

Shrink Rap Radio #441, February 5, 2015, Psychosynthesis: Past, Present and Future

David Van Nuys, Ph.D., aka “Dr. Dave” interviews Molly Young Brown, MA, M.Div.

(transcribed from www.ShrinkRapRadio.com by Mariana Naldi)

Excerpt: *“Well it was partly that it had this whole spiritual dimension without it’s being a religion in any way. It was saying, how can you have a complete psychology if you don’t include the spiritual dimension?...So, that was one of the things that really attracted us. And it was a very positive psychology. It wasn’t based on pathology and, you know, what can go wrong, but rather how can people become more fulfilled and more filling up their potential.”*

Introduction: On today’s show I’ll be speaking with Molly Young Brown, MA and Master’s in Divinity, counselor, coach, author, and long-time practitioner of psychosynthesis. For more information about Molly Young Brown please see our show notes on Shrinkrapradio.com. Now, here’s the interview.

Dr. Dave: Molly Young Brown, welcome to Shrink Rap Radio.

Molly Young Brown: Well, I’m delighted to be with you.

Dr. Dave: Well, I’m delighted to have you and I got your name from Mark Horowitz whom I recently interviewed on Human Systems Theory. And he suggested that you’d be the go-to person for me to interview about psychosynthesis.

Molly Young Brown: Well, I’ve been involved with it since, gosh, 1971, I think? Something like that. So, it’s been a while.

Dr. Dave: Right. Yeah. I should mention that I took a short course through the Esalen Institute in the early ‘70’s about psychosynthesis. I seem to recall it was taught by Jim and Susan Varsiu (sp?).

Molly Young Brown: Uh huh.

Dr. Dave: And I was really impressed with what I learned at that time, but have really lost touch with it over the years, especially since I haven’t been practicing therapy for some time.

Molly Young Brown: Mmm hmmm.

Dr. Dave: So how did you first hear about and get involved with psychosynthesis?

Molly Young Brown: Well, it, really interesting 'cause in the...it must have been the late 60's, because it was before my second son was born. And he was born in '69. So it must have been just before that, '68 or something. I took a course through Esalen. At that time they had programs in San Francisco, not just at, not just at the center down in Big Sur. And so I took a course with Jim Fattaman (sp?) called "The Psychology of Personal Development" or something, something like that. And it was just kind of a general course in personal growth that was, you know, popular at the time. But, he was bringing a lot from this book called Psychosynthesis, by Roberto Assagioli and I was very intrigued so I purchased a copy of the book for my husband for Christmas. I think it was a Christmas present. And looking back on that now I thought, my gosh, we just spent like hardly any money at Christmas on each other back then. [laughs] But, anyway, I got the book and he read it and I read and we both enjoyed it a lot and thought it was, you know, it was very much in keeping with our interest in both psychology and eastern philosophies. Oh and then later, our first training in psychosynthesis was at University of UC Santa Barbara. And the Varsius came down at the invitation, actually my husband was running a program there at the time and invited them to come down and give a workshop. So we took our first workshop from them as well. And then decided we wanted to do their training and the rest is history.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, yeah. Small world. Now, I see that you've got both a Master's degree and a Master's in Divinity. Were you, did you already have those degrees at that time? Were you already a counselor or therapist or anything?

Molly Young Brown: No, I uh actually went back later and got a Master's in Humanistic and Transpersonal Psychology through a program that was a kind of a school without walls. It was an early version of that through the University of Redlands. And I did, at the time I was in San Francisco at the psychosynthesis center that had moved to San Francisco, doing training there. And I incorporated my training into my degree program. So I really kind of got a master's degree in psychosynthesis although it wasn't called that.

Dr. Dave: Yeah.

Molly Young Brown: And, So...

Dr. Dave: Yeah, go ahead.

Molly Young Brown: So, I got that later. And after that is when I started, you know, working with clients and so forth.

Dr. Dave: So what was it about the approach of psychosynthesis that drew you to it?

Molly Young Brown: Well it was partly that it had this whole spiritual dimension without it's being a religion in any way. It was saying, how can you have a complete psychology if you don't include the spiritual dimension? Which is such an important part of almost everyone's lives, even if they reject it all together, it's still, it's part of their life in a sense. So, that was one of the things that really attracted us. And it was a very positive psychology. It wasn't based on

pathology and, you know, what can go wrong, but rather how can people become more fulfilled and more filling up their potential. So we were, that's what attracted us both to it.

Dr. Dave: You know that makes it sound pretty contemporary because I think that the integration of spirituality into psychotherapy is more widely accepted today than maybe it was back then. And also the emphasis on sort of positive dimensions of growth has been really manifested recently in the whole coaching movement.

Molly Young Brown: Yes, yes. In fact sometimes I call myself a life coach nowadays. I realize that there's...the coaching field tries to make a clear distinction between therapy and coaching. I find it difficult to make that distinction. But, I would say that my work would tend to be more in the sort of side of the coaching and less...I don't call myself a therapist.

Dr. Dave: Okay.

Molly Young Brown: I've always called myself a guide or a counselor. But, I haven't called myself a therapist. And that's partly for legal reasons. I'm not licensed. And so legally I really can't call myself a therapist and that's fine. I don't mind.

Dr. Dave: Okay. Now, before we go further, perhaps we should back up a bit and have you tell us about the founder of psychosynthesis, Roberto Assagioli.

Molly Young Brown: Right, I will do so. He was a lovely lovely man. After we had studied our initial training in psychosynthesis and we knew that Assagioli was quite elderly at the time. He was in his 80's and not in the best of health. And so we just, I just felt this, we've got to go see him. We have this opportunity to go study with a wise man and we've got to do it. So we borrowed money from my parents and, you know, we really went to a great deal of effort to go and study with him. And he had first gotten the idea of psychosynthesis, and he wrote a thesis in 1912 in which he started to present his ideas about psychosynthesis. And actually the term came from Freud. Freud said after psychoanalysis we should have a psychosynthesis, but he never did it. And Assagioli picked that up and said, yes we need to have, you know, not just pick the person apart, but put the person back together again--

Dr. Dave: Yeah, right [laughs].

Molly Young Brown: In a functioning way. So, not that we put anybody together, but help people, you know, integrate them, the various aspects of their personality. So, and he also felt at the time that there needed to be this spiritual dimension. And he had studied eastern religions. I mean he'd studied everything there was to study. He was a very integrative sort of person in that he was putting together what he was learning from Buddhism and Hinduism and Yoga and Christianity and Judaism and name it, he was including it. And I don't know if he studied Islam. He may have. I haven't seen a lot references to that.

Dr. Dave: Now he was trained as an MD, is that right?

Molly Young Brown: That's right, he was an MD. He was a psychiatrist essentially. And he wanted to make psychosynthesis be acceptable to the kind of conventional, you know, mainstream medical world. And so he found ways of languaging what he was doing in ways that he thought would be more acceptable. So he never talked about God, for example. He talks about "Self" with a capital "S." And really the Self of each of us is this dimension in which we are in contact with everything else, the universal as well as the individual.

Dr. Dave: Now, of course the capital "S" Self, I believe comes from Jung and so I'm wondering did he have personal contact with Jung since they would have been contemporaries to some degree?

Molly Young Brown: Yes. Yes, he did. And I don't know that it came from Jung or it was just an idea that was out there and they both latched onto it. He doesn't really, doesn't consider Jung his teacher, but rather as you say, a colleague. And apparently they did have some, you know, correspondence and so forth. So they knew each other. And may have influenced each other's thought as well. But it's kind of not, I don't see psychosynthesis as a spinoff of Jungian psychology. I see it as a parallel movement, shall we say.

Dr. Dave: Uh huh. Now, one of the stories I recall about Assagioli was supposedly, well I'm sure it's more than supposedly, was that he was thrown into prison by Mussolini during the Nazi era in Italy.

Molly Young Brown: That's true. That's true. And he spent quite a while in solitary confinement. And he decided he would use that time to meditate and study and write. And that's what he did. So rather than being traumatized by that he managed to turn it into like a retreat [laughs].

Dr. Dave: Yeah, that's the thing that really struck me when I heard that story was his, and hopefully I've kind of taken it in, and he kind of reframed it. And said well I've always been such a busy professional and I've never really had time to meditate to the degree that I would like to and this is kind of like my opportunity to be in a monastery.

Molly Young Brown: That's right! That's what he did. And I suppose he was not particularly abused or anything. He was able to, well, being in solitary for him was probably to his advantage in that he might have been bothered by the mainstream prison population because he was a small, you know, a small man. And slight in build and he could have been tormented. So it may have been to his advantage that he was in solitary. Actually, what was more traumatic was when he was trying, before he was arrested, he and his son were fleeing, trying to get away from the fascists, and out literally sleeping in people's barns and things like that. And his son contracted tuberculosis and died a few years later, which was a huge huge tragedy for him. He was very very fond of his son and he was his only son, his only child. So that was much more traumatic than solitary confinement for him.

Dr. Dave: So since you had the opportunity to meet with him in person and work with him, how would you describe his personality? How did he impress you?

Molly Young Brown: Well, he was kind of sparkly [laughs].

Dr. Dave: [laughs]

Molly Young Brown: Interestingly enough. My husband tells this wonderful story about when we went in to meet him for the first time in his study. This was in Florence. And he shook his hand, he had the feeling that if he pulled up on his hand that Assagioli would float up off the floor. He just had this quality of lightness about him. Not, well, probably both meanings of the word “light.” He was quite a lot of humor, not in the way of cracking jokes, but just seeing the humorous side of almost everything. And he gave us some homework to do. We were to each of us, to write, every day, a letter to our higher self. And that letter to the higher self is still a technique I still use today and certainly share with other people. And you don’t have to write it to a higher self, you can write it to Earth, you can write it to the Goddess, you can write it the Divine Mother, you can write it to whatever you want to, you know. However you want, whatever terms you want to use.

Dr. Dave: And what does that evoke?

Molly Young Brown: Well, what happens is, you...I would write a letter and say “Well I don’t even know if you exist” and “What the heck!” And I would write my doubts and fears and everything.

Dr. Dave: Good.

Molly Young Brown: And then I would find myself writing and I would realize that it was the response. That I would be, I wouldn’t, it wasn’t like it was dictated. I would say, well perhaps such and such and such. And then I would realize perhaps that was, it was like it was a dialogue. I would get insights. Yeah, I would get insights into whatever I was writing about. And I still, like I said, to this day if I’m in a quandary about something, I’ll write a letter to, as I address it to various divinities, whatever I feel like in the moment. And it always always helps me to, it’s like sink into my own inner wisdom, I think is really what it does.

Dr. Dave: Yeah.

Molly Young Brown: And clear away the, you know, the casual thoughts and confusion and concerns.

Dr. Dave: I’m curious, since that was a daily exercise, was that also shared in the group. And did you share what you had written?

Molly Young Brown: Yes, we did, if we wanted to. But, it was only, the group was only the two of us. So we were having private consultations with him.

Dr. Dave: Uh huh.

Molly Young Brown: And we also did a daily free drawing. And he said just draw. It wasn't an answer to a question or anything. It was just whatever images come to mind, just draw them. And he would look at those with us as well. And ask us questions and make comments about it. It wasn't like he was interpreting them. It was more like he was, you know, having a dialogue with us about our drawings and about our letters.

Dr. Dave: I gather you didn't go to see him explicitly for psychotherapy, but I'm wondering if, as a result of your contact with him, in doing these exercises and so on, if there were personal issues that were resolved or a sense of personal growth that you can share with us.

Molly Young Brown: Oh, very definitely. It wasn't so much like you said personal issues that were resolved. It was more that I came away with a lot more confidence, a lot more sense of my direction in life. I made a drawing while I was there, or it may have been after I returned and that had a slogan that said "Commend the day to your higher self and do only the task at hand." And that was hugely influ—you know, important for me at that time. You know, I had two small children and was very much into the household, although I was also working part time outside of the home. And somehow the business of life and everything, it just really helped to sort of say, okay, I can turn over the big picture to some kind of larger intelligence. It would be like what the 12-step people call the higher power. And then just address whatever it was I needed to do. Rather than thinking, well after I do this then I've got to remember to do that and oh I'm thinking about this thing when I'm doing this other thing. I could just...it helped me focus and I don't know how I got that. I mean I can't say that Assagioli told me that or anything, but somehow the process of working with him, I came away with that, a greater sense of focus and direction.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, that was kind of a message from your higher self and sounds like it was kind of prioritizing from a what we could call a higher perspective about okay what's really important.

Molly Young Brown: Right right. And the other piece was we did talk to him about our children. And our older son at the time was sort of stormy, emotionally. And he gave us some really good good advice about how to work with him and be with him. And he also told us to, at one point I was very worried about our kids. They were four and seven and we'd left them with grandparents. And we knew they were in good hands. But the communication between Italy and United States was really really poor in those days so we hadn't heard from them in like two weeks and I was getting quite concerned. And I told him about that. And he said, well, leave your children in the hands of their higher selves and they'll be fine. And I said, well it's only normal for a mother to worry. And he said, do you want to be a normal mother?

Dr. Dave: [laughs]

Molly Young Brown: [laughs]

Dr. Dave: Quite a challenge.

Molly Young Brown: Yes, [laughs] right. So there are a lot of those little moments we had with him where he has said something that I have remembered to this day.

Dr. Dave: A little bit of a Zen teacher.

Molly Young Brown: Yeah yeah. He was a Zen teacher. Very very much so. And we also asked him a lot of theoretical questions. We had a lot of theoretical discussions about, you know, various aspects. He had us reading a lot of stuff. And I said, we can't afford to pay you very much. Is there anything I can do? And he had me typing up, with carbon copies, five carbon copies, because this was before computers and before things like that. And so I was typing away. We didn't even have good Xerox machines or at least not in Italy there weren't. So I was hitting the keys really hard so it would go through five layers of carbon copies. And I still have copies of those articles because I was able to keep the fifth copy.

Dr. Dave: Aha.

Molly Young Brown: Today, everything he'd written in interviews he had and there was some really wonderful material in there that I have since shared with the larger world, but I have kept my own copies as well.

Dr. Dave: Well speaking of the theory, I see that you have authored or co-authored around six books, one of which is titled, "Unfolding Self: The Practice of Psychosynthesis." So perhaps you could take us through the theory of psychosynthesis.

Molly Young Brown: Wow [laughs].

Dr. Dave: Is that a big order? [laughs]

Molly Young Brown: Yeah, that's a big order.

Dr. Dave: That's a whole workshop, I'm sure.

Molly Young Brown: I'm sure. But, I'll give you what I believe to be the essential essentials. I already have talked about the idea of the Self or the higher self. Now he called it the higher self. Many of us now just call it Self, because we don't even wanna use "the," but he did. So, the idea that we have this higher self or you can call it a soul or you could call it spirit or whatever name you want to put on it. But, it is a dimension of us that is both universal and individual. So, it's kind of like the universal energy as it's funneled down into this particular incarnation or in this particular individual. Then there's the personal self which is a reflection of the higher self and is more like who we think we are. The "I." You know when I say I am going downtown, that is the personal self that I'm speaking of. Or as I'm speaking to you right now I am speaking out of the personal self. So, part of the idea in psychosynthesis is to align the personal self with the higher self so that it can be informed and inspired by that higher consciousness. Both levels of self have two dimensions: one is awareness and the other is will. Assagioli really really emphasized the will. A lot of people in psychology at the time were very much emphasizing self-awareness. It was well-known, you know, psychoanalysis is really self-awareness, becoming aware of your own inner dynamics and where they come from and so forth. But, he felt that that wasn't enough, that we also needed to act on that, on that insight. And bring it into our life in tangible ways. So the will became as important as awareness. And if you stop and think about it they are very

closely connected, because when you decide to pay attention to something you are using your will to make that choice, to pay attention to this instead of that. And the other aspect is once you become aware of some dynamic, it almost always flows that you are going to act differently as a result. You are going to make different choices as a result of that insight.

Dr. Dave: To me the will also connotes some kind of a driving force. In other words, you could, you could become aware of some things and not change, but to have some kind of a resolution to move on the basis of that insight, to me that, I would think of that as being will.

Molly Young Brown: Yes. And that is exactly the way he thinks about it. Now, I want to say that he would offer these ideas himself or higher self or personal self or will or anything else as a proposition. He would say, uh, you know, this is what I've come to. This is a conclusion I've come to, but take these ideas and work with them and look at your own personal experience and you may want to do it, you know, define it somewhat differently or you know change the terminology or whatever. And that's fine. He really wanted people to take his ideas and run with them rather than for his teachings to become a dogma.

Dr. Dave: That's my kind of guy. [laughs]

Molly Young Brown: Yeah. Mine too, mine too. So I've always felt free, like I said, now a lot of us don't call it the higher self anymore. We just call it the Self, and the reason why is because of a sense of higher being better. And we, you know, wanting to move away from up there, high is good and down here on the ground is somehow inferior. So, but one of his students, Piero Ferrucci says he didn't mean, by higher, he didn't mean better. He just meant a broader perspective. Like if you are up in the sky and you are flying around as an eagle, you see a lot more territory than you do when you're down on the ground. And that's really what he meant by higher. So I appreciate that. I think that that was probably what he meant, but how other people hear it is another story.

Dr. Dave: Yeah.

Molly Young Brown: So that was one change that some people have made and some people who are more wanting to adhere to the original teachings are upset by that. But, some of us say, well he told us to take these ideas and evolve them and run with them and develop them. So, that's what we're doing.

Dr. Dave: Yeah. Yeah. And I remember a time in the '70's when people were going to India and there were Guru's coming to this country and people would talk about this Guru or that Guru being very high. And this Guru is higher than that other Guru. And I always felt uncomfortable with that kind of talk.

Molly Young Brown: Yes, I think that's fault of our western civilization, that we do tend to create these hierarchies and you know create the great chain of being and stuff like that. When, of course nowadays with ecopsychology and areas like that in play, we try to think of—we're just all a part of the web of life. And there is no better or worse or higher or lower. So, it's partly a...partly the times have changed. So those are some of the key concepts. Another one that is

very important as far as I'm concerned is the idea of dysidentification. And a lot of people have complained about what a mouthful that word is, but we haven't really been able to come up with anything better. Because we identify, when we identify with something we attach—it's like we become attached to it. We think it's—we are that. So a gross example would be somebody who becomes identified with the car he drives and he's gotta have, you know, the latest, fanciest, most powerful car. And or it somehow reflects on him as a person if he doesn't have this fancy car. Well that's a kind of obvious example. It's a really a lot more subtle than that. So I'm a mother. I have two children, two grown children. I have grandchildren actually. And I could become identified with being a mother. That's who I am. Well I'm a lot more than a mother. Yes, I'm a mother, but I'm also a writer, I'm also a teacher, and I'm also somebody who loves to go out on walks in nature, etc. etc. So, dysidentification in psychosynthesis is very key. It's when you step back from these identifications you have and look at them with some degree of objectivity. And it's not to get rid of them or spurn them or anything like that. But, it's just to see the dynamics a little more clearly. And be able to, for example, if I find myself angry about something. I could just go with the anger and just be pissed off and meh bleh bleh (and probably get a stomach ache). Or I could say, oh boy, I'm feeling angry, what's that about? And step back just maybe a half a step. Oh well, this happened and that happened and it's my...you know I can examine that anger and understand it more. It doesn't mean that I'm going to say, well I shouldn't be angry.

Dr. Dave: You know your speaking of dysidentification also makes me think of all the interests these days about mindfulness and it sounds a bit like i.e. what would be called a mindful practice.

Molly Young Brown: Absolutely. I think it's the same, talking about the same dynamic, or the same inner action.

Dr. Dave: Yes.

Molly Young Brown: Absolutely.

Dr. Dave: Now, I'm doing a series on what might be called "Parts Therapies." For example Freud's theories has its parts: Id, Ego, Superego, conscious, and unconscious. Jung has the collective unconscious, the shadow, the anima and animus, the self, and other archetypes. And Fritz Perls has parts such as top-dog and underdog. And transactional analysis has parent, adult, and child. And of course there's a lot more to each of those theories than just the parts and I'm sure that's true of psychosynthesis as well. But, if we look at it for a moment through that filter, what are the component parts?

Molly Young Brown: Are you still there?

Dr. Dave: I am.

Molly Young Brown: Yeah. It cut out for a second. Uh, what are the components... What I would think that, if I think about parts in psychosynthesis I think about sub-personalities.

Dr. Dave: Okay.

Molly Young Brown: And in sub-personalities are little sort of almost autonomous ways of being behavior, like a little packet full of behavior, feelings, and thoughts that we develop. And they can be quite useful. It's not that they're all bad. But, often they are, we retain them like habits long past their point of effectiveness. So, for example, a girl growing up in a home with maybe kind of very demanding parents, might develop a sub-personality of being very meek and obedient and fearful. Well, it probably helps keep her out of trouble in that family, but when she grows up if she continues to be meek and fearful and placating and so forth, she's obviously going to suffer some unfortunate consequences from that. She needs to, you know, leave that sub-personality behind. And maybe it only comes up in certain instances. Maybe it only comes up if there's someone that reminds her of her father in her...you know with her. And then, it might only come up then. But, it could really be a disadvantage to continue to act that way. So, there are patterns, but they include feelings. Because when she's identified with that sub-personality, she feels a certain way, she thinks a certain way, and she acts a certain way. And so, like I say it's like a whole package. This is where dysidentification comes in because she can step back from that and say, oh what's going on here? Why am I acting this way? And, what's going on? She can then begin to find, you know, make different choices for one thing.

Dr. Dave: Let me ask you to move your mic away from your mouth a little bit.

Molly Young Brown: Yeah, okay. Okay.

Dr. Dave: So, I'm wondering are there any sub-personalities that are sort of catalogued as, you know, that are identified as sort of frequent kinds of sub-personalities?

Molly Young Brown: I would say so, but it's not as codified as those other systems you mentioned.

Dr. Dave: Okay.

Molly Young Brown: I mean like, top-dog, underdog and stuff like that. But, most of us have a critic, some kind of a critical sub-personality. Maybe we have a bully. You know, I'm thinking, that might be fairly common. But, generally the bully is we're bullying ourselves rather than somebody else. So, that yeah, I think the critic is probably the most common one, but like I said, it's not codified in the way that those other systems you mentioned. It's more just the concept that we, each person is made up of a whole bunch of sub-personalities. And they come into play, you know, in different circumstances. And some of them are useful and some of them are not.

Dr. Dave: And is part of the approach then the integration or synthesis of these sub-personalities?

Molly Young Brown: Absolutely. And again, we can't get rid of them. We can't say well I don't want to be that way anymore. I mean we might want to say that, but it's not going to happen. That part of us has to be kind of welcomed into the fold and honored for the job it's trying to do and perhaps given a different job description. That, you could say well, you are

trying to protect me from being abused by, you know, a father figure, but it would be much more helpful if you would, I don't know if you would actually say this, but I'm just giving this as an example, it'd be much more helpful if you...if when you feel this strong energy coming toward you that you say, take a deep breath and say to yourself, I'm really stronger than I think I am. So in other words, you find some way of working with that sub-personality so that it continues to be a part of you, but it kind of grows up. It kind of adapts itself to the realities of your life at that time, rather than still hanging onto old childhood traumas and such.

Dr. Dave: And would a way of working with those sub-personalities be to dialogue with them either on paper or internally?

Molly Young Brown: Uh huh. Mmm hmmm. And actually Gestalt therapy, which you mentioned earlier is a technique, if you will, that we often use, where you can suggest that the person put, you know, imagine the sub-personality in a chair and have a dialogue that way. And you may actually have the person move into the chair and speak to the sub-personality and then move back to another chair which is hopefully more the centered, the Self. And sometimes another sub-personality will show up because maybe you'll have the scared child and then all of a sudden, here's this very critical, you know parental type figure. And so then you have to work with both of them. And find out what they have to offer each other, find out what they really really need. And then often in imagery you can give them what they need. And so, well let's say the child needs, I don't know, I 'm trying to—it's hard to just think of examples off the top of my head, but you can often give them what they need in imagery. SO you might give the sub-personality a cloak that they can wear and feel safe and warm. Or a wand or a magic golden ring or whatever in symbology you can find to help that sub-personality let go of its fear and become more integrated with the rest.

Dr. Dave: I'm glad you mentioned imagery because I remember from the exposure I had that that was one of the more striking features of the approach, the idea that you could be that active a therapist, if you will, to suggest imagery, to suggest images, with the idea that this was going to help move things along. I think in some quarters that would be kind of a controversial idea, a) about being that active and b) whether or not that really is effective.

Molly Young Brown: Yeah...in the first place, in my experience it's very effective. Taking someone on a guided imagery journey where they close their eyes and go inside and visualize themselves say in a meadow or you know, whatever...So there's certain sort of archetypal images that we tend to use. If I wanted someone to confront a really negative part of themselves or a scary part I might have imagined them outside of a cave and have the scary part be inside the cave. But, I probably wouldn't tell them what the cave looked like and I wouldn't tell them what the scary part looked like. I would allow their image to come forward. So I would just sort of set the scene, imagine yourself in front of a cave. What does the cave look like? You know, what's inside the cave? Can you imagine calling into the cave and asking it to come out or do you want to go into the cave? You know, in other words, allowing as much of the imagery to come from the client as possible. So it's their imagery, not mine. However, there are, like I said, there's certain sort of archetypal things that one can do, like for example, go up a mountain and find a wise being on the top of the mountain. I try to use "being" because it might be something other than a human. So that again the suggestions are as broad as possible. The journey up the

mountain would be entirely up the mountain. It could be difficult. It could be easy. Just, whatever comes up as the person imagines climbing a mountain, but the mountain itself is kind of the archetypal thing.

Dr. Dave: Yes, I seem to recall an exercise related to that where it was like a triangle and you would have these two opposing sub-personalities perhaps. And I think you were invited to, to have some imagery, to evoke some imagery associated with each of the opposing sub-personalities and then to take them up to the top of the mountain and allow some other integrative image to spontaneously appear.

Molly Young Brown: And the trip up the mountain is important. You don't just pop up there. You have to go up gradually to allow time for that integration to take place. Also with the image of the triangle, very important concept in psychosynthesis is called the synthesis triangle where you have two sub-personalities or two conflicting desires or two anything that's a conflict and, like you said, you have an image of one and an image of the other. And you have your hands held out. So one's in your right hand, one's in your left hand, and again you let the client decide which, which polarity is in which hand. Because that can be instructive even in itself. And then you can ask the client to very gradually bring their hands together, as if at the top of a triangle. So they're not bringing them together on the same level. They are raising them up and gradually bringing them together. And do it as slowly as needed and when they get, when they get to the top, does an image emerge that is a synthesis of the two original polarities?

Dr. Dave: What do you think that physical enactment with the hands brings to the party, so to speak?

Molly Young Brown: Well, it gets the body involved and it makes it more real in a way. It makes it more a physical experience. Anything to make imagery, to help imagery be more vivid and more real is helpful. You know drawings are helpful. And I often have people do drawings and draw their images. And again encourage, like Assagioli did, for us to not plan out the drawing. To just start drawing and let the hands do it through the unconscious. The unconscious is so amazingly wise and knows so much more than our conscious mind can know. And any way that we have through imagery, through physical movement, through art, through drawing, clay sculpture, anything to make that, to allow that unconscious to express itself is very very helpful.

Dr. Dave: I'm wondering if there is a case example either from somebody you worked with or from yourself where that you can give us of the conflict and the going up to the mountain and what emerged. And I know I didn't prep you for this ahead of time.

Molly Young Brown: Yes, I know.

Dr. Dave: So, if your memory is anything like mine it may be challenging.

Molly Young Brown: It is difficult to think. I wish—I didn't bring a copy of *Unfolding Self* to the desk with me here and I might, you know I probably have some in there that I could mention. But, off the top of my head I can't think of an example.

Dr. Dave: Okay, that's fine. Just going back to the parts for a moment. We've got kind of the higher self and the, the higher self and the "I" self, the everyday "I" self, and the sub-personalities. Is there any other aspect of the theory that could be conceptualized in terms of parts?

Molly Young Brown: Yeah, actually there's two diagrams that we use. There's what we call the egg diagram, because it's egg-shaped, and there's the star diagram. And the egg diagram, in a way you could think of that as a parts thing because it's, has at the very top of the egg is the higher self and it's drawn as kind of a radiating center so that there's like radiation light coming out, you know lines coming out from it. So it's not just a fixed point, but a radiation, radiating center. And then in the middle of the oval or the egg is the "i," a point of the "i" or the personal self. And there's a dotted line drawn between the higher self and the personal self to indicate that relationship. Then around there would be a circle around the dot of the "i." And that circle is the field of awareness. So this is what we're aware of at any given time, you know what I, like I'm sitting here in this chair in this room and talking to you and this is what I'm aware of. Then outside of that is the middle unconscious. And the middle unconscious is stuff that we're not conscious of at the moment, but that we could easily recall. So I could remember in a moment what I had for dinner last night or a place I walked to yesterday or a conversation I had with my husband or you know, whatever. Now if the conversation was traumatic it may have been repressed and then it would go down into the lower unconscious. So the oval is divided into three areas: the higher unconscious, the middle unconscious that has this field of awareness and the dot of the "i" in the middle of it, and then the lower unconscious. The lower unconscious contains what we repress, what we've forgotten. It also contains things like the consciousness that keeps our heart beating and keeps us breathing, so it's not just a place of horrible stuff. It's also just our basic biological functions take place outside of our consciousness most of the time. And then the higher unconscious is kind of our potential. It's inside. It's wisdom. It's what we, sort of a waiting to be born, or waiting to come into our awareness. So that's one. That's the oval diagram. And incidentally on the outside of the oval diagram is the collective unconscious. So that has that in common with Jungian theory.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, and I seem to recall that some of those boundaries are drawn with dotted lines to suggest that there's some permeability.

Molly Young Brown: Absolutely.

Dr. Dave: That's it's not fixed. That things can move from unconscious to conscious or even from consciousness to unconscious.

Molly Young Brown: Absolutely. Every single line in this oval diagram is dotted. They're all dotted because they are all permeable. And we can talk about even the collective unconscious having those levels because sometimes, you know, if you go into a room at say some kind of party or organization and you sense that there's a lot of tension in the room, well that's probably

in the lower collective unconscious. There's something going on that people aren't really aware of, but they can kind of pick up the vibes, if you know what I mean. Or you could go into a room and people are really really happy and really open and really excited about something. And so then you can say, well that's the higher collective unconscious. So, you know you can have these...the dotted lines that separate these levels over the unconscious extended out. And, this is only a model. It's not to say that somewhere in our brain is the higher unconscious and some other place is the lower unconscious. They are all mixed up together. This is just a way of...of thinking about it—

Dr. Dave: Yes.

Molly Young Brown: For purposes of discussion. So it's not, the map is not the territory.

Dr. Dave: Right, yeah. Good point. Now, you mentioned the star diagram as maybe suggesting some other parts. Tell us about that.

Molly Young Brown: Well Assagioli talked about what he called the psychological functions. And there are six of them. So he had a six-pointed star to indicate them. So each point of the star would be another function and I'll tell you what they are in a minute. In the middle is the will and the Self. So the will is what uses, shall we say, all of these psychological functions to function. And they are: sensation (this is sort of the basic ones), desire or impulse (and this is, you know, like hunger, and you need to go to the bathroom, I mean it's real basic stuff, but it can also be psychological desires as well. It isn't just biological.), and then we have emotions and we have thinking (this is our rational thinking mind), and then these two wonderful ones (that's one of the things I love about psychosynthesis) imagination and intuition are given their own place. They are not just feelings and thoughts. They are functions in their own right. And this is one of the things I really value most about psychosynthesis is that recognition. The role of imagination, that we've just been talking about imagery and how incredibly important it is. And nowadays with a lot of study of trauma and so forth we're realizing that imagination is what allows you to figure out a different way of...figure out a way out of a bad situation. It isn't just, it isn't just for art and, you know, you know having fun. It's actually a very practical survival. And people who have had their imaginations suppressed in some way just have to keep doing things the same way because they don't have any imagination to figure out anything different. So it's really important and then intuition is again, that you could call it also where maybe we have extrasensory perception of various kinds could be part of the intuition. It's kind of mysterious. We don't know quite how it works, but it seems to be very very important. And this is part of the reason that I feel I can be more "active" as a guide or a counselor or whatever you want to call me. Is because I have really learned to trust my intuition and I've learned to be very careful with it. That is if I get a hunch about something I don't necessarily act on it right away. I kind of look at it for a little while or maybe I'll ask a question to see if that seems to be a good way to go. And I'm just really amazed at how frequently something that I say as an intuition will be a turning point for my client.

Dr. Dave: Yes.

Molly Young Brown: So, there is something there. And like I said, it's mysterious. I don't know exactly how it works, but I know it does work, that I am somehow tuned in to the clients experience sufficiently. That things can come to me, but I'm also not completely caught up in it. So I have a certain amount of objectivity. And I can, you know I'll... I'm just amazed at how often an intuition will occur to me that will be instrumental in helping the client.

Dr. Dave: Sure. I believe that. And you know we've seen that psychosynthesis is an extremely integrative approach. Even the name suggests that with synthesis. I'm not sure if it invents anything as much as it integrates some of the strong features of other approaches.

Molly Young Brown: Yeah, I don't know either. I only know that when I, when I... early days of studying psychosynthesis it was the only thing around that I was in touch with. Including Jungian, I would have to say, that did what it does. And nowadays all these techniques and concepts and ideas and way way more common in the culture. I don't think it's necessarily a direct effect of psychosynthesis as a school. I mean it may or may not be. People may have taken workshops and incorporated the ideas into whatever else they were doing, so it could be partly that, but it's also one of those... the collective unconscious, you know? Assagioli was a little ahead of his time. He came up with these ideas, but they also came into other people's consciousness and were enacted during the same time.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, you know I've speculated something similar about Humanistic psychology in general. That so much, you know people say, where did that go? And so much of it was just kind of absorbed into the culture that many of the concepts are considered common wisdom these days.

Molly Young Brown: Yeah.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, so I can see something similar there. You know back in the '70's there was a proliferation of innovative psychotherapies and psychosynthesis was one of those that was gaining some notice. However, in recent years I've not heard anything about psychosynthesis. So the question comes up, which maybe you've just partly answered, what happened to it?

Molly Young Brown: Well, for one thing, in Europe it is much more successful and active than it is in the United States these days. So I don't know what that's about. I don't know why. Maybe the American mind set is just not that open to something sort of intangible and somewhat mystic as psychosynthesis might be seen as? You know we certainly... so that's part of it. There was—

Dr. Dave: You know part of my answer to that is I think in America we use things up really fast.

Molly Young Brown: Yeah. It's not the soup de jour. It's you know, it's passé. It's yeah now we're onto something else. And I know a lot of people actually, some friends, who were originally very much involved in psychosynthesis and then went on and got involved in other systems and feel that psychosynthesis is passé. I didn't happen to do that myself, but other people, you know, certainly have. And so that could be part of it. There was a very unfortunate thing that happened at one of the psychosynthesis centers that kind of got cultish. And that really set psychosynthesis back in the eyes of the say, humanistic transpersonal movement because of

that unfortunate thing that happened. And, but that was long ago and that was over in about the '80's so I don't know why in, you know, thirty years since it hasn't been able to pull out of that. A lot of us who were involved early on are now getting older. I'm 73. We've got people my age and older. Many have died. So, it's sort of the original group of teachers is aging and dyeing and somehow there doesn't seem to be the next generation coming up. I mean there are few, but not as many and not somehow as outspoken or I don't know. It's very strange.

Dr. Dave: Well probably in years to come somebody will discover this collection of writings and it will get rediscovered and reinvented all over again.

Molly Young Brown: Maybe so.

Dr. Dave: Yeah. Is there any sort of active organization for psychosynthesis? You know like the international organization of psychosynthesis or anything like that?

Molly Young Brown: Well there's a national organization, the—well it's not, actually it's North America. We consider ourselves North Americans so it includes Canada and Mexico. It is called the Association for the Advancement of Psychosynthesis. And they have conferences about every—well they were having them every year, but now it's gone down to about every two or three years having a conference. There's one in Montreal this summer. So that's a pretty active organization. They also publish an online journal. Used to be paper, but now of course it's online. And there are organizations in Europe. Several. There's the European... what is it called? Federation of Psychosynthesis Psychotherapists [laughs]. Believe it or not! EFPP, yeah. And they have a summer school each year and actually I've been invited on, I think, two different occasions to go over and teach at that summer school and really enjoyed that. There's really active groups in Sweden. There's active groups in London. But, I think the Federation is the only organization that I know of. There may be others. There may be others that I don't know about in Europe. And also New Zealand. There's active groups in New Zealand.

Dr. Dave: So what do you see as the future of psychosynthesis, other than the possibility of it fading away as the original old guard fades away.

Molly Young Brown: Well, I'm still doing training. I do an online training and there's a very active training center in Amherst, Massachusetts. There's one in Kentucky. So there are—there used to be a lot more. But there are still some remaining and there are still some people being trained in it. And I think what's happening is a lot of them are going out and integrating psychosynthesis into their practice. So they might be doing a therapy practice or counseling practice and using psychosynthesis, but they're not teaching it...

Dr. Dave: Yes.

Molly Young Brown: Per say. They're just using it. And I think there's a lot of that going on.

Dr. Dave: Yes.

Molly Young Brown: I kind of wonder if...One of my fantasies is that it'll kind of get rediscovered from Europe, because it's so active and healthy there. That maybe somehow a spark will come from Europe and reignite something here in the United States.

Dr. Dave: Okay. Well, as we wind down here I wonder if there's anything you'd like to add by way of summary?

Molly Young Brown: Well I continue to feel that psychosynthesis, as I said earlier, I don't feel like it's become passé. And my appreciation for it kind of deepens. It's simple. It really rather simple. And I think that's part of its value. It's not a complex confusing structure. It's pretty straightforward. And within that structure people can do their own thing. They can, you know, work with it in different ways. There's not just one way of working with it. So, that's part of what I want to say is that I've had an image of a jungle gym. That psychosynthesis is like a jungle gym and you can climb around in that jungle—I see one of those domed, you know those dome-shaped ones? And you can climb around in it any way you want to. And what's more the different pieces are somewhat elastic. So as you climb around in the jungle gym it moves and changes according to what you do with it. So that's my image of psychosynthesis.

Dr. Dave: Good, we end with some imagery, which is appropriate [laughs].

Molly Young Brown: Yeah [laughs].

Dr. Dave: So, Molly Young Brown, I want to thank you for being my guest today on Shrink Rap Radio.

Molly Young Brown: I've thoroughly enjoyed talking with you.