Posted by **Weatherflow** • December, 2022

TEMPEST NEWS | DECEMBER 2022

Let's talk about the weather

Aaron Tuttle has been passionate about the weather since he can remember. Growing from a storm-obsessed kid into a storm-chasing adult, Aaron turned his love of the weather into a successful career in TV meteorology before starting his own weather broadcasts and weather app, **ATsWeatherToGo**. We spoke with Aaron about his career, his most memorable chase, and what advice he has for aspiring young meteorologists.

Q: WHEN DID YOU KNOW YOU WANTED TO BECOME A METEOROLOGIST?

A: I had an artistic mind as a kid, but was fascinated by weather, especially storms. I do not recommend this, but when I was about eight or nine, I climbed up on the roof during a thunderstorm to try to touch the clouds. They were very low that day, and I

thought I could do it. There was lightning around, but it didn't even bother me back then. As I got older, that mentality kind of grew into weather watcher status and I loved to watch the weather guy on TV.

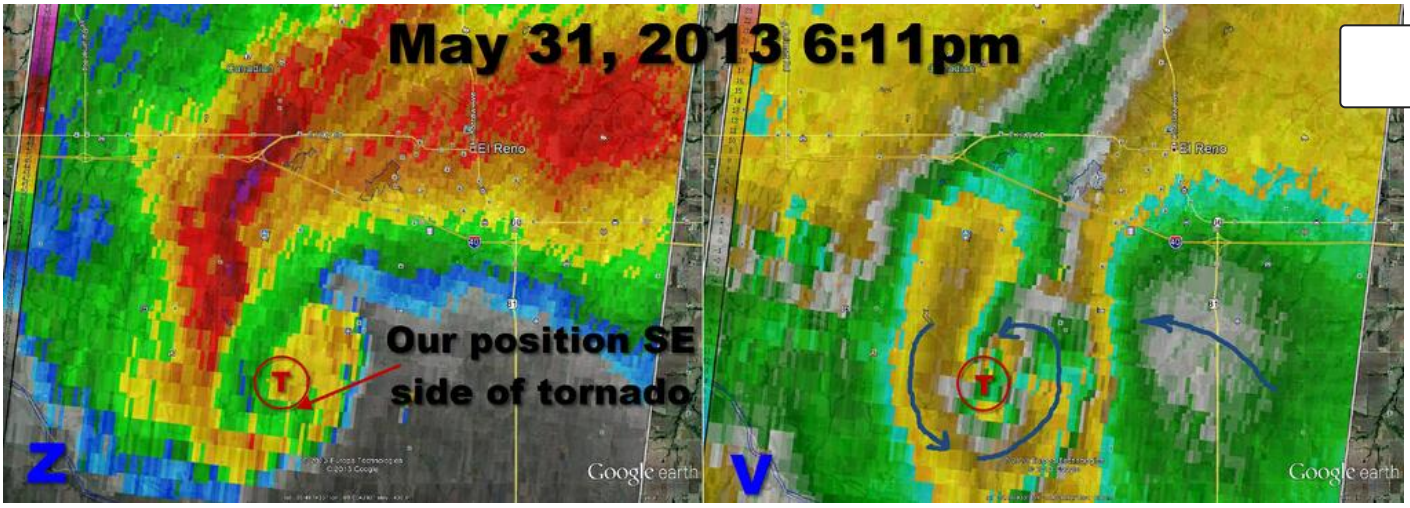
I was born and raised in Dallas, and I watched Harold Taft at the affiliate Channel Five there, and I thought, “I want to do that one day.” And that was my drive. I had the opportunity to pursue art instead, and while I enjoyed and excelled at that, my mom said something that always stuck with me. When adults speak to children, they don't always understand that children may take you literally. I think I was around 13 when my mom said, “If you want to work in the art world, you'll probably end up living in a cardboard box.” And I thought, "Well... that doesn't sound appealing at all!"

It's funny. Of all the stuff your parents tell you, you choose a couple of things that stick, and with me, that one stuck. So in part because of that, I went on the path of weather and science.

Q: I KNOW YOU'VE DONE QUITE A BIT OF STORM CHASING IN YOUR CAREER, AND I HEARD THAT YOUR LAST EXPERIENCE WAS PRETTY MEMORABLE. CAN YOU TELL ME ABOUT THAT?

A: I started storm chasing around my sophomore year at Texas A&M, and we had a lot of fun. That continued when I worked for several TV stations; they would send us out to chase. Back then, everybody was at a safe distance. The goal was not to handshake the tornado. But around 2010, a couple of popular TV shows aired that glorified the whole idea that getting close is where you want to be. So we started getting bold because we realized that everybody else was doing that. Most of the time, it was fine. It was a thrill ride. But the popularity of those shows caused a lot more inexperienced people to be on the road storm chasing. Most were just following around actual storm chasers. They would look for the cars with all the lights, sirens, flags and antennas and think, "I'm gonna go follow that guy.”

The problem is that clogs up the networks for getting out of areas you don't want to be in. Typically, escape routes are eastward roads, then you can go south or go north depending on the movement of the storm, etc. So this particular day was the 2013 El Reno tornado. My chase partner and I were doing what we normally do when it quickly turned from that feeling of, "Awesome, we've done this 1000 times," to, "Oh, no, we're gonna die."



Map view detailing the relative positions of Aaron and his chase partner to the tornado. Image courtesy of Aaron Tuttle.

The roads had quickly clogged with storm chasers, all moving about 20 to 30 miles an hour. So our escape route east wasn't gonna work, forcing us to go south. What we did not realize at the time is that this storm did what very few do, and instead of going in some direction east, it went due south. As we're traveling southward, we're watching it on the radar, and I'm still thinking it would turn back east. But it didn't. I realized that we were going to cross paths, and I yelled to my partner, "Floor it!" I'm realizing we're probably both about to die, but I don't want him to know that because he's gonna freak out.

By this point, the trail is coming very, very close to us, I'm gonna say it was less than 100 yards away at this point, but it could have been as close as 30. The cone of the trail is what you visibly see. What you don't see is the outer circulations of the trail, which can either be invisible or sometimes can have a little dust around them, called rain-wrapped curtains. In other words, the falling rainfall gets wrapped around the outskirts of the trail. So as we're driving southward, I realize we're within that wrapping rotating curtain, and I'm going, “Oh, no, this thing has expanded.” Even though I'm watching the cone, the whole thing is growing exponentially in speed, time, *and* distance. And we're now in it, and we needed to get out of it fast, because at some point, those winds will continue to crank up, and the car will lose traction. My partner had his Suburban V8 floored, and we were only going around 50. That gives you an idea of how powerfully the inflow was pulling us back toward the cone.

We got out of it, thank goodness. And at that point, I was like, "You know what, let's go home. Let’s live to tell about it." I went back and analyzed the data from the radar and the timing and realized that we were eight seconds from death. And that was my wake-up call. I’d had enough of storm chasing. It had been fun, but I was ready for something new.

Q: CAN YOU TALK A LITTLE BIT ABOUT YOUR CAREER TRAJECTORY FROM YOUR FIRST JOB IN METEOROLOGY TO WHERE YOU ARE NOW?

A: TV was the filter I saw the weather through, so that's the direction I chose. Luckily, I was a good fit. Not everyone is. You've got to play the role of an educator, but you also have to be a safety advocate, AND you need to be entertaining on top of all that! Then, you have to be a scientist, know what you're doing, come up with a forecast, and not be wrong enough times to keep the job. I did it for about 12 years, but then I noticed that the industry was changing. The Internet started taking over around 2010, and the space for television was evolving right along with everything else.

A lot of people, once they master a craft, are ready for another challenge. That's where I was. I had a few job offers, and one was with the FAA working again on weather radars. Radar was my passion, so I made the transition to go work for the Federal Aviation Administration Center working on the terminal Doppler weather radar, which is distributed in 45 of the major airports across the country. The job was great, but I missed helping others and providing forecasts. Because I was good at that, and I needed an outlet, I started my Facebook page. It started out just me giving out forecasts, and then it just blew up. That page reached about 100,000 followers almost overnight, completely organically.

In 2014 I built my own studio and started broadcasting live severe weather coverage. I released my own weather app, **ATsWeatherToGo** that allowed my audience to tune into me directly and watch the live coverage that I presented. I was a pioneer without realizing I was a pioneer. I was throwing stuff to the wall to see what stuck. My social media presence continued to grow and produced a lot of coverage, which is when television stations in the market took notice. They didn't like it. This was somebody competing with them directly using tools and platforms they weren't as familiar with yet.

I created a hugely popular weather platform without traditional television media outlets in the number one weather market in the country. And I'm not saying that to brag, I'm just saying it I'm shocked! Because I didn't know what I was doing. That's the funniest part. You may have skill sets that taught you things you didn't realize you were learning because it was so gradual. Then one day, you just put it all together, and it just clicks.

Q: DO YOU HAVE ANY ADVICE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE OR KIDS OUT THERE WHO MIGHT BE CONSIDERING A CAREER IN METEOROLOGY?

A: My advice would be to learn as much higher level math, physics, chemistry, and computer science as possible. And yes, that means programming, aka learning to

code. You have to have the fundamentals of all four of those things, and they are not easy. That aside, you also need to learn how to communicate. You are no good to anyone if you have all this knowledge and you have no ability to communicate it down to a level most anyone can understand.

As far as where you want to go in this field, that's the kind of bad news. TV used to be a big outlet. And it still is, but things are shifting. I think there's gonna be this blended approach of traditional television news that you used to see and then kind of the social media world and the two may co-mingle, or you might go one or the other. There are also job opportunities with the federal government, typically dependent on funding. But if you can get a government job, that's a great opportunity. Then you have academia. If that's what you love, you can stay in that world, jump on research projects, etc. And then of course, there's the private sector, which includes the airline and radar industries. **Baron Weather**, for example. They are pioneers in the private weather industry.

The last bit of advice I have for you is: don't be anchored to one job, be ready to move around within that industry. One may be heavy on chemistry. One may be heavy on coding or physics when designing new computer models or working with those models. And then one may be on the showman side. Do you know how to be a salesman? Do you know how to take all this knowledge that you have and present it to another group, such as the government? So there are all kinds of ways you need to be flexible in that world.

Q: SPEAKING OF BOB BARON, HE IS HELPING CREATE A STATEWIDE WEATHER NETWORK WITH TEMPEST WEATHER STATIONS IN ALABAMA. DO YOU THINK THAT MOST COMMUNITIES WOULD BENEFIT FROM SIMILAR MESONETS?

A: Yes, for sure. Oklahoma was the first to pioneer the Oklahoma Mesonet. And that was a government-sponsored network where every county in Oklahoma had at least one Mesonet station. (Obviously, some have more than one). And I think that was the blueprint that Bob looked at and said, you know, we need to mimic that. And so when Tempest came along, that was a cost-effective approach that anyone could tap into both from the government sector down, you know, to just a cool Christmas gift.

The more of those sensors out there, the better it is in what we call microclimates of meteorology. That can come into play when forecasting for severe storms and better understanding environments for tornado genesis, etc. There are unlimited ways you could probably think of how this data will help. Plus, I think the more sensors you have, the calibration of error decreases. In other words, maybe a sensor has a certain amount of error with it, but once you put that one sensor in a densely packed area with all the other sensors, all of a sudden that that error starts to diminish because now you can compare from one another to another to another, in amongst the rest of the data sources you may use to kind of collaborate.

Q: SWITCHING GEARS A LITTLE BIT - SOME FOLKS MIGHT KNOW YOU FROM SOME VENTURES THAT ARE NOT WEATHER RELATED. CAN YOU TELL US A BIT ABOUT WHAT YOU LIKE TO DO WHEN YOU'RE NOT REPORTING THE WEATHER?

A: Here's the problem that we have in society, just in general for humans. For whatever reason, we like to put each other in a box. You're allowed to do this one thing and this one thing only. Why? Because that's what I know you as. You're not allowed to do anything else. And that's unfortunate because that keeps people trapped and makes them feel like they can't do anything or shouldn't do anything. And that's nonsense. You're a person, you're an individual, and you're free to go try something new.

I've got the weather background, and because of my media experience, I shot other commercials, did a cameo in a movie, and even did a couple of reality TV shows. Those are all things you don't say no to because you never know where it will lead. So say yes, because it's different, and it's fun, and you might be a little nervous, but who cares? Try it out. For example, I always wanted to compete in fitness ever since college. So I finally went down that road and got into bodybuilding.

If you want to learn what you are capable of, try bodybuilding. It will teach you about perseverance, consistency, and not giving up when you want to quit. You will have to eat food that doesn't have the best taste because it's not for taste but for fuel. I had a very clean, wholesome diet for a long time. And I don't mean a long

time, like a few days. I’m talking about months and years. And while you're doing this, of course, you're training in the gym. At some point, you are watching your entire body transform, turning into something you've never seen before. That gives you this passion to keep going because you see the results.

You spend months practicing posing. You're dead exhausted at the end of the day, but before you go to bed, you still have to spend another 20 minutes practicing, and then it's your stage time. And by then, your mind is a vegetable because you've depleted yourself from certain foods and carbs. It's the weirdest thing because you are physically the weakest you will ever be. You can't think straight. You serve no purpose in society in this state of existence. But you look like you could conquer the world.

So you go through this whole process, and you learn so much more about yourself; you have a better appreciation of diet and exercise and the confidence in knowing what you can endure. I won my local show here in Oklahoma City in the Masters category, and then went down to Dallas the following week and won in the Masters category there. And then I said, *"Okay, I'm done. I've been in this for a few years, I accomplished my goal. What's next?"*

Aaron Tuttle is a WeatherFlow-Tempest Ambassador. To learn more about this program, click here.

Stay in touch with Aaron:

- OTHER WEATHER NEWS -

PREPARING FOR WINTER STORMS

Winter storms can bring freezing temperatures, icy roads, power failures, and a loss of communication services. The best time to prepare for such an event is long before one is forecast. Here are some helpful guidelines and tips to follow.

Read More >>>

CLIMATE CHANGE COULD MAKE SNOWSTORMS EVEN BIGGER

While large amounts of snowfall in the winter might not seem like a sign of a warming climate, scientists explain how a trend of white Christmases can be confirmation that things are heating up. Factors like air temperatures and levels of moisture, ocean temperatures, and even changes in the polar vortex are coming together to create systems that are more prone to dump large amounts of snowfall across a growing number of regions around the world.

Read More >>>

WEATHER DISASTERS COST OVER $100B FOR THE SECOND YEAR IN A ROW

For the second year, extreme weather disasters have caused over $100 billion in insured losses globally. While Hurricane Ian caused the largest single event contribution, other events from around the world, like winter storms in Europe and flooding in Australia and South Africa, and more can be held to blame.

Read More >>>

SOWING YOUR WINTER GARDEN

Don’t let the winter weather dampen (or freeze) your gardening! Even in the offseason, container and direct sowing can keep you gardening all year. From sowing how-to’s and flower suggestions for winter sowing, this guide can get you started just in time for the winter season.

Read More >>>

DOWNLOAD .PDF

Back to: Newsletter

Share

Tempest news