

Jinny Nathans: This is Jinny Nathans, I'm the archivist at AMS, and I'm here at the Hurricanes and Tropical Meteorology Conference. It's April 17th, 2018, and I have sitting opposite me James Franklin, who is going to tell a story or answer a question, and I don't know what the topic is. So I'm looking forward to hearing.

James Franklin: I'm going to tell a little story about how I came to obtain my master's thesis. I recently retired from the National Hurricane Center after 35 years with NOAA. First 18 years were with the Hurricane Research Division, and the second part of that career was at the National Hurricane Center. But this story goes back to my time at MIT, back in 1982 where I was in my second year of my master's study there. I met Frank Marks, who is the current director of the Hurricane Research Division. We overlapped at MIT, I met him there working in the radar group with Pauline Austin and Rich Passarelli, "Speed" Geotis, some of the folks that were at MIT back then, and my second year as a master's student.

My thesis was going to be a study of the New England coastal front. We were looking over that winter for various cases to gather with the radar. Fred Sanders at MIT, Kerry Emanuel was there at the time. One of the things Fred liked to do was take students out in his Volkswagen Rabbit and drive down to the cape and do traverses across the New England coastal front. This was in January, I think, of 1982, I was just starting my last semester. There was a good case, in fact, the only decent case for the New England coastal front that year. Fred and Kerry and I went out in Fred's Rabbit, drove down to the cape, and I was the scribe, Kerry was sitting in the right seat with an instrument hanging outside of Fred's Rabbit with the window rolled down taking observations, and we would drive back and forth.

I left – Frank Marks had actually left MIT at the time, he was working for the Hurricane Research Division down in Miami, but he was up visiting. I was collecting radar data to go down and do this drive. I had to leave somebody in charge of the radar. Frank graciously offered to change the tapes on the radar. One would father-in-law up, you had to then put on a new tape and continue to collect data. Of course Frank being a radar expert, I trusted him completely to do that very simple task while I was out driving around with Fred and Kerry.

Came back, wonderful case. Start looking at the tapes the next day or a couple of days later, and discover that Frank had actually reused a tape and had completely overwritten the prime part of the mission with the same tape, and it had been overwritten with junk at the very end. My one case for my thesis, the rest of the winter produced no usable coastal fronts.

So there I am in my second year as a master's student at MIT, my thesis had been destroyed by good old Frank Marks, which I've harassed him about to this day. Fortunately, Bob Burpee, who was the director at HRD at the time, and who had visited MIT – I took his course in tropical meteorology, and I guess impressed him enough that he offered me a job. But here it was the end of the semester, I didn't have a thesis. So I left MIT in '82 after doing my two years, no master's thesis. They were good enough to hire me anyway, and I began my NOAA career without my degree.

I think there was some guilt on the part of some of the folks involved, and what ended up happening a couple of years later is I did a thesis on a different topic while working at HRD and

had my thesis defense. I may be the only person who had his thesis defense on a yacht. Fred Sanders would drive – would sail his boat from Marblehead, Massachusetts down to Florida most winters. So two years later, after I had done a thesis on another topic relating to my work at HRD, I had my defense on Fred's boat, and eventually two years later did get my master's at the cost of another semester of MIT's tuition, which I remind Frank about on a regular basis over the last next 35 years that I worked with him.

So that was an interesting way to get a master's degree, but I certainly appreciate the faith that folks like Bob Burpee and Frank had in me to eventually go back and get it on another topic. I never did get reimbursed for the extra tuition that I had to cough up to MIT because of that, but anyway, that was –

JN: All's well that ends well.

JF: All's well that ends well. After I did get the master's thesis, for many years Bob Burpee encouraged me to go back for a Ph.D. Unfortunately I was a good enough writer, and they recognized that, that they kept promoting me without getting the Ph.D. Having remembered the experience with the master's thesis, I decided not to take a chance and never did go back and get the Ph.D., but it didn't end up limiting me in the career.

JN: No, you didn't have to go through getting a Ph.D.

JF: It worked out well and I had a very rewarding career which just ended last year.

JN: That's wonderful. Thank you very much, that's a great story. I have one question for you. When you drove around on the cape – because I'm from Massachusetts – where exactly did you go?

JF: Oh, well, so that was 35 years ago or thereabouts. I have some visuals in my mind of certain gas stations where we would park and get out and take observations. But I honestly remember exactly – we traversed a good part of it, so we were probably all over trying to find the exact spot where the coastal front was, and then just go back and forth, back and forth.

JN: Very interesting, and this great. I think we can cut off now, and I'll say thank you.