



STRANDED

I'VE COME FROM A PLANE THAT CRASHED ON THE MOUNTAINS

A FILM BY GONZALO ARIJÓN

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A ZEITGEIST FILMS RELEASE

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I'VE COME FROM A PLANE THAT CRASHED ON THE MOUNTAINS

It is one of the most astonishing and inspiring survival tales of all time. On October 13, 1972, a young rugby team from Montevideo, Uruguay, boarded a plane for a match in Chile—and then vanished into thin air. Two days before Christmas, 16 of the 45 passengers miraculously resurfaced. They had managed to survive for 72 days after their plane crashed on a remote Andean glacier. Thirty-five years later, the survivors returned to the crash site—known as the Valley of Tears—to recount their harrowing story of defiant endurance and indestructible friendship. Previously documented in the 1973 worldwide bestseller *Alive* (and the 1993 Ethan Hawke movie of the same name), this shocking true story finally gets the cinematic treatment it deserves. Visually breathtaking and crafted with riveting detail by documentary filmmaker (and childhood friend of the survivors) Gonzalo Arijon with a masterful combination of on-location interviews, archival footage and reenactments, *Stranded* is by turns hauntingly powerful and spiritually moving.

THE STORY

On October 12, 1972, a Uruguayan army plane left Montevideo for Santiago in Chile. The plane was chartered by the “Christian Brothers”, a rugby team from Carrasco, an upmarket suburb of Montevideo, who were planning to play a friendly match in Chile and—accompanied by a few parents and friends—spend a pleasant weekend on the shores of the Pacific.

Bad weather forced the plane to land in Mendoza, a small town on the Argentinean slopes of the Andes. On October 13, the plane took off once again. At 3:30pm the pilot transmitted his position to the control tower in Santiago. But when the tower attempted to communicate with the aircraft a minute later there was no reply.

Chile, Argentina and Uruguay joined forces to search for the plane, but there had been exceptionally heavy snowfall in the mountains and since the fuselage was white there was little chance of finding the plane and even less chance that any of the 45 passengers had survived.

Then, seventy days after the crash, a Chilean shepherd, who was watching his flock in the foothills of the Andes, caught sight of the outline of two men on the other side of a torrential river. Gesticulating frantically, they fell to their knees, their arms wide open. The shepherd took them for tourists and left. However, the next day he came back to the same spot and saw that the men were still there. The sound of the water was so loud on the banks of the river that it was impossible for the three men to hear each other so the shepherd threw a piece of paper and a pen, wrapped in a handkerchief, over the river. The two bearded men in rags wrote something on the paper and threw it back to the shepherd: “We’re from a plane that crashed on the mountains. Fourteen of our friends are still alive up there.”

They had not only survived a plane crash and three winter months in the Andes, but also an avalanche that killed 8 of their friends and trapped the rest of them in the fuselage for three days—the fuselage that up to this point had been their only shelter. Ten days after the crash they learned from a still functioning radio that the search had been abandoned and by this time their meagre food supplies had run out. They had seen their friends succumb one by one to their injuries, dying in their arms. Despite all this, they had managed to come up with devices to melt the snow to water, to protect their eyes against snow blindness and to cross the snow without sinking in.

Growing impatient with their fate they started expeditions, each time daring to go a bit further away from the safety of the camp than before, to find out what was behind the mountain range, only to find more dead bodies—and eventually the tail of the plane, in which they found batteries, some food and most importantly the material to tailor a sleeping bag. It was this sleeping bag that finally enabled them to veer farther away from the plane, as they could now also survive the freezing cold of the nights in the Andes. Picking the strongest among them, feeding them bigger rations and sparing them from the daily duties, they prepared for their last hope of rescue—sending two of their party into the unknown mountain ranges.

20-year-old Fernando “Nando” Parrado and 19-year-old Roberto Canessa walked 44 miles over the mountains, crossing summits more than 13,000 feet high, with no equipment other than rugby boots. Reports worldwide spoke of the “survivors of the century” and—maybe because they were rescued two days before Christmas—the “Miracle of the Andes”.

Shortly after their rescue, in a heated press conference, the survivors made a startling admission “... the day came when we had nothing left to eat, and we said that Christ, by offering his flesh and blood during the Last Supper, had shown us the way by indicating that we had to do likewise: take his flesh and blood, incarnated in our friends who had died in the crash... It was a personal communion for each one of us... It’s what helped us to survive...” One of our greatest taboos had been defied. And made public. The whole world was in shock.

THE SURVIVORS IN THEIR OWN WORDS

For the first time, the survivors of the Uruguayan plane crash have agreed to tell us everything—from “beginning to end”—to relive the raw, intact memory of those 72 days in the mountains.

The joy of the departure. The crash, the deaths, the wounded. The wait. The rescue services not turning up. The discouragement. Hunger setting in. The terrible decision to eat the bodies of their dead friends. The avalanche in the middle of the night which killed another eight people. Fighting to stay alive, while the world continued without them. The beginnings of a “new society”...

“As time goes on, I increasingly have the feeling that we experienced a sort of “laboratory experiment”: you throw 30 or so young Western city-dwellers into the snow. You deprive them of aid and supplies. But that’s not all: you provoke an avalanche that wipes out a dozen of them but which, paradoxically, offers the others the protein necessary for their survival... And you wait....” —**Roberto Canessa**

“At the time when the group was having trouble making the decision, I remember saying: ‘If I were dead, there, in the snow, and you were debating whether or not to use my body in an attempt to survive... If—while being dead—I had the possibility of getting up, I would kick your asses, you bunch of idiots!’ They all listened to me in silence, and I think that these words helped the group to take the step.” —**Gustavo Zerbino**

“When Roberto cut the first thin strips of meat, he placed them on the cabin. I went to eat hastily, in secret... I felt ashamed the whole time I was up there. I wanted to hide that. For a long time, I was obsessed by this story of human meat... But I couldn’t admit it...” —**Adolfo “Fito” Strauch**

“What we did was the result of thinking things through from a pragmatic and material point of view. Something like filling the tanks with petrol. The only way to buy time, to delay fatal issues, while waiting to see what we could do to get out of our situation. And our strategy succeeded.” —**Roberto Canessa**

“When Roberto and Nando finally left the burnt-out plane—to attempt to cross the Andes on foot towards the west—Nando, who had lost his mother and sister in the crash, turned around to me to say: ‘Carlitos, if it takes longer than expected for us to return, I authorize you to do as you see fit with the bodies of my mother and sister.’ He didn’t have to say such a thing to us, but he wanted to do it. For me, it was the bravest act possible.” —**Carlos Páez**

“When the first rescuers came down from the helicopters, they must have had an incredible shock when they saw all these human remains around the cabin. They had to spend the night with us in the fuselage, to wait for a storm to blow over. Their presence filled us with joy, because we were saved, and it made us feel incredibly hungry. Their powdered soup wasn’t enough, and we ate human flesh in front of them, because we had nothing to hide. In the end, they decided to sleep in a tent, about 200 feet from the plane, holding a revolver.... Poor guys!” —**Gustavo Zerbino**

“When we were coming down the mountain, thin and starving, I saw a priest, and without thinking, I told him everything. Absolutely everything. It was like a purge, something I had kept inside me and that “had to come out,” one way or another. Immediately afterwards, I asked him to hear my confession. And he replied: “My son, you’ve already confessed. May God be with you”. This helped me so much to accept what I’d done...” —**José-Luis Inciarte**

“If I had my time over again, I wouldn’t wait so long—ten days—before deciding to eat human flesh. What we did, others did before us—during wars for instance—only we gave ‘surnames and first names’ to this act.” —**Carlos Páez**

“We experience cannibalism on Earth every day, where the weak are crushed, where the race for personal interests crushes all those who happen to be in the way... The complete opposite of what we experienced up there, where we all endeavored to do our utmost, for ourselves and others, even the weakest...” —**Carlos Paez**

“The Vatican approved what we had done. However, if it had condemned us, it would have had the same effect on me. I have no scruples and don’t feel guilty about what I did. I accept it. Life—i.e. poetry, invention, intelligence—is more important than death. That’s my one and only rule.” —**Eduardo Strauch**

“The spirit of my dead friends isn’t inside me, no. On the other hand, I can feel them floating around me. In the beginning, not long after it happened, those who were no longer there were still omnipresent. It was as though they were shouting at us, which prevented us from visiting their parents and families, despite the fact that we had known each other for a long time, because we all went to the same school and lived in the same area.

“Maybe in the beginning, owing to the fact that they were too young to die, they didn’t know what to do to be only pure spirits. They still wanted to be part of the land of the living. That created a conflict between them and us. Little by little, they seemed to find their place. Or perhaps it was us that learnt to simply make them invisible. Even though I feel more like their father every day, the father of all those that aren’t here...

“I must admit that as the years go by, I can hear them increasingly. They’re there all the same, and they’re whispering to us...” —**Roberto Canessa**

GONZALO ARIJON

Director

Gonzalo Arijón was born in Montevideo, Uruguay in 1956 but has lived in France since 1979. Over the past 15 years, he has directed numerous documentaries, including *Lula's Brazil: Managing a Dream*; *Far Very Far from Rome*; *The Dark Side of Milosevic*; *Rio de Janeiro—A Vertical War*; and *For These Eyes*, which won numerous awards at international film festivals. Arijón is a childhood friend of many of the young men featured in *Stranded*.

“Several of these survivors are friends of mine. We shared the same carefree teenage years. I was shocked by their disappearance and dumbfounded when they came back to life. I shared whole nights with them, listening to their stories which constantly revolved around their survival up there. Their tragic—but also amazing!—epic continued to haunt them, day after day, year after year. And it’s still the case today. Despite a best-seller [*Alive! The Story of the Andes Survivors* by Piers Paul Read, five million copies sold in English alone], and despite a Hollywood movie [*Alive* by Frank Marshall, a 1993 Disney-Paramount co-production], we still have the feeling that this story has never been told from the inside, that what they have to say has never really been heard. And there is always this growing feeling among them that they have something to tell us, to transmit to us, that is way beyond an “enormous anecdote”... Thirty years after the event, I suggested making a film about it. A film that tells of the creation of a new society, cut off from the rest of the world, requiring the reinvention of codes and rules. No leaders—in the traditional sense of the term—but rather a collection of personalities that are gradually revealed, which harmoniously head towards a common objective: to get out of this hell together, and return to the land of the living together. An exemplary story about exceeding oneself, getting to know one another, that deals with the importance of friendship and solidarity in extreme situations.”

—Gonzalo Arijón

CESAR CHARLONE

Cinematographer

The reenacted scenes of the plane’s cabin after the crash were filmed in super 16mm by César Charlone, cinematographer of *City of God*, for which he was nominated for an Oscar for Best Cinematography, as well as *The Constant Gardener* and *Blindness* (all directed by Fernando Meirelles). Charlone was almost on Flight 571 himself. He went to the same college as the survivors (his father was the Uruguayan ambassador to Chile) and Nando was his best friend. He was on the passenger list for the flight but he was traveling from Brazil and, as luck would have it, didn’t get to Montevideo in time to catch the doomed plane.

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A film by **Gonzalo Arijón**

Directors of Photography **César Charlone & Pablo Hernán Zubizarreta**

Color Correction **Guillermo Fernandez**

Film Editors **Claudio Hughes, Samuel Lajus & Alice Larry**

Sound Designer **Fabian Oliver**

Original Music **Florencia Di Concilio-Perrin**

Sound Mixer **Georges Lafitte**

Produced by **Marc Silvera**

with

The 16 Survivors

**Jose Pedro Algorta • Roberto Canessa • Alfredo Delgado • Daniel Fernández
Roberto François • Roy Harley • José-Luis Inciarte • Alvaro Mangino • Javier Methol
Carlos Páez • Fernando Parrado • Ramón Sabella • Adolfo Strauch
Eduardo Strauch • Antonio Vinzintín • Gustavo Zerbino**

and

**José Gilberto Bravo Castro • Laura Inés Canessa • Antonio Caruso
Juan Catalán • Sergio Catalán • Jorge Massa • Juan Pedro Nicola
Mateo Nicola • Carlos Páez-Vilaró • Madelón Rodríguez • Alejandra Strauch
Gustavo Zerbino Payssé • Lucas Zerbino Payssé • Martin Zerbino Payssé
Sebastian Zerbino Payssé**

A coproduction

**ARTE France - Ethan Productions - La Realidad
The ITVS - International Media Development Fund (IMDF)**

in association with

**Alea Doc & Films (Barcelona)
Morocha Films (Buenos Aires)
Sylicone (Paris)**

France • 2008 • 126 mins • Color and B&W • In Spanish with English subtitles

Press materials are available at www.zeitgeistfilms.com/stranded

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