

**Shrink Rap Radio #483**  
**26<sup>th</sup> November, 2015**

**“An Insider’s Experience of Psychosis”**

**Dr. David Van Nuys Ph.D., aka ‘Dr. Dave’ interviews Shannon Love**  
(Transcribed from <http://www.shrinkrapradio.com> by Gloria Oelman)

**Introduction:**

My guest today is Shannon Love author of the 2015 book *Twisting My Kaleidoscope* which is a memoir of her experience with psychosis. For more information about Shannon Love please see our show notes on [www.ShrinkRapRadio.com](http://www.ShrinkRapRadio.com)

Now here’s today’s interview.

**Dr. Dave:** Shannon Love, welcome to Shrink Rap Radio.

**Shannon Love:** Oh, thank you for having me, Dr. Dave. It’s a pleasure to be here.

**Dr. Dave:** And I’m so pleased to have you. I’ve been reading your delightfully written book, *Twisting My Kaleidoscope*. The style is delightful but that’s probably not a good description for the content, which describes your experiences with psychosis. But before we get into that, let’s take a step back – your husband had some sort of high level job in a multinational company that had you two, plus your three kids, living in a variety of countries. Which countries were you in?

**Shannon Love:** We lived in Beijing, China. That’s where we were when I had my first psychotic break and we also lived in Angola, Africa before that and at one point when my husband was in graduate school, we spent a few months in Barcelona, Spain. So those are the three countries we lived in outside the U.S.

**Dr. Dave:** And before the events in the book, how did that sort of nomadic lifestyle suit you?

**Shannon Love:** Oh, I loved it! I absolutely loved it. I would go back if I could.

**Dr. Dave:** Aha, O.K. Now you were forty two when you experienced the first psychotic break and usually this kind of thing happens in the late teens or early thirties. Why do you think yours came so late and what do you think triggered it?

**Shannon Love:** Well, I do believe that I was probably always hyper manic before my first break. People would describe me before then that I was a very high energy, happy person and as a matter of fact some of my friends would make comments like “oh, why are you always in a good mood? How do you do it? How do you have so much energy to do all of these things?” And of course it was because I was hyper manic is why I was always able to and why I was always happy. But I think the reason it never exacerbated into much more than that was because I married well. I

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married a very gentle loving, stable man and I just didn't have that much stress in my life, so because my stress level was so little it just never reached that... I guess I never crossed that threshold, before that point.

**Dr. Dave:** But at some point when you were living in China, some stressors began to accumulate.

**Shannon Love:** Oh, yes. It all began in the hospital when I was getting a routine checkup, during my ECG they became quite concerned and kept me there at the hospital and continued to ask me if I was having chest pains and this and that and basically that led into a five month period of testing of my heart for a heart condition and that triggered an anxiety disorder.

**Dr. Dave:** And you had a family history – no wonder it triggered anxiety. Tell us a little about the cardiac family history.

**Shannon Love:** Well, both of my parents have heart conditions. My dad had his first heart attack in his fifties; my Mom had a massive stroke at sixty two and my brother passed away at thirty six of a massive heart attack. So it was very real to me.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah, I'll say so. And you were in China at the time and going psychotic in your home country's bad enough but I'd think that having it happen in a foreign country would be especially scary. Do you think living outside your home country contributed to it?

**Shannon Love:** No, actually I don't because all of the stressors that led to my first psychotic break really could have happened anywhere that I lived. They didn't have much to do with where I was living, they were just circumstances that could have happened anywhere. And also I suffered two more psychotic breaks while I was in the U.S. and they were equally as distressing – actually maybe I think I felt more distressed during those psychotic breaks than I did my first one.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah, so having had three breaks now, I'm wondering if that leaves you feeling kind of like you're walking on eggshells?

**Shannon Love:** Yes, it's my worst fear. I feel like every day that I can remain stable is a victory and I do worry about becoming psychotic again and for that reason I actually avoid certain things – like scary movies or violence. Anything that has to do with violence or hate, I try to just stay away from and I try to avoid because I just don't want those sorts of things affecting any delusions that I could possibly have of (unclear) sort of happen again.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah. A big part of the content of the delusions was kind of spiritual religious content – do you find that you also need to avoid certain kinds of religious/spiritual stimulation, or not?

**Shannon Love:** I am a little bit careful with that. I do still attend church regularly with my husband. This is something that's very important to my husband, is that we attend church weekly and I love him so I'm going to attend with him but I do avoid any place that's a little bit overly charismatic, or too intense. I have to avoid those

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sorts of those places.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah because part of the religious delusions that you suffered from in the past were feeling like you were Jesus, things along those lines, right?

**Shannon Love:** Yeah, yeah, definitely. At one point during my first break I thought I was more of a prophet but I ran into Jesus a few times during my first break but then in my second break I was convinced that I was some sort of manifestation of God possibly.

**Dr. Dave:** You know it's interesting that that is such a common theme you know, not just with you but with other people who've undergone psychoses. That's such a common experience that really one has to kind of reflect on that but that'll take us a little bit far afield – let's stick with your story. You had a very fascinating – I guess it's an auditory hallucination is how you described it – and I'm referring to Valentino.

**Shannon Love:** (Laughs) Yes, sweet Valentino. Valentino started out basically as just vivid thoughts in the back of my mind but he evolved into a character with a personality and a voice – I definitely heard his voice – and we developed this relationship, this intense intimate relationship, so much so that I don't think I've felt as close to anyone in my life as I did to Valentino. He knew me inside and out and he became my guide. He became my guide but he also became my lover. It was very much an erotic relationship as well and also it was a spiritual relationship because I thought that God intended for us to be together and that we were supposed to be together to change the world in some way and he did inform me – he was the one who informed me that the world was watching me and that everyone could read my mind and my every thought that crossed my mind and I was used for some sort of entertainment purposes and that my husband was part of the whole scheme and that he was kind of a bad guy. Valentino turned me against my husband, I actually felt like my husband was a monster and at one point I even asked him for a divorce.

**Dr. Dave:** Wow! Now this is another thing that happens in psychosis somewhat frequently is that the voice or voices may start off very benevolently and in the book I got the impression that in the beginning, Valentino was giving you very good advice and was being a wise counsellor in a way. But then as time went on, did he sort of begin to turn on you?

**Shannon Love:** No, Valentino never turned on me but he became more controlling over time. I remember changing the way I looked, I remember him telling me not to look any man in the eyes and not to show any affection towards anyone and to kind of keep myself covered and that sort of thing. So I definitely changed my demeanour because of him.

**Dr. Dave:** So he was becoming like a jealous lover?

**Shannon Love:** I think so. Yeah, I believe so.

**Dr. Dave:** Interesting. And Valentino, of course, sounds a lot like Valentine and your last name is "Love." Was there any connection for you either then or now that comes to mind?

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**Shannon Love:** Well, my secret is that Valentino was not actually his name. I actually gave him another name that I'm too embarrassed to tell anyone (laughs).

**Dr. Dave:** O.K. Now my imagination is racing but that's O.K. I'm not going to press you (both laugh).

**Shannon Love:** So because of that, I gave him a name for the sake of the book. I did name him but I gave him the name Valentino for poetic purposes of course, I used the word Valentino.

**Dr. Dave:** Right, right. Now you talked about him as an auditory hallucination – and I wonder, when you say it's auditory, would you mistake him for actually... let's say if you were hearing him and somebody else were in the room, would he have that kind of reality, or would it be a different sort of reality that you were experiencing? You know what I mean?

**Shannon Love:** Yeah, I see what you're saying. Ah, he was definitely in my head whereas when people spoke to me I could tell the difference between his voice and the voices that were coming from other people's mouths. So there was a difference between the two, yeah.

**Dr. Dave:** And what about with later auditory hallucinations, were there any instances where you would like turn around because you thought somebody behind you had spoken to you?

**Shannon Love:** No, I didn't but I honestly didn't bother doing that because I just felt like they could see me wherever I was standing, so why bother turning around, why bother even opening my mouth.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah, you said there was a period during which you went mute because you said you felt people could read your mind, so what was the point of speaking.

**Shannon Love:** Yeah, that's correct. I just assumed I could have communication with other people without speaking out aloud, so why waste my breath?

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah. And were there any visual or tactile hallucinations?

**Shannon Love:** I did have one visual hallucination when I was in the intensive care unit in the hospital in the United States, after my first break. And this visual hallucination... just prior to that I was lying in my bed and was suffering from severe cramps in my stomach and I assumed that those were labour pains and that I was in labour and I was giving birth to something. Once they subsided I stood up and walked over to the window of my room and when I looked out there was this big round circle in the sky and out of that a plethora of little bitty circles just escaped from it and sort of falling all over the sky and I assumed that I had just given birth to a bunch of baby stars. And during my second break I didn't really have visual hallucinations but I would have flashes of images – very disturbing images – so I'm not sure if those would be called flashbacks more than hallucinations.

**Dr. Dave:** Aha.

**Shannon Love:** Now I had a tactile hallucination, which was the most disturbing of all of my hallucinations and it was the feeling of having intercourse against my will. And I assumed that people were mentally raping to impregnate me and it was just a humiliating experience, I hate it and I couldn't even make myself go near people that I was close to or loved because I didn't want to have that hallucination when I was near anyone.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah, wow, that does sound disturbing. Anything else you want to say about other delusions that you were experiencing.

**Shannon Love:** Oh, I had *so* many delusions. There were layers after layer after layer but... I'm trying to think, so let me think of a couple of my delusions... one of my delusions was that, like I said during the second break, was that the world wanted me to be Jesus, that the church wanted me to be Jesus and that because I refused to be Jesus, the three big powers of our world – which would be religion, politics and big business – conspired to humiliate me. And what they did was that the voices in my head during my second break, just chided me and called me names and said very inappropriate things – offensive things – while I was out in public and made it in my mind sound like the world thought I was saying all these words and using this offensive language. It was very humiliating and I thought they had conspired to do that as a punishment because I didn't want to be Jesus.

**Dr. Dave:** Wow! Yeah! At what point did others begin to notice that you weren't the Shannon they knew and loved and then how did that finally end up getting you into the hospital.

**Shannon Love:** During my first break I was psychotic for quite a while before anyone actually noticed. I would say I was fully psychotic for about a month before anyone noticed. I was very, very good at hiding it for a while. But then I reached a point that I couldn't hide it any more and when I told my husband that I wanted a divorce, he kind of had an idea that something was different and wrong about me but he was so distraught about the divorce, that he was thinking more of ways that he could win me back, rather than "what's wrong with her?" But shortly after that my sister in law came to China to visit me and she was the wife of my brother that passed away seven years prior from the heart attack and I had some really crazy delusions about that but you'll have to read the book to find out but at that point my paranoia had reached to a point of terror and I had assumed that China wanted to kill me, that they wanted me dead and my husband wanted me dead. And Valentino told me that if I went to the hospital that the doctors would evacuate me to the U.S. and I would be safe. So I pretended to be very ill and to have this pain in my stomach so that I could go to the emergency room and when they could find nothing wrong with me, I broke down and started crying and said "But if you send me back they'll kill me" and the doctor then at that point realised that I was in psychiatric distress and called the psychologist in and they determined that I was psychotic and put me in a room that night and the next day they transferred me via ambulance to a psychiatric hospital in another part of the city.

**Dr. Dave:** And what was it like being in a psychiatric ward in China?

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**Shannon Love:** Oh, yeah that was fun. I mean in a way it was kind of fun because they treated me like a rock star. I was the only foreigner in there and so I definitely received special treatment. But the women were separated from the men so the women were in one building and the men were in another building and we only came together in the courtyard during kind of I guess what you could call free time or recess time – you would go outside and get some fresh air but a lot of women shared just one room with just many, many beds and I was in there at first but then they moved me to a room by myself because I was not doing very well in there and they thought I would be better off if I were in a room by myself. The people there were very, very warm and gentle with me and honestly I think that the folks in the psychiatric ward in the United States, in the intensive care units, could learn a little bit on how to treat their patients from these folks.

**Dr. Dave:** That was one of the most interesting things to me about the book was that your experience of the care there in China was actually very benevolent and you know the images that I get and that most of us in the U.S. get, come from the newspapers and they're slanted towards the worst things that are going on in China but somehow in the midst of that it seemed like the attitude of the mental health workers there in China, were very progressive and very humane.

**Shannon Love:** Yeah, they were very humane. Now I definitely received special treatment because I was the foreigner in there, so I would say that if I had been a citizen, then I might not have received quite that much attention. But that being said, it was a warmer environment, it really was.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah, you said that you actually preferred the Chinese psychiatric ward to the ones that you experienced in the U.S. What was the difference? What's going wrong in the U.S.? (Both laugh)

**Shannon Love:** Actually I did have a positive experience when I left the intensive care unit at the hospital in the U.S. and they moved me downstairs to the, I guess, less critical care for people that still needed to... I think they put the severe cases upstairs and they moved everyone else downstairs and so once they moved me downstairs, that experience was very pleasant. I didn't have any problems there but the intensive care unit, it was just... they just talk at you, they just treat you... they treated me, I felt like they treated me like I was a child that needed to be scolded most of the time. That's how I felt.

**Dr. Dave:** Ah, ha. And by contrast in China...

**Shannon Love:** They treated me like a child that needed to be held and cuddled.

**Dr. Dave:** Oh, that's a beautiful way of putting it, that's a beautiful way of putting it. And also in China, they – you know, judging from what you've written – they really worked to remove any sense of stigma that you had about your being in a psychotic state, or having been in a psychotic state. And they sort of totally normalised it, you know, saying "Well, you know your brain is an organ of your body. Sometimes things go wrong with different organs in your body, this is just another thing." Am I putting that right?

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**Shannon Love:** That's correct. That's exactly how we say it to my kids.

**Dr. Dave:** And I think there is a kind of stigma here even among some health professionals so that just really struck me.

**Shannon Love:** I have to confess my therapists in China were actually American.

**Dr. Dave:** Oh, were they?

**Shannon Love:** Yeah, they were American therapists. They purposely placed me with American therapists that were there because they thought culturally they would be able to identify with me and vice versa, a little bit better.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah but I do remember interaction with a Dr. Hoi, who seemed to have this very gentle approach.

**Shannon Love:** Yes, she was very sweet.

**Dr. Dave:** Did you experience word salad? Was your speech jumbled up as sometimes happens in psychosis?

**Shannon Love:** I don't necessarily think that I spoke specifically in the term of 'word salad' but I did have problems communicating because when someone spoke, the words would kind of toss out of their mouth and tumble into the air and twirl around a little bit and land in my ear with a completely meaning. Because of that, because I was sitting there trying to translate what they were saying – because every word had double meaning in my mind – and trying to translate that was very difficult and very painful and it actually made me leery of having any sort of conversation with anyone. I really did not enjoy speaking to other people at that point. And then another thing that was a little bit different with me, that I think maybe other folks have experienced as well, is that I thought and spoke in metaphor. One example would be one time with my therapist, Marcia – the one in the United States – I told her about this incident that I had with my statistics professor and how I turned in the project and I thought it was good and he basically gave me a bad grade for it and I wanted to discuss it with the professor and he wouldn't allow me to. He never allowed me to explain myself. I wasn't talking about that professor at all, I was talking about Valentino because during my second break, I still had these strong feelings toward Valentino but I realised at that point that that was an unhealthy relationship and I tried to keep him at an arms length because of that. But that being said I cared about him and I thought that I had really hurt Valentino's feelings and he was very upset that I was not speaking to him and that he had not given me an opportunity to explain and that's what I was really saying when I told her about the professor.

**Dr. Dave:** Ah, huh. Now you mentioned that you were taking statistics and I think you were doing a correspondence program hoping to become a school counsellor. Do I have that right?

**Shannon Love:** That is correct.

**Dr. Dave:** And did that come to pass?

**Shannon Love:** No, it didn't. It didn't come to pass. I haven't been (unclear) return to school and I also... I'm going to be honest with you. I worry, I guess I'm concerned that how people react with me working with children at this point because I do have a serious mental illness that leads to psychosis and some people – with this stigma attached – some people worry about that.

**Dr. Dave:** Hm, hmm. Yeah, yeah I can understand why that might be problematic and be a concern and in part was it the positive experiences that you were having with your therapist that kind of gave you the ambition to maybe become some kind of a counsellor or therapist yourself?

**Shannon Love:** Yeah, yeah. My therapist told me that maybe that would actually help me. That I could be more empathetic toward children who suffer from mental illness and kind of be a little bit more understanding of what they were going through.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah, sure, that can make sense too. One of your psychologist's you referred to as the role master. What were you getting at there?

**Shannon Love:** Oh, yes, that was Marcia. Marcia was my psychologist in the U.S. and shortly after I began seeing her, I suffered from my second psychotic break. And during that psychotic break, I had this experience with her that was, I don't know, it was a mixture between transference and a hallucination. You might actually know better than I do but what happened was that every time I saw her, she would take on the personality of another person, someone that I knew, or group of people that I knew, to a point that I thought it was the soul of that person and even her facial expressions and the way she spoke sounded and looked like that person. Her face didn't morph into the other person's face but her expressions did and the way she spoke did. So each time I saw her, she played a different role, a different person and it actually helped me a lot because it helped me to approach these people about the issues and discuss the issues that I had with them, without actually having to face them. Of course I spoke in metaphor most of the time and most of the issues I had were based upon my delusions.

**Dr. Dave:** O.K. You know earlier you mentioned that you have a sense of walking on eggshells, not knowing if or when you might have another episode, so I'm struck by your courage in writing this book, which is very self-revealing. What gives you, or gave you the courage to take on a project like writing this book?

**Shannon Love:** Honestly, I felt compelled to write it. I started to write the book just before my second break so I was planning on writing it after my first break because I thought that was it, that I wasn't going to have any more and then during my second break I couldn't write about it. Because I was psychotic at the time, I couldn't actually write anything that would make any sense. So I just kept a journal and I used that journal to help me with my book, so I could look back on my experiences and I even include some of my journal entries in the book. And the book also gave me something – a goal – something to look toward to try to pull out of that psychotic break because that one was a struggle because I did it without medication.



**Dr. Dave:** Talk about medication with all three experiences – what the role of medication was, what your experience of it was.

**Shannon Love:** O.K. My first break I was put on an anti-psychotic and it was really the only way I could have been pulled out of that break, I was just so far gone the first time.

**Dr. Dave:** And which drug was that?

**Shannon Love:** Latuda – I used Latuda.

**Dr. Dave:** O.K.

**Shannon Love:** Unfortunately, as I returned to my baseline, I began to suffer from depression and the anti-psychotic was causing me to be extremely depressed, to the point of having not suicidal thought but having thoughts like “Hm, I sure wish I were dead.” Or, “How long do I have to keep living? Crap!” You know, that sort of thing. I wanted to be dead but I wasn’t planning on doing anything about it. It was a terrible feeling, that’s why I actually tried to get off the medication, that’s why I stopped taking it.

**Dr. Dave:** So you stopped taking it but then after you went off, I believe you felt that being off of it led to the second break.

**Shannon Love:** Yeah, I think that...

**Dr. Dave:** Don’t let me put words in your mouth if it’s not right.

**Shannon Love:** No, I think that if I had been on an anti-psychotic at the time I probably would not have suffered from my second break. That being said, if I had remained on that anti-psychotic at that point and there had been no change in my medication, I probably would have become suicidal. So it was kind of a double-edged sword.

**Dr. Dave:** Hm, hmm. Wow! Are you on an anti-psychotic now, may I ask?

**Shannon Love:** Yes, I am. I have a wonderful psychiatrist who I can be quite open with and she and I kind of figured out a concoction that works for me. What I do is I take an anti-psychotic, I take Abilify now, which is a little bit more benign than some of the other anti-psychotics and then I also take anti-depressants and the anti-depressants counteract the side effect of the anti-psychotic and I’m able to be happy and sane at the same time.

**Dr. Dave:** Well, good (both laugh). Now you haven’t talked about your kids and you have three of them. How old were they during your breaks and how did they respond to you in that state?

**Shannon Love:** O.K. My kids were ten, thirteen and fifteen at the time and it was a nightmare for them. It was horrible for them because this person who looked like their mom was not their mom – she was acting in this bizarre fashion and she was treating

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their father very cruelly, somebody else that they loved very much but they didn't know how to really react to me. It was very, very frightening to them.

**Dr. Dave:** Hm, I can imagine. Have you been able to heal as a family unit and what's helped that to happen, if so?

**Shannon Love:** After my first psychotic break we took a trip to Hawaii, which was very healing. Just being out in the fresh air and near the ocean and near nature in this tranquil place and being by ourselves for a little while was very, very healing. I didn't put that in the book because this is such a confusing story that I thought that it would be a little bit too much.

**Dr. Dave:** Sure.

**Shannon Love:** We weren't able to do that after the second and third break. But also we talked about it with the kids. We were very, very open about my disease and what what I have and what the symptoms are and we treat it as any other illness so that the kids know that when Mom is acting a certain way, that she's symptomatic at that time with the disease. And we joke around about certain things; we get a good laugh out of some of the memories because I did some silly, silly things (both laugh).

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah, yeah.

**Shannon Love:** And so it's nice to be able to laugh about it but probably what has helped the most is time – is the fact that I've been able to remain stable for over a year now and that just kind of makes them feel more and more secure. The longer I'm able to remain stable. the more secure the rest of the family feels.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah, I certainly understand that. Did you develop any strategies of your own that kind of helped you to come out of these states?

**Shannon Love:** Oh, yeah, I did and during my second break... probably the two things that helped me most coming out of my second break were writing and research. Like I said I kept a journal and one of my delusions was that I had the power to make anything happen simply by writing it down and so if I had a delusion that I did not like, I would counteract it by writing something in my journal that would just basically say the opposite of that. And I usually wrote in metaphor so I would have to explain what each of those meant but it was my way of saying "This is not going to happen." I guess an example would be because I thought that the world wanted me to be Jesus I wrote one story about visiting this little town and they invited me to go to their festival and the mayor brought me up to the front and offered me a job if I was willing to stay and I politely declined. And this was really not what I wanted to do, this was not the position for me and that was my way of politely saying, "I don't want to be Jesus." (Both laugh)

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah.

**Shannon Love:** Also another thing that helped me was research. I remained lucid enough during my second break to know that I was having trouble discerning reality from fantasy and I needed to figure out a way to discern between the two. So what I

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did was, first I bought a Webster dictionary and I brought it back home and I started writing down the definitions of words that bothered me, that I thought had double meaning and I decided that whatever the dictionary said, that that's what that word meant and it helped me stop translating these words into nonsense and irrational thoughts and be able to look at them for what they really meant. And another thing that I did was I started researching scientific theories to see if were actually possible for the world to read my mind (both laugh), or for me to be able to stop it and I think what these two things did was they kind of steered my mind into a more direct direction, I guess, a more straightforward direction and make me look at the world in a more literal fashion which kind of got away from the delusional thoughts that I was having and I think it did definitely help.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah, so overall how has your battle with psychosis affected you and has anything good come from it?

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah. Definitely a few good things have happened. Probably the biggest difference in my personality is that I'm not as extraverted as I was before. Before my psychotic break I was the life of the party and now I prefer to be in smaller, more intimate groups now than before but as far as positive results, I would say the family dynamics. The dynamics of my family has changed completely. First of all there's the relationship with my husband – I always loved my husband very much before I was psychotic but during this experience my husband taught me what unconscious love is. He taught me how to love somebody no matter how horribly they treat you and how bizarre they act and because of that, he's become my world and I just think he's the sexiest man on earth. And also before my first psychotic break, we had very traditional roles. My husband was the breadwinner and I took care of the house and the family and the kids and my husband was not as involved with the kids at that point but when I had my psychotic breaks he had to be involved because I was not capable of it. He had to be the mother, the father – everything. He had to play all the roles and the children became quite close during that period and since then it's just remained that way. He comes earlier now, we spend a lot more time together as a family. He is as involved in my children's lives as I am and it's wonderful. And then there's my book – that's a very positive experience for me. I wrote a book about something that I think can help people and I showed vulnerability that I would not normally do, would not normally show and so I'm kind of proud of myself for that.

**Dr. Dave:** And well you should be. What do you think professionals in the mental health community might gain from reading your book?

**Shannon Love:** I think that the main thing that professionals can get from reading my book is that they can actually experience what psychosis is. The purpose of my book is to almost put the person in – even though this actually happened – into kind of a simulation of what psychosis is. It's for them to *feel* the feelings that I had and understand the thoughts that were going on in my head and just truly experiencing it. And once you've experienced something, you're definitely better able to identify with someone else who is experiencing it as well.

**Dr. Dave:** Right. So what one thing would you like our listeners to understand about psychosis – from the client's perspective?

**Shannon Love:** O.K. Well when someone becomes psychotic, it doesn't seem to them that they've gone crazy, it seems to them that they have been placed in some bizarre world and everyone else has gone crazy and you might think that that person is thinking irrationally and there's no sense to what they're doing and saying but actually they're reacting to their delusions and hallucinations in the most reasonable way that they can but the delusions and the hallucinations in themselves are what are irrational.

**Dr. Dave:** Wow! Fascinating, fascinating! Well as we wind down, is there anything else you'd like to add?

**Shannon Love:** Well, I thank you so much for having me on your show and I'm happy for anyone who has any questions to email me. Can I put that on the site?

**Dr. Dave:** You certainly can.

**Shannon Love:** O.K. They are allowed to email me at [slove60@live.com](mailto:slove60@live.com) or they can go to my website <http://www.loveskaleidoscope.com/> and I'm happy to answer any questions that they have about my experience.

**Dr. Dave:** Well, I really appreciate your being as courageous as you have been and letting us into your inner world in such an open way, so I want to thank you for being my guest today on Shrink Rap Radio.

**Shannon Love:** Thank you Dr. Dave for having me.

## WRAP UP

I'm struck by the courage that Shannon has shown both in writing her book and in being willing to do this interview – to expose herself even more after only a year since her last break. My hope is that this experience will be part of her healing. She's very brave to face down the stigma associated with psychosis. Another point that stands out to me is the value of anti-psychotic drugs for at least some patients. In past shows we've had guests here who've spoken about the down sides of medication. I think this interview underscores that there are some people who benefit significantly from their use. Also I've not been a big fan of CBT, or cognitive behaviour therapy but in the book it's clear that the therapist who worked with her most after her first break was using that approach and that it was very effective for her.

To me one of the most interesting parts of her account is her 'love affair' with the hallucinated voice she called Valentino. I believe this voice was an unconsciously split off part of her, so during that psychotic episode she was in love with herself to the extent of asking her husband for a divorce. For me this really underscores the Jungian notion that so much of love is projection –that to a large extent it's the disowned parts of ourselves that we're seeking and that we find magnified in the other in romantic love. It also seems to me that this psychotic break is one of those that might be thought of as a spiritual emergency. There were a number of issues in her life that she'd been trying to ignore that finally demanded attention and as a result of this experience and the support of family and friends and therapy and her own internal resources I have the impression that she's in a more solid space than before these

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*An Insider's Experience of Psychosis* with Sharon Love

psychotic episodes intruded in her life.

She spoke about how much metaphor seemed to invade her thoughts and speech during these episodes. In fact I find the prose in her book seems to share something of that same quality. There's a sort of poetic, creative style in her writing. I'm not sure that fully comes through in the introduction to the book but I'll read it anyway, just to give you a sense of her writing.

*Although I'm no expert in psychology I am a master of my own story: a journey from sanity to lunacy and back again. If you are up for this expedition I will paint you into the consciousness of the psychotic – transiting you through my experiences, an existence foreign to the mentally sound. My thoughts will divulge the rationale behind such outlandish behaviour. My eyes will unmask taboo symptoms that torment the afflicted. And my heart will bear witness to the distress psychosis renders.*

*Possibly, in the end, you may even be able to relate. Empowered with knowledge, a sense of empathy might allow you to connect with the mentally deranged. Instead of an unhinged lunatic you may glimpse the punctured soul – a mere human being like you, who has been taken from her safe place and positioned in another world, filled with delusions and hallucinations.*

*Why should you care? Because approximately one in a hundred people suffer from psychosis. If your social circle extends to that number then, most likely, someone you know and care about lives with this disorder. And although the stigma attached to those plagued by this syndrome prevents many from sharing, they wish they could. So in their honour I will.*

*I now offer my gift to you – a peek through my kaleidoscope.*