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Degree: When, where, what, and what in?

In 2003, I earned my PhD in biological oceanography from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology/Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution Joint Program in Oceanography and Ocean Engineering. My research focused on how—at a molecular level—persistent environmental contaminants disrupt the development of larval fish.

Did you stay in academia at all, and if so, for how long?

Although I was interested in alternative careers, I was concerned about leaving academia, then regretting it and not being able to get back in. So, for four years after finishing my PhD, I explored options outside academia, while continuing with academic postdocs. I also spent six months interning in a lab at a pharmaceutical company.

How did you go about searching for a job outside of the university setting?

I was particularly interested in science communication, and I grew up with National Public Radio (NPR), so that was the first option that occurred to me. WCAI, the public radio station in Woods Hole, is just two buildings away from the lab where I did my graduate work. Shortly after I defended my thesis, I walked up the street, introduced myself, and inquired whether they'd be interested in having me do some science reporting. What began was essentially a part-time internship that lasted four years. When WCAI got a grant for a twenty-part series about local scientists—what they do, what drives them, what frustrates them—I took the plunge and quit my postdoc. I've never looked back.

Is this the only job (post-academia) that you've had? If not, what else did you do?

Technically, yes. Since leaving academia in 2007, I have only worked for WCAI and our sister station in Boston, WGBH. That said, I've never done the same thing for more than a couple of years. I started with traditional radio reporting, spent a couple of years blogging, then launched a weekly live interview show. I still do news reporting and analysis for a handful of radio shows, and, in the past year, I've also added regular television appearances. The common threads that run through all of my work are highlighting the science inherent in daily life, explaining complex science and related issues, and telling the personal stories of scientists.

What did your oceanographic education (or academic career) give you that is useful in your current job?

The MIT-WHOI Joint Program requires that students take basic courses in all areas of oceanography, and there is a strong emphasis on drawing connections across disciplines and scales, from sub-cellular to planetary. Although this training sometimes makes it difficult for me to narrow the focus of a story, I think the ability to see any given story in a broader context and find the connections between disparate issues and discoveries is critical in helping the public understand and connect with science.

More broadly, my years in academia give me insight into the process of science—grant writing, peer review, experimental design, incremental progress. That experience enables me to tell science stories from a different perspective, perhaps a more human one, and that



is invaluable. My time in academia was *not* wasted when I switched career tracks. On the contrary, it is my greatest asset.

Is the job satisfying? What aspects of the job do you like best/least?

My job is fast-paced, mentally stimulating, and, yes, satisfying. Of course, there is drudgery; transcribing long interviews would fall into that category. But I spend most of my time reading everything I can and picking the brains of some of the most intelligent and interesting people in the country. I believe what I do is important, and regularly hear from listeners who say I've helped them understand science they thought was too complex or boring to figure out on their own—very gratifying.

Do you have any recommendations for new grads looking for jobs?

If you're interested in a job outside academia, jump in and explore it. Find people who will help you along, who value your interests; don't spend time worrying about those who don't. More specifically, if you're interested in either communication or policy, consider the AAAS (American Association for the Advancement of Science) Fellowships. 📧