

Memorial wall unveiled in Stanley Park lists the names of those who died



IAN LINDSAY/VANCOUVER SUN

Natasha Madon places her hand below the engraved name of her father, Sam Madon, who died in the Air India terrorist attack.

Wall of remembrance honours victims of Air India bombing

BY KIM BOLAN
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Before June 23, 1985, Sam Madon enjoyed taking his kids — Eddie and Natasha — to the swings and the red fire engine of Ceperley Playground in Stanley Park.

His wife Perviz snapped happy family photos of the four of them in the picnic area beside the sea that Sam, an instructor at a marine college, so loved.

Now Madon's name is among 330 others killed in the Air India terrorism attack who are listed on a memorial wall unveiled at a ceremony Friday beside the playground to which he took his young family.

"We brought our children here. I have pictures of Sam with Eddie on the swings, on the fire engine. Who would have known then that he would have been immortalized on a stone wall right here in Stanley Park?" Perviz Madon said afterwards.

"It is like a part of Sam is now here somehow — spiritually, mentally. Physically, of course, he is not here. This is his city. He loved Vancouver. ... He is now close to his passion for the sea."

For more than 22 years there was no place in B.C. for those who lost loved ones in the Air India bombing to publically express their grief.

But two years ago, former Ontario premier Bob Rae recommended Canada should create a series of monuments dedicated to the victims of the country's worst-ever terrorism attack. A Toronto memorial was unveiled last month, on the anniversary of the bombing.



LYLE STAFFORD/REUTERS

Michael Murphy (left), Jayashree Thampi (centre) and Public Safety Minister Stockwell Day place a wreath at the memorial.

And on Friday, family members from across Canada joined politicians, including Rae, and police and members of the community in Stanley Park for the dedication of the second memorial, a gently sloping wall whose shape follows the trajectory of a plane's flight path.

Just like the doomed flight, the wall ends abruptly in a sharp vertical line, containing a black stone brought over from Ahakista, Ireland, the small town near where the wreckage of Air India Flight 182 washed up on shore.

There are 331 slate patio pieces — one for each person who died aboard the ill-fated flight and for the two Japanese baggage handlers killed the same day as part of the same bomb plot.

The old run-down Ceperley Playground has been completely refurbished as part of the project by landscape architect Eric Lees, in memory of the 82 children aboard the plane when it was blown out of the sky.

Michael Murphy, an Irish official from West Cork, travelled all the way to Vancouver for the

ceremony at the invitation of RCMP deputy commissioner Gary Bass.

"It is a bit sad that after 22 years that this memorial is finally built," Murphy said.

Two decades ago, Murphy worked to ensure that a memorial in Ahakista had been constructed within a year of the bombing and many victims' families have returned to Ireland ever since to be comforted by the Irish.

"This is a stunning place. It is so natural overlooking the water, the natural trees, the flowers, the whole setting is just absolutely beautiful," Murphy said. "Our monument back in Ireland, you know, is overlooking the water and it is very, very close to my heart. And I am very glad I was forwarded this opportunity to come here today and to be at the ceremony and to lay the wreath with the minister."

Jayashree Thampi, of Toronto, lost her husband and seven-year-old daughter in the bombing and was part of the memorial committee for the families association.

"The memorial wall, etched with the names of the victims, immortalizes the lives lost in this act of terrorism. The children's playground symbolizes the innocence of those children who died in this tragedy. This place offers a beacon of hope to the children of today and the future," she said during the solemn ceremony as children played in the playground nearby.

Public Safety Minister Stockwell Day said the memorial ensures the country will not forget "the worst terrorist incident in Canadian history."

"We hope it provides a peaceful place for contemplation as well as a reminder of the very real consequences of terrorism," Day said.

Premier Gordon Campbell said the Air India bombing and its aftermath had particular significance in B.C. where the plot was hatched and executed.

"The tragic loss of 331 lives was felt around the world, but it was of particular significance here in British Columbia where many victims were family members, friends and neighbours," Campbell said.

"While this memorial will be a place of reflection and commemoration, the playground will be a place for children to play together and know one another in the hope that they will never see an atrocity like the Air India bombing."

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MEMORIAL ONLINE

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