

# THE BUFFALO NEWS

## OPINION

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### Another Voice / Flight 3407

**Heidi Snow: Peer counselors can help those who lost loved ones**

By Heidi Snow

Thirteen years ago, I lost my fiance aboard TWA Flight 800. After we exchanged our final “I love you’s” and he set off for Paris, I turned on the TV to find the Flight 800 debris burning on the dark Atlantic Ocean.

I was in shock from that time forth. Like those affected by Continental Flight 3407, I expected a brief separation and suddenly the separation was forever. When the memorial services ended and people dispersed, what was missing was a long-term bereavement organization specific for air disasters.

So I founded AirCraft Casualty Emotional Support Services, a peer-to-peer grief support network for those who lose loved ones in air disasters. All of us at ACCESS extend our heartfelt sympathy to those who lost friends and family in the 3407 crash.

As we watched this disaster unfold, we remembered our own first-hand experiences because everyone at ACCESS, including our 250 volunteer grief mentors, have lost loved ones in air disasters. We still mourn them as we witness those from Flight 3407 beginning this difficult journey.

As the initial shock subsided during the first weeks and months, the agony intensified. When everyone thought I should be “over it,” I was not. Then-New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani helped me find a meeting of the families of Pan Am 103, which had crashed eight years earlier. They offered assurance that I, too, could survive when I was not sure I could get through it.

ACCESS was born when I realized that the help they gave me could be extended to others. Since 1996, I have worked to fulfill my vow that no one should experience this loss alone.

To date, we have paired hundreds and hundreds of people who suffered losses in air disasters dating back to 1958. ACCESS provides emotional support through our free help line and Web site. Our services are available any time, but most calls come in when response teams disperse and people attempt to resume their forever-changed lives — for you in Buffalo, now.

Many individuals affected by Flight 3407 reached out to ACCESS for help. We matched mothers who just lost their children with mothers who lost their children years ago. Similarly, we matched siblings to siblings and spouses with spouses — and still the calls come in. Today, a woman who talked to one of our grief mentors commented on how important it was for her to talk with someone who proves that she can survive in the wake of Flight 3407.

Everyone who experienced the Continental 3407 disaster knows the horrors of air disasters. Like us at ACCESS, they are members of a group that no one joins willingly. Our trained grief mentors at ACCESS can reassure those suffering in the wake of Flight 3407 that they are not alone and that we are here to help them through this.

Heidi Snow is founder and executive director of AirCraft Casualty Emotional Support Services, [www.accesshelp.org](http://www.accesshelp.org).