



# *A BIT OF ME*

PTODI Celebrates SUNY Broome's Women

## *Jennifer M. Musa, PhD*

*Who is the most influential woman you know? How does she inspire you?*

**I have been influenced and inspired by an entire group of women. The women who inspire me every day are my female students who are often balancing motherhood, other family responsibilities, health issues, work, and school.**

When I was an undergraduate, I had the luxury of being able to put all my focus on my classes. I am so impressed with these women who manage to further their education while at the same time meeting many other challenging demands. Watching their struggles, perseverance, and successes has taught me some important lessons about doing my best when faced with challenges and with finding balance in my own life. I have students who come straight to an 8am class from an overnight shift of work, or after staying up all night with a sick child. Another student I admire has five children and has had many serious challenges to overcome in her life. She is now attending school so that she can use her skills to help others who have faced the same struggles that she experienced.

In addition to inspiring me, these female students have caused me to reflect on the support I received at SUNY Broome. When I started as a part-time adjunct twenty years ago, I had a baby and a toddler. When a full-time position became available, I had no intention of applying because I could not imagine taking on a full-time job with two young children at home. It was unwavering support from Dr. Richard Firenze, the Chair of the Biology Department, that changed my mind. He understood my worries and helped me to envision a teaching schedule that would work for my family. When I was fortunate enough to be hired, he made that schedule a reality. As my children grew up and my family responsibilities shifted, he was always there to listen, encourage me, and help me find a way to make it all work. He is truly a champion for working parents, and it made all the difference. My amazing SUNY Broome colleagues were also always there to listen, offer advice, and help. When I think about how Dr. Firenze's encouragement changed my path and how the support of my colleagues made such a positive difference, I am grateful and proud that I have an opportunity to be there for my female students who are going to school while facing significant life challenges.



***Dr. Jen Musa***

**Professor Biology Department**

*What are some of the biggest challenges that women face today? How do you think these might change over the next 20 years?*

**I think that the biggest challenges faced by women today are not just faced by women. We live in a world filled with tremendous inequity, where the country or society you are born into can dictate whether you will have access to safe drinking water, enough food, and opportunities for education and employment.**

For the past 8 years I have had the honor and pleasure of working with my colleague, Professor Maureen Hankin, on SUNY Broome's first global service-learning course: Health for Haiti. As part of this course, we have taken over 100 SUNY Broome students to Haiti. Our students have engaged in sustainable projects designed to help combat the effects of poverty. The Health for Haiti team, which also includes local community professionals, has provided clean safe drinking water, community gardens to fight malnutrition, education, healthcare, and economic initiatives for families in rural Haiti. At the same time, we have gained much from the partnerships with our neighbors in Haiti. As one Health for Haiti student said, "this experience has changed my perspective of life entirely, and the people of Haiti impacted my life far more than I impacted theirs".

I hope that over the next twenty years we will see more and more warriors for social justice who find ways to empower others. It is impossible to reach your full potential, mentally or physically, if you are malnourished and sick. Access to quality education and gainful employment should not be an impossible dream for so many people. We need global mobilization to fight for all kinds of inclusivity and accessibility, including racial justice and gender justice. We need champions for our global home who fight for climate justice. I believe that those of us who work in education have a unique opportunity, and maybe even a responsibility, to shine a light on local and global injustices and to create meaningful experiences that will empower our students to be the next agents of change.



*Who is your favorite historical female figure? What do you admire about her?*

**My favorite historical female figure is Marianne Cope (1838 -1918), a Sister of Saint Francis in Syracuse, New York. She started as a teacher and a school principal, and then in 1870 she became the administrator of the first public hospital in the Central New York area.**

Marianne was an early advocate for providing quality medical care for all, regardless of race or circumstance, and for promoting patient's rights. Then in 1883, as a middle-aged woman in a comfortable and respected leadership position who was making a tremendous positive impact in her community, she left all of this behind and moved to a remote part of the Hawaiian Islands to care for people afflicted with leprosy. Marianne displayed tremendous compassion and courage as she worked with people who were treated as outcasts and shunned by society. Under unimaginably difficult conditions in Hawaii, she created hospitals for delivering quality health care and communities that promoted the dignity and respect of all. I admire much about Marianne Cope, but I am most impressed with her tremendous bravery, energy, and life-long willingness to serve wherever she was needed most.

*Who is your favorite fictional woman and why?*

I have always been a big fan of the fictional character Nancy Drew. Nancy was so capable and could solve all kinds of mysteries, often with the help of her two best female friends. Nancy was smart, competent, and independent. It seemed like there was nothing she could not do. She never shied away from a challenge, even the spooky ones, which is probably why she is most often pictured holding a flashlight. Also, Nancy always had the perfect outfit for every situation.

*Which achievement made by feminists are you most thankful for? Why?*

These days I find myself very grateful for voting rights. Many people made tremendous sacrifices in support of the nineteenth amendment guaranteeing women the right to vote. Recent events have made the fragility of our democracy quite clear. I think we can look to the original suffragettes for inspiration and motivation and as a reminder that we share in the responsibility to make our voices heard and ensure that all Americans continue to have equal voting rights and that we have fair elections.

*Why are "firsts" important to note? What other barrier breakers have you witnessed in your lifetime?*

There are all kinds of "firsts", but I think that the most important to recognize and celebrate are those that set the stage for widespread change. I believe that "firsts" are important because they can provide inspiration and motivation to drive necessary shifts in cultural attitudes and beliefs. One "pioneer" that I admire is Dr. Nora Volkow, a Mexican American psychiatrist, and the Director of the National Institute on Drug Abuse. Dr. Volkow credits her eclectic family history as being the inspiration to pursue a career in science and enact positive change in the world. Dr. Volkow's brain imaging research revolutionized the understanding and treatment of drug abuse and addiction. Her pioneering work and tireless advocacy initiated a shift from viewing those with substance use disorder as having a moral failing or character defect, to fostering an understanding that addiction is linked with physical changes in the brain and is a disease. Dr. Volkow broke through a barrier of misunderstanding that helped move an entire field towards more effective and more hopeful treatment. This is especially important now as so many communities are facing an opioid crisis. Dr. Volkow has certainly been a trailblazer, and I admire her conviction, creativity, perseverance, and dedication to providing science-based evidence and widespread, accessible education.

