

Anne Lawson



Anne Lawson sat on the top bar of the gate and swung her legs. Pip, her corgi dog, lay in the sun beside her. The eight-year-old looked around. East Mains Farm had been her home for as long as she could remember, though she had been born a short distance away in the splendidly named Mains of Machermore. She even knew the colour of the bedroom in which she'd been born. It was pink. But Anne was not a particularly 'pink' girl. Pink made her think of dresses and fluffy things. She was more at home in jeans, and the fluffy things she liked best of all were young animals.

'What do you want to do when you grow up?' visitors to her home asked from time to time.

'Why do people always want to know that?' Anne wondered. 'It's almost as though what you do as a child isn't important, that you've got to be at least fifteen to do anything that matters.'

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But Anne knew that wasn't the case. There were always things to be done around the farm, and she knew that she did lots of things that were important in their own way. She especially liked helping her dad, both with his work with the animals, and with any technical things he had to do. If there were loose screws to be tightened, she was there among her dad's tools. If there were rusted nuts and bolts needing oiled to loosen them, she knew fine how to do that too. It was far from unusual for Mr Lawson and Anne to have their heads together under the hood of their Massie Ferguson tractor examining its engine parts.

As she and Pip walked over the field towards the farmhouse, Anne heard a noise that made her legs break into a run. It was the sound of voices. Pip heard them too. Anne had four cousins who stayed on a nearby farm. In fact, the land from one farm led right on to the land of the other. From the fever pitch of laughter that came from the farmyard, Anne knew that all four were in the mood for some fun.

'Just give me a minute to feed the cats,' she yelled to her cousins.

Within two minutes Wee Harry and Arthur had been fed and the fun began.

But when Anne was alone there were two things she especially enjoyed doing. One was

reading, and the other was watching the wild creatures that lived in and around the farmyard. Even the books she liked reading were about animals - but prehistoric ones.

'It's Scripture Union day,' Anne thought one morning, as she left for school.

She didn't know why she liked going but she did. It was as though something drew her there.

'You all know about the two Margarets,' the teacher who took S.U. said, 'but it's good to remember their story, especially as they lived so near here.'

Anne listened as her S.U. leader told the story she knew so well, of a teenage girl and an old woman, both called Margaret. They lived at a time in Scottish history when it was not easy to be Christian. If they believed that the Bible said something, and it was different from what the king believed, they could even be killed. The two Margarets were Christians who were tied to stakes in the sands near Wigtown and left there to drown as the tide came in over them. The monument to the two brave Margarets was so well known to young Anne Lawson that she hardly ever noticed it. Nor did she notice the people who visited her part of South West Scotland. They came to see where the two Margarets and other Christian martyrs had died in the 17th Century because of their faith in Jesus.

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When Anne was ten years old, life changed for her. Dad and Mum Lawson sold their farm and moved into a cottage for six months before buying a house in Wigtown. That would have been a big enough change for any girl but, at nearly the same time, Anne went off to boarding school in the Lake District of England.

'I'm going to a group a bit like Scripture Union,' she wrote in a letter some time later. 'Miss Gunning takes it, and it's very good.'

But although she liked and respected Miss Gunning, after a time Anne stopped attending. There seemed to be so much to do as the years passed that there was little time to think about God.

'What do you do at boarding school?' one of her friends from Wigtown Primary School days asked her.

'Work, most of the time,' Anne laughed. 'But you're right, we do loads of other things too.'

'Like what?' the girl asked.

Anne thought about the lunch hours she and her friends spent singing around the school piano, and of her own cello practice, but decided that wasn't what her friend wanted to hear about.

'We go fell-walking,' she said, 'and canoeing and sailing. In fact, we built a canoe last term.'

'It's a shame,' her friend moaned. 'We don't do that kind of thing at school here.'

Anne looked her in the eye. 'Would it really be a good idea?' she asked.

The girl's face creased into a grin. 'Guess not,' she admitted. 'Living in a part of Scotland famous for its treacherous sinking sands would probably not make canoeing the most sensible sport to take up.'

'What are you going to do when you leave school?' her friend asked, as they walked through Wigtown.

It was that question again, but it really was time to think about it seriously now.

'I'm thinking about becoming a vet,' Anne said. 'I've always loved working with animals.'

When Anne did go to university, she went to study zoology. Much of the teaching in her course was based on the theory of evolution, and before long she came to the conclusion that evolution answered all her questions and that God didn't even exist. And that was what she believed when she went for her first job. Anne started work along with four others, two Christians and two who were not. The two Christians, Nash and Kenny, made such an impression on her that she started to read the Bible.

Having done a degree in zoology, Anne discovered that working with dead animals

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was just what she didn't want to do. She retrained as a metallurgist - someone who understands about metals. After qualifying she looked for a job on an oil rig, but there were no jobs and she found work on land instead.

For eight years Anne searched for the answers to her many questions and she eventually found the answer at a wedding.

'Tell me how you became a Christian,' she was asked, years later. Anne smiled at the memory.

'On 8th July 1989,' she said, 'I went to Kenny's wedding in London. It was the first truly Christian wedding I'd ever been at. Kenny asked me if I was a Christian yet. When I said I was still sitting on the fence, he and his new wife took me into a side room during their own wedding reception, and spoke to me about the Lord Jesus. When I left the room I was a Christian, and I had peace in my heart for the very first time.'

'Would you like to come to a missionary meeting with me?' a member of her church asked Anne, not long afterwards.

Anne Lawson smiled. Her friend seemed to spend her life at missionary meetings.

'Sure, I'll come,' she replied.

'You'll be a missionary one day,' said a lady to the young Christian.

'Yes, I will,' Anne agreed, even though she wasn't quite sure what missionaries really did.

But as she thought back over the years of her life, especially over the last eight years, she realised just how much Jesus had done for her, and told the Lord that she was prepared to be a missionary - or anything else, for that matter - if that's what he wanted.

'Lord, I wish you would show me what you want me to do with my life,' Anne said, as she tidied her writing desk in 1990.

As she spoke aloud to God, she took some leaflets and letters out of the desk. One was a booklet about Mission Aviation Fellowship, and it was appealing for people to serve as aircraft engineers in Tanzania. Anne knew that God had answered her prayer. This was the way forward but what did she have to do first? The following three years were spent training to be both a missionary and an aircraft engineer. And then ... Tanzania!

'We begin the day in the aircraft hangar at Dodoma with worship,' Anne wrote to a friend. 'There is no way I'm going to try to keep aircraft in the air without God's help!'

Then she smiled and settled down to writing a newsy letter.

'You asked what I do, so here we go. Monday was the first day of the Cessna 210

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OPS 1 check - and I'll explain that to you. OPS (operational) checks are carried out in stages on every aircraft to spread the maintenance. Doing it this way means that aircraft are out of service for short bursts of time on a regular basis rather than being grounded for long periods when they might be needed, and needed urgently.

'Remember,' she went on, 'some of our flights are life saving. The other day a young boy, who had been hurt in an accident, was flown to hospital. The doctor said he would have died before he arrived if he'd gone by road.'

'But, back to the maintenance ... the Cessna 206s and 210s have four inspections for every 200 hours of flying. The first one involves a detailed inspection of the fuselage, cabin and landing gear, and a routine inspection of the engine, propeller, wings and tail.'

Anne read over what she'd written and grinned.

'She did ask about my work,' she laughed aloud.

Taking up her pen again, she continued writing.

'The rudder pedals in the cockpit need to be removed for the inspection. And if you think there's no room in a canoe, you've never removed rudder pedals from a Cessna 210. There is space to do it, and space to breath ... lightly. Seriously, getting spanners into some

of the spaces is really hard and can take ages. But it needs to be done.'

'I walk miles each day in this hangar,' said Anne to a visitor, after she'd been working there for five years. 'And I'm not just checking aircraft.'

'What else do you do?' the man asked.

'The metal parts of aircraft are not the only things with strengths and weaknesses,' Anne explained. 'All the members of the engineering team have their strengths and weaknesses too. It's up to me as Hangar Foreman to look out for them. Keeping aircraft in the air is a serious business, and everyone involved needs to do their part well.'

'So your job is about people rather than aircraft?' he commented.

'No, it's about both. And it's about housework too.'

The visitor looked puzzled.

'Do you see the size of this huge hangar?' Anne asked. 'Well, it's part of my job to make sure it's kept tidy.'

As they were talking, someone came with a message for Anne.

'Have all the ground checks been done on the Cessna 210?' she was asked.

'Yes,' said Anne, 'and the test flight too.'

'So the aircraft is operational?'

'Yes. Is there an urgent call?'

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'A mother giving birth is having problems. Both her life and the baby's life are in danger.'

That was all Anne needed to know. The Cessna 210 was rolled out of the hangar ... and the mother was airlifted to hospital where her baby was born safe and well.

The visitor was still there when, several days later, the aircraft flew to the hospital to pick up the mother and take her home with her new baby.

'That must make all your hard work worthwhile,' he commented to Anne.

'Yes,' she agreed. 'But it's not all about emergency flights. Many of our flights are routine: taking missionaries to remote areas, medical teams to villages, equipment and supplies to hospitals and mission stations and food to areas affected by drought. It's amazing what a day brings.'

Just occasionally, when Anne came back to the UK and spoke about her work, people assumed that she was just an engineer rather than being a missionary herself. They soon learned that things were very different.

'From time to time,' she told them, 'I organize a team of about ten people to go out to villages to encourage the Christians there. After breakfast each morning we have a time of worship. Then we break up and do different things. Some teach new Christians

or church leaders, others - and I love doing this - talk to the villagers about the Lord Jesus. Following lunch we have a big outdoor meeting and afterwards we pray for those who are sick. In the evenings we show films in nearby villages using a portable projector and a huge screen. It's exhausting, but great.'

As Anne Lawson sat outside her little home in Dodoma in Tanzania, she looked around and thought of God's care for her. From those distant days at East Mains Farm with Pip at her feet, to Tanzania with Bracken, her Rhodesian Ridgeback dog, God had been with her. Anne knows he will continue to be with her until she goes to be with him forever.



Fact File: Female Aviator

Amy Johnson was one of the world's first female aviators and she flew a Gipsy Moth. She learnt to fly in 1928 at Stag Lane Aerodrome, near Edgware, in the U.K. where de Havilland Moths were built. Unusually she also gained a ground engineer's licence - the first woman in Britain to do this. It was in a Gypsy Moth that Amy made the first solo flight from England to Australia by a woman, in May 1930. She wrote of her 16,000 kilometre (10,000 mile) flight: 'The prospect did not frighten me because I was so appallingly ignorant that I never realised in the least what I had taken on'.



Keynote: Do you think missionary work is glamorous and exciting? Anne maintained planes that saved people's lives. She worked in a different country and met interesting people. However, it is a hard job too. Even missionaries can find some things tedious and tiring. But Anne started the day at the aircraft hangar with worship. Each and every day that we have - be it a good day or a bad day - we should start it off with God. Bring every day to him and ask him to take charge of it.



Think: Anne Lawson prayed one day for God to show her what to do with her life. It is important to pray to God about what he wants us to do. We should ask his opinion about what decisions need to be made. Think about the plans you have for the future - bring them to God first of all. Remember that in the Bible, in Proverbs 16:9, it says that you can make plans in your heart but it is God that is in charge of what actually happens. You may be planning university or college, you may want to get a good job - all these things are fine if that is what God wants you to do. Pray to God to guide you and then do your best at whatever you choose. If you are trusting in God and looking to him for guidance then he will guide your heart and mind to choose the right thing.



Prayer: Lord God, I have plans for my life but I want these plans to please you. Help me to look to you for guidance. Show me the kind of person you want me to be through your Word. Give me friends who love and trust in you and who will give me good advice. Help me to listen to your Word and to obey it.