

# Turning a tragedy around

**Families of those killed on Pan Am Flight 103 try to help others deal with grief.**

Sunday, December 21, 2003

**By Nancy Buczek**

Since Pan Am 103 exploded over Lockerbie, Scotland, 15 years ago today, many of those whose lives were changed by the terrorist act channeled their grief into positive change.

Some victims' relatives have counseled family members of the people who died in the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.

Others have forced the aviation industry to make unprecedented safety changes.

And Syracuse University, which lost 35 of its students in the terrorist bombing, has forged a bond with the small rural town where the students fell to Earth.

On Dec. 21, 1988, a bomb hidden in a cassette recorder exploded in the cargo hold of a Boeing 747 jumbo jet en route from London to New York City. The explosion ripped the plane apart about 31,000 feet above Lockerbie. All 259 people on board died. Another 11 on the ground were killed by falling debris.

People from 21 countries died. Central New York was rocked by the tragedy, losing a Clay couple, two State University College at Oswego students, a Colgate University student and 35 students studying through SU's Division of International Programs Abroad.

"Pan Am 103 really had a tremendous impact on the American people because it was one of the first direct, large-scale, terrorist attacks on our people," said Judy O'Rourke, senior administrator in the office of undergraduate studies. "You would hope that after 15 years, we would have learned, and other people throughout the world who deal with this on a daily basis would learn, that violence doesn't solve anything. But, obviously, we haven't."

That was clear to the Pan Am families when terrorists took control of four airplanes Sept. 11, 2001. Two planes smashed into the World Trade Center's Twin Towers, collapsing them. A third plane barreled into the Pentagon in Washington, D.C., and a fourth crashed in a Pennsylvania field.

All told, more than 3,000 people died as a result of the attacks.

A month later, Kathy Daniels Tedeschi, whose husband, Bill Daniels, died in the Pan Am bombing, joined two Princeton, N.J., psychologists to form a support group for Sept. 11 victims' families.

Tedeschi reached out to Bob and Eileen Monetti, who had lost their 20-year-old son, SU student Rick, in the Pan Am disaster. She asked them to talk with families that had lost children in the 2001 attacks.

"They were a very valuable resource to the group," said Ruth Goldston, one of the psychologists. "As a therapist there were certain things I could look at objectively, but what I certainly didn't have was that experience to draw on. Sometimes I think people just need to hear from other folks . . . who are little bit further ahead of you on the path that can say, 'this is what you can expect.' "

For the Monettis, of Cherry Hill, N.J., the group helped them realize their grief had changed.

"As sensitive and as near to the surface as all these things are, when you look at them you go, 'I remember when I was that way,' and it's not that way any-

more," Bob Monetti said. "You do learn to live with it and learn to integrate it into your life so it's not the same kind of pain."

Other Pan Am victims' family members found other ways to focus their grief. Georgia Nucci spent two years putting together a biography of the 270 victims, called "On Eagles' Wings." Her 20-year-old son, SU student Christopher Jones, was on Pan Am 103.

"I didn't feel singled out, or why me? It was more like, why not? Why all these other people? It kind of reoriented me to the reality of the whole thing, which is, this wasn't personal to me, it wasn't just my problem," said Nucci, of Claverack, near Albany. "There were a lot of other people in the same boat, suffering the same, so in that respect it kind of straightened me out a little and made me realize it had a broader hit."

Nucci and her husband, Anthony, also suffered the death of their 18-year-old daughter, Jennifer Jones, 11 months before their son died. She died of an illness while an exchange student in Ecuador.

Two years after the Pan Am bombing, the Nuccis adopted four siblings from an orphanage in Bogota, Colombia. Then, in 1993, Georgia Nucci enrolled in Albany Law School and graduated in 1996.

"Many of us felt we had to make every moment count. We couldn't assume we'd be around for tomorrow. We just had to make every day matter," Georgia Nucci said.

She said she wasn't going to be another victim of terrorism by not living her life.

"My kids would have been mortified if I had done that in their memory, sort of cease living because they had died," she said.

### **Safer for others**

Some family members of Pan Am victims channeled their grief into a support group, Victims of Pan Am 103. A main goal was to push for safer air travel, specifically that airlines match baggage and passengers and keep accurate passenger lists.

"They have been tremendously active, always giving thoughtful comments and pushing the envelope, pushing the political will - the national will - to make things more safe and more secure," said Courtney Tucker, a senior policy analyst in the Office of Transportation Security Policy in the Transportation Security Administration, which falls under the Department of Homeland Security.

Group members had met with President George H. Bush and the secretary of transportation, testified before Congress and worked with the Department of State on issues such as how the government handles notifying family members, Tucker said.

"They have definite impact. They have definite influence, and they're not ignored," he said.

### **Forging a bond**

Since the Pan Am disaster, SU has fostered a relationship with Lockerbie, a town of about 3,000 residents near the English border.

The university helps support a scholarship program that brings two Lockerbie students annually to SU for one year of study. And over the years there have been many SU students, faculty and staff who have traveled to Lockerbie.

Some faculty members have used the Pan Am tragedy to enrich their students' education.

Larry Mason and Melissa Chessher, both professors in the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications, used a \$24,000 grant from SU's Vision Fund to create a book about Lockerbie that's not really related to the disaster. With the help of students, the authors hope to capture the spirit of the community in words and pictures.

They're currently searching for a publisher.

There have been numerous books written about the air disaster, but none have focused primarily on the town and its residents, Mason said.

"Almost everybody in the world has heard of Lockerbie, and almost nobody has even been there. And there's this divide of what they think about the place and what is really true about the place," said Mason, a photography professor.

About 50 students have participated, interviewing people and photographing Lockerbie. About 42,000 photographs were shot for the project. The professors plan to funnel any proceeds from the book into the scholarship fund that pays for Lockerbie children to attend SU, Mason said.

Magin McKenna, 22, who graduated from SU in May, traveled to Lockerbie three times for the book. She said the experience gave her a new career direction.

"It wasn't like anything I had done before," she said. "I discovered this passion for traveling and for travel writing and that's what I ultimately want to do."

McKenna, who is from Baltimore, now lives in Glasgow, Scotland, and is writing mostly features for newspapers in the area, primarily The Sunday Herald.

Today, four days before Christmas, many people will be bustling through shopping malls finishing their holiday shopping and preparing for guests.

In Lockerbie, twinkling holiday lights are again the norm.

"After 10 years of no Christmas lights in the town, I think because people thought it was inappropriate, that they should be mourning, the town decided that the children needed to have a proper Christmas again," Mason said.

For the families and communities touched by Pan Am 103, the holidays will always be tinged. But you have to go on, some say.

"You can't ignore the holidays, and they're a good excuse to get together with family, so you make the most of them," Bob Monetti said.

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## When Terror Hit Home

Sunday, December 21, 2003

A decade and a half ago, long before the majority of Americans would become intimately acquainted with foreign terrorism on Sept. 11, 2001, Central New Yorkers had Flight 103. The bomb that exploded on a plane over Lockerbie, Scotland, 15 years ago today exploded naive notions about vulnerability, security - and terrorism - as well. With 35 students from Syracuse University, two students from the State University at Oswego, one student from Colgate University and a couple from Clay among the 259 dead on that doomed flight, this community could sadly say that it had lost more to the madness of terrorism than any other place in America. We knew with certainty that there were people who hated America enough to kill its citizens en masse.

It would be wonderful if terrorism were a fixable problem, if assaults against airliners and skyscrapers could be avoided by capturing the right despots, dissolving the right insurgent groups, dethroning the right political leaders. But such a scenario is not probable. What is true about the war on poverty and the war on drugs is true about the war on terrorism: Battles may be won, but a final victory is elusive.

Saddam Hussein is one down - but there may be thousands more to go. Most Americans know that. A New York Times poll found that 52 percent of respondents believed that attacks on U.S. soldiers in Iraq would continue - despite the capture of Saddam and President Bush's contention that America is safer "because he is not there." The president concedes that the war on terrorism "is going to be a long struggle." The truth is that America may be a superpower, but it does not possess super powers. It cannot get every terrorist.

There can be gains. Libya's Moammar Gadhafi, once considered a terror-monger himself, has mellowed. He finally admitted that Libya was responsible for the Flight 103 bombing. (A Libyan intelligence officer was sentenced in 2001 to life in prison for his role in the crime). Gadhafi was subdued not by capture, but by the steady pressure of international sanctions, which the United Nations formally lifted in September. The United States has kept its own in place. Gadhafi has offered to pay up to \$10 million to the families of Flight 103 victims if all sanctions are lifted.

But even with Gadhafi no longer the threat he was once and Saddam behind bars, terrorists have not hung out the white flag. Osama bin Laden, the mastermind of 9/11, is still at large. Of course, America must pursue terrorists who threaten its stability, but it must also look inward to determine if it is pursuing diplomatic courses that fan the flames of hatred.

Fifteen years ago, Flight 103 taught this community and this nation something: As strong as America may be, it is not and will never be invincible.

## Lockerbie explosion still resounds

Monday, December 22, 2003

**By Marnie Eisenstadt**

At 2:03 p.m. Dec. 21, 1988, Amy Elizabeth Shapiro was a 21-year-old Syracuse University student heading home for the holidays after studying abroad. At 2:03 p.m. exactly 15 years later, her face flashed across a screen at the university's Hendricks Chapel.

She will always be 21.

Shapiro and 34 other students from the university were killed 15 years ago when Pan Am Flight 103 exploded over Lockerbie, Scotland. On Sunday they were remembered by two dozen mourners in Syracuse, while others gathered at another memorial service at Arlington National Cemetery. All 259 people on the plane died, along with 11 people on the ground.

In Syracuse, bagpipes wailed at the precise time the plane exploded, filling the room with so much sound that it drowned out the quiet sobs.

"Grant them and us your peace," prayed the Rev. Christine Day of the Episcopal Campus Ministry.

After a memorial candle was lit, clergy read the names of all 35 students in a somber staccato. Mourners were asked to remember their loved ones quietly or share their thoughts.

Joan Deppa broke the silence in a tear-filled voice.

"I just wanted to say how proud I think these young people would have been of their families and friends who fought so hard to have something good happen out of this

tragedy," said Deppa, a professor at the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications.

This summer, the Libyan government accepted responsibility for the terrorist bomb and promised victims' families up to \$10 million each. And just last week, the country agreed to turn over all of its nuclear, chemical and biological weapons.

After the ceremony ended in the chapel, the mourners walked to a campus memorial, the Place of Remembrance, as the bagpiper played "Amazing Grace."

Day put the memorial candle on the snow-covered wall and led the group in a final prayer.

Later, she said Libya's decisions to accept responsibility for the bombing and to give up its weapons were a relief and a reward for many affected by the bombing. "I do believe people and nations can change," Day said.

And by keeping the memory of Pan Am 103 alive through scholars from Syracuse and Lockerbie, the university continues to bring that change, she said.

"You are able to, one person by one person, affect change," Day said.

Alaina Potrikus, who was in first grade at the time of the bombing, was among the mourners who bowed their heads in the cold. The North Syracuse woman is one of several Remembrance Scholars at SU who receive scholarships in honor of the students who died.

Potrikus, 21, a journalism student, said she lives every day thinking of the students whose lives were cut short.

"They were so much like me - so full of life and full of dreams," Potrikus said.

The bagpiper, Jamie Graham, was only 3 when the plane exploded over his home in Lockerbie, Scotland. His cousin barely escaped when his aunt's home was crushed by debris.

Graham doesn't remember that day, but he also doesn't remember a time when he didn't know the sadness the terrorism brought to his community.

The 18-year-old college freshman is part of the bond between Lockerbie and Syracuse. He is one of more than two dozen students from the town who have been awarded yearlong scholarships to SU.

"I come here and I feel like I'm at home," he said.

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## **Settlement money is starting to arrive**

**Libyan government has promised each victim's family up to \$10 million.**

Sunday, December 21, 2003

**By Nancy Buczek**

Family members of the victims of Pan Am Flight 103 have started getting settlement checks from the civil lawsuit they filed against Libya.

The Libyan government in August accepted responsibility for the terrorist act that killed 259 people aboard the plane, which exploded over Lockerbie, Scotland, 15 years ago. Another 11 people died on the ground.

Libya has promised families up to \$10 million per victim.

"It's not like you won the lottery," said Kara Weipz, president of the Victims of Pan Am 103 and sister of victim Rick Monetti. "It's not a fun thing. And people have many different feelings about this money. It's painful for a lot of people."

Weipz, 30, was 15 when her 20-year-old brother died. He was one of 35 SU students who had spent the semester studying overseas through Syracuse University.

Weipz, who lives in Mount Laurel, N.J., has a 3-year-old son named for her brother.

"If you ask me if \$10 million was enough, I'll tell you, no, my brother was worth more than that, but how do you put a price on a human being? He was invaluable. Everyone on that plane was invaluable," Weipz said.

Libya agreed to pay families \$4 million per victim if the U.N. lifted its sanctions against Libya, which it did in September. That triggered the first flow of settlement money to the families.

If the United States lifts its sanctions against Libya, then Libya agreed to give another \$4 million per victim.

Libya also will pay another \$2 million per victim if the United States takes it off the State Department's list of state-sponsored terrorist countries.

If neither of those happen within eight months from when the United Nations lifted its sanctions, the families will receive another \$1 million per victim, Weipz said. The remaining money, which is held in an escrow account in the Bank for International Settlements in Switzerland, will be returned to Libya, including any interest.

Greg Sullivan, a spokesman for the State Department's Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, said because the United States abstained from the September vote, it never accepted the conditions of the settlement.

He said the United States did not support the resolution because Libya tied compensation to improving the relations between the two countries.

"We did not think it appropriate," Sullivan said, adding that the United States has concerns about Libya's weapons of mass destruction and possible links to terrorist groups.

Weipz's parents were at SU for a memorial ceremony Nov. 14 for the SU students who were on Pan Am 103 when Weipz called to tell them the settlement check had arrived.

Weipz's father, Bob Monetti, said most families don't want to talk about the money. The money's not the issue, he said.

"Money is important for one very big reason," he said, "because in this world, the way we measure things is in money, and Libya is spending a hell of a lot of money to make our lawsuit go away, which is another way of saying they didn't want the trial to come out because they didn't want all the facts to come out because they know they are guilty. And that's an important message," Monetti said.

# The Post-Standard

## 15 Years Later, 'A Different Culture'

Reliving Pan Am Flight 103 crash a private matter for Lockerbie, resident says.

Sunday, December 21, 2003

By Nancy Buczek

Graham Herbert, who lives near the Scotland town where Pan Am Flight 103 exploded 15 years ago today, expects that community will mark the anniversary with a quiet grief.

"It's just a different culture," said Herbert, rector of Lockerbie Academy, a high school. "Grief to a Scottish person is very private, and they keep a lid on their emotions. So, organized memorial services don't occur, but there is no doubt it will be remembered. It's a small community. It's very much in the public consciousness. . . ."

Eleven Lockerbie residents died when the jumbo jet - exploded by a terrorist bomb - rained down on their town of about 3,000 residents near the English border. Aboard the plane, 259 people died, including 35 Syracuse University students, two State University College at Oswego students, one Colgate University student and a Clay couple.

Herbert said he was teaching biology at Dumfries High School and living in Annan, about 12 miles south of Lockerbie, at the time. He now lives in Eaglesfield, about seven miles south of Lockerbie.

He remembers the grim scenes and stories as if it were yesterday: A woman whose house crumbled around her, yet she was able to walk away, clutching her dog. A body still in an airplane seat on a house roof for days because the town didn't have a crane to get it down.

A jet engine imbedded in the ground 15 meters from a relative's home. Bodies covered in black plastic as he walked down the street.

"Driving there, normally the only thing you would see is an odd pheasant or rabbit; the roads are so quiet. . . ." said Herbert, 50, the father of two daughters. "The first time that we realized that this was mega was when we went around a corner, and there was a platoon of army troops. There were military helicopters buzzing overhead. It was just a weird shiver down your spine to see it."

Hundreds of people mobilized to help, Herbert said.

"And the irony is, as regards to rescue and recovery teams, is that those hundreds of people weren't needed because there was nobody to save," he said. ". . . There was nobody injured. There was frustration and helplessness."

In the years since the disaster, many people have traveled to Lockerbie to walk the field where the plane's nose landed and more than 100 bodies were found, he said. Through those visits, many families of victims have formed relationships with Lockerbie residents.

Syracuse University and Lockerbie have strengthened their bonds through a scholarship program for Lockerbie students that began in the 1990-1991 academic year.

Herbert said no one in Lockerbie attended the trial in the Netherlands that led to the conviction of one suspect and acquittal of another. None of the families of Lockerbie victims sued.

For the 15th anniversary, Herbert said he expects more families of victims will visit Lockerbie. But they've made private arrangements with families they've grown to know over their years of grief.

"It's so private. There will be a phone call saying, 'I'm coming over,' and I imagine there will be a few of those phone calls this semester."

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