

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of: *

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CAPSIZE AND SINKING OF STRETCH DUCK 7 *

ON TABLE ROCK LAKE, BRANSON, MISSOURI, * Accident No.: DCA18MM028

JULY 19, 2018 *

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Interview of: TOMLYN McDONALD

Passenger

Cox Medical Center
Branson, Missouri

Friday,
July 20, 2018

APPEARANCES:

SGT. JASON TRAMMELL
Missouri State Highway Patrol (MSHP)

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By Sergeant Jason Trammell		4

I N T E R V I E W

(8:05 p.m.)

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3 SGT. TRAMMELL: All right. Today is 7/20/18. I got about
4 2005 hours. We are in a lobby at Cox, Branson. And with me is
5 Tomlyn R. McDonald. This is in regards to the duck sinking on
6 yesterday.

INTERVIEW OF TOMLYN McDONALD

BY SGT. TRAMMELL:

9 Q. And what is your date of birth?

10 A. It's [REDACTED]

11 Q. [REDACTED]

12 A. That's correct.

13 Q. And what is your current address right now?

14 A. [REDACTED]

15 Q. [REDACTED]

16 A. [REDACTED]

17 Q. [REDACTED].

18 A. Correct. [REDACTED] --

19 Q. In [REDACTED]

20 A. -- [REDACTED]

21 Q. [REDACTED]

22 A. Yeah. [REDACTED]

23 Q. And what is your phone number?

24 A. Area code is [REDACTED]

25 Q. All right. Tomlyn R. McDonald.

1 And tell me, who are you married to, and who's your children,
2 or, that was there and stuff like that.

3 A. All right. My husband is Dustin McDonald. He wasn't
4 present.

5 Q. Dustin wasn't there. Okay.

6 A. No. But my daughter, so my daughter, she's 11.

7 Q. Okay. Who's your daughter?

8 A. ██████████

9 Q. ████████████████████

10 A. Um-hum.

11 Q. And anybody else?

12 A. And my son, ██████████, ██████████

13 Q. And then your other -- you don't have to get everybody, but
14 just kind of who else was there, as far as that goes?

15 A. Okay. So everyone -- I was my mother, Ronita.

16 Q. Mother, Ronita.

17 A. And my sister, Tiffany; brother-in-law, Shayne.

18 Q. And that's who we just met right there, right?

19 A. Correct.

20 Q. Shayne. Okay.

21 A. And then they have three, three children.

22 Q. So is that -- Tiffany and Shayne do?

23 A. Tiffany and Shayne. Um-hum.

24 Q. And who do they have?

25 A. And that's Talyssa, the one you just spoke with.

- 1 Q. Talyssa, T-a-l-y-s-s-a?
- 2 A. s-s-a. And [REDACTED]
- 3 Q. [REDACTED]
- 4 A. [REDACTED] And [REDACTED], [REDACTED]
- 5 Q. [REDACTED]
- 6 A. Correct.
- 7 Q. [REDACTED]
- 8 A. [REDACTED]. And we have [REDACTED] and [REDACTED].
- 9 Q. [REDACTED]
- 10 A. And they're both [REDACTED] years old.
- 11 Q. All right. So 1, 2, 3 -- 6, 7, 8, 9. Was that everybody
- 12 that was in your party?
- 13 A. Nine of us. Um-hum.
- 14 Q. Nine. Okay. All right. And my understanding is, is it
- 15 correct, and I'm going to try to get this out, after talking
- 16 with --
- 17 A. Talyssa.
- 18 Q. -- Talyssa, you -- everybody kind of met up over the last 2
- 19 days, coming either from [REDACTED] or [REDACTED], right?
- 20 A. Right.
- 21 Q. They came from [REDACTED]. You came from --
- 22 A. [REDACTED]
- 23 Q. Your part of the family came from [REDACTED]. Is that right?
- 24 A. Right.
- 25 Q. And you showed up yesterday afternoon or whenever it was?

1 A. About 12. Um-hum.

2 Q. All right. And you made arrangements to ride the ducks at
3 6:30. Is that right?

4 A. We actually -- no. So we met at the, the Whitefish
5 restaurant, or whatever.

6 Q. Yeah.

7 A. At the, okay, Bass Pro Shop.

8 Q. Right. Right.

9 A. And we had lunch. And then we decided, okay, what are we
10 going to do? And then we decided to go to the *Titanic* Museum.
11 And we got tickets, because they offered a double package. So if
12 you buy tickets to the museum, you can also get the duck ride
13 tickets. So we, after we finished the museum, we didn't -- we
14 weren't sure if we were going to have time to do the duck rides,
15 but we went ahead and drove by there and asked. And they said
16 yeah, you can go ahead and -- yeah, because we board until 6:30.
17 And so we get in line --

18 Q. But your boarding time was 6:30, when you decided --

19 A. No. They didn't give us a time. We just had showed up right
20 before 6. So we were going to try to get on the 6:00.

21 Q. Right.

22 A. But then when we showed our tickets, they said, oh, you have
23 to get these -- because they're not from our venue, you have to
24 show these at the ticket counter and get our actual tickets. So,
25 I did that. I traded them out. But it was going to be -- so that

1 pushed us to the 6:30.

2 Q. Right.

3 A. And the same thing happened with the 9, the party of 9,
4 something happened with their tickets. And so, they had -- oh,
5 because they had bought them for the other venue that does the
6 duck rides.

7 Q. Right.

8 A. And then, she was like, well, can we just exchange them, you
9 know, and do it here, since we're already here. So we, both
10 parties got stuck at the 6:30 one. So that's how we ended up.

11 Q. And you said the other party, you talking about the other
12 African American family? Is that what you're talking about, that
13 was there?

14 A. Right. The party that was 11.

15 Q. It's the same kind of the same situation you were in, then?

16 A. Um-hum.

17 Q. Is -- so you get in line, you get your tickets, you load up.
18 What do they start telling you? Do you remember what they said,
19 anything regarding weather --

20 A. Watch your step, step up, step down. Well, well, I believe
21 when we were in line, they were kind of stalling because they
22 weren't sure about the weather.

23 Q. What did they say about the weather?

24 A. There was a rain storm coming in.

25 Q. And they said we knew there's a -- they acknowledged the

1 storm coming in, right?

2 A. Yes. Yes.

3 Q. And they weren't sure if they were going to go out. Is that
4 right?

5 A. Right. So it was kind of stalled --

6 Q. What did they say?

7 A. Just like, we're just holding on, like hold on, we're just
8 waiting for --

9 Q. Who's they?

10 A. -- I don't know --

11 Q. Is that somebody that works there or was this the captain?

12 A. No. I didn't meet the captain until we actually boarded. So
13 these were like the people that were helping us get on the --
14 taking the photograph and helping -- well, no, the man that was
15 helping us get on the boat and like taking the tickets.

16 Q. Right.

17 A. And so then, like for some -- I don't know, I couldn't really
18 catch it all because he was hard to hear, but once we all got on
19 the boat and sat, the captain was saying something like, well,
20 we're going to do the route, the tour backwards or something.

21 Q. Yeah.

22 A. Because I think he was trying to -- what I think they were
23 trying to do was avoid the storm.

24 Q. Right. They were going to try to get the water part in
25 first, and then just --

- 1 A. And then -- yeah.
- 2 Q. -- just do the drive part, right?
- 3 A. Do the other tour. Yeah. Then the rest of the tour.
- 4 Q. All right.
- 5 A. So -- yeah. So we went ahead and got into the water. We got
6 in the boat.
- 7 Q. Now, if I recall correctly, the black guy drove?
- 8 A. Um-hum. He drove. And then once we were --
- 9 Q. And then get, get to the water. Then the --
- 10 A. -- about to get into the water --
- 11 Q. -- captain took over?
- 12 A. Then the captain took over.
- 13 Q. So captain takes over, you hit the water, everything
14 seemed --
- 15 A. Everything's fine. Fine.
- 16 Q. Fine? And then what happened?
- 17 A. Yeah. He let my son and my nephew drive, you know, steer the
18 boat.
- 19 Q. Right.
- 20 A. And we were getting a little closer to that island and then
21 it just starts getting pretty rickety, you know.
- 22 Q. Yeah.
- 23 A. But at this point, we're laughing, we're thinking it's fun.
- 24 Q. Yeah.
- 25 A. Hah, hah, I'm getting splashed, you know.

1 Q. Yes. Yeah.

2 A. And then like he kind of -- he -- so it got more, like, wow,
3 like the wind and the rain was coming. So he shut down
4 the --

5 Q. Did he make a comment about we're going to cut this short or
6 anything? Do you remember anything like that?

7 A. No.

8 Q. What do you remember him saying? The captain say anything --

9 A. I don't recall him saying a whole lot of anything.

10 Q. So the wind starts to pick up?

11 A. Yeah.

12 Q. The wind starts coming in, and he shuts --

13 A. Then he shuts the windows to just try to kind of eliminate
14 the water, you know, splashing us, and the rain coming into us.
15 And then it just, it kind of happened so --

16 Q. Where did you sit?

17 A. So I was like kind of in the middle back. I was sitting with
18 my mother.

19 Q. On the left or right?

20 A. So if you're looking into the boat, I would have been on the
21 right. And then the left side of the boat started --

22 Q. So if you're looking at the back of the driver, are you on
23 the passenger side or driver's side?

24 A. I'm behind the driver.

25 Q. You're behind the driver?

1 A. Um-hum.

2 Q. On the left side. Okay.

3 A. Um-hum.

4 Q. And then you're sitting with your mother. And your mother,
5 again it Ronita?

6 A. Ronita. And then on the other side is my sister and her
7 husband. In front of them was my son and my nephew.

8 Q. And you're kind of in the middle part of the boat?

9 A. We're kind of -- well, yeah. Because there was about three
10 rows behind me.

11 Q. Right.

12 A. But several in front of me. So --

13 Q. And then the African American family was in front of you?

14 A. All in the front.

15 Q. All in the front.

16 A. Um-hum.

17 Q. And then what happened?

18 A. And then, so it just started getting worse. And the boat
19 started tilting this way --

20 Q. To the right side.

21 A. -- to the right. Um-hum.

22 Q. Towards Talyssa's side?

23 A. Um-hum. Correct.

24 Q. Correct. Taking on water?

25 A. Taking on water.

1 Q. Anybody said anything about life jackets at that point?

2 A. Well, before it started, he did demonstrate before --

3 Q. Right.

4 A. -- while the guy, while the guy was still driving, before we
5 got in the water, he demonstrated on how to put on life -- the
6 life, you know --

7 Q. Right.

8 A. But for some stupid reason, none of us did. I don't know
9 why.

10 Q. I mean --

11 A. I wish we would have.

12 Q. This more of a demonstrative purpose when the --

13 A. Yeah. He was demonstrating --

14 Q. But when we got into the water and things started to kind of
15 look bad, there was never any mention about --

16 A. He didn't say now's the time to put on your life vests.

17 Q. That never happened?

18 A. No. No.

19 Q. Or he didn't say, he didn't say anything about it? He didn't
20 say don't put it on; he didn't say do put it on; he didn't say
21 anything?

22 A. No. I don't think he had a chance. It happened so fast. So
23 fast. I mean, at the -- okay, so once it got to the point where
24 it was so tilted --

25 Q. Right.

1 A. -- then the back end started sinking down.

2 Q. Right.

3 A. And then that's when my brother-in-law stood up and said
4 everybody calm down. And that's -- right when that, right when my
5 brother-in-law stood up and said that, that's when that captain
6 clicked that roof to -- because he knew. He was like, oh --

7 Q. He clicked -- the roof came off when he clicked it?

8 A. Clicked the roof to click it out, and -- but that's where the
9 life vests were.

10 Q. Yeah.

11 A. On the roof.

12 Q. Yeah.

13 A. So, I mean, nobody had one.

14 Q. Yeah.

15 A. Not a single one of us had a chance to get one.

16 Q. Right.

17 A. And then, I mean, the roof wasn't even all the way off and my
18 sister said that she had to push it out, push it up and up. But I
19 don't, I don't remember touching any of the boat. I just
20 remember, just paddling for my -- forever.

21 Q. Did you, did you go under the water?

22 A. Oh, we were all submerged.

23 Q. I mean, everybody was under water? How far down?

24 A. I don't know. It felt like, it felt like forever. I
25 don't --

1 Q. Did you have to push the roof yourself?

2 A. No.

3 Q. Did you have to push it?

4 A. I don't remember touching the roof at all.

5 Q. Yeah.

6 A. Because I -- because when my brother-in-law stood up, I just,
7 I grabbed my purse for dear life. I made sure it was zipped, had
8 my phone in it, and I just started pushing into the water. And
9 that was it. And I didn't feel anything, I mean, of the boat. I
10 was just paddling up, paddling up, paddling up, and it felt like
11 it was --

12 Q. Forever.

13 A. -- going on for -- I, I, yeah. I didn't think I was going to
14 make it out to the top. And I did, I did lose air. I did lose
15 air. I don't know how I got up to the top, because people were
16 pulling on me, pulling me down to try to get above me. I just --
17 I was just thinking of my children. I was like, I can't, I can't
18 die. I probably went a good, I don't know how long without air.
19 And then finally I come up and, you know, people are still pulling
20 at me. And the -- there's the paddle, the, you know, so --

21 Q. When you come up, who did you see?

22 A. I -- not really anybody. There was an African American man
23 in a red shirt. And then I saw two ladies floating off to the
24 side. And then I just was screaming, [REDACTED], [REDACTED]. And, thank
25 God, my daughter heard me. She's like, mommy. And at that point

1 she was closer to the paddles, or to the big showboat, the red
2 wheels, you know. So she, she made her way to it. And that's
3 what she held on for dear life on.

4 Q. Did they shut the wheels down? Were the wheels --

5 A. They did, yes. Yes. Well, they were -- I feel like they
6 were still kind of moving, but real slow, thank God. But they did
7 stop. And --

8 Q. And you were able to grab the --

9 A. Yes. And so my daughter was like, mommy, grab onto it. Grab
10 onto it. And I was like I couldn't, because it kept pushing me
11 away, further back, further back. And, I mean, I was just
12 fighting for dear life, and finally grabbed onto it and just held
13 onto it until, until somebody came and --

14 Q. Did you -- you held -- you got to the boat, the paddleboat,
15 and held right there?

16 A. Held onto the wheels, the --

17 Q. And then how did you ultimately get out? Did somebody throw
18 you a preserver or pull you in a boat, or --

19 A. No. So a man, he came like, and he was like kind of helping
20 me step -- you know, how there's like the step up, step up, and --
21 but I was so weak. I, I could -- so eventually it was to the
22 point where I was kind of -- there was like a platform on the side
23 here, and two men had to pull me. And I had to lay on my back for
24 a while with my feet elevated because, I mean, I was, I was done.
25 I mean, I was --

1 Q. You were spent?

2 A. Yeah. I mean, I was so weak. I was -- ooh, it was terrible.
3 And then my daughter, I don't know, she was so brave.

4 Q. And that would be?

5 A. [REDACTED].

6 Q. [REDACTED].

7 A. Yep.

8 Q. All right.

9 A. She got over there to me somehow on the platform where I was
10 laying, and she was sitting over me and, mommy, mommy, you can't
11 leave me, mommy.

12 Q. Yeah.

13 A. I mean, I wasn't going to leave her, I knew I wasn't. I was
14 just -- I couldn't speak.

15 Q. Right.

16 A. I just, I was breathing heavy, and --

17 Q. I know.

18 A. And then finally they got me to my feet. I mean, that's when
19 we, we all kind of -- all the survivors, kind of gathered over,
20 up, you know, where the shopping centers are and stuff. And I
21 found out, well -- no. So we were inside where they have the
22 dining. They were about to have the dinner show. But, of course,
23 they didn't do that because of everything. And they were giving
24 us water and blankets.

25 And everybody was accounted for in my family, except for my

1 mom. Freaking out. We thought she was gone. Then finally they
2 pulled her up on a stretcher. And they wouldn't let me near her.
3 I was like, mother. Got her in. Somehow my sister was able to
4 get on the ambulance with her.

5 But I was busy with my daughter because she was like in shell
6 shock, in a wheelchair. So she was getting checked out by an EMT.
7 So I was with her. And so, I don't know, long story short.

8 Q. I noticed your family was kind of all in the center of the
9 boat. Is that right?

10 A. Um-hum.

11 Q. And the black family was in the front. And then other
12 people, obviously, in the back.

13 A. Um-hum.

14 Q. Was there something about, you know, being advantageous to be
15 in the center of the boat when it went down? Did it seem like
16 there was anything like that? I mean, how did the roof come off?
17 Did it just kind of --

18 A. He clicked some kind of thing and I guess it (indiscernible)
19 that.

20 Q. And does it come off like this or does it just float off, or
21 what?

22 A. I have no idea. You can't even, couldn't even tell.

23 Q. Yeah.

24 A. Because it just happened so -- 30 seconds, maybe. I have no
25 clue. Like I said, I don't even remember him touching any part of

1 the boat as far as mechanisms. And I don't, I don't recall
2 anything being advantageous about being in the middle. It's just
3 they had a party of 11. They were in the front of the line. They
4 filled up the 11. And then our family was next. And we're the
5 nine.

6 Q. Right.

7 A. So then, whoever's behind us filled in the back, the rest of
8 the --

9 Q. Right.

10 A. -- of the boat. You know, it was just -- but just thank God
11 we're a family of swimmers.

12 Q. Right.

13 A. Both my sister and my mom have swimming pools in their
14 backyard. My, you know, the --

15 Q. Your family swims a lot, then?

16 A. Oh, yeah. So, I mean, we have the skills and we know, you
17 know. That's, I swear to God, that's the only reason we're alive.
18 Even though we all thought in our head we were dead.

19 Q. But the company talked briefly about maybe not going out.
20 I'm just kind of backing up a little bit.

21 A. Right.

22 Q. They talked -- they knew there was a storm coming in, talked
23 briefly about it, we're going to go backwards, we're going to do
24 the water part first.

25 A. Um-hum. Because otherwise --

1 Q. Went out --

2 A. Otherwise, why would they change the route?

3 Q. Right. Yeah. They're just trying to be sure that they give
4 you everything they said they would. They're just --

5 A. Um-hum.

6 Q. -- going to try to do it to the weather.

7 A. A different way. Yeah.

8 Q. And so you go out, everything seemed fine, and then the wind
9 come up, it came up quickly. Is that right? And --

10 A. Yeah. Because it was pretty calm --

11 Q. -- then at first --

12 A. -- when we first got out on the water, you know?

13 Q. And then --

14 A. And then it got kind of fun. You know, we were like, woo-
15 hoo.

16 Q. Yeah. And there's splashing, and then --

17 A. Um-hum. And it was --

18 Q. -- he dropped the sides.

19 A. Um-hum. Yeah.

20 Q. And then it just started taking water. And did you realize
21 there was a problem when it started taking -- I mean, when it took
22 water, obviously. But before that, were you thinking I don't know
23 about this?

24 A. Yeah. I was. Yeah, yeah, I was kind of like, oh, I hope he,
25 I hope he can get us out of here, you know. Because I could feel

1 the back of the boat like getting heavier. I didn't necessarily
2 look back, you know. I was just, oh, this is bad.

3 Q. But nobody really panicked or anything?

4 A. Well, I guess we just kind of like, he's got it, you know,
5 he's going to --

6 Q. He's -- we're going to --

7 A. -- get us out. Yeah.

8 Q. Um-hum. Okay. All right.

9 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: (Indiscernible).

10 SGT. TRAMMELL: That's all right. We're about done anyway
11 here, so I'll go ahead and we'll this here. Then we'll talk
12 sitting right here, then, okay?

13 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: (Indiscernible) she just needed to say
14 bye to them because they're going.

15 SGT. TRAMMELL: Okay. All right. We'll stop it right now.

16 (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: CAPSIZE AND SINKING OF STRETCH DUCK 7
 ON TABLE ROCK LAKE, BRANSON, MISSOURI,
 JULY 19, 2018
 Interview of Tomlyn McDonald

ACCIDENT NO.: DCA18MM028

PLACE: Branson, Missouri

DATE: July 20, 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.

 *K*

Karen Coen Brooks
Transcriber