



A LIGHT MOMENT FOR MADELEINE WOLCZKO '15 AS SHE GESTURES TOWARD A NEARBY SHIP THAT BEARS HER NAME. SHE HAS USED HER MANY MONTHS ON BOARD A CONTAINER SHIP OFF CHINA TO SNAP SOCIAL MEDIA PHOTOS AND RECORD YOUTUBE VIDEOS ABOUT HER EXPERIENCES, ATTRACTING A SIGNIFICANT FOLLOWING.

8 Months on a Cargo Ship

by Adam Rosen

One evening in early May, a group of weary merchant mariners gathered in the crew lounge of the cargo ship *President Wilson* to sing karaoke. This bonding ritual was important enough that they met to sing and hang out no fewer than three times a week. "Wake me up, when the shipyard ends..." a crew-member sang, mic in hand, as ten or so fellow crewmates looked on knowingly.

The lines, a heartfelt albeit off-key rendition of the wistful 2004 pop hit "Wake Me Up When September Ends" by the rock group Green Day, expressed a common feeling among the assembled. The *President Wilson* had arrived in the Changxing

Shipyards, just outside Shanghai, in February for its five-year dry-dock maintenance. Due to the Chinese government's strict COVID-19 policies, however, the crew, most of whom had embarked in Oakland the previous November and made stops in Japan and South Korea on their way to Shanghai, were not allowed to leave the vessel. Nor could anyone come on. In official parlance, they were "restricted to ship."

The lockdown continued through early June, when the *President Wilson* was finally allowed to leave Changxing. (As of this writing, it has left the shipyard and will head back to California after making one more cargo stop in Asia.) This means

that many of the crew members haven't stepped off the ship in eight months.

That karaoke session is just one of many slice-of-life moments captured by Second Mate and Cal Maritime '15 alum Madeleine Wolczko in the web documentary series she started under lockdown, aptly named *Restricted to Ship*. Unlike most documentaries about the shipping industry, though, the five-episode series doesn't show life on the high seas, but on the sidelines.



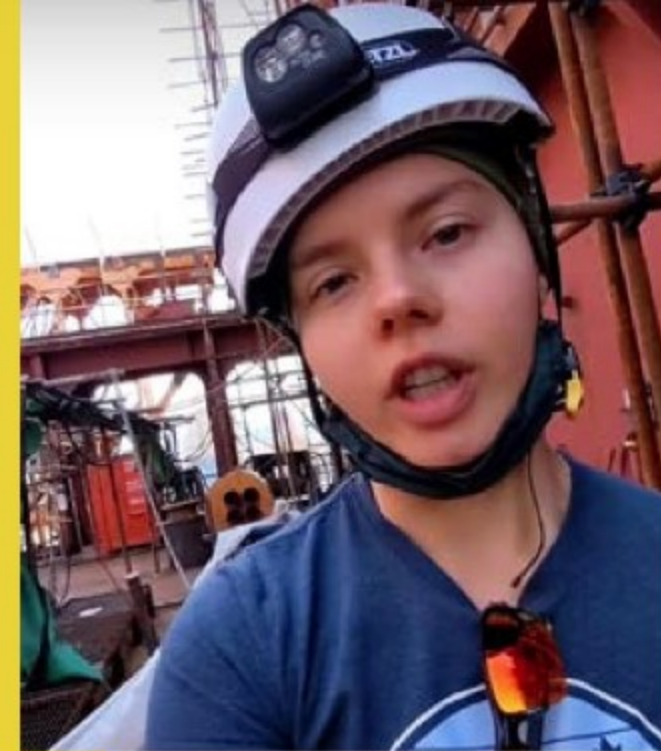
CAL MARITIME ALUMNA MADELEINE WOLCZKO KEPT A POLAROID RECORD OF HER DAYS RESTRICTED TO A CARGO SHIP OFF CHANGXING, CHINA.

Wolczko, who grew up in Vashon Island, Washington, uploaded her first episode, "Shanghai Lockdown," to YouTube on April 17. Frustrated with her numbing daily routine and in desperate search of a creative outlet, she spliced together the interviews and footage she'd been shooting as she made her rounds, day after day after day. She already had some familiarity with the Adobe Premiere Pro video production software before boarding, but with little else to do on the ship, she quickly mastered it.

Each episode of *Restricted to Ship* provides an intimate look at the ups and downs experienced by Wolczko and her twenty-three fellow crewmates (all of them male) as they attempt to create some sense of normalcy and community. Many of the scenes are informative or light, like the one where the crew carries in giant, mutant-sized zucchinis that have been delivered to the gangway by the Chinese government. There's also the time crew member Giancarlo Thomae gets a much-needed haircut, and that brief karaoke scene.

The difficulties of the situation are never far away, however. Standing outside on a deck, with land just a mile or two away, dayman John Clark tells Wolczko that their current assignment "has probably been the toughest for me in the 17 years that I've been sailing." We also see Thomae leaving a tender voicemail for his grandmother, who has dementia, on her 95th birthday. During a survey of the slop chest, the crew discovers they're out of shampoo, and possibly toothpaste. They'll have to make do until a new delivery arrives—if it arrives at all.

The series, and its producer-star, has been a hit in both the maritime and civilian worlds. In April, barely a week after her first episode was released, Wolczko was a guest on the influential shipping podcast *What's Going On with Shipping*, hosted by Campbell University professor Sal Mercogliano; a story about her on the Seattle evening news quickly followed. *The New York Times* offered its own story on June 6.



Each episode of "Restricted to Ship" has racked up thousands of views and over a hundred comments on YouTube, and has been similarly well received on Instagram, where Wolczko also posts shorter clips and pictures of and from the *President Wilson*. (One particularly amazing highlight: a haunting cover of the Radiohead song "Creep" in the ship's empty and well-rusted cargo hold.)

While nothing could quite prepare Wolczko for the unique challenges she faced while restricted to the ship, she says her experience at Cal Maritime helped her find her leadership voice, especially her time as a company commander, during her senior year. This has helped her maintain her authority and her cool while stuck aboard, which, in turn, have given her the space to pursue more creative endeavors like *Restricted to Ship*.

Wolczko credits interest in the series to its authentic, emotion-stoking production. While an insider's look at a situation few would ever get to experience may initially bring in viewers, the poignant moments keep them sticking around. "The situation itself is very ridiculous," she says. "Having people see that these are humans out here behind the ships and the [industry] is what gets people really engaged."

"I believe in the power of experience above anything," notes Wolczko in a video clip shared before Episode 5 dropped. "I really want to convey truth here... I want to continue seeing this industry progress and build itself into a healthier work environment for everybody. That's what this is all about. That's why I'm sharing this." ↴

Watch episodes of *Restricted to Ship* on YouTube. Follow Wolczko on Instagram @madeleineannawolczko.

