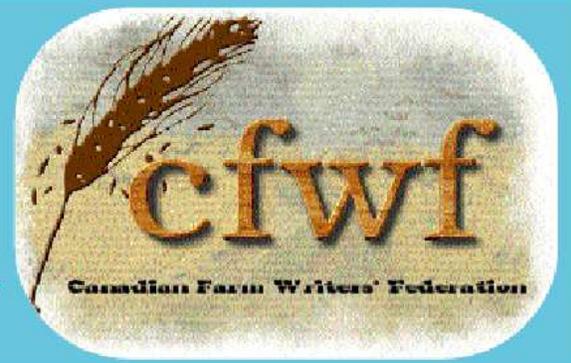


The Farm Journalist

NEWSLETTER OF THE CANADIAN FARM WRITERS' FEDERATION

[HTTP://WWW.CFWE.CA/](http://www.cfwe.ca/)



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Writing about Gurcharan

By Lisa Guenther, SFWA

Alexis Kienlen (pictured to the right) recently published a book entitled "Truth, love, non-violence: The Story of Gurcharan Singh Bhatia." Here is an interview about the process.

1. Tell us a little about Gurcharan. Why did you want to write about his life?

Gurcharan has had a fascinating life. He was born in India and lived through the partition of India, which was one of the worst massacres in history. His father was killed during partition, along with 66 other members of his family. This really influenced Gurcharan's entire life. He devoted his entire life to creating a more inclusive, diverse society, and all of his major projects have focused on diversity and human rights.

I was interested in working with him because I really believed in his work and his message. He's been involved with so many projects. He was a citizenship judge, founded a multicultural newspaper and was one of the first Sikh men to immigrate to the prairies. He had a lot of challenges in his life and overcame them by hard work and his personal conviction.

I found him inspiring. I felt that a lot of people could learn from the book and from his life, because he was an ordinary person who has really made a difference and worked to create a better Canada.

2. How did you get involved in the project?

Gurcharan was friends with Linda Goyette, a great journalist and author. He asked her to find him a young writer to work with him on the project. She asked a group of writers who she knew, and we applied, and I was selected to work with him. My first degree was in International Studies, with a focus on race and ethnic relations. I'd also studied a bit about India in my undergrad, and that base helped me as well.



3. The book opens with the story of Gurcharan, just a teenager at the time, and his family helping a little Muslim girl during India's partition. That incident seemed to encapsulate so much about him.

It definitely does. If his life was a movie, the pivotal moment in his life occurred when his father was killed during partition. His father was a police superintendent and was trying to free people from a small city. He was killed while he was helping, and no one ever found out what happened to him.

That moment defined Gurcharan, and made him dedicate his life to promoting peace, human rights and a civil society. That particular story about his family saving the Muslim girl also tells a lot about his family the way he was raised, what he was taught to believe, and the kind of values he has.

4. I also felt like I learned a lot about not only India, but Canada, from your book. Have you heard that from other people?

Yes, actually. Since it just came out, I haven't heard too much feedback from people, but I have heard a bit.

My dad read it and said that he thought it would be a great book for students to read in a high school civics or

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Congratulations

Congratulations to Tamara Leigh for winning the IFAJ Bursary to go to Scotland in 2014.

Also, congratulations to Debra Murphy who won the IFAJ Young Leaders Award.

CFWF in PEI

Join farm writers in Prince Edward Island this fall as we Dig Deep at the Canadian Farm Writers' Federation annual conference. From Oct. 2 to 5, 2014, you can explore Atlantic Canada's little treasure, known locally as "the Island."

Not only will you discover great agricultural stories, you're going to help us celebrate the P.E.I. Sesquicentennial, the 150th anniversary of the Birthplace of Confederation: the 1864 Charlottetown Conference.

Unlike in 1864 when the circus came to town leaving "no accommodations available in which to house the Canadian delegates," we have space for everyone at the Rodd Royalty Inn in Charlottetown.

We have planned a long weekend of learning, networking, food, fun and camaraderie. And anticipate that by the conference conclusion, you'll have stories, photos and videos to share – and an appreciation for Island agriculture and culture.

Watch www.acfwa.ca for more details on the agenda, hotel, travel and to register.

See you on the Island!



ECFWA's new board

L-R: Karen Dallimore, Communications Coordinator; Sarah Andrewes, Director; Clare Wooding, Past President; Kristy Nudds, 2nd Vice President; Sharon Grose, Director; Courtney Denard, Director; Melanie Epp, 1st Vice President. Front: Andi McKillop, Secretary-Treasurer; Christina Franc, President

Absent: Guylaine Gagnon, Director, Jeanine Moyer, Director

ACDC News— Canadians starving for ag coverage

Canadians are starving for agriculture coverage, Marilee Devries reported in the Spring 2014 issue of Ryerson Review of Journalism. "If food is the world's most essential industry," she asked, "why have newspapers forsaken the farm?"

"The quality of agriculture reporting in the urban press is like a wheat crop infected with fusarium head blight," Devries observed. Her article explored trends in agriculture reporting by newspapers in Canada, causes of slippage and results for citizens and the entire country. She concluded:

"Now Canadian journalists must find a way to tell the Ag story, because it's more than nice-to-know information. It's the story of something the whole country—and the whole world—needs: food."

You can read this article at: <http://www.rj.ca/m28589>

International Writers Conference, Surrey, B.C.

The Surrey International Writers' Conference, held every October in British Columbia, is the most comprehensive conference of its kind in Canada. SiWC offers writers in all genres — from beginners to experts — the opportunity both to hone their craft and to expose their work to the international literary marketplace. This year it will be from October 24-26. Find out more about the event at www.siwc.ca

A meeting of the minds

By Karen Dallimore, ECFWA



A ‘Meeting of the Minds’ was the first event to be co-hosted by ECFWA and the Canadian Agri-Marketing Association (CAMA). Held in April 2014 at the Cutten Club in Guelph, ON, the day long meeting provided an opportunity for more than 60 farm writers and marketers to meet face-to-face.

With Owen Roberts as moderator, three panels provided insight from their perspective about marketing and media. The CAMA panel consisted of Stephen Denys, VP of Sales and Marketing with Pride Seeds; Brian Klassen, President of Bark Communications; and Dave Kington, an independent media strategist with 33 years of experience.

John Grieg spoke on the farm writer panel as a former editor of the Ontario Farmer, now working at 31st Line Strategic Communications; Kristy Nudds gave the viewpoint from her seat as Editor of the Canadian Poultry magazine, and Karen Dallimore was the third panel member, operating as a freelance writer with her company Words For Hire.

While both farm writers and marketers were able to exchange ideas, a third farmer panel was able to provide a perspective that mattered to both. What do farmers have to say to the media?

For Bruce Court, he would no more leave the house without his cell phone than without his pants. As a 2500-acre cash crop farmer near Tillsonberg, Court goes to his fields every day with 800 friends, calling his phone the most valuable piece of equipment on his farm. While he admits that he now has the attention span of a four-year old and he’s “too lazy” to read an article anymore, he loves Twitter: “If it can’t be said in 140 characters it isn’t worth saying.”

Murray Sherk owns and operates a 100-cow dairy farm near Plattsville, in addition to representing Dairy Farmers

of Ontario (DFO) on their quota committee and on the Farm & Food Care board. If news doesn’t arrive electronically he’s just not interested anymore. “The good thing about reading a magazine is you find things you weren’t looking for,” Sherk told the room full of farm media; the bad thing is that he finds the magazines now just “pile up”.

What he really wanted to read was “helpful” articles. Sherk isn’t interested in stories that stir the pot just to sell papers. He likes balanced articles – pros and cons, or independent trial work.

From his vantage point at Beverly Greenhouses in Southwestern Ontario, Jan VanderHout stated that the speed of information exchange has encouraged them to step up traceability and food safety aspects of production.

As a communications tool, he sees media as “preaching to the choir”, suggesting the need for more widespread distribution of stories. VanderHout enjoys the ads (“That’s the part I like”) and the comments from other readers at the end of articles, as well as links to more information. He was comfortable with talking to the farm media but “careful” with others, although he was proud to open his greenhouses to food writers and to answer their questions. When he does research a topic he is careful to separate fact from fiction: “Just because someone writes it down, it doesn’t mean it’s true.”

The event wrapped up with a commitment to explore further networking opportunities between marketers and farm writers. As moderator Owen Roberts summarized, “We’re all trying to build on the advancements that will make our farmers better.”

ECFWA would like to thank the Western Producer for sponsoring the event and CAMA for co-hosting.

This article was originally published in The Nib



This is a summary of an informative 78-page report of an international research effort by communicators Claudia and Hans-Heinrich Berghorn. They conducted it on behalf of the regional German Farmers' Union, Westfälisch-Lippischer Landwirtschaftsverband, based in Münster. Their goal was to identify benchmarks and best practice examples to help develop new communication strategies for German farmers. Their research took them to Great Britain, the Republic of Ireland, and the U. S., including the Agricultural Communications Documentation Center at the University of Illinois.

They found that the scope of the challenges facing agricultural communication is even bigger than expected, calling for best practices that provide answers to the question of what agriculture contributes to society beyond providing food. They identified seven strategies for new directions in agricultural communication and five topics for future discussions. Thank you to ACDC for the summary.

The Context:

Declining Acceptance in Society as a Major Challenge for German Agriculture

Germany's agriculture – particularly livestock production – is faced with growing criticism by the media, NGOs and society. Many German consumers hold on to the romantic idea of small, family-run farms; at the same time, however, they want high quality food at a throwaway price. There is hardly any acceptance in Germany for farmers as profit maximizing entrepreneurs. The consumers' image and the reality of modern agriculture drift ever more apart. Already, the farmers' credibility is at stake – and so might be the future of livestock production in Germany, should this estrangement continue. Agricultural communications was identified as a key element to answering this challenge.

Project Aim and Design: Best Practice and Personal Exchange of Experience

The regional Farmers' Union, Westfaelisch-Lippischer Landwirtschaftsverband (WLW), with the support of the German and European Farmers' Unions (DBV/ COPA), devised an international research project, aiming at identifying benchmarks and best practice examples in agricultural communications in selected countries, to help develop new strategies for German farmers. The project was realized by Claudia and Hans-Heinrich Berghorn, who visited Great Britain, the Republic of Ireland and the United States of America from August to December 2012, interviewing representatives of the farming community, agribusinesses and the media as well as of government and academic institutions.

After ten months of analysis, the results were published in German in October 2012: "Neue Wege in der Agrarkommunikation". Attached, please find a brief summary of the results in English.

Key findings

1. The **scope of the challenge** facing agricultural communications is even bigger than expected. In fact, the controversial discussion about modern livestock production proves to be only the tip of the iceberg. The underlying issue is the big question of the survival of our planet: Who takes responsibility, and how can mankind achieve a sustainable future?

2. Value-based communications

Future initiatives in agricultural communications will have to be created in the context of current communications trends, responding to developments within society. One of these trends is that organizations have to show which values they act on, and how consumers benefit from their products and services. The best practice ex-

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amples presented in the study show that successful agricultural communications provides answers to the question of what agriculture contributes to society beyond providing food.

Seven Strategies for more understanding and acceptance, as presented in the study

1. “Verorten”

As a first step in a complex process, the authors recommend some “introspection”. German farmers need to clarify the way they see themselves, define their position in modern society and develop visions for a sustainable future. This clear understanding of who they are and what role they want to play is the starting point for successful communication with all stakeholders in society.

2. “Gestalten”

German farmers need to shape their image in society more actively instead of just coping with images projected on them, i.e. by the food processing companies.

3. “Informieren”

Information about farming and food remains a core issue within agricultural communications, highlighting the value of domestic agriculture and the benefits it provides to consumers and to society as a whole.

4. “Ausbilden”

The authors recommend a revision of agricultural education, putting more emphasis on communication and media science in the curricula of all existing programmes, and the establishment of a new university degree, “Agricultural Communications”, modelled after the US example.

5. “Begeistern”

Future initiatives in agricultural communications should provide relevant positive stories about agriculture, and aim at generating “friends and followers”, especially in the young generation, who are easy to reach through social media.

6. “Heilen”

German farmers should actively reach out to society, bridging the existing gap and create a new culture of mutual trust and respect as a basis of real dialogue.

7. “Bündeln”

All existing and future communications initiatives should be integrated to realize their full potential and to create “one voice” of agriculture.

Important topics for future discussions, as identified in the study

1. Sustainability and the future of agriculture
2. Ethical aspects of agriculture and the limits of growth
3. The role of agriculture within society (“Corporate Social Responsibility”)
4. Farmers as experts in food and nutrition
5. Animal welfare

A concluding remark from the authors: We think that there are limits to what communications can achieve, and should attempt. If certain modern production methods raise major concern within society, “greenwashing” through communication will not provide the solution farmers are looking for. Communications can only create positive images when it reflects positive behavior.

Writing about Gurcharan cont'd

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social studies class. The students would learn a lot about Canada, and how one man can make a difference in the world.

I certainly learned a lot about Canada while I was writing it. I had to research details about things that happened during my lifetime, but that I couldn't remember or didn't really understand. For example, I was about 14 when the Charlottetown Accord was big news, but I didn't remember all of the details or understand the implications of it. So I had to sit down with a history professor and get him to explain what was happening during that time.

I also had to read a lot about Canadian history to understand some of the context of what was happening.

5. *You've had other books published through traditional publishers, but this one was self-published. Why did you decide to self-publish, and how did that process compare to traditional publication deals?*

We decided to self-publish because we didn't have a lot of time. Traditional publishing and shopping a manuscript around can take many years. Gurcharan will be 83 in August, and we don't have ten years to waste. I wanted to publish

this while he was still around to enjoy it.

It took a lot of research to find the company that we wanted to use for self-publishing. I think that if a person chooses to self-publish, they still need to be professional about it. The book was edited by a professional and we hired a copy editor too. We did as much as we could to make sure that the finished product was equivalent to something that would be published by a traditional press.

Self-publishing was definitely a new venture for me. I learned a lot through the process.

6. *Biggest challenges in writing or publishing this book?*

There were a few challenges. Self-publishing was one, because it was a huge learning curve for me.

Writing the section about India was the hardest part for me, because I've never been to India and it was difficult for me to understand everything that was happening during partition and its aftermath. Gurcharan had to actually use maps and pictures to explain the history to me. I also had to read many books and watch movies and docu-

mentaries to get a sense of everything that was happening in order to write about it.

The project took longer than we anticipated. We thought it would be done in one year, and it took three years. I also have a full time job, so I had to fit in this book around all my regular work.

7. *Greatest joy that came from this project?*

I learned so much doing it, and I got to interview many fascinating people who had been a part of Gurcharan's life, like Senator Douglas Roche, who lives in Edmonton and was Canada's ambassador for Disarmament. I really enjoyed talking to everyone.

8. *Where can people buy it?*

The easiest way to purchase it is through any Amazon site. If you prefer online reading, it's also available in Kindle format too.

Share your news

The next deadlines for the Farm Journalist are
August 28 and October 28.

Share your news, stories, life events by emailing office@cfwf.ca