

EPISODE 046 - FINISHING WELL WITH OLIVIA SURIANO

WITH NANCY RAY

Intro

Today, you get to hear a candid conversation with one of my dearest friends and former Nancy Ray Photography team member, Olivia Suriano, all about our last year in business and what it looks like to finish well. It was so refreshing to just have a straight-up friend on the podcast and I hope you get some valuable insight from the lessons that we learned in our last year of Nancy Ray Photography together.

You're listening to Work & Play with Nancy Ray, Episode 46.

Much of our daily lives can be divided into two categories: work and play. Simply put, that's where our life and our legacy take place. This is a podcast all about learning to work and play well which leads to a healthy soul and a fulfilling life.

Listen in.

Content

Nancy Ray:

Well today, on the Work & Play podcast, I'm so excited to welcome one of my dearest friends, Olivia Suriano. Olivia, thank you so much for coming on and just having a candid conversation with me about kind of finishing well.

Olivia Suriano:

Yes, I'm so excited to be here. I feel so honored to be on your podcast.

Nancy Ray:

Well, thanks. I think it's going to be fun because we're friends and usually we're just goofy together. I mean we know how to work hard together but I also feel like this is fun because you're my first really close friend that does life with me I feel like to be on the podcast. So anyway, my hope is that whoever's listening will kind of listen in on just how we did things last year as we close down Nancy Ray Photography and take them through the journey of the lessons that we learned along the way because I think a lot of people talk about starting things and working hard, but a big part of life is finishing well when you transition from one

thing to the next. And so that's going to be what we're talking about today.

I'm honestly really excited to hear your perspective on some things because I know you have so much to bring. I admire you a lot. I think you're incredibly wise, and I'm excited just to hear your perspective on things and for us just to talk about what the closing of Nancy Ray Photography looks like and kind of what we learned from it. So I'm going to start by just kind of telling the story that I feel like will illustrate our heart behind last year and kind of what we viewed last year as, and that is as we knew it was closing.

My husband, if you go back and listen to episode four, Seasons of Business, I think I tell the story in there, but my husband talked about how there's this professor and he knew that it was the end of his career. It was time for him to leave the college. He was done being a professor and somebody talked to him and was like, "Hey, are you just going to lay low, go under the radar, wind it down?" He turned and looked at them and said, "No, I'm going out big. I want to grab all the fruit on the way out and do this thing right."

I told that story to you guys when we announced we were closing and that really captures the heart of how we wanted to finish well. So anyway, I guess my first question for you, Liv, is like what do you feel like that looked like for us grabbing all the fruit on the way out?

Olivia Suriano:

Yeah, I think that as we kind of had that conversation, we talked a lot about what are some big things that we haven't done in this business yet that we've always wanted to do specifically like what are ways that we could give to our community, our clients, anything like that. What is a big way we could do that? One of which was giving away a wedding. We had never done that before. We had definitely served a lot of our clients in a really great way by helping them with different things, but we had never just given somebody wedding photography for free. And so that was kind of like top of our list, we talked about that and it felt like really big to do but it was exciting.

I had the honor of getting to photograph that wedding and it was wonderful and it just so happened to be in Jamaica which was also really fun. But beyond that, I think that we just looked at the year through a lens of like is there anything extra that we could do, and not just like that we had to go out of our way that had nothing to do with what we were currently doing, but more so with what we have in front of us for this year, for 2019, what can we do above and beyond for each of our clients? How can we grab all the fruit on the way out for the sake of our clients and I think that that kind of became the lens through which we've looked at everything for it last year.

I think it ended up being a really incredible year for that reason. I think we served our clients very similar to how we had previously, but also just knowing that it was our last year, every wedding just felt different than previous weddings in previous years because we know it was maybe the last time we were at that venue for an answer or photography or the last time we were shooting with that second shooter for Nancy Ray Photography, different things like that.

So I think that we just really looked at everything as like how can we take what we provide to each of our clients and take it up a notch for this final year.

Nancy Ray:

Yeah, I remember at first, I think we started setting goals of like, “Okay, how many weddings do we want a book? How many family sessions do we want to book? That was the first thought is grabbing all the fruit on the way out is making this our biggest and best year ever.” And then I feel like the conversation did turn to like what is the mark that we want to leave? How can we be generous? How can we love them well and that... I don’t know if I’m being transparent. It feels like it shifted almost from this like greed of like I want to do all the things and I want to book all the things, and there was some of that. We wanted it to be a strong year as far as meetings go. We didn’t want to just fizzle out.

More than that, we wanted it to be how are we going to do this? How are we going to end well and leave our mark and bless people, and do the things that maybe we’ve always wanted to do like give away a wedding. I love that you brought that up because it was a different kind of feel. The heart behind this business for so long and our team has been legacy. And so as we talked about ending and finishing, well, it’s like what kind of legacy do we want to leave this last year? What kind of mark do we want to leave? So yeah, totally agree. So as I was starting about kind of being transparent, being transparent I think was a really important piece of this puzzle within our team and with our clients and just with each other.

The very first meeting, I don’t know if I ever told you this, Olivia, but Will and I weren’t even sure that we were going to tell you and Callie, and Jen, and Sammy at that last meeting or when was it, November?

Olivia Suriano:

Yeah, right before you had Beaufort.

Nancy Ray:

Yeah, right before I had Beaufort that when we announced we were closing, we really debated if we should say anything because I was so unsure for one. I thought that I knew, but I wasn’t totally sure and it felt like a really big step of faith to announce that to the whole team. But the bottom line is Will and I wrestled with it because we’re like maybe we should just wait a little bit longer or maybe we should see how things play out or maybe we should really get more of a sign from the Lord and through a very tearful conversation. Will and I were like no, we have to tell them we need to be transparent even if I cry through the whole meeting, which I did.

Olivia Suriano:

I think we all did.

Nancy Ray:

We all did. Absolutely we all did. Sammy was her first day and she was crying. But just the value of transparency in that, like what was that meeting like for you and how did that set the

table and really maintain transparency throughout the year for us as we finished?

Olivia Suriano:

I think I definitely want to start by saying that I have always, always appreciated and valued the way that both you and Will, but specifically you and I working so close together, transparency has just been your MO for over five years that I worked for you. So with that in mind, I think that it was definitely... I mean, when you all told us that in the meeting obviously, to some extent it was kind of like, "Whoa, okay. I think that I expected it, but I don't know that I expected it in that meeting," if that makes sense. So based off of conversations you and I had had previously, and Callie and I had had previously, I definitely felt like I knew there was a shift coming, and I didn't feel blindsided by that at all. But I definitely was not prepared to hear it in that meeting, which was not in a bad way.

I also think that we set every team meeting up and just our communication as a whole as always very transparent that it didn't feel uncomfortable or shocking in a way that I didn't know how to respond. I think prior to that meeting, you and I had had some really hard but good conversations of just what that was going to look. Obviously, at that point we already knew Callie was stepping down. She had made that decision before we decided to close and the two obviously didn't have anything to do with each other, but Callie's decision obviously spurred on some other conversations for you and I because we knew it was just going to be you and I for a little bit and trying to figure out like who do we hire? What does that look like? Where do we take this next?

So you and I, I don't know if you've talked about this at all before, but we went on a walk in your neighborhood and it was raining, and we literally walked in the rain, and it was wonderful. We just kind of talked through like what Nancy Ray Photography was going to look like moving forward, and we talked through so many different options. I shared with you that I didn't feel like I was done being a photographer. I'm still pretty young and I feel like I have a good bit of time left doing this.

But I also was like for that reason I don't want you to keep a business open for the sake of me. I wanted it to be something that you still... It was still your desire to be all in and be 100% part of this business moving forward for several years. In that conversation, we talked about what it would look like if you closed your business a little bit and that was like a terrifying thing for me to say out loud to you because just to present the idea of somebody closing their business when it's not your business, it's theirs. But just to say like have you considered this or what do you think about this?

You had obviously thought and talked about that with Will before. You and I even had that conversation. So going fast forward, when you told us in the meeting, I think that it was obviously like so bittersweet because I was so sad, because obviously it made it real that this is going to happen. But it also was like okay, next step. I got to figure out what I'm going to do from here like. What is 2019 going to look like for us? And then beyond that, I think because you and I

have built such a relationship that goes past just our work, I was a little relieved for you. I was excited for you because I have gotten to see up close and personal you be a mama of three, but I've also gotten to see up close and personal the pull you have felt from both being a mom and a business owner, and you are excellent at both.

I mean, I look up to you in both realms so, so much, but I had gotten to see just kind of the way the Lord was really tugging on your heart in both directions and you are so the type of person to give 100% or 150% of everything you do. So when you were presented with situations or circumstances, your kids getting sick or whatever it was that didn't allow you to give 150%, I could see the toll that was taking on you.

So when we talked about it in that meeting, I definitely was so sad and it was tough and hard but also so good. I felt like such good confirmation from the Lord that you were going to step into just a whole new season with being at home with your kids more and doing this more, your podcast and things that the Lord was really calling you into. So I would say like overall, it was really hard in the best way. I mean, I think that we are kind of an emotional bunch to begin with, but also we just have poured so much of our lives into this business and it became so much more than just a business to us.

This is quite honestly like really one of the only jobs I had ever had, like serious jobs and it became a big part of my world and a big part of even just my identity and I think thankfully as I said like her our communication had always been so transparent before. Even when Calie had decided to leave, and you and I had talked a lot about how like I am just a closed-fist person. I hold things so tightly and the Lord had really laid it on my heart at the beginning of the year that you decided to close the business to just open my hands and that I wasn't going to get to close them back every time he took something like, "Okay, I'm going to close it back and hold on to what I have left."

It was like I just had to leave my hands open for that whole year and I got to sit there and watch the Lord really take some things away from me, NRP specifically and I think it was such a great learning experience for me because I was like, "Okay Lord, I'm going to sit here and I'm going to leave my hands open and wait for you to tell me what you're going to place back into my hands and what I need to run with." And so yeah, I think that a lot of our conversations have been... It was a really hard one but a really, really good one.

Nancy Ray:

Yeah. We forever talk about our conversation in the rain, constantly, because it was so significant. And just to qualify, as we're talking about being transparent, when you came to me and you were bold enough to be transparent with me as a friend, but also an employee, it wasn't like you just blah, blah, blah pouring out your heart, all the things you're feeling. I want to qualify what we're meaning by transparent. It's using wisdom and discretion and having humility and prayerfully being very honest. And that's exactly what you did. You're right. That's just how we've done business together. That's how we've worked together. But your transparency was almost like this domino effect.

It goes like, “No, this is how we do things.” That’s what really made me want to be transparent in that meeting, because when you came to me you had scripture prepared for our walk in the rain. You’re like, “I have three verses I want to share and then I just want to pray. And then I need to give a disclaimer, this is where my heart is at and then let me tell you what I’m thinking.” I don’t even think you ever said, maybe consider close your business. You never said those words, it was just almost like this wisdom or this wise way of you laying before me this idea of maybe transitioning to a new season, or like I don’t know. I wish we recorded that conversation because it was so good.

But then the same thing happened when we met and just to give some context, the whole team was meeting at the end of the year to do our annual... It was like a day-long meeting where we plan and set goals for the entire next year. Will and I were like, “Okay. We think we know that this is going to be the last year, do we tell them that or do we wait a little bit longer and kind of do business as normal and then tell them.” That’s why it was so significant because we were all together in one room which doesn’t happen a lot.

And again, in transparency, we humbly said, this is what we believe that God is doing and we also qualified that and said, “Hey, we’re also giving God the permission to change his mind. This is top secret. Go home, tell your husband.” But if he wants to change his mind, he can. He’s God and so let’s keep this. Let’s prayerfully consider this for three months, and then we’ll talk about announcing it to the world. So anyway, I totally agree that just being transparent, it takes humility, it takes wisdom, but it’s the best gift. And it was especially important as we navigated that transition.

Olivia Suriano:

And I am so grateful you all did decide to tell us because I think it would have almost felt looking back if you had chosen not to tell us. Obviously, you all own the business. It would have been your decision to make, but I do think when we decided, I almost feel like we would have felt a little slighted or a little cheated that we...

Nancy Ray:

Totally.

Olivia Suriano:

Not that we weren’t a part of that conversation necessarily, but more-so that we devoted a full day to planning out a year that in hindsight if we had known it was going to be our last year, maybe we would have gone about it a little bit different.

Nancy Ray:

Exactly.

Olivia Suriano:

And so I’m so grateful that y’all chose to tell us and I think that it ultimately served our team in the best way because it allowed us to really just be wise about the way we move forward with

everything that year.

Nancy Ray:

Yep. I totally agree and that was the rub. I was like, “Will, I can’t go in there and say like hey, we’re planning our year and this is the normal year without choking back tears and being like I don’t know. I think it’s our last year.” I was just like I just don’t think I can do it. I totally agree 100%. Well, one not one of the things I love about our working relationship and our friendship is we don’t try to impress each other. We just show up and are very much so ourselves, but we want to be true to ourselves than what was happening to. So what did that look like just showing up, being our authentic selves and how was that helpful throughout this process?

Olivia Suriano:

Yeah. I think that thankfully we had really set up our business in a very client serving and just like client... Clients were always our top priority. So I think we didn’t really have to change the way we operated which was really great, and we were able to continue to just be ourselves and not have to impress each other by saying like, “Oh, I’m going to serve my clients in this way because it’s the last year.” Because we always had a very high standard for how we served our clients, but I do think that anybody who’s listening to this who’s worked in the wedding industry whether you’re still in it or you’ve worked in it for a season, I think there’s just something very different about the wedding industry than most other industries because it’s so seasonal.

We really had to be careful about how we approach to things because we still had clients for the remainder of this year. I mean, I still have one client for NRP and I’ve worked really hard to maintain such a wonderful relationship and make sure she feels loved and cared for. But that being said like I mean I was so appreciative of y’all because you and I were able to have such good conversations about if I’m moving forward, and if I want to open up my own photography studio so I can continue to do this, how can we go about that and be very honest with each other so that I can like build up a list of clients for 2020 because in the wedding industry, things happen a year out in advance.

Nancy Ray:

At least a year.

Olivia Suriano:

Yeah, if not more. So it’s just a very interesting and delicate situation to close a business, but then not really close it for a year which was hard, but I think because we didn’t try to be anything other than who we were, I was able to come to you and say like, “I am struggling.” I am feeling I need your expertise, I need your guidance because I’m starting a business, but I’m also still running NRP with you and I want to do all these things and finish strong, but also I need to make money in 2020 and I don’t want to get to 2020 and not have any clients.

Nancy Ray:

Right.

Olivia Suriano:

So I think it was really great because we were able to just show up and say like, “Oh, here’s what we want to do and I was able to say to you, “Here’s how I want to go about this. Here’s what I want to give to my clients this year, but I also need your support and knowing that like Callie’s gone now. She had left at this point. It was just you and I. Sammy was moving or had moved by now. She still works for us, but just in a very different way or realm and she also wasn’t a part of the Nancy Ray Photography side. So it was really just you and I for a lot of things and I think that it allowed me to just say like, “Take me as I am. I am going to give you my all.” I want to give you my all. I give you every right to call me out when I’m not and to just call me up to bigger and better things because I want to also set myself up for success in the future.

But I think not having any sort of facade or trying to make it look like it was something that it wasn’t, and we worked really hard. Specifically you and I worked really hard to make sure that it was apparent that the Lord had called us into this. Nothing had happened between us. There was no reason other than Lord calling us into new seasons for us closing Nancy Ray Photography. You are still one of my very best friends and we never wanted it to come across it. That wasn’t the case. And we also never wanted to come across that we were like just going to bail on any of our clients or we were just going to let things fall to the wayside.

We wanted to really be open and honest with everybody else and specifically our clients. We went about it. We told vendors then we told our clients and we made sure people knew ahead of just the world knowing so that people felt loved and cared for and we just kind of said like, “Hey, here’s where we’re at.” We were very honest with people and telling them that Lord had called us into something new and that wasn’t going to change our client’s experience at all with us, but moving forward we were moving into new seasons, so it just was going to look different.

Nancy Ray:

Totally. One of my favorite things, and I think one of the things that you did so well to finish strong and to finish well as you told me, and this means so much to me to this day and I’ll never forget but you told me, you said, “I want you to know, I am all-in for NRP this year.” Yes, I’m starting my own business next year but we discussed exactly how you were going to launch your new business, exactly how it was it going to come on the heels of me closing NRP. And so we did that almost together on the same.

Olivia Suriano:

Yeah. It was the same day.

Nancy Ray:

Same day, I announced that we closed and then you announced your opening OSP, Olivia Suriano Photography. I just love that because our hearts was not competitive, it was not impressing each other. You also told me which was just so... I thought it was just so full of integrity. You said, “When I am here working on the clock for Nancy Ray Photography, I just want you to know I will not be emailing my brides for OSP, I will not be having consultations under my brand, I’m going to do all of that in off hours when I am not on your clock and I just want you to know that.” And that to this day has meant so much to me. I never asked that, I just assumed but just you taking the time to verbally say that to me, I just thought it demonstrated such integrity, but also allowed you to finish well at NRP.

Olivia Suriano:

It did, yeah. It allowed me to draw some very clear lines because I mean, my client experience... Obviously, I learned from the best from you growing a business and what that looks like so my client experience for OSP is very similar, but it's not NRP. At the end of the day it's under a different name and I wanted to make sure things were very separate. I wanted my clients for Nancy Ray Photography to feel like they were getting Nancy Ray Photography. I didn't want them to feel like they were getting something that they didn't sign up for.

I mean my OSP clients probably thought I was crazy because for the first six months of my business or whatever, they probably got emails for me at like 8:00 p.m. because that just was when I did all of that kind of work and it was different, but it was also like that's where I needed to be. Andrew and I, even my husband, Andrew we had had so many conversations and he had just said like, "My prayer for you is what I want you to be able to give Nancy and Will is just to be all in for them this year that they don't feel like they're getting the short end of the stick or slighted either." Because like I said before, it is tricky to close a business that runs in such a seasonal way that you can't...

Nancy Ray:

Right.

Olivia Suriano:

I told you this multiple times like it's such an interesting thing to be in somewhat of a limbo of closing a business, but not closing it just yet. I hope that we executed that well for our clients, but also for our sake and I think we communicated really well throughout that to make sure that both parties felt really cared for and loved for.

Nancy Ray:

Yeah, I totally agree. One of the ways we finished well, I think was with our clients and with how we did business, we really kind of erred on the side of serving too much like over serving. We wanted to feel like we gave it our all by the end of the year. Do you think that was a good call or a mistake? How did that affect the way that we did things?

Olivia Suriano:

I definitely think it's wise to draw clear boundaries. Hear me when I say that. But I also think when you are in an industry where you are providing a service or serving people. You can never serve them too much. I think it was a great call. I think that we really worked hard. I spent way more time in person with a lot of my clients before their wedding day this past year and that's something I've carried on to my business. I think that that created just a relationship that gave me permission to push the boundaries a little bit with them in a very healthy and good way on their wedding day like allowing me to be creative with them, allowing me to really know them in a way that they felt way more comfortable on their wedding day with me than had I not spent all that extra time with them.

When it came to building out timelines, if it was going to serve our client better that they had an additional hour of coverage, sometimes we would just add that on and not think twice about it because we knew it was going to serve them better. I mean, your last wedding I'm pretty sure I didn't get to shoot it with you, but you were on the dance floor the whole night. Things like that. We just were like

we're not going to give this up. We are going to finish strong, but in a way that our clients see us the whole time. They feel loved and cared for and serving our clients has always been our top priority, but specifically as we navigated through closing the business.

I mean, I feel like the our clients were the people we talked about the most making sure that they felt loved and cared for because they're already in such an emotional and vulnerable state because they're getting married. It's a big deal. They've got a lot going on. They're stressed. A lot of them work full-time and are planning a wedding which also can feel like a full-time job. And so we wanted them to feel really cared for throughout this whole process. So I think in any way that we felt like we could take our client experience up a notch, we tried to.

For some of our clients that looks like not being up in their grill too much, for lack of a better term. Some of our clients, we knew it was just going to serve them better if we just were really clear on our communication, timely about things, but we didn't overdo it with them. We didn't over communicate. And then for others of our clients, it meant getting coffee with them regularly, spending time outside of... I mean, I went out with several of my clients to spend time like just grabbing dinner or whatever that wasn't even really related to their wedding.

Just because I wanted them to know that I cared for them and this season of their life, and I didn't want them to feel like I was going to let it like all pass by and just be so all consumed with closing NRP and launching my business that they were like an afterthought. I didn't want that at all. So I think it was a great call for us to err on the side of serving too much.

Nancy Ray:

I remember I had so many conversations with you last year and be like, "How are you doing?" And you're like, "Well, if I'm honest I am really overwhelmed." Because you ran the day-to-day, you ran all the client correspondence, you edited, you were in charge of them, editing the delivery of all the products, the photos. I mean you ran NRP while you were starting OSP because I had already scaled down my days and hours and I was focusing on transitioning and my kids were getting sick every other week, and I was launching this podcast and trying to maintain that.

You said, "I'm kind of tapped out. I work a lot, but it's for a season." And I think knowing the end was coming, it's like you can give that extra push to do it well and to finish strong because you know that there's a finality to it. I always think about the feeling of laying in the bed after shooting a wedding and your feet are throbbing, and your shoulders hurt and you've just had a shower. I mean it's probably past midnight. Honestly, I'm going to miss that feeling as weird as that sounds. I'm going to miss that feeling the most because there's nothing quite like knowing you have given something your all physically, emotionally. You've done the very best that you can. I wouldn't trade that for anything because I felt that way after every single wedding last year, after every single family session or session that we did and then towards the end of the year. I don't know, it felt right and good to know that we kind of went above and beyond as much as we could.

Olivia Suriano:

Yeah, definitely. Anytime people have asked me about what that whole process looked like, I have just said I had a lot of really high hopes for 2019 and I think that it was my year of overwhelm. Like

you said, I came to you on multiple occasions and just said, “I’m tapped out. I very much feel overwhelmed.” You were so encouraging in that but I also think that my biggest prayer throughout all of last year and every time I felt like, “Okay, I’m at my wit’s end. I feel like I need a straw because I’m drowning and I just need a little bit of air from the top.” It was like, “Lord, allow this to carry me into 2020 knowing that my workload will be far less because I’m not managing multiple photographers, it’s just me.”

And I think if anything, it was like I said, me having my hands open to the Lord. He said, “I’m going to load up your hands this year so that in 2020 when I take some of this out. You feel like naturally, you’ve created margin in your life. You have the tools and the wisdom to run your business well and efficiently, but not run yourself into the ground.” I feel like when someone starts a business you see that so often because they give all of them. And definitely like that is my hope for my business that I give all of me, all of myself to that, but I also think I learned alongside you, what that looks like to have a balanced one but also to just manage a lot of work at one time well. And so because of that, I mean I think it is beyond the skill of photography.

2019 taught me more about owning a business than I think any sort of like business degree ever could, anything like that because I just got to see so much of it up close and personal and I got to feel the overwhelm of that, that it gave me the tools and the wisdom and the guidance on how to take that into my business, and to manage things well. I mean, you and Will, and Andrew and I have met several times and you all have played a key role in helping us launch this business, and really make sure that we’re doing this well and what we’re doing is honoring and serving the Lord as well. I feel like all of 2019 gave me that and taught me that so I’m incredibly grateful for the overwhelm, as silly as that sounds. And while I was in it. I probably wasn’t but I am now. I’m so grateful for that.

Nancy Ray:

Yeah. And that’s not to say, we did everything perfectly either. A lot of me wishes that you weren’t so overwhelmed. I’m like did we do that right, but it’s also like, “Well, in some ways we didn’t have a choice and in some ways it just was what it was.”

Olivia Suriano:

I don’t want anyone to hear me say like, “Nancy and Will made me feel so overwhelmed.” That is not the case at all. A lot of it was, it was kind of like, okay either, and a lot of it was me. I’m just very much like I take on a lot of things and you know learning to say, “No.” I’m trying. But I think that a lot of it too is like we’re closing our business. We’re not going to hire somebody else for a short season to do these things because that’s not fair to someone else. It doesn’t make sense for someone else and both you and Sammy were wonderful and saying like, “Let me pick up or help you carry this.” Y’all both linked arms with me and walked me to the finish line when I needed it.

I think it was a necessary overwhelm and it was something for us to do this well. It looks like us all being overwhelmed. I mean, there were things that caused each of us I feel like to be overwhelmed after the long trip last year and Sammy basically ran NRP for two weeks because you were on maternity leave and I was out of the country. She probably felt that in that time as well. So I think that we all just kind of looked at each other and we’re like this is going to be the year where we just each carry a heavy load and we support each other in that and you all did it like, “I’m so grateful for the support I had from y’all.” So I think it was an overwhelm in the best way.

Nancy Ray:

I think it can just look different. We knew it was going to be giving our all. We knew it was going to be a lot of work, but in some ways for me, last year looked differently than I expected it to, and I think the key takeaway from that is just to remain teachable, remain humble because it's not like we'd ever closed a business before. It's not like I had ever taken my career that I had built over 12 years of my life and closed it before. There was there is a massive emotional toll that it took on me that I did not expect. I look at last year as like a grieving year. I was grieving it the whole time.

Then there was the work and then there was this three small kids. I'm nursing like a newborn baby all throughout last year. There's so much to wrestle with that was pulling us in a lot of different directions that I think the key is just to say, "Hey, maybe this isn't going to look exactly like you saw it, but you've never closed a business before." There's no way to do this. There's no like, "Hey, this is exactly what's going to look like." And one of the things that was different for my expectations is I was really excited to book as many weddings as possible because I just wanted to go all out. I wanted to give it as much as possible.

But once we made the announcement in April, we thought, "Oh, maybe a ton of people are going to be like this is the last chance to book Nancy Ray Photography. Let's jump on it." But what happened is people were hearing they're closed which that's what we said, "We're closing." So it wasn't a giant rush for all these bookings, it was a very natural kind of subsiding. Now, we still booked. We didn't reach our like mega goals that we were hoping because it was just unrealistic and that's one thing that I learned. I was setting unrealistic goals for a year that we were closing our business.

I think if I had in my normal self, which is like an achiever, a goal setter, I think I would have been really disappointed but because I remain teachable and remain humble and said, "You know what, this is actually natural. This is a natural progression of a season that's closing, in a business that's closing and that's good and that's okay." I think that's one of the best things that I learned is in any season whether you're opening something or closing something just remain teachable and humble.

Olivia Suriano:

Yeah, and I think that we also like... Because of that, our approach with our clients too was... I mean, we took a lot of feedback from them like if somebody didn't feel cared for or loved in some sort of scenario, because obviously we were each carrying a heavy load. We wanted to make sure that it didn't end there with them. We were like... our MO has always been to be the clients are always our first priority and always correct obviously, "your customer is always right" mentality, but I think even that we took to another level of just saying like, "What can we do to serve you even after your wedding to make sure you felt loved and cared for?" Because we haven't ever done this before.

We don't know what this is necessarily going to look like and we want to make sure that everyone feels like they walked along or they got walked all the way through their process in such a loving and caring way and then even after their wedding they didn't feel like they were just dropped and kicked to the curb. We wanted to make sure things were done really well. And so I think that looked like us listening to each other really well, listening to our clients really well and just taking time to look at ourselves like what can we do differently? What can we do better to make sure as we continue to move forward in this process of closing our business that we're doing it well and we're not allowing anything to fall through the cracks.

But then also like having grace. And I would say that to anybody who closes a business. I mean there are just things that become overwhelming and become difficult to maintain, and you have to just really look at the business and you're serving your clients, and we at times made a list like what's taking priority for us right now? And making sure that our priorities were in check and that the things that needed to take priority were what took priority, and really focusing on those things, and the big picture of it all to make sure that we were being humble in the way that we presented everything and that we weren't like just jumping to the closing of the business and saying like, "Bye everybody. Sorry about it."

Nancy Ray:

Yeah, totally. And I feel like one of the things we prioritized and said from the very start is our relationships. We are going to end this thing and we're not going to have this massive fall out like you said it's not... Our friendship, our working relationship really was, I feel like stronger than ever. There was a lot of grace that we gave each other, it's a lot of understanding a lot of transparency, but we knew this business will come and go but our friendship is going to stand. And I really loved how we supported each other in our marriage relationships with our husbands and our other friendships. That was one thing I feel like we did well as well.

Olivia Suriano:

Definitely. I think too like people ask me a lot, "Was it awkward to start a business while still working for Nancy? A business that essentially, had you kept your business open, would have been a competitor?" I'm like, "Well, had she kept her business open, we wouldn't probably be doing this." I had told people time and time again, and even when you and I went to a film workshop in Alabama together, one of the biggest things people comment on is just like how you, Nancy are my biggest cheerleader and I felt that. I mean, apart from Andrew, I truly think the person that walked alongside me the most in starting this business and has continued to do so is you.

I am so incredibly grateful for that. I tell people all the time I owe my business and my talent and all of my skills to Nancy because without her I wouldn't have been able to do any of this. So I'm incredibly grateful for that and the fact that because of our transparency and the way we've always communicated, we just really did hold our relationship so close and we made sure to work hard to make sure that that didn't fall to the wayside either and that took top priority for us.

Nancy Ray:

I'm tearing up over here. That just mean so much and I really am so excited for you. I've said it to you and I've said it other people, but I'm like, "You're going to be a celebrity photographer." I really believe it and now it's recorded in the podcast so you have to come back when you shoot your first celebrity wedding.

Olivia Suriano:

That's great.

Nancy Ray:

But thank you for that. I just love you. I'm so excited for you.

Olivia Suriano:

Thank you.

Nancy Ray:

Okay. Just the last question or thought that I want to address. It's just the difference between finishing strong and finishing well.

Olivia Suriano:

I think kind of the main theme I feel like we've talked a lot about in this podcast is just our client care and how much of a priority that was for us, and I think that that's one of the biggest differences in finishing strong versus finishing well is finishing strong to me means like numbers and money and things that at the end of the day knowing that legacy is always what we've stood for and what we've worked hard to achieve and just that's what we've wanted to carry on, I think legacy gave us a lens to look through things differently because we wanted to leave a lasting legacy.

And that didn't mean making the most money this year or booking the most weddings this year. That meant pouring into our clients, pouring into each other, pouring into each other's future endeavors. I mean even Callie. As she moved on to what she decided to move on to like you and I were trying to be right there next to her like cheering her on in that as well and same for Jen. I mean, I think we have worked really hard to support her in her new work environment and all of that. So I think that finishing well means that at the end of the day you can really look back and say like, "I spent so much of my time pouring into those people and allowing them to pour into me."

And the numbers may not be where we thought they were going to be or what we wanted them to be when we set those original goals, but we feel really proud of the work that we did and we feel really good about it, and hopefully our clients feel the same way and felt really cared for and loved for in each other. Hopefully, you felt that way that I cared and loved for you and vice versa for sure.

Nancy Ray:

Yeah. I feel like it just all comes down to people and that's how you finish well is just loving well, loving the people in your life well on your way out as things closed down. I don't know if I told you this story, but my family, we've just been on the struggle bus with sickness this winter. I had all these ideals in my head of the last few weeks of work in November and December for me, and my kids were just sick and I was sick. It was awful and I remember after being sick for like 10 days and just feeling like I couldn't work, I was feeling so behind. In a moment of weakness, I left this voice text for Jen because she actually randomly texted me. I was like, "Hey, how are you?" And I was like, "Oh, you texted on the wrong day."

So I left her this voice text. I was like, "Jen, I so badly want to be finishing strong with NRP and I feel like I can't. These are my last weeks of work and I feel like I can't. I physically can't." I feel physically weak and this is not how my last few weeks of work I wanted them to look like in my mind and she left me a voice text back and prayed over me and then said, "Nancy, God never called you to finish strong, He only called you to finish well." And that lifted this massive burden off of my shoulders because even in my ideals in my mind, in this picture that I had of like showing up on time and me and you.

I think it was the last weeks that you were in the studio. I was so excited to work alongside you and

that's like high five and finish all the things because I was at home sick or taking care of sick kids. I was so disappointed and that reframed my whole mind about the whole year. I was no longer thinking about that last week that I so badly wanted it to look a certain way, I was thinking you know what, I feel like we did finish well. We finished well because of how we did this year and it's exactly as it was supposed to be, and I just was able to release it through a lot of tears. I texted her back just like crying. I needed that word.

Again, it was just the reminder of the difference between finishing strong and finishing well. And finishing well is just showing up and doing the best that you can with what you have and then just letting the Lord take over. So I totally agree.

Olivia Suriano:
That sweet Jen.

Nancy Ray:
I know, sweet Jen.

Olivia Suriano:
Always having that good wisdom.

Nancy Ray:
I know. It was just so timely as she always is I feel like whenever she speaks into me. But just within our team, with our clients like you said, finishing well was more about just loving each other. Even loving our clients and loving one another well and supporting each other on the way out. And so thank you for all of your words and for your heart and for your friendships and I just love you. I'm so thankful and I'm so excited for you because we are now... I mean, it's done. NRP has done it. It's really close. We are now in the new season and it feels... I don't know if you feel this but it feels light and exciting. I would love for you just to share a little bit about what you are doing, OSP and where people can find you.

Olivia Suriano:
Yes. Well, first thank you for having me so much and I just love you. I'm also so grateful. In fact, I've still gotten to see you a decent amount and I'm just so grateful for our friendship because I would have been so sad-

Nancy Ray:
Thank you.

Olivia Suriano:
... if we didn't get to still see each other a lot despite all that.

Nancy Ray:
Totally agree. I know.

Olivia Suriano:
I opened Olivia Suriano Photography. Like Nancy said, I opened it the same day we closed Nancy Ray Photography. I am still a fine art film photographer. It looks very similar to Nancy Ray Photography

and that I serve my clients in a very similar manner. And I strive to run my business in a very similar manner.

Nancy Ray:

I mean, I taught you everything I know, right?

Olivia Suriano:

Yes. Exactly. You just get my quirky self when you do. I'm really excited. It's been a great start to the year so far and I had a little bit of a rest season between the end of my NRP season in the beginning of my OSP season which I'm really grateful for.

Nancy Ray:

Well deserved.

Olivia Suriano:

Thank you. I'm excited. I'm excited for all the new directions I'm going. I know we talked about celebrity weddings. I would love that. So if you're a celebrity listening to this and call your girl because I'm here for you.

Nancy Ray:

Sure, sure.

Olivia Suriano:

I really love like destination weddings. I've booked a couple of like smaller destination weddings which are just kind of my niche. I really love that and like a small intimate wedding, but I also like I'm all about a big wedding at the Ferrington. I think that's beautiful as well.

Nancy Ray:

Thank you because that was my wedding. I appreciate that.

Olivia Suriano:

Yes. I love it. I have a couple of those this year that I'm excited about. But just really like we said, I think last year gave me a really great picture of what it looks like to love people well and serve them well and that's kind of the mentality I'm taking in to running my business. So I only take a certain number of clients every year for that reason so that I can really love on them. I'm doing predominantly weddings, but if you were an NRP family client and you're looking for a family photographer, please don't hesitate to call. I also will be doing mini-sessions so all that good stuff, but I'm really grateful for all that I learned from Nancy and Will, Callie, and Jen, and Sammy, and Elizabeth and just everybody.

Nancy Ray:

We just had an all-star team.

Olivia Suriano:

We did.

Nancy Ray:

I love every lady on our team so much. I will say this, I feel like... So for one, I really believe you're a better photographer than me, which is just...

Olivia Suriano:

I don't know about that.

Nancy Ray:

No, you really are. You have surpassed me but I couldn't say that until after my business was closed because I didn't want people to think that I wasn't good, but literally I can say that now because of you have surpassed me. You do a better work and I really believe that we all carry our different personalities to wedding day, but the best thing about having you photograph a wedding or a family or whatever is you. You literally are the most fun, funny person and yet the perfect blend of fun and funny and professional because I just was never funny. You make your clients laugh.

Olivia Suriano:

You are funny. That's not true. I think you're one of the funniest people I know.

Nancy Ray:

Oh, bless. Well that's very nice coming from you. I just say that to say you are a gem of a photographer because of the way that you work with people. And I've been on the other side of your camera like you have photographed my family countless times and I just adore you. So anyway-

Olivia Suriano:

Thank you.

Nancy Ray:

I just wanted to kind of paint a picture of Olivia Suriano because you just get the best of everything. That's so great.

Olivia Suriano:

You're too kind.

Nancy Ray:

Well, I love you. Thank you so much for coming on the podcast. This was so fun.

Olivia Suriano:

Thank you for having me. Any time. I'll come back whenever.

Nancy Ray:

Well, I hope you enjoyed the conversation with Olivia as much as I did. And I wanted to briefly summarize just some of the main nuggets and lessons that we learned as we finished Nancy Ray Photography. Be transparent, don't try to impress each other. Err on the side of serving too much, remain teachable, work with the utmost integrity, prioritize relationships and people, focus on legacy more than numbers, be each other's biggest cheerleaders and finish well, not strong. All in all, do the very best you

can with the season you've been given and let God do the rest.

It's time for the Work & Play corner store so I thought I'd have Olivia back and she could tell you a little bit about a book that she's enjoying and a thing that she's loving. I might get a little bit of a commission from the Cornerstore and it's for a good cause. It allows me to keep this podcast coming to you every week. So without further ado, here is Olivia and something that she's loving, and a book that she's loving.

Olivia Suriano:

Oh, gosh. Okay. Well, a couple of things. Lypsyl chapstick. I really love that product.

Nancy Ray:

Is this the one you gave me with a little green lid?

Olivia Suriano:

Yes.

Nancy Ray:

You still love that? Okay.

Olivia Suriano:

Listen, you can buy like a large pack off Amazon and it's the greatest thing that will ever happen to you. So I definitely suggest that. Also, game changer is I've been like an oat milk lover recently for my lattes, but Oatly's barista version of oat milk is a game changer.

Nancy Ray:

Where do you buy that?

Olivia Suriano:

Whole Foods, Target, Amazon. I think you can buy it off Amazon. I mean I guess Amazon Whole Foods.

Nancy Ray:

Amazon has everything.

Olivia Suriano:

I know right?

Nancy Ray:

Amazon is taking over the world. It's crazy.

Olivia Suriano:

Really. But those two products I feel like have been a staple in my life recently.

Nancy Ray:

Listen, I lived on your recommendations for everything in life. So that's great.

Olivia Suriano:
So definitely those.

Nancy Ray:
And a book you're reading or a book that you've read recently that you love.

Olivia Suriano:
Ooh, that I love? Try Softer. It's a fresh approach to move us out of anxiety, stress and survival mode and into a life of connections, and joy.

Nancy Ray:
That sounds amazing.

Olivia Suriano:
Yes. She was on Annie F. Downs' podcast and it was like life-changing for me. And that book is really great. I really, really loved it. That would be the book that I would recommend right now. I don't know how to pronounce her name, Aundi Kolber. It's A-U-N-D-I Kolber.

Nancy Ray:
That's a cool name.

Olivia Suriano:
Maybe she just goes by Aundi, I don't know. But yeah, Try Softer.

Nancy Ray:
Okay. Well, I'm adding this to the corner store today because I love your recommendations.

Olivia Suriano:
Wonderful. I feel so honored. Goodness.

Thanks for listening to Episode 46 of Work & Play with Nancy Ray.

Everything I've mentioned today can be found in the show notes at nancyray.com/podcast/46. And you can find me at nancyray.com or follow me at Nancy Ray on Instagram or Facebook almost daily. I'm going to close with words from Adrian Pintoneil who said,

"We become fruitful in our faith walk, not by starting strong but by fighting to finish well."

So whether you're in the midst of finishing something well or whether it'll come to you one day, my prayer for you is that it would be fruitful as you truly finish well.

Thanks for listening and I'll catch you next time.