

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of:

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FIRE AND SINKING OF THE *CONCEPTION*
WITH LOSS OF LIFE NEAR
SANTA CRUZ ISLAND, CALIFORNIA,
SEPTEMBER 2, 2019

Accident No.: DCA19MM047

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Interview of:

SHIRLEY AND BOB HANSEN
Owners, M/V *GRAPE ESCAPE*

Via Telephone

Thursday,
September 5, 2019

APPEARANCES:

MARCEL MUISE, Marine Accident Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

ANDREW EHLERS, Marine Accident Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

I N T E R V I E W

(3:30 p.m.)

1
2
3 MR. MUISE: Okay. This is Marcel Muise. I'm an investigator
4 with the National Transportation Safety Board. It's 3:30 p.m. in
5 Santa Barbara, California. With me is Drew Ehlers, also
6 investigator with the NTSB, and we are interviewing the owners of
7 the vessel *Grape Escape*.

8 Bob and Shirley, can you give us your name, please, or spell
9 you name for us?

10 SHIRLEY HANSEN: I'm Shirley Hansen, S-h-i-r-l-e-y, and
11 Hansen is H-a-n-s-e-n.

12 MR. MUISE: And Bob, just common spelling?

13 BOB HANSEN: Yeah, Bob Hansen, B-o-b, Hansen, H-a-n-s-e-n.

14 MR. MUISE: Okay. And you're the owners of the vessel *Grape*,
15 *G-a-r-a-p-e*, *Escape* --

16 BOB HANSEN: No, Grape. Like, the fruit.

17 MR. MUISE: Okay.

18 BOB HANSEN: G-r-a-p, like Paul, and e, as in excellent.

19 MR. MUISE: Okay. Got it.

20 BOB HANSEN: G-r-a-p-e.

21 SHIRLEY HANSEN: We're farmers.

22 BOB HANSEN: We're farmers. We grow grapes in our area.

23 MR. MUISE: That's really interesting. So as I mentioned,
24 we're investigating the fire aboard the *Conception*.

25 BOB HANSEN: Uh-huh.

26 INTERVIEW OF SHIRLEY AND BOB HANSEN:

1 MR. MUISE: And we're really interested in your story, what
2 you saw, so if you could just walk us through that evening --

3 BOB HANSEN: Okay.

4 MR. MUISE: -- you know, what happened out there?

5 BOB HANSEN: All right. At 3:30 in the morning we're at
6 anchorage there Platts Harbor, and we hear some pounding on the
7 boat. It's just my wife and I on board. So I get up and I go to
8 the salon door, open the door, and there are five people in a
9 rubber dinghy at the transom of our boat, at the rear of the boat,
10 and they're calling for help and they said their boat was -- their
11 vessel was on fire. So --

12 SHIRLEY HANSEN: And you couldn't miss it.

13 BOB HANSEN: Yeah, and so I could see the vessel was
14 completely on fire from one end to the other. It was already
15 completely engulfed. There wasn't a spot on that boat that wasn't
16 burning. Flames could have been 30 feet high.

17 The five gentlemen, we brought them on board. I had -- the
18 boat is built such that it has a walk-through transom. So I could
19 open the door to the transom and slide the injured crewman with a
20 broken leg on board into the cockpit of the boat. Then we brought
21 the rest of the crew on board.

22 My wife and I got them towels to dry with. I went up in the
23 helm with the captain and we hailed the Coast Guard. It was, you
24 know, it was one of those things I didn't think about when I got
25 out of bed. I didn't grab any glasses, so I couldn't read. But

1 we knew we were in Platts Harbor -- give them, you know, an
2 accurate lat and long, but that gave them a pretty good idea where
3 we were. A little later on I called back and gave them my exact
4 lat and long.

5 Then after that, we -- like I say, I stayed on standby up
6 there with the captain in the helm. My wife brought -- we dried
7 these guys off. She brought a -- some pillows out of the salon to
8 try and make the guy with the broken leg more comfortable. She
9 brought out a blanket and put a blanket over him to keep him warm
10 because we couldn't put him in the salon. It was too -- we
11 couldn't move him.

12 The guy with the -- there was another injured crewman with a
13 twisted ankle. We put him in the salon and then my wife picked
14 out several of our long sleeved tee shirts for the guys to put on
15 to keep them warm. The captain, we gave him a pair of Levi's
16 because his were ripped quite a bit, and then we also gave him one
17 of our jackets to keep him warm.

18 And I stayed in the helm, like I said, waiting for
19 instructions from the Coast Guard. I asked the Coast Guard if
20 there was anything they wanted me to do, if they wanted me drop --
21 to pick the anchor up or not, and then they said, no, we want you
22 to stay exactly where you were. And then a little while later
23 they hailed us back and said can we put two of the other crewmen
24 in the dinghy and give them a flashlight.

25 So we gave them -- two of the crewmen that were in good

1 shape, we gave them a flashlight and two handheld VHF's that I
2 always carry with me at the door. So -- and then they went out to
3 look for survivors. They were there until the rest of the -- the
4 fireboat and everyone else showed up, and it was probably over an
5 hour. We were 25 miles -- nautical miles from the Oxnard Channel
6 Islands Harbor, and so you can understand why it took so long for
7 anybody to show up.

8 But on top of that, if the Coast Guard or the firefighting
9 boat was within 5 minutes, it wouldn't have made any difference.
10 By the time I opened that door, that boat was totally engulfed.
11 It was unapproachable. And when the captain told me -- originally
12 I thought there had been a commercial boat out, looked like they
13 were fishing for squid or something. And they were out there and
14 I thought, well, maybe it was that boat and I thought, oh, okay, I
15 got the crewmen here; we're all right, but the other boat's on
16 fire. And then when they said, no, they were on a dive boat and
17 the exact words, "There were 34 souls still on board." And I
18 looked at that boat and I thought I am so helpless here. I cannot
19 help him.

20 But our vessel is large enough, we could have handled every
21 one of those people. It's a 60-foot Hatteras Sport Fisherman. I
22 think it's like 60-ton rated. I usually carry 1700 gallons of
23 diesel and I only had about 700 on me. 1,000 gallons of diesel
24 weighs 7500 pounds. I could have carried them all. I just felt
25 so helpless. Like, you know, if the guys just would have woken me

1 up, like, an hour ago, you know? I'm still speechless. I'm still
2 speechless, you know. But it's just the way it worked out.

3 But anyway, then we -- you know, the Coast Guard eventually
4 showed up. They brought three EMTs on board, checked out the
5 vitals of our injured crewman who was with the broken leg. Found
6 he was okay where he was. They couldn't airlift him out of there.
7 Our boat is such that it's got outriggers and things that are
8 sticking out and they couldn't get him out of there. So -- and
9 the captain wanted to stay with the Coast Guard, so he -- we
10 transferred him to the Coast Guard boat, and then when I was
11 instructed it was time to go, I took their dinghy and the four
12 remaining crew members into Oxnard to the Channel Islands Marina
13 or Channel Island Harbor Coast Guard Station. So that's how we
14 did it.

15 My wife talked to the crewmen more than I did because I was
16 busy running the boat and -- you know, I did talk to them some
17 but, you know, she was down in the salon with them and so she can
18 tell you a little more about what they were saying and so forth.
19 But on my end, that's kind of where I'm at with it.

20 MR. MUISE: Wow. Thank you, Captain. That's an amazing
21 story and thanks for what you did do out there. I know you said
22 you felt kind of helpless, but thanks for taking care of that crew
23 out there.

24 BOB HANSEN: Oh, man. It's really -- you feel helpless. I
25 had the tools. I had the tools. I couldn't put the fire out, but

1 I could sure as hell picked every one of those people up and
2 easily. Again, I got a walk-through transom. The freaking
3 cockpit's only 8 inches off the water. It was a no-brainer.

4 MR. MUISE: Shirley, do you have anything to add to that
5 story?

6 SHIRLEY HANSEN: Well, I --

7 BOB HANSEN: Tell them what they said about the exiting the
8 boat, honey, and so forth.

9 SHIRLEY HANSEN: Oh, the crew told me they were in
10 wheelhouse, and that the man who was in charge of the galley, he
11 was up until 1:30 at night. They had had three birthday
12 celebrations, and he was getting the kitchen ready for 5:30 in the
13 morning when he would serve breakfast. So he said that he went to
14 bed at about 1:30, and so within the 2 hours that it took for them
15 to get to our boat, the boat -- I couldn't believe the fire when
16 we got up into our salon, that -- how could it be totally engulfed
17 like that --

18 BOB HANSEN: So quickly.

19 SHIRLEY HANSEN: -- so quickly. And the man who was in
20 charge of the galley, he said that after he was in bed for a
21 while, he said that he heard a thump like perhaps a chair falling
22 over and thought that he better go and look. And he said he
23 opened the door of the wheelhouse and --

24 BOB HANSEN: No, of the galley.

25 SHIRLEY HANSEN: -- of the galley and saw -- looked orange,

1 everything was orange. And he --

2 BOB HANSEN: Didn't he say that the ceiling tiles were
3 falling --

4 SHIRLEY HANSEN: -- said the ceiling tiles were falling down
5 and he could not get to where the stairs were to go down and help
6 any of the people below deck. And he turned around and he called
7 for the other crewmen to get up. He said he called fire. And
8 that the crewmen should -- and so they got up and jumped into the
9 water. The one crewman, he apparently fell on the deck and broke
10 his leg that way. So how they got him off and into the dinghy, it
11 must have taken a while.

12 BOB HANSEN: Yeah, they said their dinghy was tied up at the
13 back of the boat or was back there and they cut it loose. So I'm
14 assuming it was tied up and they swam back there and got in the
15 dinghy. Now we're assuming that the fellow with the broken leg,
16 they must have come around and picked him up. Or is that what
17 they said?

18 SHIRLEY HANSEN: No. They didn't say how they got him.

19 BOB HANSEN: Somehow they picked him up.

20 SHIRLEY HANSEN: And I never thought of asking questions. I
21 sort of -- the two youngest of the men were crying and the only
22 thing I asked the youngest, I think he is, was how he got his
23 glasses, because the rest of the them were just in underwear and
24 tee-shirts.

25 BOB HANSEN: Yeah, they appeared to have just rolled out of

1 bed and jumped off the boat.

2 SHIRLEY HANSEN: Yeah. And I said, well, how did you get
3 your glasses? And he said they're the first thing I reach for
4 when I wake up. And so he, at least, had his glasses, but it was
5 -- his girlfriend was down below and she was one of the ones that
6 perished, and he was crying. He was devastated.

7 And the other younger man, this was just his weekend job and
8 he didn't know how he was going to get back to Santa Barbara. He
9 didn't have keys or wallet, nothing. And so they didn't -- I
10 didn't think to ask them questions about, well, how -- you know,
11 the -- oh, I know. The man in charge of the galley said that
12 there were a lot of phones and cameras and batteries being charged
13 in the galley and he worried that that was, perhaps, the cause of
14 the fire. But, you know, that was the only thing that any of them
15 said about what could have caused the fire.

16 BOB HANSEN: Here's my -- you're the National Transportation
17 Safety Board. Here's my question. I go to a hotel, 3:30 in the
18 morning, I guarantee there's somebody at the front desk. You're a
19 floating hotel. Why the hell wasn't there somebody awake, playing
20 video games, for all I care. Am I wrong?

21 MR. MUISE: So those are all issues that we will be looking
22 at. I can assure you of that.

23 BOB HANSEN: I mean, it must be for hotels, because I've
24 never been to a hotel where, I don't care what time you get up,
25 there's somebody at the front door. And on top of that you would

1 think -- it's not just about fire. What if -- I was an engineer
2 so I think in logical senses. So what if somebody got up and just
3 fell overboard?

4 MR. MUISE: Uh-huh. Right.

5 BOB HANSEN: There's all kinds of reasons, like -- if that is
6 not a Coast Guard reg, for Christ's sake, quit worrying about
7 turtles and straws.

8 MR. MUISE: So part of what we do is we look for regulatory
9 compliance, but we also look to see if the regulations themselves
10 are adequate. So those are all issues that will be part of our
11 investigation.

12 BOB HANSEN: Yeah, because not one of those guys said they
13 were on, that they were on watch.

14 SHIRLEY HANSEN: No.

15 BOB HANSEN: Not one. Now I didn't ask, but they didn't say.

16 MR. MUISE: Can you describe -- how far away were you
17 anchored from them?

18 BOB HANSEN: Maybe 400 yards. I actually have a photo of
19 their anchorage from the bow of my boat because I, for some stupid
20 reason, I dropped the hook and then I thought, oh, I'll take a
21 nice picture here and, honest to God, I just saw it today. Oh, my
22 gosh. They were right there. You can see from the bow of my
23 boat, and they were parked up there. They weren't there yet.
24 They weren't there when I took the photo.

25 MR. EHLERS: What time did you anchor in Platts Harbor?

1 BOB HANSEN: Well, I can tell you right now. The wonderful
2 things about these telephones, they tell you what time you did
3 these things, right? Okay. Let's see here, phone. That was at
4 6:05 p.m. Sunday.

5 MR. EHLERS: Okay. Sunday, so you -- okay. That makes
6 sense. And then do you remember seeing the *Conception* come in and
7 anchor or --

8 BOB HANSEN: No. I don't remember seeing the *Conception*. In
9 fact, I'm looking at my photo here and they weren't there.

10 MR. EHLERS: Yeah. While you were anchored there, you didn't
11 see them come in, huh?

12 BOB HANSEN: No.

13 SHIRLEY HANSEN: No.

14 MR. EHLERS: Okay.

15 BOB HANSEN: I saw the commercial boat. Now, you know, the
16 boat spins. They may have come in while the boat spun around the
17 other direction. I didn't see them out that way, but I'm looking
18 out the bow from my helm, and I got a beautiful picture of the
19 anchorage there and you can see there's nobody there.

20 MR. EHLERS: Yeah. You mentioned -- what commercial boat was
21 there?

22 BOB HANSEN: I'm not sure which one, but it appeared to be --
23 because I could see they had one of their big skiff things, you
24 know, that they use for purseining; you know, they drag the line
25 out, thing out and all. I thought it might have been squid, but I

1 know they also do sardines there, I think, or something.

2 MR. EHLERS: Okay. Was it anchored or was it actively
3 fishing?

4 BOB HANSEN: I think it was just actually fishing or they
5 were just still at that point. I saw them in my -- I took out my
6 binoculars at the time just to look.

7 MR. EHLERS: Oh, okay. When --

8 BOB HANSEN: (Indiscernible) because I could see -- you know,
9 I've had the boat 11 years. We bought it in Ft. Lauderdale and we
10 brought her on her bottom all the way to Southern California. So
11 I've seen enough of this. I know what we're looking at.

12 MR. EHLERS: Sure.

13 BOB HANSEN: You now?

14 MR. EHLERS: And do you -- and have any recollection at all
15 of whether that fishing boat was still in the area when you were
16 woken up in the morning?

17 BOB HANSEN: It did show up -- I'm sure it showed up later
18 because a commercial boat did come to help with the rescue.

19 MR. EHLERS: Oh, okay. Do you have --

20 BOB HANSEN: Now, I (indiscernible) that one, because it was
21 a commercial boat. But you know, even that -- that had nets out
22 of there. You can't just, like, cut everything loose and go, you
23 know.

24 MR. EHLERS: Yeah. Do you remember the name of it, by any
25 chance?

1 BOB HANSEN: Those are not fast traveling boats.

2 MR. EHLERS: Yeah. Do you remember the name of it?

3 BOB HANSEN: No. I didn't take a photo of it or anything.

4 But I know there was one there.

5 MR. EHLERS: Okay.

6 BOB HANSEN: And I remember seeing, like I say, you know,
7 they have these funny little, not really a skiff, but a tender, I
8 guess you would call it, that they'd use to drag the net around.

9 MR. EHLERS: Sure.

10 MR. MUISE: That's a purseiner.

11 MR. EHLERS: Yeah.

12 MR. MUISE: Yeah. Which -- who was the first rescue boat to
13 show up? Was it the Coast Guard or the fire department?

14 BOB HANSEN: I think it was probably the -- the Coast Guard
15 and the fireboat came up about the same time.

16 MR. MUISE: Did any of them come on board to help our with --

17 BOB HANSEN: (Indiscernible) the Coast Guard boarding the
18 boat, because they came and they boarded our boat to see -- check
19 the vital signs of the fellow with the broken leg.

20 MR. MUISE: Okay. So that was actually my question. Thank
21 you. How about the helicopter? What time did that show up?

22 BOB HANSEN: About the same time. None of them really came
23 -- I would say it was close to an hour from the time that we woke
24 up -- and, like I say, I took photos here, and it was at -- you
25 know, they got us around 3:30, and my photos -- you know, I love

1 this thing. You know, I took photos of the boat at 3:55 and there
2 was nobody there yet. Oh, in fact, here's another one at 4:11.
3 So, like I say, it was -- could have been an hour. My wife took
4 some photos, too. She might --

5 SHIRLEY HANSEN: I have the photos --

6 BOB HANSEN: You know, and the odd thing, I didn't -- I feel
7 kind of weird. I didn't want to be one of those lookie-loo
8 things, you know. I just thought, well, okay, maybe somebody
9 wants to see these. I'll take a couple photos here, you know.
10 And that was it, and my wife --

11 SHIRLEY HANSEN: Where's the time? I don't see a time on
12 mine.

13 BOB HANSEN: Okay. Yeah, it's here at the top. So the Coast
14 Guard was at the back of our boat at 4:43 in the morning.

15 MR. MUISE: Do you mind sharing those pictures with us?

16 BOB HANSEN: Sure.

17 MR. MUISE: Okay. If I send you an email --

18 BOB HANSEN: (Indiscernible) something and then I can just
19 email them over to you.

20 MR. MUISE: Sure. Is this a cell phone? Can I text you at
21 this number?

22 BOB HANSEN: Yeah. Yeah. You can text my number.

23 MR. MUISE: Okay. I'll text you my email address then.

24 MR. EHLERS: Yeah, we'd love to see that picture you took the
25 night before, too.

1 BOB HANSEN: Say what?

2 MR. EHLERS: The picture you took the night before, before
3 the *Conception* arrived. We'd love to see that picture, as well,
4 if you don't mind sending it to us.

5 BOB HANSEN: Yep. Yep. Yep. I can do that. We'll just
6 send you everything that we took from the time we dropped the hook
7 in that area.

8 SHIRLEY HANSEN: The only reason I took the pictures of the
9 Coast Guard is I have a granddaughter that wants to join the Coast
10 Guard or else I wouldn't have taken any pictures.

11 MR. MUISE: Sure. My last question is, we've heard reports
12 of fog. Was it foggy at all out there?

13 BOB HANSEN: No. It was -- you could see from the photos.
14 Nope, nope, nope. Not there.

15 MR. MUISE: Okay.

16 MR. EHLERS: I have a quick follow-up on the -- you mentioned
17 the -- getting the flashlights and radios for the two crew members
18 in the skiff. Were they -- did you say that they were directed to
19 do that by the Coast Guard or they did that on --

20 BOB HANSEN: Yeah. The Coast Guard directed me to put two
21 guys in the back of the skiff with a flashlight. So I thought,
22 well, I also have two handhelds; take these.

23 MR. EHLERS: Oh, okay. All right.

24 BOB HANSEN: I'm a well-equipped boat. You know, like,
25 again, I'm an engineer. We're kind of like, we plan things. We

1 just can't help ourselves.

2 MR. MUISE: Yeah. Yeah.

3 BOB HANSEN: It's not a bad idea, people, you know.

4 MR. MUISE: Well, again, thank you for the information. Do
5 you have anything else before I turn the recorder off?

6 BOB HANSEN: I don't think so. I mean, you know, we didn't
7 leave until we were instructed to leave, and then the Coast Guard
8 said, okay, you take off out of here now. And it was so pitch
9 black. You know, I knew where I was but, you know, your boat
10 spins so, like, okay, what direction? Where's land? So I don't
11 want to hit -- I don't want to put my boat on the ground.

12 So I had to rely on my chart plotter to tell me, as I spun
13 the boat, to find this is where I'm going to go. And I stayed --
14 I went straight out so I would be away from the boat and all --
15 everything else that was going on, before I made my turn to head
16 towards the Channel Islands Harbor. So that's how dark it was.

17 I guess what I'm saying, that it was so dark you couldn't see
18 land, and that was right -- I knew it was right there, like, you
19 know, I couldn't have been 100 yards away. I don't think it was
20 even that far, you know. I couldn't see the shore, that's how
21 dark it was.

22 MR. MUISE: Okay. Well, thank you. It's 3:54. I'm going to
23 turn the recorder off.

24 (Whereupon, at 3:54 p.m., the interview was concluded.)

25

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

IN THE MATTER OF: FIRE AND SINKING OF THE *CONCEPTION*
WITH LOSS OF LIFE NEAR
SANTA CRUZ ISLAND, CALIFORNIA
SEPTEMBER 2, 2019
Interview of Shirley and Bob Hansen

ACCIDENT NO.: DCA19MM047

PLACE: Via Telephone

DATE: September 5, 2019

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.



Beverly A. Lano
Transcriber