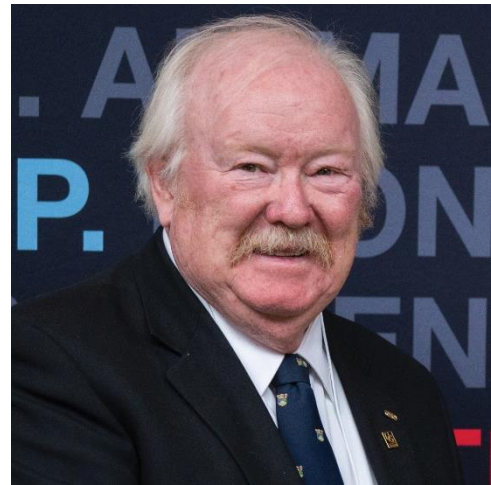


Ontario Agricultural College,  
University of Guelph  
**Alumni Oral History**

## **Dwight E. Greer**

B.Sc (Agr.) 1972

Interviewed by Julia Knowles



**I know that you graduated in the class of '72, when did you start at the OAC?**

September 1968. It's a four-year [program].

**What made you choose to go to the University of Guelph?**

Well, I grew up on a farm in Mulmur Township and it just seemed like a natural progression. I had applied to Windsor and Laurentian, maybe that was the only three at the time. I was a little bit late getting in because my Grade 13 english teacher thought that I skipped too many of his classes and he failed me. Well, I had to take a summer school and I didn't complete summer school until about 2 weeks before classes started. So, I had a curious way I got in. I had an [Agriculture] rep. in the county by the name of Bruce Matheson who brought me to Guelph to see a former classmate of his, Mike Jenkinson, who was in the Dean's Office, and it was [because of] his good graces that I got into OAC. So, I wasn't a stellar student (laughter).

**What made you choose the OAC?**

Probably the program. I didn't know anything about the campus before I applied at all. It was just that the agricultural program seemed to suit me, and I did have a little bit of a hankering, when I applied, to go into vet school and this course was the precursor to getting into veterinary college. But I quickly found out when I got there that there were too many brainy girls and guys for me to even get close because we had almost 300 in a class and they were only accepting 60 students at the time, so I didn't have much of a chance. But it all worked out because I ended up doing what I wanted to do.

## **Do you have any memories of the professors at the OAC?**

Yes, a couple of them. One that I spent quite a bit of time with is Ron Usborne, who was in the Animal Science Department, specifically meat science and he was quite good to me. I learned a lot from him and ended up in the meat business for 42 years, so I guess it was done well. But there were some other ones too, Bruce Stone (OAC '53), who did dairy science. I was impressed with some of his classes and lectures and the first time I had ever done a live test, it was an interview test. It wasn't written, it was just a series of questions, one-on-one with him. I think I learned a lot from that. Then there's another one, I can't remember his first name, but his name was Waghorn, and he was the biochemistry professor, and he was amazing. The old chemistry building, which has been replaced now by Summerlee Science [Complex], had a big lecture room. I think there were about 300 seats in it and there were I think about six blackboards across the front and this professor would come in and start at one side of it and just write out formulas, right across six boards and never look at a note. This was all just from his head, so that impressed me.

## **Was that one of the biggest classes that you had while you were at the OAC?**

Yes, there were a couple and the whole class took some of the lectures, some of the base courses, together and they're all in the afternoon. Whenever I went through agriculture classes, we had labs every morning, Four labs for different subjects, three hour labs, and then my lectures were in the afternoon. So, it was a full week.

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

I think a couple. Probably the meat science class I took in animal science and then I found the nutrition classes very entertaining too, very informational.

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

Scary. It was a big area and you're all on your own and you didn't know where you were going and everything. I still have my library card and my identification card from that first day when I showed up there and signed up. We were processed through the Powell Center; not sure what it's called now, it was the old gym. Anyways, that's where we did the sign-up and all the stuff, we lined up in alphabetical rows and were processed through. So yeah, it was scary, but it was great.

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

Actually, that's one thing that I miss about my experience at Guelph, I didn't get into residence because as I mentioned to you, I came in late. So, I was down south of the campus on Harts Lane, which is down just off Gordon Street going South. I happened to end up just renting a room there from Frank and Mary Cotter and he happened to be the foreman for the campus maintenance group, so that was cool. He would give me rides into school in the morning, so I didn't have to catch buses and it was a good experience there. But as I say, I do miss residence. Talking to some of my classmates, they gained some lifelong friends from their residence experience, and I missed out on that.

## **Where did you live after your first year? Did you stay in the same place?**

No, I went and rented an apartment with my cousin who was going to Guelph, and we rented one of those third-floor slanted roof apartments up on Cavell, which is just close to Exhibition Park at the North end. I stayed there for a year, then I met my wife, and we got married in August of that year. So, for the last two years we had an apartment back on Gordon Street just by the Diplomat. It's still there across, from the mall, north of Woodlawn; Woodlawn and Gordon.

## **Was your wife at the OAC as well?**

No, she was a teacher and she taught at one of the schools up in the North end. It was called something Brant Public School.

## **Were you involved in any extracurriculars on campus?**

Yes, I played hockey, football, rugby, baseball, and curling; a little bit of everything. And then the last two years I worked on the Committee for College Royal, so that was in '71 and '72.

## **Did you play all of those sports before you got to the OAC?**

Everything but the curling, I had done all the other ones in high school. I hadn't done curling, so I took up curling there. We had a little two ice rink right beside the old skating rink there, which isn't the skating rink anymore. It used to be called the Pygmy Palace

because the structure was built so that, I guess they didn't have enough room, but if you got close to the boards at both ends of the rink, you could hit your head on the steel beam that was going up, so you had to go around that. But anyway, the building is still there, but I don't think it's a rink anymore.

### **What was the social life like on the campus? What did you do for fun or to decompress on the weekends?**

I had friends in Mills and Johnston, so sometimes we'd end up with cards. You probably don't know this, but the campus was dry at the time, it sold no alcohol. So, if you wanted alcohol, we all went downtown to a couple places: The Albion House, The Royal Hotel, The Rebel Room. Of course, there were beer cases in the room, but there wasn't any liquor sold on campus at all. I don't know when that changed, it was a few years after I left that it changed. And then just fooling around with a football at non-game times and that type of thing; played a little soccer on Johnston Green.

### **Did you feel a part of the OAC?**

Oh yes, we had elected a class executive in the first or second classes that we took so we were indoctrinated into the OAC. Probably not as well as they've done now, John Cranfield gave me a nice book that they do for the new guys, explaining all the acronyms and what was going on. But yes, it grew of course as we were there longer, but it started fairly early.

### **Do you have any memories of things that are specific to the OAC in terms of rituals or traditions?**

Well, the College Royal is the University of Guelph now, but I think at the time College Royal was all OAC and of course, we took all our classes together, so you really got to know everybody. We played as an OAC class in hockey and an OAC class in football. It was all just the guys you go to school with and the guys you hang out with. We didn't have any of those things that have come up lately like tractor pulls. We did have a snow sculpture contest in February, I think it was called Winterlude. We did sculptures out on Johnston Green. It was quite good, all the classes did their own sculpture and they judged, and there was a trophy for the best sculpture. Some were good and some were not so good. One day because it was really cold, just two guys showed up to do the snow sculpture and there's big piles of snow there. You can't do that with two people, and especially when it was so cold. So, the guy was still there with the tractor piling up

the snow, so we got him to square off a big pile of snow. We went to Canadian Tire and bought 2 cans of paint, a green and a red, and we painted 2 cases of Labatt 50 because 50 beer was all the rage at the time. It's still in stores if you want to look. But we just did two beer cases sitting on the lawn and then left, frozen. We didn't win a prize for that, but people enjoyed it.

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

There's a few of them. Because there wasn't any liquor on campus we used to go down to Oktoberfest in Kitchener every year for Oktoberfest, so in the big tents there in Bingemans Park. That was one of the good memories because that was a lot of fun. We had to find the D.D. to drive us back, but that was a good event. Some of the graduation, of course, was exciting. We went for a class holiday right from graduating day. We went up to a place up in Muskoka at a hotel which isn't there any longer. But some of those memories, and especially some hockey games. We were pretty good at hockey; we played and won the university championship and then we were entered into, I think, three or four university intramurals. This wasn't the college one, it was just intramural, but we went up against intramural teams from Laurentian, Waterloo and McMaster, and we won that too. So, that was a good memory. But we weren't close to what the guys do for the college teams, but we had fun, we probably had more fun. There's a hockey tournament every December and we played in that until about six years ago. So, we were all 65 to 68 and were still playing hockey in the tournament and having fun. We were the oldest team for years. The team is still playing but there's a bunch of younger guys now and it's not our class guys. Some of the sons of my classmates are still playing in it.

## **Are you still friends with people that you went to the OAC with?**

Yes, definitely. We had our 50th reunion two summers ago and we had about 60 classmates back, and their wives. We had a great time, it's quite a close-knit group. We play in the OAC Alumni Golf Tournament every September and with the classmates in the Curling bonspiel and in the OAC one at the end of March. There's the OAC Alumni Foundation, which I'm involved in as the past chair, two of my classmates who are on it with me, and they handle what we call the Joint Investment Committee. So, we have a foundation that raises funds for OAC students' scholarships, and grants, and two of the three guys, their portfolio managers are classmates too. So, I'm in weekly contact with them, but by email.

**It seems like you're still, even after all these years, very connected to the culture and family of the OAC.**

Well yes, I was down there twice this week. On Monday there was a lecture given by Dr. Lenore Newman from UBC in the McLaughlin Library and then on Wednesday night there was the Alumni Association meeting and I sat in as the past chair of the foundation. So yes, I'm down there quite a bit.

**I know that you have served as the chair of multiple different committees within the OAC and that you've also been involved in the OAC golf tournament and curling bonspiel. How did you get involved with those?**

Well, I was on the Alumni Association for years and ended up chairing the events, probably because I couldn't get anyone else to do it and didn't want them to falter. So, I just took that on, I did that for several years. It's usually just a one-year term, but I think I ended up with it for about six or seven years in each case, but it was fun. You get to know everybody, a lot of students and a lot of other classes too, not just your own class. Of course, it wasn't all my own. I chaired it, but we always had good help from OAC. They have a staff member that is under Alumni Affairs and Development now, but we always have someone to do the registration stuff and help with that type of work. So, it's not all on one person.

**You have said that the 30th anniversary project in support of the Bioproducts Discovery and Development Center is one of your proudest achievements. Could you tell me a little bit about that?**

Well, it was seed money and we were a small part of that, by no means were we alone in that. We did a lot of stuff with our joint classes OAC '71 and '72 because they're close together. So, I paired up with the OAC '71 rep. and we did the fundraising campaign. The bioproducts, just because of where it's gone; it's really taken off. It has enabled the university to attract a lot of grants from the government now because it's a new, innovative area of research and I'm glad to see something like that take off. That's why I think I'm pleased with it, and I'm pleased with our two other projects besides that too, but it's nice to see that one growing. When we started out, it was supposed to be a bioproducts and computing center and the computing center sort of fell off the table and just ended up being bioproducts. I understand there's a new computing center on the books now.

## **Did you go through any tough times while you were in your university years and, if so, how did you deal with them?**

Every exam. I'm a bit of a procrastinator, so I'd never get down to it in time. But I can't really say I had tough times. My parents were pretty good in supporting me with money and then after I got married and after second year, my wife was pretty good in supporting me with money. So, unlike a lot of students now, I didn't have that big debt hanging over my head and wondering where the next rent payment was coming from. So no, I can't really say I had tough times, at least I don't remember them.

## **What opportunities has the OAC has given you throughout your life and into your career?**

It was a good basis when I was there, you know, a broad prospect of agriculture. It just provided me with a basis to go and springboard from that. Then the contacts that you make, you have your own class contacts which you always have and they're all in different industries, but OAC and the various Deans over the years kept us in contact with new people and new industries. It was important to stay up to date on technology and scientific advancements that were going on in the agriculture business. So, the support was always there, but we were always fairly close with the Dean, or I was anyway.

## **Is there anything else that you wanted to share about your experience at the OAC?**

I think we've covered most of the experiences. I mentioned that I struggled the first two years with marks because I was up against all the brainy vet kids. After that, in the third and fourth years I got into some more courses that I enjoyed, and I guess it showed in results. I went from about a 60 to 65 percent average to 85 when I graduated. So, the last two years were more enjoyable than the first two years. The first two years were the basics, so I knew what was going on.