

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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In the Matter of:	*	
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ACCIDENT OF THE LADY D	*	
ON MARCH 6, 2004	*	Docket No. DCA 04 MM015
in Baltimore, Maryland	*	
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Monday,  
March 8, 2004

INTERVIEW OF:

KAREN SCHILLING

PRESENT:

MORGAN J. TURRELL, NTSB  
MARIETTE BURER, NTSB  
SCOTT BURNOWSKI

## P R O C E E D I N G S

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MR. TURRELL: Good morning. This is Morgan Turrell. It is Monday, March 8. We are at Johns Hopkins Hospital. We are interviewing a witness who was onboard the water taxi on Saturday.

I am Morgan Turrell, NTSB and to my left is?

LIEUTENANT BURNOWSKI: Lieutenant Scott Burnowski, Coast Guard Sector, Baltimore.

MS. BURER: I am Mariette Burer, NTSB.

MR. TURRELL: Say your name and spell it?

MS. SCHILLING: Karen Schilling, S-C-H-I-L-L-I-N-G-S, and Karen is K-A-R-E-N.

MR. TURRELL: Okay. Thank you. And Karen, how old are you?

MS. SCHILLING: I am 55 years old.

MR. TURRELL: And where do you reside, what city?

MS. SCHILLING: I reside in Homewood, Illinois.

MR. TURRELL: Okay. And you were onboard the water taxi on Saturday?

MS. SCHILLING: Yes.

MR. TURRELL: Okay. I am going to just ask you

1 go ahead and just tell in your own words what happened  
2 on Saturday.

3 MS. SCHILLING: Okay. Okay. We had gone out  
4 to Fort McHenry by water taxi. And it was right before  
5 four o'clock, we were told that was the last taxi to go  
6 back to the Harbor, so we were waiting for, it was  
7 probably maybe 10 minutes until four. We waited for  
8 the last taxi. And the taxi arrived. It was right  
9 near four o'clock and we all boarded. There was quite  
10 a few people because it was the last taxi and it had  
11 started to rain and we could, we could see the clouds  
12 and it was very dark. And we could tell that there was  
13 a storm coming, and I think the, the pilot and the  
14 other crew member wanted, wanted us to quickly get  
15 onboard. They could see that the storm was coming.  
16 So, we got onboard and he pulled out and almost, at the  
17 time that he pulled out the rain started coming harder  
18 and harder. And we got a little ways off the shore,  
19 and, and the wind came up really bad. At one time it  
20 was, the boat really tipped over to one side. It  
21 didn't go over at that time because the people that  
22 were sitting the opposite side from us, stood up and  
23 came to our side of the boat. And the crew member told  
24 us get seated, not to stand up. That we weren't  
25 suppose to stand up.

1 MR. TURRELL: Okay.

2 MS. SCHILLING: Okay.

3 And then, and then because the wind was so  
4 strong I think the pilot was trying to turn the boat  
5 back to Fort McHenry, because he started to turn the  
6 boat around.

7 MR. TURRELL: Okay.

8 MS. SCHILLING: And as he is turning the boat  
9 around, another big gust came and it just took it all  
10 the way over at that time.

11 MR. TURRELL: Okay.

12 MS. SCHILLING: And, and --

13 MS. BURER: Take a breath. There you go.  
14 There you go.

15 (Pause.)

16 MS. SCHILLING: It just went totally over. And  
17 I knew, I was coherent the whole time, I knew that we  
18 were over. I am a Girl Scout volunteer, and I know  
19 quite a bit about water safety, although I am not much  
20 for the water, but, I knew that I needed to go up to  
21 find the air bubble. And I did that. But, my head  
22 touched the floor of the taxi, and I could tell there  
23 was no, there was no air bubble. So, I knew that I had  
24 to go another way out. As I was trying to find  
25 another way out, a life saver floated pass me and I

1 grabbed it. And so then I kicked to go down, so I  
2 could find the windows. And I kicked to go down, and  
3 I started feeling and I pushed a window and it seemed  
4 to just, just to float away. I don't think it was, it  
5 was attached anymore. So, I could, I could just go  
6 out of that window and then I held the preserver in  
7 front of me, and I kicked my legs as hard as I could to  
8 get up to the surface. And I finally saw light and I  
9 had kicked so hard that I was away from the wreckage.

10 And my husband could, I could see my husband  
11 attached to the wreckage, he was holding on to the  
12 wreckage and he told me to keep kicking his way. And I  
13 did and I finally got close enough that he could, he  
14 could reach out to me. And he just pulled my hand, and  
15 then he lifted me up on top of the wreckage and that is  
16 where I stayed until, until the reservists came by and  
17 got us on the, on the, I don't know, is it a barge? I  
18 don't know what it is, but it looked like some sort of  
19 a barge, that they put us on.

20 So, that is basically what happened.

21 MR. TURRELL: Okay. Great. Great.

22 Do you recall when the boat started off, if  
23 the windows were open or closed?

24 MS. SCHILLING: They were all closed except  
25 for one. A couple that was sitting across from us, I

1 will tell you exactly where we, the pilot is, was next  
2 to the shore and we were all the way, we had come on  
3 the boat first, so we were all the way opposite, so,  
4 Eileen and Ed were sitting closest to the door and then  
5 it was Denny and I. I was sitting more towards the  
6 middle than they were. And there was a couple sitting  
7 close to the other door, across from Eileen and Ed, and  
8 they had the window partly open.

9 MR. TURRELL: Okay.

10 MS. SCHILLING: Now, I don't recall if when it  
11 started to rain harder, if they closed it or not.

12 MS. BURER: Right.

13 MS. SCHILLING: I don't recall.

14 MR. TURRELL: Okay.

15 MS. SCHILLING: But, it was open as we were  
16 leaving shore.

17 MR. TURRELL: Okay. And when you are under  
18 water, you were, you were trapped inside the canopy.

19 MS. SCHILLING: Yes.

20 MR. TURRELL: The canopy was in tact under  
21 water or was in place.

22 MS. SCHILLING: It had to have been because I  
23 couldn't, I couldn't find a spot to get out.

24 MR. TURRELL: Okay.

25 MS. SCHILLING: So, but, then as I said, as I

1 was looking for but I could, like it was, like it just  
2 went away.

3 MS. BURER: Right.

4 MR. TURRELL: Okay.

5 MS. SCHILLING: Okay.

6 MR. TURRELL: Yes.

7 MS. SCHILLING: So, I don't know how, how  
8 secure it was at that time.

9 MR. TURRELL: We are going to stop and we are  
10 going to do a follow up interview down the road. And  
11 we have a really good statement from you and we really  
12 appreciate it.

13 MS. SCHILLING: Okay.

14 MR. TURRELL: This ends the interview and this  
15 is tape recorded.

16 MS. SCHILLING: Okay. Fine.

17 (Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)