

Statement/Letter from Senator Frank Lautenberg

(Read by staff representative Mada Liebman)

The Dedication of Dark Elegy at Rutgers University

September 9, 1996

(The Senator was unable to attend due to a death in the family the night before this event).

In a way this gathering is a homecoming for me. Many friends from PA 103 are here. Tragedy brought us together and binds us still. Over the past 8 years, we have walked together at Lockerbie and at memorials to your loved ones. We've talked about your pain and your memories and we've wept together.

Unfortunately, the strongest bonds of friendship are often forged by sorrow. Your courage and compassion have touched me deeply. You've had an enormous impact on safety in the skies and I'll never stop fighting with you to enhance it. But, today we gather to dedicate Suse Lowenstein's masterpiece, Dark Elegy, here at Rutgers.

The first time I saw Suse's work I was stunned, not only by the emotions conveyed but by her obvious artistic genius and outstanding talent. And, I was struck by the reality of the pain and anguish this work expresses. The figures reflect a grief and a rage that is almost overwhelming. No one who sees Dark Elegy can fail to be moved by its raw emotion, by its power and passion and pain. Yet, knowing many of the family members, I see something more. I see love, the enormous love that the families have for their loved ones and the enormous love that Suse has for her son and for this project.

Dark Elegy isn't only a powerful statement about the evil of terrorism, it is a memorial to those who were taken and those who are left behind. It is a permanent link between the victims and their loved ones and as such it is a monument to their love. Undeniably, this work of art is truly extraordinary but for me the most moving part is perhaps the ordinary. Embedded in each statute (sculpture) as perhaps many of you know is a small personal memento. I know that one of the most insidious effects of terrorism is that it distorts the meaning of "ordinary" items and ordinary moments.

As a member of the President's Commission on Aviation Safety, I visited Lockerbie to investigate the bombing. There were 33 victims from New Jersey on the flight, more than from any other place.** And, there were so many young people on the plane. Among the debris, there were items that spoke of their youth and their innocence: inexpensive souvenirs, letters which would remain unfinished and funny hats-many funny hats. I'll never forget those hats. They touched me because more than any other item they seem to speak of broken dreams and dashed hopes. And I can never look at a funny hat in quite the same way again.

After the recent TWA #800 crash, Time Magazine included an interview with Susan Cohen who lost her only daughter Theo in Lockerbie. Susan is from New Jersey and we've talked regularly. Theo had wanted to be an actress and Susan noted that she could no longer walk into a theater – that she went out of her way not to pass one.

Terrorism is a growing national and international reality that affects every country. This was brought home to me at the recent memorial to the Lockerbie victims. I was at Arlington Cemetery with many of you for the dedication of a Cairn, a traditional Scottish memorial to those who perished. And, it is fitting that this monument is in Arlington because those killed on Pan Am flight 103 deserve to be remembered along with other heroes in American history. No one chooses to become a hero. It happens because someone leads a life of distinction. And unfortunately, those who died in Lockerbie achieved that distinction because they died of terrorism.

During the ceremony, one of the family members came to me and handed me a small bag. Inside were tiny stones that had come from the Cairn. She asked me to take the stones to Israel and put them on Prime Minister Rabin's grave; a gift from one terrorist victim to another. I have those stones and I will fulfill that promise.

The truth is we are in a war with terrorists. Living in a free society there is only so much we can do to protect every public building, park and gathering place. However, terrorists will target a nation where it is most vulnerable and no where are we more vulnerable than in our air security system. Terrorists have outstripped our current aviation system which was designed to deal with an entirely different range of threats from decades ago.

I am currently serving as a Senate liaison to the Gore Commission and last Thursday the Commission announced a series of recommendations. They include automated profiling of all airline passengers based on information available in computer databases. This profiling system is to be used with sophisticated bomb detection devices including the CTX 5000 and other high technology devices. The recommendations also call for vulnerability assessments at every commercial airport for the development of uniform procedure standards for airport x-ray screeners; for mandatory bag matching; and, for improved notification of victims' families.

The Pan Am 103 Commission also recommended comprehensive changes in our system but they were not fully implemented. We need to make sure that doesn't happen again and I will work very hard in the Senate to aggressively fight back against the terrorists. Improving our security in the air may be one of the best memorials to our victims of terrorism. With you, I want no more young people taken to soon. I want no more ordinary objects turned into painful memories. Thanks..(mic goes out for a few sentences)...tribute...the memory of your loved ones and hers will remain and as long as the memory remains, they will never be completely gone.

Suse, thank you for this magnificent work of art and for inviting me to share this day with you. Thank you very much.

-End-

* *Transcribed from a video tape by Pamela Ray & Associates, LLC on November 2007.*

** *There were 35 Syracuse University Students killed on Pan Am 103.*