RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

# AN INTERVIEW WITH NANCY TOPPING BAZIN

FOR THE

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INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Kathryn Tracy Rizzi: This begins an oral history interview with Dr. Nancy Topping Bazin, on August 4, 2020, with Kate Rizzi for the Rutgers Oral History Archives. Thank you so much for doing this second session with me.

Nancy Bazin: Thank you very much.

KR: You wanted to start off today by telling a few more stories from your time at Rutgers.

NB: Yes, I wanted to mention that I wondered the whole time I was at Rutgers College about the Paul Robeson Center. Paul Robeson was a rather taboo name--not one the Board of Governors would be likely to approve. My mother was a Democrat who appreciated Franklin Delano Roosevelt and loved Eleanor Roosevelt. My father was a Republican, but I remember that he expressed what I think was sympathy for Robeson when, having had his passport taken away, Paul Robeson had to sing on the American side of the border to forty thousand people who had assembled on the Canadian side to hear his fantastic voice. In addition to praise Paul Robeson received as a singer, he was also a marvelous actor and was the first Black to play Othello in Shakespeare's play. He also acted in *The Emperor Jones* and many other Broadway and London plays. Like the life of Robert Oppenheimer and many others, Robeson's life and reputation were severely damaged by the House Un-American Activities Committee and McCarthyism. Just like pressure was put upon Edward Teller to testify against Robert Oppenheimer, pressure was put upon Jackie Robinson to testify against Paul Robeson. [Editor's Note: In 1949, the House Un-American Activities Committee called Jackie Robinson to testify and denounce Paul Robeson, after Robeson had delivered a speech at the Paris Peace Conference that was misquoted by the Associated Press and interpreted as being sympathetic to the Soviet Union during the years of the Cold War. As a result, Robeson's passport was revoked, which prevented him from traveling for work and performances, and he was ostracized by much of American society.] I wondered why there was a Paul Robeson Center at Rutgers University and where it was. I heard it mentioned, but I never knew where it was. [Editor's Note: The Paul Robeson Cultural Center was established in 1969 as the "Black House" at 17 Bartlett Street on College Avenue. In 1972, it was renamed in honor of Paul Robeson. Since 1992, it has been located on the Busch Campus, adjacent to the Busch Student Center.] For some reason, I had assumed the Paul Robeson Cultural Center was on the Rutgers College campus, but I did not know where.

Finally, motivated by this interview and because of iPhones and being able to Google in this more technological age, I finally had my question answered. Paul Robeson had grown up in Princeton, and he went to study at Rutgers. He was the third Black student to attend Rutgers. I think I only had one or maybe two Black students during the seven years I was there, so there were hardly any. Paul Robeson was not only the third Black student to attend Rutgers, but he was also valedictorian of his class in 1919. His father was an escaped slave and Paul, his son, was outstanding as a football player, a singer, an actor, and, in addition, as valedictorian of his class. He was quite an extraordinary individual. So, I just wanted to point out that recognition by Rutgers of an extraordinary man whose national mistreatment caused him to withdraw from the world into a severe depression for many years. The Rutgers recognition came four years before Robeson died in 1976. In 2020, Princeton is finally making a museum of his childhood home. [Editor's Note: In 2019, Rutgers marked the centennial anniversary of Paul Robeson's graduation from Rutgers College in 1919 with a year-long slate of events. In the spring of 2019,

the Paul Robeson Plaza on the College Avenue Campus was dedicated to pay tribute to Robeson's legacy.]

KR: Yes, Nancy, I just want to cut in for a second. What do you remember about the naming of the cultural center after Paul Robeson?

NB: I missed hearing about that event in 1972. Nor do I remember hearing anything about Robeson's death in Philadelphia in 1976. I only remember being surprised that Rutgers was honoring him despite what was still probably a negative public opinion--thanks to the House Un-American Activities Committee. This is another instance in which freedom, beauty, talent, and intelligence were destroyed by fearful, narrow-minded, bigoted people. It is a tragic and sad story.

There is another story about the bias and insensitivity in medicine that I noted at Rutgers and then at the University of Pittsburgh where I taught during 1977-1978. At the Rutgers Medical School, in those early days, the students had only two or three lectures on the female body. The rest of their studies were on the male body. When you consider that women go to doctors more often than men do, that was a practice to be changed. When I went to the University of Pittsburgh, they had a program in the women's center to make male medical students who planned to be gynecologists more sensitive to what they were asking women to do. They had the male student lie on his back on the table with his feet in the stirrups, and he was then told to "scoot forward" as women are often instructed to do. When your genitalia and bottom are totally--or even partially--exposed, this request is embarrassing. After that, these future male doctors knew better how a woman would feel in that position and in that situation. These men would be, we hope, more sensitive to women's feelings.

During my 1977-78 year in Pittsburgh, I was told that the first women faculty who taught there had to sit behind a screen in the faculty dining room. Were they trying to avoid the temptation of any close relationships between the men and women faculty? I am not sure what they imagined, but female faculty had to sit behind a screen. Even when I was there, a woman on the sociology faculty said their department had had a retreat during a previous summer. When this woman asked her Department Chair a question about it, his response was: "Oh, I didn't think your husband would allow you to go." Although the University of Pittsburgh had a much higher percentage of women faculty than Rutgers College, that uneasiness of having women around was still very much there.

At Pittsburgh, I taught my first interdisciplinary course. That meant that I was free to teach material from many other disciplines besides literature. I no longer had to team-teach with another expert, as I had done at Rutgers with Judy Walkowitz and Dee Garrison, where I was teaching the literature part and they were teaching the history part. When I went to Pittsburgh, I created for them their first "Introduction to Women's Studies" course, the interdisciplinary core course that every beginning Women's Studies student would take first.

It is interesting that I got two jobs because of Women's Studies, yet I had never had a course in Women's Studies. Of course, when I was in undergraduate and graduate school, such courses did not exist. The part-time job I got at the University of Pittsburgh saved me when there were

almost no jobs available in literature, and the full-time job I got the following year at Old Dominion University put me back on the path to tenure and life-long employment. No one else on the Rutgers College faculty would have been qualified for these positions directing Women's Studies programs. Despite what the Graduate Advisor had told the graduate students at Rutgers, certainly for me, women's studies *was* more than a "fad," and it definitely proved useful for getting a job! Even one of my *male* graduate students at Rutgers College, whose name is Joe Boles, became a feminist in my classes, and he later became a Director of Women's Studies.

My interest in Women's Studies paid off in multiple other ways, too. While teaching from a feminist perspective, my beliefs, my emotions, and my intellect were interconnected--and I had a purpose in life. Many students found my courses not only challenging but also "life-changing." Because they knew more about society, they understood more about their own lives--and that empowered them. Furthermore, in graduate school I had not looked forward to publishing to get tenure. But because of Women's Studies, I published because I really had something I wanted to say. This really motivated me a great deal, and it made me happy to make a difference! It was a very revolutionary period for women, and I feel very lucky that my professional life coincided with such an exciting time--when I could learn, teach, and publish, enjoying all three! Kate, I'll let you take it from there.

KR: How did you get the position at Old Dominion University?

NB: I heard about it from Mary Louise Briscoe, the woman at the University of Pittsburgh who had had my position in Women's Studies before going on to be Chair of the English Department. She knew the feminist in English at Old Dominion University who was looking for someone. Perhaps the person at Old Dominion University had contacted her to tell her about their job search. Anyway, Mary Lou Briscoe told me about the job. I was not, in fact, planning to do a job search again, because I was so exhausted from applying to two hundred positions the year before. I did not *want* to do it again! [laughter] I was going to relax and stay in Pittsburgh for at least the second year, maybe the third year. My contract was for three years. But, when Mary Lou told me about that job, I did apply, and then at the Modern Language Association, I met Carolyn Rhodes, who was head of the ODU hiring committee. [Editor's Note: Carolyn Rhodes (1925-2019) was a Professor Emerita of English and Women's Studies at Old Dominion University. She joined the faculty in 1965 and retired in 1990. She founded the University Women's Caucus in 1974 and helped found the Women's Studies Program in 1978.]

At Old Dominion University, they had an NEH (National Endowment for the Humanities) grant for the first year, the year that I was in Pittsburgh, and they taught six classes, of which five were team-taught. They started it with that. In exchange for the NEH grant, they were to hire a director of Women's Studies at the end of the year, and it could be someone who would be full time in Women's Studies or half time in Women's Studies and half time in a department. I preferred being in the department, because I had been through enough budget cuts to know they wouldn't chop out the whole English Department but could eliminate a small program like Women's Studies. However, the male Chair of the English Department at Old Dominion University did *not* want another "strident" feminist, which was his view of Carolyn Rhodes. She was very committed but not strident! [laughter] But, fortunately, when I met this man at a reception before my talk, he decided that I looked "like a southern lady." He told a friend in the

English Department that that was why he hired me. I was wearing a light lavender organdy (or dotted Swiss?) dress (both fabrics from long ago), so he accepted that I would be half time in the English Department. [laughter] I love that! Not coming from the South or anything, I thought that was very, very funny. That's how I got there.

The Women's Studies Program at Old Dominion University was the first one in the Commonwealth of Virginia. After we went on for some time, the Director of SCHEV (the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia) was so impressed by what we were doing that he gave money to four other universities to start Women's Studies programs. The four universities were Virginia Commonwealth University, the College of William and Mary, Virginia Tech, and Mary Washington College. At least three of those programs continued. Meanwhile, the University of Virginia (UVA) had created the second Women's Studies Program after Old Dominion University. Like Princeton University and Rutgers College, UVA had been all male, so the women faculty had an uphill battle there as well.

I was very well received at Old Dominion University. The dean, Heinz Meier--we had a wonderful dean--had a big party when I arrived at ODU. He invited all the faculty of the College of Arts and Letters to come to a reception for me at his house. The times were gradually changing, but his support was extremely welcome. That doesn't mean there wasn't opposition from a lot of the male faculty, but it was certainly a very good start.

It was there that I continued developing interdisciplinary courses. I created one named "Women in Power" and one called "Mothers and Daughters" and one called "Women's Spiritual Quest," and then we also had an intro to Women's Studies course for undergraduates called "Women in a Changing World." In addition, there was a graduate intro course entitled "Women's Studies and the Search for Truth." For the undergraduates, I used a book called *The Longest Journey: Sex Differences in Perspective* by Carol Tavris and Carole Offir, which discussed the different disciplines and how they were revolutionized by Women's Studies--by including the other fifty-one percent of the population. Men always complain, "What about men's studies?" but, of course, we had had men's studies for years, because the women had been left out. There was a book by Sheila Ruth, which was about feminism, I think it was called *Issues in Feminism*. For graduate students, there was a book called *Men's Studies Modified* and then a later book, which was even better, by Langland and Gove. It was called *A Feminist Perspective in the Academy: The Difference it Makes*. That graduate intro course clarified how Women's Studies research had changed the disciplines. That was exciting! [Editor's Note: *Issues in Feminism: A First Course in Women's Studies* by Sheila Ruth was originally published in 1980 and has been reprinted in several editions. *Men's Studies Modified: The Impact of Feminism on the Academic Disciplines* is a 1981 book by Dale Spender. *A Feminist Perspective in the Academy: The Difference It Makes*, edited by Elizabeth Langland and Walter Gove, was originally published in 1983.]

We had a lot of new courses at Old Dominion University that we had not had at Rutgers or even at the University of Pittsburgh. For example, we offered "Women in the Military," "Women in Crime," a philosophy course, and "Communication Between the Sexes." Two other new ones were "Women in the Arts" and "Women and Politics." Then there were the usual courses called "Women Writers," the "Psychology of Women," and the "History of American Women." There was another new one called "The American Male," and there is an interesting story about that. I

asked a man in the Psychology Department to teach that course. So, he went off to class the first day, expecting to find a room full of males. He found a room full of females. The whole class was female, and he had come prepared to talk to males.

Fortunately, there was an Episcopalian priest who worked with students, and he wanted to have conferences for men. He did two conferences just for males. We in Women's Studies helped him organize it, but we were not allowed to go because he wanted only male participants, which was fine. No females complained. Yet, many males, including our Dean, complained when well-known feminist and author Mary Daly came to give a talk and would not let the men who attended speak or ask questions after her speech. She felt the men always had the floor, and she wanted the women to have that time to ask her questions. Our Dean got a little ruffled at that, but he came down to talk with me about it. That was the difference between our Dean and many others. He came down to discuss it, and then he felt better after he understood why she was doing it. [Editor's Note: Mary Daly was a pioneering feminist theologian who retired after thirty-three years of teaching at Boston College, amidst a controversy over her refusal to allow male students to take her feminist ethics course.]

Another exciting development was linking up with the public-school teachers and their supervisors in Hampton and Virginia Beach; both cities were adjacent to Norfolk. I taught every semester either one course in Hampton or one course in Virginia Beach and alternated "Women in the Developing World" and "Women Writers." Alternating along with me was Toi Derricotte, a well-known poet who taught "African American Literature." Many of the high school teachers took advantage of this faculty development program. It was great for all of us. They were terrific students for us; they were all excited about the courses and they integrated that material into what they were teaching in their literature classes.

Twice a year, Women's Studies organized faculty development workshops for all the college teachers in the area. We brought in outstanding women speakers from Women's Studies Programs at other universities. Those invited gave a speech on Friday evening which was open to the public; then on Saturday, they did two faculty development sessions for university and community college faculty in our Hampton Roads area (composed of seven adjacent cities). Among our guests were Florence Howe (former president of the Modern Language Association and editor of the Feminist Press), Peggy McIntosh from the Wellesley Center for Women, known for her writings on *White Privilege and Male Privilege*, Helen Washington on contemporary Black women writers, philosopher Elizabeth K. Minnich, and Susan Stanford Friedman, a feminist scholar from the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

The Women's Studies Program at Old Dominion University went from about two hundred students in 1978 to 750 students in 1984. It awarded seventy-four Women's Studies Certificates, three of them to men. I've been in touch with Wayne Shields, who was one of the three males, and he became the CEO of the Association of Reproductive Health Professionals. His certificate in Women's Studies had certainly contributed to his professional life.

At Old Dominion University, Women's Studies also organized several conferences. The biggest one was in response to a request from Richmond to do a symposium in connection with an exhibit. This grew out of a project sponsored by Lynda Johnson Robb, who was the wife of our

Governor Charles Robb and daughter of LBJ, as we used to call him, President Lyndon B. Johnson. She and Helen Bradshaw Byrd asked historian Kym S. Rice in Richmond, Virginia, to curate an exhibit of the history of Virginia women from 1600 to 1945 using objects and photographs. Then they asked a Rutgers historian Suzanne Lebsock to use this exhibit to write a history of Virginia women. Suzanne used the materials and wrote a lovely book to go with the exhibit. It was entitled "*A Share of Honour": Virginia Women from 1600 to 1945*. The women included were diverse--not just white but Native and Black. For example, the first female in the United States to own a bank was Maggie Lena Walker, a Black woman from Richmond. There was also Janie Porter Barrett, who created a school for Black juvenile offenders. It was the first one in the nation. Well, this exhibit went from the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in Richmond to the Chrysler Museum of Art in Norfolk and then to the Roanoke Museum of Fine Arts.

When this 1985 exhibit came to Norfolk, Georgia Ryder (a dean at Norfolk State University) and I had organized a symposium to go with it. By the way, when I first came to Norfolk, I wondered why there were two state universities in Norfolk. Then it dawned on me--segregation! One was black and one was white. Happily, we had a racially-mixed audience for the Symposium. On the first evening, Suzanne Lebsock gave a talk in the Chrysler Museum about Virginia women and the exhibit. During the next two days, the symposium was in the Holiday Inn, and six hundred people came each day.

On the program, we had two other main speakers. The first was Toni Cade Bambara, who was interested in the Black children in Atlanta who had disappeared (twenty-eight people all together, mostly young children, some teenagers, and a few adults). Law enforcement concluded that they were murdered. Bambara was in the process of writing a book about this called *Those Bones Are Not My Child*, which is a marvelous title, I think. [Editor's Note: Toni Cade Bambara was still working on this novel when she died ten years later, in 1995. Her book has been called "a staggering achievement, a major work of American fiction."] The feminist Robin Morgan was the second major speaker. Then, during the day, we had all kinds of sessions on women, like "Women in the Economy," "Women in Education," "Women in Public Policy," "Women in Religion," "Women, War, and Peace"--that kind of thing. It was a major event for the women who attended.

Another conference that we had was called "Women's Spiritual Quest." I was teaching my course by that name, and some women heard about it. A principal, who belonged to a Black church in town, came to me and asked if we could create a conference on that topic. She said she had observed that the women raised all the money in her church and the men by themselves decided how it would be spent. [laughter] That was her motivation. So, we did work together on this with the help of a lot of students from my class. Ultimately, the female participants at the conference were about a third Black and two-thirds white.

The National Women's Studies Association started having national conferences in 1977. I attended them annually for at least eight years. Many of us also attended the Virginia Women's Studies Association conferences. I went annually to the Modern Language Association conventions, and for several years I was vice-president of the Women's Caucus at MLA. The value of attending conferences was making contacts and exchanging ideas. As Director of Women's Studies at Old Dominion University, I was running a Women's Studies series of

speakers as well the two faculty workshops per year. Listening to talks at the conferences and conversing with other scholars helped me find good speakers to invite.

Of the many Women's Studies Association conferences, one stood out from the others. At least that was the way it seemed to me. It was one held at Rutgers. I came out of it feeling as if I had been in some other land, where everyone was treated equally. All the speeches and panels were signed for the deaf. Everything was made easy for the disabled. Lesbians and people of all skin colors seemed in harmony that year. It was as if I had been in some other world than our own unequal society. I remember being extremely moved by that particular Women's Studies conference at Rutgers.

A few Women's Studies conferences were international. There was one, for example, at Concordia University in Montreal, Canada, where there was a Simone de Beauvoir Institute. In 1982, there was a big conference there with women coming from about eighty different countries. There was a woman from Nigeria, which is about fifty percent Muslim. Her culture, at least the male half of it, still believed in polygamy. She said her husband had several wives. Her husband would go to all the wives to make love to them, but he would not sleep with any of them. He felt that might undermine his authority and they might see him as weak. So, he never stayed for the night. He just went on. I remember meeting a young woman in the Ivory Coast who told me that she was never going to get married. I asked why, and she said, "Because of polygamy." She didn't want to marry a man who would be polygamous. She was young and educated, and she was not going to go along with that system. I was interested in the lives of Black African women because of my travels and because of my interest in the early Black African women novelists.

I had always thought that it would be wise to integrate women, Blacks, and developing world people all at the same time into the curriculum, rather than each group having to fight its own battle. Therefore, I had the idea of expanding the concept of affirmative action to include the curriculum. We had an affirmative action officer, Maggi Curry-Williams, and a president, Al Rollins, who supported bringing female and Black faculty into the university, and they were responsible for greatly increasing the number of Black students. I proposed my idea of linking women, minorities, and third world to the Affirmative Action Officer, and she set up meetings with the President to discuss it. Because they were about to change the mission statement of Old Dominion University and the strategic goals, the time was right. I suggested that the university make a commitment to the principle of equality in the Mission Statement, and they did that. The second commitment would be to change the curriculum to include material about all women as well as about males in minority communities and the developing world. The third commitment would be to hire faculty who were experts in Women's Studies, African American Studies, and Third World Studies. In those days the Developing World was called the "third world" (United States was the first; Russia the second; and most Africans and Asians were part of the Third World). Neither of the names--African or Third--have since proven to be, on the one hand, inclusive enough or, on the other hand, precise enough. Nevertheless, President Al Rollins was interested in making the curriculum more inclusive by adding these three groups and faculty qualified in those fields. So, he brought in his vice presidents, we had more discussions, and then they decided to make the commitment to equality, the commitment to transforming the curriculum, and the commitment to hire more faculty in those three fields. They did that in the

Mission Statement and they carried those ideas through the strategic goals. Required courses, in particular, were to follow those guidelines. In the English Department, we voted to require all English majors to take a course in Women Writers, African American Literature, or Literature of the Developing World.

Of course, this didn't always go over well with some of the white male faculty. We did a survey later to find out how they felt about it. One history professor wrote, "Women's history must be boring." If you believed that women never did anything important, as I assume he did, you would expect it to be boring. Another history teacher said: "You want me to do research and I don't have time to do that research, so I can't do anything until it's in the textbooks." Let's see, what else? A philosophy teacher said that the discussions of male-female issues were too heated, so therefore it was better not to talk about them in class. We had one male language professor who put in the newspaper--I think he really believed this--that when there was a rise in feminism, it created "social chaos." Certainly, it did throw off course the order of things a bit. That part of it was correct, but then he added: "By the year 2000," he said, "these women will drop their hyphenated names and get out of their trousers and back into the comfort of their foundation and their home." He went on to say: "Then NOW would become an adverb and ERA would become a common noun as it had been before." [Editor's Note: This refers to NOW, the National Organization for Women, and the ERA, the Equal Right Amendment.] We also had a man in music who said the American Musicological Association had stated that the best female composers' music was much less good than the second-rate men's music. So, a lot of men really believed this: that all these things done by women were inferior. Therefore, they didn't read about women, do research on them, or teach about them. Why waste your time on what is inferior? That was a big problem to get past. I am sure that attitude persists even today. Like racism, sexism is systemic, what Peggy MacIntosh called "invisible systems conferring dominance on [a] group." Many people think the struggle is over, but, no, it has to be renewed over and over again. Anything you wanted to ask?

KR: Over the years, who were your mentors?

NB: Let's see. There were people I learned from, like Elaine Showalter--initially from her speeches and writings--and through feminists who directed Women's Studies programs at other universities. I learned a lot at Women's Studies conferences and the Modern Language Association conventions, but I think Carolyn Rhodes was the only person I can really consider a mentor. She was always supportive of me and I could talk to her about anything--not so much personal as professional. She would encourage me to do this or that and give me advice and that sort of thing, so she was a real mentor to me and having her encouragement or even little pushes to do things was helpful and nurturing. She was a mentor to many of us younger people. When I think about it, she also had her own goals that she wanted me to fulfill. She was very intuitive, and she made each of us the best self that we could be. Furthermore, no one was a more committed feminist than she was! If that made her strident, so be it! She was the first female full professor at Old Dominion University in the College of Arts and Letters and I was the second, so there weren't very many of us. Then, I was the third female Eminent Scholar in the university as a whole and the first in the College of Arts and Letters. After becoming a full professor, you could present all your materials--teaching and service but primarily research and creativity--to a committee. One or two people a year, or sometimes no one, received that

designation. I greatly appreciated what the Provost Jo Ann Gora wrote on the letter she sent me: "You have been a pioneer in gender studies; your scholarship has broadened literary analysis and fundamentally changed the discourse."

Old Dominion University is a big state university, but also a young one. It began as a branch of the College of William and Mary; it became a four-year independent college in 1962 and became a university in 1969. When I arrived in 1978, it had about twenty thousand students. The older universities were not hiring, so ODU was able to put together an excellent faculty (many of them female) from top notch schools. It was hard to move anywhere too because there were no jobs, so people stayed. We had quite a wonderful faculty, and they still do.

KR: When you were head of Women's Studies and then chair of the English Department, what kind of work did you do in recruiting faculty?

NB: Well, by the time I was at Old Dominion University, British literature was still dominant among the older professors but there were also teachers in American literature. Those fields had to be transformed by adding Black or women writers. Within British literature, a separate new field was post-colonial literature. In American literature, the new field was African American literature. So, we had new positions in those fields. Writing was the biggest change; many new hires were in journalism, technical writing, rhetoric and composition, non-fiction writing, and creative writing. There were high standards in all fields; it was very competitive. For a position in creative writing, for example, the candidate had to have a book or two already published before applying. We would interview seven or eight candidates at the Modern Language Association convention; then the top two or three candidates were brought to campus. Usually everyone in the department would come to their presentation and give comments to the hiring committee. The Modern Language Association published a booklet of ads for all the English department jobs available in the United States. Two of our creative writers were recently named Poet Laureates of Virginia--a Black poet Tim Seibles (in 2016) and a Filipina poet Luisa Igloria (in 2020). Of course, there was affirmative action by this time, which was real. You had to interview some women as well as Blacks when available, but we didn't really have a problem convincing people to do that, so that went well. In addition to the traditional survey of world literature, the university was also trying to internationalize the curriculum. I did that by teaching world literature written in English, which I taught by adding literature from Canada, Australia, and New Zealand as well as literature written in English from countries in Africa and the Caribbean. In the past, all the people writing in English in those countries had simply been ignored. The curriculum in English departments had changed in many ways.

We also helped transform what was taught in the History Department. The dean gave me money to take the whole History Department to Williamsburg for a two-day faculty development session; eighteen out of twenty professors participated. I had invited two speakers--Lois Banner and Elizabeth Pleck. Lois Banner had taught at Rutgers and had written one of the first books on the history of American women. Elizabeth Pleck was a specialist in the history of the family (including domestic violence) and the history of Black women. We showed two films--*Rosie the Riveter* and *Women on the March.* The latter was a documentary film (at that time rarely seen) on the Suffrage Movement from McGraw-Hill. The speakers brought long bibliographies. These men could no longer say they didn't have any material to use. That was quite successful.

Then, I invited feminist Sue V. Rosser, a biologist, to come to campus. She spent one day doing faculty development for the biology faculty and the nursing faculty. Rosser discussed how gender perspectives sometimes creep into supposedly objective science. She offered explanations for biases in biological theories. Male scientists had "proved" that women were mentally inferior to men, that their brains were smaller, that reproduction drained off energy needed for their intellectual development. If I recall correctly, in contrast to the politics behind the Biblical story of Adam existing first and then Eve, they discussed the androgen bath. Systemic sexism can influence the curriculum and the teaching of science, and it may even influence the results of scientific research. Sue Rosser later published a book called *Biology and Feminism: A Dynamic Interaction* (1992). She also wrote a book about the accumulation of small inequities that add up to impeding women who wish to be scientists. It was entitled *Breaking into the Lab: Engineering Progress for Women in Science* (2012). Dr. Rosser has had a very distinguished career since that visit to ODU.

Perhaps the most significant legacy of academic feminism was a new worldview proposed by the female theologians and the philosophers. Traditional religions have been extremely patriarchal, and feminist professors observed that the traditional worldview was expressed in terms of hierarchy and dominance and dualities. Hierarchy is rooted in the medieval and Renaissance concept of the Great Chain of Being. God was at the top and then below "Him" were the angels and below the angels were men, below men were women, below the men and women were the children, below that the animals, and below that maybe the birds and below that plants, and below that minerals. That was the Great Chain of Being in the order that was supposed to be maintained. As reflected in Shakespeare's plays, if this hierarchical order was not maintained, people thought there was not the right kind of harmony and music in the cosmos. Women had to stay in their place, for example, below men. There were dualities always at war with each other: dominance vs. submission, the ruler vs. the ruled, reason vs. emotion, man vs. nature, superior vs. inferior, male vs. female. Instead of insisting on a hierarchical order, the feminist theologians and philosophers wanted an egalitarian (or circular) worldview--a different kind of order.

One of these feminist religion professors was Mary Daly, a Catholic. She wrote her first book about her awakening. The book is called *The Church and the Second Sex*, and it was inspired by a visual experience she had. She was in Rome seated in a balcony with a sanctuary full of Cardinals below. Down below were all the men in bright, cardinal-colored satin, while all the women were upstairs in the balcony, all in black. Just the sight of the women being almost invisible in the balcony in black and these men in those very showoff kinds of costumes and their cardinal colors made her realize that that hierarchy was all wrong and certainly not egalitarian. This sight made her write that book *The Church and the Second Sex*. She didn't want to be the "second" sex, and she was opposing an androcentric religion. Her next book, my favorite, was *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation.* Another feminist theologian, a protestant, was Rosemary Ruether, who wrote *Sexism and God Talk.* There was also Elizabeth Dodson Gray, who wrote a delightful book called *Green Paradise Lost*, and Naomi Goldenberg, who was Jewish, wrote the book *The Changing of the Gods: Feminism and the End of Traditional Religions*. A lot of the putting down of women has been perpetuated by the churches. These women were fighting that and asking that we replace the hierarchal system symbolized by a ladder with an egalitarian system symbolized by a circle. They also brought

ecology into the circle, not making humans superior to or rulers of the natural world. They wanted to replace the old worldview with a new one, so men would stop thinking that women were made for him, that the Earth was made for him and that he was the Master of it all, that he was the center of the universe, man is God and God is man. Copernicus and Galileo showed that the Earth was not the center of the universe, as people had thought before that; the Sun was the center and we were out there, out in space, so we were not the most important thing God created. They were suggesting, too, that you should get rid of that male ego--that narcissism and machoism. That is why feminists have to work with men as well as women on all of this.

It's very important, even today, with the macho resistance to wearing a mask to control the 2020-2021 pandemic: President Donald Trump didn't want to be seen in a mask, because he thought he would look weak if he wore a mask. This time, that machoism has caused many deaths in the United States, because his followers (males and females) decided they would not wear masks either. So, I think the feminist philosophers and theologians went to the heart of the problems--the need for a new worldview. Any other questions you wanted to ask about Women's Studies?

KR: Yes. You mentioned Nadine Gordimer before. I am wondering about your scholarship and how it evolved over time.

NB: Okay. Virginia Woolf was not only my first important interest but also a continuous interest throughout my career. In addition to my book, I published five articles, five reviews, and two conference reports on Woolf. Many people considered her apolitical--but I recognized that she was a feminist and, therefore, political in the way she saw the world. I also demonstrated how her androgynous vision related to her aesthetics and to her manic depression. In changing the title of my book from *The Aesthetics of Virginia Woolf* to the title *Virginia Woolf and the Androgynous Vision* at the last moment, the term androgyny became important. Instead of feminist literary criticism, I later suggested the term androgynous literary criticism as being more wholistic--examining class and race in addition to women, all three at once. My book on *Virginia Woolf and the Androgynous Vision* came out in April 1973 and so did Carolyn Heilbrun's *Toward the Recognition of Androgyny* and Mary Daly's *Beyond God the Father*, which talks about "androgynous being." Adrienne Rich's poem "The Stranger" which ends with the birth of an "androgyne" also appeared then in her 1973 book *Diving into the Wreck.* Therefore, a major panel on androgyny was held at the next Modern Language Association. I was on that panel and subsequently published an article and bibliography in Wendy Martin's journal called *Women's Studies.* That whole issue was devoted to androgyny. Then, there were special conferences at Cornell and--let's see where the other place was--the University of Michigan, which were devoted to androgyny. That was a part of my innovation. Then, I think that the article I wrote about expanding the concept of affirmative action to include the curriculum was innovative, and it grew out of my concept of androgyny as wholeness and my concept of androgynous literary criticism as examining women, race, and class together. I wrote several articles on the impact of Women's Studies, all of which are available on my website. The website address is www.nancytoppingbazin.com

KR: I will, for the record, say the full title of your article in 1980, "Expanding the Concept of Affirmative Action to Include the Curriculum."

NB: Yes. I wrote something like fifteen articles about what we did in Women's Studies and about the impact of the feminist perspective on the various disciplines and especially its impact on reading and teaching literature. But I also kept publishing about my favorite women writers.

The second writer I spent most of my time on was Doris Lessing. At the Modern Language Association (MLA), we had created a Doris Lessing Society as well as a Virginia Woolf Society, and each of these societies planned special programs every year on each of these authors. Because of that, both authors became more and more well-known; and we, their admirers, had opportunities to present papers at the annual MLA conventions. Many of those papers became articles and sometimes books. More and more people (mainly women) were reading Doris Lessing's works; and she received a Nobel Prize in 2007. The third writer I became extremely interested in was Nadine Gordimer. Gordimer was somewhat better known than Lessing when I began to teach her novels and short stories. All my publications grew out of my teaching. Gordimer lived in South Africa and was on the side of the Blacks during the revolts against apartheid. So, all the characters, of course, in her books were involved in that situation. She won the Nobel Prize in 1991. A book I co-edited with Marilyn Dallman Seymour was published just before that in 1990. Nadine Gordimer was invited to many countries to talk about her writings and apartheid, and everywhere she went she was usually interviewed. Our book was a collection of those interviews from all those countries. The title of the book was *Conversations with Nadine Gordimer*. I also wrote nine articles about her novels and they, like my other articles on literature or on Women's Studies, may be downloaded from my website or read on the website: www.nancytoppingbazin.com

Then, because of my travels in Africa, I was the first person to write about the early Black African women novelists. These included Mariama Ba (*So Long a Letter*) and Aminata Sow Fall (*The Beggars' Strike*), both from Senegal; they were both writing in French (which was fun for me) but they are also available in translation. Then, there were Flora Nwapa and Buchi Emecheta, both from Nigeria. Flora Nwapa wrote a book call *Efuru* and Buchi Emecheta wrote *The Joys of Motherhood*, which I taught frequently. Bessie Head from Botswana wrote a very powerful novel called *A Question of Power*. She also wrote *Maru* and *When Rain Clouds Gather*. I taught all these authors but wrote most often about Bessie Head and Buchi Emecheta. Meanwhile, I had joined the African Literature Association, and that's where I met, as I mentioned to you, Abena Busia, who is from Rutgers. I think I saw that she's an ambassador now. She may have been Chair of the Department of Women's and Gender Studies at Rutgers, when I met her. At the African Literature Association, I gave papers that later became articles. I wrote a total of eleven articles on the novels of these Black African women, often in combination with other writers. I was also active in the National Council for Teachers of English (NCTE), which was for both college and high school teachers, and I organized some of their pre-convention workshops. [Editor's Note: Abena Busia is a professor in the Department of Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies and Department of English at Rutgers. Since 2017, she has served as Ghana's Ambassador to Brazil. She is the daughter of Ghana's former Prime Minister Kofi Abrefa Busia.]

Another topic I was among the first to write about was alcoholism in literature, and after I did that article, a couple of books came out on that subject. It started because I was told by our administration that I should talk about alcoholism for ten minutes in class, because they didn't

want the students drinking too much. I was teaching Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* at that time. The father in that book drinks all the time, and it causes a great deal of pain to the members of his family. I had had a speaker from the English Department who had talked about an amusing character who drank too much, and people were laughing about it. So, I pointed out that this was not a laughing matter, that it causes so much pain in families. I could see in the room the faces of the people who obviously had alcoholism in their family. They just became stone faced and frozen. It was just visible around the room, which people had had that kind of experience. I can remember too, when I was not very old, I don't know, probably eight or nine, ten at most, that I was at a friend's house and her father was coming home, so she said, "We have to get under the dining room table." We got under the dining room table to hide, because he was coming home drunk. That was regular for her. She knew you hid whenever he came home. Those experiences led me to write about alcoholism and literature. I found it not only in Toni Morrison's novel but also in Athol Fugard's play "*Master Harold"...and the Boys*. Fugard is a South African writer and my favorite playwright. His father was also an alcoholic, and he writes about his experiences, his loneliness, and his bond with a black man who was a servant for the family but like a substitute father to him. Tragically racism intervenes. Included in my article, in addition, was a writer from India--Anita Desai--and again Buchi Emecheta, the African novelist.

I've been thinking recently about the women who got involved in the Prohibition movement, between 1848 to 1920. The reason they were involved was that so many husbands loved to drink on the way home from work, using the money that was needed for the family to put food on the table. I thought about the Charlie Chaplin films that I've seen, where these feminists were mocked for their participation. They were laughed at; they became comic, "Oh, these silly women are fussing about this alcohol," but it really was important for the family. Analyzing the impact of alcoholism in the 1990s was a new topic in literary criticism.

One thing I wanted to say, too, is that most of the opportunities I had to speak or give papers at a conference or even to be published in an edited volume or journal came from women. The kind of thing that men did for men--sharing information, choosing topics for panels, choosing people to work with because they knew them--women had been excluded from in the past. In the past, most women had not really been listened to or appreciated by men. Now there were a lot of women interested in Women's Studies and women writers, so we supported one another, encouraged one another, and exchanged intellectual ideas with one another. So, it was the women in the Virginia Woolf Society or the Doris Lessing Society, or in the MLA Women's Caucus, or at the state or national Women's Studies conferences who gave me the special opportunities that I had, so female bonding that you had through the women's movement was very important. We helped each other out, like in the Institute for Research on Women at Rutgers. You encourage other people to do their research and give them opportunities to read their papers, so that their research will get recognized, so people will realize what they are doing. If you don't get it out there, nobody knows what you're doing. That was very important for my career, the bonding that I had with a lot of other people--mostly all women.

In terms of faculty development in international affairs, we had three big projects at Old Dominion University. We had two wonderful grant writers, Jerry Bookin-Weiner and Tom Burkman. As an expert on the Middle East, Jerry created a faculty exchange with Morocco; I

gave a few talks there as part of that. Others went there for a semester or a year. Then in 1983, he had a grant to take about thirty-five professors from Old Dominion University and neighboring institutions to the Ivory Coast and Tanzania. To get ready, we had a seminar once a week for at least a year before we left. The Ivory Coast had oil off the coast and was capitalist, and Tanzania had democratic socialism and had no oil and not many ways to earn a living at that time. Julius Nyerere was head of the government there, and we interviewed him at his home.

Tom Burkman (who could speak Japanese) wrote a big grant to take colleagues to China and Japan. Most exciting was that we went to China in 1989 and watched the buildup in Tiananmen Square. We saw the protesters in the beginning, when the police were relaxed and jovial and talking to people, and it went on and on with more and more students arriving from other universities. In Xian, the workers on the trains gave the students free rides, showing their support. In the beginning almost everyone, including the President of Beijing University, spoke openly about supporting the students. We met with professors in the History Department, and they were the exception. They had portraits of all the previous leaders of China up on the walls. They knew you could be jailed or shot if you supported the "wrong" person. I believe I read at the time that the students at the end of their protest were asking to negotiate with the government on TV (so everyone could watch), and they brought a replica of the Statue of Liberty into the Square. Probably no government of any kind would negotiate on TV; and bringing in an American symbol of freedom pushed them too far. The government couldn't allow that, so the shooting began. By that time, we were fortunately on a plane headed for Japan. [Editor's Note: In the spring of 1989, pro-democracy demonstrations occurred in cities across China, with the main protest occurring in Tiananmen Square, Beijing. The movement culminated in the Tiananmen Square Massacre on June 4 and 5, when government forces, with live ammunition and military vehicles, attacked the one million protesters occupying Tiananmen Square.]

Two history teachers from China came to visit Old Dominion University a year or two later and we met with them. The way they talked you'd think nothing had happened in Tiananmen Square. They denied that that event had ever occurred. Of course, we knew because we had been there, so they were talking to the wrong group like that. But I don't know whether it was because each feared the other or whether they were convinced that they didn't want to tell the truth, because whoever was above them would punish them. Anyway, we had that experience.

I remarried on January 4, 1992. I had been traveling quite a bit before that, but my husband [Robert Eliot Reardon] and I continued to travel and went to many different countries. That all contributed to my consciousness of different cultures. Let's see, anything else that you wanted to know? I received a teaching award in 1994 in a statewide competition sponsored by the State Council of Higher Education [SCHEV], and then an Elisabeth and Charles Burgess award from the College of Arts and Letters at Old Dominion University in 1996 for creativity and research. In 2000, I retired and became an artist.

KR: As your career was progressing at Old Dominion, how much did you stay attuned to developments at Rutgers in the Institute for Research on Women and in Women's Studies?

NB: Not very much, I guess, except for people I might have invited to Old Dominion University, like historians Suzanne Lebsock and Lois Banner and poet Alicia Ostriker. I must

have invited Kate Stimpson to campus at some time. Occasionally, I would meet people like Abena Busia from Gender Studies and there must have been others at the National Women's Studies Association meeting at Rutgers. My one box of Rutgers material has been with me all these years, including the twenty after I retired, full of things that I kept thinking I would take up there some time and leave at the library. I did call the Women's Studies office at Rutgers once and got the secretary. When I asked her if they might want those papers, she said, "No, No, No, I don't have any room for them in my office!" [laughter] We do have one person from Rutgers here, Phil Gillette, who was in political science. I did not know him at Rutgers, but we moved to Norfolk at the same time and we retired the same year. We are good friends with him and his wife Nancy. A German professor from Rutgers also came to Old Dominion University, in part because Bridget Gellert told him I was happy here.

Among other countries, my husband Robert and I went to Syria--before it was bombed and ruined--and it was very interesting. The dictator [Hafez al-Assad] who had ruled Syria (as "President") from 1971 to 2000 had just died, and we were a little afraid to go. His son, Bashar al-Assad, would take over, but would there be any trouble? American tours and cruise ships that had planned to stop there had canceled. But we had our tickets, and we hoped to see a former student of mine from Old Dominion University. So, we went anyway. For some reason, my former student was not there; but we did meet her brother and her parents. Her brother took us around Aleppo, where they lived, and then we traveled to Homs, Krak des Chevaliers, Damascus, and wonderful Palmyra, on our own. Later, my former student was living in an apartment building and the other end of it was bombed. However, she wanted to stay there so her daughter could finish the equivalent of our high school before they left, even though there were bombings and terrible things going on. Eventually, she fled and is currently teaching English in Turkey. We are still in touch, and she is very fortunate to be out of that terrible, terrible situation. It is such a tragedy: Bashar al-Assad bombing his own people, destroying his own country, and crushing any form of protest. My student had a precious skill--teaching English--that allowed her to have a job while in exile in Turkey. [Editor's Note: Bashar al-Assad has been dictator since 2000 and has maintained power through the Syrian Civil War, which has been ongoing since 2011.]

We visited Turkey (before Erdogan, another autocrat admired by President Trump) and then went to the country of Georgia, because I also had a former student in Tbilisi, the capital city. Unfortunately, she had stayed in California, but we met her family and her best friend took us around. Now, I am more in touch with her best friend.

We went to Australia, New Zealand, and Central America, Spain and Portugal, St. Petersburg in Russia, Belgium and France, Ireland, Wales, Scotland, and England, and Italy. We went to Ecuador and the Galapagos Islands. The Galapagos Islands are a special treat. They are six hundred miles offshore, so it takes a plane to get there. To save the islands from destruction, only so many people are allowed on the islands at one time. Charles Darwin went there in 1835 to study evolution in an isolated place. I found there my favorite bird--the blue-footed booby--that I have painted frequently since then. We saw a blue-footed booby couple standing guard over their baby that had died. We also saw a dead baby seal still attached to the mother by the umbilical cord. The mother didn't seem to know how to detach it. Do we have more empathy for birds and animals than we do for humans? Sometimes I think so.

We enjoy traveling to see how people live in other cultures. We had this idea when we retired, that we would visit the countries farthest away and then work our way back towards home. Right now, with the pandemic, we can't even travel within the United States, so we're confined pretty much to our apartment. That's where we are now in our travels, right around the block. [laughter]

KR: Well, good thing you have gotten a lot of traveling in, since now we are all housebound.

NB: Yes. The head of the UN (United Nations) just came out with an article based on a speech he gave. He says that the world is at a breaking point due to human inequality and that the pandemic is exposing "falsehoods everywhere. The lie that free markets can deliver healthcare for all. The fiction that unpaid care work is not work. The delusion that we live in a post-racist world. The myth that we are all in the same boat." [Editor's Note: This is an excerpt from a speech given virtually by Secretary-General António Guterres at the 18th Nelson Mandela Annual Lecture on July 18, 2020. The theme of the lecture was "Tackling the Inequality Pandemic: A New Social Contract for a New Era."] He points out the inequality of wealth and other inequalities, which he says include race, gender, class, and place of birth. The place of birth is not usually mentioned, but it is so important, isn't it? He points out that twenty-six of the richest people in the world hold as much wealth as half the global population. This António Guterres, who is the Secretary-General of the UN, calls for a new model of global governance--and inclusive and equal participation. So, this problem of inequality is not just a small matter but an enormous one; and probably we are not as a nation giving much help to the developing countries now. All that U.S. aid that we once gave probably has diminished greatly. That kind of follows through with what we've been talking about in terms of trying to educate people to care about those inequalities and to fix them.

KR: I want to ask you about your art, but before we go into your art, is there anything else that you would like to talk about with your career and your scholarship?

NB: I don't think so. We've covered it pretty well. It's been a great career. I feel very lucky to have worked during that time, when there was so much excitement about what we were teaching and doing. You don't always have that opportunity. It could have been just striving for success and that kind of thing, but it was really something I cared about. Often, the students would say things like their lives were changed by those courses, or that it was a whole new experience, or that they looked at the world in a whole new way. When I hear from students that they still think about the things we talked about in class, it is very rewarding. Anything else about the broad picture that you can think of?

KR: Let us talk about your career as an artist. What has informed your style and your subject matter?

NB: Well, I think it all comes from the subconscious. It's not very easy to put your finger on it. I had thought about majoring in art, as I told you, in college. There was a studio here in Norfolk called SOFA, which stood for Studio of Fine Art. It was run by a young woman who had recently graduated in art from Virginia Commonwealth University. This is what she was doing

with her degree--setting up a school for art. I saw SOFA and I thought, "Maybe that's what I'll do--go take an art course." I did that. The place was small. So, there were only eight or nine of us in a class at one time. I kept taking all the possible art courses. Then, I branched out from there and took classes in Virginia Beach or Hampton or Newport News, other adjacent cities that had art centers of one kind or another. Then, I discovered that there were art workshops in Myrtle Beach called Springmaid Watermedia Workshops. Well, Springmaid was the manufacturer of sheets and pillowcases, which, I don't know, you may be too young to remember, but when I was young, if it was a sheet or it was a pillowcase, it had the label Springmaid. They had a place for their employees to go for vacations. One was on the beach (Springmaid Beach Resort) and the other was in the mountains (Springmaid Mountain Resort). Springmaid was taken over by the Leroy Springs Company, and their Art Director Stephen McCrae along with Alex Powers, a well-known artist in Myrtle Beach, set up art workshops--six or seven at a time for three weeks in the fall and for another three weeks in the spring.

The artist, Alex Powers, who started that, came to the Peninsula Fine Arts Center in Newport News to judge the art exhibit and do a workshop for the Virginia Watercolor Society. Even though I had only taken art for two years at that point, I had been taking art classes there at that center, so I went to that workshop. He told me about the one in Myrtle Beach, so I started going there. I received a better art education there, I think, than I would have in a university. Professional artists, nationally and sometimes internationally known, came from all over the United States to teach the classes. So, I started with one or two workshops, but very soon I began taking all three in the fall and all three in the spring. With extra workshops elsewhere, I'd end up with about nine workshops a year. Those workshops were my substitute for getting a B.A. or a master's degree in art.

Like most beginners, I began with realism. You look at something--a model, a still life, or a photo, and you draw it as realistically as possible. But I had always loved color, line, and pattern, so I began to move away from the realism in order to create patterns or lines on things that didn't have them. I also became what I call a "colorist," meaning that I could change the colors of things as I pleased. It didn't have to match the real color; it could be a different one. I finally had the freedom to change things. I could use my imagination.

I took photos as we traveled. For example, in Ecuador, I had taken pictures of markets. When I painted them, I could select a person from one market and a person from a different market and put them together. I was creating my own compositions or designs rather than placing them as they were in the photo. Or, I could place them all in one scene--a food market, an animal market, and an artisan's market. Sometimes the whole painting came from my imagination. For example, I did one I called "Imaginative Children and Busy Parents." In the foreground, I had the imaginative children and fantasy-like animals and trees; in the background were the busy parents walking by in a hurry. I was inspired to do that painting when I saw a woman walking along with her little girl. The mother was looking at her cell phone the whole time and never spoke to the child at all. So, that's what inspired me to do imaginative children with their overly busy parents.

I went both to Springmaid Beach (with its big hotels) and to Springmaid Mountain Resort (with its rustic cabins). Springmaid Mountain Resort is in the town of Spruce Pine, NC. Leroy

Springs, the company that took over Springmaid, also took over ownership of the mountain. That location could offer only one workshop at a time. I took many times the workshop offered there by artist Mary Todd Beam. She occasionally used the technique of putting black gesso, which is like acrylic paint, on one side of aluminum foil, putting the foil down on the white watercolor paper, and then making marks on the clean side of the aluminum foil--the side that did not have black gesso on it. She didn't draw using this technique; she just made lines. Sometimes we divided up the paper with the lines, sometimes we made random lines here and there, sometimes we had a combination of lines and black blotches here and there. With that, we could do an abstract painting or various imaginary creatures. One day, for some reason, when I was at Springmaid Beach with another of my favorite teachers Harold Gregor, I told him I was going to draw cats using this technique. He said, "Oh, that's such a trite subject," you know, to draw cats. Well, he loved my cats when I drew them. Cats were something I loved. When I showed it to him in black and white, you know, drawing it with this technique of the aluminum foil and the black gesso, he loved it that way and he didn't want me to put any color on it, so I left it black and white. I did another one with cats and the things that cats loved, so there were butterflies, a mouse, and a few other things in the drawing. Then, I did one out of my imagination of "a dancing beast," a man playing a flute, and a few other characters and animals.

Then, the fourth one was of birds, large birds. I don't know why I chose birds but, after that, every painting consisted of three or more birds that came from any part of the world. I never changed my subject matter. I did a series of forty big paintings of whimsical birds. Some were vertical and some horizontal. The earlier ones without a colored border were 36" x 28". The rest (with colored borders) were larger: 40" x 32." Most of the ones not sold are now on my apartment walls; only a few are still for sale. You can see two of the early ones here. [Editor's Note: This refers to the two paintings that can be seen hanging on the wall behind Dr. Bazin.] Those are very early ones. But I don't know why I chose birds. My mother loved birds, but I had never been a birder. I don't know the names of all the birds, although I've been reading about them now for several years. I drew the first one in 2012. I did other kinds of art over the years, but my main subject matter has been the birds ever since. One artist-teacher, Linda Baker, was particularly helpful by supporting my desire to paint my whimsical birds. In workshops where we each did our own projects, she supported very strongly what I wanted to do.

One day, when I was down at Springmaid Beach, a young woman said to me, "Why do you paint birds?" I thought, "Why do I paint birds?" I realized that I didn't know why I painted birds. I thought about that, and I decided to write this little book [available from Amazon] called *Why I Love to Paint Birds* (2015). I found a graphic artist at The Artist Gallery in Virginia Beach to help me design the book; Sandra Lee Snider did the graphic work. I picked out all the reasons I love to paint birds. There was one reason every two pages and I put a whimsical bird painting on each of those two pages to exemplify that reason. I am grateful for that young woman at Springmaid who asked me why I painted birds, because her question inspired me to write the book.

Although I was not conscious of it, I think the rational reason I was painting birds was because you can change a bird and it still looks like a bird. You can put all kinds of patterns or colors on it, and most people will not worry if the bird is not realistic. Usually, there was a bit of a story going on in my whimsical bird paintings, so I guess the literature part of me comes out that way.

The aluminum foil technique, the patterns, colors, and lines as well as the story and interactions among the birds make the paintings whimsical. The eyes of the birds are also very important to communicate feeling. One person after another has told me I should become an illustrator for children's books, but I didn't want to paint pictures for someone else's stories. People also told me my paintings made them feel happy, and I think that is why they wanted to offer them to children. However, adults--maybe even more than children--need some color and whimsicality to help them feel happy. I am so delighted to have my birds around me in my apartment now. The color and charm help me feel much happier than I would be without them.

I have done ten solo exhibits of my whimsical birds and other works. For example, I did one at the Norfolk Botanical Gardens at the same time that they had a big outdoor display of fantastic birds, fish, animals, and palaces from China. I also had a solo exhibit at the main library in Virginia Beach, one at the Children's Museum of Virginia in Portsmouth, and one close to Richmond at a gallery called Art for Art's Sake. I have enjoyed painting my series of forty whimsical bird paintings, and I've enjoyed showing them.

Now, though, I've picked out all my favorites from the ones not already sold, and I have put them up in my apartment. I have completed three paintings from my new series where I combine more birds interacting in a square format divided into spaces much like an abstract painting. I will exhibit them once more in October, but they are not for sale; they will come home with me to go back on the walls of my two-bedroom apartment. I've picked out all the paintings that I love most, and I've put them up at home. There are thirty-seven of them, of which twenty-two are whimsical birds. I'm not going to sell those works until I die. However, because I was so prolific, I still have 126 other paintings to sell from my website! [laughter]

I was recently juried into a national exhibit. All the paintings were hung in the Oglethorpe University Museum of Art in Atlanta, Georgia, and soon after that, the 2020-'21 pandemic hit and, unfortunately, the museum had to close. I have also been in several state-wide or regional exhibits, for example, with the Virginia Watercolor Society, the Central Virginia Watercolor Guild, the Virginia Artists, and the Gloucester Art Festival, as well as in a few exhibits online that were international. I have continuous exhibits at four places: at The Artists Gallery, which is in Virginia Beach, at the D'Art Center and at Wells Fargo Advisors in downtown Norfolk, and at The Gallery Shop, which is in Portsmouth. My greatest joy in my twenty years of painting was when the Curator Emeritus from the Chrysler Museum, Jeff Harrison, said of my whimsical bird paintings on display: "Creating an entire world is an uphill battle for any artist. But Nancy Topping Bazin has done just that, populating a whimsical realm of fantastic feathered creatures, a world of brilliant color and bold semi-abstract patterns. It is a charmed place of pure imagination that offers hours of joyful contemplation."

My academic career and my art career come together ultimately with the message that emerges from both. When I became a feminist at Rutgers College, I created the ideal of androgyny which meant wholeness or oneness in which the inequalities are eliminated that women, people of color, the poor, and people in the developing world struggle against today. As the feminist philosophers and theologians taught us, the circle of oneness or equality should replace the hierarchal ladder of the Chain of Being. In that world of equality, people would admire and appreciate the lives of birds and not destroy the environment of clean air and clean water the

birds need to survive. If birds can't live in a polluted world, we can't either. All the birds are today's canary. They are like the canary the coal miners took into the mine with them, so the bird would warn them by becoming ill when the air was not good enough for the miners to breathe. The egalitarian circle includes the birds. If my paintings can help people to admire and love birds, perhaps they will take better care of the environment needed for birds and humans to be healthy. They will finally believe that climate change is real and that it is urgent to stop making it worse.

In the Norfolk Botanical Garden, there are two young women made of bronze dancing together in a circle, and there's a saying on the side of the monument that supports them. It is by Arther Morris (1863-1929), who wrote: "There are so many gods, so many creeds, so many paths that wind and wind when just the art of being kind is all this sad world needs."

KR: I have reached the end of my questions. At this point, I want to ask you if there is anything else that you would like to add.

NB: I don't think so. I loved my career in literature and Women's Studies from 1970 to 2000, and I loved my career in art from 2000 to 2021. I was very prolific in both careers. Once I have the rest of my paintings sold, I hope to relax and continue on at a slower pace. It has been nice talking to you.

KR: I want to thank you so much for doing these oral history interviews with me. It has been such a pleasure to document your history.

NB: Thank you very much for doing it.

----------END OF TRANSCRIPT----------

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