

## Nice shot there, Captain

Oakland Tribune, Mar 28, 2007 by Angela Hill

ABOARD THE Z-FIVE — One captain's tugboat is another captain's tripod.

When veteran tugboat Capt. Jan Tiura chugs along the skin of the Bay in the tractor tug Z-Five, she's keeping a keen watch on the waves, the currents, the wakes, the skies and the looming bow of a 900-foot container ship she must guide in and out of port.

And sometimes all those things come together to make a killer photograph.

"I like the tie-in, the job and the photography," Tiura, 58, said last week from the wheelhouse of the 4,400-horsepower Z-Five, preparing to get under way out of Alameda, the smell of diesel mixing with the eggs and sausage being cooked below in the galley by engineer Matt Fike.

Tiura, who became the first female tugboat captain on the San Francisco Bay when she started running boats in the late 1970s, is still one of only two female captains in the area. She loves the demanding and often dangerous job, but is also a trained and talented photographer who just had two showings of her work — including one on the USS Potomac, which she skippered for seven years.

She recently has gone part-time as a senior captain for Starlight Marine Services, which owns the Z-Five, and plans to focus more on her photo career.

"Running tugs provides me with an unusual perspective that few people see," Tiura said. "Things like getting up close and personal with a 1,200-foot ships, under the flare of the bow — it actually gets dark under there on a sunny day, especially under aircraft carriers.

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## Captain of her destiny

**halfmoonbayreview.com** - Saturday, February 02, 2008

By Stacy Trevenon—[[stacy@hmbreview.com](mailto:stacy@hmbreview.com)]

Jan Tiura isn't an old salt gazing over a roiling sea.

But her blue eyes hint at that image when she gazes at her own photographs of tugboats guiding a giant container ship. Neither fiction nor the movies, it is her world as a tugboat captain, giving the orders that set in motion a 250- to 350-ton tugboat that must guide an 80,000-ton container ship into its berth.

The handful of large photos, on display at the Half Moon Bay Library through January, offer a glimpse into that reality. In images, she said, "my world is much easier to capture."

"This is a mirror image of me and my ship," she said, looking at one shot of a tug dwarfed by a towering container ship.

The photos in this "Aluminum Series," so named because they are mounted on thin sheets of aluminum, range from several inches to a couple of feet square.

They depict tugs escorting giants of 500 to 1,200 feet in length either into their destination dock or out of the bay or delta en route to the ocean's shipping lanes.

In the exhibit is the "Bremen Express," a large container ship from Germany. There are four photos of a tug working a giant ship. There is a long, slender ship with "Matson" painted on the side, its many-hued containers gleaming in the late-afternoon light.

There is a surreal photo of a ship and tug after dark. "I always wanted to photograph at night," said Tiura.

And there are others.

With one tug typically at the front of the ship and a second at the back, the tug's job involves exchanging a series of lines that allow the tug to lead, guide or maneuver the big boat.

That makes for a huge, watery, push-and-pull dance, as Tiura manipulates thrusters (tugs have no rudders) to turn the big ships either to the dock or out to sea. And, "it's all done by radio. It used to be by whistle signals" piercing the air.

"Think of a tug as a big engine and fuel tank," she said. "We carry fuel and have a big engine, and we're just there to push and pull."

With the thrusters, she said, "you can walk this thing sideways."

It's all slow-motion. In the bay, the ships slow to 14 knots - about; 15 mph. Around the tugs, they drop to 10 knots.

"We parallel park the big vessels," she said.

It's a different kind of world, and if the photos "give you a kind of idea what my world is like, I've succeeded," said Tiura, who has worked with digital photography for four years and shot from the docks or with her arm sticking out the tug's window.

It's hard to imagine her job as she sees it, looking up from her relatively small tug at a container ship looming above.

"All you can see is the bow, as it goes up like this," she said, leaning her head back and spreading her arms wide. "It's a real pucker job. You are tense. You can't look behind. You are going backwards to match his pace."

**But this is a world, which impacts everyday life for all on the planet.**

Container ships, Tiura said, carry literally tons of things from "a zillion widgets to Nike shoes" that define life today. They come from or head to docks around the world, and when they lumber majestically under the Golden Gate Bridge, it's to go to Antioch in the delta, Richmond to which oil tankers or loads of cars head, the Carcinas Straits, Benicia, Martinez, Stockton or ultimately, Sacramento.

And Tiura helps them get there in a process that took its own time.

Born in Berkeley and coming to the Coastside with her family at age 4, she grew up entranced by the boats in the local harbor, but frustrated by her inability to get to them.

She took her life into her own hands when she "resigned" from high school. It "wasn't really educating me in a way that it should," she said.

It was the era of the “Great Society” and Vietnam, and Tiura chafed at academics with so much going on. “I wasn’t getting a true education in the world,” she said. “I wasn’t getting the truth in Vietnam. I wanted education, not propaganda.”

She left school with her parents’ agreement and saw the world, working in a mountaineering school and as a freelance commercial photographer. In 1972, she and husband Joe accompanied friend and local teacher Bob Swift on a sailing trip to the Galapagos Islands. Her love of boats grew.

Then, considering where to go after her travels, she found herself one day watching a tug at work.

”There was something about it,” she said. “It looked so interesting. So entrancing. It got me thinking ... I could see myself there.”

But this was the mid-1970s and few women worked on tugs. The U.S. Coast Guard issued her seaman’s papers in 1976, but she had nowhere to go, though one friend said he’d employ her.

Serendipity was on her side. A class action lawsuit involving the Golden Gate Ferry, Inland Boatmans’ union, and women upset at being barred from maritime jobs had just been settled. “It was impeccable timing,” she said.

Now, she lives in Moss Beach with her husband, who is the director of operations at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. They have been together for 39 years.

And she captains tugs for Starlight Marine Services in Alameda. Her crews are small, consisting of a deckhand/engineer, and sometimes the number is doubled for 24-hour shifts when there are back-to-back boats coming and going.

”At the end of the day, it’s a hard, dirty, dangerous job,” she said.

But she likes the challenges of maneuvering the big ships. “I like the can-do attitude that tugs represent,” she said. “It proves that with the physics of force over time, we can move these mountains.”

And it’s more than that.

”There’s the feeling that you have a job to do and you’re doing it your way,” she mused. “It feels like a lark, having the responsibility. You have to be out there where no one else wants to be.”

She stepped into what some would call a daunting arena: She estimates that there are perhaps 60 tug captains in the area. She guesses that 56 of them are men. She was tested by her male counterparts, at first, but that soon ended.

”I don’t get tested any more,” she said. “I have a good reputation, I’m a fair manager, a good shipmate. You do your job, I do my job, we all get it done in a professional manner. It’s a great thing.”

Link to Story: [www.hmbreview.com/articles/2008/01/18/community/community\\_news/story1.txt](http://www.hmbreview.com/articles/2008/01/18/community/community_news/story1.txt)

**San Francisco Chronicle** - by: Leah Garchik - Thursday, May 31, 2007

— The photography show up through Tuesday at the Caffe Museo at SFMOMA is by Jan Tiura, who was the first female tugboat Captain in San Francisco. She has been “driving tugs” (if you’re thinking that the word “driving” doesn’t apply on water, it’s her usage and she’s obviously in the know) for 30 years, and the pictures were shot from that vantage point.

San Francisco Bay Crossing.com - Movement -

## Tugging at Oakland



Maritime photographer and tugboat captain, Jan Tiura's will have her work on display in Oakland for a mere four days at the beginning of the month.

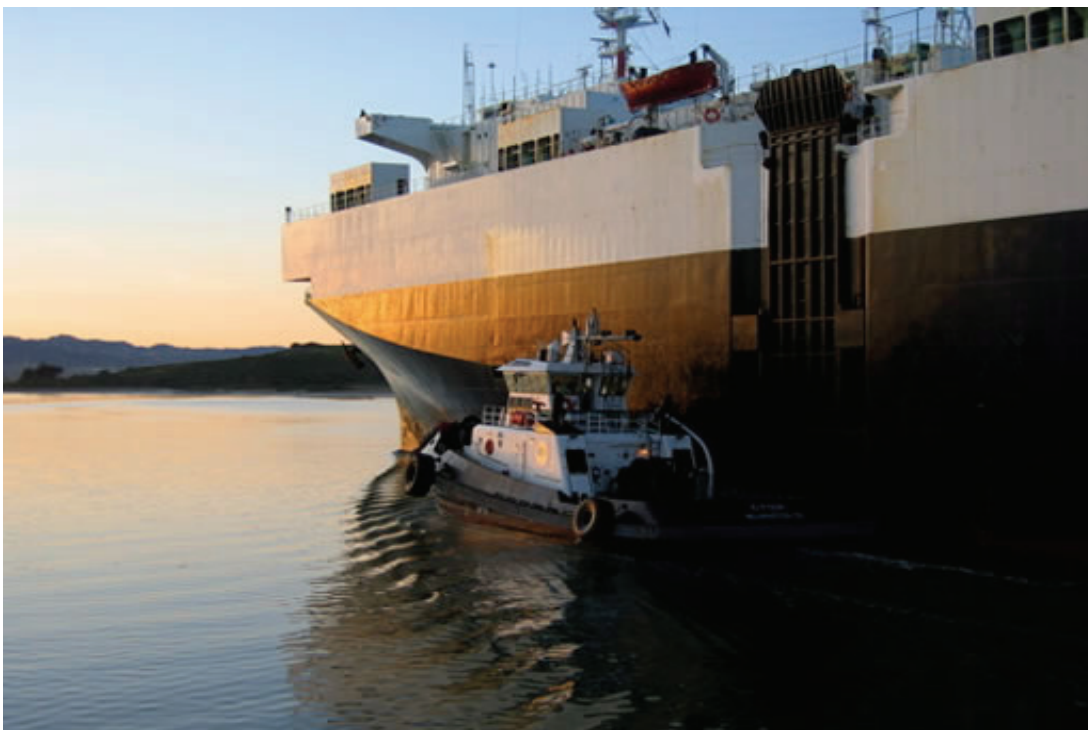
Look through the lens of Captain Jan Tiura, who is one of the elite tractor tug captains. Nearly all of the digital photographs were shot from the vantage of her tugboat, revealing intimate maritime perspectives and showing the Port of Oakland and San Francisco Bay as few are able to experience. Mar. 1-4, Potomac Visitor Center, 540 Water St., Oakland (Jack London Square). [www.phototiura.com](http://www.phototiura.com)

San Francisco Examiner - May 30, 2007 - 9:07 AM

## Tug-a-long

Ever wonder what a 1000-foot container ship looks like from underneath its bow?

Check out "TUGGING @ FRISCO," an extraordinary look into the world of the working Bay by maritime photographer Jan Tiura.



The exhibit runs now through June 5 at Caffe Museo, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

The stunning collection of recent photographs mounted on aluminum plate were shot from the unique perspective of working tugboats.

Jan Tiura, a native Californian, has worked aboard tugboats for more than 30 years. An elite “tractor tug” captain, she currently works for Starlight Marine Services on San Francisco Bay.

Tiura has photographed throughout her maritime career, but it was the advent of small, high-quality digital cameras that enabled her to capture the work on the bay while doing it.

Captain Tiura’s photos also may be viewed on her web site at: [www.phototiura.com/](http://www.phototiura.com/)

Exhibit info: Caffè Museo, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 151 Third Street, San Francisco; 10am- 6pm daily, till 9 pm Thursday. The Museum is closed Wednesday.

## **Working the Coast**

### **Photos by Tugboat Captain Jan Tiura On View in Half Moon Bay**

**January 31, 2008 - 8 AM PST**

Half Moon Bay—Tugs and tankers, cranes and container ships, Golden Gate dawns, Pacific sunsets, and Coastside fogs are all part of tugboat Captain Jan Tiura’s workaday world, a world she turns to magic through the lens of her digital camera.

Though the camera is small, the result is huge: some 15 large-scale photographs of what a working mariner sees on the job, now on view through March 15 at Moon News, the independent book and news shop at 315 Main Street, Half Moon Bay.

A professional photographer for nearly 40 years and a tugboat captain for 28 years, Tiura has been photographing what she knows since she first hoisted a film camera in class at Half Moon Bay High School. As a tugboat captain, she drives tractor tugs, assisting container ships and oil tankers, from Alameda to Zone 1 (just outside the Golden Gate Bridge). As a photographer, her work has appeared in *Workboat*, *Professional Mariner*, *Sail*, *Bicycling*, *Mountain Gazette*, and local newspapers, and on exhibit in the Potomac Visitors Center in Oakland, the World Trade Club in San Francisco, and, most recently, at the Café Museo at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

The photos on display at Moon News are large-scale prints as big as 30 inches x 49 inches, printed on Fuji archival “C” paper and mounted on aluminum plate. The impression, as the photos jut out from recessed frames, is stunning—”not to be missed,” says Moon News employee and fellow photographer Richard Kirchner. Have a look, and you’ll stand nose to nose with a thousand-foot container ship, peek through the porthole of a passing ship, push a tanker, run towards the dawn, and slide into neon-lit night—with a sense of immediacy made possible by Tiura’s ability, thanks to digital photography, to shoot while on the job.

Complementing the photos, Tiura will offer a talk at a special reception to be held Friday, February 29 from 7:00-9:00 pm at Moon News. She’ll talk about both aspects of her work—driving tugs and photographing maritime work on the Bay—and will answer questions, maybe even about how a ship hits a bridge and how an oil spill happens. Refreshments will be served.

Tiura, who grew up on the San Mateo County Coast, lives with her husband, Joe Brennan, in Moss Beach.

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