

# Sharing the Journey

Newsletter of the Family Assistance Foundation

Volume 1, Issue 1

January 2002

## Community Workshop Schedule



**Minneapolis**  
February 8/9

**Los Angeles**  
March 15/16

**Phoenix**  
April 19/20

**Boston**  
June 20/21

See page 6 for more  
information

## Inside this issue:

An "Envelope of Care"	2
Join the Foundation	2
Angels Flew Them Home	3
Community Workshops	6

## Coming in future issues:

- ◆ Suggested reading
- ◆ Book reviews
- ◆ Interviews with responders & volunteers
- ◆ Interviews with survivors
- ◆ Reports on the Symposium and workshops

## Welcome to the Family Assistance Foundation

We would like to take this opportunity to welcome you to the Family Assistance Foundation and the premier edition of our newsletter "Sharing the Journey."

If you are reading this newsletter as part of your Symposium materials, we also welcome you to our first annual Symposium. If you missed it, we hope you'll join us next year.

The Family Assistance Foundation is an independent non-profit organization dedicated to helping companies successfully plan for and respond to disaster with sufficient resources and better understanding of how best to compassionately assist survivors, family members and employees.

Our goals are to provide ongoing opportunities to share experiences, ideas, research and solutions;

To provide research-based education and training for responders who assist survivors and family members;

And to conduct ongoing research and fa-

ilitate educational initiatives, by supporting and assisting individuals who desire to pursue graduate degrees in areas that support the mission of the Foundation.

The Foundation also provides an alternative source of trained volunteers so that members can mutually assist one another through the Foundation's resource sharing pool.

We believe the articles included in this newsletter demonstrate the essence of what the Foundation is all about and the kinship that is created between survivors and the company whenever a disaster occurs.

Our hope is that you will join with us in moving the Foundation toward the common goals beneficial to those who survive terrible tragedies and those who respond to them.

## Newsletter's Name Recognizes the Unity Created by Tragedy

Our newsletter's name, *Sharing the Journey*, acknowledges and honors the relationships formed when a disaster occurs. In a sense, one journey ends and another begins - one as diverse and complex as the people usually found aboard an airliner, train, ship, or bus today.

Everyone touched by disaster begins this journey, from those aboard and their families to the people who respond by vocation or by choice to rescue, assist, counsel, or comfort them. Each is united by that experience, and many connect

(Continued on page 3)

# An “Envelope of Care”

*An airline accident survivor's perspective on the accident and its aftermath, shared here along with the thoughts of two airline volunteers sent to assist him, illustrates what trained airline personnel can accomplish. The volunteers' remarks are in italics.*

**Survivor:** I was traveling alone on business. As we neared our destination, the air became rough, throwing us about in our seats. The plane landed hard, bounced once and went down the runway with lots of bumps, thumps, and bangs. I felt several hits to my head and upper body and remember the hit that tore off my glasses. The plane went dark about half way through the landing.

Suddenly the noise and all motion stopped, and only lightning flashes illuminated the plane. It was totally quiet, and I suspected we had all died. Then I thought I saw two shadows in a forward row rise and disappear to the left. They looked more like spirits than people. I unbuckled and hurried forward, hoping the shadows were people. I saw a lady sitting in her seat, staring straight ahead. I released her seatbelt and touched her wrist. She jumped to her feet and beat me out of the aircraft.

I stepped out of an opening in the plane not knowing what might be under foot. My exit took about 15 seconds, and I was too escape-driven to feel the underlying terror. I walked, too sore to run, about five yards

away, met three or four people and realized I had survived. There was rain, wind and hail, and we hurried about 50 yards away. We turned to see an explosion and fireball behind the wing of the plane.

By this time a large group of survivors had formed. There were many injured passengers, and one of the flight attendants, severely injured, was carried to the group. I heard someone make a 911 call. We were in shock, terrorized by the event and the terrible weather.

I later learned the extent of my injuries: a broken scapula, clavicle and stress fractures of the ribs and sternum. My teeth were cracked. I lost sight in my right eye and hearing in my left ear. My wedding ring had been torn from my finger and my glasses lost. I was having trouble breathing. I was frightened, felt alone, in pain and threatened by the continuing storm. The long minutes made it seem like hours before the emergency personnel reached us.

*(Continued on page 4)*

**Suddenly the noise  
and all motion  
stopped, and only  
lightning flashes  
illuminated the plane.  
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and I suspected we  
had all died...**

## Want to Join the Foundation?

Foundation membership is open to everyone interested in the vision and mission of the Family Assistance Foundation. We have recently updated our organizational structure in response to feedback from many individuals and organizations interested in what the Foundation has to offer.

Full membership is currently only available to airlines and includes participation in the resource sharing pool.

Associate membership is available to any company or organization involved in mass transportation, disaster services or who may provide services to organizations and individuals involved in disaster response activities.

Individual memberships are available to any airline family assistance volunteer, mental health professional, emergency services staff member and disaster survivors.

Cost of membership is as follows:

- ◆ Full Membership \$1,275.00
- ◆ Associate Membership \$ 300.00
- ◆ Individual Membership \$ 50.00

Associate members will have access to Foundation educational materials and resources as well as preferred pricing for future symposiums, classes and workshops. Associate members also receive the quarterly newsletter with permission to use Foundation articles for inclusion in their own company newsletters. Other options are available for bulk distribution to your team.

Individual members receive their own copy of *Sharing the Journey*, along with the same preferred rates for materials, Symposium, classes and workshops.

Please contact the Foundation for complete details at 770-909-7474 or [info@fafonline.org](mailto:info@fafonline.org).

# Angels Flew Them Home

*Merrilee Morris*

I can still remember my husband saying to our son, Chad, "Why are you flying USAir? They've had several accidents in the last few years...."

"They're a good airline, Dad. They've been through some rough times, some misfortune, but they are a sound, well-maintained, well-managed airline. Now is the safest time of all to fly with them. I believe in them."

Chad had come through Atlanta early on a company business trip so he could spend the weekend with us. He was concerned about this father who had been ill and had recently undergone surgery. Also, he would celebrate his 35th birthday, which was that preceding Wednesday, July 6th. Little did we realize this would be his last birthday.

On September 8, 1994, Chad died in the USAir 427 crash in Pittsburgh. He perished with 131 other souls that Thursday evening. Although he died in the crash of the airline he believed in, I do not believe his faith was misplaced. I do however have serious concerns about the FAA and Boeing Manufacturing.

The employees of USAir were there for us, in spite of their own terrible losses. They helped us in that soul shattering pain, to plan and to get through what had to be done. Our family representative did this with empathy, compassion, patience, understanding and love. We are not people who generally turn to others, especially strangers, in crisis. We are Midwesterners who have faced more than our share of tragedy and

*"The employees of USAir were there for us, in spite of their own terrible losses..."*

sorrow. To be honest, we were taken aback by the unexpected empathetic and compassionate care we received from USAir. Our son was dead and they saw our horrible pain and made it their pain too.

Not only our family representative, but also other employees of the USAir family, total strangers, were sensitive to our pain and treated us with dignity and compassion. Personnel handled our baggage flawlessly, they had the rental car at the airport door, and they offered us food, rest and companionship. USAir personnel met and stayed with us between planes at inconvenient hours. In flight, a cabin attendant closed her hand over mine and just held it when I tried to pay for a glass of wine. The airline availed themselves to Chad's family with no strings, no demands placed on us. They went the extra distance ensuring that even our extended family and friends were well treated and guided gently through what could have been a tragedy made even worse.

Our son believed in USAir and I do not believe they let him down. They have come through some rough times and misfortune. In March of 1998, I listened to the NTSB report on what caused USAir Flight 427 to impact with terrain outside Pittsburgh. I found no comfort in knowing that the cause was a previously documented rudder control problem. However, I found comfort in knowing that these two USAir pilots were the best. I believe that if anyone could have saved that 737 jet it was these two skilled pilots. But they were doomed, everyone on the plane was doomed, the moment that the rudder failed.

To me, how USAir interacted with other airlines, car rental agencies, hotels, the NTSB, volunteer agencies, restaurants, the FAA, their employees, and victims' families is a tribute, a mind-boggling testament that USAir had all the good qualities Chad saw in them.

*Editor's Note: The Foundation honors company and/or survivor's wishes as to whether names are given or withheld. Our goal is to share lessons learned and to educate.*

*Merrilee Morris has shared her story with many airline employees in company training classes and in meetings with other organizations.*

## Newsletter Name

*(Continued from page 1)*

with one another in ways they could never have imagined. While we know this journey is often rocky initially, ultimately people heal best by connecting. The resulting lessons are universal and often profound, and we look forward to sharing them in these pages.

*Editor's Note: Russell Goutierez wrote this article and The Family Assistance Foundation is grateful to Russell for his inspiration and creativity in coining our newsletter name "Sharing the Journey."*

## “This envelope of care...”

*(Continued from page 2)*

**Volunteer 1:** *I was trained about 2 years prior to the accident and it was a shock when I heard the news. My entire body was shaking as I called to see if I was being deployed and found out yes, it was really happening and I was stepping into an experience like no other in my life. My flight to the accident city only carried team members, and it was very quiet and somber as everyone contemplated what lay ahead and carefully reviewed their manuals.*

**Volunteer 2:** *I had recently completed my training when the call came: we had a downed plane and I was needed immediately. I said to myself, this will not be a routine day.*

**Survivor:** I arrived at the hospital about three hours after the accident. I grabbed the first person I saw and asked them to call my wife to let her know I had survived. I was treated for my injuries, x-rayed and was in a hospital room by about seven hours after the accident. Any threat to my life seemed, now, remote. I was very concerned about where I was, what had happened, the cost of my care, my family, my friends and associates, and my physical condition. Though I was in pain I left no phone call unanswered. I wanted no one else to suffer any concern about my well-being.

**Volunteer 2:** *I caught the next flight to the accident city, which was not a scheduled flight – all the passengers aboard were either family members or team members. It was very quiet onboard. We were shuttled to a hotel and attended a briefing shortly after our arrival. We were quickly organized into groups at each hospital. My partner and I were assigned to a man that we had not met at this time. It was very early in the day when we walked in to his room to make introductions.*

**Survivor:** Ten hours after the accident, two people entered my room, and after introducing themselves as airline employees, sincerely expressed their regret. They asked me to tell them about my experience, which helped them - and me - understand what had happened. They shared information, explaining what they knew about the accident and the status of the other passengers and crew. They then asked me what I needed. One was taking notes as the other compassionately held my hand. I was no longer alone, I was with people that cared, and my major issues were being handled. They made sure the phone was at hand and soon got me reading glasses and a fresh copy of

the book I had been reading on the plane.

**Volunteer 1:** *Our survivor welcomed our self-assurance and the help that was provided. That day was spent taking care of travel arrangements for his wife and son and shopping to replace several items that had been lost at the accident site.*

**Volunteer 2:** *I felt it was important to let him know that our concern to help him was genuine. We truly cared about him and fulfilling his immediate needs until his family could be at his side, and we wanted him to know that he was not alone. After he shared his experience, we asked what kinds of things he would need. He simply asked us for some reading glasses and a copy of the book that he had been reading on the plane. We soon returned with temporary reading glasses and the book that he requested. He seemed surprised to see us return so quickly, but we wanted him to know that to us, he was not just a name on a list.*

**“I was never concerned about my care, my family’s care, or my physical, emotional or spiritual well-being...”**

**Survivor:** The two-person team visited me often during my three-day stay. They arranged to reunite me with my wife and son who were escorted through airports on their way to the hospital. At our request, they escorted my family and me from the hospital to my home, and they and their colleagues helped handle the media all along the way.

**Volunteer 1:** *By the second day, the hospital parking lot was full of media vans with satellite dishes on top. It was very unsettling to see the way this event was being handled in the news. So many people seemed to see this only as a news event while I was seeing the pain it caused so many people.*

*Our survivor’s family arrived on the second day to make the trip home with him. I was so concerned about their flight home, knowing he couldn’t make the trip easily because of his injuries. The pressure was tremendous. Days ran together - we needed constant reminders of the date and day of the week. I felt a great sense of urgency; there were so many needs to fill that sleeping and eating were impositions. The days didn’t end until the early hours of the morning and I had to remind myself to eat.*

**Survivor:** After their initial appearance, I was never concerned about my care, my family’s care, or my

*(Continued on page 5)*

*(Continued from page 4)*

physical, emotional or spiritual well-being. This envelope of care, concern, and compassion allowed me to begin the physical and psychological healing processes ten hours after the trauma occurred. My airline volunteers:

- ◆ Advised me on the steps I needed to take when I arrived home;
- ◆ Urged me to address all physical and emotional issues I might encounter; and
- ◆ Explained the financial arrangements that took care of all my needs and those of my family with little out-of-pocket expense.

After we arrived home, they answered our questions regarding replacing valuables. They personally returned my briefcase, computer, and wedding ring. The latter was delivered on a holiday.

**Volunteer 2:** *Our passenger shared with us a list of items that were missing. Besides his wedding ring, his company computer and briefcase were missing. Several days had passed before his briefcase was identified. My partner and I had the opportunity to personally return these items to his hometown. We had flown in to make this very special journey to return his briefcase, and when we arrived at his home to once again meet him and his wife, we were greeted with hugs! He invited us both inside to visit with him and his wife for a short while.*

**Survivor:** As a result of the airline team's attention to even the smallest detail, I was left with a very positive attitude about the airline, its personnel, and my future. I knew I had a valuable partner in the reconstruction of my life. No other group could have handled the all-important logistical support. No other group could make amends as effectively for the tragedy I suffered.

**Volunteer 1:** *When my assignment ended, coming home was difficult. I encountered team members who were accompanying traveling family members and felt a tremendous letdown. I tried to explain to my husband all the emotions that were pouring out. I knew there was still so much to do, that my colleagues were still working long hard hours.*

**Volunteer 2:** *One very special comment our passenger made to both of us, was that our visit to his home made it all feel complete. Though we wish the accident never would have happened, we were glad that we had the opportunity to meet a very special person. He made*

*such an impression on both of us.*

**Survivor:** As a result of the assistance I received, my wife and I became activists in the cause of helping responders provide the high level of care, concern and compassion I received to everyone that experiences a traumatic, life-altering event. I am a member of the Board of Directors of the Family Assistance Foundation, which is dedicated to building a multi-airline team to assist all airlines regardless of size or locale in responding effectively to an airline disaster.

I have since learned of the many other support groups that are in a position to assist victims of trauma. In addition to the local emergency response and airline team personnel, the following is just a sampling of those that work hard to provide a comprehensive safety net for victims of trauma:

**“There is a place and a role for every organization genuinely concerned with the victims of disaster ...”**

- ◆ The American Red Cross and National Transportation Safety Board;
- ◆ The National Organization for Victim Assistance (NOVA), which assisted the community in which my accident occurred. They always find a niche to render aid regardless of the event.
- ◆ The Community Organization for Victim Assistance. Input from COVA members in my home area would have been most helpful.

There is a place and a role for every organization genuinely concerned with the victims of disaster such as the one I experienced and those traumatic events that occur to many of us, much too frequently.

**Volunteer 1:** *"Would I do it again?" I have thought a lot about this. I couldn't make a decision based on my one experience - I knew it was unique in that I worked with a survivor and his family who cared for me as much as I cared for them. Next time, it could be a completely different experience - perhaps in another country, working with the family of a passenger who didn't survive, perhaps working with a family who doesn't share a common language with me. But YES, I would do it again. It was an incredible experience. The 'selflessness' of giving so much to helping another was priceless. I came away with greater strength and confidence - I took on a complex and challenging assignment, and succeeded. I made a difference.*

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*Working Together is the Answer*

*Visit us on the Web*  
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## Community Workshops to begin in February

The Family Assistance Foundation is dedicated to improving the assistance received by survivors, family members, and responders following disasters. We accomplish this through education, training, and coordinating resources, and we are pleased to offer a series of local working sessions called *Community Response to Mass Transportation Disaster*.

Tailored to a specific locality, these two-day events feature contingency plan briefings from local representatives, a presentation on a transportation disaster's enormous scope in the community, and an interactive training session on effectively providing survivor/family assistance. And, as with all of our programs, attendees will learn first-hand from people who have lived the experience as survivors, family members, and responders.

The agenda includes:

- ◆ Briefings from local response agencies on the plan for their community
- ◆ Briefings from airline operators serving the community

- ◆ The effects of transportation disasters on a community by faculty members from the Family Assistance Foundation
- ◆ Presentations from medical examiners and D-MORT personnel on mass casualty operations
- ◆ Disaster mental health briefings from local Red Cross chapters and other organizations
- ◆ Survivor and family issues panels with survivors from the community
- ◆ Presentations on the complexities of transportation disasters

Workshops are customized for each community so the agenda may change slightly as needed to support community efforts and needs.

Dates have been set for Minneapolis, Los Angeles, Phoenix and Boston with more cities to be announced soon. If you are interested in attending one of these workshops or helping to schedule a workshop in your area, please contact Kate Larson or Janet Sporn at 770-909-7474.