

# Q & A: Tenth anniversary of the "Miracle on the Hudson"

By Matthew Kane, as told by Stephanie Vatz, Newsela staff on 01.15.19

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Passengers wait to be rescued on the wings of a US Airways Airbus 320 jetliner that safely ditched in the frigid waters of the Hudson River in New York City after a flock of birds knocked out both its engines, January 15, 2009. Photo by: AP Photo/Steven Day

Ten years ago, a potentially tragic series of events turned inspiring.

On January 15, 2009, at around 3:20 p.m., Flight 1549 left a snowy LaGuardia Airport in New York City. It was bound for Charlotte, North Carolina. Suddenly on its takeoff, the plane hit a flock of Canada geese. Hitting the large birds broke both of the plane's engines. The flight would need to make an emergency landing.

Instead of trying to make it back to La Guardia or another nearby airport, the plane's captain, Chesley "Sully" Sullenberger, landed the plane in the frigid Hudson River. The river separates New York City from New Jersey.

This decision was controversial at the time. In fact, the choice became the subject of a movie, "Sully," starring Tom Hanks. After an investigation, it was determined that Captain Sully did exactly the right thing and his actions saved all 155 people onboard.

The event was called the "Miracle on the Hudson" by then-governor of New York David Paterson. To recognize the event's 10-year anniversary, Newsela interviewed Matthew Kane, a Newsela employee and a survivor of the crash. Kane spoke to us about the importance of mindset, both in a survival situation and in day-to-day life, and about why he wants people to remember the event that shaped his outlook on life.

### **Matt, could you tell us a little bit about the beginning of that day?**

I was headed to Charlotte for a business meeting. For work, I had always flown other airlines, but due to an error, I ended up on US Airways. My coworker, who I was traveling with, actually took the United flight I should have been on ahead of me. It was a snowy day.

I remember I sat in seat 24A. It was a small plane with only about 27 rows, so I was near the back.

### **When did you know there was a problem?**

I first felt something, then looked out the window and saw stuff coming out of the engine, then saw flames. I realized something was really wrong when I saw a flight attendant yell at another passenger to sit down. The way she sounded, it made me think, OK, this is probably serious. Then, into the flight, we started feeling the plane moving downward. You start saying to yourself, no problem, no issue. It was about six minutes into the flight when the pilot says, "Brace for impact." There was no communication before that. From there we had 90 seconds — 90 seconds where we didn't know whether we would live or die.

### **What happened next?**

The plane went down in the back first, which made sense for the way the pilot wanted to land. The challenge with that was, the water came in really quickly in the back. I survived a plane crash, but now I have freezing water coming up to my hips. So, now I think, I'm going to drown. I took the seat cushions and started throwing them forward to get them to the other passengers. I was the last passenger off before the pilot and co-pilot, who went back on the plane and made sure everyone was OK.

Things still weren't over yet, though. We had to get on the boats and before that, you know, it was so cold. We were cramping up. You could die of hypothermia out there.

**How did you stay calm?**

My dad was a Marine. He always taught me to break everything down into its simplest form. So, whether I'm doing martial arts or CrossFit or coaching my kids' football or lacrosse teams, that's what I try to do. I was pretty calm that day because I saw it as a three-step process. Those three steps were: Survive the crash, get off the plane, then get on the boat and go. Those were the things that mattered. That's how I looked at it and it totally worked.

**If I were to ask a close friend or family member, what would they say is the most noticeable change in you since that day?**

They'd say prioritization on things that matter, better prioritization of my family — my twin son and daughter, my family, my wife. Without a doubt, I would say I've gained perspective on what matters and what doesn't. I don't deal with people who are negative or do not recognize that there's always a way or always a path. I would also say that I think of life as being built of little moments. Your moments don't need to be at a "Sully" level, but I try to find two or three of those moments where I can do the right thing every single day. It's about doing the right thing and making the right calls all the time.

**What sort of little things do you not worry about anymore?**

It's mostly when people start complaining about things. It could be something as simple as someone at work or people at my kids' school. I can tell that they are not thinking about the outcome. Parents might complain that the field is wet today and the kids have football practice, but the reality is that playing in worse conditions is going to make them better. Part of what this experience taught me is, how are you going to handle yourself?

**Some folks from the flight had a hard time dealing with it. What would you say to someone who was struggling with a similarly scary past experience?**

You spend your life thinking about what happened to you and you could start blaming others for the situation. Or, you could say, this happened, this is my current situation, here's the reality of where I am and I want to work my way out of it.

People have gone through traumatic situations of all different levels. To me, I can let this eat me alive. I can say to myself I wasn't supposed to be on a plane that crashed. Or I can fight. This is my current reality, but you're not gonna get to your ultimate outcome tomorrow. You can take a step back, understand your reality and understand what steps you can take to move forward. And of course, you can rely on the support of your family, your friends.

**Do you still keep in touch with any of the passengers from that day? Do they still keep in touch with one another?**

Absolutely. There are only 155 people who have gone through this experience together. It's a small club.

**Why does this story still matter, 10 years later?**

People should remember the "Miracle on the Hudson" because of Sully, and because of where the country was. Back in 2009, the nation wasn't in the best state. Many people faced money problems. There were wars going on. Many people did not have jobs. There was negative news almost every single day.

But this story brought back the human side. It showed that if humans work together, then anything is possible. I know the country we're living in now is a different country than the one we were living in 10 years ago. But times are still tough in many ways. People feel very divided from one another. It's important to remember the "Miracle on the Hudson" because it was a story that brought us together. It reminded us that we all need to work together and that we need to be making the right decisions every single chance we get.

**Quiz**

- 1 If the introduction [paragraphs 1-5] were organized using cause and effect structure, which selection would come FIRST?
- (A) Ten years ago, a potentially tragic series of events turned inspiring.
  - (B) Suddenly on its takeoff, the plane hit a flock of Canada geese. Hitting the large birds broke both of the plane's engines.
  - (C) Instead of trying to make it back to La Guardia or another nearby airport, the plane's captain, Chesley "Sully" Sullenberger, landed the plane in the Hudson River.
  - (D) This decision was controversial at the time. In fact, the choice became the subject of a movie, "Sully," starring Tom Hanks.
- 2 Read the sections "When did you know there was a problem?" and "What happened next?" What is one connection between these two sections?
- (A) Both compare this flight with other flights Kane experienced.
  - (B) Both describe the problems Kane faced after the crash.
  - (C) Both explain what caused Kane to be on the flight that crashed.
  - (D) Both take the reader through Kane's experience on the flight.

- 3 Read the selection from the section "If I were to ask a close friend or family member, what would they say is the most noticeable change in you since that day?"

*They'd say prioritization on things that matter, better prioritization of my family — my kids, my family, my wife. Without a doubt, I would say I've gained perspective on what matters and what doesn't. I don't deal with people who are negative or do not recognize that there's always a way or always a path. I would also say that I think of life as being built of little moments.*

How does Kane experience life differently now than he did before the crash?

- (A) He tries to focus more on the things that really matter and making positive decisions.
  - (B) He meets more people who have a negative view about life and how to do things.
  - (C) He has more doubts about his own perspective about the moments in his life.
  - (D) He finds it more difficult to find the right path when trying to make big choices.
- 4 Read the sentence from the introduction [paragraphs 1-5].

*The event was called the "Miracle on the Hudson" by then-governor of New York David Paterson.*

How is Matthew Kane MOST likely to respond to this sentence?

- (A) More than a miracle, the event was about people making good choices and working together.
- (B) More than a miracle, the event has kept many people from ever flying on a plane again.
- (C) The event was not a miracle since most people went back to the same lives they had before.
- (D) The event was not a miracle since the water was cold and scary for all of the passengers.