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lead



bit by the bug

by Nick Swalm

I GOT BIT BY THE 'MISSION BUG' ON A SHORT term mission trip to Cuba in '94.

I was a high school student, and we were there repairing and painting an old hospital. I was amazed to see the needs that were there and how little of what we considered necessities people had.

I was also surprised to see the spiritual impact that we were able to have. Even though we were there as a work party, people were curious to find out why we would give our time and money to help them. As a result of their curiosity, we had a lot of great opportunities to share the gospel in areas where it had not been permitted before.

Once we returned to Canada, I felt God was calling me to go out as a long term missionary after high school. I didn't want to just be preaching, but also doing something to meet the physical needs out there.

I had always been interested in airplanes, but had never really considered aviation as a career – that is, until I found out about mission aviation.

I enrolled in the two year mission aviation program at Prairie Bible College (now Prairie School of Mission Aviation). The program included a year of Bible school and all of the licences and ratings I would need to be a pilot on the mission field.





After graduation, I stayed on staff at Prairie for another seven years to gain the flight hours required to join Mission Aviation Fellowship (MAF).

In October 2006, my wife Paula and I left Canada for our first term in Papua New Guinea (PNG).

Transportation in PNG is limited by the lack of roads and by the mountainous terrain that makes up the majority of the country. Most of the villages can only be reached by light aircraft or by travelling for days on foot.

Life with MAF is never boring. An average day can include anywhere from eight to 12 landings on any of 300 short, steep mountain airstrips. Many of the airstrips are only about 1,600 feet long, with up to a 15 percent slope. This keeps me on my toes as a pilot and requires me to be

precise with every landing.

Why do I do it?

Almost every day, I am able to look back and say, "I have made a difference today."

It may have been for a missionary, a pastor, a medical worker or a teacher who wouldn't have been able to get into an area without my help. Or it may have been for someone who was sick or injured and needed an emergency medical flight to a hospital.

I find it rewarding to be able to help the people of Papua New Guinea gain access to things that we might take for granted – things like the gospel, education and health care.

Nick and Paula Swalm are currently home in Alberta for a six month furlough and will be returning to the field in early December.

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