



With No Warning: A Night Alone on the Mountainside

By Carol Lodi

I was working as an art director for a printing company in Bedford, Massachusetts on a catalog for a natural fibers company in New Hampshire. The owners and I were good friends and we had spent the week in Montreal shooting photographs of products for the new catalog. On that Friday night, we were all eager to get home. It was February 1, 1985, a cold and snowy night.

We were flying with a charter carrier because the company pilot had another assignment and wasn't able to fly us. I wasn't originally supposed to be on the flight, but my friend had convinced me to join them just hours before.

When we stopped to clear customs in Vermont, one of my friends was nervous about the snowy weather and ice on the wings. She was also uncomfortable flying with charter pilots she didn't know, but we were assured by the pilots that everything was fine. We took off for Whitefield where my friends would be dropped off and I would continue on to Bedford.

We were about to land at Whitefield. The last thing I remember is the co-pilot turning around to tell us that we made a "missed approach" and we would try again. Shortly after that, I felt what I thought was a bumpy landing, but it was the tops of trees. We crashed into the mountain at about 7:20 p.m. I was knocked unconscious while, as I learned later, all of the others were killed on impact. I awoke during the night and realized something had happened.



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Twenty Years After – Carol's expression of her experience through art. Every element represents a significant memory of that night.

WINGS

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Assisting those affected by aircraft accidents

Wings of Light, Inc. is a national nonprofit organization dedicated to assisting those touched by aircraft accidents. The most important goal of the organization is to bring people together through the existence of three support networks.

Survivor Support Network

The *Wings of Light* Survivor Support Network is a support group for those who have been involved in and lived through an aircraft accident. This group helps individuals understand the feelings and issues of surviving the accident and coping with the impact on their lives.

Family and Friends Support Network

The *Wings of Light* Family and Friends Support Network provides families and individuals with specialized support that addresses the unique issues surrounding aircraft fatalities.

Rescue/Response Personnel Support Network

The *Wings of Light* Rescue/Response Personnel Support Network brings together individuals involved in the rescue, recovery and investigative efforts. An often overlooked group, individuals in this network are given a forum for peer counseling and voicing concerns.

Other activities include the development of local chapters, the planning of a conference for network members, distribution of related informational materials and resource kit, and referral to qualified counseling professionals.

Wings of Light, Inc. is a 501c3 public charity; contributions are tax-deductible. If you are interested in more information or would like to make a contribution, contact: *Wings of Light, Inc.*, PMB 448, 16845 N. 29 Avenue, # 1, Phoenix, AZ 85053.

Accident Reports Available Online at www.nts.gov

The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) is an independent Federal agency that investigates all civil aviation accidents in the United States. The NTSB makes recommendations to prevent similar accidents from happening in the future and also conducts safety studies on a variety of transportation issues.

NTSB accident reports may be accessed online at: www.nts.gov

Select "Aviation" and then select "Accident Database & Synopsis."

To find information about a specific accident or a list of accidents within a

certain timeframe or in a certain location, select "Database Query" to access the online search form. It is recommended to select "general instructions" for more information before conducting your search.

Included in the database are "primary reports" and "final reports." The timeframe for completing, releasing and posting reports can vary depending upon a number of factors.

If you do not have personal access to the Internet and want to search the NTSB site for information, a local library may have a computer available for your use.

The Role of the Office of Transportation Disaster Assistance in General Aviation Accidents

By Sharon W. Bryson
National Transportation Safety Board

The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) is an independent Federal agency charged by Congress with investigating every civil aviation accident in the United States and significant accidents in other modes of transportation — railroad, highway, marine, and pipeline. The NTSB determines the probable cause of accidents and issues safety recommendations aimed at preventing future accidents. The NTSB operates independently from the Department of Transportation (DOT).

The Board is composed of five members who are nominated for five-year terms by the President and confirmed by the Senate. Two of the members are designated by the President to serve as Chairman and Vice-Chairman for two-year terms, with the Chairmanship requiring separate Senate confirmation. The Board's headquarters is in Washington, D.C., with regional offices in Anchorage, Atlanta, Chicago, Dallas-Fort Worth, Denver, Los Angeles, Miami, Parsippany, NJ, Seattle and Ashburn, VA.

The NTSB may send at least one investigator to an accident. He or she is the

"Investigator-in-Charge" (IIC) and is responsible for managing all aspects of the investigation, both on-scene and after. The IIC has sole discretion to designate parties who will participate in the investigation. Parties are those persons, government agencies, companies, and associations whose employees, functions, activities, or products were involved in the accident and who can provide suitable qualified technical personnel to assist in the investigation.

An investigation results in three main documents:

1. A preliminary report, typically completed about a week after the accident, contains information revealed after the on-scene portion of the investigation and provides a synopsis of the accident sequence. The information in this report may change as the investigation proceeds.
2. A factual report, which may take nine to 12 months, contains all confirmed factual information and other supporting documents gathered over the course of the investigation. Factual reports range in length from a few to

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A Special Thank You to the *Wings of Light Inc.* Board of Directors and the Support Network Volunteers for Their Time and Dedication

Nepenthe Resource Kits in Short Supply

Wings of Light has created a resource kit for grieving individuals and families called *Nepenthe*. This kit consists of various books and videos which focus on grief recovery and assist individuals through the grief process. It also includes information on *Wings of Light* resources and Volunteer Support Networks.

Nepenthe Resource Kits are provided through donations from individuals and organizations (**Nepenthe Sponsors**). The name of the **Nepenthe Sponsor** is included in that particular kit so the recipient will know who sponsored the kit for them.

“We are running very low on the supply of materials for the **Nepenthe Resource Kits**,” states Andrea Waas, *Wings of Light* president. “It has been a very busy year for *Wings of Light* and we continue to receive requests for

assistance from around the world, most recently the U.S., Canada, and Greece.”

If you are interested in sponsoring a **Nepenthe Resource Kit** for a specific individual or family, or would like to sponsor a kit to meet a future need, please complete the form below and send it to *Wings of Light* with your donation of \$150.

If you are unable to donate \$150 for a **Nepenthe Resource Kit**, a donation of any amount, when combined with the contributions of others, will assist us with continuing the services and support we provide to grieving families and those trying to recover from the trauma of surviving an air crash themselves.

Thank you for your generosity.

All Support Network Volunteers:

Please help us update your email address information.

If you are a support network volunteer, please send your name and current email address to: awaaswings@aol.com

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several hundred pages. If additional relevant factual material is developed after the release of the factual report, it will be added to the public docket.

3. An accident brief describing the probable cause of the accident will be released several weeks after the factual report. This report is a one to two-page document, supported by factual reports.

The NTSB is responsible for investigating every civil aviation accident in the United States and its territories. Each of the NTSB investigators works multiple accident investigations with the goal of producing highly accurate reports. Because each investigation is methodical and scientifically reviewed, determining the length of an investigation is difficult.

In a regional accident investigation, the IIC is the authorized spokesperson concerning the investigation. If the IIC is unable to brief family members because of his or her investigative duties, questions may be referred to the NTSB's Office of Transportation Disaster Assistance (TDA). Based in Washington, D.C., the TDA staff is composed of five individuals with responsibility to assist victims and their family members affected by transportation disasters. At some accident sites, a member of the TDA staff may be present on-scene.

If so, they will work with the IIC to provide factual information to family members. If there is no TDA staff member on-scene, they can be reached at 800-683-9369 or via email at assistance@ntsb.gov. The TDA staff can assist with providing updates on the investigation, coordination with the medical examiner/coroner, referral to the local Red Cross Chapter, and other types of supportive services.

The NTSB only releases verified factual information. Typically there is very little confirmed factual information during the on-scene portion of our investigation. Validated factual information may be released, in an appropriate context, at any time during an investigation. Family members may request a verbal briefing by the IIC or the TDA representative regarding the progress of the investigation at any time. The NTSB will not speculate about any aspect of an investigation or offer any analysis about the probable cause while on-scene. Determining the probable cause of the accident and generating safety recommendations to prevent similar accidents from reoccurring is a complex process, often requiring nine to 12 months of work following the on-scene investigation.

The Safety Board is committed to insuring that family members are provided accurate information about the accident throughout the investigative process. In addition, the TDA staff will work to insure families are linked to other critical support services during this most difficult time in their lives.

Sharon W. Bryson joined the National Transportation Safety Board in November of 1997. Prior to her current position, she served as the Director of the Family Support Center at Dover Air Force Base.

During her 15 years at Dover Air Force Base, Sharon was also responsible for the operation of the Family Assistance Center and the Critical Incident Stress Management program for the Dover Air Force Base Mortuary. While working for the Air Force, she assisted with numerous mass fatalities beginning in 1983. Her most recent work with the NTSB includes managing the family assistance response for the crash of Alaska Air Flight 261 and the crash of EgyptAir Flight 990. Sharon also worked the recovery and identification response for American Airlines Flight 77 at the Pentagon.

Charlie Schneider Provides Support

For years, Charlie Schneider, President of netHARBOR and other technology-related businesses, has provided ongoing support to *Wings of Light* by hosting our website free of charge. We would like to express our sincere thank you for his support. Without it, *Wings of Light* would not have been able to reach the hundreds of families needing our help.



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When I came to again in the morning I saw my friend next to me, peacefully sitting with his eyes closed and snowflakes on his eyelashes.

There had been no warning of the crash, no screaming or trauma at the site so I am free from flashbacks of the crash itself. My wrist was broken and I was badly bruised.

One of the reasons I may have survived is that there was no passenger in front of me. We were flying on a twin engine, eight-seat aircraft. My friends were facing each other and I was holding a drink so when I hit the seat in front of me I broke my wrist. If there had been another passenger across from me, I may have also died on impact. I woke in my seat with the plane split in half. I suspect that I was shielded from behind by the craft and I had on many layers of clothing so my body stayed warm in the 10 degree weather.

I climbed over the wing and started to walk down the mountain. I had been there all night with no one coming to rescue me. I felt like I was on my own. I remember being very drowsy and falling asleep on my feet. I also remember yelling for help.

After some time walking, I heard a helicopter and was spotted by the crew because of my red coat. It was such a relief to see the crew and know that I was not in charge of finding my own way out. I clearly remember the crew after they had wrapped me in blankets looking at me like they couldn't believe they had found someone alive.

Since I wasn't originally supposed to be on that flight, the flight log may have said only "four" onboard. As I was airlifted away, one of the rescue crew said "she's the fourth, we have them all." I spoke up and said I was the fifth. They went back to find the fifth person.

I was airlifted and brought to the hospital for treatment. A few years ago, I contacted one of the rescuers who told me that the rescue that morning was the reason he stayed in the Air Force.

I spoke to my husband from the hospital. He had been trying to track me down through the night, but got no information.

It was probably a good thing that he didn't know the plane had crashed.

My wrist was shattered and I spent more than five months in a cast. I was out of work for three months healing and trying to make sense of what had happened. I knew there would be changes in my life, but I ended up taking my whole life apart and examining it. I quit my job five months after the crash, moved to a new house within the year and started a business. Looking back it was important for me at 29 years old to keep moving, but it seems like a lot to tackle at once.

The legal aspect was especially difficult. I didn't want to sue my employer because they had been so good to me following the crash. It actually turned out that there was never a case against them anyway. The whole process took about three years and all of that time I spent in a precarious pose of "victim." I had gone back to work, started a business and never lost wages, but whenever the lawyer called I sort of felt myself retreat into those early days. It was such a relief when that was over. Also, having a monetary "reward" seemed beside the point, I was alive, what else mattered? It did create a lot of confusion for me though.

There was no blueprint for how to handle my experience and I couldn't find any help or support. A family doctor was concerned about survivor's guilt and could only recommend speaking with WWII survivors. I read a book by a stewardess who survived a crash and wrote to her, but never got a response.

I attended a few AA meetings with my friend and business partner. I could see the benefit of community support. Every morning early on in our business, we would make a pot of coffee and talk for an hour about what was going on in our lives which had changed profoundly. I had worked with him before his sobriety and we were different people this time around . . . and a great support to each other.

My husband had his own experiences. He had almost lost me and now became concerned when I was only a few minutes late arriving home. Every once in a while he'd say "I wonder what happened to that

guy." I'd ask what guy and he'd say "that guy that lost his wife in the crash." He meant himself if I had died. It was hard for him to watch me struggle and scary for what we almost lost.

He was recently unemployed for a long time and partially because of our lessons from the crash we were able to enjoy the time off together.

It has been 20 years since I spent the night on a mountainside and I have come to see the accident as just that . . . an accident. I took away a gratitude for my life that I would never have had if I had not been aboard that plane. I think of my friends and traveling companions and try to live life the way I would want them to if the situation were reversed. It is a dubious privilege to outlive your friends, but a privilege to survive.

There was a lot of interest in the crash so I had a chance to tell my story to many people which was therapeutic . . . but it wasn't enough.

Now when I read the accounts by other survivors in *Wings of Light*, I feel such relief to have others understand. Speaking with another survivor through *Wings of Light* was remarkable because we had so much in common. I am grateful for this organization and look forward to each newsletter. I certainly feel less alone than I did 20 years ago.

Carol Lodi, a commercial artist, was the sole survivor of a charter flight on February 1, 1985 in Whitefield, New Hampshire.

A Delicious New Way To Support Wings of Light!

What if every morning as you sipped your coffee you could be supporting the work of *Wings of Light*? Now you can!

Just log on to the Cup of Care website at:

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So give yourself a delicious treat and help *Wings of Light* help those in needs.

