Voices from a Forgotten Tragedy

Trans-Canada Air Lines Flight 831
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This book is dedicated to Dorothy Jeanette Page known to our generation simply as “Dort.” She was profoundly wounded by the death of her husband, John MacPherson Page, a feeling of loss which never diminished for her. Forever resilient and always interested in our lives, Dort challenged us, argued with us, laughed with us and empowered us.

“Voices from a Forgotten Tragedy” is our gift to “Dort” and everyone else losing loved ones on Trans-Canada Air Lines Flight 831.
Lives Lost

THOMAS ADAMSON, 35, from Dundas, ON

THELMA CYNTHIA ADDISON, 41, from Toronto, ON

OLIVIER MARIE D. ALLEMAND, 23, from Toronto, ON

JOHN LANDON ALLETSON, 38, from Burlington, ON

DONALD ALAN ANDERSON, 46, from King City, ON

HAROLD STANLEY ANDREJESKI, 37, from Scarborough, ON

PHILIP REID AUSTIN, 34, from Willowdale, ON

FREDERICK W. BAMFORD, 59, from Winnipeg, MB

JOHN HENRY BASSETT, 40, from Toronto, ON

EDWARD DESMOND BAXTER, 29, from Georgetown, ON

Second Officer of TCA Flight 831

HERMANN MAX BECKMANN, 46, from Burlington, ON

MICHAEL JAMES BISCOTT, 44, from Toronto, ON

BRIAN JOHN BRADY, 38, from North York, ON

RICHARD RUTHERFORD BRUCE, 32, from Toronto, ON

RICHARD KENNETH BUHR, 43, from Erindale, ON

ROBERT HENRY BURNS, 48, from Etobicoke, ON

THOMAS SYDNEY BUTCHER, 35, from Dorval, QC

ROBERT KITCHENER CHANT, 47, from Etobicoke, ON

ANTONY YALDEN COLE, 40, from Toronto, ON

FRANCIS JOHN COLE, 34, from Weston, ON

KATHLEEN PATRICIA CREIGHTON, 23, from Veteran, AB

Stewardess with TCA Flight 831

RAYMOND HAROLD CLEAVE CROSS, 44, from Toronto, ON

MICHAEL JOSEPH DAVISION, 33, from Toronto, ON
Voices From a Forgotten Tragedy

Lives Lost

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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
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<td>45</td>
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<td>28</td>
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<td>ROSS DOUGLAS JONES</td>
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<td>from Cobourg, ON</td>
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<td>RONALD J. KERNE</td>
<td>28</td>
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<td>29</td>
<td>from Kitchener, ON</td>
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<td>ERIC CHARLES LAWRENCE</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>from Etobicoke, ON</td>
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<td>EDMUND PHILIPS LEWIS</td>
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<td>DOUGLAS GEORGE LOVE</td>
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<td>from Cooksville, ON</td>
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<tr>
<td>NARENDRA MADHULAL MASTER</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>from Bombay, India (now Mumbai)</td>
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<td>RUDOLPH MILLUS</td>
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<tr>
<td>JOHN MACPHERSON PAGE</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>from Leamington, ON</td>
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<tr>
<td>SAUL ZELMAN PANTEL</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>from Ville St Laurent, Montreal, QC</td>
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<td>TILLIE (BENJAMIN) PANTEL</td>
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<td>ROBERT ALLAN PHILLIPS</td>
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<td>MARIO ANTHONY PIERSCANTE</td>
<td>31</td>
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<tr>
<td>DAVID WILSON POLLOCK</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>from Long Branch, ON</td>
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<tr>
<td>EDWARD H. PRITCHARD</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>from London, ON</td>
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**Notes:**
- First Officer of TCA Flight 831.
- Lives Lost includes the First Officer of TCA Flight 831, Harold J. Dyck.
- The list includes individuals from various locations in Canada and the United States.
Preface

We all know where we were on 22 November 1963, when John F. Kennedy was assassinated. Even if we were too young or not yet born, someone has told us (probably many times) where they were. Remembering the weather, the wallpaper, and the circumstances of such milestones is a fundamental and powerful impulse for all of us. It connects us to history and has become all the more pervasive with instantaneous communications. The date, 11 September 2001, has already become a parallel milestone, distracting our attention from what else was happening in recent history.

Everyone has their particular events and places they can’t forget. For me the television perched on the teller’s counter in a Bank of Montreal lobby in Ottawa for the Paul Henderson goal of September 1972 is certainly one. Similarly, I will always remember hearing the news of the Kennedy assassination via a high school class-mate. The name of the fellow student, and the corridor in the school, stays with me long after I have forgotten most else. The where and how of remembering the past can be as important as the event itself.

Seven days later, a Canadian airline experienced its most serious air disaster, but I remember nothing of that day, no matter how hard I try. All 118 people aboard Trans-Canada Air Lines Flight 831, departing for Toronto from Montreal on a rainy, cold, miserable evening, were killed instantly when their DC 8 jet crashed five minutes after takeoff. Headlines in all the newspapers certainly
proclaimed the tragedy. I wasn’t personally involved and like most Canadians remember nothing of 29 November 1963.

Now, I know my dad’s cousin Harold Dyck was the co-pilot on the flight. He was also brother to our family chiropractor and our family lawyer, but we weren’t paying much attention in 1963. There must have been a funeral—a funeral these days we would certainly attend.

Bob Page remembers the night all too well. His father, John Page, had been diverted onto TCA Flight 831 while returning from a business trip to the Maritimes. Bob and I became close friends a couple of years later, travelling across Canada and to Expo ’67 together. I dated his sister, eventually married his Nova Scotia cousin, and always kept in touch. Bob never hid or denied the loss of his father and he always knew his mother never recovered. He didn’t talk about it and I never asked. During our trip to Expo, Bob and I looked for the crash site at Sainte-Thérèse de Blainville, but it was dark and no one could direct us.

After his father’s death, Bob finished high school and went on to university. In 1971 he completed his medical training and moved back to Leamington with his wife, Jean, to be nearer his mother. Bob became a successful and compassionate doctor in his hometown, and still lives along Lake Erie in Kingsville, very near his original family home.

For the past five years, at Jean’s urging and with my questions, Bob has been revisiting his tragedy. He has been joined by the hundreds of others whose knowledge of where they were on 29 November 1963 remains very clear—but who also rarely spoke about it. They were not hiding, but rather getting on with their lives. This book is their memory and their experience. More of the rest of us than we might imagine may need to share in this experience and become part of this life after the tragedy of 29 November 1963.

For those directly touched by the lives lost on TCA Flight 831 the inextricable link to the loss of John F. Kennedy undoubtedly exacerbated their loss. But for the rest of us, the very public death of JFK and the ensuing investigations distracted us from the losses of our own community. On top of this, none of us wanted to hear about tragedies, particularly those related to progress. These were the early sixties, full of optimism and good news. We couldn’t imagine emerging jet travel would be anything but a great success and perfectly safe. We still don’t! We don’t want to consider progress might be unsteady or dubious or risky.

The crash of TCA Flight 831 took place just outside Sainte-Thérèse de Blainville, Quebec. The passengers and airline employees were almost all Anglophone, while the witnesses and the first responders, the police and army who were guarding the scene, the emergency workers, and hundreds excavating the crash site were all primarily French-speaking. There was precious little joining of these two solitudes for the next forty-five years. This journey has begun to remedy the divide through the compilation of *Voices from a Forgotten Tragedy* and working together for a 50th anniversary. This book introduces the community of Sainte-Thérèse de Blainville and their response to the tragedy of TCA Flight 831. It will help them, and us, continue to memorialize the tragedy which occurred there.

*Voices from a Forgotten Tragedy* takes the form of an oral history. As an archivist, I believe the past is best kept alive through original records and the recounting of past experience. This is a collecting, compiling, deconstructing and reassembly of the past—as it has meaning today. We need to know the past, alive and with meaning, simply to know who we now are. It is also a virtual conversation, bringing together the images, newspaper clippings, visits, phone calls, e-mails and posts amassed over the past five years. In the process Bob, Jean and I have devised a collective interactive remembering, rather than a series of individual stories, which we felt would better reflect our experience. We hope it is as affirming for our readers as it has been for us.

This journey has also been an opportunity to use the range of archival and research skills developed during my forty-five years of working in archives and libraries. At the same time, the journey has also revived the contradictions, mistakes, confusions, and ambivalences which oral history, historical evidence and media reporting
invariably awaken. Bob, Jean and I have done our best in sorting through these, though undoubtedly invented our own errors in so doing. We apologize in advance for such unintended slights and look forward to corrections.

It was always painful when our research didn’t tell us enough, particularly for the younger victims of the crash. Jean often had difficulty finding proper obituaries and had precious few contributions to work with. In our tributes to those who died, we’ve included all submissions and even the smallest detail we could find about all the lives lived. We invite any corrections or additions and invite you to submit them to voices@tcaflight831.com

This remembering, and grieving, and understanding can be profoundly nourishing and affirming, rather than painful or depressing as one might expect. Tragedy often does this for us and never at a glib or superficial level. We’ve experienced this with the Swiss Air tragedy and even with 9/11. We believe Voices from a Forgotten Tragedy allows the remembering, grieving, and understanding which should have begun fifty years ago.

So finally, I offer a most heartfelt thank-you to Bob and Jean, to Bob’s sisters and brother, and to the hundreds of others who have been part of this journey. You have invited me into your lives and it has been the most important, humbling and ennobling experience of my life.

Ernest J. Dick
Granville Ferry, Nova Scotia, March 2013
The three of us had worked hard on the wording of the announcement and had requested the Globe & Mail print it as close to the date of forty-fifth anniversary as possible. But in spite of having placed the notice, we weren’t prepared for such a quick response.

When Bob answered the phone, Don Cross was on the line from Toronto. Don had heard about the notice from a friend in British Columbia. He quickly purchased a copy of the newspaper, found the notice in the Personals section, and called Bob. For the next thirty minutes Don and Bob experienced what we’ve come to consider one of the most important conversations in the genesis of the journey leading toward this book.

The two discovered at age sixteen both had lost their fathers and both had taken on the role of man of the house. They’d helped their mothers cope with the tragedy and had taken care of younger siblings—in Don’s case three sisters and in Bob’s three sisters and a baby brother. Their life paths were very similar: after attending university and attaining their professional goals, both had returned to their home communities to live closer to their mothers and continue the responsibilities they had accepted. Both had their adolescence cut short that night in 1963.

This phone call destroyed forever Bob’s assumption that no one wanted to talk about their memories of the crash of TCA Flight 831 or its impact on their lives.

Over the next few days e-mails appeared on Bob’s computer from Lynn Biscott, whose dad was travelling on the same connector plane from the Maritimes as Bob’s father and Dave Lewis, whose dad was returning home to Sarnia, Ontario, for his own birthday party after a business trip to Montreal on behalf of the Polymer Corporation. More e-mails and phone calls and letters arrived—and have never stopped arriving.

The date, 29 November 1963, and the place, Sainte-Thérèse de Blainville, Quebec will be forever burned into Bob’s memory. The DC 8 jet aircraft carrying his father, John M. Page, home from a business trip to the Maritimes plummeted from the sky and crashed into a muddy field at 500 miles per hour. Everyone on board was instantly killed as the aircraft was totally destroyed. The first people on site looked at the debris and questioned whether the mess they saw had even been an airplane. One hundred and eighteen lives were lost, and one hundred and thirteen families had their futures instantly altered. Five couples perished leaving eleven orphans. Many others lost a father, a mother, a sister or a brother, a fiancé, or a son or daughter. In all cases their lives would never again be the same.

The plane crash occurred seven days after the assassination of John F. Kennedy in Dallas, Texas. Canada and the United States were in shock and turmoil. Communities ignored their losses in the face of the more dramatic loss of John F. Kennedy. Widows from the crash of TCA Flight 831 felt they had to live up to Jackie Kennedy’s example in her very public and very brave grieving.

After a short period of grieving the Page family pulled together with support both emotional and financial from John Page’s employer. The H. J. Heinz Company’s Canadian headquarters and factory were located just three blocks away from the Page home on Erie Street in Leamington, Ontario.

With the exception of an almost comic extortion attempt—and threat on Bob’s life two months later—the family settled into a routine existence and rarely talked about the disaster. Apart from one unsuccessful trip Bob made in 1967, no one in the family had visited the site of the crash or the memorial cemetery.

With the passing years Bob attended university, became a physician, and moved back to Leamington with his wife, Jean. They lived the continuing tragedy of the crash as they helped Bob’s mother cope with her ongoing sadness and its injurious impact on her life and the lives of their family and her friends.

Over the years, Jean came to know the story of the crash. To Jean it was an intriguing story of which Bob knew relatively little beyond the incredible impact it exerted on his own family.

For a long time Bob, not wishing to revisit his memory, resisted Jean’s suggestions to explore the story and possibly write a book. Then in May 2007, while the three of us shared a glass of wine on
Bob and Jean’s sun porch, Jean invited Bob to tell Ern the story. Then she challenged Ern—an oral historian and Bob’s friend from high school—to write a book about it. Ern saw the necessity, as well as the potential and the challenges, of documenting this historic and deeply personal event.

Bob wondered how other families had survived the tragedy. We considered trying to contact them to talk about the disaster, their memories of that night, and what struggles they’d endured as they got on with their lives. Bob still wasn’t entirely convinced. Even if we were able to contact them, would families be interested or willing to relate their memories?

He agreed to work with Ern, but was still a hesitant partner. Bob called his sisters, Betty, Peggy and Susan, and brother Allen, to talk with them about the proposed journey. He needed to know they would not seriously object to his sharing the family’s story. Their reservations were clear, but they supported the decision to proceed.

This hesitancy to share memories would become a theme in our journey. Many families admitted that Bob’s openness in exploring his own loss allowed them the comfort to do the same.

Meanwhile, Ern and Jean started doing research. We quickly learned what a truly unprecedented and unexplained tragedy had occurred that night in 1963. Bob’s mother’s brown folder containing newspaper clippings, telegrams, and personal letters, preserved by Bob’s sister, Susan, provided us with our first source of stories about the crash. The passenger list printed in the *Windsor Star* in 1963 moved us from knowing one name to knowing 118 names.

Many of the family members of those who died in the crash still live in the Toronto area. On May 21, 2009, we held a meet-and-greet in the Toronto home of Valerie Dixon, daughter of Howard Dixon who died in the crash. The sun was shining, the doors were open, and thirty-eight people mingled in Valerie’s home and her garden. Everybody brought food or drink. No one knew each other, but everyone was talking to everyone. The DVD *At the Moment of Impact*, a CBC production (1965) documenting the investigation of the crash, was running on the TV in Valerie’s den. Many were seeing the documentary for the first time and there were more than a few tears shed. A feeling of connectedness filled the house, connections we had never experienced before.

Karen (Alletson) McGinty:

Thank you Valerie and Bob for hosting a very special dinner last month. I lost my father, John Landon Alletson, age 38, in the crash of TCA Flight 831. The meet-and-greet was a wonderful opportunity to meet and share stories with such a unique group of people.

What an interesting adventure—going to a potluck—not knowing a soul there and only tied together by an event that happened 45 years earlier. (Letter, Toronto)

Following the meet-and-greet, we continued to search for information relating to the crash and for more contacts. We created a DVD of our own, called *Our Search for Memory*, as a means to introduce our journey and to recoup some of our research expenses. We were able to license the distribution of *At the Moment of Impact* from CBC and combined this with an introduction to the project and a Radio-Canada television report aired on the fortieth anniversary.

In August 2009, Jean and Bob visited Sainte-Thérèse and the memorial site for the first time. Diane Demers and Monique Labelle offered to go with them. Both had been working for TCA at Dorval on the night of 29 November 1963. Dianne and Monique were not acquainted and neither had visited the memorial site before.

During their visit Bob and Jean met with city officials, a local historian, and with Madame Dauphinais-Savaria, the wife of the undertaker charged with receiving the bodies from the crash site. Through their stories and photographs we have come to appreciate how the entire community was disrupted that night, and for weeks to come.
The crash at Sainte-Thérèse occurred just as bilingualism was being born as a political possibility for Canada. Pressure to become more bilingual was building on Trans-Canada Air Lines. The transition would ultimately include a new name: Air Canada. In the course of our research we learned how the investigation of the tragedy was in fact facilitated by this emerging bilingualism.

Another cultural movement was afoot in 1963, although at the time feminism had not quite taken hold as such in Canada. In revisiting the experience of our mothers, and our sisters, we came to see them as early feminists, thrust to the forefront as a result of their sudden, however unwelcome, independence. Our journey has given us a new and profound appreciation for their accomplishments.

Our “Lives Lost” section honours the 118 people who died on TCA Flight 831. Many families have sent us clippings, biographies and recollections to combine with our research. This allowed us to compile 118 tributes. Again, our apologies in advance for the inevitable mistakes and not always being able to use your contributions as submitted.

Following the last chapter of the book and the tributes to the lives lost we’ve assembled a historical synopsis of what we know about the flight. How this flight and this jet fit into the history of aviation and aviation disaster. The weather and particular circumstances of that late November Friday evening determined so much for TCA Flight 831. How the community, investigators, aviation industry, authorities and media responded has evolved for us and we share our understanding with the reader. This understanding has not been straightforward, or easy, or complete. Your own reading and experience will continue the understanding of the tragedy that was TCA Flight 831.

We would never have come this far without the honesty and sharing of so many in our community whom we introduce later in the book. Thank you to all who have opened their hearts and memories to us. Without your support and encouragement, this memoir would have been a shallow recounting—and indeed might never have come together at all.

Chapter Two

Before the Crash

In October of 1963 John Page had been appointed Vice-President of Sales at H. J. Heinz Company’s Canadian headquarters in Leamington, Ontario. The goal was to broaden his knowledge of the company preparing him for the role of president. During the last two weeks of November, he was on his first major trip to the Maritime Provinces, accompanied by his predecessor, Leonard Crimp. The two visited sales offices throughout eastern Canada, introducing John to the sales staff and major retailers. They were scheduled to return home on 29 November.

At home, it was a typical Friday—Betty, Peggy, Susan and Bob had returned from school. Dorothy was preparing for John’s arrival from his trip and looking after Allen, who was three months old. That night was Leamington District High School’s annual Sadie Hawkins Dance allowing the girls to invite the boys. Bob, Betty and Peggy had dates for the dance, scheduled to start at seven o’clock.
Voices From a Forgotten Tragedy

Before the Crash

All the 118 passengers on TCA Flight 831 were looking forward to the weekend, thoughts of starting new jobs, visiting their fiancé, or finishing their work week. All were thrilled to be flying on the new DC 8F to Toronto. All had friends and families waiting for them—waiting to hear news of their trip and waiting to see what Dad was bringing home for them from his travels.

Karen (Allerton) McGinty:
My mother, Kay, short for Kathleen, was a housewife right out of Leave it to Beaver. She hadn’t worked outside the home in over seventeen years. The laundry and ironing was completed like clockwork, likewise the cooking and cleaning. I would come home to the smell of fresh baked chocolate chip cookies. Dinner was always ready at six o’clock and waiting for Dad to drive in after his day at work. She always kissed him hello and hung up his coat and jacket. While he was getting changed, she would be taking up dinner.

There were New Year’s Eve parties and cocktail parties, neighbours visiting.

All was right in our little corner of the world. (E-mail, Toronto)

Susan (Page) O’Hara:
I was very young, only six, when we lived in our house on Erie Street in Leamington. I remember things with my dad—one of which was stealing his beer! He came home every night and had a beer. He would place the glass on the arm of the chair as he read the newspaper. I would come over. “Can I have a sip, Dad?” He would let me have a sip. Then I stopped asking, just kept taking little sips. It got to the point where I was drinking more of it than he was.

That obviously stopped! So when he came home and got a beer, he poured a little into my own glass—that was all I could have.

After the crash ... I quit drinking cold turkey!

Another memory—making coffee with Dad. He would come down on Sunday mornings and make coffee—he obviously had it timed perfectly. He would know when it was going to start perking. He’d call me out to the kitchen and say, “I need help.”

We would stand there and say, “Perk, coffee, perk!” And it would! You’d just think he was wonderful and magical.

I was the ‘cow’s tail’ at one time on a family fishing trip. I was the last in the line as we walked through the woods to go fishing. (Visit, London, Ontario)

Sharon (Pantel) Glickman:
That was the first weekend we were on our own. Oddly enough, usually when my parents went away we had my grandmother come to stay, or a housekeeper. This time, we said, “Really we are old enough, it’s just for a weekend, why can’t we stay by ourselves?” I was eighteen. “Okay—we’ll do that.”

My mother was wearing her very first mink coat on that trip. They were going to a bar mitzvah in Toronto for a work colleague of my dad’s. I remember her modeling it for us, showing it off for us, twirling around. It was a symbol in those days!

Then about six o’clock in the evening, Steve called me and said he had just heard from a friend that there was a crash of a plane going to Toronto. “Weren’t your parents supposed to be going to Toronto?” It never occurred to me that would be the plane. It was simply not part of what you thought could happen to you ... I was just totally happy-go-lucky.

Later on in the evening the doorbell rang, and a bunch of aunts and uncles were at the door, and even then it didn’t hit me. I said, “Oh, we think they drove—because the weather was bad—they were late for that plane. We were pretty sure they weren’t going to make it anyway—chances are they just drove.” (Visit, London, Ontario)

Fate and Flight 831

Joseph Szostak, a 43-year-old drafting foreman for Westeel in Toronto, wasn’t thinking about anything except getting home to his family.
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Viola Simmons:

Instead of meeting our dad in the arrivals area we, along with all of the other friends and relatives, were asked to go to Section D — a secure area of the airport. Reporters were now arriving at the scene and there were rumors of some sort of trouble with the plane.

After several minutes? Hours? An announcement was made over the public speaker system — the plane was down! We were locked up until 12:00 a.m. It was like a chamber of horrors, everyone was crying, bedlam — you had to be there to feel the tensions and heartache. There were a few other children as well as yourselves. They supplied books for you to read, gave you milk, gave us coffee.

We all sat and waited not knowing what we were eventually going to hear. Eventually they told us they had an announcement to make. Some TCA official came in and just stood there and said, “#@$* there are no survivors!”

All hell broke loose, screaming, God knows what. I took your grandmother and you kids, went out. I got our car and drove home. It was freezing rain but we made it.

When we came home, I told my mother whose reaction was to go to bed. A friend, a nurse from Imperial Oil, came over and spent the night. She kept the reporters away from the door as they pounded on it all night.

Wally’s boss came over. He just stood in the doorway, said nothing, cried and cried and then left.

Letter to sons Michael and Peter Simmons

Peter Simmons:

I know we were taken out to the airport to wait for the flight — both Mike and myself. A photographer came in and took a photograph of myself, Mike, my mother and my grandmother. I was only four years old so that is the only memory I really have of the night. I don’t know if it’s a mental thing, but I have blocked everything else out. (Telephone call, Toronto)

Michael Simmons:

I have very partial memories of being at the airport. I remember being there — like one frozen moment in time.

After they made the announcement of what was going on and I remember asking Mom and she said, the way a mom would say to her son, “Your father is not coming home anymore.” I just went into shock then!

It was kind of like a magnifying glass — because everybody suffered the same loss but you all experienced it a slightly different way. It wasn’t like hearing it on the radio with three or four people — sharing it with a small group.

We were in a room with a hundred — I never did find out how many were there. If everybody had somebody picking them up — back then they didn’t have babysitters. So it must have been hundreds — I have no idea. (Telephone call, Toronto)

30th November 1963 — unidentified newspaper (Simmons Family Personal Memorabilia submitted by Michael & Peter Simmons November 2011)
Voices From a Forgotten Tragedy

Fred Chivers:
At the time of the terrible TCA Flight 831 crash I had been working out of the Toronto office of Southam Newspapers on a three-month training program.

On Monday, 25 November 1963, Allan Phillips, a Southam Newspaper Account Executive, and myself went to Montreal to work out of the Montreal office of Southam Newspapers. Allan and I spent three days together in Montreal. I then went on to Ottawa for further account work.

I caught a flight from Ottawa on Friday night to Toronto where upon our arrival at the Toronto airport I passed Allan’s wife who was waiting for Allan’s plane to arrive. We exchanged a few pleasantries and I proceeded to my hotel.

I was in total shock in the morning when the hotel maid told me of the crash of TCA Flight 831.

We held a wake for Allan at the home of the manager of the Toronto Southam office. (E-mail, Radium Hot Springs, British Columbia)

Noelle Grace:
Fred [Hagerman], my fiancé, was flying home to see me and visit with his parents who had travelled north by car from Evanston, Illinois to St. Thomas, Ontario.

I was in the car heading to pick Fred up at the London airport from the plane he was to connect to in Toronto when I heard the first vague radio news bulletin of an airline accident.

He did not get off the connecting flight we were expecting him on — and he had not called home! So I think I really knew ....

TCA were stunned — and not sure how to be of any help to the frantic fretful me — so I called my dad who was about to give a formal speech at an event at the Hotel London.

He told me to just go home — he would come as soon as he could.

I think he thought I must be exaggerating and truthfully as I was not a relative, no one was very helpful at the airport. On the return in the car the radio announced there were no survivors — “I repeat, no survivors”.... Those words still haunt me.... and with them any faint hope I had collapsed. (E-mail, Toronto)

Doug Hink:
My father, an engineer with TCA, was resting that evening when I received the call from TCA. In our family, when our father was resting we were not to disturb him under any circumstances.

So I told his boss that he was not available — I would have him call later. He told me in no uncertain terms to get him up and to come to the phone immediately. So I did. My father took the call and told us that he had to go to the air crash site at Sainte-Thérèse. He was gone in a few minutes and we did not see him for several days — maybe a week.

He was one of the first people on to the crash site and saw some horrific things. He was also in the midst of the confusion between the various authorities to determine who held the overall responsibility for the investigation.
Voices From a Forgotten Tragedy

All the groups involved met in a school house in Sainte-Thérèse late that night to discuss the site assessment and evaluation — the meetings were very intense.

Even though the impact on us was not in the loss of a loved one, it had deep impact on me and my family.

My father was not quite the same after that event — and when there was a subsequent event in Toronto some years later he went, but was very upset about the prospect of having to go. (E-mail)

Mimi Allemand:
When my mother and I arrived at our apartment both of my in-laws were waiting for us, as well as my father. Simpson Sears had been in touch with my mother-in-law and they were all listening to the news.

Much later I answered the telephone to a female voice saying, “Is this Mrs. Allemand?” I answered, “Yes.” “Your husband was on the flight tonight in Montreal that crashed.” All I could say was, “Thank you very much,” and then screamed out very loud and went into shock.

I know that Olivier and his two colleagues took that flight in order to get home earlier in order to be with their families for the weekend. Well I never did get to see him again. He was gone — twenty-three years old and far too young to die — and for me, far too young to be a widow. My life has been forever affected by his death.

The morning of 9/11, I was at a supplier’s showroom at Designers Walk to be told of the tragedy — I spent my afternoon at my husband’s side at Mount Hope Cemetery. (Letter, Toronto)

Bob Page:
Our Sadie Hawkins dance went well and was winding up at 11 o’clock. We all enjoyed the dance and weren’t going right home. After the dance a friend and I planned to take our dates to Stewarts Drive-In for root beer and ice cream.

As we were coming out of the gym, our neighbour, who was also our guidance counsellor at the high school, met me and said: “Bob, your mother wants you to go right home.” This was very unusual. I went back to my friends and I said: “I think I’d better go home.”

They had heard him and said, “Oh, you don’t have to go home RIGHT now, let’s go.” I said, “No!” There was something about how he said, “Your mother wants you to go right home.”

I told my friends that I wanted to go home.
I can’t remember what happened with our dates.
Our neighbour also met my sisters as they were leaving the dance. He made a point of identifying each of us and he said, “Your mother needs you to go home right away.” (Visit, Kingsville, Ontario)

Betty (Page) Webb:
Our neighbour came up to each and every one of us — very seriously said to us, “Your mom wants you go straight home tonight, straight home.” At the time I didn’t think too much of it but when I got in the car and turned to look at my date. “My dad was coming home on a plane tonight.”

I remember saying that.
Lights were on all over the house and there were people everywhere.
You know, I don’t remember Mom telling me. I can’t be sure but I know she was there when I went in the door. (Telephone call, Calgary)

Bob Page:
I arrived home and there were a lot more cars in the driveway than I expected — there were a lot of lights and lots of people.
I don’t remember a whole lot about coming home. For some reason I came in the front door — I remember coming in the front door and I remember lots of people — and the minister.
Jean Grant-Page, B.F.A (Hon)

A love of history and art stimulated Jean to initiate and co-author *Voices from a Forgotten Tragedy* with her husband Bob Page and his long-time friend Ern Dick. The four year journey of research and learning has brought new acquaintances and untold stories. The process of researching the story has resulted in a better understanding of how this tragedy became integrated into the fabric of each and everyone who experienced it. It’s never forgotten—it’s part of their memory and soul.

Born in 1948 in the farming community of Teeswater, Ontario, Jean graduated as a Registered Nurse and shares three grown children and four grandchildren with her husband Bob. At 60 years of age, Jean graduated with honours from the University of Windsor with a Bachelor of Fine Art and Women’s Studies. Her studies were invaluable for assisting in compiling the lost story of TCA Flight 831.

Jean is an amateur photographer with an eye for the visual experience. She utilized these skills to combine the images with the text to enhance and complement the contributor’s memories in *Voices from a Forgotten Tragedy*.

As Canadians, Jean feels we need to understand our history. The current postmodern era—questions, examines and seeks out events for what they might reveal—both positive and negative. It has been an emotional journey for many and difficult at times—but *Voices from a Forgotten Tragedy* is a memoir we can all be proud to read.
Robert J. Page MD, C.C.F.P.

Born in Leamington, Ontario, Robert (Bob) Page spent the first 16 years of his life in the idyllic setting of small town, southwestern Ontario. This peaceful childhood was shattered in 1963 by the sudden death of his father in the crash of TCA Flight 831. While coming to terms with the tragedy, Bob finished his last year of high school, before attending the University of Western Ontario.

Graduating in 1971 as a Doctor of Medicine (MD) Bob completed his training in Halifax, Nova Scotia and St Johns, Newfoundland followed by 1 year of surgical training in London, Ontario. Returning home to Leamington, he worked for 33 years as a Family physician and provided medical care for three local nursing homes. Between 1991 and 2006, Bob served as the Chief of the Medical Staff at Leamington Hospital. In 1999 Bob received an Ontario Hospital Association 75th Anniversary award, presented in recognition of his dedication and service to the Leamington Hospital and its community. Semi-retired since 2006, Bob continues to work part-time providing medical care to individuals with mental illness and/or chronic pain.

The process of researching and co-authoring the book, *Voices from a Forgotten Tragedy*, has been a journey of discovery for Bob. For many, the painful memories and emotions surrounding the tragic crash of TCA’s newest DC-8F jet were suppressed long ago. Bob’s ability to listen to people, acquired during his medical practice, allowed him to open a dialogue with individuals and families encouraging them to share their memories. For Bob, these interactions offered a unique opportunity to explore, analyse and appreciate his own memories and the extenuating impact of the TCA crash on his mother, and family.

Ernest J. Dick grew up in southwestern Ontario on a fruit and vegetable farm, always interested in the past. After studying history at University of Waterloo, Trent University and Carleton University he joined the Public Archives of Canada in 1974 and worked with preserving Canada’s sound and moving image heritage. He was active in promoting and researching Canada’s audio-visual production and became the CBC’s first Corporate Archivist until 1999. Thereafter has worked as a Consulting Archivist, lecturer in film and history and the moving images of Atlantic Canada at Saint Mary’s University and developed projects and installations to keep the past alive for museums and heritage societies in Nova Scotia.

As an author, Ernest J. Dick has published on the archiving of sound and moving images, Canadian broadcasting and film and the 1970’s television program “Singalong Jubilee”. He has appeared on radio and television, produced and directed documentaries and hosted a 16-part radio series on the soundscape of the millennium in 2000. He developed historic walking tours and multi-media exhibits for Annapolis Royal, installed ghosts at the Sinclair Inn and Perkins House in Nova Scotia, and is currently working towards remaking Canada’s first documentary, “Seamen Courageous”.

Ern loves the out of doors and spends as much time as possible hiking the Nova Scotia shoreline, cross-country skiing in the Gatineau Park and Nova Scotia’s North Mountain, cycling wherever he can find pavement, pruning where and whenever asked, and gardening at the Historic Gardens of Annapolis Royal and on his property in Granville Ferry on the Annapolis Basin.

Ern was pleased to combine his long-standing friendship with the Page family, his archival experience and contacts, and his experience of oral history to facilitate *Voices from a Forgotten Tragedy*. He can be reached at voices@tcaflight831.com for corrections or further contributions.
Voices From a Forgotten Tragedy

Robert J. Page  Jean Grant-Page  Ernest J. Dick