

Gord Tuck

Speaker Profile



When the unexpected changes your life

When Gord Tuck started his first real job, the 18-year-old never expected it would mean losing his leg in a forestry accident.

That was May 1991. Today, Gord lives in his hometown of Lake Cowichan as a family man, athlete and entrepreneur.

Gord is also part of a partnership between WorkSafeBC and the Canadian Paralympic Committee, sharing his experience in community presentations to raise awareness about workplace safety.

In his last day on two legs, the young worker was sawing branches off felled trees before they were loaded onto logging trucks. Another worker drove a front-end loader across the noisy, busy work area. He didn't see Gord, whose back was turned.

"I tried to jump out of the way, but my legs were caught and crushed against a four-foot-diameter log," he remembers. "The loader cut through the bone of my left leg, and missed the bone in the other leg by millimetres. I almost bled to death.

"The surgeons patched up my right leg and reattached the other one, but it didn't hold. They operated again to amputate the left leg."

Initial recovery took a month in hospital, two more of home care nursing and five at a Lower Mainland rehabilitation centre.

"None of it was easy," he says. "Learning to walk all over again, and getting my mind around the fact that this is my life from now on."

On a break from rehab, Gord tried skiing, which he had learned as a youngster. Rehab specialists approved because skiing would "rebuild my strength and coordination after losing so much muscle and body mass."

"Overall, it took a couple of years to regain most of the strength in my right leg, and to get me back to having any stamina. It was tough going, but I had endless support from friends and family — not just physically, but in putting together a good life."

The first steps were studying mechanical engineering in Victoria and eventually making the national alpine ski team. Gord represented Canada at the Winter Paralympic Games in 1998 and 2002, and the World Championships in 2000 and 2004, winning a silver medal in the downhill event for alpine skiing.

Meanwhile, he had a job in Duncan that was "the best of both worlds — working hard at engineering in the alpine off-season, skiing hard in winter when business was slow."

After 10 years, as his alpine career began winding down, Gord made three key moves:

- Shifting to water skiing and making the national team, winning a bronze medal in slalom at the 2003 World Championships and setting a Canadian record in 2008.
- Launching a company whose services include building excavations for new homes, site servicing, demolitions, stream rehabilitation, and building and maintaining logging roads.
- Starting a family in a new house on Cowichan Lake, where his two- and four-year-old daughters regularly watch Dad water ski.

“I’ve learned two lessons from my experience,” says Gord. “First, safety is number one in my business. The guys on my crew know they have a responsibility to look after themselves and each other. The last thing I need is to face a worker’s family, people like my parents, and explain why a limb or a life was lost.”

Gord’s second lesson was about effort. “Losing a leg, I could’ve lain back and said, ‘My life is over.’ But young as I was, I knew I had to make the best of the time I had left.

“I’ve found that anything is achievable if you work at it. Facing hard challenges pays off. When you think you’ve hit the edge and can’t go any further, that’s when great things are about to happen.”