

Q & A for NHC



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I know you are a hard core surfer and a hard core meteorologist.

Well I am not such a hard core a surfer these days. Miami surf is very inconsistent, to say the least, but not the surf mecca I have been accustomed to in Puerto Rico. And actually, I have been kite surfing much more than traditional surfing the past few years. So I am getting my fix here by kiting in Miami Beach. I have learned a great deal about wind and waves by all my time in the water over the years. I guess I bring some of that surfing passion to my job as a meteorologist.

So how then does a surfer start a career in meteorology?

I started out in the math and computer science program at Northeast Louisiana University. But after three or four semesters, I decided I did not want to spend four years be in the computer lab with a bunch of computer geeks.

A bit too much for you?

Yes, I had enough of FORTRAN, so I took a weather class. I had always been interested in math and the sciences, and I am an outdoor person. I grew up surfing on the east coast of Maryland, living a half hour inland and going to the beach frequently,

and there not being any waves. I wanted to know what type of weather causes waves. It went hand in hand with my interests. I really liked the weather classes and the math was applied very easily.

So, now what do you do with it?

I didn't know. The curriculum at Northeast was set up to go on to graduate school. But I was ready to get out and do the world, I guess. I applied to government agencies and government contractors, and eventually got a job with a California contractor, WSI, as a weather observer at a regional airport in Salisbury, Maryland. I had grown up near there and my father worked for NASA at Wallops Island, VA, which is the NOAA satellite receiving station.

Any thought about joining NASA?

I put in some applications there, put in some with NOAA, and put myself on the national registry. In about six months, I was contacted by a contractor at NASA Wallops Island. They had been awarded a contract with the national ozone experiment. NASA had just discovered the ozone hole over the Antarctic and realized it had data showing the hole two to three years prior to that.

That was back in the mid-'80s?

Yes, 1986. It turns out the computer program that NASA was using to take the ozone readings and quality control the data was kicking out these exceedingly low readings as being bad. It wasn't, it was the actual hole, but they didn't realize it for about a year until they started to compare the data with the readings that the British were getting. The contractor I worked for, Joule, was participating in the national ozone experiment by piggy-backing onto the radiosondes a sensor that would take chemical and ozone readings, including fluorocarbons.

So, you took the job?

I went down as part of a three man team from Wallops Island to Palmer Station, Antarctica for four and half months.

That's a rare opportunity!

I felt like Jacques Cousteau. In fact, when I got back, I remember watching a Jacques Cousteau special on TV, and some of the places shown in the special were places from where I had been. It was incredible experience! I am not a cold weather person but that was well worth it.

What did you do after living in Antarctica?

As soon as I came out there, I put in additional applications to NOAA, and was hired as an Intern at the National Weather Service forecast office in Slidell, La. That was during the Weather Service modernization period, and the workforce was being reduced. I spent four and half years as an Intern, waiting for forecaster positions to open up. I took my first journeyman position at the National Weather Service forecast office in San Juan.

For warm weather and surfing, that's a good location.

It is! I had planned on being there just a few years, but it ended up being 18 years. I became a lead forecaster within two years; there is a lot of turnover there. I knew that going in, and it afforded the opportunity for me to move up.

What was your experience in San Juan?

It was a huge learning experience; a tropical Caribbean island with a different culture and a language barrier. In any foreign country you need to learn the language to acclimate and participate in the society, even if you're not fluent; just some basic language skills. I took a Berlitz class my first or second year there, had a few girlfriends and friends, I read the newspapers, and tried to learn the language as best I could. Unless you study, you are not going to become fluent. But if you can write the language, you can get the language down. And I took a class to do just that, to help me with my verbs.

What made you toss that good life in San Juan to come to South Florida?

I wanted a change and new challenge in my life, sure. Part of my travel in San Juan was back and forth to Miami, visiting friends. I met and dated a girl here in Miami Beach in 2000 and that long distance relationship led to a beautiful little girl, Isabella. I was traveling back and forth to see my daughter and her mother nearly once a month or every other month for five or six years, and I decided that if I did not move near her, she would soon turn 15 or 16 years old and she wouldn't care. So I am here in Miami for my daughter.

So, you set your sight on TAFB.

I had bid on three GS-14 positions that had opened up there over several years. When those did not turn out, I took a GS-13 lateral, and then moved up afterward to the GS-14 position. So it has all fallen into place.

What do you enjoy most about your TAFB job?

Coming from San Juan, watching the tropical Atlantic and, being a marine person for my personal interest, I really enjoy the forecasting. I know Atlantic climatology and I am learning Pacific climatology. My job and my interest as a meteorologist relay to my personal interests as a surfer, kite surfer and marine person, so it goes hand in hand.

Any disadvantage?

Yes, it was a step of five or six years back from the NWS forecast office setting that I used in San Juan, where I was using GFE (Graphical Forecast Editor) and had gotten away from just sitting and typing the text of a forecast. We are revisiting that whole process in TAFB of how we learned to forecast in the 80's and early 90's just by looking at this piece of data at this station, then looking at another type of data on another separate workstation, pulling it all together and just typing the forecast.

But TAFB is close to using the gridded system, right?

Right. We have to have our new zone configuration okayed by headquarters, and the software to be able to back us up has to be given by OPC (Ocean Prediction Center) and they have to be trained. Hopefully in about a year. It really is a hands-on training process to become proficient in GFE.

Where do you see yourself going professionally?

I will be here for a few more years. My daughter is only eight years old, so I have about ten years before she graduates. That coincides with the time when I will become eligible to retire from government service. I want to take the opportunity while I am here to learn from all of the specialists and brilliant minds that we have here, do some research, get a few things published.

And that love of the marine weather?

After I quit my government career, I will likely do some marine consulting that will somehow relate to surfing, kite surfing and sailing. That's my love. I am in the ocean as often as I can.

Send comments to: nhc.public.affairs@noaa.gov