Transcript of "Becky DePodwin, Senior Consultant at Guidehouse."

Clear Skies Ahead: Conversations about Careers in Meteorology and Beyond

August 16, 2022

Kelly Savoie:

Hello, Clear Skies Ahead listeners. This is Kelly Savoie, and I'm hoping you can take a moment of your time to rate and review our show wherever you listen to podcasts. We have produced over 60 episodes, and you can help us reach even more individuals that will benefit from the diverse experiences shared by our guests. Thanks so much for listening, and I hope you enjoy this new episode.

Kelly Savoie:

Welcome to the American Meteorological Society's podcast series Clear Skies Ahead, conversations about careers in meteorology and beyond. I'm Kelly Savoie, and I'm here with Rex Horner, and we'll be your hosts. We're excited to give you the opportunity to step into the shoes of an expert working in weather, water, and climate sciences.

Rex Horner:

We're happy to introduce today's guest, Becky DePodwin, Senior Consultant at Guidehouse, who she works for remotely from central Pennsylvania. Welcome, Becky. Thanks very much for joining us on our podcast today.

Becky DePodwin:

Hello. Thanks for having me on

Kelly Savoie:

Becky, could you tell us a little bit about what got you interested in meteorology and how it influenced your educational path?

Becky DePodwin:

It's an interesting question that I feel like a lot of meteorologists have an answer to, although I experienced this major event when I was a kid. I'm pretty sure I was born with the love of weather. I remember in elementary school, I would always go to the high point on the playground, and I would look west, because I grew up in Colorado, and most of the storms came over the mountains. So I just always had this love of weather and watching lightning storms in the summer.

Becky DePodwin:

But I don't think I realized it could be a career until my earth science course in high school. I had a really phenomenal teacher. She was amazing. And she was like, "Yeah, meteorology is a whole, it's a whole field." And I was like, "Whoa! That's really awesome." From then on, that was going to be my undergrad degree. I didn't have a backup plan, didn't have anything else that I could switch to.

Becky DePodwin:

But I would say what was most pivotal in shifting my focus within meteorology was when my hometown was hit by a tornado in 2008. That was at the end of my freshman year of college, so I was a year into a meteorology degree. And that's when it suddenly became very tangible that this was more than just what happens in the sky, that what happens in the atmosphere directly impacts people, and it changes their lives. I saw friends, family, neighbors, their lives were completely turned upside down by this tornado. That really shifted the trajectory of my career to be more oriented towards the human impact side and, ultimately, emergency management.

Kelly Savoie:

Did you have a bunch of different colleges that you applied to, or was there one in particular that you really wanted to attend?

Becky DePodwin:

Like I said, I grew up in Colorado. At the time, and I think this is still the case, there are only two undergrad programs in meteorology. There's the University of Northern Colorado, and there is Metro State. Metro State at the time did not have dorms, and I didn't want to live at home. So I applied to the University of Northern Colorado, and I got in, and that's where I went.

Rex Horner:

Becky, you had a single-minded focus on pursuing meteorology and felt that the emergency management protection of life and property became your direction as you experienced a devastating tornado in your hometown. It was interesting, you talked about essentially being born with a barometer in your hand, to use the proverbial expression. And then you wanted to go to school in your home state, and you found one of the two schools by the process of elimination, based on your preferences, where you wanted to go. So either in high school or once you reached college, were there any other specific opportunities, outside of your traditional curriculum, that you felt would be beneficial to securing a job in your weather profession of choice?

Becky DePodwin:

Yeah, honestly I was really involved in our student chapter of the American Meteorological Society. That was a huge part of my college career. We had a pretty good program. We would go bowling every week. We did a lot of outreach. A lot of the outreach ended up being tied to that tornado, actually. We partnered with a group of psychologists to go and talk with school-age kids, because kids were really freaked out about this tornado. We talked about the science part. The student chapter, we had the credibility as the student chapter of the AMS. We talked about what they could do to be safe and prepared. That, I think, getting involved, having that network of meteorologists around me that was outside, just that my day-to-day, the students in my classes, but being able to have the network of the student chapter across the classes. But seeing what they were going through as juniors and seniors and internships, and hearing their perspectives as members of this student organization was really, really valuable.

Becky DePodwin:

I ultimately ended up getting a job in the field as a junior because of my connection, friendship with someone else who was in a grade higher than me. And again, I credit a lot of that to being in this student chapter and having that student chapter really set up. I eventually became president of the student chapter my senior year.

Kelly Savoie:

It sounds like a great way to network. I wanted to ask one question too. You had mentioned something about the students really being freaked out about the tornado. When I think of Colorado, I don't really think of tornadoes. Was that rare? Is that a rare occurrence for Colorado?

Becky DePodwin:

Well, yes and no. It's funny. The county I grew up in is called Weld County, and it's actually the county that holds the record for the most ever tornadoes, because it's a massive county. It goes from just east of I-25 all the way out to the Plains of Colorado.

Rex Horner:

The record in the US, or the record in the state?

Becky DePodwin:

The record in the US.

Kelly Savoie:

Oh, wow.

Becky DePodwin:

It may not... I think it still holds that. It's a very large county. But the tornado that occurred when it did, where it did, and the direction that it traveled was extremely unusual. It traveled northwest towards the mountains, just east of I-25, which parallels the mountains. It was at 11:30 in the morning, and it ended up being raided in EF-3.

Kelly Savoie:

Oh, wow.

Becky DePodwin:

For that part of the state, it was an extremely unusual event. It had never really happened before then, I don't think, to have one in that area and that close to the mountains. It just wasn't something that these kids had really ever experienced, had ever thought about, that people in that area were really prepared for at all.

Rex Horner:

For those of us that aren't as familiar with the tornado rating, EF, I believe, refers to Enhanced Fujita scale. And how does that, practically speaking, how does that differ from a lower-powered tornado, so to speak, in terms of its effect?

Becky DePodwin:

The EF scale is based on estimated winds, and it's done by a damage survey. The National Weather Service goes out, takes a look at the damage that has been done, and then estimates the winds, based on any number of things. For an EF-3, you would have severe damage. You would have roofs and some walls torn from well-constructed homes. You could have trains overturned. Most trees would've been

uprooted. Heavy cars could have been thrown. Those are going to be winds of 158 to 206 miles per hour for that EF-3 median mark there.

Kelly Savoie:

Whew. You had mentioned that as part of the local chapter, you got your first job in the field as an undergraduate from someone that you knew as an upperclassman. What was that job? How did you end up where you are now at Guidehouse

Becky DePodwin:

It's a very winding career path. My first job was at a company called DayWeather Incorporated. They are based in Cheyenne, Wyoming, which is about an hour north of where I went to school. I don't know my exact title, so I put together the weather page for newspapers. You open up your newspaper, you have this pretty map, you have the highs and lows for the week. You might have a little short discussion, climatological information. I would compile all of that data. I would write the little forecast blurb for, I don't know, several dozen newspapers each day across the west. And I did a little bit of radio broadcasting. I was not very good at it. I didn't really enjoy it, but I tried. And I did that for about two years. When I was in college, the second half of my junior year, all the way through my senior year, I commuted an hour each way to Cheyenne Wyoming, which was a lot, considering the workload that you have as an upperclassman in the meteorology degree.

Becky DePodwin:

After graduation, I moved to Wyoming, worked, continued working there for another nine months or so, and eventually applied for a job at the AccuWeather Severe Weather Center, which is located in Wichita, Kansas. It's now called AccuWeather for Business. At the time, it was AccuWeather Enterprise Solutions. That position was called a Storm Warning Meteorologist, and that was working directly with clients to help them be prepared for really site-specific and threshold specific hazards. So, think lightning within a certain radius, wind speeds of a certain threshold that may cause equipment to fly, cranes at construction sites, things like that. I did that for about two and a half years. I really enjoyed the work. It was high intensity. It was pretty high stress at times. I didn't love living in Kansas. My apartment got hit by a tornado after I'd been there for three months.

Kelly Savoie:

Oh, no.

Becky DePodwin:

That was sort of my second run-in.

Rex Horner:

It seems that the tornadoes have been following you, Becky, as you moved across the country. Maybe they know that you like studying them, and so they follow you around.

Becky DePodwin:

Yeah. My cat wasn't too happy. He was home alone at the time.

Becky DePodwin:

Yeah, after being in Kansas for a few years, I ended up transferring to AccuWeather headquarters, which is located in central Pennsylvania. It also coincided with the fact that I met my husband, who, now my husband, through AccuWeather, and he was at the headquarters office in Pennsylvania. I was in Kansas. He's also a meteorologist. So, I moved to Pennsylvania. I've now been here for almost eight years, had several different roles at AccuWeather headquarters in State College. I was an Operational Forecaster for a while. I wrote a blog for the website. I was a Product Manager. I was a Customer Success Manager. I did a little bit of marketing.

Becky DePodwin:

And then, in the middle of all of that, I went back for a degree in emergency management. There was a point towards the end of being an Operational Forecaster, where I did not want to do that anymore. It was partly the shift work. It was partly the fact that I don't actually love the science part as much as I really wanted to focus on the human impact side. So I wanted to get away from forecasting and figure out how I could do more of the people side of things. Ended up going back for a degree, a Master's degree in Emergency Management from Millersville University, did that while working full time and planning a wedding. Probably don't recommend that in hindsight. It's been a busy couple of years.

Kelly Savoie:

That's a lot. That's a lot.

Becky DePodwin:

Yeah. Eventually, yeah, long story short, I think I tried for a few years to really try and utilize that knowledge at AccuWeather and was able to, in some ways, and not in others. I think I wanted to get more into the field of emergency management.

Becky DePodwin:

A little over a year ago, I left AccuWeather to go work for a small emergency management consulting firm. This is where the story gets even more interesting. I was at that firm for three months and realized that it was an incredibly toxic environment and that I didn't want to work in an organization that was, culturally and functionally, not a good fit. So I did something that I never, ever thought I would do. I quit a job without having another job.

Becky DePodwin:

I took a pretty big leap of faith that there was something else out there and ended up taking seven months off. Was honestly wonderful. I probably enjoyed it more than I should have, but I hiked, I cooked, I did a lot of really nice things. I applied to jobs here and there. I did some freelance work. I got involved in local organizations. Eventually, I ended up at Guidehouse. That was a very long way to get there. I told you it was winding.

Rex Horner:

It's okay. Becky, I think that's really interesting, and I want to point out you put this in your LinkedIn resume as a career break. I thought you were very intentional with how you described it as not just being an unspoken gap in your resume, but being focused on health and wellbeing. I'm sure that there's other people that would maybe want to make this decision. I just wanted to ask, what did you feel made this

career break successful over the seven months? You did describe what you did, but what do you think made it successful?

Becky DePodwin:

Yeah, it's an interesting question to ask about that. And you're right, I was very intentional with how I worded that for a number of reasons, I think there can be a stigma around being unemployed, and I wanted to try and reduce some of that and normalize walking away from a job that is not the right fit, walk away from a job that maybe having a negative impact on your mental and physical health like this one was.

Becky DePodwin:

I think what made it successful, whew, is that, A, I have to acknowledge that I was in a privileged position. I had the support of a spouse, and we had the financial means for me to not work for X amount of time. Given inflation, let's just say it was very good that I got a job when I did, because we were running up against a point.

Becky DePodwin:

But I had that option, after many discussions, to be able to walk away. But I think also having the network that I did ultimately landed me where I am now. Just having some of these conversations with people, I emailed a lot of people within AMS that I met over the years at conferences. I applied to a fair amount of jobs. I interviewed for a fair amount of jobs. I don't feel like I overextended myself. I wasn't applying to 20 jobs per day or anything. I also took a lot of time to mentally reset. I went for a lot of hikes. I did a lot of cooking and baking and honestly, just enjoying life in a way that I hadn't for a really long time, because-

Rex Horner:

And that's definitely very important too.

Becky DePodwin:

It was. It really was.

Kelly Savoie:

And you had just gotten out of a position that wasn't a good fit. So you wanted to be extra careful with the next position. You wanted to really, I'm sure, research positions and find ones that you knew would be the best for you. Obviously, you don't want to apply to 30 jobs, because that's not being very intentional. You don't want to take anything that's out there.

Becky DePodwin:

No, and that's a really good point to make. I was much more cautious and selective than I'd ever been in my entire life. I was very direct when interviewing and particularly with HR in terms of benefits and with people who had been with the company. I asked a lot of questions that I would never have thought to ask before.

Rex Horner:

Let's get into some of that. Let's talk more about your current job, if you could walk us through some of your responsibilities as a Senior Consultant and how your role fits within the scope of the company as a whole. Just briefly, how do you fit within the whole structure?

Becky DePodwin:

Guidehouse is a pretty large company. They spun off of PwC, which is PriceWaterhouseCooper, I believe, but four or five years ago. It's a large consulting firm. They have several different segments. I sit under the National Security segment because the clients that I am supporting are in our public sector, emergency management clients.

Becky DePodwin:

I think I can say this, it's still a little gray area, FEMA sits under the Department of Homeland Security, hence why I am tracked to the National Security segment. That is part of what I do, is providing organizational support, sometimes transformational change management to emergency management clients in the public sector.

Becky DePodwin:

This can mean anything from doing organizational assessments, focus group interviews, taking in a lot of feedback and then distilling it. It's all project-based. Usually, you're going to have projects that run anywhere from six months to a year. They can have different phases, they can have different deadlines and deliverables. It's very team-based, very team-oriented, which I absolutely love.

Becky DePodwin:

But I think what's interesting about this job, with my background in meteorology, is that it's not directly, I think, it's not directly tied to weather, but it is very directly tied to disaster management and emergency management. Basically, I'm providing assistance and support, at a pretty high level, to the organization that serves this country in terms of disaster response.

Rex Horner:

What were some of the questions that you asked during the interview process with Guidehouse, that they responded positively to in a way that you could connect with, based on what you were searching for in your very intentional job hunt?

Becky DePodwin:

Yeah. What I realized with the job that didn't work out is that I don't operate well working in a silo. A lot of the questions that I asked were what is the team environment like? How do I work with people on a daily basis? What are the tools that I use to connect with people, which is particularly important, given the fully remote environment that we are in? What does the average day look like? What are the hours am I going to be expected to be online? At 9:00 PM Eastern time, especially say, if there's a client that's in a different country, which could be a possibility at some point? I wanted to make sure that my time, my personal time was protected, because that was a big issue at the previous job. The benefits and leave policy was really important.

Becky DePodwin:

And this is an interesting one. The small company that I worked for had unlimited time off. Sounds great. Right?

Rex Horner:

But does it?

Becky DePodwin:

Sounds ideal.

Kelly Savoie:

It's too good to be true.

Becky DePodwin:

Yeah. And this is where I found you have to be really, really careful. In that organization, unlimited time off meant that we were expected to work anywhere, no matter whether it was a vacation or not. I found this out the hard way five weeks in. I went to Maine for a week and, basically, was on and doing work most of the time because there weren't clear expectations set. Part of that is my fault as a new employee for trying to probably do too much.

Becky DePodwin:

But that is a mistake that I did not make this time around. Guidehouse also has unlimited discretionary time off. I asked so many questions about this, and I was like, "What does this really mean? Do people actually take time off? Does your leadership take time off?" I think one of the guys, one of the senior partners in my interview panel, was on a cruise the week after my interview, and so it took a little bit longer to get an offer. And I was like, "Okay. Well, that's a good sign. That's great. He took time off. That's wonderful. Their leadership actually takes time off."

Becky DePodwin:

It helped that I had been referred in by someone, and I asked him a lot of questions. I know that he has a family and that time off was important to him too. I got very direct answers of, "There is a work-life balance. You will work very, very hard, and it's going to be intense at times. But at the end of the day, we'll try to protect your weekends as much as possible. You are encouraged to take time off. They truly do value the mental health of their employees."

Rex Horner:

That's very important.

Kelly Savoie:

Yeah. It sounds like it's definitely a good fit for you. I know that you're working remotely, but since you have clients, are you ever required to travel and meet people in person? Or is it all done through Zoom?

Becky DePodwin:

That's all still up in the air. Most of what we do, obviously, is through Zoom or Microsoft Teams. We're all still trying to figure it out because of COVID. We actually held an offsite last week, which was in DC,

which I supported virtually. I probably could have gone down and attended in person if I had wanted to. There's no expectation at this point that people travel, and the company has gotten very, very good at doing things from a hybrid approach and making sure that everyone who is virtual or on site is fully engaged, regardless.

Kelly Savoie:

You mentioned that you really enjoy the team aspect of it. Is that what you like most about the job? Or are there are other things in addition to that you really like about it?

Becky DePodwin:

Probably. I think I'm really enjoying learning a lot about the clients that we're working with, because that's been a focus of mine since getting my emergency management degree. But the team I'm working on is absolutely incredible. And I have realized I could not necessarily love the work that I'm doing, but if I'm doing it in an engaged and collaborative and supportive team environment, I am happy as a clam. I'm an extrovert. I love talking to people. I love working with people, and I realized that was what I missed the most. I had that at AccuWeather in a bunch of different roles I was in. I had a really good team environment, and I missed that connection with people that I have found in this job.

Rex Horner:

Well, that's great to hear that you found what you were looking for in your search for a new company. Is there a significant challenge that you'd like to highlight, either in your field or in the meteorology or professional science community writ large?

Becky DePodwin:

I think one of the challenges that the Society faces generally is the balance of who is able to provide what service between the different sectors, particularly when it comes... You have the public sector, you have the private sector of meteorology, you have academia, you have broadcast, although broadcast gets lumped into private sector. But when it comes to, specifically, decision makers and emergency managers, which is where my, my expertise lies, I think there's not a lot of information being shared as to what each of these sectors has to offer.

Becky DePodwin:

I think a lot of people commonly go to the weather service, which is fantastic. That's obviously the publicly available data and information. I think there's not as much information about what the private sector has to offer and can offer. And I think there's a lot of misunderstanding amongst meteorologists themselves around what these different rules are and maybe some bad blood that goes back into the history of the enterprise, that I think the younger folks are doing a good job at talking through.

Rex Horner:

Becky, would you say there's a negative impression of the private sector, based on it being more commercial versus public-serving like the Weather Service, and that that maybe dissuades some people from considering it, or that it might actually have moral grounding?

Becky DePodwin:

Yeah. Honestly, probably all of the above. I think some of it is that it's tough to get your head around paying for data that is publicly available. But I think it also depends on your needs. I think some organizations, and just throw out professional sports teams, probably have the means to pay for a very site- and threshold-specific service that can say exactly... They'll tell you exactly when lightning is within a certain radius. And they might need and want that, whereas a local county, with very limited funds, is not going to be able to afford that kind of service. It does, in some sense, create a bit of inequity that, I think, probably should be addressed in some way. I think that's a longer term problem that we can look at.

Rex Horner:

So it's sort of flying economy versus having a private jet plane. Both can get you to the same place, but one gets you there differently and maybe more precisely.

Becky DePodwin:

Yes and no. Yeah, I feel like that... I don't want to diminish any of the work in the public sector. I think there's talented and wonderful meteorologist across the board. It's just a different way of providing a service.

Rex Horner:

Applicable to different needs, yeah.

Becky DePodwin:

Yeah.

Kelly Savoie:

Becky, getting back to your expertise in emergency management. I know there's an International Association of Emergency Managers, and they have a Mental Health and Wellness Caucus that you're a member of. Could you tell us a little bit about that?

Becky DePodwin:

Yeah. That got spun up, I want to say, a year and a half ago. Tough to figure what time means these days. I think part of that was driven by the pandemic and the fact that emergency managers as a whole have been incredibly burnt out by the last two years. But even beyond that, the last several years with natural hazards like hurricanes and wildfires, and then you have the pandemic thrown in on top of that.

Becky DePodwin:

There's been an increasing awareness of burnout and mental health struggles amongst emergency managers. I think much like the meteorology community came to sort of start having these conversations several years ago, the emergency management community is now starting to have these conversations. This also includes first responders, obviously, of whom did just incredible work during the pandemic, dealt with a lot. They see a lot of things that are very difficult to see and take in day after day. The Caucus is designed, A, to provide awareness of what's going on, to provide resources, to hold webinars, to have sessions at meetings and conferences, but really just to create an avenue for these very necessary conversations to happen, to hopefully lead to meaningful change.

Becky DePodwin:

What that change looks like, I think, is still a little bit difficult because the profession almost is what it is. You're not going to stop disasters from happening. You're not going to stop bad things in the world from happening. You can't look away. The nature of the job is to run towards the burning building, not away from it. But I think the hope is that by bringing it more out into the open and making sure people have resources, you can limit some of the really negative potential impacts on people and, hopefully, alleviate some of the burnout and even more serious implications.

Kelly Savoie:

Yeah, it sounds like it's a long time coming for something like that, because you just said, the nature of the job, it's a difficult job. You see a lot. It's devastating to some people, first responders and so forth. If the pandemic put it into action, at least, that's something great going forward for everybody working in that field.

Rex Horner:

Becky, I have a follow-up question in the mental health and emergency management sector. Just to the extent that I feel that what I see over social media and in casual conversation, that there's more of a sector of the public that has the sense of existential anxiety about the place they live, and I think some of it might be a symptom of the information age that they're seeing and sharing a lot and that there's this negativity bias. Not to say that we're not facing a lot of inherent dangers - you've cited a lot of them - but do you feel that there is or isn't this mood that the world is on fire, and we need to respond to it by pointing out that it's on fire or that there's a way to have a little bit more - I don't know if tranquility is the right word - but this sense of centering and calm from a mental health perspective?

Rex Horner:

I know that's a long, winding question, but I just wanted to talk about how you feel about the public sense of anxiety and how that plays into these mental health discussions.

Becky DePodwin:

Yeah. It's a really interesting question. These last couple years have just been so numbing, generally. When you think back to where we started, and I'm going to use the pandemic as an example again, everything seemed urgent and scary, and now we are receiving bad news almost daily. I can't even process that. It's not healthy. We're at a point where some of the information that we're taking in, we're just so numb to. And I don't think we're fully grasping the enormity of it. Some of the climate reporting that's coming out, how do we even do anything about it? I think there's a bit of a bit of a defeatist attitude, if not just a total avoidance, because people feel like they can't do anything about it. I think that's really, really tough, and how do you contend with that? How do you measure what you take in? I think it's hard, but I think we have to be really, really intentional with what and how we take in data at this point. We can't doomscroll.

Rex Horner:

Exactly.

Becky DePodwin:

Although I do it far too often and just take in this onslaught of all of this negativity. And there's not a whole lot out there right now that's all that positive. I think figuring out what are the most important resources for you to get your information, maybe only going there once or twice a day.

Kelly Savoie:

The media too, you hear about all the bad things, and you don't really hear about the good things that often, because that seems to not be news. There's probably all these wonderful things happening in the world, people doing wonderful things, being kind and selfless, but we just don't hear about them, which has always been the issue with the media historically, unfortunately.

Rex Horner:

Right. There's the terrible slogan, if it bleeds, it leads, referring to news stories. But I think Kelly's right that in the media, you don't hear about it. I think as Becky said, the solution might be taking a break from the media, because you do see kindness and compassion and good deeds when you're really in the world, not on the media platforms. You do see people being kind, and it is much more reflective and present. So I think that's a good lesson to take forward.

Rex Horner:

Becky, I want to turn the discussion towards our listeners who might be students coming out of school and/or job seekers, and what types of positions you see, from your view of the job market, for meteorologists who are interested in like fields and fields similar to what you are pursuing in risk communication and emergency management. What do you see the market looking like? What is the future job outlook, from your perspective?

Becky DePodwin:

I'm pretty optimistic when it comes to jobs that tie weather and risk together. It's pretty known that climate change is exacerbating a lot of disasters. We've seen it in the last several years, between hurricane seasons getting more intense and wildfires happening more often. There is very much a need for people to have the knowledge and the background and science of meteorology, but also be able to pair that with some level of either risk communication, emergency management, social science, anything that really, I think, involves the human impact side. And honestly, this can be anything from research to more hands-on and actually working with people.

Becky DePodwin:

I would encourage students to really think outside the box of the typical internships and jobs. Think beyond just a broadcast internship or even just a straight-up operational forecasting internship. Think energy sector. Think emergency management. That can be public information officers. Most disasters are weather-related, so you're still going to be using that knowledge and that information.

Becky DePodwin:

You don't necessarily have to have a hybrid degree or even a second degree like I did. I had that six-year gap between undergrad and graduate school. But taking courses on communications in undergrad is really, really helpful, if that's an avenue that you want to go. There are some programs that offer some level of an interim... I don't know if it's quite a Master's, but something in the realm of emergency management or disaster management.

Rex Horner:

Like a certificate degree or a professional development program?

Becky DePodwin:

Yeah. Millersville offers something. I can't tell you exactly what it is, but it's some dual...

Kelly Savoie:

I think they're called post-graduate certificates. I've seen a few of those. But it sounds like it's good to be well-rounded and to have-

Becky DePodwin:

Yes.

Kelly Savoie:

Be able to communicate. It doesn't matter what job you have in meteorology. You don't have to be a broadcast meteorologist. You need to be able to communicate to audiences,

Becky DePodwin:

Right. You need to be able to tell people how their daily lives are going to be impacted by the weather. And that can be done in just any number of ways, in any number of jobs, whether it's short-term, long-term, climate adaptation, planning. A lot of different options out there.

Kelly Savoie:

Well, thank you so much for sharing all your work experiences and advice for students. But before we go, we always like to ask our guests one last fun question. I'd like to ask, what's your favorite hobby?

Becky DePodwin:

I mentioned this earlier. Aside from hiking, which I love to do, I think my favorite hobby is baking and, specifically, sourdough baking

Rex Horner:

Sounds familiar. I've heard something about that over the pandemic.

Becky DePodwin:

I know. When I was growing up, my dad, our Sunday treat was that my dad would always make us sourdough pancakes and waffles. Since then, it's always been this fond memory. And I was like, "I always wanted to make sourdough stuff." I ended up getting a starter from a friend's mom during the pandemic, and now I bake at least a loaf a week. And I bake any number of other random things in between, pancakes and pizza dough and crackers and popovers. There's something just very satisfying about watching it all come together and having this beautiful loaf at the end. But I enjoy baking many other things too.

Rex Horner:

Do you always have this sourdough starter that you're just incubating and keeping alive, which is an added level. It's not just everything goes into the pan and then comes out and gets eaten. There's this little entity that's hanging around your house.

Becky DePodwin:

Yeah. I've heard it referred to as a critter.

Kelly Savoie:

Is it hard to make? Is it an easy thing to bake?

Becky DePodwin:

It's time-consuming. When I started, I was super intimidated by it. But really, it's getting the timing down. It's a two-day process. On the morning or afternoon of day one, I'll feed my starter, let that get all bubbly and ripe. Then I'll put the dough together in the evening, let it sit overnight and rise. Then you make it into the loaf, and you let it rise again. And then you bake it later that day.

Kelly Savoie:

Okay.

Becky DePodwin:

So it's a process.

Rex Horner:

Well, I'm sure your partner and your child will be very happy to eat all of your sour dough creations.

Becky DePodwin:

Yes. My husband does say it was the best thing that came out of the pandemic.

Rex Horner:

Well, thank you so much again. We've been speaking with Becky DePodwin, Senior Consultant at Guidehouse. Thanks so much for joining us, Becky, and sharing all of your work experiences with us.

Becky DePodwin:

Yep. Happy to be here and looking forward to listening to more of these podcasts down the road.

Kelly Savoie:

Well, that's our show for today. Please join us next time, rain or shine.

Rex Horner:

Clear Skies Ahead, conversations about careers in meteorology and beyond is a podcast by the American Meteorological Society. Our show is produced by Brandon Crose and edited by Peter Trepke. Technical direction is provided by Peter Killolay. Our theme music is composed and performed by Steve Savoie, and the show is hosted by Rex Horner and Kelly Savoie. You can learn more about the show online at

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