



# JAMES HOLLIS

interviewed  
by Kathy Brown

**J**ames Hollis, an Atlanta Jung Society favorite and the undisputed Midwife of Mid-Life, spoke with me recently about his life, his work, and his latest offspring, which is due to hit the stands in April, the same month Hollis himself hits Trinity Presbyterian. I don't use the word "hit" lightly. His engagements here are usually marked by some sort of environmental excitement.

"I remember huge storms and the lights going out," he said, recalling his past Atlanta appearances. "And a car accident on the route to the meeting. I think last time was incident-free, though, so maybe we've broken the chain."

"Last time you were here, the parking lot was filled with fire engines when we arrived," I reminded him. "The water pipes in the church had burst."

"That's right," he admitted. "I had forgotten about that. Well, it must be me. I seem to be the common element in all of those things."

It probably has something to do with the way Hollis stirs the air with his words, the way he stirs the answers inside us with the questions he poses. My favorite is the question he offers as a scale for weighing any of the elements of our lives—*Does it enlarge you or does it diminish you?*

I asked him which experiences in his own life had been enlarging to him, and which diminishing.

"I think as a strongly introverted person coming from a family that was essentially afraid of the world, speaking and teaching and writing are always inherently risky, but are enlarging. And I would say that much of my life in the first half was spent avoiding doing these things, which was diminishing."

"You avoided them because of fear?"

"Yes. And also because of the family of origin message that said, 'don't go out and risk that; don't put yourself out there, because chances are you'll make a mistake, and then you're going to get hammered.'"

"You seem to have left that family behind."

"Well...partly. It's always there."

"What is it from the experience of being raised in that family that still clings to you?"

"I think an issue for all of us is giving ourselves permission to really be who we are rather than submitting to those conditions of self-acceptance that we grew up with, even though

these have enormous reflexive power. We don't really know that they are so present, so powerful, but they are. So I recognize their present influences."

Hollis believes that moving beyond these influences and into a life that is authentic, unique, and deeply personal is the work of the second half of life and he loves to join with others in its exploration.

"One hundred percent of the people I see in analysis are in the second half of life," he told me. "Virtually everyone who comes to the Jung Center here in Houston, and probably 98% of the audiences of all Jung Societies are people over thirty-five, so it's the folks I work with all the time. It takes a certain amount of psychological maturity and frankly getting bumped about by life, to really be strong enough to take a closer look at what's going on inside us. Now, if a truck had run over us on our thirtieth birthday, we might have lived a productive life, but it would have probably have been someone else's life. It would have been lived primarily in terms of however we internalized the dynamics of our family of origin, and the messages coming from our culture as well."

"How common do you think it is for people to live their whole lives as someone else, without ever doing the kind of self-examination you are talking about?"

"I think it's very common. It's tragically common. And sometimes people awaken on their own, and sometimes they're forced to by circumstances. Sometimes it's getting a terminal diagnosis or it's the death of a spouse or divorce or retirement that really causes one to reexamine one's assumptions about life. And assumptions about oneself as well."

"What was it for you?"

"I was hit with a significant depression at mid-life. I'd accomplished everything I'd wanted to achieve and I felt depressed and that's what sent me to my first hour of analysis. That process ultimately led me to Zurich. My first hour of analysis was at age thirty-five, so I was right on schedule."

"And have you, as a result of that search, found your authentic life?"

"I think so. Most of it. I find it very fulfilling to be working with the essential mystery of human existence whether it's in analysis or in the classroom or in writing. My work week is filled with administrative work for the center, my teaching re-

sponsibilities, and my analytic practice, plus I do a lot of travel on the weekends, as you know. And what's left over is my personal life. Also, I squeeze in there whatever writing time I can get in."

"What do you do for fun?"

"My work is my fun basically. Plus, I've always read a great deal and that's for fun."

"What do you like to read?"

"I'm just reading constantly, particularly in history and fiction. I think the most influential authors for me have been Yeats and Rilke."

"Do you continue to read Jung?"

"Absolutely. As a matter of fact, this weekend we are hosting the first of our annual Philemon lectures, based on the work of the Philemon Foundation, a nonprofit organization that is working to completely and correctly publish Jung's ideas. We've found that more of Jung's writings have yet to be published than all that have been published here-to-fore, which is a staggering idea. For example, there are only about a thousand letters in the so-called *Collected Letters* and we now have twenty-five thousand letters. And more of *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* was cut than was included, so we'll be publishing that down the line. We're looking forward to making available in a couple of years the *Red Book*, which is Jung's personal journal with his own paintings in it. The Philemon Foundation is in partnership with the Jung Center in Houston, raising money for the purpose of hiring translators and scholars to see to the publication of the unpublished works of Jung and this is a project that will take at least twenty years."

"He wrote faster than people can read."

"That's exactly right."

"Are you familiar with what has been translated and will be published?"

"Only a small part of it. It has been in the hands of the family. Of course all of Jung's children are now dead, so we're into the third generation of the family. They formed a nonprofit foundation that is supporting this publication and they will also be making his home and the tower at Bollingen into public museums. It is coming at a fortuitous time in history."

"We will be holding the first lecture here in Houston, which will be explaining the material, where it comes from and what some of the contents are. We hope to hold these lectures on an annual basis. The body of work will come under the official title *The Complete Works of Jung*. And in fact, beyond publishing the unpublished works, we expect to raise enough money to redo the *Collected Works*, because many times they were thrown together according to topics rather than chronologically as Jung had personally wanted. Also, they are not always that well translated. It's a huge project that we anticipate will take twenty to thirty years to complete. I won't be around to see it but it will be an ongoing project."

"And this is all nonprofit. The money goes strictly into paying for the translation and the editors and then the publication. Any profit from the books the Jung family foundation will feed back into those other projects I mentioned."

"How can people make a donation?"

"By going to the web site, [www.philemonfoundation.org](http://www.philemonfoundation.org). There are instructions there about how to donate."

"What else would you like to tell people?"

"For those that attend the workshop on Saturday, I'd like them to bring a notebook so they can do some journaling. I

want to personalize it for individuals and I'll be posing a series of questions for them to reflect on in the context of their own lives. I want to help people to realize that our psychology is so much what we've internalized from our earliest times. It's been with us so long we forget to question it, but part of what we need to do in order to be of true service to the world, is to bring our best selves to it. That's not possible unless we work through the complexes that keep us bound to the past. It's not possible to achieve all that in our short lifetimes, but the more we can, the richer our lives will prove to be. And our pursuit of a rich and authentic life is not just work we do for ourselves; it's for us and the people we share our lives with-our children and our families. And we'll be looking at all of that, so bring your writing materials."

And bring your galoshes and candles, I might add ■