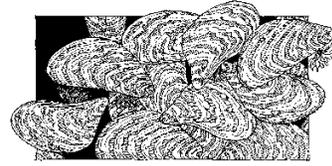


Confessions of a Gulf Exotic Aquatic



Setting: *The talk show "The Aquatic View"*

Characters: *Zelda the Zebra Mussel and Ray Rivers (the interviewer)*

Props: *Microphone, Zelda costume, feather boa (to create an exotic flair to Zelda), two chairs (optional), posters or specimens of the aquatic species to be discussed in the workshop (for Ray Rivers to point out as they are discussed)*

R: Today on the **Aquatic View** our topic is "Confessions of an Exotic Aquatic." Our special guest is Zelda from the faraway Caspian Sea. She'll be revealing secrets and giving insights into the life of a zebra mussel.

Z: Hello Darling! It's marvelous to see you! I have just finished a two-week cruise from my home in the Caspian Sea, and I am thrilled to be here.

R: But, Zelda, I understand that your type of "cruising" involves hitchhiking in the ballast tanks of ships.

Z: Well, yes that is true. But there is nothing like the ocean spray in your face and spending quality time snuggling up with your closest family members and friends.

R: I see. Cruises are well-known for the quality and incredible amount of food on them. So how was it?

Z: Ah, yes! It was luscious and elegant. We had my favorite delicacy - filtered plankton!

R: That sounds very interesting, Zelda.

Z: We bivalve mollusks really know how to live it up!

R: Speaking of living it up, I hear that you have made your way from the Great Lakes all the way down the Mississippi and are causing problems in the lower Mississippi and Atchafalaya rivers eating too much and leaving nothing for other species.

Z: Now wait one minute! It's not my fault that they can't adapt to the way I live. This is not my problem!

R: My, my, you are a bit touchy on this subject aren't you, Zelda? Maybe you can tell us all about your adventures on the cruise. Did you meet anyone interesting?

Z: Ah, yes. First, I ran into Sammy "the Spoiler" Spotted Jellyfish. You think I have an eating problem? This guy actually might like plankton more than I do! And, he eats fish eggs, too! Yuck, makes me want to turn my stomach out!

R: I heard as a young polyp, he attached himself to the hull of a boat to visit the warm Gulf of Mexico. That sounds a bit more glamorous than a ship's ballast tanks.

Z: That would be your opinion, which I might add, is not mine. I think the hull is a bumpier ride, but I hear Sammy loves it. That spotted jellyfish is a nasty, eight-tentacled slimy thing that can empty his stomach contents every two hours. That's disgusting. Don't ever talk about us both in the same breath ever again!

R: Okay, okay, I won't. So, who else did you run into on your journey?

Z: Well when I first arrived in North America I met some interesting folks that have been here for a while. I met Nick “the Gnasher” Nutria when we entered the Mississippi River at the Gulf of Mexico.

R: I don't believe I've met him. What's he like?

Z: Some think Nick is a “cool dude,” but I think he’s kind of ugly. He’s a large brown rodent with four huge, goofy looking orange teeth. You know, he’s from South America.

R: I hear that he is a huge problem in wetlands. He eats all the vegetation in an area leaving nothing but bare ground, which can lead to erosion and loss of habitat for other animals. Not too cool if you ask me.

Z: There you go again, focusing on the negative! Even though I think he’s ugly, he IS a good guy!

R: You exotics really stick together, don't you?

Z: We sure do. Well, on my way up the Mississippi River I ran into my new pal Buggy “the Bully” Big Head Carp. I don’t know how he got that bad name, but I thought he was quite charming.

R: Oh! I remember his cousin, Bobby. I was doing an interview on the river once and he flew out of the water and nearly hit me in the head. He left a huge dent in the boat!

Z: Yeah well, maybe you people and your boats don’t belong in our water. Anyway, Ray, we did see some breathtaking foliage on our cruise. My favorite was water hyacinth. I have heard that it is everywhere in North America now.

R: Yes, it is also a huge problem. The floating plants form giant mats in the water that make recreational water activities like boating, skiing and fishing impossible.

Z: But have you seen how beautiful they are? That purple flower is gorgeous. How could it be a problem?

R: Well, that beautiful plant can double in size in just over two weeks, and it can grow a new plant from just one tiny piece. Once it invades an area, it chokes out all the other plants in the water by starving them of oxygen. What will the native animals eat when this plant takes over?

Z: Maybe they can learn to adapt, just like we exotics. Oh, I almost forgot to mention Hydrilla. They are such pretty, frilly plants. Everyone could use them in their aquariums!

R: Zelda, that was one of the reasons they got here in the first place! Hydrilla has now made its way throughout the Gulf states and most of the Southeast, as well as California and Texas. They are interfering with all types of water recreation, too.

Z: I thought you wanted an interview, Ray, not a nit-picking, gripe session! You are doing nothing but pointing out serious problems. If you really think invasives are a problem, learn more about us and do something about it. Sitting here complaining isn’t getting you anywhere! Good-Bye! (stomps off).

R: Thank you Zelda the Zebra Mussel. We hope to see less and less of you in the future.