Most people don’t go to a job interview expecting to run into Dolly Parton. For Salisbury University alumna Lindsay Ruggiero ’08, however, meeting the celebrity icon while applying for a job at CBS was only a foreshadowing of what she has since experienced at the network.

For Ruggiero, a New York native and long time resident of Crofton, MD, landing a position with The Early Show took a combination of networking and persistence. Shortly before graduating from SU with a B.A. in communication arts, she contacted her “father’s girlfriend’s daughter’s sister-in-law,” who worked for CBS and asked if the network was hiring. She was called in for two interviews—during which she met Parton (along with actor Bradley Cooper)—in early June.

After that, she followed up with the interviewer daily for two months before finally getting what she thought at the time was a polite “don’t call us, we’ll call you”-type response. By early September, after several interviews with other potential employers, she decided to contact her CBS interviewer one more time. This time, the answer was different.

“He wrote me right back saying, ‘How soon can you be here?’” she said. “I responded with, ‘Whenever you need me.’ I found out I got the job at 1 p.m. on Tuesday and moved to Manhattan at 9 a.m. on Wednesday.”

“My first day at work I met Anderson Cooper,” she said. “I’ve been introduced to Lady Ga Ga, Snoop Dogg and Chris Brown. I actually went and talked to Bradley Cooper again when he came to the studio.”

“At The Early Show, my specific duties are creating the guest list and ‘hit list.’ When making the guest list, some people need cars booked for them for the morning, and I do that, also,” she said.

In creating the guest list, Ruggiero must coordinate the pick-up and drop-off locations of each guest (some are transported to “on location” sites rather than the CBS studio), contact information and information about any additional people who may be accompanying the guests, but who won’t necessarily appear on air. The “hit list” is similar in that it also is based on a running list of guests, but instead of transportation matters, that list helps producers organize which show anchor will interview the guest and what time each segment is scheduled to “hit” the air.

In addition to those duties, Ruggiero’s daily activities could include anything from locating footage and photos to purchasing items for on-air use or visiting other studios for “on-loan” assignments. So far she has seen the inside of not only CBS, but also ABC, Fox, MTV and BET.

Yet with all that, her proudest moment came when she was assigned the seemingly simple task of picking up some documents from a New York City courthouse. The assignment happened to come on the same day President Obama was in the vicinity, and getting to the building took an hour and a half by itself. By the time she got there, most of the offices were closed. She kept knocking on doors until she found a sympathetic employee who helped her get the information she needed.

“When I got back to the newsroom and handed my producer my findings, she said, ‘Oh my God, this is awesome! You could have just come back and said they were closed, but thank you so, so much!’” Ruggiero said. “I had all of my bosses in the same day tell me how great I was doing and that I’d caught on extremely fast.”

Her time at SU made a behind-the-scenes career seem just as appealing. She credits Drs. Jody Morrison and Haven Simmons in the Communication Arts Department for helping her along the way. Oh, and that initial encounter with Dolly Parton? One thing it didn’t foreshadow was Ruggiero’s work schedule. Parton may have had a hit singing about “9 to 5,” but Ruggiero’s workday can last from noon-3 a.m.

But for this SU alumna, working 13-hour days is just part of doing the job she loves… and doing it well.

Editor’s Note: Lindsay Ruggiero ’08 was recently promoted to administrative assistant to Early Show anchor Maggie Rodriguez.