

THE WIFE'S TALE

Toni Fry

My day started off like most other days, with one son away in college and two sons living at home in the quiet Edgemoor community of Bethesda, Maryland, while my husband, John, was on official travel to exotic, distant countries. We always missed him while he was away, and looked forward to his homecoming with stories of new adventures. He was due home from Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in two days.

While the boys were in school this morning, I attended a Mills College alumna gathering downtown in Washington, DC. Driving home after lunch, listening to the car's radio tuned to the popular local news station, WTOP, my thoughts remained with my recent meeting. I was paying little attention to the broadcast, when suddenly breaking news came of a terrible airplane accident in Addis Ababa. I gasped, and pulled to the side of the street, my heart pounding.

Trembling, I continued my drive home, but recall very little of this frightful time. Pulling into the driveway and dashing into the house, I remember thinking David and Matt, would soon be home from school, and I must pull myself together and not let them see my panic. After snacks and a change of clothes, helpfully, they were soon off to after-school sports. Turning then to television and radio news broadcasts, media reporting had yet to offer crucial details. All I heard was: "A tragic accident--death toll unknown--more later."

My very next thought was to call the State Department, which turned out to be fruitless. I was told by a duty officer, the Department had no information at that time, but he would investigate the media report. Being unable to get anything definitive from State was upsetting, so my next few hours were filled with terror and frustration. When the boys came home for dinner, I had to feed them, which distracted me briefly. Then, while they worked on school assignments, I again phoned State, to be told that, yes, there had been a passenger plane crash in Addis, but they still did not have further information. This was so unhelpful, but what to do next?

I never called John when he was abroad, but all I could think of was to phone directly the Addis Hilton, where he planned to stay. After what seemed like a lifetime, I reached the hotel, and asked for John Fry. I could hear the operator calling and soon a sleepy voice answered. He was alive! Why had he changed his schedule, why was he not on his way home, why, why, why? I had a million questions, but he was alive, and would be home soon. ■