

Kerri Strug and the gutsy U.S. women gymnasts

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People

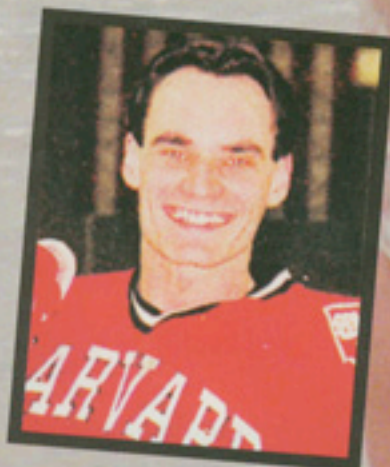
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The tragedies of Flight 800

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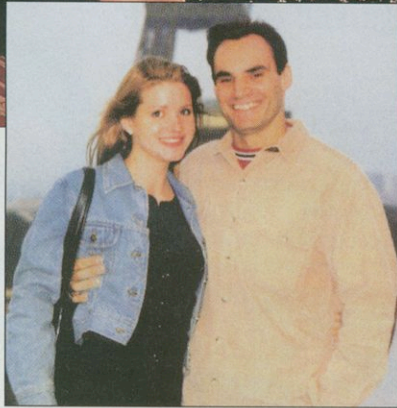
The fiancée and family members of hockey star Michel Breistroff (right) embraced on the beach after a Long Island memorial service last week. Violinist Larkyn Dwyer, 11 (left), was making her first flight alone



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COURTESY HEIDI SNOW

"I pictured him just swimming through the water," Heidi Snow (above) says of her fiancé, Michel Breistroff (with her in 1994).

The morning of the day he was scheduled to fly to France, Michel Breistroff slipped out of the New York City townhouse where his girlfriend Heidi Snow lived; he told her he had some errands to do. Twenty minutes later he returned to reveal the real object of his mission: a bouquet of white irises, her favorite flower. "Everything he said was passionate," says Snow, 24, who had known Breistroff for nearly

He proposed from the airport, and died within hours

two years. Just before he boarded Flight 800—for a brief return to his native France before going on to Germany to play professional hockey—Breistroff, 25, telephoned Snow and proposed from the airport. "I told him I'd marry him," says Snow, who is studying for a general securities exam and a career on Wall Street. "He was so happy."

Four days later, Heidi Snow stood ankle-deep in the Atlantic off Long Island with two of Breistroff's family members, saying goodbye to her fiancé, who had gone down with Flight 800. The moment, captured by a photojournalist, became an icon, flashed on front pages around the globe—and this week's PEOPLE cover. "He's what I need," Snow says tearfully, "and I can never find it again."

She met him in August 1994, when

the soft-spoken Breistroff was an anthropology major at Harvard and a standout on its hockey team. Born in the French city of Roubaix to Michel and Audrey Breistroff, he had taken up the sport at 7 and excelled early. At 15, he was recruited by a junior league in Canada, where he played until 1990, when he entered Harvard. He graduated in 1995 after narrowly missing out on a spot on France's 1994 Olympic hockey squad but was a shoo-in for the 1998 team, a lifelong dream.

What he wanted beyond that was a life with Snow and eventual retirement to a big country farm. Now Snow is haunted by a conversation they had while flying to an idyllic Florida vacation ending just three days before his death. "At least if we crash this time, we'll be together," she remembers his saying. "We won't die alone." ■