



A Biographical Sketch
Dr. Murray Bowen
1913 - 1990

1913 - 1931



Dr. Murray Bowen's upbringing as the oldest son on a working farm in a small, rural town taught him enduring lessons about family, community, human interdependence with the earth and cycles of life and death. What he learned as a boy later informed his theory of human behavior. Dr. Bowen never lost touch with Waverly and is buried there today.

"I grew up on a working farm a mile out of a town of 1100. My father and uncle ran the store in town with a lot of time spent supervising the farm. A tenant farmer and his family farmed the fields for half the crops. Mother sort of supervised day to day things about the house, a 2 acre "garden", the orchard, the 50 acre pasture for the farm animals, the chickens, the hogs, the barn and all its attachments, and etc. It was a self sustaining farm. The only things we bought were sugar, salt, flour, meal, and a few staples."

Dr. Bowen to Carl Whitaker, August 14, 1979

Clockwise from top left:

Dr. Bowen, n.d.; Jess Bowen with hunting dogs, n.d.

Grandpa and Dr. Bowen feeding chickens, n.d.

Dr. Bowen with dog, n.d.; Dr. Bowen with his mother, n.d.



Waverly, TN

"... it takes living with it to know the cycles of life and death of animals and crops and nature. ... Dad was sort of determined that his kids would know the land. He put a tremendous amount of time with his sons hunting and fishing, inspecting crops, gathering nuts, explaining his built in knowledge of Nature, nursing sick animals, disposing of dead animals, assisting at the birth of animals, nursing homeless baby animals, training hunting dogs, ... watching animals' families and explaining their motives, watching fish swim and knowing what they were about—you name it—he knew his version of what went on. Mother went along with him ... except when ... the dog population to get up to 10 or 11, she would start grumbling."

Dr. Bowen to Carl Whitaker, Aug. 14, 1979



University of Tennessee, Knoxville 1931 - 1934 Undergraduate Work



Top to bottom:
Dr. Bowen with brother Roy in front of Sigma Chi fraternity, n.d.
Dr. Bowen (back row, fifth from the left) in front of Sigma Chi fraternity, n.d.

University of Tennessee, Memphis 1934 - 1937 Medical School

"In medical school I gravitated toward the specialties that seemed to offer the biggest unsolved problems."

Working Papers on Theory,
Courtesy National Library of Medicine.



Above: Dr. Bowen (right) and classmate in caps and gowns in front of Phi Chi fraternity, 1937.

Left, top to bottom:
Sticker from the Medical Units.
Card from Phi Chi fraternity.



1938



Top to bottom:
Dr. Bowen in front of his office,
Crossville, TN, ca. 1938.
Pill boxes and a compound
prescription, Crossville, TN, 1938.

Right: Dr. Bowen's medical bag.

Homestead Project, Crossville, TN

After medical school, Dr. Bowen became a country doctor with a practice in Crossville, Tenn. Devastated by the Great Depression, the surrounding Cumberland County became the site of a Homestead community in 1934. Under President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal, the Tennessee Valley Association established 250 homesteads to provide relief to suffering miners, farmers and factory workers.

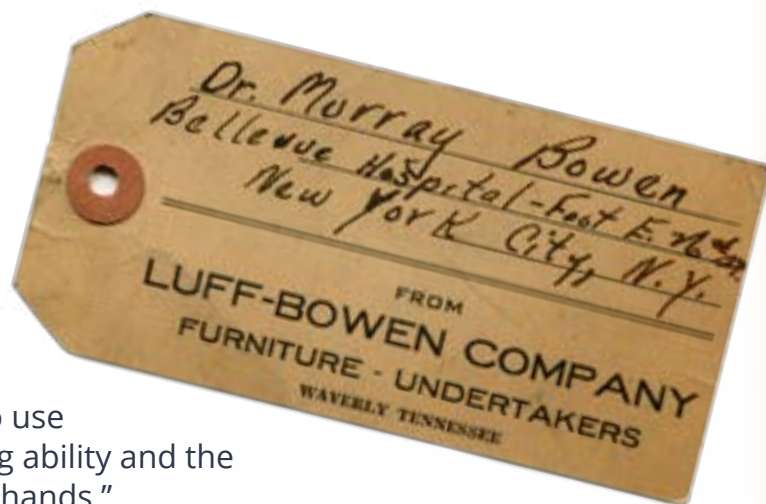


1938 Bellevue Hospital, New York, NY

Working and learning in New York City was a goal Dr. Bowen long aspired to, and in 1938 he earned an internship in the storied Bellevue Hospital. A year later, he started interning at Grasslands Hospital, where patients sought treatment for the major illnesses prevalent during that period, including tuberculosis, polio, scarlet fever and diphtheria.

"In an internship I became intrigued with making a mechanical heart and then chose surgery as the field that would enable me to use both the problem solving ability and the chance to work with my hands."

Working Papers on Theory, Courtesy National Library of Medicine.



Left page:

Mailing tag sent from Waverly, TN to Dr. Bowen at Bellevue Hospital, NY, December 26, 1938.

Right page, from top to bottom:

Dr. Bowen standing by Grasslands Ambulance, n.d.

Typed on the back of the photo: "Grasslands Psycho - December 1939.

Note my Ford at the curb". Dr. Bowen had a life-long love of cars.

Hospital Internships

1939 - 1941 Grasslands, Valhalla, NY



"... began designing a mechanical heart 1939 - too little time to finish ... I was accepted for a Fellowship in surgery in an important medical center [Mayo Clinic], which was postponed a year until I could complete a year of imminent military service."

Working Papers on Theory, Courtesy National Library of Medicine.



1941 - 1946

Five years of active duty in the Army during World War II gave Dr. Murray Bowen new insights into human behavior. It was during this period that he changed his interest from surgery to psychiatry, as he witnessed how soldiers and their leaders responded to the challenges of war.



*Left page, clockwise from top right:
Dr. Bowen in uniform, n.d.
LeRoy Bowen. Dr. Bowen kept this photo of
his wife with him throughout the war, n.d.
Dr. Bowen and soldiers, n.d.*

*Right page:
One of the hospitals where Dr. Bowen
worked during the war, n.d.*

World War II Fort Bragg NC, England, France



"We can roughly compare the security and emotional adjustment of the individual to the adjustments of nations and the world. The adjustment of the individual can range all the way to a secure, calm, mature adjustment to states of complete mental breakdown. The adjustments of nations can range from complete peace and harmony within a nation and between nations to global war. With this kind of a viewpoint, the state of psychotic breakdown of an individual is roughly analogous to a state of war on the larger national and global level.... This present turmoil began to build up in the early 1930s. It reached its peak during the war years from 1940 to 1945 and it has fluctuated back and forth since the fall of Japan."

"The Effect of Mobilization on Children and Youth", Presented at the Children and Youth in a World in Crisis conference, University of Wisconsin, 1951

1946 - 1954



Dr. Murray Bowen joined the Menninger Clinic as a fellow in psychiatry, and while there began seeing human problems as part of a system, rather than within the individual. He left the foundation so he could develop his theory, but never lost contact with clinic founders Dr. Karl Menninger and Dr. Will Menninger.



*Left page, top to bottom:
Dr. Bowen, Menninger era.
Leroy and Dr. Bowen with Susan,
visiting LeRoy's mother, Beaumont,
TX, ca.1947.*

*Right page:
Medical staff, Menninger Foundation.
Dr. Bowen is seated second from the
left in the front row, n.d.*

Menninger Foundation, Topeka, KS

"The greatest gift that mankind has to bestow on a member of the human race is the gift of reasonably mature parents. Everything comes back to this whether we talk of adjustments to school, to marriage, to work, to war, or to anything else. You . . . know that few people ever reach our theoretical concept of complete maturity and that most of us have our varying degrees of immaturity, but the child who is blessed with reasonably mature parents and who is permitted to spend his early months and years basking in the mature giving love of a mature family setting is truly a child more blessed than the child of a prince or a king or a millionaire. Such a child can grow into a mature adult free from inner turmoil and fears, free from prejudice and bias, and much more free to live and choose his own life. He has inner peace and freedom that can be the most important of the freedoms."

"The Effect of Mobilization on Children and Youth", Presented at the Children and Youth in a World in Crisis conference, University of Wisconsin, 1951



1954 - 1959

Dr. Bowen made vital progress in developing his theoretical thinking at the National Institute of Mental Health, where he was able to study the interactions of entire families with schizophrenic members. This remarkable research effort involved moving the families into the NIMH. While his project focused on schizophrenia, he said he was always thinking more broadly about the family.



"The NIMH work resulted a new theory of emotional illness and a new method of family psychotherapy . . ."

Dr. Bowen to Brig. Gen. and Mrs. Smith, June 26, 1965

National Institute of Mental Health Bethesda, MD

"I have not written anything about differentiating a self in that "live in" family project I did back in the 1950's. That was the most intense togetherness I have ever "lived in". I think all social scientists should be intimately exposed to living in a "sea of schizophrenia" which contains the MOST of everything the human phenomenon has to offer. I purposely selected the most intense stuff I could find, and what a great bunch of schizophrenics that was - the greatest in helplessness, all mixed up with the greatest bunch of hippies, the most skillful anarchists, and the most astute "anti's", and the most of everything. They were absolute masters at everything, verbal, action, you name it. No one can beat a schizophrenic at combining incisive insights with confused metaphors and shifting frames of reference, and forcing others into his frame of reference. A schizophrenic will not "relate" to you unless you listen to the content and accept his frame of reference, and then you have had it. Then comes the power plays, the threats of violence which becomes justified violence if you don't go along; the becoming a victim to your own cruel system; and all the rest. Put a ménage of schizophrenic families together, then join the ménage with all the rest of your staff, then turn up the volume on the pressure cooker, and find your way out of that. A big hunk of my life was invested in the outcome of that project. I was determined not to impinge the lives of the "patients", but when the outcome of that becomes "If you don't kill me, I am going to kill you", there is a real strong urge to call that "sick" and lock up the "sickness". There I stood facing all the families and all the staff, all tending to call me "crazy". With my "I Position", I lived them down, without being forced into the helplessness of either alternative. I grew up more in that 5 years than any other concentrated period in my life."

Dr. Bowen to Ferd (?), May 14, 1972

Left page, top to bottom:

Dr. Bowen, n.d.

Dr. and Mrs. Bowen at the American Psychiatric Association meeting, 1957.

1959 - 1990



At Georgetown University, Dr. Bowen continued developing his theory and began teaching it to a new generation. As a clinical professor of psychiatry in the School of Medicine, he started a post-graduate program and launched the Georgetown University Family Center, which today is the independent Bowen Center for the Study of the Family. Dr. Bowen became known as a pioneer in family therapy, and the center's annual symposia

continue today, attracting Distinguished Guest Lecturers who are renowned in the worlds of family therapy and science.

"Since June 1982 I have "gone it alone" in the effort to help move human behavior to the status of science. It may take a century, but it will happen. In due time we will get beyond the genetic-immuno-psychosocial-cytologic-sociobiological-hokum that divides the human brain into small disparate structural and functional packages, and moves it all into the bright new light of recognized science. The answer to cancer and several other things may be in this package. My "foolish" posture to bring the sciences together has brought a few recognitions, plus other things."

Dr. Bowen to Lou and Betty Rivers, 1986

Top; Dr. Bowen at the APA meeting in Toronto, 1977.



Dr. and Mrs. Bowen at Medical College of VA, where Bowen received an award for being the first to videotape clinical sessions, 1978. Photo by Andrea Schara.

Georgetown University Medical Center Washington, D.C.

"1978 has been the most gratifying and frustrating year in my existence. I have been so successful this year—in my work, that it is far beyond my fondest expectations. The last half of 1977 I finally made it into "Who's Who in America" (which I never thought I would make), the name "The Bowen Theory" has become a household term in the profession (one of those boyhood dreams which finally became a reality), and I was elected the 1st President of the American Family Therapy Association (another sort of later dream that was always private in my own head). Then came the book in April which sort of reinforced the whole sequence. There was the Bowen Day at Hunter College in NYC in June . . . and finally the biggest event of all when my Family Center crowd put on "Murray Bowen Day" at Gtn in Sept. That was really the "day of all days" for me."

Dr. Bowen to Family, December 30, 1978



Vice President Gerald Ford, left, shakes hands with Dr. Bowen, right, as Dr. Glen Seaborg, Chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission, center, looks on. Bowen was invited to speak at the World Future Society's forum Energy: Today's Choices, Tomorrow's Opportunities, Richmond, VA, 1974. Photographer unknown.

