ANCHORING A NEW ERA

Six cousins took to the high seas to forge diverse careers in the maritime industry. Led by eldest cousin Captain Tan Lay Ying, this maritime family has blazed a trail in the seafaring world and set the course for like-minded people who love the sea and have a desire to follow suit.

BY HAZEL TAN
SM Ptin Content Lab

A ROLE MODEL FOR THE FAMILY

At 22, armed with a Class 3 Certificate of Competency (CoC) and a passion for the sea, Captain Tan Lay Ying set sail as a seafarer with AP Moller Maersk Singapore as a third officer on board a 6,468 TEU container vessel. Growth and success have inspired her siblings and cousins to follow in her footsteps. Her brother Tan, 25, a third officer with Pacific International Lines (PIL), says: "Lay Ying always shared her experiences and upbringing at sea with her younger siblings and cousins to show them the exciting life that seafarers can enjoy. This has inspired us to pursue careers at sea, as it allows us to meet new people and gain different experiences that none of the other careers can offer."

For sisters Baby Tan Shi Ni (right), 24, and Christina Tan Shi Hao Ying, 22, their career choices were largely influenced by the stories they heard from their cousin Captain Tan Lay Ying. Says Ms Baby Tan, a second officer with PIL: "Whenever Lay Ying was out at sea, she would bring up the topic of her journey to different countries, and talk about the times when she faced a tough time out at sea and why she was passionate about the maritime industry." PIL, one of South-east Asia's largest container ship operators, is ranked among the top 15 container ship operators in the world. After her O levels, she took Captain Tan's advice to pursue a Diploma in Nautical Studies at the Singapore Maritime Academy (SMA) in Singapore Polytechnic. Ms Baby Tan says: "I was always fascinated by the sea, but didn't know where to begin. The experience at SMA helped me gain a sense of fulfillment and accomplishment. I shared my own experiences — both the good and the bad — with them and made sure I set a good example for them to follow."

As a maritime family, they can share stories from similar experiences, problems and how to relate to each other. A seafarer's job is demanding, says Capt Tan, who was the first female Master of an offshore vessel. "As a sister, I often had to drive the second officer in our vessel. But the vessel had an issue in fire balance, so I had to stay at sea for longer than expected." After her O levels, she took her A levels while at sea and was later appointed third officer. "I was always fascinated by the sea, but didn't know where to begin. The experience at SMA helped me gain a sense of fulfillment and accomplishment. I shared my own experiences — both the good and the bad — with them and made sure I set a good example for them to follow." As a maritime family, they can share stories from similar experiences, problems and how to relate to each other. A seafarer's job is demanding, says Capt Tan, who was the first female Master of an offshore vessel. "As a sister, I often had to drive the second officer in our vessel. But the vessel had an issue in fire balance, so I had to stay at sea for longer than expected." After her O levels, she took her A levels while at sea and was later appointed third officer. "I was always fascinated by the sea, but didn't know where to begin. The experience at SMA helped me gain a sense of fulfillment and accomplishment. I shared my own experiences — both the good and the bad — with them and made sure I set a good example for them to follow." As a maritime family, they can share stories from similar experiences, problems and how to relate to each other. A seafarer's job is demanding, says Capt Tan, who was the first female Master of an offshore vessel. "As a sister, I often had to drive the second officer in our vessel. But the vessel had an issue in fire balance, so I had to stay at sea for longer than expected." After her O levels, she took her A levels while at sea and was later appointed third officer. "I was always fascinated by the sea, but didn't know where to begin. The experience at SMA helped me gain a sense of fulfillment and accomplishment. I shared my own experiences — both the good and the bad — with them and made sure I set a good example for them to follow."

For the eldest siblings, Keane Tan, Cassandra Tan and Sara Tan, the maritime industry was a natural choice. Says Capt Tan, 31, who is based in the Philippines: "I've always felt that the sea was part of my identity, and I can never be separated from it. I was born to be in the maritime industry so that I can be close to what I'm most passionate about," she says. Ms Keh intends to look for a shore-based job with MMK and is interested in safeguarding Singapore's maritime interests in future. "I'm interested in being part of the sea; I want to go back to sea when I'm safely married, have children, and, who hopes to become a Chief Engineer on a vessel one day. He graduated last month with a Diploma in Marine Engineering from SMA, and is currently waiting to enlist for National Service. He hopes to carve out a career in marine engineering and is part of a team responsible for safety delivering cargo to cargo carriers. He has been used to use Marine Engineers are the jacks of all trade, but that doesn't mean we're the masters of nothing. We have to learn the skills of every job, and learn them well. "Engineers repair and maintain the equipment on board the vessel independently, and this suits my aspiration of being an all-rounder," he says.

SISTERS OF THE SEAS

For Mr Christina Tan, witnessing the launch of Captain Tan Lay Ying's new ship, which gave her the assurance that she, too, is on the rise in an exciting career. "The best thing about being the least experienced among us is that I have a career path mapped out — I'm always looking forward to the next phase of my career. I'm also looking forward to the future of our family in the maritime industry!"

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