

Alive: The Story of the Andes Survivors Study Guide

**Alive: The Story of the Andes Survivors by Piers Paul
Read**

(c)2015 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



Contents

Alive: The Story of the Andes Survivors Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Section One.....	5
Section Two.....	8
Section Three.....	10
Section Four.....	12
Section Five.....	13
Section Six.....	15
Section Seven.....	16
Section Eight.....	18
Section Nine.....	19
Section Ten.....	20
Section Eleven.....	22
Section Twelve.....	23
Section Thirteen.....	24
Section Fourteen.....	26
Section Fifteen.....	27
Characters.....	28
Objects/Places.....	32
Themes.....	34
Style.....	37
Quotes.....	39
Topics for Discussion.....	41



Plot Summary

Alive is the story of an airplane flight that crashed over the Andes mountains. It is also the story of how some of the stranded passengers survived following the crash and their reintegration into the society they left behind. Upon its departure on October 12, 1972, the Fairchild flight carried forty-five people. This number included the Old Christians Rugby team, of which there were fifteen team members, who had chartered the plane. Also on board were twenty-five friends and family of the team and the plane's crew of five. All of the Old Christians team players were alumni of Stella Maris College and as such they had long-standing friendships. They were in jovial spirits when they boarded the plane in Montevideo, Uruguay. Air patterns in the Andes mountains can be treacherous. The plane was grounded in the afternoon because of poor weather but resumed its flight the following day under more favorable conditions. The flight seemed to be going well, and the pilot prepared to descend to their destination, Santiago. A minute later the plane lost all contact and plummeted into the Andes mountain range.

The Chilean and Argentinian governments searched for the lost plane for eight days with no results. During this time the survivors of the crash took inventory and tended to the wounded as much as possible. They subsided off very little food. The Fairchild was not stocked with food, so the meager nourishment available to them consisted of souvenirs purchased for friends and family—mostly chocolate and wine. The area in which they crashed was barren of life, and it was winter, so there were no natural resources (aside from frozen water) to forage. After two full weeks in the mountains, the survivors were weak. Even though they rationed the food and divided it equally, it had run out. They were now full into the winter season, and conditions grew increasingly harsh. An avalanche over came them while they were sleeping, and another eight lives were lost. Morale was low and the passengers began to think less of being rescued and more about surviving until Spring when a rescue would be feasible. In order to facilitate this they began to eat the muscle and flesh of their deceased peers, whose bodies had been preserved in the sub zero conditions since the day of the crash.

While the decision to eat human flesh was difficult, it was necessary. This source of nourishment lasted them through the winter. Through some ingenious designing, they cooked meat, made mittens, and created hammocks in which the wounded to rested. They selected two strong men to hike out of the mountains and find help for the others. When Spring came, the two men were finally ready. The two expeditionaries, Canessa and Parrado, set out with their make-shift gear and frozen meat stores. They trekked a grueling sixty miles through snow-covered mountains before finding civilization. Because of the altitude, the hike took ten days. It had been a total of seventy days since the Fairchild had crashed. While the government agencies had officially stopped the search months earlier, they resumed the search after Canessa and Parrado's return. The remaining survivors were evacuated on December 22, 1972. All were brought first to a base camp, then inland to the hospital of St. John of God in San Fernando. Amazingly, their injuries were few, although they had all suffered from starvation and its associated weight loss. The survivors' reunions with their friends and family were bittersweet. The men had been barely surviving for so long that the world to which they

returned was overly stimulating. Their newfound appreciation for life and God made everything else seem unimportant and excessive. The media jeered and took pictures, but for the most part the men, newly accustomed to quiet, just wished for solitude.



Section One

Section One Summary and Analysis

Alive is the story of an airplane flight that crashed over the Andes mountains. It is also the story of how some of the stranded passengers survived following the crash and their reintegration into the society they left behind. The passengers were united through the Old Christians rugby team. Fifteen passengers were players, but an additional twenty-five passengers were friends and family of the players. Long before the team came together, the men were boys growing up in the country of Uruguay.

Uruguay is one of the smallest countries in South America. At the time that the author wrote the book, much of the country existed as lush pasture land. The largest city, Montevideo, was more densely populated and housed a mercantile class. Uruguay was relatively peaceful in the 1970's, but prior to that, the country experienced much instability. Uruguay fought for its independence from its neighbors, Argentina and Brazil. After gaining its independence, the country faced inner turmoil. The two major parties were the conservative Blancos from the interior and the liberal Colorados from the city. The two parties were fiercely competitive and the politics were entrenched over the course of generations. In 1904 the Colorado party president defeated the conservative party and created a democratic state. The country exported goods at a favorable price, but when the economy declined, the country again fell into turmoil. In opposition to this decline, a revolutionary group, the Tupamaros, was born. The Tupamaros utilized such tactics as kidnapping, ransom and corrupting the government agencies. The guerrilla movement was having an affect, and the army was dispatched to quench the revolt. By the 1950's the citizens were searching for stability. Despite the political tensions surrounding them, parents hoped for a great future for their children. The school systems in place at that time lacked the religious qualities the parents sought, so they invited a group of Christian brothers from Ireland to start a school in Montevideo. The brothers agreed to the teaching requirements and were quite happy with their new charge in Uruguay. They brought with them their love for rugby, which slowly replaced the local love of soccer. The school, called Stella Maris College, taught boys aged nine to sixteen in fundamental subjects with conservative Catholic undercurrents. The school was so highly regarded that its graduates created an alumni rugby team.

In 1971, the Old Christians rugby team decided to play a championship game abroad. The championship was scheduled for October 1972, in Chile and the team secured air passage. The team privately chartered a plane, which officially belonged to the Uruguayan government. Inviting friends and family who could pay their own way defrayed the cost for each player, thus making the trip feasible. The players looked forward to the tournament and also to a short vacation abroad. On October 12 the excited passengers began to arrive at the Carrasco airport for their departure. The passengers were jubilant and talked animatedly amongst themselves. Also present were Colonel Ferradas, the captain, and his co-pilot, Lieutenant Lagurara. They both



had flying experience, but only Ferradas had experience flying over the dangerous cordillera of the Andes mountains.

The plane, Fairchild number 571, took off at 8:05 a.m. on October 12. Its scheduled destination was Santiago, Chile. The plane had accumulated only 792 hours since its purchase from the USA. The plane was in good mechanical condition and Ferradas was familiar with it. The flying conditions were more of a concern. The Andes mountains were renowned for powerful and dangerous air currents. Only three months before, a cargo plane had disappeared in the mountains. With the plane traveling at 240 knots the journey was expected to take about four hours, the last half hour of which would be over the Andes mountains. By leaving at roughly eight in the morning, the pilot hoped to avoid the mid-day turbulence, which was known to occur. Even without turbulence, the pilots still had to take into consideration the limitations of the aircraft. The Fairchild was not equipped to climb higher than 22,500 feet, although many of the peaks in the mountain range exceeded that. Therefore, the pilot and his co-pilot were balancing the altitude, turbulence and visibility on that day. After witnessing the conditions as he approached the Andes, the pilot decided to land the plane in Mendoza, Argentina and wait for better weather. The young men and their acquaintances disembarked and enjoyed some local food and entertainment. After a night's rest in the local inn, all the passengers boarded the plane again the following day at 2:18 in the afternoon for the last leg of their trip. The flight was running smoothly and the pilot radioed in that they had flown over a landmark, the town of Curico in Chile. That was the last radio transmission ever heard from the Fairchild.

The steward announced bad weather ahead but reassured the passengers that they would land soon. The plane lurched and its wing came dangerously close to touching the mountains it flew between. This unnerved the passengers and they began to pray. Moments later the plane's right wing did make contact and was torn off, thrown and cut off the plane's tail. The destabilized plane then lost its left wing and propeller. Without its wings the fuselage fell and slid down the steep valley. In addition to losing many passengers and the steward, the force of the crash pinned additional passengers between the heavy, metal seats and walls of the plane. When the remaining passenger portion of the plane stopped its descent the survivors were in shock. Those that were both conscious and coherent searched amongst the wreckage. They pulled the injured people from the debris and helped them as much as they could. In the distance they saw a lone team mate staggering through the snow but were unable to reach him before he wandered away. Two of the passengers, Zerbino and Canessa, were medical students. They were in their first and second years of schooling, respectively, and had rudimentary knowledge and skills. Three passengers, Eugenia Parrado and Mr. and Mrs. Nicolas, died instantly. Of the thirty-two survivors, many people had serious injuries. Others had only superficial injuries yet were in a complete state of shock.

The plane had crashed at approximately 3:30 in the afternoon. Night came fast- the sun was setting, the temperature was decreasing and snow began falling. The passengers were not dressed for cold weather and the rear of the fuselage was an open, jagged tear which left them exposed to the elements. The pilot was confirmed dead on impact. The co-pilot was alive but badly injured (the instrumentation panel was impaling his



chest) and trapped in his seat. He mumbled repeatedly about their passing Curico and asked for help locating his revolver. The passengers responded only by giving him water to drink and he eventually died the next day. Meanwhile the survivors, knowing that a rescue could not happen in the darkness of night, huddled together in the broken fuselage for their first night. The twenty foot long area was cramped with mangled seats and this left little room for people. The injured alternated between screams of pain and incoherent chatter and those that were relatively healthy were hungry.

On the morning of Saturday, October 14 the survivors awoke and examined their surroundings. Three more people had died during the night. The medical students continued to care for the sick. They were aided by Liliana Methol whose gentle nature made her a great nurse. As a mother of four, Liliana was devoted to her children and husband, Javier. She and Javier had boarded the plane in the hopes of taking a trip to celebrate their twelfth anniversary. Once outside the survivors learned that the plane had landed on its side and was half buried in snow. The snowscape was endless and there was no vegetation of any kind. The Fairchild was not stocked with food, so the meager nourishment available to them consisted of souvenirs purchased for friends and family in Mendoza- mostly chocolate and wine. The little food available was rationed amongst them. On Sunday, October 15 they awoke to a beautiful, clear day. They were optimistic that a rescue would be possible. While they awaited a rescue party they quenched their immediate thirst. Adolfo (Fito) Strauch devised a snow melting system by harnessing solar energy. This water was important for their survival. The days passed this way- some survivors were responsible for melting snow, others for tidying up the cabin, and still others for rationing and distributing food. Occasionally planes could be heard in the distance and a few came near, increasing their hopes for rescue. Roberto Canessa was easily irritable. His volatile nature made him not well liked amongst the survivors but he was strong and clever. Canessa devised a sort of hammock for the most injured. This increased their comfort and made more floor space for the others.

On the fourth day many of the injured people showed signs of healing. One survivor, Carlitos Paez, began talking about hiking out of the cordillera. He was unprepared to do so, and the other survivors told him this, but his comments showed a turn in their thinking. Carlitos Paez also commented that he'd eat the pilot's muscle as food if he had to because he blamed them for crashing the plane. Carlitos tested his abilities on October 17th when he and a companion, Numa Turcatti, set out on an exploring mission. They found the conditions treacherous and returned to the plane. The overall result was demoralizing. This was made worse by another loss- Susana Parrado died during the night.



Section Two

Section Two Summary and Analysis

After losing touch with the Fairchild, the air traffic control service contacted the Servicio Aereo de Rescate (SAR). A search led by the interim commanders of the SAR, Garcia and Massa, commenced. They began searching along the last reported path of the plane, focusing on the pilot's comments about seeing Curico. As the search team approached Curico, they encountered a snow storm and had to return to Santiago. The following day the commanders reviewed all the available information and changed the focus of the search. They concluded that, based upon its departure time, the plane could not have been above Curico the way the pilot reported. The refined search area surrounded the Tinguiririca, Sosneado and Palomo mountains. The mountains rose 15,000 feet and the valleys in-between were steep and filled with deep snow. The top of the plane would be difficult, if not impossible to see. Even if it was not buried in snow, it was painted white. The only way to improve visibility was to fly low, but the lower altitudes were increasingly turbulent. The SAR officials had little hope of finding anyone alive but were obligated by international law to search for ten days. While the SAR officials searched, word of the crash spread. Rumors were rampant, not accurate and conflicting. The concerned and confused family members began to arrive in Santiago. They asked questions and increased pressure on the SAR.

At the heart of the rumors was a radio owned by a man named Rafael Ponce de Leon. Rafael Ponce de Leon lived in Carrasco. He was friends with Marcelo Perez. They were Old Christian team mates, but Ponce de Leon had opted not to take the trip to Chile. Ponce de Leon felt awful about the crash. He, too, was worried for his team mates. His way of being proactive was to shuttle information back and forth (via his radio) from the families in Montevideo to the officials in Santiago. In this way, the parents stayed connected to the search, and the information they received was accurate. Some family members, including the father of Carlitos, Carlos Paez Vilaro, were personally involved in the search. The search was expanded to include not just aircraft, but people on the ground searched as well. Chilean military police, called carabineros, and volunteers known as Andinists hiked in search of survivors. All were forced to turn around due to poor weather conditions and the aircraft were grounded. The relatives were discouraged by the difficult weather and lack of progress. Back at home, Madelon Vilaro requested the help of a water diviner to find her son. The water diviner indicated an area near the Tinguiririca volcano. Madelon passed this information along, through Ponce de Leon's radio, only to be told by Carlos Paez that that area had already been searched without results. Madelon next visited a clairvoyant named Gerard Croiset for advice. Rosin Strauch, mother to Adolfo (Fito) Strauch and aunt of Eduardo Strauch, placed her faith in the Virgin of Garabandal to whom she began praying regularly. Still other parents found it impossible to hope and resigned themselves to grief. Every evening they gathered in the basement of Ponce de Leon's home and crowded around his radio hoping for news of their loved ones. They were greatly disappointed to hear that on

October 21 the search was called off for lack of results. The SAR had only searched for eight days, two of which were not productive due to poor weather conditions.



Section Three

Section Three Summary and Analysis

Section three opens on the ninth day of the survivors' struggle. In the morning, they carry Susana's body out of the cabin. They move through the monotonous tasks of melting snow and tidying the fuselage. It went unsaid, but the survivors could see their own deterioration mirrored in the faces of their companions. As a group, they were becoming irritable and depressed. Marcelo Perez and Daniel Fernandez, two of the older members of the group, feared for their younger friends. With a few exceptions, the majority of those who were not irritable were instead nearing hysteria. To buoy their spirits, Marcelo tried to remain upbeat. This was an extension of his job as team captain. His positive attitude and reputation of fairness gained him respect amongst the others, but he, too, faced sorrow in the evenings. Not only did he miss his family, but he felt responsible for their losses. As team captain, he had rallied for their trip and made the arrangements. Marcelo was comforted by his close friend, Eduardo Strauch, who assured him that he was blameless. Also present were Eduardo's cousins Fito (Adolfo) Strauch and Daniel Fernandez. They were more than just friends; they were tied by familial bonds and formed a tight support group for each other. Echavarren suffered from a leg broken in many places but remained upbeat and confident. The only time he seemed to waiver was if someone accidentally came into contact with his injured leg. Enrique Platero was also a pillar of strength. He had a gaping stomach wound but was thankful to be alive and responded to anyone's request for help. Gustavo Nicolich was the organizer. He distracted the men and kept them on track with their many chores. He encouraged songs, games and nightly prayer led by Carlitos Paez. Liliana Methol was beautiful inside and out. She was truly compassionate and took on the duty of nurse to her husband, Javier, and all of the other survivors as well. She was the only surviving woman and the younger players looked to her for solace as a mother figure.

Day ten was bleak. The men had rigged a transistor radio and could hear fragments of news reports. The news was mostly related to the middle class strike against the government of the Chilean president, Allende. Unfortunately, the transistor radio was unable to transmit messages. Many of the survivors decreased the frequency of their visits outside the plane. Starvation left them without energy, and, aside from checking the news, there wasn't much to do anyway. Without nutrition they lacked balance and felt faint. Their waistlines were shrinking and their skin becoming wrinkled. Their meager food sources, even though rationed, were running out. The boys were used to eating often to sustain their athletic activities and the few calories they now consumed daily was a tease to their systems. They started thinking about other food sources. On exposed rocks they found a few lichens and tried eating those, but they were disgusting and they were not plentiful enough. In small groups there had been talk of eating the bodies of the deceased, but it was Canessa who finally made the subject a group discussion. He made a sound argument that with every day they became weaker and also less likely to be rescued. He reasoned that they needed to feed themselves to increase their strength and hike out of the mountains. He also put forth the ideas that



God wanted them to survive, but they had to help themselves, and that the souls of the deceased had already left their bodies. In order to eat what remained they had to distance themselves from the personalities they loved and associated with the bodies.

At that time, twenty-seven people still survived. They unanimously decided that the bodies should be eaten as necessary to survive. Not all of the survivors could bring themselves to partake, but none were so opposed to the idea that they would object to the others eating. Furthermore, most agreed that if they were next to die they would donate their body to the cause. Despite this pact, it was difficult to do. To cut the meat from the bodies they used broken pieces of glass; it was hard to ignore the reality of what they were doing. Once the meat was separated from the bodies, it was easier to consume from a mental perspective, but it was still not palatable. The survivors began with small pieces the size of matches and fought off revulsion as they forced themselves to swallow the unlikely source of food. Canessa was the first to do so. He felt that if he could succeed in this task, surely he would survive.

The following day the survivors heard on the transmitter radio that the rescue search had been called off. Nicolich summoned up the courage to tell the others. He described it as good news and proclaimed that he was confident they could walk out of the cordillera by their own strength. Their only hope now was to build their reserves through continued cannibalism. Marcelo and Delgado lost all optimism with this news and their previous role as leaders diminished. With only one possibility left for returning to a life in the outside world, the survivors focused on how and when they would escape. As soon as he heard the news, Parrado announced his intention to hike to the west. The others restrained him because they knew his words were stronger than his body—he had barely survived the crash. They agreed that the fittest among them should set out on a mission to climb the nearest mountain and assess their position and, if possible, locate the rest of the plane. Zerbino, Turcatti, and Maspons were selected for this task and set off immediately. While they trekked, the others ate. Eating human flesh remained difficult to do, yet everyone except Liliana and Javier had been persuaded. The meat was easier to eat when dried in the sun and Pedro Algorta had likened it to communion in the Catholic church, a concept with which they were all familiar. The three expeditionaries were finding the hike draining. They were not dressed appropriately, nor did they have any equipment to help them gain traction. Every twenty steps or so, they required rest. At the end of the day they were only half way up the mountain and discussed their choices. The three decided to spend the night at that altitude, hidden behind the protection of rocks, and resume their hike in the morning. The night was unbearably cold, and they pounded on each other to keep their blood circulating. Much to their surprise, they survived the night. While hiking the next day, they found debris from the plane but not its tail. The landscape was white and barren, and the snow reflected off it at all angles, partially blinding Zerbino. Upon their return it was obvious that one day and one night had nearly killed the three strongest men. Realizing that neither a rescue nor a hike out for help would occur quickly, Javier and, lastly, Liliana, consented to eating the meat despite their aversion to it.



Section Four

Section Four Summary and Analysis

The parents of the rugby players were appalled that the government had called off the search after so little effort. They increased their own search efforts in response. Gerard Croiset was well known as a clairvoyant and had a few hundred successful engagements to his credit. He never asked for payment and was happy to help when his powers allowed it. When Madelon Vilaro tried contacting him she instead reached his son, Gerard Croiset Jr., who was also said to have clairvoyant powers. While reviewing an aeronautical map of the area, Croiset Jr. felt that the copilot, not the pilot, had been flying the plane when one of its engines broke down. He had veered off course to make an emergency landing and crashed by a lake near Planchon. He said the plane lay with its nose crushed and, most importantly, there were survivors. This news was carried to Paez Vilaro in Chile through Ponce de Leon's use of radio communication. The parents agreed to bring this information to the attention of the Uruguayan Air Force and filed a formal request for a Uruguayan aircraft to search the area. Their petition was refused.

Undaunted by the government's lack of help, Paez Vilaro mounted his own search. He researched who owned private aircrafts and paid them to take him searching. He also set out by foot to all of the remote villages in search of news about the missing airplane. He became known as the foolish man searching for his lost son. He searched an area of forty-one miles around the plane's path, but his efforts were fruitless. Through Ponce de Leon he asked for more information from Croiset. Croiset provided more details. He also said that he no longer sensed life on the plane. The SAR was briefly convinced, in light of this new evidence, to send a token few airplanes searching in the specified area. Airplanes cannot be flown low in the mountain range and a half-buried, white plane cannot be seen from the height of an airplane. They would need helicopters, but with the country's political turmoil, they were unlikely to find anything so extravagant. Back in Montevideo, the women were becoming impatient with the lack of progress. With their prodding, Jorge Zerbino, Gustavo's father, and Luis Surraco, whose daughter was romantically involved with Robert Canessa, agreed to aid in the search. Not only did Surraco want Canessa to return safely, he was also adept at reading maps, which could be useful. The Andes mountains had experienced record snow falls that winter causing the SAR to push the date that they planned to resume the search back from January to February, and every day was critical. The three men, Paez, Zerbino, and Surraco, hired guides to take them into the mountains. They had the proper equipment that their sons lacked, but they were not as physically fit. They came to the sobering reality of what their loved ones were suffering through. The men were not convinced by Croiset. They, especially Paez, had had the opportunity to search the precordillera, and their results were always negative. They were more inclined to search near the Tinguiririca volcano but did not have the means to do so. They prepared to return home. Before doing so they donated money to school children so that they could form a soccer team in honor of the Old Christians.



Section Five

Section Five Summary and Analysis

October 29th, the seventeenth day, began normally for the survivors. They completed their chores, and when the sun went down, they entered the plane. The injured and couples climbed in first and slept where it was crowded but most protected. The strongest among the survivors took turns sleeping in the exposed area near the opening where there was room for five to sleep. On this evening those were Juan Carlos Menendez, Pancho Delgado, Roque, the mechanic, and Numa Turcatti. They all dozed off and fell asleep except Diego Storm and Roy Harley, who had just switched sleeping positions. Roy felt an odd vibration, then heard a metallic sound. He was startled and jumped up only to find himself covered waist high in snow. An avalanche had pummeled the plane and entered through their makeshift barriers. Roy remembered Carlitos Paez being directly to his right so he dug for him first. He uncovered his head and torso and then went on to help others whose hands he could see above the layer of snow. He freed Canessa and Fito, who in turn freed Eduardo, Inciarte, Daniel Fernandez, and Bobby Francois. Carlitos Paez uncovered Zerbino, Parrado, and Canessa. Inciarte and Zerbino freed Numa Tarcatti and Pancho Delgado who were buried but had a pocket of air underneath the plane's salvaged door. Pedro Algorta and Javier Methol were among the last to be found.

The avalanche had claimed eight more victims. The nineteen who survived the avalanche were exhausted and in worse shape than before. Their food supply was buried; their clothes were wet; their bodies were cold, and they lacked the mittens, pillows and blankets they had created over the last two weeks. The cabin was filled with snow making the area even smaller. A second avalanche completely buried the plane in snow. No more lives were lost but air flow was cut off. Carbon dioxide started to build and a metal rod was used to puncture the snow outside and let in fresh air. The avalanches were followed by a blizzard that lasted two days. Parrado expressed his wish to leave as soon as the snow stopped, but Fito talked him out of it. Algorta remembered that the snow stops and summer begins on November 15th in the Andes. This would make for an easier journey and would coincide with a full moon. The thought of hiking made them think of the energy they lacked. Their food supply had been buried in the avalanche and they were forced to eat the bodies that had recently died and remained in the cabin. Cleaning the new fallen snow out of the cabin took the next eight days. During this time, the survivors selected their expeditionaries. They selected Parrado, Turcatti, and Canessa because they were the most mentally and physically fit. An additional three men, Paez, Harley, and Vinzintin, were chosen to go on a one-day, information-gathering trip. The trip started out easily for Paez, Harley and Vinzintin. By midday the sun shone brightly and melted the snow. The men sank into it, and their progress was impaired. The disillusioned group headed back to the plane. Every crest and valley looked identical. Carlitos, and to a lesser extent Roy, suffered greatly and wanted to give up. They were spurred on by Vinzintin and eventually made it back to the Fairchild.



The next expedition would be even harder, so Parrado, Turcatti, and Canessa received special treatment. They hoarded clothes and food and did less work under the pretense of building their strength. During the ten days that they waited for the weather to improve, Arturo Nogueira passed away. It was a painful reminder that the expedition had to be successful and soon. Turcatti developed infected boils on his leg and was replaced as an expeditionary by Vinzintin, who had fared well on the mini expedition. On November 17th, the three departed in search of help. They carried with them blankets, meat, water and seat covers for snowshoeing. Not long after leaving, they discovered the tail of the plane. With it they found luggage which they rummaged for anything useful. They also discovered the batteries, which they hoped would bring power to the cockpit's radio. With this in mind they returned to the Fairchild on the following day. While they spent a night of relative peace in the tail, Rafael Echavarren passed away in the cabin. They were greeted with this news when they returned to the Fairchild on the following morning.

Section Six

Section Six Summary and Analysis

Madelon (Vilero) Rodriguez and Estela Perez continued to believe in Croiset's visions. They still believed that their sons were alive and would not stop searching. Some of the other parents were less convinced but still pledged their help because they wanted to know what had happened to the plane. Even Croiset himself doubted that any survivors remained. The Strauch sisters prayed fervently to the Virgin of Garabandal. The parents met with the commander-in-chief of the Uruguayan Air Force on December 5th and requested his help. He explained how unlikely it was that there were survivors but he granted their request. On December 11th, the parents accompanied military personnel aboard a C-47 plane in search of their children. While traveling one of the propellers stopped turned and the pilot performed an emergency landing. The parents were unwilling to waste any more time waiting for it to be fixed, so they hired another plane to take them to Santiago. There the men split into teams. One team would search by land, one by air, and another would try to locate a peasant miner, who, according to rumor, saw the plane crash. They called their plan Operation Christmas.



Section Seven

Section Seven Summary and Analysis

Canessa and Parrado remained at the Fairchild and attempted to make the cockpit radio functional. It was Canessa's opinion that they shouldn't risk their lives hiking again unless all of their other options had been exhausted. The radio had over sixty broken wires exiting from its back and it became Roy Harley's job to reassemble all of them. Roy resisted the idea, but the others appealed to his sense of loyalty. There were some that were not physically well enough to survive the trek through the mountains. It was Roy's job to make the radio work, so help could be summoned and the hike avoided. Repairing the radio was not an easy task and tensions rose. Canessa, Parrado, Vizintin and Roy Harley had differing opinions about how to ration food and productivity.

Back at the Fairchild the other thirteen survivors were also bickering. It was discovered that someone was pilfering extra food. Additionally, the Strauch cousins made their own group. They supported each other almost to the expense of excluding the others. Canessa had the transistor radio with him at the tail. The radio team heard news that the search would be resumed by the Uruguayan Air Force. This information brought mixed emotions. Should they risk their lives hiking or wait for help? If they waited for help and it never came hadn't they wasted more time and languished farther? They also had a very specific window of better, if not great, weather to utilize. As a compromise they continued to work on repairing the radio, preparing for the hike, and dragging the luggage out into the snow, creating the unmistakable shape of a large cross which they hoped would be visible by aircraft.

Canessa and Harley worked on the radio despite their frustrations and mounting lack of faith in its functionality. Vizintin discovered a material in the tail's heating system that would make a great insulator from the cold should the radio not work and they were forced to resume the hike. From this the survivors sewed a sleeping bag large enough for three people so that they could also benefit from the tripled body heat. When it became apparent that no amount of tinkering could produce a working, two-way radio, the four returned to the Fairchild. Roy was in no condition for the climb. He was depressed and emaciated. Because he was not one of the chosen expeditionaries, he had been living off meager rations, and it showed. It was only Parrado's sheer strength that brought Roy back safely. After being away for a few days, the men were struck with the squalor in which they had been living. Half-eaten and rotted corpses were strewn around the plane. The people's physical bulk had diminished, and the smell was unbearable. The condors noticed, too. They flew above the plane hoping to gain their own food source. While the men feared that the condors would carry away the human meat, it did not go unnoticed that the condors were the first living thing they had encountered in nearly two months. It was summer time in the Andes and time to begin the final expedition. While they had waited for summer, they had lost another friend—Numa Turcatti had died.



As they expected, the expedition was rigorous. The climbing was endless and at times, the men felt it was insurmountable. Canessa thought he saw a road in the opposite direction. He was tempted to switch directions and aim for the road, but this seemed contrary to the information they had about the plane's path and their crash position. Parrado felt strongly that they should continue in the original direction. Neither one could survive without help, so they continued on together leaving the possibility of a road behind them. Parrado was the first to summit the mountain where the plane had crashed. He hoped for a view of fertile valleys beyond it but was instead greeted with a landscape of more snow and tall mountains. Between two of the mountains Parrado viewed a Y shaped valley. If they could just get to that point, the trekking would be downhill and easier. When Canessa and Vizintin joined him on the summit he described this plan. They agreed it was plausible but that it would take too long and they would run out of food. This dilemma was solved by sending Vizintin back to the Fairchild (an easy, downhill task) and dividing between themselves the meat he would have consumed, thus extending their food supplies for a longer-than-anticipated journey.

Section Eight

Section Eight Summary and Analysis

The thirteen survivors in the Fairchild had watched the hikers' progress up the mountain for as long as possible. Eventually their position became so far away that they faded into the snowy background and could no longer be seen. It was with great surprise, then, that Vizintin came sliding back to camp on a seat cushion sled. While Canessa and Parrado were hiking, the others were trying to stay alive. Their meat sources were running low, so they went looking for more bodies. The summer sun was melting the snow and uncovering some that had been previously unattainable. Unfortunately for Fito, the body he found belonged to his deceased cousin, Daniel, and he was reluctant to use it. It was placed on reserve along with that of Liliana Methol, who had died in the avalanche. Their bodies were only to be consumed when all of the others were gone. The survivors experienced more false hope as well. They heard rumbling nearby, which they mistook for a rescue helicopter. It was actually another avalanche. They heard on the transistor radio that a cross had been discovered in the mountains. They hoped it was the cross of luggage they created by the tail; however, the cross found was created by geophysicists as part of a geology experiment. This was a source of great disappointment among the men. They heard the intermittent sounds of a plane, but it never came close enough to see. It was now one week before Christmas, and Canessa and Parrado were one week into their hike.

Section Nine

Section Nine Summary and Analysis

On December 12, the C-47 plane promised by the Uruguayan Air Force finally arrived. It had experienced additional engine problems along the way, which were apparently caused by the combination of severe cold and high altitude. Paez Vilaro and the other parents were anxious to depart. The following morning, some began searching with the C-47. Others, such as Paez, had strategic plans on the ground. Ponce de Leon's radio network was utilized to make necessary arrangements for the parents and the planes. Still others set off to attempt to locate the miner who reported seeing the plane crash. They could not find the miner, but they did speak with his close friends, who passed on the story he had told them. The miner's story confirmed that the plane was near the Tinguiririca volcano. This information was relayed via radio to Nicolich and the others who were searching by plane. They talked about the discovery of a cross in the snow on Santa Elena mountain. Its symmetry was perfect and well planned. All the newspapers were covering the story, and there was some postulation that it could be related to the Fairchild survivors. To be thorough the officials and parents moved their search to the area of the cross. While this raised the hopes of the families, it turned out to be a misuse of resources and time. They learned later that the cross was made by scientists from Mendoza. This excitement was akin to an emotional roller coaster ride for the families. They oscillated between holding onto hope and giving up. They then turned the focus of the search onto the area around the volcano and lake. While flying over the lake, they viewed human footprints. The idea of finding the boys alive seemed to good to be true. It crossed their minds that the footprints might also belong to robbers stealing from the crash site. The army commander, Colonel Morel, agreed to send a patrol to the area where they reported the footprints. When they searched again the footprints were not visible, and the disappointed fathers planned their return to Montevideo.



Section Ten

Section Ten Summary and Analysis

After Vizintin left them, Parrado and Canessa took a break to replenish their energy and then continued their ascent. Parrado (Nando) took the lead position on the expedition. The extreme altitude wore on their bodies and rendered them exhausted. During their hike, Canessa prayed continuously to God. They made it up the mountain and down the other side. The top of the mountain was wind blown and lacking in humidity, so there was little snow. Once on the other side the snow drifts were deep, and when the sun came out they began to melt. The ground beneath their feet was mushy and it required much effort to advance. In some areas they tumbled or sled down on their bottoms. Canessa was thankful for those times of sledding. He was struggling with the physical demands of the journey and often lagged substantially behind Parrado.

While Canessa prayed to God, Parrado focused on his father. Parrado knew that his father not only loved, but truly needed, him, and he willed himself to return as quickly as possible. In this way, they surged forward. Eventually they could see a small stream flowing down the mountain. It was the first clean and flowing water they had seen in months, and it was surrounded by grasses. It was a welcome sight, but they still had a distance to travel. They had come over the largest mountain and entered the area that resembled the Y. After resting for the night, Parrado woke eager to explore the corridor of the Y. Canessa's energy had not fully returned despite his curiosity. Parrado instructed Canessa to find something to distract himself from the effort. Once he did this, Canessa was able to keep up and Parrado was amused. After moving through the valley for a while they heard a roaring sound. The farther they went, the louder the noise grew until the area in front of them appeared as a paradise to their deprived eyes. The vegetation was lush; the water flowed abundantly, and there were animals present. They gave thanks to God and rested. After refreshing themselves they headed out again to find civilization. They did so with confidence that the worst was behind them.

After hiking for a while they faced the river head on. It seemed there was nothing to do but cross it. They found a spot where a large rock existed in the center of the river and they crossed it through a form of leap-frog. When Canessa had crossed, Parrado began launching their belongings across. Canessa retrieved them and then Parrado made the crossing as well. Their clothes were drenched from the river so they set up camp and dried their clothes in the setting sun. The next day they encountered trees, and Parrado thought he saw cows in the distance. They were drawn toward the horizon and the comfort it promised their tired bodies, but the terrain through which they traveled was still rocky and rough. They came across an empty soup can, cow dung, and a horseshoe. These signs of human life kept them optimistic. A stand of trees could be seen with ax marks, and they looked forward to being united with the person who watched the cows and wielded the ax. They came to a path and followed it. This made the hiking easier, although Canessa continued to suffer. His exhaustion was compounded by an awful bout of diarrhea that left him weak. Parrado carried his own



knapsack as well as Parrado's but Parrado still lagged behind. Fortunately that afternoon found them at an animal corral with rough shelter and a place for a fire. Parrado searched for firewood and assessed their surroundings. An additional river joined the one they had been following and there seemed no easy way to cross it. They decided to stay the night and contemplate their path in the morning. Their food supplies had run out and they thought of killing one of the cows for food, but decided that wouldn't be prudent since they were looking for help, not enemies.

While Canessa rested he was struck by the realization that the light was shifting. What had caught his attention was the shadow and movement of a horse with a rider. The horseman was across the river and they tried in vain to communicate with him. The rider was far away and the sound of the river was deafening. Still, they had made contact with another human being. Canessa and Parrado fell into a fitful sleep that night. Their emotions were a mix of excitement, trepidation and exhaustion. In the morning, they awoke under the watchful gaze of three men. Parrado followed the gestures of the men which led him to the river. They communicated by tying messages to a rock and tossing the package across. Parrado wrote a plea for help. He explained who he was, the circumstances surrounding his appearance and that there were fourteen more survivors in need of a rescue mission. Parrado was given bread in exchange and was left to wait. A few hours later they were approached again, this time by someone on the same side of the river where they waited. The man introduced himself as Armando Serda, and he shared his lunch with them and another peasant, Enrique Gonzalez. For the first time in seventy days they men shared conversation and food with the outside world. They were also rewarded with a bed in which to sleep.

Section Eleven

Section Eleven Summary and Analysis

While Parrado and Canessa hiked through the Andes, their parents were busy searching as well. The C-47 needed repairs again. This disappointed not just the parents but also the pilots, as they were friends of Ferradas and Lagurara. The pilots wanted to help the parents and answer the lingering questions related to the accident. While Nicolich, Harley, and Canessa waited for the repairs, they checked in with Ponce de Leon's radio network. They heard a snippet of conversation about a plane being found, but the transmission was poor and they couldn't be sure about the identity of the aircraft in question. Canessa left by bus to return to Montevideo. Nicolich and Harley waited for the repairs to the C-47. On that same day Paez Vilaro and Rodriguez had also made their way to the airport to return to Montevideo. Paez Vilaro lagged behind. He risked missing his flight by doing so but was waiting for a man to deliver to him a poodle puppy he had promised to bring home for Christmas. Boarding the plane was then risky because animals were prohibited on board. He was detained by the international police and thought for sure that it was because of the puppy. Instead he was given a telephone. Colonel Morel was on the line with great news—they had found the plane, or rather the boys who had hiked out. Paez ran to the plane to tell his friend, Rodriguez, who had already boarded. They rushed to meet the Colonel in San Fernando. Harley and Nicolich received the news as well and reversed direction. Dr. Canessa had not yet returned to Montevideo because he had stopped at a friend's house. He, too, headed back to San Fernando. Dr. Canessa had the fortune of knowing that his son was named as one of the survivors.

Section Twelve

Section Twelve Summary and Analysis

Canessa and Parrado awoke after a rest of many hours. Their malnourished bodies had digested their previous meal and required more. Armando and Enrique were happy to supply them with more food and pleasant conversation. Canessa and Parrado learned that they were a two day ride (on horseback) from the nearest town called San Fernando. They were nervous and wanted the news to travel faster for the sake of their friends still stranded in the Fairchild. They didn't have to wait long. Ten carabineers arrived and asked for directions to the plane. They were prepared only to retrieve survivors by foot. Hearing that this was not possible, the captain ordered two men to return to the post and request a helicopter from Santiago. The men shared dinner with the carabineers and went to bed excited at the prospect of a helicopter's arrival in the morning.

The next morning brought a fog bank. Parrado and Canessa ate breakfast while waiting for the fog to lift. They were startled when their next visit came not in the form of a helicopter but instead brought a throng of journalists. They politely answered the reporters' questions and omitted a few details. When the fog started to lift, three Chilean Air Force helicopters could be seen approaching. The helicopters carried the action group's commander, Colonel Morel, mechanics, a nurse, a medical orderly, a doctor, and members of the Andean Rescue Corps. Parrado offered to accompany the team and direct the pilots to the Fairchild. By then, it was midday and flying in the Andes at that time was dangerous because of wind patterns. The helicopters climbed an impressive 13,500 feet before reaching the summit and moving down the opposite side. At last, the Fairchild had been found.



Section Thirteen

Section Thirteen Summary and Analysis

Wednesday, December 20th was a turning point for the survivors in the Fairchild. It was the ninth day since the expedition had set out and the expeditionaries had brought just ten days worth of food. Therefore, their rescue was imminent or would not occur at all. They went about their daily chores with an overall sense of pessimism. Christmas was quickly approaching and they had all hoped to be home for the holiday. Carlitos and Daniel Fernandez both had strong feelings that Canessa and Parrado had been successful, but there was no evidence aside from their gut feelings.

The next morning, on day seventy-one, they used the transistor radio to listen to the news. There they discovered a beautiful sound- it was reported that two of the Fairchild's passengers had walked out of the Andes. Their friends had survived to tell their story. The men began to celebrate their salvation. They smoked cigars and cleaned themselves as much as was possible. They tidied the cabin and waited. They began to have irrational fears that something might go wrong at the last minute. One such concern was another avalanche. This was the thought when they heard a terrible sound accompanied by a white froth, but it was just Fito releasing the plane's fire extinguisher.

That afternoon, amid strong winds, the helicopters arrived. They did not evacuate the survivors immediately. Instead they dropped off packages and additional men to help the survivors. The first man who arrived was an Andinist, Sergio Diaz, accompanied by a medical orderly. Fernandez and Mangino were the first of the survivors to be evacuated. Carlitos Paez, Algorta, Eduardo and Inciarte came next. The helicopters held the maximum load possible. Delgado, Sabella, Francois, Vizintin, Zerbino, Harley and Fito remained below with the Andinists and medical orderly. It had taken Parrado and Canessa ten days to reach the cattle post, but it took the helicopters just fifteen minutes. The survivors were examined by the medical team that awaited them and given nourishment. The first eight survivors were flown to San Fernando, and the other survivors had to wait until the following day for their rescue. In this way, the helicopters were used productively, and the people were cared for without incurring any undue danger.

Bittersweet feelings swept over the parents when the survivors' names were finally read. Some, such as Paez., were rewarded for their constant faith. Others who had believed equally hard were disappointed to find that their loved ones didn't survive. Still others, who had given up months before, were shocked to have their family members return. The survivors were brought to the hospital of St. John of God in San Fernando for care. Most were carried or wheeled in, but Parrado insisted that he be permitted to walk in on his own two feet. He also demanded a bath and food. The patients were in surprisingly good condition. Broken bones were straightened and set. Lacerations were treated. Bodies were nourished. Perhaps the most important job belonged to Father Andres

Rojas who sat with the men. He heard their confessions and offered them the first peace they had felt in a truly long time.

Section Fourteen

Section Fourteen Summary and Analysis

After the first eight survivors had flown away, the rest of the crash survivors returned to the Fairchild. They had hoped that they would also be rescued on that day, but as the sun set they realized they would have to wait one more day. They talked with and ate food prepared by the Andinists. The survivors invited their guests to join them in their cabin. This openness would later prove to be a mistake as the Andinists shared details of their suffering with the media. For now, though, the Andinists politely declined and pitched their own tent nearby. Diaz was summoned back by the survivors, who felt that someone should stay with them. During the night Diaz told the survivors of his adventures in the mountain and they told him their collective story as well. Diaz warned them that people at home would not be comfortable with the idea of cannibalism. The men had just done what was necessary to survive and it had not occurred to them that anyone would object. The sleepless night brought a morning full of hope. The men knew without a doubt that they would be rescued on that day.

At ten o'clock the helicopters returned for Roy Harley, Bobby Francois, Gustavo Zerbino, Javier Methol, Fito Delgado, Sabella, and Vizintin. At base camp the survivors were examined and deemed healthy enough to travel straight to the Public Assistance Hospital in Santiago, bypassing the hospital in San Fernando. It was now December 23. The survivors were reunited with each other and with their families. They made a public statement thanking God and their rescuers for their return. A healing mass was held for the survivors in the church that adjoined the hospital. The majority of the survivors were then moved to the local hotel to celebrate the Christmas holiday.

It was not easy to slip back into the lives they had left behind. Aside from their physical suffering, the men had psychological repercussions as well. They were used to silence, and everyone around them seemed to want to diagnose or fix something. The world seemed superficial and needlessly excessive, which was difficult for those who had lived so minimally. The majority of the survivors had grown in their belief in God and wanted to share that message, even if that was not an interest of some before the crash. Family members needed to adjust to the character changes in the young men. The family members also found it difficult to accept that the men had survived by eating human flesh, a fact that could not be ignored as it made headlines in all of the local journals.

Section Fifteen

Section Fifteen Summary and Analysis

Following the Christmas holidays the men and their families returned to Montevideo. Amid many rumors, they decided to hold a conference. The group was represented by the remaining members of the Old Christian team: Canessa, Zerbino, and Vizintin. Each boy had a topic to address. The discussion of cannibalism was left up to Pancho Delgado, who delivered an eloquent speech. If there had been any lingering doubt of their motives, Delgado made it clear that their actions were completed with the utmost of reverence for their departed friends. The whole room listened intently and let up a cheer after he finished speaking.

Many of the survivors drifted into obscurity, which suited them well. Delgado continued to attend interviews and speak publicly when asked. Parrado had come close to death, conquered it, and learned the depths of his strength. While he believed in God, he now also believed in his own abilities much more so than when he left for the rugby tournament. He felt that he deserved the excitement life afforded him. He partied with women and drove fast cars. This unseemly spree lasted for a while, and then Parrado returned to work and the life he knew before the crash.

Twenty-nine of the forty-five original passengers and crew on the Fairchild did not return. The families of those lost in the crash treated the survivors with respect and love upon their return. They were an extended family of sorts. The formal investigation of the Fairchild's crash placed the blame with the pilot, who had begun a premature descent into Santiago while still flying over the Andes. In 1973, government officials erected a grave for the remains of the deceased. It is located about half a mile from the site of the crash and is sheltered from geological activity. It is marked with a cross and inscription.



Characters

Roberto Canessa

Roberto Canessa was one of the two survivors to walk out of the cordillera in search of help. Along with Fernando, he hiked for ten days over multiple mountains to find civilization. Prior to this hike, Canessa survived inside the cabin of the Fairchild for approximately two months. The conditions inside the fuselage were primitive at best. They had no food or protection. The survivors persevered by eating the frozen bodies of those who perished. This was not an easy task, but it was necessary. It was Canessa who brought this to the attention of the group and ate the first piece of flesh. His mind had to conquer his physical revulsion and swallowing was difficult. After doing this, he was convinced that he had the will to survive. The others admired his determination, but he was not always easy to like. At home Canessa had been a second-year medical student. In his favor he possessed some rudimentary medical skills that were essential for the survival of his peers. He was ingenious and created hammocks and mittens for everyone. If his personality was as admirable as his knowledge, he would have been great company. Unfortunately this was not the case. Canessa was tense, and this made him argumentative. He was not selfish but he was often impatient and this led to misunderstandings with the others. The only person who could accommodate Canessa's stubborn streak was Parrado, who physically overpowered him. Parrado's encouragement and Canessa's faith in God helped him to complete the difficult journey. For most of their hike through the Andes, Canessa focused on God and prayed continually. Canessa's thoughts also turned to his long-time girlfriend, Laura Surroco, with whom he was reunited upon his return.

Fernando Parrado

Fernando Parrado was one of the two survivors to walk out of the cordillera in search of help. After surviving freezing and squalid conditions inside the damaged cabin of the Fairchild for approximately two months, he and Roberto Canessa hiked for ten days to reach civilization. They had become stranded after the plane on which they were traveling crashed in the Andes mountains. Parrado lost his mother in the crash and his sister succumbed to her injuries a few days later. He was determined to return home to his father. Parrado was extremely strong. Prior to the crash he was an avid rugby player, which prepared his body physically for the hardships of survival. Mentally he was strong as well. He was optimistic, and this buoyed the spirits of his colleagues, many of whom were struck with complete despair. He was determined to survive. He had many suggestions and was willing to set the example by trying each one himself. His motto was to practice what he preached. He believed that if they were to survive, it would only be because they fought for their lives. He worked hard and helped the others. He was well liked by all of the people that he encountered. After surviving the crash, being stranded, and hiking out of the mountains, Parrado was confident. He had begun the journey as a slightly awkward young man but grew in strength. While the other survivors



placed their faith in God, Parrado believed in God but placed his faith in himself. Escaping the Andes mountains proved to him that anything was possible. He rewarded himself by living a life full of parties and fast cars immediately upon his return. He had no committed girlfriend and dated many women during this time. These behaviors dismayed some of the other survivors, but it was as if Parrado needed to make up for being deprived and to prove to himself that he was truly alive. After living this way for a while, Parrado eventually settled back into the life he had before the crash. He resumed his original job and remained close to his father.

Survivors

The survivors ultimately included Pedro Algorta, Roberto Canessa, Alfredo Delgado, Daniel Fernandez, Roberto Francois, Roy Harley, Jose Luis Inciarte, Alvaro Mangino, Javier Methol, Carlos Paez, Fernando Parrado, Ramon Sabella, Adolfo Strauch, Eduardo Strauch, Antonio Vizintin and Gustavo Zerbino. For the purposes of this section, we will refer to these men collectively as the survivors. Many other passengers died in the crash or shortly thereafter from injuries acquired in the crash. There were eight additional people who survived the original crash but succumbed to an avalanche during the second week. These sixteen men survived seventy days of below-freezing conditions in the rudimentary shelter of the broken plane's fuselage. The survivors practiced cannibalism and melted snow to survive. Canessa and Parrado were the most fit and eventually climbed out of the Andes and returned with help for the others.

Rafael Ponce de Leon

Rafael Ponce de Leon was an Old Christians rugby team member, but he did not attend the trip to Chile due to his wife's advanced pregnancy. Therefore, he was safe at home when the Fairchild crashed. He was deeply saddened for his teammates and their families. Ponce de Leon was also a radio ham, a hobby that he enjoyed in the basement of his home. The use of radio transmissions was as efficient as telephoning and cost much less. In this way Ponce de Leon was able to be of help to his friends. Their families used his home as their command center during the search and gathered there in the evenings to listen for news. Ponce de Leon was able to spread word quickly by contacting other radio hams in far off areas. For example, from his home in Montevideo, Uruguay Rafael contacted Paez Vilaro in Santiago, Chile with new information.

Passengers

The Fairchild originally carried forty-five passengers and crew. The passengers were united through their association with the Old Christians rugby team. Fifteen passengers were on the team, and it was these men that chartered the plane. To defray the cost of tickets, they invited their friends and family to come along as well. Twenty-five accepted their invitations. The last five people on board were the Fairchild's crew. Of these



passengers, some died on impact, others died during the wait for a rescue, and sixteen ultimately survived.

Parents

The parents of the Old Christians team members were active in the search for their children following the Fairchild's crash. They were not satisfied with the effort put forth by the government to find the plane, so they launched their own complimentary search. Some parents believed that their children survived. Others believed that no one had survived but supported the search to find answers and gain closure. Paez Vilaro was the parent most involved in the search. He was so often present that the local people began to refer to him as the foolish man looking for his lost son. He and his ex-wife, Madelon (Vilaro) Rodriguez, always had faith that their son, Carlitos, would survive. Paez was aided in his search by other parents. These included Nicolich, Luis Surraco, Jorge Zerbino, and the Strauch relatives.

Water Diviner

The old water diviner in Montevideo was consulted by the parents of the rugby team players. The water diviner was amazingly accurate. He indicated a spot on a map of the cordillera. Unfortunately, his advice was not followed because it seemed contrary to the other information gathered. Listening to the water diviner would have expedited the rescue of the survivors.

Gerard Croiset

Gerard Croiset was contacted by Madelon (Vilaro) Rodriguez. Croiset lived in Utrecht and was said to have powers of clairvoyance. He had successfully helped to solve hundreds of missing person cases, and Madelon was looking for help to find the lost Fairchild plane. Croiset's vision of the plane was accurate, but he lead the search team to the wrong position. The parents and search team spent a great deal of time and resources following up on Croiset's visions.

Armando Serda and Enrique Gonzalez

Armando Serda and Enrique Gonzalez were the peasants who first made contact with Canessa and Parrado when they emerged out of the mountains. After two months of being stranded without resources, the men must have appeared bedraggled, but the shy peasants welcomed them. The peasants watched over cattle for their landlord and tended to the land. They had minimal food and lodging but shared everything they had with the survivors and sent for additional help from the nearest post.

SAR

The Servicio Aereo de Rescate (SAR) was the Chilean governmental agency in charge of rescue operations. The search for the Fairchild was led by the SAR interim commanders Garcia and Massa. The SAR search was aided by the Carabiners (Chilean trained military police) and Andinists (hiking specialists), as well as occasional forays by the Uruguayan government.



Objects/Places

Fairchild

Airplane owned by the Uruguayan Air Force and chartered by the rugby team for its trip to the rugby tournament.

Montevideo, Uruguay

Home to the majority of the travelers on the Fairchild, the plane which also departed from this city.

Santiago, Chile

Destination for the rugby team traveling on the Fairchild.

Stella Maris College

A school for boys between the ages of nine and sixteen. It was founded in opposition to the local public schools and the private school taught by Jesuits. The Christian Brothers who taught at the school introduced the boys to the game of rugby. The boys took a liking to the game, and, after graduation, they created a competitive alumni team.

Fuselage

The fuselage was the survivors' only protection. It was the remnants of the plane (its wings and tail fell elsewhere) in which the survivors slept.

Andes mountains

The mountain range in which the Fairchild was lost.

Curico

The pilot's last reported position was flying over the city of Curico. This was actually an incorrect assessment, which led to great confusion and lost time during the rescue search.



Tinguiririca Volcano

This volcano was the closest physical landmark to the crash site. The volcano was alluded to by the water diviner, but his information was dismissed because it wasn't in agreement with the pilot's reported path.

Avalanche

On the seventeenth day of their ordeal an avalanche struck. The avalanche claimed the lives of eight of those who had originally survived the crash.

Azufre River

After trekking through the mountains Canessa and Parrado came to a large and seemingly uncrossable river. This river watered a healthy and fertile valley on the outskirts of the mountains. This river is where they finally encountered help.



Themes

Cannibalism

Cannibalism was a major theme in this book. The only way for the survivors to sustain themselves was through cannibalism. In the beginning, many of the survivors were opposed to the practice. Some overcame their revulsion when they grew weak from hunger. It is especially significant to note that the people who committed cannibalism did so with complete reverence for the departed. This was not an easy transaction; instead it involved a mixture of contemplation and desperation. Indeed, the survivors would have perished without this food source. The survivors contemplated their choices, realized that they had none and asked for God's permission. Most believed He would approve and likened their action to the Catholic Church's practice of communion. They did what they had to do to survive and came to terms with that decision. Once rescued, however, the survivors were surprised to find that what they did was not accepted by the general public. Citizens found it to be disagreeable and were quick to condemn those who participated. It was disappointing to the survivors that their food source made as large a headline in the media as the plane crash and their subsequent rescue. Certainly the cannibalism was more sensational than the survival, however newsworthy the crash and rescue were. Even more upsetting was that the families of the survivors were also upset by the rumors of cannibalism. The human heart is sometimes in conflict with the mind. The families of survivors rationally knew that the only way their family members returned was to survive through cannibalism, yet they couldn't accept it.

Rescue

The Fairchild crashed at just past three o'clock in the afternoon. Once the shock passed, the survivors began to talk among themselves about a rescue effort. Evening came fast and with it, the cold and darkness. It was apparent that a rescue could not occur in the darkness, so they huddled together to survive the first night. In the early days following the crash, the survivors were confident that they would be rescued. They did their best to stabilize the injured survivors and search the plane for supplies. Because they anticipated a fast rescue, they were tempted to eat all of the food supplies, and, in fact, some were in favor of doing so. Wisely, others thought rationing was prudent and this method was undertaken. Unfortunately, in addition to the shortage of food, the little food that they found was of poor nutritional value. The survivors heard a plane passing over the cloud cover on the second day, which raised their hopes of rescue. The third day the survivors awoke to clear skies and thought they would be rescued for sure. They had no way of knowing that, based on the last inaccurate radio transmissions from the pilot and co-pilot, the rescue attempt was focusing on the wrong area. More planes could be heard, but there was disagreement as to their proximity. The desolate, snow-covered landscape into which they plunged was deceiving. Every peak looked identical, and the distances looked short but were actually quite far. In an effort to make themselves (and their white plane) contrast from the snow, they used ladies'



cosmetics to draw on the roof of the plane and also pulled contents out of the plane. The survivors wanted to believe in rescue, so they clung to the hope, even as the sound of planes were decreasing in frequency. Some imagined it would be by plane, others by helicopter, some tomorrow and some the day after. As the days passed and the food supplies dwindled the survivors were forced to take a proactive approach. On the fourth day, Carlitos Paez announced that he would climb to safety. He had not thought it out well, and was unprepared to take action, but it was the first time that they discussed the idea of saving themselves instead of waiting to be saved. Over time, there would be small scale expeditions to forage for food, scavenge debris from the crash and test the conditions. In the end, Carlitos Paez's idea was correct—those that were able would have to walk out of the cordillera on their own feet.

Religion

This book has many references to religion. Although officially a free state, the dominant religion in Uruguay is Roman Catholicism. Long before the rugby team was organized, local parents were searching for better religious education. This is how the Stella Maris College was founded. The boys' Christian education was thorough and followed them on their journey. Their rugby team was named the "Old Christians." When the members of the Old Christian rugby team realized the gravity of the situation, many prayed. They prayed during their crash and every day thereafter. For some, prayer was continual and personal. For others, it was merely routine. No matter how they each perceived prayer prior to the crash, they all prayed the rosary together every night during their time in the mountains. When it became time to consume the meat available from the bodies of their teammates, they discussed their Catholic beliefs and the laws of the church. The Catholic church views suicide as a sin. Because of this, the survivors could not bring themselves to assist the pilot in committing suicide, even though he requested it. For this same reason the majority of the survivors could not allow themselves to languish when food, no matter how objectionable, was available. Even those who chose not to participate agreed with the conclusion that God would want them to survive. The ultimate example of this was Jesus' death for mankind and his reference at the last supper of giving his body and blood for his friends. It is easy to see how this statement would relate to the survivors and the choices with which they were faced. Once they returned to Montevideo, the survivors consulted a priest and the archbishop, who agreed that their actions were acceptable in the eyes of the church. This confirmation assuaged their fears and lingering guilt. During their integration back into society, the survivors unanimously spoke about a deeper faith and developing a closeness to God during their ordeal.

Faith

Faith enabled the survivors and their families to persevere. Faith in this novel was bidirectional- the parents, siblings and girlfriends had faith in the survivors and the survivors had faith that their loved ones wouldn't give up the search. All parents wish to protect their children. It is natural to assume that the parent will watch the child grow



and that the parent will die before the child. While some parents were afraid to hold out hope, there were others who held on fiercely to the belief that their children were alive. Some talked about having strong feelings, which enhanced their convictions. Senora Valeta had dreams about her son that were later discovered to be quite accurate. When the parents felt that the Uruguayan government failed them by ending the search after just eight days, the parents took matters into their own hands. They visited a clairvoyant, asked for help from a water diviner, petitioned the government repeatedly for help and eventually chartered planes to search when others refused to do so. Some of the parents, most notably the Strauch relatives, Paez Vilaro, Jorge Zerbino and Luis Surraco, actively participated in the search effort. Not only did the survivors believe in their rescuers, they also believed in themselves. In fact, after overhearing a radio report that the search had been called off, one survivor exclaimed "There's some good news... it means we're going to get out of here on our own." The teammates had faith in each other. When it was decided that a few strong men should venture out for help, the others supported the chosen few. They gave them extra food, clothing, rest and moral support. There was no question that those who set out would arrive safely- the others' lives depended on it. Lastly, the survivors had faith in God.

Style

Perspective

Alive is written from a detached perspective. From the sections titled Dedication and Acknowledgments the reader is aware that the book was a collaboration of sorts. The author, Paul Read, thoroughly researched the events and directly contacted the survivors to hear their stories. Read incorporates conversations among the survivors as well as talk among the parents during their search. While some of the chatter might have come from the recollections of those involved, it is likely that some dialogue was created. This is not said to minimize the validity of the dialog in the story. Indeed these discussions were important in portraying the interrelationships and feelings among the many characters. The author admits that he was given free reign when writing and resisted the temptation to fictionalize the story, but the book is not truly biographical. Read's purpose in writing this book, and the survivors' reason for cooperating, was to separate truth from rumor. Rather than allow the media to fabricate what they had experienced, the survivors hoped to honor those lost and voice their courage.

Tone

Alive reads easily and moves well. It is best described as an historical account of the events surrounding the crash. It is set in the year 1972, and accurately depicts life in South America at that time. The book includes some information with regards to the politics of the time to help the reader understand the objectives as well as the limitations of the government and its agencies. It also includes some discussion about religion to help the reader better understand the characters. The author does a great job of framing such complex subjects within the context of the story. This ensures that the tone is not heavy, pushy or overtly biased. Instead, throughout their time in the cordillera, the rest of the world and its problems seemed to be non-existent, while the characters focused on survival and helping each other. Surviving in the Andes mountains was extremely difficult, yet the author did not write with an ominous tone. He was very matter of fact about the events that transpired. The author remained non-judgmental. This was accomplished through the use of objective writing. Adjectives and adverbs were used sparingly when describing people and their choices, but used heavily when setting the scene.

Structure

Alive is structured in an organized way; however, it lacks traditional chapters. The author includes a dedication written by the survivors, an area for acknowledgments, a list of illustrations, an introduction, and fifteen sections (each with multiple subsections). The acknowledgments are useful in gaining insight with regards to the author's perspective. The illustrations included in the book lend a sense of realism, which gives



way to the awe that real people suffered and survived the ordeal. The introduction is captivating and tells just enough to capture the reader's interest. The individual sections are put together more by the occurrence of important events than by chronology. Sections relating to the parents' search alternate with sections dedicated to the survivors' struggle. With the exception of some historical and educational background, the whole novel takes place in a span of just three months (the date of the flight's departure through the interviews following the survivors' return).



Quotes

"It was as if the torrid vastness of Brazil to the north and the muddy waters of the River Plate to the south and west acted not only as natural barriers but as a protective shell in a cocoon of time." page 19

The interests they had in common, besides rugby and business, were cars and girls, and it was this which had gained them the reputation of playboys." page 29

"Are you cowards or what?" page 33

"I want them to read 'Forty-five Uruguayans cross the cordillera at all costs.' " pg 33

"Nothing broke the monotonous ascent of these brittle mountains except snow." pg 35

"Out into the icy air fell the steward, the navigator, and their pack of cards, followed by three of the boys still trapped to their seats." pg 38

"Tie that up with a shirt and I'll see to it later.' " pg 43

"Identify yourself." pg 49

"Then her mind wandered and she sang a nursery rhyme." pg 50

"Canessa, though he had studied medicine for a year longer than Zerbino, could not bring himself to say that someone was definitely dead." pg 52

"Don't you realize that you're playing with our lives?' " pg 62

"You can't climb mountains on a little piece of chocolate and a sip of wine.' " pg 65

"The warmth and the movement of breathing- both were gone." pg 68

"The souls have left their bodies and are in heaven with God.' " pg 83

"He felt triumphant. His conscience had overcome a primitive, irrational taboo. He was going to survive." pg 86

"As a scalpel he had a choice between a piece of broken glass or a razor blade." pg 92

"Then, just as his lungs were about to explode, the snow was scraped from his face." pg 121

"This system, like a good constitution, was fair in theory and flexible enough to allow for the weakness of human nature, but the burden fell on those who either could not or would not work." pg 138



"They drove Roy on until it came to a point that he no longer responded to either oath or insult." pg 210

"The fire died down. The sun set. And with these pleasant thoughts in their minds, the two bloated boys fell asleep." pg 263



Topics for Discussion

How were the boys schooled?

The boys took pride in their team. Discuss how they exemplified team spirit.

On page thirty-five, foreshadowing can be heard in the girl's quote about Argentinian planes. Extrapolate on her comments and their relevance.

Liliana and Javier make a wonderful couple. On page 101, they share a particularly poignant exchange. What is the driving force behind Liliana's actions?

Describe the scene by the River Azufre.

Discuss the underlying politics of South America at the time of the plane crash.

Canessa and Parrado traveled a long way in their climb. Were there any alternative routes?

There were a few passengers trained in rudimentary medicine. Who were they and what were they capable of?

Compare and contrast any two passengers described in the book.

Examine the survivors integration back into society. Was it easy or difficult? Why was this so?