



## Nine Minutes, Twenty Seconds: The Tragedy and Triumph of ASA Flight 529

*Editor's Note: The following are excerpts from Gary Pomerantz' book entitled, Nine Minutes, Twenty Seconds. When I was first contacted by Gary, he was asking about Wings of Light and the work we do.*

*That was when I first learned about his book, Nine Minutes, Twenty Seconds. In his book, Gary details the moments before, during, and after the crash of Flight 529. It is a tribute to the 29 lives who flew on that flight that day.*

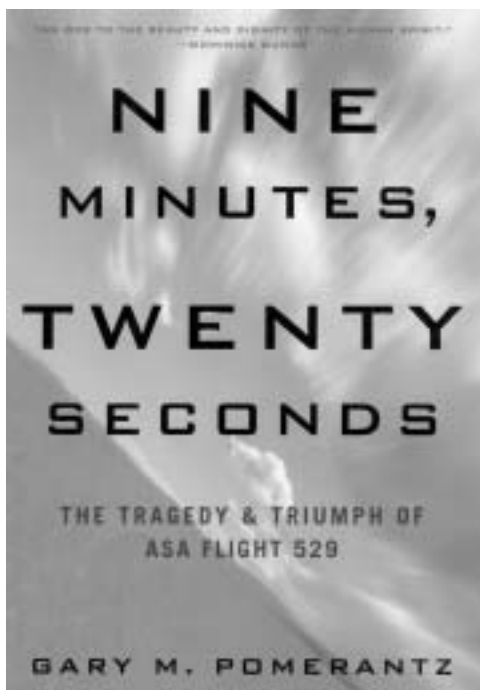
*After learning more about Wings of Light, Gary asked permission to list us in his book. We are grateful for his assistance with helping us reach those in need and for realizing the importance of linking those with similar experiences.*

*I do not know what it is like to survive a crash, but I do know all too well how it felt to lose my Dad in a fiery crash. Though the circumstances of Dad's crash were different than those of Flight 529, there are many similarities in my reaction and needs to those of some of the family members of those killed on ASA Flight 529.*

*It is those similarities that link us together. We may be strangers, but we share a common experience, a common bond. For many, it provides comfort to know there are others out there who truly understand . . . because they've been there too.*

*I'll never forget an initial meeting among new Wings of Light families. One woman started to explain to the rest of us sitting around the table how she felt when she lost a loved one. She suddenly stopped mid-sentence and looked around the room. "I don't need to explain, do I? You know," she said. We all smiled. For the first time, she realized the comfort of having others who truly understand.*

*I would like to thank Crown Publishers, Random House for letting me share excerpts from Gary Pomerantz's book. May these excerpts bring comfort to those seeking peace and a greater understanding to those searching for the answers.*



By Gary M. Pomerantz

"Now and then, a car stops on the road near Paul Butler's house and sits there while its occupants look at the hay field where ASA Flight 529 came to rest. Strangers have knocked on Butler's front door and asked to walk in his backyard. He has allowed them in even as he wondered, What is it they're looking for?"

"As I researched the ASA crash for this book, it became clear why I returned to Butler's hay field time and again. There was death, yes, and there was work to do explaining how it happened. But of the twenty-nine people aboard the ASA Brasilia, nineteen survived. In their stories was a miracle of life.

"How does anyone live through a plane crash? This is as compelling a laboratory of humanity as any, and provides a window

This issue of Wings is dedicated to the 29 people who flew on ASA Flight 529 on August 20, 1995, those who lived, those who died.

that allows us to see why people do what they do when put to the greatest stress, the stress of panic and fear . . . .

"It was nothing they had planned. It was simply their response to the conditions they encountered. This was the revelation of ASA 529, ordinary people revealing the extraordinary power of the human spirit.

"Children realized that and one day crowded into an elementary-school gym in Bowdon, four miles from the crash site. A student placed a long-stem rose in a glass vase . . . . and then another student with another red rose . . . .

"Three summers before, children had rushed to Butler's hay field, a few on bicycles, to see the little plane that had fallen from the sky. Now they brought forward ten roses, one for each of the dead, and when the children finished their memorial, [two survivors] took the roses to the hay field, now familiar to them in ways only they could understand.

"They knew where the broken fuselage had been. Several firefighters returned to the field with them and pointed to the spots where each of the dead had first been found. At each spot, . . . [they] placed a rose, and with each rose they pronounced a name . . . . In a field once on fire, now there were flowers . . . .



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# WINGS

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[www.wingsoflight.org](http://www.wingsoflight.org)

Assisting those affected  
by aircraft accidents

Allied Member of the  
Association for Death Education and Counseling

*Wings of Light, Inc.* is a national nonprofit organization dedicated to assisting those touched by aircraft accidents. The most important goal of the organization is to bring people together through the existence of three support networks.

### Survivor Support Network

The *Wings of Light* Survivor Support Network is a support group for those who have been involved in and lived through an aircraft accident. This group helps individuals understand the feelings and issues of surviving the accident and coping with the impact on their lives.

### Family and Friends Support Network

The *Wings of Light* Family and Friends Support Network provides families and individuals with specialized support that addresses the unique issues surrounding aircraft fatalities.

### Rescue/Response Personnel Support Network

The *Wings of Light* Rescue/Response Personnel Support Network brings together individuals involved in the rescue, recovery and investigative efforts. An often overlooked group, individuals in this network are given a forum for peer counseling and voicing concerns.

Other activities include the development of local chapters, the planning of a conference for network members, distribution of related informational materials and resource kit, and referral to qualified counseling professionals.

*Wings of Light, Inc.* is a 501c3 public charity; contributions are tax-deductible. If you are interested in more information or would like to make a contribution, contact: *Wings of Light, Inc.*, PMB 448, 16845 N. 29 Avenue, # 1, Phoenix, AZ 85053.

# The Role of the Office of Transportation Disaster Assistance in General Aviation Accidents

By Brenda Yager  
Director, Office of Transportation Disaster Assistance

*Brenda Yager was appointed Director, Transportation Disaster Assistance in April, 2002 by NTSB Chairman Marion C. Blakey. Prior to her appointment, Yager served the state of Illinois as Deputy Director and legislative counsel at the Department of Commerce and Community Affairs. She also previously served the Federal Aviation Administration as its Assistant Administrator for Government and Industry Affairs.*

As most of you know, the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) is an independent federal agency that investigates all civil aviation accidents in the United States and all major accidents in the surface modes – marine, highway, railroad and pipeline. We also conduct safety studies on issues of national significance, such as personal watercraft safety and operator fatigue. From these investigations and studies, the Board makes recommendations to prevent similar accidents from occurring.

In October 1996, Congress passed the Aviation Disaster Family Assistance Act that was then signed into law by President Clinton. This act followed the President's executive memorandum the previous month that asked the Board to be the lead federal agency for coordinating federal government assets at an accident site. The legislation, combined with the President's directive gave the Board the authority it needed to bring together various federal, state, and local government agencies to better serve the victims of transportation accidents and their families.

To carry out this task, the Board created the Office of Family Affairs with a small staff of carefully recruited, highly skilled and experienced individuals with the expertise and commitment necessary to successfully accomplish its goals. Over the past years, these staff members have launched to numerous accidents, including major aviation accidents, rail accidents, marine accidents, bus accidents and pipeline accidents. This past July, to better define the multiple missions and expertise the office has developed, the office's name was officially changed to the Office of Transportation Disaster Assistance (TDA).

Although the office's actions in response to major transportation accidents – especially

aviation crashes – are highly visible, its role in general aviation accidents is less well known. In fact, in many cases, families of general aviation accident victims may never encounter the TDA. That is because NTSB field investigators (in the Board's 10 field offices) who handle the majority of the nearly 2,000 general aviation accidents annually are well versed in assisting families with facts about the investigation. Nonetheless, their primary mission is to investigate what happened and make recommendations to correct the problems they find. Therefore, over the past few years, investigators will often ask the TDA for additional assistance for family members.

Most often, the investigator in charge (IIC) will simply call the TDA to talk about family members' specific issues or concerns and ask them to follow up. Although the IIC can sometimes assist family members directly, most of the time, the TDA will make contact with the family members to resolve their concerns and offer what assistance they can. In many cases, this contact also provides an opportunity for family members to ask questions or clarify information they may not have wanted to ask the IIC.

Once contact is made, family members will be given an unlisted 800 number to call the TDA specialist assigned to assist them who can then serve as a liaison between the family and the IIC. Questions about the investigation will be discussed with the IIC and the TDA specialist working with the family will relay the answers back to them. And, the TDA specialist can keep the family updated on the investigation.

Although, the TDA staff does not provide counseling services, they can discuss options for such support, including a family doctor, an employees' assistance program, or a church-affiliated program. If these options are not available, then the specialist will use their contacts with the American Red Cross to have a crisis mental health person in the local chapter contact family members.

In certain general aviation accidents, the IIC will request that a specialist from TDA respond to the location of the accident soon after it occurs. For that reason, there

*(continued on page 6)*

**SUPPORT NETWORK APPLICATION**

Yes! Please add my name to your support network for:

- Survivors       Family and Friends
- Rescue/Response Personnel

(please print)

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Company (if applicable) \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Email address \_\_\_\_\_

Please provide the following information:

**ACCIDENT INFORMATION**

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Location \_\_\_\_\_

Type:

- general aviation       airline (passenger)
- business/charter       airline (crew)
- other, (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

If applying for the Family and Friends Support Network, please provide the following information:

Name of relative/friend involved in crash \_\_\_\_\_

Relationship to you \_\_\_\_\_

Please complete and return to Wings of Light, PMB 448, 18645 N. 29th Avenue, Suite 1, Phoenix, Arizona 85053.

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Please make my contribution in memory of \_\_\_\_\_

Please notify the following family of my gift: (please provide name and address)

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# Franciscan Renewal Center Offers Hope, Healing



## Grief & Loss Retreat

January 10, 11, 12, 2003

Franciscan  
Renewal Center  
(800) 356-3247

[www.thecasa.org](http://www.thecasa.org)

The Franciscan Renewal Center holds a variety of programs including weekend retreats. One of the weekend retreats is the Grief & Loss Retreat designed for anyone experiencing grief over the death of a loved one. The retreat provides a supportive setting for sharing information about the grief process as well as ways to heal. "This retreat marked a turning point for me," states Cecile, a retreat attendee and Wings of Light volunteer. "It was a loving place to be, and I have maintained contact with others from the retreat. It also provided me with tools to cope that have served me well these past few years." For more information, contact the Franciscan Renewal Center at 800-356-3247 or [www.thecasa.org](http://www.thecasa.org).



## *Nine Minutes Twenty Seconds: The Tragedy and Triumph of ASA Flight 529*

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"Memory is imperfect. Yet studies suggest that memory of a life-threatening experience often is more accurate and reliable than memory of an everyday event, particularly with information that is central, not peripheral, to the experience. The ASA survivors' narratives provided a confirmation of those studies; memories seldom conflicted.

"ASA survivors have had limited contact with one another. They have recovered apart, and in some cases, alone. Nevertheless, they feel a powerful connection to those they know only by name or the clothes they wore on August 21, 1995.

"During interviews, survivors asked many questions, the most common, 'How are the others doing?' Almost without exception, they cried. Several asked if the two passengers who swapped seats during the descent had survived, wondering if the change had altered their fates. (It hadn't.) . . . Many survivors expressed guilt, for in the broken fuselage they had made decisions based not on ethics or morality but on adrenaline-driven survival instinct. They were afraid their lives had been purchased at the cost of others'. Whatever they did in those decisive seconds, they now live with it. Some have made peace with their actions; some haven't . . .

"From afar, we may believe we know what a plane crash is like. Yet until those abstract concepts are made real, we cannot know. The ASA survivors know it through every sense given them. They felt the plane's tremblings, heard its wings breaking off treetops, saw fire and smoke, and smelled burning flesh.

"They'll tell you they aren't heroes, that all they did was live. I understand their thoughts but respectfully disagree. Heroes act to sustain life and give life meaning. That, these people did . . ."

## Nepenthe Resource Kit

*Wings of Light Inc.* has developed a resource kit for grieving families. This kit, called *Nepenthe*, consists of various books and videos selected to assist individuals through the grieving process.

You may sponsor a kit with a donation of \$150 to *Wings of Light, Inc.* As a sponsor, your name will be included in the kit to recognize your generous donation.

For more information on the kit or to sponsor a kit, contact *Wings of Light, Inc.*, PMB 448, 16845 N. 29 Avenue, # 1, Phoenix, AZ 85053 or email [awaaswings@aol.com](mailto:awaaswings@aol.com) (please mention "Wings of Light" in the subject line).

## Kevin's Heaven Brings Comfort by Painting Light with Light

In 2000, Kevin Charles Miller had an experience that would change his life. Since that time, he has been painting angels as a form of healing art. His true joy and inspiration is to serve and help heal through providing personalized paintings as visual memorials, testimonials and affirmation of the love and light in all living beings.

To the right is one of Kevin's personalized paintings created for one of our *Wings of Light* volunteers. For a limited time, you will save \$5 on your personalized painting by mentioning *Wings of Light* when you place your order.

For more information, visit [www.kevinsheaven.net](http://www.kevinsheaven.net).

## Reflections from one of the ASA Flight 529 Survivors

By Alan Barrington  
ASA Flight 529 Survivor and  
Wings of Light volunteer

I think Gary Pomerantz's book, *Nine Minutes, Twenty Seconds*, is awesome. I think Gary knows more about what happened that day than any of us who were actually there. He's become a real friend of our family.

I was interviewed by Gary several times, a couple of times in person while I still lived in Atlanta, and then again several more times over the telephone over a period of probably more than two years. Gary is extremely thorough, and he has a way of helping you to remember things

that you might not recall otherwise. He's been very helpful to many of the passengers who have always wanted to know what was happening with everyone else during the crash.

Gary's book answers a lot of questions for us, particularly regarding why the crash occurred, and also what has become of the people involved since the crash. He puts a human face on what otherwise would just be another tragedy that you read about in the newspaper. I believe that the most important message of his book is that the human spirit triumphs regardless of the circumstances that we are faced with.



# Boeing Launches Aviation Safety Web Site

The Boeing Company has unveiled a new Web site featuring extensive information about aviation safety. The address of the site is: [www.boeing.com/safety](http://www.boeing.com/safety).

“Aviation safety is a topic of interest to people all over the world,” said Alan Mulally, president and CEO of Boeing Commercial Airplanes. “People want to know what we are doing to continuously improve the safety of our very safe global air transportation system. Our new Web site will help answer that important question by providing extensive information about all the things industry does every day to ensure the highest level of safety for the flying public.”

The site contains information about:

- Aviation’s safety record
- How airplanes fly
- Jetliner safety features
- Things passengers should do to ensure their own safety
- Governments’ role in keeping the system safe
- How aircraft manufacturers, airlines and union work together on safety
- How accidents are investigated
- Answers to frequently asked questions
- Other important aviation links

“Boeing is proud of the outstanding safety record our industry has achieved,” Mulally

said. “But we’re never satisfied. We work literally day and night with our customers, pilots and government leaders to make flying even safer. Our commitment to safety is unwavering, and with our new Web site we intend to be equally committed to keeping the public informed about this important subject,” he said.

## The Role of the Office of Transportation Disaster Assistance in General Aviation Accidents

*Continued from page 2*

is a duty officer in TDA who is on call 24 hours a day. Once the duty officer arrives, he or she will visit the crash site and receive a briefing by the IIC on the facts of the accident. Then he or she will visit with the family and provide them with as much information as possible.

If there are injured accident survivors, the specialist will also travel to the hospital(s) and establish contact with family members there. They will be briefed on the role of the NTSB and how they can contact the specialist both on scene and at the Safety Board. Depending on the accident’s

circumstances, the IIC may ask the TDA specialist to interview the survivors or gather information from family members such as location of logbooks, lists of medication being taken by the pilot, etc. The specialist can also work with hospital caseworkers and the local Red Cross to ensure there is crisis support available if needed.

When there are fatalities, the specialist will establish contact with the family members and ensure they have been in contact with the medical examiner/coroner. Additionally, they can help coordinate

crisis support for family members if needed.

Long term, the specialist will work with the IIC and the NTSB’s Public Inquiries Office to ensure family members can receive a copy of the final report once it has been completed – usually 12 to 18 months after the accident – although it can be longer.

The Office of Transportation Disaster Assistance can be reached at 202-314-6185.

