

## Plane Crash in the Rain Forest

Juliane Köpcke and her mother were finally on the plane, after a long wait at the airport in Lima, Peru.

It was 1971, and seventeen-year-old Juliane was enjoying a busy few days. Yesterday, her high school graduation party in Lima. Today, the flight to Pucallpa, a city in the middle of the rain forest. And tomorrow, Christmas Day. She wanted to spend the next few days with her father in the rain forest science center where he was working.

Juliane had the seat next to the window. Her mother was in the middle seat, and a fat man was asleep on the other side. Suddenly, thirty minutes into the flight, they flew into a storm. Juliane realized that it was a bad one. The plane started shaking and Christmas gifts fell out of the cupboards above the passengers' heads. Then the plane was hit by lightning. Juliane's mother saw that it was on fire. "This is the end!" she screamed.

After that, Juliane does not remember very much. The plane started going down, nose first. Then suddenly Juliane was outside the plane, falling in circles down toward the green trees of the rain forest. She was still in her seat, with two seats next to her. But the other seats were empty. Her mother and the fat man were not there.

She woke on the ground, under the group of seats, covered in dirty water. She tried to look around her. It was difficult because she could only open one of her eyes. Her glasses were lost, too, and her head hurt. But she soon realized that she was alone.

She tried to walk, but quickly fell to the ground. She sat up and checked her body. She had one useless eye, a broken shoulder, and deep cuts on her arm and her leg, but nothing more serious. It seemed almost impossible that she was alive.

But where was her mother? Juliane looked and looked



but at first there were no signs of the plane. Finally she saw three dead bodies covered in flies. Some Christmas gifts were hanging in the trees. Sadly she accepted that her mother was probably dead.

She found a bag of candy and a big Peruvian Christmas cake. The cake was wet and dirty. She tried some, but it tasted terrible. She quickly threw it back on the ground. Later, after days without food, she realized her mistake. But by then it was too late. The cake was many kilometers behind her.

She was sure that people were looking for the plane and for survivors. But the rescuers could not see through the trees of the rain forest to the ground below. How long before they found her? Too long, she decided. She had to walk through the rain forest to somewhere with people—that was her only hope.

She knew about rain forests. Both her parents were German scientists who studied rain forest animals. She grew up in Peru and her happiest days as a child were in the rain forest. But she did not know where she was. Which way should she go?

She remembered her father's words: "Streams run into rivers," he always said, "and people live and travel on rivers. You'll never be lost in the rain forest if you follow a stream."

She started walking along a stream, dressed in a short skirt and one summer shoe. The other shoe was lost in the crash. She hit the ground with a stick before every step. She did not want to put her foot on a snake. Insects were a problem, too. They bit her skin and flew into her cuts.

She ate the candy that she found near the dead bodies. She did not look for other food. She did not feel hungry.

After three days, she came to a narrow river. "No boats come this way," she decided. "I must continue."

She walked and swam in the river. She could hear planes



above her. Rescue planes! But they could not see her. After a few days the rescuers disappeared. "They've stopped looking for survivors now," she thought. She felt very alone.

There were a lot of crocodiles next to the river. They jumped into the water when Juliane came close. But she was not worried. She knew that the crocodiles in this area did not attack people. They were going into the water to hide. The sting rays in the river were much more dangerous. It was difficult to survive an attack by one of these. As she walked, she hit the bottom of the river in front of her with her stick. That way, the sting rays attacked the stick and not her.

Sometimes she tried to clean the cut in her arm, but it was getting worse every day. It was full of insects. "If I don't get the right medicine soon, I'll lose my arm," she thought.

After many days without food, she was getting weak. Sometimes she was unable to walk or swim. She just lay in the water, half asleep, and the river carried her along.

Ten days after the crash she came to a bigger river. There was a boat ... but was it real, or just a dream? She touched it. Yes! It really was a boat! Near it there was a path with a few small steps. Juliane was too weak to climb the steps. She tried again and again. After hours she was finally at the top, and there she found a small shelter.

She lay in the shelter that night, thinking about her next step. She decided not to take the boat. She was too weak to use it.

Suddenly she heard voices. Three woodcutters arrived at the shelter. They could not believe it when they saw Juliane. But they cleaned the cut on her arm, then took her in their boat to the nearest doctor, eleven hours away. After months in the hospital, she went home. She could only see out of one eye, but she was in good health. Of the ninety-two people on the plane, she was the only survivor.