

Episode 40: Spence is a lighthouse keeper

Can you imagine having a job that required you to live on an island, and your primary purpose there was to make sure ships avoid running into the land?

It's definitely not a job for everyone, but for some people it's perfect. Spence is one of those people. He's a modern day lighthouse keeper.

This is a bit of a different type of episode for this podcast. Sometimes when I come across opportunities like this, I think, okay, I would find this really interesting, but would other people find it interesting? So when I saw I might have the chance to do this one, I posted it as a poll in the Facebook group. And the vote was unanimous – everyone wanted to hear what it was like to be a lighthouse keeper. So here we are today.

And yes, it was really interesting! Spence told me all about the different aspects of the job, and what he has to do each day. And the fact that he works 7 days a week, but it's okay because he loves his work.

So, I hope you enjoy this episode, and if you'd like to support the podcast and keep it going, you can do that at WhatWasThatLike.com/support.

And now, here's Spence the lighthouse keeper.

Scott

Spence, thanks for coming on the show.

Spence

Hey, no problem. Happy to be here.

Scott

I should mention to our listeners, that the noise that you hear in the background is not an air conditioning unit or anything that we can control - it's the weather. Spence is at the lighthouse. Can you tell us what kind of weather is going on right there now?

Spence

Yeah, definitely. We're looking at, sort of, higher winds than usual. Now, as we are heading into mid-December, late-December, and early January, we do get a lot more rough weather during this time. Right now, we're looking at between 25 and 30 knots of wind, which is pretty considerable. They are also southeast winds, which means they blow right on my front door. So, it's pretty hard to escape all the noise, but you deal with it.

Scott

That's the nature of the business. When you're up on the top of that lighthouse, how high in the air is that?

Spence

Well, it's not a very tall tower at the location that I'm at currently - Entrance Island. It's actually only 19-meters high away from the water, so it's actually not a super-high tower. It's maybe just over 3-storeys.

Scott

Let's kind of set the scene. I know you're on an island and the name of it is Entrance Island. It's in the Georgia strait which is in British Columbia, Canada. You're kind of across the strait from Vancouver. Are you, like, maybe 15 or 20 miles away from Vancouver?

Spence

Yeah, no more than 20 miles. On a clear day, you can see Vancouver from the island. Vancouver is on the mainland. Then, there's a large island to the west of the mainland - that's Vancouver Island. Vancouver Island actually houses Victoria, which is the capital of BC. Then, it has another larger port city called Nanaimo, which is partway north of the island. Where I'm located is actually about 8 miles out of Nanaimo Harbour. The lighthouse is situated there to help guide people into the harbor because Vancouver Island and the mainland are actually separated by a whole slew of smaller islands. It's actually fairly dangerous to navigate to Georgia Strait and then find the entrances to the Nanaimo Harbour, so the lighthouse is situated just outside of the harbor to show boats, like, "Okay, this is where you should go to. Head here, port side, and you can now go into the harbor."

Scott

So, obviously, the name "Entrance Island" makes sense.

Spence

Yes.

Scott

How cold does it get there in the winter?

Spence

Well, for anybody who's ever sort of lived in, say, Seattle, Portland, Vancouver, the weather here is actually quite nice. I mean, it's not Florida nice. We don't see a lot of snow. As a matter of fact, it's very rare that it goes below freezing. Maybe once or twice a year, we'll see a little bit of snow that actually sticks for a day or two. We see a lot more rain than snow. Right now, we've been seeing lows of about 4 degrees Celsius to about 9 degrees Celsius - I'm sorry because I have no idea what that is in Fahrenheit.

Scott

Well, I've got a handy little Fahrenheit/Celsius converter here in front of me. 4 degrees Celsius is around 39 Fahrenheit, so still just above freezing and certainly colder than what we would prefer here in Florida, that's for sure.

Spence

Yes. Well, I'd still go out and do the weather in my shorts. The gentleman that I work with - the principal keeper - thinks I'm crazy. He said, "You should never go out in this weather in shorts." But generally, I wear shorts even in this type of weather. I really don't find it that cold. It's not bad here where I'm located, so I'm lucky. Not all light stations are nearly as lucky to have such glorious weather.

Scott

I know this is a pretty small island. What else is on the island? I think I actually saw 7 buildings. What are all those buildings?

Spence

Yeah. The island itself is only the light station - there is nothing else on the island - so every building on the island has something to do with the light station in some form or another. So, on the island, there's the principal keeper's house where the principal guy lives. Then, there's the assistant keeper's house, which is where I'm currently staying. There's the tower itself. There's a boathouse and, like, a workshop-type area. There's a generator building that houses our electrical generators and a machine shop. There is a small garden shed. There's a recycling shed. There's a hazardous material shed. Then, there's one more building - which is a little bit unique - that is the water cistern. And that's pretty much all the buildings that are on the island.

Scott

To do a job like this, is it something you go to school for? How do you learn and get the skills to do this?

Spence

Well, I seem to remember that - I think that was, maybe, in grade six - we learned about clouds, the different types of clouds such as altocumulus and whatnot, and different types of stuff. When you apply for the job, there's really not a whole lot of schooling or anything you need ahead of time. What you do need is your radio operator certificate, which means that you are licensed to be able to use a radio on the airwaves in the world. Everybody who uses a marine radio anywhere in the world is actually supposed to have a license. A lot of people don't, but you're supposed to have a license to use the actual radio. So, you need that before you can get the job. The only other thing that you are required to have is your first aid. You must have a first-aid certificate. Those are the only 2 things that you need before you go into the job. Everything else is pretty much on-the-job training.

Scott

I know a lot of what you do is weather-related. Actually, you've mentioned this before we hit record that, in a few minutes - maybe, 10-15 minutes from now - you're gonna have a weather report come up on the radio, which is mandatory and you need to listen to that. So, we'll just keep recording and listen to that as part of the podcast here - that'll be interesting too - so people can be ready for that when it comes up.

Spence

Right. Weather is one of the primary jobs that we do every day. By "every day", I mean, seven days a week. Every single day, the weather is reported every three hours from 3:30 AM to 9:30 PM. You have to report the conditions that you are actually seeing right at that moment, and those conditions consist of several factors. You have to report the skies, whether it's cloudy, partly cloudy, overcast, obscured, or whatever. Then, you need to report your visibility - how far it is that you can see, and is there maybe a fog or something along the lines? Sometimes, you can only see 8 or 10 kilometers, but you have to report the distance that you can see anywhere from 15 kilometers to "I can't see anything at all". Then, you report the weather itself, whether it's raining, snowing, or drizzling. Anything that's actually like a physical type of weather, you would report that. Then, you have to report the wind speeds and wind direction. So, you need to be able to use the tools on hand. For wind direction, we look and use the flag and a compass to figure out which sort of direction the wind is going. Then, we use instruments for wind speeds to tell us - within a general few knots - exactly how fast the wind is going. The last thing that we need to report for mariners is the water itself. Is the water wavy or is it calm? Are there small waves? Are there really big waves? Are there swells? These are all things that we need to report on the full weather. The last thing that we would be reporting on is stuff that we might see

in the distance. So, if it's not bad on Entrance Island - it's not raining or anything along those lines - but I can see it's raining over Vancouver, I would report rain showers to the east distance. So, you have to tell about everything that you see around you, like, pretty much all the way past the horizon and further.

Scott

And when you're doing this reporting, you're doing this over the radio - any boaters in the vicinity would be able to hear this. Is that right?

Spence

No, the way it works on our end is we report to the Central Coast Guard agency. Then, the Central Coast Guard agency takes all the reports from all the different light stations - there are 27 light stations in BC - then, they take all those reports, and put them online. So, you can go online anytime and view those reports from all the different light stations, telling you exactly what they're seeing at that hour.

Scott

Alright. Well, let's talk about your, kind of, day-to-day stuff. You mentioned someone else is on the island with you. It's just the two of you. Is that right?

Spence

Yeah. There's a mandatory of two people per station for safety sake. You can't have a person alone on a station. If something were to happen, you need a second person in case of any kind of emergency. So, there are always two people. For somebody who actually lives on the station in a permanent spot - they live there, that's their absolute career, and they call that, like, "permanent" - you can bring your family. So, you can bring your wife, you can bring your children, you can bring whoever you want to have live with you. So, there's a minimum of two people and a maximum of however big your family happens to be.

Scott

And each of you has your own house?

Spence

Yeah, there's only one station in BC that combined residents only because the station is way out on a crop of rocks. It's a single building that has the tower and the residents and everything all in a single building. Everywhere else is situated either on an island, on a peninsula, or somewhere there's actually a little more space. There are usually 3 dwellings in each location. You have a principal keepers dwelling, you have your assistant keeper dwelling, and then you have a spare dwelling for when people come to work on the island like carpenters, engineers, or anybody who needs to work on something. So yeah, you don't need to live with somebody in the same living space and drive yourself nuts.

Scott

Okay. It sounds like you essentially have the same day-to-day job as the principal keeper, but you guys, kind of, alternate hours - is that how it works?

Spence

Right. Well, it depends on the principal. Every principal is kind of different. The principal is your boss. The principal is the one who, sort of, oversees everything on the island. They're the ones that, sort of, dictate how things are worked out. Generally, what happens is there's a morning

shift, and then there's an afternoon shift. The morning shift is the one that has to get up at 3 AM and do all the reports from three til noon. Then, for the evening shift, we do everything from noon til 9.30 - to the end of the day. The gentleman that I'm working with is not big on waking up early, but I love waking up early, so I do the morning shifts because I enjoy it. I like to be out at 3. It gives me time to do whatever I need to do. I like it when it's dark. Yeah, it's all good. So, it works out nicely in that regard.

Scott

Sounds like a perfect match. How many days a week do you work? I mean, it's got to be done every day, right?

Spence

Every day. It's not a job where you do five days and then get the weekend off. You have to report the weather 7 days a week. With that being said, doing the weather is not the only thing that we do. There are lots of other jobs and tasks and whatnot, whether it's landscaping, lawn-mowing, maintenance, machine work, whatever. So, we do that type of work from Monday to Friday. Then, on Saturday and Sunday, we relax, take it easy between our reports, and then just do whatever it is that we want to do on our own.

Scott

What's a typical day like? I know you said you're up and working at three, but what is it that you do? How do you feel that day?

Spence

Well, for me, I do a lot of research. I've been doing a lot of research. I do have a YouTube channel. I am new to this job. I've only been doing this for a little over two months now. There's so much to learn - so much interesting things to know - not just about lighthouses, but about the Coast Guard, about marine living, boating, and all this kind of stuff. So, I do a lot of research. In the morning before, it's really too early to go out. I'm on the computer and I do some of my own YouTube stuff. I answer emails and communicate with other light housekeepers and whatnot. Then, after your 9.30 report is when you go out to do the outside stuff. As I said, there are a lot of lawns here. You have to mow all the lawns in the nicer weather. The buildings need maintenance. We're in a rough area. Sometimes, you get rain. You're exposed to the elements, so stuff needs to be cleaned regularly. You need to paint stuff regularly to maintain a certain look. The island is a heritage site, so it is required that everything is kept to a certain level of maintenance. That's all the responsibility of the 2 people that are on the island. I'll work something semi-physical from, like, 9.30 to maybe about 3, and then have lunch in the middle there. Then, after 3, it's just free time for me. I can do whatever - make my dinner, read a book, watch something, play a video game, and then go to bed.

Scott

What about groceries? I mean, you're out in the middle of this tiny little island. You can't just run down to the store and pick something up when you need it.

Spence

Nope. That's very, very true. One of the things that takes a lot of getting used to is understanding that if you run out of something, you're out. There's no running to 7-Eleven for milk or anything like that. You need to understand that you have only a certain amount of time that you can get whatever you need. We get groceries once a month. What happens is the Coast Guard actually uses a helicopter to bring all the groceries out to the different stations in a

certain area on a certain day of the month. There are, like, 4 different light stations in my group. Then, the helicopter will go out on a day and deliver to all four of those stations for that one day of the month. So, what we do is we buy all our groceries online. We use whatever service that happens to deliver to the main office because we have to send all of our groceries to the main office. Then, it gets accepted by the main office and then held there for a couple of days until the chopper is ready to bring it out to you.

Scott

Have you ever run out of food?

Spence

I have not. I've been lucky because I knew people who were in the business before I started. Every single person that I've talked to before I started and after I started has told me that, during their first month of employment, they ran out of food. So, I went into this with my biggest concern being, "Oh my god, do I have enough food?" So, I made sure that, during my first month, I had enough food.

Scott

If it were me, I'd probably have a spreadsheet out with each day, each meal, and have a whole list based on that.

Spence

Well, I did that before I started. When I knew that I was being sent somewhere, I sort of sat myself down and said, "Okay, how much can I eat in a week? What sort of things can I do?" For example, if I go and make a big pot of chili, that pot of chili should last me maybe 5 days - I can have one meal of chili for 5 days. Then, I know what I like for breakfast - I kind of eat the same thing for breakfast every day - I'm very particular that way. If I have to eat 30 days of breakfast, I know how much I need and made sure that I bring that with me. So, I kind of did that before I got my first posting and it worked out pretty well. The funny thing is, for the 2nd month when I was here, I was supposed to get my groceries but they actually didn't come because there was an emergency and the helicopters were needed somewhere else. So, for 4 days, they didn't come and I was getting low-- (Radio chattering) that's the radio. I don't have to do this one - lucky for me - but I do have to listen. They're going to be doing all their reports. The weather is really not very good for the radio.

Scott

So what we heard-- are those other nearby keepers talking about their weather report?

Spence

Yeah, from other stations. (Radio static) The weather's really bad right now, so it makes the signal a little bit difficult to hear.

Radio

(Inaudible)

Spence

Yes, you see there? They have big waves out in Victoria right now. They got six-foot water waves at the moment, so they're seeing some pretty big wind out at Victoria at the moment. Anyway, that was a weather report. It goes pretty quickly. As I said, I didn't have to report on this one.

Scott

What actual maintenance do you have to do? I mean, I'm sure it's probably a common misconception that, if you're a lighthouse keeper, all you got to do is to go up and make sure that light is on - right? Obviously, as you've mentioned, there's a lot more to it than that. What kind of maintenance is actually involved with that big light bulb?

Spence

Well, actually, oddly enough, all of the actual lighthouse itself is completely automated. The light uses solar energy from a large bank of batteries. The light itself uses a sensor to detect how dark it is, and comes on automatically. If a bulb burns out, there are four extras already in the mechanism to replace it, and it will replace it automatically.

Scott

So there shouldn't be any situation where the light goes dark, obviously, since you got a lot of spares.

Spence

Right. Again, technology is really different now from what you see in the movies. Movies generally look at an era that's 100 years ago when they use big giant incandescent bulbs, and all this kind of stuff. Now, a lot of the light use LEDs - small, tiny little bulb. The lenses reflect all the lights so well that they actually barely take any power. The bulbs will last 3-10 years, so the likelihood of light ever going out is pretty slim.

Scott

How far away can that light be seen on a clear night?

Spence

Actually, you're really lucky. I just did a YouTube video about this last week. There's an actual formula for figuring out how far you can see. Because the Earth is curved, it all comes down to how it works with the horizon. There's a formula that is the square root of the distance divided by a number which represents the curve of the Earth equals how far that light will go before it hits the horizon. Entrance is 19 meters tall. When you plug that number into the formula, the light will actually travel for 16 kilometers before the curve of the earth becomes a problem. You can't see anything further than that if your eyes were right at water level. Because you are not at water level, you're like 6 feet tall on a boat or whatever, that distance actually goes a little bit further. The Entrance Island Lighthouse is rated at 15 miles for how far you can see the light. Now, if you're, say, at the top of Cypress Mountain - which is in West Vancouver, which is maybe 40 kilometers from where I am right now - and it's an absolutely crystal clear, beautiful day, you could probably see the light. But you don't need a lighthouse on top of the mountain - it doesn't help you. The idea is when you're on the water.

Scott

In order for ships to be able to identify which lighthouse they're actually looking at, are there different colors or different types of lights? How do they identify where what they're seeing?

Spence

Yeah, every lighthouse has a little bit of a variation in how they're set up. For Entrance, it's quite simple - it's a white flashing light every 5 seconds. So, it's a very simple, simple setup. There are lots of different variations for different lighthouses. It could be, maybe, a 3-second flash, a 4-

second flash, a 10-second flash, maybe 2 really quick flashes and a 5-second space, or it could involve colors. There's red light, green light, blue light, and all these sorts of combinations. Each lighthouse is fairly unique. So, depending on what you're seeing on the water, it will tell you which lighthouse you happen to be looking at.

Scott

That makes sense. Do you have any is there any concern about security? I mean, do you have weapons there? I can't imagine there would be an incentive for anyone to try to intrude on that island, but is there any thought about that?

Spence

It's funny because I'm a Canadian guy and all Canadian tends to-- the joke is, like, "How do you make a Canadian say sorry?" The answer is you step on his foot and he'll say sorry. So, as Canadians, we don't look at violence as protection as our first train of thought. I know that it does happen. A lot of my American friends are like that - "I need to be protected. I need a gun. I need all these things to make myself feel safe and whatnot." But I've never felt that way here at all. Entrance is close to the mainland. We get kayakers coming out to the island - people come from Nanaimo in tiny kayak boats. Because it's government land - it's crown land - it's not like it's all fenced off, you can't go there, or anything like that. The public is welcome. We have visitor logs and all this kind of thing. We like visitors. Visitors break up our day. So yeah, I don't think the idea of having to protect yourself ever came up. If there was ever an emergency situation of any kind, I mean, one of our primary jobs is we are emergency relief - that's the whole point. When somebody goes over in the water, they have to get out of the water, and we are the ones who perform emergency services on them. We offer them a place of security and a place to stay. So yeah, it's not about protection, it's about helping.

Scott

That's a good outlook. I was surprised to find this out. You're married?

Spence

Yes.

Scott

How often do you get to see your wife?

Spence

Well, my life with my wife is a little bit interesting. We've been married for about 2.5 years now. We've been together for over 5 years. In all of that time, we spent a lot of time apart. She's from the Philippines. I was working in Hong Kong and I would spend 3 months in Hong Kong, 2 weeks in the Philippines, 3 months in Hong Kong, and 2 months in the Philippines. So, not seeing my wife for long periods of time is pretty regular. I've been on this location now for a little over two months and my wife is coming out for the holidays. She's coming out for Christmas, so she'll spend a week out here on the island with me and then go back and do whatever she does for her life. Now, because I'm still new and I don't have a permanent location, it has been discussed between us that, once I have a permanent spot, once I've been given a place where they'd say, "Okay, this is where you live", then she'll likely come. She'll either come and live with me or it'll be a spot like this where it's easy enough to get to a port, where she could live somewhere close by, and then come and visit on a semi-regular basis. So, that works for both of us.

Scott

I guess if you're both happy with that. It takes a certain type of person I would imagine - not everyone needs the constant companionship of another person to get through the day. It sounds like that kind of works out pretty well for both of you.

Spence

Yeah. I mean, I'm pretty happy with it. As far as I can tell, she's pretty happy with it. When we get together, it's not like, "Hey... how's it going?" We're always, like, really excited to see each other and spend a lot of time together. I think it just comes down to the fact that neither one of us have that insatiable need to have that company.

Scott

I got a couple of questions from listeners. Nivia asks, "When storm or hurricane waves crash against lighthouses, do they ever suffer structural damages?"

Spence

Well, I have a story for you and it's a pretty good one. Triple Islands is the scary lighthouse in BC. It's the one that's way out from in the middle of the ocean on a pile of rocks. When it gets really, really stormy, waves would go right over the entire building. The gentleman that I'm working with right now used to work at that station. One time, during an extraordinarily extreme storm, he actually had full-size trees come through the window in his bedroom. I guess what happened was a log boom or something got disconnected from a tug and several of the large logs went through different windows in the building - one of the windows was his bedroom - and came very close to actually hitting him as well. So, it does happen. Several of the stations are quite open to the elements and require a lot more care than others. There's another island, Green Island, I believe, where they have ropes between all the buildings. If you want to go from one building to another, you have to use the rope. You connect yourself to the rope, and then use the rope to go from one building to another, because they've lost, like, full cows off the island.

Scott

So they just get blown away by just the high winds?

Spence

High winds and big waves. So yeah, it can be pretty scary.

Scott

Here's another one... Actually, Zack has a couple of questions. Has your lighthouse ever proven critical to someone's safety? Then, his other question is, "Are lighthouses mostly nostalgic now and not really needed because of GPS?"

Spence

I personally have not had any dealings with an emergency yet - thank goodness for that. Let's hope that I don't have to deal with anything too crazy. It would be good. The principal keeper here has saved about a dozen lives in his 26 years stint in being a lighthouse keeper - 9 of them on this island alone. So yeah, there have been boats overturned or people in the water in emergency situations.

Scott

It sounds like you're due for something.

Spence

Yeah. No, I don't want to do (giggles). So yeah, there have been emergency situations and they have saved lives, so it's a very good thing. Sorry, what was this the second question?

Scott

Are lighthouse still needed with the GPS? Do you still really need them or just nostalgic?

Spence

Well, a lot of the bigger boats like, obviously, cruise ships, ferries, the carry boats, and whatnot, all have GPS and everything to tell them exactly where they are. But there's something about the physicality of being able to look out the window, see a lighthouse, and know where you are. It just is something that I don't believe will ever go away. There's just something about being on the water. Now, there are a lot of smaller boats. There are a lot of pleasure boats. There are a lot of fishing boats and whatnot that don't have all the fancy equipment and they do still rely heavily on buoys and lighthouses to show them the right way to go. So, it's not something that will be going away anytime soon - that goes for lighthouses all over the world, which is why lighthouses did eventually get automated because that light is still essential even if they're not putting people at the station.

Scott

If you actually see a boat that runs aground or even capsizes, what would you do? What do you do when you see something like that?

Spence

The first thing you would always do immediately is to call Victoria. You call the base, you tell the emergency situation, and you tell them everything that you can about what's going on because getting emergency relief to anywhere takes a minimum of 30-45 minutes. Sitting in the water for 30 minutes is deadly because the waters here are cold and they will kill you quickly just from hypothermia. So, that's very, very important - you must get the word out to emergency services because, even if I pull somebody from the water and they require emergency services, there's only so much that I can do on the island. Yeah, we have an AED, warming blankets, and all these kinds of things, but our abilities are limited to what we could do. They still need to go to a hospital somewhere and that will take time. So, number one is to call the head office immediately. Number two is to do what you can to assist in any way. Always keep your eyes on the situation. Keep a radio handy so that you can report any changes and if it's safe to go out and get whoever is in trouble. We're technically not allowed to leave the island. We can't get in a boat, go out, and get them - we're not allowed to. It's part of the charter for the Coast Guard. There are certain rules for getting on a boat and going out to get someone, and we can't actually do that.

Scott

I can imagine that would create some kind of a moral conundrum there. If you see somebody not that far out in the water and they're drowning, or their boats going down or something, you have to stay on the island - that'd be a tough decision.

Spence

It's a tough call. I understand that after being put into such a position - I can understand why. In many instances in the past, keepers would just say, "Screw this, I'm going out. I'm getting them. I can't let somebody die while I'm watching them." Yeah, it's a very, very tough call. You don't want to just let somebody die when you can physically do something to save them.

Scott

Right. But I can understand the rules. I mean, at that point, the lighthouse itself is unmanned and there could be other problems that result from that.

Spence

Well, exactly. That's what it all comes down to - what's the bigger risk? It also comes down to liability, right? You need to be sure that everybody is covered, safety-wise, in the long run, because if anything does happen, there's gonna be an investigation and it's always been like that for any sort of incident.

Scott

Is there any wildlife on the island? I know it's too small. There are probably no bears or anything...

Spence

Well, when we say wildlife, we do usually think, like, bears, deers, tigers, and stuff like that. But yeah, this place is way too small. I'll tell you, you can fit 400 or 500 sea lions here. They are loud and smelly. We have a family of 5 sea otters that live under one of the old docks that is abandoned. We have 4 eagles that sit on our weather equipment and screw it all up. They sit up there every day, look out at the water, or whatever it is they do. So yeah, there are lots of different things on the island. We have lots of snakes, lots of small birds, lots of seagulls, and not one rat. There's not one rat on the entire island, so that's kind of cool.

Scott

Wow. All right. Well, I just got a few more questions as we wrap this up. What do you like most about this job?

Spence

I love the isolation - I am not gonna lie. I'm tired of cities. I'm tired of crowds. I'm tired of driving to work every day, traffic, and all these kinds of things. I just love that I wake up, do my work, read a book, and relax. I'm not stressed out. It's nice.

Scott

I can imagine somebody right now is probably listening to this on their way to work and sitting in traffic.

Spence

That sounds immense, I'm sure.

Scott

Yeah. And they're probably saying, "You know what? I didn't have to get up at 3 o'clock this morning either." So there's a different job for everyone.

Spence

There's a different job for everyone. On the flip side, just to think about it, I go to bed at about 7. So, it's not like I stayed up till midnight and then get up at three - that would be ludicrous. I would die in, like, 2 weeks, right? You can't live on 3 hours of sleep. Because I'm not obligated to keep your time, I can create my own schedule. I get a full 8-hour sleep. I wake up rested and

happy and I have no problem with it because I don't need to conform to the social time schedule.

Scott

Right. Your schedule is based on when you have to do weather reports and everything related to the job, as opposed to social constructs.

Spence

Yeah.

Scott

I would imagine that you don't get bored because you have full internet access.

Spence

I have full internet access. But in reality, I don't. I don't use it that much for entertainment. I mean, I like doing YouTube videos, I enjoy bringing this information to the public, I like corresponding with people through email and comments, and that kind of thing - that's fun. For entertainment - I've been here for 2 months - I've read six books. It's amazing. I've played 3 Mass Effect games - 30 hours each game - in two months! That's amazing! Having that kind of time to be able to do whatever you want is absolutely phenomenal.

Scott

Is there anything about this that you don't like or that you would change?

Spence

I really don't think so because I can buy everything that I need online if I want to. If I need new clothes, I can go to walmart.com, buy something, ship it to head office, and then they'll send it with my groceries like no big deal. Nothing is a priority. Nothing is rushed. So yeah, I don't feel the need to change anything at all. For me, it's an absolutely ideal-like lifestyle.

Scott

It sounds like this is a good job for someone who may be somewhat of an introvert since there's not much face-to-face human interaction - would you say that's the case?

Spence

Well, yes and no. I mean, there are certain things you need to be able to get along with the person that you work with - that is essential because there are a lot of things that you have to do together. So, it's not like you'll never see anybody. You need to be able to do that. You do also need to be able to use the radio. You can't feel averse when speaking up on the radio and using communication equipment with several other people. There's no privacy - the only privacy that you have is if you have a cell phone. At a lot of the stations, you don't even get a cell phone or internet service. Your only communication is on a party-line where everybody can hear you, so there's just no privacy at all.

Scott

For someone listening to this - they're somewhere near Entrance Island - is it okay for them to just come and visit or should they contact you ahead of time?

Spence

Well, somebody can contact me. I do have a Facebook page that I check regularly or whatnot - people can get a hold of me through there very, very easily. They can let me know that they're coming around and we'll be ready. We'll give them a tour. Well, there's a picnic table if they want to sit down and have lunch. They better bring their own food, though, because I'm not sharing mine. Actually, one of the nice things we'd like - if you are ever visiting a station like this - is a piece of fruit, because we don't get a lot of fruit. Fruits only last a week or a week and a half in the fridge, and then it's no good. So, it's nice to get an apple, an orange, or a little bit of fruit every once in a while. So, bring some fruit for your lightkeeper.

Scott

That's a good plan. What I'm picturing that might happen at some point is that, instead of waiting for the helicopter every 30 days, you might eventually have drone delivery. Has there been any talk about that?

Spence

Drone delivery would be amazing, but I'm not sure how it would work. If the drone is able to go 10 miles from Nanaimo to the island and back then that might work, but I'm not sure how far drone delivery would actually work.

Scott

Yeah, that's a long way to go, and the weight of a lot of food, clothing, or whatever it's delivering is probably not economical at this point, but I can imagine that might be something that works at some point in the future.

Spence

I mean, if I really, really, really wanted to... I had somebody tell me before that if I really wanted a pizza, I could get it delivered. There's a guy in Nanaimo who has a boat - I can call him up and say, "Dude, I really need pizza. Can you bring me a pizza?" I'll have the pizza delivered to his office, he'll put it on his boat, and he will bring them to me, but it would cost me \$150 to do that. I don't need a pizza that bad for \$150.

Scott

No pizza is that good...

Spence

No pizza is that good, but the option is there. In the same instance, my wife can end up going to Nanaimo, bringing some stuff, and catching a ride with this gentleman. It will cost her \$150 to come out to the island, but she can bring a whole bunch of stuff with her and whatnot. So, those options are available. If money is no limit, then you can get stuff delivered anytime you want, but it's better to just get the helicopter to do it once a month.

Scott

Yeah. That pizza would be, like, the ultimate impulse purchase.

Spence

Oh, yeah.

Scott

You mentioned your YouTube channel. You're also on Facebook. I looked at your YouTube channel - I haven't watched all the videos yet, but each one seems like it goes into a particular

aspect of an island's lighthouse keeper's life - what do you eat, what do you do every day, and stuff like this. So, that's really interesting. For people who want to check that out, we'll have links to your YouTube channel and your Facebook page, as well as on the show notes for this episode, which is going to be WhatWasThatLike.com/40. Spence, is there anything else that you want to add that we haven't talked about?

Spence

No. That's wonderful. I think we got just about everything.

Scott

Well, I appreciate your time and I hope you have calm seas and no bad weather there today.

Spence

Well, thank you so much. And thanks so much for having me. I enjoyed it. It was a lot of fun.

Scott

Hey, just a couple of things before we head out the door –

First up, I got an email from a listener that really made my day. You might recall episode number 30, which is titled “Travis lost his son”. It's a really heart-wrenching story about a father, Travis, whose 16 year old son Brandon died from an asthma attack. It's really sad, but it actually has a positive ending. If you haven't heard it yet you should really go listen to it.

Well, Michelle listened to that episode, and it prompted her to send me this email:

Just listened to the episode where Travis lost his son. I have listened to every podcast you have posted and you are such a great host. You let people speak and that's really what people who go through terrible things need. Just someone to listen. I was feeling pretty down today. This made me appreciate life more. Thank you.

And I think that's awesome, so thank you Michelle for those kind words.

And now for you – yes, I'm talking to you right here in your ear now as you listen to this episode – I'd love to hear from you too! If you have any comment at all on the episode you just heard, or any of the previous episodes, I would seriously love to hear about it.

The easiest way is to send me an email at Scott@WhatWasThatLike.com. I guarantee I'll read it and it's pretty likely I'll reply to it as well. Or if you want, you can go to the website and click on the Contact button, and just send me a message there.

Or how about this – you could record a little audio clip, which is pretty easy to do on your phone now, and send that to me in an email. Maybe I'll just play it right here on the podcast!

If nothing else, you can at least join the private Facebook group at whatwasthatlike.com/facebook.

However you decide you want to contact me, I'd love to hear from you. See you in two weeks!