

*Voices*  
*from a*  
*Forgotten*  
*Tragedy*

TRANS-CANADA AIR LINES FLIGHT 831

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TRANS-CANADA AIR LINES FLIGHT 831



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

29<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER 1963 PRODUCTIONS

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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.*

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# 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

invariably awoken. 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](mailto: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

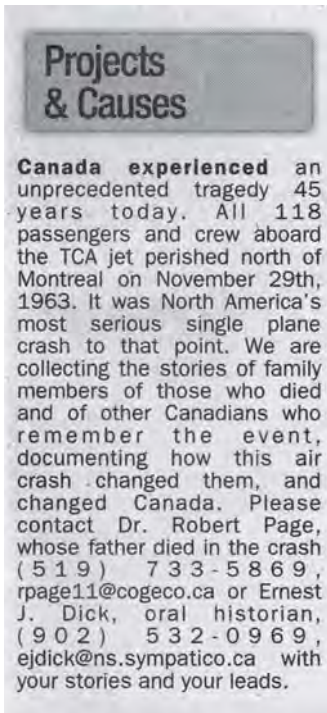
## Chapter One

# BEGINNING OUR JOURNEY



### *Claudette (Languedoc) Kohut:*

I always thought losing my father, Michael Languedoc, in a forgotten air crash was a story which was MINE alone.



29th November 2009—  
*Globe & Mail*

But I found out this week that it was NOT!—I found out that there are lots of people out there who share my story.

This had been my story for so long that realizing it wasn't just mine—it was like finding a long lost sister. There is joy in the new member but a realization there will be some sharing necessary that wasn't there before. (E-MAIL, OTTAWA)

∞ The phone rang in the Page home on Saturday afternoon, 29 November 2008. It was the forty-fifth anniversary of the crash of TCA Flight 831. Jean remembered the date and nervously answered the phone. A male voice said “I would like to speak to Bob Page about the announcement in today's *Globe & Mail*.”

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

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.

From the beginning of this journey, the authors realized we needed the help of the news media to reach out and connect with families of the victims of TCA Flight 831. Ern organized an interview for Bob with *Maritime Noon*, a regional CBC radio program from Halifax. Richard Foote, a reporter, submitted two articles about our project to the CanWest newspaper chain. They were printed in many newspapers across Canada and resulted in a flood of e-mails and even some phone calls.

The internet, and particularly e-mail, has enabled us to collect memories from people living all across Canada and abroad. Friendships have developed with people as far away as New Zealand and as close as Windsor, Ontario. We have been successful far beyond our very limited initial expectations.

Originally, Bob was hesitant to talk to the media about his father's death and the impact of the crash on the family. However, the very compassionate interviewers, the empathetic treatment of his story, and all the ensuing contacts enabled Bob to be more comfortable discussing his memories of the tragedy. As the project evolved to incorporate all of these conversations, e-mails, and telephone calls into our memoir, this mutual reinforcement has itself become the journey.

Documenting this journey has been a work in progress. *Voices from a Forgotten Tragedy; Trans-Canada Air Lines Flight 831* represents our re-creation of the virtual conversation that we experienced over the past five years. We have respected privacy, both implied and requested, and apologize for any unintended intrusions. The liberties we have taken have only been those Bob felt comfortable taking for himself.

Few Canadians, except the investigators, the aviation industry and the families, knew or thought much about how or why the DC 8F went down. Compensation was very different family to family and usually very private; memorializing and remembering their losses was uncertain; and most families were reluctant to join us on this journey. We have chapters revisiting each of these themes.



*Chapter Two*

## BEFORE THE CRASH



Summer 1958—John and Dorothy Page with daughter Susan at the annual Heinz Picnic at Seacliff Park on the shore of Lake Erie in Leamington, Ontario. (Dorothy Page Personal Memorabilia submitted by Susan (Page) O'Hara, August 2011)

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.

∞ 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 (Alletson) 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

He hadn't wanted to come to Montreal in the first place—it was his first air trip and the first time he had been away from his wife overnight in 17 years of marriage—but Stephanie had said if it was important for his job, he should go. For the trip he had bought a new suit, a new coat, a new hat, a new pair of shoes, a new flight bag, and had taken along the \$40 watch he wore only on Sundays. In Montreal the chief draftsman, William Hayman had tried to get him to stay over the weekend, but he insisted on going home. Now, as Hayman drove him to the airport, Joseph Szostak held two packages close to him—a pen and pencil set for 12-year-old Wanda, and a portable typewriter for 10-year-old Chester. When they arrived at the terminal, an hour early for flight 831 Hayman handed Szostak his bag and said: “Good luck and I’ll see you.”

Walter Foeller, 31-year-old vice-president of Zeiss (Canada) Ltd., was anxious to get home, too. His business trips to Montreal used to include a weekend of good eating, night clubs and theatre. But seven weeks ago the German-born executive had married a 26-year-old Berlin girl and now he wanted to get back to his bride in Toronto. ...

After lunch Richard Bruce returned to the Montreal office of Burroughs Business Machines and was presented with a farewell bottle of Italian wine by sales manager, John Caron. The 32-year-old Toronto psychologist grinned with pleasure, held up the bottle of Valpolicella and declared: “I’m going home to a steak dinner with this. It’s a ritual with us. Whenever I return from out of town, Dixie Anne puts Susan and Gordon to bed and we have a steak dinner.”

It was Bruce’s last day with Burroughs as supervisor of placement and development. He was joining a management consultant firm and had agreed to stay on with Burroughs for a week to interview new employees in Quebec City and Montreal. Just before 5 o’clock he picked up his bags and said goodbye to the Burroughs staff before grabbing a taxi for Flight 831. His old friend, Kaj Dichow eyed the slow-moving traffic and said, “You’ll never make it.” Bruce smiled confidently. “I’ll make it.” He did. (TORONTO STAR WEEKLY, 28 MAY 1964)