

## WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH

In honor of Women's History Month, PGY 4 General Surgery resident Benjamin Many caught up with two remarkable leaders, Dr. Marleta Reynolds and Dr. Nora Hansen, for a discussion on leadership, life, and surgery. We are grateful for the women who make Northwestern a fantastic place to train and work.

**Dr. Reynolds, as the first female Surgeon-in-Chief of Lurie Children's / Children's Memorial Hospital, you led a nationally recognized department for more than a decade. What are you most proud of? Did you always want to be surgeon in chief?**

I am most proud of the diversity I brought to the Division of Pediatric Surgery and to the Department of Surgery. I established the Department of Surgery at Children's as a place where women surgeons could thrive and be supported. With respect to my role as Surgeon-in-Chief, I didn't plan on it. Women didn't aspire to those roles. When asked to serve in the role, the CEO told me it would be a tough job and that I'd have to make tough decisions. He said, "if you are looking for friends, I suggest you get a dog". I've always felt that if women see another woman going to the podium, it gives them the confidence that they can achieve anything they want to.



**How did you decide to complete both Cardiothoracic (CT) and Pediatric Surgery fellowships? What obstacles did you face and how did you overcome them?**

After finishing general surgery, I secured a fellowship in pediatric surgery at Children's Memorial Hospital. The two pediatric surgeons I worked with were both boarded in CT, and to join their practice, they wanted me to have similar training. We didn't want anybody telling us we weren't qualified to do anything in the chest. I learned a lot during CT fellowship: I learned cardiopulmonary bypass, which helped me bring ECMO to Children's, upped my game in cardiopulmonary physiology, and I did 250 coronaries with 8-0 prolene. My technical skills were advanced exponentially. There weren't many female CT surgeons in the nation at that time. I was fortunate - the head of CT surgery at NMH was a phenomenal mentor.

**Who do you look up to? Who has been influential in your life and career?**

From a clinical care, surgical expertise, and technical perspective, I looked up to the people who trained me: Dr. Susan Luck and Dr. John Raffensperger. From a professional and leadership perspective - there just weren't many role models. Instead, I took courses at Harvard on leadership and management. I am a voracious reader - I read every book on leadership I could find - and I put sticky notes to mark important passages and tried to integrate important lessons. I would return to the readings and review topics. I was not always successful, but I have never stopped trying to learn.

**How do you spend free time outside of work?**

When my children were small, I spent my time at soccer, baseball, and basketball games, water polo meets...anything and everything they did. I am a season ticket holder for the Chicago Symphony and Lyric Opera. For a very long time, I have enjoyed riding bicycles. I've taken bike trips across the US and around the world. I've recently been introduced to pickle ball, though the Chicago winter hasn't provided much opportunity to hone my skills!

**Dr. Marleta Reynolds:** first female graduate, Tulane General Surgery residency ; first female Surgeon-in-Chief, Children's Memorial Hospital / Lurie Children's Hospital.

**I'm currently (or recently finished) reading:**

*On Juneteenth*, Anette Gordon-Reed

*No Ego*, Cy Wakeman

*Think Again*, Adam Grant

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### **Dr. Hansen, what's one "secret to your success"?**

I would say that it is important to always be aware of others and their feelings. You always want to be a team player and make others feel as though they are part of the team. A surgical career is not an easy one and you have to rely on many people to help you through your career both in and out of the hospital so it is important to set yourself up for success by building your support systems both at work and at home.

### **How did you develop your leadership skills? Have those leadership skills changed or adapted over time?**

I think leadership skills develop over time. I was the oldest in my family and had 3 younger brothers so I was often given responsibilities early on to help with my brothers when my mom was busy. My dad was a busy private practice obstetrician and worked long hours and did not participate much in home life so I was recruited at a young age to help out. A big part of being a leader is listening to others and making them feel heard and part of the team. This at times can be difficult. I think leadership skills are constantly changing and adapting to certain situations. Right now I am dealing with two teenagers at home which requires a different type of leadership skills and often is more challenging!

### **Women trainees face different challenges than their male counterparts do. What is one piece of advice you have for women integrating a busy surgical career and a family?**

I think a surgical career is challenging for both men and women but I do think women are expected to take on more responsibilities at home which at times can be challenging. However I think the younger generations of men are participating more in home life which is a step in the right direction. I did my surgical residency in the late 80's and 90's where the 80 hour work week did not exist and there were very few women residents at that time that had a child during residency. In current times, many of the women residents are able to have a baby during residency which is gratifying to see. I do think one of the keys to success is to have enough help to manage your home life. There is nothing more stressful than feeling like you are a failure in both your family and work life. I adopted my two children a bit later in life when I was already 10 years into my career so I had the resources to have a full time nanny to help which makes my life much easier, as I did not have to get my kids ready before work to get them to day care and then stress about when I would be done at work to pick them up. I think I am now in one of my most challenging times in life. Not only do I have two teenagers at home, but I also have an elderly parent living with me who is not capable of living on her own and needs a lot of support. Hopefully I am training my two children to be compassionate, self reliant, kind individuals who see the importance of finding what you are passionate about in life and following your dreams. I feel incredible lucky to be in this Department of Surgery and I hope I can pass on some of my enthusiasm for the field to the younger generation.



**Dr. Nora Hansen (with children):** Chief, Breast Surgery, Northwestern Memorial Hospital

### **What does the future have in store for breast surgery?**

I think it is likely that in the future we will no longer need to look at the lymph nodes at all and just examine the primary tumors biologic profile and develop a more directed plan for patients with breast cancer.

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### **Want to learn more?**

- Equal Pay Day: This date symbolizes how far into the year women must work to earn what men earned in the previous year. What opportunities do you have to explore and advocate for equitable pay for women?
- Podcast listen: Intersectionality matters with Kimberle Crenshaw, Episode 37: "Black women's health through twin pandemics"