

## **Shrink Rap Radio #207, May 8, 2009. Life Changing Lessons from Hard Core Cons**

**Dr. David Van Nuys, aka “Dr. Dave” interviews Dr. Dana Houck**  
(transcribed from [www.ShrinkRapRadio.com](http://www.ShrinkRapRadio.com) by Jo Kelly)

**Excerpt:** *“Jungian therapy is a little bit different, in that the soul is actually trying to find a way to speak. If the answer didn’t resonate down deep inside of them, and if the affect wasn’t there I wouldn’t accept the answer. Now it frustrated them to no end, because they would get mad because they would give the answer that got them out of the hot seat in previous therapy. But if they didn’t give the real answer, and I couldn’t hear it, I kept pushing and pushing and pushing and that would make them really upset sometimes. But after a while they began to appreciate it because they would finally look at me and say, “Finally somebody is being honest, and somebody is holding me accountable, and I’m hearing the truth and I’m not getting away with it and it really makes a difference.” So they really appreciated it, going down deep inside, and not just skating through.”*

**Introduction:** That was the voice of my guest **Dr. Dana Houck**. You may recall that Dana Houck D.Min, Ed.D. was my very fascinating guest on Shrink Rap Radio #173 – Prison Dreams and Fairy Tales. He has published a new book, *Life Changing Lessons from Hard Core Cons*.

Dr. Houck is currently a psychotherapist working in Minnesota in private practice and is working part time as a licensed School Counselor working with troubled youth in Rural Minnesota Schools. He worked as a prison Psychologist for over ten years before recently retiring. While working in the prison setting he lead numerous groups of men using myths, fairytales and dream work to assist their development and uncovering the reasons they brought themselves to prison. He also conducted individual therapy sessions using dream work with these incarcerated individuals enabling them to work through issues surrounding their crimes, lifestyles and perceptions preparing them to re-enter society as caring and productive individuals.

He is an author having recently published, *The Hooded Lady Speaks: A Spiritual and Psychological Conversation*.

His website is [www.danahouck.com/](http://www.danahouck.com/)

**Dr. Dave:** Dr. Dana Houck, welcome back to Shrink Rap Radio.

**Houck:** Well thank you Dave.

**Dr. Dave:** I'm so pleased to have you back on the show. You left me and my listeners hungering for more. I heard from people who were looking forward to this book, which you mentioned at the time you were working on. Also, listeners were left wanting to hear more about your Jungian use of dreams and fairy tales in your therapeutic work with prisoners and others. So welcome back.

So what led you to write this book?

**Houck:** Part of it was that I thought it was a pretty effective method, and that others might be able to use it to help some inmates or even other people process some of the things that were going on internally. And I thought some of the stories were kind of interesting, you don't hear many stories coming out of a prison, especially people who have changed.

**Dr. Dave:** Yes, that's for certain. And I think I had announced on the heels of that, that I was going to be doing an interview, I was going to take a visit to San Quentin and record some podcasting there, and the administrative hurdles proved to be too daunting for me, so that hasn't come about.

**Houck:** Yes, I've heard that from other people, it's just hard to get in to do anything different. For some reason they just don't want anything to change.

**Dr. Dave:** Yes I have a colleague, actually the Dean of the University where I work – actually I'm retired but I'm back teaching one class – and she leads a class there and I thought I could just kind of ride in on her coat tails. And she suggested well write a letter to the Warden, write a letter to this other person, write a letter to this other person; so I contacted the three people in writing as she suggested, and never heard back from anybody. But that's water under the bridge (laughing) I'm sure you are familiar with that rigmarole.

**Houck:** Yes.

**Dr. Dave:** So who is your intended audience for this book? I think you were kind of hinting at that.

**Houck:** Oh I think the inmates as well as the staff, or people who work in therapeutic situations with people in prison. I've gotten a lot of response from the inmates that have read the book. Some of them are in it and some are not, but they really like it and they seem to get it. I have also done some

work with people who weren't in prison and began to understand some of their processes just by reading some of the stories in the book.

**Dr. Dave:** I could believe it, having read most of the stories in the book, I can certainly believe that. I will be passing this book along to my Dean who is doing prison work, and maybe she will share it with people in San Quentin. Maybe your work will spread to San Quentin; that would be good.

**Houck:** Yes.

**Dr. Dave:** Well these are wonderful stories of transformation, yet you're not naive, and prisoners are notoriously adept at conning psychologists. Not all of them want to change. Maybe you can say something about that phenomenon – like how do you know when you are being conned and when you are not.

**Houck:** Yes that was an interesting thing that I learned – they are really good at it, they know the right things to say. Since they have been through therapy so long, a lot of them have been at it since they were 14 or 15, they are 30 or 35 now, they know all the right words, they know how to posture. But one of the things that I began to notice – and I talk about it in the book – is the difference between the right answer and the real answer. The right answer just basically comes out of the books, and they have heard it so many times, and they have gotten by with giving that answer that usually the therapist would back off. But if there wasn't any affect in it, if there wasn't something that resonated deep down inside of them I wouldn't let them get by with that; and that made all the difference in the world.

Since I used a Jungian approach, there wasn't really any "right" answer. A lot of the inmates have been "in" therapy for so long, sometimes 15 or 20 years, with therapists who were looking for simply the right answer, the one the book gave. But since Jungian therapy is a little bit different, in that the soul is actually trying to find a way to speak, if the answer didn't resonate down deep inside of them, and if the affect wasn't there, I wouldn't accept the answer. It frustrated them to no end, because they would get mad because they would give the answer that got them out of the hot seat in previous therapy; but if they didn't give the real answer, and I couldn't hear it, I kept pushing and pushing and pushing – and that would make them really upset sometimes. But after a while they began to appreciate it because they would look at me and say, "Finally someone is being honest, and someone is holding me accountable, and I'm hearing the truth, and I'm not getting away with it like before and it really makes a difference." So they really appreciated it, going down deep inside and not just skating through.

**Dr. Dave:** Yes; you know somewhere in reading the stories, I got the sense that you've got some iron in your spine (laughing).

**Houck:** Yes (laughing) actually there were a lot of guys that used to get really upset with me. But the interesting thing that happened is that, even though I would push them – and I would push really hard at times – I was never threatened at all, and nobody ever decided they were going to try to take me out. The other inmates in the group, basically I felt they were kind of protecting me, because they didn't want to lose this ability to finally get down deep into what was causing their mis-thoughts or their bad affects that they had. So it was really kind of an interesting process. Usually there were about 12 guys in a group, and if somebody really got upset I figured I had at least 11 guys who would probably try to protect me, or at least I hoped they would (laughing).

**Dr. Dave:** Yes (laughing) I got a sense of that. At the end of the book you include some letters that inmates had sent you over the years, and I really got that sense of loyalty and devotion that at least those letter writers had. They acknowledged that it was tough, and that you challenged them, but that they missed that.

**Houck:** Yes I still get some letters and phone calls from guys that have gotten out, and they really do miss it, they want to continue it even after they get out. I thought that was kind of interesting.

**Dr. Dave:** Yes, that's fascinating. As these people come through in your stories it's paradoxical because we have these images of these tough, dangerous guys in prison, and yet there's almost a kind of childlike hunger that comes through in these stories.

**Houck:** Yes I noticed that too when I was working with them. I think the soul is really hungry to be heard and it is trying everything it can to be heard, which is I think one reason why some of these guys went into prison, is that they were hoping against hope that somebody would be able to listen to what was going on inside of them, and help them straighten it out, and try to figure out why they are doing what they are doing. When I looked at it from that point of view it kind of changed my perspective on how to help them; that this is more of a cry for help than just selling drugs or doing other things.

**Dr. Dave:** Interesting. Well let's step through some of the stories in your book, and maybe you can take us through some of the stories, and draw out some of the lessons or psychological processes that they illustrate.

**Houck:** Sure. There's one guy that was in prison for stalking his wife. He was getting a divorce, and he was also an administrator at a pretty big company. He would try to find ways to follow his wife, but he also was basically a kleptomaniac – he would steal anything, even stuff he wouldn't want. He said he stole pipes, ten foot pipe and he just stored them in his garage.

When I was working with him the only thing he'd want to talk about was the past – about how his childhood was, and the things he did in the past, all the things he would steal, and talk about his wife and what she would do to him.

One day I just got kind of tired of it because we kept getting stuck in the past. And I looked at him, and I said, "From now on you can't tell me anything more than 24 hours ago. I don't want to hear what happened last week; maybe yesterday, but within 24 hours, that's all you can do." And he got really, really angry with me, and his face was red, and we sat in silence for a long, long time. Finally he began to talk about where he was at, and the feelings that he was having, and he began to change and look toward the future. Which I thought was kind of interesting, that a lot of times people spend so much time in the past about how they got to where they are; but I think that the psyche is actually moving towards the future, and it's trying to get them to move into something new and something different. But people like to stay in the past because it's safe, it's convenient, and it kind of explains them maybe; but it's the future I think that's calling them and I think that's what most people are afraid of. It's to deal with the future and what life actually has in store for them and where it wants them to go.

**Dr. Dave:** Yes, I remember reading that story. The kleptomania was interesting too because he was stealing the stuff that he really had no use for. Did you or he ever get a sense of what was behind that?

**Houck:** I think when he was growing up he never had enough, he always wanted more and his parents weren't able to give him what he really wanted. But I think he was actually trying to get caught, and so he would steal just stuff, and sometimes big stuff just hoping that he would get caught so he could get some help. One of the letters in the back is actually from him, about how he had been to different therapists and couldn't find the help, and he had been on different kinds of medication until finally we opened up the psyche and began to look at what was he actually trying to steal. My guess is on one level he was trying to steal the future; but he just didn't know how to move into the future and find out what else he could do.

He eventually got out of prison – he’s living in a different state right now – but he’s doing really well, he doesn’t steal anything any more and he’s moving on with his life.

**Dr. Dave:** That’s wonderful. Now he got into prison you said because he was stalking his wife – is that right?

**Houck:** Yes.

**Dr. Dave:** And one of the things that you discuss in relation to a number of these stories has to do with the denied feminine.

**Houck:** Yes. A lot of the guys, when we’d begin to talk about the feminine they’d get really nervous and they’d think that they had some problem, until they began to understand that it was the feminine actually that helped them to feel – that would sit down and open them up. It’s the part of them as I would often talk about, the part that could sit down with your daughter and have a tea party, and enjoy her and be with her; and the part that would roll around the floor with your son, and wrestle with him, and take him out for ice-cream. Those kinds of things they weren’t used to thinking about. Or the idea that maybe they could have to hold something and let it just kind of let it grow within them for a while, so that some new things could develop.

And when they began to understand that feminine concept, that’s when a lot of change came and they began to have a lot more empathy with people; they learned some patience, they learned how to wait for things, and to some extent how to unhook the buttons people that would push. They could process those feelings; they would go back to their room sometimes and write it out on paper. The interesting thing though was that they had to destroy it because they didn’t want any guards to see it because they might be accused of threatening, or whatever, if they shared some of the feelings they had for people.

But when they began to understand that feminine quality, that it wasn’t tough, and also that the world runs actually under feminine justice rules, they began to look at things just a little bit differently and they kind of appreciated that perspective.

**Dr. Dave:** Feminine justice rules – you kind of caught me off guard there – I have never heard that said before. How is it that the world runs under feminine justice rules?

**Houck:** Well things happen in life – if you want to call it karma or something like that – when you do something you usually don't get punished right away, sometimes you have to wait until it comes around. Most of the masculine is – you get in a fight, and you get it over with, and it's power against power. Feminine doesn't work with power, it works a little bit differently, it's not quite as overt as the masculine power. So it works underneath, trying to get people to where they are supposed to be, trying to get them to eventually deal with situations that they have gotten themselves into, or issues that they haven't dealt with at all. So it moves a little bit slower but it's a lot more potent I think.

**Dr. Dave:** That's fascinating. It's definitely a different way of looking at it than I've thought about.

So this guy got himself into prison, he was stalking his wife, so in some sense he was seeking the feminine – that it was located outside of himself, and he had kind of located it in her, and he was desperately craving it. Is that pretty much how you see it?

**Houck:** Yes; and in all his relationships after his wife left him – he had a couple of relationships – he could never really tie into them. Because he would always try to make them either his mother, or just somebody to take care of, or somebody just to be with.

A lot of these guys often just wanted a woman to be with them, just so that they would tell them what to feel. A lot of these inmates, these gentlemen wouldn't understand feeling, so that's why they often were with women; so that they would do the feeling for them, they would project that stuff onto them and they would ask the women, "What's going on? What do we feel?" Which I thought was rather fascinating.

**Dr. Dave:** Yes. There is another story that ties in closely to the same theme, where the guy, as I recall, he was infatuated with a woman that he was observing from a distance – he had never met her – but was having fantasies of talking to her, and meeting her; and he sees her with another guy, and ends up killing that guy and that's what gets him in prison.

Tell us about that story.

**Houck:** It's kind of gruesome at points. He fell in love with this woman from a distance, and would somewhat stalk her and wanted to be with her, but she had a boyfriend – again this guy and this woman had never met – but he would see her with her boyfriend and he would get really irritated because

he wasn't in the picture, and he wanted to be with her. Finally he realized that the only way to get her would be to take him out of the picture.

So one night he waited while they said goodnight, this woman and her boyfriend, and followed him home, and got out and met him in the front yard and beat him up; and took him around to the backyard and beat him up with a baseball bat and left him there. He went over across the street and thought about it a bit more, and thought the guy may be able to move around and get around. So he went over again in the backyard where the guy was laying down, and this time he poured gasoline on him, intending to actually light him on fire, but he thought different of it and beat him up again; and the man died about three days later in the hospital.

All because he could not own his own feminine, and he didn't have the courage to talk to her and even introduce himself. So he projected all this stuff onto her, and I call it in a sense it's kind of an anima projection. He gave her all his feminine and no-one could interfere with that, no-one could come in between; and since she had his soul, nobody else could be in the picture.

Which I found a lot happened in prison, especially some guys with crimes of passion. If they would project their anima or their soul onto a woman, and somebody would come along and suddenly want to be with her, or she decided that this guy was too immature to be with and started seeing someone else – often that crime of passion would be because the soul was owned by the woman, and he had to pull it back somehow, but if they didn't pull it back, then these kinds of things would take place, and some gruesome things would happen.

**Dr. Dave:** Yes that was a particularly scary story because the victim wasn't doing anything, this came totally out of the blue.

**Houck:** Yes he wasn't aware of anything, or aware of the individual at all.

**Dr. Dave:** Yes. And there are certain themes that I notice seem to run through these accounts – and the denial of the feminine was certainly one – and projection was another major theme. I think in one place you actually went so far as to say that you think maybe projection is a fundamental dynamic in lots of these guys who are in prison.

**Houck:** Yes; because they don't want to own anything that might be distasteful for them. So a lot of these guys are really good people so they thought, because they wouldn't even own their own shadow; so they project



their shadow onto another individual and try to take them out. Gangs would do that in the prison as well – whether it was white, or black, or Hispanic or native – they would project their own shadows onto the other group, then there would be in a sense a war that was going on between the groups.

Projections as I saw it in the prison are really dangerous, and that's why we worked really hard to make sure that they owned them, so that they didn't have to go out and try to get rid of their shadow or as they place it on somebody else. Streets, if they don't own their shadow, it really gets dangerous then stories like that continue. There were other stories where guys, if their wife left them, would go out and kill both of them, because that way they could take their soul back a little bit and put it onto somebody else.

**Dr. Dave:** Wow. Speaking of the gangs, another important theme in there has to do with initiation, and you talked about how our culture really doesn't have good mechanisms or rituals for initiating young males into manhood.

**Houck:** I found that really fascinating, that a lot of these guys were actually looking for that initiation. They were looking for some older person, some more mature person to basically sit them down and say alright this is what it's going to take. But it's not an easy process; again I call it being pulled through a knothole about the size of a quarter. You are going to have to get rid of all kinds of crap, all kinds of perceptions, to suddenly become a man. But it takes somebody more mature that can do that, to sit them down and say, "You're full of it here at this point, and it's best that you leave it."

In our culture we don't have very many people that can do that anymore; and these guys in the prison found very, very few older men that would be willing to do that, or even had that kind of knowledge or wisdom. So they often would join gangs as a way to try to get that initiation, but the problem is that same age people can't initiate same age people because they all know the same thing.

So what they are looking for is some older men that have been through the process, who aren't going to put up with their junk or their crap, and hold them accountable. And they really resonated toward that, and they really wanted to do that, because what happened in the group is that some of the guys that had been in it, and had been through some of the processes became mentors toward some of the younger guys. They would look up to them, and during the time we weren't in group, or they were having problems, they would go talk to these older guys and try to figure out what was going on and how they can process some of these things. So it really became an

interesting kind of community for those that were in a group just of twelve people.

A lot of the other inmates say they could tell who was in the group and who wasn't just by how the inmate walked across the yard. They held themselves with a little bit more distinction – not that they were arrogant – but just like they knew something, and others could spot it.

**Dr. Dave:** Wow. I have the impression that you were a really good role model for a fuller kind of masculinity, and that as people stayed in the group some of them were able to internalize that and become mentors themselves.

**Houck:** Yes, well I had a good teacher, so that helped.

I think they want that role model – I think even the younger ones today want that role model. I work in some schools and I see the same thing. I am trying to help some of these kids not go into prison, but they are looking for some role model to emulate – nothing in sports, or in the movies – but somebody real, that can actually take them and care for them the right way; care more about their souls and about their personality and what's going on with them. Trying to help them to develop and to see things beyond the immediate; and we don't have that very often any more.

**Dr. Dave:** Yes that's right. I'd like to read you an email I received from one of my long time listeners, Rick V, and have you respond to it.

In part, Rick wrote, "I was wondering if you could do a show on the subject of evil. There is a great book by Dr. M. Scott Peck titled *People of the Lie* in which he addresses the problem of evil, and his early educational experience of which evil was redefined as psychiatric pathology. Subsequently Peck after a number of years in a clinical setting came to believe that redefining evil in this way was nonsense – a point of view I strongly agree with" this is the letter writer still, "especially since I have been touched by evil many times in my work as a body guard, and to some degree in my personal life. Unfortunately Dr. Peck is no longer with us to discuss the topic, but perhaps you could get a forensic psychologist who would be willing to talk both about the spiritual and clinical perspectives on how to deal with evil. Or even better yet: someone who believes evil can be "cured" for lack of a better word, and someone who believes that it is not a fixable problem, with you as the moderator. I think it is a fascinating subject on every level." End quote.

So you as a Jungian, you as a guy who has worked in a prison, you as a guy who has had theological training and who has been a minister as well, what about this? What is evil? Is it a theological problem, or a psychological problem – what is your take?

**Houck:** Evil actually to me is a kind of force that exists; and if people aren't aware of it, aren't conscious of it, it overtakes them and begins to manipulate them into doing things they are not even aware of. In a Jungian sense they get caught in a negative archetype and they can't get themselves out; and somebody strong enough or who understands the process can pull them out of that negative part, and hopefully turn them to see a more positive side of that archetype or that energy. But I found the more unconscious people are, the easier evil has a chance to overtake them and to do things.

Evil to me is an actual force that is very, very strong. As I began working at it when I started in the prison, it was kind of somewhat predictable. It wasn't very creative, so I could spot it when it was coming, and it had a regular pattern. But as I went through the prison system more and more, I began to see it almost as if evil evolved a little bit, and wasn't quite as predictable, and it was becoming more vicious as I saw it.

It wasn't only in the inmates, but it was also in the people who ran the prison as well, which I thought was kind of scary; because they would simply become puppets of evil, because they weren't conscious enough to see what kinds of things were going on. Because evil is somehow, I don't know why it is, it's beyond me why, but evil always wants to destroy, always wants to take people out, use them to create havoc if you like. But it's a real force.

There were some inmates, and I would look into their eyes, I could see that they had fallen deep into the dark, or into evil; and I had to question myself whether I had the ability to pull them out. Sometimes I thought they were too much, and I didn't have the energy or the time to bring them back; because the eyes are the windows into the soul. I looked at a lot of these guys, in their eyes they wanted to get out of that kind of thought process because it was destroying them; it destroyed their families, and it was destroying them and they didn't know what to do.

I don't know if there are enough people that can deal with evil, because one of the things you never do with evil is take it on head on. You always have to come around the back side, or the side of something; because if you take it on head on, I found out it will try to take you out. So you have to sneak around it, and try to – for lack of a better term – to chip at it; and kind of surprise it by helping people become a bit more conscious.

**Dr. Dave:** Say more about that, in terms of an actual case, how you snuck around it.

**Houck:** There was a guy, he was a big man – he had actually tried out for I think it was the Minnesota Vikings. He presented himself as really, really tough; he was probably six foot seven, maybe 300 pounds, 350; he was pretty much solid muscle.

**Dr. Dave:** Oh boy.

**Houck:** He would try to intimidate people all the time with his size and with his voice; and he came into the group and was trying to do the same thing, so I would pick at him and try to talk to him about intimidation. Then what I began to do, was began to work with him a little bit more about his feeling, and found a spot in there where I found he was somewhat vulnerable. So I talked to him about being a child, and he was out playing, and what that was like. Suddenly this big tough guy began to break down and he actually started crying. After the group, it was interesting, he came up to me and he said, “You snuck up on me, I didn’t see that coming. It’s not going to happen again.” But actually he softened after that point, and it didn’t really matter that he began to show his emotions.

So rather than just confronting him head on, and saying you’re a jerk, and all these kind of things, I came around the back side of it and he began to actually help people rather than try to intimidate them. He would use his power of intimidation at that point to try to protect some of the weaker inmates.

**Dr. Dave:** That’s great; good story.

You know as psychologists we tend to see that these things don’t come out of nowhere. Generally if we look into a person’s background and childhood we can see that they were traumatized in one way or another, or suffered certain kinds of deprivation, etc. Then the public kind of looks at us I think as all too often being willing to dismiss, and forgive, and not really hold people accountable. It doesn’t sound like you are doing that though.

**Houck:** No, no; they would be held accountable. One of the interesting stories in the book for instance there is a story in there about a young man whose father had set him up – had some problem with some financial people, and actually they killed them, and then the father killed himself and left the son who was 17 years old to take the rap for it. He would often blame his

father, blame what happened – the bankers, were these crooked people, terrible people – and I wasn't going to let him get away with that. And until he began to own that for himself and to realize that yes, he may have been part of that with his father, but he still was part of the problem, he still committed the crime. Only when he would admit to that – and with an affect, and with the right and the real answer both at the same time – would I let him off the hook a little bit, and then we would process that and move on.

The last thing that this was was easy; and inmates would tell you that's probably the hardest thing they had ever done. In fact a lot of the inmates, when the new ones would come in they would look at the new guy and say, "This is not going to be easy. You think coming to prison was hard? This is about ten times harder."

Because some days I'd put them on the hot seat, and they would literally sweat as I began to probe, and try to open them up and try to open up their feelings a little bit to see what was going on; and where they are actually supposed to be, and what caused them to commit the crime in the first place. And to try to make sure that they understood why they committed the crime from a psychological point of view, as well as from the heart – so that when it came up again in the future they would know how to get out of that, and why they don't want to do that.

At times I would cut deep into the sore, I wasn't putting a bandaid on it, I want to go down there, and I would want to know why you did what you did. I want a real answer about why you did what you did – none of this "well it was my childhood", or "I got a bad gift at my birthday" or something – no, that didn't cut it. It had to be something real.

**Dr. Dave:** How could you tell when it was real?

**Houck:** Again, the affect was consistent with the voice, and the body posture; and there was something in the room that just said "this is it". It just suddenly descended into the room, and you knew that you were right there where you needed to be.

**Dr. Dave:** And you could see it probably with other members of the group – they would also come alive at that point.

**Houck:** Oh yes; actually they would sometimes just quiet down. As soon as they could sense, alright we are getting down to that, and this is a crucial point for this person, they would be quiet and still, and just wait for the moment to come. Then when the person would hit it, in the first lull –

because they knew better than to talk over me, or try to do my work – in the first lull then they would be supportive of that person. If not, these guys would tear these other people apart if they weren't going to be real; especially the guys that had been in it for a while.

**Dr. Dave:** I guess part of the power of working in a group format like that too, is that the guys – when you are working intensively with one guy – the other guys are vicariously taking in some of that message, and applying lessons to their own lives.

**Houck:** Oh yes, they would often say that after the group. They would look at the guy, and say, “oh I was glad it was you – I had the same problem, but I'm glad it was you in the hot seat instead of me, because I learned a lot from you, thank you.” (laughing)

**Dr. Dave:** Yes (laughing). You know one of the things that's surprising when I look at your background, I mean I see that you've had theological training, you've got a couple of different theological degrees. You've had an affiliation with the Methodist Church, and an affiliation with the Baptist Church – and somehow those two things don't conjure up in my mind “Jungian” (laughing). In fact they seem almost in opposition.

**Houck:** Sometimes they are, but I went into it for lack of better terms the Methodist was more liberal than the Baptist, and so I got both sides of the picture to try to sort things out, and to learn some of the language of each. Because when people, especially the inmates in prison would try to go over their religious orientation – whether it was Buddhists or Christian or Jewish – I had enough background to say I don't think so, I think you are using it the wrong way. Especially when it came to quoting the bible: they would quote a little piece of it, and when I would finish it for them they got a panic because they knew that I knew what I was talking about.

But it was just a different perspective. I think because most people feel that religion is the way into the soul, and they are looking for it in that way. They may find it there, but I think there is something deeper than just an organized religion. So to realize and understand that language really helped me understand what was going on with these guys in prison, as well as in my private practice.

**Dr. Dave:** We might have covered this in our previous interview, I don't recall, but how did you find your way into the Jungian world? You made reference to your teacher.

**Houck:** Yes I was going through a tough time and facing some internal demons, and happened to run into and call an individual who was Jungian, and began my process of working through and finding out what it was I was supposed to be doing. Part of that was to actually understand both of those fields; so I have got all that education, and I was kind of led to make sure I got both of those.

**Dr. Dave:** And not just a head education, but clearly it was very much an internal education.

**Houck:** Oh it was, it was. The teacher I had made sure that I went down deep and looked from the heart of the matter, rather than just from the head. We had a lot of interesting discussions to make sure I didn't do that. So that is one of the reasons I was able to help some of these inmates make sure they didn't give me a head answer. I know the difference, I've been there before.

**Dr. Dave:** I was interested to see in the letters that the guys wrote at the end of the book: some of them made reference to reading Robert Johnson and James Hillman, and I was struck by that. I guess you turned them on to some of these figures, some of these readings. I am teaching a class right now where I have students reading a book by Robert Johnson, and I was just struck by that. I have heard Robert Johnson speak, and of course he is quite old at this point, and he is a kind of thin and meek man as he presents himself, and so it's interesting to me that these "hardened criminals" find such comfort and wisdom in his writing.

**Houck:** Yes, they liked Johnson, they read everything – the Trickster in me got a hold of all his books, as well as Sanford's and Hillman's and a lot of other books, and they would read. I had a library, basically, about two bookshelves full of books that I had gotten any way I could. It was hard sometimes to keep some of those books on the shelves; they were hungry, they wanted to know, they wanted to read, they had a lot of time and they could process it. So they read Sanford and Hillman and Johnson and Bly and Meade, and anybody they could get their hands on.

And watching some of the movies we watched also was an interesting process, and then applying what was in those books to the movie, and then applying those to their life. Because it was the stories that Johnson would write, like in *He, She, and We* but when we would tell those stories, or see those stories in a movie it would open them up in a way that they could come into the scene without being hit head on, but they could see themselves as some of the characters in those stories and begin to relate that way, almost like a third person. But once they got into it, then it became part of their life

and they began to see – as we discussed it with each of them – how they were that person, and what that problem was, and how they could overcome it, and change the end of the story, and change the end of the myth that they were living. So it didn't have to come to a gruesome end or a bad ending, they could change it into something positive.

**Dr. Dave:** Were there certain movies that you tended to rely on?

**Houck:** Yes, actually *The Odyssey*, the tape that we see on TV so much, that was their favourite.

**Dr. Dave:** I have never seen it on TV.

**Houck:** Oh, it's a shortened version of *The Odyssey*, but they loved it. I wore a couple of those things out in ten years, the videotapes. I was glad when DVD came out. But we've watched that two or three times a year, and they would resonate, because the story opens up a lot of different areas: like meeting the Cyclops where they have to meet the myopic thinking, they have to get past that; the different seductions that happen in their life and how it can cost them time. How, while they are off in prison for those years, life goes on for other people back home, and they have to realize that there is a cost to them being in prison and going on their journey because they chose to, because they were too arrogant to let go and begin to see life a different way.

Also one of the movies they liked too was the first *Matrix* movie. Where it talks about the process of opening their eyes and becoming unplugged from the culture, and beginning to do the thing that they need to do.

**Dr. Dave:** Oh that's interesting. I just took a bunch of clips from *The Matrix* and put it into a presentation that I do on The Hero's Journey.

**Houck:** Yes, that's a lot of what it is. Even *Star Wars*; we watched the first *Star Wars* which was the Hero's Journey. Beginning to see that they have to pull themselves out and be different, instead of sometimes they would just want to be a crook, and there's a story in there about the predictable rebel. He wanted to be a rebel but he was so predictable that he really wasn't a rebel – you knew exactly where he was going to go and what he was going to say – and that is not the hero's journey of being a rebel.

They wanted to see that, and they wanted to change how they lived and find out what it is they were supposed to do; what task they had been given in life. We used some dreams, and those stories began to open them, saying



“this is my purpose, this is what I have to offer to life, I just can’t take all the time it’s time. It’s now time to give back.”

From that, from those stories we would get to the point where then we would begin to try to restore what they had taken.

In the book, we worked with *Pleasantville*, which is that black and white movie and then everybody turns into color. They liked that one too, because they began to see that when they incorporated their whole personality then they were real people, and would be in color rather than simply black and white and see things just one way.

So a lot of those different movies – we watched *Dr Jeckell and Mr Hyde*, some of *King Lear*, we watched *The Lion King*, *Beauty and the Beast*. Just all kinds of different things, telling fairy tales again: *The Three Little Pigs*, *Snow White*; all those stories began to help them understand who and what they were and where they needed to go.

**Dr. Dave:** So this was the Trickster in you sneaking up on them (laughs).

**Houck:** Yes, actually it was, yes (laughs). Especially one of the interesting things in *The Odyssey* is when he returns, and he is in his throne room, and he is defeating all these other guys that are trying to steal his wife, and he stands up and says, “You have no right to steal the world I created with my hands, and the woman that I loved.”

And I would sneak up on them and say: I wonder if you guys have ever done that, actually gone into someone’s world and try to steal it from them, whether you did it with drugs, or theft, or whatever. And it usually would get really, really quiet as they began to think of what they did to other people. So that’s one way I would sneak up on them.

**Dr. Dave:** Would you stop the film mid way at that scene, or would you wait til the whole thing was over and then raise some of these points?

**Houck:** We would stop it right where we needed to stop it. Sometimes it would take us six weeks to get through *The Odyssey*. (laughing)

**Dr. Dave:** That’s great.

**Houck:** But they would love it, they liked that we could stop it right then and there and talk about it; and if they had any questions or if it seemed to fit somebody we would go there with that person and ask them what they

thought about it. We stopped it right then and there, we didn't wait til the end of the movie to talk about it.

**Dr. Dave:** I love that. That almost sounds like a program that ought to be packaged and distributed throughout the correctional system, and maybe high schools. It sounds like you've got a very practical technology, if you will, that you've developed there.

**Houck:** Yes I've thought that it would be nice to be able to teach some other people how to do that, and look from that perspective. I haven't talked to the school yet, but I'm thinking of going to a college nearby and begin to tell people and teach some of the students who are going into corrections – this is how you need to talk to the inmates, this is what you need to look for going into therapy sessions. Or people who are going into forensic psychology, and say, “you might want to look at it from this point of view, this is more real, this is what you are going to face.” Because I don't think many people ever teach them; they just say, “here read the book, now go do it” – and that is not going to work.

**Dr. Dave:** Right, right. I really encourage you to follow that impulse. I think you've really got a message for folks.

Do you have another book percolating inside you?

**Houck:** Actually I have two books percolating (laughing). The interesting thing is that when I left, an inmate (I had worked with him five years before I was forced to quit the group the first time) sent to me five years of his dreams, all typed out, and I thought it would be interesting. He was in for murder, and began to follow the dream process as we began to work and watch the dreams begin to change, and say alright we are done with that issue, now here's the next one, here's the next one; until he got to where he could be in a sense made whole again. And he owned what he had done, and all the affect was there about how bad he felt realizing this guy was not going to ever breathe again or see his family. He walks around every day knowing that and feeling that. But the process of watching those dreams begin to shift and change is really kind of fascinating.

**Dr. Dave:** Oh that'll make for a very fascinating book. Be sure to send me a copy of that when it comes out and we will do another interview.

What's the other one that is cooking inside?

**Houck:** I think what I would like to do the title might be *The Soul In Prison*. To talk about how and why people go to prison in the first place. What it is inside of them that may be looking for help that can't find it anywhere else. Some of these guys went to prison to save their life; just because they knew they were going down the wrong path, and I think the soul created enough trouble for them to get into the prison at least give them a respite from what they are doing, hoping that maybe somebody would be there to get some help.

But also what happens to the soul, to these guys that are in prison – most of the time these inmates are forgotten people, the people that nobody wants anything to do with; so we try to make it as hard as we can on them. The problem is that they simply become better criminals if we don't give them something of value to begin to change the process. And then certain things happen while they are in prison – whether they become institutionalized, or begin to figure some of this stuff out – but if there is nobody there to help then they are really in trouble.

But even when they get out I think the soul still has to process what happened; and I think there is a type of PTSD that these guys have from being in prison and committing the crime, that they have to begin to work out and try to figure out otherwise nothing changes, and they actually become worse than when they went in.

So how does one deal with the soul in prison, and what happens at different points in the prison system to the soul, and how do we restore the soul and give that person back their life.

**Dr. Dave:** Well that is a good place for us to close. Let me just ask you though, how can listeners get a copy of your book *Life Changing Lessons from Hard Core Cons*?

**Houck:** They can get it on my website [www.danahouck.com](http://www.danahouck.com) and it's also on [amazon.com](http://amazon.com)

**Dr. Dave:** OK, great. I'll put a link to your website on my website.

So Dr Dana Houck it's great to reconnect with you, and thanks so much for being my guest today on Shrink Rap Radio.

**Houck:** Thank you for the opportunity.