Linda Legassie interviewed by Carolyn Bergonzo
Saturday, August 9, 2025, via Zoom
Revised by Linda on December 28, 2025

Carolyn Bergonzo: Linda, do you want to start from the beginning with how you met Susanne Langer?

Linda Legassie: Sure. I met Susanne Langer in the fall of 1978. My husband, Norman, and I, and my brother-in-law, who was 16 years old at the time, living with us and going to school in Old Lyme, we were searching for a place to rent. I took a white and blue lined index card, three by five size, and wrote in black marker, "Sculptor and editor seek reasonable rent," and our phone number. We posted it on an outdoor bulletin board, which was the public space for people to post small posters. I put this one right outside our local grocery store, and Mrs. Langer called me only a day after I posted it. She wanted to meet me and have an interview. I was interviewed at her home in Old Lyme. Norman did not come with me to that initial interview. He was, at that time, taking courses at the Lyme Academy of Fine Arts and a lot of his work was at night. It was the end of October. It was dark. It was a dark and stormy night.

Carolyn: And—just to clarify—you're looking for a place to rent, and she has a space, but she wants to interview you first. So, it's a dark and stormy night…

Linda: And the place to rent is not her house, but the house across the street from her. This is in a very wooded area in Old Lyme. And the way her house is situated—it's a 1764 central chimney cape, which was built on a hillside. And the hillside met the road. In the 1940s when the Connecticut highway crew went through, they took through eminent domain as much area as they could from the front of the house, so you had to drive up a sort of circular driveway to the back of her house. And that was the main entry.

Carolyn: That was a main entry always, okay.

Linda: What I mean is that to get into her house you'd have to go up this long, dirt semicircular driveway. The house was painted colonial red at that time, so in the dark, it was very difficult to see. I'd never been there before. Of course, I was kind of nervous, because I really needed a place to rent. But she had one of those yellow bug lights on at the back door, and when I knocked, she opened the interior door which had one row of tiny windows. She stood behind the screen door. It was almost shocking to see her. As I look back, I remember that she had white hair cut quite short, in a flurry of whisps and curls, reminding me of photos of Albert Einstein. I could see she had a smallish frame, taller than me. She was probably five two and quite thin at that time, and she spoke with a German accent. I had known that because of the phone call earlier that day, but I didn't know at the time that she had already authored several books on philosophy. *Mind: An Essay on Human Feeling, Volume III*, was her ninth book. And she invited me in, and we sat down next to her Steinway piano in this little center chimney cape. And I don't know if you're familiar with early American houses, but the rooms are quite small, the ceilings are low, and the windows are also quite small. It was kind of a cozy, tight-feeling space. She asked what I did. And at the time, I was working at a monthly national newspaper—I was a copyeditor and graphic designer. She said that she really was looking for someone to be a groundskeeper, which Norm could do, and someone to take care of the housekeeping. And as I sat there for a few minutes, and she listened to what I had to say, she said, "Well, you know, Linda, you're much too literary to be my housekeeper. So your first job as my secretary will be to hire a housekeeper." I knew her for a total of seven years, and over that time, we had eight housekeepers.

Carolyn: Oh, wow.

Linda: Mm hmm.

Carolyn: Why was that? Was that because she was very particular?

Linda: Mm hmm, yes.

Carolyn: Oh, yes, okay.

Linda: Well, you know I was doing some math. I met her when I was 26 and she was 83.

Carolyn: Wow.

Linda: At that time, she was the oldest person I ever knew. My paternal grandparents had passed away, probably about six or seven years prior to that. And my maternal grandfather passed away when I was 13. I was quite taken aback by her whole demeanor. Her house was full of books. When I walked in the door, immediately on the right was her worktable. And as you know, from those Jim Lord photographs, it was just piled high with papers and books and her file cabinets, those metal file cabinets. I wasn't sure that it was something that I could do, being her secretary. What would that mean? She described that she had published books before, and she was working on the third volume in a three-volume work, and that she needed to work all day.

Carolyn: Mm hmm.

Linda: And so that began the adventure.

Carolyn: That's amazing. I have some follow-up questions. She ended up renting the house across the street to you and Norm, and in exchange you were—you served these roles as groundskeeper and secretary.

Linda: That's right.

Carolyn: And just to step back a little bit—what brought you to Old Lyme? I don't know this about you.

Linda: Yeah, I know you don't, yes, well.

Carolyn: Whatever you're comfortable sharing. I'm just curious about, you know, showing up and putting your info on the grocery store board.

Linda: Well, my maternal grandparents built a summer house in 1954 in Hawks Nest Beach in Old Lyme. The house is about two blocks away from the beach, so it was not on the beach technically. And shortly after Norm and I got married, we were renting an apartment, and the rent went up on the apartment, which was not in Old Lyme. It was in East Hampton, Connecticut, which was my hometown.

I asked my grandmother if Norm and I could rent [the beach house] and move out in the summer so the family could go there. And she said, yes, I could do that. That was very adventuresome for me because it had been almost a sacred summer place for the family, and when we moved in, Norm insulated the attic, so the house became year-round. And my grandparents had installed the furnace there shortly after my grandfather retired, and within eight months of his retirement, he passed away from lung cancer, so they never really went there in the winter at all. So here, Norman and I were moving in and out of the "beach house." For a number of years, we rented the beach house as an academic rental, which means from September to June, and then in the summer we moved out. So, we eventually decided that was rough.

Carolyn: Yeah, that's a lot of logistics to manage, moving in and out.

Linda: In 1976 Norm decided to start his own business. We had always been interested in the arts, and especially in gems and minerals, and so we started making sterling silver jewelry—cutting cabochons and learning to cut and solder silver. I was working full-time at the newspaper and Norman took on caretaking jobs. That's how I knew we could help Mrs. Langer with the groundskeeping.

Carolyn: Absolutely. But you were really—you were thinking that this moving during the summer was getting a bit much. You wanted some permanent—some stability.

Linda: That's right.

Carolyn: Interesting. Do you remember what you told Norm after that first meeting with Langer? Because you were, you know, convincing him, or telling him, like, we should do this, and sort of relaying to him the deal that Langer had posed to you. Do you recall anything of that conversation or impressions of Langer that you shared with Norm at that point?

Linda: That's a really good question. I have to think a minute. Well, it was a much smaller property than the beach house. So great question, Carolyn—I have to write that down and ask Norman.

Carolyn: You were sort of like, okay, it'll probably be easier to manage, right?

Linda: That's right, yeah, and neither Norm nor I had read her books.

Carolyn: Or heard of her name at all?

Linda: No, not at all. I didn't have any friends who had gone to Connecticut College. It was a whole new world for me and for Norman. We knew she was a writer, and that she, as she indicated at the interview, that she needed her privacy.

Carolyn: She needed her privacy, you said, to do her work.

Linda: Yes.

Carolyn: Oh, I was going to ask, did she identify herself as a philosopher and share that she had taught at Connecticut College and that affiliation? Did she share a little bit about her professional background with you at that interview?

Linda: I don't know if she did at that initial interview.

Carolyn: And do you remember being—how old she is, 83, you said. She was the oldest person you had ever met, right? And here she was—and she had work that she had to get done. How did that sit with you?

Linda: Fine. I could respect that.

Carolyn: Yeah, for sure.

Linda: Yes. Well, we did pay her rent. And when it started off, I worked for her on the weekends, and I maintained my job at the newspaper for two and a half years, working Monday through Friday at the newspaper, working with Mrs. Langer on the weekends. I had correspondence that she received during the week, and wrote letters back to people, as she dictated. She did have a new electric typewriter, and I just kind of jumped in and started taking care of things, you could say. And at first it was to handle her correspondence, and eventually I left the newspaper to work with her full time. At about that time she needed someone to drive her because she felt her eyesight was failing. And so, the day would start out where—actually, I should start with the evening, because her way to work was—she worked mainly in in the evening and early morning hours.

Carolyn: Oh, wow.

Linda: So, she would go to sleep at about 1am and wake up around 9am. On the very first day of my full-time job with her, the phone rang at about 9:15. It was a summer morning, and she said, "Oh, no! Linda, call the fire department." I called 911 and Norm and I ran over there. And she cooked every day, percolated coffee and cooked up bacon, but she took the meat off the bacon, and she just really cooked up the fat part of the bacon because that's what she enjoyed and that's what she could chew the easiest, because her teeth were failing her. And what happened over time is that the wooden cupboards above her stove, I think, became so saturated with fat grease that they caught fire. She refused to leave the house. She had put her pillow on top of the frying pan on the stove to put out the fire, but the house was full of smoke. She had a galley kitchen where the stove was on the left, and an aisle with the sink and the refrigerator on the other side of the stove. But her one-person little kitchen table was right opposite the stove, where she would look out the side window. And when I ran into the house, she was seated there at her table, drinking her coffee, looking out the window, and there was above her head a whole line of smoke.

Carolyn: Oh, wow.

Linda: And the fire marshal or fireman—it's all volunteer firemen, still is—the poor fireman convinced her to at least go into the bathroom. She didn't want to leave the house. She went into the bathroom and just waited there until they could be sure that everything was copacetic.

Carolyn: Why did she not want to leave?

Linda: She was so stubborn. Carolyn, I mean, she always had her own mind on how to do things. And, yeah, that was it.

Carolyn: Why didn't she call the fire department herself? She called you to call them?

Linda: Yes, that's the perennial question. I don't know.

Carolyn: Oh, wow. And that was your first full-time day on the job?

Linda: Yeah.

Carolyn: Interesting.

Linda: And it's a good thing that I had known her previously. Otherwise, I might have just said, oh dear. It would have been like, what have I gotten myself into? But yes, that's the story of my first day there.

Carolyn: That is so fascinating. So, you noted that you'd handle her correspondence when you started with her full-time. You mentioned you would drive her around town. I'm wondering if you could go a little bit more into the nature of your full-time work with Langer?

Linda: Okay, well, the note cards. Of course, she created her handwritten manuscript pages from her note cards. And the handwritten pages, the manuscript, I would then deliver them to the typist who lived in a town about 15 minutes away from us. And I started helping her deliver the typescript, well, the manuscript and the typescript, even before I started working for her full-time. So, we must have gone out in the late afternoons to the typist while I was still part time. And then once we received the typewritten pages, I would proofread them against her handwritten note cards.

Carolyn: Mm hmm.

Linda: And if there were corrections to be made, then we would go back to the typist, who would retype. I was not the typist for her book. I only handled the correspondence. And I should say with that too, with the correspondence, is that all the financial matters were handled by her son, Leonard, who lived in Scarsdale, New York.

Carolyn: Mm hmm.

Linda: So that part of her living was not something that I handled, of course.

Carolyn: So it's more correspondence that she would receive from people who had read her work, or friends or colleagues, invitations, things like that?

Linda: That's right.

Carolyn: And she would dictate a response to you that you would then type up?

Linda: That's correct.

Carolyn: Do you remember any interesting correspondence that she received that or, you know, or things that you were—any element of that work that sticks out to you?

Linda: Well, I knew right from the start that she had a readership. And I think that's probably when I, you know, went to the library and found some of the books to see what I could see. And I would say, they were, you could call it fan mail. And of course, every day she received a letter from Wesley Wehr.

Carolyn: Every day?

Linda: Every day,

Carolyn: Oh, wow.

Linda: Mm hmm, yes. And every day, she called her dear friend, Dr. Perkins. And so, mind you, in her house she had a telephone. No radio, no television. And the phone was in her bedroom. It was a bedside phone, not one of those, what she called modern things that mounted on the wall. She had a black desk phone. I never answered her phone. Some things were, you know, really kept quite private, for sure. So, when I showed up to work there, she had no time for other conversations. She didn't learn much about my life beyond what I told her in the interview. And I could maintain that, you know. I knew that she was trying to write and read every night. For all that time I drove her up to Dr. Perkins in upstate New York, I didn't really talk to her much at all about my private life, and I knew more about her private life through conversations that I had on the phone with her daughter-in-law, Nancy Langer. Because after a while, her family in Scarsdale were concerned about her—should she be still driving, and the whole question of how to deal with a person who was so, so totally driven to be independent that it was a big learning experience for me with navigating how do I keep someone with their dignity and yet understand that their family and even I—because I felt very responsible for her—were worried for her personal safety. She, in the years that I knew her, was quite ambulatory. When I first described her to Norman, I said that she was very spry. And she walked every afternoon, at about 3:30 in the afternoon. She would at first drive her car to the spot in Old Lyme up more into the woods where there weren't any telephone poles, no wires overhead. And she would walk about a mile a day.

Carolyn: Oh, wow.

Linda: Yeah. And after a while, as I became her driver, we would drive to that spot. She always walked with what she called a shillelagh. It was a walking stick that her nephew had given her, and it was a sapling of some sort of tree. I'm not sure what the wood was, but the sapling had bittersweet vines growing out of it so that the base of the walking stick was the sapling, and then, as it went to the top, this swirl of an ancient bittersweet vine was smoothed out and attached to the straight part of the young sapling. That was her shillelagh. I don't know what happened to that after she moved. But anyway, she always walked with her shillelagh. And I feel like I'm kind of getting away from your question. Sorry.

Carolyn: No, no, I mean, it's fascinating. I'm trying to understand, based on the bits and pieces of like—what the shape of her days at that time looked like? So, she woke up in the morning, made her

coffee and bacon and sort of—can you take me through what a typical day in the life of Langer looked like from your perspective at that point?

Linda: Of course, yeah. Well, after breakfast, she would get dressed, she bathed. Then it would be time for lunch. She drank coffee all day long with a lot of milk. And even when she went for a walk in the later afternoon, she brought a thermos of coffee with milk in it. She was a diabetic and she managed her insulin herself after breakfast; I never tended to that. I never helped her get dressed. At about noon, she would have lunch. She never went out to restaurants. And after lunch, she would read *The New York Times*. And she mainly read the headlines, because by the time I knew her she felt her eyesight was failing, and so she—that's how she listened to the news or, you know, knew what was happening in the rest of the world was through the *New York Times* and talking to Dr. Perkins, and also to Nancy Langer. And she also talked with Leonard. I don't think she talked with him during the week. It was mostly on weekends. I don't know that she ever spoke much on the phone with her son, Bertie. They lived in California. After lunch, sometimes, in the early times when I was with her, she would have visitors in the afternoon. Mrs. Schaefer, Dr. Karl Schaefer's wife, might visit. And also Bunny Wheeler, a retired biology professor from Connecticut College. They were friends. In the afternoon is when we would go to the typist to pick up stuff, and then by three o'clock, 3:30, go for the walk, back to the house, have tea on Sundays. If it was a cold day, she would take out and have a sip of sherry. I don't drink, so I never had any sherry with her, but it was—a lot of her time was quite driven by…

Carolyn: Could you repeat that? You would get groceries, is that what you said?

Linda: Yeah, in the early afternoon. She had favorite places to go for groceries. If she needed prescriptions, we would go to the pharmacist. And she did not use the Old Lyme pharmacist because she didn't trust them. So we went to another pharmacy, which was interestingly down the street from her typist's office. She cooked all her own meals. She prepared her supper in the early evening, I think maybe once, well, maybe three or four times on a weekend, she did entertain people. We bought shad once or twice with asparagus that she served for friends. She also, you know, played the piano and the cello. And by the time I arrived on the scene, I think only one person in the quartet was still, well, as she would call it, "hadn't bumped the line" yet.

Carolyn: This was a quartet that she had in Old Lyme, at some point?

Linda: Yeah.

Carolyn: She would host a quartet at her house?

Linda: Correct.

Carolyn: Do you remember who that one person was?

Linda: No, I don't know. I never met them. And if I had, you know, if I'd met them, I would have recalled their name. But I, I don't know.

Carolyn: No worries. And then it was after supper where she would kind of get to work?

Linda: Oh, yeah, she would get to work. That's right.

Carolyn: And what were you…

Linda: Yeah, I would say she would probably work from about 7pm to 1am. That was her work time.

Carolyn: I take it that you weren't—this was after you were gone?

Linda: That's correct.

Carolyn: And so, what that work looked like in terms of, you know, reading or drafting, we can kind of put that together based on—well, sorry, one question I had is about her research materials, her access to books. Because, like you were saying, it's not a time where there was internet access So I'm curious how she acquired books. Did you help her with that?

Linda: Yep, that's what we would do after lunch in the early afternoon. We'd go to the Olin Library at Connecticut College quite often. She still had access via her having taught there.

Carolyn: Did she kind of go in with, like, "I'm looking for these books"?

Linda: Yes, she had her list together, for sure. And we always traveled with an ivory-colored beige canvas bag, and she always had some books in there and note cards. We always traveled with her work. Even if we went out for a walk, we would take that ivory-colored canvas bag just in case there was something that sparked a thought. Absolutely, all the time. So we went to Connecticut College a couple times a week. I would say, you know, I never kept a diary on this. But I know that we went there quite often. And we worked with Miss Helen [Aitner], she was the lending librarian. From time to time, Mrs. Langer may have called the library ahead, because Miss [Aitner] was always ready when we got there. She stood at attention when Mrs. Langer came in, Helen [Aitner]. She was a very quiet, sweet lady, I recall. She was quite thin, and she just dashed around the library to collect books for Mrs. Langer when we were there. And that's where the space in the early afternoon would come in, we'd get groceries, we would switch it up, it wasn't always the same every day, but it was similar, similar things needed to get done.

Carolyn: I see. Sort of running tasks around town to get what was needed for groceries, and then for her research, maybe to the pharmacy.

Linda: Maybe to the pharmacy. Yeah, and, you know, Connecticut College was, you know, a good 25-minute drive. So, you know, the day could get pretty filled up.

Carolyn: Was there ever anyone on campus that she wanted to see, anyone still affiliated? Because Bunny Wheeler at that time, you said, had retired.

Linda: Yes, she had.

Carolyn: And would sometimes visit Langer.

Linda: Yes. Well, we went to Bunny Wheeler's house twice that I recall, and there were other people there. One woman was the retired zoology professor.

Carolyn: Was it Richardson? Dorothy Richardson?

Linda: No, I met Dorothy Richardson—it was another lady who lived here on the lake. I'll try to remember the name of the zoology professor. Maybe it was Dorothy Richardson, who lived on the other side of Rogers Lake, whereas Mrs. Langer kind of lived on the western side. Her friend, it must have been Dorothy Richardson, had a house that sat across from the lake, but she had at the lakeside her own dock, and Mrs. Langer in the summertime, three or four times went swimming there. She would call and ask if she could swim off the dock, and then she would have me drop her off at the dock, and she would swim alone.

Carolyn: For how long would she swim alone?

Linda: Oh, for about 15 minutes.

Carolyn: Oh, wow.

Linda: I'd have to drive up the street and park, turn the car around. It was a crazy thing.

Carolyn: That's incredible.

Linda: She broke all kinds of, you know, she broke all kinds of rules that I knew of. You never swim alone. And what else, I don't know, but…

Carolyn: Well, it's sort of—it's making me think, you know, about her personality, and sort of what things kind of come through from these recollections. You noted she was pretty fiercely independent and was interested in pursuing what she wanted to pursue and didn't seem to care about how that would be perceived by other people. And you also noted that she was fairly stubborn when it came to not wanting to leave her house while it was on fire. And this is an 83-year-old woman. I'm curious to hear more about your sense of her personality. And I guess, her formality or lack of formality, her humor, things like that—dimensions of her personality that might not be known by someone who never actually got to meet her in real life.

Linda: Sure. Well, I can think of a couple of interesting stories.

Carolyn: Oh, yeah, that would be great.

Linda: When we went to Connecticut College, she would—at that time they had horses because they taught riding. They don't anymore. But we would stop at the stables so that she could collect flies and bring them home to feed to her spring peepers, which she kept in a terrarium. That was an adventure—not your average retired professor's activity, right? And her way of collecting these live flies, she would take a drinking glass, a sort of a small tumbler and an index card—she'd take an index card and approach the fly with the glass in her hand, put the glass over the fly, and then slip the index card underneath the opening of the glass to capture the fly and then hold the index card and bring it in, and

we put them in a jar. She transferred them to a jar and put the cover on that quickly, but that was her method. And she never had Windex in her house for cleaning the windows. She used—we used white vinegar and water because the flies that she caught in her house for the spring peepers wouldn't want to land on a window that had been cleaned with Windex. So anyway—she's very careful about that. And she had spring peepers because…

Carolyn: What was your sense of why she kept them in her house?

Linda: Well, they were small. She could keep them in the terrarium, and they were very intriguing. I don't know if you've ever looked at them, but they have little suction ends on their feet, little suction cups, and they would sing at night. Who doesn't want to be serenaded in the evening, you know? So, she kept the spring peepers for quite a while. And I remember one time, related to the spring peepers, I think maybe we lived there for three or four years. And when we first got there, of course, she was driving herself, no questions. And one night after we'd been there about three or four years, we looked out our window because our house is directly across the street from hers, and we saw car lights down the driveway, take the turn and make a left hand turn out of the driveway, which meant she was going toward town. And so, Norm hopped the car and tried to follow her and met up with her down where the Connecticut River meets Long Island Sound in an area right in the estuary. We're right across from what's called the Great Island Preserve. She was there in the night collecting the spring peepers.

Carolyn: Oh, wow.

Linda: There's a town landing where people can, you know, put their boats in the water. But she took her car right down to the town landing and left the engine running and had the headlights on so she could have a bit of light to see the peepers. And the reason why I say it was weird that she took that left hand turn on the driveway, because up until that time, she said that she could still drive because she could see, she could see well enough out of her right eye, so that during the daytime, when she went to town, she would make right hand turns to get into town.

Carolyn: Oh, gosh.

Linda: That's a little bit of a story.

Carolyn: So, she was very independent, focused on her work and the activities that supported her work. I'm curious a bit about her relationships. You mentioned her good friend, Nancy Perkins, and the fact that you drove her to visit Dr. Perkins a few times. And also her daughter-in-law, Nancy Langer, that they spoke regularly. So, I'm curious too about those relationships. It was quite a long—was it a long drive from Old Lyme all the way to Dr. Perkins?

Linda: Total of seven hours, one way.

Carolyn: Wow.

Linda: And we didn't take the highway. We went back roads.

Carolyn: Wow. And so, you would drive…

Linda: Yes, no radio in her car, no talking. So when we would start out—the first leg of the trip would be to Scarsdale, New York, and we'd stay overnight at Leonard and Nancy Langer's house.

Carolyn: Mm hmm.

Linda: And then we would head up north the rest of the way.

Carolyn: Okay, so it was broken up. And did you stay at the Langers' house?

Linda: I stayed overnight there but then when I would go pick her up, I would drive up and drive back same day.

Carolyn: Wow. How long would she stay there at Nancy Perkins's house?

Linda: Maybe—I was trying to think about that for you. It was definitely a week, maybe two.

Carolyn: Was it usually a certain time of year, or it varied?

Linda: Well, it was not in the winter, it was maybe in the spring and summer. And we would pack the car. She had a station wagon, and I was trying to remember the year, but I don't know. We packed the station wagon with all of her work, her books, her metal index card files, which it turns out there were 32,000 of them.

Carolyn: So, all of it would go with her?

Linda: All of it would go, that's right.

Carolyn: Interesting.

Linda: That's correct.

Carolyn: What did she—did she share anything with you about this friendship? What context did you have for who Nancy Perkins was?

Linda: Well, I knew that she had known Dr. Perkins when they were in college. And that's about all I knew, and that they had a real friendship. They spoke on the phone every night, I believe. And that's all I know. Dr Perkins was a country doctor, and you read the book of…

Carolyn: Yeah.

Linda: The biography[1] that came out on her?

Carolyn: She was a fascinating person.

[1] *A Good and Noble Thing: The Pioneering Life and Service of Anna Ward Perkins*, by Gerard A. Finin, 2018.

Linda: Oh yes. You know, I only met her maybe three times, but she was very—Can you imagine everything she must have been through as a country doctor, and a woman doctor at that time? Just such fortitude. But she was just such a kindly person, not sharp at all in her speech to you. Mrs. Langer could be kind of sharp, I would say, but not condescending. How can I explain it? Not really rude. But with Dr. Perkins, well, maybe just her tone of voice, her speech was very, I would say, calm and experienced. She spoke in a sort of a low pitch, so that you could believe her when she said, "This jewel weed growing outside your back door will be good if you create a tea of it and rub it on your poison ivy." She was full of…

Carolyn: Yes, wow, and I'm sure yeah, like you were saying, she probably met so many different people, and developed a bedside manner of knowing how to put…

Linda: People at ease as a doctor, absolutely, yes.

Carolyn: Whereas Langer, you were kind of alluding to the fact that she was more, maybe less, I don't know, I wonder—was she less concerned with how she was coming across? Was she—I'm trying to understand more this sharpness, or, you said, not condescending, but maybe direct, frank? How would you sort of—are there examples?

Linda: Are there examples? I don't know, but she also could be kind of harsh on herself. Mrs. Langer, for example, when we—a couple times we were packing up the car, making sure that she had all of her work, all of her books, her ivory-colored bag, her shillelagh, her thermos, and then her eyeglasses. I think one time it was—she forgot her eyeglasses. She wore eyeglasses for reading only. She didn't need them for daily activities. And I remember one time we were all set, and I think this is a time that Norman was driving her and she had forgotten something back in the house, and she sent Norm back to the house for whatever it was. And I was with her at the car, and she said, "And if you find my brains along the way, why don't you bring them, too."

Carolyn: Oh, gosh.

Linda: You know, yeah.

Carolyn: So she'd come up with those little kind of zingers?

Linda: But upon herself, too, yeah, which I thought was really endearing. Because it would take about a good hour to load everything into the car.

Carolyn: Thinking about her personality, and Nancy Perkins's personality, and other things that I've read about how her directness was perceived by other people, I'm interested in the way in which gender informs all of this. Perhaps, if she had been an older man, maybe parts of her personality—it was more because she was an older woman who was direct that people thought it was maybe remarkable. But I also know that she, or from what I could gather, she was not—while being a very independent woman, didn't think of herself as a feminist, or sort of had an ambiguous relationship to feminism itself. And I'm just curious what your thoughts are? Or any reactions you have about gender in her life, and her relationship to feminism? Because it was a period in which feminism was much more in the air.

Linda: Absolutely, yes, she did have an ambiguous relationship with it, for sure, I would say, even when she—now that I know more about her work and all. Even when she was teaching, I remember something happening where I was with her—and she had a library in the attic of her house. And I came across some book that was not hers, but it was "philosophy for the female student," or something. It must have been something that she had from Connecticut College. And I was looking at it, and she, you know, I don't know how we got on the subject, but she remarked that even someone sitting on a beach with all their children would need to understand the world, and that's what philosophy would bring to someone who was an educated woman. And I just thought that—that whole vision of her spending time at Connecticut College, when she was there it was still a women-only college—and I often wonder if people in her peer group would ask her why she was teaching philosophy for people who were expected to "only" become mothers. And it was a very interesting thought that stuck with me for a long time. But at the same time, at around that time, I can remember her reading some article in *The New York Times*, and I don't know what it was, but she would often say, she said, "That's what they want to do, is put woman on a pedestal and see what they can do." And I thought, isn't that an interesting dichotomy? Because she had already published eight books, and she was on the pedestal in her field. I just think maybe she was always trying to—she would always say to me, well, there's always room at the top.

Carolyn: What did that mean to you?

Linda: To me, well, a while after the book was published, we knew that things would change, and so I was—because I knew I could no longer be a full-time employee for her, so I needed to find another job. And she—we would talk about it from time to time. And she thought, well, perhaps there'd be something that I could do in town, and in town meant in the center of Old Lyme. And as it turned out, eventually, I did return to college, got my Master's degree. And during that time, when I took courses at night, working toward the Master's, I got a job at the Florence Griswold Museum, which is now well-known as the center of American Impressionism. And I started there on Saturdays as a docent in 1981, and after the book was published in 1982, I knew that I needed to learn more. There was more that I could do. And eventually I was on staff full time at the Florence Griswold Museum, and I was the first full-time program coordinator there. I handled the educational outreach and all the promotional aspects the museum. But that's—at that time when she said that to me, that's what put the idea in my mind that, you know, there's always room at the top.

Carolyn: Meaning if you're good enough, whatever your gender—basically that the work itself will—if it's good work, it'll rise to the top?

Linda: That's right, what people would now call—that's probably a general-neutral statement. There's always room at the top.

Carolyn: I see. And what about—did you—I'm interested in the fact that most of the women in Langer's orbit were other white women. So I'm curious if she had that same sort of race-neutral—the fact that it didn't matter your race or your religion or what have you, in the same way that gender was sort of not really a part of the equation for her.

Linda: I don't know the answer to that. I don't know Mrs. Langer's attitude toward people of other races or religions, we never talked of it. I really don't know where she would stand, personally, but

professionally, she looked to other ethnic groups for her research. All the time, she was always looking outside her own personal element. It's interesting to think about.

Carolyn: And one thing that I'm reflecting on is the fact that before she was in Old Lyme, she lived in New York City for quite a bit of time. And one thing I'm curious about is your sense of her relationship to the city. Did she travel back ever? Did she have visitors from New York? I know that when she was in New York City, she still had her retreat in Hurley, outside of Kingston. And so, I'm curious about her relationship to New York City. Did she still have a sort of a getaway, at the time when you knew her, in upstate New York? That wasn't well-phrased, but any threads you want to pick up about New York City, or…

Linda: Sure, I don't know that she maintained any ties with anyone in New York City except for one person who was—who visited her in Old Lyme, maybe two or three times. Mr. Price. He was blind, what was his name?

Carolyn: Was it Kingsley Price?

Linda: Yes, Kingsley, Kingsley Price, nice man. I think I met him twice. But no, she didn't go into the city then.

Carolyn: Did you know much about him or his relationship with Langer?

Linda: I seem to remember he may have been a friend of Edgar, Edgar Kaufman, but I'm not sure. I don't know if he was a professor. I don't know if he was an author, Kingsley Price. What did he do? I can't remember right now. Sorry.

Carolyn: No worries. But your sense is that he maybe lived in New York? I think he was—I think he was a philosopher. I've definitely come across that name before, but I didn't have a sense that he was close enough friends with Langer that he would come to her house. So that's really interesting.

Linda: And then, of course, the dancer, Kenneth King. He visited twice.

Carolyn: What about Edgar Kaufman?

Linda: Edgar Kaufman, I don't—I don't know. I don't know if she talked to him on the phone. I don't know, really, when he passed away. I do know the story of when she had him over to her house. This was very early on. It must have been shortly before she retired from Connecticut College, because they sat up on the rocks in the back of her house. And that's where they worked out her whole sort of abstract about *Mind*. I'm not sure if that's when he decided to help finance her work or whatever. But I know that she talked about that a couple of times. Yeah, the granite outcroppings on the back of her house are, of course, still there. They're very treed over but I know they had a picnic lunch there. But to get back to Kenneth King, I don't know if he's still around, but he did come to Old Lyme twice.

Carolyn: Did you meet him during those…

Linda: Yes, I did. I met him at the train station at Saybrook and brought him to the house. He was just totally infatuated with her work. And I didn't follow his work as a dancer in New York at all. I know that he did the tribute to her, and she did have him come to Old Lyme, and he sat up all night and read *Mind* before it was published. I think when it came right off the press.

Carolyn: What was your sense of Langer's—was she interested in him, in his dance or choreography?

Linda: That's a good question. I don't really know, except that I think he was in Old Lyme twice—the first time maybe he read the manuscript of *Mind*, and that's when he stayed at our house, Norm and I, but he didn't have any conversation with us at all.

Carolyn: Hmm.

Linda: Yeah, but—and then he came for the second time, and I think that's when he read *Mind*, but she—for some reason, Mrs. Langer thought that he could stay at her house up in her attic bedroom. And it was the only time I really voiced my opinion, but I told her that if anybody stayed in that room, she would have to repair it and really redecorate it, because it was an old house to begin with, and this room was a tiny bedroom. There was little bed up there and maybe a dresser, but it hadn't been painted, I don't think, since maybe she bought it and the plaster was peeling off the walls, and there was wallpaper coming off the ceiling. And so that was the one and only time that I knew she ever had a painter in her house.

Carolyn: Was to restore that room for Kenneth King?

Linda: I might take this off the press, but she just never used it. I mean, she had books stored on the stairway going upstairs, and then she had a larger room up there, which was her extended library, you might call it, and then that tiny bedroom

Carolyn: Okay, and so you were just like, this is not really—this is not inhabitable—if you're going to have a house guest, you're going to have to…

Linda: Yeah. And then I never, ever told her what to do, except that one time. She was receptive about it eventually.

Carolyn: Yeah. Reflecting on the housekeeping and living as an independent woman, I'm wondering—did she ever talk about the earlier part of her life where she was married or sort of mentioned—I think at this time her ex-husband had passed away. I'm just sort of curious about her relationship with that earlier experience in her life, of being someone who's married with children, and how her separation from her husband, how she kind of made sense of that? Or any kind of reflections or memories around that, either with her, or, you know, from her, directly or via her son and daughter in law, Leonard and Nancy? You know, because it was a major shift.

Linda: Yeah, absolutely. She never mentioned anything about her early years with Bill. She did in the very beginning refer to herself, even in that first interview, as a "grass widow." And she kept two plaster rondelle portraits of her sons right above her desk, created, I think, when they were just young children. They were just, you know, circular plaster reliefs of her kids. I think there's a photo with the Jim Lord

article where they're just up on the far-right hand side of the frame. I do remember seeing them and kind of noting that her sons were present, always. But did she ever get sentimental about things? No. I know from Leonard, her son, that his, stepmother was a very gracious woman, and I guess everybody loved the second Mrs. Langer, which—they were just totally different people, of course.

Carolyn: Mm hmm.

Linda: What was that lady's name?

Carolyn: Rowena.

Linda: Rowena, yes, thank you.

Carolyn: So, she was more like, you how you were describing Doctor Perkins in terms of being attentive to sort of the group or the family, or sort of being more focused on kind of cultivating that and nurturing that you know, attending to the social kind of gathering. And Langer was more was kind of preoccupied with her work.

Linda: That's right. Oh, and then the other little story that I had that I don't know if I ever told you this, but Mrs. Langer would often, even during breakfast, have a book under the table. And she was sipping her coffee, she'd be reading the book, not having a book up near the food, but sort of on her lap, and she said that that's what she did in grade school, because she would read Aristotle instead of doing something else.

Carolyn: That's great.

Linda: But she always had it, yeah, always had a book with her. So that was, you know, doing research, keeping her mind focused on her work. And, you know, thinking about how things were related or not interrelated, within the realm of whatever aspect of philosophy she was working on, because it was a multi-faceted arena, you know, you turned a little bit, and you're talking about, she's researching the brain, and you turn the focus a little more, and she's writing about aborigines.

Carolyn: Mm hmm.

Linda: You know, in the Australian outback, and how they were writing or drawing, just really fascinated with things.

Carolyn: I guess that kind of takes us back to *Mind Voume. III*. And I'm interested in that liveliness of mind, I guess. I think there's a way in which she, it seems, never stopped being curious about the world around her, encounters both on the really local level, in terms of nature, that the place where she lived could inform her thinking. I guess I'm just really struck by that—that liveliness. And I don't know if I have a question, but it seems like it was, it was apparent in your work with her, you know, like—these are the really—it's the very end of her life, right? She dies in the summer of '85 and it's just very…

Linda: Yeah, July.

Carolyn: It's just striking to me that she is so invested in completing this work and I guess maybe there is a question there about, you know, your sense of why was it she felt like she needed to finish this trilogy that she had started? Was she, you know, did she think it was going to be influential? Did she hope it was going to be influential in a certain way?

Linda: Well, I can think of a couple of things. Even after *Mind* was published, she received correspondence from people, and she had notes of other things that she was thinking of, and she would say sometimes that she was thinking about reading more about the author Spinoza, and that sometimes she could see a piece of sheet music floating by.

Carolyn: Wait. Could you—sorry the audio was—I heard a piece of sheet music floating by, and then the audio got kind of fuzzy.

Linda: Yeah, that's right, she would say that she could sometimes see a piece of sheet music floating by, perhaps maybe before she went to sleep, or in her mind's eye, she could never figure out the title of it, what the music was about. And, you know, she played the piano and the cello. So even in those late years, thinking about music, yeah, you know music, it's all measurement and it's all symbolism. And she was just still always pondering all of that, I think.

Carolyn: Yeah, it's very clear from the index cards that, you know, she was examining her dreams. She was writing about the deterioration of her senses and kind of her own experience became kind of fodder for her research, in a way like just this, this curiosity, you know, that active mind. I'm really—it's just something that I'm really inspired by, like how to cultivate for one's entire life, this profound curiosity. I think it made her a really exceptional thinker, and just something that I hope to hope comes through in whatever I write about her.

Linda: I hope so, too.

Carolyn: I guess we have about 20 minutes. I mean, I don't have any plans today, but I don't want to keep you forever. So I am just curious about other, you know, dimensions of your time with Langer that you'd want to think about or talk about, or anything that seems really salient to you for people who are trying to grapple with her writing, her research, her life, her legacy?

Linda: Well, I think to get back to your question that you asked me a few minutes ago about did she think that her work would carry forward? You didn't say it that way, but yes. And after volume III was published, she would often in the letters write that she was, and I think I mentioned this to you a couple times earlier, is that she was hoping for a parade of thinkers, you know, people would who would read her work and who would bring it into their lives and their thoughts. You know, *Mind* is dedicated to the great world peace. So, if you can't—you know, if you're working alone, you've got to think that there's room at the top, and maybe that's where you're going to be, you know, you got to have ambition.

Carolyn: Mm hmm.

Linda: And she did, she did. And I think part of her ambition was this parade of thinkers, the people who are now in the Langer circle.

Carolyn: Mm hmm.

Linda: You know, your group, people who are just learning about her now, people who are still out there, you know, in the liberal arts world, teaching people about other philosophers. I don't know you know, Tereza's work on empathy, empathy is what sets human beings on their own path, you know, being able to understand other people's points of view. It's what it's all about.

Carolyn: Yeah, and this notion of like involvement that comes up in *Mind*, it strikes me that her ambition is one very much aligned with being part of a larger whole, and not the ambition of being better than—you're part of this lineage of thinking, and you're making contributions that you're hoping others will take up and challenge and improve upon. But it's not this sort of ambition to be singular in that kind of competitive way. It is what I'm sort of gathering from her, sort of her dedication, right? Like this idea of the parade of thinkers—does that sound right to you? Or do you think there was more of a wanting to be in the history books, as it were, you know that she wanted to have some acclaim, or was it a little of both?

Linda: This is a really good question. Carolyn, I don't know the answer, except to say that could be. Because if you write something, if you commit your thoughts to black and white, you're doing something so that your voice will be here, be heard by somebody. You know, I mean, even when you wrote me this letter, I have it right here. June 1, 2021.

Carolyn: Oh, wow.

Linda: You're reaching out to me. You didn't even know if I was the right Linda, but you had something to say. You were reaching out for help and interest and some kind of acknowledgement that your work was valid. Is writing something or creating a sculpture or making a painting or a beautiful flower arrangement—is that some kind of validation of yourself for you, too, not just for the world? I don't know. So maybe she saw her work as both, you know, something she had to do individually, but also to contribute to the group.

Carolyn: Yeah, it makes me think that there is both. It can't be one or the other. Like, even in *Mind*, she writes about individuation and involvement. There's this movement between the two, the kind of creation of boundaries and distinguishing oneself from the masses, but then also being kind of—returning to the stock, you know, returning to the larger—you're still part of humanity.

Linda: Oh, for sure.

Carolyn: Yeah. I guess the great world peace made me think about whether politics, current events, whether that was ever part of—if you have any insights into things that were going on in the world at the time, and maybe what Langer thought of them? You mentioned that she read the *Times* every day, or at least the headlines. And I know that much earlier in her life, when she was in New York City during and after World War II and then the Cold War, she was quite outspoken about the rise of fascism, this identification with the kind of myth of the state. Having two sons who fought during World War II, you know, and then obviously in the wake of the atom bombs that ended World War II, she was really opposed to that kind of violence. And I'm just wondering if any dimension of that carried through in her thinking in the '80s, or anything that you kind of might recall from that period?

Linda: That's a wonderful question. I don't know the answer to that.

Carolyn: No worries, yeah, it was…

Linda: It wasn't something that she—mainly because when I met her, she knew she had to do her work. She was so focused on it. We didn't talk about politics much at all. And no, I don't know. She was very, very mindful of her waning eyesight and needed to stay mindful of her work.

Carolyn: Yeah, no, that makes good sense, she wasn't wasting her time or energy on anything outside of that. You know, you mentioned, like, obviously she would see family and friends and spend time outdoors, and would she still play music in the '80s?

Linda: Well, the only time that I knew that she played music was one time there was someone who came to her house when I first started with her, and she did get out the cello. And the second time, it must have been probably 1982. I was worried that she wasn't spending holiday time with her family. She didn't go to Scarsdale to visit with Leonard and Nancy.

Carolyn: Oh, really?

Linda: And with her permission Norman cut a Christmas tree, and we brought it into her house and put it in a bucket of water and set it on that little round table in her visitor area. There was a library that she had right opposite her worktable. And she took out German miniature candles and clipped them onto the ends of the tree branches. Then we brought out a couple buckets of water and turned off the lights in her house, and we lit the candles. I think there were maybe only a dozen, but this is a small, live Christmas tree that we brought into her house, and she sat down at the piano and she played "Silent Night."

Carolyn: That's beautiful.

Linda: And that's the only time, but that was perfect. What more did you need? Nothing, right. That's the only time.

Carolyn: Yeah. Okay, I feel like we covered a lot of ground. Were there any other things that you wanted to talk about?

Linda: I was just checking my notes. I think we've covered a lot here. I think back on when we put the exhibition together, and I think that you only came to New London maybe seven times. I know I met with Tereza 14 times over there at the college. And when we started out and I went to the library, I was just so totally flabbergasted when I got your note. First off, I was just—I just couldn't believe it. It's just been so wonderful. You just don't know, it's been great. Thank you.

Carolyn: It's been wonderful for me. Thank you, Linda.