

## **International Commemoration Service, Auditorio de Tenerife, March 27, 2007**

Speech by Mr. Jan Groenewoud, surviving relative and president of the Foundation Relatives Victims Tenerife.

Saturday evening, March 26th 1977. I was twenty years old. I was sitting on the sofa with my grandmother, aged 86, my youngest sister, and a good friend. We were watching TV. The Dutch football team was playing a match. My parents would be leaving the next day for a short holiday in sun-drenched Las Palmas with my sister Tini and my eldest sister Marijke and her family. Seven people in all. As they left, my father turned one last time with a look in his eyes that I will never forget. He probably would have liked me to have gone with them.

I was allowed to stay at home and look after things, on the condition that I behaved myself. That same evening, there was a phone call. An uncle, my father's brother, rang to tell me to switch on the television because a special News bulletin was on. A bit later, a neighbour called to say the same thing. The bulletin was about an air crash involving two 747 Jumbos, one belonging to KLM, the other to Pan Am. It had happened in Tenerife. All of a sudden, everything went dark, almost black, as if the earth under our feet had completely caved in. All we could do was breathe.

Together with what was left of the family: brothers, their wives, uncles and aunts, cousins, we sat in the living room. Totally devastated. All of us numb with disbelief, grief and shock. From one moment to the next, I was an adult. I had to fend for myself. Choice had nothing to do with it. I had to make my own way in the world, like it or not. My grandmother set a wonderful example in these difficult days and gave me a lot of strength. My grandmother's faith strengthened her determination to go on living, to support the rest of the family and to give them new confidence in a very uncertain future.

Days, months, years have passed, but now, even thirty years later, I still feel and think about that loss every single day. But the past thirty years have also had a good side; for, I am now the proud father of a son and a daughter. I am grateful to my friends and family, but also to my faith for all the love and support I have received in the past years. Without that, I would not be here today.

I used to ask myself why it felt so silent after the accident and why there was no commemoration. The years went by and we still had not come together to pay tribute to the victims of the events of March 1977. It was in the summer of 2001, when I was going through a rough patch, that I realized that I had an old wound that was desperately in need of care and attention. It was then that I sought professional help for the first time.

In November of the same year I realized that I should take the initiative and organize a commemoration. Five years ago, two of my friends and I established a Foundation to help the loved ones of the victims of this tragic accident to come to terms with their feelings. This led to the first commemorative service, in Amsterdam, five years ago.

Today, thirty years to the date, we have come together again in large numbers in the Auditorio de Tenerife in Santa Cruz to pay our respects to the victims of the tragic plane crash of 27 March 1977. This afternoon, we shall witness the unveiling of the memorial monument on the Mesa Mota. A monument to be proud of. A monument which honours the victims. A special and deeply meaningful gathering of families, friends, survivors, participants and emergency workers from America, Tenerife and the Netherlands.

We are here with each other and for each other. Together we must try to take another small step in coming to terms with this horrendous event.

*adress:* p.o. box 222 NL-2100 AE Heemstede

*telephone:* +31 20 658 06 28

*bank:* ABN AMRO N° 6227 87500

*C.o.C:* registered in Amsterdam 341.68584

*email:* [info@tenerife-memorial.org](mailto:info@tenerife-memorial.org)

*internet:* [www.tenerife-memorial.org](http://www.tenerife-memorial.org)