

## THE CROSSING Chapter 5

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Transcript of interviews with children on the bus,  
state trooper Don Girnt  
and other law enforcement officials.

Who conducted the interviews is unclear.

- A. He was standing up crying and he had his arm broke and a piece of glass came through there and cut his head, so my brothers told me.
- Q. Were you going over by the Hembry boy?
- A. I was sitting on this side, and my brother sat on that side by the Hembry boy.
- Q. How old is Gary?
- A. Eight
- Q. Do we have Johnny on that list?
- A. Yes sir, we do. We have him as age nine.
- Q. Do you know, Johnny, whether or not the bus stopped?.....before it started to cross the tracks?
- A. I don't know, I forgot.
- Q. Did anybody talk to you about it?
- A. Yea, my brothers said he stopped. Benny said he didn't.
- Q. You don't remember yourself? You remember whether or not he opened the door?
- A. All I remember is when I was trying to get out.....
- Q. What's your name now?
- A. Gary Munsen, eight years old.
- Q. Were you on the bus the time the train hit it?....By nodding your head you mean you were? Tell me the way it happened, the way you remembered it. What did the bus do when it came up to the railroad tracks?
- A. He went right on ahead and didn't stop.
- Q. Did he open the door? Where were you sitting in the back? On the same side <sup>as</sup> ~~of~~ the driver or the other side?
- A. First side, not back of him.
- Q. Not back of the driver. And who was sitting by you?
- A. Jerry Hembry.
- Q. And the bus didn't stop....you are shaking your head "no"...Hm..Answer me yes or no, did the bus stop or not?
- A. No.
- Q. Did he slow down for the railroad tracks?
- A. Yes.
- Q. Did you see the train at all before it hit the bus?
- A. No.
- Q. Did you see any light or anything like that?....you didn't.
- Q. Have you been riding on that bus each day since school started?
- A. Yes.
- Q. Did the bus driver very often stop at the railroad tracks...did he always stop or did sometimes he not stop?

A. He always did stop but that morning.

Q. This was the only time he didn't stop? How come you remember he didn't stop that morning?

Q. You don't know, hm? What's the first thing that you remember after the bus was hit by the train? Where were you?

A. I was on the road walking.

Q. You got thrown out of the bus, didn't you? And you started over towards a farm house to get help or something?

A. Uh...huh.

Q. Do you remember whether you were thrown out the door or the back end of the bus?...all you remember is you were walking on the road after the train hit the bus?

A. I first was walking up on the railroad tracks, then I cut through the weeds to the road.

Q. Do you remember being down on the ground outside the bus? So you don't know whether you lit on your feet or your head or where you lit, do you?...but you're sure the bus did not stop? Did you hear anybody yell anything, like "here comes a train" or anything on the bus?

A. They just hollered out loud.

Q. What did they holler? Did you hear the word "train" mentioned at all?

A. No. I hear them scream.

Q. Was it the children in the back end of the bus that screamed or all the children?

A. All the children.

Q. You didn't pay any attention to whether he opened the door or not? Were you sitting next to the window, Gary, or was Jerry sitting next to the window?

A. I was sitting next to the window.

Q. Jerry was sitting next to the aisle then. You didn't see the train at all?

A. No. I just heard the whistle.

Q. You heard the whistle. Was that quite a little while before the train hit the bus...or was it just right before it hit.

A. Right before it hit it.

Q. Did the bus driver stop at the crossing before this crossing that you were hit?

A. No.

Q. He went on through that other crossing without stopping?

A. Yea. What do you mean? the other one?

Q. The other crossing before you got to this one where you were hit by the train...about a half mile up the road? Remember going across that crossing? Did the bus driver stop there?

A. Yea.

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Q. Which one are you?

A. Nancy.

Q. How old are you? (answer not understandable)

- Q. You were in this bus, were you not, when it was hit? Do you remember what happened as the bus approached the railroad tracks?
- A. No, I wasn't looking.
- Q. Do you remember from what you observed or from the feel of the bus whether it stopped or whether it didn't stop.
- A. I thought it stopped.
- Q. But you were busy with your arithmetic so you really don't know one way or the other, is that correct?
- A. Yes.
- Q. You were injured pretty severely, were you not?
- A. Yes.
- Q. You're the one that had the cast? Just got it off today?
- A. Yes.
- Q. Do you remember Nancy if the driver opened the door as he approached the tracks?
- A. No.
- Q. Did you hear the train before the crash?
- A. No.
- Q. Did you see any light or anything of that kind?
- A. No.
- Q. Where were you sitting on the bus?
- A. In the second seat from the front.
- Q. The driver's side or the other side?
- A. Driver's side.
- Q. Were the children making quite a little noise on the bus that morning, or normal, or what was it?
- A. about normal.
- Q. Usually with that many children there is quite a little noise.
- A. Yes.
- Q. Is there anything else you might remember about immediately before or after?
- A. No.
- Q. After the crash, where were you the first time you remember anything.
- A. On the south side of the tracks.
- Q. Out on the ground?
- A. No, the north side of the tracks, out on the ground.
- Q. Do you remember ever seeing the train after the crash...so far as you know you were unconscious for a little while...and when you came to you were on the ground. (answer not understandable)
- Q. As far as knowing anything about it, you don't know whether the bus stopped, or didn't stop, or really just what did happen.
- A. no.

Q. Do~~x~~ you remember who was sitting in the seat with you?

A. Sheryl was.

.....

Q. Your name is Sheryl Brown?

A. Yes.

Q. How old are you Sheryl?

A. Thirteen.

Q. Suppose you tell us just what you remember about it.

A. Well, not much of anything,.....before or after?

Q. Either one.

A. Before the train hit I heard a bunch of kids screaming. I remember that. That's all I remember before the train hit.

Q. Do you remember whether the bus driver ever stopped before he crossed the track or not?

A. No, I was studying.

Q. So you couldn't say if he did or didn't?

A. No.

Q. Same true about opening the door is concerned, you don't know whether he did or didn't.

A. I don't.

Q. Did you hear the whistle on the train?

A. No.

Q. You didn't see the light of course, because you were studying...Do you remember whether the bus driver usually stops at the railroad tracks or not?

A. Well, most the time he did.

Q. Do you remember some of the times he didn't?

A. No.

Q. Was it your general practice to be studying or doing something like that rather than paying attention to what the bus driver was doing?

A. No, that day I had a test due, so I was studying for it.

Q. Do you remember anything that would be of particular significance either before or afterwards regarding the accident? Where were you when you first remembered anything?

A. I was laying out in the middle of the road.

Q. Were you unconscious for any period of time.

A. Yea, I was unconscious for a little bit and then when I came to the conductor was standing in front of me and he laid his coat over me.

Q. Were you hurt seriously?

A. Yea, my back was hurt.

Q. Did you notice any particular noise on the bus before the accident...were the children any different from what they normally are.?

- Q. Well, when the train hit I heard the screams.
- Q. Before that time, did you hear anyone call out anything about a train, or anything before it hit?
- A. No.
- Q. Did you by any chance happen to be looking out the windows at anytime after you boarded the bus....did you see from the inside of the bus, outside?
- A. No, you couldn't see.
- Q. The windows were pretty frosted up? That was all the way?
- A. Right at the top~~xx~~ there was that much.
- Q. Just an inch or two of clear space at the top? The rest was frosted over.
- A. Yea.
- Q. Was it actually frost, or just steamed?
- A. Frost.
- Q. You ~~xxxx~~ couldn't see out the windows at all?
- A. No.
- Q. Did you notice whether or not you could see out the door and the other side by the driver?
- A. No.
- Q. You don't know whether you could or couldn't.
- A. No I don't.
- Q. I think the defroster operates on the windshield and~~xxx~~ those two front windows by the driver. But you didn't notice one way or the other.

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10:30 A.M. Sgt. Robison, the bus sitting on the right hand side of the road, 32 feet from the rail, sitting in the driver's seat and looking back through the mirror, I can see the feet of the officer that walked up the track. He is standing between the rails. I can/<sup>see</sup>his feet about half way to his knees. See nothing beyond that point. The distance 96 steps which we will measure later for foot accuracy. See that through the third window back from the front on the right side.

What portion of the window are you looking through?

That is the extreme top of the window that I can see it through.

Approximately how many inches.

Be the first inch or two.

Can you see the track through any other window?

I can see the track through the rear view mirror through the first, second and third windows back.

Can you see it through the fourth window?

If I duck clear down in the seat I can see the edge of the ties through the fourth window down, but none of the rail.

Officer Don Girnt, March 16, 1962, 10:20 A.M., The bus came from Baxter's house and started in second gear and the high range was driven to 32 feet from the track in third gear and high range ~~to~~ 42 seconds from Baxter's house to the 32 feet from the first rail.

(Officer Don Girnt)

I can see the track in the third window down and begins to fade in to just the ends of the ties. By scooting way down I can see the officers legs about half-way up to his knees by scooting way down in the seat and looking in the corner of the mirror. The officer is standing 96 steps from the intersection down on the track between the rail.

We have moved the bus to the center of the road, 32 feet from the first rail, by scooting way down in the seat and looking through the extreme bottom edge of the mirror, we had Officer Warner move down on the track, I can see from Officer Warner's knees to his ankles through the extreme top of the third window on the right hand side of the bus by looking at the extreme bottom of the mirror. This is the farthest point down the track that I can see from this center mirror on this bus. From the two side mirrors we cannot see the track at all.

Are you able to see the signal box through this mirror?

No, sir, I can not.

Are you able to see any poles along the right?

No, sir, I can't. I can see nothing but just the track and ~~the~~ I can see some fence posts in the second window, but the fence posts in the second window, that's the end of it, I can't see any farther than that.

10:40 A.M., March 16, 1962, sitting in the center of the road, 32 feet from the rail looking through the rear view mirror from the driver's seat, I can see the feet, lower part of the leg and Officer Warner standing up the track. See it through the third window back from the front on the right hand side. Can't see any of the rail through the fourth window back. Can see the rail through the first one, second, and third ~~xxxx~~ window.

Are you able to see the signal box or any poles?

No, there's no signal box or any poles in the vision.

Are you able to see the railroad track to the right through any of the other mirrors on this bus?

No.

Sitting in a normal position, looking in the rear view mirror, I can see approximately 200 feet of the track.

Through what window are you looking?

That is through the second window back from the door~~x~~

What is the last window you can see any of the track?

The second window sitting in a normal position.

Now, by scooting down a little, can you see any of the track through the third window?

Yes, I can see some of the track, by sliding down in the seat, I can see through the third window.

Are you able to see the signal box or any poles through any window?

No.

Now looking at the other two mirrors on this bus are you able to see any of the track through any of the other mirrors that this bus is equipped with?

Looking in the right hand mirror, I can see the road only. Looking in the left hand mirror in this position you see very little of the road. It's mostly the field that adjoins the road.

From this position, not using the mirrors, how far do you have to turn around to look down this railroad track?

You have to turn quite severely to the right, turn clear around in your seat, then I can see the track looking through the fourth window back and part of the fifth window.

Are you looking through the upper part of the window?

The upper part for the more distant vision as for the track closer, you look through the bottom part of the window.

About how far down the track are you able to see through the top two inches of the window?

Of the lower window?

No, the top two inches of the top of the window. Are you able to see track or a possible train looking through approximately the top two inches of any of the windows?

I would say that you've got plain vision through the windows that you could see as far as you could as if you were standing outside.

~~Offex~~

Officer Girnt--Time 10:52 A.M., by moving the bus to 32 feet from the first rail to the extreme south side of the road, by hunching down in the seat and looking through the extreme right hand corner, lower right hand corner of the mirror, you can see the full length of track clear down to where it goes out of sight. You can see the signal box and the railroad whistle post along the track.

Do the poles obstruct your view in any way?

No, they do not.

Does the whistle box obstruct any of the track particularly?

Just a small section is all, you can see the track on the east side of it and you can see the track on the west side of it.

The measurements back to the first position of the bus to where you can see the feet of the other officer, 290 feet. The measurement back to the second position, 70½ feet further.

With the bus on the extreme left of the road, it took 7 seconds to clear the railroad track, starting out in second gear and the high range. Starting the bus in second gear in high range, 32 feet from the nearest rail in the middle of the road, it took 7.2 seconds. Starting in second gear and high range on the right side of the road, 32 feet from the rail, it took 8 seconds to clear. Bringing the bus up in third gear, high range, slowing down to 5 miles an hour, at the 32 point from the nearest rail, from the center of the road, it took 8 seconds to clear.

John, will you state what you see through the mirror from this present position.

In the normal position looking through the mirror, I can see approximately 300 feet of the track. That is looking through the third window on the right hand side of the bus.

Do you see any of the track back through any of the other windows, past the third window?

No.

We're in the position here where we started out at the Baxter house and drove up to the track 32 feet, and we're on the right side of the road, is that correct?

Yes.

Do you see the tracks from any of the other mirrors on this bus?

In the right hand mirror, you can see approximately half of the road. In the normal position, left hand mirror, you see just a part of the left hand side of the road.

Are there any obstructions to seeing what part of the tracks you can see through the mirror?



There are none.

What part of the window are looking out of?

Top part of the window.

How many inches down?

At the far extremity of the third window, it's approximately two inches down from the top of the window.

Officer Don Girnt, March 16, 1962, 12:12 P.M., We started from the Baxter house, came from the Baxter house to 32 feet from the crossing where bus was stopped on the right hand side of the road. It took 37 seconds from the Baxter house to where the bus in now stopped. On looking in the mirror, by hunching down and looking out through that fourth window back, I can see the bottom part of the signal. By hunching down and looking out the bottom of this mirror in the third window, I can see Officer Warner standing in the middle of the track. I can see all but his head. I'm looking through the extreme top part of the windows about two inches from the top of the molding, the extreme bottom edge of the mirror. I can see nothing from the two side mirrors in relationship to the track, all they show is the road. There is no obstructions except the post between the third and fourth window on the track that does block part of your track out.

TAPE NO. 2

Sgt. Robison, time 12:25 P.M., March 16th, sitting in the school bus parked to the right hand or north edge of the roadway, 32 feet back from the rail, looking in the rear view mirror, sitting in a normal position, I can see the feet and legs of the officers standing at the track. By scooting down, looking through the lower right hand corner of the mirror, through the third window back, I can see the signal boxes and quite a ways beyond through that vision.

What window are you looking through in the normal position?

In the normal position, it's through the fourth window back from the front.

What part of the window, as to the top or bottom?

It's the top two or three inches.

Sitting in a normal position and looking through the third window on the right hand side of the bus, I can see beyond the signal lights. Can see approximately the entire body of the officer standing on the tracks.

What part of the window are you looking through?

The top three or four inches.

Are you able to see the officer or any part of the tracks through any other mirror on this bus?

No.

Are there any obstructions of what part of the track you are able to see?

There are no obstructions.

What is the furthestest window back that you can see any part of the tracks?

The third window.

Officer Don Girnt, 12:37 P.M., Bus in now sitting approximately 15 feet from the track from the center of the road. By sitting in a normal position, I can see the bottom of the signal on the north side of the track ~~and~~ at the top of the third window, top two inches of the third window the signal is visible. By hunching over, I can see all the way down the track at the extreme bottom of the mirror and the extreme top two inches of the third window. There isn't any obstructions outside of the window post between the second and third window. This blocks a short area of the track.

Which window are you looking through?

I'm looking through the top of the third window.

Starting off in second gear, high side of the axle, 15 feet from the track, it took 5 seconds to the point of impact on the bus.

Going across the track in second gear in high range, 32 feet on the right side, it took 6 seconds.

Going across the track on the center, 32 feet from the first rail, second gear, high range, it took 5 seconds.

In second, low range, 32 feet from the rail in the middle of the road, it took 4 and  $\frac{4}{5}$  seconds.

Going across in low gear, low range, in the middle of the road, 32 feet from the rail, it took 6 seconds.

To go across the tracks in second gear, low range, in the middle of the road, 15 feet from the first rail, it took 4 and  $\frac{4}{5}$  seconds.

Coming up to the crossing at 5 miles an hour, middle of the road, in third gear, high range, it took 5 and  $\frac{2}{5}$  seconds to cross, the point of impact.