

Interview with Mike Sullivan  
Conducted by Andrea Schara  
November 13, 2021

Andrea Schara:

But let's see. Let's start with, "Who are you, Mike?"

Mike Sullivan:

Well, I'm Mike Sullivan. I'm a social worker, and family and marriage counselor, in Northern Michigan. I live in Traverse City. I've been, officially connected with Bowen theory since 1979 when I started the Postgraduate Program. I guess my interest in Bowen theory precedes that, probably goes all the way back to graduate school.

When I recall, I was trained in the psychoanalytic tradition in, they did have a... This was at Wayne State University School of Social Work, but they had a family class taught by a guy named Sandy Reed. He was a family therapist. The concept that stuck with me was the "undifferentiated family ego mass," and how a family group functions as one, kind of, super brain in one way. It just reminded me, I immediately would think about my brother would be assigned as the memory of the family. Whenever a factual story was to be told, my brother would be asked to tell the story. Everybody could tell the story, but then Joe was like the factual backup. It was just how the family relied on his brain to remember things. This was a contrast to the psychoanalytic tradition. Freud didn't really think there was much prospect of analysis with Irish people. I don't know if you ever saw that quote. I wish I could remember what it was, but it was sort of like, "Well, don't even try with Irish people," that type of thing.

Andrea Schara:

He didn't think he could have a relationship with his mother, or his father either, not just the Irish. Maybe they were Irish.

Mike Sullivan:

That was the sort of thing with my exposure to Family Systems thinking, which was, sort of a progression. There was a woman, named Ann Hartman, here in Michigan. She taught at U of M, and actually just died last week at 95, but was, in Michigan, sort of the leader of the family movement. She did an in-service at that agency I worked at. That really gave me a broader understanding of what was the potential for family.

She introduced some of the ideas from Bowen theory, and Systems theory. She had kind of a Virginia Satir kind of... Was a real engaging presenter. That sparked my interest to really pursue family, and then I was hired. I worked in Detroit out of school, in an agency that was set up after the riots, to provide family counseling, emergency counseling for families. It was a great experience of doing community outreach, or being out in the community. I was able to talk... it was a psychoanalytic agency, but I was able to talk my supervisor into letting me see families. We had to use the staff lunchroom. There was no office that was set up for more than three people, that type of thing. I was hired to run a family outreach program that was really innovative.

It was under the "Family Under Stress" model. Dan Papero's talked about that, but this was an alternative with juvenile delinquent families, an alternative to sending kids to residential placement. It would be to treat the family in the home. I got hired to run the program, and then really recognized, I

absolutely knew nothing about family therapy. So as one is wont to do, I became... anxiety drove me to read as much as I could. I forget what it was. It was like *The Handbook of Family Therapy*, or something like that. I'm reading these, where they're called theories, and it's like, "I don't get this. This is making no sense to me." Then it was that article by Dr. Bowen, I think it was the Phil Guerin book. It was like, "My God almighty, this is exact... Okay, I see this world, and this makes absolute sense."

Andrea Schara:

Was that about schizophrenia? The...

Mike Sullivan:

Not that. I think it was like... I forget now the name of it. It was the six concepts. It was just so... This was like, "Okay, this is a world I'm more familiar with." It was like, growing up in my family. It's like, "Okay, this is making sense." I couldn't get that Viennese orientation that my family, from the psychoanalytic orientation. That really launched me. Then I developed this program that was highly successful in retaining kids at home, and working out the conflicts, or whatever, within the family context. Then I learned that there were teaching tapes at Georgetown. I had started kind of like a therapist of family group, within the agency I was in. I guess we were familiar... We call them genograms. Ann Hartman had this eco map that she did, which was an extension, looking at the social connection on top of that. Then I ordered the tapes. I think when I called to order them, it was at 5:30, and Dr. Bowen answered the phone.

Andrea Schara:

I love that. This is just so perfect.

Mike Sullivan:

Well, you got to appreciate the context. The family I grew up in, my father died when I was 11, and the fortunes of the family really took a dive. We were, kind of, the poor family in the neighborhood, in the community, church community that I was involved with. There's something about being in a working-class neighborhood, you don't talk to the head guy.

Andrea Schara:

Even in a better neighborhood, you don't talk to the head guy.

Mike Sullivan:

I worked through college. I worked at the Ford Rouge plant. It was like, I was a line worker... You know your place in the hierarchy, and "Don't bother us with your problems," that type of thing. So, that was... then, in that, I asked about would it be possible to have somebody come and do a conference? He recommended Kathy Kerr, and Kathy came out, and did a two-day conference.

She started it out, I think this would be called "The Georgetown Style," it's like, if you've just enlisted in the Marines, and we're going to let you know what a miserable heap of mush you are. I think Kathy started out by saying, "Most of you will probably forget this...two days, as soon as it's over. There'll be about a percentage of 25% will remember an idea, or two, you'll take with you, and there might be one person who decides to pursue this, but maybe not." That Georgetown style of really trying to set the expectations, as low as possible, going into it.

Andrea Schara:

Into the ditch.

Mike Sullivan:

Just as an aside, Mike Kerr was doing a conference of a lot of different therapies in Detroit, which I attended. Before him, was somebody from the Minuchin Group. They had this treatment protocol for incest. The woman claimed that they were 95% effective. This was almost a cure, 95%. Then Mike got up, he was next in presenting, he got up, said, "Well, Bowen theory's about 14% effective."

Andrea Schara:

With incest.

Mike Sullivan:

No, it wasn't even with incest. It was just a contrast. It was pretty hilarious. Anyhow, from that, I worked it to get financing through the agency, to attend the postgraduate program, with the understanding that then I would come back, and give presentations to the staff. I did that for three years. That began the commitment. The agency, at the time, had just formed, so they were really looking at, they wanted to have a theoretical underpinning. What was so valuable, now in hindsight, was just the challenge of trying to impose any kind of thought process on a group of people because not all staff members were takers of Bowen theory.

There's another one of my colleagues that went through the postgraduate program too, a few years later. That began a small, but committed, network of people around here, that have continued to focus on Systems in the Grand Traverse area.

Andrea Schara:

It was amazing how you just happened to get hold of Dr. Bowen on the phone. I think that gives a lot of insight into the kind of person he was. I wondered about how your relationship with him developed over time.

Mike Sullivan:

I actually had developed a proposal and, I tried to implement it, of doing a postgraduate training program here in Michigan. It would feature Dr. Bowen, Dr. Kerr, Dr. Papero, and I think Priscilla [Friesen] was also part of that, so it would be visiting faculty. There wasn't a certificate you'd get with it or anything along that line. It just so happened, that same year, there was a group in Grand Rapids that was affiliated with the Family Institute in Chicago, and then the Ann Arbor Group with Ann Hartman, they were connected to the Ackerman Group in New York, all launched family therapy training programs the same year. So, it didn't take. That was one of... That was a major disappointment for me personally.

But, then we continued, Dr. Bowen came up here two more times, Dr. Kerr came up, once or twice, and Priscilla [Friesen] came up. Those were, largely, projects that I financed, personally, in that the numbers, there was this really high point in the late '70s, early '80s, where family therapy would draw hundreds of people, and then the numbers plummeted. The last time Dr. Bowen was up, we had 35 people. That was the conference you were at. I think we ended up with about eight the second day. I got threatened with a lawsuit, and it was quite a fiasco.

Andrea Schara:

It got worse from there. He [Bowen] was just determined that no matter how unpopular it was, everybody played a part in this. He was not going to give up on that.

Mike Sullivan:

He presented down in Detroit. This is when we were still trying to pitch the Family Training Program, in Northern Michigan. I think that was going to start in September, and this would've been June. Tony Wilgus was part of that project too. We had this nice little brochure.

We go to this conference, we have all our brochures, in the entryway, and people are taking them as they enter. Dr. Bowen, it's a day-long presentation, and he told this story about incest. He preceded it with talking about how mental health workers, and social workers, they didn't even know how anxious they were, how much anxiety. I always saw this as sort of the setup. Then he'd tell a provocative story just to demonstrate that.

It was a family where there was incest, then they managed with it, and went on with their lives. It was like a volcanic eruption in the audience. Directors of sexual abuse centers got up, and spoke. It was like the testimonials. Honest to God, probably 60% of the audience walked out. Afterwards, there were just... Our brochures were all littered, littered the floor. We ended up back at the hotel. I think Tony said, "Well, that was, what did you think of the audience response?" and Dr. Bowen said, "I think it was pretty good audience today. I think this went exactly the way"... I can't paraphrase it right. It was just like, "Well this is right on target."

Andrea Schara:

Drop the weak ones off.

Mike Sullivan:

It was always like a... I always saw it like an Andy Kaufman-quality. Andy Kaufman would work an audience, and really play against their projection of what comedy should be. He had that ability to tolerate a really negative reaction. It was always kind of fascinating to me. That was a thing with Dr. Bowen, he wasn't afraid to speak his mind, that's for sure. Just to hang in there with that, like "Here's my position," and then with the reactivity that can generate. He demonstrated differentiation, I think, all the time. You know?

Andrea Schara:

Yeah. I think that's exactly the most important thing in understanding Bowen, and how he lived theory. Maybe he enjoyed being provocative. He talked about incest with the American Indian tribes too, and they got really upset, but there's some that don't get upset. There's some people who realize getting on with your life, despite whatever trauma, that's what's really important.

Theory says, "One at a time. One at a time, we'll move forward, and the rest will object." He made it easy for people to object. Let's put it that way.

Mike Sullivan:

I remember, after the last time he was here, I asked the question, "What's it take to get the world to hear systems theory?" He said, "It's one brick at a time." That's how you build a wall, I guess. He was scheduled, this was the second time he came to Traverse. We had postponed the conference because he had the aneurysm.

It was six weeks after that, that he was here. That was in no time flat. He had requested that, given his compromised health, he would like a room that would be as close as possible to the conference hall. He had, what were they called, what was that school style? The way the seats were set up, I forget now the term for it, but it was a very specific way, no circles, or anything like that.

Andrea Schara:

No circles.

Mike Sullivan:

The plane got in at about 11:30, and we were met there. I was, actually, an assistant getting some CEUs by a psychiatrist here in town, Art Dundon, who had actually trained at Menninger's. He was in Dr. Bowen's analytic, or his supervisory group there, when he was at Menninger's. He came to see him. They hadn't seen each other in a number of years. We got to the hotel about midnight. I had given specific instructions of what the requirements were, and I was sure they would happen. We get to the front desk, and the night clerk informs me they have no rooms in the hotel, that the only rooms are in a townhouse about a mile away, on a property they own. So, they give us the keys to the place, and I'm apologetic.

I'm taking responsibility for this mishap, of course. I got the key to the place, and Dr. Bowen and I, we walk in and, I have his luggage. I turned the key to the door, open it, and the chain locks on. Some guy starts shouting, "What are you doing?" They had given us the key to a place that was occupied. Then we have to come back to the hotel, and then they're kind of hemming and hawing about what they can do. Dr. Bowen starts slamming his hand on the thing, and says, "In 30 years of conferences, I've never had an experience like this." Immediately, they miraculously, find this room down the hall from the conference center. We go back to the car to get his bags. I say, "Dr. Bowen, that that was so upsetting for you to go through this." And he said, "Upset? What made you think I was upset?"

Of course, we go there, this is where he presented on the ninth concept, so there was a lot of buzz about this presentation, but they had it in the completely wrong formulation. It was not what was requested. Then I had informed the staff of that. The next morning, as compensation, the hotel gave free continental breakfasts to the 300 people who had signed up for this conference as their form of apology. I remember Dr. Bowen, saying "Well, that's a little over the hill. This place is going to be bankrupt." Sure enough, six months later, they declared bankruptcy.

Andrea Schara:

He was good at predicting. I noticed that, in a lot of situations, he was good at predicting, better than the average.

I think that a lot of things that Bowen did like this are never written about. It's not in the literature of Bowen theory, how Bowen lived theory. It's really useful to have these kinds of stories, and the way he managed himself.

Andrea Schara:

I think it's important how he managed himself with other people, following his ideas about differentiation of self.

Mike Sullivan:

A couple in this, the first time he presented here... These are things that never were clear whether these were intentional or not. You come into a community, and I'm involved in bringing Dr. Bowen in. So, in the community, then I become the Bowen guy. It's like, by virtue of presenting and, basically organizing a conference, somehow I've now assimilated all this knowledge too. There was a therapist in town that was real reactive at the conference. I remember, he got to the microphone and said, "You sir, are a dangerous man. You do not know of what you speak. You are a theorist, sir, and I am a clinician." Then he stormed out of the place, but he had a big following, a very public guy. When the conference started he thanked... Kind of the intro thing of thanking the people, and he referred to me as Mark Sullivan. I thought, well, it was clear that we're not real close pals. It really did distinguish, I'm Dr. Bowen, and that's that guy over there.

I couldn't latch onto the coattails too much there. I was so anxious. I'll never forget this. Traverse City, the downtown is straight blocks, so it's not real confusing. I got lost going to the restaurant, taking them to the restaurant. His wife came. I think that was the trip, his wife came along as well. I think for me, a lot of that too, is organizing those things was a wonderful opportunity to really see my own anxiety at work.

Andrea Schara:

It's true, and just as an aside, Dr. Bowen would get up in front of the conferences, he'd get me to come over, and talk to him a little bit. He'd say stuff like, "Look at all these people out here. They think they can learn differentiation in a day or a weekend." My hair would just go completely straight. Friends of mine, like Priscilla, would say stuff like, "Have you been talking to Dr. Bowen? Your hair is..." The anxiety that would get going between the way he saw the audience, and what the audience wanted, his mode would be the audience was pretty infantile.

Mike Sullivan:

What was always fascinating to me was the capacity to hear the premise behind a question, and not take the bait. It was always interesting to me how skillful he was in that regard, and the device of writing the questions down, and then reading them all, rather than getting into this immediate response thing, that was kind of characteristic, I always found those things as pretty interesting.

Andrea Schara:

So that, if you had the screen of Bowen theory, and you understood it to some extent, about the way human nature is, you don't have high expectations. Maybe for him, I don't know, if more of the questions were... He could easily answer, it seemed to me. He had put up so much thought into these things. It was clear what the differences were between systems, and individual thinking. A lot of people were very confused about that, plus his way of differentiating himself from the audience. It was a powerful combination of knowledge, plus emotional process, that I think only he really understood, and found a way to deal with it, found some way to deal with it, which was amazing.

Mike Sullivan:

I think also, in terms of, we did live sessions, and of course, the technology in those days was really compromised, it was like home TVs, and that sort of thing. The respect that he had, and the way he managed himself with a clinical family and an audience...

Andrea Schara:

That was beautiful.

Mike Sullivan:

The people that participated really were appreciative of how he managed that relationship with the audience.

Andrea Schara:

He had one tape that was, especially, good with a family of six or seven kids in the family. The way he spoke to that family, and talked to that family, was very unusual. He didn't want me to show that tape to just anybody. If people were to see the tape, they would have to write up a paragraph about it, or put out some kind of energy to say, "This is what I saw, and this is where I stand about what I saw." He was very... Again, I think respectful is the right word, and not wanting people to think they know everything because now they've seen a clinical tape with Bowen and a family.

Mike Sullivan:

I think those presentations really punched up the whole notion of just how we're all in the same boat. It's just the respect of, and the effort people put into living their damn lives. There's really no distinction between the therapist, and the clinical family, in that regard. We're all humans.

Andrea Schara:

All humans, and all anxious. He still had a way, like of speaking... He spoke to the young woman that was labeled schizophrenic, and he said to her, "Sometimes you talk out of both sides of your mouth," and she just got that. She understood that... Like, my hair goes straight, when I get anxious, and she wanders around when she gets anxious. There were ways he had of seeing the emotional process, and talking to people directly about it. He talked to the oldest sister there too. Anyway, he just had, as you said, enormous respect, plus this ability, to see the process people were caught in, and blind to, and that was amazing.

Mike Sullivan:

I was mentioning earlier too, on a personal level, he was really instrumental, I think in, I guess you could say, encouraging me, but activating a go-force in me, to get busy with the music side of my life, which I'm an untrained musician. I just always loved music, and sort of taught myself how to play. It was always a social thing.

I think it was in the early '80s, there was a symposium. I think it was really moving towards science, but it was this idea of, I don't know if I'm going to waste my time on this kind of... At least this is how my brain interpreted, I'm sure it wasn't said this way but, "These half-ass efforts, let's get on with it, either do it, or you don't," like a call to arms.

I remember leaving that, and thinking, "Well, this music thing is really essential to me, it is part of me. It's not something I was trained in, like social work, or anything else. I'm not a towering intellect, by any stretch of the imagination. I'm a working-class kind of person trying to eke out a living or whatever." I would use time, I'd send songs I was writing, all that kind of thing, and get feedback on them. My-

Andrea Schara:

Bowen? You sent the song?

Mike Sullivan:

Yeah. I'm trying to think... I think I had a song that was, the hook was, "Everybody needs somebody," and he suggested, I make it, "Everybody's got somebody." It was sort of ironic because the musical career side of my life, and the type of music I do... I've been in a band for 42 years now. We've got seven recordings, and a DVD, we're touring artists. We've been designated as touring artists, in the state of Michigan, for a number of years. We've played at the Montreux Jazz Festival in Switzerland. These things all kept going. That meeting was really kind of a turning point for me, in terms of getting clear. Those belief papers are also to me, always one of those, excruciatingly beneficial things that one does, especially the reading it in front of other people part.

Andrea Schara:

You could have sung it.

Mike Sullivan:

I remember starting the... It was the first time, I was 27, and it was the first time in my life that I was in a big city by myself. I stayed out in Arlington, got there Sunday, and decided I'd take a bus there to go and find the MacArthur Boulevard, and find the Family Center. I took a bus, and I was all disoriented. I was probably out for four or five hours, looking for this place, and finally just gave up. I don't know what to do. Then of course, I turn around, and I'm in front of the Family Center. It was sort of the style that you didn't get a set of directions on how to get there. You had to figure it out yourself.

Andrea Schara:

There's no coffee. Figure it out yourself, how to get here, and don't make friends with people. It's like Kerr said, "Look to your right, look to your left. One of you aren't going to be here."

Mike Sullivan:

Then Dr. Bowen came out and he talked about how ossified our thinking was. It was like, "Welcome to the Marine Corps." From my experience of playing football, and coaching, it was like, this was like the opening day, but it kind of motivated me. It was like, "Hey, I'm up for the challenge." I was one that, I had read the book, and seen the video. I figured I can, probably, cruise through this in a year, two at most. What is it, 45 years later? I'm still at it.

Andrea Schara:

It's more than loyalty. It's more than attachment. I'm not sure how you would describe the seeking for knowledge, I guess, or the testing of the theory, or how it's useful to you and your family, your community. There's something about it that enables you to do better than maybe you thought you ever would. I don't know. Something like that.

Mike Sullivan:

I guess that... I've thought about... I came from a very engaged Catholic family, especially after my father [died]. We'd sit in the last row, get there late, and leave early. Still, the belief system of Catholicism was really kind of this overarching framework from which everything was sort of a result. The one benefit



was there was an order, outside your head, a structure that wasn't part of you, that you are trying to work on. I think, in some ways, that that exercise helped kind of an intellectual development, that opened a person's mind to abstract thinking. At least that's the way I've been trying to think about it. And then that the Bowen theory would be the best description of reality that I inhabit, that I came across. There were earlier theories, I was exposed to, that I found beneficial. There was a sociological theory that was the folk-urban continuum. It looked at that sort of evolution of mentalities from a folk world to an urban world. Marxism was such a dominant characteristic of sociology programs. This was, kind of, a little theory, but it had an evolutionary orientation to it, which I really found fascinating. I was exposed to Buckminster Fuller too, which was more general systems.

Bowen theory provides a really huge framework for thinking, and then just the details. Watching people pursue the details, and put more flesh on the bones, or something, just the contribution people are making, it's pretty remarkable. It's an exciting... It's exciting to see this effort, moving towards science, and how much progress has been made since the '80s, and that meeting where we were called to order. They figure it took, it was 150 years for Darwin's theory to be publicly accepted. We might be ahead of schedule here with Bowen theory.

Andrea Schara:

Well, it took 300 years, or more, for Galileo to be accepted by the Catholic Church. Maybe it was 600. They said it was okay, that the earth was round, and we are not the center of the universe. It depends on the structure of the organization that is required to change, it seems like. Some of them... Psychoanalytic world will still be carrying on, much smaller, but it'll probably still be carrying on in 200 years. Bowen used to say things like, "Well, psychoanalysis is okay, but Bowen theory is twice as fast." Instead of 12 years, you can do it in six.

Mike Sullivan:

There you go.

Andrea Schara:

He had his way of thinking about time without, and just humbly, I think, pointing to the fact that this was a theory, it still needed to be proven, and he's just pointing in a direction, and it'll change, adapt, and become more than it is now. I was thinking about the other song that you were going to, that were going to talk about. Before, when we first got on, you were talking about this other song.

Mike Sullivan:

I've incorporated theory in a number of songs.

Andrea Schara:

This is... Bowen theory to the correct audience, with the right music, might make more sense because it's, truly, just exposing human nature. I have one more story to ask after this one, but...

Mike Sullivan:

I wrote a song called "Average Guy," and the chorus goes, "The squeaky wheel gets the grease, but the shortest snail gets hammered least. Don't even try to wonder why. Just know that I am an average guy." One of the verses is, "I was born the second of three. My mama never could remember me. When I was born, my mama was confused. She said, all the good names already been used. A matter of fact, she was

so perplexed, on my birth certificate, she just marked an X. My sister's named Sarah, my brother's named Jim, but my old man just calls me 'him.'"

Andrea Schara:

That's what I call common sense Bowen theory.

Mike Sullivan:

That's right. "I went to confession, and the priest was tough. He said, 'All your sins boy, are just average stuff. Say three Hail Marys, and the Glory Be,' but the voice came back said, 'God don't remember me.'"

Andrea Schara:

Common sense Bowen theory. He had this way of just exposing how people are. I remember when I came with Dr. Bowen there, and he wanted me to have the room, right above his room, on the next floor up. He wanted... He says something like, "I don't want you staying with these other people because they're too social, and I want to know where you are, in case I need you," kind of thing. It was so funny, but that was common sense. In a way, you don't want people running off, here and there, and elsewhere, if you're trying to count on them.

Mike Sullivan:

One of the touching moments of that experience, for me was when we went to the fish... where the salmon were running. The salmon were all coming back. The final stage in their life was to lay eggs, and then they die. I guess it was just sort of, Dr. Bowen, at that stage, because I think he died just-

Andrea Schara:

Three months?

Mike Sullivan:

...yeah. Two or three, about three months.

Andrea Schara:

Was it in... He died in October, so I know it was, maybe it was August then. I don't know.

Mike Sullivan:

August or September maybe even.

Andrea Schara:

Maybe September. When the salmon run.

Mike Sullivan:

Going back to... They leave their eggs, and the next generation starts.

Andrea Schara:

I guess that's you and me. Now we're leaving eggs ourselves.

Mike Sullivan:

That's right. I hope so. I don't know.

Andrea Schara:

I think Bowen theory as common sense, and as kind of manifesting in your music, it's easier to hear for people, but they know they can't differentiate a self because they're singing a song, or writing a song.

Mike Sullivan:

Well, there's been some moments, with the Chicago group, after their conferences, where I've done a few sing-alongs, and I have some-

Andrea Schara:

Wasn't one about a trailer?

Mike Sullivan:

Yeah.

Andrea Schara:

That was the one I remember from the last time I was there.

Mike Sullivan:

"Double-Wide Love." I lived in a double-wide, so I'm entitled to write that, by the way.

Andrea Schara:

Can you sing a little of that?

Mike Sullivan:

Okay. Let's see. It's sometimes hard for me to recite a song rather than sing it, but let's see.

Andrea Schara:

It was about the ordinary people, and the role between women and men.

Mike Sullivan:

Let's see. I'll have to think about that.

Andrea Schara:

Do whatever song comes to mind.

Mike Sullivan:

Let's see. (singing) "I'm lying on this couch, watching TV, thinking about all the things you could do for me."

Andrea Schara:

That was it.

Mike Sullivan:

(singing) "So why don't you get up

And get me another beer

Oh, it's great having a woman like you living around here!

And while you're at it, get me some potato chips,

You know, the barbecue kind I like so well with a little French onion dip.

And next time you're on the roof, fixing a leak or chopping ice,

If you'd move the TV antennae, now that would be real nice.

After everything's said and done,

You're the best and my favorite one,

And I love you.

Some call it 'symbiotic,' others 'co-dependency,'

But that ain't the way it looks to you, and it ain't the way it feels to me.

Yeah, some call it 'twisted,' I call it 'double-wide love,'

'cause the way we found each other, baby, was guided from above.

You don't say I'm lazy, you don't call me a slob,

Oh, by the way, our checkbook's overdrawn, you better take that second job.

And it ain't true, what that lady said on the phone,

I never had another woman over here when you weren't home."

That song got me on the Jenny Jones show.

Andrea Schara:

Oh, wow.

Mike Sullivan:

I got to perform that in front of, I think they said, a couple million people. It was a primarily, a female audience. At one point in the song, they got up and started booing me, as they encouraged... I have to say, from a performer standpoint, it was the most liberating thing that ever happened. It's like, your fear as a performer, is that the audience will boo you. It was so, over-the-top, that after that, I really never encountered stage fright before a show.

It was... They were... People took it in good humor. I don't know. I worry that song, or the Jenny Jones thing, is on the internet. I'm always worried that I'll be canceled at some point, when this leaks out.

Andrea Schara:

Well, that's a song dedicated to over and under functioning. The part I play in it, whichever under- or over-functioner I am today.

Mike Sullivan:

The interesting thing is the research stuff. The sort of stuff in Irish music too, is that it's very difficult. I have really been unsuccessful in finding an Irish love song in which it's a man and woman, in a harmonious relationship, just living comfortably. The really beautiful love songs, in Irish tradition, the woman gets shot by a bullet, or they're separated by an ocean. If they're together, the songs are generally, what an under-functioner the guy is.

There's a million songs, in the Irish tradition, of what a drunk, poor, slob kind of guy, and what a saint the woman is putting up with him, that type of thing. In Scottish tradition, it's different. There's some great love songs. I guess the songs that are continued in a tradition, I have, resonate with the reality that people experience. So, there you go.

Andrea Schara:

There it is. The reality of Bowen theory is it resonates with people. The way Dr. Bowen talked, you would recognize yourself. You recognize yourself in music, too. I don't know. It's difficult to accept human nature as it is, I think. That's why your music is particularly helpful, maybe to just... "Yeah, that's me."

Mike Sullivan:

Well, I think that's... To me, it'd be one of the... I've not succeeded in this effort, but it's been a longstanding interest, would be, as there's this pursuit of science, is to have a pursuit of art that would be what would Bowen System-influenced art look like, or music and visual art, especially with film because I think a lot of film, Bowen theory, if... I was once invited to speak to the Michigan Romance Novelist Association. They really were aware of triangles in their work, but where theory can be conveyed in an artistic form as well.

Andrea Schara:

I like that. Of course, I'm working on my own art project, a book, a memoir, about being Dr. Bowen's apprentice. I think I'm going to call it, Dr. Murray Bowen's Impact on One Family. It's got some good stuff in it. I'll have to send it to you. I do think, as I said, psychoanalysis, and the individual focus, will probably still be with us in a couple of hundred years, but maybe more and more people will know about Bowen theory, and evolution, and artists. I think artistic communication is fundamental to seeing for yourself, and not learning what you should say. Because even if I sing your song, it's still your song.

Mike Sullivan:

Boy, I hear that a lot.

Andrea Schara:

Well, we're kind of running over time. I don't want to stop talking to you. It's so much fun.

One of the 10 questions was, what do you think about the future for Bowen theory? I do think there is an everyday way that Bowen theory can become more acceptable, and people will be somewhat relieved. Just be able to see, be able to perceive the world around you in a more realistic way. Any last thing you want to put in here?

Mike Sullivan:

As I've thought about societal process, because that's really been an interest of mine, with the court stuff that I've done, it's that there are regressive and progressive forces operating simultaneously. I think, in some regard, what gets amplified would be more the regression than maybe the progression.

That to me has been what the Family Center, and the various centers, around the country... I've been pretty regular in attending the Chicago group because it's close by, and they're great thinkers there. It's just that these beacons of effort in this regard, and the social networks that people are involved with, that begins to spread a way of thinking, the efforts with business and clergy, I don't know if the therapy stuff is as prevalent as it was. It was mostly therapists when I was involved. It seems like, it's other fields in society that are really picking this up. I guess that... To me, I'm hopeful that way, that it's going to take on and keep going.

Andrea Schara:

What would it do Mike? What good would it do, beside being general. We're in a regression. I don't think people would argue about that. We're, from the Pied Piper people... Our brains are set, as Facebook has shown us, to pay more attention to the scandalous, and the absurd, and the threatening, and emotional, highly emotional. Our brains are set to that. What difference could it make?

Mike Sullivan:

I guess it would be, can humans get to the point where they can enjoy having that button pushed without doing anything about it? Get as twitchy as you like, just don't burn the guy's house down next door, that type of thing.

Andrea Schara:

And don't commit suicide just because 5 out of 10 people think you're not like them.

Mike Sullivan:

It's like, how do you make friends out of your reactivity? The idea that... I think it's... To me, Bowen theory can really calm it down. On a personal level, I don't know if it's the function of age and gravity, or Bowen theory, but I certainly don't get as worked up as I did in my younger days. I think it just sort of, you just have a sense of... Maybe it's predictability. I guess it would be forecasting. It's like this, sort of, observing things and patterns, of behavior, just as they are, appreciating them, but not getting too carried away with them, I guess would... I don't know if I can put this very clearly, but the emphasis on observing patterns has been so helpful to me.

Andrea Schara:

I love that. It's about accepting what the reality is... It's a beautiful thing when you can accept where you are in life, what's going on around you, and not get too reactive to it.

I really appreciate the time with you Mike. Carry on with the songs.

Mike Sullivan:

Okay. Let's talk sometime. I'd like to catch up, and hear what your brain's been about. I've been plugging along here in Northern Michigan.

Andrea Schara:

I'll send you the beginning of my book, and see what you think.

Mike Sullivan:

Okay. Yeah. I appreciate that.

Andrea Schara:

Alrighty.

Mike Sullivan:

It was good to see you.

Andrea Schara:

Good to see you too. Good. Great to talk. Bye.

Mike Sullivan:

Bye.