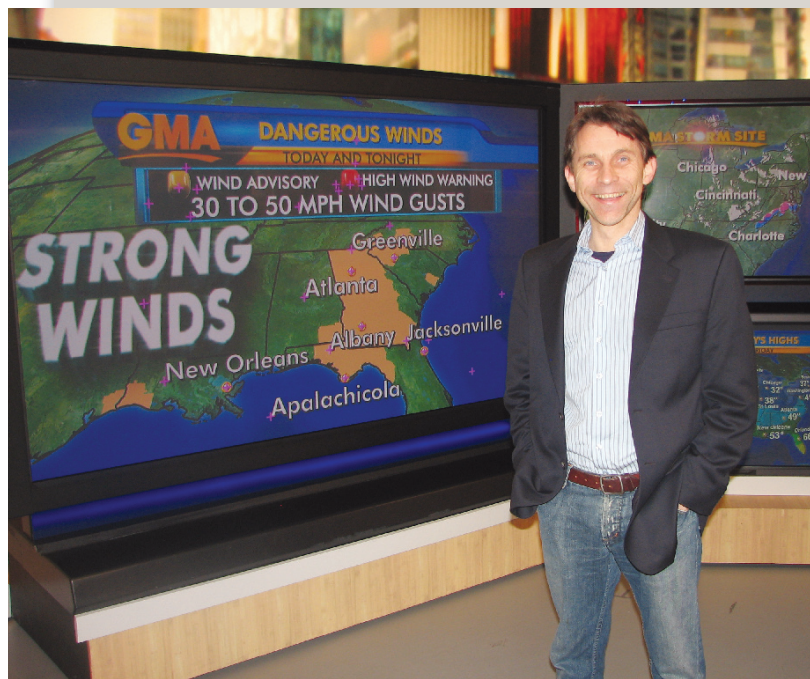


# Gerard McNiff

## Meteorologist for *Good Morning America*



**G**erard McNiff has been the meteorologist for *Good Morning America* for more than 22 years. He also provides weather support to the larger ABC network, working on such shows as *World News Now* and *America This Morning*. Gerard studied meteorology at Lyndon State College and has taught at Hunter College, volunteered at the National Weather Service, and worked as a weather observer at Kennedy Airport in New York City. We caught up with him just after an airing of *Good Morning America* one day to see what goes into producing the weather segment on the show.

### What is your position and role at *Good Morning America*?

It's meteorologist. And it's also producer, to the extent that any production of the weather segment needs to be produced. But it's mostly that of a meteo-

rologist, catering to the needs of the network, with my priority being *Good Morning America*.

### How did you become the meteorologist for *Good Morning America*?

It started out in January of 1985, when the show was in its start-up phase of doing weather from New York, whereas before they had done weather from Chicago and Atlanta. There was one particular time when they had somebody filling in for the regular weathercaster and needed another person to assist with the meteorology, graphics, and briefing. I was volunteering at the National Weather Service when somebody from ABC called and said they were looking for a meteorologist. So that's how it all began. Things changed over the course of about a year and a half, [and then] they hired me full-time to work with the weathercaster as a meteorologist and assist him with any needs that he had to broadcast the weather part of *Good Morning America*.

### Can you tell us a little bit about what an average day is like for you?

It's long. I sleep from about 11 in the morning until about 5 or 6 [in the evening]. Even before I leave the house I'll look at the most important things with the weather [that happened] during the course of the day. I get here to work at about 10 [p.m.]. For the first hour or so I try to focus on making sure that we have footage of weather from different parts of the country. And then it's a lot of figuring out the weather, where it's going to be bad, where it's not so bad. And then a few hours of the day goes to working out the graphics. *Good Morning America* is my primary focus, but the other shows also require my attention, and I give them information and brief the writers on anything that's going on with the weather. And then as it gets closer to the show, at 3 or 4 in the morning, I'll begin to work with producers or other people involved with the broadcast, as well as Sam Champion, who's the on-air weathercaster, to build a weather presentation.

My responsibilities are greatly heightened when the weather becomes as newsworthy as it often does. I finish up at about 9 or 10 a.m.

### Do you get to decide what graphics are going to be used?

I decide, and then a host of other people lend assistance in ironing out what the final product will be like. In other words, the buck never stops with me. I'll initialize the process, and then it gets built upon and changed and edited.

### What kind of equipment do you work with?

ABC and *Good Morning America* have the fanciest weather equipment that I know of. They've built up a five-star kind of weather department and weather support system. Weather Central is the vendor that we work with, and their equipment, which is called 3D Live, is the operating platform that we work off of. That's where we download the weather information from any satellites, radars, text products, alphanumeric products, or any text-derived products. So it's a lot of fun being able to just play with all the different types of weather machines.

### Has technology changed a lot in the years you've been there?

Oh, tremendously. I would say probably the single greatest change has to do with the speed and the integration of computer networks. The speed at which we get information, the speed at which we're able to turn it around and do something—there could be an earthquake in the Pacific Ocean, and we'll know that 30 seconds after it happens, and we can have Sam Champion talking about it 2 minutes later. That would never have been possible years ago. And then, of course, [there's] the improved satellite data, the improved radar data, the coverage. But again, paramount to all of that is the ability of these huge weather computers to be able to crunch so many numbers into a forecast in a relatively short period of time.

### How does the improved technology affect viewers?

There's so much more weather available to viewers [now]. The common person out there who used to watch weather reports years ago would just know a basic amount of weather information, but now the public is so used to seeing weather—whether it be on the Internet, on a major broadcast network like ABC, or on cable. You can do fancier and more complicated

things because the public is going to understand what you're doing.

### How do you tailor the weather presentation to fit a general audience?

For the general public, the real meat and potatoes of meteorology isn't what they really want to know. What they really want to know is where the travel is impacted, how bad the storm is going to be, where is it going to be tomorrow, where is it going to be today? [The information is] whittled down to what needs to be told here [and] how the graphics can illustrate that.

### Is it challenging to present weather to a national audience?

It's terribly challenging. I think it's the scope of everything that you need to be aware of that makes national forecasting very challenging. But it's fun to be able to look at a storm system in the East and one in the Northwest and to see what the people in the Northwest are experiencing weatherwise, which may be quite different from what we're having here in the Northeast.

### Do you ever focus in on a specific city?

Yes, if the weather is newsworthy and significant in a specific city, we'll do a local forecast or a regional area forecast. Today the Northeast and parts of the mid-Atlantic states are experiencing cold, wind, and an early-season snowstorm, and winds are gusting to hurricane force. So we'll focus on that regionally but never forget that there's a whole rest of the country out there that needs to know the weather.

### Are there any memorable moments that stand out to you in your long career at ABC?

Recently, Hurricane Katrina. The buildup of that and watching that come ashore, watching all the different weather that was going on and seeing that whole story unfold—that's the most memorable only because it's so recent. But the blizzard of March of 1993, I remember staying in a hotel for several days as that storm hit the East Coast like no other storm had in the past. Hurricane Andrew also stands out—seeing that after the night [and] in the morning, getting the video tape. Some of the snow events were memorable as well when they hit Syracuse and upstate [New York] in 1999. [There were] 100 inches of snow in about a week. **W**

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