

Script of the text (PART I. LISTENING)

Interviewer: Alex Morales, a journalist, and Joanne Butcher, who works with children, are about to embark on a journey through the most inhospitable place on Earth – the Arctic. It is more than a year since they applied to go on an expedition advertised as a ‘hazardous journey’ with ‘a safe return doubtful’. Jim McNeil, the renowned Arctic explorer, is leading the Ice Warrior project aiming to reach all four North Poles in one season, which is successful, will be a world record. Such a task, you may assume, must surely be undertaken by highly experienced travelers. Does that describe you, Joanne?

Joanne: Er, no! I’d never even skied before we did the training to prepare for the expedition, so I spent a lot of time falling over at first.

Interviewer: Now Jim McNeil’s motto is ‘even ordinary people can do extraordinary things’. So, Alex, what does it take to turn from an ice novice into a polar explorer?

Alex: The most important thing is building up mental resilience, as the conditions are pretty miserable at times. Although we are a very close team, we’ll be walking alone in single file for a large part of each day with just our thoughts to keep us company.

Interviewer: Now you two were strangers when you met at the first training weekends, weren’t you?

Joanne: Yes, each member of the group was sent an email telling us to meet at a certain map reference on a set time and day. We were given the phone numbers of the other people in the group and told to get there in as few cars as possible.

Interviewer: Now, you’ll be battling extremely low temperatures. What training have you done for that?

Alex: Well, a major part of a training was a three-and-a-half-week trip to the Canadian Arctic to learn how to manage body temperatures. One day I took my gloves off and literally in about 15 seconds my fingers felt like wood.

Joanne: But, surprisingly, heat can be a problem too. Once we only had T-shirts on because we were pulling a sled all day. You have to be careful not to sweat as it can freeze on to you and plummet your body temperature.

Interviewer: How difficult is it to prepare for such a trip?

Joanne: Well, we've both been putting on some weight to help maintain body heat, but at the same time we've had to pursue a healthy diet for fitness level, as pulling the sleds containing all our equipment and supplies requires a huge amount of body strength. Pulling tyres in the local park has been a regular activity for me. I've had some odd looks from people, but it's the closest thing to pulling a sled.

Interviewer: It all sounds very hard! But presumably, there have been some good moments that have made you want to carry on?

Joanne: Yes, while we were training in Canada, a few of us had been off the ice for a few days because of flu. We were transported back to the rest of the team on a skidoo and when we saw them, they were all looking out at the horizon. When we tracked their gaze, there was a polar bear with two cubs roaming in the ice. You can't just describe it!

Interviewer: Well, talking to you, I can see that you are both full of excitement and relishing the challenge that lies ahead. Am I right?

Joanne: I have got so much from it already, just by being able to survive somewhere like that. People ask me how I can enjoy it. Well, I just do!

Alex: I reckon I'll find it difficult to slip back into everyday normality when I get back. I might get itchy feet and want to go somewhere else. Let's see how many fingers I come back with first!