

GENDER PERSONAL

EXPLORING GENDER VARIANCE THROUGH ART



Judy

Gender Personal
Interview

Acknowledgement:

Understanding Grows, Views Change

This interview is part of the Gender Personal project (2013-2014) created by Jacqui Beck. For an overview of the project, including its origin, visit www.genderpersonal.org.

The following is a transcript of two of the nine interviews done for the Gender Personal project. Seven people were interviewed once each, and Jacqui's son, Finnbar, was interviewed twice.

Since that time, the people who were interviewed have grown in their understanding of themselves and their gender. Please take this into consideration as you read.

Appreciation

A huge thank you to everyone who participated in this project, especially to those I interviewed. A more detailed list of thanks may be found at <http://genderpersonal.org/project-origin/#gratitude> (this link will open in your web browser).

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Gender Personal: Interview with Judy

1. How old were you when you started to experience your gender as different from what the world seemed to expect?

Judy: Earliest memory—four or five. My mother had serious health problems, and I'd been farmed out to my grandmother in Connecticut. My grandmother and grandfather— my maternal grandmother and grandfather—had nine children, and they all had children, and they all stayed around the same area, Middletown, Connecticut.

And Christmas was just amazing: all of us kids running around, and the next generation older trying to keep some kind of order. My sister was there too, and [long pause] when we were opening gifts my sister got a party dress. All the girls went upstairs and tried it on and were oohing and aahing at how beautiful it was and running down to show off. I got a baseball mitt.

And I wanted so much to be among them. I didn't want to be . . . I didn't want a baseball mitt. That's my very first recollection about my wrong gender. I'm not sure whether I was four or five. Probably five, but I don't know . . . And it was so poignant to me. I just sort of wandered around, and had a really hard time absorbing this. I knew I couldn't tell anybody about being a girl. Now, how did I know that? Had I already been punished?

Gender was such a rigid concept, especially then. I was born in 1933 so I've just had my eightieth birthday. It was a very conservative time, during the height of the Depression, and in rural Massachusetts where my parents, sister and I ended up living . . . people didn't bend the rigid rules of gender in any way at all.

Jacqui: It probably never occurred to them.

Judy: Probably . . . And I didn't know if there was anybody else like me. I just . . . I didn't want to play with the boys; I wanted to play with the girls. I wanted to be with them and do what they did, and I just kept that inside the whole time. Not until I was forty did I tell another person.

Jacqui: Okay. So, that was the first memory. Do you remember following that? Was that awareness with you consistently, or . . .

Judy: Always! My need to be a girl was never repressed. I understood it always. But I built this kind of castle around me, brick by brick, to the point where I could keep it all inside. I schemed constantly to be alone, got into my sisters' clothing drawers and closet, and when they were away I dressed up 'cause that's what you do . . . I only got caught once.

I managed to . . . My father was conservative Christian, a late-stage Puritan kind of person who felt himself "saved." "Oh, I just wanted to see what it felt like," I cried. He was pretty willing to be drawn into denial because he didn't want to know. I did things like singing in the church choir because it was all girls, and I had a high voice and sang beautifully in those days. And they wore

these cute little frocks, and I could imagine being one with the girls for a while, and I didn't get too much crap from the boys. And I even learned to tell a Buick from a Chevy.

Jacqui: So you could pass as a guy.

Judy: Yup! [laughs]. I was in a minstrel show once. I played Madam Knowitallsky. They dressed me up as a girl, and I had a babushka on my head and a bed pillow for a bosom, and I got up on the stage and answered planted questions with funny answers. They couldn't get the clothes off me afterwards [laughs]. I just wandered around in that wonderful drag. So, yes, all the time. Constantly.

2. Tell me about your experience of yourself regarding your gender. How do you identify regarding gender?

Judy: I identify as a woman. Totally. A lot of Trans* people don't. There are people finding their place in every part of the gender spectrum. But yes, I just want to be a woman. That's all I want. And I'm happy. I was involved in the community starting in the mid '70s, and it was an emerging community, there really wasn't much of a community . . .

Jacqui: Where did you live at that time?

Judy: In Seattle. I moved out here in 1973.

Jacqui: So, '73. Let me place that. Had you already come out then?

Judy: No. I had been married once and got divorced. I have two kids by that marriage. I came out to Seattle with my second wife. And it was kind of a desperation thing. I was deeply depressed as I hit about forty.

Jacqui: When you can't be yourself . . .

Judy: Right. And neither one of those marriages was honest. Neither one of those wives knew. I have a lot of guilt about that, but there's nothing I can do with it except to let it go and try to live more honestly. I thought my only path then was to live a "normal" life. I've always loved women. I'm attracted to women, so I'm kind of a lesbian by virtue of my sex change.

Jacqui: So are you currently in a relationship?

Judy: No, I'm not—not in a sexual relationship. I'm married. We've been married thirty-five years.

Jacqui: Second wife?

Judy: Third wife. Second wife was . . . We separated about a year after coming to Seattle, and divorced a couple of years later. She stayed out here with our two young daughters. She died five years ago. So . . . lost my thread . . .

Jacqui: So, were you already out when you got together with your third wife?

Judy: Yes, I went through the crisis that so often comes at midlife . . . most queer people experience this kind of thing—am I going to come clean, or am I going to kill myself? There's not much choice. I went up and I sat on a bluff just north of Deception Pass called Rosario Head. There's a tree up there. It's an old gnarled madrona tree. It's been standing up against the weather for years and years and years, and survived, and it inspires me. So I was up there, and I wandered across the bridge and saw some plaques on the bridge where people had last stood on the earth, and thought about it, and . . . came home, and signed up with a psychiatrist. He was the first person I ever told. It took me six months to come up with the courage to tell him.

Jacqui: You'd already been seeing him six months?

Judy: Yup.

Jacqui: And what year was that?

Judy: That was around probably '75. So anyway, he reacted well. He did a little research and he found that there was something going on in L.A. It was . . . Of course L.A., where else? [Laughs] With Virginia Prince, who was the mother of us all.

Virginia Prince is famous. She put together what she called the Hose and Heels Club, and somehow recruited twelve people who were willing to get together. So they all came, and they met in a motel room, all quiet, all arriving separately, and at the count of three they took off their guy shoes and they put on knee-highs and heels all at the same time. So nobody could blow anybody else's cover, 'cause they were all in this together.

Jacqui: And thank God to be able to talk to somebody.

Judy: So that's how it all began. And there hadn't been a lot before then. There wasn't much going on in Seattle. But . . . A friend of mine, an amazing pioneer, worked for an oil company, and she kind of wandered around the Pacific Northwest. And every place she went she had this little coded book about people like us. Virginia Prince was building a national organization, by then, ultimately called "Tri Ess" . . . she was running it like a sorority with a newsletter and chapters and all. She was kind of quirky, but courageous . . . My friend was getting in touch with people wherever she went and telling them about Virginia's organization, and I was on her list.

Jacqui: Was her home base here in Seattle?

Judy: Portland. She was organizing things, and as she traveled we came together as a community. And she became the peacemaker in our growing, contentious national community until she died in 1995.

Jacqui: What was her name?

Judy: Ellen Summers. And she was wonderful, committed, intelligent and kind. She and her wife and Sally [my wife] and I became close friends. She was from Chicago, and I was running Sneakers [Judy's restaurant] by then, so every time Chicago was in town they came up we'd go to a White Sox game.

So, as our community emerged I was one of the people involved . . . I wasn't one of the heroes or anything like that, but I was present when NWGA (Northwest Gender Alliance) in Portland was formed. And then I was involved up here in Seattle when The Emerald City was started.

Jacqui: Emerald City is . . . ?

Judy: It's just called The Emerald City, and it's a transgender club. Most cities have them.

Jacqui: It's like a bar?

Judy: No, it's just a group of people that get together and rescue folks who are lurking behind the shades, and bring them out into comfort in society. The Emerald City began in 1982 or early '83. And I'm still a member. I was president for four years, and I was on the board for twelve years.

Jacqui: It still exists?

Judy: Yes.

Jacqui: I don't know about that. I keep expecting you're going to say Ingersoll.

Judy: No. Ingersoll was there, and I was also on the board of Ingersoll and did work for them, but that is the kind of organization that asks, "Why do we do this?" Emerald City was about going out and having fun. We made our presence known in society and worked on queer political issues. But our first focus was to lure people out of their closets and into comfort with being who they were.

We worked on Ed Murray's first campaign. It was eighteen years ago. Cal Anderson had died, and Ed was running for that seat. It was regarded as the gay seat from Capitol Hill, so we organized a bunch of transgender people, and solicited voters to put up yard signs, and we did other political work as well.

3. How long did you know you were trans* before you came out? And would you talk just a little about how you transitioned?

Judy: Okay, sure. When I told my psychiatrist—I was with him for a while but it wasn't working out—I got kind of saturated, so I left that psychiatrist and thought, *Well, I'm okay now.* I got very much involved in The Emerald City and kind of plunged into our emerging community. So I was occupied for a long time. Then my wife Sally came into the scene, and when we started to fall in love I revealed that I was transgender.

Sally was a flight attendant. After we were married, she'd go off to on trips for a couple of days, and that would be my time. She helped me put outfits together. Dressing as a woman is really difficult compared to dressing as a man, and I didn't know how to do it very well. She would laugh at me and . . .

Jacqui: "You're not wearing that!"

Judy: Yeah. She was wonderful, and sometimes she lent me clothes. We wore the same size at that time. I would go off to multiple-day events that were happening in Massachusetts back on Cape Cod. She'd get me all set up and I'd take notes on accessorizing.

Jacqui: These were like gender events?

Judy: Very much, out in Provincetown, MA, right on the tip of the cape. You know, I'd say to her, "while you are away we've got this event going on; what do you think I should wear?" And she'd help me pick out the outfits for that.

Soon she got to know people in the community, and the people in the community loved her. After about ten years, I began to feel that she wanted to meet the other half of me.

On one trip, when she was coming back through San Francisco, I said to her, "I'll be Judy this weekend, and if you want me to change back, call me from San Francisco. Otherwise, just come home. I won't change back unless I hear from you." She didn't call and I didn't change. I made her a nice dinner, and she laughed at me because I walked like a woman, and we had a beautiful evening.

Jacqui: So you were flipping from Judy to your male identity?

Judy: Yes.

Jacqui: Living part-time as a man and part-time as a woman?

Judy: We mostly all did that when society was so much more hostile. You never just lived as a man one day and the next day permanently as a woman. Just going out as a woman for the first time was the scariest thing I've ever done. So, no, we all go back and forth, until we can't go back anymore. And that's when it finally dawns on us, we've got to go all the way.

Jacqui: So would you have certain people that you would sort of show Judy to during that time? Is that how that works?

Judy: No, I stayed mostly within the community. I would go out and do community events.

Jacqui: Okay, so if you were going somewhere with other people who were transgender then you would dress as Judy.

Judy: Well, if I was staying home I would dress as Judy, or if I was going out to get a loaf of bread I'd be Judy. But . . . I wouldn't show myself to people who didn't want to see me. I had, during that ten years, told a lot of people. By the end of it, all my friends knew that I went off somewhere as a woman.

Jacqui: I have read sort of stories of . . . I've read *She's Not Here*. Is that what it's called?

Judy: It's a good book. I heard her interviewed recently—Jenny Boylan.

Jacqui: She's great. And that sort of . . . “let me try this.” And I guess I didn't realize that. 'Cause when Finnbar, my son, came out . . . not that he wouldn't wear—like he would wear skirts sometimes, but he was identifying as male, as he wore the skirt. He didn't look very male yet, and that was hard. People would misgender him then and that really upset him, but he identified [as male] and he expected male pronouns from his family, from the time he said it.

Judy: Was he a lesbian as a woman?

Jacqui: He thought he was for a while, but it doesn't make sense since he's attracted to men.

Judy: Yeah, well that's not unusual. But he identified as somehow queer.

Jacqui: Yes.

Judy: And that's the difference between people going in my direction and people going in that direction, because see, we are almost all attracted to women and we try to build our life as a straight person, and we don't come out as queer until we identify as transgender, so we don't have that background and so it's a big hurdle to go over . . .

Jacqui: It's a couple hurdles at once.

Judy: So we're not comfortable revealing who we are. We try really hard to pass as women, because we're scared to death to open the car door and go out in public. People going from female to male sometimes they have an easier time of it because they've already been dealing with living on the margin for a while.

Jacqui: Yeah. Have you ever been threatened?

Judy: I was assaulted once, but that was when I was pretty tender. I was still in Boston and still hidden, and I guess I was pretty obvious.

Jacqui: And that's a good reason someone should hurt you? Sorry, it just makes me so . . .

Judy: After a while you learn to just look people off and show you're not scared of them, and that makes a big difference. Because people . . . I don't know when people read me or not. I think a lot of times people get the idea that I haven't always been a woman.

Jacqui: Yeah, you have. I mean you haven't always dressed as a woman . . .

Judy: Yeah, it's true. Thank you. And I think today, as I'm getting old— I used to be a lot prettier than I am now.

Jacqui: You look damn good.

Judy: Oh, thank you. I don't know when people realize and don't care, and if they're looking at me I look back at them, and I smile. No, I haven't been threatened in a long time, for anything.

But sometimes people get you . . . And gender is such a rigid concept. It's with guys . . . it's like guys consider themselves—their gender—to be higher level and women to be at a lower level. And so their reaction to somebody messing with gender is: That woman wants to be a man? That's totally impossible; that couldn't be. And that man is playing a woman? How can anybody? That's beneath contempt.

Jacqui: Why would someone give away their masculinity?

Judy: That's the reaction. To some degree, people need something to be proud of and some people don't have a whole lot, and they can be proud of the fact that they're a "real man" pretty easily.

4. Did you have an experience of being afraid to come out? Like, I know this is true about myself but I'm afraid to show it. Can you talk about that just a little bit?

Judy: Well, how do you mean come out? Come out to . . . to tell people that I . . . to be a guy telling people that there's part of me that's a woman?

Jacqui: Well, that's what's interesting. I've never really bumped into this part, because I'll bet people have never said it like that. You're saying it so clearly. So, you would come out verbally, but not showing it.

Judy: Right. I never showed up as a woman when people hadn't asked me to show up as a woman. I wouldn't do that.

I have a friend who's dying, who lives not too far from here, he and his wife. I didn't find out he was dying because he had left when I was transitioning. Not when I told him about going off as a woman, but when I was transitioning.

In other words, the guy in me would never show up again. It's like I was dying as far as they were concerned. And so they pulled out of my life. Then, less than a year ago, I got word that he was dying and wrote a letter to him and his wife. I had been a hospice volunteer for four or five years, for Group Health, and I thought I could be helpful. And so I wrote them a nice letter and said, "I've heard [that you're dying] and if I can do anything to be helpful . . ."

And they contacted me. They finally wanted to meet me. I've been transitioned since 1999, and this is the first time, within this last year, that I have seen them. I had made a vow to myself that if anybody decided to come back into my life—I knew that I was going to lose people—but if

anybody decided to come back into my life, I would never be mad at them or feel hurt or feel resentful, but that I would accept them back into my life.

Jacqui: How'd that work?

Judy: Good. It was wonderful. Friends have been tumbling back into my life for years, but this was the most recent. I'm very much in touch with them. They're close friends again. I'm jumping ahead again, aren't I?

Jacqui: No, you're not. You're answering questions in complex ways, and that's what this is about. Let me ask another sort of clarifying question: So, you started to meet with other people who were transitioning or [who] transitioned in safe places, like they would cross dress in safe places with other people who were doing the same thing. So how old were you when you started to do that?

Judy: It was about '75, so I was forty-two.

Jacqui: So when you actually started to take it on and get yourself some women's clothes and high heels?

Judy: Well, yeah.

Jacqui: You know, shoes that . . . the uncomfortable kind of shoes.

Judy: No. No. Not that. Inch and a half, max.

Jacqui: So that was when you were about forty-two, and when you put your guy clothes away—when you sent the last of your guy clothes to Goodwill, was when?

Judy: That was 1999.

Jacqui: So how old were you then?

Judy: I was, well, let's see. Born in '33, '99—I was sixty-six.

Jacqui: So from age forty-two to age sixty-six was your transition.

Judy: Well, yeah, it was. I didn't know I was going to transition.

Jacqui: It didn't look like that at forty-two?

Judy: People going my way often made job and family commitments before dealing with being transgender. In those days, and to some degree even now, full transitioning, if it happened at all, awaited the raising of children and some kind of family financial security. People rarely transitioned on the job, as many do now. Instead, they lived in a kind of stealth in the other gender, making up their girl upbringing and endlessly fearing exposure.

I thought I could maintain by going back and forth. I thought it'd be enough, being a very active part of this community which I'm still part of.

Jacqui: So you'd keep that part separate.

Judy: Well, no, I would talk about it. But with somebody like Sally (or anybody else), if they wanted to meet me, as a woman, I would do that.

Jacqui: So gradually you might bring people in, or share more with certain people?

Judy: But eventually I just couldn't go back to being a guy. It was just too depressing. And that was after Sally and I had split, at that point. That was at her desire. She had gone off to Provincetown because she liked a lot of the people there. I had just closed Sneakers [restaurant], because I lost my lease. I was expecting to get it renewed and I didn't. So I was suddenly closing the place down and I couldn't go to Fantasia Fair, which is what the event in Provincetown is called, so she went in my place. She came back and said: "I don't want to be with you anymore."

Jacqui: Ow. That must have been hard.

Judy: It was. I moved out and was alone. I remained close to my family and my daughters. I wasn't close to her—I was mad at her. But after a while, we got together for holidays and time with the kids and with friends and stuff like that.

Jacqui: She's not your daughters' mom though.

Judy: No. She's not their biological mom, but she's done an awful lot of their mothering and they have strong mother/daughter relationships. We've been married thirty-five years and our daughters are both in their early forties now.

Jacqui: You were with Sally for thirty-five years?

Judy: Yeah, we've been married for thirty-five years and we honor that relationship.

Jacqui: So she was with the kids for most of their growing up time?

Judy: Yes, and they're very close to her and she's very close to them. She lives in California now, but she was just up here in August celebrating my 80th birthday. We went up to Whidbey Island and had this wonderful family time and we had other friends come up, too.

Jacqui: How is it for your kids? How old were they when you . . . How did you introduce Judy to them?

Judy: They knew about Judy and they had met Judy well before I transitioned, but the idea that their dad wouldn't be around anymore was really hard for them—for one of them. Hazel had an easier time of it. She had a rocky childhood and came through it in a stunning way. So she

wasn't so bummed out about it, but Jill was. Jill had a terrible time. She went away for nine months, and I knew enough to leave her alone. I didn't know when or if she would come back, but after that nine months I got a call and she said, "I'm having a party on Saturday and I'd love you to come. All my friends are going to be there. Just one thing—you're my dad, and I honor that." I always cry when I talk about this. "You're Judy and I honor that. So is it okay if I introduce you as my dad, Judy?" I said, "Sure!"

Jacqui: She'd figured it out, for herself.

Judy: So we're very close.

Jacqui: That's great.

Judy: I've never gotten through that without . . .

Jacqui: No reason not to cry.

Judy: I know.

Jacqui: It's a good thing to cry.

5. How has your view of gender or your relationship to gender changed over time?

Judy: How do you wrap your head around that question? There's just so much.

Jacqui: I know. It's a thesis right there. But the *you* who started to say, *I'm going to put women's clothes on and go and meet with these other women* is not the *you* you are now. You have a different viewpoint. And the five-year-old who didn't want the baseball mitt and knew she wouldn't be . . . she knew she shouldn't say anything to anybody. I mean, that's your history.

Judy: I always . . . we had a lot of wives come to our parties, and I was drawn to the wives. This is before I transitioned, and they liked me. So I hung with the wives a lot and made them feel welcome to whatever was going on and I really enjoyed [it]. At four or five I wanted to play with the girls. So when I was able to I began to do that.

Jacqui: And when was that?

Judy: Well, that was when I got involved with The Emerald City. Well, no, actually it was when I got involved with NWGA in Portland in the seventies. A lot of times good friends would have me talk with their wives about who their husbands were as women, because they *were* different. Sometimes I would be the first transgender person they met. And I would talk about where we went, what we did, and who we were, and give them some insights which they might have found difficult to hear from their husbands.

So when I transitioned, or long before I transitioned actually, I began to realize that a woman's conversation with other women, with no men around, is radically different from even having one man in the room.

Jacqui: How's it different?

Judy: It feels like magic to me. Women actually pay attention to another who is speaking. You know it through gestures and nodding, little smiles and sounds, body language, questions of clarification, and accurate feedback. In such a circle it gives me a rush to participate in that warm acceptance of another's ideas or hurts or stories. Women support each other beautifully, and you know that what you're saying is important to them. It's a magical thing. Guys, when they're talking together, are one-upping each other, in subtle ways. That's what goes on for the most part.

Jacqui: Just so you know, I see that last part changing in my kids' generation, and I think that's really exciting.

Judy: People in their twenties, and even thirties, are changing things like that, and so many of the rules of gender as well. It's just fine.

Jacqui: I sat in on a few groups at Gender Odyssey, and I was talking to some twenty- and thirty-year-olds and I was just blown away at how amazingly caring, respectful of themselves and others . . . Just good, good, good people.

Judy: Isn't it wonderful? I was on the board of an American Friends Service Committee youth group that went out and talked to high schools and they were wonderful. I've worked with young folks of this generation. I'm still doing it. I just came back from Washington, DC, where we had a Soulforce board meeting

Jacqui: Yes, I know. I want to hear about that at some point too.

Judy: We had an in-person meeting there and the board and the people working there are mostly of that generation, and they are wonderful. What a stimulating group of people! They're of every ethnicity, race, gender, orientation, you know. They're just . . . every difference. You wouldn't believe the differences in this group. They are so exciting to be with, because they're almost all queer . . . and they're all excited to be who they are. It's beautiful.

Jacqui: It is, yes.

6. How have writers and other people affected you or helped you?

Judy: I used to search through the card catalog, when they had card catalogs in libraries. The space between "Transylvania" and "Transval" was occupied by "transvestitism," a word not used much anymore, thank goodness. That was the one place where we could find an occasional book

and an increasing number of periodicals about other people and events and a tiny bit of research.

There was one club that actually printed information on library catalog cards and you could snap it in there, in that space . . . [for] reaching out to people, because we all knew that the rest of us would be looking in that particular slot. So early on, any little bit of gender material was really important to me. You know: *Are there people like me?* I've gotta believe.

Jacqui: So what were the earliest books you read?

Judy: There were no books.

Jacqui: No books?

Judy: Hardly any. In pre-Nazi days in Germany, Magnus Hirschfield had researched and written about the era's thriving community of gender benders, Christine Jorgensen had published "a personal biography" about her inspiring journey from "Ex-GI" to "Blonde Beauty," as a *New York Daily News* headline screamed in 1951, and Harry Benjamin in 1966 published his research about a triage he set up for the horde of surgery applicants after Christine Jorgensen's sex change in Denmark.

Jacqui: Because that's what there was.

Judy: And other people started to write books. A lot of them were fantasy books. They were: "The devil made me do it. I mean, these people dressed me up and I couldn't help it."

Jacqui: "I woke up and I was wearing a dress!" So, this is really helping. The perspective on what you had to figure out on your own, compared to somebody nowadays, where there are shelves of books. You go to Elliott Bay, there's a whole bookshelf on gender stuff and . . .

Judy: I've got a lot of books upstairs.

Jacqui: I'm sure you do now.

Judy: I've gotten rid of a lot of them. I don't read them very often anymore. It doesn't grab me so much anymore, but I learned a lot about gender from books. I learned even more from being part of the community.

Jacqui: Are there any books, now that you have had a chance, looking back, if somebody is just coming out or just starting to think about this stuff—any that you think are head-and-shoulders above others?

Judy: No, there were some good ones, but I wouldn't say there were any that blazed totally new trails, because there were so many people writing after a while. There's a lot of useful stuff and you're welcome to rumble through it at some point in this project if you want, but I've gotten rid of quite a few of them. But you can go to . . . Half-Price Books on Capitol Hill is pretty good.

7. What do you want others to understand about how you experience yourself and your gender?

Judy: Well, it's pretty easy. I have integrity now. I think about it pretty often even after all this time, that I'm just who I need to be. It's almost going to sound like clichés, because it's just . . .

Jacqui: So obvious.

Judy: Exactly. It's not hard to describe. I'm me. I'm the person I should be. And I'm a mix of genders. I'm always going to be a mix of genders. How could I not be? I was brought up as a boy, and I had all of those influences on me, and I honor them.

I'm not trying to get rid of all of them. I had all of those boy influences. I tried hard to be a boy, because . . . the girls didn't want to have this yucky boy with them. So I just had to fit in where I could. You don't want to be isolated. So I learned how to do that, but it wasn't natural to me and I didn't like it. I took refuge in my femininity whenever I could. But now it's just . . . it's peaceful, it's right.

8. What is gender?

Judy: Rules. Gender is a set of rules: "You've gotta act this way or that way." [But] in reality gender exists on a spectrum. Then there's another side of it: gender is a vast gulf. It's *huge*. The more I live my life as a woman—the longer I live, the more women friends I have—the more I realize how different it is.

Jacqui: How different being a woman is from being a man?

Judy: Yes. So, the spectrum is broad. It keeps expanding. It was "this or this" originally, [though] I knew it wasn't. Because obviously who I *was* wasn't right, according to the rules. I wrote an article once: "How will I know when I'm a woman?" And it kind of boiled down to: "If women accept me as a woman, I'm a woman."

Jacqui: Not when men do.

Judy: No. But going to that spot took a long . . . I went into all those things to kind of define me as a woman. But it's a long process to get to the other side, and you never do. There isn't a "side."

Jacqui: I'm gonna see if I can ask this question, because we're saying we are all on a spectrum. Some of us (who consider ourselves cisgender) are content enough with the gender our body is. And some of us are not. It doesn't feel right. But isn't that interesting? Because we all really have the gamut [or have a matrix of masculine/feminine experience], but my son Finnbar was not happy. And he says, "I'm a guy, not a masculine female."

Because I imagined myself this morning taking testosterone and having my breasts removed like he has done, *and it didn't feel right!* I imagined that, and I thought, *No, I don't want to do that.*

And yet I don't feel *extremely* female. But I don't want to change either. It's so confusing to me in a way, but when I look at you, you look *happy*. You look *right*. You seem female-content.

Judy: I am. I love it.

Jacqui: And if you were dressed in a suit and tie and men's underwear, it would be just *wrong*.

Judy: Oh, God, I just *couldn't* do that. I mean, I transitioned with a trans man, who was a good friend of mine. I knew him as Mary for a long time and really liked "her." And we both—we went together in opposite directions.

I gave all of my good stuff to him. And when I did my name change he went with me to court. It was a really neat thing. But we were both becoming "right." We both understood that and we both understood why we had to do it. It was a beautiful thing.

I like trans men. I just really like them, because they get really, really macho and they kind of swagger around and they get muscles and they all have to have a beard and all of this stuff, and they get pretty horny too. But they have a woman's understanding, and it is so attractive, and I absolutely adore almost every one of them. We've got one on the board, and he has been around for a while. He's just a fabulous guy, and fabulous teacher, a wonderful person. I'm getting to know him.

9. What have you learned about gender and gender expression?

Judy: Well, let me start with gender expression. You learn to walk, you learn to alter your voice as much as you can and still be comfortable with it, because if you're trying it just doesn't work. My voice started off fairly low, and it's still very low, certainly. I get identified as a woman, [but] often, on the phone, as a man.

I mean, I can do it if I have to, but I have to work at it. And I'm really more interested in the content than I am the technique of talking, so I just let it go all the time.

Jacqui: So—walk, voice . . .

Judy: Voice, a gesture . . . And the kind of things I was talking about as women's conversation. The feedback—I give the feedback.

Jacqui: Did you have to learn how to do that?

Judy: Yeah.

Jacqui: That must have been interesting.

Judy: Oh, it's wonderful! It's fun! So wonderful!

Jacqui: Did it feel like coming home in a way?

Judy: Yes, it does. I'm part of three women's groups, because I never had any spirituality all my life. I clawed my way out of Christianity in my teens, because I knew they had no place for me. And I thought spirituality and religion were the same thing. It wasn't until I had an event happen in Rome that made all the difference to me, and that was a spiritual first for me. That was in 2001, and I've been deepening spiritually ever since.

Jacqui: Yeah, I saw your bookshelf. Great stuff.

Judy: [Laughs] You caught that already? There's a lot more . . . But it's been wonderful for me. In all of my women's groups, everybody that I meet a second time pretty much knows that I'm transgender. I'm very upfront about that. And all these women's groups know that, and yet they're very comfortable with me, and I'm comfortable with them.

Jacqui: Can I hazard a guess at something? Because when you were a kid you had to squelch a lot of what would have been your natural tendencies in terms of interactions.

Judy: Absolutely.

Jacqui: So then, when you truly came out and were Judy out in public a lot, to find the female gesturing and walking . . . or how you converse with other women . . . Some of it would be learning, but some of it would be . . . unlearning. You know? Unlearning all that socialization of this little girl who got treated like a boy her whole life!

Judy: Yeah! The unlearning is hard, and then the learning . . . You don't *want* to go swaggering down the sidewalk, you know?

Jacqui: Right, but to fit in, you had to! Because you would have been . . .

Judy: Yeah, I didn't do it to extremes, but more than I wanted to.

10. Why do you think people are afraid of gender variance?

Judy: People have nostalgia for power, especially people who are a little bit afraid—who don't have real power but gather it to them as much as they can.

Jacqui: Are we talking about men?

Judy: Anyone.

Jacqui: Okay—all people.

Judy: Yes. I'm talking basically about conservative people, whom I deal with a lot. They don't want whatever little bit of power they have to be taken away. And so they . . . like the white, male guy—the white, male WASP—doesn't want to lose that power thing: white male, Anglo

Saxon, which was really, really important not that long ago. So, he will resist everything that kind of works on that. And, of course, gender is a big part of it.

Women . . . I don't understand as much because I don't get to talk with women who are threatened by that, but I suspect that their role in it . . . conservative women look up to their "man" and are more tied to the household.

Jacqui: So, I think you're talking about challenging the norms. The norm is: a *woman* has [and was born with] a vagina and breasts, and behaves like *this and this and this*. She knows where she stands in relationship to men and to other women. And the *man* is *this and this and this* and knows *his* relationship . . .

And I think you're talking about that, I mean . . . even Christianity comes into this. So, if somebody who is born with a male body identifies as female, that starts to throw this stuff into question. *What actually is a woman? What actually is a man?* And once you throw it into question then things get off-kilter.

Judy: Yeah, you can't encourage these people to be who they really are.

Jacqui: Okay . . . "They're throwing our sense of order away." Okay, so you're talking about a power structure, and threatening the power structure. The thing is that there's a *gut fear*.

Judy: The leaders on the right are really confident. They manipulate other people, they quite often do—like the Southern Baptists I have in mind. But they know that they're okay. They don't worry much. The people who do the manipulating have vast power anyway, so they're not worried about their own power, but they know that this is a tool they can use to manipulate others so they can get even greater power. Because people seeking wealth or power don't know they have any limits. They will get as much wealth as they can, or power, or whatever they seek, using fear, and often they do it by encouraging fear of people like us.

Jacqui: No matter whom they have to step on.

Judy: The people who are really difficult with this [gender variance] are the people who are afraid to lose what little bit of power they have.

11. How do people respond to you?

Judy: It all depends. Do I know whether they realize I'm transgender? If I'm just out walking my dog or something, I don't know. Sometimes I see them . . . Occasionally I see a look of horror, and I realize that they've realized and it gives them a problem, and I just let it pass by.

Jacqui: Horror?

Judy: Yeah. It happens every now and then.

Jacqui: It's threatening some part of . . . If you think about Maslow's hierarchy or something—it's threatening them right at the core.

Judy: It can be Christianity. And that's what I deal with, with Soulforce. And it is taught to the point where their kids have committed suicide because they're gay! And that's happened! And we have a lot of people who've come into Soulforce because they've realized that conservative Christianity is feeding them bad stuff.

Jacqui: I have talked to many young people who have been so close to suicide because their family doesn't accept them because they are gay or gender variant.

Judy: You've heard the horrors . . .

12. How do you wish people would respond to you?

Judy: Normally. [Laughs] What else?

13. What are the hardest things you deal with or have dealt with?

Judy: My family.

Jacqui: Family being siblings?

Judy: And children. I have two other children that I'm not in contact with, from my first marriage.

Jacqui: So you have *four* kids?

Judy: I just received a birthday card from my daughter from that marriage. And I have some contact with my son's partner—a woman. I sent them a snowy owl painting—a large one, a very impressive one by that artist over there who does a lot of bird stuff, who's a friend of mine—and they have it hanging in their place. I mean, it's kind of a reminder of me, but we've not quite found a way where we can get together so far.

Jacqui: How old is your son?

Judy: He's in his fifties. And he's a neat guy. But I don't have contact . . . You know, and with my family I get back there, usually once a year. And there were a lot of family there, and they were totally split about me when I started going back, when many were still alive and having a lot of issues.

And one by one they kind of came around, but some of them never did. And that's the heart-breaking part. It's really hard to anticipate and to take that kind of rejection from people that you really cared about all your life. But I knew I was letting myself in for it, so I did a lot of planning for that.

And good friends . . . close friends.

14. Do you have a motto or something you say to yourself that helps you get through?

Judy: I don't. I meditate a lot. I can meditate for an instant. I do that, and I guess that gets me through as much as anything. I don't get shook up very much.

Jacqui: So it sounds like the meditation . . . friends?

Judy: Yeah, I mean, I hurt sometimes. I meditate. Friends? Absolutely!

15. What helps you get through the tough times?

Jacqui: The goddess?

Judy: Goddess is a good buddy. She's really special—the doggie Goddess, I mean—the perfect manifestation of her species. So is the other goddess, but of a much larger constituency.

16. Is there anything you'd like to say to gender-variant people or people who wonder if they're gender variant? Is there anything you'd like to say to everyone?

Judy: For gender-variant people I would remind them that they're their own worst enemy; that the world is not as difficult as they imagine it to be. People are okay if you're honest and have integrity. People read that and see that in you, and you can be wherever you need to be. And I would probably say some variation of that for the general public—that we've got to be there. It's the only way that we can be real ... and in our uniqueness immensely valuable.

17. What is unique about you?

Judy: I don't think I'm unique, but I have seriously lived as a man, and I've seriously lived as a woman. And I really worked at it, both ways, because I didn't know I could be a woman for a long time.

I think that mix has something sacred in it that is expressed through priests and shamans. It goes way back to Goddess times, when we were celebrated, and when mixed gender in a person was part of the sacred. I think people who have understanding of both genders and are kind of a mix of both have something to offer that I can't quite figure out or describe, but it's important.

Jacqui: Well, one thing you said early on—you were talking about trans men, saying they have the “umph” of the male now, but they also have the understanding of the female. And can you do that for me for a trans woman? How do you see that combination for a trans woman?

Judy: I don't know [laughs]. I'll have to work on that, because I think everything's good about being a woman, and everything's bad about being a man—No, I don't! [laughs]

Jacqui: Well, you spent a long time having to pretend to be a man, and . . .

Judy: Yeah. I think it's a reaction to that. But I don't know. I think women are a higher manifestation of the species, because a woman biologically and socially is encouraged to draw in, to hear better, to nurture, to understand . . . in ways that men are pushing out into the world, are being aggressive and trying to control . . . And that's the thrust of society.

Jacqui: Western society.

Judy: Yeah, and biologically as well. Like other woman, I have a vagina. Learning to accept in that sense has been a really hard, hard road for me. I'm not even talking sexually. I'm talking about the drawing-in that a person with a vagina has to learn and feel. It changed me.

Jacqui: So instead of the thrusting, you're talking about going inside. Self-reflection, self . . .

Judy: It's all spiritual. It's the drawing in of everything. It's the bringing into yourself the wisdom of the ages and the understanding that any person you interact with is able to offer you. It's bringing that all to life, rather than going outward and trying to change things, trying to—if something's in your way—push it over or struggle hard until it changes in a way you think it should.

Jacqui: So changing the outside world to satisfy *me*, rather than . . .

Judy: Changing the outside world through nurture or understanding, dialogue . . . Going around instead of trying to overcome. Both are effective, but I think the woman's way is much more effective.

Jacqui: And is the knocking down, pushing over of the male that you're describing, is that inherent in the male?

Judy: I think so. But it's also socialized. It's also by nurture.

Jacqui: But then I think of myself in that room at Gender Odyssey, and I see male-identified people who are doing it differently, partly because of gender-queerness. And they may still identify as male—they may be cisgendered male—but because they're interfacing with this whole new way of seeing things, they aren't as "knock it down" as some males might be. I love how you think about things.

18. What are a few of your favorite books or movies?

Judy: I was an English-Journalism major, and I read a lot of books back then. My tastes have changed so many times in my life. A lot of the stuff that I read right now is spiritual—it's of the Goddess times especially. And I'm fascinated with that.

At the end of the Upper Paleolithic, going into the Neolithic, people started to settle down in communities. The women planted the crops and harvested the crops and kept the hearth and birthed babies, and the guys went out and gathered and hunted.

And the women were so infinitely more important than the guys that the guys didn't pull rank on the women. It wasn't matriarchal in the society, because the women didn't push their advantage. The household went down through the daughters, which was pretty logical. And the women really flourished because they were equal and more.

I'm fascinated by when the guys began showing up. That was when the Northerners came down and conquered. They were men, and they took conscripts or slaves and they wanted the resulting wealth to be passed down through the guys—through their sons. I mean, it happened in different ways in different places. I'm very interested in how that was done and how that can be changed, so I read a lot of stuff. When I look for a spiritual symbol, it's generally the Goddess. And that's where I rest.

19. What are your favorite pieces of music?

Judy: I love Beethoven and Mahler. And I really enjoy '60s pop! And I enjoy a lot of the rock that's on now, and I enjoy jazz. If you went through that stuff over there, I still have a turntable because I worked in the media and I care about sound quality, and the turntable is the best sound quality that I can find these days.

I have a lot of different stuff; I just couldn't even make a choice. It's what my mood is.

20. What is the best part of being transgender?

Judy: Ah! The people! The people you get thrown in contact with! There are people you'd have no other excuse to meet. I've met famous authors. I've met people that are known to the public and whose pictures have appeared in the magazines . . .

Jacqui: And you've met them because you're transgender?

Judy: Yeah, because so are they! And we have no other reason to be together. But it's just a vast, beautiful pool of people that I've gotten to know in a very intimate way, because we share this one thing, and we talk about it . . . incessantly. And we come to know each other because of that. We get to know each other in deep ways.

21. What do you wish I would ask you, and what have I left out?

Judy: Oh my goodness. I guess how being transgender led me toward a spiritual place.

Jacqui: Okay. Do you want to talk about that?

Judy: Yeah, I do. The drawing in that I mentioned was the beginning of it. And joining Soulforce, which I did because I didn't want kids to grow up the way I did—having to claw their way out of the spirituality that had nurtured them. So, we had started doing direct actions with various religious groups, at the major denominational meetings they have. Some of them have them every year, some every two years, some every four years.

Jacqui: Oh! You're talking about, like, the Baptists . . .

Judy: Yeah, and we'd do a vigil, and we'd put a vigil line of a hundred people out there, and we'd get noticed. And in nonviolence you negotiate ahead of time—you try to understand what they're feeling, and you try to develop your own ideas and try to negotiate with people—with the religions, and find a place you can both live with.

If you can't do that—if they don't want to listen and talk with you—then you move on to maybe start a vigil line, or do something else nonviolently that points out their injustice.. Getting arrested is a good way at times, because they don't have the threat of arrest to oppose what you're doing. When you're not afraid to get arrested, then you can do quite a lot.

We vigiled at the National Council of Catholic Bishops in Washington one year, and we tried to negotiate, and they said, "Well, you know, we're not the right people! It's up to the Vatican." So we went up to the Vatican.

We worked in cooperation with Dignity, which is the Catholic gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender group, and twenty people were invited to go. And so I went to the Vatican, and our leader, Mel White said: "Before you go, meditate daily on your spirituality." And I thought, *I've got to do THAT?*

So, we went to the Vatican about two months later, and it was just before Epiphany, the day when the Wise Men showed up—January 6th is when they give gifts in Italy and they carry them to the Vatican to be blessed before they give them away, and a priest comes out and blesses them. So we took our gifts there three days in a row and they refused.

Jacqui: They refused to bless your gifts?

Judy: Yes, We went to the edge of the Vatican, as everyone does, and asked that they bless the gifts. We went as a visible group each of three days before the day of Epiphany, and the Roman police were right there with us. We also had Roman allies from the LGBT community and we knew what we could do and what we couldn't do.

We didn't want to be arrested those first three days, so when the police were about to come after us we melted away. But we went and we asked for the gifts to be blessed and we held up the gifts

and we kind of showed up for the media—we had worldwide media there. We took the gifts to people each day, one day, to an orphanage, to an aids hospice the next, and the last day to a battered women's shelter.

Anyway, the first morning—we were taking the gifts to the Vatican that afternoon—we went out in the middle of the Circus Maximus, and a wonderful priest who was working with us was there. It was raining like crazy and the Roman mud is really slippery, so we slipped and slid out to the middle. And the priest had a bunch of his parishioners out there, He laid down a plastic tarp on the mud and set up a cross and took out a basket and a chalice and proceeded to say Mass.

And this story's going to drag on forever, so I'll cut out a significant portion of it. But anyway, when the Mass began the rain stopped and the sun came out and there was a rainbow. And when Mass ended it started to rain again.

And on the last day we went inside Saint Peter's Square and subjected ourselves to possible arrest. It was *well after* the Mass . . . We've never disrupted a sacred service anywhere. The Pope had said Mass in the Square that morning and there were still seven or eight thousand pilgrims in the Vatican when we showed up.

We went by different routes. I had a banner rolled up inside my pantyhose [laughs]. Somebody else had one rolled up in his pant leg, and then all of a sudden we appeared, and we were there! And our shirts were printed in two languages and so were our banners, and people really were kind of . . . hostile at first. But they began to get it. We did some interesting things: we sang, we prayed. Pretty soon people were translating for us.

The police tried to link arms and push us out of there, and we kneeled down. They weren't willing to drag us off, so we stayed. They knew we were nonviolent. They'd been with us for the first three days. They knew we weren't going to do anything bad, and they weren't willing to drag us out of there in front of all the cameras. So we stayed and after a while we sat down in a circle and people kept joining us. They were fighting over translating for us.

Jacqui: What is your main message in Soulforce? Why were you there?

Judy: We were there to let the world know that we had a legitimate issue with the Vatican.

Jacqui: Around homosexuality and gender . . . ?

Judy: They call us "objectively disordered people." Their policies are killing people of faith, Young people grow up in their faith, so committed that it's like breathing to them, and as they come to realize they're some aspect of LGBT they're told to keep it a secret, be ashamed, they're evil, they must change what they cannot. And they refuse communion to LGBT people who are out and proud. It *is*, it's really killing people!

Jacqui: So you're saying: "We come here as people of God, like everyone else here. Bless us just as you do everyone else."

Judy: Good summary--thank you.

Jacqui: Well, the fact that the Vatican, the pope, anybody . . . would say—well, hasn't this new pope changed his mind about homosexuality?

Judy: Sort of. He's said, "Well, we've gotta deal with it." If he's willing to . . . If he's willing to have a conversation with LGBT leadership about issues of faith, that's all you can ask for now.

Jacqui: That's all you want. You want to have them stop saying stop and start saying go.

Judy: Well, what it meant for me in the spiritual [sense] is that . . .

The priest did some amazing things for us that linked us to the Christian martyrs and that we and they had come there to do the things we needed to do. He inspired me to the point where I just had to become a spiritual person. And God, the Goddess . . . Whatever! I believe that there's one unifying *something* in the Universe that we all tap into. And the dogma that separates us doesn't matter—except that it does separate us, and that matters . . .

And so I came to know that there was something I was missing. Since then I've been really excited about finding out what.

I think there's a time in life—having turned eighty—that you . . . I don't think it's *fear of death*; not for me it isn't. I think it's healthy to get rid of the fear of death, because you live better each day.

But there's a time when your energy goes down but your ability to . . . explore the wisdom and experiences accumulated in a long life begins to make a little sense of it all. . . . It's a time to reflect, it's a time to think about all of these things.

You've gathered a lot of wisdom and experiences and it means something! You've got a wealth of memory in your background and you have time to do something with it!

So, my Soulforce experiences stimulated that. And it's been a beautiful trip since then, and it hasn't been that long since I became a spiritual woman, but it has been intense and wonderful.