

## **Christopher Naese**

B.Sc. (Agr.) 1985

Interviewed by Johan Rye Capua



### **Biography**

Mr. Naese works as a Freelance Business Consultant based in Florida. Prior to this, he spent time working as the Vice President of Business Development & Sustainability at Florida Food Products. He has worked in the food production industry since graduating from Guelph in 1985.

### **Before we discuss attending the OAC, what was it like for you growing up?**

I grew up in Southern Ontario. I was born in Stratford and then we moved to Kitchener when I was 10. I attended Kitchener collegiate. At that time, we had a vocational school. We had a four-year degree or high school diploma and then a five-year high school diploma. I took grade 13 which was, back then, a college prep year. It gave students a chance to take classes at a more advanced level that was a little bit more geared for going to university. After that I took a gap year to work at NCR which was a big computer manufacturer at the time. I worked for their manufacturing and quality department to make enough money to pay for residence and the tuition fee.

### **Why did you choose Guelph?**

There were several factors. I wanted independence. I didn't want my parents paying for my tuition which is why I worked at NCR for a year. They had a manufacturing facility in Waterloo, and I worked there for a year in manufacturing and quality to make enough money so I could live in residence at Guelph. Eventually I had enough money saved up that I could pay for residence and tuition.

Guelph also had a great reputation for a vibrant social life on campus at the time. The school administration at the time felt having a lot of residences on campus would create a community that had a unique personality, or presence. It would create a connection between everyone going there and having a life after class. It wasn't just everybody taking off in their cars at the end of the day or for the weekend.

I was fairly close to Guelph. From Kitchener it was logical that a lot of people ended up in Waterloo, Western, University of Toronto. But I had a pretty good introduction to Guelph since I went with my brother a lot. He's 10 years older than me so as a

younger person sometimes I'd ride over to campus with him when he had to drop off schoolwork or check on something, so I already had a pretty good sense of the physical realities of the campus.

I also really love the campus architecture. The landscape design at the time was well regarded with the Brutalist architecture mixing with the old buildings like Johnston Hall. I had an interest in the physical presence of the campus and the Arboretum was just starting a few years before I started school.

Lastly, the campus had a reputation for having the best food in Canada. Having a hotel and food school on campus it made sense they would try harder in terms of food and being an agriculture school and having people that know about that side of the food industry.

All these factors, the beautiful and interesting campus, the social scene, and my admiration of the school's legacy in food and agriculture, made choosing Guelph so much easier.

**You mentioned going with your brother to campus as a child, did you have any other personal influences that may have helped in that decision as well? Fellow OAC or Guelph graduates that you were acquainted with?**

My brother had gone to Guelph in the 1970's. He was in the recently established Hotel and Food Administration program, so I got a pretty good feel for the school and the traditions and so on which sealed the deal for me. I also had some Kitchener collegiate schoolmates that went to Guelph that helped with my decision. One classmate in particular, a couple years ahead of me is David Galbraith. He and I were photographers for our yearbook in high school and went straight to Guelph and pursued undergrad and graduate science degrees from the school. He then went on to become the Director of Science at the Royal Botanical Gardens in Burlington. A really good friend of mine, Robert Carter and I managed to get a room together and became roommates at South Residence. It was a great way to transition from living at home to going off to university!

**When did you enter the OAC and for what program?**

I started in September of 1980 after taking a year off from school. I was a bit wishy washy honestly. I started out with food science then switched to hotel and food because I like food and hospitality, so I gave it a shot. While I was in hotel and food, I thought some classes weren't all that challenging. Eventually, I realised that I like science and I like food production. My courses lined up well thankfully and I ended up going into dairy science which was affiliated with classes I had already taken and made it smoother to get my degree going.

**When did you graduate from the OAC?**

I graduated in May of 1985 with a BSc in dairy science, so I ended up being there for five years because of the way the co-op program worked. I wasn't in any particular rush in the sense of wanting to get out of the school ASAP. I was happy to stay there and study towards my career and the cool thing about co-op is that I got to know my future employer through one of my co-op terms.

### **Your interest eventually led you to dairy science, was there another reason you settled on the program?**

From a career standpoint it made sense. In the OAC, there were a number of programs like food science and dairy science, and I could visualise where I would be going in terms of a career. And this is what I did. I went into the food industry for my entire working career. It was great since the co-op program was up and running and being able to take the co-op route opened a lot of possibilities for me. Through my exposure during the work terms, I had the chance to see what it might be like to work in Quality Assurance, Research & Development, Operations and Industrial Sales. In fact, I found my future employer through one of my co-op work terms.

### **Did you remember any professors? Perhaps memorable classes?**

From the top of my head, I can remember a few. Professor Arnott who was my advisor, there was also Sandy Pearson who was the guru of ice cream in Canada. We were the last class he taught before he retired but he was really a surreal icon in the frozen dessert community, specifically the ice cream industry. He had developed a lot of evaluation techniques for judging ice cream quality. He had a lot of techniques around processing and ingredients, how you can create a certain texture, prevent freezer thaw, resistance to ice cream as it's getting shipped around and how it's affected when it warms up and cools down. I was very fortunate to be part of his last class in dairy science before it was integrated into the wider food science program.

There was also Professor David Arnott. He got the coop program going in food science and he was my advisor, if you will. He really worked hard to keep the food science department going. At that time, food science was struggling a little bit in terms of relevance and not a lot of people understood why someone would take food science. The department was having a hard time attracting new professors, getting new students, and the buildings needed repair and so on. David was really an advocate for the school, being instrumental in bringing in a couple of professors. Some young PhD's came on board in those years like Ricky Yada and Arthur Hill and brought new energy and focus to the program. It was great to see new energy coming to the department. Ron Osborne, an instructor in meat science was particularly effective due to his consulting work with the Canadian meat production industry. He was able to make the connection to what we were learning to what was going on in the real world.

There was also this husband-and-wife team that taught marketing at Guelph, I'm not sure if they were part of the OAC or not but they were really good instructors. Very innovative at the time in how they used case studies and illustrations of the greatest

(and not so great) marketing campaigns. Outside of the science degree I found it intriguing and important to understand the business around the industry. That was one of the things I liked about the program. The ability to pull in those sorts of electives that really augmented your understanding of what it's going to be like if you end up working in the industry.

### **Were there any times that you struggled while you were attending the university?**

I'll never forget Chem100 in this large lecture hall. I was looking around and there were a lot of smart people around me and I just thought "holy mackerel." I was in a sea full of brilliant people. Then the professor started talking and I started to get a bit of imposter syndrome you know? I wasn't following the material well and I was panicking, questioning how I was going to be able to do it. I've got a lot at stake and didn't want to embarrass myself. I had to learn to take things in smaller doses and focus on each assignment one by one and not let my mind race and focus on the bigger picture. It wasn't until I got well into my second year where I got myself figured out in the sense of knowing how to deal with the pressure and so on. I was fortunate to have great parents and good friends that I could rely on throughout these kinds of struggles.

### **What was your living situation like throughout your time in the OAC?**

In the first year I lived in Mountain Hall, and I had many fond memories throughout that time. In Mountain Hall we had pizza nights and that was some of the greatest tasting pizza... Of course, when it's 11pm and you're studying and starving and the kitchens would stay open and it would have snacks as well, it was great.

At that time computers were rare, so when you needed something typed you would more often than not send your notes to someone who was a typist. Luckily for me, the school had set up an Apple 2E computer in one of the multi-purpose rooms and it you could book for an hour or two. I remember writing one of my marketing papers and just having to stop to look at the screen and look for words that I missed. It's quaint thinking back on it now. The struggles of using a "new" computer in the 80's in a dorm where you know, there were only perhaps 3 Apple 2Es for an entire residence.

For my second year, I wanted to become a hall advisor because I liked the idea of being able to help the first-year students. I was already a year older so I thought that my experience and relative maturity would help the new students settle in. I got assigned to Lambton Hall which was exclusively for first years so everybody living there was just starting out. As hall advisor, it was my job to keep things in order, telling them to keep it quiet and things like that so it was a super cool experience. Of course, many of the residents had never lived away from home so come Thursday nights, things could get quite "energetic"! Guelph really did a good job training hall advisor in interpersonal skills, so it was a learning experience as well for people on

the job. It also came with the perks of having a residence room and a meal program as compensation, so it was significant for a student like myself.

For third year I lived in a small Lennox and Addington in Lennox Hall suite with its own bathroom and kitchen that was part of being the school's foodservices department's Food Ombudsman. The role was a liaison between the food services system on campus and students. Particularly between students in residence, shaping menu quality and hours of operation.

And then when I was in co-op I lived in apartments in Toronto, and then in Switzerland for my final work term. When I came back for my fourth year, I lived in a townhouse with a bunch of people on Scottsdale Road which was awesome. It was a three-story townhouse and there were around 5-6 bedrooms, so it was a big place, a lot of fun. Two of my roommates had just started at OVC and I was able to see how challenging and rigorous that program was.

**As you said, you were on campus for much of your time in the OAC, were you involved in any extracurriculars on campus then?**

Not too much. I was part of the Food Science club, which was good, we had speakers come in, so I was part of that. I did some intramural sports in the first couple of years which were great social events. I participated in the College Royal open house activities and have fond memories of demonstrating authentic Kefir to visitors to the Food Science building.

**We've discussed a lot about your academic experience in the OAC, and you've touched upon the social aspect? I'd like to hear more about that.**

For sure. There was a lot of entertainment on campus, so Thursday nights, Friday nights, there would be bands that came and performed at The Keg aka Brass Taps, which was the bar in the UC. The Bullring at the time was a dance club and this was in the 80's so there was a lot of cool punk and alternative music being played there. After the bars closed, the Bull Ring had something called "the all nighter" where you could hang out till 4am, not drinking or anything but dancing and listening to music, sometimes from edgier artists. It was sad for me see that it turned into a coffee shop since it was just this cool place to blow off steam, I'm sure it would be very popular today. It such a unique place physically (an old livestock judging ring) and added richness to the campus. A cool place to go without leaving the campus!

For relaxing I enjoyed running on campus. It was a great place to go for a run, especially on Arboretum Road. I played squash at the old Rec Centre as well, which was pretty small compared to what's available there today. It was one of the best ways to relieve stress. It was 40 minutes of an amazing workout. School was stressful, trying to keep my grades going and squash was great for balancing my time and doing something good for my body rather than just having a beer. Another one was the art gallery that had set up nearby on Gordon St. Finally, there was War

Memorial Hall. They occasionally had some interesting things that playing there and along with movie nights on Friday nights as well.

There was an eclectic range of things you could do by yourself, or in groups that just made it so much nicer to be on campus. It made you want to stay rather than just go home after classes.

### **How about anything specific to the OAC? Any special traditions that you partook in?**

Well, one of the things that I did for two years was something called the Agro Tour, which took place in summer. We would go on a road trip for almost a week. I even got a special driver's license to help drive the vans. We drove around Ontario and visited a variety of different food and agriculture related operations. For example, we would visit a mushroom production facility, a hog farm, and a poultry operation. Of course, we went to a distillery as well. It was really interesting because it allowed us to frame things we were learning and find out what was going on across the food and agriculture sectors.

Perhaps one of my biggest regrets is not getting the nice leather OAC jacket! I was being a cheapskate and couldn't afford it.

### **From the top of your head, do you have any favourite memories during your time at the University of Guelph?**

It sounds kind of goofy but honestly going to the Bull Ring on a Thursday or Friday night. There was the whole wave of music coming from the British Isles like the Talking Heads and U2 which differed a lot from what came before, which was disco music. We were playing some of the coolest stuff.

Being the Foodservices Ombudsman was really cool. I worked to get some vegetarian items on the menu to provide as alternatives from meat that some students were looking for. I worked hard on trying to get alternate menu items into the rotations so that is a proud that memory I have.

Another fond memory is going to the Whippoorwill restaurant. It was on the 5th floor of the UC and was a fine dining venue run by the university. It was a place to go to if your family visited or if you wanted to go on a "special" date. It was a really high-quality restaurant which again reflects the commitment the school had to its foodservice program and to hotel and food administration department and its students. I went there for a variety of different reasons to celebrate. I can recall going there with a friend who had gotten his master's and a great time reflecting on his hard work and achievements.

Good friendships stand out a lot for me too. You've got this community of people who are hanging out for a number of years. You get to know people. I'll never forget a memory I have with my brother. This was when I was already at the school for a couple of years. We were walking down the Weingard Walk in front of Johnston Hall,

I must have said hello to four or five people as we walked and my brother went “gosh, you know a lot of people.” It was simple yet stood out. It’s a small enough school and if you’re there you start to create a network of people. There was a great bond created!

**You mention good friendships, do you still stay in contact with the friends you’ve made during your time at the university?**

Yes, the gentleman who got his master’s degree that I mentioned earlier, I still stay in touch with him. My house advisor from first year, he and I have remained friends. I saw him recently when I was in Toronto a few months ago. There’s also one of my “hall residents” from Lambton Hall. Her name is Helen, she lives on the East Coast of Florida and she and I have stayed in touch. It’s tough to stay in touch with everyone and that’s a sad part of life but you’ve got to really make an effort you know? It’s gotten easier with social media, so I’m trying to locate some folks. It is so great that there is an instant connection one feels when meeting up with other Guelph grads as you go through life. The school leaves a big impact on those who attended!