

Interviewer: We are ready to go. You were going to tell me about Wisdom Searches, your wonderful book. Tell me.

Nancy: First of all, it came about because I was asked to create a poster for a fundraiser for Re-Imagining, for the first year anniversary. And I gather, I'm a gatherer and responder in my art forms and I had this leaf in my studio that which is very interesting, it was all curled up. And I thought oh that's a good form to work with and I started the first painting and nine came out of it, the nine in the book and it came one after the other, just bang bang bang bang, in the middle of the night, or at three in the afternoon or whatever and then it was all done.

Interviewer: Wow. I'm so glad you told that. That is wonderful, so it came out of--

Nancy: Tell them, this team that I worked for that publishes things, and they wrote that for something for, I don't remember what, and I said well I have these nine paintings and I sent them to them and then I told them I was interested in producing them as meditation cards. Would they have the ability to produce that and they wrote back and commissioned the book.

Interviewer: Oh. And then you wrote those wonderful poems to go with the images.

Nancy: I did and Harriett, my partner, wrote the text.

Interviewer: Yes, well I love how that was and I know you always talk about how important relationships are and that was certainly true with that whole enterprise it seemed like.

Nancy: Yes, and the material actually came from Elizabeth Johnson. But I was reading her section, Holy Wisdom. I'd read it and meditate on it and then I'd go paint.

Interviewer: Hm, well it obviously was a great inspiration. And it did start with Re-Imagining asking you to

Nancy: Yes. make a poster for--

Nancy: Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah. Well, that was a wonderful product. Actually, if we could just back up--

Nancy: (laughs) And I don't know if any of those posters are still around or not. My daughter use to have one but it wasn't printed with an archival ink.

Interviewer: Oh...

Nancy: And it does fade over time.

Interviewer: Okay, you know I will ask about that at the next Re-Imagining meeting 'cause I would love to know if they are still around. I know your paintings from The Gathering are at United Theological Seminary

Nancy: Yes.

Interviewer: But I can find out about the posters.

Nancy: Uh huh.

Interviewer: Wonderful. You know, you know could we just back up for a minute. I'm glad you told that story, that was wonderful. Could you, I just need some background information, could you say your full name?

Nancy: Nancy Chinn.

Interviewer: Great.

- And are you lay or clergy?

Nancy: Lay.

Interviewer: And what is your denominational affiliation, if any?

Nancy: At the time of Re-Imagining, I was Episcopalian. I had come from a Presbyterian background and many years later, probably 10 years ago, I joined the Catholic church, I went through catechetics, and became Catholic. So I could call myself Catholic but I do worship in this community in a Episcopal church.

Interviewer: Oh okay, wonderful.

Nancy: So I would call myself Roman Episcopal. (both laugh)

Interviewer: You're very ecumenical. (laughs)

Nancy: Well sort of yeah.

Interviewer: When and where were you born Nancy?

Nancy: Minneapolis, Minnesota. 1940.

Interviewer: Okay, and where did you go to school?

Nancy: I went to Louis and Clark in Portland for my BA About, hm, let's see, 52, maybe 20 years later. I went to San Francisco State and got a Masters in Art Ed and that's when I began exploring the relationship between art and spirituality. And I did it specifically because of an anthropology class which was called visual anthropology. And I was fascinated with what artists did in non-Christian communities to create the culture. And I went back to my own local, very boring visually boring church and, which grouching about about something and they said well we haven't got a clue what you're talking about. Would you like to show us? And that began my whole career of art worship.

Interviewer: Wow, that's amazing. It all started with an anthropology course.

Nancy: Uh huh.

Interviewer: What work were you doing at the time of Re-Imagining?

Nancy: What work? I was an artist. I've always been an artist.

Interviewer: Yes.

Nancy: I was bringing money by creating art for religious events, churches, and I taught as an adjunct at PSR in the field of the arts and I always taught some aspect of art and religion

Interviewer: And I know you, oh so -- go ahead.

Nancy: And what else? I ran around the country teaching things. (Interviewer laughs) The same thing I taught at seminary, just how do you create art for worship?

Interviewer: Yes, yeah. In your presentation at the '93 Gathering you talked about some examples of your work and I see it on your website, too. For example, at Grace Cathedral.

Nancy: Yeah, that's a pretty old website, but yes, you can see some things there. And there is a very good book. You probably can find it at United, called Spaces For Spirit.

Interviewer: Yes.

Nancy: And you'll get a lot more of my writing in that.

Interviewer: Good, wonderful, thank you. So, when and how did you first become aware of feminist theology?

Nancy: That one's a very interesting question. I have to start by saying I first became aware of feminist thinking with a magazine put out by the Methodist church. And it's no longer-- the last two issues, the first one was on feminist thinking, and the second, last, one was one gay lesbian thinking. And then the Methodist church shut it down.

Interviewer: Do you remember what it was called?

Nancy: And that was 1978.

Interviewer: Okay.

Nancy: No, I sure do not, must have been '72.

Interviewer: Okay.

Nancy: You know, I don't really remember exactly when that was. And then I just kept paying attention. Well, what does this mean? Feminist thinking. And I started hearing the language of normal church. It must have been '62. Because-- or '64, or something, I don't-- because the next piece that I had was, my former husband was a Presbyterian minister, at that point a youth pastor, in Riverside, California, and a group of St. Louis Jesuits had set up a residence and some sort of chapel. They had a little monastery. And we used to go over after worship and worship with them. And it was that lovely energy of static and tune, and everything is decked, everything was so fresh. And then we would have lunch together and talk. And I'm sure that's when the seeds were planted for me, and I remember, interestingly, just desiring so much to make things like alter clothes, and you know the visual stuff of worship. But at that point I was pregnant with number two, we were about to move to a new parish, and I just buried in kids.

Interviewer: Oh, interesting.

Nancy: That emerged powerfully when it did come. So the first thing I noticed, that I noticed, was that the visual things that I put in the church, really were a, what's the right word, they're very demanding. And they break them. They weren't banners that were much closer to propaganda, they were, they were interrupters.

Interviewer: Say some more what you mean by that, that's interesting, why interrupters?

Nancy: Well because they were very mysterious. And they were very large. And you couldn't not look at them. And if they were, if the service was not, if the ritual was not strong enough, they overwhelmed things. And if the ritual was well done, they became, it was so integrated, and it became like an opera that we were in the middle of. And that was a very mysterious process. And then I was also very conscious, that I was doing everything out of temporary materials, that they were gonna disappear. I was not creating art that was what I was being taught in school was art, i.e. a commodity that can be invested in, purchased, and so forth, and a personality that goes with that. I was creating something, and after the first piece went up, I began getting all kinds of volunteers to help me make it. So I began doing things in community. And that

was an interrupter.

Interviewer: And I think I can imagine this, but how would you relate it to feminist theology?

Nancy: Because it wasn't about-- whew, that's such a big question. How would I relate it to feminist thinking? Because it's about the community's response.

Interviewer: Yes.

Nancy: Because the focus of it is not in authority but in response. Because it was open-ended, there was no specific meaning to it. So it begged multiple points of view. It's something people responded to emotionally, as well as intellectually. It's just so open-ended.

Interviewer: That's great, that is really good. What was your, could you say more about your relationship to the Re-Imagining community? How that developed for the '93 conference?

Nancy: Yes, it's kind of a funny story. As I said, I taught a lot about stuff and made a lot of art for churches, that's how I earned my living. I was very busy. And got this letter from Sally Hill asking me if I would do something for Re-Imagining. I didn't know who she was, I didn't know who Re-Imagining was. But in the middle of the letter the computer somehow switched, and they were talking to Sweet Honey in the Rock, a vocal group, that they were also asking to do something. So I wrote back and I said well, did you want me to do the set design for you, the space? Or do you want me to teach? And they said, well, they wrote back and asked what would I teach? And at that point I was doing a second master's degree, an MFA, which is a terminal degree in arts, you can't get a PHD in art. And the critique process was so painful for me. I just hated it. Because you had to bring in new work every week and no matter what it was, it was torn apart. Not a constructive process. And I kept thinking, this is not the way I want to teach, not the way I learn. And at the same time I had a group that emerged--this is a longer story.

Interviewer: This is great, I love it, go ahead. (laughs)

Nancy: I had a group that emerged out of the last full time class I taught, from there on I taught it only in 10 sive 'cause I didn't have time to be present for every week in a class. So I had a group from that last class that wanted to keep going, and that class was called Making Art From Your Face.

Interviewer: It was called Making Art, I'm sorry, making art what was that?

Nancy: From your face.

Interviewer: From your face, okay.

Nancy: They were topics like birth and belonging, death and leaving, and I don't remember the topics. And they said but we don't want to make your topics, we want to make our topics. (both laugh) So I said, okay if I

can not teach you, but be a part of it with you. So I ritualized the opening and the closing, and I, we made art together once a week, in silence, we had an opening ritual where we welcomed in what we wanted to welcome in, and then banned what we wanted to ban, and then we worked together in silence for about two hours, everybody doing their own work. And then I got the idea if we witnessed each other, I think witnessing what we people do is very powerful. So we had five minutes where everybody could just but what they had done up and nobody could crosstalk about it, you couldn't say well this is what this means. And I tried to get rid of all the things in critique that I found distracted. And if the person wished, they could talk about it, or if they wanted to stand and look for five minutes, we would do that. And there were eight of us, so. It was very powerful and what I learned was that people learn by doing. They don't learn by teaching. And by the end of that semester, we did a little art show of our work, and it was breathtaking. I was so amazed. During that time I also did my own work with that same process. And worked hard at finding-- finding the truth in my body. And trying to draw it or present it in some way, visually.

Interviewer: Could you say a little bit about more what-- that's so interesting, about finding the truth in your body, what did that mean?

Nancy: How do I put that in words? I still have those drawings. And I have one where I tried to draw what it feels like to be inside my throat. I have drawings that talked about some of the issues I was going on at-- doing at the time and how I felt about it. So it's the feelings that you work with, that you comfort-ize.

Interviewer: Yeah, fascinating. That is great. So when you--

Nancy: And that's what I was trying to do with Re-Imagine, with those type, with that presentation, with getting people to draw.

Nancy: And is that enough?

Interviewer: That's wonderful. That is really helpful. And you had, it was so interesting, I believe, I'm not sure her name correctly, Wyn Rea? And you --

Nancy: Rea.

Interviewer: Rea? Okay.

Nancy: R-E-A

Interviewer: R-E-A, yes.

Nancy: Now Wyn is the young women I met somewhere, I don't remember where, and she was very interested in the work that I was doing. And when it got time to do this, I think they had asked me if I had asked me if I'd be comfortable painting as an example. I said of course, and then I thought, that's too simple I need to do it, something up,

- [Nancy To Someone Else] Okay. Wyn Rea.

Nancy: It's at this bumped up against somebody, 'cause that's what I'm asking people at their table to do, not work on your own work but work as a community, so I had no idea what her imagery was like, I had no idea. I just knew that she had the chutzpah to do it, so she came and the first thing she said to me when we got up on the stage was "I've never painted with acrylic, how do you do that?"

Interviewer: Wow. Really? (both laugh) Oh my goodness.

Nancy: So that was a big of a surprise.

Interviewer: Yes! (both laugh) And how did it go, Nancy?

Nancy: How did it go? How did what go?

Interviewer: Oh, sure, so she figured out the acrylics, you would able to figure it out?

Nancy: I just taught her as we went, ya know.

Interviewer: Oh my goodness.

Nancy: But this is me, you fix it with your work. We didn't have a mic on it, so we could just keep going. And then we kept trading over each other's work. So she didn't paint a panel and I painted a panel, we'd move, we'd take turns between. And nobody owned anything.

Interviewer: Do you remember what that felt like, doing that?

Nancy: Fun!

Interviewer: Yeah?

Nancy: Art work is fun.

Interviewer: Had you ever done exactly that before?

Nancy: Not with another person, mm mm.

Interviewer: And what was it like being there in this gathering of you know, 2000 people while you're doing it?

Nancy: I was just conscious that we were all working together. And that what Wyn and I were doing was

hopefully giving people courage to keep going.

Interviewer: Could you say a little bit more about what you told people to do at the tables, if you remember? I've seen some of the instructions but I'd love to hear what you remember and what you were envisioning. I have to tell you, many people have commented on how powerful that was for them.

Nancy: Oh! That's great. I don't--I'm glad it was. My hope was that they would be a groups of 10, this had been started by the committee before I entered, that that group of 10s, that my job would be to help them be attentive to the topic, but comfort-ize it in some form. So it was like I was doing with my own drawing. Because I think that's a very useful way to process information. My hope was also that the drawing together, I think my intention, and I think what happened was they drew the first night and then I asked them to cut out the parts they wanted to save, and throw the rest away. And then they had a new fresh paper and they could place that new drawing on with glue, or tape, or something, I think it was glue, and then just keep going, keep drawing it. Because of the medium, which was oil pastel, you can go over the tops of things. You can layer it, it's better when you layer it. And my hope was by the end of the fourth day, there would be a rich surface that would become the alter cloth for the final ritual. The sending forth of milk and honey, with milk and honey. The meal of milk and honey. My desire was to interrupt the usual process of note taking and have people immediately begin to get out of that dualistic thinking of mind and body and put the two together that they would be able to just learn in a different way.

Interviewer: Well talking to people, all of that happened, yes. (both laugh)

Nancy: For some. There were some tables that wouldn't do it.

Interviewer: Oh really? Is that right? Huh. Interesting. What'd you feel about that? What'd you think about that?

Nancy: And then--it's their choice.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah.

Nancy: Sorry they wouldn't try but you know, the invitation was certainly there, the materials were there, it was very alluring. If they walked around and saw anybody else's work I'm sure they would have been encouraged but I don't know why they froze like that.

Interviewer: Yeah, mhm, but other people also wrote about how powerful that was, and people who didn't feel particularly artistic, although you said in your presentation we're all artists, and then just connecting up with each other. I know at least one person actually brought it home with them.

Nancy: Yes, several people have written to me over the years to say they still have it, or they have a portion of it. Some groups divided theirs all up and everybody took a piece. It was important to people. To most people.

Interviewer: Yes, absolutely.

Nancy: And then they bought the painting for United. People just offered us some money and I gave it all to Wyn because I had been paid to be there. I thought that was a feminist act too.

Interviewer: Yes, absolutely.

Nancy: (laughs) She said "I'm just a volunteer."

Interviewer: (laughs) Yes. Do you have any memories about your presentation that you gave? Or anything particular about that?

Nancy: You mean the large group?

Interviewer: Yeah, you talked about the symbol system and the new way of being an artist and of art churches in art and new images of old religious ideas, those were some of the things I know you talked about.

Nancy: No, I have no memory of that.

Interviewer: That's fine.

Nancy: It's all mushed together, it was the same old speech I always did.

Interviewer: Is that right? (both laugh)

Nancy: Or it was a variation of.

Interviewer: Well it's important what you remember, and it sounds like doing art was.

Nancy: The other piece that I don't know that you know about is that I had in the meantime done my MFA on 10 stories from the bible that were comfort-izing the abuse of women.

Interviewer: I read something about that but could you please tell me more about this? I really wanna hear about this.

Nancy: Well I surrounded the alter, I mean the baptismal fount at Grace Cathedral with these pieces. And then a friend gave me the money to get lights that came down from the ceiling through gobos that put the words around the work, so that was part of it too, on the stone floor. And when the light came in through the east, in the morning, all you could see was the colored light on the floor, and then as the sun rose each hour it became more shadowed and the lights just rose up out of that light. And they were words like: murdered,

framed, betrayed. The stories themselves had the content. And I chose 10 because 10 is a minyan, in Jewish thinking, there have to be 10 for it to be, a community of 10 to make it-- make it okay to be together. And so Phyllis Trible's book *Texts of Terror* was a part of my research I was good friends with a Jewish family of rabbis, a man and a wife, I spent a long time talking with them about the midrashic stories. I just did the research and then I made the pieces. Five were sculptures and five were paintings.

Interviewer: Do you remember who they were? Or something.

Nancy: Sure.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Nancy: And then they traveled with me to the first Re-Imagining and they were set up in the chapel a round room upstairs someplace where they were visited by a number of people. They also showed first at the Episcopal cathedral in Minneapolis.

Interviewer: Do you remember which biblical women you chose for this?

Nancy: Yes, I chose Lot's wife, Zina,

Interviewer: I missed that word, I'm sorry? Zina, Zina in English.

Interviewer: Oh yes, of course, yes.

Nancy: The syrophoenician woman, the daughter of Zepta, the woman bent over double, the women Jesus heals on the sabbath, who am I leaving out?

Interviewer: The Levites concubine, perhaps?

Nancy: No, I did not do her.

Interviewer: Oh, okay.

Nancy: Oh, Rizpah. Rizpah was one of Saul's concubines, and David had all of her children killed when he ascended to the throne. So there would be no heir. No heir that could challenge him. And then I chose, I made a triptic. I was very involved with goddess studies and I wanted to find out what was the parallel in our Judea-Christian heritage of that trinity of feminine power. So I identified that I would do Eve as a virgin, Mary as a mother, and Lois as the crone.

Interviewer: Oh, interesting.

Nancy: And so I did a triptic of them but for the 10.

Interviewer: I'm curious, what was this process like for you?

Nancy: This process?

Interviewer: Of making those figures, yeah.

Nancy: Oh, well it pulled all of my passions and of all of my mind, and all of my skills, and all of my research and my inquiry, and my-- everything I had together. And Grace was so kind to me, to let me have that space. I felt like I was-- I mean I had done a lot of work for them, so they knew who I was, I wasn't a stranger. But I felt like I had been not only accepted by my graduate school process but also by the religious community, to do that work. And that was completed in 1990 or 91 I can't remember which.

Interviewer: You just mentioned -- oh go ahead.

Nancy: I didn't expect to talk about that.

Interviewer: Oh, well I'm glad you did! That was very powerful. And there is a mention of that in Re-Imagining and it's good to hear about what that was. That was huge. And you mentioned something goddess, becoming interested in the goddess, would you mind saying a little bit about how that developed?

Nancy: Well I was living in Berkeley at the time. (both laugh) I guess that's the bottom line right there. (both laugh) And there were just a number of very interesting, mostly women, that I think in the center of New College, certainly some of it in the GPU, and then I belonged to a group of women who were just involved in rituals and trying to identify the goddess, trying to reinterpret the old strictly Christian festivals, what would that look like if they were goddess festivals? What would they look like if they were discussed through a different lens? So it's pretty great work.

Interviewer: Yes! And you were doing artistic representations of these?

Nancy: No, we were ritualizing.

Interviewer: Ritualizing, okay, got it, got it. Interesting. I was wondering, in reading to get back to Re-Imagining, and was the '93 conference the only one that you were involved in?

Nancy: As an official, yes.

Interviewer: Okay, did you attend--

Nancy: I went to--

Interviewer: Oh.

Nancy: I attended, oh, maybe five of them?

Interviewer: Oh you did, okay.

Nancy: But just as a participant.

Interviewer: Yeah. And what was it like being a participant at the other ones, Nancy?

Nancy: I loved being there. It was my community at the time. You know, my tribe. My son is very connected to Burning Man.

Interviewer: Oh, yes.

Nancy: And he speaks about it as his tribe.

Interviewer: Yes, yeah. I remember you wrote about feeling like you came home. Like that you weren't alone.

Nancy: Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah. I know you experienced backlash after the conference, you wrote about that some in your essay, in Remembering and Re-Imagining, and I wonder if you could talk about how that happened and how that affected you.

Nancy: I've lost your question.

Interviewer: Oh, I'm sorry. The backlash--

Nancy: What is the topic?

Interviewer: Oh, I'm sorry, the backlash--

Nancy: Oh, the backlash.

Interviewer: Yes.

Nancy: I was very saddened by it. It felt like-- Mary-Ann Lundy, she lost her job. And I grieved for her. And I grieved for the narrowness of people's points of view. The Layman, you know about this? The Layman magazine, do you know about that?

Interviewer: I do, yes.

Nancy: Well, when they asked permission to use the painting I didn't understand they were going to edit it down. So it became something such a different story than I thought I was making. I felt so misquoted by them. It was a violation. I felt violated by them. And in the end, instead of discouraging me, it was kind of like Trump, the more negative stuff that gets thrown at him, the stronger he gets. (both laugh)

Interviewer: That may be the only similarity you have to Trump but okay! (both laugh)

Interviewer: So you did get stronger from that?

Nancy: I did, in the end, yes. Because what had happened for me was so powerful, you can't just shame that away.

Interviewer: Yeah, and how do you account for it? What do you think was the reason for that reaction?

Nancy: The backlash?

Interviewer: The backlash, yes.

Nancy: Oh, because power was being challenged. Because a new kind of authority had arisen and the powers that be were very threatened by it. And there was so much joy. And so much enthusiasm. I've been thinking this morning about the early church, and how they met together. And how they didn't know where they going, and they didn't know what they were about, but they couldn't not be together.

Interviewer: That's a wonderful analogy. I didn't mean to interrupt you, it's so hard on the phone because I can't see the, you know, the nonverbal cues.

Nancy: Right, right. Right.

Interviewer: So how would you--

Nancy: I think that's partly what was going on. And you know, it's, I think the paradigm is still there. If you look, why are people so attached to some of the more conservative politics of the day? I think it's because they're still reacting. We're in the middle of a cultural earthquake. That's the shift, the earthquake, things have really, really, really, really changed.

Interviewer: How would you describe the change?

Nancy: I loved the comments of the tennis girl, and the person in charge of the tennis tournament dissented yesterday I think on the news. He talked about how women should get down on their knees and thank the men who make tennis so great. (both laugh)

Interviewer: Yes, yes.

Nancy: I thought how weird that man sounds, but that is where we were. That kind of thinking, that men were in charge. And women's job was to support the men. That's so the way I grew up, and that's so the way the world was for so many centuries.

Interviewer: Absolutely. So Nancy how--

Nancy: And it's not that way anymore, now it's more, what can we do together? And have you thought about this? This is how it seems from my point of view. And it's not the same as you're seeing it.

Interviewer: Yeah, but I think that makes a lot of sense.

Nancy: Sure it does.

Interviewer: Absolutely, yes. So I think you might be getting towards this but how would you define Re-Imagining?

Nancy: Do you mean how would I define that word or the movement?

Interviewer: I guess the movement, I would say.

Nancy: I think it's a collective of people who want to think about matters of spiritual consequence through the lens of feminist critique. And they want to, and this is something we haven't talked about, and I really wanted to get to it. They want to do it in a formal academic way, as in a formal, spiritual way. So it's not just a head thing, it's a heart thing too. Can I go to a different topic? 'Cause I don't want it to get lost.

Interviewer: Absolutely, please do.

Nancy: Well, after I wrote to Sally Hill and got involved in it, they put me on the ritual committee. And Sue Seid-Martin, who is no longer with us, who taught at St. Thomas by the way, was such a clear thinker about ritual. But because I'd been doing all this work in the community in where I live, I understood something about the foundation of ritual, in a way that she needed me. Needed my voice to help her fullness come forth. And we had wonderful conversations about why we do the things we do and how we do them, and how do we take this concept of the first meeting, how do we do a gathering so we can climax it with a ritual that helps people embody that, helps people get out of their heads, but not leave their heads behind but bring it into their bodies, be more present. So we had this wonderful ritual designed to close the last night, and the academics took all the time. And Sally Hill said well, we're gonna cut this out. So there was great sadness on those of us who knew what could have happened. One other thing that happened that was very disturbing to me was, I was the first presenter, and we had to use those tables as a drawing surface, and at the very first they needed to be cleaned off before we'd have the conference. And nobody would do it. So that's why when I got up, I didn't know what to do. So I said, okay everybody, put all the dishes underneath

the table. And put that white piece of paper down. So there were glitches along the way.

Interviewer: You know, I am so glad you talked about Sue-Seid Martin, she was so important, and I would love to hear just a little bit more about your collaboration and what you brought to that conversation.

Nancy: I think she was in a very Catholic-centric concept of ritual. And what I think I brought to it was kind of the folks way of doing it. (both laugh) Because of this collective of women that I'd been practicing with, for about a couple years before I met Sue, I knew how to reinvent things. I knew how to reinterpret in a way that brought her-- and because she got it, because we were both speaking truth, we got it, and we could carry each other through it, through the process. Now at the same time I was also working with Presbyterians for their National Women's Convention. And one of the things I really loved, and which I took notes on to be sure to get to you, that process of making decisions in Re-Imagining was so different than the Presbyterians that I have to comment on it. What Sue taught me, as the way that we worked in our committee, the way that she said it worked within the whole, was that image of a spiral. So we did a great deal of consensus work. And she said, and that's what we do in the big planning group, we do consensus work. That Presbyterian women did everything in committees, that had to be approved. Everything cleared by an authority. And it was a linear process. Let's call it parliamentarian. Parliamentary process. And I think that that, the image of the vertical Presbyterians and the spiral of the Re-Imagining people, is critical to understanding the early beginnings.

Interviewer: Oh I agree, that is really important.

Nancy: The other piece is, you asked how did they begin? I think it began with Sally Hill going to The Decade For Women Conference in Beijing, and coming home saying, we have to do something with theology, in with it. Is that what you've been hearing?

Interviewer: Yeah, it was the Ecumenical Decade in Solidarity with Women that started it off, exactly, yes. This is really helpful, Nancy, and I'm glad, these are all important things that you're talking about. When you look at it, what aspect of Re-Imagining were most significant to you and why, you talked about several things, so I don't want, you know, you may have already said it, but I'd still be curious to see what you might say to that.

Nancy: I felt valued as an artist and so, I felt connected to a community that wasn't my own community, I mean it was my own emotionally but it wasn't my own art community. I felt that the way of thinking, this spiral way of making decisions, was so important, that it was relational and not authority being said to me. And that's I think what troubles me about where I saw it all going, because it became about theology and not about practice, it became more sterile, as that went on.

Interviewer: Really, do you see that in the gatherings as you went to the later gatherings, is that what you saw?

Nancy: Yeah, that was my experience.

Interviewer: Sure, yeah. Did your involvement in Re-Imagining change your perspective on feminist theology or the church at all?

Nancy: Change my perspective... I think I see my own perspective as something that is a continuum and it just keeps going and Re-Imagining didn't bend it, it just made it stronger. I just kept going where I was going anyway.

Interviewer: And even the backlash sounded like it strengthened you.

Nancy: Yes.

Interviewer: And do you think of specific contributions that Re-Imagining made to Christian theology or liturgy?

Nancy: It's too jumbled up with the rest of my life, so integrated, I can't perse it out like that.

Interviewer: Yeah, sure. Fair enough.

Nancy: That and I'm old. (both laugh) So my memories I do, the memory process is different when you get older. It's hard to remember specifics. I know that it was an important time for me. It was important enough with my limited resources to get back there whenever I could.

Interviewer: Yes, well the details may not be there, but certainly your reflections have been very powerful and wise, so, that's definitely there.

Nancy: Oh, thanks.

Interviewer: And what do you think Re-Imagining, and I don't just mean the Re-Imagining community, but what does Re-Imagining mean today? I mean what do you think needs to be re-imagined? Or--

Nancy: Well first of all I think it's been co-opt by our culture, until we have re-imagining baking Re-imagining cars, where you're at something so I think the first thing it has to do is that name needs to be somehow reclaimed or renamed. It's been trivialized by it's cultural advertising.

Interviewer: And what needs to be, even if we don't use that word, but what needs to be, what would you hope would be re-imagined today? In terms of spirituality or--

Nancy: I would hope that we would continue to evolve a cosmic sense of who Christ is. And that that-- I just finished a piece that I'm really excited about, it's a portrait of St. Francis, I'm working in clay now because I can't see very well. And it's a tryp--it's three parts of one monument. And it's tall, you know, it's probably, the tallest is probably 15 inches high. When you look down on it, it's a tau cross, which was his form of

devotion, he didn't like that black cross, he liked the tau one. When you see it's face, why I wanted to do Francis was that he was one of the early theologians who saw God at work in all of creation from the beginning of time. So that Christ is that manifestation of God, visible in nature, for instance. But I chose the prayer of Canticle of the Sun, and each of the three faces on each of the three towers I adorned with different aspects of that prayer and I'm really excited about that. Because I think to re-imagine the Christ needing that salvific aspect of God, the mercy side of God, the side of God that calls us toward wholeness, toward our potential, toward our beauty as a species, and as a part of creation. I think the more we can bring that forth, the more clearly that we can shine that out, I think that's where we need to go into the world.

Interviewer: As your talking I'm thinking I would love to see this sculpture, Nancy, it sounds powerful,

Nancy: Two parts are still in the kiln, so when I get it put together, I'll send you a little photograph of it.

Interviewer: I would so appreciate that. Thank you.

Nancy: But that's what I would re-imagine. I think our world is in, I think it's a beautiful world, but I think that our geopolitical situation is terrifying. And I see at the basis of that so many things that need to be re-imagined. Class, economics, distribution of wealth, sexism, speciesism. (both laugh) I still swat mosquitoes but I stopped eating animals. (both laugh) All the -isms need to be examined so badly.

Interviewer: Absolutely. I have one last specific question for you. We are developing a re-imagining website and a lot of it is about making the different resources available, digitizing things, and I was just wondering if you had thoughts about what we should include or who would benefit from it, or connections we should make.

Nancy: I'm glad to know it's not there, because I've searched since I got your letter, I've searched all over trying to look for it.

Interviewer: Oh sorry.

Nancy: I can't find it anywhere.

Interviewer: It won't be ready until the end of the summer it looks like, we're having a web designer do it. And by the way, I will send you, when it's ready, I will send you a link to it.

Nancy: Great. Now your question was, what should be on it?

Interviewer: Yes.

Nancy: The world. I will love reading and seeing everything. But of course I would love to have a section on Re-Imagining through visual information.

Interviewer: Yes.

Nancy: Like the St. Francis one.

Interviewer: Actually, if you would be willing, you don't need to answer now, but we were thinking of making all kinds of links and resources and if you would be willing to have us link to anything you're doing I think that would add a lot. But you don't have to answer that now, you can think about that.

Nancy: Yeah, it would depend on what's required of me to do.

Interviewer: Sure.

Nancy: And what kind of collection do I need to pull together and how do I do that? I'm not-- I live up in the middle of a forest, and I don't have a lot of technology. Like I couldn't open your communal open office or whatever it was, Microsoft Office.

Interviewer: Well while I'm thinking of it, and once again you don't have to say now, but even a link, you said the website is outdated, but it has a lot of beautiful images and links to your books, would that be-- you can think about whether that would be something you would want to have linked.

Nancy: Yeah, yeah, I'll talk it over with my, like, crew.

Interviewer: That sounds good, that sounds fair enough.

Nancy: May I look at my notes, just before we hang up?

Interviewer: Oh, please, I was gonna say is there anything you'd like to add, 'cause I wanna hear it, you've said wonderful things.

Nancy: I wanna know what happened to Rita Nakashima Brock.

Interviewer: She is at Brite Divinity School, and I will be interviewing her in May.

Nancy: I love her presentations.

Interviewer: Yes. Say some more about that, I'd love to hear--

Nancy: Well, because she told her stories, because she used her stories to talk about theology instead of talking about theology, you know, it was grounded in her life. It's the same old same old I've been trying to talk about, and I found that her, I found her fresh in the middle of a more academic collection of people.

Interviewer: Yes. May I have your permission to tell her that?

Nancy: Of course!

Interviewer: I'd love to, I'm sure she would appreciate hearing that.

Nancy: You know, I'm sorry I haven't been reading new work from her. I read the book about-- it wasn't original blessing but it was about, I can't see it on my bookshelf right now, it was about how the cross has not been the center of Christian art. And I was so happy she'd written that book.

Interviewer: And she actually came after Re-Imagining ended in 2003, she came, there was sort of like a reunion and she came and talked about that book and showed images, it was really interesting.

Nancy: Yeah. You asked at some point where did I start with feminist theology.

Interviewer: Yeah!

Nancy: And I wrote down these notes, that, you know, early on. I talked about the Vatican too. And it was Jesuits who came out of that, I think they were the beginning, but then I remember Beverly Harrison, and coming across her work and it having such an echo in my own life. And Elizabeth Johnson, especially She Who Is. And Texts of Terror. And I have gone through a terrible divorce, and the transition in that was really where I found that the power of men over women was something that had to be identified and fought. I found that in the end, women don't have a lot of credence I guess, cultural credence. And that's also when I became strongly women identified. I now, my partner Harriet has been with me since 1991.

Interviewer: That's wonderful, and she's the one who did the book Wisdom Searches with you?

Nancy: Yeah.

Interviewer: Oh, how wonderful.

Nancy: It's a lovely story. We ended up in Berkeley at the same time, and she came from Australia, and actually was my student. But we didn't do anything romantic until a year later. And then we were in a good relationship for 14 months, and then she went back to Australia, to her life there, and realized that she was being called to be my partner. Which scared the shit out of me. (both laugh) For goodness sakes. So that was going on while Re-Imagining was on also. This huge shift in my life, personally.

Interviewer: I'm so happy for both of you.

Nancy: Thank you. Yeah, we are very happy. We spend our days trying to bring God's love into the world.

Interviewer: Well I can feel it talking to you, Nancy.

Nancy: Oh can you? Thank you.

Interviewer: I sure can, yes. Is there anything else? You've said so many wonderful things. Did you wanna check your notes again? I just wanna make sure I give you a chance to mention everything.

Nancy: Yes, I have one last thing.

Interviewer: Good.

Nancy: I think the challenges for Re-Imagining have to be addressed. And you might be in a place to carry this forth. It's that ritual that we lost. In that first day, and then further down the road, because anything that seizes your heart and your mind is unstoppable. And the mind can't be seized by ideas alone. We have to be comfort-ize it in some way. In our body, in a sacred way. I'm thinking of people who are out on the lines fighting for Black Lives Matter, that they get this. Not the concepts, it's putting your life on the line. We don't need to put our lives on the line, we need to put our hearts on the line. And unless that happens, we're still doing dualistic thinking. So for unified thinking to happen, we need to ritualize the work itself. I taught a class on Sophia, one of my last classes I taught, and I actually made people spend five minutes at the beginning and five minutes at the end in prayer to Sophia, I used the Sophia blessing. And I said you don't have to believe this, you just have to do it. And watch what happens, see what happens to you. Maybe nothing, you may have a window, you may have a point of conversion, I don't know. But unless you do the work of prayer and action together, along with these ideas, they remain sterile. And what we were doing was making a book of ours, of prayers to Holy wisdom, we were using collage and writing poems with it, that was the work, of the class. And they had to read a book about Sophia that I wanted them to read.

Interviewer: This sounds wonderful, and I'm curious, did you get any reactions from people? About what that was like for them?

Nancy: I only had it for five days.

Interviewer: Oh.

Nancy: It was an intensive class. I had it for six hours a day for five days. At the end they had their books made. I have no idea what happened from it.

Interviewer: It sounds like an amazing experience.

Nancy: You just put things out there and where it goes, I don't know.

Interviewer: Right? Teaching's always like that isn't it.

Nancy: It is. The ideas are really cool, I'd be like, what do you think of this?

Interviewer: Right. Exactly.

Nancy: What do you teach?

Interviewer: I teach theology and women's studies, so mostly reformation, that's what I'm hired for, but I also teach a course on women in the Christian tradition.

Nancy: Oh, that's exciting. Listen, I have a wonderful paper cut out, I'll send a copy to you, a photograph of that if I can remember it, it's Mary Magdalene.

Interviewer: Yes?

Nancy: And she's celebrating eucharist, and with her parish.

Interviewer: I would love to see this. I would love that. Well I think I'm gonna end the recording now, if that's okay with you?

Nancy: Sure.

Interviewer: Okay, I'm just turning it off now.