Shrink Rap Radio #40, June 26, 2006. Practical Police Psychology

Dr. David Van Nuys, aka "Dr. Dave" interviews Dr. Laurence Miller
(transcribed from www.ShrinkRapRadio.com by Jo Kelly)

Excerpt: *"What's phenomenal is that as a whole, negotiated hostage situations have a 95% success rate: that is it's resolved without any violence taking place. It's hard to imagine most medical procedures in critical situations that have a 95% success rate. It's a tribute to the power of human communication to defuse the situations. Hostage situations are unique because they combine elements of danger with the presence of a usually disturbed or distraught hostage taker, and you have the presence of innocent people whose lives are at stake at every second. But again the same generalizable skills of crisis intervention that you would use for suicide intervention, or any other kind of violent subject, or barricade situation where someone doesn't want to come out but there may not be actual hostages – the same types of verbal approaches are effective in these situations, you are just applying it to one particular area."*

Introduction: The voice you just heard is that of Laurence Miller PhD. who is the author of a fascinating book titled *Practical Police Psychology: Stress Management And Crisis Intervention for Law Enforcement.* Dr. Miller is the Police Psychologist for the West Palm Beach Police Department, a Forensic Psychological Examiner for the Palm Beach County Court, and a Consulting Psychologist with several regional and national law enforcement agencies. Dr. Miller is also an Instructor at the Police Academy-Criminal Justice Institute of Palm Beach County and is on the adjunct Psychology at Florida Atlantic University. His specialties include clinical psychology, neuropsychology, forensic psychology, and business psychology. His list of professional affiliations, publications, and speaking engagements is too long to list here.

Dr. Dave: My guest today is forensic psychologist Dr. Laurence Miller. Larry welcome to Shrink Rap Radio.

Miller: I'm glad to be here.

Dr. Dave: Great. There is so much about your career that we could discuss but I think I'd like to focus on your latest book, *Practical Police Psychology* which just came out this year. Who's your intended audience for this book?

Miller: I actually wrote this as kind of a cross over book because as a psychologist I live in a world of psychology, but as a police psychologist I

live in a world of police officers and police administrators. And one of the reasons for writing the book is I don't think that either camp really knows about or sufficiently appreciates what the others can contribute to the field. Unfortunately most police officers run into psychologists either in the course of some kind of disciplinary action such as being evaluated for a fitness for duty evaluation or something like that, or they are referred by their EAP for some kind of mandatory counselling; and they really don't have a idea of how psychology can contribute to better policing in general.

What's interesting is that one area where psychology supposedly is appreciated is the area of forensic examination, such as behavioural profiling. And there psychological concepts are utilised routinely; but in the day to day work of police officers who basically patrol the streets, and ride in cars, and protect citizens the contribution of psychology is under recognised, so this book is kind of for them as well.

Dr. Dave: OK so what was your goal in writing the book, what do you hope it will accomplish?

Miller: Well I wanted to take psychology and write a book that was rigorous in terms of the science and the methodology and the content behind it, but again emphasise the term practical. Because what I try to do in each chapter is to give principles that a police officer can use on a day to day basis in their practical work on patrol, or in special kinds of assignments such as under cover, hostage negotiations, and so on. Also I wanted a text that psychologists could use who either work with law enforcement officers, or maybe planning to or considering it, that would give them some guidance into the world of law enforcement and how they can best apply their skills in a practical focussed way.

Dr. Dave: Well I tell you I think that you really succeeded in your goals. I have to tell you I have spent several hours with the copy of the book that you recently sent me, and I am very, very impressed. I think the book potentially has a much wider appeal than the audience that you have specified. As you point out, due to the influence of Hollywood and a variety of novels and so on, the police have achieved a kind of mythic stature in the popular imagination, for both good and for bad. So in that sense I think we are all interested in the police. I even think that your book Practical Police Psychology would make a great coffee table book, even though it doesn't have any pictures – or a good bathroom book that people could pick up and read random short selections.

Miller: I'm not sure I like the direction this is going (laughter) but I do appreciate your comments and I am someone who can take a compliment graciously, so I do appreciate your confidence in the book.

Dr. Dave: Really: the bathroom recommendation is meant in the best possible way (laughing).

Miller: We will try to get it onto coffee tables and bathrooms all across America.

Dr. Dave: Because I found it easy to jump in anywhere into the book and to find something that was both interesting and practical. I find that your book is chock full of really practical advice. It's titled *Practical Police Psychology* and I think you really achieved that goal of providing a manual of practical approaches to dealing with stress management, and crisis intervention issues, that at some point are likely to pop up in nearly everyone's lives.

Miller: I think the principles in the book are somewhat universal, because to deal with crisis intervention for example: crisis intervention doesn't just happen in law enforcement. A psychologist, who knows better than we do about the world of crisis intervention, whether you are dealing with a distraught couple, or trying to talk someone out of a suicide attempt, any of us who work in the real world of psychology should have adequate training in crisis intervention. And one of the points I make in the first chapter of the book is in essence a lot of what is in the book isn't startlingly new, it's really again applications of well validated principles of psychology to the world of law enforcement police work.

I guess the unique contribution is doing it in a practical way. Because remember these are cops, if they can't pick this up and use this right from the get go then they aren't going to have any interest in it. Unlike us academic psychologists, they are less interested in the theory; they want to know what can I do right now, how does this apply. And a lot of the content of the book grew out of my experiences teaching – police academy, seminars, lectures – and basically the two words I heard most often were "so what". How's that going to help me in a practical situation when I'm involved with an armed suspect, or if I'm trying to talk down a suicide, or if I've got a hostage crisis or a domestic violence situation – what do I actually do?

Dr. Dave: Right.

Miller: And that was really the challenge; was to take these concepts and try to boil them down to usable principles.

Dr. Dave: Definitely. You know when I was a newly minted Ph.D. I was asked to teach a course, an introduction to psychology, for the police department of Santa Rosa, California. I sure wish I had had this text then, I can tell you; because I just covered straight intro to psych and they were reasonably interested I have to say, even though it was a pretty straight intro to psych type class and it didn't have all the very focussed, practical advice that your book has.

Indeed your book is theoretically solid to a very impressive degree, with lots of academic citations: many of which I was impressed to see are research papers that you authored. But at the same time it's very readable; I like the way you seamlessly move back and forth between academic language and cop talk.

Miller: Well again a lot of my lessons on how to teach and how to write came from all the bad experiences I've had as a student and a graduate student, and basically learning how not to do things. And on the one hand I become frustrated with books that are academically sound but at the same time read like you are reading from the telephone book: dry and boring and basically they are a strain to read even if you like the stuff.

Dr. Dave: I know exactly what you are talking about.

Miller: And at the same time you have books that are written from a practical point of view, but unfortunately the theory behind it is basically b.s. it really has no factual foundation. So what I wanted to do and hopefully have succeeded in doing is creating a book that an academic scholar can look at, and consider to be a valid presentation of the field of police psychology but that any cop can pick up and use. Hopefully this book will achieve that goal.

Dr. Dave: Yes well as I say, I think it really does. I know at Sonoma State University where I have taught for years we have a criminal justice department. I'll call it to their attention; I think it ought to be a standard text across the land.

Miller: That's usually where most police psychology per se or police science or behavioural or law enforcement science is taught: at departments of criminal justice. Psychologists for some reason are late to come to this field of study, even though you would think it would be directly applicable

to their work. Just this coming Fall I will be teaching a course in police psychology at Florida Atlantic University, and I was invited to do so by the department chair because basically I sent them a copy of the book, and he said: wait a minute, why don't you teach a course in this? And I was actually surprised that their own criminal justice department didn't have a course in police psychology, but apparently they didn't and so we're jumping in to fill the gap.

Dr. Dave: Yes. You know in our psychology department there was an interesting phenomenon of lots of sweet young things, young women, co-eds, who were declaring an interest in becoming criminal profilers – you know for the FBI, or the CIA, or something like that. Probably due to the influence of some TV shows or something, I'm not sure.

Miller: Well it's interesting you mention criminal profiling; because if you look at the data, and the number of actual cases where criminal profiling is either an exclusive or a major contributor to solving a case: do you know what the percentages are?

Dr. Dave: I don't.

Miller: About 3 to 8%.

Dr. Dave: Really low.

Miller: So it's not like criminal profiling is useless, but I think it's been overblown; again due to the influence of TV and Hollywood. It still is a fascinating area of forensic science and I would not discourage anybody from going into it.

But like anything that we know about – whether it's in criminal justice or psychology, whether it's a type of school of psychotherapy, or a particular psychometric test – what people tend to do is imbue whatever they are working with as the end all and be all, and what happens is it does have some limited applicability but by overblowing it you essentially undermine the credibility of the areas where it would have worked in the first place.

Dr. Dave: Yes well it's maybe a good thing I didn't know that, because I co-authored a book in which I was invited to, and did try my hand at profiling a famous unsolved serial murder case. The book's called, This Is The Zodiac Speaking. You might take a look at some time and send me back my grade.

Miller: What was your experience in working in that area?

Dr. Dave: Well I was working with very fragmentary evidence. I was working with letters that the Zodiac killer had sent to the police department and the newspapers; basically threatening and taunting letters. So based on very fragmentary evidence I drew some conclusions, and I went way out on a psychological limb where I expected I might get nailed by my colleagues; so far it hasn't happened, but we'll see.

Let's get back to your book. I find your chapter titles fascinating; and let me take you through some of them and perhaps you can give us kind of a top line overview. For example you talk about Street Psychology 101: what do you see as the basics of Street Psychology 101?

Miller: Well you basically have officers, you have beat cops or patrol cops whose job is to interact with citizens on a day to day basis. Believe it or not most police officers want their job to be easier rather than harder. And much of the interaction that police officers have with citizens is usually in the context of some kind of problem. So the thrust of that chapter is basically helping cops be able to use communication strategies to defuse situations that might otherwise escalate into dangerous or violent situations. And this is anything from mediating neighbour disputes, to mediating disputes between two merchants, to intervening in domestic calls, to also dealing with mentally ill citizens. And again, applying some of the lessons of basic crisis intervention, and just plain good communication skill can enable a lot of officers to basically keep situations from blowing over.

Now a lot of good cops already do this, and when I teach in my courses there are always a couple of cops who sort of look at me and shrug and say: well this is what I've been doing all along. And the answer is yes, and that is why you probably have a good relationship with the community you patrol, and that is very important in this era of what's called community policing. Because for a long time in the 60s and 70s police officers were often seen as armies of occupation, patrolling through the neighbourhood: much like an occupying military force. And in the late 70s through the 80s and certainly in the last decade the move in major cities has been to essentially establish what used to be – what our parents and grand parents understood – which was the beat cop. The cop who intimately knew his neighbourhood, knew the people, was familiar with them because that actually prevents crimes from happening before they start; because you have a much more familiar and co-operative citizen population. And to do that you do need to have good communication skills. The era of patrolling around in a squad car, jumping out and making an arrest is pretty much over

if you want to have effective policing in the modern world. So that chapter is a way of helping to do that.

Dr. Dave: Yes; what about cops on mountain bikes, that's a trend I've noticed. Where do you see that? Is that sort of mid way between the patrol car and the cop walking around?

Miller: Well you know cops have to respond to their terrain. If the area that has to be covered is just too big to be covered on foot, then obviously you have to use some kind of vehicle. And if you think about it, a bike is a lot less insulating than a police car; a bike essentially you're on the street even though you are rolling down the street instead of walking. So it really is more of an intimate connection with the citizenry than being in a car. I think probably the reason they went to mountain bikes is purely practical: a bike can take you places faster, and if you do have to go places or even pursue a suspect you can do so far more efficiently on a bike in many areas than you can do in a police car. A bike can go faster than a person can run, but you can't get a police car down an alley or over grass the same way you can a mountain bike. So in every sense of the word probably the areas where this has been employed has been quite successful.

Dr. Dave: Yes it certainly makes sense to me.

Miller: I don't know that I would like wearing those little short pants.

Dr. Dave: Right (laughing) exactly. They do look vulnerable in those little shorts.

You were talking about the mediation: and I don't know if you've got your book in front of you and if you'll remember the specific steps. I know sometimes things I've written I don't necessarily remember everything I wrote. But I wonder if you are able to take us through some of the specific steps that you outlined for a police officer to be a mediator in a domestic or neighbourhood dispute. You've kind of broken it down into specific steps.

Miller: Well I don't have the book in front of me but I'll try to reconstruct it. Again, very little in this book is absolutely brand new, made up on the spot. A lot of this is employing well validated principles of arbitration and mediation that have been used in other contexts. Business people have been using mediation and arbitration for decades; countries when they have political debates, the Camp David Accords was a perfect example of mediation. I use those two terms as others have used them.

Mediation – basically having the officer serve as a go between to clarify and focus the different positions of the disputing parties: whether they may be a husband and wife in a domestic dispute, or two neighbours that are arguing about something in their yard, or two merchants who are having a conflict over something. Basically what the officer engages in is a kind of shuttle diplomacy, and then at the end sort of clarifies and allows the two disputants to arrive at their own conclusion which the officer then puts his unofficial stamp of approval on. And it's surprising how people who are fighting when they have a neutral third party – if indeed you can convince both parties that the officer is being neutral – but assuming you can do that, it's very effective because the officer still has that stamp of authority, and a lot of times it enables people to arrive at conclusions through negotiations themselves that they wouldn't be able to do if they just had to do it face to face.

When that doesn't work a lot of times what you'll move to is something called arbitration, which is a similar process of going back and forth and clarifying and focussing everybody's position. But here because the two parties really can't come to an agreement on their own, the officer says look, I am going to make a command decision. I'm going to listen to you, and much like a judge in a court case, I'm going to decide what I think is fair and you agree to abide by this if you want me to do this. Again it's surprising how many times people – if they believe the process to be fair – will go along with this kind of procedure.

Now remember what I've just described takes time, it takes time and it takes a certain degree of communication skill. Not every officer, in fact not many officers are going to be very comfortable and familiar doing this. The really good cops do this instinctively; this is a gift that they have and they've honed it and refined it through using it.

But virtually any of these skills and virtually any of the skills in this book can be taught through sufficient training and practice. And if you do that you are going to be a much more effective officer, in the sense of having a community that has a low crime rate without having to have a high arrest index.

Dr. Dave: You know one of the things that I liked about your book is that you have sample interactions, and sample dialogues that really sound like they have come right out of life; and they are easily transportable into other situations and that's why I think this book potentially has practicality for people who are not involved in law enforcement. And I found one of the segments that I really liked that illustrates what you just now described in

this officer as mediator situation. And I'd like to read from your book a couple of paragraphs that really illustrate what you're talking about. And it's kind of a script that an officer might use.

"The officer says: ok folks I can see you're having difficulty working this out, so maybe I can help here. We are going to try something called mediation. I am going to hear each of you out, get each of your sides of the story and then I'll help you come to a decision. Hopefully I'm not going to have to make the decision for you, because if you come to some agreement I want it to be your agreement. But my role is to help clarify the situation and help each of you understand where the other one is coming from. Hopefully you can work it out between you – remember this is voluntary – but if you agree to try to settle things this way the decision will be binding: alright? If it seems clear that we're getting nowhere, or if you just don't want to do things this way, then I'll have to make a command decision so this doesn't blow out of control; but my first choice is that you guys work it out for yourselves."

"OK a couple of ground rules. The basic word here is respect, otherwise this isn't going to work; so no shouting, cursing, or threatening. You know if anyone gets physical that's an arrestable offence; so keep it peaceful, alright? I want to make sure everybody gets heard, so when one person is speaking, no interruptions from the other side – the next speaker gets the same courtesy. Also this is between us as long as I don't have to make an arrest or disclose something reportable, this conversation stays with me. So I urge you to keep things controversial between yourselves so this doesn't become the latest gossip of the neighbourhood. If you are having trouble dealing with this face to face I may have to separate you, and shuttle back and forth to help you hammer out an agreement, and if we are still getting nowhere I may have to play Judge Wapner and make the final decision myself, but hopefully I can help you guys work it out for yourselves."

So that was a great example of the kind of practical scenario setting that you do in the book.

Miller: I'm glad you brought that up because it raises two important points. One of the things I do in my courses and training seminars is I give the seminar attendees a copy of a very similar script. And I ask them to first go through it pretty much as it's written. And even though I try to do it colloquially, when you write something on the page it does sound a little bit stiff and wooden. So what I ask the cops in the class to do is to make up their own version, talk in their own idiom; so somebody who is patrolling a

white middle class area is going to talk a little differently to someone who is patrolling in the 'hood. And I ask them to speak in a language that is most comfortable to them and most comfortable to their constituents, and do it in a couple of different ways and then do it in the opposite way. So the 'hood guy talks in the middle class idiom, and vice versa. And by doing this, even though it sounds artificial, and there is a lot of joking and laughing in the class, eventually what the officers do is they get very comfortable talking to different kinds of people in different styles. And so when they come across a real situation – again it doesn't feel like suddenly they have to pull out their script like they are doing cold call selling, it actually feels something natural that is coming from them. Which if you think about it is the basis for any training; and I use that analogy: if they are on the firearms range and they are shooting at a target, their goal is not to be able to shoot in a modified Weaver stance at a target 200 yards away; the goal is to be able to "shoot from the hip" and be able to deal with things as they come. So the same kind of practice and over learning, and practice in different contexts applies to verbal skills the same way it does to physical skills.

The second point is what I mentioned earlier, to do this takes time. It takes time, and the more comfortable you are with the process, the more likely you are to spend the time that's necessary. But in terms of neighbourhood and community policing it definitely pays off.

Dr. Dave: Yes I can really imagine. It's a stretch for me actually to imagine a policeman carrying out that sort of mediation that I just read; I believe it when you say that it is possible, I just have never encountered a policeman who was working at that level.

Miller: Well again, have you been in a situation where you've been on the street arguing with someone and a cop car pulls up and says: OK what's going on here? Typically somebody like you and I because of our own demographic is going to experience a police officer in a negative way most commonly for some kind of traffic stop, and even then if you think about it – if you've been pulled over more than once, anybody who has had that experience several times knows that there is a tremendous difference in terms of how the officer behaves. Anything from nasty and sarcastic and cynical, to friendly and have a nice day, to everything in between; and again there is a way of interacting with people.

It's interesting, we talk about TV but sometimes there are positive aspects; if you watch that TV show Cops.

Dr. Dave: Right, I've seen it.

Miller: You see how some of these officers do act toward some of the people they talk to. If nothing else about that show it is good at portraying the different styles that officers have in these kinds of critical situations. And you can almost see if you watch enough of these shows, you can almost predict within 10 seconds this is going to be a take down situation. Where in other situations you see where someone knows good communication skills basically taking a situation that might have exploded and calming it down. So in that sense I guess it's one positive use of reality TV.

Dr. Dave: Right; and some people as you point out are naturally gifted in this way. I have been in situations where my back immediately got up because of something somebody said that was kind of provocative; but I was with somebody who was very good at defusing the situation, and just said something humorous or made themselves just kind of plain and non threatening and it kind of defused the situation. So I know from my own experience what you're getting at here.

Miller: Well remember if you think of a police officer as somebody who has to be a professional; police officers are the only non-military profession that is not only permitted but mandated to use coercive physical force as part of their job. If you think about it – and I tell this to citizen groups all the time, and some cops don't even realise it – if you fall down in the street and clutch your chest in pain, and a paramedic ambulance just happens to be in the neighbourhood and they zoom up to you and they leap out with all their equipment, and you say "don't touch me": guess what, they are not allowed to touch you. If you are conscious enough, and stable enough, and competent enough to say "don't touch me, I do not want to be treated", they cannot treat you.

On the other hand, let's say you get up, you recover and you are walking home; and you see a little disturbance going on, and you start becoming part of a crowd that starts gawking at the disturbance. And a police officer says: please move along; and you say "nothing doing, I want to watch these goings on". And he says: sir if you don't move along I am going to have to arrest you, this is a restricted area. And you say "I don't want to move along"; he's going to arrest you. He will use coercive physical force to physically move you out of the area. If anyone else did that to you they could be subject to arrest themselves. And with this comes tremendous responsibility.

What I tell officers is: when you put on that uniform, or plain clothes or whatever it is; part of your professionalism is how you react. And the best

police officers, the best soldiers, the best sales people, the best people who are in any kind of situation where you deal with the sometimes obstreperous aspect of human nature – if you take things personally you are not going to last very long in this business; because you will be very easy to control. So when you have a citizen who is cursing at you, yelling at you, calling all kinds of names, part of the job – part of what you are getting paid to do – is have a certain demeanour, and a certain behavioural style that is not going to further inflame the situation. Now of course we all know it's easier said than done, but it certainly is an aspirational model that anybody in a position of great physical responsibility should try to abide by.

Dr. Dave: Right. A frequent kind of police call involves domestic disputes, and you say that cops dread those calls. Why is that?

Miller: The two most dangerous calls in police work are traffic stops and domestic calls. Traffic stops because of the sheer unknowability of it, the sheer unpredictability; remember you literally have no idea who is in that car. It could be just some poor little old lady who lost her way; or it could be some guy who's got a car full of drugs, and this is his strike three and he knows if he goes down this time he's going away forever, and no way he's ever going back to jail so he'll do anything to get out of there. So it's the sheer unpredictability of a traffic stop that's dangerous.

What makes domestic calls dangerous is the sheer level of emotion involved. If you have two people who do have personal relationships with each other, either it has not escalated to physical violence yet and the neighbours have called police because there is shouting and screaming, and babies crying and so on. Or there has been physical injury, in which case a mandatory arrest is usually called for. But because the people are in such a high state of emotion it can turn violent at any moment. If two people are arguing, and you get in the middle of them what's going to happen?

At the same time, officers who go into a home or a domicile are in an unknown area with unknown rooms; you don't know who else is in the house. You have a dangerous situation, because even if a fight breaks out and the officer has to use physical force to arrest a suspect, or even has to defend himself against a gun wielding suspect, you don t know if there are kids in the house, you don't know who else is there. So here you have the combination of an unknown situation with high volatile emotions going on, and it's very easy for these things to escalate out of control; and that's why it is a tribute to an officer's communication skill when they can defuse this kind of situation, and not have to make an arrest if no violence has taken place.

Dr. Dave: OK let me ask you about one more chapter in your book, which has tips for hostage negotiations. We've all seen these dramatically depicted in movies and TV shows: how accurate are those depictions?

Miller: Interestingly enough the ones that I have seen –I don't watch every single Hollywood depiction – but the few that I've seen have actually been pretty accurate in terms of the process. Remember what they are showing you on TV is probably a few seconds or minutes of a process that typically lasts hours or days. The sheer exhaustion factor of a hostage negotiation is probably the most draining aspect of it; because they are not usually resolved within the half hour or hour of TV show. You can have hours and hours when little goes on then you can have 15 seconds of punctuated conversation; so it can be extremely nerve racking and extremely frustrating.

What's phenomenal is that as a whole, negotiated hostage situations have a 95% success rate: that is it's resolved without any violence taking place. It's hard to imagine most medical procedures in critical situations that have a 95% success rate. It's a tribute to the power of human communication to defuse the situations. Hostage situations are unique because they combine elements of danger with the presence of a usually disturbed or distraught hostage taker, and you have the presence of innocent people whose lives are at stake at every second. But again the same generalizable skills of crisis intervention that you would use for suicide intervention, or any other kind of violent subject, or barricade situation where someone doesn't want to come out but there may not be actual hostages – the same types of verbal approaches are effective in these situations, you are just applying it to one particular area.

Dr. Dave: OK. Well let's pull back a little bit and look a bit at your own background. When did you first know that you wanted to become a psychologist? What was it about the profession that called to you?

Miller: Actually I started out by wanting to be a writer; I wanted to be a novelist.

Dr. Dave: I did too; interesting. Me too.

Miller: I always enjoyed reading and I always lived in kind of a world of books. I actually started out as an English major and I think it was my first or second course as an English major in college, where luckily enough or unluckily enough I had a professor who was a particular stickler for detail; and this is the kind of guy, the professor from hell that everybody dreads

having, and the only thing that was missing was the tweed jacket and the pipe. And he was more concerned with how wide the margins were, and how many words were on the page, and rules and regulations; and really cared nothing for the creative process which to me seemed bizarre for an English major.

At the same time I had met someone who was a little older than me and had just graduated with his bachelor's degree in psychology. And this looked like something interesting; and besides there was more literature in psychology, and psychology in literature than there was in other fields. So I kind of got hooked and liked the aspect of learning things about human nature, but instead of writing about them in novels being able to look forward to the prospect of applying them in real life. That's what launched my undergraduate career.

Dr. Dave: And where was that?

Miller: That was at Queens College, the City University of New York college system.

Dr. Dave: I thought I was hearing a little New York in your voice there, even though you are living in Florida now.

Miller: Well I'm glad you are hearing a little, because when I speak to people from New York who I haven't spoken to for the 18 years I have been in Florida, they can't believe that I'm actually pronouncing my consonants.

Dr. Dave: OK (laughing).

Miller: Yet when I speak to people who are Florida natives, or from different parts of the country they ask me if I have just got off the bus from The Bronx.

Dr. Dave: Yes – right. So where did you go after Queens College?

Miller: I got my masters degree at Queens College as well, and then went to the City University of New York, still called City College. In the interim I became very interested in the brain; I took some neuropsychology classes, physiological psychology classes, and became fascinated by the human brain and wanted to study the area of brain behaviour relationships. So I first went to a program that dealt specifically with physiological psychology, mainly experimental which was doing research with mainly animals. Then there was a different branch of the City University system that was a human

neuropsychology program that actually dealt with human beings who had different kinds of brain injuries, or dementias, or learning disabilities and basically did my graduate work there. And actually did my practicum at a psychiatric facility.

So after doing locations through VA hospitals and places like that, evaluating and dealing with stroke victims and brain in jury victims I actually started getting interested in the neuropsychology of I guess you would call psychiatric syndromes like schizophrenia, depression, substance abuse and so on. And basically worked for several years at a psychiatric hospital doing neuropsychological evaluations of these patients; and actually did some research and published some papers on the neuropsychology of substance abuse and other syndromes. And I got my Ph.D. finally completed my doctorate, which I did on the neuropsychology of psychopaths, which today we call them anti-social personalities.

Dr. Dave: Yes, very interesting.

Miller: I came to Florida because there was actually an interesting job opportunity at a sister hospital of the hospital I had worked at in New Jersey; and I was down here and basically stayed with that institution for about a year, and then basically went into private practice.

In the meantime got interested in the forensic aspects of neuropsychology, in the beginning mostly civil forensics which dealt with things like personal injury and compensation claims, where I would evaluate people and document the level and extent of their brain injury and brain impairment and relate this to damages for civil cases. In addition to seeing regular patients as any clinical psychologist or psychotherapist would.

Through my work in neuropsychology, I got involved in evaluating and treating other kinds of patients with different types of what I call traumatic disability syndromes: such as chronic pain, and post traumatic stress disorder. What I started to discover is that many of the symptoms of individuals with a post concussion syndrome for example overlapped with those of individuals who had been psychologically traumatised: problems with attention and concentration, mood disturbances, and so on. So I became interested in the process of psychological traumatisation: which led me to treat a wider variety of injury victims including a few fire fighters, and emergency service workers, and police officers who would come in with varying types of syndromes.

Then I became involved in the critical incident stress movement, the wonderful organization, the International Critical Incident Stress Foundation that was started by Geoffrey Mitchell, still active today; and became the clinical director of the Palm Beach County Critical Incident Stress Debriefing Team. I know that's a mouthful. And what we would do is go out on critical calls where the personnel from police officers, to fire fighters, to paramedics, if they had a particularly difficult and traumatic call – usually involving the death of a child, or maybe serious injury of a colleague – they would need a very quick traumatic stress debriefing to get them going, and either provide the basis for further follow up, or just kind of patch it together so that they can continue with their work.

After several years of doing this, I literally got a call in the middle of the night one night from one of the police officers I'd worked with who said "we've had an officer involved in a shooting: we need you to come to the scene". And my response to him was – don't you have a guy who does this for your department? And his response was basically, "you're it". So that was my field promotion as the Police Psychologist in West Palm Beach Police Department.

I became more involved in some other aspects of police work including a lot of the stuff that's covered in the book; so things have come full circle. I still do some of the neuropsychology; I do have a private practice where I see clinical patients; and a lot of it is also forensic psychology and police psychology. In addition to that I became interested in victim services; I do work a lot with crime victims and I do a fair amount of criminal psychology, evaluations to courts, things like: dangerousness, capacity to stand trial, insanity defence and so on. So I keep myself pretty busy.

Dr. Dave: It sure sounds like it! You have a very diverse and deep background.

What if there's a listener who wants to follow a similar career path; I do have some students that listen to this show. Is there a program somewhere in the country that you would recommend, or a graduate study?

Miller: Great question. People are always asking, largely due to the influence of TV – how does one become a police psychologist, or forensic psychologist, or a guy like the ones they see on CSI, or SVU – and there are several routes you can take. You can take the criminal justice, law enforcement route, or you can take the psychology route; and I tell people, I don't want them to think there is only one way to do it.

A lot of it involves the university or the educational system that's convenient to the person. So if you live in an area, or if you are in a college that has a fantastic criminal justice department but doesn't have much of a psych department, then you can major in criminal justice and take your minor as psych. Then when you go on to graduate school you can either get a degree in criminal justice or psych with a focus in forensics.

On the other hand if you are already a psych major or even a practicing psychologist and you want to get some training, then you can take some training in criminal justice and police psychology, and do it that way. What a lot of young people starting out do in an ideal sense is a double major in psych and criminal justice; and that way when they graduate they are prepared to go into whatever department will most support their career goals.

Dr. Dave: Well you know what; we have run out of time here. I could just go on and on with this interview because you do have so many areas of specialisation. I'm really so happy to have discovered you and your book.

Dr Larry Miller – thanks so much for being our guest today on Shrink Rap Radio

Miller: It's been my pleasure, and this interview has been a delight.