SEVERAL SAVED ACCIDENTALLY  
Little Things Decided Life And Death In Pan Am Crash

By KEVIN NOBLET  
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KENNER, La. (AP) — Ted Weems lived because his sons were hungry.  
Miriam Becerre lived because she didn’t want to travel alone.  
But Luis Trivolloni died because he had a tour schedule to stick to. And Judith Cunnings died because her rental car wouldn’t run.  
A “bump,” a breakdown, a loaf of bread — these everyday occurrences divided the lucky from the unlucky when Pan Am Flight 759 fell out of a thundering sky at 4:11 p.m. on July 9.

In all, 154 were killed as the Boeing 727 turned into an inferno as it cartwheeled and thudded into a suburban neighborhood two minutes after takeoff. At New Orleans International Airport, 50 minutes earlier, it had been business as usual before the doors shut on the 137 passengers and a crew of seven bound for Las Vegas or San Diego.  
There was the bustle found inside all big city airports, while outside a rainstorm grew in the clockwork weather of Louisiana midsummer afternoons. Not surprisingly, there were problems with overbookings.

Bumped From Flight  
Miss Becerre was a New Orleans nurse looking forward to a casino weekend. But she and her four girlfriends were among nine people bumped from the passenger list. Their luggage went without them. But their aggravation would turn to relief upon learning, when their alternate flight stopped in Dallas, that everybody aboard the Flight 759 was dead.

It made for a sleepless night when they got to Las Vegas.  
“We were wondering why it happened, wondering why we were chosen not to go on that plane,” said Kim Gimre, another nurse in Miss Becerre’s group. “We are still trying to understand why we are still here.”

At the last minute, Miss Becerre had been offered one ticket on the Pan Am flight, but she decided to stick with her girlfriends. She gave it to a Venezuelan law student. She didn’t get the name, but airport officials said he was one of about 50 foreigners from a dozen countries who took the ill-fated flight.

Among the others were Trivolloni, 73, and 69-year-old wife Electra and nine other Uruguayans who had just finished three intoxicating days in New Orleans during a coast-to-coast tour. They didn’t want to leave.

“All the group thought New Orleans was the most beautiful city in the United States,” said tour guide Samuel Garcia. “They said, ‘Why not spend another day here? In Las Vegas, we’re going to lose all our money.’

But they took the flight. “When you are in a tour like that, you are on a schedule,” Garcia added.

Break Down.

Judith Cunnings had to get to Las Vegas. She hadn’t planned to fly.

She and her sister Patricia Hartford had driven to a rented car in Florida two days before the crash. With three of their young children, they planned to drive cross-country to the California funeral of their 29-year-old brother, Lawrence, who had died in a motorcycle crash.

The car broke down in Louisiana. A friend let them use his credit card number to buy five plane tickets to complete the trip.

“We had quite a trauma,” said funeral home director Lew Daves in El Cajon, Calif.

He had to tell Mr. and Mrs. Arthur C. Cunnings of Howell, Mich., that they had not only lost their son — but two others as well.

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