[Snap Judgment intro]

[upbeat music]

**Glynn:** If you're lucky, very, very lucky, you get to grow up with siblings that you-- for lack of a better word, you love. Growing up, I didn't say, "Hey, knucklehead brothers, I love [pause] you." In time, I've come to realize that I do, in fact, love them, more than love them. And there are lots of horrors associated with trauma, I know this. But the gift of trauma at an early age is that it forges a type of sibling relationship that sometimes I don't see from families that had an easier go of it. I've witnessed brothers, grown men who grew up together in the same home after a long time apart greet each other by shaking hands, by nodding "Hello." What? Those of us that emerge from trauma households we greet each other with bear hugs, jumping on each other's back, suplexes and atomic wedgies. Every touch, every smack up side to head, a reminder, a celebration that we made it through. And my brothers, they both passed on too early. Far, far too early. But if I get to see them again in the next life, one thing I can absolutely guarantee is that day, that day there won't be, no shaking hands, no polite nods, no way, there will be joy and for everyone that has been to the edge and looked over.

Today in Snap Judgment, we proudly present Into the Abyss. My name is Glynn Washington. If you've never dipped your siblings' hands in hot sauce while they were sleeping, you should. You really should when you're listening to Snap Judgment.

[upbeat music]

We begin, by taking you back to the year 1988. Sensitive listeners should know that today's episode does involve a plane crash in which six lives were lost. In 1988, a young journalist based in Jerusalem, Carol Shaben, she comes across tragic news that's taken place 6000 miles away here hometown in northern Canada. Snap Judgment.

**News Reporter:** Wapiti got into big trouble back in October of 1984 when one of its planes crashed into a hill on approach to a tiny community north of Edmonton. Six people died, including Alberta NDP Leader Grant Notley. Four others, including a cabinet minister, escaped without serious injury.

**Carol:** It was October 19th, 1984, and I was working at a news agency in Jerusalem. On this particular morning, I was sitting at my desk and I was going through the Jerusalem Post and I just remember flipping through, and it was a headline that jumped out at me that said "Party Leader Killed in Alberta plane crash." And Alberta is my home province in Canada, and I zoned in on this article. I remember it so clearly, it was just a tiny block of text, less than 50 words, but it said Grant Notley, the leader of the new Democratic Party in Alberta, and five other people were killed in a crash of their twin-engine plane. It went on to talk about one of the people on the plane, and his name was Larry Shaben, my father.

I was staggered by this, and immediately I dropped the paper and I called home, and I was frantic. I couldn't somehow believe that I didn't know what had happened, I didn't know if my dad was alive or dead. I didn't know anything. And I was feeling so far away. My mom got on the phone, and she just said to me, "He's okay. He's okay."

The crash happened in October, and I couldn't get off work and get back to Canada until Christmas. I remember seeing my dad and just not being able to put these two things together, this image in my head of this crash. And my dad, who seemed fine. I mean, he had been terribly beaten up, his face was mangled. There were all of these injuries, but none of that was visible to me when I got home. But I think something had changed. There was something subdued, something profoundly sad, an error that hung around him that had never been there before.

[somber music]

My dad was always larger than life. For me, he was just dad, but for everyone else, he was this respected politician. People called him the "Honorable Larry Shaben." And I remember going to his favorite Chinese restaurant in Edmonton, and the owner would come out and greet him and say, "Governor. Hello, Governor. How are you?" There would be this flurry of attention and activity around him, and you could just get the sense that people were treating him in a very special way. He didn't really want to talk to me about what had happened. He kind of put it away, like bearing something in a box and putting it under your bed. It was just a closed chapter of his life.

**Reporter**: One of those least injured was Larry Shaben, Alberta's Housing Minister.

How are you feeling, Sir?

**Larry:** Just fine, thank you.

**Reporter:** Will you share a few thoughts with us?

**Larry:** I'd prefer not to.

**Carol:** It wasn't until 18 years later that I was able to talk to him about what had happened that night. I remember taking him down to my office in the basement, and I had a tape recorder ready, and I said, "Okay, tell me about this."

[in tape]

"Okay, I wanted to ask you about what you remember from that night, and what happened."

He said to me, "You should look up Erik Vogel. You should look him up."

**Larry:** You should talk to the pilot.

**Carol:** Yeah, I'm going to try and track him down.

**Larry:** It's tough for him.

**Carol:** I think he could feel that Erik was tortured by this. Immediately, I started looking for him, so I started looking for Vogels in the phone book and calling these numbers. As I call, I'd say, "I'm the daughter of Larry Shaben and this crash survivor, and I'm looking for the pilot." And people would say, "Yeah, no, wrong number, wrong number, wrong number." And then I called this Vogel, and I did my spiel about how I was the daughter of one of the plane crash survivors and I was looking for the pilot. It had been a woman who answered the phone. And there was this long silence, and I could feel in that silence that she did not want this question, this phone call coming. I knew before she'd even responded that I had reached the right number, and it was Erik's wife. And she said, "He's on the road, but I could take your number." I gave her my number, thinking, "This isn't going to go any further. She does not want this past dredged up."

It was evening when my phone rang and I answered the phone and this voice said, it's "Erik Vogel." And I remember just feeling this chill. He made it very clear to me that "If you weren't Larry Shaben's daughter, I would not be sharing this story with you." He just began to talk to me about this. I realized at that point the deaths of six people were on his conscience every day. Like my dad, he had bottled this all up. I knew that he had a story that he had buried and he needed to unburden himself.

**Erik:** I'm doing this as a favor to Carol, not to tell a really cool story, because it's not, but for me anyway. I figured Carol and I definitely owe her father.

I started flying right out of high school and I had no real direction, didn't know what I wanted to do. Of course, my dad, being an airline pilot, was pushing me in that direction. He got me enrolled in an aviation program. It was that first summer that I was hooked and loved it and jumped into it.

**Carol:** He was desperately trying to earn enough hours. This is the way you move up in the airlines, because they have to get a certain number of hours before they can even apply to the major airlines.

**Erik:** That was my goal. That was my incentive to do what I was told, to not get fired. And I tried too hard.

**Carol:** Wapiti Airline, started this kind of milk run that would go from Edmonton to High Prairie, which is where we lived, and on to other small communities in the north. Rather than my dad having to drive the four hours home, particularly in winter, he would take this flight. There were these scattered and remote communities, some of them accessible only by air. These kinds of commuter airlines grew up with that tradition of we're going to push the weather and we're going to fight to get in, even when the weather might indicate that they shouldn't be flying.

**Erik:** On this particular night, it was a snowy, overcast, really moist Vancouver kind of weather.

**Carol:** The night of the crash, a lot of other major airlines had grounded their flights. But for Wapiti, they decided to go. To take this flight.

**Erik:** I made a bit of an announcement in the terminal saying, "Hey, the weather is really bad. There's a good chance we're not going to get into High Prairie, it's a very small town. I had three passengers going there and I hope they didn't want to go, but they did. That didn't give me a lot of options to cancel the flight. But what was expected was to break the rules was to get in no matter what you fly overloaded, you fly below minimums, everything.

The morning pilot just said, "Be careful." He had a hard time taking off that morning because of the snow, so that was my big concern. I knew the weather was bad and I thought, "Okay, maybe it'll get better." But it turned out, it got worse. You're supposed to have a copilot in certain situations with weather being bad, but when we got to Edmonton, the ticket girl there said, they've bumped your copilot because they want to put a paying passenger on your flight.

I still to this day can't get over how stupid that was.

**Larry:** I noticed that there was a guy, he wasn't in uniform, but he had somebody handcuffed too. So, we’re going to have a prisoner and an RCMP. Of course I was a little buzzed because having a prisoner on an aircraft was a big deal.

**Erik:** I've never seen a prisoner in handcuffs before and he was a pretty scruffy-looking dude. That was a little intimidating knowing that he was on the plane that night.

**Carol:** That night there were nine passengers and the pilot on the plane. And of those passengers, only the pilot, my dad, the criminal, and the cop survived.

Paul Archambault was a drifter and a vagabond, and Scott Deschamps was this rookie RCMP, this by-the-book cop. The day that Paul was picked up, he was in Kamloops. And Scott Deschamps being caught, an RCMP based in Grand Prairie where the sentencing was, had flown out to bring him back. Basically from there, Paul and Scott Deschamps were handcuffed to one another.

**Erik:** Scott Deschamps, the RCMP officer, came up to the counter and plunked down these two wrists that were chained together with handcuffs and said, "Where do you want us to sit?" There was a story in Vancouver of a ten-passenger airplane where the prisoner was in the back and he broke free and he was climbing over the seats trying to get to the pilot. Well, on this plane in [unintelligible [00:14:23] there's actually an aisle down the middle. I said, "I know exactly where you're sitting. You're sitting at the back of the plane." And that's where I put them. That was as far away as I could put them from me in the cockpit.

**Carol:** They had been in airports all day long and on standby and several long waits. They got to talking. And Scott could see that Paul wasn't a dangerous, malicious guy. They had started to form this kind of rapport. They got on. They were seated on the plane and their final leg, and Paul turned to Scott and said, "Hey, can you just take these off me for the flight?"

**Larry:** Okay, and I remember Deschamps and Archambault talking and he said, take these handcuffs off for the flight, although it's against RCMP rules to do that.

**Carol:** But at that point, he really felt that this guy was of no risk whatsoever. He would be fine.

**Erik:** Getting out of there, I was running behind, I had to get going. Everything started out okay, but it was just trying to decide what to do along the way. We were one of the only airlines flying in this terrible weather.

**Carol:** The wings were icing up and there were huge sheets of ice building on the forward edges of the wing.

**Erik:** My deice equipment didn't work and I'm flying in a severe icing situation. I'd actually discussed this with the passengers and I said, "Hey, you're going to hear banging. It's the fuselage. It's just chunks of ice coming off the prop. It's no big deal." Well, it is a big deal.

**Carol:** He's doing dead reckoning. I mean, this is before GPS and all of these tools that would help a pilot. He was trying to do mathematical equations. How far out was he? How far back? What he didn't realize was the thickness of this ice had really slowed the progress of the plane. He was 20 miles further back than he thought he was.

**Erik:** I said, "Hey, here's what I'm going to do. I'm going to go down and try to land in this little airport. If I can't, I'm going to come right back up and I'm going to go back onto my flight plan." Just as I started leveling at about 900ft to level at 800, which is the altitude that I decided I'm not going below 800ft above ground. Over the airport, there was a hill about 850ft high. Not a mountain, just a hill, just a rise in the land. But unfortunately, it was 850ft high. I literally leveled off in the trees. I heard the banging and then thought it was ice coming off the propellers. It turned out to be the trees.

**Larry:** It was really loud, rending of metal. Obviously, we're going through the trees, but stuff was being torn off the aircraft.

**Erik:** You're talking seconds. By the time my brain registered the banging, dismissed it, we had impact.

[somber music]

Once I figured out that I was alive, there was no light because the batteries had been gone. I didn't even realize I was upside down. The wings came off, lost the nose cone right in front of us.

**Larry:** The fuselage was virtually upside down because I know when I undid my seatbelt, I fell, onto my hands and knees.

**Erik:** Turned out to be the window beside me had broken and I could feel the air. Getting out of that airplane would have been impossible for me in the front. If the window hadn't broken, I would have had a real hard time breaking the window. There's no exit up front.

**Larry:** My glasses were gone. I found my coat and put it on, and there was a lot of groaning, alive, but unconscious, and it was awful.

**Erik:** Larry followed me out, and I didn't was until I was outside, till I saw him when I was on my hands and knees. I remember looking to my left and seeing Paul standing there, and he had gone out a window. He was literally uninjured. He had a scratch on his forehead that had bled a bit. Other than that, he was untouched. We kind of gathered ourselves, but Paul was right from the get-go adamant that he had to get Scott. They had developed a pretty good relationship, which is why he was uncuffed.

**Carol:** And as it happened, it was that move that ended up saving Scott's life because had Paul Archambault been handcuffed, there's nothing he could have done to save his captor.

**Erik:** He went in there, and when he was in, he was digging around for Scott. I remember Scott started to come around, and I can't imagine how stressful that was for Scott to wake up, not know where you are, and know you're trapped.

**Larry:** Deschamps was saying, "I can't breathe, I can't breathe."

**Carol:** And he was upside down?

**Larry:** He seemed to be jammed into the snow or somehow.

**Erik:** And Paul was able to dig him out and bring Scott out.

**Larry:** We tramped through the snow because the snow was good two and a half feet deep.

**Carol:** Yeah.

**Larry:** And we tramped through the snow maybe, I don't know, a couple of hundred feet from the air, plane crash, to make a path and trapped out a little space.

**Erik:** Somehow this fire appeared. Paul got a fire going in the deep snow. Everything's wet. And then we eventually ended up around the fire. And that fire saved us for sure.

**Larry:** There's a lot of stuff in the plane, papers and stuff that we burned, so we burned whatever we could. And then there was scraps of wood lying around, but it was wet because it was in the snow we've been trying and pull bark off trees from up high.

**Carol:** That night, there were nine passengers. These were all local people who either worked in the city or had been in the city and were desperate to get home that night. Six of those people did not ever leave that hillside.

**Erik:** Most of the seats broke loose, except for Paul's. His was actually anchored because it's bolted in. Everybody else's is just clipped in. If we'd all had seats like that, who knows what would have happened? But that was where the fatalities came from the seats all broke loose because they're designed to come out quickly, because we also did [unintelligible [00:21:11].

[somber music]

**Glynn:** Stay tuned. Our four survivors are bracing for a long, cold night in remote Canadian wilderness when we return. Snap Judgment.

[somber music]

Welcome back to Snap Judgment. You're listening to Into the Abyss episode. Last we left, four men had just survived the crash of Wapiti Airlines Flight 402. There's Erik Vogel, the 24-year-old pilot who's flying the plane, politician Larry Shaben, rookie cop Scott Deschamps, and Paul Archambault, who's being escorted to court for sentencing. As together, they shiver by the fire in the middle of the blizzard. They could only wonder if help is on the way. Snap judgment.

**Erik:** I had thought that I can't tell these guys I'm the pilot because they're going to get pretty upset with me. The prisoner [chuckles] I never trusted, I thought, "Okay, this could go sideways." Scott was immobile. He was laying on the ground, he had torn all his intercostal muscles and he couldn't move. He basically laid in the snow beside the fire. I thought, "Okay, he's not going to protect me." And he kept asking for his briefcase. He wanted his gun. I was concerned why he wanted his gun, but he was thinking bears and wolves and things, and he wanted to have his gun, but it was long gone. Being on my hands and knees in the snow, trying to get my head around what I had just done, and I knew it was me. And, of course, I knew I had done it. I was ready to give up right there.

And this was a pretty helpless feeling. The pilot's responsible, it's still my flight, my passengers, I'm supposed to go now and be like the captain of the ship and I had no skills. I was supposed to gather everybody up and get them to the fire and start a fire and signal for help and just had nothing. It was probably the other voices, and Larry being beside me, and that kept me going.

**Carol:** He was so ashamed and tortured by what he'd done that this was his fault and the deaths of these people were on his conscience. I mean, remember, he was 24, he was just a kid. Erik didn't tell them until quite a bit later when they were sitting around the fire that he was a pilot.

**Erik:** I told them that I'm the pilot, and of course, they said, what happened, and I tried to tell them the whole story right from the beginning.

**Carol:** One of the big things with Wapiti Airline is it had been cited for all sorts of infractions. There had been a line of pilots who'd gone to transportation Canada saying, "This is an unsafe airline, pushing the weather," making pilots fly when they were exhausted, making them drop down below the acceptable ceilings, maintenance issues where the planes weren't properly maintained, and there were mechanical issues. This airline was known, it was known in the industry to be one of these bad operators.

**Erik:** Apparently, we were under super-secret probation. They were putting people on the flights to monitor it and I thought, "Well, how could this company keep operating?" We had been led to believe that they had an ace in the hole. They had two people that were supporting the company. Whenever they got in trouble, these people would write a letter and make a phone call and say, "Hey, don't shut these guys down." They acted a bit invincible, that they could do what they wanted. They were protected. It just deflated us because now we can't even go to Transport Canada for help. We were basically, we're on our own, and you are on your own. But they knew. When I got to the part about, how this company was able to operate this way, and I said, there's people out there that were supporting this company. Larry admitted right away. He goes, "This is pretty crazy that I'm on board this flight because I'm one of those people and the other ones in the aircraft."

**Larry:** Vogel was really good. He was really hurting in terms of mentally hurting because you could just tell. I mean, he was the guy who was the pilot, the plane went down. In addition to that, he was hurt physically, but he worked at keeping the fire going and helping until he couldn't move anymore.

**Carol:** Erik was relentless in his efforts to try and make things right. He was trying to do everything within his power. Even though he had a punctured lung, he was coughing up blood. His hands were mangled. They were unusable because the window of the cockpit had come at him and just torn up his hands.

**Erik:** I felt weak, and it was probably the blood loss. If I'd kept trying to walk around, I probably would have collapsed, but I just kind of gave up and sat down. I remember being really cold. I was in a light cotton shirt, and I'd had a parka that I had from the Arctic days. I'd given that to Scott because he's laying in the snow.

**Larry:** He was really trying to keep Deschamps comfortable. And then after that, Archambault and I kept hauling whatever we could find to keep the fire going.

**Erik:** Keeping the fire going was pretty tough and we were running out of things to burn. There was two aircraft seats that were outside. The plane opened up in the front and wreckage had been strewed. It was quite a debris trail. We found a chair, and I said, Throw that chair in the fire. I remember Scott saying, "That's not going to burn. That's an aircraft seat." I said, "Yeah, actually it is." We placed the seat over top of the small fire, and it never was a big fire until we put the seat in. This seat flashed up, and it just was like a Roman candle, and it was crazy. They wanted to burn the other one. I said, "No. Hang on. This is like a flare. We've got nothing to signal with." Keep the other seat, we put it aside and we thought, "When we hear them or see them, we're going to put the seat in and that'll be our signal fire." We held out for quite a while until we were super cold and freezing again. We thought, "Screw it, we're going to burn the other seats." So, we end up burning both seats.

**Carol:** My dad had given Paul Archambault his cigarettes that night to hang on to, and they'd lit cigarettes together and wandered into the forest.

**Larry:** Archambault had a lot of nervous energy. I'd hurt my hands from whatever damage because in spite of my hands, we were all beat up and my glasses were gone. So, I had trouble handling my cigarettes. I said, "You carry them." And the little bugger was a chain smoker. So, they were gone. It was, I think, almost a full pack. They were gone by about 2:00 in the morning. That was funny.

**Erik:** Larry, I didn't know he wore glasses, so he lost his glasses and he wouldn't sit down. He was very fidgety and it turned out he had a broken tailbone and it wasn't comfortable to sit down, but he insisted on standing the whole night. Paul was all over the place and running around and Scott was immobile. He couldn't get up. He kind of just laid there by the fire. And eventually, I did too. I couldn't get up anymore and I apologize, I couldn't get more wood. We really relied on Paul and Larry would follow him. I don't know how Larry did it all night. Scott and I basically was laid by the fire. We decided that if we had fallen asleep, we might not wake up because of hypothermia. So, we just kept each other awake. We said, "We can't fall asleep, we can't fall asleep."

**Larry:** It's funny, in a case like this, you're all complete strangers. And then as the evening wore on, there's a little more chatter, and I think part of the shock, the realization of what had happened and that sort of thing.

**Erik:** I don't think I would have survived if I was by myself. Forget survivor skill, just being there on your own would have been pretty horrendous. Without a fire, I wouldn't have survived. Yeah, having each other to talk to and we all told personal stories and some jokes.

**Larry:** We were sitting there and I said, "If you had one wish that you could have fulfilled right now, what would you wish for?" Deschamps talked about his relationship with his wife, where they had been getting along and she wanted to have a child and he didn't want to have a child and he said, "I'd tell my wife, I'm sorry, and let's have a child, and make this thing work." And [chuckles] Archambault, I said, "If you had one wish, "I'd like a joint." [laughs] That's what he wants, have a joint.

**Carol:** What would you say?

**Larry:** I said, "I want the hot bath."

**Carol:** You're cold.

**Larry:** That's what I wanted. The only thing I wanted right there, was a hot bath.

**Carol:** You were really cold, dad?

**Larry:** Yeah, I was cold, dirty, grungy.

**Erik:** My mom made these famous chocolate chip cookies. They're big cakes. So, when I'd left that morning for my flight, not knowing when I would eat again, I took four of these cookies. I don't know why I took four, they're quite big, but I took four and I wrapped them up and I put them in my flight bag. The flight bag is jammed between our passenger seats in the front. I said, "Paul, when you're in the plane, you need to go into my flight bag and there's four cookies in there and bring out whatever you find." So, he came back. The bag couldn't be removed, but he came back and he found the cookies. Well, we all got a cookie, which was pretty amazing. He gave me my logbook and I looked at this and I said, "Well, I'm never going to need this again." I was tearing out the pages and feeding them into the fire, and I can't remember who it was said, "Well, you're going to need that." And I think, "You know what? I'm never going to need this again. I'm done. No one's ever going to hire me after this." So, we burned the logbook.

**Carol:** In those moments of hopelessness, there were snippets of conversation where they would talk about how demoralized they were and this sense that it's not going to happen. We're not going to get out of here alive.

**Erik:** We crashed a little after 08:00 at night, probably, I think it was 8:20. It was most likely in the middle of the night, probably after midnight that they were dropping these flares, and they were dropping the flares for the ground crews to aim towards these flares. The first one they dropped was right on our heads. You can imagine how excited we were to see that. And I thought, "There you go. They dropped a magnesium flare right over us. That was a pretty good signal. They found us," and everybody's pretty excited, and I'm listening and the plane flew away and then it dropped another one mile away, and then it dropped a third one.

So, when I saw the third flare drop, I said, "Guys, we got a problem." And they said, "What?" I said, "They don't know where we are." He goes, "Why do you say that?" I said, "Well, look, why would they drop flares way over there and way over there if they think we're here?" And it got real quiet again, and I said, "They're just dropping flares. They don't know where we are. It's good that they're dropping them near us, that's helpful. They're just dropping them in the, again until this thing circles. We went back to basically ignoring the plane. It would fly over and we wouldn't even look up anymore.

**Glynn:** After the break. With all hope fading after darkness falls, can the survivors keep each other alive until the morning? Stay tuned.

[pensive music]

Welcome back to Snap Judgment. The Into the Abyss episode. My name is Glynn Washington, and before we left, search and rescue efforts to locate the crash site have been going on throughout the night. But neither wreckage nor survivors have been spotted through the harsh snowstorm. Snap Judgment.

**Erik:** So, the next day the sun came up and I said, "Guys, we're in trouble. We can't see. If we can't see up, they can't see us." So, there was the overcast and low fog. So, I said, "It's going to be a while yet." We could see the plane, which was pretty tough to look at. It was about 50ft away from us. If you can imagine a white aircraft in the snow and a bunch of black objects around a fire that's smoking, not even a flame, it's just smoldering. There was nothing for them to see. They're looking for the plane, they're not looking for us. They flew over and they were gone because they're going really fast. And I said, "No, don't get excited. That's cool. These guys are sure trying, they're looking." We could see all these people looking out the back of the door and the plane disappeared.

**Carol:** There was a point where the plane was there and then gone. And you said it was really demoralizing.

**Larry:** Yeah, that's right, because we're waving and waved whatever we could, really seem to come in [unintelligible [00:35:32] all over the trees.

**Erik:** So, they left and I thought, "Okay, they're all looking somewhere else." And it got quiet again. I heard the Twin Otter come and he flew over and went right by and I said, "Okay, cool. Twin Otter sure can go a little slower." In that break in the sunshine, and it's the only break we'd ever seen, it was right over top of us. Maybe from the smoke from the fire, I don't know. It just opened up and they looked down and they saw us all there. The pilot put it into a tight 360, encircled, basically stood it on its wing, right on top of us. I said, "Okay, they found us." And I could see him in the window, and that was a pretty good feeling. I said, "Okay, we might get out of this."

**Carol:** Around mid-morning, 10:30, the plane had been spotted. In a break in the clouds, the search and rescuers had seen that there were three people around the fire.

**Erik:** You could hear the big blades of this chinook coming in and it flew over and hovered off. Not over top of us, fortunately, because it's pretty chilly under those blades. They started coming down the rope, and then it flew out of the way. And the crew came by plane. I could see them looking at the plane as they walked by, and they could see us, and they walked up. But the first thing he said was, "I guess the pilot's dead." Of course, the guy thought that was funny. They said, "No, he's sitting right there." And the look in his face, but I said, "No, no, I'm right here."

**Carol:** And then how did they get you up out of the bush?

**Larry:** They winched us up. This big chinook helicopter hovered over top, noisy as it could be.

**Erik:** They started doing their triage, and I kept saying, "I'm not going first, take everybody else." They scooped up Larry and Paul because they were ambulatory. They were standing. It was easy to scoop them. And I just sat there. I remember the guy gave me an IV bag to put inside my jacket. Paul had found us some clothes and had someone's jacket on me. I was looking down at Scott while they were packaging them up and getting them ready to hoist him up, and I was kind of sitting up. And then I remember thinking that I was doing pretty good. One of the reasons I didn't bleed to death, the doctor told me, was because of the cold, your body goes into shock, and it shuts down your extremities. I had lacerations, my wristwatch slid open my wrist, and nothing was coming out of it. It was just a big gaping hole and I could put my finger in, and no blood was coming out, so that made sense. I didn't bleed to death because of the cold. So, he said, "The cold actually helped you guys." I felt really warm, and it was a weird feeling. I just felt warm all over. And I thought, "Okay, I'm getting rescued, this is good." The doc came over, looked at my pupils and said, "This one go next." And they scooped me out of there.

**Reporter:** Six people, including Alberta NDP leader Grant Notley, died when the Wapiti Airlines flight smashed into a hill. Four people, including pilot Erik Vogel, and Provincial Housing Minister, Larry Shaben, survived the crash.

**Erik:** For me, it was like, how am I going to face the world? How am I going to face everything, knowing what I'd done? Did I want to survive? It was hard to feel that good about being alive. And that started right away.

**Carol:** Did you ever think you weren't going to make it, dad?

**Larry:** No.

**Carol:** Never?

**Larry:** No.

**Carol:** You said once that you kind of mark that date every year, and you look at what you've done with this.

**Larry:** Yeah, and that's what I was saying this morning. I think that I haven't done those extra 19 years justice somehow, in terms of using the time.

**Erik:** Larry was amazing, and such a gentleman, and really helped me through the whole thing. He would reach out to us. It started with phone calls and then later became emails and messages, but it was an annual thing, on October 19th. I used to take the day off and just reflect and just do nothing. As the years went on, I just kind of went, "Okay, today's the day." Just thought about it all day. I was realistic. I thought, "Well, my airline career is done." I know there's lots of pilots out there that have had accidents, but this was pretty high profile. In the meantime, I'd gone back to being a volunteer firefighter, and I really enjoyed it. I thought this is a great career. I got hired in the fire department. It's a very respectable job. It's a good calling. It gave me back my self-respect, and I embraced it.

**Carol:** The survivors, the three who were still alive toward the end of my dad's life, had been in touch. But there was a point when it was coming up to the 20 years of the reunion, and I think my dad was getting older. He was 69, probably sensed that life was passing, and he basically said, "We need to meet. We need to see each other altogether, face to face." He arranged for the three survivors to meet.

**Erik:** We went for a meal at a nearby hotel, and we just didn't stop talking the whole time. We joked about doing it. The reunion in another 20 years, but I think Larry knew he wasn't well at the time. It's pretty amazing that they've kept me in their life, considering what I had done. That always amazed me that I was forgiven right from that first night.

**Carol:** In 2008, when my dad was dying of cancer, Erik Vogel reached out to me, and it was a month short of the anniversary of the crash, so they'd obviously been in touch. And I received an email from Erik.

**Erik:** I had a lot of things I want to say to him. I was 24. He was pretty worldly, he was a politician, he knew what was going on, and just the way he treated me right from the get-go, and I did not expect that. I felt I owed him everything because of the way he treated me right from that first moment.

**Carol:** He said, "Could you please just read this to your dad? I know he's in his last days." And I never got a chance. I didn't get back to Edmonton from Vancouver before my dad died, but I was able to read Erik's email at my dad's service. And in it, he wrote "To Larry, I'm writing this with a heavy heart from my new desk job. The only reason that I looked forward to October 19th was because I would get a note from you reminding us that we were lucky to be alive. And how great life was going. It always made me smile. You've been a hero in my new life, Larry. And I've tried to make you proud with our new lease on this life. I was hoping to give you a new tie pin to go with the bugle that I gave you. This one is my new captain's bugle that came with my promotion. I know it's just a job, but this job helped me redeem myself to you and many others. I will miss you, my friend. And now I have to explain to my chief across the room why a six-foot-three fire captain is crying at his desk."

[somber music]

[upbeat music]

**Glynn:** A huge thank you to Erik Vogel, to the late Larry Shaben, and to his daughter Carol for sharing this story with Snap. There is so much more we're not able to share with you about Erik and Larry's experience. To find out more about what transpired with Wapiti Flight 402, check out Carol Shaben's book *Into the Abyss*. A special thank you to Nikka Singh for his help with this story. The original score for this piece was by Renzo Gorrio. It was produced by Bo Walsh.

[upbeat music]

I understand, never enough stories. Never enough. But if you want more, if you need more, travel the world with us and follow Snap Judgment, the podcast, wherever you get your podcast, hours of adventure await. If you want to join the Snaptastic conversations, know that Snap is on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, don't miss a beat. Snap is brought to you by the team that always texts to make sure you made it home safe. Except, of course, for Mark Ristich, he insists on calling on the phone, "I don't know why, I don't want to speak to anybody, I think I've made that plain." There's Nancy López, Pat Mesiti-Miller, David Exumé, Anna Sussman, Renzo Gorrio, Shaina Shealy, Teo Ducot, Flo Wiley, John Fecile, Marisa Dodge, Bo Walsh, Annie Nguyen, and Zahra Noorbakhsh.

And you may have heard that this is not the news, no way it's this news. In fact, you can walk outside, hop into the back of a waiting car, explain to the Uber driver where you're going, only to have them tell you that he ain't no Uber driver because this ain't no Uber. But you know. what the heck? He is going that way, he can certainly give you a ride, true story. And you would still, still, even then, not be as far away from the news as this is, but this is PRX.

*[Transcript provided by SpeechDocs Podcast Transcription]*