

BE WILLING TO MOVE, DO SOMETHING NEW AND, ABOVE ALL, LOSE THE EGO:

RECENT ALUMNI SHARE TIPS FOR LANDING JOURNALISM JOBS

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During her post-graduation job search, former Cavalier Daily Life Editor Josie Roberts set an arbitrary standard for herself: She wouldn't take a job at a newspaper with a circulation smaller than that of The Cavalier Daily.

A few months later, she found herself in a small upstate New York town "in the middle of nowhere," writing columns about deliver-

ing newspapers on frosty dark mornings and kissing a seal.

The circulation of the community paper was 5,000, half that of The Cavalier Daily. Her first job experience taught her some lessons about the sometimes brutal journalism job search: be willing to move, do something you've never done before and most importantly, lose the ego.

"You will not start at the Boston Globe. In fact, you probably won't start at a paper you've ever heard of," Roberts said in a job tips survey she filled out for

the Cavalier Daily Alumni Association. Her survey and others can be found on the CDAA's web site, www.cdalummi.org.

A 2002 graduate, Roberts embraced her small-town job, writing 10 stories a week and even launching an "I'll Try Anything Once" column, a feature that landed her in some interesting situations.

The Search

It's all part of the journey, young CD alumni attest. Competing against well-connected journalism school graduates in an increasingly tight media market makes young Cavalier Daily alumni work hard to find jobs in the business.

Roberts, for one, described her job search as "one of the most impossible, frustrating experiences I've been through."

"I don't think you need a journalism degree to work in this industry in the long run," Roberts said, "but it's more challenging to land that first job without one."

She cited attendance at journalism career fairs and use of web sites as helpful, and stressed the importance of a creative cover letter, a tactic also recommended by former Cavalier Daily Opinion Editor Katie Dodd.

"One big component of my 'strategy' was to write very tailored cover letters for each job I applied for," Dodd said. "Yes, this is extremely time-consuming, but when you're just starting out, it's a way to get noticed."

"I think later in your career, when you experience speaks for itself, it's less necessary," she added. "I made sure my cover letter had a catchy lead, and that I detailed why I was interested in that particular job,

city, etc."

In addition to an outstanding cover letter, stressing prior experience is also critical to a successful job search.

During interviews Roberts discussed her experience at The Cavalier Daily.

"Most employers were impressed that we put out a daily paper," Roberts said. "They were alternately impressed and concerned that it was student-run. Some wanted more official training, but you don't want to work for those guys anyway."

As for clip selec-

tion, Roberts recommends showing fewer articles with exceptional leads instead of "overwhelming them with lots of fluff. Show a Life article and then a crime article to show variety."

Former CD Managing Editor Lind-say Wise admits that while her CD clips helped her get her first internship with States News Service, it was clips from that internship that then helped her get a second internship, which then led to interviews with several major daily papers during her fourth year.

Since Dodd's first job was as a copy editor at "Country Weekly," she is unsure of how much of an impact her clips made on her first bosses. However, she does believe the CD experience was a factor in their decision to hire her.

"I know for a fact they were highly impressed with a degree from U.Va., and the Cavalier Daily experience," she said. "In the absence of any 'real world' work experience, I think a collegiate daily goes a long way."

The Rewards

And then there's the light at the end of the tunnel: a job that often pays less than U.Va.'s yearly out-of-state tuition (out-of-state tuition for the 2005-2006 academic year tops \$24,000). Depressing? Slightly.

"It's very hard to accept that you'll never get rich in this job, especially as your non-

journal friends start to. But you can't put a price on having a job you love," said Dodd, a 2000 graduate, who described her first job out of college as a copy editor at Country Weekly as a place where she laughed "every single day."

The Next Step

Dodd put in her time at Country Weekly and ended up at Northwestern University's prestigious journalism school to round out her resume and help her land a writing job for magazines.

With graduate school, "in many ways, you are just paying for the contacts, or to put it on your resume—and they really are great benefits but you do learn a ton," Dodd shared in her survey. A 2001 graduate, Wise moved 3,000 miles across an ocean, plus beefed up her resume by attending graduate school—in a completely different field.

Wise enrolled at Oxford University in the fall of 2001 to learn Arabic and study Middle Eastern politics. Her interest stemmed from foreign affairs classes at U.Va. and the desire to be a foreign correspondent in the Middle East one day.

Now Wise lives in Cairo, Egypt, where she freelances for news wires and newspapers and is managing editor of an academic journal at Cairo's American University.

"Freelancing is a really tough life, especially abroad. Not for the timid or faint-hearted!" said Wise, who said journalists in Egypt must obtain police permits before interviewing people on the streets.

She practices her Arabic and works on stories that mostly seasoned (i.e., older) reporters touch.

"It's always a scramble, though utterly fascinating," Wise said in her survey. "Freelancing gives you a unique experience and so much freedom," she continued, "which is part of the attraction because you can write really meaty stories about anything



CAVALIER DAILY FILE PHOTO

Lindsey Wise, a 2001 graduate and former CD managing editor, shown here with fellow MBers Brian Haluska, Tom Bednar and John Clark, is now a freelance journalist in Cairo.

you want—historic events as they unfold, social and religious issues, human rights violations—but it also forces you to be extremely self-disciplined and self-motivated."

Roberts, who initially scoffed at working for a paper smaller than the CD, swallowed her ego and took the traditional stepping stone approach to a journalism career, starting at a 5,000-circulation paper "in the middle of nowhere."

Long hours and hard work, however, propelled Roberts from upstate New York to her current position as a features reporter for the Pittsburgh Tribune Review in less than two years.

"Four months later I was moved to a 60,000-circulation chain," she said. "A year later, I got hired at a metropolitan paper. It's the theory of 'get your foot in the door.'"

Her advice for current and future graduates yearning for that first job in journalism?

"Lose the ego. Be persistent. Be willing to go anywhere for that first job," she said. And, above all, "you have to love this. You can't kind of like it or think it would be cool or you'll be gone in a year."

For more insight into landing a journalism job out of college, visit the new job tips section of the Cavalier Daily Alumni Association's web site at www.cdalummi.org.

THE CAVALIER DAILY ALUMNI ASSOCIATION "CAREERS IN JOURNALISM" SURVEY

The purpose of this survey is to provide resource information to CD staff members who are interested in journalism as a career. This information will be posted, with some editing, to the CDAA web site and publicized to the CD staff. A digital photo would be much appreciated. Please send the answers, as a Word document or in the text of an email, to nicola@alummi.virginia.edu. An electronic copy of the survey is available online at www.cdalummi.org.

1. Name:
2. Year graduated and major:
3. Highest position held at CD (list other positions/departments as you wish):
4. What was/is your first journalism job out of college? Describe how you went about getting that job. (Did you use online job postings, word of mouth, job fairs, personal connections?)
5. Please note any stories/photos/page designs from your CD career that particularly impressed your employers. Did you discuss the CD in your job interviews?
6. What was/is your first job like? Was/is it what you expected? What did/do you write about/shoot/design on a daily basis?
7. What, if any, sacrifices have you made for your journalism career? (Pay, geographic location, etc.)
8. What do you think a college journalist should do before graduating to make his/her portfolio more impressive? (Internships, language skills, etc.)
9. Any advice for aspiring journalists? Have you had any regrets or suffered any setbacks in your career? What did you learn from those experiences?
10. Please provide your preferred contact information (email, cell phone, etc.):