

OTHER

The Real Weed Man: Portrait of Canadian Botanist Gerald A. Mulligan

By Julie Mulligan. 2014. Published by Julie Mulligan, P.O. Box 304, Russell, ON, Canada, K4R 1E1. 238 pages, Paperback edition 16.84 CAN, Kindle edition 2.95 CAN (Amazon.com).

The Real Weed Man is a daughter's very personal account of her father's life and career at the Central Experimental Farm (CEF) in Ottawa. It is based on discussions with her father, family members, colleagues, and on entries from Gerry's daily diary begun in 1974, which are frequently quoted. Within the book's 25 chapters, beginning with the early years growing up in Ottawa, the author traces Gerry's association with the "Farm" over a period covering more than 70 years. Gerry followed in the footsteps of other family members of earlier generations who worked at CEF. He began as a summer student, then as a technician after

High School, and subsequently, following the completion of his Bachelor of Science degree in 1952 from Macdonald College of McGill University, he was hired as a biologist. Through considerable perseverance and his abilities as a researcher and manager, Gerry rose through the ranks to reach the top level of the Research Scientist classification. Gerry eventually also served as the Director of the Biosystematic Research Institute at CEF from 1978 to 1987.

The author touches on many facets of Gerry's personality and career. We learn that Gerry is an avid sports, and especially hockey, fan, a devoted father and

husband, as well as a gifted researcher and manager. Gerry is a very disciplined individual and persistent in achieving his goals. He has always tried to be ethical in his approach to decision-making as a manager and was open to heading in new directions when so required. The biographical sketch deals not only with aspects of Gerry's personal traits, but also reveals, over a series of chapters, how he dealt with or views specific issues, either as a researcher or as a manager. These include such topics as health and safety in the workplace, annual staff appraisals, French in the public service, and genetically modified plants, among others.

Readers who are familiar with Ottawa, would be interested in the details on historical land ownership by the Mulligan family within the city and at CEF. Changes that have occurred over the years at CEF, in the focus of its operations and in staffing, are touched on as well.

The most surprising aspect of the book is the frankness of revelations on Gerry's interactions with colleagues and managers, or of his views about the published works of others specifically named in the book. Because of such anecdotes, the book would be of particular interest to many botanists and biologists.

The primary subject of the book is that of a botanist, a weed specialist, Gerald Alfred Mulligan, his strengths and possible weaknesses, his lifestyle and views. In this regard, I have some minor quibbles on content. The author tends to expand topics such as Gerry's life-long stuttering into a long, personal and family account. This, for the reviewer, digresses too far from its relevance to Gerry's condition and its impact on his career. Similar, perhaps excessive tangents, dealing with family outings and incidents, related specifically to the

author and her siblings, are included rather than remaining focused on Gerry's fieldwork activities. The chapter on photography might have been better treated under a different subject heading. Much of it highlights problems in maintaining a web site on Weeds of Canada rather than on Gerry's photography. The author also regularly inserts lengthy personal views rather than reflecting those of her subject.

Considering that this biography is likely of greatest general interest to botanists and biologists, the detailed definitions and discussion of botanical "type" collections seem unnecessary. It is unfortunate that the error in naming of the Gray Herbarium of Harvard University (GH), given as the "Great Herbarium of Harvard University" (page 50 and in footnote page 199), was not recognized. Similarly, the institutional citation for the herbarium known by its acronym CAN is given as "Canadian National Museum herbarium" rather than as "Canadian Museum of Nature". The updated names of institutions and the acronyms of their herbaria are readily found on the internet by searching on Index Herbariorum.

In spite of the above critique, the book is an interesting read. It provides a very detailed perspective of a Canadian botanist who is known widely for his work on the mustard family, his numerous plant chromosome counts and his documentation of the weeds of Canada. Gerry's life-time work and achievements were recognized by the Canadian Botanical Association in 2006 when it presented him with its prestigious George Lawson Medal "...for excellence in the contribution of an individual to Canadian botany".

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