

J U N E 1 9 8 6

# TORONTO

## THE SULTAN OF SWING

Shawn O'Sullivan wants to be Canada's best-known—and richest—ambassador of the sweet science

## UNFINISHED BUSINESS

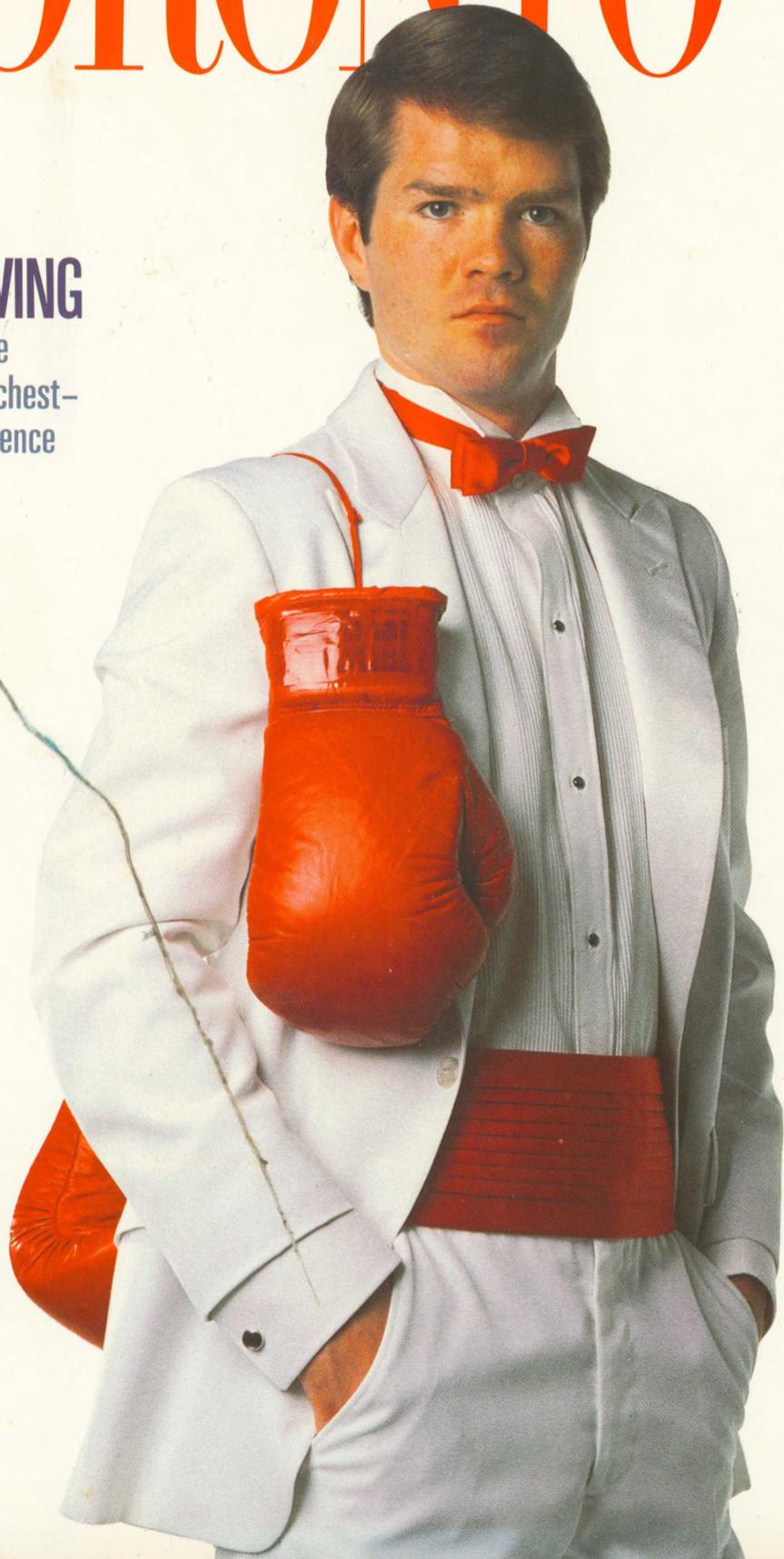
It's a year since the crash of Air India flight 182, but the case isn't closed

## THE WHIRLPOOL RAPIDS

Grace under pressure in a riveting short story by Margaret Atwood

## PLUS:

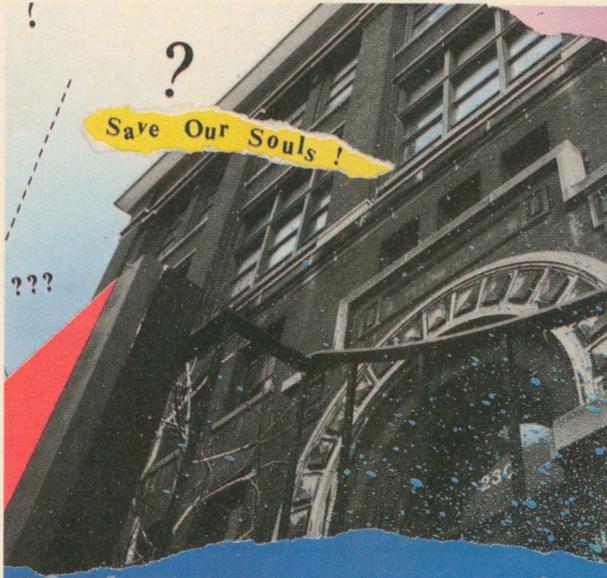
The greater glory of cheese, the German's German wine, deconstruction at the U of T, and all the best ways to start summer in the city



COLUMNS

**39** CITY POLITICS *By Norman Snider*

*The proposed closing of the Faculty of Architecture has tongues wagging and gowns flapping at the U of T*



**62** CONSUMING PASSIONS *FOOD* *By Joanne Kates*

*The artisans of natural cheese are fighting the battle of the bland in France, but in Canada the war may already be lost*

**67** CONSUMING PASSIONS *WINE* *By Charles Israel*

*It seems the Germans have a gambler's instinct when it comes to fermenting wine, emerging with a winning Riesling every time*

**96** THE TORONTONIAN *By David Warren*

*One person's garbage may be another person's treasure, but Torontonians are slow to harvest the riches of the refuse around them*



Cover photography  
 by Zoran Milich



PREVIEWS

**17** DINING OUT

*The swivel stools and wooden booths may be vintage 1940s but the Senator's is a thoroughly modern menu*

**19** ART GALLERIES

*The Market Gallery's multimedia look at the CN Tower salutes the big needle's 10th year in the sky*

**21** AT THE MOVIES

*With films about human interaction back in vogue, the soul-baring Always fits snugly in the fold*

**25** CLASSICAL MUSIC

*Colas et Colinette is Canada's first opera, courtesy of a gunrunner with a taste for song*

**29** SPORTS REPORT

*Amateurs and pros will test their drives and plant their putts at the Canadian Open*

**31** THEATRE

*Modern-day troubadours strike the wrong note with Mexican villagers suffering under military oppression*

**33** JAZZ AND POP

*If the du Maurier Jazz Festival is any indication, there's plenty of life in big band music yet*

**35** DANCE

*Teaming up for a triple-bill called Wild Imaginings, three choreographers find strength in numbers*

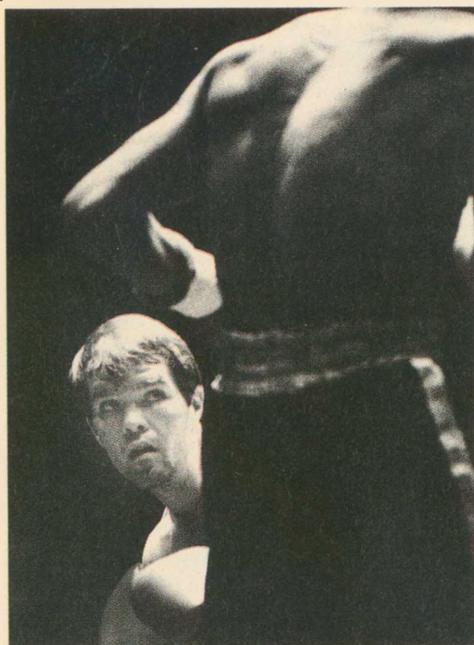
**37** EXCURSIONS

*Succulent strawberries and sumach tea usher in spring at an Iroquoian-style festival*

## FEATURES

### 46 THE SULTAN OF SWING *By Stephen Brunt*

*He's a skinny kid in a game of brawny brawlers, and he's white in a sport dominated by blacks. A local hero, Shawn O'Sullivan has been an easy boxer to sell—but will they like him in Peoria?*



### 52 UNFINISHED BUSINESS *By Philip Plews*

*Last June, 146 people from the Metro area perished in the crash of Air India flight 182. A year later, friends and relatives are still trying to pick up the pieces of their own lives*

### 58 THE WHIRLPOOL RAPIDS *By Margaret Atwood*

*Niagara Falls becomes more than just a kitschy backdrop for honeymooners in a new tale about fear and death by the author of the best seller The Handmaid's Tale*



## DEPARTMENTS

### 10 INSIDE TRACK

*Encounters with the ghost of Ernest Hemingway, Diane Keaton's bananas, art dealer Ydessa Hendeles' idealism and the joys of late-night dry cleaning*

### 60 LIVING WELL

*A floor lamp, reminiscent of the naughty phallic skyscrapers of Adolf Loos, lights up the night with the jazzy romance of art deco*

### 80 IN AND AROUND THE TOWN

*An advertising guide to city restaurants, shops and services*

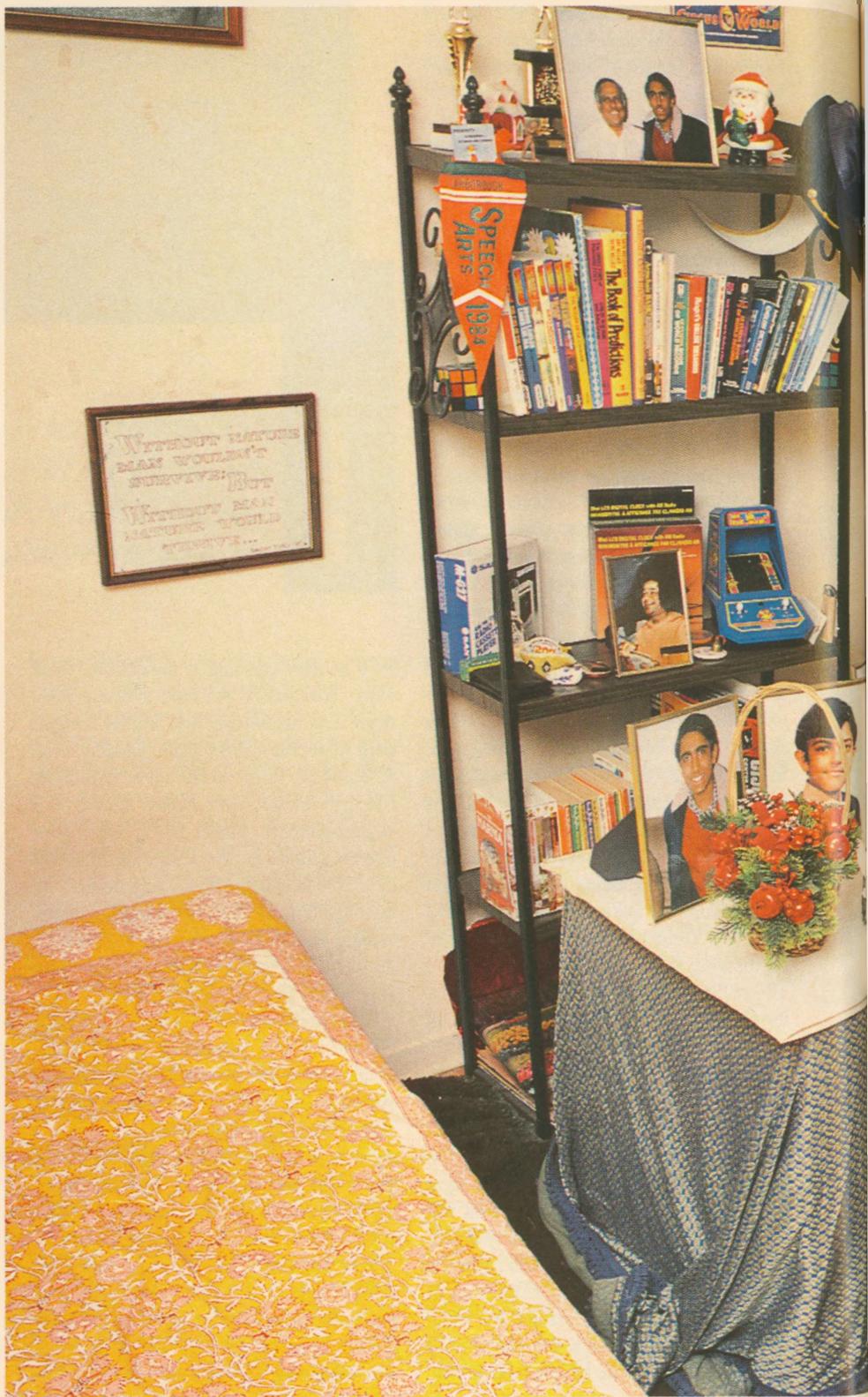
# LIFE AFTER DEATH

*A year ago, Air India flight 182 fell out of the North Atlantic skies, but as the Toronto families of the dead have found, the nightmare isn't over*

BY PHILIP PLEWS

The tides are likely to determine a traveller's impression of the Irish city of Cork. At low tide, the River Lee is brackish and smells of industrial waste; at high tide, it has the elegance and majesty of an Irish ballad. It was the smell of death that wafted in on the morning tide during the days following Sunday, June 23, 1985—the day Air India flight 182 crashed into the Atlantic about 180 kilometres west of Cork. The milky-white Boeing 747 with red markings—"A place in the sky" blazoned across its tail—was en route to Bombay from Toronto when Captain H.S. Narendra radioed the air-traffic control centre at Shannon. A former pilot to prime minister Indira Gandhi with 35 years of flying experience, Capt. Narendra reported the jet was cruising normally. Eight minutes later, without warning, Air India flight 182 disappeared from the radar scope. It had disintegrated in midair. There were no survivors among the 329 passengers and crew, of whom 279 were Canadian residents of Indian origin—146 from the Toronto area.

As speculation grew that a terrorist bomb had torn apart the jet, hundreds of anguished relatives converged on Cork. Among them, Scarborough chartered accountant, Lakshminarayana Turlapati



Photography by Debra Friedman



and his wife, Padmini, arrived in search of their sons, Deepak and Sanjay. Etobicoke research engineer, Dr. Bal Gupta, sought his wife, Ramwati, who was on board the plane. Suman Wadhwa, a computer programmer, also of Scarborough, reluctantly accompanied her husband, Ashok, who searched to no avail for his young son, Akhil, and daughter, Serina, among the remains of 131 bodies plucked from the icy Atlantic by Irish soldiers. Despite their varying backgrounds and circumstances the mourners shared one essential: all came to Ireland expecting the worst, but few were prepared for what they found.

Most remember how it took days to muster enough strength to scan the Polaroid snapshots of the bodies of the recovered victims. The mourners had to force themselves to study each of the faces, in anguish that they might not be able to identify their loved ones. They remember how they had to imagine what their kin would look like

unresolved grief. On June 23, many friends and relatives will again converge on the city of Cork. They will take part in a memorial service beside the monument erected at Dunmanus Bay—the closest port on the Irish coast to where Air India flight 182 crashed—in remembrance of the children, parents, wives and husbands who perished. For many of them, it will be part of an on going quest to reconstruct their lives—a quest that will continue long after the criminal case book has been closed.

**NEARLY ONE** year after they buried the remains of one son and mourned the memory of the other, Lakshminarayana and Padmini Turlapati sit in the living room of their apartment. Photographs of Deepak and Sanjay are all that's left to unify a family that has been torn apart. The boys' faces are innocent and

*For investigators, the task of following a trail strewn with fragments of plastic explosive and bits of airliner will be easier than piecing together the many lives shattered by senseless tragedy*

horribly disfigured, and then how they were forced to match those nightmarish thoughts with the bloated images of the portraits that were tacked to a bulletin board near the makeshift morgue in the gymnasium of Cork Regional Hospital.

They would never forget the city of Cork: how its people opened their hearts and churches; how very peaceful and green the city was; and how, even though many of them couldn't find their children or parents or spouses, they were made to feel that the victims had been received with dignity in a place where they were respected. For investigators, the task of following a trail strewn with airline tickets, fragments of plastic explosive and the debris of an airliner dredged from the ocean floor may be considerably less difficult than piecing together the remains of lives shattered by

outgoing: the 14-year-old Sanjay has a radiant copper complexion, while the photograph of the 11-year-old Deepak shows a lighter, almost golden tone. Both were honor students, athletes and aspiring writers. Sanjay's poetry possessed a depth unusual for one so young and Deepak's forte was tales of outer space and aliens. After appearing in a television series produced by *Owl* magazine, Deepak began to fancy himself as quite the actor. They were the heart of the Turlapati clan. As a final mockery of fate, there are no photographs that include all four family members in the same frame. These were lost with the children, who were taking the family album to India to show their relatives and friends how wonderful life in Canada was.

"You see, we were destined to come to Canada," says 46-year-old Lakshmi-

narayana, grappling with a philosophy shaped to fit the life he has been forced to inherit. "I was destined to send my children to visit India on that plane. I was destined to lose them. We made plans for so many other things. But man is foolish. He thinks only of the past and future; never the present."

Padmini's anxiety, brought on by the sudden intrusion of violence into her world, cannot be soothed by such fatalism: "There was a plot, a sacrifice and then senselessness. And the fellows who did it didn't even have the guts to come forward. Not that it would make me feel better. I don't give a damn who did it. When this thing happened it shook my belief in man, society—even a thing called God. Now, I'm only trying to live from day to day and build up again the trust that I used to have." She rubs her face as if to massage away her weariness. At times her moods seem as blue as the sapphire sari she wears.

Padmini was born in New Delhi, but her accent was formed during her childhood in England, and she speaks with a soft musical voice, punctuated by Western slang. She has about her an air of brooding spirituality that is unexpectedly spiked with a sense of play. "After the tragedy, because my husband was so distraught, he requested an interview with Bhagawan Sathya Sai Baba, a religious leader in India with a great following," recalls Padmini, smiling. "Lakshminarayana is a devotee of his, and we went together. The holy man met with us and during the course of our meeting he praised me, saying that I was a very sincere and selfless person. Now, each time my husband gets quarrelsome, I remind him how special I am and after that he listens to me."

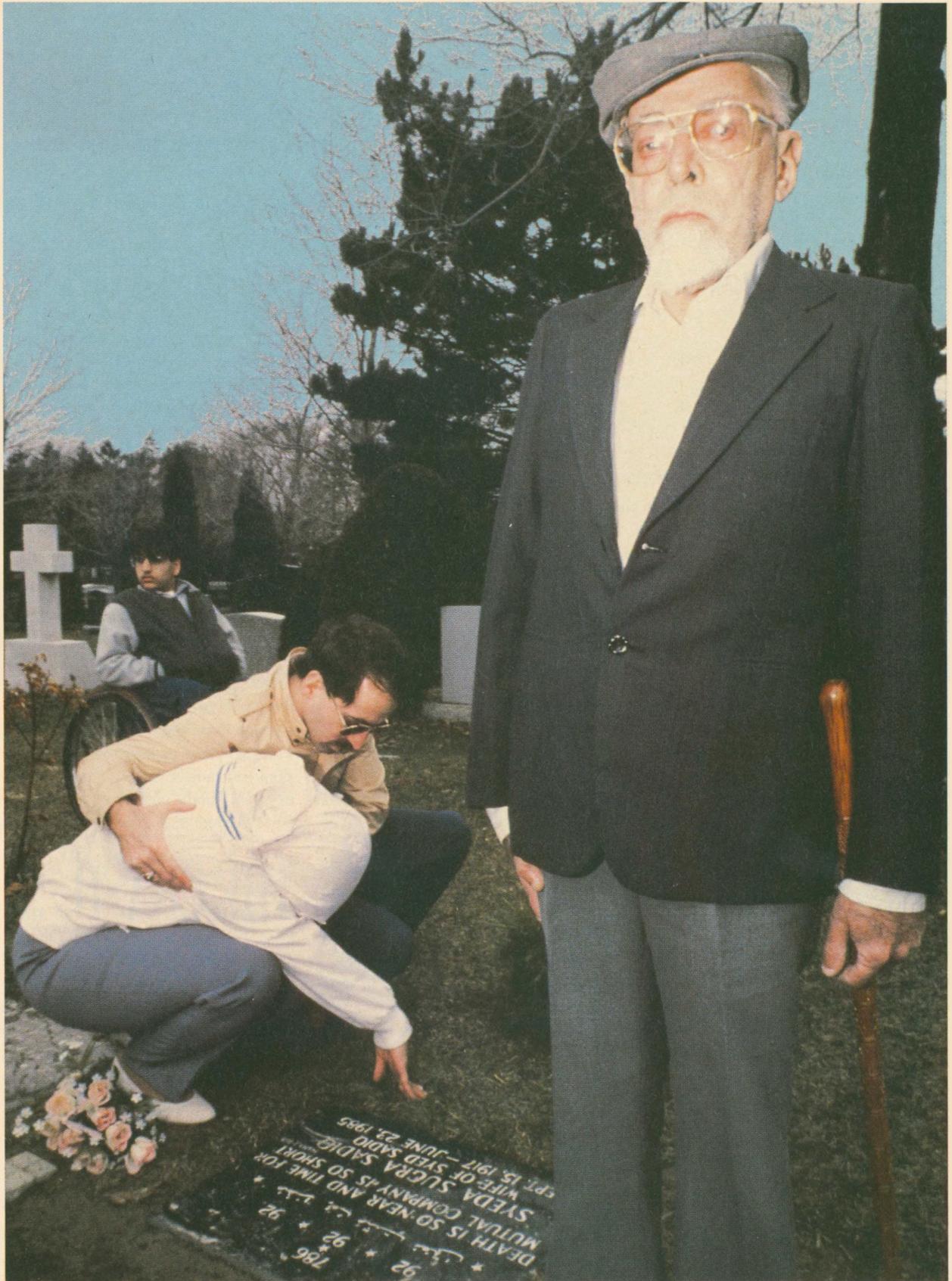
Lakshminarayana grins as he returns from the kitchen balancing cups of tea, careful not to spill on his Banlon shirt or trousers. On his finger is a glittering emer-

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SUGRA SADIQ'S FAMILY MOURNS AT HER GRAVE: HUSBAND, SYED (FOREGROUND), THEIR SON, ASKAN (BROTHER OF AJAZ), ASKAN'S WIFE, SAKINA, AND COUSIN, NAWID RAZVI. FOR THOSE LEFT BEHIND, WHAT MAKES THE AFTERMATH OF THIS DISASTER SO DIFFICULT IS ITS LINGERING INCONCLUSIVENESS

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# LIFE AFTER DEATH



ald ring—a talisman from the Bhagawan. “As far as I am concerned, Baba is God for me. And after my boys were killed I felt I had absolutely nowhere to turn. They were the spirit of my life and my spirit was broken. Baba for Hindus is the equivalent of the Pope for Catholics and what he told me gave me strength to live.” Lakshminarayana’s countenance changes when he talks—from the tense and grave look peculiar to all chartered accountants, to a very gentle and outgoing expression, much like the photograph of his son Deepak.

“Immediately after the children died,” resumes Padmini, “I told my husband: ‘You go and get married again and have children. At 46, I’m not young enough and it could be dangerous.’ Then he told me I was crazy.”

“This is too much,” sighs Mr. Lakshminarayana. “I’m not looking for another

“Deepak was having nightmares that whole week because he knew he’d be travelling and he’d been watching the news on TV. That was the week that Shi’ite Amal militiamen hijacked the TWA jet. He told me: ‘Mom, I’m going to die.’” Padmini’s voice cracks. Lakshminarayana looks away, his face registering her pain.

When Lakshminarayana and Padmini left Cork on July 4, 1985, for India, bearing the remains of their elder son, Sanjay, it was almost 15 years since they’d last set foot on Indian soil. Now they would lay their son to rest in it. Born in New Delhi, and ambitious for themselves and their sons, the Turlapatis immigrated to Canada in 1982 from Nigeria, where he was a chartered accountant with the government and she worked as a consultant in the pediatrics hospital. Like some 200,000 other Canadians who trace their roots to the Indian sub-

***“In the East, children are one’s life,” explains Suman Wadhwa. “And now, I come home to a big empty house, full of possessions all around me — but they don’t mean anything without kids”***

wife. If it is God’s will for me to have another son—it will happen.”

Like other families affected by the disaster, the Turlapatis’ lives are filled with contradictions. Above all, there is the frustration at the loss of the children whose presence still lingers.

The boys’ bedroom is exactly how they left it one year ago: two narrow beds separated by a bookcase proudly display Sanjay’s table tennis trophies. On the walls are posters of Michael Jackson, a Bristol board science project depicting the weasel in its natural habitat and a reasonably good copy of an A.J. Casson painted by Deepak. Dominating what has become a shrine to their sons, is a table-top hockey game where the brothers often sat pulling levers and battling for the Stanley Cup. Next to Deepak’s bed is the water gun he bought to protect himself if his flight was commandeered by hijackers.

continent, the Turlapatis regarded Canada as a land of opportunity which would value their skills, reward their industry and respect their culture. So, with the blessing of Padmini’s father, who was a former minister of irrigation in Nehru’s cabinet, they came to Toronto.

It was an unsettling experience. Economically, 1982 was a bad year to be a chartered accountant in search of employment, and Padmini’s degree in pediatrics from India didn’t impress the Canadian medical establishment. Yet the boys liked everything about their newly adopted city—the schools, their friends and the doughnut shops. For the children’s sake, the Turlapatis decided to stay in Toronto for a test year—or until their life’s savings ran out, whichever came first. Soon, Lakshminarayana was working in Toronto and Padmini obtained an internship at a hospital in St. John’s, Nfld. Although this meant that

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SUSHEEL GUPTA AT SICK KIDS HOSPITAL:  
“SINCE HIS MOTHER’S DEATH, MY YOUNGEST SON HAS EXPERIENCED SEVERE INTESTINAL PROBLEMS AND NOW HE’S IN THE HOSPITAL. I CAN’T BE CERTAIN BUT IT APPEARS POSSIBLE THAT HIS CONDITION WAS TRIGGERED BY RAMWATI’S DEATH”

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she would be separated from the family for two years, the sacrifice would enable her to return to Toronto as a qualified pediatrician. The family resolved to stay in Canada.

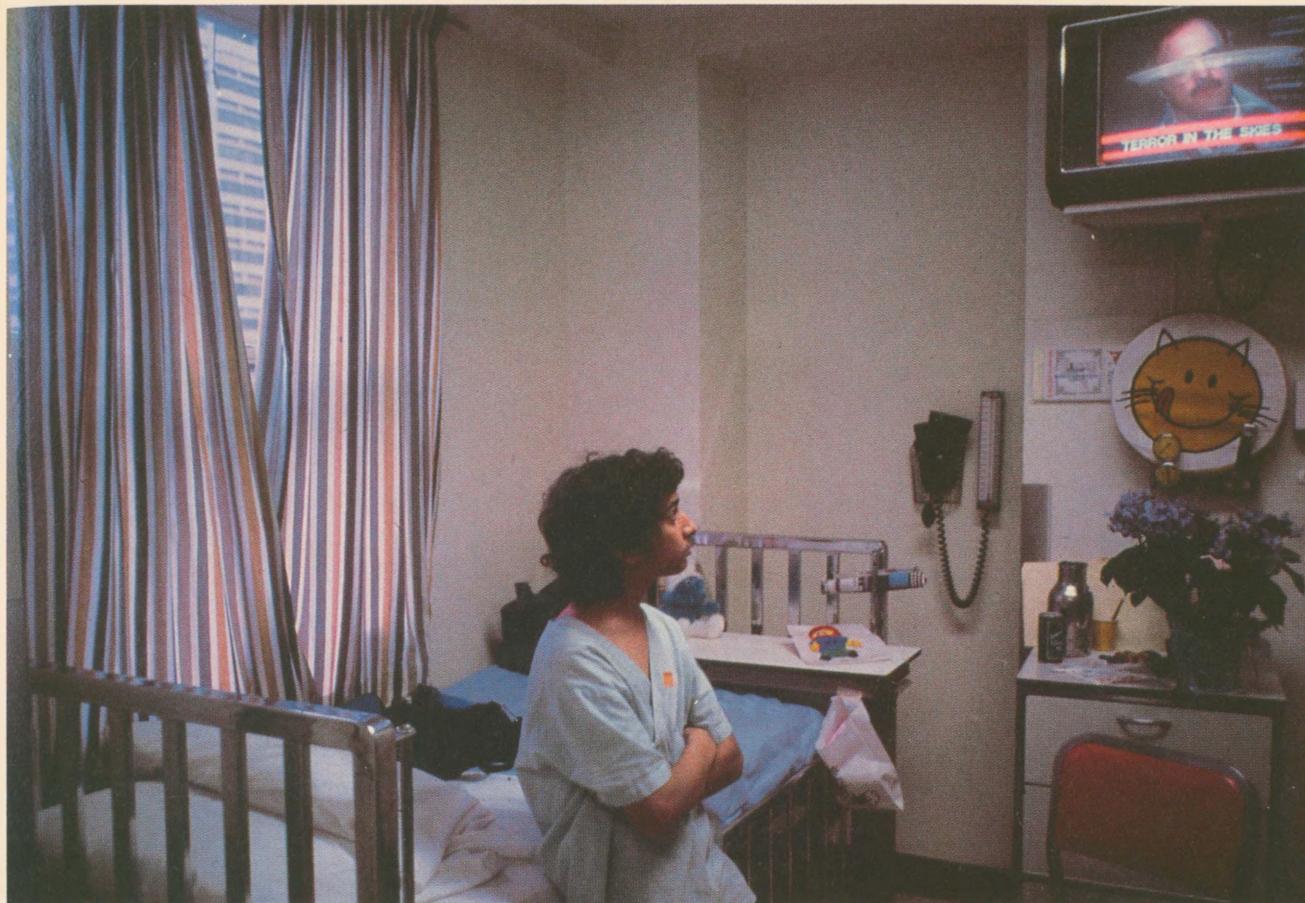
To celebrate this decision and a bright future, a plan was made to send Deepak and Sanjay to India during their summer vacation. There they would visit grandparents, other relations and India herself. Father and mother would join them for the last two weeks and together all four would embark on a nostalgic whirlwind tour. The summer would end in a farewell celebration. The New World was waiting. By the time they got back, they’d be ready to settle for good in Toronto as Canadians.

Now, the short years spent with their boys are what haunt Lakshminarayana and Padmini. Like the team of investigators thousands of miles away in India who sift through bits and scraps of flight 182’s wreckage, they explore their boys’ possessions—turning up Sanjay’s forgotten school essay on Hindu mythology, or a yellowing piece of sheet music for Deepak’s trumpet.

## THE CRASH

of Air India flight 182 ended many a new Canadian’s dream. Since the birth of her first child, Suman Wadhwa has had a recurring nightmare. In it, she is standing in a courtroom before a judge who is telling her that her daughter, Serina, would be taken away from her mother by the time she was 9 years old. Early Sunday morning, June 23, 1985, Suman was awakened from a dreamless sleep by a telephone call from a friend who asked if she and her husband could come over that morning for breakfast. It was a strange request. She asked why? The anxiety of her friend’s voice still rings in her memory. “When I was told that the plane with Serina and Akhil, my son, had

# LIFE AFTER DEATH



crashed, I went insane for a while. The children were my whole life," recalls the 32-year-old computer programmer for Employee Relocation Services who, for the past year, has relied on her faith, husband Ashok, work and friends to "hold her together." Last March, Serina would have celebrated her ninth birthday.

Ashok and Suman Wadhwa sit in the kitchen of their comfortable Scarborough house about to share their first dinner together in some time. For the past two months, Ashok has been in New Delhi setting up an import/export business, wheeling and dealing his way into the Indian garment industry. Since moving to Canada 12 years ago, the former brass and jewelry salesman and his wife have managed to raise two children and pay off a mortgage. Now, Ashok hopes to supply Toronto wholesalers with clothing manufactured in Indian mills. When there were children, he was

hesitant to take the financial risk involved with starting his own business. With the children gone, the Wadhwas' grief lingers, but there is a sense that they have come to terms with what has occurred if for no other reason than simply because what's done is done. Life goes on. "I will always love my children. I kiss them every day," says a tired Ashok pointing to the enlarged photograph of his son and daughter displayed prominently over the living room fireplace. "But we are starting everything new. Suman is working, I am changing careers. We are still young and I'm not going to spend my life regretting the fact that we didn't start another family—that it's too late."

In the photograph, Serina and her younger brother wear colorful summer clothes and kneel in front of a flower garden. She has her arms around Akhil. They resemble their mother—good-looking, slim and brimming with energy. Shortly before

the explosion on board Air India flight 182 claimed their lives, Suman underwent a tubal ligation. Recently she had it reversed. "When Ashok is away for long periods, and I'm forced to spend time alone in this house, that's when I don't think I can live without children any more," says Suman. "In the East, children are one's life. And now, I come home to an empty house, full of possessions all around me—but they mean nothing without kids. Any other children will never be a replacement for Serina or Akhil. But we're really beginning to feel at home in Toronto and we can't see living in such a beautiful city without having children to share it with." Upstairs, the children's bedrooms remain more or less as they were on the day they died.

The after effects of the disaster continue; Suman receives progress reports from the lawyers who are proceeding with the law  
*continued on page 70*