

# PLANES WITH PURPOSE

News from the Hammitt Family

August 2022

## A TEN-YEAR JOURNEY

It's hard to believe, but it was ten years ago that we decided to leave our life in suburban Ohio to begin the journey toward serving in missionary aviation. We have experienced the Lord's provision countless times, and have been blessed by the new relationships we have developed along the way. But the road has also been long, challenging, and full of twists and turns that we never could have anticipated. Many of you have been along for the ride from the very beginning, but we thought it would be helpful to reflect on the last decade, and conclude with where we find ourselves today.

We started down this path after Aaron had become increasingly restless in his engineering career. However, the desire to serve in cross-cultural missions wasn't new to us; we had served in East Asia for two years shortly after we were married, and had been on many short-term and summer mission trips. In fact, Aaron had the desire to be a missionary pilot even as a teenager.

By the time we reached our mid-30s, he believed that the opportunity to become a missionary pilot was gone forever. Historically, missions did not accept new pilots at that age, and we didn't have the means to pay for his training anyway. So we investigated several other full-time mission opportunities, but none of them seemed right. Finally, we began to open up to the possibility of missionary aviation, and when we did, it seemed as if the path suddenly opened wide before us. The Lord brought all the right people into our lives at just the right times.

For example, we heard that a missionary pilot and his wife were having a benefit dinner an hour from our home, so we decided to attend. We talked with them for a while after dinner, and they were a great encouragement to us. We shared with them some concerns and questions we had, and they connected us with a flight instructor who helped guide us through those issues with the FAA.

Later, Tara mentioned missionary aviation to her friend Nancy, who responded, "My friend Paul is doing that! Let me connect you with him!" At the time, Paul was serving at MMS Aviation, and told us about a new apprenticeship program for pilot-mechanics being developed between MMS and Missionary Air Group. We ended up interviewing at MMS, and in 2012 we were accepted as the first family in the joint pilot-mechanic apprenticeship program at MMS and MAG.

We began raising our support in 2013, and at the end of that year we moved to Coshocton, Ohio to begin serving full-time with MMS. One morning during Aaron's apprenticeship, Tony Murrin (the director of International Tribal Ministries) visited MMS to share about the ministry of ITM. Aaron was impacted by Tony's passion for the Lord, his love



*This was our family in 2011, about the time we first began considering missionary aviation.*



*Our family has changed a lot since we moved to Coshocton at the end of 2013!*



*Visiting Carachipampa Christian School during our first visit to Bolivia in 2018.*



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for the Bolivian people, and the ministry that ITM was doing among remote communities in Bolivia. That short presentation made a lasting impression.

A lot happened over the next few years! After finishing Aaron's apprenticeship at MMS, we moved to Burlington, NC where Aaron earned his commercial pilot certificate and instrument rating. In 2018, Aliza was born and we took our first trip to Bolivia. During those years, God faithfully provided for every need and brought new ministry partners on board as our needs for financial support increased.

When it came time to decide which mission to join, ITM was our first choice. We applied, met with the board of directors, were accepted, and in August 2019 made the move to Bolivia!

God never promised us that following Him would be easy, and we immediately faced many challenges upon arriving. In October—less than two months after we landed—Bolivia faced political unrest in the wake of a controversial presidential election, and we were evacuated back to the USA for several weeks. Then came the quarantines and isolation due to COVID-19. Thankfully, even through that, we were able to continue Spanish study and pilot training.

In January 2021 Aaron finally made his first solo flight as a missionary pilot in Bolivia! It had taken eight years of preparation, hard work, and sacrifice by each member of our family, but we were finally serving in the ministry role that we had been anticipating for so many years.

Then, in September of 2021—while we were in the USA for a short respite from COVID quarantines—our airplane in Bolivia was involved in a landing accident. It was recovered

and brought back to our hangar, but is still in the process of being repaired. More recently, we were forced to sell our other airplane in the USA due to new import restrictions.

Currently, Aaron is doing administration and maintenance, and will not have an airplane to fly for some time. After so many years of preparation and investment, that is a difficult place to be, especially when many missions are currently in need of pilots and mechanics. Looking back, we believe that the Lord opened the way for us to be in missionary aviation—a path that was affirmed many times by trusted friends and church leaders. But the path forward is not so clear.

We love the ministry of ITM, and our desire is to stay here and continue to support ITM through aviation. However, this is also a natural time for us to pause and evaluate our plans. Our visas expire soon, and we have to decide whether to apply for permanent residency, which is quite expensive. Ian and Ella plan to return to the USA after they graduate, so it may not make sense for them to get permanent residency, but to renew their temporary visas instead.

There are many more details we could share, but we really just want to ask you to pray with us for wisdom and guidance. To be clear, our current plan is to stay with ITM, but we're praying about whether an extended assignment in the States could be beneficial. There are opportunities to serve temporarily with a U.S.-based ministry where Aaron could fly and gain experience while Ian and Ella finish high school and transition to whatever is next for them.

We are out of space, but feel free to reach out if you would like more details. Please pray with us as we desire the Lord's will, and thank you for your prayers and partnership!

### *We are thankful. . .*

- ▶ for the funds to pay for Aaron's Bolivian private pilot certificate.
- ▶ for the sale of our Cessna 206 in the USA to another mission organization who will put it to good use.

### *Please pray with us. . .*

- ▶ that the Lord will heal Tara of the back pain she has been experiencing for many weeks.
- ▶ for ongoing repairs to our Cessna 206, as well as the Piper Navajo we recently purchased.
- ▶ that the Lord would open up opportunities for Aaron to be flying again soon, and for patience in the meantime.

## LOOKING TO THE NEXT GENERATION

I love being a missionary pilot! There is nothing I can imagine that I would rather do with my life. My prayer is that the Lord will allow me to resume flying, and to continue serving in that role for many years. But the longer we are in Bolivia, the more I realize how complicated and costly it is for expatriates to serve as pilots in Bolivia. Not only do we need to learn the language and culture and obtain Bolivian residency, but our FAA pilot and mechanic certificates are not honored here unless we become naturalized Bolivian citizens.

This has gotten me thinking, "What would it take to see Bolivian pilots and mechanics serving alongside us?" ITM already does a good job of training Bolivian nationals in the other ministry areas, such as church planting, but our aviation department is staffed entirely by North Americans. There are many barriers for Bolivians to become missionary pilots, including the cost of training, government restrictions on flight training, the difficulty of raising financial support in Bolivia, and a lack of awareness of the need for aviation in missions.

But the more time I spend here, the more my heart is burdened for my Bolivian brothers and sisters who are already serving, and for those who desire to serve in full-time missions. I'm not sure what our role should be, or exactly how to come alongside and support them, but we have a growing desire for national missionaries to be equipped to reach unreached communities within their own borders, and for the Lord to raise up missionary pilots and mechanics to help reach those difficult places. Please pray with us as we entrust this desire to the Lord, and consider how the Lord might use us.

