

The five nominees for this year's Canada's Worst Handyman TV show on the Discovery Channel met each other for the first time in the lounge of the world-renowned Deerhurst Resort, not quite understanding why they ever agreed to be on the show, the second highest rated specialty program in the country.

It was early January, bitterly cold outside the massive resort, known throughout the entertainment industry as the place where Shania Twain was discovered. Next summer the G8 heads of government will meet here.

Located a few kilometres outside Ontario's Huntsville, a Cottage Country community about 300 kilometres north of Toronto, the Deerhurst Resort would be the home for the five worst handymen and their nominators for the better part of the following three weeks. Aside from feeling a bit marooned in the near-empty resort with Arctic-like conditions blustering outside, Canada's worst handymen and their nominators were also going through mixed emotions — excited about being part of a major and very popular Canadian program along with feeling uneasy about the imminent prospect of being known across the land as one of the "worst."

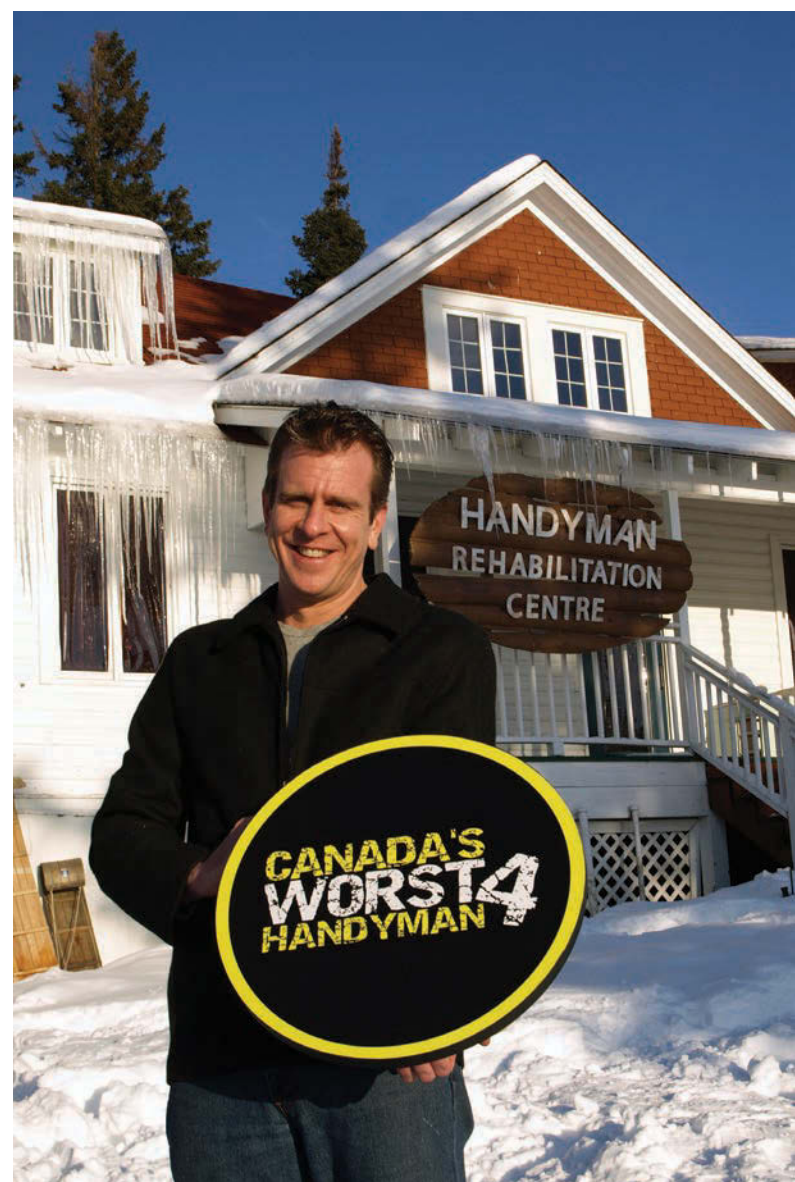
Brian McDonald, a 53-year-old Canadian Coast Guard administrator from Samia, Ontario, was convinced he had no business being chosen for the show, that his acceptance to take part was merely to prove to his wife Veronica that he was not only not the worst handyman in the country but he was in fact actually quite the handy dandy with the tools. "I am not Canada's Worst Handyman," declared McDonald with complete self-assurance. "And I am about to prove that to my wife."

Brian Pugh, a 57-year-old retired stockbroker from Ottawa, did not seem to mind. He took the attitude that his novel way of doing handy things around the house was just his way, and if it worked, all the better, and if it didn't life would simply go on.

Eric Thibeault, a 29-year-old registered nurse from Gatineau, Quebec, is a bit mystified about how and why he was ever selected from the hundreds of nominees from across the country. But he does know his wife Michelle is tired of him not completing chores around the house, and equally frustrated at being told his half completed tasks were awful, not worthy of even being completed.

Then there was Angie Budgell, a 27-year-old stay-at-home mom from Minto, New Brunswick. She was nominated by her husband Roy, a proud native of Newfoundland and Labrador, who was simply at wit's end with his wife's clumsy attempts to be the man of the house, and having to do chores all over again because Angie's projects all fell apart. But Angie is motivated. She is out to prove to Roy she is indeed one heck of a handyperson, if she is trained right.

"I had never considered myself as a terrible handyperson, even though my husband was constantly telling me this was



Andrew Younghusband, the show's host, writer and senior producer, outside the Handyman Rehabilitation Centre at the set during the show's filming in On-tario last January. Photo by Johnnie Bachusky.



Canada's worst handymen outside the Handyman Rehabilitation Centre, located at the Pow Wow Point Lodge, a 100-year old country retreat near Huntsville, Ontario. The entire seven-episode show was filmed at this location. (From left to right) Johnnie Bachusky, Brian Pugh, Angie Budgell, Eric Thibeault and Brian McDonald. Photo courtesy of the Discovery Channel.



Red Deer's Johnnie Bachusky was crowned Canada's Worst Handyman last June at the end of the fourth season's seventh and final episode. Photo by Chad Hipolito/Red Deer Express.

wrong, that was wrong. I assumed it was just him being particular," said Angie. So I chuckled at the idea and thought "Okay, I ain't that bad and this is not going to go anywhere".

And then there is me. Yes, Johnnie Bachusky, a 52-year-old journalist from Red Deer, Alberta. My wife Darlis nominated me because she was fed up with doing everything handy around the house. I freely admit I have avoided household chores my entire life. Until this show I had never used a single power tool. It takes me at least 100 strikes to hammer a single nail into a board. Package instructions terrify me. I break out in a cold sweat.

Sitting here in this swanky lounge at this exclusive resort I could not believe for a second any of the four other nominees were as hapless as me.

But I was soon to be proven wrong.

The following morning we

were transported to the set called, appropriately enough, "Handyman Rehabilitation Centre", located at the Pow Wow Point Lodge, a rundown 100-year-old lakeside country retreat just outside Huntsville.

We soon found out our task was to tear apart upstairs bedrooms and renovate them. This would include everything from installing new toilets, ripping out walls and installing drywall, assembling a work bench and a fireplace, constructing a chair out of an old liquor barrel, learning the finer points of plumbing and electrical work and even making a coat rack out of deer antlers.

But first we were introduced to Andrew Younghusband, the 37-year-old host, writer and senior producer for the show.

Full of never-ending energy, Andrew quickly said hello and raced through a few production items, and just as suddenly as he burst into our lives he was



Brian Pugh, a retired stockbroker from Ottawa, was one of the five original nominated worst handymen of Canada. He was asked to leave the show after filming of the fourth episode following an incident which forced producers to take unprecedented drastic action. Photo by Johnnie Bachusky.

gone until the first shoot.

The filming of the seven-episode show was broken up into two blocks. The first was eight days of straight shooting. We were then sent home for a week and then flown back to Ontario for the second block, another seven consecutive days of 12 to 14 hours of filming.

The first block was unbelievably physically and mentally gruelling. We were under incredible pressure. Andrew gave no

quarter. Production deadlines had to be met. The handypeople were simply told their task, sometimes with brief classroom instruction from handy experts Geoff Woodmansey and Gail Prosser-Craig, and ordered to their assigned rooms to get to work. "We all knew handymen was our weakness. At times it almost seemed surreal," said Angie. "It was not all fun and games. It was called "Handyman Rehabilitation" for a reason.



Mrs. Canada's Worst Handyman gets ready for another day of filming during the show's production last winter in Ontario. Photo by Johnnie Bachusky.

To make us better handymen came at a price — exhaustion, and a lot of confusion. We didn't know all the details, and were kept in the dark."

To add to the pressure, there were surprises everyday. During the first evening we were all transported to the Huntsville Canadian Tire store, given \$4,000 each and told to buy 269 tools and supplies. Yes, we were given a list but we did not recognize most of the items. And of course

there was yet another deadline. We had just two hours.

Frustration mounted with all five handypeople. Some just gave up. Brian Pugh even bought an artificial house plant. It wasn't on the list but Brian, of course, had his own way of doing things.

And back at the Handyman Rehabilitation Centre all five participants were soon proving their uniqueness, their profound ineptitude as they tackled each of their assigned 23 tasks.

Just dandy to be handy on Canada's Worst Handyman

Former Kerby News reporter Johnnie Bachusky fumbles his way to national notoriety in a battle for boomer supremacy

By Johnnie Bachusky.

Page design and layout by Winifred Ribeiro.



Keeping everyone on the straight and narrow plane were the show's resident handyman experts Geoff Woodmansy and Gail Prosser-Craig. Photo courtesy of the Discovery Channel.



Canada's Worst Handyman Johnnie Bachusky was asked to ride in a float at this year's Calgary Stampede Parade.

After each episode was filmed, Andrew announced the most improved and the worst handyman. I had a good start and was named most improved after the first episode.

But it was all downhill after that.

Meanwhile, tempers were building during the first block of filming. The two Brians were not getting along.

Brian Pugh was convinced the other Brian was receiving preferential treatment from the producers because the latter, convinced he had all the makings of a great handyman, felt he deserved extra instruction to utilize the array of power tools. Brian McDonald, oblivious to the mounting frustrations of the other handyman, was determined to get his way, even threatening to walk out if Andrew did not give him a quick one-on-one lesson on the power tools.

And then immediately after

the conclusion of filming for episode four the tensions between the two Brians reached a critical mass. It was ugly.

"All I heard outside was hollering and scuffling going on. I immediately yelled for help," recalled Angie. "My assumption is that Brian P flipped out from all the stress and pressure. And some say that Brian P wanted off the show, and that this was the only way he could get off."

The three other handymen, including myself, insisted Brian Pugh had to leave the show. The producers agreed, and Brian Pugh was told to go home.

"We got through the rest of the filming just fine without him," said Angie. "His reason I still don't know. If it was stress we all had stress and didn't react like that. I felt a lot less stress after Brian P's expulsion," said Angie. "It was kind of a reality check that this is real and things do happen. I often wonder if he



Dean Hennings, one of the show's producers, films the worst handymen during a break in production at the set last January. Photo by Johnnie Bachusky.

had stayed who would have been the worst?"

The next day we all went home for a week. And then we came back to finish the second and last block of filming.

Angie was right. The weight had been lifted. The final seven days of filming, unlike the first eight, were for the most part fun, especially the visit from a troupe of cub scouts who were asked to judge the rooms of the handymen. Mine was unanimously considered by the cub scouts to be an "abomination."

Towards the end we were told that many of our tasks, outside the renovation of our rooms, were actually a step by step preparation and assembly of a huge outdoor fishing hut, which we would triumphantly raise ourselves on the frozen lake just outside the resort. It was a proud moment for Canada's very worst handymen. I led everyone in a rousing rendition of Oh! Canada when the hut was finally put in place.

Meanwhile, there was one final big moment for the show — selecting Canada's Worst Handyman.

Angie and Eric were told right away their handy skills had improved incredibly and that they were far, far removed from being worst. It came down to a close call between Brian McDonald and me.

And then, for the entire nation to witness, Andrew announced it was I — the first time in the show's four-year history that a participant from western Canada had claimed the title of Canada's Worst Handyman.

But Eric and Angie did not agree.

"I truly would have voted Brian McDonald without a second thought!" said Angie.

"Brian McDonald was the most annoying person I have ever worked with and he honestly didn't understand anything and to this day I bet he still doesn't."

"Johnnie had overcome a lot in the show and I saw major improvements in his work. Johnnie always tried his best and was aware of his difficulties and was not in denial," she added.

"Johnnie took it in stride, and even sang a song for us."

Yes I did. And why not? I may be Canada's Worst Handyman but I can belt out a pretty good tune. Both make people chuckle. Best of all, I can laugh at myself.

Johnnie Bachusky is the editor of The Red Deer Express.