



**Survival Factors Attachment:**

**Riverside School District**

**interviews**

**Oakland, Ia.**

**HWY18MH003**

(116 pages)

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of:

SCHOOL BUS FIRE NEAR OAKLAND, IOWA,  
DECEMBER 12, 2017

\*  
\*  
\* Accident No.: HWY18MH003  
\*

\* \* \* \* \*

Interview of: NICK BATES  
Bus Driver

Riverside Community School District  
Bus Barn  
708 Glass Street  
Oakland, Iowa

Friday,  
December 15, 2017

## APPEARANCES:

SHERYL HARLEY, Survival Factors Investigator  
National Transportation Safety Board

I N D E XITEMPAGE

Interview of Nick Bates:

By Ms. Harley

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I N T E R V I E W

(10:17 a.m.)

## INTERVIEW OF NICK BATES

BY MS. HARLEY:

1 Q. Okay. So have a seat, please.

2 A. Nope. I'm okay.

3 Q. Okay. So I just want to make sure. You're Nick Bates,  
4 right?

5 A. Yes.

6 Q. Okay. All right. And what's your, what's your title here?

7 A. I guess they call it the transportation supervisor/director.

8 Q. Okay. All right. Are you also in charge of the -- I guess  
9 what you call the dispatch? When drivers call, you are the one  
10 who answers the radio?

11 A. Yes. I'm going to say I didn't set the schedules up this  
12 year because I didn't start until the day before school started,  
13 but --

14 Q. Oh. So actually, so you started in September? Or August?

15 A. August.

16 Q. Oh, the school starts here in August?

17 A. Yeah.

18 Q. Okay. Okay. So all right. So I guess let's start from the  
19 beginning. On the day that this whole thing happened, do you know  
20 what time Mr. Hendricks actually pulled out of here on his route?

21 A. Out of here? 6:30 to 6:35. I hope that's close enough.

1 Q. Whatever you remember, that's fine. Okay. So did he have  
2 any issues with his bus at all that you were aware?

3 A. No. And I drove it the afternoon before with him.

4 Q. Why were you driving it the afternoon before?

5 A. Because he was going to go for back surgery, and I just --  
6 just in case I had to jump in to help drive his route while he was  
7 gone, I figured I better kind of know where I'm stopping.

8 Q. Oh, okay. I see. So you were just trying to get familiar  
9 with the route, yeah.

10 A. Well, that -- while he was here. That way I kind of --  
11 instead of, okay, kids, where do you live?

12 Q. Clearly that's a good idea. So when Mr. Hendricks gets on  
13 the bus, does he actually use a walker or does he use a cane to  
14 climb up on the bus?

15 A. He uses his cane.

16 Q. He uses the cane? Okay. Okay. Does he use a walker at all?

17 A. I have not seen it. Not personally.

18 Q. All right. All right. So he pulled out around 6:30 to 6:35.  
19 Was that his scheduled first stop --

20 A. Yes.

21 Q. -- do you know? Okay. Okay. When was the first time you  
22 realized something was wrong?

23 A. When he hollered at me at the radio and -- I'm going to  
24 guess, because I really didn't look at any clocks, but it had to  
25 be just a few minutes before 7, maybe 6:55, because one of my

1 other drivers was getting ready to leave at that time.

2 Q. Okay. Do you remember what he said to you?

3 A. He was in the ditch, couldn't get out. And I -- for the life  
4 of me -- you'll have to talk to somebody else. I can't remember  
5 if he said fire or not. I just went out there. I think he did,  
6 but I can't be a hundred percent.

7 Q. So when you said he was in the ditch and couldn't get out,  
8 your assumption was that the bus couldn't get out --

9 A. Yes.

10 Q. -- or he couldn't get out? Okay. All right. Did he say  
11 anything else outside of he was in the ditch and he couldn't get  
12 out?

13 A. No.

14 Q. Okay. And he gave you the -- he told you where he was?

15 A. Yes.

16 Q. Okay. When you left here, did you think that you needed to  
17 call 911 or --

18 A. I got a hold of Laurie (ph.) up there and kind of just told  
19 her the situation.

20 Q. Who's Laurie? I'm sorry.

21 A. Nielson (ph.), our elementary secretary. And I know she had  
22 contacted, once we figured out there was a fire on there.

23 Q. Okay. So you talked to her first. And what did she do?

24 A. Under my assumption, she called 911 and then got a hold of  
25 Bernie to call out there.

1 Q. So Bernie was -- Bernie was not here?

2 A. He was not -- he was already on the road.

3 Q. Oh, Bernie was already on the road.

4 A. Yes.

5 Q. Okay. All right. So she called 911, then she called  
6 Bernie --

7 A. Yes.

8 Q. -- who was on the road. And do you know what she told Bernie  
9 to do?

10 A. She wanted him to call out there to the house. And I think  
11 this all happened -- had to be from about 6:58, 6:59, from what  
12 I've kind of gathered from -- because I know I called one of our  
13 sub drivers to originally just come grab another bus. And then he  
14 said at -- I think he said, like, 7:08 or something. I was there  
15 and already -- he just said I was freaking out and told him to go  
16 finish the other route, or finish the route. Sorry. It's still  
17 just kind of a --

18 Q. You know what? You don't have to apologize.

19 A. I feel I do, because I put a lot of it on me, just because  
20 that's me.

21 Q. Understood. Okay. So did Bernie actually say anything to  
22 anyone on the radio at --

23 A. Not that I was aware, because my radio got left in the pickup  
24 by the time I got there.

25 Q. Okay. Did you know the other gentleman who also arrived?



1 Was there another gentleman that showed up there?

2 A. I think it was one of his neighbors or something, but I don't  
3 know him.

4 Q. You don't know him? Okay. And I know this is going to be  
5 very difficult. When you arrived on the scene, what was the bus  
6 like?

7 A. It was fully engulfed.

8 Q. It was fully engulfed. From one end to the other? Okay.  
9 Do you know approximately what time you got there?

10 A. It had to be shortly after 7.

11 Q. Okay.

12 A. If I had to -- it's a guess.

13 Q. Okay. All right. So you said that, you said that at 7:08,  
14 you --

15 A. That's when, that's when Marshall Cooper, I had talked to him  
16 and told him to finish the route. That's why I'm guessing it was  
17 shortly after 7 that I had got there, if my reasoning makes sense.

18 Q. Okay. So okay. So when you got on the scene, was the mother  
19 and sister still by the bus?

20 A. No.

21 Q. No? Okay. All right. Was the neighbor already there?

22 A. No.

23 Q. Okay. So you were actually the first person there? Okay.

24 All right.

25 A. Well, besides the mother -- mother and --

1 Q. Well, the mother -- but they were not out at the --

2 A. They were in their driveway up by the house. They were not  
3 up by the bus, no. Because all I could do is just stand and  
4 watch.

5 Q. I understand. Okay. All right. So then the next person  
6 that arrived on the scene was a police officer; is that correct?

7 A. Yes.

8 Q. Okay. And do you remember when the fire department arrived  
9 on the scene?

10 A. I have no clue on time when I was out there.

11 Q. No, that's -- not worried about time. What fire department  
12 unit arrived first; do you know?

13 A. I want to say Oakland, but all three, I think, ended up being  
14 there.

15 Q. Okay. What are all three? I'm not from the area. I'm  
16 sorry.

17 A. Oh, I'm sorry. Oakland, Carson and Macedonia.

18 Q. Okay. And Macedonia.

19 A. I know I seen -- I don't know if they all brought fire trucks  
20 or what they all brought, but I'm pretty sure I seen vehicles of  
21 theirs.

22 Q. Do you know if, once they got there and they were trying to  
23 put out the fire, did they remove the windows or were the windows  
24 all blown --

25 A. No, they were already gone.

1 Q. The windows were already gone? Okay. The front of the bus  
2 by the front hood --

3 (Tone interruption.)

4 A. I must have hit a button.

5 Q. Okay, no problem. The front of the bus that was the hood,  
6 was that also all on fire?

7 A. I think it was. I think -- I think front to back.

8 Q. Okay. That's fine. Okay. All right. So I'm just going to  
9 go over this, just to make sure that I understand, okay? So  
10 Mr. Hendricks left out of here in his bus -- is that his normal  
11 bus?

12 A. Yep.

13 Q. Okay. Okay. Between 6:30 and 6:35.

14 A. Yep.

15 Q. How long does it take to actually get there?

16 A. I would say, with a bus, you're probably looking 15, 20.

17 Q. Fifteen, 20 --

18 A. Roughly.

19 Q. So it would take between 15 to 20 minutes to get to that  
20 first stop?

21 A. Yeah.

22 Q. Okay. All right. And let's see. And so the first thing you  
23 heard was, just before 7, you think around 6:55 but we're going to  
24 -- we understand that time is --

25 A. Okay.

1 Q. And that what he said to you was that the bus was in the  
2 ditch and he couldn't get out.

3 A. Yes.

4 Q. Okay. All right. Was there anybody else in this -- in here  
5 with you at the time?

6 A. Kevin Schechenger was walking to his bus.

7 Q. Kevin -- can you spell his --

8 A. Oh, God. S-C -- no.

9 Q. No? Schechenger?

10 A. Yeah, I got his last name from the file. I can --

11 Q. That's all right. You know what? We'll work on that. So  
12 Kevin was -- who else was here?

13 A. That was it.

14 Q. That was it? Okay. So it was just you and Kevin?

15 A. Well, because he was walking to his bus and I hollered at him  
16 about, I think, a kid not needing picked up.

17 Q. Okay. So at that particular point after you hear  
18 Mr. Hendricks saying that he couldn't get out, you then called  
19 Mr. Cooper to get a second bus?

20 A. Yes.

21 Q. Okay. And he originally was on his way to that point or  
22 just --

23 A. No, he wasn't. He just lives outside of town.

24 Q. Okay. All right.

25 A. He was not -- he's just one of our backup subs.

1 Q. Okay. All right. So at that particular point you call  
2 Ms. Nielson --

3 A. Yes.

4 Q. -- who's up there, and Ms. Nielson then calls Bernie. And I  
5 just want to be correct. Bernie is actually the brother of the  
6 young lady's father; is that correct? He's actually a family  
7 member.

8 A. Yes. Yes.

9 Q. Okay. And -- to call up to the house, and she was the first  
10 one to call 911, you think?

11 A. It was either her, or I heard they did out there too.

12 Q. Right. Okay. But you did not call 911?

13 A. No. I tried hitting the little button, but I wasn't --  
14 stopped driving once I kind of --

15 Q. Okay. All right. So all your radios have the emergency --

16 A. Yes.

17 Q. -- 911 button? Okay. And this bus also has that -- the  
18 button on there, the emergency 911 button?

19 A. Yes. And it still baffles me to this day why he did not hit  
20 that.

21 Q. Okay. All right. And so let's see. So when you arrived on  
22 the scene, then the neighbor arrived.

23 A. I think he was -- he wasn't that far behind. I want to say  
24 maybe 2 to 3 minutes. You know, everything kind of strung  
25 together. I'm sure you hear that --

1 Q. I'm sure time stopped, yeah. All right. Okay. Then the  
2 police officer arrived on the scene, and then the three fire  
3 departments, which is Oakland, Carson and Macedonia.

4 A. Yes.

5 Q. Okay. When you got on the scene, all the windows were gone?  
6 You think.

7 A. I think. I'm not going to say yes or no on that one, but --

8 Q. Okay. No problem. All right. And was the -- in addition to  
9 the bus, was the ground around the bus also on fire?

10 A. I think some of the ditch was.

11 Q. Okay. All right. So when you saw, when you saw  
12 Mr. Hendricks earlier that day, he didn't say he had any problems,  
13 any difficulties?

14 A. He didn't.

15 Q. And he would have told you if there was something wrong with  
16 the bus?

17 A. I would hope so. And I guess, to add to that one, I felt  
18 comfortable not to even ask because I drove it the night before.

19 Q. Okay. So did you ride his whole route the night before?

20 A. Yeah.

21 Q. Okay. So was that in the evening or in the morning?

22 A. Evening. Evening.

23 Q. Is was the evening? Okay. So -- and how long does his route  
24 usually take?

25 A. From the time they leave, about an hour and a half, hour and

1 45 minutes. You know, it depends if all the kids are ready.

2 Q. Okay. All right. Okay. What I'm going to do is I'm going  
3 to leave you my business card.

4 A. Okay.

5 Q. And if you think of something, I don't care if you think it's  
6 not important, give me a call on my cell phone and just leave a  
7 message. That's fine. You know, sometimes you think about  
8 something a little bit later. All right?

9 I'm assuming, of course, that the -- either the company or  
10 the school system is providing some kind of grief counsellors for  
11 you guys?

12 A. They have. They --

13 Q. Yeah. Good idea. Everybody does it -- police officers,  
14 firefighters. I was both a police officer and a firefighter.  
15 I'll tell you, we all do it.

16 A. Well, thank you for all your services.

17 Q. So -- but really, I certainly do appreciate it, and thank  
18 you. What is the office number here, by the way?

19 A. 712-482- --

20 Q. 482.

21 A. -- 6215.

22 Q. 1-5. By the way, when did you get these radios, these radios  
23 in the buses? I know this was way before your time, okay.

24 A. I ordered two for our two new buses coming. I was amazed how  
25 expensive they were.

1 Q. Okay. Well, I think that is about it. Do you have any  
2 questions for me?

3 A. Please figure this out.

4 Q. Well, we're going to try. We are going to try. Okay?

5 A. Because it's honestly eating me to not know.

6 Q. I can imagine.

7 A. Just hoping -- you know, hindsight's always 20/20.

8 Q. Yeah, and -- yes, it is. And trying to second-guess yourself  
9 is always 20/20. Okay. All right.

10 A. You know, I'll let you know if I have anything.

11 Q. Okay. The other thing is, outside of hitting that actuator  
12 -- I just want to verify -- the actuator where you push down to  
13 pull the --

14 A. Yes.

15 Q. -- to swing that out, there's actually no way of pushing that  
16 door open? There's not like an emergency release that's not part  
17 of that -- not part of the assembly?

18 A. No, not on this one.

19 Q. No. Not on that one?

20 A. Not that I have --

21 Q. And there's not one on -- and Mr. Hendricks' bus is just like  
22 this one?

23 A. Pretty close. I don't think his -- his didn't have this deal  
24 here. It just has the little deal that you can flip up that it'll  
25 -- it does the same thing. It bumps that so it doesn't latch.



1 Q. Latch. Right. Got you. Okay. So you actually have to do  
2 that actuator in order to get the doors to function? So in other  
3 words, if I was a kid and the door is closed, the driver has  
4 closed the door, and I just walk past the driver and push on the  
5 door, there's no way I could push the door open because this  
6 locks.

7 A. I don't -- yeah. I mean, yeah.

8 Q. Yeah. Okay. Then you have to pull it up to slide it out.

9 A. Yeah. Yeah, you -- yeah.

10 Q. Thank you very much. I appreciate your talking to me.

11 A. Well, I hope I helped some.

12 Q. I will give you my card. And, you know, any little bit we  
13 can get from anybody, we'll figure it out hopefully, okay?

14 A. I hope so. Thank you.

15 Q. No, thank you.

16 (Whereupon, at 10:34 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:           SCHOOL BUS FIRE NEAR OAKLAND, IOWA,  
                                  DECEMBER 12, 2017  
                                  Interview of Nick Bates

ACCIDENT NO.:               HWY18MH003

PLACE:                       Oakland, Iowa

DATE:                         December 15, 2017

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.



---

Eileen Gonzalez  
Transcriber

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of: \*

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SCHOOL BUS FIRE NEAR OAKLAND, IOWA, \*

DECEMBER 12, 2017 \* Accident No.: HWY18MH003

\*

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Interview of: BERNARD KLINDT

Bus Driver

Riverside Community School District  
Bus Barn  
708 Glass Street  
Oakland, Iowa

Friday,  
December 15, 2017

## APPEARANCES:

SHERYL HARLEY, Survival Factors Investigator  
National Transportation Safety Board

I N D E XITEMPAGE

Interview of Bernard Klindt:

By Ms. Harley

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I N T E R V I E W

(3:18 p.m.)

## INTERVIEW OF BERNARD KLINDT

BY MS. HARLEY:

1  
2  
3  
4  
5 Q. There are a couple things that he told me. I know that you  
6 got a phone call from Laura?

7 A. Yeah.

8 Q. Laura up there? Okay. First of all, did you hear Donny on  
9 the radio?

10 A. Yes, I did.

11 Q. Nick, he was very upset and I know this is very upsetting for  
12 you, and he couldn't really remember what he heard. Do you  
13 remember?

14 A. If I remember right, all I heard is, "This is Donny." What  
15 do you call it? "I'm out here at Klindt's. We got a fire in the  
16 bus and I can't get out."

17 Q. Okay.

18 A. And then do you call it? Then Nick hollers back at him. He  
19 goes, do you need me to help, or you need me to bring another bus?  
20 What? And Donny never answered another word.

21 Q. Okay. So then --

22 A. It was something like that, yeah: I'm at Klindt's; the bus  
23 is on fire and we can't get out. That's all he said. And I'll  
24 bet if you ask every other driver, it was that same line. And  
25 then the radio went dead.

1 Q. Okay. Then you got a phone call from Laura?

2 A. Yeah. Then about 2 minutes later, Laurie calls --

3 Q. Laurie. Okay.

4 A. -- said -- the secretary up there, she goes, Bernie, would  
5 you call Glen -- which is my brother -- and see if he can find out  
6 what's going on out there? So I called, and what do you call it,  
7 I knew my brother Glen was gone. He was -- he line-hauls clear  
8 down to the quads every night. So I called Natalie, I called the  
9 home hoping to get Natalie with answers. Straight-up Natalie  
10 answered, and she goes, hello? And my exact words -- I'm just in  
11 a hurry.

12 Q. I know.

13 A. But I said -- my exact words were, Natalie, I said, they just  
14 called me; there's an emergency. The bus is on fire right there  
15 by your place. Could you go out and look north or south, tell me  
16 what direction it is?

17 And she goes -- and I said, and I said, Megan's trapped on  
18 the bus and it's on fire. That's what I said. I said, Natalie, I  
19 said, they just called me. The bus is on fire. Megan's trapped  
20 on it and, what do you call it, can't get out. Can you go out?  
21 They say the bus is on fire. Can you look -- go outside and look  
22 either way?

23 Well, you know, she run right outside with her, just her  
24 jammies on, barefoot. And she goes -- and all I can hear on the  
25 phone, god damn, it's cold. You know, she said. And turned

1 around and she walked around the house and she goes, oh my god,  
2 the bus is -- she goes, and the fire's here by the house. And  
3 then she drops the phone.

4 And what do you call it, so then I panicked. Then I -- what  
5 do you call it -- so I called my brother Glen in the truck. And I  
6 said, Glen, I said, I don't know what to tell you, either pull  
7 your truck over right now, I said, I said, it's an emergency.  
8 Megan's on the bus; it's on fire, and she can't get out. And the  
9 fire's heading for your house. Oh, and Glenn goes, oh my God. He  
10 goes, let me -- I said, I just called Natalie. And what do you  
11 call it, the phone went dead. I told him what I said, and he got  
12 off the phone and then he called Natalie.

13 And then what do you call it, I come into Doney (ph.),  
14 because I made the route. What do you call it, I kept stopping,  
15 making phone calls and I -- about, I suppose, 10 minutes later, I  
16 called Jessica, which was their daughter. And I said, Jessica,  
17 have you heard anything? I said, I said, do you know what's going  
18 on? She said, yes. She was crying. I said, now what? And she  
19 goes, Donny and, what do you call it, Megan didn't make it. She  
20 was crying. She goes, they've already told us Donny and Megan  
21 didn't make it.

22 Q. I'm sorry. Okay.

23 A. So if that's any help to you, that's it in a nutshell. I've  
24 told it so many times to so many people that --

25 Q. I know. You're tired of it.



1 A. Yeah. But that's just the way it happened.

2 Q. Okay. I tell you what I'm going to do. I'm just going to  
3 give you my card, and I'm going to let you get back to work. If  
4 you think of anything else, and I mean --

5 A. That is the entire of it, because then when I got off, I  
6 drove out to my brother's and --

7 Q. Yeah. I'm sorry.

8 A. Yeah. As far as on the radio traffic, that's all there  
9 happened that morning. Because he wasn't answering, wasn't  
10 answering, wasn't answering. And you know, Donny, so -- what do  
11 you call it, that's when Laurie told me. And like I said, only a  
12 minute or two passed and she said, Bernie, would you want to call  
13 out there; I ain't got their number. And see if you can find out  
14 anything. Have Glen go out, see if he can see anything.

15 And I knew better to call Glen because I knew he was gone  
16 with the truck, and so I called Natalie. And she run out and seen  
17 it, and she screamed and said, oh my god, the fire's right here;  
18 the bus is on fire. And what do you call it? And then what do  
19 you call it, I talked to Megan [sic] and them. They ran out  
20 there. They grabbed a hammer out of the, what do you call it,  
21 below the kitchen sink, ran out there and it was just a little  
22 small damn hammer that you use on -- to put nails in the wall or  
23 something.

24 Q. That was Michele, right?

25 A. Michele. And she went out there, was banging on the window,

1 and she couldn't get nobody out. And what do you call it, she  
2 said that -- in her exact words, she goes, throw -- tell Megan to  
3 get out of there. And he goes, I can't find her. That's all  
4 Donny said. I can't find her. And he goes, well, push her out  
5 the window. And that's when, what do you call it, Michele said  
6 that it just engulfed him in flames.

7 And I don't know if it's just because he had the window open  
8 and the oxygen got to the fire or what. And what do you call it,  
9 the last thing he was saying, she won't fit. And poof. And then  
10 he just collapsed.

11 Q. Okay. The last question I'm going to ask you -- I know  
12 you've got to go -- is the emergency button, do all the radios  
13 have the emergency buttons on them?

14 A. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Well, yeah, on account of the county  
15 sheriff put them in, right there. Yeah.

16 Q. Do you have any idea why Donny didn't use the emergency  
17 button? He called --

18 A. You know what I'm going to say? Going by what I seen in the  
19 press, they said -- when Natalie said she seen the bus, the whole  
20 back half was on fire. I'll say it was so god darn hot they -- he  
21 was panicking. He probably couldn't even think straight, let  
22 alone be able to see. That would be my guess.

23 Q. Okay. All right. Thank you very much.

24 A. You know, anybody sitting inside of a bus when it's an  
25 inferno, what the hell would you do?

1 Q. I don't know. I couldn't even tell you how I would.

2 A. The heat, the heat must have been something, because they  
3 said she died of severe burns followed by smoke inhalation. And  
4 God, what a death.

5 Q. I know. No, I don't know. And I'm very sorry. I will let  
6 you go. I will leave your family in peace, and --

7 A. Okay. But far as radio and everything, that's all that  
8 happened. It happened, and that's all in a span of 5 minutes.  
9 You know, there's just -- I don't know what else I can tell you.

10 Q. Do you remember any times, what time the initial --

11 A. Yeah, I had Michele -- because I don't know how to run my  
12 cell phone. And Michele pulled it up, and I called Natalie at  
13 6:59.

14 Q. 6:59. Okay. All right. That'll help. Thank you very much,  
15 and I know you got to go --

16 A. Yeah, and the other people out there at the house that day,  
17 the sheriff or highway patrol, they took all that down too, or  
18 whoever was out there that day. They told -- there was two ladies  
19 with the medical examiner or whoever, something like that, that  
20 was doing an interview. And Michele was the one who brought it up  
21 on my phone, that I called Natalie at 6:59.

22 Q. What we're doing is we're actually tracking all the calls.  
23 Can I get your phone number that you called from?

24 A. Oh, yeah. [REDACTED].

25 Q. [REDACTED]?

1 A. Yep. Yeah, that's the only phone that I have. I don't have  
2 a landline anymore, so --

3 Q. None of us do.

4 MS. HARLEY: All right. Thank you, sir. Bye-bye.

5 MR. KLINDT: Yeah. Bye.

6 (Whereupon, at 3:26 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: SCHOOL BUS FIRE NEAR OAKLAND, IOWA,  
DECEMBER 12, 2017  
Interview of Bernard Klindt

ACCIDENT NO.: HWY18MH003

PLACE: Oakland, Iowa

DATE: December 15, 2017

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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Eileen Gonzalez  
Transcriber

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of:

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SCHOOL BUS FIRE NEAR OAKLAND, IOWA,  
DECEMBER 12, 2017

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Accident No.: HWY18MH003

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Interview of: DANIELLE EASON  
Bus Driver

Riverside Community School District  
Bus Barn  
708 Glass Street  
Oakland, Iowa

Friday,  
December 15, 2017

## APPEARANCES:

MICHAEL LaPONTE, Highway Vehicle Crash Investigator  
National Transportation Safety Board

Also Present:

SHERYL HARLEY, Survival Factors Investigator  
National Transportation Safety Board

JULIE KANG, Ph.D., Highway Accident Investigator  
National Transportation Safety Board

ENSAR BECIC, Ph.D., Human Performance Investigator  
National Transportation Safety Board

I N D E X

ITEM

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By Mr. LaPonte

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I N T E R V I E W

(9:46 a.m.)

## INTERVIEW OF DANIELLE EASON

BY MR. LaPONTE:

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3  
4  
5 A. -- and then we sit them down, we talk about where the exits  
6 are and how they open. And then we normally -- when we're all  
7 done, they ask questions, and then we go out the back of the bus,  
8 and then every kid jumps out and we help them down.

9 Q. Okay. Do they jump or they --

10 A. Like, we --

11 Q. -- they just step down?

12 A. Yeah.

13 Q. Yeah, okay. So you're not making them do acrobatics?

14 A. No. No backflips, no.

15 Q. Gymnastics or -- nothing tricky. You don't get a score.

16 That's a 7.

17 A. Four.

18 Q. And that's once a year? Is that -- how often?

19 A. I think it's once a semester. So once normally at the  
20 beginning of the year and once right before school gets out.

21 Q. Okay. Do you -- is there any paperwork that notates that?  
22 Like a dispatch order or a -- you know, they say, okay, you got to  
23 stay over today because we're going to do the emergency drills  
24 or --

25 A. The one thing I think they do -- like, we don't sign

1 anything. The only thing we do is, like, pay our -- we'll  
2 schedule like an hour or whatever on our pay. That's the only way  
3 I can think that we'd have a record.

4 Q. Okay, okay. So what --

5 A. But -- and a lot of the times, like, our sheets are set up  
6 where we write an hour, and then like, me, I'll write underneath,  
7 like, I went to training or for football or training whatever. I  
8 don't know. I think -- there's two or three of us that do that.  
9 So if you look through that --

10 Q. So it's usually the same two or three drivers that do this  
11 training? I would --

12 A. No. I mean, it's just whoever's available, whoever doesn't  
13 have something planned after their route. He just kind of goes,  
14 hey, we need training today. And we'll go, well, I'm available;  
15 I'm available; I'm available. Okay, that's three; we have enough.

16 Q. Yeah.

17 A. And we do --

18 Q. So that's not assigned to say, okay, tomorrow you're going to  
19 train?

20 A. No. No, it's --

21 Q. It's whoever looks at him --

22 A. Whoever can.

23 Q. -- gets a free donut and training?

24 A. Yeah.

25 Q. Oh, there you go. Can't beat that.

1           How long does the training take? So if I've got my classroom  
2 there and --

3 A. I think it's 3 hours for the whole building. Like, to get --

4 Q. For the whole building.

5 A. Because we do, like, a grade at a time. And there's -- like  
6 the kindergarten and preschool classes have three classes per  
7 grade. So we'll do them, and we'll have all of them on the bus  
8 and do it. And then we'll send them back into class, and then  
9 we'll do it for the next grade and send them back into the class.

10 Q. So does this --do you do that for the intermediary and the  
11 high school as well?

12 A. I have --

13 Q. Or is it only done --

14 A. I have never done the high school. I'm not sure. I'm sure  
15 they do, but I've never done it. I've done the middle school and  
16 the elementary.

17 Q. Okay. All right. And that would be noted on your timecard?

18 A. Yeah.

19 Q. So okay. All right. See what else. So when you go through  
20 the drill, the -- you know, how the windows open, how the  
21 (indiscernible) the ones on the back door and so forth, do you go  
22 -- are you ever given any training on how the front door opens? I  
23 mean, I --

24 A. I don't think so.

25 Q. Obviously, it looks pretty --

1 A. Yeah, I mean --

2 Q. -- it looks pretty straightforward to me. But, I mean, is  
3 there any training on how --

4 A. I don't --

5 Q. -- it opens or not open or don't do this or opening it from  
6 the outside, for instance?

7 A. Yes, but I mean, every bus in here is different. We have  
8 electronic buses. We have buses with the doors. We have ones  
9 -- it takes me a minute to take -- get into a bus around here and  
10 figure out where the button --

11 Q. Figure out where all the stuff is, yeah.

12 A. But all the kids on my bus, I make sure they know how to --  
13 where the thing is. Because I had a propane bus before I got this  
14 one. And it's a switch. And I said, if it's on switch, if that  
15 doesn't work, then there's a flip thing and then you push the door  
16 open. Like it's all on air brakes. It's all on air pressure.

17 Q. So it depends on the model of the bus?

18 A. Right.

19 Q. Okay. So those, are those strictly for the air brake buses?  
20 Is that that system, or do you know?

21 A. No, I don't think so. Mine does, and I know --

22 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Sorry. I'm eavesdropping.

23 MR. LaPONTE: No, no, by all means. This is not -- obviously  
24 this is not a private conversation. No, I just --

25 MS. EASON: Join us.

1 MR. LaPONTE: Wasn't supposed to be. It just -- we're trying  
2 to get a handle on that training, and also what happens -- if  
3 there is some training for the drivers on the different doors that  
4 are on the different vehicles, to ingress and egress. So we're  
5 wondering if --

6 MS. EASON: See, and it's kind of hard for me. I'm the new  
7 one. I never rode a bus before. This is the biggest vehicle I've  
8 ever drove. So it's only my second year-ish on it. So I hop into  
9 a bus that he tells me to move, and I'm like, okay, now I got to  
10 figure out where everything is first and then figure it out. But,  
11 like, Bernie has been here for 23 years, can just hop in a bus and  
12 drive it anywhere.

13 MR. LaPONTE: Yeah, right. Well, that -- okay. So is there  
14 any -- when you get one of these vehicles, do they -- does it come  
15 with any instructions for the driver in terms of door operations?  
16 Not necessarily the emergency door, but the --

17 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Like when we get a new one or  
18 something?

19 MR. LaPONTE: Yeah.

20 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: I don't know. We're supposed to be  
21 getting two new ones soon. Other than that, I have not gotten  
22 anything.

23 MS. EASON: Yeah. They were supposed to be here Wednesday, I  
24 think.

25 MR. LaPONTE: Well, that -- yeah, that's good. Yeah.

1 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: So I can't answer that when we haven't  
2 gotten anything.

3 MR. LaPONTE: Now when you get a new bus, do they deliver  
4 them or do you have to go to Marshalltown to pick them up?

5 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: They said they were going to deliver  
6 them.

7 MR. LaPONTE: So they'll drive them up here and drop them off  
8 and --

9 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: As far as -- yeah. That was a new one  
10 to me too, so --

11 MR. LaPONTE: Yeah.

12 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: He said that's what they were going to  
13 do, so --

14 MR. LaPONTE: Okay. All right. Okay.

15 BY MR. LaPONTE:

16 Q. Why don't you, why don't you show me your bus? Why don't we  
17 walk through? I'm going to pretend I'm 4 years old, which isn't  
18 really a stretch, but --

19 All right. Okay. So I'm the newest lad here. So just kind  
20 of go through what you would -- give me a rundown. Give me a  
21 demonstration, if you could, of what you do when you do your bus  
22 evacuation training, if you don't mind.

23 A. Well, if you're going to be 4 -- the older kids, we -- they  
24 know already because they've done it every year. But we turn the  
25 key on, and then we open some of the emergency things so they can

1 hear the sound. And then normally that's just open. We don't  
2 really even touch that other than that.

3 But we go through. We go, okay, so anything with the red  
4 little latches are emergency exits. And there's two in the front,  
5 two in the back. And we talk about these. We try to walk because  
6 we normally have a full bus, and you can't always give attention  
7 to everybody because there's so many on one.

8 Q. And they're all misbehaving, I'm sure.

9 A. Oh, yeah, because --

10 Q. They're playing grab-ass.

11 A. Exactly. And then we teach them all these, how to open them.  
12 We say that -- to never open them if we're going down the road,  
13 because that's been a big problem, especially lately.

14 Q. Yeah.

15 A. We open these, and we let them hear the sound and tell them  
16 what to do. And if they're old enough to read, like the middle  
17 school and stuff, we tell them, you know, it says lift handle to  
18 push -- or to open and then push up.

19 Q. Now does the back door have an alarm on it so that --

20 A. Yes.

21 Q. -- when it's -- the key is turned on and someone fools with  
22 that thing, it's going to buzz --

23 A. Yeah.

24 Q. -- or do something? It's going to make some noise of some  
25 nature?

1 A. Yeah. And the windows do too.

2 Q. Oh, they do?

3 A. And this.

4 Q. They're all alarmed?

5 A. I know because I had an issue with one of these. That one  
6 would shut and then you'd hear it buzzing through the -- you had  
7 to leave the back open. But we got that fixed.

8 Q. Okay. All right. And then -- so then after you've done,  
9 you're done giving that safety briefing, then you just have them  
10 exit the back door?

11 A. Yeah. And it's meant for, like, a fun day, like --

12 Q. Yeah, right.

13 A. This -- you've now sat through this boring lecture, you know,  
14 where everything is. We try to point out like the -- where the  
15 fire extinguisher is and stuff. And like, my kids, I teach them  
16 the button on the radio. I teach them what to do if I'm not  
17 responding and said, if anything happens to me, if we have an  
18 accident and you can't get a hold of me, who to call on the radio,  
19 what button to push. That's mostly my bus, my bus kids, so --

20 Q. Yeah, that's -- yeah. So the --

21 A. And I make sure all of my country kids, they all sit in the  
22 first like six seats because they love me.

23 Q. Of course they do. Why wouldn't they? Most students love  
24 their bus drivers.

25 A. Yeah. It's just, like, my city kids just (indiscernible).



1 Q. You got to discipline them, right?

2 A. (Indiscernible).

3 Q. Now the radio, let's talk about the radio for a second, if  
4 you don't mind.

5 A. Yeah.

6 Q. So the radio, you can --

7 A. You can sit right up in there.

8 Q. You go ahead and key it, and it automatically comes to this  
9 and all the other radios in the school system, so --

10 A. Yeah. Yeah.

11 Q. I mean, whoever in the administration side has a walkie-  
12 talkie is going to --

13 A. And I believe --

14 Q. -- hear that transmission?

15 A. Yes. And I believe Dave Danker (ph.) has one also.

16 Q. Okay. Now if you wanted to call -- do they give you  
17 instruction on the 911 button?

18 A. I've had --

19 Q. The 9-1-1 button?

20 A. -- one person tell me that. So that's why I've told every  
21 kid I -- that's in my front seats about that red button.

22 Q. Okay. So if you push the red button and you transmit, now it  
23 goes into the 911 dispatch system somehow. Magic, I guess.

24 A. Right. Somehow. Yeah.

25 Q. Yeah. Some guy from Italy made up this deal with macaroni

1 and radios and stuff.

2 A. Right. Well, and I think I'm the one that told Nick about  
3 it. I don't think anyone even told Nick. So it was all new to me  
4 and they just told me never to touch it unless I needed it. I  
5 kind of was trying to --

6 Q. There's this button, but never touch it.

7 A. Exactly. They were trying to teach me the radio because I  
8 changed it off the channel that went to my school and started  
9 picking up Avoca school. I'm like, I don't know how to change it  
10 back. They're like, don't touch the red button. Okay. I won't  
11 touch anything.

12 Q. So the channels are per school, or is it just a -- does it go  
13 out to the whole district?

14 A. I think there's a channel for our school and then a channel  
15 for the districts around us and us that all link up, so where you  
16 can hear everybody.

17 Q. Oh, I see. So you could talk to Griswold and --

18 A. Yeah.

19 Q. -- see what's for lunch at the Griswold café?

20 A. Right. Right.

21 Q. Okay. All right.

22 A. I know that we're, like, ARS-something-1.

23 Q. Yeah. Okay. And now do you drive the same bus every day, or  
24 does the --

25 A. This is the bus I've been driving every day since mine broke

1 down. Mine just died on the road (indiscernible).

2 Q. Oh, is that one of the ones they're trading in, one of the  
3 propane?

4 A. No. I wish. I wish. I hate that bus. No, my propane bus  
5 is getting fixed, if the part will ever come in. But they are  
6 infamous, those propane buses. The parts never come in.

7 Q. Well, that's the new American way. So when you buy a vehicle  
8 now -- I know in the trucking business, when you buy a vehicle,  
9 you have to plan for about 35 days a year of it sitting in the  
10 shop --

11 A. Exactly. Exactly.

12 Q. -- waiting for a \$9 part that has to come from somewhere far  
13 away.

14 A. I like this bus because anything that ever breaks on this  
15 one, like, he can go to Omaha to a truck company and can buy it  
16 because it's all standard.

17 Q. International.

18 A. But the propane one, it's always something with the propane  
19 lines that's broken.

20 Q. Are those all Blue Birds, those buses?

21 A. I think so.

22 Q. Yeah. The propane ones? Okay.

23 A. I know mine is. I don't -- I think -- we only have two, and  
24 I think Tim's is. Tim's is Number 9 sitting out here somewhere,  
25 and his is a propane one.

1 Q. So which do you prefer: Blue Bird's or International's? Or  
2 corn binders?

3 A. I like International. I like this bus. I hope he never  
4 let's me get out of it.

5 Q. Well, you got to put in a, you got to put in a bid.

6 Now are you the only female bus driver at this district?

7 A. No, there's three of us.

8 Q. There's three of you. Okay. All right.

9 A. I'm just the youngest one.

10 Q. You're just the --

11 A. I'm the baby. I'm 22.

12 Q. You're the rookie.

13 A. Yeah.

14 Q. You're the rookie. Okay. All right.

15 A. I relied on --

16 Q. Hum?

17 A. I rely on Donny and Bernie and Tim to teach me everything.

18 Q. Sure. And that's the way it should be. Seniority shall  
19 prevail. And in the old days, that's how new drivers learned how  
20 to drive, is they matched them up with a senior driver and then  
21 they --

22 A. See, and I'm the --

23 Q. -- became a -- the senior driver became a mentor to the newer  
24 driver, taught them the tricks.

25 A. Then that's just -- we're just a big family. Everybody helps

1 us. I need more help than everybody else, but you know, that's  
2 how it works.

3 Q. Well, you know, eventually. Eventually. Okay. Well, that's  
4 very interesting. Okay. Now the -- I noticed when we walked in  
5 we have seatbelts. Are the seatbelts only in the first two seats?

6 A. I believe so.

7 Q. Or are they on all seats?

8 A. No. No, just the first two.

9 Q. Just the first two. Why are they only on the first two? Do  
10 you know?

11 A. I think, and I'm not sure, but I think it was way back when  
12 we were having some more special needs kids. For the --

13 Q. Oh, for the handicapped kids, to --

14 A. Yeah.

15 Q. -- be able to secure them a little better? Okay.

16 Now you don't have -- I know in the district where my wife  
17 teaches, they have buses, they call them B buses. They're a  
18 little small, 16 passengers. And they usually have a --

19 A. Oh, we have one in Avoca.

20 Q. Okay. And it usually has a wheelchair lift on it, and it's  
21 for the, you know, it's for the special needs kids.

22 A. Yeah. We have one with a wheelchair lift because we're  
23 required to by law, state law, to have one. And it's 23, I think,  
24 out there.

25 Q. Okay. Does it run every day?

1 A. No. It sits here until we need it for a route for somebody  
2 that has a wheelchair.

3 Q. Has a wheelchair. Okay. All right. So that -- there is  
4 nobody currently in the district that has a special needs that  
5 requires --

6 A. No.

7 Q. -- that on a regular basis?

8 A. Anybody right now with the special needs -- because we've  
9 lost -- there's something state-required of the school to have  
10 like a certification. Somebody in the district has to have that  
11 certification to have the higher level ones. So the higher level  
12 kids that we have, we bus out on our school vans and stuff to  
13 Lewis Central, and there's a place on 9th Avenue in Council Bluffs  
14 that we take a couple there. But I think there's only like one or  
15 two that actually come here, and they're not super-high level.

16 Q. Yeah, yeah. Okay. They have 503 special needs written deals  
17 in their files and all that.

18 A. Yeah.

19 Q. Okay. All right. Okay, so I see the cameras. Do you --  
20 when you're driving the bus, do you have to do anything unique to  
21 activate that camera system?

22 A. Start it.

23 Q. Start the bus?

24 A. Yeah.

25 Q. Okay. And then you drive and it's there, and when you turn

1 it off it's still there?

2 A. Yep. And I think it records when you turn the switch and let  
3 the -- because you have to click it once and let all the gauges do  
4 their thing before you can start. The camera starts before all --  
5 you start it, so it's like 30 seconds before you start. And then  
6 it has like a timer. It's either 30 seconds or a minute after you  
7 shut it off, it's --

8 Q. It's still recording?

9 A. Yeah.

10 Q. Okay. And that downloads into a disc?

11 A. It's got a memory --

12 Q. (Indiscernible) thing. Yeah.

13 A. -- slot box, that you take it out, and he's got a little  
14 thing that hooks to his computer and we can look at anything we  
15 need.

16 Q. Okay. Okay. Now do you have any way of disabling that as a  
17 driver? I mean, your --

18 A. I have a way to get that card out, or it wouldn't --

19 Q. Well, yeah, yeah. But, I mean, there's no secret trick you  
20 do like, you know, that --

21 A. No.

22 Q. So if the bus is on and running, that's recording?

23 A. That's running. Yeah. As long as there's a card in it, it  
24 records.

25 Q. Right. So obviously, if there wasn't a card, it's going to

1 be, you know, it's going to be recording. Not -- it's not going  
2 to be recording anything on -- permanently. Okay. What else --  
3 where's the first aid kit in this bus?

4 A. In here.

5 Q. So all of that is behind there?

6 A. Yep.

7 Q. Okay. All right.

8 A. So yeah, our first aid, our blood kit, our triangles and then  
9 our thing. And then this is our box.

10 MR. LaPONTE Yeah, that's the video box.

11 MS. EASON: Yep, which --

12 MR. LaPONTE: Excuse me.

13 MS. EASON: I think the card's in. Looks it. There's a  
14 button somewhere that you push. I don't know where.

15 MR. LaPONTE: That's fine. We're just trying to get -- this  
16 is like show and tell.

17 MS. EASON: Don't mind my (indiscernible).

18 MR. LaPONTE: This is show and tell. Okay, great. Well,  
19 thank you very much. I appreciate it.

20 BY MR. LaPONTE:

21 Q. So the last question, I want you to -- why don't you pretend  
22 that we're pulling up to a stop and the door is closed and you're  
23 going to let us out? Why don't you do the door for me? Can you  
24 please?

25 Okay. So now when you're running, does that automatically



1 lock that assembly that it --

2 A. Yep.

3 Q. -- so it can't be opened?

4 A. Yep.

5 Q. Okay. Then I'm safe. What do you have to do to unlock it,  
6 to get it to open?

7 A. You just pull the piece up.

8 Q. You pull it up or push it down? I'm sorry.

9 A. No, you pull this part up.

10 Q. Oh, you pull it up.

11 A. This little black piece, you pull --

12 Q. I see. Okay. So it's on a slide piece.

13 A. Yep. Then you just pull.

14 Q. Okay. All right. But now, if the bus is -- if you're  
15 moving, the bus is running on the road, what locks that in place  
16 to prevent you from --

17 A. There's just a peg down here that sticks out. There's  
18 nothing -- I could be going 60 miles an hour and open it if I  
19 wanted to.

20 Q. Oh, that was my question. Okay. So it's not -- it doesn't  
21 have a lockout on it when the vehicle is moving. It just --

22 A. Right. And a lot of the time -- because if I'm running up to  
23 a stop, I'll have my lights on, my ambers will come on, but my red  
24 ones won't. You go like this, and your red ones will come out and  
25 your stop sign, so I can roll up to a thing with my stop sign out

1 so people behind me can realize I'm stopping.

2 Q. Ah, so does that trigger -- that triggers the pedals as well,  
3 or is that a secondary -- I mean, I took school bus driver  
4 training in the school district that I live in before I flunked  
5 retirement once. And I know that we had to pull up and start the  
6 paddles and then wait for a short period of time before we open  
7 the door. So if your paddles come out -- so you put on your four-  
8 ways, usually, what, 600 feet before the stop, and paddles are 100  
9 feet?

10 A. 300 -- 300 and then 150 in town. 300 feet before a stop, you  
11 start your ambers and stuff in the country, and then 150 in town.

12 Q. In town.

13 A. And then I just -- I throw out my stop sign because the stop  
14 sign, my stop -- my crossing gate don't open until -- and my red  
15 lights don't open until I open the door. So if I --

16 Q. So that triggers, that triggers those?

17 A. That triggers the opening here.

18 Q. Okay. So, but there's not a -- I guess what I'm trying to  
19 ask is that there is not another set of switches that will trigger  
20 the walk bar and the paddles?

21 A. Well, there is one to shut them off but there is not one to  
22 turn them on.

23 Q. To start them. Okay. So the door --

24 A. This is it.

25 Q. That's it. Okay. So now you've got the door locked. You

1 got the door locked. And I want to get out. There's no way I'm  
2 getting out without going through that --

3 A. (Indiscernible) through the -- you have to --

4 Q. Okay. Now let me do one more thing. I'm going to get out.  
5 And you lock it and I'm going to see if I can get in.

6 A. Okay. Yeah, you're not going to hurt this. If you want to  
7 pull --

8 Q. Huh?

9 A. You're not going to hurt any of this if you want to pull,  
10 push, whatever.

11 Q. Okay. Thank you.

12 I guess I'm not getting in. So now, if I'm on the inside and  
13 it's locked, is it possible to push it out without releasing that  
14 handle?

15 A. No. Do you want to try it?

16 Q. Is that a challenge? Huh?

17 A. Yeah. You want to try it?

18 Q. I like this young lady. Okay. So you're locked.

19 A. Yeah.

20 Q. I want out. So without doing that --

21 A. Without doing this, you're not going to go anywhere.

22 Q. I ain't getting out, unless I go out the back door.

23 A. Now, all of our electronic ones are different. You want to  
24 look at them?

25 Q. Sure. Yeah. That'd be great.

1 A. Like our air brake ones and stuff?

2 Q. Yeah. That'd be great. So one more thing before we stop.  
3 Can you turn on the thing, and I'm going to go pretend I'm opening  
4 that back door.

5 A. Sure.

6 Q. So we can see how much noise it makes.

7 A. Is the thing on (indiscernible) --

8 Q. Okay. If I'm riding your bus, do we get to vote on the  
9 music?

10 A. Hey, when I was gone for 2 days, I had Cooper, one of our old  
11 man in here, and I had bad --

12 Q. Excuse me. What was that comment of yours?

13 A. -- bad music. Old man. No, we don't old man music in here.  
14 And we don't do rap.

15 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Why are they looking at me?

16 MS. EASON: I have a kid that sits in your seat that has one  
17 of those portable radios, blares rap music all the time. Can't  
18 have that on here.

19 BY MR. LaPONTE:

20 Q. Can't you -- so you're the captain of a ship. Can't you tell  
21 him to turn that off?

22 A. Oh, I do. But I concentrate mostly on my driving instead of  
23 my disciplinary. That's why all the kids won't --

24 Q. There you go.

25 A. Feel like I need to figure this stuff out before --

1 Q. Okay, I think you want to ride (indiscernible).

2 A. Oh, yeah.

3 Q. Oh, that's (indiscernible).

4 (Whereupon, at 10:07 a.m., the interview was concluded.)

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the  
NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

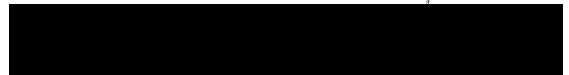
IN THE MATTER OF:           SCHOOL BUS FIRE NEAR OAKLAND, IOWA,  
                                  DECEMBER 12, 2017  
                                  Interview of Danielle Eason

ACCIDENT NO.:               HWY18MH003

PLACE:                       Oakland, Iowa

DATE:                         December 15, 2017

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.



---

Eileen Gonzalez  
Transcriber

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

\* \* \* \* \*

Investigation of: \*

\*

SCHOOL BUS FIRE NEAR OAKLAND, IOWA, \*

DECEMBER 12, 2017 \*

Accident No.: HWY18MH003

\*

\* \* \* \* \*

Interview of: MICHELE FAXON

Bus Driver

Riverside High School  
Oakland, Iowa

Friday,  
December 15, 2017

## APPEARANCES:

MICHAEL LaPONTE, Highway Vehicle Crash Investigator  
National Transportation Safety Board

SHERYL HARLEY, Survival Factors Investigator  
National Transportation Safety Board



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I N T E R V I E W

(1:40 p.m.)

## INTERVIEW OF MICHELE FAXON

BY MR. LaPONTE:

1 A. All right. Did you get this?

2 Q. Our vehicle guy has been in contact with him, because we need  
3 to get all the information from them and what that looks like,  
4 so --

5 A. Well, I was thinking like my route too. Put in two new  
6 bridges. So the road goes here and then --

7 Q. Drops.

8 A. Drops.

9 Q. Yeah. And you guys actually just -- looking at a couple of  
10 the roads you folks run on, they are --

11 A. Nasty.

12 Q. They are nasty. Absolutely. So -- excuse me. F-A-X-O-N?

13 A. Yes.

14 Q. Okay. You'll be happy to know you're still on the website as  
15 transportation director.

16 A. Seriously?

17 Q. Yeah, seriously. I looked this morning so I got a list of  
18 names for the drivers and who's who and what's what.

19 A. Well, that would explain why other transportation guys are  
20 emailing me.

21 Q. Yeah. Yeah, because you're still listed on the Riverside  
22

1 website as the interim transportation director.

2 A. Okay.

3 Q. Anyway, the big reason we wanted, or I wanted, to speak with  
4 you is about the routing and how that occurs and, you know, just  
5 an overview of when you do the routing per year, how you go about  
6 doing that.

7 A. A lot of it is year to year. When we have registration, the  
8 parents come in, sign a deal, you know, what their kids and where  
9 they live. And not knowing anything about routes, I just kind of  
10 played it by ear, kind of went from last year's, and then --

11 Q. Deleted those who were off and added those who were in?

12 A. Yeah.

13 Q. Where they made sense and --

14 A. Yeah. Like a senior, they haven't rode for a year or two.

15 Q. Yeah, because they got their own wheels.

16 A. Yeah. So I deleted them. And I would add just the name.

17 And sometimes I didn't even have to add a name because they were  
18 already there.

19 Q. Yeah, okay. But you didn't use -- there was no computer  
20 program, no nothing? This was all -- well, big metropolitan  
21 school districts buy actual computer programs --

22 A. Oh, no.

23 Q. -- that do all this.

24 A. This is a homemade --

25 Q. Yeah, yeah. Just a sheet.

1 A. -- Excel spreadsheet.

2 Q. Okay. And then do you get input from the other drivers as to  
3 what makes sense or what bus to use on this route because of  
4 clearances or anything of that nature? I mean, this -- so if you  
5 got one that's really got ugly side roads, we're not going to use  
6 the flat nose Blue Bird on it, we're going to use something else,  
7 or anything like that? No?

8 A. No. No, we all use our own --

9 Q. And the buses --

10 A. I mean, they stick you in a bus, that's what you drive.

11 Q. Okay. And the buses are assigned by year, or do they -- you  
12 guys don't slip seat them? You don't -- Monday I drive this --

13 A. No, no. We drive our own --

14 Q. Monday I drive 7 and Tuesday I drive 10 and Wednesday I drive  
15 14 --

16 A. No, no, no. We keep our own.

17 Q. Okay. So they're assigned buses?

18 A. Yes. Yes.

19 Q. Okay. Okay. Let me -- if I may, we'll get --

20 MR. LaPONTE: Sheryl, I don't like this backpack deal. This  
21 is bogus.

22 MS. HARLEY: Okay.

23 MR. LaPONTE: This is bogus.

24 MS. HARLEY: Goodness gracious.

25 MR. LaPONTE: And it's even more bogus because I think I left

1 my paperwork down at the other --

2 MS. FAXON: I was going to say, do I need my glasses?

3 MR. LaPONTE: No.

4 MS. FAXON: Okay.

5 MR. LaPONTE: No. I need my glasses.

6 MS. FAXON: And we're not having school Monday, if you didn't  
7 know.

8 MR. LaPONTE: Pardon me?

9 MS. FAXON: We're not having school Monday now.

10 MS. HARLEY: Oh, till Monday --

11 MR. LaPONTE: The funeral is tomorrow; is that correct, at 2?

12 MS. FAXON: Megan.

13 MR. LaPONTE: And Monday, I thought just for (indiscernible).  
14 I guess I have to run back to the bus for it. Anyway -- so okay,  
15 that's -- I can do that later.

16 MS. FAXON: Okay.

17 MR. LaPONTE: Second thing --

18 MS. FAXON: Well, do you need my cell number in case you need  
19 to get a hold of me?

20 MR. LaPONTE: That would be wonderful.

21 MS. FAXON: [REDACTED]

22 MR. LaPONTE: Okay.

23 BY MR. LaPONTE:

24 Q. And so there will be no school Monday?

25 A. Correct.

1 Q. So you guys will be home doing whatever you do on a day off.

2 I imagine most of you will be going to the --

3 A. Funeral. Yeah.

4 Q. -- services? Yeah. All right.

5 Second thing. Can you tell me about the annual emergency  
6 training? What does that look like? Do you do an annual  
7 emergency training for the students?

8 A. We haven't with, we haven't -- I haven't.

9 Q. Okay. Are there certain drivers that do it every year? Is  
10 it luck of the draw that just --

11 A. Probably luck. I mean, as soon as I get done with my route,  
12 I come up here. Soon as I get done here, I go on my route. Or if  
13 I have to drive any activities, then I do that.

14 Q. Okay. But if you have the annual, the annual student  
15 emergency training -- is that annual? Is it twice a year? What  
16 is -- have you ever done it --

17 A. No.

18 Q. -- I guess is my question? Okay.

19 A. I haven't.

20 Q. Okay. That's fair enough.

21 A. Now I don't know if others have because --

22 Q. Well, we talked to -- Michele? Is that her name?

23 A. No. That's me.

24 Q. No, no, not you. The young gal.

25 A. Danielle?

1 MS. HARLEY: Danielle.

2 MR. LaPONTE: Danielle. She has, she has done it a couple  
3 times.

4 MS. FAXON: I know Mr. Meek (ph.) had a discussion this year  
5 with the elementary kids that took buses up and --

6 BY MR. LaPONTE:

7 Q. Yeah. Now does it only apply to the elementary and secondary  
8 kids that are new to the district? I mean, I would -- or is it a  
9 requirement every so often for all the students? So would the  
10 high school students go through it, for instance?

11 A. That I don't know.

12 Q. Okay. Okay, well, Nick didn't know either, so -- so anyway.  
13 Okay.

14 A. It's kind of like --

15 Q. It's just kind of a random deal. Now the principal for the  
16 elementary and the middle school seemed to be fairly skookum on  
17 what that looked like and who does it.

18 A. I mean, we know what to do.

19 Q. Yeah.

20 A. I mean, get the kid. I would, like, jump out first, or the  
21 older kid would jump out first and then shuffle them along.

22 Q. Okay. And that's after the -- this is the emergency window  
23 and --

24 A. Yeah.

25 Q. -- this is the roof. This is the front door. On the door

1 systems, is there any training for the drivers on the front doors  
2 -- I mean, on the loading door system? You know, the manual  
3 versus an electric or what -- it just -- is that kind of an  
4 intuitive deal? You climb in the bus and figure out how it works  
5 and go from there?

6 A. I guess I was shown, like, on my bus. Because I got the  
7 power.

8 Q. You got -- well, and that's different than the lift up and --

9 A. Yeah.

10 Q. Yeah. Okay. Do you know if the power door can be opened  
11 from the outside?

12 A. Yeah. No.

13 Q. No.

14 A. Not in my bus.

15 Q. I can't pull it? I can't --

16 A. Yeah. Okay. Say you -- my power button doesn't work, I move  
17 that lever and I can open it up and I can shut it. But if there  
18 is no power and I had to drive, that door would be --

19 Q. Flopping.

20 A. Yeah.

21 Q. Okay. So once it's locked and you have power --

22 A. Then they don't open.

23 Q. -- and you come to a stop -- so you're stopped at that point,  
24 the vehicle, say, in park --

25 A. Yeah.



1 Q. -- is it possible for someone to come up to the outside of  
2 the door and pull it open in some fashion?

3 A. Only if they knew my little switch.

4 Q. And that's -- is there a switch on the outside?

5 A. Yeah. On my bus.

6 Q. On your bus.

7 A. Yeah. Off, on; off, on.

8 Q. Oh, okay. So if it's off, is it released? Is that how that  
9 works?

10 A. If the power is off. Is that what you mean?

11 Q. Well, what we're trying to determine is, you know, the  
12 difference between the power door system and the manual door  
13 system. And what it looks like is the manual door system is  
14 pretty -- that baby's locked, ain't nothing going out. Nothing  
15 moving.

16 A. I know. I've done that.

17 Q. You know, for whatever reason. If the little mechanism  
18 breaks or whatever --

19 A. Or you forget to turn that -- I don't know what the hell --  
20 that little thing that you could still shut the door but still get  
21 back in. But if you forget to turn that lever, shut it all the  
22 way, the only way to get in is through the window or roof. But if  
23 the roof -- yeah.

24 Q. That's a handy feature.

25 A. Yeah. I've had to do that once. Luckily it was a summertime

1 and the window was partway down.

2 Q. Yeah, that's a handy feature. Because obviously, we're still  
3 trying to figure out why folks couldn't get out of the vehicle.

4 A. I know. It racked our brains too.

5 Q. And it's -- yeah, and we're just really struggling with that,  
6 so --

7 A. But being EMS for 22 years -- panic.

8 Q. Well, that's -- you know, people respond to emergencies in  
9 different fashions, so --

10 A. Yeah.

11 MR. LaPONTE: All right. I think that's all I have.

12 BY MS. HARLEY:

13 Q. Well, one of the questions is the emergency 911 button that  
14 you guys have on your radios --

15 A. The red button.

16 Q. The red button. Okay. And you guys are actually trained on  
17 -- if there is an emergency, are you --

18 A. You hit the button.

19 Q. You hit the button. Okay. So if you were in trouble, your  
20 first thing would be -- your first indication would be --

21 A. Hit the damn button.

22 Q. Hit the damn button, not necessarily to call --

23 A. Yeah.

24 Q. -- to the -- okay. All right.

25 A. But because I'm in the situation I'm in with EMS, I would hit

1 the button, call the radio and find something to break the window.

2 Q. Right. Okay.

3 MR. LaPONTE: Are those windows -- and we forgot to look on  
4 the exemplar bus today. Are they -- is that -- I assume that's  
5 tempered safety glass, auto glass?

6 MS. FAXON: I'm sure they are.

7 MR. LaPONTE: Yeah, I would think they would be.

8 MS. HARLEY: Yeah, all the -- yeah, the exit -- the ones that  
9 are, yeah, that they -- the knockout windows.

10 BY MS. HARLEY:

11 Q. Were you working on Tuesday when this happened?

12 A. Um-hum.

13 Q. Did you hear Donny over the radio?

14 A. Um-hum.

15 Q. What did he say that you remember?

16 A. Four to base. I'm in a ditch. My bus is on fire and I can't  
17 get out. They called -- Nick called and said, where are you at?  
18 And at that next time, I hear Klindt, but it was a muffled sound  
19 and I knew what was going on. The smoke was getting him, and then  
20 it was nothing. And for the life of me, that calm is what's  
21 upsetting.

22 MR. LaPONTE: That he was calm instead of sounding panicked  
23 or emotional?

24 MS. FAXON: Yeah. That's the part -- I mean, I've been  
25 haunted lots of times on other calls. But it's just, the

1 calmness. You never get calmness.

2 MR. LaPONTE: On an emergency situation, generally not.

3 MS. FAXON: No.

4 MR. LaPONTE: I mean, people are -- at least have some  
5 emotion.

6 MS. FAXON: Screaming. Yeah.

7 MR. LaPONTE: Yeah.

8 BY MS. HARLEY:

9 Q. Could you hear anyone else behind him? Could you hear the --

10 A. No, I could not hear Megan.

11 Q. Okay. All right.

12 A. But you get trained to looking for things, and I did not hear  
13 her.

14 Q. Okay. Bernie -- who is Megan's uncle?

15 A. Yeah.

16 Q. I understand that he was told to call the house.

17 A. Yeah.

18 Q. Did Bernie actually come back over the air afterwards?

19 A. I'm going to say yes. I'm going to say he did.

20 Q. Do you remember who he was talking to?

21 A. Laurie (indiscernible).

22 Q. Laurie? Okay. So that would be Nielson?

23 A. N-I-S-L-E-Y. Nisley. It's always Laurie's elementary.

24 Q. Okay. Laurie at the elementary.

25 A. Nisley. Nisley.

1 MR. LaPONTE: And that's the woman who called 911, or is that  
2 the woman who called the family?

3 MS. FAXON: That's when they called 911. She goes, I'm going  
4 to call 911.

5 MR. LaPONTE: Okay. Because there was some confusion about  
6 whether she called the residents or --

7 MS. FAXON: She might have.

8 MS. HARLEY: I'm sorry. Could you --

9 MR. LaPONTE: Yeah, she called 911 originally for that call  
10 to be registered, timestamped, basically.

11 MS. FAXON: Yeah. Yeah.

12 MS. HARLEY: Could you spell her last name again?

13 MS. FAXON: N-I-S-L-E-Y.

14 MS. HARLEY: -- L-E-Y. Ms. Nisley.

15 MS. FAXON: N-I-S-L-E-Y. There's your other gal, in the blue  
16 shirt.

17 MR. LaPONTE: Oh, okay. And that is Tami --

18 MS. FAXON: Yeah.

19 MR. LaPONTE: -- Shelberg? Okay.

20 MS. HARLEY: Do you know a gentleman by the name --  
21 unfortunately, Nick couldn't pronounce his last name. Kevin --

22 MS. FAXON: Schechenger.

23 MS. HARLEY: Schechenger. That's the one. Yes.

24 MR. LaPONTE: Is he a sub?

25 MS. FAXON: Yes.

1 MS. HARLEY: Okay. Kevin Schechenger.

2 MR. LaPONTE: Because I didn't see his name on the driver's  
3 list.

4 MS. FAXON: But I couldn't tell you how to spell it. Just  
5 kind of how -- Tami might know because she's got kids with that  
6 last name.

7 MS. HARLEY: Oh, okay. All right. All right. I was -- he  
8 was actually in the garage with Nick at the time, and I just  
9 wanted to speak to him momentarily.

10 You worked with Donny a lot?

11 MS. FAXON: Not a lot.

12 MS. HARLEY: Do you normally see him when he leaves to get  
13 ready to go out on his route? No?

14 MS. FAXON: No, because he'll get out of his truck, get in  
15 the bus. Good morning. Got anything for me? Nick would say,  
16 nope, nothing. And then he'd be on his route. Because he got the  
17 part -- he goes out quite a ways.

18 BY MR. LaPONTE:

19 Q. On the country route --

20 A. Yeah.

21 Q. -- I believe is what you folks call it here. And then he  
22 comes back into the --

23 A. Town routes.

24 Q. But he --

25 A. But he does multiple stops at the school.

1 Q. Okay. So he runs the country route -- and help me with the  
2 progression here. Runs the country route, comes back to the  
3 elementary school --

4 A. Elementary.

5 Q. -- drops the country kids, if you will, off --

6 A. Yeah.

7 Q. -- so they can make their bus connection.

8 A. Right.

9 Q. And then the way it was explained to me, he then loads up the  
10 high school kids and comes down here. Or does he make a little  
11 route around the elementary school?

12 A. Tami would be the best, because they -- she unloads the kids  
13 to get on his bus. My route has nothing to do with Donny's route.

14 Q. Okay. So --

15 A. Or Tami's.

16 Q. Okay. So your route is more --

17 A. Me and Bernie's route is -- okay, elementary here in Carson,  
18 then we do our route south. He goes west; I go east.

19 Q. Okay. So he goes down to Macedonia?

20 A. Yeah.

21 Q. Then you go to whatever the others --

22 A. Macedonia.

23 Q. You both --

24 A. He goes on one side of 59; I go on the other.

25 Q. Okay. But it's down at that end of the district?

1 A. Yeah. But we saw the smoke.

2 Q. Okay. So you saw the smoke. Is -- and correct me if I'm  
3 wrong, which I probably am. When I drove -- I drove out Highway 6  
4 like I was going to be going -- I was going north. Or south, I  
5 think I was going. I don't know which way I was going, to be  
6 honest with you. I went that way from town. So I came out of  
7 town, I go north instead of coming this way.

8 A. Okay. You're going north.

9 Q. So I -- yeah. Well, I came out of town to 59 and I turned  
10 right. And that would be north?

11 A. Yeah.

12 Q. Okay. And then as you go out, those streets get higher in  
13 numbers, so it's like 460, 470 --

14 A. 480.

15 Q. 480 would be the street that those folks live on.

16 A. Yeah.

17 Q. Okay. So if you were south of Carson down to Macedonia --

18 A. I was on 460th and Pioneer Trail.

19 Q. Okay. And that is -- how far is that as the crow flies to  
20 480th? I mean, I guess I'm getting disoriented because it seems  
21 to me it would be even farther away than if you were in Macedonia.

22 A. I was east of Macedonia probably about 8 miles.

23 Q. Okay. And then north off of that route someplace maybe?

24 A. Do we have a map here? It'd be easier.

25 Q. Yeah, I have it here. If I can --



1 A. Well, no. It would be just -- because Pioneer Trail, then --  
2 let's see.

3 MS. HARLEY: Here, I tell you what. Draw.

4 MS. FAXON: Okay. Here is Highway 59. Say here's Pioneer  
5 Trail. Then you go just a little ways, and then that's another  
6 Pioneer Trail, and then Macedonia.

7 MR. LaPONTE: Oh, okay.

8 MS. FAXON: But my route is like --

9 MR. LaPONTE: Okay. So you're just, you're south but  
10 you're --

11 MS. FAXON: East.

12 MR. LaPONTE: East, rather. Okay. All right.

13 MS. FAXON: Where Bernie has kids right here and then goes  
14 here and that way.

15 MR. LaPONTE: Does his thing, yeah.

16 MS. FAXON: Me, I have no kids, but a lot that way.

17 MR. LaPONTE: Okay. All right.

18 MS. HARLEY: Got you.

19 BY MR. LaPONTE:

20 Q. Are you -- is that considered a country road?

21 A. Yeah.

22 Q. Okay. So you're picking up the kids out on the farms and so  
23 forth?

24 A. Yep. And maybe I shouldn't have done this, but as I was  
25 waiting for my two slowpoke kids -- oh, no that's -- no, but that

1 -- I don't know if you can tell, but that's the kind of road where  
2 it just -- I took that yesterday.

3 Q. Now that's on your route?

4 A. That's on my route.

5 Q. Okay. Yeah, some of those gravel roads look pretty tough,  
6 tough (indiscernible).

7 A. Okay. I am -- which way am I facing? I'm facing north and  
8 I'm on 460th. And I don't know if you can tell --

9 Q. Yeah, you can kind of see. That's the smoke?

10 MS. HARLEY: Smoke. Oh, okay.

11 BY MR. LaPONTE:

12 Q. Okay. What would be the, in your -- just as the crow flies,  
13 what would be the destination from where you took this picture to  
14 where the fire was?

15 A. I would guess maybe 10 miles.

16 Q. Oh, okay, (indiscernible).

17 A. Fifteen? But I don't --

18 Q. Oh, okay. So yeah. That makes sense now. When you said, I  
19 saw the smoke, I was trying to picture where you would be in terms  
20 of line of sight to be able to see that. Okay. All right. Okay.

21 A. Not the best picture, but it's just -- I knew by the color.

22 Q. Yeah. What it was.

23 A. Yeah. I mean, I've been on vehicle fires, so I knew.

24 Q. Are you a volunteer EMT for the county?

25 A. For Macedonia. When we lived in -- well, we started out --

1 right before I got married, I did the EMT training, which will be  
2 23 years in April. We started out in Illinois, then we moved to  
3 Emerson. And when there was the big flood, we had everybody go on  
4 59/34 because they thought -- it was the interstate. And then we  
5 moved to Macedonia.

6 MS. HARLEY: Can I ask you a question about the fire  
7 departments? Oakland, Carson and Macedonia --

8 MS. FAXON: Macedonia.

9 MS. HARLEY: -- fire department. What is the -- how close  
10 are they to each other? I mean, are they just, like, next --

11 MS. FAXON: Macedonia and Carson, if you go on the highway,  
12 it's 5 miles. But there's a backroad, and it's 3 miles. From  
13 Carson to Oakland, it's 5 miles.

14 MR. LaPONTE: Oh, and then that's on 59?

15 MS. FAXON: Yeah.

16 MR. LaPONTE: Then that turns into 6 --

17 MS. FAXON: Yeah.

18 MR. LaPONTE: -- down at the bottom of the street. Okay.

19 BY MS. HARLEY:

20 Q. Okay. So Carson to Oakland is how long? Is how --  
21 approximately?

22 A. Carson to Oakland, 5 miles.

23 Q. About 5 miles. And depending upon which way you went -- you  
24 go, Macedonia to Carson is between 3 and 5 miles.

25 A. Yeah.

1 Q. Okay. I just wanted the -- because I know that all three  
2 responded, and I was just trying to figure out the relationship  
3 between them.

4 A. We got paged out as a semi-tractor fire. But it was -- this  
5 bottom one. When we got paged out, which I don't respond on calls  
6 because I'm driving or -- okay, right here.

7 Q. Okay. So Macedonia got paged out at 7:02.

8 A. Yeah. If that helps.

9 Q. Yes, it actually does.

10 MR. LaPONTE: Yeah, that works.

11 MS. HARLEY: And it also gives me your run number too. 18-  
12 17-0-67. And it came out initially as a semi-tractor trailer.  
13 Semi -- okay. Trailer. Cross-street, Dogwood Road, Elm Tree  
14 Road.

15 MS. FAXON: Yeah, we don't understand that. But we have --  
16 somebody has to do cross-streets.

17 MS. HARLEY: Yeah, you know, our computers in -- do the same  
18 thing. We'll do cross-streets and some of them are a little on  
19 the weird side, you know.

20 MS. FAXON: Yeah. But no, that's what we got.

21 MS. HARLEY: Okay. All right. Okay.

22 MR. LaPONTE: Well, thank you very much, Michele.

23 MS. HARLEY: Thank you, Michele.

24 MR. LaPONTE: We appreciate your time.

25 MS. HARLEY: I'm very sorry. I really am.

1 MR. LaPONTE: And we're sorry about the community's loss.

2 MS. FAXON: And the gal, Megan, was my daughter's -- one of  
3 her best friends.

4 MS. HARLEY: Oh my God. I'm so sorry.

5 MS. FAXON: So yeah, it's just like -- EMS wise, I can  
6 visually imagine, okay. And then being friends with Donny and  
7 then being friends with Megan, it's just like, what the hell?

8 MR. LaPONTE: Yeah. And particularly in a small community  
9 where all you folks know each other.

10 MS. FAXON: Yeah.

11 MR. LaPONTE: Makes it tough.

12 MS. HARLEY: I feel like I have one really, really last  
13 question for you. I'm sorry. I know we -- as a matter of fact,  
14 we were talking to Donny's wife earlier this morning, and I know  
15 that he was scheduled for back surgery.

16 MS. FAXON: Yesterday.

17 MS. HARLEY: Yeah, yesterday. And I know that at some point,  
18 his back had gotten so bad that he actually ended up having a cane  
19 and a walker. Do you know how long ago that was? She didn't  
20 exactly say when she started -- he started actually needing the  
21 cane and the walker.

22 MS. FAXON: Oh my God, maybe a month on the walker. But the  
23 only time I saw that was at church.

24 MR. LaPONTE: At church?

25 MS. FAXON: At church.

1 MS. HARLEY: Yeah, I understand that --

2 MR. LaPONTE: So he didn't bring it to school?

3 MS. FAXON: No.

4 MR. LaPONTE: No.

5 MS. HARLEY: Yeah. I understand that he needed it when he  
6 walked --

7 MS. FAXON: If he did, I didn't --

8 MS. HARLEY: -- when he walked for a long period of time.

9 MS. FAXON: Yeah, because I asked him about it. He goes,  
10 well, if I walk a lot -- but yeah, I only saw his walker twice at  
11 church; otherwise, he had a cane.

12 MS. HARLEY: Okay. So he usually came to work just with the  
13 cane. He didn't need the walker.

14 MS. FAXON: Yeah. I mean, I never saw him in the morning. I  
15 heard him.

16 MS. HARLEY: Okay.

17 MS. FAXON: Unless I happened to be back before he got back  
18 on his route in the morning.

19 BY MR. LaPONTE:

20 Q. Do all the drivers check in when they head out in the morning  
21 for their first run?

22 A. Most of -- yeah.

23 Q. Most of them.

24 A. Because we have the board on who's riding and who's not.

25 Q. Oh, I see. Does that change daily? Oh, yeah. So your third

1 stop on Monday, you might not have it on Tuesday, Wednesday, and  
2 back again on Thursday?

3 A. Yeah. Yeah.

4 Q. Okay. So that board --

5 A. It changes daily.

6 MS. HARLEY: Daily. Okay. All right. Well, thank you very  
7 much.

8 MR. LaPONTE: Makes sense. Thank you.

9 MS. HARLEY: Again, I'm sorry for your daughter.

10 MS. FAXON: Like I said, call me if you have other questions.

11 MR. LaPONTE: We will.

12 MS. HARLEY: Appreciate it. Thank you.

13 MS. FAXON: All right, thank you.

14 MS. HARLEY: All right. Bye-bye.

15 MR. LaPONTE: Yeah, thank you.

16 MS. FAXON: Bye.

17 MR. LaPONTE: Thank you. Thank you.

18 (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:           SCHOOL BUS FIRE NEAR OAKLAND, IOWA,  
                                  DECEMBER 12, 2017  
                                  Interview of Michele Faxon

ACCIDENT NO.:               HWY18MH003

PLACE:                       Oakland, Iowa

DATE:                         December 15, 2017

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.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Eileen Gonzalez  
Transcriber



UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

\* \* \* \* \*

Investigation of:

SCHOOL BUS FIRE NEAR OAKLAND, IOWA,  
DECEMBER 12, 2017

\* Accident No.: HWY18MH003

\* \* \* \* \*

Interview of: TAMI SHELBERG  
Bus Driver

Riverside High School  
Oakland, Iowa

Friday,  
December 15, 2017

## APPEARANCES:

MICHAEL LaPONTE, Highway Vehicle Crash Investigator  
National Transportation Safety Board

SHERYL HARLEY, Survival Factors Investigator  
National Transportation Safety Board

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I N T E R V I E W

(2:06 p.m.)

1  
2  
3 MR. LaPONTE: My name's Mike LaPonte, and I'm one of the  
4 investigators for this.

5 MS. SHELBERG: I'm Tami Shelberg.

6 MR. LaPONTE: And we want to, first of all, thank you for  
7 speaking with us.

8 MS. SHELBERG: Absolutely.

9 MR. LaPONTE: We have just a few questions about the route,  
10 the training and kind of the sequence that goes on every day when  
11 you folks come in and start your day, if you will.

12 MS. SHELBERG: Right.

13 MR. LaPONTE: So you want to go first or you want me to go  
14 first?

15 MS. HARLEY: Why don't you go ahead and go first and --

16 MR. LaPONTE: All right.

## INTERVIEW OF TAMI SHELBERG

17  
18 BY MR. LaPONTE:

19 Q. So the first question I have, are you involved in the routing  
20 at all of how the -- you know, daily routes, just the bus routes?

21 A. Do I do any of the planning?

22 Q. Yes.

23 A. No. I do not. I just get in my bus and go where they tell  
24 me to, and it's pretty much the same every day.

25 Q. So you just -- they come in and you say, okay, here's your

1 route; get out of Dodge?

2 A. My route's the same every day, unless they hand me an extra  
3 -- like tonight, I'm going to take the basketball team to Logan,  
4 so -- other than that, I do the same thing every day.

5 Q. Okay. And do you have what they call a city route or a  
6 country route?

7 A. Both.

8 Q. Both. So you go out and you do your country kids --

9 A. I pick up my country kids, I drop -- then I come up here and  
10 pick up some more, and then I pick up some town kids and then I go  
11 to Carson and let them out. And at night, it's the opposite. Go  
12 to Carson --

13 Q. So you go to the middle school?

14 A. Yes, I do. And then I pick up country kids. So first kids I  
15 pick up in the morning is country kids, and then gather up the  
16 town ones and drop some off at the elementary and then go to  
17 Carson. I'm empty when I get to Carson. And then I come back  
18 here. I'm a (indiscernible), like Michele. And I park my bus out  
19 here, and I come in here and teach. And then I'll leave at about  
20 ten after 3 and go to Carson, pick up kids. Go to the elementary  
21 school, drop off the ones that get on different buses, get my  
22 little kids. And then I start dropping off kids in town. I'll  
23 come back here and drop off the teachers' kids and then I head  
24 straight out Highway 6 and drop off my country kids.

25 Q. Okay. All right. So the elementary school is, in essence,

1 the transfer point for all the kids that are going --

2 A. The swap. Yeah.

3 Q. To swap out the kids.

4 A. We swap them out there. Yeah.

5 Q. Yeah. So the kids that come in from a country route that  
6 have to come to the high school get off and wait for a shuttle  
7 down here, kind of deal, depending on --

8 A. The country kids, if they're high school or middle school,  
9 they'll get off their buses at the elementary and then they'll get  
10 on the appropriate bus up there to either come to the high school  
11 or the middle school. And at night, same thing. We go down, pick  
12 them up there. Donny used to pick up the ones here, and then we  
13 take everybody to the elementary school. They get off and get on  
14 their country bus, and they go home.

15 Q. Okay. All right. What do you know about the training for  
16 emergency exits for the students? Have you ever done that  
17 training?

18 A. We have -- I personally have not done it with my students.  
19 They did it -- we left a bus down at the school in Carson, and I  
20 know they left a bus at the elementary. I'm not sure what took  
21 place at the high school. And they all went out on the bus and  
22 went through all the procedures with the administration at the  
23 school. And I know last year, while they had all of the, like,  
24 elementary school gathered -- one of the trainings was done when  
25 they went to the pumpkin patch because they had everybody --

1 Q. Yeah, and they --

2 A. -- there.

3 Q. And after they jumped out the back, they got a free pumpkin.

4 A. That was Mr. White's pumpkin patch. So, I mean, I don't know  
5 if you've talked to him yet or not, but Tim has a pumpkin patch.

6 But my kids on the bus, we have talked about -- I have so  
7 many littles, and I don't, I don't have any high school kids that  
8 ride my bus. They all drive. So my biggest kids are junior high,  
9 but I've got some -- or middle school, I should say. I've got  
10 some middle school kids that are bigger than some of the high  
11 school kids.

12 So we've talked about -- they all sit in the back because  
13 that's where the cool kids want to sit anyway, and my little kids  
14 -- so front half is my littles, and middle school, you can go to  
15 the back. So they know, should we ever have to evacuate out of  
16 the back, Jay and Charlie get out; any of the little kids coming  
17 in the back, they help them down. I get the ones out the front.  
18 I mean, they know the drill, so that's -- but as far as getting  
19 everybody together as a group and doing drills, I've only --

20 Q. Can be tough.

21 A. I started driving last year. So this is my second year  
22 driving for this school. I drove when I was 17 years old in  
23 Atlantic. You can't do that now, but you could then.

24 Q. All right. But you have never actually participated in the  
25 training per se?

1 A. With the kids?

2 Q. Yes.

3 A. Not the ones they do at the schools, no. Because I'm here  
4 teaching when that's going on, so --

5 Q. All right. Have you had the training that they gave for TSA,  
6 the TSA training that they give once a year? They show you a  
7 movie about -- actually, I don't know --

8 A. The 3-hour face-to-face class?

9 Q. Yes, yes.

10 A. Yes. We just did that.

11 Q. Is that what that -- you folks call it? The 3-hour --

12 A. Face-to-face, yeah. The 3-hour face-to-face class. We did  
13 that in Griswold in -- I want to say September, so yes.

14 Q. Okay. Okay. And when you did that, do you remember signing  
15 any documents that prove that you did it, I guess, would be the  
16 point?

17 A. Yeah, we had to sign a little form --

18 Q. A little slip?

19 A. -- registration slip thing and then sign our name that we  
20 were there. We also had to go on the computer, I believe, and --

21 Q. And do some kind of a question/answer part?

22 A. There wasn't a question and answer. It was where we took the  
23 course.

24 MS. HARLEY: Oh, a verification.

25 MS. SHELBERG: Kind of an enrollment type thing. Yeah. An



1 enrollment type thing that we were there, what date and who the  
2 instructor and all that was, so --

3 BY MR. LaPONTE:

4 Q. Is that an annual training? Do you know?

5 A. The 3-hour face-to-face is, yes.

6 Q. Is annual?

7 A. Yes. That's annual.

8 MR. LaPONTE: Okay. And that's, Tami, the end of what I'm  
9 interested in. My associate, however, will probably not let you  
10 escape without answering more questions.

11 MS. SHELBERG: Okay.

12 MS. HARLEY: Unfortunately not, so --

13 MS. SHELBERG: I have until 10 after 3, so -- then I have to  
14 pick up --

15 MS. HARLEY: Well, I promise it will not take till 10  
16 after 3.

17 MS. SHELBERG: Okay.

18 BY MS. HARLEY:

19 Q. So let's start from the beginning. Your bus, what type of  
20 bus do you have? I'm specifically looking at the -- your front  
21 loading door. Is it a hydraulic or --

22 MR. LaPONTE: Electric.

23 MS. SHELBERG: No, I still have the old --

24 BY MS. HARLEY:

25 Q. You still have the old --

1 A. You betcha. It opens when I open it.

2 Q. Okay. So that's the one where you push down and you pull up  
3 on the sleeve and you put --

4 A. Yes.

5 Q. And correct me if I'm wrong, if you don't push down the  
6 button and pull up on the sleeve, it does not open?

7 A. No.

8 Q. Okay. All right. So that's great.

9 MR. LaPONTE: And if you were outside the bus trying to get  
10 in, it does not open; there's no way to get in from the outside?

11 MS. SHELBERG: We flip a little thing before we get out so we  
12 don't lock ourselves out.

13 MR. LaPONTE: Okay. But you do that --

14 MS. SHELBERG: But if you did not flip the little thing up  
15 and you shut the door, you're not going to be able to get the door  
16 open. I've never tried it, because I don't want to lock myself  
17 out and I don't want to crawl through that little side window.

18 BY MS. HARLEY:

19 Q. So explain to me what you were told about the red button in  
20 your bus.

21 A. What red button?

22 Q. Do you have an emergency button in your bus?

23 A. Not that I know of.

24 Q. If you were in trouble, what would you do?

25 A. Get on the radio.

1 Q. You would get on the radio. Would you -- and you would call  
2 Nick back at --

3 A. Call Nick.

4 Q. Okay. So no one's ever told you, you had an emergency --

5 A. My mind's going across the dash here and going across the  
6 side for an emergency button --

7 MR. LaPONTE: It's on the radio itself.

8 MS. HARLEY: Yeah, it's a -- the little button, little  
9 button.

10 MR. LaPONTE: It's a little corner of the radio. So  
11 theoretically what happens is you push that button and your radio  
12 call now goes to the local 911 center as well as to Nick. If you  
13 don't push that button it's just going to go to Nick, and there  
14 will be no record of that call because that's not recorded.

15 MS. SHELBERG: Exactly.

16 MR. LaPONTE: If it goes to 911, then they timestamp the call  
17 and it's recorded and all of that.

18 MS. SHELBERG: So let me just say, if I was ever told that, I  
19 don't remember being told that. Now I got to go look for the  
20 button, because I'm not sure I've ever paid attention to it, to be  
21 honest with you. You know, I'd like to cover my --

22 MS. HARLEY: How did your bus --

23 MS. SHELBERG: -- own butt here and say, oh yeah, that  
24 button, but --

25 BY MS. HARLEY:

1 Q. In addition to the radio on the bus, you -- the drivers don't  
2 normally have portable radios that they carry around with them; is  
3 that correct?

4 A. No, Nick has one in his shop, but we don't. The only thing  
5 we have is a cell phone, which we're not to be on. You know,  
6 worst-case scenario, if I take my phone and I lay it there,  
7 because if for some reason somebody has -- like I drove off here  
8 one day and the lady is -- I forgot -- some students weren't out  
9 at the door when I picked up. The only way they had of letting me  
10 know -- they're trying to wave me down. I hadn't even got around  
11 the corner, my phone rang, and I stopped at the stop sign, and I  
12 looked and it said, Melissa. And so I thought, I just left two  
13 kids. So answer, I said, how many did I forget? She said, come  
14 back; you forgot two.

15 So, you know, that would be the only time that those phones  
16 should even be looked at. And Nick has left me text messages  
17 before that, when you are done, call me, things like that, but --  
18 if it's something that he can't tell me over the radio. But he  
19 knows enough not to try and call me if it's not --

20 Q. Right.

21 A. -- because I'm not going to answer it, but --

22 Q. So the other question is -- I'm very sorry about this. Were  
23 you working on Tuesday --

24 A. Yes.

25 Q. -- when this happened?

1 A. Yes.

2 Q. Did you hear Donny on the radio?

3 A. Yes. I know exactly where I was and what time it was.

4 Q. Can you tell me what time that you heard him on the radio?

5 A. It had to be -- I can give you within 2 minutes.

6 Q. Okay. Then --

7 A. Between 6:58 and 7, because I am at my first stop at 7. It  
8 could be 7:01 if I got behind a slow-moving tractor. But I turn  
9 the corner off of Highway 6 onto a gravel road, and I had just  
10 turned when that call came through. So it would be between 6:58  
11 and 7.

12 Q. Okay.

13 A. I mean, that's as close as I can get you, but -- and I know  
14 exactly --

15 Q. That's very good.

16 A. -- where I was. Because the next morning when I turned that  
17 corner, I thought, this is right where I was when that call came  
18 through.

19 Q. Do you remember what Donny said?

20 A. He said, 0-4 to base, and of course Nick said, what do you  
21 need, Donny? He said, I'm in a ditch out here. I can't remember  
22 if he said the bus is on fire or there's a fire under the bus, but  
23 he said "fire" and "bus." And he said, I can't get out. And that  
24 was the last I heard from Donny. I heard them say, where are you?  
25 Because he didn't say where he was. He just said, I'm in a ditch,

1 the bus is on fire, I can't get out. And I -- he may have said,  
2 there's a fire under the bus. I honestly can't tell you. You  
3 could probably pull the tapes off any one of the buses and it  
4 would be recorded.

5 And then they said, where are you? I heard some static, but  
6 I didn't hear an answer. Well then, Laurie at the elementary  
7 school talked to Bernie, because that's Klindt's -- what's her  
8 name -- Megan's uncle. Said, could you call Glen and see if he's  
9 picked up Megan yet? And then that's how they figured out where  
10 he was, because he had picked her up. So they knew that he was  
11 somewhere near. And so, you know, the rest of us stayed off the  
12 radio so they could keep it clear. But no, that's the last words  
13 I ever heard from Donny was, I can't get out.

14 Q. Did you -- did Bernie come back on the radio after he talked  
15 to Megan's --

16 A. He talked to Natalie, Megan's mother.

17 Q. Megan's mother.

18 A. He did say, I just talked to Natalie. She looked out the  
19 window and said, I can see the fire coming up the ditch towards  
20 the house, and he said, and then I lost her. So she obviously  
21 hung up and called 911.

22 Q. Okay. All right then. When you heard Donny on the radio,  
23 did you hear Megan in the background?

24 A. No.

25 Q. Okay. Okay. How long have you known Donny?

1 A. I started working -- he actually took me up to Harlan to get  
2 my license. So my husband used to shoe horses for Donny's wife.  
3 So I'd known who he was, but I didn't know him personally until he  
4 drove me up to -- we went up to get my CDL. And we went to lunch  
5 that day. He bought my lunch. And then just passing each other  
6 in the bus barn and listening to him over the radio.

7 Q. So you've been driving for -- this is your second year now,  
8 you said?

9 A. Yes, second year with Riverside. I actually got my route  
10 November 1st, but I drove activities just because the guy's route  
11 that I took was retiring November 1st, going to Florida. So I  
12 drove activity buses until then, so -- but I actually started as a  
13 driver in August when the school year started last year, so --

14 Q. Okay. We talked to Kathleen today, and we were talking about  
15 -- we knew that Donny was taking time off because he was having  
16 his back surgery that was supposed to be today. And we also spoke  
17 to Nick, and I know that Nick had been riding with him on, I  
18 guess, would be Monday night, just in case he had to do the route  
19 for him.

20 A. Donny's route. Yeah.

21 Q. One of the things that we were talking about was the problems  
22 that Donny was having with his back. And I was wondering, do you  
23 remember when Donny started having to use a cane?

24 A. Donny had a walker.

25 Q. He had a walker?

1 A. He uses a walker.

2 Q. Okay. Do you remember when that started?

3 A. The cane part -- I'm trying to think. Didn't he have back  
4 surgery last year? He had cataract surgery last year. I thought  
5 he had back surgery last year as well. I don't know. You'll have  
6 to ask Kathy about that, but I know he was gone two extended  
7 periods last year for different things.

8 See, I don't see Donny in the morning, because when I'm  
9 coming into town -- I live a mile outside of town across from the  
10 packing plant. I would meet Donny's bus going by as I'm turning  
11 to come into town, so I never saw him in the mornings. Once in a  
12 while, when I'd get in, he'd still be at the bus barn. So we  
13 didn't cross paths a lot. I saw Donny more at activities, like  
14 his granddaughter's volleyball games and such. And the first time  
15 I saw him come in with a walker, my jaw hit the floor. I just  
16 thought, holy crap, the man can't walk.

17 Q. When did that -- when was that, that you first saw --

18 A. Volleyball started in September, so --

19 Q. In September.

20 A. Yeah, this year. As far as when he started walking with a  
21 cane or anything, I don't know. But he was walking with a walker  
22 the first time I saw him come in a volleyball game, and I don't  
23 know if you'd call it walking. Shuffling behind it, but --

24 Q. Did he ever -- so did he ever explain to you about the back  
25 issues?



1 A. Donny?

2 Q. Yeah.

3 A. No. Because I never really had conversations with him  
4 because we just didn't hardly ever see each other. The only  
5 conversations I would have with him were over the radio, you know,  
6 him asking me do I have all your kids or that kind of thing. But  
7 very rarely. If he happened to stay and was sitting in the barn  
8 visiting or something, you know, we might chat for a minute,  
9 but --

10 Q. His wife said he liked to hang around the barn.

11 A. Yeah.

12 Q. Yeah. Okay.

13 MR. LaPONTE: It's because they have donuts. He's no fool.

14 MS. SHELBERG: Yeah. She sends amazing cinnamon rolls.  
15 She's a good cook.

16 MS. HARLEY: Really? Oh, awesome.

17 BY MS. HARLEY:

18 Q. So here's a question. Because apparently everyone has a  
19 problem with this and they said that you may be able to help me  
20 with this.

21 A. Oh, boy.

22 Q. Yes, I'm starting on a bad note. I am trying to locate Kevin  
23 with a really -- name I can't pronounce.

24 A. Schechenger?

25 Q. That's the one that --

- 1 A. His kids ride my bus. I have eight Schechengers, and I call  
2 them my Schech peck because there's two bushels in a peck. So I  
3 have, so I have four Schech pecks.
- 4 Q. Four Schech pecks.
- 5 A. They're good kids. Kevin Schechenger, S-C-H --
- 6 Q. S-C-H.
- 7 A. -- E-C-H --
- 8 Q. E-C-H.
- 9 A. -- E-N --
- 10 Q. E-N.
- 11 A. -- G-E-R.
- 12 Q. G-E-R. Congratulations.
- 13 A. Schechenger. Schechenger.
- 14 Q. You are the first person that can actually spell that.  
15 Everybody goes --
- 16 A. Yeah. Schechenger.
- 17 Q. Okay, Schechenger. I understand that he was actually working  
18 that day. I guess he's a fill-in driver?
- 19 A. He's a sub.
- 20 Q. He's a sub?
- 21 A. Yeah.
- 22 Q. Okay. Did you see him that day?
- 23 A. Kevin?
- 24 Q. Yeah.
- 25 A. I'm trying to think when I came back in that day if I came

1 straight up here or if I had to take my bus back to the barn.

2 Normally I come straight here from Carson. I think --

3 Q. When do you normally get to work? I should -- let me start  
4 there.

5 A. I go to -- I get to the bus barn between 6:30 and 6:45. I  
6 leave the bus barn at 10 minutes till 7. And I probably did see  
7 Kevin that morning. You know, I wouldn't swear to it, but  
8 normally Kevin's there. You know, we all kind of leave around the  
9 same time. Donny would -- always left the earliest. But I know  
10 Kevin was in our little debriefing meeting because he was rather  
11 emotional. His kids ride my bus. They're my second stop, so I  
12 would have been picking them up right after Donny's call.

13 MS. HARLEY: Okay. All right. Well, that is all the  
14 questions I have for you. Again, I'm very sorry for all of you --

15 MS. SHELBERG: I just --

16 MS. HARLEY: -- losing a friend.

17 MS. SHELBERG: You know, there's a lot of emotions up here.  
18 I think my emotions are more anger than anything, just because I  
19 don't think it ever should have happened. But that's -- I know  
20 that's not what you're looking for. It did happen, so that's --

21 MS. HARLEY: Well, at this particular point we're trying to  
22 figure out why it happened. And I guess that's the big thing.  
23 You know, why it happened and --

24 MS. SHELBERG: Had a conversation --

25 MS. HARLEY: -- what was going on.

1 MS. SHELBERG: We'd had -- several of us had the conversation  
2 several times, and as -- the exact words were, how could he ever  
3 evacuate a bus? Well, now we know. He couldn't. He couldn't get  
4 out of the seat. He was very (indiscernible). And then I don't  
5 think we were supposed to bring that up, but I'm sorry, I feel  
6 like there's a little girl that should still be here --

7 MS. HARLEY: Yes, ma'am.

8 MS. SHELBERG: -- if he hadn't been in that bus. But anyway.

9 MS. HARLEY: All right. Thank you very much.

10 MS. SHELBERG: Thank you. Thank you. Nice to meet you.

11 MS. HARLEY: And I --

12 MR. LaPONTE: Thank you very much. Thank you for your time.

13 MS. HARLEY: I'm going to say merry Christmas --

14 MS. SHELBERG: Thank you.

15 MS. HARLEY: -- even though I know it's going to be a tough  
16 one.

17 MS. SHELBERG: I understand. You bet. We will.

18 MS. HARLEY: Thank you.

19 MS. SHELBERG: It'll be tougher for others than me, and so --

20 MS. HARLEY: Yes. You know --

21 MS. SHELBERG: -- thank you for your time.

22 MS. HARLEY: All right. Appreciate it.

23 MR. LaPONTE: Thank you.

24 MS. SHELBERG: Good luck with your investigation.

25 MS. HARLEY: Okay. Bye-bye.

1 MR. LaPONTE: Thank you, ma'am.

2 MS. SHELBERG: You bet.

3 (Whereupon, at 2:25 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:           SCHOOL BUS FIRE NEAR OAKLAND, IOWA,  
                                  DECEMBER 12, 2017  
                                  Interview of Tami Shelberg

ACCIDENT NO.:               HWY18MH003

PLACE:                       Oakland, Iowa

DATE:                         December 15, 2017

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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Eileen Gonzalez  
Transcriber

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of: \*

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SCHOOL BUS FIRE NEAR OAKLAND, IOWA, \* Accident No.: HWY18MH003  
DECEMBER 12, 2017 \*

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Interview of: DAVID GUTE  
Principal

Riverside High School  
Oakland, Iowa

Friday,  
December 15, 2017

## APPEARANCES:

MICHAEL LaPONTE, Highway Vehicle Crash Investigator  
National Transportation Safety Board

SHERYL HARLEY, Survival Factors Investigator  
National Transportation Safety Board



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I N T E R V I E W

(2:29 p.m.)

## INTERVIEW OF DAVID GUTE

BY MR. LaPONTE:

Q. -- I'm hoping to speak with you is that -- do you get -- how do you handle student complaints, if you get one?

A. Generally, forward it on to the superintendent.

Q. You don't do anything other than (indiscernible)?

A. So if it's student-student, you know, we'll try handling those if there's any issues, you know, on the bus. But if it's a student complaint about a driver, you know, that goes on to the next level from me.

Q. Okay. Did Megan make a complaint?

A. She complained to me about it being hot on the bus. He wouldn't let them put the windows down on the school bus early this August. And she complained about him running stop signs to me. Those two different things. And I forwarded those on to Dr. Mitchell.

Q. Okay. When and where -- do you remember when those complaints were?

A. I don't have it documented, but it would have been August. I mean, it was hot.

Q. Both times?

A. Yeah, it was at the same time when she --

Q. Oh, I see.

1 A. -- complained. It was the same --

2 Q. So this was August?

3 A. Yeah. It was right after school started. And then I visited  
4 with her again and said it got better as far as being allowed to  
5 put windows down on the school bus and --

6 Q. Did she make a complaint Monday to you?

7 A. No.

8 Q. Unfortunately, when these things occur, we start getting a  
9 lot of people coming out of the weeds, if you will, saying this  
10 happened and that happened and so forth. I stopped to get gas in  
11 town at the Sinclair, and a lady said, you know, there was another  
12 bus fire just a month ago. I said, really? And then we checked  
13 it out a little bit and it wasn't a bus fire; the bus broke down.

14 A. There was a bus fire in the neighboring district. I think at  
15 Griswold there was a bus that caught on fire about a month ago.  
16 Not in our district.

17 Q. No. And she had the driver's name, so I went and checked  
18 with the bus barn, with Nick. And actually, it was a breakdown.  
19 It was a -- one of -- the propane Blue Bird broke down. The fuel  
20 pump went out and it died, and he had a receipt where it -- you  
21 know, written up as no power, and it was towed in. Still waiting  
22 for parts down there. Still waiting for parts.

23 But those -- I guess my point was, you know, those are the  
24 kind of reports we start getting in. Because we set up a call-in  
25 line just for witnesses or whomever, and we did a get a report

1 that supposedly she made a complaint just Monday, the day before  
2 the accident.

3 A. Not to me, she did not. So, I mean, was it reported that it  
4 was to me? Because it --

5 Q. Well, that's what the person said, that she had made a  
6 complaint to the principal about Donny's driving.

7 A. In August, yes.

8 Q. In August.

9 A. Yes. About those two things.

10 Q. Okay. And that was because it was too hot in the bus --

11 A. Yeah. And that he was running stop signs.

12 Q. And he was running stop signs. Is that a common complaint  
13 for the rural drivers?

14 A. That's probably the first time I've ever had that complain,  
15 you know, honestly, that occurred.

16 Q. Okay. And did you forward that, then, up to the  
17 superintendent's office?

18 A. Yes.

19 Q. Or when you forward those, are they written up or is it just  
20 a verbal --

21 A. No. I'm doing verbals, you know.

22 Q. Okay. And do you know if they're logged in and --

23 A. I don't know how he --

24 Q. -- deals with them?

25 A. A lot of times, my -- we have a Monday afternoon admin

1 meeting. So that's when I'm informing him of what's going on.  
2 Something like that, I'm going to call and say, hey, here's what I  
3 got, you know.

4 Q. Okay. Okay. How well did you know Donny? Did you -- was he  
5 -- I know he dropped off here at the high school, but I don't know  
6 how much interface you would have with the bus people, per se.

7 A. I mean, I know him. I have been around the community for a  
8 number of years, but he and I weren't hanging out, so --

9 Q. You young fit guys don't hang out with us old guys. I know  
10 that for sure.

11 A. Acquaintance, you know, but not -- I wouldn't say friend, so  
12 -- but yeah, we were working together and -- but with the four  
13 kids, I guess. So he worked here for a long time. I've been here  
14 for 18 years, you know, but not directly working with Donny during  
15 that time.

16 Q. Correct. Because that's -- so more of a support, not  
17 really --

18 A. Yeah. Yeah, so --

19 Q. All right. Do you have any business cards?

20 A. I don't, but I can get you my contact information if you  
21 want.

22 Q. Pardon me?

23 A. I can get you my contact information. Want me to write it  
24 down?

25 Q. Yeah, if you don't mind.

1 A. No.

2 Q. Tell Dr. Tim to loosen the string -- loosen up the strings  
3 here. Come on.

4 A. Would you want email and phone number, or --

5 Q. Yeah, if you don't mind. If you don't mind.

6 A. Just school phone, or you want --

7 Q. Whichever is the best way to get a hold of you.

8 A. During the day, this is a pretty good one.

9 Q. It's a school phone and it's good, then --

10 A. Yeah.

11 Q. That's great. Okay. Okay, Mr. Gute.

12 MR. LaPONTE: Do you have any questions there?

13 MS. HARLEY: Actually, I don't. One. I take that back. I  
14 do. Well, you knew --

15 MR. LaPONTE: I knew you were going to lie to us.

16 MS. HARLEY: Give me (indiscernible).

17 BY MS. HARLEY:

18 Q. So before the incident, when was the last time you saw Donny?

19 A. Saturday. Last Saturday, we had a wrestling tournament.

20 Q. Saturday at the wrestling tournament?

21 A. Yes.

22 Q. Okay. When you saw him, was he walking with a cane or with a  
23 walker?

24 A. He was sitting down. But I believe he had a walker.

25 Q. He had a walker with him?

1 A. I believe he had a walker with him, yes.

2 Q. Okay. So before that when you saw him, was he walking with a  
3 cane or a walker? Do you remember?

4 A. Depending on -- it seemed like it was ebb and flow.  
5 Sometimes it was a cane, sometimes it was a walker. He was kind  
6 of going back and forth, probably depending on how he was feeling.  
7 But I don't know --

8 Q. We spoke to his wife, is how we were -- ended up in a  
9 conversation. And I know that he started having back problems  
10 after he had earlier surgery, and I know he was supposed to have  
11 back surgery yesterday. And one of the things that we were  
12 wondering is about mobility. And I was just wondering how long  
13 he'd actually been walking with the walker or the cane.

14 A. I cannot tell you that, I mean, without totally speculating.  
15 I mean, I wouldn't want to go to --

16 Q. Well, I'm not going to ask you to --

17 A. -- court and say he started on this date and, you know --

18 Q. And that's -- we would --

19 MR. LaPONTE: (Indiscernible).

20 MS. HARLEY: Yes. Absolutely yes.

21 MR. GUTE: You want me to speculate and tell you how long? I  
22 would say a couple months, little longer.

23 MS. HARLEY: Okay. All right. And that's just a guess,  
24 that's --

25 MR. GUTE: I mean, I'm throwing that out there. I don't

1 know. You know, don't see him every day and --

2 MS. HARLEY: Right.

3 MR. GUTE: But -- yeah.

4 MS. HARLEY: Yeah. Okay.

5 MR. LaPONTE: And actually, now that she asked a question,  
6 I'm going to lie too.

7 BY MR. LaPONTE:

8 Q. The school emergency bus training, is that strictly with --  
9 is that for the elementary and middle school, or do you have it  
10 here for the high school as well?

11 A. We have never done that here at high school.

12 Q. You never -- because the kids have had it so long that by the  
13 time they get here --

14 A. It's never been discussed, but, you know, I mean, we've never  
15 had that conversation about it.

16 Q. Okay. So you (indiscernible) --

17 A. Right.

18 Q. You would -- I mean, it would make sense that by the time  
19 they get to this level they've had it 15 times.

20 A. But I'm telling you, it drives me crazy that she couldn't get  
21 out of that school bus. You know, I just don't get that.

22 Q. That's what's driving us crazy. You know --

23 A. And I get him. I mean, we're talking mobility. I get him,  
24 why he couldn't get off. Just, I don't understand how she  
25 couldn't get off the bus. I mean, that's --



1 Q. It's very difficult to piece together the crash sequence or  
2 (indiscernible), so --

3 A. And don't, I don't know --

4 Q. But you don't do any of that training with high school?

5 A. No. We haven't. I'm not saying we shouldn't; we haven't.

6 Q. Okay. All right. Oh, I got to make note of that.

7 MS. HARLEY: I'm sorry. I did want to give you that so you  
8 actually know who you talked to. Thank you.

9 MR. GUTE: I appreciate you guys and what you're trying to  
10 do.

11 MS. HARLEY: Well, hopefully we'll be able to give somebody  
12 some answers.

13 MR. GUTE: Well, that'd be nice. You know, it's not going to  
14 help --

15 MS. HARLEY: No.

16 MR. GUTE: -- bring anybody back.

17 MR. LaPONTE: No.

18 MS. HARLEY: Absolutely not. We can't fix this.

19 MR. GUTE: But I know you're both (indiscernible) to make it  
20 safer for everybody, and that's what your ultimate job is.

21 BY MR. LaPONTE:

22 Q. Are you close to the superintendent?

23 A. I would say no.

24 Q. Huh?

25 A. I would say no.

1 Q. Okay. Is it just because you haven't had time to get  
2 acquainted?

3 A. Well, he's been around for 18, he's been around 18 months,  
4 but --

5 Q. Yeah. You just don't -- paths don't cross, generally  
6 speaking?

7 A. No. I mean, he's not around a lot on the weekends and  
8 things. I mean, we do our jobs and that's --

9 Q. Yeah.

10 A. But I would say no, I'm not --

11 Q. You're not close personal friends?

12 A. No. No.

13 Q. Is he a reasonable supervisor? I mean, is the general  
14 attitude of the staff here in the district negative, positive,  
15 neutral?

16 A. I would say it's probably been fairly positive since he's  
17 been here; however, this may change some outlooks on supervision,  
18 so -- you know, I --

19 Q. I know that, in us dealing with it in the last few days, he  
20 seems to be under an extraordinary amount of pressure.

21 A. He is. He is.

22 Q. Understandably.

23 MR. LaPONTE: All right. Well, that's all I have. Thank  
24 you.

25 MS. HARLEY: Thank you very much, sir. It's certainly

1 appreciated, and I know you're very, very busy. And good luck to  
2 your students and everything, so --

3 MR. GUTE: Thank you, ma'am. I know you'll (indiscernible).  
4 I think we should have done something before it happened, so --  
5 but it's -- we can't do anything about that now, so -- anyways,  
6 thank you, guys.

7 MR. LaPONTE: All right. Thank you, sir.

8 MS. HARLEY: Thank you. Appreciate it, sir. All right.

9 (Whereupon, at 2:39 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:           SCHOOL BUS FIRE NEAR OAKLAND, IOWA,  
                                  DECEMBER 12, 2017  
                                  Interview of David Gute

ACCIDENT NO.:               HWY18MH003

PLACE:                       Oakland, Iowa

DATE:                         December 15, 2017

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.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Eileen Gonzalez  
Transcriber