

SPRING 2024

Father of the Bride

Written by Doug Breen, Superintendent, Golf North Properties.

Well, yesterday was a big one. It was a 'top five days of my life' kinda day. My daughter got married to a fine young man, and I made the shockingly long walk down the aisle with her and my wife Krista. It wasn't a physically long walk - but in a metaphysical sense, it was twenty-five years' worth of hoping, laughing, worrying, teaching, admonishing, coaching and praying for a day just like that one. It seems like just last week she was a toddler, riding around on the Gator with me, fixing ball marks while I changed holes on the weekend - now she's all grown up.

She started the day as a Breen, but by midafternoon she was known as Aniela Ferraro. That's a seriously good moniker - it sounds like the name of a 1960's Italian movie star. Aniela Ferraro would take a yacht from Monaco to Tuscany, and then drive a Ferrari to Rome for the weekend. Aniela Breen would spend that weekend building a fence.

We held the wedding in a renovated barn at the Exeter Golf Club. The irony is not lost on me, that I spent the first 19 years of my life trying to get out of a barn - and then paid a lot of money so that my daughter could get married in a barnyard and have her reception in a hay mow. There's a chandelier hanging from the hayfork track. I had tried to avoid having the wedding at a GolfNorth facility, as I didn't want to put that much pressure on the staff. It's tough enough to relax on your own golf course, when your guests are just playing a round or eating a meal in the restaurant, but a wedding comes with an extra level of anxiety for everyone involved.

Adding to the normal level of stress, we had multiple contractors still doing work on the venue while the rehearsal was happening. They had assured me right up until a few days before, that everything would be ready for the wedding. I should have known better; because they had also guaranteed that construction would be done before we opened - and April 1st, and Easter Brunch,

ANIELA FERRARO DOUG BREEN



and May 1st... They didn't meet any of those deadlines, and they weren't finished by the wedding deadline either. On the bright side, the completed parts of the project were great, and there were very few of us who knew about the incomplete bits. Nevertheless, I was certainly feeling like Steve Martin in "Father of the Bride".

Fortunately, our daughter Aniela is legendary for her toughness. When she was four years old, she demanded that I remove the training wheels from her bike, because her brother didn't have any. After spending a few hours turning only left, she finally figured it out. The next day, we rode 40 kms on a rail trail. She was crying at the end, but I think it was mostly from the swarms of deer flies that were eating her alive.

She tried Box Lacrosse because some of her friends and hockey coaches thought she would be good at it. She played for three seasons and won three provincial AAA championships. Her Rugby career in high school led to three OFSSA medals and a little bit of cauliflower ear. She rowed for one season, and her dryland training had her ranked in the top five in the province. Before they put a boat in the water, she was offered a spot at Queens University - but she declined because "I don't like boats." I tried counting her Provincial and League

championships in hockey but can't figure it out - there were a lot. She was captain of her high school hockey team as a senior, and they won another OFSSA medal. But these were just dalliances. The only sport she ever really loved was horses - she was jumping horses cross country, and perfecting flying lead changes while other kids were in walk trot classes.

So it wasn't surprising, that in the end, it was her calming me down, and she handled each imperfection in the same stoic manner as she had done in all of those sports. Some say that competition builds character, but I side with those who say it reveals character - and she had enough for both of us.

Almost two years ago, I was walking through the Halifax airport, frustrated by a particularly bad week of work, and honestly feeling pretty sorry for myself. My phone rang, and it was the young man who is now my son-in-law. My first thought was that something was wrong. Nobody ever calls to tell me to tell me how great things are going - those calls go to Krista. I get the car accident, flat tire, no hot water calls. But he was calling to tell me that he was going to propose to Aniela and wanted my blessing. It was an old-fashioned traditional thing, that I didn't think people did anymore. Twenty minutes later, I hung up knowing that Aniela and their future family were in good hands, and at that moment I didn't care about work, or budgets, or deadlines, or flight delays, or the emails in my inbox. In the face of the thousands of mistakes that I had made as a parent - in the end, she had grown up just fine in spite of me. She had found a hard working, honest, and thoughtful young man who saw all the wonderful things in her that I did.

So yesterday was a big day - but it wasn't about me, or contractors, or venues, or dresses or flowers, or any of those things. Two young people were as happy as anyone I've ever seen, and two families have been forever united. I've always been proud of Aniela, but never more proud than yesterday. ■