

**Shrink Rap Radio #467, August 6, 2015, How to Step Out of Your Story**  
**David Van Nuys, Ph.D, aka “Dr. Dave” interviews Kim Schneiderman,**  
**LCSW, MSW**

(transcribed from [www.ShrinkRapRadio.com](http://www.ShrinkRapRadio.com) by Kat Bautista)

**Introduction:** Today my guest is licensed clinical social worker, Kim Schneiderman, who is author of the 2015 book Step Out of Your Story: Writing Exercises to Reframe and Transform Your Life. Now, here’s today’s interview.

**Dr. Dave:** Kim Schneiderman, welcome to Shrink Rap Radio.

**Kim Schneiderman:** Thanks for having me.

**Dr. Dave:** Well, I’ve been eager to talk to you, so I’m glad that we’re finally connected here. Congratulations on your book, Step Out of Your Story: Writing Exercises to Reframe and Transform Your Life.

**Schneiderman:** Thank you so much.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah. Yeah

**Dr. Dave:** Something to be proud of there. So what inspired you to write Step Out of Your Story?

**Schneiderman:** Well, there are many ways to tell this story. But I suppose it was this lifelong perspective of seeing my life as a story and myself as the protagonist of that story...

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah.

**Schneiderman:** ...at times when I was in challenging circumstances, being able to literally step out of my story and talk to myself in the third person and ask myself, “If I were reading this, about this situation in a novel or watching it in a film, what would I want to happen...

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah.

**Schneiderman:** ...in this story?” Like, how would I want it to unfold? And that allowed me to – if I were getting caught up in some sort of cognitive loop of telling myself the same stories all over and over again, I could step out of it and say, “Oh, wow, I have an opportunity to make a change here and do things differently, how would I want to respond to this situation?” So that’s the abridged version of what inspired me to write this book.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah. Well, great. And I really resonated to that. You tell the story that as a child you imagined yourself as a character in a novel...

**Schneiderman:** Yes.

**Dr. Dave:** ...and that particularly resonated with me, because I had a similar experience as a child, and I think it may have actually lasted well past childhood. (laughs)

**Schneiderman:** (laughs) Right.

**Dr. Dave:** As I got older it was – I had the sense of wanting to be the hero in my own novel...

**Schneiderman:** Yeah.

**Dr. Dave:** ...wanting to make sure that I did heroic...

**Schneiderman:** Uh-huh.

**Dr. Dave:** ...things, which got me into trouble sometimes (laughs), trying to lead an exciting life, I must say.

**Schneiderman:** Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

**Dr. Dave:** And also in the book's preface you share the story of caring for your ill father.

**Schneiderman:** Right.

**Dr. Dave:** And maybe you can share that with us and say something about how that experience contributed to the book.

**Schneiderman:** Sure. Well, the book was already in the works. It was based on a series of writing exercises that I created for workshops in the New York area around the time of the recession and the idea is that – actually I had read something, it was a mystical book (laughs) by a scholar of Kabbalah who is actually Kirk Douglas's Kabbalah teacher.

**Dr. Dave:** Uh-huh.

**Schneiderman:** And he said that he was interviewing Kirk Douglas, he was telling him "I see it, when you play a character you really become that character," and Kirk Douglas said, "No, no, no, that's actually not true. I always give a lot of love and attention to the characters that I play but I always have a sense that I'm not just – I never become the role."

**Dr. Dave:** Uh-huh.

**Schneiderman:** "I always have the sense that there's a little bit 'I can't get too attached to it.'" And the Rabbi who was his teacher was going on to say that that's how he looks at life. He was trying to make the point that we're all souls playing roles, and that we become too attached to the roles that we play, we can limit ourselves...

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah.

**Schneiderman:** ...like, “I’m only this” or “I’m only that.” So, looking at that, I was trying to create workshops for people who have lost their jobs, who really define themselves by their job titles, to see that they were souls playing roles, that there’s a larger narrative arc to their life.

**Dr. Dave:** Mm-hmm.

**Schneiderman:** And it was very successful, but then what had happened is basically I had a very tough 10 years. My mother died of cancer 10 years ago, after an 11-year struggle with ovarian cancer. My father had been – and my whole book is about seeing your whole life as a story, so my father had been the antagonist of my childhood story, and we had started to develop a better relationship after my mother died, but still a little tense. And when he 7 years later – and in between that time actually, he had met someone that I really loved and she developed cancer and died. And I mean, it’s just very sad.

**Dr. Dave:** Oh, my goodness. Yeah.

**Schneiderman:** And these aren’t young people, too, so it has that element of it, too, because – when it became clear that he had terminal cancer, and I had to leave New York to go down to Florida and become his hospice caregiver – I’m not married, I don’t have any kids and I was really still holding on to this dream that my father would walk me down the aisle and I had to really ask myself “Could I walk my own dog?” So I had really believed that I had the power to transform tragedies into triumphs simply by the way that I chose to look at my story...

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah.

**Schneiderman:** ...or to tell my story. Now what I discovered is that I did, but I had to read between the lines, because what happened when I was taking care of my dad is that even though it was probably the hardest thing I ever did, and if I told you the things that we did you would say, “Well, that sounds like a really difficult experience.” But underneath all the things that I did that happened in that time was internally between me and my dad, our relationship just flourished and we got to know each other in such a deep way. There was so much healing, and I remember my dad saying a few weeks before he died that he was amazed that he was still learning and growing, and I asked him what he was learning, and he said that he had discovered that people had found a way to love him and that he had found a way to love them, and that really stuck with me. And so basically there are many ways that I could tell this particular story...

**Dr. Dave:** Sure.

**Schneiderman:** I could tell it – I could focus on all the hard things that happened with my dad...

**Dr. Dave:** Right.

**Schneiderman:** ...and I could focus on the fact that I was left a middle-aged orphan, or I could focus on the fact that it profoundly changed my relationship with him...

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah.

**Schneiderman:** ...with men, and was very healing for me. And so that's partly the inspiration that there are many ways to tell your story, but how you tell your story affects how you feel about your story, which influences how it unfolds.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah. We're going to come back to that theme as well. Before I go on to that area, though, I want to ask about what other influences in your life have oriented you towards story and drama. For example, I read that you've been a journalist. I'm wondering if you've been involved with theater or psychodrama or other things like that.

**Schneiderman:** You know it's funny – so I was a journalist, yes, so I began my career – Well, I was an English major and I don't know – I was a big reader as a kid...

**Dr. Dave:** Me too.

**Schneiderman:** English classes were my favorite. I don't know – And I was...

**Dr. Dave:** Me too. Me too. (laughs)

**Schneiderman:** Oh, yeah, and then as an adult I studied Torah, which is, I guess, what some people would call the Old Testament, and I love the whole process of using your power of interpretation to read into the motives of the characters and to try to understand them. And what struck me is that – one of the techniques that I used in my book is writing exercises in the third person to give yourself some emotional distance. It's in alignment with a narrative therapy concept of externalization. So the idea is you write about yourself in third person. It gives you some emotional distance. And I noticed that when people were talking about – I'm thinking of a character – trying to think of a character in the story but – the biblical Jacob, or Gatsby, whoever they're talking about but you have to use your – sometimes, what struck me is it felt like people were actually talking about themselves but in a disguised way, because how could you identify with a character unless you had some experience of it yourself? And I thought, "Well, wouldn't that be interesting to be able to find a way that people could have that distance but with their own story, not something they were reading in a novel."

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah. Now you mentioned narrative therapy. You're a psychotherapist and sounds like you've been influenced by narrative therapy, and that's an area that I have not really interviewed anybody about or studied much myself. Can you give us a bit of an introduction to narrative therapy?

**Schneiderman:** Well, actually, here's the funny thing. I came up with this idea before really I had heard of narrative therapy. I didn't really know what it was.

**Dr. Dave:** Uh-huh.

**Schneiderman:** And (laughs) I was a little scared about learning about it...

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah.

**Schneiderman:** ...because I had this idea and I didn't want it to be influenced by anything else. (laughs)

**Dr. Dave:** Uh-huh. Okay.

**Schneiderman:** I was protective of my idea...

**Dr. Dave:** Sure.

**Schneiderman:** ...so after I had come up with this idea and already had basically a book proposal together, I went to hear for a weekend David Epston, who's one of the founders of narrative therapy, present...

**Dr. Dave:** What's his name again? How do you spell his...

**Schneiderman:** David Epston.

**Dr. Dave:** How do you spell that last name?

**Schneiderman:** I think it's E-P-S-T-O-N. He and Michael White founded narrative therapy.

**Dr. Dave:** Okay.

**Schneiderman:** So I thought to myself, "Okay, I have this idea ready – now that I flushed out my idea, I want to see if this is narrative therapy or not."

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah.

**Schneiderman:** So I went to a weekend in Vermont when he was leading a conference and what I discovered is that it was not. First of all, when I would talk about what I was doing, people got a little bit confused. So I don't think they really completely understood and that was one sign to me that I wasn't exactly doing narrative therapy. But as I started to become a little familiar with what they were doing, I realized that some of the techniques – write and do everything in the third person narrative, that is a classic narrative therapy technique. So that was very much aligned. Narrative therapy holds that the person is not the problem, right? So the problem is outside of the person, so whatever – I think

there's that famous example of sneaky poo and it becomes a thing, and how do you conquer sneaky poo. It was like a kid who had a problem with – I don't work with children actually, but who is going to the bathroom all the time and inappropriately, so...

**Dr. Dave:** That's a new one to me, I've not heard of sneaky poo. I've had four kids, but (laughs)...

**Schneiderman:** It's a very classic narrative therapy story and – depression is a thing, and when are you able to conquer the depression, when does the depression sneak up on you, so they look for – how they try to do it is the idea is that you have a dominant narrative, right?

**Dr. Dave:** Okay.

**Schneiderman:** And that's the way that you tell your story.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah.

**Schneiderman:** And you omit certain details and – actually they have a whole thing about the culture influences on our dominant narratives so they often work with these – cross-culturally to look at the dominant narratives that define how our consciousness and try to then locate the other narratives – I feel like I'm getting a little distracted here, but we all have a particular way that we tell our story and we omit details, we omit certain things, but that if we include them it would change how we tell our story. And that's very aligned with my book, too. The way that I go about helping people tell their story is very different from narrative therapy, because they have, I guess, a number of – again, I'm not an expert on narrative therapy, but – different kinds of maps to deal with different kinds of problems.

**Dr. Dave:** Okay. Well, I'm definitely...

**Schneiderman:** Yeah, this is more about looking at your life as a story, applying the elements of the story to your own life to see how the antagonist and the challenges in your story are actually pushing you to grow. I don't think that's narrative therapy, what they're trying to do particularly.

**Dr. Dave:** Right. Right. Right. Now your book takes the reader in a structured way through telling their life story, but not their whole life. Why do you ask readers to focus on the current chapter rather than asking them to reframe something that happened in the past or to look at their whole life?

**Schneiderman:** Sure. Because the current chapter is where change is possible.

**Dr. Dave:** Oh.

**Schneiderman:** It really is. I think that sometimes we get stuck in the same old story and we tend to think that if things that have always transpired in a particular way that that

narrative is going to continue endlessly, and that's where we get stuck. So the whole idea is if you can actually – I think people sometimes need frameworks to make meaning of their lives.

**Dr. Dave:** Sure.

**Schneiderman:** And that's basically what I'm doing. I'm providing a framework for people to say, "Let's just focus on the current chapter, and if your life is a novel what would be the title of the current chapter, and how would you describe it in the third person? Give me a description. Tell me who are the supporting characters, who are the antagonists? What are the challenges?" And I define antagonist very broadly – I'm using the classic story concepts to help people – I look at the antagonist, for example – every story has a protagonist who's trying to accomplish something, an antagonist who gets in the way, and the tension between those two creates the friction that moves the story along and forces the protagonist of the story to respond and develop tools and insights that he or she does not already possess, because if they did possess them then whatever would happen in their story wouldn't be a challenge.

**Dr. Dave:** Now, is the antagonist necessarily a person? Or could it also be the job, or...

**Schneiderman:** Absolutely.

**Dr. Dave:** ...some situation.

**Schneiderman:** Yeah, it can be a person or it can be a situation.

**Dr. Dave:** Mm-hmm.

**Schneiderman:** And for a lot of people their antagonist might be unemployment. It's whatever is pushing you...

**Dr. Dave:** Uh-huh.

**Schneiderman:** ...to stretch and grow beyond your own comfort zone. So that could be a negative thing. People, often when they're getting divorced, they're like, "Ugh, it's my spouse." (laughs)

**Dr. Dave:** Yes, right.

**Schneiderman:** But it could also be something like, for example, writing a book. Writing this book for a year and a half, this book has been one of the big antagonists of my life. (laughs)

**Dr. Dave:** (laughs)

**Schneiderman:** It pushed me to grow in ways that I really needed to stretch and grow to...

**Dr. Dave:** Wow.

**Schneiderman:** ...and sometimes it's been really hard, but I'm so much the better for it.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah.

**Schneiderman:** So it's whatever that is pushing you to stretch and grow in your life.

**Dr. Dave:** Mm-hmm.

**Schneiderman:** And looking at that as – A lot of people I think when stuff happens, like somebody's diagnosed with a terminal illness, or when their narrative doesn't unfold the way that they had hoped it would, which is true a lot in life because we have no control over many things, people tend to think, one interpretation is that life sucks and it's hard. But if you can look at your life as a story, you can ask yourself, "I understand that conflicts in stories are part of the story structure. We know that things in life are sometimes difficult, and if I can look at the characters that I read about in novels or watch in films that the situations that challenge them always helped them to grow in a particular way. What if I can look at this thing that's happened to me right now as an opportunity to grow past who I think that I am into a better, richer, more developed and evolved version of myself?" That's the challenge. It's being able to get out of your story in that way...

**Dr. Dave:** Yes.

**Schneiderman:** ...and look at yourself and say, "If life is a character development workout, what muscles could I develop here?"

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah.

**Schneiderman:** "Do I need to be more courageous, more resilient? Do I need to open my heart more? Do I need to be more disciplined?" And that way, no matter what's happening to you, you can always find a way to grow through it, because it's always pushing you. If it wasn't challenging, it wouldn't be an opportunity to grow.

**Dr. Dave:** I think you've already spoken about this, but I'm so in love with the question that I'm going to ask you anyway, and maybe you'll have more to say. (laughs)

**Schneiderman:** (laughs)

**Dr. Dave:** How come your book is titled Step Out of Your Story rather than Step Into Your Story? Many therapists work to get their clients to really own their story, their feelings and so on, however here you're asking for the reader to step out of their story. What's the rationale for that and how does one go about doing it?

**Schneiderman:** That is good.



**Dr. Dave:** So I think you have been talking about that, but maybe there's more that you can say.

**Schneiderman:** Yeah, for one, that's such a great question and no one has asked me that yet. (laughs)

**Dr. Dave:** Good! (laughs)

**Schneiderman:** And I was waiting for someone to say that because I thought about it – when I was trying to figure out the title which I had other titles as well, I was thinking, “Well, is it stepping out or stepping in?” But I chose Step Out because of the emphasis on the third-person narrative. Part of this is a writing journey and I'm giving people an opportunity to use this third person narrative which actually is not just a gimmick but is based on a growing body of psychological research. In fact, it was also the subject of a cover story in Psychology Today, the June issue, that shows that when we view ourselves from the perspective of the third person, we tend to view ourselves much more kindly and compassionately. We see ourselves as characters overcoming obstacles as opposed to the control groups, when they've done these studies. They'll ask a series of people who reflect on their lives in third person versus the first person, and they find that the first person control group always tends to have more victim stories where – those were asked to reflect on things in the third person tend to look at things like “Oh, I had an opportunity to overcome this,” or “Right now, oh yeah, she is facing a challenge that she is trying to figure out what to do with.” It's just a little bit more of an optimistic narrative.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah.

**Schneiderman:** And there had been a whole bunch of studies on this. So stepping out reflects the idea of being able to look at your life from an elevated perspective, to get out of the feeling of it, to look at it and look at it from a grander – I would say even a spiritual perspective. And the thing is, though, at the end of the book, I ask people to step back in, so I do provide that. There's an exercise where I have them, I say, “Now that you” – What I do is I walk people through the narrative arc of their story so I help them identify, debating what's the crisis, help them identify their vulnerabilities that are being exposed by the appearance of the conflict in their story, what character strengths might they develop in response. I ask them to envision how they want the story resolved. I ask them to give themselves the blessing that they want from their antagonist. There are all these creative dialogues that I use to help them access the voices of courage, or the voices of discipline, or whatever voices aren't immediately accessible to them. And at the end, I have them write an inspiring resolution and identify themes and morals, and at the very end of the book I have what looks like a page from Mad Libs.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah.

**Schneiderman:** It's a fill-in-the-blank exercise where you take all the exercises that you've done in the book and you plug them into something that you could basically tack onto your

refrigerator in the first person. Like “In the current chapter of my life, entitled \_\_\_\_, I am working on \_\_\_\_\_. The antagonist of my story, \_\_\_\_, is pushing me to develop myself in these ways.” So I have people step back in and own it in the first person because I thought that was really important.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah.

**Schneiderman:** But again, that third-person perspective, there was an article again that I mentioned in Psychology Today that said that – it was talking about how we talk to ourselves and what they’ve discovered is that – I guess psychology used to believe that it was just important that we have some sort of self-awareness and talk to ourselves in some way. Well, they’re finding is that talking to yourself, there’s a better way to talk to yourself, and that better way is in the third person. And I even noticed when I was in a crisis in the past, I remember there was one time I was just like – and all of a sudden, I started talking to myself in the third person and it got me a little bit – it helped me shift and it...

**Dr. Dave:** What would that sound like, talking to oneself? If it were out loud, what would that sound like?

**Schneiderman:** Out loud it would be like, “Kim, pull yourself together.”

**Dr. Dave:** Ah.

**Schneiderman:** “This is not about you.” It’s a different – maybe that isn’t the third person, (laughs) but it’s a different voice than me, “What am I going to do?”

**Dr. Dave:** Mm-hmm.

**Schneiderman:** It’s like another voice, the voice of the higher self. “Come on, Kim, you know better. This is not right. Come on, Kim.”

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah.

**Schneiderman:** Maybe the transactional psychologist might think it’s the voice of the parent, the benevolent parent. It’s the voice of the higher self telling me to not get stuck in whatever emotional thing that I might be stuck in. In fact, so it’s almost aligned with the idea of the observing mind...

**Dr. Dave:** Right.

**Schneiderman:** ...that kind of thing.

**Dr. Dave:** Some people call it the witness.

**Schneiderman:** Right, exactly. So that's what you're doing. Okay, so you're tapping into the witness. That's what you're doing, this witness is telling your story and it really changes – people who are really stuck, I've noticed when I've done the workshops, it's a subtle shift, but the third person just frees them to talk about themselves in a way that they couldn't talk about themselves. I call it the sneaky perspective. Because what you're doing is you're fooling the censoring ego into thinking that you're writing about somebody else but you're actually writing about yourself. So a little trick that you're doing, you're tricking yourself. But it works. I mean, people are just – “Wow, I didn't think that was going to actually work the way it did.”

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah, I can believe it.

**Schneiderman:** Yeah, it's just one of those things you have to do. Yeah, it's one of those things you have to do. One of the subtitles I think that was actually – I originally proposed was something like Writing A New Chapter When You're Stuck in the Same Old Storyline or something like that. I can't remember why that was not chosen. So it's a way of unsticking yourself.

**Dr. Dave:** Earlier you mentioned something about victim stories. I was once in a workshop where we were asked to tell our favorite story in which we were a victim...

**Schneiderman:** Hmm.

**Dr. Dave:** ...and then after we lovingly told that story, to retell it as if we created the situation. And that was very dramatic for me...

**Schneiderman:** Oh.

**Dr. Dave:** ...just changing position and taking responsibility for what happened, it really changed my orientation towards that event. So I really resonate to what you're saying that the way we tell our story, the way we tell it to ourselves, can really make a difference.

**Schneiderman:** Absolutely. That sounds like an amazing exercise, by the way. I'm going to keep that in mind.

**Dr. Dave:** It really was a very powerful exercise.

**Schneiderman:** Yeah. Yeah.

**Dr. Dave:** Particularly the way it was set up. It was in a – you know about est, right? Werner Erhard, est...

**Schneiderman:** Sure, my parents did est.

**Dr. Dave:** Well, I didn't do est. But this was a spin-off of est called Lifespring.

**Schneiderman:** Wow. Okay.

**Dr. Dave:** And actually one of my friends wanted me to go. I was so skeptical about that sort of thing that he arranged for me to go as a consultant and to write a report on what I experienced. So I went in to it as something of a skeptic, but I was willing to try to really enter into it. So it was very dramatic because they turned the lights down, and there's emotional music, and it's a whole production (laughs)...

**Schneiderman:** Wow.

**Dr. Dave:** ...that really gets you into it. So, yeah...

**Schneiderman:** Right, wow.

**Dr. Dave:** ...it stuck with me. And actually it had the impact on me of really what you're talking about, because later in life when I found myself in situations that were antagonistic, (laughs) to use your word, for me, that I realized I could back away a little bit and realize "Okay, there are two ways I can tell this story. I can either see it as 'I'm a victim of this circumstance' or I can embrace it somehow and use it in a way to make it a good story." And that was a powerful life lesson for me, I have to say.

**Schneiderman:** Yeah, I can imagine. Yes, it's a very powerful life lesson and it's interesting, though, because I had heard that – the Landmark Forum which is also an evolution of est, I'd heard that they're very into story and how you tell your story. And I was also just saying I felt the same way about Landmark that I did about narrative therapy where I wanted to make sure I could preserve my idea before – I still haven't done Landmark but I might want to do it now that I've gotten the book out. But then, so I once tried to preserve the purity of the idea and not be influenced by other people's ideas.

**Dr. Dave:** Sure.

**Schneiderman:** So...

**Dr. Dave:** Earlier you said something about reading the text of your life. What does it mean to become a good reader of the text of our lives? And how do we go about doing that?

**Schneiderman:** Yeah, well – it's the same idea that when we read – we were both English majors so – when we read a book or the one you're talking about and analyzing that you can choose to read it – there are many ways to read the same story, right? If you've ever been in a classroom and you're talking about one story, everybody's got their hands up and they're talking about it from different perspectives...

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah.

**Schneiderman:** I look at it like this. Every life is an unfolding story. It's a unique, dynamic, and unpredictable and potentially heroic story that's open to interpretation,

especially our own, right? If life is an unfolding story, then what happens in our life is the text. That's the text of it.

**Dr. Dave:** Mm-hmm.

**Schneiderman:** We can read that text – we can look at the things that we're presented that show up in our plot line, we can read them as triumphs or tragedies, we can read them – or comedies. There's the parable of the blind men and the elephant, they're blind and they're feeling it from different perspectives...

**Dr. Dave:** Yes.

**Schneiderman:** ...and they think the trunk is the elephant or the tail is the elephant. So it's like in a similar vein, there are just so many ways. We're constantly sifting through competing narratives of how to tell our story, and what I try to do is, there's no one right way to tell it but there are certainly more constructive and better ways to tell it. So what I try to do is to give people a framework so that they can use their power of interpretation to mine their story...

**Dr. Dave:** Mm-hmm.

**Schneiderman:** ...for positive meaning.

**Dr. Dave:** Well, that's interesting that you're looking for the positive spin. Now some people might say, "Well, that's just an encouraging Pollyanish attitude that's not truthful." Obviously I'm on the same page as you are, but what would be your reply to that skeptical...

**Schneiderman:** That makes sense. We're not trying to whitewash overall the unpleasantness of life here, but if you look at your life as a journey of personal transformation, then there is room within that story to include the hard things that happen. Just like the way I told my story about my father. There were tough things that happened in that story. It's the conclusions that we draw about them.

**Dr. Dave:** Mm-hmm.

**Schneiderman:** That's really the power – "This happened and therefore it means such and such." Well, a lot of people jump to false conclusions and that's how, well, often depression begins. "This happened, it means therefore that this will always happen and nothing will ever change."

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah.

**Schneiderman:** That's a very depressing storyline. This happened, and I might look at it like, "How did it change me? How did I grow from this?" One of the examples I provide in the book is the Wizard of Oz, which is like, there are many ways to tell the Wizard of Oz.

You can look at it like here's Dorothy, and she's in a farm where people love her but she doesn't appreciate it, and then this horrible neighbor steals her dog and she runs away and she gets hit in the head and she ends up killing a witch and then being chased by her sister. She wants to go home so badly and she almost dies, but then she discovers that she had the power to go home the whole time, and isn't it tragic that she had to go through all of these horrible things, of killing people and being chased by people, when she could have just appreciated where she was. Like, what a waste of time.

**Dr. Dave:** (laughs)

**Schneiderman:** Some people could read that story that way. And...

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah, that's an interesting retelling of the story for sure.

**Schneiderman:** Right, rather than what I think most people come to understand is that she went on this journey of transformation, that she needed to – it's like what Glinda said to her at the end. "You needed to discover for yourself that you had the power to change your story. You needed to discover yourself. That's why I didn't tell you." So I'm a psychotherapist and I think a lot of times people really – I think it's partly cultural that people expect their lives should be happy all the time. And there are people that have more charmed lives than others, but that's just not life. So when things happen, sometimes people will say, "Well, life sucks now. This happened, therefore life sucks. "And life can suck for you in the moment. It doesn't mean that there's – the whole idea is like there are the things that happen to us, which I call the outer story, and the way we experience them, which is the inner story. One is not more truthful or more correct than the other. They're both part of the story, and who's to say what the true story is, but the more that you can include the hard stuff and how it changes you, the more that you'll be able to create a story about your life that is richer and comes closer to approximating truth.

**Dr. Dave:** One of the things I like about what you're doing with this is that it's so non-pathological in its orientation. (laughs)

**Schneiderman:** Yeah.

**Dr. Dave:** You're not using a lot of diagnostic categories and so on, and making people feel badly about themselves or damaged, but rather providing a template through which one can see their life in a grander scale.

**Schneiderman:** Right. Well the idea is looking at what I definitely – that was intentional. I mean it's really anyone who has the possibility to find their heroic story, and we're not talking about hero with a capital *h*. We're talking about being able to change your character, which for a lot of people that means it can be changing the way that you respond to your child – when something happens and instead of screaming at them, taking a breath and catching yourself and taking a pause and seeing that they're upset or they're wherever they are and responding in a different way. Or changing the way that you have always been in relationships. Maybe you tend to play the victim in your relationships, or you tend to

attract the wrong people. When you can really change something in your character, that to me is heroic. Those are the moments that I celebrate with my clients in therapy. “Wow, you really changed your story.” And that’s what I want people to see with my book, that if they can look at – for example, one of the things I do have them look at is when something challenging happens, when the antagonist – let’s say a lot of people have these recurring characters who show up in their story and push their buttons, like the boss, the very authoritarian boss who never appreciates what you’re doing, and that might be because you had a very overbearing parent who never really could appreciate your accomplishments. Whatever it is – to help identify those characters but to look at what’s being triggered, what are the vulnerabilities that are being triggered by these experiences. Is it a tendency to tell yourself that you’re no good? Or do you tend to easily go to fear, and if that’s the case, let’s envision where we want to go from here. Would you want to be the kind of character who always responds to these kinds of situations with fear? Would you want to be the kind of character who always responds to these situations by being very passive? How would you want – “Oh, I’d like to be more assertive actually.” If you’re reading about this in a story would you want to see yourself – how would you want to see yourself evolve? Would you want to see the character stand up for themselves, and in an assertive way, not in an aggressive way? And how would you write that story. And that’s what I want to help people do, is be able to see that they can change things in the here and now, and that’s what you were talking about with the – I think it was called Lamspring, Wellspring, the est...

**Dr. Dave:** Lifespring.

**Schneiderman:** Lifespring.

**Dr. Dave:** Lifespring. Yeah.

**Schneiderman:** Lifespring. And sounds to me like that was more focused on the past, but here is an opportunity to look at how you can take responsibility for changing your story right now, because that’s when change is possible.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah. Now this book grew out of the workshops that you’re doing and I’m wondering do you also apply this set of techniques, ideas, etc., in the individual work that you do?

**Schneiderman:** I do. Not as much. I do classic psychotherapy and people come in with different kinds of problems each week, it’s not like – most people don’t come in when they want to consistently follow something, so I’ll plug in pieces with people. Sometimes, I’ll suggest specific writing exercises to them, if I feel like they’re stuck in a particular place. Obviously with the book now, it’s going to be a lot easier to do that, because it used to be stuff that was in my computer and I have to do a print out or send it to them. (laughs)

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah. Right.

**Schneiderman:** And now I have a book, and enough of my clients have bought it so I can say, “You know what, there’s this exercise, check that out. I want you to check these two exercises out and do them.” So it’s a little bit easier. I’ve had a couple of writers in my practice who wanted to do this work, and I assigned the exercises a little bit more piecemeal. It’s during the workshops that people tend to go on more of a journey.

**Dr. Dave:** Mm-hmm.

**Schneiderman:** I did an 8-week workshop with 92nd Street Y a few years ago, and actually it was those students who were like, “This should be a workbook.” So...

**Dr. Dave:** That was an 8-week course. How long was each meeting?

**Schneiderman:** Like an hour and a half, I think?

**Dr. Dave:** About an hour and a half, for 8 meetings?

**Schneiderman:** Yeah.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah, I could see where that would make a very nice workshop.

**Schneiderman:** Yeah, and they were zeroing in on the current chapter and looking – because it was like, “What’s happening to you right now in your life” and again a lot of people were going through a job transition, so “What’s happening in your life right now, and where do you want to go, what’s your character arc?” Which is something that I often ask people. “What’s your character arc here? If you were to stay on the same path that you were heading, staying right now, where would you end up?” And in fact one of the exercises I give people in the beginning is to do a character sketch of themselves. And that way they can get a holographic picture of how they’re evolving...

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah.

**Schneiderman:** I ask questions like “Who was the protagonist? What does he or she want, what’s getting in the way, and what’s at stake?” Which are actually some of the questions that authors will use before they begin writing a novel to flesh out their characters.

**Dr. Dave:** Mm-hmm.

**Schneiderman:** And the idea behind that is – if you understand a little bit more about who is the hero of your story, what he or she is made of, and what’s driving them, you can get a better sense of where they’re headed and whether that is really where they want to go.

**Dr. Dave:** So I imagine that – Well, I probably should ask you who you had in mind when you were writing the book.

**Schneiderman:** Who I had in mind when I was writing the book...



**Dr. Dave:** Yeah, who did you write the book for?

**Schneiderman:** In terms of my audience...

**Dr. Dave:** Yes, exactly.

**Schneiderman:** Really, I mean, anybody. I was thinking of adults because I primarily work with adults.

**Dr. Dave:** Mm-hmm.

**Schneiderman:** It was really people who felt stuck. It was for people who were finding that they were stuck in the same old storylines and wanted something that would unstick them and to get a fresh perspective on – people who like to write – people who might be a little bit more holistically oriented...

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah.

**Schneiderman:** ...it wasn't like a particular – although it's very interesting because at the end of the book, people have an opportunity to write what I call your life story, to look at your life and look at the different decades of your life and assign a title to each of them, describe the main conflicts and the main themes and the main growth/learning opportunities and morals of those times. It's like a big chart that they can do. It's like a life inventory.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah, so that's reaching out beyond the current chapter and looking at a broader sweep without having to write your whole life down, which...

**Schneiderman:** Right

**Dr. Dave:** ...would be overwhelming.

**Schneiderman:** Right, and there are some people who have told me to work with the elderly, that they could see that being a really good life review tool.

**Dr. Dave:** Uh-huh.

**Schneiderman:** Even though it was not meant for people who are writing their memoir, I think this would be an incredible tool for people who are. It wasn't designed that way...

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah.

**Schneiderman:** ...but I can imagine by doing the exercises in this book, it would bring up a lot of rich information that you could use in your memoir.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah, that's a good point. What about therapists? Could you see this being a good auxiliary book for therapists to own or perhaps to perhaps assign?

**Schneiderman:** Absolutely. Absolutely, in fact in some my workshops I've had therapists and they bought the book and tell me that they're using it with clients periodically. I just did a book signing in June and one of them was very enthusiastic about it, and sent me an email saying she was using it. So in my workshops in the past I've had handouts that people say that they used – they've borrowed some exercises. So yeah, absolutely. Yes. So I would say that therapists would get a lot out of this and could assign it to their clients.

**Dr. Dave:** Okay. Going back to the exercises themselves, you described the climax of the story. That seems to be particularly important. And you see it as being able to give yourself the blessing you want from your antagonist.

**Schneiderman:** Right.

**Dr. Dave:** So tell us a little bit about that, where at the end of the story, the person's looking back and we're getting near the end of the interview, so this is a good place to talk about that.

**Schneiderman:** Sure. Well, in classic adventure stories, the tension between the protagonist and antagonist builds to this big climax where the hero generally challenges or destroys the enemy, the monster, the villain. But in real life these climactic confrontations don't involve the destruction of others, but rather confronting and slaying our inner dragons to achieve an important outer goal.

**Dr. Dave:** Right.

**Schneiderman:** And what this might look like in real life is maybe we stand up to the bully or we profess our love for someone, or we have that important conversation that we've been putting off with our boss, or our spouse, or our child. So sometimes people have a lot of – they get very attached to what these situations will look like and it can create a lot of anxiety. And what I wanted – I was actually having a hard time figuring out how to do this particular exercise, because I could have people look at, like, what's the best-case scenario, what's the worst-case scenario, and usually something happens somewhere in between.

**Dr. Dave:** Mm-hmm.

**Schneiderman:** But that felt like it was missing something.

**Dr. Dave:** Mm-hmm.

**Schneiderman:** Because the whole point of this book is to help people feel empowered regardless of what actually happens in their story. So then I realized that sometimes I was reminded of the biblical story of Jacob wrestling with the angel, where he had – he asked for a blessing and this is actually the – it's the mark that he's evolved simply because at the

beginning of this story, he was not able to ask his father for a blessing. He had to disguise himself, but here he is, he's wrestling with an angel and he's saying "Bless me, bless me." And I thought to myself, "You really can't ask for a blessing unless you know that you deserve it." Whenever we imagine these difficult climactic situations, we all want them to unfold in a particular way. Maybe we want the person that we're struggling with to come and see our point of view or validate our choices, but what if you could just give – what if you were so convinced, so ready to step up to the challenge that you knew that no matter what happened you can walk away feeling like you did your best? What if you knew you deserved a blessing no matter what happened? That would be a successful climax regardless of how things unfolded. So I realized that one of the exercises needed to be able to give yourself the blessing that you're seeking from the antagonist of your story.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah, because really that's what it comes down to, right? Is that you're giving yourself that – in your imagination...

**Schneiderman:** Right.

**Dr. Dave:** ...that you're actually giving yourself that blessing that you seek.

**Schneiderman:** Right. So putting them in real-life terms, I had a client who was getting married and she was having a lot of problems with her mother. They had had a very unnatural relationship and for the first time in her life she was standing up for herself and doing things in a way that her mother did not understand or approve of. It was very hard for her, and she kept thinking that if she could just explain her rationale to her mother in a particular way, maybe her mother would come to validate her choices and tell her that she was being – she still thought she was a good girl. But her mother was just not there. And so I had her do this exercise and give herself the blessing to herself because that's what really she wanted. Like, "What do you want your mom to say? Now, I want you to give that to yourself because that's really what you're struggling with. You're struggling with your own difficulty of accepting that your way is okay, that your way might be different from hers, and it doesn't mean that it's a bad way. It doesn't make you a bad person, it doesn't make you a bad daughter. It just means that you maybe have different ideas and that's fine and so I want you to" – so it's like her work was to basically be able to validate her own choices. So she did this blessing exercise and she said she found it incredibly helpful.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah. Yeah. It makes sense to me and particularly from – I'm thinking of from a Jungian perspective of active imagination and so on that...

**Schneiderman:** Mm-hmm.

**Dr. Dave:** ...That these inner imaginary dialogues if you will – between different parts of ourselves, articulates so well with your approach and with a lot of different theoretical perspectives.

**Schneiderman:** Mm-hmm.

**Dr. Dave:** And I could see this giving the blessing as – could initiate a positive inner movement.

**Schneiderman:** Yeah, absolutely. I'm a huge fan of Jung's work. And that's probably the new direction that I want to explore more in that area...

**Dr. Dave:** Uh-huh.

**Schneiderman:** ...I've been very influenced – I've read articles and stuff and my intention is to explore about it a bit more because I think my ideas are very much aligned with Jung.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah. Well let me encourage you to listen to Shrink Rap Radio, where I've interviewed quite a few Jungian analysts. (laughs)

**Schneiderman:** Okay. Oh, great. I will. I will. Yeah.

**Dr. Dave:** So that's a very digestible way to learn a lot of Jungian psychology. A little self-promotion here. I even have CE courses, I have two or three CE courses on Jungian psychology...

**Schneiderman:** Okay.

**Dr. Dave:** ...that you can apply towards the CE units that you need. So as we wind down, is there anything that you'd like to add that we maybe didn't touch on?

**Schneiderman:** Well, can I say that – I'm not sure when this is airing, but I have a book signing this week in the Bay Area...

**Dr. Dave:** Okay, in the San Francisco Bay Area...

**Schneiderman:** Yeah, this...

**Dr. Dave:** ...there are about two weeks from this Thursday...

**Schneiderman:** Oh.

**Dr. Dave:** ...and today is July 27th, so listeners can...

**Schneiderman:** Oh.

**Dr. Dave:** ...do some internal math. Do you list where your appearances are on your website?

**Schneiderman:** Yes. Yes I do. I have a website called [StepOutOfYourStory.com](http://StepOutOfYourStory.com), which is where you can actually order the book through Amazon and Barnes and Noble or New World Library, which is my publisher.

**Dr. Dave:** Great.

**Schneiderman:** I'll go ahead. I also have a Facebook page called Step Out Of Your Story, which I invite people to like. And I'm going to be doing a workshop in Manhattan, at the JCC in Manhattan on October 25th.

**Dr. Dave:** Okay, great, well, I'm sure we've got some listeners in New York. Hey, listener, if you're a New Yorker and you go, be sure to let me know. (laughs)

**Schneiderman:** (laughs)

**Dr. Dave:** I'll be interested to hear about it. So, Kim Schneiderman, I want to thank you for being my guest today on Shrink Rap Radio.

**Schneiderman:** Oh, thank you so much for having me, it's been a real pleasure.