Transcript for "Angel Enriquez, Meteorologist at the National Weather Service Forecast Office in Glasgow, Montana"

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 will be your host. 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 Angel Enriquez, a meteorologist at the National Weather Service Forecast Office in Glasgow, Montana.

Welcome Angel, and thanks for joining us today.

Angel Enriquez: Thank you for having me. It's a pretty exciting opportunity.

Kelly Savoie: Angel, could you tell us a little bit about your educational background and what sparked your interest in meteorology?

Angel Enriquez: Yeah. So pretty much like the majority of meteorologists, there's this one defining weather event. For me growing up in Houston, Texas, we had our fair share of tropical systems that went through. And Tropical Storm Allison was the one that did it for me back in 2001. I remember waking up one morning and seeing my dad in the middle of the street with water up to his chest.

Kelly Savoie: Oh my goodness.

Angel Enriquez: From my recollection, my memory that's the first time I had really ever seen a flooding event that big in our neighborhood. So, from that moment on, I was just always interested in weather. Always that little kid who would turn on the weather channel. It was funny because even as a little kid, this may sound super geeky, but I would pretend like as a storm is coming, I would get my mom's broom and go outside and pretend I control the weather.

Kelly Savoie: We wish.

Angel Enriquez: Yes. My parents should have known by then that I was going to do something like that.

So then, going into high school, I really had a tough choice between two things that I wanted to do. I really liked playing the clarinet. So I initially thought that that's what I wanted to go to college for was something related to music or musical performance. But I think towards senior year I had a choice of taking a early math class over the summer, so I can take a AP calculus class during my last year. And that teacher was the one who pretty much helped guide me into college and finalize what I wanted to do.

So, at that point, I applied for the University of Northern Colorado among two other schools as well. And I was finally able to convince my mom to let me go out of state, even though it technically wasn't her choice. But that's sort of the hard thing living in a Hispanic culture, Mexican culture it's really tough leaving family behind. But that's what I ended up doing. So I started at the University of Northern Colorado in 2011 and I got my bachelor's in meteorology from there.

Kelly Savoie: That's awesome.

So it's interesting because you're not the first podcast guest who also played a musical instrument and wanted to pursue that and then went into meteorology. So I don't know if it's that right brain, left brain. It seems like people who are artistic have a certain side that happens. But it's interesting to see somebody who wants to pursue a science who also has that artistic ability to play an instrument as well. So, that's really cool.

Do you still play?

Angel Enriquez: Oh no, I wish I could. Once I left high school, I just dropped the ball when it came to playing. But I still every now and then pull out my sheet music and I can still actually still read music. And I think that's maybe why I like music is because of the challenge of being able to read music and being able to play these really complicated rhythms and notes. And I think it's always been wanting to fulfill that challenge of doing something hard sort of with music, with math, meteorology it's challenging, it's stimulating and it's fun.

Kelly Savoie: I was gonna say reading music is kind of like a math problem. So maybe that's the connection between musical instruments and meteorologists.

Angel Enriquez: Indeed.

Matt Moll: So what opportunities have you pursued that have led you, or that you knew were gonna be beneficial to leading you to your current role at the National Weather Service?

Angel Enriquez: Yeah, so I mean, for me it began really in high school, just being able to take those math classes super early on. It's nice because you have the advantage of having an entire school year dedicated to one math course. And you're not gonna get that in college. It's just a semester, really. So for me, that was really great having that familiarity with tough calculus with peers all around me and a teacher who was really excellent.

And then going into college, I think really it's all the extracurriculars that I honestly did outside of school. I mean, it's one thing to do your coursework, fulfill your requirements, but that's not gonna make you stand out in a resume. It's really what else you can bring to the table. And so, for me, it was doing volunteer work. I sought out an assistantship with the National Center for Atmospheric Research, NCARF. And just really getting to network people, honestly, that's probably the best way to do it, even if it's just a quick minute or two chat. Sometimes that chat can carry on years later. And it's always beneficial to get to know new people.

Kelly Savoie: So did you always want to work for the National Weather Service? What was your first job in the field? How did you end up where you are now? Did you think you wanted to pursue a different area in meteorology at first, or were you always set on working for the government?

Angel Enriquez: Yeah no, it's always been my dream to work for the National Weather Service. It took a road to get there, but yeah, no, I never gave up on that dream. Though, at the same time, what I did after college with a private weather company, as a marine meteorologist, I honestly found the joy in doing that job as well. So, in the back of my head, I always wanted to do something with the National Weather Service. I didn't know how I was gonna get there, but through things like the assistantship at NCAR, it was a great experience, but I knew at that point that I really didn't want to do research.

So then I moved on into, after I graduated, doing a private sector job for forecasting. And honestly, that operational style of work is really what I enjoyed with that job. And I knew that it would translate well going from private sector into the public sector.

But I never really discredit the jobs that I do. I always have found some sort of joy in them, even if it wasn't meteorology related. I had plenty of other jobs while I was going to school for my bachelor's and I absolutely loved every single job. One was a work study job. One was a retail. I like working, it keeps me entertained, keeps my mind from really drifting off to the middle, doing nothing.

Kelly Savoie: Yeah. And I mean, any type of position you're gonna learn a different skill that's gonna translate well to the next job. So the job that you had doing the marine meteorology, were you able to network through that job and that's how you ended up at the National Weather Service?

Angel Enriquez: Yeah so, interestingly enough, it's right across from the National Weather Center in Norman. So, we always had a group of meteorology folks within the research campus. So, yeah the networking was always there, the opportunities. Within the job itself, it brought me more skills in how to communicate and cater to specific people, or specific groups. With this company, we specifically provided a forecast for companies that do cargo shipping all over the world. So, I got to learn about the whole supply chain process and all the madness that COVID brought to it. But it also gave me the opportunity to not only do the job from here in the US, this company is headquartered outside of the US. So it gave me the opportunity to go to places like Japan, Denmark, Greece.

Kelly Savoie: Oh wow, cool.

Angel Enriquez: And it gave me a sense of the culture behind not only their business, but meteorology and how they see it, just point of view. I didn't have to do that from the comfort of my desk. It was great getting to meet all different types of people with this last job.

Matt Moll: That's fantastic.

And so, at the National Weather Service where you're working currently, is there a typical day? What are some of the responsibilities that you have? And how does your day progress on a general day?

Angel Enriquez: Yeah, well, I'm getting into the flow of really working for the National Weather Service. I've only been doing this about two months now. But it's been a pretty hectic first two months, I will say that. I started at the end of June and almost the entire month of July was severe weather for us constantly. So I really got into the whole feel of showing up, doing my training, and doing some of the related tasks like social media, making graphics for that and doing some text products as well. But really getting to learn how severe weather operations really goes.

And it's great that I got that within my first month. Sometimes it was a little tiring because it went on for a month straight. We hardly ever get severe weather up here in Montana, but no, yeah, it was great experience. I even had an opportunity to do a storm survey with the tornado that we had not that far away from the Canadian border, but within our CWA. That was really an experience I never thought I would've had in my first month.

Kelly Savoie: Oh my gosh. So do they usually have tornadoes in Montana or is that a fluke?

Angel Enriquez: It is not as common as in other places like Oklahoma. We typically get tornadoes but smaller. This one was an EF2, so it was a big shock to the community. It went through a town and it was tough to see the damage. Someone's roof came off. It was a big farming community or agriculture community so just seeing all these grain mills bent and torn up, and buildings just shredded. Surprisingly, in the five years that I was in Oklahoma, I never saw any tornado damage near me. I never

went storm chasing. I never did any of that. So, it's pretty crazy that I got that in my first month in Montana.

Kelly Savoie: I know. Tornado alley, no tornadoes. But go to Montana, there for a month you get a tornado.

So I know you've only been there for a couple of months but, so far, what do you like most about the job?

Angel Enriquez: Honestly, it's really getting to provide these forecasts for the public in our CWA. I think, for me, it's always been public service, volunteering, just the satisfaction of answering someone's question, or providing them something, or information that will benefit them or save them that's so satisfying for me.

And I'll answer phone calls during severe weather days. And because we had severe weather for the month straight, I would call some of the same spotters within our CWA and they would recognize my voice so well. And there are some people that are really appreciative of the job that we're doing, even if it's just calling to get storm damage results, or trying to get in those reports it's nice because you get to chat with them afterwards. Even if it's for a brief minute or two, you get to know them. So for me, it's just a public service.

Matt Moll: Absolutely. No, making those connections, those community connections that are so important.

And so, what would you say are some of the biggest challenges that you face working for the National Weather Service?

Angel Enriquez: Yeah, I think really what I've seen lately is not so much affecting just the National Weather Service, but any entity that provides forecasting material, or products is the amount of disinformation that you see online, or products that are given way out in advance of a forecast beyond 7, 10 days. And people sort of hype up the scenario. And it just brings a lot of mistrust with people who do ingest that information.

So being on social media, it gives us a better platform to get to everyday general public. But, at the same time, we're competing against people who think that they are doing some service by providing these scary 24 foot snowfall graphics. But I think that's something that we will just always have to combat. There's always going to be those people. And our focus is to better communicate the uncertainties, the probabilities that goes behind forecasting.

Kelly Savoie: I mean, being from New England, I'm not going to look at anything that's even more than three days out, I'm just not going to do that because it changes so quickly. I can't even imagine, I don't know, planning an event checking the 10 day forecast and thinking that that's going to be even the slightest bit accurate.

So, hopefully, with better communicating and I'm sure the National Weather Service does lots of social media and you're a trusted source. So, hopefully, people have learned to just pay attention to those organizations, or their local stations where they know that they're gonna be getting correct information. So, hopefully, that will get better.

Angel Enriquez: Right.

Kelly Savoie: So I want to ask you if there's anything that's happened during your career that you're the most proud of? And if there's anything that you wish you may have done differently?

Angel Enriquez: That's a difficult one.

I would say it's not so much an accomplishment that's happened in the career itself. It's the fact that I was able to do this at the same time as I was working. I also, in the last year, started a master's program at the University of Oklahoma in hydrology and water security. That's an online program where, essentially, I'm learning the ins and outs of hydrological processes, modeling.

So it's sort of going off of what I was saying with my initial event that sparked my interest in meteorology. I learned all the meteorology aspect to it. Now, it's time to learn the other part and I knew it was going to be hard because I was working also full-time. And, at the same time, I was transitioning from one job to another. And I think the fact that I was able to do that and still have that work-life balance for me, that was quite an accomplishment. I don't think that if I had done this two or three years back, I would've been able to survive. I think I had to get into the groove of how to manage my time at work, or have that work-life balance so I can better prepare for filling in this extra activity now.

Kelly Savoie: Yeah I mean, it's nice that it was online so that you're able to relocate for this position and it didn't interfere with that. So that's a plus for sure.

And so, the second part of the question, anything you wish you had done differently, or done sooner, or a course you thought you might have wanted to take, or should have taken when you were in college that might have helped you now in your career?

Angel Enriquez: Yeah. So I'd probably say if I could go back to the start of my bachelor program for meteorology, I would probably do that all over again, the first two years. It was a rough transition going from high school into college. Just the fact that the courses were so short within a semester, I wasn't really prepared for all the stress that would come along with it, the homework, the time management necessary for that. So my grades weren't that hot the first two years. So if I had the opportunity to do that, I would definitely do that over.

But, at the same time, my failure in getting better grades sort is what pushed me to finish out my last two and a half years strong. I took a year break during my bachelor's after my first two years because of financial reasons, and the performance that I was doing, I was just like, "I'm just gonna take a year off, see what I'm gonna do, and then come back to it if I still want to do that." And I think that I definitely needed to go through that in order to get where I was.

Now, if I were to do that again, I now have the resources, the mentality going for me. So I would probably do that in a shorter amount of time. But it was one of those things that I regret but, at the same time, I don't.

Kelly Savoie: Yeah. It's almost good that you were able to realize that you needed that break. And it was probably the best thing for you. So not everybody would've had that forethought and might not have finished without that break. So good for you that you were able to do that.

And I know that I've heard from other people I know who have taken AP courses in high school and calculus and done pretty well. And they went to college and they're like, "Oh boy, it's a whole different animal. It is really, really, really hard." So I'm sure you're not alone.

Angel Enriquez: No. Yeah, I completely agree with that. And I think maybe if there's one thing I would tell people who are going through a similar situation, or just going into college is don't be afraid to fail. Yes, it sucks that maybe you don't get the letter grade that you want in one class, but if you have the opportunity to take it again, do it. No one's gonna look at you that bad because of the fact that you retook a course. It happens all the time. I even hear within the meteorology community of people having to retake upper level math classes.

Kelly Savoie: Oh absolutely.

Angel Enriquez: No shame in that.

Matt Moll: Everything truly is a learning experience, for sure.

So what advice would you have for people who are job seekers right now looking to get into either National Weather Service, or just meteorology in general? What advice would you be able to give them?

Angel Enriquez: Yeah so I'd probably say, first of all, have a good sit down, brainstorm, write down everything that you've done since you've started high school, any volunteer opportunities, assistantships, internships, have that all on a piece of paper because really, the way you present your resume is how you're gonna stand out among the other applicants.

For the National Weather Service, it's a different format. There, you don't have to be concise or very shortened with your resume. Feel free to elaborate, have

many pages because the thing with applying for a federal job, there's a very strict criteria that they're looking for in order for your application to even be revised. So definitely, print out the job announcement, read it carefully and go from there. Have someone look at your resume. Don't just think that your draft is gonna be enough. It's always great to get a second opinion.

Kelly Savoie: Yeah, that's definitely good advice.

And Angel I have a question for you about the National Weather Service. So when you apply for a position there, are you applying for a position at a certain office? Or do you apply and then they let you know where you're gonna be?

Angel Enriquez: Yeah, so it really depends on if there are going to be other openings or announcements for other vacancies and other offices as well.

I happened to be applying during an announcement that had, I think, like 20 something other vacancies. So in order for them to, I guess, narrow down and not overwhelm them with applications, they give you the opportunity of choosing your top five preferred locations. And so, that's what I did. I listed my top five. If your application gets referred to the hiring manager after its review, it gets sent to every office that you applied for in those top five preferred. And then from there, the hiring managers will then determine if they would like to have an interview with you.

Kelly Savoie: So did you get one of your top five?

Angel Enriquez: I did. I got interviewed for the Glasgow office, Houston, Riverton and Goodland.

Kelly Savoie: That's great.

Angel Enriquez: Yeah, I had Glasgow up top surprisingly. I had known the previous MIC here and I was just like, what great opportunity then to learn from the environment, the office where she prospered so well. So she was like, "Come out here."

Kelly Savoie: That's awesome. So, I guess some advice for some of these job seekers would be to be open to traveling or relocating.

Angel Enriquez: Absolutely. If you have the means to leave your comfort zone, I would definitely suggest it. I mean, this country is beautiful. There's so many great things out there. And I've never been one to really knock out a place because of the fact that it's unknown to me. I never in my life thought that I would be in Oklahoma and I ended up staying there for five years. I've found the beauty in it and I'm pretty much how I expect it to be here. "Well, I'll find the beauty in Montana."

Kelly Savoie: Right, you don't mind the heat.

Angel Enriquez: I don't mind the heat here. I happen to live in a basement, so it's nice not having to finally rely on AC and it still being within 78, 75 degrees in my room. It's amazing.

Kelly Savoie: So while you attended the University of Northern Colorado, you were part of your local student AMS student chapter, you were president of the chapter. Tell us a little bit about that experience. Did it help you with your leadership skills and professional skills for getting positions in the field?

Angel Enriquez: So me doing the presidency for my local chapter, it definitely gave me an opportunity to see what other people would like to do, or like to see out of their organization. I've always been one to always propel the wants and needs of other people. And so, I think having that position gave me the opportunity, and the ability to improve my skills and patience, empathy, just overall good leadership skills.

I think one of the things that I learned is that in order for one to be a leader, you really have to learn to be a follower as well. And prior to being president, I was active in my local chapter. And yeah, I think slowly, what I learned through the years is how I thought the organization could be run within the school, but not only just my view of that, but how other people collectively would like to see the chapter grow. So it gave me great opportunities to learn those people skills, those professional skills, and carry that on into my career through various roles that I've had as a supervisor training people. It's been great.

Kelly Savoie: Yeah. And I'm sure it was a lot of fun too. I know that local chapters have lots of fun campus events, and community service events, and lots of camaraderie. So I'm sure it was a really fun experience in that way too.

Matt Moll: Well, Angel, we're so grateful for everything you've told us about your career. And just before you go, we always like to ask our guests one last fun question at the end of our show. So what is your favorite band or musician?

Angel Enriquez: I'm actually gonna answer both of those. So when it comes to band, I think Paramore is definitely my favorite musical group. I've been listening to them since I was in middle school when I'm not even sure if they have this, but MTV still played music in the morning.

Kelly Savoie: Gosh, I loved MTV. I miss MTV.

Angel Enriquez: Yeah. For me, it was just always a great part of my day. Just starting off to music. And Paramore had just really started blossoming during that time. So yeah, Paramore would be my musical group.

And then for actual individual musician, I'd probably say Sam Smith. He's got a beautiful voice, definitely can relate a lot to him. That voice will carry me to sleep, but not in a bad way. But, yes.

Kelly Savoie: I have heard of Sam Smith, but I haven't heard the music. So now I'm curious. And I have Spotify, so I'm gonna have to play him when I get off this podcast with you. 'Cause I love that kind of soothing sound so I think that would be an artist that I would be interested in.

Angel Enriquez: Absolutely.

Kelly Savoie: Well, thanks again for joining us Angel and sharing your work experiences with us.

Angel Enriquez: Thank you for having me again. It was always fun and always a pleasure to provide advice for people doing the job hunt.

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 Killelea. 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 skypodcast@ametsoc.org if you have any feedback or would like to become a future guest.