

Ballad of Captain Blanche Leathers

C-----F-----C
Now I got to know the river when I was a young girl
-----G-----G7
I got to know the river, and the river was my world;
-----C-----F-----C
Every steamboat, every captain, on the river I did know;
-----F-----C
Yes, I got to know the river and I learned to love her so.
C-----F-----C
I got to know the river, got to marry a steamboat man;
-----G-----G7
He taught me all he knew and helped fulfill my plan;
-----F-----C
I got to know the river, her shifting channel and her shores,
-----F-----C
And I got my pilot's license, back in eighteen-ninety-four.

Chorus:

C-----F-----C
You've got to know the river, yes, you've got to know the river,
-----G-----C--G
You've got to know the river, as she swirls and flows;
-----C-----F-----C
You've got to know the river till you have no more to give her;
-----G-----C-----G-----F
Yes, you've got to know the river as a friend, as a friend,
-----C-----G-----C
Yes, you've got to know the river in the end.

I got to know the river and I got to know my boat;
She was the flying *Natchez*, the fastest boat afloat;
I got to know the roustabouts, I got to know the crews,
And how to stow the cargo, it's what I had to do.
I got to know the river, and know just where to look;
I got to know the river and read her like a book;
The shallows and the deeps, every snag and every log,
And I loved her in the moonlight and I cursed her in the fog. (CHO)

I got to know the river, and I got to learn her song,
Every verse and chorus, we'd be singing all day long;
I got to know the river, by the levees in the towns,
The roustabouts a-singing, "Roll the Cotton Down."
Now my steamboat days are over and I make my life ashore,
But I still love the river and I'll love her ever more;
And if there comes a time when they need someone to steer,
I still have my pilot's license and renew it every year. (CHO)

Notes:

Captain Blanche Leathers (1860-1940) was one of the first women who earned her pilot's license and commanded a steamboat on the Mississippi River; the song is based on an interview of her by George William Nett in 1927, from the archives of the State Library of Louisiana. The young lady in the photo is not actually Captain Blanche Leathers but passenger Edna Walker who borrowed the cap from the captain of the Steamboat *Rose Hite*, courtesy of the Dave Thomson Collection.

Extra verse:

I got to know the river, every ripple, every bend;
I got to know the river and make her my best friend;
I got to know the river, ever changing, ever free,
And I got to know the river from the rapids to the sea. (CHO)