



## **Amanda Richardson**

**B.B.R.M 2012**

**Interviewed by Sam Winger**

### **Where are you originally from?**

Rockwood, Ontario, just outside of Guelph.

### **How far from Guelph is that, roughly?**

It's about 15-20 minutes. There is a small elementary school in Rockwood which is where I went to elementary school. By the time high school came around, we went to Guelph because there wasn't a high school in Rockwood. So we were very close.

### **What was your high school experience like then?**

I went to high school in Guelph, but we lived out in the country in Rockwood. My family lived on a farm, although we didn't necessarily farm. We had horses and so I spent a lot of time out in the barn and spending time with the horses.

### **What made you apply to the University of Guelph?**

From my last answer, you probably got the sense that I like horses. When I was in grade 11, that's when they announced that the Bachelor of Bio Resource Management program would be starting up. There was an equine major that would be available in this program. I don't remember how I heard about it, but I heard about this new program and it was basically a no-brainer for me. I knew I was going to go to university, but I didn't really know what I wanted to do. I thought that I wanted to work with horses, which I don't in my work life, but I thought that's what I wanted to do, but beyond that, I didn't really know what I wanted. I had started to realize that running a barn or being a horse trainer probably wasn't what I wanted to do or lead to the lifestyle that I wanted. I had been starting to think about maybe doing a business degree or doing something in agriculture and then I could enjoy horses in my spare time. But then the equine management program came to be. It combined business and science, so I knew that I'd get kind of that business background while spending four years studying the thing that I like the most.

## **Was Guelph the only choice for you? Did you apply to other schools or is it just kind of Guelph?**

Guelph was my first choice, but I also applied to another university. I don't remember which one it was now, but I just knew that I needed a backup plan in case I didn't get into Guelph. I applied to a couple different programs at the University of Guelph. I think I applied to the agriculture program as well. Everything else was just a backup, I definitely knew what I wanted to do.

## **Did you ever consider changing your program throughout your time at Guelph?**

No, definitely not. I mean, it was a brand-new program I was in. I started in the second cohort. The first two years were still at the Kemptville campus when I started. So I did my first and second year there and then I did my third and fourth year on the main campus. There were definitely some growing pains with the program, but I enjoyed the content and I had made some really great friends.

## **What has since happened to the Kemptville campus?**

The University of Guelph closed that campus in 2014. The campus operated similarly to the Ridgetown campus that they still have. A lot of research happened there. There was an agriculture certificate programme. The BBRM program was the only degree program that had anything at that campus. So the equine management degree program 1st and 2nd year were at Kemptville campus. If I'm remembering correctly, the environmental majors within that program did their first two years at Ridgetown and then their third or fourth year at the main campus. I think it's because the campuses were largely agriculture-based and so to be able to do agriculture research you need different environmental conditions, soil types and heat units. The University of Guelph actually has 12 or 14 different research stations around Ontario, where they do different agricultural research.

## **Did you enjoy your first year? Do you have fond memories of it?**

I made some of my best friends in my first week of school. I just got married this past summer and two of the girls that were in my bridal party were my first two friends that I made in university. We met during orientation week activities and became friends and have stayed friends ever since. I think because it was such a niche program, and a very small program. We were all a bunch of horse girls, so we had a lot in common. All the conditions were right for making lifelong friends. Then I had some great courses, some great professors. Like I said, we were on a regional campus, so I really missed out on that big exciting first year living in residence kind of experience, but I definitely made some great friends out of it.

## **Did you live in residence in your first year or off campus?**

I lived in residence. It was tiny, not like what the Guelph residence buildings look like. Picture the entire campus as one big residence building and one very small residence building. There were approximately 200 people that lived there.

## **Did you enjoy your life in residence?**

Yes, it was good. Just like at the main campus, there were some fun pub nights and yeah, everyone kind of liked it. The nice thing about it being really small is you really got to know everyone.

## **Where did you live after your first year?**

It's a pretty small town. So first and second year students generally lived in residence there. The first year and second year I was in residence. Third year when we moved to Guelph, I lived in a house with a couple of girls in my program.

## **Were there any hard times at the beginning for you?**

Yes, I would say the first and second year were a little challenging. It was a very small campus, so it was pretty isolating.

## **In your time at Guelph, were there any classes that stuck out to you as favorites, would you say?**

Ooh, what a great question. After my second year I did an internship course for an event management company that had wanted someone with equine experience because they were doing a horse show or equine trade shows at the time. They also had a big agriculture farm show that was in its 20th year or so at that time. I started working for that organization as an internship and then through my third and fourth year, I stayed on part-time and then that led to my first full time career job when I graduated. It was an incredible experience to get to learn some real-life skills and do some real-life networking that launched what has been a fantastic career for me.

## **Do you have any fond memories of professors from your time at Guelph?**

Yes, I do. There's quite a few and I'm just trying to make sure I'm linking them with the right classes. Dr. Peter Physick-Sheard taught our Trends and Issues class. He really encouraged debate and thoughtful discussion, and I always really liked that. On our graduation day, he encouraged me to pursue a Master's degree. I didn't at the time, but

he planted the seed and nearly a decade later I pursued a Master of Communications Management at McMaster University.

### **Were you involved in any extracurriculars at Guelph?**

Yes. I was involved in College Royal, and other events on campus as well. College Royal is in the fall and it's like the Ontario Agricultural College's open house. There's a cattle show and you can walk through vet college and there's activities and that kind of thing. The main campus has one as well, and there was one at Kemptville.

### **Did you take part in any of the OAC traditions?**

Yes. I'd like to offer more of an answer than "I went to Aggie pubs," but that one is top of mind!

### **You already mentioned some fond memories at Guelph but are there any others you haven't shared yet?**

This is another really cool course that I did. In my first or second year I took a course that was essentially a major paper, or a big project activity based on something that we've done. About 15 of us took this course. We went on a class trip to the World Equestrian Games in Kentucky. It was a 10-day trip, and we went to Churchill Downs and went to the Kentucky Horse Park and just had this incredible time with the friends I was speaking about earlier. They were there as well. It was this big trip, and we just had such a great time touring around. We got to see this incredible international horse show. It had jumping and dressage and reining horses and driving horses. Then to tie it back to the course we had, we came home and wrote a big paper or project about our experience there. It was incredible.

### **You already mentioned some very close friends you made at university, but are there many others you've kept in touch with?**

Yes, on a more casual basis though. I run into lots of people I went to school with at a farm show or a conference not just within my program, lots of people that I would have met at school. I have a really large professional network from people that I met at Guelph as well as a few personal close friends.

### **What year did you end up graduating from Guelph?**

2012.

## **What has life after university looked like?**

When I first graduated, I started working in a job that I did that internship with. I worked for Canada's Outdoor Farm Show and Canada's Outdoor Equine Expo. In the different roles I did, I looked after sponsorship for the events. At one point, I coordinated all of the livestock animals programming, and then I started working on marketing and communications for the events. After I had worked there for a few years in a full-time capacity, I moved on. I was really enjoying the marketing and communication side of things. And then I started at an advertising agency that is based out of Calgary, but with an office in Guelph. It's called AdFarm and they provide marketing and communications services to agricultural companies. I worked as an account manager at a company called Dow Agrosciences, which is now part of Corteva, and I also got to do some work with 4-H Canada and their Global Youth Summit. I call those two years my "marketing communications boot camp." I learned so much from that job. And then after two years, I came back to Canada's Outdoor Farm Show, and at that time, the company was also running Ag in Motion, which is an outdoor farm show just outside of Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. I was the communications manager for those two shows for a little while when the pandemic hit. I led our digital teams as we did digital events for two years and then also moved into corporate communications for the parent company of those shows. I currently work as Director of Communications and Programs for the Canadian Agri-Food Policy Institute.

## **Did COVID have a big impact on your career?**

It did, working in events, it was pretty major. When we first started hearing about COVID, when the lockdowns first started in March I remember having conversations like, "Ok, well, maybe it's good that it's in March because we'll have these six weeks of lockdowns, and then it'll blow over. Everything will be fine and back to normal for our July show and definitely for our September show." We were making these assumptions based on the best information that we had at the time, but boy we were wrong. We didn't know we were going into two years of not being able to host events. And the thing about events is a lot of the work you do is planning these events. Normally by the time March rolls around, a lot of the planning is done. It had a really big impact on our team, on our business, and also we weren't able to bring the industry together and bring farmers together with the industry in the way that we used to. It definitely had a big impact, but we learned a lot about digital events and I learned a lot about issues management and crisis communications.

## **Do you remember your first event that was back in person?**

Our first back in person would have been July 2022. Even then there was so much uncertainty. Saskatchewan was a little further ahead in their COVID recovery than we were here in Ontario. We were planning, we were going full-steam ahead, but we

realized this could change at any time. We were pretty fortunate, and we were pretty excited by the time we finally got there and it was all a go.