



LIFE IS A HIGHWAY

by Joe Martelle

Jacques Mignault meets a lot of people by accident.

The owner of C-Way towing would have it no other way. It's been his way of life for the last 23 years. Mignault learned the towing business from the ground up. "I started in September of 1991. I actually started in Ottawa at my brother's towing company. I started in a service truck... didn't tow anything for two years. That was standard procedure in his

company. You had to cut your teeth in the service truck, learn the ropes by boosting vehicles, changing lots of tires, unlocking vehicles, bringing gas to people that had run out, anything that could be done without a tow truck."

From those humble roots Mignault has built his own Johnstown based company into a fleet of four trucks. C-Way does an estimated 2,500 tow and service calls annually. That many miles under the tires inevitably lead to some very memorable encounters. "I've had all kinds over the years. It's funny, sometimes you get behind the wheel and you think you are going to have a really quiet tow and you end up on the

way to Toronto with a whole family in the cab with you. It gets pretty lively. Other times I've had situations where people sleep the whole way and I have to wake them up to find out exactly where we are going. It runs a full gambit."

The towing industry is predominately divided into two main categories. Half of tow jobs are devoted to local garages and dealerships that are constantly in need of having vehicles moved. The other half of an operator's income is generated in a more transient form from travelers broken down or in the ditch. Most of these clients are one-time-only, tourists with steaming radiators on hot summer days or unlucky winter travellers caught out in the cold or victims of icy weather conditions. However, even with roadside towing, history sometimes repeats itself. "Ironically, I've had repeat customers; people that have come up to me on the side of the road and said 'Hey, you're the same guy that pulled me out of the ditch five years ago.'" Mignault states with a chuckle. "You do get repeat business, especially on the 400-series highways (401, 416 and 417)."

It is not a lifestyle suitable for everyone. With long term success often linked directly to consistent availability, drivers must be ready and willing to hop in the driver's seat on short notice. Holidays and home life are often interrupted by the call of the highway. It is also an occupation that demands drivers to excel under storm conditions at times when the majority of the population is advised to stay off the roads.

Included amongst those who have been rescued by C-Way trucks is Canadian Country Music Legend Tommy Hunter. Tommy was broken down near Brockville. We were able to get him off the highway and get him to his gig in Cornwall. We've actually towed a few people in the music industry. We had a young group going into Ottawa once. "The Barstool Prophets" they are called. We towed their truck and trailer into the Civic Centre. We got them there 10 minutes before sound check. So they had to fly to get rolling but it worked out Ok. I still have their CD."

Country, Rock & Roll or just an everyday haul to the corner garage, they are all music to the ears of tow truck operators like Jacques Mignault. **LH**