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DJ goes right from school to big time

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Roger Varley - [More from this author](#)

Rob Daniels' parents don't worry that their son stays out all night, even though he's only 20 years old. After all, they can always make sure he is where he is supposed to be with just the flick of a radio dial.

Mr. Daniels is CHUM-FM's overnight deejay, the youngest-ever disc jockey at the station when he went on air last November while still 19.

The Thornhill resident said he considers himself a day person, but has no trouble staying awake on the job.

"The difficulty is getting to sleep during the day," he said. "Working the overnight shift is like living your life backwards."

His social life suffers as a result, but his girlfriend is supportive, he said.

Although some people in the business consider him lucky to be hired in Canada's top radio market, he said he worked hard to earn the job.

"You've got to be yourself, be a good person and work hard," he said.

Nevertheless, when he received the call to go the CHUM-FM for an interview, he wondered, "What could they ever want with me?"

He soon found out.

They wanted him to host his own show in the early morning hours with his target audience being women between the ages of 25 and 44.

Which is not exactly what Mr. Daniels had in mind just a few years ago.



PHOTOGRAPHY BY SJOERD WITTEVEEN

Rob Daniels

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Playing several years of rep baseball for the Thornhill Reds, he thought of the possibility of a baseball career, with broadcasting as a backup plan.

He received a partial baseball scholarship to a college in Iowa, where he entered the speech communication program. He left after four months when he realized the program wasn't what he needed for broadcasting.

He returned to attend Seneca College, where he fast-tracked the school's two-year radio arts program.

But it was at Vaughan Secondary School where his itch to be in radio began.

A teacher encouraged him to become involved in the school's licensed radio station, which included working with an old broadcast console from CHUM-FM.

"I just wanted to live in there," Mr. Daniels confessed. "I gave up my lunches three days a week to work in the station."

Even after he left Vaughan Secondary, he would return on Fridays to do a show from 7 to 10 p.m.

"It was just me and the custodian," he said.

It was as an intern at KISS-FM while still at high school when the bug really took hold.

"I took my resume in and they invited me up to the broadcast floor," he said. "It was amazing. I was surrounded by all these professionals and I knew I really wanted to do this."

While still at Seneca, he sent out about 20 audition tapes each semester, hitting radio stations across Canada.

"Getting into the Toronto market would be like trying to play for the Toronto Maple Leafs," he said. "I was willing to go to a radio station anywhere, even rural Saskatchewan."

But Mr. Daniels' work as an intern and at Seneca had not gone unnoticed. He said his mentors included radio personalities such as Kit Carson, Corey Kim, Tom Rivers and Tarzan Dan.

"Tarzan Dan told me I was talented enough before I left school," he said.

It was Tom Rivers who approached CHUM-FM's program director and touted Mr. Daniels as a hot new talent. As a result, he was called in and hired.

"My emotions were everywhere," he said, recalling the moment.

He made his on-air debut with the station last fall.

He admitted to being a little nervous the first time he switched on his microphone.

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"Everyone told me I sounded very quick," he said, "but I felt very comfortable after the first two or three shows. Now I have to relate to 25-to-44-year-old women."

He receives fan mail -- he said it is a little strange to occasionally be "hit on by 30-year-old women" -- but tries to keep it in perspective.

"Sure, it's flattering, but you've got to keep a straight head on your shoulders," he said.

So how does a 20-year-old male relate to older women?

Mr. Daniels said it's all a matter of paying attention, staying informed and observing lots of little things that happen around him. He visits Internet sites for current gossip, keeps up with Toronto lifestyles and watches a lot of television.

Mr. Daniels is not so dazzled by his dream job to be unaware of career moves he might have to make in the future.

He said he has heard all the arguments about "paying one's dues" in smaller areas before entering the major Toronto market.

"I can't consider this paying my dues," he said. "The general consensus is I don't want to be known as an overnight guy forever.

"I'm not opposed to moving to a smaller market to further my career. It would be good for me to hone my craft."

It might eventually come about that he realizes his first dream, being a sports announcer.

"I'm so open to the possibilities in the future," he said.

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