

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: STEPHEN LONGARELLO
Casino Dealer

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

JAMES CARLSON, Attorney
Hamilton, Miller & Birthisel

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I N T E R V I E W

INTERVIEW OF MR. LONGARELLO

BY CWO [REDACTED]

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4 Q. All right. So, Mr. Longarello, can you give us a little bit
5 of background about yourself, your education and work experience?

6 A. High school graduate. Work experience, I was a contractor
7 for 25 years, and then I was working with SunCruz for the past --
8 April it will be 9 years.

9 Q. And what's your position at SunCruz, sir?

10 A. I'm a dealer, casino dealer.

11 Q. Casino -- okay. Have you held any other positions?

12 A. With SunCruz?

13 Q. Yes, sir.

14 A. No.

15 Q. All right. Describe me your workday on the 14th of January.

16 A. Got on the shuttle, was sitting there waiting to get out to
17 the boat, and he announced everybody to go upstairs to the top
18 deck. So we all went up to the top deck. And we're standing out
19 -- I was standing there talking with some customers. And then
20 smoke started coming up off the back side of the boat, and they
21 asked people to come down the ladder in the front. So everybody
22 kind of got in line, we went down. Some people went to the front.
23 I went off to the side, where we connect with the actual casino
24 boat and get off; there was like a door there. And --

25 Q. Is that the port side? The left-hand side of the boat?

1 A. Yes.

2 Q. Okay.

3 A. And I was there with a couple other dealers and the galley
4 girl, and then I jumped off. And I stood there and I was catching
5 people as they jumped off. And started going in, and then one of
6 the other girls had asked me to grab one of the customers. I
7 grabbed one of the customers to help him come in. And then I had
8 John Crowe, who's the dealer that's coming in next, I had him --
9 called him to help me, and we started bringing that gentleman in.

10 Q. Okay. So if we back up, at what point did you know there was
11 an emergency on board? How did you know there was an emergency on
12 board? And where were you at when you found out?

13 A. Well, I -- when they told us to come upstairs, I smelled
14 something. It smelled like wire.

15 Q. Burnt wire?

16 A. Yeah.

17 Q. Okay. So I came up. You know, that's when they told
18 everybody to go upstairs, so I just went upstairs. And I really
19 -- at that point I really didn't think anything of it. And like I
20 say, we were just standing up there. We were talking with the
21 blackjack players. So, you know, we were standing there talking
22 and -- and I said, then when I saw a lot of smoke start coming up
23 and then the deckhands asked customers -- which I didn't actually
24 hear it, because I was like in the middle of the boat, you know,
25 to come down the stairs on the front of the shuttle to go from the

1 top deck down -- you know, it was a ladder actually, to go from
2 the top deck down to the bottom deck. And kind of, everybody kind
3 of -- it wasn't even disorganized. It was like everybody just
4 kind of got close to the thing and everybody went out and went
5 down.

6 I mean, there were -- from where I was at, I guess -- I was
7 halfway in the middle of, you know, the crowd of people, and
8 nobody was pushing or anything. Everybody kind of -- it seemed
9 real organized. I mean, at no time did I ever feel like it was
10 life-threatening or -- to me it wasn't a big deal. I mean, yeah,
11 you had to jump in cold water, but other than that I never felt
12 anything threatening or anything like that. I thought everything
13 was well organized.

14 Q. When you departed the vessel at the -- basically be the port
15 transfer door, did you go -- did you take the route from the bow
16 around to the transfer door station, or did you take one of the
17 aft ladderwell --

18 A. No, from the front.

19 Q. So you went from the front?

20 A. It's like right in the middle. So you went down and, like I
21 say, a lot of the people were walking to the front of the boat
22 where that's -- where the deckhands were getting the people off
23 the boat, and then I just walked around this side here.

24 Q. Um-hum.

25 A. And that's where the door is right there, and there was -- so

1 it was me, two of the dealers, the -- Cassie, the -- what's -- the
2 cook -- galley girl, that's it.

3 Q. Okay.

4 A. The galley girl, we were over there, and there might have
5 been one or two other people. So I jumped first, but, I mean, I
6 was the guy there, so they let me jump first. And then as they
7 jump in, I can -- when they hit the water, I can grab them and get
8 them going to land, and that's what I did.

9 Q. What was the depth of water where you jumped?

10 A. Waist deep.

11 Q. Okay.

12 A. Like I said, it was -- to me, it wasn't nothing dangerous or
13 anything. You didn't have to worry about drowning.

14 Q. At no point you didn't feel danger --

15 A. Not at all.

16 Q. -- even when you saw the vessel --

17 A. Not at all, no.

18 Q. -- going up in flames?

19 A. No.

20 Q. Okay.

21 A. No. Because I guess the flames and that started coming up on
22 this side of the boat, like back in here somewhere.

23 Q. Yes, sir.

24 A. And we were on that side. So it was like it seemed like you
25 had plenty of time to get off and -- like I said, I stood there

1 and I was helping other people, so it was -- you know, I had no
2 concern at all.

3 Q. Okay, great. Did you ever -- you said you saw the smoke
4 coming from this -- you were pointing toward --

5 A. Yeah, it seemed like somewhere back here.

6 Q. The starboard --

7 A. I mean, of course, you see the smoke when it comes above the
8 top deck.

9 Q. So you're pointing to the starboard quarter of the vessel.

10 A. Yeah, that's where it seemed like. I seen it coming up from
11 that side of the boat. Like I says, I was standing -- you know,
12 before anything really happened, I was standing like right here.
13 I was like halfway on that side of the boat. And then we seen
14 smoking coming up here. I never went over to look.

15 Q. Okay.

16 A. But there was smoke coming up this way somewhere, and then
17 that's when they started getting the customers to go down the
18 ladder in the front of the boat.

19 Q. Did you ever happen to look in the engine room or --

20 A. Oh, no.

21 Q. The lazaret at any time?

22 A. No.

23 Q. No. Okay. Were you in the passenger compartment when the
24 deckhands were in there?

25 A. No, just as we were riding out, I was inside. But that's

1 when, I said, they told us to go upstairs and we just -- everybody
2 just followed and just went upstairs, and --

3 Q. How did they tell you to go upstairs?

4 A. I don't know exactly. It was -- said something like, you
5 know, we'd like all the customers go up to the top deck. I don't
6 know exactly. I don't want to say anything specific because I
7 don't remember.

8 Q. It wouldn't have been like --

9 A. They didn't make it sound like it was an emergency or
10 anything, like it was a danger. Because everybody went up nice
11 and calmly. It was -- like I said, I never really saw anybody
12 that was really frantic at any point.

13 Q. Okay. Were there any immobile passengers, like, let's say,
14 wheelchair-bound or walker or anything like that?

15 A. I don't think so. That's why -- I was talking to a few
16 people about that. I says, boy, we were lucky that we had nobody,
17 you know, with wheelchairs or walkers or anything. There wasn't
18 any that I saw. Whether there was -- but as far as what I saw, I
19 didn't see any of that.

20 Q. Okay. And so you did say that you smelled the smell of
21 electrical fire, burnt wire, burnt plastic, I guess?

22 A. Well, I smelled something like that. I --

23 Q. Different than a campfire?

24 A. Yeah.

25 Q. That's wood. That's a common smell. Did you ever see smoke

1 inside the main passenger area?

2 A. No. No.

3 Q. And how about getting off the boat? Was there -- who gave
4 the direction, the order, the instructions to jump off the boat?

5 A. That I have no idea, because, like I says, I was further back
6 so apparently they must have been up front when they said it. And
7 then people just kind of gathered and followed, so I really don't
8 know who said it.

9 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Did you hear someone say it though?

10 MR. LONGARELLO: No.

11 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Okay.

12 BY CWO [REDACTED]

13 Q. At any point did a crew member say there was a fire, you
14 know, abandon ship, jump off the boat, or did you kind of already
15 answer that?

16 A. Yeah, I kind of -- I mean, first of all, I'm kind of hard of
17 hearing. So if somebody said something up there, chances are I
18 won't hear it anyways. I mean, I'm not deaf but I can, you
19 know -- so if somebody said something, I might not even hear it
20 clearly. You know, I could misinterpret it or whatever.

21 Q. All right. So shifting gears to the main boat or the casino
22 boat --

23 A. Uh-huh.

24 Q. What are your duties there? What are your responsibilities?

25 A. Well, I'm a dealer, so I basically deal with all the

1 customers that are going to play blackjack or, you know, any of
2 the table games.

3 Q. Okay. In the event of emergency, are you -- what are your
4 responsibilities on the main boat?

5 A. Well, we would get the people from the top deck. Well, like
6 the middle deck, because the top deck is an open deck.

7 Q. Okay.

8 A. So from the casino floor, we would get them to go downstairs
9 to the main deck, which is where they would get off the boat.

10 Q. Okay. So you're kind of a crowd control? You direct
11 passengers --

12 A. Yeah.

13 Q. -- where to go? Do you wear a uniform?

14 A. Yes.

15 Q. What's your uniform consist of?

16 A. White shirt, black pants, a casino apron-like.

17 Q. A -- what are they -- a cummerbund?

18 A. No, it's not a cummerbund.

19 Q. Okay.

20 A. It's --

21 Q. An apron, I guess?

22 A. Yeah, we call them aprons.

23 Q. Okay.

24 A. Black shoes.

25 Q. And do you recall when the last time you went to a fire drill

1 on either boat?

2 A. Not offhand. I know we've had them.

3 Q. In your 9 years, do you know what kind of frequency?

4 A. That I can't say. I really don't know.

5 Q. Once a year, once every other year? You know, once a month?

6 I'm just --

7 A. No, not that often.

8 Q. If you could guess? Best guess.

9 A. Maybe a year, 2 years -- every year, every 2 years. Like I
10 said, I don't --

11 Q. And do you deal -- how frequently are you a dealer on board
12 the --

13 A. I work Saturday and Sundays.

14 Q. So you're a weekend dealer?

15 A. Yeah.

16 Q. What's a shift consist of?

17 A. Well, normally on Saturdays, I work from 3:30 to 1.

18 Q. 3:30 in the afternoon --

19 A. Afternoon until 1 in the morning.

20 Q. Okay.

21 A. And Sunday I work from 11 to 12; 11 in the morning to 12 at
22 night.

23 Q. Okay. Have you had any formal training for maritime
24 employment? Have you ever had a Coast Guard credential --

25 A. No.

1 Q. -- or went through a school for marine employment?

2 A. No.

3 Q. No, okay.

4 CWO [REDACTED] [REDACTED] I think I'm --

5 BY MR. [REDACTED]

6 Q. Good morning, sir.

7 A. Hi.

8 Q. I have a couple questions. Other than working for SunCruz,
9 any other maritime employment?

10 A. No.

11 Q. When you were on the outbound shuttle, do you remember where
12 you were seated?

13 A. I was in the front of the boat.

14 Q. Okay. So --

15 A. Right where the bar is there.

16 Q. In the main cabin area?

17 A. Yeah. Right here.

18 CWO [REDACTED] All right. So you're kind of pointing to --
19 what's this area called? Main deck bow area?

20 MR. LONGARELLO: I guess, yeah.

21 BY MR. [REDACTED]

22 Q. So you were closer to the port side, left-hand side?

23 A. Yeah.

24 Q. At some point you said that you saw some smoke coming off the
25 back side of the boat.

1 A. Yeah.

2 Q. Do you remember where that you saw it? What window were you
3 looking out of?

4 A. No, no. This is when I was up on the top deck.

5 Q. My apologies. Where did you see the smoke when you were on
6 the top deck?

7 A. It looked like it was coming up from the side, like somewhere
8 around here.

9 CWO [REDACTED] So you're kind of pointing towards the starboard
10 quarter, starboard quarter.

11 BY MR. [REDACTED]

12 Q. At one point you said you were on the port side of the vessel
13 and you had yourself, two other dealers and the galley girl.

14 A. Um-hum.

15 Q. Do you remember who the two other dealers were?

16 A. Yeah. Shelly Nitz, N-i-t-z, I think it is. And Debbie Boom,
17 B-o-o-m, and the galley girl is Cassie. I don't know what her
18 last name is.

19 Q. So 9 years with SunCruz?

20 A. Um-hum.

21 Q. Do you remember any of the other shuttle boats that they used
22 to have?

23 A. Sure.

24 Q. Collectively, on -- during your -- how many trips do you
25 think you would make in 1 year?

1 A. Well, now I only work -- like I say, I only work the
2 weekends, so you figure 4 a week times 52 is 208; right?

3 Q. Has it been the same way with the other shuttle boats or --

4 A. No, I used to work -- when we had the other boat, the bigger
5 boat, I used to work 5 days a week.

6 Q. Training, I would imagine at some point somebody made sure
7 that you knew the games that you're dealing and vetted you as a
8 dealer, or you received training on how to deal for those games.
9 Did you have any training with regards to the maritime operation
10 of the vessel?

11 A. I don't recall.

12 Q. Were there any protocols or instructions or procedures that
13 you were supposed to have with direction of passengers or care and
14 feeding of the passengers when they're on board the vessel?

15 A. You mean for an emergency?

16 Q. Yes, sir.

17 A. Well, our job was to get people off the -- that floor that we
18 worked on and get them down to the floor where the exits would be.

19 Q. Have you ever been in the engine room of this --

20 A. No.

21 Q. -- particular boat? Did you see any crew members open any of
22 the hatches to the engine room?

23 A. No.

24 Q. Do you know where those hatches are located?

25 A. I believe there's one right in front of a bar. I'm not a

1 hundred percent sure, but there is a hatch there.

2 Q. You didn't see anybody go into the engine room?

3 A. No.

4 Q. With regards to the engines, I mean, they make a distinct
5 noise when you're getting underway and you can tell when you're
6 going faster and slower. Can you describe or do you know if the
7 vessel was in idle or did it get up on plane during its outbound
8 transit?

9 A. I really don't pay any attention to that.

10 Q. Did you happen to see where the boat turned around?

11 A. No.

12 Q. Do you know or can you recall any other crew members or
13 passengers that jumped off around the same time that you did?

14 A. Well, the other crew, as far as the dealers, like I said, the
15 ones that were with me.

16 Q. Okay. Do you know what order they jumped off?

17 A. I was the first one.

18 Q. Okay.

19 A. Then it was Cassie. Then Shelly, and then Debbie.

20 Q. Any passengers that you saw jump off or any passengers
21 jumping off with you all?

22 A. Not that I can recall. Like I say, once the employees got
23 off, the girls got off, then I kind of started walking to the
24 front and then that's when somebody had called me to help that one
25 passenger.

1 Q. And you said if -- I'm sorry. You said you jumped off the
2 port side of the vessel?

3 A. The port side --

4 Q. Left side.

5 A. Yeah. You can see I go out on boats a lot, right. I do go
6 fishing though.

7 MR. [REDACTED] Thank you, sir.

8 Mr. Carlson?

9 BY MR. CARLSON:

10 Q. You're hard of hearing, you said?

11 A. Well, a little hearing loss, yeah.

12 Q. Might there have been direction or guidance given that you
13 might not have heard or is your hearing that, to that level or --
14 is that a chance?

15 A. I mean, it's possible. I mean, normally I would -- I have no
16 problem hearing you guys talking and, I mean, if somebody said
17 something away from me, I might not have heard it.

18 Q. And at what point did you leave the cabin area and go to the
19 above deck?

20 A. When they made the announcement to go up.

21 Q. Do you recall who made that announcement?

22 A. I'm not sure. It might have been the entertainer. I can't
23 say for sure though.

24 Q. Who is the entertainer?

25 A. Izzy.

1 Q. Izzy.

2 MR. CARLSON: Thank you.

3 CWO [REDACTED] I just had a couple follow-ups.

4 BY CWO [REDACTED]

5 Q. Any casualties or the boat ever have to turn around recently
6 and repair -- in other words, scheduled trips that were canceled
7 that you recall?

8 A. They have been canceled because not enough customers, but on
9 the days that I've been out, that I know of, none was ever for
10 maintenance.

11 Q. Okay. Do you recall any repairs on the vessel?

12 A. No.

13 Q. And last, did you take any pictures or video that day?

14 A. No. My phone was -- I jumped in the water with my phone in
15 my pocket.

16 Q. Were you able to save it?

17 A. No.

18 CWO [REDACTED] That's all I have.

19 (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 Stephen Longarello

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.



Sandra
Transcriber