

# WINGS



June 2000

ASSISTING THOSE AFFECTED BY AIRCRAFT ACCIDENTS

No. 5

## *AOPA Air Safety Foundation – General Aviation’s Safety Course*

*By Bruce Landsberg, Executive Director,  
AOPA Air Safety Foundation*

Whenever there is an aircraft accident, one of the most important questions is “What can we do to prevent this from happening again?” Aviation and safety must be bound together so it was only logical that the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association (AOPA), the world’s largest aviation group with more than 350,000 members, create an organization dedicated to helping general aviation (GA) pilots fly more safely. Fifty years ago, the AOPA Air Safety Foundation (ASF) was created as a charitable, non-profit organization whose goal was to help a fledgling industry and its customers survive. Since that time, the GA accident rate has improved markedly and ASF has played a significant role in teaching pilots how to reduce the inherent risks of flight. Preventing accidents through knowledge and skill is a winning strategy, but there is always more to be done.

The foundation’s mission is simple. Promote safety and pilot proficiency in general aviation through education, research, and the dissemination of information. The execution is a bit more challenging. GA’s pilots, aircraft and reasons for flight are as diverse as tomorrow’s weather. New pilots, senior pilots, and flight instructors have different requirements, but all have a continuous need for current safety information.

Whenever there is a general aviation accident, it is tallied in ASF’s unique database, in conjunction with the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) data. ASF does not investigate accidents, but we do analyze them. Each year, ASF produces the Nall Report, named in honor of Joseph T. Nall, an NTSB member who died in an aircraft accident in Caracas, Venezuela in 1989. Over the years, this report has become the universal source of data on GA accidents, covering all phases of flight for fixed-wing aircraft weighing less than 12,500 pounds. After almost every high

profile light aircraft accident, ASF is asked to provide factual data for the news media and industry to help put the accident into perspective. The Nall Report is widely distributed to let everyone see where the problems are.

ASF’s database also serves the core function of helping decide what the safety priorities should be. By studying accident trends, we know where to best allocate our education and research resources. Identifying the high risk potential and implementing common sense solutions is ASF’s strategy. We work closely with the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), the NTSB, National Air and Space Administration (NASA), National Weather Service, aircraft and equipment manufacturers as well as other industry associations.

There are many ways to communicate the safety message. One of ASF’s most visible efforts is the presentation of free safety seminars. Last year, more than 30,000 pilots attended 250 programs. Topics centered on the major risk areas of weather tactics, maneuvering flight, and decision making. Top notch instructors, video and computer visual aids, a well organized curriculum and first class take home materials result in an excellent learning

environment with every incentive for pilots to attend. Every pilot within 100 miles of the seminar site is invited by direct mail. ASF works in concert with the FAA’s Aviation Safety Program to coordinate our efforts and reach the greatest number of pilots possible.

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*Kent Eckhart, one of the many AOPA Air Safety Foundation seminar speakers, answers a pilot’s questions.*

## *Aviation Safety Education at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University*

*by William D. Waldock*

A question I am often asked is: How do you teach aviation safety and accident investigation? To be a practitioner of such requires a highly complex set of knowledge and experience. The two ends of the aviation safety spectrum are “safety management” (trying to prevent accidents BEFORE they happen) and “accident investigation” (using what we can learn from accidents that have happened to

prevent similar accidents in the future). To be successful in any aviation safety area, one must learn both ends and the middle of that spectrum. In the past, the normal route into the safety disciplines was to take someone near the end of their career in aviation and make them an accident investigator or safety manager. What we have done at Embry-Riddle is to instill the knowledge and practice of aviation safety at the BEGINNING of our graduate’s aviation career. This is how we do it...

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# WINGS

Published by  
WINGS of LIGHT, INC.

PMB 448  
16845 N. 29 Avenue, # 1  
Phoenix, Arizona 85053

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Assisting those affected  
by aircraft accidents

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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.

## Aviation Safety Education at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University

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Within the field of academic aviation safety education, ERAU has one of the most comprehensive programs in the world. The cornerstone of safety education at ERAU has been the undergraduate academic program. We currently offer a total of 9 regular academic classes within the Safety (SF) program. These include Introduction to Aviation Safety, Human Factors, Aircraft Accident Investigation, Mechanical & Structural Factors in Aviation Safety, Safety Program Management, Aircraft Crash & Emergency Management, Aircraft Crash Survival Analysis, System Safety, and Special Topics in Aviation Safety.

An academic "minor" is available for students in most of our degree programs. To complete the minor a student must take a total of 5 classes (15 hours) in SF. Since its inception, the Safety Minor has been the single most popular minor offered, with more than 2000 students to date. A large percentage of students take safety classes as electives, even though they don't pursue the minor itself. Each fall & spring term, an average of 8 - 10 safety classes are offered at each resident campus in Prescott, Arizona and Daytona Beach, Florida, as well as at the more than 100 sites through the Extended Campus.

Starting in Fall of 2001, ERAU will offer a Master's degree in Safety Science, with a major focus in aviation safety and accident investigation.

ERAU developed and successfully implemented the first "student" chapter of the International Society of Air Safety Investigators (the professional society for aircraft accident investigation). This organization is presently among the most popular on the

campuses. It provides a student not only the opportunity to interact with other "safety-minded" students, but with professionals in government and industry.

In addition to our regular academic programs, a comprehensive short course program is offered in Aviation Safety for working professionals. These are 1 -2 week, 8-hour/day intensive programs with such topics as: Basic and Advanced Accident Investigation, Safety Program Management, and Human Factors.

A key asset for safety instruction is the S. Harry Robertson Aircraft Accident Investigation Laboratory on the ERAU Prescott campus. The Crash Lab offers students the opportunity to conduct hands-on field investigation of selected aircraft accident scenarios in a realistic setting. The 8.5-acre facility, which is adjacent to the Safety building (bld 21), includes seven improved field scenario sites as well as more primitive areas in which crash simulations can be set up. Current inventory at the lab includes a variety of actual accident aircraft and numerous components and cabin furnishings from different aircraft.

Within the materials lab classroom in Bld 21, many different aircraft structures, components, engines, and fixtures are available for inspection and analysis to enhance the academic classes. Students in the material factors, accident investigation and crash survival analysis classes are required to complete field investigations on selected, mocked-up accident scenes, and

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Students at Embry-Riddle study an accident scene in the S. Harry Robertson Aircraft Accident Investigation Laboratory.

# Our Sincere Thank You . . . .

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A SPECIAL THANK YOU TO THE WINGS OF LIGHT BOARD OF DIRECTORS AND THE SUPPORT NETWORK VOLUNTEERS

# New Resource Kit for Grieving Individuals and Families

*Wings of Light, Inc.* has created a new resource kit for grieving individuals and families entitled *Nepenthe*. This kit consists of various books and videos which assist individuals as they struggle to deal with their loss. If you would like to sponsor a kit, please complete the form to the right and send it with a check for \$150 to *Wings of Light*. Your name will be included as the sponsor of one kit when it is sent. If you would like to sponsor a kit to a specific person or family, please include their name and address with your check. Thank you for helping us provide additional resources to those in need.

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*Wings of Light, Inc.* is a 501(c)3 nonprofit, public charity organization. Contributions are tax deductible. Contributions of \$50 or more will receive a Certificate of Appreciation.

# Understanding the Grieving Child

By The Dougy Center for Grieving Children

It is difficult enough to deal with the death of your spouse, child or anyone else in your family. But to continue to parent and take care of the children in your household, who might have lost a sibling or parent as well, is an additional challenge. Depending on their age and level of development, you can help children cope with death in a variety of ways.

## Infants and Preschoolers

Many adults underestimate the abilities of young children to realize something is wrong, and to understand what death is. Adults often talk around young children, believing they can't understand what is being said, or that they're too young to "get it." It is important to understand that young children need to be included in the process when a family member has died. Attempting to "protect" them from this information will backfire in the long run, as they sense something is wrong yet no one will share with them what it is.

Children need clear, honest explanations about death. Although young children do not usually understand the finality of death, they can learn over time what it means.

Young children may be repetitive in their questions. Young children learn about their world by having questions answered again and again. They may want to hear the story of what happened again and again, much as they like to be read a familiar bedtime story. This can be difficult, if not exasperating, for the parent grieving the death of a spouse or child, but it is a necessary process for young children to go through as they struggle to understand the death of a significant person in their lives.

## 6-12 Year Olds

Most children in this age range are still dependent on others for survival and basic needs. The loss of a parent or sibling is confusing and difficult. Many children in this age group do not have ways to verbalize their complex and confused feelings and thoughts, which often come out as anger, frustration and irritability. Some children are open to talking about how they feel and what they think, while others barely mumble in response to a direct question.

Children in this age group tend to have magical thinking and often believe that they somehow caused the death. They

frequently show signs of guilt because they assume that their behavior, thoughts or wishes contributed to the death. They also want very much to be like their friends and to fit in. They do not want to be different, yet when a parent or sibling dies, they are different.

These children often respond well to acceptance of their emotions and thoughts and suggestions of alternative and safe behaviors to express them. Angry, frustrated children often do not know how to express those emotions except in behaviors that get them into trouble. Alternatives include using a punching bag, drawing out feelings on paper, or kicking nerf balls.

It is important to help the child feel safe in whatever way the child prefers. Their fears won't last forever, and providing safety and comfort for the child in the ways he or she needs is critical.

## Teens

Adolescence can be a difficult time even under the best of circumstances for most teenagers and their parents. If a teen is impacted by the death of a significant person in the family, he or she must also deal with the radically altered future, relationships, roles and family structure in his life.

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# AOPA Air Safety Foundation – General Aviation's Safety Course

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But not everyone can come to a seminar so ASF, with a generous grant from AOPA, went a step further last year and provided free videotapes on critical safety subjects to 20,000 new private pilots and almost 10,000 new instrument rated pilots. Nothing like that has ever been done before. It was one way of showing that we are serious about providing critical safety information to those who need it the most. This is a proactive approach to solving a problem before it manifests itself as an accident.

Another way we reach out to the community is through the ASF website, which is open to everyone. It has a wealth of free safety information, and provides ASF's calendar of courses and seminars.

There are multiple articles on major safety topics and special safety advisors to provide pilots with a short course update on everything from airspace and GPS navigation to avoiding thunderstorms and low visibility conditions. Course registration and even an online auction are there

to make it one of the most comprehensive aviation safety sites on the Internet.

Years ago, ASF recognized that certificated flight instructors were vital to the safety equation and developed the first flight instructor refresher clinic. Every two years, instructors must renew their certificates and ASF pioneered a fast-moving interactive program designed to keep them up on the latest changes and safety issues. The foundation is the industry leader in CFI recertification, but there is too much happening to wait 24 months. So, ASF provides a free quarterly newsletter to every instructor that reviews regulations, teaching techniques and safety issues as a public service. No other organization goes as far to keep the aviation constituency informed. Whenever a particular topic is identified as having a safety impact, ASF will publicize it, usually within 60 days, so that all instructors and their students know what is happening *now*.

In the mid-60's, ASF created the Pinch-Hitter® course to help non-flying

companions understand what the pilot was doing, assist in the cockpit and in the unlikely event of pilot incapacitation, land the airplane safely. It continues as one of the longest running aviation safety courses in history and is now offered in a video version as well.

ASF receives the majority of its funding from individual pilots and their tax-deductible contributors. We receive some restricted grants and contracts for specific safety projects and seminars from government or industry sponsors. There is also an aviator's memorial endowment program that funds ASF's ongoing education programs.

Most general aviation accidents don't have to happen and we believe that making free and low cost aviation education available to the entire pilot community will save many lives.

*To learn more about the Air Safety Foundation, visit our website at [www.aopa.org/asf](http://www.aopa.org/asf), call 1-800-955-9115, or write us at 421 Aviation Way, Frederick, MD 21701.*

# Unexpected Comfort Amid Destruction: My Experience Aboard Flight 242

By Frederick L. Clemens

On April 4, 1977, I boarded Southern Airways Flight 242 in Huntsville, Alabama. I was an 18 year old US Army Private on my way to a quick visit home before going to my first duty assignment in California. It was mid-afternoon and I sat with two friends, Amy and Lee, from a training course at Redstone Arsenal. We still wore our uniforms from the graduation ceremony that morning and were now flying to Atlanta to make connections to our various assignments. The DC-9 jet we were on carried a total of 81 passengers, two pilots and two flight attendants.

As we took off, some mild turbulence reminded us of the overcast skies and windy conditions. Although Amy expressed some anxiety about the turbulence, I was not especially bothered since I had flown through worse before. I was also feeling quite subdued by the after effects of our pre-graduation celebration the night before. I was mainly thinking ahead of our 30 minute hop to Atlanta and my connection to Philadelphia where my family would be waiting to pick me up.

Meanwhile up in the cockpit, the flight crew knew there was rougher weather waiting for us ahead. They had been flying this shuttle route all day and were watching a line of thunderstorms making its way across the region. At this point, this north-south line of storms was directly between us and Atlanta. The pilots were monitoring their cockpit weather radar and the reports of other aircraft in the area to find a relatively calm section of this line through which to pass.

A short time later, those of us back in the cabin experienced our arrival at the storm line as a sudden darkening outside the windows and a new, stronger wave of turbulence. At first I remained relaxed about the stormy ride, but after a minute or two when the cabin lights went out, I realized things were getting serious. To the passengers up front, the seriousness of the situation was more obvious from the frightening sound of baseball-sized hail pounding the plane. For me, and probably the others around me, this hammering was not so apparent since I was seated between the two tail-mounted jet engines, noisy enough on their own.

The storm of hail cracked the windshield and smothered both engines to the point of flameout, cutting off the electricity for the lights in the cabin and the instruments in the cockpit.

Unlike the usual Hollywood depiction of these situations, chaos did not erupt aboard our plane. Instead, the flight attendants quickly began preparing us for an emergency landing. Their prompt intervention and commanding voices went far in keeping us focused on survival. While the pilots fought to restart the engines and find us a reasonable place to land, the flight attendants briefed us on the brace position and the location of the emergency exits.

From my aisle seat, I watched one of the flight attendants as she moved back and forth through the cabin getting everything ready. My thoughts went through a slow evolution during those long five or six minutes of coasting back to earth. I was initially confident that the situation was recoverable as the lights were restored in the cabin. I didn't know the electricity was now coming from the auxiliary power unit, a small generator normally used to power a plane for startup on the ground.

After we came out of the clouds and left the noise of the storm behind, the unusual quiet of the engines stood out. In the next minute or two, the pilots' attempts to restart the engines were clear to us as we heard loud backfires from the right and then the left engine. From then on, the engines were totally silent and I realized that there was no comfortable outcome left to our situation. In those next moments, a number of crazy thoughts raced through my mind – Will I miss my connection? Is it too late to switch planes? Will my baggage be destroyed? I was especially concerned by the fact that all my army uniforms and official records were with me since it had always been drilled into our heads that we were accountable for anything lost.

I then felt very alone in my thoughts and was struck by the fact that there was no escape from this. Many people talk of having their life flash before their eyes or thinking about their families, but none of that happened to me. I became focused purely on the here and now, worried about what I needed to do to survive not just the crash, but the aftermath which included the army bureaucracy as well.

After a couple of minutes, my two seatmates and I seemed to become aware of each other again. One of us suggested we hold hands and pledge that we would all make it through. Somehow the gesture was not as reassuring as it seemed it should have been. I turned back to rehearsing in my mind what to expect upon landing. I anticipated a series

of hard bumps and then one final slam which would bring the plane to a stop.

Just then, the pilots made a steep left bank – as it turned out, they were lining us up with a road. We could see the tops of the north Georgia pine trees outside the windows. The flight attendants gave us the signal to assume the emergency position. In the brace position with my head between my knees, I listened and felt as we seemed to start brushing against the tops of trees. The noises and the vibrations grew stronger. The plane began bucking in all different directions. Instead of the relatively similar bumps I had expected, the shaking was growing in intensity. I started to doubt my plan.

In my peripheral vision, I noticed a bright light in the aisle to the left of me. I tried to tell myself that it was just the aisle light, but I looked over at it anyway. It was a fire and although it wasn't burning me, I realized that things had turned very bad. I looked back again at the carpet between my feet and realized I was going to die.

Almost immediately, a complete feeling of calm came over me. I felt the direct presence of God and became totally relaxed with the idea of dying. I was surprised at this because I had not been praying for help and I was amazed that I could feel so peaceful about my own death. I formed the question in my mind to God asking, "Is this how it is to end?"

As if in answer, the next moment I opened my eyes and instead of seeing carpet, I was looking at the sky. I was flat on my back in the dirt. There was a car parked about eight feet in front of me and beyond it was a white house with a wooded front yard, a typical quiet residential scene. As I looked to my left, everything was jumbled, smoking wreckage. I thought it must be a destroyed house, but it turned out to be my section of the plane. I was on the edge of order and chaos.

I had survived. Although the pilots and 63 of my fellow passengers did not. Nine local people on the ground also died that day along a two-lane road in a small town known as New Hope, Georgia.

A plane crash is a horrible experience, but I learned that even in the middle of such chaos, it is possible to find peace. I had faced the possibility of death and found it to be a lonely experience even with friends seated all around me. But when the moment came to die, I found that God did not abandon me. His presence transformed dying from the great unknown to a pleasant passing into the next life where the pain and fear of the moments before are quickly forgotten.

## Understanding the Grieving Child

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Because their peer group is so important to them, teens can be significantly impacted by the death of a friend as well.

Teens commonly think of themselves as immune from injury or death. When the death of a parent, sibling or friend occurs, the world as they understood it has been thrown into chaos. Many teens have difficulty communicating their thoughts and feelings about death with adults, especially the surviving parent, as they are also seeking independence from the parent.

As teens attempt to search for answers to their questions and struggle with the loss that has occurred, they may engage in behaviors that adults find frustrating and worrisome: not communicating, not eating, skipping school, not doing homework, attempting to escape through alcohol or other drugs, or exhibiting reckless behaviors.

Perhaps the best way to be of support is to listen, to be available, and approachable. Especially with teens, it is important to be available at any time they are open to communicating. As difficult as it may be, it is best to avoid, as much as possible, telling them what to do and what not to do. Allow the grieving teen to do his or her grief work as he or she chooses within reasonable boundaries.

Although it is a difficult time for everyone in the family, taking care of the children and helping them cope with death, can make a huge difference to their adjustment to life without the family member or friend. *For more information on The Dougy Center, write P.O. Box 86852, Portland, Oregon 97286, call 503-775-5683, or visit the website at [www.dougy.org](http://www.dougy.org).*

## Aviation Safety Education at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University

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specific displays providing a dimension and learning experience unavailable in the regular classroom.

Another tool the students can use to learn the art and science of safety is the Safety Information Center (SIC). This is a repository and technical library housing a variety of aviation safety materials. Current holdings include CAB/NTSB Aircraft Accident Reports dating back to 1938, Canadian Transportation Safety Board (CTSB) Accident Reports, British AIB reports, New Zealand Aircraft Accident Reports dating back to 1956, various Safety and Aviation Periodicals, many research and conference proceedings reports, books, articles, and safety statistics from several government agencies. Additionally, interactive exchange has been developed through several of the government and industry data systems, including FAA/NTSB, Flight Safety Foundation, ALPA, AOPA, and CTSB.

Aviation safety education has been, and continues to be, a major priority at Embry-Riddle. For further information, contact **Professor William D. Waldock, Associate Director-CASE Prescott, Center for Aerospace Safety Education, Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, 3200 Willow Creek Road, Prescott, AZ 86301, (520) 708-6956, or [www.pr.erau.edu/~case](http://www.pr.erau.edu/~case).**

