

Douglas Murphy:

Hold on to it without a button near.

Andrea Schara:

Yeah.

Douglas Murphy:

That works. So anyway, my introduction to Dr. Bowen really came at... through a job that I took, which was a research training project sponsored by NIAA, National Institute of Alcohol Abuse, or whatever the hell that was called, at the University of Maryland. And I took this job, or actually, I was asked to take this job there. And the point of the project was to see if people at Master's level could be trained to be family therapists and also to work with families where there was one adult alcoholic and one child with a behavior problem. So it had sort of a dual purpose, and the program was organized clinically by a woman named Elena Mansenara. I don't know if that name's even familiar. She was coming over to DC and seeing Bowen, I think with a group of people, I can't remember what that configuration was all about, but anyway, she had been trained by Minuchin.

Douglas Murphy:

And so she ran this program doing the training part of it. And part of the training was... It must've had a wonderful budget because the leading figures in family therapy came to consult to the program. I spent a day, two days, with the trainees and working with the families as well. So Minuchin, Haley, Norman Paul, somebody from Mental Research Institute, but I don't remember which person it was. It wasn't Don Jackson. He was already dead.

Andrea Schara:

Jay Haley?

Douglas Murphy:

No, it was more towards the "pure" end of the Mental Research Institute sort of, cause Haley had already gone to Philadelphia at that point. No, actually he was at University of Maryland. He was training psychiatric residents. So anyway, that process was in place and I was very intrigued by the whole idea of family therapy, and so forth and so on. And they would also, the guest would also consult with the trainees on an individual basis, and Norman Paul and I sat down one afternoon, and just discussing my family. And he said, "Do you know Murray Bowen? He's over in DC." I said, "Well, we've read..." I had already read something. Some stuff of his. He said, "You really should go see him."

Douglas Murphy:

So it was intriguing. And I really, I was sort of at a point where it was beginning to make sense to me, to attempt to reestablish contact with my father, which had been a 20-odd-year cutoff. So I began to do something with that on my own. And then instead of getting Dr. Bowen, I think I called the Center and asked for, I don't know if I asked for Dr. Kerr or not, but anyway, I got a hold of Dr. Kerr and in about a month, two months' time, I went to do a consultation with him. So, that was my entree into it. And I

hadn't met Dr. Bowen at that point. I had begun to do a lot more reading of his stuff. Probably the first time that I saw him was at the Medical College of Virginia.

Andrea Schara:

Wow.

Douglas Murphy:

I drove down there, sometime early on and I, it was the first Welford thing that I had ever seen. And I was blown out of the water. Also, he took on the audience that day. I don't remember what it was about, but it was sort of drawing boundaries and saying, "Don't step across this line." And I was just very impressed with what he was doing and how he was doing it. I may have seen him a couple of other times. I applied to the postgraduate program sometime after that, continued in coaching with Mike, and got turned down the first time I applied to the special postgraduate program. I was told to come to more of his stuff at the Medical College of Virginia, come to the symposium, come to meetings, that kind of thing, and get a perspective on what this was all about.

Douglas Murphy:

So the really, the first personal contact I had with him was after I gotten into the special postgraduate program. And I was in, I wasn't in a special, I was in the regular week to week thing. Yeah.

Andrea Schara:

1976.

Douglas Murphy:

1976. And that would have certainly we've been him in front of the classroom and doing his stuff. The thing that struck me the most about him in that very early time was his integrity, which... I don't know what it was about that, but I realized sort of, I realized at that point that he meant what he was talking about. It wasn't his usual gruff... It was just something about how he conceptualized things and didn't waiver from that. And sort of also was able to say, and he said this many times in many different ways, "You either take it or you leave it. I'm not invested in whether you buy this or not. If it's useful to you, fine." Which intrigued me as well, because most of the time people were trying to sell their product. So in the special postgraduate, in the postgraduate program, it was probably limited contact, except, I mean, he taught almost every week. It was a hell of a lot of contact with him.

Douglas Murphy:

I remember the belief paper.

Andrea Schara:

Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Douglas Murphy:

And I remember struggling with that. And my relationship with him probably was at that point and probably remained pretty much this way, sort of a posture that I fall into, which is seeing the other person as superior. And so that belief paper caused me a great deal of anxiety, cause I realized I was going to have to say what was on my mind, if I had anything on my mind. So in doing it in front of him, it

was that kind of process. I think I presented family. I'm pretty sure I presented my own family during that time. That wasn't half as bad, cause I was pretty much into that process. So I was always cautious about Dr. Bowen and sort of skirting him.

Andrea Schara:

Yes.

Douglas Murphy:

Sort of dodging him, jumping into an empty room when he came down the hall. That was sort of how I experienced him at that time. The belief paper went, you know, no big deal. It wasn't a big issue. And the next thing that stands out is the door cook kicking incident. Do you remember the kitchen? The kitchen had two doors in it and you could go in from one side of the hallway, which is right next to the video room and then you could go out the other door and I don't know why I did this, but it was out of courtesy, I thought. I held the door open for him at one point, and he kicked it out of my hand. I don't know exactly what he said, but it was that indication that he didn't need my help.

Andrea Schara:

And he didn't want to be treated as a superior person either.

Douglas Murphy:

No, he did something else about that.

Andrea Schara:

Okay, another-

Douglas Murphy:

He did a really good thing about that. And that was probably the most personable contact that I had with him. Everybody in the... It was either during the postgraduate program or maybe it was in the internship, I'm not absolutely sure, but you had to go and see him for an hour, a session or a consultation. And I went in there reasonably terrified as I usually am. And what he did was that he cursed throughout the entire hour, like a drunken sailor.

Andrea Schara:

That is wonderful.

Douglas Murphy:

And I kept thinking, I just started laughing about it and then we both laughed about it. And it was, and I saw him trying to get out of that posture that I had put him in.

Andrea Schara:

Right. The superior one.

Douglas Murphy:

You know, that, the superior being thing. That was probably the most personable thing, contact that I had with him. The theory, I didn't need much encouragement. I mean, obviously the theory is a lifelong learning process, but I didn't need much encouragement. I was attracted to it almost from the beginning because of the cutoff, and that spoke volumes to me. And when I moved against that or when I messed with that, the results were so dramatic for me that I was at that point, thought this makes a great deal of sense.

Douglas Murphy:

So my work with it in the beginning and all the way through has been one of, one more of clarification rather than being sold it. And he embodied it, but in such an interesting way, I mean, I think I could have watched him for 20, 30, 40 years and gotten something visceral just by seeing him handle himself in this, in situations. That was, I think that's sort of beyond words as well. It's that being in the presence of somebody who was, at least hypothetically, acting in a differentiated fashion. I know he had clay feet. I knew he was human, but, certainly after the cursing session, I realized that this wasn't a superior being, it was just another schmo, who was very bright. So that's real-, that really is the most outstanding part of that memory about him.

Andrea Schara:

Well, it brings up a couple of things. One is the intention, in the reading of another person, in beyond words, that kicking the door to signal I don't need your help. And you know, if you try to help me, I might kick you next. But there's, even in listening to it, I could feel a little cortisol rush.

Douglas Murphy:

Absolutely. Oh, it surprised the hell out of me, and maybe it's the courteous youngest in me, or something that sort of that, "I'll open the door and you'll think favorably of me," or something. Didn't work.

Andrea Schara:

And so my question is, in watching him with other people and so forth, I've more or less come to the conclusion myself, that a lot of times he was picking up what he needed to pick up in order to sort of smack people. And he would, he always did sort of "smacking" things to me. And I think this sort of sounds like a wake up. He had a way of seeing who you were and what you were dealing with and coming into contact with you in a really real way that didn't need words, or it might need curse words, but it was going to shock you. It was a little shocking. And I think people think of him often as a very intellectual, charismatic person and not probably this other side of him, which was just as real, and just as deep.

Douglas Murphy:

You know the picture of him in front of his practice in Waverly?

Andrea Schara:

Yeah.

Douglas Murphy:

That's a really real person.

Andrea Schara:

Yeah.

Douglas Murphy:

That's, there's that...that picture's always meant a lot. Because-

Andrea Schara:

The one in Tennessee in the mountains?

Douglas Murphy:

No, no, no, no. He's sitting, he's standing in front of his house, I guess.

Andrea Schara:

Oh, in front of his house.

Douglas Murphy:

And his practice is out on the, I mean he has a shingle out, or something like that.

Andrea Schara:

Think that it was in the mountains in Tennessee. He was working for the VA, I think at that time. But I know Kathy Vallejo says that in her office, that picture, I left it there when I left the AV, and that's one of my favorite too, cause he's so determined looking, so determined. It's just, I am going to make a difference and I'm going to do it using me.

Douglas Murphy:

Uh-huh (affirmative). No, I do think that that...that people will watch his tapes now, and I've had this reaction from people, not just in the Postgraduate Program, but also showing the basic series stuff, and people always have a reaction to him.

Andrea Schara:

Yeah.

Douglas Murphy:

It's so interesting. I mean, it goes across the board. I mean, it can be that he is very clear and thoughtful and, or that he's such a boring person or I don't know, but there's always this sort of emotional response about him, which I think's fascinating.

Andrea Schara:

Yeah.

Douglas Murphy:

But-

Andrea Schara:

So he's kind of like a Rorschach in a way. Well, I know that you do a lot of meditating and in trying to clear the mind, you can really begin to see all the illusions that are created in these relationships, and that maybe all of us are Rorschach to each other. And that, but if you're an energetic enough person, you draw a lot more of people's attempts to understand you and put you into a little box so that you're containable.

Douglas Murphy:

So that they can manage you, supposedly. He was not a "little box" person. No, I think that that's true. I mean, I think that's a good way of explaining it, that what I set him up to be... and I think it was probably inevitable... I set him up to be somebody who was beyond me, beyond, who could see through me, those kinds of processes. And that, just that conversation in his room was like, if he had pulled out a cigar and offered me a drink, I wouldn't have been surprised. You know? It was very different than what I expected.

Andrea Schara:

Well, I wondered also, and I don't want to go into too much of it, but one of the things that you've put about theory that was important to you was the concept of emotional cutoff. And very, there's, I don't think there's another theoretical framework that addresses emotional cutoff. I think his theory's the only one. I think most Freudian based ideas is, it's all about repression and because you repress, then you cut off or you cannot deal with other people. But the way that he put the theory together into these eight concepts was such a unique view of a system. And I don't know if you had any other ideas about that, but certainly of all of the concepts, emotional cut off is probably the one that is the most different from conventional psychiatry.

Douglas Murphy:

I guess the... I can't remember how he said this, where he said it, how he said it, but it was, it's almost self, it's self-therapy almost. And there's the thing about the theory that is so unique in my opinion, is that in fact it provides one with a template in which to begin to address one's life. Without, I mean... it provides tools. It doesn't necessarily tell you how to use them, but it provides this way of thinking about things which nothing else does, as far as I had been exposed to. So in that respect, the cutoff thing was just, this explains what's going on, for me, at this particular moment. And to test it out, to test the idea out, brought about a whole bunch of other stuff.

Andrea Schara:

That's fascinating. Now, Bowen also used his own life as an example, which was completely different from anything in psychiatry, in which he talked about being a self in his family and how he tricked people and did all of these things. And in conventional psychiatry, again, you're almost prohibited from talking about yourself-

Douglas Murphy:

And tricking other people.

Andrea Schara:

And tricking other people. Right. I mean, this is, it's probably some law you definitely must have missed the fact that there was a law that you were never to trick one on purpose, especially if you cared about

them or they were your client. So these are two major... What, how did that go with you? And the use of self and his tricking ways?

Douglas Murphy:

Well, being a youngest and having to trick people some of the time or all the time. I mean, I think it resonated with me, I think the stuff from the Mental Research Institute and Haley's stuff as well, those things, sort of the paradoxical stuff, that intrigued me. I thought it had limited applicability for me, but I thought it was a very, I mean, it was intriguing. It was very interesting. I thought Bowen's stuff was more solid. Dan mentioned the reversal today.

Andrea Schara:

Yeah.

Douglas Murphy:

But that was sort of an almost a minor thing as far as my thinking was about the theory. I think though, I mean, the whole idea of stepping over a cutoff, is an enormously counter-intuitive process. And that's something that, you could call that tricking somebody, you could call that jumping in their shit.

Andrea Schara:

Yeah. Exactly.

Douglas Murphy:

Right. And, and I think that's what made, and I could see, certainly see, I mean, when Doc-, the whole thing with Dr. Bowen's anonymous paper and all that, all the trip home stuff, I never saw that as being cruel. I never saw that as being... And other people have that reaction to it, that how could he do that? What's he trying, to mess them up or hurt them? But I never saw it that way. I saw it as being a way through the obstacles that were in place. So, I mean, I think I like tricks. I like humor. I like sarcasm. I like all those things, but I think the theory itself is more solid than that. More solid than say, the stuff that Jay Haley used to know or does, or I don't know if... he's dead now, I think.

Andrea Schara:

People still do that, structural and strategic, all those things, but it does not get to the depth. You're trying to cure a symptom in a few days or 10 sessions, and that's short-term therapy.

Douglas Murphy:

Right.

Andrea Schara:

And I remember when Dr. Bowen's mother died, I went to Waverly to the funeral and Marguerite Bowen came up to me and said, "Dr. Bowen says you're the right hand person or whatever, or man." And I said, "Well, I'm not a man, and I'm not right." And she said, "I want you to explain why you think he wrote those letters to us." So this is 1981, she's still upset about it. And so I said, "Well, I think he discovered how to sail a boat across a lake. And he was the first person to sail across the emotional system." And that's how he figured out how to do this through these letters that he could bring things

up that would bring people toward him who were moving away from it. And in the... what he did was just sail a boat across the lake. And it was a beautiful day and-

Douglas Murphy:
Sunny, breezy.

Andrea Schara:

Sunny, breezy. It was awesome. And then the family figured out what he was up to and they put some holes in his sails, and she laughed. And she said, "Well, I think that's a pretty good explanation, that he saw something as a system that none of us could see." And that was pretty good.

Douglas Murphy:

And he made it to the other shore.

Andrea Schara:

And he made it to the other shore. He really did, or you said, I used to, it was like catching a football and running a whole hundred yards. Nobody touched me. And it was full of tricks and reversals and things like that. And I can't remember exactly what he said to his youngest sister, Francis, when she caught on to it. But it was something like, if you want to tell people what you think I'm up to, then I'll give you all the credit for it.

Andrea Schara:

It was something tricky like that. And it was just this incredible ability, in my thinking, to put the responsibility back on people for the decisions they made and for the way they were, and without blaming them or shaming or any other thing, but just to make them aware, well, this is what happens.

Douglas Murphy:

This is who you are.

Andrea Schara:

This is who you are, this is what you're doing right now. And you know, if you would just work a little harder at it, you could see what you were doing. And then he would push him harder to do that. But certainly these are two of the big things I think that make it hard for conventional mental health to understand Bowen theory, which is the use of self and going through an emotional cut off.

Douglas Murphy:

Yeah. I hear reports from people coming from other therapists. It's, I keep telling them, I don't know what they're doing. I really don't. What are they doing?

Andrea Schara:

What is going on here?

Douglas Murphy:

I don't understand what they do in the room anymore. I mean, I think I probably, I could guess, but I don't understand what they're doing.

Andrea Schara:

They're lifting up the whole repression thing. "I'm letting you talk about your feelings."

Douglas Murphy:

Oh, goodie.

Andrea Schara:

And like Bowen used to say, you can let a volcano run and run and run. It'll never run out.

Douglas Murphy:

Never stop.

Andrea Schara:

But you get going with the feelings, it might never stop. You won't discover principle and all those feelings, no matter how hard you look. Anything else that comes to your mind about Dr. Bowen that you want to put in that...

Douglas Murphy:

Well, I think the, probably the only thing is that the theory is his successor.

Andrea Schara:

That's beautiful.

Douglas Murphy:

And that's all.

Andrea Schara:

That's a really beautiful way to say it.

Douglas Murphy:

We were talking about succession.

Andrea Schara:

Right.

Douglas Murphy:

At the clinical conference, or they were talking about it. But I see that as probably the most important thing that he did, was to leave it there.

Andrea Schara:

That's beautiful. Thanks Doug.

Douglas Murphy:

You bet.

Andrea Schara:

It was fun, maybe we'll do it again.

Douglas Murphy:

Cool.

Andrea Schara:

26 minutes, see? That's perfect. so-