

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

\* \* \* \* \*

Investigation of: \*

\*

FIRE ON BOARD THE *ISLAND LADY* \*

PORT RICHEY, FLORIDA \* ACCIDENT NO.: DCA18FM010

JANUARY 14, 2018 \*

\*

\* \* \* \* \*

Interview of: DEBORAH BLOOM  
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

<u>ITEM</u>	<u>I N D E X</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
Interview of Debra Bloom:		
By CWO [REDACTED]		4
By Mr. [REDACTED]		17
By Mr. Carlson		19
By CWO [REDACTED]		19
By Mr. [REDACTED]		21

I N T E R V I E W

1  
2 CWO [REDACTED] Good afternoon. My name is [REDACTED] [REDACTED] I'm  
3 with the U.S. Coast Guard. This is [REDACTED] [REDACTED] who is also with  
4 the U.S. Coast Guard. We're going to interview you this morning,  
5 and we're going to tape the interview just so that we don't have  
6 to write everything down.

INTERVIEW OF DEBRA BLOOM

7  
8 BY CWO [REDACTED]

9 Q. To get this started, can you tell me a description of your  
10 educational background and employment background?

11 A. High school, then started dealing. I've been dealing for  
12 almost 27 years.

13 Q. Twenty-seven years.

14 A. All Atlantic City until the past year.

15 Q. Okay. And I skipped a step. Your name?

16 A. Debra Bloom.

17 Q. And I assume you still live on [REDACTED]

18 A. Um-hum, yes.

19 Q. Okay. And so how long have you worked for SunCruz Casinos?

20 A. Since end of last January or beginning of February. I'm not  
21 sure if it was the last week of January or first week of February.

22 Q. Almost a year?

23 A. Um-hum.

24 Q. During that year have you -- has your position remained  
25 constant? Have you always been a dealer?

1 A. Yes.

2 Q. Okay. Have you had any other maritime experience? Ever  
3 employed on a vessel?

4 A. Yes.

5 Q. Which ones?

6 A. Sheepshead Bay in Brooklyn, New York. I think it was called  
7 the *Max 1*.

8 Q. *M-a-x 1*?

9 A. I think so, if I'm remembering right. It was a long time  
10 ago, '98, maybe.

11 Q. Okay. And was that a casino vessel also?

12 A. Yes. Around the same time they brought it to Fort Myers and  
13 I was on the same boat in Fort Myers, but only for a couple  
14 months. I think November to January. It was later named the *Big*  
15 *M*.

16 Q. Big M Casino?

17 A. Yes.

18 Q. Okay. And can you walk me through the events on 14 January,  
19 basically from the time you got on -- you got to work?

20 A. I got on the boat. We normally sit upstairs, but it was  
21 cold, so I went in the little front cubbyhole, little front  
22 cubbyhole where -- the counter's like here and then there's a  
23 little space behind it.

24 Q. So would it be right here?

25 A. Yeah, I had my feet sitting on the steps. And then me and

1 Steve -- I can't remember if we switched or not, because he wasn't  
2 comfortable sitting right there.

3 Q. All right. So you're pointing to the main deck starboard  
4 bow, looks like a stairwell, ladderwell area?

5 A. Yes.

6 Q. Okay. And this is a bar; is that correct?

7 A. It's a counter.

8 Q. It's a counter, okay. Okay.

9 A. Sitting there, playing on my phone. I heard them playing  
10 bingo. Next thing I knew they were saying everybody go upstairs.  
11 We all went upstairs.

12 Q. Did you know why you were going upstairs?

13 A. No. When I went up there, most of the people went to the  
14 front, like up in this area. I walked over here because I wanted  
15 to smoke a cigarette. I didn't want to be around all the people  
16 in case they didn't smoke. So I lit the cigarette. I only took a  
17 couple drags and I walked up to the ashtray to put it out because  
18 I didn't want to bother any non-smokers.

19 But when I was standing there, I saw just a little puff of  
20 smoke, so I looked over the side and saw a little bit of smoke.  
21 Didn't think it was any big deal. Went up, put my cigarette out  
22 and I sat down in the chair. Saw Tyler go by me, saw Shawn go by  
23 me. They went that way, then they came back this way. Went back.  
24 Next thing I knew they were saying to go down the front, the front  
25 ladder to jump.

1           When I was going down the ladder, the smoke went across me.  
2 I covered my face with my jacket, and the line was too long, so I  
3 squeezed to the side and jumped off the side.

4 Q.    Which side?

5 A.    The left side.

6 Q.    So the port side.  Where at?

7 A.    Where the little gate is, where they come on.

8 Q.    Okay.  And do you remember who you jumped with or who was  
9 before you or after you?

10 A     Cassie was sitting there and she was afraid of heights, so  
11 she was scared to jump.  So Steve went -- he squeezed by her and  
12 jumped down.  And I saw him go underwater, so I was thinking,  
13 well, maybe it's not as deep over there.  So I was going to go  
14 back towards the front, but saw that the line was still too long  
15 and I was like, no, I'm going to go here, just trying to coax  
16 Cassie into jumping.  So then Cassie went, then Shelly went, and  
17 then I went.

18 Q.    How deep was the water?

19 A.    I went underwater, but when I stood up it was only like to my  
20 waist.  And then I walked a few steps and -- well, walked a little  
21 bit and I was out of breath, just I guess the nerves, so I bent  
22 over just to catch my breath and I saw Steve and Jon trying to  
23 help Harold.  Then Steve came running over to me because he saw  
24 that I stopped and he's hollering at me, you can't stop, you can't  
25 stop.  And I'm like, I'm okay, I'm just catching my breath.

1           He's like no, you can't stop, and I realized he was telling  
2 me that because my feet sunk into the mud and then I couldn't  
3 walk. So he helped me get my feet out of the mud and I walked up  
4 and sat on a rock, was dry heaving. Didn't actually throw up,  
5 just kept dry heaving. And then they said to go out into the  
6 street, so I went out into the street.

7 Q.   Were you dry heaving because of your adrenalin or --

8 A.   The adrenalin, nerves. I don't know what it was, just --

9 Q.   And when you say Steve, do you mean Stephen Longarella?

10 A.   Yeah. I don't know how to pronounce the name. Yeah.

11 Q.   Okay.

12 A.   He walked me to the shore and then he went back in the water.

13 Q.   Did you know why you were jumping off the boat? I know you  
14 saw smoke. I mean --

15 A.   Oh, yeah -- no. Well, by that time -- and everything was so  
16 fast. Cassie was sitting there and I was thinking she couldn't  
17 see the flames. I mean, you could see all the smoke now. But I'm  
18 standing up and I'm seeing the flames getting closer. So we're  
19 like really trying to get her to jump, like there's no time, you  
20 got to go. And I saw the flames coming, I was just like, we got  
21 to hurry up, so we jumped. I mean, everything was so fast. I was  
22 in shock.

23           Like I said, going down the steps, the ladder steps. By then  
24 I -- you could see flames. You could see lots of smoke. So when  
25 I was going down the steps, I knew we were on fire.



1 Q. Okay. When you went over to smoke a cigarette on the -- this  
2 would be the starboard quarter of the vessel --

3 A. Um-hum.

4 Q. And you said you first saw smoke there.

5 A. Just --

6 Q. Could you tell where it was coming from? Was it coming from,  
7 let's say, the engine exhaust?

8 A. That's what I thought it was.

9 Q. Could it have been coming from these little ventilations?

10 A. It wasn't a whole lot of smoke yet.

11 Q. Okay.

12 A. And then one of the passengers said, oh, I thought you were  
13 going to jump. I'm like no, I was just looking to see what the  
14 smoke was.

15 Q. Um-hum.

16 A. And I didn't see what it was. So I backed up and I went and  
17 I put my cigarette out. Two deckhands went by, and then there was  
18 some more smoke. And then there was a lot of smoke when they said  
19 go down the ladder, because there was enough smoke that I had to  
20 cover my face, because I didn't want to breathe it. But from that  
21 little bit of time, I mean, it was just a lot of smoke.

22 Q. Okay. Did you ever hear the captain or crew? Did they say  
23 anything? Did they say what was smoking, what was causing the --

24 A. I didn't hear anything. I just remember saying -- telling us  
25 to go down and jump.

1 Q. Okay.

2 A. And I don't even know who I heard say it. I just know they  
3 said to go down the ladder and jump.

4 Q. Okay. All right.

5 A. Everybody was jumping off the front. I thought that line was  
6 too long so I squeezed around the ladder and came over to the  
7 side.

8 Q. Okay. Now I'm going to switch a little bit. We're going to  
9 talk about your role on the *Tropic Breeze*. So you say you were a  
10 dealer there?

11 A. Yes.

12 Q. Okay. So do you wear a uniform?

13 A. Yes.

14 Q. And what's that consist of?

15 A. Black pants, white shirt. But that day it was cold so I had  
16 a black sweater over my white shirt, and I had a black sweat  
17 jacket on.

18 Q. Okay. And as a dealer, what's your role? What are your  
19 responsibilities?

20 A. Deal the game.

21 Q. That's it? Okay. In the event of emergency, what would you  
22 -- what are your roles and responsibilities?

23 A. Didn't know I had any.

24 Q. Okay. Would a passenger ever look to you in the event of  
25 emergency?

1 A. I'm guessing they might have, but I didn't have my badge on  
2 yet.

3 Q. I'm talking about when you're dealing on the *Tropic Breeze*.

4 A. I think they would all look at the deckhands, because I'm  
5 just a dealer.

6 Q. Okay, okay.

7 A. I get asked questions and I try to know the answers, but I  
8 usually steer them to somebody that's been there longer. And  
9 usually if it's something about the boat, I steer them to the --  
10 one of the deckhands that would have a better answer to me.  
11 Because I've had people ask how deep is it, how far out are we?  
12 I'm like, I know I'm supposed to know this stuff but I don't know  
13 it.

14 Q. Okay.

15 A. But I've learned it -- I tried to learn it all my first  
16 couple weeks there.

17 Q. Right.

18 A. Over 9 miles out and it's not that deep. I don't know how  
19 deep, but it's not that deep. You can see the bottom.

20 Q. Okay. So in the event of an emergency and you were dealing,  
21 what would you do?

22 A. Put the lid on the game. That would be the only thing I  
23 would know is to close the game, put the lid on the game. That  
24 would be the only thing I would know, is to close the game. But  
25 there's no -- we were on the shuttle so there's no games there on

1 the shuttle, just waiting to get to the casino.

2 Q. Okay. Okay. So have you ever participated in a fire drill  
3 or a man overboard drill?

4 A. No.

5 Q. Okay. Do you know where the life jackets are kept on either  
6 boat?

7 A. Yes.

8 Q. Okay. Where?

9 A. In the benches?

10 Q. Of which boat?

11 A. The back benches of the shuttle.

12 Q. Okay. And so you're pointing to the upper deck back off --

13 A. There's like a bunch of benches here and they're in there.

14 Q. Okay, thanks. And what about on the *Tropic Breeze*?

15 A. They're all -- I don't know about all of them. There's a  
16 crate, you know, on that boat in the front underneath. They're  
17 all visible, and then there's a white, sort of like a bench. Like  
18 a tub.

19 Q. Like a deck box?

20 A. Yeah, deck box. There you go.

21 Q. Okay. Have you ever had any training on firefighting or  
22 abandon ship or what to do in the event of an emergency?

23 A. No.

24 Q. Did you suffer any injuries on the 14th when you jumped off  
25 or in the fire?

1 A. No. Just a bundle of nerves. Besides that, nothing.

2 Q. Okay. Did you happen to take any photos or videos?

3 A. Yes.

4 Q. That day?

5 A. In between my dry heaving I was snapping pictures.

6 Q. Could I see them? It looks like you have a LifeProof case  
7 too.

8 A. Yes.

9 Q. All right. So this is the first one?

10 A. That's the first one. I'm sitting on --

11 Q. Do you mind if I scroll that way?

12 A. Next one I think is like a quick second video. I didn't  
13 think it was working so it didn't stay on long. And that's  
14 more --

15 Q. Is your volume down? Is that why --

16 A. Yeah, probably.

17 Q. Oh, okay.

18 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: If I could ask a question? I see  
19 someone back there. Is that Harold being helped out of the water;  
20 do you know? Or do you know who that is in the water?

21 FEMALE SPEAKER: That's Harold right out there.

22 FEMALE SPEAKER: Harold's here.

23 FEMALE SPEAKER: Harold's right out there. He's turning in  
24 his medical bills.

25 FEMALE SPEAKER: Yeah. He's getting --

1 MS. BLOOM: Yeah, that's Harold. Because Shawn was -- that's  
2 Shawn helping Harold. And that is Jon helping Harold. Those two  
3 are helping him.

4 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Okay. Thanks.

5 CWO [REDACTED] Where is he now? Oh, right here?

6 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Yeah.

7 BY CWO [REDACTED]

8 Q. Yeah. That's Shawn?

9 A. Shawn and Jon.

10 Q. Is in the back and then Jon is in the front?

11 A. Jon's bending over here. They each at a wrist.

12 Q. Okay.

13 A. Originally it was Jon and Steve helping, but then Steve  
14 stopped and he came to get me and Shawn jumped in Steve's place.

15 Q. Were EMS or any sort of technicians or police there at this  
16 time?

17 A. No. I don't think so. They were just coming in as I was  
18 walking up to sit down, they were just getting there.

19 Q. All right. I should have just read the guy's jacket.

20 A. And they went -- after Jon helped Harold, there was a lady in  
21 the water, and Jon was trying to help her but he wasn't able to do  
22 it, and he said that the officers went and helped and he turned it  
23 over to them.

24 Q. Okay.

25 (Background conversation.)

1 BY CWO [REDACTED]

2 Q. So you stayed around a while?

3 A. No, some -- no, these I pulled off of the news clips.

4 Q. Okay.

5 A. I wasn't there for that.

6 Q. Where do yours stop? At the fire truck?

7 A. Yeah, I think the fire truck was the last one, because I  
8 couldn't get to the beach there. Yeah, because now I'm out at the  
9 street and I never went back to the beach. That's off of the --  
10 one of the news --

11 Q. Okay. Can I -- if I give you my number, can you sort of  
12 forward me those -- the pictures that you took and the video?  
13 Appreciate it.

14 CWO [REDACTED] Injury, casualty, video -- actually, I think I  
15 covered everything I wanted.

16 FEMALE SPEAKER: Jim, can you forward them to me?

17 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Is that Harold with the ball cap?

18 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Yeah.

19 BY CWO [REDACTED]

20 Q. Actually, I just have one other question.

21 A. I think I missed some so I'm redoing it.

22 Q. I have one, two, three, four, five.

23 A. What was your number again?

24 Q. Six. Area code [REDACTED].

25 A. Got that.

1 Q. [REDACTED]

2 A. There, now I got them.

3 Q. So I have seven plus the video.

4 A. Should be 12 all together, counting the video.

5 Q. Okay.

6 A. That's why I redid it.

7 Q. All right. So in the year that you've been on board, have  
8 you ever experienced where you were going out to the casino boat,  
9 either on the *Tropical Breeze* or the shuttle, and you had to turn  
10 around and come back for a casualty or just a cruise that was  
11 scrubbed?

12 A. Turn around and come back?

13 Q. Or canceled. Yes, ma'am.

14 A. Just when -- when was it, last week, we had something on the  
15 casino boat on the propeller. And it was the only time we  
16 actually turned around and came back.

17 Q. Okay. And do you remember what date that was?

18 A. No.

19 Q. Okay. Do you remember what was on that propeller or what the  
20 nature of -- or what the nature --

21 A. We were told it was a crab net or, at least -- I heard  
22 somebody say they thought it was a crab net.

23 Q. Okay.

24 A. I don't know who said it.

25 Q. Do you know who took the crab net or crab trap off the



1 propeller?

2 A. No.

3 Q. Okay.

4 A. They said they were going to have a dive team come out.

5 Q. Okay. Thanks.

6 MS. BLOOM: That's it?

7 MR. [REDACTED] Go round the table.

8 BY MR. [REDACTED]

9 Q. When you got underway, was there a brief talking about what  
10 to do in case of emergency situations? Was there an announcement  
11 to the passengers?

12 A. There usually is. I don't remember if there was, because I  
13 stopped listening to them. Like I said, I went into the little  
14 cubbyhole and just started playing the games on my phone. I do  
15 remember hearing bingo numbers. Normally the announcement would  
16 be before they started playing a game, so I'm guessing I just  
17 wasn't paying attention.

18 Q. Originally with the smoke you said there was not much smoke  
19 when you first observed it. Do you recall the color of the smoke  
20 when you first saw it?

21 A. White. There was just a little puff, and that's what made me  
22 look over.

23 Q. At some point you said you heard direction to go upstairs,  
24 and I think you stayed down and went to the back door to go smoke,  
25 and you saw Tyler and Shawn go by.

1 A. No. When I heard them say go upstairs, we all went upstairs.

2 Q. Okay.

3 A. And I went to the right side, took a couple drags of a  
4 cigarette, then I went out near the front where the ashtray is.

5 Q. Okay.

6 A. Put the ashtray. I sat down in one of the first seats, and  
7 that's when they went by that way and that way, and then back.  
8 Next thing I knew, they were saying to go down the front and jump.

9 Q. So Tyler and Shawn were coming across on the top of the  
10 vessel?

11 A. Yes.

12 Q. Do you know where Tyler --

13 A. Tyler came from the back first.

14 Q. Do you know where the engine rooms are in the vessel?

15 A. Under the floor.

16 Q. Do you know how to get into them?

17 A. A little hatch.

18 Q. Do you know how many hatches there are, one, two?

19 A. I think two.

20 Q. Have you ever had the opportunity to go -- have you ever had  
21 the opportunity to go into the engine room?

22 A. There would be no reason for me to.

23 Q. On the way out did you hear any changes in the engine that  
24 would lead you to believe the engine or -- pardon me -- that the  
25 vessel was going faster or slower on the way out?

1 A. I wasn't paying attention. Nothing caught my attention.

2 Q. Okay. Do you recall where the vessel turned around?

3 A. No.

4 Q. Anything with the engines, the pitch of the engines going up  
5 or down on the way back in?

6 A. I didn't notice.

7 BY MR. CARLSON:

8 Q. I'm Jim Carlson. Just by way of introduction, I'm  
9 representing Port Richey Casino, and they're a party in interest,  
10 so that's why I'm participating here.

11 I think you addressed this, but do you recall who -- which  
12 crew member told the people to go up topside?

13 A. Izzy, the entertainer.

14 Q. Okay. And at that point you had not seen any smoke --

15 A. No.

16 Q. -- correct? And to your awareness, was there anything wrong  
17 up to that point?

18 A. I knew something was wrong because we're not normally told to  
19 go upstairs, but I had no idea what was going on.

20 Q. But before you were told to go upstairs, there was no  
21 indication to you that there was anything wrong?

22 A. No.

23 Q. Okay. Thank you.

24 BY CWO [REDACTED]

25 Q. Who was directing the bingo?

1 A. Izzy.

2 Q. Izzy. And is he the only crew member or employee that's  
3 engaged in bingo?

4 A. The entertainers. He was the one for that day.

5 Q. Okay. I've never been on board the boat, but how does that  
6 look, the bingo? I mean, I picture, when I hear bingo, people are  
7 sitting around with cards, you know, trying to get a straight  
8 line.

9 A. Yeah.

10 Q. So, I mean, who passes out the cards?

11 A. I'm going to guess Izzy.

12 Q. Okay. And --

13 A I was sitting behind the counter on the floor and I just knew  
14 I was hearing bingo numbers, and then they stopped and he said we  
15 need everybody to go to the top deck.

16 Q. Okay. Is it something where -- I mean, could you estimate  
17 how many passengers are playing bingo at any given time?

18 A. It depends on how many people we have. Every day is  
19 different.

20 Q. Right. So I think there were 36 passengers on board. Would  
21 it be half? You'd just be guessing, I guess; right?

22 A. I'd just be guessing. Because, like I said, I went and I sat  
23 down. I couldn't see anybody. I just heard the bingo numbers.

24 Q. Okay.

25 A. I don't know how many people were already upstairs and how

1 many were actually in there, because when I got on I just went  
2 behind the wall and sat.

3 Q. Okay.

4 A. Some people stay inside; some go upstairs. I don't know that  
5 day what it was.

6 Q. Do the marine crew, are they engaged in the bingo in any way?

7 A. No.

8 Q. No? Do they hand out cards? Do they --

9 A. Not that I know of.

10 Q. Okay. So their attention isn't on bingo?

11 A. No.

12 Q. Okay. Thanks.

13 MR. [REDACTED] One follow-up.

14 BY MR. [REDACTED]

15 Q. Did you have the opportunity to observe any of the captain's  
16 actions during this time?

17 A. I don't remember seeing him.

18 Q. Okay. Thank you.

19 CWO [REDACTED] Thanks for your time.

20 MR. [REDACTED] Thank you.

21 MS. BLOOM: All done?

22 FEMALE SPEAKER: You're good.

23 (Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)

24

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 Debra Bloom

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 McCurdy  
Transcriber