

CLAIRE LEHMAN

Edited transcript of a recording of Claire Lehman interviewed by Chris Eldon Lee in Durrington, Wiltshire on 10th June 2011. BAS Archives reference AD6/24/1/121. Transcribed by Dawn Sutcliffe on 30th June 2017

[Part 1 0:00:00] Lee: This is Claire Lehman recorded by Chris Eldon Lee on the 10th June 2011. Claire Lehman part one.

Lehman: My name's Dr Claire Lehman and my date of birth is the 21st February 1980 and my place of birth, as my friends like to call it, is Amasingstoke but is actually Basingstoke, Hampshire

[Part 1 0:00:21] Lee: What sort of education did you have Claire?

Lehman: I went to primary school in Whitewater in Rotherwick in a little village in Hampshire and then I went to state school in Basingstoke called Bishop Challoner which is a Catholic School, and then I went to the sixth form college in Alton also in Hampshire and then off to University

[Part 1 0:00:41] Lee: To study?

Lehman: To study medicine at Corpus Christy College in Oxford. Sounds like the start of University Challenge

[Part 1 0:00:49] Lee: Your starter for ten! Is there a history of medicine in the family?

Lehman: Don't think so. Very distantly there was a Great Uncle who was a surgeon in Italy but a great, great uncle many moons ago so I don't know.

[Part 1 0:01:00] Lee: So what drew you to a medical career?

Lehman: When I was doing my GCSE's and my 'A' Levels I've always been interested in science, and the results came back first grades for GCSE's and predicted grades for 'A' Levels were quite good, and I thought about applying for biochemistry. I was thinking about it and then I thought 'well actually it would be quite nice to know some of the diseases I'd be treating if I did biochemistry so I'll apply for medicine and if I get in I'll do that and if I don't gain a place, I shall apply though clearing and go to do biochemistry somewhere'. It was rather divine intervention that I ended up doing this really.

[Part 1 0:01:34] Lee: Did you actually practice as a GP or a doctor? What did you choose to do when you finished University?

Lehman: I decided to practice as a GP. I had a brief time, 6 months in Sweden after I did my first house officer jobs, and served a bit of public health there and then decided to go into GP training and I was working as a GP and doing all the training for it in Salisbury down in Wiltshire. I was working the hospital jobs there doing A&E and paediatrics and obs and gynae and some psychiatry and then I did my GP registrar year, that's the final year of GP training in Fordingbridge, so back to Hampshire. I had a two month hiatus between my hospital jobs and general practice and I went to India for a couple of months as an expedition doctor with Raleigh International; slightly varied career.

[Part 1 0:02:24] Lee: What was your first awareness of a place called the Antarctic?

Lehman: I remember being in the library at the medical school in Oxford in my final year and we were planning our electives. There's a big tome of a book called The Elective Planning but I can't remember the actual title, but there was also a couple of copies of the BMJ beside it. I was flicking through and there was an article about a doctor who'd just returned from the Antarctic. I was absolutely captivated. I love freezing cold places and as it was I was already thinking about applying for an elective in Newfoundland in Canada during the winter. I actually emailed my now boss, Pete Marquis, as a medical student saying 'I don't suppose you take elective students but I'm just curious about the job'. He said 'no you're right we don't take elective students but this is a bit more about the job.' I always had that in my mind subsequently when I was pursuing my career as a professional

[Part 1 0:03:15] Lee: So at what point in your life did that take place?

Lehman: The first awareness of it? It was in 2003 or 2004, actually before I'd qualified as a doctor, and then it was in 2009 (...)

[Part 1 0:03:28] Lee: So you kind of squirrelled that away did you?

Lehman: Yea, so 2008 I applied so it was about 5 years after the initial awareness of it. Looking back at the girl reading a journal in medical school at University as a student, it's hard to imagine that I'm now within that time actually gone and done the jobs.

[Part 1 0:03:47] Lee: And come back

Lehman: Yea, and survived.

[Part 1 0:03:50] Lee: So what was it that sparked off the desire to apply formally to BAS in 2008?

Lehman: I was coming towards the end of my GP training always with the idea of the Antarctic in the background and always mentioned it to various friends and wanting to get involved in expedition medicine, primarily with Antarctica in mind. I was coming to the end of my training and googled to find out when the application was out; I was looking for the previous year's application because I thought it was in October and was preparing in advance. This was about August, September time and actually bizarrely that year the adverts were earlier so I was really lucky that I did it at that time. I happened to find the advert and applied for that. I wanted to give Antarctica a go; there was no way I could not apply for it.

[Part 1 0:04:39] Lee: So you got an interview I guess. What do you remember of the interview?

Lehman: It was a funny day. I remember it was actually Halloween so 31st October, and I was having a Halloween party that evening in Salisbury. The interview itself was down in Plymouth so the morning before the interview I was carving pumpkins at home in my house in Salisbury for a party that evening I had planned. Jumped on the train, it was snowing so I didn't know whether I'd get there on time. Made it to Plymouth, had my interview and there were about 6 people in the interview room. It went on for about an hour chatting about various things and asking questions. Ann Hicks was there, who is now the Clinical lead at ¹BASMU, and Pete Marquis who's the manager of it, who's also a former Fid at Rothera, and some members of staff from BAS as well. I just remember being myself and answering the questions as they were directed. And then meeting the girls Sue and Ali upstairs afterwards who are the secretaries for BASMU. And jumping on the train afterwards and somewhere between Exeter and Plymouth receiving a phone call on my mobile, I think I was the last interview of the day, from Ann Hicks telling me to have my passport ready and that I was going to Antarctica and I was going to Rothera. There was a girl weeping with delight on the South West train! I think the people beside me thought it was slightly unusual. Then opening some champagne when we got home and having a very good Halloween party [laughs]

¹ BASMU – British Antarctic Survey Medical Unit

[Part 1 0:06:02] Lee: So you knew within hours?

Lehman: Yea [laughs]

[Part 1 0:06:05] Lee: What do you recall of the interview itself? Was it rigorous would you say?

Lehman: Yea it was. They've got to ascertain that you've got a sane person in front of you who's got an awareness of what the job entails. Unusually for an interview we were asked, normally as standard interview practice you wouldn't ask about personal relationships or family so much, but they asked have you thought about what would happen if a first degree relative were to become poorly whilst you are away. Was I in a relationship that would jeopardise me going? You don't necessarily have to answer but I answered as best I could. Even after the initial interview I don't think it was until we were actually down there you fully appreciate some of the ramifications of being away in Antarctica for 18 months. I was very fortunate, my family stayed very well while I've been away. Yea, I've been lucky.

[Part 1 0:07:05] Lee: Do you think you were being psyched out, sussed out psychologically?

Lehman: Oh yes, absolutely. There was, I seem to have forgotten his name, the head of HR at the time, he's subsequently retired but he's got many years of experience within BAS and he's very hot on people. So BAS don't use psychometric testing formally like other countries do: Just normal conversation but they're obviously (...) you've got two people watching you, a couple of people asking questions, two other people writing notes. It's quite intense but they need to make sure they get the right person for the job. Hopefully I please them.

[Part 1 0:07:46] Lee: So there was no formal psychometric testing, there's just seat of the pants stuff, which is the way BAS has always done it over the decades.

Lehman: Yes, over decades

[Part 1 0:07:55] Lee: You've probably heard about that guy Bill Sloman who's the guy who did it for several decades around the interviews

Lehman: Yes, I'm trying to remember his name but I can't remember

[Part 1 0:08:06] Lee: It doesn't matter, it'll come. So what did you have to do between getting that phone call and catching that plane?

Lehman: Well, the job was due to start in April of 2009 so 6 months later effectively. I had to finish my GP training in the meantime, finish my exams, gain my specialist certificate

[Part 1 0:08:25] Lee: Was that a condition of getting the job?

Lehman: No not at all just for my own personal, professional progression. We have 6 months training in Plymouth before we go away where we're supernumerary and having training bespoke to our needs. There were 4 doctors myself included, one going to Halley, one going to South Georgia and one going on the ²JCR. The Halley doctor had done surgery in anaesthetics so he had to gain some more general practice experience, and the 3 other of us were all girls were all GP's so had to gain more experience in anaesthetics and surgery. So doing that, we also did courses in radiology, learning how to take x-rays and develop them. Physiotherapy, dentistry, basic surgical skills, ophthalmology, basic life support, advanced life support, advanced life support and trauma. Quite a few courses, it was a quite busy 6 months before going away.

[Part 1 0:09:27] Lee: As a doctor you started much earlier than most of the other Fids?

Lehman: Yea

[Part 1 0:09:31] Lee: And when you say Plymouth what do you mean?

Lehman: At Derriford Hospital; it's where the British Antarctic Survey Medical Unit is based. Largely operating from the A&E unit there where we have 24 hour support all the time we're out in the field. So we were based from hospital and spent time within Derriford Hospital itself and also some specialist hospitals close by for example the Eye Hospital, having our training there. So it was quite a busy 6 months.

[Part 1 0:09:59] Lee: Before I forget to ask the question, did you ever have to ring them up?

Lehman: Yea

[Part 1 0:10:02] Lee: You did?

Lehman: Yea

[Part 1 0:10:03] Lee: Can you tell me about that without naming names?

² BAS ship – *James Clark Ross*

Lehman: I had to contact them quite a bit when I was away. Often I contacted Derriford or BASMU for basic touching base and checking things are alright. But in acute situations I've had to phone up Derriford and speak to them directly. They have a special phone in the A&E department called the bat phone which is the Antarctic phone so when that one rings it's just from us. We generally speak to the most senior doctor on the shop floor as we call it, out treating patients in A&E. I've always had very good response and very good support from them. Sometimes we've had to contact specialist doctors via them and then email photos back and forth; taking digital photographs, putting them on to the computer, emailing them and then receiving emails back. We don't have it advanced enough yet to use skype directly because the internet band width isn't great enough. But the photographs and chatting works well over the telephone and taking photos of x-rays and things like that. We don't have digital x-rays where we are, it's a bit old school. Old school works well in Antarctica

[Part 1 0:11:06] Lee: Can you imagine doing all that by Morse code?

Lehman: No! [laughs] Exactly; it would be a bit of a nightmare

[Part 1 0:11:15] Lee: I'm aware of your oaths that's why I don't know how much you can tell me about (...) Can you give me an example of a situation that you've had to deal with which doesn't necessarily identify anybody?

Lehman: I had somebody who managed to hurt their foot and basically it was swollen, could have been a fracture so having to take a photo of that. It wasn't very clear whether it was a fracture or not. Contacting BASMU, emailing the actual x-ray across and letting them know and finding out and then working out what to do next.

[Part 1 0:11:53] Lee: So you could take an x-ray at Rothera but you couldn't diagnose (...)

Lehman: Oh I can if it's an obvious thing but sometimes you might need to (...)

[Part 1 0:12:00] Lee: Second opinion?

Lehman: Yea. Sometimes there can be a delay between presentation and actual incident happening which muddies the waters somewhat. Definitely for dental things I was often having to take x-rays and sometimes they're more difficult to interpret. So we would often email the dentists, which is a separate part of BASMU as well, with dental x-rays to see what they thought of those.

[Part 1 0:12:24] Lee: So did you find yourself doing more GP work than you imagined or less because you are surrounded by young, fit people weren't you really?

Lehman: If anything I ended up doing things more akin to normal general practice than I thought I would do because BAS is quite accepting of older people or people with other illnesses that some other countries may not because we've got the infrastructure to deal with it. There were some people coming down who had blood pressure problems for example or cholesterol or looking at other things. Also as a young fit population there are still things that people need for example young women seeking contraception or young guys with questions about sexual health. All of that standard part of current general practice still happens regardless of age and it was nice to have a mix of other things as well. For example blood pressure to keep your awareness going of those things so you don't forget about them when you come back, which is good.

[Part 1 0:13:22] Lee: Let's go back to Plymouth then. It seemed to be a very intensive course. At any point whilst you were at Plymouth did you have any doubts about your ability to cope with any of this?

Lehman: I applied myself well to all of the courses and passed them and my consultants were happy with the progress. I'm somebody who always, I'm probably too modest and to an extent always think I need to know more. Sometimes that can come across as someone who is not (...) I'd be kind of seeking assurance from my consultants that I was doing as I should be doing possibly slightly more than some people who were rather gung-ho and yes I'm definitely doing that always right. I think I've got better at being more confident since being away; you have to be when you're the only doctor around for a few thousand miles [laughs]. And also because other people are doing it so that's been a useful thing.

[Part 1 0:14:24] Lee: Were you at any time putting up a front when you were down south, the impression of being confident? One of the requirements of a GP is to look and feel confident so the patient has confidence in you?

Lehman: No, I would never say I put on a front because that's not very me. I behave professionally; I wouldn't put on a front. It's different for each individual doctor but personally if I don't know something I'd rather say to the patient 'that's actually something I am not particularly familiar with' because patients often present the things that you may

not be particularly familiar with. They may present with the most rarest disease they picked up in Guatemala for example and I'm not a specialist on Guatemalan skin diseases for example. I'd have to read up on it. I'd rather say to the patient 'well it's all absolutely fine at the moment, there's nothing really worrying me right now, but this is something I need to get more au fait with. How about you come back tomorrow and we'll have another look at it then' which gives me time to then speak to the people who are authorities on rare diseases and things like that to actually confer with them. I never put on a front because that's not me and it's not how I practice. If I don't know something I would convey that and deal with it accordingly and appropriately.

[Part 1 0:15:42] Lee: The question didn't quite come out as I intended

Lehman: That's ok, that's fine [Laughs]

[Part 1 0:15:47] Lee: In a village like Durrington the doctor and the vicar are significant individuals aren't they? They're kind of respected members of the community? Was that repeated in Rothera? Did you find that being the doctor on base you were (...)

Lehman: No you were more ridiculed rather than anything else

[Part 1 0:16:00] Lee: Oh are you? Tell me about that

Lehman: Because of confidentiality quite often people aren't aware that you're seeing anybody at all. That's how it should be to be honest. In a small community you don't want people finding out things inadvertently and I go to great lengths to avoid that. Consequently people often think the doctors doing nothing, and there's this general joke that the doctor's never doing anything, they're always just sitting around twiddling their fingers; which is largely true, no I joke. We have a lot to do. The other thing is, since I've come back this last fortnight, I've been back to general practice seeing 40 patients a day. In Rothera I see maximum 40 patients a month and informal consultations. The volume of patients you see, it keeps you more abreast of things, where when you're not doing that you've got to make a real vested effort to make sure you're compensating for that lack of experience you're gaining with patients some other way, so you don't lose out on your skills and your knowledge. So quite a lot of the time when I wasn't seeing patients, when I wasn't doing other jobs that I had to do on base, I was addressing those needs, so reading round issues, reading papers. With the internet there are learning modules you can do online and things

like that. It's called continuing professional development is the technical term for it.

[Part 1 0:17:15] Lee: You had to make a particular effort to do that?

Lehman: Yes. Which some people can see as you just fiddling round on the internet because people can misperceive; 'oh yes they are on facebook or checking their emails'. No, actually I am learning about prostrate problems or blood pressure, diabetes: I haven't seen too much of that down here recently, which is hard to convey to people sometimes.

[Part 1 0:17:36] Lee: Let's go back to Plymouth then. You'd done your course at Plymouth and the next step was to go to Cambridge, to Girton College for the famous conference. Tell me about that experience

Lehman: It was brilliant. The weekend before conference I'd actually been to a festival on the Isle of White so I'd had a really lovely weekend with glorious weather with my friends from University. I arrived at conference; fortunately I'd met the Base Commander John Withers before and also the winter Base Commander Dickie Hall. So I had met a couple of people at Cambridge already; so a few familiar faces. And just started meeting people I was going to be going away with. It was beautiful weather and a really dynamic bunch of people; it was a really fun week. I really enjoyed it. I met Ashley who is now the boat woman at ³KEP, she came down to Rothera initially with me. So made some really good firm friends and we had a bit of a swimming group in the morning going on. Ian Dunn and Ashley and myself, there was a little pool at Girton college, we used to go in the morning before lectures started. I really enjoyed the week.

[Part 1 0:18:46] Lee: What did you make of the intellectual input of that course apart from the social side of things which is equally important, but those 3 days, it was more than 3 days wasn't it?

Lehman: It's almost a week. There's a lot to take in because you're being taught in all manner of different aspects of Antarctic living. But I think it's a great idea because even with it you arrive and wow it's all very different, but at least you've got an awareness of that before you arrive and step off the plane. 'Oh yes I know I am going to be able to go in these areas' or there's a fire board or things like that, the kind of practical aspects of life. Looking back on it to be honest the week went by in such a blur I think because you are just meeting people the whole

³ King Edward Point

time and going from one workshop and new relationships. By the end of the week you're teaching first aid as well with the medical course. It was just a real busy week of learning about what BAS does and Antarctica; what the different bases are like

[Part 1 0:19:46] Lee: What sort of impression did you get of BAS at that point? I'm thinking particularly the historical perspective because David Walton gave quite a moving talk about the origins of FIDS

Lehman: That was really moving because it just puts it all into perspective. You realise you're taking part in this extraordinary institution and this part of history that you're actually taking part in. So very few people do actually get to go to Antarctica let alone to winter, and having that put into context it made it feel incredibly special. It made me feel very fortunate to be able to do that. I also very much enjoyed Chris Debrowski, who's one of the artists who went down a few years ago, did a fabulous presentation which was so funny on his work, making photo frames out of Nanson sledges or no, making a Nanson sledge out of a photo frame! There were fun aspects of it as well. The historical perspective certainly made it seem special

[Part 1 0:20:46] Lee: I'll talk to you about him when we finish. Then you were off to Derbyshire to do the physical cliff rescue and crevasse rescue training?

Lehman: Yes

[Part 1 0:20:55] Lee: That was the last time I saw you

Lehman: Yes that was wasn't it? Gosh I was petrified myself getting off the cliff [laughs] before I went away I've never really played around with ropes and harnesses off cliff faces in high winds, or in any winds at all in fact. That was a baptism of fire which I thoroughly enjoyed. I'm really glad we did that before we went down onto a completely alien environment of ice and snow, because it was very different.

[Part 1 0:21:24] Lee: Did you have to use anything you picked up on that field trip?

Lehman: Yea, certainly getting familiar with putting on harnesses and roping up. I did lots of climbing and walking and skiing over crevasse terrain and on glaciers. So you've got to be ready and prepared how to do those basic simple things like tying various knots. There's a pulley system thing that we have to practice doing for retrieving people from crevasses. Fortunately we never had to do that but we also had to revise it during the time we were there so we were familiar with how to do it

if we needed to. I've had to do an ice axe arrest for someone before as well but I learnt that when I was down there.

[Part 1 0:22:00] Lee: You have?

Lehman: Yea in my first summer a group of us, Ashley, Adam and I were walking up Stork one of the hills, mountains near base and Adam slipped last and his foot went down into a crevasse and I immediately crashed to the floor with my ice axe, sort of arrested it; that held us above

[Part 1 0:22:31] Lee: You were all roped up together?

Lehman: Yea Ashley, Adam and I were all roped up but I can't remember how, but yes.

[Part 1 0:22:36] Lee: OK, The date of departure approaches. I think in your case you got delayed didn't you?

Lehman: Yea I got delayed several times. Flights always change. With BAS everything's always changing so even if you think you're going tomorrow you may well not be. That's just by virtue of weather, flights, operational requirements, which in the end worked out well because I got to have bonfire night in the UK which I was very glad about. I had a fabulous last few weeks before I went away, we went to a brilliant concert in London, had a lovely time meeting friends in London, going down to Dorset one last time to go to the beach at Studland, getting to spend a bit more time with my family. Seeing autumn properly, going to some friends 30th birthday parties. I turned 30 when I was away, and the spurt of my school friends were starting to turn 30 so at least I got to go to a couple of parties before going away. I was driving round the UK rather frenetically trying to make the most of seeing people before I wouldn't be able to. I'm really glad I did that.

[Part 1 0:23:35] Lee: Who were you leaving behind? Who was important to you?

Lehman: My Mother, my Sister, my Dad and then lots of good school friends.

[Part 1 0:23:46] Lee: Did you have any parental opposition to your idea of going to the Antarctic?

Lehman: No not at all. My parents are both very supportive of my sister and I doing exciting things. Just before I'd gone away my sister was living in Shanghai for two and a half years and had literally come back the

summer before I went so I think they're quite used to it. Before that she'd been to Nepal and I'd been to India so I think our parents are quite supportive of us going off and being adventurous and trying new things.

[Part 1 0:24:13] Lee: So how did you get there?

Lehman: Ashley and I were travelling together which was really nice

[Part 1 0:24:19] Lee: Give me Ashley's second name

Lehman: Ashley Perrin. She's now boat woman at KEP. We forged a friendship from conference when we first met and that was really nice because then we ended up travelling together.

[Part 1 0:24:29] Lee: Is she North American?

Lehman: Yes. She has a British passport as well I think. Who else was with us? Steve Colwell who's a meteorologist and Adam Lane who's a Navy pilot and Chris Boden as well, both Navy people going down to work as radio operators so we were all travelling together. We started off at Heathrow, Ashley's parents and my family, we all had a joint lunch together in Pret a Manger before a rather tearful farewell as late as possible before the gate was about to close. Then frantically flying onto Madrid, and then changing at Madrid to fly to Santiago. We had a 24 hour stay over in Santiago which was brilliant having gone from dreary November weather in the UK to 30 degrees sunshine, glorious! We had a very nice time there soaking up some South American life and then flying down via Punta Arenas to the Falkland Islands where we then had about 3 days in the Falklands so going from glorious sunshine back to weather rather reminiscent of the UK.

[Part 1 0:25:33] Lee: What happened in the Falklands? Was that just rest over or were you actually being kitted out?

Leman: No, it was just rest over waiting for the flights in terms of they weren't scheduled and the way the flights worked we had to have a few days there. We made the most of it and went out on a tour around the Falkland Islands in a 4X4 with a local chap showing us all the war areas, we went to Goose Green, San Carlos Bay and had supper in his croft. It was lovely. The day came and the weather was good and we drove up to the airport at Mount Pleasant and boarded our plane to Antarctica. That's a really unusual experience, the first time you walk out to a plane and carry your own bags on [laughs]. The bus drives you

to the door; this is the start of something unusual! It's funny how normal that actually becomes where you can just drive up to a plane and just pop your things in and then you're off. It became part of the course, it's slightly unusual to now go to an airport and wait around. I prefer it the other way!

[Part 1 0:26:34] Lee: Let's get you to Rothera there, you've seen photographs you've heard all about it. What was it like in reality?

Lehman: It was amazing flying in. I was the winterer on board so I got to go in the jump seat for landing and they were like 'it's just there, it's just there'. It was a beautiful day and this expanse of white and sea and the occasional iceberg. I was like 'I can't see where this place is'. It was literally the final bank and I saw this dot below, I thought 'oh my gosh that's it!' Everything around it was just massive, huge expanse of grandeur mountains and sea and this tiny little dot which was going to be my home for 18 months. As soon as I stepped off the plane I was like 'oh my gosh this is just perfect, I'm meant to be here'. It just felt brilliant. It's a beautiful place, really stunning. John Withers was there to welcome us onto the ground which was lovely. Then there was a bombardment of safety briefings and finding where things were. I was like 'oh my gosh there's penguins and there's icebergs!' Even for about a month afterwards I was still(...) to be honest until I left I was still overawed by what surrounded me.

[Part 1 0:27:46] Lee: What did you make of the scale of the place?

Lehman: You obviously see maps with a scale on it; it's always difficult to envisage what it's going to be like. I think it was the same size as I was expecting it to be. It's quite a large base spread over quite a reasonable sized area with several individual buildings. I think that's better to have several buildings; it gives you different environments. You don't feel like you're just living and working in the same place day in day out. Whereas Halley or somewhere further south there's a need because the weather's so inclement to have everything in one building. We are quite fortunate where we are to have it in several buildings and there's also merit in having separate buildings because if one goes into flames you've got other ones in reserve which is always useful. It just felt like home.

[Part 1 0:28:39] Lee: But did it feel like a scientific establishment or a university building or an aircraft hangar? How did it feel?

Lehman: We had aircraft hangar and we had university building. It's hard to imagine, I was going to say it felt like a professional place to be but at the same time it also felt like home. I guess that's partly because I wintered there and I made my room my home for the 18 months I was there. I was lucky I got to keep that room and it felt familiar. Having just been to the surgery I worked a previously stay, it felt a similar kind of familiarity about it. But they've got really remarkable facilities down in the Bonner laboratory. Old Bransfield's looking slightly tired and I think they're going to redo it. There was hope for a new building to replace it but it's not going to happen quite yet. New Bransfield's an amazing building. It's the building where everybody socialises, eats, that's where the library is, some visiting offices, and that's only a couple of years old, and it's beautiful. It's a really good welcome to Antarctica for the British Antarctic Survey.

[Part 1 0:29:46] Lee: What about the doctor's surgery? How was it for you? How did you 'Claire' it?

Lehman: Well I cleared it! Set to scrubbing things and taking books off walls. I think it depends on doctors, different doctors are different. There's some beautiful old bits of vintage kit and you've got to be cautious of throwing too much away because actually quite frankly the older stuff actually works much better in that you don't have the problems with expiry dates and things like that on older bits of kit than you do on new. If they still work obviously, you don't want to have something that you've got that doesn't work that isn't actually useful. I made it more welcoming, there weren't too many photos on the wall so I put a few more up; made it more comfortable. In my surgery in the UK in my general practice, I had my own photos and things on the wall so made it more like home.

[Part 1 0:30:40] Lee: Had you been involved in any way in ordering what you would need, so drugs, kit, medicines?

Lehman: Not for that first year. Every year the doctor during winter orders what's required for the subsequent winter, so the doctor prior to me ordered what would come for me and the doctor prior to him ordered for him. There's always a time delay and there's a general basic list of things that they always have. I did actually make a couple of changes when I arrived because most people going to do the job aren't necessarily always general practitioners and there are certain things that were missing off the list that I was saying 'oh actually maybe we should get this'

[Part 1 0:31:20] Lee: So you were adding to the list were you?

Lehman: Yea and just making some minor things, adding a different kind of contraceptive pill that we didn't have before and things like that.

[Part 1 0:31:28] Lee: Were you able to do that before the weather closed down?

Lehman: Yes, in the summer you can get some things in relatively quickly, in a fortnight if you need it

[Part 1 0:31:37] Lee: Oh right, so one of the first things was to work out what was missing?

Lehman: Yes, it wasn't so much missing

[Part 1 0:31:44] Lee: To broaden the scope?

Lehman: Yea. And also sometimes things would expire, we hadn't necessarily anticipated them expiring when they had so sometimes you'd get drugs hand carried down by people. Hopefully that was ok to say? Via BAS mail because obviously you don't want to give certain things through the Royal Mail because they take a time delay to get down whereas people carrying it from Cambridge down seems to work better. We often had bits coming down which was quite handy.

[Part 1 0:32:09] Lee: So tell me about those first few days because part of it was to get used to it. I guess there was a hand over period of sorts was there?

Lehman: Yes there was. The first few days was getting used to being there. Everybody arriving has a certain degree of basic training they've got to do so our second night out there we camped on snow in the pyramid tents up at Vals. That was extraordinary, using metal stoves, and putting primus lamps up, Tilley lamps and sleeping on the P-bag system. So your thermarest, sheepskin rug, sleeping bag or flame retardant liner, silk liner, you're like a bug in a rug. It's really warm. Doing that for the first time, that was amazing. So it's like 'oh my gosh, I've just arrived in Antarctica and I'm camping already' it's amazing. So that was brilliant. Then doing some basic training out on the hill, the ice axe arrest and things like that. As soon as that was finished we could get on to doing work specific handovers. The doctor that was there, I had a handover of probably about 4 to 6 weeks in total. There was an initial kind of handover of things I needed to know immediately where all the emergency things were, because there's not much use in having a doctor there and don't even know where the defibrillator is, so that was pretty early on in the first few days just

finding the emergency kits and drugs and then gradually, it was rather ad hoc, but working our way through. It was slightly more structured the second year.

[Part 1 0:33:39] Lee: And then that doctor left after a while?

Lehman: He actually left at last call at the end of the summer. He went out into the field I think before Christmas, yea before Christmas he went out.

[Part 1 0:33:51] Lee: So you were actually on your own in the base as a base doctor quite early on?

Lehman: Yea I think it was before Christmas he went out, yea. And it did feel different I have to say. It did feel different because that was the first time I have ever been a sole doctor anywhere. I think for anyone that would feel different! I was speaking to my colleagues today, a bunch of GP's with thirty years' experience each, none of them would fancy doing what I just did so that's me for you, and I end up getting junior doctor, or senior. That was quite interesting. You never know when you're going to get called for doing something either. It makes life always slightly more interesting.

[Part 1 0:34:32] Lee: Well how was that psychologically for you?

Lehman: It was quite hard. I envisaged it probably being difficult and I think it very much depends on the individual as to how they perceive their role there and how they perceive their role professionally generally. So for me if something were to happen I'd always want to be able to respond regardless of the situation. As far as alcohol is concerned I didn't ever become tipsy, I'd have a glass of wine with supper but I didn't want to be able to not respond if something happened when I was the only doctor around. Initially when winter first started, there was no other doctor for miles around then, and I'd go to bed running through certain scenarios my mind 'ok so if this happens (...)' carry out in my mind what things might possibly happen so I had the emergency things already in my mind what would go on. I can't remember when it was at some point in the first few weeks of winter I just relaxed. I was like 'what will happen will happen'.

[Part 1 0:35:39] Lee: So you were doing mental rehearsals of possible scenarios?

Lehman: Yea, something would crop up in my mind, and it would be like 'oh yea what happens if this would happen?' And that's just what I'm like; I'm the kind of person that pre-empts problems, and I'm pre-emptive

rather than reactionary to problems generally. I'd rather prevent something happening rather than having to deal with the consequences of something happening.

[Part 1 0:35:59] Lee: Did the responsibility ever cause you to lose any sleep, or the equivalent of losing sleep?

Lehman: I think initially it did, at least I certainly had a bit of trouble sleeping initially just because I was like 'oh gosh'. And then I realised it would be unsustainable to have that degree of (...) I wasn't anxious but (...) I chatted it through with the folks back in the office in the UK and it was just like 'It's fine, it'll happen'. It was fine and things do happen when you least expect them to and you deal with them and that's what I am there to do, and I did.

[Part 1 0:36:41] Lee: So did you have an emergency at all?

Lehman: Yea unfortunately I can't really say very much about them. Things happen when you least expected them, and for minor little things that aren't that significant to things quite challenging and it really would be when you least expect it to so you'd always have your radio with you and just deal with it. After the first time when it happened it was like 'doctor, doctor can you come to this place' and after that first time of that happening as an emergency, it was quite early on in winter, there's a switch that takes you into that and you just deal with it. As soon as that first time of it happened and I dealt with it, I was then much more comfortable with it. I knew that I could just deal with whatever came, and I was fine.

[Part 1 0:37:40] Lee: Did I remember you saying you had to make a decision about medevacking somebody out?

Lehman: The doctors on the floor, we never directly make the decision about medevacking somebody out. We impart the knowledge to the doctors back in BAS. It is the consultant's decisions that make those decisions. We are vehicles in the pathway so to speak, although our clinical acumen and decisions (...)

[Part 1 0:38:04] Lee: You're kind of an interpreter really aren't you?

Lehman: Yea, in seeing what's going on in the shop floor; because obviously they can't see the patient directly in front of them?

[Part 1 0:38:13] Lee: So somebody was evacuated at some point [pause] Sorry you haven't got to answer that question, sorry. I'm trying to get to you how you felt about all that, having to do that

Lehman: It didn't bother me at all. That's the job I'm there to do and as far as I see the role of the doctor being in Antarctica, you're there as rather a large insurance policy. Because you're there to deal with what can be dealt with locally, and to inform accurately what needs to happen if it does need to go further afield. If you hadn't had a doctor there there'd certainly so many more people flying back and forth unnecessarily, for medivacs or whatever, than having had one there. Which is obviously a good thing; because it shows we are doing our job correctly. But I never felt uncomfortable if I had somebody away; it's never a decision that's made lightly. Every single time that decision is made with the patient's best interest at heart, and it's never a decision that's made lightly, it's a very considered decision.

[Part 1 0:39:19] Lee: There are stories in the old days, well not necessarily very old days, of doctor's having to weigh up the condition of the patient against the dangers that might be experienced by other people trying to get them out

Lehman: Yea. Fortunately we were never in that position so I never had to try and medivac anybody in the middle of winter. So I was fortunate in so far that whenever I had to do anything to extricate a patient it was always during summer. The weather was always fine; I didn't have to weigh up any pros and cons of risk to anybody else. So that was fine. I was always fortunate in a way that the flights always seemed to be timely or useful if ever I had to send anybody out.

[Part 1 0:40:00] Lee: Let's move onto other things then. I'm conscious of the boundaries although I don't want to stop you from telling me something you think was appropriate. You were doing some medical research as is the tradition with doctors in the Antarctic because you haven't got an awful lot of GP work to do, there's time to do other things.

Lehman: Yea. Part of doing the Masters in Remote Healthcare that we do through the Peninsular Medical School down in Plymouth, which is now running the masters programme for doctors going to Antarctica; it was actually a really good course. Part of what I did was a research project and I designed a research project looking at swine flu. Just before I went away there was a swine flu epidemic worldwide so it was quite pertinent. I ran a study by taking throat swabs from everybody that arrived at Rothera, well trying to get everybody that arrived at

Rothera and then following a week cohort as well to see whether anyone actually got swine flu, and if they did whether there was anything being passed round between people. People kept diaries of who they were in contact with. I managed to get my swabs back to the UK and I remember being in Antarctica I managed to get them back from Antarctica, to Cambridge without any problem at all. They had to be stowed at -80 degrees centigrade

[Part 1 0:41:19] Lee: Minus 80?

Lehman: Yea to prevent a replication of the viruses. There was the most ridiculous challenge you could possibly imagine to get them from Cambridge to Bristol to the Health protection agency. It was one of the most difficult things to organise ever, trying to organise a flight to the moon would have been easier probably. I managed it eventually [laughs]

[Part 1 0:41:39] Lee: Tell me more about that?

Lehman: It was just the way logistics of transporting samples from non-hospitals. If I could have got to Cambridge to drive for myself it would have been fine but unfortunately I was in Antarctica at the time middle of winter, wasn't so easy. But I did manage to get them there.

[Part 1 0:41:53] Lee: But you had to get a mobile fridge did you to get them from (...)

Lehman: It's more to do with getting a carrier who has licences to carry viral samples

[Part 1 0:42:00] Lee: Paperwork?

Lehman: Yes and health and safety things. But anyway they've gone there, unfortunately there has been another epidemic since and so they still haven't assayed my samples. I'm waiting for results of that still. Fortunately the professor who I was liaising with I'm actually going to be at the University he is now or he's a professor at from October, so fingers crossed I can get my samples assayed over the summer and have a useful cohort of data to use come the autumn and actually write it up.

[Part 1 0:42:33] Lee: Were you able to do any analysis in the Antarctic or was it all just taking swabs and parcelling them up?

Lehman: Taking the swabs and parcelling them up and then also doing a bit of analysis of the diary data because I can't do anything with the swab data until I've actually got the results from the swabs. I had a brief look at the diary data but it's a bit difficult to interpret without the swab results so it's rather work in progress. But the other part of the Masters have been very useful, we did a leadership module as well which was in the middle of winter. It was really nice to have something gritty to get your teeth into and seemed rather pertinent as well in an area where Antarctica is a place renowned for leaders and examples of leadership. So to be doing that and studying leadership during that period was quite useful. It was quite interesting.

[Part 1 0:43:22] Lee: Going back to the swine flu, were you aware just as a casual observation of people becoming ill in the Antarctic?

Lehman: We were certainly very keen to prevent swine flu arriving so we prevented any tourist ships coming in. So there were no unnecessary visits last year in my first summer. We were very cautious with hand washing and if anybody became poorly we isolated in their rooms. You had a greater awareness of it. I think to an extent you have to have that anyway in a small isolated community but because of the severity of the swine flu going round we had to be even more so. People did become poorly with flu and things but some people who developed a cold or flu for example on route down were being held in the Falklands for 5 days as a pro tem measure. It did have an operational effect subsequently and that may well be why I was delayed to be honest going in, because other people had been stuck in the Falklands for a week or something while one of their compatriots had the flu.

[Part 1 0:44:22] Lee: So was there a genuine concern there apart from doing the medical research to see what was happening? Was there a genuine concern that this illness could sweep through Rothera?

Lehman: Yea, and if it did, not knowing how virulent it could be; with any illness though it could sweep through that environment. You need a certain basic cohort number of people to keep a base running and if those people become really, really poorly, lots of them simultaneously, you would have a great knock on effect for operationally how much they could achieve.

[Part 1 0:44:53] Lee: And the temperatures weren't cold enough to either kill off the bug or make them dormant?

Lehman: No because the temperatures inside the buildings were probably warmer than my house here [laughs], it's slightly Baltic sorry, do you want a jumper! I think I've never been warmer in my life than I have in Antarctica, I'm used to being in a house where I'm putting on more jumpers and clothes as necessary.

[Part 1 0:45:20] Lee: I was going to come to that later but let's do it now. The way that the internal environment in the Antarctic is managed, was it comfortable or was it overbearing?

Lehman: No it was lovely actually and for me it was very familiar because particularly the accommodation block where we were living is Swedish built and having lived in Sweden a bit, it was basically very like living back in my flat in Sweden so that was really nice. Familiarity from both Sweden and Canada where you have boot rooms, because obviously wearing so much outdoor paraphernalia you have a specific room for your outdoor clothes, and then you put on your slippers and go through. That's quite commonplace and so coming back it was 'oh where's the boot room?' It's quite a useful facility to have. The environment was really comfortable, for the people who were wintering and most of the summer staff could fit into Admirals House which is a long building with twin, I think it's got 42 twin rooms with bunk beds with ensuite showers. It's a real luxury because I had no idea what to expect. You look at the photos online which are pretty out of date and you've got these bunk rooms with 4 people to a room and no bathroom. So yes it's beautiful, really comfortable actually, much more than I'd anticipated. But not so comfortable that we're spoiling our people. You're not wasting tax payer's money! [laughs] It's got quite intelligent heating, they can actually control it from Cambridge I've heard, I don't understand. You could open the windows if you want to if it's too hot, you could turn your radiators up if it's too cold, it's not dictated to you how you have to have your rooms. The communal building New Bransfield is really comfortable. Everybody during winter gravitated towards the places where they preferred to be. Nobody had their specific seat but people congregated in different areas which was nice because it kind of made it more homely.

[Part 1 0:47:23] Lee: You were down to 9 people in the winter?

Lehman: 22

[Part 1 0:47:27] Lee: 22. It was 9 at Halley?

Lehman: Yea 9 at Halley, 22 at Rothera which was comparatively large.

[Part 1 0:47:32] Lee: Tell me about the shift in atmosphere and everything once the summer people had flown. What was it like?

Lehman: Well it was funny because the first week I literally went onto nights.

[Part 1 0:47:47] Lee: You were on fire watch were you?

Lehman: I was on fire watch which I didn't really enjoy. It's quite a lonely task. I used to really enjoy nights as a doctor because it's quite sociable and there's lots of people around. It's a different kind of atmosphere whereas on night watch in Antarctica you're on your own. It's quite scary, there's no need to be scared. I hadn't even watched the scary films like *The Thing*, it's quite scary going around on your own in this quite large Antarctic base with your torch and doing all the nightly checks. That happened when there was a transition from summer into winter so I didn't experience so much the change because I was asleep during the day times. There definitely was a gear shift and people started to go out on their winter trips that first week. So it was only just before mid-winter that everybody was all together again, which was a bit of a shame because it would have been actually nice if we at least had a week where we were all together. I think within the first week there were 6 people away; I was on nights so it was a real change

[Part 1 0:48:56] Lee: These were recreational trips?

Lehman: These were winter training trips so they're not so much recreational. It's not so you can go and not do your work; if the base were to burn down that you'd be able to cope living in a pyramid tent. You'd be competent at using the primus stoves and Tilley lamps and actually be able to survive for at least a week because you may have to survive for longer if the base burnt down.

[Part 1 0:49:22] Lee: It has happened in the past. Did you feel lonely?

Lehman: Yea.

[Part 1 0:49:31] Lee: Not necessarily just at night but at any other time?

Lehman: You know I did. I think the time when I first really noticed it, that you were at the end of the world, was the time when we were all sitting up in the tower on mid-winters day listening to the mid-winter broadcast. You looked round and it was like 'oh my gosh, it's just the 22 of us in this one room. There's nobody around for thousands of miles'. We're

at the end of the world; and nobody can get in or out, nobody's coming until November, well at that time we thought October. It's like a real reminder because to an extent with the internet and things and telephones, you can easily forget that you're at the opposite end of the world. But that really brought home the kind of 'no we really are!' It was lonely. I had a very good group of friends during the summer, a good group of girlfriends, and I missed having good girlfriends during the winter; which was hard. I don't know whether the other girls felt it and I did try, but no it did feel lonely.

[Part 1 0:50:44] Lee: How many girls were there for the winter?

Lehman: There were four girls in total

[Part 1 0:50:47] Lee: Four women?

Lehman: Four women. But no it did feel lonely and people joke about me for spending so much time on the phone. I think it made me really value how very lucky I am with my friends back at home. Makes me sometimes also realise I take them for granted, not that you can make amends for that or not trying to make amends but making an effort and make sure I didn't lose those friendships whilst I was away. So people were always joking that I'd got the phone glued to my ear, but it was very important for me to have good support from friends.

[Part 1 0:51:30] Lee: You had complete free access to the phone?

Lehman: Yes, we had VoIP phones, they're internet phones so people can phone back in and it's just like phoning a Cambridge number which is great; a really valued resource. Had it been at the time when you had 400 words a month (...) I don't know actually, had it been at the time when you had 400 words a month, I think people would have spent a greater degree of time all together actually. Because in the library you have all these workbooks, project books of previous winterers, they've got fun photos of evenings they'd meet together and jokes and things like that. I think it's probably since about 2005 there haven't been any more of those. And it may be that because of the internet, because of Facebook, because of the VoIP phones, one can actually look externally to their immediate social media rather than having to just liaise with those people, because if you're limited to 400 words a month that's not a great deal of conversation to have with anybody in the outside world; you've got to get on with those people. And maybe to an extent the advent of more information going back and forth, you lose that a bit.

[Part 1 0:52:40] Lee: You lose the isolation?

Lehman: You lose the isolation; you lose the need for that cohesive force. Don't get me wrong I made some very good friends as well. I've even been across to see Smiler this afternoon so that was lovely. Sometimes it's funny, people who you become very good friends with might be the people you didn't expect to, or might be the people you had a tiff with about something and then you realised 'oh actually no, that's fine'. So that's actually quite nice and I'm looking forward to meeting up with them again as well. There's definitely a sort of an element of bond that you're always going to share.

[Part 1 0:53:18] Lee: I appreciate you trying to keep up with medical science whilst you were away but did you lose interest in what was happening in the rest of the world?

Lehman: No I definitely didn't. I think there were a couple of people I went to never ever checked the BBC news website but for me, maybe I should have taken advantage of the fact that I didn't have to be aware of what's going on in the world. Maybe it's because I was feeling isolated I actually had a bit of routine in the morning, I would go and check my emails, check BBC news world, see what's going on. Could be also related to the Leadership Masters, because we had to be aware of and abreast of positions and also there's been some mammoth changes going on in the NHS which for me has been particularly interesting. Many a time people would come in and find me ranting at the computer so I felt a need to probably be more in contact with the outside world. Even looking at local news which I probably haven't really done at all since I've been home

[Part 1 0:54:14] Lee: The Durrington village fete?

Lehman: I was just looking on BBC news and looking at Hampshire and Wiltshire and seeing what's gone on. Sometimes it's absolutely shocking, looking at the BBC news website, it's actually on the main page; there was a tragic (...) a father shot his family in Fordingbridge where I'd worked as a doctor, just round the corner from the surgery. That was quite hard

[Part 1 0:54:42] Lee: Some of the Fids had talked about feeling impotent about the world. They hear news from the rest of the world, perhaps some family news and there's nothing they can do because they're so far away

Lehman: I don't know whether that's changed because maybe of communications a bit. Now I don't know but even (...)

[Part 1 0:55:02] Lee: Well it may have made it worse. Thirty or forty years ago they didn't know what was happening

Lehman: No. That is in some respects better. If you do know however, to be able to actually speak to the people or be able to order flowers online or something to arrive at someone's house or little things like that you can do for people. I certainly ordered some birthday presents and things whilst I was away over the internet for Christmas and things like that. I think it actually helps in those situations. I was very lucky that nothing bad happened to my family when I was away. I'd have found it very difficult had it happened. I was lucky not to be in that situation.

[Part 1 0:55:47] Lee: So there were no panic attacks or no 'oh my God I want to go home', none of that?

Lehman: No, there were definitely times when I felt low and there were definitely times that were challenging but I never thought it was going to be (...) You don't go to the opposite side of the world to go to Antarctica and thing every day is going to be really easy, because you wouldn't want to do it if it was would you? I wouldn't. It's useful to have challenges and you certainly learn from them. And I've learnt a lot; and probably even things I would never have even anticipated ever learning. Some of the things I've gleaned and learnt, I'd never have thought Antarctica would be the place I'd learn them. Actually they probably even figure on my radar of things that I might learn ever. Not just skills but awareness of things. Yea, there were times when it was hard. I said to my mum it was just the other day 'I might go back to Antarctica'. 'You can't do that, it was really hard! 'I was like 'oh why? 'We were worried about you', so maybe they were. Obviously they were worried; Mum actually sent a text message or an email saying in my last month 'please Claire, make sure you come home safely, don't do anything silly in the last month'. Purposely during winter I skied as sedately as I could and desperate not to injure myself. Hopefully not at the expense of having fun, I still enjoyed my skiing. The last week I was like 'maybe I could try going a little bit harder' and I did push myself a bit but I wasn't doing anything where I was going to really injure myself.

[Part 1 0:57:27] Lee: So you had that responsibility not becoming your patient yourself

Lehman: Yea, that's not that I don't trust the doctor who was there to look after me. Well during winter there wasn't a doctor to look after me. So even during summer there's ideally an operational need to have two doctors, you don't want to create work for somebody else to then have to ship you out [laughs]

[Part 1 0:57:50] Lee: Medivac yourself

Lehman: Exactly, 'I'd like a taxi please' 'a Dash 7 to Rothera' [laughs]

[Part 1 0:57:58] Lee: Let's pause for a minute and then we'll come back and do some more

Lehman: OK

[Part 2 0:00:00] Lee: This is Claire Lehman recorded by Chris Eldon Lee on the 10th June 2011. Claire Lehman part two.

[Part 2 0:00:10] Lee: What I'd like to do for a little while now is talk about the things you did which had nothing to do with medicine because all Fids have to generalise don't they? You were a petrol pump attendant amongst other things?

Lehman: Yea that was Esso Station down at Fossil Bluff. Seems rather appropriate place to have petrochemicals seeing as they come mostly from squashed fossils I guess. My first summer I went down to Fossil Bluff for a fortnight and I actually went my second summer as well for a fortnight which was very nice. I obviously proved myself as a petrol attendant the first time so I was allowed back. Fossil Bluff is a forward-operating base for the British Antarctic Survey which was built in the 1960's as part of an exploration looking down on Alexander Island, looking at the fossils and the geology there which was quite interesting, plus there's nice strata in the rocks. It's a beautiful place; you've got this little hut which is rather like a cross between a beach chalet and an alpine hidey hut with little bunk beds. It's absolutely beautiful and overlooking what may be a lake or maybe just frozen glacier depending on the temperature around at the time. The reason we're there is looking out for weather observations for aircraft coming down and to refuel the planes as they come down. You've got to get a bit of a head start down there before the plane arrives, turn the radios on, check the weather ob [observation], give that to the plane coming in over the VHF radio that they're listening to. Then get the spate pump working which is a petrol driven pump and then open the cans, check there's no water that's got into the fuel with this particular green paste, and then refuel the plane

[Part 2 0:02:00] Lee: So how do you learn to do that because it's not exactly a GP skill is it?

Lehman: No [laughs] I'm not very good with things with pumps anyway. Basically it's a handover between the person that's about to leave, there's a continuously changing staff there. The person you're there with will show you what to do and you'll show the next person and it continues like that.

[Part 2 0:02:28] Lee: Would you have volunteered to do that or were you sent?

Lehman: BAS are keen to have people get experience out in the field and I think particularly as a doctor it's really useful to have that experience. It gives you an idea of the living conditions that people are in out in various different places whether that be Fossil Bluff, a comfortable chalet or at ⁴Sky Blu where it's quite harsh living conditions in little melon huts or be it living in a pyramid tent at the Ellsworth Mountains. It also gives an insight into if you're medivacking from my perspective, how it would be to organise that and looking at the local geography to see where the hazards are for trying to retrieve people and what things you might need to take with you if you're organising a medivac out there. So from my perspective it's very useful. For other people BAS are keen for people to have that insight into deep filled life which is really valuable. It's extraordinary particularly at Fossil Bluff; there's a book written *The Silent Sound* of which there's a copy at Fossil Bluff

[Part 2 0:03:38] Lee: Cliff Pearce

Lehman: Yes. Reading that when you're there; the effort they went to build the hut to get there, the tribulations they had in order to reach there, the first winter they had. Yet again like you're taking part in this history and you're one of the very few people that get to go there, it's extraordinary and it's beautiful. I remember both my first and second times, because you sometimes get the moon rising over the main peninsula, because you're still on an island on King George V Sound and it's just stunning and it's so silent. It's amazing, it's really beautiful. So quite lucky to get different experiences like that for being a petrol attendant, I'll gladly be a petrol attendant in Antarctica!
[laughs]

[Part 2 0:04:27] Lee: Were you tempted to Claire-ify the hut?

⁴ Another forward operating Station for BAS

Lehman: Oh we did Claire-ify the hut [laughs] both times! Actually the first time we didn't Claire-ify it too much. Alan, Glyn and I were there and the weather was very good; most of the time sorting things outside, doing quite a lot of yoga, refuelling planes and also going on expeditions up around the local vicinity as Alan's a mountaineer. The second time I was there with Karen, Karen Fowler, who was communications officer. She wintered at Halley the previous year as a communications officer there. Prior to us there had been a succession, I am not making any stereotypes about gender here, a group of boys had decided to make the one pot wonder which I think had been a meal that they had finished one day and then left for the next, and then basically they just continued adding to over the space of a fortnight. The mind boggles that nobody became ill. But anyway it's good that they didn't. We maybe Karen and Claire-ified the hut; so it's very clean; we washed all the walls and made it nice. Hopefully they'll keep the hut in function. I sincerely hope so because I think it's a really valuable resource in terms of history as well. So maybe a shame for that to close, I hope not.

[Part 2 0:05:44] Lee: When you were that far south and that far away from civilisation, did you ever feel vulnerable?

Lehman: I remember once feeling quite scared.

[Part 2 0:05:54] Lee: How do you mean?

Lehman: I don't know, it sounds really silly. It sounds really ridiculous; I thought I heard dogs barking [laughs] it is ridiculous, ridiculous, I don't believe in ghosts. And it definitely wasn't the wind. I never felt vulnerable; the second time it was two girls that were there, just Karen and I. Well it's probably the safest place for two girls to be in the entire world, nobody's going to come and find us here. So actually that's quite liberating and I think if you've got a degree of common sense you're not going to put yourself in a position where you're going to injure yourself when there's two of you and if you're sensible and you've taken your radios and you've got the ⁵iridium phone with you. Old Fids must find it extraordinary how many lines of reserve we carry wherever we go. I don't know whether it's a symptom of our litigious society that means that we have to or because we're more aware of risk, or because we've got the option to be able to have a rescue if we need it more easily. So I didn't feel vulnerable. I did feel vulnerable on my winter trip, my first winter trip. And this is probably only about 10

⁵ Satellite phone

or 12 kilometres from base; we were coming back from the ⁶Myth on Adelaide Island travelling by skidoo and link travel, doing everything absolutely as we should have done and it was a clear day we left, slightly windy and there were flurries of snow. The weather got progressively worse, progressively worse and we got to the point that Ben was just like ‘we’ve got to camp’ and you couldn’t see your hand in front of your face, it was that bad. I couldn’t see Ben’s skidoo; I couldn’t see the Nanson sledge in front of me. I couldn’t see the dongle on the end of my skidoo which connects me to his, it was that bad. So we had to get the stuff off the half unit, get the pup tent out to camp in and it’s raging winds. And I’ve never held onto something for such dear life because you just knew if I let go of that tent and it flew away, which it had the liability to do. There’s no way you could put a pyramid tent up in that. There was another party travelling not far away but we couldn’t see them, we wouldn’t be able to listen on an iridium phone to hear anybody because the wind was so bad. That was our sole means of shelter at that time, had it blown away nobody would have come out to rescue you. So definitely I felt vulnerable at that point. That was an experience that could happen to anyone, there was no problem travelling at that point, it was the right judgement to stop when we did. But it was quite terrifying, it really reminds you of where you are and how close you can be to base yet something could happen. We were the other side of McCallums Pass but that could have happened 5 km from base.

[Part 2 0:09:07] Lee: You’re not a proper Fid until you’ve had a scary moment

Lehman: No, that was scary [laughs].

[Part 2 0:09:11] Lee: Did that connect you in any way back to the heroic era?

Lehman: Absolutely yea. I’d read a bit before I went away but I tried not to read too much because I wanted to see Antarctica through my eyes rather than through somebody else’s. Since I’ve got back I’ve read a lot more and I certainly identify (...) of course there’s no way we suffered the hardship, Shackleton and Scott’s, Fuchs, that can’t compare but that fear, and having an idea of what that can be like, is amazing. It gives you a greater understanding of what they went through. When you read the books now actually so many people reading these books miss out on some of that by not knowing it. There’s no way you can describe, they’ve written beautifully. There’s an element of Antarctica that’s beyond description I think unfortunately, or fortunately I don’t know.

⁶ The Myth campsite is on the other side of Adelaide Island from Rothera

[Part 2 0:10:26] Lee: I was going to come to this later as well but I'd be very interested to hear how you get on talking to people now your back who've not been there. The nearest parallel I can think of is soldiers returning from the war who just didn't talk about it because if you hadn't been to the war you couldn't understand it. You can talk to me because I've been there briefly but I just wonder how you coped with talking to friends who weren't quite sure whether it was top or the bottom of the planet

Lehman: Yea, the number of people who have said will I see polar bears. Well I hope not.

[Part 2 0:11:01] Lee: Precisely my point. So how has that been because it's an impossible experience to share with somebody who's not been there? Or is it?

Lehman: I think there is always going to be certain elements of it that you cannot share. Even if you've been to Antarctica be it as a tourist on a transient cruise or even as a scientist whose only there for a summer, even if you've been for consecutive summers. There's nothing, well for me at least, there's something unique about a winter that is beyond description and every winter's going to be different and every team is always going to be different, and the challenges you experience and each of those is always going to be different. So there's no easy way to convey or easily describe any of that. Having said that for example today having been back to the GP surgery where I worked for a year before I went to Antarctica and gave a talk. I think I did manage to convey an element of what I did experience including some of the challenges and they certainly were challenges. But then there is always an element of it that's so personal you don't want to really share it with anyone. It's not that you are selfish it's just it's so personal. In terms of just generally chatting to people about it, I found it very difficult when somebody said, there's some people who are just like 'oh tell me about your 18 months'.

[Part 2 0:12:32] Lee: Where do you start?

Lehman: Yea 'it was nice'. You just can't do that with anyone; you can't just sit down and say 'right tell me about your 18 months away'. That's just ridiculous; I wouldn't expect to do that with my sister after she spent 2 ½ years in China. Things will just crop up that might be relevant, and with good close friends I'm spending enough time with them, they'll glean some insight into it. But there is certain elements; and I guess that's why there is this solidarity amongst Fids that there is an unspoken understanding on some things.

[Part 2 0:13:12] Lee: Your friends of course I presume were reading your blogs which are pretty expansive aren't they?

Lehman: Yes. I wasn't going to do that of my own accord, it makes me look like a media darling. My friend is a graphic designer and his girlfriend was very keen that I wrote a blog so they made it for me which is very sweet. I actually really enjoyed it and was able to (...) I think my friends appreciated it. It was nice to be able to share and it's funny when I first got back I didn't really want to see any photos of Antarctica because sometimes it was quite hard when I was away and I was quite glad just to be back, just to be able to engross myself in English life. Then the other day I looked at my blog and looking through it I was like 'God actually it looks amazing!' [laughs] and it's quite nice to have that chance to take a step back, refocus on something else and then look at it again. Again today doing that talk I did, Wow I've been so lucky, so lucky

[Part 2 0:14:12] Lee: Can I go back to that white out and the decision to camp. You're with Ben?

Lehman: Ben Tibbetts

[Part 2 0:14:18] Lee: Tibbetts. Where do you think the decision came from? Was it because you've been taught and trained and had it drummed into you? Or was it just responding naturally to the circumstances, the decision to camp I mean?

Lehman: Ben's a very experienced mountaineer

[Part 2 0:14:37] Lee: He'd been before had he?

Lehman: Not to Antarctica no, but he's spent enough time out on the hill and in the Alps to know that there are certain conditions that are just not tenable for moving in, and particularly in an Antarctic context, because they obviously have their training as well. It was Ben's call to camp or not and I'm glad he did. It was impossible to go anywhere; you couldn't see where you were going. It wasn't just a white out that you can just poor visibility or poor contrast, just can merrily go on your skidoo and just follow your bearing. It was disorientating to the point that when we camped I thought we were at a 45 degree pitch angle both up and along, and actually when it cleared we were on the complete flat. It was a matter of necessity; you've got to stop but you can't stop

in a 60 knot wind or ridiculous storm or not put up a tent because we'll perish so we put the tent up.

[Part 2 0:15:42] Lee: Light the primus?

Lehman: Light the primus. It did look rather like a gypsy site afterwards I have to say when the storm did clear because we had literally everything off both sledges

[Part 2 0:15:55]Lee: How long were you lying up for?

Lehman: We were very lucky; it was only a matter of 2 or 3 hours or something. We phoned base through on the Iridium, let them know and the other travelling party which was John James, the driving officer, and Bruce Maltman, his GA, it actually transpired they'd also phoned through because they'd stopped and they were behind us, and when it cleared we could actually see them and they were only about half a kilometre away. They came and gave us a hand to get sorted and then it was beautiful weather after that, it was amazing absolutely clear perfect skies! Beautiful pastel skies that I've never seen anywhere else, and a full moon and I remember, I think I had Clair de Lune by Debussy on my little ipod that a friend had given me, and listening to that. It was just stunning. And then we drove back up through McCallum's Pass and managed to make it home in time for Saturday dinner. I was so glad to have a shower and be back home rather than stuck in a pup tent with just the two of us [laughs] So yea, that was a real experience; it was amazing, beautiful.

[Part 2 0:17:02]Lee: What other practical skills did you learn apart from being a petrol pump attendant?

Lehman: Post mistress, shop keeper, tour guide. Practical skills; did a lot of cooking. I did a lot of seal watching for the dive team, making sure that no killer whales or leopard seals came up and on the occasions that they did, that we saw them and got them out the water quickly.

[Part 2 0:17:28]Lee: Oh really that did happen?

Lehman: Yea, reasonably often. I think they asked me to stop being on seal watch because I kept finding too many leopard seals and killer whales! I'd been really keen to do quite a lot of woodwork before I'd gone away and unfortunately I became aware that actually woodwork tools could be potentially quite dangerous. So during winter I didn't do as much woodwork as I'd hoped. I did a couple of things; I made some

picture frames which I really enjoyed and did a bit of turning on the lathe. But then I decided that actually I just don't want to injure my hands over winter when there's nobody to repair my hands so I didn't do any woodwork in winter and waited till the summer. Then I got into wood turning and that was brilliant, I really enjoyed that as a practical skill. I'm trying to think what other things I did. I did lots of baking.

[Part 2 0:18:25]Lee: Sledging I presume? Skidooing

Lehman: Well actually I'm not a big fan of skidoos I have to say. I think they're really noisy and I'd rather ski wherever I can. I'm not a big fan of wasting fossil fuels at the best of times, I cycle rather than drive so whenever there was movement to be done I always tried to go by ski rather than (...) So in terms of practical skills; yes outdoor stuff, I was thinking about work related things like plumbing and electricity. Yea I did loads of stuff. Lots of skiing, lots of climbing, ice climbing which I'd never done before; ridge walking and ski touring which is amazing, I really enjoyed that and boating. It's funny sometimes because you just don't realise how many of the things we could do with such ease and that were available for us to do. I was very lucky with the friends I had that they were very keen to do outdoor pursuits, really lucky.

[Part 2 0:19:27]Lee: What did you make for your mid-winters present?

Lehman: I was intending to make a deck chair but because of this lack of deciding not to do any woodwork over winter I was rather stuck. It was Smiler, Mike Stainer is the mechanic, was the person I was making a present for who lives in Fordingbridge where I used to work. He used to work for a vehicle recovery service and was planning on going back to that when he got back. He spends a lot of his time in his van, literally living in it 24/7 and so I thought 'actually what can I make that will be useful?' And I decided to make a rug so I made an applique rug with a couple of different scenes one of which was a photo I'd managed to find of his recovery vehicle and I made it cutting out different fabrics and using different nuts and bolts for different parts of machinery, the tyres and things like that; cross stitched on the Avery Recovery and things like that. And then I made one of the Snowcats which he had revamped at Cambridge and then brought back down to Antarctica which became our really useful vehicle. A big smiling sun compass of the north and south because he's called Smiler. I think he liked it. It was really good fun making it actually.

[Part 2 0:20:40]Lee: What did you receive?

Lehman:

It's a beautiful board; the trout flies of Rothera from Alan Hill. It's quite funny Alan was going round collecting; he wanted a sample of everybody's hair which was slightly an unusual request to be going around with. We all thought he was making a voodoo doll and hated everybody on base. One day as I'd mentioned earlier about people calling when you least expect it, there was a radio call for the doctor from Alan. He'd managed to get a barbed fish hook (...) A fly, for anyone who doesn't fly fish, is made of feathers and various bits and pieces which you use to attract fish, they've got a barbed fish hook on, you tie them onto a line to finish with. He was making one for each person specific with their hair into it and their colour and their style. He managed to get a barbed fish hook stuck in the back of his hand. He was also attached to the vice so he couldn't get himself out [laughs] so someone had to go in and release him from the vice and then we had to remove this fish hook. I didn't know at that time he was making the present for me so it's quite funny for my present. At that point he told me what he was making and then it transpired it was for me; it's beautiful and I love it. That's one of the real nice things. Already now I'm thinking about what people are making for their mid- winter presents back at Rothera. I love the way that in Antarctica people are so creative. I was at Christmas trying to make some Christmas cookies and I wanted a star cutter and we didn't have one. I happened to mention it to one of the mechanics just in passing over coffee and ⁷smoko and by afternoon smoko he presented me with a bespoke hand crafted star cookie cutter that he'd made over in the garage which I treasure. It's there at the moment for next Christmas but I might have to ask the Rothera doctor incumbent to bring it back with her next year because that's one of the nicest things anybody has ever made for me I have to say

[Part 2 0:22:52]Lee: One of the recordings you did which sadly we couldn't use in the radio 4 programme, you were just talking to (...) maybe we did use it. You were talking in the field to some Fids about vitamins and sunblock; the maintenance of people whilst you were out there. I wonder whether anything changed whilst you were there in that respect.

Lehman:

No unfortunately not. The evidence from BAS, BASMU rather, is that there isn't needed any supplementary vitamins at least during summer. During winter there is provision if people want it for vitamins. Most people going in the summer take their own anyway and that's fine. It's an individual thing. To be honest we made them available and some people wanted them some people don't. To be honest some people in

⁷ Term used for cigarette break

Antarctica have a better diet in Antarctica than they have back in the real world, so it's very much what you're used to. I took down a lifetime supply of Berocca because I eat more fruit than a fruit bat; I eat loads of vegetables and I felt better for having them. But everybody's different so it's down to individual choice. There are some things that will be easily changed and some things that are not. But I think particularly in the current economic climate it's not likely that we're going to change that now; I don't know.

[Part 2 0:24:22]Lee: You went to the Ellsworth Mountains?

Lehman: Yea that was amazing.

[Part 2 0:24:24]Lee: Tell me about that?

Lehman: So my first trip out in the summer, I'd been down to Fossil Bluff, then down to Sky Blu and then they were picking up a field party who'd been out at the Ellsworth Mountains with Andy Smith

[Part 2 0:24:37]Lee: When you say picking up do you mean by flight?

Lehman: Yes by flight so flying down to collect and bring back a field party, well two field parties; Andy Smith and Roger Stillwell were one party, and Ian 'Cheese' Rudkin was the GA in the other party, and for the life of me I can't remember the name of the scientist. They'd been out there for two months living in their field tents studying the Rutford Glacier. That was extraordinary flying in; it was beautiful, it was also very difficult landing because the visibility wasn't good, the contrast was poor. Ian Foster did an amazing job of landing and it was amazing. We were very lucky because we actually stayed the night down there as well so we stayed in a little VE 25 one of the little North Face tents which aren't quite as warm as the other ones but we were fine with our P-bags. We had a lovely evening; these guys had been camping out there for 8 weeks; I don't know when their last flight had been maybe 6 weeks before or something, and we had a brilliant evening all in Andy Smith's tent. I'd made some apple cake at Fossil Bluff and taken that down with them, and they were just ecstatic to have some fresh apple. I think I'd taken some fruit as well. We had a bit of a party in their tent with some music playing and the fire going. It makes you realise you can have a party without any alcohol, just drinking plenty of tea and having a good time. That was a really memorable evening, I really enjoyed it.

[Part 2 0:26:07]Lee: Did you learn much about the science that was going on? Obviously you were working side by side with scientists and I just wonder how much you picked up?

Lehman: You pick up quite a lot because also every Monday during summer we have a different science talk from the people who are doing their science which is great because it's really nice for everybody to understand what we're there to do. Obviously we're there all doing our jobs but ultimately we're there as a scientific institution and also there's the diplomatic role of British Antarctic Territory but primarily science. Some of them are quite high brow scientific talks which are a bit difficult to understand, most of them are brilliant; just to really give an insight. There's so much science going on; studies looking at the clouds and there's a mass of projects looking at storms. There's probably all things I'm getting all massively wrong I'm sure but they're having to fly through really difficult areas for flying looking at interference and things like that. The biology they're doing had Captain Seaweed who's a chap called Frithjof C. Küpper. He's an absolute character, came down this year collecting seaweed samples from Antarctica. He did a fabulous talk, almost 3 hours long, it was brilliant [laughs] he was so enthusiastic about his subject. The people talking about their water column samplings, people talking about the viruses they were studying in the water; really interesting looking at the changes in the Glaciers as well, with Pine Island Glacier. It's really nice when you see on the news science in an Antarctic context to actually think 'oh yes actually it's that part of it'. I wouldn't claim to be an authority on any of it though.

[Part 2 0:27:56]Lee: Were these scientific talks well attended?

Lehman: Yes. There was never a spare seat in the house. Generally there wasn't a spare seat on the floor either. They were very well attended. That was really nice because you go the mechanic to pilots, most people went along that were free to go which was lovely.

[Part 2 0:28:21]Lee: Did it feel important what was going on down there?

Lehman: Yea

[Part 2 0:28:26]Lee: Or was that something you lost sight of over the year?

Lehman: No. You realise that we were there for the science to happen and so for example if somebody couldn't get their flights done because the weather's bad or a plane's broken, you feel bad for those people.

There's definitely a sense of team spirit about that. And people making efforts to get things done. Somebody needed a specific collecting device for one item of water they were doing and somebody else help them make it, so team work like that to try and get things working. So you don't lose sight of it.

[Part 2 0:29:12]Lee: The old Fid motto is 'just get it done'?

Lehman: Yes. Largely that works. It's really nice that that does happen. Some people came down and didn't get what they wanted to get done but that's just Antarctic science. At the end of the day you can't rule the weather so you've got to make the best of what you can achieve and also take a degree of pragmatism about it as well. It was nice to see that from the different scientists that you meet. It's like 'we couldn't get that done but we've managed to achieve this instead or that's just the weather, we'll try again next year'

[Part 2 0:29:58]Lee: How do you feel now about your relationship with BAS now you've finished there?

Lehman: I went back up to Cambridge last week to collect my bits and pieces from my P-boxes and it was absolutely lovely to be back there. There's a degree of familiarity about it and it is an important institution or organisation, which is trying to achieve very important things and it's quite cool. It was really welcoming to be there and I went up to the ice breaker *The John Withers* and was having coffee and the number of people that came in that came over to say hello from all manners of different areas; scientists, people from PR, people from logistics, from all different areas and spheres. I feel really privileged to have been part of that and to still be part of that. You don't want to not be part of that. I was chatting to a friend the other day, it's kind of weird because for most people that work for BAS don't necessarily go back to work for BAS or at least not continuously up at Cambridge and there is a degree of family likeness where it's actually you do kind of feel like you belong a bit. I don't know whether that means I don't belong in the real world, I don't know, hopefully not [laughs]

[Part 2 0:31:24]Lee: It's a short career, it's like a footballer isn't it? It's a very short career. At the age of 31 you no longer work for BAS?

Lehman: No but I think I'll always have a degree of, there's always going to be BAS in me.

[Part 2 0:31:38]Lee: It's in your DNA is it?

Lehman: Yea and for example for us as doctors we'll get involved; I've been asked to go and help on the Two Bridges Conference which is a conference that happens every year between the doctors and base commanders. Hopefully I'll be asked to go and help out at the first aid course at Girton; particularly amongst the old doctors who generally are always in contact with the new doctors that arrive. I'm going on an expedition medicine course in a couple of weeks that trained me before I went even to India who want to have me come back because I've been to BAS. So you can certainly draw on that experience and I don't know whether in the future there may become possibilities to go down for slightly less than 18 months, and if there did I'd be quite keen to do that. 18 months is a long time to go away and I wouldn't do it easily or lightly. I never did it lightly in the first place, but there would have to be a very good reason for me to do it again. But I'd still be tempted [laughs] I think that's the thing because I'm really jealous, all these people I've just been wintering with and several of them are going back for the summer. I really want to go back. When I left I didn't want to think that I would never go back. It's beautiful

[Part 2 0:32:54]Lee: Is it the beauty, or is it the isolation or is it the other worldliness of it all?

Leman: It's definitely the beauty; it's definitely the sense of community and even though when things are difficult or challenging or you're lonely there is still a sense of community which actually sometimes you don't necessarily appreciate until you come back to the real world and realise that actually life can be lonely in the UK if you wanted it to be. I think the challenge is, and having chatted with other people as well who contemplate going back to winter again, you don't want to compare one winter with another and whether it'll be as good as the one you've had or better or will it be worse. And you don't know the people you're going to be put with, and that's one of the beauties of it but also one of the greatest risks. And there are some things you don't necessarily want to have to endure or experience again but then maybe they're worth risking in order to enjoy the positive aspects of it. Also the experience of having done it once actually might change how you do things again, hopefully for the better. It's a truly brilliant place, I'm really glad I went.

[Part 2 0:34:23]Lee: Do you think you might be pro-active about trying to get back down there again or will you just see if anything comes your way?

Lehman: I don't think things fall in people's laps unless you try; I've never been somebody whose just let life fall into my lap, I've always gone out and decided what I'd like to do and pursued it. At the moment I'm having to concentrate and I wanted to concentrate on returning to general practice in the UK and on my new job that's starting in August.

[Part 2 0:34:47]Lee: Tell me about the new job

Lehman: It's training to be a public health consultant so one of the things that always interested me is the NHS and how it's organised. Sounds really nerdy!

[Part 2 0:34:57]Lee: No, no. Sounds very vital at present

Lehman: Since medical school I've been very interested in it even as a final year student. Everyone else was writing their dissertations on heart failure or management of Lymphoma; I was writing mine on should the NHS be de-politicised which when most people are writing on clinical subjects to have someone looking at political science is slightly unusual. So I've always found that very interesting and I also like patient care, and I like general practice. So I've concentrated on that, done the Antarctic part and now I want to look at concentrating on the public health side of things although I still want to try and find a way I can continue with general practice because I really enjoy seeing patients and I've really enjoyed being back in practice over the last fortnight. So I'll be starting in August and I'll be in Dorchester for the first couple of months in a PCT looking at how the health service is organised locally there; interesting time because Andrew Lansley is suggesting he is going to disband all of these PCT's so it might be slightly miserable there at the moment, we'll see. Then I'll be in London from October studying for a Master's in public health at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine which I'm really looking forward to. Who knows what will be happening after that. It's a 5 year training contract and we'll see where we go. I still want to be able to keep general practice on the go though.

[Part 2 0:36:20]Lee: So you'll do the two side by side do you think?

Lehman: If I can [laughs] I may need to negotiate a bit. At the moment I can do it if I work my evenings and weekends in order to do general practice.

[Part 2 0:36:32]Lee: How do you think the Antarctic's changed you? Have you come back more confident than when you went?

Lehman: Yes, clinically I've come back more confident, not arrogant and I never want to be arrogant and hopefully I never will be. I've learnt a lot of skills that I didn't expect to learn particularly with regarding management, people management, organisations and how people operate within them and how an organisation operates, which actually as far as public health goes and even in general practice, is really informative and useful. And I don't think you could have gleaned any of what I've learnt from a book. So it's a really excellent experience to have had. I think it's made me (...) oh it's really hard. I think I'm more relaxed about things than before I went away; I'm much more patient, I think I'm more tolerant

[Part 2 0:37:42]Lee: Is that because you've been in an extreme situation, extreme environment?

Lehman: No I think it's just that living with 22 other people you can't always have things how you want them. And learning there's many ways to skin a cat. Just try it the other way and not getting het up if it's not done necessarily your way. There are still times when you have to choose your arguments, or pick your fights. So if you feel strongly about something and then discuss it and negotiate it; try not to get so het up about things. And listening I think hopefully, although I've just spoken for the last two hours for you.

[Part 2 0:38:27]Lee: But you had to listen in order to say all those things.

Lehman: Yea I suppose. Listening to other people more; probably listening to myself a bit more as well; listening and not making assumptions about people about anything really.

[Part 2 0:38:47]Lee: Were there bad experiences apart from being stuck in a snow drift?

Lehman: Yea there were challenging times.

[Part 2 0:38:55]Lee: Anything you want to talk about? Again it's an optional question

Lehman: There are challenges of being a doctor; it's very difficult to marry the challenges of being a doctor and member of the team and a friend. If you're ultimately there for your professional reason which ultimately I was, they don't employ me just to be a person to bake cakes, it's very hard when people don't like the decisions that get made. That's difficult. And the big decisions don't get made by me, they get made by seniors. But you get tarred with the same brush and that's very hard.

[Part 2 0:39:48]Lee: Are we talking about medivacking again?

Lehman: No not about medivacking, just generally some medical decisions. So that can be really challenging. The difficult thing is that people don't realise that, they just think 'oh that person's just made that decision, or hasn't made it lightly' Some people would just be like 'I don't care about what they think anyway' but I'm the kind of person that does care what people think

[Part 2 0:40:18]Lee: We're talking about claustrophobia aren't we really I think?

Lehman: I don't think its claustrophobia, it's having several roles going on at the same time and not being able to delineate because you can't ultimately. You can try as hard as you might but to an extent it's very difficult to close those boundaries, or to define them rather than have them separately. 'I will speak to you in this fashion now because we are at lunch, I will speak to you this way because we are in the surgery'; try hard as you might, particularly the people you are wintering with. I did my best for every single one of my patients; I put my hand on my heart and absolutely say that and have probably fought their corner to my seniors more than they ever realised but I won't get any recognition of that

[Part 2 0:41:10]Lee: This is classic care conundrum isn't it really? You have to have an overview from a professional point of view based on medical evidence which is your interpretation of the facts. Somebody who hasn't got the medical training might interpret those facts a different way?

Lehman: Yes. So that has been challenging and that would be what would make me think twice about doing it again. I'm very glad I've done it once

[Part 2 0:41:42]Lee: So that was the down side?

Lehman: Yea. In other ways having good doctor patient relation, that has actually been beneficial for some people. It's a fine line to balance and try and walk along but that's been one of the challenging things.

[Part 2 0:42:07]Lee: I'm dying to know, what was it like listening to the radio programme? First of all what happened because I sent it? I presume you got it?

Lehman: We did get it yes, yes, yes we got it hand delivered down.

[Part 2 0:42:17]Lee: I sent it with Heather

Lehman: Yes it came down with Heather. I think we actually waited until it was being broadcast on the radio because we didn't want to hear it before other people heard it, we wanted to hear it so that we (...)

[Part 2 0:42:28]Lee: We?

Lehman: So we had a little miniature area. It wasn't really anything formal just in the surgery so Hugh Ainsley who's the new doctor there at the moment taking over from me and Charif Al [phonetic] the communications officer and Dave Seaton the new wintering communications officer now, and a couple of the navy boys were there as well. We were sitting in the office and popped on the CD. We just sat there drinking tea and listening and it was really funny. It was an amazing programme to hear, it was so beautifully put together. It was lovely to hear what was going on in Halley and hear Mark's voice; he's got such a beautiful voice. And hear what they've been up to and hear the penguins cooing away down on the hinge zone which was brilliant because we don't get those where we are. Distinctly Claire comments about dinner parties was quite funny, the wrong brand of sun cream. Fortunately I haven't received any slapped knuckles for that one [laughs]. It was lovely and it really conveyed well because everybody there had obviously been to Antarctica and we all felt it conveyed very well what it's like which is useful for our family back home to gain some insight. Because it's not very easy to do and it is useful to have people understand. That's the nice thing about being back in Cambridge because there is a local vernacular and you do start talking about different things, and talking about what's going on at Pig, the Pine Island Glacier, the latest land [incomprehensible] project and talking about flights and all manner of things that just don't come up in normal conversation. So yes I thoroughly enjoyed listening to the programme, it was brilliant

[Part 2 0:44:18]Lee: How was it to record? Did that also cause complications with people you were working with that you wanted to record them at work and play?

Lehman: No, I didn't record people who didn't want to be recorded, obviously. Most people were more than happy to be recorded and enjoyed it. Just tried to remember to take it out, the technical aspects sometimes spoiled me or not getting the recording levels right so missed out on a few good pieces because of it. But I really enjoyed it; I really enjoyed the radio work. I listen to the radio quite a lot myself; it's really nice to be able to have radio 4 on tap back in the real world, I could only get an occasional pod cast when I was away. It was actually really useful

when I was recording to think ‘what sounds would be useful on a programme that I’d be recording when I was away?’ or I’d like to listen to or other people would like to listen to. So I really enjoyed it from that respect. So thank you for asking me to do it

[Part 2 0:45:25]Lee: Thank you for doing it. Is there anything else you wanted to talk about? I’ve kind of feel as though I’ve run through my questions I was going to ask you about but there may be some things I’ve failed to ask you about which were quite important to you?

[Pause]

[Part 2 0:45:42]Lee: I know there is something which I generally ask which may or may not apply. Did you have any spiritual or religious experiences or anything along those lines?

Lehman: I’m catholic so for me actually going away was actually quite hard. I never considered not going because I can’t go to church, but it did definitely pose itself as quite a challenge to not go. I don’t go every week but for example on the way down in the Falkland Islands I went to mass, I went to confession. I probably shocked the priest in Stanley; he’s probably still recovering now. It was nice to know that was my local church, albeit 5 hours flight away [laughs] to bear that in mind. There were times when I found that quite useful to pray on my own or (...)

[Part 2 0:46:46]Lee: Sorry?

Lehman: It was quite nice at times to pray on my own

[Part 2 0:46:50]Lee: So you kept your religion going?

Lehman: Yea. I have faith so I find that it strengthens. I find it quite helpful when I’m having difficult times. And there were certain things that I miss obviously like at Christmas and midnight mass. I remember the 9 Lessons and Carols the first year I was away. One of my friends played it to me over the telephone so I was listening to the 9 Lessons and Carols via their telephone whilst they listened to it at home which was really nice. Then at midnight mass Mummy and Becks had the telephone in Salisbury Cathedral on speakerphone so I could listen to some of midnight mass

[Part 2 0:47:32]Lee: That was important to you was it?

Lehman: Yea massively important to me yea.

[Part 2 0:47:36]Lee: How do you cope with things like communion and confessional whilst you are away?

Lehman: Confessions obviously an interesting one. I still actually need to go. I need to go since I got back

[Part 2 0:47:45]Lee: You haven't got to confess to me. If you're used to going to confessional on a fairly regular basis and suddenly it was taken away from you, how do you compensate?

Lehman: I did try to be better. I maybe more took it into my own hands trying to (...) I wrote some things to myself which obviously is not quite the same as confessing to a priest, but what I feel I'd like to have done better, what I felt I'd done wrong. I felt a real need to go to church. As soon as we got to Stanley I went to church

[Part 2 0:48:28]Lee: On the way back?

Lehman: Yea. It was only a midweek mass but I really wanted to go and I did miss it and I've been going since I've got back and I've really enjoyed it. So that was hard and in fact one of the new doctors going down now is catholic. The [REDACTED] the same time as me was catholic; we used to go to church together. It is a challenge but I don't think it precludes you going. I think if you can find an alternative way, however you do it individually, to cope with that then that's fine. I also do yoga and I did yoga every morning I was away up in new Bransfield with the most splendid view overlooking north across the bay up to the Stokes Peaks. That's not a Christian thing to do but it helped me when I was away.

[Part 2 0:49:21]Lee: Perhaps some religious opportunities is something that BAS could supply whilst you're down there? Is that just not practical?

Lehman: It's such a secular society, it really is.

[Part 2 0:49:32]Lee: There were very few practicing church goers?

Lehman: There were maybe a couple of other church goers and nobody really talked about it. I only found out that one girl was catholic because on Christmas day she was quite upset and I was chatting to her and she was 'I feel like I'm missing church' and I was 'so am I' and we chatted to each other for a bit and it was nice to have a kindred spirit. It's a

very secular society; we had the most outrageous nativity play every, it was brilliant, so funny but my Granny would have turned in her grave. It's a very secular society and I don't think there's enough demand to warrant any formal religious provision by BAS

[Part 2 0:50:19]Lee: There's no room you can go to for meditation or for peace and quiet?

Lehman: There's the library which is the quiet room you can go to. There's also the Cross memorial. I take myself up there

[Part 2 0:50:30]Lee: The?

Lehman: There's a memorial cross on the hill above the base which I occasionally took myself up to. The other place I took myself to is just around the point. There's an area which I figured was vaguely facing north. Sometimes I'd just go round there and sit

[Part 2 0:50:43]Lee: What about communion? Were you able to do that?

Lehman: No, no communion

[Part 2 0:50:49]Lee: How did that affect you not being able to do that?

Lehman: I was ok with it. I guess if I was a more devout catholic it might have been a challenge but I kind of don't think God's going to mind if it's not actually available, well I hope not. I don't know about the actual doctrine of it. But hopefully he'll understand.

[Part 2 0:51:08]Lee: In the interviews I do, I've been surprised about how many Fids actually feel as though their faith has strengthened whilst they were down there. I was just recently in Scotland; one of the Fids said 'you couldn't miss the hand of the creator'

Lehman: No, you can't. And that's why I don't think it really mattered that the actual (...) What I miss was the community of church and sense of belonging and being with likeminded people along similar lines. It was brilliant we managed to download the Papal visit and it was the only mass I'd been able to hear. The other thing is, this is embarrassing; I sometimes downloaded a podcast of The Archers from radio 4

[Part 2 0:51:46]Lee: That's not embarrassing. What's wrong with that?

Lehman: You know, young girl in her 30's listening to the Archers. So there were certain things that happened when I was away, certain people died and they had funerals

[Part 2 0:52:00]Lee: Nigel's death

Lehman: Nigel's death, that was harrowing

[Part 2 0:52:02]Lee: Did you hear that?

Lehman: Gosh did I hear that. The actual communications officer downloaded it for me, put it on a CD, flew it down to Fossil Bluff and I was playing it on the CD player at Fossil Bluff washing up at the kitchen sink there. That's what's lovely about Fossil Bluff; it's just like going back in time. I felt like I was a 1950's housewife and listening to this I was just like 'oh my gosh'. I feel like 'where were you when JFK died, where were you when Nigel Pargetter died?' I was in Fossil Bluff washing up. Just to hear him was awful. The merit of life events if anything good came of Nigel Pargetter's death is that there was a funeral and I actually got to hear a religious service in a church which was great and got to sing along to some hymns. Silly things I miss like that. I did try to find masses online but you can't really find mass online. I did try to tune in occasionally to it. There aren't very many broadcast services I have to say. There could be more of them; that would probably be a good way round it. The hand of God being round there; I don't mind so much about the physical representations of church or religion because you're in a place which is as I said to you full of majesty

[Part 2 0:53:21]Lee: The whole of the Antarctic is a church isn't it really?

Lehman: It is, and I've always been very much someone who sees the natural splendour and beauty of nature. For me I must say Antarctica is as beautiful as the English countryside; I think they've both got their beautiful merits and I don't think one's better than the other, I love both of them. Like that day I was describing to you coming back from that terrifying moment camping in the storm, when there was this beautiful moonless rise and the sky was pastel pink and there's nobody else around and it's just calm and serene. You can't help but feel a spiritual moment there.

[Part 2 0:54:04]Lee: And just a little bit about the sun, the disappearance and reappearance of the sun. You did mention that when we did the interview down the phone

Lehman: I feared maybe I might develop SAD, seasonal affective disorder. I'm somebody who does like to be outdoors when it's sunny. I don't think anybody actually physically did but you certainly noticed when the sun went closer towards the horizon, attendance at breakfast became slightly later; my barometer for change. You certainly noticed it but you still got on and I certainly made an effort to keep exercising, keep busy. You don't really notice the sun had gone until it started to make a reappearance. We were desperate to try and catch the sun because we didn't have it on base because of the Stokes peaks; they form a bloke to the sun because they are much higher than base even though they're in the north. Tom Weston, Terri and I climbed to the top of Stork, to ⁸Middle Stork to try and catch a glimpse of sunlight on our skin because that was the place that was due to first get it. We skidoo'd along, climbed up and it was a freezing day, our hair was full of ice, our eyelashes were frozen. And then we got it, the briefest glimpse of sun on our skin, it was amazing. It was lovely and then gradually about a couple of weeks later it actually made it round to base. Terri was telling me that she took the boat out further when she was doing the ⁹CTD to Ryder Bay so she could get the sunlight. She was doing some water sampling. You do really miss it, and you know that you've missed it when it comes back. But I noticed when I was doing some yoga and I realised I had a shadow again. 'My gosh a shadow' I felt like Peter Pan, it was brilliant. Going away makes you very grateful for small things. And the other thing I was going to do the post

[Part 2 0:56:07]Lee: Post?

Lehman: Yea post is one of the most important things. I think maybe at Halley less so because you don't get so much of it coming in but at Rothera the positive aspect of receiving things through the post, albeit in a postcard or a letter. It doesn't have to be a parcel of sweeties, just the littlest thing. Because you know that somebody's thought of you and made the effort to write something and has gone to the post office to post it and it's arrived and I'd save my post to actually open. So I'd have post arrive but just knowing that somebody has sent it, I'd try and guess who it's from. I would savour the things rather than open them immediately which did mean that subsequently I ended up with 2 advent calendars a bit late because the post would invariably arrive slightly sporadically anyway as it transpired. That was one of the most important things that kept my moral up.

⁸ Middle Stork is a peak near to Rothera

⁹ CTD – Conductivity Temperature Depth measurements

[Part 2 0:57:00]Lee: I'm reassured. That was the case of course in the heroic period or even the 60's and 70's the base becomes silent whilst people open their post

Lehman: Oh it still is now, really is. And I felt for people who didn't receive any post I have to say. To be fair I had a slight reputation for gaining the most post. There was a sweepstake as to whether they'd have to charter a specific flight to bring my mail in. My friends posted me things, I'm very lucky with my friends. Some people didn't post anything but that's fine, it's just not them.

[Part 2 0:57:35]Lee: So even though there's emails and phone calls?

Lehman: Nothing compares to having something tangible. Because it's distant. There's nothing tangible, a person has held that letter and posted it. There's that physical contact with the person albeit slightly mediated through a piece of paper

[Part 2 0:57:54]Lee: There's an extra level of thoughtfulness isn't there?

Lehman: Yea and sentiment even from girlfriends. It's not a romantic thing necessarily. I don't think I was the only one to experience that, I think everybody that received post. People who were there in the summer when the post arrived there's a real buzz around base. Nobody's loitering; getting the doctor to put the post out as fast as possible.

[Part 2 0:58:18]Lee: The doctor was post mistress was she?

Lehman: Yes, yes doctor's post mistress. I remember the first plane we had in at the start of the winter had loads of post, 8 bags so people gave me a hand to sort it out as fast as possible. It's just so important. So that's a definite morale booster. I'm very grateful to everybody that posted me things because it was very kind. I had some very, very beautiful presents and lovely letters; one of the important things that kept me going. And it makes me think what I will do for other people as well.

[Part 2 0:58:56]Lee: Shall we stop?

Lehman: Yes

[Part 2 0:58:58]

<ENDS>

Possible Extracts:

- The interview at BAS [Part 1 0:04:39]
- Contacting BASMU whilst away [Part 1 0:09:27]
- How you are perceived as a doctor on base [Part 1 0:15:47]
- The journey down to Antarctica [Part 1 0:22:36]
- Restocking medicines at Rothera [Part 1 0:30:40]
- The impact of being the sole doctor at Rothera [Part 1 0:33:51]
- Medical Research at Rothera [Part 1 0:40:00]
- Keeping in contact with world events [Part 1 0:53:18]
- Being a petrol pump attendant [Part 2 0:00:10]
- Claire's first winter trip [Part 2 0:05:44]
- Caught in a white out [Part 2 0:14:12]
- Scientific talks on base [Part 2 0:26:07]
- The lasting relationship with BAS [Part 2 0:29:58]
- How Antarctica changes you [Part 2 0:36:32]
- Coping with religion whilst away [Part 2 0:45:42]