**9/11 Refuge Revisited: Gander Airport**

Twenty years after, and we can't stop talking about 9/11. This is the story of the 9/11 Refuge Revisited. And, of course, the very story of where it all happened: Gander Airport.

## **September 11, 2001**

On a bright September morning in 2001, the people of Gander were up as usual. And you know the regular here? For some time, there hadn't been planes making the airport busy. Only about seven planes in, seven out, day in, day out. But all these changed within a space less than an hour! On that beautiful morning with bright blue skies, they all thought it'd be a day as usual. Even the little town's bus drivers were on strike for whatever reason. Then it all happened!

On the plane, news reached the passengers that all planes had to land in Canada. This was following the closure of the U.S. airspace getting shut down! What had happened?! Well, they had no choice as their planes were landing all over Canada. But one location of all these diversions caught the world's eyes. And that was Gander of the Gander International Airport.

To the people of Gander, the news came that a small passenger plane had crashed into one of the twin towers of the World Trade Center. And while still unsure of what was going on, the second crashed. Now, while it was pretty obvious it had to be some terrorist attack, they never saw the next five days coming. In the twinkling of an eye, planes were all over their airspace. Diverted planes headed to the U.S. had to land in their small town in Newfoundland. And with 38 planes carrying almost 7000 passengers, their population was about to double up.

## **After Landing**

Back to the plane, the passengers had to spend hours in the plane. They had no idea what was wrong but had to stay as directed. Soon enough, the doors opened, and they couldn't believe the line of buses waiting to help move them. A passenger recalled a stranger, a Gander local, walking up to him and offering him a pack of food. It was astonishing to see someone he's never met walk up to him and offer him food! And that was only the beginning of the relief the people of Gander brought to the plane people.

As the plane people walked into the doors of the Gander International lounge, they got the surprise of their lives. With bits of information flying around about terrorists, nothing was sure yet. Only fear and doubt ruled their minds. But as they walked through those doors, they got flooded with true love. In this lobby were the Gander people with food, clothing, toiletries, and all that would make their stay comfortable.

First off, all of the plane people had to get registered by the Red Cross. After this, it was all about good hospitality. All the people of Gander had come out to ensure the plane people had food, shelter, and all they'd ever need for the unforeseen future. The bus drivers that were on strike were back to help move the plane people. And really, here's the entire dilemma about shelter revisited.

## **Dilemma about Shelter**

The town of Gander, Newfoundland, lies to the easternmost part of Canada. Before now, it was the perfect point for transatlantic trips. This earned it the name: Crossroads of the world! As you really couldn't go over the ocean without stopping a bit for a refuel. This all changed in the 1960s when jet engines came into the market. However, there was a good time before then that led to the formation of the little town, Gander, around the Gander International Airport.

This little town of Gander only had about 12,000 people. For their little needs, they only had about 500 hotel rooms. And never wished they had more. Well, a lot of onlookers would have wished they had more on this special event in history. About 7000 people got added to their number, and they still only had 500 hotel rooms! But the people of Gander had a different thought. Rather than think of having more hotel rooms, they opened their doors to strangers. In those days, security personnel tried to discourage this as this talk of terrorists was rampant. But the people of Gander could care less. All they saw were people who needed their help, and they gave it to the best of their ability. Schools got cleared out to provide more space, and people got invited to homes to have their showers, dinner, and stay over. In fact, in all the day's unrest, a relationship formed that day led to marriage! Others stayed closer than blood. They formed Bonds. And till today, the plane people could never stop appreciating the love and gestures of the people of Gander.

## **All about 9/11 Today**

From that time on, many notable things have happened. The people of Gander were among those who got metal scrap from the fall of the World Trade Center. The students of Gander still enjoy scholarships that started from what the plane people called gratitude. And ten years after, the plane people gathered again in Gander for an anniversary. It was one of the best times on earth. People had gone to Gander not because they had to this time but because they wanted to. They wanted to, once again, be close to the ones who proved good people still existed in our world. And 9/11 became a day of paradox. While a group showed the worst we could be, the people of Gander showed the best we could be. This story was so touching it caught the attention of certain writers. David Hein and Irene Sankoff had been there on the anniversary to listen to the story told. And from there found themselves writing a musical that would one day shake the world from the stages of Broadway! Come From Away is a beautiful story of the goodness that remains in our hearts. And the Gander people proved this on the sad day called 9/11.