

2014-2015
PORTRAIT N° 3

Chantal Chagnon

Let's get to know these women who've had the courage and desire to take a different path by choosing a non-traditional marine career... women who dove headfirst into a world traditionally reserved for men and who, today, are our industry's pride and joy.

Make way for our female ambassadors!

"[Navigating] is the best job in the world!"



► Since completing her studies at the *Institut maritime du Québec* (IMQ), in 1999, Chantal Chagnon has worked as a navigator. She started briefly on a gas carrier for a Belgian company and then sailed the Canadian Arctic on board the *M/V Lucien-Paquin*. Since 2000, she has been a Navigation Officer with the Canadian Coast Guard (CCG).

Although she has always loved the sea, the road leading Chantal to this career choice had its twists and turns. It began, at age 12, when she decided to join the Royal Canadian Navy cadets.

Chantal immediately became a diehard fan of navigation and everything related to it: "Every year, I couldn't wait for the weather to get warmer so I could go back to the cadets. I stayed with them seven summers in a row." She first heard of the IMQ when talking with the training officers.

Before choosing a career with the merchant marine, Chantal thought of joining the Navy, but, in the end, decided to become a medical records administrator. "I soon realized my heart wasn't in it and, after a few years on the job market, I decided to come back to my first love: navigation", she told us.

Her friends and family were sceptical about her plans to go back to school. Fortunately, they soon came round and, today, Chantal knows she made the right decision. "It's the best job in the world!", she says without hesitation.

What she loves most is that every day is different, there's always action and the seascapes and views are breathtaking.

Recently, she took up new duties as Captain of the CCGS A. LeBlanc, one of the CCG's newest patrol vessels. Her mission is to patrol the Gulf of St. Lawrence to ensure compliance with commercial fishing regulations and permits.



On the picture : CCGS A. LeBlanc
Credit : Michel Tremblay (www.shipspotting.com)

With 15 years as a Navigator under her belt, Chantal obtained her papers as a fully-licensed Captain in 2012. Very few women can pride themselves on achieving this high-level certification. To succeed, Chantal had to show exceptional determination and discipline, rising up the CCG ladder one rung at a time.

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Her newest assignment brings her even closer to her ultimate career goal: Captain of a CCG icebreaker. It's a long-term project! Candidates for this position must log sea time as a Senior Ship's Officer and also have commanded smaller ships.

To date, Chantal has worked on the Amundsen, the F.C.G. Smith and, more recently, the Martha L. Black, one of the CCG fleet's most versatile vessels. On board the latter, Chantal could kiss routine goodbye!

Her duties changed with the seasons: the ship carried out icebreaking missions in the winter and performed navigation aid maintenance when spring came. As Senior Ship's Officer, Chantal had a very busy schedule, on duty 12 hours a day, 7 days a week. Her duties included steering the ship and managing the crew.



On the picture : CCGS Martha L. Black
Credit : Canadian Coast Guard

It's a full-time job and then some...often demanding, but very rewarding! Chantal experienced this firsthand when she left her mandate as captain on the F.C.G. Smith, a vessel mandated to measure the water's depth: "The team had organized a goodbye supper for me. This was a tremendous mark of recognition! I had succeeded in earning the seamen's trust."

Despite the difficulties, all are unanimous in saying that working at sea affords lifelong memories. Chantal Chagnon is an eloquent example highlighting the accessibility of these careers for today's women. Are you up to the challenge?

OPINIONS

Women marine workers and you

Within its mandate, the Human Resources Sectorial Committee of the Maritime Industry (CSMOIM) accords particular importance to planning for the new generation of workers. The current labour situation in Québec's marine sector shows that women are under-represented in non-traditional job categories, more specifically navigating. We wanted to get Chantal Chagnon's views on this major challenge to debunk any myths surrounding the phenomenon...

► **Sectorial Committee: Do you believe there are biases against women navigators? If so, what are they and how can they be eliminated?**

CC : Yes. Very often, when I tell people I work on a ship, they assume I'm a cook. Old stereotypes die hard. Then there are those that think that women get promoted just because they're women.

On board some international vessels, crew members can be very sexist. To dispel these preconceived notions, we have to work hard to succeed in having the crew accept us.

► **Sectorial Committee: What advice would you give to a woman who is thinking about a career in the marine industry?**

CC : I would tell her to take a good, hard look at herself. If she tends to miss her friends and family, it might not be for her.

To navigate, you have to be able to go far away while maintaining a balance between your personal and professional life.

Par Dominique Labbé
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