



Rescued By Coast Guard

By Dale Sherman
Board of Directors
Wings of Light, Inc.

I had a bad feeling about this trip from the very start. Something inside made me feel uneasy from the second or third day of a business trip to Charlotte, NC. I even wrote my girlfriend, now my wife and mother of my two children, that "something was really weird about this place and my being here. I just want to come home." She still has that letter.

Well, I came about two minutes from not only not getting home, but not surviving at all, after a terrible plane crash into Lake Erie . . . a crash that took the lives of three of the five people on board the plane that night.

It seems like it was just yesterday that it happened, and at the same time it seems like a lifetime ago, maybe another life altogether. It's hard to separate my identity from it, but also it's still hard to believe it happened in the first place. Only those who have lived through something like this know what I'm talking about and that makes it a very lonely, solitary experience.

"It seems like it was just yesterday that it happened, and at the same time it seems like a lifetime ago . . ."

We left Charlotte on a beautiful, sunny afternoon in the pilot's new Beechcraft Baron. We were accompanied by the pilot's girlfriend, her 12 year old son, and another colleague. We had a lovely, uneventful flight up to Cleveland with the goal of seeing the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame on Sunday, November 19, 1995. It was to become the day of days in my life, that one day that no matter what else happens in one's life (whether getting married, being

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The Coast Guard crew prepares to meet EMS personnel as they arrive back at the dock with Dale and the other accident survivor.

Coast Guard Stands Ready to Assist

The United States Coast Guard, one of our country's five armed services, was originally established as U.S. Life Saving Service in 1890. The name was changed to United States Coast Guard in 1915. It was originally dedicated to saving life at sea and enforcing the nation's maritime laws. The Coast Guard has since expanded services to include many more areas of responsibilities.

One of the programs most known to Wings of Light survivors is the Search and Rescue (SAR) program. One of the primary goals of SAR is to minimize the loss of life, personal injury, and property loss and damage in the maritime environment. To fulfill this mission, the Coast Guard maintains SAR facilities on the East, West and Gulf coasts; in Alaska, Hawaii, Guam, and Puerto Rico; as well as on the Great Lakes and inland U.S. waterways. The Coast Guard is well recognized as a leader in the field of search and rescue.

The men and women who serve in the Coast Guard are a very special group of individuals, risking their own lives repeatedly to save others.

In this issue of WINGS, Dale Sherman has described his own rescue by the Coast Guard. The following is an interview with two of those individuals responsible for saving Dale: Steve Bowman and Bob Pritchard.

Steve Bowman had been serving in the Coast Guard for approximately five years when he was called upon to respond to the plane crash on November 19, 1995. It would be the first plane crash he had ever responded to.

Bob Pritchard had served in the Coast Guard for more than seven years. Bob had responded to a different plane crash during that first seven years, but that crash didn't involve fire and the pilot was fine.

Editor: Tell me about the rescue.

Steve: We were "on" all weekend. Friday and Saturday were both quiet days. We typically do two hours of training every day and from four to six hours of actual time on the boat.

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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 occurring in the future and also conducts safety studies on a variety of transportation issues.

Most NTSB information is available in the public reference room in Washington, D.C., or on the Internet. It's also available through contract resources for a nominal fee. If specific information is not readily available, individuals formally can request the information from the NTSB under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). Please note that FOIA requests sometimes require a processing fee. For more information on FOIA, contact the NTSB FOIA staff at the NTSB Public Inquiries Branch at 800-877-6799 or 202-314-6540.

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

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Coping with the Loss of a Loved One in a Plane Crash

By Polly K. Nielsen, Ph.D.

Contributing author, The Psychosocial Aspects of Death and Dying, John D. Canine, Ph.D.

Plane crashes invariably occur suddenly and unexpectedly. They kill with a violence and ruthlessness almost unequalled, whether a single engine Cessna, or a wide-body commercial jet. There is no way to prepare for this kind of devastating loss.

As such, plane crashes have certain unique characteristics with which you, as survivors of victims, must cope as you move toward a healthy resolution of your grief. These characteristics include being:

- Sudden and unexpected;
- Gory, violent;
- Newsworthy, therefore very public.

Publication and relentless broadcasting of graphic details of the crash itself, the location and condition of wreckage, of body parts found, and intense speculation as to causality, can be profoundly disturbing. Plane crashes may also

- Involve multiple members of one family or one organization;

- Involve long delays in recovering and/or identifying remains;
- Result in no remains ever being recovered;
- Entail your being asked to make major legal & financial decisions earlier in the grief process than is advisable.

Working Through Your Grief

How you and other survivors work through this type of loss depends on many factors, including

- Previous losses
- Qualities of the relationship to the deceased
- Roles of the deceased (spouse, mother, breadwinner, child, sibling)
- Age of the griever (child or adult)
- Preventability of the death (Canine 1996)

According to Michigan grief counselor, Dr. John Canine, you may also be tempted to focus on secondary issues, such as lawsuits, family conflict, changed social status and financial loss rather than on the on-going grieving process (Canine, 1996). It is often less painful to direct your emotional energy there than to

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SUPPORT NETWORK APPLICATION

Yes! Please add my name to your support network for:

- Survivors Family and Friends
- Rescue/Response Personnel

(please print)

Name _____

Company (if applicable) _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

Phone _____

Email address _____

Please provide the following information:
ACCIDENT INFORMATION

Date _____

Location _____

Type:

- general aviation airline (passenger)
- business/charter airline (crew)
- other, (please specify) _____

If applying for the Family and Friends Support Network, please provide the following information:

Name of relative/friend involved in crash

Relationship to you

Please complete and return to Wings of Light, PMB 448, 16845 N. 29th Avenue, Suite 1, Phoenix, Arizona 85053.

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Rescued By Coast Guard

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present for the births of my two children or any future unseen event) somehow can't rise to the level of that awful night in its ferocity, its horror . . . or its power to change my life for the good.

We were to leave Cleveland's Burke-Lakefront Airport for our return trip at around 3 p.m. that afternoon. At the airport, we noticed a Gulfstream business jet on the tarmac with an unusual tail number on it that ended in "JL." We asked inside the FBO who it belonged to and they said, "Oh, that's Julio Iglesias' plane. He did a concert here last night and he should be here at any time to leave."

"Only those who have lived through something like this know what I'm talking about and that makes it a very lonely, solitary experience."

Well, the pilot's girlfriend heard that and firmly stated "I'm not leaving here until I meet him!" So we waited. And we waited. By now it was 5 p.m. and we had a long trip home so I suggested we get going. It was also almost dark by now. By 5:20 p.m., we were getting loaded and preflighting the plane to leave.

We got to the end of the runway to depart and off we went. It was around 5:38 p.m.

We climbed at an unusual rate, and after getting about 1500-2000 feet up, the pilot throttled back and we went into a shallow descent. The only thing I could think of at that moment was that we had somehow gotten into Hopkins International Airport's airspace and were being asked to descend out of it.

We went on like this in a descent for about two minutes. When I looked out the left window, I could see faint images of whitecaps probably 50 feet under the plane! I looked at the pilot's girlfriend who was hooked up to the pilot's com system and shrugged my shoulders and put my hands up as if to say "what's up?" She smiled back as if nothing was wrong.

I got my answer about 20 seconds later. We hit the water (the FAA estimated our airspeed at impact at around 300 miles an hour) and exploded into a fireball engulfing the entire airplane. The fire shot through the heater vents overhead right towards me, and I ducked down and covered my face. The pilot's girlfriend wasn't so lucky. She never saw it coming. I remember screaming "Oh, God, don't let me die like this!"

After the initial impact, the engines of course stopped instantly and it was for a split second silent. Then I heard the screaming and tearing of metal. The water and fire were shooting at us. All of a sudden, I'm out of my seat skipping and tumbling across the water at probably still 200 miles an hour! I remember feeling the sting of that freezing water on my face, ears and hands.

When I came to a stop, I was probably 15-20 feet underwater. For personal reasons (mainly because after all this time, I still don't fully understand what happened to me except to say it was paranormal), I won't say what happened to get me to the surface. When I got to the surface, the plane was 25 feet in front of me, listing to the left in the water, the wingtip lights still blinking and illuminating the water below me. It seemed the whole lake was on fire.

Everyone was alive at that moment, and that's when I first wondered if it was a dream.

I could feel the 38 degree water, but for a few minutes I still wasn't sure it was real. Then, as the minutes passed, one by one the others sank and disappeared from sight. First the pilot, then his girlfriend and after hearing that little boy cry for his mother for a minute or two, it was silent except for the soft sound of the flames. I didn't see or hear the other passenger so I was sure if I was alone out there, about five miles from shore, with life-threatening injuries on a snowy night in freezing water. That's when I made my peace with my maker. I waited for my turn.

"It's been good for me to hear from someone of similar experience."

There was a small plane circling overhead so I knew someone saw us. And I knew if I struggled I was a dead man. So I laid on my back, took deep breaths and held them, trying to use my lungs as a life preserver. This probably went on for 8-10 minutes when I started losing feeling in my arms and legs. I did not want to die, but had very little left to prevent it.

I looked over my shoulder to my right and out of the light from the fire I saw what looked like a navigation buoy about 50 feet away. I thought I could make it so I rolled over and started to swim for it. I hadn't gotten five feet when it got much closer. It wasn't a buoy. It was a small boat! I thought "Lord above, I'm going to be rescued!" The fisherman later said I looked



Dale (right) with one of his rescuers, Steve (left) by the license plate Dale displays on his vehicle.

like a porpoise and kicked with the one leg that still worked until I was out of the water to my waist! I yelled and screamed. They started right for me.

Then my elation turned to horror. They started to turn to their right, away from me and behind a wall of fire. I thought "they're this close and they don't see me!" They saw me. They yelled at me to turn around. I turned and the biggest, most beautiful white boat I'd ever seen was coming right at me fast. It was the U.S. Coast Guard!

The fishermen in the smaller boat had gone after the remaining passenger who was also struggling to stay alive. They left me in the very capable hands of the Coast Guard. The fishermen's decision at the moment of chaos probably saved the other passenger's life and earned them the Boater of the Year award from the Coast Guard that year.

The Coast Guard got us both to shore and into the hands of paramedics for a long night in Intensive Care. I then had eight days stabilizing before a trip home to Denver. After six weeks in the hospital in Denver, I finally got to go home.

Since then, I have been able to talk to a few people involved in aviation accidents, one of whom survived a crash into water. It's been good for me to hear from someone of a similar experience. As I said, unfortunately there aren't many.

If you or someone you know was involved in any type of traumatic incident, I am happy to talk and listen. Contact me through Wings of Light . . . and know there are people out there who can help.

If you are interested in contacting Dale, you may send a message through the Wings of Light website at www.wingsoflight.org. Your message will be forwarded to him.

Coping with the Loss of a Loved One in a Plane Crash

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acknowledge your loss and learn to live in a world that no longer includes the deceased.

Dealing with the Media

One unique aspect to grieving the loss of a loved one killed in a plane crash, particularly one that involves many victims, is dealing with the media. Today's news outlets must feed a 24/7 hunger for information. When dealing with the media here are some issues you may want to consider.

- The sympathetic reporter is not necessarily your friend. This seemingly caring individual is doing a job -- gathering as much "newsworthy" information as possible. When this story becomes dated, s/he will be assigned to another, more current one.
- The media spotlight can deflect your attention from the necessary grief work you have ahead of you. Once the crash story is supplanted by the next newsworthy event, the attention you have been receiving will likely be abruptly terminated.
- If you choose to deal with the media, consider making a trusted friend, family member or professional your media contact. Allow this person to make any statements on your behalf and to field questions from the media.
- If you prefer to avoid the media spotlight, you may find the following "tip" from the late Baltimore MD news anchor, Jerry Turner, helpful. Turner once told the author that there is only *one* way to avoid the unblinking eye of the camera and that is to do the following: *stop where you are, stare into the camera, and say nothing.* The reaction will be immediate -- the camera will be shut off and the reporter will move on to another source.

Working Through Your Grief

Helpful Rites and Rituals

...(T)here can also be difficulty resolving grief when the bereaved chooses to participate in few, if any, of the rites and/or rituals commonly associated with death. Some bereaved have...no religious funeral or any kind of memorial service by which to mark the occasion and facilitate the process of accepting the loss. The absence of any sort of

funerary service may also result in the bereaved's receiving limited social support from those who would otherwise have been present. (Canine 1996)

It can be helpful for you to have some sort of "rite of detachment," whether that is a religious service in a church, temple or mosque, or a simple ceremony of remembrance at a place the deceased particularly loved. Such rites typically include family, friends, co-workers, and anyone else who knew and cared about the deceased and/or you.

Long-term Support is Crucial

Paramount in any grieving process is the on-going involvement of loving, supportive people. All too often in our culture, the bereaved are well supported -- at least initially -- only to be left to finish the process alone.

Societal norms once provided clear, well-defined, and accepted 'rules' regarding bereavement, such as dress, demeanor, and duration. These norms have changed, weakening and even erasing those rules and often leaving the bereaved feeling (and in fact being) quite alone within weeks or even days after the death. American society encourages the quick fix, exhorting those who suffer a loss to 'put it behind you and get on with your life.' Such attitudes discount the bereaved's very real grief and can contribute to a sense of isolation (Canine, 1996).

Research has shown that the "...nature and strength of the bereaved's social support network... (is) a key factor in predicting the bereavement outcome. The stronger and more supportive the network, the better the outcome" (Canine 1996).

The absence of ideal support networks of family and friends requires that we look to other sources of on-going support as we work through our grief. Major sources of support available include the professional grief counselor, and self-help and/or support groups. These resources provide the acceptance and non-judgmental listening you need now and will continue to need throughout your grieving process.

Please note that while the goals are the same, support and self-help groups have one major difference. Support groups are generally run by a combination of professionals and volunteers who are trained to deal with your particular circumstances. Self-help groups, on the other hand, are entirely composed of members "...who share a common condition...and occur mostly outside the aegis of institutions or agencies..." (Dennis Klass, from Canine 1996). Self-help groups typically consist of people who have experienced the same type of trauma you are experiencing. It is likely that other survivors of crash victims will establish one or more groups, depending on geography.

The Importance of Reaching Out

While it may be tempting to want to keep your pain to yourself, or you may fear becoming a burden to others, it is crucial that you avoid becoming isolated in your grief. "... (A)ccceptance and nonjudgmental listening... will facilitate the expression of emotions and the necessary review of the relationship with the loved one" (Therese A. Rando, from Canine 1996). Undoubtedly there will be support resources set up by professionals and made available to you. You may take advantage of them or not, as you see fit.

Regardless of what path you choose, know that being with others, and talking about your grief and your loss, feeling your pain and your loss, will ultimately lead you to healing and acceptance of a life in which the deceased is no longer a part. Bear in mind, always, that your healing is a process with no set timetable and no set expectations. Be gentle with yourself as you move along in your process, and be sure to not try to go it alone.

Sources: Canine, John D. Ph.D., The Psychosocial Aspects of Death and Dying. New York: McGraw-Hill Medical Publishing Division, 1996.

Klass, Dennis. Bereaved Parents and the Compassionate Friends: Affiliation and Healing. Omega 15, no. 4: 353-373, 1985.

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Coast Guard Stands Ready to Assist

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Bob: I remember that day was cold. We usually run the boat on the lake daily until ice begins to form in winter. Because it was November and there is less activity on the lake at that time of year, we had a skeleton crew for winter operations.

Steve: We had grilled out that night on the deck.

Bob: I had "watch" duty in the watch room when a guy from the airport called. He said a plane went into the lake and told me to look outside. I saw a huge fireball in the distance. I hit the alarm and ran to join Steve and Eric at the boat.

Steve: I could see a huge orange glow in the distance on the lake. We never heard any explosion. When we got to the boat, we put on safety suits because the water was below 65 degrees.

Bob: As we got closer, from the looks of it, I wasn't sure there would be any survivors. I ran the spotlight over the water.

Steve: When we got there, I saw Dale in the water. Bob moved the boat to get closer to Dale while moving the engines and flames away. Eric threw a line to Dale. Dale was able to grab it and we slowly pulled him in. We grabbed him by the shirt and under the arms and pulled him into the boat. We immediately threw blankets on

him and placed him on a backboard to try to prevent further injury.

Bob: After Steve and Eric got Dale on the boat, what was left of the plane began to sink. The fishermen were holding on to the other survivor. We approached and Steve jumped into the water to get him. Between Steve in the water and Eric on the boat, they were able to get the other survivor into the boat. We were still looking for the other passengers from the plane when Ships to Shore Towing arrived on the scene. They had joined us on the lake to see if they could assist. Due to the medical status of our victims, we decided to head for the dock where emergency personnel were waiting to take any survivors to the hospital. Ships to Shore Towing kept looking for more survivors.



Coast Guard and EMS personnel work together to transfer Dale to a waiting ambulance.

Steve: I kept talking to Dale trying to keep him conscious. He had a cut on his forehead. I knew if he didn't stay conscious, it could be very serious with a head injury and hyperthermia. When we got to the dock, we handed the survivors to EMS. Then when we got off work Monday evening, a couple of us went by the hospital to see them. It helped so much to go by the hospital; it put me at ease that Dale was going to make it.

Editor: What was the most difficult part of the rescue?

Bob: The minute I got out there and saw Dale, I knew there were people close to the flames.

Steve: The most difficult part for me was knowing there were three other people out there in the water.

Editor: How has the experience changed your life?

Steve: After that, nothing has had the same magnitude. It's so difficult to explain the feeling it gives you to save someone who was at death's door.

Bob: You realize that you're doing a job that's actually helping others. Dale has been the most supportive and appreciative of any of the individuals I've rescued. The "thank you" is the best reward you can get.

