

Transcript for "Brandon Katz, Executive Vice President, Strategy at KatRisk in Austin, Texas in Austin, Texas"

Clear Skies Ahead: Conversations About Careers in Meteorology and Beyond

July 16, 2024

Kelly Savoie:

Hello, Clear Skies Ahead listeners, this is Kelly Savoie, and I'm hoping you can take a moment of your time to rate and review our show wherever you listen to podcasts. We have produced over 60 episodes, and you can help us reach even more individuals that will benefit from the diverse experiences shared by our guests. Thanks so much for listening, and I hope you enjoy this new episode. Welcome to the American Meteorological Society's podcast series, Clear Skies Ahead, conversations about careers in meteorology and beyond. I'm Kelly Savoie, and I'm here with Emma Collins, and we'll be your hosts. We're excited to give you the opportunity to step into the shoes of an expert working in weather, water and climate sciences.

Emma Collins:

We're happy to introduce today's guest, Brandon Katz, Executive Vice President Strategy at KatRisk in Austin, Texas. Welcome, Brandon. Thanks so much for joining us today.

Brandon Katz:

Thanks. I'm very excited to be here.

Kelly Savoie:

Brandon, could you tell us a bit about your educational background, and what sparked your interest in meteorology?

Brandon Katz:

I started out at Penn State, got my undergraduate and graduate degrees there in the meteorology department. I started out just thinking I wanted to be a weather forecaster. I worked a lot with the campus weather service that they have there, doing radio broadcasts at 4:00 in the morning-

Kelly Savoie:

Ooh.

Brandon Katz:

...and those kinds of things. I always had a perfect face for radio, as they say. I believe it's an Al Roker quote there. I started out doing that, had a real passion for forecasting, but realized I wasn't quite as good at it as I would've liked to have been, so I started looking around and learning a lot more about the math and science aspect besides just the broadcasting aspect. I got really into forecasting models, and I wanted to look around and say, "What's a career path that I could take where I got to be on a computer and program these really interesting natural phenomena that I have been looking at since I was a child?" Catastrophe modeling, which is where I am now, is really the spot that I saw that I can really leverage,

and really get my hands deep into how models are created to be able to have a wide effect on the industry.

Kelly Savoie:

When you were younger, you were interested in meteorology, even as a kid?

Brandon Katz:

Yeah, I think like a lot of us "weather weenies" I think they call us, I remember watching the National Weather Service, the NWS channel, or the Weather Channel, it was, that might be on a repeat, showing the same five minutes of B roll every single day. That was certainly where I got my original interest and passion for meteorology.

Kelly Savoie:

Well, it was good that you actually had the forethought of seeing what else there was out there besides broadcast meteorology, and positions in the National Weather Service, because not all students really know what's out there.

Brandon Katz:

Certainly, when I was an undergraduate, to be honest, and even when I was in high school, I was actually not very good at math and science. I think this is a thing that a lot of people maybe sometimes experience, where if they're not good at it, they think that maybe they're not smart. For me, I was really fortunate that I had really good professors that kept me with it. And then, first year, second year, I actually didn't pass all my math classes in college, but at some point in time I had a teacher that just clicked, and I learned how to learn. I got really, really interested in the math and science portion of it, which a lot of times, I think happens to a lot of people, maybe they get discouraged.

I was really fortunate to have a good set of teachers at Penn State in the meteorology department. And then, I was fortunate enough to be able to move into the graduate program, and work with a really good professor there, Dr. Ray Najjar was my advisor who got me really into climate studies. That was the same time that Dr. Michael Mann started at Penn State. I got to work with him as well for my graduate studies. I was really fortunate that I was able to really get into the forecast and modeling side of things.

Emma Collins:

Were there any opportunities that you pursued, either inside or outside of school, that were beneficial to you securing a job in your profession?

Brandon Katz:

Yeah, actually, I worked for a really small company called Remcom in State College, Pennsylvania, that actually was a radio wave propagation firm. It was really interesting that the reason why they wanted a meteorologist on staff is they were studying radio wave propagation and what's called radio wave ducting. If you've ever heard, back when you were younger, about people in North Dakota getting radio from Miami, as an example, that's an example of you get an inversion in the atmosphere, you can get a radio wave that starts curving up, and then curves down, and gets stuck. That's why they call it radio wave ducting. They were a military contractor, which is interesting, too, and they were looking to figure out how can you model and try to predict where radio wave ducting will and won't go?

That really got me into the idea, this is right before my grad school, so this is between my undergraduate and my graduate, and saying, "Wow, these phenomenon can actually be modeled, and you can actually just start at point A and then just let the physics go, and see where you end up at point B." That really built my passion for figuring out how to model atmospheric phenomenon, not just from a theoretical standpoint, but trying to use heuristics and other statistical methodologies to try to figure out, how can you create something that looks exactly like what's happening in nature.

Kelly Savoie:

What was your first job in the field when you got out of school, and how did you end up where you are today?

Brandon Katz:

It's not that long of a story, actually. My first job was at Risk Management Solutions. It was a great experience. They're now RMS Moody's, they got bought, I think last year or so. My first job was with our current CEO of my new company, Dag Lohman. I've been working with him almost my entire career just about. My first job was doing flood models mostly for China, was the first region I worked on. So creating catastrophe risk models in the catastrophe risk industry, which is a very small industry. There's only about six companies globally that actually do this kind of work. I worked in that first job making flood models, worked a little bit on storm surge models in the US as well. From there, I worked at a broker.

A lot of these catastrophe models are used by the insurance and reinsurance industry, to figure out, what is your premium of your house, as an example. That's what the Cat models are used for. These days, banks are starting to use them, and FEMA, the NFIP, the National Flood Insurance Program are starting to use these things, post catastrophe response. I got to go work at an insurance broker after that, and then, just three years later, I got asked to come and be one of the co-owners at KatRisk back in 2016 or so and I've been at KatRisk ever since.

Kelly Savoie:

That's great. It's good to have that networking ability, where somebody else was like, "Hey, bringing you over, let's start this other company."

Brandon Katz:

Absolutely.

Kelly Savoie:

I have a brother who's a project manager, and he's done the same thing, where it's like, oh, you start at one company, and then some people start a new one. Because it's who you know, they take the people that they know and see if they want to bring them over. It works out pretty well lots of the time.

Brandon Katz:

Yeah, I think it's nice to think of the world as a meritocracy, but sometimes, it's who you know. I think you've got to take advantage of the situations that you find. If you're not good at your job, of course, you won't be given those opportunities.

Kelly Savoie:

Of course.

Brandon Katz:

Skill and knowledge certainly play a part, but we all have to be humble, and remember that some of the opportunities we got, sometimes it's luck, and that's just that the roll of the dice that you take sometimes. It's also about doing a good enough job, setting a good enough impression, and working hard to have that reputation so that when the next thing comes along, people think of you for it.

Emma Collins:

Would you say that you spend some time doing that sort of networking, and getting yourself out there, or do you find that with your reputation, people are coming to you?

Brandon Katz:

Absolutely, you have to go out there and get your name...that's something I work really hard. I try to mentor a lot of the employees that we have here in my office in Austin and elsewhere and make sure that they're going to conferences, make sure that if it's their work, they're the ones that are being given the opportunity to speak so that people can learn who they are and that I can leverage my reputation. It's the same way that my previous boss helped basically, put me up on stage that I could go and be seen as the authority on X, Y, and Z. So you've really got to go out there, you got to be seen as a leader in your industry, or at least someone whose name is known out there. And then people start coming to you and you can pass it forward to the next generation of people so that they can get their name out. But networking is really, really important, especially in the private industry. I'm guessing it's also very, very important in academia. That's not the route that I went, but it really helps you get opportunities.

I'll give an example. In my graduate work, I worked a lot with people in the geography and the geosciences department, and one of the things that I love within that networking opportunity is I got to learn what are the tools that geoscience use versus the tools that meteorologists use. Somehow they just don't cross pollinate very much. So if we're not networking, we're not able to speak with people in adjacent fields so that we can all use each other's tools to be able to come up with the best solution. So networking is not only really beneficial for your career, it's really beneficial for science because maybe someone in geoscience you're working with has never heard of EOF analysis or some of these other things, and they can be extremely pertinent to the work that they're doing. I think it's an admirable goal to try to do this networking, not just for yourself, but also to move some of the science forward in different organizations in different fields.

Emma Collins:

Could you walk us through a typical day on the job as the executive vice president of strategy at Cat Risk?

Brandon Katz:

Oh, it's a hectic day. These days it's meetings back to back with the occasional half hour to actually get my day job done. So it's kind of a new role for me, I would say. We were acquired last October by a private equity firm, and so it's been a really, really positive experience trying to work with this new group because they're looking to grow really fast. I've been learning a lot about actually the business and how to grow businesses, which has been really interesting against having more of a scientific and analytical background. It's been really fun to be honest, but the day-to-day for me, these days I talk to a lot of clients, try to sell the product, so a lot of sales calls, a lot of answering client questions on a day-to-day basis. And then when I get time here and there, I'm actually running our script.

It's the primary programming language that we use to try to do tasks like some of the flood modeling. I'm also working on our severe convective storm model. Last week I spent two hours reading the

international panel on climate change, the IPCC report, to figure out how does climate change affect severe convective storm models, tornadoes, straight line winds, and hail, so that we could integrate some of those things in our model. It's a really interesting paper that just came out in November after the IPCC. It's always really good to be looking and see what's new, what papers are out there. It's a little bit of everything. Some of it's GIS, some of it's just statistical programming and all these different kinds of things. But with my role right now, I'm not just able to do the core work day-to-day, you also got to do a lot of the management of the business, which has been really fascinating and a new muscle I've never gotten to exercise. It's been a lot of fun.

Kelly Savoie:

How do you describe what modeling is or a model is to somebody who's not a scientist? Because non-scientist, when you think of a model you think of when you're a kid and you make a model. It's hard to grasp what an actual model is in the meteorology world. How would you explain that?

Brandon Katz:

I think that's an incredibly important question. This is one thing that's always bugged me and people who know me will have heard me tell this story before. You think about when I was a kid in school when fifth, sixth grade taking math courses and people would say, "Well, what am I ever going to use this for?" Sometimes, depending on the teacher, you'd get an answer like, "Oh, to balance your checkbook," or something like that. But what I really found fascinating was the first time in one of my undergraduate classes where someone showed basically a drop of water falling into another body of water and then you get those really cool waves and ripples. And then they said, "Well, if you actually use these mathematical equations and just step forward in time, you can recreate that exact drop of water in a computer program. "

So a model is essentially taking something that you can see in nature and just trying to recreate it with a computer program. People might say, "Well, what's the purpose of that?" The purpose of that is to model things that have never happened before, to be able to say what could happen, or to be able to better understand the natural phenomenon that we do observe in day-to-day life. A model is nothing more than a mathematical representation of what could happen in nature. That's typically how I think about it. I wish that we would tell our students some of these mathematical classes and statistics classes that we take that can really allow you to model some really amazing things.

Kelly Savoie:

That's really cool. I can't even grasp that. I would have to do it or see it happening in order to fully understand it, but to be able to do that, I can see why it's such a great business for people, anything from agriculture to energy or anything like that where you can actually be like, "Oh, well you better be careful if this happens, this is going to happen." That's really interesting. That was a very good explanation of it. Thank you for that. Now I have a bit more of a grasp.

Brandon Katz:

It can expand to lots of things. I had a friend of mine in grad school that was figuring out how carbon moves from forest into the atmosphere if you're cutting down more lumber, as an example, all the carbon sinks and sources. And so modeling can be the physical manifestation of things, but it could also be a statistical representation or just figuring out where does a unit of carbon go. If it goes in the atmosphere, it contributes to greenhouse gasses, which contributes of course to climate change. Modeling can mean lots of different things, but it's a really powerful thing to realize that you can model

these things using math and science and programming. I've said it again and again, but it's something that I've always really enjoyed and it's the reason why I think I do what I do.

Kelly Savoie:

Is that what you like most about your job doing the actual computer programming and modeling, or is there something else that you really enjoy?

Brandon Katz:

I think it's also a very interesting question. In my earlier career, I would've said, my favorite thing is solving puzzles. When I think about a model being a puzzle, it's like, well, how can you recreate this physical thing? Is there an equation that you can just get off the shelf from some paper or do you have to use some heuristics and statistics to be able to try to model that thing? As I've gotten older, the part that I find the most rewarding is when you can find a way to make an impact. The way I think about that with the work that I do is, we get to do a lot of work with climate change these days. One of the things I've seen from a government perspective is if you want positive change, say for climate change, obviously I very much believe in climate change and that it's very detrimental to our earth's and our people's health, is I get to assign a dollar sign next to the impacts of climate change now. I think that's where you see the most impact from a governmental perspective.

I think we've got a paper now that we were mentioned in one of the OMB papers from the White House, for instance, so they're starting to look at some of these models. Where Cat models become really interesting, yes, they get used for insurance purposes and they get used for private industry, but it's an amazing tool to be able to use to quantify the risk of climate change. To just give you a brief example, our former CEO Dag Lohman, again, the person that I've worked with my whole career, he recently did a study on how valuable are mangrove forests, as an example. We have storm surge models so we can say, here's a city, here's a mangrove, let's run our model with the retarding force of mangroves that prevent storm surge from getting further inland with and without those mangroves. There's a dollar sign that says, this is actually how much more money you would...this city could have if it gets hit by a storm surge event from a hurricane with and without the mangroves. That puts a dollar sign next to things.

I find that really rewarding because that seems to be, from my perspective, when our government really starts paying attention, is when you can say, "This is going to cost private industry. This is going to cost people's lives." That's the kind of work that we do. So as I've gotten older, I think the puzzle's really interesting to...how does that puzzle fit into the wider universe.

Kelly Savoie:

I was just going to say a dollar sign always is the thing that makes people pay attention. You said that the industry, the type of work that you do, it's pretty small. So what's the work life balance? Do you find that you're working a lot of overtime or is it not so bad?

Brandon Katz:

It's a great question. I think that's up to the individual. I think one of the things that the new generations that are quite a bit younger than me, that I admire, incredibly with the new generations is that they've learned to push back a lot more for work-life balance. That is a positive in my mind, not a negative. For me, when I was younger, I really wanted to get my name out there and I would work probably 60, 70, 80 hours a week, I would say.

Kelly Savoie:

Whoa.

Brandon Katz:

But that was more about me than it was about anything else. Now as I've gotten older, I've put a lot more stringent guardrails on my life, I would say. There's times as you get more senior in a company and you're the only person that can do X, Y, or Z, do have to sometimes work those extra hours. These days I keep it to 40 to 50 hours a week, but there was times in my career where ... I think learning to say no is one of the most important lessons that you can learn in life. You have to deploy it strategically, especially when you're younger and you have to make a name for yourself. But yeah, work-life balance has improved over time. It's a small industry, but most people in this industry, there's a lot of meteorologists in this industry, a lot of civil engineers, those kinds of things. I lost where I was going with that, to be honest. I'll just stop there.

Kelly Savoie:

Just stop there. That's fine.

Emma Collins:

Do you have any advice on maybe a young meteorologist who are just starting out and who may be stretching themselves a little too far with that on how to say no when developing that work-life balance as you're getting going?

Brandon Katz:

Yeah, I think one of the things that I learned is that if somebody else offers to do work, you just say yes. So early on in my career, if somebody else was like, "Well, I guess I could do this." I would say, "Well, you know what? I can take it on. I can take it on." I think to realize that some of those things, even if it's only one or one or two less projects a year that you're doing, allowing other people to do the work that they're offering to do. But really it's a difficult thing because if you're really ambitious, you have to work a little bit more than everybody else sometimes, especially people like me that have a terrible memory. My test taking skills in college were never super stellar and so I always felt I had to work a little bit harder to be able to achieve the same result as others in some respects. But yeah, I do think that allowing others to do the work that they offer to do is a good one.

I think really having a good conversation with your manager or your boss. I've been fortunate enough to have really, really good bosses through my career and saying, "Hey, I don't want to stretch myself too thin. I want to make sure I'm giving you the highest quality work that I can give you, but I can see myself spreading myself too thin, can you help me do a better job of managing my caseload? And then as you get older and as you have more experience, you get a better idea of when to say no, which projects are important. Because sometimes you might not know. Sometimes your manager really has to let you know what's less important, what's more important because you might not have insight into the business. My experience is I was always really fortunate to have that exposure, so I knew what was important, what wasn't less important. But a lot of times it needs to be a conversation with your boss, and if your boss isn't willing to share those details with you, that might be a sign it's time to start looking elsewhere if you're fortunate enough to have that ability.

Emma Collins:

I think that's great advice. What are some of the biggest challenges that you face working in your field?

Brandon Katz:

I think for me, it's really making people realize that these models exist. Modeling is such a small field. I'll give an example. One of the biggest places that I'm trying to expand catastrophe models is actually the mortgage industry. It's going to be a random thing to say, but the reason for that is, again, I'm thinking about things from the climate change angle. The insurance industry is one of the most progressive industries because people don't think of insurance industries as being progressive from a climate change perspective. And that's again, because they're starting to see the dollars and the losses. One industry that I think could really benefit from climate change is the mortgage industry, specifically because mortgage is typically 30 years, and 30 years is really the time span in which climate change is going to start having major impacts. For me, one of the most difficult things is really going out there and trying to educate other people on how Cat models work and that Cat models exists in general.

That's one of the things that for me, it's spreading the education and also answering questions. There's a lot of articles, for instance, with the most recent risk rating 2.0 efforts from the National Flood Insurance Program where rates are changing for homeowners with flood policies. We're deeply involved in that process with the NFIP, again, the National Flood Insurance Program. You see a lot of articles come out from politicians, actually that talk about Cat models as being these terrible black boxes. But what's always frustrating is I've never gotten a single phone call or email because I love talking about this stuff. I would certainly talk to somebody if they try to ask me questions about these "black box models." That's another challenge, too, it's really a lot about education and outreach and making people understand what these models are, not just little statistical representations of things. Those kind of models can be useful. These are full physics, geophysical fluid dynamical models that have been created by world-class scientists. Not me, I'm a state class scientist at best, but that's been a big challenge, it's education and outreach.

Kelly Savoie:

And what are some of the ways you build strong client relationships, which I know is a big part of your job?

Brandon Katz:

That's a huge part of my job and something that's really important. A lot of it is honesty and being humble. Some of my experiences at other companies or when I was working as a company that purchased catastrophe models is, you get companies that just say, "We're the best at everything and we're amazing." For us, the trust gets built when we break that chain and break that thought process and say, "Hey, it's a model, our model is going to be great in some places and not great in other places. Let's work with you. We should be the ones telling you where it's bad before you tell us it's bad." A lot of it is about honesty in the process. I think because our industry is so scientist focused, many of us aren't salespeople and so when we're trying to sell, we have a different perspective. I think that honesty is really, really important. We've been training all of our salespeople to meet exactly the same at KatRisk.

We didn't have any sales people until three months ago, so that's been one of my fun new jobs I've been spending a hundred percent of my time. What's been really great is being able to kind of impart that on them and already been seeing them go out and just be honest with our clients and saying, "We want to work with you. We're not just selling you something then disappearing." So it's about a lot of touch points. It's about honesty and yeah, just really making sure that when they talk to you, you're listening to what they're saying.

Kelly Savoie:

I think not acting like you're a salesperson is probably the best way to sell someone something because it's kind of a turnoff when someone's a typical salesperson where, like you said, you want to be honest and sometimes you're not so sure when someone is just trying to pitch you something to sell it. I think it's a good thing that they're not technically trained in sales. It's more of a, okay, this is our product and this is how it works, and this is how it can help you is better.

Brandon Katz:

Yeah, it certainly can be taught, like I said, our new account executives have learned that lesson really well. But one thing, maybe it's a caveat to what we're talking about, is it's not just good for sales, to be honest, it's good for interviewing and good for life. My boss who first hired me, who again was our CEO for a long time and the founder of this company, Dag, I remember he told me once, "One of the reasons I hired you was because if you didn't know something, you said, 'I don't know, but I know how to look that up.'" People can always sense when you're lying or try to overextend beyond what you know. And it's okay to say, "I don't know, but this is as far as I can get, and this is where I would go to look to find the answer." That's something I try to tell all of the people that I mentor.

Every now and then I do some of the mentor programs at Penn State. Of course, I try to mentor the employees that I have here. But it's really, really important, not just with clients, but also in life when you're doing these things, to be honest and say, "I don't know the answer to that. This is as far as I can get. This is what I know." People don't expect you to know everything in life, and if they do, they're not people that you want to be around, to be honest. Again, if you have the luxury of being able to continue looking for jobs, but it's really, really important I think, it's something I tell everybody, apply for jobs that look like they're above your pay grade and be honest in your interviews.

Emma Collins:

So how has your experience as a climate scientist been beneficial to your work in catastrophe modeling?

Brandon Katz:

Yeah, I think it goes back to what we talked about previously, it's being able to look at the climate science, translate it into a dollar sign to be able to communicate what the cost of different things are. It also gives you a larger perspective, so when you're modeling flood in, I don't know, Louisiana in a single parish, you can get a bit biopic and you're only seeing what's in front of you. But climate change is a global issue and a large regional issue and so it allows you to take a wider view to be able to see the wider picture and see how climate change is affecting different locations differently. It's a really important component of my DNA, I think, whenever I approach things, trying to look for patterns and trying to look for how things can change as time goes on. And that the past, that's not predictive of the future, that's also a really important thing to know.

Kelly Savoie:

Are you finding that there's more people grasping the idea that climate change is happening? Or do you find that there's still a lot of climate deniers where you have to really push the issue?

Brandon Katz:

Yeah, I think this is where I'm going to take some of my own advice and say I don't necessarily know. The reason why I say that is because the people that I work with in the insurance industry are climate believers because they've seen it in the last 10 years. It's affecting their pocketbook. They're having to move out of some coastal areas. You've seen insurers leave Florida en masse. You've seen wildfire

insurers leave California because of some of their restrictive laws that they have about whether Cat models can be used specifically in the state of California. That's an interesting topic to talk about in of itself.

But the insurance industry knows climate change is real, it's the people that I deal with on a day-to-day basis. It's not like when we go to our conferences, we're having a debate about if climate change is real, we're having a debate about the magnitude of the climate change, different areas. In my day-to-day life, I've managed to admit my own little bubble and Austin is...I think we all did during COVID times. I think I'm not seeing as much of the anti-climate change discussions that I know exist out there. I would say in my bubble, the answer is everybody accepts it, but the wider world is a better question for someone that deals in a larger context than I do.

Kelly Savoie:

Maybe if you were somewhere else in Texas, other than Austin.

Brandon Katz:

15 miles north, south, east or west.

Kelly Savoie:

And what advice do you have for job seekers looking to secure positions in risk management, and how's the job outlook?

Brandon Katz:

Yeah, I think in Cat modeling, it's really good. I know we're hiring right now. A lot of other companies are hiring in our field. I'll give the same advice I gave a minute ago is, as a person who hires people and writes up recs myself, job postings are aspirational. I think this is an important thing to remember, job postings are aspirational. If you see things that you don't qualify for, that doesn't mean don't apply. I think where this is important, thinking about this in a wider context, I was speaking with my wife who was in recruiting in the tech industry, and I was telling her, "How do we get more people with different diverse backgrounds to apply for these jobs because sometimes it's difficult to find?" It was interesting, one of the things she told me in her training that she's gone through was that, "You want to be really careful about the qualifications that you put on different applications because different people with different backgrounds might look at that and just decide not to apply because they don't qualify for all the components on a resume or on a job posting."

I think it's important, again, if you see something that you don't necessarily qualify for, just apply because if someone likes your background, they're going to call you back. In meteorology, it's not like we have, like in some other fields, a thousand people applying for each job. It's not typically an AI program that's weeding out the applications, it's typically going to be a human. We're fortunate, I think, in our industry, you should just apply if you're interested and you think there's a chance that you can do the job and let the manager decide if you're not qualified or not. More often than not, you're probably going to get more phone calls than you'd expect.

Kelly Savoie:

When you're looking at a resume, I'm just thinking of some of our student listeners, what types of courses, I know you said math is really important, statistic and things like that, but are there certain

things that catch your eye when you're looking at a resume where you're like, "Ooh, they might be good?" And what types of things would they be?

Brandon Katz:

Yeah, it's a great question. I think there's two main things that I look for, and of course, when I'm having someone apply for a senior position versus a junior position, it's very different. But people directly out of college, I'm looking for two things, have they programmed in any language before? I actually don't care which one I might ask for R or Fortran in my resume, but any programming language is fine because once you know the vocabulary, you know how to Google things. It's actually funny, one of the first questions I ask in the interview is, "If you don't know the answer to a programming question, where do you look?" If they have never heard of Reddit or Stack Overflow, then they don't actually program. It used to be just Stack Overflow, in the last couple of years, Reddit's been added to that. Programming in any language is really important.

I like to see if they've done some sort of independent project while they were an undergraduate. I was fortunate enough to find a professor to do one with where I did some work on Solidity in the Delaware Bay, actually with Ray Najjar, who ended up being my graduate advisor as well. But seeing some project that they did that was longer than just two weeks in a course, I think. But even if it was two weeks in a course and they presented interestingly in their resume, that's really, really important. So yeah, programming and then some larger interconnected research project that they worked on.

Kelly Savoie:

Okay. Students, if you're listening, start doing some research projects.

Brandon Katz:

If you have the time.

Kelly Savoie:

If you have the time. Find the time. Remember to say no.

Brandon Katz:

And remember to say no. I'm giving some conflicting advice here.

Emma Collins:

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 question at the end of our show. So what is your favorite hobby?

Brandon Katz:

This is a question I'm excited to answer because I only recently found my favorite hobby about two months ago.

Emma Collins:

Ooh.

Kelly Savoie:

Ooh.

Brandon Katz:

I started doing pottery at our local community college, and they asked me why I was there. I said, "Well, I do science all day and I'm looking for some sort of artistic outlet. If you were to take me and throw me into a river in a very wet paper bag and gave me a sharp pencil, I would drown." I couldn't make my way out of a paper bag with a sharp pencil, that's the joke. But I have very little artistic talent, but finally found in pottery is something that I can actually do and be really excited about the things that I'm making. So about four to five months into working on this, I think it's going to become a passion of mine.

Emma Collins:

That's awesome.

Brandon Katz:

It's nice to have some sort of artistic outlet, I have to say.

Kelly Savoie:

I took a pottery class once and I loved it. But have you done the wheel where it spins? It's so hard.

Brandon Katz:

All I wanted to do was the wheel and this class is a hundred percent hand building. I like it so much because I can just take it, plop it in front of the TV with my wife and the dog, and just work on it right there without having to worry about getting mud all over the carpet.

Kelly Savoie:

Well, let me tell you, that's what I ended up taking from this class because every time I did the wheel, I'd get to a certain point and it would just flop in and I'd be so discouraged. They teach you how to roll it out and do all that.

Brandon Katz:

Coiling. Yeah.

Kelly Savoie:

Yeah, and that's what I was better at. You're not missing much with the wheel because it's super frustrating. I guess the more you take it and the more you practice, it gets easier. But I was just like, ugh. Because I was like that too, I was like, "I want to do the wheel. It seems so cool." Like the movie Ghost.

Brandon Katz:

Exactly right. I was inspired by the movie Ghost, but I couldn't get my best friend or my wife to sit behind me, so it's just me.

Kelly Savoie:

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

Brandon Katz:

Absolutely. It was a pleasure to be here.

Emma Collins:

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

Kelly Savoie:

Clear Skies Ahead, conversations about careers in meteorology and beyond is a podcast by the American Meteorological Society. Our show is edited by Johnny Lay. Technical direction is provided by Peter Kilalay. Our theme music is composed and performed by Steve Savoy, and the show is hosted by Emma Collins 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.