

#320 - Frontiers in Somatic Therapy with Eleanor Criswell, EdD

David Van Nuys, Ph.D., aka Dr. Dave interviews **Dr. Eleanor Criswell**

Introduction: My guest today is Dr. Eleanor Criswell my long time colleague in the psychology department at Sonoma State University and we'll be discussing her long and pioneering history in the field of somatics.

Eleanor Criswell, EdD, is emeritus professor of psychology and former chair of the psychology department at Sonoma State University. Founding director of the Humanistic Psychology Institute (now Saybrook University in San Francisco). She's currently a Distinguished Consulting Faculty member for Saybrook University. Editor of *Somatics Magazine*, the magazine-journal of the mind-body arts and sciences, and director of the Novato Institute for Somatic Research and Training, her books include *Biofeedback and Somatics: Toward Personal Evolution*, *How Yoga Works: An Introduction to Somatic Yoga*, and she is editor of *Cram's Introduction to Surface Electromyography*. She's president of the International Association of Yoga Therapists, the Somatics Society, and past president of Division 32—Humanistic Psychology of the American Psychological Association, the Association for Humanistic Psychology, and the Biofeedback Society of California. She's on the board of the Association for Hanna Somatic Education and she's the originator of Somatic Yoga and Equine Hanna Somatics.

Now here's the interview.

Dr. Dave: Dr. Eleanor Criswell, welcome to Shrink Rap Radio.

Criswell: Well, it's wonderful to be here.

Dr. Dave: (chuckles) Well, it's wonderful to have you finally as a guest on Shrink Rap Radio. I should have had you on a lot sooner and I apologize for not doing so. We've both been leading such busy lives. Both before --

Criswell: Yeah.

Dr. Dave: -- and after our so-called "retirement." (chuckles)

Criswell: Right.

Dr. Dave: You've always been one of the international stars of our psychology department at Sonoma State University. I recall in years past that when I'd attend a conference or meeting somewhere else in the country and mention that I was at Sonoma State University they'd always say, "Oh, isn't that where Eleanor Criswell is?" (chuckles)

Criswell: (chuckles)

Dr. Dave: So I really should have gotten to you sooner.

Criswell: You and I retired from the university but we have not retired from the world.

Dr. Dave: That's for sure. That's for sure and I'm really impressed about the way that you're continuing to carry on. Among your many pioneering activities you've had a long history and interest in working with the body.

Criswell: Mm-hmm.

Dr. Dave: Do I recall correctly that in your youth you were almost an Olympic swimmer?

Criswell: Well, almost might be stretching it a bit. I did go to Purdue University to swim on their swimming team sort of in preparation for moving toward the Olympics. Anyway at that point, I discovered after years of marathon swimming, competitive swimming and all that, I discovered the life of the mind-- (chuckles)

Dr. Dave: (chuckles)

Criswell: --put an end to that.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, what a thought. During the time that I've known you, you went on to do important work on the body and some of the topics I want to touch on with you today in our conversation are yoga, biofeedback, Feldenkrais, Hanna Somatics, the Novato Institute and the *Somatics Journal* and your work with horses.

Criswell: Mm-hmm.

Dr. Dave: So we've got our work cut out for us here.

Criswell: We do.

Dr. Dave: OK, let's start with yoga. You taught a course on yoga and psychology way before the yoga craze got really big in this country. When did you first get exposed to yoga?

Criswell: I really discovered it through meditation, early 60s, like about 1961, and about 1966 I added in the physical practices. I did that by way of a book because there weren't any courses around where I was and that was *Fundamentals of Yoga* by Rammurti Mishra, an Indian physician who was also a yogi.

Dr. Dave: OK.

Criswell: And, so, go ahead.

Dr. Dave: Go ahead. You started to say something.

Criswell: Well, just that I really like the effects of doing them, asanas and all of that. I might add in right now that currently I'm president of the International Association of Yoga Therapists.

Dr. Dave: Oh, my goodness. (chuckles) Like cream you always rise to the top.

Criswell: Very so, very so.

Dr. Dave: And there's always something new. You actually taught an academic course at --

Criswell: I did.

Dr. Dave: -- Sonoma State in yoga. I actually got to sit in, fill in for you, I think for a few weeks one time. Tell us about how you structured your class.

Criswell: It was half lecture and half practice. It went through the eight months of Raja Yoga looking at the neurophysiology, physiology and the psychology, especially linking it up with things from western psychology that had a relationship between the effects of yoga and so forth.

Dr. Dave: Mm-hmm. I seem to recall that you were able to meet some of the really big names in yoga.

Criswell: Mm-hmm.

Dr. Dave: B. K. S. Iyengar?

Criswell: You know I did not meet him until I was in India about a year ago and we were both on the stage at the same time. I don't know if I've formally met him but I've been close shall we say. (chuckles)

Dr. Dave: Speaking of being on the stage, I know that back in the day you were speaking at one or more major yoga conferences in India and it sounds like you're continuing to do that.

Criswell: Yeah, I am and it's been very enlightening shall we say. One of the fascinating things for me, David, is that at the time that I was exploring yoga some people were also exploring it freshly in India and I had no connection with them of course. But some of the things that were -- for example, Dr. Nagendra, who is formerly with NASA, gave it all up to devote his life to yoga, is vice chancellor of SVYAS University near Bangalore or Bengaluru, was just going through that process of leaving NASA and devoting himself to yoga at the same time that I was exploring yoga and beginning our classes at Sonoma State University. So the parallels are interesting to me.

Dr. Dave: Are you saying that yoga was undergoing a revival in India at about the same time?

Criswell: Yeah, and now it has gone through various revivals historically. For example, the Yoga Institute of Santa Cruz, East Mumbai, India, was founded in 1918 and it represents a renaissance of yoga, bringing yoga into modern times and so there have been various -- and we're going through one right now that 20 million people probably more now practicing yoga in the United States. Similarly, it's growing in interest in India.

Dr. Dave: Wow, that's interesting because I think I assumed and I would think most people would just assume that it's been kind of steady state in India. You know it's always been there, it's always going to be there.

Criswell: Yeah, yeah, and that is true in a certain way but not the whole population.

Dr. Dave: Mm-hmm.

Criswell: Certainly groups within India carrying on the lineages and so forth.

Dr. Dave: This is a little bit of a digression but maybe you've heard of, I've got a block on his name just momentarily, the laughing yoga, yogi in India.

Criswell: Talking about (inaudible).

Dr. Dave: Pardon?

Criswell: No, no, you're talking about the one who's doing laughing yoga.

Dr. Dave: Yes, yes.

Criswell: Yoga laughter.

Dr. Dave: I got to interview him and that was a lot of fun too.

Criswell: Mm-hmm.

Dr. Dave: I think he was in Bangalore when we spoke. What do you see is the benefits of yoga?

Criswell: My goodness.

Dr. Dave: I know it's a big question. (chuckles)

Criswell: It's a big question and there's a lot of yoga research going on today. It's a very popular funded, federally funded yoga research out of NIH research, NCCAM and others and of course, a lot of research going on in India.

Looking at the effects which people have noticed over the years and have been aware of and have shared that with students coming along and so forth but because it's working basically with the, might say with the central nervous system, it effects everything. It effects us physically. It effects us psychologically. Of course, it

effects us spiritually and it effects us on every level but it's particularly good at helping us come back to homeostasis, to move out of sympathetic nervous system dominance, which has so many health impacts. Because it's so systemic, if you will, it effects everything. It has effects on sleeping and stress levels and mood -- has a huge effect on mood. One of our people, Amy Weintraub, has done a lot of work with effect on helping with people with depression. It has big physical effects and lots of psychological effects -- self-esteem and you name it, it has an effect on it and there are studies to support that and more coming.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, now, of course, it's being taught by so many people and in so many different ways and I imagine that you've seen some of the recent press -- not very long ago I think there was a story in *The New York Times* --

Criswell: Right.

Dr. Dave: -- about people getting injured.

Criswell: Mm-hmm.

Dr. Dave: Do you want to comment on that?

Criswell: Yeah. A fellow wrote a book called *The Science of Yoga*, which sparked that article and there are people who are injured doing yoga especially if it's done incorrectly. But compared to all the other sports that people are doing, it's a whole different picture. A lot of the stuff in the book and also in the article are anecdotal.

Dr. Dave: Yes.

Criswell: It's like one -- I remember years ago there was a chronicle, the *San Francisco Chronicle* front page. It said, "Meditation Causes Drop Foot." If you read the article closely, there was one guy who meditated too long sitting in the lotus position and when he got up he had drop foot. What they didn't tell you was that in due time he recovered.

Dr. Dave: Mm-hmm.

Criswell: But here's this front page, international press, one guy who -- (chuckles)

Dr. Dave: (chuckles) We always like the negative news right?

Criswell: Yeah. Anyway done correctly or done safely -- and that's why I encourage people to do yoga somatically with a mind-body awareness while they do it. Yoga has huge effects. It can reverse some of the effects of aging and you know.

Dr. Dave: You've always been very youthful --

Criswell: Mm-hmm.

Dr. Dave: -- both in looks and in attitude. Aside from your teaching of it, what role would you say yoga has played in your life?

Criswell: Huge role because it has been a steady presence throughout, moving towards 50 years now and I don't even know what my life would have been like without it but it helped me go through a huge amount of stress in my life and it helped me probably avoid a few medical complaints that I might have had along the way. It certainly has kept me focused on my life's work and whatever that is. (chuckles)

Dr. Dave: Yeah. (chuckles) It's multifaceted. We can say that much.

Criswell: Right. (chuckles) It helps me stay happy.

Dr. Dave: By the way, it now pops into my mind the name I blocked on. It was Dr. Madan Kataria, the laughing yogi.

Criswell: The laughing yogi.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, so my apologies to him and my growing blockage on names. (chuckles)

Now I recall that you and I both got interested in biofeedback around the same time.

Criswell: Mm-hmm.

Dr. Dave: But you really took the ball and ran with it in creating a whole biofeedback course sequence at Sonoma State.

Criswell: Mm-hmm.

Dr. Dave: Building a biofeedback lab there and eventually becoming president of the California Biofeedback Association.

Criswell: That's right.

Dr. Dave: And who knows maybe a president of something else now. (chuckles)

Criswell: (chuckles)

Dr. Dave: What else can you tell us about your work in biofeedback?

Criswell: First of all, it has so informed me about how our physiology works in relationship to everything. It's like a window into the body, into the brain, into the mind if you will. It's another thing I don't know what I would do without it because it so informs everything that I do. It's part of what helped change Thomas Hanna's work in functional integration or Feldenkrais into what it became Hanna Somatics, which is, or Hanna Somatic Education, which I helped trained people (overtalk).

Dr. Dave: We're going to talk about that some more down the line here.

Criswell: Let me --

Dr. Dave: Go ahead.

Criswell: Where I am with biofeedback now -- and I'm still actively involved at the various levels but I use it very much as a demonstration and as perhaps a single session with people so that they can see what they're doing while they're doing whatever they're doing. If they're changing, if they're meditating or if they are practicing relaxing their bodies or if they are trying to prepare for sleep or various things that they may be working on, but one big place where I've been using it is when I teach a course at Meridian University in Petaluma for "Somatics for Psychotherapists." We have a session in which the class gets to see what happens to the client physiologically -- brain wave, muscle contractions, galvanic skin response or electrodermal activity, heart rate, hand temperature -- all those things while they're in a psychotherapy session. Then they get to see, switch roles, now we see what's happening within the therapist while the therapist is --

Dr. Dave: Ah ha.

Criswell: -- getting psychotherapy.

Dr. Dave: The plot thickens. (chuckles)

Criswell: The plot thickens and it's very enlightening, very enlightening.

Dr. Dave: That sounds fascinating and like a wonderful educational experience kind of making the educational experience multidimensional.

Criswell: Mm-hmm.

Dr. Dave: I don't know if you know this fellow. I recently interviewed Dr. Paul Swingle, who is a psychologist, who has a biofeedback clinic in Vancouver. He's written a book titled, *Biofeedback for the Brain*. I was amazed at the specificity with which they're now able to map various areas of the brain for biofeedback purposes.

Criswell: Yeah.

Dr. Dave: They've even developed norms so that they can determine if something is off in terms of the expected brain wave frequencies and amplitudes for a given region. Is this something you've managed to keep up with in addition to all your other interests?

Criswell: Just sort of vicariously.

Dr. Dave: Yeah.

Criswell: What they frequently do is they'll do a quantitative EEG and map the brain.

Dr. Dave: Yes.

Criswell: Look at areas that may be less active than others in relationship to the presenting complaint of the person and then perhaps uptrain that area or downtrain that area. They have a lot of specificity. (chuckles)

Dr. Dave: Yeah, I was amazed at the specificity. At first I was -- I thought this guy might just be a snake oil salesman with some of the claims that he was making but then I realized, no, he'd really worked to root his clinical practice in as much science as he could.

Criswell: Mm-hmm. I think there's a long way to go on that research.

Dr. Dave: Mm-hmm.

Criswell: You're seeing it where it is now and I don't know whether there is the amount of research behind the specificity that we actually need.

Dr. Dave: Right. One of the things he pointed out about that is so much of research is funded by big pharma and this really runs counter to the interests of big pharma --

Criswell: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Dr. Dave: -- to have people heal themselves in some way other than through some kind of medication.

Criswell: Mm-hmm. That's very true and people also want quick fixes. So there are some people who make good candidates for biofeedback or neural feedback and others who would never want to sit there for the training that it would take to make a difference to self-regulate, to heal themselves.

Dr. Dave: Yeah.

Criswell: That's another thing that the field of biofeedback -- biofeedback and neural feedback is so incredibly valuable and it is not known as much as it should be.

Dr. Dave: Right. That was my impression when I talked to him. I thought, "Geez, why aren't people -- why don't we all know about this?"

Criswell: Uh-huh. Well, the thing is the media covers new news. They do not cover things that are continuing to be effective. They are accepted in all sorts of places where biofeedback would like to have been accepted, it is. But that's not big news to educate the public about its value and effectiveness and so forth. So that's one of the problems.

Dr. Dave: Some of it was big news to me. He even cited a study asserting that it was possible to raise IQ by as much as ten points and he also said that on the basis of the brain waves alone, he's able to tell people what problem has brought them to his clinic.

Criswell: Mm-hmm.

Dr. Dave: He doesn't even let them tell their history until after he has done his measurements.

Criswell: Wow. I think that makes sense but about the IQ thing, that is a very complex thing to try to measure. You would want to look at his research to see how did they measure IQ.

Dr. Dave: Yeah.

Criswell: IQ tests, as you know, are very faulty. That IQ tests measure what IQ tests measure.

Dr. Dave: Mm-hmm. (chuckles) That's the definition, right?

Criswell: Right.

Dr. Dave: That's actually a fairly official definition.

Criswell: Right. Let's see his evidence. I like the idea. I love the idea because the degree to which you can pay attention to information coming in and respond to it quickly is part of IQ measures and I think one of the things that neural feedback has shown, is that training of attention through brain wave feedback is a doable thing. Many children with ADD have and parents have reported changes that were quite beneficial.

Dr. Dave: Yes. He said that in fact ADD and ADHD were one of, I think, three major areas of dysfunction that biofeedback has been documented to scientifically to be very effective for.

Now moving along because we have all these topics. At some point you met and married Tom Hanna.

Criswell: Mm-hmm.

Dr. Dave: I had been teaching a course of my own invention back in the early 70s called "Psychology and the Body" because I had some intuition that there was something important here in the mind-body interface that I couldn't fully articulate it but I felt that there was something important here. I was using one of Tom's books, *Bodies in Revolt*, as one of the required books. Maybe you can briefly give us an overview of how you and Tom met and came to get married.

Criswell: Well I'll do this relatively quickly but I want to say about *Bodies in Revolt*, I reread it recently or been rereading it recently because people have been recommending it because it is so forward looking if you read it now.

Dr. Dave: Mm-hmm.

Criswell: Thomas was very forward thinking but he also was prophetic in some of the things that he was pointing toward that would be happening and could be happening and so forth. Reading it now it's kind of astonishing to consider that he wrote it on a little portable typewriter, a little Corona portable typewriter way before computers and way before he had any experience with computers. If you read it, you will not even know that. He's so projecting into where things are as they are.

Dr. Dave: Yes, wow. You know I haven't read it since way back in the day but I remember how impressed I was at that time. It felt like OK, this guy is really articulating the thing that's sort of intuitively with no great specificity. I'm sort of feeling like it's important and here he is kind of really spelling it out.

Criswell: Mm-hmm. Just as a side note here, you and I have paralleled each other in various ways --

Dr. Dave: I know we have.

Criswell: -- with contact and also without contact just where our minds have gone and where our thoughts have gone and where --

Dr. Dave: Mm-hmm.

Criswell: -- yeah, so anyway, one of those aspects of *Bodies in Revolt*, he talks about the proto-mutant and then the mutants and

this friend recently who is very interested in *Bodies in Revolt* who got me, basically, back into reading it again. (chuckles)

Dr. Dave: (chuckles)

Criswell: I've been distributing it for all these years but -- (chuckles)

Dr. Dave: Yeah.

Criswell: -- to read it again and because he said to me, "I'm a proto-mutant," he said --

Dr. Dave: (chuckles)

Criswell: -- and he is a proto-mutant and his sons are mutants. The mutants are among us and we are mutating rapidly with technological changes and other kinds of changes that are happening.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, people have used this similar expression for talking about the kids who are born into the computer thing.

Criswell: Mm-hmm.

Dr. Dave: I'm trying to remember what the expression is. It wasn't proto-mutant and mutants but it was the same idea and that will probably occur to me later as we go along.

How did you and Tom meet?

Criswell: I went back to complete my doctorate at the University of Florida and I was also teaching at Jackson Hole University at the same time. I heard that this philosophy professor was interested in existentialism, which I was also. So I wanted to sit in on his class but I never could so I actually met him at a Halloween party that Sidney Jourard gave, a historical Halloween party, at his house and I met Thomas then.

From there we started a dialogue about philosophy. He was very interested in philosophy of the body, very much a phenomenologist and so I was interested in what his ideas were and I started bringing him psychological research and physiological, neurophysiological research that kind of confirmed what he was thinking about and exploring and so forth. We developed a friendship.

Dr. Dave: So you actually started developing this friendship even before you started at Sonoma State.

Criswell: Right.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, wow, I had no idea.

Criswell: Yeah, about '67 I think. Our friendship continued over the years and I brought him out to be a visiting distinguished professor for the Humanistic Psychology Institute, which is now Saybrook Institute in about '72 and then we hired him in '73 and then he moved out. Some time later we married, about '74 we married.

Dr. Dave: All right. Now eventually you and Tom modified the Feldenkrais approach.

Criswell: He organized the first professional training program for Moshé especially in the United States and trained with him and practiced functional integration. As he practiced, his work began to evolve and part of the evolution was bringing in the principles of biofeedback, which he learned in relationship to all of our discussions and his experiences and so forth.

In a way we did it. In a way he did it. In a way it's his work and his evolution and with his death in 1990, I needed to carry it on for him. Having been his right-hand person, it was possible for me to carry it on for him. I did.

Dr. Dave: As you know I've told you before how impressed I am with the way you have carried it on and that you've attributed it to him and put his name on. I think you're characteristically very modest and played a really large role in all of that.

I even got to meet Feldenkrais at your house. You and Tom had him over for dinner or had me over for dinner and Feldenkrais was there. I was impressed by that. As I say you always seem to rise to the top and meet the top folks.

Criswell: Mm-hmm.

Dr. Dave: For people who are not familiar with Feldenkrais work and subsequently Tom Hanna somatic work, let's just dig in a little bit deeper and tell us about that.

Criswell: OK. Feldenkrais was a genius, extraordinary human being, extraordinary.

Dr. Dave: From Israel we should add -- mention.

Criswell: From Israel and had his PhD in physics and was quite knowledgeable in physics. I won't go into his whole history in France and England and back to Israel. He developed a method because he had a problem with a knee for working with his own problem and then he found it extremely beneficial for other people.

It's a work. I'm going to contrast it with what Thomas Ritter developed.

Dr. Dave: Good.

Criswell: In Feldenkrais work, in the hands-on work, the practitioner moves the client in all sorts of wonderful ways especially approximating origin and insertion of muscles, which allows the muscles to relax. But that actually is a brain, sorry, a spinal cord event, we refer to it. Other things triggering reflexes and all sorts of things to get the person to be able to move and maybe move in ways they haven't been able to move for a while or ever. It's extraordinary work.

There are two parts of it. One is the hands-on work and one is the floor exercises, which he called awareness through movement or ATMs. The purpose of those is to expand your movement repertoire to help you differentiate parts of the body and continue your motor development. Thousands of wonderful exercises that he created and then people that he trained have created.

The Hanna Somatic work give the -- you might think of it as the flip side of that, in Hanna Somatics the client does the moving in the hands-on work. The practitioner asks the client to move in a certain way and then provides resistance. Something for the client to push against or pull against to add a little extra load to the contraction and then you slowly come out of the contraction. With that you are changing levels of brain control from the brain stem motor tracks that are quite automatic up to the motor cortex, which is the only part of the brain that can actually relax the muscles. It's the only part of the motor system that synapses on little interneurons that can inhibit the firing of the neurons that are contracting a muscle.

It's sort of based on or relates to a natural process that other animals, that all animals use called pandiculation named for that by various people in the animal sciences such as Fraser who was the Canadian scientist in the field of animal husbandry.

So other animals -- you see a cat doing them -- arched back, and an extended leg, and a rounded back. You see horses also do it. Dogs do it. Witness downward dog. (chuckle)

Dr. Dave: The downward dog posture.

Criswell: The downward dog from yoga. And what those actually are doing is contracting a group of muscles. It's not really a stretch. It's really contracting them and then slowly coming out of a contraction and with that they reset the resting level of their muscles and they are ready to go. They do it after they eat, after they sleep and any time they feel some stiffness they will do a pandiculation. And foals do it about 50 times a day and as the horses get older they do it less and less frequently.

Dr. Dave: OK, now my head is exploding with associations that I want to touch on here before they go away. One of the things that I'm struck with of both Feldenkrais and Hanna Somatics, as I understand them, is that it's about very slow, subtle moments.

Criswell: Mm-hmm.

Dr. Dave: And in a way it reminds me of the whole very large interest right now in mindfulness.

Criswell: Yes.

Dr. Dave: And so the person, in both approaches, the person is being called upon to be mindful of very, very subtle movements.

Criswell: Mm-hmm.

Dr. Dave: And this in turn puts me in mind of the practice of tai chi, which I did for several years, which was also almost painfully slow, very, very slow. Even though there are these different forces coming from different directions -- also I recently interviewed somebody who's been working closely with Peter Levine who has written about trauma and that was based on the study of animals shaking their

bodies. Actually, they've experienced something traumatic so there's that animal link again.

Criswell: Mm-hmm.

Dr. Dave: I have all of these kind of corollary thoughts as I hear you speaking and then I'm wondering about the relationship to bioenergetics. It feels like there might be some connection there too.

Criswell: Mm-hmm. Well, the others are more associated. Bioenergetics even though it's dealing with the body and dealing with the mind is more likely to stir things up than it is to slow things down.

Dr. Dave: Mm-hmm.

Criswell: That's kind of where it departs from these other approaches but I want to say the mindfulness thing, it's wonderful how much it has spread and how much it's used in hospitals and communities and in schools and in classrooms and all of that. Part of it also is mindful yoga which is really a wonderful addition to all of it and which you're doing your yoga mindfully. The thing of it is if you do things fast, the cerebellum does them and it loves to do them and it does them smoothly and does them well and does all that but the cerebellum does not have any connection, direct connections with relaxing your muscles. It can run you around. It can do wonderful things but it can't reset the muscles.

When you are moving slowly, the motor cortex is more likely to be in charge of the movements with a different part of the brain.

Dr. Dave: It probably has something to do with the plasticity of the brain --

Criswell: Yes.

Dr. Dave: -- and a kind of relearning and modification of the brain, right?

Criswell: Yeah, and it is wonderfully stimulating and that contributes to the plasticity. It's a great use and involvement of the brain because the cerebellum is unconscious. It's working at an unconscious level. If you're driving down the road and you realize

you haven't been there, haven't been present for the last 30 miles who has been driving the car. The cerebellum was driving the car. (chuckles)

Dr. Dave: Yeah. (chuckles)

Criswell: But you weren't there. You were not conscious of (inaudible).

Dr. Dave: Yeah, sometimes we have that experience of feeling like we were in a trance or something saying, "Oh my God, where am I? What am I doing?" (chuckles)

Criswell: I know.

Dr. Dave: I'm lucking I didn't get into an accident but it's because, as you say, the cerebellum was in charge and doing its job rather well.

Criswell: Mm-hmm. And it's unconscious. Once upon a time in my life I was interested in doing everything fast. I want to do things faster and faster.

Dr. Dave: Yeah. (chuckles)

Criswell: And I did. I did a whole lot of things very fast for many years but the thing is I was unconscious during a lot of it because the cerebellum was doing it. The thing is when you go slowly and many people resist going slowly, it's unfamiliar and it's uncomfortable and --.

Dr. Dave: I find it hard personally.

Criswell: Yeah, but the thing is if you do these kind of things some of the time slowly, this is what I tell my clients, you can do everything else that you do faster than ever before.

Dr. Dave: Mm-hmm.

Criswell: Because your muscles are not contracted and resisting your movements.

Dr. Dave: Now see that kind of touches on the thing that made me think about bioenergetics and I know historically they're not related

but the idea character armor and chronic unconscious holding of muscles, that's the part that seems to sort of be common.

Criswell: Absolutely and that's a part of Reich's work that is not necessary a key part of contemporary bioenergetics. I don't know how much it is. I just don't know. But the thing is it's a very valuable insight because one of the things that Thomas Hanna coined was something called sensory motor amnesia in which you sort of forget how to move parts of your body or that you need to or (inaudible) how to control particular muscles. They are sort of out of your control. They are being controlled for you. People wandering around -- many of them are prisoners of their bodies. Their bodies are rigid. They can't move very well and they are sort of stuck in them. Now the good news is that can be changed. It can be changed almost instantaneously but most people don't know it until they wander around coping with not being able to move very well.

Dr. Dave: That sounds like a strong claim that it can be removed almost instantaneously. Can you give me an example maybe from your own practice?

Criswell: Oh, my own practice. Well, I...

Dr. Dave: Or somebody else's.

Criswell: No, no, yesterday. Was it yesterday? Yesterday was Sunday. I spoke at a Parkinson's support group in Napa and it was a wonderful, wonderful experience and part of what I was sharing with them was that your muscles may become contracted and when those levels are appropriate, you can decrease that stiffness faster than if you waited for it to learn to become more flexible.

Over and over again in my practice I have people who come in and they're very contracted. All the leg muscles are very contracted from whatever they've been doing. The stress of whatever they've been doing and in the course of an hour -- I mean we can do it -- it doesn't take an hour to do it because we are working with their whole bodies.

You can take a muscle, you ask the person to move and therefore contract let's say the bicep. You bring your palm towards your shoulder and therefore flexing your elbow, you're contracting the bicep muscle. If you put your hand up and then press up against your hand toward your shoulder and then slowly allow your arm to

straighten and repeat that a couple of times, your bicep muscle will not be sitting there contracted. It's that fast. You are --

Dr. Dave: Hmm.

Criswell: -- you are inhibiting the firing of the motor units is what you're actually doing. You can call it decreasing the output to the muscle. You're asking the voluntary motor cortex to stop firing the neurons that shorten the muscle fibers and it's fast.

Dr. Dave: OK. Now you've created an institute in Nevada, California, where you treat, train and certify people in Hanna Somatic work.

Criswell: Yes.

Dr. Dave: Now what you can you tell us about that training program?

Criswell: OK, well, it's basically over a three-year period. It's two nine-day modules per year for three years.

Dr. Dave: That's right. Did you say two or three years?

Criswell: Two. It's three years and in those three years there are two nine-day modules per year.

Dr. Dave: OK.

Criswell: So that every six months they come for nine days. They learn how to do the hands on Hanna Somatic education work and also how to teach the somatic exercises, which are (inaudible) and the awareness through movement exercises because the purposes are different.

Awareness through movement exercises from Feldenkrais -- you might do 45 minutes of particular movement sequence and you're working with half of the body. In the daily maintenance exercises with the Hanna Somatic system, and I'll get back to the training in just a second, you can do them all within about ten minutes once you know the sequence.

Dr. Dave: Mm-hmm.

Criswell: And you can maintain your physical comfort and flexibility and so forth on an ongoing basis. But anyway the training following the first module, you are ready to work with many people who you would have a chance to work with. The people who come for the training, some are massage therapists, some are physical therapists, some are psychologists, some are computer scientists, some are, you know, the whole range of fitness instructors and all sorts of, sometimes Pilates instructors and all sorts of people who have a body/mind interest.

Dr. Dave: Now you also publish a journal called *Somatics*.

Criswell: Mm-hmm.

Dr. Dave: Am I right that you're also the founder as well as the editor of that journal?

Criswell: You might call me a co-founder. I consider Thomas as the founder.

Dr. Dave: Uh-huh.

Criswell: His idea and I served as the associate editor or whatever for the years while he was living and I took it all in 1990 and have published it ever since. I'm the editor and the publisher of *Somatics* magazine.

Dr. Dave: OK. We have been throwing the word "somatics" around as if everybody in the audience knew what we were talking about. How do you define somatics and what sorts of articles would appear in *Somatics* magazine?

Criswell: Somatics is a term coined by Thomas Hanna. It comes from the Greek word soma, which refers to the living body versus the corpse. He took the adjective, which is somatic, which in English is used to refer to things having to do with the body period and added an "s", which makes it a noun and used as the label for the mind body disciplines. There are many of them. You've mentioned some of them already -- tai chi, Feldenkrais and yoga and biofeedback and there are a number of mind-body disciplines. Going about the brain integration of mind and body in different ways.

The magazine publishes articles from all those different traditions plus it has a section in there dealing with research that is relevant to

the somatic disciplines coming from *PubMed*, *Psych Info* and whatever else about all kinds of studies from different research approaches that shine light on the somatic disciplines.

Somatics is a term for the mind-body disciplines.

Dr. Dave: What do you think then about the notion of somatic work as a psychotherapeutic approach?

Criswell: I think it's excellent. (chuckles)

Dr. Dave: (chuckles)

Criswell: Because here we have a client sitting there maybe for years talking about dreams, life, issues and feelings and all those things but talking by in large. When you bring in the body into the equation, then the person can express everything more, can make the changes more readily and so forth and so on. It revitalizes the whole process.

Plus, for the psychotherapist, there's a wonderful book by Babette Rothschild on *Help for the Helper*. The psychotherapist is sitting there for years listening to people's problems and so forth and getting sometimes tenser and tighter over the years. For the therapist to remain somatically comfortable and the client to move on developmentally, both mind and body is very beneficial.

For years I have been trying to bring that into APA in various ways. We all make our little contributions and it's coming in more and more. The thing is that what I have said is, "OK, you're talking about behavior; the year of behavior, the national year of behavior. Well, one is doing the behaving. The body is behaving. Why are you leaving it out?" (chuckles)

Dr. Dave: Right. (chuckles)

Criswell: How can you leave it out?

Dr. Dave: Yeah.

Criswell: Bringing it in brings in all sorts of other things to be concerned about but it also brings in a very motivating, vitalizing aspect to the psychotherapy process.

Dr. Dave: Right. That makes sense to me. Now one of the things that I found particularly fascinating is that in recent years you've extended that work -- I guess it's the Hanna Somatic work to working on horses. How did that come about and with what sorts of results?

Criswell: I was doing some somatics classes and some somatic yoga classes for an equine clinician in Pennngrove, whose name is Dennis Reis and at a certain point he asked me, "Do you think it could be done with horses?" I said, "Probably," and I went home and I thought about it and I read and I searched and so forth and so on. It came me how to do it with horses. So I went back up to his ranch and we tried it with one of the horses. The horse responded immediately.

Dr. Dave: Was the horse sort of moaning, "Oh, boy, that feels so good?"

Criswell: Well, kind of. This was a gelding. There are other ways this horse showed its relaxation because it relaxed immediately. The horse's name is Tristan owned by Shirley Park and he's a historical horse.

Since then we have done it -- I have a training program. I teach people how to do it. I have a DVD so people can do it themselves out there. It follows the same principles. It's an adaptation of Hanna Somatic for horses and occasionally for dogs. It asks the horse to move and therefore, contract a group of muscles. You are working, in this case, with gravity. Then you ask the horse to slowly come out of the contraction about three times and the horse will have relaxed all the muscles that were used in lifting that limb. We're asking the horse to use its frontal lobe just like we're doing with humans as compared to the cerebellum and brain stem and so forth. In about an hour you can go through all the major muscles and the horse stands better, has a better -- might say posture/confirmation and moves more easily, is happier just like a human being.

Dr. Dave: Maybe at some point you'll get a chance to test these ideas out with a Kentucky Derby horse. You ever thought about that? (chuckles)

Criswell: I would love that.

Dr. Dave: You ever thought about that? (chuckles)

Criswell: Oh, I have. I have. Two people that I've trained have worked with racehorses. One in England and one in Ireland. In fact, the one that was worked with in Ireland came over, one of the horses, and won the Breeder's Cup, a particular race in the Breeder's Cup series. It has big potential for racehorses. I would love to have a chance to introduce that to people who are working with racehorses.

This work is useful all the way from a backyard beloved horse including horses that have some lameness issues that have to do with chronically contracted muscles to high performance horses. I worked with one horse that was in a show and had been jumping before it hurt its back and I happen to be there so the trainer asked me to help the horse, which I did. The next day he won his event and was able to perform the next day and run his event. It's the whole gamut there.

Dr. Dave: Yes, yes. Well, I would say so. On a totally different topic now, do I recall that you had something to do with the publication of *A Course in Miracles* because the impact of that course has come up in several of the interviews I've conducted.

Criswell: Mm-hmm.

Dr. Dave: I seem to recall that you played a pivotal role.

Criswell: Mm-hmm. I did and in an odd way I still do. (chuckles)

Dr. Dave: (chuckles) How's that?

Criswell: Judy Scott was her name at the time came to me when I was with the Humanistic Psychology Institute. She told me she wanted to use the course as part of her doctoral work and so seeing the course, hearing about it, I offered to publish it for her through my little press called Free Person Press on the way toward it finding a larger publisher. I think of this as kind of an interim publishing. And so I did publish it, just a few copies, 500 copies or whatever it was. From there then she got funding for her hard cover edition and it went on all over the world.

Dr. Dave: Yes, yes.

Criswell: At the time the last time I took it for duplication, I had a little sad feeling but at that point I didn't know I would no longer be involved with it. But part of me must have known. I realized that I could not go with the course. The course had to go off without me because I had other things I had to do.

Dr. Dave: I would say so. (chuckles)

Criswell: Yeah.

Dr. Dave: So many.

Criswell: Yeah, but the thing is though many, many years later a group who loved *A Course in Miracles* wanted to break the copyright. They wanted to make it available on the Internet, etc., etc. They took it to court. The suit went on for quite some time. They won. It's a whole complex story for part of the publication of the course. They won for an edition prior to it being reworked a little bit and so forth. So there is something called the Criswell edition.

Dr. Dave: Oh my goodness.

Criswell: You can get it on the Internet. (chuckles)

Dr. Dave: Oh my goodness.

Criswell: (Inaudible) I tried really hard. It was interesting. I was deposed during that trial and so I made my contribution there. I told them that I'm very much protective of copyrights and my feelings that and so forth which wasn't relevant to the case but it was like the other shoe dropping. Here's the first publication. Here's being deposed in court. In fact, you can get -- you can download the deposition.

Dr. Dave: I think people may download the Criswell edition. I don't know if they want to download the deposition.

Criswell: I don't think it's necessary. I think parts of it -- anyway it is of interest because Helen Schucman, wonderful, bright woman who so to speak channeled it, was a professor at Columbia University at the time she was transcribing this and she was also on the editorial board for the *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*.

Dr. Dave: (Inaudible)

Criswell: She was very much disowning this. Yes, I'm doing it. I'm writing these things down and we're transcribing it and doing this for about six years but I'm not the author of it. She did not claim authorship and so it's a complex case here. (chuckles)

Dr. Dave: Yeah, I'll say so. (chuckles)

Well, you know we've just scratched the surface of your wonderful and complex and multifaceted life. I wonder if there are any final points you'd wish to make as we wind down here.

Criswell: OK, just one point and that is that everything that I've done I've done because I felt inspired to do it but it all comes together in wanting to contribute to the development of human beings within the global context. They're all approaches toward fostering development.

Dr. Dave: Well, yeah, that really does tie them together.

Well, Dr. Eleanor Criswell, I want to thank you for being my guest today on Shrink Rap Radio.

Criswell: It's been great fun dialoging with you, David. It's a wonderful program and I look forward to continued discussions.