National Transportation Safety Board
Office of Highway Safety
Washington, DC 20594

HWY24MH013

HUMAN PERFORMANCE ATTACHMENT

Toyota Driver 8-16-2024 NTSB Interview

(28 Pages)

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

Investigation of:	
FATAL MULTI-VEHICLE COLLISIONS NEAR SWANTON, OHIO ON AUGUST 15, 2024	Accident No.: HWY24MH013

Interview of: THUPTEN CHOEDON
Driver of Toyota

Mercy Health
St. Vincent Medical Center
Toledo, Ohio

Friday,
August 16, 2024

APPEARANCES:

JUSTIN SNIDER, Senior Highway Accident Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

STEPHANIE MATONEK, Specialist
Transportation Disaster Assistant Division
National Transportation Safety Board

I N D E X

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By Mr. Snider	5

I N T E R V I E W

(2:10 p.m. CDT)

MR. SNIDER: This is Justin Snider, spelled J-u-s-t-i-n, S-n-i-d-e-r, senior highway accident investigator with the National Transportation Safety Board. We are at St. Vincent's Medical Center in Toledo, Ohio, and it is currently August 16th, 2024, at approximately 5:56 p.m. local time.

This interview is for Case HWY24MH013, which occurred near Swanton, Ohio.

I intend to record this interview to best preserve the information being discussed today. Do you consent to the recording of this interview?

MS. CHOEDON: Yes.

MR. SNIDER: Please say and spell your name for the record?

MS. CHOEDON: My name is Thupten Choedon. First name is Thupten, T-h-u-p-t-e-n, last name is Choedon, C-h-o-e-d-o-n.

MR. SNIDER: Thank you. You've provided information to the trooper, and I have that information and that's still correct for being able to contact you. So the phone number that you provided, will I be able to reach you later if I have more questions?

MS. CHOEDON: Okay. Do you have the phone number?

MR. SNIDER: I have it. I wrote it down. So that's still a good number to reach you at.

MS. CHOEDON: Okay.

MR. SNIDER: The interview is being conducted to learn more

about Thupten Choedon's role as a driver during the crash being investigated.

Along with myself, with the National Transportation Safety Board.

MS. MATONEK: This is Stephanie Matonek, spelled M-a-t-o-n-e-k. I'm with the NTSB's transportation disaster assistance division, and I am a specialist with that office.

MR. SNIDER: Thank you.

INTERVIEW OF THUPTEN CHOEDON

BY MR. SNIDER:

Q. As I understand the crash from what you went over with the state trooper, you were driving the Toyota.

A. A Highlander.

Q. A Highlander from Minnesota. Was that from your home in Minnesota?

A. Yeah, but my boyfriend was driving the car from like -- first I was driving for 2 hour. Then he drive 5 hour. Then I drive for like 2 hours, 2 or 3 hours, yeah.

Q. Do you know about what time you left Minnesota?

A. I left Minnesota at 6:30.

Q. 6:30. Was that 6:30 p.m. on --

A. PM.

Q. -- the night before the crash?

A. PM, yes.

Q. Okay. And you -- did you leave from your house there?

A. Yeah.
Q. Okay. And I believe you said that you had stopped on the side of the road at 3 or 4 in the morning. Do you know --
A. Yeah.
Q. -- a little more accurately or is that just a guess what time you stopped and exchanged driving?
A. That's the second drive change, right? Around -- it was like 3:30 or 4 or 4:30. I just -- I don't exactly remember but from the hour, you can count, that I'm -- how many hours I've been driving.
Q. Okay. And, I don't want you to guess on anything. If you don't know what it is, just tell me you don't.
A. Okay.
Q. Okay. I don't need you to guess on anything, just what you can remember for me.
A. Okay.
Q. So, whatever that time was that you stopped, you drove continuously from that point would you say?
A. Yeah, for only 2, 3 hours.
Q. Okay. Had you made any stops for meals or anything like that on the way?
A. From there to -- until accident, no.
Q. So, when you, when you started on the evening, on the night before the crash, you only stopped for -- to change drivers or did you stop for gas or --

A. Stop for gas, yes. We stopped gas for like 2 or 3 times.
Q. Two or three times?
A. Yeah.
Q. Do you remember about when that was?
A. I don't remember.
Q. What cities or approximately times? No.
A. I don't remember.
Q. Okay. And did you change drivers at those spots or did you just change -- just put gas and then go?
A. Gas. He put gas in when he drive. He's the driver. He put gas in when he drive.
Q. Okay.
A. And then the gas was okay, yeah. I only remember that, once I changed, I put gas, too. I stop at a gas station, and I put gas, and then I start driving.
Q. Okay.
A. Yeah.
Q. Did you stop at any restaurants or anything--
A. No.
Q. -- and eat on the way?
A. No. We have a thing of food in the car.
Q. Okay. So you just brought food to snack on --
A. Yeah.
Q. -- during the drive?
A. He made it, buns and barbeque beef, beef barbeque, and we

have grapes (ph.) in the car that I was kind of drink water and eat a grape and like happy driving. That was the happiest moment.
Q. Okay.
A. I was going to see my family.
Q. Is that where you were going in Ithaca to see family?
A. See family and Dalai Lama (ph.).
Q. How much further did you have to drive to get there?
A. For total hour, from there to here. You mean Ithaca or what do you mean?
Q. Yeah. How much, how much farther did you expect to drive from where the crash happened do you think?
A. I'm going to drive like 2 hours more because I was like happy and --
Q. So you -- when you were driving, you felt happy and --
A. Yeah.
Q. Did you feel tired or anything?
A. Not at all.
Q. No.
A. No, because I drive only 2 1/2 hours.
Q. Okay. So are you able to sleep in the car?
A. Before, yes.
Q. So while your boyfriend was driving, were you -- did you sleep in the car or were you just awake and talking?
A. No, he was -- no. He was driving, and I was sleeping. And then I wake up and like open like my eyes, so brightly and then

just like a morning person.
Q. So you like being up early in the morning?
A. Yeah.
Q. Okay.
A. So, yeah.
Q. Do you think you slept well in the car --
A. Yes.
Q. -- while you were riding?
A. Oh, yes.
Q. Okay. Where did you sleep in the car?
A. On the side, the passenger seat.
Q. Okay. So next to the driver?
A. Yeah.
Q. And did you have the seat up or back or how did you sit in the seat when you were sleeping?
A. I was sleeping like this. The seat was right here and I was like this.
Q. So against, like against the door.
A. Yeah.
Q. The window.
A. Yeah.
Q. Okay. Did you have any pillow or anything in there to kind of get comfortable?
A. No.
Q. No.

A. Once I fall asleep, I can sleep anywhere.
Q. Okay. Okay. So you had a couple hours but you felt, you felt good at the time of the crash?
A. Yeah. At the time of the crash.
Q. Before the crash --
A. Yeah.
Q. -- you felt awake and not sleepy at all.
A. No.
Q. Is that right?
A. Yeah.
Q. And I think you told him, the weather was pretty clear at the time or did you have any problems seeing?
A. It was just a little bit like cloudy. Just little, teeny, tiny, but it was very like -- I can see everything.
Q. A little cloud. Do you mean like foggy or --
A. Yeah, foggy but just teeny, tiny foggy.
Q. Okay.
A. Not that foggy.
Q. And that's -- that was your boyfriend's car?
A. Yeah, his car and I was -- I have -- my name is in the insurance.
Q. Okay. So is it also your car then?
A. Yeah.
Q. How long have you been driving that car?
A. What do you mean?

Q. So --
A. How many years?
Q. Yeah. Since it was a new car or --
A. Yes, since when new car.
Q. Okay. So you guys bought it, you buys bought it when it was new?
A. Yeah.
Q. So would you say you're very familiar with the car then?
A. Yes.
Q. Okay. And you told him there's no problems with the car.
A. Yes.
Q. You just had the brakes changed?
A. Um-hum.
Q. Do you remember when that was done?
A. I don't --
Q. About how long ago?
A. I don't remember exactly date, but been 2 or 3 months before.
Q. Two or three months?
A. Yeah.
Q. Okay. And as you were driving, nothing, nothing was wrong? The car drove normally? No sounds or vibrations or anything like that?
A. Not at all.
Q. Okay.
A. The car was total fine. The car was 100 percent okay.

That's why we choose that car. Then we have new car that (indiscernible). 2023 we bought a new car.
Q. Okay.
A. But that has like a little bit weird stuff. So we not drive that car for long hours. So we just choose that for safety.
Q. Okay. So this car's safer just because it doesn’t have some of the weird stuff in it?
A. Yeah.
Q. So it's more simple?
A. 100 percent. Yeah, 100 percent safety.
Q. Okay.
A. We checked it, yeah.
Q. And it has probably more room in there. Is there three rows of seats in that car?
A. Yeah.
Q. Okay. So you have more room for everybody --
A. Yeah.
Q. -- and your luggage and stuff?
A. Yeah.
Q. Okay. Tell me a little bit about your -- well, so you left in the evening. What did you do on that day before you left for the trip?
A. I went to work --
Q. Okay.
A. -- in the morning.

Q. What do you do?
A. I do as aide. And then I came home. I took shower, and we eat and we packing things, started packing things. He was making the barbeque beef and bun, and then we just left.
Q. Was it, was it planned that you were going to leave that time --
A. Yeah.
Q. -- before?
A. I was going to -- we leave before the time, but then he said we can just slow down. We can leave slowly because we can just leave late because it's going to be less, less traffic.
Q. Okay. So were you planning to leave earlier than when you did or you were going to leave --
A. We planned to leave at like 5 o'clock, but he said let's leave like after 6 because that time when no traffic and, yeah. So it's going to be good.
Q. Okay.
A. Yeah.
Q. But you had planned to leave and drive basically overnight --
A. Me?
Q. -- before? I mean between the two of you, you planned kind of the trip to be across those hours?
A. Yeah.
Q. You just left a little bit later than what you had originally planned. Is that right?

A. Yeah.
Q. What did you say you did for work? I'm sorry.
A. Nursing assistant.
Q. Nursing?
A. Yeah.
Q. Okay. Nursing assistant.
A. Uh-huh.
Q. At a hospital or --
A. Yeah, Methodist Hospital.
Q. Methodist Hospital. Okay. And when did you start work there the day before?
A. When I started working there?
Q. Yeah. What time?
A. Oh, 7 o'clock.
Q. 7 o'clock.
A. Yeah.
Q. Okay. And then you worked until what time do you think? 4.
A. I came home 4 o'clock.
Q. 4 o'clock.
A. Yeah.
Q. Okay. What time did you get up to go to work for that job?
A. I always wake up a little early, like I'm a morning person.
Q. Okay.
A. Like 5 o'clock wake up early, and then get ready for go to work.

Q. So you -- okay. Do you wake up just naturally at 5 o'clock or do you have an alarm clock or what do you do?
A. Sometimes I forget alarm, but I naturally wake up in the morning.
Q. Okay. And you drove -- did you drive yourself to the hospital to work?
A. Yeah. Always.
Q. And how long does that take to get to -- from your house to work?
A. 27 minutes.
Q. 27 minutes.
A. Yeah.
Q. Okay. No traffic, pretty early in the morning?
A. Yeah. Sometimes traffic, but yeah, it's like 20 to 30 minutes.
Q. Okay. Was that a busy day at work? How would you say that day went at work?
A. It was slow day.
Q. A slow day.
A. Yeah.
Q. Okay. Did you have a chance to sit down and rest --
A. Oh, yes.
Q. -- or --
A. I was (indiscernible). I've been sitting all day.
Q. Okay.

A. And then I took -- discharge two patients and helped them take it down because my one was okay. She become -- yeah.
Q. Now, just generally kind of a slow day, had some time to sit around the hospital?
A. I sit all day.
Q. Okay. And how did you sleep the night before that? Did you get a full night's sleep?
A. Oh, yes.
Q. About how many hours do you think you sleep the night before?
A. I go to bed around 8 o'clock.
Q. 8 o'clock.
A. Yeah.
Q. Okay. And so from 8 until --
A. 5.
Q. -- 5 a.m.
A. Um-hum.
Q. Okay. And you felt rested when you wake up?
A. Oh, yeah.
Q. Was the day before kind of the same thing? Did you work the previous day also?
A. Yeah.
Q. Okay. About the same times?
A. Yeah.
Q. Okay. Tell me a little bit about your driving. How long have you been, how long have you been driving in the United

States?
A. 2015, 16, around there.
Q. 2015 or 2016.
A. Yeah. I never have car crash.
Q. Okay. No crashes at all.
A. No crash, no crash. Only those pavement, I hit those but I like to safe driving.
Q. Did you drive at all before 2016, 2015 or --
A. '15, '16, I start driving everywhere.
Q. Okay. Had you driven before that?
A. Yeah.
Q. Where did you drive before that?
A. Before?
Q. Yeah.
A. No.
Q. Okay. So you started driving in 2015 or 2016?
A. Yeah.
Q. And no crashes. Did you ever get pulled over for anything, any speeding tickets or anything like that?
A. No.
Q. No.
A. No.
Q. Okay.
A. Nothing happen. That pavement, the thing need to be changed, the pavement still need to be changed. That's why the car crash.

That's why -- you don't have to ask me any questions. The pavement still need to be changed. That's why, okay.

Q. We look into all this stuff.

A. Yeah.

Q. So had you --

A. I know you looking for any --

Q. Had you gone through --

A. You keep those -- you keep killing people like animal. I feel really bad.

Q. Well, we --

A. Just keep one, take $100.

Q. We try to find as many ways that we can --

A. Don't keep on --

Q. -- to save lives as we can.

A. Yeah. You can save lives. Take those off.

Q. Had you --

A. Take those off.

Q. Had you driven through other tolls on the way here that night?

A. No.

Q. So was that the --

A. No, I've been paying so many of them.

Q. Okay. Where have you, where have you -- in Minnesota or in Ohio or --

A. Ohio, that road. Maybe you can drive from somewhere there.

Q. Okay.
A. They have so many. You can see it.
Q. Okay. Do you know like --
A. I think I have the receipt from the car, all of the payment.
Q. You have receipts from before?
A. $4, $10, $11.
Q. Okay.
A. Like why we have to stop all those. You don't need those.
Q. So when you went through those, did you -- so did you stop and have to pay somebody? Is that what --
A. Yeah.
Q. Is that what you were doing?
A. Yeah, I've been doing that, but that time I was slowing down because I have to pay.
Q. Right. Were you driving when you went through all the four other toll plazas?
A. No, only one.
Q. Just one of them.
A. One of them or two of them.
Q. Okay.
A. Two of them, yeah.
Q. And you --
A. I paid two of them.
Q. And your boyfriend was driving for the other ones?
A. The other two or three. I don't know.

Q. Okay. Well, we'll certainly look at -- we should be able to find out when you went through those also if they're --
A. The nice person, like the last toll that she took $4 and she's like, well, have a nice trip.
Q. So were you paying cash? Is that -- or credit card?
A. Credit card, and then I couldn't find the card and I paid cash for her.
Q. Okay. Was that on the last one?
A. Yeah.
Q. And she would give you the receipt and then you would continue on?
A. Yeah.
Q. Okay.
A. But we really need to take those off. We need take those off, okay. We need to change those please. Why we have those many?
Q. I don't --
A. Why?
Q. Yeah, I don't, I don't live out here. So I, you know, we come out and try to look at everything. We have people that will be looking at the roadway. We have people that will be looking at the cars and all this stuff to try to see what things we can change and --
A. Just change those. Change please, please. If you change it, let me know. It save thousands of life.

Q. Well, that's what we --
A. I don't want other people going through it just like me. Do you want to go through like this?
Q. I don't.
A. Yeah.
Q. I don't.
A. You want to be like this now?
Q. No.
A. Just change it. Just take them off.
Q. The reason that I do this is so that I can try to help so that other people don't have -- hopefully I can keep other people from having to go through --
A. Yeah, just take those off.
Q. -- this because --
A. Take it away. Take it away. Just take $100 for one time and do spit (ph.) out whatever you can do back there.
Q. Yeah.
A. We don't need that many.
Q. Well, we'll be looking into it --
A. Please.
Q. -- into the whole situation. As far as your health, had you been taking any medications before the crash?
A. Not at all.
Q. No.
A. I never take medication.

Q. In good health?
A. Yeah.
Q. Okay. And where was -- I know you said nobody was sitting in the seat next to you. Where was everybody else sitting in the car? All in the middle seat?
A. Yeah.
Q. Do you remember who was where in the seat?
A. My son was sit by the window. My daughter was in the middle, my boyfriend was right behind me.
Q. Okay.
A. And they all wear seatbelt. I think somehow -- I don't know.
Q. So do you think they all had their seatbelts on?
A. I think so because I told them always.
Q. Okay. Do they usually wear seatbelts in the car?
A. Yeah.
Q. Did you ever have any problems with them taking them off for any reason if they want to sleep or anything like that?
A. They want to sleep (indiscernible).
Q. Okay.
A. Probably sleep, yeah, I don't know.
Q. And so the backseat, you had a third row seat. Was it -- did you have that folded down before and have luggage in there or was the seat up? Do you remember? For the very back seat, do you remember how that was?
A. I don't remember.

Q. Okay. Because I know you had some luggage in the car.
A. Yeah.
Q. That was probably back in the back?
A. Yeah.
Q. Is that where you had that?
A. Yeah.
Q. Okay. What are -- I see you have your arm in a sling. Do you know what your injuries --
A. I have a broken --
Q. Your arm's broken?
A. Yeah.
Q. Okay. Do you know where?
A. Like up and down I guess. I don't know. You can ask the doctor.
Q. Okay.
A. But, yeah. I'm fine. I'm good.
Q. Okay.
A. I'm (indiscernible).
Q. (Indiscernible).
A. As long as my daughter is okay. Please try to save my daughter. She's here. (Indiscernible) here.
Q. I know you have good people working here and --
A. I need her. I only have her now. (Indiscernible) -- I have two who are gone. Please.
Q. Well, yeah, I do everything that I can to again -- we can

find ways --
A. Save other people.
Q. -- these crashes from happening.
A. Yeah.
Q. That's what we want to do. Okay.
A. We don't want it to happen to any family. They love their family. They love their kids.
Q. Yeah. I don't --
A. They have same love as me. Please.
Q. I don't want to --
A. I don't want (indiscernible).
Q. I don't want to keep you here too late. I know you're able to get out of here, and I want to thank you again for staying for this time to talk to us. Is there anything you can think of? I know you're concerned about the toll plaza --
A. Yeah.
Q. -- and it's certainly something we'll be looking into.
A. Yes, please.
Q. Is there anything else you can think of that I haven't asked you that might be important to the crash?
A. I have -- you cannot bring back my son and my boyfriend.
Q. I can't. I'm sorry.
A. If you take those off, then that will save other people's life. Please. Please. Please.
Q. If you do think of anything that comes up, I'm going to give

you my card. You can call that number or send me an email if you think of anything that might be important to the crash investigation that could help me. Please feel free to give me a call. Stephanie is going to give you her information --

MS. MATONEK: Yeah, I speak in just a few minutes with you.

BY MR. SNIDER:

Q. So if you have any questions kind of about the process, about our investigation process, she can -- she's here to kind of help that along so you have information about where this is going. It can be frustrating because it will take a while. I'm going to -- I don't have any more questions for you right now.

A. Please pray to --

Q. Can I, can I -- I have the phone number for you. If anything comes up, can I call you and --

A. Yeah.

Q. -- and ask.

A. I want you to write down that thing need to be taken off.

Q. I do. I have it, and like I said, we look at everything, and if there's anything that --

A. They need to be taken off. You don't need them.

Q. If there's --

A. The road need to be clear, especially a lot of trucks on this road.

Q. I know.

A. So road need to be clear especially those trucks.

Q. Yeah. So I'm going to stop my interview and it's 6:22 right now.

A. Okay.

(Whereupon, at 6:22 p.m., the interview was concluded.)

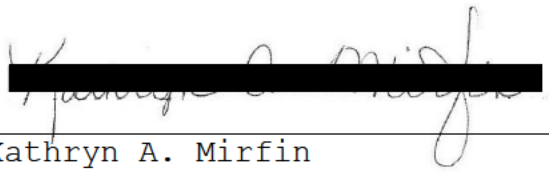
CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

IN THE MATTER OF:	FATAL MULTI-VEHICLE COLLISIONS NEAR SWANTON, OHIO ON AUGUST 15, 2024 Interview of Thupten Choedon
ACCIDENT NO.:	HWY24MH013
PLACE:	Toledo, Ohio
DATE:	August 16, 2024

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.



Kathryn A. Mirfin
Transcriber