

**Shrink Rap Radio #282, A Hollywood Perspective on Story with Producer
Lindsay Doran**

David Van Nuys, Ph.D., aka "Dr Dave" interviews Lindsay Doran

(transcribed from www.Shrink.RapRadio.com by Clare Mackey)

Introduction: My guest today, Lindsay Doran, has worked in the movie business for more than 30 years, as a studio executive and as a producer. Among her credits are such hits as "Ghost", "Ferris Bueller's Day Off", "Field Of Dreams", two of the James Bond films and the Nanny McPhee films. Most recently, she is the winner of numerous awards, including the Golden Globe 'Best Picture' Award and the British Academy Award for 'Best Film'- both for "Sense & Sensibility". Please refer to the show notes at ShrinkRapRadio.com for a more detailed description of her background. Now, here's the interview.

Dr. Dave: Lindsay Doran, welcome to Shrink Rap Radio.

Lindsay Doran: Thank you so much, I'm glad to be here.

Dr. Dave: Well, I'm so thrilled to have you here. You and I met briefly in a small group exercise at the 'Second World Congress On Positive Psychology' and I hoped to have a short interview with you then and there. It didn't happen- we missed each other and I'm really glad that it didn't happen because now I get to do a longer one.

Doran: Oh good.

Dr. Dave: And I know you've got a lot of good stuff, so I'm really happy to have this longer period with you.

Doran: Good.

Dr. Dave: A question that I didn't get a chance to ask you there is how you, a Hollywood film Executive, came to be at a conference on Positive Psychology? How did that happen?

Doran: Well, um, let's see. I'm a producer not an executive. I've been an executive a lot in my career but at the moment I'm a producer. It's a strange story, 20 years or so ago I read Dr. Martin Seligman's book "Learned Optimism".

Dr. Dave: Yep.

Doran: Recommended by a friend of mine. And it was a life-changing event; I got so much out of that book.

Dr. Dave: (impressed) Oh.

Doran: Personally and professionally. And I did something which I had never done before and have never done since, which is I called up the author. I just called him up. I remember somewhere in "Catcher In The Rye" Holden Caulfield talks about how he wishes he could call up Ring Lardner and I thought "I'm just gonna call this guy up!" So I called him up, he took my call and I asked him some questions about the book, which he answered very promptly and intelligently. And so, we started kind of getting to know each other by phone, we talked about the notion of making a TV Series out of an idea based on therapy, each episode would be a therapy session. And, you know, eventually the HBO series "In Treatment" was very much like what we were talking about.

Dr. Dave: Yes!

Doran: But that never came to pass.

Dr. Dave: Wow, you were ahead of your time.

Doran: (kidding) Yes, we were so ahead of our time. So, we talked about those things, we were in touch over the 20 years but I'd never met him and I didn't follow what he was doing at all, I had no idea what a rock star he was in the world of Psychology (laughs).

Dr. Dave: Yeh.

Doran: I just thought he was a guy who wrote a book. I really didn't know anything about him at all. I had no idea he'd been the President of the American Psychology Association, I didn't know that he was starting this whole movement about Positive Psychology, I didn't know anything. And then last year I got an email from him inviting me to a conference that was being held at a country house in England on the subject of 'flourishing' which is the subject of his latest book which came out just quite recently. And I'd never met him, I'd never met anybody else from the conference and it turned out to be doctors and psychologists and sociologists and political scientists and headmasters and people who were already very much into this field of Positive Psychology. And everybody gave a presentation from their field about how all that was working out in terms of the work that they were doing. And I showed a film I produced a few years ago called "Stranger Than Fiction" and didn't really realise until I was there how closely it mirrored everything that everybody was talking about. Because Dr. Seligman in his book talks about the sort of 5 elements of well-being, which are (let me see if I can get them right) 'positive emotions' and 'engagement' and 'positive relationships' and 'accomplishments' and 'meaning'.

Dr. Dave: Very good.

Doran: Yeh! And I thought that all of those were things that "Stranger Than Fiction" covered. I don't know if you've seen the film-

Dr. Dave: You know, I missed the film. Are you saying that it was shown at the conference?

Doran: It was shown not at the conference that you and I went to together but at the conference that Marty invited me to that took place a year ago in England.

Dr. Dave: Oh, ok.

Doran: Anyway, Will Ferrell plays a man who finds out that he is a character in a novel and then he finds out that he's going to die very imminently and he has to go search for the author and see if he can get her to change the end of her book.

Dr. Dave: I think I did see that film, actually.

Doran: Oh, ok.

Dr. Dave: I saw it in general release.

Doran: Yeh, it was 2006, I think. So, anyway, the film cuts back and forth between Will Ferrell desperately trying to find the author and Emma Thompson (who plays the author) desperately trying to figure out a way to kill off her main character.

Dr. Dave: (laughs)

Doran: And at a certain point he realises he's never going to find her, it's hopeless and the things that he'd been trying to do to get her to change the ending on his own aren't working. And he realises that he has to just face his death and live his life. And the things that he does in that part of the film are exactly what Marty Seligman was talking about in his book. He does things that he enjoys, he goes to see a Monty Python movie in the middle of the day, he takes walks instead of taking the bus, he's always loved a girl and he decides that he's going to go and actually try to have a love affair with her. He's always wanted to play the guitar, so he goes and learns how to play the guitar. He becomes friends with somebody at work who was just a guy at work and ultimately he finds a way to give his life meaning, which it never really had before. So everything that had been covered in what everybody else was talking about was right there in that film. And so, the whole experience it was five days last September and it was a very, very meaningful experience for me. And so I stayed in touch with a lot of the people that I met at that conference and earlier this year I was invited to speak at the Masters Program in Positive Psychology at the University of Pennsylvania.

Dr. Dave: Oh yes.

Doran: I came back in April and I showed a different film that I produced "Sense & Sensibility" as an example of something that had been talked about at the

conference, which is why don't critics give good reviews to happy movies? And that is a happy movie and it got really good reviews!

Dr. Dave: (laughs)

Doran: And it won a lot of awards, so it was an example of how you can actually pull that off, although that was not my intention at the time.

Dr. Dave: Ha, it contradicted your intention!

Doran: Yeh! And I also showed my favourite film from my childhood which was "Pollyanna" which is dead on the subject of happiness and has received all of the criticism that stories like that get. You know, "Pollyanna" has become a cliché for mindless happiness, while in fact if you read the book or see the movie, you realise that it's not that at all.

Dr. Dave: Ah-ha.

Doran: So anyway, all of this has not only had tremendous meaning for me personally but tremendous meaning for me professionally. Every single aspect of this feeds back into the process of creating a film script and a film. So, anyway, after my experience at the Masters class, I was invited to speak at the World Congress where you and I met. So that's how I showed up there and it was very daunting, I realised very quickly that I was speaking in front of people who were not from my field at all (laughs).

Dr. Dave: Yes, yes, whoa.

Doran: And I couldn't assume anything about what they knew or what they brought to the experience. But I'm really glad I did it, as scary as it was, it was a great experience.

Dr. Dave: Oh yes, and when we met in that small group I didn't even know that you were going to be a presenter and then later I happened to go to your presentation and I think it was the title that drew me. Well, your name had been mentioned on the podium actually by Martin Seligman, so I kind of had you tagged as someone who I was definitely interested in speaking to and knowing more about. And then I went to your presentation and that was so well received, you were just great.

Doran: Thank you.

Dr. Dave: You were funny and lively and I seem to recall you might have even have gotten a standing ovation.

Doran: Well, I got a response that I have to say was much bigger than I expected. I was so glad that there were actually a lot of people there, for one thing. Marty did

mention me in his big keynote speech because he's a big believer that the arts are going to be an important part of carrying the message of Positive Psychology. That to him is as important as education and all the other fields that he's trying to work in.

Dr. Dave: I've been surprised by the scope of his thinking. He really is thinking big.

Doran: It's really something, isn't it?

Dr. Dave: Yeh.

Doran: It really is quite remarkable. And I also didn't realise before just before I started speaking, what a resistance there is to that idea. You know, in my background, everyone's taking film courses and art courses and when they hear they have to take a science course it's like "Oh God, isn't there some way I don't have to do that?"

Dr. Dave: (laughs)

Doran: And it became very clear when, you know, James Pawelski introduced our panel that we were speaking to people who were exactly the opposite- they're taking all the science courses and the research courses and when they find out they have to take an arts course they're going "Oh God, I don't want to do that!" So it was a very different kind of crowd but I think there were a couple of things that happened; for one thing, I've never used PowerPoint and so when they asked me if I wanted something like that I said "No, I don't want that." And I actually think that makes a huge difference.

Dr. Dave: I think it does too.

Doran: You know, I'd like to think that it was all the brilliant things that I said that got that reaction but I honestly think that I was the only speaker that was looking everybody in the eye and was actually able to play off the responses that I was getting. Or I would spot somebody and I would say, "Oh, this will be particularly interesting to you" Or I could see people, some of them were people who I had met or knew, some of them were brand new people but you know, you play the audience like you play an instrument and I was looking at them and they were looking at me.

Dr. Dave: Yeh.

Doran: Because that's the other part of PowerPoint; not only are you not looking at them you're looking down at a screen, they're not looking at you they're looking up at a screen!

Dr. Dave: (laughs) Yeh!

Doran: So, here you have a conference which is all about human interaction and the importance of human relationships and how crucial it is that people have these

relationships that mean something and yet all of the presentations that I went to (almost without exception) were situations in which no-one was looking anybody in the eye until the questions part!

Dr. Dave: That is such a good point that you're making.

Doran: I sent a thing to everybody afterwards and I said "You know, I really do think everybody has to draw a lesson from this." I'm terribly flattered that I got such a good reaction but I honestly think that part of it was that. That I was looking at them and they were looking at me and it was an intimate experience even though there were 200 people in the room.

Dr. Dave: PowerPoint has kind of taken over in education, it's used more and more and more. So, I think students are getting a lot less of that eye contact. But that's really going to carry us down another road then I wanted to go here.

Doran: Yeh, yeh.

Dr. Dave: But I'm really glad to learn that. I'm interested in your work from a number of perspectives. I'm a big movie buff and I've seen the movies that you've mentioned, fortunately.

Doran: Good.

Dr. Dave: I'm obviously interested in it as a psychologist and that's the primary focus of this show. And I have also been very interested in the Positive Psychology movement and kind of tracking it because I came out of a Humanistic Psychology background which kind of preceded this, though Martin doesn't spend any time on that. But there really is a movement that preceded this. But also, for a long time I've been involved with market research and I've been a focus group moderator.

Doran: Oh, interesting.

Dr. Dave: So I know that you've been on one side of the mirror and I've been on the other side of the mirror. I know Hollywood does extensive consumer research.

Doran: Right, yes.

Dr. Dave: So I really have lots of reasons to be fascinated by you and your work. Now in your presentation you pointed out that Hollywood spends an enormous amount of money each year doing things like focus groups (and I don't know what else) to figure out what will make filmgoers happy.

Doran: Right.

Dr. Dave: What have we found out?

Doran: (laughs) Well, it's interesting. It isn't that they're doing that kind of research, the research that is done is more like they'll look at trends in what's going on in society in general and they'll tell you things like "the biggest problem that teenagers feel today is that they feel invisible". And you know, that's an interesting piece of information to have if you're making a movie for teenagers. Or they'll give you some sort of sense of the trend- the trend is towards this or the trend is towards that. But mostly what they're doing is figuring out whether the movie you've just made is making the audience happy (laughing). That's where most of the money goes is you make a movie and then you figure out who the movie would normally be aimed at. A movie like "Sense & Sensibility" they sort of knew it was more women than men and it was the kind of women who had seen things like "Howard's End" and "The Remains of the Day". So you put together an audience that you think would reflect the kinds of people that would show up on opening weekend. And you show them the movie and then they fill out cards. I spend a lot of time composing those cards actually because I think this kind of research is crucial.

Dr. Dave: Mm-hm.

Doran: And a lot of it is very general like "Which is your favourite character?" and "Would you recommend this to your friends?" or "Do you think this is appropriate for all ages or just people of a certain age?" and "What do you think of the ending" or "Do you have any specific questions about characters?"

Dr. Dave: Yeh, and don't they also focus group alternate endings?

Doran: Then they do a focus group. So, they've selected 20 people out of the line that they think represented the audience.

Dr. Dave: Ok.

Doran: In age and gender and things like that and then those 20 people stay behind. So after everybody's finished filling out the cards, then you do the focus group. And I've actually led some of those focus groups myself when we've had screenings that were so private that we didn't even want big research companies involved because then the studio has to be involved.

Dr. Dave: Yes.

Doran: We've had little groups of maybe 50 people and we've saved back 20 people and I've been watching focus groups for 30 years now, or more. And I actually used to go to them as a teenager. That was the thing that I loved to do on weekends, was to go to studio previews and fill out those cards.

Dr. Dave: Wow.

Doran: So, I've been on all the ends of this!

Dr. Dave: You have!

Doran: I've been on every single end of it. But I think running a focus group is a very interesting activity. And it's terrifying when it's your own film and trying to behave completely neutral towards answers is scary.

Dr. Dave: Oh, yeh, I can imagine.

Doran: But I find that sometimes people who are hired to do it, who should be completely neutral are not neutral. Somebody will say "Well, I really liked the film" and the guy will say "Oh, come on!" (laughs)

Dr. Dave: (laughing)

Doran: And once I saw that kind of thing going on I thought, "I can do this". You know, if he can get paid for it, I can do it for free. I'm always saying to new directors who've never been through this before; the first question is going to be, "How many of you liked the film? How many of you wrote down on the card that you scored the film 'excellent'?" And if 15 out of 20 hands at least don't go up, we're in trouble. And then the next question is always "How many of you said that you would definitely recommend the film?" and it's the same thing, if 15 out of 20 hands don't go up, we're in trouble. And then it's really about figuring out what went wrong and why are we not satisfying people and what did they expect. And, you know, it's fascinating to me, all that work. But what's happened of course is that studios have been doing this kind of research since the silent days. You look at "Singing In The Rain" and you can see that even with that, they're doing previews. And previews were a huge part of silent films, they would literally go out and re-shoot the movies the next day after previews and they always knew that was what they were going to do. So these companies that do the research have a lot of information that they're not used to sharing about what's really going on and what makes audiences happy. And I was able to get one guy to open up a little bit about the kind of things that he's learned, it was pretty interesting (laughs).

Dr. Dave: Well, you've done a bunch of research on your own, I got that impression from your presentation.

Doran: Well, really, the research that I've done has been being part of market research on the films I've worked on. As a studio executive I would sometimes be in charge of five movies (or more) in a single year and then as a producer I've also worked on a lot of things. So I've been to hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of focus groups and things like that. But this was the first time (in anticipation of my speech at the World Congress) that I actually went to people who do audience research for a living and said, "What have you got? What do you know?" And sort of said "You know, here are the five elements of well-being that are in this book and

does any of that relate to what you're learning from all of these audiences that you're working with?" And I was able to get a little bit of information out of them. You know, they own it and they don't want to give it away for free but I was able to get a little bit of information that I found really interesting.

Dr. Dave: So, what's your sense of how well Seligman's P-E-R-M-A articulates with happiness in film with a film's success?

Doran: Well, the substance of my speech was looking at the first one 'positive emotions' and that is one of things that Hollywood movies are known for. And it's one of the reasons that they are the most successful movies in the world. In other countries, they are much more likely to make films that are downers, for lack of a better word (laughs).

Dr. Dave: (laughs)

Doran: Or that are very serious subjects and do not necessarily have happy endings. And the result is that they may make those movies but that people in those countries are much more likely to go and see a movie that comes out of Hollywood than a movie that comes out of their own country, most of the time- not all of the time but most of the time. So I think that Hollywood is sort of synonymous with happy movies and movies that make you feel good. And working with the Positive Psychology group was one of the first times that I haven't felt criticised for that.

Dr. Dave: (laughing)

Doran: Where that's actually a good thing and they don't see anything bad about that. And one of the things that I thought about, as I thought about that particular thing, is that there are movies or there used to be movies that I thought were pure 'positive emotions'. You know, the Fred Astaire movies and "Singing In The Rain" and some of the movies from the 30s and all the way through there have been comedies and musicals that have been meant to make you feel great all the way through. And probably of the movies that I've worked on I think of "The Naked Gun" which I worked on in the 80s as something that is just fun, start to finish. I think of "Ferris Bueller's Day Off" even though it has a five minute scene which is a little scary and disturbing (when Ferris' friend Cameron seems to become catatonic out of fear for his father) that goes away rather quickly and you go right back to having a wonderful time. I'm not sure that we're doing that right at this moment in Hollywood but I do think that we sort of specialise in happy endings and 'positive emotions'. For 'engagement' obviously the audience's engagement with the film is crucial, we count on that. And one of the things that we find out with those cards is whether or not people got bored and where did they get bored and why did they get bored. But what I thought was more interesting than that and something that I've been noticing for a very long time, which is that we love watching engagement. We are very engaged by watching characters who are engaged in something.

Dr. Dave: Mm-hm.

Doran: I mean this weekend there is a movie opening called "Moneyball" about a real life baseball manager who figured out how to use statistics to completely put together a team that nobody else would ever put together. And it's his engagement in those statistics that is really interesting to watch. If you look at a movie like "Social Network" we're spending an awful lot of time watching characters watching screens; we're watching a screen on which there's a character watching a screen.

Dr. Dave: Yes.

Doran: And their engagement in that activity is fascinating. We're fascinated by people who are engaged in crime, engaged in dancing, engaged in learning to sing, engaged in learning to ride, all kinds of different things. So, I think that 'engagement' is a very crucial part of successful movies. And since I had just been making lists of movies that I thought were pure 'positive emotions' I thought "Well, can I make a list of movies that are pure 'engagement'?" And I was just writing things down without giving them much thought. And the three movies I wrote down were "Godfather II", "Silence of the Lambs" and "No Country for Old Men".

Dr. Dave: Mm-hm.

Doran: And when I looked at that list later I thought, "A: they are very grim."

Dr. Dave: Yeh.

Doran: Every single one of those is grim. And B: every single one of those won the Academy Award for 'Best Picture'.

Dr. Dave: Mm-hm.

Doran: And I don't know what that means, I really don't. But I've talked to a lot of people about this now and they all kind of agree. The "Godfather" movies: everybody knows (well the people that I spend time with) if you turn on the TV in the morning and there is any scene from "The Godfather" you stop what you're doing and the next thing you know it's 20 minutes later, you're so completely engaged by it.

Dr. Dave: (laughing)

Doran: With all three of those movies, what we're watching is people engaged in crimes and people engaged in trying to stop crime. Mostly hopelessly engaged, you know, not successfully engaged. And that's it! You know, there's no 'positive emotions', there's no 'positive relationships', there's no 'positive accomplishments' and finding 'meaning' in any of that is very difficult. Maybe the filmmakers would disagree with me, I hope they would but I don't see any particular 'meaning' that comes out of any of those films. And they're very grim and a lot of people find them

very very depressing. But you are watching 'engagement' when you are watching those films (laughs). So anyway, those are my thoughts about 'engagement'.

Dr. Dave: Ok, yes.

Doran: And then I began looking at 'accomplishments' and 'relationships' because the one little piece of information I was able to get out of one of these research companies when I was listing off these five things was that somebody said to me "you know audiences aren't really interested in accomplishments" and I said "really?" (Laughs) because I think of 'accomplishments' as being the bread and butter of the movie industry.

Dr. Dave: Yeh, yeh (laughs).

Doran: We're always making movies about winners and that is what everybody thinks that we're doing. Somebody sets out to save the world, somebody sets out to be a successful singer, whatever it is and then the movie shows them achieving that.

Dr. Dave: Right!

Doran: And he said no, they're not really that interested in the accomplishment what they're interested in is that moment right afterwards when that accomplishment is shared with somebody else. And that really set me thinking. Because I thought maybe what this is showing is that as human beings, there is a sort of hierarchy to these things, this P-E-R-M-A stuff that Marty Seligman is talking about. And that what we really value more than 'positive accomplishments' is 'positive relationships'. And when I had been writing down movies to show as an example of 'positive accomplishments' the three that I had written down were "Karate Kid", "Dirty Dancing" and "The Kings Speech". I thought that covered all of the bases. At the end of "Dirty Dancing" Jennifer Grey does this leap that she was afraid to make earlier in the film and in the end she leaps into Patrick Swayze's arms. And then at the end of "The Karate Kid" I was thinking of the new version when he does this impossible kick (he does that in both versions but I had seen the new one most recently). After he does the impossible kick there's a beautiful moment where he reconciles with his opponent, there's a beautiful moment where he shares it with his mother, with his sensei, with a little girl that he's met. It like, the movie does not end with the kick. And I thought if we were really making movies that were about 'accomplishments' we'd just end with the kick! We'd end with the leap. And then I looked at "The King's Speech" and realised that the last thing you see at the end of "The King's Speech" is a card that says "Lionel and Bertie remained friends for the rest of their lives." That's the speech therapist and the King.

Dr. Dave: Yes.

Doran: And I know the producers of "The King's Speech" and I called them up and I said "This is interesting, did it always end that way?" and they said "No, it's interesting, the relationship kind of took over the movie." (laughs)

Dr. Dave: (laughs)

Doran: And it wasn't until the movie was finished that we realised we couldn't just end with the speech, we had to acknowledge the relationship and make sure the audience knew that those people were going to go on being friends forever. It wasn't just that this one thing brought them together and then the King went back to being a king and Lionel went back to being a commoner and they never talked anymore; they were friends. And the acknowledgement of that friendship was the right ending for that movie and it won the Academy Award for 'Best Picture'. So this is kind of news to me, I never really thought about it that way before. When I was at Paramount in the 80s, they had made "Top Gun" and "Top Gun" is the perfect example. This very arrogant guy (played by Tom Cruise) wants more than anything to be the best dog flyer of fighter jets in the whole world and there's a very specific trophy that you get and the real prize is that you get to come back and teach at Top Gun School. And at the end of the movie he comes back to teach at Top Gun School but the last scene of the movie is about his broken relationship with Kelly McGilles. And they have to make up in order to have the right ending for the movie. So it becomes pretty clear (and there will certainly be people who will say "oh yeh, well that's the formula") but why is it the formula? Why is it when you make a movie as macho as "Top Gun", you don't end with a jet? (laughs) You end with a girl and a love song.

Dr. Dave: Right, that's a good issue.

Doran: Why is the formula the formula? And why (like the producers of "The King's Speech") do we not know that it's the right ending to the movie until we've made the movie? Another example is "Shawshank Redemption" where they went back and shot the scene where Morgan Freeman appears on the beach and sees Tim Robbins. You know, a very inspiring movie but it ended originally with him on the bus heading off and you sort of hoped he got there. Well that wasn't enough, we had to see that relationship confirmed. So, I'm fascinated by this and I'm talking to a lot of people in Hollywood about it because it's kind of new to everybody to think of it that way.

Dr. Dave: Have you had a chance to discuss that with Marty?

Doran: Yes, absolutely. One thing I did say to him was "Look, is it true? If Hollywood is proving that 'relationships' matter more than 'accomplishments' is that borne out by your research?" And what he wrote back was "No, women prefer 'relationships' to 'accomplishments' and they will rate that higher as something they care about, while men will rate 'accomplishments'."

Dr. Dave: A-ha.

Doran: But I think all this (I mean this is all brand new, I gave that speech about a week ago) but I think what the movies are telling us is that men may say that they value 'accomplishments' more than 'relationships' but if they really did, we would end "Top Gun" with a dog flight.

Dr. Dave: I think there are two different things going on here, personally. I do think that a component of happiness is- I don't know if accomplishment's the right word but experiencing one's effectiveness. The experience of 'Wow, here's something I can do, I can do this well.' I mean, you see this all the way up from toddlers who want to do it themselves!

Doran: There was someone else who gave a speech at the Congress who talked about three other things people really want and one of them was competence.

Dr. Dave: I think that's the word I was looking for, competence. The experience of competence I think really is an important thing. But that doesn't obviate what you're saying about sharing our successes. I mean, we are social creatures and we look for that reinforcement that we get from other people who rejoice in our accomplishments and in our effectiveness.

Doran: I think that's true. And the other thing I noticed that was really surprising to me was I saw that in most movies that we make (in most general audience movies) you have the 'accomplishment' and you have the 'relationship'. The man is trying to accomplish whatever it is he wants to accomplish and the woman is saying things like "Don't race tomorrow Johnny, I've got a bad feeling about it."

Dr. Dave: (laughs)

Doran: And you've got a child saying "Don't go Daddy, stay home with me for once" and you've got a father saying "You were never any good and you're still never any good and you're never going to accomplish this thing you're trying to accomplish". Those are your classic relationships. And in many of those movies, not all of them but most of them, you go through that thing. The person accomplishes what he sets out to accomplish and then he realises that what really matters is the relationship and that's why the movies end that way. And then I thought, "Well, wait a minute, for women the relationship IS the accomplishment!" We don't need a whole movie to teach us what we knew when we walked in to the theatre. And that's why you have movies like, pretty much every romantic comedy. Movies like "Notting Hill" and "Sleepless in Seattle" and so many movies aimed at women, which have nothing to do with an accomplishment at all. The accomplishment is 'I'm trying to find a guy' and that's it. Or in some of them, it's a man trying to find a woman. But in something like "Notting Hill" Hugh Grant works in a bookstore but it's irrelevant. You know, his class is relevant because that's the obstacle of the movie- she's a movie star and he's a bookseller in London. His class is the obstacle but nobody's trying to accomplish anything- he's not trying to be the best bookseller. And she's not

trying to be the best actress, that's not what's going on at all. There is some reference that she wins an Academy Award off-screen somewhere but it doesn't matter, it's not what the plot is about. The plot is about 'are those two people going to get together' and the accomplishment is that they do. And Hollywood takes so much grief from people saying that when we make movies like that we're being condescending. Making love stories that are nothing but love stories (including the movie "Love Story") is condescending, that we should be making movies about accomplishments. But actually, this is a huge discovery for me, that women already know! They already know, they don't need the accomplishment; they don't need it to lure them into the theatre at all. It's as though you make "Top Gun" to lure the men into the theatre, to teach them that the relationship matters more than the accomplishment. But women don't need to be taught that, they know that, so they're perfectly happy to go and see a movie about the accomplishment they care about, which is the relationship.

Dr. Dave: The relationship, yes.

Doran: So, I shared this with some of the female producers that I know and they're all just kind of stunned by this. All of a sudden they're saying "You mean, I don't have to be ashamed of this anymore? I don't have to look down on this anymore? I don't have to feel as though I'm making movies that are less than anymore? That I'm making a movie that is just proof that people care about relationships more than anything else?" It's been very interesting having these conversations and they're going on as recently as this week. I'm engaged with them all the time now because it's really making people think about all of this stuff. So that was some of the stuff I thought about in terms of 'accomplishments' and 'relationships'.

Dr. Dave: Yeh.

Doran: But then I wanted to talk about 'meaning'. And I thought it would be interesting to start with "Rocky" since we were in Philadelphia for that conference and we were not very far at all from that museum where Rocky runs up the steps quite famously at different times through the movie. So I got there a day early before the conference and I actually went to the museum.

Dr. Dave: (laughing) Did you run up the steps?

Doran: I hadn't always thought about it but a friend of mine, we had dinner the night before and she works at the Philadelphia "Enquirer" and she was telling me that someone she knew (a Pulitzer Prize winning journalist) had spent a year at the top of the 'Rocky Steps' interviewing people who were running up them. And saying "What are you doing here?"

Dr. Dave: (laughs)

Doran: "You're not even from America! You're from China!" or "You're from France!" or "You're from Uruguay! What are you doing here?" And he photographed them; it's a lovely book that he put together. And so much of the time what he found out was that people said, "I had cancer and I said to myself in the hospital 'If I beat this, I'm going to run up those steps and I'm going to jump up and down like Rocky at the top.'"

Dr. Dave: Oh, how wonderful.

Doran: I know! Or "I had a heart transplant and I said to myself 'If this goes well, I'm going to go to Philadelphia, I'm going to fly to Philadelphia and I'm gonna run up those steps and that's how I'm going to celebrate my victory!'" And there were people getting married; the day I went there were three different weddings going on at the same time, three different sets of people having their picture taken up at those steps. Not by chance, not because they think that it's a beautiful museum, or because they go and see the art there all the time. It's all about "Rocky" which is 35 years old.

Dr. Dave: Amazing.

Doran: And I thought that this really illustrates what Marty is talking about which is how the Arts can carry the message of Positive Psychology, of how ingrained that is. And when I went there that day, you'll remember it was that horrible heat wave.

Dr. Dave: Oh yes, I'd forgotten!

Doran: It was like the hottest week on record. And on that particular day, they were expecting a heat index of 115 degrees or something. And if you turned on the TV or turned on the radio, they were begging people not to go outside, let alone exert themselves. They were literally saying "You can die. If you walk down the street today, you can die." And I took a cab to the museum because I was afraid of walking there and I walked out onto the steps and here were all these people, running the steps, turning around, pumping their fists in the air, having their picture taken- children, men, women, Americans, people from other countries, it was all there right in front of me, three different weddings. And I thought, "Wow, this is about 'meaning'!" And so I talked about "Rocky" in the speech and I talked about how it won the Academy Award for 'Best Picture' and how it's number four on the American Film Institute's list of inspirational movies of all time. And how many movies it's spawned; there's been seven sequels so far, or six sequels, something like that. And even now, as recently as this week, somebody said to me "Well, it's kind of a 'Rocky' story" when they were pitching me something. It's still a very very strong image in Hollywood about making a movie about an underdog that wins.

Dr. Dave: I just saw "Warrior" and it's definitely a "Rocky" film.

Doran: It definitely is, absolutely. But what's interesting about "Warrior" and all of these imitators is that they don't copy one of the most basic aspects of the "Rocky"

story which is that Rocky in the original movie (the one that won the Academy Award, the one that's number four on the inspirational list) he didn't win the fight! He didn't win the fight. Nobody remembers this; even in Hollywood they don't remember this. I've been annoying people with this information for years now.

Dr. Dave: (laughs)

Doran: I'm always in these meetings going "Ah, you know he didn't win." They're like, "What are you talking about?" He didn't win. If you look at the last five minutes it's very clear. The fight goes 15 rounds, which is what he said he wanted; all he wanted was to 'go the distance' he'd said the night before. It goes 15 rounds, he's screaming for Adrian, we don't know how the fight has come out and then in the background you see Apollo Creed start jumping up and down in victory. He wins the fight! And what's really important is that a reporter says to Apollo Creed "Do you want a rematch?" and Apollo Creed says "Aint gonna be no rematch. Don't want one." In other words, he's too scared; it's too hard to fight this guy. And that's the victory of the movie. And that's when the music takes off; at that point. That amazing music cue that happens at the end of the movie starts then. That's the victory. He's gone head-to-head with the World Champion and held his own. And what he's gotten is not the fight; he's won the girl, he's won self-respect, he's won the respect of his trainer, he's won all kinds of things that matter more, especially in terms of relationships in his life.

Dr. Dave: Yeh.

Doran: And then I started looking at that list of inspirational movies and realised how many of them are about people who don't win, how many of them are about people who don't get what they set out to get. "The Best Years Of Our Lives": the guys sets out to travel the world, he never gets to travel the world. "Grapes Of Wrath": they come to California because they want prosperity and they find things are even worse than they were in Oklahoma. If you look at the list, it's quite a long list, the top 100 inspirational films of all time and almost none of them are about people who actually achieve anything. And then I thought, "Well, ok, I should look at the box office list because if I'm looking at the biggest box office movies of all time, those will definitely be about winners, right?" And I saw that they are about winners most of the time but they're usually about winners in the midst of incredible loss. You know, something like "Titanic" where 1,500 people on the ship die or so many of the big movies where it's just loss after loss after loss. "Schindler's List" or "Harry Potter"; so many of the mentors die, Gandalf dies and Obi-Wan dies. And I began to think that really what we're saying is that the accomplishment we're celebrating in these very very successful movies is resilience. (laughs) It's the ability to survive loss. Which is really what Positive Psychology is at it's most basic. And that's why in the army when they're teaching all these principles in the army, they're calling it 'Master Resilience Training'. And I think these movies that we're making, whether they're "Schindler's List" or "Grapes Of Wrath" or "Titanic" are really 'Master Resilience Training'. That's what we're doing. We're showing how Rocky can survive

loss, we're showing how the Jews during WWII can survive loss, we're showing how Harry Potter can lose almost everything and survive. And I thought that went right back to Positive Psychology and that definitely has to do with 'meaning' and what we call in the movie industry 'resonance'. We'll talk about a movie that resonates. And the movies that resonate are movies that almost always involve tremendous loss.

Dr. Dave: That's a fascinating observation. Now, one of the films that I asked you about that you worked on is "Ferris Bueller's Day Off" and I think that's one of the all time 'feel-good' films.

Doran: I agree.

Dr. Dave: I've seen it a number of times and I always come away with a great feeling. What do you think is the secret? What's the 'secret sauce' there?

Doran: Well, I think in some ways Ferris is not quite a human character. If you look at the movie you see he does things that you couldn't actually do. You know, he runs through people's living rooms and nobody seems to care, he gets on the Parade float and nobody throws him off, he seems to be able to go anywhere that he wants to go, he goes to the ball game and catches a ball. It's like he's a slightly magical character. He feels a little bit like something out of a Greek myth, he feels a little bit like something out of a fairy tale. And I think he is pure joy. You know what I mean? He is a character who simply refuses to not have a wonderful day. He opens the curtains, he sees what a beautiful day it is and he decides, "I am not staying in today" And it's about freedom and the joy of freedom and the joy of ignoring the rules.

Dr. Dave: Yes, rebellion.

Doran: And I think that is a huge, huge part of it. But then you look at the movie and the movie is really about Cameron. People who work on stories or plays or comedy or drama of any kind are always talking about 'how does the main character change?' Ferris doesn't change! He's exactly the same guy at the end of the day that he was at the beginning of the day. It's Cameron who changes. Cameron starts the day terrified of everything, a complete hypochondriac, incapable of experiencing joy and he ends the day strong and happy and resilient. And it is Ferris who has put him through this, maybe deliberately (it's hinted- the girl says "You knew exactly what you were doing when you took off school today" and there's this hint that he always knew what he was doing); he was going to put Cameron through a terrible experience, hoping to shake him out of this depression and terror that he brings to the world at the beginning of the story and he does it! He doesn't do it exactly how he intended to do it, he thought that maybe by taking him to the Sears Tower and a baseball game and the stock exchange and a nice restaurant he could do it that way- instead it's by wrecking the car. But he does it. And it's his loyalty to Cameron that gives the movie resonance, I think. That gives it something more than just fun. A movie like "The Naked Gun" is not resonant. (laughs)

Dr. Dave: (laughs) Right, right.

Doran: "Airplane" which is another movie by the same guys is just fun, beginning to end. And that kind of enjoyment, it does last, people still talk about "Airplane" and it made \$100 million and it cost \$1 million at the time. People still talk about it and they celebrate its anniversaries and it's just joy and I don't think there's anything wrong with pure joy. But I think when you can take a character of pure joy like Ferris and combine it with the resonance of a character like Cameron, prepared to stand up to his father for the first time in his life and achieve some kind of peace, I think if anything that's the reason that the movie is so successful and everybody loves it so much. But as I say, if you look at the movie, there's about 5 minutes in it (if that) that feel anything less than fun.

Dr. Dave: I have to ask you where Bollywood fits in here.

Doran: I don't know that much about Bollywood, I really don't. I have only seen a couple of those movies.

Dr. Dave: Well, at least the ones I've seen (there have been some Hollywood films that have really tried to capture that energy) they're about romance, that's in there, a lot of singing and dancing and joy!

Doran: And colour!

Dr. Dave: Yeh, colour.

Doran: And it's interesting how many people in Europe find Hollywood movies embarrassing, in terms of the amount of fun and happiness they're willing to put on the screen. And I think in Hollywood, they find some of the Bollywood movies embarrassing. They find them so shamelessly sentimental. They find it so fun and upbeat that it makes you kind of look away, like you're looking away from the sun a little bit. So, I think every culture has its own version of how acceptable happiness is (laughs) and what kind of happiness is acceptable. I make a lot of films in England and I know that they find it very very difficult to accept even the films of their own filmmaker, Richard Curtis, who is such a successful filmmaker who wrote "Notting Hill" and who directed "Love Actually" and wrote "Four Weddings & A Funeral". And he's tremendously successful at doing these romantic comedies but in England, they don't like them. You know, the critics hate them, the sophisticated people that I know in England speak very very badly about those films, they think it's embarrassing.

Dr. Dave: Amazing.

Doran: They think that kind of sentiment is embarrassing and cynical. They find it very difficult to believe that he is from his heart, making movies about people who get together and are happy. They think that he must be trying to sell out and that he

must be trying to make money in Hollywood and things like that and that's not who he is at all but they find that very difficult to accept in England. And I think that in America we find that- what we think of as shameless- sentiment of Bollywood very hard to accept. It just isn't our taste.

Dr. Dave: We're big fans of the Oscars in my family. It's always a big event, a special dinner and so on, watching the Oscars.

Doran: Cool!

Dr. Dave: And I even watched the Emmys this last round. And both at the Oscars and particularly at the Emmys there are people who win the award and when they're up there they're kind of saying "We had no idea that this movie would be so successful." And then there are other movies where huge amounts of money and resources are poured into the movies and they are flops. After all these years of research and insight, why is it still so difficult to predict what will make audiences happy?

Doran: This is a question we ask ourselves every day. We sit in these meetings that go on for hours, working on stories, going "How is it possible that we know so little?" And I think the thing is, it's true a little bit for every creative endeavour. I have a friend who is a poet and she said to me once "You know, every time I write a poem, I have to learn how to write a poem all over again." And I found that very funny but also comforting because it really is true. Every time I make a movie, I have to learn how to make a movie all over again. And it isn't just the physical making of the movie, actually being on the set and anticipating all of those problems and figuring out how to solve them but every time I sit down to develop a screenplay, it's as though I've never done it before. It's as though I don't know anything. They stick their tongue out at you; they resist you. And I also think that there's something about the simplicity about having a sincere idea and not having enough money to do anything except put that sincere idea on screen that often leads to a lot of awards. "Rocky" is a perfect example of that. They never thought that movie was going to amount to anything; I think the director said, "We thought it would be on the second half of a double bill of somebody else's movie." It never occurred to them that that would happen. One of the movies that I worked on that turned out like that was "Ghost" which was the third movie that year about a ghost. Bill Cosby made a movie I think called "Ghost Dad" which came out a month and a half before us and we were sure that that title was going to kill our movie. And then Stephen Spielberg at the height of his success and powers made a movie called "Always" with Richard Dreyfuss and Hollie Hunter who were both big stars at that moment; a romance where someone dies and then tries to contact the other person. You know, very very similar scenes and themes to "Ghost" We were going to be the third one! And Patrick Swayze was not a big movie star at that point, it was not as though he was going to guarantee anything. Demi Moore was not a big star, it was not as though she was going to guarantee anything. Whoopi Goldberg hadn't had a hit movie in years; at that point it was quite controversial even putting her in the movie, they were afraid

she was going to drag it down and she won the Academy Award. Once they saw the movie (the studio) they loved it and they saw it preview and they realised it previewed like nothing they'd ever seen before; the audience's response to it. And then it was like "Ok, how are we going to get people to see it?" Because it happens all the time that you make a movie- like "Warrior" for example, which is a huge crowd pleaser and nobody comes. They can't figure out how to market it in a way that makes people go. And that's what they were afraid "Ghost" was going to be. And so they thought "we're going to have to start doing screenings early, we'll have a paid preview the weekend before it opens" hoping that would spread the word-of-mouth (there was no Internet). And it's very expensive to open the movie that way. So they did this paid preview in a thousand theatres the week before the movie opened and the theatres were packed! Why was that? How did they know? (laughs) Why was that the right movie at the right time?

Dr. Dave: Do you have any idea in retrospect now?

Doran: Well, I heard that movie as a pitch. The writer came in and said "this is what the movie is about" and I cried in the room. And I had to turn around and pitch it to my boss and she went "put that into development right away" And by the time we were ready to show the script to the studio that woman had left and somebody else was in charge and he read it and said "Oh my God, we have to make this movie" We were so moved by it. And just that basic concept: two people are walking down the street having a conversation and then suddenly something happens and one of them is dead, is a very frightening thing to everybody. "Finding Nemo" is based on the idea that you turn around in the supermarket and suddenly your kid is gone. It's a very basic fear that people have. But the bigger fear, the idea that you're the dead person and you can't contact the person you love and she's sitting right there crying over your body and you can't tell her that you're there and then you find out she's in trouble and you have to save her. I don't know, I just thought that was one of the best ideas for a movie I had ever heard. And it's hard to explain "Warrior" you know what I mean? I looked at that campaign very carefully, it's hard to say, it's like "Two brothers are fighting each other so who am I rooting for?" It's like, what is the happy ending in that situation when I like both of them and they're fighting each other? It's just harder. I make it sound easy after the fact and it never ever is. "Ghost" I think was a great idea for a movie and the right movie at the right time. People (in spite of the fact that there had been two other movies about ghosts in the past three months) that one really spoke to them and the campaign really showed them how emotionally compelling that situation was. And it was a lot of different movies, it was very very funny, it was a thriller, it was a supernatural love story- there's three different movies going on there. It's very hard to say, though.

Dr. Dave: You know, earlier we were talking about 'engagement' and I'm wondering, given that you know all the nuts and bolts behind these films, are you still able to be engaged in a movie? Can you enjoy the magic of movies as an audience member?

Doran: Completely. It's ridiculous how engaged I still am, I mean, it's embarrassing! I go and see a movie that is set in outer space and think that it's shot in outer space, I completely forget, I really do. It's crazy, I'm completely able to be engaged. If I'm bored, I think I would have been bored anyway even if I did something else for a living. And at that point I can sit back and say "oh, I can see what the problem is here" and I can begin to analyse it as somebody who sort of specialises in script structure. I can sit back and begin to say "I think there's a problem here and they should have done it this way" but if I'm not bored, if I'm engaged in the story, I am like everybody else in the audience. I'm laughing in all the right places and I'm crying in all the right places and I'm cheering at the end.

Dr. Dave: Well, that's fascinating. And maybe it's that ability in part that is the gift that you're able to bring to film making.

Doran: I think so. I mean I know that one of the things that I can do that people keep telling me is quite rare, is that I can read 30 drafts of the script and still laugh at the same jokes. I never mind picking up a script I love the 30th time or the 35th time, it's never a drag if I'm having a wonderful time. And I see movies over and over and over again, there's nothing I like more than turning on the television and saying "Oh, I love this movie, let's watch it again!" And that can be movies that I have seen literally 100 times. I worked as an usherette, it was one of my very first jobs as a human being was as an usherette at a theatre in Los Angeles. And I would literally watch a movie twice in my job as an usherette and then take off my uniform, put on my regular clothes, sit down and watch it again because I just loved them that much! And you know, sometimes as a filmmaker- as a studio executive especially- you see five movies a day. It's not uncommon. It's definitely not uncommon to see two or three movies a day.

Dr. Dave: Wow.

Doran: Nobody even thinks about that, how strange that is from the outside, how weird that is. But for us it's not strange at all and consequently, we're in the right business. Now, there are definitely people in the movie business who don't enjoy movies, including filmmakers. Woody Allen talked about never watching his movies, it's just too painful. And Sydney Pollack who I worked for for eight years, it was way too hard for him to watch the movies that he made. He didn't enjoy the experience at all; he didn't enjoy sitting with an audience and watching it and he didn't enjoy sitting alone and watching it. He just didn't enjoy it. And yet that's what he did for a living! So figure that out.

Dr. Dave: But you are able to enjoy the movies that you've worked on?

Doran: Completely! And some people find that...(laughs) maybe not quite what you should do. For example, when I showed "Sense & Sensibility" at the Masters class at Penn in April, I hadn't seen it for years. And I said to them "You know, it's sad because I made this movie because I loved the book and I love the movie and I

would be too embarrassed to watch it at home!” It would feel too stupid. What if somebody came in and said, “What are you doing, you’re watching your own movie?” (and I have to be careful about saying ‘my own movie’ obviously it’s the director and the actors and everybody). But I love that book and I’d always wanted to make it into a movie and I spent years looking for a writer and I found Emma Thompson who’d never written a screenplay in her life and I had this hunch she could do it and then she won the Oscar for Best Screenplay. So the whole thing was such a success story on so many levels.

Dr. Dave: Oh, yeh.

Doran: But mostly, I love the movie. The movie is exactly the way I wanted it to be when I thought about making a movie out of it when I was 22 years old (which was many many years before the movie was actually made). So I am completely capable of watching “Sense & Sensibility” and laughing at all the jokes and crying at the end. I have no problem with that whatsoever. And you know, not everybody can do that. Scott Rudin (who is a very very successful film producer and theatre producer, probably one of the most successful of all time) he and Brian Grazer (another successful producer, Ron Howard’s producing partner) were working on a film together and they were on a day of interviews and some reporter said “What drives you?” And almost at the same time they said the same thing which was, “Fear of failure.” And I thought, “God, that’s never driven me for a second my whole life!” And I went to Jerry Zucker who is one of the directors of “Airplane” and one of the writers of “The Naked Gun” and who I had hired to direct “Ghost” and I said to him “What drives you?” and he said “Gosh, it’s that moment in the theatre when everybody is laughing at the same time or gasping at the same time.” And I said “Yeh, that’s it, that’s exactly what drives me. It’s sitting in the theatre, surrounded by paying customers and having them have the exact experience you hoped they would have.” And most of the people that I work with, that is their answer. But there are plenty of other people who are doing it out of some kind of drive from a negative place and they’re the ones who don’t sit through their movies and they’re the ones who have a hard time with it.

Dr. Dave: Well Lindsay, it would be so easy to just go on and on with you, there are lots of other questions I could ask but I try to keep this within some kind of reasonable range, particularly for a person who is as busy as you are! So I really want to thank you, this has been delightful.

Doran: You’re so welcome. I suddenly realised, “Oh gosh, I’ve been talking too much! You didn’t get a word in edgewise!”

Dr. Dave: No, not at all. Lindsay Doran, thanks for being my guest today on ‘Shrink Rap Radio’

Doran: You are very welcome.

Conclusion: As I believe I mentioned in the interview, Lindsay and I met in a small group that was a ‘breakout’ of a presentation that was being conducted by Nick Marks from the UK, who is a superstar in his own rights and with whom I conducted a brief interview that I played a couple of podcasts ago. Nick is definitely worthy of a much longer interview for his work promoting positive psychological health through a program called ‘The Five Ways’ which he’s been executing throughout Britain. So Lindsay and I were in a small group for a brief exercise and my initial impression was that she was quiet and maybe introverted and she did not particularly stand out; except that I had heard Marty Seligman mention her name in his initial Keynote. So I had mentally tagged her as someone to interview. Then later, I happened to attend her presentation and she was a fireball and a real audience favourite! So once again, Dr. Dave has his nose rubbed in the lesson of ‘the error of snap judgements and first impressions’ I think in the interview you just heard, you could get a sense of her vibrancy and quick crackling intelligence. As you also heard, she chalked up a lot of the success of her talk to the fact that she did not lean on a PowerPoint, another great reminder to all those of us who tend to do that. I recall another wonderful presentation I attended some years ago in which the woman used ‘old technology’ - namely an overhead transparency projector and a grease pen. She engaged the audience with great intensity, scribbling and emphasising key points and diagrams as she went along; dialoguing with members of the audience, holding eye contact and never turning her back to write on a whiteboard or chalkboard or look at a PowerPoint. So listen up all you students and public presenters!

And while I have this podium, I need to mention that I was very saddened by the passing of Steve Jobs. earlier this week. I’ve been a huge fan of Apple computers, ever since its very early days. I had an Apple 2 and then most of the subsequent Macintosh models that came along over the years. I haven’t kept count but I wouldn’t be surprised if I’m on my fifteenth Apple computer and have had three or four iPhones and two iPads and a MacBook Air- not all at once, mind you. I was privileged to be in the same room as Steve Jobs years back when a business partner and I were facilitating an ‘Ideation and Planning’ session with the Mac team on the Apple campus in Cupertino. A young, long-haired and bearded Steve Jobs came in about half way through the session and made some pronouncements and then left. I didn’t have the chance to engage with him personally and that probably just as well because he was known to be especially mercurial and fierce in those days. Still, I think he stands out as the greatest business leader of maybe the last 100 years. For better or worse, he’s transformed the entire planet in ways that are both obvious and some that are yet to be discovered. I’m very saddened by his passing but happy to have lived in his time and to have been a witness and beneficiary of his vision and drive.

END.

