



# In loving memory of Wayne Sharkey

An intertwined tale of love and devotion on the winding road of life

*Yet another story in our series of women in towing, and this time we have found that love and romance has played a big part in getting each of these gals into the industry.*

by John Crossen

photos courtesy Sharkey's Towing

Erin says she has never owned a car, always a truck - a Ford gal at heart.

Eva Sharkey, owner of Sharkey's Towing in Ottawa, got into the business back in 1982 on account of her love for her then boyfriend, Wayne. Wayne was a broker for a towing firm and the two of them spent many long and romantic hours 'Slinging' and 'Jay hooking'

together.

*(Note: Before you get the wrong idea about Eva, some terminology is different from one coast to the other, but I assure you, these terms refer to towing!)*

Many kilometers down the road, the two lovebirds got hitched and before long there was a little Sharkey coming along for the ride. They spent so much time in the truck they even had a porta-potty for the kid. The family that tows together... well, you know the rest.

*Erin White in front of a Sharkey's truck displaying the black ribbon in memory of Eva's husband Wayne and all the fallen in the towing industry, be it drivers or otherwise.*

Business was good and in '98 Wayne went out on his own with one truck and a cell phone.

Eva went to work in the hi-tech field, shipping and receiving, while Wayne ran the show solo.

By 2002 she was laid off and back in the towing business assisting Wayne.

Life was going well. By 2003 they had 2 children and the business had 3 trucks on the road. But then disaster hit. Wayne suddenly died of a heart attack. Eva got rather choked up as she recounted the story to me and it was very clear that the love they had shared was still very strong.

Two weeks later, Eva threw herself into the business and has run the whole show ever since, claiming she doesn't know what she would do without the business.

A remarkable woman who is full of life, she shared some advice and anecdotes with me.

First, she told me that the towing business can be addicting but more importantly, very unhealthy. Unless one is highly disciplined and very health conscious, the business will kill you. As we can see by the demise of her beloved Wayne, the long hours, cold nights, stressful situations and dismally poor diet takes its toll.

As it turns out, Wayne had actually had a first heart attack back in '83.

Eva said Wayne would put the jack under the car and she would change the tire. Of course Wayne got the tip and his reply to that one was often, "She helps me make it and she helps me spend it!" Eva was never too perturbed about it.

When it comes to men's reactions to her being a woman in a predominantly male industry she says they just look at her with a funny expression until they see that she knows her stuff, then they think it's cool.

Fast forward to 2009 and Eva is still going strong. Sharkey's boasts 6 trucks (5 owned and one broker); they have inside storage and a shop to do the repairs on their own vehicles. Wayne would be proud.

Eva's regret is that when operators die on the job in the line of duty, there is often a memorial and big fan fare made of it, but when they simply die by other causes, such as in Wayne's situation, not much mention is made, hence the tribute in the title of this article.

Rumor has it Eva now has a boyfriend. You guessed it, another tow truck operator.

Eager to welcome other women into the industry, Eva hired Erin White. Erin, better known as Muppet to the O.P.P. and her colleagues, is a very fun loving, 40-ish gal, thoroughly ensconced in the towing industry. She has been working for Eva since last November.

In Erin's case it was love (or lack there of) that got

her into the business.

Erin moved to Kelowna, BC in hope of salvaging a failing relationship. She saw an ad for job at a local towing company and applied, got the job and was getting what she needed from it.

Unfortunately, she was still not getting what she needed from her relationship so she gave notice, packed up her 20-year-old Ford F250 and headed east to Ottawa to visit family.

She may not currently have a love affair with a human but she does have a serious love affair with her 115 lb Landseer

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*Eva Sharkey and Erin White.*

## "The first time you come to me with a broken nail, you're out!"

Newfoundland dog 'Rizzo' and with trucks in general. Erin says she has never owned a car, always a truck - a Ford gal at heart.

As it turned out, her brother-in-law, in Ottawa, whose father had owned a towing company and was the manager of a Ford dealership, put her in touch with Eva Sharkey and within a month of arriving, she was hired back into her chosen field.

The two women have much respect for each other, though Eva had a few timely words of advice for Erin. She said, "The first time you come to me with a broken nail, you're out!" Secondly, "That beast of a dog cannot ride in the truck."

Though Eva is a Chevy gal and Erin a staunch Ford gal the two of them get along famously. Erin is aiming to own her own truck soon. She has some interesting ways of dealing with the standard old comments like, "Hey you're a woman!" She often replies with a bewildered expression, looks down briefly and then back at the person with, "Oh my, when did that happen?"

She laughs when she tells me that many men who have called roadside service for a flat repair claim hernia problems or back injuries when she is reefing off the wheel.

I asked her why she thinks women make good operators and she quipped, "Well, we are great drivers, we are not afraid to ask for directions and we read instructions." If she was not so fun and light about it, (and if it wasn't at least partly true) I might have considered that a sexist statement.

Erin is a great addition to the small army of operators on the road in Ottawa and though the nights are long, the weather harsh, the stress, bad diet and all the rest are taking a toll on her she loves what she does and is devoted to the trade. She's happy to be under the Sharkey roof.

Though she presently has no affairs of the heart on the horizon, she is ever hopeful. "However," she says with a chuckle, "The guy has to be able to change his own tire!"



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