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Experience: I crash-landed in the Hudson

'I could hear people screaming and one instinct took over: I need to get out'

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'Within minutes of taking off, I heard the strangest popping sound coming from the engine.' Photograph: Chris Hinkle for the Guardian

I've never been anxious about flying. I'm Australian and I've always travelled widely, so I was completely relaxed when I boarded [US Airways flight 1549](#) from LaGuardia airport, New York. Taking my seat, 13F, next to the window, I grabbed the in-flight magazine and settled in for the journey. The flight began with the usual safety speech which I ignored as I'd heard it all before. Leaning against the window, I stared out at the wing and thought about the words to a song I was writing. It was 15 January 2009 and I had been holidaying in New York for a week. I was on my way to Charlotte, North Carolina, to see friends.

Within minutes of taking off, I heard the strangest popping sound coming from the engine, rather like a car backfiring. I certainly wouldn't have guessed the noise was down to a large flock of Canada geese flying into the plane's engines, disabling both of them on impact. My seat shook with the vibrations and suddenly the plane began dropping. Everything went eerily quiet – the familiar drone of the engines had disappeared. Gripping the armrests, I said to myself, "OK, I am 27, I've never been married, but if it's my time to go, I'm OK with this." A strange peace washed over me, one I've never experienced before or since. All my life I had struggled with anxiety and had learned coping techniques, but this was different.

Looking around, I noticed some passengers crying and others edging up in their seats to catch a glimpse out of the window. Peering around, I locked eyes with the woman behind me. She was hyperventilating. A man a few seats down was making a phone call. Mostly everyone was quiet, except one passenger at the back who yelled, "Fire!"

Moments later the captain made an announcement: "This is the captain, brace for impact." I had to figure out how to brace myself because, of course, I had never paid attention to the emergency drill. In the end, I grabbed the seat in front and held on tightly. Just in time. The impact came with incredible force – I'm still amazed I walked away without any injuries. As we landed tail first, we were hurled back into our seats,

then plunged forwards. Someone screamed, "We're in water." We all jumped to our feet, jostling towards the exit doors.

By now, water was rising as the back of the plane was submerged. I could hear people screaming and one instinct took over: I need to get out. By the time I reached the exit door, freezing water was up to my shins. I could see passengers standing outside on the icy wing. Aware of others behind me, I jumped into one of the liferafts. I was soaking and shivering, from the water as well as the wind howling down the river.

A minute later another woman jumped in with me. By now there were several of us in the raft. All of a sudden it hit me: here I was in the Hudson, a single Australian woman in another country with no identification. I leaned over to the lady next to me and asked if she thought it would be OK for me to go back into the plane to get my passport. I realise now how ridiculous this must have sounded – I think it was part of being in shock.

We waited for what felt like an hour, but was really only 10 minutes, before help arrived. We clambered into ferries and were taken to a restaurant on the New Jersey waterfront where we changed out of our wet clothes into chefs' uniforms. Staff draped tablecloths around us, worried we might get hypothermia. Anxious to call home, I borrowed someone's mobile and rang my mum in Australia. I woke her up. "Mum," I said, "I'm OK, but I've been in a plane crash." She paused for a moment, then said: "OK – but did you get your auntie's jacket?" I giggle now when I think of this. My life was hanging in the balance and my mum was worried about a jacket I had borrowed.

An hour later, we were all bussed to a hotel near the airport. Over the next few days, airline staff bought me new clothes and a suitcase, and helped me to get a new passport.

Two days later I was on another plane to Charlotte. I found it a little unnerving, but I was keen to overcome any fear I might have. I haven't had much trauma since the crash. When faced with anxiety, I'm comforted when I recall the peace I felt on flight 1549 – and I definitely pay closer attention to the safety procedures now.

- As told to Nicole Partridge

Do you have an experience to share? Email experience@guardian.co.uk