

030202 Challenge

I think that the most difficult part of living in a society which is not your own is the sense of isolation you feel when tragedy occurs in your home country. Because I am a news junky, I was aware of the Columbia tragedy within minutes of the loss of contact with the shuttle and watched as the magnitude of the problem began to unfold. The video footage from Texas told the whole story, but I was still clinging to the idea that maybe there was some hope. I wanted more information, but I had to leave BBC & CNN to go to a party to celebrate the Chinese New Year.

When tragedy strikes the way that I cope is the talk with someone else about it, so I was eager to talk with someone about the disaster. I went to the bus station where I saw my friend Fabricio from Peru who was also going to the party. To try to come to grips with everything, I explained to Fabricio that the space shuttle had blown up on reentry. "What is a space shuttle?" he asked. I explained to him that it is the rocket that goes into space and of course he knew of it, but did not know the English name. "What is reentry?" was the next of a series of questions in a conversation pattern that was repeated with others once I got to the party. I expected engineers to know what the space craft was I was disappointed that they did not share my shock and sadness as I explained the tragedy. I kept going back to our host's room to check the news on the internet, but updates and pictures meant nothing to the others. The words on the screen wound up being nothing but a reminder of what it is to feel isolated in a crowded room.

I don't mean to make this all seem like some sort of personal drama which was a bigger tragedy than the shuttle itself. Rather, I just am trying to explain what it is like to be abroad and suddenly feel far from home. When tragedy strikes, we all revert back to who we are and where we come from and you want to be in the presence of others who understand.

Over the course of the past year, several military aircraft have crashed in Afghanistan due to mechanical failure. The men and women on these planes were no less brave than the astronauts who died on Columbia, but the nation barely blinked. Alas, but those military transports could not fly into space. When has space not fascinated us? It is almost a childhood wish that space missions would be so commonplace that we could simply take them for granted. Isn't that the idea after all? Isn't that the future? Yet with the commonplace comes forgetfulness that our own fallibility is imposed on the infallible. The illusion has once again been shattered and we have to watch as the pieces fall. Over the next year we will hear theories of missing thermal panels (haven't they fallen off during the early missions without destroying the shuttle?), wrong approach angles and other theories of what happened. Three shuttles left and fifteen years before the next generation is built if at all. I just hope that this is not the end.

 [Previous](#) | [Next](#)  | [Return to Main Page](#)
