

Sherry: Johanna, we are now recording. Thank you so much for agreeing to be interviewed. It would be helpful to get some background, so if you could just say your full name and perhaps spell it as well. (Johanna chuckles)

Johanna: My full name is Johanna Wilhelmina Hendrika van Wijk-bos, so the shortest version of the formal version is Johanna W.H. van Wijk-bos, and the last names are spelled v-a-n, small letters, capital W, I-J-K dash B-O-S, one S only. (chuckling)

Sherry: Thank you, that's great.

Johanna: It bears just a small comment. I dropped my family name even though in Holland, I'm originally from Holland, it's customary for women to have both their family name and their married name. But the van Wijk of course was so cumbersome that I felt I couldn't really bear to explain it all the time, so I did drop it for a number of years. And then when I wrote my first book that I really had devised, which Reformed and Feminist, that was not an assignment, I dedicated it to my parents who were both deceased at the time, and I wanted to use my family name. And so after that I have for official purposes always used my family name. These days I don't ask people to say it. I just have it on documents and stuff like that because to honor them because they were such supportive people in my career and for my person.

Sherry: Oh, I'm glad you told that. Names really do matter actually as you said in your book Reimagining God, and that just proved it again. Thank you so much.

Johanna: Exactly.

Sherry: Now are you lay or clergy?

Johanna: I'm clergy. I'm ordained to the Presbyterian clergy. So as we now say again teaching elder, and I was ordained in 1977 at the Downtown United Presbyterian Church in Rochester, New York. And my husband was on the staff at the time. That church of course also bears mentioning because it was a church that not so, well let's see, 12 years later maybe called Jamie Sparr to be on the staff, out of which the whole hullabaloo happened in interdenomination in the early '90s. So Jamie was of course the one that kind of became the burning point for that whole controversy, and we were very much in touch with that church. We've loved the church there, and so we were very aware of that. We were, I'm close friends with Jamie. It's a great honor I think because (mumbling) of course was also the Presbytery that overruled the General Assembly for ordination of women to the ordained ministry. So you know this is a great history.

Sherry: It is.

Johanna: And we forget our history so often, so I'm trying to stay aware of that. It's in the Burntover District, and very close actually to the Seneca Falls Conference where Elizabeth Katie Stanton and Susan B. Anthony held force, and I have visited that museum a number of times. So in any case that gives you a little bit of depths to that particular background. I was ordained to teach at the seminary. I never had a position as a minister, parish minister, not for want of trying, but the days were still a little bit I think closed off to women unless they really were hard up. (laughing) So I did a lot of preaching in the Rochester area, and I had contacts with a number of congregations, but then when, my husband's and my decision was that if I got an offer to teach at a place where the position was a tenure track position that he would follow me. So he followed me to Louisville, Kentucky, together with our three-year-old son who had very little choice but to follow us.

Sherry: And when would that have been, Johanna, that you moved to Louisville?

Johanna: In '77, so I was ordained as soon as I got the call. I had been ordained, I'm kind of forgetting what the title of that was. There was something you could do if you, at the time, this has completely disappeared, but you could be all but ordained, which is what I was. It was like an ABD (mumbling). (laughing) I had everything. I had everything in place. I had done all my exams. All I was waiting for was the call, and once the call came the process went just boom boom boom. And there was no restriction on where the call came from. So the call came from Louisville. I was ordained in the Tennessee Valley Presbytery, and then I became a member of what was then the Louisville Presbytery, neighbor to mid-Kentucky Presbytery, and now the mid-Kentucky Presbytery. And I think I was maybe one of four women in the Presbytery in '77, not a lot of us, just very few.

Sherry: Wow, oh that's fascinating. And Johanna, when and where were you born?

Johanna: I was born on the eighth of August, about four, five months into the second World War in Holland or The Netherlands. The Netherlands is really the official name, but it's kind of a mouthful so I often say Holland, except that my husband was born in Holland, Michigan and raised there, so we usually made the distinction between Holland the The Netherlands, but I often will also use Holland. So I was born in a small town, and the first five years of my life were spent during the second World War. I have described that in detail in Reformed and Feminist, which is really a very personal record also about my early years, the way I became a feminist and all of that.

Sherry: Yes, oh wow. And you've already kind of talked about this, but actually where did you go to graduate school or seminary?

Johanna: I went to a preparatory school in Holland. There was a classical school where we had to do classical languages as well as three modern languages, and I also did Hebrew there because I was attracted to go and study theology. So that from that preparatory school which had six grades in it, you went directly to your field of choice. So if I had done medicine, I would have gone directly into medicine. There was no more, it was sort of a college and a high school in one, and so I went into theology. And I had already done two years of Hebrew, so that was sometimes recommended if students were interested in theology, and I

was interested in studying theology from a very young age. Don't ask me why. It was just what I wanted to do. I thought there was a lot of interesting stuff there, and I've not been disappointed. I have to say that. So I went to Langdon University, which is one of (mumbling) mercy state schools. It's an old school, 16th century.

Sherry: Wonderful.

Johanna: And I lived there, and then I went to Scotland for a year to study, and then I met my husband which was fortuitous because his Dutch was not so good, and my English had gotten to be pretty good, so. (laughing)

Sherry: So you met in Scotland.

Johanna: He was a Presbyterian pastor, and he was on his Fulbright, and I met him in Laydon, and we got, we met in '65, and we were married in, that's not possible, we must have met in the fall of '64, but in any case we got married in '66.

Sherry: Ah, that's wonderful. Well, I knew you were teaching at Louisville at the time of Reimagining and after, and I know you've written a whole book about this, but could you give a short description of when and how you became interested in feminist theology?

Johanna: Yeah, I should mention that I did my PhD at Union (mumbling). (laughing) So I was kind of ABD when I left Holland and went back to do one more exam there, and then had to choose whether I would just write a dissertation or whether I would get a degree in the states. And I thought it'd be more, it'd be smarter, it'd be more useful to do it in the States. And so we lived on Long Island, and my husband was a community minister there. And I went in and out of the city for years to get my PhD in Old Testament. I switched from medieval Dutch history into Old Testament. So I was very busy. I mean, we are all busy, and I'm still busy, but at that point I was an immigrant. I'd been cut off from my roots. I was busy I think coping with a pretty deep trauma from that, and I think the move was more traumatic than I wanted to acknowledge at the time. I've gone back into my journals lately and seen how homesick I really was. So I think there was a lot to digest for me, and also a lot to digest in terms of doing my doctorate, and what I really wanted to do with my life because that had until that point not been very clear. So I went to Union in my late 20, well when I was 28 I think I started, so not old, but I was an adult and married. And then a few years later we had our son, so marriage, family, questions of identity, vocation and everything bore down on me, which is my way of saying that I came to feminist theology in my own estimation when I look back somewhat later as a full adult. So feminism and feminist theology were for me approach to the door of liberation theology. There was no liberation theology. There were no courses in it at Louisville Presbyterian Seminary. And one of my students said we have to, don't you think we should have a course in liberation theology? And what I knew about liberation theology you could put in a thimble really. My husband was the one who had read (mumbling) and who had read (mumbling) on liberation theology. And so we talked it over, and my husband was also a great advocate and person that stimulated me in all my endeavors. And he said yeah, that sounds like a great idea, you should do that. And liberation, so in the second year in Louisville, that would have

been in '70, probably the winter of '79 I started that course, liberation theology. And I took it from three perspectives, Latin America, African American, Black theology. James Cohn was really pretty hot at the time. And also feminist theology, so I considered that to be a liberation theology. And that was really for me I would say intellectually the door through which I came to feminist theology was liberation theology. And I still feel the most attracted to feminist theology most broadly conceived in terms of the fact ...

Sherry: Johanna?

Johanna: Short end of the stick and not getting educated, that violence can swim--

Sherry: Johanna, I'm sorry to interrupt. There was a break there, and I missed some of what you said. You said intellectually you came to feminist theology, and then I lost you.

Johanna: Oh, I'm so sorry. Through liberation theology, so I still think I think today there's never really left me that feminist theology has to be very broadly conceived. So it's always about not just the middle class women, not just the white women, but it's about poor women, women across the globe who are today, you know, just not really our situation is not good. And I think that's very important. I try to teach my students that because sometimes in the United States the temptation for young women is to think oh, we've made it. Well, we have not made it at all, even in the States, but we need to look at the whole, in a very broad spectrum. I think like early the writers that I was influenced by were Rosemary Rousser, of course, and she has such a broad conception of the lack of really what women are deprived of, historically and also globally. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza came a little bit later for me. Mary Daley was actually hugely influential on me. I'm not, I was never counted myself completely in accord with her, but when I heard her maybe four times in my life. I mean, actually heard her, and then read most of the early books especially. (mumbling) was very influential. And I always felt that she propelled me a little bit further down the road. I mean, she was the one who was out there being the most radical of us. You know, she never offended me. My husband found her very empowering because he thought it was empowering to listen to a woman who wouldn't let men speak. So she was very influential in a very kind of broad way also, and then so I've always tried to stay up, I've had to stay up with my field, but I'm also compelled to stay up with feminist thinking, not just theology, but also in the secular world. Dale Spender, the Australian author, rates very high. Robin Morgan, you know, all the sort of classical. So I began to, I had to really expand my reading list pretty widely. (mumbling) was of course already, you know, was already way up there, and so all of that I tried to incorporate in my teaching. So that's a little bit I think about how I came to feminist theology. And then, of course, there's the Bible, right? There's the Bible. So in my book of Reformed and Feminist, which was a book I wrote in the early '90s. Yes, I wrote it for a big partner, and I was teaching in France in '89, '90. And (mumbling) John Knox published that. And that's pretty much I think a record. I should say something else here. So what I just described was the intellectual development, but I also was emotionally and I think maybe emotionally is not the right word. My sentiments as a grown up person were ready, I was ready to put all kinds of things together. And what I put together was the experiences that I'd had in the war, which I was very young of course, I was five when it ended, but in Reformed and Feminist I was able to articulate what I think happened in my consciousness, consciousness is maybe the best word, that what I had experienced was a victimization on account of not bad behavior or committing crimes, but simply on who you were. So if you were Dutch in my context, you

were a victim because you were in an occupied country. And then of course, the Jews among us experienced that 10 times more in every country. It wasn't even a matter of national identity. And I think this had a deep influence in my psyche, that I was finally able to understand what oppression really is and what it's really after. That it's really a destroying force because of what I experienced as a young person. And even though I was only five, of course my whole formative years were after war years. And then after war years was when all the news came out about what had actually happened in the second World War to the Jewish people and other groups of people like Gypsies and other people that simply were who they were. And I think it's just, it marked me for life, both in the sense of a kind of trauma, but that's kind of just the personal part of it. I think also in terms of how I see gender oppression, heterosexism, all of those ought to be destroying forces, and they're out to destroy, so none of them are benign. I think they're not all thought out. I don't think, you know, all men sit there wanting to destroy women. That's not what I mean, but I think the ideology is extremely deep seated. (mumbling), whom you probably know, who wrote her story on the creation of patriarchy was a Jewish immigrant actually from Austria, and also had an influence on me. I don't agree particularly on what where she traces patriarchy from, but she has this great definition in the back of the Creation of Patriarchy. She defines a lot of terms that she says that sexism is the ideology of patriarchy, so even where patriarchy has been modified, or as we live, and I think we live in a modified patriarchy in the States with a lot of progress made by women. That the ideology of patriarchy has to be tackled because if it isn't, then things can revert like nothing. And I think we saw that in the States exactly in the debates about reproduction and in the debates about the pill. I mean, I thought what? But then I thought yes because all we've had is access. We've had access, and we've not really changed ideologies. And not that I'm saying that I'm blaming us or anything. I think this is a huge task. It will take a long time before we make progress on ideologies. They're very ingrained I think still in all our contexts, the church, the society, the classroom, the way we teach, you know, everything. Anyway, so that's an earful, but you get a bit of a sense. I have described a lot of that in Reformed and Feminist. If you wanna take a quick look at that, I'm sure they have it in some library there. It's still in print, so it's still, it was surprising to me. Reformed and Feminist, you know, I may not today, if I wrote it today I might say some things a little differently, but it is a book I'm pretty proud of. And I was amazed at how many people hooked into it. I thought this would be so personal because I described the war years, how I became a Calvinist, my whole adoption of the paradigm where the Bible is in the center. And I thought this is gonna sound so alien. And then I found out in the mid '90s that there were college kids that were reading it and liking it, and it was just stunning to me. But I think it sort of managed to be both personal and also universal in the sense that it describes experiences lots of people can have if they wake up to what's going on in the world. Anyway, that's a lot about that, but it has a lot to do. I think Reformed and Feminist was for me the expression of my formative years of actually embracing feminism, articulating it where it came from. I give a lot of credit in the book to the women students who put pressure on the administration to hire woman faculty. I was the only woman on the faculty for a while. And also too United Presbyterian Wwomen. UPW gave me my first platform, and I love speaking. I love presenting, I'm sort of a ham, you know, it's kind of good. Some people in my professional are, some are not. I'm not saying it's bad or good, but it's just the way I am. And so I did a lot of speaking for UPW, and they gave me also a writing assignment. I wrote Weaving the Fabric of Faith, which was the biblical background for the Apostle's Creed. So you know, and then when you do that, they invite you to speak everywhere. So they did that, and then when I really became a feminist, and I felt then in the late, let's say the late '80s, mid to late '80s when I would go out to speak somewhere that I would have to say that. I would introduce myself and say I'm a

Christian feminist. You know we all, that became such a big thing that we locate ourselves, right? And today I would say even more, I'm White, and blah blah blah. So they took some distance from me. I've always regretted that. I felt that that was too bad. It may also just be that when I came through there were very few women, and that they had plenty of women to choose from, but I think there was some real distance taking. And then also I joined so fociferously in the struggle for the ordination of gays and lesbians. And I think that there was a bit of a cost there in terms of, I still got to speak in places, but you know, I think it was a little bit too edgy. I became a little too edgy for them, which is fine. You know, I have no feelings of hardship at all, and I think it's a great organization.

Sherry: Thank you, Johanna. Boy, that is fascinating. It's so helpful, thank you. If we could move to Reimagining, this was an important context for it for sure. You spoke at the '93 gathering, and you talked about Reimagining language, and I'm wonder if you could say a little bit about how you initially got involved. Maybe we could start there.

Johanna: Yeah, they invited me to speak there, so I was one of the afternoon speakers. I still have the booklet with my picture in it and all the songs and everything. I didn't bring it with me because I have to watch out toting too many books, you know, when you go on a long trip like I am. But I have it still, and I remember they invited me I think, you know, conferences like that, people must have told you, but they were years in the planning of course, as they should be. And they invited me early on, and I was so excited about being invited. Now I must have heard something about it, but I accepted, and I had it a year earlier than it was gonna take place. I was gonna turn up a year early. (laughing) Gives you a sense of the eagerness with which I did participate.

Sherry: Wow.

Johanna: I loved being a part of it. Maryann Lundy was a good friend of my husband and me at the time because she worked at the offices, of course. And I don't know whether she was the one who proposed my name, but that's how I got involved. That how I got invited to, somebody sent me a letter asking whether I would be willing to speak, and I jumped at the chance. I can only tell you that.

Sherry: Yes, and what do you remember about that experience at the '93 gathering, Johanna?

Johanna: I thought it was extraordinary. We went with, and invigorating, we went with seven people from Louisville I think. And there were two men, my husband went also, and one male student, and then there were five women, four students and myself. And I'm trying to think of whether we rented a van or something or how we did this because we wanted to always keep the cost down for the students. I thought the whole set up was fabulous. I loved being seated around the round tables. I loved the idea of doing art. I still have the picture that I made on the table up on my office wall.

Sherry: Really?

Johanna: Yeah, I never done any of that. I had never done anything with crayon, and they had these

wonderful oil-based creypas, and ever since then I've used that in my teaching. In my smaller seminars we do, we make pictures, we do the same thing. People draw, not taking time out, but just sitting there while we're talking and drawing and making pictures.

Sherry: And that's because of Reimagining. That's great.

Johanna: Because I think, well of course that became something really well known, drawing of the different intelligences, right?

Sherry: Yes.

Johanna: And so that's what that was. And of course it loosens something in your brain, so I think people do better in discussions when they have something to do with their hands, as long as they know this is not going to be graded. Some are very good at it, some are not too good at it, it doesn't matter, so we do that. I loved all the singing. I'm a singer and love singing, and singing I have probably always done in my classes, but I was more encouraged, so we do a lot of that also. And kind of shocking you out of a rigidity I think of presenting. I liked the way people were in the center, and the platform moved around. I think physical space is so important, and I thought the physical set up was very enlivening and promoted good discussion, and so we had good discussions around that table. There were some presentations of the main presenters that I remember better than others, but that's just my memory. Bernice Reagan Johnson, who sang part of it. It was just absolutely great. And there were some others. There's a young person, well she's not young anymore, Christine. I think she's in Minneapolis, she's in (mumbling), and she did a really good job on the title Phoenician Woman. I remember that.

Sherry: Yeah, Christine Smith probably.

Johanna: Pardon.

Sherry: Christine Smith, I think?

Johanna: Yeah, that may have been. She had been at Princeton, and moved to St. Paul. She was at, yeah, so she was wonderful. There were lots of them. I can't remember a speech, but I really hooked off and said you know, this is lousy. So the speeches were great. The art was great. I liked all that. I like weaving the music in doing, really honestly I mean you'll think I'm just crazy because there wasn't anything that I found negative. I can't remember anything that I really didn't like. And my students loved it.

Sherry: Did they?

Johanna: I know my students became radicalized. I know that (mumbling) of course was very stimulated. And I had a Korean woman student with me, and she, her life just changed I think after that. And then saying at the end (mumbling) I'm singing we're marching in the light of god, which had been one of the songs I've loved, I had loved for a bit. And doing that in such a large group was so great. I thought I'd gone to heaven, I

mean, it was great.

Sherry: Oh, I love it. That's so many great memories, Johanna. You mentioned you took students back to the other gatherings, and I'm just wondering if there are specific moments from those that particularly struck you or were important.

Johanna: It's a little harder I think because I was so involved with Voices of Sophia at the time too, so that probably does stand out a little more in my memory. But the one that I remember the best was when Mary Daley spoke, and there was a bit of an altercation between her and Alice Walker's daughter.

Sherry: Rebecca Walker.

Johanna: It was a kind of gen, were you there?

Sherry: I was there, yes, yep.

Johanna: And there was a sort of generational conflict, and Mary Daley felt that she was spoken about as if she were dead, and she said that actually, don't talk to me as if I am dead. And I thought that was interesting. I mean, was that second, third rate feminism thing going on, and I think it may also, how many of those were there? Were then two of them, or how many of them?

Sherry: There were six more after the '93, a total of seven.

Johanna: Seven, so I probably went to three of those, but that's the one I remember the best because that was pretty lively, I thought.

(laughing) But students were, or the students, they weren't all my students, but there were students there that I knew were somewhat taken aback by Mary Daley. She could have that influence on people. I never had that. I always thought she was a kick in the pants. She was just something else. (laughing) so I talked to her there. I will not recall when she amused me the most because you do not want that on your tape. It was on the opening of the, when she opened, gave the major speech at the Society of (mumbling) Literature Conference in San Francisco. That was something else, and you know, I spoke with her a couple of times. She came to Lexington once for a women writers conference, and students and I went there, and she was just so nice and ordinary. We talked to her, we carried her backpack for her. She was, I thought she was an extraordinary person. I truly do. I'm sure that she was not the easiest person to have in your surroundings, you know, somebody who was so odd, but she always had thoughts that were, she was so much her own person, and would think about things that you had maybe not thought about before. The last time I heard her it was cloning that was on her mind, and she had some very, very I think some words of warning against all of that. She was the one who pointed me in the direction of the military, the phallic expressions of the military. I think she was very good about that, how much of the military is really an expression of what she would call philocracy, you know, that was her word. Yeah, an amazing person. So that's what I remember the best about the (mumbling) communities, but that's not really a good comment on how good they were, how bad they were because I'm, I was more involved I think in trying to be supportive and helpful in the

Voices of Sophia movement in the Presbyterian church, which also directly came out of that, Reimagining.

Sherry: And I wanna get to that. Before we do, could we talk about the backlash and how it affected you personally?

Johanna: Yeah, so the backlash came pretty much hard and fast. I had backlash at my seminary. I received correspondence from, there was one church in Texas that sent me copious letters, I think urged on by maybe their pastor. I was accused of heresy in the letters. They wanted to burn my books. There was total madness actually that went on. I stopped opening them because it became so depressing. They wanted to, they wrote to my president, to the president of the seminary, John Mulder at the time, wanting action against this heretic. And actually he was in public pretty good. He was not so good in private, but he was pretty good in public because he defended my right as academic freedom. He felt as an academic I had the right to speak the way I wanted to, so he was pretty good about it. So where I was fairly safe is that I was a tenured professor. And so that of course was unfortunately not true for Maryann Lundy. We were close to that situation, and you know one of my colleagues was actually quite instrumental in getting her fired, so it was a very difficult time, yeah, in terms of that. I wouldn't say that personally I suffered. I just got mad because, you know, people said these idiotic things. I just couldn't believe them. And I wrote a letter to our president telling him that if the seminary had lost money on my account, then I would be happy to refund whatever they had lost. And so he sent me a note saying that they lost \$130 to his knowledge, and thought yeah, well then I think you're just fine (laughing) with your millions of dollars in endowment. I don't think that I'm gonna refund \$130, so it was funny. My board, the board at the seminary, a couple of members got mad. They listened to my speech, and they didn't like the fact that I had called patriarchy a pissing contest. I think I already told you that, and I thought of all the things to get mad about, what is wrong with you, you got mad about that? But you know, Presbyterians, they like to be nice and ... Yeah, they like to be respectable, and that's not respectable, and so that kind of got up their nose, but that's as far as it went. There was an extensive correspondence. There was also something interesting happening. One of my more conservative colleagues wrote a letter to the layman. You know, the layman also took us all to task. You know all that. I'm sure you have in the archives of that.

Sherry: Yes.

Johanna: And he wrote a letter taking up for me even though he did not agree with me on the content of what I said he felt that I had the right. Again, it was that principal of academic freedom that I had the right to speak the way I wanted to speak. I have to say that the president also said some positive words actually about my speech before he caught on that the board didn't like the words because they got that (mumbling), he took a couple of steps back. But yes, so I think what I experienced was psychological pressure. I got some letters from former students who were disappointed. I got into kind of an extended discussion with one of them whom I had liked and whom I respected. I thought a lot of them, they haven't been there, so they all were talking about what they didn't know about really. (laughing) But they became very mad. He was very angry also. I just sort of in the end just hooked off and thought well, there's not much I can do here. You know, I can't make much progress here. I think, I'll tell you what I've always said what part

of what made people mad was that we had such a good time.

Sherry: Say some more about that.

Johanna: Feminists are not supposed to have a good time. They're not supposed to be laughing together. They're supposed to be dower and have a bad sense of humor and be real battle ax's, and we had just such a good time. And that I think really got up people's nose. I mean psychologically, you know, not in their heads not thinking and so, but I truly think it did. And I think the other thing I think in the questions that you have here you ask how I would account for it?

Sherry: Yeah.

Johanna: I think what had happened, or what still is perhaps the case is that what was pretty commonplace for people up to date on feminist theology, in fact none of us were all that radical in some ways, not like Mary Daley, that this had not filtered through to the pew, and I do feel that the clergy is responsible in terms of educating our people. We are teaching elders, so that needs to be done, and I don't think that happened enough, and so it came as a big surprise. That's one part I think how I account for it. And the other is that really we had not made as much headway ideologically as perhaps some of us thought we had. And so the church is still back there somewhere, and I think unfortunately, whether I don't know, I'm not holding the Reimagining conference responsible, but now I feel that we have taken 10 steps backward in terms of the language for god in the church, and we're losing people. We're now losing people because they no longer can reconcile the either neutral language or totally patriarchal language with their view of god, and we're losing really good people, and in concerns me deeply. I think many of my students are just hanging on by their fingernails. Many don't want to go into ministry because they don't, they see this as an abusive environment or just too tricky to enter into, and it's not a good, I don't think we're in a good place as it, not so much the Presbyterian, you know, I think we're just part of the mainline denominations. And it has sorted itself out a little bit since Presbyterians at least came on board in terms of lesbian and gay ordination, but I think we're sort of trundling behind the culture, you know. The Supreme Court passed it first. Same sex marriage came first there, so I think what are we doing? So we're just sort of keeping up with the culture, and some of the mainline denominations aren't even doing that, and not thinking things through in terms of making progress on our, on the image we have of god. It's depressing.

Sherry: You know, you said you weren't blaming Reimagining. Do you think however that the backlash of Reimagining is in part what caused this regression in terms of inclusive or expansive language in the churches?

Johanna: Maybe. The cause and effect thing is a little hard for me. It could be also that it's this wave, this ebbing and flowing just like at the end of the 19th century and the opening of the 20th century, you know, the vote for the franchise was stalled, right? It was totally stalled until Alice Ball took everything in hand and started to rouse the old guard again. So maybe we're looking for new leadership. I'll be there, I'll be onboard, I'm telling you, (laughing) for a totally, you know, an awakening, new awakening I would say. And I think the new awakening, if it happens, will take a different form. The Reimagining conference was after all

under the auspices of the World Council of Churches. It was a Christian conference. I think that we need to move more in the direction of interfaith relations and movements and thinking with Muslims, Buddhists, Jews, because we may have more in common with one another than we have in common with our own, people in our own faith community.

Sherry: Yeah, yeah.

Johanna: So I'm looking, so I think we need to be looking for something new actually in that direction. I don't know whether you agree, but with the Louisville group we are deliberate about making this an interfaith effort, whatever anniversary we're going to have, because we don't want to make compromises on language. We want to be sort of past that. I don't wanna be mired in that struggle again about language. It's time to move, and we haven't moved. We've moved backward if anything, don't you think?

Sherry: Yeah, oh that's been a common reaction. Yes, I agree. I just wanna clarify something which is really interesting here. In moving the interfaith direction, did you say that that's getting away from the language issue, moving beyond it?

Johanna: I think that would be with people who all have, I meant moving past in the sense that we're all on board, that we cannot live with a totally masculine language, not with a totally masculine product in our heads. It's just not going to move us forward. And there are people in Judaism and people in Islam I think that are completely on board with that. That's where we need to go. We need to move forward together, and just you know, I'm still a Christian, and I'm still part of a faith community you know, but that's not where things are going to happen I think.

Sherry: Yeah yeah.

Johanna: And maybe that's okay. Maybe something new will be born out of all of this. So that's kind of what I was, that's what I meant.

Sherry: So we're not still gonna fight that battle, just move beyond it.

Johanna: Right, in the sense that the battle, that battle is past. I mean, Reimagining God was published in '95. Elizabeth Johnson wrote the phenomenal book *She Who Is*, a phenomenal book in the '90s, that reimagining god also begins with that, also the (mumbling). I mean, this has all been done. We're not gonna go over all that ground again, and so we should just wake up and smell the coffee, you know, that's what I think. (laughing) Just get on with it. I'm not gonna talk about, I think what's gonna be fascinating is looking at contributions of women in the different faith communities and how we learn from one another, how we are not just victimized but contributors, how we can construct theology together. That's exciting to me. So anyway, that may all just sound totally utopian, sorry, but whatever. I'll live into the utopia, that's what I'll do. (laughing)

Sherry: I love it. And it sounds as if you're saying that the way forward is not to continue this discussion

within the Christian community, but to link up with feminists, interfaith feminists, and that's where the movement forward is gonna happen.

Johanna: That's what I think. If there is forward movement in the denomination, I'll be the first on board with that, of course you know, but I don't see it happening. I mean, even in the most progressive, I mean part of a more light congregation, even in the most progressive of our congregations, certainly in what I am, which is the Bible Belt, it could be that things are different in some other parts, and I'll totally allow for that, but as a denomination I think we're not, we're not really ... We're not really joining the battle where it should be joined. I'm saying all the arguments have been made. We've done all that. We don't need to go over that ground again. I don't wanna make the arguments again. It's like making the argument over and over again that women ought be ordained. Who want to do that, right?

Sherry: Yes.

Johanna: So you can't stay stuck there, but I don't mean to say that it's not important also for the denomination to move forward. Whether that will happen or not, I don't know. I think the new hymnal in the Presbyterian church is an out and out disaster. I hope that's on my tape that I said this because it's--

Sherry: Tell me why, Johanna.

Johanna: Because of the language. It has maintained all the lord language, all the king language, all the strong patriarchal images that are also images of power. It isn't just that they're masculine images. It's also images of power. And if you're coming those two, it think it's ... a total regression. I think the new hymnal, The Praise, whatever it's called, Praise the Lord I think. (laughing) I can't remember what it's called. (laughing)

Sherry: A mental block.

Johanna: I had a block on board. I was actually because my dear husband died five years ago, and he was such a wonderful feminist and such an activist, and I was gonna dedicate a hymnal in my congregation to him, you know, you could do that, and put his name in one of the front. And I've been there a couple of times singing from it, and I thought oh my god, I'm not gonna do that. My poor David would turn around in his grave if I did that, so I'm not doing that. And I'm either, so I think I should say this. I don't think that language in itself will save us and will create total equality for women, but it is a given that I think we do need to do this. It's one of the things that you have to do without which you're not gonna make the progress you need to make. And I think an Reimagining conference was a breath of fresh air. It was not beholden to this old images, and maybe when there are more new images, when there is more freshness in the reimagining, the old images don't have to die. It's just that we keep hanging onto them. (laughing) Well, I think in Reimagining I actually am, I'm usually pretty surprised when I read that myself when it says that we have crucified god on the cross of patriarchy, and that it's an actual violent deed against god. I think I say that at the end, and I'm always kind of surprised. It's a pretty radical thing to say, but I totally believe in that, so why are people at my institution, for example, even asking me to join in a debate about this? (laughing)

I mean, I thought we had got beyond that more than 20 years ago. I'm 75 bloody years old. I still need to make the arguments?

Sherry: Yeah, yeah.

Johanna: Well, in a teaching institution of course you do, you need to educate students. I try to educate, you know, as gently as I can, and I model a different way of speaking. I'm hoping that sometimes pays off, and maybe it does.

Sherry: But you haven't progressed in all those years. We've even gone backwards from where we were.

Johanna: Exactly, yeah.

Sherry: I did wanna ask you briefly about your wonderful book, Reimagining God, and if you can say a little bit about, you write about it in the book actually, the connection to Elizabeth Johnson and your publisher, and then you do mention the Reimagining conference, too. And I wondered if you could say a little bit about the connection to the gathering, to Reimagining in that book?

Johanna: I think that the publishers, David and Agnitovich, that they actually had the idea that because of the Reimagining conference it would be great to do a book by a biblical scholar on images, especially from the Hebrew Bible, which is so often in the Christian imagination supposed to be less loving, blah blah blah, than the New Testament. So they knew me, I had done Reformed and Feminist with them, and so they met with me and actually commissioned it. And I do think that the conference, I have a feeling that probably Stephanie was certainly at the conference. I don't know whether you ever heard of her or knew her. She died untimely early of cancer, but it was very exciting for me that they wanted to do this. And it was a good project for me to be in. I really enjoyed mining what was there in the Hebrew Bible. I have since done more on the name of god, the holy name that the Jews don't say, and I don't say either. And I've made more progress with that, so in that next book I did more, there's an article out on that, which is actually the reason I'm in Sweden because my colleague here read my article on, it's called Writing on the Water, the Inevitable Name of God and it was published in a book called Theology of Jews and Christians, and it's Jewish and Christian scholars on the Hebrew Bible.

Sherry: Oh, that's wonderful.

Johanna: It's called Writing on the Water, and I think I made more progress with my thinking about how to name god. So it's been more going on in my thinking about it, and more settling I think on a particular way. I think I use Adonai in Reimagining for a holy name.

Sherry: You do, yes.

Johanna: So anyway, so I was very excited to do it. It was a good project. I'm still happy with it. I got to know Brian Wren a little bit, and he let me use two of his poems for free, which was very kind of him. And of

course, he's a phenomenal hymn writer, and wrote a great book called *What Language Shall I Borrow?* It's a male about language, about god. I mean, this is all way back now, right? We're all talking 25 years ago.

Sherry: I know, and it is amazing that Westminster John Knox approached you this. This was '95 the book came out, and there was so much controversy in the Presbyterian church about this.

Johanna: Right, so they approached, they must have approached me right after the conference.

Sherry: Yeah yeah.

Johanna: Yeah. Oh, they probably thought it would sell, Sherry, you know.

Sherry: True, good point.

Johanna: Because publishers are interested in selling books. I have no objection to that. I understand all that. So it's not a very long book. I think it's accessible. It's still, I would stay it's still, it's something I'm, I'm not ashamed of it at all. I think I did a solid job with it, and I'm glad that the press did that. So I have since started to write with some, with Eerdmans, so my book making life is simple. I fled to Eerdmans, (laughing) because Eerdmans has ... They let you do footnotes on the page, so.

Sherry: Ah, yes.

Johanna: That was not the reason, but in any case, they have been a good publisher for me, and I'm currently writing for them so. So here in Sweden I was originally invited to a conference in 2011 called *Stereotyping the Other*. And I kind of fell in love with, learned with the place, and I met my colleague that invited me a couple of times more. And then I asked whether I could be here and teach with him in his course, so this has been exciting. And he's a lovely man. He's very, very forward looking and inclusive, and we're taking, the students here are almost all young, so we're taking this group of young people to Jerusalem. And the Swedes have an institute there, the Lutheran Church does, called the Swedish Theological Institute. And they will be inundated there with stuff about Islam and Judaism and Christianity. The course is called *The Children of Abraham*, and I'll be very much a part of that, and also give a public lecture in Jerusalem, so I'm in heaven. I think it's great. I am a personal high point here.

Sherry: Oh Johanna, it sounds wonderful. Oh, I'm so happy for you, and happy for your students too that they get to experience this.

Johanna: Yeah, these are all Swedes, but everything is, well they're not all Swedes. There's also a Dutch student and an Italian student, so everything is in English, thank god because my Swedish is extremely weak. So I'm lecturing tomorrow on Rahab. I can't wait.

Sherry: Oh wow, I wish I could be there. I bet it's gonna be great. (laughing)

Johanna: I'm hoping that they're gonna be entertained as well as enlightened.

Sherry: I can tell they are.

Johanna: I had fun doing it. I mean, I had fun preparing. I haven't done the thing yet.

Sherry: You know, Johanna, I also wanted to ask you about Voices of Sophia and your involvement in that.

Johanna: Right, so I was pretty much, after they organized, because one of the organizers was Virginia Copenheffer, who was the local person. She and her husband, then her husband Jack, who died also after that, were very involved in the founding of Voices of Sophia. And it seemed to me a really good logical follow up. It was very feminist. I needed I think something else, you know, and there were local people involved in the organizing. That was good. I went to all the conferences except I think the very last one or maybe the last two. I think it ... I'm not sure why it didn't continue. I don't know whether someone else gave you a bead on that, whether someone else had insight in it. It was very white, it was too white.

Sherry: Yeah.

Johanna: That may have been an issue, but our church is white. That's another thing about breaking out of the denomination. I think we need to break out of our color barriers, and we're not gonna do that by just, most of what you try to do feels artificial. I think one conference we did try to address racism, so we worked very hard on that, but ... I think it was great. I loved voices of Sophia. We had these, what did we call them? Not the hundred theses because--

Sherry: Ninety-five illuminations.

Johanna: The illuminations, yes, I talked to those. And we proclaimed them at the general assembly, and we sang our songs in the booth and we carried on, and it all tapped into my zeal for making noise and ruckus and stuff like that, and really kind of putting the denomination on notice. And being honest, I don't know, our denomination became so stuck I think in the struggle over gay-lesbian ordination, it was just awful. I went to general assemblies and spoke and testified in the '90s, I think maybe the whole decade, and I just had to stop. It felt like they were torturing my friends, you know. I couldn't do it anymore.

Sherry: Yeah.

Johanna: And so I think the denomination suffered, we suffered, and Voices had a great role to play at the time. I think it was a fine organization. I'm not sure either though that annual conferences are the way to go. They do have an elitist aspect because it's expensive. It's expensive to go, to travel, and so when we're dreaming about anniversary celebrations of the Reimagining conference we were dreaming about different locations. I think I told you that because one annual conference, that may just not be at the moment anymore what we need to do.

Sherry: Right.

Johanna: And I just found out that there is a Muslim initiative in Louisville. There is a friend mine who is a feminist Muslim, a Dr. Rifat Hassan, and they invited me to be a part of that, and they also will have Jewish participants. So there is a kind of interfaith effort underway. This has mostly to do with perspectives on Islam, you know. It has to do with creating a positive Muslim presence in our context, in our local context. And I can't be a part of the first meeting because I'm here, but I will be a part of it. And I think it's great that that's happening because that will be a natural for us to hook up with. And Dr. Hassan is certainly a feminist, strong Muslim feminist. So I think, you know, that will be, so there are some things, some signs I would say of things happening that, where there's life. That's what we need to look for and look into and tap into and continue with, and see what, what transpires, what comes out of all of that, out of the shoot of Jesse, you know. (laughing)

Sherry: Oh, I love it.

Johanna: Something will happen, I know. I know that the spirit lives, and we will, you know, there will be something. But I'm getting older, so I sure hope it happens before I die, I tell you that. (laughing)

Sherry: Me too, for many reasons. Well, Johanna, as you look back, what aspects of Reimagining were most significant to you and why would you say?

Johanna: I think it was directly influential on my teaching, that I was encouraged to, I always have been pretty participatory in my teaching, but even today I think I'm still making progress, which I hope one always does anyway, but I make changes all the time in the way I teach. I think that's directly coming out of that conference. Well, I felt we were really, even though there were speakers in the central platform, we were all participating. And if you're not all participating in the thinking process, then it's not really good teaching. Part of that is the art. Part of that is the, drawing on different intelligences. I'm also I have not spoken about that because we would need a whole other hour, but we have a womens center at the seminary that's 25 years old, which is independent in the sense that we raise all our own funds. And there's been there, I was one of the founders with students. I don't know that it will survive my retirement. I have a feeling it will not, but that may be also things have to die so something new arises. The womens center is really also a part of, I'm trying to think, 25 years. So if you're thinking 25 years back, that was also all about the same time. So I think the inspiration for that initiative, the courage to try this out, to do things like that very much were connected to the Reimagining conference. So I give it credit for so many things in my own personal life, and then in how that spilled over into the context where I work. And one of the programs that we have that the womens center devised is called An Artist in Residence. And every other January, I think we've done it for the past 10 or maybe 12 years, every other January we invite an artist to teach a course. It's a course students will take for credit, and it has to be a woman artist, and it has to be someone who is interested in feminism. It does not have to be a theologian necessarily. We've had I think maybe two people who were not theologians. One was a visual artist. One of those people was a (mumbling), and also the fields are different, so we're not having all one thing. It's always been different. We've had singers, songwriters, potters, dancers, theater persons, and I was very, because of some intra bureaucratic issues at

the seminary, what happened is that they could not make them adjunct professors unless they had a degree in theology beyond the MDiv. And at first I thought that was a negative. Then I thought no, we have to take advantage of this because basically it meant we could invite anybody that really had an interest in doing this, and then it would fly as I say under my flag. I would co-teach it with them, and it would be a biblical theology course. So that's what we've done in the last three years actually. We've done a course on art, women in art, and the Bible in the early Renaissance, and that was a travel seminar. We went to Italy and France to look at the art of the Renaissance. And we had one person who was also very influential for me, and she is a theater person. She was an ordained minister, but had a community theater her whole career at FC worked after seminary. She's just now retiring, and she did a course for us on the Abram-Sarah-Hagar cycle. And we did a performance actually on the basis of that. It was a two-week deal, and she got me more into, so I had already incorporated a lot of artistic expression as you might want to call it into courses, the smaller courses. And she taught me how to also do more with the body in your courses, so it's this whole, and I've learned more and read more about that. So there's a whole movement where there is actually we can do, it's not fancy, it's not dancing, but you can do a lot with your body so that you get the students involved with their body. The soul loves the body, they are one, they are one. The soul loves the body, my body, my soul, my own. Our first artist in residence taught us that. She was a fabulous dancer who did just such a marvelous job. And then the theater person just taught me that all over again, so I do more with the body. I have students move, and in the very large classes this is a little harder, but I split the Hebrew classes. So in Hebrew we always do a lot of singing, a lot of moving, a lot of sort of expression where your whole body is involved. Now you could say that has nothing to do with the Reimagining conference. I think all of those things were kind of built into it, and in that sense it was really an ideal conference. I go to a lot of conferences, because you know, I'm part of the Biblical Guild, and they're deadly. They're just killers. None of them are inspiring. A conference can be inspiring if it's very small. That was the conference I went to here in Sweden. There were only 60 people, and that was also a marvelous conference because there was true interchange and conversation between people, and a meeting of minds even if we didn't totally agree. That Reimagining conference was not small. It was a large conference. Well you know, not as large as the American Academy of Religion, but 2,000 people is a good amount of people.

Sherry: Yes.

Johanna: And to make that the way it was, to make that so inspiring, and my husband completely agreed with me, by the way. I mean, we both were just blown away by it. It was something that will stand the test of time in my opinion, and you should be very proud of it. And Maryann Lundy of course just, that was a tragic thing. She lost her job over it, but then that's, and that's so telling. That's still we pay these prices for it, you know. These things shouldn't happen, but that's happened. That alone I think, that fact testifies also to its significance. It was hugely significant, can't be underestimated. And it was visually attractive, you know? Ernest Paul did these great marches, right, where everyone was beautifully dressed and costumed, and it was kind of like that. It was visually so beautiful with the artists (mumbling) beaming on the side and women coming in drumming and carrying these platters with, it was great. Very inspiring. I think more than just my words of enthusiasm, this conference will, yeah, it will stand the test of time. It will be there. It will be there as something that all the people who organized it, all the people that were involved in it should be very, very proud of.

Sherry: Um hmm, thank you so much. So I think you've already been talking about this, but I'd like to hear your answer to what do you think Reimagining means today? And by that I don't mean just the conference or the community, but needs to be reimagined?

Johanna: Did I lose you?

Sherry: I just lost you, but we're trying to get it back.

Johanna: Okay, I did not say anything because I lost you. Your face froze, so I thought that's a sign they're trying to cut us off.

Sherry: Perfect.

Johanna: I think I did speak to that a bit about what it means is that we need to step out of our denominational fortresses and our face fortresses and that we need to think more broadly and probably more daringly, and more daringly than what I've said. I think there are people out there who are willing to do that. We need good leadership or good voices, voices that will raise themselves and that we will support, and they will happen. I'm sure they will come, and I hope it's not too late for the people that are really yearning I think for something that they feel speaks to their religious impulse. You know, people like us have a religious impulse or a talent for religion or what a lot of people call with the word I have no track with, but I'll just, the word spirituality.

(laughing) That's a word that I don't use, but it's you know, whatever you want to call it. I would call it a religious impulse or the talent for religion. Well, that needs to find expression, and if it's no longer finding expression, if your ordinary place where you practice that impulse and that talent is, makes you angry every time, then there needs to be something else that happens. Then if it's deadening every time, then life needs to happen somewhere else. And life will happen. It will go where it needs to go I think. And I see it more in the direction of an interfaith movement I would say, a movement of people that have probably more in common with one another. Not that we all have to agree on every aspect or every conviction or even all our ideas about god, but that do want to take on the patriarchal hegemony. I don't know, I think I, I was going to send, who is the person who sent me the notice about the meeting? Mary somebody?

Sherry: Mary Kay, yes, Mary Kay Sauder.

Johanna: Okay, so I was gonna send Mary Kay, but I feel the group has to be a little bit behind that, and I'm doing everything via email at the moment because my iPhone is not the most reliable here. Europe is always a little bit off the grid, other states is off the grid, whatever, so communication doesn't happen. And then the time difference is hard, as you know. You're working day is in the morning. My working day is kind of ending. So I sent, I think my friend Courtney Hookster is working on setting up a meeting, so she was just doing a doodlebug. And I sent them notes from our last meeting and the vision, and I think what I wanna ask them is whether we could pass that on to you all, the vision statement at least, unless my son can do it. He can do a pretty fast website build, so he might be able to build us a website pretty quickly, and then we'll be up there,

but I think I'll suggest one other person to be a contact person so it's not just me because I don't need to be, you know, I have been active, and it's a very small group still, but we need to work on diversifying. That's our next step is getting people from other faiths involved in our, from the ground floor up because if you get them, if you do that at too late a stage it's not gonna be good. We need to have that from the ground floor, so that's, it all takes a lot of work, and we're all busy of course. As you know, you are too. I'm so glad you're doing this, Sherry. I think this is great. We need to preserve all this.

Sherry: Yeah, I'm glad I'm doing it too, and it's so exciting and so important and plain enjoyable. It's just delightful.

Johanna: You hear all these crazy people talking to you. (laughing)

Sherry: I love it. They're creative, smart, wonderful, generous, including you. Is there anything else you wanna add before we end the interview?

Johanna: I put a couple of things. What would you include it says in the current Reimagining website?

Sherry: Yes, I wonder if you had ideas about that. As you know, we're working on that, but it won't be coming out until the end of the summer.

Johanna: Right, and let's just say that we'll stay in touch, and if I think of something that I think is really crucial, then I'll send it to you. So I think you asked the specific question what does reimagining mean today, and I think I've said that now a couple of times, that I think we need to get out of our denominational and even our particular faith constructs to construct new frameworks together. That's what I think, that's what I think, and I may be totally wrong. I mean, we can all be wrong, and there's nothing wrong with being wrong as Catherine Schultz wrote. I hope you've read the book *Being Wrong*. It's one of the greatest books of all time.

Sherry: I have it. I have to read that now, Johanna, thank you, *Being Wrong*.

Johanna: But it's great, it's great. Catherine Schultz, oh she's wonderful, *Being Wrong*. It's one of the best books, and it's so funny. She's a wonderful writer, and it makes you feel so good about being wrong, I tell you. You get over yourself so quickly after you read that book. All right, I really enjoyed this. I know you've been listening to me for a long time. Thanks for all your energy in doing that.

Sherry: Oh, it's been delightful. I'm gonna turn off the recordings now.

Johanna: Okay.