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ALIVE & SPEAKING

Plane crash survivor Nando Parrado instills hope
and perseverance to audiences worldwide

HAPPY TO

Nando Parrado talks about survival, hope and living life with the

Nando Parrado hasn't had a problem in 36 years. Not a single worry. Nothing to get upset about. No reason to fret.

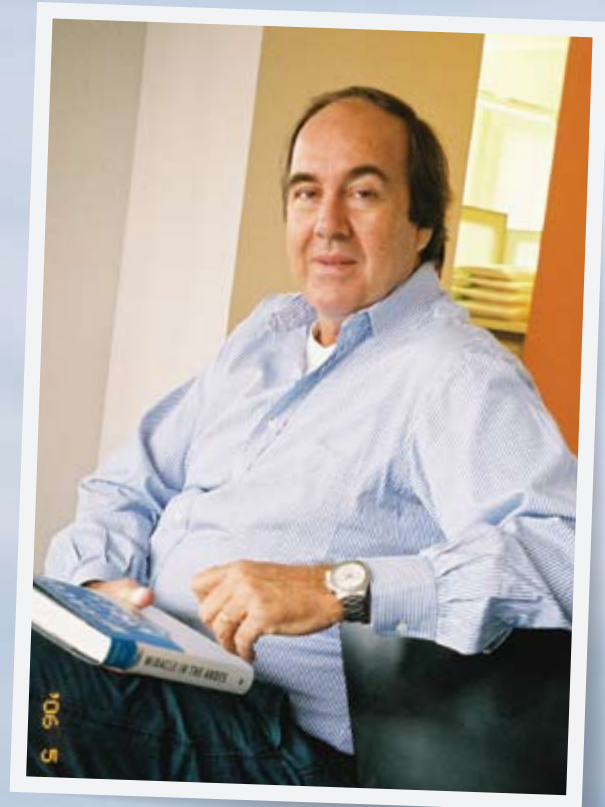
"I've already had all of the problems and stress I'll ever have," says Parrado. "People ask me why I'm always so positive. Well, simple. I've already suffered all of the stress a human can take. All of the fear, all of the panic, all of the crises."

Parrado lives life to its fullest. He doesn't sweat the small stuff. He truly believes every day is a gift. He also knows he's very lucky to live this way. Then again, if anyone has earned this gift, it's Parrado.

The 59-year-old native of Uruguay is one of the 16 survivors of Uruguayan Air Force Flight 571, the doomed air-

liner that crashed into the Andes Mountains in October 1972. The crash killed 12 passengers instantly and left nearly everyone else on the plane that day either near death or severely injured, including Parrado, who suffered such massive head wounds that his friends believed him to be dead. When Parrado finally awoke, he found his mother dead, his sister dying, and himself living a nightmare that had only just begun.

Surviving the crash was only the first challenge for Parrado and his fellow survivors. They would ultimately spend the next two months stranded in the snow-covered Andes, nursing their injuries while battling freezing temperatures, acute thirst and starvation, a deadly avalanche and, eventually,



BE ALIVE

proper perspective BY TIM HYLAND

the crushing realization that they had been left for dead—and nobody was coming to save them.


It was a situation that no human should have survived. And yet Parrado did more than that, hiking out of the mountains to find help and emerging as possibly the singular hero of one of the greatest survival stories ever—a story immortalized not only in Piers Paul Read's 1973 book, *Alive: The Story of the Andes Survivors*, but also the 1993 film (actor Ethan Hawke portrayed Parrado), and, most recently, Parrado's own nonfiction account, *Miracle in the Andes*, published in 2006.

For the past 15 years, Parrado has shared his story on the speaking circuit as one of the industry's most successful, sought-after and inspiring motivational

speakers. In appearances throughout the United States, Europe, Asia, Australia and Latin America, Parrado has transfixed even the most jaded audiences with a simple message: Life should be lived, savored, loved and appreciated. We should all have the proper perspective on our short time here on earth. We should be happy, above all, that we are alive. Parrado also will share his message with 2009 NSA Annual Convention attendees as a general session presenter on Monday, July 20.

“True crisis is being left alone at 18,000 feet up in

the Andes with no coats, no water, no food, no search and rescue on the way. That's a crisis,” Parrado explains. “So, if you lose your job? Well, you'll find another. At least, you're alive. I think I've had issues like everyone else in the past 36 years. But I haven't had any problems.”



Parrado hiked through the rugged Chilean Andes terrain in freezing temperatures to seek help for the plane crash survivors.

A DIAMOND IN THE ROUGH

People need to live life in the present, according to Parrado. “This is the only experience in life you get. Yes, bad things can happen, and sometimes people will ask, ‘Why me?’ Well, I say, ‘Why not?’ Sometimes you win the lottery. Sometimes you win the bad lottery. Life is like a jigsaw puzzle. Some of the pieces are beautiful. Some are not so beautiful.”

This may seem to be the kind of message most *any* motivational speaker could deliver. Then again, few have a story nearly as compelling as Parrado’s. And it’s that story that sells the message—keeping his audiences on the edge of their seats as he talks of suffering, loss, perseverance, survival and hope.

His appearances have literally changed and have even saved lives. He’s got the letters and emails to prove it. Some people see Parrado speak and, from that point forward, claim to live happier, fuller lives.

“I think the story has transcended time,” Parrado says. “It’s like the Titanic story, with the only difference being that I am alive—we are alive. I mean, how many people would love to speak with a Titanic survivor? I would love to hear their story.”

Amazingly, Parrado’s story might not be reaching these audiences were it not for the dogged determination of one woman who was desperately seeking a keynote speaker for an event that, under orders of her boss, had to be spectacular.

In 1994, Gail Davis was working as the events director for EDS, and the

most important thing she did every year was plan the company’s year-end sales recognition event. She was pretty good at her job, too, regularly cranking out well-attended and well-received events that seemed to get better each year. But then one day her boss issued a challenge.

“He comes up to me and asks, ‘So who are we going to have speaking next year?’” Davis recalls. “And I said, ‘Well, I haven’t really thought about it.’ So

FROM SURVIVOR TO SPEAKER

Davis and a friend rented a movie one night, titled “Alive.”

“Early in the movie, my friend said, ‘That’s the guy you should get for the event,’” Davis recalls. “It was just one of those great moments. For me, the movie was such an emotional story about the power of the human spirit, and I was very drawn to that side of it. But it’s also an incredible story about leadership and creativity. And you take all of that together, and it’s got a very broad appeal.”

Davis knew Parrado would make a great speaker. Her biggest challenge, it turned out, was convincing *him* of that.

As far as Parrado was concerned, once he was rescued from the Andes—that part of his life was over. He didn’t feel like talking about it to anybody. This was, after all, a disaster—an event that stole away his mother, sister and many of his

closest friends.

By the time Davis approached Parrado about headlining the EDS event, he had only spoken publicly about his ordeal once—at a convention of the prestigious Young Presidents Organization three years earlier. Though the speech went remarkably well—“I spoke for two hours, and nobody moved,” Parrado says. He still wasn’t comfortable; however, with the idea of making a living talking about the worst two months of his life.

But Davis was determined, pursuing him relentlessly even when he said he wasn’t interested. Her chase continued for six months, and even as the date of the EDS event approached, Parrado could not promise Davis that he would make it. Davis went ahead and had promotional materials printed



Clockwise from top left: Parrado as a young athlete; Parrado with Gail Davis and NSA members Christine Cashen, MAEd, CSP, and Randy Shaw; Parrado taking a spin before the crash; Parrado and Davis.

then he says, ‘Well, I have a couple of thoughts. I’d like you find somebody that everyone would like to hear but haven’t heard yet. I’m tired of the same old, same old. I want someone unique.’ That was his mission.”

By extension, it became Davis’ mission, too. How would she fulfill it? Then fate intervened.

ABOUT URUGUAYAN AIR FORCE FLIGHT 571

up announcing Parrado as the event's speaker anyway, then waited anxiously to see if he would actually show up. He did, of course—and promptly delivered a speech that utterly captivated the EDS audience.

"I am happy to be able to share with people these things I've learned," Parrado says. "I think at the end of the day, everyone wants to answer that question—what do they have inside themselves? How would they react in a situation like that? If they have a financial problem, or a health issue, and then they hear about this guy who was nothing—a small, young Uruguayan—who was able to survive what he survived, maybe they can learn from my example in their battle. I hope they think, 'Maybe I can find the miracle inside myself, too.'"

WHEN TO THROW A 'GRENADE'

Though Parrado's speaking career formally began with his 1995 speech at an EDS convention, his first speaking appearance had come years earlier, at a gathering of the Young President's Association.

"I had prepared some notes but the way I put them on the podium, I couldn't read them," Parrado says. "So I couldn't start. I was paralyzed for 20 or 30 seconds. And then I said to myself, 'OK, Nando, you've been in more difficult places than this, so just start already.'"

The first thing that came out of his mouth? "Hello, I shouldn't be here today. I should have been buried on a mountain 25 years ago."

Suffice to say, the opening line caught the audience's attention. The speech went amazingly well, as have most of his others since.

But Parrado says he's certainly come a long way as a speaker over the years, learning the tricks of the trade both by watching his fellow professionals and through his own years of experience.

One of the most important things he's learned, he says, is how to keep tabs on his audience's interest as he speaks. Even with a story as gripping



Uruguayan Air Force Flight 571, carrying 45 passengers, crashed in the Andes Mountains east of Chile on Oct. 13, 1972.

Twelve passengers were killed instantly. Those who survived faced frightening conditions. Nighttime temperatures dipped to 30 below zero. They had almost no food, no shelter and only a limited ability to make fire. They also had no warm clothing. Many of the survivors had suffered severe injuries, and a few died in the days after the crash.

Days passed without rescue, and, the limited food supplies quickly ran out. The survivors deliberated before agreeing to resort to cannibalism. It was the only way they could survive.

On October 30, tragedy struck again. As the survivors slept, an avalanche enveloped the plane, burying them in deep, suffocating snow. The avalanche left eight more dead. In the weeks that followed, two more died from their injuries while another succumbed to infection.

Finally, on December 12, Parrado set out to find help with two of his fellow survivors, Antonio Vizintín and Roberto Canessa. Parrado. They hiked through some of the harshest terrain in the world without any climbing gear and only a bit of food.

After 12 days, Parrado and Canessa finally found help. The remaining survivors were finally rescued on December 22 and December 23.

as his, Parrado knows the minds of his audience members will wander. So when he begins to sense a lull in their attention, he takes action—by, as he says, "throwing a grenade."

To jolt his audience, Parrado tosses in another dramatic turn to his story. And the audiences comes right back. "You learn through experience," he says. "You learn how to put different feelings in your audiences and different times, and when and how to do that. The whole conference is not going to be at the same level of interest. I cannot be totally exciting the entire time.

You're going to have ups and downs. And I've learned to sense that, and when the time comes, you have to throw a 'grenade.' I'll tell myself, 'OK, Nando, time for a grenade.'"



Tim Hyland has been a professional writer and editor for 10 years. His work has appeared in numerous publications, including Fast

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