

AMERICA WORKS PODCAST

OCCUPATIONAL FOLKLIFE PROJECT, AMERICAN FOLKLIFE CENTER

SEASON 04: EPISODE 7: Susan Morelli, Physician/Neonatologist. Provo, Utah.

Length: 4:53

ANNOUNCER: From the Library of Congress in Washington, DC.

THEME MUSIC: "Pay Day" played on guitar by Mississippi John Hurt.

Nancy Groce (Host): Welcome to America Works, interviews with contemporary workers throughout the United States collected by the Library's American Folklife Center as part of its Occupational Folklife Project.

This is AFC staff folklorist Nancy Groce and this America Works episode features excerpts from a longer interview with Dr. Susan Morelli, a neonatologist and geneticist who works in Provo, Utah. She was interviewed by folklorist Lisa Gabbert as part of a larger project on "Doctoring," which documents the training, daily routines, work environments, personal motivations, occupational folklore and humor of contemporary American physicians. Dr. Morelli starts with a bit of family history and then relates how her own spirituality intersects with her occupation.

INTERVIEW

Susan Morelli: I had this grandmother who--she always, she always wanted to be a doctor. And she had a pretty hard life. When she was--by the time she was 13, she was with a step-mother and a step-father and moved out on her own, with her eighth-grade education, and, and made a life with my grandfather. And she never had those opportunities. And she would call me up every day--not every day--but when she talked she would ask me, "So, don't you want to be a doctor?" I'm like, "No, grandma. I hate hospitals."

She passed away my first year of college, and that summer I was home, I was working, and my mother and I were driving to the beach one day, and it literally popped into my head: "I should be a doctor!" And I always think, "I guess my grandma had more, more influence on the other side."

To be at the beginning of life on a regular basis is quite magical. To see families with a newborn baby struggle and to see the different things they go through – it gives me a lot of perspective in the rest of my life. Every minute my children are healthy, they can breathe, they can swallow, they can run, they can--just really basic things are, are amazing.

There was a moment I think that really captured this sense of what I do. I was in the NICU late at night and – or the evening... And a mother came in with twins and they knew that one had severe birth defects. And she needed to be delivered.

And when the twin with birth defects came out, she had anencephaly, and she was not going to survive. About an hour into caring for the other twin, and the nurse was holding the girl who was going to die. And the family finally says, “We need the baby to be baptized.” And no one could get hold of a priest or a chaplain. I knew that I could baptize the baby.

And then I went in the hall and cried, pretty hard, because I can take care of life and death, and I wasn’t sure I was really going to take care of someone’s soul, as well, that day. And I went back in and did it--and baptized this little girl for this family. And I cried a lot more tears that night. But it was quite special to be a part of that for that family, and to give them that comfort at that moment.

Sometimes I’m called to do even more than be a doctor.

END OF INTERVIEW

Nancy Groce (Host): You’ve been listening to Dr. Susan Morelli, a neonatologist and physician in Provo, Utah. To hear the complete interview with Dr. Morelli and other Utah physicians as well as hundreds of other contemporary American workers, please visit the Library’s Occupational Folklife Project at www.loc.gov/folklife -- or just search online for the Occupation Folklife Project.

This is AFC staff folklorist Nancy Groce. On behalf of the American Folklife Center, and with special thanks to AFC intern Elisa Alfonso for her help with this episode, thank you for listening to America Works.

ANNOUNCER: This has been a presentation of the Library of Congress. Visit us at LOC.GOV