



**Lesbian Elders Oral Herstory  
of  
Zelda aka Judith Miller**

An Interview  
Conducted by  
Alicia Mountain

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Collection: The Lesbian Elders Oral Herstory Project

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**Alicia Mountain 00:04**

Alright. Hello and thanks for joining us. Today is August 25, 2021. We are recording an oral history with me, Alicia Mountain, talking to Zelda aka Judith Z. Miller, about her life and her multimedia show, "Que Será, Será: a Life's Journey of Sexual Orientation & Gender Expression." This is a Lesbian Elders Oral History Project Interview, a project with the Lesbian Herstory Archives and we're recording from Queens, New York, and from Kingston, New York. Thank you so much. Zelda, so nice to get to have this time to talk with you, both about life, about art making, about this one-person show, and about how being a part of the Lesbian Herstory Archives also has a place of importance. So to get us started, I'm wondering if maybe you can first tell us just a little bit about this show that we'll be talking about and then we'll go back in time a little bit and hear about how you became an artist and what happened along the way?

**Zelda aka Judith Miller 01:26**

Yeah, I was thinking though and I don't mean to get out of water.

**Alicia Mountain 01:30**

Sure.

**Zelda aka Judith Miller 01:30**

I guess by nature [laughs]— I want to just like thank the Lesbian Herstory Archives because it's like I think that a younger generation doesn't fully understand what it means to grow up and think you're the only lesbian on planet Earth. To really think that. And how profound it is that we are housing the memory of what that was like, and how important it is to never go back there without anybody to make us go back there. So I think that the Lesbian History Archives is so essential and I'm really, really honored to be part of that because I think it's so important. So thank you.

**Alicia Mountain 02:23**

Well put, I agree. So if we're thinking about like kind of having an archive and a documentation of our history and our communities, and kind of how we get from point A to point B in our lives as lesbian people I am so— I've had the opportunity to watch "Que Será, Será" and I hope that any archive visitors also take some time to watch and meditate on this project that you made. Can you tell us— well, let's go from there either about, you know, life as an artist, life becoming an artist, or any particular projects that you want to tell us about?

**Zelda aka Judith Miller 03:17**

Well, maybe I don't know. You know, I wasn't sure where to start but maybe I should start with "Que Será, Será" and just talk about like how it started. Maybe that's important that I live here at The Lace Mill artists residency in Kingston, New York. And we, prior to the pandemic, were producing all kinds of things here. We have art gallery shows and, you know, jazz bands and

that's starting up again now. Just now. But they— right at the beginning of the Me Too movement— or I don't know I'm not good with time— but it was April 2018. I think at that time that the Me Too movement was just— please everybody correct me, I'm not a historian— but I know it was present in the news and in my consciousness and in everybody's consciousness. It was the beginning of the meeting and the producer, one of the producers here, decided to do a show called MEN right at the height of the Me Too movement to show how good men are. That not all men are like that. So he asked me to participate in that show and I was like, "No. This— not only would I not want to participate, this is really bad timing. I'm just advising you. Not now. Not now. Okay. I'm just— as a friend." Well, he went ahead with the show and I— it, he asked someone else in the building to participate in the show. That someone was a man who is gay and can be effeminate and can wear women's clothing sometimes [unclear] and he said to him, "Would you like to participate in the show?" And he said, "oh, oh— but you know, not like in drag. Don't do anything in drag. We want positive images of men, you know, like businessmen and sportsmen." So my friend told me this. And at first I was like— I laughed. I was like that— how foolish can you be to say to a man who dresses like that, "Do not represent yourself in my show about men, even though you're a man. It's not positive. We want positive images of men." So we decided, he and I, that we would take pictures of ourselves in— exactly like each other— dressed in those particular images of men. We had a cowboy, we had a military man, we had a hockey player, and we had a biker. And he dressed in drag, the female drag, and I dressed in male drag and we posed identically. But what I wanted to do was I wanted to blow them up so that when you walked in this show, all you saw was the exact opposite of what the curator wanted to represent. Because I will not have him not tell me what a positive image of a man is, or any man who wants to express his femininity.

So that became— I got a photographer to help us and we got all our costumes together and we did the photoshoot. And then, but the pictures weren't like crisp enough to blow up really big. And I couldn't spend hundreds of dollars. So one of the women here, Patt Blue, suggested that I just do projections. That would be free and I could make it whatever size I wanted. So then I started thinking about the projections. What he had said to me about what's positive about masculinity affected me in my core, about how I perceive my own masculine side. And I also feel very male sometimes so it's— I felt insulted and like inspired all at the same time. I couldn't, I was like this can't happen; I got to do something. So I started looking at these projections and I started like, oh, there's a story here. There's not only my story but there's the story of what happens when people are squelched in that way in our culture. Either for women or men or however you identify, you know, in whatever gender. That box about positivity, you know, it needs to be very much expanded. Anyway, so I started doing the projections and I said, okay, there's my story about how this impacts me. But then there's also statistics, the fact that that impact makes kids hang themselves. This makes children die or kill other kids or beat the shit out of em. So that— I was thinking about that and I was like, you know, this— I have to talk about this. I have to talk about, you know, what the impact is.

So I then went and I interviewed all these people. Or actually they came to my home and I interviewed people. You know, I interviewed someone who I didn't really come out fully as female until he was in jail. And then, I think it was like 58 years old or something. You know like I mean people who had gone through changes that were just fascinating to me. You know, people identify as bisexual. I just did all these interviews and then I thought, well okay, what I'm going to do— I didn't do any of this. I just like I had to drop it because what happened was, I wanted to get it edited in such a weird way that their voices would be a collage. So this is a whole separate project that might take place in the future to accompany the show. These interviews with these amazing voices talking to me in intimate detail about their lives. But anyway, it inspired me to be even more open about my own life, like to be ruthlessly honest. Cause I showed it, 30 minutes of it, at that men's show for like, I don't know— I think I had 15, I guess, performances I kind of— and people responded very positively but there was a big uproar because of what I was doing. I was saying [unclear]— this show, going on right here, is not what should be happening. You know, it was scary. Okay. But then it evolved. And then it, you know, I thought, okay, I want— there are stories in my life that I feel are important for me to get out and for other people to hear and hopefully it will have the effect of changing lives without me having to mention those statistics. Maybe those statistics can accompany the show in some fashion. I mean I felt like I couldn't take on the world, at least not at this moment. So it became more [crashing noise]— that's my dog throwing her bone down— images mostly of me, and then of my artwork, and how my art and my theater, and social events impacted my ability to go from a place of being absolutely I am the only lesbian in the world and I'm going to kill myself, to a celebration of who I am and a desire to inspire and to protect others. So I know I'm talking like a maniac but I have to get that shit out.

**Alicia Mountain** 11:56

Absolutely. No, that's so important. And so in the the blurb that accompanies the recording that I got to see of the show, we're offered this description: "Que Será, Será is a multimedia show that chronicles the joys and challenges of navigating non-binary queerness from childhood in the 1950s to adulthood." And I think that's a good— I think that's a solid like summary blurb but it also doesn't capture the full richness of this project and its performance. So you were mentioning—

**Zelda aka Judith Miller** 12:39

Yeah I got to work on my media [laughs]— I have got a great quote about the show from this Australian reviewer and I realized that I should be using that more in such a way because she describes the show.

**Alicia Mountain** 12:56

Yeah—

**Zelda aka Judith Miller** 12:57

So I have to shift, I think. Yeah—

**Alicia Mountain** 13:00

No, I think—

**Zelda aka Judith Miller** 13:01

I'll call my marketing person.

**Alicia Mountain** 13:03

Yeah.

**Zelda aka Judith Miller** 13:05

Yes, I am reminding myself now. Thank you.

**Alicia Mountain** 13:07

[Laughs] — no, so I think that that's a great starting place but in case anyone hasn't seen the whole show, I would describe it as there are almost vignettes, like a number of sections, how many sections do you think?

**Zelda aka Judith Miller** 13:26

I have no idea because I haven't even looked at the show in like two years because [laughs]— it's a performance and it's only out of my mind.

**Alicia Mountain** 13:34

Oh yes, it has to be at least 40, probably more, sections that are each a couple minutes long where you're visiting— you're bringing us to a moment in your life. Starting with childhood and for the most part, it seems chronologically kind of moving us forward through a life of exploring lesbian identity. Exploring like a girlhood that doesn't quite feel comfortable. And then exploring masculine and male expressions of yourself, female and woman expressions of yourself, ways that that intersects with the careers that you have, and then also spiritual aspects of opening up and deepening I would say your relationships with these different parts of you. Does that sound like we're getting towards a picture of the project?

**Zelda aka Judith Miller** 14:35

Yeah, you're so smart. I love smart women.

**Alicia Mountain** 14:38

[Laughs]— lots of school, lots of school.

**Zelda aka Judith Miller** 14:42

No, it's no, it's like a thing. It's like it's very rare for anybody to actually talk to me about my show intellectually, you know.

**Alicia Mountain** 14:58

So to take us back. Some concepts that we had thought of, you know, we were kind of planning on talking about in this time together are when and how you became an artist. Also this concept that you mentioned of being ruthlessly honest, taking risks, and then how you develop this project and maybe how you've developed other art practices or ritual practices in your life too.

**Zelda aka Judith Miller** 15:30

Oh my G-d, we could be here for a week.

**Alicia Mountain** 15:31

I know.

**Zelda aka Judith Miller** 15:31

No wait, which one are we talking about?

**Alicia Mountain** 15:31

Okay, let's start with a sense of when or how you became an artist or when you started like thinking of yourself that way? Because we're talking a lot about different identities and when did you start identifying as an artist? Well we can stay focused on "Que Será, Será" for now [crosstalk]—

**Zelda aka Judith Miller** 15:44

Oh my G-d [crosstalk]— no we need a month, you know, because I don't know— wait no, we gotta pick one of those. I think it's important because one of my experiences in life is when I used to live in New York City. I've been in Brooklyn and Manhattan, and I've been walking down the street, and somehow I'd end up talking to some young woman. Usually, I have a great big dog so everybody wants to talk to me. But we get in the conversation and she says, "somehow, I'm an artist but I'm not really that good. And you know, I don't know, I don't think it's that important. That's never gonna go anywhere." And I'm like going, oh my G-d and I'm like, no, no, wait, if you're doing art, do art! And I'd be like this prophetess of, you know, inspiring young women to take themselves seriously artistically like that. It just happened to me over and over and over. And I felt— and one time 20 years later, a woman came up to me and said, "Thank you for inspiring me. You inspired me about my art 20 years ago." And so like, yeah, yeah.

So I want to, I've always— okay, so I didn't want to be an artist. I didn't want to be an artist because my brother was the biggest agent for kids on Broadway. And even though the arts were fantastic, when I went to— he took me to Broadway shows, they were incredible. But he also took me backstage and the stage mothers were bitches. There were bitches and the kids were brats. I didn't like them and they weren't nice to me. And I was like, I'm never going to be like them. So it wasn't until I was doing the Gestalt therapy, that I realized that— or my group therapy— I could change characters and they were like, "oh, go do acting! You should go be an actress." I was like, nahh, but then I walked down the street one day and I saw this sign and it said 'the acting process, inquire within,' so I inquired within.

At the desk was this absolutely stunningly beautiful woman, like a knockout [laughs]— see, I don't know how you are, but I know how I am. And she just like blew me away. And she was just so sexy and so beautiful and so sophisticated and so like everything. She started talking to me about classes and I was like, I'll be— whatever you tell, whatever you say, wherever you say, I will be there. So but then what happened was she— so of course she was going to be my teacher, right. So then, she was performing in the theater space that was going to be our— this little 30 seat theater and rehearsal place. So that's where my classes were going to be. They only had like four rows of seats. Okay. It's dark. She comes out. You know, this is the performance, she comes out— this is 1976 right now 19— I'm so bad on dates, 1977, something like that '76. Anyway, she comes out she's dressed in black in a sexy bustier right with a whip, a bull fucking whip. It's like 20 feet [laughs]— right, but not quite long enough to hit the audience but almost between her legs, a baby doll hanging bloody from her crotch. And she's like bam! She's like and I'm like, holy fucking shit this is my teacher. Right? So she scared the hell out of me but I went to the class and oh my G-d, it was so inspiring. It was so fun. It was so playful. It was everything I wanted. It was just and she was so beautiful. But anyway, that's a whole other story.

We ended up co-founding the theater together. Like another theater out of what was Earth Onion Women's Theater. That's where I went to study. It was called Earth Onion Women's Theater in Washington DC and they did a lot of really cool things. And then we got together and created The Fine Line Actors Theatre. So it was that person, that incredible woman, who's name is Jane LeGrand. Jane LeGrand was the director, the artistic director, and I was the executive director. She was brilliant and amazing and like unbelievable and she inspired me.

She helped me understand that I had something to give to the world through just being in response and not having a filter of shame. And to use that artistically. Use that artistically so that it's like— and we did all these great projects. We did a senior citizens project. We did an alcohol and drug abuse prevention project.

We did a [note: Women's Prison Project]— we spent six weeks performing in a federal women's penitentiary and it was amazing. It was the most, it was that moment— well, there were two moments. I was also studying at some point with Arena Stage. And we had a moment in this

class where they turned out all the lights and they had us just standing silently in the dark and all we could say over and over and over was “I am an artist. I am an artist. I am an artist. I am an artist.” And I— tears were streaming down everyone's face, including me. So the combination of studying with Jane and this affirmation that I was, in fact an artist, and then we created this project at the women's theater with Marsha Norman's *Getting Out*. Marsha Norman is a Pulitzer Prize winning artist, author. Her play *‘night, Mother* won the Pulitzer. But she also wrote this show *Getting Out*. And we took it to women's prisons. I was one of the performers and it was like, why am I performing this on for regular audiences when women in prison who benefit from this so much? And I raised all this money. I got all these grants— I mean it was like, oh my G-d, I performed for a special board of directors. And you know, it's like that gets you to the whole history of theater.

We should talk separately, really about the history of women's theater. You know, these theaters, there's so many things that happened and I want to give credit to that. To how hard Jane worked and how hard I worked. But it was a moment on stage. There's a moment in the play called *Getting Out* where the two actresses are on stage and the two actresses play the same character in different phases in their lives. And they are— one is getting out of prison and the other one is the young girl. I played the young girl, the wild one, right? And this was the one getting out, getting ready for the world. And there's a moment prior to this where the older one is in prison and she's got a piece of paper in her hand. And that piece of paper consists of a phone number. She had just received a visit from her John and he said, "You're going to get out soon baby and when you do the Johns— you know, I'll dress you from head to toe in red and white, red, red baby. The Johns would be lining up around the block." We did this in a regular audience. It was silence and they wondered is she going to rip up his phone number or not? We did it in the prison. They were up on top of their chairs screaming, “tear it up, tear it up, tear it up!”. I was like I'm on stage and we're both going like “holy fuck!,” we had never experienced anything like this. This was what theater was meant to be. It was meant to make people think that you were actually them. And they are you. And it was so— and then at the end, when I bow when the whole cast bowed, I literally felt waves of loving light pour over my body. I've never ever felt anything like that before or since. I thought, okay, I could die now. I have done something. You know, I was like— and the experience of being in prison and working in the prison. And what that show also did was very interesting. The women in the prison perceived me as my character so they accepted me. And it was really an interesting entree into how to break a boundary and work with people and what came out of it was really amazing. I wish I could read you the letters. I have the letters from women who say it changed their lives. That like that they were in chains and now— I mean our workshop really did— you know, it was very— I mean, I helped a woman get out. You know, I mean just so many things happen. And I learned that it was important to just do important stuff. That it actually could matter. You know, it actually could matter.

**Alicia Mountain** 27:08

Absolutely. And Zelda was that with Fine Line?

**Zelda aka Judith Miller** 27:13

Yeah.

**Alicia Mountain** 27:14

Yeah. Amazing, amazing. And that was in the DC area?

**Zelda aka Judith Miller** 27:21

Yeah, Washington, DC and that was back from like 1970. Well, '77, '8, '9. I probably started studying and it lasted till '85. Wasn't that long but we did stuff. You know, we could still get covered in the *Washington Post*. And like, several times. It was cool. You know, people knew who we were. And one time this girl asked me for my autograph and I faint [laughs]— and I was like— no, once, but it did. But what was I saying? Oh but then for 20 years, the theater closed and I could go all into that. That's actually probably in my show. But then I became a manager for performers. So you know, I ended up doing nothing but trying to help them enhance their careers, which was actually, you know, lovely. And I took— I did a lot of work from some very talented people. And I made a difference. I helped someone get nominated for a Grammy and that made me feel good, you know, but then also shit happened. I won't go into that. I started focusing back on my performing work but also in the interim, there's a whole trajectory of like, the spiritual practice that is also my visual work, which I was very thankful to be able to include some of it in my show... because it's like I always wanted to do a one-person show but I was like, well what is it? And it wasn't until I got inspired by the negative energy of back when the men's show that I thought, okay, I have to actually do something. So I have to make something. Oh, oh, me! I'm gonna make something. Yes. So yeah.

**Alicia Mountain** 29:28

And had visual art been a part of your life growing up or a part of your life when you were, you know, kind of doing your theater work also or was that something that the visual art that has come later to you?

**Zelda aka Judith Miller** 29:49

Much later. like it never even occurred to me. My best friend, Maggie, was an artist and is an artist and her work is like— Maggie Siner! Maggie Siner! Look her up! Her work is like— I don't know, it's like when you look at a cake that's been frosted deeply. It's really good and you want to eat it and it's like she understands how to work with paints and they're working is so beautiful. Maggie Signer. Check her out. She was my childhood best friend. And that's the only, you know— she could doodle and stuff and I'd be around but otherwise, other than music in my

house from my brother's love of theater where he had every musical in the world. Every Broadway musical and he plays them all the time. So we'll be dancing around to that. So other than that, I didn't have any experience really with visual art.

Every experience I've had with visual art has been a spiritual experience. And like, the first— I won't say one of the first things that happened to me. I've always had great danes. And this was my second great dane and Zuli, a beautiful harlequin great dane, and I would walk with her down the street everywhere and everybody knew her. They petted her and she was friendly and sweet. And then in one period, one week's time, three different mentally deranged men told me that they were going to kill my dog. And one of them— I was standing right in front of my brownstone in Brooklyn with my dog. And he stops me because a lot of people talk to me. They would, you know, stop me on the street constantly to talk to me about my dog. He stops me and he whispers in my ear. And he says, "I have a knife in my pocket. Next time I see your dog I'm going to cut her" and then he walks away. I'm like in shock and I looked down at the ground and I see a stick. I pick up the stick. I'm not thinking I want to hit this man with a stick. I don't know what I'm thinking. I just pick up the stick. I take it inside and go inside my house. And I start taking down all of these things that I had collected from when I lived in the country. Before I moved to Brooklyn, I lived in the country and I brought all these things that I would collect. You see the sticks hanging there. And it has on it a horse's tail because I used to drive a horse carriage and it has a horse tail there. It has a Yoni, a clay Yoni. It's wrapped with leather. And I just started to put these things around the stick. And then I leaned it against the wall, I took off all my clothes and I stood in the mirror. I looked in the mirror and I said you are crazier than any other, any of these other motherfuckers. This staff will protect you. So I sort of walked around the streets with the staff right. Oh and it has a jawbone of the deer— I've got my glasses off so I can't see that exactly. It has the jawbone of the deer on it. So I'm walking around Brooklyn like this, okay. I'm protecting myself from these crazy people. They're crazy and they threatened to kill my dog.

Okay. So but I started afterwards carving wood. I started going and digging up trees and making them into what are called Sacred Staffs sacred staffs. And every single one of them has a particular purpose. So each one is, you know, represents some aspect of freedom or something I'm trying to work out or something. You know, some frustration with my sexuality. It's like all these different things. So it's roots become the thing. My whole apartment is filled with them. And I have a show at the boathouse in Prospect Park. It was really cool. And then I had this guy named Max Pollak— he's a dancer and actually they just made this stamp. The United States stamp just came out for tap dancing and he's on it. And he tap danced at the closing of my show. No, I can't remember. The opening or the closing. I had an opening and a closing. And he danced with the staffs. He took them off the— I mean danced with them in the way that I had envisioned they would be. That they would be used for more of a tribal ritual purpose and he dances. He does body percussion and tap. He's really interesting. So Max Pollak, look him up, Max Pollak. So G-d now I'm lost. I lost myself.

**Alicia Mountain 35:03**

That's okay. So we were talking about how initially visual practice wasn't really part of your life and now it looks like it's both in a— there's a wood carving aspect to it, there's a drawing aspect to it. All sorts of things.

**Zelda aka Judith Miller 35:24**

Yeah. I make necklaces of trees and stones. And I started— I think when I look back on things, you know, it's like there's like this trajectory that doesn't happen to me in a purposeful way but in a spiritual way. It just sort of changes like, I started doing— I saw this picture in a magazine of a four character artwork and I cut it out but I didn't cut out the name of the artist. I mean, I cut out the name of the artist. And it's a four character sculpture and each one is looking up in different directions and looking down. And they look like gestures, and they look like they're clay. I had this on my altars for 20 years and I finally figured out who the artist is and her name is Roxanne Swentzell. She's a Native American artist. She's wonderful. What I realized, as I was looking at these pictures, of the picture of the sculpture, was that I wanted to be inside them. I wanted to understand what they saw through each of their eyes. I just, I felt like each one had a special kind of wisdom that I wanted to have.

So I had my girlfriend at the time, she— I posed in the exact same positions as a sculpture. And then she took pictures of me in each of the four poses. And then I printed that out very faintly and then I drew on them. And every single time I drew on them, I would have light rays coming out of my hands. And I found that— they're on my wall so I could see them. [Unclear]— at some point. And I didn't understand this. And then for a whole series of events. I had this opportunity, I won this trip to go anywhere I wanted to go in the world. It had happened. I can talk about I knew— it happened through a series of magical events. That would take a long time. I literally heard a voice in my head to tell me to do something I didn't want to do. And I did it. And that led to me winning this trip. So I went to Thailand and I met with this shaman. That was a miracle also, the way I was able to reach out to the man who actually knew this particular shaman who was the shaman for the head of Thailand. He's a king, he's a prime minister, what is he [laughs]— I should know. Anyway, a while ago and he said to me that I should be healing with my hands. And I brought him the shakers that I use to play when I chant and I pray and that's how I have a spiritual practice of chanting and praying and dancing. And he said that my shakers were part of my healing practice. When I went back home, I started doing that work. So then to connect it to the show, it's like that gave me strength. The experience of the transformation, my spiritual transformations, and giving credence to the fact that when I do— I'm a Jew— but giving credence to the fact that I practice shamanism and I practice journeying frequently. That I have frequently, like for years, immediately gone into the same exact bird spiritual being into the same exact cavern. Flying the same exact way into the caverns through over and over and over meadow in the exact same way every single time that I know that. And as

I encounter my spirit guides and they helped me in this process that I know that there's a connection between my spiritual work and my sexuality. Because when sexuality is repressed, you can't develop yourself entirely spiritually because your body is not in alignment, and you're in your soul, it's not in alignment. So when there's any form of oppression, you know, it just makes me really sad when I think of kids having to still having to go through similar growth experiences to what I had to go through.

**Alicia Mountain 40:28**

Yeah, absolutely. I feel like that all kind of paints the bigger picture and speaks to the fact that it's— my sense that your art practice, your spiritual self, and your gender self are not separate components. They're overlapping and commingling and sometimes one in the same. Yeah—

**Zelda aka Judith Miller 40:56**

I think a thing that I guess— I want to confirm and encourage the struggle to allow ourselves to not know and for one aspect to be informed by the other and to not feel that we have to separate ourselves in some way or be forced to do that, you know? I just—

**Alicia Mountain 41:30**

Yeah, that makes sense. So what does ruthless honesty mean and what kind of risk taking? How do you see that showing up either in your making of— I feel like we see it in different moments as you chronicle your life through "Que Será, Será." But yeah, tell me a little bit about being ruthlessly honest.

**Zelda aka Judith Miller 41:55**

Well, okay. Whenever I tell people that they should watch the show, which I do every day, because I want you to watch the show.

**Alicia Mountain 42:03**

Got to watch it, yes.

**Zelda aka Judith Miller 42:06**

But, you know, I'm like watch the show. But listen, I really don't want you to know anything that's in the show. Because because there are parts of the show that I don't really want people to know, you know, like maybe my best friends or something or my therapist. But like, there's stuff I don't want, you know—

**Alicia Mountain 42:26**

It's very intimate.

**Zelda aka Judith Miller 42:28**

Yeah and I mean look, if somebody is judging you, there might be people out there like, you know, more right-wing, whatever. Close-minded. I don't know what to call people. But if they judge certain aspects for lesbians in general then I can't control that. But to the people who are open to it, you know, I hope that it can be received across the board to everyone. To any audience. I mean, most of the people who've seen the show are straight. It's really interesting. And so it's like, they're like, oh no, this is universal. This is universal and that's what I'm hoping and praying, you know, not that I don't want to appeal to queer audiences, obviously. But it's like, you know, I want the show to resonate. I mean, I had one audience member say to me, she said, "After watching this, I feel like I can accept myself." I was like, holy shit, okay, boom. That's all I need to know.

**Alicia Mountain** 43:44

Totally. Yeah, my sense is that when we get really specific in the art that we make, and we get really personal, it's not even so much about the details of our own life. It is just a way of saying, look you can be your full self in all your specificity. And like, here's an example of that. Now you go live your life being as full a person as you can. I'm living life being as full of a person as I can.

**Zelda aka Judith Miller** 44:17

Yeah. That's interesting that you see that. I hope so. I hope that's true. You know, I just want people in general to be themselves.

**Alicia Mountain** 44:33

Yeah [laughs]— so you were saying that, like, I mean granted there, it seems like they're just kind of more straight people out there than there are LGBTQ people so most of the people who have seen it have been straight people. How has it— and it's been received well and powerfully, and you were saying that there's been, you know, some writing about the show? What's it been like or how have people interacted with it? Or what have they told you beyond this person who says that now she feels like, they feel like—

**Zelda aka Judith Miller** 45:11

I mean, no people, you know, I've got like a whole bunch of written responses about what people felt. You know, everything from the practical oh you need to take this to colleges to gender studies programs because, you know, they really— gender studies and women's studies and social studies and any campus that has an LGBTQ, whatever. That it would be good to be there and to talk about the show, you know, whether I can go by video or in other words, the video that exists or live. Dear G-d, allow me to live long enough to do this show live [laughs]— please. So and G-ddess and all spirits support it. But wait, what was I saying? I'm getting it lost in my head.

**Alicia Mountain 46:09**

You were talking about or I was curious about how it's been received. What people say when they see it.

**Zelda aka Judith Miller 46:15**

Yeah, no, people have been, you know— everything from very personally moved to self acceptance and a desire to express themselves more fully to ideas to this needs to go to Broadway. You know, and every— this kind of person needs to see this and oh my G-d, I have a trans son, and I really appreciate this to if I have a trans child or if I have a gay child, you know, this really helped me understand and be open, more open to that idea. Thank you. You know, like people feeling— numerous people have used the word gift. That it was a gift to them. They felt that way. And I think back to risk taking. I think that, you know, obviously, it's scary to talk about things that are so personal and I feel scared about it. But at the same time, I feel like it's like, what have I got to lose really? I'm privileged enough that I can do this. I have to like— if I can't do it, who's going to do it? So, you know, I feel an obligation, I feel an obligation. So anyway, it feels good to have these people respond so positively. I just really feel, you know, inspired like, okay look, I'm not crazy. I know I'm talking about my own shit here but there is something that's gonna affect people. And let's, you know, my thing now is like just getting it out there. You know, honestly, I just have to keep getting it out there.

**Alicia Mountain 48:14**

Yeah. In being a viewer and being an audience member, my sense of one of the ways that it— what's so powerful is that in each scene, you're really transporting us back there to that moment, viscerally that moment in time, in your body, in your mind, in your consciousness, in your developmental stage of life. Like when you're discussing being a child, you're putting it through your child self's eyes, rather than, you know, just memories. It's more experiential than that. So I found that very affecting to be in it in those moments.

**Zelda aka Judith Miller 49:05**

Oh, one of the things I wanted to do is I wanted to thank the TMI project. People should know about the TMI project locally here in Kingston. They're doing larger things too, and I'm not an expert in them. But the reason, as I said, I was managing other artists and I started to do my own work and then the show started happening and then I concurrently, with this or just prior to this, I started taking some classes with TMI. Fortunately, RUPCO, the organization that created or renovated this Lace Mill artists building that I live in, they paid for a workshop for us residents to participate with the TMI project and that's the first story I did? I think so. I've done a number of stories, but I think the first story was SheitelStock. I told the story that is now in my show, about the time I dressed in drag to an orthodox women's lesbian event, run by the Orthodykes called Sheitelstock. So it was a humorous story. But it was one, honestly, that I never thought that I could admit to people that I enjoyed the concept of wearing a dildo. Out loud. Or that I

wanted to dress in drag, or that somehow mingled with Jewishness and what that meant like to be the different me. The kind of Jew I am and those orthodox women. The way the kind of Jews they are and what lesbianism is like. You know, to me that story that's in the show is shortened. There's a longer version of SheitelStock, which talks about my experience going out with an Orthodox Jewish woman and being with her and her kids. And I think that's an interesting thing to watch because culturally speaking, you know, I never knew what it was like to know— I never knew an orthodox person. I never knew an Orthodox person. And to go out on dates with an orthodox woman with kids, it was really interesting. And I had like more respect for her and still have more respect for her than like practically anybody. She's amazing. And why am I saying this? There's a reason I'm saying this that— okay, that what happened with TMI was I was able to talk about the story and then think about other stories that I wanted to tell about my life and that I wanted to delve into. It inspired me to take other of their workshops and concurrently with this MEN [note: show] thing happening, right, or in the same frame of time. So it encouraged me to be able to say you know what, why can't I be a performer again? If I was a performer and I did this show where I felt like there were waves of love pouring over me, do you know when you're— have you ever experienced being near a woodstove late at night, right? It's cold but you can feel the warmth of the stove, just like it comes in waves, right? That's how, although that audience applause and screams, there was— I never, it was like a blessing. It was like a blessing from the G-ddess, you know? So, to be able to hope to do something that will move people again, continuously, in some way and also protect people.

**Alicia Mountain 53:19**

Yeah that it— I'm drawn to the way that you're nothing a lot of different moments of being a learner or being like, not necessarily a student in a formal sense but, you know, studying acting with mentors or doing the TMI project workshops, where you're learning and perhaps teaching yourself and taking wisdom from others.

**Zelda aka Judith Miller 53:53**

Yeah. I also was an assistant, an assistant teacher. I have led a whole bunch of workshops myself too. So that's been like a really interesting process. Like I— yeah, it's been really interesting. But okay, you go, your turn.

**Alicia Mountain 54:15**

I was just thinking about being on both sides of that equation too of like, being a mentor and a teacher, and being a learner and a student. I'm wondering if there are any, you've mentioned a few people, but any particular folks either that you've worked with, or learned from, or taught that, have had an impact, like a big impact, on how you are as an artist nowadays.

**Zelda aka Judith Miller 54:49**

I think, you know, it's— I have to say it again, I feel like the person who made me understand what an artist is Jane LeGrand who I've mentioned before that, because she told me certain things like that fear and anticipation feel the same in the body. Fear and excitement, feel the same in the body. You know, so when you're going on stage and you're about to be fearful, because I had a terrible stage fright and still do, that it's helpful to at least...reframe to some extent and acknowledge that it's excitement. You're looking forward to it, you know. Something like that is not just a theater lesson; it's a life lesson. You know that sometimes we're looking at something and we're fearful about it and sometimes it's an opportunity, you know, not undisclosed.

I mean like I'll give you an example. I told you the story about how, so I walked around with this stick and tried to protect my dog. That's what made me start carving and creating, you know, this visual art and it didn't mention the time I was— well, okay, I'm gonna forget what I'm saying. Oh, I got distracted because I looked up on my wall and on my wall is a carving of a mask. This is somewhat relevant though. This is a carving of a mask. I used to apply all these pictures for purposes of exploration. But I got a grant from an organization called Fractured Atlas, some kind of development grant. And since I was a woodcarver, and I had wanted for years to study with this particular woodcarver that I met. Anyway, it did not work out with this man. But this man in Alaska, who is called Tommy Joseph, who's an amazing woodcarver. I got this grant to study with him and he allowed me to come and be in his workshop or his working space for three weeks.

I carved this mask out of a log, which I never could have done without him. But what it is, it repres[ents]— I had a dream and the dream inspired me to create the mask. He said to me, I was in his workshop, and he said, "Look, you know, you're here for three days now and we only got three weeks. It's gonna take a long time. You have to figure out what you want to carve." So I said, okay. So that night, I went home and I said, well not home, but to my little rented place, and I prayed. And I said, "I'm going to dream my mask, I'm going to dream my mask, I'm going to dream my mask." I had this amazing dream, which was not an image but there was a concept in the dream and it was about a longing. It was about a longing to be able to express oneself fully. And to be both of those things. There were characters in the dream that had been getting what they wanted and were completely in love and entangled and it was gorgeous. And there was this person longing for that. And I knew that I was both of them. And that I was not only both of them that but I was also like, every gender, every race, every everything and I wanted my mask to represent the universal reality of that, now, female, gay, straight the [gestures to face] of every corner of the earth so it's like has almond shaped eyes on one side and other shaped eyes. Beard on one side. It has like this peacock flames coming out of here and it's like short spiky hair like me. Anyway, it's got all, alabaster, not alabaste— abalone, abalone shell teeth and when I was there, he was so embarrassed because out of its mouth, which looks like a cigar— it's not a cigar; it's a penis and every time the all the tourists would come by he'd like go, "Could you just take

that out so I don't have to talk about it" [laughs]— it is so funny. But anyway I don't know why I'm talking about that. But all of this, that if you're talking about a mentorship, if you're talking about something— I think it's so important that somebody get the message that. Oh I know, on the bus, I went— after this thing with my dog and saving my dog with the staff, one day years later, I was on the bus on Fifth Avenue in Brooklyn, I sit down. A man comes and sits next to me and he's, you know, he looks at me and goes, nice hair which happens all the time. I don't think anything of it and I look at him and I go, oh my G-d , that's one of those crazy motherfuckers that threatened to kill my dog. So I began to feel this incredible surge of anger. And then I had another thought. And that thought was, thank you for helping me become an artist. Because his threat made me go in and wrap that staff that became a collection and made me— it enabled me to study with Tommy Joseph. That kept the arts alive inside of me in a visual way. And then I was able to become a performer again, which was another aspect that I haven't manifested for many years, so it's like every stage of my art has been a— spiritually from one to the other. The first one was like in response to a crisis, right. So I had to have the staff that became this whole exploration and then though, then I started with the self portraits, and then drawing on them, and then they became the spiritual self portraits. Rays coming up. Then those self portraits morphed into a character that was an alien shaman, who was behind me, and she has all these worlds that she is praying upwards to in this image floats at night, under, under, under black light. It glows and it comes off the thing so it looks like there's these worlds floating. She's praying. She's up on this— it's all a collage. So it's you know, but she's up on this mountain top. You can see the tunnel. She's up on this mountaintop. She's praying, praying, praying, praying and you can see the energy flying out of her fingertips. But also inside of her body is a— and she's pregnant— you can see the inside and inside there is the exact same replica of her, of this alien shaped figure. That figure is also reaching, reaching, reaching up. And above that is another world and it's the exact same picture in a different color depending on this. This is a complex thing about the energy of the color. But anyway, each one has a slightly different color and it has to do with the 10th dimension. And anyway, never mind. But it's, she is praying into another world like as if we're praying up to the moon and beyond the moon or beyond the stars. Each one is another aspect, but they're all aspects of another pregnant woman alien figure looking, seeking the divine, and it's cut flat like this. It's five feet by eight feet but at the edges, it has like half a world so you know, they keep going. It just keeps going and going that I guess this figure represents me seeking spiritually. So that's what and then I started doing these self portraits of like— I would paint myself with fluorescent colors. I also produced this event called Zelda's Happenings, which are black light body painting, percussion, dance parties, except they're not happening because of the pandemic and because I'm too busy. But I was getting painted and painting people. And so I started taking these selfies and then I took the selfies in front of the canvas behind me. Then I printed them out. So they're glowing under black light, painted body paint, and then I print them out and then I paint on top of them with fluorescent paint and then I either show them under blacklight or photograph them again, if possible. It's very hard because the eye doesn't see what

the camera sees. And it's hard to— but anyway, they're all expressions of a spiritual quest to understand. So that's what's going on.

**Alicia Mountain** 1:04:58

Yeah, that's what's going on. So day to day right now, are you working on a particular next project? Is there something that you're kind of chewing on or churning on?

**Zelda aka Judith Miller** 1:05:13

I am— well, I have one thing I am working on. I don't know if it's ever gonna happen. I have several things I'm working on. I just don't know if they're gonna happen. But if they do one of them— as Jews, we pray what's called the Sh'ma. It's basically G-d is one. And when I pray the Sh'ma, I have been like everything I've prayed— you're supposed to pray every day but I'm not a religious Jew so I pray it once a week. And so I imagined myself expanding in various different ways through time, through space, through images, through all these other things that I've been working on for a long, long time, and I've been recording some of my experiences. I don't know what they'll be. That's one thing. I have another visual art project that I'm working on that also may go nowhere, because it's a half dog, half human creature. And she's got like dog paws. And so it's— she's like, because my dog died. Was very sick and she died. And I felt this energy. And I don't know if it will all ever be anything and what it is partially done. But that's happening. And ‘Que Será, Será’, basically, I'm— there's two things. There's the trajectory of the show itself. You know, the content of the show. If I have the time, if I had the money, what I would do is stop everything and well, no, I would keep promoting. But I would stop everything else and I would focus on certain songs that I want, between the sections of the show. There are changes that probably should maybe be made in the show that I haven't been able to think about, even though I've had years, because I've been doing other things. There are— I have in my living room, maybe some images that are what do you call it? Film images of myself as a child, I'm praying that being in six years of storage didn't ruin them but I'm fearful it did. But if it exists, I'd like to show it before or during or something in the show. Cause I think there's something, you know, again, about somebody thinking, that girl that we're looking at in that film is eight years old, and she is having these thoughts. But you can't talk to an eight year old about these thoughts. Because you're not supposed to talk about sex. And the eight year old knows they're not supposed to talk about sex. So it's like hopefully a doorway into the reality of that child because of the complexity of childhood and the vulnerability of everyone. So—

**Alicia Mountain** 1:08:46

Yeah, I think that's really well said because in childhood, we're already navigating some of the hardest things in life, but we don't have the language for it, or the way of framing it. And yeah, to be able to speak to that early self is very powerful. And that's kind of where we arrive at the end of “Que Será, Será.” That last section is talking about how—

**Zelda aka Judith Miller** 1:09:00

Spoiler alert, spoiler alert, spoiler alert.

**Alicia Mountain** 1:09:04

I won't get into details but it's just about caring for the younger self and that I think that was a powerful way to land.

**Zelda aka Judith Miller** 1:09:32

Yeah, I mean it. You know, I also want to work a little bit. I feel like I want to work on— well, I want a real stage and a real crew. And like, I want certain things to happen but I also would like to have a more musical component to the show overall. I mean, I don't know if that'll ever happen, honestly. But if I had like money in my drawers, there'd be sort of— there'd be a percussive element. If I couldn't have the music of the day, there would be some kind of percussive element during certain more certain portions. One of the things I'm struggling with that I don't even know, and as an agent and manager, I should know, but because it was so long ago, I don't know, is that I don't think— see what I wanted to do, ultimately was to have, I have a whole list of exactly what song fits what mostly fits as far as I could have. The idea of the scene, or what I was struggling with at the time, that was the number one hit of the year. So I did research on that. And, you know, things at least I was relating to during that period. And I picked out all these great songs. And of course, I can't use them because I won't have the rights to them. So if I'm performing, you know, then I know someone who does that kind of law. I have to call and I think what she's gonna say is that I have to pick generic music that is free or that you can buy. That represents the beat of that deck that year. But that is far from, you know, somebody singing which I can't sing, and I started [singing] my girl, my girl, my girl, and that and when they were singing my girl, I'm alone thinking I'm the only lesbian in the whole fucking world, singing “My Girl”. You know like how music impacts us as lesbians. You know?

**Alicia Mountain** 1:11:55

Totally. Yeah. And moments where we hear a narrative but we aren't sure if it belongs to us or we feel a kinship to it. But we know it's, you know, meant for someone else or something. So another note that I had written down was, let's talk about why this is an important contribution to the Archives. “Que Será, Será,” the video recording that will be archived. What do you hope that lesbian or non lesbian audiences 20 years from now, take from it when they get to see this show?

**Zelda aka Judith Miller** 1:12:45

Oh my G-d, 20 years from now. We couldn't imagine, for instance, that we're in the middle of a plague 20 years from now, how can we even imagine?

**Alicia Mountain** 1:12:52

I know [laughs]— it could be next year, it could be 100 years from now.

**Zelda aka Judith Miller** 1:12:58

I don't know. I mean look, for any audience, I hope that they are personally affected by it, that they do feel more accepting of themselves, that they feel somewhat more open minded about their own inner experience and others inner experience that if they're studying the era that they, you know, for whatever reason, I hope they're going to come from a time where this is so crazy, like, oh my G-d, they discriminated against lesbians? How is that even possible? You know what I mean? Like, won't that be nice? Okay, fine. I'll be an old relic of being an old relic and I'm proud to be. But I hope that, you know, I do touch a little bit in the show about how the Women's Movement and Occupy Wall Street and the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival and certain political things that are going on affect me and affect my experience of being a lesbian or my place in the world. So I think, you know, I do try to place it in history. And also because it's you know, I do go year by year, I'd say. It's 1999 and I'm going to a party, what I've been looking forward to all year long. Sheitelstock, you know, I'm like— so you think wow, and I think actually, I think I have to be corrected. I think it's 1980 [note: 2000]. But in any event, it was a different world. Okay, well am I—

**Alicia Mountain** 1:15:03

I also wonder what— I hope too that we live in that different future where, you know, it's wild to think about a lesbian feeling isolated, or a lesbian feeling like there's something wrong with her or a gender fluid person feeling like they aren't understood. I think I do think also that this show has things to offer performers who watch it and and just get inspiration about how to, you know, how to make work that maybe in form is related to this.

**Zelda aka Judith Miller** 1:15:40

Possibly. I think I hope there comes a time when I can develop the show a little bit more in some fashion. I mean I would like there to be more visual elements. I'd like musical elements. I mean so I don't see it as finished. So I feel like I'm a little bit embarrassed, like people might—I mean, this was the first, the second time I ever read it, and the first time I ever read it, was the night before. So to say I was nervous would be an understatement. I was also violently ill. Violently, like, sicker than I've ever been like I almost didn't make it to the stage. So I was [laughs]— and I'm really glad. I have to thank Radio of Kingston as well. Radio Kingston. I asked Kale— that's his name. His actual name is Kale. He's in charge of technicians. And he— I asked him, I see him everywhere. They are always at every lefty rally and they really are wonderful people there. I asked him if he would document the show. Oh, I got, I should mention very much also that I got a grant from Arts Mid Hudson. It was an individual artists commission to create the show. And because I documented what I did with the beginning of the show, the first 30 minutes, and then and then I got audience quotes, because that's what you got to do. You got to like, sell yourself right. So, you know, I spent six weeks writing a grant. Six weeks, right? Like, that's

what I did and I got the individual and I also have tremendous help from Lilia Perez at the Arts Mid Hudson. Lilia is a devoted person there. She's— believe me, I know because I ran a theater company back in DC. I know what it's like to try to write these grants and not understand, you know, what or who you're writing them for or whatever. And I have some history but she sat down with me, and she was like, no, take this paragraph, move it over here. This is more important. This is what you want to say. You don't need to say this part. And I was like, oh my G-d, thank you. I was like, on my hands and knees thanking this woman. And she's wonderful. She helped me, I mean she helped everybody. She helped everybody. But I had the intelligence to ask.

That's another thing that I want to tell people who are artists, right? Ask for help. Ask for feedback, take the feedback, and apply again. Because that's what these people are getting paid to do. Or they're your friends or whoever they are. If they offer it, take it. So anyway, I got the grant. And you know, I'm like, oh shit, I was gonna give up. I was gonna give up on the idea. And I was like, oh shit, I guess I have to do this cause I got the grant. So then I was like, I'm doing it. I started piecing together all of these stories from the TMI project that I have recorded from like— just things that I was remembering. Other things that I had written a little bit about, a note here or there. I started to get them all together. Oh, I also must thank Raine Grayson. Raine Grayson, who was a script editor and helped me tremendously because as you can tell, I talk a lot and I don't know what to cut. So Raine was helpful.

**Alicia Mountain 1:19:28**

And who was the percussionist who performed, who accompanied that bit of performance at the end?

**Zelda aka Judith Miller 1:19:35**

Oh, G-d. I really don't know.

**Alicia Mountain 1:19:40**

It's okay!

**Zelda aka Judith Miller 1:19:40**

I have to supply you with the program—

**Alicia Mountain 1:19:42**

Perfect, perfect—

**Zelda aka Judith Miller 1:19:44**

Actually, I think they were— one night there were two people and one night there was one person.

**Alicia Mountain** 1:19:50

What was— Zelda, what was the venue where it was performed?

**Zelda aka Judith Miller** 1:19:53

Oh, it was the Hudson Valley LGBTQ center.

**Alicia Mountain** 1:19:57

Wonderful.

**Zelda aka Judith Miller** 1:19:57

Yeah, yeah. So yeah and it was interesting. I got some videotapes. I also could give at some point— oh my G-d, this is like a project that I don't have time for. But later I could, I'm trying to get— my friend is actually helping me send the stuff, like compiling it. I'm just thinking of other things I should send but I'm waiting. I forgot what I was gonna say, shit.

**Alicia Mountain** 1:20:25

It's all good! So in thinking about kind of, yeah, like giving archives video material, paper, whatever the case may be, I suppose maybe it brings us to that unifying question of like— at the beginning, you're saying that the Lesbian Herstory Archives feels important and I'm wondering if you can just say a little bit about, yeah, about this project of archiving lesbian history or herstory and what, why we need that?

**Zelda aka Judith Miller** 1:20:58

Well, it's like every other movement says: if you don't honor yourself, if you don't keep your own history, no one else will. And we have to learn from everyone and we have to learn about ourselves. So I can't think of anything more valuable or more important than the Lesbian Herstory Archives.

**Alicia Mountain** 1:21:33

Absolutely. Absolutely. Well, thank you so much for taking this time to talk with me and to talk with us, our broader future audience. If folks are seeking more information, is there a good way for them to be in touch with you if they want to?

**Zelda aka Judith Miller** 1:21:51

Yeah, yeah, I have a website. You know and it's growing and evolving, and I do have someone who is helping me. Her name is Dallas. And—

**Alicia Mountain** 1:22:03

Is it your name? The website?

**Zelda aka Judith Miller** 1:22:06

Oh, the website is QueSeraSerashow.com. And that's— starts with a Q. [Spells out QueSeraSerashow.com]— yeah.

**Alicia Mountain** 1:22:22

Amazing. That is good info to have. Well, let's sign off for now. Thank you so much. And thank you to the Lesbian Elders Oral History [sic: Herstory] Project and the Lesbian Herstory Archives. I'm Alicia Mountain. I've been speaking with Zelda aka Judith Z. Miller about her multimedia show “Que Será Será” and the bigger life beyond that. Thank you so much.

**Zelda aka Judith Miller** 1:22:51

Thank you.