

Q & A for NHC



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You are the newest hurricane specialist here. Were you always interested in hurricanes?

No, actually. What sparked my interest in meteorology was winter weather. I grew up in New York City, and became really interested around ten years old because I wanted to get off from school from snow. But that was a problem in New York City because they never closed the schools from snow. It took the Superstorm of '93 and the Blizzard of '96 for them to finally do it.

So you went to college with meteorology in mind?

College was interesting. I went two years in New York to a small school which didn't have meteorology. I have a twin brother and we are really close, and I told him I wanted to go to one of the meteorology schools. We looked at the State universities of New York at Albany, Stony Brook, as well as Penn State. But what was more important to me than my love for winter weather at that time was my brother and how to stay close. He said he'll only go away with me to school if went to Florida or California. So we went to go visit several schools, both got scholarships to (the University of) Miami and we went there as junior transfers.

Somewhere in there, hurricanes took over?

I was interested in operational meteorology, always knew I wanted to be a forecaster. Although, I really thought that I wanted to do TV, it's what I grew up on. But since I have been here, forget about winter weather! The Miami program is geared towards tropical stuff. When I went to graduate school here, I just got more and more into hurricanes.

And something else I hear.

Yes, it is rather ironic that my brother and I went to Miami, as we both met our wives here. My (future) wife lived right next door to me in the dorm when I moved in, the first person I talked to when I moved to Miami. And I know this sounds fake but it's real, my brother, his wife, was my wife's roommate. They both lived next door!

How did you find your way to NHC?

While I was doing graduate work at UM in 2005, I was involved in a project called RAINEX (Hurricane Rainband and Intensity Change Experiment). It was a multimillion dollar project that involved the University of Miami, University of Washington, NCAR (National Center for Atmospheric Research) and several other agencies. I had many jobs with it, but I was the lead forecaster, my first real taste of forecasting. I had to provide briefings every day at 11 AM and give the possibility of tropical cyclone formation. What they really wanted to know was there going to be any rapid intensity changes, because that's what the project was targeting. It put me to the test, the biggest challenge of my professional life up to that point. It was my first taste of hurricane forecasting.

What came next?

Since being in graduate school, I was into numerical modeling. So for the RAINEX project, I was able to conduct a team of models, similar to the GFDL used here at NHC, but custom-made for the project. I would present some of our model simulations during the briefings. But the project only lasted three months, then after that it was all research.

You didn't want to do research?

I wanted to be an operational forecaster, so I began to bid on (National) Weather Service jobs. I got to the interview stage on a job in Maine. But at the same time, I had bid on a job with NHC's Tropical Analysis and Forecast Branch (TAFB). I decided to go with that one and stay in Miami.

So you were definitely staying with hurricanes?

Oh yes! One of the coolest things I got to do that year was flying on a hurricane hunter P-3 plane into Hurricane Rita. That's the research plane, so we penetrated the core

and the eye. What was real cool was we got there at maximum intensity, 897 millibars. Once I saw the beauty of the hurricane, I was just blown away. I decided there was no way I was going to forecast snow and frost events in Maine

Now you're the newest hurricane specialist.

Yes, I had done the HSM (Hurricane Support Meteorologist) for a couple of years and had a little bit of experience with it, and it came through.

What do you see as your greatest challenge?

At least initially, the biggest challenge is to take a breath and get on board. The products are so visible; I don't want to make any mistakes.

Any downsides?

No, there are so many upsides! Number one, I am doing something I love. Number two, I enjoy communicating to the public, and this job gives the opportunity to do that with very highly visible, high impact weather.

When you're not doing the weather stuff, what are you up to?

I like going fishing with my Dad, who lives just a few hours away. I'm a family guy with an Italian background, so it's kind of in the blood. I like being with people, like going to sporting events and love to cook. I am a big baseball fan, having played it up through college.

Is there something here at NHC that surprised you, something that you did not expect?

The biggest thing I didn't expect was to move this far along so quickly. I am generally a humble guy and have a background where nothing has been handed to me. I feel very lucky to have moved up in the ranks so quickly. This was a goal and I am going to work hard and enjoy it.

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