

**SURVIVAL FACTORS GROUP
INTERVIEWS
ATTACHMENT #1
(12 Pages)**

FIRST RESPONDER INTERVIEWS

James Hook
Fire Chief Bluff Volunteer Fire Department
Interviewed 1/10/08

According to Chief Hook who was the Incident Commander (IC), he heard the radio traffic on his scanner and departed prior to being paged out by the San Juan County dispatcher. After leaving he had his wife page out the other five firefighters/EMT's of his volunteer force.

When he arrived, he saw 3 Navajo guys in two pick-up trucks already on-scene helping out. One of the men in a dually pick-up truck had used a jack from his bed and started jacking up the bus attempting to help remove a victim stuck underneath. In addition he had a generator in the bed of his truck and later used it to help light up the scene. According to the Chief, an EMT from Montezuma Creek arrived just ahead of him.

As the Chief approached the scene, another EMT from Montezuma Creek came up to him telling him of at least 3 fatalities. As he approached the bus he saw one person still inside partially entrapped and saw a pair of legs sticking out from underneath the bus. He instructed his other arriving EMT's to start extrication on both people.

The Chief instructed his wife to send down two 15-passenger vans from his business down to help keep the walking wounded passengers warm. He also went back to his truck to request the San Juan dispatcher to send a life-flight helicopter.

The Chief stated that when the Blanding Fire Department arrived he instructed them to set-up additional lighting.

According to the Chief there was so much to do he never set-up a Command post but just helped out and instructed arriving firefighters and EMT's what to do. He said he let the San Juan County EMS Coordinator handle operations and transport when she arrived.

Linda Larsen
San Juan County EMS Coordinator
Interviewed 1/11/08 at the San Juan County Bldg

According to Ms. Larsen, when she received the call from dispatch she proceeded to the ambulance garage. When she heard from Chief Hook that a bus was involved and it was on its top she called dispatch and requested that the two ambulance crews from Monticello be dispatched to the scene. She then contacted the San Juan County EOC Director to send two 15-passenger vans down to the scene to help transport walking wounded. According to Ms. Larsen, she proceeded to the scene in the county's MCI trailer¹.

¹ MCI trailer is loaded with numerous backboards, neck braces and other supplies needed to transport injured persons.

Upon Ms. Larsen's arrival she finished helping triage injured passengers and assumed transport operations. She instructed a San Juan Deputy and Utah Highway trooper on-scene, to contact dispatch for further ambulances from the Navajo Nation. According to Ms. Larsen, she proceeded to send ambulances loaded with injured passengers to hospitals, making sure there was had an EMT and driver on each ambulance. After all the ambulances on-scene were utilized and the ETA for other ambulances was an hour away, Ms. Larsen decided to use the 15-passenger vans to transport injured passengers to a clinic in Blanding and a hospital in Monticello. One of these vans returned to the scene to transport injured once they were dropped off at the Blanding clinic.

According to Ms. Larsen, the last ambulance transported injured passengers at approximately 12:30 a.m.

Rick Eldridge
Utah Highway Patrolman
Interviewed 1/11/08 at the UHP barracks in Monticello

Trooper Eldridge explained to the NTSB why there was such a discrepancy in the time from when the accident occurred to the dispatch times.

According to Trooper Eldridge, the accident time of 8:02 p.m. was decided based on several factors.

- According to the Trooper and the San Juan County Dispatcher, a 911 call was received at 8:04 p.m. but lost its signal prior to getting the location.
- Being a different motorcoach was involved in a minor accident north of Blanding at MP 66 the dispatcher assumed the caller was referring to that incident.
- Passengers on the accident-involved motorcoach have stated that First responders arrived on scene approximately an hour after the accident occurred.
- Passengers on the motorcoach that had possession of a cell phone after the accident, all attempted to make calls. One of these calls was most likely the one to make it to the dispatcher at 8:04.

The documented call that was received from dispatch with a location was at 8:38 p.m.

PASSENGER INTERVIEWS

Joseph Luke

Interviewed 1/9/08 at Allen Memorial Hospital, Moab, Utah

Age 40, Height 6' 272 lbs

According to Mr. Luke, he was seated in the twelfth row on the right side in the aisle next to Jay Baumer.

Mr. Luke stated that prior to leaving the trip coordinator told the passengers that because of the avalanche, the trip home would take 12 hours.

Mr. Luke stated they were watching a movie and turned to ask Jay if he thought they were traveling fast. Mr. Luke replied, "Yeah". Soon after this he said that he felt the bus sway and noticed Jay bracing himself. Mr. Luke stated that he looked up and could see that the bus was on an incline going into a left turn. According to Mr. Luke, after Jay braced himself it was no more than 30 seconds later that heard the rear tires spinning and the bus rolled over to the right.

According to Mr. Luke, he didn't recall being ejected but did recall hitting the roof and window as the bus rolled. The next thing he recalled was being on his back with his knees bent with luggage all around him. He looked around and noticed Maurice to his right and Teresa next to Maurice, Kenny Bowden was near his left leg and a kid named Mark on the other side of Teresa.

According to Mr. Luke he sustained a laceration to his face that needed 20 stitches, 2 fractured ribs on his right side rear, another fractured rib on the left side front, a fractured jaw, and multiple contusions to his whole body.

James Johnston

Interviewed on 1/13/08 at Good Samaritan Hospital in Phoenix Arizona

Age 45, Height 6' 4", 250 lbs

According to Mr. Johnston, he was seated in row eight on the right side in the aisle next to Jeff Rivera. Mr. Johnston said that to his left next to him were Paul Kluzak and David Rhoads. In front of him were Richard Scarborough and Scott Swanson with Damien Nichols across the aisle from Richard Scarborough.

Mr. Johnston said that just prior to the accident; the bus went off onto the shoulder and the driver swerved back causing the bus to rock and people yelled out, "hey slow down". After that everything went fine up until the accident.

According to Mr. Johnston, a short distance after that, he felt what he thought was the bus scraping against a guardrail or something and looked out to see the right rear

wheels going off and felt the bus fishtail. The next thing he remembers is the bus flipping and he's flying through the air.

Mr. Johnston stated that he landed on his left side and when he rolled over onto his stomach to get up he couldn't move. He said afterwards his friends helped him by putting jackets and other clothes on him to stay warm.

Mr. Johnston stated that he sustained L1-5 vertebrae fractures, one rib fracture to his left side, deep contusions to his right knee, internal bleeding, and a very large contusion to his whole left side from his hip to his shoulder.

Richard Scarborough
Interviewed 1/14/08 at his residence in Glendale, Arizona
Age 45, Height 6' 185 lbs.

Mr. Scarborough stated that he was seated in the seventh row on the right side in the aisle seat next to Scott Swanson.

According to Mr. Scarborough, as they were driving south of Blanding, the road was getting curvy and at one point the bus went off the road onto the shoulder and the bus driver jerked the bus back to the left causing one passenger to shout out, "Slow down".

Mr. Scarborough stated that about 10 minutes later he heard gravel hitting the underside of the bus and could feel the bus swerve to the left. He said he could feel the bus' back end swing around and the next thing he knows is the bus flipping over. Mr. Scarborough said that he grabbed the armrest and tried to hold on but was thrown and knocked out. He said he woke up face down on the roof of the bus and tried to get up but he couldn't initially do so.

Mr. Scarborough stated that he finally got up on his hands and knees and crawled to what he thought was the front of the bus but in fact it was the back of the bus. He saw his friend Jeff Rivera lying perpendicular to the bus roof with his legs under the bus roof. He continued to crawl further and saw what turned out to be Joe Debolske face down in the mud. He was parallel to the bus and roof with his head towards the front of the bus. Mr. Scarborough said he turned his head away from the mud and saw blood.

Mr. Scarborough stated that he saw the bus driver and asked him if there were any flares or a flashlight on the bus and the bus driver replied, "No".

Mr. Scarborough heard a girl scream and found her partially pinned under the bus. He and several other passengers tried digging around her and pulling her out but she screamed out so they let her alone until first responders arrived.

Mr. Scarborough stated that he was one of the last group of people to leave in a van that went to a clinic in Blanding.

According to Mr. Scarborough, he sustained a fractured T12 vertebra, fractures to his right clavicle, left clavicle, right scapula, and had multiple nose fractures.

Andrew Gregory

Interviewed on 1/14/08 at his residence

Age 41, Height 6'3" 260 lbs.

Mr. Gregory stated that he was seated in row eleven on the left side next to the window. Mr. Gregory said that Jamie Nellon was seated next to him in the aisle seat. He said across the aisle from them were Ginger Bidle and her daughter Kim Bidle.

According to Mr. Gregory, they were watching a movie when he felt what seemed like the bus turn left and then straighten out then felt a harder turn left and everything seemed to shift when the bus flipped.

The next thing he remembered was waking up about 15 feet from the bus. Mr. Gregory stated that after a minute or two trying to gather his senses, he got up and saw Kim Bidle 4-5 feet from him. She told him she was cold so he found his suitcase and pulled out an extra jacket and put it over her.

Mr. Gregory stated that he saw the trip Captain as he was walking around trying to keep everyone calm and telling us to find extra jackets and clothes for the others that were cold

Mr. Gregory said he next went up to the roadway hoping to flag down a vehicle. After a few minutes a pick-up truck with a u-haul trailer behind it pulled up. Somebody told him to go call for help.

According to Mr. Gregory, the other bus came by and a lot of those people came down to help. Mr. Gregory stated that the EMT's showed up around 30-40 minutes later.

Mr. Gregory stated that he ended up being transported to Kayenta Clinic then moved to a hospital in Tuba City, Arizona. After returning to the Phoenix area he went again for treatment at Banner-Healthcare Thunderbird.

According to Mr. Gregory, he sustained 4 fractured ribs on the left side, a compression fracture of T3 and L12 along with multiple bruises and cuts to his torso and extremities.

Bryce Cooper

Interviewed on 1/14/08 at his parent's residence in Glendale, AZ. with his father present.

Age 17, Height 6' 165 lbs.

Mr. Cooper stated that he was seated on the right side in row five next to the window. To his left was Mark Rasmussen in the aisle seat.

According to Mr. Cooper, the bus driver seemed to be driving fast. He said that a few minutes prior to the accident the driver drove off the road and when he swerved back peoples belongings flew out from under the seats. We all said "Wow". A few minutes later he could hear rocks hitting the underside of the bus and when he looked up he could see a drop-off and could feel that they were in a left turn. He said he braced himself by putting his left hand on the seatback in front of him and his right hand next to the window. He then remembers the bus flipping and hitting the ground. The next thing he recalled was waking up in the dirt.

When Mr. Cooper got up to his knees he was initially dazed. As he regained his senses he saw that he was about 10 feet from the roof of the bus and that the roof and the bus were almost parallel to each other. He said that there was a guy next to him and he grabbed the guy's cell phone and tried calling 911 but it said, "No Service".

Mr. Cooper said that he and Daniel Torres ran up to the road in their bare feet and flagged down a vehicle that was going into town and told them to call for help when they got there.

Mr. Cooper stated that he and Sam Rasmussen were transported to the clinic in Blanding for treatment. From there they were taken up to the Monticello hospital where a doctor and his wife drove them to Farmington, New Mexico where they met the Torres family and were driven home.

According to Mr. Cooper, he sustained road rash to his left shoulder and left foot, and had stitches to his right shin, right eyebrow, and the top of his head.

Scott Swanson

Interviewed on 1/14/08 at his residence in Phoenix, AZ

Age 38, Height 6' 220lbs.

Mr. Swanson stated that he was seated in the seventh row on the right side next to the window. Next to him in the aisle seat was Rich Scarborough.

Mr. Swanson said that prior to leaving Telluride, he overheard the bus driver telling Damien Nichols that he had been sick the past 3 days.

According to Mr. Swanson, at the time of the accident he was sleeping. He recalled being jerked to the side and leaning on two wheels. The next thing he recalled was being in the mud between the bus and the roof.

Mr. Swanson said when he got up he helped several friends but ended up stopping because he couldn't stop the flow of blood in his face and his right arm was in severe pain. He said after a while someone came and told him to go stay warm in the other bus and later he was transported to Monticello Hospital. After being stitched up he said he was transported to St. Mary's in Grand Junction, Colorado.

When asked about the drive, Mr. Swanson stated that others on the bus complained about the bus speeding but he and others who had taken the trip before were used to the buses speeding.

According to Mr. Swanson, he sustained 3 fractures to his right scapula, facial lacerations with a deep avulsion, a torn left knee ACL, and a nose fracture.

Damien Nichols

Interviewed on 1/14/08 at his residence in Chandler, AZ.

Age 35, Height 5'6" 175 lbs.

Mr. Nichols stated that he was seated on the left side of the bus in row seven in the aisle seat. According to Mr. Nichols, the seat next to him was empty but the seat across the aisle was occupied by Richard Scarborough and Scott Swanson.

Mr. Nichols said prior to leaving Telluride he had a discussion with the bus driver. According to Mr. Nichols, he specifically asked the bus driver if there was still a 10 hour maximum drive rule, and the driver said yes but under emergency circumstances a driver can drive over 10 hours.

On the drive, Mr. Nichols recalled the bus driver hitting the rumble strips on the shoulder a couple times, which scared everyone. Mr. Nichols thought that a couple passengers may have said something to him about it.

Mr. Nichols recalled feeling the bus turning sharply and it seemed like it kept turning. He then heard Jim Johnston scream, "No, No" and saw that Richard Scarborough let go of his laptop and Mr. Nichols said he looked up he could tell that the bus was sliding off the roadway. He said he tightly grabbed the seat in front of him as the bus started to roll over. When everything came to a stop he was laying on the ground on the left side of the bus. As he tried crawling away from what he thought was leaking fuel, he noticed his leg was stuck in barbed wire. He said he grabbed the back of the bus and pulled himself up. After doing so, he made it over to David Rhoads and David told him to go up to the road and flag down some help.

When he got up to the roadside he said others were already up there trying to do the same thing. Mr. Nichols said that a pick-up truck pulled up and the guy had a generator with lights in the bed. The driver pulled over and started helping. The other bus came by and Mr. Nichols said someone wrapped up his bleeding head and told him to go inside the bus to get warm.

Later an EMT came on the bus and put all of us in a neck brace and told us to follow her to a 15-passenger van. He said they were all taken to a clinic in Blanding. Mr. Nichols said that the next morning they were taken to San Juan hospital in Monticello. After having more x-rays they drove him back down to Blanding where a

Life-Flight helicopter picked him up and took him to Good Samaritan hospital in Phoenix.

According to Mr. Nichols, he sustained an injury to his left eye, head and facial lacerations, and multiple contusions.

Jamie Nellon

Interviewed on 1/15/08 at his residence in Phoenix, AZ.

Age 31, Height 6' 160 lbs.

Mr. Nellon stated that he was seated on the left side of the bus in the eleventh row in the aisle seat. He said he was seated next to Andy Gregory. He said across the aisle from him was Ginger Bidle and her daughter Kim.

According to Mr. Nellon, he was watching a movie and started dozing off when he felt the bus leave the road, start shaking, and heard the gravel hitting the undercarriage. He saw the bus start to tilt over to right and he grabbed the handle on the seat in front of him. When the bus stopped he still thought he was on the bus but realized after cleaning the dirt out of his eyes that he was about 20 feet from the bus. He said he saw fuel shooting out from the bus and got up and walked away. He called out to locate his friends while pulling out his cell phone to call for help. After getting no signal on his phone he walked up to the roadway to try from there.

Mr. Nellon said that as he got up near the road there were others trying to flag down a truck towing a U-haul trailer that was coming from the south. After the driver stopped they told him what happened and the driver said he would go to Bluff and call for help. After he left, Mr. Nellon said a minute later another truck pulled up and after seeing what happened turned his truck around and directed his headlights on the bus.

Mr. Nellon stated that he saw a young guy partially trapped under the bus and two people trapped under the roof. He said one of the guys under the roof was deceased.

According to Mr. Nellon, he was transported to the Blanding Clinic in a 15-passenger van and had x-rays and got stitches for his cuts there. He sustained a laceration to his forehead, road rash to his right hip and multiple contusions.

Maurice Washington Age 44

Teresa Washington Age 42

Both interviewed 1/11/2008 at St. Mary's Hospital, Grand Junction, Colorado

According to Mr. Washington, he was seated in row thirteen on the right side in the aisle seat ext to his wife. This was his 3rd annual trip and second for his wife who was in the window seat next to him.

Returning from Telluride, everyone was on-board the bus by 3pm. The group knew the night before that there was bad weather, and the bus was going to depart no

later than 3:15pm. The morning news had reported that Lizard Head Pass was closed. They also knew before departing Telluride that they were going to take a different route home and the trip captain told them the route, but they were unfamiliar with the area and could not recall what that was. Normally the bus arrives back in Phoenix by midnight, this trip they were told they would arrive around 3-4 am.

When they departed the condos in Telluride, the bus had chains on the tires. Outside of Telluride the buses all pulled over to remove the chains, which took about an hour. Other buses had to stop and help the accident driver to remove his chains, along with some volunteer bus passengers who also helped.

His wife stated that she noticed the driver was on his cell phone because she could see his reflection in the rear-view mirror and he did not have both hands on the wheel. She was nervous because of the road conditions and windy curves that he did not have both hands on the wheel. She said something to her husband, and he also did notice the driver was using his cell phone.

Mrs. Washington said she could feel the tires on the gravel and sliding, then was not aware of anything else until she opened her eyes and she was outside the bus in the dirt, and was cold. She was lying on her back and could not move.

Mr. Washington stated that he heard the tires on the gravel and thought that was “not good”. He said he was tossed toward the aisle, then back toward the window and restroom. He recalls seeing a lot of dirt and dust in the bus, feeling a heavy weight on his back, and then blacked out. He woke up outside the bus, on his back about 30 feet from the bus, about 10 feet from his wife. He said that both he and his wife ended up being ejected in an area that was flat, but rocky.

He was laying on the ground, next to other people like the passenger seated in 12C. This Passenger (12C) had a cell phone and started to call 911 – but could not get a signal.

Mrs. Washington recalled that the emergency responders were a mix of volunteers, good Samaritans, and professionals, but they all did a great job. EMS worked well together; they did triage and seemed under control.

According to Mr. Washington, he sustained multiple injuries, including a lacerated liver, spleen contusion, multiple rib fractures (right side) and multiple lacerations, contusions and abrasions. His wife sustained a compound fracture of the ulna and radius, a lacerated scalp, and multiple contusions.

Both passengers stated they felt the bus could have been safer if it had seatbelts, a better support structure for the roof, and the windows were smaller because they were ejected.

Jon Dins

Interviewed 1/11/2008 at St. Mary's Hospital, Grand Junction, Colorado

Age 23

Mr. Dins stated that he was seated on the right side of the bus in the aisle seat in his "assigned" seat according to trip captain's seat chart, 10C

Remembers getting on the bus leaving Telluride and watching a movie, everything was uneventful. Then he was looking at his laptop, then remembers nothing until he woke up in the ICU at St. Mary's Hospital in Grand Junction.

He recalls the driver was "not shy about passing" slower vehicles ahead, but seemed okay in his driving. This passenger did not feel unsafe or that the driver was reckless.

He saw the driver at 2:45 pm at the condos to pick up the passengers; he and his friends were the first to board the bus. He remembers they drove for about 20 minutes and then stopping to remove the chains which seemed to take at least an hour – at about 4pm they started to drive again. He felt it took too long for the driver to remove the chains, and that other bus drivers and passengers had to help him do it.

Kristin Rogers

Interviewed 1/11/2008 at St. Mary's Hospital, Grand Junction, Colorado

Age 27

Ms. Rodgers stated that that he was seated on the right side of the bus in row 10 next to the window and her boyfriend, Jon Dins.

On the way to Telluride, she felt the driver was going too fast. She saw him tailgating, especially a truck at one time. She also recalled that the trip captain kept joking with the passengers that they were going to beat all the other buses to Telluride – like it was a running joke to see whose bus was the first to arrive.

When they were outside of Telluride, as they were removing the tire chains, she still felt uncomfortable about the speed the driver was traveling but she cannot recall what the speed was or if she felt that way because she was next to the window and so high up in the air.

Then she noticed that their bus was alone, the other two buses in their caravan were not around. She called her parents and told them they had gotten out of the mountains safely just before the accident happened. Then she felt the bus slide, not smoothly like a skid, but slide like it was turning too fast and the tires could not grip the road. The bus tipped to the right, she hit the window, felt herself falling out of the bus and getting tangled up in debris. She then recalled laying on a rocky area, it was flat and

there was a lot of barbed wire all around her. She said she was far away from where the bus came to rest.

She sustained a fractured L1 and L2, compound right ankle fracture, collapsed lung, broken rib, lacerated spleen and broken clavicle.

She recalled everything, did not lose consciousness. She said after the 2nd bus arrived and started to help, then EMS arrived, she believed it was about 45 minutes.

She believes the EMS did a good job, they did triage, and the EMS in her ambulance taking her to Grand Junction was really great. There was a fire fighter who was with her the entire time, including when she was inside San Juan hospital waiting for transport, he stayed with her and helped her when other doctors or nurses interacted with her. She felt Monticello (San Juan hospital) did an excellent job, and she was then transferred in the morning to St. Mary's.