



**CenturyCollege**

## ***News Release***

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### **From Homeless to Century: Daryl's Story**

Century College student Daryl Koschak's life is a tale of survival that has all the elements of a made-for-TV movie.

Family discord, homelessness, California skateboarding, hip-hop record producing, love at first sight, international travel, college-inspired hopes and dreams – Koschak has crammed a lot of living into his 31 years.

“For most of my life, I had nothing,” said Koschak, who spent his early years in Mahtomedi and now lives in Coon Rapids. “But then I met a girl who happened to be a Century student, and everything changed. We were engaged on Jan. 1, 2009, in Cambodia, and now I am thinking about a career, a house and making everything right, one step at a time.”

Born in Ely, Koschak moved to Mahtomedi with his mom and brother after his parent's divorce. “We lived in Section 8 housing until I was 10,” said Koschak. “We had WIC (Women, Infants and Children nutrition program), food stamps, government cheese and powdered milk. We never saw our father again until a few months before he died of alcoholism and lung cancer. He never paid child support.”

After Koschak's mother married a military drill sergeant, the family moved almost every year, living in many cities across the country. Koschak spent his teenage years in Fayetteville, North Carolina. Conflict with his stepfather erupted after Koschak decided to drop out of high school and get a job.

"I was smart and got good grades in school, but public education was poor in North Carolina," said Koschak. "I was just another statistic."

Koschak lived with friends for a year, but was basically homeless. For a change of scenery, he and another homeless friend decided to make their way to Key West, where he encountered one of the country's largest homeless communities.

After Koschak's mother divorced her second husband, Koschak's family reunited in Minnesota and lived with his grandfather in Inver Grove Heights. Koschak got a job and earned his GED high school equivalency degree at age 20.

A skateboard enthusiast, Koschak made a deal with a company in California that agreed to sponsor him in various amateur competitions. Koschak pawned his video camcorder to buy a bus ticket and traveled to California, where he skated at different events and lived in an apartment with three other young men. As amateurs, they could not earn cash so they were given free clothing and equipment, which they pawned for food.

"For about 10 months, I was living my dream," said Koschak. Then an attempted 360-degree kick flip down a set of stairs ended in a fall that fractured his ankle. Unable to afford medical care, Koschak spent his last month in California on a couch, and then boarded a bus back to Minnesota. "It took about three years for that ankle to fully heal," he said.

Back in Minnesota, Koschak followed another of his dreams – producing hip-hop music. He now operates his own production company, and stages shows at popular venues around Minneapolis.

Technologically gifted, Koschak in 2005 went to work as a laser operator for Boston Scientific. There he met his future fiancé, Sochinda Neou, a Century College alum who is now at the University of Minnesota.

“In the clean-room environment where we work, she was wearing a big white gown and a hairnet,” said Koschak. “All I could see was her face. But as soon as I saw her, I fell in love with her.”

Neou encouraged Koschak to enroll at Century, who took his first college class in 2006. He is currently pursuing his Associate in Arts degree and Global Studies certificate. International education is of particular interest to Koschak since he became engaged to Neou on a trip to Cambodia this winter.

“Cambodia is absolutely beautiful,” said Koschak. He was enchanted by the perfect weather, gorgeous temples and friendly people. The engagement ceremony spanned several days and involved many elaborate meals and clothing changes. The couple is eager to return once they earn their college degrees.

Koschak next semester plans to enter the Information and Telecommunications Technology program at Century, with hopes of one day moving to Cambodia to help build that country’s technological infrastructure. His future wife plans to have a career in the medical technology field. People with American college degrees are much sought after in Cambodia, Koschak said.

“I’ve been making my own way for a very long time,” said Koschak. “But now it feels like I am finally on the right road.”



Photo: Daryl Koschak and Sochinda Neou at their engagement ceremony in Cambodia on Jan. 1, 2009