

Oral History Interview

Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum
“The Culture of Tugs and Tugs in Culture”

Interviewee: Mary Hutchins (M.H.)
DOB 11/5/1998

Interviewer: Michelle Zacks (M.Z.)

Date: February 8, 2012

Location: Aboard the *Cape Romain*, at the Moran Towing Corporation, Baltimore

Comments: Mary is deckhand on the *Cape Romain*. She graduated in May 2011 from the Small Vessel Operations program at the Maine Maritime Academy, where she received a Bachelor of Science.
Maine Maritime Academy attendance: 2007-2011.
Each summer, the students at the academy get relevant job experience.
During her freshman year (2007-2008), she worked for a private ferry operation in Portsmouth, New Hampshire.
During her sophomore and junior years (2009-2011), she worked for Moran in Jacksonville, Florida.
This job with Moran in Baltimore is her first job since graduating.
She is in the process of studying for her Mate's license. She has a 200-ton Mate's license; in a month she'll sit for the 1600-ton Mate's license. Once she upgrades, she wants to look for offshore opportunities within Moran.

Mary was getting off of a two-week stint, and was packing her bags and getting ready to go to the airport to head up to New Hampshire, where she lives, for her two weeks' off. Thus, the interview (the opportunity for which just sprung up when we arrived at Moran that morning) was rather rushed.

Documentation:

Audio: Zoom H2 Handy Recorder (digital);
recorded in four-channel stereo mode.

Digital Photos:

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M.Z.: Today is February 8, 2012. We are on the *Cape Romain*, which is a Moran tug in Baltimore Harbor. I'm talking to Mary Hutchins. How old are you?

M.H.: Twenty-three.

M.Z.: And you are deckhand on this boat?

M.H.: Yes.

M.Z.: I know you have to get going pretty soon; you're going to the airport so you can fly back to New Hampshire where you live, and you come down here every couple of weeks, I understand. So we can keep this kind of short and sweet. But maybe you can just tell us your story a little bit. You graduated from Maine Maritime Academy?

M.H.: Yep. I graduated in May from Maine Maritime Academy. I did the small vessel operations program there and that's a 1,600-ton license and it's also a bachelor of science. So it's a four-year program. It's like a program where you go to school from September until May, and then May to September you ship out doing co-ops for various workboat companies or yachting companies or schooners or anything like that.

M.Z.: Is it geared towards doing tug work? It sounds like not so much.

M.H.: No, the small vessel operations program's really unique because it is the only maritime school that has a tugboat and a barge at their school. So they have that specific route that you can go. But they also offer yacht management, tons of sail training and sail certifications, and they do a lot of traditional sail, too. So you can go, like either route and kind of like specialize in it.

M.Z.: Did you know ahead of time what route you wanted to go, or did that sort of come out of doing the program?

M.H.: It definitely, like I started traditional sail and thought I wanted to do something like yacht, or charters or something like that. But the more I got into it and the more I learned, I was just attracted to the workboat industry.

M.Z.: Can you say a little bit about that? What attracted you, do you know? Can you put your finger on it?

M.H.: I'm just like really practical, I'm really hands on. I've just like always been a tomboy, like working on boats with my father. And it's just the workboat industry's so impressive with the technology and the boat handling skills, and there's so much that goes into it.

M.Z.: How did you grow up? Where did you grow up, and what was your growing up like? You worked with your dad with boats?

M.H.: Yeah, I grew up in the Lakes Region, New Hampshire. We grew up on a pond and my dad's like an old wooden boat buff. So specifically like lapstrake Thompsons and so I was just always like his sanding slave, like, we were always restoring boats together. I didn't want to go to a normal university and not apply that degree in real life. So it just kind of happened, Maine Maritime.

M.Z.: He must have been, it sounds like, probably pretty supportive of you going that route?

M.H.: Yeah, well because I'm the youngest of five and all my siblings have gone to school, like four-year degrees and no one's applied their degree or their career to what they're doing now. It's completely opposite of what they're doing now. I didn't want that, just saw that as a waste. And, I know I love the water and I never thought I'd love it this much, so it worked out great.

M.Z.: That's great. How did you find out about the Maine Maritime Academy? Is it pretty common knowledge up there that there is that institution that people can go to?

M.H.: I don't think so, because I really didn't know a lot about it. And at first, I was like, oh like marine bioscience looks really cool, and just kind of researched schools that offered that. And then I went and visited Maine Maritime, and I was blown away by all the boats and all their degrees, they have so many awesome programs. And, just fell in love with boats.

M.Z.: Were there many other women, girls in there, or did you really stick out?

M.H.: No. Yeah, I did. Like especially my freshman year, there really wasn't anyone. But in my program, I was probably like one of three girls, just in the small vessel program. But by my senior year, there's a lot of girls, there are now a lot of women in the industry. I can't believe, it's like quadrupled just from freshman to senior year.

M.Z.: How did that happen, just the word is getting out?

M.H.: Yeah, I think so. I think that the programs are so appealing and fun to people. And it has blown me away how many women are doing it now.

M.Z.: Yeah, like I was saying before we turned this on, it appeals to me even though I don't have any background in this at all. It looks like fun.

M.H.: It is.

M.Z.: And like you say, really practical. And it's a decent job, right, at the end of it.

M.H.: Yeah. And it was a job right out of school. Like a lot of kids that I went to high school with still are looking for jobs that go with their degrees. So this was my first opportunity,

and I just jumped on it because I worked for Moran before. I worked for them down in Jacksonville.

M.Z.: When was that?

M.H.: That was my sophomore year and then my junior year. So I spent like, two separate hitches of like three to four months down there. And I haven't had one bad experience yet. All the crews have just like – of course everyone gets nervous at first with a woman onboard. But it's just been so welcoming, and we're all like family here, it's crazy.

M.Z.: That's great to hear.

M.H.: I've lucked out because I've talked to other women and they've had bad situations. Like, I won't go back to this boat. I've asked people, "Hey, have you worked with that crew?" and they're like, "Yeah, you don't wanna work with those guys." But I can't say that about one person I've met in Jacksonville or in Baltimore.

M.Z.: So you think it's something about the company?

M.H.: I don't know if it's the company. It just might be like there's a lot of good people in this industry, I don't know. It might be a boat people thing, I'm not sure. But I definitely think Moran hires a lot of great people.

M.Z.: Did you say that sometimes people are nervous when they see a woman onboard, like initially they might be a little nervous.

M.H.: Yeah.

M.Z.: What's that about? They just don't know what to expect?

M.H.: Yeah, I think so. You know, they don't know what's appropriate, what's inappropriate for a woman on board. Like, what are the lines that you can't cross, and it's just uncomfortable at first.

M.Z.: Just in terms of the working atmosphere, like what they can say, what they can't say, what kind of jokes they can make, that sort of thing?

M.H.: Yeah, exactly. And, you know, can she handle this work, am I going to have to help her, anything like that. So it just takes a while for everyone to click.

M.Z.: So how has that been for you, the physical part of it? I mean you don't look like a big, brawny woman. Is it a real challenge or are there certain techniques you have to learn for how to handle big heavy lines and stuff?

M.H.: Yeah, I mean there's definitely techniques. Like, I am small, but I'm scrappy. I mean it's been hard, but it's nothing that you can't handle if you really want to do it. The one thing

that I do have a problem with is when we come alongside a ship and there's a sunken bit in the ship. You have to go up and you have to take this huge hawser and throw it up there, and that's the hardest part is the weight over your head. And you literally have to go and practice with weights and just lift them like this because if you can't get it, we have to switch spots. Like I'll go and take Dayvien's spot holding the boat to the ship and then he'll go and put it up. So that's the worst part is when you can't do your job and someone has to do it for you. That's the worst feeling.

M.Z.: Yeah, for you personally, that's a bad feeling?

M.H.: Yeah, if someone can do my job better than me, you don't want that.

M.Z.: But I guess the more you do it, the better and more experienced you get at it.

M.H.: Yeah, and then there are certain techniques, too. We do this certain throw where we twist the line and it'll be way above us and it'll just twist off of the bit and you get to practice that, too. And it's funny, because my captain who's like five feet, can do it and it's like ten feet above him. So it's just techniques.

M.Z.: Well it's good to have something to kind of strive towards; you have really concrete goals, I'm going to heap that line up there.

M.H.: Yeah, definitely.

M.Z.: I guess now having the new materials for the lines, that must make it a little bit easier. You have more synthetic stuff and it's lighter. It's really super strong, but light.

M.H.: Yeah, exactly, yeah. But on this tugboat, it's from the seventies, you're not going to find that type of line on here. You're going to find the big hawser. But on that tractor tug, that's a brand new tug, then you'll find that type of line.

M.Z.: Oh, I didn't realize that. So the older boats still use older line, they can't incorporate the newer line or how does that work?

M.H.: Well we won't really incorporate it on this boat because we don't have a winch and usually the ultra-strength and super lightweight lines are more on winches now and on the tugs with the higher baller (indiscernible 10:30). This is the most traditional you're going to get, like typical twin screw conventional tug. But it's good to start on this.

M.Z.: How do you like doing the ship docking work? Is that what you were doing in Jacksonville, too?

M.H.: Uh-huh.

M.Z.: So that's pretty much what you've done your whole tug life so far?

M.H.: Yeah. I've taken tug and barge classes but I've just done ship assist. I mean, I think I'll stick with it for a little while, but I'd like to go offshore soon after I upgrade my license and whatnot.

M.Z.: So right now you're deckhand.

M.H.: Yeah. And I have a smaller license and once I upgrade that, then I'll starting looking at more opportunities, probably within Moran. They have a whole offshore fleet, so look for some type of transfer.

M.Z.: What's the license that you have right now?

M.H.: The 200-ton mate's license.

M.Z.: What's the next step that you'll be upgrading to?

M.H.: Well what I went to school for is the 1,600-ton and that's a mate license, too. I sit for that in a month.

M.Z.: How's it going studying?

M.H.: It's really tough. I was planning on doing a lot of studying this past hitch, but we were so busy.

M.Z.: Can you chose when you sit for it, like when you're ready?

M.H.: Yeah. After you're approved, you can go and schedule whatever works for you.

M.Z.: Do you guys help each other out with the studying?

M.H.: Yeah, well Dayvien's about to sit for a test, too, so we'll do chart plots together and we're about to start that stuff. And nav. problems, talk about navigational rules. Those are all the same, really.

M.Z.: So I've heard a lot of people that I've interviewed say that it's kind of like a family aboard a tug because it's such a small crew.

M.H.: Yeah.

M.Z.: It sounds like there's that kind of vibe here on this tug, would you say so?

M.H.: Yeah, totally. I feel like my captain's almost like my dad in a way. He's like, "Where are you going? What are you doing?" "Are you gonna be back in time?" I always tell my parents, I'm like, "Yeah, it's like I have you guys up there, and I have Captain Tony down here," it's like, great. But no, everyone's really close so it's cool.

M.Z.: What's your captain's name, Tony?

M.H.: Captain **Tony Roman**. He's been here for like, thirty years. His dad worked here. He's impressive.

M.Z.: That's great, so you learn a lot, I guess.

M.H.: Yeah, he's awesome.

M.Z.: Is there anything else you can tell us about that, about the family-like atmosphere? I mean I was just picturing you and Dayvien studying together. It's sort of like brother and sister working on classroom stuff. What about, is there stuff like cooking and cleaning and things like that that's like family?

M.H.: Yeah, we'll do like two family meals at like a hitch and we'll cook a dish together. We're always going to breakfast and out to eat together. It's just the way that you even talk and treat each other. You become such good friends. You spend more time here than you do at home so it's kind of crazy how close you get to everyone.

M.Z.: Do you have personal relationships? Are you involved with anybody when you go back home, and is that a challenge?

M.H.: Yeah, I mean that's a challenge. I had a long-distance relationship with a boyfriend from school and he was an engineer so we were both shipping out. But I mean it's a challenge, I mean you have to really want it to make it work. But I mean that's what's great about his job for all of these guys, they get to go home a lot because it's really local. So most of them are really close to home and will shoot home as much as they can. So that's good for a family life relationship type job.

M.Z.: Do you ever think about relocating to be closer to work?

M.H.: Not at this point, no, because eventually I hope to get a transfer soon. I'm kind of looking to go offshore. I mean I'm young, I just graduated, so I'm really up for anything. I don't need to be on land every day.

M.Z.: One question I've been asking people, and you're not from this area originally so I don't know if you can answer this, but we're at the Maritime Museum out on the Eastern Shore, I don't know if you've been there or not, but a lot of the focus for Chesapeake Bay maritime history tends to be the old wooden boats and stuff like that and boat building and the work of watermen, like oystering and crabbing and stuff like that. But we're certainly finding, especially coming here to Baltimore, that this kind of like industrial harbor is just as important to the history of the Chesapeake. You know, Baltimore's a really old port, it's been very important for the whole agricultural history and seafood industry, everything else.

Do you have any thoughts about that, about the significance of tugs and barges in the Chesapeake and the work that they perform?

M.H.: I mean, I think Baltimore Harbor's impressive. It used to be like, what, the biggest port in the U.S. and it's going to be like the second biggest on the East Coast in the next two years. It's really growing.

M.Z.: With all the upgrades.

M.H.: Yeah, I mean all the new ships coming in. There's two big new contracts in the harbor. I think it was like Mediterranean Shipping Company's going to create like 40,000 jobs coming up. So more tugs, more work, I think. You know, Baltimore's lucky to have this. And it's good, I love to see that.

M.Z.: Do you see gentrification? We came in that way and there were all those, you can tell there's like old industrial buildings but now they're new restaurants and shops and whatever. Is there kind of a tension there, or does everybody seem to get along pretty well?

M.H.: I mean I think everyone gets along pretty well, but I'm not really local, I don't really understand that as much, I haven't really been around to see the phases. But it seems okay.

M.Z.: Do you guys all stay onboard the boat when you're here?

M.H.: Yeah. If we'll get more than twenty-four hours off, which maybe happens once a week, then everyone will go home, which is nice because then I get the boat.

M.Z.: Is there anything else you want to add about your experience as a woman or as a young person in this industry? It sounds like you feel pretty positive about it overall.

M.H.: Yeah, I feel lucky. I have a job, be with great people, and every day is fun so it's going good.

M.Z.: Thank you very much. It's really nice to meet you, and I appreciate you taking the time to talk to us.

M.H.: Yeah, thank you.

[End of Interview.]