

Flight 486

By Marianne Hill

We were living in Zanesville, Ohio in the late Spring 1970. My husband, Richard, was working with the Department of Housing and Urban Development for the city. Our sons Doug, 16, and Rob, 9, were typical young students. I was a stay-at-home mom. Everyone in our family was well and happy—life was good.

One late May evening we were getting ready for bed when the phone rang. I knew it was bad news by the way Richard was responding. His mother Helen, who had moved from Ohio to Phoenix, Arizona for health reasons, had suffered a massive heart attack, and Richard's stepfather, Cy, was calling from a Phoenix hospital.

Sadly, by the time Richard, traveling alone, arrived at the hospital, his mother had died. His siblings and stepfather gathered together to make the final arrangements for her funeral.

The day after Helen's funeral, as Richard prepared to return home, he and his brothers stopped at Cy's mobile home to check on his condition. His dog was tied outside, which was unusual. Upon entering his home, they discovered Cy had committed suicide. Richard called to inform us of the second tragedy. He would be attending another funeral; his flight back to Ohio would be postponed. I tried to be strong for the boys, but I found myself crying... and doubting God. Why was this happening to us?

It was June 4, 1970. The skies over Phoenix were blue, the morning temps were seasonal. Richard was looking forward to a relaxing flight after the emotionally draining week. The scene inside the red and white TWA flight 486 seemed normal. Richard and the other 50 passengers buckled into seats for the two-hour flight to St. Louis, where he would connect to Columbus.

In Zanesville, the boys and I were apprehensive about Dad's return. Doug had a driver's license, so we buckled in for the short drive to the Columbus airport. The radio was on

and I heard a plane had been hijacked somewhere on the East Coast. We laughed and joked facetiously, "That's probably Dad's plane!"

When we entered the Columbus airport terminal, there were few people inside. We checked the arrival boards, and TWA Flight #486 had not arrived. The person at the counter gave us little information. We waited for a little while, then decided to call Richard's brother, Jim, who lived in the St. Louis area. He informed us that Richard's flight had indeed been hijacked! The man in charge of the TWA counter would not confirm or deny the hijacking. He said, "Go home and wait. Someone from TWA will contact you." After the events of the preceding ten days, I guess I couldn't take any more, because I honestly don't remember driving back to Zanesville to await word of my husband's fate.

TWA flight 486 never landed in St. Louis. The flight's pilot Capt. Hupe announced, "Due to inclement weather conditions, we will not be landing as scheduled." Richard thought that was strange, because from where he sat, the weather looked clear. He asked a flight attendant about his connecting flight to Columbus. When she answered, "Please take your seat", Richard suspected something was wrong. The next time Capt. Hupe spoke he announced that they were preparing to land at Dulles International Airport near Washington, D.C., hundreds of miles east of their destination. He announced to the startled passengers, "The aircraft has been taken over. We will not pull up to the terminal." The jet touched down and stopped a long distance away from any building.

Trucks came out to the plane for refueling, while a man carrying a large briefcase boarded the plane and entered the cockpit. The hijacker, later identified as Arthur Barkley, had smuggled a gun and a container of gasoline onboard, and now was demanding one hundred million dollars in cash as ransom for the airplane and fifty-one passengers. When the briefcase

was opened Barkley became enraged when he saw small bills and he realized that his demands were not being taken seriously. It was a very volatile situation .

Soon the hijacker ordered the jet back in the air. It circled aimlessly, flanked by military aircraft on both sides. Eventually it landed back at Dulles Airport outside Washington D.C.

Fire trucks were waiting as the plane touched down for the second time. Richard noticed that many duffle bags lined the runway, apparently in an attempt to convince the hijacker that this time the enormous ransom would be paid .

The next few minutes were noisy and frantic! To prevent the jetliner from taking off again , sharpshooters with high-powered rifles shot out the tires of the plane as it sat on the edge of the runway. As FBI agents stormed the 727 jet cockpit, the pilot tackled the armed hijacker. During this scuffle, Capt. Hupe was shot in the stomach. Meanwhile, Richard and several other passengers forced open the plane's exit doors and the passengers hurried off and slid down evacuation slides to the ground. The frightened passengers crouched low in the open as they scurried behind the mobile units toward safety.

The hijacker was apprehended by the FBI agents and taken away , while Capt. Hupe was taken by ambulance to a hospital. Thankfully his injuries were not life threatening.

After a de-briefing session, Richard and the passengers were sent on to their destinations the next day. While awaiting take-off, a woman passenger seated next to my husband remarked , “ Oh my , did you hear about what happened to those people on that flight here yesterday? “ When Richard smiled and replied that he was one of those hijacked, she never said another word on the flight to Columbus. Apparently, she was afraid he might be a Jonah!

In August 1971, the family moved from Zanesville to Elyria, Ohio. We both continued to fly after the hijacking ,but due to health problems, we don't fly much anymore. Richard and I

have been married fifty-eight years. This extremely stressful two weeks changed my life . Before this incident, I worried about everything even though I professed to have faith in God. After flight #486, I found strength from God to better cope with the trials and struggles of life. As my trust in Him deepened I became more confident . God has blessed me with a long life and I am thankful for every minute.