

News from Ben and Anisha Hopkinson

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Dear friends,

Helimission's Candidate Training Camp is now over and we have so much to tell you. As you know, we have to date spent four and a half years in training to join Helimission. We have been dreaming of the day when Ben will finally possess the qualifications and experience as a helicopter mechanic and pilot so that we can assist in spreading the gospel to the world's most remote tribes.



When we set out on this journey Helimission advised it would be 5-7 years until we actually made it to the mission field. Despite the long time of training ahead we knew this was the journey the Lord was leading us on. We left England full of excitement to attend training in Florida with the helicopter flight school Bristow Academy. Today Ben has achieved the training we set out for. The mechanic licenses and pilot licenses necessary to work for Helimission are completed. But it seems now an even more difficult task has arrived - gaining experience in the air and in the maintenance shop on a specific aircraft type Helimission operates.



For about 6 months we have been stuck in an "in between" phase. Not requiring more training but still not possessing the necessary experience. Pilot and mechanic jobs are hard to come by as it is and with this knowledge came many discouraging questions. How can we possibly find an employer to provide the specific experience Helimission requires? What employer would be happy to see Ben leave after 6-12 months? What about our current jobs? Will we have to move? No possible easy answers seemed to exist.



Last autumn Helimission invited us to attend their 2009 Candidate Training Camp (CTC) held at the headquarters in Switzerland from the 8th -12th of June. The CTC is designed specifically for people like us - those dreaming of joining Helimission and trying to navigate the arduous training path. We had hoped the CTC would provide us with direction and further confirmation that we are indeed heading in the right direction.



In total, 11 people participated in the CTC - 8 potential pilots/mechanics and 3 wives. Each candidate had a different level of experience ranging from the beginner pilot to Andi and Elisabeth who are to join Helimission in Madagascar this time next year. Simply meeting people going through training as we are was quite encouraging. It is one thing to be enrolled in a missions or bible school constantly surrounded by others who share your vision and quite another to be alone at a secular flight school. We are looking forward to continued contact with our group members.



During the CTC we had the opportunity to listen to teaching by Ernie Tanner (founder of Helimission) and his son Simon Tanner (current Helimission leader). Both were quite encouraging and hearing about the beginning days from Ernie really built our faith - what God calls for he definitely makes a way for! We even had the opportunity to sit in Ernie & Hedi Tanner's living room and watch 8mm film of his second pioneer mission flying a helicopter from Cameroon to Ethiopia in 1976. With Ernie providing commentary, we saw him as a young man making contact with African tribes who had never heard the name of Jesus! Knowing that in the future we may have the opportunity to fly missionaries into unreached tribes was tremendously encouraging. What an incredible privilege to sit under Ernie's teaching and listen to his stories!



Since our last visit to Helimission in 2004 there have been many changes in the area of member care. No formal scheme previously existed and this was an area of concern we had expressed to the Helimission staff. After having already served on the field we were well aware of the possible emotional, physical, and spiritual vulnerabilities missionaries can experience. In 2004 the Helimission staff confirmed this was something on their hearts too and were looking into solutions. Today Helimission partners with the USA based ministry Heart Stream to provide missionaries with an avenue to seek Christian counseling. Dr Lois Dodds is the head of Heart Stream and together with her husband (now with the Lord) spent 35 years on the mission field – 13 of those years in the Amazon jungle! Lois presented several sessions in the CTC on heart issues and self care. We were very pleased to know that should we face difficulties both the Helimission staff and Heart Stream are readily available for support.



Our week not only consisted of lectures, but included afternoons of practical work around the facilities. We weeded, moved gravel and stones, chopped wood, cleaned, prepared meals, helped with the installation of new heating pipes, labeled parts bins, and cleaned the helipad. The impact of our work is clearly seen at Helimission and we felt privileged to serve them in a practical way.



On the last day of the camp we met privately with the Helimission staff and received the formal invitation to join Helimission. We whole heartedly said yes! We are excited to be a part of Helimission as we continue to prepare for the field. We now have practical support from Helimission in finding a piloting position to build experience and are praying doors will open on this front. The way ahead is still not totally clear, but we are so grateful to have the assistance from Helimission. The staff advised we should be fully prepared and ready to go in 1-2 years.



Our next step is to take a psychological evaluation test organised by the Helimission office in Lima, New York. With the pressures experienced on the field this evaluation (conducted over the phone by a Christian psychologist and counselor) is to identify areas of need and of growth in our spiritual/emotional lives.



The Lord has been faithful to us and we are excited to have already come this far. Thank you very much for your prayers, encouragement, and support. We will let you know once an employer is found for Ben to gain flight and maintenance experience. Please also pray with us that doors will open soon! We are thankful that you also share our vision of reaching the last tribes and supporting missions work in the world's most remote regions.

With love,
Ben and Anisha

If you would like more information on Helimission, our training, or pray/support needs please feel free to contact us. We would love to hear from you.

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