

## ALEX GAFFIKIN

Edited transcript of a recording of Alex Gaffikin interviewed by Chris Eldon Lee on 18th June 2011. Transcribed by Andy Smith, 19th November 2012.

Part 1

[Part 1 0:00:00] Lee: This is Alex Gaffikin recorded by Chris Eldon Lee on the 18th of June 2011. Alex Gaffikin.

Gaffikin: Yes, my name is Alex Gaffikin and I am 34 years old. I live in London and I used to work for the British Antarctic Survey. Is that enough?

[Part 1 0:00:18] Lee: What was your date of birth?

Gaffikin: The 12<sup>th</sup> of August 1976.

[Part 1 0:00:22] Lee: And where were you born?

Gaffikin: I was born in Lambeth in London, in South London. But I was brought up in Balham in South London.

[Part 1 0:00:31] Lee: And your background? What sort of education did you have, Alex?

Gaffikin: Well I went to junior school, secondary school. I did A-levels in biology, physics and maths, because I liked science. Actually I liked lots of things but I thought there was more chance of getting a career in science. Then I went to UMIST which is now part of Manchester University. I did Physics and Environmental Science. I did that for three years.

[Part 1 0:01:01] Lee: Your parents, were they professional people?

Gaffikin: Oh my golly! My Mum hasn't worked probably since she had me, but she is a churchwarden. She does a lot with the church. My Dad was an economics teacher. Then he was the Vice-Principal and then the Principal of Brixton College, South London. None of them were scientists, although apparently my mum's father (my grandfather) had an interest in physics, and exploring too.

[Part 1 0:01:33] Lee: Where did he go?

Gaffikin: Ah well during the Second World War he was stationed in Egypt and he did a lot of traipsing around North Africa. Then he ended up in Italy as well, liberating Italy. He fell in love with those countries while he was there, at war, and he travelled a lot and learned a lot of languages. I never met him but I think he would be very proud of my accomplishments.

[Part 1 0:01:55] Lee: So there are some explorer genes in your DNA?

Gaffikin: Yes.

[Part 1 0:01:57] Lee: Tell me a bit about your relationship with the church, because that is very important to you, isn't it?

Gaffikin: Yes. So my Mum got me baptised in my local church when I was a baby, Holy Trinity Anglican Church. In fact we still go there because I live in South London now. I was in the choir, Sunday School, all that sort of thing. So I did a lot of activities with the church and with various religious groups, that sort of thing. Which is quite funny because obviously when I applied for the job with the British Antarctic Survey, I had written about this in my CV, all the things I had done. I remember sitting in the interview and (I can't remember who it was now, it might have been Jon Shanklin) or (I can't remember who was the chap from personnel) but someone said to me 'We can see from your CV, Alex, that your faith is very important to you. Do you feel when you go to Antarctica, you might want to share that faith?' I was thinking 'They are actually asking me if I am going to go down and be a crazy Bible-bashing evangelist. So I said 'No, no. It is quite alright. I am not going to go down there and try to convert everybody. Each to his own.'

[Part 1 0:03:10] Gaffikin: But it was quite interesting because then I stopped for a moment and I thought to myself. 'That is true, but it is not quite the whole story.' So I plucked up the courage to say at the end that actually even though I wasn't going to try and convert everyone to Christianity, my faith was very important to me and I felt that would be a benefit to working in Antarctica because I would really try and be a good Christian and to 'love my neighbour as myself' and try to build a good community spirit. So I mentioned that in my interview, which obviously did not work against me which was very good. Actually the guy who was the personnel officer then said 'Ah that is interesting' and he produced this article from a magazine about a doctor who had been to Antarctica and had a spiritual experience as well. So it was quite funny really. Usually work and religion don't collide, but they did. Meanwhile down in Antarctica I discovered the Halley-ites were panicking, thinking 'My God ...', seeing my CV about my guitar playing and my church, having visions of my singing *Kumbayar* at them. So they were very relieved when I turned up and was vaguely normal.

[Part 1 0:04:21] Lee: Let's just explore that for a moment or two because it was obviously on my list of questions too. BAS aren't very good at catering for religion, are they?

Gaffikin: Well, there was no chaplain or anything like that. There was a church in the Falkland Islands. Then there was also the church at South Georgia, Grytviken, that has services every so often – once a year I think – so I visited that which was nice but, no, my nearest church was (I think) the Falkland Islands. And they did not have a space on the base. We heard that in the Indian base they did. They had a kind of Prayer Room but at Halley there wasn't. I suppose the only sort of 'religious' thing I did was: I think it was my final year when we organised carol singing on the ship and we had mince pies and mulled wine. We got all the 'steelies' together and we sang Christmas carols which was very nice, but otherwise there wasn't any kind of provision.

[Part 1 0:05:27] Lee: So how did you manage to maintain your commitment to worship without any opportunity for communal worship.

Gaffikin: I am in the Church of England and it is not so much like the Catholic Church where taking communion every day is very very important. For me in my church particularly, Holy Trinity, that communitarian aspect is very important. So seeing God, seeing Jesus in your neighbour is very important. Trying to love your neighbour and see Jesus in them is very important. So for me, trying to build positive relationships, avoiding gossip, being positive, trying to be the first to love in a situation, those were the ways that I could express my Christianity, I suppose.

[Part 1 0:06:17] Lee: So you were doing it through secular procedures, if you like?

Gaffikin: Yes, through actions. When I first arrived on base, you would hear stories things in Antarctica, about people who ... , cliques that form, or arguments that happen. I remember when I first arrived, two of the people on base had fallen out with each other, weren't really talking. Vicky mentioned this to me as she was leaving.

[Part 1 0:06:49] Lee: Vicky Auld?

Gaffikin: Yes, Vicky Auld. As she was leaving she said 'These two folks that you are working with don't really get on' and I remember thinking 'I am not going to listen to all this news and gossip – all this stuff from last year – I am just going to start afresh with these people, and try to build new relationships with them and try to love them.' So I did both separately. With Adrian I worked very hard, talked to him to find out about his experiences, and with Karen I tried to find out about her experiences. Gradually I think both of them realised that I was not there to judge them, or to be mean to them, or to gossip about them or pick on them, whatever. So I became friends with one and friends with the other. Eventually the two of them became friends with each other, and made up in a sense. It was really nice because by the end of the first year, I remember some of the guys, the pilots and the plane mechanics coming in and I remember them coming in one summer and saying to me 'Alex, you know it is such a pleasure to come onto base with such a lovely atmosphere.' I am not saying it was perfect; don't get me wrong, but they said it was lovely to arrive because sometimes you arrive at a base and you have no idea what to expect: factions, cliques, wars, whatever. They said the last couple of years had been just lovely to arrive on base and it had been such a nice atmosphere.

[Part 1 0:08:11] Lee: They can become 'pressure cookers' can't they?

Gaffikin: I guess, yes, because there are so few of you. There were 16 winterers when I was there but I think we got on really well, because considering there were so few people and so much time. Quite amazing really.

[Part 1 0:08:28] Lee: Did you find time in what is obviously a very busy routine, particularly in the summer, did you find time for private prayer or was there always a conflict between having to unload a ship and having to do what you wanted to do privately?

Gaffikin: I was reading my diary this morning and I had written something on one of the pages about how ... I had written something really lovely, that I was in this place with no formal worship, no church, no vicars, but I said 'I can see God everywhere.' I think that was partly in the camaraderie of the people on base, but partly as well just the sheer beauty of it. I am not a creationist but I remember standing at the edge of the sea ice, looking out over the sea ice, and it was ... I must have been on a creek one day. The sun was setting, the sky had gone purple and pink. I was just feeling this overwhelming sense of the beauty of it all and feeling that being part of a creation, of feeling God in that beauty I suppose and thanking God for that and for that moment. Those were my moments for a real strong sense of God and sense of prayer really.

[Part 1 0:10:00] Lee: So you felt the hand of a Creator?

Gaffikin: Yes. As I said, I am not a creationist. I believe in evolution, but somehow the sense that the existence of it all and the beauty of it all. How lucky we all are to live on this planet and have such beautiful things to experience. Well at least some of us, anyway (and then everybody else vicariously through me).

[Part 1 0:10:26] Lee: Well also through example. You mention in your notes that you used to help clear up on your days off and you would gash when it wasn't your turn to gash, and you would make doughnuts at breakfast time. I suppose these are just physical examples of outward love which you hope rubbed off on other people.

Gaffikin: Yes exactly. And it does you know. It really works. I belong to a group; it is called the Focolare and it is a religious organisation that is all about that practical Christianity, of Christianity being more than just going to church, going to confession, ticking boxes, taking communion, but really about trying to put it into practice, living the Gospel in your everyday life and for me that was so important being in Antarctica. Because there were only 16 people in a small area, you can have really a big impact through very little you know. And it rubs off on people: through me refusing to let people gossip or be mean to each other, people would change their ways slowly or just relax or just ... I will tell you one experience for example. I remember when I arrived, Adrian, he was one of the other meteorologists, infamous the year before. He won't mind me telling you this. Everybody talked about it the whole time.

[Part 1 0:11:38] Gaffikin: We all had to take it in turns to do dinner occasionally. He had done beans on toast, bring your own toast! [laughs] He had heated up a pot of beans. I just don't think he had been that happy really the year before. Anyway the year that I arrived down there it was a fresh start for a lot of them and I made a real effort with Adrian in particular and we got on really really well and he got on really well with the doctor, John Paddle. About halfway through my first year, the two of them spent all Saturday preparing a lavish Indian feast. I thought 'This is it. This just shows that you can't ever pigeonhole people.' You can't ever say 'OK this person is this way, they had this experience. This is how they are in Antarctica.' One year he is doing beans on toast, the next year he is spending .... They must have been preparing it for days and days. It was fantastic. I didn't suggest it to them or anything but part of the thing was to try and what I wanted was to create a base where people were happy and I think that was one of those expressions of happiness really, was for those two to do this huge act of love, really, for everyone else.

[Part 1 0:12:52] Lee: Should there be a prayer room on BAS bases? Would it help or would it be superfluous?

Gaffikin: I don't know. We had the library and the library was a calm space. I remember sometimes just sitting in there and thinking or meditating or knitting. Having the space to yourself and I think that is very important. It is important to have space like that. People have different expressions of their religiosity. I don't know. It is good to have a place of quiet, I think, where if you want to pray or meditate, you can. Or if you just want to escape and be by yourself, or read a book, you can. So we had that which was nice.

[Part 1 0:13:42] Lee: The other early influence you mentioned is being a member of the Woodcraft Folk, the youth organisation. Were you ever called upon to employ your woodcraft skills in the Antarctic?

Gaffikin: No. It is called Woodcraft but it has got nothing to do with wood really. That was the name given to it by the founder who ... I can't remember when it was now; it must have been the '50s or '60s or something. He was a Scout and his sister had wanted to come along and she couldn't because Scouts was for blokes only. It was also quite militaristic so: I can't remember the name of the chap who founded it but he founded this organisation, a youth group, in order to take inner-city kids out of cities and take them out into the countryside. So my mum signed us up to this as kids because she was a bit of a Socialist, anarchist. She didn't want us in the Scouts or Brownies; she thought that was too military. So we used to go camping and hiking. We did music and barn dancing, all that sort of thing. I think it gave me such a huge fantastic start to life into camping, preparing, packing. All that sort of stuff stood me in great stead.

[Part 1 0:14:53] Lee: So in some respects this physical outdoors world was, you were introduced to the outdoors world through the Woodcraft Folk.

Gaffikin: Yes, that's right.

[Part 1 0:15:01] Lee: Which of course becomes important when you go South. How did you first hear about the Antarctic? What was your first connection with the place?

Gaffikin: I hadn't thought about it at all until I was doing my Masters. I had finished my degree at UMIST and I had started doing a Masters, in Computational and Experimental Fluid Engineering, which was horrible. I was still at UMIST but I met up with my old tutor Dr Bicknell. He used to take his tutees to the pub on Friday evenings and just informally chat to them. I bumped into him and he invited me along on the Friday. We were chatting away and he said 'What are you going to do for the rest of your life, Alex?' I said 'I have no idea.' I was 21. He said 'I think you should go to Antarctica. You would be good at that.' I was thinking 'What a stupid thing to say to someone.' But there was method to this madness. In fact I discovered that the UMIST Physics Department had a long association with BAS and many of the researchers had been down. In fact much later on I also got a job with UMIST and went back to Antarctica but at the time I thought it was rather random.

[Part 1 0:16:05] Gaffikin: But I mentioned it to a few friends and one friend said ‘Did you know that (a couple of weeks later just by coincidence) BAS are coming to Manchester University to do an employer presentation?’ So I went along. I can’t remember the name of the chap now but he did a slide show. He showed loads of pictures of Antarctica. He did not really talk about jobs; he just showed pictures. I sat there thinking ‘That’s what I want to do. I want to go there.’ So I went along to the Careers Department. This was all before the Internet so it was just like a big folder, full of jobs. I remember just flicking through them until I found literally the first one that I was qualified to do, which was a post of Meteorologist/ Physicist/ Electronic Engineer. I thought ‘Aha!’ but they had run out of application forms because obviously it was very popular. I thought ‘Oh I am never going to get this.’ But I wrote off for an application form and filled it in and sent it off, much to my mother’s horror. [laughs] And yes got the interview and then got the job.

[Part 1 0:16:59] Lee: What do you remember about the interview, because usually in the old days they were quite informal and relaxed. I guess they have sharpened up in more recent years.

Gaffikin: Well I sort of cheated.

[Part 1 0:17:09] Lee: You cheated?

Gaffikin: Well kind of. When I was still working at UMIST, I mentioned to a few people that I had applied and got this interview, and one of my friends said (he was doing a PhD) that a guy had just come back from Faraday working as a Met man down there. So I went and chatted to this bloke and he showed me slides. He said ‘Oh you will have an interview with Jon Shanklin and he will ask you all these questions.’ So he told me what they were going to say.

[Part 1 0:17:34] Lee: That’s not cheating; that’s research.

Gaffikin: That’s right. For example he said ‘They will ask you what the weather is like today.’ So on the way down to BAS HQ I was looking at the weather, which was basically stratus (nothing exciting going on there). He said ‘They will ask you about why you want to go, what excites you about it.’ He just gave me loads of ideas about questions they might ask. So at least when I went into the interview I had an idea of the sort of things they might ask me. There were three people. There was Jon Shanklin, a chap from the personnel department and I think somebody from the other department, because at Halley there were two departments: there was the Lower Atmospheric Physics and the Upper Atmospheric Physics and I think they were keeping an eye ... They interviewed me as well, just to see if I would be any good for those posts. But in the end I went down as a Met man, Met woman. Met Babe, that was what we called ourselves down there.

[Part 1 0:18:32] Lee: Were you surprised to get the job, or were you young and full of expectation?

Gaffikin: I was delighted. Surprised? I don’t think I really appreciated at the time how many people would go for the jobs and how popular they would be and what a great ..., how lucky I was basically, how great it was. I just, I thought it was so bizarre.

How many people would want to go to Antarctica? In fact I think they had hundreds of applications but I did not know that at the time. My mother wasn't surprised. She thought I might get it.

[Part 1 0:19:15] Lee: You had a penchant for penguins I gather, in your earlier years?

Gaffikin: Mm. Yes, I wrote you my limerick didn't I?

[Part 1 0:19:24] Lee: I have it in front of me.

Gaffikin: Shall I read it out to you? Why not? I wrote this in junior school.

[Part 1 0:19:27] Lee: You were nine years old.

Gaffikin: Heaven knows what was going through my head. It is pretty gory but I will tell it to you:

There once was a penguin from the Pole  
Who hitched up a ride with a sole  
A day and a half later  
He reached the Equator  
And the penguin burned up like a coal.

[laughs] Isn't that fab? I used to be a gory child, but yes, I must have done this project on penguins at junior school.

[Part 1 0:19:52] Lee: I will email you my penguin song.

Gaffikin: Did you write one?

[Part 1 0:19:57] Lee: It was only written ten years ago. But otherwise, the Antarctic had not been on your radar really, until you saw the advert?

Gaffikin: No not until Dr Bicknell mentioned it to me in the pub. I had wanted to go exploring. I had always imagined myself having adventures and seeing the world. I did not want to just get my degree, get a job, get a mortgage, get a family. I thought that would be far too boring. I wanted to go and see the world.

[Part 1 0:20:26] Lee: So you gave up your Masters degree, didn't you?

Gaffikin: I did yes. I didn't finish it.

[Part 1 0:20:30] Lee: A sacrifice?

Gaffikin: Yes. It wasn't a huge sacrifice. I wasn't doing very well at it.

[Part 1 0:20:35] Lee: So you started to get to know this rather strange government department called British Antarctic Survey. I guess the first serious rubbing of shoulders was going to be at the Cambridge Conference.

Gaffikin: Well I guess, although I started quite early. I must have gone in July, at the beginning of July for work in the Met department there. So I did an awful lot of

training before the Cambridge Conference. I had done the Met training: 2 weeks in Camborne for example. And we also went to Derbyshire. Maybe that was after Camborne, but I had spent the summer at BAS HQ. So I had already been there about 2 months I think before the Conference, so I already knew quite a lot of people and knew my way around. I knew what I was getting myself into. Then, I can't remember the Conference very well at all. I think I was in a blur, but do you know what I did find really funny? I remember when lots of my friends were applying for jobs back in the UK, for things like pharmaceutical companies and whatnot. They had huge great big kind of interviews and second interviews and psychometric testing and all that sort of thing. I remember being surprised that I had sent in my application form, an hour long interview and bang, I had got the job. But now with hindsight I realise that in fact that whole summer really, and the trip down on the ship, is one long interview, and they are just keeping their beady eye on you the whole time to see how you are getting on.

[Part 1 0:22:03] Lee: People have been sent back from Stanley.

Gaffikin: Yes, and people have sent themselves back from Stanley and from Halley as they have realised it is not for them. So I suppose it is an interview all the way down, isn't it.

[Part 1 0:22:14] Lee: Was it for you?

Gaffikin: I didn't feel like that, no. I was just so excited. I didn't feel homesick at all really. I am the sort of person who wherever they turn up, or find themselves, I feel at home instantly.

[Part 1 0:22:31] Lee: Who were you leaving behind?

Gaffikin: No-one really, my Mum and Dad, Joe and Tom, but I had left. I had gone to university aged 18 and I had only been back in holidays so I did not feel like I was abandoning them. Then all my friends at university had gone around the world and I didn't have a boyfriend. They asked me that in the interview. Yes. I don't if they asked everyone else, but they asked us all at the interview if we'd had a partner. I don't think they would have refused to give me the job but perhaps just to see if you knew what you were letting yourself in for. But I discovered something funny because when I went down to Antarctica I discovered that between the interview and saying 'No, one does not have a partner' and actually leaving, loads of the lads in Antarctica had managed to acquire girlfriends. I think they never realised that they were leaving for a year or two years and they wanted no-one back at home to be thinking of them. So they managed to acquire these girlfriends, temporary ones. There were quite a few 'Dear John's in the first year.

[Part 1 0:23:30] Lee: Like soldiers going off to war?

Gaffikin: Yes, you want someone to miss you, don't you? But I didn't have you know. I had moved on really, so ...

[Part 1 0:23:38] Lee: But the training also encompassed some things you might not expect to have to do as a Met man, which was to learn about medicine?



Gaffikin: Yes, I did the first aid training at Camborne, and I had obviously done well enough or because I was going to Halley, I did the advanced first aid training. So we went down with BASMU to Plymouth. We must have spent a week there. We went out with the ambulance crews. So at one stage I was helping the ambulance crews and we got called to a guy who had had a heart attack. I remember going to this house and doing CPR on this bloke, giving him chest compressions while the ambulance crew were setting up their equipment. I was thinking ‘Cor blimey, I have really been thrown in the deep end.’ But I think that is a really good start for Antarctica, because the one thing you need in Antarctica that taught me more than anything else was to just leap on in there and fix things yourself. There is no waiting around for someone else to sort it out. Obviously we had electricians and plumbers and whatnot, but most of the time if something is not working, you have to just get in there and sort it out yourself. That stood with me for the rest of my life. I don’t just call somebody to come and fix something. I leap on in there, possibly to the detriment sometimes, I think of botched jobs.

[Part 1 0:25:03] Lee: What happened to the poor guy?

Gaffikin: Well they kick-started him with the pads and we took him in the ambulance and then his heart kept stopping and we kept re-zapping him all the way to hospital and which point he got taken in to A & E. I don’t know what happened to him after that. I stitched up a guy’s head (he had had a breeze block fall on his head). This was in Plymouth again. It was fascinating, very fascinating.

[Part 1 0:25:31] Lee: I wasn’t aware of that. Thank you for that. So anyway off you went, on the *Bransfield* from Grimsby. This ship was probably smaller than you thought it was going to be?

Gaffikin: Yes I think so. I can’t really remember now. It was pouring with rain I do remember. The night before we left I couldn’t sleep at all and I was sick. At home I was actually vomiting, I was so excited and nervous and everything. As my parents drove me up to Grimsby I remember we arrived, just pulled up next to the ship and there was nobody there. You just get your stuff out, walk up the gangplank and eventually somebody comes over and ‘Ah yes, hello.’ Nice big cabin; they are bigger cabins on the *Branny* than the *Shackleton*. The first night we spent at the dock. I think we must have left about midnight or one o’clock, but I went to sleep. I didn’t want to say goodbye to England. In fact the first morning we ended up going further inland. We went up north – because they were testing something out – but then by the afternoon we were out, doing the crossing, which was very smooth.

[Part 1 0:26:42] Lee: What was it like down South? Was it everything you hoped for?

Gaffikin: It was warmer than I thought it was going to be. I remember when we arrived at: I can’t remember, one of the creeks anyway. We pulled up and I remember pulling on all my clothes, my balaclava and everything, just walking out like Michelin Man. Everybody else was in their windy tops and a hat or something. I was covered from head to toe. I did that for about two days before I realised, actually, -9 was not the same as -40, and I could take some of my clothes off. So it was warmer. That was the other weird thing as well: it doesn’t feel as big because there is no ... It is like

being on a ship when you are on the water, or if you are on ice, there is nothing, there is no frame of reference. There are no mountains or cities or anything, so you do not have an idea how far you are looking. On the ship and in the base as well, it felt smaller than I thought. I thought I would be in a place where I could see for miles and miles and miles. But there is no perspective, so that I found very surprising. I remember the first time I got on the back of a German sledge to go up to base, with Karen and Mark Doughty. We were travelling up and Karen kept pointing things out to me.

[Part 1 0:28:01] Lee: Karen?

Gaffikin: Karen Shorey. She had been there already a year, with Vicky, and then she did another year with me. We were travelling up together and she was pointing things out. She was going 'That's the drum depot and that's the caboose and this is the summer accommodation building.' I looked and they just looked like black blobs on a white background to me. I had absolutely no ... They all looked the same really. Flat white ice and black blobs. Later when you get to it, you can distinguish anything from everything, because there are only half a dozen things down there. That was funny. I did not particularly remember having huge expectations, or not huge expectations but huge knowledge really of what I was expecting, so I was delightfully surprised.

[Part 1 0:28:50] Lee: Well I suppose you were expecting to have to work pretty hard. Relief time is a time when you do work exceedingly hard. Do you have any memories from that first relief, because it is full-on from the moment you land, isn't it?

Gaffikin: Yes. So I went to bed and Paul Cousens said 'Right I will be picking you up at 8 o'clock tomorrow morning. No about 10 to 8. We will go down to the depot line. So I went to sleep, woke up, had a shower, had breakfast and straight away on the back of this strange guy's skidoo. Paul Cousens had the most humungous beard. He was from New Zealand. In fact he was a gentle giant but I was terrified. I got on the back of the skidoo. He just drove me out to the depot and that was it. I was spending the rest of my day directing cranes, unloading things. I thought this was the end of the world, but it was great fun.

[Part 1 0:29:34] Gaffikin: You just don't have enough time to get homesick or bored, not that first week of relief, because you are 8 in the morning to 8 in the evening, bang bang bang you know, and then as soon as you finish it is dinner and about an hour chatting to people, collapse in bed. The next morning, off you go again. I loved it. It kept me busy. In fact I loved Antarctica for that reason. There was very little difference in my head between the work, the Met work, and the base work that we had to do, digging things out constantly. Or just the stuff you had to do because there are no shops, like making presents for people or cards or cooking, that sort of thing. It was just ... You didn't really have a day off, in the sense of ... and even when you did go on a trip, because it was a field trip, you were jumaring, ice climbing, and stuff. So they were all just rolled into one really for me.

[Part 1 0:30:27] Lee: What about the Met work? How was that for you when you got there? Or did you not do any in the end?

Gaffikin: I did. In fact I think the first relief was quite complicated because Karen and I kept having to shoot off every three hours to do Met observations. It took quite a while to get up to speed. There was an awful lot we had to do: weather observations, ozone observations, launch weather balloons every morning at 11. There was kite flying; there was snow stake measurement. There were loads of instruments to monitor so we had shifts between the three of us. Plus some other people on base as well, but it was very time-consuming. There was an awful lot ... I would say it took me at least 6 months to get to grips with every single job and how to do it all properly. I made some messes as well.

[Part 1 0:31:13] Lee: Any that you can talk about?

Gaffikin: I think I miscoded something for about 3 months. I think it was cloud cover or something like that. I eventually confessed to Karen 'I am doing it wrong.' But things were always breaking. I don't know; I can't remember anything particular.

[Part 1 0:31:35] Lee: How do you measure snow flakes?

Gaffikin: Measure snowflakes?

[Part 1 0:31:39] Lee: Oh sorry, snow stakes.

Gaffikin: Snow stakes? We had an array of 10 snow stakes out 50 yards away from the Simpson Building (or the ICB or B building), and two or three times a week we had to go out. You had to approach them from the same direction with a measuring tape and just measure how long they were, and obviously then just record that in a chart, and it just measured the amount of snowfall that we had. That was a fairly simple job, actually.

[Part 1 0:32:18] Lee: And the ozone measurements? There were chaps doing ozone measurements at Halley 40 years before you, before the discovery of the Hole. What was your feeling about doing that, because obviously you were there 15 years after the discovery of the ozone hole. So did it feel like important work?

Gaffikin: Oh it was amazing, because of course Jon Shanklin was teaching us and he was part of the team that had discovered the hole in the ozone layer.

[Part 1 0:32:42] Lee: With Joe Farman?

Gaffikin: Yes. So that was incredible and I think we might even have been using the same instrument, the Dobson ozone spectrophotometer. It is a very mechanical instrument, and Jon had explained how they had discovered the Ozone Hole. The Americans had been using satellites and they had had some sort of computer programmes that had corrected the ozone measurements, which meant that the Hole hadn't appeared. Because they said 'If the figure drops below a certain level, it must be wrong. Therefore we will put it back up to a certain level.' But of course with a fairly mechanical, simple electro photometers, stuff like that, it was so simple that you get a reading, it must be the right reading. It was a hell of a machine to use. Lots of dials and knobs; it was prehistoric, but it worked brilliantly because it was the same instrument they had been using. We had to calibrate it but it was essentially the same

instrument they had been using for 40 years. There were two of them anyway that they alternated. Yes, our readings were part of this continuity for 50 years, or whatever it was. So it was incredible. It was great to be part of that, that scientific legacy. Plus it was brilliantly useful because you could see when the hole in the ozone was forming, so come September or October you could put up a warning on base: 'Put your sunscreen on because you are going to burn, frazzle like ...'.

[Part 1 0:34:10] Lee: So you could actually watch the Hole getting bigger and smaller, could you?

Gaffikin: Yes.

[Part 1 0:34:14] Lee: More dense and more opaque? More transparent?

Gaffikin: Well you could just ... Every day we would take a Dobson unit reading and you could see over winter you would have a fairly high level. Then come spring, it would drop, drop, drop all the way down to 100 Dobson units or something, which is basically no more ozone above your heads. You are going to frazzle. It was very interesting and Jon, he would use our results, publish papers still. Send out ozone bulletins around the world that people were using. It was great to be part of that.

[Part 1 0:34:45] Lee: You are very fortunate in that respect. Most of the chaps, the older Fids who were doing those kind of early measurement work, they didn't really ever understand, or they didn't really ever get told, the consequence of the work they were doing. They were just recording stuff, whereas you were actually recording it and seeing how useful that information was at the time.

Gaffikin: Yes. And with the weather observations, obviously we sent those back every day to Bracknell, who then fed it into their super-computers to predict the weather forecasts for the whole world. Our data point in Antarctica, because the Met observation stations were so far apart, it meant our data was incredibly important to the weather forecasting, so it was good. I got my name on a paper. That was for running some GPS's. Someone came down and put the GPS on the ice shelf to measure the ice flow. That was a huge big deal because of climate change. They were trying to measure how fast the ice sheets were flowing, all that sort of thing. So that was just taking off when I was down there. That was a really big deal.

[Part 1 0:35:55] Lee: So it was an exciting time, scientifically?

Gaffikin: It was, yes, because ice shelves were breaking up. The Peninsula ice was breaking up. So everyone was very keen on measuring and finding out why the ice was flowing so quickly.

[Part 1 0:36:09] Lee: And did you?

Gaffikin: I didn't but I think the data that I helped collect has gone into lots of models of ice flow and glacier flow and that sort of thing. I don't know what the results are now.

[Part 1 0:36:28] [End of Part One]

Part 2

[Part 2 0:00:00] Lee: Did you get out much, into the big wild world?

Gaffikin: Every summer I did co-pilot flights around Halley. So we flew out to various nunataks and things, which was great, because that was rocks. That was very exciting. Then I also went on some field trips. Sometimes we went to the Windy Caboose which was down by the creeks. We went camping at the Hinge Zone, but the best trip I went on was in my final summer, when I flew to Rothera for the weekend. That was terrific. That was the most exciting thing of the whole time because you have got to imagine being at Halley for two and a half years. Basically it is flat white ice as far as the eye can see, every day.

[Part 2 0:00:45] Gaffikin: So then in my final summer, Steve<sup>1</sup> the base commander said to me that there had been a fault on one of the Twin Otters and they had to fly it to Rothera to get it looked at, and would I co-pilot the flight with Andy Alsop. I said 'Yes, that would be fantastic.' I think that was the best day of my life ever, ever. We took off from Halley and we flew about 6 hours across, around the Weddell Sea really, over the Peninsula. We got up to whatever it was, 15000 feet, and Andy said 'Have you ever flown a plane before?' I said 'Well I have done a few co-pilots with Les.' He said 'Well, it is dead easy. Here is the compass. Point it in this direction. Off you go.' I must have flown for ages. It was wonderful, really wonderful. One of the best bits was flying as we approached the Peninsula, the air had obviously flowed over a mountain and formed these giant lenticular clouds, huge almost spherical balls of clouds, kind of lumps. They looked like giant white Christmas trees. I remember flying around these almost giant round spherical Christmas trees. That was just unbelievable. And then as we approached the Peninsula, it was just amazing, because, much as I love Halley, it is flat and white. So it was great to see the mountains. We flew around a bit and saw icebergs and the mountains. Then we landed at Rothera, which was like paradise. They had salad. They had animals. They had rock. They had plants. I felt like a country bumpkin cousin, wandering around going 'Ah, shells, lettuce.' It was great.

[Part 2 0:02:40] Lee: You also had a fault, did you not?

Gaffikin: That didn't worry me at all.

[Part 2 0:02:46] Lee: You co-piloted a plane and there was something wrong with it?

Gaffikin: I don't remember what the fault was, but obviously quite minor to fly across.

[Part 2 0:02:53] Lee: It sounds like an excuse for a trip, actually.

Gaffikin: A bit of a jolly maybe. Cheer me up. 'The poor guy has been looking a bit glum.'

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<sup>1</sup> This would be Steve Marshall. AS.

[Part 2 0:03:00] Lee: Some of the things you had to pick up, skills you had to develop whilst you were down there. Learning how to do flight following. This is balloon, aeroplane?

Gaffikin: No, this is for the Comms. In my first year Mark Ryan was the Communications Officer. Obviously, being in Antarctica, everyone has got their job, but should one of you disappear, vanish, die or whatever, you always need backup people. So I volunteered to be the reserve Communications Officer, just in case something happened to Mark. So he taught me how to work all the radios, the telex machines, plus all the emergency satellite phones and how to set that up. But the best thing was, he taught me how to do the flight following for the aeroplanes, just in case. Also, when the first planes are coming in, it is quite tiring to do flight following, so sometimes I would take over from him. So we learned how to do all the signals, pass information and all that sort of thing. So that was great. It was like doing air traffic control at Halley, for a couple of planes anyway. I really enjoyed that actually; it was good fun.

[Part 2 0:04:06] Lee: And emergency satellite phones, you had to learn about those as well? They were just coming in I guess, were they?

Gaffikin: They had been there a couple of ... I don't know when they had arrived. It was all stored at the garage, just in case the main accommodation building went up in flames, or we had to evacuate for whatever reason. It was all stored down in the garage, so every so often we had a drill and we would all have to pile out of the building, go down to the garage and we all had jobs. Somebody would go over to (the changed the names of the buildings while I was down there) the SSB/ Piggott Building. That was where the emergency generator was, so a whole load of people would go off and do that. Mark and I would go down to the garage and set up all the emergency comms equipment and test calling BAS HQ, that sort of thing. Then I used to use it, as a test as well, to call my mum, another treat.

[Part 2 0:05:05] Lee: How much were you in touch with home ten years ago? Were there direct phone lines by then?

Gaffikin: No, what we had was, we had an email schedule. There was a phone but it was tremendously expensive, so I only phoned at 'high days and holidays'. We also had an email schedule twice a day. When I first arrived, there was a limit to the amount you could write but actually, for some reason I think they bought more bandwidth on the satellite, by the end you could send emails pretty much willy-nilly, although I did not send that many. They got Internet eventually but it was after I left. So I had pretty good communication.

[Part 2 0:05:42] Lee: So being in touch with your mum was still a rare treat?

Gaffikin: Yes.

[Part 2 0:05:46] Lee: That was made, at a guess, in both directions?

Gaffikin: Emails backwards and forwards.

[Part 2 0:05:51] Lee: Airmail?

Gaffikin: Airmail came in with the first plane in October/ November, and obviously with the ship as well a whole lot of things came down. Then we had the Midwinter phone call as well. The radio message, when everyone ...

[Part 2 0:06:09] Lee: *Calling Antarctica?*

Gaffikin: Yes. That was great. Weird; it is a weird moment.

[Part 2 0:06:14] Lee: Why?

Gaffikin: I don't know. I found in Antarctica it was best to just imagine that it was just this weird dream going on somewhere else, focussed down .... My life was in Antarctica and it was really strange when you hear news or you hear stories or you hear about people back ... because they don't seem real any more. It seems like a dream. I remember everyone listens to the radio recording and there is this kind of silence. It is almost like 'Oh!' you know, and you don't really want that. So then you try and cheer yourself up by having a few drinks, a slap-up meal and stuff.

[Part 2 0:06:46] Lee: So the reaction to the half-hour radio programme was quite melancholy?

Gaffikin: Exactly; subdued and melancholy. Everybody was reminded of people at home. I don't know; it wasn't my most favourite day in Antarctica.

[Part 2 0:07:02] Lee: Did you follow world news? That was also, as I mentioned, some Fids did and some Fids didn't want to.

Gaffikin: No. In fact I remember when I first arrived we used to get a kind of newsletter thing that was sent out, a news bulletin, and for the first week or couple of weeks you are scrutinising this thing every day. Mark Ryan used to print it out and put out these things. There would be loads of them and everybody would be reading it, but as the weeks went past, as the months went past, you just cared less and less, and you knew less and less about what was going on. No actually he would just print out one version a week and people would vaguely have a look at it, because you just don't care any more, do you? But one of the funniest things that happened when I was down in Antarctica was *Big Brother* started and on television. We read about this and we thought this was hilarious. We read about it: a group of people stuck in a house, given challenges. Of course everybody spent the whole time in Antarctica thinking a 'Fly on the wall' documentary would be awesome. So we read about these people in the Big Brother House. We just thought 'They have got it easy compared to us.' We thought 'How crazy!'

[Part 2 0:08:18] Lee: Yes. I can see the parallels, absolutely. Apart from flying to Rothera, you also did some terrestrial field trips, all of which I wanted to talk a bit about because you went with Dave Routledge to the Hinge Zone and the Arch Berg. What was the Arch Berg? You are the first person to mention this.

Gaffikin: OK, I looked up the same trip in my diary earlier. It was in 1999 so I had arrived and it was still the summer season. I went out on the first field trip of the season, in the summer still. Dave Routledge was the wintering GA. In fact he left that summer. He was notorious. He must have been in his fifties. He was the fittest person I have ever come across in my life and he was notorious for taking people on field trips that were: get up at the crack of dawn, forced march across the icy wastes, jumaring, abseiling, no slacking. So myself, Kevin O'Rourke, and David (the generator mechanic; what was his name? we called him 'Tiny Dave', everyone has nicknames obviously)<sup>2</sup>. So the four of us went out, and (that's right) Dave ... It was hilarious. One of the other things that I discovered later, that winterers did, was they used to collect frozen ... You would have dinners for a week before your field trip and people would take frozen food out with them so they would have proper meals. There was none of that with Dave: you were living out of your manfood box. You might take a few pots of satay sauce to cheer it up but it was all done old-school.

[Part 2 0:09:51] Gaffikin: So we went down to the Hinge Zone. Beautiful weather of course, it was still February, so it was lovely and warm. The two boys were in the other tent and Dave and I were in this one. We would go out on skidoos or go hiking every day. The two features that we particularly listed were Arch Berg which was a berg that was in the shape of an arch. It must have been around for at least a year before we arrived because people on the base were still talking about going visiting it and it was beautiful. We have loads of photos of the beautiful arch but by the time I left, I think in fact by my third summer, the last field trips, it had gone. So it was very temporary. It was in the Hinge Zone obviously, so it was moving around a lot. But the other thing we went to was Stony Berg which I had forgotten about, which was an iceberg that had scraped along the bottom of the sea picking up stones and then flipped up, so it was studded with little rocks and pebbles. That was quite exciting again. Rocks, pebbles, quite unusual. So these were the two places we went to. Gosh I remember the boys moaning. Dave Routledge would take us out and we would be 'Stop, stop, stop!' The rest of us would all be going 'Hey', dying at the back.

[Part 2 0:11:06] Gaffikin: Anyway about three or four days into the field trip Dave and Kevin went on strike. They said 'We are not going for a walk; we just want to have a relaxing day in the tent.' So Dave said to me 'Do you want to go for a walk, Alex?' I was quite tired but why not. You only live once, don't you? So the two of us went out and we had the most lazy day in the world. He didn't storm off. He leisurely strolled around, obviously roped up to me. That was the problem, you see, being roped up to Dave Routledge, you had to keep going. But because there were just the two of us, he was obviously in a good mood and I had said I would go so we just had a lovely stroll around. We stopped for a picnic, we had a nice chat. We had a lovely day together. The next day the boys joined us and off we went again, hurtling across the snow. So that was a beautiful field trip, lovely and warm.

[Part 2 0:12:00] Lee: Did the penguins live up to expectations?

Gaffikin: Oh they were magnificent. Yes we used to go down to the Creeks. I don't know if other people have explained, but there was a place called the Rumples which just south of Halley, which was rocks that were poking out. I don't know if they

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<sup>2</sup> Dave Whitren. AS.



actually came above the sea level but anyway the sea ice used to go over them, then break up and form these cracks in the shelf that would then fill up with snow and form these ramps. It was brilliant of course for relief. But we used to go down and camp next to a creek, things like Creek Three, Creek Six, and then we could walk down onto the sea ice and see the penguins. I think my favourite trips were when we went down and stayed in the caboose when it was sunset (which lasts for weeks). The sky would be beautiful and we used to get these beautiful emperor penguins out there, and the chicks. At first I did not know how to behave with the animals. I used to get too close and scare them a bit and I remember Ian Marriott saying 'Alex, don't get too close, you will alarm them.' They were just as curious about us really because they obviously hadn't seen anything else.

[Part 2 0:13:08] Gaffikin: And we saw some Weddell seals; they were beautiful. I saw, one time we went down to N9 (we were doing a drum raise) and we arrived on the sea ice. This was one of my all-time favourite moments. Who else was on the ship? Jim Fox was because he got very excited about this. We must have been making some noise on the sea ice because we saw these four things approach. At first we thought they were seals but as they got closer, we thought 'They are not.' Next we thought they were dolphins because we didn't really know. But then they came up and it was two mums and two calves, some sort of whale with very very long beaks. Jim thought they were Arnoux's beaked whales but I have never found out. I have looked them up. I have tried looking it up but some sort of whale with very very long beaks, very rare whale. But the great thing was: they could obviously hear us. So they came to have a look at us. They came up and I remember these beautiful big eyes, not that far, 30 yards away. They were coming to have a look at us and we were looking at them. That kind of interaction with wildlife was just precious.

[Part 2 0:14:17] Gaffikin: I remember one time, this was something just for me, because everything you do, you do together. It drives you mad. You have got nothing to talk about because you have done everything together. But one time coming back from the Met Building, doing a weather observation during the day or something, perhaps about 6 o'clock or 9 o'clock in the morning. Everyone else was asleep. As I set off towards (it must have been in summer time) the main Accommodation Building when suddenly the snow erupted. While I had been at the Met Building, a whole load of petrels had come in, seen the buildings and perhaps thought they were mountains. I think they were on their way further inland, the Shackletons, to nest. They had been on the snow and they were white so they were camouflaged, and I disturbed them, and this whole flock of birds just lifted off the ice and went 'Whoosh!' Do you know, I went back to base and I didn't tell anybody, because I wanted to have something just for me. So now you know; it's there for posterity.

[Part 2 0:15:15] Lee: Tell me about the Millennium celebrations, because you were there when the Millennium turned. First of all, when did it turn for you? Where were you in the time zones?

Gaffikin: Oh my golly, now you are asking. I think we were on GMT for most of the year, but I think then we went on to GMT - 3 in the summer season, so we could be on the same period as Rothera. Yes, I think so. Yes we did, so we had a kind of summer ..., like a British summer ...

[Part 2 0:15:52] Lee: So the Millennium happened for you 3 hours before it happened for everyone?

Gaffikin: Yes, it must have done.

[Part 2 0:15:56] Lee: Or 3 hours later?

Gaffikin: Yes, and we had a big party, so I don't have great recollections of what we got up to. [laughs] But we also took a photograph of everybody, which would have gone on the base wall as well. Obviously everyone would say this, but you know how every year you have a winterers photograph that gets put up on the wall. So while we were there we still had all these photographs. I think we did a special one for the Millennium as well, which was great, with everybody who was down there. But we didn't really do much, apart from the party and the photograph. We had the flag of course, because you know at the beginning of summer, the end of winter, we always raffle the flag out, but I think we did a special Millennium flag as well. So somebody won the Millennium flag, possibly Gary Wilson the chippy. He seemed to win all the flags.

[Part 2 0:16:42] Lee: It was a time here for looking forward and looking backwards. I wonder how much opportunity you had to contemplate those who had gone before you, whether in 21<sup>st</sup> century Halley there was any sense of the pioneers from the heroic era who, a hundred years ago, had made their first tentative footsteps on the continent?

Gaffikin: While we were down there ... The Millennium, it was the end of ..., it might even have been the middle of relief and it was such a busy period. It wasn't really a time for recollection. I remember we did most of our recollection and thinking during the winter time and at Midwinter. The library had a huge amount of books on Antarctic history and also we read lots of books about the past. Also we read lots of the old base reports. We had the old film, the old projectors with really old film, reel-to-reel films, so we used to watch that during the winter. We used to learn a lot about the guys who were there, so we all read *Of Ice and Men* and *South*, things like that, Shackleton's *South*. But the other thing I was particularly interested in was the history of women in Antarctica, so I read a lot of books about that before I went and then when I went down there. So the first thing I read was Sarah Wheeler's *Terra Incognita* which was brilliant. [laughs] She had some hilarious experiences. She had been down before women were wintering with the British Antarctic Survey, because I think I was the third year women had wintered. So she had had a mixed bag of experiences.

[Part 2 0:18:25] Gaffikin: But then I was interested in other women, so the other thing I read was *Antarctic Housewife* by Nan Brown which was quite a rare book, and she had wintered at South Georgia with her husband, who was the Comms Manager. That was a very poignant story because at the end I discovered that, later on in life, she had committed suicide. I don't know whether that was related to her experiences in Antarctica or just the person she was. As I said, she spent some time in Antarctica. She used to have a pet penguin that she dressed up. Of course going to South Georgia was very poignant. There were many stories about women in Antarctica. I am trying to think of the other books. I have got some of them at home.

[Part 2 0:19:16] Lee: You hinted at the fact that you were also a historic woman in the Antarctic. Maybe 3 years on but you were still a pioneer, one of the very first female winterers? Did that generate any complications at all, either in physical, practical or just in attitudes?

Gaffikin: Because there is such a high turnover, every 2 years you have a whole new set of people on base. Some of them had obviously been down when there weren't women, particularly the summerers. For example: the winterers, they were a whole new batch so they didn't know any different. It wasn't like the guys were sitting around going 'When I was ...' So from that point of view there was not any major problem. Some of the guys who had been down doing summers would obviously ... Dave Routledge had been down loads of times, but he took it in his stride. He was very kind to me. When we first turned up, we were told that that the base commander before the first women, Lucy and I can't remember her name<sup>3</sup>, some time before they turned up, Les had gone round and pulled all the pornography off the walls. Apparently there had been some modifications before we arrived. The girls' loo had been installed, and they said that women had a civilising effect on the base.

[Part 2 0:20:38] Gaffikin: I was reading my diary on the train down here, and I seemed to spend an awful lot of my time ironing. The blokes just had no sense of cleanliness or decorum. This is another one I confess to: I remember my second winter, towards the end, the summerers were coming back and we got out all the duvets to do up the summer accommodation building, and I insisted on pulling all the duvet covers off and washing them. Some of the guys were like 'Oh don't bother. They will survive.' 'I am not putting dirty duvets back.' So a certain level of standards I think were raised. But some of the gear, some of the equipment was obviously male-orientated. I think I said in the notes that I was issued with underwear, my thermal underwear, was for blokes. It had a great gaping hole in the front for blokes to pee out of, so when I first got it, I stitched it up. So there were a few things like that.

[Part 2 0:21:36] Lee: I hope it wasn't passed on to a chap 2 years later?

Gaffikin: I kept it. I wouldn't ... But some of the other bases didn't have women. We used to play darts with other bases and I remember in my second winter playing with Sanae, the South African base which was all men. I was on the Comms, reading out the scores of the darts match. After about 20 minutes I think I handed back over to Mark Ryan and the guys at the other end of the radio were like 'Put the woman back on!' [laughs] They were obviously very keen to hear a female voice. That was quite funny. My first winter there were two women: there were myself and Karen Shorey, meteorologist. In my second winter there were three women.

[Part 2 0:22:21] Lee: That was a world record?

Gaffikin: That was a world record. Myself, Cat Gillies, the steel erector (steely), and then Lil Ng who was the doctor. That was a unique I think, three women. Still 13 men, and 3 women.

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<sup>3</sup> Lucy Yeomans and Kate Charles. AS.

[Part 2 0:22:37] Lee: So how did that work in the dynamics of the base? Did the women stick together, or did you form a little WI?

Gaffikin: No. I was trying to think about this. Obviously you have got women and men, but pretty soon, after a few weeks, you stop being a woman and a man; you are just people, aren't you? You are David and Kevin and Alex and Lil, and you get on with some people and you don't get on so well with other people. You stop being girls and boys, you just become those people.

[Part 2 0:23:12] Lee: Fids?

Gaffikin: Fids, exactly, and there is a very ...

[Part 2 0:23:16] Lee: So you didn't have any problems in that respect?

Gaffikin: No. There were a few relationships down there in Antarctica. I won't give away any secrets. Maybe that did actually cause some friction with the lads. You are just busy getting on with it really aren't you? We didn't really have any girl cliques. We did have odd girls got very slow. This was in my second year. This is funny. Steve, the GA, decided to ... All three girls decided to go off on a field trip together with the GA. The four of us left base and we said to the guys 'OK, you can do what you like now. Watch as much pornography as you like, trash the place, do whatever you like.' So we all went off base. They apparently just completely behaved themselves. Somebody tried to stick a blue movie on and it lasted about 5 minutes, so they turned it off again. They were very ... We had had quite a civilising effect by then.

[Part 2 0:24:10] Lee: Domesticated?

Gaffikin: Exactly. And there is a lot of peer pressure on boys to be boys.

[Part 2 0:24:19] Lee: A couple of little details then before we wrap up, if I may. You suffered from hallucinations?

Gaffikin: I did. I was on a field trip. I think I had got a bit tired, very tired, and I was dehydrated, and I remember my mind was going completely. Ten out of ten to the lads who got me off the sea ice that afternoon, because I was absolutely knackered. It was Andy Cope mainly. He was the one who helped me get off the ice. I was in a right state. You know sometimes you can forget just how dangerous Antarctica can be, silly things like, you go out in a blizzard and take the wrong step. One of the most scary moments I have ever had in Antarctica was when we were camping down at the coast in a tent and I think I was with Ian Marriott in the tent and the two others were in the caboose. It got to about ten o'clock at night and we left the caboose to go to the tent and it must have been 10 metres away, if that. There were some lights in the caboose but not in the tent and we set off from the caboose and after a few steps I remember looking back to the tent and seeing the glow, turned around and then just saw that I was ... Ian in front of me and then I couldn't see anything else. The wind was howling, the snow blowing and I thought to myself 'Oh my gosh! I hope he knows which direction he is going in because a tent is not that big and if we miss the

tent and we are moving away from the caboose, which has got the light on, that's it. We could walk off the edge of a cliff. We could just die of exposure.' I remember suddenly my heart went in my mouth and I thought to myself ... and literally about 5 seconds later, bang, we hit the tent. But for that moment of disorientation, when I turned round and turned back again, I realised how dangerous it would be and how the life could just shssh, like that, in Antarctica.

[Part 2 0:26:25] Lee: Did that connect you back to the pioneering days, the heroic era, because you were in a situation that they would have been in more regularly than you?

Gaffikin: Yes. Obviously Health & Safety was a big thing on base. We always carried radios, always had to check in and out. If you didn't report back, based on experience in the past, they were really strict about what you could do and how you travelled. So it was much safer than it was in the past, but still, a split-second decision and ... I don't know who else you have interviewed, but the year before Karen had quite scary experience. She got lost between the main accommodation building and the balloon launching facility and had wandered around a little bit in the blow and had found one of the surveyor's measuring poles (thank God), rang the base, estimated the height of it, then they used the plan to work out where she could be, roped themselves up and eventually found her. I thought 'Gosh, you can get lost just 50 yards from base.' It just goes to show. You can see now why Scott ... You vaguely think 'Well, they are only a couple of miles away from food.' It doesn't take much, does it?

[Part 2 0:27:39] Lee: Tell me about the igloo.

Gaffikin: Oh yes. This was Andy Cope and Tiny Dave again, decided to build an igloo, and we did it all wrong. So what happened was: we dug the hole in the ground to get the blocks, and then used those blocks to build the igloo, which of course is all wrong because you are supposed to have the inside of the igloo higher up than the outside so the warm air stays in the igloo. Anyway nonetheless we built this igloo. It was quite big actually; it was very good. I think they spent a night in it and then I spent a night in it which was great. I woke up covered in snow. It wasn't very windproof, but it was great because it let the light in but it was soundproof. I remember waking up in the morning, sticking my head out and finding the Nodwell crane was working about 20 yards away from me. Yes, I couldn't hear a thing. It was nice to have somewhere else to go. After a year, you have been everywhere, seen everything. It is nice to have a different destination.

[Part 2 0:28:35] Lee: Did you wind up at Rothera on a more regular basis, apart from that one flight? Or near Rothera?

Gaffikin: I only went down to Rothera for the weekend. Then I left I left Halley. Then the following summer I went to Rothera and did a season at a camp site at the bottom of the Peninsula. So I went to Rothera for a couple of weeks, then flew south and spent a month out camping. Then I went back to Rothera and flew out again.

[Part 2 0:29:03] Lee: Was that with BAS or was that with a different organisation?

Gaffikin: It was with the Antarctic Funding Initiative, which had literally just started that year, which was a way for universities in Britain to have more access to the facilities that the British Antarctic Survey had. So the government (obviously NERC) was giving a whole pot of money to BAS but set aside a little amount for universities to apply for. So UMIST, the physics department again, got in touch and got some money. So as I was leaving, they said to me – it was a joint project actually: BAS and UMIST – would I be interested in doing this project out of Rothera, one of the summers? I jumped at the chance. So I was in fact employed by this AFI money, Antarctic Funding Initiative money, and working for UMIST Physics Department which was nice.

[Part 2 0:29:57] Lee: Was that a successful arrangement? Did that work out nicely?

Gaffikin: Yes, it was good. We were running an ice nuclide chamber, which is basically a snow making machine [laughs], so I took a snow making machine to Antarctica. It was great fun. We spent 4 weeks out camping down there; we made observations, flying kites, getting snow samples, that sort of thing. Again, just collecting data for someone at a later stage to use. It was nice to spend a bit more time at Rothera.

[Part 2 0:30:24] Lee: You are now working in the museum business, and at the Natural History Museum you actually ran an Antarctic exhibition for example?

Gaffikin: Yes.

[Part 2 0:30:34] Lee: We can finish up on that. Tell me a bit about that.

Gaffikin: I had been working at the Science Museum for a couple of years, doing exhibitions, and I found out that the Natural History Museum were doing an exhibition on Antarctica, with the British Antarctic Survey, for International Polar year (which was a few years ago now). It must have been 2006 of course, 50 years after the International Geophysical Year. So I applied for that job, and got it, obviously, because I had exhibition experience and [emphasised] I had been to Antarctica. So we did an exhibition. It was called *Ice Station Antarctica*. Basically it was for families and kids, and encourage more children to find out about Antarctica and be inspired by it. It was great fun; I worked very closely with folks at BAS again. We had clothing on display. We talked about the science they do: geology and biology and a bit of meteorology. We did a re-creation of a base station: beds and the comms, just a flavour really for people to get an idea of what it was like. It was great fun working on it and after the Natural History Museum, it went off to Spain as well. It has been touring.

[Part 2 0:31:37] Lee: Then you wound up on *Blue Peter*?

Gaffikin: I did. To promote the exhibition and International Polar Year, I was invited to go on *Blue Peter*. So we set up a campsite in the studio, with a pyramid tent, with food boxes, jerry cans, the lot. Myself and the presenter dressed up in 'doo suits, roped ourselves up to each other, and then walked on stage, and they had got some penguins from somewhere, obviously some sort of South African or New Zealand or

Falkland Islands penguins waddling across. Then he interviewed me and we talked a lot about Antarctica. So it was fabulous.

[Part 2 0:32:20] Lee: Which do you value most, your *Blue Peter* badge or your Fuchs Medal?

Gaffikin: [laughs] Both. Both are wonderful.

[Part 2 0:32:29] Lee: Were you gobsmacked about the Fuchs Medal?

Gaffikin: It was unbelievable. I was so proud to receive it. I got it for 'Met and morale'. I can't remember the whole citation but I think it was my 'dedication to Meteorology' and then my work on Morale was, I suppose, probably for the activities I organised. I did Spanish lessons, Easter egg hunts. I organised a Murder Mystery Night, all sorts of daft things like that, just to keep everyone entertained. So it was delightful to get that. I am so proud of that.

[Part 2 0:33:11] Lee: It has been delightful to talk to you. Thank you very much indeed.

Gaffikin: Thank you.

[Part 2 0:33:15] [End of Part Two]

ENDS

Possible extracts:

- A Christian at Halley. [Part 1 0:03:10]
- Colleagues become friends. [Part 1 0:06:49]
- Beans on toast (bring your own toast). [Part 1 0:11:38]
- Penguin limerick. [Part 1 0:19:27]
- First aid training in Plymouth. [Part 1 0:23:38]
- Relief – a busy time. [Part 1 0:28:50]
- Monitoring the Ozone Hole. [Part 1 0:32:42]
- A trip to Rothera. [Part 2 0:00:45]
- Sledging with Dave Routledge. [Part 2 0:08:18]
- Sighting of beaked whales. [Part 2 0:13:08]
- Celebrating the Millennium. [Part 2 0:15:56]
- Thoughts about women in Antarctica. [Part 2 0:19:16]
- ‘Put the woman back on!’ [Part 2 0:21:36]
- Nearly lost in a blizzard. [Part 2 0:24:19]
- How not to build an igloo. [Part 2 0:27:39]
- A star on *Blue Peter*. [Part 2 0:31:37]