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Knox Church, Ross Ferry CONTINUED FROM INSIDE FRONT COVER had remained attached to the foundation, so that it came to rest at about a 60-degree angle, making ready exit impossible. We had difficulty remaining upright, but I managed to support myself by clinging to the back pew and working my way toward the middle of the church. My response then shifted into automatic, and years of training and exposure to tragedies clicked me into gear. How often have I taught to residents, paramedics, nurses and others those standard principles of multicasualty management, now recalled to my mind almost as a mantra: 1. Establish authority and control/send for help. 2. Ensure the safety of the scene and prevent further injury. 3. Evacuate the ambulatory. 4. Triage or sort the injured. 5. Evacuate/treat the injured. Putting the first principle into practice was easy-most of the congregation, if not all, knew me well. They had followed my career closely and were aware of my specialty. Nonetheless, I stood up as tall as I could under the circumstances, announced who I was and that I was "in charge," called for everyone's co-operation and proceeded to issue orders like an infamous sergeant major of past wars. The effect was immediate and, in retrospect, remarkable. There was absolutely no panic. People stood in their places and supported each other, as ordered. No one wept or raised a voice and few spoke. Two "human chains" of younger men were formed to support and lift people up the steep slope toward the main entrance. The second principle-safety-was more of a problem in the first minutes. I was unsure of the roof supports. The 10-metre roof could come crashing down at any time, but I could do nothing about that, so I confined my fears to getting help, preventing fire (I was not sure the "dust" was really dust) and cutting off electricity. Several were dispatched to call the RCMP, the nearest ambulances CenjerttvInmenY' gS'JPjt i Joe*s Warehouse The Food Emporium Cape Breton's Largest and Finest Restaurant Specializing in Aged Prime Cuts of Roast Beef and Steaks and One of the Most Unique Salad Bars in the Maritimes & CABARETJ Live Entertainment Nightly! 424 Charlotte street 539-6686 539-0408 RESTAURANT LOUNGE D BANQUET FACILITIES AVAILABLE C (some 50 km. distant) and the fire department. Others were set to organizing a "bucket brigade" in case of fire-something that would have sealed the fate of any victims trapped under the rubble. After a few minutes had passed, a friend told me quietly about the meeting in the basement. Her husband, a minister from the nearby community of Baddeck, was attending. I had been unaware of a basement room in the church; it had apparently been added during the years I was not at home. The thought of someone-anyone- being under the rubble changed the whole focus of rescue attempts. Rushing down what was left of the back stairs to the basement, I could barely squeeze between the foundation and the space created by the floor beams. There were still few sounds, and I felt certain most attending the meeting had been killed or seriously injured under the coish of the rubble. Lying in the passageway created near the foundation, a dear friend and elder of my home church was the first encountered. A scalp laceration had bloodied his face and suitcoat, but he



immediately recognized me and was able to recount quickly what had happened. That was convincing enough for a quick triage, and he was able to squeeze out of the building painfully, but on his own. Nearer, the pulpit area tables were crushed, heating ducts were broken apart, and the space under which several were trapped was not more than 30 or 40 cm. Within this crawl space, three were still trapped. Some 20 others, seeing the basement ceiling fall, scurried back beneath the pulpit area or under nearby tables that had been set out with food for the after-service tea. Still concerned for safety, I asked that trees be cut to help prop up the rubble that appeared, in some instances, to be precariously perched above our heads. We needed blocks and we raised the floor beams using jacks from the many cars parked at the church. Women retrieved tea towels and tore tablecloths for bandages; others ensured the congregation was kept well clear of the church during the rescue attempts. As I crawled under the space, a young friend of mine, a minister in a nearby community and a classmate at Acadia University in our undergraduate years, was helping to soothe and extricate the two still-trapped members of the Presbytery. One, a young minister from a rural church in Cape Breton, and the other, my first cousin whom I hadn't seen in several years, were stuck fast by beams pinning their lower extremities. The extrication proceeded carefully and without panic or complaint on the part of the injured. Soon ambulances arrived from the nearby town of Sydney Mines, as well as a rescue truck from the Sydney Mines Fire Department led by a young friend whom I had trained as a paramedic in a scholarship program offered by the University of Pittsburgh while I was chief of the department. His father was one of those injured. With his arrival, and as the victims were successfully freed from the wreckage, my role changed to ensuring the hospital was prepared for arrival of casualties and to conducting a brief survey to check for others injured. I travelled with my cousin in the ambulance to the hospital in North Sydney, about 40 km. distant. He was remarkably calm, as were all the victims, and even in such circumstances-retained a sense of humor. The hospital was ready for our arrival, having recalled physicians and nurses to the emergency department. The injured were quickly cared for. I was welcomed and offered tea in the fine Cape Breton tradition, given a pat on the back and sent home to where friends had gathered for tea and conversation-our version of disaster debriefing.