

A National Geographic Channel TV documentary airing June 22 recreates the events of one of the most successful emergency landings in aviation history.

Miracle Landing on the Hudson

Passengers share their stories five years later *By Nancy Henderson*

JIM WHITAKER wasn't supposed to board US Airways Flight 1549 on the afternoon of Jan. 15, 2009. But when the architect finished his meeting in Manhattan earlier than expected, he headed straight for New York's LaGuardia Airport and signed up as a standby for the next flight home to Charlotte, N.C.



Jim Whitaker

He got the last available seat—next to a young mother with a noisy, restless baby—“the worst-possible-case scenario,” says Whitaker, 49, with a laugh. “But I happen to be a kid lover.” The seasoned flier and father of five children

struck up a conversation to calm the woman, who was anxious about having to sit several rows away from her husband and daughter.

Two minutes after takeoff, the airplane struck a flock of Canada geese and stopped ascending. “The engines were all gone, just gone, and there was complete silence,” Whitaker recalls. “There was a very foul

smell . . . Clearly, something terrible was going on.”

Seconds later, pilot Chesley “Sully” Sullenberger announced what no passenger wants to hear: “This is your captain. Brace for impact.”

Whitaker and other Flight 1549 passengers share their stories of courage and survival in *Miracle Landing on the Hudson*, a two-hour documentary commemorating the five-year anniversary of one of the most successful emergency landings in aviation history. The program is scheduled to air June 22 on the National Geographic Channel.

Whitaker says his initial impulse was to shield the woman's baby as they prepared for an emergency landing. “May I hold your child?” he asked his panicked seatmate. She agreed, and he clutched the 9-month-old boy tight to his chest like a football.

When the aircraft hit the Hudson River, the floor buckled beneath Whitaker's feet and water began pouring into the cabin. Incredibly, the baby was unscathed. “He

was just looking up, eyes clear, not crying,” Whitaker remembers. “That's one of the great small miracles in this story.”

Whitaker hopes *Miracle Landing*, which includes reenactments of what occurred inside the plane, will remind viewers “good things do happen.”

“It was a scary disaster,” he says. “But there were 155 people that weren't killed. We all lived.” ★



A scene from *Miracle Landing on the Hudson*