

OUT OF HORROR SHINE DECENCY AND GOODNESS

The people of Halifax, Nova Scotia, have long been familiar with tragedy. Traditionally many of them earn their living in precarious conditions at sea, and perhaps this is why Haligonians have always been able to respond to disaster with heroism and generosity. The city buried victims of the *Titanic* in 1912; it weathered the great Halifax Explosion of 1917 and the 1998 Swissair crash. And on September 11, Halifax once again showed its strength.

Shortly after the terrorist attacks on that day, American authorities shut down U.S. airspace and asked Canada to play host to a throng of accidental tourists. In all, 224 planes were diverted to Canada, carrying over 33 000 passengers in need of refuge and solace.

By 4:30 P.M. on the 11th, Halifax International Airport had become a parking lot for more than 40 diverted planes, and 8000 distressed and bewildered passengers needed to be housed, fed and comforted. With open arms and hearts, the citizens of Halifax welcomed strangers into their homes. They offered sustenance and, more important, emotional support to people of many nationalities, most of whom at first were unaware of why their travel had been interrupted. Churches donated space and cots for weary travellers. Volunteers organized soup kitchens and set up 1500 makeshift beds at Exhibition Park.

One of the passengers diverted to Halifax was noted Harvard University

professor and author Stephen Jay Gould. In an article in the *Globe and Mail* on September 20, he wrote, "You responded immediately, unanimously, unstintingly and with all conceivable goodness, when no real danger, but merely fear and sub-



Céline Dion sings at a benefit concert of Quebec artists in Montreal on September 28. One week earlier she performed at a nationwide live telethon in New York in support of the victims' families.

stantial inconvenience, dogged your refugees for a few days. Our lives did not depend upon you, but you gave us everything nonetheless. We . . . are forever in your debt, and all humanity glows in the light of your unselfish goodness."

Good neighbours from coast to coast

Countless acts of kindness were performed by people across Canada. In St. John's, Newfoundland, 4000 volunteers cared for 4400 passengers from 27 flights. Not far away, the small city of Gander—with a

population of some 10 000—took in 6595 people arriving in 38 aircraft. It and the surrounding communities closed schools, meeting halls and other gathering places, and converted these into mass lodging areas with cots and sleeping bags. In gratitude to the warm-hearted people of Lewisporte—located about 45 kilometres from Gander—the passengers of diverted Delta Airlines Flight 15 from Frankfurt set up a trust fund to send a local high school student to university. On their flight back to Atlanta, Georgia, they collected some \$20 000.

Thirty-four planes were diverted to Vancouver, British Columbia. Hotels near Vancouver International Airport made available every bedroom, and converted ballrooms and conference rooms into makeshift dormitories. When still more beds were needed, the staff of the Best Western Richmond Inn became "bed-traffic controllers," booking hotel rooms in locations as far away as Whistler and Chilliwack.

Canadians also demonstrated kindness and support to those directly affected by the tragedy. In the days immediately following September 11, Canadians lined up for hours to donate blood. They organized events such as benefit concerts and raffles across the country to raise funds for the victims. In Windsor, Ontario, Rebecca Deans (age 7) and her brother Jamie (age 4) set up a roadside fruit stand selling pears from the family tree to raise money for the victims. They collected \$21.40.