

December 21, 2018

Dear Mrs. Donaldson,

I went to Syracuse University with Nicole Boulanger and Amy Shapiro. Amy and I were in a couple of classes together in the Newhouse School of Public Communications. She was a photography major and I was print journalism, but we didn't know each other all that well. Nicole and I met as freshmen, lived on the same dorm floor that year and shared a very special bond.

Nicole was tremendously talented. I wish you could have heard her sing. I often wonder what her life would have been in if only terrorism didn't take her from us. It was incredibly difficult to lose her as a result of the bombing of Pan Am 103. Her precious life was cut short. I can never forget what she gave to this world in her short time here, what she gave to me.

Today I wrote a special remembrance that I posted on Facebook, and I wanted to share it with you as well. I also wanted to express my sincere thanks for looking out for both Nicole and Amy all these years. You didn't have to do it. You did it anyway. It matters to me, to my friends and I'm sure to their families. Thank you from the bottom of my heart. You will never understand the value of the gift I received this week just knowing that you've been watching out for both of them all of these years.

I'm sure the holidays will be over by the time you receive this, but I'm wishing you many blessings this holiday season and in the coming year.

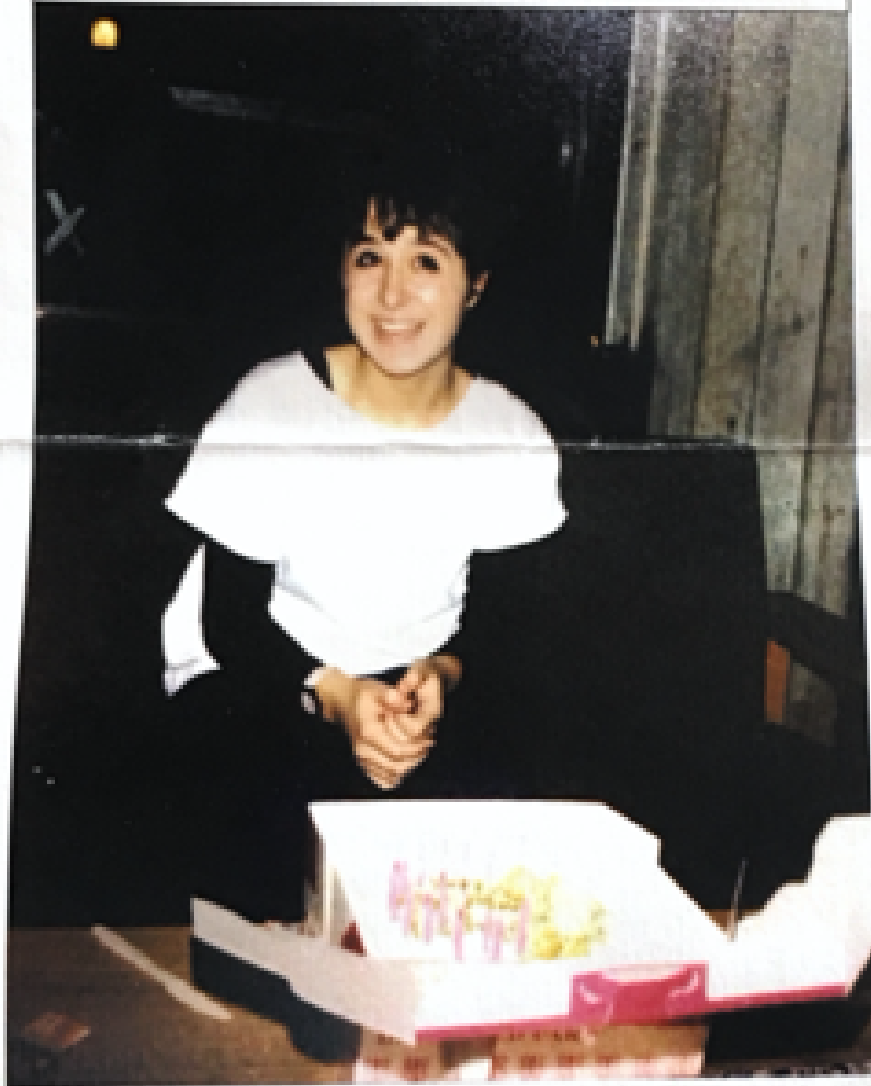
Sincerely,



Roselee Papandrea Taylor

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Nicole celebrating with a cake on her 18th birthday in 1985, when we were freshmen at Syracuse University.



All of my friends attending Syracuse at the time know where they were when they heard the news of a plane going down that had, among the 259 passengers aboard, 35 Syracuse students who had spent the semester studying abroad in London. If they were still on campus that night, they haven't forgotten the impromptu vigil we all attended in Hendricks Chapel. We were kids in shock seeking comfort and a reason so it would hurt less. While there were words spoken, tears shed and hugs offered, I suspect all of us are still waiting for an explanation that makes sense.

After reading Sue's message early Wednesday, my mind didn't even have time to reflect on any of those memories before my physical body immediately became sick. The back and forth on messenger with my friends helped calm my stomach and my plan to

wait before I consumed any news about the anniversary was no longer an option.

I kept thinking of Sue's words "the story made me happy" when I clicked the link and immediately saw an image of the "Maid-of-the-Seas" blown up from a bomb hidden inside a radio cassette recorder, which was in a suitcase located in the forward cargo hold. The story, "Lockerbie: The town scarred by Pan Am flight 103," featured the stories of several of the town's residents: What they were doing right before the plane blew up 31,000 feet up in the sky followed by what ensued for them after it crashed in the middle of the town, leaving 270 dead (including 11 on the ground in Lockerbie), wreckage, suitcases and grief in its wake.

It was Josephine Donaldson who stuck out to Sue, so much so that she contacted Craig Williamson, the BBC journalist who wrote the story, in order to get her address. Mrs. Donaldson found a handbag lying in her garden. "I opened it up, and there was this girl's 21st birthday cards," she is quoted in the story as saying. "Her name was Nicole Boulanger, and she had been

The plan was to wait until after the holidays when I was off from work and some of the stressors of the holiday season were behind me. It would be easier that way and after 30 years, I thought, there wouldn't be anything new written that I didn't already know or hadn't already read.

That was the plan anyway. The universe rarely abides by my plans. This year was no different.

Today is the 30th anniversary of the bombing of Pan Am flight 103. There isn't a year that goes by that I don't acknowledge what happened on this day, even if it's just in my head. The truth is there aren't a lot of days that go by without that acknowledgement. There are some life events that alter us forever. For me, the act of terrorism that occurred on the evening of December 21, 1988, changed me in ways that are still unfolding. Terrorism took the life of my friend and 35 of my fellow Syracuse University classmates and, as I've come to realize over the years, a big chunk of my trust and certainly my innocence.



Nicole at her dorm room door on October 28, 1987 when we were freshmen at Syracuse University.

A few days ago, Sue, a friend I met during my freshman year at Syracuse, sent a link of a recent BBC article to a few of us who lived on the same floor together that year. "I was reading it and came upon a picture of Nicole and a story about a woman who lives in Lockerbie who found her purse after the crash. It took my breath away. ... It's always a sad time of year but the story made me happy." Nicole Boulanger, a musical theater major, had been studying in London during fall semester 1988 and was on the Pan Am 103 flight that December.

Anyone who watched news coverage of this tragedy back in 1988, when we were on the cusp of today's 24-hour news cycle, probably saw Nicole's mother receive the news of her daughter's death at Kennedy Airport in New York. There weren't cell phone videos or YouTube channels back then. Still, I can easily call up that news clip in my mind. I hear the screaming: "My baby. My baby." I see a mother in anguish collapsing on the floor while her husband tries desperately to shield her from the cameras capturing her darkest hour.

21 on the 28th October that year." When Mrs. Donaldson turned on the news, she saw Nicole's mother on the floor of Kennedy Airport. "I just felt so, so sad." She knew right then that she would do her best to look after Nicole in whatever way she could.

But I guess Mrs. Donaldson's work wasn't yet done. I think the universe wanted to give her a confirming nudge. She was part of a group of local women who set up a laundry to sort, wash and iron clothes recovered from the wreckage, which they then matched to owners and sent to the victims' families. There was so much work for this amazing group of volunteers. "Some of the boxes the police would give you, you just did it on autopilot, others you maybe had a wee look through," Mrs. Donaldson was quoted as saying. In one of the boxes she was handed, she spotted the portfolio of Syracuse photography major Amy Shapiro. Among her photos were 21st birthday cards. Like Nicole, Amy also was born on October 28, 1967.

They both became important to Mrs. Donaldson. She referred to them as "my girls" and for the past 30 years on their birthday and the anniversary of the bombing, she has put flowers and a card in their memory at the memorial site in Lockerbie.

For the past 30 years, I have had some amazing encounters connected to Pan Am 103. I've met and corresponded with people touched by the tragedy in some way who have certainly impacted my life in very deep and meaningful ways. I've experienced uncanny "coincidences," much like the one Mrs. Donaldson did when she found the belongings of two Syracuse students who shared the same birthday, and I have been amazed by the lessons I've learned along the way.

I used to think or hope that one day I'd turn the corner and heal completely and get through the entire month of December without feeling that wet blanket of grief trying to suffocate me. I thought I would one day celebrate, laugh, sing, rejoice and share the holidays, including my own birthday, with family and friends and not feel the pull of that underlying sadness. It was only a few years ago that I understood, thanks to a very patient therapist, that's never going to happen, at least not in the way I thought, and that it's OK.

I have also learned, especially during my times as a crime reporter, that it is indeed the darkest of times that bring out the very best in people. Kindness prevails regardless of hate. I feel the need to repeat that to myself. Kindness prevails regardless of hate.

For 30 years, Josephine Donaldson has visited the Pan Am flight 103 memorial site in Lockerbie, Scotland, at least 60 times. She continues to remember the lives of two young women, two complete strangers, who literally crashed into her world on the darkest night of the year. That's her story, and, like Sue, it is Josephine Donaldson's part of this story that has in fact made me happy. I am fortunate that Sue shared that link on Wednesday and that I had the chance to read the BBC story before facing this day.



Sometimes the universe offers us a confirming nudge. I certainly received mine this year. I am grateful.

—Roselee Papandrea Taylor
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