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CAME TO MY RESCUE

ONE WOMAN'S PASSION FOR
FLIGHTS OF COMPASSION

SHINE BEAUTIFULLY,
DESPITE THE DARKNESS

PARTY! PARTY! DECOR



A Hui Hou

"until we meet again"

written by
JENNIFER HAYNES

We are invincible, we are immortal, we can conquer the world! But, there are days when all of that fades, and all we feel is pain. Those are the days when we need them most. When everything is at it's worst, we expect them to be there. We don't wonder if the 911 operator will answer, we don't hope the ambulance

is running that day, and we don't cross our fingers and pray that a helicopter with a nurse on board might be willing to take flight for us. Instead, we expect that they will be there when we need them.

Air medical professionals are undoubtedly heroes. They daily risk their lives to lift victims from accidents, transport critically ill patients between hospitals, and bring sick travelers home. When we need them, they are there. Each



MARLENA (LEFT) & ALEX ON THE JOB TOGETHER.

year hundreds of thousands of missions are flown. Sadly, due to the high stakes in the life of being a hero, many crew members have also lost their lives along the way. One such story is that of Marlena Lee Yomes and Alex Farnsworth.

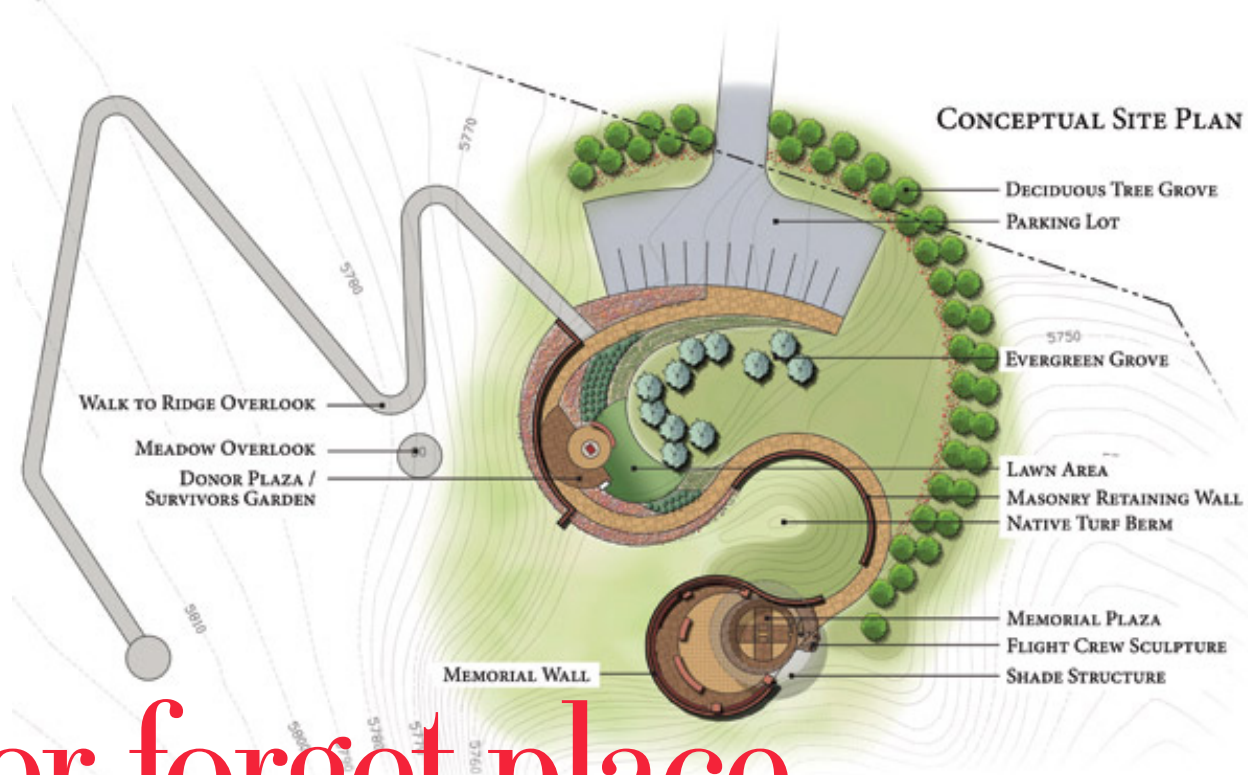
Marlena and Alex had the kind of friendship that only comes around once in a lifetime, if ever. These girls were soul mates. Opposites in so many ways and yet sisters to their core. If they weren't on the job together as flight paramedics in Hawaii, they were chatting on the phone, often 5-6 times a day.

They were family. When speaking of Marlena, Alex explains that, "she was full of life, always making everyone laugh, and doing her job with everything she had in her. She was utterly fearless".

While Marlena convinced Alex to leave the job they both loved after a deadly crash in 2004 which claimed the lives of three crew members (including their inspiration to flight medicine, Mandy Shiraki), she herself remained. Due to

unanswered questions about safety issues, Alex pleaded for her friend to also leave the air but despite these risks Marlena remained. Perhaps it was because she knew how desperately the people of Hawaii relied on air transport to care centers and she couldn't help but be there for them.

On Wednesday March 8, 2006 Alex was headed home from work at the hospital, and like clockwork, Marlena and Alex had their evening phone chat. Marlena, had had a grueling day, back to back flights had worn down their crew, and there were was one more flight scheduled



a never forget place

for that evening. When Alex returned home, the phone rang again and she hesitated to answer it. Then the moment she did, the world stopped. The co-worker who had called explained that Marlena’s crew was on their way from Honolulu to Maui, when the flight went down in a parking lot of a BMW dealership. There were no survivors. Alex, immediately, fell into hysterics, and tried to get dressed so that she could be the one to tell Marlena’s family. Marlena’s husband had a terminal brain tumor and in the worst sort of irony, they had already started making arrangements for his passing. No one would have known that Marlena (age 39) would pass on first, and that soon their children would be orphans.

From the beginning of tragedy: the crash, the way Marlena’s family was treated, the lack of reverence

for the situation, and the investigation, Alex dove deeper into loss and hurt. Marlena’s crew’s accident was a sensational story to many, and everyone coined their self “Marlena’s best friend”. But as time went on, people forgot. The crew’s memorial pieces were taken down, and Alex was told to, “just get over it.”

Alex had begun her career as a single mom with a need to provide for her family. A brochure and a ride-along with another EMT, had hooked her into receiving her master’s in Nursing and flying on emergency missions, but now in the wake of Marlena’s death, Alex stood uncertain. She loved the work and she loved flying. And though, she eventually went back to flying, her sadness turned to rage. She swore the complacen-

cy within the company and medical flight industry would not win.

After several deaths throughout 2006-2008, and various investigations, safety standards were called into question. And flight nurses around Hawaii, refused to fly and the state stepped in as well until a new company arrived. Since, Hawaii greatly relied on medical air transport, this meant the industry was forced to change. Alex piloted this new Hawaiian program, as the chief flight nurse; and since that time numerous changes have been made.

One of these changes, was that The *Air Medical Memorial* was conceived in the wake of the industry's greatest number of lost lives in 2008. Through a Facebook contact, Alex quickly discovered the Air Medical Memorial at its inception in 2009 and is now the volunteer liaison representing the International Association of Flight and Critical Care Paramedics with the *Air Medical Memorial* and vice versa. The agencies' partnership together, gives them each a voice in the memorial site's creation process. Alex imagines the memorial as a place of healing, a place where she could be a part of making changes, and giving families a "never forget" place. Of-

ten for those that have survived, whether it be an actual victim of a crash or the close friends and family of the lost, they will always remember, and often relive the past each time a new tragedy strikes. Therefore, this new memorial place will not only honor the lost, like Marlana, but it will also bring healing to the victims and the family left behind, like Alex.

Thanks to the *Air Medical Memorial*, *Vision Zero*, *The Survivor's Network* and others, numerous changes are being made in the air medical transport industry. But there is much more to be done, along with many people who need to be remembered, and many who still need to heal. Please check out the memorial and once it is completed, visit and honor the crews lost in flight. Funds are still needed for its completion set for 2012. Visit the **Air Medical Memorial's website for more information**, but most of all never forget to continue to pass on the stories of people like Marlana. As Alex states, "don't just remember the tragedy or that people were lost... remember the people themselves."

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