

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

* * * * *

Investigation of:

*

*

SIKORSKY S76B HELICOPTER N72EX

*

CRASH NEAR CALABASAS, CALIFORNIA,

*

ON JANUARY 26, 2020

*

*

* * * * *

Interview of: WHITNEY BAGGE, Vice President
 Island Express Helicopters

Island Express Helicopters
 Long Beach, California

Thursday,
 January 30, 2020

APPEARANCES:

DUJUAN SEVILLIAN, Ph.D., Human Performance Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

FABIAN SALAZAR, Operational Factors Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

SATHYA SILVA, Ph.D., Human Performance Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

MATTHEW RIGSBY, Air Safety Investigator
Federal Aviation Administration

GARRET DALTON, Director of Operations
Island Express Helicopters

DON SWAIM, Attorney
Cunningham Swaim, LLP
(On behalf of Mr. Perez)

<u>ITEM</u>	<u>I N D E X</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
Interview of Whitney Bagge:		
By Dr. Sevillian		5
By Mr. Salazar		7
By Dr. Silva		11
By Mr. Rigsby		21
By Dr. Sevillian		22
By Mr. Salazar		23
By Dr. Silva		23
By Mr. Rigsby		26
By Dr. Silva		28

I N T E R V I E W

(3:09 p.m.)

DR. SILVA: On the record at 3:09 p.m.

DR. SEVILLIAN: I know we met earlier Whitney, but just to sort of formalize this interview, my name is Dajuan Sevillian. I'm a human performance investigator for the NTSB. And we really appreciate you taking time to speak with us today.

The NTSB mission is to improve safety, make recommendations, and that's basically -- that's our vision, if you will. And you're here because you're the expert in the operation and we want to hear from you. And we're going to conduct an interview. We'll do two rounds of questions. And at any time if you don't know an answer to a question, just say you don't know. And any clarification to a question, let us know that, as well.

Everything that we discuss today is going to be part of a public docket in the future and you're allowed one representative. So for the record, who would you like to represent you today?

MS. BAGGE: Don, please.

DR. SEVILLIAN: Okay. And what you're seeing around the table today is part of our party system. As part of our party system, today we have several NTSB investigators and we also have the FAA here. The FAA is not here for enforcement; they're here for safety. He'll introduce his role here in a moment. And we've got the company representative, as well, if you need him.

So with that being said, I want to go around the room, have

1 folks introduce themselves so you know who you're talking with and
2 we will start with Fabian.

3 MR. SALAZAR: Hello. Fabian Salazar, operations.

4 DR. SILVA: Sathya Silva, human performance with NTSB.

5 MR. RIGSBY: Matt Rigsby, FAA Office of Accident
6 Investigation. No regulatory authority. I don't know if you hold
7 any licenses, but --

8 MS. BAGGE: I don't.

9 MR. RIGSBY: Okay. No big deal then.

10 MR. DALTON: I'm Garret Dalton representing the company, and
11 my expertise is in operations and the aircraft.

12 DR. SEVILLIAN: All right, thank you. Any questions before
13 we get started? I do want to say this, if there's any time you
14 want to take a break let us know and we'll take a break.

15 MS. BAGGE: Okay.

16 INTERVIEW OF WHITNEY BAGGE

17 BY DR. SEVILLIAN:

18 Q. So for the record, could you please state and spell your full
19 name?

20 A. Whitney Bagge. My full name is W-h-i-t-n-e-y; last name is
21 B as in boy-a-g-g-e.

22 Q. And what is your role here at the company?

23 A. I'm the vice president.

24 Q. Can you describe your roles and responsibilities as vice
25 president of the company?

1 A. Pretty much do everything except for operate a helicopter and
2 work on a helicopter. So I do reservations, accounting, HR, a lot
3 of the scheduling. You know, I'm a confidante for everyone, phone
4 call away. Booking charters, I deal firsthand with a lot of the
5 clientele we have, mainly the highest clientele we have, which
6 would obviously be Kobe Bryant. He was my -- one of my main
7 clients. So I'm a lot of the face of the company.

8 Q. Do you have any aviation flight background?

9 A. I don't; my husband is a pilot. He's taught me a lot, you
10 know, of how piloting works. And I'm pretty -- not to brag, I'm
11 pretty smart, so I catch on pretty quick to where, you know, I can
12 plot out a new charter without having to ask him how to do it.
13 You know, I understand airspace, I understand weather. I just
14 physically don't fly.

15 Q. So as an executive for the company how do you -- how would
16 you describe the safety culture here at the company?

17 A. I would say that's our main culture, is safety. You know, it
18 starts from the top and goes all the way to the bottom. It's
19 preached every single day. I preach it to my clients every single
20 day. You know, if we see something that we feel is deemed unsafe,
21 we figure out how to fix it immediately, whether it goes to me,
22 Garret, Josh, to my chief pilot. You know, it's what we stand for
23 really as a company is safety. That's why this is such a shock.

24 Q. Has there ever been any safety issues to your knowledge since
25 you've been here?

1 A. I mean, every company has their safety issues, but that's why
2 we place policies. You know, without having a safety issue you
3 wouldn't have policies. So, I mean, drastic safety issues I would
4 say not to my knowledge, but there's little safety issues from day
5 to day where -- you know, people standing on ladders
6 inappropriately or they need training appropriately.

7 Q. Have you ever had an employee come in and discuss any
8 concerns or anything, any risks with you?

9 A. No.

10 DR. SEVILLIAN: That's all the questions I have for right
11 now. Fabian?

12 MR. SALAZAR: Just a couple, Whitney.

13 BY MR. SALAZAR:

14 Q. Tell us how you coordinate or interact with operations on a
15 daily basis?

16 A. I would say every charter I book involves operations from,
17 you know, the beginning of the day to the end of the day, it's --
18 if I have a charter inquiry, I'll call operations and say can we
19 get -- you know, if they're requesting a specific pilot. In this
20 case of the incident it's always Ara. It was always requested as
21 Ara. You know, it would either go to Garret or I'd ask Ara, hey,
22 are one of you available? We'd assign a pilot and then they would
23 check the weather and then they would give me the yes, we can do
24 it. You know, and I would always tell them it's from this airport
25 to this airport in this aircraft. And then they would always say

1 okay yeah, we can do it.

2 Q. So you're talking to that third-party broker and he's giving
3 you the information and you're coordinating all of that?

4 A. Um-hum.

5 Q. You're the voice between the two?

6 A. I'm pretty much the voice between the clients and my
7 operations, yes.

8 Q. All right. And you mentioned it's always Ara. Is it always
9 the broker's decision to use Ara?

10 A. Not always. We do get certain requests for specific pilots.
11 In Kobe Bryant's case it was always a request for Ara. Oftentimes
12 if Ara wasn't available, Garret was always the back-up pilot and
13 they would be fine with it. But it was always requested for that
14 specific pilot.

15 Q. Okay.

16 A. In this instance, but -- you know, I do have other charters
17 where they request one of my other pilots or something because he
18 was a movie star and --

19 Q. Does it help -- interacting with operations gives you the
20 ability to let the broker know, hey, you requested pilot X but we
21 got to give you pilot Y?

22 A. That's happened quite often, yes. Or, you know, that one's
23 off for the day. Because we do scheduling -- well, Ara used to do
24 the pilot scheduling, and if a pilot is scheduled off that day and
25 they've requested, I'd oftentimes tell the broker, you know, sorry

1 that's their scheduled day off. Unless, you know, unless the
2 pilot volunteers yeah, I can come in and we can take this day off
3 instead, that's usually how those are handled.

4 Q. Do you ever deal with the customer asking you can one of our
5 guys, any of them, just sit up front? Do you have any involvement
6 in that conversation?

7 A. I usually tell them no. The answer is no because they're not
8 a rated pilot to sit up front.

9 Q. Okay. Moving on to maintenance. Tell us how you interact
10 with maintenance on a daily basis.

11 A. For maintenance it's a lot of scheduling and it's, you know,
12 it's more or less so that I can reiterate that to my reservations
13 and the other charter booking agents on what aircrafts are going
14 to be down, what aircrafts can be used. We have specific
15 aircrafts that are VIP setups, so there's leather interior where
16 other ones aren't. So we -- you know, he -- ultimately my DOM
17 makes the decision on what aircraft is doing what, but I more or
18 less say, well, they'd like a VIP ship. So he'll move the
19 schedule around to make that possible.

20 But then, like, obviously with maintenance -- because I'm
21 involved with the money side, too, it's -- he discusses we need
22 this part, you know, it costs this much, and then if it's a
23 certain priced item, if it's higher than what I think that I
24 should be approving because I don't know anything about
25 maintenance, I tell him to call Phil because that's Phil's

1 expertise.

2 Q. Okay. Have you ever had any challenges to where you had to
3 come in as a mediator if there was a conflict with the chief pilot
4 and the director of maintenance because both of those answer
5 directly to the director of operations? Have there ever been any
6 challenges that you've had to work through?

7 A. Not -- before Garret --

8 MR. DALTON: I apologize for --

9 MS. BAGGE: I haven't had to intervene between the pilots and
10 the mechanics since Garret's been on board, but obviously all
11 employees have their differences and that's where HR steps in for
12 me. You know, if it has to do with a mechanical issue, that's
13 where Phil is involved, because I can't tell a pilot well you
14 can't -- you know, I can't make up that difference because I don't
15 know because I'm not a pilot. And then that's when Phil gets
16 involved, because Phil is a mechanic and, you know, he can kind of
17 be that buffer between the two if needed.

18 But we also have policies in place that I do know about with,
19 you know, if there's something broken on the aircraft and the
20 pilot feels there's something broken and they MEL it, and then if
21 it is an MEL item, but --

22 Q. Okay. Lastly, director of safety, how do you interact with
23 the director of safety on a daily basis?

24 A. The current one?

25 Q. Um-hum.

1 A. I interact with him every day. He's very vocal to me about
2 everything because he is my husband, so I'm very keen on what's
3 going on with safety. You know, a lot of times if he's not sure
4 what to do, obviously I'd be the first person where he'd say well
5 this happened, and then I kind of give him ideas on what I think
6 we should do as well to mitigate it.

7 Q. Very good. Do you interact at all with the flight followers?

8 A. I do.

9 Q. How do you interact with the flight followers?

10 A. I oftentimes -- because we have Spidertracks, so I oftentimes
11 will follow a lot of my charters and that's just as a second eye.
12 But I, you know, I call them on a daily basis because they're
13 dealing with the clients firsthand every day flying to the island.
14 So I, at one point, pretty much had Pete on speed dial.

15 Q. Is Pete your flight follower?

16 A. Yeah, he's one of my main guys over at Queensway for flight
17 following.

18 MR. SALAZAR: Okay. I think that's all the questions I have.
19 Thank you.

20 DR. SEVILLIAN: All right, thank you. Sathya?

21 BY DR. SILVA:

22 Q. Okay. So just to follow on that. We've heard Queensway
23 quite a bit. What does that mean?

24 A. Okay. Queensway, if you're familiar with the Long Beach
25 area, there's the Queen Mary at one of our other hubs, and our

1 actual street name is Queensway. So that's why we call it
2 Queensway. Our lease holder there is the Queen Mary, and so --

3 Q. Okay.

4 A. -- it's our Queensway operation.

5 Q. So you have a certain number of employees out in that
6 facility?

7 A. I do. I have reservations in that facility. They're
8 actually going to be moving over here sometime. And then I have
9 my ground crew over there.

10 Q. Okay. How many people does that -- actually, does everyone
11 in the company report to you, aside from the president?

12 A. I would say so, in a sense, yes.

13 Q. Okay. So how many flight followers do you have?

14 A. I have what I call as my -- they're running the desk.

15 Q. Okay.

16 A. And they're usually the ones flight following. So every day
17 there is an assigned flight follower.

18 Q. Okay.

19 A. And it would either be Angel or Pete.

20 Q. Okay. What about reservation people?

21 A. Reservations pretty much sit in the back and they don't even
22 know how to flight follow. All they know how to do is answer
23 phones and take reservations, to be honest.

24 Q. How many people do you have doing that?

25 A. Five.

1 Q. How many operations do you guys do? Whether it's per month
2 or per week, can you give me an estimate how many flights are you
3 doing?

4 A. I'm not sure what you're asking.

5 Q. So for essentially any type of mission that you're contracted
6 to do, do you have a number? I'm not trying to get a feel for how
7 many --

8 A. How much we fly?

9 Q. Yeah, exactly.

10 A. Is that kind of what you're asking? Okay. To give you kind
11 of a glimpse of Island Express, we have contracts with the oil
12 rigs off the shore so we're doing flights for them probably two
13 times a week, I would say right now, and we do like a morning
14 flight for them, afternoon flight, and that's specific to an
15 AStar. And then we do, on a summer day, 12 roundtrips back and
16 forth to the island.

17 Q. Okay.

18 A. And Catalina Island, if you're familiar with it, it's, what,
19 27 miles off shore, I believe.

20 Q. Okay.

21 A. So that's 12 roundtrips. And a roundtrip is going from
22 Queensway to Pebbly Beach, Pebbly Beach to Queensway. So that's
23 one roundtrip. And then obviously our charters on top of it, and
24 those can be anywhere in Southern California. They're all
25 different.

1 Q. Okay. How often would you get charters come in?

2 A. Last year we probably had a charter once a day.

3 Q. Okay. So specific to the mission that the accident pilot --
4 or the accident flight was on, is that a normal route for you
5 guys?

6 A. Yes. I did check. He did that route 10 times last year
7 alone with that one client.

8 Q. Do you know how long you've had that route mission profile?

9 A. It's -- you know, since the client took over that facility
10 it's probably been once a month.

11 Q. Okay.

12 A. So it was a very normal route for him and Ara specifically,
13 yes.

14 Q. So he started flying him probably about a year ago, is
15 that --

16 A. No, he's been flying to Camarillo for -- we've been doing
17 Camarillo flights since we've taken it over, probably --

18 Q. Right, but -- okay.

19 A. -- in 2011. It's a very familiar airport.

20 Q. Familiar airport but with this client?

21 A. Santa Barbara area, Oxnard is all familiar to him.

22 Q. So specifically with this client, though, it's been about a
23 year or -- since he's been --

24 A. Maybe 2 years for Camarillo.

25 Q. Okay. So you actually -- you described this a bit in terms

1 of when you get a flight or when you get a request. Can you run
2 through in as much detail as you can, you get a request, what
3 process do you go through from a call comes in to the helicopter
4 takes off? What does that look like for you?

5 A. So for me it would be the client wants to go from -- we can
6 use the accident, for instance -- SNA to Camarillo, and they want
7 to go on the 26th of January, and I'll give you names and weights
8 later. That's a very common thing for clients to do is I'll
9 provide you names and weights later. You know, in this case they
10 requested the Sikorsky, which I always knew it was going to be the
11 Sikorsky anyways with Kobe. And so I check the pilot's schedule,
12 see what pilot was scheduled for the day, and if it was Ara it was
13 automatically put into the schedule if the aircraft was free and,
14 you know, I would schedule it in.

15 I would make the reservation, and with Kobe in general, I
16 would be the one to usually make the reservations. So that
17 entails like opening the event, which means you're making the
18 charter in the reservation system. You're inputting the
19 reservation and then you put who is booking it. In this case, OC
20 Helicopters is booking it, and Patti was booking it and it's for
21 Kobe Bryant. And then she'll oftentimes text me or call me with
22 the names and weights of all the passengers a couple days in
23 advance. In this case, she had texted me 2 days in advance and I
24 input Saturday and Sunday because it was the same people back to
25 back. So that same group flew Saturday, as well. And then I

1 input the names and weights, and we always add 10 pounds onto the
2 weights that are provided, so I did that as standard. And as for
3 my doing, that's completely done with reservation.

4 And how All Pro works is, you know, the manifest can be made
5 off of my reservation. So I would close that out and then the
6 night before, like Saturday night, I had texted Ara the names and
7 weights and I said can you please check to make sure I input them
8 because I didn't know if I had done it for just Saturday or
9 Sunday, and he said all taken care of, don't worry about it. And
10 I had already input Sunday, in that case. So, you know, for me my
11 job is kind of done at that point.

12 For Kobe, we would always do a texting stream between the
13 drivers, the pilot, me and OC Helicopters because Kobe's people
14 always wanted to be informed on where he was at. So, you know,
15 the texts came out as normal, you know, we're going from SNA to
16 Camarillo at -- planning 9 o'clock departure, names and weights
17 are previously provided. And then Ara would -- sorry -- when Ara
18 got to SNA, he said aircraft at SNA standing by. And then Ric
19 from OC Helicopters, he said I'll be there in 30 minutes, and he
20 just happened to arrive when the clients got there, as well, and
21 he helped load them into the aircraft. And, you know, that's very
22 standard because Ric gets training by Ara, and I'm sure Garret, on
23 how to properly latch the doors and shut the doors and he is a
24 pilot himself. So it's not something that he would think about.
25 And then Ric texted that, you know, he's lifting off, and it's

1 just kind of our form of communication on top of it.

2 So he -- it was taking off just like normal. In normal cases
3 when Ara lands at the location, he would text "landed," and then
4 the driver would always text "passengers on board," and then he
5 would text again when the passengers were at the location, and
6 then -- it was just our form of communication between the whole
7 group.

8 In this case, he was late and then when I look at the
9 tracker, because, you know, he had taken off on time, I saw that
10 he was circling. So I screenshot that to Patti before I had
11 looked farther on. And I said this is probably why he's late, it
12 looks like he got held up in space or Kobe wanted to look at
13 something over there, which wasn't uncommon. And I went down the
14 tracker and saw that he was starting to turn left. And then I
15 called Angel to see if he could get Ara over the radio to see
16 where he was going, and he dropped off the tracker.

17 Q. Do you want to take a minute?

18 A. No, I'm good. I'm good.

19 Q. Do you --

20 A. But that's normally how charters work.

21 Q. So do you remember with the accident flight how -- when that
22 reservation was made, how much lead time did you guys have?

23 A. We -- I had known about the 26th for probably a couple weeks.

24 Q. Okay.

25 A. Because oftentimes I would get sent flights months in advance

1 of like a whole month's worth of events for that specific client.

2 Q. Okay. Do you know why they always requested Ara?

3 A. Kobe was very particular on who flew him. He's very
4 particular on who drove him. I can't tell you how many drivers
5 I've seen been fired, like drivers on the ground, because his wife
6 didn't like them. And it was just because she just didn't like
7 them, that's why they would get fired, because they said something
8 wrong or something and they would be fired just like that.

9 Ara had been flying Kobe for years and, you know, it was more
10 -- it had turned into like a friendship at that where he would
11 call him "Mr. Pilot Man." He probably -- Ara is probably the only
12 one he knew his name. I don't think even knew Garret's name.

13 MR. DALTON: He doesn't know my name. I've been flying him
14 since 2009 and he doesn't know my name. Or at least if he does,
15 he never said it.

16 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Since when?

17 MR. DALTON: 2009.

18 MS. BAGGE: But he -- you know, Vanessa loved Ara, and Kobe
19 would even have Ara fly his girls by themselves. That's how much
20 he trusted a pilot to just take his daughter to a basketball game
21 and I'll be there in 10 minutes. You know, so --

22 BY DR. SILVA:

23 Q. Was there a reason why he preferred the Sikorsky over the
24 AStar, that you know of?

25 A. Yeah.

1 Q. Okay.

2 A. I do know that. Because in a Sikorsky he's -- well, in an
3 AStar it's cramped.

4 Q. Okay.

5 A. He's very tall and in a Sikorsky he fits. He -- you know,
6 yeah. Not a very uncommon request either.

7 Q. You mentioned the flight was scheduled to take off at 9. Do
8 you recall when they actually launched?

9 A. I believe 9:06.

10 Q. Was there any change to that schedule or was it always
11 9 a.m.?

12 A. There was actually a couple times it had changed. It went
13 from 8 o'clock to 8:30 to 9:45 to 9 o'clock. But Kobe was the
14 type of client you -- you know, we always scheduled the pilot and
15 aircraft to be there 30 minutes before he was supposed to be
16 there, but it wasn't uncommon you were like waiting for almost 2
17 hours for him to get there.

18 Q. Okay.

19 A. So it was kind of his time. So I could never back a charter
20 into his flights ever.

21 Q. Okay. So for this case, do you recall when the flight got
22 moved up? You said it was 9:45 and then ended up at 9?

23 A. When she sent me the final passenger list, which was -- I
24 don't remember. It was probably at least a couple days in
25 advance. But it was like a small adjustment in time.

1 Q. Were you aware of whether the customer had to be at Camarillo
2 at a certain time?

3 A. No.

4 Q. Is that information ever passed on to you?

5 A. (No audible response.)

6 Q. So do people just request the departure time?

7 A. Um-hum. It's usually those people that say -- well, I never
8 talked to his people. It's usually OC Helicopters that would say
9 oh, they're saying, you know, let's leave at this time.

10 Q. Okay.

11 A. But like I said, oftentimes Kobe would, more than 99 percent
12 of the time, be late.

13 Q. Okay. So were there any times where you would get any type
14 of feedback on what -- any feedback on when they had to be at a
15 certain place? Any customer?

16 A. Like any customer?

17 Q. Yeah.

18 A. Oh, yeah.

19 Q. Okay.

20 A. I mean, that's very common where I have to be there at -- I
21 mean, if we're scheduling a driver for them as well, they say I
22 have to be there at 9:30, and then so we have to take into
23 consideration driving time and traffic with the driver. And
24 oftentimes we'll ask a driver well, how long is it going to take
25 you to get from LAX to wherever they need to go? And they'll say

1 it's going to take this much time, and then we factor in how much
2 flight time it's supposed to take and then we add usually 20
3 minutes onto it.

4 Q. Okay.

5 A. So that's the departure time usually.

6 Q. But with this client you never -- that's not something that
7 was normal for you?

8 A. I don't schedule his drivers at all. So for us it's a --
9 he'd like to depart at this time so we'll have an arrival time of,
10 I don't know, 8:30.

11 DR. SILVA: Okay. I think that's all I have. Thank you.

12 DR. SEVILLIAN: Thank you, Sathya. Let's go to Matt.

13 MR. RIGSBY: Yeah, just a couple.

14 BY MR. RIGSBY:

15 Q. How long have you been with Island Express?

16 A. Since 2012, beginning of 2012.

17 Q. Has a client ever expressed any concerns to you as far as any
18 particular pilots or feeling unsafe or did something they didn't
19 like?

20 A. No.

21 Q. Okay. Do you know did -- Kobe Bryant said I want to --
22 sitting up front, nobody -- do you always tell the clients no?

23 A. Well if a client wants to sit up front -- I mean, it depends
24 on the circumstance. Because when we fly the AStars all the time,
25 that's like -- we've even thought about charging more for sitting

1 up front. I mean, it's kind of a luxury to sit up front. I think
2 maybe I can think of two occasions where Kobe's ever sat up front,
3 and once was when his girls were in the back and he had been with
4 them all day. So he sat up front with Ara and, you know --

5 Q. Sure.

6 A. -- that's when he really like -- Ara was so excited to tell
7 me about their conversation, where he's like ah, and then he'd
8 look and he's like I'd never be able to do this. You know, it's
9 not uncommon for clients to sit up front.

10 Q. Okay. Have pilots ever asked you if it's okay to take a
11 flight?

12 A. They have. I mean, but the answer is no.

13 Q. Do you know who has operational control for the company?

14 A. Garret.

15 MR. RIGSBY: I don't have any more.

16 DR. SEVILLIAN: Thanks, Matt.

17 Okay, Garret, you're up.

18 MR. DALTON: I don't have any questions.

19 DR. SEVILLIAN: Okay. Then we'll go one more round here.

20 BY DR. SEVILLIAN:

21 Q. You mentioned that the flights -- there was a previous flight
22 the previous day, same route, et cetera. Do you have a sense of
23 where Kobe was going as far as was -- what his destination, his
24 final destination, where was he trying to go that day?

25 A. Yeah, he was going to Camarillo to go to the training

1 facility, his training facility with the girls.

2 Q. Okay.

3 A. So they were headed to Camarillo.

4 Q. And that's usually -- is that usually communicated through
5 you often or others as well in the company?

6 A. That's usually something that I just keep with me. It's --
7 the only thing the company would know is that he was going to
8 Camarillo. That's -- you know, we do have an NDA with them, so
9 that's something if my staff doesn't need to know, it's not like
10 I'm going to tell them hey, they're going to the training facility
11 with the girls.

12 DR. SEVILLIAN: That's all the questions I have for right
13 now. Fabian?

14 MR. SALAZAR: Just one.

15 BY MR. SALAZAR:

16 Q. I heard you mention the name Patti. Who is Patti?

17 A. Patti is Ric's wife. Ric Webb's wife. And she deals
18 firsthand a lot of what I do, like, with the client face on.

19 Q. OC Helicopter is the broker, right?

20 A. Yes.

21 MR. SALAZAR: That's it. Thank you.

22 DR. SEVILLIAN: Okay, thank you. Sathya?

23 BY DR. SILVA:

24 Q. You mentioned with Matt that pilots have asked you if it was
25 okay to take a flight. Can you give me an example of that?

1 A. We've had requests for pilots come in and say, hey, he flies
2 Sikorsky, I want to get some Sikorsky time, can I just sit up
3 front as second in command?

4 Q. I see.

5 A. That's a very, very common request for our company, and, you
6 know, the answer is no. It's -- unless you're a hired employee,
7 you can't sit up front and we're not training you because, you
8 know, we just don't do that.

9 Q. Okay. I apologize if you've already gone through this, but
10 can you run through your background and how you got to where you
11 are?

12 A. Well, I graduated nursing school in 2011 with my bachelor's
13 in nursing. My husband is a pilot. We used to run a flight
14 school together called Vegas Air Service up in Vegas. And you
15 know, I did -- that was so much simpler. God, what I would do to
16 get that back. He -- you know, he handled all the students,
17 obviously. He handled all the flight staff and then I just did
18 the books. It was so much easier.

19 When I graduated nursing school, his dad and Phil, the
20 partners for Island Express Holding, wanted to venture into a
21 helicopter company. So the options were a 135 company that was up
22 in Vegas that was about to go under or down here. And so they
23 chose to do down here, and so me and my husband kind of got pushed
24 into this. And, you know, Josh was a pilot so it was going to be
25 a given that he was going to be flying and learning the ropes and

1 slowly getting into it.

2 Somebody else was supposed to be doing my job and I was
3 pregnant. Had my daughter December 2011, and we had purchased the
4 company in November of 2011. And Josh was coming here every day;
5 I was at home with the baby, and I was supposed to be staying at
6 home with the baby. But Jim called me and said I need you to come
7 work for Island, and I didn't want to because I was supposed to be
8 that stay-at-home mom, you know, and I just had a baby. And he
9 was like, well, when can you come work because the other girl is
10 not working out and she's quitting because it's too much for her.
11 So I started bringing my daughter to work with me every day at 2
12 months old.

13 And this is where, you know, obviously for the first year or
14 two we had a different director of operations, which was the old
15 owner. We got to learn the operations, and once John was pretty
16 much out of the picture, I was able to start changing it. You
17 know, I've changed this company from ground up. They used to do
18 reservations on pen and paper. You know, we did reservations -- I
19 changed it to being online to do -- you know, to be able to have
20 it more efficient. I made this company more efficient. I made
21 this company -- you know, we added larger aircrafts. We started
22 doing more than just the island flights. I mean, we always had
23 the oil rigs. That was kind of a given because, you know, the oil
24 -- it was easy for the oil rigs to use us.

25 As time went, I just learned more about the operation and I

1 got better at helping everyone else be better at their jobs. You
2 know, we moved reservations from off the island so I could handle
3 reservations more. And fast forward, and here we are today.

4 Q. When did you become VP?

5 A. I became VP probably a year after I had started. I
6 originally started out as the office manager.

7 Q. Okay.

8 A. But it got to a point where I was handling so much of the
9 daily work that office manager wasn't an appropriate title for me.
10 All the staff was very confused on -- you know, we're new owners.
11 They were very confused on what I was even supposed to be doing
12 because I'm barking orders at them, telling them how to do stuff
13 differently and, you know, it was the whole process of giving me
14 seniority over the staff. Obviously, they've always respected me,
15 but I feel like when I got the title it was known to the world
16 that I wasn't just the office manager and trying to make
17 decisions. It was more executive decisions on top of it.

18 DR. SILVA: That's all the questions I have. Thanks.

19 DR. SEVILLIAN: Thanks, Sathya. Matt?

20 MR. RIGSBY: Just a couple.

21 BY MR. RIGSBY:

22 Q. The training facility you mentioned, is there a helipad at
23 the training facility?

24 A. The training facility?

25 Q. The -- in Camarillo, where they were going? Their

1 destination, where they (indiscernible) --

2 A. Oh no, no, no. There's not. That's why we would go to
3 Camarillo.

4 Q. Okay.

5 A. Because when they first -- when we first started flying there
6 they were trying to get us to find a spot that's super close to
7 the training facility, and -- I don't remember what it's called.
8 They call it like the Kobe Bryant something facility. But the
9 closest airport was Camarillo. So I didn't -- you know, if we
10 were going to be doing it often, I didn't want to try and find a
11 spot that we could just land at. I wanted it to remain an
12 airport.

13 Q. Okay. Part of your job, do you hire -- are you involved in
14 the hiring process of pilots?

15 A. I am.

16 Q. Okay. Who has ultimate say on hiring the pilots?

17 A. It's kind of a mutual decision, I would say, to where, you
18 know, we all have to be in agreeance on it, otherwise it's a no.

19 MR. RIGSBY: That's it.

20 DR. SEVILLIAN: Thanks, Matt. Garret?

21 MR. DALTON: I have nothing.

22 DR. SEVILLIAN: All right. That concludes our interview.

23 Oh, Sathya, follow-up?

24 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Whitney's getting a third round.

25 MS. BAGGE: Oh no. No, that's okay. I probably know the

1 most of the ins and outs besides the operations side. So --

2 BY DR. SILVA:

3 Q. Yeah. No, you just mentioned that you all have to be in
4 agreement for pilot hiring. Who is you -- who has to be in
5 agreement?

6 A. Director of operations, which would be Garret; Ara, which was
7 chief pilot; my husband is involved, as well, as the safety
8 officer. I'm usually in the interview process. If -- generally
9 us four are the ones that make the decision. And if we kind of
10 want someone else's input, we'll ask Phil at that point.

11 DR. SILVA: Okay. Got it, thank you.

12 DR. SEVILLIAN: Thanks, Sathya.

13 So that concludes our interview. Is there anything that we
14 should have asked you that we didn't ask you?

15 MS. BAGGE: I don't think so.

16 DR. SEVILLIAN: Okay. Any other, any other employees that
17 you think we should speak with?

18 MS. BAGGE: No, not that you already don't have on your list.

19 DR. SEVILLIAN: Okay. Well, thank you. That concludes our
20 interview.

21 Off the record.

22 DR. SILVA: Off the record at 3:48 p.m.

23 (Whereupon, at 3:48 p.m., the interview was concluded.)

24

25

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

IN THE MATTER OF: SIKORSKY S76B HELICOPTER N72EX
 CRASH NEAR CALABASAS, CALIFORNIA,
 ON JANUARY 26, 2020
 Interview of Whitney Bagge

ACCIDENT NO.: DCA20MA059

PLACE: Long Beach, California

DATE: January 30, 2020

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.



Christy Behlke
Transcriber