

What one experience has profoundly changed who you are? by Maureen Stipe

I was an executive secretary for a private airline. There were three offices in three airports for this company. It was my responsibility to keep things running smoothly. At our Detroit, Michigan office there were complaints the pilots were not getting their paychecks in a timely manner. After many chats with Elizabeth, the payroll clerk in Detroit, my boss decided to send me on a business flight to talk to her in person. That day came on November 18, 1968.

As was my practice, if I were flying anywhere, I would call home and let them know where I was going. Having a boy crazy sister at home; she would spend hours on the phone. This was the case that day. Time was flying by and I had to board the plane. I could reach her in Detroit I thought so off I went to get on board.

We taxied to the end of the runway and prepared to go thru the checklist and I had a premonition. "Please, let me get off. I just remembered I can't go. Uhhh I have an appointment." "You can't get off now we are ready to go and I can't shut things down to let you off." barked the pilot. There was a co-pilot who got on board at the last minute and a crew member to help load the plane. It was a very busy season that year. My body temperature rose and in a very helpless voice I whispered to Steve, the boy sent to help load, "We're not coming back tonight." "What do you mean?" he said. I have a premonition. He tried to put my mind at ease.

When we arrived at Detroit Metro Airport, we taxied over to pick up the cargo. Someone from the office was there to take me to meet Elizabeth. When we arrived there was a note on the door stating, "Was unable to stay. Sorry Signed Elizabeth. All this for nought.

We drove back to the area to see the cargo was almost loaded on the plane. I had time to get a cup of hot cocoa before flying back on this cold snowy night.

Five minutes had passed, when I noticed Martin, the co-pilot coming in. "It's time to get on board. You will have to climb over the shipment and sit on the spar of the airplane. That is what the pilot steps over to get in the cockpit. There isn't much room so I sat on the crew boys lap.

We taxied to our runway. I looked at the crates of bumper parts for Ford Motor Co., Lorain plant. The pilot went thru the checklist, I heard the roar of the engine getting louder and louder as we were taking off. What was that cough? It wasn't human! The right engine was spitting and coughing and struggling to stay on. Martin told me don't worry we will flutter the engine and everything will be fine. "Yeah I know that's what you'll do, thank you, I've been in a plane when that's happened before."

No sooner than I had spoken those words the engine stopped completely, and as the plane banked, and began to fall; all I had time to say was Jesus, Mary, and Joseph pray for us. And with that we had crashed.

As I lay there unconscious, bleeding, and cargo on my legs, I heard "Wake up are you alright?". It was Steve. As he tried to reach me he said don't touch your head, you are bleeding. As the cargo door opened, and two firemen were trying to remove the men from the cockpit, they asked if anyone was supporting the pilot? I said yes I was. They tried a support behind me. Who was at the cargo door you ask? A fireman in a flame retardant suit, looking scary, but most welcomed! The pain was excruciating and I was unable to keep conscious. They were trying to get the four of us out before flames erupted.

At the hospital is the next time I remember being conscious. As they wheeled me past Bryce, I could see his bone protruding from his heel. They were hurrying me along as quickly as possible. It turns out I was the most seriously hurt. There were plenty of staff. After all, they had received the call there was a plane crash, and not knowing how many people were in it, we were all well attended by physicians and nurses.

I had just bought a Russian Mini Coat, and all I could say was don't cut my coat, don't cut my coat.

My injuries amounted to three vertebrae in my back, right femur, left tibia, big toe all broken and my left knee crushed. Cuts and bruises, and concussion also.

This hospital was a learning hospital and I felt like a guinea pig. Three operations later, I was sent home to Ohio for six weeks by ambulance to recuperate. I then went back and they checked my progress and turned me into very capable hands at Elyria Memorial Hospital.

I spent a year, yes every holiday there. As I was cleaning out my drawer to come home, I discovered a small envelope with a heart on it. I read it. It was from my sister Joan. She had stated I taught her more about God than any book could have taught her.

Easter Sunday I went to church on polio crutches and body cast. I went early so I could get to the front of the church. After the service, a young girl was crying as she approached me. Nora said "I am never going to miss mass again, because I saw how important it was for you to struggle to get here."

When I died, and was brought back to life, St. Michael told me God said it wasn't my time-God had work for me to do. This is my work.