

Karen Wyatt: Hello and welcome to this special interview for Death Expo which is a presentation of End of Life University. I'm your host, Dr. Karen Wyatt. And I am so glad that you've joined us today for this special conversation. I'm excited to welcome my guest Judith Gantly who is an actress who currently performs the one-woman play *Waltzing the Reaper*. And we'll be talking about that a bit later in the interview. But first, I just wanted to tell you a little bit more about Judith.

She was nominated the best featured actress in a comedy by the *Newark Star Ledger* for her performance in *Mornings at Seven* at the Bickford Theater in New Jersey. She also performs a one-woman play *Back Talk* which she has taken to numerous universities and theaters around the country.

She appeared with the Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey in Chekhov's *The Seagull*, in *Waiting for MacArthur*, *Mother's Day* and the *Women* with the Women's Theater Cooperative of New Jersey. Judith has performed in numerous plays in regional theaters including *Alphabetical Order*, *Hedda Gabler*, *Bedroom Farce*, *The Dining Room*, *Fifth of July*, and *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*.

She also records books for the American Foundation for the Blind as well as commercial publishers. She was nominated for the prestigious Audie award for her recording of *Sea Glass* by Anita Shreve. Judith has a B.A. and M.A. in education and is a graduate of the American Academy of Dramatic Arts. And I recently had the pleasure of presenting side by side or back to back with Judith at a hospice conference in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina.

So I got to see her perform the play *Waltzing the Reaper*. And right before my presentation, and it was a wonderful experience. And we'll talk about bit more about that. And Judith and I met through each other through the playwright of *Waltzing the Reaper*, Poullette MacDougal who is a mutual friend. So Judith, I'm so glad. I know you're very, very busy. But I'm really glad you were able to take out a little bit of time to come here today and talk with me about *Waltzing the Reaper*.

Judith Gantly: Oh, it's my pleasure, Karen. I'm happy to do so. I love talking about *Waltzing the Reaper*.

Karen Wyatt: Well, it's really a phenomenal play. I can't say enough good things about it. And I'm so excited to hear about it from your perspective.

And I was hoping first just for our audience you'd tell us all a little bit about the play, the premise, and the characters.

Judith Gantly:

Surely. Well first of all, our mutual friend is Paullette MacDougal. And she has written this beautiful play. It's really a very deeply, moving, and humorous look at the patient and caregiver journey through the dying process. And it's also a last minute opportunity to mend a broken family relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law.

There's this woman, Vera, who has led a very full life. And she is now hooked up to six, as she says, "gurgling, buzzing, whizzing technical wonders in a hospital." She didn't want to go to that way. She told her family, "When my time comes, don't call an ambulance. I don't want to breathe my last breath in a recklessly driven vehicle while overbearing strangers pound on my chest." But unfortunately they do call the ambulance.

And now Vera is attached to all these machines and all these tubes. And all of this, in spite of her living well. But we get to hear her. She comes and talks to us, to the audience and tells us about her life. And tells us about the strange, unpleasant relationship she has with her daughter-in-law. And then we come to the second scene of the play, and I play the daughter-in-law as well.

And the daughter-in-law tells you about the relationship with her mother-in-law. But she has somewhat of a wonderful experience of realizing what it must be like for her mother-in-law to be so attached to these machines when it's not how she wanted to die in the first place. And the play ends with a very beautiful way of dying. So I hope that helps explain it, Karen.

Karen Wyatt:

Yes. And I just – getting to – it was really fun to get to see the play and to see the audiences' reaction to the play when you and I were presenting together. And I realize it's quite genius the way the play begins because we see Vera – it's Vera's higher self really who comes on stage to talk to us and tell us what's going on. And it's very comfortable for the audience 'cause they're not seeing the ICU.

They're not seeing the machines and the tubes and they're not seeing Vera in a bed. They're seeing Vera walking around on the stage able to talk to them and really full of life and vibrant. And describing how miserable it is for her to be in that bed and to be dying that way. But it's comfortable for the audience because it eases them into the subject, I think, of death and dying. They get

to see Vera whole and walking around and almost at her best, in many ways, talking to us. So the audience doesn't feel the discomfort that they might if they had to see the scene in the ICU.

Judith Gantly:

No, it's true. I've actually had people come to me after the play and say to me, "This play has helped me realize that I'm not going to be afraid to die", which I thought was quite an interesting response. It just seemed to make it more – make them realize. Help them to realize how or think about how they would like to go. And what it woulda been like if they were Vera attached to all these machines.

And it seems to be very comforting to the audience. You saw that when we were together in Myrtle Beach. I must say we also had the best audience. They were wonderful. But the play allows them to not – and it puts them in a nonthreatening position, pretty much what you were just describing, to be able to watch someone die. But it's not – no one's talking at them. They are just there as willing participants who look at a play, to watch a play and hear what's going on and meet this wonderful character, Vera.

I think Poullette MacDougal has done a fabulous job creating this character. And you really like her. She's had a good life. She's had a fun life. She would rather not go yet. She said – how does she put it? "If it were up to me, I would not expire at this age. I mean, I love life. That is I did until my wild oats turned into shredded wheat." She'd like to go on for longer, for sure. But she says, "Dying is what happens after living." And she finally got over objecting to that.

And so she learned to start accepting the fact that this was what was going to happen to her. And it is a very nice nonthreatening way to do it and yet a very nice way. People have come to me and said, "Now I know how to speak to someone who's in the hospital and what I need to say." 'Cause I'll say to the audience as the character Vera, "I wish my children would – I wish they would lighten up. Either smile and talk and laugh or go home because I'm still alive. Even though I'm hooked up, I'm still here. Let's talk about the good times and the fun times."

So she says, "But they come in here every day with their mortician faces." So she's a happy human being who's had a good, fun life. And now she's come to another stage of life. And she's so well received by the audience. We've never really defined who she is. What did you call her, my higher self or – *[laughs]* how do you put it?

Karen Wyatt: Yeah, that's how I interpret it.

[Crosstalk]

Judith Gantly: Yes. And that's what we do. We leave it to the audience members to interpret how she's out there talking to them when, in fact, she's really hooked up to all these machines. As she says, "What is this, astral projection or getting ready to give up the ghost? I couldn't have done this before when I was definitely alive." So it seems to be so well received.

And first of all, so many – I don't know if you know anyone who is not going to expire, but I don't. So there isn't a person who isn't going to die, right? And so many people – this play is just for everyone. It truly is. But then sometimes I'm also requested to really perform, let's say, in front of nursing students who will be coming upon people like this. They will be taking care of people like this. What's it like?

I'll never forget having a dear friend hooked up to all the machines after a particular, terrible brain problem. And I was not a family member, so I had no say. And so I would go and read to her. Not the kinda books they do in the play is really kinda cute. The daughter-in-law reads all the wrong books to her mother-in-law. But I would read to her. And then the nurses would come in and check on everything.

And one day a nurse came in and said, "Can you please tell me about Miss Joyce?" And I thought that was so nice. She wanted to know what she – who was this human being is laying in this bed who can't talk, read, sing, dance, even look out the window as Vera says. So anyway. It's lovely and I will let you continue with what you have in mind here.

Karen Wyatt: Well, it is lovely. And I think the character, Vera, as you described, she's someone that we all immediately like her and we all relate to her in some ways. And she represents the best of living life well. So kind of an inspiration when she talks about the way she's lived. Like wow, she didn't hold back on anything. She got the most out of every part of life. That's a good thing to do. That makes sense. And she's really teaching the audience, I think, through her monologue.

You know, she's describing what's happening to her, but she's teaching the audience all along how to relate to the idea of dying

and how a person comes to accept that idea. And from the patient's perspective, what is needed from the family, what's needed from the medical system to make this process better. For me, that really stood out.

Judith Gantly:

That's true. And what you just said, to you, that's what stood out. And that's what so wonderful about using theater is everyone brings who they are to that auditorium, church hall, wherever it is they're seeing me do the play. They bring who they are to that audience, to that place. And so therefore, they take away something very personal to them. And I love the idea that you've been – you just alluded to is that maybe it does send some people away thinking I better live my life because my wild oats might turn into shredded wheat sooner than I want them to.

And so let's lead a full life. And I think that would be a lovely sentiment to take away from this play as well. And I'm sure Poullette MacDougal would be pleased to know that. Many, many times after the play is performed, I will tell her all the remarks I hear afterwards. And it's just thrilling how people respond. And again, it's so personal.

I've had people come to me and say two weeks ago my mother died or two weeks ago my husband died – and I'm being honest with you Karen, I am amazed they are even there in the audience. But it comforts them. It seems to comfort them. Now maybe some people couldn't do that, couldn't come. But to them, they find comfort in it.

Karen Wyatt:

It's interesting watching the affect the play had on the audience and how much it really opened their hearts and their minds so that when I came up – and I came up as more a traditional speaker just presenting my ideas about – I mean, I was there to talk about living fully in the face of death. So my subject tied in with the play that you just presented.

But I've never had an audience so well-prepared for what I came to talk about. It was amazing. The audience was already right there fully engaged and with me. There was nothing – I didn't have to overcome any discomfort or nervousness on their part. They were already completely drawn in because of the play. And so it was a great experience to see how well those two modalities worked together, the place and then having time afterwards for a little bit of a lecture and a talk from me, but primarily a chance for people to ask questions. That's the other thing that I was really surprised by is how many people in the audience had compelling questions

they wanted to ask about death and dying and the end of life. And I –

[Crosstalk]

Judith Gantly: And share their feelings, yes. And share their feeling. And they were so with you.

Karen Wyatt: It's great.

Judith Gantly: They were –

Karen Wyatt: That the play got them to that place where they were ready for that conversation.

Judith Gantly: I agree with you. I think it did. But you certainly had quite a wrapped audience because they were there, and they had thoughts and opinions and questions. When you asked about questions, boy, there were a number of hands. *[Laughs]* You never went without a question.

Karen Wyatt: But that's how great the need is. How much people need to talk about the subject. And they were just – they just couldn't wait to get to bring up these issues and bring up their questions and tell their stories. And it was just such a powerful experience. And you and I got to share that together. And I really feel like that's – I really believe the idea of stories and theater and the arts, it's so evocative and it really helps break down the barriers that we put up around ourselves to protect ourselves. And I think it's a perfect way to lead people into these conversations.

Judith Gantly: I think so, too. I couldn't agree more. It's, as I said, a nonthreatening, very comfortable evening of the theater or afternoon of theater. And it is nonthreatening, very comfortable, pleasant, and opens minds. It opens minds. And you had people there who were helping one another, too, in your audience, if you recall.

This one woman whose children just refuse to do any talking about this issue and who she didn't think were even gonna be around to help her. And another woman's who's saying well, why don't you try this or why don't you do that? And it was wonderful. Just opened up this incredible group of very involved, very interested – it just generated much more than we could've imagined had it just been separate presentations of here's the play, go home.

I always will say to people – and of course, this is our first time doing this. So that was a great way to do it. But also I will say when I am hired to do the play I highly recommend that you create a panel. The play is 45 minutes, then maybe people can take a break or whatever you chose, and you set up a panel on a stage or however works best. And perhaps you'll have a hospice chaplain and a social worker and a hospice doctor or a hospice nurse or whomever they felt would be appropriate for the audience.

And generally, I'm doing many, many more for communities because everybody's gonna die. So besides doing medical schools and nursing schools and hospice groups, also they're bringing in the community, people from the areas. And it's a great way to do – like if you're not around – to have people respond to the play and then help answer questions like about living wills and advanced directives and the five questions or whatever is appropriate in that state where I have just done the play.

You're right. People are hungry for this information. And we're seeing it more and more on television, in the newspaper, in magazines. People are talking more about death, I think, as the baby boomers move along. They were always pretty demanding group as it is. So they're gonna wanna know what's gonna be best for me and what do I even want?

I have never thought about it before. What kind of music do I want playing if I'm in hospice? Or what do I want my children to say or do for me? So it's – there's eager. People are eager to learn and doing a play seems to help relax them and open them to discussion. And I've seen it work many times.

Karen Wyatt:

And this play, in particular, because it has humor in it. I mean, for being about a heavy subject, it's a light play. I mean, and you find yourself laughing, and suddenly you realize it's not that scary to talk about death and dying, and because you're laughing and you're being shown the humor and the beauty in this whole subject. And it immediately takes away all the fear and the discomfort and the anxiety that might have been there.

Judith Gantly:

That's a good point.

Karen Wyatt:

I was just thinking of other audiences I've spoken to, community audiences where there is almost a palpable feeling of tension in the room before I start talking. And I really spend at least half of my talk is trying to get people comfortable so that they can relax so that they'll really listen so that they – and then they will ask their

questions and be able to converse about the subject. But the play did it for me. So that is already accomplished before I ever started talking.

Judith Gantly:

I can understand that you must experience that because we're going to hear – we're going to talk about death. *[Laughs]* It's just incredible fear.

Yes. I think about it for myself because I just – I've been doing this play since 2000. And I don't know. It's just natural to do it for me. It will be interesting to see my response when my turn comes what it will be like. But laughter is definitely a part of our day. It's always a part of our day. I have talked to friends who have been with their dying parents, and people can be laughing right up to the very last minute.

The dying person can be laughing. We often think oh, that's just terrible. You shouldn't do that. No. It's really a part of our lives. If people realized how many times during the day they laugh at the silly things we do or we laugh ourselves when we do silly things. It's just all there. And it – not that we're laughing at death at all, but we are laughing at ourselves responding to death or knowing that this is something that's inevitable and it is going to happen.

And so if it's going to happen, I'm looking like I'm getting on the downward slope. Maybe I oughta do the best I can. And she says, "There was so much else I should've given away while I still could, like my wardrobe. There is no sense in being the best-dressed in the cemetery. You can't even find a date there." *[Laughs]*

And maybe what it is in particular with Vera is that it's her outlook. She is dying. There's no doubt about it. But the glass is still half full for Vera except she would rather be home doing this dying than hooked up to all these machines with all these tubes in her throat. I know she said even with all of that, she can still chuckle a little bit on the inside. So interesting.

Karen Wyatt:

Very interesting. And one aspect of the play I found very moving was that first we get to hear Vera's perspective, her take on her daughter-in-law and their relationship and how she looks at it. And in the next scene we get to hear the daughter-in-law's perspective on that same relationship. And it makes it really clear how differently we – each one of us sees things in the world. And how two people could be looking at the same thing and see something completely different.

And yet, these two women actually had so much to share and so much in common, but they just completely misunderstood one another. And I found so much redemption in that somehow that ultimately Elizabeth comes to realize that. I mean, both of them do throughout the play. And that's the relationship that heals. And it just give me so much hope that actually the stress of this dying process and the crisis of someone dying is – it's one of those moments when we have an opportunity like that.

We have an opportunity to actually change the way we're looking at things to change our perspective and come closer to another person. We can use it to try to look at life the way that person sees it and understand it. And I just thought that was beautifully portrayed.

Judith Gantly:

Yes, it is lovely. And again, Poullette MacDougal doing a fabulous job. And I wonder sometimes if – I've never heard of a confession of this from an audience member. But I wonder if that doesn't touch someone to make them think wow, I haven't talked to my brother in five years or my father in five years or whatever it is. Maybe I should give them a call. Maybe I shouldn't wait until they're dying. Wouldn't it be lovely to be able to have a relationship? And maybe I've missed something. Maybe there's more to this person than I have – or maybe I'm not accepting of – wouldn't that be a wonderful outcome of this play? I mean, there's so many wonderful things that comes from this play.

Karen Wyatt:

I could see that of a seed that gets planted that may bloom at a later time, too. That someone might never forget that because there's – you feel the moment of that transformation in the play. And it sticks with you. You remember the feeling of how amazing it is when Elizabeth finally understands who Vera is and sees it.

Judith Gantly:

And right in Myrtle Beach there might've been some testimony to that because I don't know if I shared with you that a woman came up to me after the play and said you performed the play – this play in this same room two years ago, she said. And I was in the front row. And when I heard you were coming, I said to the people in my office who's coming with me because she wanted to see it again.

So she brought five of her friends with her. And she said to me, she even said, "And you have a new costume." *[Laughs]* She was so impressed. So that's kind of nice. And this time she probably saw something else or heard something else or hopefully more than things – even actually she did come to me afterwards as well in

hopes to bring the play to her area.

But I like that idea, Karen, that even if it's just planting the seed that – I mean, how lucky can a person get, meaning me, to have someone write a play for you and then be able to perform it and perhaps make people's lives a little bit happier or easier or – I don't wanna say better but whatever is good for them? That's incredible. And I love that –

Karen Wyatt: And I will say you perform it extremely well to your portrayal of the two characters is – it just rings so true and –

Judith Gantly: Thank you.

Karen Wyatt: – really, really well done.

Judith Gantly: Thank you. Thank you.

Karen Wyatt: So I just wanna praise you for that. Not that I'm a theater critic, but I could say that it just – it was just beautifully presented. And I wanted to make sure people listening – my goal here is for people to actually hear about this play and decide we need this play. We need to present this play at our next conference because I'm thinking of medical conferences I've been to that are just so dry. I mean, you hear one clinical presentation after another all day long. To have a play like this in the middle of that day would be so inspiring. I mean, it would just completely change the ambiance and the feeling in that room to incorporate this play.

Judith Gantly: It changes the dynamics. I have used it as the keynote speaker. They've used my play instead. And I have – and oftentimes in these type of conferences they will ask for feedback; people are required to review their day and what happens, so on and so forth. And I have learned from people in charge that the play is brought up in the breakout sessions and so on, or the various smaller group sessions.

They actually can refer to the play sort of like you did with your talk and makes it seem a little bit more real and come alive. So the play does change the dynamic, I think, somewhat. And it's not dreary, as you know. So it is a great way to use it. You're absolutely right. And it has been used that way and I think to a great success.

Karen Wyatt: And you're right. I had no plans to mention the play in my talk. We were scheduled back to back. But I haven't even considered

what I might say about the play during my talk. But the points that I was bringing up were just – there were several times just the perfect illustration from the play. And I could refer back to it. And then I'd see people in the audience shaking their head yes. Like, I get that because I just saw that. I just saw it on stage. And I get what you're saying about that. And so to have that real example that they've just experienced, it's so valuable to a speaker to be able to engage your audience in that way.

Judith Gantly:

Well, your audience was – yes, your audience was well-engaged. And I felt that, too, actually from the stage when I was performing the play. These were people. I felt these were mighty. This was a mighty audience. They were lovely. They were so engaged. And then – and we even took a break in between my play and your presentation. And they were still there. They were right there. They were probably even more riled – I don't wanna say riled up. That's sounds more negative. But you know what I mean? Engage, energized by what just went on. They probably talked about it at the break.

Then you came along and you were speaking. And I mean, you could've – they just wanted to be a part of what you were doing. They wanted to be a part of what you were talking about and learn. They were so very involved with you. And yes, I think definitely that was our first time together, and it worked well doing the play in tandem. It was great. And your speech.

Karen Wyatt:

It worked really well.

Judith Gantly:

Yeah, it did.

Karen Wyatt:

And it did tell me that people, as we said before, are hungry for this information. And they're hungry to receive it in different formats, too, in different ways to have it presented to them through different modalities. And that's where I think *Waltzing the Reaper* has so much value to offer.

Judith Gantly:

Yes, it's different, isn't it? It's very different than being taught that. And perhaps things that they've heard before. And sometimes I think people tend to tune out when they're being talked at or they're hearing a fairly dry lecture. But with a play, even someone who's thinking I don't know if I really wanna hear a play. All of a sudden they're engaged. They're with you. And that's what I do love.

Paullette MacDougal, I think, is a genius in that she knows how to write so that people do come along with you. An audience, I'm so

impressed how audiences are so willing to accept this character, as you call her, what any of us want – is she a ghost? Is she an apparition who's talking to us even though she's actually hooked up to machines? The audience members are so willing to come with me on that. And I am so – I always feel like they are half the battle – not the battle – that's the wrong.

They're half the energy. They're half the play really because I can feel their energy. I can feel their enthusiasm. I can feel their interest. They care about Vera. They care. And that's lovely. They care. And then they begin to care for Elizabeth, too. She's them. She's Vera. The audience members, I'm sure, can put themselves in Vera's place. And they can put themselves in Elizabeth's place. And they can put themselves in Vera's children's place and how in-laws are treated.

I mean, there's so much in that play that can touch someone. And wouldn't it be fun – if I ask, I'll get the responses. They'll send me the responses from the conferences. And of course, it's lovely to read all good things. But it's fascinating to see some of the answers people put down as to how it truly affected them, and I'm very grateful that people do that. I mean, sometimes we get those who just fill them out quickly and send it in. But these people really were touched by it, and I guess that's why they wrote what they did or why they were willing to spend some time responding to questionnaires like that.

Karen Wyatt: Well, I'm sure –

[Crosstalk]

Judith Gantly: I just get so excited about it, Karen. I go talking too much sometimes. *[Laughs]*

Karen Wyatt: No, I love hearing about this 'cause I was just thinking that for you as an actress, I'm sure it's even more inspiring to be able to use your passion for acting and to do this play know that you're actually – you're really making a big difference in the world. You're really helping people and you're giving them something that they need. That has to be a great feeling.

Judith Gantly: It's overwhelming. It's an overwhelming feeling. I'm sitting to you in my home in Georgia, and to think that could really be happening is lovely to meet this woman who two years ago saw the play and said I've gotta see it again. I wanna come back two years later. I mean, wow. That is – and people who have seen it this summer –

there's this one dear man who has now invited me to all the various lunches of all the various aging groups in Georgia that are at least fairly nearby where I live because he just has – he's such love for the play.

And he wants it to be seen. And actually that is – if I have a goal, I would like as many people to see this play as possible. And I always feel I can say that because I didn't write it. The dear woman who wrote it, Paullette MacDougal, has given me such a vehicle that I am so blessed to have. And she's really made this happen.

Karen Wyatt: It's great 'cause you can promote it wholeheartedly, and you're promoting her work.

Karen Wyatt: And that has to feel good. But I feel that way about it as well, which is why I wanted to interview you and put it out there for other people to hear because I would just – I'd love for hospices, medical groups, community groups to really consider utilizing this play when they do put together presentations. And if you want to make an impact on your community, if you do something like this incorporating a play when you're having other speakers come, I think it could make a much greater impact and maybe even draw in more people to the event because of the fact that a play is being a presented there.

I don't know for sure, but it seems to me that that could happen. And I wanted to just mention as far as venues that the room in which you performed in Myrtle Beach just had a really small – like a riser stage. It doesn't have to be an auditorium. It doesn't have to be so that that's not a barrier for a group wanting to bring the play in.

Judith Gantly: No, that's true. Actually, even if I perform in a ballroom for 200 or 300 people, it's usually risers because ballrooms don't have stages. And so it's a couple of risers and some steps up to it. And as far as – I need a chair and very, very tiny table. And it's worked – it's very easy to set up. I bring my own microphone. And so many places now I just tie into theirs. I've never had a problem actually. The microphone I have has four different adapters. So I've only needed two of them since I started with the mic.

And if we have theater, well, sometimes we actually use a spotlight type of effect. But actually someone who just hired me to do the play saw it done with a spotlight use. And of course, it's quite dramatic towards the end. You know, as you can imagine. She

says, "Well, what happens if there's no spotlight?" I said, "Oh, it's not a problem." And you saw that happen, Karen, yourself. We were in a well-lit room. We don't need special lighting for this play at all.

If I'm a theater that happens to have it, fun, we use it. But I would say nine times out of ten, all the lights are up because most of the play is done in the hospital, in the hospital corridor, and then it's done in the hospital chapel and then at home. So it's basically an all lights up event anyway. So it is really rather easy to mount, easy to do, no doubt about it. And then usually a dressing room of some sort. And I've learned the term, it's called pipe and drape. They get a ballroom kinda thing. They have these pipes and the black drapes and they set it up close to the risers that they've built to make a stage. And that's my dressing room. So it is rather easy to mount.

Karen Wyatt: Yeah, there's no curtain. There's no dressing area. It's all – it's simple. So there are minimal barriers to any organization that might want to bring the play in. It should be as easy as bringing a speaker in. Really –

Judith Gantly: That's true.

Karen Wyatt: – if you have a microphone – an audio set up for speakers and a chair and you should be able to do it.

Judith Gantly: Absolutely. Yes. Before I had my own mic, I would use like a lavalier which most places have. Or I'm an actor, I can project. I wouldn't probably project to 300, but I might consider projecting to 200, depending. I have made sure in the last few years that I – actually it's really only in the last couple of years that I am bringing my own microphone because when people bring in the community, a number of the people are seniors and may have some hearing difficulties, so we wanna make sure everyone can hear. So it just makes it more comfortable for everyone.

But it always works out. As I said, I've never had a problem yet. It always works out. I just know that it will work out. I wouldn't be going if it wasn't gonna work out. I do believe this play has a life of its own. It goes to where it's meant to be. And I'd love to see it keep going and keep impressing people and keep hope alive for our future, of what our future is going to be like with death and dying.

Karen Wyatt: Absolutely. And I think – I mean, I was – so I didn't realize it had been around since 2000. So it's been out there for a while. But right now actually seems like a perfect time for this play. Like this right now it's really needed. It's really needed everywhere I can think of all around our country just because it's uplifting. It's hopeful. It's inspiring, and it's comforting. And I think everyone can use that.

Judith Gantly: That's very true. You can imagine I've seen changes in all of this. I mean, I have learned a lot all about hospice and advanced directives and living wills. In the time I've been doing this I have to say I wasn't doing it as frequently because I was also teaching. So I couldn't get out as often as I would like to travel because the play goes wherever anybody wants it. That's where I travel to.

But I'm seeing such a difference between when I began doing this and now. As you say, it's needed even more. And of course, there's a stirring up, too, of so much more being talked about, about death and dying, I think anyway, unless it's just because my play is so much about that that I'm so much more aware of it. But I think – and you certainly would be able to attest to that. So I think you're right. There's more of a need. And I hope that it does keep traveling, keep going on.

Someone at lunch after the Myrtle Beach performance asked if I had a DVD. And I have to say to everyone no because then I wouldn't be here having such a good time with you performing for you. There is not a DVD for sale. But just before this woman left the lunch, she said to me, she looked at me, she said, "You have to make a DVD so that when you're not here any longer people can watch it." So it's oh, okay. *[Laughs]* Do you know something I don't know?

[Laughter]

Karen Wyatt: Well, I do – I hear what you're saying because there's something really special about the live performance that might be lost in recording.

Judith Gantly: Oh, it would be.

Karen Wyatt: So the energy of that live performance is so special and for one person to be sitting a room watching a DVD wouldn't have nearly the power of being there with the whole audience and having a chance to ask questions and have a discussion afterwards. That would be missing as well.

Judith Gantly: Absolutely. And it would just – I think it would lose so much because, as I said before, the audience is at least 50 percent – I mean, and that's the audience together. It can't just be one. It does – it would lose something. And I would lose something. And I think the sum is greater than the parts when you do it the way I've been doing it. And that works for me very nicely.

Karen Wyatt: One of the things that drives me to do these interviews and put them out there is the idea that I think we need to bring as many different modalities as we can together in our work for the end of life and our conversations. And so that's why I think of the more we work together and the more we come together and bring in different people with different offerings and all combine our energies and our efforts, I think the more impact we'll have in our communities and the more change we can bring about.

So I'm putting out these interviews hoping that they'll become a way for people to network and connect with each other and just to hear about what someone else is doing. For someone to hear hey, there's a one-woman play called *Waltzing the Reaper*. I never knew that before. And hopefully to spark ideas in people's minds of how they might creatively come together and work with you and with other people out there.

Judith Gantly: That's a great idea, Karen. Thank you for doing this, for putting all of this together for all of us to learn what is out there. I appreciate that.

Karen Wyatt: Yeah. Well, it's part of my passion for just bringing things together and making us all more whole by coming together and helping each other in our work. I did – I was hoping that you would do a little excerpt. I know you recited a few of the lines from the play. But if there was a favorite part you have – portion you have from the play that you would present for us now just so that listeners can get some idea of just this monologue and how it flows.

Judith Gantly: Mm-hmm. All right. As I said, the first scene, which is the longest, is when you meet Vera who is all hooked up to the machines in the hospital. The second you meet the daughter-in-law. She didn't get along with very well. And the third scene is – I don't wanna give too much away. But anyway, the third scene Vera is at home. And she's with hospice. So why don't I pick something from there. And sometimes that always touches me.

She says, "To each of my children, I said thank you for coming into my life. Life is about learning. But when you were little, there was so much you didn't know or didn't trust I knew or didn't know in time. Although, I wanted the best for you, my mothering could've been vastly improved. From my omissions and transgressions I beg your forgiveness. I thank God for entrusting you to my care. Thank you for coming into my life. I love you. Good-bye. I love you."

And that's one little paragraph out of the third scene which is a fairly short scene. She talks about Elizabeth and about her own two daughters. And then how her granddaughter Missy, who she thought she'd never get a kiss from again, comes every day and puts her little arms around her and gives her a kiss. So it's really rather beautiful. And I hope...

Karen Wyatt: It's very beautiful.

Judith Gantly: Oh, thank you. I hope I can be able to let you know about some of the people I meet via this work that you're doing now, Karen. And I hope we get to do this together again about those people spoiled us terribly. It was so much fun. They were the most incredible audience.

Karen Wyatt: We really did have a lot of fun doing it together. And I suppose realistically not every audience maybe has engaged with that group of people. But I would like to find out. I'd love to try it again.

Judith Gantly: Yeah, me too. That's right. That's...

Karen Wyatt: I wanna make sure we tell people how to get in touch with you. What if someone's considering offering *Waltzing the Reaper*?

Judith Gantly: Well, I would suggest – here's a few things. The first thing I would suggest if they wanted to be able to share this with someone else about this play that they've just heard about, I would go to my web page which is judithgantly.com. And that's J-U-D-I-T-H, G-A-N-T-L-Y.com. And on there I have wonderful responses from people who have seen the play, have hired me, beautiful, beautiful responses. And across the board they will see.

But then if they click on the *Waltzing the Reaper* tab, they'll be able to show people – tell people what this play is all about. And they will be able to click on the YouTube link which is just a picture on my page. But click on that and then I do excerpts of the play in order of how they occur in the play.

So it's really a great way to get a good handle on it. So that's judithgantly.com. I also have my phone number on there. My phone number for my play is 908-812-1784. And I'm also on LinkedIn. And again, it would be just my name, Judith Gantly. But on LinkedIn, as anyone who's on it, will know it really gives you a good outline of what it is you do. And again, I have some different references on that particular page as well.

So I think that would be – those would be all the best ways to learn – know more about it. And then you can also e-mail me at judithgantly@yahoo.com. And there's actually a way on my web page to send me an e-mail, and that's the address it will come to. I don't think you even have to type in the address on my web page. But it's judithgantly@yahoo.com. Have I left anything out, Karen, do you think?

Karen Wyatt: I don't think so. I think that's great. And so do you travel around the country. You just – you mainly have a big suitcase with your costumes in it, right? I mean, it's manageable traveling? You don't need a whole bunch.

Karen Wyatt: You're located in Georgia, but you're willing to travel around the country and –

Judith Gantly: Oh, I have taken this play. Yes, I am in Georgia. I have traveled the United States. My sister and I actually have a competition as to who's been in more states. And she says I cheat because of my play. I get to be in more states. And I certainly – I've done Idaho, state of Washington, California. I mean, I would just go on. But that's as far west as I have gotten so far. And actually I've had some interest from some people in Canada, which of course I'll do. I mean, this is – if my goal is for people to see this play, then I go. I will go. So I'm happy to do that, Karen, yes. Very happy.

Karen Wyatt: Well, it's just – I am excited for people to have this in mind and consider it if you are putting together any type of a conference or community outreach event. It's just a fantastic addition. I can't say enough positive things about it. If you decide you want me to join the team, I might be available too to come along. *[Laughs]*

Judith Gantly: I hope you would be.

[Laughter]

Karen Wyatt: But that's not what –

Judith Gantly: That would be great.

Karen Wyatt: – this is about. But yeah, Judith and I do – we make a good team.

[Crosstalk]

Judith Gantly: We noticed that. Yes. And I must say, too, of something I didn't mention, Karen, is that absolutely I've done – well, I do colleges, too, or universities, nursing and medical schools, on medical conferences. And also hospice groups in all different ways. I've actually done, I think it was all of volunteers. My children love when I say I performed at the Phoenix zoo, but I did. They actually have rooms. I wasn't in a cage. And performed at the zoo. And it was a day – it was a treat. A day for the volunteers in this huge hospice organization in Phoenix.

And they thought this would be a great way for the volunteers to, you know, get a good handle on who are their clients? Who are their patients? Who are these people sitting there or lying there that they're taking care of? And the same with huge organization in Denver, National Hospice Organization – Palliative care organization. I perform for Grand Rounds. I always wanna say ground round. I used to wrap meat in the AMP when I was in the college.

But Grand Rounds. And it was all doctors. It was wonderful. More and more this is becoming something of great and that to them. So anyway. That was great. And I loved that we had this talk. And thank you so much. I do hope that we work together. I'm counting on it. I'm pretty sure we will. Aren't you?

Karen Wyatt: Yes, I hope so too. I wanna bring you back to Colorado. I'm working on that on my end. So hopefully there'll be an opportunity for us, Judith. And I just wanna thank you so much for taking time out of your busy because I know you're a grandma and you are busy with grandchildren. And so thank you so much for taking time out to join me.

[Crosstalk]

Judith Gantly: Such a pleasure to do so. Thank you, Karen. It's a joy. Thank you so much. And we will talk again.

[Crosstalk]

OK.

Karen Wyatt: Yep, take care.

Judith Gantly: Good. Bye-bye.

Karen Wyatt: Good-bye.

[End of Audio]