

Interview on Disaster with Kathy, a survivor

I am Susan and I would like to welcome you back to rising from the ashes trauma talks a podcast series brought to you by UB School of social work The Institute on Trauma and Trauma-Informed Care. This series provides an opportunity for individuals to share their witness of how strength and resiliency has allowed individuals to rise from the ashes. Trauma talks follows people who have both worked in the field of trauma as well as those who have experienced trauma. Here we will reflect on how trauma and trauma-informed care can assist those who have experienced traumatic events to embrace a new life of wholeness, hope, strength, courage, safety, trust, choice, collaboration, and empowerment. Today I am joined by Kathy, whose husband Kevin passed away in flight 3407 on February 12, 2009. On behalf of the institute, we would like to thank you for being here today and sharing your story with us. Kathy would you be willing to give us a little bit of your story and tell us about your experience?

01:01 **Kathy:** Sure, I would like to thank you for asking me to participate in this if I can be of any help it would be a big plus for me. I have three children, three girls, daughters and my husband traveled very frequently for business. My husband Kevin was 51 at the time, 52 at the time of the crash, and he was traveling quite a bit. And, it was his third week out. He would be back on weekends and stuff so he had left on that Tuesday on business to Newark. And on that Thursday, he had called and told me his flight was delayed. And, he said I am now booked on two different flights so I don't know which one I will get on I'm delayed. So, I said ok talk to you later I said I love you and he said love you too. So, that night ironically, I will tell you how I found out about the crash is um, I was at a friend's house because her mom was in hospice care. And I had been there that afternoon to see her and her mom at the home, at their house, and she wasn't doing well and they called me back and said mom isn't doing well would you mind coming over? I'm a nurse so I went back she didn't have much longer at all so I said I would call her kids over and stuff and she passed that night. And, while I was there they mentioned to me where's Kevin? You know, and I said oh you know he's traveling, and they said oh where? I said Newark and with the so, I said goodbye to them came home that night and went to bed, and usually I flip the news on and I didn't, I just didn't flip the TV on. I was tired and I went to bed and fell asleep. This was about 10:30 at night. About midnight my phone rang and it was my friend whose house I had just been at and she said that uh, she asked me if Kevin was home, and I looked next to me in my bed and I said no. I said he must really be delayed. Cause I knew, I think he said he would get in about 10 that night. Um, I wasn't sure because again he was on two different flights. So, she said ok go back to sleep, I said is everything all right? You know, it was odd that she was calling me at midnight. And I said did they come get your mom? The funeral directors. Yep, no don't worry Kathy go back to bed. So, I hung up the phone and I don't know why but a total feeling of dread came over me. Like, something is totally wrong here. And, all I remember is picking up the remote to the TV in my room and putting it on and seeing Newark Continental flight 3407 flames on the TV. And, realized a plane had crashed, realized Kevin wasn't home, and that's how I found out about the plane crash. So this was about midnight, 12:30 I, two of my daughters were home here at the time, my youngest was a senior in high school, and my other daughter was 22, she had just finished college the year and Jennifer had been away at college four years back living home started job and was here. And they were both in bed asleep. So, I remember calling my neighbor next door and just saying, screaming she

said, there's a crash and Kevin's been on a plane, he's on that plane. I woke up my oldest daughter I said get on the computer and see what flight dad was on. But he changes his flight so frequently that I knew that wasn't, that number probably wouldn't match what she did. But, in the meantime the girl that I had called about her mom showed up at my door. She knew that she needed to tell me, but they ended up showing up, so they were all here and I called my sister and said something is unfolded.

04:29 **Susan:** Wow, that's a really hard way to

04:31 **Kathy:** Yes it is. I didn't even know they gave you the number on the TV to call. So I'm trying to get confirmation that he was on that flight, but we really couldn't get through to that number. And, they just asked your name and who you were calling about and you don't really get the information that you needed. Thing we are working on but

04:50 **Susan:** yeah,

04:51 **Kathy:** It needs to change

04:51 **Susan:** So, that was a long time to just sit not knowing

04:54 **Kathy:** I didn't know until 5 in the morning we got notification.

04:56 **Susan:** oh wow. Wow so for 5 hours you were sitting not knowing

04:59 **Kathy:** oh yes, yep it was difficult

05:01 **Susan:** And do you mind me asking how, or who confirmed it for you?

05:04 **Kathy:** Yeah, time went on we are trying to reach the TVs on I wouldn't watch it but my sister and my brother in law came over at that time both of my kids are now awake. My other daughter was living in New York at the time, she was a teacher, she was leaving on break it was her February break, and that day, this was Thursday night, well wee hours of Friday, she was going to leave for Denver, but I didn't know what time. So, I'm concerned I would have to call her but I was still waiting for more information. We ended up getting, going to the airport because we weren't getting through on the 800 number, and I said families are going to the airport. So, I said to my brother in law I need to go to the airplane. He said ok. So, he went and my oldest daughter went my youngest stayed there with the neighbor and friends. We went to the airport and what's really weird is walking in I was thinking are we going to get through security? I'm not even thinking I guess logically

05:54 **Susan:** yeah, yeah

05:54 **Kathy:** I just remember somebody took one look at us and took us, never asked a question and led us into a room. Later, I found out there was a whole huge media to the right of us which I never saw. I believe I was just looking down.

06:08 **Susan:** hm, hm

06:08 **Kathy:** Because somebody called my brother in law and said I saw you on CNN. Why were you on? You know why are you there? I wish there was at that point they could have controlled the media a little bit, and not had them in the airport. Once we got through the security course, but they were like in the lobby of the airport.

06:24 **Susan:** oh wow

06:24 **Kathy:** We found out later you know. They were just all over the place. So, they took us into a room there. It was US Air that called and there were family members there. And, now somebody comes up and wants us to fill out some paperwork. Which I was unable to do.

06:38 **Susan:** Paperwork, yeah,

06:40 **Kathy:** Giving information about your loved one who was on the flight. Which we still don't know he was on that flight. So, again all I wanted was information. In the mean time I of course called my husband's cellphone probably every 5 minutes. And, I was thinking I wonder what happens when a cellphone gets destroyed?

06:58 **Susan:** yeah

06:58 **Kathy:** I mean I just remember thinking that. I wonder what happens. It kept going to voicemail, voicemail, voicemail. And I kept saying answer the phone, answer the phone, answer the phone, just hoping. So, we were at the airport and that was going nowhere I still wasn't getting information and it was more comfort measures that they had us there. Want a blanket, want water, then they made the decision that they needed to move the family members from the airport. Uh, because now it's getting more flights coming in, you know the airport would get busy and they wanted us in a secure location. So, later I found out as a part of their response to disaster plan there was senior center in Cheektowaga that was set up for families to go to where they could secure us from the media and stuff so,

07:42 **Susan:** This is the family assistance center

07:42 **Kathy:** Yeah, it wasn't yeah, I mean but that's the airports plan, that they would transfer families to the senior center. They wanted to put us in a bus and go. And I said I'm not going there right now.

07:53 **Susan:** Yeah, I don't blame you

07:54 **Kathy:** Yeah, I said I need to go home I need to get Kelsey and I, that's my youngest, and I need to call my daughter Melissa, um, in New York. I need to stop her from getting on a flight. I need to tell her. So, we left, but, so when we were leaving, they were very aware of the media situation at that time so I was not walked out back through the lobby. We were getting ready to leave and they said, they stopped and they said a police officer will escort you out. I

mean actually escort us out, underneath in the basement of the airport where the luggage comes normally on the cart on the underneath.

08:24 **Susan:** yeah

08:24 **Kathy:** you know underneath in the basement, we actually climbed a fence, like a low fence to get outside and get out a door to avoid the media. So, they did protect us at that point. I still was, at that point I was very um, I wasn't realizing the media was such an issue. Like I was ready to just walk out of the airport.

08:40 **Susan:** Sure

08:41 **Kathy:** You know like I said, I didn't realize the media was there. I just wasn't even thinking that.

08:45 **Susan:** Right

08:45 **Kathy:** You know I'm not thinking. So, we got home here at the house and we start, I had to call my daughter and tell her, uh, ironically the three weeks before was the miracle on the Hudson crash.

09:00 **Susan:** Yes, right

09:00 **Kathy:** and my daughter living in New York and she called me and I will never forget I was in Target and I was in the checkout line and she heard there was a crash and she called me totally upset, freaking out mom, is dad flying, is dad flying, is dad flying today, I just heard a plane went down, a plane went down. And I said, I kind of laughed her off and oh said he is flying today but he is coming home today. Oh my God, I said he isn't due in until tonight. To tell you the truth I don't know where he is. What city, which wasn't unusual either. So, he was on a day trip and unless I took a real interest, it becomes a part of your way of life

09:33 **Susan:** right

09:33 **Kathy:** So, it's like I'm going to work you know? So she was freaking out and I remember Kevin getting home that night and we were lying in bed and I remember sharing that story with him. You know Melissa she freaked out about you and we kind of chuckled about it. And then three weeks later I had to make a call so, her dad was in a crash. Which was probably the most difficult, difficult thing I ever had to do, it was awful. So, she was with her boyfriend they were both supposed to leave for Denver so he got her in a car and we had only met him once. We had only met him once but he had to drive her home.

10:09 **Susan:** Oh, wow, I'm glad she wasn't alone.

10:09 **Kathy:** Oh, I know I said she went into shock I think. He told me, he got on the phone, he met me once, I can't get her to move, I can't get her to get up. I said put the phone in her ear and I said honey you just have to get in the car. Just get in the car. Get in the car get in the car and

he finally got her in the car. I said if you have to carry her, put her in the car and start driving. So, then we drove, my daughter wouldn't get here until noon so then I took my two daughters and had to get my mom and my family and we went to the senior center at this point because we were told a briefing would be happening. Now I still don't have confirmation Kevin was on that flight. So my first encounter at the senior center when we walked in, there were police officers from all over New York protecting us. Took our name and everything. And, I did find out later that through windows media, was way in the distance. So we were protected at that time

11:01 **Susan:** good

11:01 **Kathy:** And I felt secure and safe there. I don't want my kids exposed, I don't want our faces out there nothing. I mean my husband's family lived in Chicago. I still hadn't. I notified my, his sister. One sister that was younger. And her husband happened to be flying to Buffalo that night for

11:21 **Susan:** Oh wow

11:21 **Kathy:** So, he showed up at the senior center. But his parents were watching her kids in Chicago and we didn't want them to know until we knew someone could watch them. So, my brother in law had to fly back. He actually got on a flight as soon as he could to be back to them. So he could tell them because my sister in law was out of town also. It was crazy. So, anyway we gathered at the center and my first encounter when we walked in was the Red Cross was there. And we sat at a big round table and again we are trying to get confirmation it's confusing, they are. There was really only one representative too probably from the airline there. Because they were now going to fly in there people continental, their care team people everybody NTSB has to get there. And now we are waiting for all of these people to arrive. It happened in the middle of the night and so we were told they would probably get there 6 am or so and we are just sitting around. There was food and water that sort of thing, which they kept coming, do you need anything, want anything? So my first encounter was with Sister Martha from Red Cross. And I remember just sitting there in the chair and her coming over and, I will never forget this cause she didn't ask me a dumb questions like how are you? Cause that's a dumb question.

12:34 **Susan:** It is...yeah

12:34 **Kathy:** But for me it was more she just came over and introduced herself. And asked who was on the flight and she knew. I told her I'm waiting to hear. And she just put her arm on my back and rubbed my back a little and that was all she needed to do. She was there. You know she walked away and then she would come back a little while later and she was trying for us to get information also. I know she was trying to get the information we needed. Was he on the flight? But she could only do so much we could only do so much. We were just waiting for someone from continental. Everybody seemed to be afraid to tell you the awful news.

13:11 **Susan:** How many people were there? In that space with you?

13:11 **Kathy:** You know quite a few, cause people kept coming and coming and it's funny as I have gotten to know the families now, we can remember certain things now. We'll think back and say I was sitting at this table there were big round tables

13:26 **Susan:** yeah,

13:26 **Kathy:** And, I can remember a family member uh Kevin Coulic in fact, who lost his girlfriend, serious girlfriend, she was flying in for his brother's wedding. And, I remember him and his parents sitting next to me and going up to his mom and saying, because we were just sitting there waiting and waiting and you hear people crying

13:48 **Susan:** yeah

13:48 **Kathy:** and sobbing. I remember hearing the sobbing from the bathroom and it was just, you're just waiting

13:53 **Susan:** right

13:53 **Kathy:** and I'm going up to them and I say who was on the flight, my sons getting married tomorrow, and his girlfriend was coming in.

14:05 **Susan:** Oh

14:05 **Kathy:** And they had a wedding to deal with.

14:05 **Kathy:** So I still remember, but there were quite a few people, I couldn't give you a count, but it seemed like a lot, but you're so tunneled in to your own.

14:12 **Susan:** And that was

14:13 **Kathy:** You don't know anybody there you just see people, you don't even know.

14:17 **Susan:** So it sounds like Sister Martha just being present and caring

14:21 **Kathy:** oh yes,

14:21 **Susan:** and just checking in

14:22 **Kathy:** Absolutely, and you know she didn't have to say anything. She wasn't I don't think any of them were. Sister Martha was the one who I guess uh, connected with us. I mean there were many other Red Cross volunteers, but she's the one that connected with my family. And she was just there and present. She didn't have to say anything or, she, if she I think she offered if there were any calls or something we needed to call or anything for us. But she was just present so I knew I could almost like my little security blanket.

15:00 **Susan:** Sure

15:00 **Kathy:** because I could then turn to her and say could you this, can you this

15:01 **Susan:** yeah

15:01 **Kathy:** I'll never forget her for that.

15:03 **Susan:** That's huge.

15:05 **Kathy:** It's so you know we got connected at that point. So mean while the airlines did show up finally, it must have been 6 am. At that point they said we understand there are still family that doesn't have confirmation. Please see us after, my brother in law went up and that's when they finally gave confirmation he was on the flight. I knew in my heart that he was, but you still hold out hope

15:27 **Susan:** yeah of course you do

15:27 **Kathy:** you don't give up hope. It would be nothing for him to get in a car and oh I'm just going to drive, this is crazy

15:34 **Susan:** right

15:34 **Kathy:** He, he's driven through the night to make a meeting because a flight was canceled and drive one state to another because that is how he was. And it was confirmed at that point that he was on the flight. We then left the senior center because they wanted to transfer us to a safe (inaudible) my family safe care hadn't arrived safe yet. The airlines were there and the airline spokesperson was there and their care team and disaster plan Jason who was from Continental strongly suggested he explained the procedure that we would all be in a hotel and strongly suggest that we stay there even though we were local because they could protect us from the media.

16:14 **Susan:** I was just going to say is it

16:21 **Kathy:** So they suggested that and of course my first reaction was I'm waiting for my daughter to get here and now we have been up all night. I looked at her and said (inaudible) so they gave us some information and explained when the next briefing would be and more people would be coming because NTSB had to get to the crash site. And at that point he told us there was no survivors. So we came home here. Was waiting for my daughter to get here, just gathering our thoughts and making calls. And, we decided at that point we wanted to get to the hotel for the briefing. My daughter arrived about 11 in the morning. My neighbors came over and stuff so we all got in the car

16:58 **Susan:** uh huh

16:58 **Kathy:** Not my neighbors, but my family and we went to the hotel. And there were police officers there and they checked going in who are you when we got there. One of the first things we had to do was get our photos taken for security reasons

17:11 **Susan:** mhm

17:11 **Kathy:** So, we all had to get photos taken, so I'm in line with my mom waiting for my photo and my daughter was sitting in another room, my oldest Melissa the one that just came from New York, and she came up to us after and she went to my brother in law. They had warned us at the senior center that you would get to know people at the hotel because, for people who don't know they empty out the whole hotel.

17:36 **Susan:** oh yeah

17:36 **Kathy:** Yeah, that's what they do. So they had to secure us.

17:39 **Susan:** So they really do protect you then?

17:39 **Kathy:** They do. So the entire hotel gets, so they have to find in a short period of time a hotel that can fit everybody, and that they can totally empty out and get people out of there. And then get their whole team in there. We ended up at this hotel. We got there and now we are sitting there and they said if you get to know everyone, and you will know who doesn't belong here you will just know. If there is anyone that appears they don't belong, you need to let us know. So, my daughter was sitting there, we had just got there and checking in and she is sitting there and all of a sudden she said that someone comes and sits next to her and start asking questions. Oh do you know someone on the flight who was it? And she said my dad, and all of a sudden she knew something wasn't right.

18:20 **Susan:** right

18:20 **Kathy:** My daughter was in her 20's she knew enough. So she did get up and tell my brother in law. My brother in law immediately went to the airline people and they got him. He was from the local media he had snuck in.

18:30 **Susan:** oh you're kidding?

18:31 **Kathy:** And he had been standing behind me in line listening to my conversation with my mom.

18:35 **Susan:** That is so disrespectful. Wow.

18:35 **Kathy:** He did get in

18:36 **Susan:** wow

18:36 **Kathy:** So that's the stuff they need to protect you from

18:39 **Susan:** Sure

18:41 **Kathy:** So we were there and I never expected to stay there and I ended up staying at the hotel. We stayed a week.

18:46 **Susan:** Did the media come here?

18:48 **Kathy:** Um, I never came here. People, I have very close neighborhood people who were watching my house. I have a friend whose husband is a police officer and he would keep an eye on my house. I was getting calls they were trying to reach out, I understand they were trying to do their job but, at that time, I didn't want any exposure. I didn't want my children exposed.

19:07 **Susan:** Sure right

19:09 **Kathy:** We really wanted our privacy you know. We were in shock. This is not a normal death, if you can call any death normal.

19:19 **Susan:** Right

19:19 **Kathy:** But the immediate trauma when I think back on what we had to endure is unthinkable, about what my kids had to go through. In identifying him. It's just, it's just something you would never think you would experience. You see this stuff on to, but it would never happen to me.

19:36 **Susan:** Right

19:36 **Kathy:** So, now when I see a crash or something on TV it's, it's we have trauma

19:41 **Susan:** right, you know what those families are going through

19:43 **Kathy:** oh and we have a lot of difficulty even, it just brings everything back.

19:49 **Susan:** Well, if you are in shock and you are trying to get information and they are making you do all of these things, like standing in line to get your picture taken, you know if not a part of the normal grief process. You know that's there's no

20:01 **Kathy:** Right, now you need to identify, so at the hotel, like I said I ended up not going home, because I realized it was going to protect me, not only through media, but also protect me from a lot of people coming to my home. Again, because of the circumstances of the death, the community was very involved, the community, everybody feels helpless. So, they all mean well, but if I had to be answering the door. So my neighbors started checking here, they even said they don't know where to put the food that was coming in, and the flowers which was wonderful. I had so much. I told my friend and family I said starting eating it, because they were gathering every night together because they were grieving. The loss of Kevin

20:49 **Susan:** Sure

20:49 **Kathy:** We lost one of us which way to young which was a shock for everybody and my daughters friends, it was just, and my daughter went to Williamsville school district and she was the only one in the district that lost somebody in the crash so, anyway so as things unfolded care teams were introduced to and care teams were provided by the airlines. So the Red Cross was at the hotel the entire time and my care team was there.

21:19 **Susan:** So each family gets assigned a care team?

21:19 **Kathy:** yeah, each

21:22 **Susan:** What comprises the care members of this team? How many team members are in a care team?

21:29 **Kathy:** the airlines. We had two assigned to our family. Some people had one some people maybe what the needs were? We ended up getting two young girls with whatever company had a care team. This was all a learning process for me remember I didn't know any of this. They volunteer and they take the training hoping to never use it. These two girls, one was an international airline attendant, she lived and worked in New York, and the other one was Jamie was her name. She as a supervisor was no longer flying but was supervising on that end. So they were both young girls. Jamie had no kids at the time and Kris was the other girl she had two young kids. And they would get notice and had to be ready to leave and they don't know when they will be able to come home. So it's a lot for them also. So we were introduced to them. And my brother in law his name is Marty became the spokesperson for us. So everything went through him rather than us. They took his number and everything went through him, they took care of everything. When the care team arrived it was comforting. They took care of anything and everything. Things I would not even think of, and because you aren't thinking at that time. It was things like do you have a pet? Yeah I do, oh my, my dog is at home. But my neighbor thank goodness was a dog walker and she just scooped him right up and just took over, but I wasn't even thinking of that. So that's something you don't think about your pets. I'll never forget too they said where's Kevin's car parked at the airport? I never thought of it. It needs to be picked up. And everyone was saying I don't know where he parked it. Sometimes he would park off site and sometime in the lot at the airport, sometimes he did long term. Since he was only on a two day trip he might have parked right at the airport. I really don't know all I can tell you is what kind of car it was. No worries, no problem. One of the family members got the keys for me. A set of keys and where do you want the car taken? Take it home because I couldn't look at it. It was taken to my brother in law and sisters house. So they did find it. Things that seem so simple but you don't

23:44 **Susan:** But you aren't thinking about that.

23:44 **Kathy:** You don't. Things like. Not only emotional support but they provided things like phone chargers, anything any social or emotional need were taken care of. Anything you need they were there you just call. I'm the type of person I get upset and I can't eat so, eating became an issue for my girls and I we're all the same. And uh so I remember these girls went out and these girls aren't even from here and they went out and got me soup somewhere. They provide food there but it was like pasta it was just not what I was interested in. So I just need to get

something in me. So they went out and did that. They don't stay at the same hotel as you do. They separate themselves at the end of the day. If you need them you can call them because you have their numbers but they will say is there anything else you need tonight. If you needed clothes if you needed anything they were there.

24:37 **Susan:** That's great.

24: 38 **Kathy:** They were good to my kids and all of us. At that point you become very attached. Very, very, attached. They cry with you, they show their emotions, they were not allowed to go to the service with us. They have rules they have to follow. I think they can't cross. So I would have liked for them to come to the service but they were not, because they made all of the arrangements. I mean they, we decided to have a memorial service. My husband's remains were not identified until April. So there was obviously, my brother in laws the one that brought up that we needed to do some type of service and I agreed with the family. So we did that but they made our transportation arrangements. They had everything. Just things so we didn't have to worry about it. They were there for when we got back they were there when we got off the bus at the hotel and again what do you need we will order you something out now.

25:40 **Susan:** they were there to pay attention to all of the needs

25:26 **Kathy:** all of the needs. I can remember my one daughter, my middle daughter. Each kid had their own emotional way of reacting to the trauma. I can remember one daughter In the middle of the night. We all slept in this one hotel room, she got up in the middle of the night and started throwing up. Just because of the grief. My oldest was more zombie I want to say. Just walking around going through the emotions.

26:11 **Susan:** Numb.

26:12 **Kathy:** And my middle who was 20 I remember her just being very weak. Weak as far as physically as far as having to help her walk. We had a friend who was a physician. We went home to get clothes for the service and we brought her home with us and as we were walking she passed out. The care team asked us if we wanted to get a doctor and we said nope. So I brought her home here and I just thought it was important how to look at how it affected her physical condition because of this trauma. And

26:49 **Susan:** There are physiological effects

26:50 **Kathy:** And she laid on the couch and she and a good friend of ours the physician said her blood pressure is low. She is just dehydrated. She hadn't been drinking. So we got Gatorade and stuffed in her. And she perked up a little but trying to get her to eat was difficult. It's like your body just shuts down. So I think it's important for people to look out for that. Did you eat something have you slept? You know.

27:29 **Susan:** When you were at the hotel did they structure your days in a certain way?

27:31 **Kathy:** We were structured in a way that we were always notified for the next briefing. So the briefing was not attended by care team members, Red Cross would not allow them to break the rules it was only for family members. I can remember the doors shutting and seeing Tara Hughes from the Red Cross who I met and tell you about. She was there. They weren't allowed in there really. I'm trying to think I take that back the care team was not allowed, I'm trying to remember if there was someone from the Red Cross in the room. I cannot remember now, but I know the care team was not allowed. So we would have scheduled briefings. They would say we have a briefing at 9 AM and we will have another briefing at 1. And the NASB would come in a brief and tell us everything they found at the crash site and where they were with that. The medical examiner had to come in a brief us. The district attorney came to brief and told us we would be able to get death certificates, you know things like that that you don't think of. Another thing we had to do and something I don't think anyone would be aware of was that was very, very tough. It's called coveted demort interview. And actually it's an undertaker who comes. It's someone they provide, it wasn't someone local. They come and interview you and ask a lot of personal questions as a way to identify you the bones. So that became, they told me it would be tough and I could chose who I wanted in the room with me. So my daughters were all volunteering. My oldest was with me and my brother in law and sister was there when we went for this interview. And they ask you things like what type of clothing they wear. And things like did he wear boxers or briefs. Did he have any markings on his body that would help us describe him?

29:18 **Susan:** yeah, like scars or moles

29:19 **Kathy:** Was he uh, did he ever have a broken bone? Things like that (inaudible). There were lots of things like that. That was a real difficult one. Things like what he would have had on him, like his personal belongings. What color was his wallet did he have on jewelry or what kind he wore. What kind of phone did he have?

29:43 **Susan:** Did they let you have a care team member with you or somebody sit with you.

29:48 **Kathy:** Care team member were not allowed. Nobody was allowed in those interviews. Red Cross was not allowed. They just walked us to the room. They were not allowed in.

29:55 **Susan:** So did they provide for any kind of emotional support?

29:59 **Kathy:** No. And I say that was what was lacking and I would say they need to do is be a little more clear on how personal they get. Because it would help you, I knew it would be difficult, and that's how I knew because how personal they get they wanted to know who would be with you. And when I say the things the kids had to go through one of them had to be swabbed for DNA. They said they didn't have to do all three but they had to do just one. Of course all my daughters volunteered. My oldest did it and I think that's a thing I think back now it's upsetting to me to think here are these girls, my daughters, and they are trying to find their dad and that hits home. It was hard. We did all of that, and it was hard. So that was another thing we had to do. Things like that were so structured to our day. It was like I said they would let us know when the briefings were but other than that. There was a site visit that was probably the most if not the toughest day.

31:11 **Susan:** Sure

31:12 **Kathy:** They were all arranged by the airlines the care team was not allowed to go again.

31:16 **Susan:** Really

31:16 **Kathy:** Nope. They really couldn't do, they were very supporting of getting us on the bus to take us, but there was someone else from the airline on the bus.

31:26 **Susan:** Were there counselors of any other kind there?

31:27 **Kathy:** There was someone from the airline on each of the buses. I don't know right now if they were a mental counselor or who they were.

31:33 **Susan:** But it wasn't someone you knew or had a relationship with at that point.

31:40 **Kathy:** There was one person for each big coach bus. We were very protected getting on the busses that were there to protect us from the media. There was I still get chills thinking about moving to the crash site. Because cars, they must have known who we were. It must have been in the media that day. We were led by police escort and cars were just pulling over and people were putting their hand over their hearts. And on the bus that was very thoughtful they had a flower in every seat, they had a pad of paper, water, tissues. So providing if you wanted to write a note while you were at the site or a flower. Water, tissues, so that was. So we got to the site and that was unbelievable because all these volunteer firefighters, troopers, state troopers, a lot of police force were there. There was part of the. They wouldn't let us go until they had already looked for remains. The crash was on Thursday this was Tuesday I believe it was. I'm trying to remember if the tail of the plane was still there, but everything else was gone. They wanted to makes sure we didn't go there and see any remains there.

32:56 **Susan:** Right

32:58 **Kathy:** So we did go there but it was the officer and everyone were lined up. And I can member just walking by thanking all of them because they had such respect for the families. Really, we were being told from the Red Cross how much they respected that crash site and how much they respected our loved ones. And you could see it on their faces.

33:18 **Susan:** um hm

33:18 **Kathy:** And members of the NTSB were crying. As we are there it was so emotional these people from the airlines were crying. Everybody showed their emotions. Which was good they were human. It showed compassion

33:33 **Susan:** Yeah

33:34 **Kathy:** for us.

33:36 **Susan:** That you weren't alone in your grief

33:37 **Kathy:** Yes, so we did that and it was a tough, tough, one. It was a very draining day. Then we came back to the hotel. So there was like a common area. Conference rooms where families would gather. And people started putting pictures up of their loved ones. And that's kind of where we now look back and there's certain family members that we can remember being there. And you start talking you know, who'd you lose and stuff. And I remember during one of the briefings it was one of them and now I know he was a DC Ken Millet. And Ken got up, I didn't know his name at the time, and he said, I think we should kind of exchange some emails and get some information among us. Like he took the lead at that point. And we did. And at that point we became connected.

34:23 **Susan:** yeah, yeah,

34:23 **Kathy:** Started to get connected at that point. And the woman I met at the airport I told you whose son was getting married, I saw her in the hallway at the hotel a couple days later and we just stopped and gave each other a hug. And my brother in law goes do you guys even know each other's names and we said no we don't. But we just remembered you know.

34:40 **Susan:** yeah, you still had that connection

34:41 **Kathy:** yes, we had that connection. I didn't see Sister Martha again she was at the site with the volunteer fire fighters and that was her spot. But, so we had our care team but the Red Cross was there. They were, you knew who they were and I noticed there was signs up about grief counselors and stuff. Posted up throughout the hotel. So I knew enough at that, I'm surprised. It was already hitting me, I knew enough that my girls and I needed to get into some type of counseling because nothing was normal about this situation.

35:20 **Susan:** No, Yeah

35:21 **Kathy:** And I just knew it you know. And I remember approaching Cara and my sister was with me. And she came up in and I my hotel room that we had there and we were sitting in there and I think she was sitting right on my bed. We were talking about everything and she gave me contacts and stuff and people to reach out with, to, that's how I first contacted with that to advocate for some mental health counseling.

35:47 **Susan:** Good

35:48 **Kathy:** Like I said I knew there was just was just not normal.

35:53 **Susan:** yeah, no

35:54 **Kathy:** So, tough, it was hard. And my husband's memorial service was on Wednesday and we ended up, I came home I think Thursday. It ended up being a week, it was time to leave. It was time for our care team to leave. They don't leave until we are done. Like we give them the lead on when we need to leave. It makes sense. It was really nothing else that could be done

there. Our briefings were coming less frequent. There was less to tell us, there wasn't anything really. There wasn't any to be included anymore. So we came home. And we had to say good bye to our care team. Now this is another thing which we were told. We were not allowed to contact our care team members at all after that.

36:35 **Susan:** You're kidding?

36:36 **Kathy:** and it was very strictly worded

36:38 **Susan:** So you build that relationship with them and it's that intense, that's hard

36:42 **Kathy:** Very strict, now my brother in law was sneaky with social media and stuff he asked one of them now, what's your last name? And he ended up finding one of them on Facebook. And I respected that that we couldn't reach out. But to this day, I was actually talking to somebody else and I got from united airlines, who worked for united and those people and I actually emailed them because I was given my care team members names he was going to look them up for me and get back with me. Because I would love to see them. But what did happen. this is a few years back, my brother in law and my sister were traveling on a trip and they were in Chicago on a connection and they were on United and they were a, and someone goes Marty? And my brother in law turned around and it was a care taker

37:26 **Susan:** Oh wow

37:27 **Kathy:** Jamie and she looked at him and goes Marty? I was just shocked. He sent me pictures and said do you know who this is? I cried when I saw it. It was just that emotional. And she said I will never, she remembered it every one of our family. How's **Kathy**, how's Melissa, you know all of the kids everyone. She said, I think of you guys all of the time. You think of what a huge impact they made on them.

37:49 **Susan:** yeah.

37:50 **Kathy:** They have to debrief going back I mean they were crying when we parted. We were all crying.

37:55 **Susan:** And them not being able to connect with you must be hard on them too.

37:57 **Kathy:** Oh so hard, so hard. And um, but they have to make that break too. You know? I mean they miss their kid she wanted to see her children. She was gone a week, but what an emotional to have to you know I learned later, they had nothing coming into this. This is the first time they had to do it.

38:15 **Susan:** Wow

38:16 **Kathy:** They're walking having no clue who they are going to be connected with

38:20 **Susan:** Yeah

38:17 **Kathy:** What we were going to be like so it was very nerve racking. You know we were blessed, and I'm going to tell ya every family member I talked to felt the same way everybody loved their care team member

38:35 **Susan:** Yeah that's great

38:35 **Kathy:** Such a positive experience.

38:38 **Susan:** I'm glad

38:38 **Kathy:** I want to tell you a few years ago the family assistance act came in for the airlines, because there was nothing for people, for families. It was people just wondering in crash sites, picking up stuff it was just awful, there was nothing

38:51 **Susan:** Oh wow

38:54 **Kathy:** And now because of the family assistance act in place they have to provide this by law it has to be provided.so that's why they so thank God it was.

39:03 **Susan:** So you mentioned going into counseling after, and I know that you have started working toward policy toward changing policy. Do you mind talking a little more about that in terms of your grief process? How things have

39:17 **Kathy:** Sure, I'll tell you about my counseling, I went into um, to see a grief counselor initially I went for myself it was a woman, I found out then, you have to think I have 3 or 4 of us going in and financially that gets expensive. And at the time, I didn't even know if my insurance would cover it. Just something to think about, so I actually contacted the airline. When we left the airline we were given a number that you can call if we had any questions or anything we can call. Because the crash was operated by a regional airline continental airline operated by Cogan (?) I was getting the run around because no one wanted to cover us. And that is such an important part of this process

39:57 **Susan:** Yes

39:57 **Kathy:** I was given a hard time. Later, Later I an attorney ended up getting involved to get my coverage for my counseling. So the first counselor I went to didn't take any insurance I found out, so then well then you know I found out what insurance and I found another person who specialized in grief counseling. I'll just tell you the importance of the grief counseling was someone telling me what I was going through was normal. Because at times, it didn't feel normal, you feel like you are going to lose your mind. And someone saying it's ok to feel that way. The first time I went, my daughter went back to New York, because she had her job, you know now my oldest daughter wanted to get into counseling immediately. The girls, each one is different process. The oldest one immediately found a counselor of course since 9-11 there were many counselors that were very, could do the trauma part of it and stuff so she found a great counselor that worked for her. My other two came with me the first time we first met. and then

my middle one went back on her own and I went back on my own my youngest was 17 and this wasn't for me I mean so I didn't push it.

41:06 **Susan:** uh huh

41:07 **Kathy:** I said ok I won't push it. A little tid bit she went away to college, to Ithaca University she was into exams and it was tough her going away. Dad and mom should be moving her and it was really another phase I felt so bad for her. She wasn't one who wanted people to know she was very private. She did not share it, oh my dad died. Did not like to share it did not like to talk about it. But in her college years I think it was the first year or second it hit her. She got into exams and it was a very stressful time for her, point in her life. She started having nightmares of the crash, she wasn't sleeping, and having difficulty. So, came home and I hooked her up with at that time our pediatrician saw the kids until they were 21. So we took her to the pediatrician and I told her and she suggested she get into counseling at that time. And also suggested yoga. Kelsey got into yoga, loved it, got someone, and we contacted a counselor up there and she said now I'm ready for counseling. Was the same. A couple of years later she needed the counseling. Because she wasn't talking about it, now she needed to talk about it.

42:19 **Susan:** and there's no time line for grief happens

42:22 **Kathy:** So that was an example of how everybody's different.

42:24 **Susan:** Absolutely

42:26 **Kathy:** So that's where we went with the counseling. Also, part of my, I started as worker. The Red Cross contacted me um, Sister Martha contacted me and had me meet with some people that were about 9-11 in Buffalo that had their own little support group. And asked if I would want to meet with them. Again, so I keep saying my brother and sister in law, were my big support system, so they said yes they would go with me. And I met with 5 people that lost people in 9-11. And I asked them questions will this get better? Yes it will get better Kathy and gave me encouragement that way. So then I decided to organize a support group to help the families and talked Sister Martha and we started the support group. Basically we got together and got the families back and it was private. SO we started. That's where I went through the support group and reached out probably 15 people came and we would start meeting and go through it. That was great, you know it worked. You just can't go to support group for someone who died for medical reasons.

43:34 **Susan:** It's different

43:35 **Kathy:** We just the publicity of it. Because things kept coming up. Every time there was a new notice why the crash happened or why

43:44 **Susan:** It's back in the news

43:44 **Kathy:** And the news would have pictures of us

43:45 **Susan:** You get re-traumatized all over again.

(43:47) **Kathy:** Yes, seeing the flames would SO, through the family care website, we had somebody, Kevin Koolic (?) who I met that day, we had a few people become real advocates. And got involved in Washington. In the law of the whole aviation safety. Cause part of the reason for our crash we had very inexperienced pilots. It was a regional airline, and the regional airline pay very, very, little. So it's almost a stepping stone to get up to regular airlines. The qualifications for a regional airline pilot are different for your big airline pilots. And that's where the problem existed. So we as a family decided to start making a difference. We had a few that really got involved and started. Kevin Koolic (?) was amazing. He reached out and started learning the ropes in DC and what we had to do and we kind of became our own little lobbyist

44:43 **Susan:** That's great

44:43 **Kathy:** Not paid. We all used our own money, used our own time, and paid our own ways, our own hotels to go to DC. Our original trip where we kind of met with families was one of the initial NTSB hearings about the crash. Because they notify when the hearings are going to be. So that was probably the first time for us all to be together. There was much media there in this auditorium where this hearing would take place. Then again we were put in a separate room initially and we were briefed what would be involved in the hearing. That they were going to show photos that were going to be difficult they would show an animation.

45:31 **Susan:** right

45:31 **Kathy:** of the crash you know

45:34 **Susan:** Right, the simulation

45:35 **Kathy:** The simulation that's what I wanted to say, I'm sorry. The simulation of the crash. We were told that would be shown and we could step out if we wanted to. I did step out for that. I could not watch that. We were in a private room and then I met another woman who had lost a daughter, who was local born I'm very good friends with now and that's where we started to make our bond in DC and then we started going out in on our website which was private between us, we could talk and stuff. Anything, like they have to eventually when all the remains (inaudible) the medical examiner feels he could do no more. By law the airlines now have to do stuff like that so there had to be another burial for that. So that was all arranged by the airlines. So through our website someone would communicate. We would all get these letters, and someone would communicate because the airline, we thought were going to pay for us to come and they weren't things like that.

46:31 **Susan:** So when you all were getting these letters that remains were available at different times or?

46:34 **Kathy:** We got Well we got remains for each loved one the medical examiner had everyone's contact. So as he would identify someone he would call them. Some people he had identified were intact bodies initially like within a few days, some did not. Others and like I said

I didn't have anything identifiable until May I believe I was notified. April or May? And the medical examiner called me. Then what it works identified and unidentified remains, family members had to go to the site. If they remains identified earlier on, some people may only have three quarters of a body, so maybe they would decide to bury their person, their loved one and then they may identify more. So they have to decide at that point if they want to claim those remains at that point or if they wanted them to be put with the identified remains that would be put at the site together. So that's why there was two caskets. One with identified and one with unidentified remains. Then a whole big service and everything was planned at forest lawn and a memorial was designed with our input how it was going to be. So this was all communication through our website and letters we would get as families we would talk amongst each other and that's how that unfolded. But

47:57 **Susan:** I'm glad you were connected at that point. I mean having that drawn out for such a long period and not.

48:06 **Kathy:** We got very connected with each other going back and forth to DC and Ken Mellet (?) who asked for everyone's email. Love him give him a big hug when I see him now when we go to DC. I probably made 20 something trips, there are people who have made 40 or 50. I was working, but whenever there was a calling that they needed our bodies there in red. Red was our color we would go, we would go. It was just to make our presents known that we weren't going away. This was not just important for us but for the entire flying community around the world, but also for me it was a healing process. Those trips would be draining. I would get home, midnight on a flight and go to work the next day. I would be drained but they were also healing. I flew two months after the crash because we had planned a trip Kevin, and I and my daughter Kelsey were all that could go. We were going to see my brother in Savannah and I forgot where else we were going down to Florida so I ended up going with my daughter to Savannah because I thought I don't want to, I wanted to get away and I knew there I could be comfortable. And I could show my grief.

49:09 **Susan:** Yeah

49:09 **Kathy:** Kelsey and I had decided to fly in, we had gotten medication from the doctor to help us. But we got to the airport and were waiting for the flight and we were both very emotional. But I went through, this was another thing that's interesting. I went through a dry run. We contacted the airlines and we were given the opportunity to go to the airport and go through security when we weren't even taking a flight. We were given a pass

49:32 **Susan:** That's great

49:32 **Kathy:** and because I was scared

49:36 **Susan:** Sure

49:36 **Kathy:** My sister went with me because she had been there that night, so she also was scared, you know we were, it just walking in the airport you could feel your heart just start

49:45 **Susan:** Sure it affects it

49:45 **Kathy:** And remembering and looking at that room we were in. It just. So we went through, we were given a pass someone met us from the airline we were given a pass, we went through security we sat we had a drink in the airport and then we left, just to get myself in the airport. And that's what I did, so I left my daughter. It was tough, somebody came up to me it was spring break and some woman came up behind me and came over and started chatting and thought why are you here talking to me. It was like

50:19 **Susan:** Yeah

50:19 **Kathy:** Were going on. I was like really? She could see how upset we were, it was like to not come over right now. We just need to be in our own spot

50:27 **Susan:** Yeah

50:27 **Kathy:** And we did it. And flying has not been easy for my kids

50:33 **Susan:** I can imagine

50:33 **Kathy:** It has been very tough. I'm getting better because I've done it so much, but you know part of the reason I did it, is we had to keep on running. And I know if it had been me on that plane my husband would have kept doing it. We wouldn't want it we had to get away. We had to keep on living. And that was part of it for us. Keep on traveling and so we did it, but I learned so much now with the airlines. We've made a big difference. We've made a huge difference in DC.

50:59 **Susan:** You've changed policy.

50:59 **Kathy:** Yes, we did and that's huge. Because we were nobody's from Buffalo and we did. It's been great and there's still more to be done. But we've made people so aware. I mean so aware.

51:10 **Susan:** Yeah

51:10 **Kathy:** You know our biggest thing is we said we need one level safety, one level of safety. We who take regional airlines should not have less safety standards than someone who doesn't.

51:19 **Susan:** Right

51:20 **Kathy:** We've made that point clear and we've come a long way and it's a long haul we still when did we go to DC last? I think in January or February had another cause there was someone making flack about changing something on the bill and going backwards and so we make our presents known again. But there are a few family members that stayed very, very

active. They go to aviation hearings give us the updates and when there is a need to have a group of us there then they let us know and then we go, whoever can go, go.

51:50 **Susan:** Have you had other family who have lost loved ones from other crashes come join you? Have you are you

51:56 **Kathy:** Not on the mostly it's just us this is our, yeah, this is us. We've heard from other people, but this is our thing. You know yeah, we have not. I haven't really met, I mean I take it family There's a company called Avium (?) and they train care teams, not just airlines, but say Noco gas or something, you know if they have an explosion or something you know they want all these companies to have care teams in place for things whether it's a train anything any company and through that, I have had people volunteer and done the training as I have we have met other people who have lost people in crashes. And have even met a couple whose daughter was a survivor of a plane crash. So I have met them and heard their stories. Then I share my story at their conferences and then that helps their people when training. But you again, it's healing for me to do it or I wouldn't do it.

52:53 **Susan:** Yeah

52:53 **Kathy:** It is or people they will thank me but it's healing. Being able to talk about it.

52:58 **Susan:** Sure

52:58 **Kathy:** You know, I hate to be cliché about it but it makes something good out of bad. That's what we do.

53:04 **Susan:** Yeah

53:06 **Kathy:** But we've come a long way with our children two girls married

53:10 **Susan:** That's great

53:10 **Kathy:** We've survived, we've survived. But still, the trauma is there it's far from me. I can, my mind starts to go to that I try to make my mind not go that night even though sometimes I know it's healthy just to let it go and have a good cry cause um, thinking of that night and they were the plane was falling for about 20-30 seconds so thinking of that is probably the hardest you know

53:38 **Susan:** Sure

53:38 **Kathy:** It is very difficult what they must have been going through. being in touch with the other family members from that crash have developed wonderful they are my family now so many of us have gotten close and stay very close and we see each other socially and we do things together so that's helped.

54:02 **Susan:** Well, thank you for being willing to share your story

54:03 **Kathy:** You're welcome

54:04 **Susan:** We really, really appreciate it. Your resilience is really stunning.

54:10 **Kathy:** I hope it helps you

54:12 **Susan:** It does well

54:14 **Kathy:** Whatever way you want

54:16 **Susan:** No it helps a lot. I think, think that what you have shared is actually something that can empower people who are going through similar grieving process and it can also help people who are providing care to them. I didn't really need to go through the pillars of trauma informed care because you named them one after another. You did, no you did a great job. So, officially on behalf of the Institute on Trauma and Trauma Informed care I'd like to thank you

54:43 **Kathy:** Thank you

54:44 **Susan:** For sharing your story

54:44 **Susan:** Thank you