

Mork excelled in schooldays

By ETHEL SIMMONS

Mork may be from Ork but he got there by way of Detroit Country Day School. And the teachers who remember Robin (Rob) Williams, 27-year-old star of the No. 1 TV comedy hit "Mork and Mindy," don't recall him particularly as a zany.

He is, however, not quite the onetime shy bookworm described by the sensationalist National Enquirer, which ran a cover story last week on "The Incredible Childhoods of Mork & Mindy."

Richard A. Schlegel, president-headmaster of Detroit Country Day School, was one of many people in Rob's life interviewed for that article. In fact, reporters for all kinds of publications have been arriving at the private school in Beverly Hills, wanting to know more about "Mork."

For anyone who has managed to escape the Mork madness, Mork is a visitor from the planet Ork, an advanced civilization where no one has emotions. Mork has been sent to check out the Earth people, and he observes our quaint customs, befriended by an apple-cheeked young woman named Mindy (played by Pam Dawber, who incidentally is from Farmington Hills).

ON A RECENT morning, Schlegel set the record straight on Rob Williams, cooling the fire of excitement that surrounds everything about TV's newest blazing star.

"The hype does not represent the Robin that we knew," Schlegel said. "He was a gifted student and a very popular boy. He had a good sense of humor and was always a good little mimic."

Schlegel stressed that his memories of Rob were "those of a headmaster. However, Rob was my son's age — my

middle son Michael, who was a class behind him.

"They were together in soccer and wrestling."

Rob came to DCDS at the age of 12, when his parents moved to the Birmingham-Bloomfield area from Chicago. Did he really live in a mansion in Bloomfield Hills, as reported by the Enquirer? "Yes," replied Schlegel.

But Schlegel thinks the Enquirer may have misquoted him in talking about Rob's parents. They were depicted as being rather aloof from their youngest son.

"HE DID HAVE more formal parents. His parents were older than most parents," Schlegel explained. "He was trying very hard to please them, and they were pleased with him." Then Schlegel added, "Perhaps not as much as they might have been considering what he has accomplished."

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— Richard A. Schlegel, headmaster DCDS

Rob was a student at DCDS in middle and upper school (1965-68), until his senior year when the family moved to California, where he graduated from Redwood High School in Larkspur.

Rob may have startled his public school classmates by wearing a suit and tie and carrying his books in a briefcase, but that was the way things were done at conservative DCDS. Students at DCDS only had lockers in gym and had to carry all their books around.

"TO UNDERSTAND Rob as an athlete, you need to know we have the scholar-athlete tradition," Schlegel said. "Athletics can teach self-commitment and discipline."

According to Schlegel, Rob was a fine wrestler who could have been a state champion, if he had not injured his shoulder and had to drop the sport.

"IF YOU LOOK at his physique, he is well built. And that is developed during the middle school years," Schlegel said.

While at DCDS, Rob was a leader in student government. He also belonged to the drama club, but his interest in the performing arts didn't gain ascendancy until he went to Claremont Men's College in California, where he majored in drama.

DCDS faculty members George Browne and Al Luneman are others who look back with fondness, yet surprise on Rob's show business career.

Browne taught Rob in eighth and 11th grade American history. As alumni development director, Browne has a fat file on Rob Williams. "He's had more publicity in the last two years!" Browne exclaimed. He mentioned Rob started on his way to fame doing stand-up routines at the Comedy Store in Los Angeles and introduced the character Mork in his first TV spot on "Happy Days."

Mork discovers the joys of holding a baby, on TV segment of "Mork and Mindy."

"Mork and Mindy" is seen on ABC-TV, Channel 7, from 8-9 p.m. Thursdays.

Browne, who also is track coach at DCDS, said, "Rob ran track three years. He was a two miler in track. He was a wrestler for varsity wrestling and played soccer two years. In his junior year, Rob double lettered in tennis and track."

THE YEAR Rob left DCDS he went out for cross-country, long-distance running in Redwood, Calif., and the team got the county championship. Browne received two letters from Rob, mostly clippings, about the sport.

"He was the quietest kid in creation," Browne said, shaking his head, marveling at the change that has turned Rob into the brash, inquisitive Mork.

Biology teacher Al Luneman taught Rob during his sophomore year, in

Luneman also was assistant track coach.

Young Rob weighed only 120 pounds and stood 5 feet 6 or 7 inches tall. He was a respectful teenager who called his teachers, as well as his father, "Sir."

Asked about Rob's reputation as a comedy cut-up, Luneman said, "Between classes he did have that type of entertainment for kids," and Browne said, "He would perform, I'm told, only for people he knew."



Robin Williams looks bright-eyed in 1968 DCDS yearbook photo.



As spaceman Mork, on "Mork and Mindy," Robin Williams has skyrocketed to fame 10 years after his school days at Detroit Country Day School. (More pictures on the next page.)

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