

# Daniel flying high as he trains for career in mission aviation

Monkstown Parish is 'home' to 22-year-old Daniel Gill. But this adventurous young man, who has had a somewhat unconventional upbringing, is currently living in Australia where he is training to be a pilot with the Mission Aviation Fellowship (MAF).

Daniel's parents are Church Mission Society Ireland (CMSI) mission partners Mark and Ali Gill, who are now based in Dadeldhura, Nepal.

Daniel was born in Nepal, and lived in remote villages in the region until he was six. "I absolutely loved growing up on the Hydro Power projects my father was Project Manager of," Daniel said. "The Nepalis called me 'Sano PM' (small PM). It was a great adventure in beautiful lands and I think left quite a Nepali mindset in me."

The family moved back to Northern Ireland and set up home in Whitehead, where Daniel attended Whitehead Primary School.

"We moved back to Kathmandu when I was 11 and I stayed there till I finished my GCSEs. Living in 'the Smog' or the city was different, but enjoyable. It provided great opportunities and friendships for a teenager." Daniel did his A Levels at Hebron Boarding School in the south of India.

Throughout his youth, his sense of adventure and mission deepened. "Growing up I saw the possibilities holistic mission offered to the disadvantaged. Moving around frequently amongst all these exciting places enabled me to experience lots and want to go out and see more and be involved in missions somewhere myself," he said.

After A Levels, he spent six months in Monkstown before moving to Australia where he is a student at ACMA, the Australian Centre for Mission Aviation

"Growing up in Kime, one of the places we lived in Nepal, we often had helicopters bring in supplies for the hydro power project which could not be brought in by road," Daniel said.

"So from a young age I was interested in aviation, especially after I saw a MAF display at Summer Madness when I was 11. Three years later when my family were in Nepal some MAF pilots visited Kathmandu and showed me pictures of rough rural runways and told me stories.

After that I knew what I wanted to do.

"The service to people in remote areas and spreading the good news using aviation combined my passions. It also involved adventure and being able to use my skills for God. When I was 17 I had to start thinking seriously about putting plans and passions into action. I saw the ACMA website and knew straight away that it was where I would go."

The training Daniel is pursuing is very specialised. Only two or three other colleges around the world offer a similar course of combined engineering, flight and bible training.

It will take four and a half years. "I opted to do the combined engineering and flight training course," Daniel explained. "I studied one year at the Bible College of Victoria. I then did a two year course in aircraft maintenance at ACMA. Now I'm in my final year of a 16 month flight training course."

This will take him up to Commercial Pilot level with instrument rating and night rating.

"ACMA also gives students an extra 'advanced flight training' course which seeks to train the commercial pilots in flying in similar conditions to those faced in normal Mission Aviation scenarios such as Papua New Guinea and the other operating areas," Daniel said.

His preparation for a career in mission aviation will not end with completion of the ACMA course, as Daniel explains.

"I will graduate with between 200 and 250 flying hours, however the minimum hours for joining mission agencies is 500 or 1000 hours. So I will have to spend a year or two getting the required experience before being able to work in the more tricky environments."

Daniel says the job is vitally important. "I'm amazed by how few people know about the work of mission aviation and its integral role of serving not only missionaries in rural areas but also in the role it can fulfil supplying medication and food to famine stricken areas," he said.

"This can include taking medical teams out to administer life saving medication, providing a means of business for people who have no other transport, improving government links with regional centres, or taking in building supplies for a new school.

"I personally can appreciate its role in providing supplies to missionaries in the bush. But most importantly, the lives of the mission aviators can be salt and light to the



Daniel Gill at the controls of a plane during his training for mission aviation at AMCA in Australia.

people they fly with. People can be stuck in a plane with you for an hour. That's an hour when you can talk about the good news and they can't get away!"

Over the summer Daniel participated in his fourth ACMA camp which allows 16 to 18-year-olds to come to ACMA and hear God's word and learn about the experiences of the missionaries who work there.

"Every time the camp has been a blessing to campers and the students, like me, who run it," Daniel said. "In September we began a 'Remote Area Navigation' from Melbourne to Gove in the Northern Territories, a distance of over 6,000 kilometres there and back.

"This safari provides students with opportunities to get involved in the mission activities in Arnhem land and see the work being done in Aboriginal communities there for a week, living with a missionary family before returning to Melbourne."

Daniel is just starting out on his Mission Aviation career. It is something he is committed to long term. "In the future I hope to be serving God somewhere around the world in Mission Aviation. Maybe in Africa or South America, or even Nepal or Bangladesh," he said.

- This year Daniel received a grant from Connor Diocese Mission Support Fund towards the cost of his training with ACMA.

