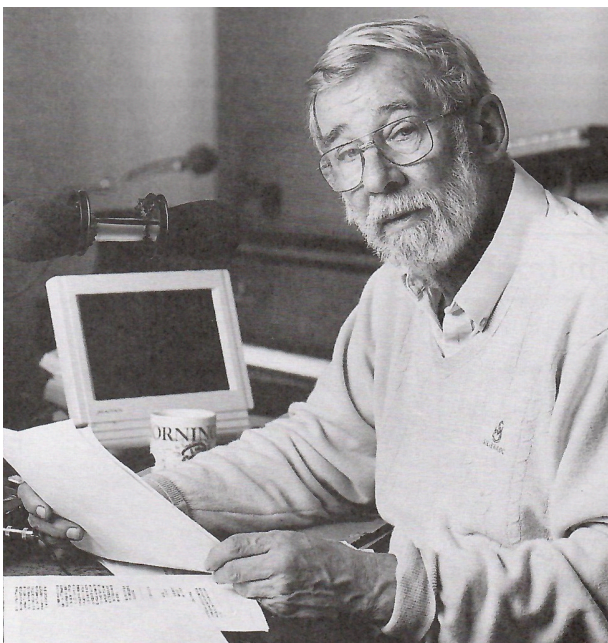
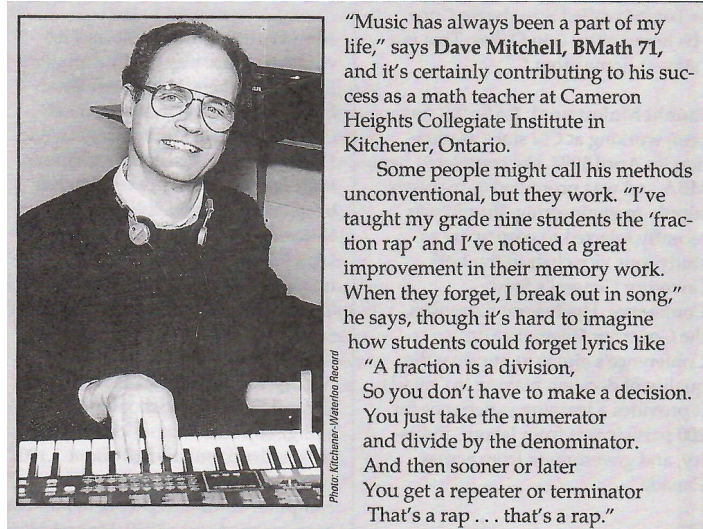


## Kickstarting a Speaking Career

In 1995, I received a phone call from a reporter for the University of Waterloo's Alumni magazine, asking if she could interview me about the math songs I was using in my classes at Cameron Heights C.I. in Kitchener. I agreed.

The reporter showed up, asked a number of questions and took a photograph of me in my basement recording studio. The article appeared in the next issue and I was pleased with the outcome. I noticed on a page near the article about me, there was one about Peter Gzowski, of CBC Radio fame, well known for his national radio show, Morningside. Peter had been a recent featured speaker at a University of Waterloo function. What I didn't realize was that the staff of the magazine had sent a copy of that issue to Peter Gzowski's staff in Toronto. The producer of Morningside saw the article about Peter, but also noticed the one about me, and was intrigued.



I was teaching a grade 13 calculus, just before lunch, when the phone in my room rang and the secretary mentioned that the producer had called, hoping to speak to me. The secretary had said she couldn't interrupt the class but she took the contact name and number on my behalf. Being a huge fan of CBC radio, and of Peter Gzowski, I was relieved to know of the contact information.

That lunch hour, I called the producer who wondered if I would be available the

next day for an over-the-phone interview with Peter. I responded in the affirmative but said what would be even better would be if I came to Toronto to speak with Peter in person on live national radio. “Is that a possibility?” the producer asked. I responded that my Principal, David Martindale, was a huge Gzowski fan and would very likely provide coverage for me so I could do the interview in person. I was correct in my assumption, and details were worked out so that I was to report to the CBC building in downtown Toronto at 9:00 a.m. the next morning. My cousin, Wendy, kindly let me stay at her place in Toronto overnight so that I would not have to worry about being stuck in traffic the next morning and possibly miss the opportunity.

At 9:00 a.m., I arrived at the CBC building, my portable piano keyboard in tow, and checked in at security. I was told to go to the third floor, and, once there, I was escorted into a waiting area. I was told that I would be taken to the studio for a sound check, be introduced to Peter, and then be on the air. I was also told this was for a 5-minute slot. That time constraint was a disappointment, but I resolved I would just make the best of it.



The interview soon started and it immediately had great chemistry. Both Peter and I were in high gear, as questions and answers were flying about the sound studio. I gave a musical example of my *Fraction Rap*, about changing a fraction to a decimal. The minutes were whizzing by and I soon came to realize that I had been told about the 5-minute limit in case things were not going well. It became obvious that the interview would just keep going.

I sang another song entitled, *Zero, that funny number*, and Peter remarked that I was getting standing ovation in the control room. On we went for about 15 minutes of fun. Peter then announced that the theme music for the close of the show was playing and asked me to retell a story I had related to him before we went live. I obliged.

One of my students had told me that his mother was a huge Gzowski fan who listened every day to *Morningside*, and habitually took the dog for a walk after the show ended. One day, she had a sore ankle and couldn't walk. The dog recognized the closing music and was pawing at the door, wanting to go for the walk. I remarked that they named the dog Pavlov. Peter piped in, "Pavlov, don't go for a walk, we're sending out a false signal!"

The show ended and Peter congratulated me on the interview. He mentioned it would be on *The Best Of Morningside* that evening. (And, as it turned out, it got played again the next July on *Morningside in the Summer*.) When I was driving back to teach my afternoon classes, I heard my own interview on the radio. What a thrill! It had gone out live to the east coast and then followed the time zones heading west across Canada.

The day before, I had told my grade 13 students about the show, and they had tuned in. On my return from Toronto, when I walked into my class to greet them, they gave me a standing ovation! What a special memory it was.

The next day, I started getting calls from teachers across Canada, congratulating me. One teacher, Judy Honikman, from Calgary, asked me if I would be available to speak at the Calgary City Teachers' Convention in February. They would pay for my substitute teacher and for my travel and accommodation. I agreed, and prepared several sessions, including one entitled, *Math, Music and Mayhem*. Here's the description: Math songs, rap, math commercials, stories, puzzles, math puppet skits, origami and lots of off-the-wall ideas to make your math class memorable, meaningful and fun. Even if you don't teach math you'll want to attend because many of the ideas are transferable. If you don't experience major laughs at this session, it's because the world is ending! ( senior elementary, junior high school, high school )

About 300 teachers were present when I gave this talk, and the response was overwhelmingly positive. In fact, one of the teachers responsible for finding speakers for the Greater Edmonton Teachers' Convention was present and booked me for their event. Over the years that followed, I spoke dozens of times at teachers' conventions in Alberta, Saskatchewan and Ontario.



When I retired from the classroom in June of 2004, I continued with my speaking endeavours in Canada. In addition, I found an agency in the Peterborough, New Hampshire, called Staff Development for Educators. They gave me an opportunity for an audition at a large teachers' convention in Columbus, Ohio. The response was so good that I became a speaker on their roster. This led to speaking gigs in New York, Indiana, Illinois, Arkansas, Utah, Arizona, Mississippi, Maryland, Ohio, Florida, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, and included three appearances in Las Vegas, Nevada.

Reflect for a moment on what got this all started: It was a phone call from a reporter from the Alumni Magazine of the University of Waterloo. To this day, I remain very thankful for that call.

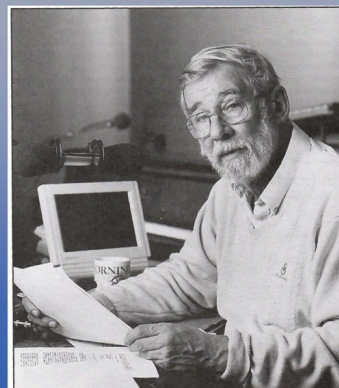
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0ROUjP\\_c9g4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0ROUjP_c9g4)

Click on the picture to the right for a link to an audio clip.

CBC's Morningside - live, national radio in 1996



Dave Mitchell



Peter Gzowski