

**FIRST MUSIC,  
 NOW MOVIES**  
 Napsterizing Films  
 Make Your Own Movies

**TOMB RAIDER'S  
 ANGELINA  
 JOLIE**  
 And the Incredible  
 Internet Buzz Machine  
 How the Net Makes  
 Big Movies Bigger

**HOLLYWIRED**

50 MOST WIRED CITIES ■ HIGH-SPEED QUIZ

ONLINE BY JEREMY CAPLAN



# Tragedy in the sky, hope online

Select sites help accident survivors share their sorrow and push for safer air travel

**A**N EXPLOSION SOUNDED, FOLLOWED BY TERROR. AS HER PLANE TREMBLED 37,000 feet above ground, Mary Kahl prayed softly and held hands with her husband and 14-year-old son, while others wrote good-bye notes to loved ones. A long 45 minutes later, United Airlines Flight 232 crash-landed in Sioux City, Iowa, on July 19, 1989,

knocking Kahl unconscious and shattering the DC-10 two rows in front of where her family was seated. The three of them were not among the 112 people who died in the accident, but each suffered severe emotional trauma. Despite a difficult recovery process, Kahl believes that being alive enables her to pass on her good fortune. "I was given a gift," she says of her survival. "And I like to share that with others."

Today, Kahl is a board-member liaison for the National Air Disaster Alliance/Foundation (NADA/F), the largest grassroots air safety organization in the United States. Since 1995, NADA/F has provided emotional support and political advocacy for plane crash survivors and those who have lost loved ones in air accidents.

In 1996, the organization successfully lobbied for enactment of the Aviation Disaster Family Assistance Act, which details how airlines should assist survivors and families. And in recent years NADA/F and other like-minded groups have employed the Internet to extend the reach of their services and to fight for plane safety. At the **NATIONAL AIR DISASTER ALLIANCE/FOUNDATION** [planesafe.org], for instance, survivors post notices seeking other survivors. People share memories of friends or loved ones who died in air accidents. Casey Clarke, whose sister died in 1974 on TWA Flight 514, is using the site to rally support for a memorial to the victims of that disaster.

In addition to hosting its own message boards for victims' family members, the site links visitors to **ACCESS: AIRCRAFT CASUALTY EMOTIONAL SUPPORT SERVICES** [www.accesshelp.org]. Initiated by Heidi Snow, who lost her fiancé on TWA Flight 800, the site offers community support for victims of air disasters. It has grown into a network of support tools since its launch in 1996, hosting an online memorial where victims of air accidents all over the world log on to share their pain and memories.

According to the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB), a government organization that monitors travel-related safety issues, 2,221 passengers died in airline accidents between 1982 and 1999. And in 1999 alone, according to NTSB spokesperson Paul Schlamm, 628 people

died in a total of 1,908 general aviation (noncommercial airplane) accidents. Until the Net came along, it was often difficult for grieving family members to connect with others who shared their experiences.

But things are changing. NADA/F president Gail Dunham says that her organization's site recently helped coordinate contact between those who had suffered from the crash of a Boeing 737 plane in Argentina and those who had crashed in a 737 in the Philippines. Dunham, who lost a loved one in a 737 crash, says that the Internet was a valuable tool in enabling parties in both countries to learn from the concurrent investigations.

**Until the Net came along, it was often difficult for grieving family members to connect with others**

And in conjunction with plane accident survivors, pilots are also now employing the Internet to make air travel as safe as possible. Paul Omodt, spokesperson for the Northwest Airlines affiliate of the **AIR LINE PILOTS ASSOCIATION INTERNATIONAL** [alpa.org], says this site makes airlines' internal communications about safety more efficient. "If a pilot perceives a potential safety problem, he can fill out a post-flight form online to have that information relayed immediately, rather than writing out a form that takes four days to get to the appropriate officials," Omodt says. Similarly, ALPA uses e-mail to relay safety alerts and updates to more than 20,000 of its 60,000 pilot members.

Even as the Net propels plane safety forward, survivors and family members rely on its capacity to link people. "Online, people who lost loved ones 40 years ago connect with others whose family members were on the same plane," says NADA/F president Dunham of her site's message and discussion boards. Kahl agrees that the Internet opens up lines of communication. "It's important to be in touch with people who have been through what you have," she says. "They know your suffering."

**ABOVE:** A memorial on Long Island, New York, to the victims of TWA Flight 800.