Transcript of " JP Kalb, Weather Observer at San Jose Airport Weather Station in Cupertino, California"

Clear Skies Ahead: Conversations about Careers in Meteorology and Beyond

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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 Herbst-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 Herbst-Horner:

We are happy to introduce today's guest, JP Kalb, a Weather Observer at San Jose Airport Weather Station in Cupertino, California. Welcome, JP. Thanks very much for joining us.

JP Kalb:

It's a pleasure to be here.

Kelly:

JP, could you tell us a little bit about what sparked your interest in meteorology and how it influenced your educational path?

JP:

I got interested in meteorology first at a young age. With my autism, especially, when I would sneak into the garage at my grandparents whenever I visited them, and watch The Weather Channel. Also autism played a big role in sparking my interest in meteorology, as I was always drawing maps when I was young.

Rex:

What did you like most about the maps? Did it help you understand how weather was different between different areas, or what was interesting to you about creating a map?

JP:

It just seemed so interesting. Calming, kind of fun with those, what we call, my fellow autistics refer to as a special interest as a way to get ourselves into a certain mindset.

Kelly:

Did you take some classes in high school that were earth science or weather related? Did you talk to advisors about possibly going to college to major in that? Is that how you ended up going to college for that?

JP:

Unfortunately, I did not take any courses. The only earth science they had was more for freshmen who weren't qualified for biology at the time, but definitely it would have piqued my interest if they had a more advanced earth science class.

Kelly:

Yeah, I know a lot of high schools don't have meteorology courses or weather courses, and it's mostly just the basics of the physics, chemistry and biology. I mean, I know that sometimes in the lower grades, middle school, they might have a portion of the science class that's weather based, but not a complete course, which they should. Where did you go to college, and what types of things were you involved in there?

JP:

I went to San Jose State University, with some time at De Anza [College] and Mission College, because I had a bad freshman year of college. I was pretty involved in the SCAMS or the student chapter of the AMS.

Rex:

How did it feel to all of a sudden have a lot of different classes about meteorology that you just didn't have access to in high school?

JP:

It definitely felt different.

Rex:

I know there's different topics about satellite meteorology, or climatology, or forecasting. When did you start to realize what part of meteorology was the most interesting to you?

JP:

My biggest one was forecasting, right off the bat. Actually beforehand, forecasting just seemed like, hey, I think I can do well in it.

Kelly:

Did you find any of the courses in particular to be pretty challenging?

JP:

Definitely some of the more core classes, which required a lot of math.

Kelly:

The dynamic meteorology and thermodynamic meteorology, yeah. How did you get through those? Did you just have to study a little harder for that, or were there study groups or anything like that that helped you through?

JP:

We actually had, luckily it was just four of us for the senior year, but six to start out junior year. Then it went down to five, then four. We knew each other pretty well. We would have study groups for whenever we had a big test coming up, plus one of my classmates actually took notes and shared them with the whole class.

Kelly:

Oh, that was really great. It was definitely helpful to have a bit of a team help each other out.

Rex:

JP, were these the same people that were in the student chapter of the AMS?

JP:

Yeah. Since San Jose State is a pretty small department, like there was four in my class, four in the one below me, and this is not including the climate science.

Kelly:

Wow, that is small. I mean, I guess that's good in some ways, cause you have personal relationships with teachers and fellow students. I guess that probably was helpful for you.

JP:

A little bit.

Kelly:

JP, from your experiences as an early career professional, what are some do's and don'ts when it comes to job seeking?

JP:

Definitely seek feedback. As I'm trying to find a new job for myself right now, I'm always trying to get feedback from the meteorologist-in-charge at the NWS, which I applied to, to get feedback as to what I could improve on since no one is perfect. Knowing what they expect would help you understand, like, hey, maybe I should change up how I do things a little bit.

Rex:

You would say that the people who you're applying to work with are willing to be helpful, not just in giving you a job on the spot or after the application process, but they're also they're willing to help you out overall, even if they don't choose you for this specific job, they're still there to say, "Hey, we're both meteorologists. Let me share some something with you."

JP:

Yeah, definitely. Since meteorology is a small field, and if you make the right connections, you can really grow.

Rex:

You do have a position as a Weather Observer at the moment, as I mentioned earlier at the San Jose Airport Weather Station. Could you tell us a little bit more about what you do in that position?

JP:

Basically, what I do is make sure the ASOS sends out the right information as that information goes to the broadcast meteorologists, the National Weather Service, the pilots, and the models.

Kelly:

That sounds really interesting. What do you like most about the job?

JP:

At my particular office, it's pretty slow. We don't get a lot of weather in California.

Rex:

There's a lot of just sunny days, not much wind?

JP:

Actually we do get some wind, but not enough to really affect operations. We do get stratus sometimes.

Rex:

Stratus are a type of cloud, correct?

JP:

Yeah, which I actually did my thesis on.

Rex:

What about stratus clouds did you do your thesis on?

JP:

There was a two-part problem where I was trying to find a way to come up with an equation to predict the cloud coverage better. Since I modified an equation by Dr. Julia Slingo, which I have adapted even more in recent years. Then I would use the forecast into seeing how much of a delay would happen at San Francisco, since San Francisco gets delays due to the stratus.

Rex:

So working as a Weather Observer has helped you continue thinking and developing your thesis even after you finished it. Was that one of the reasons you found this position was you thought, “Hey, this is a good opportunity to continue?”

JP:

No, actually I got the position first when I was still a student, like six and a half years ago now or so. Since it was during my junior year and I had just finished the season at a theme park I was working at, I saw a posting on the department floor about it. I decided it was worth a shot.

Rex:

That sounds great. Is there a particular thing that's challenging about working as a Weather Observer?

JP:

Just all the rules and regulations you have to know about, like knowing the rules by hand, like how to report the clouds, what the specifications for a special observation is, and if I can be reported for visibility and that type of thing.

Kelly:

It must take a while. Did it take you a while to learn all those rules?

JP:

A little bit.

Kelly:

We've discovered that you have an autism vlog. What inspired you to start it, and how is it applicable to the weather community?

JP:

I actually started my vlog back in October, because I did not know how long the pandemic was going to last. I figured, why not do something in my spare time?

Kelly:

What is it about?

JP:

Basically in my vlog, I'm trying to highlight some of my life as an autistic meteorologist. Most of the episodes have been stuff that I learned from my own experience, like budgeting, grocery shopping, but I also have some weather education videos.

Kelly:

Excellent.

JP:

I explain in a way that can be understandable to those who are not as scientific literate. Like, explain what CAPE is in a way that people can understand for thunderstorms.

Rex:

Yeah, I watched that one and I liked it. I also watched another one about, I think it was Autism Awareness Month, and how you said that maybe that wasn't the best title for it. I also saw you had some other interesting posts about traveling during the pandemic and really giving a lot of different experiences. The name of your vlog is “Weathering the Autism Storm,” correct?

JP:

Yes. Since I wanted to throw some weather into it, because of my background as a meteorologist.

Rex:

You can maybe pull this from other episodes you've done, but what other advice or resources would you want to use this podcast to talk about for other fellow autistic students who are interested in pursuing careers in forecasting?

JP:

One of the biggest things is definitely talk to your teachers more. Talk to them, try to build a rapport, explain to them what they can do to help you. Since one common theme is people would assume based on autism, but autism is a spectrum, more of a round spectrum where some of us are better in stuff like executive functioning, but are weak in other areas.

JP:

Just talk to the professors and explain to them about your autism. Since everyone's autism is different, everyone who's autistic has a different scope of autism. Some have strong points where others have weakness.

Kelly:

You're saying it's very helpful to talk to the professors and be like, "Well, these are my weak areas. What can I do to try to strengthen those, to do better in the course?"

JP:

Also like, how can the professor help you? If you're a visual learner, versus a hands-on on learner, versus just hearing the words.

Kelly:

Right.

Rex:

Right. I like what you said about looking at the spectrum as a circle instead of kind of a straight line. That sounds like a straight line seems like a little bit reductive is what you're saying, but a circle feels more like, I guess open-ended, or not as sort of like, you're either one thing or another. It's more like you have to look at all the different parts of like where within the circle, different things overlap. I think that's a really nice difference to point out.

JP:

Yeah, since most people in the autism community aren't a fan of the line between high functioning and low functioning, like it can be systematic in a sense, but also just like, isn't as effective.

Rex:

Right.

Kelly:

You're very involved in AMS, JP. I know that you had mentioned that you were a member of the local chapter. You're also a member of the Board on Representation, Accessibility, Inclusion, and Diversity. Could you tell us a little bit about your experiences in the local chapter and also the BRAID board?

JP:

I'm actually involved in more parts.

Rex:

What other ones? What did we miss?

Kelly:

Yeah, what other ones?

JP:

I'm on the ARAM [Aviation, Range, and Aerospace Meteorology] Committee. I'm also an ad hoc member of the Board of Early Career Professionals.

Kelly:

Oh, excellent. What do AMS local chapters do? For our listeners who may be not familiar with what the local chapters are all about?

JP:

Local chapters is just a group of people, mainly like student chapters like I was involved in at the university, to learn more about meteorology outside of the classroom. More like visiting places like the National Weather Service office, or the local TV stations, or instruments labs, or for some other chapters, community service stuff like cleaning the river or helping with a flood.

Rex:

Those all sound like great activities that really go beyond what you can do in college in a classroom. What are you most interested in about on the Board on Representation, Accessibility, Inclusion, and Diversity? I know it's a new name for the board, and sort of a name that better encompasses their mission, but what do you feel like you can help contribute to that discussion on that board?

JP:

I'm trying to bring more of the autism approach to it. Like, "Hey, the number of autistics is growing. We haven't exactly been welcomed with open arms, especially in the job hunt." Also just try to show like, "Hey, we want to be in community," and set an example for future autistic meteorologists. Sends a message like, "Hey, the AMS is here for you. What can the AMS do to help you?" That type of thing.

Kelly:

Well, it sounds like a great board to be involved in. I know that you recently participated in a webinar through that group. How was that experience? Did you enjoy that?

JP:

It was all right.

Rex:

Speaking of webinars, I also wanted to ask what's your creative process behind your vlog? How long does it take you to put together an episode before people see it on YouTube?

JP:

It takes some time. Days, sometimes, for me to write my script, then maybe an hour of shooting. Then editing does not take too long, although it takes a while sometimes for it to compile. The uploading definitely takes an hour or two.

Rex:

Every episode has a script. I know you also find and bring in different images to help with things you're explaining. The editing, it's more than just video footage of you talking. There's those other visual aids as well. You must have to do some research with finding the right images that help out, and the ones that you're able to download and use, et cetera.

JP:

Definitely. Since some of the images are partially me using [Microsoft] Paint to kind of whip something up last minute.

Kelly:

Well, having the vlog is definitely a great resource for the community, and I commend you for starting that. JP, before we end the podcast, we always ask our guests one last fun question, unrelated to meteorology. What is your favorite food and why?

JP:

Probably a bowl of Cincinnati chili, a three-way Cincinnati chili, with a glass of Mountain Dew.

Kelly:

Oh, Mountain Dew. I just love Mountain Dew. Is Cincinnati chili different than other kinds of chili? Is there like a special ingredient?

JP:

Yeah.

Kelly:

What is it?

JP:

Well, most cases it does not have beans.

Rex:

Oh.

JP:

Also it is on spaghetti.

Rex:

Oh, okay. That's a very fun way. I've had chili over noodles too, and that's a great way to have it.

JP:

Also it's like the spices that are used in it are different than what most people think of chili.

Kelly:

Is it spicy?

JP:

No, not really. It's more of a bit of a Mediterranean feel, I think. I forget what's in it, but it's not like Texas chili.

Rex:

Does it have more herbs in it? Things kind of more like, maybe Italian sort of spices, like parsley or oregano or rosemary? Greek?

JP:

Actually more like Greek ones. I think it has like maybe chocolate or something, but also cinnamon, I think. I don't remember right now, but it's definitely different.

Kelly:

I'm going to have to look that up online and get a recipe and try it out.

Rex:

All right. We'll all have bowls of Cincinnati chili after this episode.

Kelly:

Yes.

Rex:

Thanks so much for joining us, JP, and for sharing your work experiences with us. It's been a pleasure talking with you.

JP:

It's great to have spoken to you guys about it.

Kelly:

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

Rex:

Clear Skies Ahead: Conversations about Careers and Meteorology and Beyond is a podcast by the American Meteorological Society. Our show is produced by Brandon Crose, edited by Peter Trepke. 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 www.ametsoc.org/clearskies, and can contact us at skypodcast@ametsoc.org if you have any feedback or if you would like to become a future guest.