

SPECIAL GUEST

Judith Jacob

Judith Jacob, a British actress, is known for her role as the health visitor, Carmel Roberts, in the BBC soap opera EastEnders from 1986 – 1989. She attended London's Anna Scher Theatre. Two of her classmates were also former actors of EastEnders, Susan Tully (Michelle Fowler) and Phil Daniels (Kevin Wicks). Before landing her role on EastEnders, Jacob was a co-founder of Black Theatre Co-op (BTC), a London theatre group of black actors. I hooked up with Judith recently, check out her interview...



NSS: Greetings Judith and thank you for agreeing to take time out to be interviewed. Before we start I have to say it's an honour featuring you in Panther Newsletter. Over the years you have been inspiring as an actress, artist and a black woman and I'm sure many of the Panther Newsletter readers feel the same – So welcome.

JJ: Bless yah, how wonderful of you to give me so much love. Most appreciated.

NSS: Please tell the readers a little about yourself; where are you from?

JJ: I was brought up in Finsbury Park on Finsbury Park road, N4 with my parents who are from Grenada and my siblings. My brother Elliot, the eldest, Cynthia, the next in line, Janice and the baby sister Mandie. I am in the middle. Elliot and Cynthia were born in Grenada and came here aged 9 and 8. My mum was a furs machinist and my dad a forklift driver.

NSS: When did you first realise you wanted to do acting? – What prompted you?

JJ: I wanted to act from primary school. I was involved in all the school productions. My mum bought me a book showing the life of a Hollywood actress, on set by 6am, make-up and costume one hour, then on set till 10pm, at home 11pm then it all starts again the next day. I think that was meant to put me off, but I loved the whole thing. I am not sure if any particular person prompted me but I know when I saw [Diahann Carroll](#) in [Julia](#) I knew that it was possible.

NSS: Did you get a lot of encouragement from your parents?

JJ: It was a foreign idea to our parents who came here from the Caribbean but having said that my mum just wanted me to do what made me happy, whilst my dad wanted me to be a doctor or a lawyer. He just could not see how it would be possible to become an actor, especially as I was a black person, first generation British born. Love him. He became my biggest supporter as my mum died the night before my first episode of [Angels](#), which was a BBC drama series about nurses.

NSS: Is your occupation a full time professional actress?

JJ: It was for most of my life but now I am a fitness instructor as well so that the bills can still be paid. I needed to find something that I enjoyed doing and as I have always trained I took the advice of a couple of friends who suggested that I trained to work as an instructor.

NSS: What does it take to become a professional actor/actress and do you write as well?

JJ: That's a question. I went to Anna Scher Drama in the evenings and she became my agent, however a lot of people go to stage school or take acting classes/diplomas in college or university. Getting jobs can be done online as opposed to having an agent. My daughter has enlightened me about that. The most important thing is to study your art. Get as much lessons /training as possible. The moment you get paid for your acting job then you are a professional.

I do write but it's daunting. You never know if other people will get what you're saying. However, I have written a few characters that I have done on the stage shows of [The Real McCoy](#) which have been well received.

NSS: How do you go about seeking a role to play on screen or on stage?

JJ: It would be great to have control on the roles I play on stage and screen but I don't have that power, *yet*. My agent sends me on auditions and then it is the waiting game to see if you fit the image they want.

NSS: What people have inspired you in particular?

JJ: In the acting world women like Dionne Carrol, Bette Davis and Angela Bassett. Then there is the amazing Oprah who is a huge inspiration on how to put your money where your mouth is and not putting limits on yourself.

NSS: What do you enjoy most about being an actress?

JJ: I love being able to play someone totally different to myself and finding out what makes my them click. Then there is the dressing up and make-up that puts the final touches of the character.

NSS: When you are on stage or the screen, what processes do you go through to get into the character you are portraying?

JJ: I try to find someone who is like or as close to the character I'm playing, that's my base. Then there's the rehearsal, with the director, which helps to find your character's journey. By the time you are performing, you should know who you are and know what you are telling the audience.

NSS: In regards to portraying your character, do you impose a discipline on yourself regarding reading schedules etc?

JJ: Hmmm, I don't know if you would call it a discipline, more a procedure that an actor has to do and each person learns their lines at a different pace, but you're not really able to play properly till you are of the script.

NSS: What does it take to become a successful black actress in the UK?

JJ: I am still trying to work that out. (☺ Laughing)

NSS: During the 1980's you were a member of The Black Theatre Co-Op which inspired me and my friends to form our theatre group in Birmingham Ebony Arts. Every time you visited Birmingham to perform we were there. How did The Black Theatre Co-Op come together?

JJ: I was not there at the beginning but it was actors which included, Victor Romero Evans, Chris Tummings, Trevor Laird, Gordon Case, Funmi Pearce (previously known as Shope Shodinde), Malcolm Fredrick two writers, Mustapha Matura and Farrukh Dhondy, with Charlie Hanson as the director who wanted to put on a play, so they formed the company, I think.

NSS: Are they still together and are you still in touch with the guys who were involved?

JJ: Black Theatre Co-op is now Nitro and none of the original members are involved. However I am still in contact with my No Problem family.

NSS: I'm glad you mentioned No Problem. One of the best black comedy shows ever produced on UK television in my opinion in the 1980's was No Problem in which you played one of the major roles. It was regular viewing for me and millions of people back in the day – How did that series come together?

JJ: A man called Humphrey Barclay, who was the head of light entertainment at London Weekend Television (LWT), at the time, approached Black Theatre Co-operative to devise a show. We spent about 4-8 weeks work shopping different ideas, then one day Funmi came in with a breakdown of names and characters we work shopped it and the end result was 'No Problem'.

NSS: Why did it stop?

JJ: We done 3 series and by the last one [Janet Kay](#) and myself were pregnant. Janet could show her pregnancy but it was felt that it would not be good to have both of us pregnant on TV.

NSS: In your opinion, what do you think of the way black characters and families are portrayed on British television as a whole?

JJ: To me the only problem is there's still not enough black families or characters on television so when we see one we want it to be all things to all people which is just not practical. However, there is the show '[Luther](#)' with the very sexy and talented [Idris Elba](#) which helps to balance things out, a little.

NSS: Do you have ambitions to star in a movie?

JJ: Yes I have; to act in and have a lead part in movies.

NSS: How do you promote yourself? – Do you have a website?

JJ: I'm still waiting on my brother in law to sort out my website; it's only been nearly 2 years so far. I have to work on the promoting myself bit a little more.

NSS: Outside of acting, what other interests, projects and hobbies do you have?

JJ: I love training. I did martial arts for many years, Wayling, Wing Chun and Kick Boxing but not at the moment. I do want to start it back though. I'm working on a couple of projects with 5 other actresses and we call ourselves BiBi Crew. I also have my own live chat show, Judith Jacob Yabba Yabba's with Friends. My friends perform, I interview them then the audience gets to ask questions. I've done this show four times in four different venues.

NSS: And finally, do you have any advice and encouragement you would like to share with any potential budding stars of tomorrow, whatever their choice of career?

JJ: Wherever you decide your passion is take time to find out about it, study, be well informed, ask questions and never stop learning.

Judith it's been a pleasure and honour again chatting with you. May our Creator guide and bless you in all your future ventures.

Log on to PANTHER NEWSLETTER in the next issue and meet another SPECIAL GUEST or ARTIST OF THE MONTH – Everyting Bless

CHECK OUT JUDITH JACOB INNA FULL SWING IN...

The Real McCoy

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H3_rUcPKDho

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IPmUojcaG6I>

No Problem!

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q59hII0MWS4>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z7jpgahhIa8&feature=related>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=abUHZ4tynbk&feature=related>

Interview

Beating The Odds- Judith Jacob Part 1

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kDDPjpM84AM>

Beating The Odds- Judith Jacob Part 2

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ImToGI3IYwo&feature=related>