

PRESS



SOLE SURVIVOR

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SOLE SURVIVOR

SYNOPSIS

SUMMARY

SOLE SURVIVOR profiles four people who, through the vagaries of fate, were the only survivors of otherwise fatal plane crashes. Having suffered through not only the physical trauma of a deadly crash, but also the emotional impact of losing family members, these survivors have been reluctant to share their stories. Eschewing sensationalism, SOLE SURVIVOR provides them with a sensitive platform to revisit their past and try to make sense of what it meant for them to survive when so many others lost their lives.

In 1985, George Lamson was the lone survivor of Galaxy flight 203. Two decades later, George lives blocks from the accident site and still struggles with the emotional weight of his survival. In an effort to heal, he seeks to connect with the other thirteen sole survivors of commercial aviation disasters, including Cecelia Cichan, Bahia Bakari and Jim Polehinke - most of who have ever spoken publicly.

Jim Polehinke was the co-pilot of Comair Flight 5191 that crashed in 2006. Jim lost the use of his legs in the accident, but when he woke up from his coma, the most devastating news was that everyone on the plane had perished. Jim's emotional struggle with his survivorship is underscored by the NTSB's findings that the plane crashed solely due to pilot error. Former investigators say Jim was unfairly blamed and offer a case to overturn the ruling. Through their insightful explanations, the film underscores deep flaws in the American safety system and limitations in how the National Transportation and Safety Board investigates accidents.

Cecelia Cichan and Bahia Bakari were children at the time of their accidents. By sharing their stories with American audiences for the first time, Cecelia and Bahia illustrate the implications of survival on children, and how media attention thwarts the healing process.

RATIONALE

The suicide rate among US soldiers returning from war is higher than it has ever been. PTSD is the deadly killer, taking more lives than the battlefield itself. Families, communities, media outlets and institutions often neglect the long-term struggles of survivors due to lack of understanding. Pressure is placed on survivors to embrace their "luck" and move on, without immediately responding to the immense psychological, social, emotional and spiritual ramifications of survival. This is true for survivors of natural disaster, war, disease as well as accidents. SOLE SURVIVOR aims to put a face on survivorship, choosing to highlight airplane crash survivors whose experiences are acute, public and dramatic. In doing so, the film offers a vehicle for understanding the experiences of all kinds of survivors. The film also chronicles the healing power when survivors meet victims from the same tragedy.

SOLE SURVIVOR

PEOPLE



Ky Dickens, Director & Writer

Award winning filmmaker Ky Dickens directed the documentary FISH OUT OF WATER which uses animation, LGBT narratives and historical analysis to deconstruct the seven Bible verses used to condemn homosexuality. FISH OUT OF WATER was a breakout success on the festival circuit, winning four festival prizes and international distribution immediately after its release.

Most recently, Ky joined forces with Rock the Vote & Equality Illinois to direct the *Vote Naked Illinois* campaign, which generated over 500,000 absentee ballot applications, gaining national media attention and a segment on FOX News' O'Reilly Factor. Ky won the 2010 UK Yahoo! Holiday Video of the Year award for her viral cell phone video about a lost snowman. She was a Documentary Juror for Chicago's Reeling Film Festival and has

been a panelist at the Chicago International Film Festival and the Show Me Justice Film Festival.

Her current feature film project, SOLE SURVIVOR, preserves the stories of sole survivors of commercial plane crashes and analyzes the impact of survivorship on the human condition. SOLE SURVIVOR will be completed in late 2012. As a producer, Ky has worked on a wide variety of feature and short films including THE WIDOW, directed by Ryan Logan, JAMIE AND JESSIE ARE NOT TOGETHER directed by Wendy Jo Carlton and RANGE LIFE directed by Robert Trondson.

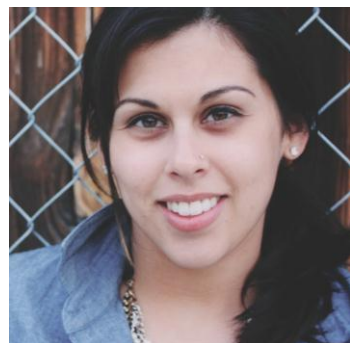
By day, Ky directs TV commercials at the world-renown production studio, MK FILMS (mkfilmsgroup.net).

Ky graduated with Magna Cum Laude honors from Vanderbilt University. She is a member of the Chicago chapter of Women in Film and she was the keynote speaker at the 2011 conference of Methodist Clergy in Houston Texas.



Tom Clayton, Cinematographer

Throughout six years of professional experience Tom has been fortunate to work on a wide variety of projects including documentaries, commercials, television shows and feature films, in both the camera and lighting departments. These jobs have taken him across fourteen countries on five continents. Professionally, he prides himself on being reliable, dedicated, passionate, and having the ability to blend innovation with an eye for detail. In the field, he strives to approach each new project with the correct balance of observation and creative interpretation. Documentary work, particularly with humanitarian organizations is a constant source of inspiration for him.



Anna Patel, Editor

Anna Patel is an Editor at Foundation Content in Los Angeles. Anna has edited films including Ky Dickens' FISH OUT OF WATER (USA), Arctic Monkeys documentary, Duran Duran doc, and "Out of Our Minds" a film about Sir Ken Robinson. Anna's music video editorial list includes Matt & Kim, KD Lang, Arctic Monkeys, Duran Duran and Delorean. As well as creating infectious viral spots for clients such as Nike, Levis, Clorox, and she has cut her way into film trailers including, Martin Provost's SERAPHINE and Emmanuel Mouret's SHALL WE KISS. A NEPHILIM GRIEVES, her directorial debut film, premiered at the Chicago International Film Festival in 2008. Anna is currently working on a stop motion interactive Facebook page for a high profile client. Anna currently lives in Los Angeles with her boyfriend Josh Hamilton. Anna graduated with a B.A. from Columbia College with a major in film.

Franck Rapp, Composer

French composer Franck Rapp, who lives and works just outside of Paris, has composed and arranged four albums, from jazz, to house, to pop music, has a catalogue of over 150 pieces, and has created music for a variety of clients including the Chateau de Versailles, a production of Romeo and Juliet, Braun, Batida, Pepsi and many others. He also composes for theater and film, and was recently commissioned in the United States to create a suite of five compositions for the Centennial of the Executives Club of Chicago.

Susan Aurinko, Executive Producer

Susan Aurinko founded FLATFILEgalleries in 2000. In the nine years it was open, the gallery grew to be one of the largest in Chicago, and continually received national and international press for many of its 200+ exhibitions. In 2003, Aurinko was named "One of 25 People Making a Difference in the Arts in the Midwest" by Dialogue Magazine, and in 2007, she received Columbia College's Entrepreneur of the Year Award. Among the gallery's highlights were many political exhibitions, including the record-breaking Domestic Tension, which featured the residency of Wafaa Bilal, which received press in over 80 countries. Bilal credits Aurinko with being a visionary to allow the project to be played out in the gallery. University College of London geographic sociologist Alan Ingram is currently writing a book about the exhibition in which Aurinko figures prominently as a source. During the years of the gallery, Aurinko was known for pushing the envelope with the content of the exhibitions she curated. Through the gallery, Aurinko became very involved in Chicago's arts community, actively working with or serving on the Boards of several major organizations including the Chicago Artists Coalition, the City of Chicago's Chicago Artists Month Advisory Committee, Chicago Sculpture International, the Community Arts Assistance Program award panel, and Ballet Chicago, among others. Currently, she serves on the Art Acquisition Committee and other subcommittees of the Union League Club of Chicago. She continues to serve as the Chair Emeritus of Chicago Artists.

Amy McIntyre, Producer

Amy's early love of theater and study of it, in tandem with communications at Saint Mary's College, foreshadowed her career reaching audiences with a range of film-related pursuits. Amy has been producing commercials in Chicago for fifteen years. She has had the opportunity to produce many projects for top-tier clients including Pantene, Revlon, McDonald's, Coors and P&G. Initially having been introduced to the craft in post-production, her work has evolved as she has taken on producing jobs in animation and EFX in both Chicago and New York. She got a taste of producing for independent film with her work on "Range Life", directed by former Blue Meanies punk band drummer Robert Trondson. That paved the way for her to continue in her love of independent film making as one of the producers on "Sole Survivor". She currently exercises a balance of the creative and practical, working as one of the senior producers for MK Films Group in Chicago. She contributes to creative development and manages the bidding and negotiating of projects for MK Films Group's five directors working in live-action and tabletop realms. Other past affiliations include Avenue Edit, Peter Elliott Productions, Big Deahl Productions and MTV. She has also enjoyed contributing her skills to past productions of the annual fundraising film for Off the Street Club. When not producing commercials and films, she is focusing on her biggest production project to date: keeping up with the exciting and unpredictable lives of her two young children.

Alexis Jaworski, Co-Producer



University of Vermont.

Receiving her Master's degree in Media Studies from DePaul University, Alexis has worked in arts management for more than a decade with some of the country's most renowned and vital artistic organizations, including Steppenwolf Theatre Company, Hubbard Street Dance Chicago, The Joffrey Ballet and River North Dance Chicago. As a Marketing Manager and Director of Marketing and Communications, Alexis has focused on strategic communications, creative development, media management, and audience development projects with partner organizations such as the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, The Art Institute of Chicago, Illinois Institute of Technology, Chicago Jazz Philharmonic Orchestra and the Auditorium Theater. Incorporating film production into her personal and professional interests since 2008, she is thrilled and honored to be a part of the *Sole Survivor* team. Alexis received her B.A. in Psychology and Art History from

Kristen Kaza, Co-Producer



Since moving to Chicago in 2003 from Vermont, Kristen has worked in marketing and community outreach for Time Out Chicago, Whole Foods Market and the Chicago Reader, where she currently serves as the newspaper's Marketing Director. Kristen likes to create work that is collaborative and community-oriented, as evident in productions & campaigns including the Chicago Reader Biker Village for Pitchfork Music Festival and the major launch of the reinvented Reader, which included pop up events to celebration the revamped publication.

In addition to her position at the Reader, Kristen co-manages the video production company Yellow Wing Productions, which she co-founded with Ky Dickens in 2007. In 2009, they released the breakout documentary film *Fish out of Water* with First Run Features, produced by Kristen and Fawzia Mirza and written and directed by Ky. The film, which explores the relationship between homosexuality and the Bible, had a successful run in the festival circuit and won four juror awards. Currently they are working on the film *Sole Survivor*, which examines the impact of survivorship on the human condition and is set to release in 2012.

In June 2009 Kristen received a 30 Under 30 award from the Windy City Media Group for her achievements in the LGBTQ community, and serves on the About Face Theater Junior Board. Kristen is a Magna Cum Laude graduate from Columbia College where she will begin teaching Collaborative Consumerism, a course she devised for the college, in spring, 2012.

SOLE SURVIVOR

PRODUCTION STILLS





OUR COMPANY

Yellow Wing Productions is an award winning, Chicago-based production company specializing in documentaries. We're committed to preserving stories and inspiring change with media that educates, heals and transforms both individuals and communities. Yellow Wing Productions initiates employment opportunities and creative outlets for women and minorities on every job. All of our films have been women produced, directed, organized and operated.

OUR WORK

Yellow Wing's first feature film, *FISH OUT OF WATER*, directed by Ky Dickens explores the seven Bible passages notoriously used to condemn homosexuality and justify marriage discrimination. *FISH OUT OF WATER* won the prize for Best Documentary at the Reeling International Film Festival, the prize for Best Documentary at the Show Me Social Justice International Film Festival, the Audience Award, Louisville LGBT Film Festival and won the Audience Award Runner Up at the Tall Grass Film Festival. It was a showcase film at the Rhode Island International Film festival and was the runner up for the After Ellen Visibility Prize for the best Festival Release with a lesbian Character in 2009. Golden Globe nominated Kaki King created an original score for *FISH OUT OF WATER*. The film, distributed in North America by FIRST RUN FEATURES, can be found on Netflix, Amazon, Borders and iTunes. Internationally, the film is distributed on television OTPL Worldwide.

VOTE NAKED, a get-out the vote campaign, was conceived and directed by Ky Dickens and might have had the single largest media impact on voter turnout in Illinois history. This highly captivating get-out-the-vote commercial was discussed as the "video of the day" on Fox News' The O'Reilly Factor. The commercial, sponsored by Rock The Vote, Roosevelt University and Equality Illinois inspired over 70,000 absentee ballots through its mail-in program.

SOLE SURVIVOR is Yellow Wing's next feature film. In the history of aviation, there have been fourteen commuter plane crashes with a sole survivor. This documentary explores the impact of sole survivorship by following the journey of George Lamson. At seventeen, George was the sole survivor of Galaxy Airlines flight 203 that killed 70 people in Reno, Nevada. As George seeks answers about the meaning of his tragedy and the purpose of his life, he takes us on a worldwide journey to meet the other sole survivors and discover what struggles, questions, inspirations and fears they share. *SOLE SURVIVOR* is currently in production and is scheduled to release in 2012.

Yellow Wing Productions produced the playful cell phone video, *ORPHAN*, about an abandoned snowman. The video was voted the "Yahoo! Holiday Video of the Year" in the United Kingdom. Yellow Wing Productions is currently producing the short film, *THE WIDOW*, directed by Ryan Logan and has created content for Yale University, The About Face Theater, Baconfest 2011, The Gay Games and Estrojam.

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All donations to our work are tax deductible through our fiscal sponsor: The Chicago Filmmakers

FISH OUT OF WATER FILM - FESTIVAL AWARDS





🔍 Hillary Clinton gets her groove on in South Africa



🔍 Only survivor thinks about plane crash 'every day'



🔍 DNC chief: 'Ryan plan is a cuts-only approach'



🔍 Hope Solo: Writing memoir felt like counseling

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KLG & Hoda

By Scott Stump

TODAY.com contributor

updated 8/14/2012 8:55:10 AM ET



Twenty-five years ago this week, Cecelia Cichan was the only survivor in a plane crash in Michigan that killed the other 154 people on board.

Only 4 years old when Northwest Airlines Flight 255 exploded in a ball of fire in 1987, Cichan said in her first interview since the horrific ordeal that she still thinks about it every day. Now 29 and married, Cichan tells her story in the yet-to-be-released documentary "Sole Survivor," excerpts of which aired on TODAY Tuesday. The documentary also features other people who survived commercial plane crashes despite long odds.

In the film, Cichan displays a tattoo of a commercial jet on the underside of her left wrist.

"I think about the accident every day," she told the filmmakers. "It's kind of hard not to think about it. When I look in the mirror, I have visual scars."

Story: Sole survivor of plane crash making 'miracle' recovery

A twitching arm

Cichan suffered a fractured skull, a broken leg and collarbone and third-degree burns covering much of her body in the crash. She somehow survived after the McDonnell Douglas MD 80 bound for Phoenix exploded into a ball of fire shortly after takeoff at 8:46 p.m. from the Detroit Metropolitan Wayne County Airport in Romulus, Mich., on Aug. 16, 1987. Her mother, Paula, her father, Michael, and her 6-year-old brother, David, were among the fatalities, as the family was returning from a vacation.

She was found among the wreck when a paramedic spotted her twitching arm and heard her moaning as she suffered from serious burns on 30 percent of her body. For the first 24 hours, she remained unidentified before her grandfather confirmed it was her by her chipped front tooth and the purple nail polish her grandmother had painted on her fingernails before the trip.

The National Transportation Safety Board later determined the crash was most likely caused when the slats and flaps on the plane were not extended because of the crew's failure to use a pre-flight checklist; there was also a lack of electrical power at the time of takeoff that failed to trigger the warning system. In the aftermath of the crash, the second-deadliest in U.S. history at the time, Cichan was shielded from public view and raised by an aunt and uncle in Birmingham, Ala., after moving from her home of Tempe, Ariz.



1 Hillary Clinton gets her groove on in South Africa



2 Only survivor thinks about plane crash 'every day'



3 DNC chief: 'Ryan plan is a cuts-only approach'



4 Hope Solo: Writing memoir felt like counseling

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KLG & Hoda

The subject of media scrutiny and public curiosity since her amazing survival, Cichan received numerous gifts from strangers in the aftermath and was featured on magazine covers and even a billboard in Phoenix wishing her well, according to The Arizona Republic. She granted her first interview to the documentary because of the theme of the film.



"This 'Sole Survivor' project is more about a group, and that's why I'm willing to get involved and be part of something bigger," she told the filmmakers.

Moving moment

The director of the documentary, Ky Dickens, told NBC News that all the survivors were somewhat reluctant to speak out of respect to the loss that other families endured, but were aware of why the public is so fascinated with their lives. Cichan has kept in touch with families of the victims over the years, as well as with Lt. John Thiede, the firefighter who rescued her from the smoldering wreck. He met her for the first time as an adult on her wedding day, when she became Cecelia Crocker.

"To see her come down the aisle, my heart, I lost it really," Thiede says in the documentary. "Just to see her in person was something."

"I can say that Cecelia is happy, she's grounded, (and) she's doing wonderful," Dickens told NBC News. "She's in a committed relationship."

After speaking out for the first time, Cichan hopes to resume her private life, according to the documentary filmmakers. On Thursday, there will be a memorial in Romulus, Mich., on the anniversary of the crash, which remains one of the worst disasters in U.S. aviation history.

There is currently a memorial edifice in Romulus listing the names of all of those who perished on that day.

Learn more about the upcoming documentary "Sole Survivor" on the film's website.



Film explores pain, guilt of 'Sole Survivor'

Across the world, there are only 14 sole survivors of catastrophic plane crashes where dozens of lives were lost.



Jason D. Geil, AP

A police officer is shown at the crash site of Comair Flight 5191 that crashed on takeoff killing 49 of 50 onboard at the Blue Grass Airport in Lexington, Ky., on Aug. 27, 2006. James M. Polehinke, the plane's first officer, was the only survivor.

On Aug. 27, 2006, Jim Polehinke joined that small group when he was the only person rescued from the crash of Comair 5191 at Lexington, Ky.'s Bluegrass Airport. Polehinke, the co-pilot, survived, while 49 others died. For six years, Polehinke has kept private the story of his survival, declining interview requests.

Now, he is breaking his silence as one of four people featured in a new documentary, "Sole Survivor." The film is in the final stages of production and in the midst of a Kickstarter.com campaign aimed at raising another \$18,000 by Sept. 3 to put the finishing touches on the film. The film's producers provided some clips of the documentary but aren't releasing Polehinke's comments. The director hopes to enter it in festivals and release it early next year.

In the Lexington crash, the Comair jet turned onto the wrong runway, one that was too short, and the plane crashed while trying to take off.

The [National Transportation Safety Board](#) found that the flight crew missed multiple cues and markings that should have told them they were on the wrong runway. The crew also failed to cross-check instruments and engaged in extraneous conversation, the board said. Polehinke, who was assigned part of the blame for the crash by the [NTSB](#), doesn't remember much about the accident because he suffered severe [brain injury](#). In the film, he talks about what he remembers of the crash and his life after, said filmmaker Ky Dickens. Since the accident, Polehinke has lived a life isolated from the families of the victims. He moved from Florida to Colorado. He has never spoken with any of the victims' families. But Dickens said not a day goes by when Polehinke doesn't think about each life lost on that flight. "He lives with this every day of his life in a very real way," she said. "He absolutely wishes that he'd gone down with the ship." Dickens said Polehinke has wanted to reach out to the families but also wants to respect their feelings. "He talks about the victims' families all the time," she said. "It's his biggest concern."

Victims' relatives

The film includes interviews with others affected by the Comair 5191 crash.

[Amy Clay](#), whose husband Jeff was the captain and died in the crash, said she hesitated about being involved in the project. But she eventually decided that exploring the lives of survivors and others might be healing. Clay stopped talking about the crash publicly years ago, saying that she needed to focus on raising her two

girls and moving on with her life. But this project intrigued her. "Everyone involved has carried a big burden," she said. "It has been hard to just go on, but at some point you just have to." Clay said she feels some anxiety about the release of the movie because it is painful to relive the crash. "It's going to be a very, very difficult thing to watch," she said. "It's a very heavy piece." "I'm hopeful about it," Clay said. "Some of the most beautiful things in life are difficult."

Matthew Snoddy, whose father, Timothy, was killed in the Comair crash, said he was skeptical when Dickens first approached him about her film. But after some thought, he decided to give voice to his feelings about the crash. "I wanted to portray some of the frustration and anguish we went through," he said. Snoddy said family members of those who died have mixed emotions about Polehinke surviving the crash. Some want him to provide answers about what happened. Some blame him and are angry that he survived. Snoddy said because Polehinke went into isolation, he never thought about him much. But he admits he'd like to hear from him. "Every family member would love to hear him say what happened," Snoddy said. "That's what I want to hear." But he knows anything he sees and hears in the film could be painful. And he's glad that no matter what Polehinke says in the film, that he has an opportunity to share his story. "It's going to be an important film to the history of the accident," Snoddy said.

Film's origins

Dickens, from Chicago, began the project about two years ago. A survivor of a car crash herself, Dickens said she'd always been fascinated by survivor stories. Her curiosity led to a meeting with George Lamson, the only survivor of the 1985 crash of Galaxy Airlines Flight 203 in Reno, Nev., that killed 70. Lamson had never reconciled what happened to him and had a desire to find others like him, Dickens said. Lamson agreed to let Dickens document his search. "It has evolved quite a bit from that," Dickens said, though Lamson remains the central character of the film. As she got deeper into the project, Dickens met other sole survivors, including Bahia Bakari, who was 12 in 2009 when she clung to the wreckage of a Yemenia airline flight in the [Indian Ocean](#) for more than 13 hours after 152 were killed in the crash north of the Comoros Islands; Cecelia Chichan, who was just 4 years old when her Northwest Flight 255 went down on takeoff in Detroit 25 years ago killing 156; and Polehinke. The film, Dickens said, is an exploration about the complex emotions felt by the survivors. It also explores the experiences and emotions of the others affected by the crash: the investigators who explored the crashes, the first responders who arrived at the scenes and the family members of those who died.

For many of the survivors, Dickens said, there is immense guilt and pressure. She said often the public looks at the survivors as miracles, but that is not always how the survivors feel about it themselves. "They lost something too," Dickens said. "And it's easy to forget that it's a tragedy for them too." In the case of Comair 5191, the emotions become even more complex since Polehinke was co-pilot. After investigating, the NTSB ruled that pilot error was to blame for the crash. But Dickens said the cause isn't as simple as that and there is some new information, which she didn't detail, in the film about what investigators say they found during the crash investigation.

The NTSB report also said there were shortcomings in air-traffic control staffing and pilot training, as well as inaccurate airport charts, notices to pilots and airport navigation broadcasts. The NTSB said all played a role in the accident, but pilot error was the key cause.

Once completed, Dickens said she hopes to be able to provide private screenings for those family members who wish to see it. Snoddy said he will be among those who watch the film, though it will be painful. "It will be healing for a lot of people," Snoddy said. "But I don't think it will be immediately healing. It's only been six years."

Contributing: Halladay also reports for The Courier-Journal in Louisville

Reader's Digest RECOMMENDS

Aug 15, 2012 08:51 PM EDT

25 Years Later: “Sole Survivor” Film Examines Emotions, Struggle

by Drew Anne Scarantino

Tomorrow marks the 25th anniversary of one of the worst disasters in U.S. aviation history: On August 16, 1987, Northwest Airlines flight 255 crashed in Romulus, Michigan shortly after takeoff while en route to Phoenix, Arizona. All on board were killed except one, the sole survivor Cecelia Cichan. Dubbed the “miracle child,” the four-year-old suffered a fractured skull, a broken leg and collarbone, and third-degree burns on 30 percent of her body. Her mother, father, and six-year-old brother were among the fatalities. Yet somehow, she survived.

After the crash, young Cecelia’s aunt and uncle raised her in obscurity in Birmingham, Alabama, shielded from the media and public. Now 29 and married, Cecelia Crocker has finally come forward with her story in the upcoming documentary “[Sole Survivor](#),” which examines the emotional struggle of survivorship and its impact on the human condition. Director Ky Dickens’ film features Crocker and 12 other sole commercial plane-crash survivors—including George Lamson, Bahia Bakari, and Jim Polehinke—all of whom have never spoken in public until now. Though the survivors were reluctant to share their stories out of respect for the losses of other [families](#), Crocker said she did so when she came to realize that the documentary project is about being a part of something bigger.

To commemorate the Northwest Airlines flight, the victims’ families will meet August 16 on a hill near the crash site, where a black granite slab inscribed with each victim’s name stands. As for the film, Dickens plans to finish it in September.

NATION NOW

25 years later: Sole survivor of Detroit plane crash speaks

By John M. Glionna

August 14, 2012 | 6:00 a.m.

Cecelia Cichan wears a tattoo of an airplane on her wrist.

It's a statement of sorts — one of cheating death and an acknowledgment that a luckless flight she took a quarter-century ago has stayed in her dreams and in her daily reality.

Twenty-five years ago this Thursday, on Aug. 16, 1987, Cichan was aboard Northwest Airlines Flight 25, which crashed in the Detroit suburb of Romulus near Detroit Metropolitan Wayne County Airport, killing 154 people on board. Two people also died on the ground.

Cichan, who was just 4 at the time, was the only passenger to survive.

As the anniversary approaches, Cichan talked about the crash for "Sole Survivor," an upcoming documentary featuring stories of plane crash survivors. It's an interview that celebrates life and deals with the horrifying "what if" — what if she had been in another seat or in another part of the plane.

"I think about the accident every day. It's kind of hard not to think about it when I look in the mirror," she said in a clip from the film that was broadcast by a television station in Detroit.

The Phoenix-bound plane had just lifted off at 8:46 p.m., when its left wing clipped a light pole, sending the damaged airliner into a tumble of death. The McDonnell Douglas MD-80 sheared off the top off a [rental car](#) building, leaving a half-mile-long trail of bodies, charred wreckage, magazines and trays of food along Middlebelt Road.

The National Transportation Safety Board concluded that the plane's crew failed to set the wing flaps properly for takeoff. The agency also said a cockpit warning system did not alert the crew to the problem.

Cichan's parents and brother were killed in the disaster. The little girl suffered severe burns.

THE INDIANAPOLIS STAR

10:16 PM, Aug. 26, 2012

Comair crash co-pilot part of 'Sole Survivor' documentary

Written by

[Jessie Halladay | The Courier-Journal](#)

Across the world, there are only 14 sole survivors of catastrophic plane crashes where dozens of lives were lost.

On Aug. 27, 2006, Jim Polehinke joined that small group when he was the only person rescued from the crash of Comair 5191 at Lexington's Bluegrass Airport. Polehinke, the co-pilot, survived, while 49 others died.

For six years, Polehinke has kept private the story of his survival, declining interview requests. Now, he is breaking his silence as one of four people featured in a new documentary, "Sole Survivor."



Jim Polehinke, sole survivor of Comair Flight 5191 in Lexington, with his wife, Ida. Image courtesy of 'Sole Survivor'

The film's producers provided some clips of the documentary but aren't releasing Polehinke's comments. The director hopes to enter it in festivals and release it early next year.

In the Lexington crash, the Comair jet turned onto the wrong runway, one that was too short, and the plane crashed while trying to take off.

The National Transportation Safety Board found that the flight crew missed multiple cues and markings that should have told them they were on the wrong runway. The crew also failed to cross-check instruments and engaged in extraneous conversation, the board said.

Polehinke, who was assigned part of the blame for the crash by the NTSB, doesn't remember much about the accident because he suffered severe brain injury. In the film, he talks about what he remembers of the crash and his life after, said filmmaker Ky Dickens.

Since the accident, Polehinke has lived a life isolated from the families of the victims. He moved from Florida to Colorado. He has never spoken with any of the victims' families.

But Dickens said not a day goes by when Polehinke doesn't think about each life lost on that flight.

"He lives with this every day of his life in a very real way," she said. "He absolutely wishes that he'd gone down with the ship."

Dickens said Polehinke has wanted to reach out to the families but also wants to respect their feelings. "He talks about the victims' families all the time," she said. "It's his biggest concern."

Victims' relatives

The film includes interviews with others affected by the Comair 5191 crash.

Amy Clay, whose husband Jeff was the captain and died in the crash, said she hesitated about being involved in the project. But she eventually decided that exploring the lives of survivors and others might be healing.

Clay stopped talking about the crash publicly years ago, saying that she needed to focus on raising her two girls and moving on with her life. But this project intrigued her.

THE INDIANAPOLIS STAR – CONT.

“Everyone involved has carried a big burden,” she said. “It has been hard to just go on, but at some point you just have to.” Clay said she feels some anxiety about the release of the movie because it is painful to relive the crash. “It’s going to be a very, very difficult thing to watch,” she said. “It’s a very heavy piece.” “I’m hopeful about it,” Clay said. “Some of the most beautiful things in life are difficult.”

Matthew Snoddy, whose father, Timothy, was killed in the Comair crash, said he was skeptical when Dickens first approached him about her film. But after some thought, he decided to give voice to his feelings about the crash. “I wanted to portray some of the frustration and anguish we went through,” he said. Snoddy said family members of those who died have mixed emotions about Polehinke surviving the crash. Some want him to provide answers about what happened. Some blame him and are angry that he survived. Snoddy said because Polehinke went into isolation, he never thought about him much. But he admits he’d like to hear from him. “Every family member would love to hear him say what happened,” Snoddy said. “That’s what I want to hear.” But he knows anything he sees and hears in the film could be painful. And he’s glad that no matter what Polehinke says in the film, that he has an opportunity to share his story. “It’s going to be an important film to the history of the accident,” Snoddy said.

Film's origins

Dickens, from Chicago, began the project about two years ago. A survivor of a car crash herself, Dickens said she’d always been fascinated by survivor stories. Her curiosity led to a meeting with George Lamson, the only survivor of the 1985 crash of Galaxy Airlines Flight 203 in Reno, Nev., that killed 70. Lamson had never reconciled what happened to him and had a desire to find others like him, Dickens said. Lamson agreed to let Dickens document his search. “It has evolved quite a bit from that,” Dickens said, though Lamson remains the central character of the film.

As she got deeper into the project, Dickens met other sole survivors, including Bahia Bakari, who was 12 in 2009 when she clung to the wreckage of a Yemenia airline flight in the Indian Ocean for more than 13 hours after 152 were killed in the crash north of the Comoros Islands; Cecelia Chichan, who was just 4 years old when her Northwest Flight 255 went down on takeoff in Detroit 25 years ago killing 156; and Polehinke. The film, Dickens said, is an exploration about the complex emotions felt by the survivors. It also explores the experiences and emotions of the others affected by the crash: the investigators who explored the crashes, the first responders who arrived at the scenes and the family members of those who died.

For many of the survivors, Dickens said, there is immense guilt and pressure. “It’s unspoken that they need to be doing something grandiose,” she said. “There’s pressure to do something with your life that’s pleasing.” She said often the public looks at the survivors as miracles, but that is not always how the survivors feel about it themselves.

“They lost something too,” Dickens said. “And it’s easy to forget that it’s a tragedy for them too.” In the case of Comair 5191, the emotions become even more complex since Polehinke was co-pilot.

After investigating, the NTSB ruled that pilot error was to blame for the crash. But Dickens said the cause isn’t as simple as that and there is some new information, which she didn’t detail, in the film about what investigators say they found during the crash investigation.

The NTSB report also said there were shortcomings in air-traffic control staffing and pilot training, as well as inaccurate airport charts, notices to pilots and airport navigation broadcasts. The NTSB said all played a role in the accident, but pilot error was the key cause.

Once completed, Dickens said she hopes to be able to provide private screenings for those family members who wish to see it.

Snoddy said he will be among those who watch the film, though it will be painful. “It will be healing for a lot of people,” Snoddy said. “But I don’t think it will be immediately healing. It’s only been six years.”

what (not) to doc



AUGUST 24, 2012 · 12:01 PM

In the Works: SOLE SURVIVOR

An in-depth and sensitive look at the lone survivors of commercial airplane crashes.



Director Ky Dickens profiles four people who, through the vagaries of fate, were the single survivors of otherwise fatal plane accidents. Having suffered through not only the physical trauma of a deadly crash, but also the emotional impact of losing loved ones, these individuals have typically been reticent to share their stories. Eschewing sensationalism, Dickens provides them with a platform to revisit their past and try to make sense of what it meant for them to survive when so many others perished.

Dickens has reached nearly three-quarters of her latest [Kickstarter](#) campaign for \$18,000 in finishing [funds](#) with nine days to go. She previously successfully raised more than \$20,000 to get to a rough cut. Additional information on the project may be found at its [website](#).

I first learned of this project when the filmmaker contacted me some months ago inquiring about a consultation. I was immediately intrigued – as the film notes, these individuals and their circumstances are exceedingly rare, with only fourteen such cases noted in the history of aviation. That Dickens was able to gain the trust of more than a quarter of them is something of a feat – even one of their stories has the potential to provide the material for a compelling documentary project. Faced with expectations from others that their miraculous survival must have meant they were destined for something more, what happens if they don't end up changing the world? She handles their stories with care, bypassing the potential “freakshow” aspects of their unlikely survival to pose larger, thought-provoking questions about survivor's guilt, one's purpose in life, and how it's even possible to heal from such profound loss. I'm looking forward to seeing how the project develops further.

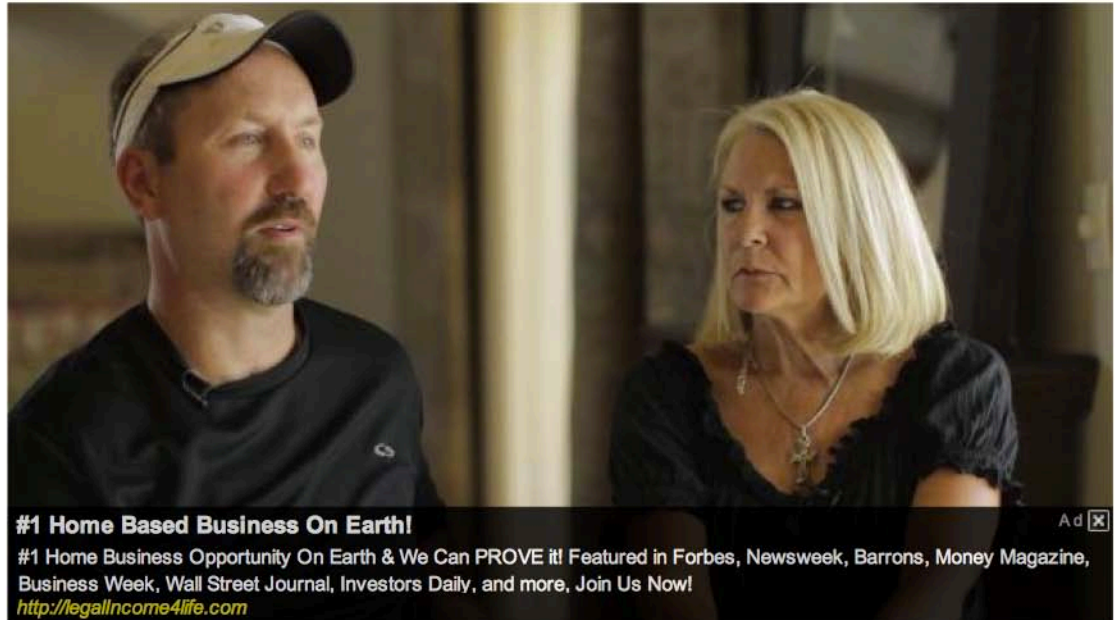
WKYT to air flight 5191 sole survivor's first interview discussing crash



Posted: Fri 7:00 PM, May 04, 2012
Updated: Fri 10:03 AM, May 04, 2012

After more than five and a half years of silence, the lone survivor of Comair flight 5191 is breaking his silence and speaking directly about the crash at Lexington's Blue Grass Airport that killed 49 people.

"If I am not doing something and I am not involved with an activity, my mind goes back to August 27, 2006," said flight 5191 first officer Jim Polehinke.



Flight 5191 first officer and sole survivor Jim Polehinke and his wife Ida

"If I am not doing something and I am not involved with an activity, my mind goes back to August 27, 2006," said flight 5191 first officer Jim Polehinke.

While headed down the wrong runway, Polehinke and the flight's captain noticed something strange. There were no lights and the runway ended before the plane could be airborne.

After awaking from a coma, Polehinke learned he was the flight's only survivor and would never walk again while facing the reality that he was one of the pilots at the helm of flight 5191.

During their investigation, federal officials never talked to Polehinke whose doctor told the National Transportation Safety Board he was "medically unfit" to be interviewed.

Eleven months later, the NTSB determined the probable cause was the pilots' "failure to use available cues and aids to identify the airplane's location ... and to cross-check and verify that the airplane was on the correct runway before takeoff."

"Jim will be the first person to shoulder the responsibility for his part in it," said Chicago filmmaker Ky Dickens who convinced Polehinke and his wife Ida to open their home and lives to the documentary. "Sole Survivor" which will be released in the fall documents the world's 14 sole survivors of commuter plane crashes.

The documentary focuses main on Polehinke and George Lamson who was the sole survivor of a 1985 airline crash that killed 70 people as it left Reno, Nevada, for Minneapolis.

"George was a passenger who ended up being a sole survivor and Jim was obviously a pilot who ended up being a sole survivor," said Dickens. "And I think we really can understand survivorship in a very comprehensive by looking at someone who was in control versus someone who just happened to survive."

Parts of that documentary and Polehinke's first interview where he discusses the crash will air on WKYT at 6 p.m. Monday.

10 Documentaries to Look Forward To in 2012

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by [Tom Roston](#) | December 29th, 2011 at 10:21 AM

Looking forward to 2012, here are the 10 documentaries that I am most eager to see.

These films are either already on the horizon, way off the radar, or a figment of my imagination. Still, I hope to see each of them some day...

10. *Shut Up and Play the Hits* (Dylan Southern, Will Lovelace)

After hearing that this documentary about LCD Soundsystem front man James Murphy was being featured at Sundance, I started listening to the band. I've been hooked ever since. And then a friend told me he was at the show featured in the film, and that it was beyond belief. I'm looking forward to seeing the footage of the two days when the band had that final show at Madison Square Garden. The film premieres at Sundance 2012.

9. *Act Up! The Movie* (Scott Robbe)

This documentary about the AIDS activist group ACT UP strikes a chord for me, as a former 1980s lefty activist who used to always join the ACT UP contingent of any march. I can attest to the immense power and galvanizing force of the group. The AIDS crisis was the closest my generation came to combating a plague, and these were the people fighting on the frontlines. With Gus Van Sant executive producing, hopefully this film will be making a splash soon (Sundance, 2013, perhaps?). Still in production...

8. *Training for the Apocalypse* (Rob VanAlkemade)

It's an intriguing premise: A documentary about survivalists and other doomsday preppers who try to live life as they make provisions for the end of the world. VanAlkemade has an interesting eye for the bizarre (see his *What Would Jesus Buy?*), which I can appreciate. Still in production...

7. *The Queen of Versailles* (Lauren Greenfield)

I'm always on the lookout for good films about our current economic crisis and this one is about a family that is constructing the biggest house in America. When their timeshare-fortune disappears, they end up in ruin. Sure, there's a schadenfreude appeal to this, but let's try to remain above that. The film is premiering at Sundance

6. *Sole Survivor* (Ky Dickens)

There's something a little icky about a documentary about the sole survivors of catastrophic airplane crashes. The rubbernecking appeal bothers me. And yet, I can't deny being fascinated by the subject of Dickens' film, which focuses on George Lamson, who survived a 1985 crash when he was a teenager, and who reaches out to similar survivors of plane crashes. Check out [Sole Survivor's Kickstarter campaign](#). Still in production...



Arts & Culture

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FRI AUGUST 31, 2012

Documentary wraps featuring Detroit plane crash survivor

BY KATE WELLS



Filming has wrapped on a documentary featuring the only survivor of the 1987 plane crash near Detroit.

Twenty-five years after Northwest Flight 255 killed some 150 passengers, Cecelia Cichan is telling her story publicly for the first time.

She was just four years old when she survived the crash that killed her parents and brother. Now she and 13 other lone survivors of commercial crashes are the focus of the film entitled "Sole Survivor."

Ky Dickens is the film's director. "The one unifying emotion that all of them have is a deep sense of loneliness. Often, the sole survivors feel completely separate from the community that was impacted, from the victim's families, because in some way they are: they survived."

"And then there's a separation from the public at large, because there's often a deep desire to put a shield around you so people can't judge what you are or are not doing with your lives after this tragedy where you were the only one spared. "

Dickens says the process of filming itself was an emotional evolution for the survivors, especially as they met with the families of crash victims.

As they finished shooting in Michigan around the time of the 25th anniversary of Northwest Flight 255, Dickens says they began to receive an outpouring of support. "The amount of letters and emails that we received of victim's families telling us how happy they were that Cecilia was finally speaking, because for them she was a link in this whole tragedy that had never really been soldered, and a link back to their loved ones. And also almost a way for them to catalogue where their loved ones would be 25 years later."

Knowing that Cecilia had gone on to live a fulfilling life – she was adopted by family, graduated from college, and married – brought victims' families a sense of comfort, says Dickens. "Knowing that Cecilia's happy and is doing well now, and getting some insight into that life, it really does facilitate, I think, that final [step](#) towards closure." Dickens says Michigan families connected to Flight 255 have been a big part of the film's fundraising. "It's been unbelievable. The community in Michigan and especially the Detroit area has given almost more than any other place in the country. And I think that's just a testament to how many people were affected by the Northwest 255 tragedy, how many people were impacted also by the survival of Cecilia and also just deeply want to hear her story told."

Dickens says the film will be released within the next six months.

Six Years Later, Comair Crash Survivor Starts To Talk About His Recovery



Posted: May 2, 2012 4:45 PM
Updated: May 3, 2012 7:45 AM

It's been almost six years, and we've never heard from him. But now, the co-pilot and sole survivor of the Comair Flight 5191 crash is slowly breaking his silence.

After living through the August 2006 crash at Blue Grass Airport, Jim Polehinke joined a group of 13 other people, the only people in the world who can say they were the sole survivor of a commercial plane crash. And because of it, there's only a small percentage of people who can say they relate.

In Lexington, there has been no greater tragedy than August 27, 2006. We've mourned the 49 lives lost, built memorials to remember them, marked the anniversary with somber ceremonies. But until now, we never heard from the one who survived.

The first and last time we had seen Polehinke was in the fall of 2006 when he quietly left Lexington to go back home to Florida, where he would attempt to get his life back. After nearly six years, it appears he's on his way, and for the first time, he's talking about the tragedy.

Polehinke and 13 others from around the world are the only ones who can say they were sole survivors of plane crashes. George Lamson is one. "When I was 17 years old, I was in a plane accident," he said. "and I was the only one to survive."



Recently, Lamson met with someone who could relate while filming a documentary called "Sole Survivor," a film about struggling with survivorship. "I'd like to be friends with these people," said Lamson. "To let them know that I'm there for them. To help them the best I can from what I've learned."

In the film, slated to be released later this year, the sole survivor of the Flight 5191 crash opens up about his life as a paraplegic and, according to directors, Polehinke makes a case in the film that would exonerate him of the charge that the plane crashed solely due to pilot error.

"I've adapted very quickly," said Polehinke. "But at the same time not having use of my legs, getting dressed..."

The challenges are obvious. But Polehinke will tell you they're what push him to get up each day and appreciate what he does have. He's found a new hobby, participating in almost anything outdoors, and he's embracing it. Skiing, for instance, he describes as therapeutic. "It makes me look forward, go forward and not go back to the past to think about how I got hurt."

But moving forward in life, doesn't involve trying to forget what happened in Lexington. Recently, Polehinke met Lamson, of Reno, Nevada, and a film crew snapped photos of the two as they chatted about their tragedies.

In the meantime, the man with a story everyone has waited to hear has his sights set on the ultimate story of survival. "I want to try and achieve my goal and get into the Paralympics," said Polehinke. "And if God has it in my path, to win a medal."

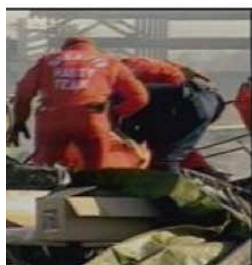
Sole Reno crash survivor in documentary

10:25 PM, Dec 27, 2011 | 3 comments

GOLDEN VALLEY, Minn. -- Almost 27 years later, George Lamson, Jr. returned to Minnesota on Tuesday to assist in the making of a documentary about his luck and misfortune a thousand miles away. Lamson was the sole survivor of the January 21, 1985 airplane crash in Reno, Nevada. 64 people, almost all Minnesotans, died in the mishap.

Lamson was a 17 year old Senior and Military Cadet at Cretin-Derham High School in St. Paul. His father, businessman George, Sr. died as a result of the crash.

The plane was an aging Lockheed Electra, four-engine turbo prop. The National Transportation Safety Board would later rule that vibration caused by an air access door under the leading edge of one wing had been left open and was the "probable cause" of the accident.



The pilots over-reacted to the vibration, according to investigators. The plane lost air speed and crashed in a trailer lot. Lamson, Jr. was thrown clear of the wreckage, landing in the middle of a highway, still strapped in his seat from the Electra. In the split-second before the plane exploded behind him, Lamson unbuckled and ran forward into a field.

Initially, George, Sr. also survived, but succumbed to head injuries a few days

later. Robert Miggins also survived, but died of severe burns in a Los Vegas Hospital. Only the St. Paul teenager was left alive to tell the tale of what happened.

George had spoken briefly from his hospital bed about thinking he was dead before he ran into the field. "I realized that I got up. I ran away and the plane blew up, knocked me down and I ran as fast as I could."

Some years later, he would tell KARE 11's Allen Costantini, who covered the crash in 1985, about being the only person to walk away from the pre-dawn horror.

"It is exhilarating, then depressing, because you are thinking, 'Geez, I am blessed by God to be alive and then you realize that all these people died and you are the only one there,'" explained Lamson, who was then in his 30's.

Lamson moved out of state years after the crash, returning only to visit family and this week to be present for the making of a documentary about his experience as a "sole survivor."

Costantini was interviewed Tuesday by documentarian Ky Dickens, of Chicago, about Lamson's demeanor in the days and months after the crash.



"I could not find one sort of definitive answer to how many sole survivors there have been of airplane crashes and that sort of thing," said Dickens. "I got interested and started looking and found there have been 14. There had never been one medium to bring these stories together and look at that impact that it has on the human condition to survive something like that."

Dickens contacted Lamson in 2009 and he agreed to help her project. "I felt it was a way for me to fulfill the purpose that I feel I need to do. I wanted to help people and this is a way to do it," said Lamson.

Dickens intends to interview the sole survivor of the Romulus, Michigan Northwest Airlines crash in 1987 that claimed 156 lives. Only then 4 year old Cecelia Cichan survived. George Lamson is anxious to speak with her in person. She is now 27. They have communicated only by social media.

Lamson remains a private person, but did say he has a daughter, 15, of whom he is "very, very proud". The question for Minnesotans who remember his story is: has he overcome the horror of that day in 1985?

"I do not know. 'Content' is a pretty big word. I am doing okay. You know? I am happy," said Lamson.

Ky Dickens documentary is to be completed in the summer of 2012. Plans for its distribution are undetermined.

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Comair 5191 crash's surviving copilot speaks in documentary film

Published: May 6, 2012



NEWS, SPORTS AND ENTERTAINMENT
FROM THE LEXINGTON HERALD-LEADER

By Josh Kegley — jkegley@herald-leader.com

In the years that followed the crash of Comair Flight 5191, one voice has been conspicuously absent from the courtroom dramas, memorial services, media reports and safety investigations.

Jim Polehinke, the co-pilot and only survivor, became somewhat of a mystery after the crash that killed 49 people at Blue Grass Airport in Lexington in 2006. Few knew the sound of his voice, the extent of his injuries, or where he lived.

The shroud surrounding Polehinke's survival will be lifted later this year when *Sole Survivor*, a new documentary by Chicago filmmaker Ky Dickens, casts Polehinke as a central figure.

On Monday, select portions of the documentary featuring Polehinke talking about the crash will be shown on the 6 p.m. newscast of WKYT-TV.

In the film, Polehinke discusses his recovery and his hazy memories from the moments before the plane went down, as well as his guilt about being at the helm of the plane during a crash the National Transportation Safety Board ruled as being caused by pilot error.

Polehinke kept a newspaper article, detailing the names and destinations of all the passengers who were killed, under his wheelchair.

"The accident again is as fresh as it was yesterday," Polehinke said in footage from the film provided to WKYT.

Polehinke is one of several sole survivors of commuter plane crashes around the world highlighted in the film. *Sole Survivor* will be submitted to film festivals starting this fall, with further distribution plans still in the works.

Dickens began working on *Sole Survivor* about two years ago. There were at least 14 sole survivors of commuter plane crashes in the history of aviation, she said, and her goal was to unite them and explore how being the only survivor of a mass-casualty plane crash affects their lives.

"It felt like an important story to tell," she said. "A lot of people in society don't always understand. A lot of people think the survivors are lucky to have lived, but that's not always the case."

Dickens was two-thirds of the way through filming before she met Polehinke, who is wheelchair-bound from injuries sustained in the crash.

He now lives in Colorado.

Polehinke took on a larger-than-planned role in the film when it became clear to Dickens that his story was different and more involved.

He was the only one with a significant disability; he lost the use of both legs and had one amputated below the knee.

"Many survivors have burns, some are missing fingers, but in terms of not being able to walk, Jim was the only one that had suffered such a physical impairment," she said.

He also was the only pilot among the sole survivors; the others were all passengers.

The film focuses on that "emotional experience, having been the sole survivor and, in the end, held accountable by the NTSB for the deaths of so many people," she said.

Dickens spent about eight months getting to know Polehinke, whom she described as funny, trusting and intelligent. She also said he thinks about the crash daily and occasionally ventures into a "dark place" in his mind.

Polehinke has found therapy in skiing and religion, Dickens said, and hopes to use his story as inspiration for people in similar difficult circumstances.



Jim Polehinke and his wife, Ida, will tell their story in *Sole Survivor*, an upcoming documentary about survivors of mass-casualty plane crashes. Polehinke was the copilot of Comair Flight 5191, which crashed in Lexington on Aug. 27, 2006, killing 49 people. He was the only survivor. Photo provided by WKYT.

Dickens and her crew gave WKYT the exclusive clip of Polehinke in exchange for its news footage filmed after the crash.

Over the years, many people — lawyers, attorneys, journalists and loved ones of other victims — had reached out to Polehinke, but he's never spoken publicly.

Sam Dick, an anchor for WKYT, interviewed family members of those who died in the crash. They had never heard Polehinke speak, and their reactions to the footage will make up a portion of the newscast.

The last that many people heard about Polehinke were reports that he was recovering from a coma and possibly had significant brain damage.

"They had the impression ... that for many years, he was so badly injured that he was not capable of communicating," Dick said. "To see him, to hear from him for the first time, was pretty eye-opening."

Among those who viewed the footage was Lois Turner, wife of University of Kentucky Associate Dean Larry Turner, who died in the crash.

Lois Turner, who became somewhat of a spokeswoman for the many families affected by the crash in the lengthy legal battles that followed, described seeing and hearing Polehinke as "surreal."

"I was just really surprised because I think all along, we knew he had been severely injured," she said. "We hadn't heard anything for 5 1/2 years."

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The News-Herald

NEWS

ROMULUS: Flight 255 survivor to speak in documentary (VIDEO)

Published: Monday, June 11, 2012



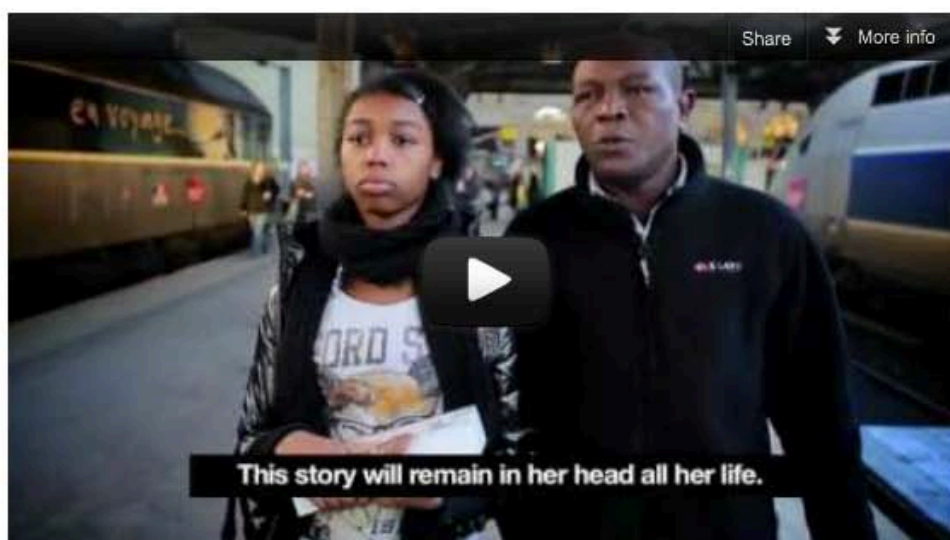
Cecelia Cichan, the lone survivor of Northwest Flight 255, which crashed shortly after takeoff Aug. 16, 1987, has broken her silence.

Cichan, who lost both parents and her brother in the crash, spoke to filmmakers last year for "Sole Survivor," a documentary that seeks out the 14 known living people who were the only survivors of major airliner crashes.

She was 4 years old at the time of the crash and kept in seclusion by family in Birmingham, Ala., after recovering from injuries sustained during the mishap, including a fractured skull, collar bone and leg, as well as third-degree burns over 30 percent of her body.

Flight 255, the worst airline disaster in state history, exploded at the intersection of I-94 and Middlebelt Road after pilots were unable to control the plane. Investigators later found the crew did not follow preflight protocols.

The film, directed by Ky Dickens, should be completed by August, according to its website www.solesurvivorfilm.com.



Ky Dickens' 'Sole Survivor': Fundraiser Supports Local Filmmaker's New Documentary



Ky Dickens, the talented filmmaker behind "Sole Survivor."

A local filmmaker's latest documentary project is the subject of a swanky fundraiser to be held next Tuesday in Chicago.

Ky Dickens, award-winning director of the 2009 documentary "Fish out of Water," recently wrapped production on her latest project, "[Sole Survivor](#)," a new feature film that explores the experience of sole survivors of plane crashes, of which there are only 14 worldwide.

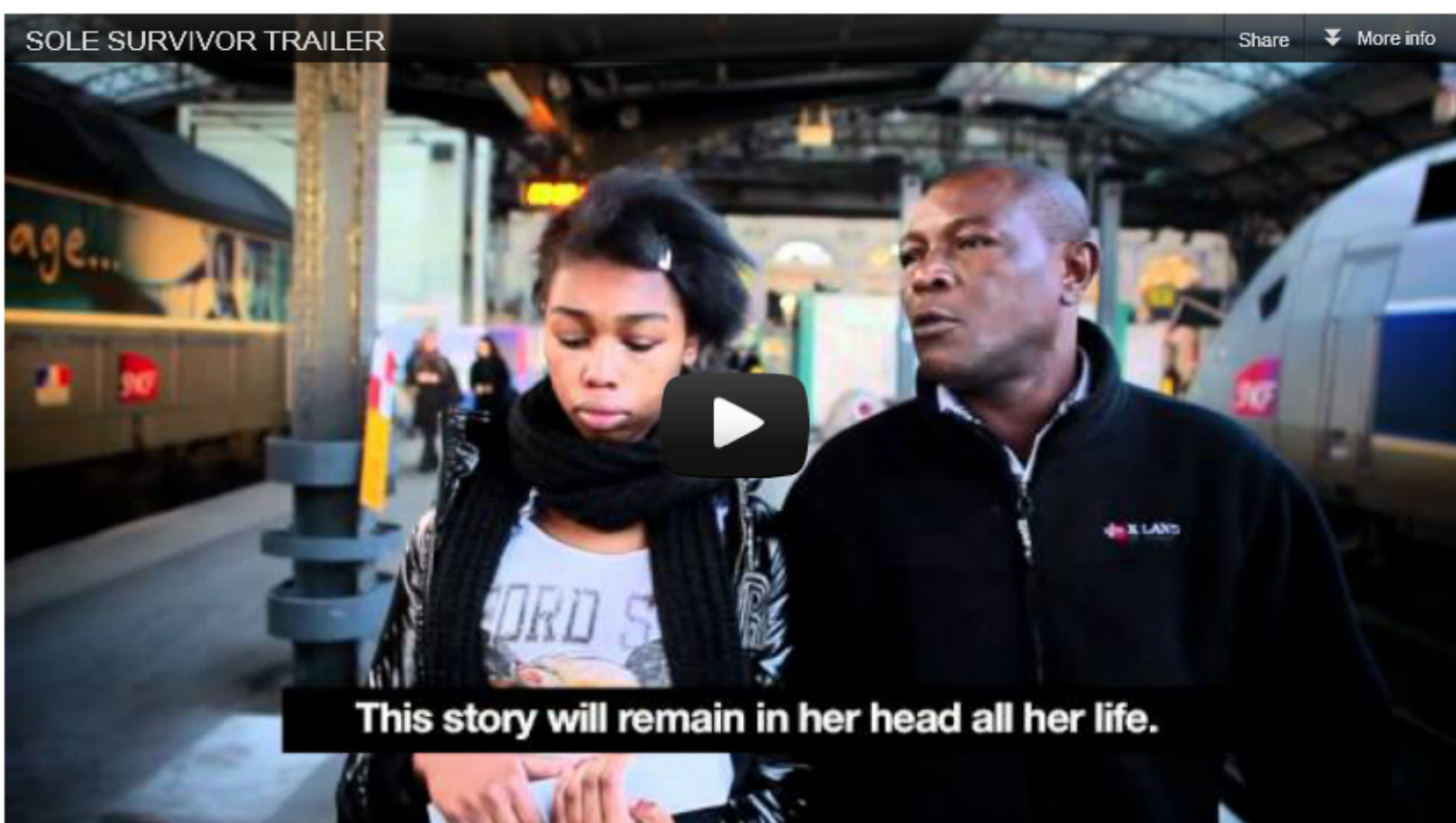
Dickens explained last year to the *Windy City Times* that she was drawn to the subject of sole survivors [largely because none of the survivors' stories had previously collected in either a book or a film](#). Many of the survivors were children who, in Dickens' words, "appeared to walk away unscathed from accidents where nothing was left," where so many lives had been taken.

"This film penetrates questions about purpose and random chance," Dickens told the paper.

Dickens' filmmaking team will be the beneficiary of [the May 29 fundraiser "The Height of Fashion"](#), to be held on the top of the Dana Hotel & [Spa](#) in the Vertigo Sky Lounge, 2 W. Erie St., on the city's Near North Side. [For \\$50 or \\$35 \(student, artist price\)](#), guests can enjoy Farmhouse food and craft cocktails, Magic Hat brews and cocomori desserts, in addition to participating in a one-time auction featuring art, jewelry and fashion.

Designers Maria Pinto, Tammy Kohl and fashion blogger Emma Arnold will host and DJs Victor Organic and Huggies Supreme will be spinning jams.

WATCH the trailer for "Sole Survivor" below:



WINDY CITY TIMES

June 15, 2011

31

MOVIES

Ky Dickens on her 'Sole' ambition

BY TULLY SATRE

For a long time after the release of the documentary *Fish Out of Water*, award-winning director Ky Dickens was anxious to start a new project. "This is like when you go out and try to look for a boyfriend or a girlfriend," Dickens joked. "You have to wait for it to find you." Dickens said she knew the right film would eventually come to her.

Dickens' ideas for a new project started last May. She recalled reading about a 9-year-old Dutch boy named Ruben van Assouw. Assouw was the sole survivor of Afriqiyah Airways Flight 771, which crashed on approach to Tripoli International Airport in the early evening hours of May 12, 2010. Struck by his amazing story of survival, Dickens was intrigued. She continued to look into other aviation accidents yielding sole or "lone" survivors.

"The more I researched the more I found that many [sole survivors] were children," Dickens said, "[who] just appeared to walk away unscathed from accidents where nothing was left." At the time, Dickens was not set on the idea for a film, she was just curious.

Her career was already off to a great start. *Fish Out of Water*, Dickens' first feature film, explored the seven Bible passages notoriously used to condemn homosexuality and arrest the struggle for equality. The documentary received awards and nominations in festivals all around the country, and more importantly, provided the LGBT community with a tool they did not have before.

"*Fish Out of Water* felt like the most difficult thing that I have ever done," Dickens recalled, "Because I felt like I needed to give it my full undivided attention for three to four years every

day." She felt desperate for a break.

Dickens headed to the Burning Man festival in the Black Rock Desert of Nevada, just outside of Reno, in August of last year. During her research about sole survivors she recalled an accident in Reno with a lone survivor, Galaxy Airlines Flight 203 crashed shortly after takeoff in the early hours of Jan. 21, 1985, killing 73 people. George Lamson, 17 at the time, was the sole survivor. Dickens reached out to him.

The Chicago filmmaker and the sole survivor met for lunch before Dickens headed into the desert for the five-day festival. "We started talking and had an 'a-ha' moment," said Dickens. The two bonded over similar experiences. In high school, Dickens was involved in a fatal car accident, which left her with guilt she still carries. Still unsure if she is ready to talk openly about what happened, Dickens recalled writing a paper about the accident for an English class. Without her consent, the paper was made public. Dickens said the publicity made the situation worse and only intensified her feelings of remorse and responsibility about the events that unfolded after the accident.

Although her conversation with Lamson, Dickens began to realize how a survivor's trauma was often misunderstood. "I think that we're all guilty of this to some degree," said Dickens. "If you hear a guy just came back from war and everyone in his contingent was killed, many people would say, 'you're so lucky' ... or someone who survived AIDS, while all of his friends died, or the only house standing in an Alabama neighborhood after a tornado...we don't realize the damage of something dying with that person that day, too. When you witness an entire community obliterated, a great deal of damage is done."



Ky Dickens.

She said society tends to assign to survivors the need to feel lucky or grateful. After the accident, Lamson was praised in the media as a hero and the product of a miracle, complicating his own sense of identity. "We don't take the time to assimilate someone back into society with the resources they need," said Dickens. With no one to relate to, Lamson was indeed a lone survivor.

On her way back from Burning Man, Dickens had six hours to kill before her flight. Though she barely knew him, she called Lamson to see if he would like to meet for breakfast. Lamson picked Dickens up from the airport. After passing several restaurants, Dickens asked why they had not yet stopped. "He said, 'I am going to take you somewhere,'" remembered Dickens. "I immediately said to myself, 'My mother told me not to get into a car with a stranger!'"

They stopped at a field on the side of the road

and Dickens was instructed to get out of the car. "I thought, 'This is it,'" said Dickens. "But then he started telling me, 'this is where the plane went down,' and then he looked at me and said, 'I've never told anyone this....I've never come back here.'" Lamson told Dickens he wanted to make a film with her.

"I told him if he put his whole self into it, then I'd put my whole self into it. It was kind of a dramatic moment," laughed Dickens; that was when she knew she would be making her next film.

Having completed a successful bid for \$20,000 on Kickstarter, production for *Sole Survivor* is well underway.

Sole Survivor will be the second feature film for Yellow Wing Productions, Dickens' Chicago-based production company. The film focuses on lone survivors of airplane crashes as they "embody the experience of all types of survivor because their experience is acute, public and dramatic." The documentary follows George Lamson, one of fourteen sole survivors in a commuter plane crash. With Dickens, Lamson will embark on a journey across eleven countries, three generations and a myriad of cultures to connect with the thirteen other sole survivors of large-scale commercial plane crashes.

"I think there are two things that I like to do when deciding what project to work on," said Dickens. "I like to find a story or topic that has not been covered in a specific way ... and I like it to have a spiritual element."

"There were many films that looked at spirituality," Dickens recalled when she first began filming *Fish Out of Water*, "but no film that had looked through the unique passages. None of the stories in *Sole Survivor* have ever been collected in a book or for a film. This film penetrates questions about purpose and random chance."

Dickens hopes to wrap up production by the end of the year with an intended release in 2012. More information is at <http://www.solesurvivorfilm.com>.

Cecelia Cichan, Sole Survivor of Michigan Plane Crash, Shares Her Story

3

12



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Posted: August 14, 2012



Cecelia Cichan was the sole survivor of a 1987 Michigan plane crash which took the lives of 156 people including her entire family. Cichan was only 4-years-old when she was pulled from the burning plane and is now sharing her memories of the ordeal and how it impacted her life for the first time. Cecelia Cichan recently got married, and, John Thiede, the firefighter who saved her life, walked her down the aisle.



Cichan was referred to as the "miracle child" by the media after she emerged from the Michigan Airlines flight 255 crash wreckage. The firefighter heard the preschooler whimpering and dug her out of the carnage, according to the [Daily Mail](#). The plane crashed to the ground in flames shortly after take-off from airport in Michigan on the way to Phoenix. The crash also took the lives of two individuals on the ground.

The Michigan Airlines flight 255 crash remains one of the most deadly plane disasters in United States history. Cecelia Cichan lost both of her parents and her 6-year-old brother when the plane went down. Although Cichan was fortunate to be alive, she suffered a fractured skull, broken collarbone, broken leg, and multiple third-degree burns.



Cichan's story is part of a new documentary entitled [Sole Survivor](#) focusing on passengers who lived through deadly plane crashes. [Michigan](#) rescuers believe Cecelia Cichan survived the plane crash because her mother Paula, shielded the child with her own body as the plane went down. The family, which include father Michael and

brother David, were on the way home from vacation.

"It's kind of hard not to think about it. When I look in the mirror, I have visual scars," Cichan stated in the *Sole Survivor* documentary.

Cecelia Cichan was the focus of intense media coverage after the Michigan plane crash. Her aunt Rita and Uncle Franklin Lumpkin shielded the little girl from the press and raised her away from the cameras in Birmingham, Alabama. Cichan has a tattoo of an airplane on her wrist to remind her of the tragedy which took the lives of her family. The 25th anniversary of Michigan Airlines flight 255 will be commemorated on Thursday at a black granite memorial near where the plane went down.



Lone survivor is now 29, married

By Scott Craven, The Republic|azcentral.com

Posted 8/16/2012 04:10:49 AM

Twenty five years after Northwest Flight 255 crashed, killing 156 people, one mystery remained: What happened to the Tempe girl who survived?

Not long after responders pulled the badly injured 4-year-old from the wreckage, the story of Cecelia Cichan captured headlines.

And then the sole survivor disappeared. She lived with relatives and stayed out of the public eye. Until now.

She spoke publicly for the first time in a yet-to-be-released documentary called "Sole Survivor." The little girl now is healthy, happy and, at 29 years old, married.

In clips provided by director Ky Dickens, Cecelia Crocker, as she is now known, sports a tattoo of an airplane on her wrist, which is just as indelible as her memories.

"I think about the accident every day," she says in the clip. "It's kind of hard not to think about it. When I look in the mirror, I have visual scars."

Michael and Paula Cichan, Crocker's parents, died in the crash, as did her 6-year-old brother, David. Crocker appeared in the documentary because she told her story alongside others, Dickens said in an [e-mail](#), adding that Crocker was not doing interviews.

"I realize there is much more to tell, and Cecelia tells it," Dickens said. "Everything people want to hear will be out there as soon as the film is released."

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Lone survivor of Northwest Airlines Flight 255 crash gives first interview

By David Shepardson
Detroit News Washington Bureau
June 11, 2012 at 9:22 pm

The Detroit News

The only survivor of doomed Northwest Airlines Flight 255 that killed 156 people shortly after takeoff from Romulus in 1987 has given her first-ever interview for a documentary.

Cecelia Cichan, then 4, was found in the wreckage after the plane slammed onto Middle Belt

The producers of "Sole Survivor" posted photos of Cichan and the news of the interview on the movie's blog (www.solesurvivorfilm.com). The documentary, to be completed in August, features the stories of 14 sole survivors of plane crashes.

"Our interview with Cecelia was the first that she's ever given about her accident, and we feel grateful to include her positive outlook, loving insight, bright smile and honest reflection in this film. Cecelia is an astounding person, a humble observer and an inspiring example of how one can pick up their life after a tragedy," they wrote.

In a 1997 Detroit News interview, relatives said she was well.

"She's doing wonderful," said Catherine Lumpkin, the mother of Cecelia's guardian, Frank Lumpkin Jr.

Since she was released from the University of Michigan burn center two months after Flight 255 crashed on Aug. 16, 1987, the girl with a chipped front tooth who liked purple nail polish was fervently shielded from public scrutiny.

Frank and Rita Lumpkin, Cecelia's maternal aunt and uncle and her godparents, whisked her to suburban Birmingham, Ala., after her release from the hospital.

The girl's dad, Michael, her mother, Paula — Rita Lumpkin's sister — and David, her 6-year-old brother, died in the crash.

As a result of Flight 255, she suffered severe burns to her hands, arms, lower back, left thigh, right foot and left ear. Doctors amputated her right index finger because of the hand burns.

She suffered serious head and lung injuries and a fractured hip. Somehow she was sandwiched between seats and luggage — and some say her mother's embrace — and survived the 150-mph impact.

Cecelia's survival continues to astonish those who helped her pull through after the crash.

"I did not believe that someone could live through a (plane) crash," said Jai Prasad, the U-M doctor supervising Cecelia's recovery in a 1997 Detroit News interview.

Prasad said Cecelia was told by a U-M child psychologist two weeks after the crash, in the presence of the Lumpkins and her paternal grandfather, Anthony, that her parents and brother were killed.

"She had tears in her eyes. ... It was a very, very moving experience," Prasad said.

Northwest Flight 255 crashed onto Middle Belt just after takeoff in Romulus. The crash killed 154 passengers and two people on the ground.

It was a warm, clear night, Aug. 16, 1987, when the McDonnell Douglas MD-80 crashed. The plane clipped an airport light pole and struck an Avis Car Rental building moments after clearing Runway 3-Center, before falling from the sky at 8:46 p.m.

A memorial was dedicated in 1994.

The interview with Cichan was conducted in August 2011.

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Cecelia Cichan, the sole survivor of Northwest flight 255, has given her first interview in the new documentary titled "Sole



4-year-old Cecelia Cichan was the sole survivor of the 1987 crash of ... (Detroit News File Photo)



Northwest Flight 255 slammed onto Middle Belt just after takeoff in ... (Detroit News File Photo)

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Enter our 6th annual Celebrate Michigan Photo Contest for a chance to win prizes

Cecilia Cichan, Miracle Child of 1987 crash at Metro, speaks out for first time

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Meeting Cecilia Cichan

Screen shot of Cecilia Cichan from the documentary "Sole Survivor." / www.solesurvivorfilm.com

Cecilia Cichan was 4 when she was rescued from the wreckage of a Northwest Airlines jet crash near Metro Airport on Aug. 16, 1987.

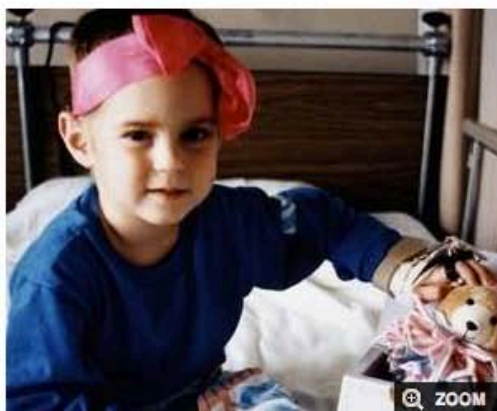
The airliner crashed shortly after takeoff, killing 156 people and leaving Cichan the sole survivor.

Cichan is talking about the crash for the first time in a new documentary called "Sole Survivor" scheduled to be completed in August. The film tells 14 tales of sole survivorship.

On the blog for "Sole Survivor," the filmmaker describes Cichan's interview:

In August of 2011, we had the pleasure of interviewing Cecelia Cichan, the Sole Survivor of Northwest Flight 255. Our interview with Cecelia was the first that she's ever given about her accident and we feel grateful to include her positive outlook, loving insight, bright smile, and honest reflection in this film. Cecelia is an astounding person, a humble observer and an inspiring example of how one can pick up their life after a tragedy.

We love you Cecelia.



Cecilia Cichan sits on her hospital bed before her release from the University of Michigan Medical Center in Ann Arbor, Mich. on Oct. 9, 1987. Cichan is the lone survivor on board the Northwest Airlines flight 255 that crashed Aug. 16 at Detroit Metropolitan Airport. / AP file photo

Cichan, who was dubbed the Miracle Child, was hospitalized for a fractured skull, broken leg, broken collarbone and third-degree burns over 30 percent of her body. Her parents and 6-year-old brother died in the crash. Cichan lived with an aunt, uncle and cousin in Birmingham, Ala., after the crash.

FilmStew.com

Tracking the offbeat side of independent film, short films & documentaries.

Tuesday, June 12, 2012

Fourteen Major Plane Crashes, Fourteen Sole Survivors

That's the chilling statistic at the heart of ***Sole Survivor***, a feature documentary edited this month in **LA** and scheduled to debut by fall.

In places where the crashes occurred, the fact that a sole survivor is now speaking is in some cases [big news](#). For example, until the making of the documentary, **Jim Polehinke** had not talked publicly about surviving the **2006** crash in **Lexington, Kentucky** of **Comair Flight 5191**. Co-pilot **Polehinke**, who is disabled and now lives in **Colorado**, is front and center in ***Sole Survivor***, as is **George Lamson**, who survived a crash in **1985** of a **Reno** flight bound for **Minneapolis**.



In the interview for the film, **Polehinke's** wife hints at the fatalism that envelops people caught up in this bizarre, harrowing scenario:

"First of all, he would have rather died," said his wife **Ida** in a clip from the film. "His conviction as a pilot was so great that he would have rather gone down with the ship. And that is how he felt. His heart was always with the passengers and never ever with himself. It is such an emotional cross that he bears that no one really sees but me. I wish we could convey that. And he would have given anything to have gone with all of them rather than sitting here today doing this."

"In the film, we see **Jim's** emotion," said the filmmaker. "We get to know **Jim** quiet intimately. In the interviews, it is very difficult for **Jim** to talk about. It is very difficult for him to keep his composure, and **Ida** is able to articulate some of the things that are very difficult for him to say. It's a prison that he will be in forever and maybe it will lessen through time. Who knows? But it is something that he thinks about every day."

Sole Survivor was written and directed by **Chicago** based filmmaker **Ky Dickens**, who previously made ***Fish Out of Water***.

An interview with Ky Dickens

BY CASEY · MAY 29, 2012 · [POST A COMMENT](#)

FILED UNDER INTERVIEWS



YOUR ONE STOP FOR
EVERYTHING
LESBIAN IN CHICAGO



Best known for her humorous and insightful LGBT documentary *Fish out of Water*, director Ky Dickens, has recently completed a new project that, while not as comical, is just as original and thought provoking.

Her newest documentary *Sole Survivor* tells the story of the fourteen people all united by a shocking life experience – each of them being the sole survivor of a plane crash. As Dickens describes the film, *Sole Survivor* was “an attempt to bring all their stories to light to some degree with the heart of the story following a man who was a pilot as well

as a sole survivor, and a passenger who was also a sole survivor.”

Of course, one of my first questions regarded Dickens’s inspiration to make this unique documentary. What she shared with me illustrated the developmental stage of her creative process. “Choosing a topic, the metaphor I like to use often when it comes to picking a film, it’s sort of like falling in love,” Dickens explained. “Like if you go out looking for love, someone to meet, you never find the person you’re supposed to be with. It’s only when you stop looking, that something connects, something works...It was similar with this film.

“Right after of *Fish out of Water* I was looking for films, looking for films, looking for ideas, looking for something I could really sink my teeth into, and nothing was hitting that heartstring, and then I read an article one morning, about a sole survivor, a little boy...the boy lost everything, everyone on the plane died... I was just wondering if there was anyone in the world that could relate to him or vice versa and then started researching other sole survivors of plane crashes and found out there wasn’t really any kind of book or movie or collective source that dealt with this strange perplexing unique topic of one person surviving a thing hundreds of people didn’t....I was then sort of hooked.”

Dickens makes her documentaries with a remarkable sense of compassion and emotional generosity. *Sole Survivor* is no exception. Even when she was not the central character in this project, as she was in *Fish Out of Water*, she revealed an equal degree of empathy for the people involved with this story. She shared with me how their traumatic stories personally effected her through out the duration of filming.

“When I first started working with George, who’s the kind of main character of the film as well as a passenger, the first few times out him were emotionally difficult, and I’d have a lot of nightmares about plane crashes, and I’d come home from my trips with him and I think I’d bring a lot of the emotional weight with me. It was really bad...It’s happened overtime, but I had to emotionally plunge in with all of them and really feel it and wake up from nightmares like they did to get what they’ve been experiencing.”

Dickens went on to say “the biggest emotional struggle with the film has been dealing with the pilot’s story, Jim Polheinke.” Jim Polheinke was the sole surviving pilot on Comair Flight 191, which crashed in Lexington, Kentucky in August of 2008. While 47 passengers died on this flight, Polheinke, while seriously injured miraculously survived. The National Transportation Safety Board reported this crash was due to “pilot error,” adding weight to Polheinke’s already heavy survivor’s guilt. One of Dickens’ primary objectives with this film was to offer him some peace of mind, and to give him a platform to revisit his case.

Dickens also expressed her respect for those who took issue with her project. While committed to the cause, Dickens recognizes that many people, specifically the survivors' and victims' families, were not eager to revisit these events, and that this film may trigger memories of this extremely tragic experience. "The last thing you want to do as a filmmaker is invite someone to revisit the most painfully challenging thing in their life, but sometimes we have to do that to tell stories."

"I always thought that *Fish out of Water* would be the controversial film that received hate mail and mean phones, and almost all the feedback I got was positive," said Dickens. "With *Sole Survivor*, I feel it's agitated more people that feel the need to be verbally expressive about their agitation... I think it's going to be a mixed bag."

While she wrote and directed the documentary, she humbly expressed her gratitude to the other women who made this film possible. "It's impossible to do it without producers," Dickens began. "I've been lucky to always have brilliant women on my team, lots of ladies, and lots of queer ladies. I try to build teams that are women run, women own, women centric. There's not enough women in film, still to this day."

Ky Dickens's film takes a unique series of life stories and tells them in a way that audiences can relate. She explains her principle attraction to this story is that it "sparked my interest for things that are spiritually challenging, since it questions our purpose our origins our destination."

May 29, 2012, you will find Ky Dickens and fellow members of the film making team at the "[Height of Fashion](#)" fundraiser. This event is to raise post production funds for *Sole Survivor*. For \$50 dollars (\$35 for students or artists), guests will enjoy refreshments provided by Farmhouse and beer provided by Magic Hat. There will also auctioning off of original art, jewelry, and clothing. Those of you hip to the fashion and art scenes, other guests include designer Maria Pinto and *Sole Survivor*'s producer Kristen Kaza. As Dickens puts it, it will not be just for celebrated female artists, it is "an event bringing together all different artists from all walks of life."



Flight 5191 copilot and sole survivor talks about crash



Flight 5191 first officer and sole survivor Jim Polehinke and his wife Ida

"There are a lot of why questions that are not answered and will probably never get answered," said Jim Polehinke, the first officer and sole survivor of the crash of Comair flight 5191.

In the more than five and a half years since the crash that killed 49 passengers and crew at Lexington's Blue Grass Airport, Polehinke has never talked publicly about the 2006 crash.

"The accident again is as fresh as it was yesterday," Polehinke said while being interviewed aired on WKYT. The interview was for the documentary "Sole Survivor" which will be released in the fall. The film documents the world's 14 sole survivors of commuter plane crashes.

"Jim will be the first person to shoulder the responsibility for his part in it," said Chicago filmmaker Ky Dickens who convinced Polehinke and his wife Ida to open their home and lives to the documentary.

"It was probably even a year before Jim and I even started rolling cameras," Dickens said to WKYT's Sam Dick. "It was a lot of phone conversations. A lot of hand written letters even. It was building trust. It was building friendship."

Polehinke and his wife Ida now live in Colorado. But a new home and new surroundings can't erase the memories of that day.

"I have an article that The Kentucky Herald [The Herald-Leader] had published that shows faces of the people were onboard. It gives profiles," said Jim Polehinke.

"He kept that article with all the pictures of the people's faces and their profiles under his chair," added his wife Ida. "And he knows each person, their faces, and their names and what they did, where they were going."

"There are things he wants to say to the victims' families," said Dickens. "There are things that he wants to say about his perspective of what happened."

The documentary has two main storylines: Polehinke and George Lamson who was the sole survivor of a 1985 airline crash that killed 70 people as it left Reno, Nevada, for Minneapolis.

"George was a passenger who ended up being a sole survivor and Jim was obviously a pilot who ended up being a sole survivor," said Dickens. "And I think we really can understand survivorship in a very comprehensive by looking at someone who was in control versus someone who just happened to survive."

In video from the film released to WKYT, he is seen at his home in Colorado. Following the crash, Polehinke lost the use of both his legs. One of his legs was amputated.

"So being part of such a unique, small, perplexing group," said Dickens. "You can imagine that it helps a lot of heal if you can relate your experience to someone else's experience because that's just human nature."

While headed down the wrong runway, he and flight Captain Jeffrey Clay noticed something strange. There were no lights and the runway ended before the plane could be airborne.

After awaking from a coma, Polehinke learned the horrific news. He was the flight's only survivor and would never walk again while also facing the reality that he was one of the pilots at the helm of flight 5191.

Even during their investigation, federal officials never talked to Polehinke whose doctor told the National Transportation Safety Board at the time was "medically unfit" to be interviewed.

Eleven months later, the NTSB determined the probable cause was "the pilots' failure to use available cues and aids to identify the airplane's location and to cross-check and verify that the airplane was on the correct runway before takeoff."

Polehinke and his wife moved to Colorado from Florida because his wife felt Colorado had more activities disabled persons, according to Dickens.

"First of all, he would have rather died," said his wife Ida in a clip from the film. "His conviction as a pilot was so great that he would have rather gone down with the ship. And that is how he felt. His heart was always with the passengers and never ever with himself. It is such an emotional cross that he bears that no one really sees but me. I wish we could convey that. And he would have given anything to have gone with all of them rather than sitting here today doing this."

"In the film, we see Jim's emotion," said the filmmaker. "We get to know Jim quiet intimately. In the interviews, it is very difficult for Jim to talk about. It is very difficult for him to keep his composure, and Ida is able to articulate some of the things that are very difficult for him to say. It's a prison that he will be in forever and maybe it will lessen through time. Who knows? But it is something that he thinks about everyday."