

July 24, 2008

Dear Air Medical Industry Leaders
& Safety Summit Delegates;

The people writing this letter are the families and friends of flight crews and passengers killed in air medical accidents. We are also the survivors of air ambulance crashes still trying to cope with our injuries. Like other relatives of accident victims, from the mothers of victims of drunk drivers, to the families of TWA 800's passengers, our pursuit of safety is a huge priority. By personalizing our loss, we hope to make our voices heard so that you and others may understand and take action.

Although we are not represented at your upcoming safety summit on July 25 in Dallas, Texas, we feel it is important that our voices be heard. We ask that you respect our right to be heard, to participate, and to express our concerns about safety. We ask that each delegate receive our letter during this summit. Additionally, a copy of this letter has been sent to the leadership at every major air medical association, many flight programs across the country, the FAA, the NTSB, and the media.

This summit convenes in the midst of a deadly year of accidents that have killed 17 people in less than seven months. Since the 2006 release of the National Transportation Safety Board's report on EMS flight safety, 43 people have died. If you are summit delegate, you know the numbers better than most. While we may disagree on the specific measures to improve safety, we are united in our desire to find ways to prevent future tragedies like those we've experienced.

As you prepare to develop solutions to the problems of EMS flight safety, an understanding of the deep emotional impact these accidents leave in their wake cannot go unrecognized. Our lives are forever changed. The loss is forever.

This is our testimony:

***“On July 29th, during my son's 12th birthday party, we were told my brother's flight was involved in a mid-air collision. My brother survived, but was in extremely critical condition. We rushed to be with him and five days later on July 4th 2008, he died. We found out later that these two flights were coming in within 3 minutes of each other. They didn't see each other and crashed in mid-air. My brother died due to simple lack of communication.*”**

He left behind a wife and three children. Children who will never play baseball with their Dad again, children who will never go on their yearly Disneyland trip with their Dad again, children who will never watch a Red Sox game with Dad again. And James will never see them drive their first car, graduate, get married, or have children of their own. It was not just a talented life flight nurse that was lost that day. It was a father, a husband, a son, a brother, an uncle, a friend.

There is now a hole in all our lives that will never be filled, we miss him every moment of every day.

--Laurie Brady, sister of James Taylor, Utah

My name is Adam Wells and my wife Jenny was killed January 11th, 2005. As her husband, when she died I lost everything in life that was important to me; my best friend, my partner in life, and our chance at having a family. Her family and friends lost one of the brightest parts of their lives. Jenny was the one that was always sending cards, flowers or gifts when people were in need of some special attention. Jenny always had an open ear and a non-judgmental attitude when somebody had a problem. The community lost a nurse that cannot be replaced for the talent and level of care that Jenny gave so selflessly. As beautiful as Jenny was on the outside, her heart was even more so. Jenny died needlessly, flying in unsafe conditions to get to a patient that never would have been airlifted due to poor weather.

--Adam Wells, widow of Jenny Wells, Colorado

My youngest son is known for his questions ALL DAY LONG. I consider them to be tough questions because I don't always know the answers. Today, Ty proved that questions are sometimes tougher even when I know the answers. Out of the blue, while driving down the road, Ty asked "Momma, who cleaned up the mountain?" "What mountain?" I asked in confusion. "The mountain where dad crashed." Oh, THAT mountain. "What do you mean who cleaned it up?" "Well, did the fire trucks go put out the fire?" "No," I said, fire trucks wouldn't be able to get up there." He then quickly fired off, "How did the ambulances get up there to get the people?" Oh boy, this conversation is headed

in a dangerous direction I thought. "Um, the ambulances didn't get the people. "A helicopter did," I offered. "To take them to the hospital?" he asked. Um, that would be the big N. O. "No, probably to the mortuary because they were dead." Great thing to say to a kindergartener, eh?

Okay, this is the end of the conversation, I'm thinking. So, how many days until Santa comes? What do you think we should have for dinner? Who's going to win tonight's football game?

"I know how dad died, he was burned," said Ty. Okay, I can handle this, I tell myself. Don't freak out Sandy. I took a deep breath and said, "yes, he was burned, but he probably died when the helicopter crashed – before the fire." "Was everyone burned?" he continued. "Probably," I confirm. My eyes are getting a little misty and the lump is forming in my throat. "Was his skin all off him?" he questioned. What? Are you kidding me? What do I say? How about a lame answer. "I don't know." "How many pieces was his body in"? I don't know seemed to work last time. Let's try it again. "I don't know." "Why didn't you ask the people who saw him?" Um, uh, because maybe I didn't want to know. Maybe if I just hum for awhile, I'll think of something intelligent to say. "Hmmm." "How did they know it was him?" Finally, a question I can handle "They did tests," I say. Please, please, please don't ask me what kind of tests. "Then what did they do with him?" Now we're back to what he already knows.". "They put him in that box and then we buried him at the cemetery, remember?"

"Oh yeah," Ty says softly. I look in the mirror and see his shoulders hunched over and his head down. He looks up at me and through the mirror, our eyes meet. "I miss him," he says. "Me too, buddy, me too."

--Sandy Hellman, widow of Todd Hellman, Nevada

"My daughter Flight Nurse Erin Reed was killed on September 29, 2005, in an air medical helicopter. Erin death was a huge loss to our family and her friends. The hole she left is the motivation that keeps us working to try to prevent air medical crews from dying needlessly. We urge you to listen to the voices of families and friends of those killed. There is much that can be done to make the environment they fly in safer. Not only technological

changes, but more importantly, attitudes toward safety must change. There must be a willingness to protect flight crew first and foremost. They continue to die because there is failure to act."

--Sandy Brians, mother of Erin Reed, California

"On 9/11 in 1995, my twin sister, Amy, and her crew-mates, Marna and Lee, died when their air ambulance helicopter crashed into Puget Sound in the calm, darkened pre-dawn hours of that fateful Monday. The significance of that date was never lost on me and, in 2001; I added national grief to my own.

I won't tell you what kind of person my sister was - the fact that she was an air ambulance nurse should tell you that. What I will tell you is, even to this day, I can only aspire to be half the nurse she was. What I will tell you is, even with all the education and advanced training she had, she continued to work as a flight nurse because it was her calling. What I will tell you is, in spite of other offers and choices for employment, she came back to flight nursing. What I will tell you is, the day she died, the world lost more than "just" my sister.

Soon, it will be 13 years since that accident. Not a day goes by that Amy does not cross my mind, much less my heart because I re-live that pain. Her death did nothing for my already "unusual" view of life. Amy's death probably didn't help our mother in her descent into the hell that is dementia. Our father never really got over her death. And, a year ago this January, he was fortunate enough to join Amy again. Maybe our mother has too, at least somewhere in what's left of her mind...

Almost 13 years and look at the numbers of continued tragedies... and why? No one will ever convince me that my sister did not die in vain until the steps necessary to protect our air ambulance personnel are taken. No one that will ever convince me that my sister's life wasn't worth what it takes to save another. No one that will ever convince me that they wouldn't feel the same if their loved one died needlessly. We're not asking for your help anymore - we're demanding it!"

--Cece Terry, sister of Amy Riebe, Arizona

“After our crash I remember waking up in the rehab hospital. Yes, I was "awake" before but I lost a few weeks. I did some soul searching. Did I want to fly again? Tough question. As far as I knew at the time, I would be physically "able.”

It seems the next thing I remember was being wheeled on a cot up the newly built ramp to my house. I was thinking "how lucky I am to have friends to take me home." Inside my living room was my hospital bed waiting. Beside that was my wheelchair. Beside that, was my new walker. I thought "how lucky I am to have this all set up." On my bed was a handmade note from my son. "Welcome home dad, I have missed you." As my EMT friends were leaving, my son gave me a big hug. I couldn't let go. I think I squeezed him and cried for a LONG time. He whispered, "I'm glad you're alive." At that very moment, I knew I wouldn't fly again.

As it turns out, physically I can't fly. I loved flying. I was damn proud of myself and my family was proud of me also. I think I helped a few people along the way. Now I spend as much time as I can with my family. Life is short enough.”

--Danny Kelly, Former Medic, Survivor, Indiana

On December 3, 2007 I lost my brother and my best friend, John Stumpff, in a medical helicopter crash in the unforgiving winter waters of Alaska. John's body was the only one found of the four on board. John was the only boy in our family of five siblings. After the death of our father 16 years ago, John kept up with taking care of our mother in Kansas by traveling from New Hampshire, Florida and eventually Alaska. In New Hampshire, John was a fire fighter and paramedic. After moving to Florida, he obtained his nursing degree with visions of travel, exploration and adventure. He worked in emergency rooms in Florida, Nome and Anchorage and was sooo excited about getting his next adventure as a Flight Nurse. He was an exceptional nurse, respected for his dedication, talent, stamina, quick wit, sense of humor and infectious laughter. There is no replacement for John. We would talk frequently and share tales of our adventures and we would each plan our next dream. He was always willing to help anyone, and would go out of his way to do so. John left two beautiful daughters and one grandchild who will soon turn two as well as a companion that had been sharing his adventures

and love for Alaska. His co-workers and long-time friends will also miss his laughter, motivation and inspiration.

We need to be more active to protect the good people, those who spend a lifetime helping others. There have been too many wonderful people's lifetimes cut short that could have been prevented. With increasing usage of helicopters for medical transport, immediate action is required to provide legislation that can increase helicopter safety and prevent the tragic and unnecessary loss of another brother, sister, father, mother, uncle, aunt, grandfather, grandmother, husband, companion, friend or co-worker.

--Deborah Crane, Sister of John Stumpff, Alabama

I am a flight nurse who has chosen to return to the air medical industry. I have not only the past but the future in mind as I grieve for a community that has lost so many. My wife and children are the sweet reminder that my co-workers do not enjoy the life that I still have.

I sat in the front row and listened to a safety panel meeting in the spring of 2005, just weeks after our crash. Many questions and suggestions came from the panel of experts. A question came from the floor "What will give these recommendations teeth?" That question gnaws at me as I empathize with families and survivors alike.

--Jonathan Godfrey, RN, CMTE Sole survivor 1-10-2005

My brother, John Stumpff, was the Flight Nurse on the LifeGuard Alaska helicopter which crashed in Prince William Sound on December 3, 2007. Because of, in my opinion, inadequate tracking systems on these medical helicopters, nothing was found from the helicopter for several days. My brother's body was finally found, washed up on the shore of Passage Canal, on December 8th. The other members of the crew and the patient have never been found, nor has the helicopter, though it is presumed to be at the bottom of Passage Canal.

John was not just my only brother, but one of my best friends. I miss our conversations, his laugh, and his love for life. The last 8 months has been the most difficult time of my life. John was a fantastic nurse and his loss is also a loss for the medical profession and patient care.

I feel that there could have been better safety precautions put in place for these medical flights, especially considering that these brave men and women are risking so much everyday to help others.

--Rebecca L. Novotny, sister of John Stumpff

“On September 29, 2005 my daughter Erin Eachus Reed, an air medical trauma nurse, was killed in a helicopter crash in Washington.

This tragedy remains the most difficult and emotionally paralyzing thing that parents can experience. Erin was the oldest child and the keel of our family. She always kept the panic level at a two instead of a ten in her career and in her personal life. How do we do live without her? She was passion and compassion as a daughter, sister, friend and nurse. We are lost.”

--Dick & Pat Eachus, family of Erin Reed, Hawaii

“How strange that I would start searching the web for information on my dad and find your tribute to him. I know how horrible accidents are – they change your life forever.

Today I thought I would see if there were any news stories about my dad's helicopter crash on the web. He crashed in 1985 so I wasn't hopeful, but curious I guess. This is the only place I could find anything! Thank you for this page, it is so good to see someone acknowledge his service.

My dad's name is Michael Myers and he crashed in Monument Valley Christmas Eve 1985. I was nine, my sister was seven and my brother was five. We found out about the crash Christmas morning, and were actually able to see him before he died. They got him back with a ruptured pancreas I think - we got to see him and kiss his forehead (the only place not covered with tubes or whatever) and I know he saw us and knew us. That was the last

time I saw him. He died on December 30. We all still miss him and there is a space in our hearts where he used to be.

I have pieces of the helicopter believe it or not! We visited Monument Valley (I don't know when or how old I was) and there was still debris on the ground from the crash."

-- Marji, daughter of pilot Michael Myers, Colorado

"How strange to know that your best friend won't be there for you to talk to. A piece of you is missing leaving an unfinished puzzle. I met Erin Eachus Reed when we were in high school more than thirty years ago. We went through a lot together over the years; the highs and lows of boyfriends, husbands and friends. She taught me how to drive a stick shift, I taught her how to eat sushi. There was an abiding love and zest for living just being with Erin. We traveled together as teenagers and later as adults but we still had unvisited places on "the list" when she died in Washington in September of 2005. Erin, a flight nurse, was killed when the helicopter she was in went down. My head tells me she went doing something she loved when she died, but my heart doesn't listen very well.

The exact cause of the crash is not known, but I urge you, the leaders of the air medical industry to make the right choices, the right decisions so even one less person will be writing of the sadness they feel without their best friend... I miss her everyday."

-- Paula Roberts, Florida

"When I got the phone call that Rog had crashed, my first thought was "Oh no!" Then it was "he's an experienced pilot, it will be ok." Never in my wildest dreams did I think he would die in a civilian crash. He made it back from Vietnam where someone shot away the chin bubble at his feet, where he had to keep one skid on a hillside and the other in the air as troops accessed his aircraft. How could peacetime aviation be as bad as that? Little did I know before August 21, 2004 that the air medical industry is so dangerous.

Rog was the oldest child in our family... my big brother. He was

kind, funny, loving, and generous. He helped anyone with a hard luck story. I always thought he was too easy going and people took advantage of him. But, his compassion, humor, and love of life were the very things that made him so special to me. He is in my thoughts every day and I wonder what happened that night. Was it wind shear, bird or lightening strike, mechanical or instrument failure, human error, or some in flight emergency?

Unfortunately, there will never be a definite answer, as there were no survivors, no witnesses, and basically no wreckage to examine. The only things, flight data recorder and cockpit voice recorder, that might have provided answers to why five people died that night on the mountain are not required equipment on air medical aircraft. Even getting basic information from various agencies has proven difficult, which has made the situation worse.

How does an experienced instrument pilot, flying on a known course, with the same crew and aircraft as previous flights, hit a mountain he knows is there? I don't know, but those are the circumstances that took my brother, his crew, and passengers from their families.”

--Cindy Swank, sister of pilot Roger Morrison

“After our crash, I tried to point out the issues that I felt could have prevented it. The NTSB listened and agreed. But within the organization, the points I made fell on deaf ears... I didn't get any response. I have a very good idea as to why, and I suspect similar situations are occurring in other flight programs as well. While I realize that there are a multitude of factors that contribute to accidents across the country, I do suspect that most of the problems boil down to money, politics, and most of all, ignorance. In light of what I had personally experienced, the post-crash(es) environment at my program became an unacceptable place to work. Flight nursing is inherently risky without adding organizational turmoil on top of it.”

--Former Flight Nurse and Chair of Safety Committee, Krista Haugen, RN, MN, CEN

“Erin and I were very different. She’d talk to me about the occasional messy scene call or being sleep deprived 24/7 and I’d tell her about my new “high paying” dream job right out of graduate school -- selling defense weapons to the military (and foreign countries). My sister laughed when I told her about the new bomb we’d developed with the secret weapon(s) - - 202 bomb-lets. Let’s just say you’d better stay the heck out of the neighborhood when that went off!

She never criticized my career choices, never told me I should be ‘ashamed of myself’ or that ‘I had no business doing what I did.’ Those remarks actually came from some of you in the air medical community. Some people have said ‘family members have no right to influence aviation safety legislation’ or that ‘my sister would be ashamed of me for lying.’ Let’s face it, if my sister wasn’t ashamed of me for selling bombs, it’s doubtful she’s up there criticizing my safety advocacy...

I’m not ashamed. I’m proud of every person who wrote a statement for this document and for those who wanted to but still can’t make themselves go there.

I miss my sister. After nearly three years, I still find myself thinking about her last moments even though there is so much more to think through. Those last eight to 12 seconds before they hit the water; that’s what makes my eyes burn. I count the time off in my head “one-one thousand, two-two thousand, three-three thousand...” It seems like an eternity. I just hope she wasn’t afraid. I hope she never knew what was happening. But somehow, knowing Erin, that seems unlikely. She always knew what was coming. It’s the rest of us who didn’t know...

--Stacey Friedman, sister of Erin Reed, California

My brother, John Stumpff, 47, was killed in a medical helicopter crash in Passage Canal, Anchorage, Alaska in December, 2007. Three crew and a patient were on that medical helicopter. His body was the only one found. I have peace in knowing he loved what he was doing but will always wonder exactly what happened. The helicopter was never found and it sounds like Alaskan officials have stopped looking for the wreckage. This whole incident has had a profound impact on our family. My mother had to bury her only son and my sisters and I miss our brother everyday. Please do all that you can to make our medical

skies safer. The safety of medical helicopter flights should hold the same importance as all flights in our airways. These helicopters should be equipped with a black box to locate its position. My brother's helicopter was missing for 5 days before he was found in Passage Canal.

--Barb Demesko, sister of John Stumpff

“As they fell from the sky, they fell out of their lives. In an instant they were transformed from living presences in the world to memories. Their children would grow up, and recollections of them would dim and waiver. Their parents would grow old without them, and even in their sleep, cry out for them. People would have dreams of them, and even in their dreams dread the pain of waking to the world from which they had vanished. All this has gone on ever since and will go on until the last person who loved them is dead.”

--(Gerson & Adler)

Contributors & Endorsers

The following families and friends of those killed and injured in air medical accidents support the reading and distribution of these impact statements.

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