

Shrink Rap Radio #229, Jan 28, 2010. A Jungian View of The Unlived Life

Dr. David Van Nuys, aka “Dr. Dave” interviews Dr. Jerry Ruhl
(transcribed from www.ShrinkRapRadio.com by Jo Kelly)

Excerpt: *“As we become more and more specialized in our vocations and our job training we also become specialized in our personalities. And people don’t realize that: that for every choice you make, another choice hasn’t been made, and that gets pushed over into the unlived life pile. So that as we age, that unlived portion doesn’t just go away – we like to think that it does, by just banishing it – but it actually goes rancid. So that those energies that are important to who we are, from an earlier age if we can start to pay attention to that, and be mindful of the fact that life is not just about the almighty dollar – that that’s part of building a cultural life – but there is this other urge within us, something deeper, something of a greater circumference than our own egos, something more lasting, then I think the transition can be much easier later on, if we are mindful of that as we go along.”*

Introduction: That was the voice of my guest, Dr. Jerry Ruhl speaking about living your unlived dreams, especially in the second half of life.

Jerry M. Ruhl, Ph.D. is a Jungian therapist and the executive director of the Houston Jung Center. With Robert Johnson, Jerry is the co-author of three books on psychology and spirituality, including *Living Your Unlived Life: Coping with Unrealized Dreams and Fulfilling Your Purpose in the Second Half of Life*.

A therapist, national speaker, and internationally known author living in Houston, Texas, Jerry was a journalist in the first half of his life, and he managed communications for two major corporations. At mid-life he realized he had climbed up the corporate ladder but it was leaning against the wrong wall. He began studying the works of Joseph Campbell and Carl Jung and observed first hand spiritual practices in Japan, Bali, Thailand, Nepal, and India. Jerry and Robert Johnson met at a Jungian conference in 1987, and a lasting friendship and professional collaboration began.

Dr. Ruhl earned a Ph.D. in clinical psychology from Pacifica Graduate Institute, where he developed a new holistic model for coping with life changing accidents and illnesses. During a visit to San Diego, Jerry suggested that Robert’s remarkable life would make a fascinating book. They inquired of the I Ching if this would be a fortuitous venture, and an

affirmative response led to a series of conversations stretching out for nearly a year. Jerry and Robert discussed life, death, reincarnation, loneliness, and many other topics. They shared dreams, practiced active imagination together, and worked through a life review that culminated in the book *Balancing Heaven and Earth*. They have sustained a collaborative writing partnership since that time, culminating in their most recent book: *Living Your Unlived Life*. Robert and Jerry also have a website and blog at www.jerryruhlobertjohnson.com

Dr. Dave: Dr. Jerry Ruhl, welcome to Shrink Rap Radio.

Ruhl: Thank you – it's my pleasure to be here with you today.

Dr. Dave: Well I'm really pleased to have the opportunity to speak with you. I believe it was one of my listeners, John Buscher – who I think heads up the Seattle Jung Society – who urged me that I should get in contact with you. I think you gave a presentation up there?

Ruhl: I did, so I'm grateful for that.

Dr. Dave: Well evidently you made an impression, so that's great.

I'm also under the impression, having looked a little bit at your background that you didn't start out your professional life as a psychotherapist. Take us through that evolution if you will.

Ruhl: I always say that like many people I ended up at the door of Carl Jung through suffering. It took a while for me to find the best place to understand that.

I started out in the corporate world, first as a journalist – I've always been a writer – and then in corporate communications, and worked for a couple of different companies doing that. Eventually about mid life I got interested in the works of Joseph Campbell and Carl Jung, and started taking some classes at the Jung Center in Denver where I lived at the time. I'd had polio as a child, and I had lost my father very early on, due to cancer at the age of 52, and so I always had questions of trying to make sense of that, that had I guess driven me.

But in the first part of life it was trying to get away from some of those things and trying to normalize my life as much as possible. Like many people I got to mid life and really those came back up for me, and though I

had achieved certain cultural tasks in life I had these deeper issues and deeper questions and trying to make sense of that. And as I did reading, I really found in the works of Carl Jung answers that I didn't find anywhere else.

Dr. Dave: I know what you mean, and really what you have been saying kind of feeds into this book that you have written. I have been enjoying your most recent book, *Living Your Unlived Life*, which you co-authored with Robert Johnson.

I believe this is the third book that you have done with him, is that right?

Ruhl: Yes Robert and I became friends about twenty years ago, and he mentored me as I went through graduate school, and kind of changed careers by going back for a degree in Clinical Psychology, taking the communications background and turning it more to an inner level.

At one point Robert had decided he was not going to write any more books and of course I have always been a writer, so I suggested that we do a book together, and here we are many years later having published three and now working on a fourth book.

Dr. Dave: Wow. Well how fortunate for you, at that point in your career to hook up with Robert who is kind of I guess one of the grand old men of Jungian psychology these days.

Ruhl: It's been one of the great gifts in my life to find a mentor, someone who cares about your soul as well as your career. Robert was one of the great popularizers of Jung.

For listeners or readers who are not familiar with his work, he started in the seventies with books like *He, She, Inner Work*, and really brought the rather complex ideas of Jung which are spread across twenty volumes of the *Collected Works*, to a level that people can apply in their lives. I've tried to follow that path as well in terms of making Jung understandable to people.

Dr. Dave: Yes he really has a gift, and I guess you have it too because as I read through the book it's seamless – I can't tell who has written what, or who is saying what.

And speaking of his book *Inner Work*, that's one that I've used regularly in a class that I teach on "Myth, Dream and Symbol" and it's a wonderful book,

it really deepens the students' work with their own dreams; gives them a step by step approach that makes a lot of sense.

Ruhl: Yes it's become a classic in its field.

Robert and I over time – people always say, who is who in the book – and this most recent one, while writing it I just took to saying “I” because it was too confusing for the reader to change narrator from this is Robert and this is Jerry. Then people will say, when you are talking about your own suffering or the losses you had in your life, which is which? And again I say we had very similar experiences. Robert lost a leg in a car accident as a young boy, and as I already mentioned I had a bout with polio – one of the last people in America to get that – and had some reconstructive surgeries. So from the beginning I think he and I connected in this way, we had a felt sense of understanding with each other that has been part of our friendship.

Dr. Dave: That's great. Well I'm still curious how two people who live in two different cities – you're in Huston, and is he in Santiago?

Ruhl: Yes Robert lives in Santiago.

Dr. Dave: Yes, and so how two people live in two different cities write a book together. How do the mechanics of the collaboration work?

Ruhl: Well on the early books we just sit down and have a conversation together and I turn on the tape recorder, and Robert says that we bring out the best in each other. There is something about the dynamic – we just get to rolling on different topics – so our first book, *Balancing Heaven and Earth* began that way. It's the story of Robert's life, and then amplified into lessons that people can apply in their own lives.

I came home with a grocery bag full of cassette tapes after spending many week-ends together. I would fly out to Santiago and we would just sit down and talk, and then my task was to organize that into a book form, so that has gradually been our tack.

This last book, *Living Your Unlived Life* began with a chapter which is now in the center of the book – based on a lecture that Robert had given about symbolic life, which always touched me deeply – and that became the core. And after transcribing that I started having questions, and I flew out several times and we discussed things and I'd record them, and I'd go back and write it up; and through that process we end up with the finished product. It's a back and forth.

Dr. Dave: So do you each read what the other has written, and each make suggestions and corrections?

Ruhl: Yes, at this stage I do the bulk of the writing but I always run everything by Robert. As I say this book draws upon the wisdom of a man who is now 88 years old and the chapters that talk about dealing with aging, and dealing with death. Much of that is Robert's voice: his reflections, things that he sends me, journal items that he has done, analysis of dreams, and so forth.

Dr. Dave: Well the book is very much about finding fulfilment in the second half of life.

How would you characterize the first half of life versus the second half?

Ruhl: Humans are given the most conflicting job description imaginable. On the one hand we are called upon to do all the things that the culture, our society says to do – and most of us spend the first half of life doing that – finding a partner, finding an educational system that appeals to us, pursuing that, developing a job or a career, getting whatever degree, getting our ticket stamped officially by society so that we can go out and get a job. Then of course if you get involved with having children, everything that entails – driving them here and there, and getting them through school – for most people that takes up the bulk of our energy in the early years.

But by the time we get to mid life, we have what I call the mid life opportunity (as opposed to the mid life crisis) and that is, so often the energy that goes into those cultural tasks starts to feel like it is not enough, it starts to lose some of its excitement for us. And living in such an extroverted culture of course we typically try to change things on the outside – we get a different job, or we switch partners, or we move to a different city – when in fact it's really an inner call, because the second half of the job description that we all have is to become whole, to become all that we potentially were put here on earth to become. And I believe, as Jung did, that there is a force within us that he called "the self" that continually pushes us into greater and greater wholeness, and higher levels of integration and creativity, and that that is a knowable aspect of who we are.

And these two start to come into tension by mid life, so that one day we wake up and we think well, is this the life that I set out to have, or is my life living me? And it's really the call of the un-lived life – those things that you've never gotten around to, or things that were pushed aside, many of

them based on decisions that are made for you by circumstance of your life. And I believe that's the call of the second half of life, is realizing these potentials, so that by the time you get to your eighties or nineties you feel like you've really done the things that you were meant to do.

Dr. Dave: I'm wondering if the mid way point of life – the second half – if it's beginning later than it used to, because we are living longer. The fifties are the new forties, the sixties are the new fifties, and so on. Then it is complicated by boomerang children who return home, so that for many people who thought that they were done with parenting, particularly during the current period that we are going through, then they discover, “oops, we are not done” and Junior has just come back home.

Ruhl: Yes, mid life doesn't always line up with chronological age, so people can have this turning about of the personality at any age. Some people it strikes quite early. Even people in their twenties I've counselled in my consulting room, who have one foot in this world and another foot in a calling to something divine, or something imaginative, or something that their loyalties are divided for.

It's interesting to note that at the turn of the 1900's the average life span was forty-three, and now it's in the eighties – it's seventy-eight for men and it's about eighty-six for women. I reflect on that and think why should we suppose that the same interests that met our lives in our twenties, or thirties, or forties would be relevant in our seventies or eighties? We've got these extra decades now that people didn't have until a hundred years ago, and what are we to do with them? Are we just to repeat the same things that we have already done? And for most people those cultural tasks, as I say, start to run a bit dry, and they wake up and say, “Is this all there is”?

So the premise of the book is that this is a time for renewal, this is a time to really see this as a call, and that while you can't live out every potential – no life is long enough for that – you can determine certain things that are urgent in you that really need to be lived out in various ways, either on an inner level or on an outer level.

Dr. Dave: You know you touched on something that I was going to ask you about. We have younger listeners, people who are in the first half of their life, and I don't want them to feel like this conversation has no relevance to them, or that your book has no relevance to them. And you have kind of hinted that people in their twenties – and these are probably the kinds of people who would listen to a show like this – what value might they derive from reading your book?

Ruhl: Well of course one thing is just to really from an early age to start to get this idea that we are not here to be perfect, we are here to be whole. That is a distinction that Dr. Jung made that I think is a very important one for young people, who more and more in our society get driven by the educational system.

It takes our whole educational system to socialize people into this idea, and as we become more and more specialized in our vocations and our job training we also become specialized in our personalities. And people don't realize that: that for every choice you make, another choice hasn't been made, and that gets pushed over into the unlived life pile. So that as we age, that unlived portion doesn't just go away – we like to think that it does, by just banishing it – but it actually goes rancid. So that those energies that are important to who we are, from an earlier age if we can start to pay attention to that, and be mindful of the fact that life is not just about the almighty dollar – that that is part of building a cultural life – but there is this other urge within us for something deeper, something of a greater circumference than our own egos, something more lasting, then I think the transition can be much easier later on, if we are mindful of that as we go along.

Dr. Dave: When I first sat down with the book and looked through the table of contents, I immediately skipped ahead to Chapter 8 which is entitled “Two Essential Archetypes for Maturity”, and I guess that probably says something about me and my priorities at this point in my life (laughing). Was that the chapter in fact that the book started with? You mentioned that it was some mid chapter that was the stimulus for the book.

Ruhl: No, it was actually the one on “Symbolic Life” – which I hope we can talk a little bit about – which is that these things can be lived on a symbolic level, so they don't all have to be lived out, because often times people will say, “hey it's not practical for me to go do these things”. And we will get to that, but let me speak first of all about the one you have mentioned.

The two archetypes in our society that have to be balanced in any modern life are this archetype of the “eternal youth”, and the other one is the archetype of the “wise elder”.

Dr. Dave: Right, I know it well – both (laughing).

Ruhl: We talk about in that chapter that you need both. The eternal youth is always fresh, innovative, coming up with new possibilities, potentials,

ideas, it's exciting. Many people have dated someone who epitomizes the eternal youth – it's called the puer in Latin, a phrase that Jung used to describe someone whose personality is dominated by the eternal youth.

The downside of that is the eternal youth often times has a hard time committing to anything. They have a hard time committing to relationships because they want to keep all their options open. They are very exciting when you are dating but the pure eternal youth never really wants to settle down and have their ideas made real.

That has to be balanced with the wise elder, which is all about structure, institutions, trying to put things in some kind of an order that is lasting; and conversely too much of that and you become rigid. In the aging process we have all met people like that – you can see them physically as well as psychologically becoming stiff and tied up with their ideas, and totally out of touch with the eternal youth.

So I like to say that regardless of your chronological age, again you need to be in touch with this fountain of youth that is the spirit of playfulness and invention and new ideas within you.

Dr. Dave: Yes; and I like the positive spin that you put on that, because I have to confess that I think I have had, more than now, definite puer leanings. And one of the things that I liked about your book is that actually you focus on it not just as a negative thing, but really that it's got positive energy for us.

Ruhl: Oh, it's essential; it's essential energy.

Dr. Dave: The impulse to dive into a certain part of the book, as I did, can have an element of synchronicity. For example, right off it begins talking about two sets of mythological twins: Castor and Pollux in Roman mythology, and Horace the Younger and Horace the Elder in Egypt. And this caught my eye because I'm the father of twin boys, along with two other children.

Tell us a bit about these twins in mythology, and how they support the archetypes of maturity.

Ruhl: Well it's a wonderful story. Most people today don't know anything about Castor and Pollux: they are the Gemini twins, for which the Gemini stars, and Gemini space mission, and other things. Navigation points in ancient sea going vessels were always related to these stars in terms of

trying to find your way, and the story serves as a navigation point for us. Interestingly the truths of this story are so archetypal that they still hold up today.

The basic idea – Castor and Pollux were the brothers of Helen of Troy. Most people remember her from some class in high school, where they read about Helen of Troy, the woman with a face that launched a thousand ships, and it led to the Trojan War.

Dr. Dave: Yes.

Ruhl: Castor and Pollux were twins, but one of them was born of a mortal father, and the other one was born of father Zeus, the great sky god for the ancient Greeks. So when they were born they were the best of friends, but one of them had a loyalty to the divine world, and the other one was absolutely committed to the earthly world.

So we follow their story, and see how as a parallel all of us are united and have a sense of wholeness when we first come into the world in childhood, but over time a split occurs – as happens in the story of Castor and Pollux, the two are separated after a battle in war.

And all of us go to the wars every day, it's all of the decisions we have to make: deciding between this and that, being torn between one choice, should I stay on my diet or should I have this dessert, I really deserve it today. From the time we get up in the morning we all go to these wars. They are inner wars, of being torn between two decisions, so that the goal is to try to get these two back together again to a sense of wholeness, so that our cultural half and our soul mate – and often we look for this missing piece in another person.

We have a chapter where we talk about that, in “Romantic Love”, and how so often we ask for someone else to carry our unlived life for us, as opposed to realizing that what we see in them is the gold that's ripe for development in ourselves, and that's why it's so attractive. It doesn't mean it's not in them, but it tells us something about ourselves; and instead of demanding that someone else carry that for us indefinitely it's always a signal of what's ripe of our own unlived life, the people that we are attracted to.

You can go back and take an inventory of different people that you have fallen in love with at different times, and I will ask people, well what was golden about them, what was it that really made them shine in your eyes?

And a person with a certain amount of integrity and honesty, if they make a list, they are basically assembling a history of their own unlived life and things that were developing in them. These are the things we fall in love with. We see them first on the outside, and gradually we need to take it back on the inside – it's our inner work – and so that's a bit of what this story of Castor and Pollux. It's a wonderful mythological story which has great parallels for modern life.

Dr. Dave: Yes I discovered – after reading Chapter 8 and then skipping back to the beginning – that actually the Castor and Pollux myth was one that is woven throughout the entire book. It just surfaced in a particular way in Chapter 8, but it's really a kind of guiding metaphor throughout the book.

Ruhl: We love to take stories in all of our books and use those as a way to reveal deep psychological truths for people, and you know there are timeless stories or myths which really speak to all of us regardless of the century that we live in.

The art is finding these and really applying these to our own lives, and this seemed to me like a perfect one to describe this problem of unlived life.

Dr. Dave: Yes. Now speaking of myths, I also have a lifelong fascination with monkeys, and I actually owned one for a brief period of time – or should I say, one owned me (laughing) – so I was delighted by the story that you tell in Chapter 8 about Hanuman the monkey god, and his banana gifts to the king. Can you share that story with us here?

Ruhl: Well this is a chapter on the spirit of play, where we are talking about the need to be able to reinvent ourselves, and to be able to be open to new possibilities and new potentials within ourselves.

For most modern people the hard part is letting go of the grip of the ego which becomes like an overused muscle, and so I reference that story in that chapter about Hanuman, who was the monkey god in India. During the court King Rama – this was in the days of King Rama who is one of the great epic stories of India – he would hold court every day, and people would come to him with all their trials and tribulations, and decisions to be made, and these were to be made at the hand of the king. And every day this monkey would bring a piece of fruit to King Rama, and because it was just a monkey, and because he thought it was pointless, the king would take the fruit and toss it over his shoulder, and over time the growing collection of fruit gathered behind the back of the throne.

One day somebody got around to cleaning, and cleaned up the fruit; and they noticed that there had been a jewel inside of each piece of fruit that Hanuman the monkey had brought to the king, and not paying attention to it he had discarded it, thinking that it wasn't in his agenda (it wasn't in the king's agenda).

We are all rather like that, in that our wilful ego – setting about the business each day of things that it needs to do, and crossing things off its list, and trying to control life – oftentimes ignores these things that come to us from our instinctive or our monkey nature. They come in dreams, they come in synchronicities which are so called “chance meetings” when someone crosses your path and has something important to share with you. They can come in a letter that mysteriously appears that you would never have predicted from a rational point of view.

And these are like gifts – these are instinctive gifts – and like Rama we tend to toss them over our shoulder and not pay much attention to them, when in fact there is a jewel in each one.

Dr. Dave: There was a jewel in each of the bananas, and he kind of tossed it over his shoulder, and that's something that we do in our lives at a different level.

It seems like the idea of a divided self – or an authentic self that has been sacrificed for a socially expedient self – underlies just about every spiritual and psychotherapeutic theory. What's your take on that?

Ruhl: That's true; and I think it underlies – if one looks at the religious traditions, and the wisdom traditions around the world – one can see this tension between balancing the earth and balancing heaven. Our first book was called *Balancing Heaven and Earth* and picked up on that idea, that there is part of us that naturally has a connection to something of wholeness, something greater, something beyond, and there is another part of us which has to carry out its cultural duties.

In India that has a notion of caste, and order, and yet within the system of Hindu and the system of Buddhism one can see that tension and one is always trying to resolve the two. And the great stories from many of these cultures, and the symbols within religious traditions – religion always speaks in terms of symbols – often show this. They give us guidance and mile markers along the way of how do we strike this balance between the two; how do we integrate the two into a greater synthesis.

A compromise is where we do a little bit of one and then a little bit of the other. For example a compromise which is always a product of the ego is, well I'll do my cultural things during the week: I'll do my work, and I'll pay attention to those things and I will balance the cheque book, and I'll get those done. Then on the week-end, Saturday night comes and one is devoted to ecstasy (laughing) – the Dionysian or trying to get outside that usual mode of consciousness. Then on Sunday, or on Saturday depending on one's religious beliefs in our culture, one often devotes that to the divine.

But over time, one starts to think, oh here's Blue Monday again. Why can't I have both at the same place? How could I integrate some of my passion, and some of my hunger for the divine in my day to day life; and conversely how could I bring practicality to these inner urgings that I have for the ecstatic, to stand outside myself.

And that's the last part of our book – the last two chapters are about that – how do we create a synthesis of the two, so that our lives are truly meaningful.

Dr. Dave: You are saying there is a real difference between compromise and synthesis.

Ruhl: That's right. A compromise is always a little bit of this, and a little bit of that. It's always a product of the ego. Whereas a synthesis comes from a different place; it appears contradictory to the ego, but it will hold the tension of unknowing between two apparent things that seem to be apparently in conflict. They are actually united, they are actually complimentary, and a new solution will come to us which comes out of a different part of the personality.

You don't have to take this on faith, I just ask people to reflect on their own experience. If they have an experience of getting still, and getting quiet when they were trying to make a decision – and we call that different things – you know if you are about to buy a new car and you say: well I think maybe I should sleep on it; or, I need to go home and just reflect on this; or, I'm going to listen to my intuition. These are all homespun ways of talking about the fact that there is something within us that contributes to the situation, and moves it out of the contradiction into a solution that maybe we hadn't thought of.

That is what I'm calling a synthesis. A synthesis is one which resolves the contradiction, and you move into a new place that you hadn't thought of before.

Dr. Dave: OK. One sentence that struck me in the discussion about the divided self, there was a sentence that reads, “Every culture instils one-sidedness in its members”.

I thought that was an interesting observation, that it’s not just our culture, but I guess it’s an existential fact of being alive.

Ruhl: Yes, Freud once said that no-one ever forgives the people who inculturate you, because inevitably no matter how good of a parent you are, it’s always a one-sidedness when children are inculturated, because we say that you do this, and you don’t do that. But it’s interesting as one travels or explores other cultures to see that often these things are quite arbitrary.

If I go to the east and I’m in India I have to take my shoes off before I enter the temple, or I will be considered a barbarian and I will be thrown out on my ear. If I go to St. Peter’s Cathedral in Rome and I don’t have shoes on, it is quite the contrary. And there are many cultural decisions that are made that are like that, where we choose this, and not that, and every decision is a cutting out. Just as in medicine an incision is a cutting in – the root of the word decision means you choose this and the other one is cut out. So for every choice you make – or choice that was made for you oftentimes, in the early years – something else was cut out, and this is your unlived life.

Dr. Dave: I think some approaches give the impression that we are born with very wonderful and authentic selves that somehow become warped by the expectations of our parents and by society, and how could it be otherwise? I’m thinking of kids who were raised by some very idealistic hippy parents, without any boundaries to trammel their perfect little selves, and these kids often were just obnoxious little snots.

Do you know what I mean? (laughing)

Ruhl: Well regardless of how you are brought up, oftentimes you have to find your own way, and the first path of doing that is the negative path: it’s saying, I’m not sure what I am but I’m not that. So regardless of what you try to say, oftentimes the child has to try those ideas on for themselves.

But your earlier statement about regardless of what culture you are brought up in, or no matter how good of a job a parent does, there always is a one sidedness. The time I spent in India and Indonesia I was submerged in a culture that had much more of a feeling side, whereas our culture in America has an emphasis on thinking. We push our children from a very early age on

achievement tests, and getting good grades, because we know that's what pays off in our culture. But for each of those choices, then something else is sacrificed; and the ego, as I said the personality starts to specialize.

So it shouldn't be a surprise that while we are number one in the world in terms of technology, we don't fare so well when it comes to things of feeling; our relationships are very difficult for us.

My friend Robert jokes that in America we have a hundred words for nuts and bolts, but only three or four for love; and in India they have a hundred words finely differentiating love in Sanskrit based languages but have a much harder time with nuts and bolts, or technology.

So no matter what culture you are in there is always a certain degree of specialization, and then there is something else that goes into your un-lived portion.

Dr. Dave: Yes. I was struck by your quote from Jung, indicating that sometimes we are burdened by trying to live the un-lived life of our parents. Can you comment on that a bit?

Ruhl: Yes. Jung famously said that that's the greatest burden a child bears, is the un-lived life of the parent; by which he meant those places where the parent is unconscious, or feels inadequate, or just oftentimes unconsciously gets handed down. You see that in extreme examples, like the stage door mother who is pushing her daughter to be a model, or on stage from the time she is a little girl, or performing; or the soccer coach dad, or the athletic dad who really wants his son to relive some of his dreams of being an athletics star.

That's fine if it's the child's natural aptitude, but oftentimes it's not. Oftentimes we hand these things onto our children unconsciously so that they are struggling with those early on, in the first half of life, trying to figure out well why am I doing these things? Is it because I want to, or is it because somebody else told me that this is what I should do? Or conversely, am I doing just the opposite out of rebellion – and sometimes we do that also with the parent's un-lived life – we do just the opposite of what they didn't live out.

Either way we are bound to them, we are still living reflexively, we are not choosing, we are bound by these unconscious tendencies that have been passed on by the parent.

Dr. Dave: I think I really resonated to that, because I come from a line of frustrated writers, so at some point in my life I realized that I was really flagellating myself because I hadn't written a book. You know my mother was going to write a book, and my grandmother was going to write a book, and so on, and at some point I realized that I had kind of nailed myself to this cross – you know, “I must write a book” – and I realized I could just choose to get off of that cross. That there are plenty of people in the world who do not write books, and who are leading perfectly happy lives; and so that was an important turning point for me.

And then interestingly, once I made that decision and let myself off the hook, an opportunity came along to be a co-author of a book, and it just flowed in the easiest and most natural way possible.

Ruhl: Yes, that's a great example.

The thing I alluded to earlier about symbolic life, just to pick up that thread.

Dr. Dave: Yes.

Ruhl: One of the things that people say is, “well you know I can't do this, it's not practical”. Maybe I always wanted to be a sky diver and now I'm in my sixties. I actually had a woman phone in on a radio show that I did at one point, and said, “Well Doctor Ruhl I've got you here, explain this for me: I always wanted to be a sky diver, and now I'm 75 and they won't let me do it; and that's my unlived life, what am I supposed to do?”

That's the point at which I always say well the underlying idea of symbolic life is how do you do this without literally doing it? And when you first say that to someone usually they scratch their head and say, well what do you mean? And I say well, how can you do this without literally acting it out? Because so many of these unlived things cannot be done literally.

Jumping out of an airplane for her, or for other people maybe it's rekindling a relationship with someone who has passed away, or trying to heal some wound, or something of a physical nature that is now beyond possibility.

The thing that's interesting is for our psyches many of these things can be lived just as significantly on an inner level – which is what I call active imagination – and it has just as much power for us. So I ask people, what is the thing that you are really after? For example the skydiver: I began a brief dialogue with her, well what does this represent to you? Is it a sense of freedom, flying through the air? Is it a sense of risk? Is it encountering

your fears? And if you start to think of it that way, then you can say well there are other ways to meet this need. Once you get beneath the obvious way – literally acting it out – there are many symbolic ways of doing these things as inner experience, which can be very powerful.

Another frequent one that comes up in my consulting room is someone falls in love with somebody outside of an existing relationship, and then they find their way to my door. And they say, well I'm in love with this person and what am I supposed to do: I have a family, I have these social responsibilities. I don't want to leave a trail of wreckage?

And it appears on the surface that there are two choices: the famous “just say no” policy, or to act it out. Neither one of these is a very good alternative. Acting out obviously would leave a trail of wreckage, and just to throw away all of your existing cultural obligations is not a good path. Conversely, the “just say no” policy oftentimes ends in resentment towards one's partner, one's children, depression, all kinds of physical symptoms – lord knows how much physical illness results from just saying no to important aspects of unlived life that rise up in us.

So in this example I say to the person, well what is it that shines about this person? They are caring for you, obviously they have part of it, but it's also some unlived portion of you that needs to be reclaimed. And with a person of honesty and integrity they will sit down and we'll start to make a list of what is it about this person. And as we identify that, then we can explore other ways of getting that need met. For example maybe the person is worldly – maybe you need to bring more of that into your life; maybe the person is exciting, and you need more spontaneity in your life.

Maybe the person is a “bad boy” – that's one that oftentimes women bring to me – “I don't know why I'm attracted to this guy, he's just trouble, but I keep being drawn to these type of men.” Oftentimes that's a case of too much virtuousness, when one needs to free up and do something spontaneous. Not acting out and doing something that's immoral, but that one is too rigid in one's life and needs to look at that, and that's why that has a hook.

So that's the idea of symbolic life in a nutshell, is how do you do it without literally doing it; and there is always an answer for that.

Dr. Dave: You know I particularly resonated with the section on Romantic Love and the Unlived Life; I'm glad you are talking about that. That was probably the puer in me, pricking up his ears. You write, “No-one notices at

the time, but in-loveness obliterates the humanity of the beloved, for we are really looking at our own insipient potentials.”

Do you want to comment on that?

Ruhl: Yes, that’s an example of where our culture and its misunderstood feeling function, we have all kinds of trouble. I differentiate “in-loveness” from “love”. In-loveness, that magical feeling where you are about three feet off the ground and the person just makes you giddy, the thought of that person. This is a divine quality and it has a divine element. It’s like we have crossed a little corner of heaven.

In Jungian psychology we would say that we have experienced a bit of the self, or of the divine, or of this whole-making capacity within us.

The difficulty in the west is we put that on somebody else, and we expect a poor individual person to carry that for us (laughing).

Dr. Dave: I love hearing you say that it’s a bit of the divine, because so often it’s discredited as puppy love, or “just infatuation” – and you are saying that really it taps into something that’s more deep than that.

Ruhl: It’s as close as some modern people get to religious experience, in that deep sense of profound love and union with the other. So I have great respect for that, and I never try to psychologize love by saying it can all be boiled down to projection. It’s a great mystery and it’s one of the great gifts that each of us can experience in life.

But one has to be mindful of not putting that 10,000 Volt current into a 110 Volt household outlet, where we expect it to last indefinitely, because we all wake up after 6 months, or 9 months or maybe a year and a half and we realize that that person that we thought was divine is an ordinary person. Then we get disgruntled, and there is the slamming of doors and the blaming, and the “you are not the princess I thought you were”, or “you are not the knight in shining armour” – and what did we expect? (laughing)

No-one can carry that for us, it’s a chance for us to experience that, but then comes the critical moment where we can turn that into real love – and real love is the appreciation for the identity of the other with all their foibles and faults.

That transition is a rocky one for most of us, because instead of realizing that that’s what I call the stirring the oatmeal love – the day to day

appreciation of sharing your life with someone – that’s when that really begins, is when that divine element starts to wear thin, and if we were wiser about it we would realize that the divine needs to be realized someplace else in our life.

Dr. Dave: Yes, yes.

In this connection, one of the quotes that I took down from the book was, “Our religious life can be fed by in-loveness. It’s a deep spiritual experience for many people, the only religious experience they will have in their life. The last recourse god has to catch them.”

I like that phrase (laughing), “The last recourse god has to catch them.”

Ruhl: In India this is actually called the Bhakti path, where one finds someone and devotes all of one’s devotion, whether that is a guru or a saint; oftentimes people who are not living – a saint from the past – and that is called the Bhakti path, and it is recognized as a spiritual path.

But we tend to muddle that all up with romantic love; and of course through pop music and Hollywood movies, we enjoy that experience, and you hear it over and over again – the disappointment when it ends – instead of realizing OK, that’s part of the learning experience of how we learn to convert this love into something profound.

Dr. Dave: Yes. Well, as we begin to near the end of our time together here, maybe you would like to give us the grand synthesis (laughing) of the message of this book.

Ruhl: Well the synthesis for me is learning, as I say, that there are two tasks in every life and I think this is very confusing for most people. We tend to make a muddle of it. The job in the second half of life is trying to integrate these into a greater wholeness, into becoming more and more whole.

We never become a realized version of all the potentials that we could be, but I like to say that it’s accepting life whole – it’s accepting all of life – looking at the things that we would never ask for, the things that we would never expect to come our way.

As I mentioned at the beginning, my doorway into Jung was through suffering: through my early childhood illness, and then through the loss of my father. So the message of our book is that one can create meaning from this suffering, and that a critical point occurs in every life when we stop

asking why did this happen? Or, why me? Which always throws us into a passive victim mode, and instead ask where is this taking me? How can I create purpose and meaning from this? And whatever my experience is, whatever the suffering I have gone through, whatever the misfortune, how can I turn it into something that is valuable to others, that is valuable to myself?

So we have really written a book with a lot of exercises to help people do that, and hopefully lead a more meaningful life.

Dr. Dave: Well I think the book really succeeds in that way.

Let me just step back and ask you a little bit about the society that you head up. Is it called the Jung Society of Houston?

Ruhl: I'm the Executive Director of the Jung Center of Houston, which is one of the largest in the world.

We offer more than 200 classes a year, of all different types that have to do with self development, psychology, meditation. And our mission is really to advance these ideas of Carl Jung – a man who died in 1961 – and to bring them into the new century, keep them relevant, help people to apply these and building better communities and a better life, as well as a better life for themselves and a better society.

So we have an outreach program, we do a number of community based programs. I'm working on a program right now with the cancer center at the Children's Hospital in Houston. We also work with disadvantaged children in helping to keep their imagination alive, and that imaginative spirit. We also have programs where we go out to nursing homes and work with people, and bring these gifts that Carl Jung left for us about the spirit, the imagination, and bringing those into daily lives. So that's what the Jung Center of Houston is really dedicated to.

Dr. Dave: So it's not a training institute where Jungian analysts are trained, right?

Ruhl: It is not; there are training institutes in other cities, however we do have a sister organization that we deal with – Saybrook Institute of San Francisco – in which we offer graduate degrees.

Dr. Dave: Oh.

Ruhl: Students fly into Houston for one week-end a month, and they receive specialized training in Jungian psychology while earning a master's degree or a Ph.D. in Psychology, and oftentimes we have people from all walks of life who are participating in that program. So that is also part of our efforts. I was just teaching graduate students this past week-end, so that is also part of what we do.

Dr. Dave: Well I never would have guessed that Houston was a hotbed of Jungian activity (laughs).

Ruhl: Well there is something about Houston. For people who have not spent time here, they may have certain stereotypes about the city. But you know it grew up on the energy business, and that brought people from all over the world here; it's a very cosmopolitan city, now the fourth largest in the nation. So there are people from a lot of different cultures and it's created a real melting pot of ideas that is very rich.

It may be surprising at first but it's maybe no accident that these ideas about awareness and consciousness are emanating from here, and we hope that we can be an influence throughout the entire nation.

Dr. Dave: Well you have been an influence today throughout the entire world, as we have listeners in over 50 countries who will hear this.

So Dr. Jerry Ruhl, I want to thank you so much for being my guest today on Shrink Rap Radio.

Ruhl: Thank you, it's been my pleasure.