

DCA13MR002  
Conrail - Shared Assets  
Derailment/Hazardous Material Release  
Paulsboro, New Jersey  
November 30, 2012

## NTSB - Interview of Paulsboro Local Resident and Witness

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

\* \* \* \* \*

Investigation of: \*

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TRAIN DERAILMENT/CHEMICAL SPILL \*

NOVEMBER 30, 2012 \* Docket No.: DCA-13-MR-002

PAULSBORO, NEW JERSEY \*

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Interview of: RAELYNN STEVENSON

Paulsboro, New Jersey

Sunday,  
December 2, 2012

The above-captioned matter convened, pursuant to notice.

BEFORE: PAUL STANCIL  
Accident Investigator

## APPEARANCES:

PAUL STANCIL, Accident Investigator  
Office of Railroad, Pipeline and Hazardous  
Materials Investigations  
National Transportation Safety Board  
490 L'Enfant Plaza East, S.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20594

\*\* PII \*\*

I N D E XITEMPAGE

Interview of Raelynn Stevenson:

By Mr. Stancil

4

I N T E R V I E W

(11:35 a.m.)

1  
2  
3 MR. STANCIL: Today is December 2nd, 2012. It's  
4 approximately 11:35 a.m. My name is Paul Stancil. I'm a  
5 Hazardous Materials Accident Investigator with the National  
6 Transportation Safety Board out of Washington, D.C. We are  
7 located at the Paulsboro Police Department conference room, and  
8 present in the room with me is Raelynn Stevenson.

9 Could you spell your name for me?

10 MS. STEVENSON: It's R-a-e-l-y-n-n.

11 MR. STANCIL: Okay. And Ms. Stevenson is a resident at  
12 \*\*PII\*\*, Paulsboro, New Jersey, and she reports  
13 that she was a witness to the accident.

## INTERVIEW OF RAELYNN STEVENSON

14  
15 BY MR. STANCIL:

16 Q. So, with that, Ms. Stevenson, I would like to ask you to  
17 think back and remember everything you saw and everything you  
18 experienced on the morning of this train accident here in  
19 Paulsboro. Begin with what you were doing just before the  
20 accident occurred and then tell me everything you can remember.

21 A. Sure. I was half dressed for work. I was in the  
22 kitchen. And every day I take a small bowl of cereal to work with  
23 me. So I got out of my cabinet the box of cereal, had the bowl  
24 there. And I said, oh, here comes the train. Boy, he's early  
25 today, I said, make a lot of people happy because he won't be

1 making them late for work.

2           And he was sitting there and I'm, like, okay. And I  
3 was just getting ready to open a new box of cereal and he started  
4 coming across. And then -- you have to -- it just flashed. I'll  
5 have to -- he started coming across and then some cars went by.  
6 And then all of a sudden it just went down. It was the tanker car  
7 that went down and then the other cars, of course, collided with  
8 him -- with that one.

9           And I -- my husband was upstairs sleeping. I yelled,  
10 "Gary, get down here." And he goes, "Yes, I know what happened."  
11 I says, "No, you don't. Get down here now." And when he came  
12 down the steps -- you can actually see the train bridge from my  
13 living room and he said, "Holy \*\*\*\* Raelynn. Call 911." And I  
14 said, "I'm on the phone with them right now."

15           And then he went outside and took the phone from me  
16 because he's the assistant fire chief, so he was telling them more  
17 detail than what I was just telling them, for someone to get here  
18 right away. You know, "The train derailed and it's serious. Get  
19 here right away."

20           But what happened -- what I saw, to me, it was like a  
21 slow -- it was slow motion. To me I don't think it was where the  
22 train opens and closes. To me it looked like at the end. I don't  
23 know how you could put it. The train opens out to the river. It  
24 was this part. It wasn't this part. To me it looked like it  
25 collapsed. It looked like it was over here.

1 Q. You're referring to the part of the bridge closest to  
2 the bank or in the middle?

3 A. Yes. This part over here, to me. That's what it looked  
4 like because it almost looked like the tanker car went this way --

5 Q. So you're --

6 A. -- right at that point.

7 Q. -- saying the tanker car went nose down?

8 A. It kind of went that way and then of course the other  
9 ones went on top. And then as I'm standing there it was like slow  
10 motion. It kind of like -- that's when the bridge went over. And  
11 that's all that I can remember.

12 Q. Okay. Let's go back. Where were you in your house when  
13 you --

14 A. I was standing right there at the kitchen counter, and  
15 my view is the train bridge.

16 Q. So you're standing at the kitchen counter. You're  
17 looking --

18 A. I look at it every day.

19 Q. You have a window that looks right on --

20 A. It's two sliding glass -- well, a sliding glass door  
21 where there's big -- two panes there.

22 Q. And when you looked out the window where did you see the  
23 train? Where was --

24 A. Oh, he was on the other side of the bridge.

25 Q. The locomotive?

1 A. Um-hum.

2 Q. Was he stopped? Was he --

3 A. Yes, he was stopped.

4 Q. For how long?

5 A. You know, I mean, he had to -- I don't think it was --  
6 like maybe 5 minutes at the most because I had let the -- I  
7 usually let the dog out before I go to work. So I let the dog out  
8 and then I went back into the kitchen and was doing my cereal  
9 thing so I could go finish getting dressed. So it wasn't -- I  
10 would say maybe 5 minutes.

11 Q. And then what happened?

12 A. That's when he started coming across.

13 Q. And all at once or did he stop and go?

14 A. No. He was going fairly slow over it, which they  
15 usually do. You know, he -- maybe it's just getting started it  
16 takes him a little longer. But, I mean, he was going across very  
17 slow.

18 Q. Was this what you usually observed?

19 A. Oh, yeah. I watch the train all the time. I know when  
20 they're coming.

21 Q. Was there anything unusual?

22 A. No. No. It was just the normal, you know, I'm, like --  
23 other than he was a little early today -- you know, Friday. But  
24 other than that, no, everything was practically normal, a normal  
25 day.



1 Q. And then what alerted you that something wasn't right?  
2 When did something --

3 A. When I saw it going down.

4 Q. Did you hear anything?

5 A. Prior to that? No. No. Well, the windows and doors  
6 were shut, you know. It was, you know, a little chilly morning.  
7 But, no, nothing -- nothing unusual at all.

8 Q. So what drew your attention to the train when it went  
9 down? What --

10 A. The loud noise and how -- you know, how it was just, you  
11 know, one after another. I guess with the impact it forced this  
12 one, this one, and this one. And I didn't even realize the other  
13 two cars -- the lumber car and all, I didn't even realize they  
14 were down until I went outside and saw it.

15 Q. You said it moved in slow motion.

16 A. To me it was slow motion. It might not have been, but  
17 to me it felt like it was, and then all of a sudden the bridge  
18 went down.

19 Q. Maybe it would help if you close your eyes and think  
20 about the first thing that happened and then tell me what happened  
21 next.

22 A. All I remember is seeing, is the first tanker car go  
23 down.

24 Q. And then what happened?

25 A. And then I'm assuming it was just the motion of the

1 other ones still coming. Bang, you know, bang, bang and then all  
2 of a sudden the bridge went down. But the first tanker car -- as  
3 much I can remember and see, that was the first car that went down  
4 right there.

5 Q. Can you describe how the other tanker cars moved after  
6 the first one went down?

7 A. I know one kind of went up, like, in the air and the  
8 other -- it was more like a -- just like a collision on a highway,  
9 a rear-ender. That's kind of like how it was: boom, boom, boom.  
10 And one kind of went up in the air and, if I'm not mistaken,  
11 that's probably the one that ended up with the hole in it. That  
12 one was up in the air. But it was more like a accident on the  
13 highway where it's a chain reaction.

14 Q. And then what happened?

15 A. Then I screamed for my husband because I thought I was  
16 going to die.

17 Q. Why?

18 A. I didn't know what was in those cars.

19 Q. What did you see? What --

20 A. Nothing happened right away. I mean, I know -- I've  
21 lived in this town all of my life, and you never know what's in  
22 these cars. We didn't know what was in it. That's when he ran  
23 out and came running back to me and told me to go Google vinyl  
24 chloride, how to stabilize it. So I'm trying to type. I can't  
25 type. But it was a very, very scary situation. I was scared to

1 death. I was shaking because I didn't know what was going to  
2 happen. And I said, I just hope I never see this again in my  
3 life, because I was scared to death.

4 Q. Did you see anything coming out of the car?

5 A. No, I did not, not until that vapor, or whatever you  
6 want to call it, was. As I described it -- when you watched 9/11  
7 on TV you saw that dust come up the street. That's what it looked  
8 like coming up to my house. It -- like the 9/11 dust. It would  
9 just roll up, you know, and then went wherever it did. But it  
10 just looked like 9/11 coming up, with the dust. That's the only  
11 way I can explain how -- you know, because you saw it on TV. I'm,  
12 like, god, that's just what it looked like. It was really  
13 different. And then I saw that coming up and my poor dog was  
14 outside, and thank God he was at my front step so I went outside  
15 and grabbed him and pulled him in. And that's when it got, you  
16 know, thicker and thicker and thicker.

17 Q. Did it come into your home?

18 A. It probably did. We had people in and out. Since it's  
19 my home, you know, I gave them full range of my house. You know,  
20 "Bathrooms are in there. Help yourself," you know, "If you want a  
21 drink," you know, "go help yourself. There's tables there if you  
22 just want to go sit and talk about what you're going to do." You  
23 know, my house was open to you.

24 They did not evacuate us until 5:00 that evening. I  
25 think that's when your people came and said get them out.

1 Q. Did you feel like you needed to get away before that?

2 A. I did not feel scared at all. I mean, I was okay after  
3 I -- I just saw it, just sitting there. It was, I think, the  
4 initial shock of what I happened to see and what happened that  
5 scared me. But after a while, you know, everyone else was there,  
6 so I'm like, okay, you're okay, you're okay. So I felt -- I felt  
7 fine.

8 I've had no problems whatsoever. I was tested. I don't  
9 know how that will be. I think they told me a week they'll know.

10 Q. So how long after the train came to rest did the cloud  
11 come up toward your house?

12 A. Well, if we want to put it this way, my husband said I  
13 initially called 911 at 7:12. The first picture I took was at  
14 7:17 and it was just starting to come. So that may be the first  
15 picture that you have. I'm not sure. But I do have it on my  
16 camera. So it -- I would say close to 5 minutes.

17 Q. So prior to the accident the weather was clear?

18 A. Oh, it was crystal clear. It was a beautiful morning.  
19 Um-hum.

20 Q. Had the sun risen yet?

21 A. Not quite. It was like that in-between. You know, it  
22 was almost up but not -- it was just, just a tad bit light but not  
23 dark.

24 Q. You could see, but --

25 A. Oh, yeah, I could see everything.

1 Q. And going back to the point in time when you saw the  
2 tank go down, were you actually looking out the window at that  
3 very moment?

4 A. Um-hum. Yes.

5 Q. Is there any particular thing that drew your attention  
6 to it?

7 A. I watch it every day.

8 Q. So watched the train?

9 A. Oh, yeah, every day. I know -- you know, I kind of know  
10 when they come. Oh, here comes the 5:00 train, you know, or --  
11 like I said, but this one was early today. I'm, like, oh,  
12 everybody's going to be happy, they won't be holding them up,  
13 being late for work today. So -- because they usually come about  
14 7:30, a quarter of 8:00. And then some mornings, of course, you  
15 know, they come about 6:30. So, I mean, it fluctuates.

16 Q. Okay. Let's talk about the aftermath now, when people  
17 started arriving at your home.

18 A. Um-hum.

19 Q. Did you talk to anyone, any experts or responders or  
20 anyone that came in and told you --

21 A. Questioning me?

22 Q. Yeah. Did anybody tell you anything about what had  
23 happened, what the chemical was and --

24 A. No. No.

25 Q. And who came?

1           A.    I was questioned by the FBI.  I know that.  And that was  
2 probably the only people I was questioned by.

3           Q.    You said people were coming into your home.  Were they  
4 from the railroad?

5           A.    There was firefighter, you know.  It was --

6           Q.    Firefighters, railroad --

7           A.    Rail people, yes.  There was quite a few people around  
8 my property that day.

9           Q.    Did they tell you anything about whether you should  
10 leave --

11          A.    No.

12          Q.    -- what the hazard was?

13          A.    No.

14          Q.    And then you were evacuated at 5?

15          A.    Yes.

16          Q.    What happened?  What --

17          A.    I was told -- the police officer came in the house and  
18 told me, you have to leave.  And I'm, like, really?  And he goes,  
19 yeah, they're really adamant about it.  He goes, I'm sorry, but  
20 I've got to make you leave now.  He says, they're making me have  
21 you to leave.  And I'm, like, okay.

22          Q.    Could you smell any of the chemical?

23          A.    No.

24          Q.    It didn't have any --

25          A.    I don't have a very good sense of smell whatsoever, but

1 I didn't smell anything, no.

2 Q. Not throughout the entire day?

3 A. No. No.

4 Q. So nothing really gave you any cause for concern  
5 about --

6 A. No, because I'm sure, you know, all the experts that  
7 were there, if -- I felt as though if we were in danger or  
8 something, they would've made us go. But no one said anything to  
9 me that -- you know, any type of danger, so I just stayed there.

10 Q. What experts did you encounter there at --

11 A. I mean, like the DEP people were there, you know. The  
12 EPA people were there. Oh, I can't even -- there was like 200  
13 people in my yard, you know, all over the place, different forms  
14 of the government, so -- no one had, you know, said anything to  
15 us.

16 Q. And you mentioned that you had some testing done at your  
17 home since then.

18 A. Yes.

19 Q. And can you tell me about that?

20 A. Well, yesterday I went up to the tracks and I asked a  
21 gentleman if I could go in the house and get my dog. It has to go  
22 to the bathroom, you know. He's, like, if you can hold on a  
23 minute I'll go talk to someone. And I can't remember this  
24 gentleman's name. My husband knows his name. He's been very  
25 helpful to us. He's, like, I'll get you in the house, he says,

1 just give us a minute. He says, but this gentleman is going to go  
2 with you because he's monitoring the air and he has to be with  
3 you. I said, okay, that's no problem.

4 So we walked from the railroad tracks through the lot on  
5 the side of my house. And he says, do you mind if we go this way?  
6 I said, no, it's fine. So we kind of made a bigger circle. And  
7 he said, oh, that's good, the air quality here is reading fine. I  
8 said okay. So he goes, have you got a key? I said, yeah, I got a  
9 key.

10 We went into the house and he says, well, I'm going to  
11 take some readings in the house, and I said, okay. So then all of  
12 a sudden -- I'm putting some food in for the dog. I'm getting his  
13 chain. And I had the cat in there. I made sure she had some  
14 food. And he's on the phone. He's on the cell phone. And I  
15 heard him say, "Hi, Doc," and he's, like, "I'm at the house next  
16 to the thing and I'm getting a reading of 2.5" and, you know,  
17 going on with his stuff that I don't understand. So he told me,  
18 you know, the doctor told me that we should not be in the home,  
19 and he suggests we get the animals out also.

20 So I got on the phone. The doctor wanted to talk to me.  
21 He's a toxicology doctor. I'm not sure if it's like a -- I don't  
22 know -- well, actually, I do have his card here. It's a doctor  
23 from CSX.

24 Q. Okay.

25 A. He got on the phone and told me in long -- long-term in



1 the house would be very hazardous, you know, the gentleman you're  
2 with is getting a high reading; I suggest, you know, you don't  
3 spend any time in the house. "Get out as soon as possible. Get  
4 the animals out." I said okay. So we gathered up all the animals  
5 and got them -- he helped me and we got the animals out.

6 And then my husband said that they went back in this  
7 morning -- I was still at the hotel. And he said -- he called me  
8 on my cell phone and said to me, I've got some bad news to tell  
9 you. And I'm, like, what's that? He goes, they just took a  
10 reading in the house; it's 5-point-something now. I don't  
11 remember exactly what it was, but it was in the 5's.

12 I said, you're kidding, right? He goes, no, it's  
13 tripled since yesterday. I said, so what are you going to do?  
14 And he goes, well, if I can get in the house to get some clothes  
15 for you to go to work and all tomorrow, I may have to wear my scud  
16 air pack in, because the levels were so high. He said, now the  
17 question is how is that getting in the house if all the windows  
18 and the doors were closed. So he says, I'm really sorry to give  
19 you the bad news, but I don't know what's going to happen, if we  
20 can get back in today.

21 Q. Have they told you what they propose to do or what's to  
22 be done?

23 A. Well, right now the guys that were monitoring the air  
24 went to the house and opened some doors and windows as of right  
25 now. But I think once they start doing -- with their vacuum today

1 I think they're going to go back in and shut the windows. That's  
2 really all I know right now.

3 Q. Okay. I received some information that you might have  
4 heard an unusual noise a few days prior to the accident.

5 A. Wednesday evening.

6 Q. Can you tell me about that?

7 A. Me and my husband were sitting on the couch watching TV  
8 and we heard like a large boom and it kind of like shook our  
9 house. And I'm, like, "Gary, what the hell was that?" And he  
10 goes, "I don't know." I said, "Did your Christmas tree  
11 decorations blow up outside," you know, because he had a lot out  
12 there. And he goes, "That wouldn't shake the house." So he got  
13 up and, you know, we looked all around, even looked at the plant.  
14 He looked at the bridge to make sure, you know, there was no  
15 trains there. But we would hear them coming anyway. He went  
16 outside, walked all around, and he says, "I don't know what it  
17 was. I don't see anything." And really that's -- that was the  
18 extent of it. But it shook my house.

19 Q. Was it something that prompted you to report it to  
20 anyone?

21 A. We didn't report it to anybody, no. No.

22 Q. It wasn't so severe that you thought somebody should  
23 know about it?

24 A. Well, I personally didn't. I mean, I didn't even move  
25 off the couch. He's the one that jumped up because he -- you

1 know, first thing, as a firefighter and all, he thinks of the  
2 plant. It didn't dawn on me and -- I mean, if anybody, he  
3 would've probably called, you know, and said, "We just heard  
4 something," you know, "do you know -- are you aware of anything  
5 that might have happened?" But --

6 Q. So what's your opinion? Do you think it had anything to  
7 do with the railroad or --

8 A. It's so hard to say. It really is hard to say.

9 Q. What about the bridge and the routine rail traffic over  
10 the bridge, has anything changed over last few months?

11 A. The noise of the wheels going over to where it opens and  
12 closes at the end, on the other side of the creek, to me the  
13 clicking was just getting louder when they went over. It just  
14 seemed like it was getting louder. And Gary's, like, yeah, did  
15 you notice that, too? I'm, like, yeah, it just -- it just seemed  
16 to have gotten louder over a period of time and you can really  
17 hear the cars going over it, like click-click, click-click, click-  
18 click. And we never heard that before. It just seemed to have  
19 intensified [sic] more over a period of time.

20 Q. How long of a period of time?

21 A. I would probably say like maybe 6 months.

22 Q. Prior to that it was never loud?

23 A. I never really paid attention until I noticed it just  
24 seemed to be getting louder and louder. Especially when you're  
25 outside you can more hear it.

1 Q. But this particular day was there anything unusual about  
2 this transit of the train going by?

3 A. Other than the bridge was closed already. It wasn't  
4 open. It was closed already. Other than that, that would be the  
5 only --

6 Q. So what normally happens?

7 A. Well, usually the bridge is open and then, you know,  
8 they do what they -- whatever it is that they do with their  
9 computer systems, and you actually hear the computer talking.  
10 "The bridge will close momentarily," you know, or "The bridge will  
11 open momentarily" depending on if it's coming or leaving. And the  
12 bridge was already closed that day.

13 Q. So that's the only thing different about this time?

14 A. Well, it's on or about December 1st they close it for  
15 the winter anyway, so I just assumed that Conrail had shut it.

16 Q. Okay. Your husband asked you to research vinyl  
17 chloride?

18 A. Yes.

19 Q. How did he know there was vinyl chloride --

20 A. He read the tanker car and then I went into Google.

21 Q. You Googled what?

22 A. Vinyl chloride stabilizer or stabilization or something.

23 Q. Okay. And based on your research what did that tell  
24 you?

25 A. I didn't even look at anything. I just hit "print" and

1 said, "Here." I saw, like, there was, like, five or six different  
2 pages with different -- like there was firefighting on there. I  
3 did see that. But I just printed it out and handed it to him and  
4 said, "I hope this is good enough." He says, "I think it is."

5 Q. Now, where was your husband throughout the whole  
6 episode? You say he got his radio.

7 A. Yeah, and he went out my sliding glass door right here.  
8 This is my living room right here. This is my kitchen. This is  
9 where I was, standing at the kitchen counter. He went out the  
10 sliding glass door right there.

11 Q. Okay. What we're referring to is an aerial photograph  
12 of the accident scene, which also depicts your home.

13 A. Yes.

14 Q. Could you draw a circle on the photograph as to where  
15 you were when you observed the accident?

16 A. Um-hum

17 Q. Okay. So we're looking at four windows. I think that  
18 would be the northeast corner of the house if I'm correct with my  
19 directions there. And you were looking out one of those windows;  
20 is that --

21 A. Yeah. This is a sliding glass door. Only these two are  
22 windows.

23 Q. Oh, I see.

24 A. And it opens. These two are stabilized. These two  
25 open. And my kitchen is right here. I was standing on my other

1 side of my counter, looking out.

2 Q. I see.

3 A. Yeah.

4 Q. How far do you estimate that is from the bridge?

5 A. My husband said he thinks it's about 50 yards and  
6 probably 10 or 15 going out the back door or the laundry room  
7 door.

8 Q. Was there anyone else in your house at the time?

9 A. Just me, my husband, the dog, and the cat.

10 Q. Does anyone else live with you?

11 A. No.

12 Q. This next house next door to you is --

13 A. This is the church here.

14 Q. Oh, okay.

15 A. That's the church. Over here at this house, which is  
16 not really seen in the photo, is my -- my husband's mother and  
17 father live right here.

18 Q. Okay. What's the name of this church?

19 A. This is Saint James Episcopal Church.

20 Q. Okay. And your property extends where on this --

21 A. All --

22 Q. You can draw on it.

23 A. Okay. All of this is mine. All the way up -- there's a  
24 tree somewhere here. All of this.

25 Q. All the way down to the waterfront?

1           A.    Yes.  This is my boat dock that's right here and this is  
2   our bulkhead here, and then it goes into his father's property  
3   because we kind of go right here.

4           Q.    Okay.  Very good.  Is there anything else that you can  
5   remember about that day?

6           A.    No.  It was just a normal day.

7           Q.    Anyone said anything to you that sticks out in your  
8   mind, anything unusual?

9           A.    No.  No.  I've been trying to stay away from people,  
10  honestly, press and -- I've been trying to stay away.

11          Q.    Have you been interviewed by any other agencies, the  
12  media?

13          A.    Media, no.  I've stayed away from the media.  The only  
14  people, like I said, I was interviewed by was the FBI.  And I  
15  think that was not concerning the train accident.  It was more  
16  concerning the explosion we heard on Wednesday night because they  
17  more intensified their questioning on Wednesday night.

18          Q.    So the agent arrived after the train accident to talk to  
19  you about --

20          A.    Yes.

21          Q.    Okay.  So besides the agent I'm the only other person  
22  you've spoken to about this?

23          A.    Yes.

24          Q.    Okay.  Anything else you would like to add?

25          A.    Not that I'm aware of, no, other than it was a very

1 scary day and I'm just glad that everything worked well. I can't  
2 praise people more. I mean, they've been very considerate and  
3 very kind to us. Other than that, that's about it

4 Q. Okay. Well, it's 12:07 p.m. I think we will end the  
5 interview at this point. Ms. Stevenson, thank you so much for  
6 your assistance in trying to tell us what happened here.

7 A. You're welcome. Thank you.

8 Q. Thank you.

9 (Whereupon, at 12:07 p.m., 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:            TRAIN DERAILMENT/CHEMICAL SPILL  
                                      NOVEMBER 30, 2012  
                                      PAULSBORO, NEW JERSEY  
                                      Interview of Raelynn Stevenson

DOCKET NUMBER:            DCA-13-MR-002

PLACE:                        Paulsboro, New Jersey

DATE:                         December 2, 2012

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.

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Linda L. Brown  
Transcriber