

The Story of Juliane Koepcke

It was Christmas Eve when Juliane Koepcke, only seventeen years old, was on a flight home with her mother when she noticed storm clouds looming in the distance. Home was the remote Amazonian town of Pucallpa in Peru and whilst the plane passed above the South American rainforest, they were hit by a violent storm, a storm that would change Koepcke's life forever.

After the storm had taken hold of the plane, bags and luggage fell from the overhead compartments and the cabin from plunged into darkness. Not long after this, Koepcke was somehow flung from the aircraft, leaving behind her mother, whose final words were drilled into Koepcke's mind, "That is the end. It is all over." The girl hurtled towards the rainforest below and amazingly survived the fall but that did not end her horror. She was young, alone and hurt but had to navigate her way through the traitorous jungle to safety.

Koepcke's German parents had worked at the Museum of Natural History, Lima. She was the only child of biologist Hans-Wilhelm Koepcke and ornithologist Maria Koepcke. When Koepcke was 14, her parents decided to leave Lima and set up Panguana, a research station in the Amazon rainforest. She became a "jungle child" and learned survival techniques such as:

- Walking through shallow water can be safer than walking on land.
- Jungle settlements are often built near water.
- Fruits can be poisonous.
- The temperature will drop at nightfall so it is best to find warmth and shelter.
- When travelling on foot, it was important to keep a cool head, one mistake could have severe consequences.
- It's vital to stay hydrated and cool when possible.

Worryingly, Koepcke had no idea where she was and she had very little food – a small bag of sweets which didn't last very long. However, knowing she couldn't stay still for much longer, she made do with what she had and began her journey to safety. It wasn't long before Koepcke found some water and put her father's advice into practice following the stream as it weaved through the forest. She did this for many days surviving on the small bag of sweets she had at the start of her perilous journey but her body was hurt from the crash, from the seemingly countless number of insects that had bitten and stung her fragile skin and from the intense sun beaming down on her. She was growing weaker and, with that, her chance of surviving seemed to be slipping from her grasp.