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People always ask, "Where has it all begun? How did you choose this profession?" This question has always seemed strange to me. Yes, being a mariner sets us apart, and yes, it's a unique path, but what truly distinguishes it from other occupations? The answer lies within.

Unlike other occupations, mariners, especially women in the maritime industry, are rarely encountered. From the general public's perspective, in the absence of any encounter with a mariner, their presence globally is often overlooked; it is as if we don't exist. Interestingly, the same situation applies to women within the maritime industry, where it feels like it does not acknowledge our existence from time to time. Therefore, many women in our industry feel pressured to show that we also exist in this industry where our peers are only concerned about their qualifications and competency.



There was no particular reason for me to become a mariner, and I wasn't even thinking about it. I enjoyed painting, so I considered studying fine arts and then thought about genetic engineering before deciding on a career as a mariner. I didn't feel compelled to



limit my dreams and ambitions but to keep an open mind about how my future developed. While discussions continued at home, my sister encouraged me to consider maritime university and told me that my uncle also graduated from there. I knew my uncle, whom I looked up to, respected and loved very much, had been working on board as an engineer, but I didn't know what his job entailed, so I discussed it with him in detail. After that conversation, I decided to pursue a career at sea; however, my mother had concerns. When I spoke to my uncle about my mother's concerns, he only asked me if I had a problem with being away from home.

The story of this profession is actually about being distant from your home and loved ones. It is not about men or women; like every profession, this is a profession that can be done by whoever has the ability and, most importantly, the love for it. The person should be able to decide her/his compatibility on her/his own. When that happens,

gender fades into insignificance. Mariners are not exclusively men or women but just mariners, navigators or engineers. However, this is not the case; unfortunately, like most women in any industry, I faced similar hardships while getting promotions.

While studying, the question persistently asked was, "Would I work at sea?". For me, there has never been a definite yes or no. Like many young people, my decisions and circumstances could change even in my senior year. I graduated and started working at sea. It would have been good to have our options explained in more detail at that time. Frankly, it was essential to choose the difficult option for some reason.

As women in the maritime industry, we wanted to prove that we can compete with our male colleagues. To accomplish this, we decided to take on the most challenging job, which was on chemical tankers. This was also my personal goal and that of many of my peers. I never considered being away from family and friends a significant and challenging part of the job. However, I have never had a chance to work on a chemical tanker; I spent most of my seagoing career at sea working on crude oil tankers.

During my career, I've never signed a single contract feeling obliged; in fact, there were many times I felt at peace while sailing. Of course, being away from your home and loved ones is never easy; however, I had full support and encouragement from my family, and I never really felt alone. I also knew my affairs at home were taken care of. I only needed to focus on doing my job without any distractions. That is why I always felt lucky.



Captain Nazli Aksu and I on the bridge of a container ship.



Some people also mentored me during this long process. I encountered many outstanding individuals who transformed my path into something beautiful and meaningful.

My maritime career began in 2007, and I continued to work at sea until I became a Master Mariner. While there were some hardships, they were never significant enough to make me reconsider my career choice. Maybe it was just because my adaptation skills and all the support I had helped me perform my duties on board as a seafarer.

2015 I applied for a Maritime Pilot position, aspiring to become one. The maritime industry in our country has numerous graduates. However, the number of positions

available for Pilots is minimal. They advised me to check in every two months regarding the application status, so I remained hopeful. Therefore, I decided not to sign any contract and to utilise my time working on inland ferries to gain insights into various types of ship manoeuvring equipment while waiting to be called as if I didn't know if they had not accepted me because I was a woman.

After working on ferries, I also worked in different shore-based jobs, such as a marine advisor position during the establishment and commissioning phase of an LNG terminal, followed by a Shift Supervisor position after commissioning, and lastly, an HSEQ and Vetting Manager position for another corporation.

My fortunes turned as the "Empowering Women" headline became popular while working as HSEQ and Vetting Manager. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure started holding exams for us to become apprentices for Maritime Pilot positions, and there were no gender limitations. I applied to my current company, and they happily accepted my application and added that they would be happy to have one more woman onboard.

Finally, in August 2022, I became part of the Turkish Maritime Pilot Association. Last December in 2023, I proudly completed my first year as an active Maritime Pilot, and each day, I look forward to beginning my day on a vessel with growing enthusiasm despite experiencing uncomfortable situations. Sometimes, Captains express their admiration when they see a female Pilot on their vessel or express their gratitude after completing a manoeuvre. Other times, we feel or maybe hear their fear of giving command of their vessel to us.

Reflecting on my 22-year journey in the maritime industry, I've realised that this profession is much more than gender roles. As women, we often take calculated risks to create equal opportunities. I've witnessed the genuine desire of others to celebrate our successes while providing unwavering support. Luck or circumstances have not always been on my side, but at the end of the day, the fact that I love my profession makes me treasure every moment, both the good and bad.

Throughout my career, I have encountered challenging situations. Some of these difficulties arose simply because I am a woman, while others were everyday experiences shared by all seafarers. The crucial point is to never give up based on others' opinions. Although the path may be arduous at times, you can find joy while gazing out at the vast blue ocean if you truly desire it.

