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# Girl On A Plane



## Synopsis

Bahrain, 1970. After a summer spent with her family, fifteen-year-old Anna is flying back to boarding school in England when her plane is hijacked by Palestinian terrorists and taken to the Jordanian desert. Demands are issued. If they are not met, the terrorists will blow up the plane, killing all hostages. The heat becomes unbearable; food and water supplies dwindle. All alone, Anna begins to face the possibility that she may never see her family again. Inspired by true events in the author's life, this is a story about ordinary people facing agonizing horror with courage and resilience. Includes Q&A with the author.

## Book Information

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Age Range: 12 and up

Grade Level: 7 and up

## Customer Reviews

An Essay From Miriam Moss - The Author's Personal Story Behind The Book Girl on a Plane is the heart-pounding, thrilling story of one girl's determination to survive in the midst of terror as her plane to boarding school is hijacked. This is a work of fiction, but with a very true story as the inspiration. Miriam Moss, the author, shares some words below as to her own personal hijacking experience, and how it inspired this incredible book.

When I mentioned to my picture book editor that my plane had been hijacked while I was traveling

from the Middle East back to school in England, alone and aged fifteen, she suggested I tell the fiction editor my story. So, armed with a few newspaper clippings from 1970, I told her what happened all those years ago: how my plane was one of three that was hijacked by Palestinian guerrillas, forced to land in the desert in Jordan, and trussed with explosives. But there's a chasm between telling a story like that verbally and writing a novel about it. Despite having written many children's books, poems, and short stories, I had never written a novel, and I wasn't sure I could – especially about such a traumatic subject that had been buried for so long. In the desert the plane's power was turned off, so there was no water or sanitation, and there was very little food and water. The seventy passengers and crew sweated in the intense daytime heat and froze in the cold desert nights, waiting to hear whether the UK prime minister, Edward Heath, would negotiate with the guerrillas. They had set an ultimatum: release Leila Khaled, a Palestinian member of the PFLP (Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine), who had been arrested in London after a failed hijack attempt, or they would blow up the plane and all the passengers with it. The deadline ticked away. ... Revisiting the four-day ordeal while writing the story was very difficult. To write convincingly, I had to relive every emotion: being separated from my parents, the anguish of being alone, and the intense fear of being killed. By the end of each writing day, my voice had all but disappeared, only coming back gradually during the evening as I relaxed and returned to the present. I realized early on in the writing process that the book, though based on fact, would have to be fictionalized. I could set the book in the exact location, which I revisited, and in precise historical time, which I researched, but I couldn't accurately recall from a cast of seventy what everyone looked like, wore, and said. And I had to respect the many passengers still alive today. But all that happened to me is there and is real, and by writing the book through the eyes of a fifteen-year old girl called Anna, I was able to give the story its emotional truth. I have tried to write a nonjudgmental account of events, to show that the world is not black-and-white, but an infinitely richer and more complex gray. I have tried to understand what drives desperate people to do desperate things, and to understand the complexities of the Middle East a little better. Those who hijacked me were homeless and disenfranchised. I hope this book might help those of us who have so much understand a little better those who have so little.

Gr 7 Up • Fifteen-year-old Anna has been living in Bahrain with her family while her father has been stationed there by the British Armed Forces. She is supposed to fly back to her English boarding school by herself. It is September 1970, and the plane is hijacked by members of the

Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), who force the pilot to land the plane at a deserted airstrip in the Jordanian desert and turn off the power. The guerrillas demand the release of imprisoned PFLP members, and they threaten to blow up the plane and kill the passengers unless their demands are met. Anna and her fellow passengers suffer from heat and cold, hunger and thirst, and the claustrophobic confinement of the plane as they wait to see whether they will live or die. It is implied that one of the guerrillas sexually assaults a young woman on the plane, but this is never made explicit. Moss was a teenager when she was on a plane hijacked by Palestinian terrorists in the fall of 1970, and this book is a slightly fictionalized version of her experience. This is an intense, realistic, and absolutely gripping story; many readers have never heard of this incident and won't know the outcome. It is not a one-sided treatment; a PFLP guerrilla tells Anna about the deaths of his family members and atrocities that occurred in Palestine. VERDICT An excellent choice for a book discussion or for a class on world history, and a thrilling read. — Kathleen E. Gruver, Burlington County Library, Westampton, NJ

"...wide-eyed and suspenseful reading." — Bulletin "The accounts of terrorism during the 1970s are just as real as they are today, and teens will love this real-life account." — This title is highly recommended for both middle and high school collections." — VOYA "This is an intense, realistic, and absolutely gripping story ..." — School Library Journal "A unique glimpse into a pivotal point in world history." — Booklist "Historical fiction readers and lovers of history in general will enjoy this title about a time not often written about. It would make a good addition to a middle grade or young adult collection." — School Library Connection

What is it like to be alone on a hijacked plane for 4 days as a 15 year old girl? Horrifying, frightening, confusing. Well described almost as if written by the 15 year old herself. In fact, the author was actually in the situation but everything other than the hijacking itself is fiction. You absolutely understand her fears, her reactions, her hunger and thirst. You can almost feel the terrible heat and freezing cold of the nights. If there was a downside, it was that I really wanted to know what happened to the boys she sat with on the plane, but that wasn't the story, and she was right not to go there. The book will keep you reading

Great choice for a literature circle group. Gripping all the way to the end. This is a must read book.

It was pretty interesting, but I didn't like how the author tried to empathize with the terrorists. Also, I

am surprised the main character was so calm, there was little fear and it just seemed unreal to me.

My daughter loves it

As a 14 year old girl returning to boarding school in England from her parents' house in the middle east, the narrator's plane is hijacked. Because this is 1970 and the Palestinian hijackers had demands that they wanted fulfilled (the release of a political prisoner in England), rather than blow the plane up, they held the non-Arab passengers hostage in Jordan. For four days, the narrator of the story (and the author in real life, as this is loosely based on her experience) is held with little food and drink inside a plane in the Jordanian desert. That's all there is to the story. The action starts nearly immediately and the book ends when the hijacking ends (not-actually-a-spoiler alert: she is released). There is a short aftermath at the end, with the author as an adult, reflecting. The story is at once interesting - she provides enough action and dynamic between the passengers to keep it moving - and also a little bit boring. The book took me forever to read. And the most awkward part is conveying what's happening from the eyes of a young girl. There's a hamhanded introduction of a half-British hijacker who speaks English to explain the historical background, and the narrator seems to understand/appreciate more than her age would suggest (at times, and then at other times - not).

Miriam Moss was fifteen years old when she was aboard a hijacked plane by the PFLP (Palestinian Liberation Army). Her story is a historical and fictional account aboard the plane and four of being hijacked. Moss' character, Anna, befriends other children, other passengers, Rosemary and even the hijackers. By talking to them through the harrowing four day ordeal, she befriends them. She learns to understand the situation. The hijackers with the exception of the female are not depicted as cold blooded monsters or heartless in this novel. The plane hijackings of the sixties, seventies and even eighties were for political or financial gain. These hijackers wanted Leila Khaled, a prominent Palestinian activist, freed. The novel would have been smooth sailing if it was edited down for the reader. The author adds an epilogue and answers questions about her experience. She returned to visit Jordan decades later.

Mrs. Moss has an incredible story to tell here in *Girl On A Plane* primarily because it is, quite literally her story. In 1970 the Palestinian and Israeli situation escalated beyond their individual interests and began to envelope Jordan and Syria, creating a civil war and more. September of that year was

when multiple terrorist acts of hijacked airliners drew innocent civilians and the West directly into the conflict in ways that could not be ignored. This book is a fully fictionalized account of the author's personal experience as one of the hostages held on the last airplane hijacked and forced to land in the Jordanian desert. The main character, Annie, is a 15 year old girl flying alone to England and it is from her perspective that we experience everything. The fear, tension, hunger, cold, boredom and claustrophobic frustration of being cooped up in an airplane for days & nights on end. The lack of real information about the full situation had to have been terrifying and yet there is a sense of camaraderie amongst the passengers - adults and children alike. I found her account of how little things were handled particularly fascinating - the rationing of water, the treatment of the kids after they were released, but especially the bizarre way that the press was brought out to the site to photograph the hostages. I had to go pull that up on Google and sure enough those photos and videos are out there. My one quibble here is the fact that this book is intended for readers in the 12 and up age group. I think they may need some maps and a bit more context on the overall timeframe to fully grasp the situation and the fact that these issues in the Middle East aren't new today and weren't new in 1970. This is well written and should be read.

This is an easy read that most teens will love. Although fictional, the author uses her real experience as victim of a plane hijacking to put you into the mind of one such teenager as her plane is hijacked on the way to her boarding school. Stuck on a plane with no air, little food or water, and armed men threatening to shoot them or even blow up the plane, Anna (our fictional teen) must deal with the fact that in just a few days, she might be killed. The story manages to be intense, while still very suitable for teen readers. I liked the fact that the author tried to give a very fair picture of what was going on in the minds of the hijackers as well. She does a good job at reminding you that things aren't always so simple and straightforward as they may seem. I did want a little more when it came to era. The book takes place in 1970, but aside from a mini skirt and the fact that people read comics and books instead of being on devices, I never really felt that sense of time. I needed a few more details to make it really seem like we were in that era. But over all, it's a good, easy read that most teens will really enjoy.

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