No Time to Spare

On August 2, 2005, a fully loaded Air France Airbus A340 arriving from Paris crashed and landed at Toronto’s Pearson International Airport and caught fire. Only four of the plane’s eight exits were usable, yet all 309 people on board made it off the aircraft in two minutes—before it was consumed by flames. Here, five of the passengers recount their escape.

**Eddie Ho (seat 16B)**
The first words from the crew were “The aircraft is fine. Stay calm, remain in your seats.” But passengers at the back were screaming “Fire!” Then the crew told us to jump out, but nothing about leaving behind hand luggage or taking off shoes. The closest exit was a few rows in front of me, but there was no slide there and a lady was blocking my way into a slide to jump. People were pushing from behind. I was in business-class seat, but the slide was not inflated. With no other option, I leaped out about four to five meters and tumbled onto some people below me. It was a mess.

**Lisa Popow (seat 36F)**
As we were landing, there was this banging and shaking, and the lights were flickering on and off. People were screaming like crazy. They were jumping over seats to get to the exit. The flight attendant in front of me was directing everyone to the rear of the plane. I had to get every man back to reach the exit. I would have been closer to the exit if it weren’t for those who jumped ahead of me. I was helping on to my friend’s seat at the back. We got the exit and went down the chute. All of us were309 people below me. It was a mess.

**JoAnn Cordary Bundock (seat 2E)**
I could tell we were coming in very fast. I cinched up my seat belt tighter than normal. We landed hard, and then it was like we were going a hundred and fifty miles an hour over a road that was filled with giant potholes. The plane skidded on its belly. I could smell jet fuel as soon as we stopped. A flight attendant rushed to the front of the plane and told us to evacuate immediately. I went to the exit on the left side, saw thick smoke, and thought, “No way am I going down that.” So I went to the exit on the right. The door was opened up a quarter of the way down, but I went anyhow. Flight attendants weren’t instructing people to leave anything. I went down through thick smoke and got to a transport truck. We were in there when one of the fireballs exploded.

**Yasmin Ladak (seat 25K)**
I looked toward the back of the plane and could see flames and thick black smoke. I was heading toward the back, but in the front, there was one lady. I got the door open, we’re going to be okay! Once off the plane, I followed the way the firefighters went. Motorists were starting to stop on the runway. Once stopped, I stood up and gave all five of us back to the highway.

**Philippe Lacaille (with his wife and two children; seats 45 DEFJ)**
After touchdown, the lights went off. I looked over to see my daughter’s face surrounded by an orange halo. It was fire. I unbuckled the seat belt and grabbed the kids. Nobody was telling us what to do. People were grabbing their belongings and looking around us while the cabin was filling up with smoke. A flight attendant struggled to open the nearest exit. The chute deployed, but we were almost the first ones out.