

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

 IN RE: :
 :
 THE EL FARO INCIDENT OFF : NTSB Accident No.
 THE COAST OF THE BAHAMAS ON : DCA16MM001
 OCTOBER 1, 2015 :
 :

Friday,
November 20, 2015

Interview of: KATIE GRIFFIN

BEFORE:

BRIAN YOUNG, NTSB
CARRIE BELL, NTSB

This transcript was produced from audio provided by the National Transportation Safety Board.

APPEARANCES:

On Behalf of the U.S. Coast Guard:

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U.S. Coast Guard

1 P-R-O-C-E-E-D-I-N-G-S

2 MR. YOUNG: -- on how long your husband's
3 been working for TOTE and aboard the El Faro?

4 MS. GRIFFIN: Yes I believe he started
5 working for the El Faro, it was, I want to say --
6 actually yes. I can say it was in December. I'm
7 looking at his records, December 12th of 2014 he
8 started working for the El Faro.

9 MR. YOUNG: And he'd been with TOTE prior to
10 that or was that the first time?

11 MS. GRIFFIN: Yes. No, he was with TOTE
12 when -- well it used to be, I believe it was still
13 known as the Sea Star. It was the El Morro ship.
14 There was three steam ships and he worked for the El
15 Morro. And that was in 2009 until 2012.

16 MR. YOUNG: Okay. And I think, if I
17 remember right, they scrapped the El Morro, correct?

18 MS. GRIFFIN: Yes.

19 MR. YOUNG: Then was he always sailing as
20 first with TOTE?

21 MS. GRIFFIN: No, he was a third and a
22 second on there when it was the El Morro. But no, he
23 was just a third on there, sorry.

24 MR. YOUNG: Okay.

25 MS. GRIFFIN: And then he sailed as a

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1 second. And then went to a first. He went first I
2 think in like February.

3 MR. YOUNG: February of this year?

4 MS. GRIFFIN: Yes.

5 MR. YOUNG: Okay. And I know we've kind of
6 talked earlier that he had said some kind of on one of
7 the cable ships. Is there a reason he might have
8 looked for a different job with a different company?

9 MS. GRIFFIN: Yes. He didn't like that
10 whole being out there with like, like we were just
11 going to get married and we're going on a honeymoon and
12 stuff like that. And he didn't like the, like he had a
13 job you have to be out there for a while. And kind of
14 like that whole, I'm getting on this day and I get off
15 this day. He'd been overseas before that on the Red
16 Cloud. So he's been far away for a while. So we
17 wanted something for him to be close.

18 MR. YOUNG: Okay.

19 MS. GRIFFIN: Because he was in South Korea
20 and then he was over in Taipei, Guam and stuff like
21 that.

22 MR. YOUNG: Yes. That's a long ride to get
23 out there.

24 MS. GRIFFIN: Yes.

25 MR. YOUNG: And then while he was aboard El

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1 Faro, he started as a second and got promoted to first.
2 Was there any talk, do you know if there was a
3 possibility of going to the new ships, these LNG ships?

4 MS. GRIFFIN: Yes. He went for training in
5 April of this year. They pulled him off the ship and
6 sent him for training, for the first round of training
7 for the ship. I went with him.

8 MR. YOUNG: And were there others aboard the
9 ship that you think that were going as well? Or others
10 that maybe weren't selected? Did you hear anything
11 that --

12 MS. GRIFFIN: Rich Pusatere, he was there.
13 And I know Mitch (phonetic) was there for the training.
14 And I was told that when Rich was getting off, he was
15 supposed to be going to the second part of training. I
16 know that he was going to go. And I guess him and
17 Keith were supposed to be on the second ship. Like not
18 the Isla Bella, but the other one.

19 MR. YOUNG: Yes. And did Keith and Rich
20 work together a lot?

21 MS. GRIFFIN: Yes.

22 MR. YOUNG: And did they seem to get along
23 pretty well?

24 MS. GRIFFIN: Yes they did. Rich actually
25 trained Keith for the first job. But like, he taught

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1 him the first job before he, you know, got the
2 position. You know, he showed him how to do
3 everything. So they did get along very well. And he
4 got along very well with the Second Engineer as well.

5 MR. YOUNG: Okay.

6 MS. GRIFFIN: Same with How.

7 MR. YOUNG: Howie (phonetic), yes. Did it
8 seem that it was a good team there with those guys
9 working together?

10 MS. GRIFFIN: Yes.

11 MR. YOUNG: Or any complaints, issues?

12 MS. GRIFFIN: No, there was no -- the only
13 thing, there wasn't anything bad. That he would just
14 say he would get, that Rich had OCD and it could be
15 annoying sometimes. But he would say it in joking. He
16 would never say anything bad.

17 MR. YOUNG: Yes, that's what we've heard.
18 That he seemed to be very, very organized.

19 MS. GRIFFIN: Yes.

20 MR. YOUNG: And do you remember too if they
21 always went to a very normal rotation for the engineers
22 on El Faro? Was the 70 day on pretty regular?

23 MS. GRIFFIN: Yes. They were on kind of
24 like their set schedule.

25 MR. YOUNG: Yes. Okay. How about working

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1 with the Captain? Did he seem, I don't know if the
2 First Engineers on the ships interact with the Captain.
3 But did you ever hear any complaints about working with
4 the Captain?

5 MS. GRIFFIN: No, he didn't complain about
6 working with the Captain. I know that he had said, you
7 know, he had gotten a business card from him about, I
8 think it was hunting in Maine or something like that.
9 So they would communicate on like a personal level.
10 That's the only really thing, he's really much said
11 about the Captain.

12 MR. YOUNG: Okay. I'm from Maine too. I'm
13 up here in Maine right now and it's good hunting
14 season. So I think I'm wearing my orange up here. You
15 can tell when it's hunting season. And Keith had gone
16 to Mass Maritime, right?

17 MS. GRIFFIN: Yes, it was Mass Maritime.

18 MR. YOUNG: Okay. And do you have any
19 maritime background?

20 MS. GRIFFIN: No I do not.

21 MR. YOUNG: I know, I think I had seen an
22 email that you had sent to our Katy Chisom that there
23 were some concerns and emails between you and Keith
24 about the boiler and the boiler acting up.

25 MS. GRIFFIN: Yes. That Monday, it was

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1 something about bringing the boiler back online or
2 (inaudible). He said, it was something about bringing
3 a boiler back online and he won't be able to talk until
4 dinner time. And that was on the 28th.

5 MR. YOUNG: Okay. And did you, I know when
6 I was on a ship, I would not always tell my wife all
7 the bad things, you know, just so we kind of protect
8 her. But was there any other maybe concerns about
9 anything machinery related that he said was maybe a
10 piece of junk or a rust bucket? Or anything that he
11 relayed to you?

12 MS. GRIFFIN: On the, I think I have it in
13 an email on the 21st, I believe it was. He did, he
14 said this was the worst tour he's ever been on. And he
15 can't wait to get off because he was just working all
16 the time. He was always working. And I guess -- hold
17 on, let me get the squeaky toy for my dog.

18 Something about a compressor. He wrote
19 another morning, another piece of equipment down. Then
20 it's asking me about my day. And then responded and
21 said about a compressor pump not working and they had
22 to fix it. He had the compressor fixed and oil hose
23 blew.

24 MR. YOUNG: Okay.

25 MS. GRIFFIN: That's what he said the next

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1 day. And he also had said, I have couple texts from.
2 He was saying, you know, I'd get kind of upset because
3 I'm pregnant. You know, I've been sick. So I barely
4 get to talk to him than normal. And he's like
5 everything is breaking on here and I'm just working my
6 ass off. And you know, so he was, you know, he was
7 overworked.

8 And he had sent me a message to text one
9 day. It was like, I think it was 2:30, 3:00 and he
10 said, you know, now I've got to go do overtime. But
11 I've been up since, working since like 4:00 in the
12 morning or something like that, 2:00 in the morning.
13 And he was exhausted.

14 MR. YOUNG: And he was, was he a day worker
15 or did he stand a watch duty?

16 MS. GRIFFIN: I think he would do that too
17 sometimes.

18 MR. YOUNG: Okay.

19 MS. GRIFFIN: I know he did say there was a
20 couple of older -- when they had to work, he told me
21 there was a couple older guys that worked down there
22 that were like all nice guys. But they would just kind
23 of have them go do something and he would do it because
24 he said it would take them longer to fix things and it
25 was harder for them. So it was just easier if Keith

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1 would just do it.

2 MR. YOUNG: Yes. That's kind of a good
3 trait of a First Engineer, you know. Did it seem like
4 the company was pushing that ship to make schedules?
5 Did you ever hear anything like that, like we're really
6 under the gun?

7 MS. GRIFFIN: That I didn't. You know, he's
8 never mentioned to me about -- I know certain times
9 that like, he would call me before he would go to bed.
10 And then he'd say we're getting to leave at so and so.
11 And then he'd call me a little bit later and I'd be
12 like, I thought you were leaving. And he'd say no,
13 we're not leaving until so and so now. So I don't know
14 if that was through the port or what. But he never
15 really complained about getting a schedule.

16 MR. YOUNG: Okay. More you know, asking on
17 the deck side with the cargo and that kind of thing.

18 MS. GRIFFIN: Yes.

19 MR. YOUNG: And would they push the engineer
20 guys to, you know, really push the ship hard or try to
21 make schedule?

22 MS. GRIFFIN: No, I haven't heard him
23 complain about that part.

24 MR. YOUNG: Any chance, and I know the last
25 thing you want to see is pictures of the ship. But any

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1 chance you might have any pictures of any of the
2 machinery or equipment or lifeboats or anything that
3 might have been sent to you?

4 MS. GRIFFIN: Unfortunately, I don't.

5 MR. YOUNG: Okay. And you know, obviously,
6 you don't need to see pictures of turbines and boilers,
7 you know. But I suspect, you know, sometimes there
8 might have been a selfie taken or something that might
9 --

10 MS. GRIFFIN: No. He didn't let people that
11 worked for him, he didn't let them have their cell
12 phones on them.

13 MR. YOUNG: Okay.

14 MS. GRIFFIN: So he never took his cell
15 phone down to the engine room.

16 MR. YOUNG: Okay. And do you ever hear
17 anything on what the safety culture is like on the
18 ship? Did he say, you know, people are very, very
19 safety conscious and wearing PP, personal protective
20 equipment, and having drills all the time?

21 MS. GRIFFIN: As far as safety, he did, you
22 know, mostly would mention that -- because I would joke
23 with him about his hearing sometimes. Like, you're an
24 old man and deaf. You know, and he would say that they
25 have to wear those things in their ear and then the

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1 cones on them. I mean, the headphones.

2 And in regards to that, he also said that, I
3 guess when he was a second or third, they would have to
4 check the lifeboats.

5 MR. YOUNG: Yes.

6 MS. GRIFFIN: But other than that, he didn't
7 mention anything like that. I know like, when he went
8 for -- he would say that, he said it's weird the
9 company is, they spend money on certain things and
10 they're cheap on others. And he would say they'd skimp
11 out, like on the new Isla Bella ship. He was like,
12 they're skimping out on certain equipment.

13 MR. YOUNG: On the El Faro?

14 MS. GRIFFIN: Yes. Too when they went for
15 training for the Isla Bella. Because he said like, you
16 know, a lot of their equipment is -- and he would say
17 it's a 40 year old ship. It's an old ship and things
18 that they need to put, you know, change or upgrade I
19 guess, because they were pulling it out.

20 MR. YOUNG: And what we were told was that
21 the El Faro was slated to go up to Alaska after the
22 Isla Bella took over. Is that pretty much what you
23 heard as well?

24 MS. GRIFFIN: Yes, that's exactly what he
25 said.

1 MR. YOUNG: Okay. Do you know when it was
2 scheduled for Keith to transfer from the El Faro to the
3 new ship?

4 MS. GRIFFIN: No. And that's what he would
5 get so upset about. Because he repeatedly said -- we
6 sent them from my email. So you know, I repeatedly
7 sent the crewing manager emails asking about when the
8 second portion of the training was. Because he had a
9 problem, they didn't pay him for a while. So he had to
10 go to the Captain and have the Captain send an email to
11 try to get Keith paid for the training.

12 So but because he would repeatedly send to
13 Melissa when he was going to get paid and asked her
14 about the second portion of the training. Because you
15 know, obviously we need to know what's to happen next
16 with this job. So he didn't, he would never get a
17 response back.

18 MR. YOUNG: Do you know if he had heard if
19 anybody hadn't been picked to go over to the new ship,
20 in terms of the officers?

21 MS. GRIFFIN: I did hear, you know, that
22 there was people on there that were pissed that they
23 weren't getting picked. I know Howie was not picked.
24 I was told that there was a guy that had never sailed
25 as Chief Mate was going on as Chief Mate. And it was

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1 kind of basically how, if Melissa liked you, you know,
2 she kind of picked favorites type of issue.

3 So I guess that caused some animosity with
4 some people. Because there were some people that, you
5 know, I guess that had been working on the ship for,
6 you know, ten years, twenty years and they're not
7 getting picked. And they're taking, I was told, Keith
8 said that they want a young crew for the new ships. So
9 I guess, for longevity wise.

10 MR. YOUNG: Right. And how was the
11 selection done? Was there interview or was it --

12 MS. GRIFFIN: No. There was no -- he said
13 that he found out from Rich that they got a piece of
14 paper. I guess like an email sent over and saying --
15 like they didn't contact him. Rich said hey, you're
16 going to go for training. And he was like, I am? So
17 he had no idea. He was told basically, he said that
18 whoever kissed Melissa's ass the most.

19 MR. YOUNG: That's what we're trying to
20 establish, if there was any sort of criteria for how
21 people were selected to go to the new ships or not.

22 MS. GRIFFIN: He said like Howie worked, you
23 know, even said Howie, the second, had worked on that
24 ship for a long time. And that's why, you know, he
25 said he, Howie knew so much about the ship and that's

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1 why he was glad he had him a second. And liked working
2 with him on the rotation and stuff like that. But he
3 hasn't picked and I guess like, the young guy Mitch, he
4 was new. And you know, he hasn't sailed for very long
5 on there and he was picked.

6 So it was basically -- and that's what I, it
7 was basically how, you know, however much you got along
8 with Melissa.

9 MR. YOUNG: Got you. I know there are two
10 different Melissas there. Is it Melissa Clark?

11 MS. GRIFFIN: Melissa Clark, yes. The
12 Crewing Manager.

13 MR. YOUNG: Yes. And do you know if there
14 was, if you understood from any emails back and forth,
15 that there was a good relationship between the guys on
16 the ship and the rest of the company? Like in hearing
17 wise, the company comes all the time and we never seen
18 them or they do support us? Any indication?

19 MS. GRIFFIN: No. He just said that they
20 would come on the ship and stuff like that. But it
21 was, I don't really think they communicate -- he didn't
22 say it so much as they communicated with, you know, the
23 engineers. And I guess like Melissa Clark and a couple
24 other people would come on occasionally and -- I really
25 don't know what they were doing on the ship.

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1 Because the one day he had asked her,
2 because he wanted to talk to Melissa. And I think, I
3 forgot it was about. And I guess she was on the ship
4 with a couple of the executives. So I don't know.

5 MR. YOUNG: Okay. And just before I pass
6 the microphone to Carrie, anything else engineering
7 wise that you heard or wanted to share with us?
8 Whether it's through emails or communication when it
9 comes to boilers or the engine, issues, complaints,
10 concerns that you guys talked about. And not even just
11 the last few weeks, but over the last, you know, since
12 February when he was transferred over there.

13 MS. GRIFFIN: Just you know, like this one,
14 he said it was the worst tour he's ever been on, it's
15 the roughest, everything's breaking. And they're
16 getting ready to scrap the ship so they don't really
17 care. You know, he said they don't want to spend the
18 money to replace certain things, I believe is what he
19 said. Which I mean, I get it. It's like having a
20 crappy car and you're like, well I'm selling it
21 anyways.

22 MR. YOUNG: Right, right. Did he ever say
23 anything or mention about the Polish guys that were on
24 the ship?

25 MS. GRIFFIN: Yes, he did. He said there

1 was the riding gang was on there. And I guess, I
2 remember when they all went out to eat and they were in
3 port. And he said they were plenty nice guys but I
4 guess they were there doing some conversion or
5 something.

6 MR. YOUNG: Okay. Did he ever mention that,
7 you know, they had been down working on say the boilers
8 or any of the propulsion machinery like the turbines or
9 anything?

10 MS. GRIFFIN: No he didn't mention what
11 exactly they were doing.

12 MR. YOUNG: Okay. And do you know if he was
13 able to communicate with them, like speaking English?
14 Were they able to -- because they went to dinner, like
15 you said. Were they actually able to speak?

16 MS. GRIFFIN: Yes I think so. Because when
17 he came back, he called me and I asked him how it was
18 and he said it was good. And then he's like, he's
19 goes, yes they've been on there for a while. And he
20 goes they're funny guys. So there must have been some
21 form of communication that he was able to.

22 MR. YOUNG: Okay. That was one of the
23 concerns we had, is to see how much.

24 MS. GRIFFIN: I don't know exactly how much
25 English they knew. But I'm sure certain engineer crap

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1 they knew.

2 MR. YOUNG: Yes. And they were able to
3 order a good pizza or something.

4 MS. GRIFFIN: Yes. And went with the Chief.
5 I was told they went with, I don't know if Rich went
6 but I know -- actually I think Rich did go and Jeff
7 Mathias.

8 MR. YOUNG: Oh he did?

9 MS. GRIFFIN: I believe Howie went. I
10 believe Howie went to dinner as well. Actually I don't
11 know if that's true. I'm not 100 percent sure who
12 went. But I know the Chief went and Keith went and the
13 Polish guys went.

14 MR. YOUNG: Okay. Did they go out
15 occasionally for dinner, like in either Jacksonville or
16 Puerto Rico?

17 MS. GRIFFIN: Occasionally they would go,
18 yes in Jacksonville. Keith sometimes would go. His
19 brother worked in Puerto Rico. His brother is a
20 Custom's Agent. So sometimes he would go see him in
21 the day. Because they were over there at night really
22 so much. They would leave fairly early in Puerto Rico.

23 MR. YOUNG: Right, right. Never an
24 overnight so they would (inaudible).

25 MS. GRIFFIN: Yes.

1 MR. YOUNG: Okay. So from kind of
2 engineering, I think I asked you as many questions as I
3 can come up with engineering wise. Maybe Carrie has
4 some other areas?

5 MS. GRIFFIN: I do have, and I don't know if
6 this is even pertaining to the engineering part or
7 another part. But when, I remember I got freaked out
8 during Tropical Storm Erika. And I said to him, we
9 were sending text messages back and forth. And I said,
10 if the ship goes in a tropical storm, don't go.

11 And he was like, you need to calm down,
12 settle down. And he was telling me, these people,
13 they've been doing this run for 20 years. If there's a
14 hurricane, you go around. And that's what he had said
15 in the text messages. Like you go around, you don't go
16 straight through.

17 MR. YOUNG: That was during Tropical Storm
18 Erika?

19 MS. GRIFFIN: Yes. That was like August
20 21st, I believe I have on my texts.

21 MR. YOUNG: 8/21?

22 MS. GRIFFIN: (Inaudible) I never delete a
23 text or email. So I have all our emails and all of our
24 texts.

25 MS. GRIFFIN: Yes. And that's one of the

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1 areas we are looking into, is the decision making of,
2 you know, why the Captain would choose to go certain
3 routes. So that's another investigator from the
4 nautical side, from the deck side, he's another Fort
5 Schuyler graduate. But he's a retired Captain and he's
6 looking into those issues.

7 So you know, we're trying to investigate
8 each one of these, whether it's engineering or
9 decisions on weather. And what kind of weather reports
10 were they given? So that's definitely something. Even
11 that text between you and Keith about, you know, if
12 there's a hurricane, that's important information. So
13 thank you.

14 MS. GRIFFIN: Okay.

15 MR. YOUNG: Carrie?

16 MS. BELL: Yes. Hi Katie.

17 MS. GRIFFIN: Hi.

18 MS. BELL: Brian has covered quite a few of
19 the things that I had on my list. So thank you for
20 going through those and being patient with us. One of
21 the things you had mentioned was that there was, kind
22 of quoted that it was the worst he's ever been on. In
23 terms of just general complaints about the company, was
24 there anything that just kind of stood out as general
25 complaints? Or anything that he had considered maybe

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1 filing a grievance about or anything like that?

2 MS. GRIFFIN: He said certain things like,
3 it was about the new ship. It was always (inaudible)
4 like you know, the new ship, how they skimmed out on
5 certain things. Or it's things like when they went and
6 were reading through everything and going over the
7 training and I guess complaining about the new pay.
8 It's supposed to be better pay and it's the same like
9 pay you would have been getting on this ship or
10 something like that.

11 But yes, he just said certain things. You
12 know, it was a 40 year old ship and it's old.

13 MS. BELL: Yes. Can you go into -- what did
14 you say about the pay?

15 MS. GRIFFIN: He was saying that he thought,
16 you know, they were expecting the pay to be better for
17 the new ship and it wasn't. You know, from what they
18 saw on like a pay scale, that it wasn't going to be.
19 So he's like they skimp out on certain, they're a
20 little cheaper on this and that. You know, he would
21 say certain -- I don't know any engineering stuff.

22 MS. BELL: Yes.

23 MS. GRIFFIN: I went down to (inaudible)
24 with him because he went for the training for the two
25 weeks. So he would come back to the room and study for

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1 this and that, he would talk about it a little bit.

2 MS. BELL: Okay. So you mentioned the
3 training he had. That was a two week training that he
4 went to? And there was a second part of that as well?

5 MS. GRIFFIN: Yes. He went to the two week
6 training in April, they pulled him off the ship.

7 MS. BELL: During his tour?

8 MS. GRIFFIN: During his tour, yes.

9 MS. BELL: And then you mentioned that he
10 wasn't getting paid for that?

11 MS. GRIFFIN: Yes. He kept sending Melissa
12 emails about trying to get paid. And he even told me
13 that he wasn't the only one not getting paid. He said
14 there was, one time it took someone like seven months
15 or eight months to get paid for their training.

16 MS. BELL: Oh wow.

17 MS. GRIFFIN: But he kept sending Melissa
18 emails. So he finally, he wouldn't get a response. So
19 then he, you know, he went to the Captain and they
20 emailed somebody else in the company. And in
21 September, he got paid for his training in April.

22 MS. BELL: Okay. All right. Did they give
23 an explanation as to why?

24 MS. GRIFFIN: He sent me a picture of the,
25 he sent me a text of the email the Captain got from the

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1 company, like from one of the ladies, that he's like
2 finally making progress.

3 MS. BELL: Okay. No explanation as to why
4 it took them months to pay him?

5 MS. GRIFFIN: And one of the responses that
6 he got was, when he contacted someone else, they said
7 well you need to contact, you're supposed to contact
8 Melissa Clark. And he said, well I have been, I have
9 numerous emails. And they're like okay. And then
10 that's when Keith talked to Captain and the Captain
11 sent the -- or they sent the email through the Captain.
12 And then that's when Keith finally eventually got paid.

13 MS. BELL: Okay. So you also mentioned,
14 over time, and that he was really busy. Like busier
15 than usual on this trip.

16 MS. GRIFFIN: Yes.

17 MS. BELL: What was his average overtime?
18 What did he usually do for overtime? Do you know?

19 MS. GRIFFIN: I don't exactly know. I know
20 it was, he was over, he was down there fixing stuff all
21 the time. And that I think was causing all the
22 overtime because everything was breaking.

23 MS. BELL: Okay. And in general, you said -
24 -

25 MS. GRIFFIN: You know --

1 MS. BELL: Sorry, go ahead.

2 MS. GRIFFIN: I'm sorry, go ahead. No I
3 saying he just wouldn't tell me, you know, much more in
4 the emails and the texts and he only really wouldn't
5 say much. Just I've got to go back down to the engine
6 room, stopped to get a quick bite to eat and just
7 wanted to say I love you or this and that. Or hi, I've
8 got to go back down to work.

9 MS. BELL: So in the time that he was at
10 TOTE, that he worked for TOTE in the couple of years or
11 so, the last few months was busier than earlier?

12 MS. GRIFFIN: Yes.

13 MS. BELL: Did he seem to have a general --
14 what was his attitude from earlier during his early
15 employment until later? Was there a change in his
16 attitude with the company?

17 MS. GRIFFIN: No. You know, it's the same.
18 He was working and he was getting a little frustrated
19 not knowing about what was going on with the Isla
20 Bella. Because I know he got another job offer from
21 one of his old Chiefs on the Red Cloud to go back to
22 South Korea. And I was like, Keith we're going to have
23 a baby, you can't go over there.

24 And he's like, I know, I'm just getting
25 confused as what's going to happen. Like I haven't

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1 heard anything when I was going to go for the next part
2 of the training or on the next ship. You know, like he
3 said, I know I'm going on the next ship but I don't
4 know when.

5 And I think that was kind of what a lot of
6 people on there. They weren't sure who was going to go
7 and do, when they were going to scrap the ship, you
8 know, send the ship for conversion or go over to Alaska
9 run.

10 MS. BELL: So was he actually searching for
11 a new job at this time?

12 MS. GRIFFIN: No he wasn't. He was just
13 offered a job.

14 MS. BELL: Okay.

15 MS. GRIFFIN: And I think he said something
16 like, it sucks because I don't know what's happening
17 with this job on one of the emails he sent to me about
18 Mitch. You know, and then his old job Rick (phonetic)
19 had offered him a job. So he was like, I just don't
20 know what's going on with this job. So that's just
21 giving him confusion.

22 MS. BELL: Yes. So did he ever mention
23 anything about sleep? If he was having difficulty
24 sleeping, not having time to sleep, anything like that?

25 MS. GRIFFIN: He did say that he would

1 sometimes only get a couple hours of sleep. Or he
2 would, like sometimes like it would happen where he
3 would go back down to go to bed and he'd try to sleep
4 for an hour or two. And then they thought they were
5 leaving but they weren't. So he'd get up and then --
6 and he would get like an hour here, an hour there, that
7 type of thing. And that was normally on Fridays when
8 they would leave or Tuesdays.

9 But he would say that, you know, he's
10 exhausted, he's working his butt off. Because Keith's
11 kind of the type of person that also, when all this
12 stuff is breaking, he wants to make sure it's fixed.
13 You know, because if he's signing off on anything, he
14 doesn't want to sign off on things that he knows aren't
15 fixed.

16 MS. BELL: Right. So he feels a sense of
17 responsibility to make sure he can vouch for whatever
18 work is being done?

19 MS. GRIFFIN: Exactly.

20 MS. BELL: Right. Now do you --

21 MS. GRIFFIN: And especially with, you know,
22 him being new. Like you know, he was trying to be a
23 First Engineer. In February he, you know, he wants to
24 make sure that, you know, especially more so I believe
25 with him, he wants to make sure, you know, with too

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1 going to the new ship, there's no reason why he
2 wouldn't be able to go. Or stuff like that.

3 MS. BELL: Doesn't want to give them any
4 reason to not take him?

5 MS. GRIFFIN: Yes, exactly.

6 MS. BELL: Okay. Anything else in terms of
7 concerns about safety? You know, did he talk at all
8 about safety drills that they did on a regular basis?

9 MS. GRIFFIN: No.

10 MS. BELL: Okay.

11 MS. GRIFFIN: Not really. I know like, when
12 he was on the other ships he would talk more about it.
13 But I haven't, I didn't really, he never really
14 mentioned much for safety training on this ship.

15 MS. BELL: Okay. And you mentioned the
16 Tropical Storm Erika. Did he ever any, did he ever
17 talk to you about concerns about going out in weather?
18 I know you said that he said we've been doing this for
19 20 years. But were there any times that you recall
20 that they were going into bad weather? Or they were
21 discussing going into bad weather and there were
22 concerns about that?

23 MS. GRIFFIN: Yes. And he's mentioned
24 before they've gone out and like storms and stuff like
25 that. But he's like, it's just going to be snotty out.

1 That's what he used to say. But this last one, with
2 Erika, I was the one that kind of stressed about it.
3 Because you know, I was laying in bed and I'd been sick
4 so I had been watching TV. I'm trying to see my text,
5 what he said.

6 He had something about, you know, we know,
7 we've been doing this run for, they've been doing this
8 run for 20 years. If there's a storm, you go around
9 it. And then with this, that night, the night that he
10 left on Tuesday, he sent me an, we were talking back
11 and forth in an email. And he said it's going to be
12 stormy out, I'm probably not going to get much sleep, I
13 love you.

14 MS. BELL: And that was the Tropical Storm
15 Erika, right? The 21st you said?

16 MS. GRIFFIN: No. That was the Tuesday on
17 the 30th.

18 MS. BELL: Okay.

19 MS. GRIFFIN: That was the last, that was
20 Wednesday night actually. That was the 30th of
21 September.

22 MS. BELL: Okay.

23 MS. GRIFFIN: That was the last time we
24 talked.

25 MS. BELL: Okay. I don't think I have

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1 anything else at the moment. I do have a question
2 about your text messages. Do you mind sharing those
3 with us? I don't know if that's a possibility.

4 MS. GRIFFIN: Yes, that's fine.

5 MS. BELL: Yes?

6 MS. GRIFFIN: Yes. I'm trying to actually,
7 I'm going through it. Yes, what he says was, I said
8 there's that storm is tropical 3, hurricane 3. I hope
9 it's not going to affect you. And he says, yes we'll
10 be going near it next week. And I said I don't like
11 that at all, don't leave port if it becomes bad. And
12 he says, we don't know, might just slow into it.

13 You know, because he said that they would,
14 that's what they would do in the rain storms, they'd
15 slow into it. And he says won't know until at least
16 Monday. And then I said, slow into it, that's nuts,
17 don't freak me out, don't go if they know the storm is
18 coming. He said they know what they are doing on here.
19 And I said I hope so, no job is worth your life. And
20 he said I know, settle down. And I said I can't help
21 it, I'm pregnant and I get emotional and I'm worried.

22 MS. BELL: That's okay.

23 MS. GRIFFIN: And he said, yes well this
24 ship's being doing this run for almost 20 years. If
25 there's a storm, you go around it. And I said or don't

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1 go at all. And he said I've got to go back to work, I
2 love you. That's funny. You know, when he said it was
3 going to be stormy on this one, I thought the same
4 thing.

5 MS. BELL: Right.

6 MS. GRIFFIN: He was just going around like
7 they would normally do. And that's why when I got, you
8 know, when they said, the company said the Captain had
9 a sound plan. And I looked at, my friend Charlie
10 (phonetic) told me about (inaudible). So I looked at
11 it and I was like, well it doesn't look like they
12 changed anything except going through their same run.

13 MS. BELL: So when you heard him say a sound
14 plan, did you think that didn't sound right to you?

15 MS. GRIFFIN: Well the first time I was
16 listening to it and then when I talked to Charlie, he's
17 like well go on (inaudible) and see what they -- he
18 goes, maybe they went, I think it's what he called a
19 hole in the wall and are hiding, you know, hiding there
20 or whatever. And when he went on it and then told me
21 about it, he's like, he goes it looks like this is the
22 same run. He goes it doesn't look like they altered
23 anything.

24 MS. BELL: Sorry to make you walk through
25 that. I apologize for that.

1 MS. GRIFFIN: That's okay.

2 MS. BELL: I really don't have anything else
3 that I can think of at the moment. So I'm going to
4 pass it on to [REDACTED] Go ahead [REDACTED]

5 MR. [REDACTED] Hi Katie. This is [REDACTED]
6 [REDACTED] with the Coast Guard.

7 MS. GRIFFIN: Hi.

8 MR. [REDACTED] You know, the text message or
9 the communication you had that talked about when they
10 departed on August 21st. You know, there was an
11 exchange you had that was related to Tropical Storm
12 Erika. Now just so you know, on that particular
13 voyage, the ship did go around the storm. It went down
14 between Florida and the Bahamas and then cut north of
15 Florida, north of Cuba and went into San Juan.

16 MS. GRIFFIN: Yes and that's why I was
17 confused on why they didn't do it this time.

18 MR. [REDACTED] Right.

19 MS. GRIFFIN: When they (inaudible), like
20 with the sound plan. I'm like the sound plan was the
21 same.

22 MR. [REDACTED] Right. So is there any
23 communication that you might have that maybe talks
24 about that in any detail? Like where Keith might have
25 said well this time we're going around the storm or

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1 we're going around the storm for a particular reason?
2 We're trying to understand, like you just mentioned,
3 why they didn't go around Joaquin down in the same
4 general area.

5 MS. GRIFFIN: Unfortunately, I don't.

6 MR. [REDACTED] Okay.

7 MS. GRIFFIN: I've got, I save all his
8 emails, it's stupid. It's kind of like how we
9 communicated. So I have the emails when he was on the
10 Red Cloud. And when this whole thing happened, I went
11 back and tried to read all of our emails. Just the
12 last thing that was on the 30th, we're talking about
13 our day and back and forth. And last thing was, he
14 said just had dinner and it'll be a stormy night so I
15 probably won't get much sleep. Did you go see the
16 rental yet and see how it looks? I love you.

17 And he didn't mention anything about the
18 ship or anything like that. Like where they were going
19 --

20 MR. [REDACTED] Okay. If you could at some
21 other point, you know, take a good look through your
22 emails. Because we're particularly interested in the
23 late August voyage where they did go around. And
24 anything that you find would be very helpful for us.
25 Because we're trying to understand why they did it

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1 there and they didn't do it here. And it was the same
2 Captain aboard. So you know, some other time when you
3 get a chance, it would be very, very helpful for us.

4 MS. GRIFFIN: Okay. I know that the whole
5 Erika thing, that was on the 21st. And then -- I'll
6 definitely try to go through and look at all those.

7 MR. [REDACTED] Okay. Thank you very much.
8 So you know, on this particular voyage he sailed with
9 Captain Davidson. Is there a chance that you would
10 know, you know, when you talked, if Captain Davidson
11 was a different kind of skipper than the other skippers
12 of the ship? Did Keith make any comparisons about
13 Captain Davidson versus the other Captains like Captain
14 Axelrod?

15 MS. GRIFFIN: Not really. He would, you
16 know, he did mention that but he never mentioned their
17 names. He'd just say one, that you know, one Captain
18 is not as hot headed as the other or something like
19 that. He said one time -- but that's all he said.
20 He's never mentioned any names to me on the Captains.
21 He mostly talked about, you know, would communicate
22 when he would talk about people on the ship, it was
23 with the engineer guys because that's who he worked the
24 closest with.

25 MR. [REDACTED] Okay.

1 MS. GRIFFIN: So he never really did
2 communicate as far as which Captain he like better or
3 this and that. I know they spoke on personal level
4 because he took a picture of, on his old phone you
5 know, we had this scanner thing of Mike's business card
6 for hunting. And I guess he did that on the side or
7 something like that, the hunting guide.

8 MR. [REDACTED] Would you that, just based on
9 your conversations, that the El Faro was a happy ship
10 at the time of this voyage?

11 MS. GRIFFIN: I wouldn't say that he liked
12 the guys they worked with. But I think they were all
13 working so much and there was all these things going
14 wrong with it. So I do think they were all tired. You
15 know, Keith, you know, he was like I was like I can't
16 wait to be gone, getting down in the countdown. Just
17 he wanted to get off the ship.

18 MR. [REDACTED] And so, as far as the
19 uncertainty and frustration with the new assignments
20 and stuff, do you think that contributed to just a
21 climate aboard the ship, the working climate?

22 MS. GRIFFIN: I think so. I think you know,
23 when things are constantly breaking down, you're
24 exhausted and it kind of stresses you out.

25 MR. [REDACTED] And were there any, did he

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1 mention any specific personnel issues on the ship?
2 Other than, you know, just that generally people being
3 tired or anything like that.

4 MS. GRIFFIN: No. He didn't really complain
5 about anybody on the ship. He did say there was a
6 couple, like not the engineers themselves, but a couple
7 of the helper people, like some are older and they
8 don't really, they take longer, they don't really get
9 it. He said there was a new guy on the ship, they just
10 got a new guy on the ship or something like that.

11 So I think that kind of escalated Chief's
12 work. Because they said he likes to make sure if he's
13 signing off on something, it's done right.

14 MR. [REDACTED] How about, did he ever talk to
15 you about his job evaluations? We understand that
16 people were evaluated on an annual basis. Did he ever
17 talk to you about his thoughts on that?

18 MS. GRIFFIN: Yes. His first, I remember he
19 got -- when I picked him up from Jacksonville he was
20 kind of pissed at Rich. Because his first engineer
21 evaluation, he told me that Rich said something like he
22 needed to work on something. Or he didn't give him as
23 good evaluation as he thought he should have and that
24 he was still treating him like a second. And that's
25 why he was mad about his evaluation.

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1 He's like, I still think he's looking at me
2 as a second in his eyes. And I'm not supposed to be
3 doing these second jobs but he's complaining that I'm
4 not doing those jobs. So I remember he got really
5 pissed about that on his way home. Not really pissed,
6 but he was pissed. You know like, he wants to have
7 good evaluations.

8 MR. [REDACTED] So that would be early this
9 year when he was promoted to first, right?

10 MS. GRIFFIN: Yes, that was after his first
11 tour being the first.

12 MR. [REDACTED] And you know, I get evaluated
13 from my job sometimes. If I don't like my evaluation,
14 I sometimes say that they're meaningless and don't make
15 a difference anyway. What were Keith's thoughts? Did
16 those evaluations mean something with the company?

17 MS. GRIFFIN: I don't know if so much they
18 mean something. It's just they meant more to Keith
19 than -- you know, like anybody, you think you're doing
20 a great job. You know, and then you get a bad
21 evaluation. You're like, what do you mean? I'm
22 working my butt off. You know, so I think he was more,
23 he was upset because he still thought that Rich was
24 looking at him as a second and not evaluating him as a
25 first. And he said Rich had said to him, well I didn't

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1 get a good my first engineer job, I didn't get a good
2 review. And then Keith was like, well I hope he's not
3 doing that to me because he didn't get a good review.

4 And that kind of was it. You know, that was
5 kind of -- it didn't ruin our trip home or anything.
6 He was like all right, he was done with it. I don't
7 know if it meant anything with the company. I don't
8 know if it made Keith made because he was worried about
9 going on, you know, on the new ship, if that would
10 affect it. I don't know. But it didn't because, you
11 know, he was still going to go on the other ship.

12 MR. [REDACTED] I understand. How about, I
13 know you mentioned that he didn't really talk too much
14 about the weather. Did he ever talk about, you know,
15 we lost some cargo, we had some cargo damage, the ship
16 rolled really bad? Anything related to the weather in
17 relation to the actual ship handling things?

18 MS. GRIFFIN: Not so much. I do know he
19 said, you know, one time before because he said --
20 because I was asking questions about it. And he says
21 yes, you know, we lose cargo all the time. So I was
22 like, really? So that was kind of weird and
23 fascinating to me at the same time. But I said, do you
24 guys go back and get it? And he's like no. But other
25 than that, he didn't say oh we lost some cargo today.

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1 MR. [REDACTED] And nothing about like, how
2 the ship rode? Like I can't even stay in my bunk, you
3 know, people are getting knocked down by the pounding
4 of the ship or anything like that?

5 MS. GRIFFIN: He had said before, because
6 I've asked, you know, when it's stormy out, I said how,
7 you know? And he's like no. He says well the ship
8 rolls. He was like, you know, it's like it's hard to
9 sleep. And I'm like oh I thought that was scary. But
10 he has said the ship would roll, you know, when you're
11 trying to sleep.

12 MR. [REDACTED] And then talking about those
13 same kind of things, did he ever talk about how hot it
14 was in the engine room?

15 MS. GRIFFIN: Yes.

16 MR. [REDACTED] Could you talk about that a
17 little bit?

18 MS. GRIFFIN: Yes. He said that he would go
19 through sometimes like three shirts a day. I always
20 packed his sea bag. So when I'd come home and like, I
21 throw out all his socks. And I'm like just get rid of
22 those and his old shirts, work shirts. Because I just,
23 I knew it was because he would go through. And I had
24 to pack a ton because he would sometimes go through
25 three of them a day. And he would say how hot it was.

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1 He said, like 134 degrees in the engine room. So he
2 would go to the shower, change, and then go back down.

3 MR. [REDACTED] And do you ever remember him
4 saying anything they did to maybe reduce the heat in
5 the engine room so it wasn't quite so hot?

6 MS. GRIFFIN: No.

7 MR. [REDACTED] And then, I know we talked
8 about it before but the schedule that they were on.
9 Did he ever talk about like pressure the engine room
10 gang would get to keep the plant running? I know
11 you've already said they fixed a bunch of stuff and
12 things kept breaking. But anything about like pressure
13 from some about like the commercial pressure to keep
14 the plant running and keep the ship moving?

15 MS. GRIFFIN: No he didn't.

16 MR. [REDACTED] And then, did he keep any kind
17 of like -- a lot of people keep like a green book that
18 has all their personal notes in it. Like ship pilots
19 record every single trip they make so they can recall,
20 you know, what they did. A lot of us, you know,
21 mariners keep like our own personal record book. Did
22 Keith do that?

23 MS. GRIFFIN: I know that he would, he kept
24 a port log on there. But he would also, he did put on
25 his laptop that he brought with him. He would write

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1 notes because when he was home doing taxes and stuff
2 like that, he would go to the port log. And then he
3 would go onto like his, he'd have like a spreadsheet
4 that he would write things down that I guess would help
5 him remember what days, stuff like that. So I know he
6 did take notes. But obviously, that's on the ship.

7 MR. [REDACTED] That wouldn't be backed up
8 anywhere at home in the cloud or anything like that?

9 MS. GRIFFIN: Unfortunately not.

10 MR. [REDACTED] And then just my final
11 question, when you communicated back and forth, you
12 were using the ships email address? Or did you have
13 your own sort of a cell phone, cellular account or
14 wireless account?

15 MS. GRIFFIN: It would depend. Mostly yes,
16 it was mostly, he would use the engineers email. The
17 firsteng.whatever@globalmail.com. Because we would
18 talk every day. So he was only in port Tuesdays, like
19 Monday afternoon, Tuesday and then Friday.

20 MR. [REDACTED] So he would use that while he
21 was at sea and communicate brief messages back and
22 forth?

23 MS. GRIFFIN: Yes.

24 MR. [REDACTED] Okay. I can't think of
25 anything else. I thank you very much Katie for sharing

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1 this information with us. And I'll turn it back over
2 to Brian.

3 MS. GRIFFIN: Okay. Thank you.

4 MR. YOUNG: Yes, thanks Katie. And I know
5 we've all asked you a ton of questions. But I just
6 didn't know if you had anything, any more information
7 that we haven't asked you or if you had any questions
8 for us?

9 MS. GRIFFIN: I do have two questions. One
10 was, and it may not pertain to what you can tell me or
11 this and that. But I know that CBS was on the ship
12 with, for like the 60 minutes for like the interview
13 thing. And I'd like to know if the family is going to
14 see any images that CBS may have before we have to see
15 in on TV?

16 MR. YOUNG: I'll have to check about that.
17 I know when NTSB gets any information, whatever video
18 or pictures of whatever we receive from us will go to
19 the families first.

20 MS. GRIFFIN: Okay. Because I don't want to
21 be sitting there watching --

22 MR. YOUNG: No.

23 MS. GRIFFIN: No?

24 MR. YOUNG: But I will run it through our
25 public affairs department and probably have Katy

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1 discuss that with you. But I'll make sure that they
2 are aware of that and make sure that the families are
3 notified. But I do know that's our policy, is any
4 information before it is released to the public will
5 absolutely go through the families.

6 MS. GRIFFIN: Okay. And my other question
7 is, and it was told that it wasn't true but I don't
8 know. There was a news article from, saying that the
9 Emerald Express heard the radio conversations between
10 the ship and the Coast Guard saying that they were
11 going to abandon ship.

12 MR. YOUNG: Yes I saw an email about that.
13 That someone, and I don't know who brought that to the
14 Coast Guard's attention.

15 MS. GRIFFIN: I emailed Katy and I wanted to
16 know. But you know, I was told by someone that it
17 wasn't true. But I just wanted to know, like again.

18 MR. YOUNG: What I have heard and what we
19 have heard is that the Coast Guard was in communication
20 with the Emerald Express and they specifically asked
21 them to try to get hold of the El Faro. And I don't
22 think they were able to. But there is no, we have no
23 information that they actually made that indication.

24 MS. GRIFFIN: Okay.

25 MR. [REDACTED] And this is [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

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1 Also just so you know, that the nautical operations,
2 the NTSB is following that down to determine whether
3 those statements are correct. And I believe they've
4 scheduled some interviews, maybe telephonic interviews.
5 But the point is is that they'll find out if that's
6 true information or not.

7 MS. GRIFFIN: And I also have one other
8 thing. I want to know like, we were told at the family
9 meeting that when the El Faro last communicated, the
10 Captain called and they missed his call and it went to
11 voicemail. And then one other piece of paper says that
12 it went to a call center. So I want to know, did it go
13 to a call center and someone talked to them or did it
14 go to a voicemail?

15 MR. YOUNG: It was both. And that was, I
16 think we did -- it might have been a little confusing
17 because it does sound confusing. But he initially did
18 call the company and went to a voicemail. So then the
19 Captain called the call center. And while they were
20 attempting to reach the company, the operator did ask
21 what is the nature of your call? And at that point, he
22 explained the nature of the call and then they did
23 connect him to the company. So he did actually speak
24 with the company. But in the meantime, while he was on
25 hold, the Captain did discuss with the operator the

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1 fact that they had a list and that there was a hull
2 breach and that the scuttle had popped open.

3 MS. GRIFFIN: That sounded different from
4 what we were told. We were told there was a voicemail
5 they missed and when they called back, they weren't
6 able to get hold of them.

7 MR. YOUNG: It was a voicemail. And then he
8 used a different number and then did get hold of the
9 company, the same guy he was trying to get hold of, the
10 designated person. So it is true what they said. It's
11 probably a little confusing. But you know, again, he
12 called, the phone rang, he left a voicemail. And
13 within seconds, he called the emergency call number.
14 And that is their job, is to transfer him to the
15 company in order. And the first guy in that order was
16 the DP who the Captain had initially called. And then
17 they were in communication. They did talk. And we do
18 not have the recording of that conversation
19 unfortunately.

20 MS. GRIFFIN: Okay.

21 MR. YOUNG: What you were told is accurate,
22 it might have just been a little confusing.

23 MS. GRIFFIN: Okay. And if I have any more
24 emails or texts pertaining to that August tropical
25 storm, who would I send them to?

1 MR. YOUNG: I think what I was going to say
2 too, I have your email (inaudible)?

3 MS. GRIFFIN: Correct.

4 MR. YOUNG: What I'll do is I'm going to
5 send you an email from my NTSB account. And I'm going
6 to list [REDACTED] [REDACTED] email, Carrie Bell's email, and
7 my email. I'll put all three of our emails in the body
8 of the note to you. And if there is anything, maybe
9 you could communicate with us. And if you have any
10 more information or any questions, you'll have a point
11 of contact in addition to Katy Chisom's.

12 MS. GRIFFIN: Okay. Sounds good.

13 MR. YOUNG: And if you're more comfortable
14 just dealing with Katy, she has the ability to get in
15 contact with us too. But I just figure instead of
16 handing you a business card, I'll give you electronic
17 contact with our phone numbers and our email addresses.

18 MS. GRIFFIN: That sounds good.

19 MR. YOUNG: And if there's else, you know,
20 in the next few days and weeks or months, whatever, you
21 need to get hold of us again please feel free to call
22 us or Katy. I know Katy has been very good about
23 getting hold of many of the family members.

24 MS. GRIFFIN: If I go through some emails
25 and there's some prior to like his last tour, would you

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1 want to know that information too? Or just this tour?

2 MR. YOUNG: No, anything that would be, you
3 know, relevant to, you know, weather or ship condition.
4 And again, if there's a chance there's a picture of
5 anything. But yes, that would be great.

6 MS. GRIFFIN: Okay.

7 MR. YOUNG: And I can't tell you how much we
8 appreciate the time. It's not an easy task to talk to
9 us but you've really done a great job and you've really
10 given us a lot of very, very good information.

11 MS. GRIFFIN: Okay. Thank you.

12 MR. YOUNG: Anything Carrie?

13 MS. BELL: No that's it. Thank you so much
14 for taking the time to talk to us.

15 MS. GRIFFIN: You're welcome. Thank you.

16 MR. YOUNG: And [REDACTED]

17 MR. [REDACTED] Once again Katie, on behalf of
18 the Coast Guard, thank you very much.

19 MS. GRIFFIN: Appreciate it, thank you.

20 MR. YOUNG: And if you don't have anything
21 else Katie, I think we kind of completed our interview.
22 But again, please feel free to contact us or Katy
23 Chisom at any time.

24 (Whereupon, the above-entitled matter went
25 off the record.)

C E R T I F I C A T E

MATTER: The El Faro Incident
Interview of Katie Griffin
NTSB Accident No. DCA16MM001

DATE: 11-20-15

I hereby certify that the attached transcription of page 1 to 47 inclusive are to the best of my professional ability a true, accurate, and complete record of the above referenced proceedings as contained on the provided audio recording; further that I am neither counsel for, nor related to, nor employed by any of the parties to this action in which this proceeding has taken place; and further that I am not financially nor otherwise interested in the outcome of the action.



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