

# **My Story – No Survivors**

## **The Diary of Jackie Simms, Hamilton, 1979**

Author: Sharon Holt

### **Synopsis**

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Jackie Simms is 12 years old. She lives with her parents and her brother Jeff in Hamilton, New Zealand in the 1970s. Jackie is a typical girl, she loves the group ABBA (even though others at her school think they are lame) and tries to balance skating practice with doing her schoolwork and spending time with her best friend Maria. Jackie has a massive crush on her brother's best friend Davey, but unfortunately he doesn't seem to know she exists. Jackie dreams that one day Davey will suddenly notice her and she will become his girlfriend. Surely when she turns 13 the fact that he is so much older than her (17) will seem unimportant.

Jeff and Davey are in their last year at school and as a reward for passing their exams their parents are letting them go on the trip of a lifetime - to Antarctica! Jeff's Uncle John will accompany them on a day flight where they will be able to take amazing pictures of this untouched wonderland. The boys are unbelievably excited about their trip. They prepare for weeks and the anticipation is almost unbearable. Jackie doesn't really understand what all of the fuss is about but she is hoping to get the day off school so that she can say goodbye to her brother (and more importantly Davey) at the airport.

However, things do not go according to plan. A series of unexpected mishaps means that Jeff doesn't make his flight. Uncle John and Davey go without him. Jeff is devastated but he still wants to hear about the flight so he, Jackie and their father wait for the flight to return. Then the unimaginable happens; the flight disappears and, after searching, wreckage is found on the slopes of Mount Erebus. There are no survivors. Uncle John and Davey are dead.

Jackie, Jeff and her family are devastated. Jeff feels both relieved that he missed the flight and guilty that Davey was killed and he is still alive. Jackie feels that she can't properly grieve for Davey because her feelings for him were a secret. Together, they must learn to deal with the tragedy that has rocked their family and move on with their lives.

### **Text Type**

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No Survivors is a fictional diary about New Zealand's worst ever air disaster - the Erebus crash. It is the latest in the Scholastic My Story series and is based

on the actual events that occurred on the 28<sup>th</sup> November, 1979, when an Air New Zealand plane crashed and all 237 passengers and 20 crew perished. The story is told in first person point of view. Through Jackie's diary entries the reader is given a fascinating insight into life in Hamilton in the 1970s and Jackie's thoughts and feelings about her experiences. Jackie is 12 years old (nearly 13) and she deals with many issues that contemporary youth will be able to relate to. These include trying to juggle school and sport, expressing herself through the music that she listens to, vying for the approval of her peers and unrequited love. Students interested in history will find her "random thoughts" interesting because life in 1979 contrasts sharply with the life of teenagers today, especially in terms of entertainment. Jackie is a likeable and resilient character who has to deal with a significant loss.

Themes include family, peer pressure, unrequited love and dealing with grief.

## Sharing the Novel

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**The novel has been divided up as follows: pp. 3- 13 and the Historical Note (pp. 171- 177), pp. 14- 107 and pp. 108- 170.**

**It would be a good idea to have students conduct some library research into the Erebus disaster so that they understand the context of the story.**

**During the shared sessions encourage students to ask questions to clarify their understanding of words and ideas used in the novel. Have them make predictions and inferences. Have them compare and contrast their lives with Jackie's in terms of leisure activities, school, friends and family. Students should be able to identify the impact that the disaster has on Jackie's family and the people of New Zealand.**

## Introducing the Novel

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Have students study the front cover of the novel and read the blurb.

- Who does the diary belong to? Where does she live? What year is it?
- What do you expect from a book that is set out in this way?
- Describe the photographs on the front cover of the novel. Why do you think these are important?
- Why do you think the novel is called No Survivors?
- What two things does the main character love the most?
- Who does she have a crush on?

- What is the main character's brother's name and what is he looking forward to doing?

**Teacher reads the Historical Note (pp. 171- 177) and pp. 3- 13 aloud.  
Students follow along in their books**

### **Comprehension pp. 171- 177 and pp. 3- 13**

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- When did Air New Zealand begin day excursions to Antarctica? What was the purpose of the flights? Why do you think they were so popular?
- What did Flight 901 crash into? How many people were killed?
- Who was the Captain of the plane? Who was the commentator?
- What did Air New Zealand do to try and console the families of its passengers?
- What did Chief Air Inspector Ron Chippindale believe was responsible for the crash?
- How did Royal Commission Inquiry head Peter Mahon's conclusions differ from his?
- Why does Jackie feel inadequate compared to the rest of the girls at her school?
- Who is Jackie's best friend?
- What music does she listen to?
- Who does Jackie have a crush on? Why does having him around all the time drive her "nuts"?
- Where did Jackie's family live before they moved to Hamilton?
- Why does Maria think that it is a good sign that Davey calls Jackie "Jack"?
- What is Jackie's random thought # 10?
- How does Jackie manage to spend a whole day with Davey? How does this make her feel?

#### **Discussion**

- What clues are contained in the story that suggests it is set in the 1970s?
- Have you ever had a crush on someone older than you? How did you act around them? How would you feel if they found out about the crush?
- Predict what will happen next in the story.

**Students read pp. 14- 107 independently before the next shared session.**

### **Comprehension pp. 14- 107**

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- How is Form 2 different from Form 1?
- Who was Jackie named after?
- How does Jeff celebrate his birthday? What does he want to do when he is older?
- Why does Jackie's dad get nervous when Uncle John gets around Jeff and Davey?
- Who is the star of the swimming sports?
- What does Uncle John bring to dinner to show the boys? How do the boys react? What plan do the trio formulate?
- Why do Maria and Jackie get teased at school?
- Why does Jeff try and phone Sir Edmund Hillary?
- Why does Jackie begin to panic when she starts skating training?
- What do Jackie and Maria do for Jackie's mum's birthday?
- What does Maria want them to do for the talent show? Why is Jackie apprehensive about this? What prizes could they win?
- Why does Jackie feel so comfortable at the skating rink?
- How does Jeff plan to raise the money for his plane ticket?
- How does Davey stick up for Jackie? How does this make her feel?
- Who is Chris?
- How does Jackie feel about her mother choosing her clothes for her? Would you let your mother choose clothes for you? Why/why not?
- How does Jackie celebrate her birthday? What presents does she receive?
- What surprise does Davey turn up with for Jeff? Why isn't Jackie allowed to go?
- Who is Hilda? Why is Jackie so keen to have an exotic ancestor? What do Jackie and Maria do to commemorate Hilda?
- Where do Jackie and Maria go for Easter weekend?
- Who does Jackie's mum invite over from Tauranga? Why is Jackie so excited to talk to her? Why does this weekend turn out to be so special?
- Who are Jackie and Maria billeted with in Palmerston North? Why do the girls get on so well with her? How is her family different to Jackie's?
- Who is George? Why does Jackie interview him?
- What is George's "war medal"?
- How does Jackie feel after she performs in the talent quest? What do the girls win?
- Why does Jackie hate "random boys"?
- Why does Jackie's skating coach want her to spend as much time as possible down at the rink in the holidays?
- Why does Jackie enjoy going to Maria's house so much?
- How does Jackie feel about her secret admirer?
- What happens to Maria at skating?

- How does Jackie feel about the prospect of going to skating by herself?
- What happens at the car wash that Jackie finds embarrassing?
- Why does Jackie's mum begin to worry about Jeff's trip?
- Why does Jackie have mixed feelings about making the table tennis team?
- What terrible news does Jackie get on June 14<sup>th</sup>? Why does Jackie feel guilty when she hears the news?
- How does Jackie's dad feel about his mother's death? Why is Jackie surprised when her dad says that it's like "someone has taken his umbrella away"?
- Describe Auntie Robin. Why does Jackie like her so much? Why does Jackie's dad think she is a bad influence?
- What is Jackie's billet's fatal flaw?
- Why does Jackie think that her grandmother was watching over her when she completes her medal test?
- Why does Jackie think that Jeff is her parents' favourite? Do you agree with her? Why/why not?
- Why do Jackie's parents want her to start riding her bike to school? How does she feel about this?
- Why does Mrs H want to talk to Jackie's parents?
- What are carless days?
- Why is Jackie dismayed when she learns that her class will be studying Antarctica?
- How do Jackie and Maria raise money for Jackie's new skates?
- How does Jackie feel when Davey turns up for the concert?
- Why does Jeff tell Jackie that the plane crash reported on the news is "not relevant"?
- Where do Jackie and her family go for the school holidays?
- How does Jackie win a new bike?

### Discussion

- Describe Jackie. What information have we found out about her in this section of the book? What qualities and attributes does she possess? What sorts of things does she worry about? Would she make a good friend? Why/why not?
- Compare and contrast Jackie's life with yours. How was life in the 1970s different? Which decade would you rather live in and why?
- Jeff and Jackie have totally different ideas about the flight over Antarctica. Would you want to go on a flight like this one? Why/why not?
- Jackie is desperate to have an exotic ancestor. What do you know about your own whakapapa or family tree?

- Describe Jackie's friendship with Maria. How are the girls similar? How are they different? In what ways is Maria a good influence on Jackie?

**Students read pp. 108- 170 independently before the next shared session.**

## **Comprehension pp. 108- 170**

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- Who turns up at Mokau? What sort of competition does Jackie's dad organise? Who wins?
- Who is Jackie's pen pal? Where is she from?
- Who bullies Jackie at school? Who sticks up for her? How does this incident make Jackie feel?
- Why doesn't Maria enter the club champs?
- Who makes Jackie's skating costume?
- Where does Jackie come in the club champs? Why is she so embarrassed? What announcement does she make that night at dinner? How does her family react to this announcement?
- Who does Jackie find in the kitchen when she gets up to get a drink? What is he doing? What does he give her?
- Why does Jackie change her mind about giving up skating?
- How does Jackie get in Mrs H's bad books?
- Why is Jackie's skating coach worried that she is training too much?
- What assignment does Jackie forget to complete for Mrs H? How does Jackie's mum react when Jackie tells her? Why does she react like this? How do Jackie's parents help her solve her problem?
- What does Maria decide to do her speech on? What does Jackie decide to do her speech on?
- How does Jackie feel when she finds out that Davey has been at her house all weekend?
- Who else is going on a flight to Antarctica?
- Why is Maria acting strangely at school?
- Why do Jackie and her mother go to Tauranga?
- How does Jackie do in the skating competition? How does she feel about her achievement? How does she feel when her name is mentioned in assembly?
- What deal does Jackie's dad make with her about having a day off school? Why is Jackie so eager to go to the airport?
- What does Jacqueline in Malawi tell Jackie in her letter that makes her jealous?

- Why won't Davey be visiting until the flight to Antarctica? What does Jackie promise to give him at the airport?
- Why do you think that Mrs H thinks her flight to Antarctica will be life-changing? Who does she meet on the flight? Why does Jackie's dad decide to invite her over for lunch? What does she bring with her?
- What is special about the flight that Jeff is going on to Antarctica?
- Explain the series of events that happen which cause Jeff to miss his flight. What time do he, Jackie and their dad arrive at the airport? How does Jeff feel about missing his flight?
- What happens to the plane? How does Jeff react to the news? Why does Jackie feel like nobody understands how she feels?
- Who comes and visits Jackie's family after the disaster? How does Jackie feel about their presence?
- How many died in the crash? How does Jackie feel when her father breaks down in front of her?
- Why wasn't Sir Edmund Hillary on the plane?
- Why does Jackie feel so much better after she talks to Auntie Robin? What advice does Auntie Robin give her?
- Describe what happened while Jackie, Jeff and her dad waited at the airport. How does Jackie's mum feel when she learns that Jeff wasn't on the plane?
- Describe Davey's parents' visit to the house. What do they give Jeff's parents to give to him? Why do you think Jeff doesn't want to see them?
- Why does Jackie's mother insist that she return to school?
- Why does Jackie feel like Davey is with her at the rink? How does she feel after this experience?
- What does Jackie give her brother to remember Davey by? What does he give back to her?

### Discussion

- Have you ever been the victim of bullying? How did this make you feel? What is the best way to deal with bullies?
- Is there anywhere in the world that you would really love to go and visit? If so where? What is it about the place that particularly interests you?
- Jeff feels many emotions when Uncle John and Davey die in the crash. Describe these. Why does Jackie have such a hard time dealing with Davey's death? Have you ever lost anyone close to you? How did you deal with this?
- What lessons do you think Jackie has learnt from Davey?
- What important ideas or messages are presented in the novel?

## Activities

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**Research** - Complete a research assignment about the Erebus air disaster. Formulate questions to focus your research. Keep a log that records the research process. Present your findings in an essay, as an oral presentation or on a poster.

**Speech** - Conduct some research on Sir Edmund Hillary. Present the information that you have gathered to the rest of the class as a prepared speech. Use visual aides to reinforce your ideas.

**Letter** - Imagine that you are Jackie Simms. Write a letter to Auntie Robin explaining your thoughts and feelings about what has happened.

**Radio Announcement** - Imagine that you are a radio announcer who is reporting on the Erebus disaster. Record your news broadcast and play it to the rest of the class.

**Newspaper Front Page** - Design a newspaper front page for a Hamilton paper. Invent a name for the paper. Design a banner. Write a newspaper article about the Erebus disaster. Use the inverted pyramid style of writing and include the 5 W's and H. Also include a feature article and design some advertisements that are in keeping with the time that the disaster occurred. Think carefully about the layout of your front page. Remember that there should not be any empty space.

**Poster** - Design a poster advertising the novel. This poster should be suitable for display in your classroom or library.

**Poem** - Write a poem about the effects of the Erebus disaster on the people of New Zealand.

**Theme** - Choose an important idea or theme developed in the novel. Design a collage that uses images, words and symbols to portray this theme.

**Issues** - Did anything in the story make you change your mind about something? If you did, what was it in the story that caused it and why?

**Character** - Complete a character description for Jackie Simms. Include information about her qualities and characteristics and any difficulties that she had to overcome.

Notes written by Vicki Ladd