April 25, 1978

My Dear Mrs. Howard,

You can never know how deeply touched my entire family has been by your letter. It has been read again and again and shall be cherished forever. I tried to find your phone number, but was unable to locate a listing.

There is so much I would like to say to you, anything which could bring the peace for which you seek. I will tell you the answers to all which you have asked. By doing so, we shall be helping one another. I understand what you meant when you said we were not emotionally involved, however, we are emotionally involved in a way which I am incapable of explaining. The incident has touched within us the wildest variety and the most remote of emotions. The crash is with us during every moment while we go about our daily activites. I'm certain we appear most unchanged, but we most assuredly view life in a different way. I just this moment overheard our ten-year-old Betsey discussing her feelings with a friend in the most mature and sensitive way. We speak of you, of Marijane and David, the other passengers, the Pearshall brothers who rescued us, as we would of old and dear friends, for our lives have been forever linked. Although we may never really meet, we "know" one another in the deepest sense.

On April 5th, my husband Bill, Betsey and I had spent a gorgeous day on St. John exploring and enjoying the beach. Our fight back to St. Croix, where we had been staying at my mother and father in-law's home, was scheduled to leave at 4:30 p.m. We arrived a few minutes early and my husband saw the Goose fly over, in what was probably part of Captain Mooney's extra training.

At 4:30 the plane landed and a man hastily checked our weights while a native boy stuck a dip stick into the gasoline tank , and then the passengers quickly boarded. Captain Mooney was in the pilot's seat and David was in the co-pilot's seat. David spoke to us about putting on our seat belts, etc.

It was extremely windy and the plane had great difficulty becoming airborne. We had not been in the air more than four minutes when an engine cut out.

David stood and began working with a hand crank. The engine started momentarily. Then both engines quit. David looked at Captain Mooney long and hard and calmly said. "Don't panic!!!" Captain Mooney had been in the process of making a turn to return to St. John. David turned and yelled "Get your seat belts on!" Suddenly the plane plunged to the water. It hit very hard. The impact was sickening. As I searched for my life vest, David was within clear view as he had been throughout the flight. He had been knocked to his seat. I'm certain without a doubt whatsoever that he was dead---killed immediately upon impact. I believe totally that he did not suffer. I would not condescend to you by saying these things if they were not true.

The plane hit two more times and as it did a section fell down separating the cockpit from the passenger section. Water entered rapidly. Passengers began to exit. Some were stunned. One lady was partially pinned beneath the wreakage. My darling husband immediately assumed command. Without him, not one of the passengers would have survived. As the last passenger, Bill Brady, exited, I recall watching the hatch sink below the water. The cockpit submerged immediately. My husband did not, as you heard, examine the bodies of the pilots. It would have been impossible to do so. The waves were 15 feet high. None of us would have failed to assist. We all helped one another. There was no May Day call as there was no time.

Once in the water, our work began. My daughter and one other woman had no preservers. My husband and a lady, the former wife of Blair, were good swimmers. Flip Blair was, however, hampered by her heavy shoes which we were unable to remove to help her. My daughter was a relatively good swimmer. Four of us were poor swimmers. My husband, Bill, managed to recover the floatations and the log book. Mrs. Clark was in serious trouble and required immediate help. Once she was somewhat stabilized, Bill checked the area of the plane. The Bradys and I had clung to the tail of the plane for a few moments while we adjusted our life vests. Dick Brady, unable to find his life vest, had caught my daughter's as it floated off of her. This was miraculous for another adult without a preserver could not have survived. Bill formed a circle of passengers around Betsey and June. There were moments of near panic, but no one went "over the edge."

There are numerous stories to be told of superb conduct.

After a period of time, I began to have serious concern for the group as a whole. Although planes passed overhead, it was clear that we could not be seen. We all knew that darkness would be at 6 P.M. I felt that my husband was the real strength of the group, and with heavy seas and the approaching darkness, two passengers without life vests, and others dependent upon him in other ways, Bill would soon tire. The group made the decision to swim to a tiny, uninhabited island, but could never have reached it. I decided that I had nothing to contribute to the physical strength of the group and knew that as things got more difficult, I would drain the energy of the others in the group. I made the decision to float away from them. I felt comfortable in my life preserver. Strangely, the combination of stark terror and fantastic energy allowed all of us to face that time with total calm, almost peace. I called some final instructions to my daughter and we drifted apart with smiles and waves. I was more proud than I can ever say of her.

During the next hours, I worked hard to conserve my physical energy and remain mentally alert. My thoughts were clear and precise. I felt totally confident that no matter what, life in whatever form would continue. Several boats passed, but did not see or hear me. A freighter came within about 200 feet of me, and I was probably in the distinct danger of being run over. A small shark passed within 10 feet or so. Darkness had set in and the lights of St. Thomas were visable. I felt a tremendous surge of energy knowing that there were people on that island who were "with us."

I thought about David and Tom Mooney. I cannot explain to you the feelings I experienced. Partly it was peace, partly it was pain for the unknown families, partly I felt some sort of guilt. Why had we been spared? I have a deep sense of God's presence, although I do not truly subscribe to any specific religion. I am certain that within your lifetime you have experienced so much for which you could find no explanation.

At one point I looked behind me and saw a dull glow. It turned out to be a light which was still attached to my vest by a long cord. I was able to hold it aloft.

It was tiny, but precious. Of the five life vests, only two had lights. Because of the position on the life vest, the other light on my vest was useless because of its position on the vest.

Suddenly, from nowhere there appeared a tiny red light, and then two pairs of beautiful, strong arms hauled me aboard a small speed boat, the "24 Karet." David and Dusty Pearsall questioned me and relayed information. By this time, I had been in the water for four hours. As the Pearshall brothers relayed information, other boats began to appear. We spent the next thirty minutes searching for the others. These young men were private citizens who had joined the search, although they had been advised NOT to. The main search was taking place some four miles away.

I never have known precisely who coordinated the search. The only knowlege the boaters had was simply the fact that a flight from St. John to St. Croix, scheduled to arrive at 4:55 P.M. was overdue. I DO know that Captain Blair did not use any of his aircraft in the search until after the passengers had been rescued.

As the 24-Karet crashed through the waves, we suddenly saw the brightest light I have ever seen. It was a special beam hovering over the boat from the Coast Guard helicopter stationed in San Juan. All of us were hauled aboard and taken to St. Thomas, where we were examined in the small hospital there.

There was a great deal of confusion. All of us experienced bumps, bruises, abrasions, etc., but miraculously only my daughter Bitsey had greater injuries. She has some fractured vertabrae and is wearing a brace this summer. It is uncomfortable, but a small price to pay.

I cannot begin to tell you how emotionally spent I feel over my inability to do more for you and Marijane. I would so very much like to sit down with you, to talk and share our tears.

We can only repeat to you from the very depths of our hearts that we care for you and share your pain. David is gone. He did not suffer. Somehow we must now put our lives together. His life was important for he gave us all the

opportunity to continue living ours.

Our family feels a sense of responsibility to future pasengers, and will continue to battle for improved conditions.

We send our love and daily thoughts,

Judith