

LOCKERBIE MEMORIAL SERVICE

Westminster Abbey

DEVORAH BAUM ATTENDED ONE OF
THE FOUR MEMORIAL SERVICES MARKING
THE 10TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE DESTRUCTION
OF PAN AM FLIGHT 103; HERE, SHE LOOKS
AT LOCKERBIE AND THE CONCEPT
OF REMEMBRANCE.

Early evening on 21st December 1998, just before Christmas and just after the Allies' spell of winter bombing on Iraq, a bleak human huddle forms outside Westminster Abbey. Overhead one or two aeroplanes are heard making their careful descents into London Heathrow Airport. Nearby, opposite the Houses of Parliament, a modest band of protesters wave banners and clamour chants to avenge the crimes of General Pinochet. The imperial gothic buildings seem obdurately oblivious to the passionate cries of those below.

Those gathered outside the Abbey are there to commemorate the lives of 270 people who were killed by terrorist bomb in and above the Scottish town of Lockerbie on December 21st 1988... on the occasion of the 10th Anniversary of the atrocity. That is what it reads on the Order of Service's front page, which each visitor finds awaiting them as they take their seats inside.

The Abbey soon fills to capacity. It, one of London's most hallowed monuments, houses a crowd unanimous in their sense of occasion, but divided in their relationship to it. They bear witness to the terrible tension which occurs whenever innocent individuals become the unwilling representatives of historical event. The majority are in Westminster this night to commemorate the memories of cherished friends or relatives, spouses or children, for whom they continue to mourn, ten years on, and whose lives and deaths are never far from their thoughts, and always in their hearts. However, also in the Abbey this night, settling down on seats further back, are those, like myself, who seem to be spying on a grief to which we can lay no direct claim. We are there because the private tragedy of those assembled before us is publicly owned. Nothing could reinforce this sense of it more strongly than the appearance of the Duke of York, closely followed by Prime Minister Tony Blair, Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott, and Foreign Secretary Robin

Cooke - the edgily earnest faces of New Labour. When the personal becomes the political then anniversaries prove to be deeply fraught occasions. I found myself wondering, who is the Memorial Service for... for those who died, for their families, or for the press?

The relatives of those who were killed at Lockerbie are not unaware of the media and political interest in their sorrow, which attends their remembrance once a year. Reverend John Mosey, when making his address in the Abbey, spoke of "the world of international politics into which we have been hurled". However, he managed to, for the main part, conduct a heartfelt service as if unaffected by that "world". Despite the choice of venue, numbered amongst those murdered at Lockerbie were Christians, Muslims, Jews, atheists - (terrorists are never very discriminating when they attack) - therefore Reverend Mosey accommodated the diversity by steering his message clear from divisive or specific religious practice, to preach the universal messages of love and hope. "It is not justice I want", he said, "I want to know who I have to forgive".

The reading of the names and the lighting of the candles, which took place half way through the Memorial Service, soaked the gilded walls of the Abbey and those inside them, with the blaze of a sea of fire. One candle, one name - 270 candles lit altogether.

'THE FAMILIES
CONTINUE TO SUFFER
THEIR LOSS, UNAIDED
BY ANSWERS TO THOSE
QUESTIONS WHICH THEY
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BEEN ASKING; NO
TRIAL HAS BEEN HELD'

PRAYER

Written by the Reverend Dr. Richard L. Phillips,
Dean of Hendricks Chapel,
Syracuse University, New York

Oh God of our histories, Oh God of our futures:
We, the people of the Lockerbie Air Disaster assemble
here today to share in a service of commemoration
on this tenth anniversary. We continue to mourn the
loss of 270 lives, individuals torn from the temporal
world, far sooner than "fullness of life" would warrant.

We did not. Oh God, need this event to know that
we possess the gift of life but for a fleeting moment.
We did not need this shock to understand the precious
nature of our existences and our relationships to one
another. Yet despite the bitter pain of the loss of those
precious soul, we come together to affirm the beauty of
life and to express our profound gratitude for this
amazing gift.

Keep us, we pray, even in our most casual moments,
keenly mindful of the lessons we have gathered unto our
hearts and our minds as a result of this gigantic tragedy.

Bless, Oh God, the loved ones for whom the loss is most
bitter: bless us all as we continue to share the miracles
of life and love. May we each know success as we strive
in our multitude of actions to create a terrorless world.

Amen.

"Do not stand at my grave and cry - I am not there, I did not die", Pamela Dix, a relative, read from a short poem. To remember someone is thus to call them back to life - even if only for so long as one candle burns.

For the families of those who died at Lockerbie, though, memory is not so short-lived. The last ten years have not been, for them, a process of forgetting requiring salutary reminiscence once a year. They have spent a decade internalising the memories of those for whom they once had no need of memory; so that the event of

December 1988 is no longer a shock coming from outside them, but an inextricable aspect of who they are. The "anniversary", in this case, may indeed not be for them, but for us, after all.

The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting. The occasion of an anniversary is an important aspect of that struggle. The families of Lockerbie know - and have suffered - the fickle interest of the public in their personal loss. They mark an anniversary so that those seated at the back of the Abbey, and those glittering dignitaries in the front row, might be engaged to remember. It was not to those who had lost a loved one or a daughter, like himself, that Reverend Mosey spoke when alluding to the "frailty of the human institutions meant to protect us". It was to those who run the "institutions", be they the aviation authorities, the legal and political authorities, or the media. Those "institutions" not only failed to "protect" the dead, but they have failed to honour them as well. In the ten long years since that most heinous crime, no trial has been held. The alleged murderous activities of Libyan suspects abiding somewhere in the Middle East, have been all but matched by the lacklustre inactivities of those whose job it has unsuccessfully been to eke out the truth. The trial - still in its embryonic stages - risks a further termination, perhaps, as a result of the bombing campaign on Iraq.

And so, the personal has had, reluctantly, to become politically motivated. The pressure group led by Dr. Jim Swire (who wrote movingly of the loss of his daughter in this publication last issue), UK Families Flight 103, is pressing for truth, for justice, and for media coverage so that the world does not forget to remember the dead. They want and expect more than pledges or promises from the New Labour heads on the guest list; and they want more than cosmetic changes to be made in the aviation industry. Not only is it the job of the airlines to improve their security measures, naturally as a result of Pan Am 103, but to lobby for State backing and funding to aid their implementation. Ten years after Lockerbie, it is something we owe to those who died, to those, their families, who mourn them, and, more importantly, to ourselves. The point about a terrorist bomb, after all, is that anyone is its target.

Of the Memorial Service's tenth anniversary it might be possible to conclude that whilst, on the one hand, nothing has changed over the last ten years: the families continue to suffer their loss, unaided by answers to those questions which they have ceaselessly been asking; no trial has been held. The Service also bore testimony to just how much has changed over that time: the sensations of loss are no less powerful, but the Act of Remembrance in 1998 was thoughtful rather than emotive. What has changed, therefore, which we have here been discussing, is the families' relationship to the event. I have suggested that, what was once an inconsolable rage against some nameless, faceless entities who chose to kill entities equally nameless and faceless to them, has become a more gen-

erally indignant conception of the failings of politics in all its various forms - which brings the anger much closer to home. When Reverend Mosey begged for truth, in the name of forgiveness rather than justice, he was asking the public to pay its duty to the private. He was asking us to put an end to the uncertainty, so that those who have had to bury their dead, can also bury the demons which have haunted them ever since that time. We - the public - must want justice for ourselves, because, in a world which neglects or delays its responsibilities to those who have suffered cruelly at the hands of terror, then nobody can have peace of mind.

POEM

Author unknown. Found on the body
of a dead soldier in Northern Ireland

*Do not stand on my grave and weep,
I am not there, I do not sleep.
I am a thousand winds that blow,
I am the diamond glints on snow.
I am the sunlight on ripened grain,
I am the gentle Autumn rain.
When you awake in the morning's hush,
I am the swift uplifting rush
of quiet birds in circle flight.
I am the soft stars that shine at night.
Do not stand on my grave and cry -
I am not there, I did not die.*

Read by Pamela Dix
A member of U.K. Families Flight 103