

Transcript for “Jason Samenow, Weather Editor and Chief Meteorologist at The Washington Post in Washington, DC”

Clear Skies Ahead: Conversations About Careers in Meteorology and Beyond

January 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, Jason Samenow, Weather Editor and Chief Meteorologist at the Washington Post in Washington DC. Welcome, Jason. Thanks so much for joining us today.

Jason Samenow:

Thanks so much for having me.

Kelly Savoie:

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

Jason Samenow:

Of course. Yeah, so for me, it began at a young age like it has for many people in our field, but when I was about 10 years old, we had back-to-back blockbuster snowstorms in the DC area in 1987. Shut down schools for seven straight days. And I think the impact that that snowstorm had on our community really fascinated me with snowstorms. And then we had another big snowstorm later that winter and I was hooked. And so my interest in weather began with those snowstorms, and then it evolved into all things weather, hurricanes, severe thunderstorms, and I just obsessively watched the Weather Channel from a young age, and of course my local weathercasters in the DC market. And my interest also expanded into climate change and the environmental influences of weather as time went on.

Kelly Savoie:

And so did you realize when you were in high school that, okay, I can do this for a living, and you said, I want to go to college and major in this?

Jason Samenow:

Yeah, I mean, I knew by fifth, sixth grade that I wanted a career in meteorology. There was no doubt about that, and that just strengthened in intermediate school and high school and then when I got to

college. Of course I looked for college programs that had meteorology and atmospheric science, and the rest is history.

Emma Collins:

And once you got on that path, what opportunities did you pursue inside and outside of school that you knew would be beneficial to securing a job in your position?

Jason Samenow:

Yeah, so when I was at the University of Virginia, I did an atmospheric science concentration. They have an environmental science program there. They're not nationally known as a meteorology department, but they have a very multidisciplinary program in environmental sciences in which you can concentrate in either atmospheric science, geology, ecology, or hydrology. So I felt that that program would give me a good foundation to specialize in graduate school potentially. I kind of knew from the beginning I wanted to go for an advanced degree. So the University of Virginia from that standpoint, with that multidisciplinary program, I thought would serve as a good foundation for future study. And so when I was at the University of Virginia, I of course took advantage of all the classes that I could there in atmospheric sciences. And then during the summer, I did a couple internships. In fact, actually, I had my first internship while I was still in high school. For my senior project in high school I interned for, at the time, the chief meteorologist at the NBC affiliate in Washington DC, Bob Ryan, who was also a past president of the AMS.

And I also actually did two internships at the same time. I also worked at the National Weather Service Techniques Development Laboratory. That was again, at the end of my senior year of high school. And then again, getting back to college, during the summers, I did a couple of internships at a company called Mitre Tech at the time. They've now changed their name. They're called Noblis, but I was doing satellite meteorology-related work for them and just as an opportunity to get some professional experience before heading off to graduate school.

Kelly Savoie:

Wow. Bob Ryan as a high school student, you must've been so psyched.

Jason Samenow:

Oh my gosh, yeah, that was an incredible opportunity. Sometimes having connections helped. He was a classmate of mine in high school, so yeah, his son Jason and I took Latin together, and so I made that connection and got an opportunity to tour Channel Four when I was just a freshman in high school. And then, when it was time for that senior project, Bob Ryan was number one on my list, and he's been a career mentor for me ever since. And we're now friends and get lunch occasionally. One of the best in the field for sure.

Kelly Savoie:

And so it sounds like you did some internships in different types of areas of meteorology, which is really smart, and you could figure out what you liked and didn't like. So what was your first job in the field and how did you end up where you are today at the Washington Post?

Jason Samenow:

Yeah, that's an astute point that I did internships and work in a lot of different areas because I wasn't sure when I was in college and even in graduate school what direction I wanted to go in. And even when I conducted my job search, it was kind of all over the map. I really had two core interests, which were weather forecasting and climate change and climate change science. And as an undergraduate and a graduate, I took courses in both.

And when I was applying for jobs after finishing my master's degree, I applied for some jobs in TV weather, for some government labs. I just cast a wide net. And it happened that EPA was going through a reorganization at the time, and they had a lot of jobs that were opening up in the climate change area. And so I ended up taking my first job at the EPA as a climate change science analyst fresh out of graduate school. And that was a tremendous experience. I loved working there. I was there for 10 years. So that's where I got my start, was working in climate change, science, communication and analysis when I was at the EPA.

Kelly Savoie:

And so that's a big shift to writing and going to the Washington Post. When did you say, oh, I really like writing and I want to go in this direction? What led you to that?

Jason Samenow:

Yeah, no, it's an interesting story. So because I pursued a job in climate change work, I wanted to remain active in weather forecasting because that was sort of my first love, and my love of snowstorms dated back to when I was 10 years old, which got me into weather. I didn't want to leave weather behind, even though I was working on climate change. So while I was at the EPA as a side hustle or as a side gig or whatever you want to call it, I started a website for DC weather called CapitalWeather.com, which I launched in 2003. And initially it was just sort of a website for friends and family where I'd write forecast discussions and post about weather happenings. And then in 2004, this was around the time blogs were becoming really popular, I realized that the blog format could be really a strong format for communicating weather, because it made communicating weather a two-way conversation where you were providing information to your users and your users were feeding back by sending in comments and so forth.

So I decided to convert CapitalWeather.com into a blog style site. And so with a team of contributors, I had several friends who were fellow meteorologists or weather enthusiasts who helped me staff basically what I think was the first blog style local weather site on the internet, which was CapitalWeather.com. When we turned it into a blog in 2004, we launched it that winter. So that was really a hyper-local DC weather blog that we would post forecasts and forecast updates at least once or twice a day, every day, more when the weather was active. And that was sort of the springboard to my Washington Post career because what happened was, CapitalWeather.com over time, just through grassroots promotion by getting other sites to link to us, we started to get noticed and we were profiled by the Washington Post, I think in 2005, Washingtonian Magazine, named as DC's Best Blog a couple of different years. And so we started to earn a reputation as being sort of a fun, useful, entertaining and interactive educational website for DC weather.

And in 2017, the Washington Post reached out to me and asked me if we would want to basically become the Washington Post Local weather team and blog for them the same way we were doing as an independent website. Of course, we were eager for more exposure and they offered us money. And in fairness, we had some ads and we were making a little bit of money on the website before the Post took us over, but it was basically beer money. It wasn't anything. It basically covered costs and a little bit more. So yeah, we struck a deal with the Post and we began working with them in 2008. I still had my

EPA job at the time, so it was between 2008 and 2010 when I was working both at EPA and at the Post at the same time. That was a lot because the Post gig, I did mainly nights and weekends, and then I still had my EPA job during the day, and the EPA job was just getting busier and busier because the branch I was working in was involved in a lot of important initiatives on climate change.

And at the same time, the gig at the Washington Post was also ramping up in terms of our audience growing, and there's just greater demand for the information we were providing. And then, at the very end of our first contract with the Post, which was the winter of 2009, 2010, we had the Snowmageddon winter, which was massive. We had 56 inches of snow in DC and that really put the Capital Weather gang on the map and increased the amount of traffic we were getting by at least an order of magnitude, and it really represented our value to the Washington Post. And so it just happened that our contract with the Post was ending after that winter. And so we had seen just major spikes in traffic that winter because of our coverage. And the Post obviously didn't want to let it go away after they saw how important local weather coverage was to their audience, and the amount of traffic that sort of coverage could generate.

So they decided to, again, after that snowmageddon winter when the contract expired, I told the Post, I was like, "Look, this is great. We love what we're doing, but it's unsustainable for me to continue to do both." Run the Capital Weather gang for the post and do my EPA job. So the Post said, "Well, what if we made you a full-time offer to come work for us?" And so I decided to, at that point, leave my government job, which was going really well, by the way. And we were doing a lot of very cool work, and it was very high profile work at the time, and I jumped ship to work for what was at the time a struggling media organization.

So basically I took the leap to leave a stable government job for a struggling media organization, but it was basically to pursue my passion and to do something full-time, which I had started off as a side project, and really try to help make it grow into something even more. And so that's what motivated that switch. So it's kind of a cool story because it's a case of somebody doing something on the side as sort of a side venture and turning it into their full-time job. And so that's how this whole thing evolved.

Kelly Savoie:

Yeah, and that's what everybody's dream is, right? Their hobby becomes their career that they get paid for, so, bonus.

Jason Samenow:

Yeah, no, it was a tremendous opportunity, and again, it was a little bit of a risk because I think at the time the Post was, they were going through some tough financial times. The print subscriptions were, and this continues to be the case, but the print audience was declining. They really hadn't figured out digital yet. Obviously weather has been a big part of how the Post has found success on digital because weather is just a very popular news information source for people on their mobile phones and on all their various devices. So in any event, it was a leap of faith, but it's turned out well.

Emma Collins:

Yeah, I'm pretty sure I follow the Post on TikTok at this point, and you made that leap of faith and you're well established now. Could you walk us through a typical day on the job as a weather editor?

Jason Samenow:

Sure. So my job, it doesn't turn off, but typically when I get up in the morning, I sort of survey the news and see what are the key weather stories of the day. That's sort of my number one task is to try to figure out, okay, what is it we need to cover today? What are the major weather stories that are resonating

across the information world? And so I look at what our competitors are covering. I look at what our competitors are not covering, which maybe they should be covering. And I look at social media, what are people talking about? I look at, at obviously Twitter, Facebook, other platforms, Instagram, and just try to get a sense as to what weather and climate stories people are paying attention to or are potentially good weather stories that we should be covering. And then it's a matter of assigning the stories to our team of writers. My job has evolved over time. When I joined the Post, I used to basically just write and assign myself stories or assign and write my own stories.

But now we have a team, and so I've got several full-time writers, I've got freelancers, contractors, and so it's a matter of assigning the stories to them. And then once the stories come in, I edit them and after I edit them, they go up and I try to promote them on social media and to make sure that they're ready to try to propagate them across the internet as well as I can on various social media platforms. And then it's sort of after that's done, it's looking ahead to, okay, what will the next day's weather stories be? And starting to plan for the next day and talk to my team about, okay, what stories should we be thinking about for tomorrow? And making some assignments. It depends, sometimes in the afternoon, you know what the next day's weather stories will be, and so you can assign them ahead of time.

Other days you have to wait until the morning and then you assign the stories then, because sometimes it's not clear what weather story on any given day is going to emerge and be what people are going to care about and paying most attention to. So that's it. I guess there are a lot of other little things that I do during the day, including obviously looking at weather models to see what's coming, what's in the pipeline, responding to emails, project planning, thinking about, okay, what sort of interesting outside the box ideas could we pursue? Are there any profiles we want to do about any interesting people and the work they're doing or are there any research initiatives we want to be following or writing about? So I'm always on the prowl for stories and always thinking about projects and different tasks we could take on to reach broad audiences and communicate weather as effectively as we can.

Kelly Savoie:

It sounds really interesting. So you said your day never really stops, but do you have set hours or how does it work?

Jason Samenow:

Yeah, no, it's good. I work a pretty regular workday in that I usually start between 8:30 and 9:00 and stop between 5:00 and 5:30. Those are my core hours. It's pretty regular. But that said, if you're in the news business, you kind of have to keep your hands on the pulse of what's happening all the time. So even when you're not on the job, you're checking Twitter, you're kind of keeping an eye out on what's happening. Obviously if there's storms going on, you're watching radar. And that's the other thing too about weather stories is that it's typically, it's not like once you publish them, they're done. Oftentimes you have to update them multiple times.

And of course, during major high impact weather events, you might be doing what we call live updates where you're doing updates all day on the same weather story in sort of a stream format. So yeah, it kind of depends on the day. But as a weather editor, I think if you talk to my counterparts at other news organizations, they're going to say they always have to kind of be paying attention. Now, I have help. The Washington Post, we have an overnight desk, which is watching the weather. We have a general assignment desk, so it's not all on my team. So we do have backup and support, and they help out a lot on weekends as well. So you do get breaks, but to do a job like I have, you have to be committed to it because it is not something you can just... You can't be passive.

Kelly Savoie:

Yeah, you can't just say, oh, no, I'm not working right now.

Jason Samenow:

Right. No, no. I mean, especially when there's a major weather event. I mean, of course when things are quiet, that's a good opportunity for you to catch up on other things and take time off if you need it and so forth. But yeah, it can be demanding.

Emma Collins:

I did want to ask, when you're always on like that, how do you handle your work-life balance with your mental load?

Jason Samenow:

Yeah, no, it's a challenge. I think people in broadcast deal with this as well, because I know they're being asked to do more. They have to be on so many different platforms now, as do we, for TV folks, it's not just about being on TV, but they've got to be on social media, they've got to update their websites and they've got to do radio. And actually we do radio as well at the Post. So there are a lot of different platforms. And the name of the game is to try to be on all of them, to reach as many people as possible in as many different formats as possible. So text, audio, video, all of the above. So yeah, burnout can be an issue. It's something that I think anybody who's been in this field long enough in the media industry has dealt with and confronted, and I think you just need to have supportive management. I'm fortunate that I do, but it's been a challenge at times. I'm not going to lie. It's something that you have to have a real appetite for this, and you have to really love it.

And it's not to say you can't have both. It's not to say that you can't pursue a busy media job and have a work-life balance, but you also have to accept that if there's a major hurricane happening on the weekend, you're going to have to work. And hopefully then you can take some time off when it gets quieter. But yeah, it's definitely, I think it's across the media business overall, burnout's an issue and I think managers, they're doing their best to confront it. I think it's just something we face. There's a lot of competitive pressure, and that's just the nature of news. It's always happening. But yeah, it's real. I don't want to lie, but I think there are ways of effectively working through it and having strong management is important. And I think if you're pursuing a career in media, you do want to look carefully at who your management is and evaluate whether they're going to be supportive and whether they do value work-life balance, because if you have any questions about that or reservations, then that can be a red flag.

Kelly Savoie:

And it sounds like you do a lot of different things in your position. What do you like the most about your job? I know that's a hard question.

Jason Samenow:

It's a hard question. I think seeing our work reach a lot of people is the most satisfying element of my job. So if we produce something really good and we see it effectively reaching a large audience and people saying, "You know what? This is really good work you're doing." That's the most satisfying thing, especially if that information is helping them in terms of staying safe or being more prepared for a potentially dangerous weather situation. I think that's why we do what we do, is to try to help people.

And if you're doing it in a way and that it's resonating and people are sharing what you're doing and are valuing what you're doing, that's what's most rewarding. So just doing good work, which reaches a lot of people and is helping people. I would say that's, to me, the most rewarding aspect of the job and the thing I like the best.

Kelly Savoie:

And that's what you're proud of too, because your work is getting realized and people are using it and finding it useful.

Jason Samenow:

Absolutely. Yeah.

Emma Collins:

So you kind of touched on this with burnout and those challenges of always being on, but what are some of the other bigger challenges that you've faced during your career?

Jason Samenow:

I think that there've been different challenges at different times. So I guess early in my career when I was sort of a one-man band, I think it was just trying to resist the urge to do everything. And I struggled with that a little bit. I think I would sometimes write four or five stories a day just myself. And I think if I had stayed on that path, I wouldn't've been able to sustain in this career path because it was just too much. And so I put a lot of pressure on myself early on, and I think I maybe didn't need to do that. I think sometimes you're trying to build something and you want it to be successful, so you maybe overdo it a little bit. So I would caution people, even if they're ambitious and hardworking and really driven to make sure to catch their breath and step back sometimes and ask themselves, do I really have to do this? Five years from now, Am I going to look back and say, "Oh, shoot, if I hadn't done this one story, would it have made that big a difference?"

I think sometimes in the moment you think you have to do everything, and I think that's something I struggled with early in my career. And then I think just as a manager, I evolved from being a one person shop to having a team. And I think learning how to manage people effectively has been sort of an area of growth for me. And depending on the organization you're at, you may or may not get a lot of training and help in that, and in some cases you have to learn by doing. So I think that's a challenge that I had to just grow into, I would say. I would say I'm a much better manager now than I was maybe five or six years ago.

I think I've always been an empathetic and nice person, but in terms of being effective and as effective as I can be, I think I've grown. And I think obviously any manager always has additional room for growth. So those are a couple areas and challenges that I've dealt with over time. And I think, as you alluded to before, the burnout question, and just making sure that I make time for myself and my family. I've got two young children, well, they're not so young anymore. They grow up fast, but they're 12 and almost eight. You want to make sure you make time for that because you don't get that time back. So that's important I think for people who are, maybe not for early career, but in mid-career, you've got to make sure you make time for your family. Again, in the media space, that's important. And I'm sure there are other areas of meteorology where burnout can be an issue too. I'm not pretending it's only in media. I think obviously people who are in other areas can have to deal with that too, depending on what they're doing.

Kelly Savoie:

And speaking of doing more, you're one of the board members for AMS's new Certified Digital Meteorologist program. Can you talk briefly about that program and what encouraged you to join the board?

Jason Samenow:

Yeah, sure. So the Certified Digital Meteorologist program was, I think it was championed by Erica Grow. Basically she came up with the idea of the AMS, building the certification program, and it actually started up, there's a comparable effort in the National Weather Association, the NWA, which is their digital seal of approval, which actually I have. But the idea behind the AMS CDM is just to have a way of distinguishing people in the digital space who are trusted sources, who have a strong meteorology background, who communicate effectively, who communicate responsibly as well, and who clearly have experience and have earned the trust of their audience. And so this is a new effort, which just launched in September, and the people who get this certification have to pass an exam and also have their work reviewed by their peers. And assuming they pass the test and their peer review is satisfactory, they get the AMS Certified Digital Meteorology certification.

I'm on the committee, which is evaluating candidates, and I encourage anybody who's in this digital space to apply. We want to grow a community of folks who are these trusted sources for their audience so that the seal stands for something. So that people can post the seal or the certification on their websites and their bios so that people know, and audiences know that when they're getting information from these people, that these people know what they're talking about, they're going to responsibly communicate meteorology. They're not going to hype information. They're not going to try to clickbait people, but they're going to provide to people trusted, authoritative information. And so that's the goal. And I have to give props to Erica for working this through AMS and getting the whole program approved. And I'm excited that we already have, I think, at least one applicant into the program, and I'm hoping that there will be many more.

Emma Collins:

You have more than just one. I'm looking at the dashboard right now. We have about 45 applications that we're getting ready to go through.

Jason Samenow:

Whoa.

Emma Collins:

Yep.

Jason Samenow:

45. Wow, that's amazing. Okay, excellent. Well, I think I've just received one to review so far, but I guess before they go out for review, they have to, do they have to pass the test before they go out for review?

Emma Collins:

Yes.

Jason Samenow:

Okay, got it.

Emma Collins:

If they're not certified broadcast meteorologists already.

Jason Samenow:

Got it.

Kelly Savoie:

And a lot of those people are in the process, so some of them may not have submitted yet, but they're in the process of probably gathering their transcripts and all that good stuff. But hey, we need this more now than ever because there's way too many people who have access to social media who don't know what they're talking about.

Jason Samenow:

Well, I think you're exactly right, and you raise a good point because especially if you look across TikTok and some of these emerging platforms, Facebook, Instagram Reels, some of the people who are doing weather briefings, it can be a problem. I mean, there's some people who just, it's kind of like crying wolf. They show the most extreme scenarios. They post misleading thumbnails and weather graphics, and they clearly don't have the credentials to be talking about people, sorry. They don't have the credentials to be talking about some of these things.

And the problem is that it can erode trust in meteorology more broadly if audiences are exposed to this information and they're misled, then it damages the reputation in the meteorology field more broadly. So I think it's really important that the CDM initiative hopefully gets some legs, and we get sort of a large group of people out there who are known as trusted sources, and then some of these people who don't have the credentials, it's not to discourage people who want to communicate about weather from doing it, but people have to understand, and there needs to be a way for people to know, hopefully pretty quickly, whether it's somebody they can trust and has sort of a solid foundation on whether it's not.

Emma Collins:

So on top of being a fantastic weather editor, you're also on our board keeping busy, and you have a very dynamic career now, but is there anything you wished you would've done differently?

Jason Samenow:

Oh, wow. No, I don't have any regrets. I think I had a great decade at the EPA and I had terrific colleagues there. I got to work on really interesting assignments. Part of me wonders if my life would've been a lot simpler, I would have had a lot more free time if I just stayed with a government job and not moved into the media. And I think that's a choice I made. Do I regret it? No, because I've been able to have a pretty exciting career, work on something I'm really passionate about. As I said before, could I have made some different choices about sometimes backing off at times and not trying to do everything? I think that was a mistake I made.

And sometimes when you try to do everything and you put a lot of stress on yourself, it can even impair your decision-making a little bit, and you try to do too much, and then the quality of everything you do gets watered down a little bit. So what I've learned is try to do a little bit less, but do that better. So not

try to do so much and some of it be mediocre, but do less and have all of it be strong. I think that's a lesson-

Kelly Savoie:

Quality's better than quantity.

Emma Collins:

Yeah, I really like that.

Jason Samenow:

Yes, exactly. That's a shorthand way of saying what I just said in a lot more words. So that's a lesson I've learned, and I think I've gotten to the point in my career now where I can step back and say no to things more. I think I was trying to prove myself early on, so I was just trying to do everything and I was trying to cover local, national, international weather as one person. And that's a lot to do. Now I've got a whole team and I can delegate and I can ask people to do stuff. I mean, we still move a lot of stories every day. We do between two and four national, international weather stories a day, and then we also do a couple DC weather updates each day, and we do radio and we do social media.

So there's a lot. I mean, I think as through the course of this conversation, you've got enough flavor of all the various things we do. There's a lot to it. There are a lot of moving parts, and that's fun. I mean, that's one of the things I really like about the job, and again, why I don't have regrets is just because I get to do so many different things. And the really cool thing about the job I have now too is that it sort of marries together my two interests, weather forecasting and climate change, because the weather desk that I run is in the Washington Post Climate Department, which was just established about a year ago. We were previously in the metro department because we were initially brought in as a local weather team, so we were in the Post local news or metro department, but we were moved about a year and a half ago into the Post Climate Department, which is a huge, not huge, but it's a large department for, I think it's probably one of the biggest climate teams of any news organization in the world.

We've got, I think over 30 climate journalists on our team, so, so I'm getting to work on both climate change and weather forecasting simultaneously. So it's kind of like I started off when I was 10 years old, really interested in weather forecasting. I sort of in college and graduate school skewed a little bit more towards climate, but wanting to stay active in weather when I was at EPA and through the Post gig, I'm able to kind of do both. I can communicate about both weather and climate change for one of the world's largest, and I think most respected news organizations, which is pretty awesome. It's a big responsibility, and I don't take that lightly. And to have this opportunity again about having no regrets, look at what I'm able to do.

Kelly Savoie:

Right.

Emma Collins:

Absolutely.

Jason Samenow:

Yeah. I mean, few people are able to take their top two interests and make it their job in a high profile way. Have I had to make sacrifices? Yeah. But again, I think now I've gotten to the point where I'm more

in a management role and able to think a little bit more and coach a little bit more rather than having to do it all myself, if that makes sense.

Kelly Savoie:

Yeah, and I mean, you probably said to yourself at the time, what's the worst that could happen? It doesn't work out, you have plenty of experience working for the government. You can get another job for the government.

Jason Samenow:

Yeah. I mean, that was a thought process. Yeah. It's funny, when I took the job at the Post in 2010, I never thought about failure. I never thought, oh gosh, this isn't going to work. Because we had the three-year contract, and that was sort of the proof of concept. After the Snowmageddon winter in which our traffic metrics went wild, I think we demonstrated proof of concept right there that weather was a big sell for local audiences, some things have changed since then, and that the Post has evolved from being more of a hometown newspaper into being this sort of international news organization.

And so we've expanded. Initially I was really focused on the DC area, but now it's like, I would say I spend maybe 10 to 15% of my time on DC weather and probably 80% of my time or more on national, international weather and climate news. So that's been a change as well. Sort of the shift from local, more to national and international. We still do local, but the Post's focus has definitely shifted because we want to scale. When Jeff Bezos took the Post over, he really wanted the Post to make its content reach a lot more people, not just readers in the Washington area. So that's been a change.

Kelly Savoie:

And so what advice do you have for students who are looking to establish similar careers? I mean, I know media has changed so much. Are there certain courses, are there certain types of extracurriculars in professional development they should be doing in order to stand out if they want positions like that?

Jason Samenow:

Yeah, I mean, I think if you want to go into media, you just have to be versatile. I really would emphasize that. And I think just like print media was disrupted by the internet in the first decade of the 2000s, I think broadcast media is being disrupted now because appointment television viewership is changing so quickly. A lot of people don't, especially younger people don't watch local news anymore, especially by 6:10 in the evening, or they don't watch the morning news. They just look at their phones and that's what they do. So broadcast meteorology is going to see a shift as well. And so I think you have to be effective at communicating to different people on different platforms and different formats. So you not only need to be able to communicate on camera and be a strong public speaker, but you need to be able to write, especially if you want to work at a news organization like the Washington Post, you have to be able to write, and write well.

So writing is really important. And so you've got to take humanities as serious as you do science when you're an undergraduate I would say. If you want to go into the communication side of weather, I mean, obviously if you want to go into big data or programming or research, writing is always going to be important, but not as essential as if you go into a media field. Yeah, I mean, obviously being strong in visual presentation with graphics, and I would also say audience engagement is important, and just the ability to interact with your readers, your viewers, and just having an appetite to sustain that engagement and wanting to have that engagement. Because people sort of have high demands now. If they ask you a question on social media, they expect you to respond. You can't ignore it. So yeah, I would

just say, again, for media, versatility is key, but you have to have skills across public speaking as well as writing and all of it. And you just have to learn by doing and practicing. And I would say just get started as soon as you can.

Get on different social media platforms, see who's effective at communicating on those platforms, what they do, how they built their audience, look at Facebook, look at Twitter, look at some of the new ones like Bluesky and Threads, which are emerging with Twitter, or X as I guess it's now called sort of losing some popularity. So yeah, you want to look at people in the weather space who are effective and who have built large audiences, and try to replicate what they're doing and just practice on your own.

And if you want to be a strong writer, I mean, you want to obviously take classes in journalism and maybe consider working for your college daily newspapers and get experience, not just writing about weather, but other topics, because I think you're going to be more attractive to a news organization if you can write about more than just one subject. I've actually not had to do that. I've just always written about weather. But I think just because I think your path towards career growth than any organization is better the more skills you have. So you don't want to be too specialized, I guess I would say. You limit yourself a little bit.

Kelly Savoie:

Yeah. And the college newspaper is kind of a good idea because lots of these positions, when you're applying for jobs for writing, they want a writing sample-

Jason Samenow:

Oh my gosh. Yeah, absolutely.

Kelly Savoie:

Then you'll have something.

Jason Samenow:

Yeah, for sure. And I've obviously, I've reviewed a lot of job applicants over time, and it's been surprising to me the number of people who they struggle with, what writing sample to give you. They will send you a research paper from a class, and that doesn't really show how you communicate to the public, so it's a little hard to evaluate that. So any opportunity you have to write for the public, it doesn't have to be a newspaper, but you could write for a website, so yeah, I mean, just any opportunity or platform to get some practice and experience writing for laypeople, I think is useful.

Emma Collins:

Yeah, like a blog.

Jason Samenow:

Like a blog, exactly. Yeah. And I have to say, part of my job at EPA before I even started CapitalWeather.com was science communication. I wrote a lot of the material on EPA's global warming site back in the day. So I had some experience doing that, and I worked on my college paper, so worked on my high school paper. So I always have had a passion for communicating and writing. So I guess maybe I was destined to do what I'm doing in some ways. But yeah, I think get as much experience as you can communicating. If you want to go into weather communications, it's an exciting field, it's going

to change a lot too. And AI is going to change things, that's going to be true across a lot of different fields, but I think that it will also hold true in journalism and weather as well.

Kelly Savoie:

Well, Jason, 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?

Jason Samenow:

Okay, so-

Kelly Savoie:

You're ready.

Jason Samenow:

Well, yeah. So for me, that's a hard one to answer because I have a lot of hobbies, and I wish I had more time. This gets back to the burnout work-life balance issue. So if I'd had my government job, I may just had one job rather than doing what I've done, I would've had more time. But yeah, I mean, I like to do a lot of things. I like to play piano. I like to read. I like to play golf. I like to play tennis, and I like to collect things. But I think the thing I am most passionate about, which maybe it's strange, but a lot of people are into sports teams. So I'm a big University of Virginia football and basketball fan.

Of course, that's my undergraduate alma mater. So I love following their sports teams. Their football team is not good. They're one in five. They were much better when I was an undergraduate. But their basketball team is good, and they have been good. So that's good. And one of the fun things about it too is that I've indoctrinated my son who's 12, and he's also a big UVA football and basketball fan. So we go to games together, which is a great way to bond with him. So that's one of the real fun things about that particular hobby.

Kelly Savoie:

Yeah. And you're not a Fairweather, you're a fan no matter what.

Jason Samenow:

Oh, absolutely. Yeah.

Kelly Savoie:

That's great.

Jason Samenow:

I'm not a bandwagon fan who only pulls for them when they're doing well, so yeah, no, no, I just enjoy it. It's just something, yeah, it's fun.

Kelly Savoie:

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

Jason Samenow:

Absolutely. It's been a blast. Thank you. Appreciate it.

Emma Collins:

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 Le, technical direction is provided by Peter Killelea. Our theme music is composed and performed by Steve Savoie, 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.