

# **Connecticut Courant**

## **Support in Time of Pain – EgyptAir Flight 990**

By FRANCES GRANDY TAYLOR - November 19, 1999

As the mystery of EgyptAir Flight 990 continues to unfold, the work is just beginning for a small group of people who know what life is like after an airline disaster.

Ned Brooks knows what happens after the memorial services are over and TV cameras move on to new catastrophes. He lost both of his parents when TWA Flight 800 exploded over Long Island Sound in July 1996. Brooks, 49, of New Canaan, is a volunteer grief mentor for AirCraft Casualty Emotional Support Services, ACCESS, based in New York City.

He can easily recall the continuing desire for information that would help explain the tragedy.

"There's an incredible thirst for information, anything that might hold the answer, that I remember so well," Brooks said. "In our case, we are still waiting."

The relatives of Flight 990's victims may have a long wait as well. The plane crashed south of Nantucket two weeks ago, and each day has seemed to bring more questions than answers. One of the co-pilots is suspected of having deliberately plunged the plane into the ocean, while the captain vainly wrestled with the controls.

If that scenario turns out to be true, it could be even more devastating for the families, said Brooks, who is mentoring a man whose mother died on the EgyptAir flight.

"Then it would mean that it was a willful act, a malicious act, and that changes things, viscerally," Brooks said. "I think I would have had an even harder time with a willful act."

Since meeting a week or so ago, Brooks said, he and the man have been speaking by phone and by e-mail, as the stages of grief and loss begin to evolve.

"I'm not a professional counselor; my role is to keep in touch, to reach out to him . . . not to speculate on the latest news, but to be there when he wants to share stuff."

ACCESS was started three years ago by Heidi Snow, a New York resident whose fiance died on TWA Flight 800. The group has been available to anyone who has lost a loved one in an airplane crash. When Swissair Flight 111 crashed off Nova Scotia in September 1998, ACCESS was ready to help.

A person who has lost a husband or wife or parent gets a mentor who has been through much the same situation. There are about 55 volunteers nationwide. Brooks is also mentoring a woman who lost a parent on the Swissair flight.

Snow started the group after a woman whose fiance died on PanAm Flight 103 reached out to her. Flight 103 crashed in Lockerbie, Scotland, in December 1988.

After a disaster, "The crash site closes down, everyone goes home, and there is no real support," Snow said.

"I learned from her that I can survive this, and that's the whole point of ACCESS," Snow adds. "There's someone there who has been through it, who can say, 'You're going to make it,' at a time when it feels like you are not going to make it."