

Q & A for NHC



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You are clearly one of the veterans here.

Yes, I was looking at that. There are a couple of hurricane specialists that were here before me: Lixion Avila and Richard Pasch. Jack Beven was in TAFB (Tropical Analysis and Forecast Branch) when I got here. I've been here 17 years!

There aren't many female meteorologists in your position, let alone one that is highly experienced.

I've always been in male-oriented and male-dominated scientific fields. I was an electronics engineer. There's been many times where I've been the only female on shift, the only female on a flight line, and the only female on a ship. That's the way my brain works. I was more geared to that than female-oriented positions.

You have military experience then?

Oh yes, I had four years of military duty in the Air Force. I worked flight line - electronic warfare. After I left the military, I started working for what was Western Electric, now AT&T as a government contractor doing oceanographic research for the Navy. So, I have been working for the government my entire life.

When did the weather bug come in?

I was doing oceanographic research, and it came down that I was going to be laid off. AT&T said it would send me back to school to get a degree in something else. So they paid for me to attend school for three years and I got a degree in Climatology from the University of North Carolina in Asheville. But AT&T laid me off anyway when it lost some government contracts when the Cold War ended.

How were you able to use the degree?

I immediately started working here at NHC in TAFB. I graduated in June and started the following September.

Had you ever been here before?

I had never done anything with weather before I got here. I started as an intern, and have been at the same desk since. But I've branched out. I don't just do meteorology.

Branched out to what?

I used to do a lot of public speaking, going to schools and career days. I did one stint for two years as a DOC/NOAA recruiter. I am now doing the time sheets here, which is totally out of my comfort zone. I also did a temporary assignment with NOS (National Ocean Services), which really was not much of a stretch for me because I had done oceanographic research before. I went up to NOS and did that for six months, and that's when I got involved with GIS. I am now doing GIS work for NHC and OPC (Ocean Prediction Center), creating shape files for the new AWIPS2 system.

That's a lot on your plate! How do you keep it all organized?

I just take it one day at a time.

If I were to ask what your primary job is here, what would you say?

My primary job is surface analysis. I also write the tropical weather discussions. I fill in for the Pacific forecaster when the need be, doing marine products. Then I do all of the time sheets for TAFB and all of shape files for AWIPS2.

There are a lot of physical changes going on in your TAFB surroundings. That has to be exciting.

My entire career has been like that. When I started working with computers, they filled rooms. PCs did not exist. I remember getting our first portable computer and it filled up a 100 square foot room. I still have paper tapes where we used to load programs. When I first got here, we were just starting to draw the maps on the computer. We would print out for copy, and take it to somebody else to scan it and send it out, rather than just hit a "send" button and out it goes to the world. That's just since I have been here.

But the changes have all been positive?

Oh absolutely! I won't say easier, but more cohesive, especially with AWIPS2. We'll be able to better coordinate with the other offices, because our forecast area abuts with all of the local forecast offices along the Gulf coast and the East coast. We have to coordinate all of this, and it'll make coordination a lot easier.

I see you working the midnight shift a lot. Are you kind of a night owl?

Well, yes. The only good time to see the sun come up is right before bed. Actually, it is getting harder to change shifts. I'm getting older, so I don't work as many mid-shifts as I used to. I am working just my fair share now.

You mentioned retirement. How far away is that for you to be eligible?

One thousand nine hundred eighty-eight days! I just happen to have it on the computer and noticed it went below two thousand. I can retire in a little more than five years. Whether I will or not depends upon what's happening.

What's the best part of your job?

That I get to go home in nine hours? Just kidding! I really enjoy the GIS work. I'm really getting into that. I'm taking some courses now, and only have a few left. Then I start on Python language courses.

This is the future?

In the beginning, there was no real use for GIS. But once I started getting into it and taking courses for it, I said "Well, let's do this with this" and it has just evolved. As a favor to (TAFB meteorologist) Eric Christensen, I was redoing the shape files for the offshore waters, that's how it started, and then it just snowballed. Now we are finding more and more need for it, and more and more uses for it.

What's the worst part of the job?

Nine hours before I get to go home? Some of us are working alternate works hours. I'm ready for a change. I'm one of those that have to be constantly challenged. That's why the GIS interesting because it's given me that challenge that I need to stay focused.

When the nine hours are over, how do you turn it off and just be you?

Oh, I always have projects going on at home. Right now I am completely redoing my backyard, digging it all up, putting in rocks and pathways, and replanting flowerbeds. I have to be doing something physical, too. That's the one thing about working in an office. I don't have the physical aspect.

You've had that in the past?

That was the one thing I liked about going to sea. That was a physical job as well as a mental job. I did both navigation and acoustic work for them. That was the mental challenge. The physical challenge was having to repair the equipment, because when you're out at sea, there's no repairman to call, you had to do that yourself. You had to learn to do a lot of things and be very diverse. I really miss that.

Where does your Southern drawl come from?

Well, I'm a Georgia girl. I was born in Georgia, my Mom's from Alabama, and I grew up in North Carolina. I still have ties to there.

Do you miss North Carolina?

Yes. I'd love to go back. I lived in the foothills at Winston-Salem, right up against the mountains, and it's a beautiful place. You don't have all the snow, but you still have the change of seasons.

Send comments to: nhc.public.affairs@noaa.gov