



Laura Langford

B.Comm. 2006

Interviewed by Nick Poloniato

Thank you for coming and giving me your time. So, to start, where were you from, and what kind of family background did you have?

I grew up in Oxford County on a dairy farm with my parents and my four siblings and grandparents farming with us. My parents also went to the University of Guelph. It was one of my top choices when applying to university because it was familiar, but I also fell in love with the campus when we would go visit. Originally, I wanted to go to teacher's college, but there were no jobs in teaching at that time. So, I thought, "Well, I'll take business and then I'll see if maybe I want to be a teacher later." I took agricultural business because there were always lots of jobs in agriculture. I was being practical that way. But I really enjoyed it and then I got a job working in agricultural banking out of university. I'm now living on the farm I grew up on with my husband Matt and our 3 children. We grow corn, wheat, edible beans and soybeans alongside my parents, and I work part time at Western University in Residence Admissions.

Growing up, did you live in a farm environment where you had to do chores every day? What was that like?

We had a dairy farm, so that's a really active farm. By the time I went to university, I was helping with the milking once a day usually, and helped with chores growing up right from when I was really young. I knew that I was interested in agriculture, but I didn't want to do that. The industry has changed a lot, but at that time it really kept you close to home, and I saw the restricted lifestyle that it had. I like living in the country, but that wasn't for me. But we sold the cows in the year 2000 around when I went to university.

Personally, I grew up in the country just on the outside of Guelph, so I have chickens and I have had chores but nothing like cows, but it does make me very interested in the overall aspect of having the land and being able to use it for beneficial aspects.

You said your parents went to Guelph.

Yes. My dad is an OAC '81 Aggie and lived in Mills Hall and my mom took family studies and lived in Maids Hall. They would have met while dining in Creelman Hall,

I'm sure. I've been hearing stories about OAC traditions for as long as I remember and made many annual visits to the campus for the College Royal Open House.

Did you have any other schools that you were thinking about or was Guelph always just at the top?

I wanted to be a math teacher, and Brock had a concurrent education program. So that was at the top of my list but then at the very last minute, I decided on business at Guelph. It was my third choice when I was applying to university. I'm glad the way that things worked out. When students are applying now, when there's a certain university and it's their top choice, I always say to keep an open mind because I ended up with my third choice and I wouldn't change anything.

I'm similar in that regard. I was looking at Brock, but I didn't really want to leave home, and I was more interested in the Guelph aspect of just staying at home. So, I stayed here.

I think there's something nice about doing the degree and then going to teacher's college after too. It's different now that it's two years instead of 1. It's a good choice anyway.

So how was your overall university experience that you enjoy it? Do you still have a lot of memories that you think about?

I really enjoyed my time at the University of Guelph and getting to be part of the Ontario Agricultural College. It wasn't really something that I understood fully how unique of an experience it was when I was going to Guelph. The OAC is part of the University of Guelph, but it is also this close-knit community. I had never really been involved in things like student council or anything in high school, but when I got to university, I felt comfortable or confident enough that right away in my first year, I got involved with the OAC class executive. That opened me up to joining more things and I ended up joining College Royal and finished out my 4th year as the OAC 2006 class president which was never something that I thought I would have done. It's great because now I've joined local boards and things like that because I have that experience from university. When you're young, you feel more confident to join things and try things than when you're older. It was great to have the Ontario Agricultural College promote and facilitate that class executive within our college.

Personally, myself, I didn't know too much about the Ontario Agricultural College. But being in this class I have learned more and that it was founded in Guelph. You said your first year you joined the class executive. How did you hear about it in your first year?

When I attended Guelph, all the Aggies, regardless of if they're a business student or a science student, had one common class their first year. As part of that class near

the beginning, you're choosing your class colors and your class mascot and putting together a class executive. So, people will run for class president and all these positions.

I was interested in sports and intramurals, so I joined as the sports rep, which was great because I got to meet lots of people and organize lots of intramurals and tournaments. It wasn't a lot of pressure on the executive. It was really just fun. That's a nice feature of it that they really help us to get that together. We're not relying on older students or signing up for something. It's right in our class, right in front of us, so that was nice.

What class was that sorry?

I can't remember what it was. I want to say it was like exploring agriculture or something. It was a general class that all first-year agriculture students were taking.

So, you said you were a part of some extracurriculars and setting those up. Would you mind talking more about those?

So, when I was at Guelph, I don't know if it's still the same, there were different tournaments within the Ontario Agricultural College. There would be a three-pitch tournament and hockey tournaments and each class would enter a team. I was helping to organize those teams for our class and then we always had class teams in the University of Guelph, intramurals as well. So, there was inner tube water polo and the soccer team. It was a way to get students involved without having to have an existing friend group. We could just send it out to all the students in our first year who want to join our intramural soccer team and there you have an immediate community of people that you could meet up with and get to know better so that really appealed to me.

That's interesting, and you said you grew up in Oxford, correct? How far is that from Guelph?

It's about an hour and 15-minute drive. I think a lot of people from this area go to Guelph because it's just far enough that you don't have to go home every weekend. But close enough that you could go home whenever you wanted. It was ideal for me.

Were you in residence for the first year?

I was in Macdonald Hall, which is now an administration building. But it was the all-female residence. At first, I wasn't thrilled, I was placed in that residence without having really chosen it as one of my top choices and thought, "Oh, I don't want to be in this all-girl's residence," but it ended up being fantastic. We could go out and have parties and everything at the other residences and then come home to our clean, nice, quiet, girls' residence. So that was nice.

At Christmas or in the late fall, they were looking for resident assistants. They didn't have enough upper years that wanted to be RAs, so they advertised to the first-year students to see if anybody wanted to be an RA starting in the winter term and I thought that sounds pretty good, get my residence for free in second term. I applied and I got the job, so then in second semester of my first year, I became an RA in Prairie in South. I moved in the winter term. That was an interesting experience being an RA for students that were the same age as me, but it was just organizing activities and doing the rounds in the halls and that kind of thing. So that was a good experience too.

That's very interesting. I didn't know that there was an all-girls residence at Guelph. Does that still exist?

I was interested in that too, if they replaced it with somewhere else, like if there's a floor in a certain residence like that has all girls now or not?

You got your second semester paid for your residence. Did you end up living in residence any years after that?

I did, in second year, I lived in the East townhouses, which I think are first year residences now I'm not sure, but at that time they were upper year residences, so that was a good option for me. I was in the co-op program for agriculture business, so I knew that I couldn't be committing to year-long leases. It was a good fit that I could stay there for eight months and then I picked up sublets for the rest of my time as I did my work placements or was back in Guelph.

Your overall experience at the campus of the University of Guelph and just Guelph in general, how did you find that?

It was amazing. You get out of it what you put into it and so getting involved right away from the first semester of first year helped me to really get the most out of it. I got to know lots of people through the class executive and through intramurals and joining College Royal. College Royal adds a whole other layer to it because you spend a year preparing to showcase the campus to the community as well. It was a great experience to be a part of that board.

Could you tell me more about College Royal?

So each March, the College Royal Open house opens the university mostly to the City of Guelph, but also to the public. It brings back alumni and community members, and it's mostly the clubs around campus and the different faculties that open their doors and then showcase what they're learning and make it interesting for families to come. So, for example, the engineering building opens up and the engineers will put on activities and there's science activities in the science building and there are shows and lectures and it's a great experience. There are milkshakes in the food science building. It's a way just for the community to see the university without being a student there or being employed there.

Do you remember being a part of any OAC traditions?

I guess the biggest thing is the executive, but then there's the different events that happened through the year. The Aggie pub, I guess, is the most frequent one, but there was the crop tour in fourth year that I did. That's like a course, but it's the Midwest Tour that goes through the United States and you're visiting agricultural businesses. That was a good way to get to know my classmates going into fourth year, so that's a nice tradition that way.

What year would you say was your favourite year of university?

Probably fourth year because you get into the more specialized classes, smaller classes and specializing in what you're majoring in. I had gotten to know my classmates really well by that point. It's also just the fun of being the oldest OAC class on campus and getting to welcome in the first years.

So being a part of the OAC alumni executive board of directors? What's that like?

While I was at school, I was part of the OAC class executive and then just in the last few years I was part of the OAC Alumni Board.

What does that entail?

So the class executive was the group of students that represented each class. It was what I was doing in my first year organizing those intramurals and class events. But we also had a class bank account, so we had a treasurer and we're raising funds for class events. We would go on a ski trip every year, so I was facilitating things like that, and then making sure that the class was participating in different OAC events and building spirit as a class and letting students know about different opportunities on campus, things to apply for, different events and activities. Students were involved in those class executives are a great resource to tap into for the OAC alumni board because that's a group of alumni who are OAC graduates who want to keep that spirit going after graduation. I didn't join until well after I graduated, but it got me back involved and doing a lot of, we call it, friend raising. So not necessarily fundraising but getting the classes together. We had a curling bonspiel, a golf tournament, different opportunities to connect with the students through the year, like a careers in cocktails event and dean's lunch event, so students could listen to alumni speak, things like that.

What made you take a break in between your degree and then coming back to joining the board?

I felt like I was too far away. When I graduated, I came home to the farm and was also working in commercial banking close to it, and I felt like I was far away from Guelph, and the meetings were in Guelph. But things were getting more virtual, even

before COVID, so you could join the meeting virtually or there were different options. Then I felt like I could get back involved. My kids were older, so it was easier to get involved.

Your experience at Guelph, would you say during your time frame there was anything specific to the University of Guelph that you felt like was a really fun opportunity or neat thing to be there at the time during that as well?

That's a good question. The city was really changing when I was there. A lot of the space now between Stone Road Mall and where the university is, was farmland when I started. Then, all those big box stores were being added while I was there, buildings were added to campus - the Summerlee Science Complex was being built while I was there. So, it was neat to see the growth of the city and the growth of the university all at the same time. It was a really great time to be an agricultural student because there were lots of jobs to be had, there were more jobs than graduates.

We were the premier program offering those graduates to industry. There was lots of money and perks, having the employers coming to us and offering jobs and bonuses. So that was exciting too. I did two co-op terms and then I stopped doing co-op because I realized I don't really need to do co-op to get a job. I thought, I'm going to be able to get a job no problem when I graduate anyway. It was a great time to be an agriculture student.

In our class, one of the first lectures we saw a photo of the College before it was the University of Guelph, just the Ontario Agriculture College and seeing how parking lots we have now were just fields, crops and the like. Even in the South end of Guelph where I live, I've noticed over like the last 10 years, how much has been developed and went from fields to apartment buildings and grocery stores, etcetera. You don't have to answer this if you don't feel comfortable, but did you have any hardships during your time as well?

I guess I'm pretty lucky, I don't know. Not really hardships, probably the main one that sticks out in my mind was when I was on the agricultural marketing team CAMA. It's a marketing competition for students and we were supposed to go to New Orleans for our competition and then Hurricane Katrina hit, so instead we had to go to Kansas City. That was a bit of a let-down at that time. I had the usual struggles of getting to the end of the year and then being able to get my summer job to start having money again. But it didn't feel like a struggle because everyone was in the same boat. The money starts to run out in April and then everybody gets home for their job in May. But the housing situation wasn't like the housing struggles that students have now. I definitely consider myself lucky, the time that I was at university.

Growing up on the farm and then coming to a place like Guelph, where the university is so compact and there's so many people and things there and the general area, what did you find that experience like?

I really liked it, it was good. It was neat for me that I could take the bus places and I could walk everywhere that I needed to go. That was a new experience for me. When you come from somewhere where you have to drive everywhere. It is something that I miss now, having had that experience. That was probably the best thing, like public transit and being able to ride my bike, that was a great experience. But it was also nice to go home on weekends every once in a while and be in the country again for sure.

What did you like to do for fun and relaxation at university?

I liked to do the intramurals and sports that were offered. I had my hockey equipment in my first-year residence room and so I got to participate in those things. And then clubs on campus, like College Royal, and going downtown, that normal student stuff.

Did you come to university right after you graduated high school, or did you take any years in between?

So I was there in 2002 and 2003. The government changed from five years of high school to four years of high school, so I was supposed to do five years of high school and instead I thought I don't want to be part of that double year. So, I crammed my five years into four years, so I came a year early and I was a year younger than my classmates.

So you were eager to get into university?

Well, I was eager to get out of high school and on to university, but it did very much play into that change that the government was making. My younger sister was in grade 11 when I was in grade 12, so I knew that I would be graduating at the same time as her and going off to university with her and I was like, no, no, I want to do my own thing, so I fast tracked things to get going sooner.

Do you have any specific memories that were your highlights of university or the OAC experience?

I really enjoyed doing the College Royal square dancing. It's something that I never thought I would do. I would have thought that was ridiculous, but it was a team building thing with our class. Getting myself into that tradition and thinking about all the classes that had done it before and just trying something new. That was memorable and not something I've done ever since. So that was a cool experience. All the friends that I met and as part of our classes with the OAC, we do class reunions. We started right in the first year, one of our classmates hosted at their

place in the summer, so we all got to see each other over the summer, and we did it every year while we were in university. And then we've done it every five years since we graduated. So that was always a fun memory too, doing the class reunions.

That's nice, did you have any professors that you felt were very impactful in your journey and university or even your path after that?

We had professors that would mentor our class as a whole, like our OAC 2006 class, Rick Yada was one of our honorary class presidents, they were our staff connection. He was always good at supporting and mentoring our class. And then Rick Upfold was our professor that did the crop tour with us to the US Midwest and so we got really close with him then.

It sounds like you guys in the in the OAC have done a lot of cool trips, do you have any that you like to talk about here?

When I was in my second year, I did the international agriculture course that goes to Costa Rica over reading week, so that was fantastic experience as well. We went to Earth University and saw different agriculture; we went to a cicada sanctuary and all kinds of different cool places in Costa Rica. Places that you wouldn't normally go as a tourist, but as traveling agricultural students, we got to experience those. And then there were also students in the International Development program at Guelph, so it was nice to interact with them too.

And through your entire time at university, what would you say is one thing that you've really learned and valued?

This is a bit of a cliché with the OAC, but the saying to not letting your class work get in the way of your education. It's joining the extracurriculars, trying new things, and getting involved outside of class. Classwork is important, but sometimes students get really focused on that and forget about everything else the university has to offer. That's probably the biggest takeaway. We were reminded of that when I was in first year and I kept it in the back of my mind the whole way through.

Well, thank you for your time today, I will ask if you have any pictures that you can find or you have the time to find and you could send to me through e-mail I would very much appreciate that.

Sure, yes, I can do that.

Thank you for your time.