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FLIGHT of DESTINY

EMMA
SOPHINA



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FLIGHT of DESTINY

When Australian singer-songwriter Emma Sophina left Australia for the USA in January, her parents prayed that God would open doors. Her father recalls her words were “Do something BIG, Lord.” Just a week later, Emma was all over the world media in what has been termed the ‘Hudson River Miracle’. The daughter of Perth pastors, Stephen and Wendy Cowan, was one of the 155 passengers and crew on US Airways Flight 1549 who all survived the crash in the icy Hudson River. EMMA SOPHINA COWAN shared her incredible experience with ACCENT magazine.

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–Emma Sophina Cowan



I'm just a girl who got on a very ordinary flight, or at least I thought it was going to be. Do you ever sometimes sit there and wonder if God did things just because He has a plan for you, never mind the other 154 passengers on the flight, the whole thing was for you?

I arrived in New York on the 7th of January 2009 to be a tourist, to go to Tiffany's and take some much needed time to do some songwriting. I wanted to get away and not have any distractions. I had spent seven days in New York by myself and was feeling well-rested, ready to continue on with my holiday. Before leaving New York I had been in contact with songwriter/producer Marc Swersky and asked if I could forward him a song I'd written a few days earlier.

Flight 1549

The flight to Charlotte, North Carolina, where I was going to visit some old friends from Perth, began normally. The flight crew gave the usual emergency procedures that no one really pays attention to, including me. I was sitting in seat 13F next to the window, with a businesswoman in the aisle seat and a businessman next to me. Come to think of it, there were loads of business people on the flight, I'm assuming to get home for the weekend.

The pilot asked the flight crew to be seated and we took off at 3:26pm (the flight was running very late). I was sitting in my seat thinking how I had an hour and 15 minutes to work on the chorus of my song, and wondering how I was going to sing on the flight.

Within a minute of the plane taking off there was a startling pop and the smell of smoke. Something was on fire. In that moment my thoughts were, "Ah, I'm going home... ok". That complete peace that surpasses human understanding was so real. Only a few days earlier I had been reading in Acts how God gave a woman a trusting heart, and I had prayed that over my life.

You could hear the engines dying and what sounded like someone manually turning a wheel of some sort. I remember turning to the businessman next to me and asking if he knew what was happening. He didn't, of course. I then began to take notice of what was happening. The lady behind me was hyperventilating, I couldn't understand why. Some people were praying, others asking questions and saying they could see smoke.

I then tuned back to the noise of the wheel turning. I thought something had happened to the wheels and the pilots were having to manually turn them out so we could land. By this time you could feel we were heading down gradually and turning towards the left. I had no idea of our orientation. My window was looking at the wings, so I couldn't see anything.

'Brace for Impact'

The next thing I heard was the pilot saying "Brace for impact". There were a couple of people yelling, "Be ready on the doors". There was about 15 seconds where I had to try and work out what was the best place to put my head in case I did any damage. If I tried for the head on knees position, I was hitting my head on the tray table. I then tried to put my head to my right, but I thought I might put my back out. I then realised I was tall enough (for once in my life – I'm 5 foot) to reach the seat in front of me so I grabbed that just in time.

The plane crashed and I thought we had hit a building

(I was having a 9/11 moment). Because the crash was so abrupt and shocking, I thought we had missed the tarmac and hit a building. Seconds later, the doors were open and someone yelled, "We're in the water".

At that point, everything was a mess. I was out of my seat in the aisle and moving forward when someone else yelled, "Life jackets". I reached back to the seat near me and tried to pull out a life jacket. The first seat didn't work, so I tried under the second. (They don't come out easily.) I put it over my head and started moving down the aisle and exited on the left (I was seated on the right). Within seconds of getting out the door, I had to make a decision where to stand and I noticed that the emergency raft had inflated so I jumped for that. Water was gushing into the plane so I was already soaked to my knees. After jumping for the raft, I was soaked up to my waist.

Once seated awkwardly in the raft, I looked around for boats while trying to get half my body out of the water. At this point everyone was just about out of the plane and people were reaching to grab life jackets and seats, any items that float.

Moment of panic

That was my point of panic. I suddenly realised I was an Australian in a river (I had no idea which one) with no ID. I'm glad God gave us our ID on our fingers, but at the time I wasn't thinking that. My passport, drivers license, credit cards, bank cards, every other card you can think of, was now submerged in water. I was fine during the part when I thought I was going to die but when I realised I had no ID, I panicked. Clearly the cold was getting to me.

I now think back and laugh. I actually asked the ladies who were in my raft if they thought it would be ok if I went back into the plane. Crazy, clearly!

This prompted thoughts of being sucked under if we stayed close to the plane, or if fuel was leaking, something could blow up.

Some of us began trying to push ourselves off from the plane to get away. I didn't realise it at the time but the current was so strong that day, we couldn't have done that in our human strength. Once we realised we couldn't push ourselves away, the boats arrived. They began getting the passengers off the wings first because the plane was sinking fast and they were getting wetter. Whilst the water temperature that day was seven degrees, the breeze was in the minus. So once you pulled your wet body out of the water, you began to shiver.

This is about the time the picture of me with my mouth wide open was taken. When the ferries had removed all the people off the wings and we were waiting to be picked up, helicopters began show up. As they got lower, the water began to blow around us, adding to the cold. Divers were jumping out of the helicopters and heading into the plane. Just before a diver went into the plane, he yelled to us (above the noise of the helicopters) if everyone was out. I yelled back, "Everyone is out", upon the word 'OUT'



'I suddenly realised I was an Australian in a river (I had no idea which one) with no ID.'



The Cowan family

the picture was taken. I am not in pain and aguish! I laughed when I saw that picture. Unless you can see the diver, all in black in the window of the plane, you would think something was wrong.

I was one of the last to be picked up and taken in a boat to our first location – a restaurant on the New Jersey side. I remember looking back at the New York skyline from that side, thinking, “I didn’t get to see this in the last seven days”.

In the restaurant, we all began taking off our wet clothes and getting into chef’s uniforms. I was joking that I was going to take up a new profession. A lady near me was on the phone – she managed to get her mobile out with her. One man was praying and when I realised what he was praying, I gently interrupted him and told him that everyone had gotten off the plane and was alive. I didn’t know it at the time but he was separated from his son, who was sitting at the front of the plane and he was at the back. He was overjoyed to hear the news, then continued to pray, mostly asking for forgiveness of sins. (Is it wrong to eavesdrop on prayers?)

‘Ah... I’m alive!’

I then began chatting to another girl as I was getting my blood pressure taken. As it turned out Karin was from Colorado and also a Christian. She couldn’t get over how I was being so lighthearted and joking about the situation. I remember saying, “Ah... I’m alive... It’s all good”. She later called me the strong one, I appreciate that. She was separated from her boyfriend who exited on the right while she exited on the left with me. I just kept encouraging her that I was sure he was ok and thinking of her.

Once they made sure everyone was ok, I then had a chance to ring my parents [in Australia]. I’m so grateful to God that they were asleep because I woke them up to tell them what had happened and at that point they hadn’t seen the news regarding the crash.

I then used the internet to email my family and also Marc Swersky. Since he was the only person I had spoken to in New York and I didn’t know what was going to happen, I thought I might need his help. I then went back down into the restaurant to find out that we were being moved to a Senior Citizens Hall so the airline could work out what was to happen next. In the hall we were able to see what had happened on TV. At this stage things really hadn’t hit me. I was still in awe of God and the pilot’s skill, and just happy to be alive. I was also trying to work out if I could phone the Australian consulate.

I am a person who likes to know what is going on. I like to be organised and have a plan. Not to say I won’t do things on the fly. I’ve been known to plan an international trip in eight days just because I want to go somewhere. Since the plane crash I have been really stretched in letting go and letting God. I have no idea what is happening from week to week, sometimes day to day. It’s exciting and challenging all in the same breath. I have repented of my doubt and lack of faith in who God is and what He can do.

– Emma Sophina Cowan



FOR A **TIME** SUCH AS THIS

Today Emma Sophina Cowan is still in the USA and doors have begun to open for her that no man could have orchestrated. She believes it's all part of God's plan for her life.

Growing up a pastor's daughter, Emma's Christian heritage spans four generations. Her American-born father, Stephen, and Australian mother, Wendy, are the senior pastors of Eden Hill Church in Western Australia. Throughout Emma's childhood, the family moved around, pastoring churches in Melbourne and Sydney, as well as pioneering a church in Papua New Guinea.

"I am blessed to have four generations of ministers before me," states Emma, "and to be in a place where the dreams of my grandmother are being fulfilled."

She goes by her stage name Emma Sophina, which is her middle name and that of her great-grandmother.

"I received a prophecy many years ago that said 'Something big is going to happen to you. You'll receive a recording contract out of it but you need to make sure you get a lawyer'," says Emma. "I think this is fairly big (a plane crash where everyone survives) and what God is now doing is blowing my mind."

For a time such as this

In the days following the miraculous crash-landing, Emma co-wrote a song called 'Send Another Prayer' that includes the words, *"Before I lay my head down, there's just one thing to do, I'm going to send another prayer to heaven, to say I'm thankful for the things you've done."*

"It's a Thank You, giving glory to God," she says of the song that thanks Him for sparing her life and is also an appreciation of the pilot, Chesley Sullenberger, and first officer, Jeffrey B. Skiles.

Emma recorded this song with Grammy-award-winning producers Marc Swersky (Joe Crocker, Hillary Duff, Natalie Cole, Gary Pinto) and Tony Black (Alicia Keys, Jay Z, Bruce Springsteen, P.Diddy, Elton John, David Foster, Janet Jackson, Celine Dion, R.Kelly and many others) at The Melody Club in New Jersey, and in February signed a recording contract with Decca Universal.

"During this time I've often thought

back to the scripture that Christ shared that 'you will do even greater works than these'," she says. "The disciples could only have dreamt of a time when a plane crash in New York is televised all over the world within seconds of the event. If this had occurred even ten years ago, I would not be in a situation that within days I've recorded three songs, signed a recording contract and my songs are on iTunes within two weeks."

Emma has also been interviewed on some of America's biggest chat shows, such as Good Morning America and Larry King Live. For the pastor's daughter from Perth, it's both overwhelming and exciting, but she knows God's hand is on her life.

"In what many others have said should have been the most terrifying moment of my life, I had complete calm and peace, which hasn't always been the case in my life when chaos has *suddenly* shown up!" Emma says.

"I seriously can't stop saying 'For such a time as this' - I feel this is so much bigger than me," Emma states. "I have always sensed that I'm called to bigger things than Perth and Australia. (Don't get me wrong - I love my home on this earth). Each time I think of that phrase out of Esther, I'm reminded of how she was taken out of her home to where God was going to use her 'for such a time as this' to save the people of God who were facing death."

Music ministry has always been in Emma's life. She has sung with Planetshakers in Perth and Youth Alive in Western Australia.

"I also have had wonderful opportunities being part of a great church that every year put out a worship album and encouraged us to write songs and develop our gifts," she says.

Yet it was in 2005, while teaching singing, she met a six-year old girl who caused her to see the need for role models in places of influence in the music arena.

Wilderness years

Three years ago, Emma couldn't have imagined where she'd be today. "They were some of the hardest years emotionally for me," she says. "The Lord really stripped away the walls of what I thought and began rebuilding who I am

in Him."

"The Lord literally took me to a desert, not only emotionally," she states. "I was on a gold mine site, four hours north-east of Kalgoorlie. I spent a year and a half there, dealing with the junk. I had no-one but God."

Emma emerged strengthened and renewed, with a resolve to serve God with her life and love of music.

"At the end of 2007, my parents took over pastoring Eden Hill Church, and I left the mine site in January 2008 to help them in the ministry," she recalls. "I knew my season in the desert was over and it was time to get on with things in my life."

Looking back, Emma values those hard years and knows they have made her who she is today.

"There have been times in my life where I have doubted what I have felt called to do," she says. "Just because I was waiting, clearly the Lord wanted to do something internally in me for the better - to build a strength and a confidence in Him rather than in what I can try and do myself."

"I know beyond a shadow of a doubt that I am called to be where I am and I am incredibly humbled that He has chosen me, in this moment in time to share Christ."
-D Le Roux



Emma with producer Marc Swersky and pilot Chesley Sullenberger



Emma with Dianne Sawyer and her mum, Wendy Cowah



Emma with Larry King

ED'S NOTE: Emma Sophina's EP will be released worldwide at the end of May. For more information: <http://myspace.com/emmasophina>