



The Historian

Preserving Today for Tomorrow

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Vacation Tragedy

By Terry Baker

“Just then, when we were starting off, there was a terrible, terrible sound. It sounded like an awful explosion...I pushed a piece of the ceiling about four by three from my face. It was like fire and brimstone! Everything was falling!”

Such was the terrifying recollection of Floy Heck of Leisure World in 1977, on her return from Santa Cruz de Tenerife in the Canary Islands. Heck and her husband Paul had been on the beginning of a Mediterranean tour, March 27 that year, with 35 Leisure World neighbors, when fate included them in the worst airline disaster of the 20th Century.

Last year marked the 30th anniversary of the terrible event that took 582 lives, including 27 of our local residents.

The Hecks were among just 10 others from here that survived that Sunday afternoon, when two jumbo jets collided on the fog-covered runway of the diminutive airport of a small island in the Spanish-owned Canary group off the Atlantic coast of Africa.

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“What’s he doing?
He’ll kill us all!”

582 people died on March 27, 1977 when two jumbo jets collided on the runway at Los Rodeos airport. Both planes had been diverted to Tenerife. The Dutch KLM flight was taking off without final clearance when the accident happened. Picture: TIME Magazine



Robert E. Miller

Strevey Award to Bob Miller

Bob Miller, the Society’s selection for the Tracy J. Strevey Award for 2007, will be honored for his contributions to the governance of our community.

Miller has been a member of GRF since 2005 and is currently its president. As a member of the United Mutual Board for 7 years, he was its treasurer and then its president. In 2002 he was appointed to the City’s Planning Advisory Committee followed by an appointment to the Community Services Committee. Since 2001 he has served as a Director of Saddleback Memorial Medical Center and has been its Secretary since 2002. He was elected to serve as a Director of the Saddleback Associates and has served as its Treasurer since 2004.

Bob was a valued member of the Society’s Board of Directors from 1994 through 2007. He headed the Society’s Committee responsible for moving the Leisure World Globe from Avenida Carlotta to Gate 12. He also chaired the Nominating Committee for several years.

Please help us honor Bob at the Society’s Annual Dinner on March 30th.

MUSINGS

Annual Dinner

Please join us on March 30th as we honor Bob Miller, the Society's selection for the Tracy J. Strevey Community Service Award.

The Society is in the process of creating digital copies of all of our pictures. We have prepared a slide show which includes some interesting visuals of days gone by.

As agreed at last year's Annual Meeting, our Dinner is now focused on providing a relaxing entertaining evening. I will take a few minutes of your time and introduce the following, who were elected to the Board at our February 28th Annual Business Meeting:

New Directors (in alphabetical order)

- Terry Baker**, current Archives Volunteer,
- Gloria Erbe**, current Oral Histories Volunteer,
- Libby Marks**, elected for a second term,
- Elaine Morgado**, elected for a second term,
- Bob Ring**, elected for a second term, and
- Mark Schneider**, elected for a second term.

Honoree of the Month

I would like to congratulate **Phyllis and Van Heflin**, our Laguna Woods Honorees for the Month of February and **George Portlock** our Honoree for March.

We are grateful to Las Palmas and The Regency for funding this program as well as the Video Club, whose members video tape the ceremony.

Charles Little

I would like to thank retiring Director Charlie Little. He is the creator of the Society's logo. During the last three years Charlie took charge of our publicity.

From my personal perspective, Charlie was always available to provide guidance whenever the road got a bit bumpy. He has promised to continue to be a member of my "kitchen cabinet."



Bob Ring

Archives

I am pleased to announce a reorganization of the Historical Society's archives department. As I've discussed in previous columns, 2008 will be a "year of change" for the Society. Most notably, this year will see us grow and make significant improvements to our day-to-day and long-term operations. Increasing the accessibility of our collection and creating new and exciting ways to share the plethora of information available to us is of paramount importance. To that end, we are shifting to a research-based archives model. Volunteers will soon take a more active role in gathering history as it happens, under the capable supervision of Martin Hecht, the Society's assistant archivist. Fran Lindberg, the Society's archivist, is responsible for all administrative functions, including many of the preparatory steps necessary for our move to a computer-based collection management system. Fran and her team will continue to provide for the care and maintenance of our collection, as well as the fulfillment of all research requests and historical inquiries.

"California of the Past"

The Historical Society continues to work with the Orange County Public Library on the "California of the Past" project. Topics of our digital stories include the Japanese-American experience during World War II, music education in the public school system, and the cowboy way of life.

Veterans History Project

Calling all veterans! A new team is in place to facilitate your participation in the Library of Congress' Veterans History Project. You can choose to submit a data form that details important aspects of your service (locations of assignment, highest rank, etc.) or submit a data form and participate in an interview to bring your experiences to life! All veterans are added to the Society's registry of Laguna Woods' Veterans, a copy of which is also maintained at the Library of Congress in Washington D.C. For more information, or to request that a data form be mailed to your home, please contact our office at 206-0150.



Chris Macon, Curator

*Historical Society's**Pictures From**The Past**Annual Dinner**Strevey Award Presentation**to Robert E. Miller***Sunday, March 30, 2008****5:00 PM****Clubhouse 5****Donation \$25.00****Music by Rush Robinson****RSVP by March 20, 2008****Dinner menu includes choice of:****Prime Rib****Salmon en Croute****Chicken Cordon Bleu****with salad, dessert and wine**

Mail your check payable to Historical Society, PO Box 2220, Laguna Hills, CA 92654. Seating is based upon date when paid reservation is received. Reservations for groups, up to 8, who wish to be seated together should be made at the same time, using a separate sheet to list names, and entrée selections.

Archive Corner Fran Lindberg Our Home's 10th Anniversary

In the late 70's, the Historical Society leased 180 square feet of office space in the old Administration Building. At that time this space served as our office and storage room. There was room for 2 vertical files, 2 desks and a manual typewriter. As we accumulated archival material, it became necessary to lease a public storage unit.

In January 1987, we obtained storage space in the breezeway area of Clubhouse I. This space had been used by the Camera Club as a dark room. Every time archival material had to be stored we had to go to this dark and dank room that was about 600 feet from our office. I must say we did get in our exercise.

In 1995 I was introduced to Helen Clark, Archivist of the Historical Society, who welcomed me as a member. Shortly after that, Marjorie Williams took over the Archives position.

Prior to the opening of our new building, we had to vacate the storage room in Clubhouse I. This entailed packing about 130 boxes which were put into public storage. I can recall several requests for archival material – lo and behold, we had to dig into box upon box to accommodate these requests.

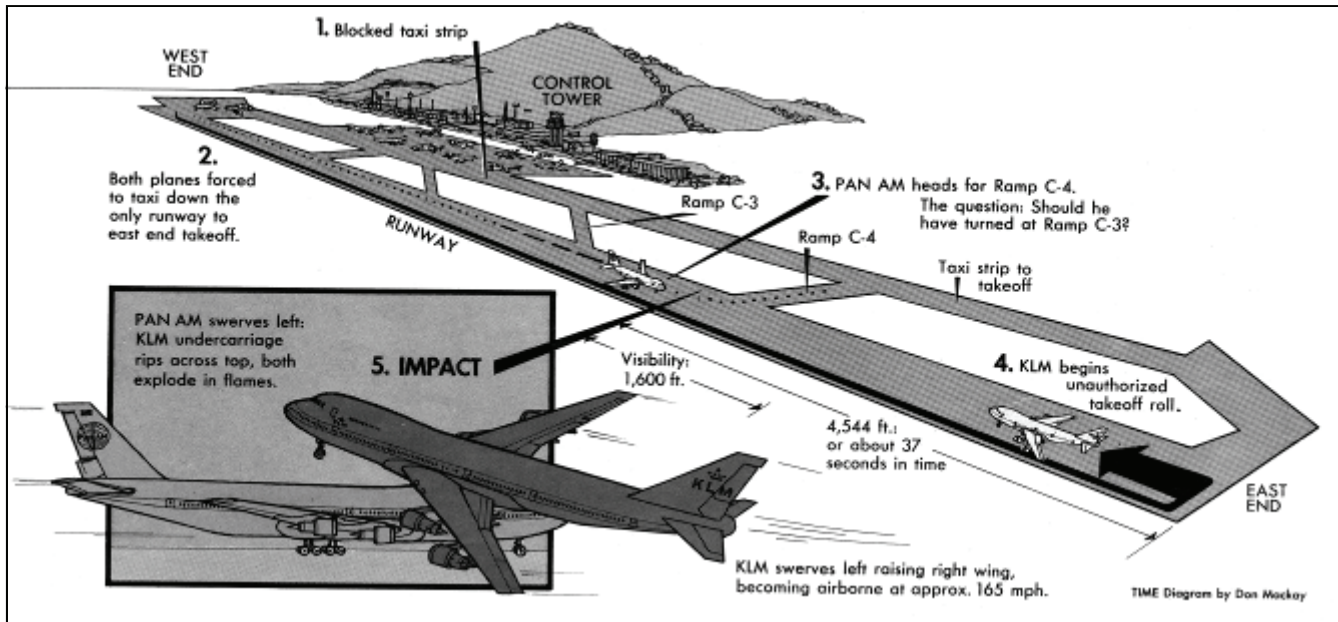
Then our dream came true with the efforts of many who donated their time and money toward the building we occupy next to the Village Library. The grand opening took place in March 1998.

Marge Williams initiated the procedures that we currently use for storing and retrieving archival material. The climate-controlled Archives include records, scrapbooks, photos, and other important material pertaining to the history of our community.

During the past ten years the amount of material stored in the Archives by the Society and the Village's Clubs has increased to the point where we must now adopt more space efficient methods to store the informational items. I believe that the work of our volunteers will result in another success story.



The expression "two-bits" is part of our Spanish Heritage. Actually a "bit" was an American nickname for the Spanish or Mexican "REAL" which in early American settler days, was worth about twelve and a half cents in U.S. currency. Thus a U.S. quarter came to be known as "two bits."



Crash (from Page 1)

Freak Circumstances

After so many years, now the details have become public record and the freak circumstances that often accompany such tragedies have been identified.

The Heck's Pan Am 747 Flight 1736 and a KLM Royal Dutch Airlines jumbo jet Flight 3805 had both been diverted to the airport on the smaller island from their original destination, Los Palmas airport on the larger Gran Canaria. It was temporarily closed when Canary Islands separatist rebels detonated a small bomb in a florist shop.

While the jumbo jets, and the enormous load of other air traffic diverted that day, impatiently waited hours for clearance to proceed to their destinations, a thick fog had rolled in covering the single runway of Los Rodeos Airport which is located on a 2,073 foot high plateau. In a confusion of messages from the small, two-man control tower, over-burdened by the day's unusual amount of commercial airliners, the KLM 747 began its take-off in the fog while the Pan Am flight was still taxiing up the same runway.

When the respective pilots saw the opposing headlights in the fog, they each tried to take immediate action to avert a collision.

“We are still on the runway,” the Pan Am Captain shouted into his radio mike, “What’s he doing? He’ll kill us all!”

The Pan Am crew applied full throttle trying a sharp, quick turn into the grass infield off the runway while

the KLM crew pulled up hard attempting to climb away in an early lift-off.

Nearly successful but too late, the KLM jet dragged its tail on the runway asphalt for 20 meters (65 feet) then scraped the bottom of its fuselage across the top of the sideways Pan Am body, tearing its roof and tail away. Out of control, the Dutch plane went into a stall, rolled hard to its side and collapsed, and exploded 150 meters from the collision point before sliding to a stop another 300 meters farther down the runway.

All 234 passengers and 14 crew aboard the KLM plane perished in the subsequent fireball, but 56 passengers and 6 crewmen of the Pan Am's 396 total occupants escaped with their lives from the inferno of their own plane.

Witnesses and surviving crew reported that at least one of the large engines on the burning, nearly topless, Pan Am plane eerily continued running at full power for a number of minutes after the accident. Tragically, rescue and fire crews were initially drawn to the KLM wreckage because of the dense fog and smoke. It took a long time before they realized that the Pan Am plane was burning further up the runway.

The Heck's Good Fortune

“Don't just say I'm a lucky person,” Heck told Farley Eagan of the Leisure World News staff when she returned home. “God was in this miracle.”

When the ceiling was collapsing above her, Heck reported that her husband Paul had shouted “Honey, let's get out!”



Pan Am 747 burns while Leisure World resident Grace Ellerbrock kneels beside her husband whom she saved.

Picture: *TIME Magazine*

Crash (from Page 4)

While he pushed away burning debris around them, they moved to an emergency exit above a wing. Heck lost all his hair and his hands were burned fighting the flames on the way out. As he jumped from a higher point on the wing tip, she felt her way to the base near the body before she jumped the two stories to the ground. The fall momentarily knocked her out. When she came to, she couldn't move her legs, so she crawled away from the plane.

"I said 'Jesus help me! Jesus help me!' I said it over and over" Heck had recalled.

During their escape, the Hecks were separated and didn't reconnect for a harrowing 10 hours before they were certain that the other had survived.



Paul and Floy Heck
Picture: Diane Corder

Paul Heck spent weeks at Orange County-UCI Medical Center recovering from second and third degree burns. Wife Floy wore a cast on a bad sprain for a while.

Their traveling companions and close friends, Karl and Lorraine Larson, whom they'd met

on a Leisure World Caribbean tour the year before, were sitting next to them on the ill-fated plane, but the Larsons died in the fire.

Other Survivors

Other Leisure World survivors escaped with varying

injuries. Jean Brown and her husband Gordon owned the "Good Time to Travel" agency that booked many of the Leisure World reservations for that "Mediterranean Highlights" cruise. It had been the inaugural flight of a Royal Cruise Lines idea to design a cruise around a 747 full of tourists. The Pan Am was filled with many affluent retirees that day, most of whom had left Los Angeles and Southern California 15 hours before.

Jean, who still found the experience difficult to discuss a year later, had ended up in the burn ward of the Institute for Surgical Research at the Brooke Army Medical Center at Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio, Texas for many weeks, seriously ill with critical burns on her legs. A year after, she also still wore rubberized stockings to promote circulation in them, but her face and hands had healed, leaving only white spots that she covered with make-up. Her husband Gordon had gone ahead on a different commercial flight for lack of seating that day. He was in the Los Palmas airport waiting for his wife and the tour when the terrorist bomb went off.

Leisure Worlder Mario Tyzbir survived, but lost his wife Irene. Byron and Grace Ellerbrock arrived at El Toro Naval Air Station three days after the accident in satisfactory condition, but neither could walk under their own power. Lura and Herbert Waldrip eventually joined Tyzbir and the Ellerbrock's at Saddleback Community Hospital, where all were listed in satisfactory condition after their arrival. Harold and Grace McGowan met relieved relatives when their plane touched down at El Toro.

The list of Leisure World residents killed that day

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also included: Ethel Blanche, Mabel Brassfield, Lloyd and Helen Chatterton, Myra Cochran, William and Leone Combs, Sherman and Marian Ellsworth, Ray and Helen Watwood Halldorson, Jean Houston, Frank and Gwen Kase, Benjamin Malin, Helen Peters, Elizabeth Reining, Ethel Selbo, Francis and Kathryn Simmons, Florence Sparr, Helen Vernon, Charles and Fern Zeibell, Martin Fisher, and Clubhouse 2 Hostess Marjorie Bradley a resident of San Juan Capistrano.

Other Southern California passengers who escaped that day reported their own frightening experiences.

“At first I thought they had gotten to us with a bomb,” Erma Schlecht recalled, “I put my hands over my face and said, ‘Lord, today I’ll see you.’”

Stunned at first, Karen Anderson’s instinct for survival saved her life. She and her husband had been celebrating their 10th anniversary with their first cruise vacation. “The minute I opened my eyes,” she remembered, “I looked in the cabin and everything was on fire! I immediately thought it was total destruction. It was then that my survival mode kicked in and it was just ‘Get out of that airplane!’”

Despite her doubts, she never gave up. “It never dawned on me that I would make it,” she said later. “I just thought ‘Do something!’ So I climbed over the seat backs.”

Anderson sadly added that, as she made her way to a door over a wing, she noticed her husband behind her looking toward the door across from her. Before she jumped, she turned around again. In that instant, that side of the plane had become a wall of flames and he was gone.

Monuments

Today, a monument sits above the scene of the accident at Tenerife, Canary Islands, where for the 30th anniversary on March 27, 2007, Dutch and American next of kin joined in the ceremonies together for the first time. A monument to the victims also stands in



The remains of the KLM 747 jumbo jet.

Picture: *Los Angeles Times*

the Westgaarde Cemetery in Amsterdam, and in the City of Westminster, California.

Conclusions

As with most accidents, this disaster resulted from the convergence of many unlikely circumstances and coincidences.

Final inquiries pointed to the fact that the KLM pilot, Captain Jacob Veldhuyzen van Zanten, an executive and senior pilot of the company, was concerned about exceeding company crew duty-hour guidelines, which would have called for the passengers to be put up in hotels for the night, if the flight did not make it back to the Netherlands in a designated period of time. That fact also increased the captain’s desire to get off before the fog became worse, and

to take on extra jet fuel, which made the plane even heavier at take-off. Some evidence also suggests that he may have failed to confirm some instructions from the tower, but as senior officer, his co-pilot and crew hesitated to question his actions.

Pan Am Captain Victor Grubb and his crew had, at the same time, missed their runway exit through a miscommunication, and mistakenly headed for one further up the runway before trying to turn off.

Other factors surfaced that illustrated that actual voice contact with the tower from both planes may have taken place at the same time “squelching” the messages, making some parts inaudible.

Other Information

Numerous magazine articles and television programs, including a PBS NOVA presentation, “The Deadliest Plane Crash” subsequently depicted the day’s tragic events, and an hour-long documentary was produced called “Crash of the Century: Tenerife.” You can view it at www.youtube.com/results?orig_query=airline+disasters&search_query=Tenerife

The book about the tragedy titled, “*Terror at Tenerife*” by George Otis is available from the Laguna Woods O.C. Library branch at City Hall.

This tragedy remains the world’s most terrible airline accident involving only aircraft, and certainly reigns as one of the darkest days for residents in the near 50-year legacy of our community’s happy existence.

BITS AND PIECES OF LEISURE WORLD HISTORY

(Selected from the *Leisure World News*) Evelyn Shopp

40 Years Ago — March - April 1968

A manor at 272 D Sevilla was destroyed by a raging fire. The unconscious resident was rescued by the fireman who had just been honored for his role in the tragic plane crash of January 1967 which had scattered ashes over this same apartment complex.

A noted Danish newspaper carried a full page story on Leisure World, describing it as "*active old age*" for the "*young old ones*."

The ancient Sycamore tree in Aliso Park was designated as an Historical Landmark. It was estimated to be more than 500 years old.

An Easter Sunday musical program was scheduled for the "Outdoor Aliso Creek Auditorium" which had new plants and flowers for the season.

Tickets for a Recreation Dept. sponsored fashion show featuring Lane Bryant fashions were 50¢, with refreshments included.

Leisure World News moved its offices to the Leisure World Sales Administration building.

Charges for after-hours service calls were raised from \$5 to \$7 per hour which approximated the average hourly cost for all service calls.

Duplicate bridge sessions were held in CH-1 every day and evening of the week. An overflow group met at the Medical Center on Thursdays.

Architectural plans for the First Baptist Church were approved by the congregation. A bride's room, nursery and a parlor-dining room for 160 were included in the plans.

More than 300 residents watched resident Richard Turner, a former McGraw Hill editor, win the local Spelling Bee and qualify to compete against 7 Los Angeles County winners.

Advertised specials: Grapefruit – 8 lbs for 49¢; Wonder Bread – 19¢; Red Wine – 99¢ a gallon.

25 Years Ago — March - April 1983

Residents at a Community Association meeting voiced adamant disapproval of the proposed

business park development, on the southwest corner of Moulton Parkway and El Toro Road, declaring it would increase traffic, noise and air pollution., and loss of a "calm atmosphere."

A lecture by an investment counselor on "Inflation and its Effect on the Economy" attracted a large audience.

The annual meeting of the Historical Society featured a talk by Joe Osterman who discussed the pre-Leisure World ranch area.

Betty Frieden, an internationally recognized leader of the women's movement and daughter of a Leisure World resident, lectured in CH3.

The outstanding safety record by PCM employees warranted a \$604,090 refund from the State Compensation Insurance Fund.

"Vigilantes" were engaged to patrol the Garden Centers to stop the thievery of produce. They wore blue and white caps with "Garden Patrol" printed on them.

A proposed Irvine Company development of 3,600 homes in the Laguna Laurel section of Laguna Canyon was put on hold pending hearings.

Advertised specials: Grapefruit – 20¢ each; CDs with APYs as high as 11.3%.

10 Years Ago — March - April 1998

GRF approved \$30,000 for the cityhood incorporation study. This was in addition to previous grants of \$93,000.

The Community Association scheduled a meeting on the proposed Aliso Viejo Resort area with a high rise hotel and golf course. On advice of counsel, the developer scheduled to speak did not appear.

Official open house for the new Historical Society building was held on March 25th.

A proposed six acre park in the Gate 11 area was dropped, much to the relief of area residents. All agreed that "sprucing up the area" was desirable.

Advertised specials: CDs with APYs between 5.5% to 5.9%.



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Elaine Morgado
Evelyn Shopp



Newly elected Board Members, from left to right: Bob Ring, Gloria Erbe, Libby Marks, Terry Baker, Elaine Morgado and Mark Schneider (not pictured).

Bob Ring, Editor

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