



**SURVIVAL AND VEHICLE FACTUAL REPORT
ATTACHMENT**

Bystander Witness Interview

Coral Gables, FL

HWY21FH011

(19 pages)

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of: *

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FATAL CRASH AND FIRE OF TESLA *

MODEL 3 IN CORAL GABLES, *

Accident No.: HWY21FH011

FLORIDA ON SEPTEMBER 13, 2021 *

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Interview of: JORGE PEREZ

Witness to Accident

Via telephone

Thursday,

October 7, 2021

APPEARANCES:

TOM BARTH, Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

I N D E X

ITEM

PAGE

Interview of Jorge Perez:

By Mr. Barth

4

I N T E R V I E W

1
2 MR. BARTH: Okay. So it is October 7, 2021. This is Tom
3 Barth, investigator with the NTSB. And I'm speaking with Jorge
4 Perez, a witness of the Coral Gables Tesla crash. That's NTSB
5 HWY21FH011.

INTERVIEW OF GEORGE PEREZ

6
7 BY MR. BARTH:

8 Q. So, Mr. Perez, if you can just describe what you remember
9 about the crash?

10 A. Yeah. Thanks, Tom. So I was exiting my house going for a
11 walk. I live on the south side of Coral and Alhambra. The Tesla
12 -- (audio lapse) north on Alhambra, so it would've been on my
13 left-hand side as I was approaching Coral Way, before the lights.
14 I sensed a car was coming. I was pretty much at the corner of
15 Coral Way. The reason I sensed a car was coming is that, you
16 know, I heard, you know, an acceleration.

17 Q. When -- describe what you heard -- the sounds that you heard
18 when you say "acceleration".

19 (Pause)

20 MR. BARTH: Are you there? Hello? Hello? I think I must
21 have lost him. I'm going to have to start over.

22 BY MR. BARTH:

23 Q. But anyway, so what -- where we left -- where I lost you was
24 you had said you had heard -- or you noticed that something was
25 happening because you heard a vehicle accelerate. So I wanted you

1 to try to describe what you heard and then go from there.

2 A. Yeah. So like, at this point, I'm probably around 20 to 30
3 yards south of the light signal. And, you know, I don't know how
4 to describe an acceleration, but I sensed a car whiz by me, you
5 know, it felt like the car was going at a faster pace than I'd
6 normally see on my street, right? And like, you know, right now
7 at this point, I would be roughly 40 yards from my house, right?
8 So like, it's in a very common area for me.

9 So I sensed the car going fast, you know, for what it's
10 worth, later that (audio lapse) my wife told me that she could
11 hear the car accelerating beyond that, it (indiscernible) was
12 inside -- she could hear it from inside the house. But, you know,
13 (audio lapse) or felt, we -- whatever it was, like, I sensed that
14 something was moving fast. I looked up, and almost
15 instantaneously, I see the vehicle in question.

16 You know, obviously it had passed me by this point, and what
17 looked to me like it had taken a red light, you know, at least
18 that's what it appeared to me. I wasn't looking up, you know, so
19 it may have been yellow turning red, I don't know, but it looked
20 to me like it was a red light. I saw the vehicle hit, well,
21 take -- basically cross Coral Way, and in my head, I was thinking,
22 wow, that is like, one of the most dangerous things that I had
23 ever seen.

24 This is a very traffic-heavy intersection and it took the --
25 you know, it crossed the street at such a speed, that I saw the

1 vehicle, you know, what appeared to me, catch air. Like, it took
2 off. It didn't look like it had deviated off into like, the curbs
3 or anything like that. It was in the middle of the lane, but it
4 hit the intersection at such speed, that that (indiscernible) car
5 looked like it had slammed down on the bottom.

6 Q. Mm-hmm. Did you see sparks or anything like that?

7 A. Definitely saw sparks. And then it looked like the
8 vehicle -- like, definitely saw sparks; definitely saw what seemed
9 like actually considerable sparks. And then the vehicle swerves a
10 little bit, appears to make -- like, appeared to me to like, you
11 know, swerve, and then like, I mean, this is very, you know,
12 almost instantaneous in like, real life, right? Smashes into the
13 trees, and the vehicle caught on fire; what seemed to me like an
14 instantaneous explosion, if you will. I -- so as mentioned, I was
15 now at this point, probably 40 yards south of the accident. A car
16 pulls up next to me as this is happening and he -- someone says to
17 me -- and I reached out to this person --

18 (Audio lapse)

19 Q. Hello?

20 A. -- you know (indiscernible). Yeah, I'm here. I'm here.

21 Q. Oh, yeah.

22 A. Hello?

23 Q. Could you -- you said you reached out to that person? Sorry,
24 the phone broke-up. So you reached out to that person and then
25 what happened?

1 A. So I'm on the (indiscernible) accident and someone pulls up
2 in a vehicle next to me and says I'm calling the police, you know,
3 you go. And I was already kind of like -- you know, I'm in
4 motion. And I ran to the accident, so I was only about (audio
5 lapse). By the time I got to the accident, the car was completely
6 engulfed in flames. I remember screaming for help, asking -- you
7 know, just screaming, like, I need a hose, something to put the
8 fire out, anything.

9 I couldn't make out that there were people in the vehicle at
10 this point. The fire had engulfed the car. You know, I remember
11 getting to the point of the accident and seeing, you know, what
12 looked to me like little -- like fireworks, if you will, like
13 fireworks that had been discharged, that were like molten lava-
14 looking things which later on -- or later on seemed to be the
15 battery -- the battery cells, which were littered across the
16 entirety of the crash scene.

17 At the time, these things looked like molten lava. So like,
18 somehow, they had caught fire -- they had caught ignition very
19 quickly because I mean, again, I ran to the accident at point of
20 impact, maybe, you know, I want to say it probably took less than
21 20, 30 seconds for me to get there.

22 Q. Right.

23 A. And these things were all over the place, they were shooting
24 out of the car. So I screamed for help. I asked, you know, if
25 the neighbors started to come out because there was a huge -- you

1 know, a very loud sound, right? Someone gave me -- you know, I
2 was screaming, (audio lapse) fire extinguisher. You know, I think
3 someone came with their (audio lapse) -- garage door and brought
4 out a fire extinguisher. I grabbed it, I tried to get close to
5 the car. It was (audio lapse) than ten to the car.

6 Q. So, sorry, that broke --

7 A. I did --

8 Q. That broke up again. You were -- said you were -- you used
9 the fire extinguisher and what happened?

10 A. I couldn't get close enough to the vehicle to do it. I mean,
11 like, the entire vehicle was engulfed at this point. I was
12 kidding myself.

13 Q. Right. Okay. Okay. And then --

14 A. Can I let you know something though because like, look, I
15 filed a police report that night. The person that pulled up next
16 to me told me, he's like, hey, I have dash -- I -- like, I caught
17 it all on the dash cam video. Now -- and I just wanted to see if
18 like you guys had seen that dash cam video because it does show
19 exactly what I saw.

20 Q. Yeah. We obtained that. And I think the person -- in that
21 video, there's a person that's shown running towards the scene.

22 A. That's me.

23 Q. That must be you.

24 A. Yes. He pulls up next to me, and you hear me on the video
25 saying, holy shit.

- 1 Q. Yeah. And then he says, call 911 or something like that.
- 2 A. He's like, I'm calling 911. You go. You run.
- 3 Q. Right.
- 4 A. And I was already crossing Coral Way at that point. So like,
- 5 it gives you an idea of where we were relative to the accident.
- 6 You know, I'm actually out here right now just to see like, make
- 7 sure that I'm giving you the right discussion. You know, I
- 8 must've been 20 to 30 yards south of Coral Way. The accident
- 9 happened probably 30 to 40 yards north of Coral Way. So like,
- 10 whatever time it took me to run there, maybe less than 20 seconds,
- 11 and I was running as fast as I can. I'm a fairly fit guy.
- 12 Q. Yeah.
- 13 A. This thing was in flames.
- 14 Q. What's your house address? Where do you live?
- 15 A. [REDACTED]
- 16 Q. Okay.
- 17 A. So it's just south of the intersection --
- 18 Q. Yeah.
- 19 A. Maybe like, a hundred yards south of the intersection.
- 20 Q. Yep. Okay. And one thing I'd like to have you describe in
- 21 more detail if you can was the point between -- like, when it
- 22 crossed the intersection and you saw it kind of -- as you
- 23 described, you know, go over the crown of the road, or catch some
- 24 air, or something, or --
- 25 A. Yeah.

1 Q. Do -- the point from there as it lost control on the roadway
2 -- as it departed the roadway to the point that it struck the
3 tree, what -- do you remember anything else, or could you run
4 through that description again for me and --

5 A. Yeah. So let me run through it again. So what -- exactly
6 where it -- the car --

7 (Buttons pressed on phone)

8 -- traveling in the middle of the lane, I didn't recall
9 seeing the car brake at all. You know, so like, if I'm going off
10 my memory, this car didn't seem to slow down at all. It hits the
11 crown of Coral Way. And again, I think it caught air. Like I
12 don't know if the vehicle was in the air or anything like this,
13 but what I did see was the back of the vehicle slam down on the
14 ground. Maybe like, 10 feet after the intersection, like it
15 smashes down.

16 (Buttons pressed on phone)

17 I see the vehicle fishtail. Sorry -- beep. There's a beep
18 on the line. I don't know if it's me.

19 Q. Yeah. So -- yeah, that's okay. And I'll have you start
20 again. And then the -- so your perspective is -- from the
21 intersection, you basically -- as it crosses the intersection,
22 you're essentially behind and to the --

23 A. Right.

24 Q. Right of the -- so you're seeing the back and right side of
25 the vehicle?

1 A. Correct.

2 Q. Okay. Yeah, so go ahead and continue from -- you said you'd
3 -- you aren't really sure or not if it actually caught air but you
4 saw the back end slam down. Why don't you take it from there?

5 A. Yeah. Correct. So it seemed like the back of the vehicle
6 slammed down on the ground. I definitely saw sparks, you know,
7 whether those were flames, I don't know, but definitely saw bright
8 sparks. Then the car begins to like, fishtail almost
9 instantaneously at that point. It looked like the driver was
10 trying to get control but, you know, the distance there was not
11 very much and it's not very forgiving. So it looks like she
12 fishtails and loses control of the vehicle. And then the vehicle
13 slams, you know, what seemed to be kind of head-on to me, at the
14 -- from where I was. But once I got closer to the vehicle I saw
15 that it was mostly around the front end side.

16 Q. Say that -- what do you mean -- you said that the orientation
17 of the vehicle, you mean the impact was at the front end or the --
18 what do you mean front end?

19 A. Sorry. So from my vantage point, the car would've been
20 almost -- let's say 11:55, if you will, from a time standpoint, so
21 it wasn't like, directly 12:00; it was a little bit to my left.

22 Q. Okay. I understand.

23 A. And I see the vehicle hit the air, slams down, swerves, and
24 what seems to me as like, the -- you know, again, it was
25 nighttime, I mean, I didn't have my glasses on, but it hit the

1 tree. And again, I -- what seemed to me as head-on, but it --
2 like, when I got to the vehicle, I saw that it was really kind of
3 like, on the right side of the vehicle that was smashed --

4 (Buttons pressed on phone)

5 -- like, on the passenger side, and on the -- like, the front
6 wheel side is what it seemed to me.

7 Q. Okay.

8 A. From my recollection at this point.

9 Q. Okay. Yeah, that clears it up. What color were the sparks
10 that you saw when the back end hit the ground?

11 A. The sparks looked like regular sparks to me. I didn't notice
12 anything -- the one weird thing I noticed with regards to the
13 flame was when I tried to get close with the fire extinguisher,
14 just the degree of the heat and noxious smell that was coming out
15 of the vehicle, I -- it could've just been burning, but it was a
16 very fowl-like, acidic, you know, kind of like a mechanical burn.

17 Q. Right. Okay. Okay. Yeah, that's very helpful to get your
18 account. I really appreciate -- I know it's not an easy thing to
19 recall all of this and it is very helpful for our investigation,
20 and I appreciate that.

21 A. Okay.

22 Q. Is there anything else that you feel is important or any --
23 do you have any questions for me?

24 A. No. I was just saying like, we -- you know, I'm happy to
25 help. Obviously, I've been impacted by this. It's like -- it's

1 on my mind, that's why I reached out when I saw the article. I
2 did see that -- I did see eventually because, I -- you know, I'd
3 been searching the dash cam video and you know, it essentially is
4 very much like, exactly how I remembered it. So, I mean, it's
5 probably the best representation of what happened.

6 MR. BARTH: Yeah. Okay. Great. I'm going to stop the
7 recording now.

8 (Off the record)

9 (On the record)

10 MR. BARTH: So I'm resuming the interview again with George
11 Perez to ask about the next morning when he looked at the crash
12 scene, what he recalls.

13 BY MR. BARTH:

14 Q. So go ahead.

15 A. Thank you. So the next morning I woke up with my wife and we
16 both decided to walk towards the crash scene to try to make sense
17 of what had happened the night before. As I approached the scene,
18 there's debris littered everywhere. I saw the hub cap of the
19 Tesla broken in half. I saw a -- what seemed like thousands of
20 battery cells littered. The battery cell that I had seen as I was
21 running to the car the night before that was in the driveway of
22 the neighbor was still there, and I remember showing it to my wife
23 and letting her know that when I had seen it leave the car, it
24 looked like it was lava. You know, it looked like it the -- it
25 was burning.

1 Q. Where was that at?

2 A. I also --

3 Q. Wait. So the house that you saw some debris from the
4 battery, where was that in relation to the tree and the final
5 position of the vehicle?

6 A. Directly in front.

7 Q. Okay.

8 A. That -- it's the house that is directly -- it would've been
9 on the passenger side of the vehicle as they traveled north on
10 Alhambra. There's a --

11 Q. Got it.

12 A. -- home there. Those were the people that came out when they
13 heard the bang -- when they heard the explosion. So by the time I
14 had run there, I had maybe spent like, two or three seconds then I
15 saw someone open the front door. That's when I was asking them
16 like, do you have a hose, do you have water, is there something I
17 could put here? And I had seen some of the cells leaving the car.
18 Again, the cells seemed to be flying out of the car and they were
19 molten. They were red.

20 Q. Gotcha.

21 A. Yeah.

22 Q. Okay. Great. Thanks.

23 A. So I noticed a lot of battery cells on the ground. I also
24 noticed that two trees had been impacted. So you know, as I
25 recall the accident, the vehicle seemed to have caught air,

1 slammed on the back, fishtailed a little bit, it looks like the
2 driver hits the first tree on the driver's side of the car, and
3 that seemed to have turned the car enough where they -- the speed
4 and the acceleration swung them to the right side of the vehicle
5 on the next tree. So it essentially hit the left side, turns the
6 vehicle, the vehicle slams into the tree on the right side of the
7 vehicle -- or the passenger side of the vehicle, and that's where
8 the burn occurred, and where you see most of the vehicle's debris.

9 Q. Yeah. So you --

10 A. The -- yeah.

11 Q. So you noticed in the morning that it had struck two trees.
12 Do you know --

13 A. I could not see that the night before. I was -- it was
14 nighttime, and it was so fast that I didn't -- I couldn't tell
15 that it had struck the first tree.

16 Q. Okay. Okay. That's fine.

17 A. Yes.

18 Q. Yep. Okay.

19 A. But that was actually where I did see the -- you know, the
20 broken -- you know -- I don't know what it is. Like a Tesla
21 hubcap, was near that first -- was before the accident in a way so
22 I don't know if that --

23 Q. So it was near that tree that it glanced off of?

24 A. Yeah. It was closer to the first tree so I don't know if
25 that came off when the vehicle slammed on the ground after

1 crossing the intersection, or if it came off as a -- you know,
2 upon first impact with that first tree.

3 Q. Right. And you saw -- so you saw -- could you describe
4 exactly what you saw and where you saw it again?

5 A. I saw what appeared to be a Tesla hubcap cracked in half.
6 And it appeared to me from recollection that next day that it was
7 south of the final tree impact.

8 Q. Okay.

9 A. You know, it was closer to that first tree. And I didn't see
10 it come off. I could -- you know, if it came off at the impact
11 and rolled back, I couldn't tell you. I don't know.

12 Q. Right. And it was -- so it was between the two trees and
13 then in relation to the median, was it in the -- like in the
14 middle of that grassy median or was it closer to the road or where
15 was it?

16 A. Yeah, closer to the road.

17 Q. Okay.

18 A. Yeah.

19 Q. Okay.

20 A. It was closer to the right side. You know, like, if you
21 split the median in half, it was closer to the street that the car
22 was traveling north on than the other side.

23 Q. Okay. Okay.

24 A. Yeah.

25 Q. Yeah. I'm sure that that would've been documented. I think

1 we've got that documented where it was. So --

2 A. Okay. Great.

3 Q. Okay.

4 A. So hopefully I recall that correctly.

5 MR. BARTH: All right. I think that's it for now then. Let
6 me turn off the recording here. Hold on.

7 (Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

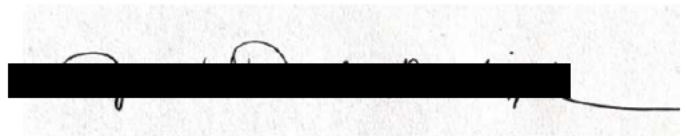
IN THE MATTER OF: FATAL CRASH AND FIRE OF TESLA
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ON SEPTEMBER 13, 2021
Interview of George Perez

ACCIDENT NO.: HWY21FH011

PLACE: Via telephone

DATE: October 7, 2021

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.

A rectangular area of the document is redacted with a solid black bar. Above the bar, there are faint, illegible handwritten marks that appear to be initials or a signature.

Janet Deal Mendizabal
Transcriber