

Nov14

How Do We Go On?

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The photo I snapped this morning, to record our first “sticking” snow of the season, came out almost like a black and white image. That’s fitting, as this place seems to have lost a lot of its color today.

Though there have been a few, always tragic, crashes involving private or charter planes, accidents, here, are rare. On Beaver Island, we have two air taxi services: Island Airways, and Fresh Air Aviation. They make dozens of trips a day between the mainland and our remote island, delivering passengers and packages and mail, and that are, for four months of every year, our only physical connection to the mainland. They serve our needs in a hundred ways, safely and thoughtfully. Both do a wonderful job. Island Airways has been around the longest, having served the island for more than seventy years.

Yesterday, coming in for a landing on a blustery day, one of the Island Airways planes crashed. The tragedy unfolded through the afternoon. In town, we first learned that *all* of our emergency vehicles and personnel, ambulance, EMT, fire trucks, and sheriff, were headed south. That told us that it was something big; faces reflected the tension as we waited for more news. Slowly, information came, as people came in. It happened at the airport. The Coast Guard sent helicopters. it was a plane crash.

“Wait,” we told ourselves and each other, “you know how facts get garbled.” We reached out hands and gave out hugs, and looked into faces filled with worry and concern and sadness. That bit of connection was all we had, as we waited.

By last night, there were news reports. Three dead at the scene; two airlifted out in critical condition; one of those died. At this time, one young girl is the only survivor. Some names were revealed. They are people we know. We know their smiles, their history, their projects, their families. They all *feel like* family. The island grieves together. It’s like a thick fog we are stumbling around in. What do we say? What do we do next? How do we continue?

Social media, which is often filled with current events, family pictures and petty grievances, is suddenly awash with images: a candle’s flame. One light in the darkness, posted and shared, sometimes with a few words, sometimes alone. It’s just a small way of reaching out, from whatever distance, to say “I feel it, too,” “I care,” “We are family.” Just a small light, a tiny spark, to help to lead us through. Until we figure out how to go on.