

V RECONCILIATION AND HOPE

Rallying the Families: Seeking Justice

The disorganization that followed the bombing, and the frantic efforts of family members to hurry to Ireland and deal with authorities in the process of identifying the bodies of victims, are well documented. While in Cork, family members recognized the need for “mutual cooperation”. Back in Canada, most families felt ignored and had a sense of isolation and hopelessness. In India, other families felt more distanced from the entire matter. Some individuals, well-meaning but without adequate legal or monetary assistance, assumed the challenge of organizing, lobbying for and representing the interests of groups of surviving families. Many of those family members were unable or lacked the confidence to make representations on their own.

These individuals willingly assumed the responsibility to organize and rally others who, like themselves, had been affected so deeply by the loss of Flight 182. Most were related to victims – a few were family friends. All of them have devoted countless hours over the years to ensure that families would be heard and the victims not forgotten.

Dr. Bal Gupta

Dr. Bal Gupta was the first family member to speak before the Commission. He is a driving force behind the Air India Victims Families Association which represents about 80 families covering 180 of the victims of the bombing. One was his wife, **Ramwati "Rama" Gupta**, who died a month before her 38th birthday.²⁹¹ She was a pillar of strength for her family. She instilled in her two sons a sense of what was right and a desire to strive to do their best.



Ramwati Gupta 56

She lived every breath of life for her family. Even casual acquaintances were always welcome just like her own family members in her house. To her husband she was a source of unwavering support and wise counsel through thick and thin. She kept her otherwise impatient, excitable and active husband in line by always reminding him to be patient and to smell the roses on the way.²⁹²

Dr. Bal Gupta has carried that lesson from his wife with him in his pursuit of justice. He remained patient against all odds as he fought to keep the memories alive and to press authorities at various levels for a criminal investigation and a public inquiry. He told the Commission that what has been achieved in recent years was made possible only through the combined efforts of a core group of dedicated people.

While in Ireland, Bal Gupta made a promise to himself to help organize and provide support for the families for as long as necessary. He has been involved for years in meetings, phone calls and conversations during this time. He indicated that the families met frequently at the beginning to discuss concerns and grieve together, and, later on, met whenever necessary. He acknowledges the "mutual cooperation" involved:

²⁹¹ Love, Honour, Respect: The memories of our loved ones, p. 115.

²⁹² Testimony of Dr. Bal Gupta, vol. 1, September 25, 2006, p. 28.

My special thanks go to those...18 core family members who have volunteered selflessly their emotional strength, time and, yes, money, as needed, to the collective cause continuously through very difficult times from 1985 to today without seeking any limelight or recognition. They are, or in some cases, were, the true leaders. I use the word "were" because some of them have passed away. Let me not forget the second generation of family members who were kids in 1985, children who lost their mother, father, or a sister, or a brother, or a grandfather. They have infused youthful enthusiasm whenever we always falter.²⁹³

Dr. Gupta served as the Air India Victims Families Association coordinator (and more recently chair) from the beginning. The Association brought families together to deal with government agencies, first in seeking compensation, and then to continue pressing for answers and a public inquiry. He described for the Commission the ongoing cooperation necessary to face the difficult issues and stumbling blocks:

Families have worked very hard to keep together. We were and are a very diverse group brought together by this tragedy... On one hand, this togetherness helped families in coping with the pain and grief ... On the other hand, it helped the families in dealing with the government agencies collectively...We kept the whole thing apolitical, demonstrated in front of the Parliament, petitioned the Parliament, got questions raised in the Parliament by members of different political parties. No government official or minister ever contacted any family to communicate about any progress in any investigation for about eight years.²⁹⁴

Murthy Subramanian told the Commission:

Bal Gupta organized for the families to meet with a psychiatrist on weekends. Bal Gupta also leads the memorial service that I attend every year on the anniversary.²⁹⁵

²⁹³ Testimony of Dr. Bal Gupta, vol. 1, September 25, 2006, pp. 26-27.

²⁹⁴ Testimony of Dr. Bal Gupta, vol. 1, September 25, 2006, pp. 41-42.

²⁹⁵ Submission of Murthy Subramanian, vol. 4, September 28, 2006, p. 417.

Dr. Bal Gupta told the Commission how all happy occasions have been tainted by an underlying pain and how his wife's parents never recovered from the tragedy. He remarried in 1992 and his new wife has been a source of support and guidance for his sons and their wives. With the cooperation of other surviving families, he continues to work for the families of the victims.

The creation of the Commission of Inquiry gave him renewed hope, but he has guarded optimism for what might result. Dr. Gupta wants the Commission to deal with outstanding issues and make critical recommendations that can control terrorist activities in Canada:

The Commission's findings and recommendations, if accepted and executed by the government, may hopefully deter some dubious religious preachers from becoming hawkers of hatred and prevent them from turning our houses of worship into temples of doom.²⁹⁶

²⁹⁶ Testimony of Dr. Bal Gupta, vol. 1, September 25, 2006, p. 51.

Sundaram Ramakasavan

Sundaram “Ramu” Ramakasavan spoke before the Commission on September 25, 2006. He had no family aboard Air India Flight 182, but a good friend, **Dr. Akhand Pratap Singh**, who perished with his wife **Usha Singh** and their children **Amar** and **Ajai**.²⁹⁷ **Dr. Akhand Pratap Singh** had come to the University of British Columbia for post-doctoral studies and later was a visiting professor at an Ontario university. He was on his way back to India earlier than planned to accept an academic promotion.

By the third anniversary of the bombing, Ramu Ramakasavan felt that he had to do something to help the victims’ families by attending or assisting in organizing the annual memorial at Dow’s Lake in Ottawa. He telephoned Dr. Yogesh Paliwal, the primary organizer for the victims’ families in the Ottawa region. His son **Mukul Paliwal**, an honours student and a musician, was lost on the flight.²⁹⁸

As early as 1988, Ramu Ramakasavan was adamant in pressuring the government to call for a public inquiry and offered to work with Dr. Paliwal in organizing a public demonstration.

However, I would soon learn that the victim families were in a desperate state and on the verge of giving up their call for justice... The parliamentarians who had promised to raise the issues at the right places had backed off. The RCMP would not talk to any of the victim families, singly or as a group. Finally, they were running out of ideas to continue the struggle in the face of stonewalling by the authorities.²⁹⁹

The morning of the scheduled event, Ramu Ramakasavan was wakened by a call from a mutual friend with the news that Dr. Paliwal had died of a massive heart attack during the night:

²⁹⁷ Professor Akhand Singh and his family are listed in *Love, Honour, Respect: The memories of our loved ones*, p.301. They had no family representation at the hearings.

²⁹⁸ *Love, Honour, Respect*, p. 223.

²⁹⁹ Testimony of Ramu Ramakasavan, vol. 1, September 25, 2006, pp. 114-115.

Here was the last man standing from the victim families ready to fight for justice for the victims and he was no more. Despite the twin tragedies in the short span of three years, Dr. Paliwal's family decided to go ahead with the demonstration to fulfill his last wish.³⁰⁰

Persevering throughout the years that followed, and gaining support from citizens' groups and parliamentarians, Ramu Ramakasavan fought beside Dr. Bal Gupta, Dr. Ramji Khandelwal of Saskatchewan and others to gain support to have the criminal investigation reopened and to keep up the pressure for a public inquiry. He praised the Air India Task Force established by the RCMP for its professionalism and compassion in dealing with the families of victims.

In my opinion, it was an uphill battle. It was very frustrating. It was demoralizing and knowing that nothing was happening, we have been -- it may be too harsh...but I think we have been lied to...misled by everybody who talked to the families. Again and again and again, we were told that there is an active criminal investigation going on. Later on we found out nothing was happening. We were told by not only politicians but bureaucrats, RCMP, everyone, they just I think lied to us, misled us, so that we keep quiet.³⁰¹

Ramu Ramakasavan refused to retreat from his mission to create momentum for a public inquiry, even after the acquittal of those charged in the criminal trial:

...whether we wanted to fight for justice or not, the people at large, even people who are not East Indians, wanted us to fight. They had empowered us to fight. They would do anything to support us so that we would continue to fight. So giving up and walking away would be my personal failure.³⁰²

In the face of ongoing frustration, refusals to meet, perceived and real threats to his safety and enormous time requirements, Ramu Ramakasavan persevered in his quest to see this Commission of Inquiry established.

³⁰⁰ Testimony of Ramu Ramakasavan, vol. 1, September 25, 2006, p. 116.

³⁰¹ Testimony of Dr. Ramji Khandelwal, vol. 6, October 4, 2006, p. 656.

³⁰² Testimony of Ramu Ramakasavan, vol. 1, September 25, 2006, p. 134.

Overcoming Grief to Create a Better World

Out of the ruins of the Air India tragedy, family members sought mechanisms to cope with their losses. Some did not succeed and died prematurely with the pain unabated as a consequence of their inability to accept such grief. A number of family members continue to grieve and to seek relief; others hover on the precipice of despair. However, faced with the reality that loved ones were gone, many found the strength and determination to pursue a path of good works and charity. Their efforts to help others through volunteer activities, medical clinics, teaching and other forms of giving are described in this section.

Dr. Chandra Sankurathri

Manjari Sankurathri was flying to India with her six-year-old son **Srikiran** and her three-year-old daughter **Sarada**. They were going to attend the wedding of **Manjari Sankurathri's** brother in August. **Manjari Sankurathri's** husband, Dr. Chandra Sankurathri, was a biologist working for Health and Welfare Canada who had stayed behind to work, intending to join them in July. They planned to return home together before the school year commenced in September.



57

For three years after the bombing, Dr. Chandra Sankurathri continued to work in Ottawa while struggling with the memories of his lost family. He concluded that the only way to restore meaning to his life was to return to India and begin a mission to help those less fortunate than he:

First of all, my reaction was disbelief. I did not believe that... it happened... So it took me almost three years to erase what had happened, and I studied a lot to cope... because it was not really easy. That was the most difficult part of my... whole life; and finally I have decided... to find something meaningful for my life... I had to be productive... so that I could be useful to other people. With that intent, I left this country in 1988, to start working with the people, mostly children, in India.³⁰³

³⁰³ Testimony of Dr. Chandra Sankurathri, vol. 44, June 18, 2007, p. 5343.

Dr. Chandra Sankurathri resigned his public service employment, liquidated everything of value, including his federal pension, and established a Canadian-registered charitable foundation named in his wife's memory (the **Manjari Sankurathri Memorial Foundation**). He opened a school in 1992 to provide education for poor children. The school, **Sarada Vidyalayam**,³⁰⁴



58

named for his daughter, is located in the small Indian village of Kakinada in the state of Andhra Pradesh where he and his wife were born. Schooling from Grades 1 through 7 is provided without charge to all children living in the area.

Dr. Sankurathri told the Commission that the school has achieved enormous success and that not one student has dropped out:

*Since the last 15 years we did not see a single student drop out of education. They all completed their high school diplomas and also attended college. Some of them have graduated from the college and [are] working in our own foundation now.*³⁰⁵

Consideration is being given to expanding coverage to high school grades in order to allow youth to complete their education without having to move away.

His son **Srikiran** dreamt of becoming a paediatric ophthalmologist when he grew up –an admirable vision for a boy of six.³⁰⁶ In his memory, Dr. Chandra Sankurathri established an eye hospital in the same compound as the school. The **Srikiran Institute of Ophthalmology** provides equitable, accessible and affordable eye care to everyone in the region:

³⁰⁴ "Vidyalayam" is the Sanskrit word for "school".

³⁰⁵ Testimony of Dr. Chandra Sankurathri, vol. 44, June 18, 2007, p. 5345.

³⁰⁶ *Love, Honour, Respect: The memories of our loved ones*, p.275.

...blindness is very prevalent especially in the rural areas where there are no eye care facilities ...almost 80 per cent of the blindness is either preventable or curable... for cataract blindness. It hardly takes three to four minutes of a surgeon's time. So this kind of blindness is not needed in the community, so we are planning to go to the villages and try to identify people with cataract blindness restoring eyesight for them... We also screen children for eye problems, so that...in a timely intervention...you can prevent the blindness also.³⁰⁷



59

The hospital sees about 300 outpatients daily and offers surgery to correct cataracts, glaucoma, corneal and retinal problems. The hope is to reach people who might otherwise be unable to access such care. In addition there is a special paediatric eye care unit. Dr. Chandra Sankurathri estimates that about 12,000 surgeries are performed each year. The Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) is an official supporting organization and various Canadian health agencies have provided funding to help in this noble work. Several physicians from the University of Ottawa Eye Institute, among others, have volunteered to go to Kakinada to assist, operate and help to train the local doctors.

This is an inspiring story of how a man dealt with grief by rebuilding his life to help so many people overcome illiteracy and eye disease. Only 10 percent of the patients are able to pay fees of up to what Canadians may view as a modest \$300. Ninety percent of his patients at the clinic and students at the school are charity cases. Somehow, Dr. Chandra Sankurathri's foundation is able to deliver both its educational and medical services to everyone on a modest budget of \$500,000 annually.

³⁰⁷ Testimony of Dr. Chandra Sankurathri, vol. 44, June 18, 2007, p. 5346.

When Lata Pada lost her husband **Vishnu Pada** and daughters **Arti** and **Brinda** in the bombing of June 23, 1985, *a horrific and unimaginable darkness engulfed me.*³⁰⁸

Brinda was 18 and had graduated from Grade 13 the night before the scheduled flight to India:

*Photographs of Brinda excitedly celebrating her graduation are forever seared in my memory. Her dreams of a life ahead are now buried with her in the ocean bed of the Atlantic.*³⁰⁹

Her second daughter **Arti** was 15 years old and:

*... brimming with aspirations of being a doctor, the clown of her class, an affectionate and doting daughter, the popular babysitter on our street, training to be a swimming coach... Her loyalty and support to her friends made her a very special person.*³¹⁰

The girls loved India and Indonesia, where their father was transferred by his employer from Sudbury, Ontario to work in the company's nickel mining operations on the island of Sulawesi. **Vishnu Pada** was, according to his wife, a "quintessential Canadian" and a very special man. He was an accomplished geologist, a folk singer, had a great sense of humour, and was a lover of Canadian winter activities –skiing, ice-fishing and curling. He was also a fan of tennis and cricket. He was a man of many cultures and a champion of multicultural and interfaith activities:

*Vishnu was a man with a vision for a better world, always believing in his capacity to make a difference. I was always filled with admiration for his passion for volunteer work such as visits to senior citizens' homes and hospices for the terminally ill.*³¹¹

³⁰⁸ Submission of Lata Pada, vol. 1, September 25, 2006, p. 53.

³⁰⁹ Submission of Lata Pada, vol. 1, September 25, 2006, pp. 59-60.

³¹⁰ Submission of Lata Pada, vol. 1, September 25, 2006, p. 60.

³¹¹ Submission of Lata Pada, vol. 1, September 25, 2006, p. 57.

Lata Pada is a classical dancer. In June 1985, she had gone to India two weeks in advance of her family to rehearse for a summer performance. **Vishnu Pada** was always supportive of his wife's involvement in artistic endeavours...

encouraging me to explore my potential as a classical dancer. He understood my need to define my own identity, giving me the space and independence to pursue my academic and artistic interests.³¹²

Lata Pada told the Commission that her loneliness will never go away and that she has an inner sadness at the prospect of never again hearing her husband say "I love you", or dreaming of holding grandchildren in her arms. At the same time, she has been able to recapture her own life from the void created by the murder of her family by immersing herself in dance:

...the events of 1985 marked the beginning of a journey of deep personal and spiritual transformation, a journey that would in time reveal dance as the metonymy of my existence and a return to wholeness. My life in dance became a pilgrimage, a sacred pathway towards a new revelation of my inner being.

As I danced the poetry of India's great saint poets, I came to understand the philosophy of my faith and the profound truths of the cyclical nature of life and death. I came to comprehend the significance of the Holy Scriptures of Bhagavad Gita of self-realization and the purpose for human existence. I went back to school and I did my master's in dance at York University in 1996.³¹³

Having found inner strength through dance, Lata Pada was able to become a public voice for the victims of Air India Flight 182. Often she would work with politicians, journalists and ordinary Canadians to raise their awareness of the impact of the 1985 terrorist attack on those left behind, and about remedies that should be pursued to avoid a reoccurrence.

³¹² Submission of Lata Pada, vol. 1, September 25, 2006, pp. 56-57.

³¹³ Submission of Lata Pada, vol. 1, September 25, 2006, pp. 69-70.

We cannot allow history to repeat itself. We have been patient, dignified and hopeful, while coping with an unimaginable pain that the rest of Canada has forgotten about. Twenty-one years ago, a devastating tragedy irrevocably altered all our lives and the one hope we held on to was the successful conviction of the two accused. The long and expensive trial was yet another callous miscarriage of justice.³¹⁴

Despite many setbacks and disappointments, Lata Pada continues to advocate on behalf of the families of the victims and left the Commission to ponder the summation of her pain:

Imagine knowing that there will never be closure. Imagine living with the pervasive and lingering sadness for the rest of your life. Imagine facing happiness with the inevitable "if only". Imagine not ever seeing them again. Imagine never feeling complete again.³¹⁵



60

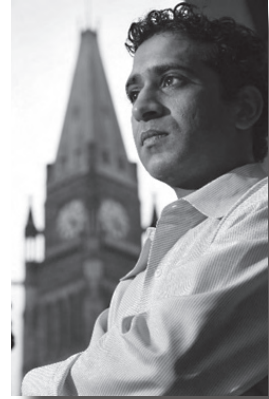
³¹⁴ Submission of Lata Pada, vol. 1, September 25, 2006, p. 75.

³¹⁵ Submission of Lata Pada, vol. 1, September 25, 2006, p. 71.

Susheel Gupta

Susheel Gupta was 12 years old when his mother **Ramwati Gupta** boarded Flight 182. The news of the crash and her death devastated him and created feelings of guilt:

At 12 years old, what could I think and feel but guilt that my mother was blown up and murdered alone instead of all of us being together or instead of it being me? To this day I still ask myself these questions and think these thoughts no matter how illogical they are. Emotion does not always coincide with logic.³¹⁶



61

Susheel Gupta did not comprehend the meaning of death at the age of 12, but understood that he would never see his mother again. Amidst a flurry of activity at home, with relatives and friends coming by to console the family, he left the house to complete his paper route. He cried the entire time. At the end of his deliveries, he saw a turtle, overturned and struggling. His first instinct was to hit the helpless turtle. But then, his thoughts turned to how his late mother, through no fault of her own, had been ripped away forever by evil forces:

It's like I had an epiphany right then and there with that turtle...I decided I wasn't going to be part of that evil, that I was going to try to be on the side of good for the innocents in our world. I walked over to the turtle, lifted it up, placed him on his feet towards the water, sat back down and watched as it slowly made its way towards the water safely. And then with that epiphany, I got on my bike, went home feeling angry but at least feeling a little more filled with purpose.³¹⁷

Soon after that, the Guptas were advised that a chartered plane would take up to two members of each family to Ireland for the identification of bodies. Susheel was 12, but his father had little choice and took him, leaving his almost 18-year-old brother Suneel alone at home. Susheel

³¹⁶ Testimony of Susheel Gupta, vol. 2, September 26, 2006, pp. 206-207.

³¹⁷ Testimony of Susheel Gupta, vol. 2, September 26, 2006, p. 211.

Gupta was the only child who went to Ireland in the aftermath of the bombing.

The activities of the following days had high and low points. The kindness and warmth of the local citizenry are etched in Susheel Gupta's memory. But so are the images of dead bodies he found lying behind closed doors in the Cork Regional Hospital:

I was 12, looking at all these dead bodies. I left only because of the fear of getting in trouble from my father for being somewhere where I shouldn't have been. As I looked at those bodies, I remembered the turtle back home. The faces of those bodies are still burning in my head today. I picture them almost every day, every night, before I go to sleep, sometimes while I'm sitting at work.³¹⁸

After Ireland he travelled to India for the cremation of his mother's body and participated in lighting matches for cremation, all of which took a toll on young Susheel. Six months after returning to Toronto, he was hospitalized and in isolation with an illness that continues to flare up. His physicians attribute the ailment to the cumulative trauma of the events beginning with his mother's death and her cremation.

Susheel Gupta rose above his personal suffering to pursue a course of action to make his late mother proud. He volunteered with community organizations and took his studies more seriously. As noted earlier (see section IV-B *Dedicated Careers*) he decided to pursue a career in law and to work on the side of justice:

I promised myself and to my mother that I was going to work in a field where I could make my country, Canada, safer, healthier and happier, and that decision turned into my decision to be a lawyer, for I personally believe it speaks to the fact that I hold great respect for the Department of Justice and our government institutions, even being a victim of terrorism, where there have really been no convictions. I could not walk into a court of law today if I did not have faith in our laws and our justice system.³¹⁹

³¹⁸ Testimony of Susheel Gupta, vol. 2, September 26, 2006, p. 218.

³¹⁹ Testimony of Susheel Gupta, vol. 2, September 26, 2006, p. 225.

When he appeared before the Commission, Susheel Gupta was a federal Crown prosecutor. He spoke with pride about his close friendships with law enforcement officials, members of the Bar and judges, all of whom are part of the Canadian system of law enforcement and the pursuit of justice. In spite of his personal tragedy, Susheel Gupta told the Commission that he considered it an honour to be a participant in the institutions reflective of Canada's system of justice.

Kalwant Mamak

Kalwant Mamak is a Canadian Sikh living in Sarnia, Ontario. He came to Canada in 1970, first working for a tool and die company in Chatham, Ontario. Within two years he had started his own women's clothing and accessories store in Chatham. In a few years, he had moved to the wholesale market and operated four stores in Ontario. His wife **Rajinder Mamak** and two young children had joined him by then and she managed their store in Sarnia. As Kalwant Mamak recalled, **Rajinder** was a kind wife, a caring mother and a partner beyond his expectations.



Rajinder Mamak 62

Rajinder Mamak was going to India for three weeks to visit her ailing father. The entire family was planning to go there for a winter vacation. Their elder son Pal, a shy teenager, did not want to hug his mother as she left because, as he said, *Mom, you are just going for three weeks. You'll be back.*³²⁰

After the identification of her body in Ireland, Kalwant Mamak made what he described as the biggest mistake of his life. On the advice of his wife's relatives in India, he did not take her body there for cremation, but went with **Rajinder's** brother to London, England where her body was cremated. His children still question him on why they never had a last opportunity to see their mother's face. It is an unfortunate twist of fate that his hope

³²⁰ Testimony of Kalwant Mamak, vol. 2, September 26, 2006, p. 140.

of doing the right thing was not shared by others close to him.

In Sarnia, the small local Sikh population and other friends in the community had made arrangements for a memorial service.

His wife's death left a void in the family. Everyone was deeply dependent on her for all aspects of the household, particularly the preparation of meals which he wistfully recalled:

It was the most difficult years of my life. I didn't want my children to stray. I was always there for them. We were having McDonald's every day. We don't know how to cook. When we came home, my children would ask, "Pa, not McDonald's today. Can you make us supper?" I said, "I don't know how to cook. We'll try it." We used to try and then the things would go bad and something would go wrong with it and then we would end up again in a fast food restaurant.³²¹

Being a single father and running his businesses proved too stressful. He suffered a major heart attack on June 23, 1987, but is grateful for his recovery and for what his children have become. Although they suffered from the Air India tragedy and had little help from any government agencies, all three of Kalwant Mamak's children now have careers in the field of law enforcement (see section IV-B *Dedicated Careers*).

Kalwant Mamak went to India and successfully learned how to cook. Today, he volunteers his services to cook for charitable and fundraising events. His mission is to help others wherever the opportunity arises:

... I cook for charities now. We did it for the Iran earthquake. We cooked for 500 people. Then we cooked for the tsunami dinner... We did it for the Cancer Society... We do a voluntary job...³²²

³²¹ Testimony of Kalwant Mamak, vol. 2, September 26, 2006, pp. 149-150.

³²² Testimony of Kalwant Mamak, vol. 2, September 26, 2006, pp. 151-152.

Jayashree Thampi

Jayashree Thampi lost her husband **Kanaka Lakshmanan**³²³ ("**Babu**") and daughter, **Preethi**, on Flight 182.

Babu Lakshmanan was an engineer who had an easy and jovial disposition. He moved to Canada in 1976 with his wife. Their daughter **Preethi** was seven years old, "vivacious and full of life". As her mother told the Commission:

She was very pretty...loved to dance, particularly Indian classical dancing, and she loved music.³²⁴

Babu Lakshmanan and **Preethi** were travelling to India for his niece's wedding. Because she did not have sufficient holiday time, Jayashree Thampi planned to join them a couple of weeks later. When she heard of the loss of her husband and daughter, she was unable to cry. In fact, as she told the Commission, she pretended that nothing had happened to her.

For many months I hoped somebody would have rescued Babu and Preethi and would imagine getting calls from them.³²⁵

Her inability to cry lasted 20 years. On August 2, 2005, her son was on board an Air France plane that skidded on the runway and burst into flames at Pearson International Airport in Toronto. Miraculously there were no fatalities.

Nobody understood why I was crying because my son was safe. They didn't know I was not crying for the son who made it but for the daughter who didn't. For the first time in 20 years I mourned the death of my daughter and cried for her.³²⁶

³²³ The full name of Mrs. Jayashree Thampi's deceased husband appears in *Love, Honour, Respect*, 2005, p. 173.

³²⁴ Statement of Jayashree Thampi, vol. 2, September 26, 2006, p. 164.

³²⁵ Statement of Jayashree Thampi, vol. 2, September 26, 2006, pp. 167-168.

³²⁶ Statement of Jayashree Thampi, vol. 2, September 26, 2006, p. 168.

Jayashree Thampi told the Commission that after the Air India bombing in 1985, nobody from the Canadian government called and *there was no offer of counselling from Air India or the government.*³²⁷ In contrast, after her son's accident in 2005:

*Air France offered counselling to my family and I accepted the offer. The therapy allowed me to start dealing with the issues I had never dealt with before.*³²⁸

As a result of this "therapeutic experience", Jayashree Thampi was able to become an active member of the committee responsible for establishing memorials for the Victims of Air India Flight 182 in Toronto and Vancouver.

³²⁷ Statement of Jayashree Thampi, vol. 2, September 26, 2006, p. 168.

³²⁸ Statement of Jayashree Thampi, vol. 2, September 26, 2006, p. 168.

Anita Gupta

Anumita Gupta was 16 years old when she boarded Flight 182. Her sister Anita was 11. Anita Gupta told the Commission that she felt a sense of abandonment when she was left behind with family friends while her parents went to Ireland to look for **Mita's** body.³²⁹ Then, in her words, she felt a "sense of false elation" when her mother phoned from Ireland in the middle of the night:

... to tell me that they had found my sister. I remember feeling so happy for an instant that she had been found and this whole nightmare was over, before it hit me that it was just her dead body, it wasn't her.³³⁰

She told the Commission that she remembers most about her lost sister *how meaningful her friendship had been to many people and how she knew how to be a true friend...*

The stolen opportunity to become friends with my sister is my continuing loss... we would have had so much time as we grew up together and celebrated with each other the joys of life, like our weddings, choosing our careers, raising our children, as well as supporting each other through the sadness, such as the deaths of my parents.³³¹

Anita Gupta is now a clinical psychologist. She shared with the Commission her personal and professional opinions on the continuing need for contact among the victims of violence and terrorism, as the grief is constant or recurring:

A lot of times in the initial impact of an event like this, you are so busy with doing all the things that need to be done; identifying bodies, signing wills... and so it's so important to contact victims of violent crime and terrorism in the ensuing months, maybe on the year anniversary, having available phone numbers where people can contact, should they feel it, because it might just be one lonely night that they decide to call. They are not always going to... say "yes" even if they need it when someone approaches them, because it might not be the right time.³³²

³²⁹ Statement of Anita Gupta, vol. 5, October 3, 2007, p. 512.

³³⁰ Statement of Anita Gupta, vol. 5, October 3, 2007, p. 511.

³³¹ Statement of Anita Gupta, vol. 5, October 3, 2007, p. 512.

³³² Statement of Anita Gupta, vol. 5, October 3, 2007, p. 523.

She initially found it difficult through adolescence to think of **Anumita's** death as a murder. The full realization finally came while at university and charges were laid in British Columbia. She told the Commission that the disappointing outcome of the criminal trials awoke something that had been dormant within her. She became more involved with other family members and joined in the effort to create pressure for a public inquiry.

For the first time, she attended the memorial service in Ireland on the 20th anniversary of the bombing and there met other family members who had grown up with similar losses.

Another transformation took place in Anita Gupta. While growing up, she disdained members of the media:

... I remember thinking of the press as vultures, creatures who swooped down on our family every June 23rd... so my parents could speak of the loss of their daughter and my father could express his frustrations, anger and bewilderment at the lack of prosecution, as well as government response to the bombings. I remember running to my friend's house on many occasions so that I could avoid the reporters' visits...³³³

She told the Commission that her mother would sometimes stop her father from speaking to reporters because it upset Anita so much.

She wondered how her late father would react to hearing her say things today that he had said 20 years ago. Through her involvement with other family members and her active participation in the public policy process, Anita Gupta now appreciates the media for keeping the Air India story alive and not abandoned to history:

Today, I feel a deep sense of gratitude towards members of the press for keeping the story alive year after year, even when it was considered old news. I frankly don't know where we would be without the press, but I didn't always feel that way.³³⁴

³³³ Statement of Anita Gupta, vol. 5, October 3, 2007, pp. 524-25.

³³⁴ Statement of Anita Gupta, vol. 5, October 3, 2007, p. 524.