- So, I'm sorry, if you could pick up again with the feminist theology, I'm not sure we got all of that.

- Okay. I was in Hamilton College, and a woman who had been a feminist in this red stocking group they called me at University, came to campus and formed a consciousness-raising group, which I joined. And we got very active. I was serving in the chapel in Hamilton College, and we started using inclusive language right way. And decided the connection was just obvious that it was true for much more than just Columbia University. They don't have you go into the church. And got Mary Ruther started writing in 83, I just started eating up whatever I could find to read.

- That's wonderful, and I can hear it better. I'll be honest with you, I'd heard of consciousness-raising groups. Would you mind saying a little bit about what that meant, what you did?

- If you were in a small group, there are lots of people that are interested in (mumbles) you do, get into several small groups, not one large group. And they talk about life using a feminist lens, in a way that means all the minds in a group can begin to work on it. In our situation, we were all in a boy's college, and as we continued to talk, we got (mumbles). There ought to be a women's college. And that kind of thing, and actually, one came. We didn't help that. We became an activist group as people grew into it. At that time, I also did not- I was going to go to a seminary, but I made a pact with my girls that I would leave if I did not discover a redeeming potential for women in Christianity.

- Wow. And what was the ... I know this was a huge question but briefly, what was your seminary experience like? Did it help with that?

- I had a wonderful time because I was 42 when I went to the seminary, and I was as old as many of the professors, and I was very persuasive at (mumbles). So I actually was able to invent classes to take classes at the University, Princeton University. To do individual reading projects with people. So if they were teaching hermeneutics, they would do reading projects with me on feminist hermeneutics. And they let me do my big project, you had to do a sort of education on conversations and a feminist model. Which was a lot of fun.

- Oh, interesting. Could you say a little bit about that?

- Yeah. I was talking about inclusive conversation of women of all colors and (mumbles) and different sexual orientation. And Lannie Russel, do you know her?

- Yes.

- Her name? Lannie Russel begun something called the Women's Interseminary Conference. And she brought it to Princeton while I was there and worked with my conversation model. So we had Lannie and
Ave Maria, (mumbles), and Clock (mumbles), and not absolutely certain knew who the woman was. But we had a wonderful time. And she wrote a book from that conference called, Inheriting Our Mother’s Burden.

- Oh, okay, I read the book, but I didn't know. That's a fascinating history, yes.

- Yeah. Plus, my name is in the presses.

- Oh, Susan, that's really wonderful. Sounds really exciting.

- Yeah, Lannie is fabulous, she always giving, or was. Always giving credit to other people in the (mumbles) church, along other things.

- Yeah. So what was your relationship to the re-imagining community?

- Well ... Oh you mean after I went to school?

- Yes.

- The Women's Institute? I'm just looking, I wrote something down here. I just knew all kinds of people that had been and also a number of the presenters. So I stayed close that way. And we had everything, it was like a breeding place for more feminist theology. So I stayed up that way. Also, Marianne was moved to a different office after (mumbles) centers, so she and I could collaborate then sort of sub-rota. Let's see. I had already worked with her and found the network of Presbyterian College Women, so I knew her pretty well by then. I'm trying to see if that really answers your question.

- Sure, well you were saying earlier that you weren't able to attend the 93 conference, 'cause you had a previous commitment.

- Right. Yeah, that's right. I just wanted to say, though I don't remember which year I was able to go. Obviously I couldn't, I would have had to go with a paper bag over my head if I went publicly from the Presbyterian Center. So it was within the first five years that I did just go on my own. And of course, Rebecca Walker. And Chris Spence and Mary Daley were there, that might be a way of figuring out what year it was.

- That was 2000.

- I wasn't doing anything, writing anything, I just went.

- What were your memories of that conference?

- The issue that seemed to come up with the first and second generation feminists. What were the lines between younger feminists? And they were already there, and having a new generation of feminists. And Rebecca Walker, I don't remember this well enough to say very much, but Rebecca Walker is the daughter of
Alice Walker, and she had written about the second generation had some complaints I think, about her mother. And then, Mary Daley, who hadn't bothered to go to Rebecca Walker's presentation, showed up and did something where she totally braised out Walker, which is what you do. But it seemed very insensitive after Rebecca's sensitive discussion. And then Chris Spence who is a good friend from the seminary. In her address, she said "Well Mary Daley, "as usual, you have not ceased to astound "and annoy and anger and excite us" It was a very awkward moment.

- Yes. Well, do you recall what your experience with that was like? Of the whole conference or of that in particular?

- That in particular was very uncomfortable. I was annoyed with Mary Daley, because in the end she hadn't done her homework.

- Yes.

- I think I enjoyed it once since I went with my current spouse. And I'm married to a woman. And we liked it very much, and it was good to see the people of the community there. Good to be back in touch with Chris Smith and folks like that that I knew.

- Excellent, yes. Well, I know you were aware of the backlash after the 93 conference, being in Loorval, so I'm curious, first of all, did it effect you directly?

- Yes. I sat in the office, then all this really ugly mail came in. And we worked it there and discussed it a lot in our big meetings. And we took together a packet of articles and then we made distinctions between people that wrote letters that seemed to ask for more information or explanation, people that wrote letters to us that seemed to want more contact, and we sent those folks the packs and wrote them nice letters. I'm not aware that we heard of any of them again, from any of them, but I was chastised by the General Assembly Council for doing that without asking their permission.

- Really?

- Yeah. We also got some really ugly letters. And I'm trying to remember, I know we decided we'd just throw those away. Not try to deal with them, but we may have decided to send out one line answers saying "We have received your letter"

- Right.

- But I'm not sure. Oh, we had to make decisions because (mumbles) for women should be end.

- And I'm curious, you probably don't wanna particularly remember this or some of it you may not be able to say, but just to get the tenor when you said they were unpleasant, what kinds of things are we talking about for the sake of the historical record?
- Some of the ugliest. They were always very brief. And just very ugly comments about women trying to change for church. And how could we have imagined doing that. Blah, blah, blah.

- Yes.

- And they really were not kind of things that we would answer. Wait a minute, I have a (mumbles). Did I tell you that the Presbyterian Church did not send its (mumbles) people? Its reporters to the re-imagining?

- Oh. Say some more about that.

- It was a huge mistake. Though in women's ministries we always assumed that they just blew us off, they thought it was just gonna be a little women's conference or something. So they didn't go, whereas the Methodists and the Lutheran physical presence were all there writing very negative comment and commentary on the conference, and that was the sorts of problems to Presbyterians, that their folk hadn't been there.

- You think it really would have helped if they had their press there?

- Probably, I think the Presbyterians thought they had egg on their face, and shouldn't have been there. I'm certain that the press weren't as angry as others, but at least we would have had the possibility of being in direct contact in conversation with our own people.

- Yes. And how did you react to this whole situation?

- Well I thought it was great. I followed the conference, I was totally in support of it, while I was there. I was a follower of the Ecumenical Decade. I had been throughout the decade. This was re-imagining what the mid point, I guess, you know? But we knew by then that the Ecumenical Decade wasn't going very well, wasn't accomplishing its goals. I guess it was the World Council of Churches, sent out teams to go to different parts of the country and check in the congregations, then councils and churches and that was their report in general. But I had been in a place where there was one of those groups from the WTC. I also took a group of Presbyterian women to the Beijing Conference in 1996, which was a group of Presbyterian women, which was another part of the decade. It's where Hillary Clinton gave her speech and said, "Women's rights are human rights".

- Yes, and you were there, wow.

- Yes.

- When you say the goals weren't being accomplished for the Ecumenical Decade, what did that mean? Did that mean people just weren't organizing things? Or what did that mean?
My understanding was that the goals were, again, for women for power in the church, equal representation in leadership, but also outside of the church. And that and several others which, women weren't being paid as much, that kind of thing. And the hope was that the Ecumenical Decade would bring about the changes in the church and especially to denominations that didn't allow women to be ordained. But also then it would accept more broadly the lives of women outside the church.

- Yes, and-

- (mumbles)

- Oh, I apologize, I thought were done, go ahead, yes. So was it meeting those goals?

- The other thing under the backlash was that we did put out the Church and Sobriety Magazine which I really think is good.

- Yes. I've read that and it's very impressive. Lot's of the speeches are in there.

- Most. But it also goes through the goals and things.

- Exactly, it puts it in context.

- Yeah.

- How would you describe the mood in the Women's Division while all this was happening?

- I think we often felt beleaguered. But it didn't seem necessarily because of re-imagining. It felt bold, the way it has always been in the church and stuff, but just kind of a reflective lack of interest, and reflective attempt to keep us from making much change. We sapped our energy, and enjoyed ourselves but we didn't get all that far. At some point, we actually really (mumbles).

- Yeah. Well I'm curious, were you or other people surprised by the backlash to re-imagining?

- No. I don't think so. It happened so quickly that I can't remember a time when I didn't know about it. I did want to tell you that (mumbles), and her mother and best friend did go to re-imagining. And they loved her. And when they came back, they wrote a report to their Presbytery, and they were called on the carpet side to man in the Presbyterian question about what they had done there and what it was like. So that premise stuff was going on as part of the backlash.

- I'm glad they went and they had such a positive experience.

- Yeah, 'cause Bear wasn't able to go, and I wasn't, as I said. So I'm so glad they were.
- And I think you were starting to answer this already, but just to ask, so how do you account for this backlash, you said it seemed part of a longer event or process, but how would you account for it?

- I think re-imagining was explosive. I think it was, I suppose that's maybe the next question, but it was a huge turning point. And I think that the misogyny and the male theology of the churches, although it was being challenged everywhere, there wasn't a focal point. And it wasn't all that scary, but after re-imagining, I think the people who benefited from male theologies knew that their time in charge was up. And they wanted to fight to see if that they could tamp it down, but there was no way, the genie was out of the bottle.

- What about re-imagining made it such a turning point, and so explosive?

- I think the fact that it was global, that it was ecumenical, that it was very public, that it was very publicized. You can't deny something that's that big, I think. You can't say, "Oh, that's just the Luterhans". It was all the women who knew and cared, and it was sponsored by the World Council of Churches. I think the global aspect was very important.

- You know, before you move on, I did wanna ask you if you were at the general assembly that discussed re-imagining, and or what you thought, if you remember, about the report, or what your reaction was to what happened there?

- Wow. I must have been there and I haven't thought about that. I don't have answers. I will think about it, and if I ... I'll talk with Claire about it. And if I can come up with anything, I'll write you.

- Thank you, I appreciate that. Well it has been a long time now (laughs). But thank you.

- Yeah.

- Susan, how would you define re-imagining?

- I think it's so obvious that it's hard to say. I like the story on Sally Hill. Sally Hill's typo?

- Yes.

- When it was supposed to be "re-imaging". As you know that's "re-imagining". Do you have that story?

- I do, and several people have told it. It is so important, and I wanna know why you love that story.

- Well, because she told it in a very funny way. But I like Sally Hill. I know I don't have anything much bigger than that, but re-imagining is about re-imaging. And re-imagining, both of which are theological/spiritual, (mumbles), and explorations, and that's what it means to me, just looking at it all. Looking at everything we've been taught, and told and seeing whether it conveys a redeeming potential for women, or requires that it be re-imagined so that it does. Is that helpful?
- It is, that's excellent, that's a great way to put it. Absolutely. And every time I ask, I get a slightly different answer, and that's really helpful, that's good.

- Yeah, you have to look at everything they do.

- Say some more about that.

- Well, I'm thinking of things that work with other inclusivities, like racism and then Black Lives Matter. We have to look at everything. We white people have to look at everything that reviews not just human rights for gender, or who we vote for. And I think as time goes by, it's also true for sexuality, it's got ... You have to look at those whole, across-the-board things in order to make new and make deliberative what we used to think what were the good old days.

- Do you think re-imagining was doing that? Or is it something that needs-

- Oh yeah.

- Yeah?

- I think it did as much as you can do in a few days. But that what it set in motion ... All of this stuff was in motion was before, but it brought so much together, and named it, that I'm forgetting the end of my sentence! (interviewer laughs)

- It brought so much together and named it, and I'm curious, what are you thinking of when you say that? You're on to something (laughs).

- Well I think it goes back to the important idea. That nothing was the same afterwards. For everybody. For those who cared, nothing was the same. And for those who were furious, nothing was the same, or I hope nothing was.

- Right. For you, what aspects of re-imagining where most significant?

- Well, I like a lot of the big stuff. So liturgies, the music, the secret society, all the books that people kept on writing. Because of that resource, all of us could not be writing because we were pastors. Or whatever. And so that helped it grow, and by providing resources, to spread the change I think, push rate, accepting the places where you couldn't change anything. But that's not the (mumbles), says nothing about.

- And you think those resources were actually used?

- Oh yeah. Well, I'm speaking for myself in part, but certainly the books that I have, for seven years written books of liturgies, and I used them when I was writing church services, that sort of thing. And even before I
went to seminary, I got a great big bottle of white out, and so did the minister. And we would white out all the masculine words, and all the exclusive language. In church services, even anselms and stuff, that we were involved in.

- And I'm curious in how- Go ahead.

- No, that's okay.

- I'm sorry, I was wondering how people reacted to this?

- You know, they didn't. The people that were in that church in the small college chapel, they were ready for it, and none of them were women that were in the group I was in. So yeah.

- That's great. Did your involvement in re-imagining change your perspective on feminist theology or the church at all?

- What I would say is that it aided my appreciation of its inclusivity, it's global nature led me to think of being inclusive of other religions than just Christianity. We do a lot of interfaith stuff here now. And for me, it helped answer the question of if there's not a redeeming potential for women, I won't go there. It helps make the church become popular, become wonderful. And you don't go to the ones that didn't change.

- Yeah. Wow, okay, that's great. Can you think of specific contributions that re-imagining made Christian theology or liturgy?

- I put (mumbles) on this question. I think it turns theologies around. I may be being a little grandiose about it, but I don't think ... The people that we care about, the male writers, as we care about good (mumbles) again, I think, write the sort of books that they have. I think that it changed writers and thinkers and liturgists in a big way. I've also, we've mentioned the resources there, and of course language, where we have continued to grow.

- So despite the backlash, you think that it really did have an impact?

- Yeah, because so many of us carried it with us.

- Yes.

- And we're able to ... We call it something like an infectious disease. (interviewer laughs) It spread (laughs). It's like a flu. So yeah, it spread, we became walking re-imaginers.

- And so what I hear you saying is, so I wanna make sure I'm hearing you right, is that even for people who didn't attend, but the people who did sort of just spread it out from there, so it went beyond the people who actually attended, is that correct?
- Oh yes.

- Great.

- I'm American, there are a whole lot of people like me and my spouse who were not able to go.

- Right.

- So and all of us were primed to drink it up and carry it on our backs.

- Yeah. Now this might be a tough question, but I'll try it, what do you think is the greatest legacy of the re-imagining community?

- (mumbles) (interviewer laughs) It's really a hard choice, isn't it?

- You don't have to list just one I don't think.

- I had forgotten the global impact, and its improvement, racially, includes all the inclusivities, racial denomination, all that stuff. But I also think it got a big influence, our best legacy beyond the church.

- That's interesting, what do you think its legacy was beyond the church?

- Well, we talked a little bit about kind of measuring the Ecumenical Decade's goals and whether they were being achieved at the five year point. I think that much has been achieved. Its re-imagining was theological/spiritual. We are carrying it on our back, there are people out there in the real world involved in social justice and (mumbles) classes, issues for women. And I think that over time, since 1993, that those are making a change, and I also think that they help people that think that social justice has nothing to do with our spirituality, to put together the fact that it is our spirituality, just as it grows from our spirituality. People say, "Justice is the activity of love". And to my mind, love is the activity of religion. So I think changes are being made. They don't look at other people as being theological, they look just like justice.

- Wow, thank you. Well, and I think we're starting to move in that direction, but what do you think re-imagining means today? And I don't mean just that particular community, but what needs to be re-imagined today?

- What I have answered was ... I think it's words to the years (mumbles) everywhere. That it's an activity that needs to be used continuously. Continually. We need (mumbles) they do, (mumbles), maybe that's some good news. And whether we're stuck some place and not noticing that our behavior is injurious to other people. So I think that's what I think. It needs to be a continuous way of being.

- Oh, that is great. I have one last very specific question for you. We're working on a re-imagining website,
and I'm wondering if you had ideas about what could be included in it or who would benefit from it? Any ideas you have about the website would be really helpful.

- Okay, I think the non-liturgy for book reviews or books of liturgies. The same for music, some of the people who don't know anything about this, the next generation can have resources for their church services or women's groups or whatever. I tried to get the church's society on (mumbles) that may become outdated. Book reviews in general of feminist theologies. And I think if there are (mumbles) communities of re-imaginers in different areas, or whole big ones, they put down contacts that people can be in touch with, if they want to learn more or be in a group themselves.

- That's great. Those are all good ideas, absolutely. That's, I think we're picturing it, sort of a resource, and those are good ideas for resources. Is there anything that we haven't discussed that you would like to add, Susan?

- (laughs) I would get people to go to the website if they don't know it exists.

- Yes, that's the problem. It hasn't been online yet, but-

- Yeah, I know, I tried.

- Yes, it'll be the end of the summer. We're hiring someone to design it. And so I think the main idea that we have at the moment is to try to spread the word every way we can think of, for example, we had this distribution list, and we're kind of hoping other people will do it, use social media. And using the contacts of the people I've been interviewing, hopefully they will help to spread it. I don't know, do you have other ideas? Because I think that's gonna be huge. And of course, the issue too is not just bringing it to the next generation as you said.

- Yeah. I think I had a thought that just left my head. Oh, maybe on the website, you could ask the people there to spread the word.

- Yes.

- And particularly their pastors that are using it. Pastors that are working with liturgists, to tell them that's a good place go. But you get the word out that way.

- That is a great idea. I think we're gonna have to be really explicit about that, you're right.

- Yeah.

- Yeah, maybe the same thing for people who are teaching, as well, teaching theology, colleges and seminaries.
- Oh yes, I haven't said enough about teachers, professors, I still think it's fabulous that I was able to do a feminist theology class round 1990, in a little Methodist college.

- Yeah, what was that like, Susan? Were the students receptive, how did that-

- Yes, but they had weekend college there for older people, and so that's the group that I taught. And they (mumbles). I didn't give them really heavy assignments but we kept journals and wrote poems and I tried to teach them obviously in a feminist way. So it was really good. We had great parties. (interviewer laughs)

- Was it women and men?

- No.

- It was all women?

- Uuhh.

- Yeah, and do you think that the older students were more receptive than the more traditional-aged ones would have been?

- I will bet so. I was teaching ethics to traditionally-aged children, ugh children, students there. And they had such a hard time getting the concepts. I finally went to a psychologist and said, "What's up? Why aren't these students "doing better?". At least his opinion was that typical college-aged students aren't really good at complex thinking yet. But putting things together, most of them aren't really ready to think ethically or anyhow, I don't know if that's really true but it's the knee-jerk thing ... I would (mumbles) older people and just women.

- Yes, sounds like a great experience.

- Yeah.

- Is there anything else that you wanted to add?

- I don't think so.

- (laughs) Well ...

- Anything else you want to ask?

- I don't think so, I think that you have done a great job, you've obviously thought about these questions and you've added a lot to the history and the conversation, I really appreciate it.
- Well, for one who didn't go, perhaps that's important, (mumbles) somebody who'd go.

- Absolutely, and to hear about it impacted people who didn't go, that's an important part of the story.

- Uhuh.

- I'm gonna turn the recorder off now. So just give me a second.

- Okay.

- Here we go.