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Interviewed by

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**Jessica de Leon:** Today is February 28th, 2025. I am Jessica de Leon, and I'm recording an interview today with Dr. Marilu Gorno-Tempini for the Great Women in Neurology series. So it's good to see you this morning. I'm so glad that we are able to spend some time together and just chat a little bit.

**Marilu Gorno-Tempini:** Hi, Jessica, thank you so much. Thank you for doing this. Nice to be here.

**Jessica de Leon:** Yeah, this will be exciting. We have some good questions for you today, and I'd love to just hear a little bit more. Maybe just to start out, can you tell me a little bit about when you started your career at UCSF, and what you were doing before you came?

**Marilu Gorno-Tempini:** I came to UCSF 25 years ago now, seems crazy to think about it. I came in 2001 to do a two-year postdoc, and then it was just too nice, too good, too amazing to leave. So one year after the other, it's become 25 years. Because I've met people like you and like my other mentors and mentees. And yeah, it's been an incredible journey, if initially unexpected. If you had told me when I was in med school in Italy that I would have ever lived my whole life outside of Italy, I probably would have said no way. But you know, life goes this way, and I'm very happy it did. So I did do medical school and residency in Northern Italy, between Brescia and Modena, and both places have a really strong tradition in cognitive behavioral neurology, so I was very lucky. And then I did a PhD in imaging neuroscience in London. Because, as my parents said, I'd like to be a professional student. Their feeling was, are you gonna start working at some point?

So I did that, and there I met my husband-to-be that was coming to UCSF to do a postdoc in neurophysiology, and I wasn't quite ready to go back to Italy. I think I realized twenty years later, maybe, why I wasn't quite ready to go back. And I said, well, let's see what's available in San Francisco, and that was the best fortune of my career to see that Bruce Miller was at UCSF. I wrote him an email, and he said, "Come on out, come and visit." And that's where it all started.

**Jessica de Leon:** It's funny how things start, all it just feels sometimes with an email, or just a little bit unexpectedly, and then it blossoms into these really wonderful things.

**Marilu Gorno-Tempini:** Absolutely. I think we've been reminded of this also with the story of Clare Clelland. Right? That you get an email and, you know, you respond. You never know what's going to happen. You always want to be generous and open. And yeah, that's definitely what Bruce did for me back then.

**Jessica de Leon:** And this actually helps me think a little bit about your work. And how maybe some things happened a little bit, maybe unexpectedly, but also just how hard you've worked to really establish everything that you've managed to accomplish. So maybe this might be a good time to transition and just talk a little bit about your work. If there's anything you'd like to highlight, any accomplishments that you're really proud of, that you'd like to tell us all about.

**Marilu Gorno-Tempini:** Gosh! I wasn't really prepared for this. I guess a few things. I think I'm very proud of what we do at the Memory and Aging Center and in our program, particularly on speech and language, on how we always want to do very, let's say, good science, but keep the patients at the forefront. It's much more established now, but I think right from the beginning what we always did is try to hear from our patients what was useful for them, and what were the challenges they were encountering and really tailored our science to that. I think that's very unique at UCSF. In the various places where I worked in my career, at least another three or four, actually, I have never seen such a clear vision as the one we have at UCSF. I've always been proud of that.

Scientifically, our lab, and thanks to the work that you have done as well, is discovering this new variant of primary progressive aphasia and describing it for the scientific community and clinical community really. It's helped getting our patients better diagnosed and led to more specific diagnosis for these atypical variants of Alzheimer's disease. I think that is a unique contribution. And then again, it's always been very important for me to be able to mentor young women such as yourself and see a career grow and help sponsor and mentor, and share the knowledge back and forward, and seeing your career growth. I think it's one of the most fulfilling aspects of the job, for sure.

I kind of remember the time when I wrote my first K24, and I wrote this. Maybe you remember we talked about this early on—like this year is my eighth year on the K24, it's about to end, and it's not renewable anymore. It's kind of a little sad for me, but I can see that it's fine for someone else to take the torch. But, you know, the first time I wrote it eight years ago and I said that I wanted to focus on mentoring women through their career transition and family-work balance, it got sent to me, saying that that was not a goal.

**Jessica de Leon:** No.

**Marilu Gorno-Tempini:** That was not a scientific goal, that it wasn't appropriate to write it. I really hope we're not going back to that! You know, I answered, and in the end it was fine. I talked with the SRO about it and the PO, and they were all like, "No, this is fine. Don't worry about it." And yeah, but time has changed.

**Jessica de Leon:** Oh!

**Marilu Gorno-Tempini:** And I hope they'll still keep it that way. So that that was a very good—it's a big part of what I'm proud of.

**Jessica de Leon:** Yeah. And I think that I guess I don't know—it feels—I don't know if it's okay to talk about legacy. And just that it just feels like there's been so many lives that have been touched by your mentoring this way. So, wow! I did not know that about the feedback.

**Marilu Gorno-Tempini:** Yeah, you know, there were good and bad, and then I had them, you know. Early on, I was lucky enough to be called to be in a study section, and at that time we were flying to D.C. four times a year. And I had just had my first baby, and I told them I would be happy

to do it if I can fly with my nanny, and at that time they were offering us some very expensive flights and hotels, and I was like, "Well, with that same money, I can also pay for my nanny to come with me." And they said yes right away. So there were good and bad moments. I think you always have to be reasonable, and put your needs out there, and somebody will say yes, somebody will say no. Try to keep pushing for what you need.

**Jessica de Leon:** Yeah, this is great to hear. So then, I guess, maybe, looking back, were there people that have influenced your life, or maybe influenced how you think about your scientific career—mentors that really stick out in your mind?

**Marilu Gorno-Tempini:** Oh, my! I've been really lucky in my career, starting with my first couple of mentors in med school in Italy. One was a clinician, a woman, a neurophysiologist, and the other one, a behavioral neurologist, more on the science side. I've always tried to have that kind of pair: a scientist with a clinician, a man and a woman—someone. It just happened that way. I didn't plan it. But thinking back I really think I've always had a couple of people that really influenced me. I really sought out women, even if there weren't that many, because I thought it was... I needed that mentorship on how to deal with life *and* science. With all the expectations that society puts on us outside of work. And in different cultures, that's been a very humbling and interesting aspect. Being a woman in Italy, being a woman in the UK, being a woman in the US. The expectations of society around you are very different, and navigating that, how different societies value women working or not working, being ambitious, and wanting a career. I think my own mother is still surprised by my ambition. I think she's going to live with it, and she's very proud of it, though I don't think she quite understands it. It's like that.

And it's not easy to navigate when you really love someone, and it's your mother, your aunt, or people you care about, and you feel like they're not quite getting you. It can be a little difficult, but I'm derailing. Anyway.

**Jessica de Leon:** No, I can relate.

**Marilu Gorno-Tempini:** I would say Cathy Price in London, an incredible cognitive scientist, taught me all I know about science. She's incredibly lovely and hardworking, a single mom reading my papers on the tube in London, going back from Queen Square to read you know, 12 or 15 versions of the same paper. So you know where it comes from! Incredibly dedicated and lovely. I really learned my science with her, and I'm incredibly grateful to her and to Bruce. They are the people who really changed my direction in life. Bruce has always been a mentor, a sponsor. Really taught me all I know about behavioral neurology and always left us very free to pursue our own interests. I'll always be grateful.

And then, I think I've learned a lot from you guys. Again, going back to different cultures, different aspects, different generations, I feel I've been so lucky to have the most brilliant mentees, and I've really learned from you guys. So thank you.

**Jessica de Leon:** Oh, and I'm glad too. I think we've had so much shaping from the mentors that we've had. I'm extremely grateful for this as well. So then, I guess thinking forward—do you have visions for the future? I guess that can be a very broad question. Maybe in terms of how you'd like to see women in neurology evolve over time, or talking a little bit about how you hope science evolves, what your vision is for the future of science, although that's a very big question.

**Marilu Gorno-Tempini:** Wow, yes. Let's start with UCSF. Brilliant women in the department at UCSF. I'm very excited to see where you guys take your generation. I think there are many of us

doing incredible things. We all know that at the senior level, there's still not equal representation, but I think that will change with your generation, and I'm really excited to see it. I'm excited to see what a more representative leadership will look like. It's always a generational change, isn't it? It comes with a little turmoil sometimes, but I think the climate at UCSF is so collaborative, so ingrained into lifting each other up, that I'm very excited about what your generation will do. I hope I can be around to observe it and support it or –

**Jessica de Leon:** – or be a part of it!

**Marilu Gorno-Tempini:** – be a part of it, if I can. Yeah! I think there's a very bright future for women in neurology at UCSF, for sure. A lot of progress has been made in the time I've been here, for sure. We're lucky to have Andy as chair, always there to listen. So I think the future looks bright for you guys and for all of us.

Science-wise, we work on neurodegenerative diseases mainly, and neurodevelopment as well. But staying with the Memory and Aging Center, a broader mission on neurodegenerative diseases, there's never been a more exciting time. And I think we're greatly positioned again to bridge incredible new therapeutics and basic science with direct impact on patients. So I think it's a very exciting time for behavioral neurology and the MAC in general.

**Jessica de Leon:** Agreed. I think this is really exciting, and I think exactly what you said—we care so much for our patients and get to be so close to what it's like for them that we're able to translate that into better care.

**Marilu Gorno-Tempini:** Yes.

**Jessica de Leon:** I know our time is ending, but maybe just another reflection question. Looking back, thinking about women in neurology, do you have any advice for people who are just starting their careers?

**Marilu Gorno-Tempini:** Wow! I don't know. It seems so silly to say, "Follow your passion," but scientists, as clinicians, as clinician-scientists, all of us have a kind of fixation with what we do, right? There's just that spark of wanting to know *why* and wanting to understand the mechanisms behind symptoms or diseases that we see, or even health. That, I think, is the best advice—just follow that, even if sometimes it seems a little compulsive in a way or obsessive in a way, or different from the expectations others have of you. I would just encourage you to follow it and seek out mentorship, always keep an open mind, and listen to the generation above you and the generation coming up. There are different ways of seeing things, and we're not always ready for them. It might take a little work, but be open to that work. That's more in the career realm.

So yeah, I think following that light, that passion, and seeking different opinions, mentorship, and sponsorship. It's not too original, but I think that's the most important thing. And not being afraid to speak up and have difficult conversations. It's easy to have fun and stimulating conversations in which everyone's agreeing, but it's less easy to be willing to trust the person in front of you to have conversations that are maybe not 100% comfortable. I think our community is a place where we can do that. There's the safety of being able to have all the different conversations we need to have.

You and I have known each other for 15 years. We come from very different backgrounds, but we have the same passion and the same trust. It's been an incredible honor to follow your career for 15 years since you were a med student at UCSF.

**Jessica de Leon:** Yeah, yeah. And it's a big reason why I've stayed. I think this mentorship and the ability to work with people who are really amazing at what they do and who care a lot about the people around them is a big reason why I decided to stay.

**Marilu Gorno-Tempini:** I'm very glad you did, for all of us.

**Jessica de Leon:** Yeah. Well, thank you. This has been an absolute joy. It's always a treat to hear from you, Dr. Gorno-Tempini. Thank you for sharing your wisdom, your knowledge, and just a little more about your life today.

**Marilu Gorno-Tempini:** Thank you.

**Jessica de Leon:** Thank you.