

Shrink Rap Radio #103, July 28, 2007 – The Dream Interview Method

Dr. David Van Nuys, aka “Dr. Dave” interviews Dr. Gayle Delaney
(transcribed from www.ShrinkRapRadio.com by Susan Argyelan)

Excerpt: *I have a sense that if I could only turn the world on to using the mind that works so hard for us every night, we'd work from a less defensive and – really surprisingly – a more objective perspective on ourselves, our lives, and our relationships, every night. And most of us just throw most of that away. So as a woman (?) in my life I would be very content to die, thinking I had moved that forward a little bit; to say we have a mind and we're not using it. It's as if we were at a point in our evolution where we could all speak but none of us had bothered to learn to sing. Or we could all walk, and none of us would learn to dance.*

Introduction: That was the voice of my guest, Dr. Gayle Delaney, who is the founding president of the International Association for the Study of Dreams and co-director of the Delaney & Flowers Dream Center in San Francisco. She created the Dream Interview Method of interpretation and has authored seven books and several audio and video programs on the modern, practical uses of dreams for problem solving. Her best-selling book, *Living Your Dreams*, sparked modern interest in dream incubation in 1979 and showed readers how to target their dreams to help them solve specific problems and creative blocks. Dr. Delaney graduated with highest honors from Princeton University and earned her doctorate in clinical psychology from the Union Graduate School. She studied in Paris and at the C.G. Jung Institute in Zurich, Switzerland. She's been on hundreds of television shows in the U.S., including “Good Morning America,” “The NBC Nightly News,” “The View,” “The Montel Williams Show,” “The Today Show,” and has been a guest on “The Oprah Show” five times. She has hosted a three-hour daily prime-time AM radio show, *Dream Talk*, in the Seattle area, and has presented her work on French, Italian, Canadian, and German radio and television. Now I'm pleased to bring you the interview.

Dr. Dave: Dr. Gayle Delaney, welcome to Shrink Rap Radio.

Dr. Gayle Delaney: Well, thank you very much, David.

Dr. Dave: Yes, it was so wonderful to be able to meet you in person at the Dreams Conference that we recently had at Sonoma State University, because of course I was familiar with your work. I know I read your first book, and then I think I heard you once, I know of – maybe more than once – on the radio. So it was great to have an opportunity to be in the workshop that you did at the conference.

Delaney: Thank you. I enjoyed having you, and it's great to be back at the Association for the Study of Dreams again.

Dr. Dave: Yes. Now, you've had a very interesting background. I'm sure we can't touch on it all here, but you studied first at Princeton, and then you went on to Paris, and later to the Jung Institute in Zurich. Can you tell us about that progression a bit?

Delaney: Well, actually, I had hoped to be the next [Averell Harriman](#) of the U.S., with special diplomatic duty to the Soviet Union, because I wanted to bring peace between the Soviet Union and the U.S. since 1955, when I saw Khrushchev tell us he'd be burying us. And so there I was...

Dr. Dave: A small ambition.

Delaney: A small ambition, but you know, why work for little things?

Dr. Dave: (laughing) Right!

Delaney: So, I went off to Paris in the middle of undergraduate school to a graduate school there, where I specialized in Russian Studies, which was tremendously interesting because American academics had the story very cockeyed. They thought the European communist parties were independent, and they weren't. They were really run by the Soviet Union, and anybody who watched the news there would have to know that. So that was fascinating. I had some incredible dreams that year that I was living in Paris, and I thought, what is this? My educational system hasn't mentioned a thing about how my mind works at night. So, I went into the French bookstore, looking, well, who are the specialists? I wouldn't know them in English, much less in French. And I fell upon two French journalists, who wrote a wonderful, non-dogmatic book on dreams. What luck! And then, of course, I read all the dogmatic tracts: Freud, Jung, Perls, Boss. And I went back to college in Russian Studies, and when I noticed there weren't any men around – it took me a while – no, there were no *women* anywhere in sight. We had all sorts of interesting professors and people visiting from D.C. and from New York and the U.N.: all men. And Princeton, of course, had just become coeducational, so that I was the only woman in all my classes. And I thought, I don't want to be angry for the rest of my career. And I thought, why don't I try to bring peace by studying dreams? Women can be psychologists without constant battle. And so at the end of my junior year, I switched departments, which at Princeton takes an enormous amount of writing, and I had to do a whole summer's worth of reading Carl Jung, basically, all the requested (?) work.

Dr. Dave: Wow.

Delaney: And so then I went to Zurich after college to become a Jungian. And there I thought, you know, this is more of a religious cult than a psychological system. It's my opinion; I held it, strongly.

Dr. Dave: Interesting. Do you still hold that opinion?

Delaney: I do. I do.

Dr. Dave: Okay.

Delaney: It brought back memories of [The True Believer](#), which I'm really glad I read in high school. And I thought, I just didn't want to be a true believer. I wanted to be someone who worked with the brain. The mind is (inaudible) problem solver, and I didn't want to be the follower of a guru. And while Freud and Jung had wonderful things to say, "The truth (inaudible), not an edifice (?)." And that's a quote from a psychoanalytic friend, Joe Natterson, in L.A. And so I found a way of working with dreams that doesn't require any external symbol systems. It just works wonderfully. I had come upon it while I was still an undergraduate and was appalled to see people interpreting my dreams in Zurich with these a priori symbol systems, talking to me only long enough to pontificate on their erudition and what they read. So after about a year in Zurich, I came back here and actually did a Ph.D program at Union Graduate School but folded into that a year at Sonoma State, a master's degree, because [Stan Krippner](#) was there and some other people interested in dreams. I had a wonderful, wonderful time and then went on and developed this Dream Interview Method of interpretation, focusing on dream incubation. And Loma Flowers and I began our dream center, the Delaney & Flowers Center for the Study of Dreams, because we wanted something that was outside the academic cycles (?) and outside of a cult; in other words, a follower of a particular leader. And so we try to train people how to be good interviewers rather than interpreters by asking questions and following the dreamer's lead and not imposing or even suggesting – if we can possibly help it – our own interpretations, certainly not our own symbolic interpretations.

Dr. Dave: So, you came to call this approach the Dream Interview Method, and indeed it's very down-to-earth and doesn't bring a lot of assumptions to the process, so it was wonderful to have the opportunity to experience it in the workshop. So, why don't you take - And I think in the workshop, you took us through four or five steps, as I recall, that you had up on the pad. Why don't you take our listeners through the process, if you would? And maybe illustrating with a dream as you do it...

Delaney: Okay. So, David, let's say that you have just had a dream about a cat.

Dr. Dave: Okay.

Delaney: And I'm going to say to you, pretend I come from another planet. I'm your interviewer. I'm going to ask you very basic, descriptive questions to encourage

you to put words to your visual and emotional images in a dream. So, when I ask you things like, what's a cat like? You know I've never seen one before. This way, if you pretend that I come from another planet, you come up with quick descriptions that I can then feed back to you, and then ask you if they remind you of anything in your life. And I'll give you an example, but here are the three steps, the short version, right?

Dr. Dave: Okay.

Delaney: I'll ask you to describe the cat. I'll get a good description. Then I feed back that description in your recapitulation. I try to be concise and say, okay, in your dream, your cat is da-da-da-da-da-da who does da-da-da-da-da-da. And I say, is that right? You can correct me at that point and say, "Oh, Gayle, you put in your own words," or "You misemphasized," or "Now that you say that, I really want to correct this," or "I'd like to add that." All right, that's the recapitulation step. And the third step is the bridging step. Then I recapitulate one more time and say, so, is there anything in your life that's like a cat, that is? And I recapitulate. I'm trying to bridge and ask you for a metaphor between your cat description and something in your life. So here's the example, and it's a good example. I think it helps people remember not to impose their own perceptions, their own knowledge (what they think of this knowledge), their own associations. And you can play both parts: you can be both the interviewer and the dreamer. But let's talk about it as two people now because it makes it easier to talk about. All right, so I had a dreamer who had a dream about a cat. We all know, don't we – any of us who have studied anything – that cats represent the feminine. Now what that is, is up for grabs. Some people believe, as Freud often said, that the cat is a symbol of the mother. And that's pretty much what you hear. And sometimes, religious symbols of cats in Egypt as being symbolic of femininity and other mother/feminine principles. Okay, so I had a female dreamer who said, "I dreamt of a cat sitting on the windowsill in my room. It came into my room, ran all around, raised a ruckus, and it left." So, first I ask you clarification questions. "How'd you feel when it left?" "Oh, I was so sad, I was in tears." So, I ask, "Pretend I come from another planet. What are cats like? What's the personality of a cat, and what are they like?" And she said, "Well, cats are aloof and distant – gorgeous! The one in my dream was (inaudible) black and sleek and gorgeous and agile. And they love you when they want to, and they leave you when they want to." And I said, "What room is this cat coming into?" "Oh, it's my bedroom." So, then, I recapitulate, "And so you say a cat, and sleek, gorgeous – this one's black and sleek and agile; they're distant, aloof; they love you when they want to and leave you when they want to." She said, "Yes, that's right. That's a good description." I try to use only her words in my recapitulation. Then I go for the bridge. I say, "So, is there anything in your life, any part of yourself, or anyone in your life that's like a black, sleek cat that's distant and aloof? Loves you when it wants to; leaves you when it wants to; comes into your bedroom; raises a whole ruckus, leaves, and you're in tears?" She immediately said, "My boyfriend! And he's black, and he's sleek, and he's everything that I just said about cats."

Dr. Dave: Wow.

Delaney: So imagine, now, in that situation, if we had started to lecture her on the feminine principle. She'd say, "Well, yes...well, perhaps." But we would never have gotten to the fact that this cat is what she represented as her boyfriend. And then she said later, a few minutes later, "You know something? All of my major boyfriends have been cats. What I need is a dog. I need some faithful, loyal, dependent dog who's going to be happy to see me when I come home, wiggle his tail, and will love me. And I won't have any doubt that this dog loves me." She made a major shift in the way she looked at her choices about men.

Dr. Dave: Yes, yes.

Delaney: And I think that's a great, short description of both the method of dream interviewing and the perils of bringing to the dreamer or to yourself interpretations on certain symbols that other people have made.

Dr. Dave: Okay, what are the steps again? One, two, three, four, five?

Delaney: All right. First, get a good description of all the major images in the dream.

Dr. Dave: Okay.

Delaney: And the description is helpful if you keep it brief and with adjectives. Sometimes, there will be stories and associations, but keep them brief and very close to the basic image. And then you recapitulate that description. So, you say cats are...da-da-da-da. And you do this even for yourself, to see if you got a good description there. Did you get the feeling-tone (?) of cats? Because you want the facts and feelings. How you like or don't like cats...all of that stuff. And then, you ask the bridge question, and you say, is there anything in your life, anyone in your life, or any part of your self that's like a cat? That you describe as (and you recapitulate one more time). Now, you do that for all the main elements of the dream. And the elements of your dream can be roughly put into five or six categories: the setting, the people, the animals, the objects; the feelings are just as important as any other piece; and the action of the plot. Now, the action in the cat dream is, the cat came into the bedroom and raised a ruckus, the main element in this woman's relationship with her black, sleek, aloof, and distant cat, who loved her when he wanted to and left her when he wanted to.

Dr. Dave: So, if any of those elements are missing, would you query about them, to try to bring them out?

Delaney: Yes. In fact, sometimes, you know, you can't make a bridge because, "No, it *doesn't* remind me of anything in my life, or anyone, or any part of myself." So then you go back to the description. "Well, let's try one more time. Tell me some more about cats. What are they like? What's the cat in your dreams like?" And

then, I don't have it on my website – but I'm soon going to put it up – is a whole list of what I call the “cue-card questions,” the questions I spent 35 years honing, that get to the point quickly and ask the questions succinctly. “Tell me more about cats...what's the personality of a cat? What is the cat in your dream like?” They're follow-up questions to the basic descriptions that help you get the material you need most efficiently. And it is important, I think, to be efficient, because if you take two hours to work with a dream, you'll only do it every once in a blue moon. If you learn not to put in extra words, such as, “Well, I was wondering if you could tell me what you were thinking about cats,” rather than, “Tell me, what's a cat like?” The word “like” is so helpful to the dreamer if she suddenly can answer.

Dr. Dave: Mm-hmm.

Delaney: So I will, within a couple of weeks, put my cue cards up. But they're in all my books, all of these questions that'll ask about the people, the objects, the actions, the plot, the feelings.

Dr. Dave: Yes, now, it seems to me that a key step is that bridging one, where the person is able to say, “Where in my life is it like this in my dream?” And that's the step at which it becomes kind of metaphorical. They see that the dream is a metaphor for something in their life. Is everyone...

Delaney: Exactly, and that's the main prejudice (?) of my method. I do believe that the images in your dreams are metaphors for something in your life.

Dr. Dave: And I believe that.

Delaney: And so I lead the witness in that regard.

Dr. Dave: Yes, and I believe that as well. So I have no problem with leading the witness in that regard (laughs). But, I'm wondering if that works for everybody? Some people have such a concrete approach to life. Do you find that there are some people that just really don't get it?

Delaney: You know, I've worked at the Veterans' Hospital, with people who have zero verbal education, almost zero. And I would think that they'd be the most difficult, because I'm asking words. But it works! It works with little children. The people I have the most difficulty with are people who are deeply depressed and highly insecure, and they think they have nothing to say. Isn't that interesting? Just to get them to describe their own dream images is very difficult. And some who are very concrete work very well because they can give me what I'm asking for, concrete descriptions in the beginning. “So tell me! Go ahead; you're really in the dream. There really is a cat here. Tell me, what's this cat like? How does it feel when he runs around in the room? How's it feel when you leave?” Then, you're asking the dreamer to be almost in – almost, this is not a hypnotic state. Hypnotic people – people who are in hypnosis - are very concrete. Everything is just what it is. Well,

that's what I encourage in the first part, in the descriptive phase, and the recapitulation questions. So then we ask the dreamer to make a huge leap. What seems to be helping us is that the words we get from the dreamer – not anything from Freud or from Jung – but from the dreamer. These are the words that the dreamer has used at other days in her life to describe herself or situations in her life or people, because dreamers inevitably say to me, “Well, now that you put it that way!” and I've only repeated their own words, but they've heard them for the first time. The dreamer says, “Well, now that you put it that way, that's exactly what my brother's like. You know, in fact, just the other day, I called him (something) or (something).” And so I find that concrete people can do it if you get a rich enough description and you feed it back in the dreamer's own words to the degree that you can, in the dreamer's own tone. Now, one of the things in this bridge question is, notice how we're asking, “Is there anything in your life, anyone in your life, or any part of yourself that's like this image we've just described?”

Dr. Dave: Mm-hmm.

Delaney: That leaves the dreamer to decide, I hope, to recognize where that fits in her life. There are some schools of thought – in the pure Gestalt – that believe that every image in the dream is a part of your self. Well, I can't fully argue with that because to know everything, you could say, to some degree we are it, to (inaudible). But, it just doesn't make sense to have this woman look at the part of her self that's like a cat that's distant and aloof, and that runs around in her bedroom and loves and leaves her when he wants to. That's the kind of *man* she chooses. That's the *other* in her life; that's not a part of her self in any practical, realistic, useful sense. So, I let the dreamer choose that. Now, the dreamer might well have said, “You know, that's a part of me. I act like that with women.” Who knows? She might have said that. I might...

Dr. Dave: Mm-hmm.

Delaney: You never know what the dreamer's going to say. The dreamer might describe an oak tree and say (inaudible) a surprising, interesting description. One of the reasons interviewing is so much fun is you never know what someone's going to say about the most mundane images. But then the dreamer will say, “You know, I'm more like that.” And the dreamer *will* claim it, because it's hard to avoid it, once you've given a good description.

Dr. Dave: Yes.

Delaney: Then there are questions you can ask to make it easier. Let's say that you've just told me a dream about Fred, and you absolutely can't stand Fred. He's one of the most irritating people you've ever known. So when I say, “What's Fred like?” you tell me, “Oh, he's just such a pain in the neck, and he's so irritable,” and this and that. And I say...I feed that back to you in the recapitulation, and I'd ask, “So, is there anyone in your life or any part of yourself or anything that's like Fred?”

And you might say, “Well, actually, Fred. I have to deal with Fred.” Or you might say, “You know, I was in a meeting yesterday and I was acting just like Fred.” But let’s say you were very defensive and say, “Oh, no, no, no! No part of me like Fred!” So I’d say, well, one good back-up question to open the dreamer up is, “Why do you think Fred is the way he is? Why is he so irritable?” “Well, because he feels so attacked all the time, and he’s just sick and tired of it.” And just in saying that, I see something glimmer in your eye. I say, “Is there any part of you that feels attacked, and you’re sick and tired of it?” “Well, you know, yesterday at this meeting, I was feeling so attacked.” “Do you think you might’ve been acting a little bit, in a little way, like Fred, or if other people would’ve thought so,” and then the dreamer warms up to the topic.

Dr. Dave: That’s great. You’ve kind of, along the way you’ve kind of knocked Freud and Jung. You know, these guys were deep thinkers and deep scholars. Why is it that you don’t want to reap the wisdom of their study and their knowledge, and the use of symbolic interpretation that Jung and Freud have developed?

Delaney: I love Freud, and I love Jung. But I don’t worship either of them, and I think Freud’s most important work was not his Dreams. His basic work about transference, of the structure of relationship between people, of repressed issues...we all take it all for granted, and many of us don’t realize that’s all Freud.

Dr. Dave: Yes.

Delaney: Had it not been for Freud, we wouldn’t know it.

Dr. Dave: That’s right.

Delaney: So we live in a sea that is Freud.

Dr. Dave: Yes.

Delaney: And for that, I’m very grateful. When he started working on Dreams, he got very caught up in his own symbolic system because of his beliefs about sexuality, aggression, repression, and the discontents of civilization (Civilization and Its Discontents), a book everyone should read, wonderful reading. But, I think when he worked with dreams, he missed the point. He understood, and he was the first. I did a huge history on the study of dreams, which hasn’t been published because it’s much too long. But I could not find anybody except a couple of poets who even hinted at the idea that dreams are really about our psychological selves as we understand it – our individual development, for better and for worse. Freud made the most enormous leap. It’s just in interpreting the dreams that he got very stuck, I think, in his own belief systems about how your psyche is arranged, and how my psyche as a woman is arranged. And Jung fell into the same trap, that there’s a male psyche and a female psyche, and they looked the way each one of those thought they looked.

Dr. Dave: Mm-hmm.

Delaney: And I don't agree with that. Let's look at the fact that Carl Jung died in 1961, in Switzerland. The last woman got to vote in Switzerland in 1990. I lived there. I mean I lived there in '72, when women had just gotten the vote in most of the cantons. They were voting according to how their husbands told them to. So, in a world where women were so in the pocket of the man, I think Jung (inaudible) it very well. He did say there are wonderful things to what is feminine, to the feminine. But he had very old – ancient – yin-yang attitudes towards masculine and feminine, towards man and woman, and the only hate mail I ever got was when I wrote an article, a column in a magazine, talking about Jung's attitude toward women and citing him chapter and verse. These are Jung's quotes. In fact, I have that on my website if you want to see it. It's called Jung and the Sexes, or Dreams and the Sexes, a whole page on that.

Dr. Dave: Okay.

Delaney: And Jung... Basically, I'm Jungian of spirit: I believe that dreams help us understand ourselves; help us to grow, develop, evolve. Freud didn't go that far. Jung took it the next step. But again, when Jung got to interpreting, he thought, "The myths of the "Oobie-joobie" are good interpretive tools for my dreams." Well, that is simply not true, in my experience. And that he so exaggerated the archetypal meanings of dreams as to have people doing witch-hunts, looking in all dreams for archetypes. Why do that? What the person goes to sleep with tonight is what the dreamer knows, and what the dreamer uses to select dream images to make a dream story to give you a message. There may be wonderful, academic pleasure in seeing the parallels of how many human beings use water. Wonderful! But to say that water is just the spirit is to miss a huge percentage of people's dreams. What if you're dreaming of a stream, of a polluted stream, a dry rock-bed stream, a tidal wave, dishwasher? Think of all the versions of water: garden-hose water, water in your swimming pool...

Dr. Dave: (laughs)

Delaney: It's going to mean different things to different people, and you mustn't jump to conclusions that the fact that it's water means spirit. I had a client who had a dream (about) being with her daughter on the seashore, and a huge tidal wave came. And she had to protect her daughter, above all. Now, is she protecting her daughter from the spirit? Hmm-mmm. I said, "What are tidal waves? Pretend that I come from another planet. What are they like?" That word "like" gets people going.

Dr. Dave: Yes.

Delaney: It's very useful. And she said, "Oh, they're absolutely overwhelming, and they destroy absolutely everything in their way. And the only way to protect

yourself is to get away.” “Is there anything in your life like a tidal wave; that’s absolutely overwhelming, destroys everything in its path, and the only way to protect yourself and your daughter is to get away?” And she burst into tears, and she said, “My husband’s alcoholism...”

Dr. Dave: Mmmm...

Delaney: “...that I’ve been denying.” Okay, now that’s not *the* spirit, unless, of course, the spirit is everything. But let’s be practical. And so I think you do better not to assume(?). If it is the spirit, the dreamer will tell you.

Dr. Dave: Okay, well, let me play devil’s advocate a little bit. Your system might – from the outside – might look a little bit mechanical. You know: step one, step two, step three, step four, step five. What about intuition? Is there...you know, you’ve got a lot of experience in this work. Does your own intuition come into play at all here?

Delaney: I love this question! And I can’t tell you that my answer’s going to be correct, but I can tell you that this is how I experience it. When people watch me work with dreams – when they’re new to the technique – they’ll often say, “Oh, you’re so intuitive!” and I don’t think I am at all. In fact, I take my intuition and put it aside in a carefully sequestered space, so it doesn’t bleed into the dream work. If you ask me why I ask the dreamer a particular question, why I follow up a particular response at any time, stop me, and I can tell you, “Because she said this, and we didn’t get a full enough description, or because in the recapitulation, she (inaudible) something very important in her feeling tone about it, that you could hear it in the tone of her voice.” What I have found, because of my first work with Jungians, and with other people, as I went to many, many workshops in the seventies, as you might imagine.

Dr. Dave: Yes. (laughs)

Delaney: Intuition is often what I call the “long, black cloak” that hides people’s projections. And this is some of my dearest friends: Joe Natterson likes to share his associations to the dream with his dreamer. He’s a psychoanalyst in L.A., and he’s a very avant-garde psychoanalyst. But what he’s doing is putting his projections, his associations onto the dreamer’s experience. And you can do things like that, but I don’t think you do the best dream work. So I think when you are being intuitive, you’re getting ideas about what something may mean. I try to train people, “Ask a question that does not lead the dreamer.” Doesn’t “lead the witness,” in other words; doesn’t give away your idea, your goal. And if the dreamer says yes or no, or goes in that direction, you know right away whether or not your idea is where she’s really headed. But don’t push her there. Don’t nudge her in the direction you want to go, which is what has covered so much dream work through the ages. “Don’t you think this could be like your husband, who drinks?” Isn’t it more valuable to the dreamer for me to keep getting a better description of

the tidal wave, until she says, “Ah! Those are the words I use to describe my husband’s alcoholism.”

Dr. Dave: Yes.

Delaney: It makes her take responsibility. So, even if I had been right in my guess, my intuition, my projection, it’s better for the dreamer to get there first.

Dr. Dave: Yes, yes. That’s true generally in psychotherapy that whatever brilliant insight you may have as a therapist, it’s always better if the client comes to that recognition themselves.

Delaney: A number of therapists say to me, “But Gayle, you’re asking me to go into the dream naked, and the dreamer’s paying me! I have to have the answer.”

Dr. Dave: (laughs)

Delaney: Some people actually say this. And they feel it. And they feel it out of the goodness of their heart, not just out of the idea of “I have to look smart.” So, what I try to convince them of is, “You’ll be a better therapist, and you’ll be much more efficient in your work, if you pride yourself not on having the answers, but on having the questions that get the dreamer to figure it out.” And there is a structure to that. I think that dreams are like a poem or a Shakespearean play, highly constructed.

Dr. Dave: Yes.

Delaney: They aren’t these loose, vague, bizarre agglomerations of images. And so if you go image-by-image – at least major images – ask for the description, feed back that description in your recapitulation, and then – now and then when the time (?) is right – ask for a bridge. “Does this remind you of anything in your life?” That structure, it keeps you from forgetting the main images, and it keeps you talking to the dreamer, through the finding of the words, the finding of the interpretation of the metaphor. And then you get proud that you were able to do that rather than give her the answer.

Dr. Dave: Yes, yes. Now, what’s your take on common dreams? For example, dreams of teeth falling out, dreams of falling, flying, being pursued, etc.

Delaney: Well, you know, 35 years is a long time to be in the field, and I get interviewed for magazines maybe two or three times a month. And I don’t think I’ve ever been interviewed that they’ve haven’t said, “Okay, we’ll tell everyone that the dreams are individual, and we’ll tell them that you have to ask the dreamer. But in the mean time, could you tell me what it means when...?” (laughs)

Dr. Dave: Yes, yes.

Delaney: ...your teeth fall out, when you're falling, when you're flying. They all want this sidebar. I finally wrote a book on it – on common dreams – and I made it look like a dictionary. I wanted it to be called The Anti-Dictionary Dream Dictionary.

Dr. Dave: Oh, okay.

Delaney: They called it In Your Dreams. You know, the title (inaudible) You know, I don't have any control over it. But the book was set up with, okay, here's the common dream, the dream of teeth falling out. You can look that one right up. And then I showed the variations of teeth falling out. Some people have teeth falling out, and they put the teeth back in. Some people have their teeth crumbling in their hands. Some people have their teeth melting in their mouth. Some people have their teeth knocked out. So, there is a variety. Can all those dreams mean the same thing? And then I give some quotes on how others have seen the meanings – you know, the fixed answers from Freud and Jung, from certain folks – which makes you laugh, because they'll see them for sure meaning different things. And then I have two dreamers doing dream interviews. “Ah! What are teeth like? How does it feel for a human” – so the interviewer comes from another planet – “to have her teeth fall out?” And then I have a list of the questions. So, if you have a dream of teeth, these are the questions to ask yourself about your teeth falling out. So having said all that, most people, when I ask them, “How do you feel when your teeth fall out?” I want to tell you what they say. Let me tell you, I was once on this television show with a former psychoanalyst, and I said, “Why don't you take the next dream?” Two cute teenage girls stand up and they're giggling, with their hands over their mouths, and they say, “What does it mean – hee-hee-hee-hee – when your teeth fall out?” And then each crumpled down into their seats, laughing, that they'd been on TV asking questions. So, this psychoanalyst said, “Well, that's a simple dream, and it's obvious: something's coming out of your body. And it's a wish to have babies.” Well, I almost fell off my chair.

Dr. Dave: (laughs)

Delaney: (laughs) I looked at him and I said, “Do you believe that?” We went right to an ad! I just came right out; I just couldn't believe it! So, I asked the girls during the break, “Pretend I come from another planet. How does it feel to have your teeth fall out?” “Oh, it's terrible!” “Why is it terrible for humans to have their teeth fall out?” “We would look terrible! We would just look awful!” “Is there anything in your life, or any time when you feel like you're going to look just awful, and you're going to be seen toothless?” And, of course, they giggled, because they have lots of situations like that. It's very common for people to feel the loss of face. I think that's where that dream goes most of the time, and maybe “most of the time” is 70% of the time. I'm guessing wildly because we don't have good figures on it. But when the dreams have more variety – you know, you know what's going on that leads to the teeth falling out?

Dr. Dave: Yes.

Delaney: Or, one woman had a tooth that she put back in, and it became a German shepherd, a police dog? (laughs)

Dr. Dave: Wow. (laughs)

Delaney: So there are lots of ways it can go.

Dr. Dave: Sure.

Delaney: My encouragement to people, yes, you can find out the general tendency how many humans use these dreams, but look for the specifics in *your* dream, and particularly when the dream occurs, to see what your common dream is saying to you. And the key question to ask about a common dream is, what's going on in the dream? Is this normal for humans to do, as in flying? How do you feel when you're flying? Are there obstacles? What are those obstacles like to your flight? And then, does this remind you of anything going on in your life? And then you can usually figure it out. I can give you an example of the flying dream. It's usually tons of fun; people love it. They're soaring, they're fun, they're showing their friends that they can fly...

Dr. Dave: Yes...

Delaney: ...things like that.

Dr. Dave: Right.

Delaney: Well, I had a woman who came in and said, "Gayle, I was trying to fly in my dream, but I couldn't get liftoff. I was about, you know, five feet off the ground. I just couldn't... I kept trying to flap my arms, and I couldn't get liftoff. And then I looked down, and my husband was holding onto my left ankle...and wouldn't let me go."

Dr. Dave: Mmmm.

Delaney: So, I said, "So! How'd that feel?" "I was furious!" "And what's going on in your life? Is there anything in your life that's like this, where you feel like you'd like to fly, and your husband's holding onto your left ankle and keeping you from getting liftoff?" And she said, "Well, I've wanted to go back to graduate school, and he doesn't want me to go." "Does that *feel* in waking life the way it feels in the dream?" And she burst into tears. So her flying dream meant that, at that moment...

Dr. Dave: Yes, yes.

Delaney: It might not have meant that at another time.

Dr. Dave: Right, right. Well, thank you so much. That's really a good cautionary tale about dream dictionaries, and I like the fact that you wrote a "non-dictionary dictionary" for dreaming. Now, your first book, *Living Your Dreams*, which was published in 1979, was all about dream incubation, and that's, of course, become a very popular topic. How did you become interested in that, and where are you with that today?

Delaney: In '69, when I was living in Paris, I read a book by [Edgar Cayce](#).

Dr. Dave: Oh, yes...

Delaney: And it was not my normal sort of reading. Edgar Cayce was a psychic who died in 1945 in Virginia. But I had gone back during Christmas and asked one of my very best friends, a super-bright guy from Yale, what's the best book he'd ever read. And of all things, he gave me a book on a psychic! And I just thought, "Oh, no! Now I'm going to have to read this!"

Dr. Dave: (laughs)

Delaney: And I *read* it! And I was just amazed. It was very interesting to me. And Edgar Cayce said, if you have a problem to solve, pray to God and ask for a dream. So I tried it, and sure enough, you know, I got these dreams. But the little problem was, I didn't particularly believe in God. I mean, there may or may not be a God, but I didn't feel addressing him personally made the most sense. So I developed a very simple form that I called the "phrase-focusing method," where before you go to sleep, you take your dream journal, and you write down a few lines about what you want to dream about. You can skip that step, but what you really must do is write down your question before you go to sleep. Because then you don't ask four questions, and you remember in the morning what you asked. And you're more likely to remember your dream because you've at least consulted your journal before sleep. So you write down your one-line question: "I need a new idea for this project at work," or, "Why do I always pick men who are dead-ends?" or "What's really going on in my arguments, my regular arguments with my son?" Any kind of question (inaudible) in your life. You write it down in a clear one-liner. Go to sleep, focusing on that one question. Just repeat it over and over, like a mantra or a lullaby, and when you wake up in the morning, write down whatever's on your mind. It might be a dream; it might be a fragment of a dream; it might be the memory of a friend you haven't seen since high school. You write it down. You go and you take your shower, and then come back and look at the dream (inaudible) yourself without an assumption that you were successful. Because if you didn't get a dream on a topic, you did get a dream on something useful, and you lose both if you force one to fit into the other category.

Dr. Dave: Mm-hmm.

Delaney: So you interview the dream, see what the dream was about, and then after that you ask, “Now, does this answer my question?” And I found that this worked – I did a little study on this on my Master’s program at Sonoma State – and it works 95% of the time if you ask a question on a night you’re not intoxicated with anything, including fatigue, and if you ask a question that is of direct concern to you – not, you know, how can we put a man on Jupiter...if you’re not an engineer. And people find out very quickly that one, you go to sleep quickly, because you don’t worry about your problems (you’re repeating that one question over and over ‘til you fall asleep, which is very boring); that’ll put you right away to sleep counting sheep. And then you find out that your mind is responsive to you. Your sleeping mind says, “Okay, we will focus on this problem for at least one dream tonight. And when I first did book tours – 1981 or so – ’80 and ’81, the interviewers would say, “Delaney claims that you can have a dream on a particular topic on a given night.” And then by about 1987, I would say, everybody assumed that yes, we can do that. And it’s become much more popular, much more taken for granted that we can target dreams before sleep on issues that are of concern to us. And I think it’s extremely helpful in general living and in therapy, and in creative endeavors. And it’s just plain exciting.

Dr. Dave: Well, how about in your own life? Have there been any big dreams or incubated dreams that have changed the course of your life?

Delaney: Oh, many, many, many huge dreams and dreams that helped me shift. And who could think that you’d be at Princeton, end of your junior year, you’ve written your junior papers - two junior papers which were probably 50 to 100 pages each – and you’ve done all your coursework. You’re going into your senior year, and I think, “How could I possibly change departments?” Didn’t even occur to me to go and ask anyone, but I had a dream one night that said, “Go to the student union,” which I’d been to only twice in a year, “and talk about changing your department with the head of the Religion Department. So I went there, and there he was! He said, “Gayle, what have you doing?” I didn’t know him well; I’d only had one course with him. “Well, I was thinking of changing departments.” And he looked at me, and he said, “Well, it’s not entirely impossible if you’re willing to work really hard this summer.” And that happened. Now, that was a pretty big dream, because I don’t know that I would’ve gone and asked anyone...

Dr. Dave: Mm-hmm.

Delaney: I assumed you couldn’t do that in one year, have a whole new major, from Russian Studies into a Religion/Philosophy/Psychology bridge...

Dr. Dave: Yes.

Delaney: And then I had tons of dreams about my courtship with my future husband, whom I was married to for 19 years. Lots of dreams have helped me through our

divorce – deciding whether or not to divorce, and how to do it with heart – and then being single and in the trenches of being single. Dreams are marvelously helpful. If you're dating someone, look to your dreams right away, because your dreams pick up on the things you'd rather not notice, perhaps, and that are handy. If you think about your relationships that have lasted for several years and then you look back at the dreams you had in the first month or two, if you keep a dream journal, you'll find that most of the difficult issues were things that your dreams picked up right away. And so that's very important. Dreams of self-esteem issues: you know, would anybody be attracted to me after I get divorced at 40 - I don't know how old I, probably 45 when I got divorced, or so. And I remember I had dreams saying, "Don't worry; this will be just fine." And it was very convincing. And sure enough, it was fine.

Dr. Dave: Mm-hmm.

Delaney: I've had dreams of spiritual, mystical beauty that are so extraordinary, that I feel they infuse my life with a kind of energy that is like champagne! It just bubbles all the time! And it feels like I've got that from listening (?) to my dreams.

Dr. Dave: Wow. That really feeds right in to what was going to be my next question.

Delaney: (laughs)

Dr. Dave: Maybe it answers it, because you've been doing this for so long. You had your own radio show; you've written books; you're doing interviews all the time. And I've just wondered, how do you keep going over this material over and over again without burning out on it?

Delaney: Well, I have a little...you know, I have a lot of cheerleader in me. (laughs)

Dr. Dave: (laughs)

Delaney: (inaudible) I'm not a good therapist. And I just got a call. I was up in Sun Valley, where I ice skate in the summertime. Sun Valley, Idaho, at this beautiful outdoor skating rink. And there I was skating and I got a call. Someone said, "Here, you've got a call," and it was this New York producer who wanted to know if I'd like to do a television show on dreams and romance. You know, how to date and use your dreams. Well, needless to say, that's exactly what I'm writing a book on, what I'm excited about. And so I thought, "Yes!" Would I move to New York? Ohhh...not sure about that, from San Francisco. But my first thought was, well, I could reach a broad public with my own show, so it wouldn't just have to be sound bites, so there'd still be too many sound bites (inaudible) pleasure. And I could do that. And I have a sense that if I could only turn the world on to using the mind that works so hard for us every night, we'd work from a less defensive and – really surprisingly – a more objective perspective, on ourselves, our lives, and our relationships, every night. And most of us just throw most of that away. So, as a

woman in my life, I would be very content to die, thinking I had moved that forward a little bit; to say, we have a mind and we're not using it. It's as if we were at a point in our evolution where we could all speak, but none of us had bothered to learn to sing. Or we could all walk, and none of us had learned to dance. And, to me, we think, we use our problem-solving skills – I think we do a lot unconsciously, a lot of us wake up with solutions in the morning and don't remember any dreams – but there's more there. It's much richer, so I'd like to turn the world on to that. And so how can I (inaudible) forward (inaudible), I just don't.

Dr. Dave: Oh, that's really wonderful. That image of the bubbling champagne really does fit you very well. (laughs)

Delaney: (laughs) I must say, I was probably born with it. Biologically, my father was highly energetic. But, there are key dreams through my life that have infused me with the bubbles.

Dr. Dave: Yes, yes.

Delaney: Like electrically. And...and it's there, it doesn't go away.

Dr. Dave: Well, we're going to have to... I hope you'll be willing to come back, because there's a whole other direction that your life has taken that we haven't had a chance to discuss, but you've got another website called Choose Romance. And you talked about, you know, after the end of your marriage, what were you going to do, and would you find love again? And now you've become a dating and romance coach, and so I think that would be a very interesting topic for a future interview.

Delaney: Well, I'd be happy to, and it was my dream work that led me into it, with clients who were missing out on dating. They didn't know how to date, these wonderful people – good men, good women – who just didn't know how to relate to the opposite sex. So I'd take them shopping, and I'd get their house to be male- or female-friendly, and I'd talk about dating behaviors. And I'd say, "Now, let's look at your dreams." And so it just fed right into it. Who knew?

Dr. Dave: "Who knew?" indeed! Somehow, some inner part of you knew, evidently, and brought you in that direction.

Delaney: (laughs)

Dr. Dave: So, Dr. Gayle Delaney, thanks so much for being my guest today on Shrink Rap Radio.

Delaney: Well, thank you, David! You're just a lot of fun, and you don't do sound bites, and thank you very much!

