

## **Jillian Dasti – Biographical Essay**

I first realized in Kindergarten that our society lacks an understanding of the role and importance of the agricultural industry.

The Kindergarten classes of my elementary school were visiting an apple orchard on a school trip; we were there to learn about the production and uses of apples.

I remember asking many of our chaperoning teachers and parents what, and how, apple trees 'eat'. None of them could answer my questions.

Of course, the challenge of explaining a scientific process to a five year old may have been a factor in their inability to give me answers. But as I grew older, I had many other similar experiences.

In second grade, I asked how cows produced milk. In fifth grade, I wanted to know how bees made honey, and why I was supposed to eat honey when I was sick. Nobody could tell me, nor did they care.

However, in sixth grade, I had a teacher named Mr. Stapleton, who taught environmental studies. I can honestly say Mr. Stapleton ranks as one of my 'Top Ten' favourite teachers, partially because he was a passionate educator, but also because he was able to feed my desire to learn about nature and animals. It was while in sixth grade with Mr. Stapleton that I

finally found some answers to the questions I had growing up about food, animals, and the environment. I also started taking horseback riding lessons that year.

By the time I entered high school, I realized that I would have to seek answers from other sources; my family, peers, and teachers knew very little about agriculture and the environment.

By doing extensive research at the local library and volunteering at the barn where I took riding lessons, I started to explore the world of agriculture and the environment, becoming more educated than my family and peers.

And yet, my family, friends, and peers barely understood where their food came from.

By the time I had reached my last year in high school, my love for horses, agriculture, and the environment had flourished. I considered pursuing a career in agriculture, but I was faced with a problem: how could a city girl like me have a career in agriculture? I remember asking my guidance counselor about career opportunities in agriculture, and being told not to pursue a career in that industry; I didn't have a family farming background, and jobs in that industry didn't pay well anyways.

The general consensus that I needed to be a farmer to have a career in agriculture led me to enroll at Durham College in their three-year Multimedia Design diploma program instead; while I loved agriculture, I also had a knack for technology and design.

Over the next two years, I learned how to create all sorts of media, from print material and photos, audio and video content, to web and graphic design, and how to communicate without words.

And I learned that I was more passionate about agriculture than what I was learning at Durham College.

I was still bothered by the fact that the majority of our population don't understand anything about the industry that feeds us. The more I asked questions and talked about what I had learned, the more I realized that there is a need for people who will make that connection between the agriculture industry and society.

As Mikhail Gorbachev once said, "If not me, who? If not now, when?"

Thus, I made a decision – I dropped out of my program at Durham College, went back to high school for the necessary credits to pursue a university education, and then enrolled in the Bachelor of Bio-Resource Management Equine Major program at the University of Guelph.

Throughout my studies at the University of Guelph, I've come to realize just how co-dependent our society and the agriculture industry are; the agriculture industry is what sustains our populations, but the industry wouldn't thrive without interest and support. I also learned that I enjoy explaining ideas and educating others, and my work with the University's Office of

Research in writing articles about research in the horse industry helped me realize that I am in a unique position to do this. I have a passion and educational background in agriculture, and an ability to communicate what I know to the average person.

As I pursue my goal to bridge the connection between society and the agriculture industry, I realize that I must also constantly seek new knowledge, and new ways to communicate what I have learned.