Transcript of Matthew Cappucci, a Meteorologist at MyRadar, The Washington Post, and Fox5DC.

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 Matt Moll 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.

Matt Moll:

We're happy to introduce today's guest, Matthew Cappucci, a meteorologist at MyRadar, the Washington Post, and Fox 5 DC. Welcome, Matthew, and thanks very much for joining us today.

Matthew Cappucci:

Hey, thanks so much for having me. Good to be here.

Kelly Savoie:

Matthew, you're pretty well known for having enthusiasm and a passion for meteorology. What sparked your interest in this field?

Matthew Cappucci:

That's a really good question. Honestly, I've loved it pretty much as long as I can remember. When I was about two or three years old, I was obsessed with two things, the little downspout type things they have at, I don't know why, landfills, the methane release things. I don't know why I like those. I thought they were like big candy canes and then anemometers spinning on people's roofs, and I couldn't figure out how those things could move without anything touching them. And then I learned about wind and different types of wind, and when I was about four or five, my parents were watching House Hunters or a show like that, and they had two water spouts in the background. And suddenly like that, I was hooked. And it's really just grown over time.

Kelly Savoie:

So did you know right away that you wanted to pursue a degree in meteorology or, in high school, did you have any mentors who kind of filled you in on, "Hey, there's a field that you can get into that's specifically for this?"

Matthew Cappucci:

So I always knew that I wanted to do weather somehow. When I was little. I thought it'd be storm chasing. When I was in middle school, I wasn't sure if I'd be doing meteorology for work, but I knew I'd always wind up sort of on this path. And really towards late middle school, high school, I essentially codified my love of wanting to be on air. I desperately wanted to be in front of the camera, not because I wanted to be on camera, but really because I wanted to have that conversation, that ability to sort of interact with viewers and readers and listeners and get folks as excited about the weather as I am. Back in middle school, elementary school, when you're a weather nerd, there aren't really many outlets to talk weather with people unless you're watching the evening newscast. And I always watched Channel 5, WCVB, you guys are up there in Boston, y'all know Boston, Harvey Leonard, and it was the only three minutes per day when I got to geek out about weather and talk it with someone.

And I wanted to be that person in the future who would be on air, people would be listening to, talking weather with, and I could sort of get that enthusiasm out there. And so really it was always that love of TV. I got to say in terms of mentors, the AMS, and not just because this is an AMS podcast, but you guys have opened so many doors, from letting me present at 14, 15 to all the connections you've helped foster over the years and all the guidance you've delivered. I mean, the AMS really was sort of that pivotal inflection point that showed me what was possible and sort of connected me to the people who I need to know.

Kelly Savoie:

Matthew, while attending Harvard, you referred to yourself as a little department of one and you created your own program from scratch. You have to tell us how you went about making that happen.

Matthew Cappucci:

So to be honest, I never wanted to go to Harvard. I only wound up there because it was pretty affordable. Harvard has the best endowment, so they wanted to charge only 8,500 when every other school would be 30 or 40,000. And I knew that was kind of outside my budget. And I had applied for outside scholarships and stuff, but Harvard was the most affordable. So I wound up going there, but in advance, I had looked at the option to do a special concentration, essentially design one's own major from scratch. It's very unusual. Very few people do it. Really, we only have one person every year, every two years who sort of pulls it off. So it's meant to be difficult because they don't want most folks doing it. But I was looking at the classes and I realized we have atmospheric sciences classes in the Harvard Grad School, and there are some over at MIT.

And all the puzzle pieces were sort of there for a really good atmospheric sciences major. They just hadn't been linked yet. So I went to Harvard, sort on a whim, thinking "I'm going to give this a shot." And prior to Harvard, I had written for newspapers back in high school and middle school. And one day when I was 14 or 15, some reader wrote in saying they loved one of my articles and they signed an Eric J. Heller. And I didn't think too much of that. And at the time, I emailed him a thank-you note, had no idea who he was, he had just written a letter to the editor. And I thought, okay, that's that.

When I wound up at Harvard, three or four years later, I remember wandering through the Jefferson Laboratories looking for an exam. I was hopelessly lost. I had hated Harvard up to that point. It was my first midterm, couldn't find the room. And come to find out the exam had been canceled, which is why I couldn't find it. But I sort of, after not finding this exam, I was convinced I had failed out of Harvard. And I sat down in this random place in the Jefferson Laboratories and started to cry. And while I'm sitting there, I look across the hallway and there's this random nameplate that says, Eric J. Heller, Harvard.

Kelly Savoie:

Oh my gosh, what?

Matthew Cappucci:

I was like, wait a second. Is this a common name? So I knocked on the door, I'm like, "Hi, I don't know if you remember me, if you're the person who wrote this letter to the editor four years ago." And he remembered me. And it turns out that he was not just this random reader of a small town newspaper. He was an award-winning physicist and femtochemist and all these crazy accolades. And we talked for about 30, 40 minutes. And he was asking me, "how do you plan to do a special concentration here? Do you have an advisor?" I was like, "No, it's going to take me forever to find one, blah, blah, blah." He said, "you just found one." And just like that, this random reader from years prior who turned out to be this award-winning physicist, offered to help me make the first and only ever atmospheric sciences undergrad at Harvard.

And so it was chaotic, but it was good chaos. Everything about my life is a little chaotic. I went to MIT three days a week for classes over there. Took sometimes seven classes per semester instead of just four. Some classes were sort of classes of just me and a professor or teacher. There were, on Thursdays of my junior year, I had to make appearances in three different classes in one hour between Harvard and MIT. It was like, I need the time turner that Hermione had in Harry Potter. But somehow we pulled it off. And it's funny, there are still folks who are like, "Matthew's not really a meteorologist. He doesn't have a real meteorology degree." And no, it's a bonafide atmospheric sciences degree, an unconventional path, but made it work. I got to say the department Christmas parties were a little bit lonesome and there was never anyone to drive home from them either, but it wound up working out.

Kelly Savoie:

Oh, that is an amazing story to make that happen. And so now for anybody going forward, is that set up, if somebody else wanted to major in meteorology? Is there kind of an outline for what you did?

Matthew Cappucci:

So to be honest, they haven't made it a department because I took classes from MIT too, about 25 to 30% of my meteorology classes were there. So they can't have their own little department. What can be done though, I would say another student could probably come in, petition to do a special concentration. And because I already did it, there would be precedent. So they could say, "Hey, let's just copy what Cappucc did, and he's shown it's feasible. We can do it again."

Kelly Savoie:

Nice.

Matt Moll:

So what opportunities did you pursue that you knew would be beneficial to securing a job in your profession?

Matthew Cappucci:

So to be honest, Harvard was an interesting school. I mean, I got the knowledge, but Harvard was not sort of streamlined to get people into broadcast. I look at so many schools like Lyndon State, Penn State, Plymouth State, all these schools that have really good broadcast programs, and that was never Harvard.

But I mean, I never had a graphic system, anything to work with practicing the graphics. I wound up discovering that Harvard had this teeny little green screen studio that no one knew about in the third floor basement of the library, but it was a $4 million recording studio. So one day I knock on the door, I'm like, "Hey, I'd like to practice doing the weather. Can we make it happen?" And for three years it was me and PowerPoint behind me, but I practiced and it was another one of those things that we made work.

I feel like Harvard is a golden ticket. You can't do everything, but you can do anything you want. And I used my sort of golden ticket to travel. And so I traveled a hundred thousand miles my senior year. I went storm chasing every year. I went and studied abroad in Vietnam, Morocco and Bolivia. I went to the Arctic to volunteer with a plankton research mission, which had nothing to do with my major, but I figured everyone else will have these polished demo reels. I have PowerPoint behind me, that's not going to work. So instead, I figured if I could cobble together me in the field doing actual meteorology, storm chasing, that would work.

I think the fact that I posted on Twitter, all these videos of me all over the place being like, "Hey gang, we're talking about volcanoes today." Or "Hey gang, here's a tornado. How's this work?" I think folks A, saw the enthusiasm, but B, it's much more tangible, much more real than being in a studio. So when I graduated it was sort of a different story. I had this weird cobbled-together demo reel, but no one would take it seriously, partly because I had no formal experience as does anyone graduating college, they have no formal experience, but partly because it wasn't conventional. The best offer I got was $30,000, which I just knew wouldn't really be sort of enough and not out of greed. But that's not enough for anyone to really live on in today's day and age.

And the unfortunate reality is that in broadcast, a lot of smaller markets paid poverty wages, in fact, less in poverty because it's salary. And that was really distressing to me, especially because coming from a place like Harvard, all my friends in the lunch table, the social circle, they all had these fancy-schmanzy, hundred thousand, $150,000 a year jobs. And I mean, I can't get anyone to pay me more than 30. And it was such a blow to my ego, and I think it'd be a blow to anyone's ego to think everyone else has their life set up, they've been recruited. I can't get anyone to return my calls. And I remember going and I skipped graduation because I'd rather storm chase instead, went down to Nebraska, sort of spent the last of the money I had storm chasing and that was it. And I drove home and I was like, "Now, what?"

And I was so depressed for about a week after that thinking I blew it. Why did I go into broadcast meteorology, why did I choose this major? And the phone rang and it was Jason Samenow from the Washington Post whom I'd worked for as a freelancer for two or three years. And he said, "Hey, apply for this opening. You're not going to be an editor, but we think we might be able to make something work. We'll craft a position for you." And I did, and I'm not going to say it was my dream job because it wasn't, I didn't want to be a weather writer, but it was the only thing that opened up. It paid decently. And it was Washington, DC. I had dreamt of moving to DC since I was 14. I had gone to weather camp and I loved it so much. I came down here, DC, for weather camp and I loved it so much I kept the same MetroCard ever since. And I said, "I have to live in DC someday."

So I thought, you know what? This is the only option. It's in DC. If nothing else, I'd like to be in this market someday. This is a foot in the door. And I came down and things kind of went from there.

Kelly Savoie:

That's so great. And I guess the moral here is, well first of all, you do what you have to do. You didn't have the typical reel, which some stations want that, but you knew people, you met people, and Jason was somebody that you networked with and he reached out to you. So networking is key. And it sounds like you met a lot of the right people at the right time. So that's great.

Matthew Cappucci:

There have been so many weird connections over, I shouldn't say weird connections, but just bizarre sort of twists of fate that have come from these random connections. And it's just been amazing. And I know this is an AMS podcast, but I have to plug, all these connections came from that broadcast conference when I was 14, 15 years old. And in any other organization, if a 15 year old took to the podium, people would be like, "Why is he here? This is for adults. Why is this person here?" And only in the AMS would people come up to me after, talk to me, be my friend. I mean, I remember standing in the breakfast line at the broadcast conference in Nashville back in 2013 and seeing all these meteorologists who outside the field, people aren't starstruck by them, but I was so starstruck and petrified to talk to them.

Brian Norcross was sitting there having breakfast, and in my head I'm like, oh my gosh, that's Brian Norcross. And now we text back and forth, he's a great mentor. And all these people, admittedly, my legs still shake when I'm on the phone with some of these people. And it's the funniest thing because I'm also a TV meteorologist now too, but I'm still starstruck by my colleagues, which... These folks are so nice, and they'll do anything to help folks along the line. And I hope I can pay it forward someday the way that folks did for me.

Matt Moll:

That's great. So could you walk us through what is a typical day as a meteorologist for you? And I know it sounds like there's probably not very much that's typical, but if you could walk us through just generally, what's a day in the life of Matthew Cappucci like?

Matthew Cappucci:

So my days have evolved so much over the past two years. I feel like this is kind of going to be a lengthy story time, but when I used to be at the Washington Post full time and I'd write three or four articles per day, it was a hamster wheel, nonstop writing, and Jason was an amazing boss, but it'd be nonstop writing. And one thing that helped, and this will sound horrible, but from an employment standpoint, the pandemic helped me sort of redefine my workday, redefine my workflow. Obviously it was horrible for a lot of people. I am sort of extroverted, obviously. I like getting out there. And the Post for me was this giant study hall where 800 people would be sitting there and no one would talk to each other. And it was killing me. And again, I love the people there, but I'm more high energy, I need to get out and about.

And so when the pandemic came and I could work from home, I thought, this is great. If I'm going there to talk to nobody and sit at a desk, I can just do it at home, save the time. But then I started thinking, why am I sitting at home? I can storm chase, I can do whatever. So I'd go out and storm chase. So in the mornings I would write, in the afternoons, I would storm chase, and it was awesome. And over the course of two years, between May 2020 and May 2021, I made an even more sort of substantial demo reel of me in front of a F3 tornado or me in a softball size hailstorm. And this demo reel was really sort of taking shape. And my social media audience grew. Around the same time, I was doing hits for the local NPR affiliate WAMU.

And we know that NPR in general has sort of a very flat style. And I don't. And I was trying to think of a way to bring folks together. The pandemic can be very rough. A lot of folks were isolated, they needed human connection. And so I would start every forecast with well gang, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, just to bring folks together like, hey, we're all one gang, we're all one group. And that took off like wildfire. People far and wide across the DMV, down here in DC, loved that. And they responded to it in a very wholesome way. Now I was getting thousands of nice comments and nice letters from people saying, "you have no idea what these 45 seconds each Thursday afternoon or each Monday afternoon mean. It's

the only time I sort of stop and look up, or it's the only time I stopped focusing on all the cruddy news around me."

And that sort of really helped me grow my following. At the same time too, because Zoom took off, there were these agencies, BBC News, DW News, that started reaching out and saying, "Hey, could you do the US weather or could you do a hit from your living room on this hurricane?" And so then I got a conventional demo reel because I was doing actual news, BBC World News. And so in May 2021, I saw this opening at Fox 5 here in DC. And on a whim, I applied and I sent in this cobbled-together demo reel of all my different, me in front of the tornado, me this, me almost falling through hot spring. And the cover letter was basically, I sent a cover letter and I sent about 1500 kind comments from viewers and listeners from my other engagements.

And I basically said, look, I'm not the conventional person. I don't have the crisp on-air polished format. What I have is passion. That's what we need in 2021. That's what we need in 2022. I've done the weather in front of a tornado, I've done the weather from the eye of a hurricane. I can do it in front of a green screen. First month might not be perfect, but I can do it. Screw my age, let my experience speak for itself. And to my surprise, I got a note back from the news director saying," Hey, would you like to meet?" And his name's Paul McGonagle, and instantly, as soon as the camera flicked on for the Zoom interview, I was like, "wow, this is not my Wall Street or my hedge fund interviews." This guy, it was so conversational. And it turns out this boss of mine lived in Sandwich, Massachusetts, which as you know is about four miles from where I grew up.

His neighborhood is where I took piano lessons when I was little. His son and I have mutual friends from the Cape. It was such a bizarre connection. And without meaning to, as he's asking me these questions about how I approach weather, I slipped into character and I essentially did a real time forecast or real time explainer. And to my surprise, one interview and I got the gig, but then my first day on air was July 1st of last year. Keep in mind, I was 23 at the time. This is the most educated TV market in the country, one of the top TV markets in the country. How at 23, with no experience, can you walk into that and expect it to go well? And I've been joking for weeks, I can't do a typical intro. I can't talk about myself. What we need is a tornado.

And I know that sounds horrible, but if there's something for me to talk about, I'll be good. Lo and behold, they're getting ready to introduce me. Tornado warning.

Kelly Savoie:

Oh my gosh.

Matthew Cappucci:

So they're like, "Cappucci, here's a mic, do your thing." And that evening we had another tornado warning. I happened to have finished my day, I was at a pub next door with one of the anchors who had bought me dinner. And I was like, "I got to get back. It's time to go." And I ran inside, rolled up my sleeves, James Spann style, and did the weather. And again, I know this story is long, but it gets better. So it went so well, and I was like, this is sort of my baptism by fire in the DC market. And people responded. And over the first two months, I would get very nerdy on air because I wanted to give people more.

It was almost like I was trying to play Doogie Howser because I realized to be taken seriously at this age, at this point in my life, I need to prove I know my stuff, but I don't want to do it in sort of an esoteric way. I want to say, "Hey, have you ever noticed xyz? Did you notice that weird sound last night? The reason you could hear that was because of an inversion" and walk people through the science and make it conversational and people loved it. So then come September first of last year, and for days I've been

warning folks, tornadoes are coming, we can talk potential tornadoes in DC which you don't really go on the air four days out, five days out and say, "Hey, potential tornadoes are coming." And I was really going out on a limb, especially because this was two months into my career, and I had been badgering my bosses days in advance like, "Hey, please schedule me for this Wednesday. Please schedule me for this Wednesday, I got to be here."

And we were overstaffed as it was. So they kept saying, "no, no, no." And the day came, I had to go in for a promo shoot, to basically stand there with my suit and smile, and then I had to go home. And I remember standing there and being like, "Hey, you got to keep me. It's an hour 'til tornado time." And they're like, "Matthew, we're overstaffed." And I kind of grumbled, "fine, I'll do it myself." And I sprinted out of the studio, I'm running down the street in Bethesda, Maryland, literally taking off my shirt, throwing on a T-shirt. And I drive as fast as I can to Annapolis, Maryland on a hunch. And lo and behold, an EF-2 tornado touches down in right in front of me, goes across the street, rips the roof off a building, and I'm there in the side of the road with my iPhone going, "Hey gang, I'm Fox 5 meteorologist Matt Cappucci, here's a tornado, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah." We had in on air in 20 minutes.

Kelly Savoie:

I'm sure... I was going to say, I'm sure they used it.

Matthew Cappucci:

Oh yes. And then I was on for 11 hours straight. I did the news via Zoom because we couldn't get a crew out to me fast enough. So I just did the news first via phone, then via Zoom. And that week I got a note from my boss saying, "we have bigger plans for you, let's talk." And then I got a full-time offer. But weirdly enough I said no to the full-time offer because when you're 23, 24 years old, you want to travel, you want to, I want to be everywhere. And so... Only Fox 5, only Paul, Paul said, "you know what? Let's give you an unusual contract. We'll use you essentially halftime. You can travel when you need to. You can storm chase when you need to. You can work for these other organizations and we'll take you when we can get you and you can negotiate for the rate you want." And to my surprise, I named a number and he said, "Sure."

Kelly Savoie:

That's incredible. That really is.

Matthew Cappucci:

He's such an unusual boss. I mean, he doesn't, there's no micromanagement whatsoever at the station. He's like everyone's sort of glorified coach. And it's so unusual. So now a typical day for me might mean getting up at two, doing the morning news, writing a Washington Post article, partially during commercial breaks, partially when I have downtime, coming home, filming something for MyRadar, doing the radio in the afternoon and it might come out, and then I also have students who I mentor and coach as well, that takes a couple hours per day. It's such an unusual day.

Kelly Savoie:

Do you sleep?

Matthew Cappucci:

I don't enough. And heck, I wrote most of my book while doing the weather during commercial breaks. But here's the thing, I am so unbelievably blessed to have the employers I have, to have the flexibility I have. I mean, one time I was in Texas and storm chasing and there was a tornado warning in DC and I said, "Paul, I think I could be valuable today." And he said, "I think you're right. Zoom in and do the tornado warning via Zoom." And I did, and viewers loved it. I got folks writing and saying, it was reassuring to hear your voice even though you were far away. And he'll try anything. And all these, none of my companies micromanage me. They all say, "Cappucci, what you're doing is working, do it." And I'm unbelievably blessed, because to be able to do that for companies I like who like me, and to do it for a good amount of pay, I mean, I think they pay me more than they should.

And for that reason, I'm going to essentially milk this as much as I can. I will work 70, 80 hours a week because you never know how long this can last. There might be a day when they say, "Matthew, we don't need you anymore. "At this point, I'm 25, I'm being paid more than I should. And I'm just so lucky to be paid good money to do what I love, that I'm going to work, I'll work myself into the grave if that's what it takes. But as long as people want me around, I'll be there.

Kelly Savoie:

And I mean, it's such a variety too. So is that what you like most about the job is that you have all these different types of things that you're doing, but they're all meteorology related and it's what you love?

Matthew Cappucci:

Yeah, I mean, honestly, I almost wonder if I have a bit of ADD because I don't doing one thing for more than a couple of hours. So I love the fact that I can do the morning weather and then I can do a Washington Post article and then I can do something for MyRadar. And I can also, Fox periodically sends me up for these field trips. They texted me the other day, "Hey, can you go to a winery on Wednesday?" I said, "twist my arm, I'll go to the winery." So it's so much fun and I love that I can do international hits too. A week for me might also involve doing BBC News, DW News, making an appearance in Australia, doing a podcast. And it's such a variety, but it's so much fun and I love it.

And anytime a school visit or anytime anyone needs anything, I will instantly say yes because the only, I mean, heck, there have been homeschoolers before who have reached out and said, "Hey, we're not a school, but my son loves following you via the weather or loves whatever. Would you swing by for a 30 minute presentation?" I'll hop on Zoom and do it because the only reason I get to do what I do is because people follow, people watch, people listen. And this city has embraced me in a way no other city has or perhaps would, and I owe it to all these people. I mean, heck, I've shown up at birthday parties before because people wanted to meet me. I'll do whatever folks want me to do because they're the reason I get to do what it is that I do.

Kelly Savoie:

And so you touched on briefly about MyRadar. So what is that position?

Matthew Cappucci:

So it's another one of these weird positions. All my positions in all these companies didn't exist before I got there. Fox essentially created this role for me. Washington Post created, they don't have part-time weather people. And when I went to Fox 5, I essentially said, "Hey, I'll give you 20 hours a week, that'll have to do." And they're like, "sure, we'll make it work." And so MyRadar reached out to me a while ago

and they said, "Hey, we love your stuff. Would you do stuff for us on contract?" I said, "yeah." And then they wanted me to go full time and I kept saying, "no, no, no, I'm not moving to Florida." Finally, I proved to them that I can do the weather from my living room and it can look damned good. And so they sent me essentially a mobile studio. You can't see it, but there's a prompter, fancy lighting, all this stuff, studio lighting over there, and I can do the weather from my living room and it works.

My style for them is very much technical in that I'm like, let's talk the main weather story of the day. Let's do a weather briefing. And folks love that style. And so that's what I do with them. They also take whatever I give them. So I went down to chase the hurricane and they funded that and they sort of gave me the resources I needed to. And so I can sort of storm chase on their dime, which is awesome. They're paying me to do what I love, come tornado season, they'll fly me out to chase tornadoes and it's a win-win because they get to educate viewers by having me there explaining, here's a rear flank downdraft, here's what this means, here's whatever. And I get to do what I love for people who I love.

Just everything so far has been great. And there have been a couple national networks that have been flirty so far. And I'll cross that bridge when I come to it. But ultimately I love where I am. I love these people that I work for. And the fact that I have three or four different employers who share, that doesn't happen in other industries. That doesn't happen in TV. But Paul, Andy, Jason, they make it happen and it's my dream come true.

Matt Moll:

So what would you say are some of the biggest challenges that you face working in the field right now?

Matthew Cappucci:

I think one of the biggest challenges is that I'm under a microscope always. And I mean that in a couple ways. In terms of the public, I used to be a high schooler, then I was a college person. I went from a regular student who no one cares about to a public figure over the course of a year. But it's a very gradual process. So now I sort have to compose myself as a public figure. And I mean, I'm me on air and off air and I'm me on social media. I'll tweet about my Waffle House escapades or all these things, but I sort just have to remember that aspect of it. The other thing too that's been a little bit tricky is that because I'm sort of this weird, I'm all over the map in terms of I post very technical stuff, but I also have to make it accessible.

But I'm also a broadcast meteorologist, but I'm also kind of not, I try to maintain a level of technical but accessible. And there are times when other meteorologists will sort come after me on social media being like, you over-simplified or you this or you that. And I found there's almost a bit of, I don't know, animosity is not the right word, but within the field of meteorology, there are different lunch tables. And it frustrates me to see that there are different lunch tables who will come after one another and tear folks down rather than build them up. And we see it all the time on social media in general. But interestingly enough, when I get of negative tweets, it's never from the public. It's always from a few folks who don't like what it is I do.

And that's to be expected across the board. But that's sort of been the biggest challenge in of realizing that I can't please everybody. I just got to do things the way I do. It's working so far. I'm beholden to my viewers. Those are the folks who I serve. And it was tough initially. It really was tough to be like, why don't XYZ people like me? And now I'm just like, you know what? I do my best. And to hell with the rest.

Kelly Savoie:

You can't please everyone. That's just the way it is. So you've done a lot. You're pretty young, you've done a lot. So we have a couple questions for you. So what's one thing that's happened during your career that you're the most proud of, and is there anything you wish you had done differently?

Matthew Cappucci:

That's a really good question. I think the most proud of was probably the Annapolis tornado because I mean, let's be honest, has anyone on the east coast ever got a tornado in their DMA? Nevermind chase and F2 tornado in Maryland, got video of it and stood there and been like, "Hey, I'm so and so", then got it on air within two months of starting their job. I mean, I'm really proud to be the youngest top 10 market meteorologist in the country, and it means the world that folks took a chance on me. Things I would do differently. I mean, there are times when, especially a couple years ago, I sort went into things with a little more confidence than I wish I had. And that's a blessing and a curse. Confidence is what sort of sells people. People follow along because I mean, it takes a certain level of confidence to go on air and be like X, Y, Z, this is how it's going to go.

There are times that I wish I had backed down a little bit more. And there are times I wish on social media, I just dropped things because it's not worth bickering. Folks don't care if you're right. They care whether or not other people say you're right or they care whether or not... It's a telephone game. So there are times that I wish I'd backed down with that, but ultimately I'm really liking where my career's going so far. I think the biggest thing for me would have been, I wish I talked slower, but I wish I had known when I was two or three years younger than I am now that life has a plan, it really does. All these things that should not have worked out somehow did. I made this bucket list when I was probably in fifth or sixth grade, and I had things that I thought would be feasible, and I had things that I thought would never be feasible, but were just kind of pipe dreams.

I remember I always wished even back in high school that someday I could afford a plane ticket or I could afford to storm chase just once. And now I storm chase all the time and I get to fly around all the time. I remember thinking maybe someday an employer will buy me a plane ticket just once. And now that's routine and I'm just like, I get to of live my childhood dream. The other thing too, I had always wanted to be a top 10 market meteorologist by the time I turned 24, which statistically is not going to happen. And yet I made it with less than a month and a half to spare. I always wanted to publish a book by the time I turned 25, 11 days to spare. And so at this point, I mean, those are all just, that's such coincidence that, and I know somebody upstairs is sort of helping me out. So at this point I know life is a plan and I'm just along for the ride and it's been a really fun ride so far.

Kelly Savoie:

Yeah. Well you have a lot to be proud of, that's for sure. And this is a good segue about the book.

Matt Moll:

Absolutely. You mentioned the book, Matthew, and you recently wrote Looking Up: The True Adventures of a Storm-Chasing Weather Nerd. So can you tell us what prompted you to write that book and what was that process like?

Matthew Cappucci:

So honestly, y'all might remember Sharpie Gate, which as a meteorologist is tough to forget, when a former US president drew on the National Hurricane Center's map and stirred quite the kerfuffle. I

helped break that story at the Washington Post and it got a lot of media attention. And I got a letter from a company, from actually a group here in Alexandria, Virginia shortly thereafter that said, "Hey, we noticed you just started at the Washington Post full-time. You write in an unusually accessible manner. It's very conversational and you seem more engaged with the weather than most people. Had you ever thought about writing a book?" And I wrote back within 30 seconds, yes, in all caps and exclamation points, and I probably scared them. When can we meet? So we met up and we tossed around some ideas and initially I thought I'll write about Hurricane Harvey and the Houston story because I don't know how many folks have really told that story in the way that I wanted to tell it.

But it didn't really resonate with them because it wasn't personal. I wasn't there for it. I had no involvement. And things kind of fell apart during the pandemic a little bit. I didn't hear that much from them. And we didn't have much... Publishing sort of slowed down, but midway, it's sort of the latter portions of the pandemic, when I was doing all this traveling, and flying beneath the Northern Lights in Alaska or chasing an eclipse in Chile or getting seven tornadoes in a month, they reached out. They said, "Matthew, this is your story. Where your career has gotten to you so far is sort of the perfect ending point of your first book, but also all these adventures along the way that shaped you and your career. This is your story." I thought, "you know what? You're right." So we threw together a proposal and we got one bite, this company called Pegasus. One bite.

And they said, "we can wait for other offers". I said, "other offers can't be guaranteed. I'm a nobody right now. Let's just take this." They said, "all right." And we talked back and forth with Pegasus, and as soon as I signed the contract, this was right after the Annapolis tornado. They said, when would you like to have it out? 2023, 2024? I said, "when's the earliest you guys can get it out if you had the manuscript tomorrow?" They said, "August 2nd, 2022." I said, "when would my manuscript need to be in?" They said, "December 31st," which gave me barely three months to write it. I said, "all right, I'll have it done." And I wrote 92,000 words in 87 days.

Kelly Savoie:

Geez.

Matthew Cappucci:

Half of it was written at Fox 5, half was, I mean, I shouldn't say half, probably a third was written at Fox 5. A third was written on planes or in public transportation and a third was written at my favorite Mexican restaurant, Dos Amigos. You can tell which chapters I had had a margarita or two with, but no, I got to say it's... I poured my heart and soul into this book. It's a really good book if I do say so myself. And it's meant to be uplifting because it's a testament to all the people who have made my life happen the way it has there.

There's no such thing as a self-made person. It takes a village. Everyone in the AMS, all the meteorologists I met, every school teacher who would sort of nurture or kindle my passion, my parents who would get up at two in the morning to drive me to the beach to watch a thunderstorm. It takes a village. And this book is not my book. This is our book. This is the book that is a testament to that village. And it's hopefully a story of gratitude because that's what people need more of these days. They need gratitude.

Kelly Savoie:

And so if our listeners are interested in obtaining your book, is it available on Amazon? Where would they be able to buy it?

Matthew Cappucci:

Amazon, apparently Barnes and Noble has a few of them too. It's really anywhere books are sold, Better World Books, you can buy used copies cheaper obviously. So eBay might have a few, but I mean, I'd like it if you buy the new copy, 'cause that funds my storm chasing. But really folks can get it anywhere. There's a Kindle edition to that's a little bit cheaper. And I'm just shocked folks care what I have to say. We've sold about 43, 4400 copies so far. I've done book signings that I thought would be empty. We had a jam packed house, and the best part is, at one of them, a bunch of people who I had met in random places. I got to say there's something special about DC and there's something special about the connection I have with folks here in that random people, these little random connections will sort of gel into things.

About two or three months ago, I had just got my first copies of the book and I was flying up to Boston to hand deliver to my grandmother with cancer a copy of the book and my mother so they could have some of the first copies. And I was sitting next to an older lady at the airport, our flight got delayed and we were talking back and forth and she was telling me about how she was in town from Sacramento to visit her granddaughter and all this stuff. And we had a really nice talk. And that was that. And I got a note from some random person who I didn't know who said months prior you spoke with my mother at the airport. You may not remember this, but she was going to Sacramento. She came home and told me about you, and we just got your book and we love it.

And stuff like that means a lot. Or a person who apparently I was in an Uber pool with two and a half years ago when I was talking about how I hoped someday I could be a TV meteorologist. She remembered me, she got the book, or I picked up my friend Patrick at the hospital after an operation, and I had a 15, 20 second interaction with the nurse there. She came to one of the book signings. DC's just such a special group of people, and I'm shocked folks turn up and care what I have to say.

Kelly Savoie:

Yeah, I mean I think that would happen anywhere. It's like you're personable and gracious and kind to people, strangers who just ask you if you could do a school visit or somebody who is homeschooled. I mean, like you said, that matters a lot to the average person. So that makes you a bit different than a lot of people. So give yourself some credit for that because that's what makes you successful.

Matthew Cappucci:

Well, thanks. I think the biggest thing for me is that I was so fortunate to have unbelievably great teachers. I mean very eclectic teachers, but I'm an eclectic person too. I had just the best teachers in the entire world in middle school, high school, and really, college meh, but middle school and high school. And I think to that end, they taught me how to teach. They showed me how to make something that may be esoteric accessible to the average person. And because of that, I don't consider my role that of a TV meteorologist or a media personality. I'm a teacher who just happens to work on TV or just happens to do radio hits. And so at the end of the day, I'm a teacher, and to me, teachers are the most important people in the world. And if I can embody that, that's my goal.

Kelly Savoie:

So you've been very successful. What advice do you have for our listeners who may be job seekers hoping to secure positions in the weather, water, and climate enterprise?

Matthew Cappucci:

I would say twofold, and this might sound a little egoistical, but these days you have to be your own brand, because your brand follows you. I'm not sort of a stereotypical cookie cutter TV meteorologist. I bring my own sort of brand to Fox 5. And that was one of the things that Paul, the news director, said to me when he hired me. He's like, "we're trying to hire personalities. We're trying to hire people who do things their way, and we unleash that and we make it work." I mean, my forecast is very different from the forecast that comes after me, the one that came before me. But viewers like that variety. They want to connect with people. So I think the media landscape in general is changed and the Washington Post, nowadays, they're giving me sort of a personalized column, and MyRadar lets me do my thing my way. It's about figuring out what your niche is and how you can monetize that.

The other thing, too, you have to, and this will again sound egoistical, but it's something that has to be done. You have to be a savvy shopper when it comes to employment, but also you have to be good at negotiating. I mean, I sent a letter to the Washington Post a while back that almost got me in big trouble, but it basically said, "here's why I need this raise and I'm worth quote every damned penny." And I sent a list of 30 reasons, and I basically said, "if I don't get this, you won't get me." And they waited until the day before the end of my contract. But they gave me the new contract and they gave me the raise to match what I was making at Fox. And once in a while, you have to play hardball, not in a rude way. Don't let your ego get in the way, but you are a product or service. Don't let people low ball you.

Once a year, I never really negotiate with people. Once a year, I set a price. The price is the same no matter where I go. It is a fair price. I don't ask for too much. I don't ask for too little. I ask for sort what an experienced person in market seven should get. And I sort of present that to all my employers. And they can either renew me for another year or they can know that I can go to one of my other employers and work more hours there. So for me, one of the best things has been almost like getting two car dealerships sort of negotiating against each other. It's been working for multiple employers and they all have to compete with one another for my time. And that makes them more competitive in terms of what they pay.

Matt Moll:

Well, 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 final question at the end of our show. So what is your favorite food and why?

Matthew Cappucci:

My favorite food is a grilled cheese sandwich. And you know what, the reason dates back to my childhood. You guys are from New England, but for the viewers at whom, who may not know, have y'all heard of Friendly's?

Kelly Savoie:

Oh yeah.

Matt Moll:

Absolutely.

Matthew Cappucci:

Of course. Okay, so we're Friendly's people. We know Friendly's. Outside the northeast, most folks probably don't know, but it's like a diner-esque style restaurant. They're known for their ice cream and they're Fribbles, their milkshakes. And when I was little, there used to be Friendly's right near my house that unfortunately has since closed. But my mother and I, every Wednesday would go because the kids' meals back then were $1.99, nowadays they're $7.99, but they were $1.99. And I would get a grilled cheese sandwich, and the waitress's name was Marilyn. And I'd see Marilyn every Wednesday, and she saw me as little three year old, four year old, five year old. And I was adorable. I still am, but I was extra adorable back then.

And I remember one day saying to Marilyn, "Marilyn, this is the best grilled cheese I've ever had. It's extra special today." And she said, "Aw, you're so sweet. Say, could you come to the kitchen and tell the cook what you just told me? She's been having a rough day." I can go into the kitchen? Because to me, the kitchen was like NASA mission control. There were these two saloon style double doors that I had always wanted to go through, but I couldn't because they led into the kitchen. And she's like, "yes, you can go through the double doors." And I got a running start. I run into the kitchen with these double doors and I'm like four or five. And there's this lady sort of hunched over a stove just working away and toiling over the... It's a million degrees in there. And she has probably 30 sandwiches on the grill, she's running the whole restaurant. And she looks at me, she's like, "what's this?" And Marilyn introduced me and said, "this is Carol." I said, "Carol, that was the best grilled cheese I ever had. You're amazing. You're a really, really good cook."

And she started to tear up and she gave me a big hug and said, "you don't know what that means." And so every time I went back there, every week, I'd wander into the kitchen to see Carol, and she started coming over for Christmas and Easter, became like a favorite grandmother.

Kelly Savoie:

That's amazing.

Matthew Cappucci:

Her grandkids never visited, but I always wanted to see Carol, the cook. She passed away when I was about 13 or 14, and I still feel bad because when she had her heart attack, she wanted the hospital to call us. And we weren't around at the time, but at her funeral, I gave an impromptu eulogy about the amazing lifelong friendship and a relationship that can come from a grilled cheese sandwich. And that's why I love grilled cheeses. Nowadays, I get my fix of grilled cheese at Waffle House, and anyone who follows me on social media knows I'm obsessed with Waffle House. And I joke that Waffle House is my church, but it really is, because Waffle House doesn't care who you bring. They don't care who you're with. They don't care what time you show up. They don't care what you're dressed like. They don't care what time you get there, if you're early, if you're late, they don't care if you're covered in leaves and mud from a hurricane when you walk in.

They're just happy to see you. It's affordable to pretty much everyone. It's not fancy. It's the way that my church should be. And I brought folks there to sort of test them if they're keepers, if they're not, on first dates and stuff like that. But to me, Waffle House is that place, and that's where I can always go for good grilled cheese. And yeah, Carol's legacy lives on at Waffle House.

Kelly Savoie:

Yeah. Well, that was such a heart warming story. It really was. I mean, you would never think that you could get that out of a grilled cheese sandwich. But thanks so much for joining us, Matthew, and sharing your work experiences with us.

Matthew Cappucci:

It's been my pleasure. Thanks again for having me and for putting up with me.

Matt Moll:

Well, that's our show for today. Please join us next time, rain or shine. Clear Skies Ahead: Conversations About Careers in Meteorology and Beyond is a podcast by the American Meteorological Society. Our show is edited by Peter Trepke. Technical direction is provided by Peter Kile. Our theme music is composed and performed by Steve Savoie, and the show is hosted by Matt Moll and Kelly Savoie. You can learn more about the show online at www.ametsoc.org/clearskies. And you can contact us at Sky Podcasts at ametsoc.org if you have any feedback, or would like to become a future guest.