



# ACCESS<sup>SM</sup>

## NEWSLETTER

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AirCraft Casualty Emotional Support Services

### Chairman's Message

I became involved with ACCESS for the worst possible reason. My wife, Rosie Braman, was killed in the explosion of TWA 800. Rosie was a flight attendant for TWA, and had been for 19 years.

She was not scheduled to fly 800 that night, but was what the industry euphemistically (and ironically) calls "dead heading." That means she was an employee not working the flight, but "commuting" to join another. As always, I asked her that morning what flight number she was flying on. Only half awake, she reminded me that she was on her way to Rome. I made a mental note of it and kissed her good-bye. Actually I never said good-bye to her. I preferred saying, "Come home safely to me." To which she responded, "I always do". I mistakenly thought that little ritual would keep her safe. It didn't. Later in the day she called to tell me the Rome flight was cancelled and that she would be flying to Paris to pick up the returning Rome flight. Again I asked the flight number, she told me "800". "Okay," I said. "Have a safe trip. Come home safely to me." She once again replied, "I always do."

It was the last time we spoke. The anguish and grief that followed in the aftermath of that event have been chronicled many times through the hundreds of stories of others who lost loved ones that night. For me it was too personal, and it took me well over a year to accept that Rosie's story was just one of them.

I attended one support group meeting made up of people who lost loved ones on 800, and there, briefly, met Heidi Snow. Months later I read about her formation of the previously named Air Crash Support Network. I thought it was a wonderful concept and made a small donation. Not long afterward, it occurred to me that the best tribute I could make to Rosie's memory was to help others. That was her legacy. Through ACCESS, I have been able to keep that legacy alive, and in so doing, keep her memory alive as well.

In the simplest of terms, ACCESS represents people with broken hearts helping people with broken hearts. It is a human endeavor that has been played out throughout the history of civilization. This compassion and understanding provides ACCESS with its focus and is the basis for our appeal to volunteers and contributors alike. Thank you for helping me fulfill the legacy that has been entrusted to me. Thank you for your contributions and support.

-Stewart Mosberg, Chairman of ACCESS

ACCESS provides comfort to friends and families of air disaster victims and survivors. ACCESS helps people cope with their grief and pain by connecting them to grief mentors who have also survived or lost loved ones in an air tragedy.

ACCESS is there for as long as the grieving need support.

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**Heidi Snow**  
Founder / Executive Director  
(TWA 800)

## **What I learned from the Families of TWA Flight 800** **By Governor George E. Pataki**

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We will miss him!  
We are all grateful to him for his support of ACCESS as an Honorary Advisory Board Member, and his commitment to the loved ones of air disaster victims.

I want to thank everyone involved with ACCESS for the wonderful and important work you do, and for giving me the opportunity to include some personal thoughts in your spring newsletter.

Two years ago, I completed work on the first and only book I've ever written. In the final chapter, I did some soul searching about my role as Governor and I'd like to share with you a portion of what I wrote.

"[Not long after taking office], it became clear to me that, as Governor, I was going to make a difference -- and in more ways than one. I began to realize that even in the darkest moments on the job, I could somehow bring light to someone, somewhere. Ironically, this realization came during the saddest time of my term in office: the evening of July 17, 1996, when TWA Flight 800 crashed off the coast of Long Island."

When I heard the news, everything that seemed important just minutes before suddenly became irrelevant. And reflecting on it later, it occurred to me that one of the most important functions a Governor can fulfill is to extend a caring hand to people in despair and give them what they need most in times of sorrow: comfort, understanding, and a shoulder to cry on.

So days after the crash, we organized a memorial service on the beach closest to the site of the disaster. The service was broadcast worldwide, enabling people everywhere to join in the mourning and to show love and support for the family members who needed it so desperately. I ended the service by telling family members: "Long after this horrible tragedy, and long after those who have assembled here have dispersed, we will be thinking of you." I have never stopped thinking of them. The moments I spent with them are forever etched in my mind and in my heart. Many of them told me that the service and all the state's efforts on their behalf helped to ease their pain. What this means to me, I cannot possibly express in words.

There's more to being Governor than simply governing. One of the most important things we can do in life is to give a piece of ourselves to lighten the burden of others. I learned this lesson from the family members of those who died on TWA Flight 800. I am eternally grateful to them, and they will forever be in my prayers.

## Tribute to Ryan Sparks

As the sun sets so early  
On a life that was so grand  
Our hearts are filled with sorrow  
As we try to understand

But when there are no answers  
And peace seems far away  
We lift our voices up to God  
And through our hearts we pray

"Our father, who art in heaven  
Hallowed by thy name"  
But without our friend, our brother,  
Ryan  
We'll never be the same

The joy he held within his heart  
He showed us through his smile  
We were privileged to know him  
Even if for just a while

The life he gave will not soon fade  
Nor will his memory die  
Even as we say together  
To Ryan Sparks "Good-Bye"

Poem written by Ryan's friend, John Akers



-Poem and photo (above) submitted by Pam Sparks, WA, in memory her son, Ryan Sparks, age 20, who was lost aboard Alaska Airlines Flight 261, January 31, 2000. Meghann Hall and Ryan Sparks (shown in photo above) along with their friend Rachel Janosik were killed aboard the flight. The photo was taken this past Christmas.

## Message of Spring

In the eleven and a half years that have passed since the bombing of Pan Am 103, I have learned so very much about love and grief and life. I recall how excruciatingly painful the first spring was after the bombing -- and indeed so many springs thereafter. How possibly could life be springing anew everywhere, when the man I loved was dead, and it seemed as though my soul, too, was dying within. Somewhere along the way, though, I began to see that the message of spring was a powerful and universal one, found in so many religions and different cultures. It was hardly a surprise that within the Christian faith, the death and resurrection of Christ was said to happen in the spring ... I began to find first, solace and later, hope, in the fact that the way of the world is that life, no matter what, begins again. And as long as there is life, and renewal, there is hope. So this year, my eleventh spring post-Pan Am 103, I do feel that my late fiancé is with me, in my heart, looking at the joy and beauty of spring.

-Sanya Popovic, NY, lost her late fiancé on Pan Am Flight 103, December 21, 1988

## **A Eulogy to my Father and Brother**

My father, William and brother, Steven shared their love of travel. My father had expressed his interest in seeing the world to my mom before they were even married. And see the world they did. My father and my mother traveled the world together, going to South America, Europe, China, Japan, Africa; the list goes on. Only a few short months ago, my brother, Steve returned from Vietnam, where he was helping to set up an international family residency program. My brother, Steve and Dad's most recent trip to Africa was their third adventure there together. They both shared a love of photography and of mysterious animals. Though both have always been adventurous spirits, Steve was the daredevil of the family, having parachuted out of planes and bungee jumped from a bridge in Africa known to be the highest bungee jump in the world.

So, together in August of this year, Dad and Steve left for Africa. We all know they were having the time of their lives because every time they returned from one of these trips, they had smiles on their faces and 100,000 photographs. On September 1, there were two small planes on the ground ready for take-off. Their destination was Kilimanjaro Airport. The flight was only supposed to be one hour. I can imagine that my father grabbed my brother and said "C'mon, lets get on the first plane." My dad was like that, always rushing to be first.

The plane was only a dozen or so miles from its destination when the pilot descended into the clouds to take a closer look at an ancient volcano known as Mt. Meru. The pilot, supposedly very experienced, made a critical error, and their plane clipped a tree colliding into a mountainous ravine. I spoke with a U.S. forensic pathologist, who had the difficult job of identifying remains, and he told me, and I tell you now, that they could not possibly have felt any pain and that their deaths were instantaneous.

These two people, pillars in our family, people who showed us and everyone who knew them, that as humans, nothing is beyond our reach, are now gone. I choose to believe that they are still with us. I feel my father and brother's presence within me, helping me, guiding me, and showing me what is right and what is wrong.

Fifty years ago, it took my father five days to fly from Buenos Aires to Miami, to begin a new life in a new country, a very different land where people spoke a strange language. My father has begun a very different journey from yet another continent, to return again to Miami, but this time, not as a stranger, not as a visitor, but to be buried along with his son in the nation he called "home." Goodbye Dad, Goodbye Steve. We love you.

**-Submitted by Joan Putterman, who lost her husband William, 64, and her son Steve, 36, aboard Northern Airlines, Tanzania, Africa, September 1, 1999. Written by her son, Barry in memory of his father and brother.**



## **The Ripple of Alaska Airlines Flight #261**

The impact on calm water displaces circular ripples that touch so many, such as the far-reaching effect of an aviation disaster. The fatal accident of Alaska Airlines Flight #261 affected many communities up and down the west coast.

Our community is home to Western Washington University, an excellent state college with an enrollment of 12,000 students. It is not uncommon for life-long friendships to be established at the school. So it was comprehensible to find twelve former students as passengers on Alaska Airlines Flight #261. In the three months following the crash, I am suddenly stopped in my everyday activities with yet another reminder and another sinking wave of sadness and loss.

The minister who spoke at our memorial service attended high school and college with a husband and wife who were passengers.

The Coast Guard pilot who commemorated the 88 white carnations to the water off our shore following the memorial service was a neighbor of a young passenger. His daughter attended elementary and high school with her friend.

Two managers at Starbucks Coffee Shops here attended college with two passengers. The Commissioner of our local airport worked in earlier years with many of the traveling airline employees.

The young mother who works at the salon where I have my hair cut spent an hour talking of her husband's difficult experience as the owner and captain of a Squid boat. That boat was one that volunteered to do search and rescue/salvage and retrieved the ring of one of the passengers on his deck.

Last week while waiting for my husband at the Ford Tractor store, I picked up a local monthly horse magazine. A featured article was about the loss of a couple, both ministers who perished on Alaska Airlines Flight #261, returning from Mexico where they were working with a poor village to enhance the lives of the people. This couple was well known to the horse community in our state and it was obvious they were deeply saddened by this loss.

After opening my favorite magazine subscription this month I was stopped again by the letter from the editor -- a beautiful, heart-felt dedication to a writer who was a wine critic and had written for this magazine and the whole industry for over 25 years. He and his wife both were on Alaska Airlines Flight 261.

**-Barbara Skudlarick, Resident, State of Washington**

## My Sister Sandi

My sister, my best friend that's what she was  
I think of her so much  
Because she was my special friend  
Her loss so great right at the end.

My sister was there for me  
She told me things and I agreed  
My pain so deep, my tears I cry  
I feel her peace, that wasn't goodbye.

For when it's time for me to go  
She'll hold my hand, won't let it go  
And when it rains, her tears come down  
I feel her everywhere around.

Just peace I feel my thoughts all good  
I loved my sister the way I should  
And when I hear a quiet sound  
I know it's her, with angels around.

-Submitted by: Kim Modaff Collins, PA, in memory of her sister Sandi, age 27, lost aboard American Eagle Flight 4184, October 31, 1994. Written by: Robin Wright Bowling

## The Cruellest Month

Fresh reminders come as suddenly as the original disaster, ringing in the middle of the night, or wafting though the air from a neighbor's kitchen at dinnertime. We can almost sense one another bracing in unison against the announcement, "We interrupt this program . . ." At those times, no explanation is needed. At other times, no explanation seems possible, although other people do sometimes learn to understand the distant expression that comes over our faces, out of the blue.

The smell of crushed tangerine leaves in the grocery store does it to me every time: it's the lunar new year, and I'm a child again, wondering if my room is clean enough, thinking how strange it will feel to have citrus leaves from the garden floating in my holiday bath water. Then I come back through so many years to reality, a willful boy still fighting that bath, as though by resisting, I could keep it all--childhood, home, Mother, Father--from washing away.

It froze hard the winter before my parents died, unusual for the San Francisco Bay area killing a great many trees, including a few in our back yard.

By June, it became clear we had to cut them down, leaving the yard quite bare. We planted some saplings, and my mother went out and bought a garden umbrella, white with a black embroidered border, for a bit of extra shade and privacy. When my father saw the umbrella, the blood drained from his face, which turned as white as the canvas. She had no way of knowing that it would remind him of a Chinese funeral procession.

All over the Berkeley Hills, in Wildcat and Strawberry Canyons, you can find hundreds of lopsided Eucalyptus trees, forty or fifty feet tall, that have regrown from the stumps that were left that year. The skylines of my childhood vanished in one season, and they haven't recovered. Each year, as soon as the rains let up, I like to put on my mud boots and get lost along the trails to see what's new, and how the rest of the world is digging out of the winter's debris.

-Eric V. Siu, Berkeley, CA, lost his father René age 45, his mother Barbara, age 43, and three young cousins on Pan Am Flight 816, Papéeté, Tahiti, July 22, 1973.

## Swissair Flight 111 Memorial Services in Canada

In September 1999, I traveled to Halifax, Canada, with my mother and other family members who lost loved ones on Swissair 111. It had been a year since the crash and the Canadians so graciously extended themselves to the hundreds of family members who came to memorialize our loved ones. It was three days of intense emotions and the days were long and full. The burial and memorial ceremonies were unbelievably touching; the Canadian people could not have been nicer and they extended themselves in every way possible. The investigators patiently explained what they were doing; the hotel staff couldn't have been nicer, the bus drivers who took us are every site, the protectiveness of the volunteers who shielded us from the press in their formation around us are things I will never forget. The signs along the road by the people who are residents of that peaceful land were meant to provide support to us, the families who are heart broken. I will always feel their love and am deeply appreciative of everything they did. But the most remarkable aspect of the three days was the feeling of connectedness I felt toward other families who lost loved ones on that flight. Listening to others' stories about the night of the crash is something that is with me forever.

After returning to my daily routine I found it took about a month to decompress from the three days in Halifax. My thoughts kept returning there. I will always pray for all the people on Swissair 111 and their families. I will always identify with anyone who loses a loved one on a plane crash. I hope that we who suffer so from this event can help others in the future.

-Lynn Romano Zimney, lost her brother, Raymond Romano, 44, aboard Swissair Flight 111, September 2, 1998.

### A Loved Ones Prayer In Loving Memory of the Families of Swissair Flight 111

Be near me Lord when I need you the most,  
Open up your arms and hold me close.  
Take me under your wing and keep me there,  
Away from the hurt and grief I bear.

Walk with me Lord through the sad days ahead,  
Give me love and strength from morn till bed.  
Within myself my pain is so strong,  
With hope in my heart you can lead me on.

Through tears and pain can I only grow,  
At this point in my life I can't let go.  
Heal my wounds and steer me right, maybe then in  
the end I will win my fight.

As time passes by I will realize then,  
How wonderful life can become again.  
I know in my heart you will always be there,  
To love and guide me because you care.

So be near me my Lord in this time of need,  
Only with your love I will heal indeed.

**"I lost my father in 1996 and at that time I had written this poem for my mother. My mother was diagnosed with cancer a few months after that and I lost her one year later. We all have different losses but the pain is similar. I am so very, sorry for all the families. I hope my prayer will help in some small way. God Bless!"**  
-Mary E. Ferrari, Copyright 1996

## **Tragic Flight (800) - A Tragic Night**

My heart it aches, my prayers are many for 230 families tonight.  
Because their friends and loved ones were tragically lost in flight;  
They represent many countries, nationalities and races.  
Most were seeking fun and joy in many beautiful places;  
I ask myself over and over, Oh Lord How Could It Be?  
Why did 230 bodies fall into the Atlantic Sea;

When I heard that it was possible this was the work of terrorists  
My palms, they started bleeding from the clenching of my fists;  
Life is very precious but death we cannot control  
Now God has 230 angels and he will bless each and every soul;  
We must control our anger and pray and pray and pray  
For relatives, friends and loved ones who will suffer every day;

A service was held for the victims on Fire Island sand  
As millions and millions of people mourned through-out the land;  
They say time heals all wounds, which I personally do not believe  
Because many have lost loved ones and for eternity we will grieve;

As I write this tragic poem many tears come to my eyes  
And I also mourn for other when I look up at the skies;  
I am just a man who suffers along with all of you today  
But I hope my words and prayers will somehow help you along the way.

**"I wrote this poem on the night of the TWA Flight 800 air crash, July 17, 1996. I have always wanted to share it with the families of Flight 800." - Michael F. Connolly, Woodside, NY**

## **The Fragility of Life**

"Life--so precious, so beautiful . . . indeed a gift for it is here one day and taken for granted. The ability to get up and walk, to listen to the cicadas on this beautiful evening, to feel and luxuriate in the warm fragrant bath water. Oh yes--all a gift; savor it; feel it; see it; hear it; smell it; but most of all appreciate it. For like the life of a beautiful fragrant rose, it is here one moment and cruelly snatched away. A lesson for us all. (So on this beautiful evening of Monday, Sept, 1, 1997 at 9:15 p.m., I am counting myself lucky indeed. I want to awaken all my senses; I want to be alive in every possible way. I want to SAVOR it all. I will begin by being more in tune physically, emotionally and spiritually). Life is good . . . to life!!"  
("The passing of Princess Diana makes one pause and think . . .")

**-Written by Diane A. Sheer on 9/1/97 who was a passenger aboard Swissair Flight 111, September 2, 1998 which fatally crashed into the waters of Nova Scotia, killing all 229 aboard.**

**"Dedicated with all my love to Donald and Diane Sheer! Diane was my beautiful mother and I am proud to share her thoughts."**

**-Submitted by Michelle (Shelli) Terrien, MA, lost her mother, Diane Sheer and stepfather, Donald Sheer on Swissair Flight 111, Nova Scotia, September 2, 1998**



## **Their Spirit Lives On**

Our Northwest flight 255 air crash support group was the first to form. Our logo is the dove, "THEIR SPIRIT LIVES ON" and a rainbow as many families had rainbows around their homes the next night after the crash. On our first anniversary something happened that was so beautiful, as we started to read our loved ones names we looked up into the sky and there was a huge pink cloud shaped like a dove. We caught it on video. It is strange it happened at that moment. It had to be a sign that our loved ones were with us that night.

I received another sign a few years later when I was going out to our cemetery at home and asking for a sign that they were at peace. I came back home and was sitting in my living room and telling my sister-in-law about going out there and talking to my brother and his family and asking for a sign. As I was saying this, all of a sudden I looked out the window and in the sky was this beautiful rainbow and it was a clear day and it had not even rained. Nobody would have believed me if I told them about the rainbow, but my sister-in-law was a witness to it. I never believed in getting signs from God, but now I know it does happen and I am now a believer.

**-Joan Pontante, NY, lost her brother, his wife and their three children on Northwest Flight 255, Detroit, August 16, 1987.**

## **A Child's Loss**

In 1965, I was a 19-year-old freshman in college. The director of my drama class assigned an exercise called a "Zeigeist." We were to re-enact an event that changed our lives. I walked up to the stage, lay down on a couch with a stuffed animal my father had given me and cried out "My daddy is dead!" I started crying and could not stop for days.

My father was a Navy pilot and died when his plane went down in 1959. I was 12 at the time. Those seven years were a time of denial and confusion for me even though I had been present at the full military funeral at Arlington Cemetery in Washington, D.C.

There was no grief counseling or support groups in those days. All attention and sympathy were poured on my mother - the widow. My younger brother and I were left to figure things out for ourselves. I think that people in those days believed children were better off not discussing life's hardships. However, I remember how drastically it changed my life and how I had to learn to cope with my loss on a day-to-day basis - especially the feeling that no one understood or cared about my heartache.

I saw Heidi Snow being interviewed on television soon after the Alaska Airlines Flight 261 disaster and realized that in my entire life, I had never met or talked to anyone that had survived the loss of a loved one that had died in a plane crash (other than family members).

Although I came to terms with what my life may have been - "if only ....", - a long time ago, the question is still there occasionally. I also tend to wonder whether the whole experience would have been less confusing and frustrating if there had been mentors, grief counselors or other people who would just listen.

I think ACCESS is a wonderful organization. I am enthusiastically available to reach out to anyone needing to express their feelings or share the pain they feel. I would also like to encourage adults to communicate with the youngsters involved - the pain is different but is definitely there as well as the need to express it.

**-Diane von Rivenburgh, CA. Lost her father in a Navy Aircraft Disaster, February 23, 1959**

## **"EAST MEETS WEST"**



### **Cheri LaBelle, WA, meets her Volunteer Grief Mentor, Julie Cruz, NY, in NYC**

(Above photo) Heidi Snow (left), Julie Cruz (middle), Cheri LaBelle, (right)

-Cheri lost her best friend, Carol White, aboard EgyptAir Flight 990 on October 31, 1999.

-Julie lost her best friend, Ingrid Acevedo, aboard Swissair Flight 111 on September 2, 1999.

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### **UPCOMING MEMORIALS**

For information about upcoming air disaster remembrance days and events check out our website. We have links to other air disaster groups where upcoming memorial events should be posted. If you are planning a memorial event and do not have a website please e-mail us and we will post the information for you on our site.

### **VOLUNTEER GRIEF MENTORING**

If you have survived or lost a loved one in an air disaster and would like to become a Volunteer Grief Mentor who provides comfort and guidance to friends and families of air disaster victims and survivors please contact us (below).

### **SUPPORT**

If you have would like to be matched up with a Volunteer Grief Mentor or receive resource information please call our toll-free phone number (below) or log on to our website.

### **NEWSLETTER**

Share your personal story, a poem, a photo or a memorial in our next newsletter. Your newsletter submissions are appreciated. Please send them to us via mail or E-mail.

#### **ACCESS**

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*\*Stories in this newsletter were compiled and edited by Heidi Snow, Jackie Dotson and Margaret Zamos*

**I would like to extend a special thanks to our volunteer grief mentors who have offered to be available to help those who have been affected by air disasters, our writers who have contributed their personal stories, our Board of Directors and our sponsors for helping us help others. Thank you!**

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Please make checks payable to ACCESS, tear off bottom portion and send to:  
**ACCESS 1594 York Ave. PMB 22 New York, NY 10028**  
 You can also contribute on-line at [www.accesshelp.org](http://www.accesshelp.org)

**Thank you!**

## HOPI PRAYER

Do not stand at my grave and weep.  
I am not there, I do not sleep.  
I am a thousand winds that blow.  
I am the diamond glints on snow.  
I am the gentle Autumn's rain.  
When you awaken in the morning hush,  
I am the swift uplifting  
rush of quiet birds in circled flight.  
I am the soft stars that shine at night.  
Do not stand at my grave and cry:  
I am not there, I did not die.

-Submitted by Janelle Davis in memory of her stepsister, Colleen Rose Whorley and her stepsister's boyfriend, Monte Lane Donaldson, aboard Alaska Airlines Flight 261, January 31, 2000



**ACCESS<sup>SM</sup>**

**AirCRAFT Casualty Emotional Support Services**

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