

## LUCAS FLOYD CHAUKE

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**Place:** Marion Island

**Interviewer (Q):** Dora Scott | Antarctic Legacy Project | C-I-B | University Stellenbosch

**Interviewee (A):** Floyd Chauke | Sealer ; Environmental Officer | Marion 59 ; 68 | 2002 ; 2011

**Q:** When did you come to Marion Island for the first time?

**A:** That was in April 2002.

**Q:** And you stayed for the year?

**A:** I stayed for the whole year.

**Q:** What team number was that?

**A:** Marion 59; yes.

**Q:** And what did you do?

**A:** Well, I came as a sealer.

**Q:** As a sealer?

**A:** Yes, as a sealer.

**Q:** So how did it happen that you applied to go? Why did you want to come here?

**A:** Well, I must say, it was a bit by chance of course to get an opportunity, because, as far as I remember, we knew about Marion Island because some of our student mates had previously had an opportunity to work with Prof Bester, and we were studying at the University of Venda then.

**Q:** Okay.

**A:** And we knew about this guy, who came just before us, and our professor used to speak highly of him. And we then knew of Marion Island and we had an interest in going. And just after completing my BSc degree, he got in touch with Prof Bester, and his name was Prof Gaiga [?] – I can't remember his initials or first name, but he contacted Prof Bester, and well, pioneered, you know, the way in. And we found ourselves here.

**Q:** Brilliant.

**A:** And that was a very, very good experience, indeed.

**Q:** So did you have any interest in Antarctica or the Islands, or anything, before you came here?

**A:** No, not at all. Because, as I said, we didn't know anything about the island *per se*, but then, you know, they ...

- Q:** From hearsay?
- A:** From hearsay, you know, that there's so and so; he's doing well; he's on Marion Island, working on seals. And, to us, you know, we didn't even know what a seal is – 'cause I mean, I'm from a ... I'm not so sure whether you know Musina?
- Q:** A little bit ... It's north!
- A:** It's way ... or rather say the very last town, just before the Zimbabwean border in the north. So obviously the sea was quite new for me. And again, a colleague of mine, who was my partner then, who was a fellow sealer, was also from Venda – and his name was Takalani Maswime. And he also was in the same position, because, you know, we had never travelled from Venda; we studied in Venda. And these opportunities of course opened doors – that's when we went to Pretoria for the first time for interviews, following which we went to Cape Town, saw the sea for the first time. You know, being on the ship itself for the first time was quite a remarkable experience, I would say.
- Q:** Yes, that's great ... I'm going to ask you about that now. But first, can you describe the team preparations for everyone before you left?
- A:** Well, the team preparation happened in Pretoria then, which is quite the opposite of ... or rather say which is quite different from, you know, what the new teams are being prepared for.
- Q:** Yes, they're trained in Cape Town now.
- A:** Cape Town, yes.
- Q:** Okay. But you were still in Pretoria?
- A:** Yes, we did our team training in Pretoria. And it lasted for about two weeks, if I remember well. And, you know, we were people of a different background, and the diversity itself was quite threatening to some of us, in the sense that, you know, while I had never been in close association with some people, so to say; and again, it poses lots and lots of questions for me whether ... will I be part of the team or not?
- Q:** Oh, I see what you mean ...
- A:** And to tell you the honest truth, there were instances where I asked myself whether I would survive or not. Because, I mean, we had never been associated ...
- Q:** In that environment ... ?
- A:** Yes, in that environment, and again, you know, social-wise, we had never met other people, instead of, you know ... the two of us, we knew each other from back then. And ... Well, we did well as a team.
- Q:** The other thing: what preparations did you make specifically for your job as a sealer?

**A:** Well, as far as I remember, we spent a day or two with Prof Bester just before we went for the actual team training, and he sat with us and gave us what I would today call a work plan of some sort, and said, look, you're going to be dealing with seals, and this is what is going to be expected of you. But then, you obviously know, we didn't know seals then, so I didn't even have any imagination of what a seal looks like, because, to tell you the honest truth, I knew I was going to an island where I was going to be working with seals, and I knew that I had to walk along the coast and recover the census, in other words take data, and then weigh pups at some point and ... I didn't even ... My worry was also the difference between Southern Elephant seals and Fur seals, which I thought maybe would be difficult for me to tell apart, because they kept on speaking of Fur seals, and on the other hand they spoke of Southern Elephant seals, of which it didn't even make sense to me!

**Q:** Did he show you any pictures or anything?

**A:** Yes, there were pictures, but, you know ... that fear was obviously there, because, I mean, I ... all I wanted to do was to perform best – be the best employee ever. And yet I had such questions – you know, would I be able to do it, or not?, **Q:** Now, the journey there ... You went on the Agulhas?

**A:** Yes.

**Q:** Do you remember who the captain was?

**A:** No, unfortunately then I was not ... Okay, I was not seasick, but then ...

**Q:** No?!

**A:** Not at all!

**Q:** Your first time on a ship?!

**A:** My first time ever!

**Q:** Wow!

**A:** And I must say, we had ... That was one of the worst voyages I have ever been on of the SA Agulhas.

**Q:** How so?

**A:** Because we had very high swells, of which I can't really tell you how high they were, but then ... I know for sure that the night before we arrived at Marion Island, I fell in the salon. We were heading for lunch as usual – 11.30, it was our lunchtime, ever since then – and I walked all the way from my cabin to the dining room. Just when I got there, because of the swells, the ship was ...

**Q:** Ah ...

- A:** How do you say ... ? Going sideways and all that, and I fell, Alvin ... you know, Neville, the guy with glasses, at the ship, he fell on top of me with soup ... !
- Q:** Hot soup?
- A:** Luckily, it was warm soup, but not hot soup as such.
- Q:** Oh-oh ...
- A:** Well, it was one of those things which ... I promised myself I'm not getting into the SA Agulhas again, because ... Forgetting that I need to go back home, you know? Obviously, the SA Agulhas was the only mode of transport from Marion Island to home, of course. So that was one of the incidents which I can remember clearly.
- Q:** But what did you do on the ship on the way down?
- A:** On the way down, I had ... I'm a very, very serious music lover ...
- Q:** Oh ... ?
- A:** And I remember, Prof Bester had bought me a CD player ...
- Q:** Nice!
- A:** Like one of those portable CD players, stereo's; and I had brought my music with, and of course, a book, which I spent most of my time sitting – you know, at the heli-hangar – reading. And there were quite a number of oceanographers then, who were quite enthusiastic and again, they were very jolly people. So we would play, now and then, at the helideck. And one other thing that I remember clearly, back then, we never had a helicopter at the back of the SA Agulhas –. So the only helicopter we had, was straight into the heli-hangars.
- Q:** So that whole deck was open?
- A:** It was open for games or ...
- Q:** So what kind of games did you play?
- A:** I remember we sometimes ... We once tried volleyball, but then obviously we were ...
- Q:** It didn't last long ... ?
- A:** It didn't last long, because the safety was a major issue, so we were warned not to do it. But I remember the day ... we had fun. And again, we also tried some table tennis, right straight in the hangar – as I said, the helicopter was just one, and the other heli-hangar was open for games.
- Q:** So when you arrived here at Marion that first time, what did you think? What did you feel?
- A:** Well, I must say, it was such a disappointment, because we had a tractor on top of ... I mean in the ship itself, in the hangar. So my perception of Marion was completely different, in the

sense that at least I expected the tractor to be off-loaded – we could use it and do all sorts of things. But then, when I got here, I didn't even ... Okay; when we were busy getting this issue, I never understood why we would be using gumboots, for instance ...

**Q:** Oh ...

**A:** So when I then learned that ... You know, things were very, very quick, in the sense that I didn't even know where we were heading to. But the first time I stepped off the catwalk, I was on my way to Trypot, with the guy who had been ... who we were relieving of course, and I had a very, very ... totally different perception of Marion. I at least expected ...

**Q:** Solid ground?

**A:** Solid ground, or even have a helicopter the whole year, which would obviously help us in this task that we got from our bosses of course, which was not the case.

**Q:** Yes.

**A:** Yes, and I expected lots: trees – you know, like palm trees, and stuff like that, but it ... Because, I mean, when you hear of an island, you'd be talking about islands such as Zanzibar and all that; but then ...

**Q:** Yes, you don't think it's a frozen island.

**A:** Yes.

**Q:** So did you spend a lot of time with the outgoing team?

**A:** Well, we were ... Most of the time, we spent preparing ourselves, and I must say we never had lots of interaction with them, but then, only ... We got to know the person who ...

**Q:** Your predecessor?

**A:** Yes, predecessor so to say.

**Q:** So what kinds of things did they tell you?

**A:** Well, luckily, with our predecessor, he was somebody who we knew, and we could relate in many respects, because he was Venda – I'm Tsonga myself, and the other guy, Takalani Maswime, he's Venda – and we knew this guy, because he was our fellow colleague at varsity, but he had come here before us and all that.

**Q:** Ah? Okay.

**A:** So ... But all in all, he warned us about the danger of getting lost; the dangers of mires. And he trained us well in terms of vegetation structure and obviously finding ... using it as some sort of a navigation tool – we should always look at the ground and know where you'll be heading to and you shouldn't be following footsteps that you think ... you know, they are not as valid as ever, because you could be following somebody's ... who's been lost as well.

**Q:** Yes.

- A:** Yes, so he taught us to navigate. Because I remember, our first trip, longest first trip, was when we went to Kildalkey.
- Q:** Ooh!
- A:** And to be honest with you, I couldn't even see the way, the path itself ...
- Q:** Was it misty, or ... ?
- A:** It was way too misty. And I couldn't even see the people ahead of me, and we had to cross over Stony Ridge and obviously cross over to Kildalkey; yet he did well. He knew where we were and ... Yes, he navigated well. So those are the kind of things that he told us.
- Q:** Yes, they are very important skills.
- A:** Yes, especially on Marion, because ... Yes.
- Q:** So did he also take you down to Ship's Cove and some of the other places to see the seals?
- A:** Yes.
- Q:** And what was it like to see a seal for the first time?
- A:** For the first time, I must say, I was way too excited! Especially when it came to Fur seal pups ... Because we had to ... Our first trip to Trypot was ... we were meant to go and take mother-baby pairs for observation purposes and all that, and we were quite fascinated; because I remember, I almost handled it for quite a long time, 'cause I know for sure that, you know, we were missing dogs – I'm a dog lover, and Fur seals were quite cute for me. And again, I thought, those will be good pets to have! And I must say, they were quite cute.
- Q:** Were you ever bitten?
- A:** By a seal?
- Q:** Yes.
- A:** Well, there's quite a number of stories which I can tell you about almost being bitten. One of the highlights was when I was almost crushed – you know, like an Elephant seal almost ...
- Q:** A male?
- A:** Not a male; you know, Elephant seals have a tendency of watching each other's tail when they are busy moulting. And one would lie across, like facing the other direction, and the other one would be lying, facing ... you know, like almost parallel to each other ...
- Q:** Oh, yes.
- A:** And part of our job is to look at, or rather say recover, information engraved on the tag. And I remember ... You know, being short-sighted, I use glasses; but then, out there in the field, they have no use, because you end up getting steamed and you can't see.
- Q:** Or they fall off ...

- A:** So I had this trick. I would go blow on the ... you know, blow some air on the flippers of a seal. Then they “open up”, in the sense that I can read the tag easily.
- Q:** Yes; the number on the tag.
- A:** The number on the tag. Well, that day, I’d gone to Ripetto’s and I found two seals sleeping, as I told you earlier, and I went to blow on the tail of the other one. Here, the one had its head close by. So I remember I was wearing a beanie, and just by mere blowing, the other one ... you know, the seal opened its flipper. Here, the one sleeping right across saw me and grabbed me; you know, grabbed me ... I had an afro, very huge afro, and he grabbed the afro and the beanie, and part of my hair got ...
- Q:** Ripped out?
- A:** Ripped out.
- Q:** Ooh ... !
- A:** With obviously the beanie. Then the seal ended up running away and I had to pick up the beanie halfway closer to the beach.
- Q:** Wow, that was lucky!
- A:** That was lucky. And the second one, which will probably be the last one which I’ll tell you. One of the highlights was when we were at Cape Davis, Maswime and I – you know, Takalani – we had a task to weigh some Fur seal pups. And the way it works is, we had a stony, or rather say the boulders area and the vegetation. We were supposed to weigh 50-50 of the pups, and that day we ... Unfortunately, it was breeding season for Fur seals, tropically so to say. So we managed to do the vegetation easily, because there we could manoeuvre and obviously run easily when the parents came charging. And you’d remember that Fur seals are very territorial, in the sense that they don’t want anything around whenever they’re breeding. So, when we went to the boulders side ... Well, I was always the brave person when it comes to charging seals and all that, and I would even go an extra mile. So Maswime was going to distract a couple of bulls, which had occupied an area, and there were like four of them. So I ended up opting right in the middle to go get some pups for weighing of course, not knowing that I’ll get my feet stuck in between the boulders. So, unfortunately, the two seals, or rather say all four bulls, came charging at the same time. And I tried to get my feet out, and I didn’t even have a stick with me, because it was the norm – I was so used to working with Fur seals and all that – but that day, I didn’t know that during breeding season the level of territoriality is too high, and again, they can do anything. But I fell, twisted my ankle, just when I was expecting to hear a bite. Nothing happened. All I heard was a couple of slaps, flippers, on me, all over!
- Q:** Really? So they were hitting you with their flippers?

- A:** With flippers. But you know, this is what happened: they started charging each other, biting and fighting on top of me, simply because they all most probably thought they were invading each other's territory, so they started charging each other, fighting right on top of me.
- Q:** Ah ...
- A:** And, you know, they never bit me.
- Q:** Wow; you're lucky!
- A:** Very lucky. So those are the highlights which I can tell you about my job.
- Q:** That's fantastic. So just tell me, how did you get your foot out?
- A:** Eventually, Maswime came ...
- Q:** Okay; and helped you ...
- A:** And helped.
- Q:** Okay.
- A:** But then it wasn't' so easy, because he also struggled to get into the thing, because two seals were fighting – you know, in fact, all four of them were biting each other. And it got to a point where he came and then loosened the boulders with his stick and obviously trying to distract the seals and chasing them away. And we then walked back to base, of course with me limping!
- Q:** Describe a day in the life of a sealer.
- A:** A day in the life of a sealer ...
- Q:** Yes. What was your day to day routine like?
- A:** Our day to day routine ... Well, we ... Well, the problem is with sealers, we had a schedule to adhere to, so during normal duty days, you'd be expected to wake up very early in the morning and then prepare for yourself. With me being lighter back then, which I could stick right on the ground on windy days of course, I would go to the extent of going to the pantry, grab a couple of cans, put them in my backpack, just to get a bit of weight; then walk out, no matter how rainy it is, no matter how windy it may be ... We would be walking either inland, straight to where we were supposed to start our coastal work, and then come back all the way from base. And the other thing that made us different from other sealers, myself and Takalani, we never liked staying at huts back then, 'cause huts were infested with mice of course – you probably remember. But I hated, or rather say I hate, mice, even now.
- Q:** Yes, well, there are mice at this base too.
- A:** Yes. So basically day to day would be going, you know, blowing wind on seals that are sleeping; then you'd get the information, then walk back. It's such a nice feeling when you



step on the catwalk and obviously there would be warm coffee, and a nice shower. And you obviously fight with people over your clothes being ... You know, we had very, very stinking people in the base, and you would when we're back!

**Q:** I see!

**A:** Yes

**Q:** Tell me, what were the challenges living on Marion Island?

**A:** Well, challenges were .. I must say the length itself was quite a challenge, because I remember pretty well, I used to asked myself how home would be like when I get back, and you know, even the way telephone calls ... We could make telephone calls and Internet, but then, we had this challenge that things might not necessarily be the same when you're not at home. They may tell you, and you'll still be inclined to believe that there's going to be quite a number of changes when you got back, and whether you're going to be fitting into the society again and all that. So those are the kinds of challenges which I had. And obviously we also had quite a number of challenges as a team. I mean, understanding the next person was one of the those, and how they behave and all that ... You know, those are the kinds of things ...

**Q:** Team dynamics ...

**A:** Team dynamics so to say – 'cause we're different people with a different background, and again, different upbringing and stuff like that; yes.

**Q:** So you had to adjust quite a lot to these strange people, and you're all now living together on this island ...

**A:** Very true; very true. Those are the kinds of things we ... And to add onto that, most of the people in our team were either coming for the second time or they had been on other islands, so ...

**Q:** Oh? So that also made it different, because they'd had more experience and you didn't have any experience?

**A:** Very true; yes.

**Q:** Okay; I see. And now on a lighter note, what did you do for entertainment, when you weren't working?

**A:** Entertainment ... ? Well, with me, I watched movies; you know, like I used to watch movies a lot. And I don't drink, so ... well, I didn't even have booze on the island, so, you know ... except some of the sponsored issues which I got. But I would still party with everyone else in the team. And I remember we used to have parties as well. But then, I ... you know, you'd imagine that you would ... you know, not being a drinker and then being exposed to people

who are drinking and all that, it doesn't really matter. But then you'd not be as excited as they are, because, I mean, alcohol can excite people heavily.

**Q:** Yes. So what did you do for Midwinter?

**A:** Midwinter, I remember I was a judge.

**Q:** Oh, did you have the Maid Marion competition then?

**A:** Very true. So I remember I opted to be judge, simply because I didn't really, you know, like ... or not necessarily like, but I never pictured myself wearing a dress or doing all sorts of funny things ... yes. But I remember I was the judge and a DJ at some point, and it got to a point where ... yes; we had fun.

**Q:** No, that's good; that's good. Now did you have any interaction with some of the other bases, for example did you have messages from SANAE or maybe some of the other islands, or any such things?

**A:** The only person who was very in touch with other islands was the metkassie.

**Q:** Okay.

**A:** Yes; most probably because of his duty, because I remember, back then, Gough used to get Internet at night, then we'd get it during the day, and SANAE ... I can't remember where did SANAE feature, but we used to exchange the line, so to say. But then, the metkassie had to send a sign up to Pretoria every 3 hours, if I remember well. So for him to do so, he must first ask Gough to disconnect, and then ...

**Q:** Get off the Internet ...

**A:** And then they'd do that, and ....

**Q:** Oh? Okay ...

**A:** Yes. And for him to phone as well and confirm that Pretoria ...

**Q:** That they'd received it ...

**A:** Yes ... Gough had to disconnect. So he knew most people, and whenever they heard his voice, of course they would know that ... Yes, he's Phineas from Marion Island.

**Q:** Oh, okay. Did you have any visits from ships or helicopters, or any such things during you year?

**A:** We had a yacht coming in.

**Q:** A yacht?

**A:** (Yes.)

**Q:** Oh, okay.

- A:** Yes. It so happened that that yacht was somewhere within the vicinity, so they wanted some fresh water for that matter. So they came ... I remember we're not supposed to give them water, but then, we phoned Cape Town and then Cape Town allowed us to give them water, but we were strictly warned not to get to the yacht or even accepting anything that they're going to give, because I know for sure that those guys had fresh vegetables ...
- Q:** Aw ...
- A:** And they had biltong, which we didn't have at the time, so we ... Though we were very, very desperate; but we never accepted any of their offers. I remember they even attempted to give us a bottle of wine, but ...
- Q:** You said ...
- A:** Obviously the team leader disagreed, but most of us, as team members, we were very, very upset that he never wanted to take ... !
- Q:** Yes, I can understand.
- A:** And the other visit was ... You probably remember the French guy who crashed at Marion Island, Henri Chorosz ...
- Q:** Oh, yes ...
- A:** Yes. So, it so happened that that morning, myself and Phineas ... I was getting ready to go out for my fieldwork, and I had opted to go simply because my partner had an injury, and I was meant to carry out the load all by myself. So it so happened that they called while Phineas was changing a sun chart, and I happened to pick up the phone. And I spoke to the American Embassy. Then I remembered ... Or an American agent of some sort ...
- Q:** Okay ...
- A:** Then I had to like call Deryck Yelverton, because it didn't make sense. First, I called Phineas and asked if there was any runway at Marion Island, of which, to me ... You know, back then, I didn't even know what the runway was, but then they kept on saying a "runaway", and where a plane can land, and all that. So, to me, it was a very new story, so I had to get a second opinion from someone. Then I called Phineas. Phineas then said look, let us call Deryck Yelverton; he would be able to assist. Because we could tell that this person is in a desperate situation, and they even made it clear that it's a matter of life and death – we can either pick him up, you know, alive or dead. We then called Deryck Yelverton, which was very early hours of the morning – 5 o' clock, if I remember well. Then Derek answered and then they spoke to him, and they came to terms that they're supposed to call Henry and talk to him about it. And Henry was the guy who came back to us and said find any hard spot and help this guy land. So at that time, Michelle du Toit, who was a conservation officer, was not at the base, and the only person who was there to decide, was Deryck Yelverton, and he was – I remember well, he was a radio tech; yes, he was a radio tech – and he didn't have ... I

wouldn't say a "true" sense of conservation, but you know, some of these things were not as clear cut to him ... He then decided to go to the zone 4 area, where we had a colony of Wandering Albatrosses, and of which Michelle was pretty much upset when she came back from the round-island which she ... I must also say, she was so puzzled to see a plane, because that was such a show-off of some sort, which you can't miss, from far away ... So yes; we then walked all the way to the incident, where it happened, and what was really so striking, was the mere fact that when the guy ... when he landed, we had all been given instructions that ... for fieldworkers, we're supposed to stand right aside ...

**Q:** In terms of the breeding colony?

**A:** No, no ...

**Q:** In terms of him?

**A:** We're supposed to ... Safety-wise. We were given clear instructions that ... you guys are going to be waiting there, and then the only people who'd approach the aircraft after landing was meant to be Deryck, Paul Putter, who was a diesel mac, as well as Alfonzo Mills, who was a medic – so which was fair enough, because Paul was meant to go and brake the aircraft and make sure that they put out the fire and the team leader and ... So, not forgetting that the place was very 'mirey', in the sense that ... I remember it well. It so happened, and in no time, Henri ... We directed him to a hard spot where he was supposed to ... But he landed a bit earlier, into a mire, and then the plane flipped, as John has told you; yes.

**Q:** Yes; the picture.

**A:** Very true; and then myself and Phineas, or rather say the designated people, were standing right across the mire, in the sense that when ... by the time it landed, they ran all the way, trying to approach the plane, but then they all sink ... in the sense that only the lighter people could get to the plane first.

**Q:** Oh ...

**A:** And myself was one of the people who floated a lot on mires, and Phineas. We got there, we broke ... And then luckily Alfonzo came and we pulled the guy out. And then, just after pulling him out, he was so resisting, and he started speaking in this French accent, "My wife; my wife!" We're like no, your wife is not here. And initially I thought maybe his wife is also there with him, but then what he meant was, was 'I want to phone my wife', and 'give me a phone'. And then we told him okay, you can only phone when we get back to the base. Then he said, "No, phone in plane; phone in the plane!" Then we started searching for the phone in the plane, which was a set phone. Then he did that call, made that call, and ... yes, we ...

**Q:** He spoke to his wife?

**A:** Yes, he spoke to his wife. And ... with obviously all the nappies that we saw in the plane ... ! Yes, we started ... The next thing was ... You know, the other challenge was to move all sorts of things that could pollute the environment, and we brought some bags and stuff to carry those things back to the base. So we did something like two trips, if I remember well.

**Q:** Carrying all this ...

**A:** Carrying all this ...

**Q:** Carrying all of these things that were in the plane to the base, so that they don't pollute the area ...

**A:** Yes.

**Q:** And what did you do with the wreckage of the plane?

**A:** It stayed there until the following takeover, when they came to pick us up.

**Q:** Okay; so a few months?

**A:** Yes.

**Q:** And how long did the Frenchman stay on the island?

**A:** He stayed little less than 3 months, if I remember well.

**Q:** Okay.

**A:** Yes. Because he was such a good company, I must say, very funny. And he got picked up by the French navy.

**Q:** Oh, okay.

**A:** Yes.

**Q:** What did he do the whole time? Did he go out and help you with your work?

**A:** He didn't do work ... He didn't help us a lot, but he was a good entertainer, in the sense that there was very little that he didn't know, and he was a wise man, I must say. And again, we happened to like the same music, me and him, so he ... I remember at some point I had to like lend him my CDs as well as my radio for entertainment.

**Q:** Oh, I see.

**A:** And he read a lot; he had some books with him. He read a lot.

**Q:** In the plane, that he got ... ?

**A:** Yes.

**Q:** Okay. Is there anything else that you want to tell me about your year?

**A:** My year was quite a good one, but then I had promised myself obviously to come back. And just after that whole stay at Marion Island. And I must say, the team was also a fantastic

one, and we got along most of the time. Of course, there's quite a number of occasions where team members didn't really feel like speaking to each other and all that, but it didn't last long. That was one other good thing about our team, because we could upset each other, and then you know. Work it out; and then we continued; life carries on.

**Q:** Work it out ...

**A:** Work it out. And then we continued; life carries on.

**Q:** So when you got back from Marion, what did you do?

**A:** Well, I went back to the University of Pretoria, of which I had shown an interest in genetics, to ... And obviously spoke to Marthan, who was meant to be my supervisor. And he managed to secure some grant from the NRF, and I went to do some genetics work on Southern Elephant seals, which I later on further ... as a Masters.

**Q:** Okay, so you were busy with your studies in genetics then ... of the Fur seals?

**A:** Yes, at the start of ... Elephant seals.

**Q:** Of the Elephant seals?

**A:** Yes. So that, as I said, I did my Honours project on it, which was in 2004, and then did my MSc 2005 to 2008, because I had taken a job

**Q:** Oh, okay.

**A:** In my second year, I remember, yes.

**Q:** Oh, okay. I wanted to ask ... When the ship got back, how was it to be back in South Africa?

**A:** I remember I was one of the very, very last people to be picked up; or rather say the team. That was then – everybody would be flown back to the boat, but I remember, I was one of the people who was late; who was late to go to the heli-hangar, which was a bit of a walk. And obviously, my fear was to get back to the SA Agulhas, 'cause I had promised myself I was never going to go back. And with all the excitement, afterwards, when I got there, things were very much calm, and we had a very, very successful and very safe voyage back home. And again, what also drove me very, very ... What also made it better, was the mere fact that I was looking forward to the new beginning afterwards, so the ship wasn't that much of a ...

**Q:** Wasn't that bad the second time?

**A:** Yes, the second part.

**Q:** And when you were here for the year, what did you miss about home? What did you miss about South Africa?

**A:** Well, I must say, more into music ... And I had a choir, which I was more like a conductor ...

**Q:** Oh, okay.

- A:** And I missed, you know, the choir itself. And also, I was a youth leader at my church ...
- Q:** Oh.
- A:** ... which was the Evangelical Presbyterian, which I very, very missed; dearly missed, because I was a chairperson of the youth ...
- Q:** Oh.
- A:** ... at a national level then.
- Q:** And so you got back and you could continue with these things?
- A:** Exactly; yes.
- Q:** Okay, now to get to your work that you're doing here now ... Tell me, what exactly are you now doing on this takeover?
- A:** Well, I'm more like an environmental officer, or rather say I'm an environmental officer. And we have challenges as the Department, you know, keeping this island as pristine as possible. It's quite a mission, because one thing's for sure, we have ... you know, people from different backgrounds – some don't even have a conservation sense of some sort. So my duty as an environmental officer is to see to it that at least people do understand the mere fact that we ... they need to operate in a manner that doesn't really have a negative impact on the environment. And we do so by quarantining things that get brought here from South Africa, and then we also make sure that there's no bugs or produce of some sort that may definitely find its way and then live here as ... You know, aliens are one of the dangerous things that can take over.
- Q:** Okay. And how long have you been doing this?
- A:** Well, I started this job in August last year, so I'm failing you here ...
- Q:** Okay. And this is the first takeover that you're environmental officer?
- A:** First takeover for Marion Island ...
- Q:** Yes.
- A:** ... and ... Well, last year I came down for construction work, which was quite intense, because we had too much cargo to quarantine, and we also had a lot to worry about when it came to where do we put the construction material – do we put it on the vegetation itself, or do we have to come up with mechanisms which would allow us building without impacting the environment.
- Q:** *Jis* ... So what did you decide to do in that instance?
- A:** Well, most of the time the building material would be put on designated areas ...
- Q:** Okay.

- A:** ... where we would obviously rehabilitate as soon as we ...
- Q:** As it's moved ...
- A:** As it's moved
- Q:** Okay.
- A:** And obviously that prevents us from putting all over and which may obviously be lethal to some point, of course; because I mean, we may not necessarily manage, and we end up losing a lot.
- Q:** Yes; a lot of the environment ... Okay. So you now explained a little bit of the work that you've now done as an environmental control officer, but tell me, why do you think it's important to preserve Marion Island?
- A:** Well, to start off with, Marion Island is a home for quite a number of biodiversities, so as a result, imagine someone destroying your home – you may not necessarily like it, but then, if you are a seal, you'd really love to come back to Marion and breed. And obviously I'm quite fond of biodiversity itself, so I would still think, in order for us to keep this biodiversity, we need to definitely have efforts in protecting it. And I have a very, very good saying which I usually say when I speak about conservation. It's always ... It always reminds me that we didn't get this whole world for ourselves, but we have borrowed it from future generations; so as a result, we need to ...
- Q:** ... take care of it.
- A:** ... take care of it pretty well.
- Q:** Okay.
- A:** In order for us to give it back to the liable owners, which are the distant future.
- Q:** Okay. And so your work entails making sure ... your work entails educating people and making sure that they understand how they should take care of the place?
- A:** Very true; very true.
- Q:** Okay, so I'm on the right ...
- A:** Yes.
- Q:** Good ... Is there anything else that you'd like to add about your work that you're doing here?
- A:** Well, apart from saying that there has been quite a number of laws which have been set and put in place just to see to it that this environment is protected, but most people are unaware; I would imagine that we definitely need, at some point, people who are going to focus solely on educating people on all about these laws. Because some ... You know, laws are there and made available to govern and for the management, better management of



resources. So I would imagine that while everybody is busy with their science, they need to be taught, or at least highlighted of the mere fact of some of the clauses that binds them to be taking very good consideration when doing things.

**Q:** Okay.

**A:** Yes.

**Q:** What do you think is the worst misconception that people have about the island? What do they think that's not right in terms of ... for example, you said you didn't know about seals ... Do you know ... what does the general public think about the islands?

**A:** Well, why do you study things at these islands? That's one of the questions that people don't really, necessarily, understand.

**Q:** And what do you answer them if they ask you this?

**A:** I would give them a typical example about climate. You know, we have a station here that feeds the general globe about climate change and stuff like that; and again, we tend to know the weather that's on our way, to South Africa, simply because of this station. And again, I also talk about ... I have learnt a lot as far as mating systems are concerned – you know, how do they influence genes, and stuff like that. Those are the kind of things that obviously, as people may not necessarily know, but they ... And I should be ... I am quite sure that in most cases when I have to speak to people about genetics, I always refer back to the Southern Elephant seal mating system and use it as an example, and I relate it to practical issues that we have in our societies; for instance, polygamy, which would definitely influence the genetic diversity. And again, we ... As you may know, our President is an polygamy relationship and all that, so, in most cases when I have to advise people with my genetic background, I always refer back to Southern Elephant seals, because I've used tangible data, where polygamous mating systems are investigated – how ... and how did they influence the genes. So those are the kind of things that I think we will learn, because I mean it's not all about ... Our knowledge here may be quite applicable in other societies or elsewhere.

**Q:** Okay.

**A:** So we tend to be very knowledgeable in all respects.

**Q:** Okay; good. Thank you very much. Anything else that you would like to add?

**A:** No, apart from the mere fact that I am quite grateful that I'm going to make part of history.

**Q:** Thank you!

**A:** Sure; thanks a lot.