

## Article 4 – Changing Misconceptions



**Elaina Dickinson** | Owner Operator at Parise's Auto & Towing

Elaina Dickinson knows the business inside and out. We recently caught up with her during a busy workday to ask her some questions about running a successful tow business like Parise's Auto & Towing, and being a woman in a predominantly male industry.

**RRA: When did you become interested in the towing industry?**

I was born into the towing industry and spent my childhood and teenage years growing up at the shop. As soon as I was old enough to walk, I wanted to follow my father everywhere he went. My parents had car seats in the tow trucks so I would be able to ride along when my mother or father went out on calls. Throughout the years my interest increased because I wanted to help my parents as much as I could.

**RRA: Who were your biggest influences and why?**

My biggest influences would be my family. My grandparents started the family business in 1956 and they started a small gas station with one tow truck while raising a family of seven. They pushed through the hard times and with their great work ethic were able to grow our family business. My mother was always interested in the business side, while my father grew up working at the shop for his soon to be in-laws. My parents got married in 1985 and took over the family business. My mom showed me that women could do anything. I grew up watching her tow, handle the office work while being a full time mom. My dad never treated me differently because I was a female. He has pushed me to be the person I am today and taught me I can do anything I put my mind to. I am thankful for my parents to believe in me and be my biggest supporters as I start the journey of third generation owner.

**RRA: This tends to be labeled a "man's business", how do you help to change that perception?**

I continue to do my job with a smile. Showing the public and the customers you come in contact with that a female can perform the job just as well as if a male were to complete the task is a huge eye opener to public. Most people are shocked when I get out of a 35 ton Peterbilt, but soon change their



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perception when they see I can handle the job. When people ask me about being a female in a predominately male industry, I explain to them I see myself performing on the same level as a male and will continue to strive to do my best.

**RRA: What is the biggest challenge you face being a woman in this industry?**

The biggest challenge I face being a woman is the skepticism from the public and the tow industry. Can you drive that big rig? Are you strong enough? Do you even know what you are doing? Those are all everyday questions I am asked. My solution for everyone who doubts my ability is to show them I can do the job and do it with a smile.

**RRA: If you could change one misconception about this industry, what would it be?**

I would change the misconception about the tow industry that people who are tow operators are not well educated. Many people think it does not require much education and knowledge to be in this profession, which is quite the opposite. Being able to operate heavy wreckers and perform recoveries on all levels requires training and knowledge. We go to classes and seminars to further our education to better serve the public. People are quite surprised when they find out I have a masters and bachelor's degree in accounting, which helps me perform the business side of the company.

I would also change the misconception of the level of danger being in the towing industry. Each year the numbers increase of the fallen tow operators who do not make it home safe from working on the side of the road. We have an extremely dangerous job that requires us to be working along high-speed traffic and distracted drivers.

*"Thank you Elaina for sharing your history, inspiration and thoughts on being a top towing and recovery firm in the US and for continuing to help make our roads safer for emergency personnel and those who share the road."*

- Skip Bargielski with GSI, an affiliate of Robertson Ryan & Associates

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