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A Sailor's Life for Me: One Doctor's Quest to Live & Practice from a 40-Foot Sailboat

Narrator:

You're Listening to *Spotlight On Locum Tenens* on ReachMD in partnership with Locumstory-dot-com.

Mr. Rush:

Have you ever dreamed of selling everything you have and starting a brand new life? One physician I know did exactly that. I'm Tim Rush and joining me today is Dr. Robin Mangione. Dr. Robin Mangione had a beautiful home in Arkansas, a 3-car garage full of fancy cars, but she and her husband decided to trade it all in for a 40-foot sailboat and a life at sea. She says the decision has given her a life she only dreamed could be possible. And the best part is that she found a way to practice medicine too. As a locum tenens with Weatherby Healthcare, she takes urgent care assignments wherever the seas take her. Today we're discussing following your passions while keeping your day job too.

Dr. Mangione, welcome to the show.

Dr. Mangione:

Thanks, Tim, glad to be here.

Mr. Rush:

We all dream of buying that boat and sailing off into the sunset, but you actually did it. Tell me what inspired you to sell your home and move on to a sailboat.

Dr. Mangione:

It actually all started with a book. My husband read the book *Maiden Voyage*, which was one young woman's chronicles about sailing around the world on a sailboat after having graduated from high school. He bugged me—we had to get a boat. Next thing I know, we have a 22-foot sailboat out on our local lake. He's at the helm. I've got the *How to Sail* picture book open on my lap going, "Oh, it looks like this. We should do that." All of a sudden the wind catches the sail, we're making the boat go, and it was just an exhilarating experience, and I think that's where we both caught the sailing bug. We managed to graduate to a bigger boat and an even bigger boat, and then one day we promised ourselves that we would end up living on our boat. That was going to be our dream. I was looking for a transition in my career, gotten a little tired of my work in the emergency room. We realized our son had successfully launched himself from the house, and we looked at each other and decided this is the time, so we put the house for sale, downsized and moved aboard a 40-foot sailboat and moved it to the salt water and started our dream.

Mr. Rush:

That is fantastic. So, is it really as good as you imagined?

Dr. Mangione:

Some days it's even better. Some days it's a trial, but some days it's even better. Those days where we'd still get so excited every time we see dolphins when we're out sailing, and if you catch those moments when the dolphins are riding the waves that the bow of the boat is making in the water, it's a wonderful experience. We've caught manatees drinking fresh water dripping off of the boat after a shower, and they're just funny-looking and funny-acting, but still a wonderful experience getting to see that. We've had great sunrises, great sunsets, and there's nothing that's any more exhilarating than to have the wind just puff out the sails and push you through the water, and both of us really enjoy that a lot. We've been able to meet new people and travel to the coast, all along the coastal United States, within mainly east coast. It's been an adventure, and we're really enjoying it.

Mr. Rush:

That's fantastic. So, do you stay pretty much within the intercoastal waterway, or have you been in the Keys or the Caribbean? Where is your...

Dr. Mangione:

We started our journey in Mobile, Alabama, and have traveled around the coast down to the Keys. We managed to spend a winter in the Keys and then traveled up the east coast to the Chesapeake Bay. We spent a summer hanging out between Baltimore and Annapolis and now have done several trips up and down the east coast. Offshore is on our game plan. We're hoping to make a trip over to the Bahamas and have talked with some friends about doing a trip down to Cuba. We just haven't got those plans nailed down yet.

Mr. Rush:

Okay, so I will be married 22 years this Saturday and love my wife dearly, but I can't imagine living on a boat with her. I think she would be kicking me off and throwing me into the water sometimes—and again, love her beyond anything I could ever imagine. How does traveling with your husband on a 40-foot boat affect your relationship to him?

Dr. Mangione:

It comes with its own challenges. Being on a 40-foot sailboat, you have about 40 feet of distance that you can put between you and your beloved spouse, and there are days we need all 40 feet, but being on the sailboat has kind of forced us to hone our abilities at communicating, and that's kept things going well, both on the boat and in our relationship. And if anything, I'd say we're closer than ever. My husband and I have always been the best of friends. We share a lot of the same passions and desires, and so traveling was something that we really wanted to do, and this has afforded us a way to travel, meet new people and have new experiences that are shared.

Mr. Rush:

That is fantastic. I know how important listening is. It's a lesson 22 years later I continue to do, and so I think sometimes that confinement would actually be to the advantage, so thanks for sharing that with us. You know, as a physician, the most interesting part of your story is that you haven't retired. How do you make that work?

Dr. Mangione:

Initially, when Michael and I moved aboard the sailboat, I had promised him, let's do this for a year, and if either one of us doesn't like it or has any kind of problems with this, we'll renegotiate. We had saved up some money to pay for that year off of working, and to be perfectly honest with you, I was nervous about stepping away from my career even though I was at a point where I was a little bit tired of the specifics of the job that I was doing. I was doing more shift work. We were traveling down the west coast of Florida when my cell phone rang, and it was a consultant from Weatherby Healthcare asking if I would be interested in doing locums urgent care. She started explaining the job, what it required. She started explaining the flexibility that this would offer me, and I suddenly was seeing a path to us being on the sailboat and me continuing to practice medicine. I really think that over time my consultant with Weatherby Healthcare, Dustin Fidel—I think Dustin has been as enthusiastically supportive of Michael's and my dream to live on the sailboat as we are. He's worked tirelessly to help find me assignments that were convenient for me working from the boat as well as keeping me on the boat with Michael. Working locums has been the thing that has fueled us being on the boat. We're starting our fourth year of living on the sailboat and working.

Mr. Rush:

Wow, so this is not in the experiment stage. This is something that has been worked out and the whole situation has matured. That's fantastic. You're listening to ReachMD, and I'm your host, Tim Rush. And today I'm speaking with Dr. Mangione, an urgent care physician with Weatherby Healthcare. We're talking about her decision to sell her house and live on a 40-foot sailboat while still practicing medicine.

Being able to follow your passions and still earn a living—gosh, I mean, that almost seems too good to be true. What are some of the challenges of living on the boat while working full-time assignments? How do you juggle it all?

Dr. Mangione:

The separations that I sometimes will have from Michael, my husband, are probably my biggest stumbling block and some of my biggest challenges, but working locums I have had the flexibility to pick how long I'm away from the boat, and having that flexibility I think has helped. I can take a short period of time or a longer period of time. A lot of times Michael gets to travel with me. And one of the things on the flipside of that is that being gone and knowing that I'm going and going to work allows me to focus on just work, so that kind of is a double-edged sword. Weather sometimes actually is a problem. We got caught up in the Hurricane Matthew this last season, and so we have to be very aware of weather and where our boat is at any time. And working with Dustin, he has been very cognizant of that also and has helped me to arrange my work schedule so that it's least affected by the weather, so that's been one of our challenges.

Mr. Rush:

I was in Disney for a National Nursing Conference during Hurricane Matthew. I can't imagine what that would have been like being on a boat. Practicing medicine, how has this affected your interaction with patients, the way that you are able to practice and pursue? Tell us how it's changed your approach.

Dr. Mangione:

I think that by having the ability to maximize my down time, I come in to work and I'm more relaxed, I'm more open, I feel like I've learned some new lessons even at this point in my life about communicating more effectively with others because I have to communicate more effectively with my husband, and I think that helps me be better at what I do. And certainly, it allows me to bring more focus and enthusiasm into work when I'm at work by having better down time and to be able to have some control over when I'm working and when I'm not at work.

Mr. Rush:

You're still young, a ways from retirement, but I'm sure you still think about it. How do you balance paying for the dream and preparing for the future?

Dr. Mangione:

Living on the sailboat has forced us to simplify things. You can't get real complicated when you're living on a 40-foot sailboat, so you learn real quickly what your priorities are, what's important to you, and having the opportunity to continue to work while we're living on the sailboat has been—honestly, it's been a Godsend. We're able to fund our travels. We're able to pick and choose where we go. And truthfully, I'm saving more now for my retirement than I was when we were land-based.

Mr. Rush:

Wow, that's fantastic. Well, with that, I want to thank our guest, Dr. Robin Mangione, for joining me today to talk about balancing work and following your dreams. Dr. Mangione, it was great having you on the program today.

Dr. Mangione:

Thank you. I've enjoyed visiting with you.

Mr. Rush:

I'm Tim Rush. To access this episode and others, visit ReachMD.com and become part of the knowledge. Thanks for listening.

Narrator:

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