Jinny Nathans: This is Jinny Nathans, AMS archivist. It's Wednesday, January 9th, I am in Phoenix at the AMS annual meeting, 2019. I'm sitting here with Ron Baskett, and he's going to tell me how and why he became a meteorologist.

Ron Baskett: Good afternoon. I got interested in being a meteorologist because of an inspirational middle school science teacher, Mr. Hitt [sp?], at Daniel Webster Junior High School in Stockton, California. He encouraged me to make a weather station, so I put that together, I put together a hair hygrometer with some horse hair, a thermometer, I made my wind vane out of conical cups, rather anemometer, and a vane out of a shingle, and put up a weather station as a middle school student.

JN: And then you worked off of the weather station, you took readings?

RB: Exactly, yeah, I took readings and except for misspelling the word "forecasting" in my poster, I left out the E, I was graded very high, and it inspired me. When I began to go to school at UC Davis I started out in engineering as it turns out, civil engineering, because I also had a hobby with maps, and so I was a career conditional topographic engineer, and along came Leonard Myrup and John Carroll from UCLA to start a new department in atmospheric science at Davis in the late 60s, and they inspired me to jump from engineering to atmospheric science.

JN: And then graduate school?

RB: I finished undergraduate at Davis and at that time I looked around and as a Bachelor's jobs were kind of sparse, so John Carroll, Dr. Carroll had a project flying an aircraft over Yosemite Valley to look at the air quality transport from the Bay Area to Yosemite, and that was the bill, I really grabbed onto that because I love the mountains, I'm a backpacker and spent time in Yosemite, and we just had a fabulous time, we released pilot balloons and looked at the flow up the valley and saw yes, the Bay Area does impact the ozone in Yosemite Valley. Now there are permanent measurements up in Yosemite Valley that reflect that on a routine basis.

JN: Did you write papers about it?

RB: Yes, that was our first paper, and Dr. Carroll took the lead authorship and he gave me some advice which lasted my whole career, and that was, "there's a lot of junk papers out there Ron, so if you're gonna write a paper it better be good." That was something that stayed with me my whole career.

JN: And where did you publish that paper?

RB: That was published in the Journal of Applied Meteorology. [https://doi.org/10.1175/1520-0450(1979)018<0474:DOAQIA>2.0.CO;2 --ed]

JN: So that leads into my next question, which is when did you start your relationship with AMS?

RB: As a student, in the student chapter at UC Davis, that would have been 1970 or ’71, I believe.

JN: And then what was your first meeting?

RB: The first conference was, I worked with Leonard Myrup on a study of urban meteorology, and another meteorologist at Davis and I, Doug Grano, he and I decided that we wanted to go to our first AMS conference. Turns out it was in Boston, and here we are in California. Well, Doug’s dad gave him this old Oldsmobile 88, and Doug said “let's drive across the country!” So we did, and what do you know, outside of Denver the water pump blew. So I got to replace the water pump on the road. But we made it to Boston, made it to the first conference for both of us.

JN: That's great. And then what was your next interaction with AMS, did you continue to publish?

RB: Mostly what I found with AMS was attending conferences. I should count the number, but I believe over my 44 year career with six employers, that I have gone to about, I’m going to say, 30 or 40 AMS conferences.

JN: Wow.

RB: I really enjoy going to them. Actually in the last five years, I just retired last year, but my employer didn’t pay for me to go to the annual conferences, I paid my own way. And I joined the Board of Certified Consulting Meteorologists, that was kind of a driving factor to come to AMS annuals.

JN: And now let's go back to the six employers.

RB: Well then, so an interesting interview happened. I did my masters in air quality and I looked at some companies in Southern California, but along came Fred Alonso [sp?] from Lockheed Missiles and Space at the Johnson Space Center, and I always had a very avid interest in the space program, the moon landings, and he had this jewel of a project, a large-area crop inventory experiment where NASA, NOAA and USDA got together and decided the United States wants to know, the government wants to know how much wheat is produced each year around the world, because we didn’t want to undersell the wheat, as we did with the Russians about a decade earlier. And so that was a seminal research project that I was just really excited to be the lead phenological modeler on, the Large Area Crop Inventory Experiment. It was also a honeymoon trip. I told my wife that there’s a nice seaside village called Nassau Bay. In her mind it was like Carmel, but we got out to the Space Center and of course the Gulf coast is quite different than the west coast, but she adapted, and she ended up teaching Spanish at the Dickinson High School.

JN: So then you progressed to the next…

RB: Yes, actually the next position I took was in Thousand Oaks, California, in Westlake Village with Environmental Research and Technology, which was a consulting firm and became a group

leader to do modeling and monitoring for new industrial facilities in the west, as well as supporting George Hidy and Pete Mueller in the Sulfate Regional Project, which was understanding acid precipitation in the Northeast. That was a great project to work on.

JN: And then what next?

RB: I heard through a company in Denver, Colorado that they needed someone to lead a study to determine the air quality impacts of the AMAX Mount Emmons project for a large molybdenum mine and mill in central Colorado, right in the middle of the Rockies. Since I love the mountains I told my wife "hey, let's do this, let's go out to Denver." So we packed up our two kids and headed to Denver, and I did a really fun tracer study to evaluate a three-dimensional dispersion model, and worked on one of the largest environmental impact statements in Colorado's history.

JN: That's wonderful. So where does that bring us to?

RB: Well, then the company, Camp Dresser & McKee, ended up dissolving, so I was on the street, I was laid off, and that was an interesting process where I ended up doing some jobs with some friends of mine. One of the people that inspired me the most was one of the original developers of the particle and cell method for dispersion modeling, that would be Ralph Sklarew, who we met in Thousand Oaks. He said "hey, Ron, I've got this job of this problem with sour gas potential leaks in Alberta," so I ended up going up to Alberta and putting his model on their system, in a complex terrain dispersion model. That was a really, really fun association with the Canadians. But like I say, it was an interesting time in transition between jobs. I went to a mountain meteorology conference and met Marv Dickerson, who I just had dinner with last evening, and he had a new program called the National Atmospheric Release Advisory Capability at Lawrence Livermore National Lab, and that sounded like a fantastic project to do real-time modeling of all kinds of accidental situations where the federal government has requested for support. So I joined the NARAC program.

JN: What was the favorite project that you worked on?

RB: The favorite project is and always will be the Mount Emmons tracer study. I was given a position as a project manager to put this together quickly, in a limited budget, get it out, learn how to do a sulfur hexafluoride tracer gas sampling. We did the analysis at night, we worked 20 hour days, climbed up and down the mountains, put in meteorological stations, tetroons to track and calculate horizontal diffusivities in a mountain valley, calculated slope winds to adjust for the three-dimensional model, and put it together and report in a timely fashion. That was, to me, getting the team together, working with the team was just a lot of fun.

JN: And now here you are in Phoenix, what are you enjoying most about the meeting?

RB: This meeting is about people. To me, connecting back up with the people when you get together in these environments and sessions, talking to the certified consulting meteorologists at the breakfast, sharing stories, sharing experiences, comparing notes and just working with people is what I've always loved.

JN: So the contacts that you've made through your work and then through AMS have really kind of carried you through your career.

RB: Absolutely, yes. Getting out of the office if you will and coming to meetings, coming to AMS meetings and giving papers and just being interactive with people and standing up and asking questions, even dumb questions, I mean even if you don't know something about a topic, or say going to a subject area and just walking into a session which you don't know anything about and learning something, this is just fabulous. The diversity of people and knowledge are just incredible.

JN: I agree, and we're going to wind up now, but I'm assuming I will perhaps see you in Boston?

RB: Yes, that is the plan. And that will be a roundabout, first conference, maybe not the last one, but.

JN: Almost full circle. Well, and weather permitting, in January in Boston.

RB: I'm coming out anyway.

JN: Everybody will. Well, thank you very very much.