



Interview of Towanda

Futrell

Williamsburg, VA

HWY23MH004

(22 pages)

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of:

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FATAL TWO-VEHICLE CRASH IN YORK
COUNTY NEAR NEWPORT NEWS, VIRGINIA
ON DECEMBER 16, 2022

Accident No.: HWY23MH004

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Interview of: TOWANDA FUTRELL, Owner
Futrell's Party Adventures

Newport News, Virginia

Saturday,
December 17, 2022

APPEARANCES:

SHAWN CURRIE, Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

ANTHONY SIGNORINI, Safety Investigator
Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration

Also present:

CURTIS FUTRELL, Husband

I N D E X

ITEM

PAGE

Interview of Luke Griganavocius:

By Mr. Currie

4

I N T E R V I E W

(12:25 p.m.)

1
2
3 MR. CURRIE: Okay. It is December 17 at about 12:25, and
4 we're at the Riverside Hospital in Newport News, Virginia, in
5 room 4601, and I'm talking to Towanda Futrell. That's
6 T-O-W-A-N-D-A, F-U-T-R-E-L-L. And my name is Shawn, S-H-A-W-N,
7 Currie, C-U-R-R-I-E, in regards to NTSB case highway, HWY,
8 23MS004. We had to pause for the nurse to come in. Is it okay if
9 I call you Towanda?

10 MS. FUTRELL: Yes, yeah.

11 MR. CURRIE: Well, what do you want to be called?

12 MS. FUTRELL: You can call me Towanda. It's perfect.

13 MR. CURRIE: All right.

14 MS. FUTRELL: That's my name. I've got a nickname, Tutu
15 (ph.), a lot of people call when they (indiscernible).

16 MR. CURRIE: What's your nickname?

17 MS. FUTRELL: Tutu.

18 MR. CURRIE: Tutu? All right. I'll call you Towanda. It
19 sounds more professional.

20 MR. FUTRELL: Yeah, yeah.

21 MR. CURRIE: All right.

INTERVIEW OF TOWANDA FUTRELL

22 BY MR. CURRIE:

23 Q. So, you own Futrell's Party Adventures?

24 A. I do.

1 Q. Okay. How long have you owned that?

2 A. Like two years.

3 Q. Two years. And do you have an office for that, or do you run
4 it out of your house, or --

5 A. No, I have an office that I run at Military Highway.

6 Q. Military Highway? And that's in Chesapeake?

7 A. Chesapeake, Virginia. 2973 South Military Highway --

8 Q. Okay.

9 A. -- Chesapeake, 23323.

10 Q. Okay. How many buses do you have?

11 A. I have one.

12 Q. Just this one?

13 A. Yes.

14 Q. Okay, and how long have you had that?

15 A. For two years.

16 Q. Two years? Did you buy it local, or how did you get it?

17 A. No, I bought it from a place out of Arizona somewhere.

18 Q. Okay.

19 A. And I had it shipped here.

20 Q. Okay. Was it all tricked out, or did you have to get that
21 done here?

22 A. No, everything was --

23 MR. FUTRELL: Upgraded.

24 MS. FUTRELL: Dang. Everything was (indiscernible). I

25 upgraded just the music, the speakers, the TV, the sound, put LED

1 lights on. I just upgraded everything in it.

2 Q. Okay, so -- but the seats and everything?

3 A. Yeah, the seats, I got (indiscernible).

4 Q. All right. Do you have -- you said you just dealt with some
5 motor carrier stuff. Do you have all your records for that, where
6 you got it and --

7 A. It's in my email.

8 Q. It's all in your email?

9 A. Everything. I was certified to make trips and all that. I
10 have the confirmation number, all that, that I just went through
11 before I moved my bus here, because I had got it, like I say,
12 two years ago. I registered through DMV. I had the title and
13 everything, and I had regular plate tags. From my point of view,
14 somebody from -- friends that own party buses had seen my party
15 bus through my friend, the one I -- yes. I had a party and a
16 half, five of us. It was a friend thing. He gave me party,
17 two parties, and all that stuff. So, that's how we do. We swap
18 out buses. Well, he got (indiscernible), he gives it to me. If
19 I've got the same, I give it to him. And we just work together
20 like that. So, it was a state trooper that seen that there was
21 regular tags, so it wasn't registered through the main company
22 that I needed to.

23 Q. Okay.

24 A. So, I had to sit that down for a couple of months, and I had
25 to get -- what is it? Security bond?

1 Q. Okay. Yeah.

2 A. I had to get a security bond; and then, I had to get some
3 papers through the Motor Carrier itself. Well, all of the
4 (indiscernible) was before I (indiscernible), and I took care of
5 all of that with -- about a couple of weeks ago.

6 Q. Okay. So, you've been running this business. This business
7 just isn't a party bus. It looks like --

8 A. No.

9 Q. -- you did like --

10 A. It's not just a party bus. I'm an event planner.

11 Q. Okay.

12 A. So, I do the party bus just like entertainment, but I do
13 kids' parties for this (indiscernible) a bounce house,
14 processions, I do balloon arches, decorate. Little labels and
15 stuff, I do. I do a lot of things pertaining to parties --

16 Q. Okay.

17 A. -- and kid parties.

18 Q. All right. And you've been doing -- how long have you
19 been -- two years with --

20 A. I've been doing it with the business for two years, but I've
21 been helping others for --

22 Q. Okay.

23 A. -- quite a few years.

24 Q. Okay. So, the party bus end of it, you've been doing that
25 for?

1 A. Two years.

2 Q. Two years? And do you keep driver qualification files? Have
3 you ever heard that term before? Like, how do you hire a driver?
4 Do you have full-time employees, or how does that work?

5 A. Yeah, I have a full-time employee, but he -- well, I ain't
6 going to say full-time, because I don't get rides every day, so
7 I'm not going to say full-time. But I have somebody that normally
8 drives for me.

9 Q. Was it the same guy who was driving?

10 A. No. He wasn't the same guy that was driving. It was a
11 different guy that drove --

12 MR. FUTRELL: Yeah.

13 MS. FUTRELL: -- the bus that day.

14 MR. FUTRELL: We had --

15 MR. CURRIE: Okay.

16 MR. FUTRELL: -- (indiscernible).

17 BY MR. CURRIE:

18 Q. And who's your normal driver?

19 A. Johnny.

20 Q. Johnny?

21 A. Johnny Blunt (ph.).

22 Q. Johnny Blunt?

23 A. Yeah. He will drive for me whenever I ask him, but a lot of
24 times, he has to have (indiscernible).

25 Q. Okay. What's he do for a living?

- 1 A. He drives buses and (indiscernible).
- 2 Q. All right. So, he works for another bus company? He works
3 for like a bus bus company, or --
- 4 A. Yeah, (indiscernible) works for a bus bus company and
5 (indiscernible). I believe his (indiscernible).
- 6 Q. Okay. So, Antonio, Mr. Wiggins (ph.) --
- 7 A. Yeah.
- 8 Q. -- how did he end up driving for this trip?
- 9 A. How'd he end up driving for this trip? Antonio, I've been
10 knowing him for little bit of a minute now, and Antonio drove like
11 my last maybe like three or four trips or something.
- 12 Q. Okay. So, how did you hire him? Did he have to fill out an
13 application and everything, or just word of mouth, or how did that
14 work?
- 15 A. No, he didn't have to fill out an application. It was
16 basically like word of mouth (indiscernible). He used to drive
17 the humanity trucks and all that, so I just --
- 18 Q. Used to drive what?
- 19 A. Some truck for humanity or something.
- 20 Q. Okay.
- 21 A. I'm not sure. He used to drive a couple of trucks, and I
22 know him very well, and like I asked him if he could drive
23 sometimes when Johnny couldn't drive and stuff like that.
- 24 Q. So, he's kind of like a fill-in guy?
- 25 A. Yeah, yeah, pretty much.

1 Q. So, he doesn't have to fill out an application. Do you --
2 and I realize you only have one bus and you're a really small
3 company, but do you have any like driving policies, like safety
4 things, like drivers can't use their phone and have to wear their
5 seatbelt? Do you have any of those?

6 A. Yeah. He had to, well, he had to -- when he uses his phone,
7 it's for navigation, but he had it like, you know --

8 Q. Yeah, that --

9 A. -- set up in front, yes.

10 Q. But do you have like -- does your -- does the company have
11 any written policies or anything like that, or is it all just
12 commonsense that you don't use your phone when you're driving?

13 A. Yeah, I don't have a written policy.

14 Q. Okay. Trying to think what else. Now, your party bus, who
15 maintains that? I mean, I know you do, because you're responsible
16 for it, but do you have a garage you use, or a mechanic, or --

17 A. Yes. I have mechanics that I had used since I've had it, a
18 couple of mechanics, and not no major work to have done to it,
19 just like an oil change and, you know, the --

20 MR. FUTRELL: Yes, inspections and all that (indiscernible).

21 MS. FUTRELL: Yeah, all this stuff. My husband takes care of
22 that stuff for me.

23 MR. CURRIE: Is that the husband?

24 MS. FUTRELL: Yeah.

25 MR. CURRIE: All right. What's your name, sir?

1 MR. FUTRELL: Huh?

2 MR. CURRIE: What's your name?

3 MR. FUTRELL: (Indiscernible) Curtis.

4 MR. CURRIE: Curtis? All right.

5 MR. FUTRELL: Yeah.

6 BY MR. CURRIE:

7 Q. So, do you keep records on what you've had done on the bus,
8 like oil changes, and inspections, and that kind of stuff?

9 A. Yeah, I have --

10 Q. Yeah.

11 A. -- I have the paperwork somewhere in there.

12 Q. Okay.

13 A. I do (indiscernible).

14 MR. FUTRELL: Well, I (indiscernible).

15 MS. FUTRELL: Yeah. I think -- and we put underneath of the
16 seat. There should be a file. I don't know if they found it.
17 They got a lot of stuff in there that's been done to.

18 BY MR. CURRIE:

19 Q. Okay. So, there's a file under the seat?

20 A. Yeah, and I think it was in a container, though, like
21 underneath one of the seats.

22 Q. Okay.

23 A. And I have a couple of records at home somewhere.

24 Q. So, how long -- did they tell you how long you're going to be
25 here in the hospital?

1 A. No. I'm not sure.

2 Q. All right. Because one of the things I need to do is, I need
3 to meet with whoever, either you or your representative, at your
4 office, if you have those records, and look at them, because there
5 are certain records you're supposed to have, and they have to meet
6 a certain criteria, and we'll talk about that just to see what you
7 have so I can talk about it in my report. Like, if you've had an
8 inspection, but it was done whenever, wherever, you know, the --

9 MR. FUTRELL: Yeah. But a lot of stuff was left on the bus
10 (indiscernible) and the bus got tore up.

11 MR. CURRIE: All right.

12 MR. FUTRELL: So, there's stuff on the bus that we need the
13 paperwork (indiscernible) driving.

14 MR. CURRIE: Okay.

15 MR. FUTRELL: So, a lot of that stuff is on the bus, stuff --

16 MR. CURRIE: All right.

17 MS. FUTRELL: (Indiscernible).

18 MR. CURRIE: So --

19 MR. FUTRELL: Like --

20 MR. CURRIE: -- do you keep receipts that you pay these
21 people for taxes and stuff? You know what I mean? If you pay go
22 get your inspection or your oil changed, you keep that for tax
23 purposes, right? Because you're writing that off.

24 MS. FUTRELL: Yeah. I have some, I have some stuff.

25 MR. CURRIE: Okay. That's the kind of stuff.

1 MR. FUTRELL: Yeah, we've got that.

2 MR. CURRIE: If you don't have the actual stuff, then you can
3 tell me where you've got it, and I can go get it.

4 MR. FUTRELL: We have receipts, yes, sir.

5 MS. FUTRELL: Yeah. Oh --

6 MR. CURRIE: All right.

7 MS. FUTRELL: -- where we got everything done at, I can tell
8 you that, too.

9 MR. CURRIE: Okay.

10 MS. FUTRELL: Yeah.

11 MR. CURRIE: Perfect.

12 BY MR. CURRIE:

13 Q. And so, this trip, you all were left where to go to Richmond,
14 and then back?

15 A. Yeah. We went to Richmond.

16 Q. From --

17 A. I had a --

18 Q. -- Chesapeake?

19 A. No, from -- not from -- everybody met at my house.

20 Q. Okay.

21 A. From Norfolk.

22 Q. And what time did you guys leave?

23 A. Around 7 --

24 Q. Doesn't have to be exact, just --

25 A. Probably around 7:- -- close to 8:00, I know.

1 Q. Okay.

2 A. Yes.

3 Q. So, about --

4 A. Probably been about close to 8:00. It was late 7:00
5 something or 8 o'clock. I'm not sure. Just somewhere around that
6 time.

7 Q. Okay. And where did you go from your house?

8 A. So, 7-Eleven; and then -- because we had to get some diesel
9 gas. And then, we went to -- because they didn't have any. Then,
10 we went to -- the name of the gas station. It's by
11 (indiscernible) somewhere.

12 Q. Okay.

13 A. To get some gas. And from there, we got on the road to go to
14 Richmond.

15 Q. Okay. And then, you all went up to Richmond?

16 A. Um-hum.

17 Q. How long does that take? An hour?

18 A. A couple -- like an hour and a half, like a couple of hours,
19 an hour and a half, (indiscernible) close to two hours, I believe.

20 Q. Okay. And when you were up to Richmond, where did you go?

21 A. We was going to Trios (ph.). It's -- somewhere with my
22 daughter. And one of the guys -- I call him my son, because my
23 daughter (indiscernible). He was on one of the ones that didn't
24 make it.

25 Q. Okay.

- 1 A. So, I say, my --
- 2 Q. Sorry.
- 3 A. -- son.
- 4 Q. Okay.
- 5 A. Him and my, one of my daughters performed at (indiscernible).
6 That's our only reason why we went to Richmond, because we had
7 like such a big crowd, we just took the party bus with the support
8 on the crowds there, but a lot of it was family. You know,
9 majority of us was family and close friends.
- 10 Q. Okay. So, was this a pay trip or a free trip?
- 11 A. No, it was a free trip.
- 12 Q. Free trip?
- 13 A. Yeah. I won a free trip.
- 14 Q. So, no one --
- 15 A. Nobody paid, no, no.
- 16 UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: No. It was just a support.
- 17 MR. CURRIE: Okay.
- 18 MS. FUTRELL: It was just --
- 19 UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: A support.
- 20 MS. FUTRELL: -- a support family event (indiscernible). We
21 just took it down there, you know, because we had quite a few
22 people, so we did it on the party bus.
- 23 Q. Okay.
- 24 A. And we never made it -- we made it, but -- for them to
25 perform at the Trios. So, the producers and all them people was

1 there that was handling the performance. We went right in the
2 parking lot where they was at; and then, we went inside another
3 place for like a couple of hours, probably about an hour and a
4 half, I'll say. And they was performing in front of them, because
5 that's why we was down there, to -- for them to perform. And they
6 performed. We sat there for a little while. And then, when it
7 was over, that's when we was headed back to --

8 Q. Back to your house?

9 A. Yeah.

10 Q. So, about what time did you all leave Richmond?

11 A. Probably about 12:00, something after 12:00.

12 Q. So, midnight-ish? And then, you came back?

13 A. It was after midnight.

14 Q. All right. Did you stop anywhere between when you left
15 Richmond and the crash, or --

16 A. No. We went -- we was coming straight home.

17 Q. Okay. And what do you remember about the crash?

18 A. The only thing -- I don't remember nothing about it. All I
19 remember is, you heard it hit, and I was out the -- I don't know
20 if I went out the door, the window, whatever. I was outside. And
21 then, I just remember I didn't remember anything, just out. I
22 remember hitting something, and debris in my face and all that,
23 and I was unconscious, because I don't remember nothing else.

24 Q. Okay.

25 A. But in the interim of me being unconscious, I seen like my

1 life flashing. It might be (indiscernible) crazy, but --

2 Q. No. I believe you.

3 A. -- my life flashed in front of me, and I seen a time when I
4 was a baby all the way into my adult life, from baby, toddler, to
5 teenager, to -- and it happened so fast, real fast. I just seen a
6 whole lot of (indiscernible). And I'm, you know, I'm a Christian
7 and believe highly of God, and when I seen my life flash in front
8 of me, I seen my body. It went so fast. I seen my body laying
9 down. And all I can remember is saying, Lord, forgive me. Please
10 don't take my (indiscernible) whatever, whatever, whatever. And
11 then, I -- my spirit was in my body or something.

12 And from that experience, I heard them hollering, mom. My
13 daughters (indiscernible) mom, mommy. Where's my mommy? Because
14 I was down (indiscernible) dirt somewhere. I crawl up as much as
15 I could. Didn't know that my leg was broken, but I'm not going to
16 use it, I was so sore. And I was still -- my (indiscernible).
17 So, I kept pulling up and pulling up until I reached almost the
18 top, and they pulled me the rest of the way, and I lay down and
19 wait until the ambulance came and got here. (Indiscernible) I
20 don't remember. Completely nothing.

21 Q. Okay.

22 A. I just remember me. I don't know what was -- he was driving,
23 and that was it. I heard it, and before you know it, like I say,
24 I was out (indiscernible).

25 Q. Okay. Where were you sitting?

1 A. Where was I sitting? I was sitting in the inside, and I had
2 just went and talked to the driver and seen, was he okay, right?
3 You know, and I think I had sat on the step, because I was talking
4 to him for a second. And that was it. It happened so fast.

5 Q. So, you're sitting on the step?

6 A. Yeah, just talking to him for a couple of seconds. Yeah, I
7 was. I did went out there and sat on the step for a couple of
8 seconds while I was talking to him. I had got up from the back --

9 Q. Okay.

10 A. -- and went to the step. I sat there, and it wasn't even
11 a second until I'm -- and then, it happened.

12 Q. And he was fine?

13 A. Well, he was fine. He was driving, and I don't remember
14 nothing else.

15 Q. Okay.

16 A. He was driving it. I had went up there and asked him, was he
17 okay? And he was like, yeah. And I, and I was there. I just sat
18 right there and there. Before I could get up, I heard -- and it
19 was fast like that.

20 Q. Okay. Was he getting paid for this trip, or was he just
21 along for the ride?

22 A. No, he -- I normally pay him for the trip, so I never paid
23 him yet.

24 Q. All right, but he was expecting pay?

25 A. No. I'm going to say not. I ain't going to say he was

1 expecting pay for this trip, because he wanted to go and support
2 them, and he was willing to do it.

3 Q. Right.

4 A. But I normally pay him for the trips that he do.

5 Q. Okay.

6 A. But this trip, everything was free.

7 Q. Right.

8 A. And he didn't charge me for this trip.

9 Q. Okay. So, I know your phone is amongst the missing. Is
10 there another number to get a hold of you at?

11 A. My husband's number.

12 Q. Curtis' number?

13 MR. CURRIE: Curtis, what's your number, my friend?

14 MR. FUTRELL: [REDACTED] - --

15 MR. CURRIE: Yep.

16 MR. FUTRELL: -- [REDACTED]

17 MR. CURRIE: And I didn't ask you this. I should have. You
18 say you live in Norfolk? Whereabouts? What's your address?

19 MS. FUTRELL: [REDACTED]

20 [REDACTED]

21 MR. CURRIE: Whew. That's a different one.

22 MS. FUTRELL: [REDACTED]. Yeah. It's a funny. It's Omohundro.
23 I spelled it out because a lot of people get --

24 MR. CURRIE: Yeah. No. I would have never guessed that one.

25 All right. So, Curtis, if you get a (202) area code --

1 MR. FUTRELL: Yeah, correct.

2 MR. CURRIE: -- it's not the IRS, hey? It's just me --

3 MR. FUTRELL: Okay.

4 MR. CURRIE: -- all right?

5 MS. FUTRELL: (202)?

6 MR. FUTRELL: Yeah, all right.

7 MS. FUTRELL: It's in Washington somewhere?

8 MR. CURRIE: Yeah. It's a DC number. So, that's where our
9 offices are. So, don't be concerned. I'll probably text you
10 before I call, because nobody answers --

11 MR. FUTRELL: (Indiscernible).

12 MR. CURRIE: -- a (202) number.

13 MR. FUTRELL: (Indiscernible). Yes, sir.

14 MS. FUTRELL: Yeah.

15 MR. CURRIE: Yeah. So, at some point, hopefully, you know --
16 what you got? A broken leg?

17 MS. FUTRELL: Yes, ankle.

18 MR. FUTRELL: Broken ankle.

19 MR. CURRIE: Broken ankle?

20 MS. FUTRELL: Um-hum.

21 MR. CURRIE: Got a great big old piece of Styrofoam.

22 MS. FUTRELL: Yeah.

23 MR. CURRIE: All right. I'm going to stop the interview at
24 12:55.

25 (Whereupon, at 12:55 p.m., the interview was concluded.)

CERTIFICATE

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

IN THE MATTER OF: FATAL TWO-VEHICLE CRASH IN YORK
COUNTY NEAR NEWPORT NEWS, VIRGINIA
ON DECEMBER 16, 2022
Interview of Towanda Futrell

ACCIDENT NO.: HWY23MH004

PLACE: Newport News, Virginia

DATE: December 17, 2022

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 containing a redacted signature, with a black box covering the text.

Lisa D. Sevarino
Transcriber