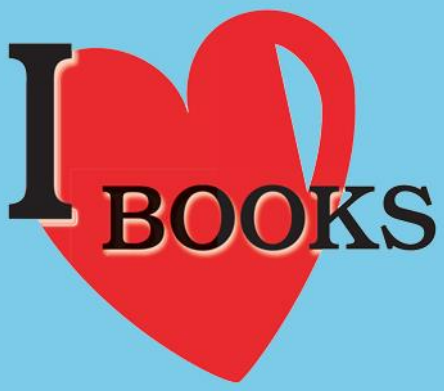



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Opening extract from

# Survivors

Written by

**David Long**

Illustrated by

**Kerry Hyndman**

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# SURVIVORS

## Great Escapes and Amazing Stories of Survival

DAVID LONG

Illustrated by Kerry Hyndman

FABER & FABER

**For as long as people have looked for adventure some have also found danger, and when it comes to stories of survival few can match the true tales told in this book. Sometimes the individuals know they are taking huge risks, while others are just incredibly unlucky. But in every case these men, women and children have been forced to battle against almost impossible odds – at sea, in the air, and in horrifying situations down on the ground.**

**As you'll read in the following pages, they need to find amazing reserves of strength, fortitude and self-belief to come through it all safely. Not everyone emerges unscathed, and quite a few suffer serious injuries, but their stories are exciting, insightful and inspirational – and, however unbelievable, absolutely true.**



## Juliane Koepcke

# The girl who fell from the sky (Peru, 1971)

On Christmas Eve, seventeen-year-old Juliane Koepcke was flying high above the South American rainforest when the airliner carrying her and her mother was hit by a violent storm. The previous evening

had been prom night at Koepcke's school, but now term was over and they were heading home for the holidays. Home meant the remote Amazonian town of Pucallpa in Peru, where Koepcke's father, Hans-Wilhelm, worked as a biologist. Her mother, Maria, was an ornithologist who studied birds and their behaviour. Sharing her parents' passion for science and nature, Koepcke planned to follow their example by studying biology at university.

On board the four-engined Lockheed Electra aeroplane she could hear other passengers complaining because their flight had been delayed by nearly seven hours. But they were airborne now and Koepcke was happy to be on holiday and looking forward to seeing her father. From her window seat she noticed storm clouds in the distance, but she loved flying and had no reason to feel afraid.

**she began to feel anxious as the Electra dipped suddenly and entered a massive, rain-dark cloud.**

Her mother felt less relaxed about the storm. Never quite believing that something metal could rival the birds she studied, Maria didn't like flying at the best of times. Now she began to feel anxious as the Electra dipped suddenly and entered a massive, rain-dark cloud. Before long the plane was being buffeted about by the air currents, and after a few minutes even Koepcke began to feel that something wasn't quite right.

Bags and other pieces of luggage started to fall from the overhead racks and drinks tipped into passengers' laps. Soon Christmas presents and parcels began bouncing around the cabin as the aircraft was pitched up and down by the turbulence.



Through her window Koepcke could see flashes of lightning around the aircraft. With the storm obviously closing in she too began to feel scared. Above the sound of the propellers several passengers could be heard crying as she reached across for her mother's hand.

The violent pitching continued like this for nearly ten minutes, throwing the aircraft this way and that. Gripping her mother's hand more tightly now, Koepcke looked out of the window and saw that one of the engines was glowing brightly. Her mother also noticed this and very quietly said, 'That is the end. It's all over.' These were the last words Koepcke ever heard her say.

Moments later the cabin was plunged into darkness, and the Electra went into a steep nosedive. Koepcke couldn't see anything in the pitch black, and could hear nothing but the roar of the engines. Then, just as suddenly, everything went silent. With a shock the teenager realised she was somehow outside the aeroplane, still strapped in her seat but tumbling over and over and over. With nothing around her but the rush of cold air, she was plummeting down towards the jungle.

**With a shock the teenager realised she was somehow outside the aeroplane**

Coming out of the clouds she momentarily glimpsed the tops of the trees spinning up to meet her like a patch of giant broccoli. It was petrifying, but she must have passed out immediately because the next thing she remembered was waking up the following morning. It was Christmas Day. She was still strapped into her seat, but it was now wedged firmly into the ground.

Forty minutes after taking off, the aircraft had apparently been

struck by lightning, one deadly bolt causing a fuel tank to explode and rip off the right wing. As the fuselage began to disintegrate around her, Koepcke had been thrown clear of the airborne wreckage and then fell more than two miles down into the jungle below.

Despite the trauma of this experience, she realised at once what had happened. Looking up at the trees she knew she had survived an air disaster, probably because her seat had broken the fall as she crashed through the dense foliage.

**Looking up at the trees she knew she had survived an air disaster,**

Unsurprisingly, the seventeen-year-old was in considerable pain and feeling dizzy. She had broken her collarbone, damaged a ligament in one knee, and sustained deep cuts and bruises as she hit the ground. Her left eye was also swollen shut, but she could still walk and knew she had to start finding a way to safety.

Koepcke had learned enough about the jungle from her parents to know it wasn't as dangerous as people like to think. Travelling on foot, it was important to keep a cool head and not do anything foolish, but she had no idea where she was, or where any of the other passengers had come down. She had also lost a shoe and her glasses, which complicated things as she was very short-sighted. Nor was she dressed for a jungle trek, with only a light cotton summer dress to protect her from the hordes of biting, stinging insects that were buzzing all around her.

The first thing to establish was if anyone else was nearby, especially her mother, but when Koepcke called out there was no response except the chatter of startled animals. Some time later she was thrilled to hear an



aircraft circling overhead. Presumably the crew were looking for survivors, but since she couldn't see the plane through the thick canopy of trees she quickly guessed they couldn't see her either. This realisation made her feel utterly alone.

For a while the Koepckes had lived in a remote scientific research station, and Hans-Wilhelm had taught his daughter some useful survival tips. For example, he told her that walking through shallow water can be safer than walking on land – snakes and other poisonous creatures are hard to spot on the ground and may attack if anyone steps too near them. Koepcke also knew that jungle settlements tend to be built on rivers, so if she stayed near water she would stand a better chance of meeting someone and finding help.

**walking through shallow water can be safer than walking on land**

Until this happened, however, her situation looked desperate. She had nothing to eat except a small bag of sweets, and she had no idea how far she might have to walk to reach safety. Soon dozens of insects were dropping onto her skin and climbing into her hair, and with the sun up the rain forest was unbearably hot. It was also very wet because torrential storms like the one that had brought down the Electra continued on and off throughout the day.

Having failed to find signs of anyone nearby Koepcke started to walk, and when she came to a small stream she decided to follow it. It was lucky that there was plenty of water to drink, but the rainy season meant there was no ripe fruit on the trees, and from her parents' jungle training she knew that eating anything else would be too risky.

At nightfall the temperature dropped dramatically, and with her

sleeveless dress wet through Koepcke felt terribly cold. She also felt very lonely as well as frightened. Unable to sleep, she sat shivering as she listened to the startling sounds of the rainforest at night.

The following morning she continued slowly along the course of the stream. It didn't take long before the little bag of sweets was empty, and when her watch stopped she rapidly lost track of time.

**It didn't take long before the little bag of sweets was empty,**

After a couple of days she heard the sound of a king vulture somewhere nearby. From her mother Koepcke knew these huge carnivores tend to land only where there is lots of food around. Knowing they eat only dead animals, she had to consider the gruesome possibility that the bird was looking for bodies from the plane.

To her horror her fears were proved correct shortly afterwards when she stumbled upon a bank of seats from the aircraft. It was partly buried in the undergrowth and Koepcke could see three bodies still strapped in place. For a moment she thought one of them might be her mother, but then she noticed nail varnish on the toes, which Maria never wore. In fact, Koepcke never did find any more survivors during her time in the jungle; she later learned that of the ninety-one people on board the Electra she was the only one left alive.

For several days she continued her journey downstream, alternately walking and swimming. This made her progress very slow, and swimming led to serious burns from the sun beating down on her back and arms. Together with her other injuries this caused her more and more pain, while a lack of sleep and the effort needed to keep moving only added to her exhaustion. She was also alarmed to find that the insect bites were becoming infected





and that live maggots were now burrowing under her skin.

After a week Koepcke realised that she could no longer hear aircraft above, meaning that the authorities must have stopped looking for survivors. This scared her but also made her very angry, knowing they had given up even though she was in the jungle below still fighting for her life. She began to despair, but on the ninth day, to her astonishment and delight, she found an old, broken-down boat on a stretch of riverbank where she'd been resting.

Her first thought was to take the boat, but she didn't want to be accused of stealing. Instead she looked around and noticed a path running up the bank and into the trees. Climbing the path took all her strength as she was so tired and hungry, but at the top she found a small shack. Inside it was an outboard motor and a can of fuel, which reminded her of a trick her father used to cure the family dog of worms.

**Climbing the path took all her strength as she was so tired and hungry, but at the top she found a small shack.**

Pouring petrol onto her wounds ought to kill the maggots, or at least get them off her skin. Koepcke knew the stinging would be excruciating but it had to be worth a try. After dousing one arm in the flammable liquid she counted no fewer than forty maggots as they dropped out of her wounds and onto the ground. The effort left her even more exhausted, and wrapping herself in a tarpaulin from the shack she quickly fell asleep.

Waking the following day Koepcke didn't feel much better and decided to stay in the shelter a bit longer because she was too tired to move. Outside she could hear another rainstorm beginning, but later, as the rain died away, she thought she could hear voices approaching the shack. Struggling to her feet and pulling open the door she was overjoyed to see three forestry workers. The men were astonished, and she quickly explained about the crash and how she had spent the last ten days alone in the forest.

The men offered her some food, but after so long without anything except water she was unable to eat. They quickly decided to take her downriver in their canoe. After seven hours on the water she was flown to a hospital, and then reunited with her father in Pucallpa. Happily, Koepcke went on to make a full recovery, although for years afterwards she was haunted by nightmares about her ordeal and the loss of her mother and the other passengers. Juliane Koepcke never lost her love of biology, however, and after qualifying in Germany she has returned to Peru many times to visit the rainforest and study its wildlife.