

Ontario Agricultural College,
University of Guelph
Alumni Oral History



Pat Mighton

B.Sc. (Agr.) 1964, M.Sc. 1993

Interviewed by Abigail Armitage

What year did you start at the OAC?

Our class was the last year to graduate from University of Toronto. After 1964, all students received their degrees from the University of Guelph, but my class got our degrees from the University of Toronto. I started in the Fall of 1960.

Where did you grow up and where did you go to high school?

I grew up in Toronto and I went to high school at Etobicoke Collegiate.

When did you graduate from the OAC, what year was it?

In 1964, I completed my undergrad degree at the OAC. Then I received a Bachelor of Education in 1984 at the University of Western Ontario, and a Master of Science in Rural Planning and Development in 1993 from the OAC.

Wow, those are quite the accomplishments. Did you ever visit the campus before you started school? Was there an orientation or something? Did they do that back then?

That's a great place to start. When I was looking at Universities and trying to decide where I wanted to go to university, I was reading all kinds of university calendars, and I came upon this program in dairy science at Guelph. It wasn't the University of Guelph at the time, it was the Ontario Agriculture College. I was in Toronto, but the Ontario Agricultural College was in Guelph, and I said to my parents, wow that's really interesting. I think this is what I'd like to do. Nobody in my family had any agriculture background. But my dad said to me: "I have a friend who works in the Department of Agriculture, maybe he could help us arrange a tour of the campus." I was still in grade 12 at this time and that was back when you had grade 13. I was just finishing up grade 12 and my father's friend made arrangements for us to go to Guelph on a Sunday morning and meet with Dr. McLaughlin. I didn't know anything about the campus or this man, but when we met, I found him to be a very nice and kind person. He took my

parents and me around the campus and was proud of it. He showed us all the buildings and explained how all of them came to be. Then he took us for lunch in Creelman Hall and at that point I knew I wanted to go there. We had a marvelous day. Dr. McLaughlin just made me feel like the OAC was absolutely the best place to be. It was only later that I learned that he was actually the President of the College or the Principal of the College. I had no idea at the time when he was showing us around, but he was just so kind and so enthusiastic. Throughout my years at Guelph, he was the president of the college. Then the year after I graduated, he became the 1st President of the University of Guelph. I know now what a privilege that was. But I didn't at the time-realize that this man, who'd been so kind, was such an important person at the college.

Did you have any family members or friends with a connection to the college? Your father had a connection, correct?

Yes, it was a friend of my father's. I couldn't even tell you the man's name. But when I think about it, I think he also had an important position in the Department of Agriculture, as it was called then. It is the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs now, but back then it was known as the Department of Agriculture. I also think that this friend of my father's was a friend from church or something. He might have been an assistant deputy minister or even a deputy minister – someone in a fairly high position, but again, you know, that doesn't mean much to a 17-year-old city girl.

That's very true, you're from Toronto too, a huge city. So, when did you pick your major? Did you know that you wanted to go into agriculture right away?

I knew that I wanted to go into dairy science. Dairy science, that was what to do with the milk after it was out of the cow, rather than how to get it out of the cow. I was really interested in that aspect of food science. I was interested in the research side of the dairy industry.

I realize that you were the first female president of the OAC Alumni Association.

Yes, I was.

That's such an honor. Did you wanted to expand on that a little more? How were your experiences at the college specifically as a woman?

That was several years after I graduated. Fifteen years after I graduated, I had a friend who was involved with the Alumni Association. He was our classmate from '64. He nominated me to be a director on the OAC Alumni Association Board. The way that the

OAC Alumni Association was structured back then anyways, in the mid to late 70s, was that you served a couple of years, as a director and then you completed your term, or you got nominated to be on the executive. After I served as a director, I was nominated to be on the executive. I served for a year as Vice President and then a year as President. I don't believe that there were other women on as directors at the time. I mean there were only four women in my class out of about 200 people.

That's crazy. Only four women.

By the late 70s, there was a far, far, far greater percentage of women in agriculture. And now I understand that it's more than 50%. In the late 70s, early 80s, women were becoming a higher and higher percentage of the student body and therefore there were far more women joining. There were plenty of women joining the Alumni Association as directors as well, but I just happened to be the first.

The first one that's very cool.

It certainly was an honor. You earn a position like that because you're qualified to serve, it really shouldn't matter what your gender is. That made very little difference. It wasn't a big deal.

Do you remember any of your professors? Do any of your professors specifically stand out in your memory?

Yes. Some do stand out, very much. Do you still select an honorary class president?

I'm not sure.

Ok. Well, back then, every class selected an honorary class president. Our class executives organized parties, homecoming floats for the homecoming parade and a bunch of things on campus. Our honorary president for our class of 64' was Dr. Jim Stevens. He was our first-year physics professor. He was such a nice man. He was quite young at the time, and we kept in touch with him. He just died; I'd say within the last year. Maybe within the last two years, but we kept in touch with him right up until his death. He came to all our class reunions.

That's cool.

I don't remember all of them, there were a few other professors that I remember from our first two years on campus that were general years. After the first two years, we got to choose what we called at that time our "option." You would now refer to it as a major. My option was Dairy Science. I remember most of my dairy science professors because

we were an extremely small class. There were four of us in '64 who were in dairy science. It was Sandy Pearson, who was the ice cream guy and Don Irwin, who was the cheese guy and Dave Arnott. I don't remember what his specialty was, but he was a very nice man. And I worked in the Dairy Science Department for 2 summers, so of course I knew the professors that I worked with throughout the summer, and they were quite influential.

It's always nice to have professors like that. I hope that I keep in touch with mine too.

Well, you have to make an effort to do that and of course, you know, it wasn't just an individual thing. It was through our class time and going to talk to the professors after class was over. As I said before some of my professors would come to our class reunions. Both people have to make an effort to keep in touch.

How many people were in your graduating class, do you remember?

Somewhere between 120 and 150 graduates. I could probably look it up somewhere, but let's say somewhere in that range.

So not a very large graduating class either. What was it like when you first got to campus? Were you nervous at all? I remember when I moved into residence last year, I was so nervous, I felt like I didn't know anybody. It was a huge adjustment. So, what was your experience with that?

Oh, I was more excited than nervous. I had already left home after grade 12 to go away for grade 13, so I was not living at home the year immediately preceding coming to Guelph. I wasn't brand new to living away from my parents for the first time. So no, I wasn't really nervous. I was more excited. At that point, back in the early 60's, the first year OAC and vet girls were housed in Macdonald Hall with the second-year Mac students. So that's where I lived. We had a lot of fun living there. The guys that were in my class were very fun too, we had orientation, and we did all kinds of fun and silly things.

The drinking age back then was 21 and I was only 18 at the time, way under the legal drinking age. That wasn't as much of a factor in first year university as perhaps it is today. Most of you are of legal drinking age when you start on campus, I guess.

I never even thought of that.

There were only four girls in this class of about 200, and that came as a surprise to me. I didn't know that it was going to be just such a small number of girls in the class, but the

guys that started with me made us feel included. Not to say that they made us feel like one of the guys or anything like that, they just made us feel like we belonged, right from the get-go.

That's good.

I had this sense of belonging, and of course, that feeling had been fostered right from the start. Starting with my introduction by Doctor McLaughlin, showing me around and making me feel like I was absolutely right where I belonged. Then I arrived on campus, and it was beautiful. It was fairly small, but in the fall, it was really pretty, with all the leaves changing and all that. September was nice and warm, so it was just this feeling of belonging right from the start.

I think Guelph has that kind of vibe to it all year round. Everyone always says that when I talk to them about how they like it here. So, were you involved in any extracurricular activities?

I was on my class executive, so I helped in planning class parties and that sort of thing. I also swam for a little bit, but I wasn't really a competitive swimmer. I played hockey for the Guelph Girls Hockey team. The Guelph Women's Hockey team had just started back then. I played hockey when I was in fourth year. By that time, I was living in Bursar Hall, which is the building between Creelman and Johnston Hall. I think it's now called Drew Hall, but at that time it was a really pretty little house. It had a beautiful front porch on it and the Aggie and vet girls lived there. One day, some of my best friends came in and said "Hey, come on and skate with us, we're starting a hockey team." I had never played hockey before, but I did like skating. So, I thought to myself, I can do this.

I play hockey and I absolutely love it. Were there other girl sports teams at the time? I was just wondering, because of the extremely low population of girls that attended the college at the time.

No, not really. I can't make any kind of generalization of the women's teams at Guelph. I don't really know what other teams there were.

Guelph, Western, Queens and McMaster school sports teams have been around for years, they might have had well-established women's teams. Although I was brand new at the college, I would say we were not a terribly competitive team. I believe we did end up winning one year though. I think it was around 4-5 years after I graduated that there was a winning Guelph women's team. Yes, I had fun, but I wasn't a particularly competitive hockey player.

My experience at Guelph was that you lived in residence on campus for your first year, then second year you had to find housing off campus. So, my question was, when you were studying at Guelph did you live on campus the whole time? Or at any point did you have to find housing off campus?

The first year we lived in Macdonald Hall. In second year, we moved over to Bursar Hall, where we were known as the Bursar Buzzards. In the third year we were off campus and so we had to find accommodations off campus and for me that was just a room in the basement of a house with three other OAC girls. In fourth year, we were back on campus again in Bursar Hall.

That's a lot different from how it is on campus now.

It certainly is. The campus was very small but so was the number of girls that went to the college back then, so girls were able to be housed on campus as a result.

So, you would say that the social life on campus was pretty fun? You were a part of organizing everything?

There was always a lot of fun going on. We were allowed to organize one party on campus and one-off campus. Those were always a lot of fun. I do remember another story though. It was one of those sad occasions. We were planning our class party in the fall of 1963, our graduating year. Our class party was scheduled for November 22, or maybe it was the 23rd. Anyway, it was the day John F Kennedy was shot. I can clearly remember coming out of a chemistry lab and one of my classmates saying to me, "Did you hear the news? John Kennedy, President Kennedy was shot." I thought, he's waiting for me to ask the right question, because there's got to be some kind of punchline here, right? And then I realized no, my friend was being serious.

Oh my gosh. That's terrible.

It was just this most awful, awful feeling, and we had this party planned, it was planned for a location in Kitchener, I think. So that was a pretty somber event.

That would definitely be a memorable experience.

But we did have two parties a year and they were formal events. We would have a head table and speeches. We would usually have a speaker and we would have dancing and fun stuff. But it was practice in organizing a very formal event and how to do it. We would even invite our faculty. We would make printed invitations and send them to our faculty, and they would bring their spouses. All the guests would get dressed up for

these events. Then there were social events like Conversat, which was a very formal event, and the College Royal Ball. The Conversat dance was very fun, the guys got dressed up in suits. I think that Conversat would be the equivalent of today's highschool prom.

That would have been fun.

I even have pictures of my father-in-law and mother-in-law at Conversat several years after his graduation in 1931.

I wanted to ask about the Bull Ring too, because the Bull Ring is one of my favorite places to hang out and I always go in there. I see that it literally used to be a Bullring, but I'm assuming that it wasn't actually a Bullring when you were there?

Oh yes. It was an actual bullring when I went to school.

I didn't know that. That's awesome.

We would go in there for a judging class. Everyone in their first year at the college had to take a class in judging. Judging was learning how to look at whatever it was, a crop like carrots or wheat, or livestock. You would have to examine four specimens of whatever you were looking at and compare and rank them according to a set of standards. Or look at a cow and figure out if it was a grade A dairy cow by looking at its physical characteristics. We would all gather in the Bull Ring, sit around in the bleachers, and one of our classmates would bring a cow out, and then we would all judge it. We would learn what we were looking for in a top-grade animal.

That's crazy, I did not know that.

Yes, the bull ring was used to show animals.

That's very cool.

The other thing was that we would show livestock at College Royal. I think they might still this to do this to this day. You could go into the dairy barn, and they would give you a dairy cow, you would work with that cow or in my case it was sheep. I loved the sheep, so I would go up to the sheep barn, which is now Alumni House. We would get a sheep assigned to us and we would practice showing the sheep. We were taught how to hold it under its head, then your other hand was on its tail as it was walking around the ring. You were basically just trying to make it look pretty. In my fourth year I was the College Royal champion sheep showman which meant that I went on to the Grand

Championship Showman competition. It was a very fancy show. You would have to show a horse, a pig, a dairy cow, and a beef cow. I knew nothing about showing any of those animals, so I would get a quick lesson from the guys in my class. They would tell me, "hang on to the animal here and do this," I would try my best. But I didn't go any further than sheep showing.

Wow. That's very cool. For fun or to just kind of relax around campus, what did you go and do? My place to hang out at for downtime is the Bull Ring, but obviously you couldn't relax there because it was an actual bull ring.

You're right. We couldn't hang out at the bullring. I don't think there was any place on campus that served liquor when we were students. Those who were drinking age would go down to the Royal Hotel in downtown Guelph. All the guys would go there on Thursday nights. I couldn't do that because I wasn't of drinking age. I wasn't old enough to drink until fourth year, but even then, I didn't go out much. I might have gone a few times to the Royal Hotel, that would have been the equivalent to the Bull Ring now. As far as dates on campus go, I met my husband when I was in first year. We didn't start dating a lot until I was in second year, then we got engaged in third year.

Wow.

We would go to the basement of Massey Hall; that was what the library was called back then. The basement of Massey was what we called the lounge; it was a little coffee shop. You could get cinnamon toast, or a fried egg sandwich, or coffee, hot chocolate, and a muffin. That's where we would go on dates.

Cool. Did you ever skate on the Speed River that runs through downtown Guelph? Was that there when you were at the college?

Is that the river that has the boathouse where you get ice cream?

Yes, that river. Did you ever do ice skating and stuff like that there? Last year when it froze for a couple days, we went out skating there.

No, we never skated on the river but that would've been fun.

Yes, it was fun. Do you still keep in touch with all your classmates? Are you still good friends with any of them?

Well, yes, actually I'm going out tonight with some good friends from school. My husband started in '63 so some of our closest friends are from that graduating class.

There are five or six couples that all still hang out together. We still celebrate New Year's Eve with those couples every year as well.

Nice. That's awesome.

Yes. We have a reunion every five years. Our next reunion is coming up in 2024. It'll be our classes 60th and the OAC's 150th.

So you've spoken very highly about the University of Guelph so far. I don't know if you'll be able to answer this, but did you go through any hard times when you were at school if you don't mind me asking? Did you have to go through anything tough? It sounds like everything was pretty smooth sailing and like you had a good time.

No, I can't say that I did. The only thing I can think of was my roommate's father dying when we were moving in together in second year. That was certainly a really difficult time for her. But other than that, no, my time at Guelph was really good.

That's the way it should be.

I absolutely loved my dairy science courses. I was not at the top of my class, but I wasn't failing so I really didn't have too much to worry about. I had a steady boyfriend and lots of good friends. It was good. I learned lots and I liked all my living arrangements. I also really enjoyed all the guys in my class, they always made us girls feel included. Yes, I pretty much liked everything about my time at the OAC.

That's awesome. Was the Arboretum there when you went to school too?

No, the Arboretum was just getting started back then I believe. Our graduating class contributed money to a project for the Arboretum. I think the first project was the gravel pit rehabilitation at the Arboretum. That had to be in the early 70's. We also started a scholarship. Our aim was to collect \$200 000, which we did. Then with interest and in additional money that's come in since our 50th anniversary, we now offer two \$5000 scholarships to a graduate student in Agriculture or Environmental studies. We're proud of that.

Yes, that's awesome.

But to go back to your question about the Arboretum. It did not exist while we were students.

That's one of my favorite places to hang out on campus, the Arboretum.

One of the places that existed then and probably still does... it's probably still off-bounds today as it was then. It was the steam tunnels that ran under the campus, they controlled heating on campus. One day my fiancé thought it would be a good idea to tour that. So, we did.

I didn't know that Guelph had tunnels underground for heating, that interesting.

Yes, it was fun. Although, we weren't supposed to be down there. It was almost like walking around in an underground subway.

I didn't even know that we have those here.

Maybe the heating system is a little more modern now.

Would you'd be willing to share any photos of your time at the university?

Maybe. I don't even know where to look. We didn't have digital cameras back then, so we didn't take a whole lot of photos.

I didn't even think about that.

I can't think of any place in my house where I might have a stash of old photos. I think we have some pictures in our yearbooks. They are kept in the Alumni House, there's a 64' lounge and there used to be a collection of the class yearbooks. You could go check those out.

I'll have to go take a look.

I'm looking at one photo here in my office. My husband, Dennis, and I were the Honorary Chairs of Alumni Weekend 10 years ago, so that would be 2014. At the end of the weekend, they presented us with a set of three photos. The first one is a photo of the two of us holding a long toilet paper scroll. When we were in fourth year, my friends and housemates in Bursar Hall made Dennis, then my fiancé, an honorary Bursar Buzzard/ That's what the long scroll was for. The other photos are more recent. I don't think I can take them out of the frame, but I can copy it.

If you could send it to me via email, that'll be perfect. I can always go and check out the yearbooks at the Alumni House too. I really appreciate you taking the time out of your day to talk to me. It was really interesting.

Oh no problem. I had fun too, it's fun to reminisce about the good old days. I hope I've given you lots for your oral history project.

Yes, lots of insight. It was very helpful. I loved it.

One of the things that I had been thinking about in advance that would seem so archaic to you was that we had a curfew when I was living on campus. Back when we were in our first year living in Macdonald Hall, we had to be back in residence by 11:00 o'clock. I think it was 10:00 pm during the week and 11:00 pm on weekends.

That is a lot different than how it is today.

I remember once each semester we were given a key which meant that we could come in a little bit later than curfew, but I think we had to be back in by 1:00 am. There were absolutely no boys allowed in that residence ever too. That was a very strict rule.

Yes, again a lot different than how it is now.

The girls also wore skirts all the time. We never wore slacks. When I think back on it now, I laugh to myself because we would wear skirts to our labs and field trips. Now there are strict dress codes for working in the laboratories.

That's crazy that they let you wear skirts to labs. Did you have Residence Assistants like we have today? Or a don that would live with you in resistance? Did you have that or was it a faculty member?

It was a faculty member who was responsible. In Bursar Hall, that's the little house I talked about for Aggie and vet girls, our honorary faculty member was Dr. McLaughlin's wife. Mrs. McLaughlin was charming, and once a year she would invite us to her home for tea. They lived on campus in the President's House, which is over across the road from Creelman. We would in turn reciprocate it and invite her to Bursar Hall for cake and cookies or something like that.

That's very cool.

It was really fun.

That would be.

She was very charming, so that was kind of a fun thing for us to do with the faculty.

It's crazy how much things have changed regarding the university in just a span of 60ish years. Even now, we are able to switch our classes to online if a professor is sick or something like that. We even submit all our projects online, which is different than how it used to be. My mom always tells me how lucky we are that everything's online now. She said that back when she went to school, they would have to hand all their assignments to their professor in person, before the due date, and if you didn't make it there on time, then too bad, you couldn't hand it in. Crazy how times have changed.

Exactly.

Do you have anything else to add? Any other stories or anything like that?

No, I can't think of anything else. This has been such fun to chat with you Abby and good luck with the project.

Yes, thank you very much.

You're very welcome. It's been lovely to meet you.