

'We are the same as any man in the world, but we are not the equal'

'Somos iguales a cualquier hombre en el mundo, pero no somos lo mismo'

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Speaker at the JST Symposium:
Diversity and Safety in
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Abstract

In this interview conducted by the RSO JST magazine team with Lianne Van Der Veen, the senior maritime accident investigator at the Dutch Safety Board (DSB) and chair of the Maritime Accident Investigators International Forum (MAIIF) since 2018 gives voice to her experience by recounting her beginnings, the evolution of the sector and the challenges ahead.

Resumen

En esta entrevista realizada por el equipo de la revista RSO JST a Lianne Van Der Veen, la investigadora senior de accidentes marítimos en la Junta de Seguridad de Países Bajos (DSB) y presidenta del Foro Internacional de Investigadores de Accidentes Marítimos (MAIIF) desde 2018 le pone voz a su experiencia relatando sus inicios, la evolución del sector y los desafíos por enfrentar.

Why did you decide to start your career in the maritime world, or when did you realize you wanted to pursue this?

My parents had an inland navigation barge company (there are many of these small inland cargo barges on the rivers in Europe), and my parents had one, so I was born and raised on such a barge, and I always liked it. I didn't want to do what they did, but I always knew I was going to continue in the shipping business and do something with it. That's why I went to the Naval Architecture university.

What was it like being a woman in these spaces? Did you encounter any barriers or obstacles?

In the inland navigation where I grew up, it was quite common for women to do the work as well. So, for me, that wasn't very strange. This is a question that makes me reflect, but I don't think there's a definitive answer. I think I was able to adapt to the circumstances I found myself in; I never had major obstacles to achieving the goals I set for myself just because I was a woman. It was at university, where I was one of four women in a class of 45 students, that I realized "something was different." Anyway, I'm not sure I really encountered barriers. I suppose that from the beginning, I always tried to understand how the industry worked, and it was my more masculine side that allowed me to be accepted. Maybe only once did I experience prejudice when, after a phone call, my colleague said, "They thought you were the administrative assistant, not the investigator." But I think that was the only time.

Certainly, the way you dealt with everything and your knowledge of how to navigate these situations played a significant role. Additionally, do you think that the situation in the Netherlands is different from other places?

Of course, I see differences all around the world. In the Netherlands, we have a good working environment, but we also face difficulties. It's a combination of factors; I think in my case, it has to do with my ability to adapt to each situation.

You were one of only four women in your class, and due to your life experiences, you dealt with discrepancies with a different approach, more focused on your abilities than the difficulties that might arise from being a woman in that field. Do you think it was the same for others, or perhaps someone who wasn't connected to the maritime world would have had a different experience?

One of my classmates had no experience in the maritime world, but she also managed to succeed. I believe the key is to have confidence in your knowledge. We all started from the same place, and she also reached a position. You must believe in your own way of doing things. It's essential to be able to adapt to different

circumstances. You need to understand that it's a male-dominated world, and perhaps, at times, they want to keep it that way. It doesn't necessarily require fighting it but defending your own position, trying to achieve your goals instead of feeling dominated. Unfortunately, this feeling arises in many women, but it's essential to recognize it and not fight against it but defend it.

What challenges do you see today regarding women's participation and diversity in the maritime world?

There is a difference between being equal and being the same. I am equal to any man in the world, but we are not "the same." I am fighting for equality, but I don't want to be the same as a man. Looking at biological factors, we are not the same, but that doesn't mean we can't achieve the same goals. If you strive to be the same, that becomes an obstacle. But equality and being taken seriously, for example, that's what we should strive for.

"We must work for equality and to be taken seriously as women."



The challenge I see is that if you are a man accustomed to working with men, working with a woman will be different. It's in our DNA to be as comfortable as possible, so it's not always easy to accept something in your group when it poses a challenge and requires a new way of thinking. To be honest, I wouldn't want to be on a team with only women, as a team composed of both men and women is more complete. The key is to accept differences and seek the necessary balance.

To work in a male-dominated environment, such as women in the maritime world, sometimes you need someone to introduce them to a male team. You can fight alone, but it's not always easy; sometimes you need someone to clear part of that path for you.

Do you see any evolution since you started?

I think there is some evolution, but on the other hand, if you look specifically at the maritime career, I don't see that much progress. If a man goes to sea for three months, we accept it, but I couldn't be away from my family for three months. Throughout history, it has been easier for men to do that. Of course, this is not a generalization; there will always be people who think differently, but I don't believe there has been much evolution. It's not about men versus women; we are equal, although different.

Of course, I only know the European situation. It is known that Dutch women raise their voices, but

I think this is not accepted or as common in all cultures. There are differences. In my environment, I see opportunities; neither my parents nor anyone else has pressured me to stay at home, take care of the children, or not go to work. But of course, if you go back forty years, the situation was different. In the Netherlands, I see some evolution, but I know that not everyone is at the same stage. We can learn from each other.

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Since 2014, you have worked as a maritime investigator at the Dutch Safety Board (DSB), becoming a senior investigator in 2021. What can you tell us about your work there and about the DSB? Could you share your opinion on safety and multimodality?

For a long time, I wanted to work for the DSB. Our goal is to make things safer, and what interests me is not just finding out what went wrong but taking it as an opportunity to do things better and prevent other disasters from happening. We will never be without accidents, and what I learned at the DSB is that when you solve one problem, new risks can be introduced. For me, it's always a challenge to balance that, to see where we can be useful. At the DSB, we look at the entire system, not just the accident itself but also the interrelationships and variables beyond the event.

Working in a multimodal board helps because you get opinions from people with expertise in investigations outside of the maritime domain, who often ask you questions you didn't know you had to ask and contribute with their different perspectives on the accident. They give you a new perspective. However, being multimodal means there is always tension about something beyond the maritime department's issues, so we can't always investigate each maritime incident in-depth.

The reason I started in 2014 and became a senior in 2021 is primarily based on experience, and a job opening! But most importantly, it was my international experience working with the Marine Accident Investigators' International Forum (MAIIF) and the International Maritime Organization (IMO) that allowed me to gain knowledge not only in the maritime business but also in dealing with others and achieving a holistic

approach rather than focusing on detail. I believe that senior investigators in our department, to be good at their tasks, need to be able to see the bigger picture, to perceive different aspects and challenges by looking at the problem from a different level.

In addition to your work at the DSB, you hold a leadership role as the President of MAIIF since 2018. What is MAIIF, and how has your journey been there? What would you highlight, and what were the challenges you encountered?

MAIIF is the International Forum of Maritime Accident Investigators, a global network of peers, where we are all maritime accident investigators. It's a forum for learning from each other. In our meetings, we exchange different investigation cases we are working on to pinpoint challenges and share results. It's also a forum where everyone seeks to cooperate with each other.



Our obligation is to investigate very serious maritime incidents. You are responsible for your flagships, but also for vessels of other flags in your territorial waters. It's crucial that if something happens outside our waters, we stay in touch with our colleagues. In these situations, we are not the first to board because we would have to hurry, and while it is desirable to be there within the first hour of the incident, this is not always possible. That's why it's essential to have a good network worldwide to call for help, and that's also what MAIIF is about.

I attended my first MAIIF meeting in 2014, just a few months after joining DSB. I was lucky because most of my colleagues were on vacation, and my director offered me the incredible opportunity to attend that meeting in Panama. Something truly amazing about MAIIF is that you will always find someone who makes you feel welcome and enjoy the meeting. In 2016, a vacancy opened for the position of president; it was my third MAIIF meeting, and someone asked me why I hadn't applied for it, but then I considered myself too new to the organization. I knew the president would

stay for the next two years, and during that time, the idea started to appeal to me. In 2017, the position of vice president became vacant, and this time I decided to run. Then, in 2018, a vacancy for the position of president opened, and I was elected. I have held that position since then, and although it typically lasts for two years, we couldn't have a proper MAIIF meeting during the pandemic, so we will have elections later this year. During this period, we achieved good things, and I think the way we decided to work helped keep MAIIF alive during the pandemic. It's essential to be able to meet, preferably in person, but I am very happy that we managed to keep the group together in 2020. And I was delighted to see so many people in Peru in 2022, where we held our first meeting after the pandemic.

You participated in IMO's Sub-Committee III. How would you explain to someone outside the field what IMO's Sub-Committee III is? What was your experience like there?

The acronym "III" in the sub-committee stands for "Implementation of IMO Instruments," and it is responsible for the Maritime Safety Investigation Report Analysis Working Group, which I am a part of as a member of the Dutch delegation. What we do is analyze maritime safety investigation reports to identify safety issues. These are discussed during the III working group meeting, along with other topics related to maritime incidents that are addressed in the Sub-Committee III meeting.

"Minorities must defend their position, claim their own space and opportunities, and have confidence in their work, knowledge, and experience."

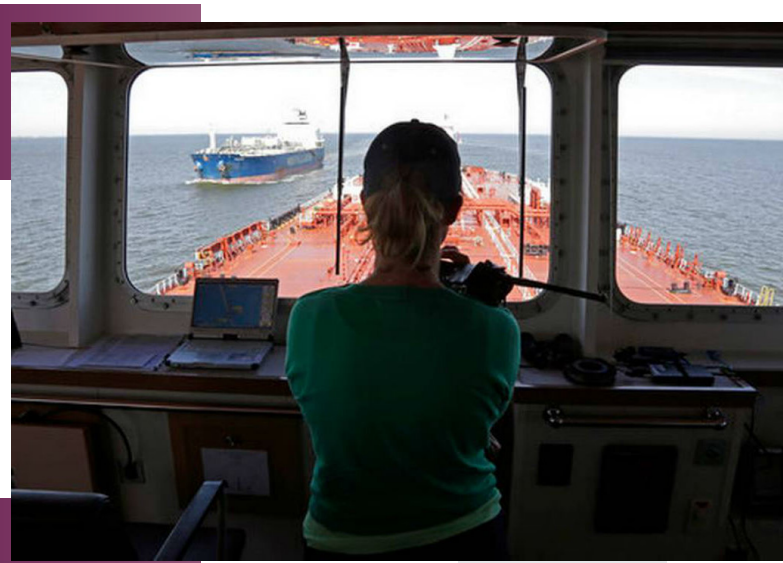


You are going to participate as the keynote speaker on the second day of the JST Symposium. What are your thoughts on having these dedicated spaces for discussion? If you had to summarize the main message you would like to convey in your presentation, what would it be?

To have such dedicated spaces for exchange is very important because someone needs to give topics like these the importance they deserve. It's not always straightforward, and if you find yourself in an environment dominated by one gender, it's essential to give the other gender a voice. If everyone thinks the

same way, some effort must be made to move towards something different. If we don't "force" ourselves to engage with what's different, we won't always know how to observe and acknowledge it. I believe it's essential to have these dedicated spaces, but without going overboard. I think it's in these matters where minorities must defend their position, claim their own space and opportunities, and have confidence in their work, knowledge, and experience, even when they sometimes need support.

When I went to my first MAIIF meeting, I had only been working at DSB for three months, and yet, someone from the office supported me to attend. We need to have opportunities. Looking at the Symposium in this way, I feel honored to have received the opportunity to travel to Argentina to talk about my career in the study of safety in the maritime mode.



The interview was conducted by Agustina Facciolo and María Constanza Mones Ruiz, from the International Relations Department of JST.