

**“LEARNING FROM ‘THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN THERE’:
GATHERING COMFORT AND HOPE FROM SELF-HELP
SUPPORT GROUPS” CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS
FOR BEREAVED 9/11 FAMILIES***

Submitted by EDWARD J. MADARA, MS

New Jersey Self-Help Group Clearinghouse, Dover, New Jersey

CEIL BUONOCORE

The Compassionate Friends, Wilmington, Delaware

We have a saying in Compassionate Friends, “When I look at you, I see my past. I hope that when you look at me, you see your future.”

I’d like to take you back to December 27, 1985. My 16-year-old son Todd had many “Welcome Home” signs up. Our family was awaiting the arrival home of our 20-year-old son John, from Rome, Italy. He had just completed his first semester of his junior college year abroad, studying the classics. He was a student at Dickinson College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. I woke up at 8 A.M. I turned on CNN and heard about a terrorist attack in the Rome Airport, 16 killed and 80 injured. My husband assured me that my son John was already on the plane home, but I immediately got on the telephone and started calling.

I could get no answers from his airline, TWA. I had call-waiting, and as I made all these calls, I was hoping that John would break in any moment and tell me that he was safe. Finally, about 1 P.M., a customer service representative suggested that I call the State Department. I had no idea how to contact them, so I immediately called our Senator Roth’s office and they in turn connected me to the State Department. The young lady told me I had to wait 45 minutes for a list of the dead and wounded. I called back in half an hour, I couldn’t wait any

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longer. She asked for my son's date of birth. When I answered her, "2/16/65," she told me that he was listed as one of the dead. I started screaming; she told me she needed to speak to "someone in control." I said that I was an RN and that I was "in control."

I stayed "in control" for a long time, I needed to be. I had a husband in bed in a fetal position and a 16-year-old son in shock. I had TV reporters, newspaper reporters, friends, and strangers at my door. I needed to be "in control" when the State Department sent me a telegram giving me a "laundry list" of how I could get my son's body home: I needed to wire \$900 if I wanted the body, \$400 if he was to be cremated, and other options. There were no assurances as to when he could be returned, but fortunately, Senator Roth was a big help in this matter and John's body was returned on New Years Eve. I needed to be "in control" when I saw the TV screen showing the picture of the Rome Airport massacre and realized that one of those bodies on the floor was my son, John, marked letter "C," lying face down in the ski sweater I had sent him for Christmas, in a pool of his own blood. That picture was shown hundreds if not thousands of times whenever the subject turned to terrorism. Senator Arlen Specter even showed the picture in his campaign for re-election. It was even shown on the Discovery Channel after the 9/11 tragedy.

We had a chapter of "The Compassionate Friends" in Wilmington, Delaware. I didn't think I needed to go to "The Compassionate Friends," or so I thought. I went to my first meeting of TCF to see what it was all about. It was held in the chapter leader's home. I met a woman who seemed serene; her daughter was killed many years before in an auto crash and her son was the driver. He survived! I realized that this was a very difficult situation, but I could tell by her manner that she was "at peace" with the situation. Then it was my turn to tell my story. I was upset that my friends, who came to John's funeral, were not in touch eight months later. A man there counseled me to forgive my friends because they had no idea what I was going through, and he hoped they never would. Then this man told his story. His daughter had been abducted, raped, and murdered by a serial killer. Here was a man who could hate for the rest of his life and he was telling me to forgive. It was a powerful message that I remember to this day.

Compassionate Friends helped me recover from the loss of my son. They gave to me, and now I am giving back. I am the Chapter Leader of Wilmington and on the National Board of Directors.

The Compassionate Friends was founded in England when a young hospital chaplain, Simon Stephens, introduced two sets of parents who were both grieving the death of a child. He realized that they were more support for each other than he could ever provide. In 1971 there was an article in *Time* magazine about this group in England that was then called "The Society of the Compassionate Friends." A bereaved couple in Florida wrote and asked Simon to come to this country and help them form a chapter. From that humble beginning, we now have approximately 600 chapters nationwide. We are an all volunteer organization with

an Executive Director and four paid staff in Oakbrook, Illinois. Our mission is “to assist families toward the positive resolution of grief following the death of a child of any age and to provide information to help others be supportive.”

What do we do at meetings? In Delaware we have two meetings a month. The first meeting provides support. You can talk about anything at a Compassionate Friends meeting. As an example, what to do with your child’s possessions, what to say to “insensitive friends,” etc. Usually, in our second meeting of the month we try to provide information on the grieving process. In February we had a visit from an emergency room doctor and nurse; their topic is “When a Child Dies in the ER” and they will answer any questions following their speech. In March we have scheduled a child psychologist whose topic is “Caring for the surviving children after the death of a brother or sister.”

We also have regional conferences. We’re having one in Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, in May. It provides workshops and noted speakers on grief, because grief is a “process” and you need information. Once a year we have a national conference. In 2001 it was in Arlington, Virginia, and we had 1500 attend, and I was the chairwoman. If anyone ever told me 16 years ago that I would be chairing a national conference, I would have told them that they were crazy. But it’s amazing what you can do in the name of your deceased child.

Bereaved parents are very powerful people. They can take that enormous love for their child and reinvest their energy to make this a better world in memory of their son or daughter. You all know about Candy Lightner who formed “Mothers Against Drunk Drivers”; but did you know that the legislation prohibiting children from riding in the front seat of a car was begun by a bereaved dad whose young daughter was in the front passenger seat with her seat belt fastened, when a minor accident at a stop sign caused the airbag to open, and it killed her. In New York State, you can no longer use a hand-held cell phone. Why? Because of a bereaved mom whose child was killed by an inattentive driver using a hand-held cell phone. In Delaware, a couple changed the laws when their 16-year-old daughter died from inexperienced driving; we now have a graduated form of license.

I would like to close with a poem from Iris Bolton. Iris was a counselor when her son, Mitch, died by suicide. In her book, *My Son, My Son* (Bolton, 1983) is this poem:

I don’t know why.
 I’ll never know why.
 I don’t have to know why.
 I don’t like it.
 I don’t have to like it.
 What I do have to do is make a choice about my living.
 What I do want to do is accept it and go on living.
 The choice is mine.
 I can go on living, valuing every moment in a way I never did before,
 or I can be destroyed by it and, in turn, destroy others.

I thought I was immortal.
That my family and my children were also.
That tragedy happened only to others.
But I know now that life is tenuous and valuable.
So I am choosing to go on living,
making the most of the time I have,
valuing my family and friends in a way never possible before.
(Reprinted with permission of © Bolton Press, 1983.)

REFERENCES

Bolton, I. (1983). *My son, my son*. Atlanta, GA: Bolton Press.

Direct reprint requests to:

Ceil Buonocore
Wilmington, DE
c/o fax E. Madara 973-989-1159

KATHRYN C. TESDESCHI **Victims of Pan Am 103, Belle Mead, New Jersey**

My name is Kathy Tedeschi. I have walked in the shoes of all the widows out there who have lost their husbands in a terrorist attack. My first husband, Bill Daniels, was killed on Pan Am 103, the plane that was bombed out of the sky over Lockerbie, Scotland. This event happened on December 21, 1988. Terrorists placed a bomb in a cassette recorder in a suitcase and got the suitcase on board the plane unaccompanied.

At that time, Bill was coming home from a business trip and I was a stay-at-home mom with three small children, 10, 7, and 2. I was Girl Scout leader, a homeroom mother, and mommy to my children. I lived in a suburban community near Princeton, New Jersey. As I said, I have been in your shoes, and I can tell you what worked for me and what didn't. I can give a sort of timeline—but mostly I can tell you that things didn't get better in the blink of an eye, but they did get better eventually.

My first concern was for my kids. I depended on family, friends, and church to help me. My parents stayed with me for about six weeks, but eventually they had to go back to their home in South Carolina. Then I depended on friends and my church. I had people bringing me food twice a week for six months. I got free haircuts for six months. I got free babysitting at a small day care-like facility for six months.

As far as financial things go, I was "fortunate" in that I did already know how to write checks. A close family friend who was a CPA came over and helped me many nights. He helped me to get a budget set up. My husband's company,

American Cyanamid, helped me to get in touch with an investment company in New York. They worked with me to set up a financial plan. I learned how to invest life insurance and plan for college for my children.

One big problem that I had looming over me at the time was health insurance. Erin, my oldest, had fallen and broken her two front teeth right before her dad was killed, but she also needed braces, and all this had to be fixed and started before I lost the dental insurance at six months. Also, I used COBRA for my health insurance, but that lasted three years. At that time, I tried to get health insurance on my own, but found that I couldn't because we had gone to counseling and it was on our insurance record, so no one else wanted us until we were "two years treatment-free!" I did what I could—I cried on the phone to Cyanamid and they agreed to let me back on their plan for another two years, until we were "treatment-free."

About a month after the plane crash, Cardinal O'Connor invited all the family members to a special mass at St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York. My mother and my children and I went. Afterward at the reception I met other family members. I kept in touch with them for the next few weeks and a month later, we met again and formed the Victims of Pan Am Flight 103. This was before the days of e-mail, but we talked long hours through the nights and kept in touch with each other by phone. My phone bills sky-rocketed!

The media was there at that initial meeting when we formed our group, and they were constantly there, whenever we met. No one was around to "protect us from the media." But later, I began to see how at many times, they were our friends. They helped us to keep the word out there. They kept the attention of the public on airline security as much as possible. That was a big thing to me—I didn't want Bill's death to be in vain. That was what kept me going—in addition to my kids—was working as hard as I could to make sure that the U.S. government kept focused on airline security. The other people in the Pan Am group became as close to me as my family—my parents and my siblings—that was why I didn't move to Oklahoma to be near my brother's family.

In 1988, we know almost immediately that this was an act of terrorism. We certainly knew that it was by the end of the Christmas season. The Scottish police had recovered big enough pieces of the fuselage to see the evidence of bomb damage. I also hired an attorney to help me in my quest to get to the bottom of this. It was very important to me to have the answers to why Bill had died.

After Bill died, I had to learn how to do things that I had never worried about doing before. Bill had been an amateur carpenter and he always did our lawn himself. When he died, I hired a mowing service. But I did try the first year to fertilize the lawn myself; however, when we had stripes across the lawn, I decided to go ahead and hire a lawn care company to do it from then on! I did try to do the pruning and the planting myself. We were in a brand new house, and had only lived there a year. We did not have screens on the windows yet, and I decided that I could do this. He had plenty of power tools, but I didn't know how to use them. I

brought his power drill/screwdriver to a Little League game and walked around with it, until I found a man who wasn't coaching and who could tell me how to use it. Then I was able to put up the screens.

Another story that happened to me was that right after he had died, my sister-in-law invited us to drive to Oklahoma to visit them that next summer. At first I told her that I didn't know how I could do this—I had never pumped gas before (New Jersey doesn't allow car owners to pump their own gas), and I had never registered in a motel before. She said, "Kathy, you are a college graduate—you can do this!" And I did!

All these little successes built up on each other, and eventually I was able to do more and more things and felt more and more confident.

My children are older now. We are all happy, functioning, and productive people. My daughter Erin was 10, but now she is 24. She graduated from college with honors and is employed on the West Coast. My son Brice was 7, but now he is 21. He is a junior at an Ivy League college. He is doing well. He was an Eagle Scout, and is in the Air Force ROTC, planning to graduate in a year and a half as a 2nd lieutenant in the Air Force. I am very proud of him, but I am also scared for him. My daughter Melanie was 2, but now she is 15 and a sophomore in high school. She is a beautiful person, both inside and out—with a sunny personality and a lot of compassion for other people. I remarried six years ago. My new husband Russ is a great guy. He is a great step-dad to my children, and a great support to me. He has two children, also, and the kids all get along—they mesh well, like a "Brady Bunch"!

We still have our ups and downs. My own personal "ground zero" times were during the trial of the two Libyans accused of the bombing, seeing the reconstructed plane, and on Sept. 11. After Sept. 11, I wrote a letter to our local paper. That mushroomed into me and a friendly psychologist to start a Sept. 11 support group. I looked up names on the state police Web site to find out who were victims of this massacre. I called every name I could find a number for, and our group started from that—our first meeting was October 10, and we have been meeting weekly since that day. This is perhaps the most rewarding thing I have ever done.

My timing may be different from yours, but that is okay. I wore my wedding ring for 15 months, but finally at that time, I decided that I had had enough—I was not married any longer and I wanted more in my life. I started dating sometime after taking off my ring. One thing that happened to me was that on my first night going to a singles mixer/discussion group, I met some other women who told me that a bunch of people all went to a restaurant with a band after these meetings. I went along too. I had a glass of wine and danced and had a nice time. Then I left, and didn't realize till I got home that I had left without paying for my wine! I had never had to be responsible for paying my own way before!

Bill and I had met in college when I was 18 and he was 20. We dated all through the rest of our college days and got married 11 days after I had graduated.

We were married 17 years. We had a good marriage and I knew when I took off my ring that I wanted that again. I found it in Russ.

The children and I will always have a hole in our hearts. We will never forget, but we will survive. We are surviving.

In closing, I would just like to say that you may LOVE again. I am sure that you will LAUGH again. I feel that most definitely though, you will LIVE again. Thank you.

Direct reprint requests to:

Kathryn C. Tesdeschi
Belle Mead, NJ
c/o fax E. Madara: 973-989-1159

DIANE LEONARD
Oklahoma City Family Support Groups
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

On September 11th you became members of a terrible club. I have prayed there would be no new members. As you now know, members of this club experience anguish that you wouldn't wish on your worst enemy. I am so very sorry for your loss and for your pain.

On September 11th, you began a journey that is difficult beyond description. You are not only dealing with grief, but you are also dealing with trauma. Many who experience trauma also suffer symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress. Some of the symptoms of PTSD are flashbacks, feeling numb, can't sleep, can't eat, can't concentrate or remember, and thoughts of the traumatic event consume your thoughts.

The symptoms of PTSD are very difficult to endure. One of the symptoms that was so hard for me was the difficulty I had remembering. I have learned why that occurs and thought it might be helpful to you to have this information. When you experience a trauma, your body goes through some changes that you cannot control. Information is processed differently. New information totally bypasses short-term memory.

I experienced PTSD when my mother committed suicide a few years before the Oklahoma Bombing and then again when my husband was murdered in the bombing. When my mother died, I really had nobody to talk to who I felt could understand. The effects of PTSD sometimes made me think I was going crazy. After the bombing, there were so many of us experiencing the same event that there were many to reach out to. I learned very early on the value of reaching out to these other family members.

The day our bombing occurred, the spouses of those missing from my husband's office were calling each other and asking each other about whether or

not they had new information. After the funerals, we began meeting weekly just to chat. We talked about the thoughts and emotions we were experiencing and the difficulties we were having. We found it very validating and reassuring to hear from others that they were experiencing some of the same thoughts and emotions. It helped settle some of our fears.

Also, shortly after the bombing, the funeral home that handled my husband's arrangements offered a support group for those of us who lost someone in the bombing. There were four widows who had used this funeral home who came together as a group. We were a group for two years and gained great support from each other. Two of us still get together for lunch frequently.

About three weeks after the bombing, I got involved with another group of about 20 people. We had attended a meeting with our State Assembly General concerning legislation on Death Penalty reform. This group worked together for a year to get the reform passed. But when the reform was signed into law by President Clinton, that did not end our need to get together to talk and later to work on several other projects. It has been over six years now and our group is still getting together because we care about each other—we are a family.

When the memorial process began, which was very soon after the bombing, I attended some of the meetings. However, there was so much anger in that group that I found I simply couldn't be there.

I was also very involved in the trials of McVeigh and Nichols. I attended virtually all of the proceedings in both trials. As we attended the trials, another support group formed. At lunch and during breaks we would discuss not only the proceedings, but also how the testimony was affecting us. I can't begin to tell you how beneficial that support for each other was.

After the trials, I worked with the Chaplain of the Oklahoma City Police Department to get a federal grant to conduct critical incident workshops for rescue workers, survivors, and family members. These workshops were intensive—from Tuesday at noon to Friday at noon. These groups have had incredible affects on those who attend. One comment was “you saved my career, my marriage, my life.”

As you can see, I have been involved with many groups of people affected by the bombing. I have found that discussing the event with others who you know understand your experience first-hand is beneficial beyond description. We have a bond with each other that defies description. I now feel that bond with each of you. That is why I have been to New York twice to work with families at the Pier 94 Family Center and that is why I am here today. We are all members of this horrendous club. It is not a club in which you welcome new members. It is one where we reach out to our new members and say we understand your pain, we want to reach out to help, and we want to offer you hope.

With that in mind, I would like to share some lines from a song. (Note that here Ms. Leonard quoted the lyrics of the refrain from the Mariah Carey song, “Hero.”) You are all heroes—you CAN carry on.

One other thing I would like to share is a verse that has been inspirational to me. I hope you find it helpful in some small way: “We cannot tell what may happen to us in the strange medley of life. But we can decide what happens in us . . . how we can take it, what we can do with it . . . and that is what really counts in the end.”

Everyone handles grief and trauma differently and there is no set length of time for this process. In order to work through this, I have had to make some positive things come from it (that is the only way I could stand it) and carry on my husband’s legacy. I have been able to accomplish these things with the help of God and many others. Mental Health professionals in Oklahoma City found that those who made quicker progress had one or all of the following: early counseling, a strong faith, and/or good support from family and friends.

I cannot emphasize enough the importance of becoming part of a group and accessing the support and validation that comes from those groups. If you try one and it is not comfortable, try another. Find a group that feels comfortable for you. It will be one of the wisest things you could do for yourself. You can make this journey alone—I did when my mother died. But after being part of so many groups where we gave each other so much support after the bombing, I promise you there was an enormous difference in my ability to cope. This journey will be easier with the support of others.

I wanted to feel better NOW—as I am sure you do. I was willing to try anything to feel better. Accessing the support of others was one of my most successful things I tried.

We are a society of quick fixes. It WILL get better, but it is not something that will happen over night. It is a roller coaster journey, sometimes two steps forward and one step back. But with time, the dips get more shallow and easier to handle.

I represent many in Oklahoma who are reaching out to you. To remind you of that, I have “Oklahoma” pins for each of you. Also, I am chairman of a committee that is working on having video conferences between the families here and the families in Oklahoma City. The first conference is scheduled for January 31st, with sites for you in Manhattan and New Jersey.

I am honored to have had this opportunity to be with you and I continue to pray for you. I know how hard peace is to find for you now, so I wish you moments of peace during the upcoming days, weeks, and months.

And I am so very sorry you had to become part of our family.

Direct reprint requests to:

Diane Leonard
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma
c/o fax E. Madara: 973-989-1159

HEIDI SNOW
AirCRAFT Casualty Emotional Support Services (ACCESS)
New York, New York

We are in this together. As the events of September 11th have touched us all, we either know people personally who were killed or know people who knew people who were. ACCESS has been assisting people affected by the September 11th tragedy who lost people both on the ground and aboard the hijacked aircraft, as well as American Flight 587, and I want to share with you what ACCESS does in the event that our organization may be of help to you or people whom you may know.

I also want to share with you what I learned and experienced following the sudden loss of my fiancé aboard TWA Flight 800, which led me to found AirCRAFT Casualty Emotional Support Services in 1996. In May 1996, my fiancé and I watched in horror as the ValuJet crash unfolded. A few months later, on July 17, 1996, with the TWA Flight 800 crash, I myself descended into the ruins of tragedy, and it was far more devastating to experience than anything I could have ever imagined.

My first thought was that no one should ever have to go through this loss the way I experienced those first months—feeling so isolated from understanding. I took what I had learned and my desire to help others, and I founded ACCESS, which is a non-profit peer grief support network available 24 hours a day for families and friends of air disaster victims throughout their grieving process. We simply connect our volunteer grief mentors, who have themselves been affected by an air disaster in years past, to individuals who have been affected by more recent air disaster tragedies. We match mothers to mothers, orphans to orphans, spouses to spouses, and survivors to survivors.

This is my story and a description of my loss and who Michel was to me. Michel and I met by the beach at Martha's Vineyard during the summer in 1994. I lived in Boston, and as a new college graduate, was pursuing a career in finance. Michel was a Harvard senior at the time and later became a professional hockey player in Europe. On July 17th, 1996, Michel boarded TWA 800. I was to join him in Germany after taking an exam in finance. He called just before he boarded the plane. In those few minutes we put the final details into our plans. The wedding next summer would be on an island off the southern Atlantic coast. There would be a few close friends and family, and he named his best man. At the final boarding announcement, we exchanged our final "I love you's" and he said that he would call when he arrived in Paris.

About an hour later at around 8 P.M., my mother called. She said, "Please tell me that Michel wasn't going to Paris tonight." I turned on the TV to the TWA Flight 800 debris which was burning in the dark Atlantic Ocean. My mind began racing with thoughts—"This could not possibly be his flight." He was young and he was just talking to me less than an hour ago. Then for a few

moments, the press announced that they were looking for survivors. Michel was strong; he would of course survive. They showed life rafts and he certainly was on one of them, and wait maybe somehow he did not get on the plane. He was still going to call me when he got to Paris—he could not be gone. I called Michel's family who live in France to let them know there was a possibility that Michel was aboard the plane, but in my heart I already knew the unspeakable truth. Making that call was one of the hardest things I have ever done. By 2 A.M., it was confirmed that he was on board. My closest girlfriend came to my house and held me through the night. I was just in shock from that time forth. Hours before, I had held him and exchanged warm and tearful good-byes. We had expected a separation of just days. Suddenly the separation was forever.

When I would fall into a dream, he was always alive. He was always there with me as before. In my dreams over and over I would rescue him at the last minute by convincing him to stay off the plane and come back to me. Whenever anyone asked me if I would talk about Michel, I would say, "Of course." How else could he live on? I talked to anyone who would listen and he would be alive for those moments. Even the press became an outlet to talk about him and keep him alive. Larry King asked, "How are you dealing with it, Heidi?" There were no words for what lay within me, but I said something. The right answer was that I was not yet dealing with it all and would not deal with it for a very long time. What I was really doing was pleading for him to be alive, and if I talked about him somehow he was alive. These conversations helped for that moment to drown out the sorrow.

He had given me flowers before he left, and in time they had begun to fade—but I kept them in water until his body was rescued from the ocean weeks later. I would do anything to preserve his memory and keep him alive! I went to the memorial service on the beach. The grief site at the Ramada Inn emptied over the next week. At that point, we were told to locate our own support by ourselves. Not knowing what to do, but still trying to keep him alive, I looked for him in the places that we had frequented together: on the streets of New York, in Central Park, Harvard Yard, Martha's Vineyard, and everywhere. At that point his body had still not been recovered and somewhere in my heart I held hope that he had survived, yet rationally I knew it was impossible. For weeks, as one part of me knew the truth, the other part couldn't imagine forever without him. I had visions of him coming to the door with seaweed all over him from the ocean explaining that he had been unconscious and washed onto the beach. Followed by a huge series of "what ifs": if only he hadn't left on that flight, if only I had told him he needed to stay an extra day—so, like thousands of loved ones of the 230 people who perished on that Paris-bound flight, my life was changed forever.

As the initial shock subsided during the first weeks and months, the agony truly intensified as the fact that he was really gone and not coming back hit home. He was front and center in all my future plans. I felt totally alone now. He was the person I would have turned to for comfort during a time like this and

he was not there. A month later his body was recovered, and then the painful fact that he was really not coming back set in.

No one else seemed to understand that the process of grieving not only didn't go away after the funeral, but that it intensified as the reality of the loss set in and put its footprint on every aspect of my life. Like many others, I had friends and colleagues who expected a gradual and smooth day-to-day improvement toward recovery. Long after my friends and colleagues thought I should be "over it," I was not. There was no one with true perspective about what I was going through. Months later, the mayor helped me locate a meeting of friends and families of victims from the Pan Am 103 bombing over Lockerbie, Scotland, eight years earlier in December of 1988. They had continued to support one another through the years. For the first time in months, I didn't have to apologize for my tears. They still shed tears. Most important, they listened to my sorrow and didn't judge me. They realized that for the most part, grieving people aren't listening, they are asking to be listened to. They offered assurance through their survival and that it was okay to still cry. I began to understand that the journey would be hard and long but it could be made and that they were there to help me.

Through that group, I met a woman who also lost her fiancé and we began to talk on the phone regularly, and I knew that she got it. She would not judge me or tell me to get over it when I cried, she just listened. During her years of grieving and healing she had acquired an understanding, which she generously shared. I learned that communication with such kindred spirits helped first to justify the pain and second to begin to deal with the pain. A unique bond and genuine trust is established between someone who has traveled a similar journey years earlier, and one just beginning. Seeing that someone else survived through the years can be healing and reassuring. Most important of all, I realized that the help they gave me could be extended to others, and so the idea for the ACCESS support network was born.

These and others who had survived their losses met the concept of ACCESS with an enthusiastic response. There were over 50 volunteers from this one Pan Am 103 group that day who offered to help others traveling a similar journey. I was told that telling their own stories and hearing our stories, helped these Pan Am survivors realize how far they had come and the great capacity that they had to help others. I found help after months of feeling isolated and misunderstood, and I wanted to be sure that others in that same situation had easy access to the support that it took me too long to find and the support that others may have never found.

Since losing my fiancé on Flight 800 I have worked to fulfill my vow that no one would ever have to go through the loneliness and sense of abandonment that I experienced after leaving the emergency grief site in New York. Until ACCESS was founded, loved ones of air disaster related tragedies did not have ready access to mentors who had survived similar losses.

Our first response was to Swissair Flight 111 on September 2, 1998. We partnered with the American Red Cross, who kindly helped us distribute our

resources and grief literature. To date ACCESS has helped both survivors and those who have lost loved ones in numerous air disasters dating as far back as 1958. This includes: American Airlines 1420 (6/1/99), Egypt Air 990 (10/31/99), Alaska Airlines 261 (1/31/00), Air France Concorde Flight 4590 (6/25/00), Gulf Air Bus A320 (8/23/00), Singapore Airlines 006 (10/31/00), the events of September 11, 2001, American Flight 587 (11/12/01), as well as other private, commercial, and military air crashes.

ACCESS has over 150 volunteers who have been affected by air disasters who speak with others from more recent crashes. Since this recent tragedy, our volunteer base has almost doubled as many who have lost loved ones in past air disasters have reached out to help. ACCESS has an interactive Web site, www.accesshelp.org, where people can explore volunteer opportunities, request help, locate useful resources in their area, and make donations. We also provide 24-hour toll-free phone access to all our services. In addition, we distribute a periodic newsletter which is a compilation of people sharing their personal stories, photos, memorials, and experiences.

I thank you for this opportunity to share my own story and to tell you about the work of the people involved in ACCESS.

Direct reprint requests to:

Heidi Snow
Executive Director
ACCESS, Suite 335
1202 Lexington Ave.
New York, NY 10028

ELIZABETH HALE FILA
Garden State Survivors – N.J. Concerns Of Police Survivors

I am a survivor. On July 11, 1997, my little brother, Detective Paul Hale, was murdered in the line of duty after seven years with the Raleigh Police Department. He was 35 years old. Left behind to pick up and sort through the pieces were a wife, two girls under 10 years of age, parents, siblings, in-laws, relatives, and many many co-workers and friends.

Not only was I a “survivor” now, but I was a sibling who had lost my brother who had been there to help carry out family decisions. I was also the primary support for my parents. I returned home to New Jersey completely bereft of support. I had no one to turn to and nowhere to reach out. I felt completely isolated and began to move into a depression. I had another brother who was in the throes of a bad marriage and drinking heavily, parents who were inconsolable, and a sister-in-law who couldn’t accept any caring or pain from the family as she waded through her own. My friends and support, people who understood and

were grieving themselves, were in Raleigh. My husband had never had a family member die that he had loved well enough to grieve for, and he, like me, had limited understanding of my grief and his own.

My depression worsened the second year, as we went through two trials—first a mistrial, and then the second and final sentencing trial. I was there in Raleigh as often as I could, to support my sister-in-law and my parents, and to grieve. There I was comforted.

I first became involved with a peer-support group when I attended a National COPS (Concerns Of Police Survivors) activities and Police Week. The ceremonies and seminars provided a place to feel safe and in a cocoon, a place where my feelings were recognized and acknowledged and where I was supported. I had an identity. The peer support and the trained facilitators helped me to understand my feelings as a survivor, as a sibling, and as the primary support for my parents. Being out of state for so long, and feeling as if my life was in North Carolina, National COPS gave me the “rest stop” on the way back home. I have attended their Police Week every year after my little brother was killed, and each session has provided me with seminars that address issues important to me and my family at each stage of my healing.

The GSSNJCOPS (Garden State Survivors New Jersey Concerns Of Police Survivors) chapter gives me a local “home,” where those same feelings and that identity as a survivor, a sibling, and the primary supporter of my parents are recognized. Even an out-of-state incident is valued. GSS is one of the areas where I can channel some of my emotion into action to reach out and be there for others.

When there is a line of duty death in our state, GSS immediately reaches out to the fallen officer’s family to let them know there is peer support available for them when they are ready. GSS helps them through the funeral, as well as answers any questions they may have about benefits. Many local departments have never had a line of duty death before, and we help the officer’s department with information and procedures. GSS is also active in legal and legislative issues that affect line of duty survivors.

I was not aware of these services at the time our families needed them. I believe that stemmed from the fact that we lived in a total of four different states, and at the time, neither my parents nor I lived in the same state as my brother. We also could not reach far out of our abyss.

One of the aftereffects of the murder of my brother was the “cascade” of losses that followed. I found that initially, my grief was too deep to recognize this, but soon afterwards, the loss of my brother impacted the relationship with my sister-in-law, my connection with my nieces, and with my parents, and distanced me from my friends, and on and on and on. The grief was relived and actually compounded by the cascading effect of the murder. Holidays were changed; family traditions, vacations, and even telephone contact were altered.

What brought me out of my depression? Attending National COPS and redoing my house. The summer of the murder trials, I began a frenzied renovation of our

home which, at the speed I undertook it, convinced my husband I had “lost it.” The process gave me a positive focus and “took me out of” my grief for moments. Looking for paint colors and carpet allowed me to set down my pain, and brought my attention back to my home, my family, my town. National Police Week ceremonies validated my new identity and redoing my home brought me back.

Garden State Survivors, Inc. (GSSNJCOPS) is a New Jersey chapter of the national organization Concerns of Police Survivors, Inc. (COPS). Our main goal is to provide resources to assist in the rebuilding of the lives of surviving families and co-workers of law enforcement officers killed in the line of duty. COPS ministers to survivors’ needs by extending a helping hand to stabilize their emotional, financial, and legal well-being. Others suffering the same loss can be of service to new survivors during their periods of helplessness. COPS provide training law enforcement agencies on survivor victimization issues and educates the public of the need to support the law enforcement profession and its survivors.

The term “survivor” refers to the family, significant others, and co-workers that are left behind when a police officer is killed in the line of duty. These are the members of COPS.

Our GSS chapter deals with all law enforcement agencies in the state of New Jersey, except for the NJ State Police, which is the responsibility of another COPS chapter, the NJ State Police Survivors of the Triangle. Our chapter co-founders Madeline Neumann and Stacy Cullinane both realized the importance of peer support. There was no local chapter of COPS that offered regular meetings. Their experience with National COPS was so positive that in 1997 they decided to start a new chapter in New Jersey to offer the peer support so desperately needed for future survivors.

A peer support group does not need any money to get started. The biggest expense a group will incur will be postage, which can be donated. The postage for our state newsletter comes to \$350 each quarter, which is donated by a local businessman.

National COPS was founded in 1984. COPS was formed at a national grief seminar hosted by the Fraternal Order of Police following the national memorial service. This seminar was attended by 110 survivors. Currently, about 800 survivors attend the national grief seminars hosted by COPS, which cover a variety of topics over two full days.

Most survivors’ first experience with National COPS is at National Police Week, celebrated during May. It is a time when fallen officers are honored and remembered throughout our country. National COPS hosts bereavement seminars during National Police Week. The National Peace Officers’ Memorial Service is also held in Washington, DC, and is hosted by the Grand Lodge Fraternal Order of Police. The Candlelight Vigil, which is hosted by the NLEOMG, is also a major Police Week Event. GSSNJCOPS contributes funds to cover the expenses for new surviving families so that they may attend the seminars and services that are held in Washington, DC.

Funding from outside sources enables GSSNJCOPS to offer survivors professional help through meetings, training of those survivors who are ready to actively support new survivors, and training to police departments on how to handle a line-of-duty death. Unfortunately, many departments have no protocol on what to do when the tragedy of an officers' death strikes. In these instances, it is harder for the agency to help the surviving families and the affected co-workers get through what could be the most difficult crisis of their lives.

GSSNJCOPS also funds survivors' travel expenses to the retreat weekends which national COPS offers throughout the year for the survivors of law enforcement officers who have died in the line-of-duty.

Time has helped us all heal and move through and with the pain. My home looks lovely and I have set down stronger roots in my community. Nearly five years after my brother's murder I am involved as a Trustee for GSSNJCOPS. My parents started a local 200 Club, the first in the state of North Carolina, and are very active in supporting its growth. They attend Police Week each year with my family. My sister-in-law remarried and we are probably closer than ever. My nieces are doing wonderfully in their lives and holidays have their own special traditions, new and old. I give tremendous credit to the healing value of the peer support I received and which I now can return.

Direct reprint requests to:

Betsy Hale Fila
Chester, New Jersey
c/o fax E. Madara: 973-989-1159

JUDITH YOUNG
The Beirut Connection, Moorestown, New Jersey

On behalf of the Beirut Connection families I want to extend our deepest sympathy to everyone affected by the recent terrorist events. Time began for *us* on October 23, 1983, when the largest ever non-nuclear blast was detonated by a terrorist who drove his truck into the marine barracks in Beirut, Lebanon. He looked at his victims and smiled before the blast brought down the building killing 241 servicemen and injuring hundreds more. Years later, two more men died as results of their injuries. Whenever we see or hear the number "10-23" our hearts skip a beat and we are thrown back to that day—as if it were yesterday, not eighteen years ago. One of the servicemen who survived Beirut was lost on 9-11, doing his job as a New York fireman. His name was John Chipura. The families and veterans of Beirut once again experienced all the emotion, heartbreak, agony, waiting, shock, and disbelief when 9-11 occurred. We know the pain, frustration, anger, and sorrow you are experiencing.

The Beirut Connection came about when a small group of Philadelphia, New Jersey, and Connecticut families in January of 1984 met to share photos, letters, and stories. We all wanted to know what our sons' lives had been like for the previous months while in Beirut. We were especially searching for photographs since their belongings had been destroyed in the blast. We had last seen our son, Jeffrey, on May 1, 1983 when he returned to Camp Lejeune after a weekend leave to board the ship for Lebanon. May 1 is another special day for us to remember. At that meeting we met Joan and Bob Muffler from Pennsylvania, who have become some of our closest friends. Later we decided that we wanted to reach out to more families who were experiencing the same loss. Joan had a friend who had a connection to Dear Abby. A letter was drafted and it ran in her column all over the country. We asked families to contact us at our address in Moorestown. We began getting mail from all over the country and the original group began meeting every couple months. Joan and I then decided to start a newsletter, printing the letters we had received from other families and we called it the Beirut Connection. Our Beirut family grew as we met other families, when we attended a tree planting ceremony in Jacksonville, North Carolina, where 241 pear trees were planted.

We spent three years researching addresses, when finally on the third anniversary ceremony when the Beirut Memorial Park was dedicated in Jacksonville, North Carolina, the park committee gave us the list of all the families. Soon, we were able to send a newsletter to everyone. Newsletters were mailed to over 450 people three times a year and it was quite large. We included letters from families, poems written by family and friends, hometown memorial dedications, scholarships, state memorials (the states of Arkansas, New York, Massachusetts, West Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, Florida, and Ohio all have memorials dedicated to their native sons). We had paperweights and patches made for families to buy, helping us with the mailing costs. It took a lot of work gathering information, typing, cutting, and pasting to get as much as we could into one legal size six page newsletter, but the families looked forward to getting it.

Joan and I knew from the beginning that we would not hear or meet many families because everyone deals with grief in their own way and some do not want to be reminded of their tragedy. But we have met many lovely families during the past 18 years. One of our parents in Alabama, at their own cost, printed the poems in a booklet which we want to reprint for our 20th anniversary. One of our goals was to be there for the veterans when they were ready to remember and needed to eventually network with each other. The Beirut Veterans Association was formed and got off to a rocky start, but it's now up and running. We then combined the Beirut Connection with the BVA who would be doing the newsletter, calling it *The Root*. Root was the nickname for Beirut. The BVA's motto is "Our First Duty is to Remember." The Beirut Connection now has a column in their newsletter for the families. Our Beirut Memorial Park at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, is set in the woods. Its brick paths are outlined by azaleas. The names are inscribed on one wall, connected to another wall, with the inscription

“They Came in Peace.” Between the walls is a jagged section representing the blast. There stands a life-size Marine overlooking the list of names. He is called the guardian of freedom and has been reproduced by the Marine Corps Scholarship Foundation. It is hard to describe the feeling a family member gets when they visit the park. It is quiet, tranquil, beautiful, and very comforting because you know a lot of love, dedication, and hard work went into this park, which had to be dedicated in stages because of lack of money to complete it. I think the inscription on our son’s park in Moorestown, spoken in the eulogy by our minister, sums it up pretty well. “They did not make war. They were simple victims of war in the honorable attempt to keep the peace. The gift of these men was of the ultimate quality and we know that it cannot be given again.” These words are also used as the introduction of the Beirut Web site.

Sixteen years ago the idea of a commemorative stamp was embraced by our families for the 10th anniversary. Ten years is a requirement by the postal committee. The families contacted their government representatives for support. A stamp, showing a flying dove holding rippled red streamers with blue and gold stars, was drawn. It said, “Remember the Peacekeepers: Beirut 1982-1984.” Over 50,000 petitions and letters were sent to the White House and postal committee who asked me to not send anymore. The committee twice turned us down citing the reason that they do not commemorate tragedy. The stamp never mentions the bombing or loss of life, but was still refused. We are still pursuing having a stamp issued especially since the government of Grenada did issue the stamp on our 15th anniversary. Beirut has always been a political nightmare and although swift action was promised by the president at that time, there has never been any attempt to bring the families any justice for the greatest loss of life in military history for a single day since Pearl Harbor. One man, Imad Mughniyah, former head of Hezbollah’s special overseas operations who is believed to be responsible for more American deaths by a terrorist prior to 9-11, has never been caught. It is now coming to light that his expertise was sought by Bin Laden. He has been called the faceless terrorist because he has not been seen publicly for years and may have changed his looks.

I personally have found my comfort in keeping our small group of families together all these years. Remembering is what has held us together. We are disappointed when our family and friends don’t remember the most important date in our life. “9-11” is not only a date all Americans will remember, but the whole world will remember.

In 1998 I received a call from the State Department that my husband and I were free to travel to Beirut, as the ban was being lifted that day. Two previous requests had been turned down. Going to Beirut was going to be something we had wanted to do for many years. We will never forget the hospitality and friendship shown us by a group of Lebanese Fighters and their families. The morning of our first day there we were taken into the mountains where they have a memorial park for their martyrs. They also find it comforting to remember. The

mountains is where the park is located, free of Syrian control. To our surprise they had erected a large monument with the inscription: "To commemorate the visit of John and Judith Young to the cedars of martyrs in Tabriyyeh-Lebanon October 1, 1998 during which they paid tribute to their son Jeffrey, birth date July 25, 1961 and his fellow Marines who bravely gave their lives October 23, 1983 for right and freedom in Lebanon." It was one of the most moving events in our lives as the group sang Lebanese hymns to us. We hugged and cried and will cherish their friendship forever. As long as we are able, we will be there for the families and veterans who have made it their first duty to remember and for those the world over who cherish freedom and peace. I hope you can find peace and comfort in each other, but you will always know the world is with you.

Note: It's fortunate that officials in London called upon Jelena and her group to play a role in response efforts there. I regret that it's unlikely that American disaster response organizations will involve self-help groups in their plans. We need to convince policy makers and disaster response agencies here of the helpful and needed role that these survivor self-help groups can and do serve.

Direct reprint requests to:

Judith Young
Moorestown, New Jersey
c/o fax E. Madara: 973-989-1159