

# Feelings of hope, relief after plane rescue in Hudson

BY ROBERT MARCHANT • THE JOURNAL NEWS • JANUARY 17, 2009

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It looked at first as if another heap of bad news was ready to land on top of a lofty pile of woes.

Bad recollections of earlier aviation disasters came rushing up from the collective memory when the news broke of an airline crash in the Hudson River Thursday afternoon, while sour news about layoffs, millionaire swindlers and bombings in Gaza played a steady drumbeat on the airwaves.

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Then, something else happened. New Yorkers breathed a collective sigh of relief. Word spread that all 155 people aboard U.S. Airways Flight 1549 survived their frigid encounter with the Hudson, and scenes of quiet courage and cooperation played out in newspaper and television accounts of the incident. People paused to reflect that good things happen in the world, too. As Winston Churchill once said, "There is nothing so exhilarating as to be shot at without effect," so New Yorkers were feeling exhilaration that they dodged that bullet.

Jay Varley, 66, Vietnam War veteran and retired paratrooper from Port Chester, said the story gave him a hopeful feeling.

"People are smiling. There is a light today that wasn't there yesterday," said Varley. "It was in the shadow of the trade center. It's a very spiritual, sacred place. ... It had a tremendous effect on the city and people in general. A lot of little miracles happened yesterday. I think there is a spiritual future ahead. It will bring people together."

Jeffrey Kleinberg, the president-elect of the American Group Psychotherapy Association, said the spectacle showed people at their best - and that always had a positive effect on the collective mood.

"People help each other, people are not always selfish. That's a group phenomenon," said Kleinberg, a Peekskill resident. "And for a change, authority worked well. We've been used to authority failing us all across the board. Here was an experience where it all worked - an experienced pilot and the crew working well together, and the ferries, the rescue boats, all coming together. It was an incredible choreography. In a positive way."

Social psychologist Susan Newman said, "9/11 had a lot to do with people realizing how precious life is. What we saw on the Hudson, the effect was very similar, all of a sudden we go, 'I'm alive. I could have been on that plane. I could be dead.' It changes people's perspective dramatically."

The rescue is likely to be a source of conversation at parish halls and churches around the region tomorrow.

David Frost of Patterson, a seminarian and an elder at the Patterson Community Church, said he would offer up the rescue as a prayer of thanks. "Miracle" is a word to be used with caution, he said. "I think it warms a lot of people's hearts in terms of the human response. That was the miracle, not some divine intervention," he said.

Many people were fixated by the spectacle on the river.

Laura Robinsky racked her brain for a piece of good news she'd seen recently and couldn't come up with much. That's why when she heard that a plane was down in the Hudson, her first reaction was that it was more bad news, perhaps a terror attack. "Then to find out that there were no fatalities, not even serious injuries, wow!" said Robinsky, a teacher at Clarkstown South High School.

Domingo Moronta, 33, of White Plains, owner of the Gedney Way Deli, said he was astounded as he watched news coverage of the dramatic landing and rescue.

"It really was a miracle," he said. "The pilot deserves a medal for saving everybody like he did. ... It makes you feel positive, like maybe things aren't so bad after all."

Eve Hausler said the reason she liked the story was simple.

"People helping each other," said Hausler, 51, a social worker from Mount Kisco. "We haven't heard about that for a long time."

**Staff writers Hema Easley, Theresa Juva, Richard Liebson and Michael Risinit contributed to this report.**

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