

Paula the Penguin
or
Some Birds Just Don't Fly
by Steven Ackley

This is Paula. Paula is a Rockhopper Penguin who lives on an icy, rocky island, near the far tip of South America.

The island is full of other penguins. Paula lives with her mother and father and her many, many brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, and cousins.

Paula's parents, along with all the other grown-up penguins, spend most of their time fishing in the cold ocean water around the island. Soon, Paula will be old enough to go fishing along with her parents.

"Fishing is all fine and well," thought Paula, "but what I really want to do is fly."

Paula had seen birds fly over the rocky island and she thought that flying was the greatest thing in the world. She'd seen seagulls flying overhead on their way out to sea. And she'd seen cormorants dive-bombing into the water to catch fish.

When Paula told her mother this, her mother said, "Don't be silly. Penguins don't fly. I know it looks fun, but some birds just don't fly."

Paula knew that her mother loved her and that she meant well, but for some reason her words about not flying made Paula sad. So she never said anything to her mom about it again.

Once, when a seagull landed on the island, Paula asked him what it was like to fly. The seagull said that, compared to walking, flying was like dreaming. He said, "You can see everything and go anywhere, just like in your dreams."

Paula told the seagull that she would love to fly.

The seagull said, "Well that's a nice wish but, with all due respect, you do know that penguins can't fly."

Paula looked sad. This made the seagull feel sorry for her, so he tried to cheer her up.

"You need to be happy with who you are. Look at me. I'm all gray and dull. You've got that sleek tuxedo coat, and those cool yellow feathers that stick out of your head."

Paula knew that the seagull was being polite. But she also felt like she was being talked down to. She knew that flying was better than being stuck on the icy, rocky island. Talking to the seagull made Paula want to fly more than ever.

Years later, when Paula was all grown up, she spent her days catching fish with all the other penguins. Sometimes it was fun, diving into the water and swimming after the fish, but sometimes it got boring. It was also a lot of hard work.

One day when she was fishing, she got tired and decided she needed a rest. She sat down on a nice flat rock to warm herself in the sun. Looking up at the big blue sky, she thought again about flying.

As she was sitting there, she suddenly heard the sound of footsteps crunching in the snow.

Paula turned around and saw a giant blue thing standing in the snow. It was a woman wearing a big blue parka.

"What's your name?" asked the woman.

"My name is Paula."

“Nice to meet you, Paula. My name is Jan. I’m a geologist.”

“A what?” asked Paula.

“A geologist. I study the earth beneath us. I’m here to look at the rocks on your little island.”

“You like rocks?” asked Paula. “I think rocks are boring.”

“Well, everyone likes different things,” replied Jan with a smile.

Paula had never seen a human being up close before. She was curious where the woman came from.

“Where are you from? And how did you get here?” asked Paula.

“I’m from Argentina,” said Jan. “I came here on a plane.”

“What’s a plane?” asked Paula.

Jan stretched out her arm and pointed her finger towards the water. “There!” she said. “That’s my plane.”

Across the water, Paula could see a strange red and white thing floating on the sea.

“Come on. I’ll show you,” said Jan.

Paula and Jan went out to the plane. Jan rowed herself in something she called a dingy. Paula swam alongside her.

The plane was sort of like a boat, but it was raised up on these two long tubes called pontoons, and it had a big flat board across the top called wings. Paula thought it was very odd.

“What does this do?” asked Paula.

“Why it flies, of course!” answered Jan.

“IT FLIES?” asked Paula.

“Yes,” said Jan. “Would you like to go for a ride?”

“Oh, yes!” answered Paula.

Jan started the engine and the plane soon began to move across the water. As it picked up speed, Paula could see the ocean spraying up behind them.

She then had a funny feeling in her tummy and, when she looked down, she could see that the water was ten feet beneath her.

As the plane rose higher into the air, Paula saw her island grow smaller. She then saw other islands in the distance. And then she saw the backs of seagulls down below. She was flying even higher than they were.

Then Paula remembered what the seagull had said and she thought, "He was wrong. I can see everything and go anywhere. But it's even better for me, because it's not LIKE a dream. It IS my dream. This penguin can fly."

THE END