

An Inspired Chat with Nancy Brimhall of South Park/Downtown Los Angeles



LOCAL STORIES



We're looking forward to introducing you to Nancy Brimhall. Check out our conversation below.

Nancy, so good to connect and we're excited to share your story and insights with our audience. There's a ton to learn from your story, but let's start with a warm up before we get into the heart of the interview. Who are you learning from right now?

My closest friend for decades. She lives back east and had a very successful career as an attorney. Married the love of her life, had a child she adored, a beautiful shimmering life by a golden pond, and life looked pretty magnificent to anyone outside looking in.

And yet, today, her husband is on a dementia journey, her son passed away after a shocking four-month battle with cancer in his late 30's leaving two little children and their drug-addicted mother. My friend stepped in to rescue the children and has set them on a great course to health and happiness. And, yet, the story goes on. She is now battling a bad breast cancer herself. I stare at the wall sometimes and wonder how these things could happen. What twist of fate rains down on those you love and keeps you dry? Life lessons are long and hard and deep and wide. Her lessons are 12 times longer, harder, deeper and wider. They are teeth-grindingly, ear-splittingly difficult, but they are the most important lessons I may ever have. They are lessons of empathy and grit against a powerful force. I will never be the same.

Can you briefly introduce yourself and share what makes you or your brand unique?

I am by anyone's definition a cross between Mary Tyler Moore (look it up if you don't know) and Helen of Troy. I know that I am the one you want to have with you if your plane crashes on a remote island; I will get us off. Guaranteed. It's a strong feeling that happened to a young 24-year-old woman who once left a husband and took a plane to Nome, Alaska and never came back. I went to the airport counter and bought a one-way ticket and the man behind the counter literally said "are you sure lady?" Wasn't. But, I wouldn't know that till years later. At that moment, it was the only choice.

By 30 I had conceived of two very successful state-wide conferences for artisans, served as the University of Alaska's Village Art Coordinator, and been selected as the first executive director of the Institute of Native Alaskan Arts. So, I moved to Boston (doesn't everybody) because I knew that I had two of the top three arts jobs in the state and the holder of the third one wasn't going anywhere fast enough for me.

Then, I got hooked on nonprofits and never really looked back. I knew that their potential was a place to wiser up, learn, and use my intelligence to find the ways to help them grow. And, generally, that's what I've been doing for the last decades. And, just like that, I became very knowledgeable and highly sought after. Essentially, I'm a non-profit fixer. That's the consulting side. The side that likes to listen to music, relax, and read thought oh, maybe that's not enough to be doing, let's fill up some more time and fix why nonprofit teams struggle to keep key staff, why boards never really know what their role is

and why it is so critical, and why learning from books, videos, and lectures doesn't stick. And, just like that redux we launched Change Lab (www.changelab.studio.)

My "brand" if I had one, I suppose would always be the achiever, the one who knows it can be done and leads the team out of the jungle to get the job done. The natural optimist who slays the dragons to make way for the team to come out into the open, have some fun, and dream up some pretty great stuff together.

And, that's exactly what Change Lab is working on now. We launched. We listened. We tested. We modified. We found our voices. Now, we are deep into creating some AI applications, designing AR and VR experiences, finishing up some things that were lingering, and working on partnerships to move us to the next level. Don't turn the channel.

We're focused on bringing nonprofits into the 21st century and helping them become the powerhouse we need to solve some of the world's biggest problems – climate, racism, ignorance, injustice.....

Great, so let's dive into your journey a bit more. What was your earliest memory of feeling powerful?

Strangely, I was a very shy child. I wore thick glasses and saw myself as handicapped. I just basically stayed quiet and listened. Maybe nobody would notice me. It was the era of children were not to speak until spoken to and the male is king in his home, office, and the world. So, I can point to exactly the moment when I felt powerful. I was 23 and working in my first office job. I was participating in a two-day training with other new hires. I was so excited by the subject matter and discussion sessions in the training. Essentially, no one had ever presented an open discussion where my opinion and ideas had an opportunity platform. At lunch on the second day, the instructor told me that the group (all males) felt that I was expressing my thoughts too much. I remember staring at the instructor and blurting out "no." Yup, I had found my voice.

Is there something you miss that no one else knows about?

Being able to eat anything I wanted and still remain skinny. Alas. Putting that stupid angst aside, my truest struggles have always come from the "beginnings again." I think it is what I really miss sometimes — not having to change.

I never knew life was going to be so full of ups and downs. Love and not love. Joy and true terror. Fear and light and the “beginnings again.”

I sat down one day during the early days of Covid 19 and wrote out a PowerPoint on “Fundraising in Uncertain Times” and sent it to clients, colleagues, and posted it in a blog. I saw so many people in nonprofits sure that the world was going to come to an end. Remember when the grocery store shelves were empty bastions of the last jar of pickled pig’s feet and people were hoarding. So many people were not only afraid for their frail and ailing family members, and for those that might have compromised health and son on, but the true fear that life would never ever be life as we know it again.

By now, I have been working in one way or another for the nonprofit sector through at least three if not four deep down cycles in the economy, plus 9/11. I knew innately that we are a resilient, self-reliant people in this country who can weather much and any of those downturns and threats were to be met with the moments of people helping each other to get through it. And, we did and do, and will. And, I felt that nonprofits can learn to bring out the best in people who will help their work if you tell them what you need and why. Thus, the PowerPoint. Yes, people stretch to help and it’s a proud part of why I am in this field. We keep living even with health setbacks, with terrible, terrible tragedies and ugly, inhumane things that happen but we can never recover alone. Nonprofits hold the key. They are the vault to bridges to the people who bring in the light. Believe me, that’s how we all survive. We give of ourselves.

I think our readers would appreciate hearing more about your values and what you think matters in life and career, etc. So our next question is along those lines. Is the public version of you the real you?

For real.

Okay, so before we go, let’s tackle one more area. What will you regret not doing?

Getting another dog. They are the darndest champions of the biggest, best part of you. And, those ears. Yum.

Contact Info:

- Website: <https://www.changelab.studio>
- Instagram: @yourchangelab
- Linkedin: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/18836805/admin/page-posts/published/>
- Youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/@ChangeLab>
- Other: TIK TOK @changelab

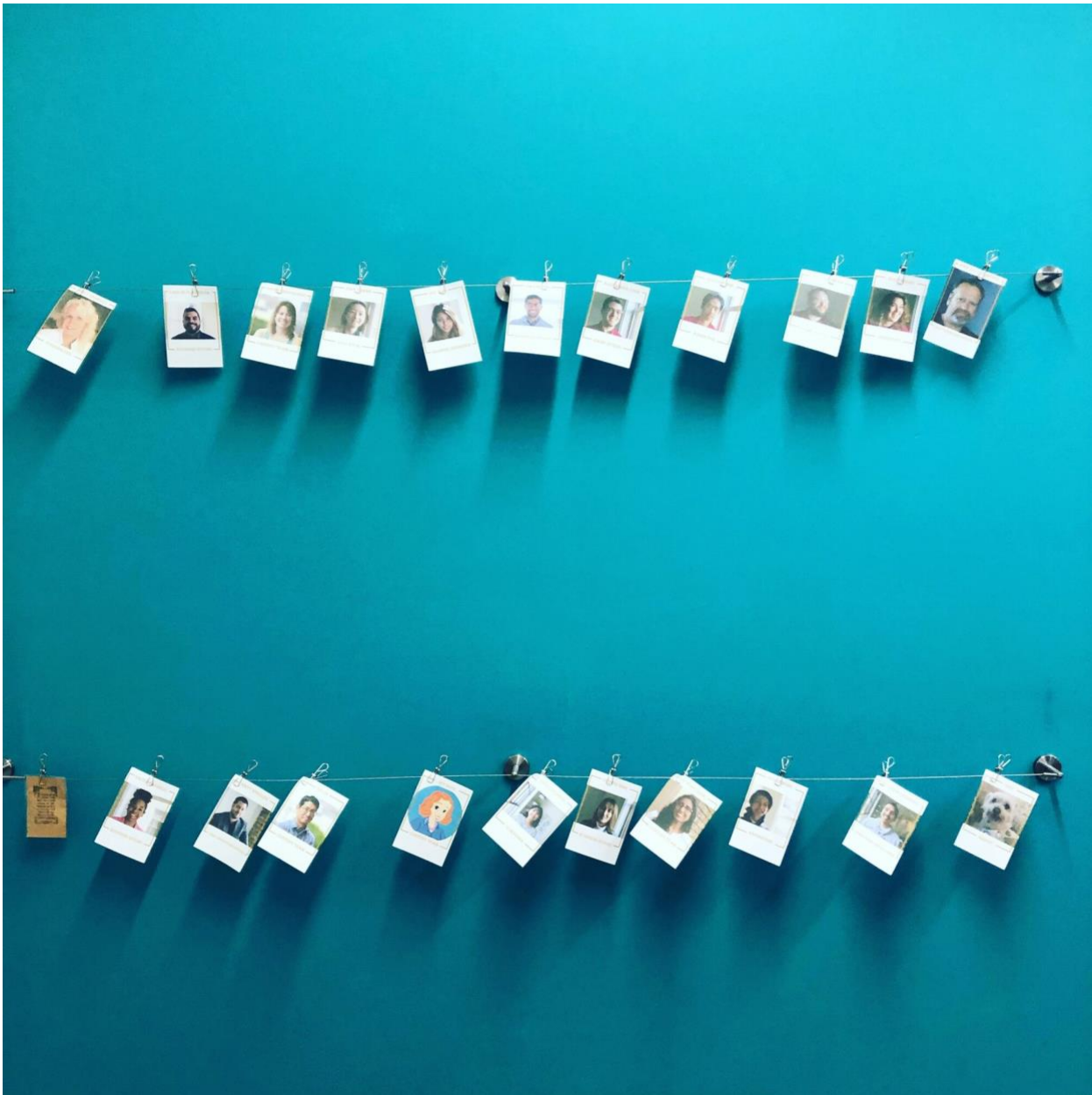






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