



## What Happened After Zulema Arroyo Farley Stopped Denying Her Own Truth

After decades of keeping her psychic abilities hidden from her family and friends, Zulema Arroyo Farley found herself unable to deny that she could communicate with the spirit world. The decision to be public about it came with much criticism and pushback, but she knew to be her complete self she needed to not just accept this part of her, but share it with others. In this fascinating episode, she also tells Alicia about the rare cancer diagnosis that changed her life, her chance encounter with Adele, and her fight against sarcoma. She writes about it all in her new memoir, *So Much More: A Poignant Memoir about Finding Love, Fighting Adversity, and Defining Life on My Own Terms*.

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Clip, Zulema Arroyo Farley:

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Alicia Menendez:

Zulema Arroyo Farley's memoir, *So Much More*, is about finding love and building a life in the face of overwhelming challenges. Today, the former advertising and marketing executive is battling sarcoma, a rare cancer, while telling the world a secret she's harbored her entire life. She is a psychic medium able to communicate with the spirit world.

Menendez:

Zulema, so good to see you.

Arroyo Farley:

Hello, Alicia. How are you?

Menendez:

I am so happy to have you here. So many questions. So let's start with the one on everyone's mind. What is a medium?

Arroyo Farley:

A medium is someone that has the ability to connect with our loved ones that have departed. What that means, and I don't really like to talk about it in these terms, is that I speak to the dead.

Menendez:

Why don't you like to talk about it that way?

Arroyo Farley:

There's a lack of information and misinformation and education on mediumship, and a lot of people think it's something negative, especially in the Hispanic culture where I come from. They think it's witchcraft or black magic, brujeria. So, to say, "The dead," to me it feels like we're disrespecting our loved ones, because they're still our loved ones, no matter the fact that they passed.

Menendez: You sort of grew up all over. One of my favorite parts of the book is your time in Jersey City, since I grew up in Union City. I was very happy to see that North Jersey shout out.

Arroyo Farley: That's right.

Menendez: Back and forth to Puerto Rico, some time in California. Growing up, did you know anyone who had these gifts?

Arroyo Farley: Personally? No, I didn't, but I always suspected that there had to be something of the sort going on with my paternal grandmother, and I had that confirmation and validation last year after I decided to come up publicly on national television that I was a psychic medium, and someone from my dad's side of the family contacted me and they said that my grandmother had the gift.

Menendez: When was the first time you communicated with the spirit world?

Arroyo Farley: The first real recollection that I have of connecting with spirit was what we call, in the mediumship world, my first in living color apparition, which is my maternal grandfather presenting himself to me to let me know that he was going to pass, and I thought that had happened for real, and it didn't. It wasn't until many, many, many years later that I asked my mom, "Can you tell me more about that day that grandpa died, and he was brought on the stretcher to our home. The ambulance stopped in the house." And she was like, "What are you talking about? That never happened." Yeah.

But I remember since I was five, by the way, we had a huge backyard in the house that I lived in Puerto Rico that I grew up. And I had a swing and I had a roundabout, and I always remember... When I say seeing, it's silhouettes and shadows. It's not full color, like I'm seeing you, or like I saw my grandfather, or I've seen other people later on in my life. It was more like I knew I had the impression. It's like impression and the knowing that there's somebody there or a shadow or silhouette.

Menendez: Did you embrace it as a gift or did you resist it?

Arroyo Farley: I suppressed it my whole life, and I suppressed it out of fear of rejection. I don't know if making this comparison actually is the right thing to do, but I can't find any other analogy, but it's kind of how I felt when I read the Ricky Martin book, when he finally came out publicly that he was gay. He had to suppress and hide his whole life, probably, who he was and how he really felt because of fear. Right? Just the same. And the same thing was for me. First and foremost, I'm like, if I would've told anybody growing up when I was a teenager, or when I was in my twenties, or anybody in my business world, that I had this gift, that I was a psychic medium, they would've thought that I was crazy and a lunatic. Right? Like, who knows what my family would have done at the time, because nobody knew how to handle it.

Menendez: So, then years later you're at a reading with Theresa Caputo, who most of us know as the Long Island Medium, and that's where it really clicks for you that you have these abilities and that it is something worth embracing. What happens?

Arroyo Farley: You know, it was the first time I was in front of a real medium, right? It was the first time ever, and I was like, "OMG. I can't believe that I'm hearing and I'm seeing exactly what she's saying." I could finish off the sentence of what she was about to say. Clearly, she had no idea there was another psychic medium in the room and that was me. I was dying to tell my husband what had happened. My family was with me at the time. I never mentioned a word to them. I kept it secret, but my husband was ecstatic and super happy for me.

Menendez: It's not just a turning point for you, right? Your father died when you were very young. There were questions around the circumstances of his death. Your mother says to you as you're walking into the reading, "This is the one that..." You ask her, "What's the one thing you want to know?" And the first thing I know answers...

Arroyo Farley: Is exactly that.

Menendez: Did that move them from a place of skepticism to a place anywhere closer to understanding of these gifts?

Arroyo Farley: No. No. I could understand why it could be challenging for my family to accept it. First and foremost, they've me for 47 years, 46 years, sorry, as Zulema, and then all of a sudden doing this, I had some people that even call my friends in Puerto Rico to say, "Please tell her not to come up with this publicly."

But at that point, there was nothing they could do because I'm a grown up woman. You know, I make the choices and the decisions. I think it's happened also, somewhat, to Theresa. It's happened to other mediums, although we all come from very religious Catholic formation. It's very normal because you don't understand it. It's not until you see the impact that it has on people's lives. And how, for example, I could be on a TV show. Like yesterday, I did live on Un Nuevo Día and they surprised a fan of mine with a reading who was sitting in the audience.

*[Clip from Un Nuevo Día]*

Arroyo Farley: *¿Qué pasó en mayo? ¿Qué pasó contigo en mayo?*

Audience Member: *Falleció mi novio.*

Arroyo Farley: I had no idea who the person was. I didn't know their name. They just said, "Somebody in the audience, you're going to give a reading to who's a fan of yours," and the cameras are rolling. You know the clock is ticking. It's live television. The pressure's on and spirit just started--do-do-do-do-do--telling me everything.

Arroyo Farley: *...pero algo también me está diciendo. Me hacen corazón bien grande; ustedes tenían planes de casarse, y me está me diciendo que tienes que...*

Menendez: Okay, but is there any chance, have you ever had it happen, that you're like, "Spirit? Spirit? Are you there? Spirit? We're on live television. Let's get it moving."

Arroyo Farley: No, no, no. What has happened on live TV is that, unfortunately, some of those audience members, first of all, didn't know what a psychic medium was. That was the first time that they heard there was a psychic medium. So, they don't know that they need to validate the information from spirit. And when I give a letter, for example, or a name, is the name of the person that has actually passed, or they mention the name of somebody who's alive related to the person that I'm reading. So, the problem is they don't understand it. They don't know.

I was live on Cheddar News two weeks ago, and I was surprised in the air by, "Well, who's here? Who do you get?" And immediately, I saw the father figure of one of the anchors, Vanessa, step forward. And I said, "I hear the letter R, and I hear Robert." And she was like, "No, there's no Robert." So, left it at that. The show finishes. I get home and by the time I get home and I check my email, I have an email from Vanessa saying, "I just can't believe this. It must be that I'm pregnant, but I couldn't validate the letter R and how stupid of me. My mom's side of the family, my grandfather and everybody, the last name is Roberts." And that's very normal. You tend to forget. You're nervous, you're anxious.

Menendez: And there's some skepticism, too.

Arroyo Farley: Of course. You took the words out of my mouth. I'm like, and they're skeptical, which is completely understandable. This is why I tell people you really need to come prepared to a reading, and how you prepare for a reading is you start talking to those that you want to come through, to tell them, "Please come through," and tell them, "Mention this in the reading, and I know that it's you."

Menendez: When you lose someone as young as you lost your father, you weren't even two years old.

Arroyo Farley: No, a year and three months old.

Menendez: That absence is ever present. Do you think that factors into your ability to connect with the spirit world?

Arroyo Farley: 100%. I know that my dad is behind this, and has always been 100%. There are readings sometimes that there are spirits that are not very talkative. This could be people that are very introvert or don't want to talk, or the situation surrounding their death, right? It's obscure and it's really sad, and they don't want to go there. I've had people that are on the other side and the person they sexually abuse, it could be the uncle or the father abused the daughter or the niece, and those tend to be a little quiet.

So, sometimes, when I find that there are spirits that are more quiet, that are not forthcoming in talking, that's when I asked my dad to step in and to help me translate or communicate, and be the interpreter to get the information and get that spirit to talk. So, he's on the other side, but he's still working on my behalf.

Menendez: What is the request you get most frequently?

Arroyo Farley: For Hispanics, especially, I have a lot of Venezuelan clients, what's going to happen with Venezuela, Maduro, because of the situation and the hardship. Overall-

Menendez: And is that a question you can answer?

Arroyo Farley: I can. But I don't want to be known as the medium that does predictions. So, I refrain from doing predictions. I don't like to. I've been asked can I predict who's the new Miss Universe that is going to win? Sure, I can do that if I want to, but I don't want to be known for that. I want to do something different with my gift.

The other question is, is it really my loved one, and what are the signs and the symbols that my loved one uses to let me know that is them? And that normally is answered via reading. And everybody wants to come and talk about love, and their love life.

Menendez: Have you ever just straight up gotten a reading wrong?

Arroyo Farley: No, not wrong. Once only, a woman here in Miami, in person, who was not in the right frame of mind to have a reading. Her husband had just left her after 35 years of marriage, literally, like three weeks before. She came expecting that I was going to solve her life and the reading was going to bring her husband back, and you can't come to a reading like that. You need to come to a reading open to the messages that you want to hear.

Menendez: There are lots of variations on how people harness their abilities and apply them in the world. So, for example, there are psychic mediums who work with police officers. Is that something you think is legit? Is interesting? Is that something you would ever want to do?

Arroyo Farley: It is completely legit. The show, The Medium, Alison Dubois, she's a medium and a perfect-

Menendez: Thank you for knowing my reference point there.

Arroyo Farley: Absolutely. And she does that and she also tells you your expiration date, which I could because they show us. But again, I don't want to be the bearer of those kinds of news. I want to be known, and I want people to come to me for other reasons, not for that.

Menendez: How about someone like Theresa Caputo, who has parlayed this into celebrity? Does that in any way... What's the word I'm looking for? Does it...

Arroyo Farley: Diminish?

Menendez: Thank you. Thank you, medium. Yeah, that's the word I was looking for. I mean, does it diminish the skills, the talent, the actual connection?

Arroyo Farley: No, not at all. In terms of the whole celebrity thing, I personally have an issue when they call me celebrity medium because I just don't read celebrities. I've read

maybe 25, 30 celebrities. I've done over 1200 readings to date, and it's normal, regular people that come to me. Of course there's celebs. They're normal people like we are, that also want answers, and they want guidance in their lives. But in that regard, I don't want to be what only is reading celebrities. I don't want that.

Menendez: How do we, as lay people, know who was legit and who is not?

Arroyo Farley: Very easy. A reading with a psychic needs to be very specific. Specific information. So, they have to give you dates, numbers, months. They also have to be able to say how that spirit that's stepping forward passed, what happened to that spirit, or name other people related to you or to them. So, you can't generalize. The moment that you hear somebody generalizing, that's not a psychic medium. It has to be very specific.

Menendez: For most professionals, we have to maintain our skills. So I, for example, am always listening to other interviews to see how other interviewers shape their questions, so that I can take those skills and apply them to my own. But your skill is a gift. So, how do you maintain a gift like yours, and how do you sharpen the skill underneath it?

Arroyo Farley: Number one, meditation is key every single day. And there's meditations for different purposes. So, meditation for protection of our energy. Every time I do a reading, I have to protect myself. And after the fact, to sort of clear, I also have to meditate after the reading especially if it's been a reading that causes me a headache. Example, I had a woman who was a victim of sex trafficking by her own husband, and that left me...

Yeah, exactly. That reaction is how I felt, and seriously, I got a headache and I'm like, "I have more clients to see. I have to let this go." It's like a psychologist, right? The psychologist cannot take your problems to the home with them. So, that's one. Meditation is key.

And two, we continuously learn from our spiritual teachers. So, I have a spiritual teacher whose Theresa Caputo's, Marianne the Medium also. She helps us hone in, and it's specifically, in terms of the readings, the signs and the symbols. So, imagine we develop a new alphabet or a new language with spirit. So, if spirit shows me an apple, for example, it's my clue. It's my symbol that the person that they're talking to or who I have in front of me as either a teacher or something related to the Big Apple, to New York City.

But there is always also new signs that come through that, during the reading, I'm like, "Sorry spirit, I'm not understanding. Be more clear. Give it to me." And I'll give you an example. I was reading someone, and I saw a heart on the floor, broken into a million little pieces, and I didn't understand the sign. I kept telling the person something happened to your heart, but it's not a heart attack. It's not like a cardiac arrest. It's not like you die from it, but something happened to your heart, and I can't see it.

And a few minutes later, his grandmother tells me that, and this is the reason why he came to a reading, his youngest son is not from him, because his wife was unfaithful to him while he was on a trip, and she got pregnant from this man who happens to be a friend of them, and this is why. So, the symbol was his heart was

broken into a million little pieces. So, I learned from that day that, if they ever show me that sign again, that person has gone through a similar experience.

Menendez: You were diagnosed with sarcoma, which followed a long line of health challenges, sarcoma, a form of cancer, very rare form. Did you have any premonition that you were sick?

Arroyo Farley: Yes. I did. I knew I had cancer, probably a year and a half before it was diagnosed. I didn't feel well. I knew there was something going on in my body. I was very tired. Something didn't make sense because I was really skinny. I was 110 pounds and I don't know why I had the sense and the feeling that I had cancer.

Menendez: Part of your mission in this life is also to draw attention to sarcoma, the cancer that you have, and orphan cancer, because so few people have it. What is sarcoma? How does one know if they have it?

Arroyo Farley: Sarcoma is considered rare and orphan. It's a type of cancer, because it doesn't have drugs. So, specifically targeted chemotherapies, to be treated in the United States. And the reason for that is that there's no financial incentives from the pharmaceutical companies or the government to develop the drugs because the amount of people that suffer from the disease is considered low. It's less than 200000 new patients a year.

So, what happens in the United States is a lot of people die from it because we're treated with drugs that were developed for other cancers, and these drugs were produced and developed back in the 1980s. So, you're not even talking about state of yard, the latest trial, the latest things. And that's a whole nother topic, but just so that you know, sarcoma can grow anywhere in your body. It can grow between organs in your abdomen, around your lungs, around your stomach, that you don't know that it's there until it's massive. When I say massive, it could be sometimes 10 pounds, 15 pounds, larger than a soccer ball, and it compromises a lot of your organs.

In my case specifically, and this is 80% of the cases, we are all misdiagnosed or victims of malpractice because the regular doctors, they're not oncologists, they're your primary care physician, then your orthopedic surgeon that don't treat cancer; they think it's benign, and they open up the people, like they open us up. And they don't tell us; they try to figure it out and they just can't. So, the education has to happen amongst us individuals, right. like me sharing my story amongst senators, Congress, government level, pharmaceutical companies, and even doctors.

So, because I knew, at least, I had the connection to the Spanish-speaking media, I knew that, at least, I could try to save lives of my own, because I'm Hispanic. And little did I know that Adele was going to call me on concert, and I would become a voice.

Menendez: Well wait, let's back it up. You bring a poster to this Adele concert, you're jumping up and down like a schoolgirl.

Arroyo Farley: Yes.

Menendez: And Adele turns to you and invites you up on stage.

Arroyo Farley: I know. That was amazing. My intention, honestly, Alicia, was just to get a selfie. That's what I wanted. Never in a million years, never, I thought I'd be getting up talking about sarcoma.

*[Clip from Adele concert]*

Arroyo Farley: *My name is Zulema.*

Adele: *What cancer did you have?*

Arroyo Farley: *It's a very rare cancer. Sarcoma survivors are going to be so touched to raise awareness. The UK is actually at the forefront of this.*

Arroyo Farley: So, the moment that she put the microphone on me and asked me, "So, what cancer did you have?" For a nanosecond, I froze, but immediately I was like, "You know what? This is the sign that I've been asking spirit if I should continue to pursue this. Because as you know, it's not easy to establish a foundation. It's not easy to talk about and get the attention of the media about something that doesn't affect a lot of people. So, I knew it would be a long uphill battle to get attention around me and sarcoma.

The ultimate goal of this book, by the way, is not about mediumship. It's really I want to convey the message of sarcoma and I want to continue to be that patient advocate that I've done for other people.

Menendez: You write in *So Much More*, "I eliminated the surplus that doesn't add to my life." What does that look like in your life?

Arroyo Farley: You really prove who people are when you are at your lowest. Right? Everybody handles being diagnosed with cancer differently, and I respect that. And it's sad that there were people that were not able to respect whatever I wanted. So, you know, some people took offense at the fact I didn't want to talk to them or I didn't want to answer their everyday message, "How are you?"

And I was like, "Well, what the fuck you think how am I doing? Why are you asking me every day, 'How are you?' You know the answer, like why didn't you really, if you care about me as much as you say that you do, figure out something that could bring me joy or add something to my life at that moment, instead of criticizing how I'm handling my disease and how I want to do it."

Menendez: So if, you know, had someone in your own life who was ill, how would you show up for them?

Arroyo Farley: Well, I'll tell you, Therese, my friend, died at the same time I was being diagnosed, and I would never ask her, "How are you today?" Ever. I would say, "I am sure that yesterday was tough," because she would say, "Today we have a family gathering with the hospice people." And I said, "I'm sure it was stuff. I'm sure you wanted to scream. I'm sure you cried, and you have all these feelings and emotions, and I just want to validate that what you're feeling is completely right. I am here for you."



And when you say those words, you really have to mean it. And I was like, "What is it that you need me to do? Do you need me to help you find a videographer? I'll go research. Who's the videographer that can shoot the video for that legacy video that you want to shoot for your daughters." And you're taking something, a task that is so simple, off their plate because they're drained. That woman has no energy. Finding a videographer for her is overwhelming.

Menendez: You and your husband, Nick, have a life list. What is the most fun thing you have crossed off, your favorite thing you've crossed off?

Arroyo Farley: Oh my God, skydiving together.

Menendez: They pushed you out of that plane, Zulema.

Arroyo Farley: Uh-huh (affirmative). They literally pushed me out of that plane. Those are the moments that you have so much fear, right? Because you're like, "What if this thing doesn't open? I'm dead." And for many people, it would be like, "Oh, she died being reckless," if you die from skydiving. And that was amazing.

One, it taught me how the thing that we fear the most, you shouldn't fear because it's not a big deal. If anything, you don't know what you're missing out by not doing it because of fear.

Menendez: Zulema, thank you so much.

Arroyo Farley: Thank you for having me. This is amazing.

Menendez: Thanks as always for joining us. Latina to Latina is Executive Produced and owned by Juleyka Lantigua-Williams and me. Maria Murriel is our Producer. Carolina Rodriguez is our Sound Engineer. Emma Forbes is our Assistant Producer.

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