

‘Picked by God’

by Michele Reed

Curious . . . funny . . . beautiful . . . charismatic. **Colleen Brunner ’90** and **Lynne Hartunian ’89** and their personalities are impossible to forget, even 20 years after their lives were cut tragically short.

Hartunian and Brunner were among 270 lost — 11 people on the ground and 259 passengers and crew — when the Boeing 747 Clipper Maid of the Seas went down over Lockerbie, Scotland, Dec. 21, 1988, en route from London to New York. The young women were traveling home from a SUNY Oswego study-abroad trip to England.

“They were the sweetest people of the whole trip,” said **Joanna Shelmidine ’89**, who took part in the London study-abroad program with Brunner and Hartunian. “Looking back, you knew why they were picked by God: Because they were the most prepared for heaven, both very good people.”

Both were communication majors and Brunner was a member of Alpha Sigma Chi sorority. Brunner worked in the Admissions Office and Hartunian was a teaching assistant for the late Professor Emeritus I. David Glick.

Shelmidine and Hartunian lived in the same residence hall, and were both into theatre, sharing every theatre class together from freshman year on.

Shelmidine remembered how excited Hartunian was for the trip, recalling the day the girls found out they had been accepted for the program. “I met her between Penfield Library and the Union and she was so excited to go,” Shelmidine recalled.

When the class traveled to Paris on a side trip, Shelmidine spent the entire day there with Brunner and Hartunian. She recalled the three of them sitting at an outdoor café, sipping Coca Cola, a little link with home. “They were both so enthusiastic — had so much life,” she said.

ASA sister **Janette Hausler ’89** remembered the close-knit group of girls who traveled to London together.

“Lynne and I were roommates and had planned on going on the trip since freshman year,” she said. “As we talked about it over the years, more and more people became interested in going.” Brunner and several other ASA sisters would join the group.

“We had a wonderful time while there. We studied the humanities, were exposed to many different plays — drama and musicals — [we were] exposed to different cultures.”

Kristin Usaitis ’89 was Brunner’s roommate in London and they were slated to room together after the trip. “Colleen was very consistent, always a smile on her face. She was such a good person and a good friend,” she remembered. “You could not help but feel happy when you were around Colleen.”



© JANETTE HAUSLER '89

Lynne Hartunian ’89 (left) and **Colleen Brunner ’90** were killed in the Dec. 21, 1988, terrorist bombing of Pan Am Flight 103.

‘Beautiful people’

Hausler and Usaitis both described Brunner and Hartunian as “beautiful people, inside and out.”

Family meant a lot to them. “They were the apples of their families’ eyes,” Hausler remembered. Hartunian was the youngest of three; Brunner the baby of a large family.

“They lived for their family and friends,” Hausler said. They were so devoted to their families, they were determined to fly home in time for Christmas, taking the fatal flight Dec. 21.

Hausler, Usaitis, Brunner and Hartunian traveled to Ireland and Scotland, and all over England. After the semester ended, the foursome traveled around Europe by train, backpacking through Spain, France, Switzerland, Germany and Austria.

One incident on that side trip would give Hausler and Usaitis a permanent remembrance of their friends. One day, a dime showed up in Hartunian's luggage; later it turned up in Hausler's, Usaitis' and Brunner's bags as the trip wore on. The girls laughed about it and it became a running joke.

After the crash, Hausler and Usaitis attended a memorial service for Hartunian in Niskayuna, her hometown. At the reception following, they met Hartunian's best friend, Nancy. They visited for a while, and as Nancy walked away, Hausler and Usaitis glanced down. There was a dime on the floor.

"It was a sign that Lynne and Colleen were with us," said Usaitis. "Janette is still finding dimes in weird places and they make us think of Lynne and Colleen."

A campus shaken

Word of the downed jetliner arrived just after students had left the Oswego campus for the winter break.

At first, the crash was thought to be just a tragic accident. Later investigation would reveal that the plane was brought down by a bomb, as part of an attack by Libyan terrorists.

"Terrorism is something that is so much more on our minds now," said **Marc Heller '90**, then editor-in-chief of the *Oswegonian* and now Washington bureau chief for the *Watertown Daily Times*. "It wasn't in our consciousness so much then."

Heller recalled the moment he heard the news. "I was driving home to White Plains, bringing **Karen Norris '89** home for the break, and heard it in the car," Heller said. "I had no idea there was anybody from Oswego; I heard Syracuse mentioned."

Later that evening, Heller was watching the nightly news with his parents, when he saw the image of a newspaper headline flash across the screen, including the word Oswego.

He immediately called campus and Public Affairs Director Julie Harrison Blissert confirmed the bad news.

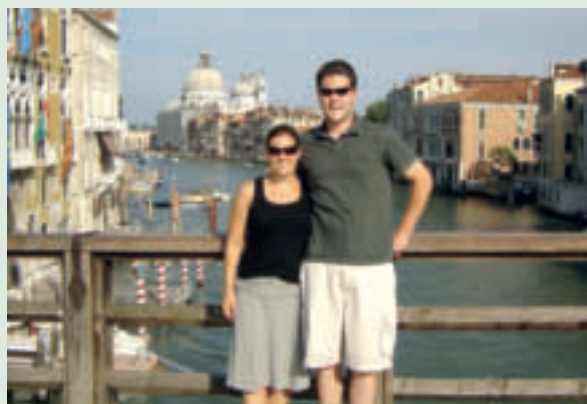
As students returned to campus in January 1989, they shared their grief. "For a couple of days, people were walking around in a state of shock," said **Bill Schreiner '92**, WTOP-TV news director and now an attorney and president of the Oswego Alumni Association Board of Directors. "It was all that anyone was talking about."

Students, faculty and family members gathered to remember the victims and console each other at a memorial service and Mass at the Newman Center Jan. 30, 1989.

"It is never easy to find one's self at peace over such a loss. Young people are not supposed to die. Yet it was clear from the emotion at the service that Lynne and Colleen had already accomplished a great deal in their lives," read the *Oswegonian* editorial of Feb. 2, 1989, written collectively by Heller and members of the editorial team. "They were both exceptionally talented, active women who touched people's lives; what more can we ask for in a lifetime?"

"In that sense the sorrow over the loss of loved ones is mixed with the celebration over what they did for us. That is how we remember them. Lynne Hartunian and Colleen Brunner will always be remembered at Oswego as symbols of what we can do," concluded the editorial.

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'Forever grateful'

By Kelly Ellis-Meehan '98

EDITOR'S NOTE: *Kelly Ellis-Meehan '98 (pictured above with her husband, Matthew Meehan '98 in Venice) received the Colleen Brunner Memorial Scholarship in 1997, making her study-abroad trip to London in that year possible. Now the Robinson Secondary School eighth-grade school counselor in Fairfax, Va., Ellis-Meehan contributed the following remembrance in gratitude for the experience the scholarship made possible.*

My trip provided me with an education that went above and beyond the classroom. My life was forever changed with the chance to study abroad and I will be forever grateful for the opportunity.

There are not enough words to describe this fantastic trip and life-changing experience. I met and lived with wonderful students and we banded together as we took advantage of all that London had to offer. We went to theaters, museums, and cathedrals; we rode the "Tube," walked the streets and had the best time of our lives.

For some of us, it was the first time we had traveled abroad and we took advantage of our location to visit other countries such as France, Belgium, Scotland and Ireland. We met other students traveling along the way, and we shared our stories during train rides through Europe.

As my last night approached, I remembered that [Colleen's mother] Mrs. Brunner had told me that Colleen had particularly enjoyed the Hard Rock Café in London and asked if I might be willing to go there and keep Colleen in mind. So my friends and I went; we toasted a brave girl I had never met; and we reminisced about our time spent together and the experiences we were lucky enough to have.

Today I am a school counselor and an avid traveler. Any time I have a vacation or a chance, I hit the road (or hop a plane) and find a new place to discover. I have also had the chance to take students on some of their first trips abroad and watch their eyes light up as they see something for the first time. It is always a touching moment to be there to see their faces and watch them have new experiences.

I couldn't have done it without the Colleen Brunner Memorial Scholarship and for that I am forever grateful to her family. I know that her memory continues on through the future trips Oswego students will embark upon.

One of my professors in London had a quote that I try to live my life by: "Be bold and courageous. In life you will regret the things you didn't do more than the ones you did." ●

WTOP honored them with a special broadcast, “A Time to Remember,” produced by Schreiner along with **Steve Messina ’91**, who was WTOP general manager and now also an attorney and OAA director along with Schreiner.

The centerpiece of the film was the Newman Center memorial service.

Schreiner recalled how the Rev. James Lang, Newman Center chaplain, was protective of the campus community. “It was very important to him that the service be primarily for the local Oswego community; no Syracuse media could be there,” Schreiner recalled. “We were not going to put our grief on display for the world.”

To that end, Lang would only allow WTOP to film the service; no other film crews were granted access. “Afterward, we got calls from all the major networks, asking for footage,” recalled Messina.

“It was a very moving service — the sort of thing that shook the whole campus to its knees for several days,” Schreiner said.

A crowd of 700 filled the tiny chapel on New Street. It was so crowded, recalled Schreiner, that many members of the campus, including part of his film crew, were forced to stand outside in the frigid January air, watching through the windows. His fellow WTOP staffers passed blank tapes through the window for his camera.

“There was a general feeling of shock and sadness,” recalled Messina. “Being there when they had the eulogy, it was an incredibly, profoundly sad moment.”

The service became the core of the half-hour show. Messina and Schreiner interviewed friends of Brunner and Hartunian and pieced the segments together with clips from local news coverage of the tragedy, along with narration by Schreiner in the station’s Hewitt Union studios.

The resulting documentary was good enough to be picked up by NCTV, a network of college TV stations, and shown throughout the Northeast.

A Laker legacy

Other tributes would follow throughout the years.

The Class of 1989 senior gift was dedicated to Hartunian and Brunner’s memory.

In 1993, Oswego marked the fifth anniversary of the tragedy by installing a memorial dedicated to the two women in the lobby of Penfield Library. Theatre Professor Emeritus **William Stark ’68** designed the display, which includes a copper-and-brass sculpture by Professor Emeritus Vincent D’Ambrosio symbolizing the earth, and a photo of Brunner and Hartunian sightseeing in Oxford.

In February 1999, the 10th anniversary of the tragedy was marked by a memorial service at the Hall Newman Center. Lang would once again preside as friends and family members of the fallen girls gathered to share their memories.

The Colleen Brunner Memorial Scholarship was established in 1989 by her family and friends to assist students with financial need to participate in the college’s Study Abroad program. Since then, 27 Brunner scholars have traveled to other countries.



The Rev. James Lang speaks at the April 1993 dedication of a memorial in Penfield Library.



The Hartunian family at the April 1993 memorial dedication.



The Rev. James Lang and the Rev. Peter Worn concelebrate a memorial Mass in 1999.

Dec. 21, 1988

Pan Am Flight 103 crashes in Lockerbie, Scotland, killing 270, including **Colleen Brunner ’90** and **Lynne Hartunian ’89**.

Dec. 29, 1988

Investigation reveals the crash was due to a bomb.

Jan. 30, 1989

Memorial service held at Oswego’s Hall Newman Center.

Nov. 15, 1991

Two Libyans are charged in Pan Am bombing.

April 1, 1992

U.N. Security Council votes sanctions against Libya.

April 13, 1993

Memorial to **Colleen Brunner ’90** and **Lynne Hartunian ’89** dedicated in Oswego’s Penfield Library.

Nov. 21, 1995

President Bill Clinton dedicates memorial cairn at Arlington National Cemetery for the victims of the bombing.

Jan. 24, 1999

10th anniversary memorial service held at Oswego’s Hall Newman Center.

April 6, 1999

Two Libyans go on trial at The Hague, Netherlands, for Pan Am bombing.

Feb. 1, 2001

Libyan Abdelbaset Ali Mohamed al-Megrahi convicted.

May 29, 2002

Libya offers to pay \$2.7 billion to victims’ families if sanctions are lifted.

Aug. 16, 2003

Libya admits responsibility for crash.

Sept. 13, 2003

U.N. lifts sanctions against Libya.

Lasting effects

As if to prove the *Oswegonian's* words right, the Pan Am 103 tragedy would go on to inspire Oswego students.

Shelmidine, a budding actress with a flair for musical comedy, would abandon the stage for the role of a stuntwoman. She was scheduled on Pan Am 103 and postponed her flight to surprise her family by arriving home on Christmas Eve.

"It completely changed my life; made me a completely different woman," she said. "I jump in front of cars now and set myself on fire, because I cheated death."

For Schreiner, covering Pan Am 103 along with a blackout earlier during the fall 1988 semester, reaffirmed his decision to attend Oswego. He wanted to be a serious journalist, with hands-on experience early in his college career. For a freshman to cover those two events, getting the facts right and yet showing sensitivity to the people involved, was challenging but valuable. "At age 18, it was sort of tough, but a great experience," he said.

Hausler thinks about what would have become of her lost classmates. "We often wonder, 'What would they be doing now?' Lynne would be living abroad or in a major city somewhere and being very successful, but with a family," she said. "Colleen would be close geographically and in heart to her family in the Hamburg area."

Hausler has traveled the world for personal and professional reasons. She says she will encourage her children, 5-year-old Maya Lynne (whose middle name honors Hartunian) and 3-year-old Gregory, to study and travel abroad.

And she is determined to keep Brunner and Hartunian's story alive, making people aware of the history surrounding the Pan Am 103 bombing. She and Usaitis traveled to Washington for the 20th anniversary in December, and they have stayed in touch with the families of the fallen girls. "We feel responsible for the oral history of this," Hausler says of herself and her fellow travelers. "We are a part of this." ●



President Deborah F. Stanley (center) is flanked by **Peter McCarthy '82** (left) and his brother John as they visit "Danny's Room" during the Campus Center dedication Oct. 10, 2007.

'Danny' Remembered

Daniel Emmet McCarthy's "kind, gentle, fun-loving, generous spirit" will be remembered by generations of Oswego students, whether they receive a scholarship in his name or use a special room in the Campus Center.

The memorials were established by **Peter McCarthy '82** to honor the older brother he lost in the Pan Am 103 tragedy.

Peter McCarthy established the Daniel McCarthy Scholarship to support current Oswego students in their efforts to study abroad.

In addition, Peter named the Student Association's Resource Area "Danny's Room," in his brother's memory.

Dan McCarthy, who was not an Oswego alumnus, was only 31 years of age when he perished Dec. 21, 1988.

"Dan did not cure cancer and could not bend steel in his bare hands; he was not Mother Theresa, nor was he a noted delegate for world peace, but he was a kind, gentle, fun-loving, generous spirit and a friendly presence has been taken from our midst," Peter said at his brother's memorial service.

At the time of his death, Dan McCarthy was a vice president in international operations for Credit Suisse First Boston, living in London. He was returning home from London for the holidays at the time of the crash. ●

Reunion Remembrance

Colleen Brunner '90 and **Lynne Hartunian '89** will be remembered at what would have been their 20th Reunion, with a special gathering at

9 a.m. Sunday, June 7 at the Pan Am 103 memorial in Penfield Library.

Immediately following will be refreshments in the library's Lake Effect Café.

All are invited to attend.

July 8, 2006

Libya withholds payment of reparations.

Dec. 21, 2008

20th anniversary remembrances at Arlington National Cemetery, Lockerbie and Oswego's Hall Newman Center.

June 7, 2009

Reunion 2009 remembrance for Pan Am 103 victims.



Midway through their semester abroad, Oct. 21, 1988, a group of Oswego students gather at the Vulcan Restaurant on Rue Thorin just off the Monge Tube Station in Paris. They are, from left, **Joanna Shelmidine '89**, **Regina Trach Gallary '89**, **Cindy Hottelmann '89**, Robin Begleiter, **Chris Eichele '89**, **Joan Pelzer '89**, **Kristin Usaitis '89**, **Lynne Hartunian '89**, **Janette Hausler '89** and **Colleen Brunner '90**.