



# ACCESS<sup>SM</sup>

## NEWSLETTER

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AirCraft Casualty Emotional Support Services

### Chairman's Message

Although only a few months since the last newsletter, the world has been rocked yet again, by news of three more major airline disasters and numerous private air disasters. Whether caused by debris on the runway, pilot error, malfunctioning equipment or explosions of unknown origin, it saddens us to hear of these catastrophes - again and again. These incidents serve to bring home the message of just how important the work of ACCESS truly is. As always, our hearts go out to the survivors and the loved ones left behind to grieve.

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*By Theresa M. Perfetto, LCSW*

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Over the past year, our volunteer grief mentor base has tripled, and we have provided assistance to hundreds of people who have been affected by over thirty air disasters - some dating back to 1960. We have created an interactive website ([www.accesshelp.org](http://www.accesshelp.org)) and continue to provide free twenty-four hour availability to all our services.

As we come close to the end of 2000 (didn't we just celebrate the millennium?) I am reminded it is the time of year when charities of all kinds seek contributions. In recognition of your help, we wish to take this opportunity to thank all of you for your support and hope our work has been as gratifying for you as it has been for us.

**-Stewart Mosberg,  
Chairman**

Stewart lost his wife, Rosie Braman, aboard TWA Flight 800 on July 17, 1996

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.

# Surviving the Holidays

Theresa M. Perfetto, LCSW

## Heidi Snow

Founder / Executive Director  
(TWA 800)

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*For in the dew of little things the heart*

*Finds it's meaning and is refreshed.*

The Prophet

Customarily, holidays are a time of joy, love, and peace. For those who have experienced a significant loss, however, the holidays can be a time of isolation, pain, and loneliness. There is a way to get through it by following some of these basic steps.

· **Emotionally Feed Yourself** ~ Do what gives you comfort. This can be anything from taking a trip to getting a massage. This can be even allowing yourself to cry for a spell if you feel sad. Be true to your feelings. Forcing yourself to behave and feel in a way that you think you should OR in a way others expect, only creates resentment and is exhausting.

· **Take Care** ~ Of yourself. Both emotionally and physically. Over use of alcohol or food will most certainly make you more depressed. Make sure you get enough rest, eat balanced meals, and be sure to set limits with others who may expect too much of you that you are not able to give. Exercise, take a walk or hike, start a project.

· **Change your Holiday Rituals** ~ Sometimes doing the same things you did with those you have lost can be painful. Try doing some things different. Try NOT cooking, or go to a different place to celebrate this year. Even going to a different place of worship or attending at a different time can help. Start your own rituals.

· **Travel** ~ For some, traveling makes the holiday much easier to tolerate. Perhaps if you live in a cold climate go to a warmer one. If you live in a warmer climate go to a cooler one. Mood follows action.

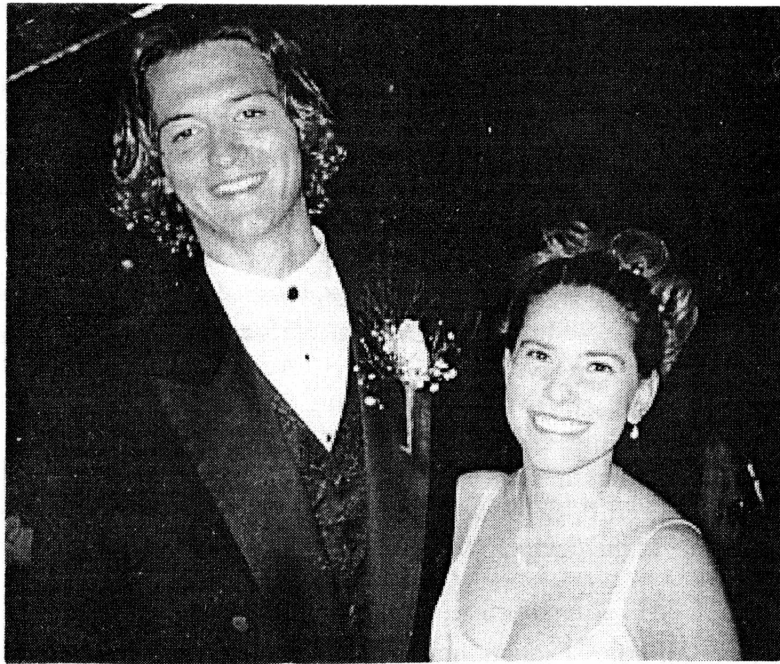
· **Stay out of Malls** ~ Do your shopping through catalogs, or even through the Internet. You may want to even consider doing your shopping earlier than usual.

· **Volunteer** ~ On the holiday at a homeless shelter or some other community organization. Helping others takes the focus off of yourself and helps others who need you at the same time.

· **Ask for Help** ~ If you think you need it. Holidays are tough for many people, despite all the hype. Talk with those you trust or even a professional about how you feel and let it be OK. Your feelings are OK and do not have to make sense.

-Theresa Perfetto is a Licensed Psychotherapist, practicing in Northern Virginia.

## A Tribute to Jason



Jason liked to eat bananas and chocolate chip cookies. He drank his eight glasses of water a day. He was a natural athlete, quickly learning any sport he tried. Jason drove a cute little red convertible. He would ride along with the top down, letting the wind blow through his long, curly hair. He often flexed his muscles in the mirror, and claimed that he looked like a Greek God. Jason's stomach was ticklish. He was not a very good speller. He liked animals. Jason was laid-back as well as adventurous. He had a beautiful smile and many friends. Jason was so healthy and alive. He loved to fly.

If it weren't for the last part, Jason would probably still be here today, surfing at the beach and bringing joy to the lives of others. But Jason loved to fly. He dreamt of being an airline pilot after he finished school. Jason worked hard in pursuit of this goal, even taking flying lessons during his summer break from aeronautical school. On what was thought to be just a typical day this summer, Jason was up with his instructor practicing for his commercial pilot exam when Jason's lofty dreams came crashing down to earth.

On that Wednesday morning in August, Jason's plane and another plane collided in the sky. The passengers of both planes died. At age 20, Jason will never get to enjoy the simple pleasures of life again. He will never get to lie in a hammock on a summer's night and gaze at the stars, or take his dog for a walk in the park. Jason won't get to watch his favorite movie "Top Gun" or spend time with the people he loved ever again. There will be no more milestones in Jason's life, such as graduating from college, pursuing a career, getting married and having children, and growing old.

The abrupt ending to Jason's life is devastating. The loss of Jason leaves a gaping wound in the hearts of many, who long to hear the sound of his voice and his laughter, and see his smile once more.

**-Submitted by Sharon Fry, Wellesley MA, (shown above) who lost her boyfriend, Jason Wismer, age 20, (shown above) aboard a private plane, which collided with a military aircraft over Burlington, NJ on August 9, 2000.**

# A Survivor's Story

After 25 adventurous years as a commercial pilot, beginning in the outback of my native Australia and continuing in the wilderness of Alaska, my career was cut short following a dramatic in-flight medical emergency. In 1987 while flying a Piper T-1040 turbo prop on a charter flight over the Bering Sea I experienced a sudden loss of consciousness for about 15 minutes. There was no other pilot on board and the two passengers knew nothing about flying. We survived, I believe, only through divine intervention. The high point of my career was the many years that I spent flying in the Aleutian Islands while working for Pen Air, a regional airline in Alaska. I felt like I had arrived, life could not get any better, then in one day I went from being a senior pilot to being not only unemployed, but seemingly unemployable and unwanted.

After this traumatic experience and a career gone forever that had been so rewarding, my world was devastated. Knowing that I would never fly a commercial aircraft again was something that I could not accept. The emotional pain is still severe even after 12 years. As I struggled to find some direction in life and establish a new career, my world sank to a very low point. Not knowing that I needed treatment from a counselor, I tried to deal with the feelings of loss and confusion myself hoping that they would just go away—they didn't. I am frustrated that no one in the medical profession explained the situation to me. After the near death experience in the aircraft, followed by the total loss of a career, then struggling to rebuild my life, it should have been obvious to the doctors who treated me that without help I would be facing a difficult future.

Recently, on my own initiative, I sought help from a wonderful counselor who diagnosed me with severe depression the result of untreated post-traumatic stress, and now is showing me that while the scars are permanent the wounds can be healed in time. While I still cannot understand why it all happened, I am just now beginning to find healing for that chapter of my life. Some of the reasons my loss became so severe were the long delay in getting help and the fact that I kept my emotional turmoil a secret feeling that no one would understand my condition. I became very proficient at living in denial of what had happened, attempting to block it out of my mind, even trying to pretend that I had never been an airline pilot. I felt guilty and angry for allowing myself to be in this condition and that perhaps I was just a weak person, over reacting to some small thing.

I am thankful to have discovered ACCESS. To be able to speak with other survivors and share experiences is very therapeutic. My heart goes out to each person who has suffered a traumatic loss in their life. My appreciation goes to Heidi Snow and the other dedicated people who operate this organization in such a professional way. I would welcome hearing from anyone who may wish to share his or her experience. Thank you so much.

**-Harold Wilson, a pilot who survived a Piper T-1040 turbo prop charter flight, which crashed over the Bering Sea on August 13, 1987. (P.O. Box 1833 Oregon City, OR 97045 or E-mail: [haroldaust@msn.com](mailto:haroldaust@msn.com))**

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## Impressions of a Pilot

Flight is freedom in its purest form,  
To dance with the clouds which follow a storm;  
To roll and glide, to wheel and spin,  
To feel the joy that swells within;  
To leave the earth with its troubles and fly,  
And know the warmth of a clear spring sky;  
Then back to earth at the end of a day,  
Released from the tensions, which melted away.  
Should my end come while I am in flight?

Whether brightest day or darkest night;  
Spare me your pity and shrug off the pain,  
Secure in the knowledge that I'd do it again;  
For each of us is created to die,  
And within me I know,  
I was born to fly.

Poem written by: Gary Claud Stokor

**Submitted by Deana Huneke, who lost her brother-in law, Craig, age 28, a pilot aboard a private plane, which collided with a military aircraft over Burlington, NJ on August 9, 2000.**

## My Sister Ymke

In July of this year, my younger sister Ymke, 23 years old, visited her life-long friend Silvia in Ecuador, where Silvia had been teaching for six months. They spent an adventurous month together, the highlight of which was a week of sailing around the Galapagos Islands. She emailed me: "I think the week in Galapagos was one of the best weeks of my life!" Before returning home to Switzerland, their plan was to visit us in Tamarindo, on the northwest Pacific coast of Costa Rica.

They arrived in San José, Costa Rica on August 15, but both had contracted a severe bacterial infection in Ecuador, and spent 9 days in a San José clinic. Discharged on August 25, Ymke called me that evening. They were in a hotel, had walked around town, felt healthy and were excited to head our way the next morning. We were so happy to finally get to see and embrace them!

On Saturday, August 26 they boarded Sansa Airlines flight 1644 in San José. After a stop in La Fortuna, they took off again for the 20-minute leg to Tamarindo. But the pilot immediately veered off course towards the Arenal volcano - it had been active, with new mudflows, it seems the pilot wanted to do a little sightseeing...

The plane slammed into the mile-high volcano, near its summit. The 8 passengers and 2 pilots were all killed on impact.

I waited with my 2 children at the airstrip in Tamarindo for an hour and a half. We went home, returned again to the airstrip and were told by the crew of the next flight that the plane had crashed. "Noooooo!" Time stood still.

It is all still so raw: images of recovery efforts on TV, my sister arriving from Canada, my Dad, stepmother and brother from Switzerland together with Silvia's parents, all of us in a daze, meeting the family members of other passengers, crying together, bonding in our grief, traveling to La Fortuna and seeing the wreckage when the volcano clears... Despair. Anger.

And now we are all back in our own homes, where sadness is normal now. Why did this happen? There will never be an answer. Somehow I can't even believe this really happened. It is not supposed to happen! And with "why" comes "if only". So many variables...

My father wrote me: It is as if I heard beautiful, wonderful music [Ymke]. I know I will never hear it again, but now it is an intangible part of me, and nobody can take it away from me. It will continue to be a joy to me. I long to hear this music again, but it is not to be. I will have to live with the memory... Ymke will live in our hearts forever.



-Submitted by Petra Schoep, Santa Cruz, Costa Rica, who lost her sister, Ymke, 23, (shown left) aboard Sansa Airlines Flight 1644 on August 26, 2000.

