

(AIRCRAFT 1980 KING AIR F-90)

I am sure, absolutely positive, that I have been spared from "death" as we know it, by surviving a devastating airplane crash January 11, 1991.

By myself, due to unusual circumstances, I experienced a gradual deceleration in airspeed very shortly after take off from an East Texas airfield with Dallas as my destination. Unable to maintain a climb, the aircraft slowly slipped its way back toward Mother Earth and although the mechanical functions seemed to be normal, it was obvious I was on my way down. Having climbed to approximately 150 feet above the surface before I noticed any unusual differences. I put my hand on the landing gear up lever only to realize the aircraft seemed to be slowing slightly. Quick glances indicated normal fuel pressure, normal power settings, etc., so I added power beyond the normal limits of the engines only to no avail. I was going to crash.

Now we're taught never to let the plane slow down beyond its stall speed, that which would lose its ability to provide "lift". Thank God for the presence of mind to keep the wings level, the airspeed above stall. Since the aircraft is relatively heavy (approximately 9500 pounds estimated at ground contact) the speed I was descending at was approximately 120 knots (132 MPH), unable to maintain space above the wooded area to a field that slightly escaped my reach, I elected the alternative to try to go between two large trees--which ones? Here is a forest of trees looming up at me at 130 MPH, I knew death was imminent. Like goal posts peered two huge trees in my path of flight--a gift of life as it turns out--The speed was such I nearly miscalculated striking the right engine directly into the big tree about 15 feet from the ground; The left wing striking the other tree just outside of the left engine. The wings sheared off at impact. The fuel load exploded but the fuselage and my Guardian Angels and myself bounded straight ahead through the forest for another 100 feet or so, slowed down by the impact coming to rest intact but totally twisted and bent partially upside down and turned counter clockwise about 1/4 turn. The tail area (although gone) was 8 or 10 feet in the air. No windows were broken out, little damage to the interior panel and a true Miracle from God. I ran from the wreckage through the woods, blood from the lacerations on my forehead, a sore leg, two broken ribs, and a small break on my foot.

There is much to tell, like the shear job of the Emergency Crew when they found me sitting on a stump obviously alive. I never thought about it before they told me later they had located six other crash victims "all dead" just one month ago. So they were repeating over and over "he's alive, he's alive". I was astounded and so very thankful for them. They were great. I was beginning to hurt all over now. They treated me like a king and I was so very thankful. As I was transported to the hospital, they were on the radio telling the Hospital Crew what to expect. I never lost consciousness except at the initial impact.

The efficiency of the Hospital and Staff was excellent. They got me stabilized and sewed up in record time at the sharp "commands" of Dr. Ellis, a Houston Physician on duty in Nacagdoches. The Dr's bark was much worse than his bite as he mellowed & he compassionately went about his duties. The last I saw of

him was with a Texas Handshake and a big smile telling me I would be ready to go home in about 48 hours. He was correct! In my room now Dr. Clifton Thomas took over and brought in Dr. Edwin Ferren the Orthopedic man. Dr. Paul Engstrom and Dr. Kelvin Samaratinga -the Neurology team. They were all just flabbergasted by the aura of prayers and healing that had commenced. It was a feeling unlike any I've known. It seemed like a "protective aura" around me. No crazy gouges appeared and very little bruising: Just healing-healing, a great feeling! The nurses were wonderful, especially "Evelyn". She watched over me continuously. All of the nurses were great. They certainly do not get enough credit. Now we see God in His people who care for all of us; Both as hospital workers and friends. So many friends. My fellow aircraft dealer friends and associates of which is a great bond between us all. My precious family, all of which flooded me with telephone calls, cards, flowers and food. And I am still receiving cards of care and concern and still many prayers, all are so appreciated.

I will never as long as the Lord God allows me each additional day on this earth take one of these peoples or their acts for granted. Each person has a special Blessing to input and each is so special. My feelings could inspire me to write much more but I believe this experience that I am able to share with you in this context is enough to make even the lonliest soul realize God's Magnificent Power and overwhelming Love is real. His miracles continue to take place daily, by the moment, in all corners of this vast world as we know it. He loves us beyond human knowledge.

As the Gulf War progresses, please God, may all of the participants-no matter their role feel the Blessings You have showered on me, this I pray. Amen.

Note: For my pilot peers (and technical folks), it is unknown at this writing why both props slowly went into feather position simultaneously after take off. I personally was unable to detect that it was happening, although I knew both engines were operating at or above "Red Line" both Torque/Temp: I was able to cut the master switch at near strike position and as well as I recall I was reducing power at that point. I was in the Air for a total of 20 seconds.

Bud Ridgley