

# Local woman makes inroads in haulage

**KATE GILDERDALE**  
Correspondent

While women are making increasing inroads into male-dominated professions, it's not every day you come across a female trucker. Stouffville's Margaret Wilcox has been driving gravel trucks for more than two years and can't imagine doing anything else.

Her original job choices were conventional enough. She started work as a secretary for an insurance company in the city and went on to become a switchboard operator at Bell Canada. When she and her husband had children, "I did temporary office jobs after I had the first two but when Everett arrived, I started driving a school bus for Simcoe Transit."

Driving large vehicles was not a new experience for Margaret, who had driven trucks on her father's farm just south of Ballantrae. "He used to haul animal feed and stuff, so I'm used to driving trucks. My brother Kevin drove them then

and still does.

"Once he came home with a great big transport when I was pregnant with my first son," she recalls. "I took it for a run. My mother was having a fit." Her decision to drive a school bus wasn't based entirely on her driving ability, but was also a reaction to a childhood tragedy in her family.

"My younger sister was killed by a school bus when she was eight. She'd dropped something in front of the bus and went to pick it up. The driver didn't see her and she was run over. It happened on a country road with no traffic. That's really why I got into it. I wanted to see what it was actually like in the bus and how something like that could happen."

While it made her acutely aware of the safety hazards, she admits it's difficult to instill caution in children. "I try to convince my kids, but they're just as bad. They don't realize the danger and the responsibility involved when they're riding

the bus." Eventually, however, the wear and tear of driving boisterous students persuaded her to try something new.

"My brother had been after me to drive a truck but I didn't feel I was capable of handling one of those things, hauling gravel," she notes. However, when he needed someone to drive a friend's truck one day, she agreed to help out and found she loved it. "I thought, 'I really want to try this,' and I told my brother I was going to drive a truck."

Two weeks later, she got a call from Churchill Haulage in Port Perry, asking if she would be interested in working for them. "They would only let me drive locally at first; they had some concerns about insurance because there are very few women drivers, only about six that I know of."

That winter, her employer's

house burned to the ground and he asked if she would take his new tandem truck, "so I went out and got my licence, which allows me to drive tractor-trailers." Although women are scarce in the haulage business, "it was a woman, Linde Graham, who took me out and trained me on her truck," Margaret notes.

There was only one problem, she recalls. "I just couldn't back the thing up. I spent a whole day at the sales barn going backwards and forwards and when I finally went to do the test, the examiner didn't ask me to back it up straight, but into a driveway and I'd never done that." To her relief, she not only handled the manoeuvre successfully, she also passed the test.

While a certain amount of leg-pulling from fellow workers is inevitable, ("if you mind

that, you shouldn't be doing it") she finds it an extremely friendly and supportive environment to work in.

"If you're doing anything wrong, the guys will tell you. If you break down or if something happens to you, they'll always stop to help. It's a very friendly business."

She still gets some surprised looks when she arrives at the job site and gets out of her truck, but that's something she's used to now. "I feel totally equal to the men. I feel I've proven myself out there." On one occasion, she lost one of the shoes she was wearing while she was dumping gravel.

"One man came up with a backhoe and dug for 45 minutes looking for it. I told him not to worry, but he dug until he found it." Every day on the job is different, she declares. "I really (See Truck page 16)



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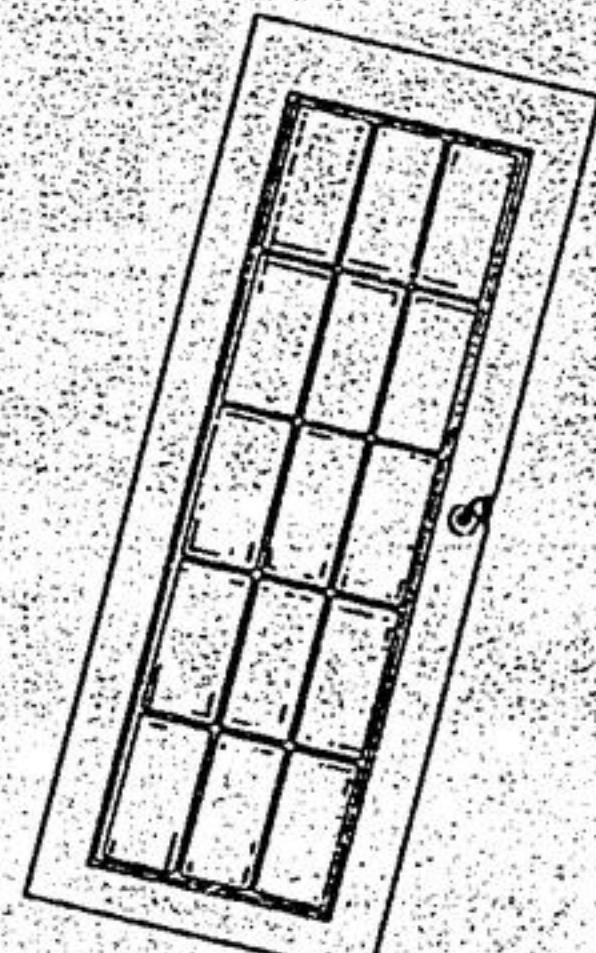
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