

## Transcript of "[Vanessa Alonso, Sunrise/Midday Meteorologist at WCBI in Columbus, Mississippi](#)"

Clear Skies Ahead: Conversations about Careers in Meteorology and Beyond

January 12, 2021

### **Kelly Savoie:**

Welcome to the American Meteorological Society's podcast series on careers in the atmospheric and related sciences. I'm Kelly Savoie, and I'm here with Rex Horner, and we'll be your hosts. Our podcast series will give you the opportunity to step into the shoes of an expert working in weather, water, and climate sciences.

### **Rex Horner:**

We are excited to introduce today's guest, Vanessa Alonso, the Sunrise/Midday Meteorologist at WCBI in Columbus, Mississippi. Welcome, Vanessa. Thanks so much for joining us.

### **Vanessa Alonso:**

No, thank you guys for inviting me to be here with you today. I can't tell you how much this means to me. I have been an active member of the AMS — wow, seems like forever. This is just another way of me to contributing to you guys and everything you have done for me.

### **Kelly:**

Well, that's great. Vanessa, could you tell us a little bit about your educational background and what sparked your interest in meteorology?

### **Vanessa:**

Yes. I have a very interesting story with that. I have actually always wanted to be a meteorologist since I was a kid. I was only seven years old when a Category 5 — Hurricane Andrew — devastated my hometown of Miami, Florida on August 24th, 1992. There are little things that I still remember very well about that night. I just remembered hearing this constant roar outside my house that just wouldn't stop. I lived in Coral Gables at the time. That is where the northern eyewall of the storm was just passing through. I lived actually a couple of blocks from the National Hurricane Center, and as everyone knows, the famous story, the Miami radar was lost at the National Hurricane Center that same night when Andrew was passing through South Florida. I just remember hearing that constant roaring sound of that 165 mile per hour wind.

### **Vanessa:**

My mom remembers vividly this noise on our roof of the house. It was making this like, *errr, errr* [impression of sound]. My dad literally thought at that point that we were about to lose our roof. We were watching Bryan Norcross — obviously Bryan Norcross, he was the hero of Miami that night. My dad remembers Bryan Norcross saying at that moment, "Get a mattress, get into a place with no windows, and just hunker down." We grabbed the mattress from my parents' bedroom. We hunkered in there. And at that moment we just heard this loud noise and we realized one of our windows blew out.

**Vanessa:**

Thankfully, that was the only issue we had at our home. My home continued standing, but as you went miles South of Coral Gables into Kendall, into Florida City, Homestead, it was like a nuclear bomb went off. It was just damage for miles and miles, and you just didn't know where that ended. Me being a kid, it was like, "How did this happen?"

**Vanessa:**

I just remembered when school started up again, a few weeks later, I remembered going to the library and getting every single book I could think of related to weather and meteorology. That kind of inspired me to go into weather and weather just became a hobby for me growing up. Then I realized when I was going through high school, I was really good at math, I was really good in science, physics, chemistry. I found out that you can make weather into a career by being a meteorologist, and me being the math [and] science whiz I was, I decided to go for it. I was actually the first student from the University of Miami in 2008 to be the first student to receive a Bachelor of Science in Communication in both Meteorology and Broadcast Journalism. There was no broadcast meteorology program when I arrived at the University of Miami.

**Vanessa:**

When everyone, my advisors, my teachers, my professors saw the drive that I had into making this dream a career, they were behind me 100%. They were like, "We're interested in starting a broadcast meteorology program, would you like to be our little guinea pig for this program?" I did it. It took me five years, a lot of physics, math, dynamics, forecasting, a lot of long nights studying, lots of coffee — coffee being my best friend in college — but I did it. It was one of the best days of my life when I walked down that stage and got my degree in meteorology. It was one of the best feelings ever.

**Kelly:**

That's so exciting that you were the first student in that program. How awesome.

**Vanessa:**

Oh, it was great being that mark. Since I have graduated 12 years ago, at least, I know about 100 kids [that] have graduated through that program. I know a few who have made it to the bigger markets. To know that I was able to open up that door for these kids to make their dreams come true, it makes me feel good.

**Rex:**

What was the first market, Vanessa, that you made your way into after graduation, and what was your career path after that first job up into where you found yourself now?

**Vanessa:**

I was very fortunate that I was able to get a lot of experience in college. I did internships at CNN in Atlanta, Georgia. I was able to do internships at WTVJ NBC 6 in Miami, WSVN Channel 7 Fox in Miami, and WFROR-CBS 4 Miami. I was also very heavily involved as a weather forecaster for our college stations news show, News Vision. That helped me a lot to build my resume. Unfortunately, in 2008, I graduated at the worst possible time to be a graduate. As we all know, we were going through a recession at that at the time. I just remembered every week for about a year, I was working in retail as

an assistant manager in Victoria Secret, just trying to get by, trying to make money. I just remembered going to the post office every week, sending out — these youngsters wouldn't believe it — back then you would have to send DVDs.

**Vanessa:**

That's something that I've noticed that has evolved over these last 12 years I've been in the real world, that when I first started off in this business, you would send out DVDs to your news directors, along with a resume and a cover letter, all through mail. Now all you have to do is send an email and send your YouTube link and that's it. That's all you do today. For me, I just spent week after week sending out DVDs and envelopes. Even the people at the post office knew who I was right away when I walked through the door, they'd be like, "Vanessa, how many resumes are you sending out this week?"

**Vanessa:**

Oh, it was hard. It was hard. Being in a recession and not knowing where you were going to go, it was kind of scary for me. Me coming from a very tight knit family — I come from a variety of different cultures. My mom, she's Cuban American. My dad is Jewish, German American. I grew up in a culture where you're very close to your family, and I was the first born daughter. Just not knowing where I was going, it was like, "How was I going to go through the process of being on my own without my parents by my side?" It was a lot of changes going on that that year we were waiting.

**Vanessa:**

I will never forget that day in July 2009. I got a call from KOAM-TV in Joplin, Missouri. They saw my tape, They were very interested in me. I remember talking to the chief meteorologist, Doug Heady, who obviously is very well known in the AMS community. He has had a huge impact on my career to this very day. He's a very dear friend and mentor to me. He's guided me through this career in ways that I can never repay him back for.

**Vanessa:**

I just remember that first interview with him and he was asking me, "What does a girl like you from Miami, Florida wants to go to the Midwest for?" For me, I was ready to leave 12 months of sunshine, hurricanes behind and go somewhere where the weather was going to be ever changing, For me, the Midwest is like the Mecca for meteorologists. You get all four seasons, you get everything from the hot to dry summers, the severe weather in the spring, the blizzards and the cold in the winter time, and then you get the changing of the leaves and the cool weather in the fall. I never got a chance to experience that.

**Vanessa:**

I wanted that opportunity to get a chance to forecast that type of weather. Up until I moved to Joplin, I never forecasted snow, I never forecasted severe weather. So this was going to be something new and exciting for me. I ended up going to Joplin. I ended up being in Joplin for about two years. Joplin ended up becoming like a second home for me. Then in April of 2011, I got a call from the northern part of the Show-Me State to Kirksville, Missouri. I got a call from KTVO. They saw that I was bilingual. I'm bilingual in both English and Spanish, and they were looking for a bilingual English-speaking, Spanish meteorologist. I was like, "You know what? This is an opportunity for me that I couldn't say no to."

**Vanessa:**

I ended up taking the job. I moved from Joplin on April 15th, 2011. Little did I know what was going to happen there five weeks later. It is still something that I still get chills down my spine. I'm even getting goosebumps talking to you thinking about it, because as we all know, on May 22nd, 2011, the Joplin EF-5 tornado hit the city. That huge monster literally just wiped out the neighborhood I lived in, in Joplin. It was just a blessing in disguise that I left Joplin when I did.

**Vanessa:**

When we first found out about the tornado in Joplin, my news director, she was like, "You're going down there. You know people down there. We want you to go and survey the damage." For me, having to experience hurricane Andrew as a child, and then having to deal with the aftermath of the EF-5 tornado in Joplin as an adult, it really — going through those two experiences really made me realize at that point, it was a learning curve for me, that weather affects everyone in all ways, shapes, and forms. Weather doesn't affect just a certain group of people, a certain background, a certain race, religion, you name it. Weather affects everyone in some way, shape, or form. That just made my purpose as being a meteorologist greater.

**Vanessa:**

I've always been taught, "You have to be there and be informative during the good sunny days, but you also have to make sure you keep your viewer safe during the stormy bad days." Going through that experience took my career to a whole other level. I ended up staying in Kirksville, Missouri for six years as their English/Spanish speaking meteorologist and MMJ.

**Vanessa:**

In February 2017, I ended up crossing over to the Sunflower State to Topeka, Kansas at KSNT where I worked there as their weekend morning meteorologist and their multimedia journalist. That opportunity allowed me for the first time ever to actually go and storm chase. That was another great experience that I went through. For me, having in the past only being in the studio for severe weather to actually go out and storm chase, that was a rush. I remembered still to this very day being stuck in a hail storm. Our storm chaser vehicle was a Hummer, so we were safe where we were, but I just remember seeing all these chunks of hail just falling. Once the storm passed, I thought it snowed because all you could see was white everywhere. That was quite an experience going through an actual hailstorm when I lived in Topeka.

**Vanessa:**

I was only in Topeka for 10 months because in December 2017, I got a call from KQ2 in St. Joseph, Missouri. They were looking for a weekday morning meteorologist and they were like, "We saw your work. We really like your personality. We think you'd be perfect here." I went ahead and I wanted to — I love the Midwest. At this point, I was already living in the Midwest for almost 10 years. I wanted to stay in the Midwest. I took that opportunity. This was my first full time, five-day a week weather position. At this point, I was ready to go from a three-day reporting position to go to a five-day-a-week weather position. That was something that I was really excited about.

**Vanessa:**

For two years, I did morning weather, and I was also their feature reporter, which was nice because I had to do a lot of hard news when I was a multimedia journalist. It was not fun when you had to cover. I can't tell you how many murders and robberies and horrible stories that I did not want to report. It's like, "You're a meteorologist, you didn't study to cover murders and trials and things like that." It was a nice change for me to actually do more feature reporting when I lived in St. Joseph. I got to cover the Kansas City Chiefs during their two past amazing seasons, especially their Super Bowl win. That was amazing. I got to do more agricultural stories.

**Vanessa:**

It was my first chance of getting to talk about climate change with my viewers, especially with the state of the planet we live in now, that climate change is now coming to the forefront. I'm actually part of the Climate Matters community group, which is a group of broadcast meteorologists that are working to try to bring climate change to the forefront, because it's something that I feel very strongly about that we do need, as broadcast meteorologists, to communicate to our viewers, to let them know that this is happening, this is real, and that we need to take steps now to slow down the process or else our planet and us and our children and our children's children will suffer if we don't take action now to try to slow down the climate change process. It was a very great two years there.

**Vanessa:**

But then in December of 2019, I got a call from WCBI here in Columbus. Keith Gibson, the chief here, he saw my resume, he saw my work. He was like, "We're looking for someone with your experience to come work for us in Dixie Alley. Would you be interested in coming here?" It was a very difficult decision for me to make. I would say it was one of the most difficult decisions I've ever made in my career because I've grown to love the Midwest. Missouri became home for me for 10 years. Being in Tornado Alley, covering the severe weather, the winter, the blizzards. A part of me wanted to stay Kansas City. I love Kansas City to death. I miss it dearly, but I was ready for a change in my life. I figured, Dixie Alley: it's a whole other world, it's a whole other jungle. I figured if I didn't take this opportunity now, when would I get an opportunity like this?

**Vanessa:**

I've been here now in Columbus for six months and whoa, it's a change. It is quite the change. I can't tell you how many nights I have not slept. I've had to babysit radar because — Dixie Alley, it's exciting, But at the same time it's a forecasting challenge that I'm still learning to this very day. I'm still trying to get used to [it].

**Kelly:**

Wow! That's a whirlwind of positions, but that's awesome that you had so many opportunities. When you were in school, you said you did lots of internships. Were there any other opportunities you pursued that you knew would be beneficial to getting a job as a broadcast meteorologist?

**Vanessa:**

Well, that's where my involvement with the AMS comes in. I have to first say, "The American Meteorological Society, you have had such a big impact in my life that I don't even know how I'm ever going to repay the AMS for everything you have done for me." I even tell my mentees to this very day,

"You need to get involved with the American Meteorological Society, because you just never know what getting involved with this organization will do for your career down the road." I got involved first with the AMS when I was offered a minority scholarship for my first two years at the University of Miami to study meteorology. It was through getting that scholarship and learning about the American Meteorological Society and knowing about how this organization is — it made me realize, "Okay, I need to be a member of this organization. If I'm going to be a broadcast meteorologist or a meteorologist, I need to be involved in this."

**Vanessa:**

I became a student member of the AMS in 2003–2004. In 2005, I, along with some other meteorology students, we went ahead and we created the University of Miami Student Chapter. I ended up being a founding student chapter of the AMS. Through that experience of creating the AMS student chapter, I was able to attend my first AMS annual conference in San Diego. That was my first opportunity to career network with people. That's another thing that I tell my mentees all the time, "You need to go to these conferences and you have to network, network, network. You need to meet people. You will never know if that connection or that person you network with could get you an internship or get you a job down the road. You just never know. You just never know when you go to these conferences."

**Vanessa:**

Not only did I [go] to the San Diego conference, I went to the conferences in Atlanta in 2006, and then to San Antonio in 2007 as a student volunteer. That was my first real involvement with the AMS, actually being a part of the annual meeting and actually helping you all out with making sure everything was running smoothly, whether it was running the registration desk or running PowerPoints at the presentations, making sure there were no technical issues, or getting coffee. It was little things like that. You just never know how valuable that experience could be for you down the road. I tell my mentees to this very day, "You need to be involved with AMS if you're not a member yet, because you'll regret it later if you don't become a member of the AMS."

**Rex:**

You've talked a lot about your mentees and you talked earlier about a mentor that was really helpful to you, Doug Heady, and I'm just interested to know, what is maybe an important moment in your life that a mentor helped guide you through, or a particularly difficult situation maybe that they were there for you or a decision that you had no idea how to proceed and they were able to offer some wisdom?

**Vanessa:**

Okay, well, this actually brings me back to Doug. Ever since I got to Joplin in 2009, Doug, as everyone knows in the AMS community, he's been a very essential part of the AMS Broadcast Board, and obviously the Broadcast Board is known to give out the CBM, the Certified Broadcast Meteorologist seal, and Doug from the get-go, he's like, "You need to get your CBM. You need to get your CBM. You need to get your CBM." I saw the requirements, I saw the process, and it was like a part of me was scared to get the seal. I don't know. I just felt like I didn't have what it took to become a CBM. I went from about 2009 to about 2016 being a broadcast meteorologist and not having my seal. Now, me being involved with the AMS, I heard about how big the CBM program was, but at the time I didn't feel I had the confidence to do it.

**Vanessa:**

I remembered seeing Doug in Austin in 2016 — at the broadcast conference in Austin — and he told me like, "Have you gotten your CBM yet?" I went, "Nope." At that point, he literally sat me down. At this point, I was already going from year five to year six at KTVO in Kirksville. It was a small market. I wasn't making enough money. I wanted to move on to another job. I was getting interviews, but I wasn't getting the job. I just was at a crossroads at that point. I just did not know where my life and my career was going to go from there. He literally told me, "If you don't get your CBM now, you're going to miss out. You never know what opportunities you're going to miss out because you didn't have your CBM." I will admit my heart was pounding the whole time I was taking that exam.

**Vanessa:**

When I found out that I finally passed that exam with an 81 percent — oh my God, I just remember screaming out and saying, "I passed!" We had a proctor watching me through the webcam and I just freaked out for a second. I was like, "Oh my God, you're not supposed to be talking when you take your exam." But at that point I turned in my exam and the proctor was like, "No, you're fine. Congratulations." I was just so happy just knowing that I went through that hurdle.

**Kelly:**

That's fantastic.

**Vanessa:**

Going through the exam, that was quite — just getting through the exam part was an experience. Then it was the video submissions and, oh my goodness, those chill nights that I was doing those video submissions, I was just waking up with a goal every day saying, "This is going to be the day I'm going to get my active day. This is going to be the day I'm going to get my routine day down." You're your own worst critic. Every time you're looking and watching yourself, you're like, "What? Wait, no, am I doing this right? Am I pointing this right?" Thankfully, I had my chief, I had other mentors that I went to saying, "Hey, can you look over this? Can you see how it went?"

**Vanessa:**

That's another thing. Being involved in the AMS, I got a chance to meet so many people who saw my drive, who saw that there was something bigger and better for me out there to do. I think people wanted to see that happen for me. Having people and that support behind me meant a lot to me when I was going through this CBM process. Also, I'm very involved with a Facebook group specifically for female broadcast meteorologists, and that's one of the biggest support systems that I have ever had. It's tough enough being a female in this broadcast business. It really is. And to be part of a group to know that you're not alone, and you have that support system of other females, to know that they're going through the same issues or different issues that you're going through, it really helped me a lot.

**Vanessa:**

February 16th 2019: I will never forget that day. I was having a really crummy day earlier that day. I was just so over the day already. I just remember looking up at the sky and I just said, "God, just let something good happen for me today. Just let something good happen for me today." I get home. I see there was a little key in my mailbox. I opened up my mailbox and then I see this huge thick white

envelope from the AMS. I just went, "Oh my goodness, this is it." I honestly have to say getting my AMS CBM seal was — it has been the most exciting thing that has ever happened to me.

**Vanessa:**

I've met amazing people in my life, but unfortunately, I have met people in my career in my life who have doubted me and underestimated me of what I was capable of. Getting my seal helped me to realize that I can do something. If you set your mind to something, you can do it.

**Kelly:**

Could you tell our listeners a little bit about what your day on the job is like at WCBI?

**Vanessa:**

Oh, yes. I can definitely break that down. Currently, I'm a morning through Friday, weekday meteorologist for the morning and noon shows. My sleeping schedule is not the best. I would honestly say that's the most challenging part for me is my sleeping schedule with this job. I usually go to bed every night around 5:00 PM, 6:00 PM, so I can try to get a good six to seven hours of sleep. That's my goal I try to do every night during the week. I get up around approximately midnight, 12:30 in the morning. I usually will get my hair, my makeup done. Yes, I do my own hair and makeup. A lot of people think that we have makeup artists, that we hire people that do our hair when we go to work. Nope, that is far from the truth.

**Vanessa:**

I personally, at every market I've worked at, I've done my own hair and makeup. That's all me. I do my hair, I do my makeup. I usually lay out my outfit for the day the night before. Get my outfit done, everything from the accessories to the dress, the shoes. Around 1:30 AM, I'll be eating breakfast. I'll start looking over from home, the latest forecast models, like the GFS, the NAM, National Weather Service discussions.

**Vanessa:**

My chief meteorologist, Keith, he is great about emailing me the night before and saying, "Hey, this has changed since you did the noon show the day before. This is what I saw changed in the forecast, or something's going on this computer, you should look into it." We have a really good communication system. We're pretty good at letting each other know what happens during our shifts. That way, when we walk in for our shift, we're not surprised if something happens or something changes.

**Vanessa:**

I'll get into the station around 2:00 AM, I'll build my graphics, I'll get our little weather center ready for the show. Around 4:00 AM, I'll do a website weather forecast for — especially in this day and age, a lot of people they'll — everyone looks at their phones first when they get up in the morning. Before they even turn the TV on, they're going to first look at their phones. We want to make sure that we cover social media and our website. I'll do a little forecast for the website and for social media.

**Vanessa:**

Then we do CBS morning show cut-ins at 4:00 AM. My station is a CBS station. so we'll record our cuttings at 4:00 AM to run during the 7:25, 7:55, 8:25 and 8:55 cut-ins. From 4:30 AM to 8:00 AM, we

will do our morning show. From 4:30 to 7:00, it will be on our CBS channel. Then from 7:00 AM to 8:00 AM, we'll do our newscast on our CW channel, which is the other broadcast company that we have at our station. We're mostly CBS, but we also have a CW department that we'll do a morning show for. That's a three and a half hour long morning show. I'm not just doing those live TV heads. In between my live TV heads, which I do about every 10 to 15 minutes, I will update the station website, doing a web story for the day of what the weather's going to be like. I'll break everything down of how the weather's going to be for today, for tonight, for tomorrow, for the next few days.

**Vanessa:**

I will constantly be doing social media posts on Facebook, Twitter. I have Instagram, our station also has an Instagram page. I'll do Instagram. I have Snapchat. I'll do Snapchat. We haven't gone to TikTok yet. I'm still learning TikTok. I don't even know if I can handle TikTok right now. It's something we're thinking about, so I'm like, "Oh boy, I need to learn TikTok fast." That's something we're probably talking about to do. Also, I will put together a forecast for the local newspaper, the *Columbus Dispatch*, that's the local newspaper in Columbus. It's actually just down the block from the station in downtown Columbus. I'll do a forecast for the newspaper.

**Vanessa:**

Then I will also do radio hits for six local area radio stations. It is a lot. A lot of people just think I walk in at 4:30, I look glamorous and smiley, and I just go home and I'm done for the day. Nope. If people only knew what was going on behind the scenes, if people only knew.

**Kelly:**

Yes. You sound like it's a super busy day.

**Vanessa:**

Oh yeah. I'm glad that coffee became my best friend in college because I can't tell you how many mornings I can't get by without coffee. I need my coffee. The good thing is too, I'm a very vibrant person, very alive. Getting through the morning show, being my peppy self helps me a lot. By the time 8:00 AM rolls around, I'm just ready to crash. I'm ready for a nap. Thankfully, between 8:00 AM to about 10:30 in the morning, I'll come home. I live only five minutes from the station in downtown Columbus. I'll take a little break. I'll take a nice little hour, 90 minute nap, Come back into work around 10:30, do our midday/noon show. It's a quick half hour show. After doing the three and a half hour show in the morning, half hour noon show is a piece of cake. It is literally the easiest show to do.

**Vanessa:**

By then, I'm just like, "I can get through this. It's no biggie." Then I will get home usually around 1:00, 1:15. At that point, it's my laid back day. If I need to run errands, I'll run errands. I'll go to the gym. The gym is my biggest de-stressor. I love going to the gym and working out and just de-stressing and just mentally de-stress and just get ready for the next day. I'll get home from the gym, shower, get in my PJ's, I'll watch the 5:00 PM news to see what my chief Keith has in his forecast. Then I'll go to bed and we do it all over again the next day.

**Rex:**

That's a pretty good rundown. You've had a ton of experience and I'd be interested to know what do you feel are some must-haves on a resume for a meteorologist who is just starting their career very

early on, what could be on the resume? Also, in general, what advice would you give them on what they should expect for their career?

**Vanessa:**

Oh, this is a good one. Obviously you need your college degree in meteorology. I will tell you right now, I can't tell you how many nights I cried over physics, my math classes, even dynamics. Dynamics 1 and Dynamics 2, I still get nightmares thinking about the long equations from that class. I still have nightmares thinking about it, but you need that education, you need that background. You need to have that background in math and science to be a meteorologist. If you don't like math and science, then unfortunately you can't — you could still be a weather enthusiast, but you need that math and science background to be a meteorologist. You've got to love math. You've got to love science. It's a STEM career. You have to love STEM in order to be a meteorologist. Obviously lots of experience from the unpaid jobs, like the internships, job shadowing to the paid positions.

**Vanessa:**

Getting your seals, like I just told you earlier. The CBM, I felt for me, helped me to get to where I am in my career. If I didn't get my CBM, I wouldn't be where I am now. Getting my CBM definitely opened up a lot of doors for me. I am currently going to start working on my National Weather Association broadcast seal. That is another goal that I'm going to be working on over the next year or so. Definitely getting your seal is very important. Is it another difficult task? Yes, it's going to be. Yes, you have to study your butt off for an exam. Yes, you're going to have to put some good video submissions together to submit to the board to get reviewed and evaluated. Is that scary? Is that going to be difficult? Yes. But is it worth it in the end? Yes, it is worth it in the end because you just never know what doors it's going to open for you.

**Vanessa:**

This is something that I tell to all my mentees, because especially in this day and age, your first job — I'm going to tell you right now, your first job in the broadcasting business, it's not going to be the most glamorous job in the whole world. You will most likely have to move to a very small town and you will most likely make very little money to start off. I will tell you right now, when I first — me coming from a metropolitan area like Miami, Florida, and Miami, Florida is not only a metropolitan area, it's very diverse. There's a lot of culture, a lot of diversity. That was my life for almost twenty-five years.

**Vanessa:**

To go from Miami, Florida to Joplin, Missouri, that was a big culture shock for me. Yeah, the Midwest, the weather, I was excited about it. But then I was like, "Oh, Toto, I am in Kansas and Missouri now." It was a culture shock, but it was a lifestyle that I actually ended up loving. Miami is a very fast paced city, and the traffic is just absolutely horrendous. Now, when I go home to visit my family, I have to mentally prepare myself for Miami traffic. I can't handle it anymore. It's just so funny how living in one place for so long just changes you and you just get accustomed to the lifestyle.

**Vanessa:**

But you have to be prepared to move to a very small town in the middle of nowhere and make very little money. There were times that I was living on soup cans because I couldn't afford enough to buy enough grocery. Soup cans was the only way for me to get by because I needed to save money for rent or to pay student loans or whatever, or health insurance, any little things that I needed to do to get by.

**Vanessa:**

But there is a plus side to all of this. Being in a small market in your first job, you get a chance to have a lot of opportunities, and you're going to learn a lot. You will learn a lot and you need to learn a lot in order to get your feet wet to help you make that next big step in your career. This is something that I still tell everyone to this very day. I feel it's my pet peeve of life. Every day when I get up every morning, I always make an effort to learn something new every day, because I feel no matter how old you are, you should never stop learning. You should never stop growing, regardless of how many years of experience you have, especially with how changing this business is. There's something new that's coming out every day. So if I can learn something new every day when I get out and go into the world, "You know what, hey, I'm living life."

**Kelly:**

Well, that's some great advice. Vanessa, we always ask our guests one last fun question at the end of each podcast, what is your favorite musical group?

**Vanessa:**

Oh, this is going to be a fun one. Lady Gaga. Oh my goodness. Me and her have a lot of similarities that a lot of people wouldn't believe. Lady Gaga, she came out, I remember, when I was first starting off in this business. I remember when Lady Gaga first came out, this woman, she's an artist. This woman knows — I think she's very brilliant and smart when it comes to her music, her fashion, her creativity. She's a very smart woman when it comes to all of this. She expresses herself in a way that I feel like it made me feel, "It's okay for me to express myself and to show the world, 'Hey, this is what I love. This is what I want to do. If you like it, great. If you don't, that's okay. Just let me be me and let me show the world what I got.'" She came out in 2009, right around the time I was just starting off. To see someone new and fresh to come out the same time I was starting off, and to see that she was not afraid to be herself and to be her, it inspired me to say, "You know what? This is who I am. It's okay to be me. And it's okay to express your feelings and show your love and passion."

**Vanessa:**

That's another thing that I tell my mentees, because a lot of people ask me, "With all the craziness that you have been through in this business, why are you still in this business?" And I tell people, "It's because of my enthusiasm and it's because of my passion for weather." I love weather. I have a passion for weather that is very, very deep. It's been that passion that helps me get up every morning and has helped me get through the good days and has helped me get through the bad days, and it's helped me get through the ugly days. It's that spark that just keeps me going. And as long as I have that passion and I feel that I still can have that passion to show the world of who I am and what I got, that's all that matters at the end of the day. That's another thing I tell kids, "You have to have passion for what you want to do. You've got to love what you want to do in life."

**Rex:**

What Lady Gaga song should we all go listen to now?

**Vanessa:**

Oh, wow. Wow. That's a good question.

**Kelly:**

My favorite one is the one from The Star is Born, "Shallow." Love that one.

**Vanessa:**

I love "Shallow." Wow. It's so hard to pick. Oh, "Born this Way." That is definitely my all-time favorite one, "Born this Way," now thinking about it, because it's the lyrics. It's just saying, "I was born this way," and I feel like I was born to be a meteorologist and I was born to share my passion and love of weather with the world.

**Rex:**

Perfect. Well, thank you so much for joining us, Vanessa, and for sharing your work experience with us.

**Vanessa:**

No, thank you guys again for letting me be here. Again, thank you so much to the AMS and to all of you for all you've done for me. I am still very involved with the AMS to this very day. I'm an AMS Community Champion. I am a member of the AMS Station Scientist Committee. My goal is to eventually get on the AMS Broadcast Board to help inspire others to get their Certified Broadcast Meteorologists seals. I'm not going anywhere. I'm planning to still be with the AMS for a very long time. So thank you guys for letting me be on today.

**Rex:**

We're grateful to have you with us. Well, that's our show for today. Please, join us next time, rain or shine!