From Tornadoes to Teaching: A Professor’s Journey

Christopher M. Godfrey
University of North Carolina Asheville

The track from birth to high school is often clear
Then life presents us with a series of choices…

Choice #1: Which undergraduate school?

I chose Cornell University…

…as a music major!
In college, take advantage of every opportunity

- Morning observations at a cooperative observing station
- Undergraduate research
  - The January thaw
  - Forecast verification
- Jobs and internships
  - Mount Washington Observatory
  - Northeast Regional Climate Center
  - Campus library

---

In college, take advantage of every opportunity

- Conferences
  - Northeast Storms Conference, Saratoga Springs, NY
  - Local AMS meetings
  - Weather Analysis and Forecasting, Denver, CO
  - Probability and Statistics, Asheville, NC
- Teaching Assistant
  - Intro. to meteorology
  - Thermodynamics
  - Dynamics
  - Astronomy
Choice #2: Which graduate school?

- A few things to consider
  - Good program in your field of study
  - In your application, don’t limit your interests only to a narrow research focus
  - Apply to several schools
  - Visit the schools
  - Consider a teaching assistantship before accepting a research assistantship

I chose to move to Norman, OK
I chose to move to Norman, OK

University of Oklahoma

- Masters degree (research assistantship)
  - Rainfall rates, radar, and drop size distributions

Investigation of Rainfall Estimation Using Polarimetric Radar
I met my wife, Elaine!

Storm chasing with research groups: Doppler on Wheels
Storm chasing with research groups:
UMASS Mobile Radars

IMAX Filming
*Forces of Nature*

The “People Chaser” Derecho
The “People Chaser” Derecho

Looking West

Looking East
Hail and Tornadoes

I have seem some great storms…
...and learned the wrong way to chase them

What am I going to do after I graduate?
Choice #3: Do I try for a doctorate?

- More things to consider:
  - Do you need the Ph.D. for what you want to do with your life?
  - A good advisor makes all the difference
  - Wait for a good project (or create your own)
- Don’t let setbacks discourage you from achieving your goals
  - I did not pass the Ph.D. qualifying exam on the first try!
  - Studying for it might help…
  - …and it did

Sometimes the best projects arrive later

- While waiting…
  - Edited scientific papers for CIMMS
  - Chased storms (rarely chase without being paid!)
  - NCAR Juneau Airport Wind System field project
  - Taught “Severe and Unusual Weather”
I found a great Ph.D. project!

Generation of Improved Land-surface Data and an Assessment of its Impact on Mesoscale Predictions

Preparing for an Academic Career in the Geosciences
- A career-shaping workshop
- Decided I want to teach at a PUI
UNC Asheville had a job opening!

Applied to four schools…

…offered jobs at 2

I chose to teach at UNCA
Tornadoes and High Pressure: Severe Weather Field Experience