

Miracle in the Andes by Nando Parrado (2006)

On Oct 7 a chartered flight with the Old Christian Rugby team [from Montevideo, Uruguay] was forced to land due to bad weather. The next day they took off over the Andes, but the altimeter was off & low cloud cover hid the fact that they were too low & crashed into the mtn at 12,000' & the plane broke apart. 13 died on impact including his mom & best friend.

It was a miracle any were alive [29 were]; there were many miracles that night. The team doctor was dead, but 2 medical students were alive. They used the seats that were ripped from the floor to build a wall where the back of the plane ripped away in attempt to keep out the -35 dF at nights, but their summer clothes were useless. During the day they would sit on cushion in the sun & let snow melt in pieces of aluminum.

Marcelo [team captain] made good decisions & rationed food [lasted a week]. Nando had a fractured skull & was in a coma for 2 days. Others had broken bones. On the 5th day 4 climbed the nearest mtn, but were forced back. His sister died after 8 days [27 left]. A search party was sent out, but it was impossible to see the crash & they were probably off course. They felt it was their duty to survive.

After 10 days they heard on a radio the search was called off & they decided they must eat the meat on the dead bodies. 3 more went out to search for the rest of the plane, were stranded for the night & forced back. On Oct 28 one man heard something & stood up just as an avalanche buried everyone. He quickly helped a few out & they dug for faces to save others. 8 died that night [19 left]. They had to poke a hole in the plane for fresh air. The blizzard lasted days before they began to dig out. Someone heard summer in the Andes begins Nov 15 so 4 set out & were quickly turned back by a storm that lasted days. Then 3 set out & found the tail section. There was food & clothes & a warm place to spend the night. They almost froze to death the next night in the open. They returned to the plan & tried to fix the radio with batteries from the tail. It did not work. They were caught in another blizzard & barely returned to the plane.

They sewed insulated clothe together with wire to make a sleeping bag & 3 set out west this time. Ice made it slippery in the morning & they sank up to the knees in the afternoon. Some areas were so steep they had to dig steps. It took them 3 days to reach to top of the ridge when they saw endless mtns. They sent Tintin back & took his food so Roberto & Nando could continue.

Every time Nando wanted to give up he would remember a story his father told them that when he was young, he was a scull rower & one race he was battling it out with another. He was so exhausted & ready to quit but so was the other so he pushed on & won the race. Apathy causes death & he determined the opposite of death was love. The love for his family kept him alive.

Once he rode a cushion down a snow bank when he realized 60 mph was too fast. He doesn't know how he survived. Then they would carefully crawl down the steep sections. The nights got warmer as they descended. Walking across a glacier was dangerous. After 7 days they were out of the snow & followed streams of water. Day 9 one of them got diarrhea. Day 10 they saw a man watching over his cows. The man went for help as his friends feed them. Police came by horseback, but due to fog, reporters arrived before the helicopter.

The helicopter took him more than 70 miles to the crash site. They struggled to get over the mtns. They were taken to a hospital, cleaned up, examined & reunited with family. 16 survived the 72 days in the Andes [29 died]. Some found God, others not.

Quotes: “So I decided I would not quit after all. I decided I would suffer a little longer.” “I will try not to feel sorry for what was taken from me, but to be happy for what was given back.” (Seler Parrado) “Do not turn away from God because of our suffering.” (Arturo)

Notes: The Andes are the longest & 2nd highest mtn range in the world. To drive a car through a high-speed curve, start wide & brake into the apex then accelerate out wide again. Our body dehydrates 5x faster at high altitude.