

Interview with Dr. Dan Papero

Conducted by Andrea Schara

July 21, 2022

Dan Papero:

Now it is. Now I got the messages started.

Andrea Schara:

Okay. Dan, what day is today?

Dan Papero:

July 21st, 2022.

Andrea Schara:

So we had a little fun to start with, and I read you the questions and now you pick up and go where you want. All I recall was that your PhD was in...

Dan Papero:

German.

Andrea Schara:

German.

Dan Papero:

German language and literature, yep. Which is a strange area to be in. It's a good area, but it's a strange one.

Andrea Schara:

But it's about language.

Dan Papero:

Yeah. Well, I mean, one of the questions that you asked was where I met Dr. Bowen, and I can actually remember it rather clearly. It was in April 1974, I believe. Or 75, I am actually unclear a little bit when, which year it was. But it was like April 11th and 12th, or 12th and 13th of that, whichever year it was. And it was in Knoxville, Tennessee, where Dr. Bowen was giving a conference sponsored by the Departments of Social Work and Psychology at the University of Tennessee. And it was held in a Howard Johnson's hotel in West Knoxville. And it was in an awful room. It was a basement, large basement room with pillars, and there was a little sort of stage-like area up toward the front in one corner, which is where he was. And there were probably 300, 400 people. There were a lot of people, I don't know the exact number.

And I'd gotten there through a circuitous route. I had begun to work for the community mental health center in Nashville in 1974. And I worked in what was called their day hospital program, it was called

Intermediate Care. But it was essentially a place where people who were coming out of the state hospital, came to spend the day and then went home. And it was mainly people who had been fairly psychotic. Percentage of them were young, I don't remember now the exact percentage, but probably 30 40% of them were people 18, 19, 20, 21. And then there were some older people. And it was the heyday of family, as you I'm sure are aware, the late 1960s, early 1970s, and family was in the air. And I was working with young people who were called "schizophrenic." And I got sort of interested in family. And I could do pretty well with a schizophrenic person. I could get a relationship to a schizophrenic that I somehow didn't get too bothered by the crazy stuff.

I'd get snookered every once in a while. Schizophrenic people are real good at getting ya. But in general, I was doing pretty well, but I got real interested in this and I'd started experimenting a little bit with having families come in. This was a crazy thing, because I was in those days what was called a paraprofessional. I didn't have a mental health degree, I had a degree in German. But the director of this Intermediate Care was a social worker, and she sort of let me do what I wanted, it was interesting. And I owe her a lot, actually. So I started experimenting with families. And I had gone to a family therapy workshop sometime that year, that was run by someone who came down from the Family Institute of Chicago. And it was the sort of standard family therapy workshop of that day. You did role playing, and empty chairs, and this sort of stuff that everybody loved, but I didn't think ever produced much.

But in the process of this, this fellow sort of made this comment, he did it sort of derisively, dismissively. He sort of said, "Well, there's this person who says if you want to be a family therapist, you need to get your relationship with your mother straightened out." And my ears perked up and I thought, "That sounds like the important comment this whole meeting." But I thought that the guy said that the person's name was "Mary Bowen." So I spent the next several months looking for this Mary Bowen. Couldn't find her. And it was before the internet, you couldn't just flip the name in and pull it up.

And so one day I was in the office of the mental health center, and I saw this flyer come through, and here it was, Murray Bowen, is doing this conference in West Knoxville. And all of a sudden the light bulbs went off and I thought, "Oh, no wonder I couldn't find this person." So I trundled off to West Knoxville from Nashville for this conference. It was a Friday-Saturday conference. And it was quite an experience. Two things stand out for me now even all these years later, what is it? Gosh, 40 some, almost 50 years later.

One was the way he handled himself with the audience, because the audience, the front rows were filled with academics from the University of Tennessee who were just constantly on the attack. They were challenging him every step of the way. And what was fascinating about it was he never fought back. They'd come up with blah blah blah, what about this? What about that? And he'd just simply say, "My research says..." And then he'd go on and present his point. And then they'd come at him again, the same thing. He never threw the brick back. I'd never seen anybody do that before.

Andrea Schara:

That's beautiful.

Dan Papero:

Because I had come out of the world of universities and academics where people throw the bricks at one another all the time. And I thought, "Boy, I wish I could learn to do that." And then the other thing, he was showing some of the classic videos of family therapy, that he was doing family psychotherapy...And the tapes were playing, he'd been describing his approach, and I could see what he was saying, it made perfect sense to me. It was completely clear to me. I had no problem with it at all. And it struck me at the time about this guy knows something that's important to know. So, he

mentioned that they were starting, that Georgetown was starting the first, four times a year program, essentially for non-medical people. They'd done one year where it was only physicians who were allowed to come.

So I was in that first year. We went to Washington. At that point the Family Center didn't exist. I mean, there wasn't space, we met in the medical school on the weekends. I remember meeting in the chemistry lab, and sitting at the chemistry benches on a Sunday. But it was interesting. Bob Noone was in that group as well, and a few others. And too many years have passed and I'm not sure I can remember who the others were. There were probably 8 or 10 of us, maybe a few more. It's hard to remember.

Andrea Schara:

1975 though is the year.

Dan Papero:

Yeah.

Andrea Schara:

I came in '76, where they had the building.

Dan Papero:

That makes it April of '75, that I ran across Bowen, because I started that June, actually. The first session of that was in June. And so it went on from there. And I spent five years in that program. So that took it up to 1979, I think. And I proposed at that point to the Family Center, the Georgetown Family Center, that a seminar could be created for people like me who were finishing up their four times a year, who would come to the end of what they wanted to do with that. That would meet four times a year in conjunction with the clinical conference and the symposium. And that was the genesis of the seminar that goes on to this day. It's probably the longest running seminar in history. The Center didn't let me run that on my own. They assigned Charlie Paddock to do it with me, but Charlie was never much of a presence in it. And by the end of the first year he sort of dropped out.

And I very quickly came up with the formula on that one. The first year I felt responsible for making something happen in that seminar, and I worked way too hard and it didn't go very well. And I got clear about, I didn't care whether it went or not. I basically gave people the proposition, I'm willing to coordinate this, and turn up here, and I'll put a schedule on the chalkboard and you come, if you got something to say, sign up. If you haven't, we'll go home early. And that formula has persisted ever since. And there's never been a moment where the day hasn't been filled.

Andrea Schara:

Wow.

Dan Papero:

Ever. And that became the model for how that one ran. So that's got my involvement going.

Andrea Schara:

Did you give everybody a half an hour?

Dan Papero:

45 minutes. Everybody 45 minutes.

Andrea Schara:

45 minutes. So there was competition between the people there. You had 10 people or something like that.

Dan Papero:

Yeah, it's varied over the years, between 8 and 10 people.

Andrea Schara:

So a little bit of competition, not too much.

Dan Papero:

Yeah. Although it was, people just really wanted their chance to have a go of it. And it all just worked pretty well. I don't know that the competition between them drove it as much as each of them saw it as an opportunity to do something and they did it. I mean, it had really very competent people in it. It wasn't that I had to do anything.

Andrea Schara:

You had to listen.

Dan Papero:

I had to listen, I had to be present, bring my distinguished body into the space.

Andrea Schara:

And your thinking, little bit of prodding, questioning.

Dan Papero:

And so, I was going to Washington then for the next three years, going for that seminar, number one. But I occasionally went for an additional clinical conference when I could afford it. I mean, I was coming from Nashville, Tennessee, and I was working in a community mental health center and I didn't have any money. And I had a wife who was in graduate school and we had two little kids. So scraping together, the dollars to come was not easy.

So I'd come certainly for the four times a year for the seminar, which was always associated with the clinical conference and with a symposium. And then I'd come a couple of other times during the year. And so that went on until the spring of 1982. And I was there for a clinical conference, and Dr. Bowen asked me if I'd join the faculty. And that led to kind of a momentous change and upheaval in my life, certainly, because I was working for the Veterans Administration Medical Center by that time. I had gotten a degree in social work while I was working at the community mental health center. The University of Tennessee in those days had a School of Social Work, which is based in Knoxville, but it had an operating branch in Nashville.

And so I went to the branch in Nashville, and they had a program for people already working in the field of mental health that you could do your MSSW in a year, one calendar year of intense stuff. And so, I got into that program and finished the social work degree by June of 1978. And so, I got a job with the Veteran's Administration, which was a prestige job at the time in terms of pay, it was about twice as much pay as the community mental health center. In those days, the Veteran's Administration had a program for each medical center.

The VA hospital in Nashville was an extension of Vanderbilt University Medical School as many of the VAs are even today. So, it wasn't a psychiatric hospital, it was a general medical/surgical hospital with a psychiatric unit in it, but it was not primarily a psychiatric hospital. The VA had those as well, but this was a general medical/surg unit. And so I was hired as the designated family therapist. The VA had a program in those days where they would hire, usually a social worker or psychologist as the designated family therapist for the hospital. Lovely idea. It lasted a month and they made me the head of the outpatient services in psychiatry. Not because I wanted it, but because they just said, "You're here and this is what you're going to do."

Which was my introduction to the government, and to the VA system, which wasn't a bad system, and it still isn't a bad system. It gets a lot of criticism, but they were in those days, and I suspect they still are, dealing with a very difficult group of people, usually with very serious medical complaints, many of them. And lots of other things. They did pretty darn good service in general. That psychiatry unit was one of two in the country that was not run by psychiatry, it was run by psychology, which is very interesting. There were only two of them in the country in those days. Now there aren't any, I don't think. So that the psychiatrist worked for the psychologist, and I worked for the psychologist, and I was appointed dually. I was part of the Department of Social Work and part of what was called the Mental Health Service, which was the psychiatric side of the hospital. So I had to work for two masters.

Andrea Schara:

What was the problem with that? The two-master problem.

Dan Papero:

The two services didn't get along very well, for one thing. The Head of Social Work was a man who actually had been at Menninger's. He actually had known Bowen as a social worker. He was a Navy veteran, but he'd been in the government so long that he was sort of a burned out bureaucrat. And he'd spend most of his days sitting in his office with his feet up on the desk reading the newspaper. And the head of the Mental Health Service was a psychologist named Oakley Ray, who was a full professor at Vanderbilt. And Oakley was one of these dynamic guys. He'd just written a best-selling textbook on drugs. And so, he is go, go, go, and up to date on the latest things. And of course, on the one hand, the bureaucrat, who's the head of the social work service, and then this Vanderbilt professor who's running this thing as well as teaching a full load of courses at Vanderbilt and doing all that stuff, is running the psychology.

And it's oil and...oil and water. And so I had to navigate that, which I did reasonably well. My main boss was Oakley Ray, the psychologist, but I had to keep reporting, I had to meet the social work services requirements, which were the usual stuff. Plus, I was technically a social worker, which meant I had to do some of the social work stuff that I really didn't like doing. That is when a homeless alcoholic comes in in the middle of the winter looking for a bed, I had to find bed for him somewhere, which meant calling around Nashville to see if a shelter would take him in, that sort of thing. That's the sort of social work stuff that I'm not built for it, I'm not good at it. And I don't want to dismiss it, because many people do that well, and it's a real service for people. But it wasn't my deal. Anyway.

Andrea Schara:

Yeah. I hear that. Yeah.

Dan Papero:

So all this time now, I'm now working for the VA and I'm going back and forth to Washington. And I'm thinking about what Bowen is telling me, and I'm watching this VA service. And I managed to carve out, I suppose in the jargon of Bowen theory you would say I defined myself to the system. That may be a grandiose way of saying it, but I basically carved out a kind of working agreement that I would put each afternoon into the family therapy side of things and I'd run the clinical service each morning. And that pretty much worked out. I was pretty much able to see families in the afternoon, and run the clinic in the morning, although it wasn't a perfect thing. Things would come up and I'd have to stop and go over and do it. The other thing I had to do was, because I was one of the clinical staff of the Mental Health unit, I had to serve, it's what they called "mental health officer of the day," which meant I had to cover the emergency room at night.

And because I was the most junior member, I had to cover it on the weekends. So I had to cover it instead of just a 24-hour period, I had to be on 48 hours or more. And I absolutely hated that. But it was an absolutely fabulous experience to have to deal with these folks coming in off the street. And I began to think about Bowen theory in the middle of that, and figuring out that if I got to do that, that I've got to manage myself in this more than anything, which was a huge sort of help in all of that.

I mean, the VA Medical Center in Nashville was the primary VA general medical center in the state of Tennessee in those days. There was one in Memphis, but the Nashville one sort of was the center of it all. So a veteran would have a psychotic break, or shoot up a bar or something, somewhere out in west Tennessee, and the cops would come and they'd handcuff him and put him in the back of a patrol car and drive to Nashville, push him out the door and send him into the VA. And I'd have to go deal with these guys, which was always an interesting experience, because not only are they, probably some of them, psychotic, but now they're mad as hell because they've been manhandled around by the police.

And believe me, one upset psychotic person can cause one hell of a lot of damage when they're let loose in emergency room. The one I remember most was, it was an afternoon, a weekday afternoon. It was about time for me to go home. I don't know, it was five or six o'clock at night. And I get this call from a social worker at the VA, and at a VA outpatient center in Chicago. And she says, "I just put my patient on the bus. He's just shot his brother, and I'm sending him to you."

Andrea Schara:

Shot his brother with good cause.

Dan Papero:

And so I think, "Oh my Lord, what is that?" First thing the next morning I walked in, seven o'clock in the morning, I haven't even gotten my coat off before I'm being paged to the emergency room. And here's this kid, an African American kid, I mean, he was as big as a linebacker for the Chicago Bears. I mean, he was huge. He had muscles bulging out all over him. And he is psychotic as anything can be. And he is just raging. And the darn triage nurses put him in one of the standard ER rooms, where there's scalpels and needles and all this kind of stuff. And I'm thinking, "Lord, lord, lord, this can't go on." So I managed to talk him out of that and bring him up to my office. And in the course of going into my office, I had my

hand on the doorknob. He put his hand on the doorknob and my fingernail scraped him a little bit. And he went ballistic. He went ballistic. By the time we were done, it literally took 10 men to hold him down. I'm not kidding. We had all the security officers plus all the mental health staff trying to hold this guy down to give him enough Haldol to settle him down. No, that's the kind of work. But my point in all of that is, I was trying to work with Bowen theory. I was also working between these divisions, the social work service and so on. In the same time, I also had to participate in an alcohol program, which was run by the VA, so I got quite a bit of experience with alcoholism. And in fact, they were some of the families that were being sent to me in the afternoon.

And I also had to participate in the inpatient mental health stuff. I had to be part of the team meetings. And I could watch the very thing that Bowen described when I heard him in Knoxville, and that had always disturbed me about working in the community mental health center, that the treatment plan would change based upon the feeling response of the clinicians rather than upon any objective information, or theoretical information, for that matter. And I could just watch it in front of me. And I began to count how the use of the seclusion room was related to tension in the staff. So I started watching that, and you could predict it. When the nursing staff would get uptight, more and more patients would be sent to the seclusion room. And so I could watch this all going on. I wasn't very effective in dealing with it. I mean, I was the low-ranking guy on the totem pole, and that's not the best position to operate from within that kind of system. But I could see it. Anyway.

Andrea Schara:

But one of your early observations of Bowen was, don't throw bricks back.

Dan Papero:

Don't throw bricks back.

Andrea Schara:

Which seems to be...

Dan Papero:

Don't throw bricks back.

Andrea Schara:

Don't throw... Which seems to be woven through all these stories is that...

Dan Papero:

Yeah, well, I had to deal with... Because this was a psychology-run service and because the VA kicked the Vanderbilt Psychiatry Department out, we had to work with contract psychiatrists. And they'd come through and the VA would hire them. And these are some of the most screwed up psychiatrists I've ever seen in my life. I mean, some of them were okay but they wouldn't last very long.

Andrea Schara:

Right.

Dan Papero:

They'd be there two or three months and they'd move on, and we'd have another one. Finally, we got an Indian psychiatrist who'd immigrated, and he was very good. But the thing about it was he was Indian, and they wouldn't promote him.

Andrea Schara:

Oh.

Dan Papero:

You knew what was going on. But anyway, neither here nor there.

Andrea Schara:

Scapegoating everywhere.

Dan Papero:

Had to deal with these psychiatrists. So I would have to... And so I got pretty good at going in and telling the psychiatrist what I thought they should do. You do this a while, and you know what the medications, prescription's going to be. Most of these psychiatrists weren't rocket scientists. They were just doing the standard stuff. Well, this guy probably could use... You have to phrase it as a social worker just right that you aren't telling them what to do, but you're sort of dropping the idea in somewhere. And I got really good at that.

Andrea Schara:

Yeah, that's beautiful.

Dan Papero:

And I got very good at dealing with the Head of the Psychology Service who was my main boss. And there are all these problems that come up. One of the biggest problems in any hospital, I think, but in the VA in particular, is the competition between the services, the rheumatology and psychology and epidemiology, and all these different services, where the different wards were.

And no service wanted to get these very difficult patients. And the game that they tried to play was, let's dump this guy into psychiatry, let's dump him into the Mental Health Service. So I'm the one that has to deal with that. I have to go out around the hospital and deal with that. So I got pretty good at sorting some of that stuff out. I also got myself criticized on the floor of the Kentucky legislature because the Kentucky State Hospital system tried to offload a couple of veterans into the VA system. And I sent them back, sent them back to Kentucky. Apparently, I made the floor of the Kentucky legislature in terms of criticism. In any event, golly, this is kind of fun to think about all this stuff.

When I got pretty good at dealing with Oakley Ray, he'd come down with these various problems and I'd tell him, "Oakley," I'd write him a memo and say, "Oakley, you're the boss here, but this is what I'd do, but I'll be glad to do whatever you tell me to do." And percentage of the time he'd follow what I said. And he then began to single me out in the staff as he really liked the way I dealt with him, which created other kinds of problems.

Andrea Schara:

Yeah.



Dan Papero:

And then one that stands out, this was a training program for PhD psychologists. And so we'd have two or three young psychologists who are in their graduate school programs, either finishing their doctorate dissertations or as postdocs. And this one guy came in, and he was just one of these classic kind of guys who, no matter what you say, he's going to try to get at you, annoy you. And after about six months of this, he annoyed his mentors in psychology so much that they're about to kick him out of the program. And he comes in to me. I hadn't had much to do with him. I might know who he was, but he wasn't my responsibility.

He comes in to me and he says, "They're going to kick me out of the program." He says, "Will you help me?" And I looked at him and I said, "Are you crazy?" And I said to him, "I will under one condition. Number one, that you never tell a soul that I'm doing this. If you say anything, I will deny it and I will stop helping you." And we started out and the first thing... Well, one of the things, in the VA in those days, the staff had to wear a tie. The staff was primarily male. The nursing staff was female, but all the rest were male. And I always used to joke that the staff had to wear a tie because it's the only way you could tell them apart from the patients, which was true.

We were as crazy as they were. But anyway, he refused to wear a tie. And that's one of the things that just annoyed the hell out of his mentors over in the psychology service. So I told him, "The first thing you got to do is you gotta start wearing a tie, but I don't want you to put it on and wear it all at once. I want you to start out wearing it one day a week. And then you start, and then you go two days a week, but you don't do two consecutive days, you split them apart. And so at the end of four or five weeks here, I want you wearing a tie every day."

Andrea Schara:

How did you come up with that?

Dan Papero:

I don't know.

Andrea Schara:

I'm sure a lot went into it actually thinking about that.

Dan Papero:

Yeah, well-

Andrea Schara:

Maybe it goes under-

Dan Papero:

He had to begin to meet the minimum requirements of the Psychology Service. That was a part of it. He was not meeting the minimum requirements. If you meet the minimum requirements, then you can do almost anything you want.

Andrea Schara:

That's so important to know.

Dan Papero:

There were other things like he was not turn up on time for meetings. He'd dragged in late. So we worked on that one. He had to start being on time, but again, he couldn't do it all at once. He had to begin to start so that within another period of time he would be a regular participant in the meetings. And that he would have to, when the psychologist put him in the hot seat, he was going to have to learn to shut his mouth and take it.

Andrea Schara:

Yeah.

Dan Papero:

If he could do that, the hot seat would move to somebody else. That's the other thing I learned in the VA.

Andrea Schara:

Yeah.

Dan Papero:

That the focus will come on you, but if you handle it, it will move on. If you fight it, it tends to rest on you permanently. Looks like it gets Velcro to you. Anyway, Bowen theory was, at least, Bowen theory as I understood it in those days, which was pretty primitive, was guiding almost everything I did along the way. So it comes time to leave, Bowen asked me to go to Washington and a major huge decision. So the VA, they do a little party for people who are leaving so many of these places. And the VA prints these certificates by the thousands I think. Thank you for your service to the VA, these government forms. So we're there and I go in and here's the chief of the medical staff and the bigwigs of the hospital there. And anyway, I said a few inappropriate remarks, which was kind of me in those days.

And I figured, I'm going to get the certificate. Well, I did get a certificate, but it wasn't one of the standard ones. It was a custom-made one, which I still have actually. And in it listed every principle that I had been trying to operate on that I had never told a soul in the VA that I was doing.

Andrea Schara:

Wow.

Dan Papero:

There were five or six of them almost in bullet point fashion-

Andrea Schara:

That's amazing.

Dan Papero:

... in this certificate. And I thought, "Geez, I did okay." I also lasted in that job. They had not been able to keep a person in that clinic. They called me a coordinator, but that's basically a director. No one had lasted in it more than about a year and a half. And I lasted in it four years and left when I chose, not because I had to. So I was kind of pleased with that too.

Andrea Schara:

So you don't really remember all the principles, but it starts with don't throw bricks?

Dan Papero:

Don't throw bricks.

Andrea Schara:

Don't throw bricks.

Dan Papero:

I'd have to pull it out and look at it.

Andrea Schara:

Meet the minimum requirements.

Dan Papero:

Meet the minimum requirements, that sort of stuff. Talk to people, not about people.

Andrea Schara:

Yeah, talk to people. That's a really good one. Talk to people, not about people. Get out of the gossip loop.

Dan Papero:

Make sure I make good contact with the Head of Social Work as well as the Head of Psychology. In other words, don't get caught, operate in the triangle, is the way I was thinking about it. Working to be a kind of neutral third, which more or less worked out. And in this period we had a joint, a visit by The Joint Commission for the accreditation of hospitals, which was a big deal. They come in and review everything. And I was the head of the clinic and there were no clinic documents at all. Nobody. So, I had to write the damn things. And I wrote them out as I thought the way to, and it didn't have anything, the jargon of the VA in it. It had the decision points. The veteran comes in, is interviewed, the interviewer has these options. It could be this decision, this decision, this decision. Then what the next decision point is and next. And I laid that all out.

And the reviewer of The Joint Commission came and he commented to Oakley Ray as he was leaving. He thought it was the most interesting set of clinic documents he'd ever seen. He'd never seen any done that way. But they were the best done he'd ever seen. And I have no idea whether they kept them or not after that. But the funny story in that one was that the unit passed, the joint accreditation, but when the certificate came, they sent you a big wall hanging about "you're an accredited blah, blah blah." And instead of saying that they accredited the *inpatient* unit of the veteran's hospital, they made a spelling error and called it the *impatient* unit of the veteran's hospital. And I thought, "Boy, they got that right." Anyway, that was my VA days. So then I go off to Washington to see, to join Dr. Bowen's faculty, and I

get these letters from him ahead of time, which I've still got somewhere, one or two of them. And telling, and he's really warning me about the triangles. He says, "You may get contacted!" Something like that. It went, "Do not respond!"

Apparently there was a big brouhaha going on. You may have been around the edges of that.

Andrea Schara:

Yeah.

Dan Papero:

I don't know. It was a big-

Andrea Schara:

I was hired in '80. So I was there.

Dan Papero:

There was a big brouhaha going on apparently among the faculty about whether I should have an office on the hall or not, or other things that I didn't know anything about. And sure enough, I got contacted by somebody, I won't say who, but, and on it went. And then I arrived in DC. And, of course, it was two years after Dr. Bowen's surgery and he was, I think, I don't know if struggling is the right word, it was not easy for him. Let me say it that way. Yeah. And I hadn't been there more than three weeks when in a faculty meeting, Bowen's talking about leaving.

Andrea Schara:

Yeah.

Dan Papero:

And I thought, "Holy cow, Dr. Bowen! I have just uprooted my family and jumped off the edge of the cliff here. And you're talking about leaving." Anyway, he didn't leave. I don't know why he didn't, but he didn't.

Andrea Schara:

He had more to do.

Dan Papero:

He had more, I don't know. I don't know what the story was, but he didn't leave. But that was one rough couple of years because I arrived in Washington exactly at the time when the insurance was all being revised, and much harder to get insurance payments, and all that kind of stuff. And the agreement I had with Dr. Bowen that when people are talking to me about this, all the faculty have more referrals than they can deal with. And by that time I arrived, that's all dried up. So the first year I'm at the Bowen Center, I get one referral from a faculty member, one. And I got a family here. Thank God my wife Pat had a job. She saved us. And we were on the edge of financial ruin for the better part of two or three years there until finally I began to get some income going. It was a difficult, difficult period.

Andrea Schara:

Yeah, I remember that. I remember being in a policy meeting and Bowen was talking about, well, we can't afford to be here, basically. And I said something about, well, it seems like people could pay rent for their offices. They were getting free offices.

Dan Papero:

Well, that was the deal he made with me.

Andrea Schara:

Yeah.

Dan Papero:

He'd give me free office space down the hall and all the referrals that they could muster in response, in return for my taking on some responsibilities at the Center.

Andrea Schara:

But there were others who were making money.

Dan Papero:

There were others who were making a lot of money.

Andrea Schara:

They could pay.

Dan Papero:

Yeah.

Andrea Schara:

And so then Bowen called me the tail that wags the dog.

Dan Papero:

Anyway, that all went on. And I ended up with one of... My first thing, responsibility that I had was for the Tuesday night program, which at that time was the bigger of the two training programs. The four times a year was still a kind of a fledgling program and seen as the secondary program that the main one was the Tuesday night program that met weekly. And at that time, there were probably 50 people enrolled in it. It was 1982, '83. And it was probably the end of the family therapy boom. And it went downhill very quickly after that. The enrollment dropped off.

I always claimed that I had a reverse Midas touch. Anything Midas touched turned to gold, and anything I touched turned to excrement. I don't know how much of it was me and how much it was just the times that the fad of family therapy had worn off and people were going elsewhere. But it was an interesting experience.

Andrea Schara:

I think that's accurate, yeah.

Dan Papero:

One of the things that had interested me was Bowen's comments about teaching. Because I had come out of a university, and I left the university... When I was at Indiana University in my graduate program, I had risen through the teaching ranks. I started as a teaching associate. And my last year there, they created a position for me, which was sort of a quasi-faculty position called "lecturer" because I was getting such good teaching ratings, teaching German, German literature.

And I went to Vanderbilt. Indiana was, in those days, the leading graduate school in German in the country. I mean it was a very progressive, interesting program with lots of emphasis on teaching and that sort of thing. And you begin to get a marker of my level of differentiation because I could work well in that program. I went to Vanderbilt and it was stepping back into the dark ages, with the old style department head who made all the decisions and all that kind of stuff. In any event, I had come out of Vanderbilt. Vanderbilt basically fired me with good cause, I was pretty immature. I mean, although what they actually fired me over was... I actually did the right thing. I was in charge of all the teaching of elementary German and there were like eight sections of German. And I had teaching assistants working under me.

And we were into the semester, the beginning of the fall semester. And I kept hearing about this ninth section of German that I knew nothing about that was under my name. And it turned out the department had cut a deal with the football coach, and they'd created a section filled with football players being taught by an assistant football coach. Now this is Vanderbilt, the "Harvard of the South," and I blew a gasket. I was pretty immature. I mean it was the right thing, but I was just reactive as hell. And I-

Andrea Schara:

You threw a brick.

Dan Papero:

I threw a brick big time. So this is... I haven't moved to the mental health center yet, this is when I'm still operating on pure immaturity. And so that led to my... They didn't technically fire me, they just chose not to renew my contract, which is a nice way of doing it.

Andrea Schara:

That's not so bad.

Dan Papero:

And that led to the transfer to the mental health or rethinking of what I was going to do and all that sort of stuff. In any event, now where was I going with all of that? I don't have any idea.

Andrea Schara:

Well, you started out talking about Bowen's way of teaching and then you went into this-

Dan Papero:

Yeah. Well-

Andrea Schara:

... kind of ordinary way of teaching.

Dan Papero:

I came out of that thinking I would never teach again because I couldn't figure out how to do it. Even though I would get these good ratings, I hadn't figured out, I didn't think anybody's learning anything that I thought was significant anyway. And so Bowen would talk about his thoughts about, you don't talk down to people, you don't place yourself as "I who know communicating something to you who don't." That you engage in a kind of mutual exploration.

And boy, I heard those ideas and that made all kinds of sense to me. And that you don't water things down for people. You don't deliberately make them harder either, but you don't water them down. And so it was with that idea that I took on the Tuesday night program. And my ideas in it were, I didn't care so much whether people in the training program learned that there were eight concepts in Bowen theory and that they could tell me what they were. What I was interested in what... Could that program be a stimulus? Could it engage and turn on minds that would begin to work on some of the problems that were being presented to them about human behavior in the human family?

And my goal was not to have the faculty come in and teach Bowen theory, but to come in and present their best work on whatever they were working on, which created a program that didn't have a lot of structure, but it had a lot of energy.

And it's where I'd be today if I were doing it. Program's gone a very different direction nowadays. It's back more where I don't think it should be, but that's just me. What do I know? But it was this sort of really stimulating... My goal was to make each Tuesday night, and we didn't always hit this.

Andrea Schara:

Yeah.

Dan Papero:

But the goal was to make each Tuesday night intellectually stimulating that it would turn on those frontal lobes of those people. And that if some people couldn't keep up with it, well, okay, they go their own way. But we'd keep going at that.

Andrea Schara:

Well, I love that. There's a lot to be said for turning people's frontal lobes on, and many different dimensions which I also wanted to tie back into your book with Bob Noone, which I thought was great on a lot, some of these... The way that you wrote up that book is very intellectually stimulating to read, the way your chapter on the emotional system... I don't want to skip ahead, but I think there's also literature maybe. Yeah, I read it a while ago, which basically said, "If it's easy for you to learn, you're not learning anything." And that these feedback loops you give your professor, "Oh, yeah, you're so great. I had so much fun. I didn't learn much. But you're a great teacher." Versus "It's a damn hard course. And yeah, I finally got what you were pointing toward here." But that has a better outcome. Are you familiar with that kind of a thing?

Dan Papero:

Yeah. I don't know, I haven't been in the world of academics, universities now since I left Vanderbilt in 1982. So I don't really know what it's like nowadays. But my sense of it is that much of education has become more of an entertainment process for bored young people.

And I don't know whether that's accurate or not. And it's gotten more so as the technology has improved and all of that. It doesn't mean that there isn't some good teaching going on. It doesn't mean that there aren't kids who are motivated to learn. But a lot of it seems to be filling time with these sort of interesting things that... Providing something rather than requiring that people gain it on their own somehow. I don't know how to say it. And that just may be old-fashioned thinking, I don't know. But as I say I haven't been around a university in a long time.

Andrea Schara:

But the point you're making is do, kind of do it for yourself. What are you interested in? And follow that.

Dan Papero:

Get something you're interested in and go as far as you can with it. And that will take you into other things that will mess you up. And then you go as far as you can with them.

Andrea Schara:

Yeah, which also you've done. I wanted to put a little bit in here about was there a reason for studying Bowen theory in your own family? And how has your family been changed by Bowen theory?

Dan Papero:

Yeah.

Andrea Schara:

And I think you put pretty much in, you may have more to say about the way Bowen managed himself with you maybe before and after the surgery.

Dan Papero:

Yeah. I mean, you were around in those days, as you know. And the years I was in the training program and then doing this seminar up till 1980, Bowen was really at his peak. He was in his late 60s, and he was all there. And then I saw him about, I don't know, a month before the surgery. Then I saw him again... AFTA had a meeting in Seattle, maybe a month or two months after his surgery. As a person who didn't see Bowen every day, it was like he'd age 10 years in two months. His hair turned all white. He was hunched over. Instead of this vibrant, late-60s guy, he was sort of a hunched over old man when I saw him. I was actually shocked by it. The assault to his body that went on, that surgery, was just enormous. What also was there was that his brain was still there. His mind was still there.

Andrea Schara:

Yeah. I agree with this.

Dan Papero:



He was having trouble talking as you know. He rasped it out, he didn't have any timbre, any tone to his voice, but that stayed that way forever.

Andrea Schara:

Yeah. That's how I got more involved because he needed that microphone. I think he also put pressure on people to take over for him or to put more into it.

Dan Papero:

My sense of it was, and this is just my subjective sense, how I made sense of it. That that experience had said to him that he did not have as much time left in his life as he had thought he would have. He didn't have any place anymore to tolerate things that weren't directly related to what he wanted to do. Something like that. And that he was mustering as much of his strength and his energy as he could to keep focused on what he thought was important. And other people were going to have to pick up other things if they were going to be picked up. Something like that.

That's kind of how I understood it. That may not have been the way it was, but that's kind of how I understood it. Dr. Bowen and I were never... Many of you had direct personal relationships with him. You were around him a lot, Priscilla, Mike, to quite a degree. Mine was a more formal relationship with him, always. I was always respectful of him. I deferred to him, perhaps too much, I don't know in hindsight. And he never came at me like he came at some of the others, and I never quite understood why. Of all the people on the faculty, he understood how I had stepped off the cliff to come to Washington.

Andrea Schara:

Yeah, mm-hmm.

Dan Papero:

Nobody else on the faculty did anything like that. You did, you came from...

Andrea Schara:

Yeah, I came from Virginia Beach, wasn't as far, but I also had two younger children. It was a risk, but it was a good risk.

Dan Papero:

Well, it turned out okay. There was a while there I wasn't sure.

Andrea Schara:

It did turn out really well for you actually. But as I recall, he wanted you to be director of training. He did this videotape with you. Do you recall that at all?

Dan Papero:

I really don't remember that at all. It's amazing, I do not remember that.

Andrea Schara:

Yeah. Well, that videotape's somewhere at the National Library of Medicine, so one day...

Dan Papero:

I heard after the fact that he had talked to people about my becoming the director when he was gone. He never talked to me about that. I never had a clue about that.

Andrea Schara:

That tape is kind of skirting around the issue to see if you would be interested. That's the way I took it. Would you be interested in it? And...

Dan Papero:

Well, I was too dumb to pick that up.

Andrea Schara:

Maybe you were too smart.

Dan Papero:

I don't know. I don't know.

Andrea Schara:

I don't know either, but it was in the air. But Bowen would do silly things, he would come in my room and say, "Do you want Ted Beal to be the director of the Family Center? Do you want Pat Meyer? Do you want..." And I would just say, "Well, they have some good things and some not so good things." And he would just stomp out and get mad, but it was on his mind. He was testing people, I think, to see, and then he just kind of let things be as they were going to be.

Dan Papero:

Yeah. I do remember he did the tape with Mike about... Mike, and I don't remember whether Kathy was in it or not, about whether he should be the director or not and going through that. I tried to find that tape a few years ago, and it essentially has disappeared. I don't know where it went, but...

Andrea Schara:

Yes, I recall that tape very well that Bowen said, "Mike, you've done better with Kathy than I can do." That was the way he put it. And it sort of relieved some of the tension, but he talked about the difficulty of people being married and what Mike was up against. He wasn't afraid to talk about stuff. He would just put it out there on the table. And he also wasn't afraid to say what he thought. One time, I said something about one of the... The guy in communication theory...

Dan Papero:

Umsky?

Andrea Schara:

Don Jackson.

Dan Papero:

Oh, Jackson, Don Jackson. Yeah.

Andrea Schara:

I said, "I heard that Don Jackson committed suicide." And he went, "bang."

Dan Papero:

He did not like people to say that, I remember. I think I was around, I remember that.

Andrea Schara:

Holy moly. And so I said, "I guess that's gossip." And I shouldn't repeat gossip.

Dan Papero:

From my perspective, Jackson was quite well respected by Bowen.

Andrea Schara:

Yes, very.

Dan Papero:

And I've got an order in for it right now. In Bowen's writings, he uses the term ego fusion. In his early papers, when he is talking about the family undifferentiated ego mass. In his later papers, he shifts that to an emotional fusion, which is an interesting shift in its own right. I thought "Ego fusion, that's an interesting term. Where did that come from?" And I thought, "Well, it must be in the psychoanalytic literature somewhere." So I went on a search for it and I couldn't find it.

And lo and behold, Don Jackson created that term, apparently. And he did it in an article he wrote, or a book chapter I think it is, which is what I'm trying to get a hold of right now. In the late 1960s, where he says that the similarities that one sees in twins that become schizophrenic, both twins become schizophrenic, may not be due to the genetic similarity, but due to growing up in a similar psychological context. In other words, that it's being shaped by the environment as opposed to being genetics.

As you know, in the late 1960s, there was all this business about the genetics of schizophrenia. People were looking at the twin studies in Denmark where all these records are kept for decades about all this stuff. And there was all this stuff about "schizophrenia is genetic." And it turns out there may be a little bit of truth to that, but not genetics in the way that they were presenting it in the sixties. And Jackson's presenting this whole other sort of thing that this may be actually being created by context. In other words, these twins who become psychotic, yes, they do share genetic material, but they are being raised in the same context, in the same environment. And the environmental factors may be more determinative of the psychosis than the genetic factors, which is fascinating.

Andrea Schara:

The guy who did Don Jackson's archives...

Dan Papero:

Yeah, I know who you mean. I can't think of...

Andrea Schara:

I interviewed him for the Archives and his interview was on there, and he has access to all these papers. But I also wanted to jump ahead to Jack Calhoun in a way. Because of this, being raised in this context and what is happening in our world today, and the young people of today who are being raised in this context of 9 billion on the Earth and maybe too many frustrating interactions. And so it's certainly a decline in functioning for vast numbers of people.

Dan Papero:

Decline in opportunities for them, which begins to present all kinds of difficulties. I guess people may take away my Bowen Union card when I say that, but I think I was at least as much influenced by Jack Calhoun as Murray Bowen.

Andrea Schara:

Me too. I totally agree, but I don't take cards.

Dan Papero:

I went through a period after I moved to the Bowen Center, to the Georgetown Family Center in 1982, where I read everything of Calhoun's that I could get. I basically read everything he wrote, including that monograph on the Norway rat. I don't think anybody's read that in decades. And I didn't always understand it, but it was Calhoun who taught me what the emotional system is. It was from Calhoun that I began to understand the emotional system, not from Bowen. In particular, there was a paper Calhoun wrote early on in his career of a study he was doing in central New York State. And they had about an acre of ground, and within this, there were several colonies of, I believe they were red-footed mice, I think that's the species.

And what Calhoun was doing was he was demonstrating how these animals distribute themselves in space. And so what he would do would be go in and remove the center-most colony and then watch what happened. And that how these would redistribute themselves automatically in a predictable fashion, these other colonies. And then he'd take another colony out and watch the same thing happen. And that first began to click in my mind, what Bowen was talking about, about the emotional system. How it is an adaptive system that is assessing a number of factors and making a decision. I don't mean a thoughtful decision, that is a "thinking decision," but is coming to a way of acting that fits the input from the environment plus the resources available within the, either, organism or group itself and is making an adaptive choice. And that this is automatic. And then I went on to many, many other things with Jack Calhoun. His work was, work was and is, in my opinion, brilliant. Absolutely brilliant. I don't think the world has yet caught up to him.

Andrea Schara:

No. One thing I noticed in all that's been written and the video tapes made about Calhoun, they are always focused on the worst. And no one has written about the two mice that live in the cooperative universe and have to go down together, noticing each other...

Dan Papero:

Great discovery. The function of cooperation...

Andrea Schara:

And then, press the bar.

Dan Papero:

The function of cooperation and survival. Now, they're beginning... Nobody mentions Calhoun, but Group Selection Theory is beginning to come around to that. Because Group Selection Theory is demonstrating that groups in which cooperative behavior develops outperform adaptively groups in which there is inter-individual or intergroup competition.

They frame it in terms of, oh, having a senior moment here right in front of you. Can't think of the word I want right now. Anyway, they frame it in terms of doing something for others that isn't in one's immediate best interest, but ultimately benefits the survival value and adaptability of the group. So, the idea is sneaking in the back door, but Calhoun had it from a research perspective right at the front door. That these animals that learn to cooperate are much better able to maintain functioning under pressure than those that don't.

Andrea Schara:

I think he said eight times the ability.

Dan Papero:

Yeah. It's significantly enhanced ability to maintain functioning under pressure. And then we get into that idea of functioning. Jack Calhoun also taught me a whole lot about functioning. What does that mean? Now, Bowen, I've been talking in a lot of the talks I've done lately about Bowen's concept of functioning and how important it is. And that led me to develop the proposal for a framework for family assessment that I published a few years ago looking at the functioning of the family unit. But Calhoun focuses a lot on functioning, and what does an animal that is functioning optimally according to the demands of that species look like compared to one that isn't functioning well, and what does that look like? And you see that in Calhoun's research.

What happens as the functioning, for example, of mice in the universe is begins to regress under the pressures of population density, which is equivalent to stress. So, you can see that in Calhoun's work. And then this thing about social autism that has completely dropped out. Even Bowen theory people don't remember this at all, even though the Center sponsored that last major talk that Jack did in 1986 on social autism. And in fact, it looks to me like we're seeing exactly what Jack predicted under that happening today.

The inability of people to respond appropriately to one another. The refusal or inability to engage in complex thinking, which is another aspect of the social regression idea. The heaping in clumps, the clumping behavior that we're seeing today. All of this stuff was built into that societal regression concept, social autism concept. And how do you know? It looks to me like so much of what Calhoun and others were talking about 40 and 50 years ago. We are seeing play out today exactly. Exactly, that may be too strong, but it looks pretty much like what they were predicting, we're seeing today.

Andrea Schara:

Yeah. You also said, I think in Sweden, something about "We're seeing it today and what are we doing about it now?"

Dan Papero:

What are we doing about it? Yeah.

Andrea Schara:

Yeah. Calhoun had one idea, design the environment to force cooperation, kind of like the book *Nudge* that designs your sheet of paper, that if you want to opt out of your retirement fund, you have to check the box and nobody wants to check a box. So, it nudges you to more cooperative behavior, let's say.

Dan Papero:

That's the contribution of social psychology. That sort of stuff is, and it's brilliant. Lee Ross, Richard Nesbit, those folks have just added tremendous amounts of information about how you set up context to promote certain sorts of behavior versus other sorts of behavior. But Calhoun, this idea of the space in which the animal lives, was a brilliant idea. He isn't the originator of it, but he took it as far as many people wanted to take it. And it remains to this day a very important idea. It's just all of this requires that people begin to be able to individually, and then collectively, to establish goals for how they want to try to work on something. Have sufficient personal self-regulation and interpersonal self-regulation, that the emotional disturbances don't interrupt the problem solving processes connected to the attainment of the goal.

And that's what we're seeing right now. Well, you have to be very careful anytime you make these big statements. Our big political systems are completely stuck, it seems like. Underneath that, there are cooperative things occurring. There are pockets where people are working on problems and beginning to try to find these collective responses that then reflect that process of self-regulation and interpersonal regulation toward the attainment of a goal seen by everybody as significant. And it may well be that the changes in the world... This is actually my view, I borrowed it a bit from... Andrea, I'm having a heck of a time with names this afternoon, this is what I hate about being old. In the last two days, I've had more trouble with names than I've had in a long time. Anyway, I can't think of her last name. Nobel Prize Winner, 2009 Economics, on the management of common... areas held in common. Elinor Ostrom. Elinor Ostrom. Ostrom and her husband Victor, people focus on Elinor and miss Victor's work. But Victor was an extremely important theoretical thinker and researcher on the functioning of collective governmental units.

But Ostrom, I believe, is of the idea that these major changes in society will not occur from the top down. In other words, they won't be led by the government. They will occur from the bottom up. That various collectives will begin to form to work on problems, and these will begin to put the pressure up that leads to the paradigm change, if you want to use that framework for it. That leads to a change in the way societies function. And that process is going on right now, I think. One of the problems of our era is that we are attracted to the great shiny baubles of emotional intensity.

Andrea Schara:

That is the biggest problem of all.

Dan Papero:

And our media drives it, our social media drives it, and people can't disengage from it.

Andrea Schara:

Yeah. It's like TikTok. You're addicted to it.

Dan Papero:

Underneath that, things are happening. They're not happening quickly necessarily, but things are happening that are beginning to move toward a resolution of some of these very difficult and challenging problems. But we are in a race with nature at this point, it looks to me. Whether the speed with which environmental change is occurring, plus the disturbances in human societal functioning are going to have the time they need to stabilize themselves, or whether we face some sort of disaster that may produce waves of extinction that we've never considered before. I don't want to get into the doom...

Andrea Schara:

It's a 50/50 bet.

Dan Papero:

I don't want to get into the doom and gloom, but that is where we are. We're in a race, essentially.

Andrea Schara:

Yeah, it's a 50/50 bet.

Dan Papero:

And as Calhoun said, the human has always been a crisis responder. In other words, humans don't do anything until their backs are absolutely against the wall, generally. And we're beginning to see that now, but then the question is that going to be enough? Perhaps it will be. Perhaps within our technology, we will find ways to abate CO2 methane release. We will begin to find ways to recycle and redistribute water resources. We may find ways to circumvent some of the problems historically embedded in tribal competition, which we're seeing across our world right now.

Andrea Schara:

Would you call the tribal competition, Steve Bannon and his group?

Dan Papero:

Yeah. Here in the United States, we've been on this trail now. I've been watching it for at least 50 years, with the overemphasis of competition and with it, the zero-sum mindset, that there are winners and losers. There's no option but to win or lose, which is irrational thinking, big time. And this idea that competition connected to this win-lose is the most important thing. And it's created where we are today. In many ways, it's been slowly... I used to watch it in high school sports. Competition is useful, but when competition gets into this win or lose, and the problem with it is it becomes so cutthroat that it's... the price is high whether you win or lose. Doesn't matter.

Andrea Schara:

Well, just to go back to Steve Bannon, because I read an interesting article about him and I'm trying to understand. First I was trying to understand how is it that the ordinary person doesn't value facts and doesn't value cooperation. But Steve Bannon has this "war room" where he has five hours of talking.

Dan Papero:

Five hours of Steve Bannon spreading his subjective nonsense on the world.

Andrea Schara:

Inflaming. And he says, "Just repeat. Just repeat and repeat and repeat the message. It doesn't have to be true, it doesn't matter. Just repeat it."

Dan Papero:

Well, you know-

Andrea Schara:

And that is his formula for dominance. Do on, full stop.

Dan Papero:

What people forget is that that didn't begin with Steve Bannon. The man who perfected that actually was working for social reform and that was Saul Alinsky.

Andrea Schara:

Wow.

Dan Papero:

And that was, he perfected that. He's the one that came up with that strategy. And it actually began on the radical progressive side. And of course, all ideas that you get irresponsible people take an idea and they can turn it into something that's pretty irresponsible in and of itself. But Alinsky was the one that started the business, you just keep saying it and people will believe it.

Andrea Schara:

Say it and they'll believe it. Say it often enough.

Dan Papero:

Say it often enough. And then that got...

Andrea Schara:

What is the answer to that kind of a challenge? Do we have to face... you in your book?

Dan Papero:

I wish I knew, Andrea Schara. I mean we have had a decline in our educational system, which I consider a regression. It's been marked by number one, uneven distribution of resources within the educational system for one thing. A reduction of resources put into education, number two.



Part of this winners-and-losers continuum has been a disrespect for people who are working at service jobs as opposed to those that make big money. Plus the development of what amounts to anxiety-driven conflict between parents and educators, which then has led to the curtailment of innovation. In other words, education then becomes a defensive process rather than an exploration. And the minute an organization goes on the defense, all innovation basically is shut down.

Andrea Schara:

I've always believed if you could make the problem clear enough, people could work on a solution. But if you don't see what the problem is, it's hard to work on this.

Dan Papero:

That's the first step. How do people come to a common understanding of what a significant problem is? A problem that affects everyone, that requires coordinated interaction. And one of the things that the disinformation does, which both sides of the political arena in the United States are good at, but which the right wing has taken and made a, I don't know what the word is, a varsity sport out of, if you will... professional sport, has been this whole idea of blocking people's access to information and diverting people's focus away from the significance of the problems to the short term dilemmas.

And the idea that there's a quick fix for these dilemmas, as opposed to change that involves looking at the system from which the problems emerge. Something like that. Will we ever get to that? I don't know. Has the human ever been there? I think so. I think at times human structures have gotten to that.

I go back and look at, as imperfect as it is, the resolution of in the aftermath of World War II, it led to the formation of the polarization of the Soviet Union and the Western powers, which created a polarized stability. But I'm thinking more about the efforts of things like the Marshall Plan. Which would be the effort to redevelop, that everybody does well when those that have been most impacted are able to function well, too. Something like that.

And that had its politics in it as well. But there have been times when humanity has been able to engage in these great collaborative endeavors, that it produced huge profits for the world really. I mean the polarization with the Soviet Union and then the Marshall Plan created for, at least the Western societies, 50 or 60 or 70 years of progressive affluence, good health, all kinds of things. It's what makes it so hard right now because people grew up in that. And then now we're watching that disappear and people don't know what to do about it.

Andrea Schara:

They want to blame somebody.

Dan Papero:

Blame somebody. Well, that's it. It's somebody else. It's your fault over there. Anyway, that seems to be built into which Jaak Panksepp says, that that is automatic, when aroused, to look outside for the source of the threat.

Andrea Schara:

Yeah. I really appreciate the outside view. When people can, like you do, I believe you're one of the few who can really give an outside view without getting caught up in it, is a good way to put it. But I

personally think that hearing people like you talk about this engenders more optimism. There is a way. We've been down this road.

Dan Papero:

Been down this road many times before. Many, many. Now, what's different now is the size of the population and the speed of the climate change. Those are two different variables that I don't think we've ever faced in quite this way before.

But we've been at these positions where the world and the social orders have collapsed many times. I mean think about the fall of Rome. Or think about the world as the Napoleonic era is collapsing and Europe has basically been destroyed. And then, the whole world order is changing. And the Congress of Vienna, which attempts to restructure the world.

And then look at World War I, where the whole social order of the world collapsed. And then the Paris Peace talks at the end of World War I, which "we're going to make war never happen again," only to have it 30, 20 years later reemerge even worse than the first.

Andrea Schara:

Absolutely. Yeah. History has a lot of lessons. It's not going to repeat, but the lessons in terms of the process, maybe even blame versus learning...

Dan Papero:

Yeah. And in the midst of these things, interesting things are happening. I had the very good fortune earlier this year to have come into my possession, 8 or 10 boxes of family documents that had been in my cousin's possession. And some of them, they're rich in many ways. And I've been sorting my way through them, which is an enormous job, believe me.

But in those are many of the papers of my aunt who was...ended up being the Vice Chancellor of the University of Illinois. She probably would've been the first woman Chancellor of a major university in the United States had she not developed cancer. But what's interesting in it is that she was in the first group of women who entered the Navy in World War II. And they weren't allowed to join the regular Navy. They entered as reserve officers.

She was in the first class of officers, women officers, that were trained at Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts in the fall of 1942. And she went on, she was an aviator. She'd been a flyer and she went on to serve on... and became a major figure for women in naval aviation. And then in late 1943, was sent to Hawaii where she was in charge of all of the women in naval aviation in the Pacific Theater.

And my point in all of this is I've run into a lot of her letters and communications. And the point in this is, in the midst of all of this chaos of World War II, you pick up the excitement of women moving into positions of leadership. The letters are full of this, and how excited they were about this. And so, you have this terrible period where the world is in collapse. It's not clear who's going to win the war. In fact, it looked for quite a while like it wasn't going to be the West.

I mean, Hitler's running rampant. Rommel's racing through North Africa. The German submarines are sinking everything in sight. It looked pretty grim for much of 1942 and '43. But here's this other thing that's happening. This emergence of a whole new thing that's being facilitated by the war. There's an opening and an adaptation that's occurring, which has created a different world for women.

I know that it's hard for women today. I hear it. I live with a bunch of women, I hear about it. But it is so different from what it was in the late 1930s when this all started. And a lot of that was due to these early women in the military who took charge.

There are things in there about how she's on an admiral staff and they have pictures of her. She's meeting with Henry Ford, she's doing all this stuff. And she has letters about how certain naval commanders won't speak to her. This kind of crap's going on. And it's fascinating to think about how, in the midst of all of this, there are also things that are germinating. That's all I want to say in all of that. That is happening today as well.

Andrea Schara:

Yeah, there are things that are germinating.

Dan Papero:

There are things that are germinating. And we don't know what they're going to be. We don't know whether they're going to be an alien life form that's going to destroy us or whether it's going to be a better, newer life form from which we're all going to benefit. We don't know the answer to that. Probably not either extreme, probably somewhere in the middle. But that's happening. That is the nature of evolution. That is the nature of adaptation. That is the nature of life.

Andrea Schara:

All right. I'm ready to fly. But to circle back to what this has to do with Bowen theory and to your particular understanding of Bowen theory and the way you see it functioning maybe as a compass or a guide or, I think differentiation and triangles when I think about functioning...

Dan Papero:

I think they're absolutely essential. Progress in this world is going to require differentiation of self. I wish it could be called something else. Like Murray Bowen, I don't like the term, but I get it. I get that he couldn't come up with a better one.

Andrea Schara:

DOS? He made some DOS every day.

Dan Papero:

I mean, if you think about differentiation of self and you think about the descriptions of the higher end, that people set goals, they develop an internal regulatory ability, they become able to regulate themselves. They are oriented toward problem solving. They're resourceful. They know how to develop and use resources from their environment.

All of those things are going to be essential for humanity as we go through the difficult middle decades of this century. Which led me, in the talk, article I did a couple years ago on climate change, to suggest that differentiation is essential for progress. Again, I wish there was something other... It's a jargon term. I wish there was a better way to...

Andrea Schara:

Well, the thing I like about it is that it begs the question, differentiation from what? And so then that directly brings you to the emotional system which is controlling you. And so, it's the only thing that gives

a clue that you are becoming more specialized. And at the same time, you are withdrawing some amount of energy out of the togetherness.

Dan Papero:

You're becoming more specialized. At the same time, you're becoming more of a generalist. In other words, the emotional system is forcing people into specialist functioning positions and differentiation of self expands that, so that there's a range of functioning positions that are available to the individual rather than the one into which he or she was born. Which in a certain sense is allowing someone to become more of a generalist. There are more options available than the tightness of the specialization.

Andrea Schara:

Yeah, that's perfectly well said there. And that's what would somehow lead us to be able to cooperate more because we're not living in a reactive past.

Dan Papero:

And we see the bigger picture that we can pre-adapt. The great observation of Joaquin Fuster, the neuroscientist at UCLA, about the prefrontal cortex, allows the human to think ahead and to pre-adapt as he calls it, to plan. To see the consequences down the line of behavior. Now, there are limits to that, but what we're looking to doing right now in the society, the mindless society that seems to be running right now, is that nobody can look ahead beyond more than a step or two. That's why we're in such difficult danger with climate and that sort of thing.

Andrea Schara:

And with polarization.

Dan Papero:

Polarizations.

Andrea Schara:

Polarizations are just, people feel good when they get polarized. They can't solve problems worth a darn, but they feel good.

Dan Papero:

Well, they think they're solving problems. That's the interesting thing about it. The problem with it is they haven't got the problems defined very clearly. The problems are vague and they're following a messianic figure who says, "I have the answer."

Andrea Schara:

Yeah. That's it.

Dan Papero:

I mean, if anybody has embodied that in the modern world it's Donald Trump, who is perhaps the greatest con man ever, ever in the history of life.

Andrea Schara:

Yeah. He is polarizing. It's again, I go back to, if I really understood, could I make it clear to others what Steve Bannon or Trump, what they're up to. And the way they... How is, how can you recognize manipulation? How can you understand that you're being manipulated by these kind of emotional messages?

Dan Papero:

Well, it requires, first of all, an awareness of self. It requires an awareness of one's own emotional reactivity I think. Because I mean you sit and listen to Donald Trump, and there are people who have an emotional reaction which is akin to falling in love. The oxytocin flows. Then there's others who have an emotional reaction which is exactly the opposite. And neither one of them is objective. You follow me?

Andrea Schara:

Okay.

Dan Papero:

And if you're not aware of your reaction, you have no way to try to regulate it and move toward objectivity in it somewhere. Your question... I don't mean to sit here and suggest I know the answer to your question, I think is one of the challenges of the age.

How do people begin to step out of the mass psychosis of our era and begin to work on the problem that science has posed forever? What is objective reality? And not that we ever fully get there, but we're constantly making approaches to get closer and closer to it. What is?

And the only way I know to do that is through science. Other schools of thought work on problems. Theology works on problems, philosophy works on problems. And they're not bad, but science is the one that attempts to really work through experiment verification, hypothesis building, double checking, that sort of thing.

That seems to be the best way to move toward objective reality, but then science itself becomes distorted through the emotional process of scientists and of the reactivity of the scientific community to the reactivity of the non-scientific community.

Andrea Schara:

React to the new information. But I think Bowen put you on this path or introduced to you a lot of these ideas.

Dan Papero:

No question about it.

Andrea Schara:

You've conceptualized in what I would call a reader-friendly way. It's how to get these ideas across in a friendly way because they're really ways of leading your life and of cooperating with others that can add to the good I think. That's what I think.

Dan Papero:

Yeah, I wouldn't disagree with you on that. I think that's right.

Andrea Schara:

And so that's why Bowen's ideas have always been so powerful. And that he didn't have to do much in a way. All he did really was show you how useful it is when you don't throw bricks back. What a useful...

Dan Papero:

Well, certainly that was one of the very first observations.

Andrea Schara:

Yeah. How many ways did you use that...

Dan Papero:

But there was something in me at the time that I could see that.

Andrea Schara:

Yeah. Yeah.

Dan Papero:

Now, I don't know what that was in me. Is that differentiation in me? I don't think so. I don't put myself real high on the scale of differentiation, looking at the course of my life. But there was something in me that could see what he was doing. Could see the process, that's what I'm saying. And could disengage it from the issues, if you will, or the bricks that are being thrown.

Andrea Schara:

Well, Dan, I really appreciate the time and I'd love to do maybe another one of these when... Look, we'll make a transcript and send it to you. And it's really just so interesting to talk to you. I really appreciate the time, and thank you so much for doing this for the archive.

Dan Papero:

It's been fun. It's good to see you again too, by the way. Maybe we'll do it in person before too long. Who knows? Although I'm... having come down with COVID in Sweden, I'm a little leery about jumping back into "let's rub noses together."

Andrea Schara:

Well, I'll remember that.

Dan Papero:

Okay. Take care.

Andrea Schara:

Proper distance.

Dan Papero:

All right.

Andrea Schara:

Dan, thanks.

Dan Papero:

Yep. Bye-bye.

Andrea Schara:

Bye-bye.