

Alexander Lowenstein

SUSE LOWENSTEIN

(February 25, 1967-December 21, 1988)

Four days before Christmas, 1988, Pan Am Flight 103 exploded over Lockerbie, Scotland, killing 270 people. This February, two Libyans charged with planting the bomb that caused the crash are scheduled to go on trial in The Netherlands. Peter and Susé Lowenstein of Montauk, New York, plan to attend the trial. Their 21-year-old son, Alexander, one of 35 Syracuse University students returning from a semester abroad, was a passenger. In a group of life-sized figures titled "Dark Flegy," Susé, a sculptor, captured the bare emotion women felt the moment they learned of the explosion and horrific deaths of people they loved.

"Even though it has been eleven years, I still go to bed each night with a pain in my heart and awake each morning with a sigh, like that of a baby who has cried all night. That is how I sleep, and that is how I awake.

"You have no idea—you can't until it happens to you—of the total realization that once your child no longer exists how every part of your being is connected to him. He was my hope for the future, and with that gone, the depth of your grief is bottomless. But that is only the beginning.

"Nature is very kind to you when you suffer a loss like this. Your feelings come in stages. If you felt them all at once, there is no way you could survive. First, there is the shock and the separateness, knowing on some level that it is true, while holding to the belief that maybe you are in a dream. When the truth does come to you, there is this total and utter feeling of hopelessness. You know that there is nothing that can ever, ever make it any better.

"I was in my studio working on a sculpture of Alexander when I got a phone call from one

of his girlfriends asking when he would be home and which flight he was on. When I told her he was on Flight 103, she screamed, "Haven't you heard? It exploded over Scotland!" I yelled back, "No—no!" I remember grabbing myself—my stomach, and in my mind seeing a fireball explode in the sky and knowing in the depths of my soul that I would never see him again. Then, it was like the life was sucked out of me.

"When I called my husband Peter's office to tell him, he was out on an errand. It turned out he had heard about the explosion on the car radio. He came home and we were in each other's arms. Peter seemed to hold out hope. He was saying things like, 'Maybe he missed the flight. Maybe he took another flight.' But I knew. I knew in my heart our son was dead.

"That moment, the instant in which you are told is one you never forget; the exact feeling, the posture of your body. It is what is depicted in "Dark Elegy." Being able to express my anguish and that of the other women in this way is what has kept me sane. When you lose a child at any age, I am sure it must be somewhat the same, but when you lose an adult child, you have been through all their stages and you have this fully formed person. You know them longer, so the loss seems greater.

"They found Alexander's body on a farm in Lockerbie. For days we wondered, was it intact? What would remain of our beautiful son? Thankfully, and I know that is a strange word to use, but still, it meant something to us that he was found in one piece. I spent days wondering if ~~wolves~~ ^{FOXES} [?] or other wild animals would get to him before officials did.

"Because of where he was sitting, he was one of the first to fall from the sky. When we got his autopsy report, we had it analyzed. We needed to know if he had suffered. There was some

solace in knowing that he probably died instantly. But still, I wonder how long he was conscious before he died. In my mind I have taken that fall many, many times and still do.

"It was a while before his body was returned to us. The bodies were delivered en masse to an airport hangar at Kennedy airport marked Livestock Quarantine. It was an unforgettable scene of hard hats and hearses. I remember one woman was holding flowers in her hand and shaking and suddenly she started yelling, 'They're here! They're here!' A big truck pulled up, with graffiti scrawled on its side. Then one by one, forklifts removed the caskets. We stood there as coffin after coffin after coffin was unloaded. It was surreal.

"What is so strange, too, about the timing of Alexander's death was that two weeks prior to his coming home, I was absolutely overwhelmed by this urge, this necessity to fly to London to see him. At the time, it made no sense. He was coming home in two weeks—it was an expensive thing to do, but something inside me propelled me to go. And so I did and we spent a glorious ten days together. I even took him to Germany to meet my family. He had met my parents, but not his uncles or aunts or any of his cousins. Thank God I did that, even when all reason spoke against it.

"Alexander's death was especially hard on his younger brother, Lucas, who also attended Syracuse. He was there taking finals. We called him and when he came home, he walked through the door, burst into tears and screamed, 'It should have been me. It should have been me.' By all accounts, Alexander was what one would call 'a golden boy'—he had it all. For (Lu- X LUCAS) cus) life had always been much more of a struggle, and I think he felt guilty, that perhaps our pain would have been less had it been him. Another thing that has kept me going is the chal-

lenge of letting Lucas know how very much we love him; how important he has always been in our lives and not to be consumed by our grief for Alexander. ^ALucas is now married and we have two grandchildren. They are part of the legacy. I cannot have enough of them; I cannot love them enough. And that is what I would say to people: Never ever hold back your love, because you just never know."