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Recommended Citation

Office of University Communications, "As “Sully” Movie Premieres, Gardner-Webb University Alumnus Reflects on “Miracle on the Hudson”" (2016). *Gardner-Webb NewsCenter Archive*. 792.
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As “Sully” Movie Premieres, Gardner-Webb University Alumnus Reflects on “Miracle on the Hudson”

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Office of University
Communications

September 6, 2016

Ben Bostic ('01) was Among Passengers on Plane That Crashed into N.Y. River

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C.—Out the window of his airplane, Gardner-Webb University alumnus Ben Bostic stared straight down at the Hudson River near New York City. Just seconds earlier, he had heard a booming noise, felt a jarring motion, sensed a burning smell and noticed one of the aircraft’s engines was in flames. Then he heard a voice on the cabin speaker: “This is your captain. Brace for impact.”

“My heart just fell out of my chest,” Bostic remembers. “But what was really surprising to me was it only took a couple of seconds and I had this feeling of calmness wash over me. I lamented the fact there may have been some things in my life I hadn’t done yet. Did I hug a loved one the last time I saw them? Then a sense of calm, and I had no control over it. I assumed the position and was pretty sure I was going to die.”

Bostic, who earned his Bachelor of Science in Information Systems at GWU in 2001, occupied seat 20A on U.S. Airways Flight 1549 on that day, Jan. 15, 2009. He had only been in New York for about 24 hours on a business trip for his job with a tech company in the Charlotte region. But just moments after departing from LaGuardia Airport in New York on a return flight to Charlotte, N.C., his plane struck a flock of geese, causing both engines to lose power. The captain, Chesley Sullenberger, led a series of quick maneuvers to land the craft in the river below.

After crashing into the water, metal from the plane crumpled around Bostic and the other nearly 150 passengers and crew on board. Cold water quickly flowed into the vessel. But despite a number of injuries, everyone on board escaped and survived. The events that day have now widely become known as the “Miracle on the Hudson.”

“I remember looking at my fingers and my feet and being in shock I was in one piece,” Bostic recalls. “I followed a lady up the left side of the seats and ended up going out the front right side of the plane and into a raft. That’s the moment when I felt like, ‘OK, we’re going to get out of this.’”

After the rescue and global media coverage, Bostic and many of the other passengers and crew members suffered from varying forms of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Both the trials and honors of the captain, who became renowned simply as “Sully,” have been widely chronicled.

A film, based on Sully’s autobiography and bearing his name, will be released on Friday, Sept. 9. It is directed by Oscar winner Clint Eastwood and stars Oscar winner Tom Hanks as the now-famed captain. At a prescreening in Charlotte this week, Bostic viewed the movie alongside others who shared the “Miracle” experience as passengers and crew on Flight 1549.

Memories of that January day nearly eight years ago remain fresh for Bostic, who says it was a gradual process getting through stages of his own PTSD. In the first days after the experience, he struggled to sleep and eat.

“It’s difficult for me to say when I got past it. It disrupts your whole world view and belief system up to that point,” he shares. “But it taught me to be true to myself, not try to make everyone happy, live a more inspiring life, be more positive and optimistic than I was, especially when it comes to challenges in life. I wake up every day now and one of the first things I do is look out the window and smile up at the sun, just to see it again for another day.”

Located in Boiling Springs, N.C., Gardner-Webb University’s purpose is to advance the Kingdom of God through Christian higher education by preparing graduates for professional and personal success, instilling in them a deep commitment to service and leadership, and equipping them for well-rounded lives of lasting impact, Pro Deo et Humanitate (For God and Humanity).