

Interview with Gerald Schwan

Conducted by Andrea Schara

Andrea Schara:

Yeah, you sound good.

Gerald Schwan:

Okay.

Andrea Schara:

I wanted to introduce Gerry Schwan, who has agreed to do an interview for the Murray Bowen Archives Project, and I think the first time I met you was at the old Family Center and maybe we were both in Mike Kerr's supervision group, I'm not sure if that's-

Gerald Schwan:

I think I met you for the first time when I was in the special postgraduate program-

Andrea Schara:

Yes.

Gerald Schwan:

... '77 and '78.

Andrea Schara:

Yeah, so, were we in the same supervision group with Mike Kerr?

Gerald Schwan:

No.

Andrea Schara:

'78, no.

Gerald Schwan:

No. Initially I had Gary Singleton.

Andrea Schara:

Yeah, I had Gary.

Gerald Schwan:

And then... we may have been then, but ... And I think I had Gary until he died.

Andrea Schara:

Oh, that was great.

Gerald Schwan:

Yeah.

Andrea Schara:

I'll save my story about Gary for later on, because once we went to Waverly and we're both assigned to be in the trailer, the Bowen's... funeral for his mother, there's so many good memories. But I wanted to start with who you are and what your professional background is, how you got interested in Bowen theory, and then just go from there.

Gerald Schwan:

Well, I'm Gerald Schwan. I live in Green Bay, Wisconsin, originally born in Milwaukee. I came here in 1974 for my first job as a social worker. I attended UW Milwaukee for my undergraduate, 1972. Graduated with undergrad in psychology, and from there went on to graduate school for my master's in social welfare, social work. Before I went into graduate school, and then I think the last year of graduate school, I was still very committed to behavioral therapy. And back in those days part of the understanding I had from instructors is they want us to have an eclectic approach as a practitioner once we got out. I had studied under a psychologist by the name of Tom Stampfl, who first introduced me to the importance of having research to inform your teaching and your practice. And I was, for five and a half years I had spent time with the undergrad in the last several years actually assisted Dr. Stampfl in his animal research.

I was very familiar with a procedure called Implosive Therapy, which today now is being used with some post-traumatic stress victims. In my second year of graduate school, I wanted to pick up some basic skills in family therapy, so I was assigned to Catholic Social Services in Racine, Wisconsin, where I met my supervisor, Clem Grote. Clem had been educated at the program in Chicago on family where Mike [Kerr] was on staff. And when I first met Clem, we did not exactly hit it off. Clem was pretty much a disciple of Bowen theory, and that was the only way of thinking I was supposed to learn to practice, at least that's how I took it. And it led for some tense days. But at the same time, if I look back at my own family history, the first year that I went ... The fall of '73 when I went down there, I had lost my paternal grandfather in June of '83 ['73], who was extremely important to me. And I lost another uncle on that side of the family that August. So in retrospect, I have to question how much of my own reactivity was some delayed grief, as I look back. That became more clear as we got into some of the coaching things at Georgetown, but I never made that connection at the time. And being somewhat of a rebel, having a supervisor who wanted to tell you how to do things for a while, that didn't make for a good dynamic, and I was not going to be allowed to leave that field placement, so I had to find a way to adapt. So-

Andrea Schara:

Beautiful.

Gerald Schwan:

I took notes and to this day have copies of those notes, and that was very important, because after I got out of graduate school, I left Milwaukee and came to Green Bay, which is about two hours north of Milwaukee. I had my choice of going to a number of other agency locations in the state... it was a

licensed child welfare agency at the time. But I came to Green Bay because I had some extended family north of here. I knew zero people in Green Bay. And so needless to say, you have a master's degree, you have a brand new Chevy Camaro, you got your first loan, car loan. I got up here and basically had to start from scratch.

The program that I was in was a child and parent counseling program. I was part of a licensed child welfare agency that did adoptions, did foster care, did other kinds of things. And I was responsible for developing the program. And it wasn't that difficult because my supervisor at the time had worked for the County Department of Social Services, so he was happy to take me around town and introduce me to a lot of people. He used to, one of the things he sold me on about Green Bay is you could drive from the east to the west side in seven minutes.

Andrea Schara:

Great.

Gerald Schwan:

That's not the same today.

Andrea Schara:

How long today?

Gerald Schwan:

And another reason I came to Green Bay is because of, this is a community of about 105,000, but it's one of the oldest National Football League franchises, with the Green Bay Packers, in the State of Wisconsin and in the National Football League. And we'll talk about that going forward because that was part of the connection that I developed with Murray Bowen.

Andrea Schara:

Yeah.

Gerald Schwan:

I practiced for about two years from May of '74 until 1976, and then actually recontacted Clem.

Andrea Schara:

Wow.

Gerald Schwan:

Because I wanted to become more familiar with the theory that he had pushed my way. By the way, we have subsequently talked about that. And he told people in front of one of the programs that we had here how tough he was on me back in those days, so it wasn't all my perception. But he said one of the things that he respected was that I took notes.

Andrea Schara:

Oh wow. You're adapting.

Gerald Schwan:

Yes. Yes. And I have to say that that education that I got there in the introduction to the theory was the cornerstone for much of what I did the next 15 years or so in my career. Over the course of time I worked in different agencies, but in 1980 I changed jobs, got married the same year, and I was working for Catholic Social Services in Green Bay, and I got called to the executive director's office. Eugene Gillis was his name. And I was wondering why, what I had not done correctly. And the conversation very quickly shifted to what could I do with this theory that I was practicing from.

Andrea Schara:

Wow.

Gerald Schwan:

And the conversation was, and that was part of the reason I later learned I was hired, was because Mr. Gillis had become familiar with Bowen's work. And the agency had practitioners who had been there for decades, but their skills had not been kept up. And he asked me what I could do with this there. I couldn't believe my ears, but what I said was that we could, Georgetown had started making the tapes back then. And Gene put a budget behind purchasing the initial training tapes from Georgetown. And we organized the first, large community meeting in which we probably invited about 60 people from the community. Social workers and a lot of the people, peers in the community, for the first conference that we had. I had convinced Gene, Mr. Gillis, that we needed to have an outside consultant to help me, because I knew enough about triangles looking at the agency myself and what we were going to do that I had some interlocking triangles to deal with.

Andrea Schara:

Exactly.

Gerald Schwan:

And Gene agreed to hire Clem Grote, my former supervisor, who I contacted to come up and help me with that process. And over the next nine years we were able to have seven different conferences in Green Bay, along with coaching groups for the staff. I did coaching groups as part of my private practice as a licensed clinical social worker in my home, and also acquired my own tapes. Now, we had Mike Kerr first come in in 1982, and I believe he did a program around systems. But my idea was they were only hearing my interpretation of theory. Why not bring some people and try to structure the program as I saw Georgetown do it, here. I couldn't believe it. We were able to do that. It was a blessing.

Then the interesting one came, because I had gone out to a ... The only time I had met Murray before that was maybe in the hallway at the symposium in 1976. And he was always, he would shake his hand or shake your hand and he'd be pleasant, then he'd be on his way. Then I had more of Murray in the 1977 program and '78, and really began to think about what I had been preached at in undergrad or in graduate school with Clem in terms of, "You need to learn this theory to practice from it." And I really came to understand that.

I had a personal accident in April of 1977 when I was out partying one night on a motorcycle and managed to find a telephone pole. And there's nothing worse waking up with a concussion the next morning and having your parents at the foot of your bed. You can't get out of the bed, knowing that

you've got a broken clavicle, a concussion, and burns, and you're lucky to be alive. And there are your parents staring you in the eyes in terms of what they said you shouldn't be doing, okay? Now, that hurt at the time, I have to tell you. But that was the incident that led me to decide that I had to make a commitment here, probably to growing up and also looking into how the theory could work for me.

Now, it's a couple years back, but I want to bring that incident up because as embarrassing as it is to describe, if I had not gone through that, I'm not sure I'd be alive today because of the fast lane I was living in at the time. And when I began to take a stronger look at Georgetown into my own family, I really began to start to grasp how the concepts of the theory would come together. The importance of family diagrams, three generations, four generations in the histories that I took, it was interesting. And in 1978 I was already, about a year after the accident, I was already being approached by our agency administrators as to what they could do to help keep me on staff because of this theory that I was practicing from and what I was doing.

Then I made the move, as I said earlier, and we brought Mike [Kerr] in in 1982, and then it took me about nine months to get Dr. Bowen to come here. He only knew me from the program. I would leave messages, I got no response, so that was kind of interesting. But in 1983, I finally got Murray to come up here, you know, I'll tell that story... in September, I believe of '83, and I think we did a program on child-focused families. And when he came I picked him up at our airport, and when he first got here, I would describe him as being pretty uptight. He didn't know what he was walking into. I wasn't sure how this was going to go, all right? Amazingly, when I went to pick him up, Clem was up here already and he was driving a white Cadillac convertible with a red leather interior.

Andrea Schara:

That's beautiful.

Gerald Schwan:

Took Murray to the hotel, and then we went out for a drive. And Andrea, he knew more about this community than I did after living here for several years. He knew about the history, I believe he had some social or family contacts up here, and in retrospect he talked about the history of our airlines and things like that. And then the conversation starting getting more interesting. With the convertible, we took Murray around Lambeau Field. We had the top down, and he just took all of it in. In retrospect, I wish I'd have had the time to take him over to Lambeau to the Hall of Fame. His whole attraction to football, aside from being a bit of a fan, was how successful the Lombardi teams had been in the '60s.

And it's almost parallel to what's happening now, up until the news we got today, about the Packers, because the whole thing was how a system of 11 people could function so well. The team back then was made up of a lot of people that had been with four and five teams before they came and settled in to Green Bay. Coach Lombardi was the dynamic, the person who got them into playing well together. Today, one of the statements that came out from Lambeau is, "The team is being successful because they love playing for each other, with each other." And that statement right there summarizes what things were like back in the '60s, in terms of how successful. Dr. Bowen was not so much a Packer's fan but was interesting in that first visit was that the assistant director, a lady by the name of Ruth Bruha at the diocese, came up with two autographed pictures of players from the Lombardi team, gave those to Dr. Bowen. And he took them back and I believe hung them in the Family Center.

Andrea Schara:

Yeah, the quarterback.

Gerald Schwan:

While he was here, we also were able to, through the telecommunications director of the agency, were able to arrange for Dr. Bowen to be on a television show, which was eventually called The Grand... that he did with Tom Joles with WFRV.

Andrea Schara:

That's one-

Gerald Schwan:

The Grandstand Franchise. [Program was called "Inquiry"]

Andrea Schara:

Still, one of the best tapes for explanation of Bowen Theory from Bowen himself. Very tricky kind of too.

Gerald Schwan:

And it was interesting because he wasn't so sure he wanted to do it at first. And so I'm thinking, "Oh boy." And then I took him over there and he come out with a smile on his face and thought he did pretty good. And he liked the commentator. He said he thought the commentator stayed on point, and if you watched that tape, he kept bringing Murray back to it. How much viewers got out of it, I'm not sure. But I think those kind of things helped establish my connection with Dr. Bowen.

Now, another thing that, as much as he had the reputation and everything that he did, one of the things that I remember about him is it was the simple things that caught his attention as well. At the Family Center I watched that and noticed that he used some chalk that was thicker in diameter than the others. And by chance I found some exactly like what he had at Georgetown. This may seem like a little thing, but to him, I think it was important because he got up, I'll never forget, to do his first illustration at the chalkboard. The chalk was sitting in the tray. He picked it up and looked at me. He says, the first thing he says to me is, "Where did you get this?" In front of everybody. And then just proceeded to go and do his. But I think those, Murray used to talk about how little things were important. That was one of them, I think, that helped him in terms of understanding that we were trying to do something with this.

Andrea Schara:

Yes.

Gerald Schwan:

Little bit more after that 1983 visit, that was in October of 1983, October 17th. By chance, I had submitted a paper that was selected for the main symposium, and it was on Alzheimer's disease and the life of a beloved uncle. We were at the Washington Hilton, and of course, I was nervous enough about getting up there in front of how many people in one of those auditoriums, let alone getting up there and all of a sudden seeing both Doctors Bowen and Kerr coming from the back of the room to sit down in the front right below the podium.

I would say that I got the meaning of anxiety, that was a very wet suit that day, from the inside out [laughs]. I managed to get through the program okay, my presentation, only to be told, "What a

beautiful job." That made the trip in and of itself worth it. And after that, I think that was the start of some things.

Andrea Schara:

You didn't-

Gerald Schwan:

In 1984-

Andrea Schara:

... by the praise?

Gerald Schwan:

What's that?

Andrea Schara:

I say you didn't get done in by the praise, the pat on the back.

Gerald Schwan:

There was no pat on the back. It was verbal. It was, I just felt I accomplished my mission out there, all right?

Andrea Schara:

Awesome.

Gerald Schwan:

We also had another faculty member come out, that was in 1984, with Ted Beal.

Andrea Schara:

Yeah.

Gerald Schwan:

Ted did a program for us on separation, divorce in single-parent families, which was his focus back in those days. Then we did a program with Murray. Again, now we was not the agency then, Clem Grote and I formed a group we called Family Consultants of Wisconsin, just the two of us. And we put together a program with Dr. Bowen on alcoholism and family systems down in Milwaukee at The Pfister Hotel. I don't know if you came up for that one. That was in 1985.

Andrea Schara:

Yeah, I think that was the one I asked you, "Who was this?" The man in the picture. I think that was the one, 1985. I came up for that, yes.

Gerald Schwan:

Yeah. And that turned out to be successful. We had Murray back in 198-... I didn't do conferences again, then again till about 1989. And that was when his health was starting to deteriorate.

Andrea Schara:

Yeah.

Gerald Schwan:

We did a final conference with Murray in 1990, April, and that was on addictions, April 19th and 20th. But from 1985 through 1990, I received five personal letters from Murray. The way that I think he shared his perspective, took his stand on things that he needed, and then he'd say some things about what was happening back at the Family Center. He would refer to history, he would talk about other things. But overall, I think what happened is that there was a good connection that developed. What had taken me nine months to get this first commitment from him was usually an immediate response in the phone call the next time I would try it several years later. So, I think there was some respect that had developed between us.

Andrea Schara:

Yes.

Gerald Schwan:

Those letters were important to me because in the last one that he said, he said, "Keep going," with what I was trying to do. I had changed employment, because back in the late '80s already I had been practicing with a psychiatrist, but insurance payments for social workers, we weren't licensed at the time up here, and having a young family, I had been sharing, job-sharing a couple days a week with the school system. Never intended to become a school social worker. But that's how I finished the last 23 years of my career and having left clinical practice.

So, no regrets. But if I look back in terms of when I felt the most growth occurred, when I had the most fun, it was back in the days when we were still doing the things with the folks from Georgetown up here. As I said, I got to know the theory back in '73, participated in the postgraduate program '77 to '78, took a year off, and then was going back '79 to '80. And I'll never forget my wife saying, "Well, now that we're getting married, you [don't] have to go to Georgetown." And my statement was, "No, I don't have to get married." That was the last I ever heard about going out there. That's how important the theory had become to me, and the work. There was just something special.

I remember Dr. Bowen's statement about, "Welcome to the citadel." There was something about going to the higher ground to get your head cleared. Even though you might come back with your head messed up for a while after what you heard, eventually there was a message that you took away from there each time you went back. And I am absolutely thankful that I was able to go out there and get to know Murray as I did before his death.

Andrea Schara:

Yeah, beautiful. You have a really good description there of differentiation as, in a way, being able to manage the social pressure with your wife and use humor to do it. That social pressure doesn't have to result in a fight.

Gerald Schwan:

No. No, it didn't have to result in a marriage either.

Andrea Schara:

It didn't have to. Social pressure didn't have to result in a marriage either.

Gerald Schwan:

But we had reached that point, and I've been very blessed, Andrea, with 41 years of a good marriage, two children, grown children, now one grandchild at two years old has got grandpa's heart, another one coming in January. Wonderful in-laws, and you know, you sit back and look back in time now, and it's been great.

Andrea Schara:

Do you think that somehow Bowen theory helped you to manage what I call social pressure? Not just with your wife there, but with everybody?

Gerald Schwan:

Oh, no question. When I would find myself getting caught up in an emotional entanglement, I was generally drawing diagrams and then using the concepts in terms of my understanding, just to try to get myself settled down and then to decide what my next move was going to be.

Andrea Schara:

Yeah, that's great. Strategy... takes time to develop a strategy that you're willing to try Bowen theory and see if it can help you to make better decisions about how you're going to relate to people. That's kind of what it-

Gerald Schwan:

It help me when I was cognizant of it. When I forgot it, I didn't always do so well. [both laugh]

Andrea Schara:

I love the picture of your parents looking over the bed at you when you're in the hospital with your motorcycle accident.

Gerald Schwan:

I didn't.

Andrea Schara:

Another beautiful description of social pressure.

Gerald Schwan:

Well-

Andrea Schara:

Even monkeys have social pressure, you know?

Gerald Schwan:

Well, I could have been part of their troop.

Andrea Schara:

Okay.

Gerald Schwan:

But throughout all that I credit my involvement at Georgetown as probably helping save my life.

Andrea Schara:

Because you would've gotten back on that motorcycle and said nana-booboo to your parents.

Gerald Schwan:

Well, I was already, my roommate when I got out of the hospital insisted I get on the back of the bike so I wasn't afraid of it, and took me for a ride.

Andrea Schara:

Wow.

Gerald Schwan:

I never got on one again after that on my own. That's another story.

Andrea Schara:

That's pretty good though. The two lessons I guess that I hear in this is that how important the details are in trying to make contact with somebody. And then when you finally are successful through perseverance, you're able to figure out what things are really appealing that makes some relationship possible, which is good to, it's really good to know.

Gerald Schwan:

This is a sidebar, but Green Bay is a pretty small community, and when you work in the social work field up here you get to know law enforcement. I was very much a part of helping start our sexual assault center up here back in the '70s. And so I got to know law enforcement. I played ball with the district attorney's office up here. I'll never forget being on my first motorcycle, was riding with my two roommates and we were downtown and I had a dark shield on. Two of the detectives that I had gotten to know through the rape crisis center pulled up at the intersection where we were in downtown and started, of course, looking us over. I'll never forget raising the shield and saying, "Hi, Bob. Hi Tom." And that was the end of the... But that's the beauty of being in a small town.

Andrea Schara:

Yeah. Well, it's also the beauty of knowing the importance of relationships. I mean-

Gerald Schwan:

It was. It was through that, that we actually got the district attorneys involved with the helping support the victims up here back in the '70s already. And that center is now going very strong.

Andrea Schara:

Do they still retain some idea about systems, or did that all wash out with the focus on the individual?

Gerald Schwan:

More general systems. And the whole concept was based on the social work idea of parent and family and community model. And we brought all of the players together at the same table. And to have an assistant district attorney there at the table willing to take the... Listen to the volunteers that were working with the victims that we had and getting them all together was a pretty special time in our lives. And that center is still going today up here, but we were able to do it because of the people involved. And as you said, it was through the relationship connections.

Andrea Schara:

Yeah. I think you study Bowen theory, you get a lot clearer many times, not always, but about the importance of relationships and how to manage them. It's so important. I think you created your own citadel there while you were there, and I'm not sure how much, after you leave how much stays there. But it's interesting to see Bowen theory, if it can stay alive when people leave, kind of like Dr. Bowen dying and Bowen theory still stays alive.

Gerald Schwan:

Oh-

Andrea Schara:

Good.

Gerald Schwan:

One thing I know that did happen is when I left the agency where we did the initial training, things had already begun to change with the new administrator. And a lot of what had been done over those couple years before the administrator came in, I think got put on the shelf. And I was still practicing, but I had made a move into private practice at the time as a social worker. And I was actually doing part-time private work. I was with Dr. Johnson, I was working with the schools and some contract work, so I was kind of spread out, but then I went full-time with the schools.

Andrea Schara:

What do you think, or do you think there's some ability for Bowen Theory to make a difference in today's world if people knew about it, especially in schools? I mean, I don't know where your head goes. Just thinking about the possible uses of theory and the difficulty generally speaking that people have in keeping it going.

Gerald Schwan:

I think one of the more memorable outgrowths of the work of many of the individuals out at Georgetown at the time I was there were the books that came out to contribute and advance the theory. Murray's book, Family [Therapy], Mike [Kerr]'s book on family assessment, family treatment. But the books on how to extend the theory to business and things. I can tell you right now that I think we're in a time of societal regression, and I wish the people in Congress and the White House would talk to some of the people at Georgetown. But I don't think that's going to happen, because over time, unless

you have a practice where people are probably paying out of pocket, I think the insurance industry and the pharmaceutical industry drive the way things are being done and this focus on let's get it done quickly.

Andrea Schara:

Yeah.

Gerald Schwan:

Grief therapy, symptom treatment, all those things is just at the opposite end of the spectrum of what I understood Bowen's work to be. I mean, I saw clients for years, two, three years, sometimes four years. Not every week, but-

Andrea Schara:

Not every week. But it takes a long time to, like you were describing earlier, try and understand the theory, draw the diagrams, look at the family patterns, see where your weakness and strength is, and then make a decision about how you're going to deal with it. Develop your-

Gerald Schwan:

Exactly.

Andrea Schara:

... hypothesis, develop hypothesis from the theory and see if it works. And for you, it worked. But still, I mean not, doesn't work up against the focus on the individuals that insurance companies and pharmaceutical companies have. They have been-

Gerald Schwan:

No, no. And I've observed in my career, I practiced for 40 years, 23 in the schools, 17 in agencies, United Way agencies, private practice, that kind of thing. But the psychiatrist who I worked with was very interesting, because he supported what I did and I was able to maintain the practice with it. And we found ways to do that until he finally closed up shop. Not having had that opportunity, I probably wouldn't have been in family treatment as long as I was.

Andrea Schara:

You had somebody who could open the doors and see what you were doing and not feel threatened or that you were going in the wrong direction?

Gerald Schwan:

He was my landlord, but he came for coaching himself.

Andrea Schara:

He did? That's awesome.

Gerald Schwan:

A couple... he took the classes I had. How's that?

Andrea Schara:

Yeah, that's-

Gerald Schwan:

Yeah.

Andrea Schara:

If somebody will put their toes in the water, I guess, learn just a little bit about theory and then apply it to self. I think that's what makes the difference. And as you were saying, when you saw what was happening to you, lying in the bed and your parents at the other end looking down on you. You knew what it was all about, what you had to deal with.

Gerald Schwan:

Well, let's face it, when you have a concussion and a broken clavicle, you're not going to be getting out of bed and going too far.

Andrea Schara:

Yeah. You've got to live, you've got to figure out, manage relationships.

Gerald Schwan:

No, I'm just being very candid with you about it. But those kind of things led to that. And the other thing that really helped me, I think get focused on this, was the expectation of how we had to do our beliefs papers out of Georgetown, if you remember that.

Andrea Schara:

Yes, I did.

Gerald Schwan:

And I still remember Dr. Bowen laughing when he said he had a simple assignment for us. Just write down your feelings, your values, your beliefs, your convictions and where you got them.

Andrea Schara:

And if you weren't willing to speak about them-

Gerald Schwan:

You got to sit in the other room.

Andrea Schara:

You had to go in the other room, watch TV.

Gerald Schwan:

Yeah, those papers, I think when I did some coaching up here, I had people doing that. Made a difference for people. I think, I still use a notebook today, even though I'm not practicing. At 71, you forget things, so. But I keep the notes just like you did in private work. Just the thing that I had to make

sure is that my kids don't see them when I'm gone. Well, maybe when I'm gone it ain't going to make any difference.

Andrea Schara:

Well, maybe if they hand in their own belief paper to you, you'll read it. Let them read yours.

Gerald Schwan:

That doesn't happen.

Andrea Schara:

But it does show, one, how much your life changed. And two, it still doesn't look good for the general acceptance of Bowen theory in society or with psychiatry. I don't know what will make the difference, but I keep hoping that by more and more people talking about how it changed their lives, that that's one reason I wanted to do this series, that I think it's probably, it's not the kind of research that 3,000 or 300,000 people, yes or no vaccine. But to think about the long-term impact on being able to see how relationships function. And that there is an instinctive part to it, and there's a little bit you can do about it once you recognize these patterns. I think it's beautiful.

Gerald Schwan:

If I thought of the professional contributors, first of all, I know, and I believe this is has been done, because I did it, we actually taught a graduate class out here on Bowen Family Systems at the university. Because of the research, because of the wealth of references, it didn't take much to put a class together. I do think though that if people at say the technical school level and college and graduate programs would take a hard look at this, more could be done. In order to have that opportunity though, that faculty has got to have some funding available away from having to go out and earn a living at the same time while you're trying to do the practice and just be focused on that kind of a position where you can do it. And that was one of the takeaways that I had from it. The reason I think we're in societal regression is because I think since the '70s it's all about "me," and-

Andrea Schara:

Me being happy.

Gerald Schwan:

Rights have taken a place of responsibility, if I can get up on my little soapbox and get off of that. That was one of the biggest takeaways I had from working with the theory as well is the responsibility to yourself and others. When we had to do beliefs papers about what do you think is your responsibility to your parents and to your grandparents, to your community? At first you think, well, I remember some of my fellow colleagues up to saying, "I'll get this done in an hour or two." Good luck with that.

Andrea Schara:

Yeah. Well, everybody needs a superficial side here and there. They can just slide by.

Gerald Schwan:

The other thing here, Andrea, is the focus on facts and predictability. That was another thing that was important to me about this theory. And you could almost anticipate what was going to happen based on

what the information was that you had. When people, I've gone back with cousins and extended family four or five, six generations in the family. It's been amazing to see how that all had to do with where I am today. I go back and look at pictures of ancestors and it's taken me a while to figure out what they were saying to me when I was growing up. But I'm thankful for the time that I put in for getting to know these folks as people beyond the role models as aunts and uncles. And I don't know that without this theory and the emphasis on the importance of family, you want to work with families, you start with yourself and your own. I don't know that I'd have ever done that.

Andrea Schara:

It's lacking in society. You mean the general idea is all for one and one for all. There's something, a lot of groupiness in seeking an identity. And you might want an identity and wear a Green Bay sweater, but that doesn't mean that you really understand how the 11 people on the squad are working together-

Gerald Schwan:

No.

Andrea Schara:

... to make something happen.

Gerald Schwan:

No, but I get back to that statement before about, "We play for each other and with each other." I mean, that's from the inside out. That's taken a lot to get that message across. But what's been fun to watch, even with the culture, people say, "You don't have a lot of culture here." They haven't lived here. When I first came here, Green Bay was probably 90% Caucasian and mixed. Black players didn't want to come here until we got the different coaching staff in the 1990s. And then a gentleman by the name of Reggie White came here and changed everything. How one person can have an impact on the system. I wanted to share with you too, I don't know if I've discussed this one, but when Dr. Bowen was here in 1983, and then I went out to get that program at the symposium, and I had forgotten this earlier. We played the Washington Redskins on a Monday night football game. Green Bay was on a losing trend when I hadn't been at the symposium. I couldn't go into the men's room without being told how much we were going to get clobbered when I was out there. And then we beat the Redskins 48 to 47 in a Monday night shootout.

Andrea Schara:

Wow.

Gerald Schwan:

I was emotionally so pumped up from that that that I called the Packers office, and I think I wrote Bart Starr a letter, who was the coach who later got fired.

Andrea Schara:

He was a quarterback and then a coach.

Gerald Schwan:

He was a quarterback and then a coach. But I sent the letter just letting him know how thrilled I was with that victory and what it meant. I had a call back from his office asking for a copy of Dr. Bowen's book. And I had an extra one from the publisher. I took it over there. I never heard back. And that was important because Bart had lost his son to a tragedy back then. So, I don't know whatever happened with all that, but I just think it is been kind of interesting with all that here.

Andrea Schara:

You're making a difference one by one by one. Just every time you have an opportunity to have a real relationship with somebody or another, you just do it. And the evidence piles up that this is worth doing.

Gerald Schwan:

Yes. Yes.

Andrea Schara:

Finding that piece of chalk was worth doing. And it just says something about the importance of the relationship when you notice those details and you do it, yeah.

Gerald Schwan:

And just looking at the questions, if we've covered them.

Andrea Schara:

Well, definitely how your family and your life have been changed. Because you can get your wife to tell us what still needs to be changed, but.

Gerald Schwan:

We won't go there.

Andrea Schara:

We all have that part. We got to keep on going for our grandkids and everybody else.

Gerald Schwan:

Well, our children are each married, one has the grandson and the other is expecting January. They live in Minnesota. My wife's been clear that if I go before her, she's moving. For me-

Andrea Schara:

It's a very instinctual drive and all instincts are not bad.

Gerald Schwan:

No, no. I mean, that's just how important family is to her. And I'm not saying it isn't. It's not like the days of when we had a rotary phone with a cord on the wall and you were waiting to hear from your family. I mean, now you can see them just like you and I were talking and you're not in-person, but you can schedule special times for that.

Andrea Schara:
Yeah, it's pretty good.

Gerald Schwan:
I have not developed any other ideas to refine the theory, but what I tried to do with the time I had the opportunities here was to spread the word in different ways. And I think we were pretty successful with that, at least for a number of years.

Andrea Schara:
The tape that Joel, what's his name made, is still the most popular tape on the Bowen Archives, that news clip interview that he did. Can't remember his name exactly.

Gerald Schwan:
Tom Bowls.

Andrea Schara:
Tom Bowls.

Gerald Schwan:
Tom Joles. Tom Joles, yeah.

Andrea Schara:
Tom Joles. Yeah, he did an interview and that remains as a crucial part of the archives, so there you go.

Gerald Schwan:
Is that right?

Andrea Schara:
Yeah. You go to the Murray Bowen Archives Project and look for videos.

Gerald Schwan:
I've seen those. I think I sent a couple other videos out too to you beside the ones that they posted. I was wondering whatever happened with those.

Andrea Schara:
I still have those. The National Library of Medicine has been closed, and I don't know when it will open again. So letters, tapes, things that people have to donate to the National Library of Medicine. Maybe we're going to figure out how to do it, but it's closed currently, so yeah.

Gerald Schwan:
I have five original letters that I'm willing to send, but I'll ask you to give me the word when I should do that.

Andrea Schara:

Oh yeah, I will, for sure. And we may be able to create, not we, but Priscilla Friesen in particular is really working with Joanne Bowen and meeting monthly now with the person who runs the National Library of Medicine, so there may be some way to have these things donated. And it may also be, I don't know, I can talk to Catherine Rakow, that your letters are already in the collection, because the way he typed and he had carbon paper and maybe he would make a copy. So almost every letter he wrote had a carbon copy.

Gerald Schwan:

Yeah, okay.

Andrea Schara:

But I'll find out. But the originals would be better than the carbon copy.

Gerald Schwan:

Well, I would prefer them going there because I can't only think of what'll happen to them when I'm not here.

Andrea Schara:

Exactly.

Gerald Schwan:

Who was Murray Bowen?

Andrea Schara:

He was the guy that said human behavior could be understood and to some extent was predictable. Who was the guy that hooked us into evolution and away from the Greek tragedies? Beyond Greek tragedies, to social systems.

Gerald Schwan:

Yeah.

Andrea Schara:

I really appreciate the time with you. I don't know, we pretty much covered, we covered a lot. There's just no easy way to do this but to work on yourself and your relationships and see what happens.

Gerald Schwan:

Well, hopefully this gives you a different side. To this day, I wonder what had happened had I not gone into the schools and continued with private work. But I think it would have been a lot more stressful.

Andrea Schara:

There's a lot more uncertainty. And if you get tied up with insurance companies then your life is never your own. If you can do private practice, that's what I do, coaching. And I don't need insurance companies and they don't need me.

Gerald Schwan:

But to have had this opportunity and the career that I did, Andrea, was special. And getting to know yourself and some of the others, having them here, especially Dr. Bowen, is a privilege that I guess few people ever had.

Andrea Schara:

You and Mike Sullivan, I would say, took responsibility for the Northern United States.

Gerald Schwan:

Well, and don't forget the good folks in Chicago.

Andrea Schara:

In Chicago, you call that the northern part too? Okay, we'll include Chicago then.

Gerald Schwan:

I'm thinking of the group down there. There's four of them that they came up to the first time we had Murray, I remember. Stephanie, I think, and-

Andrea Schara:

Yeah. Stephanie Ferrera.

Gerald Schwan:

Yeah, I think there's the Minneapolis, because you're a Minneapolis group now that's-

Andrea Schara:

Mary Bourne had the Minneapolis group there, but-

Gerald Schwan:

Okay.

Andrea Schara:

... she's died. I think everybody has left. Her work has been included in a chapter in the Charlie White book, Ona Bregman and Charlie White have a book. And so, I don't think anybody's work is forgotten. We might not live forever, but maybe our work will be kept in the National Library of Medicine.

Gerald Schwan:

It was definitely a special time back in the day when I still remember him coming in. And then the descriptors about his trip home, and even as frail as he was in 1990, describing about how he could barely make it from his room to the auditorium just speaks to the fact of how committed he was to helping us out here.

Andrea Schara:

He was determined. He was going to spread the message, and I went with him three days before he died, I guess you know that, to the AAMFT meeting with for the pioneers of Family Therapy. And he's three days before he is going to die. And it was just an amazing moment. The limo's outside, I come up and Mrs. Bowen says, "Go down there please and talk to Murray. And he's wanting to smoke a cigarette, mumble, mumble." And so I went down there and he's on oxygen, oxygen mask. And she's like, "See?" And he's just twinkly eyed. And so I said, "Well, all I know about this triangle here, maybe the best thing would be if I could say something without taking sides." So I said to Dr. Bowen, "You look like the soldier going out for your last march to battle, one more cigarette. That's it, that's all you need, one more cigarette, you'll be fine. But Mrs. Bowen, you're kind of worried about him going out with the oxygen mask to smoke that one cigarette. Would you agree to let him do it if he takes the oxygen off? And Dr. Bowen, would you be willing to take the oxygen mask off?"

Gerald Schwan:

What did he say?

Andrea Schara:

He grumbled, took the thing off and Mrs. Bowen was happy going up the steps. And he lights that last cigarette. Looks out the window at the limo. And so we rode on down the road, but yeah. One of your letters was about his trying to deal with me. Not that easy, but you learn a lot hanging around with people like Murray Bowen.

Gerald Schwan:

Well, he talked in one of the letters about his shift of needing to have you there and always about the resourcefulness on your part.

Andrea Schara:

Yeah.

Gerald Schwan:

And it worked out. We were fortunate to do it while he was here and have the opportunity and life memory, for sure.

Andrea Schara:

Well, I remember after he died, Joanne Bowen told me, "You really added years to my father's life and I appreciate that." And I think there is some truth to that. If you can keep on going and you might find some irritating person who will, but I learned a lot. I am so grateful. It was good to be in Green Bay and see part of what you and Clem did there, and it was just a really important part of my life too. So, glad we got to talk about it a little bit.

Gerald Schwan:

Yes.

Andrea Schara:

Much more to say, but let us end for today, and I'll catch up with you later. Thanks for doing this, Gerry.

Gerald Schwan:

You bet. We'll talk, Andrea. Thank you.

Andrea Schara:

Okay, you're welcome.

Gerald Schwan:

Have a good one.

Andrea Schara:

You too. Bye for now.

Gerald Schwan:

Bye.