

**#278 – The Use of Active Imagination in Jungian Sandplay with
Maria Hess, PhD**

David Van Nuys, Ph.D., aka “Dr. Dave” interviews Maria Hess PhD,
(transcribed from www.ShrinkRapRadio.com by Emily Humphreys)

Introduction: Maria Hess, Ph.D has been a practicing depth oriented psychotherapist and therapist educator in Sonoma County, California for over 25 years. She was the founding clinical director and supervisor for the Lomi Community Clinic and for Humanidad Counseling Services. An Associate Professor of Psychology at Sonoma State University Maria teaches clinical courses to prepare undergrads for advanced training as professional helpers such as Psychologists, Marriage and Family Therapists and Clinical Social Workers. Her own clinical training is grounded in psychodynamic, somatic, humanistic and transpersonal modalities.

In 2006 Maria was inspired by a workshop that included Martin Kalff PhD, the son of the founder of Sandplay Therapy. Over the last 5 years she has studied and implemented Sandplay in her undergraduate courses, in training in clinic settings, and in her own psychotherapy practice. This June and July she traveled to Zurich to study with Martin Kalff more intensively. She has returned from her travels once again inspired about Sandplay as well as other non-verbal expressive modalities.

This is Maria’s third appearance on Shrink Rap Radio. She has previously appeared on Episodes #20 – Teaching with Passion and #46 – The Narcissistic Personality. How here’s the interview.

Dr. Dave: Dr. Maria Hess, welcome back to Shrink Rap Radio.

Maria Hess: Thanks, David.

Dr. Dave: I think this is your third time, if I recall.

Hess: It is.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, that’s great. Now, you just returned form the Jung Institute in Zurich, Switzerland. And before we get into what you were doing there, I’ve been to Switzerland once or twice, but unfortunately never went to the mecca, of the Jung Institute. What’s that like?

Hess: Mm-hmm. It was uh, pretty amazing actually.

Dr. Dave: What’s the building like?

Hess: Yeah. It's beautiful, it's right on Lake Zurich which is a really large beautiful lake.

Dr. Dave: Okay.

Hess: And it has a boat dock and the whole nine yards. In the center it has a lovely rose garden that apparently has been there for forever, they're really old bushes and they've kind of put like symbolic architecture and symbolic-like statuary and things like that in the rose garden.

Dr. Dave: Okay is that in some kind of old mansion or something? I kind of remember a mansion or. . .

Hess: It is, let's see, counting the basement and the attic, it has like 4 different levels.

Dr. Dave: Okay.

Hess: And it's uh, a old building, I mean it's a old family house and it's been there a long time.

Dr. Dave: Wow, wow. Was it in the Jung family, do you know?

Hess: Yes, it has been in the Jung family, if I remember correctly, and it is – it's the house that is talked about in the books when he talks about looking across the lake and that's the place.

Dr. Dave: Oh, okay. That's the place.

Hess: Yeah.

Dr. Dave: So what were you doing there?

Hess: Um, well I actually went to the Jung Institute as an adjunct to what I – visiting with Martin Kalff who I was there to study with for sandplay. So while I was there they had the American um, summer lectures which are done in English.

Dr. Dave: Mm-hmm.

Hess: So I actually shouldn't say American, it's more English –.

Dr. Dave: English speakers.

Hess: English speakers. So they came from everywhere and um most of their teachers however, were from the United States and, and from the San Francisco institute and someplace in Houston. So that was interesting and I just went to a few like maybe 6 or 7 lectures while I was there.

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Dr. Dave: OK. So primarily you went there to study with Martin Kalff –

Hess: I did.

Dr. Dave: Who is the leading living exponent teacher, guru of sandplay

Hess: Yes, it's true. Uh-huh.

Dr. Dave: Ok, now I know that you're not a Jungian analyst.

Hess: That's true.

Dr. Dave: Or, you don't even bill yourself as a Jungian therapist.

Hess: True.

Dr. Dave: Rather, you're a very eclectic depth-oriented psychotherapist.

Hess: Mm-hmm.

Dr. Dave: So the Jungian perspective is something that supplements your work, is that right?

Hess: That would be fair to say yeah, really. Um, however you know right now it is taking up my biggest interest,

Dr. Dave: Yeah.

Hess: It is, because there is something about this nondirective Jungian focus that's interesting to me.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, and just so our listeners will know, because there are a number of therapists and wannabe therapists who listen, you have strong roots in a number of approaches including your salt therapy and somatic approaches and. . .

Hess: Psychodynamic.

Dr. Dave: And Psychodynamic, that's the word I was reaching for. And um so what is it that – for how many years have you been practicing?

Hess: Uh, 30.

Dr. Dave: 30 years. Ok. You know you're kind of atypical in a way, of a therapist who has a lot of depth and has checked out of a lot of different perspectives so I really think your experience and insights will be useful to hear. And so maybe

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you touched on this, but let me ask you again, what is it that's drawn you to the Jungian perspective?

Hess: Mm-Hmm. Well what really drew me to the union to the Jungian perspective was my experience with Martin Kalff about 5 years ago, and the sandplay. I didn't really realize that sandplay is funded by 3 branches of thought, one of them is Jungian psychology, the other is Buddhist psychology and then the 3rd is a field of sandplay therapy that was developed by a woman by the name of Margaret Lowenfeld who practiced in Britain at the time, so it was this combination of the Buddhist and the Jungian that really showed up for me, when I went to a workshop with Marion Woodman, Jack Kornfield and Martin Kalff. And Martin Kalff was a non-person to me, I had no idea what sandplay was, or who the Kalffs were. I went to see Jack Kornfield and Marion Woodman.

Dr. Dave: Yeah.

Hess: But out of it came this incredible gem of a field known as Sandplay. And –

Dr. Dave: Marion Woodman is a Jungian analyst.

Hess: She is, yeah she is fabulous.

Dr. Dave: I would like to interview her.

Hess: Yes, I'm sure you would. (laughs) She's wonderful.

Dr. Dave: I wonder if she's responsible. . .

Hess: She's in Canada.

Dr. Dave: I'll see if I can chase her down.

Hess: Yeah, really.

Dr. Dave: So what is it about sandplay in particular, that's drawn you to this practice?

Hess: Well there's a couple of things, I think that, and the things that have drawn me to sandplay are also. . . In thinking back preparing for this, there's really this kernel for me, of all of the modalities that I appreciate are more nondirective with the exception of course of gestalt and some somatic techniques. But most of it is a person's center, right. It comes from the client. So in sandplay there is that dynamic as well. Even though where the Jungian influence we're going to look at you know, if complexes show up or archetypes what the symbols and the signals might mean. But really what we're paying attention to is how it's generated by the client. So there's something about that that really is intriguing to me is the client

become the vehicle, the vessel, for whatever then needs to play out. And like a dream, right, in our dream group, right we talk about if that was my dream. . . Well, here what we're really looking at is like a dream in the sand manifests these kind of arrows that kind of signal what's going on in a person's psyche, in a person's unconscious, or in their subconscious. And there something very exciting about seeing them from this nonverbal, nondirective way what shows up in these images in the sand.

Dr. Dave: What I'm hearing is that this nondirective aspect somehow aligns with a deep value of yours.

Hess: Absolutely. I really – I'm much more interested in hearing how the client thinks, what the client feels, what the client understands, than hearing what I think they should do about it all.

Dr. Dave: Yeah.

Hess: For me, after 30 years, I've seen the value of really getting quieter and waiting to see what manifests from the client. I really see the value of that.

Dr. Dave: Getting quieter, that sounds like it might take some discipline at least initially.

Hess: It does, particularly for somebody like me that loves to yack it up. (laughs) It's been a discipline, absolutely. First doing my work and really learning how to appreciate my own quietude, and then how it plays out. But then allowing it to transfer over and then be appreciative of how my clients might manifest that as well.

Dr. Dave: Now, you've been studying Buddhism as well, has that fed into this kind of orientation?

Hess: Absolutely, oh sure. And I would say that's a big chunk of what I believe study with Martin is. How to use the meditative quiet as like the breeding ground for the work of the therapeutic hour. So just allowing the quiet to be and then to see what shows up.

Dr. Dave: Mm-hmm.

Hess: And it is very similar to meditation, right. You allow whatever comes up to come up, but we're not moving into an analysis or any kind of pulling apart necessarily, but just more breathing through and allowing. And then we go back and analyze and look of course, but in the psychotherapeutic hours you really allow the quiet to come up and then the analysis comes if the client is wanting and ready to analyze.

Dr. Dave: Mm-hmm.

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Hess: So there's something about that overlay between the Buddhism and Shamanism I meant there's all kind of ways –

Dr. Dave: Sure.

Hess: It merges.

Dr. Dave: Sure. Mm-hmm. Is anxiety an issue in the quietude, I mean I could imagine that either, you as a therapist might begin to have rising anxiety of : “Oh, it's been quiet a long time here, am I supposed to be doing something”, or that the client might have a similar voice coming up.

Hess: I think yeah, right now I'm paying attention to how the client experiences it. I'm in that grace period you know, from having just now having come out of a 2-month training, and still not in a hurry in the rush of life yet. So I'm not feeling so much internal anxiety right now, but I am aware of how the anxiety can mount in a therapeutic interchange if you're waiting for something to happen. It's more less that way if it's more organic, you know?

Dr. Dave: Well I imagine, the anxiety for you has gotten a lot less as you've settled into your quietude as you've said.

Hess: It's true.

Dr. Dave: With more experience.

Hess: Yes, it's true.

Dr. Dave: Now you've been studying with Martin Kalff, in Switzerland, for a couple of years. And do I recall correctly that he's the son of Dora Kalff I think we've mentioned that actually, and she was the originator of sandplay there.

Hess: That's right, yeah.

Dr. Dave: And, I know sometimes I get mixed up between sandplay and sandtray. . .

Hess: Mm-hmm.

Dr. Dave: Can you refresh my memory about the difference between those two approaches?

Hess: Well I don't know much about Sandtray at all, except to know that it's a method that's used most frequently with children.

Dr. Dave: Okay.

Hess: But the primary difference is that it's as I understand it sandtray doesn't have the ooze of psychology or the Jungian theory behind it.

Dr. Dave: Okay, right. That comes back from my previous interview with ah, Liza Ravitz does this work, and I know you've studied with her as well. Maybe you can take us through a bit of the history of the development of this approach.

Hess: This is how I understand it, um Dora Kalff talks a little bit about it in her book: *Sandplay*, but how I understand it is that she was a doctor. And in her late 50s she actually came into some of this – awareness where she was living in the time was in Jungian world right so –

Dr. Dave: Okay.

Hess: A lot of the . . . Jung was her neighbor and in that area and she lives in Zollikon she lived in Zollikon, Zurich so it was very close to where the Jungs lived. She was also, important she was taken by the Tibetan plight at the time. So if you remember in 1958-59, this is was when the Tibetans exiled, left Tibet, so she and many Tibetans went to places where there's high mountains, so Switzerland is a perfect place.

Dr. Dave: Oh.

Hess: Those good ol' Alps.

Dr. Dave: (laughs) I did not realize that.

Hess: Yeah, Boulder, Colorado where there's big mountains you'll find Tibetans. Anyway, she was involved and instrumental in bringing quite a few of the Lamas over from Tibet and so the Dalai Lama had been present her home and she was very instrumental in bringing them and helping. She was taken by them, and started studying Buddhism herself and then at the same time was integrating her work and I don't remember exactly if she had been Jung's client, or maybe a client of Marie-louise Von Franz, something like that, but she had a connection.

Dr. Dave: Mm-hmm.

Hess: Also her own personal mark of doing that, and then she had met Margaret Lowenfeld, who also was doing this child therapy. And I should mention, you know, as I remember, Dora was a pediatrician, and she had a particular affinity with children. And the Lowenfeld model was interesting to her because it was a direct way of working with kids. And she had noticed that there was a lot of children, especially when they're traumatized who are nonverbal. So she brought those three areas together, her interest in Buddhism, her interest in Jung and then

her awakening and understanding with how Lowenfeld worked on the floor with children with toys and would see how their worlds would kind of get layed out in front of her in the way the kids played with the toys. So that's kind of how it all kind of emerged.

Dr. Dave: Well it sounds like there is a relationship to play therapy.

Hess: Well yes, there is a relationship in that way where play therapy as I understand it – And I'm certainly not an expert, but as I understand it, does not have the Buddhist element or the Jungian element of looking at what that might mean and exploring the complexes or doing the active imagination or other kinds of visualization processes that you would do with sandplay.

Dr. Dave: That history is fascinating. I'm glad I asked you about that because when you said earlier you talked about well there's the Jungian influence and the Tibetan influence well I know that you're interested in Tibetan stuff.

Hess: Yeah.

Dr. Dave: And Tibetan Buddhism, and I so thought, well maybe that's just kind of your overly.

Hess: No, no.

Dr. Dave: But it's not, it's really right there in the history.

Hess: It's true, and you know Martin one of the things that he's known for is that he is a translator for the Dalai Lama. So he really became immersed in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition and his wife is a Dharma teacher and Martin leads a meditation retreat. So he has both, you know, his world as a psychologist and then his world as a Buddhist practitioner and teacher.

Dr. Dave: I love the way everything comes together.

Hess: Isn't it great?

Dr. Dave: Across all these interviews that I've done now which are well over 300.

Hess: Wow.

Dr. Dave: And I just see so many connections between everything.

Hess: I bet you do, I bet you do.

Dr. Dave: Yeah.

Hess: It's really true.

Dr. Dave: So, as we move closer to the actual sandplay session, what is a sandplay session look like, for the fly on the wall?

Hess: Yes.

Dr. Dave: What would the fly see?

Hess: Oh yeah. (laughs) Wouldn't that be an interesting life? I'm imaging that like every therapeutic session it would be different for every person in any given session. But I can tell you that what stays the same is that there is a small box as you can see here and it's about 2 and a half feet long and about a foot and a half wide and 9 inches deep. And it's blue in the inside and around the corners and edges and it's filled with sand. It's usually beach sand, by the way. And most of us have an experience being with this type of sand, particularly. And then there are figurines and it's my experience as somebody who does sandplay as a client, and sandplay as a therapist is that the quality of the figurines matters. Because these figurines take on the charge, or the personality, or the experience if you will of whatever is being represented. So it's not just a dragon, but it might be the dragon who was the father, who was an alcoholic and screamed and yelled so that it shows up in the tray as a dragon. But when the client talks about it, it may be something else. And one day the dragon might be the fierce voice of the father, and on another day it might represent a sense of feeling personally empowered. And being in charge of one's life for one's self.

Dr. Dave: So, where an outsider might just see a little figurine of glass or plastic or ceramic, the dragon as the client gets really engaged and immersed, I gather it's much more than that. It's charged with meaning and develops a kind of life of its own.

Hess: Yes it does. And it can take a long time also to understand what it is, because this is a nondirective, nonverbal thing. So it's not necessarily like a client completes a tray, and we sit down, and talk about what that tray means. Sometimes it will go unaddressed, we won't say anything more the client will move away from the tray, and I'm going to listen to how their most recent dating experience was and we're not going to talk about that tray. Other times, clients will come in, and they're fully charged up with something and they want to play in the sand for the release and because it's also a wonderful way to release feelings, it's such an expressive modality.

Dr. Dave: Mm-hmm.

Hess: So there's a way of getting it out of the body if you will, and into the sand, and the sand then holds the charge. And the figurines hold the charge. And sometimes I'm invited to look at that discussion that the client might have with the figurines themselves or maybe between the figurines.

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Dr. Dave: Okay.

Hess: So in some way, and that's the exciting part, because it looks a little gestalt-y you know.

Dr. Dave: Yeah.

Hess: And there's this little discussion that happened between the figurines, or between me and the client about the figurines.

Dr. Dave: Yeah.

Hess: So it's where I see the fields of theory starting to leap over and lap over too.

Dr. Dave: Now, I imagine that a client might choose a dragon and maybe in that session not even know that it's about their father, or about something else.

Hess: That's right.

Dr. Dave: There's not a conscious process of saying: "Oh, this dragon will be my father".

Hess: That's right sometimes it's a surprise to the client.

Dr. Dave: Mm-hmm.

Hess: You know, it's like wow. And I do not participate in this, so I'm not playing in the sand, I'm not suggesting anything, this is nondirective.

Dr. Dave: Yeah.

Hess: So I'm sitting off to the side, I'm observing, I'm participating, I'm not telling them "Oh, that dragon would be good there", or "Don't forget this over here", I'm pretty nonverbal. I'm over here. There's not a lot of direction that goes on, or even an initiation. As I've brought in my own sandtray and my own figurines it depends totally on the client, so I have some clients I don't think they even recognize that I have the tray in the office yet, there are others like "Ok, so what's this all about?" and so there's different ways that people approach the tray.

Dr. Dave: What would your instructions typically be for somebody's first try?

Hess: Well, it might be – a client says "Hey, can I play with that?"

Dr. Dave: (laughs)

Hess: And I say “Sure”. And take the lid off, and I just take the lid off, and open the windows on my bookcase and that’s how I introduce it.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, the bookcase, I’m looking at them, I’m actually physically present with Maria, most of my interviews are conducted over Skype, and it’s wonderful when I can be with the interviewee. So I’m looking at this bookcase, and it’s got 1,2, 3, 4, 5, 6, shelves with glass doors, so when you open the glass doors and you can see actually through the glass doors, of course and there are 6 shelves of small figurines and I see a bunch of figurines or figures on top of the tray itself which right now is closed. And then I see boxes underneath. (laughs)

Hess: (laughs) It’s true.

Dr. Dave: So I think you have quite a collection going here.

Hess: Yes, it’s true. It’s really quite a small collection actually, but yes you can see it, you can get a sense quality figurines are really essential.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, Getting back here to you instructions to the client, I imagine sometimes at least you must give some orientation of what their job is in relation to the sandtray.

Hess: I know it actually it’s my style to be very limited. So I just, I say something like “Take your time and you know, do whatever you like in that space”.

Dr. Dave: (laughs)

Hess: I mean really, right it’s like that. I don’t really say too much. You know, I’ve not had the experience of clients not knowing what to do.

Dr. Dave: Mm-hmm.

Hess: They see the figurines, they see the sand, and it’s connect the dots.

Dr. Dave: Wow. (laughs)

Hess: (laughs)

Dr. Dave: Sounds like it connects with the inner child.

Hess: It really does.

Dr. Dave: We’re just at some intuitive level, we’re just drawn to it.

Hess: I think so. And I think so many of us have the experience of when you have a mound of sand in front of you, what you do is play. I remember as a kid right, having a bucket and a . . .

Dr. Dave: Yeah.

Hess: Spoon, and being in heaven for hours. (laughs)

Dr. Dave: Right, Right. Going to the beach, building sandcastles.

Hess: Totally. On the riverbed. Yeah, absolutely.

Dr. Dave: Yeah. I spent a lot of time playing in. . . my grandparents had a cabin in the San Bernardino mountains and there was a creek there, I spent hours and hours and days filling dams and forts.

Hess: Yes, absolutely.

Dr. Dave: It was a wonderful time.

Hess: You bet.

Dr. Dave: So, tell me a little bit more about the role of the therapist in the process.

Hess: Mm-hmm.

Dr. Dave: We know you're hanging back, and but you do have to go out and get all of this training. . . (laughs)

Hess: That's right. (laughs) That's so true.

Dr. Dave: What is it you're learning about what you're supposed to do?

Hess: Well, you know what I'm learning is in this aspect of sandplay the Jungian aspect, so part of my job is being familiar with the fairy tales and the energies of the archetypes. And being clearer and clearer about what a complex is and feels like. You know, again, I'm not expert but certainly getting a sense of what that's like or when a complex shows up. And mostly I'm connecting the dots in my psyche so I'm remembering the discussions I've had with the client, the stories they've told the places, where their hurt resides. And sometimes I look at the train and it just looks like oh wow, look at this, the energy of that dominant restrictive mother is showing up and it's looking like it might be embodied in that figurine today in here. I'm not really sharing this with the clients it more of what I'm doing in my notes, and then I take pictures of the trays and I send them to the clients so that they receive the photographs of the trays and then sometimes a client talks about what they saw in the photograph other times they don't, but I keep a record.

Dr. Dave: Mm-hmm.

Hess: A photographic record also of the trays and I start connecting – and then when I look at a client case, I can start seeing how things show up for the client, at least as I understand them. And I might lay that before them at some point in the therapy.

Dr. Dave: Do you see a progression in these picture of the trays over time? Do you see any kind of progression that mirrors hopefully a healing process?

Hess: Oh, absolutely. And I've had the experience myself, so I really can't speak for the client's internal dialogue yet because I haven't really heard much about what they're thinking about what they're doing with the trays. But I know for myself, I have been doing it for about 18 months just as a practice for myself, and there's a couple of little things that I've noticed I feel like issues are resolved without having talked about them.

Dr. Dave: Mm-hmm.

Hess: So feeling a nervousness around my teaching practice, for example.

Dr. Dave: Okay.

Hess: I'm noticing that's changed over time as I've continued to work with it. I can't tell you, I mean, the person that I work with she's never interpreted the trays. I don't know that I've ever interpreted to her, my trays. But I interpret them to myself when I see the pictures, and I go oh look at that, look at that, look at that.

Dr. Dave: Mm-hmm.

Hess: What I'm noticing is there is a calming that's happening, there's a place inside of myself that I can go back to that feels more relievable and more continuous. I'm happier, that's a good outcome. (laughs)

Dr. Dave: Right, right. How does sand tray therapy articulate with Jung's major theoretical concepts such as active imagination the collective unconscious, the archetypes you've mentioned, symbols of transformation, individualization and so on?

Hess: Well for the very basic ideas that you can look at the trays, and you can see images that are trying to work that out, like a black stone and a white stone being placed next to each other, and looking like they're there for balance. And the client might say something like this is a balance piece so that you can see that they're trying to look for the right and the wrong, the good and the bad of it you know how do things balance out. And when negativity shows up in the tray or

something, that we might talk about as a complex or a negative manifestation of something in the collective unconscious the way the client works out the negativity for themselves, sometimes there's like – I don't hear much dialogue but there's noises of play, you know the explosions, just the elimination of that kind of negativity that can happen in the tray, that is so expressive with guns and. . .

Dr. Dave: When kids are in the bathtub. . .

Hess: That's right.

Dr. Dave: You hear explosions and little boys got shots and all kinds of things.

Hess: (laughs) Yes.

Dr. Dave: I remember being embarrassed as late as being in graduate school in the University of Michigan I think I remember this, and I'm in the bathroom, in the counseling center where I'm an intern. . .

Hess: (laughs)

Dr. Dave: And I'm doing something like that, and somebody comes in, and it's totally subconscious and I'm in the stall, and I've gotten carried away.

Hess: (laughs) Oh yes.

Dr. Dave: kind of miss that, you don't see that anymore.

Hess: That's right, well. . .

Dr. Dave: You can use the tray she's gesturing towards the tray folks.

Hess: (laughs) That's right, I've got army guys and by the way, you said little boys at least. But I'll tell you there's a little boy, little girl in everybody, so the little girls who are these big woman also explode things. (laughs)

Dr. Dave: Interesting, yes.

Hess: Absolutely.

Dr. Dave: Well it sounds like there are all these Jungian things really that are manifesting themselves in the sandplay work but not necessarily talked about. . .

Hess: That's right.

Dr. Dave: . . .in those abstract terms.

Hess: That's what I was going to elaborate on, is that in the end something about the active imagination. I know for myself, most of the active imagination is happening inside of me so I'm not really even saying it out loud, but when I'm placing the figurines I'm having the dialogue and then it looks like it's happening with my clients as well. They're having a dialogue, because you can see that there's a delay between placing one figurine and then looking for the other, and then placing the other one. So there is a full it's a fertile void, this is not an empty silence, It's a fertile void.

Dr. Dave: Right, it's some kind of process Some kind of process is unfolding. . .

Hess: Absolutely.

Dr. Dave: . . .coming up from within.

Hess: Yes, and I think that's part of what the training is about is learning to trust, especially those of us that have been trained as verbal therapists right, to trust that there is something valuable and valid happening in the silence. That it's not just dead space, that the psyche really knows what we need on some level and manifests it in the subconscious. And that's part of the play of it.

Dr. Dave: Yeah. And the trust is really key. Going back to your earlier observations about the silence and the trust is really key, where does that trust come from? How does one develop that trust?

Hess: Oh, for me, I think it's been a process of a lot of things one, I also have a 30 year history as an educator. So, it's a similar process I see as a teacher having to trust that what I've decided to bring into the classroom is what's going to meet the need of that student. And if it doesn't happen out there they're going to let me know, I have to trust that too, right. So, the same way in psychotherapeutic practice is that it's a matter of experience learning that in my relationship with the client I'm going to be able to hear from them and trust them and myself, so I had to just practice, it's just practice.

Dr. Dave: Yeah. And experience. On both sides of the couch, so to speak.

Hess: Absolutely.

Dr. Dave: Having been a client for a long time in various settings and as a therapist.

Hess: Oh sure. And I also know and you know this too David as a psychologist yourself is that to learn to put one's ego aside to be able to not know and ask. So, to say to the client I'm clueless here, what do you suppose this is about? Takes a particular type of trust to be vulnerable as the "healer".

Dr. Dave: Yes. You and I have been involved in a dream group together for a number of years and it seems like there might be an affinity between sandplay and the Jungian understanding of dreams, so what do you say is the relationship between the two?

Hess: In some way, I mean, I've used the sandtray itself and the figurines to play out dreams. So, it's such a simple thing in some way it the way I see it, as I look at it anyway, is that the tray is kind of a way of working with dreams. And what I learned with Martin this last time is that I came upon this notion of looking at all of life as if it's a giant sandplay. Right, so I'm a figurine, and I'm walking around in a sea of figurines and everything that's happening is happening in this tray (laughs)

Dr. Dave: (laughs)

Hess: And I've oh yeah, it's kind of like a dreamscape, right? When you're in it, especially if you're lucid, dreaming, you realize oh yeah, this is totally a dream, I can do whatever I want in it.

Dr. Dave: Well this is reminding me that the lucid dreamers, people who are really into the lucid dreaming, have been rioting and arguing that one should realize in the midst of every day life that they are in a lucid dream.

Hess: Yes.

Dr. Dave: That's a call to wake up.

Hess: Yes. I would agree and I think that well I personally believe that's what psychotherapy is anyway, it's like a waking dream and then the box, the play, what happens in the sandplay really seems that way to me, like a we're having a dream together. It's kind of like how in a lot of psychological theories they talk about how you can't have just the client's experience, because when you're in the psychotherapeutic hour with the person, there's two of us, so my psyche is being affected by my client, my client's psyche is being affected by me. And so in the same way, that's why it's so important in sandplay that the therapist not impose their thinking because I'm already imposing something just by being there. By the psyche. And I think the same thing is true in our dream group, that's why the sensitivity, right? If you're using Jeremy Taylor's model if it were my dream, I would right being respectful, the other person has their psyche active and we may not know. And to be respectful and come in that way, and I just really see the parallels between the dream work and the sandplay and psychotherapy as being really close together and a tripod kind of experience.

Dr. Dave: Right. And I suppose I can disclose that there at times when we got together as a dream group and we didn't have a dream and you called and brought in one of your sandplay pictures from therapy.

Hess: Yes, that's right. It's such an interesting thing to also see that for me, anyway these last couple years as I've been doing this sandplay work, as you know, my dream life went down to not being able to remember I think I – in the last 2 years I remembered 5 dreams, and I'm pretty convinced that there's a correlate for me anyway, that when I do the sandplay, a lot of my dreaming energy gets manifest actually in the trays. Because when I went to Switzerland and I was there for 2 months, and I didn't do sandtray, ok, so I didn't do any sandplay work while I was there.

Dr. Dave: You didn't? (laughs)

Hess: No.

Dr. Dave: I thought that's totally why you were there.

Hess: No, I went there to study. And I did, I studied it, but I didn't play and my dreams came back. So I remembered more of my dreams when I wasn't doing my sandplay. Now that's how it went for me, lots of people have both, their dreams and their sandplay (laughs) but for me, the dreams went in the background as the work in sandplay came to the foreground.

Dr. Dave: Now, that's fascinating. Because you know, being the psycho dynamically oriented people that we are, we really think our dreams are there for a purpose. To pay attention to underlying feelings, emotions, situations that need to be looked at, experienced, examined in some way.

Hess: Yeah.

Dr. Dave: And so it really makes sense what you're saying, that if you're getting that stuff out of there in the tray, you don't need to remember the dream.

Hess: Yeah, and when I was in with Martin, part of the thing that was very interesting was that because we weren't working with the tray, what we got really interested in were the images that would come up in my sessions with him. So, we would have 3 hour long sessions at a time. So, I hired him privately and I studied with him privately and I would meet with him somewhere between 6 and 9 hours a week. And it was structured around a supervisorial consultation experience so I wasn't his client there, I was a private student, and we had lots of conversations. And because we weren't working with the sandtray per say, we started getting curious with just the images that would come up for me. And normally, I would go to the Greek God, Google and find an image, and print it, and work with it maybe in a collage, or other expressive modality. But I didn't have access to a printer and I was in a very interesting situation there. In retreat, I didn't understand the language in a very small room. And it was very intensive and specific and I had lots of time in between my sessions with Martin to deepen my

work and part of what we decided to do together was, he was very client centered in some ways, what we decided to do together was to work with my images as they came up. So, without the printer, I did art. So, the image would come up, and I would draw them, rather than print them.

Dr. Dave: Well how would these images come up? You were actually in conversation?

Hess: That's right, in conversation and then meditation. Martin would say, "Oh, what just came up for you?"

"Oh, I don't know, I'm feeling a little uncomfortable, lets get quiet lets go see".

We would go over to meditation together and an image would arise, for example I felt embarrassed about being tearful and I was like Oh my God, I'm here to talk with you, about how to move my professional life ahead and I don't want to be crying. I have this issue, I don't want to be so emotional. (laughs)

Dr. Dave: Right.

Hess: and he's like wow, you know you're crying, why don't we just work with what is, so I started getting in touch with being flowing water. He said something – "It's like flowing water" that's what he said. So I went back and I put into Google flowing water, for example, and what came up was a Tibetan goddess by the name of Sarasvati and Sarasvati means flowing water. So, I got really interested in that, because Sarasvati, is my Dharma name. So it was like this –

Dr. Dave: All the synchronicity was happening.

Hess: So then I painted a picture of Sarasvati and I brought it back and it became one of my working figurines. So, while I was there for 7 weeks, I ended up with 20 some odd images that I had drawn and cut out. And then I would come to Martin and we would place them on his rug. And he would say, "Oh lets pretend it's your body, where would you feel these images in your body?" So, then I'd create this body of imagery, where it would be, oh this would be in my heart, this would be in my lower abdomen, this would be in my throat. And I was like, Martin your rug is becoming like this giant sandtray (laughs) and we're doing sandplay in it. And I learned something from that is that when the images want to come out one way or the other, whether you have them 3-dimensional, whether they come up in your imagination, whether they're part of your inner dialogue or not, its all there.

Dr. Dave: Or a dream.

Hess: Or a dream, or some kind of a feeling that you get with somebody when you're talking and its not quite on what you're talking about but you have a nigggle, why am I feeling this way talking about this person, its everywhere in our lives, you

know, and I became very sensitive to that. It was something about everywhere. sandplay happening everywhere. The world is sandplay that's very powerful.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, I'm not. . . hmm. Except in my dreams, I don't think of myself as a very visual person. I have visual dreams, but in the ordinary course of my day, I don't have these images arising, and it sounds like you do.

Hess: I did, and with the agreement that's what we were going to do, so I was really looking for my images.

Dr. Dave: Oh, okay.

Hess: And I was doing things that was visual in regards to it, so I went to Google looking for images.

Dr. Dave: Okay.

Hess: Or for example, I went to a workshop that Martin gave while I was there, He gave a workshop with Peter Levine about Trauma and healing once of the things he was talking about was the connection between Buddhism and a concept of Mara, right, Mara being the destroyer who wanted to keep Buddha from his enlightenment and he had images he was flashing on the screen, and from watching his images, it simulated other images for me.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, also, you were in this intense encounter, I'm thinking of alchemy and the beaver, and the container.

Hess: That's right, yes.

Dr. Dave: And you're in this container with Martin in this intense space so that's also causing stuff to bubble up.

Hess: Absolutely. And one of the biggest images that came up, was a cauldron. So I spent a lot of time drawing this cauldron and it became like a base of everything that fit in. So in some way, you know, the sand tray is the cauldron.

Dr. Dave: Yes, exactly.

Hess: The body is the cauldron.

Dr. Dave: I'm recalling the Jung himself went through a period as an adult of building a little man in some waterworks with pebbles and stone and a nearby stream.

Hess: Yes.

Dr. Dave: It seems like there would be a relationship between what he was doing there, and the sandplay that later emerged.

Hess: Yes, I think that there was a way that a door was impressed by that and impacted by that. You know also that I want to tell you that while I was in Zurich, this last time, the Jungian institute was celebrating the 50 year anniversary of Jung's death, so I went to go see Jung's home, his childhood home. I went to see his grave. And they had a big event and I watched a video of Jung being interviewed and for the first time really, I connected with the pain that Jung experienced and talked about in this interview, about being such a thinker. And that for him, getting to his feelings was getting to the point of it all for him. He was really aware of how being such a thinker and not feeling, compromised the quality of his life, and his unconscious. And so there was a way in this interview he was really talking about: ". . .yes, I had to really get to that part of myself that wasn't thinking oriented". And I really got to see he struggled with that. Somehow I knew about it, I had read it but to see him really struggling in the interview was something.

Dr. Dave: Maybe you've already touched on this, this was your second trip to Switzerland to study with Martin, what was the new learning for you in the second trip?

Hess: Well, for one, it was this experience seeing how profound working with the imagery was with, or without sand and the figurines. So, that was something to just see oh, to see how the images evoked inside of me that I didn't need the figurines. That was interesting. The other thing was, is that, you imagined here for the last year, I've been negotiating this training with Martin, and I had been negotiating with him to bring a set of tray slides and then we would analyze the slides together. But he didn't read my email all the way through and he didn't want to do that when I got there. And we had to change my thinking about what I was there for.

Dr. Dave: So, you went through some period of disappointment and frustration it sounds like

Hess: Well, I was ready to be disappointed, but I wasn't disappointed. No, it was incredible what happened. And just watching him as a therapist and a teacher, how he handled that. I learned so much is that he was just so open and so: ". . .well, ok well let's just take it from there. We're not going to do this, we're going to do this. And what does this look like between you and I right now".

Dr. Dave: He really opened it up to invite your reactions

Hess: Absolutely, and he was like of course you know, if that's exactly what you want to do, I will do what you like, but what would happen if we see what would come up between the two of us? And that became very exciting.

Dr. Dave: Kind of invitation, right.

Hess: Yes, and he said it was the first time he had ever done this kind of work with another person, so that was also kind of exciting to see what we would create together.

Dr. Dave: Learning for both of you.

Hess: It was, it was learning for both of us. It was really great.

Dr. Dave: Do you see sandplay as a complete therapy in itself, or more as a supplement to other sorts of therapies. It sound's like its more of a supplement.

Hess: Well, it can be, but I think in and of itself it's a whole therapeutic technique. That, I think, could be very beneficial. I'm seeing it for myself, and this is my very limited understanding, I mean 3 years of studying this is really nothing, it's really a drop in the bucket in my experience there's so much to it, there's a lot of depth to this modality. But from my spot as a beginner, for me, it's been inclusive all by itself. But I'm not the best person to – I've had years of therapy so is it what it is now to me because of everything else that has come before it, and would it be what it is to me now with out it? (laughs)

Dr. Dave: All tangled up there. (laughs)

Hess: You see how it can go.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, so speaking of that then, and I think you've already described yourself as a beginner, at the same time I'm willing to believe that, what would be your advice to other therapists who may or may not be new to Jungian ideas but would like to somehow integrate sandplay into their work.

Hess: Oh there's some wonderful books and there's a training now, sandplay has started in the last few years now going now into the certification process so there's more classes available on it. There is the International Society of Sandplay Therapists, the American Association of Sandplay Therapists That could give a lot of information, and that's kind of how I started, by reading what was available online, and then I went to books that were more deliberate.

Dr. Dave: Are there a couple of book that come to mind?

Hess: There are. Absolute Dora Kalff's book, *Sandplay* there's also Bradway and McCoard's book on *Sandplay the Silent Workshop* and then also Estelle Weinrib wrote a remarkable book. We have a local expert here in Cloverdale, Barbara Turner she wrote the handbook on sandplay so now it's something that's been around a while, but it's been gaining momentum. Nationally and internationally,

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so there's quite a bit written now about sandplay there's a journal of sandplay therapy that's wonderful.

Dr. Dave: Oh, okay. I didn't realize that it was on the increase.

Hess: It is, mm-hmm.

Dr. Dave: Well as we wind down, is there anything that you would like to add, or you were hoping to say, planning to say that we didn't get to?

Hess: Yeah, well now that you mention it, there's only one thing, when you were talking about adjunctive therapy a couple of years ago, I had been involved with a clinic that was working with a lot of Latino young men that had been diagnosed – not diagnosed but, they were involved with the legal system.

Dr. Dave: Okay.

Hess: We were told that we were told that these Latino guys would never respond to sandplay therapy and blah, blah, blah. They don't even like to go to therapy.

Dr. Dave: They're tough and macho.

Hess: But we used the sandplay model with them, and we had remarkable experiences with them. One, it totally bypassed any kind of language barrier, and we also used therapists that were not bilingual working with Spanish speaking clients using the sandtray, so it broke down that language thing all together you didn't need to do too much, you could just see it play out in the tray. That was pretty remarkable. Also, So I guess in some way that was a very successful adjunctive. And then also I would use sandplay in hospice situations in people's dying process so I've been at their deathbed using a small miniature sand tray and having them use the figurines while they were in their dying process. And that's been remarkable. That was remarkable.

Dr. Dave: How so?

Hess: Well because the client came to recognize while doing the play that they had a death scenario running that they didn't really realize. They had beliefs about death and dying that they didn't realize until they saw in the tray, that somehow they had demonized death instead of seeing it as a natural progression of life. So for them that was very liberating. Oh so no wonder I'm having such a hard time accepting my dying process, I see it as the enemy, and that's a pretty big awareness for somebody that might have that block around surrendering to let go. So I guess I wanted to say that those were really two profound examples of the power of this work.

Dr. Dave: Oh yeah.

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Hess: I was really touched by both of those scenarios.

Dr. Dave: You know there was one other thing that I meant to ask you which was sandplay in teaching because I know that you're bring it into the classroom.

Hess: I have, and I've had some of the most remarkable – as a matter of fact, one of the things I really want to write about, in the list of things to write about right, one of the things was really powerful, and I've taught my students about this over and over again, I've taught this class for 5 semesters now called death oriented psychotherapies and in it, they have a sandplay experience, they do one sandplay and then they witness one other student's sandplay and then they write about it. And again, we don't analyze their trays, they talk about it if they want to and then we see what shows up. And what has come out in one tray has been remarkable. One sandplay, just one sandplay and how the students see parts of themselves that are so surprising, so shocking inside themselves, Not shocking like Oh terrible, but shocking like, whoa.

Dr. Dave: An insight.

Hess: Big insights, yeah. About their personal power, or that something's going on for them that's totally back their personal power or really seeing that there's a pocket of something they're trying to get at, but they're in denial about. It's like that juxtaposition, how can you move ahead when you've got something holding you back here. So those have been really exiting. Very exciting.

Dr. Dave: Well I think we've come to the end of our chat here.

Hess: Okay.

Dr. Dave: I've enjoyed the passion and energy that you bring to I'm so glad I'm sitting in the same room with you, and not over Skype.

Hess: Yeah, it's been fun.

Dr. Dave: Dr. Maria Hess, thank you for being my guest today on Shrink Rap Radio.

Hess: My pleasure, David.

