

I Survived
San Jose Mine Collapse, 2010
by
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This event took place in August, 2010, in Copiapo, Chile. Thirty-three miners were trapped in the San Jose mine for 69 days. The miners were trapped 2,300 feet below the surface, and the exit was blocked by a diorite as tall as a 45-story building. The miners had to survive on the emergency supply of food that was locked up inside the refuge, which was meant for 25 miners to survive for 48 hours. Fortunately, they had access to water. However, this water was used to cool down machinery and was heavily contaminated with oil and dirt.

Living conditions in the collapsed mine were horrible. The average temperature in the mine was 110 degrees Fahrenheit and was also unbearably humid. On top of facing starvation, the miners started to experience health problems. In the beginning, the miners experienced constipation. Gradually, they experienced fatigue, swelling, and breathing problems. The miners had to deal with a spore-like mushroom that attached itself to their skin and caused rashes and severe itching. Yonni Barrios, one of the trapped miners, acted as their doctor. Yonni helped them cope with the mushrooms and other health problems.

Right after the mine collapsed, the miners were fearful and anxious. Some of them become emotionally unstable. Two miners in particular, Victor Zamora and Edison Pina, started causing problems. Zamora led a raid on the food supply on the first night of the mine collapse. They stole boxes of cookies, which severely reduced the food supply for the trapped miners. Edison Pina caused many fights because he was going mad. The miners needed somebody to be their leader or they would not survive. They all agreed that Luis Urzua should be their leader because Urzua was their boss before the mine collapsed. Urzua did not want to be their leader and insisted that in the mine, they are all equal. He made a domino set out of scrap material to help his miners pass the time and assigned chores to the miners to keep them busy. He took care of his men and pulled everybody together so that they could all survive.

On the surface of the collapsed mine were the families and friends of the trapped miners making painstaking efforts to save them. There were also people trying to drill a hole to reach the miners. The drillers failed to reach the miners twice but were finally able to drill a hole to them on their third try. The people on the surface never gave up on rescuing the trapped men.

This event could have been prevented, but the owners of the San Jose mine focused on making money, instead of their miners' safety. The mining company was too cheap to purchase a machine to predict when the mine was going to collapse. The mine was constructed with "chimneys" which were holes for escape when the mine collapsed. The problem was that the chimneys that weren't blocked didn't have a ladder so the miners could not climb up for escape. The company was not careful with the way that they mined diorite. This caused the mine to collapse, trapping the miners.

I think that this event should be in the "I Survived" series because given the limited resources and challenging living conditions, it is a miracle that all the 33 miners trapped 2,300 feet below the surface for 69 days survived and were rescued. This event shows that when people in a catastrophic tragedy help one another and work together, they can overcome the tragedy and survive. It shows the incredible perseverance, endurance, strength, faith, and love of human beings – the best remedy for tragedy.