

For the people you'll meet in this story, life is truly a miracle. Somehow—against all odds—they survived where others perished. Why?

The last peaceful thought Larissa Savitskaya had before falling soundly asleep against her new husband Vladimir was of how much she loved him. They were flying back to Moscow after their honeymoon, and her sleep was full of happy dreams.

She woke up with a jolt to screams and freezing-cold air. The plane had collided with another and was spinning wildly out of control. Larissa hit her head on the seat in front of her. Suddenly she remembered a scene from a movie about a plane crash and scrambled to a window seat, just as the girl who survived had. Then everything went black.

'I knew where I'd fallen I was completely hidden from view. I realized that it was up to me to get myself out of there'
—Christine F.

Five hours later, the newlywed awoke on the ground in a fragment of the plane. In agony with spinal, hand and rib injuries, she tried to search for other passengers, but shock and pain forced her to give up. Three days later, an amazed rescue team found her three miles from the main wreckage of the plane. She was the sole survivor.

"I can't explain it," Larissa says. "It must have been a miracle."

It was indeed. But experts say people such as Larissa, who cheat death against all odds, can attribute their miracles partly to clear thinking, partly to luck—and partly to their personalities.

"Two people caught in similar life-threatening situations can react in remarkably different ways," explains Herman Feifel,

Ph.D., chief psychologist at the Veterans' Administration outpatient clinic in Los Angeles. "One might tell herself, 'That's it, I've had enough, I'm giving up—whereas the other will think, 'No! I'm not ready to go!'"

"These people tend to feel they control their destinies," says University of Wisconsin psychologist Frank Farley, Ph.D. "They're not the type to throw up their hands and say, 'Nothing I do matters.'"

Simone Scialdo is one person who put up a desperate struggle to survive because her life mattered. The 21-year-old college student from Bellevue, Washington, was backpacking through Europe last sum-

mer when she learned just how much it mattered.

During a ferry ride from Italy to Greece her friend, Texan Larry Welborn, playfully lifted her to the boat's railing. Suddenly she lost her balance and plunged 40 feet through the night air into the waters of the Mediterranean. Trying to grab her, Larry was pulled along.

No one saw them fall overboard. The boat continued on its way, growing smaller and smaller by the second. But somehow, Simone didn't lose her head. "I said, 'Okay, what do we do now?'"

Together they swam toward a speck of land in the distance. But by morning they were exhausted and freezing—and the speck of land seemed just as far away.

"Larry would say things

like, 'If we get out of here, and I'd stop him and say, 'No—when we get out of here.' I knew we had to keep a positive attitude."

They napped floating on their backs—until one time Simone woke up and Larry was gone. The thought that he had drowned never crossed her mind. She assumed he'd just drifted away.

"Looking back I realize I had to think that way for my own survival. If I had thought he was dead, I would have given up."

When a storm blew up, Simone struggled to stay afloat in 12-foot swells.

"I felt I was being given a choice—to live or to give up and die—and I decided 'I can't die! I have too much left to do.'"

"If I had really, really

dwelted on the situation I was in, I would have given up. I didn't know why, but I just felt sure that I was going to get out of there."

When, 17 hours after her fall from the ferry, a yacht happened by and sailors dragged her out of the Mediterranean, Simone was

those who feel they have something to live for," says Keith Johnsgard, Ph.D., a psychology professor at San Jose University.

For Christine F., 29, life itself was reason enough to go on. She was hiking

'The ones most likely to survive feel they have something to live for'

—Keith Johnsgard, Ph.D.

disoriented and feverish. Now she says, "I cherish everyday things like flowers and taking the bus."

Simone's determination saved her life. "The ones most likely to survive are

on a mountaintop in Peru last year when a wild-eyed man rushed up to her and held a knife to her throat.

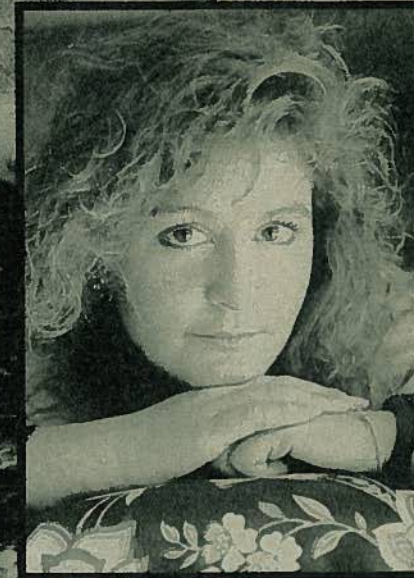
"I'm going to kill you!" her attacker spat out violently. "Give me all your money."



Left, Larissa Savitskaya made it back from her honeymoon—without her groom. He lost his life in the plane crash that claimed the crew and all the passengers but one: Larissa. Was her survival due to luck alone?

Woman's World THE WOMAN'S WEEKLY REPORT

For Simone Scialdo, below, the realization that she still had so much to experience kept her afloat for 17 hours in the Mediterranean. Her positive thinking kept her from giving up—and saved her from death.



ALIVE!

to drag herself up.

"I felt like I was going to pass out from the pain, but there was no choice—I had to make it out of there."

She was weak, exhausted and losing consciousness by the time she'd inched her way up to the trail. But she knew she had to stay awake enough to move around a bit or she would die of exposure. "Tears of pain were rolling down my cheeks. All I could think was, 'When is morning?'"

It wasn't until 20 hours later that tourists happened by and carried her out of the canyon.

"I have incredible tenacity and drive," Christine says. "I always believe you must do the best you can—and then do a little more." ❄

by Meg Lundstrom and Naomi Kenin

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