

Tears flow for Aileen...

By REBECCA TORR

THE family of crash victim Aileen Woods say they will never be free of the pain of losing her.

"Although it has been a long time you don't get over it, you just learn to live with it," said the 28-year-old's father, Scotsman Alistair Woods.

The Bapco security head still remembers the events that followed the crash as clearly as if they happened yesterday.

Aileen, a former St Christopher's School student, had just taken up a job in Cairo as country manager for a telecommunications company and was visiting her father for a short break.

"She had been talking about it the whole week but couldn't get a flight, so it was a last minute thing, unfortunately," said Mr Woods.

He remembers waiting for her to arrive at Bahrain International Airport, but only thought at first the flight had been delayed.

"The flight was shown as delayed and then it disappeared," he said.

"I saw blue lights outside and had a feeling something happened, I went to speak to people around the airport but no-one said anything.

"I was taken to a special area to wait but at no time did Gulf Air come out and say there had been a crash, although they came out with a passenger list.

"There was no information, I just got the list and found a name



■ Niall, Margaret and Alistair ... still grieving. Right, Aileen ... tragic loss



that resembled her name. I was numb, I guessed what had happened."

Mr Woods and other passengers' relatives met Gulf Air officials at the Gulf Hotel the next morning and then went on to identify the bodies at the mortuary.

He had phoned Aileen's mother Margaret, who had returned to their native Scotland six years earlier, the evening of the crash.

"I called Aileen's brothers first because I didn't want Margaret to be alone when she heard the news," said Mr Woods.

"It was probably the hardest phone call I've ever had to make." Mrs Woods came to Bahrain

a day after getting the call and the family later attended a heart-rending memorial service at St Christopher's Cathedral in Manama.

Aileen's body was later flown to Scotland for a service at the family home in Moffat and she was buried in Carluke.

"We had a lovely service at St Christopher's Cathedral which was conducted by the Rev Victor Salve," said Mrs Woods, who is in Bahrain with Aileen's 43-year-old brother Niall to mark the 10th anniversary of the disaster.

"But time doesn't heal, you just live with it because you have to. Some people don't survive but

you have to work and I've got my friends, my sons and my grandchildren, you just get on with things.

"She was a nice girl, happy, people liked her, she was a kind person who lived life to the full.

"She's not here and I miss her and I'm not going to have her around in my old age.

"I had seen her before she went to Cairo on July 4 and the last thing was we were waving goodbye and I said 'I'll see you in October', but of course we never did."

Mrs Woods and Niall are planning to visit their old home in Saar and other places where they have fond memories of being with Aileen, whose other brother Euan,

aged 46, was unable to come.

Aileen lived in Bahrain from the age of four to 11 years old and spent most of her holidays here.

She loved travel and it was her ambition to work in the Middle East, said Mr Woods.

"Bahrain was Aileen's home, she was only four when she came here and she always came for the school holidays," he said.

Niall said he believed she would have ended up back in the Gulf and preferably Bahrain, if she had been given the chance.

He said he missed her every day, but especially during birthdays and family events such as Christmas and weddings.

"There is a period of numbness, but then you have just got to go on, but it's not easy," said the former Bahrain School student.

"But you have to stop the mourning and remember the happy times and not the sadness.

"I miss her during family events, such as Christmas, weddings, birthdays. I've got two children, she was a good aunt to Eve but she never even knew Rory who is five now, so we miss her.

"You always empathise with people who lost loved ones and there were whole families lost and so many young children."

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One of Bahrain's biggest tragedies

AT around 7.30pm on Wednesday, August 23 2000, Gulf Air flight 072 crashed into the sea about a mile north-east of Bahrain International Airport.

The flight was en route from Cairo to Bahrain, when it plunged from the sky, killing all 143 passengers and crew members on board.

The list of fatalities included 34 Bahrainis, 63 Egyptians, 12 Saudis, nine Palestinians, six UAE nationals, three people from China, two from Oman, two Britons and one each from Australia, Canada, India, Kuwait, Morocco, Philippines, Poland,

Sudan and the US.

More than 400 people were involved in the recovery operation, including personnel from the Amiri Air Force, Bahrain Coastguard, Civil Defence and Fire Service and the US Navy.

A full report into the incident, published almost two years after it occurred, found that the accident was the result of a fatal combination of many contributory factors, both at the individual and systemic levels.

Bahraini pilot Captain Ihsan Shakeeb was deemed to have been so confused during the final sec-

onds of the flight that he pitched the aircraft into the water.

The report, released by the Accident Investigation Board, said Capt Shakeeb increased speed and thrust the plane into a dive for 11 seconds, before trying to pull up, but it was too late.

It revealed that Capt Shakeeb and his Omani co-pilot Khalaf Al Alawi may have been disorientated as they performed a tight orbit after a failed attempt to land.

The pair allegedly ignored repeated computer voice warnings to pull up, in what was described

as a catalogue of safety violations and mistakes.

Gulf Air's organisational, management and training systems, leading up to the accident, as well as human error on the flight deck were also cited in the report.

Compensation for the families of the victims of the crash was agreed in an out-of-court settlement in December 2003 following a long-running battle.

The settlement amount was never made public.

Three days of national mourning was declared in Bahrain following what is one of the biggest tragedies in the country's history.

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