Testimony of John Michael 'Mike' Loftus
Father of Madeline Loftus
'Families of Continental Flight 3407'

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"If I only knew that I will never ever see, hear or feel all this, if I just knew that he was just given to me for only 28 years, I would never have let him out of my sight for a second. How I wish I can hear him just one more time, so that I could say one more time to him, 'I love you'."

- Nirmal Sidhu, mother of Dipinder Sidhu

Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
U.S. House of Representatives
Subcommittee on Aviation
'The Federal Aviation Administration's Call to Action on Airline Safety and Pilot Training"
Wednesday, September 23, 2009
2167 Rayburn House Office Building
(202) 225-4472

Making Air Travel Safer in the Wake of the Continental Flight 3407 Tragedy

Chairman Costello, Ranking Member Petri, and subcommittee members, I would like to thank you for inviting me to speak before your committee today. I am here today representing not only my immediate family, but also my new family – 'The Families of Continental Flight 3407'.

My 24 year-old daughter Madeline was on board Continental 3407 on that wintry night outside of Buffalo. She, along with 49 others and an unborn baby, perished on that night in February. This past August 28th, my family gathered at my daughter's grave in the pouring rain to sing Happy Birthday to our Maddy. That was not a birthday celebration I would wish on anybody.

Since that tragic night in February, birthdays, anniversaries, graduations, family events, and simple everyday life seems as though they have lost their luster. Nothing for us will ever be the same. The only thing we are left with is the past, the memories.

More than any issue we can spotlight or debate at this hearing, I feel the most important mission for me to accomplish today is to keep the oh-so-painful human side of this accident fresh in the minds of the important people in both our government and the aviation industry. I have included at the end of my testimony twenty three impact statements that have been submitted by members of our group, letting you know the pain and sadness that we all still struggle with on a daily basis, over seven months later. I would like to share just one, from Nirmal Sidhu, who lost her son, Dipinder, on that fateful night. She writes,

> "How can I ever forget those Sundays when Dipinder would ask me to stay in bed as he would whip up a scrumptious breakfast and serve it with aplomb… or the special way he would pick up our ten year old shiatsu and cuddle him everyday upon entering the house day from work… or the sound of "Wheel of Fortune" playing religiously on the TV in the evening… I can still hear the relentless teasing of my niece Simmar by my son, whom he treated like his youngest sister. He was instrumental in getting her admission in India in the medical school, right after

her graduation. How we missed sharing the joy just a week back when Simmar passed the first year of medical school in a new environment and with a different educational system with flying colors... I can still feel the exuberance in his voice when he talked about the girl in whom he felt that he had found a true soul mate... I can still see him joking and laughing with his father most evenings... I can visualize his smile when he talked with pride about his sister, Natasha.

It is all gone forever!!!!.

If I only knew that I will never ever see, hear or feel all this, if I just knew that he was just given to me for only 28 years, I would never have let him out of my sight for a second. How I wish I can hear him just one more time, so that I could say one more time to him, 'I love you'."

We are all here with one goal in mind. That is to prevent a tragedy like Continental Flight 3407 from ever happening again. The simple question we and everyone else must ask is what measures will make this a reality. And that brings me to the FAA's Call to Action plan unveiled in June, in response to the findings revealed at the NTSB hearings in May. I want to acknowledge Administrator Babbitt and his staff, who have met with our group on multiple occasions, kept us informed of on-going developments, and most importantly, not waited for the NTSB's final report to begin moving forward in the quest of making crucial improvements to our aviation system.

We have a simple message for the FAA. As a former pilot, when I look at the initiatives detailed in the Call to Action, they address three critical areas: training, fatigue, and an increased emphasis and investment in safety at the regional airline level.

Clearly our accident revealed deficiencies in both stall recovery and cold weather training in the industry. Since 2004 the FAA has been working on a rulemaking geared towards improving the airlines' Crew Training programs. The comment period on this proposed rulemaking closed last month. As we reviewed the submissions to the FAA, we came across quite a few negative comments from the industry. For me, they echo the all-too-familiar complaints of the changes being 'too great of an economic burden', and the complacent attitude of 'what we are currently doing is sufficient'. That

mindset is exactly what got us in the predicament that we find ourselves in today.

At the same time, the FAA is moving forward on a rulemaking that would lead to revised flight and duty time regulations, which former pilots like myself and Administrator Babbitt can testify are long overdue. This would be an enormous stride towards making air travel safer. One area that our group would like to see kept in the spotlight is the problematic area of commuting. With pilots flying cross-country to report for their duty, we cannot just continue to look the other way and pretend that we do not have some issues associated with it that need to be addressed.

So in terms of eliminating deficiencies related to training and fatigue, our group challenges Administrator Babbitt and the FAA to stand up to the industry, to stick up for our loved ones and the traveling public in general, and see these new regulations through to enactment in the course of the next year.

Next, I want to touch on the FAA's effort to identify industry-wide best practices and secure voluntary commitments from all Part 121 carriers to implement them. What this really speaks to is the inconsistencies in how regional carriers approach training, safety, and all phases of their operations When I flew, when it came to best practices in terms of safety and training, what was good enough for Continental was good enough for Continental Express. Sadly our accident revealed that this is no longer the case. Instead we watch as Continental does everything it can to lay the blame for the shortcomings at Colgan at the feet of the FAA and its lack of oversight.

Instead of looking to shift the blame, we feel that everyone needs to come together and accept responsibility, from the regional carriers to the major carriers to the pilots to the FAA to Congress, and

figure out what went wrong and work together to fix it. If parent carriers taking some responsibility for their regional partners will allow for safer operations, then that is what should happen.

So for the regional airlines, it all comes down to investing in safety and in your pilots, and doing everything you can to set them up for success. There should be no corner cutting when it comes to providing the very best training and the most state-of-the-art safety management tools. And yet as we look at the operations of Colgan, this was exactly what was allowed to happen.

The FAA has gotten the ball rolling in many of these areas with their recent summit and regional safety forums. But I know too well from my time in the industry that voluntary commitments to best practices now, can certainly go away quickly in the future, if the economics change or if Administrator Babbitt is not at the helm of the FAA to keep the industry honest.

And so this is where we need you, our representatives in Congress, to come in and mandate some of these changes. There are numerous important initiatives that have been put forth by both the House and the Senate for consideration with the FAA Reauthorization, but I want to spotlight three that we consider 'must-haves':

First, we must move forward with the comprehensive pilot training record database for use in the hiring process. Let us never have another accident where the carrier has the excuse that they did not know everything there was to know about the pilot when they hired him or her.

Secondly, we need to lock in MANDATORY safety management programs – FOQA, LOSA, ASAP – with the privacy protections that the pilots are asking for. We cannot leave the regional carriers with any temptations to save money at the expense of safety, which we glaringly saw in the case of Colgan.

And lastly, we need to achieve one of the key provisions put forth by this subcommittee's recently-introduced legislation, namely that all commercial pilots MUST have an ATP rating, with its requirement of 1,500 hours, prior to being hired to fly commercially. The demographics of the pilot workforce have changed, moving towards a younger, more inexperienced pilot, while the technology has gotten more advanced. When I was hired at Continental Express, I had an ATP and five thousand flight hours, and the captains whom I flew with had twice as much time. As I said in my previous testimony before this committee, there is no substitute for experience in the air. As a veteran of the industry, I know that this provision will require entry level pilots to build up additional hours by flight instructing, cargo hauling, and crop dusting before they can be hired to fly commercially. Many years ago, that is exactly the route I took, and all those experiences made me a better pilot when I got to Continental Express and had human lives in my hands in the back of my plane. So we ask the regional and major carriers, the pilot unions, and flight training schools to support this initiative – it means a lot to our group.

In conclusion, I would like all the key players in this room to look at the families here with me today – the Mellett's, the Eckert's, the Maurer's, the Kausner's, the Perry's, the Tolsma's and the Pettys's – and the other families who were not able to come to Washington but who are with us all the way. For us, what matters is not a well-crafted public relations strategy while our accident is still in the spotlight. What matters to us is implementation and follow-through. When it comes to the FAA Reauthorization, the Call to Action, and the NTSB final report and safety recommendations, we ask that you do everything you can to make sure the tragic mistakes of Continental Flight 3407 are never repeated.

Thank you.

IMPACT STATEMENTS FROM THE 'FAMILIES OF CONTINENTAL FLIGHT 3407'

Please take a few moments to read and reflect on the incredible hole that this tragedy has left in the lives of so many families. Hopefully our pain and sorrow will drive those in our government and the aviation industry who can make a difference to do everything they can to keep this from happening to other families.

I have been reading emails by everyone and until now I just did not feel like writing. I think most of you by know that we have not received any remains for our son Dipinder. This has intensified our grief many times.

How can I ever forget, those Sundays when Dipinder would ask me to stay in bed as he would whip up a scrumptious breakfast and serve it with aplomb... or the special way he would pick up our ten year old shiatsu and cuddle him everyday upon entering the house day from work... or the sound of "Wheel of Fortune" playing religiously on the TV in the evening... I can still hear the relentless teasing of my niece Simmar by my son, whom he treated like his youngest sister. He was instrumental in getting her admission in India in the medical school, right after her graduation. How we missed sharing the joy just a week back when Simmar passed the first year of medical school in a new environment and with a different educational system with flying colors... I can still feel the exuberance in his voice when he talked about the girl in whom he felt that he had found a true soul mate... I can still see him joking and laughing with his father most evenings... I can visualize his smile when he talked with pride about his sister, Natasha.

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Nirmal Sidhu, mother of Dipinder Sidhu

Beverly,

You were supposed to be there cheering when Nate struggled mightily to cross the finish line in his Special Olympics race.
You were supposed to be there for Mike and Amy's party to celebrate their wedding.
You were supposed to be there for David's graduation from college.
You were supposed to be there for the summer trip with Margot.
You were supposed to be there for Ray's 50th birthday dinner.
You were supposed to be there on Susan's porch to share cake and ice cream for your traditional double birthday party with Karen
Instead, we buried your ashes that day.
It hurts like you died yesterday.

submitted by Margot Eckert, sister of Beverly Eckert

Yesterday was another of what has been many painful "firsts". We took a ride to Ellicottville...a trip I had been dreading since my husband was killed. Since the crash, it was my first return to the beautiful log cabin home Kevin built for our family...a home we designed together, furnished together, and where together, we were to spend many winter seasons ahead of us with family, creating happy and long-lasting memories. Sadly, these memories were short-lived when, only months after his dream house was completed, this tragedy ended Kevin's life. It is disheartening to us that Kevin was able to relish in it for only one short season. Our chalet home was a long-time dream of Kevin's and it breaks my heart to think of all the time and hard work and love he put into it for the enjoyment of all our family. When I walked into the house yesterday for the first time in 7 months, I cried for all those years we looked forward to of joyful family gatherings that are now lost forever to Kevin.

For myself and my 3 daughters, I feel cheated out of a life and future that should have been...but that has forever been changed due to this totally preventable tragedy.

Kathy Johnston and family

My husband, Zhaofang Guo, went to visit his family in China in January after being away from them for several years. He was coming back home on Feb 12th. He never made it. Our family here was only three of us, my husband, Zhaofang, my son, Kevin and me. We did everything together. All of our other relatives are half way around the world. Since that day when Zhaofang was suddenly yanked away from our life, it was like our sky collapsed. We are so lost without him. We miss him so much, I do not even know where to begin. Life used to be fun and happy, now it is so empty, depressing and sad. Everywhere I go and every corner I turn, there are things that remind me that Fang is forever gone.

Fang went to work real early in the morning everyday so he could be home when my son got back from school. He took care all Kevin's afterschool activities. Kevin turned 16 three weeks after the crash. He is a junior in high school now. Three of us started visiting colleges in the summer of 08. But this past summer we did not visit any. Fang was a great cook and he cooked dinner almost everyday for us. Ever since he passed, we never had a meal like we used to. I did what I can to hold myself up and give Kevin some kind of stability. But nothing will be the same ever again.

Ping Wong, wife of Zhaofang Guo

By now Jean Srnecz and I would be married and she would be In Buffalo redecorating our home madly. Instead I continue to ask why.

Paul Jonmaire, fiancé of Jean Srnecz

Our hearts ache every day for our sister, Jean Marie Srnecz, who lived with her 23-year old daughter, our niece, Kristen, in Clinton, NJ. Jean grew up in Strykersville, NY, and attended college in Buffalo before moving to NJ. She was a Senior Vice President of Marketing at Baker & Taylor, an

extraordinary professional, mourned not only by her family and friends, but across the publishing industry. Jean was engaged to be married this summer and was traveling to Buffalo on February 12th to spend Valentine's Day weekend with her fiance. She was planning to move back to the Buffalo area when she married. Jean was a recent breast cancer survivor and had finally found happiness after a difficult marriage and divorce. Her courage and bravery were an inspiration to us all. What a tragedy to have overcome so much only to lose that happiness. Kristen lost not only her mother, but her friend and mentor. She will not have her Mom to see her through graduate school, to watch her career blossom, to see her get married and have children. Michael and Marilyn spent every Thanksgiving and Christmas holiday with Jean and Kristen and it will be unbearably sad and empty without her this year. Jim & Marlene and Dan & Mary won't have their Sunday brunches with Jean on her frequent visits to the Buffalo area. The nieces and nephews will never enjoy their aunt's lively company again. Jean was the sister who brought all of our family members together and we have been shattered.

Marilyn Marzolf & Michael Greenstein, Sunnyside, Queens, NY

Jim & Marlene Marzolf, Strykersville, NY

Dan & Mary Marzolf, Orchard Park, NY

Our mom's birthday is also in December, every year the sister's would take mom on a birthday outing. We would go to lunch or dinner, shop, (even went to New York City) or like last year, the theater to see The Rockettes. This tradition will also stop since shopping and going on adventures no longer are meaningful or fun.

Tina & Ruthann, sisters of Mary J Abraham

There has been so many events that had not been the same since I lost my husband Jerry that horrible plane crash Feb. 12, 2009 that I don't know where to begin. We had planned to go back to Las Vegas in May for our 29th wedding anniversary and to start looking for our second home, which would be our retirement home. Our retirement is no longer in question. Our first grandchild Ava had her Baptism and first steps and will soon be celebrating her 1st birthday in October. I keep looking at the pink baseball mitt and story books he bought for her on his own because Grandpa was going to teach her how to play baseball and read her stories. He could hardly wait.

We are not looking forward to the upcoming holidays. We loved to decorate our home and celebrate. There will be not many, if any, decorations but many tears. I never thought, so soon in my life, that I would be waking up and eating every meal alone and with no one to kiss goodnight.

Justine Krasuski, wife of Jerry Krasuski

Our habit was to talk each day at lunch time or in the evening. Elly would detail all of her interests and activities including law professors, new friends, movies, books, political views, future plans and dreams. My favorite times were her frequent trips home for holidays and special occasions or a long weekend trip to Jacksonville to share in her wonderful life. All of that is gone. Our family is looking forward with dread to the holiday season. Elly's 25th birthday will be December 13th. Each year we

would schedule "The Great Christmas Tree Adventure" around her birthday. This was a particular favorite of Elly's. She would get the entire family, including babies, bundled up and we would travel to the Southern Tier to cut the perfect tree then back to our house for chili and a football game. We will not go this year. These were happy memories but are also sad reminders that our beautiful girl died in such a violent and tragic way. My once optimistic and irrepressible husband is quiet and withdrawn. We are depressed, but determined to see that her death was not in vain. We are continuing our quest to see changes in commercial airline safety to honor our daughter Ellyce Kausner.

Marilyn Kausner, mother of Ellyce Kausner

My husband, Brad Green, was my loving buddy, my soul mate, family leader, willing listener, and constant companion. His absence is felt every minute of every day. There is no normal anything for this family anymore. My husband's daily breakfast time with our son when I was at work was filled with mentorship from business advice to personal conversations. Now that is gone ... a large hole to be sure. Our daughter and son-in-law anguish over the fact that Brad will never be there to build his grandchildren a backyard playground or help them learn to ride a bike. They will never get to hear his laugh or taste his special dishes at Thanksgiving and Christmas, two holidays we have yet to face.

Our family fishing times no longer exist. Attempts to keep them going were futile this spring and summer. We just journey without him, watching each season pass meaninglessly. No one ever expects to be traveling down such a tragic road like this for the rest of their lives. And....our pain and grief is intensified because this tragedy was so very preventable.

We rely on God to give our family and all our 3407 families the continued strength to get through each difficult day.

Sharon Green, wife of Brad Green Sr.

Although we are facing the tragic loss of our wonderful son, Coley, it is difficult to embrace our lives without his glowing smile, his tenderness, and his love. Every day is a challenge to make it a good day. Our family is trying; we constantly remind ourselves of how fortunate we are to have had Coley for thirty-four years. We are praying and hoping for changes with airlines safety standards. Certainly the loss of his life can help push higher safety standards for all citizens. Coley was a gifted musician with a powerful intellect - surely he would expect the government to step up to safety issues- do it for Coley and all the passengers and families of Flight 3407. We feel Coley's strength and conviction every time we attend a meeting - we find our own strength and conviction through him - we are determined to work for change, we hope the government will help us make our country safer through the efforts of the families of Flight 3407.

Mary Ellen and Kenneth M. Mellett, parents of Coleman Mellett

I did not know where to start with all the sadness that has been going on. I felt I was dealing with my pain day by day and I almost felt strength as each day passed. Today was a really painful day for my daughter. When I picked her up from school she got in the van and started weeping. There was an assembly at the school today that talked about air cadets, pilots, training and flying. At first I was so angry as to why she would sit through this assembly and she indicated that if she would have walked

out, everyone would have looked at her. My heart is aching so bad for her now that she is faced with something like this. I am trying to be strong for her but seeing your child trying to deal with things out of your control hurts so badly. Throughout all of this, she has strongly indicated that she did not want kids to ask her questions or be treated differently.

I did explain to her that in our life we are going to be exposed to so much of this and she said, "Will it get better?" I told her it will get better and we will be a strong team dealing with this. She is an amazing girl and I know if Don was here he would be so proud of her. It is such a bitter sweet life that she is so much like him that it is scary and yet comforting that I have a large piece of him in her. She will always be my constant reminder of what an amazing man Don is and what he taught her.

Elaine McDonald Family

My mother asked that we NOT do ANYTHING for her birthday this month. Her mother's day was heartbreaking and she says food no longer tastes the same, and the fragrance of the flowers she loves so much doesn't even smell the same. She was very close to her youngest son, Ronald, and they did very special things on these special holidays. She talks about being ready to be called to heaven so she can be united with her Ronald. It is very sad to see and hear. Ronnie was an excellent, intelligent, feisty, funny, compassionate, and loved human being. The Gonzalez-Figueroa family is forever scarred and changed because of this incredible tragedy. God help us!

Rebecca Gonzalez, sister of Ronald Gonzalez

Sue and I shared private jokes and language that stem back to the days when we shared a room as kids. Even with the super heavy load she carried as an adult, she always made time to read drafts of my writing, often helping me articulate and develop my ideas, fine-tuning my language and earning the privilege of making fun of what I felt to be a deep thought. I am near frozen now as I need to complete a work in progress that we had discussed many times, no longer able to turn to Sue for her astute and poetic mind, her love and encouragement, her ability to challenge and support me at once. My tears break through the ice as I hear and see us laughing and sharing together ... knowing this will be no more.

Dana Wehle (sister of Susan Wehle)

Summer transferred from her crib to a big girl full-sized bed this August. I ordered the rails, mattress/box springs, all of the princess bedding, and put the bed together by myself, and cried the whole time. October 8th will be her 3rd birthday and I just booked a kids facility for her party today, because I cannot bear to have our usual party at our home because it will be too empty without her Daddy there. The most painful thing is listening to her ask where Daddy is, or make up stories how Daddy is gone and she wants to see him. Summer swam by herself (with her life preserver) this summer for the first time. So many moments we were excited to share are gone. I don't know how I will wake up Christmas morning without him.

My birthday is Nov. 14, and every year we would eat at Shoguns and get the goofy photo taken of me with the wig. I have a photo from every year we've been together. This year will be the first year I will not be going to Shoguns, as the tradition will end along with the photos. Ernie's birthday is

October 31st on Halloween, our favorite Holiday. Halloween will never feel the same for me and how am I going to take Summer to trick or treat without her protector? Also, another tradition was World's Largest Disco. Ernie and I got dressed in our 70's duds and attended every year the Saturday after Thanksgiving. Thanksgiving was a tradition every year at our home also. Ernie cooked the WHOLE dinner for my family. He was so proud of his meal. This year I cannot have it at our home and notice the empty chair and missing chef. Every holiday I have to make other arrangements as it is too painful to have it in our home without Ernie. I pray Summer understands.

Jennifer West, wife of Ernie West

Getting Nikki's senior portraits in the mail brought me to my knees, literally, and a crying spell that lasted for a very long time. I am already dreading the emptiness and pain in my heart when she walks across the stage at graduation without her dad next to me.

Robin Tolsma, wife of Darren Tolsma

Doug's love, energy and love of life is missed every day, but especially on the day we would have celebrated our 30th wedding anniversary, and on the bittersweet day I had to walk our daughter, Lori, down the aisle on her wedding day.

Karen Wielinski, wife of Douglas Wielinski

Singing a special song at my nephew's wedding in August was not quite the same for me or the family without my singing partner, Susan. She also would have been the one officiating at the wedding had she not been taken from us so unnecessarily.

Eva Friedner, sister of Susan Wehle

My youngest brother Brian is getting married. The first person he called to tell was our brother John. He also asked him to be the best man. John was thrilled, this was such a happy time for our family. John would be home on the 12th of February, and the following Monday we had a family dinner planned; this would be the first time John would meet his future sister-in-law. John never made it home, he never met his future sister-in-law, he never saw his family.
I can't even put into words how painful the loss of our brother has been. There will not be a best man at the wedding. A day that we should all be looking forward too has turned into a painful reminder of what we have lost.

Carole Gagliardo, sister of John Roberts

I called Kristin's husband, Russ, and asked what he has missed most these past months. I caught him at a time in which he was totally overwhelmed with all of the responsibilities that he now has to take care of by himself. His response was how can he even pick one thing; every single day without Kristin is a

day filled with thoughts of her, thoughts of how much she is missed by the girls and him, and then the horrible reality of knowing that they will never be together again on this earth.

Cindi Saltzgiver, mother of Kristin Safran

Life is different after you have lost someone you loved so deeply. The joy is gone, replaced by sadness so profound that you physically hurt. A child who you brought into this world with such love, whose wonderful, exceptional life was cut short by a tragedy that should never have happened changes a parent, a brother, a sister. Now we try to get through each day with some semblance of normalcy, it is a struggle. Our life is not normal. On what should have been a simple flight to Buffalo, NY, our 27 year old son and his fiancé were killed. Our families were anticipating planning a wedding, instead we planned memorial services. We waited to receive his remains from the Medical Examiner. Finally, on May 30, 2009 Johnathan R. Perry and Nicole K. Korczykowski were buried together, a week before Johnathan's 28th birthday. It was his mother's birthday. There are no more long phone calls, no more text messages, no more surprise visits, no more requests for his favorite cookies, or homemade meatloaf, no more advice for his siblings. We all even miss his relentless teasing. We have memories, our future dreams for them, their future dreams have come to an abrupt end. We don't understand why or how this could have happened. We try to accept what cannot be changed and we are trying to change things that will prevent other families from experiencing a similar tragedy. Life is different now. It is a struggle.

Denise and Bob Perry, parents of Johnathan R. Perry

We live through our children. Their joys are our joys; their successes our successes. Not only was Nicole beautiful, brilliant and successful, she had the rare gift of making you believe in yourself. Her love of life, her energy, her wit, her laughter lit up the room. When you were with her, she made you feel you were capable of achieving anything you set out to do because she did. She connected with everyone whose lives she touched. A waiter at her favorite New York restaurant told us with tears in his eyes, "I'm only a waiter, but she made me feel like a king." Johnathan and Nicole were coming to announce their engagement and her promotion. He was no less brilliant and successful. Both were in their twenties. Instead of planning a wedding, we selected a burial site for them to be together. Where there was joy and purpose in our lives, we now find anguish and despair. Every day has become meaningless.

Maureen and Larry Korczykowski, parents of Nicole Korczykowski

Needless to say, the last 7 months have completely changed our lives. This tragedy has put a hole in our hearts that can never be repaired. I keep searching for a reason why this would have happened to so many victims and so many families, only to be left with emptiness for an answer. My uncle was a true hero. Fighting for his country in the military for over 30 years, all the while providing for his family while maintaining his civilian status. The only good that has come from this horrible event is that it has brought our family closer together, and hopefully opened the eyes of the lawmakers that can make a change.

My grandmother became ill in late 2007, at which time we moved her into my mother's home to live out her last days with family. My uncle moved in with my mother to help her care for my grandmother. The two of them became very close, closer than they have ever been. They sat and talked first thing in the morning, before bed, and during the course of the day. It wasn't about what was said, it was knowing that they were there for each other and more importantly there for my grandmother. When she passed away a few months later (Christmas Eve 2007), my uncle remained living with my mother and their bond grew that much tighter. That's what my mother misses about my uncle, seeing him every day. Having her brother to talk to, to see, to make his lunch for him and more importantly to share their memories of their mother. She will never have the chance to share those things again.

The night of the crash, I had to call my cousin Dana and inform her that her father was gone. I remember that call like it was yesterday. It was by far the hardest thing I ever had to do in my life. My uncle was Dana's rock. He was there for her every need. There for support during the difficult times of being a single parent, there for a talk when one was needed, there to put his arm around his daughter when she needed it most. He was there for her two wonderful children that have lost the chance to continue bonding with their grandfather. Having lost my father 23 years ago, I know what Dana is going through and it kills me knowing there is nothing we can do to change this. My uncle was the rock of the family, always the voice of reason. Always the peacemaker, making sure family was together and loving each other. I now see all the traits that he passed down to Dana. I am amazed everyday at how she has held herself together through all of this. It goes back to the strength handed down to her by my aunt and uncle. I am so very proud of her.

As for me, I miss the visits from my uncle. Even while living with my mother, he enjoyed his occasional away time from her (sorry Mom, love you) and would come over my apartment to do his laundry or to take a shower after his shift at the plant ended. He would, however, do this sometimes at 6-7am on the weekends. He tried hard to not wake me, but most of the time it resulted in me waking up and having a conversation. I would give anything to have the opportunity for him to wake me up again.

Every day when I think of my uncle, I have to remind myself that there are so many other families going through this same process and it absolutely breaks my heart. It is comforting knowing we are not alone in this, but it doesn't change the fact that it is the reality that we all have to live with. To make it that worse, it is painfully obvious that this could have been avoided and we hope the people with the power to make the necessary changes, do just that. They cannot allow this to happen to another family. My heart goes out to all the families that have lost loved ones, my thoughts and prayers are with you always.

Ron Aughtmon, nephew of John J. Fiore

In Memory – Continental Flight 3407

Mary Julia Abraham
Clarence A. 'Larry' Beutel III
Ronald and Linda Davidson
Beverly Eckert
Ronald Gonzalez
Zhaofang Guo
Kevin W. Johnston
Ellyce Kausner
Jerome Krasuski
Beth Ann Kushner
Madeline Linn Loftus
Don McDonald
Dawn Monachino
Jennifer Neill (and Baby Neill)
Mary 'Belle' Pettys
Matilda Quintero
Capt. Marvin D. Renslow
John G. Roberts III
Rebecca Lynne Shaw
Jean Srnecz
Susan Wehle
Douglas C. Wielinski
ClayYarber

Georges Abu Karam
David Borner
Alison Des Forges
John J. Fiore
Brad S. Green
Steven L. Johnson
Ruth Harel Katz
Nicole Korczykowski and Johnathan Perry
Brian Kuklewicz
Sean Lang
Lorin Maurer
Coleman Mellett
Donald, Dawn, and Shawn Mossop
Gerard Niewood
Donna Prisco
Ferris Reid
Julie Ries
Kristin Safran
Dipinder Sidhu
Darren Tolsma
Ernest West
Shibin Yao
Joseph J. Zuffoletto