I never wanted to be a lawyer. Growing up I wanted to be an ophthalmologist, a pharmacologist, veterinarian, or any career that required a microscope and test tubes. I wanted to do science. But when I was fifteen my path took an unexpected turn. Enthralled with golf I was determined to build a putting green in my backyard. I thought it would be a simple task, but it turns out that maintaining a living plant at one-eighth of an inch requires dedication, knowledge, and special equipment. Not dissuaded, I lined my bookshelf with college textbooks on plant science and turfgrass management, and I scoured junkyards across the state to find the equipment I needed, which I then restored to like-new condition. After a year of hard work and research, I had a respectable backyard putting green, [not used by me]. I found not only a hobby but also a career path. I wanted to be a golf course superintendent.

I did major in agronomy (plant science) at Auburn, but after a year of classes I realized there were more important problems to solve in agriculture than perfecting putting greens, viz., feeding the growing world population. So, beginning my sophomore year I shifted my focus to agronomy research (though this did not stop me from leading Auburn to a win in the turfgrass industry’s most prestigious competition – a written-examination covering all aspects of plant science and management), and accepted an offer to join Professor Scott McElroy’s Lab as a master’s candidate through the accelerated BS/MS program.