

## JENNY BONNER

Edited transcript of interview with Jenny Bonner conducted by Felicity Aston at her home in Monmouthshire on the 24th of March, 2011. BAS archives AD24/1/113. Transcribed by John Zerfahs on 25th October, 2019.

### Part 1

[Part 1 0:00:00] Aston: An interview conducted by Felicity Aston with Jenny Bonner at her home in Monmouthshire, on the 24th of March, 2011.

Bonner: I'm Jennifer Mary Bonner, and I was born on the 18th of May, 1931 in London.

[Part 1 0:00:22] Aston: Thanks very much. Jenny, you completed your degree at University College London.

Bonner: Yes.

[Part 1 0:00:31] Aston: So what made you want to study botany and zoology, how did that come about, was that an interest from childhood?

Bonner: I think it was the only subject I was really good at at school.

[Part 1 0:00:45] Aston: And, so getting to UCL, was that a big sort of achievement for you, was that the ambition, what was the ambition?

Bonner: My father was a doctor and originally I thought I wanted to follow him as a G.P., but then I decided I didn't, and I was, then my family wanted me to go to university, and I lived in London and so it would be cheaper to go to a London college, and so I applied for University College London and I got in to do intermediate B.Sc. which was the same as first M.B. same as nowadays about A level.

[Part 1 0:01:30] Aston: And did you come from a particularly academic family?

Bonner: My father was academic, my mother was very intelligent, but wasn't academic, but it was just that something they - I think because I had a sister and not a brother my father wanted the eldest, me, as the eldest daughter to go to university, and he'd loved me to have followed in his footsteps, but, no it was just sort of something that I was expected to do, and the school I went to sort of expected me to go to university, so it didn't seem a big deal.

[Part 1 0:2:15] Aston: So at UCL were there lots of women at that time.

Bonner: Oh yes, yes lots of women. I think there were more men than women but it wasn't hugely outnumbered, and it was just, the building was still bombed, then, when we were there they started to rebuild it.

[Part 1 0:02:38] Aston: Oh right, from the...

Bonner: From the bombing in the war, because the war finished in '45 and I went originally in '49.

[Part 1 0:02:49] Aston: Right, and how long were you there studying?

Bonner: Just three years, because I did a general degree, which in those days was two years long, but I had to be at the college for three years and because I'd done intermediate B.Sc. that counted, although I didn't realise that when I went to do it.

[Part 1 0:03:10] Aston: And did it come very easily to you?

Bonner: Well the botany and zoology came, but the chemistry didn't come very easily at all, and in fact in those days your degree was your worst subject, and if you failed one subject you failed your degree, and so I got a, well most people got a pass, and that was because my chemistry wasn't as good as my botany and zoology.

[Part 1 0:03:46] Aston: And so what was your intention after ...?

Bonner: To go into teaching, those who can do, those who can't teach.

[Part 1 0:03:55] Aston: But while you were studying there you met Nigel.

Bonner: Nigel, yes. When I started my degree he did chemistry as a subsidiary subject to an Honours Zoology degree, and that's where we met, in the chemistry lab.

[Part 1 0:04:11] Aston: And what did you think of him when you first met him?

Bonner: I was rather superior. I'd just finished a relationship, and I was going to work, I wasn't going to get involved with men, and in those days you called each other Mr. Bonner and Miss [Sacks?], until you really got to know each other, and so apparently I was rather standoffish.

[Part 1 0:04:41] Aston: You also met some other people that went on to work for ...

Bonner: Yes, Bernard Stonehouse who had been on the Shetland Islands, South Shetlands. The name escapes me where they were. It's not a base any longer, there was a volcanic eruption there.

[Part 1 0:05:58] Aston: Oh, Deception Island.

Bonner: That's right! And that was when it was a military organisation. He went down as, he was in the navy as a pilot, and he, while he was down there he studied the emperor penguins, and what he wanted to do was to study the king penguins in South Georgia after his degree, to compare them with the emperors. And of course he couldn't go down on his own, so he just sort of said 'Does anybody want to come to South Georgia?', and Nigel thought that might be an interesting thing to do although his plan originally was to do entomology, and he was specialising in that to go to Africa. Well, this seemed something to do so he went to South Georgia to study elephant seals.

[Part 1 0:06:18] Aston: And so before Bernard Stonehouse came up with this idea, Nigel didn't have any intention of particularly going to Antarctica?

Bonner: No, not at all, not at all.

[Part 1 0:06:29] Aston: So when he told you that he was planning to go to South Georgia how, what did you think?

Bonner: No, we weren't, I mean we were going out but we weren't expected to marry. It seemed quite a good idea really.

[Part 1 0:06:48] Aston: But I wondered if it was something that you thought 'Actually I'd quite to go and do that too'

Bonner: No, no. I suppose we, that was at the beginning of the final year, and I suppose we got closer during that final year – well he was doing *his* final years for his degree, I'd got my degree and was doing my P.G.C.E. during that year. And I didn't think it was such a good idea that he was going for eighteen months when he actually went.

[Part 1 0:07:21] Aston: Why, because it might damage his career, or..?

Bonner: No, 'cos I just wanted him with me.

[Part 1 0:07:29] Aston: Was it seen as quite an adventurous thing to be going and doing at that time?

Bonner: Oh yes, yes, yes it was.

[Part 1 0:07:38] Aston: So, Bernard and Nigel went off to Antarctica in July, 1953...

Bonner: Yes.

[Part 1 0:07:47] Aston: And then meantime you started your teaching?

Bonner: Teaching, yes. Yes, and it took me a little while to control the children, but once I'd learnt that art I really enjoyed teaching.

[Part 1 0:08:05] Aston: And did you hear from Nigel while he was...?

Bonner: Yes, we wrote, but, and he knew when.. When he arrived, the day he arrived in South Georgia, he had a terrific pain in his abdomen and was diagnosed with appendicitis, but the doctor down there at the time, the winter doctor, the administrative officer didn't want him to operate on his own and so they waited until a Welsh doctor came down, which was a couple of days, and then the Welsh doctor, who was only just out of college, well just got his medical degree, operated on him, but he'd had so much morphine that the Welsh doctor wasn't, David Richards, wasn't keen on giving him a general anaesthetic, so they gave him a spinal anaesthetic so he could see David paging through the books to see what he had to do next [laughs]. And then finally the spinal anaesthetic wore out and Nigel said 'Excuse me I can feel you', and so they had to give him ether, or chloroform I suppose it was, and he survived, which says something for David Richards' efforts. And so he didn't join Bernard for about, I can't remember exactly how long, but it was a long time, couple of months, it may even have been three months before he was allowed to go and join Bernard. And the

first I knew of it was Bernard sent me a telegram saying he was better, because I wasn't next of kin, and then, but all the time we were writing letters and just sending them off, Nigel was sending them off, knowingly on to boats, but I was just sending them off into the ether. I think I could send 20 small pages of Basildon Bond. I can't remember, I think it may have been sixpence, 6d, and then they used to come from Nigel in huge, great bundles, and the postman used to sort of play a little tune on our doorbell when they came so that I knew when it had arrived [laughs]. So but, yes, pages and pages went between us.

[Part 1 0:11:07] Aston: So then he came back.

Bonner: He came back in it must have been about March – yes, 1955.

[Part 1 0:11:21] Aston: So he'd been away...?

Bonner: He'd been away 18 months, yes, and about 14 months at the Bay of Isles. He came back and we decided we did want to marry and we married in August of that year.

[Part 1 0:11:44] Aston: Ah, how lovely. And did he know that he was going ...

Bonner: No, we thought, he thought and we thought that he was going to settle back into academia and write doing ???[incomprehensible] go on to lecture or something at university, and then he was offered the chance to go down again, and so on our first wedding anniversary he was back again, on his way back to South Georgia, to act as sealing inspector and do what research he wanted to, biological research as and when he could. And so he studied the flora, and he studied the reindeer, and he was able to at the end of the season go to Bird Island where he discovered this thriving colony of fur seals.

[Part 1 0:13:01] Aston: So, when Nigel went back the second time were you really supportive of that, or did you think 'Oh my goodness off he goes again'?

Bonner: Yes, I think I was supportive, but a bit miffed I suppose. But I had my work, and I just thought it was going to be the one time, and just to collect more material for his elephant seal work. But then having found these fur seals which was a really exciting thing, when they asked him if he'd go back again – no, we'd better go back again – when he got to South Georgia that second time he went down everybody on South Georgia, or at the Point, the government station, had expected me to come down with him. They hadn't expected him to come on his own, and they'd all presumed that Bob Spivey, who was the administrative officer and an ex-Fid, we would stay at the magistrate's house on the Point with him, and in fact Nigel did stay there. And they were talking about it at a meal one day with the manager of Husvik whaling station and the manager said 'Well why doesn't she come down on *Tyr*, it's coming down in January?', and Bob said 'Yes, send her a cable and ask if she can come down on *Tyr*'.

[Part 1 0:15:07] And so I thought 'The man's mad, but never mind I'll ask for leave from work', because of course I was going to miss the whole of the Easter term, and I got leave, and got in touch with the whaling company which was called *Tonsbergs Hvalfangeri* which was based in Tonsberg in Norway, and went to Denmark, Copenhagen, to join the boat, and

was told that the boat was delayed. So we stayed in Copenhagen for about the best part of a week, and by this time I joined up with two government people going down to the Point, the single men's steward, Cyril Stroyer, who was always called 'Tonk', and a customs officer, whose name John, but his name has escaped me, and also the wife of Dick Brown who was a glaciologist and was on a private expedition, and I don't think she had government permission to go down, I think she was private completely. And there was also the wife of either a meteorologist or a wireless operator – I think he was a wireless operator. She had two children and so we had met up in there and then went to North Denmark to catch the boat, and it worked out that a week after I'd left England we were back in the English Channel.

[Part 1 0:17:30] And we set off on this mega voyage, we were going to Aruba to get fuel, but it fuel transpired that it was cheaper in Caripito in Venezuela, so we went across to round Trinidad, and up the San Juan river for a night and almost a day through the forest which came right down to the river it was quite fascinating going up the river to this little port, well jetty really in the middle of nowhere, where the fuel oil could be loaded. But the actual oil depot was inland and all the men, 'cos we had a number of whalers on board who were going down for the winter to repair ships and to work on the stations and that sort of thing, and they all shot ashore and disappeared into the jungle, and the women were told that we were to stay on board, or we could go to the seamen's mission at the jetty. So went down to the seamen's mission for a little while, but everything was extremely expensive there and there wasn't really much to do so we came back on board. And then of course the men returned very drunk and so we just went into our cabins, locked the doors and went to bed, and let all the mayhem continue.

[Part 1 0:19:21] But the journey, see there was quite a lot activity during the journey. We had, the Norwegians, seamen anyway, find it quite easy men dancing together, so that they often had dances, and on this occasion there was, not only were the three English women going down, there was also the captain's wife and the stewardess, the steward's wife. So there were five women so once we were into the tropics we used to have dances on board on deck and there were cinema showings and sort of activities silly games one of which I remember was trying to get an elastic band from under your nose down to your chin without touching anything, and at other times we just played cards and sat in our mess, 'cos there was a sort of visitors' mess, and the officers used to come and sit with us and talk and we'd play games, card games and other games.

[Part 1 0:20:40] Aston: What was the sort of berthing conditions like, were the living conditions ... quite comfortable?

Bonner: The living conditions on total were *extremely* comfortable. We each had a cabin to ourselves which had two bunks in it and a settee, and hot and cold running water to a basin, and it was very tastefully decorated in the sort of Scandinavian style - that we thought of as being Scandinavian style. So it was very comfortable and the mess room was comfort(able), quite large and they, because they'd got five women on board they decided that they'd set up a swimming pool and have a crossing the line ceremony, and we had a little conflag about

what we'd do about this, and in the end we decided that we'd pretend it was a sort of beauty contest, 'cos we'd have to wear swimming costumes which was the whole point of the exercise. And so we wore swimming costumes and big hats and we made sashes to go across us and we had Miss Take and Miss Hap and the little girl was Miss Chief, and we carried sort of numbers like they do on beauty things, and they were very good actually. They tipped us very gently back into the water, and then the captain insisted on the swimming pool being removed, we never actually swam in it – it was just sort of tarpaulin erected for this exercise. Yes it was a good time, and it got six weeks was too long. I can't imagine how people go for cruises for three months.

[Part 1 0:22:43] Aston: Had any of these women made this journey before...?

Bonner: Yes, the stewardess had, the Norwegian stewardess, but I'm not sure about the captain's wife – probably.

[Part 1 0:22:58] Aston: And so was there sort of a sense of anticipation perhaps, a bit of nerves about what you were sailing into?

Bonner: Oh yes, we hadn't a clue and the two young men that were going down, didn't know. Tonk had been in the, a boy, I think he started off in the navy as a boy and then transferred to the army, and then when he left the army he didn't know what to do so he thought, I don't think he had any skill at cooking, but he applied to go down to South Georgia to cook for the men. He didn't stay in that job very long.

[Part 1 0:23:39] Aston: I see. So then after six weeks you finally arrived at South Georgia, when you first saw South Georgia what did you think?

Bonner: Well I didn't see South Georgia because it was extremely windy and we were stood off and we couldn't see a thing because everything was covered by cloud, and that that wasn't covered by cloud was covered by spray 'cos it was so windy we couldn't get near South Georgia we stood off for quite a long time. And then I was just so relieved to get off the boat, and we got to Husvik which was where *Tyr* was going and was met by Nigel and some other of the 'Keep' [phonetic, for *King Edward Point*] staff, and we went round on one of the whale boats to the Point straightaway, and Spivey who had to do all the administration of getting the boat, signing the boat in and checking it over for customs incursions, was over there so we had the house to ourselves, which was rather lovely. And then I gradually got to meet everybody on the Point and at Pesca with Grytviken which was the whaling company was always known as Pesca, because it was the *Compana Argentina de Pesca* was the company that owned it, based in Buenos Aires, and we always called it Pesca.

[Part 1 0:25:22] Aston: What was Husvik like, what was your..?

Bonner: I didn't really see Husvik at all that time, and we came round straight to the Point jetty, and got off at the Point jetty, and then – it was dark so I didn't really by that time didn't really see anything and I'd been very tired, and just collapsed.

[Part 1 0:25:55] Aston: And what about the Point and er...

Bonner: The Point was, I mean I'd seen photographs but it was just this – have you been to the Point? - it was this settlement of small wooden buildings, single storied, I, what, a tiny, tiny more of s'pose there were 25 people living there, and I think there were five children there when I was there, Betty and Basil's three children were there I think. [Pause]. No they weren't 'cos I don't think Betty and Basil were there – I could find out but – and then we just, our days were pretty full. The previous administrative officer, Ken Butler, and his wife were living, well he was manager of Pesca then, and Nigel, he'd been the administrative officer when Nigel and Bernard had gone down, so Nigel knew them very well. And so we went over there and spent quite a lot of time there. Ken had been a Fid in the days when it was, he was ex-army, and he'd been a Fid when it was a military operation, and so when we hadn't got much to do we used to walk round to Pesca and go and visit Jean and often stayed for supper, we sometimes went over for lunch.

[Part 1 0:28:08] And while I was there we were pretty busy, we did go to Leith, Salvesen's station, and stayed the night there, and we went to Husvik, just for the day, and we walked over to Maiviken and we went to Hesterslepan [phonetic], and we went to the Pesca, and two or three times to walk round on our own, round the station and find out about it, or show me how it all went together, and we, as I say, spent a lot of time with Jean and Ken. And then, after eleven days, I mean the only thing you know about the Antarctic for certain is that nothing's certain. And so I'd expected (A) to get there earlier so I'd have longer, and (B) to stay longer, but the transport and everything worked out, so Nigel and I came home on *Tyr*, sharing the cabin that I'd been in on the way down, but it only took four weeks to get back, to Norway and we had three or four days in Norway, and then back on to *Tyr* and came back to the U.K.

[Part 1 0:29:48] Aston: So, did it seem like an incredibly short period of time after that huge long journey down there and equally long journey back?

Bonner: Well it did. Looking back on it it did. But the whole thing was such an exciting expedition for me that at the time I felt I'd like to have stayed longer, but I didn't feel – I think it wasn't until I got back and looked back on it that I thought 'Gosh, why did I do that trip', but it did make me understand why Nigel wanted to go back, I mean it's the most beautiful place, and I really, I enjoyed being there, I was made enormously welcome by all the people on the Point, all the people I met at all the whaling stations, but I just thought that that was a wonderful experience and Nigel'd go back to doing his research and I'd go back to teaching. And then they suggested he should go down again. And in those days you didn't have one year contracts you just had a job and stayed in it. And so we did think about that very carefully. Nigel desperately wanted to go back to study the fur seals, and we decided that if he did go back I would go with him. But then what would we do after another year, would he get another contract? He'd broken, you know, would he... So we decided that we'd ask that I should go down and that we should have a house, but, first of all a five year contract, I should go with him, and his salary should be doubled, because we were earning about the same at the time, and of course I was stopping earning, and he said 'Well you've managed..', you know, when we decided this he said 'Well that means that I won't go'. So off he went for the interview, and he came back and said 'They've accepted all my

conditions!', and we wondered what else we should have asked for! But I don't think they'd have accepted much else.

[Part 1 0:32:24] Aston: So your impressions of South Georgia must have been quite favourable looking back. And what about the towns, the whaling stations must have been quite male dominated, busy places.

Bonner: Oh absolutely! They were entirely male dominated. Occasionally there was one, I don't think there were more than one woman on them, but possibly, sometimes the station, the winter station manager had a wife, and sometimes the summer station manager had a wife, and the only times there were two women on a station was when they crossed over, or when one of the boats came down with a stewardess on board, but normally there wasn't a woman on the stations, and if there was there was only one.

[Part 1 0:33:19] Aston: And were they quite industrial places?

Bonner: Oh entirely industrial. I mean during the season they work 24 hours if there were whales coming in, and there were the whaling, the crew of the whalers were at Grytviken there were, five main whaling boats, and two others, seven boats in all going to sea. There was the crew of the sealing boats, who the sealing happened the month before the whaling started the sealing happened, so they had other jobs on the base, and then there were all the necessary trades to repair a ship – engineers, welders, riveters, blacksmiths, electricians, carpenters, and even things like mould makers – pattern makers – to make out of wood patterns to cast equipment so to replace something on the whaling boats, if they hadn't got it in store they made it. And then of course there were the ancillary things like bakers, butchers, pig man who looked after – there were pigs on the whaling station and he looked after the pigs and the chickens, and he had tame doves, which wouldn't be allowed nowadays, and the hospital with the, there was one doctor on the island during the winter, and three doctors during the season, one at each station. And then if they, their only job was emergencies really, and if they had an emergency and had to do an operation then a doctor would come round from one of the other stations.

[Part 1 0:35:47] Aston: And what was the atmosphere like on the stations, was it men far from home focussed on their job, or were they really quite homely places or were they a bit intimidating?

Bonner: Well they were run really like ships I suppose, even the foremen were in dormitories and they had messes and they worked all the time. If there weren't whales in then they worked nine till five, or eight till five. If there were whales in, as I say, those who needed to work worked. And of course there were the people who worked in the factories, so there were the people who ran the boilers, and the people who cut up the whales, and there was a diesel engine so there were diesel mechanics to generate the electricity; there was the wireless operator who was very important; there was a hydro-electric power station and so there was somebody manning that.

[Part 1 0:37:04] Aston: And was it quite shocking for you seeing that all, both the actual whaling and the sealing as a [overtalk]?

Bonner: I didn't see any sealing at all because all the areas round, the inhabited areas, were closed areas, so that you never saw the sealing. I never actually was ever close to the seal boats, because when I was down there I had Martin, so it would have been difficult for me to get across when the seal boats came in with the seal skins on. So I never saw that. The whaling, we were less squeamish in those days – presented with a rabbit fully clothed it wouldn't have surprised me I would have been able to skin it and clean it without any difficulty, 'cos that's what my mother did during the war even though she was a doctor's wife in London, rabbits were off ration so when they came in you got one and so I think we were less squeamish, although we were aware, very aware, and so were the whalers, that they were having to go farther and farther out to sea to catch the whales, and therefore they were depleting the stocks, and they all felt it was very wrong, and we did too, and Nigel actually mentioned this to somebody from head office at one of the whaling stations, and they said 'Yes, but we've paid for the equipment so what we'll do is get as much profit out of it and then close down, cut our losses, and go on to another organisation'. So that was quite interesting, but that was the attitude of the people who were running the commercial side of the organisation. But the whalers themselves felt that they should whale for less time and catch fewer whales, so that it would be, because in Norway it was a very respected job. If you were a whaler you were a respected member of the community, and they felt that they wanted to leave it for their children.

[Part 1 0:39:57] Aston: And then the people that you met that first visit Bob Spivey so what were your memories of Bob Spivey and the Matthews?

Bonner: Do you know, it's strange, I remember, the Matthews I didn't, I only saw, they had a son when they came. I sort of was the person who greeted them I cooked them their first meal on the island, so they were sort of getting used to where they were and where they were going to be for the next year anyway, and I honestly can't remember very much about Bob Spivey, apart from the fact that he was very amenable and a good host, I can't really remember Bob very well at all. We weren't with him very much because he was busy doing things, and when we were with him we were usually entertaining people – the *Protector* came in and so the captain and some of the senior officers came up to the house. One of the BAS boats came in so the same thing happened, and then he was off at the other whaling stations, or we were off at the other whaling stations, so I didn't see all that much of him.

[Part 1 0:42:01] Aston: And what was his role on South Georgia?

Bonner: He was the administrative officer, which meant that he was the senior postmaster, a customs officer, the magistrate, which was how he was always called the magistrate because that's what the Norwegian, the whalers, saw him doing, most often. So he was in charge of all the administration, and then he had a customs officer under him, and when I first went, he had one - that time - he had one policeman oblique stroke handyman, so that his job was actually painting the houses, clearing away the rubbish, all the odd jobs on the island. But

then when a ship came in he put on his police uniform and went over with Bob, as the strong arm of the law, and if there was a trial of course he was in charge of the prisoner. And then there were three radio operators, three met. men, and a met. forecaster. Later, not that time when I was there but when I went back, there was a steward for the magistrate, and there was a steward, very often a steward and his wife for the single men, and when I went back again there was a dentist, because the government provided the dentist, and then in three hospitals there was a dental surgery.

[Part 1 0:44:00] Aston: And what about the Matthews, what was their role.

Bonner: They were exactly the same as Bob Spivey's.

[Part 1 0:44:05] Aston: Right. And just going back a little bit can you just describe a bit about what the ship was, it was an oil tanker...?

Bonner: It was originally an oil tanker and then they'd converted it into a transporter for people by building up on stilts two decks of cabins and mess rooms and kitchens and things, galleys, so that the waves could break across the tanker deck below the accommodation decks. So it was a very strange looking ship, but very comfortable accommodation.

[Part 1 0:44:59] Aston: And then, what was the company that it was run by?

Bonner: *Tonsbergs Hvalfangeri*, which is 'whaling...'

[Part 1 0:45:09] Aston: Oh, 'whaling' in Norwegian.

Bonner: *Hvalfangeri* is 'whaling factory', or 'whaling business', yes.

[Part 1 0:45:18] Aston: I can find out how to spell that [laughter]

Bonner: Yes, it's in Bob Headland's book on South Georgia.

[Part 1 0:45:27] Aston: So you went back the second time, and this was going to be for a lot longer.

Bonner: Well then the second time Nige[?], the five year contract, there wasn't accommodation for me, and anyway we decided that I would become pregnant although we only had a month and a half, but we succeeded in that object so that I was going to stay at home while I was pregnant, and have the baby and then go down with the baby, because that was alright although we didn't tell anybody.

[Part 1 0:46:15] Aston: It wasn't seen at all as unusual taking a young child?

Bonner: No because they'd take – not many young children went from U.K. previously, but quite a lot from Falkland had, because quite a lot of the married families came from Falkland, although then after the, the Matthews brought down a three year old when I was first there, and then when I was there the second time the German dentist and his wife had a son with them, and then she went back to Germany to have a baby, but she was pregnant on the island but went back, and Jean Matthews went back to have a second child.

[Part 1 0:47:09] Aston: What did your family in the U.K. think about you taking a young child to [overtalk]?

Bonner: I don't, thinking about them now I think they were very good because they didn't say 'Don't do it'. But they must have been devastated, because it was both families' first grandchild, and I think they were horrified [chuckles], but they didn't try and persuade us not to go.

[Part 1 0:47:44] Aston: What did they think about you going south the first time, it must have been seen quite an adventurous unusual thing to do?

Bonner: Yes it was, but I think they were quite worried, but I think their attitude was that if Nigel felt it was alright for me to do it, it probably was. So I think they thought that Nigel wouldn't put me in danger.

[Part 1 0:48:11] Aston: And what about you and you're a new mum? Did you have worries?

Bonner: Yes I did. I had worries – I was pretty confident person actually. I had looked after babies for other people, babysat and that sort of thing. I went clasping Doctor Spock's book, which is denigrated now, but was written exactly for somebody like me, it was written for American young mothers who were away from doctors and older women or experienced mothers. So it was exactly what I needed, and he anticipated everything, that you might come across, and told you what to do if there was illness, when you *had* to go and see a doctor however difficult, or get hold of a doctor, and I had that and it was wonderful, I was very impressed with that. And I knew that there were many illnesses on the island and only those, if a ship had been to Falkland or South America and came to the island within a week then it often brought colds with it. But otherwise we got very little illness at all, and it was only accidents.

[Part 1 0:50:13] The other thing was feeding Martin. I wasn't quite sure, I knew that there was adequate food there, in fact the whaling stations brought down food but some of it wasn't as fresh, there wasn't a lot, I imagine there wasn't a lot of fresh vegetables and fresh fruit, and I wrote to Heinz and asked them if they could give me an idea of what Heinz tinned food I'd need, for bringing up a child from four months old to when it was on fully on adult food, and they rang me up and said they were very interested, and they'd certainly do it, and if they could use me and the baby as advertising material they'd certainly help there. And I said 'Well, what sort of advertising', and I could feel the man the other end pulling himself up and he said 'Madam, we are Heinz', as if to say 'Heinz don't do anything unpleasant!' So I said 'Yes', and in the end they gave me 1200 cans of baby food for free in exchange for a big advert, which I can show you, in the *Grocers' Gazette*, which ends up 'To Mr and Mrs Bonner we wish *bon voyage*, to Martin we wish *bon appetit!*'

[Part 1 0:52:08] Aston: Wonderful. And so how did you travel down to South Georgia with Martin, this was in 1958?

Bonner: 1958, he was born in April and we left at the beginning of, no the end of August. The idea was that we should all travel down together, but there wasn't room for me to get

from South America to South Georgia with, when Nigel went down for the start of the sealing season, because they were taking down the sealers and men from, to do repairs or something early. So I travelled down in the height of luxury on one of the *Highland Princesses* which was a mail ship going down. So I travelled first class and sat at the captain's table, because I was a government official's wife and therefore I was suitable material for the captain's table.

[Part 1 0:53:22] And it took us three weeks to get to Montevideo, we couldn't go to Buenos Aires 'cos at that time England and Argentina was rowing about the Falklands, and so we went to Monte, and that was a wonderful journey because I was looked after so well and the stewardess was lovely, she was an older la[dy], well I thought she was older now I think she was quite young, and she looked after me like a mother. But I didn't go ashore because it would have been difficult with Martin, and although other people would have helped me I felt that was, you know... So went to, we stopped at Vigo and Las Palmas and Recife I think, and somewhere in Brazil, and then to Montevideo, and I stayed on the ship for the rest of that day and then I was collected and taken across to a Norwegian oil tanker, which hadn't been converted, and I was just appalled. The ship looked so grubby and the deck was covered in what looked like rubbish to me, and there were a lot of men swarming around who didn't appear to be doing anything productive.

[Part 1 0:54:57] Anyway a rotund Latin gentleman came down the gangplank and greeted me and he was the *commissario*, and soon after him a tall, blond man came down and he was the captain, and the *commissario* took the baby from me, handed it to the captain, and we went up to my cabin, which was the second officer's cabin, and the captain said 'Now what about the baby's meals?' and I said 'Well I feed him milk', and a sort of look of relief came over his face, and I didn't find out until a year later that apparently there was fuel oil in the drinking water tank, a small quantity of fuel oil, and they treated it for us and they got rid of it, but he was worried about a baby drinking, having the milk, then I had my tins of Heinz baby food, so that was alright. But there wasn't any hot water, in fact there wasn't almost any water dripping into the basin that was in my cabin, and so when I wanted to do washing, or to bath Martin, three men had to carry two buckets each of hot water, one of cold and one of hot, across from the – you know how a tanker is with the engine one end and the (what's it called?), well the bridges, the bridge the other end, well I was living in the bridge area, to provide me with water, and, but I did the washing in the captain's bathroom, which was next to his cabin, and he provided special washing powder for babies, and pegs for hanging the washing up, and then one day he asked me if I'd like a bath, and I said 'Yes, that would be nice', so a lock was put on the bathroom door, although they'd have to, and there was a towel draped over the porthole, and then three men had to make goodness knows how many walks along, the weather was not too good but they did it, and I had this luxurious bath, 'cos I'd been sort of topping and tailing in the water after I'd bathed Martin [laughter].

[Part 1 0:57:48] Aston: What was the name of the ship do you remember?

Bonner: *Conquistador*. And it was owned by the *Compania Argentina de Pesca*, which was, but everybody on board was really kind to me. The first meal I noticed that the other officers

kept their knife and fork from their first course so I did the same, but I wasn't allowed to do that I had to put my knife and fork back, and I had clean knives and forks for every course, and I had a proper napkin – I don't think anybody else had a napkin, but I had a napkin, and I used to keep out of the mess room because they all had to speak, some of them didn't speak English, but those that spoke English, when I was in the cabin spoke English to me and to each other, and I felt that was a bit hard. But after the second day they came and got me about three o' clock and said 'Why didn't I bring the baby into the mess room and have tea with them, and so I did, and then in the evening when Martin was asleep I'd go in and play canasta with them, but they, it just took a week from..., and we had very good weather until the last day when the fog came down, so I didn't see South Georgia when I went in the next time.

[Part 1 0:59:29] Aston: I mean Nigel must have been incredibly relieved I imagine to see you arrive at [talkover]

Bonner: Oh he was. He came out with the pilot boat and, so that was lovely, and the only time that Martin really cried was when Nigel picked him up [laughs], and he'd got this reputation of this baby that didn't cry.

## PART 2

[Part 2 0:00:00] Aston: This is an interview conducted by Felicity Aston with Jenny Bonner at her home in Monmouthshire, on the 24th of March, 2011.

[Part 2 0:00:13] Aston: And so then you lived in a house on King Edward Point?

Bonner: Yes. The house it had been specially built for us, and though it's no longer there, but most Fids who did know the house would know it as Quigley's. But we had it first, it was the last house that you got to if you went right from the jetty right along the Point to the very distance, and ours was the last house. And, very comfortable. It was a Swedish design, it had double glazed windows which we'd never heard of in the U.K. We'd heard of secondary double glazing, but very, very few houses had that, but this was integral double glazing, it was very well insulated. It had the sitting room, or the living room was 22 feet by 11 feet, and it had two 11 by 11 foot bedrooms, a kitchen and a bathroom, and a beautiful loft, with a lovely loft ladder which was counterbalanced, and it had been very tastefully equipped. The furniture and the curtains were very similar to what I would have chosen, and the curtains were almost identical to the ones I'd chosen, except in colour, for our flat. And we brought down, of course Nigel had talked to all the women on the island, and we had to bring down our own china, cutlery, bed linen, pots and pans, cooking utensils, and everything for the baby, and almost everything for me because although the whaling station had what was known as the slop chest, which was a shop which sold everything that a whaler would need, it didn't sell everything that a woman would need, although I could, because there were young boys from fifteen, I could buy some clothes from them like sweaters or, I suppose that's the main thing I bought was sweaters. But you could buy things like writing paper and shoe

polish and toothpaste and flannels from them. And so we came down with all this enormous luggage, cot, pram, high chair, so on, and we were very comfortable in there. It had electricity, because we needed electricity for the wireless station and for the met. people, and we also had oil fired central heating, but the boiler was an industrial central heating boiler with an open grate, which wasn't very suitable for a small child, and it also wasn't running on the right fuel so the oil spilled out and flooded the kitchen floor, and after about a year, I think it must have been the end of the first summer, Nigel and John Quigley the diesel mechanic moved the boiler into the back porch, which made life much easier. And I also managed to get rid of the Aga type cooking stove which also ran on the wrong fuel and so didn't work properly and flooded, and that, I'd managed to persuade John Quigley because he had to come so often to clean it out, that he should give me an ordinary electric cooker, which was in another house and wasn't being used. So after that life was much easier. I had a single tub washing machine and a fridge, and life was very similar to being in a small house in England really.

[Part 2 0:05:18] Aston: Was there much support for you you're there with your little baby, you had your Doctor Spock, but was there anyone else on the ...?

Bonner: Well the, I didn't actually think I actually asked for support excepting twice from the doctor. I ...

[Part 2 0:05:45] Aston: No other sort of families on the island at the time,,,

Bonner: Yes, Betty and Basil were our next Fids who were Falklanders, and Basil as I say was a policeman/handyman and they had three children, but they were at school in Falkland most of the time. But they did come down for the summer holidays, or Betty and/or Basil – Betty on her own went back, and sometimes Basil went back with her, Betty never sailed south on her own, to be with them during their long summer holidays, so I think it was one summer holiday they came down, one summer holiday that Betty went back. So the children were down for two summer holidays I think. But when I was, before I arrived, Betty had lent Nigel sheets and cutlery just so that we could have something to eat that night, and she came round that evening with sausage rolls and cake and eggs from her chickens, and that sort of thing. And on another occasion Nigel was away and it was actually in the summer but it snowed, Nigel had went out sealing - I think it was the end of the season - they went out for one trip for some reason, and it started snowing and it snowed and it snowed and it snowed and I couldn't, it snowed so much I couldn't see Nigel's boat going out past the windows, and I was sitting in the house and the wind was blowing and it had stopped snowing but it was right up against the house and suddenly I heard a knock on the door and a voice saying 'Don't open the door, Jenny!', 'cos we opened the doors inwards not outwards and all the snow would have fallen in, and so he came round to the window, and they hadn't been able to see my lights, so Betty had sent him out in this awful weather to check on me and see if I was alright. So from that way I had support.

[Part 2 0:08:25] Aston: I understand there were two particular favourite babysitters?

Bonner: Yes, there was, John Quigley was a favourite babysitter, he came from a large Irish family from Tipperary and he didn't think it at all strange to look after small baby, and he used to come. I never, on very few occasions was I left them for more than an hour, because most of the things that I needed a babysitter for were a party on the Point, and they had probably been invited. So, but I used to go and then come back and relieve them and they'd go. But on one occasion I was invited out to *Protector* which was the Royal Navy's ship, like *Endurance*, and it had the admiral on board and they particularly asked for the women to come. So, I think there were only two of us – I can't remember who the other one was – anyway we went over and they laid on a buffet and a film and so I was gone for about three hours, I wanted to go after the meal go back, but they were at anchor and so I was, because they wouldn't put on a boat to take me home I had to stay, and John Quigley I got home and found him walking up and down the kitchen with the baby explaining how he and Nigel were going to move the oil thing ???[incomprehensible] into the thing, and he said 'He doesn't cry when I'm talking to him'.

[Part 2 0:10:32] And then there was *bestefar*, which is grandfather in Norwegian, and he was the first blacksmith at the whaling station, and his job, the blacksmith's main job, was straightening by eye the harpoons, the whaling harpoons, which used to get twisted if it wasn't a clean shot and the whale struggled then the harpoon got twisted, and then it had to be absolutely straight and they did this by eye and I don't know how they did it. But also he would make things in iron that the whaling station needed, and he would do carvings of whale teeth. Everything of the whale was used at the whaling station except the teeth which most of the teeth had been sperm teeth of course were collected and went to the Norwegian Red Cross to be carved, to be sellers' ornaments for the Red Cross funds. But on the station you could acquire whale teeth, and Strand [phonetic] used to make them into penguins, seals and whales, and when the Duke of Edinburgh came to South Georgia on his minor colonies tour in 1957, he was presented with this, a whale, a seal and a penguin that Strand had made, and Strand made me a whale, a seal and a penguin and assured me they were as big as the ones the queen of England had!

[Part 2 0:12:39] But anyway, he appointed himself Martin's *bestefar*, and he started, he was to have been, it was 46, seasons that he'd done in South Georgia and 21 winters, so he'd never had a, in all that time he'd never had a Christmas at home because he got caught down in South Georgia during the war, so he spent the whole of the war in the South Atlantic – they did get up to South America on one occasion, I think, during the winter. And he started by coming for tea, and then he came for tea and supper, and then he came, he decided he'd come for lunch, and then he thought 'Well why, I'll come for coffee as well', so he came about ten o' clock and stayed till about nine o' clock, except when Nigel was away when he came at ten o' clock and stayed till ten o' clock. He explained to me that normally when he went home he met the people from the Point coming from the *kino*, the cinema, and so because Nigel was away he stayed a little longer so he didn't meet them. Mind you, he had to walk past all the houses, on the gravel, so that everybody could hear him go, and everybody knew that Strand was up at my house and was going home [laughs]. But he thought it was proper for him not to do that.

[Part 2 0:14:23] Aston: So did you have many Norwegian friends?

Bonner: Yes, we did. We were very friendly with the whale captains, the gunners. They used to come to us, we used to go over when they came in we used to go over, if Nigel was free, to go over for tea and have tea on board with them, and they always came to us on Christmas tea time to have Christmas cake and mince pies, and we were friendly with the managers of the whaling station and their wives, if they were there, and one or two other of the workmen on the whaling station, and we'd go and visit at Pesca, or they walked round and come and visit us.

[Part 2 0:15:24] Aston: And did they speak in English, or [overtalk]?

Bonner: We spoke in English, Nigel spoke pretty good Norwegian and in the first winter we were there we decided we, somebody had a Linguaphone course and we bought it off them, and we did half an hour of Linguaphone after lunch every day. So by the end of the winter I could follow a conversation, and occasionally said one or two words but wasn't very confident. And then the following winter one of the gunners' wife came down to join him, because he was going to be winter manager, and she was the only woman up in the whaling station, I was the only woman at the Point, and she assured me she didn't speak any English, and so I had to speak to her in Norwegian, and she had to understand me because if she didn't then she didn't get, come across. So, yes, so I started becoming more fluent in Norwegian, and then I was, by the time I left, I was able to carry on a conversation, and when we went to Norway, when Lucy was, my daughter, who was born during the last trip Nigel made, was four months old, so it was a year aft[er], that's right a year after I came home we went to Norway, and there I spoke Norwegian with the people we stayed with all the time.

[Part 2 0:17:23] Aston: So you kept in touch with the people that you knew from South Georgia.

Bonner: Oh yes, yes, until most of them, till they died actually.

[Part 2 0:17:35] Aston: Did the two communities mix quite a lot at Point when the whaling station was there...?

Bonner: Yes, various people had various friends at the whaling station, yes.

[Part 2 0:17:53] Aston: And you seem to have had a lot of visitors and things during the winters. Was it always quite a celebratory sort of [overtalk]? Was it difficult to keep them entertained? How was the, did you have limited food supplies or was there whatever you needed?

Bonner: No, we got all our food from the whaling station, from Grytviken, from Pesca, and in fact the steward there, the senior steward, he was Norwegian, and of course the food for that whaling station came from South America, and so it only took a week to come down, so we always had potat[oes?], but there were long spells when nothing, particularly during the winter, we didn't have, the whaleboats left in March, or the beginning of April, and didn't come back until the first boat came down towards the beginning of September, with the

sealers, so for all that time there wasn't any, we didn't get renewed, the supplies weren't renewed, except mid-winter we got a boat from Falkland. Falkland was supplied in those days by a boat that ran between Falkland and Montevideo, and mid-winter this boat came down and supplied the Point really, it didn't bring enough but it was very useful, so we could order stuff on the boat that came down from Falkland, and it, the other thing we could do, twice we did, was to order a sheep from Falkland, 'cos the mutton in Falkland was 6d a pound, and we were able to get a whole carcass for thirty shillings, without its fleece, which was £1.50, and we got that down, cut it up and put it in the Pesca deep freeze, 'cos we didn't have a deep freeze, and then for special occasions we'd put that mutton out. It wasn't lamb, it was definitely mutton! But it was a change from pork.

[Part 2 0:20:39] We also had whale meat. If a whale had been caught in close inland then, but of course we listened to the whaling conversations, 'cos they were at certain times, we knew when there were fresh whales coming in, we sometimes, or Nigel would go and get a lump of fresh whale meat, about that size, I suppose two feet by a foot, and we'd hang that up outside the house, and let the oil drip out. If you ate it immediately it was fine, but if you left, if you didn't let the oil come out, and the outside went black and you cut off the outside on the bottom and then you had a lovely steaks inside, and we used to do that, the other thing we used to do was fish off the end of the jetty to get what we called cod, notothenia, and then the rest of our supplies came from the whaling station, and we used to have a linen bag for meat which we didn't have any choice in, so we'd get, sometimes we, well most of the time we'd get pork, some of the time, if very, very rarely did we get any other, sometimes about once a year we got lamb, and about once a year we got beef which they got down from, and the other meat we had was reindeer when they went to shoot the reindeer on the Barff peninsula very occasionally, about twice a year.

[Part 2 0:22:44] And then the other supplies we gave a list, but things came in tins so I had a seven pound tin of cocoa, a seven pound tin of custard powder, a pound tin of ground pepper, and then butter in tins, dried fruit, flour, by the kilo of course, and also fresh fruit and vegetables. There wasn't a day that Martin didn't have half an orange and an apple, because when the oranges and apples were running out, the whalers were told they weren't getting any more 'cos it was being kept for the children. So he always had some fresh fruit, and the other thing we always had white cabbage and swede and turnip and potatoes. We always had those, but there were other things. We tried growing vegetables in our green house, the porch to the door into the sitting room faced south so that was wrong it should have faced north of course, and it had a solid roof, so it didn't get really enough sun, so that we tried growing lettuce and that sort of thing. We grew mustard and cress, and we grew cut and come again cabbage, kale, and each year we had about two tomatoes, but that's all. So we specialized in flowers in the porch.

[Part 2 0:24:51] Aston: And did you get the opportunity to entertain often? Were there many people passing through?

Bonner: Yes. Nigel used to go off and about, when he was at home he used to go off about quarter to nine, and re-appear at about half past ten for coffee, and usually with one or two

other people from the Point, then he'd go away and come back at half past twelve for lunch, rarely with anybody else, and then he'd come back at half past three for tea, and that usually was somebody else coming with him, and then, depending on what work he was doing, depended when he came in about six o' clock to be there when Martin went to bed and then supper. But if a boat came in then he always invited somebody back, and I remember one occasion when there was a Norwegian research ship down, and we were walking over to Pesca for tea, and he said 'Oh by the way I've invited everybody off the ship for drinks at seven!' I said 'Well I better get back then!' So he said 'I know you've got cheese straws', which I almost kept on making so that they were there, and sweet biscuits and other things so he said 'It's alright there aren't all that many of them'. And then their time was, we were on South Georgia time and they were on GMT or something, so they didn't come till later.

[Part 2 0:26:42] But, yes, and then for instance we had the, as I said the whale gunners for Christmas tea, and they also usually came on New Year's Day, and then we had a party one winter and invited everybody at Pesca, there were only 32 people at Pesca, or 35 possibly, because I think four or five of them had to stay there 'cos they were watch keepers, and then the rest came, and we had a party, so 29 people got into our sitting room [laughs] I don't know how they did it. But they were very, very touched because they said that they never had everybody from Pesca being invited to a house on the Point. They'd been invited to a party, yes, we usually had a mid-winter's party in what had been the generating room, and then the generators were changed and they were put into a separate building, and so this room, this huge area was cleaned out and they, they could put all the men on the point were putting in, spruced it up and painted it and put brand new floor tiles.

[Part 2 0:28:12] Aston: So was there a lot of difference between summer and winter, and what were the winters like?

Bonner: In some ways we enjoyed the winter more than the summer, because the weather was calmer, although there was a lot of snow, and we weren't, it wasn't so disrupted, whereas in the summer there were boats coming in and going out and something happening, and somebody had to see to it, and there were messages coming in from head office in code that needed two people to sort them out, and then there was work, whereas in the winter it was, Nigel didn't go out on the sealing trips or to study fur seals, and the men working at the whaling station worked normal hours. And so it was more normal I suppose you could say. And I suppose from my point of view having Nigel there all the time made it more enjoyable, and we could, if the weather was nice, go out skiing. We didn't have ski lifts, or anything like that, so that if we wanted to come down a hill we had to go up the hill first, and I wasn't very good at that. But I think probably the weather was calmer, and there was less disruption. So in many ways we could get on, and we could plan things more.

[Part 2 0:30:05] Aston: Did it ever get quite scary the weather, I mean there must have been some big storms down there.

Bonner: Oh there was, it got very windy but I of course never had to go out in it, except on one occasion when there was a big storm and snow, and Nigel was away, and I went out to

feed the chickens only to discover the door was open, and drifts of snow had got into the chicken hut, and they were all cuddled as far away from the door as they could get, and I had to clear out the snow, and shut the door and that was very, I s'pose that was about my lowest point, because you didn't have the nice clothes you have now, I didn't have any really waterproof clothes, so I always put on a pair of Nigel's oilskins, and of course it hadn't got a hood on so the snow was going down my collar. In fact I changed into his anorak, well his working cloth anorak, which although not as waterproof at least protected me more I felt, and I got most of the snow out, and fed the chickens, and shut the door. I could have cried then, I really could. But I think that was the worst time.

[Part 2 0:31:41] Aston: I just want to talk to you a little bit about your visit to Bird Island, so how did that come about?

Bonner: Well Nigel, having discovered these fur seals, used to go for four weeks in the winter, and sometimes another expedition would be down, Lance Tickell's expeditions were sometimes down when he wanted to go, and they would help him, because they had, he was trying to keep track of the composition of the colonies, and they had to tag the seals, and also count the seals, and on this occasion Nig[el], they'd done that but Nigel wanted to go back for a short trip to just see whether any more pups had been born, and to look at the composition of the breeding beaches, and there wasn't anybody available to accompany him. On one occasion he had people from the whaling station, on another occasion he had a Canadian who was collecting animals for the Vancouver zoo who went and helped him, but on this occasion there was nobody. And he hadn't got a radio 'cos there wasn't a working radio on the island, and – which wasn't in use – and so I sort of thought 'Well, I couldn't really do very much but at least I could feed him and I could notice where, if he didn't come home, know where he'd gone and possibly get the tent over to him'.

[Part 2 0:33:49] But I suggested to Nigel that I went and he was thrilled, and also surprised I think, and he said 'Yes, that would be wonderful, and you'll see Bird Island and all that it has to offer', and we thought 'Well should we ask the administrative officer?', which was Coleman in those days, and we thought 'Well, his first reaction will be 'No'', it will be easier to say 'No'' '. And Denton-Thompson [Note: Aubrey Denton-Thompson] who was the Colonial Secretary on Falkland was coming down, and we knew that he'd want to see Nigel and so when he came to lunch, so that he could have a chat to Nigel about his work, we broached the subject, and he said 'Well, I don't know anything about it, if Nigel thinks it's safe for you to go, with the baby, well go! Why not?!'

[Part 2 0:34:53] So, and I had sort of been planning it and packing an' getting everything ready, because three days later we were on *Albatross*, and off to Bird Island, and Martin was 18 months old then, and very surprisingly I didn't think a young child would get seasick, he got seasick, but he wouldn't move from Nigel's arms so Nigel had to hold him and then I became seasick and I went and laid down on the skipper's bunk, and finally Nigel persuaded Martin to come and lie with me. So for seven hours we lay on this bunk feeling seasick, and all I could think going up was that if it wasn't safe for us to get off we would have to come back. It might be safe for Nigel to get off on his own, but if they didn't feel it was safe for

me and Martin to go, we were going to have, but thank goodness the weather calmed, and so we could get off this wretched boat. And then we had this walk, nothing like it is today, up through the seals to the hut, Bonner's Bothy, as they called it.

[Part 2 0:36:20] Aston: What was the hut like inside...?

Bonner: Well it was a garden shed. It was an ordinary garden shed, eight foot by ten foot. It may have been a bit smaller, but it had, but it was lined with hardboard, and between the hardboard and the wooden outside they'd packed it with whatever they'd taken up, the packing material, whatever they'd taken up in the first place, and it was, there were ropes across it which were, I don't know whether it was concreted into the ground or what, so it didn't blow away, and there was two bunks on one side of the door, and on the other side of the door there was a bench, with two chimney type Calag [phonetic] stoves, for cooking and heating, and that was it. And the wall above the bench was lined with nails, on which the cooking equipment hung on one end of the bench and the scientific equipment hung on the other end of the bench, and we also had an inflatable igloo tent for stores and emergencies, and we lived in that for eleven days. And Nigel created a sort of a playpen out of the bottom bunk by using some wire which had been used for bird cages or something at the end, and then along the long side he put in two planks of wood which you could lift out so that Nigel could sleep on that bunk, and I slept on the top bunk, and Martin slept in his pram top, which was a long pram top which I deliberately got a long one so he could use it when he was older, on the bench on the other side. And I did all the cooking and all the washing and the jobs round the hut an' Nigel went off every day and watched and counted the seals.

[Part 2 0:38:44] And then, as Bird Island always is, it was rainy and misty and foggy, but there were two dry days and one of the afternoons was very sunny, and both afternoons after tea we went for a walk. The one we went up to the albatross meadows, Martin was carried on Nigel's shoulders, and then another occasion we went up to the molly cliffs and watched all the mollies, and also to the penguin, the gentoo rookery, an' Martin was *insistent* that he should stroke a penguin, and he did, but he got bitten for his efforts but he didn't mind, and up on the albatross meadows one of the albatross was very interested in us, and I always had Martin on reins, and I've got a transparency of them. They're about four foot apart and if the albatross took one step forward Martin took one step back, and if Martin put one step forward the albatross took one step back. But, yes, and I really understood how Nigel wanted to keep on going back to Bird Island, you couldn't imagine anywhere more idyllic.

[Part 2 0:40:24] Aston: Was it difficult to have a young child on Bird Island, or did it feel more like a holiday away from [overtalk]?

Bonner: Well for me it felt more like a holiday away, and also it was a time when we were with Nigel and sort of, well you see, you're sort of doing things together even though he might well be writing up his log or something on his notebook or, he didn't do any actual cutting specimens or anything like that while we were up there. I found a skua ring in the mud, so I felt I'd achieved something scientific. Lance Tickell who was doing research on

albatrosses and skuas had put rings on the birds, so it was quite useful for him to know that this ring had been found on Bird Island, even if it wasn't attached to a bird.

[Part 2 0:41:30] Aston: Were you ever sort of worried with Martin around about the birds especially as they can be quite aggressive and with big elephant seals around and big albatross were you ever worried about that?

Bonner: No, there weren't that many fur seals on Bird Island, and we did take our stakes to tickle their whiskers if they came too close, and except round the hut I didn't go out any distance without Nigel. On the Point I was worried about elephant seals, and in the end I had to teach him that they were, they were, not to go near them. But the albatrosses were more frightened of us than we of them. I was more worried about the proximity of the sea actually, to the house. So that we used to go out but I always had him on reins, always when we were down there, just because you've got control of them but they've got freedom, so he could go where he wanted, and I could follow if that's what I wanted, or if I didn't want him to go there I could hold them and call him back.

[Part 2 0:43:05] Aston: And was it a special time for Nigel as well to be able to show you the places he had been going?

Bonner: Oh yes, definitely, and when he went back for the last, 'cos we decided that it would be less disruptive for Martin to come, 'cos we were allowed to come back to the U.K. for one trip during the five years, and we decided it would be better for Martin to come back and stay back, and that Nigel would go down for the last season on his own. And again I would be pregnant and then although there would be only four years between our two children, whereas if I stayed another year, gone back it would be five years. So that's how we arranged it, and Nigel said he didn't like being there on his own, although he was very busy.

[Part 2 0:44:04] Aston: I imagine he must have missed you terribly. So that was your main reasons for returning [overtalk] in 1961?

Bonner: We returned in 1961, yes.

[Part 2 0:44:18] Aston: And so coming back it must have been a huge change.

Bonner: It was enormous change. We were supposed to be coming back to Tilbury, that was the original plan, but the ship that we came, we came back on a ship called *Pollarbris*, which was an oil tanker, *Pollar* - P-o-l-l-a-r, B-r-i-s. It was a Norwegian tanker, I don't know who owned it – I must have known – but it only took three weeks for us to come home, and we went to Amsterdam, and we went to the oil terminal through a canal. So we sort of watched civilisation from the boat, which was known territory, and Martin suddenly said 'Oh look Mummy, penguins!', and I looked and there was Freisian cows in the distance [chuckles], they were black and white. And then we got to the oiling jetty, and of course we'd expected to go to Tilbury, and so there was the problem, how did we get from the oiling jetty to U.K.? Because we couldn't stay, the boat was going to go to Tilbury, but was picking up the owner, and we were in the owner's cabin, and there wasn't accommodation for most, for other people on the boat it was just an oil tanker.

[Part 2 0:46:46] And so we were on the boat and we looked at the, we were looking at this oil depot and I said to Martin 'This is Amsterdam', and he sort of shrugged his shoulders and said 'It's a big Pesca', 'cos it had oil tanks and Pesca had big oil tanks [chuckles]. And he took everything in his stride except he didn't want to get into the taxi, from the oil terminal to the hotel, and I said 'It's just like a pop-pop boat', because we used to go over to the whaling station on the little boat, which he called the pop-pop boat, 'cos it made a 'pop-pop' noise, and he got in then, he thought 'Oh well that's alright, if it's a pop-pop boat it must be alright', and he was fine on the train journey going to the Hook of Holland, and when the train shot past us the noise didn't worry him 'cos of course the whaling station was very noisy, and there was a lot of steam, and as I say we got to London and he settled in very well. And when Nigel went back we got a lot of cards of snow and boats and Nigel wrote messages to him on them, and when I thought he was feeling that Nigel had forgotten him or something I'd drop it on the doormat and then pick it up with the other post, and said 'Look here's the letter from Daddy', and he was, and then Daddy did send mail.

[Part 2 0:47:57] Aston: Was there quite a lot of curiosity in you as well? There was a bit of press coverage and things before you left.

Bonner: Oh yes, and when I, and when we coming back there was, well locally, somehow the local paper got hold of it.

[Part 2 0:48:11] Aston: But what about with your friends were you a bit of a curiosity for a while?

Bonner: Oh definitely, yes, definitely, before I went and when I came back, well ever since really.

[Part 2 0:48:25] Aston: Did you miss it?

Bonner: Oh dreadfully, yes. I think it was probably the happiest two and a half years of our lives, really in many ways, because there wasn't the stress of modern living in many ways, we just, we knew what the parameters were and what we had to do, and there was stress for Nigel because he had to get work done to a deadline and stress because we had to get things out on the mail, we didn't have to go to work, we didn't, nothing, he was, and we weren't ill, and...

[Part 2 0:49:16] Aston: Do you think it helped being apart from Nigel that you knew where he was?

Bonner: Yes, definitely, yes, definitely, and I could understand why we wanted to go back, and after that he became a lecturer, and then a job was available in BAS that he might have applied for, but I wasn't too happy 'cos I knew he'd be going south as often as he could, but at the same time a job came up to be head of the seals unit for the U.K., and although that took him away quite a bit I knew I couldn't say 'No' to that. And then seven years later when the head of life sciences came up at BAS, and the children were older, I understood why he wanted to go back.

[Part 2 0:50:12] Aston: Have you ever been back?

Bonner: No, no. I think when he went back to South Georgia he was very upset by its, that's 1974, about the derelict whaling stations, and it was about space then, but it was sort of remembering all the happy times we'd had there at the whaling stations, and then of course he went down and started the museum and got that going. And then we were talking about him going on a cruise ship as a lecturer, and you can go on a cruise ship as a lecturer and not be paid and your wife can go with you, and we thought we'd do that, 'cos then I could go down to Rothera and places like that which he'd written about but I'd never seen, but that wasn't to be, and then I would hopefully we would have gone to South Georgia. But still.

[Part 2 0:51:22] Aston: Mmm. And so you had to pick one particular memory from South Georgia that really sticks out for you?

Bonner: Oh, Bird Island without a doubt, Bird Island without a doubt.

[Part 2 0:51:33] Aston: And a bad time, cleaning out the...?

Bonner: Chickens! Cleaning out the chickens.

[Part 2 0:51:40] Aston: Fine. Wonderful. Thank you very much.

Possible extracts:

- Husband arrives in South Georgia with appendicitis. [Part 1 0:08:05]
- Jenny's 'mega voyage' to South Georgia. [Part 1 0:15:07]
- Her arrival at South Georgia. [Part 1 0:23:39]
- Returns home after only 11 days. Part 1 [0:28:08]
- Husband negotiates five year contract for both to return to South Georgia. [Part 1 0:31:18]
- Jenny describes the living environment around the whaling station. [Part 1 0:32:24]
- Young children on South Georgia. [Part 1 0:46:15]
- Feeding baby Martin, with generous help from Heinz. [Part 1 0:50:13]
- A second voyage to South Georgia, this time with baby Martin. [Part 1 0:52:08]
- Transfer from luxury cruise ship to oil tanker, and subsequent special arrangements for mother and baby. [Part 1 0:54:57]
- A new home in South Georgia. [Part 2 0:00:13]
- Babysitters. [Part 2 0:08:25]
- Martin's interesting Norwegian 'grandfather'. [Part 2 0:10:32]
- Norwegian friends, and learning the language. [Part 2 0:14:23]
- Procuring food supplies. [Part 2 0:17:53]
- Jenny's visit to Bird Island. [Part 2 0:31:41]
- Return to civilisation after five years, and Martin's introduction to a different world. [Part 2 0:44:18]