

BONAVISTA POOLS

Good afternoon, everyone. It's a pleasure to be here and share my journey in the pool industry — mine is a story rooted in family, determination, and a deep passion for learning and innovation.

My story begins in childhood, where some of my fondest memories were working alongside my dad. Whether it was renovating the house, gardening, or cleaning his workshop, I loved being by his side. By the time I was eight years old, I knew what I wanted to do — become an engineer and work with my father. I still remember visiting job sites with him and sharing McDonald's french fries sitting in the front seat of his big blue Oldsmobile. As I got older, I jumped at the chance to work at BonaVista. It started at the kitchen table, helping my mom record the time and job costing codes from the payroll time cards. I then got my feet wet learning about cleaning pools with BonaVista's first maintenance technician, Doug McLean.

My parents played a huge role in shaping who I am today. My dad was always in "teaching mode," involving me in his projects and encouraging me to ask questions. He showed me the value of curiosity and the importance of hands-on learning. My mom, too, inspired me with the same curiosity and hands-on learning by letting me make messes in the kitchen while learning to cook, she also taught me how to sew and knit — all sparking the creativity to make something. For my 8th Grade graduation, she gave me a cross-stitched poem that still resonates with me:

*"Somebody said that it couldn't be done,
but she, with a chuckle, replied
that "maybe it couldn't," but she would be one
who wouldn't say so till she'd tried.
So she buckled right in with the trace of a grin
on her face. If she worried, she hid it.
She started to sing as she tackled the thing
that couldn't be done, and she did it!"*

That message of perseverance and optimism became a core part of my identity. Only later did I learn that this poem was originally written with masculine pronouns — how smart my mom was to change it for me.

The decision to pursue engineering felt natural, but I remember a pivotal moment in high school that solidified my determination. During a meeting with my guidance counselor at my all-girls catholic high school, I told her I

planned to apply to engineering programs at a few Ontario universities. Her response shocked me: "You can't do that, it is not something that girls do." Stunned, I responded firmly, "Yes, I can — and I will." That conversation ignited a determination I'd never felt before, and it's been a guiding force ever since.

Like any career, mine hasn't been without challenges. Early on as a recent graduate attending site meetings, I often encountered older men who wouldn't speak to me directly, instead addressing my father. It stung, but my dad turned it into a teaching moment. He would ask me for information in front of them, giving me the confidence to speak up. The surprise on their faces when they realized I knew what I was talking about was always satisfying. I still see that a little bit today, but my knowledge and confidence easily squashes any prejudice that may appear in others.

One of my biggest challenges came when my father passed away. I was 32 years old and worried that clients might hesitate to trust me to lead BonaVista. At that time, we were working on a major project at Blue Mountain Village. The project manager's unwavering confidence in me was invaluable. That silent support gave me the strength to move forward and continue growing the business. Just last week I had the opportunity to meet the project manager and site superintendent from those projects once again, and I told them that they gave me the confidence to carry on — something that I am sure they did not realize at the time.

Although more fun than challenging, the birth and raising of my four kids has been a wonderful adventure and a bit challenging. Part of owning a business that is active in the summer ensured that I did not get much time off — I was back at work three days after Alexa was born, seven days after Bob, 10 days after Owen was born, and I got a whole three months after Isabelle was born — I knew she was going to be my last, it was October, and I felt that I could take some time to enjoy! And am I ever glad I did.

Shortly after I returned to work in 2012, my brother was rushed to surgery to have a tumor removed from the back of his head. Non-cancerous, which was great, but the slow recovery needed after brain surgery was not expected. As women, we do not realize how much we take on to get things done until it is too late. My brother was back at work almost full time by August, but it took me two years to get past my adrenal fatigue as a result of taking everything

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on through the spring and early summer of 2012 with a 6-month-old. I can honestly say that my brother recovered from brain surgery faster than I did from the overload. This taught me that my own self-care is as important as the business. Although the work still gets a lot of me, I am working to change that.

Today, I'm proud of how far we've come. BonaVista has an incredible team, and I find joy in mentoring and guiding them. They all know that I will always question, push them to try new things, and figure out how to be better. My focus is shifting to developing processes, sharing knowledge, and creating tools to help the team measure success and set meaningful goals as I start to step back and help them grow.

Curiosity remains one of my most important guiding principles. It drives me to question the status quo, explore new methods, and stay innovative. That mindset has kept me learning and improving over the years. It's also why I'm so excited about the future, particularly about two thermal spa projects I'm currently working on. My goal is to create spaces where water takes center stage in wellness. Water can be calming, invigorating, social, and restorative — everything a wellness journey needs.

But beyond the projects, I'm thinking about my legacy in the industry. A long time ago, I took the Pool and Spa

Servicer and the Installer Apprenticeship courses. At that time our industry held Trade status, and I believe it's time to bring it back. I want to help reinstate Apprenticeship Trade Status for swimming pool builders and technicians in Ontario. The work our builders and technicians do is skilled, essential, and deserving of recognition. I'd love to be part of teaching the curriculum that trains the next generation.

Looking back, I'm proud of what we've built — both in my family and at BonaVista. But I'm not done yet. There's always more to learn, teach, explore, and achieve. Thank you for letting me share my journey. I hope it inspires you to embrace curiosity, overcome challenges, dive into your own dreams with confidence and share what you can with those around you.

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A project featured in the Inspiration Gallery at bonavistapools.com