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Oral history interview with Nancy Brooks
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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Nancy Brooks Brody on January 9, 22, 24, and 28, 2018. The interview took place at the home of Nancy Brooks Brody in Brooklyn, N.Y., and was conducted by Svetlana Kitto for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This interview is part of the Archives of American Art's Visual Arts and the AIDS Epidemic: An Oral History Project.

Nancy Brooks Brody and Svetlana Kitto have reviewed the transcript. Their corrections and emendations appear below in brackets with initials. This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

SVETLANA KITTO: This is Svetlana Kitto interviewing Nancy Brooks Brody at her home in Brooklyn, New York, on January 9, 2018, as part of the Visual Arts and AIDS Epidemic Oral History Project for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Card number one. If you can just start by telling me where and when you were born, and a little bit about your early life.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Sure. Hi, thanks, Svetlana. I was born in Manhattan, September 12, 1962. Manhattan, New York City.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yes. And where did you grow up?

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: My family was living on 55th Street when I was born. I was born in Doctors Hospital. I believe it was on the Upper West Side. We lived on 55th Street into my third year. I remember having my fourth birthday up on the Upper West Side, on 86th Street, which is where we moved, between Riverside and West End. We were on 55th Street between Sixth and Seventh Avenue. My family lived—it was right across from City Center, and I believe we had to leave because I think they used eminent domain. They made the Ziegfeld Movie Theater there, on that property, and that was when all that entire Avenue of the Americas and all those modern buildings that were going up in the '60s—that was all—I mean, I assume it was all pre-war buildings that got—you know, brick buildings that got taken down for the glass towers that are there now, like all around MoMA, in that area close to Central Park. I remember going to Central Park as a kid, the southeast end of the park.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah. So were you allowed to play in the neighborhood? [00:02:03]

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: At that age, when I was three, I really don't recall playing in the neighborhood so much. Certainly when we moved to the Upper West Side. But I do remember my sister went to kindergarten, it must have been, or pre-kindergarten, around the corner from where we lived. I recall—and this is when I know it was already in a state of demolition, because I remember my mom teaching me to pick my sister up from school by myself when I was three. Should I tell this story?

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah, go ahead.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: I didn't have to cross any streets. I would go on my tricycle. And I remember her telling me to stop when I got to this certain spot where there was a chain link fence. And in my mind's eye, I can see all the old brick, rubble, a new chain link fence, and the back of all these buildings. And so, there was already—deconstruction was already happening in the neighborhood. This is right before we moved.

I would have to—she would say, "Wave at me, look. So I know you made it around the block, stop at this spot and wave." I would always go around the block. [Around the corner from 110 West 55th Street. -NBB] And I was so young. She doesn't even know this, to this day, that I would just look at this sea, this wall of windows, and I never saw her. I didn't understand what floor we lived on. I think we lived on three or six, I would really have to ask. But I just would stop and look up and wave, and then I would—but I never saw her waving at me. [00:03:55]

And then I would carry on, on my tricycle, and it was all adults, and I would wait for my sister to come out of pre-kindergarten or kindergarten. Sometimes they would let me come in and play with the little stainless steel, aluminum tea sets and whatnot. And I remember the teacher. I know it was the early '60s, because she was in that pant—kind of just above the knee—suit, skirt, and little high-heel spiked shoes, pointy black leather. I can see the legs. That's why I know my height. Like, I can picture the stockings and the length of a skirt, but I don't really picture people's faces.

SVETLANA KITTO: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. So you moved when you were three.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Yeah, and I would always have to stop and get my mother a *New York Times* and a peppermint patty, also on this trip.

SVETLANA KITTO: Oh, really?

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: And I would take my sister on the back of the trike, and I would trike her home.

SVETLANA KITTO: Amazing.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: I was very proud about this, because I was three and I was, like, picking my sister up.

SVETLANA KITTO: [Laughs.] That's like really young to be getting—

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: So that's how it was, yeah.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah, yeah. That is different.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: 1965?

SVETLANA KITTO: That's different than it is now.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Yes, so, anyway, that was my very early beginnings. And then we moved uptown, and we ran like—I was a major neighborhood kid, on the streets daily. You know, my father would have to come out and find me and bring me in.

SVETLANA KITTO: So who were your friends in the neighborhood?

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Who were my friends?

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah. Who did you play with?

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Who was out on the streets? It's funny that you're asking me that, because I was just thinking about it recently. The apartment building that I grew up in was probably a pretty, like, standard middle-class. But the Upper West Side was so—it was such a mix of people. Like you would go from literally one block to the next, it could change on a dime. Eighty-Sixth Street was always this grand boulevard. It was a large street, whereas right around the corner on 85th Street was all brownstones and small, low apartments buildings. There, you had a Phoenix House. There was a home for—we would call it "wayward women," that's what I remember saying. And there was a welfare home. So it was always like, "Don't go around the corner, don't go around the street." Literally around the street there was like—it was "dangerous" around the street. [00:06:25]

But 86th Street, right on that, was this more middle-class—but there was always—you know, there was a lot happening. I was talking to my mom about it, like, there was lots of prostitution in my neighborhood. [A lot of muggings and street violence. -NBB] The streets were different than they are now, when people think of the Upper West Side.

SVETLANA KITTO: What was your block like?

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Eighty-Sixth Street was, I mean—what was my block like? It felt like a very—I mean, I didn't have much to compare it to. Riverside Drive was half a block away, so we would be on my street, but also we would go to the park, and we were up right by Soldiers and Sailors Monument. I feel very lucky that I grew up near a park, because I would ride my bike and go play ball, and I was a real physical—I wanted to be playing outside a lot. I played with any kid. It was like, you know, you would rustle up kids, go knock on your neighbor's door, try to get a bunch of kids to come out and play dodgeball. It was kind of, like, whoever hit the streets.

But I think it—this is the thing I was thinking about recently. I was like, "Oh, I didn't play with too many white kids." Some for sure, but I think now, a lot of the white kids were probably doing more after school. Not like today's standard of after-school, but people were taking lessons and doing things that I wasn't really doing. So I had to make my own time outside of the organization of a school and a classroom. I think any time that wasn't in class or school was very unorganized time, so I was on the street with pretty much anyone that would play. [00:08:18]

A lot of the times it was the superintendent's kids and all their cousins. They were from Vieques, and some other part of Puerto Rico. I know they would always bring me back *quenepa* and stuff from—they would go back to the island a lot. I hung out with them and their family in their house a lot. And I don't know, just lots of—a real mix of kids. A lot of kids, when I think about it, were kids that ended up in jail, kids that ended up dead. You know, this was—now we're probably talking about the early '70s, and the city was bankrupt, the streets were really different then, up there, than they are now. Amsterdam Avenue was always—it was always, like, you know,

"Don't go on Amsterdam Avenue," but of course, I was always on Amsterdam Avenue, you know?

SVETLANA KITTO: Was it scary?

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: In a way it might have been a little scary. Yes, when I was alone, it was scary. When I was with anyone, I wasn't scared. But coming home at night, I would be afraid, definitely. It was tough. There was a lot of homeless people, a lot of people with varying mental states. [Being in groups felt safe. -NBB]

SVETLANA KITTO: Okay. And what was your family's class background?

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: I would say we were pretty middle-class. My father came from—both my parents grew up in New Jersey. They met in the city when they were in their 20s, but when they—they figured out that they both grew up on the same block in New Jersey—in Perth Amboy, New Jersey—but they didn't know each other because they were eight years apart. My father was eight years older than my mom, but when my grandmothers met, they knew each other. [00:10:16]

My father was quite poor. His father came to this country from—I'm pretty sure it was Poland. The borders were changing a lot then. Poland or Russia. He came when he was a very little boy, probably seven, eight years old. My grandfather worked at a gas station. [. . . -NBB] I know that he was, like, a delivery man at a bank or something. They didn't have money.

My mother's father was a bootlegger during prohibition, and then became a liquor salesman. And he passed away when my mother was fairly young, in her 20s. And then my grandmother, my maternal grandmother, had a job at a pharmacy. She called herself a cosmetician, but she just worked behind the counter at a pharmacy. [Wernicks Pharmacy -NBB] And she had that job, unbeknownst to my grandfather evidently, for years. He would go out to work and my grandmother would secretly have someone—she didn't have a license, but she would have someone come and pick her up and drive her to her job at the pharmacy, so that she could have money to buy my mom and my mother's sister clothes, because my grandfather wasn't very—I think he spent a lot of money on himself. He had very beautiful things for himself [and lots of girlfriends. -NBB]

SVETLANA KITTO: And where were they from? The maternal grandparents? [00:11:52]

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: My maternal grandmother—they were—both my maternal grandmother and maternal grandfather grew up in this country. They came from immigrant parents. My mother's grandmother came from Hungary. She met her husband on the boat coming over in the early 1900s. I guess my mother's grandfather died in some—there's a mystery about his death. He was brought over here, as an engineer. They were Catholic, that side of my family.

Everybody else were the Jews. So they came in a different class. They were a slightly higher class, I guess, coming from Hungary. So my maternal great-grandmother and great-grandfather met on the boat coming to America. They came through Ellis Island. He went to—I know he lived on 14th Street, she lived on the Upper West Side. They ended up marrying somehow, winding up in Woodbridge, Perth Amboy area. He died and left her without money, and she ended up having to take in laundry. This is my [maternal -NBB] great-grandmother. [The Jews came with nothing. -NBB]

They had three children: my grandmother, and my great-aunt, and a great-uncle. And my great-uncle died quite young. But my grandmother and great-aunt went on to kind of live closely together. They lived, like, every weekend together. So, they were—that's who I was somewhat raised by, was my maternal grandmother and great-aunt. I didn't live with them, but I spent a lot of time with them out in New Jersey.

SVETLANA KITTO: And what were they like?

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: I really loved my maternal grandmother and my great-aunt a lot. I went to church with my—my grandmother would drive us to church. She wouldn't go to church, but my great-aunt, Alga, they were Herzcochs, Herczogh Hungarian. H-E-R-C-Z-O-G-H. [00:14:10]

I know very little about—I know nothing of what happened in Europe and what life was like. I know my great-aunt would talk about Budapest. She never went there, but they had, like, some deed of land that was always this fantasy—that there was some relationship to the Czar, and some story of someone being murdered and, you know, war resistance or something—that I never researched and don't really know about. It's something that I have a little—I don't want to say regret or remorse—but it's a curiosity, it's some question mark. And then I don't really know anything about the Jewish side either, my father's side.

Well, my mom is half Jewish, half Catholic. My mother's parents were eloped and didn't let anyone know they were married for some years, because he was Jewish and she was Catholic. There was, you know, a lot of secrecy around that. And then she was pregnant, so they let people know they were actually married. But it was

a big deal for a Jew and a Catholic to marry then, in the '30s.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah. So that was your dad's side.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Mom.

SVETLANA KITTO: Oh, that was your mom's side.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: My mom.

SVETLANA KITTO: But did you say there's Jewishness on your dad's side?

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Yes. My father is full Jew.

SVETLANA KITTO: Oh, okay.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: My mom was half Jew, but none of them have any religion. I know nothing about Judaism.

SVETLANA KITTO: So you went to church.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: I more went to church and I went to an Episcopalian camp. You grew up on the Upper West Side, Judaism kind of seeps in.

SVETLANA KITTO: So, the grandfather, the bootlegger, was the Jew?

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: He was the Jew. He was the alcoholic, evidently a bit of a nightmare. [They feared him. -NBB] [00:16:00]

SVETLANA KITTO: Did he die before you—did you know him?

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: No. He died before my parents were ever married. Not long before. My mom doesn't tell fine stories about him, sadly. My grandmother always said I would have loved him. I have some shirts of his.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah. So tell me more about your grandmother. Or like, a memory that you have of her.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Gosh, it's like I don't—I mean, it's funny, the things that I have of her are so in my heart, you know? It's not even so much this incredible woman that I think—she was just very kind. She felt very solid to me. I always felt very safe with her. She just, you know, is the grandma classic: good cook, playing cards when I got a little older, smoking cigarettes with her and drinking whisky, learning how to play rummy 500 and gin rummy and Scrabble, and sitting around the house and just feeling—there was a safety to her home. The porch, the backyard. Just going shopping.

SVETLANA KITTO: Where was it?

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: It was suburbia. She was in Metuchen and my great-aunt was in Woodbridge, and they spent every single weekend together. My great-aunt never learned how to drive. My grandmother would go and pick her up. Finally, my grandmother—after my grandfather died, she learned how to drive and would go and get my great-aunt. They all lived together at a time, too, when—there was a moment there where, I guess, when my grandfather—he had a lot of other women.

And at one point, there was a separation. And my mom, and my mom's sister, my grandmother, all went and lived with my great-grandmother and my great-aunt in Woodbridge, New Jersey, in this house that my great-aunt lived in until she died. And then, when there was, I guess, a forgiveness, a rapprochement, between my grandmother and my grandfather, they went and bought a home in Metuchen. And that's where my mom, then, was a senior in high school. That's the home that I would go visit my grandmother in Metuchen. [00:18:09]

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah. And what was your great-aunt like?

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: My great-aunt was tough. She was rough. They were both like—so, my grandmother felt a little more refined than my great-aunt, just naturally. She had just an elegance to her, a kind of calm elegance, nothing ostentatious. She just had kind of a way that my great-aunt didn't have. My great-aunt was kind of butchy. She never married. She was just like, you know, [demonstrates raspy voice] "Hey kid, how you doing?" She loved me a lot. She's the one who would come to New York and take care of us when my mom and dad would take vacations or go somewhere. She would come and take care of my sister and me. [She worked for the government and told a lot of stories. -NBB]

She was tough, she was a tough cookie, she was rough. She, you know, was like—bought clothes at—I don't know where you even bought clothes like that. Like, matching polyester shirts and pants, and Keds sneakers, and she would just comb her hair back, in almost like a D.A., but longer. Not a lot of self-care in there, but a lot of love, a lot of heart. She liked her family. I don't think she liked anyone too much outside of the family, but she went to church every Sunday. She was a racist, I think. You know, she—

SVETLANA KITTO: Did they tell you stories? Like, did your grandmother tell you stories?

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Did my grandmother tell me stories?

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Not so much, I don't think.

SVETLANA KITTO: But you heard them talking.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: What do you mean by stories?

SVETLANA KITTO: Like, my grandmother told me stories about our other relatives, about her growing up, about her time during the war. She had a lot of war stories, my grandmother. [00:20:11]

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Yeah. I wish I had a little more of that. I don't feel like I got too much. I got a little bit about their brother being sent back to Europe at a certain point and being educated in Europe, and there being some pride around that, my uncle Jack. And that was this whole, like, Catholic side of the family that I didn't ever really know.

The part of my family that I—my family is very small, and yet, it's actually—if we knew everyone, it would be large. But something happened—I don't know what it was or whose control came into it, where I want to say it's probably my mom—that we became somewhat of a small family. And my grandmother didn't—I didn't hear a lot of stories. I'm not sure why. And I'm really interested in stories, I'm really curious, and I love hearing about other people and the past and my family. I was the one that was always like, "Where are we from? What are we—?" But I didn't get a whole lot.

SVETLANA KITTO: So, it wasn't, like, an important part—it wasn't important to them maybe, to be talking about.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: For them, I guess not. I mean, I knew that my grandmother could speak Hungarian.

SVETLANA KITTO: Oh, wow.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Because my great-grandmother came over and didn't speak any English. But I never really heard her speak Hungarian, or learned it myself, and she certainly didn't teach it to her kids. Food, I think. There was some food that got passed down, recipes and some Hungarian cooking that happened.

SVETLANA KITTO: Oh, really?

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Mm-hmm [affirmative], for sure. Chicken paprikash, I remember, and a certain kind of white stuffed cabbage that I always heard, "This was from Hungary," you know? [00:22:02]

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah. So how about—back to just your nuclear family home. Did your mother work?

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: My mom always had jobs when I was growing up. A lot of them were part-time jobs, secretarial jobs. My mom was set to marry someone. My mom went to Bucknell College, and she met someone and dropped out of college to marry him, and—I think it was something like a week before the wedding—called the wedding off. That was a big story, that was the story that I would hear about. And then six months later met my dad, and then six months later from that, married my father.

So, my mom never graduated college, because she had left school to marry. It's I guess what you did then, some did. And then she went—she moved to the city. She was about 21, she moved to Manhattan, got a little apartment, and learned secretarial skills. She went to something called Katharine Gibbs. I don't know why I know that, but—you know, it is a little funny, but I think that's where she met—she was friends with Loretta Swit, you know, who went on—she was "Hot Lips" Houlihan in the TV show *M*A*S*H*. Not the movie *MASH*, but the TV show.

SVETLANA KITTO: That's vaguely familiar.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: It was a big hit of a TV show.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah, no, I remember the show.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Oh, okay.

SVETLANA KITTO: But I don't remember—I remember the show [laughs] because I didn't like the show, when I was a kid.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Well, it was from the Robert Altman movie *MASH*—was originally, and Sally Kellerman played "Hot Lips" Houlihan in the movie. And Elliott Gould, and then it went on, and it was Alan Alda and this woman, Loretta Swit.

Before she got that job, she and my mom were roommates, and they lived in this really tiny apartment on the Upper West Side. I remember my mom never told my grandmother that when—I guess Loretta Swit moved out at a certain point, and she was my mom's maid of honor at her wedding and stuff, and they were very close. They're still in touch. [00:24:17]

But my grandmother never knew that my mom was actually living alone, that my mom and she—I think my mom had lots of lovers and had different—she worked as a secretary at different places, she was on her own. When she met my father, my father was working at Macy's at that time.

SVETLANA KITTO: Doing?

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: He was a buyer. I think he was a buyer of, like, housewares. He was living in the Village with roommates. Or maybe at that point, he might have been on the Upper—he might have had the apartment on 55th Street, with roommates. I don't know, they had some deal that whoever got married first got the apartment. And I think that was my dad met my mom, and she knew immediately. Oh, should I tell the story of my parents meeting?

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah, yeah.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: It's kind of good. So, my father knew one of my mom's roommates. It wasn't Loretta, it was somebody else. And he called the home to speak with the roommate for some reason, but she was no longer the roommate and my mom got to talking with him. She always told it that she was like—had just taken a shower, she had her robe on, she had a towel on her head, she was getting ready to go to bed, or heading in that direction. The phone rang, she gets to talking to this man on the phone, and she finds out that he lived on State Street in Perth Amboy, which was the block that she grew up in. And he said, "If you really grew up on State Street, come meet me at"—some bar. And I think it was P.J. Clarke's. I think that's the bar that they went to. [00:26:05]

My mom said she really didn't feel like it. She was ready for bed, but she said, "Oh, what the hell, I'll go." She said she laid an eye on my dad and she just was—it was kind of like, "This is it." And I think on, like, their second date or something, she recalls going through her date book and canceling all her dates with her other gentlemen. My mom was a very beautiful woman and she had, I'm sure, quite a few dates lined up. She canceled them all and she told my father very early, very quickly, "You and I are going to be—you're going to marry me." He kind of laughed at her, but they were married, and they never unmarried until my father passed away.

SVETLANA KITTO: Oh, wow. And what were they like as a couple?

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: I totally deviated from telling you my mother's jobs, but that's okay. They were a good couple, they got along well together. It was classic in the sense that my father—so my father was the first person in his family to ever go to college.

SVETLANA KITTO: What did he study? Business or something?

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: He wanted to be a doctor. He at first went to George Washington, and he just found it really difficult, and he was like, "I can't do all this time and all this." I think it was a little bit of a disappointment for himself, but he ended up going to Rutgers University and learning business, and that's when he got this job at Macy's. Then he worked at JCPenney's—he was a buyer for JCPenney's—which, oddly enough, was right near where we [lived on 55th Street -NBB]. One of those buildings that came up, of the buildings that got taken down, was JCPenney's headquarters. It's since moved to Dallas, but their headquarters were right there, on like 52nd or something, and Sixth Avenue. [00:28:03]

So it was kind of like my dad had the solid job. It was that thing of like, "We've never had money, I went to college, I'm going to be a good father, I'm going to take care of my family," in a way that probably he didn't feel taken care of. [His sister was four years older than him, but because he was the boy he got to go to college. - NBB] He got the wife. I mean, he loved my mother. He didn't like, "get the wife," but he had a beautiful wife. It

was, you know, two kids, Upper West Side.

My mom worked as a secretary. I remember her working for some guy who worked in pearls. I think he got a pearl distributor or something. So they didn't make jewelry, but [. . . sold pearls. -NBB] And then she worked for the Essex House, which was a hotel on 59th Street and Central Park South. It's, I think, still there. Now it's the Marriott, but it was Essex House and she was in personnel. She worked in personnel there and she loved that job. That was a part-time job. So not really secretarial, but secretarial management of some sort [or a personal assistant. -NBB] But she always had a job, my mom, and so I was, like, one of those kids that literally had a ribbon around my neck with the key on it.

I would say they had a good marriage, just probably not the marriage that I would have wanted for myself.

SVETLANA KITTO: It's okay, we're good. So, take me maybe a little bit forward and tell—

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: I have something to say about my—

SVETLANA KITTO: Go ahead, yeah, yeah.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Well, I'm thinking about parents and I just was thinking, well, they—my parents had an interesting relationship where my mom always was like that—always would really get it together for my father. I always remember, if I wasn't—I would usually be on the street, to see my father coming up at five. He came home every night, my father, like, after work. It was a nine-to-five job, and he came home literally every single night. My father never went out. He didn't have friends. My mom was his friend. My mom had a lot of friends, she did a lot of the connecting and socializing. [00:30:30]

And my dad—it's not that he was reclusive in any way, but he—I mean, maybe one could really delve into it, like, "How did that happen? Why didn't he have friends?" He worked with people all day long. He came home from work. So, I would be on the street and I would see my father in his suit, coming up the street. And if I was home, if it was not nice weather and I was in the house, I would see my mom always, like, lit a candle, would always put out cheese and crackers. She would change into, like, a kaftan in the '70s, brush her hair, and was, like, ready for my father when he came home from work. It was like she greeted my father with that type of, "Welcome home, really glad you're home." Very loving. Also I think probably a lot of drinking involved in that meeting, like there was always wine and drinking, and my parents had a very romantic kind of relationship. Part of that was also very lovely, but I'm sure there's a couple of ways one might look at it.

They were very into each other. Like, when they took vacations, the kids—we didn't go with them. When he got his little—

SVETLANA KITTO: Was that often?

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: When you have a job like he had, it was probably a couple of weeks a year. I don't know what they get.

SVETLANA KITTO: They weren't family vacations. [00:32:00]

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: No, no, no. They were not family vacations. My aunt would come and take care of us and they would go away, wherever they went. And that's how they sustained their relationship and maintained it. They were really like—they were number one to each other, and the kids were kind of a separate thing.

SVETLANA KITTO: And so, it was your sister? You have a sister?

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: I have one sister, who is two years older than me.

SVETLANA KITTO: And that's it, siblings-wise?

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Yes.

SVETLANA KITTO: Okay. And what was your relationship like?

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: With my sister?

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: We were not close.

SVETLANA KITTO: Oh, okay.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Sadly. I mean, we played on the street when we were really young, but we really were never close.

SVETLANA KITTO: Uh-huh [affirmative]. So, what were your kind of, like, interests as you were growing up? You were in public school, right?

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: I went to public school all but one year. For sixth grade, I went to an alternative school called the Calhoun School. And I didn't do well at all there. I went back to public school. My sister went to that school, the private school, from fifth grade until graduation of high school, and I returned to the public school system.

SVETLANA KITTO: What was that school like?

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: That school was an interesting school. It was an alternative kind of open classroom learning, where you had mixed grades together, learn at your own pace. It all was—you know, like group rooms and that kind of furniture that's like—I don't know what that's called, that soft furniture. [Curvy 1970s furniture, that is sectional and modern. -NBB]

SVETLANA KITTO: Montessori or something?

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: It wasn't Montessori, but it may have been influenced by Montessori. I would have to read up a little more on the philosophy of it. I only went there for a year. I don't really know. I did not function well in it, you know?

SVETLANA KITTO: What was school like for you? [00:33:52]

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Well, I started to go—I went to PS 166, which was on 89th Street, between Amsterdam and Columbus, until I was in—I was from pre-kindergarten through fifth grade. And school was—I mean, that's a tough question. I liked school, I liked going to school, I never missed school. I was, like, one of those kids that had a full attendance record. I wanted to get to school every day.

But school was tough. Kids were tough. You know, like, I didn't go to the bathroom. Maybe in that school I did, but I know in IS 44 it was like, "Do not go to the bathroom." Like, you just did not go because it was dangerous. [We did not go to the bathroom at all! -NBB]

SVETLANA KITTO: Just the whole day?

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Yeah. My best friend at the time, I remember her—this was like in seventh grade—starting to wear her sweaters a little longer. I remember one time her telling me that was just so the boys wouldn't grab her ass. You know, because her—my body wasn't really very curvy, but she was developing earlier, or young. I don't know if it was earlier, but it was different than mine, and I think she got a lot of violence and fear. She had a lot of fear around the way the boys were treating her.

And I think, probably with that, I steeled myself. I was kind of a tough kid, a bit of a street kid. My mom would tell it that I was, like, the sweetest kid in the world until I was about seven, and then something changed. That's what my mom would say. I remember a sort of change in me that happened, because I was an incredibly happy child. And then, I think I just started to realize the ways of the world a little bit, and how tough it was, and steeling myself in some way. The kids were—there were gangs, you know? [00:36:15]

SVETLANA KITTO: In elementary school, too?

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Yeah, there were little gangs. Even though you were little, it was tough, kids were tough. Yeah. There were fights, and you had to watch yourself. You would learn, like, what to say, what not to say. You know, kids grew up hard in that neighborhood, you know? There were a lot of kids who didn't have very stable homes, you know, with a lot of older brother and sisters. And so they were, like, playing things out in the school.

SVETLANA KITTO: Of course, I'm thinking of, like, *West Side Story* or something. [Laughs.]

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: It was like that, it really was. I mean, it felt like—I mean, we performed. We never fully performed it, but we would perform *West Side Story*. Like, that was a thing that we would—you know, and there was a lot of racism against—I mean, like, anti-whiteness at that time. The black and Puerto Rican kids kind of were like—you know, you had to be—if you were white, you had to step back a little bit, like you might get your ass kicked because you were white. You know? Like, people more talk about being afraid—and I'm sure, for them, I mean, there would be a whole other story about what was really going on, in the larger sense of the word. But just like, right there in the little—

SVETLANA KITTO: You're talking about in your school.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: In our school, yeah. Like, where you had a little piece of power or something.

SVETLANA KITTO: So, the classrooms and the teachers—were you being nurtured?

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: No [laughs], I don't think so. I mean, this was—it was an interesting time though. [00:38:00] Maybe there was some, but I mean, I was kind of tough.

SVETLANA KITTO: You were tough.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: So, I don't know how receptive I was to nurturing. I wasn't very nurtured in my home, and I don't know that I would have been aware of anyone being nurturing toward me.

SVETLANA KITTO: What about your interests, or like—how did that start developing?

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: I mean, things—well, before I speak about that—I was like the—well.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah, go ahead.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Well, I mean, interests—I was talking the other day to somebody about this. Like, when I would read books, I would want to—I would always—like one of the first, probably, artistic kind of gestures that I made was making dioramas. If I read a book that I really liked—like I remember reading—I loved *The Trumpet of the Swan*. E.B. White. And I really remember, like, taking an old shoebox and figuring out how to make a swan's head out of paper, and cotton balls for clouds, and making that. Picking up a little piece of string and making the little slate that he wore around his neck, to write on. That's how he communicated.

SVETLANA KITTO: Right.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: I remember that. So that was one of my first—like, I—of making things from something that I loved. That was making up—and so drawing was always in there, making—but it was often, like, manifesting something that I had read. You know, like *A Wrinkle in Time*, I remember, or *The Cricket in Times Square*, reading that book. I don't even remember that story any more. But making dioramas and, you know, putting on kind of like—thinking about physicalizing. Is that a word? Making a physical version of the book. [00:40:05]

SVETLANA KITTO: Material.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Materializing.

SVETLANA KITTO: Materializing, yeah.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: But I mean, really, that wasn't something that was really teased out and something that I really grew in some way. Like when I think of interests, I'm like—my interests, I was on the—my interests were really, like, making treehouses in Central Park and go-carts. I loved the *Little Rascals* and would run with all of the kids in the neighborhood, riding bikes and skateboarding. I was more—I was that kind of kid. I wasn't the artist that was, like, deep into my fantasy. I mean, I was deep in fantasy, but it wasn't in a very—I don't think it was, like, encouraged, to go into that world so much. And with a lot of that, I think there was—gender is probably a big question, I'm not sure. I don't know if there's—

SVETLANA KITTO: What time is it now?

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: I have 3:38. Can we take a moment pause?

[Audio break.]

SVETLANA KITTO: So yeah, I was thinking about your—when did you sort of start forming as an artist? What were you doing at a younger age? You were talking about drawing and making things. And what else?

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: I mean, I was always that kid that made every card, every family card, every holiday card. But I didn't have—I wasn't, like, a gifted artist like some kids that are like—they can draw crazy good at a very young age. Drawing for me was always a struggle, and it still is. I'm still that kind of an artist, where it's not—I don't have like this God-given ability to render what is—of rendering. You know, you think of Nicole Eisenman or Picasso, people that can just draw their brain or something. I'm much more of—it's much more of a struggle for me. I have to erase a lot and redraw and redraw and try again. I think that's why I loved, when I started to see Matisse's paintings, where he would show his mistakes. I always thought that was so generous. Like the *Bather* or something, where you see how many times he drew the ass, and how many times he drew the thighs,

and how many times he drew—under the undercoats. [00:42:39]

But anyway, I could relate to that type of art-making, or mark-making. But not having that facility didn't ever stop me from—I was always drawing. When I went to IS 44—it was after that one year at Calhoun—I had two periods of art, back-to-back, a day. We did batik, and that was just amazing to me. I loved drawing with wax. I remember doing drawings of my friend Maria, these pastels of her. I remember this grid sweater that she used to wear, and I loved drawing the color grids on her sweater. She had this really big afro that she used to put these clips in. I just remember loving, like, the way that her hair parted, like that round shape but it would have these parts in it with these—and drawing Maria. I used to draw her a lot.

I remember drawing my dad. One of my favorite drawings that I ever have made is actually a drawing of my father in this director's chair. We used to have this very '70s kind of style director's chair. [00:44:00]

Also, I was lucky, a pottery studio opened up on 85th Street between Broadway and West End Avenue, called Earthworks Pottery. I don't know how it happened but my mom—because I didn't ever have any kind of outside lessons. That was the first time. Somehow, she enrolled me in pottery. And I don't remember how—I had to have been very young, because that's some of the only art my mom kept of mine. I don't have all my old stuff, but I look at these little pots and they're thrown—I worked on the kick wheel—and they're very tiny, these pots, so I know that my hands must have been pretty small, even though I felt larger. Maybe I was 10. I don't know, 10.

I also remember getting to—for that, for pottery, I remember had these construction worker shoes, like those white waffle bottom kind of shoes, with tan leather. I just loved that I could wear these construction shoes [laughs] that somehow—it was tied into kicking the wheel, I would wear those shoes. That was of interest to me, getting to touch clay, learning to knead clay, learning to throw on the wheel. I did hand-building too a little bit. And then, when I went to high school, I did more pottery.

The other thing that—because I went to an art high school. That was like—yeah, so when I did those two periods a day of art, that was seventh and eighth grade, and I really fell in love with—not fell in love with—but I really liked all the different materials that I got exposed to. And like I say, it wasn't that I excelled so much in them, but I really enjoyed them. But I also—I still ran on the streets and did all—it wasn't like, now I'm—I wasn't that kid that was home all day, isolated, drawing or something. But I did spend definitely, like—mark-making was always in there. [00:46:31]

And then, you know, when you're in eighth grade in the city, it was like my next—the next move is high school. And it was like, "Where are you going to go to high school?" The local high school, that would be the next high school, was either Brandeis, or they had just built Martin Luther King High School. I think it was the first year. My class would have been the first year. But that's where, you know, people really started to sort out class- and race-wise, in the city, and that's when kids were going to private school. It was, like, the white people were putting their kids in private school. Black and Puerto Rican kids were going to Brandeis or Martin Luther King, and it wasn't safe for white kids to go there, really. And then they also had these schools that you tried out for, which was Art and Design, Music & Art—Fiorello LaGuardia School of the Arts is the other name for it—Performing Arts. And you had Brooklyn Tech, Bronx High School of Science, and Stuyvesant High School. Those were the schools you tried out for.

I wanted to go to Music & Art. And that was in this old, neo-Gothic building up on City College campus, and you had to make a portfolio to go there, and you had to apply. That was pretty scary, because if I didn't get into that school, I would have had to go to Brandeis or King, and that was like, "Oh, I really hope I get in that school." And you had to test to get in. You had to go there and draw from the model and draw from the still life, and show this portfolio. [00:48:17]

SVETLANA KITTO: So you put a portfolio together?

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Yes. I had to put a portfolio together. That was very challenging. It was really hard. Thank God I got into Music & Art High School.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah. How was that?

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: I loved it. I loved Music & Art. It was this high school at the top of—it was on St. Nicholas Terrace, I think.

SVETLANA KITTO: In Harlem?

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Yeah, up on 135th and Convent Avenue. I'm trying to think of the name of the park. It wasn't Morningside Park, but I could look it up, the name of the park that it sat in. A really dangerous park, but during the day it was just this beautiful sunny hill. But like, you did not want to be in that park by yourself at any time. But that was, like, right across the street from the school, so at every break you were outside, playing

Frisbee.

In the school, it was Music & Art, so you had—some of my friends were there for singing, some of them were there for instruments, and I was there for art. There, I learned—I touched oil paint, pen and ink, watercolor. I learned—and what really turned me on was printmaking. I really loved the repetition. I still really love working in series, and that idea of multiples and being able to apply an image to all different kinds of surfaces. We're talking about linoleum and woodcuts. It wasn't fancy printmaking, but I loved printmaking. I got to draw from the model, a nude model, for the first time ever there. And ceramics, again, I did. [00:50:15]

And then there was, like, your standard classes, math and English and all of that, and I was exposed to—you know. Oh, there was a "women in literature" class, when I was in ninth grade, and I remember the teacher was like—you know, I learned about feminism and her writing her name on the blackboard and the sound of that chalk, it was Ms., *ca-cha-ssh*, Mason, Ms. Mason, and she was—I loved her. I read Carson McCullers, *The Member of the Wedding*, and that really was kind of life-changing thinking. *The Member of the Wedding* just blew it open for me.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah. Yeah, what was going on with you, like around sexuality and stuff at that time?

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: That's a really long, difficult subject, I would say. But I mean, another thing that we haven't talked about is also what was going on with—all throughout this, I mean, I was smoking a lot of pot, drinking. There was like a whole subtext—even in IS 44, there was major partying happening, and a lot of craziness. I mean, smoking massive amounts of pot in seventh grade and eighth grade. I don't know about massive, but a lot.

I liked boys then. I had, like, little crushes on boys, and I really had good—I had girlfriends too, but when you were like, "What are your interests?"—definitely relationships with kids were—I would like—you know, I had a real intuitive—like I would see someone, and it just was like, "I want to know them, I want to be friends with them." And I would be, it would happen. Or I might see someone on the street and then two days later meet them. And that went on, that continued to happen in my—this kind of organic way, you know, befriending people and events overlapping. But you asked me about sexuality. [00:52:34]

SVETLANA KITTO: *The Member of the Wedding*.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Well, yeah, but—and in terms of—well, *The Member of the Wedding* is just such a tale of being outside, wanting to be a part of something. You know, the me of we. And her really wanting to be brought into something that she didn't have. There was a gay character, I think. You know, her neighbor or her cousin. I forget exactly, but I feel like there was a young queenie character.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah, there was, definitely.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: It was so long ago that I read that. It was really about the pain of having to grow up. And for me, you know, I remember my sister's friends and they were all reading, like, Judy Blume, *Are You There, God? It's Me, Margaret*, and "We must, we must, we must increase our busts." They were like—there was some, I think it was the Itty Bitty Titty Committee, some club that was in that.

SVETLANA KITTO: Totally, yeah.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: I wanted to want that. And I remember reading, being all excited to read, *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret*, like, "Oh, I get to read this book," and really not relating to it whatsoever. And I couldn't talk to anybody. [00:54:05]

I've never even said this, I don't think, before. I so didn't want to have breasts. I didn't want my body to change. When I was saying that I ran around in the streets as a kid, I ran around and a lot of it, I didn't have a shirt on. And I remember being told like, "Oh, you have to start putting a shirt on." Someone shamed—there was some shame. My sister also ran around without a shirt, and maybe she was starting to get maybe some development happening on her chest, and some neighbor or somebody *tsk-tsk*'d us for being too old evidently, on the streets.

I remember my aunt saying something to my mother too, about us being topless on the beach. There was some shaming in there. But, you know, I used to take my shirt—I had a white T-shirt and I would, like, have it on my shoulders, but take it over my head, so it was on your shoulders, and it was like the way the boys did it. I wanted to just be a little boy. You know, I begged and begged and begged for high-top sneakers. My parents—I mean, it was such a fight to get that pair of high-top sneakers, but I got them. I really wanted Converse, but my father could get them a little cheaper from JCPenney's, so they were like Skippy versions. We called them Skippies, like they weren't real, they were knockoffs or something. When I got my high-top sneakers, oh, my God, I slept with them in my bed. I can remember, physically remember holding onto them and sleeping with my sneakers.

My mom had cut my hair really short, in like a pixie haircut. She did cut my hair short a lot. People mistook me for a boy all the time, on the street as a little kid, which was to mix—for me, I would always feel really embarrassed, because I would want to protect them from figuring out that I was a girl. I would always think like, "Oh, they're going to be embarrassed if they found out that they called me—that they 'he'd' me, when I'm really she." But yet I kind of liked it, that they thought—and it was this very, very deeply conflicted feeling inside, where I wanted to, like—if they thought I was a boy, then I would really want to boy it up, because I would have felt so much shame if they found out I was a girl, for myself and for them. It was really kind of confusing and painful. [00:56:26]

My best friend, Lizzie Higgins, who—I actually wrote a story about her, we can talk about that later, but that was published—she only wore pants, only, only. And never, never, never wore a dress. I was forced to. I wore dresses, I had to. I had endless fights with my mom about dresses, and when I had longer hair, ribbons in my hair. That might—probably was the time when I started out—when my mom talks about me being like this happy kid, and then at seven, I started getting grouchy perhaps. Probably it had to do with an understanding of my body and my gender, and what that meant for me, and what it meant to be a girl in the world, and what it meant—yeah, and how fucking shitty that hand was going to be. And also, not wanting my body to change. Yeah, any of the kind of power that girls used in terms of their femininity, wasn't anything I related to, wanted, or liked.

SVETLANA KITTO: What about in high school, what was gender?

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: That was harder, I think. I mean, in high school, we were—I was, at first—my friends were artists, so we weren't—I didn't have that typical—like the whole—people talk about jocks and—

SVETLANA KITTO: —cheerleaders.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: No, I didn't have that at all. We were really—I had a really great go of it, but I don't know that I was really in touch with—I think when I was younger, I repressed and suppressed a lot of that, how I really felt comfortable. I didn't talk about—I didn't reveal to anyone my sense of, I don't know, remorse, anger, fear. [00:58:28]

SVETLANA KITTO: Frustration.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Frustration around being female. That was a real—I really retreated into fantasy. I mean, I didn't have—a big part of growing up, from when I was seven all through high school, is I went to camp outside of the city. And that was a place where I really got a lot of nature and I got a lot of—I learned how to sleep outside and make a fire and cook meals outside. I was away from home young and I could really be myself. I felt like at camp, I could gender—I could kind of really be the gender that I wanted to be.

And that friend, Lizzy Higgins, that I talked about, who lived on 85th Street, she went to that same camp. And being a tomboy, I had a camaraderie in that. She went on to be gay, it turns out, as well, but we didn't talk about—we never talked about any of that. We never, never, ever, ever talked about—I was going to say "desire," but I don't even know that I had desire. My desire was more in what I wanted to be, than who I wanted to be with. You know? [01:00:02]

I think I looked to boys—I hung out with boys a lot, and that I wanted to be like a boy. I didn't want to be with a boy. And that would always get very confusing, and that would become very difficult. That was difficult in high school, when I wanted to hang with the guys, but a line got—because then it was like, well, if you're hanging out with them you have to fuck them or something, and I didn't want to. And when you were young too, there was some of that. Growing up in the city too—I mean, maybe anywhere—but kids are pretty precocious. A lot was happening at a very young age. A very, very young age.

SVETLANA KITTO: In Los Angeles too.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Yeah, I'm sure.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: And maybe everywhere. I don't know. I just know what being in the city was like.

SVETLANA KITTO: No, I don't think so.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: And this was like—Black Power movement happening, this was like, civil rights, feminism. Like, all of that was very—it was in the air. You know, Bella Abzug—I remember stuffing envelopes for Bella Abzug and Mayor Lindsay, and walking and taking—my mom taking me to anti-war demonstrations.

SVETLANA KITTO: I was going to ask you about that. But should we check on the time?

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Yes, yes, yes. It's time.

SVETLANA KITTO: Do you need to wrap up? Okay, so we'll start again next time.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Thank you.

[END OF BRODY18_1OF2_TRACK2.]

SVETLANA KITTO: This is Svetlana Kitto interviewing Nancy Brooks Brody, at her home in Prospect Heights, Brooklyn, New York, on January 22, 2018, as part of the Visual Arts and the AIDS Epidemic Oral History Project, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. We are still on card number one.

So, you had been telling me a little bit about camp, which actually spanned a long time—right?—in your childhood.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Yes. Camp covers a lot of years. This is sleepaway camp. My mom sent my sister and I to a sleepaway camp that you were supposed to be eight years old to go to, but I think she lied about my age. I was seven. So I was pretty young to be going away for an entire month. And so the first year in camp was a bit of a struggle at night. I would cry at night. I would wake up crying sometimes, and they would have to go find my sister or just soothe me in some way.

But that didn't keep me from returning to camp for the next, I think, 11 years—I went to camp. I went from when I was seven until I was—until you were as old as you could go, I think it's about 15 or 16, and then I worked at the camp. I worked in the kitchen and then I was a counselor's aide, and then the year I was supposed to be a counselor, I actually was graduating high school and got my own apartment in the city, and so I didn't—wasn't able to go to camp.

Camp was a very, like, low-budget camp. We slept in tents, big canvas tents with wooden platforms, with no electricity, on metal bunk beds, like army style cots. I always wanted the top bunk. We were about seven in a tent, with a counselor. And I just—camp was—I mean, it's a common story for a lot of people, but it just was this incredibly special, special time. [00:02:25]

I learned how to build fires. I talked earlier about—I think we talked about being physical and learning. This was a way that I could really—I felt like I just could run wild in camp. There were animals, and there was a big lake that I learned to swim in over the years, and I just could remember all my different experiences. I remember my body learning things, my body learning how to—how difficult it was, at first, to go in the lake. I was so little, and I was always kind of small, and I was in the area that was like a turtle, and you were supposed to—most of the kids could stand in the deepest part of that section, and I couldn't, so it was really scary for me. They wouldn't let you just come out on the ground, you had to go out the ladder on the dock, and that was always a tough one. Anyway, these are like—they're just, like, remembering.

SVETLANA KITTO: No, it's good.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: It's like, body—memories of trying to be on my tippy-tippy toes, and having my head arching as high up as I could, to just not be swallowing all the water that I could swallow. And then the next year, being like, "Oh, I can move in the water a little bit." And then the next year, really learning. Like, once I could figure out how to put my hands in a certain position, you really pulled the water, almost like you would paddles in a boat. And I could propel myself and kick my legs. And then I went—like from there I went from turtle to advanced turtle, to dolphin, to shark, to whale, to killer whale, and then I swam the whole lake back and forth for four miles and, like, I just got it. I got the water and got swimming. [00:04:13]

Yeah, camp was like, a real place I could be in my body and be—I remember my mom would pack a trunk. We had these yellow metal trunks that she would pack for us, and all the kids—you had to put all your laundry, once a week, in the shared bag, laundry bag, that then would leave your cabin, your tent. They would write the name of your tent on it, your number. And I remember all the kids throwing all their laundry in it. I had, like—all I had was like a teeny little line of laundry. It was just socks and underwear, and like I didn't want to—I don't know if it was that I didn't want to put my clothes in or I just didn't have much. I would just put my underwear and socks in. And the bag was really heavy. We were little. We would have to carry this giant, many pound bag down to where the laundry was. I remember the bag coming back and we would be sorting through the clothes, but I only had, like, two garments in there, seven garments or something, literally my underwear.

I remember my mom—visiting for parents was three weeks into the month. I don't know why they didn't do it two weeks in, it was kind of a long time. I guess she looked in my trunk and was like "Wow, Brody is so tidy." Everything was totally folded, everything was totally neat, because I wore the exact same—I wore one outfit the entire time I was in camp. There's pictures of me in these little pinstriped pants and a work shirt, or my jeans and a work shirt, and some shorts, and maybe a windbreaker. And it's pretty much the way I dress to this day,

although I have—I do my laundry quite often now. [00:06:12]

SVETLANA KITTO: [Laughs.]

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: But, you know, when you're a little kid you're not real—I don't understand, like why—it wasn't like you were smelly and gross. I feel like I'm telling this story and I'm telling it like I was dirty. I wasn't. I just—it was—the meaning, I don't know. Now I'm like, why am I telling this story? What meaning does this hold?

SVETLANA KITTO: You were free.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: It was this way that I was free, that my mom—when I was younger, my mom would pick out my clothes for school and they were often these horrible dresses that I hated. It's not like my trunk was full of dresses that I didn't wear, but I could wear the exact thing that I wanted and make my own choices, minimal as they were. I didn't really delve into all my options, but I found a thing that worked, and I went with it, and no one was second guessing me on it. And I think about that sometimes, just how comfortable I was there. I just was really, really comfortable in my skin at camp.

So, camp was incredibly special. Once I got past that first year of a little bit of homesickness, then it was sort of the opposite, and when I would come home from camp, I would be really blue. I was very sad. I remember going into the bathroom and just crying and crying and crying and missing camp. I wanted to live at camp. And hiding that from my parents. I thought that would really hurt their feelings, if they knew how incredibly heartbroken I was to leave camp. [00:07:47]

There was also—I mean, it was interesting there. It was an Episcopalian camp, and there was the *Good News Bible*, and we would have chapel. It was the '70s and they sang songs from *Godspell* and *Jesus Christ Superstar*. It was like hippie camp, kind of, seeming—hippie church service by the lake. But it was born again-ish, for sure, and the fact that my father was Jewish, and my mother was half Jewish was—I really hid that.

So, there was this one way that I was really myself and could be myself in terms of gender, but there was this other way that I was sort of hiding and had some shame around that difference that I had. Although I didn't really—I didn't have—I knew my father was Jewish, but I wasn't—I never went to shul or temple. So, Catholicism, or Christianity in this case, was my connection to spirituality or religion. It was my first kind of opening.

SVETLANA KITTO: Introduction.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Introduction—thank you—into that, and it was at camp and in this kind of group setting. I took communion like a stealth. I remember I took communion for the first time, and I don't know that—I don't know if—I was afraid people might find out I was Jewish. So, it was like I had this kind of secret there. So it was a little bit—it was still a little mixed.

SVETLANA KITTO: What about as you got older?

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: There?

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah, when you were like—because I think camp is a good way to talk about what life—like, the distinction between life at camp and then life at home. [00:10:02]

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: This may not really answer your question, but I think this was the second year of camp, so I would have been eight. I remember it was like, just before camp. It was summer. You have to remember, this is like 1970, '69. If I was eight—'62, yeah, like '70. I was on Riverside Drive with my father, at 86th Street, and this is—and I looked across at 85th Street, kind of that side of the street that I told you it was sort of like, "Don't go in that area, don't go on that street." And there was an open fire hydrant, and that's how we all played. We would play in open fire hydrants on the street, like fully open.

I remember seeing this kid playing in the fire hydrant and she didn't have a shirt on, and she had long cutoff jeans and braids in her hair. I remember I was with my dad, walking down the park side of Riverside Drive, and crossing toward West End Avenue, and there was this open fire hydrant. I went in it for a little bit, but I really was just watching this one girl, and I was just taken with her because she was kind of tall and lanky, and she had little teeny buds maybe, of starting to develop her breasts, so tiny, but she was still without a shirt. That was something that I had just kind of learned—been shamed out of doing, and there she was, really free in this fire hydrant and the water, and it was just this beautiful body and this beautiful moment. I can picture the light, it was kind of that golden light, the sun sets right there over the river, and so I know this is a summer memory. And then I got to camp that summer and the tent was empty, save for one person, and it was that girl. [00:12:03]

SVETLANA KITTO: Wow.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: And it was just like—her name was Amy Damayo. And it turns out she lived on like 86th Street and West End Avenue, so we became—we got to be friends outside of camp. I had some other friends also that were—people who lived in my building went to the same camp. My best friend, Lizzie Higgins—my best friend kind of on and off, on 85th Street and Central Park West—she was a real tomboy too. She ended up being queer and became a veterinarian. I actually wrote a story about her later in life, that's published, that we can talk about later. But there was this girl in my tent, and then plus Lizzie Higgins was in my tent too, I found out later, so it was like these three kind of—we had a great tomboy tent.

So—I was actually reminded this a little bit at Gregg's talk—when Amy's stepfather was—I mean, he was this beautiful—I don't know if it was like a producer or what his job was, but he was this black man and she was white, this girl, and her mother was white, and her parents were divorced. I became very good friends with her and I got to go, one time, to where her [step] father worked, and it was this recording studio. It wasn't until years later that I realized that it was Roberta Flack that I got to go hear, and he was recording her. I remember sitting in this recording booth and hearing her sing "Killing Me Softly," I think. We could probably check the time and whatever album she was recording at that year. But it was, like, her singing over and over again, and I got to go play in the recording booth. I remember making monkey faces and making everybody laugh. Those are the kind of things that later you're like, "Who was that? What was that? Oh, that was Roberta Flack." [00:14:08]

Amy Damayo went on to be a singer, and I remember seeing her on Fire Island, on the beach singing songs that she wrote about Fire Island, with her other friends. Because that's another place we would go sometimes in the summer, was Fire Island. I grew up going to Fire Island my entire life, from when I was a baby.

SVETLANA KITTO: Wow.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Like truly a little baby, like not being able to walk, until—I still go there. I'm going through all the different communities in Fire Island, from the—I guess it's the westernmost tip, out toward the—I'm trying to think if I've got my directions right. Yeah, sunrise is in the east. Yeah, to the easternmost, where it's like Cherry Grove and the Pines—and I found out about that years and years and years later—but I had been going there and having all kinds of experiences. My parents didn't have a house there, but when you grew up on the Upper West Side, you often knew people who would rent places. That was a go-to place because you could get there without a car.

So sometimes my Julys would be at camp, and then in August, I would hopefully get to visit someone and be invited to a friend's house in Fire Island, or maybe the Hamptons or something, before the Hamptons were like fancy-pantsy, you know, when they were still potato fields and farms in the Hamptons. Fire Island was another place where you could really run wild. The first time I ever slept with a woman was in the Pines, on the beach, in Fire Island, and that's a whole—that's a really good story to tell.

SVETLANA KITTO: Can you just tell it to me?

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Do you want me to tell that?

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Well, this summer, I guess I was—this might have been the summer I didn't go to camp.

SVETLANA KITTO: Perfect.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Because I think it was the first summer that I had an apartment, because a friend of mine from high school, Jonathan, who was a DJ and a musician and—[inaudible]—bands. He, Jonathan Schneider, then took on his father's name, Sender. He got an apartment in SoHo, on Thompson Street. It was, I think, \$160 a month. He was a year ahead of me, so he graduated ahead of me and then I was graduating, and he let me sublet his apartment for a month or two, and I just never left. We ended up living together for six months or close to a year, which when you're young, that seems like a really long time. [00:16:29]

It was this teeny, teeny, teeny, tiny apartment on Thompson Street that had a shower in the living room, it wasn't even in the bathroom. There wasn't even a kitchen. It was in the living room, the shower, and there was just a loft bed and a pullout couch. Oh, my God, we lived there with like four or five people, but it was really just his apartment and mine. But I had it to myself that summer for the first time.

Oh, my God, I'm sorry, but my mind is traveling, because I remember this time that I went to Fire Island for the week, my other friends already—and David Svitzer—were letting themselves in and out of my apartment through a window in the back. Like, they didn't have a key to my apartment, but they lived out of my apartment, come to find out. That's how it was.

SVETLANA KITTO: [Laughs.]

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: But I got lucky. I was working at Abrams Publishing Company. I worked and did art book in the darkroom there. I worked there with my friend Don, who also lived on 86th Street, who—I was very close to his family. I met him when I was eight years old and we remained friends through high school, though we didn't go to the same schools. We reconnected at a night club in the '80s.

SVETLANA KITTO: Don?

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Don Tinling. He looms pretty large of a figure. His whole family—there were four of them, and I was friends with the sister, and my sister was friends with one of the brothers, and they were a single-mom family where we could smoke pot at the house. The mom would let us all hang out and drink and smoke pot, so that was a real location. I remember watching Billie Jean King and Bobby Riggs' tennis match at their house. [00:18:16]

SVETLANA KITTO: Wow.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: This one summer, Don's mom rented a house in an area of Fire Island called Corneille Estates. It's funny, like as I grew up, through my years of going to Fire Island, it was like I went, little by little by little, more east. If you knew the different communities of Fire Island, they're all very, very different, but they're all on this little strip of land, spit of an island.

So, this year we were in Corneille Estates, which was very close to Ocean Beach, which was a little more of a town. It was a dome, a geodesic dome in an A-frame, and it was late summer, because I know blueberries—it was blueberry season, would pick blueberries and make pies. The house was owned by Flo Kennedy, it turns out, who was this remarkable feminist lawyer who was—she's no longer alive.

So, Don's—remember, this is right around the time I was starting to come out. This is my first year I was attending the School of Visual Arts. I had been flirting. I don't know if I'll tell the story of how I met the first woman that I slept with, but we wound up—this is on Fire Island. It's kind of a good story.

SVETLANA KITTO: You should tell—yeah, tell that.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Gosh, this is digging. Okay. So, when Jonathan—the guy I was living with, he was a musician, and he was—this apartment that he had, on Thompson Street in SoHo, was actually owned by this woman called Lynne Messenger, who was a musician as well. We could look up the band she was in. I didn't know her. Jonathan played with her, he was the bass player. She would come once a month to get the check, the rent from us, because we were like an illegal sublet. She was making like her little \$20 from us or something. [00:20:25]

I remember Jonathan telling me she was a lesbian. I wasn't out yet or anything. So, whenever she would come over, I would make sure I had my—I was in my undershirt or my hair was brushed, and I would be, like, washing dishes or something.

SVETLANA KITTO: [Laughs.]

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: I was like, you know, there, in my pleated men's pants and my little sleeveless undershirt. I wasn't even like—I wasn't into Lynne Messenger, but I was just like, "Oh, she's a lesbian."

And so Jonathan told me about this band called the Bloods, which was Kathy Ray, Adele Bertei, and some other women. Kathy Rey and Adele Bertei were like Mick and Keith. I mean, they were playing out, they were remarkable. And it turns out, the first time I had ever seen Adele Bertei—she was in the Contortions. I mean, she was a force, she still is, I'm sure. But Adele—I walked into the Mudd Club one time, and Adele was on stage with, it turns out her then girlfriend at the time, in tux tails and singing "Mack the Knife." And I was like, "Holy shit, who the fuck is that?"

And that just went into my little bank of my registry. So years later, Jonathan is the one who's telling me about these lesbian bands and the Bloods, and so I took myself and I found the Bloods, and I was like, "Oh, shit." And there would be like all these girls like really into Kathy and Adele, and they were great, a punk band, really fun. It was like, Hurrah's they would play, definitely the Mudd Club. [00:22:08]

Okay, so I hadn't met them yet, but I was going to the School of Visual Arts when I was still in—this is like that overlap time of being in New York. My best friends in high school—I had longer hair and my best friends in high school, one by one, were like—this is senior year of high school, I'm dialing it back a little—showed up with their hair cut, buzz cut, bleach blonde hair, or dyed red, or, you know, awesome haircuts, but shaved. I remember my mom seeing these haircuts and was like, "Whoever is cutting these girls' hair, your friends' hair, is into S&M."

And I was like, "Oh, Mom, you know, like we're just punk, we're just punk kids." We're wearing like—this is now transitioning into pointy shoes and shopping in Canal Street, and peg-legging our pants, and going to see bands at CBGBs, and the Mudd Club and dancing. I skipped over this, but my high school boyfriend was Jean-Michel Basquiat.

SVETLANA KITTO: Right. You have to talk about that too.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: We're going to talk about the gayness first, but, oh, my God, those are some stories, good stories. Good times at least, I don't know if they're good stories. So this dude was cutting their hair, Maury [ph]—he was in radio, I think. He wasn't a haircutter. My friends had gotten their hair cut from him before me, and then they took me to his house and I was going to get mine, and I think that's when my mom was like, "This dude's into S&M," and I was like, "He is not." His wife was tall and thin, and she had also a very buzz cut hair, and he was this, like, mama's boy, Jewish man, kind of. He was not like—he was older than us. [00:24:14]

SVETLANA KITTO: His name was?

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Maury [ph]. I don't remember his last name. I don't even know how my friends met him, or what that connection was. So that was high school, he cut our hair. We already—we were cutting our own hair too and stuff, but he did these major cuts. That's high school.

There I am, living in my apartment, going to the School of Visual Arts. I think I had like longish hair at this time—you know, shoulder length or something—and I'm walking down the street one night. Actually, I think I was looking for coke, if I'm really honest. I had heard about somebody that sold coke in this place. Anyway, I run into Maury [ph] on the street—and it seems like years later, but it's probably six months later, because now I'm on St. Marks Street. Maury's [ph] like, "Come inside, come into this apartment." He lived on the Upper East Side, but now we are in the building where I was going to go to buy this cocaine. He, coincidentally, is going into the same building. And it turns out, he does have this woman in there, and they do have this deep S&M scene going. I went and copped a little cocaine and I'm hanging out with them, and we're doing coke and it becomes—it's revealed that this is his mistress. This is funny because it was like, "Oh, my mom was right."

[They laugh.]

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: The haircut did play into not just some style, it was like—and she was his—he topped her. They had a little scene going on that was interesting. I just saw them for the—so, I ended up getting my hair cut that night, again, after not—and not a buzz cut, but like, kind of back. [00:26:11]

I say that only because these were signifiers in terms of sexuality. So now I had this kind of masculine cut, and I already was dressing, always dressed now, in more men's kind of fashion. I didn't think of it as drag in any kind of way. It just was, again, how I was comfortable. Probably like very—we would shop in thrift stores, so I would find like—I would find men's clothes from the—they were probably from the '50s or '40s—and just kind of put a few stitches to make them fit around the waist and, you know, kind of make them just fit. They were huge and baggy. I mean, to this day people tell me, "Oh, I saw some like old man on the street in the distance and I thought it was you, but then it turned out it was an old man or something." It's like, "Oh, that's great." But I relate, because I have that old man in me.

SVETLANA KITTO: [Laughs.]

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Anyway, so this whole tale is going to the point of: One night when I was out with Jonathan, I remember we were dancing in some very empty club, and this little group of lesbians came in. I didn't know a lot of lesbians. My best friend, David Svitzer, was a gay man, and I had a lot of gay men in my life, but I didn't have lesbians that I knew of. And there we are, all dancing, and I ended up dancing with this woman. We didn't say anything, but we had a really good dance, really good, and then she was gone, and I always remembered, "Oh, that was something."

So now I'm in the East Village some months later, I have my haircut, I go into the Pyramid Club, happy hour. I don't know if I knew it was like a women's scene at this time or that it was—I figured it out, that there was a lot of lesbians that hung out at the Pyramid Club in this particular time. So, I'm in there and this woman, Ivonne, just flirts with me, and at one point she's like, "Didn't"—so, we end up having—we ended up getting to know each other a little bit. It was just—I think I have her phone number or something. [00:28:33]

So this summer now, that I'm in Fire Island, somehow, I knew she was going to be there at the same time. I'm out there with Don. I'm just trying to remember. You know what? I was at that bar that night, and she said—well let me just say. So I'm in Fire Island, we're having this—Don and I are out there at Don's mom's place with the geodesic dome, and I'm this bed and I look up and I see this picture, and it's like—there's a women's symbol pin and Flo Kennedy, and I'm like, "Oh, this house is lesbian-owned," which—you know, Don's mom isn't a lesbian. Don isn't even out to his—Don's a big fag, but he's working it out. He kind of has a crush on me, but—

SVETLANA KITTO: [Laughs.]

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: —we tried that, that wasn't really happening, when we were younger. So, Don—I mean, should I?

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: There is a big drug time too. Don's brother was a big drug person, so we—I freebased for the first time that summer, in one of these huts on the property, and Don had, like, a roll of Quaaludes. I'm out there on Fire Island, meant to go for maybe a long week, weekend. I still have my job at Abrams, and I just start phoning Abrams like, "Hey, I'm sick, I'm not coming home, I don't feel well, I can't come to work." [00:30:12]

The rental is over now, and Don and I just decide to stay on Fire Island, with no place to stay, and we're just going to sleep on the beach. Don has this roll of Quaaludes, so we can sell—he's selling those. And Don is gorgeous, you have to know Don is like—he looked like Johnny Depp. I mean, he is spectacular. So, I just rode that coattail of his beauty out in Fire Island, and everyone was giving us—we would always get a little place to stay. We often slept on the beach though. We would be out dancing all night long, swim in the ocean late at night.

SVETLANA KITTO: In the Pines?

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: We were still in Corneille Estates, Ocean Beach area. I didn't know about the Pines yet. I did not know at all about the Pines. We would sleep on—I don't know how. We would sleep by—this is still when there were taxis on the beach, so it was dangerous to sleep on the beach. You had to sleep—like, we would sleep in certain areas and we would hope the tide wouldn't come up, or the taxis wouldn't ride us over, and also where the cops maybe wouldn't find us.

So, you couldn't—so we would go to sleep at night in the cool air, and you would wake up in the morning and it was a lot. I would come out of my sleeping bag and there would be already, like, people on the beach in their bathing suits, applying suntan lotion. And we're just like, rolling out of our cocoon sleeping bags, and just dive right in the ocean. And Don got a little job at a diner. He was very—he was taking care of business. I didn't have a job there. I just kept calling into work: "I don't feel well."

SVETLANA KITTO: [Laughs.]

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Don had this friend, Daniel Wanger. And Daniel Wanger was friends with Divine. And Divine was staying with him. And so Daniel and Don had a little thing going on. It was all a little bit like—we were young, and gayness was still—we're not really talking about it in a really—Don was not—I didn't really know that him and Daniel—what was truly going on. It didn't matter. [00:32:19]

They were hanging out with Divine, and we decide we're all going to go to the Pines. I don't know where my stuff is, I don't have keys, I don't have a wallet. I'm in this psychedelic dress, I remember, this beautiful pink and green and turquoise psychedelic A-frame kind of dress, halter. I'm 18, 19 years old. Eighteen. No shoes. I think we had a little mushrooms. I know we smoked pot. We all—and we're with Divine.

Divine is in this white T-shirt, full-length moo-moo, but just like a T-shirt that goes all the way down. We get in a water taxi. I had never been in a water taxi, I've only walked on the beach, driven in the beach taxi. I didn't even know what a water taxi was. I mean, I knew but I—we got in this water taxi, I'm on mushrooms, Divine is in his little bleached hair, shaved buzz cut. All the fags are a-tither that they're—Divine steps out of the water taxi. He's just like—the queen has arrived. He's just waving to everyone, all, and it is just—it's tea dance, it's high tea, it's the Pines, it's pre-AIDS. It's thumping. It's just one more beautiful man after the next. All the architecture is brand new, everyone's waving their flags, and it's shiny, and it's—I couldn't believe it. I was like "Holy shit." I didn't know an all-one-gender spot existed. [00:34:13]

And lo and behold, I don't know if I—I don't know how I found her, or whatever, but there's Ivonne, this girl who flirted with me at the Pyramid. So we end up, somehow, on the beach, and I have—I had my first sexual experience with a woman, on the beach that summer, in the Pines. I wasn't in love with her. I knew I wasn't in love with her. It was just sort of, like, I had to get that done. So, I mean, I think about this now, and I'm like, "How did I find Don again? How did we get back to Corneille Estates?"

SVETLANA KITTO: With no cell phone.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: No, nothing, no plans, no cell phones, no anxiety whatsoever. We just found each other. You were just, like—Don, I'm sure, spent the night in some—you would walk down these boardwalks and it was just, like, high hedges and these doors. You know, you would go through them and there were just these—

there were pools. At the other communities that I had to be to, Fair Harbor and whatnot, there weren't really pools. There wasn't the money. Now there was money, it was men with money. It was a very different scene. Flags and—

SVETLANA KITTO: Flags? What kind of flags?

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Waving their flags, like, literally—you know, not the rainbow, that wasn't there yet, but just, you know, a red flag or—I don't know if it's—everyone had flags flying. I don't know, that's what I remember, that, like, modern architecture, with flags.

SVETLANA KITTO: [Laughs.]

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: There we were, the lesbians, like, on the beach. I wasn't in one of those houses, I don't think. [00:36:00]

Anyway, I wound up—finally then, I get myself back to Abrams, and I just was, like, at my job, and I just said, "Well, I had"—they were like, "Wow, you really are tanned." Because I had been, like, living on the beach.

SVETLANA KITTO: [Laughs.]

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: And I said, "Yeah, I went up to the roof a lot. I was up on my roof." I didn't lose my job, nothing. It turns out my parents were freaking out, they didn't know where I was. They had broken into my—they had figured out how to get into my apartment, too. My poor father and my sister went down and got into my apartment through the alleyway, too. They didn't know where I was, no one knew. I didn't even think about it, like telling people where I was or what I was doing, and having a great time.

This is when I was going to the School of Visual Arts, and now I start this affair with Ivonne, we start this little affair. And that's when—I remember being with her one night or one day, I don't know. We were, like, lying in bed or whatever, and she was like, "Come on, you are so gay." You know? Because she couldn't believe I had never slept with a woman before, that I didn't even—and at this point I was like, "I'm not gay." I think I still had, like, some guy I was sleeping with sometimes, Alonso or something. It was just like, "I'm not. I'm not gay."

SVETLANA KITTO: [Laughs.] Alonso?

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: I was just like, you know, open, trying it out, whatever, it's all good [laughs], attitude. And I'm also—like, through all of this, I'm making art also. I'm not really talking about this here—

SVETLANA KITTO: Talk about it, yeah.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: —but like my whole apartment that I shared with Jonathan is like floor-to-floor, ceiling, wall-to-wall, floor-to-floor canvases, art. You know, like, I'm super creative at this point. Not super creative, I was just always—

SVETLANA KITTO: —productive.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Productive, thank you. I was making friends at that point, at the School of Visual Arts, with this Mario and Nina, who ended up opening a gallery in the Lower East Side called New Math, where I ended up showing my work with them. They were friends as well, and then that hooked me into a community of artists that showed at this gallery, that I became very close to. [00:38:13]

So, all through this time—and I didn't talk about Jean-Michel and his practice, and we can kind of maybe meander back, but I'll—

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah. After this, yeah.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: So I'm there, I'm with Ivonne and she's like, "Come on, aren't you? You had to have known you're gay." She was like, "Come on, hasn't any woman ever flirted with you? Didn't anyone ever ask you on a date?" I was like, "No, never, never, never." And I was like, "Well, one time, this woman danced with me in a club at this place," and I described it, because it was—I don't really remember where we were. It was some empty room, it wasn't a packed club. And she's like, "That was you?" It was her, the one freaking other woman that ever danced with me, and she completely remembered it.

SVETLANA KITTO: [Laughs.] Wow.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: She knew the situation, she knew the place. That was her, and there I am, she's the first. So then, I was with her at her house some other time. This is all a very short amount of time. Five, six months.

So, if that was summer, now we're probably in just fall or something, back at the School of Visual Arts, you know. It might have been my first year at the School of Visual Arts. It probably was, because that would have made sense. If I graduated from high school in June, didn't go to camp—actually, I went to Israel, that's another story—and got my first apartment. So yeah, so this would have been my first year at the School of Visual Arts. So I was 19, 18.

So, I'm with Ivonne, laying there, sitting there, and the phone rings, and she's like, "Oh, my friend's coming over." I was like, "Who's your friend?" Adele Bertei. This is woman who I saw singing "Mack the Knife" at the Mudd Club some year before, and I was like, "Okay, now she I liked." I mean, I liked Ivonne. But I was like, "This girl, I actually like." So I was like, "Get dressed." So, Adele came over to Ivonne's house. [00:40:30]

I mean, when I say "get dressed," I mean I didn't want to look like I was with—I didn't want there to be—I wasn't with Ivonne. I was having fun with Ivonne. We were having fun together, there was no—

SVETLANA KITTO: Right.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Then I met Adele and we ended up—I really fell for her. Like, she I had a crush on, in a big way. She kind of broke my heart a little bit. That's when I slept with her, and it was a little bit like, "Oh, okay, I really like this, I really like her," in a way that I just—I had never felt before, in terms of being physical with someone.

I really loved Jean-Michel, and I'll talk about it. I fell in love with him and he did kind of break my heart in high school. He did, but we went on to be friends. I really loved him, but I didn't want to sleep with him really. I really wanted to be with him and friends with him. I loved him, but I didn't really want to be, like, fucking him, you know? But I really did love him, truly, deeply, until he died. I mean, I miss him a lot. But in terms of, like, bodies and being with someone, Adele felt good to be with. And she was like a little Rimbaud character. She was kind of a street urchin. She had, like, a crazy life story and a lot of energy, and really smart and a really good performer, really good singer. [00:42:23]

Around this time, I had moved. I went to Europe for the first time ever. Now I think I'm sort of jumping into maybe—well, probably now, it's like my second year at the School of Visual Arts. My friends Nina and Mario are really having this gallery. I went to Europe for the first time, and I just never went back to school. I ended up staying in Europe for about three months.

When I came back, Jonathan had met Erika Belle, who was very close—Erika introduced me to literature, like she had read books that I had never heard of. I think she might have introduced me to Audre Lorde and I want to say Adrienne Rich. I'm trying to think of some others. She introduced me to making tinctures, making like—soaking lavender and witch hazel, or like, home remedies. She was actually very close to Madonna, and she was a backup dancer and choreographer for Madonna at this time. So, that might have been a little bit later, because she then—she and Jonathan were lovers, so I had to leave the apartment, because it was, like, I came back from Europe, Artie had a girlfriend. Artie and I used to kind of sleep together, but he now had a girlfriend. This is how things move, kind of fast, when you're young. [00:44:13]

[They laugh.]

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: And Jonathan had a girlfriend, so it was like, "Brody, you've got to move uptown." This is when you could move in a taxicab, and I just like packed my little bags. I didn't know where really to go, so David Svitzer lived—his family had a house in Harlem. They owned a whole building on 121st Street, between Lexington and Second Avenue, and his family let me come live with them. It was getting cold now at that time, because—yeah, I had probably come back from Europe toward the end of early fall, into winter.

I lived with his family, and we had no heat and hot water in this building. His family was poor. His stepfather was a storefront preacher, Baptist. He did not like his father. David was a queen. He ended up being—he and Erika were very close, and he was a backup dancer for Madonna as well. David was out, super out. I don't know how he really survived those streets up there. But there were a lot of drag queens at night on the street. But David was kind of like—he had his own style, but it definitely was, like—could be on the drag end but it wasn't. It wasn't drag. It wasn't camp. But he wore, like, full makeup. He didn't really wear dresses though. But he and I made jewelry together, and that's how we made our living, is we would make—we made jewelry. Anyway, that's when I moved. I moved up with his family. [00:46:04]

SVETLANA KITTO: And how did you meet him?

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: David and I went to high school together. So I met David when I was like 13. Coincidentally, his brother and my sister went to the Calhoun School, his older brother. And David's younger—so David's older brother, and he, had the same father, who was, I think, from Guyana. David's mother was from Guyana. But David—I never met his father. I don't know what happened to the father, I can't really recall. But the

stepfather was who was in David's life. [He called me his "vanilla child." -NBB]

SVETLANA KITTO: That was the Svitzer?

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: That was Snipes. He had his father's last name. The father's name was Snipes. But then he had two younger siblings, a boy and a girl, and the boy was also a queen. He was a dancer and he ended up going to Performing Arts. When they made *Fame*, the movie *Fame*, they made about Performing Arts, but that was our sister school, because Performing Arts and Music & Art are now at the Fiorello LaGuardia High School of the Arts. We just went to Music & Art.

David went very high up in the calls to be Leroy, and we were like, "Oh!" I thought he was going to get that, I really thought. I was like, "David's going to be a star." David was a star. He was like—David passed away. He was a star. He was so, so, so special, very beautiful. But he never really rose, that star. He backup danced with Madonna, early, when it was like "Everybody," when that album came out, and they would be at the Pyramid Club. The first time I ever hung a painting was for Madonna. Madonna asked me to hang a painting behind her at this club called Lucky Strike, which was above where the St. Mark's Bookstore used to be, and I just pinned the painting, raw canvas. [00:48:11]

I think Madonna found out that David was shooting drugs and he didn't get to—he was on tour and he got the boot, and I think that's when Madonna's brother took over. I forget his name right now. When I worked at Abrams, Fiorucci, the store, was right across the street. And Erika sold her clothes at Fiorucci. Don—who I got a job at Abrams, in the darkroom as well—he was friends with all these people at Fiorucci. Joey Arias worked at Fiorucci. You could get free cappuccino there.

I was then selling jewelry at Pat Field's, and that was on Eighth Street, and we would go into Pat Field's and hope that she would buy our handmade jewelry. Madonna wore our jewelry. David would bedeck himself in the jewelry. I would always put him in front of me when we would go to these jewelry places, hoping they would buy our stuff. Details was a place that we sold jewelry. We would sometimes go and stand on the street with our jewelry. Henri Bendel's had open call sometimes, and so we would like—I think we got our jewelry once into Henri Bendel's. I remember it was a long line, so we were like—just put a piece of blanket out, or a piece of material out, and sell on the street, up on 57th Street. We did that. Yeah, so jewelry, I'm working at Abrams, I guess is how the rent was getting paid. The rent was low. [00:50:06]

Because at that point, I had—I was up at David's for a while, and then I got my own—oh, you know what? I didn't—I reversed it, I apologize. I lived at David's house while I was still at the School of Visual Arts I think, and then I went to Europe from there. I don't know if somehow Erika and Jonathan had gotten together in that time. Maybe it wasn't while I was away. That would have been too long, that I had been living there.

Erika and Jonathan must have—I don't know exactly what happened, but I was living up at David's and I went to Europe from his place, not the other way around, because I remember when I had come back from Europe, I didn't have a place to stay. I wasn't sure where I was going to stay, and I was at Danceteria, and I ran into Zoe. Zoe had just come back from living in Japan, and I remember her saying to me, "Where are you living?"

I didn't really know her very well. David and Zoe were friends. When we were in high school, I remember seeing Zoe in the Mudd Club and thinking, "Wow, that girl is so cool." She was like, the coolest-looking girl. This is when Zoe wore party dresses, she had her hair jet black. She would wear fishnet stockings, seam in the back, red lipstick, black—her whole rack of clothing was just like, black dresses, a couple of suits. This girl—and oh, spike-heeled shoes, she had it. She had it. There's a book that somebody made, of Zoe, that's like—not exactly that time. [00:52:04]

But there I was at Danceteria, and Zoe was in a suit. She was in a custom-made suit I remember, and she said, "Where are you living?" I was a little embarrassed because I didn't really have a place, and I said, "I don't really have a place." She said, "Come stay at my house. I have a room, you can stay at my place." So the next day, I think I went from David—collecting my stuff from David's. It was time to move on from there.

Because living at David's was rough. I was with his family. There was no heat, no hot water. You had to get your bucket from the—there was no running water. There wasn't just no hot water, there was no running water. You had to fill up your bucket of water to go bring it upstairs and flush the toilet. So, David's was rough a little bit, living. It was like camping in a—but they owned the whole building.

It was time to move on from there, and so I moved in with Zoe, and that was on Stanton Street, at the corner of Stanton and Ludlow. I stayed with her for about six months and then I got my own place around the corner. But a little part that I missed out, that I—somewhere in there, in this time, when I was still in high school—this is my high school job. You know what? I should tell this one. Is it all right if I tell it?

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah, yeah.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: This is before all this. I was hanging out with—after I had broken up with Jean—

SVETLANA KITTO: Can you start with Jean? Okay, do this, and then we'll talk about Jean after that, okay?

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Okay, after—it's not much. Okay, okay.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah, okay.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Jean is in there. It's all this tight little period of time.

SVETLANA KITTO: [Laughs.]

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Like, it's funny to try to parse it out, because when you now look—at the time, it all was chronological, and it seemed like over a long time, but it's actually like two years or something. It was really short. All this happened really, truly—I think it was two years, two or three years. [00:54:07]

I mean, I can say about—I'll say this. This is, like, before Madonna, before—when I was still in high school, we started going to the Mudd Club. This is probably, like, Maury [ph] and our haircuts, and my friends, Heather and Wendy Jo. We went from like a little bit—and you have to understand, Music & Art was an art high school, so we were all always drawing. That's where I think I talked about getting turned on to printmaking. I think I said about that, right?

SVETLANA KITTO: You did, yeah.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: So, all that is all in there. I'm just not really—we were always drawing. And when I say we were hanging out, doing drugs or smoking, we were also always drawing on each other's drawings, passing art around between each other, making clothes, you know, changing—you know, style and art was all—it was all part of it. You couldn't find things that you liked in a store, to wear. Or I couldn't. Like, '70s clothing just looked—I didn't like polyester, and kind of wide bellbottom stuff. We had to make it ourselves, or I would wear a lot of clothes that were—I mined from my grandmother's basement, that was my mom's and my aunt, from the '50s. So, I wore all clothes from the '50s and '40s, and people—I remember kids teasing me. Like, all the Puerto Rican and black kids would be like, "Oh, you know, you wear those pointy shoes to get your roaches in the corners. That's how you get them, you stomp the roaches in the corner."

[They laugh.]

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: But they loved me. It was all fun. Because they were like—they looked good in their polyester outfits that I probably wanted to wear when I was younger, but I was like, "No, I'm moving on from that." But there was like, a little minute in there of like—definitely like a hippie, young, hippie-ism, wanting to like—maybe thinking that I was going to end up living on a commune or something, to then going to clubs and punk rock and, you know, Patti Smith and Liquid Sky and Liquid Liquid, this band. [00:56:35]

So there was this—there was the Mudd Club and there was Tier 3, which was just down the street. We would go back and forth, from the Mudd Club to Tier 3, the Mudd Club to Tier 3, carrying a drink in your hand. So, I remember being outside of Tier 3 one night and seeing Jean, and Jean had on army—like a one-piece suit, what are those things? Like a parachute suit, I think they called them.

SVETLANA KITTO: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Like a one's—romper type. It was like a work suit.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: But it was military.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah, like—yeah.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Parachute, I think. And he had this Take-N-Tape, these like—this is when you had a tape. You didn't have boom boxes yet really. You had this—there was like this—I had one too. He had one and I had one, not at the same moment, but it was this really sweet little plastic. I think mine was white and his was red. You put a single cassette in, and you could record things and you could play music out of it. It had a little handle, and he had that little thing, and his hair was like really shaved short in the front and it had a little, little—like, little teeny dreads in the back, and I just—I mean, I just—I just fell for this boy. I was like, "Oh, no, who is that?" And he was with this guy called Wayne, who was dating—oh, this girl I want to high school with, who I can't remember her name right now. Maryanne [ph]. I think we went to high school together, or she certainly was of the same age. [00:58:09]

Wayne-Wayne [ph] and Jean. And they—so anyway, Wayne—so Jean was flirting with my friend, Wendy Jo, who lived on 86th Street also. Heather, myself, and Wendy all lived on 86th Street, which is crazy. And we all went to high school together. I think I knew about the Mudd Club from Heather. Heather was, like, already sleeping with guys and a little bit—I was very immature physically, which I didn't mind at all, like in terms of femininity. I

didn't really want hips and I didn't really want tits, and I didn't really want my period, and she had all that. She was beautiful. She looked like Mick Jagger or something. She was gorgeous. Glam. She had a glam rock look. She was a really good artist, she could really draw. And she and Wendy were really close, and Wendy and I were really close, and I really wanted to be close with Heather, but Heather didn't really like me at all that much. But we hung out a lot together.

SVETLANA KITTO: [Laughs.]

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: I hung out at Heather's house a lot, because you could hang there. There was like a playroom on the Upper West Side, like a room that was just ping-pong and pot, and albums, and we played—you know, we played *Ziggy Stardust* and the Rolling Stones. I started learning about bootleg music, and Joe Jackson.

So, Heather brought us down to clubs, and Carrie Hamilton, this other friend, turned me on to, like, Bette Midler. And show music too, was in there. So, we're downtown and Jean's flirting with Wendy but Wendy did not like him. She was not interested in Jean, and I was like, "Oh." Somehow—I was like, "Good," because I don't even know that he really noticed me, I don't really remember. [01:00:15]

But I do remember, like the next—I'll just say Heather was dating this guy called Shannon, Shannon Dawson. He played the trumpet. I'm still, I'm at my mom's house, the phone rings and it's Jean. It's like the next day after I had met him, and I couldn't believe he was calling me, and he got my number from Heather. This is around Christmastime maybe, because I went over to Heather's house and he was there, and Shannon was there. I remember there was a Christmas tree, and I remember I sat on Jean's lap and I just—I liked him so much. I had already slept with one other guy before Jean, this guy named John, and that, too, was just like getting it done. Similar to Ivonne. I guess it was my second ones that I liked, because that was just like—

SVETLANA KITTO: Sophomore effort.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: The first one too, I just picked him up at the Mudd Club, this guy John, John Rosen. He was a handsome guy, he had an apartment, I met him at the Mudd Club. I somehow brought him to my own home. I brought him to my parents' house, and I let him fuck me, and it did not feel good, it just hurt. It was not fun, and I did things with him physically that I did not want to do, not because anyone forced me, but I just thought that's what you had to do. You know, that's what you did.

I lost this bag when I moved from Jonathan's to David's, that was a sad bag to lose, because I had these beautiful pictures of Jean-Michel—

[END OF BRODY18_10F2_TRACK3.]

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: —when he was in high school. Even though I met him just out of high school. Somebody had given them to me, I don't think he had. And I had these really good pictures that John Rosen had taken of David Bowie, because he had slept with David Bowie one night. He picked him up at a club, at the Mudd Club, I think. These pictures of David with a telephone coming out of his fly, I remember, there were these black and white—they were beautiful pictures and he gave me them. I lost those in a cab. So John,—I only say about John, because I was like—Jean wasn't my first lover, but he was like my first—

SVETLANA KITTO: —love.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: I really loved him, yeah. I mean, I had loved other boys when I was younger, but who I really—who I slept with. So, yeah, so I was with Jean for about—for my last six months of high school, and then I went away that summer. My mother's sister had married a Jew and they had a son, and they wanted to bar mitzvah him in Israel, and my mother's sister invited my sister and I to come to Israel that summer. That was my last—I had to leave—I missed some of the last weeks of high school to go. I barely got out of high school in terms of grades. Barely, barely got out of high school. And I missed those last days of high school. I came back just in time to go to graduation, and then Jean wasn't my boyfriend anymore when I came home.

It was like, "Oh, he just wasn't my boyfriend anymore." We didn't really break up or anything like that, but it was just like, "Oh, that's sad." He was with somebody else or something, and I just had to swallow it. I think he was with Suzanne Mallouk, who goes on to write books about Jean. Anyway, Jean—I really did—that was a heartbreak for me that I didn't ever really talk about with anyone. I had a lot of shame around that. [00:02:02]

But Jean and I remained friends. So I was still living in my parents' house, and I was in high school, and then I did that thing of Fire Island and coming out and living at Jonathan's. I remember bumping into Jean one time, when I lived at Jonathan's. This is how it was, like, such a condensed time, because I remember—well, you know what, I was going to tell this other story then, about when I was in high school, just after that, and being at Tier 3 and meeting H.R. from the Bad Brains.

I don't know if you've ever heard of this band. It's this really good punk rock band, really good. And H.R. really liked me, he had a crush on me. I was still in high school, or just fresh out. Fresh out I guess, but I still somehow had ties to home. Maybe I wasn't living at home, because I remember going uptown with H.R. to my parents' house, and going to some thrift stores, and us—I think I bought him a suit for like ten dollars or something. I vaguely remember that. Anyway, he lived in this loft down on the Bowery, I think it was the Mad, or the Misfits, I can't remember, this band. The Mad is Japanese rockers. They had this loft, and I remember visiting him, and we were hungry.

We did not have any money. We rode the subway by hopping the subway. Like, we would all get into a cab, pile into a cab, and give the cab driver, you know, like a dollar to take us uptown or something, you know? We would go to Dave's after the Mudd Club and have, like, just a bagel and jelly. The women at Dave's Diner still had beehives. I would go to high school from Dave's Diner, from a night of dancing at the Mudd Club. [00:04:00]

SVETLANA KITTO: Wow.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: In like, my dress and stilettos that might have worn sometimes. Once in a while I would wear—once in a while I wore that, but mostly I was in suits. But I do have this one memory of being in my grandma's pointy—it was my grandma's shoes. I had some of those, what do you call it, spiked heels.

But H.R. and I were hanging out, and we had a can of Campbell's cream of mushroom soup, and I said—and we passed Moishe's Bakery, which was next to the Kiev, on Second Avenue. On Houston Street they had Moishe's Bakery—was down there too—but the main one was on 2nd Avenue. And I said, "I'm going to go in there and ask them for some day-old bread."

And I went in and it so happens that Moishe was behind the counter, which is unusual. He's a Hasidic man and I said, "Excuse me, do you have any day-old bread or anything?" And he's like, "What, with a nose like that, you don't have a job?" I said, "No, I don't have a job." And he said, "You come back eight o'clock tonight, I give you a job." And he proceeded to give me, like, challah and all this, some stuff to take with me at the moment.

And we went back, and we had our soup and the bread, and H.R. walked me back at eight o'clock. And I went in and I helped Moishe empty the dumbwaiters of challah bread. It was the one night a week that they stay open late to—it must have been like a Thursday or a Friday night, that you have challah, I don't know. It was a special night that you eat challah bread, the next day. Anyway, I helped him take the challah out, hot challah, and he gave me all these bags of bread to take up to my parents' house. See, I was still in high school. Some of these—you'll forgive me, some of these—

SVETLANA KITTO: That's fine, don't worry about it. [00:06:00]

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Moishe drove me home in his Lincoln, and it was a little bit like—when I think of the #MeToo movement now it's like, "Oh, there was"—it was creepy. It was a creepy moment, where it was like what's going to—am I going to get out of this car? Do I really have a job? And I remember him saying to me, "Pull my finger." He wanted me to—I touched his finger. I've never told anybody this actually, or maybe I told one person, but just recently. I had never told anybody this for years and years. And it was like a test a little bit, and then he never drove me home again, and I got the job, and it never was really creepy ever, ever, ever again. But it was like a moment there where it was a Hasidic man with a not Hasidic girl, in a car. It could have been a little dangerous but wasn't, because I got—because we know how to navigate those waters.

SVETLANA KITTO: Right.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: It was, like, a very—it's a moment I navigated, and kept the job. And so, I had that job at Moishe's for quite some time, and that was when the Lower East Side was—you found your—you know, when I talk about clothes and fashion, I hope it doesn't really sound shallow, but these were signifiers. That's how you kind of found your people. Because everybody didn't have short hair or spiked hair or overcoats or pointy shoes or black peg-leg pants. And it was—chances are that, like, those people were making content, those people were also artists, or those people are also musicians, or those people were also poets, you know, or writers. You found your tribe in those places. [00:08:08]

Since I was on Second Avenue selling bread, a lot of people came into the store. You know, a lot of people that I got to know a little bit. When Heather—Heather was like—when I say about her being a little—like a little more, I don't know—she was daring in this way. She liked sleeping with men, she wanted to sleep with men. And I remember being at the Mudd Club one night and John Lurie was there, and I remember he was in this—he was, you know, this beautiful, striking man, in this suit. And this was like—for me, all these people—I remember these men and I was like—I did not want to sleep with any of these men. I more wanted to be these men. And Heather wanted to be with these men. She would meet these guys and go home with them the night of. I think that's what I was sort of copying when I went with John Rosen, is like, "I guess I have to do that eventually." You know?

So I remember her going home with John Lurie, and I remember him saying to us, "I'm starting a band. Should we call ourselves the Lounge Lizards or the Eels?" And I was like, "You should call yourself the Eels." [Laughs.] He didn't do that. But she and him had this big affair. And I remember he would come into the bakery and I would give him cookies and cakes.

When Zoe—when I was on Houston Street—before I lived with Zoe those months, when Zoe lived around the corner, on Ludlow Street—she would be coming home from clubs and I would give her cakes and cookies. She'd be in her little whatever, night after, you know, morning of. She would be going home, and I was fresh. Those were the nights I didn't go to the—I wasn't staying out late. I was eight o'clock in the morning, I had my apron on and I was selling baked goods, you know? Sometimes I would work at night and sometimes I would work in the morning, and it was a ways to travel when you lived on the Upper West Side, to go down to the Lower East Side. So that was my high school job, yeah. [00:10:22]

SVETLANA KITTO: How did you end up going to SVA?

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: You know, I didn't really apply to any colleges. Most of my friends had dropped out of high school. Heather and Wendy, who I speak about, and David, they all went to City-As-School, which is where Jean had gone. That's where Zoe, it turns out, had gone. Al Diaz went there. I think Shannon went there. I think that's how they all knew each other.

Because it turned out that, like, Shannon, Jean and Wayne-Wayne [ph], they all were in a band called Gray at that time. Like, they all were just starting to make music together. Jean played the clarinet. I went and got a soprano sax. I copied that, you know? I remember I was there when they named themselves Gray. We were at the Mudd Club and they didn't—they already had the gig before they had their name, and there was a gray piece of paper, and I remember Wayne-Wayne [ph] saying, "Should we call ourselves Hairbrush?" Like, you were just coming—and the paper was gray and then Jean just wrote the word "gray," and he made a drawing, a beautiful drawing, on the paper, and tore it a little bit, and it was like—that was the backdrop for their—and then they were Gray. There was another guy in the band, that I'm not remembering his name. It's bad, I'm not remembering his name.

Jean lived over on 12th Street, between A and B, which ends up being right across the street from where New Math ended up having their gallery. But Jean was already gone from there, because when I lived on Thompson Street, I ran into Jean one time. I could go gaps of time without seeing him, and then I remember running into him and he said, "Hey, I'm making art in this basement." And it was the basement of Annina Nosei, the gallery that he first showed at. And he was making money now. His canvases, I think they sold for about \$5,000, which was a lot of money to us. [00:12:33]

Because I remember being with Jean when we would, like, go into a supermarket and steal butter and steal meat, and I could go get a loaf of bread at Moishe's, because I, you know, knew them or whatever. But now, I ran into him when we were in SoHo, and it's not that SoHo was fancy yet. It was starting. The galleries were starting to open. And he said—and I think there was Dean & DeLuca maybe, because we went in and bought fancy butter and fancy cheese and fancy bread, and we went back to my apartment, Jonathan's apartment when Jonathan wasn't there, and we made grilled cheese sandwiches. I remember we slept together even though it was like years that we hadn't slept together. And I still really loved him.

SVETLANA KITTO: So you were going to tell me a little bit more about Music & Art.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Music & Art, yes, the High School of Music & Art. I mean, I guess I may have said this already, but my experience of high school wasn't what a lot of friends that I know who come from the rest of the country experienced. It wasn't jocks and—what did they have? [00:14:00]

SVETLANA KITTO: Right. Cheerleaders.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Cheerleaders and sports. I was with my people. I found my people. They were artists and musicians. You would come out of an art class and there would literally be, you know, the sound of kids singing gospel or opera. The doors would open, and they would be singing into the hallways. I mean, it was like a film or something. It was just real. And we would be—I think I told you, I got to draw the nude at that time and the school was situated in this very beautiful, old, neo-Gothic building, and quite run down, but I liked it aesthetically. I didn't like the new anyway. And it was at the top of a hill, on Convent Avenue.

This was like '76, I think, that I started going there, because I graduated in '80. So it had like that—there was this real sense of hippie-ness there, which I really liked. Kids from other schools would often visit our school, because it was a fun place to be. It was really quite accepting. I didn't feel like we were—there was any kind of elitist. At least it didn't feel like that to me. It may have felt like that to other people, but I felt like my group and my community of friends were quite open.

I mean, even a little further back, into junior high—I don't know if I really talked about this, but I think I touched on, like, people started kind of self-segregating at that time, where—when we were really young, in PS 166, all genders and class and race were really integrated. And then as you get into like 10 years old, 11 years old, and parents started filtering their kids, and it was like, who had access to go where. [00:16:29]

And I was of the middle—more middle-class—so my parents were able to send my sister to private school, because she really needed a little more individual oversight of some—she had some learning—I don't want to say disability because it wasn't. I don't actually know what it was, but there was some, maybe, diagnosis around the way she learned. So they found this school, the Calhoun School, that was an opening learning—that I spoke about, I think earlier, which I didn't fare well in. And I returned to the IS 44. But at that point it was, like, kind of tougher kids, and often that was kids with less money, which often related to race, class. These things start separating and segregating us.

And then Music & Art was a school that people who knew—who had enough, a little bit of parenting or some way of the kid knowing, "Oh, okay, I can go there and test." You have to test to get into that school, whether it was singing, playing an instrument, or for me, drawing, creating a portfolio. So, I was in a school where there was already a vibe of—creativity was welcomed and encouraged. Professionalism, not so much. [00:18:09]

Though I remember when I was young, my father—when I was in junior high—my father saying to me that I was—I don't remember how he put it, but I think there was a bit of racism in this in that he was saying that I kind of hung with people, quote-unquote, he would say, beneath me. And I think there was a table of, like, more upper-middle-class, upper-class white girls that were really in their books, and really—I mean, they were probably fantastic girls, but I was not really friends with those girls. I was friends more with the tougher, slightly tougher kids, and kids who were doing drugs. I was doing drugs and drinking.

So those were other places of segregation and friends with broken homes, so we could—broken [laughs], I haven't said that in a really long time. They weren't broken. They just might not have had a mother or a father in the house, so maybe there were places where we could hang out and not have a lot of supervision. As I rolled into high school, I had a really good friend—he didn't go to our high school, but he had—his family had a brownstone in the '80s or '90s, and we spent a tremendous amount of time there. I think I said when I was younger, I often stayed at other people's houses for long weekends, and kind of wanted to be a part of other families.

Now you might not—we didn't really have the family, but we had the location, where I spent long weekends, in this home where years later now, I realize, "Oh, I never even saw the mother." And then I find out years later, oh, the mother was an alcoholic or a depressive, and she was in a dark room, and we, the kids, had full run of the house. Once in a while, we would see the mother like come downstairs and like get something out of the refrigerator. But meantime, Jared—I don't even know what school Jared went to—but he had learned about health food, brown rice. I learned from my friend Tavia Ito about sesame oil and cooking a whole fish and chopping garlic. [00:20:44]

But I was also doing cocaine with them, with the family, or tripping and being at Jared's house and just being on—smoking pot and being with all these same people, David and these other kids, and all their—a lot of my friends lived in Westbeth, which is a building in the West Village where it's an artists' building. So, they were the children of artists. We would all just spend like, literally, just nights into days together, and we would be on the streets at all hours, or listening to music. Crosby, Stills & Nash. This is like a little bit younger, a little bit more of the hippie kind of—I think I thought we all were going to live together for the rest of our lives, kind of, you know? [Laughs.]

But we got along, and it didn't feel like—you hear about other kids, about competition or feeling outside of something. I felt inside of something. For the most part, not entirely. But I didn't feel so much in my own family, so it was like already starting to have a chosen family. But we all had probably a lot that we weren't really talking about, but we thought we were talking about our stuff to a degree. I mean, you find out, "Oh, this person's mom was an alcoholic," or, "That person was anorexic," or, you know, "My mom's anorexic and a drinker."

We have these things that we weren't really aware of at that young age, but we're also having amazing times together, going to see art, going to museums, going camping. I learned about—I already knew camping from camp actually, but I had never camped with a friend or a family member. My friend Tavia had a lot of camping equipment. And I think I talked about this, like, sleeping bag that I had, that I don't know if I—did I tell about like, being really—? [00:22:59]

I don't know that I told this, but one night, Jared and I decided to go camping in Harriman State Park, and I had—I don't think I talked about this, where I had—this is when I had heard about down, and my father got me a down sleeping bag, but he didn't know and I didn't know, that the down is rated. And this down was for the most

summery night possible, like it was for the least cold conditions.

But I thought I had a down sleeping bag, and so I went with Jared in wintertime, in the frozen snow. We took a bus to Harriman State Park, got there at night, because we found a cab on the way and this and that. Anyway, we got there at night, and I remember just being freezing, freezing cold, and pitching out tent and having to end up getting into his sleeping bag, because my sleeping bag was basically nothing, it was like paper with a little bit—like three feathers in it. But we just didn't—but we had a great—it wasn't a bad time at all. It was a totally fun time. [00:24:05]

Or going to Harriman in summer. You would take a bus to Tuxedo Park and get out and just walk across the street and go into the woods. We would take acid and take walks along streams and just—it felt—it was actually—I don't know if it sounds like what it sounds like, but for me they were deeply spiritual adventures. They were, like, discovering trees, that their roots were intertwined, and finding freshwater springs and, I don't know, just communing in a way and sleeping outside, and being with my friends and connecting in some way, or that it felt like I was connecting.

One time, we decided we were going to go to Woodstock. We had heard about Woodstock. A bunch of us—I think it was maybe eight of us, seven of us—thought we would hitchhike to Woodstock. We took the subway as far as you could take on the number one train, to the West Side Highway, and we just got on the West Side Highway. And my group was David Svitzer, who then I remember was wearing, like, giant purple overalls, super hippie, like overdyed purple. He had a pretty big afro, big white framed, with no lens, glasses. Tavia kind of got whatever scene she has on, with her dog. And me. I don't know what the hell I looked like, probably I don't know what. [00:26:00]

The first group—I don't know what—the first group, they got a car that took them all the way there. And us, unfortunately, nobody would stop for us. I think it's probably because David was black, I don't know. But finally, we made David hide and we got a ride, and then he came out. It was Tavia and I, a woman, but it was like ride after ride after ride. It took us from like, I don't know, eight, 10 hours to get to Woodstock, and our friends were there waiting for us when we got there, and then we went hiking into Woodstock. But again, similar to the Fire Island story, this wasn't really stressful in any way. It all was just—took a while to get to Woodstock. You know, a very different way of traveling than I probably would [laughs] travel today.

I don't know, those were just the way we rolled, you know? And this idea of like career, or how we're going to make money, those kind of things weren't really on my mind. And I didn't really have a lot of guidance around that. Like I said, a lot of my friends dropped out of high school pretty soon, not that long later. I did graduate high school. I didn't know how I was going to—I didn't have a desire to go to college. I didn't want to go into America. I mean, I lived in Manhattan. I didn't have any interest in—it's like, Manhattan seemed like its own country, you know? I didn't even understand the rest of the country. You know, anything on television just looked repulsive to me. Yeah, I was right where I wanted to be, I thought, you know, in terms of—I didn't want to go. I thought college also would be, like, all white people and the same class and the same age. That just seemed uninteresting to my brain at that time. [00:28:10]

So, I did end up going to the School of Visual Arts. My father really pressured me. He's like, "You really should go to school." I don't know how exactly that happened, but I must have made a portfolio. I honestly don't remember what it was, the path to get you into that school, but I was accepted, and I did like being there, and I met really good people. And again, similar to Music & Art, I was introduced to materials and ideas and ways of looking. I had a drawing class with a much older man named Burt Hasen, who—I mean, he could draw like the masters, and he really taught me—it was the first time someone really taught me to look at negative space, and that was, like—it kind of blew my mind in a way of looking, a way of seeing, and that really piqued my interest in drawing.

I had never—I used to draw all the time in high school, but this was a different way of looking, a different way of seeing. It was, I think, similar to when I talked about swimming and all of a sudden being able to use your arms in a way that you could move through water. I kind of found a way to use pencils or material that started to feel part of me, I guess. I didn't have—like I think I told you, I didn't have like a quote-unquote God-given gift of talent. It was still a struggle, but—I mean, I say that in terms of rendering. I couldn't draw like realism, but seeing space in a certain way, seeing the space between things, became apparent to me. [00:30:13]

Similarly, like when I first saw probably, you know, a Rachel Whiteread, when she did the—this is years later—but when she did those resin pieces of casts under a chair, or Serra's lead pieces inside a corner, or, you know, even Beuys's *Fat Chair*. I know that's different, but still, like, making me aware of negative space in a certain way, I think was—it's funny because I hadn't thought about this. But I still am very much interested in negative space in space, and the body in relation to it.

I still—at that time it was—I wasn't—you know, I was still finding my voice as an artist. I was learning about materials. I took an art class with Hannah Wilke. She was a terrible teacher. She just would sit and talk about

herself and Claes Oldenburg and, you know, chocolate. But just as a bookmark, that is the first time—when I was there, in Hanna's class—is the first time I ever saw David Nelson, who is a person who comes back into my life quite meaningfully, quite strongly, later on. But I remember seeing him and working with these very Minimalist copper rods. I remember being very taken with him, and he would just be arranging and rearranging these rods, and I didn't quite get that. [00:32:04]

I was much more in expression. You know, I think I was influenced by Jean in some ways of, you know, mashing paint around. Rauschenberg and Twombly and Johns, they didn't really mash paint around. There was like—what are those three Italians that were, like, Sandro Chia, Clemente, and I forget the other guy, we have to look it up. But a kind of Expressionism, people were calling it Neo-Expressionism. I probably was—through osmosis, not directly, not because of theory or ideas so much. It was more materially and gut, you know?

But I loved color and I love material, and I got onto—when I was in the Hannah Wilke class, I started working with clay in a negative. I always kind of find—I don't know, I just find—I still sort of find my way. I don't pick the material first. It's like the material is the thing that I use to make the thing that I need to make, and I wanted to make these reliefs. There probably would have been a whole other way to make them, but I chose to draw in the negative, roll out clay, and make almost like a drawing in the clay and then pour plaster, and then pull the clay away, so I had like a one-time mold. And then I would paint on that plaster, and then I often would put that next to a canvas or even attach it to a canvas, so the canvases had reliefs to them. [00:34:07]

The first time I ever showed—I had like a show, not—the first time I showed a painting was at Lucky Strike, but the first time I had a real show was at the Pyramid Club, because Jonathan, my friend, had been DJ-ing there and he knew the owners. And so, I hung these canvases with these reliefs on them, like hands, almost like Cocteau. Like I squeezed my hand in clay and then poured plaster, and then you could like—I actually attached that to a canvas and put a candle in the hand and burned the candle and practically burned the house down one Christmas. Because actually, this was a Christmas that Madonna was there. This is when I was friends with her, and I was living at Zoe's and she came to the house. I remember us all hanging out, and I think I got high that night and I went in—we smelled something, and I went in the living room and the canvas with my hand was on fire, not far from the Christmas tree. That was, like, fire on the wall, and we just put it out and kept right on going.

But anyway, those were the type of pieces [laughs] I was doing at that time. When I showed, that's the first time I ever sold a piece. It was the first show I ever had. One of the guys—Bradley, I think his name was—I don't know if he ran the Pyramid or he owned it. I thought of him as an owner, but he probably just was the manager. He bought a painting from the first time that I—one of these relief pieces. It looked a person breaking out of jail. It was like a jailbird, with the face was plaster, and I think something else on it was plaster, but the rest was—it was a way to have a perspective, because you had a relief, and then you could go way back into the canvas. And I also did collage on the—like the stripes were probably cut canvas, the stripes of the jailbird. Yeah, that was the first time I sold. I went to the store and I bought my mom like a diamond ring from a junk store, with the first money that I ever sold, my first canvas. I bought her a little diamond ring, she still has it. It was like \$120 or something. I spent it all on her, on my mom. Yeah. [00:36:36]

So that was like—I was in SVA at that time, when I was making that work, and then out of SVA too. I think that time is when I was working at Abrams still, and that was that crossover period where I lived at Zoe's for a really short time. Because I remember having those relief paintings in this room at her house that was supposed to be my bedroom, but it was really just—had a sleeping bag on the floor, and the whole room was plaster and canvases that I would make work in. That might have been—that's the time that I hung the canvas for Madonna, at that time period.

Then, coincidentally, Jean-Michel dated Madonna, so that was another way that I knew her and was friends with her too. He really loved her a lot, and I remember seeing her at his house when I would go visit her. That's also how I became friends with her, like through—Erika and she were very good friends. Madonna read a lot too. Madonna and Erika shared a real love of literature. I think Toni Morrison was something that probably Erika introduced me to. Yeah, I mean, the books I cited were more, like, feminist, you know, my first—not my first, because I had read Carson McCullers—I think I told you that, in high school—*The Member of the Wedding*. [00:38:11]

Yeah, so that was the School of Visual Arts time. And that ending never really—the fact that the New Math was opening and showing with them, and starting to sell work—it was like, there was all these galleries in the Lower East Side. I think Jean's success influenced a lot of people, because Jean lived in the Lower East Side, he was of that location. I think a lot of people thought, "Wow, if he can do it, I can do it," kind of. And there was a lot of people who were like—a lot of derivative work happening from his work, you know? Including myself, I'm sure. But I think we were also, like—I mean, I know it was really—I was very impressed that he just listened to his own voice, and witnessing someone really listen to themselves.

I remember Jean, like right—also, like, when I was still seeing him, back in high school, when I had the Moishe's Bakery job, I would go to the Kiev and have soup afterwards. I would always get a bowl of soup before I went home. And I remember waiting one time, being with Jean, and Glenn O'Brien, who was involved with *Interview* magazine and *TV Party*, took Jean to Warhol's. And I remember waiting for Jean at the Kiev, and Jean came back, and Warhol had bought some sweatshirts. Jean was painting on sweatshirts and selling them at Pat Fields too. [00:40:03]

He had had a show at Pat Fields—had one of his first shows. He was making assemblages, like really great collages out of broken typewriters and things that he found on the street. I remember him painting a test pattern on a TV set. TVs used to have test patterns when they were going to sign off and sign on, these black and white patterns. I remember him taking a TV—he painted on broken old TVs a lot. And he had a show—I think Pat was the first person to give Jean a show. And Pat was gay it turns out, and I didn't know that about her. She lived above the store. I remember going to a Christmas party of hers one time, and being like, "Oh, women," [laughs] you know? There too, like whenever we would sell the jewelry, I would put David in front of me, because I just—I did that a lot when I was younger, I kind of put other people in front of me and kind of—but I would be back making the stuff. I just didn't want to be the front person, you know?

And, anyway, this one time with Jean, I remember him coming back and just being like—this was like right when things were going to start to happen for him, happen quote-unquote financially. He was going to start to have recognition and quite a lot of success. Warhol took a shine, I guess, to him, and gave him money for—I think it was sweatshirts at that time. I just remember him being so excited and him coming back with this cash in his hands, and us just eating at the Kiev together.

And then I also remember running into him—this was some years later, and he had learned about Cy Twombly. Because it had always been—like Rauschenberg was the obvious one people would compare him to. And he had learned about Cy Twombly, and he told me about Cy Twombly and he showed me a book of his. Those were like—I remember being on St. Mark's Street, hearing that word, "Cy Twombly," like it was one word, you know? And you think about some of Jean's mark-making, it registers, you know. [00:42:19]

With Jean, it was like everything was game for his work. When he lived on 12th Street with Alexis, there was this refrigerator that they had—this fat old refrigerator—and him taking purple paint and putting his hands in it and putting his hands on the refrigerator door and smearing the paint and then writing "grape jelly" in his classic handwriting. The walls were covered in marks and writing of Jean's. And in the bathroom, there was a painting that I remember had a butter knife tied to it. It was like these reliefs, you know, using the canvas but things coming out from the canvas. Maybe that was an influence of maybe the plaster for me, I don't know. Yeah, I would probably imagine.

So yeah, so many galleries started to open. He was also writing SAMO and writing graffiti with Al and Shannon at that time. I think I had seen all that SAMO writing before I met Jean too, so that was another thing. Maybe when I met Jean, I had already seen SAMO, it was like, "Oh, that's SAMO, or one of the people that wrote SAMO." I had already known lots of graffiti writers, because in high school, a lot of the boys, mostly boys, wrote graffiti, like the Rebels, RTW, Rolling Thunder Writers. You would ride the—the subways were covered in graffiti, floor to ceiling. It was beautiful. Beautiful. [00:44:03]

And I remember seeing, like, "Hi, Nancy, Duster," when I would go on the subways. And that was me. It was my friend, Duster. It was like—I forget—Bell. What the fuck was his first name? I can't—Steven Bell, you know, these graffiti writers that I knew. Zephyr, and—you know, it's like—and that's when Fab Five Freddy had done the outside of a train in all Campbell's soup cans, Andy Warhol's Campbell's soup cans. That was a beautiful train. Jean wasn't that kind of a writer. He wasn't a spray-painter, he was a writer-writer.

So yeah, so I think all the galleries starting on the Lower East Side, there was like a commodification starting to happen. You know, people were paying their rent, people were selling things. I think other collectors, it was—like now, when people talk about it, there was like a quote-unquote boom. I didn't really know that was, but there was a financial growth in our country, as we were coming out of this—like, the city was bankrupt when I was growing up. I think I had told you, like Mayor Lindsay—and we were going to lose—Snug Harbor was tearing down—they were just bombed out the buildings. The Lower East Side was bombed out. It was just empty lots, you know? The Upper West Side was boarded up too.

I mean, it was—that's why the subways were all graffiti, you know? You know, people were working on the streets at night, like selling sex, and it was all—the meat market and the piers and all these sites were—you know, it wasn't cleaned up. Times Square. Giuliani hadn't happened yet, you know? Like, the city truly was bankrupt. Then the '80s was a change and a shift. So in these funky storefronts, people started to show work, and people started to come and have money and buy the work. [00:46:16]

My work was bought some, for sure. I always had a job, but I also was always showing work. I kind of went on

like that for a while. You know it still kind of was—up until quite recently, like I would have a job, but also would be showing and selling work. And my friends were always artists. So at New Math—New Math had a really—there were some really good artists that showed there. Nobody who really went on to terrific success. AIDS cut a lot of people out. My friend Craig Coleman died of AIDS later. I got Zoe a job at the gallery. She was taking pictures and I wanted her to be in the gallery, and I asked the gallery if they would take on, but they already said they had a photographer, so they didn't show Zoe. But she worked there for, you know, probably six months, a year, I don't really remember. I don't remember.

But yeah, the whole Lower East Side, there would be—you just would go to openings every night and find people. You know, we didn't have social media or these are the ways of contacting each other. You just, like, went to—you went out, you found people out. You found people at the gallery, you found people at the bar, you found people at the club. You know, "Where are you going later?" I remember seeing Martin Wong on those streets and those openings. I wasn't friends with him, but I knew him, and David Wojnarowicz was showing at Civilian Warfare. And Greer Lankton, I was friends with her. Not big, big friends but we hung out, you know? [00:48:09]

SVETLANA KITTO: Like you went out together?

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Well, I remember going to her house a couple of times. She would come to the gallery a lot. She probably was in shows at the New Math Gallery, I'm guessing, I can vaguely remember. Our galleries were friends, you know. But yeah, I definitely hung out with Greer. Greer is—you know, something that I would say is that—I don't know if it's very well-known. I think I told Leah this, or somebody, that Greer's—I think her father was a puppet-maker. I remember Greer showing me, when I was at her house, this beautiful, beautiful wooden hand—this small wooden hand, like to a marionette or a puppet—that her father had carved. I thought it was very tender and really telling, because she made these dolls, you know? And she kept that on her mantel, and she showed me that. I always wondered what happened to that, like if that's in her archives or anything, because that was a special thing to her.

She used to have gravity boots, and she would hang upside down in her gravity boots, on her [laughs] fire escape, so dangerous. Oh, my God. She was so—she was, like, the first person that I met that was trans, that like—just, you would see her walking down the street with her hair kind of uncombed and no makeup and just a little frock and flip-flops. You know, it was just a real sweetness, country, something out of country. That's also when—now it's like, if you're like 24, I start meeting people that aren't just born and raised here—you know, in your 20s, or younger, younger even. People were coming to School of Visual Arts to go to school. Like, David Nelson came from California. [00:50:04]

And then I met a whole other kind of chunk of people, when I started meeting women more, that had been graduating college. So that was probably, like, 24. It was a wave of people that I met who came to the city, who started coming to the Lower East Side, who got—you know, they got wind that you could get an inexpensive apartment there. You know, people starting out in town, who were my age, but I had already—I had just been there. You know, I'm a townie. You know, I didn't come here to—so, consequently, I also don't know if I had the best planning, you know? Like, "I'm really going to, like, take this city." It wasn't [laughs] like that for me. It kind of was always like, just, "I don't know, what's the next thing?" For better or worse. Sometimes, I prided myself on my just intuitive, you know—and consequences were what they were, you know? And coincidences were something that I really went with. Like, those were kind of touchstones for me, of like, "Okay, I'm on my path, you know, I'm meeting the people that I'm meeting."

I was pretty young when I had my first solo show at New Math. And then I had a second show. They moved to a much nicer gallery, a bigger gallery on Avenue A, which they probably couldn't really sustain because the rent was a lot higher for them and that's—they didn't last so long in that space, but some—

SVETLANA KITTO: Something like '86 or something?

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: 1985, I think, because I remember having my second solo show, I think, in '85. And a gallery from California called the Kiva Gallery had bought some work from me and offered me to have a show in San Francisco. That's when I—they introduced me to Nayland Blake's work, they showed his work. I didn't meet him, but I always remembered his name. And I met him many, many, many years later, but somehow, I remembered his name. I was like, "Oh, did you"—he showed at Kiva Gallery as well, back in the—I have never really talked to him much about it, I just touched on it. I've only met him a handful of times. I just know that. So, these are those overlaps, you know? [00:52:33]

SVETLANA KITTO: Right, yeah.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Do you want to say anything else, or ask any more questions?

SVETLANA KITTO: No, I think that's good for now. Let's stop.

[END OF BRODY18_10F2_TRACK4.]

SVETLANA KITTO: This is Svetlana Kitto, interviewing Nancy Brooks Brody at her home in Prospect Heights, Brooklyn, New York, on January 24, 2018, as part of the Visual Arts and the AIDS Epidemic Oral History Project, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Card number one.

So, you were going to tell me a little bit more about your first exhibitions at New Math.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Okay. You have such a nice introductory voice.

SVETLANA KITTO: [Laughs.]

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Hi. [Laughs.] Yeah, so I already said that New Math was on 12th Street, between A and B, in the East Village in Manhattan. And I think people have to understand that the East Village was—I mean, who knows when people will ever listen to this, but it's quite different than it is now, in 2018. You have to do a little research to find out about that.

But it was this tiny little storefront in this tenement building on 12th Street. Mario and Nina invited me to have a solo show there, and the show consisted mostly of paintings, but a lot of the paintings had sculptural elements. As I said before, in the School of Visual Arts, I had been working with relief. I like mixing materials, mixing mediums. They were a lot—figurative, my work was figurative. You know, like I can't—the work was probably personal. It came from, like, a personal place of storytelling. Not so much about identity, which much later, the stories moved into, but of—it was an investigation, I think, of the self in some way, my young self. [00:02:13]

I also made objects. I had made this object with a face on it, out of found wood and paint and a face that I had cast. At that time, Zoe Leonard and I were hanging out a lot. We were good friends, and she agreed to be a live sculpture in my first exhibition, where I covered her in clay. I put some jewelry on that David and I had made. There were pieces made out of twisting metal and semiprecious stones, and I put, like, clay in her hair and clay on her body, and she didn't have a shirt on, but she had on these—she had been living in Japan and she gave me these beautiful, old—I still have them actually—Japanese—I think they were sumo wrestler pants. I never used them or wore them other than this time that she wore them. So, she was a live sculpture at the opening.

SVETLANA KITTO: Wow.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Really, she was very beautiful. And she stood super still.

SVETLANA KITTO: Is that documented?

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: There might be a photo somewhere, I don't know. I don't have one that I can think of. But that was the opening. That was, like, the opening party or event night. She didn't do it again, we didn't repeat that. But the sculpture stayed. She held this sculpture, this face and this assemblage that I had made, and that then went on the podium in her absence. [00:04:00]

Yeah, I mean things—that show was—that show, I'm not sure I sold work from it. I don't know who was—I don't know how any of that was happening. That was the gallery, was just kind of scrappy. I don't think they even realized—they were serious about it and really cared about art, and all the artists that showed there were quite passionate about their work. I mean, that's really what we did, what we wanted to do.

I know myself, I just—all I cared about at that time was working as little as I could at paying jobs, to pay the rent or pay a studio space. At one point I even left my—I had this little—I think I said, I had this little apartment on Ludlow Street, between Stanton and Rivington, and I subletted that out and just moved into my basement studio on Ludlow Street, where I just had a sink. I didn't even have a hotplate or anything, and I had a hammock. I had been in Mexico and I bought a hammock and I hung it down this dank, nasty—it was a nasty basement. I mean, just a raw tenement basement, where this band shared—this rock and roll band, I forget even the name of them. These guys would come at certain hours and play, but I would sleep down there.

Then actually, somebody that I had been dating knew of an apartment in the West Side, on West 14th Street, owned by Frank's Steakhouse Restaurant, when it used to be on 14th Street. And that's when there was nothing on 14th Street. Like, there was Western Beef and there were meat—it was the meat market. And it really was—like, at night it was just—the streets were, like, slick with, you know, calf fat from—and it just smelled like fat from the meat, and you would just see, like, blood in the gutter, and slabs of meat would be moving in and out of these warehouses. It really was a meat market. And it functioned late, late, late, late at night, early into the morning. [00:06:17]

And then there were—at that time we called them transvestites, I think we called them, or drag queens. They were, like, pretty, pretty tough guys on the streets, selling them, hustling. And a couple of artists, I guess, lived

in this housing, and I—this woman called Nancy Mitchnick, who had—she was older and she had a larger career, I guess. I don't know where she was going, but she let me sublet her studio and loft, a super raw loft. Her daughter was Marla Mitchnick, and Marla was very good friends with this young—so the deal was that I could sublet this space. Somebody else was already living there, John Kelsey, who was—through him, I learned about semiotics. He's the first person that introduced me to that word, semiotics. He read. He just stayed home and read basically all the time. I was painting in the center studio with a skylight. It was this green studio with a giant skylight. And we lived there together, but the deal was, whenever she wanted to, Nancy's daughter could come and stay in her little loft bedroom area.

So once in a while Nancy would come from wherever she was coming from. She was a little younger than us. She was probably, like, 18 or something. And she was quite good friends with her high school friend called Jessica Craig-Martin, whose dad is Craig Martin, who has a painting career. I think he's British. Jessica was dating this guy named Nick, and it was Nick Cooper. It was Paula Cooper's son at that time. So this was, like, the kids of the Village I was meeting. They were younger, a little younger than me. [00:08:12]

So that was just—I don't know that I knew exactly who—I didn't know who these artists were, but I remember them. Also at that time—earlier, when I was working at Abrams—I don't know if I was still working there. I don't think I was, because that's why I think I had been living in the basement. I don't really think I had a job anymore. I think I had left Abrams, I'm pretty sure I had. At Abrams, when I was working there, one of the artists—so I was in the darkroom, working on those photo enlargers for the designers, planning their books, pre-computer, with paste-up mechanicals, and they would want an image. They would give us negatives and we would blow them up to different sizes, and they would—were figuring out the scale for their design for their books.

And I remember, like, photocopying—Photostat, it was called—of all these images of this little boy, drawings of this little boy, pissing in a pond. And it was Jennifer Bartlett's work. And I remember seeing Jennifer Bartlett working on the design with the designer. At that time it was Sam Antiput, I think, was the head of Abrams. And she came in, Jennifer and her, in, like, plaid wool Bermuda shorts and a matching plaid coat and scarf. And I remember just going like—she just looked so fancy, I kind of couldn't believe she could be an artist. Because anyone that I knew who was an artist didn't look so high-end. I didn't really like her work very much, to be honest. I Photostated tons of it and I wasn't that fond of it. Anyway, I remember seeing her. [00:10:19]

That cycles back to saying that I ended up working for her many, many years later. It will connect, but she showed at Paula Cooper. So here I was, now meeting Nick Cooper, Paula's son, and the other thing that was—I was working on my second solo show, so this must have been '84, into '85, because I was working on my second solo show at New Math at that time, in Nancy's studio, and listening to the Talking Heads over and over again. I had a record player that you could stack all these albums up and it just would go, *ch-ch-ch*. At night, I would go to clubs. Late at night I would go to clubs, and go dancing, and come back and work all into the morning.

Anyway, so one thing—one time I was sleeping up on this loft bed, in that loft, and I remember looking down and I saw this guy called Craig Barnes, and Marla Mitchnick, doing this circle movement. And they explained to me it was called Bagua, and it was kind of a martial art. They also would talk to me about the—Marla would talk to me about the Wudang, this martial arts club. And I always was very curious about that but I never—but I remember being on the loft and watching them circle. Years later, I was back on Ludlow Street, and I ran into Marla on the street and I went to the Wudang with her and took a Bagua class at the Wudang. [00:12:06]

And Marla never came back again ever, I think she—I don't know where she went in her life. But I never left the Wudang, and I studied this martial art from when I was—I must have been now—this is jumping ahead, but I was probably like 26. It was '88, however old I was. It was '87. It was '87.

SVETLANA KITTO: Twenty-five?

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: So, I was like—and I have studied that ever—I still practice. Anyway, that's just a connection, that that little time at the loft, there was a lot of—

SVETLANA KITTO: —growth.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: —branches that I saw. It wasn't so much even growth, but—yeah, and I had my first really terrible heartbreak at that time, of a girlfriend. I'm not going to go on about that in this, but experienced that.

So yeah, I was working on my second solo show at New Math, and I had that show, and I think it was actually—I don't know if it was that show or the show before—I think it was that show—that a gallery from San Francisco called Kiva Gallery. They saw that show, and then very soon after, I went and had a solo show in San Francisco.

SVETLANA KITTO: In '86.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: And I really didn't have enough time in between. That was always a little bit of a regret and a learning curve for me, that I needed more time in between shows. I mean, my show fared well in San Francisco, it turned out, and I remember getting a review, but that was too short of a time. It was really like, "Oh, got to slow down in that regard, because I really cared about the work more than I cared about—actually, it was like a few years ago, I was going through some papers and I was like, "Oh, that show got reviewed." A couple of places I think, but I didn't even remember that happening. I just remembered the feeling of, "Oh, that show wasn't strong enough," at that time. Then I moved back to this basement, a different basement studio on Ludlow Street, at 170 Ludlow. [00:14:28]

Well, I'll say about—you were asking about my second opening. New Math had moved to a larger space, because they started to do—they were growing, and they could afford a higher rent, and they moved to this really quite large—or it seemed very big—gallery space, and that's where I had my second solo show. It was kind of—it seemed a little fancier. I think that was the gallery. That's where probably Zoe was working when she worked there, I think. Jean came to that opening. There's some photograph of us. We were in some paper, somebody photographed the two of us together. I remember my parents coming to that opening, and some of my parents' friends from the Upper West Side. That was at that age where it was still, like, embarrassed of your parents a little bit. Like, I had never left New York, so it was a little—I felt a little encroached upon. But I was also happy they were there, I'm sure, on some level, but also cringed a little. I felt guilty about that.

Jean swept into my opening, and he was going—there was a fancy—he was already kind of fancy. And there was a restaurant that he would go to called Mr. Chow's, and I remember he was like, "Let's go. Let's leave and go to Mr. Chow's." And I went with him. I left my opening and went to Mr. Chow's. And he kind of convinced me. It was like as though that was, like, a cool thing to do, but it really wasn't. It was like—I mean, it was the end of my opening, it's not like—but I didn't hang out with the people that—anyway, I went, and at the dinner, I met this guy named Michael Halsband, and we became good friends. He's the person who has a lot of photographic documentation of Jean and Andy together, boxing and stuff. And so—not "and stuff," but images of them with—they weren't really boxing, but with gloves and satin boxing shorts. I think during that time Jean was probably collaborating with Warhol. [00:16:50]

Oh, I didn't say this, but there was a certain time when I hadn't seen Jean in a while and I ran into him. This was before this opening. I can't even remember when this was. Maybe it was some time in there. But Jean—it might have been around that time, Jean was like, "What are you doing? What are you up to?" And I was like, "I could use a job," but not asking him for one. But he said, "Come work for me." And he was now living on [. . . Great Jones -NBB] Street, in a building that Warhol actually owned, and he was occupying the entire building. I went in to work for him because I was just like, "Okay."

So, I get to work, he's asleep. This guy name Shagsie, who—Jean had this friend of his living in the basement there, in a basement kind of apartment or bedroom. And Shenge was downstairs and Shagsie, Shenge's—they were Jamaican. Shagsie was just like—I walk in and Shagsie is just smoking a giant joint. It's only like nine in the morning. And I have, like, this work ethic where I'm like, "What should I do?" And they're just getting high, they're just smoking. Jean's asleep. Finally, Jean rolls up, and I'm like, "What do you want me to do?" [00:18:10]

So I worked for him for some, I don't know, probably six months maybe. So a lot of Jean's—the canvases that have—I would take his drawings, these beautiful drawings that he was making, and I would bring them to Todd's Copy Shop on Mott Street. It was when color Xeroxing—there was like one color Xerox place, and I would leave tens and twenties of his drawings there, and Todd would copy them. Like, move them around, move the drawing around, and get as much of the drawing copied as he could, on the Xerox machine. And then I would go and matte, like, glue them with matte medium, to the canvases, and I would get Jean's canvases all ready. It was like I was doing all his surfaces. It was almost like faux painting, like gluing and getting a kind of look ready for him, so then he would—almost to make it look like a wall on the street or something, with his drawings, and then he would paint on them.

Then, the Palladium was opening, and Jean did these two major works for the Palladium. And I actually painted those. Jean's addiction was pretty bad at this time. That's why he was sleeping all the time. He was just—when I was working for him in those days it was a bummer, because he would be sleeping, and I would go upstairs, and I would go back—and I didn't like just sitting around. I mean, I would look at books and stuff, but I didn't feel right. Shagsie was just chill about it. But then Jean got this gig, and we had these giant canvases stretched for above the bar, and on the wall of the Michael Todd Room at the Palladium, and we would wait and wait and wait for Jean. [00:20:09]

Ian Schragar was one of the owners of the Palladium. I can't remember, I think Steve Rubell was in jail. Ian and Steve had owned Studio 54. I don't know so much all that story, but Ian was really super nice, and he would be like, "Where's Jean?" Like, the opening is coming, you know, and he has to paint these paintings. Jean finally rolled in and would like, do this—he did a big, beautiful drawing on the canvases and then I painted them in like paint-by-numbers style. And I hired this guy Skip Snow, who showed at New Math, or was around New Math. I

think he showed there, or wanted to, I don't remember.

But I remember being like, "Skip, paint this area green." It literally was paint-by-numbers, and Skip poured all this turpentine in the painting and made it really thin, and I was like, "No, no, no, right out of the tube." Like, we couldn't imagine using paint right out of the tube with no medium or anything, because it was so expensive to just go through tubes of paint, and like have these deliveries from New York Central. I had to really tell—I think I ended up firing Skip, or I had to be like, "Skip"—like he could not not put turpentine in it. He couldn't wrap his mind around using that much paint on a canvas, like to be that—you know?

SVETLANA KITTO: Extravagant.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Extravagant, thank you. Like, "abundant" is the word. They were beautiful canvases, and Jean got them done. But he was not in great shape, Jean wasn't. I don't know what year that was. [00:22:00]

Some time in there, Jean also curated a show with Carlos Amotta [ph], and he put me in that show. I remember Jean coming to my basement studio and seeing these works that I was doing, that I was really—I was making these pieces where I was using computer. This is, like, before people had computers, but computers were starting to be digital. Digitizing was in—I was learning about it. And I knew someone who had a computer in Ithaca, New York, and I would go up there. She would photograph or videotape images I was interested in. Patterns in nature, like the spiral of the shell, which I'm still interested in, the veins of a leaf. I went to the library and I would find images of these—that I was curious about, like patterns that repeat themselves, like the meander, the spiral, branching, in nature. Like, things that are microcosm, macrocosm. Like, "Is that a vein in the body or is that a vein of a leaf? Is that a river from an aerial photograph?" You know, these all look—they have the same way of moving and structuring.

So, she digitized some of those images for me and then I would have them silk-screened. I would have them made into giant silk screens, and I was silk-screening these digitized images. I was just—there was really something to that work that I still could find interest in, and Jean came and looked at those and he really liked them. I think those might have been actually digitized, of letters in the alphabet. I think it was actually—I think the ones that I showed with him were not so much images in nature, but letters and things more from early schoolbooks, like the ABCs. And maybe some mathematical equations and geometric shapes, that I was digitizing. [00:24:32]

So I was kind of interested in not having the hand, also, with this idea of silk-screening and digitizing. So that's the work that Jean and Carlos chose, and it's the first time Jean ever came to my studio. I was so touched, because he was really excited about the work. Like he kept grabbing me and hugging me, and he was just like, "I didn't know, I didn't know, I didn't know you were making work like this! I want to put you in this show." This was shortly before his last show.

This had to have been close to when he was—the end for him. He had big holes in his hands, and Band-Aids on, and his skin was really bad. Jean didn't have a spleen. He had been in a car accident, he didn't have a spleen, so I think he had—I don't know exactly what the spleen does, but it cleans your blood, I think, in some way. I think Jean was really—it was hard for him to heal his skin, his wounds, his abscessing. It was rough to see him like that in my studio. It was really painful. But it was also really joyful because he liked my work so much and that felt so good. I had always kind of wanted him to see my work. And he came to that opening and he liked that work, but he really liked this work. This work was more mature. The other work was really a little more emotional, but I was—anyway, there's still—I still have some pieces from that era that I find I can separate myself from, and I still have interest in it. [00:26:24]

So yeah, when I stopped working for Jean, it was—I think it was just—I'll tell one other story about working for Jean that was crazy, is that he had these flat files, these metal flat files, stuffed of drawings, full. He just drew all the time. And he would have this big TV on, watching the *Little Rascals*, or—you know, like the *Crown*, I think it comes—I don't know, I've never—I don't read about his work, but King Productions, from the *Little Rascals*. Anyway, so he drew, like, whatever little toys he had around, and objects that he loved, and words came from songs, and the television, and books.

So he had these drawing files stuffed of drawings, filled with drawings. He gave me a couple of them and I had left them there. I never got them because I didn't know he was going to die, and it seemed like a safe place to—because it was a flat file. But I remember them bursting, and instead of us fucking buying more flat files, I was like, "Jean, we should go through these drawings and get rid of some of these." Also, like, it might have been a good idea to trim down some of them, where you might not want left around, but me and Shags and Jean went through tons of these drawings and we burnt—we went in the back of Warhol's, this backyard area, this like alley, and there was a metal trashcan, and I lit a fire in it, and we just burned tons of Jean's drawings. I always think about that. I'm like, "Oh, my God, we burned"— [00:28:14]

SVETLANA KITTO: [Laughs.] It's like burning dollar bills. Hundred-dollar, million-dollar bills. [Laughs.]

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: I have a couple little scraps, that I always wonder if they're worth something. I never showed them to anybody. The good drawings that Jean gave me, I don't have. But what Jean did give me is one time when, when—not one time. I hadn't been seeing him much, but when Andy died, I went by Great Jones. I just rode my bike by, and he was alone. I just wanted to see how he was doing. And he was sad, he was really sad. This is really shortly after Andy died. I had gone out for dinner a couple of times with Andy and Jean.

SVETLANA KITTO: What was that like?

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Well, I'll first just say this, that Jean had this soffit on the ceiling that was like a beam or something. And perfectly on these soffits—it must have been like 16 inches deep or something—he had these three paintings of Warhol. And one of them used to be over his bed, I always remembered that, but now they were here. I hadn't seen him in a while, and now this was over, over—and it was—Warhol had kind of returned to his very early work of advertising and doing like a single pass with a silk screen on white canvas.

So, it was like—one was steaks, and one was hair dye, and one was this bra and panty. I think it says like "\$11.99" or something, and it used to be over Jean's bed—that one, the bra and panty one—and it had a coffee stain on it. I don't know, I always thought it was like a collaboration in a weird way, between Jean and Warhol, because it has this coffee stain. And I pointed to it and I was like, "Oh, I always really loved that one." And Jean just reached up and handed it to me, the painting, and I rode home with the painting under my arm that night. Not wrapped, nothing. [00:30:15]

SVETLANA KITTO: [Laughs.]

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: I still have it. I still have that painting. I think about hanging it up. I've never hung it up. I just have it. I once told someone about it and I showed her. Somebody that I know contacted me about that painting, and they were like, "You have a forgery," and I was like, "What?" She didn't even see it in person. I, like, photographed the back of it for her too, because it says, "For Jean, love Andy." And it says, like, "'84," but the four kind of looks like a seven, and I think Andy was already gone by then. And as though, like, a forger would get the fricking date wrong. Like, oh, please.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: If you're going to forge that good, you're going to know what year to sign the damn piece. Anyway, I couldn't believe it. And this was, like, Amy Cappolazzo. This is, like, somebody—I shouldn't even say her name, but it was like somebody from—can we erase that? No, too late. Because I was like, "Girl, I told you this." She's like, "Oh, that's a sweet story" or something. It's like, Jean gave—you know?

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: It's a heartache. It hurt my feelings. It hurt, because there was a whole thing about Warhols, about authenticity, and people were being told their paintings weren't real or something. I guess they're easy to forge or something, but it was just incredible, the way he just—I don't know where the other two are.

I think I had wanted to tell Jean's family at one point, that I had it, in case they were wondering or just wanting to know his collection, but I knew that—he had been dating Jennifer Goode for a long time and he gave her a larger one from that series—a motorcycle, same kind of style—and I think she had to fight to get hers. And I remember seeing it, and I know it was hers, because he told me. Jean said, "That one is Jennifer's," even though they had broke up and everything. I think they had broke up by then. I don't remember if they had broken up or not. But I always think if Jennifer saw this painting, she would remember it, because it was over their bed, you know? [00:32:29]

But anyway, I don't know what I'm going to do with that piece anyway, but that always was a little tender, because it's something that he gave me, that means a lot to me. And he said to me, "Don't sell it."

SVETLANA KITTO: [Laughs.]

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: He goes, "Don't sell this." He's so one to talk. He would sell anything when he was younger, to pay his rent or get some weed or whatever the hell.

SVETLANA KITTO: [Laughs.]

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: But I listened to him and I still have it, and now it might not even be worth anything, because people might not even believe this story because it's so long later or something. You know what I mean? Who knows.

Anyway, that was so sad. I was really sad. Jean was really—losing Andy was a big deal.

SVETLANA KITTO: It was, yeah.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: It was a big deal for Jean. You know, I think about that. I never thought about this, but—that's wild that I had never thought this, that I saw Jean the first day he met Warhol.

SVETLANA KITTO: Right. You told me that. With the sweatshirts?

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Had a meeting. I think he had like, engaged with Warhol before—yeah. But the first day he had like a real meeting with him. And then I saw him like not long after Andy died. Then it wasn't that long later, Jean was dead.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: What—not a year or something? Jean died in August of '88, I think.

SVETLANA KITTO: Mm-hmm [affirmative], '88.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Yeah, '88. So, it was hard to see Jean. I didn't see him much in the last year of his life, because he was just so troubled with dope. And I wasn't getting high, I wasn't—I had stopped doing any drugs. I was never like him with them, but I tried drugs. You know, I did drugs, but not like that, you know? [00:34:15]

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Anyway, at that point, somehow I had been dating this guy—a little bit of friends, kind of—this guy Artie, who I met at School of Visual Arts. He taught me how to house paint, and then that's when I got into house painting, and that's how I paid my rent, was I was—I went on to be a house painter. I went on to be a really good high-end decorative house painter. We painted Jon Bon Jovi's house. It's a big house [laughs], big, big.

Anyway, but I was—you know, those are the materials that I used, brushes and paints, so I could make money doing painting. Early on, this is when I was just doing straight-up house painting, I tapped into the queer community—more the lesbian community, queer—and I had met this woman, Vickie Cardaro, who worked at Jennifer Bartlett's. She was Jennifer Bartlett's office manager, assistant. And they needed someone to—she had been working on this large painting series that had a sculptural element. Jennifer was living in Paris, but the sculptures were being made in her studio on Lafayette Street in New York, and I was brought in as the painter.

When I walked into that studio, there was Tony Feher, George Stoll—David Nelson, I think was there, I don't know if he was there that first day—and then David Knudswig. All four of these men were working for Jennifer. Now I can't remember if they were all there at that moment, because I know—I think David Knudswig was in Paris, working with her in Paris, and then he came back and then Tony went to Paris and worked for Jennifer. Or it may have been the other way around. I don't remember who went first, but each stayed there for like six months. I didn't even meet Jennifer. [00:36:35]

So, I was—they made these incredible—I mean, they exist in the world today. They're really phenomenal to-perspective, wooden sculptures. So, they were like—Jennifer made these paintings, these giant paintings of a house and a fence, and they made them in 3-D, but in perspective of the painting. So they were, like, flattened, like the fence is really big and the house is really small, and two little boats. I did, like, I don't know how many coats of paint on these sculptures. White oil, Benjamin Moore house paint. But it's, like, lacquer. It was just like, coat after coat after coat of these, sanding in between, and they were making them, they were doing all the woodworking.

That's when I—I mean, that was just—David Nelson was the guy who I had seen at Hannah Wilke's class, and there he is years later. Jennifer Bartlett, I had seen at Abrams Publishing Company, and now here I am, working for her. And then I ended up working for her for many years. They brought me on as her part-time studio assistant, and I did that for years and years and years and years. And then I didn't work for her for many, many years again, and I worked for her again. So, she looms large. And Tony worked for her for quite a few years, and then he went and worked for Paula Cooper. Jennifer showed there. So the first installation that I did, of those pieces, were at the Paula Cooper Gallery. [00:38:15]

New Math had closed, so my way of making money through my own work shifted and I didn't get another gallery. I didn't have another gallery after New Math closed. So that was a big change for me. So now I had a job, you know? It was just two or three days a week. I think it was three days a week. But working at Jennifer's that first time, we just made our own hours, because she wasn't there. So we would sleep there sometimes, we would go out dancing, come back to work.

SVETLANA KITTO: Where were you dancing then?

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: The World.

SVETLANA KITTO: The World.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: The World was great. It was on—near Houston Street, on like First Street or something, and Avenue C. Yeah, this wasn't the Mudd Club, this wasn't Danceteria. So that's a bit of a leap ahead, because then—earlier, before I had even known any of these guys, when I was still on Ludlow, or when I was still maybe even living at Zoe's, in like—no, I don't know what year it was. It might have been '84, '83? We had heard about some kind of a disease that people were getting from using needles and sharing needles. So it was like, "Don't share needles." And the first person that I had heard, who had ever gotten sick and died, was Klaus Nomi. Klaus Nomi was a singer and a performer who worked with Joey Arias, who I had met at Fiorucci. [00:39:53]

We didn't know much about it. I don't even know if I knew that word GRID that people talk about. I don't even know that I heard—I might have known that it was gay-related. I certainly had had sex with gay guys. I had used needles. But years and years and years later, I think we found—I know with hep C, what I found out recently is that you could get hep C—because I know people that have got hep C—that had never had sex with anyone, a man, or had any blood transfusion or shared blood or needles—and they had hep C. And it turns out straws, which—from coke. That makes so much sense, that nobody talked about. Nobody talks about that. I don't really know—I would like to learn more about that, because that is not talked about in terms of coke use and HIV. Like, "Don't share straws." We never heard that.

SVETLANA KITTO: Right.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: So, somewhere in there, I had said, like, I had a heartbreak and I had that second show. And a friend of mine and her husband, another friend who had the band in the basement on Ludlow Street, we went to Mexico. I had an incredible time in Mexico. It was the first time I had gone. I had been to Europe, but I had never flown anywhere else, out of the country. I went to Tulum and I went to—and this is when Tulum—I haven't been back ever, but I hear that, like, there was a gravel road. That's all there was there, and there was, I think, one restaurant. You didn't have to pay to go in the ruins. I've heard that it's very built-up now.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah, it is.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: I can't imagine. We slept on hammocks on the beach.

SVETLANA KITTO: That's where you got your hammock.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Somewhere in there, in Merida. I got my hammock in Merida. But I had gone to Palenque and we tripped on mushrooms at the ruins—at the sites of, you know, where their astronomers were. I learned a lot there. I learned a lot. I kind of can't believe I've never been back. But there was a reason why I was speaking about that. [00:42:15]

SVETLANA KITTO: You went to Mexico with who, again?

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: I went there with this woman called Jane, and her husband Al [Diaz], and this guy Ken. But there was something about—oh, I'm not—I don't know what that was going to roll into, but it was all—there was so much—oh, I know. When I came back, I was interested in learning Spanish.

SVETLANA KITTO: Okay.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: And this woman that I had met there named Cynthia Schneider, I think—she, it turns out—I don't know if she had already made it or was working on it later, you would have to check the dates—but she worked with Todd Haynes on that Karen Carpenter film, which is such a great film. So, I was learning Spanish and in, like, break time, there was this woman that I just was attracted to as a human being, and we ended up knowing each other at Spanish a little bit. I remember, like, I would ride her home on the back of my bicycle sometimes, wherever she lived, in the West Village, or go—I just remember her being on the back of my bike. Cynthia Schneider, I really liked her a lot. She took me to my first ACT UP demo.

SVETLANA KITTO: Okay.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: So, I didn't know anything about ACT UP. I mean, I didn't really—I didn't know that there were meetings. I just went to this demo at City Hall. So that was this huge demo. And even at that demo, I didn't realize there were meetings. I don't think I had been to, ever—I know I had never been to such a political protest before. I remember marching when I was a kid, like I said, with Bella Abzug and for Shirley Chisholm, you know, doing—

SVETLANA KITTO: Anti-war? Yeah. [00:44:05]

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Yeah, like, some marches, but this—I had never been to a protest, like a demonstration, where you're like—you know? And by then, I had known that people were dying, and that this thing was upon us. I didn't understand it in full, but I knew enough to want to go to this protest about it, you know, and demand. And I was amazed by this, all this outrage, and amazed by all these—you know, this gathering of people, with all this knowledge and information. But I still didn't realize like, "Oh, I could go to an ACT UP meeting." It wasn't until sometime later that I actually went to an ACT UP meeting and it was like, "Oh, this is that demo that I"—it was probably very shortly after. It seems like a lot of time to me, but it probably was just a matter of months. But it might have been more, it might have been more. It could have been a year, in there.

A through line through all of this is that I was going to my martial arts school and practicing Qigong, Tai Chi, and Bagua. And I think that was a tremendous gift, that I had this place of a physical community of people that I was physical with. That was on Second Avenue, between Houston and First Street, which is now torn—it was a squat. I mean, it should have been, like, a New York landmark. This place was incredible. My friend Frank Allen, who made this school—it was like—I painted the floor with this giant red and white Tai Chi symbol, the yin-yang, and all the Bagua trigrams, the I Ching, around the—on the floor. And he had the walls covered, floor to ceiling, with boxers and martial arts memorabilia. I mean, it was—I can't even begin to describe this place, it was so beautiful and rich. And that all just got torn down and there's a big glass tower, the Avalon. [00:46:21]

I actually just read recently that Justin Bond, Vivian, lived above the Mars Bar and that got—she had to leave her apartment at that same time. I didn't know her. That was really a sad thing, that that got taken down. I spent many a time there, and I remember I had to stop going there Monday nights, to my martial arts, because I would go to ACT UP meetings. I remember being like, you know, "I'm hanging out with people."

SVETLANA KITTO: [Laughs.]

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: So, yeah. And I started going to ACT UP on Monday nights. And there, I met a lot of really remarkable—Zoe was going there, I already knew Zoe of course. But there, I met Joy and Carrie. And it turns out—we figured out years—it took years to figure out Joy telling me something. I think I said, "Oh, I made jewelry," or she said, "Oh, I used to work at a jewelry shop, and it was called Detail." And I was like, "Detail?" David Svitzer and I, back in the day, sold our jewelry to Joy, at Detail. And she totally remembered me. Like, we went—and then I completely remembered her. And I remember being intimidated by her, and I would make David go in and sell it, because she was this beautiful woman. She's a little older than me and in that time—like, I don't know how much older.

SVETLANA KITTO: A few years.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: She's like, five years older than me.

SVETLANA KITTO: It would have felt—yeah.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Oh, it was huge when you were that age. Like, you already have an apartment or whatever you have.

[They laugh.]

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Joy always had her red lipstick and her long braid, and she was sitting there, and we would just have our fingers crossed that she would buy something from us, because we had to pay the rent. Or I had to. David just lived in my house. [00:48:08]

[They laugh.]

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Oh, my God. And then she loved us, it turns out. You know, she was just like, "Oh, my God, you guys were so cute, of course I bought from you." Our work, our stuff sold. It's not like she was doing us—but then, you know, that's when fierce pussy happened, is we all—you know, we were working so hard with ACT UP and doing—

SVETLANA KITTO: What kind of things were you doing with ACT UP?

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: I'll also say, this was a total—the part that I wasn't involved in was—needle exchange was an important part of ACT UP, and they ended up sharing my basement studio on Ludlow Street for years, even after I was out—I think I was even out of town, and they took over the entire back half of my basement, where they would make bleach kits and organize all their clean needles and everything, to go out on the streets. And so, needle exchange operated out of 170 Ludlow Street for some years.

With ACT UP, I was definitely involved in—I was interested in how AIDS manifested in women, and how it

manifested differently in women. You know, we would say AIDS—I'm sure you've heard, "Women don't get AIDS, they just die from it." And that's—I mean, I imagine many people have talked about this, that like, there was—in ACT UP, we find that the thing was if you went down to 200 T-cells or less, 200, you got a diagnosis of having AIDS. Women were dying before their T-cells were dropping to this level. Or they were getting terrible, like, different cancers or different—you know, we have different body parts. [00:50:00]

SVETLANA KITTO: Right.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: So, women had really intense—like, debilitating yeast infections and thrush, but not getting any kind of diagnosis, not getting the diagnosis that you needed to then get the treatment and care. So it was so fucked up.

And there was all like—so there were people on the floor bringing research, and there were people doing studies, and then there were some of us that were more, like, applying pressure. I felt more like I was a foot soldier in ACT UP. I was like the one who was on the streets. And we did lots of organizing. We would go, you know, go on buses. I can't even really remember all the different—we're going to the CDC. You know, Day of Desperation was a huge demonstration. I got arrested on that day. We were putting up a banner at the church, I think it was Trinity Church, down on Wall Street. We wanted to hang a banner and we got caught, at like four in the morning, and got put in—three in the morning—got put in jail.

In retrospect, the reverend, or the priest from that—this was an interesting thing—from that demo, they ended up dropping the charges against us, but he was—they were—we probably could have had a conversation with them and hung our banner. So there were times when we—I feel like in ACT UP, we were so used to people being against us, that we maybe could have done some more—

SVETLANA KITTO: —dialogue, yeah.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Yeah, with churches and such. Because instead we were trespassing, we were in the cemetery. But we didn't know. We just assumed they would hate us. It's the church.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah, that's a fair assumption I think, at that time. [00:52:00]

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Yeah, yeah. But I always was like, "Oh"—because I got a letter once, written to me, saying, "We would have supported your"—like they were very left wing. And I've been to that church since, and it's actually—there's a whole history of political organizing that church has done. But we didn't think, or I didn't think, "Go to the church, do a recon." I just went to the outside and looked, like, where can we hang this banner?

We did this amazing banner drop on—down at City Hall as well. I can't remember what it said, like, "No AIDS, no"—oh, my God, I don't—I'm sorry that I can't—I can do a little work, to figure it out, but it obviously was around AIDS awareness. ["Act up/ End AIDS." -NBB] I don't remember the exact language, but we—I think creative time or creative? Tony had sussed this out, where he had an artist friend who lived across the street. I forget who it was, you would know this guy. A lot of people that I know have worked for him since. He's a painter. David something? I wish I could remember his name. He wasn't a friend of mine. But we went to his loft and we made these huge banners, and we attached metal bicycle chains to them, and we grommited them, and we painted—Tony had figured out—you know, Tony and I worked for Jennifer Bartlett for years, so we worked together. We knew how to—

SVETLANA KITTO: —make things happen.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: You know, "You hold this, I'll hold that," but actually to make things, objects. So we had a shorthand, and we cut all these foam core letters, and we figured out the littlest amount of foam core letters that you could make, to make all the letters in the alphabet, by holding them in different directions and flipping them in different ways. [00:54:08]

So, we had this—you could draw on these. We did black fabric and we used white chalk and we painted in white, and we made these really big lengthwise banners. When I think about what we did, I mean, it is so crazy. The two of us did a recon, we went up, we figured out, we jammed the door, we got in. Then we all were going to do it together and totally stealth. We're on this roof that was so steep, that like, seriously, if you slipped, you would have tumbled right off this roof. Because we dropped the banner over the roof and hung it. I mean, if we would have dropped the banner, it had chains, it could have killed someone. We weren't dropping anything, but we had it in our bags, up, and we like—

SVETLANA KITTO: —super heroes.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Yeah. I don't know, but it was like, you know, "What sneakers are we going to wear?" Like seriously, like, "How are we going to do this safely and do this well?" And we unfurled these banners, and

one of them twisted a little, we were really bummed, because they were huge, and it said like, "No AIDS," or "End AIDS." I'm sorry, I can't remember the exact thing that it said. And I've never seen a documentation of this, but I'm sure there is.

But you could see the—I think I can't remember because it twisted in part. In my mind, I can just see like the word—like, "No More AIDS" or something.

SVETLANA KITTO: Or "Stop AIDS," maybe?

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Maybe we can figure it out between now and the next one. Tony and I have talked about it many times since. That was a big one for us, we worked really hard on that. And it stayed up for a little while, not long. But that was a good banner drop. I don't remember what the demo was around that, because we would often do these banners in tandem with. [00:56:15]

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah. But it wasn't the Day of Desperation.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: That one wasn't the Day of Desperation.

SVETLANA KITTO: That was later.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: I think the Day of Desperation was later. I think Day of Desperation was—because I remember we got arrested, we were in jail into the morning, and we got out of jail in time to go up to Grand Central and protest there. I didn't get arrested again, but there were people who definitely got arrested twice, and Day of Desperation was an incredible day. That was a really—because there was a march downtown, before—at Day of Desperation—and that's what we were hanging that banner [at the church on Broadway -NBB] for downtown. And then we were all going to go uptown and take Grand Central. And just the—there was—we did—there was another demo that we did, that was the midtown tunnel. We blocked the fucking tunnel. We ran across traffic and held arms and didn't let cars past us.

A lot of these things—like Grand Central was—you know, people were like, "I have to get home!" And we were like, "Well, AIDS"—you know, "Sorry you're inconvenienced." I mean, it was hard. It's hard to look in someone's face, and they're yelling at you like, "I need to go home," and you're just like—I mean, if somebody had said like, you know, "My house is on fire or something"—but we really held firm. We really held firm, like, "No, you're not getting through. You're not." We did not let anybody—I mean, we blocked all entrances to all trains. We shut it down with our bodies and we—people climbed up and they covered the schedule, so there were no trains running. It was like, this is—you're stuck too. Like, your life is being stopped, just like our lives are being stopped, for this moment. [00:58:10]

And we did that with going into the streets too. And it was always like that. You would find someone's apartment that was kind of—and I don't even remember, like I have so many of these memories. Like I said, what artist let us take over his loft, to make those things? I don't really remember. Or whose apartment was I in, that was near the tunnel, that we would meet in to plan, and, "You come from there, I'll come from there, this is how we're going to converge." You know?

SVETLANA KITTO: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. How did you, like—how did—

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Oh, my God, we—yeah.

SVETLANA KITTO: How did you emotionally prepare? Like, how did you do that? As a group, when you met in your meetings—

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Well, I mean, we were so down for anything. There was this other time—my God, I really wish I could remember some of these people's names. I mean, we would—I didn't know what people did for their living, I didn't know what their hobbies were, I didn't even know people's names. But I knew their faces, I held their hands. I mean, I knew some people's names.

SVETLANA KITTO: Whose names did you know?

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: People who were, like, on—you were doing these intense actions with sometimes. I mean, I knew people's names, but I didn't like—I don't really know anything about these people. We were just like—we were coming together once a week, and then many other times, for—you know, it was just like—anyway, but I was going to say, this one meeting, I remember—you know, because also at the—the thing, there was—because AIDS came down and the city has so much of this gay disease, homophobia and—I mean, obviously, homophobia was being unpacked for the first time in my life. You know? [01:00:03]

SVETLANA KITTO: Right.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: And I was coming out at the same—I was discovering and exploring my own sexuality at the same time as I was being told that you could die from these acts. We were being told how this disease was, you know, God's rapture or whatever, God's word. I mean, I wasn't sucked in on that shit, but it was still like you were—there was so—it was like gayness and death were—or illness, or—

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah, yeah.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: —you know? It was like punishment.

SVETLANA KITTO: Punishment, yeah.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: So, there was like this double—and, you know, to be figuring out who you are, and being with your—I had so many gay male friends. A lot of them didn't go to meetings. A lot of them—David Nelson, early on, early, early on, he didn't go to ACT UP. David Knudswig didn't go to ACT UP. Tony went later a lot, but early on, I don't—I can't remember if Tony was there early or not. It might have taken him a beat, but Tony was certainly there. But a lot of gay men that I knew—David Svitzer didn't go to ACT UP. They all—all my Davids.

SVETLANA KITTO: So, what initially, like—

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: But, I was just going to say, sorry, this one time, I remember being at an ACT UP meeting and us hearing about somebody who got gay-bashed, somebody from our group. And we all just were like, "Let's leave the meeting now and go up to the precinct on 42nd Street." Because we had this power. It wasn't just like, "Let's talk about this and figure out what we're going to do later." We voted on the floor: Do we want to end the meeting and go up there and protest en masse? And I said to this one friend, this guy and this girl Barb—I was like, "Do you"—I can't remember the guy's name. He was awesome. I loved this guy. [01:02:04]

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NANCY BROOKS BRODY: I can't remember names, I have to apologize.

SVETLANA KITTO: That's fine.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: I'm still like that. But I said, "My studio isn't that far from Cooper Union," where the meetings were. My studio was on Ludlow Street. I was like, "Let's go to my studio and mix up some paint." I don't know why I thought of that, but it was like—so we went to my studio and we just—I had all this house paint, and we mixed up this lavender color in a couple of gallon—and then we met and we ran up to—we ran, you know, got on the subway, went up, and there was everybody, at the precinct. We were yelling, and the cops were in our faces, super confrontational.

This is when ACT UP was—you know, protesting like this on the street, we weren't penned in. They were not expecting us. It wasn't like now, when they get—when you're protesting now, it feels very different. They block us off in ways now that they didn't block us off then. They separate us. I heard, like, at the Women's March, there were all these barricades at all these different intersections. That's done for a reason. That's so that you can't feel your people and you can't move freely [so they can control you more easily and quickly. -NBB]

I was coming up the West Side Highway last night, on a bicycle, and I was just blown away. At every intersection and all up the bike path, there are these giant—and in midtown too, obviously, but I was struck that it was downtown. There are all these giant cement blocks where, in a moment's notice, you can lock down the West Side. You can lock it down. The city, it is ready to be locked down now. Be it protests, be it terrorism. There are metal barricades up and down Fifth Avenue, along with these concrete blocks. This wasn't like that then. The city is—it's like the police are—in a second, this place can be shut down. If you even think, "Oh, I can get out on a bicycle"—sometimes we talk about that, like, "How would you get out? How would you get out?" And it was like, "On a bike. I'm not going to go in a car." You can't even get on a bicycle now. It's like, these bike paths, they're ready to block. [00:02:19]

So anyway, at this time we all went to 42nd Street. And me and Barb and this other guy, I remember we wanted to throw the purple, the violet paint, onto the ground in front of the precinct. And the head of the precinct, the captain, who we recognized from demos—you start to know who people are, in white shirts, and who is decorated. Anyway, we—I'll never forget, we poured that paint and it hit his leg. I can just see his little square-toe, patent leather shoe, and his plaid bottom of his polyester pant, and that purple paint, the lavender, going all down his pants and his shoes, and it was like—we did not mean to hit his shoe. And forget it, he got—we ran back into the crowd, we took off, we flipped our clothes inside out. Because they were coming for us, they wanted to get the people who threw this paint. He was humiliated, that's how—you know, you, like, humiliated them when you—it really was an accident. People ended up getting hurt at that demo because of that. This one guy got arrested and he got hurt. He hit his head. I think he was—I think he suffered quite badly. I know he did, I

visited him at his home.

SVETLANA KITTO: Who was it?

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: I do not know his name. I did visit him at his home. I don't know that I told him it was me that threw the paint, because that initiated a—it was a bummer, that was. Anyway, I always felt really badly about that, because somebody got hurt at that demo for that action. [00:04:20]

Another—I mean, people were willing to put themselves on the line though. People were putting their bodies—you could get hurt. We tried to keep each other safe. And doing an action like that, like throwing paint, that's not really a floor-approved—it was sort of, like—it was like a little bit of a [. . . rogue -NBB]—

SVETLANA KITTO: —act.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: We were mad. We were really pissed off. We were really angry. A lot of times we got into confrontations with cops when I was—when we really shouldn't have. But they were horrible to us. And this is, like, before gay studies, this is before—you know? And ACT UP, I believe—really so much came out of ACT UP, of course including most importantly, treatment and information, which it still needs—but there was an awareness of gay—like the CLAGS' gay studies happened. Gays were—queers were in television shows. It really was like a penny in the pond. Queer Nation spread across the country, ACT UP was in so many different states across the country. Through universities, it really—like, I wasn't in academia, but I know that it entered academia, here at City College, the CLAGS. I forget what that— [00:06:00]

SVETLANA KITTO: Center for Lesbian and Gay—it's at CUNY.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Yeah. I remember going there when it started, like, the first day, and hearing panels on it. There were panels at the—

SVETLANA KITTO: Martin Duberman.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Yeah, yeah. There were panels at the Gay and Lesbian Community Center. ACT UP started at the Community Center. I remember going to a couple of meetings there, but I more went when it was at—

SVETLANA KITTO: —Cooper.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Cooper Union. AVP, the Anti-Violence Project, I worked for them. I volunteered under—the guy who's in politics now, I'll have to remember his name, you know his name. I'm sorry, it's terrible. But I met Robert Vazquez there, who was in Gran Fury and worked with Avram. And *Silence = Death* came out of—well, the *Silence = Death* coalition is different than Gran Fury, but it was connected. Tom, Tom—

SVETLANA KITTO: —Bailey?

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: No, no, the guy was sort of AVP—Tom [Duene]—or was the first person that I worked—not Greene. Tom is his first name.

SVETLANA KITTO: What about—so more on ACT UP.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: So, all to say that ACT UP had this tremendous effect culturally, because—and *Out* magazine started. My friend Sarah Petit, who has passed away since, she was an editor for *Out* magazine, and that's when they were doing—people were like—Michael Signorelli was really starting to out people. It became really important, which I was—that's a whole other conversation, whether you agreed with or didn't agree with outing.

SVETLANA KITTO: Did you—because didn't ACT UP do stuff like that too?

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: I wasn't into—I didn't like outing, but I understood. I understood not being silent, silence equals death. I mean, that was the—part of that is just, you have to be—you have to—[00:08:08]

SVETLANA KITTO: Right.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: But, you know, I remember people really wanting to out Jodi Foster. Sarah actually was really good friends with Jodi Foster at Yale—I forgot that—and so she had stories about her, but it was like a really good example of people talking about Jodi Foster, and it was like, you know, she fucking—she's a human being. Is she out to her family? We don't know. Look what happened around *Taxi Driver* where, you know, people were shot, somebody was shot in her name. You know, John Lennon. Was it John Lennon?

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Yeah. Or was it Ronald Reagan. Now I'm getting confused, of who shot Ronald—it might have been Ronald Reagan. John Chapman? [John Hinckely, Jr.]

SVETLANA KITTO: No, it was Ronald Reagan. John Lennon was—yeah, John Lennon was just for John Lennon.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Just for John Lennon. [Mark Chapman]

SVETLANA KITTO: And Ronald Reagan was to get her attention.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Exactly, which was like the politician in *Taxi Driver*.

So anyway, just to say, like, people have lives and they're individuals and they're human beings, and I wasn't really for outing. Did I want people to come out? Did I demand that people come out? Did I come out to my own family? Yes. But it took me a while.

SVETLANA KITTO: It did?

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Yes. It took me quite a while. I mean, I was like, you know, with really short hair, dressing in men's clothes, but I didn't come out.

SVETLANA KITTO: When did you?

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: I was 27.

SVETLANA KITTO: What was that experience?

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: That's late, that's really fricking late. Well, my friend, George Stoll, I worked with at Jennifer's—he was older than me, and he had a lover who was—he told me this story, that his lover came out with him as the boyfriend and the family hated him, because their family could blame George for their son being gay. Of course their son was long gay. [00:10:13]

And so, George was—I always said, "Oh well, when I have a girlfriend." I just had lots of lovers. I didn't have a girlfriend, and I just was like, "I'm not going to come out to my parents unless I have a girlfriend, someone to meet." He was—he said, "No, that's too much pressure on whoever you come out with. You should come out with them before you have a girlfriend, and then when they meet your girlfriend, they'll just be meeting your girlfriend." And it was really good advice, so I did.

SVETLANA KITTO: Also, like with your sexuality—I mean, isn't it also kind of true that the idea of coming out and being like, "My sexuality is a static thing" as in, "It's an unchanging thing." Doesn't that kind of emerge, like as part of this political movement, as an idea? Whereas before, you might not have been like—you know, when you were younger, before AIDS, you might not have been like, "I'm gay! This is the thing that I am!"

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Right, you declare.

SVETLANA KITTO: But like there was a precipitous event, which was AIDS, which made—yeah, the *Silence = Death*, you know, kind of require that.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: I mean, there was still gay liberation, and there was—you know? It all was part of a moving forward, moving something forward. Harvey Milk and, you know, gay—you know, we wanted our rights. People could still fucking lose their jobs in Colorado if you were—like literally, you could be fired. I mean, we still don't have an Equal Rights Amendment for Christ's sake.

SVETLANA KITTO: I guess I just wondered if you thought of yourself as "gay." You know what I mean?

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Well, it became necessary.

SVETLANA KITTO: Right. [00:12:00]

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: I don't know, I can't say, because I don't know another way, because that's how I came out. But the timing was such where being gay and doing activism was—and then that's where, you know, we were doing all this work. The lesbians did a lot of work with ACT UP and there was a way in which the guys, I think, had a lot of bonding time. Guys tell amazing stories about being at demos, but then, like, going all out together afterwards, to sex clubs and, you know, having—

SVETLANA KITTO: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: And the lesbians, I think—you know, because of invisibility and visibility, we formed fierce pussy. We did an open call on the floor of ACT UP, for all lesbians who wanted to. A group of us met at Zoe's, and we made those first *Lists*, you know, using the words that were used against us, to reclaim and put them on the street. It was like we—there very much was an ACT UP sensibility in terms of not a lot of processing around actions. Like, you make it and you—we just went right out onto the street the next day. That was when the city was—you know you got your information from the walls. You saw bands, clubs, events, were all on—

SVETLANA KITTO: —wheat-pasting.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Wheat-pasted. You know, you literally saw a wheat-pasted sign and it was like, "Oh, shit," you know, "that's happening at CBGBs or the Mudd Club." And now it's like, "I am a lezzie butch." You know, we just joined right in. But we also decided to target other neighborhoods where maybe there wasn't so much wheat paste happening, like the Upper West Side. We didn't go to other boroughs, we only stayed in Manhattan, but we tried to hit a lot of neighborhoods. We always needed a place where we had someone who had an apartment, because we would need to fill up our—remake our wheat paste. We would travel with big jugs of water and buckets, and—you know. I mean, we didn't have cars. At one time, somebody had a car, and we used the trunk of their car. But, you know, we named the gay and lesbian streets. I don't know if I should go on. [00:14:26]

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah, no, please do.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Well, fierce pussy did so much together.

SVETLANA KITTO: Just remember. Yeah, you know, just tell stories about it.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Well, I mean, that was at that same time. We didn't stop going to ACT UP. We just were like—and we wanted to do something a little more joyful, you know.

SVETLANA KITTO: Or life-affirming.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Yeah, exactly. Something for us, something that wasn't about death. It was about life and living and being who we were, and having fun. And so, one of the things that we did was at the Gay Pride Parade we—we were so crazy, the time that we took doing all these things. We painted all these foam core—spray-painted them orange and then stenciled on them, like, Tomboy Turnpike, Martina Navratilova Court, Audre Lorde Lane. Adrienne Rich Way?

SVETLANA KITTO: [Laughs.]

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: I don't remember what that one said. And we hung them up. We went, with a ladder, at like three in the morning, four in the morning, the day of the Gay and Lesbian Pride Parade, and climbed, you know, as high as we could on any pole and renamed—wired these foam core signs. Somehow, there was a couple of them at the Lesbian Herstory Archives. Somebody brought them there, not one of us. We didn't document any of this. We don't have one picture of any of it. We had the stencils as well, that we made the signs with, and we stenciled on the street too. We spray-painted these words, because we only had so many to hang along the route. So like, every five or ten blocks or something, we would hang these signs, and we would wheat-paste fierce pussy, and we just—we did a lot. It was really—that was really fun. That was a fun thing to do. [00:16:26]

ACT UP was fun in a way [laughs], but it was fucked up. It was so fucked up, you know? Like, there was—I hear young people talk about that time as though it was like—there was a nostalgia for this time, and I'm like, "Oh, my God." Like, people were really sick. You would see—like, the doorman of the Mudd Club was Haoui Montaug, and then he went on to work at Danceteria and would do these events there called "No Entiendes," and he still worked the door sometimes. He was such—Haoui was this phenomenal guy.

So many of my friends performed there, my roommate Edwige, who I haven't even talked about, the first time I ever saw her. She performed, she was performing at Danceteria. She just died a couple of years ago, from hepatitis C. I contracted hepatitis C, which I haven't talked about here, which I don't talk about much in the world, but I think it's important to be out about these things.

SVETLANA KITTO: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: And even for all the AIDS activism that I did, I was closeted about having hep C. I still am. Not a lot of people know. Very, very few people know. I didn't tell people.

SVETLANA KITTO: When did you get that?

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Well I found out in 2001, but I probably had it since the '80s. I mean, I was no longer

doing drugs or anything, but I had had a blood transfusion before they were checking for blood. I'm lucky I didn't have [HIV -NBB]—I have slept with men who are HIV-positive. I have used needles with people who are HIV-positive and who are no longer here. [00:18:13]

A lot was—loss was—in all of these things, loss was just cycled in. You know, Jean dying of an overdose in '88 was at the same time that so many people—I say about Haoui—I don't know what year, we could look it up, Haoui died right in there. [1991 -NBB] Martin, who was Madonna's, like, right hand man, best friend, and I think he may have danced with her some. He certainly—I don't even know, managerially, what he did with her, but he was—like, he died [in 1986. -NBB] I remember calling up to Haoui's, calling him at Haoui's, and then sticking his—because you would holler up to people. People didn't have buzzers sometimes. I don't know about phones. It was like, "Martin! Martin!" I remember him sticking his face out the window, and he was so skinny, and he was just like, "I'm too sick," like it wasn't a time to go up.

I mean, I called Haoui a couple of days before—you would hear people were dying—and I called Haoui. He wasn't even a really good friend of mine. I didn't know he would take my call even, but just to be like, "Hey," you know, "Hey, I know what's happening." He wanted to say goodbye. I remember being at some art auction, I don't know what it was. I don't know if it was—it was probably AIDS-related, that I donated something to. I don't know where I was, if it was like Artists Space or Thread Waxing Space, I'm not sure. But I saw Haoui and he was just covered in, you know, sores, his whole face. That's like what—you would see people on the street, just like with, you know, these big lesions, you know, you can't hide. Some people tried to use makeup, you know? [00:20:06]

The West Village was—early on it was this like—when I said I lived in the meat market area, it was like—other people that were on those streets, other than the guys moving meat and maybe those people selling their bodies, was dudes in leather. You know, there was, like, chaps, and it was this major night scene. That was where the men's clubs were, and that was where there was massive fucking happening on the streets then. You know, behind trucks and cars, and the piers. The piers was a place of refuge too. Anyways, this like, thriving, hunking, big macho bodies, that then were like these thin, wounded, you know, just—once in a while, years later—because you stopped seeing men in leather, you stopped seeing guys in chaps, you stopped seeing the plaid shirts and the bandanas, and when you would see one or two of them on the street it was like seeing a dinosaur, years later. You know, it was just so rare, whereas that's how the streets were teeming before. All those people were gone, and at the same time that they died—I mean, Sarah Schulman writes about it—apartments and rents went up.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: It's no mistake that that was happening at the same time, you know? So the whole neighborhood was shifting, the whole demographic. People started moving up to Chelsea a little bit more too, and then I think people started taking—medicines happened at that—started being available. There was, like, the pumping of the body more. Steroids. Looking healthy, looking fit became a real thing for gay men, in a way that it wasn't before. It wasn't thought about. [00:22:12]

SVETLANA KITTO: I never thought about that.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: I mean, I'm saying this. I don't know if that's—that's how I saw it.

SVETLANA KITTO: Wow.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Like a disassociation it seemed like, a little bit. But not entirely. It was just—you saw people with broken bodies, people walking with canes, people holding each other, people taking each other to diners. You know?

SVETLANA KITTO: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: You would go into a restaurant in the West Village at that time, and it was like—I don't know how many percent of people in there looked like they were going to be dead really soon.

So yeah, we were on the streets fighting. I don't know if all those people were at ACT UP or not, but we were, you know? And it was intense. One thing about ACT UP that I really was blown away by—and part of this was, it was fueled—I would say, somebody might argue—but by a privileged white man, white men, or it looked like that to me. Sure, there was like the Latino Caucus, and amazing things came out of ACT UP. Housing Works came out of ACT UP. But I was always taken with how—just the way that we—what we were demanding from our government, demanding our rights, that to me felt like such a shock, like I was so used to just, like, getting by, or being a young woman and being invisible, or being a lesbian and being not seen in some way, being marginalized. [00:24:05]

And I don't know where in me—where that sits—but on a personal level, this idea of asking, demanding, fighting

for what should be rightly yours, what's humane, was a concept that took me a really long time. I still, you know, struggle with realizing, like, healthcare is a human right. I mean, I believe healthcare, housing and education are really human rights. And these are things we were saying. I mean the words "healthcare is a right" came out of my mouth—I can't tell you how many thousands of times I chanted those words, but I don't even know how much I could—believed it.

Now, I deeply, deeply, like at a cellular level, believe it is a human right. Like, how can we call ourselves—where is our humanity? I worked with fierce pussy on this text recently, and I was like, "You call yourselves human. Is there an E on the end of that?" Like, humane, humanity, like these—but at that time, even though we were on the streets asking for it, there was a little part of me that didn't even really believe we deserved these things. Like I understood how they could just let us die on some—or just let us—not care. You know, capitalism, it's fucking capitalism.

And so seeing these men demand was—it was amazing. It was awe-inspiring, and it wasn't something I was used to seeing or getting. I wasn't raised like that, and I don't think black people are, and I don't think people of color in general are. And I think that it was the white people that led that, because they fucking are used to getting what they want, even if they're gay. A lot of them were, you know—

SVETLANA KITTO: —wealthy. [00:26:00]

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Yeah. Or just well-educated.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah, have access.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Working on Wall Street. Access. They had access to things I did not have. They lived in nice apartments. They had, you know, occupations. They weren't scrappy poor artists living out in fucking Harlem with their friend who didn't have any hot water, and he was like a child with his family like that. You know?

Or Jean, I mean, Jean—you know, people talk about Jean being like from the streets and that they had this myth about him of like, you know, whatever, wild child, they like to fucking put on him. But, like, Jean actually, he came from—his father was Haitian, and his mother was Puerto Rican. He's not like—I don't even know if you would call that African American.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah. He's the son of immigrants.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Yeah. His father was an accountant or something. They lived in Brooklyn. Like they had—he had a home. He put himself on the streets, I understand. You know what I mean?

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: I'm just saying, like—

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah, yeah, yeah. I understand what you're saying. But if none of—so, if a lot of your gay male friends weren't even involved in ACT UP yet, like, what was happening in your life or in what you were seeing that—

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: These people became my friends and I knew these people. My friends were HIV-positive, and just because they might not have gotten themselves to a meeting, I was—you know, like it didn't need to be in my body for me to fight for it. You know? It was happening to our city, to our country, to the fucking world, you know? It's outrageous and horrible. It was overwhelming. [I didn't need to be HIV positive to fight for health care and education. Other people's lives meant all lives. -NBB]

SVETLANA KITTO: Who were the first people close to you that you saw really suffering? [00:28:05]

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: David Knudswig. David Knudswig. He was a very private man. We worked together at Jennifer's for a long time, so I worked daily with these guys. Tony told me he was positive, I remember the day he told me that. And David Nelson was positive. The drugs worked very well in both Tony and David's body, but David Knudswig they didn't, and it was before the cocktail was available, just before. He had been working for Jennifer. He stopped working for her at some point there, but I know he came back. Jennifer doesn't even know this, but he didn't even take a paycheck. David Nelson always—David Nelson and David Knudswig were lovers, both artists. And David Knudswig—I don't know what he owed Jennifer money for, something around healthcare or something—I don't know what.

And so we were working this—Jennifer was doing this temple ceiling in Japan, this very, very, very—it's actually a very beautiful project that these Japanese men taught us, like a very traditional way of mixing pigments into rabbit skin glue, and it was this very—you could sit and work. It was very calm, very quiet, very repetitive,

smaller scale panels, probably like 24x24 inch panels, that then they were going to bring to Japan and install in this ceiling. So, somebody who wasn't very well physically could sit and work, and David came back to work on that. [00:30:03]

I never knew he wasn't drawing a paycheck. That's just crazy to me. I can't believe that. But he and I worked together a lot, and that was intense, to be with him and see him. Like he would have to just get to work and get up and go to the bathroom, and work and get up and go to the bathroom, and work and get up and go to the bathroom, and then we would walk to the corner at the end of the day and I would put him in a cab. He just lived on 14th, which is on the West Side, but he was getting frail. He had been in the hospital and gotten out also, you know.

But I would say he was like the first person that I was really close to. And there's just nothing you can do for them. And he was very—you know, we didn't talk about it. I always really kind of wanted to talk to him about it, but there was really I guess nothing to say. He was wasting. His body was just wasting away. His overcoat was just huge on him, his cheeks were just gaunt, he was so skinny. He would show up and work. He just showed up and worked.

I would visit him in hospital. I remember sneaking his dog in. That was like a big stealth thing to do, was to sneak—he had this little dog named Al that I actually—that was like an act of action we did. We took on bringing his dog in, like an action. Like, "Okay, you get the bag, I'll get the dog, you stand here, if the dog barks, you cough."

[They laugh.]

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: You know, it was like—and we got the dog in the room. Oh, God. And, yeah, things were getting really—that was like '92. Things were really—it was grim. That time was really grim. People were really getting sick. Because now, HIV had been in their bodies for some years, and it was taking a toll, and those fucking drugs were—[00:32:14]

I mean, another big demo was at Burroughs Wellcome. I remember it was, like, September—I think it was the 14th or something, because my birthday was the 12th. So, it was some time around my birthday. I think it was '88, maybe? I would have to check the date on that. It might have been later. But we really fought hard to get Burroughs Wellcome, because they were making so much. The pharmaceutical companies were making hand over fist. When you asked me what I was interested in, that. Getting the fucking medicines—the prices lowered, getting them out to people. I mean, there were still trials. I mean, it was—it could be confusing, like fighting for AZT, when you knew that AZT wasn't necessarily going to save your friend. In fact it might hurt their body, but that's all we had. And then you had these fucking drug companies making *bajillions* of dollars trading it on the stock market. It's so fucked up.

I mean, the whole money game tied into it, was just the corruption over people's bodies and the CDC not responding, and our fucking President not responding. I mean, it was—and I think Mayor Koch was our—Koch was our mayor, and he's a closeted gay man as far as I know. I don't know as a fact, fact, fact, but that's what I've—even if he weren't. But he talked about the bathhouses being these sites of death, whereas they could be sites of education. [00:34:07]

You know, we knew about—they knew about this virus for a very long time. We're talking about me in the '90s. They knew this shit in the early '80s. And people were not talking about it, they were not educating people, they were afraid to talk about it in schools. That's where outing and all of that is, like, this overlap of just wanting people to be informed at the very least. People were afraid to be—people were—they wanted to quarantine. I mean, it was insane, and given their way, they might have. You would still be—I mean, who knows where we would be. I mean, it was that level.

It is insane, the reaction and the response or the lack thereof, of it. And then the homophobia that was compiled, you know? The ignorance and the hatred. And everybody knew somebody who know somebody at least who was gay, who might have been in contact with this virus. Even like, I thought—remember being, like, fucking Nancy Reagan—I'm like, "Look at your—whatever gown you're wearing is made by a gay man."

SVETLANA KITTO: Or she was Rock Hudson's—she was friends with him.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Yes, please, yeah. The actors, but like even the people that are making your—the person who is making your dress, who is doing your flower display, who designed your shoes, who does your hair. These are all gay people. You know? And it goes on today. We still don't have universal healthcare, obviously, but I mean, this is insane to me. That's why I'm doing the work that I'm doing now with Rise and Resist, because it's insane that we do not, as a country, have universal healthcare, where it's just like across the board, we all should have access to the same healthcare. I mean, they act like, you know, "You want cancer treatment? Oh, it's spa treatment you're asking for." Like, "Oh, you want your nails done." [00:38:24]

SVETLANA KITTO: Right, yeah. It's like what you said about the privilege of, you know, feeling entitled to have that right.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: That's right.

SVETLANA KITTO: I mean, in this country, it's also about class. It's like, "Well, you know, if you just worked hard enough, then you would be able to afford good"—the only—yeah, it's just, it's so coded that way.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: It's horrible.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: It is horrible, and you know, people are like, "Oh, those people are on the street, they're in the subway begging." I'm like, "You know what, begging on that subway, that shit is hard work." You know how hard it is to beg? I'm not—you know what I mean?

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Like, it's like—I'm not saying that should be your job, but it's like things can't be going that well for that person, if that's what they're doing. Like, the system ain't working. Something's wrong here. You give people a good home, education and good healthcare, these basic tenets for living, things would be very different in our society. And keeping people uneducated, I mean the history in that. You know, don't teach them to read. Don't let them know, don't show them that. You know, or control how it gets out. That still totally exists today. I mean, the whole prison industrial complex. I mean, it's all tied in. It's not separate, you know? So yeah, you know, working around AIDS, that was just so intense and so—

SVETLANA KITTO: —urgent. [00:37:58]

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: The urgency was, I mean, so extreme, just so extreme. I mean, people weren't getting medications in prisons, so there was work around that. I still am uncertain about what people—I mean, my friend David Svitzer, he's someone who struggled with drug abuse his entire life that I knew him, and kind of self-medicating. He never got—I don't know what he did or didn't get, but he never got his own apartment ever, because he lived in—his family had that building, so he was able to always have a spot. I think it's just different when you come from a family that doesn't have money and, you know, you're all working together to keep it together.

He had a lover who actually had an apartment somewhere on Fifth Avenue. I went there, a nice little apartment, I don't know. And this guy was white. David liked white guys. I never met him, but somehow—he was very sick. I can't remember his name. He was in a wheelchair and he was going blind, and David ended up bringing him uptown to his family's home. David knew about medicine and I know he read *POZ* magazine, because we would talk about that. David was—he knew what time it was, but he didn't do political work per se. But he just was political. David stepping his foot out the door was fucking political. I mean, that man was brave and beautiful. He was a gorgeous soul. My God, I loved him. We would talk on the phone a lot, and he was copping dope. This is in the '90s, and he was—you know, this is like, to take pain away, you know? [00:40:21]

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: His boyfriend is blind and in a wheelchair, and he's on [. . . 118th -NBB] Street I think, or somewhere uptown in Harlem, where he lived, and he got arrested copping dope. And he had a prior that he didn't show up for, so they incarcerated him. I get a phone call from Erika Belle. This is who David was still close to. She had her struggles too, and she said, "David's in jail," or, "David's in the hospital."

Well, David was—he was copping dope one day and the next day he's in the fucking Bellevue Prison Hospital. They say he suffered a stroke, he cannot speak. They had to get his fucking handcuffs removed from the metal bed. His mother had to ask for that. They would not give him his medication in jail, because Jonathan had talked to him on the phone. He begged for his medicine, he told them that he was HIV-positive. I'm sure they just saw him as some, like, crazy drag queen. I went in and I saw him like the day before he died.

SVETLANA KITTO: When was that?

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: In the early '90s. I don't know when that was. Mid-'90s? [1999 -NBB] I could look, I have it in my book. I have a book of people that died. [00:42:00]

I mean, it's crazy that he died before this man that he was taking care of, because that guy was on death's door. Like, this guy was like—David was his caretaker. David brought him to live in his parents' home in Harlem, this white boy from fucking Fifth Avenue—man, he was a man—and David gets arrested and then the next thing you know he's laying there. And I went to up him I said, "David, hey it's me. It's me, it's Nancy." And [demonstrates]

snot came out of his—he knew I was there, but he couldn't speak. I never got to talk to him again. His mother was there. It was just me and his mother, holding his hand. He never came out of it.

SVETLANA KITTO: Oh, my God.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: And I don't know, like I think about it sometimes and I'm just like—I don't know if there was a way that I—you know, I just wish we had—I don't know, I don't know. If we had pressed—like, no one did any investigating. Like, did any prisoners see anything? He didn't have any marks on his face or anything, and maybe he did just have a stroke. I don't know, but to me—it's an AIDS death, obviously it's an AIDS death—but is this like a police brutality of some sort? We don't know, we don't know. And this is like—you know, I don't know, he's 30, 35. I don't know how old he was. [37 years old. -NBB]

SVETLANA KITTO: Just like, completely unprotected. [00:43:52]

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Totally. Begging for his HIV medicine. And not getting it. So I don't know, like, what happens to the body if you don't get your HIV—it's not like, "Oh, the virus is going to take over"—and they didn't die by like the—the virus didn't kill him. It's not like he died from cancer. But something happened. Something happened to that boy. And he did have a mouth, but he knew how to behave in terms of like the cops and shit. And I know that woman—Leyla, the mother—her other son is HIV-positive. I don't know, I don't know what happened. I don't know what happened there. I didn't stay in touch with them. I went to the funeral and they did a Baptist—a full Baptist—the father preached over his body.

SVETLANA KITTO: Oh, right.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Storefront, full on. You know, not David's—"There will be no more makeup!" That's what I remember him saying about David. [Laughs.]

SVETLANA KITTO: God, that's crazy.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: He said that in a way that I took as honoring David, though. It wasn't like, "There will be no more makeup," like, you know, "You're not allowed to have makeup anymore." It was like, who David—I think the stepfather was embracing—like he's not—the things that there will be no more of David. He was like, "There will be no more makeup!"

Could we just take a little break?

[END OF BRODY18_10F2_TRACK6.]

SVETLANA KITTO: This is Svetlana Kitto, interviewing Nancy Brooks Brody at her home in Prospect Heights, Brooklyn, New York, on January 28, 2018, as part the Visual Arts and AIDS Epidemic Oral History Project for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. And we are now on card number two.

So, we had left off with you telling me a little bit about your friend, David Svitzer, and what happened to him. And I know also that before that, you had left New York, and I wondered if you could just take me through that a little bit.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Well, I think I had said that I was working at that time. I was living on Ludlow Street and I was working for Jennifer Bartlett. There was so—I mean, there is so much you can't get into all of this, but there's a couple names I would add, that were in my life around that time, before leaving.

I want to just—for just history's sake, I was living at, I think it was 143 Ludlow Street. And I was living with Edwige Belmore, who was—the first women that I had slept with [Ivonne Casas -NBB], on the beach in Fire Island, had brought me to Danceteria to see her perform. She was a quite remarkable woman that people could look up and learn about. She had this very public life, but then we lived in this teeny little tenement. Tiny, tiny tenement apartment. She was a bartender and a doorwoman at Area, so she was quite a remarkable woman. We lived together for several years in the '80s. [Ivonne Casas was the first woman to sleep with Edwige. -NBB] [00:02:06]

I'm not going to take up too much time talking about her, but I think that's the time that I—shortly after we were roommates, I started working for Jennifer Bartlett, and—yeah, that was when I had met David. David and Tony and those stories that I had already kind of talked a little bit about.

SVETLANA KITTO: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: It was during that time that David Knudswig was sick [in the early 1990s. -NBB] At that time also, I had gotten one of my first—I was making a lot of art. Being an artist was—when we were doing all that activism it was—making art was something I continued to do and always did, but it was something I kind of

did—I don't want to say the word "in secret," but it was sort of to the side a little bit. Doing AIDS work and doing activism was so central, and that felt so important, so urgent and vital, that making art felt kind of extraneous in a way.

But I also couldn't help that part of myself, and always continued to make art, throughout. Making art about the images that I was talking about, about nature, or that was inspired by shapes in nature. That was a connection to the body, a connection to the planet, in this way that the virus itself, as this infiltrator into the system—it was something I thought about, I'll just say. But it wasn't so much like storytelling, it wasn't about identity, it wasn't about—I didn't make—I wasn't making art that was emotional or about what was—whereas the activism was very emotional. [00:04:44]

When David [died -NBB]—I had started to make these kind of secret drawings that were about—that were much more diaristic, much more storytelling, more about identity, images that were—they felt very close to my heart, whereas I was still making these larger paintings that were silk-screened. And they were real paintings on canvas, and material, and joint compound, and more broader thoughts about nature, and the world, or the environment. But then these other pieces that I started to do were—actually, I started to make them—now that I'm saying this, they were on—when Jean was alive, I was at his house one time, and he got a big art delivery from New York Central. And they were reams of paper, BFK Rives, like literally reams of paper, and I never knew anyone—I would like—I never had access to such beautiful paper. And he just took two big reams of paper—one was white, and one was off-white—or unbleached and bleached—and he just gave me these reams of paper. [00:06:09]

So, I started making drawings on them. [The drawings came later 1992 or so. -NBB] That's funny, I never put them together, that that's what kind of initiated these drawings, was this material to draw on. I made these very small, unmoored drawings of the figure. Like, there was a hairy leg from the knee down being shoved into a very light, spike-heeled woman's shoe, something like that. There were images of the—one of the first drawings was after David K. died—Donald, some friends of ours, Donald Mouton and Bobby Bordo, and Joy and Carrie had taken David Nelson to Europe, to see him through a show that he had already planned before David died, and he wouldn't have been able to make it on his own. They all supported him and brought him to Paris, at Tracy Williams Gallery, he had this big exhibition.

And when they were telling me about it. When they came back, they told me about this—they were staying at Pierre Bergé's, some lover of Yves Saint Laurent—not some lover, a lover of Yves Saint Laurent. Like, Yves Saint Laurent's right hand man. They were staying at some apartment of his in Paris that, I think through Jennifer Bartlett or something, they got. And there was a closet there that just had maids' uniforms in it. Donald was telling me about trying one on and actually taking one. And I was like, "You have to put it on for me. You have to put that dress on for me." [00:07:50]

And Donald was this beautiful, this beautiful man. He's a Mark Morris dancer. And he always had this very short head of gray hair or white hair, and he's very—just this kind of stocky, just strong-bodied person, a very well-proportioned body. He went and he put on this maid's uniform for me and it just fit him perfectly. It was like it was made for his body. It was a very simple little black dress with a white lace collar, and he had thick wool socks on, like country socks. It struck such an image to me, to see Donald in this dress, where it wasn't camp, it wasn't drag. It just made sense on him. It made me think about all the dresses that I used to be forced to wear, that didn't make any sense on me, that didn't feel good, and I went and I made many drawings of Donald—or several drawings of Donald—in this dress, from memory.

And so that was the kind of—and I made a lot of—I drew these little monkeys in polka-dot dresses, or monkeys with hats. Just in the center of a page, a big white page, and it was a little pencil drawing with watercolor, small touches of watercolor. Those drawings were more personal for me, about gender and identity and relationship. There were drawings of trees and drawings of the body broken, the body amputated, different parts of the body, pieces. And so right before I had—it was when I was working for Jennifer Bartlett, I had done this—well, I'm jumping. I'm just going to stay on track. [00:10:00]

Andrea Rosen, who had a gallery in SoHo—both Tony and Zoe had told her about my work, and she came to my basement studio and saw my paintings, and we had a nice studio visit. She liked—I mean, whatever, she liked the paintings, but she had her coat on to leave, and I started to kind of sweat and get nervous and I just said, "Hey, can I show you these—before you go, can I just show you these drawings that I've been making?" I probably only had about five of them at that time. Maybe seven, maybe 10.

SVETLANA KITTO: [Laughs.]

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Not that many. But I was terrified to show her these, because they were really—they mattered to me. They were like showing someone a poem or something, something very private. And she took her coat off and she looked at them and she didn't say much but I knew she connected to them. That same day

or later that day, she called me, and she said, "Will you show those drawings with me? I want to curate a show, and I want to put those drawings in the show." And I said, "I really need to think about it." I was like, "I don't know if I can do that." I mean, I really felt very shy of these. The other work I was doing had more of a story and they were more—you know.

SVETLANA KITTO: It was more familiar.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Very—yeah, and more distance though, actually, in a sense. Like, they weren't personal. She said, "Well, I really need to know because I'm not going to curate the show unless—I'm not going to put the show together unless—your work is central to the show. Like, we're not—you need to let me know ASAP." She got kind of a little stern with me. I hung up the phone and I really thought about it. I waited a day maybe, and I called her back and I said okay. [00:12:05]

But I had already had this trip—so I had, prior to that, I had done some work for Air France. It was one of the few, if ever, commercial jobs that I had ever done. A friend of a friend knew someone that was—threw parties or [was an event planner or -NBB] something, and as a gift to the people from Air France, who worked for some corporate level of Air France—they were having a party at MoMA, and they asked an artist, me, to make a series of prints. There were two different jobs. One was to do the cover of a menu, and then part of the payment was free tickets to Paris.

And then it was about a year later, I had never used those tickets, hadn't used those tickets, and they came to me and they said, "Will you do this series of prints that are—now we're taking the Americans' corporate Air France people to Paris and we want to give them the gift of an artist." And they did these framed series. I don't know where any of these are, but I said, "Well, I've never been—I didn't even go to Paris, I haven't used these tickets yet. Can I go somewhere else that Air France flies?" And so I picked India. And it was—I didn't have any real attraction to India, other than like—I didn't practice yoga yet, I wasn't that fond of Indian food. It was just someplace as far away that you could go, very expensive to get to, but very cheap once you got there, very inexpensive. [00:13:43]

And so then I made these trips, and I made a—I was dating a woman who had—a dancer, whose family had a house in the South of France. So I took my friend Robin, and we went to this place in the South of France, and Juliet came also. And then we spent like a week in the South of France—or more, a couple of weeks—and then Robin and I continued on to Morocco. And while we were there—Robin was born in Portland, and she had had a girlfriend in Portland who had worked as a firefighter for the Forest Service, and I had never heard about this type of a job. And I thought, "Oh, that is something I might like to do." And then when I came back from that trip, I think I had like a couple-of-week turnaround, and I took Zoe to India with the other tickets. And so, I was away from the city for pretty much the first time, for a good chunk of time, back-to-back. Zoe and I planned to go to India for two months and we ended up staying three. We changed our tickets and stayed three months.

So, with the trip before it, it was probably almost three-and-a-half months, three and change, of not being in New York. And that's when I was like, "Oh, New York got"—I got a real perspective on New York. In India, we traveled to the Himalayas, we traveled to the Thar Desert, we traveled to the south, we were in Chandigarh and Delhi, Ahmedabad. We went to a lot. We saw a lot in India, and I just was like, "Oh, I don't want to go back to New York." New York was so painful, I think. I was 30. I think I had my 30th birthday on Dal Lake, in a houseboat in India, in Srinagar. And so, when I came back, I think that's when that show with Andrea happened.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah, how was that? [00:16:01]

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: That was quite successful, but I left with my drawings still on the wall, I'm pretty sure, because I know somebody else had to go and like, get my portfolio of drawings. So now I had made more drawings. I'm not sure how all that worked out, but I know that I wasn't in town. A lot of people were like, "You're crazy to leave New York, you're having a show at Andrea Rosen's." I think she sold all the drawings. "You should stay in New York now," like this is—I had never showed at such a nice gallery before. But I had—I left. When I got the job at the Forest Service, I just used all this bullshit experience. Like I had worked for Jennifer Bartlett, she had a garden. I said I had done all this gardening work. I helped a friend put in fence in Maine. I said I—you know, I just expounded on all these—I was arrested, and for community service, I spread woodchips, so I said I volunteered for the Parks Department. You know?

And I got hired to be a firefighter, actually out at Mount Rainier, and then it got switched somehow, and I ended up in Mount St. Helens. And I got to work for the crew boss [Loretta Sharpe -NBB] that my friend Robin's girlfriend had worked at, because there was very few, if any—there was one crew boss in the entire country that was a firefighting crew boss, and that was at Mount St. Helens. There was a hotshot crew boss, but I wouldn't—you had to do—you couldn't just go to be a hotshot.

Anyway, I got the job, said I could—didn't even have a driver's license. My grandmother had passed away and left me her little Nissan Sentra. My father had been parking it for me for like a year or something, and it was like,

"You need to get a driver's license." And I was like, "Oh yeah, I do, because"—I got my driver's license, and a week later, I drove across country. I loaded it up with my dog and all, and drove across country, and I went to Mount St. Helens and was a firefighter. I went for a season, but I stayed three years. I fell in love with it there. You know, my—yeah, so that was an incredible experience for me. Incredible. [00:18:26]

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah. What was that like?

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: I mean, I was terrified, driving. I mean, not terrified, but I wasn't a good driver yet. I just got on Highway 80, I went over the George Washington Bridge. I remember visiting my mom on the way uptown. She had made me, like, a [tuna fish -NBB] sandwich and then I went a little further uptown and kind of made out with some girl I was flirting with, and then I like went across that George Washington Bridge and drove across country, with—and I would just stop at rest stops. I slept in rest stops the whole way. I didn't go to hotels. I think I camped a couple of times.

SVETLANA KITTO: Had you been out in America before?

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Never, no. Well, I had driven across country with a friend. I didn't drive. I mean, I drove a little, but I didn't know how to drive. Like one time, on a stretch of highway, I drove.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah, you're from Manhattan, you didn't know [laughs] how to drive.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Yeah, no one drove, none of my friends drove. When I saw people driving, when peers were driving, it was a shock. No, we took the subways.

I'm being distracted by own mind, because before I went to Morocco and France and India, when I was going to get—at those days you got travelers checks when you traveled, and you had to go up to American Express, to the office, and you had have your—I think you had to have your passport.

I remember I had Robin's passport in my back pocket. I came downstairs, I went across the street, I hollered up for Zoe—these people didn't have bells—and she was going to come with me to American Express. I had like \$500 in cash, my passport, Robin's passport. I was going to see Zoe, we're walking up toward Katz's, and this van, this police van, comes screaming down the street and it was like, [demonstrates screeching noise] "Yeah, denim vest, cowboy boots, jeans. We got her." [00:20:17]

And they proceeded to arrest me, and it was kind of a violent arrest. They were really hassling. Zoe was shouting at them, like, "You can't arrest us!" This was like—we were doing all this activism, and had been arrested doing AIDS work, but this was really different. But we did feel enough entitled, or that we had our rights, that—"How dare you arrest us? We're not doing anything, we're walking down the street." And I watched them pull Zoe away, because she was like, "Why are you arresting us? You need to tell us what's going on." And I got nervous that they were going to hurt her, and I remember like, lunging forward to protect her in some way.

And this is a van full of cops, and they grabbed me, and I had been practicing martial arts for all these years. I didn't fight, but I knew how to get out of people grabbing my arms, and I kept just like—you can't see me, because I'm talking, but I kept like turning my arms in this way, and doing this like spiraling motion that just kept releasing myself. And I remember thinking, "Uh-oh, I'm not letting them"—I didn't want them to hold me, but I also was like "Oh, they're going to start getting pissed off," but I just kept getting out of their hold. And then the cop's eyeglasses fell off, his mirror aviators fell, and I was like, "Uh-oh," like, "He's going to be pissed." You don't—

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah. It's like the paint, right?

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Exactly.

SVETLANA KITTO: [Laughs.] On the boots. [00:21:55]

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: And then I let them kind of grab me, and then they threw us both in the van. And there were tons of people around. I was screaming, "Help! Help! Help!" to the—I knew all the people on the street, on Ludlow Street. And everybody was like, "Let them go, let them go, we know them!" And they said that we were buying dope. We were not. This is—they were doing a sweep. It was 1992, gentrification was in full swing. They were cleaning up, quote-unquote, and the guys were—and I said to Zoe, I turned to Zoe, I was like—we had been in Fire Island, I guess, or I don't know if I was—and I said, "I never should have come back from Fire Island." And they were like, "Oh, you were in Fire Island, you fucking dykes, you probably have AIDS, we shouldn't have touched you." They were really intense. Our cuffs were super tight.

When all that scuffle was happening, somebody saw us. Zoe was showing at Paula Cooper already, and when we got to the Pitt Street precinct, there was someone from her gallery already there. And because of that,

somehow, they let Zoe off. Some class thing where they were like—I don't know, but they put me through the system and I stayed in. They did a strip search on me, a cavity search, not cavity full, but they made me bend over. They treated me very, very, very poorly.

I was in jail for probably close to 48 hours, and I ended up—could have faced a grand jury, assaulting an officer, resisting arrest. Some lawyers from ACT UP that I knew wanted me to go to trial, but I had this whole trip planned for India and was like, "I don't want to go to trial." I was terrified, I was really scared that I would lose and end up going to jail. I was facing six years.

SVETLANA KITTO: For what? [00:23:58]

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Assaulting an officer and resisting arrest. It was some grand jury potentially. So, you know, the lawyer really wanted to go to trial, because she thought she could win, but I was scared, and I copped a plea. That's where I got all this community service. I got weeks and weeks of community service, throwing woodchips in Thompkins Square Park. I wanted to go traveling. So, part of my travels were—it wasn't resolved yet and I would have to stop and, like, do faxing back to the city and deal with some courts, and Tony was my point person on this end, yeah.

So that was kind of a nightmare, and it was—but the community service is what I used to say that I had done all this work, to get myself to Mount St. Helens, which ended up being a fantastic thing to do. I learned a lot about the Forest Service and how we use the trees as resources. There was clearcutting there, and slash-and-burns, and—yeah, anyway, I learned. Before I had gone, I would just see, you know, Central Park or the woods, and I would just see green. And then there, I learned like, "Oh, that's *Dicentra*, that's hellebore, this is—you know, that's a pine tree, that's a noble fir. There's the different kinds of pine. That's a white pine, that's a Doug fir. You know, how to identify plants and trees. I was in old growth forests. Anyway, that whole northwest volcanic—the chain of volcanos: Hood, Adams, St. Helens, Rainier. I mean, I learned so much there. I got to walk into the—some scientists took me on this walk into the mouth of the volcano at St. Helens, and I flew in helicopters over it, and climbed it. It was really special, and I was in nature. [00:26:20]

But I just want to say, like, the first summer I was there, I drove across country in—I think it was the end of May. I had to be there by early June, and I had left David. And that was really hard, to leave David, because he had—like I said, he was a very proud, very stoic, but he was sick and I didn't—I don't think I realized how close he could have been to death, but when I was working out in the woods one night, one day, pruning trees or something, I didn't have a radio. Not everybody had a radio. That's how you had contact with the headquarters. There was a radio call that came through, that said like, it was like [demonstrates radio signal sound], you know, "St. Helens. Headquarters, Jubb," my crew boss. [Neal Jubb -NBB] "Hey, get Brody to a phone, there's an emergency. Get Brody to a phone." And they drove me to a radio phone and I was able to contact Zoe, and Zoe said, "Listen, if you want to see David, you should come home."

And I was, like, in my woods clothes, hickory shirt, firefighting boots, and a friend of mine just drove me to Portland Airport. I packed a small bag, where I went right from the airport from the taxi, to St. Vincent's, and David was there. They waited for me. I never got to talk to him. [I got to talk but he could no longer speak. - NBB] He was on a respirator and they took him off the respirator when I got there, like an hour or so after I got there. And David died. [00:28:00]

But they waited. My friends waited for me to get there. So, yeah—and then David Nelson went into a really extreme spiral down, and there was a lot of—whether or not he was going to make it. He was domestic partners—but this is another case of he—the landlord ended up kicking—he lived on 14th Street with David K., and he was getting kicked out. So, Carrie and Joy took David in, to an apartment that they had in their [. . . garden apartment -NBB], because he wasn't going to be able to stay. I mean, so that was the other thing, and it wasn't just people that—people's lovers lost their apartments. You know? Because they weren't on leases and they had no rights to—families took people's homes away and, you know, people weren't recognized as partners.

And then David Knudswig was an amazing artist, and David Nelson ended up being the protector of David K.'s—all his entire—all the art that he ever made, and everything that he owned. David K. would—you know, from one apartment or one studio to the next, David was the caretaker and the overseer of David's entire estate. David was a really good artist, David K. He showed at Debs & Co., as did Joy and Carrie, and David Nelson. Yeah, so I went back to fighting fire and I stayed—like I say, I stayed three years, but I came back for winters then. Not the first winter. I stayed an entire year-and-a-half, and then the next winter I returned, and then I went back. [00:30:01]

And when I left doing that, I drove across country by myself, all the way back, and I took a couple of months to come home, maybe a month. I wasn't sure if I was going to stay or not, in that first summer that I was back. Prior to ever leaving, I had seen Circus Amok, which was this political radical street circus that would go to different parks in the summer. They started at PS 122. They started as an indoor, before they did circus on the

streets. And I had worked for Paper Bag Players, making paper bag props and sets at a time before I left one of my many jobs. I think while I still worked for Jennifer Bartlett, I did that. It was like a second job. The Paper Bag Players—one of the actors in Paper Bag Players was in Circus Amok, indoors, at PS 122, and I fell in love with Circus Amok. I had a dream that I made props for them, these like—anyway, I had a dream that I made props for them.

I went, and I did all that firefighting, and I had sublet my basement studio to this woman that had just answered an ad. I didn't know her. She was a straight girl. She just answered an ad. When I came back, in that time that I had been gone fighting fires, she had been in my studio. She now came out and was gay, and was working for Circus Amok. [Circus Amok is run by Jennifer Miller. -NBB] And they were doing an outdoor—they were doing work in the outdoors and they needed a roustabout, like a stagehand. And she contacted me, and she said our roustabout had quit, can you do it? This is my first summer back in New York, I remember I had other jobs lined up that were actually paying jobs. This was not a paying job. And I said "Oh, my God, yes." [00:32:01]

I canceled my jobs, I went to Williamsburg, I drove the car, I drove Deborah Edmeades to Williamsburg. And I remember her looking at the loading dock and saying, "Oh, there's the strong lady of the circus," and I looked up and all I saw was some Hasidic Jews. It was the Hasidic building mostly, and I saw these Hasids on the loading dock, and I didn't see who she was referring to. Then when the elevator opened up, the big freight elevator, there was Sarah Johnson, the quote-unquote strong lady, who was like, "Okay, one of you stay here, one of you come with me, because now I'm going to work for Circus Amok for the summer."

And I took one look at Sarah and I was smitten. I was instantly in love with her, and I said, "Deborah, you go up, I'm staying here."

SVETLANA KITTO: [Laughs.]

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: I mean, I almost quit. I was like, "That's it, I'm not doing Circus Amok. Like, this is going to be a problem." And we all loaded up this truck and we ended up going to, I think, Jennifer Monson's house for, like, major band rehearsals for the—and I learned the whole [show -NBB]—I had to, you know, flip a whip cream pie and do water balloons, or whatever, all the things a roustabout—basically a stagehand, which I had done before at La MaMa. I had worked on the Sam Shepherd sets, making—anyway, yeah, I had done a ton of—so I knew how to do—I knew theater. I had worked in theater, that was another—like I said, the Paper Bag Players and La MaMa. I had made a crown for *Medea*.

So yeah, that was a great—it was a really terrific summer, because it was my first summer back in New York, and I was out of doors the entire time, in city parks. So, it was this really beautiful way to—

SVETLANA KITTO: —enter back into it. [00:34:01]

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Enter back. Unbeknownst to me, that was the last year of my father's life, so I was also really, really glad I didn't go back to Washington State, because like I say, this is before cell phones. The November that I traveled across country to return to New York, that season I—

SVETLANA KITTO: You were off the grid.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: I was totally off the grid, and had I—anyway, it would have been a nightmare, had I been a year later, if I had been traveling at that same November, because that's when my father passed away. I mean, I would have called home and they would have said, "Hey, your dad died," which is like what happened to me when my grandmother died, one of my—my father's mother died the August before my father died. She was 96, and then my father died six months later, less than six months later or something. August to November.

SVETLANA KITTO: He was young then.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: He was 67. He died of an aneurism. We think it was an aneurism. A total shock. A total shock to the family. One other thing I was doing in there—another reason why I did come back home from Mount St. Helens was I had been—I was—I had had an affair, and had worked and became very close to Kim Pierce, who made *Boys Don't Cry*. I feel like that's a good point of putting it in there, because I remember giving her my copy of *Stone Butch Blues*, which I never got back—

SVETLANA KITTO: [Laughs.]

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: —and going over the script with her a lot. And working out her Columbia—she did the first version of the film, was a student film for Columbia, which I never saw. I never saw any of that footage, but we shot up in Beacon, New York. I flew home from firefighting to work on that actually. And then later, it became—I guess Christine Vachon from—I don't know if they were even called Killer Films yet—produced *Boys Don't Cry*, that then Kim reworked and rewrote to be a feature-length movie, which I didn't work on. But the one for

Columbia, I was in the quote-unquote art department, when we were working on that. [00:36:26]

And, you know, just a point, a funny point, was that Christine's younger brother, Michael Vachon, was my, like, little boyfriend when I was like 10 or 11 years old. And her mother, Madame Vachon, was our French teacher in Music & Art High School. Christine and I went to Music & Art together and her brother and I were little boyfriend and girlfriend at some point, when we were—

SVETLANA KITTO: That's funny.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Yeah, a little funny connection, because then I re-met her around the time where Kim made that film.

SVETLANA KITTO: Small town.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Small town. Upper West Side. It's always good to put those little points in.

SVETLANA KITTO: [Laughs.] Yeah.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: It is. It's small town. Yeah, so I was working with Circus Amok, I met Sarah, we ended up getting together, and then the two—and then Sarah had already—she was living here in this building and it was this very raw, raw, raw space. And the two of us ended up buying this building together at that time. Even before I moved in we bought it. I knew that, like, I was—I wasn't ready to live with someone, but somehow I knew it was ahead of us, which is kind of odd, that you normally would live with someone before you would buy something, but it was very, very, very inexpensive. And I had the money, and we—yeah, so we did that together, which was—but I didn't want to live here yet, so I stayed in my apartment on Ludlow Street. [00:38:12]

SVETLANA KITTO: So when was that?

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: That was '97. Because I came back across country. I was fighting fire from '93 to '96, and I worked at Circus Amok in '96. And so yeah, then I was with Sarah for 18-and-a-half years, which is kind of like a whole giant chapter of life.

SVETLANA KITTO: So, also—yeah, I wanted to ask you a little bit about the world that you encountered when you came back to New York, after having been gone in those years, when so many people died.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: I mean, it was very difficult. You know, when I had first—before I even left, we had been—in '92, Clinton won against Bush, and that was a huge—I was in India when he won, and so he took office in '93. I never really thought about that in terms of the years I was away, because I was here fighting so much when it was Reagan and Bush, and it was just awful times, politically. So, I was away in Washington State when Clinton took office. And coming back, we had Clinton still. The climate here, in terms of people who had—friends and all the people that had passed away. [00:40:05]

I mean, my own personal relationships with people—like people that I was close, close, close to—there were no more deaths there, but there were so many people that I knew. I mean, David Wojnarowicz died, John Greenberg died. Like I had said, there was many, many people's names I didn't know, but you would look at a photograph or somebody would talk about somebody and describe them and you're like, "Oh, they died." I mean, there was—it was like time sped up, and that was a heightened time, and I think that's—I mean, I don't think there was any mistake that I was not here.

I mean, I feel—I don't know what I feel about that, about my going away at that time and how hard it was to be here. It was like I was suffocating here. It was just—and so coming back and re-finding, reconnecting. When you're that age, two, three years is a long time. I mean, like I say, I wasn't gone the entire time straight. I did return here and there. But this is a very different return, and also starting a relationship was a different way of being in the city for me. I had never really had that experience before. I had never really been—

SVETLANA KITTO: Living here, right? Living in Brooklyn, versus downtown.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Yeah, and that was the other thing. I mean, I moved here in '98, [or '99] but that was like really moving out of town. Brooklyn was a small—it felt like going to a little suburb, practically.

SVETLANA KITTO: Right. [00:42:00]

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: And I was no longer working for Jennifer Bartlett. I was doing showroom work, decorative work, decorative painting work. I did a lot of decorative painting work. Then I got called back in to work at Jennifer's, and worked for her again at a certain time, and worked with David Nelson again, who had never left working for her. He had been there for like 25, 30 years. But you know when—after Clinton, when we had the war and Bush, the second Bush, I was still friends with and in touch with Carrie and Joy and Zoe.

Joy had friends, Barbara Hughes and some other people from—I think she worked with The Marys, back in ACT UP, and we had been getting together and doing some—there was the whole big "If you see something, say something" campaign, that we responded to, on the subways, where Joy actually—she's really good at Photoshop and she created these stickers that we made that said, "If you see something, say something, call the White House," and we had the number of the White House. And it was like, "I see a Secretary of State that"—blah, blah, blah. I could try to find out the exact, but we had four different ones that we made. Like, "I see an Attorney General that basically, you know, is anti-choice," but, like—you know.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: They were really good. We had really—these were—I'm not remembering them, that was years ago.

SVETLANA KITTO: Were you doing that as fierce pussy? [00:43:45]

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: No, but it was—it was this group of us. Many of us, from the core members of fierce pussy, interestingly enough, were meeting and working together. So, we had a sort of shorthand way of working, and a trust between us. And when the war happened, we came up with this idea. I'm kind of avoiding saying who it was, because they may not want their name known, but we did this banner release in Grand Central that said, "No Wars, No Lies, No Bush." And we did this—we had giant—they almost looked like weather balloons, like white helium balloons, and we attached little, pretty—so nobody would be scared of these, because everyone was so scared. You know, "If you see something, say something. Oh, terrorism! Everything is terrorism."

We walked into Grand Central Station with these big balloons, and we had a banner that beautifully floated up. We attached these balloons to it. We had gone and done recon and the place was covered in cops, armed guards, so we really did a beautiful action. We had two people holding the door, another person distracting the guards by talking to them, pretending that she was a tour guide and she was looking for her tour group. Four of us had clips and held the banner, and we clipped our balloons and it said like, "Bon voyage," basically. It was just like—

SVETLANA KITTO: So, this was after 9/11?

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Yeah, this was after 9/11. Yes, yes, this is the war.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah, okay.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: So that was an action that—so when that all—the minute 9/11 happened too, it was like, we all—a couple of us came to my studio and made this giant banner that said, you know, "Justice, Not Revenge." And we were in Union Square holding this banner, and people stood—we stood together. So, there was always that, like—fierce pussy, we always were—those people came together several times, even after we were no longer fierce pussy, and [we] trusted one another during protest and during times such as 9/11. [00:46:26]

SVETLANA KITTO: So, it was like, Carrie, Joy, Zoe, and who else?

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: This woman Anastasia was there. I can't really picture—but the *No War, No Lies, No Bush* was Ana Blum, this woman Barbara Hughes. I don't know if I—I don't think these people mind. I hope they don't mind their names being—this woman Beth, this other woman. It was a group of us that would meet and plan and respond, and we went in the subways.

SVETLANA KITTO: Of women.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Yes, these were women. David Nelson was involved in the *No War, No Lies, No Bush* banner, by just—I think he just held the door for us to go inside with these big balloons, because we were moving. We were just like stealth and we wanted to—we put that banner up, we quickly took our hats off, or our glasses, you know, did a little change and tried to just get—and no one got arrested. We didn't get arrested, but we were terrified that we would get arrested. I mean, this was—it was a big deal to let something like that up in the climate that was.

And it turned out that we—I was the one who went back up afterwards, later on that night, because I wanted to see if it was still up, and somebody from the restaurant said that they shot it down with rubber bullets. So, it didn't stay up for that long after, but you can see it on YouTube. It was a really successful action. At a certain point—I mean, I'm trying to think about—I mean, who gathered together after 9/11? I was—you know, that day was a Tuesday. [00:48:23]

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah, tell me about that.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: It was 2001. Now I was working for Jennifer again. That's my second time around working for Jennifer. She was living on Charles Street at that time, and I was to be at work at nine. And I think I was a tad late for work. And I remember coming up out of the subway at the number one train at Christopher Street, and I could see people's legs at the top of the stairs—because I can picture the light and feet moving—and I heard this loud, loud sound, and I was scared. And I went back down into the subway. I knew it was something, and I just stayed there for a couple of seconds.

And then I came back up and everybody was looking up at the sky and that's facing, at Christopher Street, Seventh Avenue, right by the cigar stand. You looked downtown and there's the World Trade Towers. It's one of the best views of the Trade Towers you had of the city, and there, one of them has this gaping hole at the top and it's smoking. So, I heard it, but I didn't see it. Had I been just, like, a few seconds ahead of my—if the subway was literally 30 seconds ahead, I would have been on the street. And it looked like a small plane, like most people thought. I assumed, "Oh, it was an accident, a small plane," because somebody said it was a plane. And so, it was like, "Oh, it must have been a private plane." [00:50:00]

And I was just—you couldn't stop looking at it, just staring at it. And then I don't know what came over me, but I knew this woman, Dana Flynn, who taught yoga on Christopher Street, and I thought to just go there and tell her that a plane went into the World Trade Tower. I don't even know why I went, but I went up and they were in *Shavasana*. I opened the door to this yoga studio, and everybody was in *Shavasana*, and the woman, Jasmine—who was the co-owner of the studio, she knew me—she came over, and totally quietly, I just said to her, "A plane hit the World Trade Tower." I don't know why I was compelled to [laughs] go there, and she was like, "Okay."

And then I went back downstairs and I'm just staring at it, and a second plane comes and I saw that plane hit. It was like a glint out of the side of my eye, of light, on the plane, and it came from behind and broke—and it was like—that was like an animation. I know everyone says it was like a movie, but it was like seeing—you never saw anything like that other than in the movies, and people who witness war. But I had never seen a firebomb, that red, orange, black smoke. And then I was like, "Holy shit, it wasn't a mistake." And I just said, "We're being attacked." People screaming in the streets.

SVETLANA KITTO: Oh, my God.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: I thought, at any moment, tons of planes were going to arrive and that we were going to just be, like—bullets were going to be fired upon us. We just stood there watching with people, and I remember this one woman saying—she was in a business suit, she's like, "I have to go to work." I just looked at her and I was like, "Ma'am, you're not going to work today. You are not going to work today." And she just looked at me and she was like, "Thank you." I mean, people were—people didn't know what they were—I mean, people weren't registering what they were looking at. [00:52:08]

So, I went on to work, and I kept coming back outside. And then I came outside and one of the towers fell. I didn't see that fall, but it was like—I had seen all the dirt and—

SVETLANA KITTO: —debris.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Debris. And I remember saying right then to David—I was like, "Where are, like, the Stealth Bombers? Where's our, like, you know—all of our defense?" And then in a moment—and the next moment that I said that, there it was. There was the—it's called the Stealth, right?

SVETLANA KITTO: I don't know.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: This, like, black—our most prized aircraft, defense, war craft. And that was just—and then the next one fell. I knew that one was going to fall too. I was like, "Oh, I could stand here and watch," and then it was like, "You know what, you don't need to see that. I don't know if you need to see that." And I just went back inside at Jennifer's, and then we were watching TV. Then Radek, my friend who I worked with, took me on his little motorcycle or moped, whatever that is, scooter, and he brought me to Kim Pierce's. She was living on the Bowery, and so you could just see smoke. She was at the Bowery, like, by the New Museum, somewhere over there. And it was just massive smoke.

It was September 11th. My birthday is the 12th, so there was already a planned gathering for my birthday. So a bunch of us—that day of the 12th, I wanted to go down to the World Trade Center site, and I was with Zoe and Anastasia and we met up with Marissa, and this woman Chris, who I worked with, and we walked all through Lower Manhattan. And it was just—the streets were just covered in ash, the cars were covered in ash. Storefronts, broken storefronts, everything that people had in their storefronts, shoes and coats, covered in ash. Abandoned fruit carts covered in ash. Smashed cars, shoes, papers everywhere. I collected a lot of burnt papers. I have papers that say like, "From the desk of"—people's names. I have a box of debris from the World Trade Tower, that I collected. [00:54:40]

SVETLANA KITTO: Wow.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Shoes and ash. When we all gathered for my birthday dinner, then it was like a whole other group of people who just were like—it was kind of great. We went to this Italian restaurant, Lanza's, on—

SVETLANA KITTO: —Second.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Yeah. And I remember Frank Moore coming. He was a good friend of Joy and Carrie's, and I gave them all stuff. I had a box of all this. I gave everybody debris from—there was this one that Anastasia had that was a page from a dictionary, and it was P, and it said—there was "Plymouth Rock" on it, I always remember that. And it said, like, "Political Justice" on one of them, which was so ironic. "Plymouth Rock" was a crazy one to find, because you think of, you know, the history of colonialism.

SVETLANA KITTO: Right.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: To find this burnt dictionary page. Frank was really inspired and the next day he went down, and he actually got in past, into the actual—he put a hardhat on or something and just walked in, because he's a big guy, like he belonged there. And he went into the actual site. Like, we got close to it that day, but we didn't walk on the footprint. He did. He had some piece that has—I don't know if it's the paper I gave him or [. . . papers-NBB] that he found—that he made with—something from the pieces from the World Trade Tower. [00:56:15]

I haven't looked in that box, but there's always a part of me that would like to see if I have—I'm sure I have someone's name, like, "From the desk of." I always wondered if, like, a family member would—I don't know what to do with this box of stuff. And the city just smelled, just for months and months.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah, I was going to say, it must have been so noxious to be walking in Lower Manhattan.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Oh, yeah it was fucked up. I put a bandana over my face, or I had a handkerchief, but it was disgusting. I mean, it was not good, not good, not good to be breathing that in. But we weren't breathing it for days and days and days. Although if you lived in the city, you were. If you smelled it, you're breathing it. I mean, that shit was fucked up.

And that's when we went and made that banner [*Justice No Revenge -NBB*], and that's when we started *No Wars, No Lies, No Bush*.

SVETLANA KITTO: So was that, like, the first sort of political activism that you had done since before Washington?

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: I would say. I mean, Circus Amok was political content.

SVETLANA KITTO: Sure, yeah. That's Jennifer Miller, right?

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Who I love, but it wasn't, like, direct action. So I would say yes, that was probably the first direct action, political response. And we had all the people that we knew from ACT UP and fierce pussy. There was a lot of people from ACT UP. So, we all had, like I said, this kind of shorthand of working together and trust. So it wasn't like we needed to reinvent this dialogue. [00:57:57]

At some point in there, a little later then—this is later, because now we jump to, like, 2008. Fierce pussy got—I don't know how this came up, but perhaps because—AA Bronson maybe it was, who called us out to do a quote-unquote retrospective in the back of Printed Matter, and we were also invited to make a book. And we wanted to make more like kind of a bound book, and I suggested we make it with a spiral at the top, kind of calendar style, and put a hole in it, so that people could take all of our posters and sort of handle the book closer to how we intended the work to be in the world. Like, you could put a nail on your wall and have it up and out, so it wouldn't just be this closed book. And people could Xerox them and share them, tear them out if they wanted to.

So we made this book of all of our early fierce pussy work, and then we did this retrospective and we did an open call. Anyone who was ever in fierce pussy, we let them know, and who showed up but Joy, Carrie and Zoe. And so, we mined all of our stuff. We, like, had these vitrines, and we had an exhibition. And one of the things we decided to do, we were like, "Well, let's not just show our stuff as this, like, history. Let's make something new."

So we decided to make a remix of all those *Lists* that we had made. So instead of it saying "And proud" at the end, we said, "And so are you." Like, "I'm a lezzie butch, femme," you know, whatever, "mannish, muff diver"—we chose our favorite words from the three *Lists* and made this one remix, "And so are you." And we asked if we could do the entire window façade, a storefront of Printed Matter. [01:00:15]

While we were installing that, we were like halfway done and we were decided to go for lunch. It might have been almost all the way finished. We went to Le Gamin, had lunch, came back, and we hear that the police had been there. There's been many, many, many calls. In fact, the cops thought that the façade had been up for weeks, for the amount of calls that he said that they received.

SVETLANA KITTO: Oh, my God. Wow.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: And this is like—I mean, it says "I am a femme, butch, dyke, mannish." And so the people who worked at Printed Matter were scared. They said, "Oh, the children—there are schools in the area, that this language was offending, upsetting." In the meantime, Joy looks up and we look at this—there's a huge billboard of this woman straddling a Courvoisier bottle, which is like a giant yoni, like, "Oh, nobody cares about that."

SVETLANA KITTO: Right. [Laughs.] It's like the same as—

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: So then we realized—we were like, "Oh, my God, our work from [. . . 1991 -NBB], and now we're in 2008, these same freaking words are offending people." We were like, "Oh, my God," this shit is still really relevant.

SVETLANA KITTO: Because it offended people then too, like on the Upper West Side, right?

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Yeah. But then we didn't know, so we didn't hear about it, like in terms of—we didn't know people. People didn't contact us and say, "Hey fierce pussy, you're offending us." This is the first thing that we had ever done that we were kind of, like, allowed—I mean, maybe we did—fierce pussy had done, like, a bathroom in the Gay and Lesbian Community Center, a long, long, long time ago. [01:02:04]

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NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Anyway, so we realized, "Oh, gosh, our work is still relevant." And so, then the Lesbian History Archives asked us if we would move our [laughs] retrospective there, and again we were like, "Let's not just move our stuff there. Can we do something here?"

And so, we did something called *Mining the Archives*, and we made a big piece out of all the buttons. That was a great piece, where we went through every single button that they had, and we made a spiral of all the buttons and we organized it in a very particular way, of like, "All the witchy ones here," or "All the kind of anti-men ones here." And we went through all their pulp fiction novels and we went through T-shirts. And so, we made a circle, a square, and a kind of pyramid triangle shape out of those things. And we did these salons. Ginger Takahashi Brooks came and did her quilt. We had Barbara Hammer showed a film. Linda Matalon made soup, and she made bread bowls out of edible bread. It was really quite special, and we did a few of those salons.

And then from being there and looking through all those pulp fictions, we made a project called *Gutter*, which—we looked at the pulp fiction, and we Xeroxed these pages that we then redacted and changed to some—we just circled or whited out or magic marked, Sharpied out, and kind of tried to make a new story out of the stories. Because all the stories in pulp fiction are these lesbians that, like, eventually die, or are alcoholic, or they sleep with men. And we wanted to reclaim those. And we called it *Gutter*, because of the gutter of the book, and also like, elevating something [. . . considered to be low or of the gutter. -NBB] [00:02:09]

We then got invited to go to Harvard. There was this very big ACT UP—the oral history project was being curated by Helen Molesworth and Claire Grace. They were doing this big ACT UP oral history show, where they were going to show that project. Helen came to interview fierce pussy, and we basically talked a lot, spoke a lot to her, and she got excited about the idea of fierce pussy coming there. Even though a big large portion of our work wasn't AIDS-related—some of it was, but it wasn't all AIDS-related—she understood how that work was very connected and very important in terms of that time. And so we spent a week or so at Harvard, and we did the bathrooms there, with students, and we did a workshop at the Women's Center, I think. And we also got to install *Gutter* at the [. . . Graduate School of Design. -NBB] So we did a big—we did several projects there. So we did our brand new *Gutter* project, and we did the old posters, floor-to-ceiling wallpaper of *Are You A Boy or a Girl?* And our *Lists*. [00:03:45]

And there too, one of the students, Martabel Wasserman—who made a beautiful catalogue for that show as her project, her thesis—found that they had—they wrote—Harvard installed: "These bathrooms may contain offensive content." [Outside of the bathrooms as a warning. -NBB] This is Harvard. On the outdoor of the bathroom. Like, what about any of this is offensive? "I am a"—"And so are you." "Are you a boy or a girl?" I mean, it was just—and people were offended, and Martabel would take off those signs as part of her project [as an action. -NBB]. So it was just kind of amazing, how that material was still—

SVETLANA KITTO: —so relevant.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Yes. And that was a really intense time because that was a revisiting of a lot of people from ACT UP. There were panels. Joy was on a panel, many people were on panels. And we all hadn't been together, and I think revisiting that material was—it was so moving. And it was so clear and for me, really shocking, how much mourning we didn't actually do. How much was still in our bodies.

I mean, this one panel that Joy was on, there wasn't—I mean, it was devastating. It was like, just—I think so many people—I mean, I was just floored by how much was in there deeply, deeply, deeply buried inside, that had never been really parsed out or unpacked and mourned. Because when people were dying, we just kept going. I mean, people talk about this. You went to a funeral, and then you were out on the streets. Or you were at a meeting, and then you went to a hospital to take care of someone and feed them. Feed someone's cats, walk their dog, help someone move. You know? These things just—we didn't have any—I didn't have any room or perspective on it. It was just what was happening. And that's why, too—like I think when I said making art, making your own art, was complicated, you know? [00:06:35]

SVETLANA KITTO: Right.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: You know, it was so—anyway, so when we were at Harvard, that's when fierce pussy really got—after that, White Columns wanted to take the oral history project to New York, and that's when we realized there was so much mourning still inside of us, and we didn't want to make a piece—we wanted to make a piece about AIDS from the now, not from then. And that's when we came up with what we call *Get Up Everybody and Sing*. We asked White Columns. We showed our *Lists*, but we didn't want to just like wheat-paste a room or a wall.

And we came up with that whole project that—"If he were alive today, if she were alive today, if they were alive today, you would be going out dancing." "If she were alive today, you'd be—he'd be going gray." "If he were alive today"—I'm changing the genders each time, but—"she would be outside smoking, they would have their arm around you, they would be in this picture, they would really make you laugh, they would have a gallery by now, she would have a gallery by now." You know? "She would have written that book." All the things that— [00:08:11]

So, we thought we would wheat-paste them on the wall, and then we ended up tabbing them with blue tape, just kind of figuring out where they would go. And they were almost like fortune cookie-like lengths of language on a strip of paper. And we realized we liked the way it looked more tabbed, more ephemeral, for lack of a better word. Like, temporary. And these little ripped, torn pieces of tape, almost like confetti.

And then we realized we really wanted a sound or some kind of music component, and we found that anthem, "We Are Family," by Sister Sledge, written by Nile Rodgers. And we made a big Xerox stack of that as a giveaway. That's almost—if you read the lyrics to that, it's really a poem, and you just think, like: A night out wasn't a night out of dancing if that song didn't come on. "I got all my sisters with me," you know? Basically it's like love and support of each other, that song, you know? It's a beautiful song. It's not just, you know, dance. It's just a really beautiful song.

So then, we also had gone to Denniston Hill, to work on that—to an artists' residency—to really hone down that list and hone down that language, of all the different things, "If they were alive today." So that piece was really about loss from now, really missing people. Because we really found, in Harvard, how much was still there, how much we really missed the people, and really what we went through. I don't want to say it's like—I never went through a war, but it was like a kind of a war, a kind of a loss. That's just in you. [00:10:23]

So when you say, "How was it when you came back?"—you know, "How do you walk through your life and your streets, and how do you recalibrate?" And it's not that it's over. It wasn't over. David—so many more people that I know seroconverted, who quote-unquote survived that time, you know? People are still seroconverting. I mean, but people that I know, that I thought like, "Okay, they didn't—they're HIV-negative."

Because now, also, you know, people started responding to the medicine. The cocktail came out, and it was just like—like, Tony got on the cocktail and his body responded really well to it. David responded very well to it. I mean, he had had other side effects, but for the most part, his T-cells were very strong. Not Tony so much, but David. Tony always had kind of a low T-cell, but his other functions were really good.

You know, so these bodies that were able to tolerate the medicine and to live. You know, it was just—it was like a respite. You could breathe a little. You know? You don't fear that, "Oh, God, you're going to get—that cold that you have, it's going to turn into something." Because that's how you felt. When somebody got like—it was terrifying if somebody was—literally, had, like, you know, a common cold. You know, "Are you okay?" You know, "Are you going to make it?" [00:12:19]

So then Visual Aids asked us if we would make for A Day Without Art—to do a project. And we were ruminating and ruminating and trying to figure out what we were going to do, and we ended up making a broadsheet. So it

was like a newspaper, kind of like the size of a *Daily News*, where we did those, "If he were alive today, if she were alive today, if they were alive today, they would still be living with AIDS." And "AIDS" is the only thing written in red [which we called *For the Record*, also taken from the song *Let Me State for the Record*. -NBB]

Then we were invited, by Greater New York, to install that at MoMA PS 1, and we really thought we were going to blow the language up really large, the text. And when we got there it was just too big. It felt too loud, like we were—it's one thing to have it kind of in a newspaper form, where it feels a little more intimate. But having it really big just felt—

SVETLANA KITTO: —like sensationalism.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Yeah, it didn't feel right. We got all the way there and, I mean, they had assistants they wanted to give us, and they kept coming out. The curators were like—you know, Thomas would come, "How are you doing? How are you guys doing?" We're like, "We're fine, fine." But meantime we were panicked because we didn't like our piece. And we had never had that happen to us before, where we were really not sure what to do, and we were really like, "Oh, God," you know? I mean, we were coming down to like—I remember Zoe being like, "Should we just handwrite it with Sharpie?" Carrie was like, "Should we fold the piece of paper and just have it be blank?" Like, we literally do not know how we're going to approach this, and we're sitting there, in our room at a museum. [00:14:23]

It was interesting, because then the four of us, it was like our own art practices really came in. I mean, they always have. Our art practices have always come in, but this was really like—almost like a studio, private studio moment, of trying different things. This was right when Tony—very soon after, we found out that Tony was diagnosed with [. . . anal -NBB] cancer, and it was a very difficult time for us all. We were very close to Tony.

So we ended up taking—somehow, we flipped the—we knew, from all the other installs that we did, that when you wheat-paste, you see this ghosting through. And since this was now—we decided to print on newsprint, because the broadsides were newsprint. And I had done my own work, my *Merce Drawings* had been on newsprint, so I was familiar with—I kind of knew the thinness of it. I knew that when we glued it, you would be able to read it backwards. So, we ended up flipping it and doing this, "if you were alive today," and all that same text, flipped to the wall so that it was really, really, really ghosting, like a ghosting of—if you looked, you could follow it, and if you wanted—if you took the time, you could read it backwards, but we also had the broad sides there for people to be able to hold it and read it as a broadside, the stacks. [00:16:09]

And it felt like an interior outward. It felt like, to me—I was like, "Oh, this is if you're standing in the room, it's facing out," rather than shouting at you from the other side of the—and it had this doorway cut in it that went to the other gallery, that just was like—so you could actually penetrate through the space. That felt like a really good room that we did. That was a tough one, but it was—I think we found a way to have, like, a poetry—for lack of a better—in it. Like, it hit a note, it resonated, kind of a truth of what that piece could be and is. So that piece still has life. It travels, you know. It's a broadside, so people have it. [Stickers and postcards -NBB]

And fierce pussy has other projects ahead as well, that we're working on. We made that piece, the *Transmission*. It's like a letter from the future, an imagining of how things could potentially be if things really might change. It's an assumed change. Like, we called it the transpendancy, that this thing has happened, that we have evolved as a people, and that we look back to today. And we are saying to the people of today, like, "Do you need assistance? Do you need help?" Like, "We take care of each other," you know? We asked you, "Is there an E in the word human? Humane?" Like, "Are you not humane? Are you not human?" You know, "Do you not all have healthcare? Why do your people live in cages?" You know, "What are these words that you call each other?" You know, "Are you really killing each other? Is that really war?" [00:18:34]

Anyway, it's a quite beautiful text that we're now in our third of iteration of. That's our most up-to-date project, and we're about to go to the Beeler and do a project there, in Ohio.

SVETLANA KITTO: Cool. So do you want to talk at all about David Nelson?

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Sure, sure.

SVETLANA KITTO: Okay.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: So yeah, I mean, his name is woven through a lot of this talk. David was—you know, he was HIV-positive for a really long time. He was doing well on the medicine, but, you know, some people who have that kind of a loss, his lover—you know, David still made art. He was—you know, like all of us, he continued to make art, but he never really thrived. And David was an alcoholic, and he drank regularly, and it was really—I mean, I think of his death as an AIDS-related, alcoholic death. [00:19:53]

He got very—in, I guess, like 2012 or so, things got really bad, and he was going to lose his job at Jennifer's

[Bartlett]. I think the years of the medicine—he had really started to lose his memory, his short-term memory, and he really was—he tried to hide that. He would write things down, and he would look at you and go, "Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative]," and look really serious, as though he's really listening and taking things in. And later you would be like, "He doesn't remember any of that."

And I worked with him. We were doing projects together with Jennifer, and it was hard. I mean, I was having to cover for him. It was difficult. It was very difficult, and he wasn't honest about his alcoholism really at all. Eventually he was. A group of us, much earlier, had done an intervention with him, and he did admit to being an alcoholic and he did stop drinking for a time, but he very quickly went back to drinking, but then kept it closeted. So he said he wasn't drinking but he was drinking, and so he went underground with his drinking, which is I think one of the worst things you can do.

So he drank secretly, and it really took a large toll. Between that and the meds, it took a toll on David and he became pretty impossible, but also really scary. David went into a terrible, terrible, terrible, alcoholic slide when he lost his job with Jennifer. Because when he had his job, at least he kind of cleaned up for a few days a week, to get it together to come to work. But when he no longer had to come to work, I mean, it was—I don't know how much of the details I need to go into but it was shocking, quite shocking. [00:22:08]

And I managed to get David into—Barry and I—basically Joy and Carrie had him leave the apartment. They couldn't have him live there anymore. That was some years before he died even, they broke off with him. And Zoe pretty much didn't talk to him at all, for the most part.

I had curated a show with Linda Matalon, at La MaMa La Galleria, and that brought a lot of our friends together. David could barely show up for that. And he was doing very beautiful work still. He had started painting, which was kind of remarkable.

But at this point, really at the end there, he wasn't functioning at all. I mean, to the point where his door was off his apartment wall, literally off. He had to just—his apartment was kind of open to the public. He was living like a homeless person, he was going to lose everything. It was a nightmare. I got David into a treatment center, and he just couldn't keep it together afterwards. He was there for a month and I tried to get him into a Step Down Program in California. I tried really hard to quote-unquote save him, but he went back to drinking and he ended up dying from alcoholism. He drank beer of all things.

David's work was about to all go. He had a studio in Industry City, and there was one of these [eviction -NBB] locks on it to keep—he was evicted, and all of David K.'s work was in there, and all of his work was in there. And it was like—that was going to go in a dumpster. And we managed to get a locksmith [to break in -NBB] and we saved all his work, and all that work, and got it into storage. Friends helped with that, financially, a little bit. It was just a terrible time. [00:24:17]

And then David ended up dying. That's a long—that's a story in and of itself, which—I'll just end with that. Pretty much Barry Paddock and I were the only people left standing. I still was working at Jennifer's, and then I just quit that job. I just couldn't take it anymore. It became very dysfunctional there. Jennifer was not well either, and there was just bad people circling in at Jennifer's place, and I ended up slipping out myself. I just said, "I can't work here anymore." And that was kind of a nightmare. I was very poorly treated in the end, by other people who worked there. And Jennifer didn't have her wits about her. That was really a terrific loss of—they were like—that job was a kind of family, like we would have Christmases and it was a very—the line between personal and work was—there were no boundaries. So with that came the good and the bad.

So after David died, this friend, this person that I knew from when he was—who I had met in ACT UP, when he was about 16, and then I knew him again at Circus Amok coincidentally, and now he was the director of 80WSE, an NYU Gallery—Jonathan Berger, contacted me. Or actually, he had seen me when David was still alive, and he had remembered David. Jonathan tells this story that he was kind of at his wits end of being able to be an artist, like he just didn't know if he wanted to—could make art any more. He saw David Nelson's show at Debs and Company back in the '90s and never forgot it, and ran into me and said now, in 2011, "Do you know David Nelson? I would like to get in touch with him." And I was able to put David and Jonathan together, and Jonathan made a studio visit with David and put him in a show before David died. [The show was in 2015. -NBB] [00:26:34]

And then when David passed, Jonathan found out and asked me if I would curate a show of David's work at 80WSE. And so I did. And that was a little bit of a, like, push for me, because I had been wrapped in trying to keep him alive, and then he died, and I was like, "Oh, now I have to mount a show of his work." It was bittersweet. Of course, I wanted for the world to know his work and for people to see his work, but it was also like, "Goddamn you, you're still taking over [laughs] my life." What we made—what I think is a very, very, very beautiful show, and there's a catalogue of David's work. And I worked on that for about a year, in 2012 to 2013 to '14, because that happened a year after he died.

At that time, I had been working on this painting series that I called *Glory Holes*, up until then. I could no longer work on those when I was curating David's show, because they required a kind of attention and focus and calm that I didn't have. Like I would—David's work kind of took over. David and David's work took over. And I remember really fighting that inside, and talking to Zoe, and then Zoe said to me, you know, "Maybe curating this show is your practice right now." And once I took that in, I was like, "Oh, I can just really take on curating this show." And then I began to really enjoy it, and made curating my practice for that time. [00:28:25]

I was also making—that's when I started painting these bookmarks, because at my free time, I could make these tiny little paintings that are bookmarks. They're really paintings masquerading as bookmarks, but I can do them sort of in between, whereas the *Glory Holes* required lengths of really uninterrupted—sort of a meditative, quiet time that I didn't have.

I wrote an essay for David's book about our relationship. And the show was—we got a really—Holland Cotter reviewed it in the *Times*, and a lot of people saw David's work. A lot, a lot, a lot of people got to see David's work, and we had a whole room of his most recent paintings that many people didn't know about, because so many people stopped seeing David at the end, because of his alcoholism. He had lost so many contacts. So it was really—it was amazing for people to see his work.

But that said—I remember it was my birthday, September 12th. We did a walkthrough talk of David's show, and a small group of us went out for dinner afterwards, and the next day Tony called me, and he said, you know, "I've been waiting to tell you this. I wanted to wait until you were done. I knew you were really working on David's show, but I've been diagnosed with cancer." I just remember sitting here on this couch and just saying, "Tony, can I call you back? Can I call you right back?" And I just put that phone down for a second and I just broke down. I did not have a good feeling about it, and I was just—[00:30:17]

I mean, I remember when Tony and I sat at Angelica's and he told me he was HIV-positive, back in—I don't know when that was. '92? I'm not sure what year it was, when Tony tested positive. He took me to lunch to tell me, and I remember being really shaken by that, when he told me, but somehow, I remember feeling like, "Tony's going to survive this." I don't know why I thought that. I was terrified, but I had this—even though people were dying all around me—I mean, I was scared.

But this time, when Tony called me, I had a bad—I just—oh, I couldn't. I called him back. I pulled it together, I called him back, and he told me the details of it. He had [. . . anal -NBB] cancer. It was a teeny little—it was teeny. He had known, he had heard, in August. But he didn't want to fricking tell me because I was working on this project. And then it just—we just went into full on Tony and his cancer, and we—Zoe and Joy and Carrie, again—the four of us [and Andrea Blum -NBB] really rallied around him, and we took his cancer on. Almost like an action.

SVETLANA KITTO: Like a cause.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Like I went into deep—well, I mean it was like—the thing about Tony having cancer was it was an HPV cancer that, perhaps, if somebody didn't have a compromised immune system, they would have cleared. And there were all these drug trials on the horizon for people with this kind of anal cancer that—did I say colon? Anal. [00:32:10]

[. . . -NBB] HPV-related anal cancer, that most often people can clear. It's what Farrah Fawcett died of. In fact, I called the Farrah Fawcett Foundation, and people were fantastic there. Because we were going bananas, trying to find if there might be an alternative kind of treatment for him, like these drug trials that are now these—all these different new cancer treatments that are not necessarily chemo and radiation. Unfortunately, there are these trials, but they're not—if you have HIV, they haven't—you can't go on these trials if your T-cell count is too low, and Tony's T-cell—it was a double-edged sword. Because he chose to do radiation and chemo, it knocked his T-cell count so low that he then wasn't able—for these immunotherapy treatments that we really hoped to get him on, these trials.

We got—I mean, we had done massive research, massive planning, getting him—I forget what state we were going to go to. It was all set up, and then we found out, at the 11th hour, they wouldn't take you because he had this—the T-cell count. We were pissed, because they knew he was HIV-positive. They said he could—there was a lot of misinformation but it was heartbreaking, because down the line, there are going to be—not that far away from now, there is going to be immunotherapy treatment for people who are HIV-positive, who have this HPV-related cancer. But they're just not taking them into the trials. [00:34:09]

Anyway, Tony's cancer spread very quickly. It went from—they did find he had like a little speck on his liver, and a little speck on his lung. I mean, a speck. It was a teeny little—when I said it was tiny, it was tiny on his liver. But they did find that it was in these other places, which doesn't—it's not good news. But within a year, literally the language they used was that the cancer had displaced his liver. So, I mean, when I heard that Tony was sick and I hung up that phone, the first thing I thought of was, "I do not want"—I pictured myself at a fucking stand, a

wooden podium, eulogizing Tony, and I was like, "I don't want to eulogize." I didn't want to—and within a year, within a year.

And then that November of that year Sikkema Jenkins had invited us to the gallery that he showed at, to curate his show of Tony's work. So Joy—this time it was Joy, Carrie, Zoe, and Tony's wife. He married Andrea Blum, for insurance purposes, so we were like the sisters and the wife. We told everyone in the hospital, when they said, "Who are you?" "We're his sisters, I'm his sister, I'm his wife." And we curated this show of his, all of his, kind of, sketches that he did on napkins and scraps of paper. And his last series of paintings, we curated into Sikkema Jenkins. That wasn't a year-long curatorial—but the curatorial project that I did with Jonathan, that was like a retrospective. Tony's was this body of work and his recent paintings. [00:36:14]

But anyway—that was just—that was losing—I mean, losing Tony is still—I just can't believe it. I cannot believe it. And I see his death as very much an AIDS-related death. I mean, I don't think he would have died from that had he not been HIV-positive, and he would have gotten a different kind of treatment had he not been HIV-positive.

SVETLANA KITTO: Right.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: So, it's really upsetting. I mean, I went online, and I researched these drug trials, and I contacted the people on the board of these hospitals where these trials were happening. I mean, it's amazing now, with the Internet and being able to track down people's numbers. I mean, I got phone calls back from people on the heads of these trials, doctors, calling. Like, I was talking to their secretaries. This major—I mean, they were really kind, calling me from an airport in, like, Dubai or wherever the hell they are, like doing some—you know, it's drug trial people, drug doctors, pharmaceutical industry-related doctors, but doctors that are research doctors. And I talked to a lot of people, getting advice. And people were kind, and they did give me advice, and I got to talk to a lot of people, but Tony's dead. You know, Tony died. [00:37:55]

But I mean, I talked to nurses and I talked to all kinds—you know, people in California, because it's a huge thing in San Francisco. Like, people that have survived AIDS—you know, the height of the AIDS crisis, right—people that the medicines worked on, but now have this whole other set of medical problems due to being on these pills for so long. There's a whole other wave of people that have survived being positive for this long. And HPV is a cancer that's very tenacious in a lot of these bodies, and there needs to be way more research on it and way more education and outreach around it.

And then we get Trump now, who is just taking this, like, giant, you know—he's like a bulldozer—all the advances that we made and all the fighting that we did, it feels like all of it was just in a—it's like taking a bomb to a building and it's just down. You know, it takes you—how many decades are we away from this, that we built this and tried to make some strides—and then we're finally getting some kind of healthcare in this country. And it's just, in a moment, going to be munched, just devastated and destroyed.

So that's been my political work now, that I've been doing, was mostly around trying to save the ACA. I mean, I'm still interested in single payer and other ideas. But it's just—that's where I go back to when I say to you, like, I—this is the round where I am now—you know, I'm 55 and I'm like, "I cannot believe—like in every cell of my body—I cannot believe that we do not have healthcare in this country, that healthcare is just not a right. I mean, that we all have healthcare." I cannot believe it. Of course, I can believe it, I'm living it. But it's just, it's hard to be—it's hard, it's really hard. [00:40:16]

And yet, then to do this work and to be fighting these fights, and being, "Healthcare is a right," it's un-fucking believable. And then, you know, you have people—like when I say to you, you know, Agnes Martin had that whole philosophy of, you know, "You can't do anything but make your art if you want to be an artist. You know, you can't even have a cat." And I'm like, "I don't know, I'm somebody that does—I do want to have that kind of calm studio time. I love showing up and making my work." And I also have this, "Who else is going to do it?" You know, "We have to do it, you have to do it, you have to do it, you have to do it." You have to do it, because they're going to fucking take it away from you. You know, and it's that thing: "When they came for you, I didn't speak up. When they came for you, I didn't speak up. And then they came for you and there was no one there to speak up."

So, can it really change? I don't know. I have, I guess, this kind of hope of moving forward. You know, that King quote of the arc—the larger arc—but who knows? The arc of justice, you know.

SVETLANA KITTO: "The arc of the universe bends towards justice." Is that what it is?

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Yeah, what is just or justice, or something. But it's the long arc of history. I don't think it's the universe, it's history. But yeah, the arc of the universe.

SVETLANA KITTO: Or something like that. Yeah, I guess I'm curious—and it might be a good sort of place to stop is—but how, like in the work that you're making now—

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Yeah, I was just thinking about that.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah, how have these experiences that you've had, very recently, come into the studio and the work? [00:42:03]

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Right. Well, you know, back—I showed at this gallery in the 2000s, early 2000s, mid-2000s, called Virgil de Voldere. And I had made some work there during that time where I just tore a piece of paper and sewed it back together. That was a lot about repair. I had done—when I was drawing all those, because I kind of felt like I—I never said I stopped making art, but I stopped painting and was just doing all those drawings.

Some of those drawings were trees. Many of those drawings I made of trees cut. So they were cut from their root system, from their—there are all these stumps I saw at Mount St. Helens, from the slash-and-burn. There were these huge trees that had been cut, with the roots—you know, the wooden roots in place. I've always said I'm never going to make art from things like this, that I see, but it made its way in, really unintentionally, metaphorically.

So, there's these cut trees, but the tree would be flowering, and it was like, "Is this tree flowering in spite of being cut? Or is it cut because it's flowering?" Like, is it a beautiful thriving thing, so someone wanted to cut it down? Or was it cut down and it flowered in spite of being cut and detached from its root? And I did figures like that as well. I did a human figure with—one leg is the foot and the other leg is a stump, and the tree stump is there. So, it's kind of a predicament of being cut from its base, so it's free to move, but it's also now amputated from its root. [00:44:02]

Sad little kind of drawings, and some of them were—and then I did this one of a tree tied together. So it was also a flowering tree, and one of the parts of the tree is the base and the other is flowers. It's a lot about relationship, friendships, feelings that you might feel inside yourself or feelings that you might feel with a friend. Like, "Oh, you're flowering and I'm the base," or, "You're the base and I'm flowering." I did a lot of pictures of donkeys' asses. Thinking maybe a little bit Circus Amok-y, like Lucy and Ethel. "Who's the ass end and who's the head end?" You know, the polka dot, and also then, like, finding your head and finding your ass and, "Get your face out of my ass"—kind of. There's a lot to those. Those were a while back [in the late 1990s. -NBB]

But moving forward, I think from that cut tree came these drawings of—I just started doing circles, concentric circles, of like a tree ring. But really, I wasn't thinking about trees, but they look like tree rings, and they're about time. I did a large series of paintings that are actually—but those are just circles inside of circles, a larger circle and then smaller circles within it. People think they're lines, but they're actual full circles moving inward. And they're in shades of brown, so they look like tree rings, but they could all be—I want to make some that are all white, or all black, with parts of the rainbow.

And I had done these drawings—my martial arts teacher had—this was around the time that he was dying, Mr. Chan, one of my martial arts teachers. And I was out at Jennifer's, at the beach. She gave me her home for a week at the beach and I was kind of on an artist residency, a self-given artist residency. And I did all these—I was collecting shells and then I found these *Poli duplicatus*, people call them moon shells, *Polinices duplicatus*. They are a spiral shell. So I like the idea of a spiral in terms of the golden ratio. [Fibonacci -NBB] You would pick them up on the beach and it was, like, usually you keep them if they're intact and you throw them away if they're broken. [00:46:35]

But the quote-unquote broken ones, I started to paint the insides of, so I was tracking the interior with these really bright colors and kind of taking these broken, discarded shells, and taking them in and painting them and kind of elevating them in some way, and also tracking the interiors. The golden ratio is Fibonacci, so that kind of counting system, I was interested in as well. And then when I was looking at these shells at the beach, I started to draw them in this kind of weaving pattern, this over-under pattern, actually drawn very detailed.

I was doing these really detailed drawings of the shells, and it led me to realize, "Oh, I want to flatten it and open it out, like to take this spiral and flatten it." And it became more about negative space and the space in between things and the universe and connectivity, almost like string theory. I wasn't intentionally thinking about that, but like, somebody talked to me about Indra's net, this Buddhist idea of a semi-precious or precious stone at every crossing of a net, and a net in a cosmic drawing. So I was making those drawings, and then I realized, when I wanted to flatten it out, that's when I wanted to return to painting. And I came up with these systems. [00:48:23]

And then I had seen in—I was in Hawaii, and I was hiking, and I was up high, looking down at the mouth of a volcano, and I saw something that was a round rainbow. And I realized I was staring at this round—like, literally a fully round rainbow, 360 degrees, with violet at center. I was staring at it and I noticed my own shadow within the rainbow, and I could move my arms and see my shadow. And I went a little further on the trail and it said this is a site where, you know, Polynesians or Hawaiians would come for ritual and prayer and ceremony. And if

you're here at a certain time, under certain conditions, you might see this round rainbow. And it requires the sun to be at a certain angle, and the clouds to be as such, and it's—I've read a lot about it and the shadow is called the Spectre of the Brocken, and you often see them from airplanes. I just saw one the last time I flew. I was lucky enough.

And so, I got into looking at this white-on-white, because it's just all white cloud, but you have this rainbow. I then brought that into—and they're called glories. The rainbow is called a glory. I started to make these weaving paintings that I was making already. Then I made them square and I parsed out, in a very particular measure—I'm not going to go on about all the details of it because it's too difficult to explain, but there's an XY axis and there's a very specific color measure, and they go violet out to red or red out to violet, much like the colors of the rainbow. And they're not round, they're a grid and they're a squaring. [00:50:16]

But the thing about these paintings is, I was curious about color and curious about—could one feel the color? Like, if there's such a little amount of color in these paintings. But I was wondering or curious. They're like color studies. They're white, gray, and black, plus all the colors of the ROYGBIV and VIBGYOR. And I was wondering, if one let their—I mean, I've talked about it before, where I've said, like: If you let your ego recede, or if you let your eyes kind of soften, and you don't look and think just with your brain and your head and your ideas first, but can you think with your body first?

And that's where I come into—I think my years of meditation and Tai Chi and Qigong and really working from a physical place. That's why I think they're called arts. Martial art, it's a physical art. Yoga is, I think, a practice of art, a joining, a yoking. So, I think with these—I mean, the paintings, for me, were really about experience. They weren't about ideas. Although there might be a color theory aspect to them, they're not theory-based works. And they're—hopefully, if one spends time with them, you move your body right to left, you move forward and back, you can kind of find a sweet spot of looking at them. And if your eyes relax, you start to see the colors, or if you don't see them, I think you feel them. And oddly enough, if you look at them from a certain angle they round out and it's almost like they are insistent on being the round rainbow. [00:52:12]

And so, I think looking at all of that, really dealing with color in that way, at the same time and even before, my work is not—I'm not insistent on chronology. I will come in and out of bodies of work, and return to things, and things sit in me for a really long time before I actually take the time to make them. And so, I had been wanting to do these embedded pieces. Since like 1999, I had this shape embedded in a piece of foam core. I knew I wanted it embedded. I didn't know it would go on the wall yet, but sometimes for me, when I remember people, I often—not often but sometimes—I remember them in a shape or a color. Like the way you're sitting right now, I might remember you there, and especially if there was a white wall behind you. And it's not that I see—I'm not looking at you and seeing your rainbow, or I see—what do they call that?

SVETLANA KITTO: Aura.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: The aura, it's not that. It's really much more of like, I feel you later and your shape. Literally your shape in space I might remember. I sometimes remember those things more than I remember what someone said. And I started to make those shapes. I started to let myself draw those shapes and then make them in this material. [00:53:57]

Then, I've always been interested in dance and the body. Cunningham has been one of my favorite choreographers, and I saw a Cunningham production at the Joyce. It was the first piece that I saw indoors, posthumously, where he wasn't there. But I was incredibly, like, extra moved by the intelligence of the dancers' bodies, the way that they occupy and pierce space. I was moved to tears that night, and when I came home, on my table was this Arts & Leisure section of [*The New York Times*, March 2011–NBB]—the cover of all the dancers. I think it was *Antic Meet*, it was a restaging of *Antic Meet*. And I just took a pen—I didn't know what—and I drew their shapes, and I was so struck by, "Oh, those look just like these shapes I've been drawing for years, of people." But I was just drawing them from memories and not—I wasn't thinking I was drawing it like, literally. It was memory. And then I made this drawing and it was like, oh, those shapes. It's like realism versus impressionism. Like, I would have an impression of your shape, but there it is in a photograph, it's realism.

And so, then I started drawing people for real, in life. I went to, even, the New York Art Students League, where I hadn't been since I was 13. When I went to Music & Art, I went there and drew the nude. And now I went back and drew the nude all these years later, and it was magical to go back there. And I did some drawings of just friends, like Ginger and MPA, and Scottie, a couple people who might come to my studio. I used to be like, "Do you mind if I just draw you really quickly?" And I would just draw a quick line drawing, and it was almost an easier way than waiting for this impression or this memory. So I have some of them that are actual and some of them that are memory, you know? [00:56:05]

SVETLANA KITTO: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: *Impression Or Realism*, I call it. And they look like the *Merce Drawings*, and I think

they're—so those pieces are about—again, there are these unmoored figures in space, somewhat like those drawings that I had been doing, of the monkey or the shoe or the tree, these unmoored shapes on a page. These are, like, unmoored shapes on a wall. Then I started thinking much more about the body in relation to a room, the body in relation to architecture. You know, I think about a door or a window. All the spaces that you are in are made to fit the human body, and we are always in measure.

It's like the way you can have a conversation and be listening to the radio at the same time, or hearing a song. Like, you're always aware of where you are in space, and in relation to the room or the objects in the room. You know, "Oh, out of the corner of my eye there's a stack of books here, that's making a shape. Oh, there's the angle of that couch, or the distance between me and that corner, me and you. Oh, what's the measure between your hip and your shoulder?" Well, da Vinci was—you know, the *Vitruvian Man* is, you know, the biggest—arms and legs extended, as that relates, again, to Fibonacci and the distances of the body. And all of that is related to architecture and nature as well. So that all, I think, has come into the work that I'm doing now, and it's getting more abstract in terms of—maybe away from actually drawing the body itself, but the body in relation to space. But it's still connected. [00:58:00]

And I was able to do a dance piece where I took black elastic bands and made it to fit a human body, and they could move with the band, within the band, and make shapes. So it's been kind of enacted, as well as—and it's funny, because I also have a big history of making thread drawings. I've done a lot of drawings with thread, and there are people who think, "Oh, that's about thread, and thread as textile, and it's like writing and text." I don't mind that take on it at all. I mean, I had a friend, Xylor, and Xylor was like, "Don't"—she was really upset that I was using thread, because it was women's—I'm going to be pigeonholed into women—it's going to be women's art and that whole—that it could be. I was like, "You know, I'm using thread because I like the quality of the line." I like the line from point A to point B that it makes, and I like the way the light hits the thread, and I'm using it as I would a pencil or any other material that would be available to me, or to everyone.

So, I'm not necessarily making it because of the story of thread. But if you have a story of thread, I'm not against it. It's in there. It's like Johanna saw those paintings at—Johanna Burton who curated *Trigger* recently, at the New Museum. It turns out she had seen those paintings in 2009, the first three I had ever made and showed at Virgil's, and she remembered them and contacted me—how long is that, eight years later?

SVETLANA KITTO: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Is it eight or more? 2009 to 2018.

SVETLANA KITTO: Nine. [00:59:58]

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Nine years later, she remembered those paintings and curated them into a show now. Well, this was 2017, that she curated it. And she saw them through a very—her whole thesis of *Trigger* is around gender, and at first I didn't see how those paintings made their way there, into that show. But of course I do because it's—or Avram curated *Found*, and he saw the embedded work, and when he wanted to curate my work and just thinking about my—he was talking to me about my work in terms of—in a queering of the—and I was like, "But this work isn't directly about gayness." Like, maybe the monkey with the dress is like, "Oh, that's gay." Or a little naked girl's body with a Frankenstein head—that's how I felt, like, "That's gay, but this work is not."

Avram was like, "No, no, no, this work is entirely gay. It's the making of a queer person. Only a queer person would make this work." And I absolutely understand and agree. He could tell you exactly why far better than I can, but I get it, and I get why Johanna put those paintings in *Trigger* as well. The maker of them, even though the works themselves aren't telling that particular story of gender—like it's not didactic, I think—it's just like, I made that. So when you asked me, "How does that—maybe how does AIDS come into all of these"—these are one's history. It's all—you're squinting like you didn't—

SVETLANA KITTO: I'm thinking.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Yeah. Because it's all—it's the—you know, you make these things. You can't separate yourself out from—

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah. Yeah.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: You know? Even if you're not telling that exact—like fierce pussy's work could really be didactic. [01:02:01]

SVETLANA KITTO: Right.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: And clear, and I'm so grateful that I had.

SVETLANA KITTO: It was urgent, it was directed.

[END OF BRODY18_2OF2_TRACK8.]

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Specific.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah, yeah.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: You know, we use language and image. And I'm grateful for that. But it's all in all of our work in a very distant way.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah. What I'm thinking about is just—and you can tell me if I'm off. But when you're talking about the impression of bodies, I'm just thinking of—and like, maybe not remembering something that someone said but remembering a shape. That to me feels very related to the experience of not only bodies—how many bodies you've encountered in your life that are gone now—but then also masses of bodies in process, in movements, in political movements.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Yes, absolutely, and in relation to one another.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah. And then affectively, like the emotional content—to me it feels like, somehow, when you're talking about the dancers and drawing the shapes, it feels so related to love. Like that's the sensation that I—

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Mm-hmm [affirmative], I think so. It's interesting that you say about absence, because when I make these pieces, when I have gotten to carve them in the wall, there are some—I haven't done this publicly yet, but the absence of the shape, before the shape goes in—because I carve the space before I embed it—the negative space is something I'm really interested in.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah, right. You said this, right? [00:02:01] Yeah, you did. You said, "Just everyone that's not here."

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Yeah, yeah. And then everyone that is here, and still always here. I mean, somebody like—I know we're winding down, but somebody like Tony. People that—you have friendships with people that you don't necessarily see every day, right? Tony and I could go a few months without talking.

SVETLANA KITTO: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: I mean, from the day he tested—the day he got—

SVETLANA KITTO: —diagnosed.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: —told me he had cancer, I talked to him every single day. Not a day went by. Not a day. I called Tony, he picked that phone up, and he would be like, "Hey girl, let me call you back. I have to call you later." I mean, he would, no matter what. We talked every day. But prior to that, you could go six months. I mean, that would be long. Six months would be long, but you could go three months.

And so now that it's been time that he hasn't been—it's really—I mean, that's strange. It's very strange, because it's not—it's a kind of—I can't believe I can't pick up the phone and call him. And that's like—it could be like, "Hey, Tony it's too long. Let's go get a cup of coffee, or go eat dinner, or go see a show, or something." Or, "You have a show, or I have a show." Or show up for each other. [Laughs.] You know? I mean, I just can't believe that he's really gone, you know? It's really—I miss him. I miss—yeah.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: I miss a lot of people. And then life is short. It's really, really, really, really short. Even when you live a good, long life, I think it's really short.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah. [00:04:00]

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: I understand people wanting to take their lives and end it early, but I'm like, "It's really short anyway."

SVETLANA KITTO: [Laughs.]

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Stick around and see. It's not long that we're here at this time, so enjoy it. Enjoy, enjoy, enjoy. That's it. [Laughs.] Got to have fun and be good to each other. Be kind and spend your time well.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah. Well, thank you so much, Brody, I think that's a beautiful place to stop.

NANCY BROOKS BRODY: Svetlana, thank you, you're the best.

[END OF BRODY18_2OF2_TRACK9.]

[END OF INTERVIEW.]