

Trucker featured in Documentary

By Sue Dickens

Question: What can be more compelling than a true story? Answer: A true story about the kindness and compassion of a trucker many are calling a hero.

Long Haul Big Hearts is a documentary about Peter Bruno, a Canadian trucker, who with his blind dog, set out in an 18-wheeler on a relief mission to help people in Katrina ravaged Mississippi.

Canadian Trucking News published the story about his first trip in our premier edition last November. Readers may recall the article Trucker on a Mission. Since then Pete's efforts have captured the hearts of many, including Canadian filmmaker Doug Raby.

The footage in his documentary is vital and inspiring, capturing your interest from the very beginning, evoking a lot of emotions, from amazement to pride, from joy to anger. More importantly it raises questions about how one man can do what politicians said could not be done . . . fill a trailer with much needed supplies and haul it to Mississippi – not once but twice.

A DOCUMENTARY WITH HEART

“My first goal in making this documentary was to give Peter something so he could remember this chapter of his life. I didn't know if I would have enough to make a compelling documentary,” said Doug from his studio in Ajax, Ontario.

“When I started to piece the thing together it had a bit more life to it. I saw how I could build the story around his eight minute rant about the lack of government support for his plans to assist the victims of Katrina,” he added.

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With that goal in mind, Doug proceeded to put his editing expertise to work as he crafted a documentary for not only those in the trucking industry but for anyone who appreciates a true story.

The world premiere of the ‘Directors Cut’ of the unfinished film was in the form of a public screening at Bowmanville High School, “primarily for the people who participated in the end of this situation. The second was a private audience of friends and television industry colleagues that I, and my partner, Joanne Jackson know in the TV business. It was held at the National Film Board Cinema in Toronto,” said Doug.

Joanne Jackson is the Consulting and Executive Producer on the project. She's an experienced producer who has worked for CBC, YTV, WTN and CITY TV.

The documentary received a standing ovation in Bowmanville and lots of accolades from both audiences. “The showing in Toronto was kind of an affirmation of the quality of my work because these were professionals in the movie and television industry there, who were very supportive and quite astonished at what I had done on my own.” commented Doug.

ONE YEAR AFTER KATRINA

As the one-year anniversary of the devastating hurricane approaches, Aug. 29th will have special meaning for Peter and Doug. “That was when life changed for Peter as he rode out the big storm in the cab of his truck just south of Memphis, Tennessee,” said Doug.

Hurricane Katrina was the largest natural disaster in North American history, changing the lives of more than two million people who call the Gulf Coast home.

Peter describes it best when he said, “I had tears in

my eyes all the way home when I saw the kind of devastation the region had suffered. I knew it was time for me to get up off my ass and do something.”

That was the defining moment for this trucker, whose wife Deborah Hope and their blind dog Buddy, who they had rescued a few years ago, became part of the story that soon took on a life of its own.

“I was flying by the seat of my pants . . . it was a learning experience the whole way,” he added.

A MISSION OF MERCY

“Life has gone on for everybody else – hell, life never stopped for most people. But it sure as hell stopped for the people in Mississippi and Louisiana. They ran into a bloody brick wall – they don't have a life. I don't care if it's one load or two, I'm gonna get more help for these people. I may end up without a job and homeless myself but I'll be in good company because I met a lot of good people down there.”

That was what Pete Bruno had to say Oct. 12, 2005 describing his reasons for helping. By that time he was on his second mission of mercy. He had already completed one trip shortly after the hurricane hit. The second is the one Doug joined and filmed. It is a journey neither will forget.

Rallying the goodwill of everyday citizens had been surprisingly easy each time, with the help of his wife Deb, and local newspapers, radio and television. “It seems that others felt the need to help – and this gentle giant was the perfect conduit for their concern and generosity,” said Doug. Peter's trucking company agreed to let him use the rig and a local steel company and their employee's union kicked in for the fuel. To everyone's surprise, Peter was the first long haul trucker to arrive at the relief

center, Camp Coast Care, in Long Beach, Mississippi – just seven days after the storm. The centre was set up by the Episcopalian Diocese to help Katrina victims and has provided aid to over 31,000 victims.

The documentary follows Pete's story from the collection stage of donations in Ontario, to the long haul trip ending at the relief center and into the worst hit areas of Long Beach and Pass Christian, Mississippi, including a guided tour and commentary by a former resident of the area.

“The visible devastation in this area outstrips most of what you've seen on CNN from New Orleans. Complete towns are left with less than 8% of housing that will be salvageable,” he added.

Peter and Doug plan one more trip to Mississippi to see what has happened at Camp Coast Care and the Long Beach Area since their trip last fall. That third trip will also be documented as an epilogue for the broadcast version of the documentary. Vision TV in Canada has expressed interest in telecasting the film in early 2007.

THE THEME

The common thread through the whole story is about Peter's attempts to get government assistance. “He got nothing – oh yes he got a letter from John O'Toole, MPP for Durham Riding. He was the only politician,

federal or provincial to acknowledge in any way what Peter had accomplished,” said Doug.

“That to me is the driving theme of the documentary. Here is this trucker who did this incredible act of generosity and he did it despite the fact the government said what he was trying to do was impossible.”

For Doug and Pete the journey to Mississippi took on a life of its own.

“The longer you have a camera pointed at your subject the less intimidated they are so the more open they become and finally the camera just disappears and they are just talking to you,” said Doug.

When that happens, the true story emerges.

For Pete the journey was about helping others in need. “I'm no hero,” he said at one point in the documentary. “I'm just an ordinary Joe, like everyone else, trying to do a little bit of good.”

For Doug it was about learning what the life of a trucker who cares is like – in particular the life of trucker Pete Bruno.

ABOUT THE FILMMAKER

Doug is a freelance director, editor and camera operator, and an award-winning producer of corporate videos. The documentary is the culmination of his talents and skills and of the vision he saw as the film took shape. The high technical

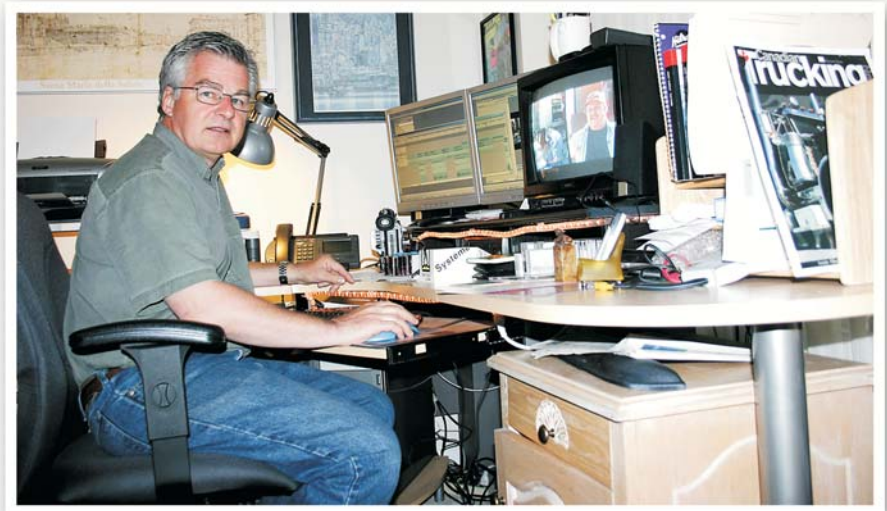
quality combines with his artistic bent for a heart wrenching and introspective film which also feature the music of the Juno Award winning band, The Road Hammers.

“Driving down with Peter, stopping at truck stops on the way – for me it was a whole world I had never seen before. When it was all said and done I thought truckers would love to have something like this documentary to feel good about themselves – about the life they have chosen – and to celebrate the life of one of their fellow truckers – a hero in my eyes for sure,” said Doug.

“In addition to getting one determined truck driver's views on life, it's a story about everyday people trying to make a difference in the aftermath of the humbling force of Hurricane Katrina. I really want people to know about Peter like I do, and have a source of pride in what Canadians do for those in need,” he concluded.

Long Haul, Big Hearts is produced and directed by Doug under the label Delta Romeo Productions and Brilliant Red Media, from the company base in Ajax, Ontario.

Anyone wanting to order a copy of the 45-minute documentary or learn more about this story of a true Canadian hero – a trucker - can contact Doug at 905-428-9891 or deltaromeo@sympatico.ca



Doug Raby.