

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: RONITA MCKINLEY

Passenger

Cox Medical Center
Branson, Missouri

Friday,
July 20, 2018

APPEARANCES:

LES LEDET, Marine Casualty Investigator
Investigation National Center of Expertise
U.S. Coast Guard

UNIDENTIFIED TROOPER
Missouri State Highway Patrol (MSHP)

JACKIE
(Ms. McKinley's daughter-in-law)

TODD
(Ms. McKinley's son)

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I N T E R V I E W

(Time)

1

MS. McKINLEY: You want to shut that door?

2

3

TROOPER: Yeah. We can shut that door.

4

5

MS. McKINLEY: So you're all working together, because you've all got different recorders?

6

TROOPER: Well --

7

MR. LEDET: I'm a investigator with the U.S. Coast Guard.

8

MS. McKINLEY: Okay.

9

MR. LEDET: So and we're working in collaboration together on the investigation.

10

MS. McKINLEY: Okay.

11

MR. LEDET: I'm working with the Missouri Highway Patrol.

12

MS. McKINLEY: Okay. So, I mean, where do we want to start?

13

INTERVIEW OF RONITA McKINLEY

14

BY MSHP TROOPER:

15

Q. Well, hold on just a second. I want to write some names down, make sure I have everybody's address, ma'am.

16

A. [REDACTED].

17

Q. Is that the same address as --

18

A. [REDACTED].

19

Q. Do you live with your daughter there?

20

A. [REDACTED]

21

Q. Okay. I knew the [REDACTED]

22

A. Yeah. I don't know if it's [REDACTED]

1 JACKIE: They live [REDACTED]

2 MS. MCKINLEY: Yeah.

3 JACKIE: -- right near --

4 MS. MCKINLEY: This is my daughter-in-law, Jackie.

5 BY MSHP TROOPER:

6 Q. Basically -- and let me make sure I have your date of birth
7 before I get there. [REDACTED]

8 A. Um-hum.

9 Q. And, basically what everybody's been doing, just kind of
10 giving us a narrative of what happened --

11 A. Okay.

12 Q. -- and what you saw, everything. But, and then we'll, if we
13 see something that we want to ask questions about, we'll ask
14 questions about it. If that helps you out, where you can kind of
15 just go through it. If it's difficult for you, just say this is
16 difficult for me and we can take a break, or anything like that.
17 Okay?

18 A. We bought out ticket that -- at someplace?

19 Q. The *Titanic*?

20 A. Yeah. And they didn't tell us that we had to turn the
21 tickets in when we went to the boat ride, or to -- okay? Because
22 we were in line for the 6:00 one. Well, till we got up there to
23 get on the 6:00 one, and they said we had to turn those tickets
24 in. So by the time that happened, we missed the 6:00 boat.

25 Q. So which boat --

1 A. So we went on the --

2 Q. 6:30?

3 A. We went on the 6:30 boat. And so we took off, and we went, I
4 don't know, up the hill, and then we went straight to the water.
5 And the guy said we're going to go to the water first because the
6 weather's going to get bad. So he took us in the water first.
7 And then it just got bad.

8 He did do the little video for the life vests. He didn't ask
9 anybody if they wanted them. He didn't pass, they didn't pass
10 them out. And we were parents and we didn't grab them either.
11 So -- and the way the boat's designed, they're all up front. We
12 were in the middle of the boat, and the -- we were by the baby
13 life jackets.

14 And so, the water just started coming in. And seemed like he
15 was okay with it, you know? He kind of acted like it's okay. And
16 then put those side -- the plastic shields down.

17 Q. How did they put those down?

18 A. I don't know if they push a button or not.

19 Q. I mean, is it something automatically comes down?

20 A. Yeah. I guess he pushed a button. I don't know. But the
21 sides came down to keep the water from coming in, I guess, and
22 getting us wet. I don't know.

23 And then we were kind of going this-a-way and that big
24 steamship boat was there. And I thought that boat was going and I
25 thought it was going to run into us. But I guess it wasn't

1 moving. They just had the propeller things on.

2 And then the next thing you know, the boat was just filling
3 up with water. We all kind of floated up, couldn't get out
4 because the roof was on. Of course, we couldn't grab a life
5 jacket because those were all on a shelf, and you couldn't see
6 anything. And then finally, I guess, it burst, or he let it go.
7 I don't know how the roof came off. I don't know if the water
8 pressure pushed it off. I don't know any of that. And then it
9 was everybody for themselves, and I know how to swim and tread
10 water. And I couldn't see any of my family. All I could see was
11 the --

12 Q. The swells?

13 A. No. The -- what are those -- the front of the boat, those
14 big things that go round.

15 Q. Oh --

16 JACKIE: On, on steamboat.

17 MS. MCKINLEY: On that steamship.

18 BY MSHP TROOPER:

19 Q. The paddle wheel?

20 A. Yeah. The paddle wheel. And I thought, well -- and they
21 were running. And I said, well, that's the only thing I see so
22 I'm going to head for that. And luckily they turned those off. I
23 got there and I just hung on as long as I could. And that's about
24 it. I don't remember how I got out.

25 Q. When you said that you watched the video, what was -- where

1 did you guys watch the video at? On the boat? Or was it --

2 A. We didn't watch a video.

3 Q. Oh, they said he showed a video of the --

4 A. No. He just demonstrated --

5 Q. Oh, okay.

6 A. -- how to use the life vest.

7 Q. So he actually demonstrated. Did he put one on?

8 A. No.

9 Q. Okay. What did he do?

10 A. He just said it opens up, you put it over your head, you
11 bring the strap around, and you click it in the front.

12 Q. And this was --

13 A. And then he said but you won't need one, so don't worry about
14 it.

15 Q. Yeah. Okay. And --

16 A. So we didn't worry about it.

17 Q. But he never took one off the rack and showed you guys how to
18 use it or anything?

19 A. He did have one in his hand. You know, like an airline
20 stewardess kind of thing.

21 Q. Okay. All right. When did he say that you were going to go
22 to the water first? Was that before you guys left? Or was
23 that --

24 A. That was after we were going up the hill.

25 Q. All right. From leaving the --

1 A. Yeah, from leaving the thing.

2 Q. From leaving the beginning?

3 A. Uh-huh. We went by some big hotel mansion thing that costs a
4 lot of money to stay there. I mean --

5 Q. Chateau on the Lake?

6 A. Yeah. Maybe that's what it was. And then we went to the
7 water, and went in it.

8 Q. So, and that -- he told you, did he say why you guys were
9 going to the, to the --

10 A. Yeah. He said a storm's coming, and it's going to get bad
11 and so we're going to go to the water first. So we went to the
12 water first.

13 Q. Was that -- say that he was trying to beat the storm or what
14 was -- or he just said that?

15 A. I guess he was just telling what was going. I guess he'd
16 been a captain for a long time or something. I don't know. Of
17 course, we had trust in him. We thought he knew what he was
18 doing, so -- you know, even an airplane has the life jackets, you
19 sit on them.

20 Q. Yeah.

21 A. And if you're going to fall in an airplane, you're probably
22 not going to survive but at least your life jacket is handy.

23 Q. Yeah.

24 A. It was just terrifying.

25 Q. I imagine. I imagine that was just --

1 A. And there were older people on there, so I assume that's why
2 they couldn't get out, or they didn't know how to swim. I don't
3 know.

4 Q. Yeah.

5 A. There were people trying -- you know, grabbing onto people to
6 try to --

7 Q. Stay afloat?

8 A. -- stay -- but, I mean, you got to kind of -- if you can't
9 hold them up, you got to go do your own thing, so --

10 Q. Absolutely.

11 A. And then, and that's sad too. So --

12 Q. Yep. Your son-in-law told us the story about his daughter
13 was coming up to him and trying to grab him, and he just kept
14 having to push her away and say paddle with me, paddle with me.
15 Don't grab onto me --

16 A. Yeah.

17 Q. -- or we'll both go down. And he said --

18 A. Yeah.

19 Q. -- he would go a little ways and then just tell her come on,
20 come on, come on. And I told him, I said -- he said that was the
21 hardest thing he ever did. So --

22 A. Yeah.

23 Q. It was bad.

24 A. That was bad.

25 Q. Listening to him tell the story was, was rough.

1 A. Well, he's a talker.

2 Q. Yeah. He likes to talk. So --

3 A. This is my son, Todd.

4 Q. Okay.

5 TODD: Hi.

6 MSHP TROOPER: Nice to meet you.

7 MS. MCKINLEY: They weren't there, but they came to see me.

8 MSHP TROOPER: Well, I would expect a son to come see you.

9 MS. MCKINLEY: It's a long ways away.

10 TODD: Yeah, it is.

11 MS. MCKINLEY: [REDACTED] hours.

12 BY MSHP TROOPER:

13 Q. Yeah. Traumatic deal. But I tell you what, we appreciate
14 you guys talking to us, and we're glad that you guys are still
15 here, and all that good stuff. So --

16 But if you think of anything or you have questions, you have
17 my card. And your son-in-law and your daughter have my cell phone
18 number, my personal cell phone number.

19 A. Okay.

20 Q. So if you need to call us and ask any questions, don't
21 hesitate. And is there anything else that you can think of
22 that --

23 A. Well, I don't think he should have gone on the water if he
24 knew the storm was coming in. He shouldn't have done that.

25 Q. Yeah. Yeah.

1 JACKIE: And he should have warned the people that boat was
2 taking on water, I think. You know, all of them keep saying he
3 didn't say that boat's taking on water, like --

4 MSHP TROOPER: Yeah.

5 UNIDENTIFIED PERSON: -- trying to get people off.

6 BY MSHP TROOPER:

7 Q. Well, and that's a question I had for you. Do you ever
8 remember him saying anything about -- once he -- I know that kids
9 were going up, from what I understand, were the kids going up and
10 kind of driving the the boat for a little bit. And then that
11 stopped. And what happened after that? Did he just not say
12 anything, or what was that?

13 A. Well, like I said, the water was coming in. He put those
14 things down. And, of course, there was no direction on what we
15 should do. So we just assumed, you know, you ride a boat,
16 sometimes the water comes in.

17 Q. Yeah.

18 A. So but then it got more bumpy and more bumpy, and it was
19 over. You know, I don't know that he had -- I don't know. But,
20 when he knew the water was bad, he should have said put a life
21 jacket on or something, I guess. But then we would have been
22 stuck, in there with a life jacket on. So I don't know if that
23 would have helped us or not. It might have just pushed us down
24 further. So I don't know.

25 MSHP TROOPER: Les, do you have anything?

1 BY MR. LEDET:

2 Q. Just one question for you, Ms. McKinley -- it is
3 Ms. McKinley, right? You said that you were sitting about the
4 middle --

5 A. Uh-huh.

6 Q. -- of the boat?

7 A. Uh-huh.

8 Q. Do you -- can you recall what the seating of the vessel, what
9 -- do you remember if more people were on one side than the other?

10 A. Well, I think some people were -- well, we were leaning like
11 this. So the people that were over here probably, as they slid
12 over to here, probably helped make the boat sink. I don't know.

13 Q. So when you all first went into the water, was it kind of
14 evenly sitting, or --

15 A. Yeah. Uh-huh.

16 Q. It was evenly spread?

17 A. It was fine when we went in.

18 Q. I got you.

19 A. And then the family of 11 that had 9 people die, they were
20 all up front. And then we were kind of in the middle, and then
21 the others were behind us.

22 Q. Any recollection of hearing the captain or who -- anyone
23 telling everyone to sit down?

24 A. My son-in-law.

25 Q. Pardon me?

1 A. My son-in-law.

2 Q. Yeah? Your son-in-law?

3 MSHP TROOPER: Your son-in-law said sit down?

4 MS. MCKINLEY: Yeah, he said, he said you all need to quiet
5 down, and you need to settle down and -- and then that's when we
6 floated to the top, because the thing got full.

7 BY MR. LEDET:

8 Q. Right. It was that quick, huh? Yeah.

9 And do you recall anybody, like, getting up and moving around
10 in those less than seconds?

11 A. Everybody was in their seats --

12 Q. Everybody in seats.

13 A. -- except the boat went like this, so you kind of -- it was
14 kind of hard -- I was on this side --

15 Q. Yes, ma'am.

16 A. -- so it was hard to stay in our seats. And I was like out
17 in the, in the aisle.

18 Q. Yes, ma'am.

19 TODD: My sister said when it did that, she said she noticed
20 water was up to her, coming up on her legs and she went to tell
21 everybody the water's coming in. And so, she said everybody
22 was --

23 MSHP TROOPER: Is that Tiffany?

24 TODD: Yeah. Was trying to push up. And by the time they
25 pushed up, it was already under water.

1 MSHP TROOPER: Yeah, that's what -- she told us that, yeah.

2 MR. LEDET: Yeah. That's all I have. Thank you very much.

3 MSHP TROOPER: Steve, you got anything to follow up on?

4 BY UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:

5 Q. Did you hear any alarms sounding or any type of buzzing or
6 anything?

7 A. Uh-uh. I was looking for help. I didn't see any. So, I
8 don't know, I guess the -- I don't know where it was. I'm sure it
9 was there, but I didn't ever see any help. There was a guy on the
10 boat, steamship that saw me. And he threw me a life jacket, but I
11 was holding on for dear -- there was no way I could get the life
12 jacket on at that point. And it just kind of floated away from
13 me.

14 MSHP TROOPER: All right. We sure appreciate your time.

15 MS. MCKINLEY: Well, tell everybody, the responders and
16 everybody, that we appreciated their help.

17 MSHP TROOPER: Well, that has been relayed many times, and we
18 appreciate that, too. So that's -- we'll just go ahead and
19 conclude, Steve.

20 (Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)

21

22

23

24

25

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 Ronita McKinley

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.



Karen Coen Brooks
Transcriber