

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of:

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SINKING OF THE CFV *EMMY ROSE* WITH  
LOSS OF LIFE, OFF THE COAST OF  
PROVINCETOWN, MASSACHUSETTS,  
ON NOVEMBER 23, 2020

Accident No.: DCA21FM007

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Interview of: ROBERT ROBERGE, Captain  
CFV *3 Girls*

Via Zoom videoconference

Thursday,  
January 28, 2021

APPEARANCES :

CDR [REDACTED]  
U.S. Coast Guard

CWO [REDACTED]  
U.S. Coast Guard

LT [REDACTED]  
U.S. Coast Guard

[REDACTED], Investigator  
U.S. Coast Guard

[REDACTED]  
U.S. Coast Guard

BRIAN YOUNG, Accident Investigator  
National Transportation Safety Board

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I N T E R V I E W

1  
2 CDR [REDACTED]: This is Commander [REDACTED]. Last name is

3 [REDACTED]  
4 [REDACTED]  
5 CWO [REDACTED] I'm Chief Warrant Officer [REDACTED],  
6 [REDACTED]

7 CDR [REDACTED]: All right.

8 [REDACTED]  
9 MR. [REDACTED]: Sorry about that. I was on mute. [REDACTED].  
10 [REDACTED]

11 CDR [REDACTED]: Great. Thanks, [REDACTED]

12 Moving on to Mr. Young.

13 MR. YOUNG: Brian Young with the National Transportation  
14 Safety Board, Y-o-u-n-g.

15 CDR [REDACTED]: Great.

16 And, Captain Robbie, if you could just introduce yourself  
17 again, and then just spell your last name, please.

18 MR. ROBERGE: Okay. It's Robert Roberge, R-o-b-e-r-g-e, and  
19 I'm with the fishing boat the 3 *Girls*.

20 CDR [REDACTED]: Awesome. All right, Captain. Thank you very  
21 much. We'll kick off the questions now with [REDACTED] Thank you.

22 CWO [REDACTED]: All right. Thanks, Commander.

## INTERVIEW OF ROBERT ROBERGE

23  
24 BY CWO [REDACTED]:

25 Q. Morning, Captain. So I'm basically just going to ask you

1 some background questions as far as your experience. So starting  
2 off, what is your experience in the commercial fishing vessel  
3 industry?

4 A. I've been fishing -- I guess I started lobstering when I was  
5 11, 12 years old, and I've been in the fishing industry my whole  
6 life. I've been a captain since I was 26, was when I first  
7 started running a boat. And I'm 40 now. I've been, you know, a  
8 full-time skipper for the past 10 years, 8 years. And yeah, it's  
9 all I've done, so -- and now I own a boat, and I operate a boat as  
10 well now. So, in April of 2020, I bought my own vessel.

11 Q. Oh, very nice. What kind of vessel did you buy?

12 A. It's a dragger. It's a 90-foot ground fishing boat. Same  
13 thing the *Emmy Rose* was doing.

14 Q. Okay. How many vessels overall in your career have you  
15 sailed or worked on?

16 A. Oh, geesh. 40, maybe? I don't know. That's kind of a tough  
17 one, you know? Different ones throughout the years. 30 or 40,  
18 I'd say.

19 Q. Okay.

20 A. Anywhere from the -- I've run vessels here in the northeast,  
21 and I've skippered a boat out in Alaska, too, a factory trawler  
22 out there.

23 Q. And so have you basically held every position on a commercial  
24 fishing vessel as far as like being a deckhand and then -- and now  
25 as a skipper?

1 A. I've done it all.

2 Q. Okay.

3 A. From the cook to the engineer to the captain, I've done every  
4 last job on a boat -- fishing boat.

5 Q. All right. So, during your time as a commercial fisherman,  
6 have you had any training -- have you gone to like any type of  
7 specialized training for your job?

8 A. I have, yeah.

9 Q. What kind of training have you done?

10 A. Excuse me. I am a -- geesh, what do they call it? A safety  
11 drill instructor. I took that with Fred Materra (ph.) out of,  
12 what is it, Port Judith, Rhode Island, Galilee, down there. I've  
13 done that. And then out west, I mean, I took (indiscernible), all  
14 that stuff out there. I did go through the stuff. I never did  
15 get my 100-ton license. I never sent in for it. I thought I was  
16 going to go tug boating, and I didn't. But I did take, through  
17 Northeast Maritime Institute, I did take all the tests and passed  
18 all the safety stuff to get my license. I just hadn't got the  
19 license.

20 Q. Okay. So about how many -- well, currently, about how many  
21 trips a month do you go out on the *3 Girls*?

22 A. Three.

23 Q. Three a month?

24 A. Yeah, that's what we average, you know, a standard ground  
25 fishing boat on this coast averages about three a month.

1 Q. Okay, and how often -- how long are those trips for?

2 A. I would say about a week long, give or take a couple days,  
3 you know.

4 Q. Okay. And when you guys are underway, do you have a set work  
5 schedule? How's that normal routine?

6 A. I mean, there's not a normal routine. You know, it all  
7 depends on how fishing's like. And, you know, we do run a watch.  
8 If I get tired, then I will put one of my crew members up on  
9 watch, where he'll either tow or be steaming the boat. An  
10 experienced crew member, you know, you wouldn't put a green guy at  
11 the wheel or anything like that. But a full-share deckhand you  
12 would put at the wheel to steam or tow, take a watch.

13 Q. Okay. So can you tell me how you knew Captain Bobby Blethen?

14 A. Just through the fishing industry, just being on the water  
15 since we were kids. I've known Bobby since I was about 16 or 17  
16 years old.

17 Q. All right, and did you know any of the crew members that were  
18 on the *Emmy Rose*?

19 A. I did. I did, yep. I knew, I knew them all. There was the  
20 younger kid. I believe his name was Ethan. I didn't know him as  
21 well as I knew Bobby, Mikey, and Jeff. I knew them, those three,  
22 very well. I've known them for 20-something years.

23 Q. Have you ever worked with any of them on a fishing boat  
24 together?

25 A. I've worked with all of them except for the Ethan kid. And

1 actually, when I first bought this boat, Bobby was my mate over  
2 here. He worked for me originally.

3 Q. Okay, and how were the crew members? As far as like, when  
4 you were working with Bobby? Was he a good deckhand?

5 A. One of the best. Yeah, he was. He was good.

6 Q. And then did you work with any of the other crew members, or  
7 just Bobby?

8 A. Yeah, no. Jeff and Mikey. Jeff Matthews and Mikey Porper.  
9 I've worked with both of them over the years. Both of them  
10 experienced deckhands. They weren't -- Jeff or Mike weren't  
11 captains or anything, but they were experienced deckhands,  
12 full-share deck guys.

13 Q. Okay, and with Bobby as a captain, how would you say Bobby  
14 was as a captain?

15 A. I would say Bobby was a good captain.

16 Q. Yeah.

17 A. Very knowledgeable on boats and all that stuff. He  
18 definitely knew what he was doing.

19 Q. Okay.

20 CWO [REDACTED] All right. That's all I have. Thank you very  
21 much.

22 MR. ROBERGE: Yep.

23 CDR [REDACTED]: All right. Thanks, [REDACTED].

24 Moving on to [REDACTED] for some additional questions, Captain.

25 Thanks.



1 BY MR. [REDACTED]:

2 Q. All right. I'm going to ask you some questions about the  
3 *Emmy Rose*. If you happen to know, just let us know what you  
4 happen to know about the *Emmy Rose's* history. And do you guys  
5 normally fish out of New Bedford?

6 A. No, I fish out of Boston. I keep my boat right here in South  
7 Boston at the Boston Fish Pier. It is -- its home port is  
8 Portland. But I take out fish with (indiscernible) at Atlantic  
9 Coast, so my berth is here in Boston. And the *Emmy Rose* was, like  
10 my boat, homeported out of Portland, but they went to Gloucester  
11 to unload fish.

12 Q. Okay, and so what was your normal trip from -- you would go  
13 from out of Boston, fish, and then go back to Boston? Or you  
14 would go to Gloucester to offload?

15 A. Right back. Nope, I would leave Boston, go fishing, come  
16 back to Boston. I would leave my boat in Boston. The only time  
17 my boat would go up to Portland is if I had a week worth of work  
18 to do or something. I got a transit berth up there I just pay  
19 daily. So I'll bring my boat up there and work for the week, so I  
20 don't have to drive to Boston every day. But 95 percent of the  
21 time, my boat is in Boston.

22 Q. Okay. When you had work done in Portland, where would you  
23 tie up? Would you typically use Vessel Services in Portland?

24 A. I would tie up at the Portland Fish Exchange.

25 Q. Okay. And have you ever, have you ever been on the *Emmy*

1 Rose?

2 A. I have. I have, yep.

3 Q. Okay. About how many times?

4 A. Actually, when I was looking at this boat, when I was looking  
5 to purchase a boat in April, the *Emmy Rose* was one of the first  
6 boats I actually looked at to purchase.

7 Q. Okay.

8 A. I didn't buy it, but I did look at the boat then. And I  
9 would say five to eight times, maybe ten times, I was on the boat  
10 in Portland.

11 Q. Okay. Now, was that just as it was at the dock, or did you  
12 actually get underway on the *Emmy Rose*?

13 A. No, that was just at the dock.

14 Q. Okay. Any reason why you didn't purchase the *Emmy Rose*?

15 A. No, it was a nice boat. It just didn't have the horsepower  
16 and stuff that I was looking for. My boat's a lot bigger boat  
17 than the *Emmy Rose*, so just that's the only reason. That's the  
18 reason I didn't purchase it is because it didn't -- it didn't suit  
19 my needs. It didn't have the horsepower and all that stuff.

20 So --

21 Q. Other than the horsepower issue, what was your opinion of the  
22 *Emmy Rose* as far as how it looked, how it was maintained?

23 A. It looked like a great boat to me. I didn't see any issues  
24 with it. I know that there was plenty of steel underneath it and  
25 stuff like that. When I looked at in New Bedford, it had been

1 sitting for a while. You could definitely tell it had been  
2 sitting. But I didn't see anything that would throw an alarm off  
3 like, oh no, that boat is in bad shape. I actually thought the  
4 boat was in really, really nice shape to be honest with you.

5 Q. Okay. I know you said you usually go out three times a month  
6 for about a week at a time. Is that a typical schedule for the  
7 *Emmy Rose*? Would you happen to know that from the crew that was  
8 on it?

9 A. I would say, I would say any, you know, ground fishing boat  
10 on this coast, that size, would be about a week-long trip, yep.

11 Q. Okay. Did you -- during your fishing trips, did you ever  
12 come across the *Emmy Rose* while it was underway as well?

13 A. Oh, yeah. Yeah, yeah.

14 Q. Okay. And was it typical for you to have communications with  
15 them while you were at sea?

16 A. Oh, yeah. I would talk with the *Emmy Rose* five times a day,  
17 probably, at least.

18 Q. Okay. And was that typically just with Captain Bobby?

19 A. Correct.

20 Q. Okay. And do you know how the catch was stored on the *Emmy*  
21 *Rose*?

22 A. The catch would have been caught, processed up on deck, and  
23 put into the fish hold and iced in its pens.

24 Q. Okay. And do you know what is a typical catch size for a  
25 boat that size? What would be considered a good catch as far as

1 pounds?

2 A. I would say with that boat, a decent trip would be 40,000 to  
3 60,000 pounds. I'd say that boat could -- I mean, it had a big  
4 fish hold in it. I would say she'd be able to hold 100,000 easy  
5 enough. But I would say a good trip for that boat would be  
6 between 40,000 and 60,000 pounds of fish.

7 Q. Okay, and is it typical for you to keep fishing until you  
8 reach a certain threshold if the catch is -- if the fish is good?  
9 Or do you kind of limit yourself to days at sea?

10 A. No, you would fish -- obviously, you can't be out for two  
11 weeks, because the fish only last for so long on the ice and stuff  
12 like that. So you would fish until either the weather came, or  
13 you ran out of time, or you ran out of ice in the fish hold or  
14 room to put it.

15 Q. Okay. Do you know what the watch schedules or the work  
16 schedules on the *Emmy Rose* were? Were they typical of what you  
17 ran on your boat? Would you happen to know that?

18 A. Yeah. I would say they were -- they're exactly the same.  
19 There's no real work schedule, and I guess everybody kind of comes  
20 up with their own type schedule. I mean, when you're catching  
21 fish, you're on them, and you're up until they're done. It's not  
22 uncommon to stay up for 24 hours in this industry.

23 Q. Okay.

24 A. Me, personally, after between 20 and 24 hours, I usually like  
25 to give the guys a nap and myself a nap. But I don't think they

1 were on to fishing that was that good. I think they were on to  
2 fishing, but I don't think they were -- there was that much fish.

3 Q. Okay. Talking with Bobby as much as you did, was it common  
4 for him to basically be at the helm most of the time?

5 A. Yes.

6 Q. Okay, and was there any crew members that he trusted more  
7 than others to man the helm when he was taking a break?

8 A. Yeah, I would say if Jeff or Mikey -- they both had enough  
9 experience to take a watch.

10 Q. Okay.

11 A. If either -- if Jeff or Mike was on my boat, they would be  
12 taking a watch on my boat, so -- the Ethan -- I just don't know a  
13 whole lot about Ethan. I didn't know him as well as I knew the  
14 other guys. I don't know exactly what his fishing history was. I  
15 mean, I seen him around the waterfront and stuff like that. But  
16 Jeff or Mikey were both very capable of taking a wheel watch.

17 Q. Okay. Did you happen to hear anything about unresolved  
18 maintenance issues or any flooding conditions on the *Emmy Rose*?

19 A. No, sir, I did not. And, actually, I -- we were -- I had  
20 seen Bobby earlier in my trip, and he was at an area. And I  
21 continued on to go to a different fishing spot, and he stayed  
22 there. And he actually had some decent fishing, some good  
23 fishing. And I went around looking in other spots, and I didn't  
24 find as good of fishing.

25 And I was kind of working my way towards Portland because

1 there was supposed to be a little bit of weather that was coming,  
2 and I was just going to go in and hang out for the weather and  
3 come back out. And when I went in, Jeff Matthews' kids were down  
4 at the dock, and since we've known each other for so long, his  
5 kids jumped onto my boat saying, hey, what's going? The kids were  
6 wondering what happened and stuff. And I just said I don't know,  
7 I don't know.

8 And then his kids started talking about, oh, they were  
9 welding on -- they were welding something. They were welding down  
10 in the lazarette or something like that or in the engine room.  
11 And I was like, I don't know. Where'd you hear that? And they  
12 were like, oh, Dad said something about they were welding. And  
13 I'm like, well, are you sure it was in the engine room or  
14 something? And they just kind of hemmed and hawed.

15 And I had talked to Bobby that day, and I know for a fact he  
16 was welding that day. But he was welding on the trawl doors, the  
17 doors we tow behind the boat. He had broke a towing point thing,  
18 so he had to weld on his trawl doors. And I think they -- I think  
19 they misinterpreted as he was -- they were welding down in the  
20 lazarette or something. I don't know how all that came about,  
21 welding in the engine room or whatever. I know that that welding  
22 that was taking place that day prior to the *Emmy Rose* sinking, the  
23 welding that was taking place, Bobby was welding on the trawl  
24 doors.

25 Q. Okay, but you never heard anything prior to that about any

1 issues with unresolved maintenance or any flooding conditions on  
2 the boat from the crew?

3 A. No, no, I did not.

4 Q. Okay.

5 A. Bobby seemed really happy with the boat.

6 Q. Okay.

7 A. So I mean, yeah, no, I heard of nothing of that nature.

8 Q. Okay, and when you're completed with your catch, and you're  
9 heading back to Boston, what is the typical arrangements that you  
10 have? Do you bring the boat back in and you let your crew sleep?  
11 Or do you have them up cleaning that deck? What is typical?

12 A. Yeah, so we would get done fishing, and we would steam to  
13 port. I mean, on my vessel, I have a watch alarm, and I set the  
14 watch alarm, because I know everybody's tired and stuff like that.  
15 We set the watch alarm. The guys that are capable of steaming the  
16 boat, that have the experience, and everybody -- I split it up.  
17 Say it's a 6-hour ride, and I've got three guys, I give each guy  
18 2-hour watch, and wake me up a couple hours before we get in. And  
19 we start cleaning the boat, and we take out the fish. And we  
20 clean up the boat. And we park it.

21 Q. Okay. So, on your boat, anyway, you divide up the watch.  
22 But when we're actually bringing it in to Boston, you're on the  
23 helm?

24 A. Yes, yep.

25 Q. Okay. Speaking of internal transfers, do you ever have a

1 need to transfer fuel between tanks on your vessel while you're  
2 underway?

3 A. Yes.

4 Q. Okay.

5 A. In a rare -- I mean, normally the practice is, obviously,  
6 with diesel engines, they burn and they return fuel. So, for the  
7 most part, you would burn and return to the same tank. But  
8 sometimes, when you're out fishing or whatever, if you get a load  
9 of fish, and they ice the fish down, and the boat kind of sits a  
10 little funny, you would -- sometimes you would burn from one tank  
11 and return to another tank to make the boat level.

12 Q. Okay. So you would do internal transfers to kind of set the  
13 stability of the trim of the vessel?

14 A. Yeah, you would. Yeah.

15 Q. Okay, all right.

16 A. Yeah, so if you had a bag of fish, and it was all haddock,  
17 and it was going on over here, sometimes you'll get a little bit  
18 of a lift to that side that you're putting it on. So you would --  
19 you would put the fuel so that the boat would stay straight.

20 Q. Okay, and was that something that you would do, or you would  
21 trust other crew members to do that for you?

22 A. I would do -- I mean, me, personally, I do have two kids on  
23 here that, if I asked them to do it, they know how to do it, and  
24 they know what they're doing. So I guess the answer is, you know,  
25 I do have a couple crew members that I would trust to switch it



1 over.

2 Q. Okay, all right. Last question I have is, the weather that  
3 day when you were out there, when you saw the *Emmy Rose*, how was  
4 it, in your opinion?

5 A. It was 20 to 30 with a 8- to 10-foot sea, southeast wind.  
6 They had a following sea going into Gloucester.

7 Q. Okay. Any reason to think the *Emmy Rose* couldn't handle that  
8 type of weather condition?

9 A. No, there's no -- I mean, that boat -- that was nothing for  
10 that boat.

11 Q. Okay.

12 MR. [REDACTED]: All right. Thank you. I don't have any other  
13 questions at this time.

14 MR. ROBERGE: All right. Thank you.

15 CDR [REDACTED]: Great, thanks, [REDACTED].

16 Moving on to Mr. Young.

17 BY MR. YOUNG:

18 Q. Morning, Captain. This is Brian Young with the NTSB. Thank  
19 you for your time and for helping us out. I just had a few  
20 questions kind of following up on what either [REDACTED] or [REDACTED] talked  
21 about. What license do you hold?

22 A. I don't hold any license.

23 Q. Okay. When you did -- when you were able to speak to the  
24 *Emmy Rose* on the afternoon before they -- their issue, were you  
25 close enough that you actually saw them, or did you just hail them

1 on the radio?

2 A. The night that they sunk? I just spoke to them on the  
3 satellite phone. So I was a -- I was a distance away from them.  
4 Bobby was scheduled to go in. I was going in because they were  
5 actually calling for more weather than they actually did. So I  
6 was just going to go in and wait for the weather to go by and go  
7 back out. And, actually, that morning, I got up, and I realized  
8 the weather wasn't that bad, and I wasn't going to go in. And  
9 then I heard about all that stuff, and I was just -- you know, I  
10 lost three good friends that night. So I just went in anyway.  
11 So --

12 Q. Would it be accurate to say that when you did hear the  
13 weather report, that you suspended fishing operations because of  
14 the incoming predicted weather?

15 A. Yes, I did. I was going to -- not that this boat couldn't  
16 handle it. It could, but -- this boat could have stayed through  
17 it, but you're fishing -- it's not the boat, why I suspended the  
18 fishing. It's because your catch goes down so much when you get  
19 weather like that because of the rocking and the rolling. It  
20 doesn't allow the nets to stay on bottom as well. That's the only  
21 reason I was -- to save fuel and stuff like that. It wasn't  
22 because I didn't think my boat could handle the weather. It's  
23 just -- economically, it's just smarter. If you can't really  
24 fish, why burn the fuel?

25 Q. Right. Makes sense. And were you fishing in a general close

1 vicinity of where the *Emmy Rose* had been fishing? Were you in the  
2 ballpark area?

3 A. I was. A few days prior to that -- and I'm just trying to  
4 think, 2 or 3 days prior to that, I mean, I was within an eighth  
5 of a mile of them. And he set out, and I kept going further to  
6 the east because I was going to go to a different fishing spot.

7 Q. Okay. When you have seen the *Emmy Rose* out fishing or  
8 transiting, do you ever notice how she sits in the water? Whether  
9 she's heavy on the stern or has a heavy trim? Is there anything  
10 noticeable, different, about how she rides compared to other  
11 fishing vessels?

12 A. No, nothing alarming. She looked like a good boat.

13 Q. Yep. When you did talk to them, I think it was around 1600  
14 on the night before they sank, was there any talk about the  
15 quantity that he had aboard? Whether he was happy with it? Was  
16 it a good catch, or was he unhappy with it?

17 A. Yeah, he had -- he had decent fishing, good fishing. He  
18 said, I think, over the course of 2 or 3 days -- you know, it's so  
19 long now -- I think he might have picked up about 30,000 of fish.  
20 I think if -- you know, it's been so long now. I would say he  
21 was, you know, give or take a little bit, right around 50,000  
22 pounds of fish on the boat, is my guess, from what I could  
23 interpret on what he said.

24 Q. And when you communicated, I think you did say you were using  
25 the sat phone. Was it ever a practice that you spoke to the *Emmy*

1 Rose over the VHF radio?

2 A. No.

3 Q. Always on the sat phone?

4 A. Yeah, I spoke to him on the sat phone, yeah. Can't let out  
5 your secret spots, you know?

6 Q. Right, okay. And that was where I was going with this, was  
7 we did not hear or we weren't notified that any calls were made  
8 when they got in trouble. And I was just wondering if that might  
9 be a way they could've communicated was over VHF to anyone in the  
10 area that they might have been having some problems. Is that --  
11 obviously, you probably were too far away; you wouldn't have heard  
12 it. But is that something that might have been a practice out  
13 there? If you run into problems, to use the VHF to contact other  
14 fishing vessels?

15 A. Oh, yeah, absolutely, absolutely. And I'm trying to remember  
16 if he had used the radio a few days prior, because the Coast  
17 Guard, they were -- around 2 or 3 days prior to the boat sinking,  
18 they were conducting at-sea boardings, you know, for safety and  
19 fisheries regulations and whatever you call it. They were, I  
20 mean, they were within 10 miles of them 2 or 3 days prior to that,  
21 so --

22 And I can't say that I absolutely remember that the Coast  
23 Guard did call them and ask them what their -- sometimes they'll  
24 just call and ask, you know, your targeted species, this, that and  
25 the other thing. They'll ask you the questions and not send over

1 a boarding team. And then sometimes they do send a boarding team.  
2 And I can't exactly remember if they had called the boat prior to  
3 that. I do know -- I do remember, when Bobby and I were within an  
4 eighth of a mile of each other, we could see the Coast Guard  
5 cutter.

6 Q. And would it be fair to say that, on the night of the  
7 sinking, you were too far away to hear any VHF calls from the *Emmy*  
8 *Rose* if they made any?

9 A. Yes, I was too far away. I didn't even -- I didn't hear the  
10 Coast Guard stuff on the radio and stuff. I was almost up into  
11 Portland, so --

12 Q. Okay.

13 A. -- I was a good ways away from them.

14 Q. Okay. The *Emmy Rose* had a bilge system connected to a Murphy  
15 alarm system. Is that something you ever used or are you familiar  
16 with that?

17 A. Yep. I have that system on my boat. I have a Murphy alarm  
18 system with float switches. And the bilges fill up, the floats go  
19 up and send off the alarms up in the wheelhouse.

20 Q. Do you routinely test your bilge system?

21 A. Oh, yeah, every trip.

22 Q. And how do you actually test it? Do you pour water down and  
23 make it rise using water? Or do you have a deckhand go down and  
24 raise the float?

25 A. Yes, I have deckhand go down, and he'll lift the flapper up,

1 and the alarm will go off. I test it that way. And my alarms at  
2 sea really don't go off that much because the kid -- the couple  
3 kids that I have on the boat, you know, they go out, they do the  
4 fish, and at the end of doing the fish, they'll come in, they'll  
5 pump out the fish hold, and -- because the way we wash our fish,  
6 we have a swirl box. They go in this box that swirls around, and  
7 then they go across a dewatering grate.

8 But still a little bit of water goes down there, and the ice  
9 melts and stuff like that. And the stuff in boxes, you know,  
10 you're supposed to leak a little bit. So, you know, we keep up on  
11 this stuff, pumping it out pretty good. Sometimes, if they've  
12 been out there for a while washing the fish, and it's added up,  
13 and the water has come up in the bilge high enough to make the  
14 alarm go off, it does. So --

15 Q. Okay, that's great. And, speaking of alarms, you talked a  
16 little bit about what we called in the Merchant Marine, the dead  
17 man alarm, up on the bridge in the wheelhouse to keep the crew  
18 awake up there. And you said you turned that on or set it. What  
19 do you set it for? How many minutes do you have to activate it?

20 A. I usually set it at like 10 minutes, 5 to 10 minutes. You  
21 know, depending on how tired everybody is. And, you know, that's  
22 kind of how I make that judgement call. If I realize everybody's  
23 really tired and stuff like that, I'll set it for 5 minutes. And  
24 if people ain't all that tired, I'll set it for 10 or 15 minutes,  
25 just to make sure we have it on.

1 Q. And does that have motion sensors on it as well, or it just  
2 something they have to touch to keep it active?

3 A. Yeah, they have to -- it's just like a little countdown  
4 timer, and it's just a little red button that they -- I've set  
5 mine so you actually have to get up out of the chair and reach  
6 over and push the button. And it goes off with a fairly loud  
7 alarm at first. I think it goes off for like 30 seconds, and then  
8 it changes sound to an even louder alarm for another 30 seconds.  
9 And then after a minute, if it hasn't been -- the button hasn't  
10 been pushed, the general alarm throughout the whole boat goes off.

11 Q. Got you.

12 A. And you don't want that happening, because then that pisses  
13 me off.

14 Q. Yeah, I bet.

15 A. That means you're not paying attention.

16 Q. Do you know if that is something that a crew member could  
17 turn off on the bridge and silence it?

18 A. I mean, yeah -- well, it takes -- there's so many different  
19 models of them that -- like mine has a key, you know, to turn it  
20 on. I put the key in. I turn it on. And then I take the key  
21 out, and there's no way to -- you can't tape the button down or  
22 anything like that. So there's no -- the only person that can  
23 turn that alarm off is myself.

24 Q. Okay, that's good. That's good. And then, when you are  
25 steaming and after your catch, and say you're heading back to

1 Boston, do you typically use an autopilot, or do you have them  
2 steering by hand?

3 A. No, we use an autopilot.

4 Q. Okay. You talked a little bit previously about burning off a  
5 tank and either returning or -- to the same tank or switching it.  
6 Is there a separate pump, at least on your boat, that you would be  
7 able to transfer from port to starboard tank, or is the using,  
8 burning, and returning the only way to transfer fuel?

9 A. My boat has a transfer pump on it as well. I can use the  
10 main engine, or I have another pump that can transfer the fuel.

11 Q. And would you ever do that to kind of control your list if  
12 you were getting hit with a wind, or like you said, with a heavy  
13 load on one side of fish?

14 A. Yeah. It's not very often that you have to use them, but it  
15 has -- I've had to use them, you know, a couple times. So,  
16 often -- say you're out fishing, and you actually lose a net  
17 altogether. You lose it on the bottom, and you're coming home  
18 with no net. You've lost 7,000 or 8,000 pounds of weight on one  
19 side of the boat, so you would have to move the fuel that way.  
20 So --

21 Q. Is that your only way of being able to control the list, by  
22 the fuel? You don't have any other ballast or water tanks port to  
23 starboard?

24 A. No, only the fuel.

25 Q. Okay, okay. Do you see, out there when you're fishing, that



1 other vessels, whether they be fishing vessels, tugboats, or even  
2 big ships, are out there running without their AIS on?

3 A. I -- yeah. Some people do, yeah. Boats are -- they have the  
4 AIS on them, and a lot of boats have a switch that you can switch  
5 it off so that you're not transmitting, giving out your fishing  
6 spots.

7 Q. Right, right.

8 A. So --

9 Q. If you can remember back that night or when you were in the  
10 vicinity of the *Emmy Rose*, and when you were talking to Bobby and  
11 for the rest of that night, do you recall picking up any radar  
12 hits of anything odd or strange in the area that may or may not  
13 have the AIS on?

14 A. No, I can't say that I do. And I -- I don't believe that the  
15 *Emmy Rose* had that switch that I was talking about, because his  
16 AIS was always on. I don't ever remember seeing the boat without  
17 the AIS on.

18 Q. And I was just wondering about others in the area. Someone  
19 that -- you might have seen something on the radar that maybe  
20 was --

21 A. No, no, I did not.

22 MR. YOUNG: I think that's the only questions I have, but  
23 thank you very much, Captain, for your time. I'll pass it over to  
24 Commander.

25 MR. ROBERGE: Okay, thank you.

1 CDR [REDACTED]: All right. Thanks, Mr. Young.

2 Thanks, Captain Robbie. I think we finished kind of the  
3 formal questions we had. We'll go around, and if anybody has any  
4 follow-up questions -- I had a couple follow-up questions for you  
5 now.

6 BY CDR [REDACTED]:

7 Q. Now, just that night you talked to Bobby on the cell phone, I  
8 believe that was the 22nd. What did you guys talk about, and how  
9 long did you guys speak for? Around what time? You said 1600, I  
10 think.

11 A. Yeah, it was like right after dark, and we just talked about  
12 fishing, what he was catching for fish. That boat, I'm trying to  
13 remember, I think he had had it for three or four trips, and he  
14 was just getting stuff dialed in. The boat was starting to work  
15 really well for him catching fish, and he was happy with his  
16 catch. And he was going in to offload. You know, he was happy.  
17 The fisherman who gets a trip is usually pretty happy when you put  
18 money in guys' pockets and stuff.

19 Q. Yeah, no. Yeah, that usually makes sense. But you told us  
20 earlier, he was, he was welding on the fish doors, or was that  
21 around the same time? Or was that the day before?

22 A. No, that was earlier in the day. That was earlier in the day  
23 that he was welding on the trawl doors. So --

24 Q. Okay.

25 A. -- the bottom that -- the bottom that he was fishing on was

1 pretty hard. And it's not uncommon on our boats to -- the trawl  
2 doors hit rocks and stuff and break things off of it or crack the  
3 pieces of steel that are on it. And it's not uncommon to have to  
4 weld on those.

5 Q. Okay, that makes sense. And so, when he talked to you at  
6 1600 that day, around you said nighttime, dark, just dusk, was he  
7 planning -- was he done fishing? Did he have his gear away, was  
8 getting ready to head back in? Or was he planning on doing any  
9 more fishing?

10 A. No, he was all done fishing. He had made his last tow. He  
11 had a decent little tow, 3,000 pounds of fish or something like  
12 that. He had his net aboard, and he said he was going home to  
13 take out, and I'd talk to him in the morning.

14 Q. Okay, thanks. And then another question, just I know [REDACTED]  
15 had asked you about the *Emmy Rose*. You were thinking about, or at  
16 least it was on your shortlist of vessels to purchase. You said  
17 you didn't buy it or weren't interested because it was  
18 underpowered; is that correct?

19 A. It wasn't underpowered, it just wasn't my -- it just wasn't  
20 what I was looking for. The vessel, in my personal opinion, the  
21 vessel was in great shape. It was a nice boat. It just wasn't  
22 exactly what I was looking for. My boat's substantially bigger,  
23 and it tows a lot bigger fishing gear and stuff like that.

24 That's -- when I talk about the horsepower, it's not the  
25 vessel being underpowered, it's the size fishing gear that we can

1 tow behind us. Obviously, the more horsepower you've got, the  
2 bigger the nets you can tow. So that's the reason why I wasn't  
3 interested in the vessel. But besides that, I mean, the boat was  
4 a nice-looking boat. It looked pretty much brand new.

5 Q. Yeah. And then was there anything unique about it? Is your  
6 -- I know it's a southern -- it was originally built as a shrimp  
7 boat. Is your -- the boat that you have now, I haven't seen  
8 pictures of it or seen it, is it a -- was it built as a shrimper  
9 that's now a grounder, ground dragger, or was it a northeast  
10 fishery built specific vessel?

11 A. No, so mine is a western-rig vessel. I have a raised  
12 fo'c'sle, so mine is like the normal here. I'm not a huge fan of  
13 the shrimp-style boats, and I don't think it's because of the  
14 boats. I just know that, when you haul back and stuff, the  
15 Captain's got to go outside, so he's got to go to the back of the  
16 boat to do it. It's just shaped a little bit different. So my  
17 boat is not a southern shrimper. Mine is a raised fo'c'sle boat.

18 Q. Yeah, have you worked on converted shrimpers before?

19 A. Um-hum, yep. There's actually quite a few of them that are  
20 in the ground fish industry up here, right in Boston itself.

21 Q. And what were the major differences between traditional  
22 western rig with the raised fo'c'sle versus the ground fisher?  
23 Sorry, shrimper. What were the differences between the two  
24 different styles of boats in your opinion and experience?

25 A. I mean, I would just say there's more room in a boat like

1 mine because the wheelhouse is up a different level. So, on the  
2 shrimper, you come off the deck, and it goes all the way up to the  
3 wheelhouse. Where here, if you came off the deck, it would be all  
4 the living quarters, the bathrooms, the staterooms and stuff, and  
5 then you'd go up the stairs into the pilot house. That's the only  
6 difference that I really know of.

7 Did you freeze up? You there?

8 Q. Sorry. It looks like we had a little disconnect there. So,  
9 no, I've still got you. Last question I had was just based on  
10 your experience and knowledge, what do you think happened to the  
11 *Emmy Rose*?

12 A. What do I think happened to the *Emmy Rose*? I think that the  
13 boat's stability was changed somehow, whether someone went down  
14 and was putting fuel on one side of the boat and forgot about it,  
15 or it somehow started taking on water somewhere in a bilge and an  
16 alarm didn't work.

17 It isn't -- I mean, I've seen it happen where the alarms, you  
18 know, just a freak thing, they don't, you know, they don't go off,  
19 and the next thing you know, you look down in the fish hold, and  
20 there's a few inches of water down there. I think somehow the  
21 stability -- either that happened, and whoever was at the wheel  
22 just wasn't paying attention, and a following sea like that, it  
23 doesn't take much to flip one over.

24 Q. And then has --

25 A. I mean, through my experience -- for no mayday, even if a

1 2-foot hole got put in the side of the boat, it would still take  
2 time for the boat to fill up with water and sink, you know? The  
3 boat had to roll over somehow for nobody to get nothing out or  
4 anything, or nobody to get out of the boat. It was all --  
5 happened very fast. And that's, you know, and that's just my  
6 opinion. So --

7 Q. Yeah, no, I appreciate you sharing that with us. Thank you  
8 very much. And, in your experience fishing with Captain Blethen  
9 and Mikey and Jeff and everybody, was there any other instances  
10 where stability came into play and stuff happened that kind of  
11 leads you to that conclusion, or is that just your general thought  
12 or idea?

13 A. Yeah, no, I never heard of anything. That's just kind of my  
14 thoughts on it. Like I said, I know my boat. If I had a foot  
15 hole in the side of it, it would still take time for it to fill up  
16 and all that stuff. And you've just got to think, for nobody to  
17 get off a mayday call or anything like that, it had to have just  
18 been going along, and its stability got messed up and rolled over.  
19 In a following sea, too, that's even worse.

20 Q. Um-hum. Okay.

21 CDR [REDACTED]: Well, Captain Robbie, that's all the questions I  
22 have for you. I'm going to go just around the -- to the team and  
23 see if they have anything.

24 So I'll start off with [REDACTED]. Do you have any additional  
25 questions?

1 CWO [REDACTED]: I do. I just have a couple follow-up questions.

2 BY CWO [REDACTED]:

3 Q. Robbie, for -- do you know if Bobby had gone through a drill  
4 instructor training like you had done?

5 A. I do not know that.

6 Q. Okay. And then, Brian had asked about the dead man alarm.  
7 So, on your boat, you have it where you -- the crew member will  
8 actually have to get up to go and hit the alarm. Do you know if  
9 that's how it was on the *Emmy Rose*?

10 A. I can't remember. I mean, most people, that's the way they  
11 set them. But I can't answer that for sure. I don't know.

12 Q. Okay, and would it -- would there be any reason that all crew  
13 on deck would be sleeping, including the captain? Have you  
14 ever -- like, with your experience as a commercial fisherman, have  
15 you ever had it where everybody on the boat was sleeping at the  
16 same time?

17 A. Like, say there's four crew members, three crew members in  
18 their bunk, and the person driving fell asleep? Yes, I -- anyone  
19 that's been fishing and says they haven't fallen asleep is a liar.  
20 You know? I mean, I don't think -- intentionally, I don't think  
21 all -- anybody -- you know, I've never seen it where say there was  
22 a four-man crew, all four crew members were in the bunk, and the  
23 autopilot was taking the boat. So, I mean, it is possible that  
24 whoever was driving that night dozed off, yep.

25 Q. Okay, and then -- so, when you had looked at the *Emmy Rose*

1 when you were thinking about possibly buying it, did you happen to  
2 notice if they had a transfer pump to where they could do internal  
3 fuel transfers?

4 A. I did not. I can't remember whether it had that or not.

5 Q. Okay. And then the last question, and this is really  
6 concerning the 3 *Girls*. Do you know the official number for it?

7 A. The documentation number?

8 Q. Yes.

9 A. I do. I believe -- hold on one second. I believe it's  
10 609865, but I just want to make sure I'm telling you the actual --  
11 yeah, 609865.

12 Q. 609865? Okay.

13 CWO [REDACTED]: Thank you.

14 MR. ROBERGE: You there?

15 CWO [REDACTED]: Yes, that's all the questions I have.

16 MR. ROBERGE: Okay.

17 CDR [REDACTED]: Great. Thanks, [REDACTED].

18 Moving on to [REDACTED].

19 BY MR. [REDACTED]:

20 Q. Hey, Robbie, just one question in regards to outriggers. Do  
21 you typically fish with your outriggers down or in the water?

22 A. I do not have outriggers on this boat.

23 Q. Right. The *Emmy Rose* had outriggers. Is that typical, if  
24 you have them, to have them placed out and in the water while  
25 you're underway?



1 A. Yes.

2 Q. Okay.

3 A. And the outriggers, you would never have your outriggers up  
4 at sea.

5 Q. Okay.

6 A. The outriggers would be down because they would just bang  
7 around too much. You couldn't do it. The outriggers would be  
8 down necessarily. Whether you had the birds in the water or not  
9 would be your call. That night, I would say they had the birds in  
10 the water.

11 Q. Okay, and is that just to make the ride smoother for  
12 stability?

13 A. Correct.

14 Q. Okay.

15 A. Yep.

16 Q. Okay. And when you -- when you saw them that night, were you  
17 close enough to see if the birds were in the water?

18 A. I did not see them that night. I had seen them a few days  
19 prior to that.

20 Q. Okay.

21 A. I did not see the vessel for a couple days. It was a couple  
22 days before that, 2 or 3 days prior to that, I had seen the  
23 vessel.

24 Q. Okay.

25 A. I had gone off fishing in other spots and had not seen the

1 vessel for a few days.

2 Q. Okay, all right.

3 A. I just talked to him on the phone.

4 Q. Okay, thanks.

5 MR. [REDACTED]: That's all I had.

6 MR. ROBERGE: Okay.

7 CDR [REDACTED]: Great. Thanks, [REDACTED].

8 Moving on to Mr. Young.

9 BY MR. YOUNG:

10 Q. Yeah, Captain, one question I forgot to ask. And I was  
11 looking on the internet to try to see a picture of your boat, and  
12 I know [REDACTED] asked for the official number.

13 A. Used to be called the *Sammy Joe*, yeah.

14 Q. Do you have a lazarette on your vessel?

15 A. I do.

16 Q. And I know they're all different, and there's several  
17 different models of hatches and hatch covers, but what do you have  
18 for a hatch cover over the lazarette?

19 A. It's -- it probably sticks up a couple inches, and then it  
20 dogs down. It locks into place. I don't know the brand of it or  
21 whatever, but it's like a big -- it's probably 3-feet-by-3-feet or  
22 2½-feet-by-2½-feet square. And it lifts up, and it goes down, and  
23 then it -- right back there, there's like a keyway, like a tool  
24 that you lock it in place with.

25 Q. Is it hinged, or can you lift it straight up and remove it?

1 A. It is hinged.

2 Q. Okay, and then when it is in the closed position, you have a  
3 key to actually lock it in with a dog or something?

4 A. Yeah, you dog it down so that it seals it off. You know,  
5 it's got a rubber seal around it and stuff so that it's  
6 watertight. And then you close it down, and you dog it down, and  
7 it presses the seal around it.

8 Q. Have you seen, in your vast experience, any fishing vessels  
9 that the hatch cover would just sit on it with gravity and be held  
10 in place without having dogs on it?

11 A. Yes, there's actually a lot of boats like that.

12 Q. So it would just be, say, some sort of square or rectangular  
13 piece of steel with a gasket that might just sit on top of a  
14 raised (indiscernible)?

15 A. A steel cover that would just set on top of it and set there,  
16 yep.

17 Q. How about the fish hold? Is that the same kind of idea?

18 A. No. My fish hold, my fish hold hatch does not -- it's just,  
19 it's probably 8-feet-by-3-feet wide, something like that, and it's  
20 got these boards that sit down inside of it. And then it's just  
21 got a hatch cover that just sets on top. It does not, it does not  
22 dog down.

23 Q. Have you ever had an experience that you hit some rough seas  
24 or anything that that hatch has removed itself unwantedly?

25 A. Nope, I've never seen that.

1 Q. Okay.

2 A. There's little -- there's like -- I guess you could tie it  
3 down if you wanted to. There's little links that are welded to  
4 the side where I guess you could tie it down if you wanted. But  
5 no, and I've been out in a lot of weather, and I've never seen the  
6 hatch come off.

7 Q. Okay. And can you recall, and I know it's been a long while  
8 ago, what type of hatch or hatch covers were on the *Emmy Rose*  
9 (indiscernible) when you looked at it to buy it? Or --

10 A. I can't remember off the top of my head. No, I don't. I  
11 know in alarms and stuff like that, the owner of the vessel, he  
12 takes a lot of pride in keeping up with his vessels. So I know --  
13 I know the vessel was a well-maintained vessel. You know, I was  
14 completely shocked when it happened.

15 Q. Yeah, yeah.

16 A. So --

17 Q. And last question, when you were considering purchasing it,  
18 did you happen to take any pictures or videos of it that you might  
19 still have?

20 A. I did not. I might still have like -- because Atlantic  
21 Brokerage House was the one that was selling it, and I might still  
22 have, at my house, a package, like, you know, hey, this boat's for  
23 sale, with the pictures and stuff like that. I might possibly  
24 still have that at the house, you know, which said how much -- how  
25 thick the steel was underneath of it and all that stuff. So I

1 might still have that at my house. I'm not positive though.

2 Q. Okay. If you do, it would be great if you might be willing  
3 to share it with us. I'm sure you have Commander [REDACTED] contact  
4 information. If you could find it, we would appreciate that.

5 A. Okay, yeah. I'll look.

6 MR. YOUNG: Great, thank you.

7 MR. ROBERGE: Yep, thank you.

8 CDR [REDACTED] Yep. All right. Thanks, Brian.

9 I'll go to Lieutenant [REDACTED] next. Any follow-up questions?

10 (No audible response.)

11 CDR [REDACTED] Anyone there? Hey, sorry, I guess -- I think you  
12 might be having some technical issues.

13 I'll move on to Mr. [REDACTED]. Mr. [REDACTED] do you have  
14 any follow-up questions?

15 MR. [REDACTED] Hello. Yes, Commander, I think I do. And I  
16 believe you've been asked most of the questions I'm about to ask.  
17 And it, again, it has to do with transferring of fuel.

18 BY MR. [REDACTED]

19 Q. You used the word you were lucky to have people you trust  
20 that you could assign to go down and do that. You also opined  
21 that, you know, (indiscernible) to the vessel. Can you speak to  
22 any experience where it lead to a serious concern when you were  
23 doing internal transfers on other boats that you may have heard  
24 internal transfer created stability problems?

25 A. Not with fuel. I've never -- I've never seen it get to the

1 point where it's scary, I guess. So, with the whole fuel transfer  
2 thing, I've never had -- I've never had the experience where --  
3 I've seen fuel transferred to one side of the boat where it's  
4 filled up so much that, you know, it's burped out the vents. But  
5 never at a point where you put so much fuel on one side that you  
6 were like, oh my god, it's super scary. And that's just my  
7 experience. I'm sure it's absolutely possible, but I've never  
8 experienced it.

9 Q. An additional question. You did say, you know, it's quite  
10 common to do that to balance the trim of the vessel. At what  
11 stage in a week-long trip might that be the most common time to do  
12 that?

13 A. I mean, for the most part, as a skipper running a boat, you  
14 kind of know as you're catching fish and where the fish is going,  
15 that you anticipate that ahead of time. You know, if you get a  
16 bag of haddock, and you know the haddock's going on the starboard  
17 side, you'll start burning and returning off the starboard side to  
18 keep it straight. It would take quite a bit of -- and every  
19 boat's different, you know.

20 On my boat, it would take a lot of fish to make that kind of  
21 a difference to where you're like, oh my god, I've got to switch  
22 it over to there. But yeah, I mean, on a daily basis, you go  
23 down -- so, for the most part, you'll burn 24 hours. You'll burn  
24 and return off one side for 24 hours, and then you'll go  
25 downstairs and you'll switch over, and you'll burn 24 hours off

1 the other side, and just keep going like that until your trip's  
2 over.

3 Q. Okay. Thanks. And then, finally, and I think you already  
4 answered me, is there any specific reason why you mentioned that  
5 internal transfers -- you know, you said stability, but why you  
6 picked that out as one of the stability reasons that may have had  
7 that type of a sudden impact?

8 A. Just trying to think how weight could get --

9 Q. (Indiscernible).

10 A. Yeah, so what you're saying is when -- I'm just trying to  
11 think what's on a boat that could change how a boat would list  
12 side to side, you know? It would either be fuel or it would be  
13 water somehow getting into the boat, so -- and either one of those  
14 would change the stability of the boat.

15 Q. Okay.

16 MR. [REDACTED] Thank you very much for your answers.

17 MR. ROBERGE: Okay.

18 CDR [REDACTED] All right, Captain. I'll just open it up --

19 MR. [REDACTED] That's it for that, Commander.

20 CDR [REDACTED] Okay. Thank you, [REDACTED]

21 Yeah, I'll just open it up for final thoughts. Anybody have  
22 anything before we move into closing?

23 (No audible response.)

24 CDR [REDACTED] Okay. I did reach out to [REDACTED] -- Lieutenant

25 [REDACTED] He said he didn't have any additional questions, so I

1 think we're good there. But, Captain Robbie, that completes the  
2 interview process. We'll go ahead and stop recording at this  
3 time.

4 (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:                   SINKING OF THE CFV *EMMY ROSE* WITH  
LOSS OF LIFE, OFF THE COAST OF  
PROVINCETOWN, MASSACHUSETTS,  
ON NOVEMBER 23, 2020  
Interview of Robert Roberge

ACCIDENT NO.:                       DCA21FM007

PLACE:                               Via Zoom videoconference

DATE:                                 January 28, 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 large black rectangular redaction box covering the signature of Sarah Collins.

Sarah Collins  
Transcriber