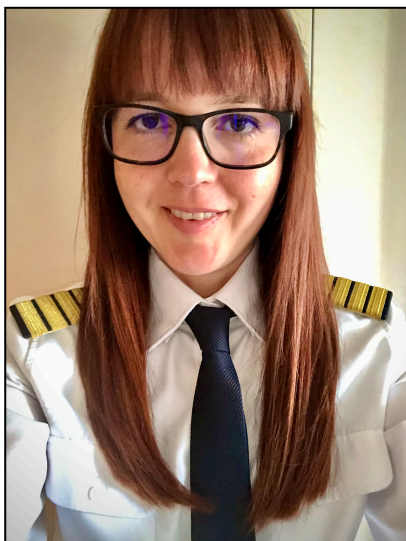


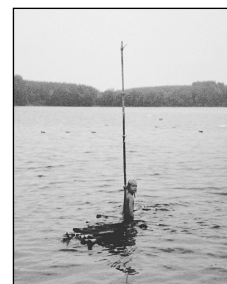
## Christin Wenge, Hamburg Harbour Pilot

„There are usually more people who give up voluntarily than those who actually fail.“; one of the motivational quotes that has kept me going when the journey of this career felt especially challenging or rather unfair. Looking back, I am glad that I did always chose to keep going.



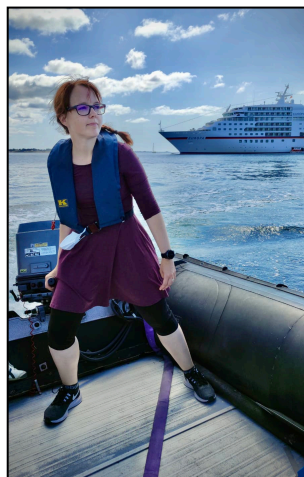
A career at sea does not run in my family and I cannot name a particular event that sparked my interest. During school I had developed the wish to become an emergency room doctor and did start out towards that goal after graduation. For various personal reasons this didn't work out, leaving me a little disoriented as to what else I might actually want to do professionally. Seeing it all come together many years later, I would now say that the „clues“ for my lasting passion to work and succeed in the maritime industry have always been there. As a young child on vacation I would tie together blocks of wood and big branches to create any kind of a raft which could be used to „sail“ around the lake. I would jump off the jetties at the Baltic Sea without properly knowing how to swim, simply trusting that I can float and feeling some kind of connection to the ocean (it never went wrong but did give my Mother and Grandmother a good scare). Finally, after I had revealed that I wanted to attend a

maritime academy, it was also Grandma who said that this wasn't much of a surprise to her. Apparently whenever we had to board a ferry during travels when I was little, many other children would soon start to complain of being bored while I was deeply fascinated until the end and only began complaining when we had to get off.



At that time when I tried to figure out which new way to go, it was actually the increased focused of TV and radio documentaries on careers at sea that drew my attention. During high school this kind of profession was just never part of any occupational information projects or work shops and I must admit that I simply didn't know it was a real option. I am not from the ocean and since there were no seafarers in the family those documentaries were largely the first time I heard of different career paths onboard ships; as odd as that might seem. When I watched the Bridge Officers performing their duties while sailing around the world, I felt right away that something inside me had sparked and eventually that spark lit up a passion which, despite all odds, has not left me ever since.

I had a great time during maritime university, finding the different classes interesting and meeting nice people. However already during my first practical term onboard, I was „welcomed“ by the Chief Officer with words I'll never forget: „Women onboard are bad luck and I do not get paid for training anyway so if you want to know something, check the books.“



Luckily the Deck Crew onboard this small tanker had the complete opposite mindset and was very welcoming. This first experience at sea was more focused on practical skills and in the end it did not matter so much that I wasn't receiving the kind of education on the Bridge I probably should have. Overall it still turned out to be a good experience but it also gave me a realistic glimpse at the resistance and/ or rejection women can and do face in this industry. During other practical terms on various ships I was also confronted with repeated, unwelcome „romantic“ approaches despite clearly declining them; this included unauthorized entry to my cabin and an attempt to spike my drink. Back then internet or even email was not yet very common onboard, especially on cargo ships. Cellphone charges for calls from other countries were also very high and being the only female on the ship, it felt like there was no one to talk to about these things. I didn't want to quit before even graduating so instead I started sleeping with a knife under my pillow. Like in several other tough situations during my

career, I then suddenly received unexpected support which reinforced my motivation to keep going. A new Captain arrived onboard; soon realizing my discomfort he asked for a private conversation. His concern felt earnest so I opened up about what was happening and he took care of it thoroughly. Luckily such intense approaches did not reoccur on other ships where I worked but I do know that they have happened to female colleagues as well. So the reason I am writing about it is to hopefully make others, who are affected and haven't or couldn't speak up yet, feel less alone. In this day and age where we have come a long way regarding equal rights, it sometimes feels like people don't really want to believe that these things still happen more often than we may think. Or it can feel as if we are expected to just deal with it because we chose to be in this line of work which is still largely a „men's world“ and therefore we should be strong. We may also hear stories from those who have spoken up and ended up with repercussions to their own careers and/ or getting labelled as „too sensitive“ or „too emotional“. We should not have to fight to be treated with respect in all areas including this but sometimes we still do and speaking up is important. I will always be open for any fellow seafarer who wants to reach out.



After graduating from maritime university, I soon changed into the cruise industry where I remained for well over 12 years and went through all the positions from 3rd Officer to Captain. For me it was a wonderful part of the maritime world to grow and develop in. The much larger Bridge Teams were something to get used to but it also brings more experiences to hear about and learn from. There have been great shoreside training systems for further growth in most cruise companies that I worked for which is something I enjoy very much. Over time, I had the chance to see various types of cruise ships ranging from the largest ones to much smaller, exclusive vessels. Being part of three shipyard, new-build projects was also something I loved and benefited from. My own command came unexpected during rough times of the COVID-19 pandemic but even though the circumstances were different than what I had always imagined, it was fulfilling and a great honor just the same. Along the way and throughout the years I did experience similar disappointments/ set backs with promotions like female peers have talked about; getting passed over more than once. The fairness of evaluations has also more than once been tied to rather the evaluating Senior Officer was open minded towards women at sea or not. This situation is not unique to our industry alone; we hear it rather often that women in high ranking positions/ leading roles had to work harder and longer to reach these. I personally mentored several young women wanting to start a maritime career and have tried to provide strength to keep going in similar situations. Some companies have developed systems to provide more equal opportunities but I believe there is still work to do and again speaking up about our experiences will hopefully help those who come after us. It's our skills, mindset and willingness to grow which should decide whether we succeed in this industry or not. This line of work is surely not for everyone and that's okay but those who see their professional dreams in it, should be given the opportunities to pursue them regardless of gender.

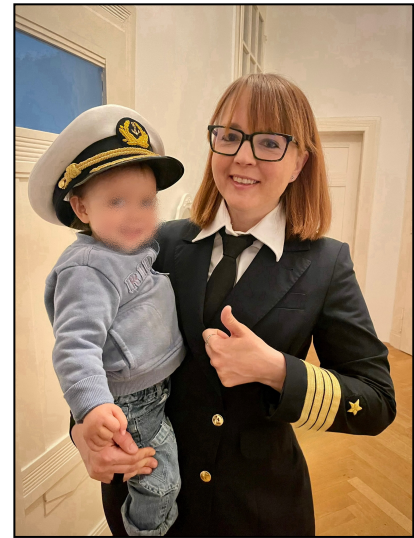
My interest in piloting came with the more senior roles onboard and increased own experiences to maneuver the ship. I discovered how much I liked this part of the job and the ever changing



nature of tight channels as well as docking/ undocking. The different aspects of every port and various weather conditions make each single maneuver unique and never really the same. Therefore it was soon clear to me that if I wanted to have a shot at becoming a pilot, it would have to be a harbour/ docking pilot. We have two separate Harbour Pilot Associations in Germany, one of them being the port of Hamburg. Despite not being from the coast, I have always been fascinated with that city and its port so that is where I wanted to be. The desire to settle down a bit more permanently had grown since I got married in 2016 and started building a life in Germany together with my wife. In the end it wasn't an easy decision to leave active sailing behind but I did really want the closer proximity to home as well as the challenge of pilot training and so I applied in Hamburg. It

turned out that I would be the first female harbour pilot here which made the road quite a bit rockier than I would have expected in my own country. After all these years at sea though, I had a way for myself to decide which comments to let in for personal development, which ones to simply ignore and which ones to fight back. I did also find myself surrounded with just as many colleagues supporting my presence than those who needed some time to adjust.

Including the training time, I have now been in Hamburg just over 2 years and very much enjoy the job. While being closer to home, I still get to go onboard and do exactly what was always one of the most interesting parts for me anyway; maneuvering in and out of the port! Given the large variety of vessels calling the port of Hamburg with various maneuvering characteristics, it has been a steep learning curve. Most cruise ships come with advanced propulsion and complex maneuvering systems where many cargo ships can have more basic, traditional equipment. Becoming more experienced in handling all kinds of vessels and their individual characteristics continuously provides a feeling of personal growth which is important to me. Furthermore, I still get to work with ship Crews from all corners of the globe and that has always been a wonderful aspect of this work to me as well. Sometimes I am met with surprised faces upon entering the Bridge but for the great majority of pilotages that I've done, this has been the positive kind of surprise and I was met with kind hospitality as well as honest interest and supportive words. When I first started the pilot training, I expected to miss my active sailing time quite a bit but so far I can't really say that I do. It will always remain an important part of my life and, of course, had a large impact on who I am today but I am now fully and happily committed to this new chapter of continuously growing into my role as a Hamburg Harbour Pilot.



My wish for the maritime industry is that our future generations of women can fully focus on developing the skills needed to succeed and be given equal opportunity to reach the goals they have rather than first spending considerable energy on being accepted just because of their gender. The same of course goes for ethnic origin, sexual orientation and religion. I would also dare to dream that one day there might be better options to combine motherhood with a career at sea/ in this industry in general. My little daughter regularly runs around and just shouts out: „I am strong, I am beautiful, I am capable“ and I will do everything in my power for her to keep that mindset but it can't be done by the parents alone. We will need all of society to support or at least respect the dreams and choices of our daughters, young women and female coworkers. Let's go for that. Ahoy!