

## ***Transcript for “Bob Henson, meteorologist and science writer in Boulder, CO”***

Clear Skies Ahead: Conversations About Careers in Meteorology and Beyond

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### **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.

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 Emma Collins, 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.

### **Emma Collins:**

We're happy to introduce today's guest, Bob Henson, meteorologist and science writer in Boulder, Colorado. Welcome, Bob. Thanks so much for joining us today.

### **Bob Henson:**

Well thanks, Emma, and thanks, Kelly. It's great to be here.

### **Kelly Savoie:**

Bob, when did you become interested in meteorology? And did you plan on pursuing a major in that in college?

### **Bob Henson:**

I kind of sort of did, but it started on a dark and stormy night a long time ago. I think many of your guests, it was weather itself that inspired me. I grew up in Oklahoma City, which is of course a weather savvy place; one of the most tornado frequented places on earth. But parents were not scientists or science really interested at all in particular. They were both first generation college grads, so they were very big on education. But I didn't really have science in the chemistry of either of my sides of the family.

But when I was eight years old, maybe seven, actually seven, one Saturday night, I was upstairs watching, I think it was My Three Sons, an ancient sitcom, and my parents were having a few people over downstairs, and a woman came on in the middle of the program and said there was a tornado warning. And that freaked me out a little bit, so I ran downstairs. My parents, they knew Oklahoma weather, they were blase about it. And I ran outside and looked up at the sky, and it was truly one of those epiphany moments where this is what I... Actually, to be honest, at the moment, it was like, I need to find out about this for my own safety. That was really what kicked it off, though. And there wasn't, I think, any real serious tornado that night, but unlike some folks who were inspired by really bad tornadic events, but it certainly piqued my interest.

And within a couple of years, I was making my own weather instruments. And went to high school, and by that point, my weather interest was really well established. But I got interested in writing in college too; or in high school, rather. That was right about the time of Watergate, and different forms of

journalism were really rising to the fore, and I just became interested in it. In high school, along with studying science, of course, I got interested in journalism and edited the school yearbook and wrote a lot for the school paper.

When I reached college age, I had decisions to make, and I think I already knew I wanted to somehow combine those, but I had no idea how that would happen. But I did know that if I wanted to do meteorology, I would need at least a bachelor's degree in that. I went forward, I attended Rice University in Houston, and that was because I had gotten advice somewhere or other that if you know you want to do meteorology and even pursue it in grad school, it's not a bad idea to get a undergrad in allied parts of science technology engineering and prepare yourself with some really high level math and physics type courses. That's in fact what I did. I did a side minor in psychology just because I was interested in that. But the writing took a back burner at that point. Eventually I went to graduate school at the University of Oklahoma, their meteorology program. Got to take classes from people like Howard Bluestein, the now legendary storm chaser who had just arrived a few years before that.

Obviously there I am in the meteorology school, but I knew that writing was still tugging at me. And I got the sense already I didn't want to be a working forecaster, and I wasn't really cut out to be a researcher, but the thing that really helped me crystallize this was a book called What Color Is Your Parachute? That has been out there for 40 years. Yes. I think it is still in print. Literally, that book changed my life. I went through the exercises, and it told me I wanted to work with words. And I thought, oh, well, maybe I'll just be a science journalist and fold in weather that way.

I literally went to the journalism school at OU that week and started taking graduate courses in journalism. And it was like a switch got flipped. All of a sudden I felt my calling. And mind you, I was still taking meteorology classes. I completed all my graduate met classes. I took my comps for my meteorology master's. But my degree ended up being a master's in journalism with full complement of work in both fields. And my thesis involved faculty from both departments. It was looking at how weather warnings were broadcast in Oklahoma City television, and which stations did people think would be most accurate and timely, and which stations were most accurate and timely? It was a fun project.

**Kelly Savoie:**

Wow, that sounds so cool. And there are a lot of people who have that science, math mind that aren't so great in writing. There are plenty of people who are, but it seems to be like you're either good in English and literature and writing or you're good in science and math. And just having, I don't know, experience with both of those, that must have been really, really helpful in your career.

**Bob Henson:**

I think it was. But it took me another several years to really figure out what I was going to do with this hybrid degree, which was unusual at the time. Neither department was really set up to accommodate the other, so I just made it work.

**Emma Collins:**

Were there any opportunities that you pursued inside or outside of school that you found helpful in securing a job in your profession?

**Bob Henson:**

Absolutely. When I was an undergraduate at Rice, Rice didn't really have a meteorology department per se, but there was a University of St. Thomas a couple miles away, and they had a meteorology

department, and they actually had a program that did consulting meteorology. I worked as a met tech, filled out station symbols, plots for weather maps, and just helped out in that way. That was a job I had for about a year. And I worked part-time all through college.

Then I would say the other couple things are more related to the writing side of my career. I moved to Boulder after graduating and worked at the newspaper here, but I was still trying to get into meteorology. And I applied for two jobs and was number two for both of those, which is frustrating. But in the meantime, I started volunteering at the Boulder County AIDS project, and I became editor of their newsletter, and in doing so, I had to learn how to work on a Macintosh. And I think actually this was one of the very first Macs, so we're talking late '80s. I had no experience on either PCs or Macs, but that gave me a real leg up because when a job opened up the next year at NCAR, lo and behold, they asked for people with Mac experience. I use this as a way to promote the value of volunteering-

**Kelly Savoie:**

Oh, absolutely.

**Bob Henson:**

... for its own sake, but also because it can help professionally as well.

**Kelly Savoie:**

It can definitely help. When people are looking to hire someone, they don't really necessarily care that you've been paid for a position, they just want to know that you actually have experience doing it, so why not?

**Bob Henson:**

Yeah. Now, perfectly put, Kelly. Yeah, that's what they cared about. And I was able to show that I could use a Mac. There was one other thing. Oh yeah, conferences. Sometimes conferences are considered fluff or whatever. They have been crucial to my career in several ways. In that year when I was still trying to find a job, I joined the National Association of Science Writers, and by coincidence, fortunately for me, their annual meeting that year was in Boulder, so it was right here. I was able to go. And one of the receptions was at NCAR. And I met the media relations person for NCAR, Joan Frisch. And this was just a couple months before the job came up, but then when the job came up, she was able to say, "Oh, I met this guy at the NESW meeting." Once again, just something that doesn't seem like much turns out to be a big deal.

**Kelly Savoie:**

And so did you start at NCAR? And then how did you get into the science writing?

**Bob Henson:**

Well, I started at NCAR, UCAR, and that was the next 26 years of my career.

**Kelly Savoie:**

Oh, wow, okay.

**Bob Henson:**

I'm one of those lucky people who it took me until I was age 28 to find that niche, but once I found it, I was there. And it really has been a perfect place for the core of my career. I need to lay out a little bit of a preface because not everybody knows UCAR and NCAR. There are so many acronyms in our world, as we know. They both started around 1960, the year I was born. UCAR is the University Corporation for Atmospheric Research. It's a nonprofit organization that's made up of more than 100 universities around the country that all have some form of atmospheric science degrees. What UCAR does, first and foremost, is it manages NCAR, which is the National Center for Atmospheric Research. And NCAR is funded mostly by the National Science Foundation, but also gets grants from NOAA and USGS and other entities.

UCAR is this perfect entity for managing a research center because you have people at all these schools who know what atmospheric science needs and can help steer these grants, especially the National Science Foundation, that help advise the country on the kind of research that a place like NCAR could do. It was so wonderfully stimulating. We would have annual meetings, and still do at NCAR, UCAR every year, and there would be two people from each campus. Within the first year or two, I was meeting faculty from all over the country, all kinds of specialties.

The other really transformative thing was climate change, because I had not been exposed to that at OU. It was not really a thing in the mid-'80s, but the late '80s is when it took off. The Yellowstone National Park fire was in '88. That was the famous testimony by Jim Hansen that the Greenhouse Effect is here, and the IPCC began the next year or two. That was really when it took off in a big way in a public way. And that was right when I started at NCAR, so I had this front row seat to some of the leading scientists in the field, and I learned so, so, so much. It was like perpetual grad school in the best possible way.

**Kelly Savoie:**

And then how did you end up where you are now? Were there any other positions after NCAR where you worked?

**Bob Henson:**

Well, I can tell you, I'm looking out my office window, and I live down the hill from the NCAR Mesa Lab. Where I am now, I can see NCAR. Although I never worked in that building, ironically. I was always in the other buildings across town. But how it got from NCAR to now is I had a wonderful, enjoyable, fantastic career at NCAR, and then about 1990, or rather, 2014, 2015, I'm like, "Okay, I'm in my mid-50s if I ever want to do something different before I hit retirement, now is probably the time." I didn't want to wait until I was 60.

I started just looking around a little bit, and an opportunity came up at Weather Underground, which was co-founded by Dr. Jeff Masters. He was looking for someone to work with him on Dr. Jeff Masters' Blog, which is what it was called at the time. This was the heyday of blogging. He started it in 2005, and it caught fire during Hurricane Katrina. And within a couple of years, it was arguably the most widely read weather blog in the nation, if not the world. And to be honest, that's still what I'm doing now, it's just taking different forms. I was at Weather Underground for five years working with Jeff as a full-time employee mostly on that blog. I helped out in other ways.

After a while, especially around 2019, 2020, it became apparent that Weather Underground and really the parent organizations were the weather company and IBM, that they really wanted to move more towards short form stuff, videos and so forth, and Jeff and I preferred the longer blogging. And the way this all unfolded is eventually we parted ways, but we found a spot at Yale Climate Connections because they were like, "Bring the blog over here. We'd love to have it." That's where it's been ever since. It had already been renamed Category Six, and then at Yale it became what we now call Eye on the Storm. Jeff

and I are still doing this. I'm on a contract with Yale to write for them. It's equivalent of maybe a quarter time to a half-time job. And I like to call where I am as "pretirement."

**Kelly Savoie:**

Yeah. Well, doing freelance work is great. You can do it on your own time.

**Bob Henson:**

Yeah. Now, as we'll get into, we talk about books. I also freelanced quite a bit during my NCAR, UCAR days. And happily, they were very supportive of that. As long as I was very transparent about what I was writing about, that I'm not taking something I wrote for NCAR and reworking it to be a freelance piece, it was always separate work that I would do on my own time nights and weekends. And so that helped a lot in segueing into being a full-time freelancer, which I am now.

**Kelly Savoie:**

Yeah, and Colorado is such a great place to be. And I've been to the NCAR offices, and boy, it's gorgeous there. Just Boulder in general is such a great town.

**Bob Henson:**

It's magical. It's awfully hard to think about being anyplace else. And we're pretty settled here. My spouse is also a meteorologist. In fact, he was the first one to move here. We were in graduate school together, and he landed a job at NOAA. And I ended up getting up here a year and a half later because I was doing the two masters essentially, and he was doing just meteorology. But there was an opening for storm chasing, a summer job doing storm chasing to confirm the data from the very first NEXRAD radar, which had been installed near Denver. We literally drove out in groups of two each. There were four teams. And we would call back, "Okay, we're getting one-inch hail," or two-inch hail, or whatever, and then they would relate that to what the radar was seeing. It was literally ground-truthing the radars. It was pretty amazing summer job, and that's what got me here.

**Kelly Savoie:**

Yeah, and you were like, "This place is awesome. I don't want to leave."

**Bob Henson:**

Yeah, yeah. Well, and I was already interested in bicycling.

**Kelly Savoie:**

Yeah, and hiking.

**Bob Henson:**

My spouse and I did long-distance biking, hiking. I was already leaning vegetarian, and there's all kinds of healthy food here. It's amazing that all the boxes are checked. We didn't consciously think let's move to Boulder. It just-

**Kelly Savoie:**

Just happened.

**Bob Henson:**

Was where a job was. Yeah.

**Emma Collins:**

And when you're not busy sponsoring Boulder, you have a knack for translating complex science and making it accessible for general audiences. Do you have some advice for others who may find this challenging?

**Bob Henson:**

Sure. It's not easy. And I love it, and I've been able to do this for most of my adult life, but I recognize I'm lucky to have found the niche and to have been able to do it with some skill, I hope. But it's not easy. And many folks just don't like writing, period, but I think translating is a particular skill. There's a long time people thought, oh, you're a technical writer. And I was like, "Well, not quite that." That's a separate skill that I'm not as good at.

But the translation, I was thinking about this, as always, with any kind of writing, you're thinking, okay, who is my audience? And what is my communication goal? In the climate change realm, there's lots of communication goals. You may be wanting to grab people by the collar and say, "We need to do something now, now, now, now, now. Go do this." Or you may be wanting to educate people. "Here's how this works." You may be wanting to disabuse them of something that's false. You may want to be debunking, essentially. Well, those are different goals. And as a communicator, you may use any or all of those different goals, and you may be talking to different audiences, and so you have to think about who it is you're talking to and what it is you're trying to communicate.

I've always been most comfortable in the explainer realm. For example, with climate change, here's how it works, here's why it's important, here are some things that society can do to combat it, but leaving it up to the reader as a citizen or as a stakeholder to decide how they want to act, but maintaining that acting is important if we don't want outcome X or outcome Y. But that's all rooted in the science. I'm not generally not saying, "We need to do this." I think the closest I get is some obvious things like electrifying society makes sense on so many levels. We just need to do it, but there's smart ways to do it in less smart ways. And so it doesn't mean we'll never use another drop of fossil fuel, but we clearly need to move toward a renewable energy.

That's been my strategy as a popularizer. I generally am an explainer. But explaining science is not easy. And there is pushback some time for analogies. I don't think you can be a writer without using analogies and metaphors. The sun, we talk about sunrise. Okay, well, the sun is rising from the way we see it, from our vantage point, but it's not rising on the other side of the world at that moment. It's a relative thing. You can be literalist and say, "Well, the sun's not actually rising with respect to a fixed vantage point," but it's okay. We're all comfortable with that. Okay, well, here's one that's a little trickier. We often hear, okay, a warmer atmosphere holds more water. The warmer the air is, the more humid it can feel. Well, in truth, the air is not holding that water. The water evaporates when it's warmer because of the excitement of the water vapor molecules. The water molecules, they're more likely to evaporate in a warmer atmosphere. But that's not literally the holding capacity of the air.

There are faculty in meteorology who would say you just shouldn't ever talk about the air holding water. Now, but if you're talking to a member of the general public and you're just trying to get across the point that the warmer it is, the more humid an atmosphere can become in terms of the amount of water it has in it, I personally think it's okay to say something like the air holds more water, or there could be more moisture in the air, or just put "holds" in quotation marks. I think there's ways you could do that because

you're not talking to someone who's going to go on to graduate school and meteorology. If you are, this is for meteorology students, then yeah, you got to make it clear that it's not literally holding the water.

I think that's a perfect example that whereas a popularizer, you're going to do some different things. You have to develop a comfort level at doing those things. Like any writer, you have to be open to editing. You've got to get a thick skin. Many people, they crumble if they're edited. Sometimes it's self-criticism. "Oh, I'm a disaster." Sometimes you get defensive. "How dare you say that." Well, it's neither of those, usually it's just, okay, they've got a point. You know?

**Kelly Savoie:**

Yeah.

**Bob Henson:**

And once you get comfortable with that, then you can push back if you have a legitimate argument, otherwise just, "Okay, good point."

**Kelly Savoie:**

And I've heard I think from some broadcast meteorologists that the way to get a message across to the public is to try to make it more local. Okay, this is how this is going to directly affect you in terms of your day-to-day life. And I'm not sure if that's one of the techniques you use as well when you write.

**Bob Henson:**

Yeah, that's a good one. And that is important. Hyper local. The interesting thing is, thinking about it, I was a contributing editor to *Texas Climate News*, an online newsletter, and certainly there I was localizing things. Interestingly enough, I generally now write for national or international audiences, so if I'm localizing, it's localizing to the US. But yeah, I don't really write to or communicate with local audiences in the way the local weathercasters do.

**Kelly Savoie:**

Now, you are the author of three books focusing on weather and climate. What inspired you to pursue these projects?

**Bob Henson:**

That's a great question. Well, my first book-leads book was called *Television Weathercasting: A History*, which is exactly what it was. And that emerged from my graduate work because for a while I thought I might do my master's thesis in journalism on the history of TV weather. It was just something I was curious about. I actually tried doing weathercasting in graduate school, and it was like oil and vinegar.

**Kelly Savoie:**

It seems really difficult to do that.

**Bob Henson:**

Well, I've always maintained that a news reader, an anchor just sits there and reads. And they're thoughtful, but to do the weather, you have to stand there. You're not reading off a script, you're extemporaneously speaking and you're pointing.

**Kelly Savoie:**

I know.

**Bob Henson:**

And you're pointing... Yeah.

**Kelly Savoie:**

And it's not like the way you're used to pointing. It's like—

**Bob Henson:**

No, you're pointing at a mirror image. These are really challenging things. And it's funny that weathercasting has been scorned and made fun of as the goofiest of the components of a newscast, but really, it's the most challenging. And you're the only person probably that will tell you, if you do this, you will survive, if you don't do this, you may die. The sportscaster is not going to tell you that. It's hugely important. For all these reasons, TV weather has always intrigued me.

And I started work a little bit, but really it was after I came to Boulder and before I was working at NCAR, I just thought, I'm just going to do this as a book. And I put out query letters and feelers to some publishers, which is not easy to do if you don't have an agent, especially now. But I did find a publishing house in North Carolina that focused on offbeat media histories. They had one title, I'll never forget it, *Inside Gilligan's Island: From Creation to Syndication*.

**Kelly Savoie:**

Oh, my goodness.

**Bob Henson:**

And it was the whole story. It was written by Sherwood Schwartz, who not only created the show, but he wrote the theme song and also wrote *The Brady Bunch* theme song.

**Emma Collins:**

I don't think I knew that. That's really cool.

**Bob Henson:**

Yeah, it's very cool. But don't get me started on cultural trivia. But anyway, it was a good home for me, given those interests. And it wasn't a big, lucrative book, but it sold a few hundred copies. And interestingly, they translated it into Japanese. It was a company called Weather News, which managed weathercasting in Japan, and they printed 5,000 copies there.

**Kelly Savoie:**

Oh, wow.

**Emma Collins:**

That's so cool.

**Bob Henson:**

My first book was more widely distributed in Japanese than in English. That book we'll circle back to. But then I met an agent again at a conference who became a good friend of mine, and he had published books with the company Rough Guides, which is a travel publisher that started in the '80s in London. Wrote quirky, semi-hippie-ish travel books as opposed to the more starchy ones that were out at the time like how to backpack through Greece. Very similar to *Lonely Planet*. They're like Coke and Pepsi. A *Lonely Planet* is Australia based, and *Rough Guides* is British based. But anyway, he had a frequent contact with them, and they told him they were interested in having someone do a book on weather. And so my friend Robert came to me and said, "Why don't you do it?" And so I had to do a proposal, which they accepted. And that book came out in 2002. And it did well; it got a second printing.

Then flash forward to 2005 and Rough Guides comes to my friend Robert, and says, "We'd like to have someone do a climate change book or a global warming book." And I was like, "I don't know." And Robert, it was devilish, he would say, "Oh, well, if you like to write books, this is an opportunity." And I was like, "Well, yeah, I like to write books." He knew that would probably get under my skin. I said, "Okay, well, I need to make sure NCAR is okay with this," which they were. And again, all of my own time.

And so that was published in the summer of 2006. And that was the summer of Al Gore, *An Inconvenient Truth*. And I heard a few months out that was going to come out a month apart from mine, and I thought, oh, crap, this is going to tank my book. And Rough Guides, to their credit, they said, "No, no, this is like a rising tide lifts all boats." And it's exactly what it was. There was just interest in the topic stimulated by that book, and people wanted to, "Oh, well, maybe there's another book on this topic," or whatever. The book did really well, and a second printing the very next year, and actually was a finalist for the Royal Society Prize for Science Books.

**Kelly Savoie:**

Nice.

**Bob Henson:**

That was tremendously exciting. They brought me over to London. And it didn't win, but I was one of five finalists. And one of the semi-finalists was Brian May, the guitarist for Queen.

**Kelly Savoie:**

Wow. Oh, my gosh. Yeah.

**Bob Henson:**

Because he is a PhD in physics, believe it or not.

**Kelly Savoie:**

Yeah, I know. I heard that.

**Bob Henson:**

Oh, you know about him.

**Kelly Savoie:**

Yeah.

**Bob Henson:**

Okay, yeah, he wrote a book, and it was a nominee, but he didn't come to the proceedings, darn it.

**Kelly Savoie:**

I know, that would've been great to meet him. What was the title of the second book?

**Bob Henson:**

Okay, that was the second book, *The Rough Guide*. They wanted to call it *The Rough Guide to Global Warming*, and I argued for Climate Change, which it became. And you would not believe how many covers we evaluated, because to find a picture that says climate change is much, much more difficult than you can imagine. Every time I've done a new edition, it's been a struggle to find the right photo. And then the third book is really the same book that was my first book. In other words, I did the TV weather book, I did the weather book, I did the climate change book, then I circled back to the TV weather because AMS decided they would like to reissue my TV weather book as an AMS book. I completely updated it, and it came out in 2010 as *Weather On the Air*.

**Kelly Savoie:**

*On the Air*, yeah.

**Bob Henson:**

*The History of Broadcast Meteorology*. It was really fun to go back, do new interviews. I've probably talked to 100 weathercasters. And I have to tell you a story about that one. The woman who was giving the tornado warning when I was seven years old was named Lola Hall, one of the first woman weather broadcasters in the Southwest. She is in her 90s now, but Slate reached out to both her and me last year for a podcast they did in 1955. They had a whole episode on what was called the Weather Girl Phenomenon. They interviewed Lola, they interviewed me. I'd never met Lola Hall, but they said afterward, "Oh." Basically connected Lola Hall and me, and I got to sit in her living room for an hour last year.

**Kelly Savoie:**

Oh, my gosh.

**Bob Henson:**

And she was so nice. She was so, so smart, had such a wicked sense of humor. I told her I did a look on climate change. She looked at me for a moment, paused for a beat, and then she said, "You're brave."

**Kelly Savoie:**

Well, you didn't call it Global Warming, at least.

**Bob Henson:**

No, no. That was the ultimate full circle moment for me.

**Emma Collins:**

That's wild. That's so cool.

**Kelly Savoie:**

Yeah, did you tell her that she inspired you?

**Emma Collins:**

Yeah, did you tell her?

**Bob Henson:**

Oh gosh, of course I told her. Absolutely. And she got such a kick out of that. She was just so straightforward as a weathercaster. And she was of course in my book. And she's on the back cover of *Weather in the Air*.

**Kelly Savoie:**

Oh, nice.

**Emma Collins:**

You've had an incredible career. And over the course of that career, is there anything you wish you would have done differently?

**Bob Henson:**

Oh, boy. I'll have to tell you, one of my philosophies of life is to do the best you can and be grateful for where you are and what you have and to look back and maybe acknowledge, oh, maybe I could have done this, but I can't change it now. If I accept that, accept you can't change what you've done, and be aware if there's something you might've done differently, but don't dwell on it. I honestly don't think about it that much. But I think if I had taken an editing course in graduate school, if I had been on the school paper for one semester at OU, it probably would've helped me get a job that first year in Boulder when I was struggling. But by the same token, it wouldn't have been the NCAR job probably.

**Kelly Savoie:**

Right.

**Emma Collins:**

True.

**Bob Henson:**

And then who knows if I would've circled around to NCAR? And that truly changed my life being at NCAR. I like to think that if you just follow your heart, follow your passions, find out what it is you like to do, and make sure there's some plausible career path, but don't sweat too much on a perfect career path because context changes. My gosh, science journalism, it's being transformed already. Journalism is. AI can do a lot of the kind of writing I used to do in terms of synthesizing a lot of different papers. You could tell AI to go read these 20 esoteric scientific papers and summarize, and it'll do an okay job. Not a great job. But I think at 10 years, it'll be able to do 90% to 95% of what I've done in my whole life. It's a little daunting and a little humbling, and I'm sure glad I'm not 25 trying to do exactly what I've done.

But there's always going to be a place for people who want to communicate, I firmly believe. For a while, it may be editing AI products. It may be being a proofreader, which is hugely important, making sure that they got it right. We have incredible artwork now done by AI. You tell it to draw a picture of something; it

does great. But it might give you two left hands or misspell a simple sign on a building. Well, in a year or two, those problems aren't going to be there.

**Kelly Savoie:**

Yeah, you mentioned you wish you may have taken an editing course when you were in college. Do you have any other advice for listeners who are interested in careers in science writing, focusing specifically on weather and climate? Any tips?

**Bob Henson:**

Sure, sure. Now, of course, keeping in mind these are tips from someone near the end of their career, but I would say absolutely get your bachelor's degree. You could major in science writing. You could major in journalism. There's been a debate for decades within science writing as to whether it's better to have the beginner's mind and just get a journalism degree and then ask the questions that a layperson might ask when you're talking to a scientist. And I think that's good if you plan to be a general assignment science reporter at a newspaper. Of course there's fewer and fewer of those now.

The other approach is to get core training in your science interest and then tack on, say, a master's in journalism or a program in science writing. And I would probably lean a little that way now, given where things are in society and in writing and just the way our culture is structured. I think if there's going to be an increasing need for anything, it's for people who really know the science and can write and know how to write. I would probably lean that direction. But just you need some academic training in both fields, I think. And you need to simply write. Gosh, it's going to be hard to resist the temptation, I think, if you're in that place in your life to just let AI do the writing, but you have to write from scratch.

**Kelly Savoie:**

If somebody were to have a double major, say, in journalism and meteorology, that'd be pretty tough though, wouldn't it?

**Bob Henson:**

Oh, it depends. Schools are accommodating now. OU has literal programs set up for that. And sometimes it's in broadcast communication, sometimes it's a matter of getting a minor in meteorology or a minor in journalism. There's quite a few schools now where I think you could do that. And especially if you're getting a master's, then it's even easier to blend them together. I think it's smart to take a couple of classes in each one and see where your comfort level is. A lot of people, this is legendary meteorology, you take your first calculus class and it's like, oh, crap.

**Kelly Savoie:**

Yeah, the differential equations.

**Bob Henson:**

Yeah. Yeah. I actually liked differential equations. I didn't like calculus. Just make sure you're comfortable with that. Computer programming, obviously, but not computer programming per se, but learning things like Python. I would say any machine learning training, the earlier you can get, the better just so you're in on the ground floor of AI machine learning.

But weather models, we're at this really interesting moment where, for example, you have the European Center now has an operational AI global model that it's pretty competitive in a lot of ways. NOAA is

heading that direction. I think there's some that are in the works right now to be alongside the standard weather and climate models. It's a fertile time to be learning about this. Those are my main suggestions. Just learn how to write, get comfortable with being edited and editing, and get training in both of these, and then be flexible. If you're a sophomore in college right now, who knows what the working world is going to be like in three years or six years? Honestly.

**Kelly Savoie:**

This is true.

**Bob Henson:**

We are in such a mode in US government of whipsawing back and forth. Who knows how that's going to look in four years. AI is going to change private, public, all sectors of society. It's just an incredible time of flux. It reminds me of times like the late 1940s when TV was coming along. My father got his master's in speech in the late '40s and was a radio broadcaster for a couple of years, radio newscaster. And I imagine he probably thought this will be my career, and then TV comes along.

**Kelly Savoie:**

Yeah, I know.

**Bob Henson:**

And I think for whatever reason, he decided he didn't want to do TV and he ended up doing life insurance.

**Kelly Savoie:**

Yeah, you just have to be adaptable.

**Bob Henson:**

Yeah. Yeah. And the other time I was going to mention is when I first started NCAR, we were just getting email. I went to a couple of conferences around '94 on the World Wide Web, and people were asking things, "What is this thing called the web?" I don't know if you all remember or have seen these commercials from the late '90s, I think it was for Britannica, computer guides, learning how to be on your computer. And people on these commercials would say things like, "What's an icon?" Or, "When I click here, what happens next?" That was a type of incredible change. And these periods happen, and we're in one now.

**Emma Collins:**

True. I do wonder when we'll get to the generation where they don't know that the save icon is a floppy disk.

**Bob Henson:**

Oh, God. I still have probably six, four bats of various disks.

**Emma Collins:**

Well, Bob, we're so grateful for everything you've told us about your career. However, before you go, we always ask our guests one last fun question at the end of our show. What is your all-time favorite movie?

**Bob Henson:**

I bet a lot of people could guess. My all-time favorite movie is definitely The Wizard of Oz, the original just for many reasons.

**Kelly Savoie:**

Yeah. It's fantastic.

**Bob Henson:**

And as a kid, it scared the heck out of me. I just came to appreciate the artwork, the craftsmanship. The tornado, that is still pretty darn realistic, considering it's a sock. It's literally a sock.

**Emma Collins:**

I don't think I knew that. I didn't know it was a sock.

**Bob Henson:**

Yeah. And honestly, there's just so many things about it I love. The music. Even culturally, the ominousness of it. It was 1930, World War II was looming, and there was just this poignancy that I can't help but think filmmakers knew we're going into this dark world. There was some darkness in that film.

**Kelly Savoie:**

Yeah. The Wizard of Oz, that's one of my favorite films. And coincidentally, I just saw it for the first time ever on the big screen. The Wang Theater in Boston had a week of free films that were all Boston related. And I'm thinking, how is The Wizard of Oz Boston related? But apparently, the Scarecrow and the Tin Man were both from Massachusetts. Yeah.

**Bob Henson:**

Oh, interesting. One of those, I think the Tin Man, I always heard a touch of an accent. And I always thought it was Northeastern, but I didn't know where. Interesting.

**Kelly Savoie:**

Yeah. And the film was so cool on the big screen. And just my favorite part is when it goes from black and white to color.

**Bob Henson:**

Oh, yeah.

**Kelly Savoie:**

I think it's just amazing. And it was such a cool effect. And for 1939, that film still holds up. It still holds up.

**Bob Henson:**

Oh, my goodness. I have to also say my mother grew up literally in the Dust Bowl in Oklahoma in the '20s and '30s, and she would tell stories of putting a handkerchief to her face, wet handkerchief in order to breathe on our way to school. It was just in our family, there was this deep imprint of the Dust Bowl. And

just north, the 1930s... Well, it was set before that, but you know what I mean, the black and white Kansas landscape just isn't that different from Oklahoma.

**Kelly Savoie:**

Yeah, for all you young people out there who may have never seen The Wizard of Oz, which I don't know if it's possible, but I'm sure there's some people out there, it is a must see.

**Bob Henson:**

Oh, I have to say, you really have to see the entire movie. And interestingly, I once was hanging out with a friend from the Netherlands who was visiting at NCAR, and he had never even heard of The Wizard of Oz. It is a far more American-centric trope than people realize. It's just many people in Europe just don't know about it. Yeah, introduce your international friend to it if you all get a chance.

**Kelly Savoie:**

Well, thanks so much for joining us, Bob, and sharing your work experiences with us.

**Bob Henson:**

Oh, totally my pleasure. Great to chat with you all. Thanks for doing this.

**Emma Collins:**

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

**Kelly Savoie:**

Clear Skies Ahead: Conversations About Careers in Meteorology and Beyond is a podcast by the American Meteorological Society. Our show is edited by Johnny Le. Technical direction is provided by Peter Killelea. Our theme music is composed and performed by Steve Savoie, and the show is hosted by Emma Collins and Kelly Savoie. You can learn more about the show online at [www.ametsoc.org/clearskies](http://www.ametsoc.org/clearskies), and you can contact us at [skypodcast@ametsoc.org](mailto:skypodcast@ametsoc.org) if you have any feedback or would like to become a future guest.