



## **Rhonda Alger**

B.Sc. (Agr.) 1991

**Interviewed by Jack Parker**

### **So, what year did you start at OAC/the University of Guelph?**

1986. OAC was a part of the University of Guelph.

### **Before that, where did you go to high school?**

I grew up in Eastern Ontario. I attended high school in the town of Perth. I'm from a farming family, so we tend to talk by counties and it was Lanark County that I grew up in.

### **When did you graduate?**

1991.

### **What made you want to go to the University of Guelph?**

My agricultural background, my family history. I was the first of my family to go post-secondary, neither of my parents went beyond high school. I was the oldest of four, so I felt like I was embarking on something unfamiliar to us all. It felt like a long way away and my parents would have preferred if I was little closer. But I suppose at that age there was an interest in going a little farther away.

### **Did you visit campus before you started? And if you did what was that like?**

I did visit. If I can recall, I think I just visited campus once - it was family friend who was going to school here. Her sister decided to go on a road trip to visit her, and I tagged along. I think we just wandered around campus. I remember sleeping over in her house. She was in the basement room of the house. I don't remember too much else besides the long drive.

## **Those were all of your connections to Guelph?**

Yes, no family connections. Just friends. Some community kids older than me had gone off to Guelph.

## **What did you major in? And did you decide your major right away?**

I did major right away. I majored in animal science. I also did a minor in agricultural business. I come from a beef farm, so I felt a closer connection to the animal program. But I was interested in some of the agricultural business courses, so I was able to turn that into a minor.

## **Do you remember any of your professors at the time?**

Yes, lots of them. I probably remember more the ones from the later year classes where they had more of an animal science focus. In my working life I've only been at the University of Guelph. I worked for a number of years in the animal science department, so I began working with the professors who taught me. It was great to have a different connection to them beyond the student/professor connection.

## **Did you have a favourite course?**

Early on, year one and two, there was an intro to agrifood systems. They were a series of classes that covered all kinds of aspects of agriculture. I found that series of classes quite interesting because I was learning things that I hadn't been exposed to before.

## **Interesting. What was like when you first arrived on campus?**

I remember my parents driving down the 401 and the banners hanging on the overpasses as we approached Guelph. I can't remember what they said, but they were welcoming us. My parents had never been here before. We came up the Hanlon and then turned onto Stone Rd. As we're coming along Stone Rd and see the University of Guelph signs at the married student housing that's located at Stone and Edinburgh, my dad sees the University of Guelph sign and says, "well, this must be it". Then he pulled in. And because I had been here for that one visit, I knew this was not where we were supposed to be going, but it just emphasized the difference in our perceptions of what to expect that day and how big a university campus is. There were no move-in directions like they give now.

## **Where did you live your first year? And did you enjoy that experience?**

I lived in South Residence in Prairie Hall in a basement quad. I don't know if they still call them quads.

### **Yes, they do.**

That particular year, there were more first year students than they had rooms for, so they were adding extra beds into the quads. There were five beds in that four-person suite, and I was last to arrive, so I got the last bed. I had nothing to compare it to, so it was OK. But knowing that it was really only intended for four people and there were five of us in there, made it a little cramped. Eventually one person did move out; I think that was in second semester. Rooms had opened up elsewhere in residence, so we were able to go back to being four. Did I like where I lived? Yes, I'd say the five of us got along quite well. I remain friends with one of the girls. We were just talking at noon today. So, I would say yes, I enjoyed the experience.

## **Were you involved in any extracurriculars on campus at the time?**

Not so much in first and second years. Later, I got a little more involved with some College Royal activities. I showed dairy in the livestock show. I chose to show in the dairy competition because I had no experience with showing dairy cattle and I wanted to give that a try. All my experience had been with showing beef cattle. I was on the Animal Science Society square dance team. I wasn't involved in any sports.

## **What was the social life like on campus at the time? And what did you do for fun and relaxation?**

We always had a lot of fun in residence. We had a lot of fun playing cards in the lounge area, watching TV together. We had more pub opportunities on campus. The place I enjoyed going most was Der Kellers. It's in the basement in Johnston Hall, where I work now. It was a nice small little spot.

## **What are your favourite memories of your time at the University of Guelph?**

The friendships that developed. A lot of us stuck together for a lot of years after and some of us are still friends. If I had to pick one particular memory, it was graduating on Johnston Green. They had outside ceremonies at that time. The particular day that I graduated was really hot. The audience, the families and students had no sun shelter, but where you walked across the stage to receive the diploma, there was a nice shelter there. But I don't know what they would have done if it had rained. It was a beautiful spot to be graduating out there, that that's a favourite memory.

## **Do you feel a part of the OAC, and can you remember taking part in any OAC traditions?**

I mentioned College Royal, that's an OAC tradition. We've continued to attend College Royal over the years with our kids. So, it's been special. Did I feel a part of the OAC? I tended to want to pull back from the Aggie label. I didn't buy any of the usual things like the Aggie jacket. I wasn't a regular at the Aggie Pubs, although had a good time when I did go. I did feel a part of the OAC, but maybe not in the typical "Aggie" way. In my working career I've continued to work in OAC and there really is a great connection among people that graduate from here. In conversation, if you're talking about where you went to school and what program, and so on, there's an instant connection when talking with fellow OAC grads.

## **OK, you don't have to answer this if you don't feel comfortable, but did you go through any tough times during the university years and if so, what caused the difficulties and how did you deal with them?**

I had a challenge. At the end of second year, I received notice that I was required to withdraw. I had gotten too many C's. I forget the rules, but a certain number of your marks had to be C+ or better. I had done poorly in a couple of classes and so I had to take a semester off, which was really hard to accept. I knew it was going to happen, so it wasn't a surprise, but to get the letter in the mail was devastating. And then having to tell my parents. But in hindsight, it made my determination to come back and pick up and get going again, all the stronger. That was a tough one and it's not one that I talk about a lot. Now, of course, it's easier to talk about it, because it's not a big deal now – it certainly was in the moment.

## **I went through something similar.**

Do they still use that language?

## **No, they don't, thankfully.**

I never hear anyone talk about it anymore.

## **It was just a semester but wasn't great. Last question, would you be willing to share any photos of your years at the OAC and just email them to me? Obviously totally ok if you aren't.**

I was looking for photos last night. There are not a lot that are great quality.

## **Just any photos of academic, social life, extracurricular etc just anything to do with the university.**

I'll look again.

**Thank you very much for taking this interview and I hope you have a good rest of your day.**