**Come From Away, a True Story from Gander**

Come From Away is not just a local way of referring to a stranger. Today, it is the title of the world's most iconic musical. It tells a true story of a time of tragedy when the sky had come to a halt. It's a story of how a group of people had been there for the plane people. It's about how an unprecedented event led 38 planes to a little town, Gander. And the lifetime bonds formed between strangers.

On September 11, 2001, the U.S airspace had to close down following the terrorist attacks. This was in an attempt to mitigate and prevent any other attack. This, however, forced thousands of planes en route to the U.S to find a new destination.

The Canadian response to this was Operation Yellow Ribbon. Here, the planes diverted from the American airspace were to land. And of these planes, 38 were to land in Gander International Airport. This was one of the world's most important airports, situated in Gander, Newfoundland of Canada.

## **Before the 9/11 Story**

Before this time, Gander Airport had experienced a time of highs and lows. There was a time the world relied entirely on Gander Airport. This was due to the fact that it lied to the far East part of Canada. Thus, it was a good point of takeoff for planes hoping to cross the Atlantic. It was the point of takeoff for bomber planes heading to Europe as supports during World War II. And after the war, it retained its importance in commercial transgenic travels.

However, in the 1960s, jet engines came into the market. And that took the busy days of Gander Airport downhill. Why? No plane needed to refuel at Gander again. The jet engines made it possible to fly higher, faster. Of course, that made it possible to travel longer distances. And there was no need to stop briefly at Gander again. It was in this period of quietness that followed the Jet age we got the world's most beautiful story.

## **Come From Away, The Story**

Like any other day, Gander had woken up to the same quietness. They never expected that the same runway that almost had no planes would be home to 38 planes! But that did happen; only it was due to a diversion. This, in turn, was due to a tragedy.

The people of Gander numbered between 10,000 to 12,000. But following the diversion, this population almost doubled. Almost 7,000 people were to join them. And in a time you'd expect to be the worst for both passengers and citizens, it turned out to be one of the best times in history. How did this happen?

Come From Away shows us how the Gander people swung into action upon the news. They knew of the incoming planes and people. But they just could not look the other way. They had food, clothing, and other essentials ready to welcome the plane people. To their surprise, the plane people could not but appreciate the comfort they received on this day. It was a time of confusion for the plane people. They had had to land in the first place without a clear knowledge of what had happened. But soon enough, they received relief from the kindness of the strangers they met in Gander.

## **The Stage Musical**

The stage musical and film features many real characters. These were either passengers that got stranded. And also the residents of Gander itself. In fact, some characters retained the actual names! While there was some condensation to the story, it still maintained the spirit of what truly happened. The musical had come from the hands of Irene Sankoff and David Hein. These were at Gander on the 10th anniversary. They gave birth to this beautiful musical first performed by students.

The musical actually takes inspiration also from a book released after that time too. This was in 2002, by Jim DeFede. He titled it "The Day the World Came to Town: 9/11 in Gander, Newfoundland." He had moved to Gander after the tragedy to get a first-hand narrative of the story.

The idea for the musical itself didn't come first from Sankoff and Hein. The first person to ever mention it was Michael Rubinoff. He was a lawyer and a theatre producer at the time. And he couldn't help the inspiration from the Gander people. However, he never really went on with the story. This was because the other people then thought it gruesome to find inspiration from a sad time. But his wish was to come back to life when he met Irene Sankoff and David Hein to discuss the idea.

The three then embarked on the journey of producing the first musical. While many were against it, it was still easy to go on with the production, given that Rubinoff was an associate dean at the time. He was the Associate Dean of Visual and Performing Arts at the Sheridan College. And that helped in bringing the dream to life.

Before their meeting, the pair (Sankoff and Hein) had spent over three weeks in Gander. All through this time, they gathered hundreds of testimonies of the event back in 2001. And then work started on it in Sheridan. The result was a 40-minute play by the Sheridan students.

## **Come From Away in Present Day**

Compared to this day at Sheridan, Come From Away has come a long way. It has won so many awards, and the world is grateful to the brave minds who wouldn't let the world forget this beautiful story. One of the awards was a 2017 Tony Awards under the direction of Christopher Ashley. The live performance was in Broadway's Gerald Schoenfeld Theatre. And today, a live recording exists on Apple Tv+. It should have been a film adaptation on Apple, but the pandemic wouldn't allow it. So, what we have currently is a live recording of the performance. And trully, it is just as beautiful!

Finally, Come From Away is a true story of what the world lost. But also a story of what the world found in a little town called Gander. It's the perfect story of an uplifting experience from a time of tragedy. And it's no surprise that today, the little musical from Sheridan is one of the world's most acclaimed musicals.