



The first time Minor "Butch" Kates took his son, Butch, Jr., into the engine room of a Sun tanker (left), the experience was not a happy one for the youngster. Today, father and son work together as engineers for Sun Transport.

Son follows Dad into ship's engine room

The one thing Minor "Butch" Kates didn't want to do when he grew up was to follow in his Dad's footsteps—those footsteps being the ones that take you up the gangplank of a Sun R&M tanker and down the steel ladder into the engine room.

Butch had had his fill of that at the age of 12 when his Dad, Chief Engineer Minor Kates, Sr., took him on a 12-day cruise between Marcus Hook and Nederland, Tex. on a Sun tanker.

"Of those 12 days, I think Butch spent about two hours with me in the engine room," Kates recalled. "He said he didn't like it because it was 'too hot, too noisy and too smelly.'"

Well, engine rooms still are hot and noisy and don't smell too great either; but that youngster who originally turned up his nose at the job today is Third Engineer Minor Kates, Jr.

Not only that, but recently he and his father achieved a real rarity when both were assigned to the same engine room aboard the *Texas Sun*.

It's not uncommon for sons and daughters to follow their parents into Sun Transport, but for both to work together is practically unheard of.

The elder Kates, like a lot of youngsters growing up in his native Boothwyn, just a few miles from the

Delaware River, always planned to go to sea. So right after graduating from high school, he got a job aboard the *Atlantic Sun*.

"You didn't get much leave time in those days, only 30 days a year," Kates said, "but you couldn't beat the pay. We started at \$290 per month . . . good wages back in the '50s."

"I had wanted to work with the 'black gang' in the engine room, but they made me a messman because I only weighed 92 pounds and the company doctor said I couldn't handle the work in the engine room."

"But after my first cruise, to Port Arthur, Tex., I went back to the doctor. I said, 'Doc, you know all those 50 pound sacks of potatoes and 100-pound bags of sugar they use on the ship? Well, who do you think carries them around? I do. Those guys in the engine room only carry a wrench with them.'"

"The doctor said he'd give me a chance to prove myself, and I'm happy to say that I did."

For the last 28 years, Kates has been in and out of practically every engine room in Sun's fleet, rising through the ranks from third to second to first to chief engineer in two-year intervals. You must have one year of

sea time in a particular grade before being eligible to advance. With today's schedules, it usually takes two years to compile a year of seetime.

The younger Kates, like his Dad, shipped out at the age of 17 as a temporary summer employee.

"Usually they put those summer workers as painters and chippers," Butch said. "But I got a break. They put me right in the engine room of the *Western Sun* as a wiper. I don't think that happens too often."

That was more than six summers ago, and now Butch has his Third Engineer's license.

He had a rare opportunity to spend some time with his father recently (usually, because of conflicting seetime, they get together "one day at a time, a couple times a year") when an assignment became available on the *Texas Sun* where the elder Kates was chief engineer.

Butch got the job and Third Engineer Kates found himself working for Chief Engineer Kates.

Now, despite his somewhat unpleasant introduction to the sea, Butch knows it is the life he wants to lead.

"I won't move up as fast as Dad," he said. "There aren't that many ships

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Like father, like son

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now, and there's not that much movement with personnel. But this is definitely what I want to do."

That's okay with Dad, who was pleasantly surprised when his son came to work for him.

"I had heard from other engineers that Butch was pretty good," he said, "but I guess I had to see for myself. You know how it is. Most times you think your sons don't know anything.

But I was really amazed at how sharp he is."

After 28 years at sea, retirement still doesn't figure in Kates' immediate plans.

"But I'll know when the time will come," he said.

"When I get that Telex from the office, the one that reports assignment changes, and it says, 'Chief Engineer Kates replacing Chief Engineer Kates,' that will be my last trip. I know I will have left my job in good hands."