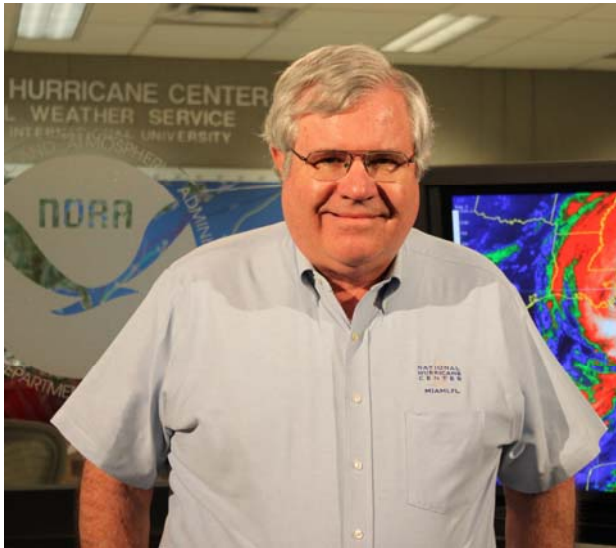


# Q & A for NHC



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**You are one of the old guard here.**

I am one of the old-timers, the second oldest of the current group of hurricane specialists.

**Are there any advantages to that?**

That I can retire whenever I feel like. But aside from that, you get a certain level of respect. There is something to be said for experience, but experience isn't everything. There are an awful lot of new things coming down the 'pike and sometimes it's a little hard to keep up with them, including technological advances such as social media and elaborate graphics.

**You and I were classmates at Florida State University. At some of our student AMS meetings, I recall you showing film of Miami weather events.**

Oh yes, some of our old home movies - dust devils and waterspouts. My good friend Jim Leonard and I did a lot of photography of weather phenomena, such as they were there. They really aren't much compared to some of the tornado footage that you see today; it's been taken to a much higher level.

**Being in Miami, was it a hurricane that planted the weather bug into you?**

I was eight years old and it was 1960's Hurricane Donna. That really got me interested in weather and hurricanes, and we went through a period of activity there. After Donna, there was Hurricane Cleo in 1964. I had the "privilege" of being right in the center of it, as the eye moved right over our house in north Dade County. Of course after the eye, we got the backside of the hurricane, and it was the first time I ever really got scared by weather. The winds were more than 100 mph, and it was a little bit frightening. And then Betsy came along in 1965.

**Obviously, you were going to be a meteorologist.**

Yeah, I used to come to the Hurricane Center as a kid. I would talk with the Director – Gordon Dunn - and some of the other forecasters that were there. They'd advise me on what I needed do, primarily the education I was going to need.

**Was there a single piece of advice that stood out?**

They all said, "Go to Florida State!" At that time, there was this entire lineage that went from the University of Chicago, with Herbert Riehl and his students, to the professors who founded the Department of Meteorology at FSU in the early 1950s, in particular Dr. Charles Jordan and Dr. Noel LeSuer, both students of Riehl. To have the opportunity to go there was kind of the ultimate for me.

**As a classmate, I recall your being very strong academically, and also not really taking the whole thing seriously – you enjoyed your time there.**

Yes, I guess I did. Several of my friends and I had this reputation of being a little cynical, and not taking things seriously is kind of an offshoot of that. To this day, I am still accused of that. So many people say it, so it's got to be true, I guess. Even my high school civics teacher told me I was a cynic, but it was meant in an affectionate way.

**Many members of the Class of '73 and '74 left for careers, but you stayed on.**

It was a good many years. I studied under Dr. Noel LaSuer, and then under Professor Krishnamurti for my Doctorate. To be quite honest, "Krish" was my advisor for my Master's degree, too. Noel blessed the work that I did, but Krish provided me with the ideas, the data, and the programs. I could not ask for more than that. In fact, at this past AMS Annual Conference, there was a symposium honoring Professor Krishnamurti, and I actually said that in some remarks that I gave before the group there.

**That is a strong bond.**

It is. I worked with him for many years and it was quite an adventure. And really, we did not do that much hurricane-related stuff because, at that time, the research emphasis was on the global tropics and the monsoons which dominated the global tropical circulation. It seems as if, wherever I am at, the hurricane emphasis comes after I leave.

### **Even after Florida State?**

I joined the faculty at the University of Miami in the division of Meteorology and Physical Oceanography. It was dominated by physical oceanographers and had a shortage of meteorologists. I was kind of in a vacuum, with few colleagues at the school who shared my interests. That was a bit of a handicap. But I left there in 1989 to come to the Hurricane Center and have been here for 23 years. And the University of Miami shifted its research emphasis to hurricanes after I left.

### **Perhaps you were leaving a legacy?**

I really think it's because hurricanes became a hot topic. We started getting some big storms in '89 with Hugo, and of course there was Andrew in '92. The interest shifted, and likely the research dollars, too.

### **What made you want to come to the Hurricane Center?**

I've wanted to come here since I was 10 years old. I wanted to be where the action was. And I come from a time when you couldn't find out very easily if there were storms out there, what the status was, or what was developing. You had to kill yourself just to get a satellite picture. You'll recall at Florida State when we were first there in the early '70s, just trying to get the data up on the roof of the Love Building was like obtaining a closely guarded secret. Nowadays, you can set up your own hurricane center at home with the Internet.

### **Is that problematic?**

I do have a little bit of a problem with that. This proliferation of information has gotten to the point where everyone's got the model data and all the other data and they can go ahead and make their own forecasts. It certainly is a little dangerous, and it's a reality we have to cope with it. Many of these webpages are becoming more and more sophisticated with displays, although most of them don't have access to the best model that we have, which is the one from the European Center. We are the official forecast. It may not always be right, but it is the official forecast.

### **There are a number of media that track every disturbance out there.**

This idea of an Invest 91L, or whatever is out there now - people take that to a new level of what a tropical cyclone is by naming almost every cloud cluster that's out there, and tracking them and running guidance models on them. It's true that (NHC) does typically run guidance on them, but there is this assumption that because we have put a number on it that it is going to become a storm or a hurricane.

### **But all the Invest means is that you want more information on it.**

Yes. And that's what's changed for me going back to the late '80s to now, about a quarter of a century. I've seen that evolve, and I've seen the science evolve from track

prediction being done by statistical-dynamical approaches to advances in numerical weather prediction, which is considered my specialization here because I did work on a global spectral model while at FSU.

**It is obvious to anyone here that you enjoy being in operations.**

Yes, I do. As I say, I have seen the workload increase, perhaps not exponentially but certainly linearly, from when it could all be done with one specialist to now needing two most of the time when anything is going on. But other than the workload aspect, it is obviously interesting, exciting work. It certainly is not monotonous; there is always something different. Every system is different, and there are all of the additional data sets now. It is very tough to keep up on things, so you really have to be on your toes.

**How difficult is it to have a hurricane overhead and you're working?**

Hurricane Andrew turned out much better for me than Hurricane Wilma. There was a tremendous excitement level there with Andrew, and the northern eyewall almost clipped NHC, the old Coral Gables site. It blew the radome off of the building and disabled the instrumentation. We had to write the advisory right when it came ashore, and that was certainly exciting. I was home for Katrina when it came ashore, as the shifts were covered that night, and it wasn't much of a storm where I lived in north Dade. But Wilma was much worse, and I got a call at work from home that the roof had been blown off of my house.

**That makes you a hurricane survivor.**

Yes, and I have changed from my enthusiastic days of my youth and wanting to see hurricanes to saying let's send them somewhere else. That's a little tough to do when you live in southeast Florida because, unfortunately, we are often a little under the gun. There are many moments of personal anxiety here during the hurricane season.

**How much longer do you want to do this?**

As long as I am having a fun, it will be a few more years. It doesn't mean I could not pack in it any time, as I am eligible. I haven't put in as many years of service as most, not having joined the Weather Service until my mid-30s. We have people here that began working when they were 18 or 19. But I can still manage a few more years before retiring.

**What do you do to get away from it all?**

I enjoy classical music, the opera in particular. I even go on trips just to go to opera, including the Metropolitan Opera House (the Met) in New York City, and I have seen operas in London, Paris, Prague, Chicago and San Francisco. I also enjoy vintage/classic science fiction and horror movies. I have a big collection of these on DVD, along with a massive set of classical music CDs.

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