

# The Rise of Women Engineers

by Ms. CC Tan

**THIS** month's edition of *JURUTERA* pays tribute to women engineers in Malaysia. Here, five iconic women engineers in the country today share their thoughts on being a woman engineer, the challenges they face, the differences between men and women engineers, and how we can encourage more female graduates to embark on a career in engineering.

**IR. MOLLY SIM LIM HONG** holds a Bsc (Hons) in Civil Engineering and was the first woman engineer recruited by Sarawak Shell Berhad in 1981. Her career in the oil and gas industry spanned 23 years. Her last appointment was as Cost Planning Engineer for the B11 Redevelopment Project, a Top 70 Offshore Gas Project, which was initiated in 2006 and completed in 2011.

Ir. Molly Sim was the winner of the Woman Engineer Award for 2013. The objective of the award is to primarily recognise the contributions by women engineers in the field of engineering.

Not only is she a successful woman engineer, albeit a retired one, but she is also the equally proud mother of four children – three of whom are now doing well in their own chosen career fields while the youngest is at university, pursuing a degree in psychology.

"To succeed equally as a career woman, housewife and mother, one has to be a good time manager. You have to control time. If you don't, it will control you."

With her long experience in the field, particularly at a time when women engineers were rare, one would think she must have faced heavy discrimination based on her gender. However, Sim begged to differ.

"I started my career in the 1980s and I was the company's first woman engineer. But the management didn't look at me as a woman at the sites. Just like anyone else, they expect me to prove myself as an able engineer. So I went ahead and did my job. I was eager to learn, so I took all challenges thrown my way as an opportunity to learn," she said.

The world may think that men make better engineers than women "because since time immemorial, men have always been the designers, the builders and the engineers of many historical structures but the willingness and ability to do well and to be a good engineer, are irregardless of gender", said Sim.

"It is about passion and commitment. These are what will ultimately make one a good engineer. It is only recently that women are getting into engineering so the world better watch out – there will be lots of great things coming from them."

Some women claim that men discriminate against women



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engineers at work by being overly protective but for Sim, this has not been the case.

"In O&G, when you are offshore, you are just expected to go and get the job done. If you're pregnant, the men will be more protective. They are chivalrous and considerate. Otherwise, they do not treat us with kid gloves. They expect us to do the job that we are trained for and paid to do, just like everyone else," she said.

After all, she said, "choosing a male-dominated profession also means accepting all that it comes with and doing the job well, no matter how harsh the work environment is. This is the 21st Century – it is every man and woman for himself and herself."

Some people have even told her that there is the perception that generally, successful women are not as well liked as successful men.

"But in my experience, I find that successful women engineers are as highly respected as men engineers," she said.

Besides building a strong career for herself over the years, Sim has also served the Institution of Engineers, Malaysia, (IEM) actively for over 18 years.

She is currently the vice-chairman of the Executive Committee of the IEM, Miri Branch, and a mentor in the Young Engineers' Section.

"It is true that not all women who study engineering end up in this profession. But it is a matter of choice. Not everyone wants to work under the hot sun or rough it out at an offshore facility," she said on why not all women engineering students end up in the workforce.

"The qualification gives them plenty of choices. This (involvement in engineering professions) is not something that can be forced. It's up to the individual what she wants to do with her qualification."

To young women graduates who are intent on pursuing a career in engineering, she has these words of advice: "Follow your passion. Whatever you take on, do it well and go the extra mile." ■