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The Solari Report

MAY 22, 2014

A STORY OF DISASTER AND SURVIVAL

Deep Survival with Laurence Gonzales

FLIGHT 232

LAURENCE GONZALES





Deep Survival

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C. AUSTIN FITTS: Well, it's my pleasure to welcome back to The Solari Report Laurence Gonzales. He is a very successful journalist and author, focused very much on extreme experiences and survival experiences. Laurence is no stranger to The Solari Report; we did a Solari Report, several years ago, on *Deep Survival*, which is one of my favorite books. I recommend it to everyone. Laurence has published several new books, has one coming out, and it's very exciting. It's my pleasure to welcome him today to The Solari Report.

LAURENCE GONZALES: Thank you very much for inviting me back.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: Oh, it's our pleasure. So, I wanted to go back and revisit and introduce *Deep Survival*, and the basic premise. It's a book I try and get everyone to read, because I think it has enormous application in every person's life. It's sort of one of those unbelievably authentic, invaluable things that you haven't thought deeply about – but you need to. So, if you could just take us back: describe how it was you came to write *Deep Survival*, what it's about, and what the message of the book is.

LAURENCE GONZALES: Well, my interest in this began when I was a little kid, and I heard stories about my father who was a combat pilot in World War Two – and he was shot down. Ostensibly, the story is, he fell 27,000 feet without a parachute and survived. As a little kid, this is a very compelling idea. So, I – at a very early age – began to wonder, “Well, why does one person survive, and another doesn't, in the same situation?”

In my father's case, I think it was luck. But it set me on the road to researching this, and by about the 1990s, there was a whole lot of



neuroscience coming out that told us how certain things work in the brain. I began to realize, therein lie the answers to my questions: “So, why do we get ourselves into trouble in the first place?” That’s the first half of *Deep Survival*. The second half is, “Once we’ve gotten ourselves into trouble, how do we get out and who survives?” The subheading of the book is, “Who Lives, Who Dies, and Why” – and that’s really what the book is about.

At the end of the book, there’s some lessons for people that illustrate 12 traits of survivors that people can actually practice in their lives. They can do better – not just in surviving a life-threatening event, but do better, in general – in just making decisions.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: The first thing I should say is, *Deep Survival* is beautifully written. You’re just a beautiful writer; you’ve mastered your craft. When you go through the descriptions of the different wilderness experiences, it’s really like you’re there. You’re really on the cliff; you’re hanging there. It’s certainly very entertaining in that way.

LAURENCE GONZALES: Well, thank you.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: But you come out with a set of 10 lessons, and – or 10 takeaways; best practices, I would say. If you look at the blog post on The Solari Report we did, it’s linked. But what I discovered is, the things that cause people to survive an extreme wilderness experience are the things that cause people to succeed in everyday life.

It’s the same, you see them play out in an extreme circumstance, it brings the lesson home emotionally. But maybe you could just talk quickly about what some of the lessons learned were.

LAURENCE GONZALES: Well, it’s interesting, because – although I use a lot of episodes from wilderness events as examples – the most popular venues I have for speaking engagements are people who take risks of other kinds, like doctors who treat cancer; financial analysts who invest other people’s money; bankers; businessmen. They are all drawn to this stuff because, as you say, it’s lessons in life.



My kids and I joked about naming the book *The Rules of Life*. So, in the end of the book, I call this chapter “The Rules of Adventure,” because so many of these stories are from wilderness adventures. But there are 12 rules that I give, and the first one is, “Perceive, believe.” It means, “Don’t enter into denial.” When trouble comes – and it always does – one of the biggest stumbling blocks for people is that they tend to deny that it’s happening.

So, the good survivor will admit, “You know what? I really am lost. I really don’t know what’s going on,” or “My marriage really is in trouble,” or “I really do have these symptoms; I’d better go see a doctor.” That’s a big one: perceiving and believing; becoming a believer in your own vulnerability.

The second thing is, of course, when you find out you’re in trouble, the impulse is to panic. The second rule is to “stay calm and use your fear to focus” – use your fear to make you angry enough to do something about it. These are steps that lead toward action.

The third thing is, “Think, analyze, plan.” So, if you’re staying calm, you’re able to think; if you’re too excited, you can’t think. The survivor makes a plan, because he’s going to ultimately do something about his troubles.

That’s the next step: “Take correct, decisive action.” So, it’s all well and good to think about things, but you have to actually do something.

“Celebrate your success.” So, along the way, the survivor takes little steps, and he has little celebrations to reward himself – to keep himself motivated.

So, it goes on. There are 12 of them – if you want, I can go through all of them.

“My kids and I joked about naming the book *The Rules of Life*. So, in the end of the book, I call this chapter “The Rules of Adventure,” because so many of these stories are from wilderness adventures.”



C. AUSTIN FITTS: No, there's a link to the article from the last blog post. We will link to it again, unless there's further links.

One of the things that struck me in *Surviving Survival: The Art and Science of Resilience* – one of your newer ones – I was reading the story of the woman where she and her husband were attacked by a bear. Again, it was a remarkable – you've done this several times, in the two books, where you tell the story of someone whose intuition is telling them, "There's something wrong." For a variety of reasons, they override that intuition. They – in this case, the husband's pooh-poohing it – but they don't listen to their intuition.

I was struck again, this weekend, as I read this, let me ask you: since setting all these things, and writing all these things, have you become better at listening to your intuition?

LAURENCE GONZALES: Gee, I hope so. This goes way back for me. In 1979, my first novel was coming out, and I was supposed to go to Los Angeles for the book fair – the Booksellers Convention – to promote my book. A bunch of colleagues were going. At the time, I was studying aviation accidents, and I discovered that we were supposed to get on this DC-10 to go to Los Angeles together. I just didn't like the DC-10. I just really had done some research, and had some bad feelings about it, and my gut told me this: "Get another flight; this is not good."

C. AUSTIN FITTS: Did you tell them?

LAURENCE GONZALES: I did. Yes, I told them, and they pooh-poohed me about it. Kind of like, "Oh, come on, it's just a flight to L.A." It was a DC-10 – American Flight 191 had crashed after 30 seconds of flight, and everyone was killed.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: Oh, I remember reading that story.

LAURENCE GONZALES: My colleagues were on that flight, and I was not. So, I do take this business of gut feelings seriously. I try to be attuned to it. It's a difficult thing, because it can be paralyzing if you take it too much



in the wrong direction. There's another story in *Surviving Survival*, about a soldier – Chris Lawrence – who gets blown up because he doesn't listen to his inner voice. So, yes, I think we should practice that.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: At one point, you call it “The Stream,” which I love.

LAURENCE GONZALES: Yes, “The Stream.” So, I have a novel that was published by Alfred A. Knopf; it's called *Lucy*. It's a coming-of-age novel about a teenage girl, but she's actually only half-human. So, this whole fantasy story, which is very popular among teenagers, by the way, is about this girl's trials and tribulations in coming of age. Because she's only half-human, she has these animal qualities that are very important to the story. She can enter into “The Stream” and communicate at a higher level than humans can.

Although I made that up for the book, it's actually true that there's a level at which we communicate, and a level at which we perceive that's really not conscious. It's hard to bring it to consciousness, and it results in gut feelings. So, we're constantly getting these signals from our environment, and from others in the environment; we just are not very practiced, in our culture, at paying attention to them.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: In the '90s, I was at a business dinner, and turned to the fellow on my right, and basically said to him, “So, who are you and what are you doing?” He was a young insurance executive from Scandinavia. He was in charge of doing the research on how memories come from the future. I thought, “Well, if the actuaries take this seriously, I'm going to.”

LAURENCE GONZALES: Yes. Well there's just too much, although it's anecdotal, there's just too much evidence, in my view. Now, there's starting to be much more evidence that's hard science. Like, the neuroscientists are studying people's brains, and they can see stuff happening, basically, before it happens. So, there really is a huge subterranean piece of our brain that we don't get access to, but that deals out messages to our body.



C. AUSTIN FITTS: Remarkable. Okay, *Surviving Survival: The Art and Science of Resilience* – why and how did you come to write this?

LAURENCE GONZALES: Well, *Deep Survival* tells the stories it tells from the point of view of the survivor or the person who perishes, in cases where the person doesn't survive. It always ends with either the death or the rescue. The fact of the matter is that, when you go through a big, traumatic experience like that and get out alive, that's not the end of the story. That's the beginning of a much more dramatic story, really, in that you have to somehow get your life back.

If you get shipwrecked and have to be floating at sea for weeks and weeks, fighting for your life, when you get home, you can't just step back into your life. You're not going to be the same person. So, *Surviving Survival* examines two big questions. One is, "Why does that happen? How does it happen? What's going on in your brain when that happens?" We all are familiar with PTSD, but what exactly is it, and why is it the way it is?

Then, the second thing is, "What can you do about it?" So, *Surviving Survival* is actually a sequel to *Deep Survival*, and takes off with, first of all, making you understand that you're not crazy; these things are real, and they do take place in your brain. Secondly, giving you some tools to cope with those things, so that you can get on with your life.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: I kept thinking, as I was reading this: I've never been a person who was particularly adept at school. I got a college degree, and a graduate degree, and I found it to be a very traumatic and stressful experience but I got something for it that's been useful ever since. So, I got a diploma, and I got credentials, and so on. We need you to start an institute to credential, it's almost like you need to prove you got something out of it.

Because in fact, the experience can be one that can be extraordinarily informative and useful in future life but it's almost like you don't get the credential. One of the things I was struck by in your book was that it has many scribbles in it. One of the first things I wanted to touch on is the reaction of "alienation and displacement," as you called it.



LAURENCE GONZALES: Right. Well, when you go through a traumatic experience, all kinds of things change. You're learning a lesson. We are tremendous learning machines, and even before birth, our brains and bodies are busy learning about our environment; they're learning about the other creatures in our environment; and storing all this information away. It's now thought that people really don't forget anything, that we remember everything; it's just that our conscious minds have limited capacity, so we stick stuff back where we can't retrieve it anymore.

So, in something like trauma, it's very important that the brain record this stuff; that it's associated with certain bodily feelings; and that we have the sensory equipment to sense anything that may be related to this kind of danger for the future so that we can survive. So, in the case of the couple who were attacked by the bear that you mentioned, the woman used to love the smell of pine. When the bear attacked, they were in the woods of the Canadian Rockies and she came away from that experience unable to control her emotions when she was in the presence of the smell of pine. She had panic attacks whenever she smelled pine. The smell of pine had been conveniently paired, in the brain and body, with this traumatic experience of the bear.

So, the brain is constantly pairing up all kinds of things that you're not aware of. This develops a tremendous array of what they call "triggers" to set you off. It can set you off in a good way, too: so, for me, the smell of roses takes me back to my grandmother's house in San Antonio when I was a kid, because she liked to grow roses. This is the underpinning of the whole book, really. It's about the way the brain and body work to, first of all, disturb us when we go through trauma, and then if we use it right, if we know the tricks, to make us feel better in the aftermath of trauma.

“It's now thought that people really don't forget anything, that we remember everything; it's just that our conscious minds have limited capacity, so we stick stuff back where we can't retrieve it anymore.”



C. AUSTIN FITTS: One theme that came up, again and again and again, which I just loved, was the importance of being useful; converting your experience into something that turns into a successful life for you.

LAURENCE GONZALES: Yes. I talk about this in *Deep Survival*, too. So, you can choose to be a victim, or you can choose to be a rescuer; that's essentially what this is about. Simply by finding someone who's worse off than you are, and helping that person, you can experience an almost immediate relief of whatever's troubling you because you're forced to do something for someone else.

So, it is often the case in big, traumatic events that you find a certain subgroup of people who have these traumatic experiences will go into a helping profession afterwards. They'll go off volunteering at disasters, or they'll become psychotherapists, or volunteer at the local hospital, in the children's cancer ward. It does take you out of yourself; it's a very helpful thing to do. Our conscious brains are so limited in their capacity that we can't sit around feeling sorry for ourselves when we're concentrating on helping someone else.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: Yes. One of your great quotes that I resonated with; when I worked in the federal government, I had little buttons made up that said, "No Whining." I worked in an agency where everybody whined. It got in the way of getting things done, because you needed people to tell you what actions they needed you to take to get them out of their predicament. If that took 20 minutes of working through the whining you'd never get there.

So, I was trying to communicate to them a strategy for getting things changed. So, we had these "No Whining" buttons made, and the next thing you know, everybody at OMB loved me because all the other agencies wanted them. You could tell how bad things were around Washington according to who wanted how many "No Whining" buttons. You have this great line that says, "Those who survive waste little time whining."

LAURENCE GONZALES: Yes, and that's one of the first things that comes up in



these situations, is: “You know what? Here you are. Guess what? You got yourself lost. Now what? What’s the next right thing to do?”

C. AUSTIN FITTS: Right. Exactly. I went through a period of litigating with the federal government that got very violent, and very difficult. Ever since then I’ve always loved to travel, and I’ve put about 500,000 miles on different cars, traveling around the country. I need to do due diligence for business, and so, I travel. Let me use your quote: “Travel is a time-honored strategy for healing.” Wow. You’re right.

LAURENCE GONZALES: Yes, it is. In *Surviving Survival*, I talk about Ann Hood, who lost her little daughter and it destroyed her life. She had to really work hard to get her life back. Part of her strategy was traveling; she would just leave town and go to Europe with her husband, and they would just walk all over the place. Walking is a time-honored strategy for relieving suffering, as well. I go into that in the book.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: “We evolved to live in small groups of 150 or so people. Within each group, we lived in even smaller and more intimate groups of 30 or 50. Nesting within those, we lived in even smaller groups, made up of our extended families and friends. There was a kind of stability in this manner of living that we don’t have in the modern city, where we’re constantly exposed to hundreds, or even thousands, of strangers – faces upon faces.”

Then you go into coming out of a survival experience and how the security of those kind of groupings can make a difference. It’s almost like we need to go back to community.

LAURENCE GONZALES: Yes, exactly. People who are socially well-connected and intimately connected with other people in the family, or circle of friends just do better in these survival situations. They have something worth getting back to, and the aftermath of the survival situation, because they have all of the emotional connection and emotional support of the people around them.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: It’s funny you say that. As a child, I was required to read



The New York Times every day. I don't know if you remember: they used to have a science page on Wednesday, and I'll never forget. I think I was in high school, reading a story about scientists who took two groups of rats. One group of rats, they just fed whatever they wanted, and they had the life of Riley, and they were lazy; they never exercised; they just ate and got fat. The other got conditioned and did lots of running around, and was required to train, and everything else.

Then they took the two groups of rats, and they put them in water to see how long they would swim before they gave up and died. And the rats that had worked hard and done endurance training gave up almost immediately and died while the rats that were fat and unexercised swam forever, because they had something really wonderful to look forward to if they could make it. I said, "Oh, okay. That tells something."

Okay, so, in the last chapter of *Surviving Survival*, you describe "The Rules of Life." So, you bring it back to 12. And maybe, if we could go through those quickly. I think this is really a terrific chapter.

LAURENCE GONZALES: "Want it, need it, have it." That's the first item on the list, and it is something that my eldest daughter, Elena, used to say when she was about two years old. She would ask for something, and she'd say, "Want it, need it, have it." It always stuck with me, because it's so intimately human, so quintessentially human. In order to get past your traumatic experience, you have to be passionate about something; you have to want something in your life.

A lot of us, pre-trauma, can just sort of coast through life, not really deciding what we care about the most, or what we're really passionate about. Some people are inherently passionate all their lives, but many people just don't know what they want. A traumatic experience will torture you and force you to decide what it is you really want if you're ever going to get out of it.

The second thing is, "Be here now." This is another thing that my kids and I talked about all the time. It's mindfulness; it's being aware of your surroundings, aware of what you're actually doing; thinking about



things more deeply than you normally do. It means, be quiet; it means take time, every day, to tune out all the electronic noise and the chattering voices that clamor for our attention and then, listen to your own mind and body. So, this is getting in “The Stream:” putting in this effort to pay attention means that you’ll be much more likely to seize opportunities and avoid hazards.

The third thing is, “Be patient.” We live in a culture that is instant gratification all the time – especially with all our new iPhones, and Facebook. Be patient, because these things take time. If you really have gone through a traumatic experience, and you want to get better, you’re going to have to live with it for a while. It’s what one of my friends called “The Hard Work Miracle”: you can get out of it but it takes hard work.

The fourth item is, “Be tough.” Victor Frankl is a famous psychiatrist who was in Auschwitz, and nearly died there but did survive, and wrote about it afterwards. He wrote about “learning to suffer well, learning the art of suffering.” Well, when we go through traumatic experiences, we suffer in the wake of them. So, that’s part of our job. Not to suffer eternally, but to at least get through it.

The fifth item is, “Get the small picture.” You suffer, but you don’t have to suffer all the time. Again, this is from a Nazi death camp. There’s a wonderful book, called *The Last Expression: Art and Auschwitz*. It shows all of the art that was made, secretly, inside the death camp. It’s an amazing thing, how these people who were suffering so much could produce such wonderful art. It’s a lesson for us when we are suffering. Again, it helps to find someone who’s worse off than you are and certainly, somebody in a Nazi death camp is about as “worse off” as it can get.

“It’s an amazing thing, how these people who were suffering so much could produce such wonderful art. It’s a lesson for us when we are suffering.”

The sixth thing is, “Put things in their place.” Traumatic memories don’t go away; they stay with us even when we learn to live with them



and cope with them. There's a way to set them in a context, so that we can move past them. My wife, Debbie, had cervical cancer when she was young, and she had a hysterectomy on May 18th, when she was 27. So, she was never able to have children, and it was always a sad day for her. When we decided to get married, I said, "Let's get married on May 18th. That'll be our anniversary, and it no longer will be a sad day for you." So, that's what we did.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: Did it work?

LAURENCE GONZALES: Yes, yes, sure. It did. Actually, we've taken some of our best trips to include May 18th; we went to Italy one year, and France another year. So, May 18th has come to be a real fun date for us. So, that's "Put things in their place."

Seven is, "Work, work, work." So, people who go through trauma have to do something. Everyone has a different way of doing this. In the case of Ann Hood, we mentioned she lost her little five-year-old daughter, and went crazy, she took up knitting. She found that the act of knitting, in a group of people calmed her down. Some days, when she was first trying to get through this she would knit all day long, for eight hours, and do nothing else. She's written about this.

Of course, when I first heard this, I thought, "Knitting? Seriously?" It turns out there are tricks you can play on the brain, and this is one of them: to do something that is patterned, repetitive, and rhythmic. This is why walking helps people who are traumatized. You can use all kinds of things: a game of golf, for one of the people I write about, is what calmed his brain down. There are any other things. I think, for me, it's writing, to tell you the truth. It does the same thing to the brain, in all these cases.

Eight: "See one, do one, teach one." That's what neuroscientists and neurosurgeons say; they're talking about operations. When they're teaching the students, they say, "See one, do one, teach one." That's how you learn to do it. So, while you're doing your work, you receive benefits. Then, as you pass this along to someone else, you receive benefits.



Ann Hood had been knitting for a couple of years when a woman called her. She was a woman whose son had gone to the same grade school as Ann Hood's daughter who died. The woman called Ann to tell her that her son had died. Ann said, "Come over to my house. I'm going to teach you to knit." So, that's how she helped someone else, like we talked about.

Nine: "Touch someone." Staying socially connected. We just talked about that a few minutes ago. So, having these people around you is very important. Ann Hood knitted alone, but she mostly knitted in groups of people, and she wrote a novel, in fact, called *The Knitting Circle*.

Number 10: "Be grateful." You can't be grateful and angry all at the same time, and the brain isn't that competent to do that. If you're feeling gratitude, you're going to feel better. There's so much to be grateful for after you go through a traumatic experience: you're alive, for one thing.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: It was in the '90s, when I was in the middle of this dangerous situation, and we did a workshop. I saw a video of myself, and I realized: "Oh my God, I'm dying. What I'm doing isn't working; I need a new plan." I worked on Wall Street, and I said, "I'm going to study the story of everybody else that has been through this, and see what worked and what didn't."

So, I went back and I studied. What I discovered was, the people who failed and didn't make it whether because they were poisoned by their own anger. I said, "Oh my God." I was lucky; I had a great church that had classes on spiritual warfare, which completely taught you how to deal with all of this stuff without going to anger. It saved my life because I learned. One of my favorite preachers says, "God does not need what you have lost to bless you."

That's when I realized: "If you're alive and you can put two cents and rub them together, you've got something that can grow into whatever it is you want." It starts with being grateful. It's a way of staying out of, and getting out of, anger that's tremendous.



LAURENCE GONZALES: Yes. Exactly. So, that's number 10: "Be grateful."

Number 11 is, "Walk the walk." Act like you're better. It's interesting that you can find small things in your life that allow you to behave normally, and not as if you're a victim of something.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: I love the quote here: "I acted strong when I didn't feel strong, and before long, I was strong." The woman who was attacked by the crocodile?

LAURENCE GONZALES: Yes, right. A crocodile. There's a whole business in this book about "mirrored neurons". If you are with somebody who's smiling, you're more apt to smile; if you're with someone who's depressed, you're more apt to be depressed. There's a whole explanation of how that stuff works.

Likewise, if you stand up straight and walk with a purpose, you're going to feel better than if you slouch down and act like a depressed person. So, "Walk the walk" is all about engaging this system that I'm talking about.

Number 12 which is the last thing: "Life is deep; shallow up." So, this is about humor. Again, you can't be laughing and feel very angry. Villains don't have genuine laughs; they have fake laughs. But if you can laugh genuinely, with your strong circle of friends and family, you're going to feel better. This is all about feeling better, because one of the problems with trauma is it makes us feel bad for long periods of time. This cascades into all kinds of other problems, like: your spouse doesn't want to be with you, because you're depressed. So, laugh because this is a big part of healing. As my wife says, "Go ahead and cry, too, sometimes."

C. AUSTIN FITTS: I call it "staying in a state of amusement," because, if you deal with financial matters then you have to look at things that are very negative. I've come to believe that you can look at anything and take it seriously, but still stay in a state of amusement; it's kind of what the Buddha did.



Well, that's it. *Surviving Survival* and that's a good one. I also just wanted to mention *House of Pain*, which is a selection of essays, and they're extraordinary. I'm not going to go into all of them, but there were two that I just wanted to mention.

The first one is remarkable: "Marion Prison." I wrote a book that was a case study of a private prison company, and the premise is that it's unbelievably expensive and not economic to use the prison policies that we have. They make no sense. In my experience, the prison experience for most people was much more gruesome than I think the average person knows. You do a remarkable job, in "Marion Prison," of describing this extraordinary and very unhappy place. Maybe if you just described it, in a few words?

LAURENCE GONZALES: Well, prison turns people into savage animals. Prison is there for two purposes these days. It's not about rehabilitation; it's about making money. So, these prisons are run by private organizations that are making a profit off of this business; that's why we have so many prisoners in the U.S. The second reason we have so many is to keep minorities away from the white people.

"Prison is there for two purposes these days. It's not about rehabilitation; it's about making money."

C. AUSTIN FITTS: And away from the voting polls.

LAURENCE GONZALES: It's a horrible system, and most of the people in prison are black or Hispanic. It's not because blacks and Hispanics commit more crimes; it's because we live in a racist culture.

In "Marion Prison," I was given unprecedented access to this maximum-security prison and it was the most maximum-security prison in the country at the time. I was basically given free run of the place, and I decided just to keep myself out of it and describe what I saw and heard. I did so, and divided it into basically, three tiers. The administration; the people at the top of the organization. The staff; the guards and so forth. Then finally the prisoners are the third tier. The reality for those three



tiers is so different that you might think they were on different planets.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: Well, you are.

LAURENCE GONZALES: The administration has no idea what the guards do. The guards have no idea what the prisoners do. The prisoners are the brunt of all this ignorance, and really don't care what the other two are doing; they just do their own thing. So, it was a fascinating microcosm for me.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: Then, one on the World Trade Center, which I thought was fascinating. I hadn't realized that you had headed down to Ground Zero right after it happened.

LAURENCE GONZALES: Yes. Well, I saw it on the TV, like so many. I thought, "Well, this is my job; to bear witness to historic events." So, I got in my car and drove there with a friend of mine who's a photographer. We spent a week or so at Ground Zero, just talking to people, watching what was going on, and gathering stories. It was quite amazing. I just felt I was obliged to bear witness to this historic event.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: Right. Well, if you're Laurence Gonzales, it's true: you have to go.

Okay, so your new book, which I did not know about until we just talked beforehand: *Flight 232*. This sounds fantastic. When can I get it?

LAURENCE GONZALES: You can pre-order it online now. If you go to my website, <http://www.laurencegonzales.com>, it offers you choices of Amazon, an independent bookstore, or Barnes & Noble. But anybody online who sells books is going to allow you to pre-order it at this point. If you go on my website, you can also see an increasing number of things that we're posting having to do with *232*: a description of it; you can see the cover; you can read an excerpt.

There is, right now, an excerpt of the book in *Popular Mechanics* for this month's issue. There's a link on my Facebook page to it. So, you can go



to Facebook, and search “Laurence Gonzales,” and you’ll find my public Facebook page there with a link to *Popular Mechanics*. You can just search “Popular Mechanics” and “United Flight 232,” and you’ll see it.

So, in 1989, July 19th, a DC-10 that was fully loaded with 296 people onboard, experienced the explosion of one of its engines. The DC-10 had one engine on each wing, and one running through the tail. The one running through the tail blew up, and it threw shrapnel and pieces of metal out. The pieces of metal went through the tail and cut the hydraulic line.

So, this plane, at 37,000 feet, going 83 percent of the speed of sound suddenly had no steering. No steering at all. What the captain did to save those lives is, he closed the throttle on the left engine, and opened the throttle on the right engine; as the plane was trying to roll over and dive into the ground, it rolled to the right. By using this different thrust on the two wings, he was able to raise that right wing, and prevent the plane from diving into the ground.

Then, for the next 44 minutes, the crew manipulated those throttles to keep the plane from diving into the ground. They somehow made it to an airport at Sioux City, Iowa, where they crashed. You can go on my web page and see a video of this crash; a newsman happened to catch it on video. When you watch that video, you will say to yourself, “Nobody could’ve survived that crash.” I mean, it is a total fireball, breaking into pieces; the tail snaps off early in the sequence; you can see seats tumbling down the runway as people are thrown out of the aircraft, and it just looks hopeless.

Yet, out of 296 people, 184 survived. Of those 184, about 130 just walked away, almost without a scratch. So, I thought to myself, “Wow. These people are out there with their stories to tell, and nobody’s ever asked them to tell those stories.” Not only that, the crew is still alive, because they survived the crash, as well. The flight attendants are alive.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: What year was the crash?



LAURENCE GONZALES: I believe it was 1989. So, it's the 25th anniversary this summer, and the book will be out this summer for that anniversary.

So, I told this story in a 360-degree, intensely-detailed fashion. You first start in the mind of a passenger; and then you go up to the cockpit, and you're with the pilot, trying to keep the plane from diving into the ground. Then you go to the air traffic controller in the control tower; and you go to the nurses who are in the hospitals, preparing bandages and gurneys. You go from point of view, to point of view, to point of view. It just keeps the pace going.

So, it's really interesting, because now, with this excerpt in *Popular Mechanics*, I'm hearing from people. I just heard from an air traffic controller this morning, and he said, "My God, I never realized what was going on. I was up in the tower, but I never knew what was really happening inside the airplane."

C. AUSTIN FITTS: They can never get full closure because they only were part of the story. Have you ever had a reunion?

LAURENCE GONZALES: Well, there have been reunions, yes. There were several. There was a first reunion and a second reunion. Then, I'm not sure where they ended. There were several of them, and then they stopped. And this year – I know they had a 20th.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: I've already ordered the book, your writing is incredible. You can slow it down, and take the reader into the head or the actions of the person, and be with one person in that place.

So, I can imagine in the cockpit or whatever, and it's as though you're there. You slow it down and you take it into very meticulous detail. Then, you can swoop right up to the big picture and the framework of what's going on. You can go up and look at the big picture, and swoop down and slow down and get into the details.

LAURENCE GONZALES: Well, this is the book. My wife will tell you stories about me during this period of writing this book.



C. AUSTIN FITTS: How long did it take?

LAURENCE GONZALES: It's hard to say, because so much of the research is spread over years of my life. All the research that went into this book probably represents about 10 years of work, and then, the actual writing of the book took about two years. I was pretty much chained to my desk for that period of time. I was doing 15-hour days, but I was having the time of my life, because I was born to write this book.

This is the finest project of my lifetime. It was effortless. People would tell me their stories, and it was like I was just typing for them, you know? "I'm the typist, and you tell me your story."

C. AUSTIN FITTS: I don't know. I can't imagine it being better than *Deep Survival*, but if you say so.

LAURENCE GONZALES: Well, it's a different kind of animal from *Deep Survival*. *Deep Survival* invites your participation, and you might even call it a "self-help" book, in a way. I always wanted to combine literature with science. However it's a pure rocket ride, from the beginning of *Flight 232*. Don't start it at 10:00 PM, because you won't get any sleep. I'm serious.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: Will we fly again after we read it?

LAURENCE GONZALES: Yes, and the interesting thing is, it doesn't leave you afraid to fly. Despite all that happens in the book, in the end, you come away going, "Wow, flying is really safer than I thought it was, because so many different things had to go wrong for this crash to happen." All of the stars had to be in alignment, or the crash simply wouldn't have happened.

"Despite all that happens in the book, in the end, you come away going, 'Wow, flying is really safer than I thought it was, because so many different things had to go wrong for this crash to happen.' All of the stars had to be in alignment, or the crash simply wouldn't have happened."



C. AUSTIN FITTS: It sounds, to me, like a lot of professionals did a lot of things right.

LAURENCE GONZALES: Yes. A lot of people did a lot of things right; yes, indeed.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: It's amazing to me, when there are extreme circumstances, the way people will pull together, and all the training comes out, and it's amazing what they can accomplish.

LAURENCE GONZALES: Well, and the heroism of certain people in this story are just remarkable. There were a bunch of kids onboard, many of them traveling alone, because of a special promotion that United had going on that day. One of the people I interviewed was a nine-year-old boy, traveling alone, sitting next to a businessman. He was so scared that he couldn't cooperate. You're supposed to get into the brace position, which you're folded over, and grabbing your ankles, and keeping your head out of the way, because things go flying when you are in a crash.

This businessman next to him pushed him down and placed his body on top of this boy, and saved the boy's life. The businessman lost his life in the course of doing that. So, there's just stunning stories of amazing feats by these people.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: Heroism, yes. Well, Laurence, our time is up. But I can't thank you enough for this.

LAURENCE GONZALES: Thanks for having me back.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: I can't say how much I enjoyed my weekend reading *Surviving Survival*, and I look forward to *Flight 232*. I think your work is really essential reading for life in a modern age.

LAURENCE GONZALES: Why, thank you very much.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: Whether we're flying around or roaming in the wilderness, I will never go into the wilderness unprepared again. That, I can say.



LAURENCE GONZALES: Well, if you want me to come back when *Flight 232* comes out, just let me know.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: Absolutely. I will. I will. I've already ordered it. When am I going to get it?

LAURENCE GONZALES: You'll probably get it in late June. The official publication date is July 7th, but they usually honor the pre-orders first, so you'll probably get it by late June.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: Okay. Okay, well, listen, you have a wonderful day.

LAURENCE GONZALES: Thank you.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: Good luck with the book tour.

LAURENCE GONZALES: Yes, well, we're going to Sioux City first, for the 25th-year reunion.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: Fabulous. Well, all the best, and may this book do everything you want for it, okay?

LAURENCE GONZALES: Okay. Thanks very much.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: Have a great day.

LAURENCE GONZALES: Bye-bye.

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