

6/7

Life cannot be examined in a routine office job.

Variety doesn't bloom in the like of filing cabinets or routine minutes of meetings or committees. Any job that you don't love is poison. I'm an outdoor person with an eye for marathons. And shopping does not get me kicks.

Helicopters welcome you to a different world. From the sky, you realise that borders are indeed scars of history. Not neat earth-lines. Rivers aren't nationalistic. They go as they please. And sky encompasses all.

Yet, if we don't have the freedom to protect the sky that we hold dear, we lose our ideals. When we lose our ideals, our souls wrinkle. And when that happens, we really grow old. It's not time alone that makes us so.

Before beginning my studies in USA, at Basic Military Training (BMT), I met people from all walks. I was the youngest. I joined right after my A Levels. Many ladies signed on after first jobs at private firms. One was a bank officer.

I still keep in touch with my course mates. Most are in other services – the Navy and Army. Together, we endured the buzz of insects. Went through mud, rain, cold and navigated in the dark – shared the joys of the military. We did things ordinarily reserved for men – shooting, field camp, going on and accomplishing missions. But I suspect that we did what we had to do with a lot less fuss.

I did a double degree in Mechanical Engineering and Economics at the University of Illinois. This entailed about 1.5 times of a usual workload.

At first, there was some adjustment pain. Planning schedules, choosing electives and putting up with inclement weather. But I got over that very quickly. The university boasts a huge international student body. I made many friends including Ayako Suzuki from Japan. We had a common passion in running and taekwondo.

Despite a relatively heavy work load, there was time for travel and a year's stint as an exchange student, at Birmingham, United Kingdom.

In Africa, I saw crocodiles attack an elephant. At night, animals pawed at our tents. At day, hippos lazed in rivers and vast herds kicked dust clouds.

And I found some significance through insignificance, at America's Grand Canyon.

Travel is still very much part of my life. Regularly, as pilots, we train overseas.



Once, at the South China Sea, a Greek seaman was injured. He'd fallen from a container at his vessel. My helicopter roared off with crew and doctor. For two hours we were at open sea. **Then his ship came within view. We hovered above and winched him on board. Zoomed for General Hospital. Returned. Placed heart on rest mode. Rested face with smile. Poetic irony? Damsel saves man in distress...**

YouYou is the favourite of my collection of 60 teddy bears. Ayako, my room mate at the University of Illinois gave it.