

SETTANTA VITE IMMORTALI
Olgiate Olona - 26 giugno



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The commemoration of TWA flight 891 of June 26, 1959

by Kathy Ellis, June 26, 2016



Frank W. Ellis (1930-1959), First Officer on TWA flight 891 of June 26, 1959

On June 26, 1959, TWA flight 891 was presumably struck by lightning shortly after takeoff from Malpensa Airport in Italy. All 70 souls onboard perished. My dad, **Frank W. Ellis**, age 29, was the First Officer.

Growing up, this was always a sad day. We knew so little - only that the plane had gone down in Olgiate Olona. Finding information was difficult. In high school I spent hours at the public library looking through microfiche then later the Internet, always coming up empty handed.

On the 50th anniversary, in 2009, things changed. My sister, Susan, came across new postings and excitedly called out to me. One in particular was from the Kansas City Star featuring Don Lueke, the son of the Flight Engineer, who had just returned from a 3-day memorial service in Olgiate Olona. The following day we got in touch with Don who unleashed a wealth of information. He

put us in touch with Alberto Colombo, author of a recent book about the crash. Alberto extended an invitation to attend the service the following year, including lunch with he and his wife, Anna, and interpreter Federica Baù, as well as a visit to the mayor's office with Mayor Volpi and staff. The following June we traveled to Italy for what has been perhaps the most emotional week of my life. We were treated like celebrities. We were given postcards with commemorative stamps of the 50th anniversary, soaps with an artist's rendition of the crash, posters of the service announcements, a CD of the music written and performed at the service by Nicola Puddu and his band Panama Bus and three books. The first book was Alberto's about the tragedy and the lives lost, the second an account of the 50th anniversary and the third about the surrounding towns. As we waited in the mayor's office for the interpreter we looked at the pictures in the book. One was of the 69 caskets lined up with wreaths in the church of a neighboring town Busto Arsizio. There had been a funeral, a procession, a mass with hundreds of people. Tears welled in my eyes, then fell freely. This town, these strangers, had prayed for and cried and taken such care of my father so he and the others were not alone so far from home.

Later that afternoon we were lined up behind the flag of the town and 8 flags representing the nationalities of the victims. About 100 people joined in a procession from the town hall to the

memorial site of the crash. At 5:33, the exact time of the crash, the service began. A local priest started with a prayer, the mayor spoke, Alberto spoke, the church bells were rung 70 times, once for each victim, Susan recited the Our Father and local elementary school children had written poems - the top three were read. I was overwhelmed. I was standing in the place my father had last been. Fifty one years later and this town was reverent with honor, respect, kindness and care. After the service, people took pictures of a photograph of my dad that we had placed at the site, then took pictures of his daughters, Susan and I. An older Italian man approached us, embraced us and cried. The interpreter told us this man was the young firefighter pictured the cover of the book overlooking the wreckage. This was Antonio Monti, who we now affectionately call *Papi*. We are here now for the seventh time. Each trip has been unique. We are familiar on the town streets, in the churches and restaurants. We have friends here. We are welcomed with open arms, double kisses, and warm embraces. It is no longer a sad day.



Olgiate Olona, Italy, commemoration of June 26, 2016
Olgiate Olona mayor Giovanni Montano welcomes Kathy Ellis