



Capturing the Past, Inspiring the Future

# Lisa Powis

Interviewed by

**Richard Sharpe**

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**Archives of IT**

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*Welcome to the Archives of Information Technology, where we capture the past and inspire the future. It is Thursday January the 30<sup>th</sup> 2020, and we are in the City of London, in the Livery Hall of the Worshipful Company of Information Technologists. I am Richard Sharpe, and I have been covering the IT industry since, ooh, the early 1970s.*

[00:26]

*So many of the people who have made their contribution to the Archives are on the supply side. They're selling, or building systems for other people, software and hardware. That's fine, you've got to have the technology. But what can the technology actually do of practical use? That is the key issue. And the key issue therefore is to talk to users. And a renowned user is making her contribution to the Archives today, and she is from the area of insurance. What, you might ask, has that to do with IT? Well you will find out a lot by listening to Lisa Powis. Lisa, welcome to the Archives. You were born in 1967, when there were just 2,000 computers in the UK.*

Amazing.

*Only 2,000. Yes.*

Gosh.

[01:18]

*Gosh. Where were you born?*

I was born in a place called Bognor Regis, not such a great place, but, someone actually gave me a book that was, it was voted one of the top three crappiest places in the UK, but I'm proud to be from Bognor Regis. It's a seaside town.

*And what were your parents doing?*

So, they met actually in a caravan park in Bognor Regis, on a holiday romance. My mum worked for my dad. My dad had an insurance brokerage. And that's how I got into insurance actually, through my dad.

*You went to a state school in '74, yes?*

Yes, that's right.

*A primary school. Did you enjoy that?*

Yeah, I did. I was, I was from a big family, and it was, yeah, it was great. I did enjoy my childhood, coming from a big family, I did very much enjoy it actually. It was quite a relaxed background that I had.

*Were you into sports?*

Yeah, I did. I enjoyed netball and, and I enjoyed running and high-jump. I did a few sports. But, no more than anybody else really, yeah. But... And you know, I did enjoy it, but not... There were occasions when I perhaps didn't always enjoy it. And there was one occasion, well, quite a few occasions [laughs], when, as we got a bit older my friends used to sneak out of the PE lessons and go off and have a cheeky fag. Because it was quite a relaxed school, I've got to be honest. It was a very big school. But, but yeah, we enjoyed it, we had fun.

*Were you academically oriented?*

Reasonably so. I've got to be honest, the school wasn't a great school. So you could get away with doing the barest minimum. But I, I came out with five O Levels, which was OK.

*And this was from the Bognor Regis comprehensive?*

Yes. Yeah.

*Where you went in '78 to '83.*

Yes. Yeah. I think... I think if I had probably been to a better school and been pushed a little bit more, I probably could have done better. I had a twin brother that was super-duper brainy, so it was always, difficult sometimes to do as well as him. But I did OK, I was, you know, OK with it.

[03:13]

*Right. Now your father was running an insurance company.*

Yes.

*Called Computer Car Insurance?*

Yes, that's right.

*So what is the significance of the computer before the car with this?*

Yeah. So, Computer Car Insurance. It was when comp- People hadn't really got into computers. So, my dad was a Co-Op Agent to start with, he used to go knocking on doors and taking, you know, £1 a week from them to do their car insurance. So, he decided to set up his own business. And he was going to use a computer to work out their insurance premiums. And that was revolutionary. So we had this big sort of monster that sat in the corner of his office, and people would come into the office and he would get them the best price. And he actually had, his sort of logo was ticker tape, which, I don't know if people remember that, but it was this like, this little coding with little marks pulled out of it. And that was what, that's why it's called Computer Car Insurance. And people would come along. And he was really successful with it actually.

*What type of computer was it?*

I... Do you know, I, I don't know if I remember what it was. I just remember being, this lady who was sitting at this big, really huge computer. But, he was one of the first people to have had it.

*Who did the programs for it?*

He got... I remember there was a chap that came in. I mean I was quite young, because this was before I was even working for him, so I was probably... He started that business when I was eleven, so, I was quite young. But I remember being completely fascinated by it, thinking... And it was really revolutionary. And so, he had got a gentleman that helped program it. And, I mean I, I guess it was probably... You know, did we keep our client records on it? I don't think so. I think it was literally used to work out prices. Because we had microfiche at the time as well, I remember that. You know, he'd put these sort of, sheets in, to look up these different pricings. But he wasn't, you know, he was fairly, I think he was revolutionary. And I think, that's probably what got me into being completely fascinated by the world of technology.

[05:06]

*And so he was able to offer better prices as a result of the information he had?*

Yeah. Because... Yeah, because with insurance, you were looking up, you had rate guides, and we, as an insurance broker you have a panel of insurers, so you might be looking at 40 different companies' rates, but by using a computer you would be sort of... And it was very crude in those days. It's much more... It's very different now. But you would be, have a steer to which insurance company would, would give you the best price. And that computer was helping you in those days. Rather than thinking, well that company might work, or that company, and using your memory, you could actually use the computer to help you with that steer. So... And that was, that's what he started doing. And of course now, it's completely different, everybody's using a computer for everything. But back then, it was different. I mean this, we're talking, probably in 1978, '79 I think it was.

[05:52]

*Right. And then you worked for your father after school?*

Yeah. Well I didn't plan that at all. I wanted to be a nurse. But I remember leaving school at sixteen, I couldn't wait to leave school, and my dad said, 'What are you

going to do?' He said, 'Well come and work for me.' And I said, 'All right then, why not?' And I got... He paid me, and I, you know, I got a bit of money, and, I was happy to do it. So it wasn't really my intention, but I just sort of fell into it.

*Did any of his other children work for him? Because he had six.*

Yes. Actually, my aunty worked for him, my nan worked for him. [laughs] My nan used to... My nan worked for him until she was, well till she was about 85. She used to do the banking. She used to go down with her handbag with all the cash, because people paid in cash, walking down to the bank with this cash in her handbag, to bank it. My aunty, my older brother, who I actually went into business with, my, two of my sisters. I've got five brothers and sisters; only one didn't work for him. But all, at any point, we did, all worked for him, yeah.

*A proper family firm.*

Oh absolutely. Absolutely. I think a lot of people did that when you worked in, certainly if you lived in Bognor Regis, people did have family businesses.

[06:58]

*Did he get into personal computers? Because the IBM PC was launched in '81, 1981.*

[hesitates] Well, as... So, when I started working for him, we bought a system called North Park computer system. So, we were, it was generally what, you tended to work with software companies.

*Yes.*

So they wrote the programs, and you were given almost what you were given.

*Yes.*

And then... So I was very used to using... When I first started at sixteen, so that would have been '83, we used a microfiche system, and then that, it was very soon, I

should think literally within about a year of me working there, we had a much more advanced system. So we actually were tapping the information into the computer and getting prices out. And that was from the North computer system. We then switched, about three or four years later we started working with a company called Misys, who eventually became Open GI. And actually that's who I used for a long time. So, as an insurance broker you were using a system that was provided for you. But that system did everything. And it became very advanced, so it would do, have your CRM system, it would have your quoting system, it would have your scanning, literally, your payments, everything, it would control everything. But you ended up having to have very close relationships with your computer, your software provider.

*Absolutely.*

Because, they were providing everything for you. And literally, everything, whatever you did on your business would run through that.

*And it was bespoke.*

No, it wasn't bespoke. You could have bespoke elements, but as a brokerage, you would have certain parts of it, so... But if you... So I'll explain. You've got a system that will... So a client comes in and they want a price. So I was doing personalised insurance. So they want a price for their insurance. So that would start. And then you would go through all the different parts. You'd have to send their documents. But that eventually, as time went on, this system would improve. So to start with... So at sixteen, when I was sixteen or seventeen, car insurance was just about getting a price. But by the time sort of, fast-forward 20 or 30 years, it's much more advanced, how we do, how we various things.

*Right. So it is a package.*

Yeah, it was a package. But it became much more advanced.

*Loaded onto a computer, delivered to you.*

Yeah. And... But you could have elements. So, as, when I set up my own business it became much more bespoke, much more depending on the type of insurance you wanted.

*Right.*

So I did have lots of bespoke elements to what I was doing.

*Yeah.*

Yeah.

[09:22]

*And did your siblings take to technology as well as you?*

Yeah. So, my older brother, that I worked with, he, again, was very keen on technology.

*This is Jan?*

No, this is Mark. Mark.

*Mark.*

Mark, my older brother. Jan...

*Yes, '62.*

Yeah, he, in fact he went to college and did a year computer programming. But, yeah, so he would be using... I think he probably did that on BBC BASIC, yeah, which is what I did as well at, at college.

*OK.*



Yeah. I mean again... It's funny to think back about what that was like. I mean I can remember doing very basic coding when it was, 10, go to, run, 20. You know, you didn't... Really simple programming. But again, found it fascinating.

[10:04]

*And apart from work, did you have them at home?*

Probably in those... I'm trying to think if we did. Mean certainly I was a very early adopter of, I became a Mac convert very early on.

*Why?*

Because I just love the way the Mac operates. So... I just love everything about Apple. I can remember saying to my friend, 'I've got this... I've seen an iPod.' No one had heard of iPods. And we're talking a long time ago, maybe, ten, fifteen years ago, probably fifteen years ago. And I was, I was with a friend, and they had just got this, this iPod. And it was playing music. And I said, 'You've got to see these.' And I was one of the first people, all my friends, anyone I knew, to get an iPod. And I remember being like, an early adopter of, of even the iPod. Because people hadn't, hadn't, didn't know what an iPod could do.

[10:50]

*You liked, did you, this is a question, did you like the more intuitive interface of the Macintosh?*

Yes. Yeah. So, using a Mac, I, I remember going over from being a Windows user, and thinking, I remember thinking it was like, two weeks of actually finding it quite hard to use, but I wanted to persevere. Because I just knew that I would end up being a Mac. And now, my children are Mac users, my son, he was a, he was, he got into Macs and loved it. And it just, all, as a family we love everything to do with Apple, all their products. But it is, because it's intuitive, it's got... The look and feel is much better. And having said that, that's changing actually, I think other, you know, I think there's so much out there now that it's probably... So, it's challenging them, very much so, actually, at the moment, Apple.

*And that's the effect of Steve Jobs basically isn't it?*

Yeah. I think so. The fact that he's not there is, is making a difference actually, yeah.

*Yes.*

Yeah, but I think... But yeah, so we were always....

*Describe the Mac that you first got.*

Oh, that Mac. Yeah. Oh, it was, it was a white one.

*Right, a little tubby thing.*

Yeah. And it was quite thick. When I think about what you've got now, it was a thick white Mac.

*Yeah.*

But I just think what it could do. And it... But I think it was pretty. That's a strange thing to say isn't it, but I think...

*No. What's wrong with that?*

It was pretty. And I liked, I liked what it could do. And... I think as well, it doesn't have... In the days when viruses, and you'd get problems with... Just, it was just slick, clean, everything straightforward. Once you got to grips with it, and it was a little bit of time to get to grips with it. But it, everything was quite straightforward. Now, I just love the fact, I've got, you know, I've got an iPhone, I've got a Mac, I've got a desktop Mac, and I've got, I can just, everything is seamless. I can just look at anything anywhere. And that's, it's sort of down to the fact that it's all via Apple, I just like the way it operates.

*Someone once said, I think it's a very, a very good quote, 'Great technology should be like magic.'*

Yeah.

*And often the Macs are a bit like magic, aren't they.*

They are. And I think the way they, I think actually the way Apple have... They've... Actually, I think they've changed the way people, they've marketed their products. They've opened their stores up, and they've invited people in, and they've said you can touch everything, we don't care. That was quite, that was quite novel really, when you think about when Apple did that, shops didn't work really like that in the beginning. I think, when you look back to when Apple started doing that, shops almost sort of said, 'Don't touch,' but Apple said, 'Come in and touch our products.' And I think that got young people into it. And I think that's how they really got people buying them. I mean when you think about it, Apple's very expensive.

*Ooh, they are.*

They are. Yeah.

*Still are.*

Yeah. Yes.

[13:27]

*Did your dad push you?*

Yes. I think, coming from... I think, my dad pushed me but my, my brothers and sisters pushed me as well. I'm the second youngest, so, a twin brother. I had quite clever brothers. I think we all pushed each other. And I think as well, I would say that I come from an entrepreneurial family. So my dad having his own business, I think that encouraged us all to, see their work more than just having a job. I think it, I

was encouraged to do more. And I think, probably I was always, I always knew I would have my own business.

*Would you have wanted to go to university?*

Well, I think it's strange really, because I think I was, I've got a twin brother, he went to university and I didn't. And I always wonder... My parents didn't really push me to go to uni. So I think, when I look back I think, it's strange that I've got twin brother that was pushed and I wasn't, but I think partly I didn't want to, but partly my parents were very encouraging of the boys. So I think it was slightly chauvinistic from my parents really. [laughs]

[14:24]

*But what you did do is, you attended Chichester Polytechnic.*

Yeah.

*'86 to '87.*

Yeah.

*And did a, a year's Certificate in Management Studies.*

Yeah. Yeah, I think that might, I think my dad probably felt a bit guilty about not encouraging me to go to university.

*Right. And that's where you learnt your BBC BASIC.*

Yes.

*And that's where you did your programming.*

Yes.

*What type of programs did you write?*

Oh. I mean they were very, very basic. Because I think it was when computers were so basic, but I think... I think that's probably where I got my love of technology, knowing what technology could do. I mean, it was literally, go to, run. That's how basic it was. So, I wouldn't say, I'm a technologist. I'd say, I'm a technology enthusiast. I like what technology can do. So, even if my own business, I had a fantastic tech team of technologists that would use technology to make everything we did better. So we were known for being good at it. But if you say to me, 'Lisa, go and write a program,' no, I can't do that. But I can absolutely get the people together and say, 'Right, we are going to be the best at technology.' So, I think that's, I, I just what technology can do. And I will, will want to be... I live in a house that is, where we use, technology is run through it. I live in a, a low carbon footprint house, and we've got technology running through. I love it, I just, every part of my life has got to be run using technology to its best. I love it. I just like technology.

*You're very keen.*

I am aren't I. Yeah.

[15:55]

*Let me put a, a philosophical question to you. Isn't there too much of it?*

Um... I feel... Yes, I do. I feel that, for the older generation it's hard. My parents particularly struggle. My mum loves social media, she's nearly 80 and she likes social media. But she struggles sometimes, because I think it's difficult. So I think that's hard, and I do think that we could probably... It is hard, and I think we should consider the older generation, with technology. And I... Yeah.

*There's coverage, for instance, now of these, called smart motorways.*

Yes.

*Which depend on a lot of technology.*

Yeah.

*And they don't really have hard shoulders.*

Yeah.

*Isn't this, aren't we becoming too reliant on it?*

Well, I think... [sighs] You see I, because I, I'm completely pro-technology, so it's hard to ask me that question. Because I think, until... I can only say, you've just got to make progress with tech. I think, technology allows the progress. So I wouldn't, I'm not necessarily going to agree with that. No, I'm not.

*I didn't think you would.*

No.

*No.*

I just feel sorry for the older generation struggling, because I see my parents struggling. That's the only part I will say, it's difficult.

[17:11]

*1990 to '91, Allen & Allen Group.*

Yes.

*And that's an insurance company is it?*

Yes. Yes.

*Right.*

Yes.

*And you moved in as an insurance adviser.*

Yes.

*Why did you leave the family firm?*

Because, I... I, I had boyfriend troubles. [laughs] And, I just was... I was in a rut, you know. Living in Bognor Regis, you need to get out, and so I did, and, you know, the relationship wasn't going so great. And I just... You know, I'm going to sow my seeds, and go out into the big wide world, and that's what I did.

*And the big wide world was Hampton Hill in Middlesex.*

Yes. [laughs] I thought it was London, but it wasn't, it wasn't. [laughing] I know, people laugh at that. I thought I was going off to London, and I wasn't. No.

*You were offered the position of hyper-performance manager.*

Yes.

*What does that mean?*

Well, so, we had a division. We had just set up a division, they had just set up a division, and it was for sports cars, fast cars. Because it was in the, it was in the years where, like, your XR2s, XR3s were very popular, and youngsters were driving that type of car. So we had managed to get some competitive rates for that type of car. So they asked me if I would take over that department. So it was quite, when I took it over it was quite small, but when I left that area it was, was quite big. I mean I got up about 80 staff; when I started it was only about ten people. So it was very successful actually.

*And you were, well, there from '90 to '94 basically.*

Yeah.

*But then, as office manager, you grew a team of 90. Again, did you use a lot of technology?*

Yes, we did, we used a lot of technology. We... I mean I got involved actually in, everything. I mean even down to, I was often pulled into... I just, liked what technology can do. Even on the hardware side, I would often be the person... So I looked after our suppliers. Down to cable in the office, it would be me that would be saying... I understood about Cat 5 cabling. Because I thought, I need to, if I'm going to, if we were moving offices, because we were growing, we took over new offices, it would be that would be helping, you know, spec-ing out the, what cabling was required, and what would be needed for the phone system. So I, I tended to get involved in everything. Again, not an expert, but I just wanted to understand it. And, so we did, we, we used technology as much as you could, but we were very reliant on our software supplier, which...

*Who was that?*

That was, we, it was a combination. There was a company Cheshire Data Systems, and Open GI, which was the company I spoke about earlier, Misys. So we'd use, in different parts of the businesses we used different suppliers. But it was those two predominantly. They were... But that was when we started to consider using scanning and going paperless. Because that, imagine in insurance, how much paperwork do you have. And I can remember looking into going paperless, and we did start to go paperless. And eventually when I had my own business, I went completely paperless. I remember looking into that and trying to get, start doing the paperless programming. But also, we used EDI transmissions as well, which is electronic data, is it, electronic data intermission, I think it is, where we were transmitting data overnight to the insurers. So it was starting to become more seamless and less paperwork. And that was towards the end of the, that would have been, I think towards the end of the Nineties really.



Yes.

It was.

Yes.

That's, and that's where insurance was changing, and was really starting to rely on technology.

[20:40]

*You then became Group Operations Director of Allen & Allen.*

Yes.

*So you are a director of this company.*

Yes. So I had a shareholding.

*And quite young still.*

Yeah, no, and I had a shareholding in the business as well. I mean I...

*You had shareholders?*

Yeah, I became a shareholder as well in the business too. And I, I, at that time I had set up another division as well, which was on kit cars, and, we had a kit car specialism as well. And I... So I had set that up and I took a shareholding in that, and then, overall I took a group shareholding as well, which was great actually. So, I felt I had sort of, skin in the game.

*You did. And you, some of that skin, you had to put into the game in France.*

Yes. I did. So we, we launched a company in France, which again, great, because I didn't have any experience working in another country. So, I used to drive, [laughs]

get up at five in the morning, and drive over to Boulogne-sur-Mer, which is in the north part of Calais region. Literally, I would have to get, I would try to get to the office for nine in the morning, so it was a really early start, like, a three-hour drive. So, great, great, I had a fantastic team.

*Did you use as much technology there as you did...?*

Well, yes, we did. We... So I was... We were using an English company to write our software, and that was... Because in France there wasn't really anybody that could do it. So we literally had to spec out what software we needed. It was a big challenge, that was, actually, yeah. And especially when it's in another language. But I was involved in all parts of it. I wasn't totally involved in, we obviously had to get some of the French group to help with it. So we employed a French speaker, an English person. So in fact, the company we were using, they had an English person that could obviously, multi-language, who would help with the, the design and the spec-ing of it. But it was, it was a challenge actually. In fact I think after a year or so we ended up having to buy the system out in France, because it just, it proved too much of a challenge. Because it was in the very early days of, trying to get the system to work. Yeah, it was difficult actually, that was a challenge.

*But you did make it a success?*

Yeah, no that company's still going actually. Yeah, it's quite a big company.

*And what type of insurance was it involved in?*

It was insure... It's personal lines. So, it's car insurance generally.

*Oh right.*

Yeah.

*OK. Still car insurance.*

Yeah.

[22:59]

*Then in 2001 you broke away, did you?*

Yeah, I did.

*You cashed in your chips.*

I did. I did, yes.

*What led you to do that?*

Well actually, what led me to do it was, just before, a year before that, it was when the Internet was taking off, and I had proposed that we should set up an Internet brand. Because it was, literally that was when it was all, like, you know, people were considering buying insurance online. And, I thought, I just thought, do you know what, I, I'm going to do this for myself. Because I could see such a big opportunity, that insurance was going to go online. And I, I just thought, that's it, I'm going to do it for myself. And I wanted to specialise in female insurance. You can't do that now by the way because it's, we have to have gender neutral rates. But... So, that's really what gave me the push really, is realising that it's a big opportunity. One, to specialise in something, but also to be selling insurance with, partly online.

*How did you tackle being online?*

People... Well, people don't tend... Now, people will do the whole thing online, but it's more, for a long time, people want to use the Internet as a, a reference. So they want to look at their pricing online, and then they want to speak to somebody. So certainly in those days, they would want to see a good website, and they want to be able to run their information through, and then they want to speak to you.

*Who designed your website?*

At the time, we just instructed a company, you know, a local company to help us do it actually. But, setting up your own business costs work really, you know, [laughs] cost came into it. Didn't have that much money to set it up. So we used a local firm, who were great actually. Yeah. In fact we're still friends with the gentleman that helped me.

[24:43]

*In all of this use of computers, you seem to be getting through it very well. Have you had any mishaps?*

Oh gosh, I've had lots of mishaps. In fact, probably, three years into having my own business, we had, we had a big, a virus that came through. And you learn lessons through that actually, because you realise that you haven't got the right firewalls in place, and you realise you've got to, you know, up your security. So yeah, we were down for a day and a half actually, and that was a real problem.

*This is Fresh Insurance Services Group.*

Yeah.

*That's what you called it.*

Yeah, Fresh. So we had... So we started off with a company called Ladybird, so that's when we specialised in just females insurance. But quite early, we decided we would specialise, we would have more than one specialism, so we did insurance for young drivers, we did home insurance. So... And that, Fresh was the group, and some of the brands sat underneath, so we had, Ladybird was our car, female insurance; we had Fresh Homes; we had Autosave, which was the young driver brand; and we had van insurance as well, we had a van insurance product. So we had different brands of products that sat underneath it.

*Right.*

So yeah, so that, it was probably about two or three years into the journey we, we had a virus that, you know, we probably could have avoided had we had better security, that we...

*Right.*

And it, it just spread through.

*About what date was that?*

That was probably... It wasn't that long after I started, so, it was, we started in 2001, so about 2004.

*Right.*

Yeah. Yeah. And, yeah, it just makes you realise, you've got to, you've really got to think about your security on your system.

[26:10]

*Have you ever had to pull a project because it wasn't working? As a computer project, IT project.*

[pause] Have we ever had to do that? [pause] Not really, I wouldn't say we've had to, no, I can't think of any that we have. We probably have. I'll have to think about that and I'll come to you on that one. I can't think of any that we have had to.

*Right.*

It's generally projects as a whole that we've, that have got technology into them really. I'm sure there would be. Because we, we always did come up with sort of mad ideas, and they don't... But they're, sometimes you think, they're not going to work. So I'm sure there have been a few crazy ideas, and it's me that comes up with them as well. [laughs] I always think, can we do something. So we often...

*Because you... Sorry.*

No, it's, it's often, we... I'll sometimes come up with an idea that might be where I think we could save money, but in the, it'll be technology where, it'll be a process. But, on reflection it doesn't work. And so there would have been, over the years there would be ideas like that, that we realise, no, it's not going to work. Because we were always trying to innovate. As a business we were known for being innovative. Yeah.

[27:17]

*So when you... Probably... I'm not insulting you when I say this, I hope you don't think I'm insulting you.*

Yeah.

*But, your lack of deep professional knowledge...*

Yeah.

*...of the technology, leads you to say, 'Because of my business needs, I want to do this,' and maybe the technology isn't quite there.*

Oh. God, yeah. I'm sure that my tech, my, the IT team, like, groan when they see me. I'm sure. They probably... You can imagine me having a meeting with them, I'm sure, and they probably get, oh my God, what does she want now? I mean there'll be loads of times that's happened. But, the Fresh team I worked with, we had such a good, we were a really good management team, and we worked very well together. So, we could have open conversations. So there would have been lots of situations where they'd say, 'No, that's not going to work.' And I would take that. I would. Because you're quite right, what I would want in a business sense doesn't always equate to what the IT would be, would be capable of or would be able to, or would even be workable. Because it doesn't always work, does it? You know, I've got this big vision, and it doesn't always work.

*Right. And do you find that frustrating?*

[hesitates] Yeah, definitely. But I can accept those things. Because there's always another idea that will come.

*[laughs] There's always another idea...*

Pop in, pop in there.

*...that will pop into your head.*

Yeah, definitely. Yeah. Yeah.

*And where do these ideas... I don't know where they come from, but, do they come from a particular place, like, are you gardening and they pop into your head, or...?*

No no. I wake up in the morning and I come up with ideas. My other half, he hates me in the mornings, he says, 'Oh my God, not another idea.' Because I wake him up with my ideas. [RS laughs] Oh he does, he hates it.

*So that's that process of sleeping and it going into your subconscious, and then coming out again as a more formed idea.*

Yeah. Because, I, I like, I just think of things. I do. But it is mornings for me. Yeah. I just wake up thinking, mm, how can we do this? What's the idea? Yeah. I recognise that about myself, I have too many ideas, and I have to sort of calm them down. Yeah. Yeah.

[29:14]

*What do you think is the balance of power between on the one hand the suppliers of software and systems, and, technology, and on the other the users like you?*

Well, I think that, I think, certainly in this... So my software supplier had a lot of power, and that, if you, that would be, that was frustrating for me. Because... So I didn't buy a bespoke system, so if I wanted it bespoke I'd have to pay for that. And

there was always time constraints. And there wasn't that much... So, in my arena, you'd have software companies, not many. And they would give a very good system, generally, but they would, I would always want additional bespoke parts. So that would be frustrating, to not, for them not be able to deliver as quickly as you want. Especially when you've got an idea, and you'd say, 'I want you to do X, Y and Z.' And they could say, 'Well you can, but it's going to cost x, and it's going to take three months,' or it's going to take six months. And that can happen. And, if we are trying to deliver a product to market, and it's going to take a while, and you want to get that, and generally it's about a competitive product, you don't want to wait six months, because by that time someone else is going to be doing that product. So that can be extremely frustrating. So, if you ask that question about power, they have a lot of power sometimes, and it would be frustrating. But... So, I, in the ideal world, you want to build your own program, but that would never be possible, not in insurance. You would always have to rely on a software provider, because, the starting point is, we are a broker, and we work with a panel of insurers, and they supply their rates to the software company. They do a lot of jiggery-pokery to get those rates through to us, because we would work with numerous schemes. So, could be 100 different types of rates coming through. And that would come through on our quote system. So we, we, we're very reliant on that, so they have a lot of power. Does that make sense?

*Yes, it makes perfect sense.*

Yeah. So that would be... So there would be more frustration. Yeah.

[31:14]

*Had you ever thought of going, outsourcing?*

Yes. So we did outsource. So...

*You did outsource?*

Yeah. So when I started, I used a company called Cheshire Data, and we outsourced one of our... So, we had some competitive rates, so we would sort of, almost bolt our, some, what we called our, we called it a rinky dink actually, [laughs] that was our



code name, rinky dink. It was basically how we changed some of the ratings so we were more competitive. And it was, basically, someone fitted some criteria to make us more competitive. We outsourced this actual product. We sort of bolted it on to our system. But we weren't able to do it, and this, our software supplier couldn't do it for us. So we then had to, to move suppliers. It was very very difficult, because they could control so much of what we did. But we were forced into doing it, because we needed this rinky dink to be separate..

*Was that costly?*

Costly. Costly? Not necessarily costly; it was more, very difficult, because we had our, imagine our CRM system, everything was on that system. We had, you know, probably 20,000 clients that we had to move, and they had, their twelve-month policy was there, all their transactions. We had to move it. And it was all because, we couldn't... Because we had outsourced this product that we couldn't put on, bolt onto the system. And they didn't have the technology to do it, and we really needed it. Because, at Fresh Insurance we would say, we were always quite innovative, we were always trying to push things forward, and we were always doing things different. So we were often outsourcing little bits. So we were, we had a core system, and we were bolting things on sometimes. But this, what we called the rinky dink, we couldn't actually do it, and we had to find a solution.

[32:55]

*What are you like as a manager?*

Oh. I think, I think I've got quite demanding on what we want to achieve, but, I think I work well with people, I'd like to think we do, but, sometimes... Somebody once said I was like a helicopter landing, and it was like, [laughs] like landing, and then like [laughs], spraying out all my different thoughts and processes. They found it, sometimes people might find that hard.

*Right.*

But, I think I'm, you know, I'm inclusive, I'd like to think.

*Can you fire people?*

I don't like to do that, but I, I'm absolutely willing to, and I have done that, yeah. Of course you've got to be able to do that. I don't... Because I always think of, you've got to think of people as people. But I think if they've not performed, then I can, I can happily do that, because I think, if you... It's harder if it's not about performance. But yes, I can.

[33:43]

*Do you have mentors?*

Yes.

*Who?*

Actually, at the moment I've got some fantastic mentors, because I work with the ScaleUp Group, and there are some really talented people on the ScaleUp Group.

*Tell us about the ScaleUp Group.*

So the ScaleUp Group is, there's a group of 29 people, mostly gentlemen, which is a shame because I know they, they'd like to have more women on that. And they are hugely talented people. And we help... So basically what we do is, we help companies that are looking for finance in Series A. So not only do we help them raise finance, but we would often invest in their companies as well. But also, help them with mentoring, finding, we might help them when they're recruiting for perhaps a chairman, or non-exec positions. But also, those people have come from extremely, they've got fantastic CVs, they've got great backgrounds. So, John O'Connell, our Chairman, is help- I joined it a couple of years ago, but he's, he's a great mentor for me. And some of the other people on there, on, some other members are great, they're helping me. Because I've sort of got, new into helping raise finance.

*Are they as keen on technology as you are?*

Well it's, everybody has, has got technology running through their blood. So, they are, yeah. So they've all been involved in companies with technology, yeah. Yeah.

[35:02]

*What's the biggest mistakes you've made in technology?*

Oh. [pause] Oh, what's the biggest mistakes? [pause] Oh I don't know, because that's quite hard to hit me with that one, without me thinking about that one. I think, I mean obviously, that security issue, not having, that was definitely a problem, not, not having the right security. I think... Mm, nothing comes to mind really, because I don't like to think of mistakes. [pause] I can't think of anything at the moment. I'll come back to...

*How would people describe you?*

I think they'd say I was ambitious. I think they'd say I don't stop still. I think they'd say I was good fun. And, I think they would say that, I'm, I should stop, I should probably occasionally take it easy, but I won't. [laughs]

[36:04]

*You're going to be speaking sometime soon, aren't you, on a platform about insurance technology.*

Yes.

*What are you going to say?*

Well, do you know what, I'm not going to be speaking, I'm going to be on a panel.

*Oh you're going to be on a panel.*

Yes, I'm on a panel.

*Same thing really.*

The same thing. So, what will I be talking about? Well, because I've, I've got a passion for insure tech, I will be talking about insure tech. Because there's a lot of things that are happening in the insure tech arena. So if you think about FinTech, what's happened there, it's, when you think about Monzo revenue, these, all these cards are coming to make payment so much easier. And the younger generation, Millennials, love it. So, insure tech I think, it's ready to change. So, when people, for instance when they buy car insurance, it's quite time-consuming, do they want to answer all these questions? So, what is insure tech? Well it's using technology to make it easier. So that's what I'll be talking about, how can we, how can we improve the customer journey? Well there's so many datasets out there that are making it a lot easier for people to take out insurance without being asked all those questions. So, I would be talking a little bit about that, what's going to make people's, the customer journey or the user experience better? Because that's what's happening in FinTech. So a little bit about that. There is advancements in claims settlement in the wider piece about insure tech which is quite interesting. So for instance, if you take the Australian bush fires. That's quite topical at the moment. When they come to settling those claims, sometimes it's almost impossible for people to even get there, because there's so much damage. Well, satellite vision, using satellites, they can actually see what's happened, so they can actually, by using what we'd call... That's part of insure tech, so by using technology, you can use that technology to start looking at those satellite images to say, well how can we settle that claim faster? Because, these are people's liveli-, you know, these are businesses, they want that claim settled as soon as possible. So this is where insure tech can improve the process, or the claims process. And that is where insure tech is winning, but also reducing costs. Because, if there's an insurance, a claims, there's business interruption, and business interruption is where they're paying, because people can't continue their business, but if they could settle that claim faster, that is reducing the costs. So it's using technology. Does that make sense?

*Yes, absolutely.*

So that, that's... So, there are so many things going on at insure tech. And so I will be talking about subjects like that. And, just, yeah, lots of different subjects.

[38:42]

*I've seen it said that, basically, insurers are going to be able to test how well you drive...*

Yes.

*...by telematics, and...*

Yes.

*...then, adjust your rate accordingly.*

Yes, because I, I... So we did an... Well in fact, we did a telematics project, we were one of the first to market, we started one about ten years ago, believe it or not. And it was for young drivers. And, it all started... So in fact, we started it... My son was seventeen, he's 26 now. So he was one of our first guinea pigs. And it's very big for young drivers, because, obviously, you don't know... Somebody gets in the car, you don't know how they're going to drive. Telematics is big for all ages, but predominantly for young drivers. Because, you don't know what they're doing when they get in the car. So our product was all about parents having access to how that child drives. And I can tell you, it is, well, you just don't want to know how your child drives. And I'll give you an example of my own son. So he was one of our first guinea pigs. So we put this telematic box. He didn't want it of course. And, there was a particular point when my, some of the guys in the office said, 'Your son's driving 106 miles an hour down the motorway in his Rover,' a little Rover. And I said, 'He wouldn't drive 106 miles an hour.' It was down the A3 in Guildford. I said, 'He wouldn't drive that, my Henry would never do that.' So I asked him, I said, 'Henry, were you driving 106 miles an hour down the motorway, the A3?' And he said, he said, 'Er... Maybe.' [both laugh] 'Maybe.' And I just couldn't believe he would do that. But this... So I could actually have, you know, I had got parental control over what he was doing. So I could say 'Right, if you do that again, I'm going

to take the keys off you.' So I actually had the ability to influence how my son was driving. And that's what telematics can do. Having that box in the car meant I could stop... And I actually did have control. I mean it... It got to a point where, I mean he never did that again obviously, but it got to a point where I actually did take, him and his dad, we took his keys off him for a week. And he got really cross, because he couldn't go to his girlfriend. But it meant his driving improved. Because you don't... You know, these young drivers, and boys are the worst, and which is why, you know, in years gone by boys had to pay more for their insurance, because they don't drive very well. And they do drive at 106 miles an hour down the A3 because they just want to see if their Rover can drive that fast.

*I often drive down the A3, and I can't see how you could get to do 106 miles an hour.*

I don't know how he did either really.

*It's not a motorway even, well the last bit of is, isn't it.*

I don't know. I don't know how he did it, but...

*But he did do it?*

He did do it, apparently.

*Only once though.*

Only the once, yeah. But it's just that you can. And, so, telematics has been a great thing, because, it's actually statistically proven that young drivers, having telematics in the car, their driving has improved. And what does that mean? They're done to have fewer accidents. Which means, people on the road are safer. And the thing is with, with young drivers, and boys particularly, when they do have accidents, they have very big accidents, and they're, they are genuinely with, where there's injuries involved. And, we want that to, we want to stop that. So that's why telematics has been such a good thing for the insurance industry. And that's technology that's done that. You know, this little black box that has been installed in the cars, means that...

And it... So, we had, oh it's all about parental control, so parents have an access to that data. But, people want, youngsters want cheaper insurance. I mean, insurance for young drivers may be seven or eight years ago was £3,000. With a telematics box, it's somewhere between £1500 and £2,000. So, if they want that cheaper price, they've got have a box in the car, and that box is going to determine how they're going to... That is going to be... If they don't drive well, they're going to have, they're not going to get that price. So it's, it's great, telematics.

*How much is that box?*

Well the box ranges between £100, but, in fact boxes aren't... We started with boxes, because that was one of, the only ways we could do it, but now there's all sorts of devices. You can have, you can have it where you put it in your, your cigarette, you can have a little device that goes in the cigarette; there's little stickers, literally, tiny little stickers that go on, that connect to your mobile phone. There's loads of different devices. They're improving all the time. And there's one that goes in the ODB port. Lots of them. But now, they're down to, they're less than £100. And if you... They're, self-fitted, they're less than £50. And some are even as cheap as like, £30.

[43:05]

*You ran this company.*

Yes.

*With other people presumably.*

Yes.

*250 people.*

Yes.

*From a standing start.*

Yes.

*Just you on your own.*

Yeah. My brother joined forces with me. He was my other partner, he came in a couple of years after.

*Your twin brother?*

No, my older brother.

*Your other brother.*

Yes.

*And, you've won numerous awards.*

Yes.

*And, in 2018, two years ago, you sold it, did you?*

Yes. Yeah.

*What did you do, float it, or sell it, or...?*

I sold it. So it's an American company. Yeah. Yup.

*For 70 million dollars – pounds.*

No, I didn't sell it for that much. That's how... [laughs] No. That would be nice. But no, not as much as that, no. No. And I'm not going to say what I sold it to. But we were, we were 70 million, our income was 70 million. It was big.

*Oh your turnover was 70 million?*



Yes. Yes.

*I'm sorry, I misinterpreted that.*

Yes.

OK.

Yes. Yeah.

*So it must have been quite good then.*

Yeah.

*You are a millionairess, are you?*

Er... Maybe. [laughs]

*Maybe. I won't press you. OK.*

Yup.

*And, with all...*

But, I would say we had a successful exit, we had a very successful exit.

*Oh yes, oh sure. Good. Good.*

Yes.

[44:08]

*So with this enthusiasm for technology, and your great knowledge of the insurance industry, what are you going to do, what are you doing now?*

Well what I'm doing now, which is, I'm really excited about, is, I'm setting up with a couple of colleagues, we're just in the process of setting up an insure tech crowdfunding platform. So...

*OK, explain that to us.*

So I will explain. And, so at the moment... So since selling, I obviously get approached by lots of companies to, for raising, they obviously want to raise money, in... And it's very difficult for people at the angel investing stage, so this is early stages, to, to find funds, it's very difficult. I do invest in certain companies, and I very much like insure tech, because I think... I've worked with, I've done some mentoring with start-ups. And start-ups, surprisingly it's a very low success rate for start-ups, but in insure tech I think it's, you've got much more buyable, because, people need insurance. So it's not like you're reinventing the wheel, they actually do need insurance. And a lot of start-ups are trying to improve the customer experience, or to improving, taking, improving the cost proposition, or, just making the journey better. So, what we're trying to do is give people the opportunity to put their, their start-up onto our crowdfunding platform. So, have you heard of things like Seedrs, or Crowdcube, or Funding Circle? Do you know... They're all crowdfunding platforms. So where, the start-up puts their...

*Put their prospectus, basically...*

...on our platform.

*On your platform.*

We connect them with investors.

*Right. Who put some money in.*

And then we help them, set them forth onto their journey. But on top of that, we'll offer them a lot of other value-added services. Such as, how do they get their R&D tax credits, how do they get EIS or SEIS?

*EIS...?*

EIS and SEIS. So if, if you're an investor... When you set up a business, you generally want to get EIS or SEIS approval from the Government, because, as an investor, you get a very good tax break. So it's advice like that that helps the investor invest, but the business, the start-up, look for attractive. So we're going, we're... So we're giving them a platform to show what they're doing, but also helping them improve their proposition as well. So that... And there's a very big ecosystem out there. Because I'm, I'm happy to invest, but I want to invest in what I know. So we're bringing all these investors together to say, 'Right, these are the opportunities. You know about insurance. If you want to invest, why don't you come and do it on this platform, because it's all about insure tech.' So that's, that's my next project, that we hope to launch in about six weeks' time. Insure Angels.

*Insure Angels, it's called?*

Yeah. Insure Angels.

*In six weeks' time. So that will be...*

Hopefully. Yeah.

*...at the end of, end of February?*

Yup.

*Towards the end of February?*

Yes. That, that is the next project.

*And do you have any of these start-ups lined up yet?*

Yes, we do.

*Who do you have lined up?*

Oh, that, I won't, I won't say, because it is, we're not quite there. But we have got, we've already been approached. In fact we've got, we've got a lot of start-ups that are ready to be pinged on our platform. We've just got to get the platform ready.

*Right.*

Yeah. Yeah.

*That should be inspiring for people.*

It should be, because...

*You see, this is what, that's what we say we do. We capture the past and inspire the future. You're inspiring people to come to you...*

Do you know what, I think, I can't tell you how... I get approached all the time, probably, every day I get an approach about investing in a company. And I didn't want to turn people away. I don't want to say no. But this is an area that I can, we can bring all of the investors to say, 'Right, these are the fantastic opportunities, and these are the people that want investment.' So, we're like, the middle men now. We're going to do it. So it's like... And I am passionate about insure tech. I believe it's such a good ecosystem. There is, people can make money, but also you want people to develop. Because, London is known for insurance. If you think of about Lloyd's of London. We are known for it. And I want to make the UK great. I want us all to promote that industry. And we, the only way we can do that is, encouraging, but also financing these insure tech start-ups. We've got to do that. And so how do we do that? So... And we are the first to be able to do this. So I'm passionate and motivated to get this going, inspired.

*Inspired.*

Totally.

*And that's going to be your sole focus for the coming...?*

No, because I do lots of other things as well. So I'm investing in lots of other companies.

*Right.*

But this is the one that probably means a lot to me, because I believe in the insure tech community.

*Who else is working with you on this?*

There's... I've got two other gentlemen. Nick Crannigan, it was his idea actually, he sort of, said to me, he knew that I was sort of, big in the insure tech world, and said... No I'm not big actually, that's the wrong word. He knows that I'm very interested in the insure tech world. So he asked, would I come on board. And another chap, who's very big in this, David Sweet, he's very big in the, in the Lloyd's market, which I'm not, I don't really do as much as the Lloyd's market. I'm more in the general insurance. So, he's brought us two together. So, yeah. So we're, we've got a meeting this afternoon to kickstart it, a bit more, because we're working every week on it to try and push it forward.

[49:35]

*Lisa, you are also on the special advisory council Iotatech Limited. That's a software company for the insurance sector. Is that write?*

That's right, yes. So, Iotatech. They have been around for, whilst there'd be shareholders, or the gentlemen that run the business, have been around for quite a long time, they've only been around for about three years. So, they are a software,

insurance software provider, but they're very innovative, and this is why I wanted to get involved in them, because, they're offering a fantastic solution actually to new, to anybody that really wants a new and dynamic system. And what do I do, is, basically, I sit on their advisory council, but because I know a lot of people in the industry, they use my, obviously use some of my contacts, but obviously I understand, I did use a software system, so it's good for me to give feedback on what works and what doesn't work. But I'm really impressed with what they do, because they, they, it's a very modern system, and it's very bespoke, so, they've, they've just recently launched, with one of their clients, and it's going very well. I'm really impressed with what they do.

*What does it actually do for the insurance?*

Well, it's a software provider.

*Right.*

So, again, it's when you are using insurance, they are able to do, they've got... At the moment they've just developed a claims software system. So, if anybody has any, in the claims, in the insurance system, insurance, in the insurance process, if anybody has a claim, they will take, look after all the software that sits behind it. So that could be managing anything from, instructing an engineer, organising hire cars, capturing all the documentation. So it's just the whole process, but that's the software that sits behind it. But they also... And then it's obviously the policy management behind the insurance process as well, which is what they're doing as well. But predominantly it's claims but they do policy management too.

[51:40]

*Last year you were a judge for the Technology Industry Enterprise Awards.*

Yes.

*Tell me about those.*

Yes. So that was really great, because, I was fortunate to be judging all the females, and I was completely inspired by some of the women, what fantastic women we've got, and what they're achieving as well. It was great actually, I felt humbled by meeting some of the women and what they've done. And it's just interesting to see what people are able to do actually, and what they're able to achieve. It was great actually. Mm.

*I would have thought that insurance, which I know very little about, was very male-dominated, rather like IT. Is it?*

Absolutely. In fact, it's... Because I've, I've got more involved in technology recently, and I've just literally jumped from one male-dominated industry to another male-dominated industry. But I've always wanted to fight the cause for women. [laughs] And, so I will always promote women in insurance. It's getting... In fact my daughter's just joined, she's working... I told her to, you know, 'Go and get yourself working in insurance.' She's loving it, but she said it's, again it's, it's lots of men working. But, you know, it is... And I think, yeah, IT, tech, insurance, it's all the same, it's all lots of men.

*How do you break that?*

Well, I was... So having my own business, I was, I had, my management team was 37 per cent female to male, and I, I felt that was a pretty good stat, because, again, it's a male-dominated industry that I've... So I was really pushing it. I... One of the things I did do... I think, women, certainly in management roles, don't necessarily want to work full-time, you know, they might have children, and they don't want to work full-time. I allowed a lot of our women to work part-time, even in management roles. We worked, our opening hours weren't Monday to Friday. We work, open from eight till 7.30, and, and Saturdays. So nobody worked full-time. So why insist your females, your ladies work full-time? So, we were quite flexible on hours, and I think that encouraged, to get women into senior roles. And, I just think, I was, I didn't matter what, if you're male or female, I would promote whatever. It was just if you were good at the job. I think, companies are losing out if they don't recognise the talents of women, really, I do. I can't... I feel that so strongly actually. I've had

fantastic women work for me, really good. I mean if you don't... And if you don't say... Sometimes you've just go to let them work fewer hours.

[54:09]

*Will Insure Angels take a particular position on the role of women?*

Oh... Well, I think in a way, it's the position of women, I just think, women are talented, and that will always come through. So I will always... If I can do anything to help women do whatever they can achieve, I will always be behind them. Definitely. So, we'll always promote women.

*That is inspiring. Thank you very much for your, thank you very much for your contribution, Lisa Powis.*

Thank you. Thank you very much.

[End of Interview]