

Dee Limbaya

The Donaldson Scholarship 2023



Almost a week had gone by since my interview for the PPL scholarship. The thoughts in my mind scrolled like an endless stream of social media reels. My mental algorithm displayed, with crystal clarity, every little mistake I had made and how I could have enhanced my performance. "Not again!" I thought.

I was no stranger to disappointment. Every year, since 2019, I applied for a PPL scholarship and was unsuccessful at the first stage. 2020 was the only exception, but only because the scholarships were cancelled due to Covid 19. Each year, I was informed that the scholarships had been even more competitive, and it just wasn't my year.

Within the same period of time, I found myself working at a school near Heathrow Airport. Every day, I would witness the splendor of soaring planes, and hear the sweet roar of their engines. Memories of my childhood dream to become a pilot flooded back and reignited my obsession. In a wild move, I made the decision to live out of my car in order to save up for flight training.



In 2021, I had the exhilarating, unforgettable experience of going 'first solo' for my 30th birthday, thanks to that decision, and my generous social media sponsors.



Fast forward to 2023. Somehow, I had progressed through to the final stage of the scholarship selection process. During my work break, with Heathrow Airport as a backdrop, I opened the decision email and my eyes darted to the word, "**Congratulations**". I could hardly believe it! With tear-filled eyes, I fell to my knees and punched the air. It was finally my year.

By this point, I had completed all theoretical exams and had crawled my way to 33 flying hours, in a Cessna 152 and Piper PA-28. The scholarship gave me a much-needed turbo boost towards achieving my private pilot's license.



In the weeks that followed, I completed my radiotelephony exam and embarked on the final phase of my PPL training. My qualifying cross-country flight took me from the historic North Weald Airfield, through the hustle and bustle of Southend Airport, to the picturesque Shoreham shoreline, painting a memory that I will forever cherish .

It wasn't always clear skies and calm winds. Most of my flying lessons featured bumpy crosswind take-offs and landings. There were a fair amount of challenges on the ground too. To name one, radiotelephony exams were harder to come by, due to a shortage of examiners. Thankfully, the Air Pilots crew had my back and they helped me navigate the turbulence with ease.



In the week leading up to my skills test, I completed emergency touch drills every day. This included the full gamut of emergencies, from engine fire on start, to engine failure in flight. I also spent a considerable amount of time armchair flying, to ensure that I could perform all the necessary manoeuvres smoothly. This preparation gave me the confidence to bring my skills test forward by a day, to take advantage of good weather.



On the 16th of August 2023, I passed my skills test. This was a tremendous achievement, made possible by all the people who have supported me along the way. Thank you to all those who contributed to my journey, initially, via my social media platforms. Thank you to my family without whom I could never have made it this far.

My burning passion is to fuse my love for aviation with my love for teaching, by becoming a flight instructor. Eventually, I envision myself becoming a wide body jet captain. As such, I haven't yet fully achieved my dream, but I am light years away from where I first started.

Thank you to the Honourable Company of Air Pilots who have enriched my life in an immeasurable way. Special thanks to Captain Colin Donaldson, my sponsor, whose generosity has been life-changing. I promise to pay it forward.

Finally, thank you for reading. Whatever your dream, whatever the odds, never give up, never give in and never be afraid to pursue and live your dream.