is so jumbled  
8 really.

9 Q. So when Captain Mike left the bridge to go down and  
10 investigate in the engine room, was it just you left on the  
11 bridge?

12 A. No. No, it was me and Alissa.

13 Q. Okay.

14 A. And Michelle.

15 Q. When did Alissa and Michelle get to the bridge?

16 A. Probably when they put everybody upstairs, and then they came  
17 straight to the bridge. Because there was a lot of people. It  
18 was really congested. So they just kind of stayed out of the way,  
19 came on the bridge to give everybody a little bit more space and  
20 less crowded.

21 Q. Okay. So when Mike left the bridge to go look in the engine  
22 room, it was you, Alissa and Michelle?

23 A. Uh-huh.

24 Q. Okay. Who drove the boat when Mike left?

25 A. Well, he put the boat in idle and we were just kind of like

1 idling into the water and Alissa just stood there and made sure  
2 that we were going to be okay. Because we were really close, very  
3 close, like 10, 15 feet. But he just didn't want to beach the  
4 boat and have everybody freaking out and then the fire start. I'm  
5 guessing that now.

6 Q. Did Mike tell anybody drive the boat or did Alissa just walk  
7 over there on her own?

8 A. Truthfully, I don't even -- I was trying to grab all mine and  
9 Alissa's stuff really. I was just trying to make sure that  
10 everybody had their stuff and their bags. I didn't even think to  
11 grab Mike's stuff really. I feel bad about that, because his  
12 phone burned with the boat. But that was the only one I didn't --  
13 I didn't even think. I didn't think to grab his phone or  
14 anything.

15 Q. Okay. You said that you were unable to find a fire  
16 extinguisher when you and Michelle went to the back of the boat.  
17 Do you know if Michelle found one?

18 A. Truthfully, I don't know. I was so scared. Just like my  
19 head was so jumbled. I was just like -- fire extinguisher. I was  
20 like a dog with a bone. I was like looking for a fire  
21 extinguisher, but my head's like, well, so -- I was just a little  
22 bit like -- I was just a little bit everywhere, a little bit  
23 scatterbrained. The blondness. What are you going to do?

24 Q. Do you know anywhere where firefighting equipment is on the  
25 boat?

1 A. Me?

2 Q. Yes.

3 A. If I probably looked around a little bit I probably could  
4 find it. Truthfully, I never even thought like -- I don't know I  
5 just never really prepared myself for the worst. I guess I should  
6 have, but --

7 Q. Tyler was number one off the boat. You were number three off  
8 the boat.

9 A. Me and Alissa went at the same time.

10 Q. So you and Alissa?

11 A. Me and Alissa.

12 Q. Do you know who number two, number four, or anybody else?

13 A. It was Tyler, me and Alissa, two and three. After that I'm  
14 not really sure.

15 Q. Okay. So who jumped -- was it you and Alissa at the same  
16 time or did --

17 A. Yeah. Because my feet were stuck in the mud. So she came  
18 over to me. And Tyler was already off the boat.

19 Q. Okay. You don't know anybody else after that?

20 A. No. I wasn't really paying attention truthfully.

21 Q. Have you ever been in the engine room on that boat?

22 A. No.

23 Q. Ever been in the engine room of the big casino?

24 A. No.

25 Q. Okay.

1 BY CWO [REDACTED]

2 Q. I had a couple follow-ups. So on the big boat, can you  
3 explain what are your duties and responsibilities?

4 A. I just bartend. I take my rounds, see anybody wants a drink.

5 Q. Do you wear a uniform?

6 A. Yep.

7 Q. What does your uniform look like?

8 A. Well, I have two different shirts that I wear. I have a  
9 black short-sleeve SunCruz shirt. Well, actually, I have three:  
10 I have the black short-sleeve SunCruz shirt. I have long sleeve  
11 purple SunCruz -- well, it says Tropical Breeze. And then I have  
12 a flowered shit that I kind of like just tie, coming in, tied on.  
13 It doesn't have any emblems, no nothing.

14 Q. Okay. And on the big boat, what are your responsibilities in  
15 case there were a fire?

16 A. To kind of like crowd control really. I'm guessing find a  
17 fire extinguisher and know where the fire extinguishers are. Just  
18 to keep everybody like calm and collected a little bit, try and  
19 like -- and not crowded and people getting violent or anything  
20 like that. Just because I'm like down by the door. And I'm  
21 guessing the deckhands would help out. I don't know.

22 Q. Okay. And have you ever conducted a fire drill --

23 A. Me?

24 Q. -- or been part of a fire drill?

25 A. Me personally?

1 Q. Yes.

2 A. No.

3 Q. Okay. And I think that's about it.

4 BY UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:

5 Q. So when you were hired on a year ago, what type of training  
6 did you undergo, whether it was employee training, bartender  
7 training, boat-specific training?

8 A. Bartender, just like dos and don'ts. I mean like -- I mean,  
9 I don't know. I grew up on boats so I kind of know like a little  
10 bit about boats, so -- I mean, not much, obviously, the technical  
11 names. But just like what I'm supposed to do behind my bar  
12 basically.

13 Q. Okay. So any training on boat operations or was it just all  
14 related to bartender training?

15 A. Mostly bartender. I mean, the basics of like safety and  
16 stuff like that. Like, if you can't swim, you need a life jacket.  
17 I mean, just like basics and stuff like that. I mean, for the  
18 most part the deckhands are on it. The deckhands are really good  
19 about the drills and everything. They know everything about that.

20 Q. Do you know where the life jackets were on the boat or where  
21 they are maintained or kept?

22 A. I only know that they were on the boat.

23 Q. Do you know where they're kept on the boat?

24 A. I think that they are downstairs in the front of the boat.

25 Q. Did anybody direct anyone or did anybody get any life jackets



1 out?

2 A. There wasn't really any time to pass out life jackets. I  
3 just remember Mike was driving, doing what he could. The  
4 deckhands put everybody on top when they started getting a little  
5 bit worried. I mean, tried to keep everybody as calm and  
6 collected as possible, I mean, in that situation. But no, there  
7 was no time really for life jackets, and I don't know, in my  
8 opinion you would have just been wasting your time with the life  
9 jackets because we were in shallow water. And it's like what if  
10 you got stuck downstairs or something trying to get a life jacket  
11 for somebody, you know. I just feel like it was shallow enough I  
12 think, in my opinion, I mean.

13 CWO [REDACTED] Mr. Carlson, do you have any questions?

14 BY MR. CARLSON:

15 Q. How deep was the water when you jumped off?

16 A. When I jumped off? Like ankle deep. Not really -- not even  
17 past -- not even that deep. But I was in the very front though,  
18 so I was in the shallowest part.

19 Q. You don't recall Mike giving any instructions to Alissa when  
20 he went down below?

21 A. Well, he said, you know, like there's the front of the boat.  
22 Like there's the beach; you're really close. Like the boat is in  
23 idle. Like we are not going fast. The motors aren't on. He  
24 said, just point it straight. He said, I'll be back. He said,  
25 I'll be back. He said, I have to do something. He said, there's

1 just something I have to do. And he tied his shirt around his  
2 face and he went downstairs.

3 Q. Okay. Did he give her the helm or the wheel or just --

4 A. I mean, yeah, as much as he could. I mean, without taking it  
5 out of the thing, I mean.

6 Q. What do you mean, without taking it out of the thing?

7 A. I mean, he just kind of said like don't turn the wheel, you  
8 know, don't like 90-percent angle the wheel or anything, but like  
9 just go straight. He said, really, you don't even have to touch  
10 it because there's no power steering. So it's so steadfast it  
11 could basically drive itself, you know.

12 She just stood there, held onto it. She didn't turn it. She  
13 just made sure that the boat went straight. And when the boat hit  
14 the land you could feel it because your body kind of jolted a  
15 little bit, and that was when people started jumping pretty much.

16 Q. And to the best of your recollection, how far from the beach  
17 was the boat when this happened?

18 A. Oh, when we were beached?

19 Q. When Mike put something around his face and --

20 A. We were probably like a set and a half of markers away from  
21 the beach. We were like 15 feet, 20 feet, if that.

22 Q. And the boat was idling?

23 A. Yeah, we weren't going fast.

24 Q. And drifting?

25 A. Yeah. The wind could have honestly pushed us up there

1 without Alissa. If Mike would have just left it totally like no  
2 man, I think we would have been okay.

3 Q. Do you know what Mike did when he left?

4 A. I'm guessing he tried to save us by putting out the fire, but  
5 I don't think that he realized -- it was probably worse than he  
6 thought. He tried though. I'll give it to him, he tried. He did  
7 everything he could. I mean, there was not really much else that  
8 anybody could have done to like prevent it or really anything like  
9 that. Like with the life jackets, that would just waste time  
10 really, I mean. I would be more concerned about the people, like,  
11 at least getting off the boat instead of them having a life  
12 jacket, you know, because if they don't get off the boat, I mean,  
13 why do you need the life jacket, you know.

14 Q. Okay. Have you sailed with Mike a lot in the past?

15 A. Yeah. He's my favorite captain.

16 Q. And why do you say that?

17 A. Because, in my opinion, he's the best captain. I think that  
18 he's the most collected. I think that he -- I mean, other than  
19 Willie G's. That's a hard one. I don't know. Mike is just more  
20 of like a normal guy, you know. He's just like your average Joe,  
21 but he's Mike -- like, I don't know he's just a great guy. He's  
22 (indiscernible). He knows a lot about boats. I mean, I don't  
23 think that there's anything that he could have done to really  
24 prevent the fire. I mean, we were already out in the water. I  
25 mean, at least he turned the boat around and he -- at least we

1 were like on land instead of kind of keep going, you know. At  
2 least he thought about that. Probably would have been a way worse  
3 situation if we would have kept going. Then we would have needed  
4 the life jackets.

5 Q. How many trips do you think you have made back and forth  
6 total to the Casino, 50, 100?

7 A. A lot.

8 Q. A lot?

9 A. 200.

10 Q. So when you're going out the channel, there comes a point  
11 that, you know, someone is driving the boat and the boat will  
12 start going faster and you can hear --

13 A. Like on planes?

14 Q. Yeah, you can hear the engine pitch change.

15 A. Yeah.

16 Q. So when you are transiting out of the channel did you get to  
17 the point where you kind of got off an idle --

18 A. No. No.

19 Q. -- started -- so on the --

20 A. The entire time before like we -- because we almost were at  
21 the rock and I remember him saying, I don't want to hit the rock;  
22 I don't want to hit the rock. And he just kind of like shifted as  
23 far away from the rock as he could and just kind of hoped for the  
24 best really.

25 Q. So the entire outbound transit was idle speed?

1 A. Yeah. I mean, he put it in reverse one time just to see if  
2 like it would stop overheating. Just to see if that was the  
3 problem, I mean, but that -- not for long. I mean, he just did it  
4 for point of a second, not even.

5 Q. So how do you know he put it in reverse?

6 A. I just watched him.

7 Q. Did he say that it was overheating or --

8 A. No. No. No. No. Noting like that ever really happened.  
9 He was just trying to keep himself collected and to see if he  
10 could figure out if he could fix the problem himself or if he  
11 needed like assistance or -- he didn't know what he needed at,  
12 like, at the time because he didn't know how serious it was. Like  
13 he did, but he -- he just said like -- this is the point, like it  
14 was so early like he just had that weird feeling, you know, like  
15 the really weird feeling.

16 Q. So when you say he put it in reverse, how do you know that  
17 he --

18 A. Not like in reverse like gun it in reverse or anything. But  
19 like he just like backed up a little bit just so that the motors  
20 were like -- the motors, you could just tell that they were in  
21 reverse, you know, like, they're like -- it's not that they bubble  
22 or like that they do anything. But you can just tell, you know.

23 Q. Do you know how the boat moves -- what you have to do to put  
24 the boat in motion?

25 A. Do the little --

1 Q. Okay. Can we call them throttles?

2 A. Yeah.

3 Q. Bingo.

4 A. Gas.

5 Q. So did you see Mike, did he pull back on the throttles when  
6 you say he put it in reverse?

7 A. I want to say it's back.

8 Q. Okay. Do you know how many throttle levers -- do you  
9 remember how many throttle levers there are?

10 A. I think there's two. I don't think that they're connected.

11 Q. Okay.

12 A. I'm pretty sure.

13 Q. So if he pulled one back or when he went in reverse, did he  
14 pull them -- do you remember if he pulled --

15 A. No.

16 Q. -- both back or one?

17 A. I don't even know. I have no idea really. It wasn't  
18 anything even serious. It was just him trying to fix this little  
19 motor skills.

20 Q. Was there any changes in pitch and engine that sounded  
21 abnormal other than what you have witnessed on your approximately  
22 200 trips?

23 A. No. Not really. There wasn't any -- like you couldn't tell  
24 like -- like you really couldn't tell. Like there wasn't anything  
25 weird sounding, like any weird like -- I don't know it was just --

1 it all happened really fast, really fast.

2 Q. Did Mike say he thought the boat was overheating?

3 A. I didn't even ask him because it wasn't my -- it wasn't my  
4 business. And I didn't want to be like that nosy like, hey, are  
5 we on fire? Hey, what's wrong like? You know, I didn't want to  
6 stress him out and then he would be like, you know, what just get  
7 out of here.

8 Q. Okay.

9 CWO [REDACTED] In your 200 trips or so, have you ever had a  
10 similar experience or one where the boat had to turn around or  
11 there was an issue that had to be fixed?

12 MS. CLETCHER: Never. Never when I have been on the boat,  
13 no.

14 CWO [REDACTED] Never. Okay.

15 BY UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:

16 Q. I do have one follow-up. So you worked for how long? Coming  
17 up on a year?

18 A. Yeah.

19 Q. How many days a week do you work?

20 A. It varies?

21 Q. Three, 5, 7?

22 A. Three, 4, 5, 6.

23 Q. Three, 4, 5. One to two --

24 A. As many as I can get.

25 Q. One or two trips a day?

1 A. No, at least one.

2 Q. I'm just trying to think (indiscernible).

3 A. No, at least, at least one. Not 7 days a week, but I mean at  
4 least once, one trip a day when I do work.

5 Q. Okay. All right. Thank you.

6 CWO [REDACTED] Thanks for your time.

7 (Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)

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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 Joanna Cletcher

ACCIDENT NO.:                DCA18FM010

PLACE:

DATE:                         January 23, 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.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Letha Wheeler  
Transcriber