

Transcript of “Kerrin Jeromin, Meteorologist and Communications Strategist at the National Renewable Energy Laboratory in Golden, Colorado”

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 the 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're happy to introduce today's guest, **Kerrin Jeromin**, a Meteorologist and Communications Strategist for the National Renewable Energy Laboratory in Golden, Colorado. Welcome, Kerrin. Thanks very much for joining us.

Kerrin Jeromin:

Thanks so much for having me. I'm happy to be here.

Kelly:

Karen, could you tell us a little bit about your educational background and what sparked your interest in science?

Kerrin:

Yeah. I'd be glad to. So my background is mostly meteorology, but I would also go so far as to say it's just science. I have always been a science kid, a science geek, if you will. I remember from a very young age just always being in love with science and learning about the world around us. And that means going to science museums, always being more engaged and generally doing better in my science courses in school. Growing up in New England and Vermont, I think being in the weather and experiencing nor'easters and blizzards and things that shut down school was always fascinating to me, and so that just sparked this natural interest as a kid. No big event that really sparked my interest, which is surprising. I know a lot of meteorologists always have one big event that triggered their interest. But I think for me, it's just a general love of science and understanding the world around me that got me into science and weather.

Kerrin:

I might say the movie *Twister* probably had a little influence on my life because it was around that time. And I thought, "Wow, that's really cool." It was like seeing these huge storms and tornadoes on TV in an entertaining way and it probably triggered something, whether or not I want to admit that, I'm not sure if I want to be in that group. But I think there's a lot of us that probably had *Twister* as a small influence in our life there. And it was around that time that I was deciding on college and where to go and what to study.

Kerrin:

And to be honest, I was totally split between two very different focuses. I was torn if I wanted to go into meteorology or interior design and decorating, so clearly I think I've always been split by my creative side and my scientific side, and opted to go with the scientific side and chose Lyndon State College, which is a small school in the northeast corner of Vermont, great school for both meteorology and also broadcasting, because I knew I wanted to pursue that side of meteorology, so I went to Lyndon and got my degree there.

Rex:

Well, that's wonderful that you had a school in your home state that had a good program for meteorology. How long has that program been around? And what was particularly rich and fulfilling about going to school at Lyndon State?

Kerrin:

I'm not sure the entire history or how long the school has been around. I probably should know that. But I know that the program is just very well renowned. For a small school, it creates some really excellent coursework and students that come out of that school because it's a smaller school. It's not one of those huge universities. You really get kind of a smaller school experience, which I really personally enjoyed. Being from a smaller town in Vermont, it was just more comfortable than one of the larger universities. And so that really enabled more of a closer interaction with my professors. And I think because of that, students succeed and they really get the attention they need to pass their course work and get the extra help if they need it, and so I found that really, really great about going to Lyndon, which has since gone through a name change. It's now called Northern Vermont University for the current day.

Kelly:

So those schools, they actually have studios. And so schools that have broadcast meteorology concentration, you were able to actually do weathercasts on air, and they had their own school station. Is that right?

Kerrin:

Yes, exactly. And it wasn't just broadcast within the school. This was actually a community television station called News Seven at the college. And so students get real life experience to be live on television and do forecasts, or do journalism.

Kelly:

That's really cool.

Kerrin:

It's a whole television station, so we produced daily newscasts, and then I think what we called news breaks, so just little cut ins, if you will, earlier in the day. And so you might start with the little cut ins and news breaks as a sophomore or junior. And then when you become a senior, you build up to those evening newscasts, and totally nerve-racking for a student and just a really great way to shake off the cobwebs early on in your experience. And gosh, just an invaluable opportunity to be able to do that. We had a pretty small graduating class, a handful, I think it was less than ten graduating seniors in meteorology, so we would basically rotate out. Once a week, you get your evening hit. And you're

thinking about it for days ahead of time. I just remember being so nervous three, four days ahead, I was already thinking about what I would say on the air.

Kerrin:

And so by the time graduation came around, it was much more comfortable, and you felt comfortable in front of a camera. You knew what live television was like. And again, just really an invaluable experience to get me into broadcasting.

Kelly:

And you had a resume tape.

Kerrin:

I did. That is really important going into broadcast being a student. I mean, that's a leg up to already have a reel to share with potential employers.

Rex:

So part of the college experience is internships, is finding mentors, other opportunities, as you said, and in Vermont, there's a lot of active weather. There's ski areas that are affected by snow, et cetera. What opportunities did you pursue while you were in school or even earlier in high school that you felt were related to securing a job or just gaining experience in your profession that you were really interested in of meteorology?

Kerrin:

Sure. I've always kind of been a performer, I guess you could say. I've been involved in theater and film making, and just performance for a good chunk of my life, which we can talk about that later. So I think because of that, I kind of had this performance niche and knew that broadcasting was probably my best track of choice, pursuing meteorology. It's outside of personal hobbies and doing plays and such and getting that performance practice. I really was focused on meteorology and learning the science while I was in college, so taking the bachelor's degree, of course, was the right approach to get the training and get the knowledge that I need. But then getting internships and opportunities along the way helped me get more hands on experience.

Kerrin:

So News Seven, like we talked about the college TV station, that was a great experience to work the broadcast side. But then when it came time to choosing internships, I actually wanted to kind of open up my eyes a little bit to other opportunities in case I had horse blinders on that I wanted to go into broadcasting only. So I actually chose internships that were not in the broadcast field to test the waters, to see what else was out there. So I ended up getting an internship with the Utah Department of Transportation. And through that, I was working on their road weather instrumentation, so basically measuring the local conditions meteorologically. It's built right into the road, so they can do things like see the road temperature, which informs the crews going out and treating the roadways potentially pre-storm and things like that. So it was really an awesome opportunity, really hands-on opportunity to work with equipment and work with those in-situ measurements across the state, and it was driving Utah, which of course was really gorgeous as well. And quality control of the data.

Kerrin:

So that was a really different opportunity than the broadcast world, which I knew I was pursuing, but just to see a different way to use meteorology in a career path was really great. So aside from that, that was my main formal internship. And I also had another kind of internship, but almost like a part-time or seasonal job while I was in school as well. And that was with a company called bestskiweather.com. And so we did forecasts for ski areas around North America, looking for great conditions for ski enthusiasts and such. And interestingly enough, I ended up working for a different company that I still work for called Snow Country, where we do something really similar now, it's forecasting for North American ski areas and finding really great conditions for outdoor winter enthusiasts.

Kelly:

Well, that was really smart of you to go outside of the broadcast meteorology for an internship because you were already doing that in school. And you kind of had experience with that. So knowing that you did do these internships in different areas, how did that influence you pursuing your first job in the field? What was that? And how did you end up at The National Renewable Energy Laboratory?

Kerrin:

Yeah. So it's a long windy career path it seems like at this point. But I definitely knew broadcast was my thing because of my passion for kind of blending performance and science. It just seemed like a natural marriage, and so I did decide to pursue broadcast. Plus, it's fun. I mean, broadcast is a really cool way to do meteorology. It's very creative. It's very physical I guess is a good way to put it. You get to use your body. You get to be on TV and present the weather and tell people what's going on. And so it's just really testing all parts of the brain to do broadcasting, so I really enjoyed that.

Kerrin:

My first job out of college didn't come right away. I briefly had a stint at the local golf course, working at the food and beverage cart. That was my summer after graduation, which was a little opportunity, but not quite in the field I was shooting for. Quick side note, I actually ended up meeting at the time, and still, one of the network meteorologists. I won't name names, but one of the network meteorologists actually came to the golf course and was golfing that day, and I totally took the opportunity to say, "Hey, I just graduated from meteorology and I'm going to be a meteorologist too," so it was funny.

Kerrin:

But I was a little bit starstruck, but it also kind of motivated me to say, "I've got to get a broadcast job. This is cool." So I did finally land my first broadcast job in Vermont as well, at a local station in Burlington, Vermont. I worked at the local ABC and Fox affiliate, Local 22 and Local 44, and started as the weekend meteorologist and weekday environmental reporter, which is often the case for broadcasters. You might start on a weekend shift. It's kind of the entry level. Got my feet wet, learned all the tricks of the trade of journalism and really just learned a lot in those first two years. Getting into the community was awesome, seeing it even more. Growing up there, you kind of become blind to the great activities, events, and people and all the things that go on in a community. But through the journalistic side, I was able to get out to events and meet many more folks and really understand Vermont and Upstate New York and New Hampshire—that was the viewing area—really thoroughly, so that was great.

Kerrin:

That was about two years. And then throughout that time at the Fox and ABC station there, I had actually jumped positions a couple of times. I was promoted, which was really great. I got to move to a morning shift for a couple of years, and then eventually moved on to become the chief meteorologist there at that station. So it almost felt like three jobs in one because it was shifting roles throughout the course of the six to seven years that I was there. Gosh, again, great learning experience throughout the way, just even understanding New England weather more. That's such a hard area to forecast. Worked through what was Hurricane Irene as it came through Vermont. It just devastated Vermont, and so that was just really a humbling experience as a forecaster, as a new chief meteorologist. And actually, I think I was mornings at the time, but kind of a lead and understanding the weather in that area was a very humbling experience to go through Irene and see the devastation across Vermont and New Hampshire and New York. It was just a really incredible experience to learn from and grow from.

Kerrin:

And believe it or not, I think that experience with Irene actually triggered my next move. I went down to West Palm Beach, Florida, moved to another station to kind of stretch my forecasting skills and get some more tropical meteorology in there. So I went to WPEC in West Palm Beach, working with some really awesome local legends there, have been in the business for years. And so again, [it was a] growth experience, learning experience. Went through yet another tropical system there, Hurricane Matthew, in 2016. So wow, what an experience to live and work yet another tropical system in Florida and plus understanding tropical weather was a very different experience.

Kerrin:

At that station, at WPEC, we did forecasts for a national entity called WeatherNation as well. It was kind of our digital or Dot-Two channel, so we were doing forecasts for this entity called WeatherNation and we'd provide updated hits throughout the day. And believe it or not, that's actually where I jumped next. WeatherNation was my third job in television. The news director had reached out and had seen my work on the air and said, "Would you like to come work for us?" And I thought that was really great to know that we were reaching, not only people, but reaching the next job opportunity, reaching the news director. And they invited me to come and work as kind of a hybrid role, some on-air, but more of an off camera and managerial role at WeatherNation. And that's what I did from 2017 to 2019, was the Director of Weather Operations position there, so it was an off camera role. It was more of a coordinator role, and seeing to our coverage on live and digital television. And it was, again, gosh, that threw me out of my comfort zone because it was no longer me presenting, but it was helping our entire team present the weather, not only locally, but across the whole country and the Caribbean.

Kerrin:

So now you're dealing with all types of weather, all types of disasters as well. We covered everything from fires, to hurricanes to snowstorms, ice storms, flooding, you name it, even volcanoes, throw that in there, and coordinating that coverage with our in-studio and also field teams was just an incredible experience to learn how to do that and coordinate that. So goodness, sorry, I'm getting long winded here on my career. But broadcast I think was a really big chunk of my career path. And eventually, unfortunately, I just got to a point, like so many broadcasters and meteorologists do, you kind of just reach a burnout point. Working 24/7, 365 is really difficult, especially at a national entity. So I did decide to kind of shift careers a little bit. I knew I loved science. I knew I wanted to stay in science, but I needed to kind of take a break from around the clock broadcast cycle.

Kerrin:

And so I was lucky enough to have an interview and eventually land my role at the National Renewable Energy Laboratory, where now I work as a Communication Strategist. So it's still communicating science, but much more than just meteorology. I'm learning so many more types of science and just new ways to communicate other than just the broadcasting realm. So I will stop there, but goodness, that was a long track.

Rex:

Well, thank you for a very thorough journey through your broadcasting history. I think you answered some of the questions I had on my mind as you went through about how you would characterize going from on-camera to off-camera, and the feeling of being 24/7 nationally, and all the changes between those different positions. So how does the National Renewable Energy Laboratory fit into the national science—federal science mission overall? What's their niche? Obviously, it's in the name to an extent. Tell us what some of their activities are and then how you communicate those activities, and who you communicate them with on a typical day on the job or in your work life.

Kerrin:

Sure. So I started at NREL in 2019, so I'm still learning all the ways, so forgive me. I'm just going to read the mission directly. “The mission of The National Renewable Energy Laboratory is to advance the science and engineering of energy efficiency, sustainable transportation, and renewable power technologies, and provide the knowledge to integrate and optimize energy systems.” My role with the lab is with a certain program, so there's a lot of work and a lot of research going on across the lab, so we kind of have niches in the communications department, which is huge, by the way, I think over 100 or so in the communications department alone.

Rex:

Wow.

Kerrin:

Yeah, it's huge. So my role is within a program called the State, Local and Tribal Program, really excellent work going on by several researchers. And in this program, NREL works with local jurisdictions to support the development of efficient, affordable, equitable and resilience energy systems that address local energy and infrastructure challenges. So to communicate that, it really depends on a day to day basis, the program has a wide reaching breadth of research going on and different projects. And so my day to day is typically talking with all of those different points of contact for each project going on and talking strategically about, “How are we going to communicate this?” Be it developing their technical reports and those papers.

Kerrin:

Or it might be developing the website, it might be developing conference material, videos—which is one of my favorite things to do is the video and kind of creative side. It's probably my broadcaster [side] coming out in me there. And so every day's a little bit different. It might be talking with each project group and project team and developing those plans of how we're going to get the word out about this research, so every day's a little bit different.

Kelly:

It's great that you still get to do video and get that out of your system because I was going to say, you probably do miss being on air. You miss that sometimes, even though it was a tough work-life balance. You now at least get to have a little bit of that in your role now.

Kerrin:

Yeah, absolutely. I mean, it was totally a transition to go from an on camera role, on television all the time, and now I get the work-life balance. It's kind of weird to shut off my computer at 5:00 and say, "I'm done." What? What is that like? But I do get the creative opportunities, and that's probably my favorite part of the work that I do is when we get to create fun and unique outreach content like videos. Those are probably my favorite niche there just because I enjoy the writing, development, the whole process of production, even editing sometimes, even though it doesn't have to be me.

Kerrin:

We've got a huge and very, very talented communications team, so that's a bit different going from doing it all as a broadcaster. You're writing, editing, producing your own packages, doing the interviews, to now tapping into a team of super talented people. I'm talking really great designers, great videographers and video editors, writers. We've got a whole team there that can really excel in their area of expertise. And so my role in particular is coordinating those projects no matter what they may be, tapping into the right team and gathering everyone to make those products happen.

Kelly:

So is the communication, is it public outreach as well? Or is it more internal? What is the outreach portion?

Kerrin:

It's a little bit of everything, depending on the project, so I won't really go into any details of certain projects. But depending on what the purpose is of that particular project, it might be talking to an external audience, sharing what the lab is doing in our research, or it might be more of an internal audience. We do work with the Department of Energy, so it might be talking to those folks and kind of the value of the research that's going on across the lab. So it depends on the project, every one's a little bit different. And again, that's part of my role as the strategy side is to determine, "Who is the audience? Who are we talking to? And how do we want to effectively communicate that?"

Kerrin:

Another thing that I really love about my job is that I can still add in the occasional meteorology at NREL. I had a really great opportunity to join in one of the research projects to contribute meteorologically. It was a virtual workshop run by NREL to support energy resilience and future planning in another country. My role was to shed light on the atmosphere or processes as it relates to forecasting and uncertainty in the short and long-term, basically to inform and help this country understand the impacts on the energy sector resilience. This is really critical for countries that currently lack the infrastructure to incorporate accurate and timely forecasts into their every day and future preparedness plans. So I really thought that was a great opportunity for me to jump in and put on my meteorology hat. Even though it's not my primary role at NREL, I love that I was able to contribute that way for this project.

Rex:

What do you see as some of the largest challenges that you face either in your current science communication field, or in broadcasting, which you've had lots of experience in? You've talked about burnout and how a lot of meteorologists face that roadblock in their broadcast career. But tell us more about how you would present the pros and cons of your career and your field to someone else that's curious.

Kerrin:

For meteorology, it's a passion for so many who are in this field. You have to be okay with the fact that weather never stops, so that could mean in certain meteorology jobs, that weekends and holidays and vacations aren't always a guarantee. That's probably the con. High impact events always seemed to fall on my planned vacations. But the truth is, it is a science that's still being uncovered. We know a lot about the atmosphere and how the weather works, but there is a social science side that has huge room for improvement, so that's a pro. There's so much to be explored, relaying not just a good forecast, but the impact to your audience.

Kerrin:

And the same could be said about my role in renewable energy and energy efficiency communication. These are complex topics, and so to find the right language to effectively communicate is ever changing, depending on with whom you're talking. It's certainly the case in meteorology. Right? There's jargon galore, and you could go really deep into the dynamics of the atmosphere, but if you're talking to a viewer on TV, that's not really going to help them understand what they want to hear, the weather for tomorrow. That's all they want. Right? I find this a similar challenge in my role at NREL, especially now being closer to a research community. There's a lot of technical terminology.

Kerrin:

And when you're talking to a community to help them understand the value of maybe transitioning to clean energy, you need to speak the same language and hear what's important to them to most effectively communicate between both parties. I think this has been always been a challenge, effective communication in science. And so there will continue to be a need for great communicators. Maybe that's a pro and a con.

Kelly:

So we've learned previously that you worked on films, on stage, you provided voice over talent. So how did that merge into your broadcast work? And why was that exciting for you?

Kerrin:

There's something really magical to me about blending science and performance to make it entertaining. I think I've heard the word "edutainment" go around before, and that word just kind of gives me a little buzz inside. I'm super excited about that. Going back to things like *Twister*, watching that movie, it was blending science, but it was being shown in an exciting way, so it got you interested. As a kid, I loved watching *Bill Nye the Science Guy* because it is exciting to learn about science. And so I think that's probably where the marriage of my two worlds have blended together.

Kerrin:

Doing work in theater, you're learning to present and be effective in communication. You can't get on stage and mumble through your lines because no one will hear you. Doing movies, there's a certain value of production that goes into it, and all the pieces that come together to make that movie happen, so cool. And it's kind of the same thing. Sometimes I think about that as I'm doing my work as a project manager in science communication. We're pulling all these different pieces together to make an end product happen. And I don't know, I really like that side of it, of coordinating everything to come up with this really fun and interesting and educational product that goes out to the world. I just think that's a really cool blend of everything. And keeping true to the science is what's most important. Right?

Kerrin:

It's being able to clearly, effectively, but accurately communicate science and climate and weather. It's a tough challenge because there's a lot to it. It's a really technical topic. But if you can make it entertaining in a way that people absorb and take away something from it, then my job here is done. But it'd be really cool some day to blend the meteorology with doing the meteorology behind the scenes for a movie. That'd be so cool. I always thought that was kind of my dream job, and maybe it still is. I'm not sure.

Rex:

Well, maybe there's a *Twister 2* in the works.

Kerrin:

Maybe.

Rex:

Or another volcano movie.

Kerrin:

Oh, I'm sure there is.

Kelly:

I'm sure there is.

Rex:

So you also do some volunteer work, including for the AMS. Right now, you currently serve on the AMS Board on Continuing Professional Development. How'd you get involved with the AMS? And then when did you find out about this board? And what do you do in your role on the board?

Kerrin:

Yes. So the AMS is fantastic, so shout out to you all for all the great opportunities that you enable and present to the membership here because for me, going to the annual conferences is my excitement of the year. I love going to that annual conference, networking, learning, understanding what's going on around the community. And so I remember being at a conference a couple years ago and just kind of networking, talking with other folks on boards, and just realizing that you could get involved more with

the AMS excited me. So I looked around to see which boards had openings and landed on the Board on Continuing Professional Development because, I don't know, it's just kind of the lifelong learner in me. I think that's a really cool niche to just continue to develop yourself professionally. And I'm always striving to do that as well.

Kerrin:

So the chair of the board asked me to be on, and so I'm a member at the moment. And the whole purpose of the board is to basically oversee and maintain the continuing education program of the society and to improve and expand upon it. Oftentimes, our large role is to review the short courses that happen both at the annual meeting, but also virtually. It's been a great opportunity for a lot of folks, I'm sure, these days. If you have not done one of these, I highly recommend it. It's a great learning opportunity to really dive into a focused topic, if you're at the annual conference, again, adds value even more so for that time you're there. And the board also supports the online webinars that have become even more valuable and frequent through COVID. It's been really great to be able to provide these opportunities to members, and in some cases, the public, when we otherwise couldn't be together in person to help people continue to develop.

Kerrin:

I look forward to continuing on the board. And it is worth noting, I believe we're looking for a couple of members, including a student role in early 2022, I believe. So if you're interested, get involved.

Kelly:

And I noticed that you've done a lot more social media posts recently through the board, so that's an excellent way to get the information out to the membership as well.

Kerrin:

Yes, yes. We kick started the Twitter account because weather Twitter is just oh so active, so we had to get involved. You can follow the board on Twitter @AMS_BCPD if you're interested.

Rex:

That's great. Well, Kerrin, we're so grateful for everything you've told us about your career, starting in Vermont, going to Florida, ending up in Colorado, the whole story. However, before you go, we always like to ask our guests a non-meteorological question before we end the show. We've talked a lot about performance and movies, so tell us. What's one of your all time favorite movies?

Kerrin:

That's a hard one. What's my favorite breath of air? There's so many great movies. But I did think about this question, so I'm not stumbling over my thoughts here. *Jurassic Park* is such a great movie. Actually, there's a reason behind it. Not only is it an awesome cinematic feat for its time, but it really did play a role in kind of that passion for production that I've always had. I remember watching the making of that movie with my brother and sister when we were young, and just over and over and over again, and learning how the movie was made, everything from the animatronics to the computer generated imagery. And just making that whole movie was such an incredible feat for its time. It came out in 1993, I think. I remember going to the movie theater and seeing this at—I won't say what age—but a really young age. And even the movie theater folks were like, "Is she too young to be here? I don't think she should be in this film. She's too young for this." But I just remember being inspired watching it.

Kerrin:

Fun fact, there's a weather reference in there too. The tropical storm that was part of the storyline, it was also a real hurricane that hit during filming. It was [Hurricane] Iniki in 1992 that hit Hawaii while they were filming *Jurassic Park*. And I believe there's some real footage, a little bit of the storm that made it into the movie. And the coolest part is just recently in July, I got the opportunity to see *Jurassic Park* at the Red Rocks Amphitheater, which if you're familiar with that in Colorado, it's a really epic music venue—like really epic music venue—outdoor space, has this incredible sound. So I went to see *Jurassic Park* recently at that venue. And it just made me fall in love with it all over again.

Kelly:

Oh, my God. That sounds so awesome. And I have to say, I saw that when I was not super young, but that part where the Tyrannosaurus Rex tries to get the kids in the Jeep, I'm terrified of that part. I still freak out every time that scene comes on, but it was such a great movie and it still holds up. It really does.

Kerrin:

Absolutely. Yeah, it's one of the faves for sure.

Rex:

Yeah. I actually watched it myself I think about two weekends ago. I watch it about once a year. It's one of my all time favorites. “Life finds a way” is the classic quote from I think Ian Malcolm, who's the scientist, mathematician guy. And it's wonderful how intimate and immediate and sensory it is. And then you look at some of the later more CGI heavy endeavors in the Jurassic Park franchise and it doesn't have the same feeling compared to, like you said, the way they produced that original film, how much they really put the actors in this real life environment is stunning. So definitely a movie to go down in history as a classic.

Kerrin:

Absolutely, one of my faves forever.

Kelly:

Well, thanks so much for joining us, Kerrin, and sharing your work experiences with us. We really appreciate it.

Kerrin:

Thank you so much for having me. This was a blast.

Rex:

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

Rex:

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. 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.