

Interview with Patricia Hanes Meyer
Conducted by Andrea Schara

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For the Murray Bowen Archives Project of Leaders for Tomorrow at History of Science
Division of the National Library of Medicine

Monika: Sunday the afternoon, April 14th, 2013.

Schara: So happy to spend time with you, such an honor. And really looking forward to your thoughts and ideas. So, I think he already put on here, but maybe, just in case, for this one, I'm going to say it's April the 14th, 2013, Andrea Schara, and Pat Meyer.

Meyer: Alright.

Schara: So, you can go wherever you want to go, you have the questions, and - Course we- to start out, they- it's easier to just say who you are, and how did you come to know Dr. Bowen, and then, go wherever you want.

Meyer: I became involved with Dr. Bowen by an utter blessing, and I look back, and I think, this truly was kind of a divine intervention in my path and trajectory. I was hired by Fairfax Juvenile Court, and began my work January 1, 1970. Well just as it turned out Bud Andres was getting a project at the court, in March of 1970. They had interviewed all of the probation officers and had said to them, "of all the things that would be helpful to you in training, what would be the most important thing for you?" And apparently, they strongly said, "Help us with the parents." And Ken McGlothlin, from the Fairfax Court, found out about Bowen and Georgetown and Bud Andres, and by the time I was hired, this project was already ready to go, beginning in March. I'm 22 years old. And I began to hear the theory, and watch... these were all multiple sessions, with the court staff that would range from 5 to 10, probably, maximum. Sitting in the room, visibly in the room, at the back. And, Bud Andres would work with the three families, the families would leave, and then we would discuss what we'd seen. When I heard the theory, heard the concepts, there was that immediate "oh my goodness, this is so solid; this makes so much sense; this is such a responsible way, as opposed to something loosey-goosey, or feeling-oriented, or approaches to mental health, approaches to behavior, that I would not have been comfortable with." I was immediately comfortable with this. And became so involved. By August I was in charge of the program, administratively. I could not have, obviously, done anything theoretically, but I began in the postgraduate program in September of '70. Met Dr. Bowen, and that was, the beginning of the rest of my life, professionally. So, that is, and at that

time there was no Family Center, at least there was no building, we were meeting, for all the meetings, in the Medical School.

Schara: Saint Mary's

Meyer: well, Saint Mary's, absolutely, and so we- you know, this was way back in the early wonderful exciting days. That was how I began to get involved, I knew, immediately, whatever immediately means, that mental health, pursuing this theory, and this capacity, to connect to human beings and to be able to provide a process that could- really, through which they could release themselves from tangles from their extended family, above them, was so powerful and so wonderful. I was deeply committed to it right away. And knew I needed to get a Master's. I presented my first paper, as a bachelor in the arts, on a panel with a couple physicians, and I don't know who else. [laughter] It was just evident a Master's degree was absolutely called for.

Schara: Where did you go to get your Masters?

Meyer: I went to Catholic, and I chose at that time social work, over psychology, because, I believed, and I think it was true, at that time, and it may even be true today, I don't know, that social workers had more leverage, with their Master's, than potential psychologists. Why would that have been? Because social workers are activists. And they're in Congress and they're on Capitol Hill all the time, advocating for social work stuff. And so I just believed I would have a more powerful capability, and so that's why, social work... So I went to Catholic, and it was quite an experience. This began in '73, so I'd done the postgraduate program 3 years, and everything else I could go to, and attend, I did. During that time. And Catholic was pretty psychodynamic, and...there was some mention of family, of systemic whatever, but it was essentially a psychodynamic individual thinking, et cetera. Which was very difficult, because I needed my Master's. And I had just completed intensive -I don't know, what all I did, but I did every MCV, all of it. And now I'm sitting in a classroom, psychodynamic. Now, it was very valuable to have done that, because that was the world. That is the world, that's part of the world even today, and it's important to know it, to understand it, and to know how it thinks. But it was extremely tricky. The hardest part was my third year. I worked full-time the first two years, in the court. I am now, with my regular probation cases, by my second year, there, so by '71, I had converted, of my 50 probation cases, 25 of them at least, I was seeing the parents. And, so the court said, "Ok. We get it." And then allowed me to begin to have that be my function. And then ultimately, the program was allowed to hire up into four full-time therapists doing Bowen Theory. And that program lasted 40 years.

Schara: Wow.

Meyer: Which I think-

Schara: Forty years.

Meyer: Yes.

Schara: Amazing.

Meyer: The program ended back in - what is today - maybe '09. It was the last huge cut of Fairfax County as the economy tanked. And the program had been saved over and over, as the budget kept getting cut and cut and cut. And finally, you know, '09, they cut everything. That was not mandated. And mandated is...the state mandates that you shall be probation officers, and do probation- the law stuff. And so, it lasted 40 years. And in my incredible gratitude, because the Family Center, the first year, I worked full-time, in the Catholic program. I worked full-time and did the studies. And that meant, that I was seeing probation families on Saturday. The court went along with that; they gave me that flexibility, so I could do both things. And, the second year, my first internship was at the court.

Schara: Wow.

Meyer: And they sent in a supervisor from Catholic, to me, to supervise my work, but they allowed me to use own agency. And in the third year, I went half-time at the court, and full-time with Catholic, because I did my internship at Georgetown, and in their Department of Social Work, and OB-GYN, spina bifida, I don't remember what all that was. That was when the real pressure hit. Where I really got caught in the middle. Because the supervisor was a... how do I say this. She was a pretty fanatic individual-focus: "How do you feel; how does this feel to you?" And I was pregnant at the time, with my first child, [laughter] and I was in part coping with that. Because this was exhausting, this dance, because I had to do it her way enough, to get her sign-off, and

Schara: Exactly.

Meyer: but this was the kind of individual focus, it made my hair stand up. And, so, part of the way I coped with that was to eat two sandwiches at lunch, and stuff my face. But all of that worked, and then once I had the Masters, within about six months after that, Dr. Bowen put me on the faculty, immediately, and I then move to the Family Center about six months later.

Schara: So that would be '70-

Meyer: '77? '76? It's in that range.

Schara: Yeah. And I think it must have had been, because I came in '76, you were on the faculty, So maybe '75...

Meyer: It may have been '75, because I graduated in '76. I was very much around even when going to school. But not faculty, until it was May, I believe, it was '76. And so then I left the court, and I came full-time at Georgetown. But, because the juvenile court had been- I grew up at the juvenile court, I was 22- and,

Schara: Right.

Meyer: I felt the system had given me so much flexibility now, I gave it everything. I mean, I gave it 150%. Built this program, whatever. It was a wonderful partnership, if you will, but as a result, I had this enormous commitment. So for the next 38 years, or, or 35 years, or whatever it was, I went back once a month, to the court, and I taught for half a day, taught to the family program there. And, anytime they hired a new director, I sat on the panel, and helped select that new director. So, "grandma" of the system, remained stayed involved until it ended, 40 years later.

Schara: Wow.

Meyer: Bud ended his involvement, I can't remember when, we had a wonderful celebration at 25 years, and we were both going strong at that point. So I can't say, between 25 and 40, that next 15 years exactly when he stopped coming. So then the multiple sessions ended, and the monthly sessions turned into teaching. And the staff presenting cases, and my supervision of that, whatever.

Schara: Was there a big difference, in the, you know, now they have this kind of evaluate, treatment by outcome, outcome treatment programs and all of this.

Meyer: Right, right.

Schara: Could you- could the court see a difference, when you saw parents, and

Meyer: Well, let me put it this way, the judges continued to assign families to a program that died, in '09.

Schara: Oh, wow. [laughter]

Meyer: I mean, they don't stop assigning them!

Schara: And who takes care of the families then, who looks after them?

Meyer: Well, there are several of the staff, who got pocketed, in different job -

Schara: Right.

Meyer: sort of, and I think the hope is then they could bring back, actually bring the program back again, and maybe not in the same way, but bring it back. But the judges valued it so much they continued assigning cases to this program that was dead. And didn't exist anymore. Which I just thought was

Schara: Right. Valuable. But no real research was done? I remember that one research think, where you had the three different kinds of therapies, Haley, Satir, and Bowen. I think you organized that, at the family thing.

Meyer: Yes, yes, yes. I ran our part of it. I did. And yes, that occurred, and I can't

Schara: Yes, ok.

Meyer: tell you what year, but it would have been-

Schara: I was there then, so it was '81, '82, seemed like it could have been '83-

Meyer: Or slightly earlier, maybe late '70s and early '80s, but what happened there, random assignments. This was the Department of Corrections of Virginia that did this. And they randomly assigned cases to the three programs. And each of the programs had one person that ran it and was the coordinating spot. And so at the Family Center, the therapists who were willing to be involved participated. And so these cases would come in, I would then randomly just assign them out, and then the ultimate research was looking at recidivism. So, one year later, two years later, three years later. How many of these cases had new charges? For the juvenile. And the Head of Corrections, with whom I had a very good relationship, was just very honest with me. And he said, "Pat, you guys aren't going to do very well here. But thanks for participating, and I really appreciate you all being involved, but I don't think you're going to do very well."

Schara: [laughter]

Meyer: And of course, the research facts were that Bowen Theory came out on top. Significantly. That there was less recidivism. And that those families had stabilized in a way that reduced the acting out.

Schara: Right. So 1, 5, and how many years did it go on? Five years? Or-

Meyer: So that-

Schara: Did it go all the way out to-

Meyer: Oh it did not go in, you know, human frailty-

Schara: But they got some information all the way out to five years, or no? Maybe three.

Meyer: I do not remember. The program and the research and the findings never became really formally written, and introduced, and published, which is a tragedy.

Schara: That was, Winters, that was-

Meyer: That is correct. And relationship difficulties-

Schara: Okay.

Meyer: ensued, and ultimately the project just broke down. So, relationships on the staff at the Department of Corrections, I don't know if it was there, or the researchers they'd hired, or whatever. But, no, Bowen Theory came out strongly on top, as a methodology that brought calm and stability to families. And that the acting out greatly, greatly reduced. I don't know of any other real studies. I believe that the Fairfax program was the second in the country. I believe there was one in California, somewhere in the west, And then, this was back when family was so big, and family was popping up everywhere, all kinds of different family stuff, and so family programs popped up all over the place. I don't know how many were actually a part of the-

Schara: Right.

Meyer: court as we were. We were court employees. And the program, and in particularly the years after Bud was there, it really branched out, where therapists who were in the program

would go out to North Center, South Center, whatever, and go out and be part of that center, and come and bring the theory and bring ideas. They would sit on diagnostic committees and whatever. I mean, it was just, became really this significant piece of the court. And, as of '09, I think we may have been the final program in the country. So we were number two starting this huge-

Schara: [laughter] We had so much money, then.

Meyer: flood of pro- and so much money. And then those programs slowly drifting off into the point where 40 years later, I think it may have been the last one in the country.

Schara: Now they've got to replace that; they've got more drugs and more prisons. [laughter]

Meyer: Well, all the court was left with was probation house. I mean, when we got cut, the things they had to keep were the girls probation house, boys probation, those things were pur court.

Schara: Yeah. Isolate the kids from society,

Meyer: As opposed to-

Schara: they don't fit. Yeah, right.

Meyer: Well, they can't live at home because they're out of control too much and whatever. Those were the only programs that remained. And anything that was, was beyond that was removed. So, it, you know, baptism by fire. Working with all of those cases that were very difficult. And it was just a wonderful way to begin learning this theory. And developing my way of using it. Because it was in full action almost immediately.

Schara: So what you worked with when you talk about theory, you said it was solid sense, it makes a contribution, the approach to behavior. What were you really, practically, using, of the theory, that proved so useful with these kinds of families?

Meyer: Well...how in the world to answer that. The beauty, the power of the family diagram all these many years later. So here we are in 2013, this was 1970, that I will say to you today, and I'm still fully practicing, if I do not do a family diagram-

Schara: Right.

Meyer: -the likelihood of transference... I don't know. 90%? You know what I'm saying?

Schara: [laughter] Yeah.

Meyer: The second a family diagram begins, and I have a case now that fits this. A woman had come in, not coming in to begin treatment. She got my name from someone, whatever. Had an emergency, and this was one of those, quote "emergency, one-time appointments." So no - did I do three generations - no, I didn't. But, as it turned out, the things I had to say and whatever became very valuable. I've since seen her 6, 8 times, this is going to be a family that's... So, we have begun the whole process, but the minute that a family diagram begins, everything changes. In what you're hearing, and what you're thinking. Because the aspects of the theory immediately activate. I am sitting here with a classic youngest daughter, a classic oldest daughter, an only daughter, I am sitting with a family that has been a single-parent family, three generations. I'm sitting with a family who, three generations ago, were killed in the Holocaust. Voltage. Those things that the theory's so clear about, that create significant human voltage, and I'm using voltage to mean significant reactivity. We react to everything.

Schara: Mmhmm. Yes.

Meyer: And much of that is simply, simply a momentary annoyance. But, when there's voltage, there is no choice but to respond to it. And you do one of those three things: you repeat the pattern of the voltage, you do the opposite, so the daughter of a screamer can't scream if the house is on fire, and she of course raises a screamer. Right.

Schara: [laughter]

Meyer: So, you're doing the diagram, you're picking up tangle and voltage. Reactivity. Cutoff. And all of a sudden, the mystery's gone. Now, is everything laid out and clear and... No, but the mystery's gone, and almost immediately there begins to be that sense of where the high-level voltage and reactivity has come from, and what has led it to take this particular path in the arteries, if you will. And, so, there's no time for transference, you're so busy, taking the facts, and then thinking, "What is it that we know about those facts? And therefore, what is it we know about the picture sitting in front of us?" So the impact and the power of that and the beautiful way that all of the concepts of this theory are so intertwined, it remains, all these years later, a magnificent, beautiful thing. It is like, looking outside my office window are blue herons, and my heart stops for a second every time I see one. They are just so magnificent. Beautiful. The theory's beautiful. Why, would I say it? Bowen's just turned over, hearing me say that.

Schara: [laughter]

Meyer: Its accuracy, complete accuracy. No, because at the point Bowen died, I don't know when the first scans came, but the fact that we've got all these scans now, can watch the brain. Sure, we've learned a lot of things that we didn't understand before. And maybe some of that is the impact of emotional process on brain function that was something that he would not necessarily have fully known. Because so much of that neuro-knowledge wasn't really knowable in the same way. And I would talk about that data more in the range of additional information, that, Bowen Theory isn't the whole story. Because then, those things that happen in the brain whatever, they begin to have their impact on the emotional process.

Schara: Yeah.

Meyer: But I think the things that he laid out are so incredibly accurate and that if you can sit as a calm presence in an anxious room, and if you can validate the emotion, the fear, the panic of a person you're sitting with, and begin to introduce the thinking. And how does that occur, it occurs through responses and questions. That the therapist is introducing. And what happens? And I'm struck with it every time, is, unless you're sitting with someone, whose emotional and maturity level, and when I say maturity, I talk about that as the difference between facts and feelings, and that a mature organism knows the difference. And can act on the facts, even if they're drunk on the feel- they're gagging on feeling,

Schara: [laughter]

Meyer: they still can act on the facts because they know the facts are accurate. And they know the facts, by focusing on them, will lead to a different outcome than allowing the impulse, in reacting to the feelings. And, that, watching a family, and this is exactly with this family I'm mentioning, came in emergency session. A son cutting off, threatening, and you know, attacking emails, and blah blah blah blah blah. And the quickness, with which this mother could hear what I was saying. Not get mad at me.

Schara: Yeah.

Meyer: For beginning to pick up the fact that she got married, four miscarriages, was told there would be no children, ends up with two boys.

Schara: Yeah.

Meyer: And the boy in question is the second. And a lot of emotionality. As any set of parents who's been told, they've lost four pregnancies and they're told they are not capable of having children. And they end up with two little healthy baby boys. There's not a parent alive who's going to be able to keep that appropriately neutral. Right?

Schara: Maybe if the other four had lived, but even then they could have had a little trouble letting go, I don't know [laughter].

Meyer: But when you've lost four?

Schara: But when you've lost four...

Meyer: And you're told you can have none,

Schara: You're up against it [laughter]

Meyer: And you win the lottery and you get two. Right? But mom,

Schara: Wow.

Meyer: was able to hear my thinking and talking about the specialness. And the immaturity in this youngest boy, who is 20, maybe 19. And that he could not figure out how to launch his path, as a sophomore-junior-senior in college, and heading towards graduating, and doing that sort of breaking away, moving into his own identity, as the older brother had done. In a natural way, in a smoother way. And so, she could hear that, and in the meantime, has been able to take a number of actions. And now the father has started coming. That is what happens with this theory. And it is a beautiful, magnificent thing. Why? Because of its accuracy. And because of what? Because of the accuracy. The gift it gives to human decision-making. And the capacity to change. The capacity to release tangles.

Schara: So somehow, what I get out of what you're saying in a way, is that even if people are low on the scale, really caught in their lives that- if they're with some person who's a little bit more neutral about how they're caught, they can hear. Almost anybody, you're saying, because these are pretty impinged often, that end up in juvenile court, they have the capacity to hear, and therefore, to self-regulate to some extent or another, their own stuff.

Meyer: That's right. Right. Right. And if, even a low level of maturity can calm down a little bit, the lives of that system is better. Even if they can't do magnificent things. And sometimes they

can. And sometimes that's what I love about the theory. There is nothing concrete about- that's not what I'm meaning to say- emotion can present, families can present, reactivity can present, and very much indicate a low level of maturity of the system. And time quickly shows, that is not the case. That you've seen people who are caught in a shockwave. Who are flipping out. And way out of their normal thinking and functioning. We've all been there. So, I've kind of forgotten where we were headed, but this is what is so powerful about the theory, and I think it holds today. I don't think there's a concept in the theory, in my opinion, that isn't as accurate today as it was then. I do think there's new knowledge, that's an addition on that. I'm talking about the neuroscience.

Schara: Mmhmm. Right.

Meyer: I'm talking about the pleasure pathway. And how the brain can take over, and something that begins this behavior. And now you're dealing with a brain that has sort of taken over the steering wheel, a little bit. Whatever. And maybe that wasn't all fully understood, back then, but the concepts-

Schara: Well you- I think we skipped over to kind of the main characteristics, the main contribution, that Bowen made to a Western science world view. I think the difference is in what you're talking about and how the theory is enabling people to become more mature, rather than with this feeling, psychodynamic kind of approach that is almost everywhere.

Meyer: Right. There's psychodynamics, and then there's drugs, and then there's Bowen theory.

Meyer: Right, right.

Schara: And this contribution allowed - I love your thing about the blue heron - allowed people to see the family as a blue heron, a nest of blue herons. You know, it's just part of nature, there's certain, as you say, there's certain shockwaves and other things that happen. In the life of a blue heron. [laughter] And some blue herons can listen better than others and alter their functioning. And there's nothing in psychodynamic that allows people to see that nest that they're emerging from or find a way to be more factual about it.

Meyer: Well, I think worse yet, the focus on feeling, "how are you feeling about what you've just said," and whatever, the person's already drowning in feeling.

Schara: [laughter] Yeah.

Meyer: And what they can do by talking more about it is, drown at a deeper level. And it's like journaling; journaling can be incredibly helpful, and it can be a disaster.

Schara: [laughter]

Meyer: Because if journaling is simply recording how you feel, then the feeling state gets more and more and more revved up, as you write more and more. On the other hand, if someone sits down to write about how they are feeling, it begins to move into thoughts, and into factors that are influencing this. They're going to be calming down, as they write.

Schara: The Unabomber was a good example, of a journalist. [laughter] He wrote a lot about it [laughter]. He wasn't very objective about his writing. I remember one story Dr. Bowen- after he'd had, maybe his second hospitalization, he said to me. "Punkin, those people come up to me and they say to me, 'Dr. Bowen, how do you feel?'" He said, "The next person that does that to me, I'm going to punch him in the nose." [laughter] And then, he says, "You see all these "Get Well" cards in here? People are sending me "Get Well" cards like I'm sick and they're not?" [laughter] And stuff like that. But he had a way of seeing emotional process that was hysterical. It was so funny. And you could kind of calm down, in relationship to the emotion that was around you everywhere.

Meyer: Right.

Schara: In these kind of looks at the blue heron. [laughter] At the way human nature is.

Meyer: Right. Right.

Schara: And I don't know if you- go ahead.

Meyer: (Well, the other-) Well, I was going to say the other thing about the theory that is so helpful, low level, looking at this, because Bowen created the scale of differentiation, that every one of us on this earth is on, there isn't a normal scale, an abnormal scale, a pathological scale, no. And his reassertion over and over and over, "There is schizophrenia in all of us." That, not that those things would be said to somebody in front of you, but that, any family that has had this kind of experience, anyone who's had to go through what you've just described, would be struggling. There was that, just forgiveness. That isn't the word I'm wanting, generalization, that also I think helped people to relax. That the kind of thing you have gone through, is deeply, deeply distressing. No mother would be calm, with the email you're describing to me. And that allows that person to calm down. And that's part of what the theory says. Part of what that scale

of differentiation says, that we're all on it and also, I think, gave the theory traction with people. Because then they began to move into "oh, so..."

Schara: So being part of the human dilemma is sort of validated, in a way and I-

Meyer: That's calming.

Schara: That's calming. Sometimes it's one of the things that I think about and, with Dr. Bowen, he often interrupted. Sometimes he would say things that were funny, and calming, but he would also interrupt people who were doing things that he didn't want to participate in. And he had a way, even when he interrupted, he had a way of connecting with people that calmed them down. So it wasn't always this positive validation. And I had Jean Blackburn in earlier, and she was telling this story that, she stood up at her first conference with Dr. Bowen, and she said to him, "Dr. Bowen, I'm not sure if I'm hearing you correctly, but I think that you're saying, societal regression means that we are going to be, before you know it, there'll be no more humans on the Earth; we're doing ourselves in. Is that what you're saying?" And he said, "No, ma'am." [laughter] And she said, you know, "The 'no' was kind of a shock, and when he called me 'ma'am' and I was 20-some years old, it, you know, it made me think, 'okay,' you know. I didn't quite understand him. Let me sit back here and think about it again, and then I'll come back and ask him again."

Meyer: Yes, yes, yeah. He did have that way of connecting. I'm thinking I'm not going to be able to pull it out, maybe. He was at one of the meetings where they brought in, in the later '70s or whatever, maybe Haley, maybe someone else. And they were interviewing the same families; they were doing whatever, and his capacity to connect to a patient with schizophrenia, and just to make that very direct, straight connection, he just, he had an incredible capability to do that, to connect. He did.

Schara: I read in one of the letters, down in Williamsburg, that he wrote about, he said, when he began to see, that the way people resolved the transference, you could scale it out. So the way in which people were more or less mature, in how they resolved that transference thing, became this kind of scale of differentiation; that's how he saw it. [laughter]

Meyer: Sure, sure, sure, absolutely.

Schara: And that ability, that he had, to make a connection with people, and I'm not saying he was always 100%, and a lot of other things went on in his trying to promote the Family Center that might not have worked out to his best interests, I don't know, but you know, no one's 100% at doing this. So, little tangles occur, along the way.

Meyer: Andrea, the way I went about this, and this was a peace that I made with myself at some point, you cannot be cutting edge and moderate.

Schara: I like that.

Meyer: What it takes, in your thinking, in your courage, to be cutting edge when he first presented his family, knowing, that that audience was going to see him with an Oedipal Complex, when this was over. He knew. What it takes to do that is not moderation. Or you'll never make it.

Schara: Mmhmm.[laughter]

Meyer: And that, I think the things that didn't turn out so well were part of that cutting edge. And because he was so valiant, as a warrior for this theory, I'm remembering, he and Dr. Toman, and I don't remember which time, and they're on the same panel together, and Dr. Bowen said to Dr. Toman, "Walter, doesn't it just infuriate you when people take your theory and they start doing stuff to it that isn't accurate. Doesn't that make you mad?" And you can guess what Walter said. If you don't remember: "No, that doesn't bother me." He said, "As far as I'm concerned, when I've said it, it's not mine anymore. Now, what I've written is mine, but once I've put it out there, I don't control it anymore." Well Dr. Bowen felt his mission. First in trying to create this thing that was accurate, align it with science, meaning using terms in biology that were accurate, so the same process in human behavior as the process in biology were completely consistent, that he continued as a warrior trying to protect this theory as that cutting edge. He had no manual of how to do this.

Schara: Right, absolutely.

Meyer: There was no manual, right? So, the things that did not work so well were things that were hard to understand, as you are that cutting-edge person. And there are a lot of things

Schara: So, trial and error research? Can I call it that? Trial and error research that he took Bowen Theory himself all the way, and I think he said that, in the three days before he died, at that AAMFT meeting. He said, "I was walking down the road, and I found differentiation. I stumbled upon it. And many times, I wish I'd never discovered it. Because it probably took a few years off my life." So that would be, the trial and error research that he did with his own family. With the family of family therapists. And his colleagues, and so forth.

Meyer: Right, with all of those different systems, they were different steps. The first step was beginning to see the theory. And the beauty of how all of that occurred, and what allowed that to occur. Some of which we'll never know. In other words, what made him so unique and different was that he could see it. I mean, I think if you go back to Freud, there is a description in there of a mother and a daughter where he talks about anxiety. But it's as if, everyone, as soon as the interview's over, completely forgets he said anything about anxiety. It was seen. And then everyone just moves right on. You know, Bowen wasn't the first person to be aware of anxiety, the difference was, he was the one who 'got' its power and its impact and took it so seriously. So, the first level was, for him to be able to think and to know what was going on at Menninger's, the individual, the psychodynamic. Just incomplete and very inadequate. And all of that curiosity and that strong observation. That was part of him, from the beginning. And I think back, and I think that the stories about his father, that he knew everyone in town from their back, by how they walked. I mean, that's paying attention, you know.

Schara: Observation.

Meyer: We look at things going on around us, and then we move right on. No, no, no. His father clearly observed; Bowen liked to talk about that story. And, you know, how much of that was the eldest boy; how much was growing up with a dad whose lens was pretty wide, and who wasn't just paying attention to his own thoughts, but he was watching the world around him. And then, that oldest boy stuff, leader. In World War II, he sees mental health in World War II is a disaster. And how much that oldest leader in him, that capable leader, the sense of 'you do things right,' activated him to come home, and, 'there has to be a better way.' So he had that power of a mission when he came back from World War II. And went into Menninger's, went into psychoanalysis and all the traditional, typical stuff. But he brought a wider lens to it. And so he began to see; he begins to see the concepts. That leads to the beginning of the theory. That leads to NIH, and the concepts start being laid down concretely. Ok, well that was sort of Phase 1. And then Phase 2, 3, 4, 5, how do you teach it? Well, he figured out, by getting trainees and residents and whatever, to do research on their own family. Of the healing that came from that. Again, that's going to the facts. And becoming aware of voltage, in your own history and your own background. So, how this can be taught, the process of imparting the concepts of this theory, in a way that can be readily picked up by people that can hear him. And we go back and we talk about people being calmer in the room. They have to have enough maturity to be able to let go of blaming. And for those who cannot accept accountability, woah, I do that too. I just did what my mother did? Right? I'm going way back, 10 minutes, 15 minutes ago. And you see that, this theory presented thoughtfully, with questions and whatever, will not touch someone who will not be accountable and be accurate about their own functioning and their own realities. That's a correction. [noise of tape change] Have I talked too long? Is that what that means?

Schara: No.

Monika: No, it just means the tape went to Side 1 right now. That's all.

Meyer: I think that's a hint.

Monika: Go on.

Meyer: So, we're talking phases, that first was the wide lens of thinking. And then beginning to see repeating patterns and the beginning of the rapid exchange of anxiety between moms and their children at Menninger's, and blah blah blah. So then the theory begins to fall in place, and how in the world does this get taught and presented to other people that can then use this theory effectively? That was the phase. A learning phase. I'm saying, and that isn't to say that you know, trying to figure out how to impart data doesn't continue forever, but there is that original "oh ok, now here it is. What do we do with it? And how to we teach it?" So I'm using, in the most simple way, not saying these phases stop, is what I'm trying to say.

Schara: I remember in talking about it at NIH, where he decided that, instead of the staff meeting, he would have the staff come in and listen, and that the staff had to focus on their own accountability, their own responsibility, in the dilemmas that they had in relating to the patients.

Meyer: And...

Schara: Then the patients could learn, from listening to these other stories, instead of being instructed.

Meyer: But also, there was a flip to that. That the families, the parents were invited to every staff meeting to listen to the staff processing their family. Well that's about as open as you're going to get it.

Schara: Mmhmm, right.

Meyer: And open and accurate. And that was one of the things that, you know, his sense that there's never any mirrors with Murray Bowen.

Schara: Right. [laughter] No one-way mirrors.

Meyer: No one-way mirrors.

Schara: Just come in and have a seat.

Meyer: Here it is. Here's the whole scale of differentiation sitting in this room. Right? And we're all going to work at this. And so then, we go from "How is this taught, and then how is this related to other people in the mental health field?" I mean, all these things had to be done, ultimately. And again, if you're remembering, this is a man who's on the cutting edge, which means he's a warrior, and he carried a sword. And that was to cut down the jungle in front of him. To allow this thing to be built. But nevertheless. So I'm just saying when there was no manual, about how to deal with other people, and I think we saw that, in that he became the first president of AFTA, and then a real collision there. That ended, you know, very negatively, and I regret that terribly. There were no manuals, how to be true to this theory, accurate to the theory, and to set it side by side, with other ways of thinking. There were no manuals, how to do that. And cutting edge is never moderate. That's the peace-

Schara: [laughter] I love that.

Meyer: -I finally came to, and all is forgiven, because what he did is so, so incredible.

Schara: That is really true. Do you remember the first time you met Dr. Bowen? No?

Meyer: Of course.

Schara: Oh you do? Of course?

Meyer: You don't forget it.

Schara: [laughter] That's one of the things I've noticed, in all these interviews.

Meyer: It's that observation again. He...sort of looks you up and down, not in the typical way the world does that. But he is observing all of you and trying to hear and listen to whatever kind of level of self is standing in front of him. You don't forget that. I have a picture at the Family Center with my son, who I would guess was six months, no, he was younger than that. Two months, three months. I mean he was old enough that I put him on the floor. Dr. Bowen's sitting in a chair, kind of right in front of him, and Dr. Bowen is just staring him up. And it just, I love the picture, because, that's just what he did. Every symposium of any kind, we all know, he walked the aisles, up and down, looking at who was there, and just assessing and observing. Cutting edge. Cutting edge.

Schara: One of the first stories I heard him tell about it was, he was at Menninger's, and he'd got in his car to drive back to Waverly, Tennessee. And he got about an hour outside of Menninger's, and he said "I don't know why, you know, those people are talking badly about, you know, X, Y, and Z, and I kind of was buying into all that stuff, but now I'm in the country, smelling the good fresh air, I don't feel so bad about A, B, and C. [laughter]

Meyer: That's like his story about getting on an airplane. About the time you're at 30,000 feet, you have a whole different view of a-

Schara: Of a- well when he got back to Menninger's, within two or three days he noticed, he was believing all that gossip again about A, B, and C. [laughter]

Meyer: Yeah, right, right, right.

Schara: Because the muddle of the emotional system, you call it voltage, and the intensity and the anxiety that runs through it, can infect you. And there you are with it.

Meyer: Does infect you.

Schara: And there you are with it.

Meyer: And, what was different about him was that he could see this happening. He could be in it, he could be doing it. He said, "three days back, I'm doing the same thing." The gossip. But he had that capacity to be enough outside. That he could still be observing it. And the world's a different place, because he could do that - or this theory would not - wouldn't exist. It wouldn't exist. And my deep, deep regret is that, because of the difficulties he had in "How do I maintain, sustain, the accuracy of this theory in the middle of people thinking differently," has allowed an isolation of the theory and the thinking. Back in '04, when I left the Family Center I, sometime later, I joined the American Psychotherapy Association. And I presented in Chicago, in '04, Bowen Theory, and I was stunned at the number of people who had never even heard of it. Heard of it! So, my deepest regret, about all that we're talking about, would be the parts of the process of dealing in the world of mental health that I think has ended up with it isolated. And minimized the impact it could have.

Schara: Yeah.

Meyer: Now, our world, is not going to jump at this, because this theory calls for an enormous amount of individual responsibility. And accountability. And we're in a world that would much

prefer the government to do it, or someone else to do it, and it certainly isn't my fault, after all. However, how do you argue

Schara: Big Daddy. Big Momma.

Meyer: with success? So, we go back to the court program again, that three-pronged research project. I think the mental health world would've had to accept this, to a much greater degree, because you cannot dispute success. And the isolation has kept more of the mental health world, and the research world, from- from knowing. And that is my deepest regret.

Schara: Well, it kind of reminds me of going back to my father's family, I was always thought well of in my mother's family and thought poorly of in my father's family, and you know, it took 22 years, 22 years, of going to visit the Maloney family in Williamsburg, before one of them would come and cross the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel to come back over to the other side. And, I've been to AFTA, and you know and I usually am comfortable being a gladfly-or you know, somebody who disturbs the group from the back. That's kind of the position that I like to be in, I don't like to be in the position of being the expert. I'm more the tormentor. And I said something about Bowen and the speaker got up and said, "Well you know, Bowen, he was like you're, kind of your comment, about 'oh, he didn't like women.'" And now AFTA has become a completely female-dominated organization. They're maybe 20% males now, and 80% females. And he was one of the guys and kind of taking credit for, I guess, getting rid of Bowen Theory, so that the women could stand. And I was like, uh "I'm still standing, I love Bowen Theory, because it shows the way families are in terms of evolution." And there's no blame, here. But he, you know, it's very hard to go and the unresolved emotional, which is in that organization, the unresolved emotional- Some people, are very happy to see me, to say, "Oh, there's a Bowen person." You know. And Carolyn, God bless her, she's stuck with it, over these many, many years trying to make a difference, and letting people understand that Bowen Theory's pretty human and pretty darn useful. So, I think, I don't know what to say about it. I'm not sure I would know a way, from all that I have seen, of allowing Bowen Theory to be more accessible to people in mental health. I don't know the way through that.

Meyer: Well, I'm thinking of something as simple- Let me tell a story I'm thinking in my mind, when you talk about AFTA, the year Dr. Bowen resigned.

Schara: Mmhmm. I remember it like yesterday.

Meyer: Amen. And, the letters that were going out about the organization, and it was not our proudest moment, shall we say.

Schara: [laughter] Yes.

Meyer: Well, my thinking was, and then, the majority of the faculty, immediately, dropped out too. And I said, this did not win me points with the head honcho, "I have to make decisions about what I join, and what I choose to end, belonging to myself. And that, I don't join because the director did, and I don't quit because the director did. I need to go make my own decision." And so I went to AFTA, the next year after all those letters. Those were not the warmest days for me, either, at the Family Center. So, I get out to AFTA,-

Schara: Yeah. [laughter] Well, you became your own warrior, you know.

Meyer: Well, whatever. I get out to AFTA, and

Schara: You get the sort of truth, and it's yours.

Meyer: Jim Framo is staring at me. And I walked up and I said, "Hey Jim, Pat Meyer." He's "Oh, I know."

Schara: [laughter]

Meyer: I knew, he knew! Right? That was sort of the three days. And so by the time the three days sort of went like that, what level of maturity and commitment to thinking and belief is going to behave like that? So after that very joyful three days, I came back, and I, indeed, ended my membership as well. But I had to go do that myself. And, so. That's yesterday's AFTA, and the AFTA you have seen frequently.

Schara: Well I still go back, part of it based on just, the way that I see it is overcoming my own sensitivity to rejection. And that if you go back often enough, to your family, or to AFTA, or to any organization, they begin to see you, not as an emotional image, the rumor that, you know, who you are as seen by the group but as a self. It might take 22 years, as it did in my father's family, you know, to be seen as a person. It's not an easy thing. But I think it's one the great guiding principles that I've gotten out of Bowen Theory, which is, to move towards the rejection.

Meyer: You continue to do what you believe, you move towards the rejection,

Schara: Without a big deal.

Meyer: You move towards the fire and absolutely. I do have an answer. He will not like this answer. Sorry! I think his decision on the Networker was wrong.

Schara: What was his decision on the Networker? The Networker meeting? Or the...

Meyer: I don't know. The big symposium. When there are 3800 people in the room. The speakers from this-

Schara: Okay. Alright, mmhmm.

Meyer: symposium, are speakers there. Candace Pert. But, again, there was that remaining completely separate. I would love for Dr. Bowen to have been there, and done a meeting every single year at that symposium, presenting his thinking and theory. I think one of the ways, that people, a much larger population, could have been drawn in. But I think it had the same kind of problems as AFTA. I mean, AFTA was everything in the spectrum, the Networker, you know, they're, how many workshops they do in three days or whatever, it's everything in the spectrum.

Schara: Absolutely.

Meyer: But, had he been there, that would be an example of the kind of thing. I don't think you taint anything about the accuracy of what you're doing, if you stay true to yourself. In his own classroom, teaching his theory, accurately. I do not think that something would have been lost by being in the program with all of that entire range of mental health.

Schara: I hear you. I know that I'm a sort of an introvert myself. In a way I like going out and in a way I don't. I prefer my books, and a small number of people, and I don't know if you've ever read- you know, sometimes I (go) "Jesus only had 12 disciples." He had, you know, because how many people can you really directly influence, you know, that might be one question. In a time-consuming relationship, versus, yeah, and I think he made that kind of a decision

Meyer: Oh! That's a minimal number.

Schara: about a lot of things and a lot of people. And not that he was 100% right. But that I only have so much life energy, who do I want to invest it with? And who can I invest it with?

Meyer: Right, right, right, right, right, right. I'm only talking, speaking with large audiences, which he did all over the country, but to have 3800 under one roof, and stick him in a big room, and let people be exposed to it. I do regret that didn't occur. When you're taking, the commitment, training, truly, training....no. No. You can't do...

Schara: You can't do 3200 people.

Meyer: I'm just speaking to my great distress-

Schara: Yeah, to the-

Meyer: at the isolation that I think the theory sits in, that's all.

Schara: Yeah. I wouldn't be going to AFTA if I didn't have a bit of that in me, too, and I'm not even a trained mental health professional in the normal sense. I'm just a trained Bowen person. But I want to be able to communicate to a more general audience, and I think that's something that I hear with you too, is that Bowen Theory, take the basket off the light and let the light shine!

Meyer: Let the light shine.

Schara: Let the light shine.

Meyer: Absolutely. And yet, again there is no manual how to do this.

Schara: Right. Well you have a talent for it, you have a, you know, a real talent.

Meyer: Well, I have an enormous passion, about it, because it is so strong and so powerful. And so beautiful, as I said. And...

Schara: Yes, that is true. So, when we look back here at these questions, I'm just trying to pretty much- was there anything about your family that spawned your interest in Bowen Theory? We didn't touch on that.

Meyer: Yeah. The answer was 'no,' to that, Bowen would comment on that from time to time. In other words, there wasn't distress about my family. I was not seeking therapy, or an answer, or whatever.

Schara: Yeah.

Meyer: Just sitting in that room at the juvenile court, beginning to hear this theory, I just lit on fire because of the solid responsibility of it and sense about it. It made such concrete sense to me. But no, there was no factor in my family pulling me towards mental health, or seeking a assistance of some sort. Which is not to say, as I began to do my own family work, I didn't see a

bushel basket full of work I needed to do! And I'm still working at that at this point in time. But no, it was that happenstance that I end up at Fairfax Court two months before this program begins, and for which I will always be grateful.

Schara: He used to say that about himself. "I was drawn through seeking a way that I could be useful and make a contribution. At first, I thought it was medicine, about being a heart surgeon,

Meyer: Well he thought it was- heart surgeon- Exactly!

Schara: and then after World War II, I saw it was psychiatry, where I could make the biggest contribution."

Meyer: Yes. Because-

Schara: And so that's a little bit like your situation where knowledge drew you into Bowen Theory basically.

Meyer: Right. Right. And when he looked at that unbelievably poor, inadequate, maybe even negative mental health for those soldiers. Even though he had no theory at that moment, he knew there had to be a better way. It's just like when he had his alcoholic friend, colleague, at Menninger's, and it was forbidden that you ever are therapeutic with someone you know!

Schara: [laughter]

Meyer: Right? Help! And he just knew that was wrong.

Schara: Help your colleague? Oh no! Flush them! Yeah.

Meyer: Even though he wasn't, at a point in time, to be able to see how it could work, he knew that was wrong. He knew there had to be a way. That you could connect in a very useful way, with people with whom you had emotional relationships. Well, you know, it's so obviously clear, because the focus is not on the relationship and feelings, it's all about facts. And just unbelievable power.

Schara: Yeah. Well I'm going to stick with your- I think you probably have, in the teaching of theory, tried to refine and extend theory in terms of the teaching of it. I don't know that it's all been fleshed out again, but I think you're one of the really talented teachers that has come out of the Bowen system.

Meyer: Thank you.

Schara: And it's hard to put words to these things, you know, how you extend and refine it, in terms of mental health.

Meyer: I would never use the word, that I've done anything to extend, that's almost an offensive thought, because my brain has not been out trying to build new theoretical concepts of any sort, so

Schara: Well, it might be.

Meyer: That is so-whatever. However, where that would have been so true, so not a new concept, how in the world to communicate these concepts and this accuracy in ways that can be so fruitful, and useful for people. And I probably am very guilty of just being obsessed with looking at ways, finding a different way of explaining, a different way of whatever.

Schara: Yeah.

Meyer: Because it is so powerful. But, extending in the sense of a new theory, you know the thirteenth concept or something. No, that has not been my deal.

Schara: No, I remember once, he asked us to write, "Bowen Theory 2002: What would it be like?" And that's when I got all into Jack Calhoun, and so forth, and wrote a Bowen Theory 2002 paper about the reason we had so much divorce in the world was because of the increasing density, the lower number of children, and that we had to go back to this tribal thing of 12 adults and 18 children, which could only come about if you had enough divorces, and then you would have more aunts and uncles. [laughter] And things like that. But I think there, you know, there are many ways that you could take any concept, triangles is a beautiful one, and I really think that's one, probably differentiation and triangles are two of the ones that I've put the most thought into. Because if you're going to deal with emotional cutoff, or any of these things, you've got to do it in triangles. They're just, they're everywhere. So I've put a lot of thought into that. But I-

Meyer: Yeah, yeah-

Schara: I think that refining and teaching kind of go together. I don't know. The last question is, "The evidence that proves the theory, and we talked a lot about that work that you did in the

court system. Which, if it had been captured in some sort of way or other... You could, maybe, develop ways of thinking about proving Bowen Theory.

Meyer: Human flaw...so sad.

Schara: I don't know. But, it's something to think about.

Meyer: Well, the beauty is, the theory gets proven in my office, in your office every day. And how to report that out to the world's a different problem and question. And that's where it's so sad about that three different approaches research. And so many years back, and it was powerful data. And, too bad, but you know, I think what is going on here and getting the stories, telling the stories, trying to gather it all in on behalf of having all of this recorded and available at the Library of Science, blah blah blah is so important. I'm so grateful.

Schara: Well I'm so grateful you came for the interview. And I could go on for hours, unfortunately [laughter]. I love probing your mind, and seeing what you're thinking about, and it's just a real honor to spend the time with you.

Meyer: Well, there's no way I would not have come and done this, it's-

Schara: So Monika, I don't know, did you have anything? You only got in for the last part-

Monika: No.

Schara: The next generation, over here, I call her!

Meyer: Thank goodness.

Schara: [laughter]

Meyer: Lotta grey heads in that room.

Monika: Fascinating to listen to. Really interesting.

Meyer: Well, listening to all these different- just like Schulberg yesterday.

Schara: Yeah, that was fabulous.

Meyer: Different angles of memory about him. And, this is what you're doing with all this story-telling. I mean people who have come from all sorts of different connections with Bowen. And whatever, just-

Schara: Cast a big fishing net and see what you come up with.

Meyer: Really, right.

Schara: To me, the most important thing is he lived theory. He did a lot of trial-and-error learning, and people caught different parts of what he was talking about. And then they went and took it in a million different directions.

Meyer: Right, which is what humans do with ideas.

Schara: And just to be able to capture the richness of that, I think is,

Meyer: the accuracy of it is

Schara: Great. Great fun.

Meyer: Incredible.

Schara: Well Pat, thanks again. For all you do.

Meyer: So welcome. Thank you. This has just been-

Schara: [laughter] And maybe we'll, do something else, again.

Meyer: I hope so! I hope this just-

Schara: Keeps going!

Meyer: Yes!