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When Linda Thurston was hired to work aboard the Glenora Ferry in 1982 she made local history as the first woman ever to become a deck hand since ferries began plying the waters of the Bay of Quinte from Adolphustown to Glenora shores in the early 1880s.

Technologically, the boats offering the service had come a long way since travellers used to cross the waters aboard the two-horse treadmill ferry and the wooden ones that followed years later.

Equipped with radar system the Glenora Ferry offered a modern service to its customers today. Nonetheless, until two decades ago a woman was never part of the ferry's crew.

Thurston said that she had had no formal training for the job adding humourously that her husband's profession as a commercial fisherman might have been a factor in the decision to hire her.

"I guess somehow they believed that I knew what to do on a boat. I had no real background for the job. I was raised on a waterfront property and that's about it," she said chuckling quietly.

Recalling her first day of work, she said: "Thinking back, I guess my experience was funny. There was this man from Kingston office who hired me. He told me what time to arrive but he told me not to arrive there before he got there. He said 'I want to meet you up at the road,' and I said 'what for?'. He said 'nobody knows you're coming'. So we went together and he announced to them, 'Hey, guys, this is your new deck hand.'"

Their expression said 'Oh, my gosh, he's

lost it,' she laughed.

She became the only woman among 28 male employees aboard the ferry and with much amusement she recalled the single washroom which, prior to her arrival, had

no lock on it.

"Of course that had to change. They put a lock on it and they also put a notification on the door three inches deep and eight inches long saying that the bathroom

was now unisex."

Her co-workers, who were mostly in their fifties at the time, took some time to get used to her as one of their own.

"We had this mechanical breakdown one time, and as a crew member, I went over, rolled up my sleeves to help and the engineer said to me, 'Oh, it's okay. You can go over and sit down. We'll get this.' and I said, 'doesn't the men deckhand do this?' and he started to laugh," said Thurston.

Women passengers and most men were pleased to see her as part of the crew, she said, but one male customer wanted her to know his disapproval. "He rolled down his window and said 'you're taking a man's job.' But over the years, everybody has accepted me as part of the furniture around here," she concluded.

Approximately 75 per cent of her job as a deck hand was customer relations and dealing with people and that was one of the things that drew her to this job.

One of the things required of a deck hand was rope-tying skills and Thurston's background in a farm helped her along with that.

"That was no problem. In the hobby farm where we came from we were always tying up something or the other," she laughed.

Thurston remained a deck hand on the Glenora Ferry for three seasons before being hired full time. She became a Mate from 1985-89 and as one her responsibilities included loading the boat and fire and safety inspections amongst others.

"It was a common sense type thing. For Mate, I took a three-week course in Port Colborne where I learned firefighting and lifesaving (skills). You had to actually put out fires. At the time I thought they were pretty hot roaring fires. It was so hot."

Thurston is appreciative of the fact that she never had to apply such emergency skills over the years.

Currently, four female employees, three full-time and one part-time, work aboard the ferry, she said.

"People often asked me if this job is boring and I say, 'How can it be boring when you're outside and watching the birds and the clouds. Its definitely unique.'"

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