

Doomed jet pilot worked in El Paso

By Leticia Zamarripa

El Paso Times

Dr. Leslie Penley, an El Paso dentist, was going to meet her longtime friend, Candi Kubeck, in Dallas over Memorial Day weekend for a day of shopping.

Instead, Penley is mourning.

Kubeck, who worked as an air-traffic controller at El Paso International Airport in the early 1980s, was flying the ValuJet plane that nosedived into the Florida Everglades Saturday. All 109 people on board, including Kubeck, died.

"I'm devastated," Penley said Monday.

El Paso flight instructor Jim Thompson remembers Kubeck as a young pilot in the early '80s who was "working on a rating" to qualify her to fly bigger plans. In addition to gaining additional flying time, Kubeck also worked briefly as an instructor at



Kubeck

Thompson's company, Matco, he said.

"Like everyone else who came through at that time, she was trying to become an airline pilot," Thompson said.

Kubeck, 35, and Penley met through Penley's brother, who also is a pilot. Penley said she followed Kubeck's career closely.

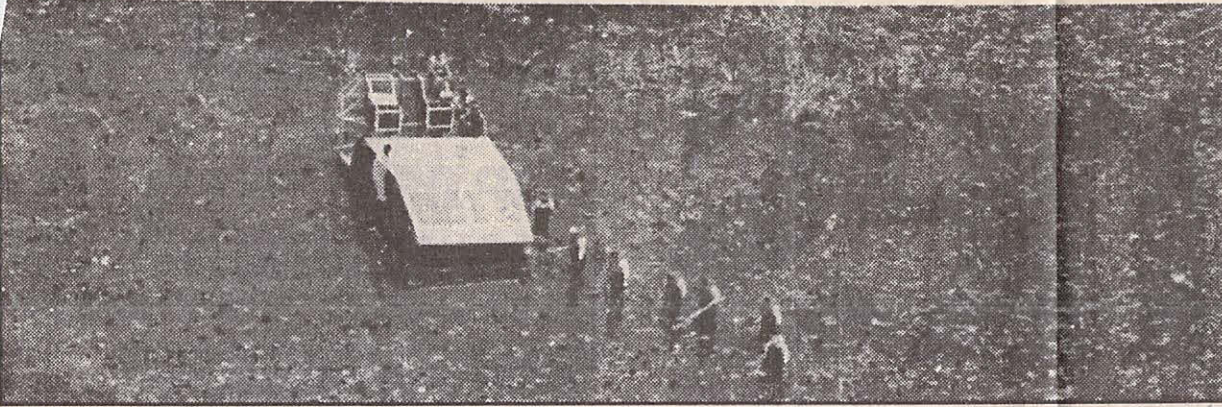
"We were close friends. She had a quick laugh, and is happy, easy going," said Penley. "We'd make it a point to see each other

■ **Black box:**
Divers recover crucial evidence / **3A**

■ **Victims:**
Profiles of some killed in Saturday crash / **3A**

Please see **Pilot / 2A**

Continued from 1A



Knight-Ridder News Service

A recovery crew wades through the Florida Everglades to continue the search for evidence at the ValuJet crash site.

Pilot

Continued from 1A

a couple of times a year."

Penley said she spent a day with Kubeck at the Galleria in Dallas last May, and both visited Disney World in Florida for the first time in 1984.

"She was a big shopper, a shop-till-you-drop type," she said. "She loved going in the Disney Store. And there wasn't any amusement park ride she didn't try."

Penley said she spoke to Kubeck for the last time Wednesday. She received a letter April 24 in which Kubeck talked about switching planes.

"She flew a DC-9 and had requested to be switched to an MD-80," Penley said. "She said she was ready to upgrade. Bigger and

better, that was Candi."

Penley described her friend of 18 years as "anything but inexperienced."

"I'll miss her a lot. She was a neat lady, fearless," she said. "She loved flying and like all pilots, had tremendous faith in her equipment, machinery and ability to land."

Roger Kubeck, her husband, said Candi Kubeck, a champion pilot on college flight teams, was careful to make sure everything was functioning on planes she flew.

"She would have everything checked out," said Roger Kubeck in an interview with The Associated Press. "Sometimes the flight might get delayed or canceled, but Candi was the type who wouldn't go on."

"Whatever happened on this deal, it was something she did not know about," he said.

She loved flying, but not enough to take chances, he said.

"I think they passed out from the smoke, based on that eyewitness report that the angle never varied. If that's correct, they were obviously incapacitated," he said.

Roger Kubeck, 38, is a pilot for America West Airlines.

Candi Kubeck, a Los Angeles native who grew up in Rancho Santa Fe near San Diego, often saw planes flying over the family home from a nearby military base, her husband said. She chose flight lessons over a stuffed animal for her 16th birthday present. He said she was close to her grandfather, who flew biplanes during World War I.

"She was a pilot, that's all there was to it," Roger Kubeck said. "She was not a girl pilot. She thought of herself as one of the boys."



Courtesy photo

Roger Kubeck, pictured with wife, Candi, is also a pilot. He described her as a meticulous detail-checker. "Sometimes the flight might get delayed or canceled, but Candi was the type who wouldn't go on," he said.