

A Flight to Remember **R&G Nurses Credited for Saving Passenger** **during Medical Emergency**

Deb Gorombei and Lori Plate hurried through the Orlando Airport. It was Friday, September 23, 2005 and their flight to Phoenix would take off shortly. It had been a busy trip with long hours at a software conference and the two nurses along with two other R&G Medical Consultants employees were ready to be home. Missing the plane was not an option.

Arriving at the gate, they happily discovered the plane had been delayed a few minutes. They had made it just in time. As they boarded, Deb noticed a man whose coloring was grey as if he didn't feel well. The thought crossed her mind that something could go wrong on this flight.

The plane was packed, so Lori took a seat forward with Deb seated at the back of the plane. Although the plane went through some rough weather initially, the first 45 minutes or so of the flight was fairly routine. That was all about to change. In the middle of the plane, Jim Wick, in 19C, suddenly slumped in his seat.

An emergency announcement came over the PA system. A flight attendant asked if there were any physicians or RN's on board. Both Deb and Lori quickly left their seats to lend assistance. Deb's feeling of something happening on the flight was coming true — ironically, it wasn't the man she had originally thought looked ill.



(left to right) Lori Plate, RN, LNCC, Roberta Wick, James Wick and Deb Gorombei, RN, BSN, MS, LNCC



James A. Wick holds a bumper sticker depicting that nurses work 24-7.

Jim Wick, accompanied by his wife Roberta, was returning from a business trip to Orlando. As America's Environmental Health & Safety Manager for Intel, based in Chandler, Arizona, he had attended the National Safety Congress conference. The event was sponsored by the National Safety Council where he serves as a member of the Board of Delegates.

"I absolutely had no prior warning," Jim says, "until the moment I collapsed I felt fine." At that moment, no one knew, but Jim had suffered a sudden cardiac arrest. The next few minutes would be a matter of life or death.

As Deb, a former flight nurse, raced down the aisle she thought "I hope Lori will be there."

She was. With years of medical and critical care training and experience between them — and a surge of adrenaline — Lori and Deb went to work. Upright and unconscious in his seat, Deb hurriedly unbuttoned Jim's shirt and called for the automated external defibrillator (AED), ambu bag and a glucometer (in case the unresponsiveness was diabetic related). "Time was of the essence," Deb says, "and we had to make every second count." The airline crew, responsive to every request, quickly provided each item requested.

Frantic, Roberta Wick watched her husband's condition quickly deteriorate. His breathing had completely stopped. "He's turning blue, he's turning blue," she screamed.

As people assisted Jim to the aisle floor, Deb assembled the ambu bag, placed an oral airway and began hand bagging to force oxygen into his lungs. It was essential to keep oxygen flowing to his brain and tissues to prevent damage. As Lori prepared the oxygen tanks, she assessed his circulation — no pulse. Jim was clinically dead.

Deb made a quick, second authoritative call for the defibrillator. Mortality increases by 10% every minute prior to defibrillation. She also shouted to the flight attendants "We need to

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A Flight to Remember

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land this plane now!" The captain, following airline procedure, searched for the closest local airports with nearby hospitals handling cardiac care patients. The plane quickly diverted toward Monroe, Louisiana.

"I nearly jumped for joy when the AED arrived," Lori says recalling those harrowing moments. Quickly unzipping the defibrillator, Deb ripped open the pads. She prayed she and Lori could work the defibrillator correctly in the cramped aisle. They were in sync with one another, working as one in these crucial seconds.

Deb placed the pads on Jim's chest, shouted 'clear' and pressed the button. "Please God, don't let him die," Lori prayed. With no positive results, a second shock was administered. This time it worked. Although irregular and weak, a rhythm and pulse was detected. Slowly, the rhythm progressed and Jim began taking small, shallow breaths. The oral airway was removed.

At this point, Jim was confused and combative, not unusual for someone suffering from oxygen deprivation. As Deb and Lori spoke encouraging words, explaining what had happened, Jim turned to Deb, telling her repeatedly to be quiet. "It was music to my ears," Deb says smiling. "Keep talking to me," Deb told him as he continued to become more responsive.

In a race to avert an additional incident, an IV was started and a call went out for baby aspirin (*helpful in preventing death in a heart attack by reducing clotting*) and nitroglycerin pills (*increases oxygen flow to the heart*). Once again, passengers responded with anything they had with them.

To better assist him, passengers and flight attendants helped to rotate Jim. With his head in Lori's lap, he remembers her calming voice and looking into her face. "It was the face of an angel," Jim says.

As the plane prepared to make the emergency landing in Monroe, Lori and Deb remained on the aisle floor with Jim. As the plane landed, sets of hands firmly braced them. It was a simple, unsolicited act of kindness by fellow passengers to Deb and Lori. Just before landing, Jim, becoming more responsive, looked at Lori and a flight attendant and winked. "I couldn't

form the words "Thank You" but that's what I meant from the bottom of my heart," he says.

As Jim left the plane, passengers burst into applause. One of the other R&G employees came up to him and said "I'm not a nurse, but I can pray." Two business men offered Roberta money "just in case she needed it" which she graciously returned. These were touching moments for Jim and his wife, among many that night. Deb saw him and his wife safely away in the ambulance while Lori helped the flight crew clean up after the emergency.

Deb and Lori both marveled at the crew...after 14 hours on duty, handling a serious medical emergency with skill and professionalism, they could still smile as they served passengers drinks.

After spending six days in the hospital in Monroe and two in a Phoenix Hospital, Jim is back at home and work, well on his way to recovery. Upbeat about the incident, he says he and his wife both want people to know about what happened to him on that fateful flight. "I feel an obligation to tell this story," he says. "It is heartwarming to find people like Deb and Lori — total strangers who care about people."

Since he was 15 years old, Jim has served as a volunteer fireman and has served with six volunteer fire departments in his life, although now he doesn't physically fight the fires. "I believe in giving back to people," Jim continues. "I hope this story encourages others to take CPR, to learn

emergency preparedness, or to volunteer for people in need."

Deb and Lori have similar thoughts. "Be prepared and have training," Deb says. "Don't be afraid to use a defibrillator or ask for one in an emergency. If faced with this situation, remain calm and methodical and work together as a team to help someone," she adds.

Lori agrees. This is her fourth airline medical emergency. "An AED has instructions to walk you through the steps if you are not trained. AED's are located in many public places such as casinos, airports, etc. Don't be afraid to help."

Both Deb and Lori believe in doing random acts of kindness and encourage people to "Pay It Forward". As in the movie, the concept encourages people to not necessarily repay a favor, but do something nice for someone else. "This way, people charged with 'paying it forward' can make exponential differences in many more lives," Deb says.

All three — Jim, Deb and Lori — agree on one thing, God was on board the flight that evening. And thanks to Him, Jim has a new birthday: September 23, 2005.



Lori Plate, Director, Global Legal Solutions, and Deb Gorombej, VP of Operations/COO pictured here with the Waterford Crystal Angels presented to them by Mr. James Wick. The base is a plaque inscribed with the flight number and 'Guardian Angel.'

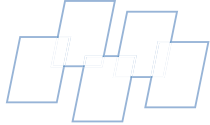
Take CPR,
Learn emergency
preparedness and
volunteer for people
in need.

Footnote: At a recent American Association of Legal Nurse Consultants chapter meeting in Phoenix, Jim presented Deb and Lori a plaque and a Waterford Crystal Angel, symbolizing Deb and Lori as his guardian angels. A year ago at the November 2004 AALNC meeting, both watched a presentation on airline emergency preparedness and used the information they learned to assist Jim Wick.



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Cardiac Care Reaching New Heights



Overall, more than 250,000 Americans die each year from sudden cardiac arrest according to the American Heart Association. Fewer than 7% suffering cardiac arrest outside a hospital survive without a defibrillator according to the association.

With travelers flying more often and longer distances, onboard medical emergencies are becoming more frequent. All airlines are equipped with standard first aid kits. Most carry medical kits which only a trained physician or nurse can use.

Many planes carry an automatic external defibrillator (AED). Pilots have onboard telephones and radios for medical consultations with medical personnel on the ground.

They are also equipped with a booklet showing airports near medical facilities with specific capabilities (i.e. cardiac care) should a medical emergency occur onboard.

If you or a member of your family travels by air and has heart problems, you may want to discuss your travel plans with your physician, carry sufficient supplies of medications you may need and call the airline to check if AED's are on board. Should a problem occur aloft, it could save your life.

Note: In an American Heart Association study released in November 2005, a new CPR technique was revealed. During CPR, the new study suggests doing 2 breaths, followed by 30 chest compressions instead of 15 chest compressions as previously taught. This keeps blood flowing to the body's vital tissues in the CPR process.