

Shrink Rap Radio #5, September 3, 2005. Podcasting, Psychology, and My Serial Killer Book

Chris Ritke of 49media.com interviews Dr. David Van Nuys, aka “Dr. Dave”
(transcribed from www.ShrinkRapRadio.com by Dale Hoff)

Introduction: Hi everybody and welcome to Shrink Rap Radio. This is David Van Nuys, otherwise known as Dr. Dave, coming to you from Sonoma County, California. Now usually, I interview fascinating people from around the world of Psychology in the belief that everyone is interested in what makes us tick. However, today, the tables are turned and I was interviewed by Chris Ritke. I met Chris at the San Francisco podcaster’s meetup and I was flattered when he sent me an email letting me know that he’d like to interview me for his podcast, which can be found at www.49media.com. In the interview that you’re about to hear, Chris does a very good job of drawing me out and you’ll find out quite a bit about my background and some of the projects that I’ve been involved in. However, we did this interview in a coffee house and it was rather noisy in there, so there’s a fair amount of background noise that you’ll hear in the interview. Nevertheless, you will be able to make it out. So, here we go.

Ritke: Hi, I’m Chris Ritke and I’m here with David Van Nuys who is a Psychologist from Rohnert Park and you’re also a Professor in Sonoma?

Dr. Dave: Right. Rohnert Park, California.

Ritke: Rohnert Park, California.

Dr. Dave: Sonoma State University.

Ritke: Oh, okay. Good. And, we’re here in San Raphael at a coffee shop so there’s a little bit of background noise but I guess that’ll be okay. So, hi.

Dr. Dave: Hi.

Ritke: Now, you’re on the web with a podcast at what is that, again?

Dr. Dave: ShrinkRapRadio.

Ritke: Okay, Shrink—

Dr. Dave: ShrinkRapRadio.com

Ritke: Dot com, okay, so. And you're focusing on Psychology in your podcast?

Dr. Dave: That's right, because I have a long history of being a Psychologist and it seems to me that everybody is interested in Psychology at some level. I mean, we're all interested in what makes people tick and what makes ourselves tick, and because I've been in the field for a long time and because I'm in California, I'm well networked to a lot of very interesting Psychologists. So, the premise of the show is to do interviews that are about twenty, twenty-five minutes long on various topics. And I'm going to be talking to people about dreams, about psychoanalysis, about Gestalt Therapy, about Consumer Psychology, about Psychology and Thoreau, Psychology and politics. All sorts of stuff, so I think it should be fun.

Ritke: Wow. And, you already have three shows up. What are those about?

Dr. Dave: Actually, I've got four shows up.

Ritke: Oh, four. Okay.

Dr. Dave: I got another one up since you were there. On one I'm interviewing a local Psychologist about intuition. He does workshops in the area on developing one's intuition. He had a lot of interesting stuff to say about that. I did another one. What did I do him on? I'm blocking. Oh, I did one with a Psychologist who was visiting from Virginia. And, I don't know if you've ever heard of Joseph Campbell and the Hero's Journey.

Ritke: No.

Dr. Dave: Important book and television series based on the book. And this guy has done important work relating the dreams that we have to the hero's journey. I do a whole session on hero's journey so we'll have to skip all of that one. I did one—I thought, you know, I tend to put myself in the background and I've sort of set up this show so the focus would be on other people and then I thought, you know, I shouldn't do that. I should get myself out front a little bit too. So I got together with a friend on a Skype call who I went to school with, like, a long time ago and we were freshmen at the University of Pennsylvania and this guy picked a

fight with us. So I tell the story. I never thought that I would have to worry about somebody picking a fight with me when I went away to an Ivy League university.

Ritke: Right.

Dr. Dave: So and then I developed some psychological themes around that incident. And then, in another one, I interviewed him. He dropped out of Psychology right at the pinnacle of just finishing up his dissertation, his doctoral dissertation.

Ritke: Wow.

Dr. Dave: And then he decided, “Nope, I don’t want to do this.”

Ritke: Wow.

Dr. Dave: But he had some interesting things to say about what he called the death of Psychology. So that’s what we’ve done so far.

Ritke: And how did you originally get involved in Psychology or interested in that?

Dr. Dave: Well when I was a freshman— originally I started out as an Electrical Engineer.

Ritke: Oh, okay.

Dr. Dave: That’s what I was accepted into school as. I was quickly intimidated by Calculus and I fled that major and I thought, well maybe Psychology. So I took a Psych— Introduction to Psychology and it was one of these large theater type rooms with tiers going down and the Professor was way down in the center and about 300 of us up in the rows. And he started the class off saying, “Welcome to Introduction to Psychology: The Science of the Study of Behavior of Animals and Humans. And if any of you are here because you’re interested in your friends’ strange quirks or you want to understand yourself, you’re in the wrong place.

Ritke: Wow.

Dr. Dave: So, my heart sunk as did, I think, many other people. And he proceeded to prove what he said to be the case by— we learned all about pigeons and rats and

so on in that course so I crossed Psychology off as a possible major at that point. But then time went on and, I think it was the summer between my junior and senior year, I'd gone back home to Los Angeles for the summer and I got together with an old high school buddy over a beer. And so, you know, what are you doing, what are doing, what are you going to be when you grow up? And he said, well, he says, I'm going to be a Psychologist— no, no, he said, I'm going to be a Clinical Psychologist. I said, a Clinical Psychologist, what's that? — because my only exposure was this other course. He said, well it's like a Psychiatrist only you don't have to go to medical school. And I thought, hey that sounds easy, you know, I think I could do that. I said, tell me more. He says, well, he says, I'm a Rogerian. I said, what's a Rogerian? I've never heard of that. He said well it's named after this Psychologist, Carl Rogers, and his technique is whatever the person says, you just kind of feed the same thing back to them. And I thought, well, jeez, that sounds pretty easy. I think I could do that. So, believe it or not, it was that thought that then when I went back to school caused me to take a course in Abnormal Psychology. And, oh boy, this, now this was juicy. This was what I was looking for. This was all about people. So, I decided I wanted to be a Clinical Psychologist and that set me off on an incredible journey. First going to the University of Montana to get a Master's Degree and how did I get to the University of Montana? Well, with indifferent grades and not an undergraduate major in Psychology, I figured I better find some small Master's program to get into so I went to the library. I was looking through catalogues of different universities and I found one that showed a picture of two guys throwing an anesthetized grizzly bear into the back of a pickup truck and I said, "This place will let me in." Well they let me in provisionally and, after two years there, it was on to the University of Michigan where I spent another six years. So in all, I spent eight years in graduate school and, you know what, I thought I was following the easy path. I could have gone to medical school in that time. So, long answer.

Ritke: Uh huh and how did you end up in Sonoma?

Dr. Dave: I was particularly attracted to Sonoma State University because they were, at the time that I came, they were one of two schools in the whole country that had an allegiance to Humanistic Psychology. That had the right ring, again, because my interest was in people, not animals, it's in personal— and I'd been very involved in what was called at the time the Human Potential Movement. And

so this sounded like the place for me to be. I had not planned to be an academic, actually. I had not planned to be a professor. I had planned to be a therapist. But at the time that I got my degree, the way that I was taught at the University of Michigan was you didn't just run out and hang out a shingle; you had to have some grey hairs and experience and so on. Things have changed these days. People take a workshop and then they're a therapist.

Ritke: Right, right, okay. And now, podcasting— How did you decide that you— or how did you find out about podcasting? How did you decide you wanted to do a podcast?

Dr. Dave: You know, I can't even remember how I first got exposed to it. It must have been— it might have been the *Wired Magazine* article. I probably— it was either there or in a newspaper. As soon as I saw the word podcast it was like this light went off in my head. I was already a devotee of my iPod and so it just like right away it's a— podcasting. Now, how can you— how are you going to transmit to a podcast? So I was a ham radio operator, amateur radio operator so it kind of clicked with that too. And so right away I, you know, went out and went to Google, I think, and typed in podcast and got a bunch of information and then I can't tell which show I listen to first, but it was probably either Adam Curry's *Daily Source Code* or Dawn and Drew.

Ritke: That's everybody. Yeah. Right. Exactly.

Dr. Dave: That's everybody else. And then I was hooked. And I thought, well what could I do a podcast about? Well, I've been a Psychologist all these years so I thought I'd try to parlay that.

Ritke: Hmm Hmm. And, now you're on your fourth show?

Dr. Dave: Yep.

Ritke: And, you're enjoying it?

Dr. Dave: Yeah, I am enjoying it.

Ritke: Uh huh.

Dr. Dave: I found it to be more of a technical challenge than I expected.

Ritke: Mm hmm.

Dr. Dave: As I say, I was originally going to be an engineer and an amateur radio operator. I understand electronics but I really didn't understand sound. Line in, line out, decibels, bit rates, sampling rates – all of that stuff was new to me, as well as creating a feed and some of the— and all of these articles talk about how easy it is.

Ritke: Right.

Dr. Dave: Maybe it's easy for some people. I needed some help.

Ritke: Right.

Dr. Dave: And I got some help from a podcaster whom I've never met face to face but I have to give props.

Ritke: Oh, of course. That's what it's all about.

Dr. Dave: Props to Rob Walsh of podcast411. Through email and Skype calls he's kind of brought me along and I am enjoying it.

Ritke: Good. And, what is it that you're trying to achieve with it, I mean—?

Dr. Dave: I want an audience.

Ritke: Uh huh. Uh huh.

Dr. Dave: I want to get people excited and interested and just be a— provide a source of what I hope will be interesting content. The way that I listen to podcasts are, to me, they're a wonderful alternative to radio. As we all agree, radio sucks. And the time that I listen to podcasts are when I'm in my car, without exception. When I'm not in my car, I'm busy. I'm busy doing other stuff and I can't be listening to chatter. When I listen to the radio, I like to listen to talk radio. So what the world of podcasting has opened up is a limitless horizon of talk shows that I can listen to. I don't tune in to many of the music shows although every now and then I get a hankering for something like the Roadhouse where they play a lot of blues and a couple other shows. So, for me, it's about listening to talk radio, talk internet radio in my car.

Ritke: Hm hmm. Okay. Yeah, well, so do I. And what about the people that you wish to be listening to your podcast? Do you think more, are you aiming towards more people that don't have anything to do with psychology or more people that are in the field or both?

Dr. Dave: Both. I would love it if it speaks to people who are not in the field. I think one of my prime targets probably should be Psychology majors, undergraduate Psychology majors although they may be so steeped in their courses and the reading that they have to do that they may not want any more input so I think maybe it's really more of that general listener that I would like to excite. People who would maybe like to go to workshops that they see advertised but they're expensive. This gives them a smattering of a lot of different psychological perspectives and it costs nothing to listen.

Ritke: Hm hmm. Right, right and how do you see this new medium, podcasting, and compare it to the traditional media and do you think that the traditional media is scared of what maybe you're doing or do you think they're going to embrace it or how do you see those two relating to one another.

Dr. Dave: Oh, I would love it if they were scared of me.

Ritke: Yeah.

Dr. Dave: Yeah. One of the taglines that I have is "All the Psychology you need to know and just enough to make you a little bit dangerous."

Ritke: Okay.

Dr. Dave: Tell me the question again. I just lost it.

Ritke: How traditional media and podcasting and whether they're scared of it and how you see those two coexisting or one winning out over the other or where do you see all of that going?

Dr. Dave: Well, clearly they are scared of it. They are starting to bring out their own podcasts. Major radio stations, magazines and newspapers are all creating podcasts. And there's the danger that maybe the little indies will get shoved out of the way. We'll be harder to find and so on. I'm not too worried about that because I think we all seek diversity and those people who come from a corporate

perspective are going to— there's certain guideline they're going to have to follow so they're going to be constrained. Now, of course, one of the things that podcasting allows is for people to talk in more natural ways, to swear, and so on. I think my show is going to be a clean one for the most part just because it doesn't feel appropriate to me somehow to represent Psychology in that rawer sort of way. So hopefully that's not going to be the only appeal of podcasting is just to hear people talk dirty because you don't have to go far to hear people talk dirty.

Ritke: And what about money? Do you plan on or wish to make money directly off of your podcast or is money an issue at all or what are your thoughts on that?

Dr. Dave: Money was certainly not my motivation in getting into this. One of the things I didn't realize when I got into it was that if I were successful and the show caught on, it would begin to cost money for the bandwidth and, what do you call it, the throughput.

Ritke: Hm hmm. Right, right.

Dr. Dave: So, that could be problematic. You know, I've already invested, you know, five or six hundred dollars in equipment and maybe five dollars a month for hosting at this point. And happily, you know, because it's a great hobby at this point and, geez, that's not a whole lot of money to spend on hobbies. I've spent more than that on some other hobbies. But at the same time, if a money-making opportunity came along, you know, I would look at that. In the back of my mind, I'm sort of wondering well, you know, maybe not with this podcast, maybe there's some other kind of podcast. I got an idea this morning, actually, along those lines, sort of a more local idea. There used to be radio shows where you could call in for things that buying and selling, sort of like classified ads. There's no show like that on the radio in my area and to run an ad in the newspaper is pretty expensive. So it occurred to me, geez, this would be a great community service being mediated through a podcast. If there was a number where people could call in and say, you know, I've got a 21-speed mountain bike that I'd let go of for a hundred bucks and somebody else says I'm looking for a cheap engagement ring.

Ritke: Right. Huh, well, who knows? And but one thing I've been hearing a lot from people with blogs and with podcasts is that they don't necessarily expect to make money directly off the podcast or off their blog but they've been seeing that

they've been getting gigs in whatever they're doing, artists and all kinds of people. They've been getting big gigs because people have been finding them and finding out about them through their podcasts or blogs. So, do you think that would be a way for you somehow get things that you could do through your podcast?

Dr. Dave: Well, maybe. I need a product. I've often thought I need a product because I'm a Market Research Consultant in addition to being a mostly retired professor although I am teaching a class this semester. But when you're a consultant, you can only make as much money as there are hours multiplied by what you charge per hour so there is a limit. Whereas, if you have a product, you can sell hundreds or thousands or millions of your product so I haven't come up with a product yet, although I am doing a workshop in Switzerland. This probably won't get out in time to benefit me but, I've forgotten the dates but September 19th I think is when that workshop starts in Switzerland, a week-long workshop, sort of a personal growth type workshop. And, I suppose, if I had a following that might help to get people to workshops like that.

Ritke: And how did it end up being in Switzerland or why is it in Switzerland?

Dr. Dave: That's a good question. I'm doing it with, I'm co-leading this workshop, with a former student who was a student of mine over twenty years ago and he's become a very successful therapist to the stars and spiritual guru and he has quite a following and he does workshops all over the country and throughout Europe.

Ritke: What's his name?

Dr. Dave: His name is Ron Alexander, Dr. Ronald Alexander. Thank you for prompting me. I'm sure he would appreciate the plug. And he's very successful at it, very wonderful at it and I just had this intuitive hunch that I should—I would get his flyers, and I contacted him and said, hey Ron, how about I co-lead with you? He was going to do one in Mallorca and he had one coming up in Kauai and I had an intuitive sense that if I proposed going to Mallorca, he would say no but that if I proposed going to Kauai, he would say yes. It turns out there are people asking to co-lead with him all the time and he turns them down because it gets too competitive and so on. But he had an intuitive feeling when he got my email proposing that we work together in Kauai, he had an intuitive feeling of saying yes. So, I went to Kauai and co-led a week-long workshop with him and we really

clicked and he said, hey, why don't you come to Mallorca I didn't even have to ask.

Ritke: Wow, wow.

Dr. Dave: And so this will be our fourth year working together. And he did it two years in Mallorca and he wanted a new venue and so he chose Switzerland. But I think next year—I don't know if Switzerland is the best venue. I'm thinking Italy and he's thinking Italy now next year himself. Start saving your pennies everybody.

Ritke: And so are those people that, when you go to Europe, are those Europeans that go to those workshops or are they Americans or—

Dr. Dave: It's been a mix. The two years that we did it in Mallorca was a mix of Brits and U.S.

Ritke: Hm hmm, okay. So it's all in English.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, yeah and it's about, you know, ten, twelve people. So it's a small, intensive workshop with plenty of time to go shopping in the local village or go hiking and then cry your eyes out in the therapy group.

Ritke: What is the focus of the workshops, I mean, what do you do there?

Dr. Dave: It's a mix of Gestalt Therapy work—

Ritke: I don't know what that is.

Dr. Dave: Oh, well, that would be another long lecture. Gestalt Therapy was an approach pioneered by a fellow by the name of Fritz Perls. Many people would recognize the name. He was an Austrian guy who led workshops at Esalen Institute in California in the '70s. He passed away. He had a big influence on psychology. He had a sort of school of working which was based on psychoanalysis but brought in much more of a— he had wanted to be an actor— so it brought it in a much more dramatic approach to therapy where instead of giving the patient, sort of analyzing, giving them interpretations, the patient is invited to— and we don't even call them patients— the client is invited to dialogue with parts of themselves. He would have them move back and forth between two chairs, say. Somebody

starts talking about their anger at their mother, for example. Instead of having it be abstract and in their head he'd say, okay, imagine that your mother is in this chair opposite you. What do you want to say to her right now? And then he'd move you into the other chair, now what does your mother say? And because, you know, really it's not the real mother that the difficulties lie with. Often the real mother has been dead for ten or twenty years but it's the mother that's internalized that one needs to come to grips with.

Ritke: You know, it's funny because yesterday I was listening to the radio and they were talking to people who had lost their husbands and things in the 9/11 tragedy and they were also saying that people are getting over it by, like a husband that they lost, imagine that you're talking as they would be speaking and then what would they be saying to you well they're in a better place well then they would say just get on with your life and things like that. Does that all have to do with that or—?

Dr. Dave: Yeah, I think it's probably an outgrowth. It's probably one variant, one outgrowth. We also do another thing that's very interesting that we do is a dual hypnotic induction—

Ritke: Wow.

Dr. Dave: Where we're each talking into— the person is in the middle that we're working with, one person in the group will volunteer who wants to do this. Somebody will say, well, I've got an issue I'm working on. They tell us a little bit about the issue. Then they come and they sit between the two of us and we're each doing a hypnotic induction, one in the left ear and one in the right ear. Now, theoretically, one ear is kind of more hooked into the unconscious and the other ear is more hooked into the conscious. And so hopefully they get so distracted by the— it's more content than they can consciously juggle. So the suggestions kind of get through the defenses. And for Ron and I, it's like word jazz. We're improvising. We're playing off of each other and we're jamming. It's fun for us and it's profound for the people who are doing it. And then Ron leads meditation, teaches meditation. He's a long-time meditator, studied with many teachers around the world. I do things like get involved with Thoreau in a very psychological way and use that for some psychological entry of those issues. I probably will be

leading some Thai Chi since I'm a Tai Chi student. I'm not really a Tai Chi teacher but I am a Tai Chi student and I can share that with people.

Ritke: Wow. That is absolutely fascinating. That is really something. And so one last thing I want to ask you about is your book and that— you do have a product. You have your book, at least, or a book that you co-authored. So what is that about that says, *This is the Zodiac speaking*.

Dr. Dave: Right. *This is the Zodiac Speaking* and the subtitle is *into the mind of a serial killer* and the Zodiac case was a famous unsolved serial murder case that happened in the San Francisco Bay area, in San Francisco, Napa and Sonoma Counties in the early '70s and, as I say, it was unsolved. In a way, it was the prototypic terrorist. It was before we had these terrorists and this guy was manipulating the media in the way that terrorists do today by sending letters to the police department and to editors of the *San Francisco Chronicle*, the *Vallejo Times* and so on, describing his crimes, threatening to commit other murders, sending in pieces of evidence and this stuff was getting published in the paper. He threatened to blow up a school bus, for example. He threatened to pick off the little kiddies as they came off the school bus, so people who grew up in the bay area as children remember this today as adults. I've met people who say, oh yeah, my mother wouldn't let me go outside because of the zodiac. So I was approached out of the blue. At the time, I was chairman of the Psychology Department at Sonoma State and when you're chair of a Psychology Department, you sometimes get some strange phone calls and some strange emails. And this was one of the rather stranger ones that I got was an email from someone I didn't know who said, I wonder if you'd be willing to look at some letters of a serial killer and tell me what you think and I said well— I sent back an email saying, well I don't have any particular experience with that but send me a letter or two and I'll noodle around with it and see what you think. And then I thought, well what if this is the serial killer and he just kind of wants a read.

Ritke: Right.

Dr. Dave: Well, later I found out that this guy was an author, a local author who published, successfully published several true crime books. In fact, his most recent book had just been the subject of a four-page review in the *New Yorker*.

Ritke: Hmm. Wow.

Dr. Dave: Hey. If you're in the *New Yorker*, you've made it. So, I felt good about working with him. And we worked— My job on the book then— he got very excited about my noodling with these letters and so we collaborated. He would send me a letter and I would noodle and get it back and he said, hey, you know, my book was practically written but I'd like to reorganize it around your analyses. So that's what he did. And we worked very quickly. We had it done within about three or four months.

Ritke: And what's his name?

Dr. Dave: His name is Michael D. Kelleher.

Ritke: Uh huh.

Dr. Dave: And people can find this book on zodiac— on Amazon.

Ritke: Oh, they can? Okay.

Dr. Dave: On Amazon. I was amazed. You know, I was not into this but there are message boards— one is run out of Amsterdam. They get thousands of hits a day about the Zodiac case still. I was amazed. There is a whole worldwide subculture of interest in this case just like with Jack the Ripper. This is a case that's on a par with that, I would say.

Ritke: Mm hmm. And so to find it on Amazon they just type in “this is the zodiac speaking” or something then they'll find it or—

Dr. Dave: Yes or they could type in zodiac and they would find it or type in my name, David Van Nuys. That's V, A, N, space, N, U, Y, S.

Ritke: Well, great. Well, David, thank you very, very much. That was absolutely fascinating. I enjoyed this very much.

Dr. Dave: Well, that's it. I sure hope you enjoyed this podcast. I know that I did. Today was a red letter day for Shrink Rap Radio because we finally got our artwork up and appearing in the iTunes music store so be sure to check that out. Please email your comments to Shrink@ShrinkRapRadio.com and tell all your friends to visit us. We'd love to get audio comments as well which you can send to

that same email address. I've got lots of great guests lined up for the future and you can leave audio comments on Gizmo Project for the name ShrinkPod. Finally, if there are any podcasters listening, let's talk about swapping promos. So until next time, this is Dr. Dave reminding you, it's all in your mind.