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"The Motherline"

Dr. David Van Nuys Ph.D., aka 'Dr. Dave' interviews Naomi Ruth Lowinsky PhD

(Transcribed from http://www.shrinkrapradio.com by Gloria Oelman)

Introduction:

My guest today is Jungian analyst Dr Naomi Ruth Lowinsky and we'll be discussing her book *The Motherline,* which is about the journey to discover the roots of the feminine psyche. It should be of interest not only to our female listeners but also to those men who wish to understand them. To learn more about Dr. Lowinsky, please consult our show notes at www.shrinkrapradio.com

Now here's the interview.

Dr. Dave: Dr. Naomi Ruth Lowinsky welcome to Shrink Rap Radio**.**

Naomi Lowinsky: Thank you.

Dr. Dave: Well it's good to have you on the show. I recently interviewed your friend and fellow analyst Pat Damery about her book *Farming Soul* and I know you two are collaborators. You're working on other things together, right?

Naomi Lowinsky: We are, yes.

Dr. Dave: So let's talk about your book *The Motherline*. So first of all, what do you mean by the term 'Motherline?'

Naomi Lowinsky: I understand the Motherline to be the interconnection between generations of women and for men it's their relationship to their connection to the birth process. All life begins in a woman's body and I was struggling with this notion that lineage tended – at least in the time that I was working on this book, which was a while ago – to be seen totally in male terms. And I thought 'hey, wait a minute, there's something missing here.' So for me the image of the Motherline is kind of like umbilical cords that tie us back to our great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great grandmothers and forward to generations to come. So a woman who has children will often think about her children in terms of her own memories of being a child and I call that looping. That's another form of the Motherline and women who don't have children, or men, relate to the women who gave them birth.

Dr. Dave: There was a portion in your book where you were talking about this and it reminded me of something my wife had shared with me some years back, before we had children I think and it was a kind of vision in which she saw these pelvic arches, if you will, extending way into the past and way into the future.

Naomi Lowinsky: Oh, that's beautiful!

Dr. Dave: Yeah and she realized that she was in this flow both from the past and from the children that would come and since then we've had four children and at least one of them has had children. Now you yourself are a daughter and a granddaughter and a mother and maybe a grandmother too, or not?

Naomi Lowinsky: Oh, yes, a grandmother as well, yes. I wasn't at the time I wrote the book, which was twenty years ago but now I'm a grandma.

Dr. Dave: The book you wrote twenty years ago?

Naomi Lowinsky: I did, yes. It's been reissued by Fisher King Press but Putnam originally published it in 1992.

Dr. Dave: Well, I had no idea. As I ask you questions about the book I hope you can remember. Maybe some of your ideas will have changed because I just looked at the copyright date and it was 2010. If I'd read the fine print further down on the page, maybe I would have seen something indicating that it was older than that.

Naomi Lowinsky: Yeah. Well it's my first publication and women still come and tell me how much it means to them and are buying it currently which makes me really happy and I was very delighted when Fisher King Press decided to reissue it.

Dr. Dave: Well, this has particular relevance to the next question that I had here, which was: 'in your forward you say you've been working on this book all your life and so, how so?' was the question. Tell us about what you meant when you said that twenty years ago. Maybe the forward was for this edition?

Naomi Lowinsky: No, actually I think I said that at the time that I originally published it because I became a mother very young and I married young and had children very young and as I developed and had some Jungian analysis and began to reflect on myself, I came to understand that I needed to have babies young because my people were German and Russian Jews who had to flee from Hitler and so many were lost in the show up, in the Holocaust, that at an unconscious level I just needed to repopulate the earth. Of course obviously I wasn't going to do that single handedly but it was that there was this enormous inner pressure to have children.

Dr. Dave: How old were you, you say you were very young, how old were you?

Naomi Lowinsky: Well I was married at 18 and had my first child at 19. That's pretty young, huh?

Dr. Dave: Yeah, by middle class US standards, that's true.

Naomi Lowinsky: Right, that's true. So giving birth was such a powerful experience and it's an archetypal experience of course and one of the great things, at least for me, about having a baby young was that it was pretty easy to give birth. So I was able to really, really enjoy the experience and I didn't have to use any drugs. I felt like I was transformed by that experience and I kept feeling I needed to be able to write about it but I had kids to take care of and dishes to do and meals to prepare and a husband going to medical school. So it really wasn't a good time but I kept thinking about it

and I kept making little stabs at it and then as I got older and my kids got older, I started getting really angry that I could not put being a mother on a resumé and so I began plotting how I could put this on a resumé. So when I decided to go get my master's degree in psychology because I wanted to work as a therapist, I did a dissertation about three generations of women and how ideas about contraception had changed. Then when I decided, after I'd been in practice for a while, that I wanted a doctorate I did a dissertation again about women and interviewed women about their experiences and that's where the Motherline idea really came into focus for me. When a woman whom I interviewed began talking about her daughter's first menstruation and how moved she was by it and – kind of like your wife's image – she suddenly started describing this as being the bridge between generations, where she could see herself and all the women before her and then all the women from her daughter on, going on into the future, in this moment of seeing the blood on her daughter's underpants. It was so moving and I began thinking about that in terms of Jung's beautiful essay on the Eleusinian mysteries where he talks about the interconnection between generations of women as having this kind of healthy aspect for women where they know who they belong to and they know where they're going. And that was at a time when women's lives were pretty circular and I don't know if women were happy with it or not, I don't go back that far but there was that sense of becoming your mother and through giving birth and having a daughter, remembering your younger self. That is something that I think is enormously valuable that had, certainly at the time that I was working on the book, with the feminist movement which was extremely important for my development but there was this kind of rejection of the feminine, in the Jungian sense of the feminine, by a lot of feminists.

Dr. Dave: Yes, I want to pick up on both of those things that you just mentioned but first I wanted to ask you, early on you write and I'm going to quote: 'we're so full of judgments about what mother ought to be, that we can barely see what mother is.' So tell us about that.

Naomi Lowinsky: Well, you and I are in a profession that tends to objectify mothers. In fact, mothers are the essential objects – object relations is all about the relationship to the mother and so much is understood about our psychological development in terms of our relationship to our mothers at a very young age and of course I think that's profoundly true and very, very important but there's been a kind of bias which identifies with the child's point of view and doesn't see the mother's point of view that has left mothers out of the equation. And so to think about the mother and her experience and her reality is part of the psychological picture that I think it's a great loss if we don't include that and it's a great loss to women who are mothers because we can't basically identify with ourselves because we keep thinking – in my practice I'm constantly hearing this from women – 'Oh, my God, I'm ruining my child, I did this, I did that…' There's this hyperconsciousness and self-criticality about being a human being who has limitations and has a temper sometimes and has needs.

Dr. Dave: Right. So, yes you did talk about psychology having a long history of being child focused and you mentioned feminism and it was clear that you were impacted by the feminist movement. What do you see as the pluses and the minuses of the feminist perspective on the feminine?

Naomi Lowinsky: Well, for me, I was trapped in a very conventional notion, as a

young woman, of what my role was to be and a marriage to a very nice person who just was not somebody that I had that much in common with. I married young out of this kind of biological or psychological cultural need to have babies, is how I see it now. So there was a moment – and I think a lot of it had to do with feminism – in a consciousness raising group of young women in the seventies I suddenly got it, that I didn't belong where I was. That I had a lot of needs to be a creative person, to be an exploratory person and there wasn't really room for that in my relationship and so like lots of people did in the early seventies, I left that marriage and I went out and explored the world with my three young kids in tow.

Dr. Dave: Wow! That was brave!

Naomi Lowinsky: Right. My kids refer to that time as the poverty days and I'm surprised at how fond they are of those days because I think it was hard – definitely hard for me but it was also exciting and I feel like it freed me to have a sense that I had a right, as much as any man I might be with would have a right, to find my own personal place in life. Not just to be a bearer of life but to have a creative connection to myself in relationship to life and that's enormously important.

Dr. Dave: Yes. So you were empowered – as the popular word goes these days – you were very empowered by the feminist movement, at the same time, as you reflected on it, you felt that the feminist perspective was maybe too daughter identified. Can you say something about that?

Naomi Lowinsky: Daughter identified and in an unconscious way, male identified. It's kind of like women wanted to be like men and boy, back in the seventies and eighties, women were writing books about why should women have to do such a nasty task as bear children? There was an identification with the male view of the feminine, which is 'Oh, my God, that's disgusting,' instead of a sense of the beauty and mystery of it. So I feel like we've come a long ways and there are many more women now who are both feminists and very appreciative of the feminine and appreciative of the miracle of being able to bear life and of the menstrual cycle.

Dr. Dave: That was a very difficult time there to be a male with a lot of angry women on the warpath in the seventies…

Naomi Lowinsky: That's really true, yeah.

Dr. Dave: …and I'm lucky to have a number of women friends who are very Jungian in their orientation and so they have both that quality of feeling fully empowered but also valuing the feminine.

Naomi Lowinsky: Right and valuing the masculine not only within themselves but in men. To me that's incredibly important and I'm glad you raised that because I think it was very, very hard for men and continues to be.

Dr. Dave: Yeah. Another thing that you write and again I quote 'Because the gods are dead, mothers are expected to stand in for them, taking the blame for much that more truly belongs to fate.' Can you reach back and expand on that for us.

Naomi Lowinsky: Well, you know, luckily I actually agree with myself still.

Dr. Dave: Good. What do you meant that 'mothers stand in for the gods?'

Naomi Lowinsky: Well, I mean it's like the power that is projected on the mother as this all powerful… I mean when you're the mother of a baby, you are standing in for the Great Mother. You're nursing, hopefully, you're responding to the child but of course, you're not the Great Mother. You need to sleep, you've got a husband to deal with maybe, you've got other children maybe, maybe you have a job. You can't be the Great Mother in that full sense of being a goddess but because we don't have that kind of sense of the gods carrying a lot of power and we as humans having limitations, so many of us, particularly the more educated and intelligent among us, have lost that sense of the kind of humility of what we can control and what we can't control. We take way too much responsibility, or ascribe too much responsibility to the individual mother. I think that a child's temperament has a lot to do with fate, the birth order, the place that the family's in, in terms of the capacity of the family to provide for the child and also what's going on in the culture. I think of people trying to keep their families together in this economy now, it is just awful and it is not something that we can just do something about. You're caught in something much larger that has to do with fate.

Dr. Dave: Right, right. Yeah, boy – the economy… I've been watching a documentary called *Inside Job* about the whole 2008 crash of the economy and boy, talk about fate intervening in just a huge way.

Naomi Lowinsky: In all of our lives.

Dr. Dave: Yes, right across the planet and such mischief…

Naomi Lowinsky: Well there were some people that had some responsibility but I don't think you or I are among them.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, not that I'm aware of. But relevant here I think is that you speak about three levels of looking at the mother-daughter relationship – the personal, the cultural and the archetypal. So maybe you could take us through each of these.

Naomi Lowinsky: Yeah, well what I'm saying about the mother standing in for the goddess is at the archetypal level and that's a level that was worshipped in the Eleusinian Mystery religions that were practiced for five thousand years and were about the Demeter-Persephone myth in which Persephone is seized by Hades and taken down into the underworld and her mother is in such deep grief that she makes everything stop growing. There was a whole religious practice that Jung and Kerényi write about very movingly in which people identified with the goddess and I believe they took some substances and they spent nine days getting into a trance and going into a dark place and being blindfolded and getting into a state where they were dealing with a sense of their mortality and their lack of control over their lives. Then having let themselves down to that deep, dark archetypal place they removed the blindfolds and a priest held up a grain of wheat and this was this magical moment in which they recognized that the wheat would fall into the earth and be like something dead but then it would spring up again in the spring and be reborn and so there is this

kind of archetypal sense of death and rebirth that's at the core of Jungian psychology, at the core of so many religions and carries this profound archetypal sense that the woman whom I interviewed at the beginning of my book on *The Motherline* saw when she saw her daughter's menstrual blood. So that's the archetypal level.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, you know I think of Jung as being a sort of feminist in some ways – ahead of his time.

Naomi Lowinsky: Absolutely, absolutely. For me he totally is. I mean he's a feminist in the feminine sense.

Dr. Dave: Yeah.

Naomi Lowinsky: But also he encouraged so many women to… you know he was surrounded by the women that people called the 'Jungfrauen' and they were all brilliant women – Marie Louise Von Franz and so many women who were early analysts and who were encouraged by Jung to use their intelligence and their creativity to become themselves.

Dr. Dave: Even his wife became a Jungian analyst, didn't she?

Naomi Lowinsky: Yes, I think she was doing some practice and she wrote this beautiful book on the Grail.

Dr. Dave: Yes, right. Now you mentioned earlier the doctoral work that you did and I guess it got integrated into this book as part of your work?

Naomi Lowinsky: Yes, it all got folded in.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, you decided to study the lives of other women and you interviewed twenty five women, all of them mothers and some grandmothers. What did you learn in this process? You did tell us the story about the menstruation but in sort of pulling back, what is it that you learned about women?

Naomi Lowinsky: I learned that women have… you know there's a value in our culture about thinking in a linear way and I learned that women seem organically to not want to think in a linear way but they may apologize for it – they say 'I'm all over the place!' But what they're doing is what I came to think of as looping – they're talking about themselves, then they're talking about their mothers, then they're talking about their daughters and then maybe they go back to their mother's mother and maybe then, if their daughter has a daughter, they'll talk about that. And they're back and forth and I began to see, it looked like in my mind's eye, it looked like crocheting or knitting, it looked like that kind of interconnection that creates fabric.

Dr. Dave: Interesting.

Naomi Lowinsky: And the other thing that I found painful as I became conscious of this, was how many of us women start apologizing and they're really pulling important things together but because there's this notion that you're supposed to think a certain way, there was an embarrassment about it and I felt like that was connected

to women's embarrassment about their bodies, about their cycles and about the issues of giving birth and all the things that are kind of old wives' tales. So at a cultural level I feel like our culture has made it hard to enjoy the complexity and the richness and the natural organic way in which women think about their lives.

Dr. Dave: Maybe you can talk about the challenges of the daughter differentiating herself from her mother. I seem to recall from psychodynamic theory that the challenge for the daughter is quite different and more difficult in some ways than for the son.

Naomi Lowinsky: Yeah, I think that's true and I think the reason it's so much more difficult is because the daughter, at an archetypal level, is like her mother. So if she's going to differentiate herself she really has to work hard at it because the tendency is to kind of be pulled into that ancient archetypal shape of the daughter becoming the mother, having a daughter who becomes a mother. So in our time, where luckily women have many more things they can do besides becoming a mother and I think that's really important a daughter feels she needs to differentiate and also because she's interested in her own character and her own personality, which may be extremely different than her mother's. I was lucky and had a very wonderful mother but her personality is totally different than mine. So, like a small thing, is that my mother's favorite expression is 'too fancy.' She doesn't want anything fancy. Well, I love beautiful clothes but my mother never would go shopping with me. So this process of feeling like it's okay for me to be different, to enjoy clothes, or to prove to myself that I have a different kind of personality than hers, was very important. And then of course, I have a daughter – I have two daughters – one, my biological daughter, is just like my mother and I could never get her in a dress. She wouldn't wear a dress, she wouldn't wear a dress to her own graduation. My adopted daughter is more like me – go figure! She loves beautiful clothes.

Dr. Dave: Interesting. It seems like in the process of therapy often the daughter goes through a period of being really angry at her mother as part of that differentiation, just has all kinds of baggage and anger directed at the mother and then periodically is saying 'Oh, my God, I'm just like my mother' and hating that aspect of herself but then later if therapy's successful somehow comes to terms with and begins to value that internalized part of the mother.

Naomi Lowinsky: Yeah, I think that's always a sign to me that things are really shifting when a daughter can begin to value her mother, or if she has had a mother who wasn't very competent, or who really was a terrible mother, to have compassion for her because of course our mothers all have stories and they've gone through dreadful things. In my story my mother's family had to leave Germany for the Netherlands when my mother was thirteen. My mother got pulled away from this whole life that she had known and valued and suddenly she… you know she was in an upper class German-Jewish, very assimilated family and suddenly she discovered she was a Jew and she was hated by the people that she had thought were her people. So that was a terrible trauma and you could feel it in my mother's personality and of course my grandmother was enormously traumatized by that too. My grandmother, like so many women of her generation, lost her mother when she was two, her mother died in childbirth. So you go back and you have these very, very wounded Motherlines and that's part of the Motherline, that there's so much suffering and death

and birth in it and as women's psyches become larger and they are more accepting of their own shadow aspects and parts of themselves that they don't like, they can begin to think about 'Well, how come my mother's that way and how come my grandmother was that way and what was that all about?'

Dr. Dave: Yes and you talk about a somewhat corresponding Fatherline but you say and again I'm quoting, 'The Fatherline is even more unknown in our culture than the Motherline, for, while women's mysteries have been segregated and disenfranchised in the patriarchy, men's mysteries have been either sublimated beyond recognition or obliterated.' Maybe you can expand on that a bit for us.

Naomi Lowinsky: Well, of course that was before Bly that I wrote that. I think Bly was really doing a good job trying to get men conscious of their mysteries. Well, I think at the archetypal base and the cultural base, one of the big issues here is that men don't necessarily know that the child that the woman they're with is bearing is their child unless they totally control that woman. So controlling that woman so that they know that that's their seed that produced the child that she's giving birth to, has been a very important part in culture for thousands and thousands of years and I think has everything to do with the development of patriarchy. So, you know, men's mysteries are hard to get a hold of because I think men haven't wanted to feel how basically helpless they are in relation to women. If women have freedom and women can sleep with whomever they want and have whosever child they want, that puts men in a very vulnerable position. To know the mysteries, you have to know your vulnerabilities and be open to them.

Dr. Dave: One of the things that I've discovered in my involvement with the men's movement – I've been in a men's group for probably around twenty years and read some of the men's books that were originally inspired by the women's movement. In one of the books, I don't remember which one, he really emphasized how dependent men are, we men are, on women but we're mostly in denial about that much of the time. Maybe as part of that differentiating from the mother process, we just kind of… We have this – probably because of our cultural context too, where we're supposed to be big and strong and powerful and protectors and all of that – as men get older, in particular, I think we become a lot more dependent upon wives and the women in our lives and needy. Needy! I'll say it. (laughter)

Naomi Lowinsky: Uh, huh. Uh huh. Uh, huh. Yeah and in terms of a sense of lineage and continuity, men are totally dependent on women even as young men, if they have children young, for that. So, yeah, I agree with whoever wrote that book, I think that's a big dynamic between men and women but within patriarchy, it's looked to women like men had it good. They could just go out and live their lives and do their thing and women would take care of them, so I think that mothers have tended to prefer boys because they identify with the boys and with the power in the boy, because of that projection and haven't understood that it comes out of this denied dependency. I actually think that one of the most exciting things that's happened in my lifetime has been that so many men are present at the birth of their children.

Dr. Dave: It has made a difference hasn't it?

Naomi Lowinsky: I think it makes a huge difference in terms of connecting men

both to the power and vulnerability of women and to their own power to be caretakers and to be companions in that amazing, miraculous, mysterious, dangerous passage.

Dr. Dave: There was some place in your book, there was a passage where I felt really seen and understood as a man.

Naomi Lowinsky: Oh, I'm so pleased.

Dr. Dave: Yeah and unfortunately I didn't mark it up so I haven't been able to find that place again to bring it up here but I think it's scary to be a man and somehow I think you recognized that. I mean, women are fearful of men's power, their physicality and so on, well, so are many of us men.

Naomi Lowinsky: Scared of your own physicality or…?

Dr. Dave: Of other men.

Naomi Lowinsky: Oh, of other men, yeah.

Dr. Dave: Both the vulnerability of being called upon to go to war and all that means but also if a man is out on the street with a woman and another man makes lewd gestures or something, that man is supposed to fight for her honor. That's still in our code of expectations and so on.

Naomi Lowinsky: It sure is, it's a huge expectation.

Dr. Dave: So it tends to make the world a bit of a scary place, not only for the woman but for the man as well.

Naomi Lowinsky: Yeah, I think that's absolutely right and it's a cultural expectation that you may not be comfortable with, maybe you don't want to be using your fists.

Dr. Dave: If you're not a physical brute you know…

Naomi Lowinsky: Right, that's right.

Dr. Dave: You've got a chapter titled *Wrestling with the Mother* that probably touches on some of the things we were talking about earlier.

Naomi Lowinsky: Yeah, with that differentiation process.

Dr. Dave: Yeah – *Wrestling with the Mother: Of Love, Rebellion and Our Personal Shadows*. We haven't spoken about the shadow here.

Naomi Lowinsky: Well, I mean the mother archetype is full of shadow and if you think about some of the goddesses we know about – Kali, for example, the Indian goddess is a very dark goddess. She gives birth and then she'll chop your head off. You see these statues of Kali and she's just given birth then off comes the head and of course what we understand about a culture like India is that so many children died so young that that was exactly true. But Kali was the goddess of birth and death and

time, so there is that archetypal sense of the goddess representing death as well as birth. She's also the terrible goddess – she brings in, you know, if you think of, given our relationship to our own earth, who is getting pretty mad at us these days it seems to me and is throwing up a lot of temper tantrums with storms and floods and fires and she's pretty mad at us for good reasons. Her terrible aspect is pretty scary and people are in such denial about it and in our culture I just find it breathtaking.

Dr. Dave: Yeah. Your book is filled with Motherline stories of various women and you weave the story of your own Motherline throughout it. Perhaps you can take us through some of the highlights of your own Motherline journey and how motherhood perhaps changed you.

Naomi Lowinsky: Sure, well as I mentioned I had children young and I didn't understand this until I was much older because my people had to flee and so many of my people were lost in the Holocaust. My mother's parents were German Jews who had money and my grandfather was very good at getting people, a lot of family people, out of Germany and getting his own family, his own immediate family out as much as he could. My father's side of the family – my father had been born in Germany but his parents were Russian Jews, that's where the Lowinsky name comes from and a lot of his people didn't make it out of Germany and out of Holland, like his mother and father never made it. They were living in Holland at the time and I didn't know until after my father's death in '85, when I received the contents of his safe deposit box, that he had a letter from his mother who was in a concentration camp in Holland. She was in Westerbork, which was a transit camp but she died in that transit camp and she had written a letter to my father basically kind of telling him that he better take care of his sister, who was her oldest daughter and who was also in the concentration camp with her and she hoped that he would find a way of getting her back to America. He was very lucky, he had money, he had a job, he had family back up on his wife's side – and then she addressed my mother who was quite a bit younger than my father and she said that she was so sorry she wasn't going to get to see her development and she wondered if she might be pregnant. I looked at the date and that was nine months before I was born and then she died just right thereafter.

Dr. Dave: Wow!

Naomi Lowinsky: When that happened I had a real intense experience of her presence, that she knew in some way – my paternal grandmother – that I was on the way and that there was a connection between her and me that I needed to honor and so one of the things that's happened in my writing over the years – and it began with *The Motherline* – is that I had to write about her. And in the *The Motherline* I quoted her letter, which the letter ended as a blessing to the family and the people that would come after her death and a plea that we not take her dying in such a terrible way as a reason not to fully live our lives. I mean this was a psychologically sophisticated woman who had a sense of the kind of survivor guilt that might keep people from being able to fully engage with their lives because of what had happened.

Dr. Dave: Yes.

Naomi Lowinsky: And she was blessing us and warning us not to do that, so for years thereafter I would read that letter at our family's Passover celebrations. My

father had never talked about her and I think he felt so guilty. I think that's one way that he just had to deny and cut off his own guilt feelings and I know it must have been incredibly painful for him. My mother tells a story that when the family was in Cuba trying to get into the United States, my father spent a night just weeping and weeping about his mother and then she said he never wept again, she never saw that side of him again. It's like he just shut that door and closed it. So I think one of the reasons that I needed to start my writing life on the Motherline was that I was so haunted by it and in ways that I wasn't conscious of until I began actually working on the book. As I was working on the book this letter came to me from my father's estate and his mother revealed herself to me and she's shown up in poetry and she's got a chapter in my new book, *The Sister From Below* which is a book about creativity and she's like an inner figure who speaks to me in active imagination and with whom I need to kind of check things out, as is my maternal grandmother. I'm sitting in my study as I talk to you and I'm looking at her self portrait done in nineteen thirty six in a very, very bad time, which is a portrait – she was a very fine painter – it's a portrait of so much grief and so much suffering and so much strength, that she can look at herself in the mirror and paint what she sees, paint the truth of her own suffering, of the shadow that she's living under.

Dr. Dave: Wow!

Naomi Lowinsky: So you see I come from a Motherline of very passionate, intense women.

Dr. Dave: Right, right and you've done them honor I think in your work and your journey.

Naomi Lowinsky: Well thank you.

Dr. Dave: You mentioned active imagination and that's something that I've been interested in and actually did a couple of recent interviews about. Maybe you could…

Naomi Lowinsky: Yeah, I heard your interview with Jeffrey Raff. That was nice, I liked that.

Dr. Dave: Could you tell us a little bit about your use of active imagination?

Naomi Lowinsky: Well you know that takes us beyond *The Motherline*. I wasn't really doing it so much in *The Motherline,* though the last chapter it began to happen. I began to be assaulted by these figures, so I'll talk about that.

Dr. Dave: It's okay if we leave *The Motherline,* that's okay too.

Naomi Lowinsky: Well, in the last chapter in *The Motherline* I tell the story of a trip my second husband and I and my mother took to Germany and then after… it was a very powerful trip because I met the people that my mother had grown up with, who were wonderful people and none of them Nazis and they talk about fate. Among American Jews there's been this hatred of anything German and I grew up with that and my mother who went to a very progressive little school before she had to leave Germany was approached by the non Jews who were part of that school and asked to

come back to Germany because they missed her. So she had sort of broken through that anger, that Jewish anger at anything German and realized that there were a lot of Germans who were very good people, who had been caught in something that was way bigger than they. That's a little bit off the topic, anyway from there we went to England, which I had not thought of as goddess country but we went to Glastonbury and I had an experience sitting on the Tor at Glastonbury, which is that famous Tor that shows up in the stories about King Arthur and used to be in Ireland and was all part of the Arthurian romance. Sitting there I suddenly saw this image that I actually found embarrassing. It was an old lady, old woman, who was naked and who was just blatantly showing her vulva and sort of spreading the lips of her vulva and grinning.

Dr. Dave: Wow!

Naomi Lowinsky: I thought, 'my God, who is this?' You know and I thought 'Oh my, maybe she's Aztec, maybe she's Mayan, I've never seen anything like that before' and it was… I sort of thought 'Ugh!' I wanted to pull the curtain down over her.

Dr. Dave: Well this reminds me of Jung's dream where faeces is raining down from heaven on the church and that was also an unbidden image that came to him.

Naomi Lowinsky: Exactly, exactly and it opened everything up for him because once he allowed that image in, he was able to question all of the convention, which actually that's wonderful because that's sort of what happened with me. We walked down the Tor and I didn't say anything to my husband because I didn't know how to describe this outrageous image and then we went to a little souvenir shop and I picked up a little book about goddess images or pagan images from the area and opened it and there – talk about synchronicity – was exactly the image of who I had seen on the top of the Tor with my eyes closed. It was Sheila Na Gig. I don't know if you know Sheila Na Gig…

Dr. Dave: No.

Naomi Lowinsky: …but Sheila Na Gig is a very powerful goddess. She shows up, believe it or not, on churches – on old English and Irish churches. As you enter the church door, she'll be right above the church door and she has a kind of Kali like presence. In the pagan religion of that area… you know England of course was pagan before it was Christian and she carries both a sense of birth and death very much the way that Kali does. And so my kind of letting her in and writing about her and letting her lead me to an understanding of the dark aspects of the feminine and how important they are, both about aging as a woman and about holding the tension between women's lives as having to do with birth and death. That was extremely important for me and it led me on into really the courage, I think, to be able to listen to inner voices and to pay attention to inner images that everything in this culture would say 'put that away, that's yukky, or that's nonsense, or that's silly, or don't listen to that.'

Dr. Dave: Or 'that's crazy!' Right?

Naomi Lowinsky: Or 'that's crazy!' Exactly.

Dr. Dave: So did you… I'm really interested in the mechanics for the sake of my listeners – is that something then that you… do you dialogue with this goddess in your journal?

Naomi Lowinsky: Well, what happened with her is that I saw her and I wrote down about her but then as I began understanding what Jung meant by active imagination and reading his work about it, which was enormously helpful to me and began paying more attention to dream figures as they showed up, or little glimpses of things when I would sit and meditate a little bit, I've developed a technique for working with it that works for me and I think that everybody has a different way of doing this. But my way – and it's something that I talk about in my new book *The Sister From Below: When the Muse Gets Her Way* because 'the sister from below' was the one who showed up and announced it was her time and I was to listen to her and stop paying so much attention to the outer world and pay more attention to the inner world because it was time for me to be a poet again. So what I do is I sit and I allow the image to come up and then I just ask her what she has to say to me and I write in her voice and I'm always totally astounded by what she has to say, which is not usually something that I was thinking about, or was conscious of. So she'll bring this deeper wisdom, she'll bring something from the archetypal realm that I don't have access to from the point of view of my ego, or from the point of view of the culture.

Dr. Dave: Right. I wonder if this relates at all to the final chapter of your book, which is titled *The Forbidden Feminine*?

Naomi Lowinsky: Yes, the forbidden feminine of course is Sheila Na Gig – that's how I got there, it was through Sheila Na Gig. But I'll tell you 'the sister from below' who's my muse, is also pretty scary, she's pretty forbidden.

Dr. Dave: Well, can you tell us about her?

Naomi Lowinsky: Well, she doesn't give a hang if I get dinner on the table for the kids, or if I pay the mortgage – she just wants poetry and she'll take over and I actually believe that it took me too long Jungian analyses to be able to get a strong enough ego connection to myself and to what needed to happen in the real world, to be able to tolerate her enormous energy. Because she just comes racing through me and she's Dionysian energy – she'll just as soon rip you apart as look at you but if you have a strong enough container, then it's enormously exciting to allow that to come up and you say 'okay, I'll give you an hour, I'm going to write for an hour and then I'm going to work. Goodbye!'

Dr. Dave: And so does poetry come out as a result in those sessions?

Naomi Lowinsky: That's right. That's how poetry comes out.

Dr. Dave: And you've published some books of poetry now, right?

Naomi Lowinsky: I do, I have three books of poetry and a couple more on the way.

Dr. Dave: Is there a poem that you would like to share with us?

Naomi Lowinsky: Oh, well let's see. You know I'm going to read you a poem that I put in *The Sister From Below,* that is an expression of the kind of wildness of this energy and also how dangerous and how exciting it is. And it's a poem that came out of dreams and it's called *The Woman You're Not.*

The woman you're not is sure of her great breasted body/Mermaid to this one, siren to that/She knows where to put her feet/Knows each step of the dance/And her voice from the deep of her belly/how she flings it about/like her long fiery hair/her laugh that collides with the stars/fear never touches her whose dreams rise like sap/and any man who knows her/knows her teeth and the back of her hand/she grows crystals at the bottom of your garden/where it's purple silk and lavender chiffon/travels in a green and yellow covered wagon drawn by seven giraffes/this morning in a dream she's handed you an image under glass/a bale of hay in a field of darkness burning.

Dr. Dave: That's beautiful.

Naomi Lowinsky: Thank you.

Dr. Dave: And that's not only the woman you are not but it's also the woman you are, right?

Naomi Lowinsky: Well, she's an archetype – you can have moments of her but if you let yourself be taken over you know, there goes everything.

Dr. Dave: Oh, so there's some danger there?

Naomi Lowinsky: Oh, a lot of danger, I mean she's nasty, she's a bitch on wheels and she's also enormously creative.

Dr. Dave: Well, as we wind down here, I wonder if there's anything that you'd like to add, anything that you maybe didn't get to say or any thought that you'd like to leave our listeners with.

Naomi Lowinsky: Well, I've enjoyed talking to you a lot and I appreciate what you have said about the male point of view about all of this. I think it's been very important and I guess the thing that happened for me with *The Sister From Below,* I'd like to add this, is that my muse appeared to me and she shape shifted in all different forms. She was the sister from below and she turned into the grandmother I told you about who died just at the time that I was conceived but by the end of the book, she had shape shifted into a male. I always thought the muse was female and she is in many ways but for me she also was a male figure, who was somebody I had known when I was young who's no longer on this planet and I found that very meaningful. It felt like a coniunctio to use the Jungian word – that Latin Jungian word about the marriage of opposites – the marriage of the male and the female. That there needed to be a coming together of male and the female, both externally and internally – and that seems really important to me.

Dr. Dave: Yes, that's lovely. Thanks for sharing that with us. Dr. Naomi Ruth Lowinsky, thanks for being my guest today on Shrink Rap Radio.

Naomi Lowinsky: Thank you.

WRAP UP:

Okay, well I do hope you enjoyed this conversation with Jungian Analyst Dr. Naomi Ruth Lowinsky. You heard my surprise that her book T*he Motherline: Every Woman's Journey to find Her Female Roots* was first published twenty years ago. However Jung's timeless books were published much further back than that and her book is a timeless one. I'll be sure to put an Amazon.com link to it in the show notes for easy purchase. You also might want to consider her more recent book that she mentioned, which was *The Sister From Below: When the Muse Gets Her Way.* I believe that book goes into greater detail about the encounter with the archetypal Kali type figure she shared with us, which unleashed her poetic creativity. Especially for those of you interested in active imagination, I think that book will give you an even more detailed sense of how she approached that work. You can also find two books of her poetry on Amazon. One title is *red clay is talking* and the other is provocatively title *crimes of the dreamer*.

So thanks again to Jungian Analyst Dr. Naomi Ruth Lowinsky for sharing her insights on *The Motherline*.