

Long Path To College Education Unforgettable For Daniel Rizzo

"The road of life can only reveal itself as it is traveled; each turn in the road reveals a surprise. Man's future is hidden." – Anonymous

Daniel Rizzo's route to a college education can't be described as direct. His path to becoming a successful business owner, loving family man and political aspirant, far from considered undeviating. Yet through his turmoils arose major life decisions, some made as a young man struggling to find his place in the world, that ultimately, whether by foot, by car, by plane, or ship, carried him through the doors of Emmanuel College and through experiences he considers the greatest of his life.

After graduating from Woburn High School in 1977, Rizzo appeared ready at first to take a more traditional route to a college degree, intending to attend the University of Lowell that upcoming fall.

The summer before his freshman enrollment, however, a friend, whose father worked for Honeywell, convinced him to defer his educational pursuits in exchange for what was, at the time, a lucrative opportunity for a young kid to work for the multinational corporation at \$10 an hour.

"It was always my intention to go to college right after high school," said Rizzo. "But I saw the dollar signs and the money became a distraction to me. I saw an opportunity to make \$400 a week right out of high school and I thought maybe I didn't need college."

Rizzo quickly found himself in a dissatisfying situation at Honeywell, working the night shift and unable to switch over to days. As good as the money was, after a year the unhappy lifestyle soon proved too powerful to ignore, forcing him to search for other options.

At the behest of his father, Rizzo tried his hand at selling life insurance, a field his father had worked in for 20 years. It didn't take long for him to discover this path too led to many challenges for a young man still in his teens.

"It takes a special person at that age to sell life insurance," he said. "To go out there as a young guy with no life experience and know why people should have life insurance, that's a hard sell."

Needless to say the experience was short-lived, and within a year Rizzo was again back searching for other avenues of employment. Feeling devoid of options, he decided to return to Honeywell. The only problem was, there wasn't a job for him.

"Only he that has traveled the road knows where the holes are deep."
– Chinese Proverb



Daniel Rizzo, who has owned and operated Rizzo Insurance with his brother Paul since its inception in 1986, is a proud graduate of Emmanuel's ECAP program.

Dead set on getting back with his former company, Rizzo contacted some friends down in Florida, thinking he could attempt to find an opening in Honeywell's St. Petersburg division. Selling his car to finance a trip south, he soon found the change in location and climate did little to improve his financial anguish, let alone his feelings of uncertainty.

Disoriented and admittedly "running on empty" at this point, Rizzo was forced to walk the streets of Florida in search of anything that might help set his direction in life on some type of guided track.

Passing by a Navy recruiting station, he decided to swing in, soon finding himself chatting with a recruiter. Although looking back, Rizzo admits he was just looking for someone, or anyone, to talk to at that point, within a couple of hours he was taking the military entrance exam. Within a couple of weeks, he found himself signed up for six years in the United States Navy.

He remembers being in the air when the decision final hit him.

"I was flying back home to Massachusetts when I found myself saying 'what did I just do?'"

Upon immediately entering the Navy, Rizzo's decision seemed to fall right in line with his previous major life conclusions, as he found himself frequently questioning his choice during his first year of service. Rather than revert back to his previous capricious tendencies, however, he eventually decided to see his military commitment through to the end, hoping to make the best out of the situation.

"There was just a point when something clicked," said Rizzo. "I told myself, you know what, I'm in the military now and I'm going to do the

best job I can while I'm here and just see where it takes me."

The realization ended up reaping positive rewards for Rizzo, who became a respected leader during his four and a half year stay aboard the aircraft carrier the USS Independence. By the end of his service time, he even considered re-enlisting and possibly would have, had it not been for a conversation with his younger brother Paul, who had also entered the insurance business and was experiencing much of the same dissatisfaction as he did years before. After discussing the possibility of starting an agency together, Rizzo decided to leave his military life behind him and return home.

The rest, you could say, is history.

Today, the Rizzo Insurance Group in Revere, owned and operated by Daniel and Paul Rizzo since the agency's inception in 1986, serves over 3000 clients, having just recently celebrated its 20th year in business.

"It's been a great experience," said Rizzo. "To have an opportunity to have a job you love, work with your brother and be able to control your own destiny, that's just a great thing."

"Success isn't how far you got, but the distance you traveled from where you started."
– Unknown

In the years since he and his brother formed their own business, one could say Rizzo has experienced much in the ways of life. He started a family with his wife Jane and his two sons, Ryan and Nicholas, who are now 19 and 17 years old, respectively. He's been able to serve the community in a number of different capacities as well, including as an at-large city councilor in Revere, where he's currently serving his fourth term. He's even considering running for a State Senate seat if one vacates in the near future.

Taking all that into consideration, it seems one could also argue that Rizzo's assumption years back that he didn't need a college education proved true in some respects.

For Rizzo, however, nothing was farther from the truth.

"One of the voids I always felt I missed out on was getting the formal education side of things, as part of my personal portfolio," he said. "Even though I had experienced moderate success in my business life, started a family with my wife and two children, something was always missing and after a while it started to eat away at me."

When he decided to do something about filling that empty space a few years back, it didn't take him long to see that Emmanuel College's ECAP program was the right path to take.

"Emmanuel's a very well-respected school and that was important to me," he said. "It's a school I thought I'd be proud to graduate from."

One of the most unforgettable memories Rizzo has of his time as an Emmanuel student was a comment one of his first professors made to his class on the first day. Addressing the students for the very first time, Rizzo remembers the professor making a point of telling the class his course would not be easy, a simple and honest statement that Rizzo has never forgotten.

"Unfortunately, over the years there have been a number of programs that while being accredited, have developed reputations for delivering a substandard educational experience in exchange for a quick graduation date," he said. "He was insinuating that Emmanuel was not just printing diplomas. That really resonated through me."

While Rizzo admits the program's workload did prove more demanding than he anticipated, he took to the challenge much the same way he approached his time in the Navy: with enduring resolve and a strong will to succeed.

"I told myself if I'm going to do this, I'm going to finish it," he said. "And that's the attitude I had to keep. It turned out to be a real learning experience for me."

Expecting himself to be at a slight disadvantage considering the number of years it had been since he'd last been in a classroom, Rizzo was pleasantly surprised at how much more useful the coursework was to him as an already experienced professional.

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CAMPUS NEWS

"Campus Cats" Call Emmanuel, New Cat Houses, Home

They take up residence just inside the gates of Emmanuel's campus, welcoming in students, faculty and visitors as they drive on through. Maybe they hang out there in hopes of providing backup assistance to the guards inside the security hut. Realistically, they're probably there because underneath the shade of the bushes and shrubs in front of the Administration Building is the best place on campus to grab some food and take a nap.

The "campus cats" have been a fixture around the College for the last few years, having originally gained the attention of Assistant to the Vice President of Finance and Administration Patricia Devaney about five or six years ago when she began feeding them. At that time, according to Devaney, the Fenway neighborhood had an abundance of felines, with possibly 50 cats inhabiting the surrounding area including what is now the Merck building, which was under construction at the time.

Today, three cats are permanent residents, with a great number of their former playmates and litters having been adopted thanks to the efforts of Devaney, Assistant Registrar Sherry Lavalley and a number of others who stepped in to help the homeless animals, curtailing a potential overpopulation problem that could have



One of the "campus cats" hides along the wall of the Administration Building.

plagued the Fenway area.

"It was upsetting to know these cats were out there all starving," said Devaney. "We could have had hundreds of cats in the neighborhood if we didn't do anything about it."

With the assistance of St. Meow's, a non-profit, no-kill cat shelter based in Cambridge, as well as Regina Flynn, a volunteer rescuer with a love for animals, a great number of cats found permanent homes. Devaney and Lavelley each have adopted kittens born to Sunshine, the oldest of the three resident cats, with Lavelley taking in two from an earlier litter and Devaney adopting Manny, the friendliest kitten from Sunshine's latest litter.

Last May, Lavalley and veterinarian Dr. Jane O'Donnell helped capture Sunshine to have her spayed. O'Donnell was instrumental in finding homes for Sunshine's kittens as well as caring for her during her lengthy stay at Lavalley's home.

This past September, Sunshine returned to campus to be reunited with the "Teenagers," her fellow resident felines, a male and female. To ease her back into the transition, as well as provide her and her family with further protection from the weather, Flynn contributed an insulated house for the cats, placed along the outside of the Administration Building.

Just last month, Flynn added a second house for the cats, when it was discovered that Sunshine, either spoiled by her time at Lavalley's or intent on enforcing a tough love approach with the Teenagers, refused to share the comfortable abode. The new house arrived just in the nick of time too, one day before the first considerable snow fall of the year.

While feral cats are usually intimidated by people, due to the fact that they missed out on proper socialization with humans during the critical stages of two to 12 weeks of age, Devaney and Lavalley say the cats are friendly, with a number of people including Security Guard Dennis DePierre having much success with them.

"Dennis can pat both of the Teenagers, they sit on his lap, they love him," said Devaney. "And Sunshine loves Sherry. She still won't let her pick her up, but she follows her around everywhere."

And affection for the cats goes well beyond the likes of Devaney and Lavalley.

"People I don't even know come up to me and ask me 'how are the cats doing'," said Lavalley.

Judging by their new setup, it's safe to say Sunshine and the gang are doing just fine.

Emmanuel Staff, Faculty Get Ready to GETfit

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considered "doable" for people of all fitness levels, in hopes of encouraging anyone interested to jump in and participate.

"We thought 20 minutes of exercise, five days a week was a good place to start," she said. "We looked at the problems with obesity and the biggest thing was that less movement was much more prevalent with people who were overweight. Just a few minutes a week can really help diminish those problems."

Throughout the process, Scaffidi plans on providing suggestions and advice to participants on the program's web site, where all participants can stay up-to-date on how teams and individuals are performing. Scaffidi kicked-off the challenge by offering team members the opportunity to get their heart rate, blood pressure, body fat and weight measured, with the same procedures being offered in the final weeks of the challenge to allow participants the chance to see how far they've come.

While she admits she's been over-

whelmed by the support of the program, which originally came about last October when a committee made up of Human Resources Representative Leah Kendall, Director of Human Resources Erin Farmer Noonan, Facilities Coordinator Katy Mulvaney, Director of Student Center Services Marybeth Thomas, Assistant to the Vice President of Student Affairs Maryanne Murphy, System Integrator Brian Hayes, Director of Publications and Communications Molly Honan, Senior Graphic Design Specialist/Director of Print Production Helen Smirnoudis, and Assistant Web/Graphic Designer Jessica Barnoski, put the wheels in motion, in other ways, Scaffidi has not been completely surprised by the turnout.

"I think the competition part has drawn people into it," she said. "I also think the desire to be physically active played a big role as well. Some people have the desire to be active, but just aren't really sure how to do it. I think GETfit will not only draw a lot of attention to how each individual person feels, but also establish an even greater sense of community within the campus."

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"In all reality, the classes were better to take then at that stage of my life and career, then if I had taken them right out of high school," he said. "I had a real sense of how it all affected people in the real world, not just strictly in an academic book sense.

"For example, classes such as Accounting, Business Law, Micro/Macro Economics, and Marketing helped answer the how and whys of reports that I had been reading in my business for years, but wasn't really sure how all the numbers go to where they did," he added. "My accountant had always prepared our income statement and balance sheets, so I had always taken a bottom-line approach. To learn how to prepare this report myself really brought much more clarity to the process. It was really something that helped me in my business life."

While the sacrifice was great for both Rizzo and his family during

those years, the payback of bringing them to his graduation ceremony in 2001 was that much greater. His diploma hangs proudly in his office, offering a constant reminder of just how far he's come.

And despite some of the hard times he experienced during his life travels, he insists he wouldn't have traded it for anything.

"I've been blessed and have had a great life," he said. "I've had a chance to see the world in the military. I spent Christmas in Bethlehem, not many of my friends can say that.

"Looking back, those were some of the best days of my life and I have a strong sense of pride about it," he added. "I think the ECAP program provided me with everything that I would have learned had I been a traditional student."

"I took the road less traveled by, and that has made all the difference."

— Robert Frost