

Interview with Stephanie Ferrera
Conducted by Andrea Schara

June 4th, 2013

For the Murray Bowen Archives Project of Leaders for Tomorrow at History of Science
Division of the National Library of Medicine

Ferrera: (Dr. Bonn) I was- I had finished (inaudible)

Schara: Who- who's the (guy)? For this recording?

Ferrera: Okay.

Schara: I'll say who I am. I'm Andrea Schara, it's (June 4th) 2013.

Ferrera: Oh- okay, I'm Stephanie **Ferrera**. At Sydney Reed's house, talking to Andrea Schara. On June 4th, overlooking a beautiful garden. [Laughter] So, I heard about Bowen Theory by going to a lecture that was given by James Framo. And he had -I think was instrumental in publishing the Anonymous Paper when it was actually the anonymous paper. And he was just talking about it, and with tremendous enthusiasm, so I went and got the book and read the paper, and that was my start, that was the first time I made connection with Dr. Bowen, really, through his ideas and through that Anonymous Paper.

Schara: What year would that have been?

Ferrera: It would have been probably 1976, maybe.

Schara: And were you already a social worker?

Ferrera: I was - I had just finished my Master's degree in '75. And was starting practice, and was attending lectures here and there. It was a time of, high intensity, in retrospect I see now that it was a point where a lot of issues in my family were culminating. And I was attracted to Bowen's ideas, I think, because I heard them as kind of a -a roadmap, to changing, bringing about a change. I-I- when I think about the first - my first response to reading that paper, it was I call it 'magical thinking.'

Schara: [laughter]

Ferrera: And I thought, "He has got some kind of a special way, of going in and transforming a family." He of course, when I go back and look at it, I realize it wasn't a transformation that he pulled off, it was,

Schara: For his self, maybe, it was a transformation.

Ferrera: It was a test of his own ability to take the theory into real life, and see if he could manage himself in a more intense emotional field. But at the time, I thought "He's doing something really magical" and that was what I wanted to be able to do. [Laughter] So, as soon as I could get it together to get out to Georgetown, I had known of it through Carol Moran and I had, four times a year program, and started to go taking the, sometimes flying, sometimes driving. But getting out of Chicago, and away from home. That was really a big -a big piece of what was working well for me. Was that it- it removed me from the emotional field of my life. For a period of time, and put me into an environment where you could think. You could think in the training program.

And, the lucky part, for me, was the timing, which in the late seventies, '78 to '80, were my two years in the formal program. After that, I continued to get back to conferences and meetings. But those were the two years in which were kind of Bowen at his prime, in those years. That was- his health was still robust, and before he became more frail after he had those surgeries. So, it was a start, but it wasn't, -I did not think in terms of science that much. I was more in terms of how do- how do these family dynamics work and what can I use, to bring about change in my own family. And then of course I was getting into my career as a social worker. And I was going to be able to obviously apply it there.

Schara: So it was still a little bit magical?

Ferrera: Yeah, and I was, yeah,

Schara: [laughter] (With) lots of new grease, for the pig.

Ferrera: I remember trying to organize a little study group, I was working in the Illinois State Psychiatric Institute, is the -which is part of the Illinois Department of Mental Health. And it's now closed, but at one time, actually Dr. Bowen thought about going there. He thought about taking charge of a unit at that hospital, it of course, it wound up he went to NIMH. But, I think he actually considered that, for- at one point.

Schara: What's the name of it again?

Ferrera: ISPI, Illinois State Psychiatric Institute. And, it was kind of a very special hospital where there would be invited psychiatrists; one was -trying to think about the name of the woman who was such a specialist in working with eating disorders and- in-

Schara: Was it Froma Walsh, was it?

Ferrera: Not Froma Walsh, no. I'll think of her name. But there were people who had important reputations in the field. Fritz Midelfort was one. He actually was a contemporary of Dr. Bowen's, and Fritz Midelfort was up in Wisconsin, and he would come down and consult at ISPI. He had some interesting ideas about hospitalizing families with patients both for physical and emotional illnesses. I think it really took quite

a while for the idea to sink in that there was more involved here than family. That Dr. Bowen was really going for something bigger. And it was a science of human behavior.

And, it was important to start learning some science, and reading- I started to read E.O. Wilson, and a number of the writers, which I've continued to do through the years, trying to self-educate. [Laughter] And, ask Dr. Bowen for some guidance, and he thought Wilson was a good one to [laughter]. I've been very curious, myself, about where -where Dr. Bowen really was with evolutionary theory, because there's very little mention of it in his book.

Schara: Right.

Ferrera: Very little. He -that was one of my realizations, is that he did not get into the detail of evolutionary theory. It was, the idea of the human as a product of evolution, the continuity with other species, the emotional system being what we have in common, the instinctual, he used the word 'instinct' a lot, he used the word 'symbiosis.' But, interestingly, he didn't look at- it didn't look to me like he was and- he talked in one part of his book he talks about- or no, I think it's in that paper, on -the paper on the Homo sapiens science, and I forget the subjectivity or something.

He says he read more Darwin than he read Freud. But, over the time that I've been, getting more serious about the science, the commitment to taking that on as a subject, first of all, when you look into some of the literature, you find out that in neuroscience, it took a while before you could even get funding for research on emotion. Emotion was considered too nebulous, or too- not- not a quantifiable, not a thing that you could study. I think Ledoux commented that if you wrote a grant, use the word 'cognitive,' don't use the word 'emotional.' [Laughter] It won't get funded if you talk about emotion! And Panksepp became the -kind of the, the flag bearer, for the idea that you could study emotion in the brain, and so the idea that you could study, not only could study emotion, but you could study it in probably the most complex arena, which would be the human family.

Just the idea that you could take on something that complex, and study it scientifically. Just really impresses me, the more I think of it I think, how do you get the courage, in a field that is saying it can't be done. How do you make up your mind that you're going to find a way to study this complex organism? And then how do you set it up so that you can do it?

And I just think a lot about now, about what the process and the thought process that Dr. Bowen went through. And that he hid the early hypothesis, about mother- child, that you had to at least look at the mother-child unit, in order to get a handle on schizophrenia. And then of course, that was his starting point, and then he built and it turned out to be the whole family as a unit. But, it also- now there's this new book out, on the research at the NIMH.

Schara: by Jack Butler.

Ferrera: Yeah, I'm- I'm looking at that, now and I'm realizing what Dr. Bowen had to - how he had to align the stars in such a way, that he could even have a shot at doing what he wanted to do.

Schara: Yeah.

Ferrera: And, one of the things I-I go back to in a conversation I had with my son, the scientist, and there- this was back when I was all excited about theory. And I said, "Vince, don't you think theory is the engine that drives science?" [Laughter] Without hesitation, and in a most emphatic way, he said right back to me, he said, "No. Data is the engine that drives science." And, on just that conversation, that little statement, data is the engine that drives science, and it got me thinking a lot about the relationship between data and theory.

And that, if you are attached to theory- Paul MacLean writes about how scientists become attached to theories and their founders. And their founders. And that science progresses one funeral at a time, which is his way of saying, you become emotionally attached to a certain way of thinking, and paradigm, and you then are in a position where everything fits into that. You- the data gets fit into the theory. And what I think is really amazing about Bowen, is that he seemed to have- well, he not only seemed to, he actually had that respect for data, and he talked so often about the importance of facts. Get objective, get facts.

And so, how do you- how did he go about getting the facts about something as complex as the human- the relationships in a family. And, so, there was -there seems to me a tremendous amount of discipline and careful planning, to set up that project. So that he would have a field of observation. And he would try to look at it as objectively as he could, he would eliminate the diagnostic language, and he didn't have very many preconceived notions. He didn't make interpretations. He just was looking to see and describe as accurately as he could. What he was seeing.

And that I like very much to go back to read those chapters and look at the- what he says about the floodgate opening, the data coming at him faster than he could even capture it. And that it was data, data, data that was coming out of this project. What he was seeing. And, and he, the theory rose out of the data. I love that idea. That you don't come with a preconceived and fit, try to bend the theory of mis-seeing parts of it, that don't fit. You look at the data. As- as clearly as you can. And then, from the data, you derive the hypothesis. And you test it. And you go back, and you modify it. And the theory develops from the data. And then, fi- following that, the therapy develops from the theory.

Schara: Yeah, I hear you. (Inaudible)

Ferrera: That's the order of the thinking.

Schara: Is his ability to observe. Tremendous. And, I think that part of that might have been living in a small town, and being able- his position, and his family, where he could see the other families, and his own family, and then of course, no one can see

completely without prejudice, because you've already learned, in his case, psychoanalysis.

Ferrera: Yeah. Yes.

Schara: But I do remember, when he was young he wanted- he told me he wanted to be in the row of kings. He wanted to really make a difference, and at first, he thought he could make a difference by doing this artificial heart. And then when he went in the Second World War, he thought the problem was not physical problems. It's emotional. It's mental problems.

And that's when he decided to go into that, but he, in reading Freud, he couldn't see how you could ever make a science out of -even though, a lot of people do believe that Freud in his psychology of science, that little booklet, maybe it's 86 pages, that book, but the psych- the scien- I've forgotten exactly the name of it, but it's a small little book that people at- even today, are quite taken with Freud's ability, also, to see the in- the trouble with instincts.

And I used to challenge Bowen, cause he would say stuff like, "Freud never read Darwin." And I would bring in all my Freud books and say, "Well he did. Look (he) footnoted all over here." And he'd say, "He didn't read him the way I did." Didn't read him the way he should've. But he still saw it as I think, man within himself, the problem lies in your own head, in your own brain, and he couldn't see the way evolution points you to see the animals in their social group, and how the social group influences them. That's what Freud missed. He saw it only as a movie that was (inaudible)

Ferrera: Well, he- he was going into the intrapsychic world. Which in itself is complex enough!

Schara: Into- And then I think the things he -these are things that I remember him saying, when he was at Menninger's he would believe that so-and-so was not a good person, because X, Y, and Z people had said so-and-so wasn't a good person. And he'd get about a hundred miles away from Menninger's and then he'd think, "Well, so-and-so's not so bad!" [Laughter]

Ferrera: [laughter]

Schara: And he began to doubt the beliefs of the group. And I always think that's a huge beginning, of the recognition- that- yeah

Ferrera: Yeah, the- the (self) observation, looking at how his thinking changed when he's gone into the different environment.

Schara: And that how- how- what a difference that made, but just to realize that you're being influenced by the environment. And that you have observational blindness, based on what you're supposed to see. And that when he began to talk about what he saw, Carl Menninger didn't like it. And when he tried to leave the Menninger Institute, he got like a lump in his chest, and he wasn't ready to leave.

He couldn't- couldn't separate out, without paying a tremendous price for doing it. So, I think, a lot of -I wonder, again, how much of his ability to see a different way came out of his own ability to see how he was caught. In relationships. Both in his family and - and then he had this

Ferrera: Yeah, I saw that.

Schara: little cottage, I guess, on the grounds at the Menninger. I don't know if you read about that. Where he would invite the

Ferrera: Oh really? No, I didn't.

Schara: families to come and help take care of these people. A little bit like the person you mentioned here that would hospitalize- yeah. Fritz, or- Fritz.

Ferrera: Oh, like Chris Midelfort? Fritz. Well, his name was Christian, and M-I-D-D-L-E-F-O-R-T.

Schara: Okay, Christian Midelfort.

Ferrera: Very interesting man, another -another kind of pioneer, very early pioneer, in using families. But he used families to come in and take care of hospitalized patients.

Schara: Well, I know this actually went but not that they observed what the families did with them, and how -whether they got overinvolved or underinvolved or level of fusion, that happens. I don't think these guys had any knowledge of that. But, I know it went all-like, to Norway.

You might remember that tape I did with (Gudren). But she had a -what they have is a system of sending people. You can live at home and they send people. To observe you, and see how you-whether you can make sandwiches, or dress yourself, what level-

Ferrera: Oh really? Well, Midelfort was a product of the Lutheran Norwegian community in Wisconsin. And he- one of his observations was that in that community, produced particular kinds of symptoms. A lot of physical illness and surgeries. Whereas, the more urban communities, where the -there was a higher degree of cutoff, produced more of the social and emotional type symptoms.

Schara: Did he call it cutoff?

Ferrera: He didn't call it cutoff, I think he just said he would come down to Chicago and he'd kind of compare Chicago. And, the Norwegian community was- there was a lot- there was intermarriage, it was very tightknit and bound by tradition. More, and I think people have -they have created a certain difficulty for anyone to do- to separate out and differentiate. Whereas, whereas the urban communities were more hectic and - I'd have to go back and look at his articles, and what did he actually write. But I remember

having several conversations with him, and -and he and Dr. Bowen knew each other but I don't know that they had an important relationship.

Schara: That they read each other's ideas. So, the-

Ferrera: Yeah.

Schara: When you first started hearing Dr. Bowen, and thinking about it, how much of it was important to you in terms of your own life, and how much was attracted about "I can change my life here", and how much was, "Wow, this is a whole new scientific worldview!" Were they evenly matched, o-

Ferrera: Oh, I-I started out very much with the personal agenda. And, the period of time that I was going to Georgetown was -things were pretty, - marriage was really falling apart. I didn't recognize it, at that time, but it became clear after another couple of years, and wound up separating and my sister had been diagnosed with multiple sclerosis, I was pulled in a number of different directions trying to cover too many bases. Some - and six kids, and my mother -my mother's had a very large I made a lot of space for my mother. She was real important in my life. And after my father died I was kind of, I think, her main support. She was heart-broken, and we were both about my sister, my sister's illness, and increasing disability, and all that was going on at the time that I was going, making those trips to Washington. And so I was constantly looking for any ideas I could use. And, try-

Schara: What did you use? [Laughter]

Ferrera: I think I got the idea of overfunctioning, [it] was powerful. It takes a while, I think, to really get to grasp what that means. And, and you kind of, you see it, you kind of go through stages of seeing it more and more clearly! But the idea that -that helping wasn't always helpful. And that I-I came to realize, I kind of could see, where my emotional profile as an oldest daughter, all the fact that when my parents married, my mother came -left her family behind in New York, in 1926. And, came to Chicago for one person. And that one person had to provide whatever she was leaving behind! You know, make up for it! Which he could try to do. But had she been raising her family in proximity to her people, we would have been a different family. But she wasn't. She had come to Chicago to be with my dad, and they had, all together they had eight children, plus a miscarriage. Only four of the children made it to adult life, they lost four in childhood.

So, there were- there were plenty of events and losses. And, I think coming into that family as their first daughter, I-I think I became overly important to my mother. I felt that a lot growing up. That I was just too important. That what was most important to my dad was, "Help your mother."

Schara: [laughter]

Ferrera: And he was -he was very sensitive to her anxiety. And, he tended to relate to the kids in terms of, "Are you upsetting your mother?" [Laughter] Cause that of course, would be upsetting him!

Schara: So you saw the flow of-

Ferrera: All of the theory helped me begin to put all these pieces together. And to see how it made sense, that I would be as responsive as I was, to have people coming to me and every member of the family would kind of turn to me, and their- whatever their problems were. And I would just, not stop and think whether I should get involved, I'd always jump in to it! [Laughter]

And that was one of the, I don't know if you knew- oh, of course you did, you were there for that, that tape- that (Bowen) made with me and Sal. Of course, Sal pointed out that I was kind of all over the place, with all these missions for mom, and all the stuff with my family, and that was part of what put a strain on our relationship. But, so, so I would say, yes it was a long time from the time I started the postgraduate in 1978 to the time I got enough of an understanding to go to be able to start seeing the- being interested in the theory itself, and in the science of it. Was probably several years. I was much more of a personal agenda. What I did, can I try out, I was constantly, trying to -concerned about my sister's caretaking, the way they made the decisions, the amount of pressure I felt to be doing more nursing care than I really could afford to do. And, how to- how to deal with all of that. So, the application there was my- my main agenda. For quite a long time.

Schara: What made it shift, do you think? That you were freer, somehow, to focus on science?

Ferrera: Yeah, yeah. I think- well, certainly in the last ten or fifteen years- as I -got into it I did start to do some writing, and writing helped me. I started to get into the literature, and put ideas together and do some writing which really helped me think. I think there's a definite connection between writing and thinking. Writing pushes you to get more clear in your ideas.

Schara: So that'd be '98, sometime like that?

Ferrera: Well, the -let's see. I had a paper in the first issue of The Family Systems Journal. I had published a couple things before that. And, and then I

Schara: That could have been '93, though, or '92, or-

Ferrera: That issue came out in '94. I had presented the paper at Georgetown.

Schara: '94?

Ferrera: In- well, Dr. Bowen was still living. Actually, I presented papers at several of the symposia that he attended. So that would be in the '80s, actually. So writing and researching, figuring out connections between some of the science I was reading. Got me -got me more-I just find I kind of reclaimed my intellectual life which had been sort of buried, for years. [Laughter] Truly, when you have a lot of children you don't do a lot of reading and thinking about, [Laughter], abstract thoughts! [Laughter]

Schara: Exactly. [laughter] There's- there's real life, and then there's time to think. The pressures of real life. So, you- how does that coordinate like, with your youngest child going to college, or leaving home, or that time frame?

Ferrera: Well, my youngest child was still pretty young, when I started. She was born in -well, she would have been about ten, when I started the learning the theory. Or even younger. So, I still had children at home and a lot of family responsibilities when I started. As the kids have gotten older and I've had more free time, I've

Schara: But by- by 9- so, if that child was ten when you started say, in '78, the child's close to thirty or so, when you're really starting to have the time and space to get into writing.

Ferrera: Yes. Well, I'm still very active in my family and balancing that with - but, I think you can do a lot of other things and still be thinking. If you're reading, you're thinking. And you could be washing the dishes and thinking and so I just- I really tu- I've, like most of us, stacks of books, and go to the meetings, and find out about new things to read, and keep working at it.

I think the limited contact I had personally with Dr. Bowen was always encouraging. He had a way of making one sentence comments that would just stay with you. And just evoke a lot of thinking. And I'll give you one example. It was at a meeting in Chicago and we were at lunch. I was explaining about how my sister's kids and my kids -our kids are all the same ages. Two of them are, one of hers and one of mine was graduating from I think, maybe eighth grade. And, had told her that he didn't want her to come. Her kids got pretty hostile to her. Her younger kids cause they were born into caretaking. They were drafted or recruited into doing a fair amount of care, coming home from school, and she would need things, and anyway, at that point her son was hostile, and so I had felt badly of course that she had that to deal with, and had encouraged her to come to one of my graduations. [Laughter] Well, Dr. Bowen was sitting there eating his lunch, saying nothing and then he pipes up, "Well tell her she can come, but it doesn't make up for anything!"

Schara: [laughter]

Ferrera: [laughter]

Schara: She still got blackmailed by her son, and bullied!

Ferrera: Well, it just really stayed with me. I thought, (I don't know) how to put this, What do you mean by that "it doesn't make up for anything". And he was right on target, but I mean, he just could zone in on exactly where you were, emotionally. And of course, I was trying to make it up to her.

Schara: Exactly. And all that compensation. I was thinking earlier, and how did Dr. Bowen have that ability, to just kind of titrate emotion? And that he may have had the ability and maybe someday it'll be more clear to actually penetrate what the level of fusion is in the family. And where people are caught in it. And that if we were good enough observers we could do that too. That

Ferrera: He was- I don't know if there could ever be a match for him, as far as his ability to observe and that discipline that he had for being able to stay objective, in an emotional field.

Schara: Do you think that's part of what he taught everybody, though, that ability, to -I don't know.

Ferrera: Well, I think he practiced. I think he practiced and he modeled it. I think people try to some extent, to imitate it.

Schara: It's not doing it.

Ferrera: Which isn't really doing it. But [laughter]

Schara: But can it be taught? Can people be taught to be better observers, be less reactive and see this process, this

Ferrera: Well, his comments would capture where you were emotionally. He would say, he would start a sentence by saying, "Oh that assumes that..." He would pick up on what your assumptions were. Behind what you were saying. And he just had -I guess it came out of the years of research at the ability to pick up the emotional process. And the way people- comments that people made-would be showing their biases and their assumptions that was behind the thinking. That they hadn't even identified. When he said, "Tell her she can come, but it doesn't make up for anything" I don't [laughter] he wasn't actually suggesting that I say that to my sister, I don't think. I think he was saying it for my sake, to help me recognize what I was doing.

Schara: Well, either one is good, I- the biases and assumptions that I wonder how much of that is in psychoanalysis, too, that I think he wrote somewhere, that the scale of differentiation would be each person has a symbiotic attachment, which is the transference. And that this goes up and down a scale. And that you could know more about the symbiotic way in which you were attached to people. And therefore you live this out in the way you deal with them and in order to keep these relationships the same, keep them going. And, I don't know if you remember he made this tape, I think it might be called Emotional Detachment, And he talked about how he "I would get in my

car, and leave Menninger's, and go so far away that I'd realize that all the things that were said about so-and-so weren't true."

Ferrera: Oh, right. Right.

Schara: "And then two days later I'd go back, I'd be pretty neutral, and then two days later I'd be back believing what the group believed, about so-and-so- and so-and-so."

Ferrera: That was a key - that seemed to me to be a very key experience for him."

Schara: That was a key moment.

Ferrera: Was that ability to see his, his own thinking, shift, as he made connections with certain people and see the influence that people had on him.

Schara: But if you take that into the transference, that's really what you see in a relationship.

Ferrera: Yeah, so he had- he had practiced it as an analyst.

Schara: To see, to look at those underlying biases, and what position the client, if you will, puts you in, when they do certain things to make you feel sorry for them and then you fall into that pitiful trap and do feel sorry for them and try to help them and

Ferrera: Well, I think, too, things that I would have thought were very positive things, like family harmony, empathy, forget it! [Laughter] Those are your biases!

Schara: [laughter] You're in the togetherness. [Laughter]

Ferrera: Those aren't necessarily that positive. Those could be the source of a lot of problems (inaudible).

Unknown Speaker Are y'all still talking?

Schara: Oh yes, we are. [Laughter] We're- we think it's fun, actually. [Laughter] So far, it's fun.

Ferrera: I do!

Unknown Speaker Different strokes for different folks!

Ferrera: Yeah, I think he jarred my thinking many times. And, I'm sure did it all the time with people. You kind of -it'd take you a little time to recover. But I, at one time I asked him, I was so impressed with the concept of triangles, and I thought, "I wonder how he ever figured that out." And I asked him. He said one sentence,

Schara: It is a clinical fact. [Laughter]

Ferrera: "It is a clinical fact." [Laughter]

Schara: Well, yeah.

Ferrera: (Which I have) discovered. [Laughter]

Schara: It is an amazing thing to -and I guess, when you- when you just- when you try to back up and analyze the side-taking, which probably is the most common thing that goes on in all clinical work, is that they're set out, I think, to get you on their side immediately. And to tell you how those horrible awful other people who somehow have only done (inaudible) And I guess if you listen to that long enough you might come to that conclusion, but you wonder, and he did say, and I don't- I can't remember looking back over at the, the history of the term he used initially - triad. And other people used triad, I don't know if that was a part of -because I know he did a differentiated family ego mass and Lyman, who's at NIH, did the rubber walls, and stuff like that. That- Yeah, to des-

Ferrera: Define language to - describe what the emotional system was.

Schara: And these early guys were using some of these terms that were different than psychoanalytic terms, to describe relationship process. I don't know. I haven't gotten the whole (inaudible)

Ferrera: I have the feeling that as Bowen was reading biology, that the part that he related to most was the literature on symbiosis. And because he actually adopt-adapted that term, he took- he wanted to take things from biology, which he did, as much as he could. Took triangle, symbiosis, I'm just getting into the literature on that now. And how helpful that concept is. To understanding functional interdependence. That the- the symbionts are all a unit- you create- they are a unit, there's a -a new paper I'm watching for coming out in Quarterly Review of Biology, I think Biology, Jan Sapp, we're going to invite - I think Bob has agreed to invite Jan Sapp to our next

Schara: S-A-P-P?

Ferrera: S-A-P-P. He's in Toronto at York University, Jan Sapp. I have one of his books, and I want to get more into him. He was an associate of Lynn Margulis. And, I want- his book title is *Evolution by Association*. And I think that in his new paper, he's saying, we were never individuals. He's really more into that way of thinking. Of the organism as so func- even though humans, we have a sense of being separate and we live in separate bodies, but we're- the functional interdependence is-is to me, probably, Bowen would have been in tune with the literature on symbiosis. To have -that- that would have been helpful. Maybe more helpful to him than some of the literature in evolutionary theory.

Schara: Well, if you reconstruct a little bit on what he said to you, which was "It's a clinical fact." That people come in, and they want to fuse with (him), they want to get into this side taking. Immediately, two against one. And that you can see that in almost every family, where either the wife is protecting the child, the husband's protecting the wife, but there are two aligned in, and the other people are the ones that get the symptoms. [Laughter] And, and you can see that side taking and the fusion and the confusion that would exist in the clinical world. I mean, I could see that easily. And I think the other story that I remember in his talking about the early days was he had gotten the parents to say they would come and see these children who they hadn't seen for many years. And he's walking across the quadrangle with this kid, who's now in his thirties, hasn't seen his parents for ten or fifteen years, when they get about halfway across the kid reaches in and pulls something out, and said, "Dr. Bowen, I have a gift for you." And he looks down there, the kid opens his hand. And there's something that looks like a cigar in there. But he knows it's not a cigar. And he put the hand back together,

Ferrera: [laughter]

Schara: And he said, "That was the beginning of family therapy."

Ferrera: [laughter]

Schara: [laughter] You take your stuff and you give it back to your parents and you don't get rid of it or transfer it.

Ferrera: Yeah, right [laughter]

Schara: And I always liked that, because I think it showed the attempt to make a side, to make that triangle work, and to get the parents to be left out of the closeness, and the clinician -the coach refuses, and the person has to work out- he said many times, "Put the schizophrenic back into the family and let the family work it out."

Ferrera: Yeah, yeah.

Schara: And, so once you get- once you could see that clinically then when you went to look for what is this side-taking all about, maybe that's how you end up, and I'm just making a conjecture here, but part of the questioning here is, what are your hypotheses about theory and how Bowen came to his research methods? How he began to understand and see these things.

Ferrera: Well, I think he - it would - very ingenious that he was able to actually create that project and deal with the funding and the hospital system and getting that unit running the way he wanted, dealing with the staff. He writes a lot about what it took to deal with the staff, who were having their own reactivity, and to set something like that up so you could say, here is this system that's a living organism. And it operates as a system.

And I'm going to just position myself to be an observer of this. And, after five years, of what he took in from let the family teach you how it works, and don't have too many pre-conceived ideas, to me, that was being the essence of a good scientist - to be able to do that. Only most scientists take much simpler organisms! [Laughter]

Schara: Well, I love this evolution by association, because I do think that when you really are objective about a family, that's what you do see, that they're wedded to this giving and taking and borrowing and lending and side-taking and scapegoating. It's- they're wedded to it, and it's -I know in the tape that I presented about my brother the other - it took his wife two years to be able to not be so involved in being my brother's brain! [Laughter] And to say, "Well, Drew, I've packed the car up, I'm going to sit out here. If you want to watch Matlock, you go right ahead." And when we get up there and we're a little late, then you can explain to your sister why we're late. And you take the consequences." And that took two years, to get that much out of telling him what to do.

And I see that in myself, my grandkids don't do the right thing, I'm like [clapping] get over there, and finish your homework, and all that. And you just like, why am I doing that? Well, symbiosis.

Ferrera: Yeah, right. God, you can't - well, the-

Schara: That over functioning involvement.

Ferrera: To tolerate the idea of your kid actually having the consequences that will come, if they do certain things, I mean parents are constantly anticipating what'll happen and I have to save it because I can't let that happen. I mean it's-

Schara: Well, it's, again, the next book, if I, if I write a book about all of this, I was thinking of a title for it, seeing that-

Ferrera: I was interested in the project, tell me more about this

Schara: Well, the main- the thing it started with basically, was I thought a lot of people are getting older. And I would like to collect their stories about Dr. Bowen. And, because I think there are ways that he operated with me that encouraged me to learn. And I think he did that with other people. And at first, I was going to call it Interrupting, because I think a lot of what he did was to interrupt this symbiosis. Or the family emotional process, with these things like he did with you. And he didn't really care in the caring sense of the word, care, about- he was just interested. He was setting up little experiments all the time to see whether you would rise up or fall down. What was going to happen? But I think he was terribly interested in interrupting.

Ferrera: Yeah, yeah. [Laughter]

Schara: After the first research project where he did just observe for a long time, but all the time that I knew him he observed and he interrupted. The first time I went to Richmond, to the MCV project, which was what it was called then, the clinical conference later, he took me by the hand, he said, "See that couple over there? Tell me who's in charge?" And the wife's grabbing the husband's arm and taking him away from the group and I said, "Well, the wife." The stuff like that, that just makes a lasting impression.

Ferrera: Well, his- the way he could ask a question, is how does he get you to do this, or -

Schara: Yeah, right, exactly.

Ferrera: Keeping (inaudible) in the (inaudible) position.

Schara: [laughter] Yes that was a brilliant one.

Ferrera: That was. But throughout the interviews, you see those kinds of questions.

Schara: So that's what got me interested in this project, was I wanted to know how he did it with other people, what they got out of it, why have people stuck with this theory for so long? He's been dead since 1990. And with the archives going to NIH, I think it makes a well-rounded picture, to have other people's viewpoint not just the letters he wrote.

Ferrera: It is. The timing is good for it, too.

Schara: But how he interacted with his own community, and what happened as a function of his interaction with people. That's what I wanted to get to. And,

Ferrera: How did you put together your list of interviewees, or-

Schara: Just people who knew Bowen and were influenced by him. And then, just, I tried doing it with Priscilla, I asked her, and Kathy Wiseman, and, I asked the people- Joanne Bowen and other people who do you know that you think we should (inaudible). And, so but there's a-

Ferrera: Are you doing it on your own then, Andrea, or?

Schara: I started out doing it on my own, just like every organization, there's so many rules and I said there's forty people I want to interview, I don't have enough time in my life to wait for the committee and you guys can decide what you're going to do. And so, actually, as usual I didn't bring the forms with me that they gave me to give out! That-

Ferrera: Are others doing interviews?

Schara: Priscilla, and Kathy Wiseman, and Frank -I don't know if you know Frank or not, but he's helped me a lot with all the audio, taping and stuff, he interviewed Mike Kerr, for a couple of hours, so- I wanted somebody neutral, outside the group.

Ferrera: Oh, good, good.

Schara: To interview him. Frank Gregorsky did that. Victoria sort of wanted to, now I think Randy Krayble and Pam Allen are going to interview the people in Kansas,

Ferrera: But boy, what then? That's a huge amount of interviews and then how are you going to put it together?

Schara: It's a huge amount of interviews. Well, I don't know. I mostly am thinking it's going to go to the National Library of Medicine. It's all going to be on a tiny little hard drive and somebody can look at it later if I can't.

Ferrera: I see. Okay.

Schara: But if I can figure out, what I'm saying is, what did Bowen do, how do you encourage people to think for themselves, and to get out of the togetherness? Just take little stories from people. But I think it would make an interesting book, to do it. So, as part of this, the Leaders for Tomorrow, is supposed to give everyone a transcript. Of this interview. Supposed to be transcribed. Now, that could take forever.

Ferrera: Oh, really? Yeah, that's pretty ambitious. [Laughter]

Schara: Extremely ambitious. And I just wanted to give everybody a CD, which I'll do. That's easier! Than to transcribe it. But if you transcribe it, then it's easier to make a book out of it. And then maybe then they could give them to people for a donation.

Ferrera: It's a cumulative body of reflections and memories, and people's own descriptions of the relationship they had and what it -how it impacted them. That putting all that together would make a wonderful -if there's some way to take it and organize and streamline it a bit, and

Schara: So that-it would take- it would take a lot of work to do, but I think it's an important and somebody will do it. I might start and do five of the interviews, or ten, or fifteen maybe, who knows, but some of them are so good, there are just so many of them that touch on things that I think are -and the other thing I think about it is that Roberta Gilbert was saying this to me, like we can prove Bowen Theory by showing all the work we have done with our clients. And that's like, well, why should we write up all the work we've done with our clients, why not write up all the work you've done with really advanced thinking people? And just take it out of the clinical world into the world of knowledge? So that's sort of my thoughts about it.

Ferrera: Yes, I've heard Roberta, she suggested that idea. And we even talked about it, at CFC, it would be a monumental project, to put together.

Schara: It would be a monumental project.

Ferrera: A lot of clinical experience, from people's practices -.

Schara: So I'd rather do all of people's experiences that have known Bowen, that's just what I'm doing. Or that's what, and who knows, how far I'll get with it. But that certainly in listening to every person you see this evolution by association, over and over, the functional interdependency, the brilliance of the triangle and how he detriangled. I mean, that is like amazing. Laurie Lassiter in particular, who has those tapes of her interviews with Dr. Bowen. And he coaching her, to interrupt in an emotional process. Those are amazing.

Ferrera: Yes, it's - I've never felt like I got a whole lot of mastery, clinically. I think [that] maybe I'd had more success in my applying it in my personal life. [Laughter] I don't know so much about clients. I think it takes -there's only a small percentage of people who come in initially, and so many times it's because of they're so anxious or they're in crisis. And only a small percentage who get serious about doing any real work. But, so it's a lot of what you gain is really for yourself. For your own life. I think I've mentioned to you about my little current project of my grandson living with me. And so this morning, after going through this weekend of "I shouldn't have to do this history project they're just testing us for conformity, I've already learned, I shouldn't have to show it in writing or anything." And he goes into his diatribes about [it]; he turns it into a justice issue! [Laughter]

Schara: Sounds so familiar.

Ferrera: And of course I'm thinking to myself, "Well, okay, if you blow off class, you don't get the credit for the course, you probably won't graduate on time with your class, and looking down the road, and [phone rings] but I was able to kind of just have conversations with him. And not get into any kind of authoritarian -authoritarianism is a total turn-off. And, so last night and this morning, he's sitting at the computer he's doing the project. [Laughter]

Schara: [laughter] I think that's huge, to get out of the symbiosis. Which I think-controlling others is a function of symbiosis.

Ferrera: It's constantly watching myself. I'm- it's- it's so much more managing self. Not the other. As soon as you try to manage the other you're sunk.

Schara: You're sunk in the symbiosis!

Ferrera: And, for years and years, I used to think and think and think, how to I get so-and-so to do such-and-such? That was so automatic for me! Always trying to figure out how to get somebody to do some-

Schara: Well, if you took that thought and just thought about the Western scientific worldview, which is a cause-and-effect worldview, "How do I get somebody..." and you work with people who are talking about the war in Ireland and the peace process there, and how they were able to get out of trying to force the other one to give them something, or do something for them.

Ferrera: Yeah, well that was- I love that discovering that book, on that subject and the beautiful analysis that they did, of the triangle between the three - the triangle of three, of England and the two

Schara: England, Sp- (northern, southern)

Ferrera: sides of the Northern Ireland dispute was a beautiful analysis. And that was- that came about through Mulvihill, who was a- I never got to meet the man in person, cause he cancelled out of being in that societal conference, but he I think learned about Bowen through Ted Beal. And, Ted Beal has had a great interest in looking at the societal level. And, some wonderful- I think he's written some wonderful stuff. He taught it to Mulvihill, and Mulvihill worked with Farin, who was a Northern Ireland politician. And the book is full of all kinds of theoretical analysis, but they say of all the different explanations they considered, this was the one that really did it. This is the one that really told what- you had to have the shift in the triangle. Before the two sides could work out their differences.

Schara: Isn't that amazing? I mean-

Ferrera: It is! I think it's an amazing study, and I don't know how well-known it is or ever will be. And I looked up on Amazon, there's just hundreds and hundreds of books on Northern Ireland. There was a great deal written about it. And of course, Gerry Adams is a prolific writer, and lots and lots of people have looked at that and written about it, and continue. But that one book, that brought emotional process into it. And I'm very excited about the idea of the emo- the societal level. I feel like that is where the real payoffs could come. That if this theory, and I love to see that Pat Comella's kind of really running with the ball on that, she's -are you interviewing her? She should be interviewed. Oh definitely.

Schara: Yes, she should be interviewed. She -I've tried to think, I think Priscilla has her on her list. But I'm going to see her and I might actually do it myself, in June, June 17th, 18th, I'm going to be in Williamsburg for a week, and so I might -I'm going to try to interview she and maybe even Joanne, some of the other people that are there, Catherine Rakow, and -I'm going to be there and I've got my tape recorder and I might as well get it while I can. Yes, and Pat would be a great one. But it's-it's-it's-

Ferrera: Yes, well she's got that kind of a trained mind as an attorney, and the years that she's been in the State Department, talk about complex emotional process. She's just the ideal person, I think, to be able to move that concept forward.

Schara: Did you read her article that was in Victoria's journal?

Ferrera: Oh, I'm just blown away by what she's writing. Absolutely. It's brilliant. That last piece she wrote was just - yes, so good.

Schara: For Victoria?

Ferrera: How she's beginning to look at the public policy issues. Oh, what a difference it could make. Wow. Yes. I - that again, I mean, that's a whole other side of Bowen. That he took that on in the 70s to start writing about society. [Laughter]

Schara: He had grandsons too. [Laughter] Yes. But it's amazing when you see that the way you managed yourself with your grandson there has implications for society. [Laughter]

Ferrera: [laughter]

Schara: And that's the sweep of it. The-

Ferrera: Yes. Well, it's so radically different from growing up. My family was quite authoritarian. My father had quite an- could have an explosive temper. And become very punitive. My brothers had the hard- the worst -the worst side of that was with my brothers, but force, you must do, and there- it was pure force. Is how you get people to do what you think they need to do. Well, that's an option.

Schara: That's a fusion option.

Ferrera: [laughter] That's an option, but it has its price to be paid, you have force, the use of force.

Schara: Yes, controlling others is, of course I grew up in the south, and that was the way that you also made - did it in sort of a Steel Magnolias, that's what we used to call the sort of, more forceful women, and more distant husbands, perhaps, in the south. But, tremendous cruelty in the South. I don't know if you've read The Better Angels of our Nature by Steven Pinker, but that just

Ferrera: No, no. I've read about it.

Schara: fabulous book, that I think you'd probably enjoy. It's also at your local library on CDs if you drive around and listen to CDs, but his remarkable tracking of the decrease in aggression and violence and the valuing of human life. And that those- those two things have gone together.

Ferrera: Does he think it's worldwide? Or does he feel that-

Schara: It's worldwide, the decrease in - well you think back to the 17th century, which was only three hundred years ago. [Laughter] It's not that long ago. And, slavery was everywhere, I've forgotten, but the cruelty- of slavery was- And-

Ferrera: Yes, slavery's been a big part of human history.

Schara: And, I think maybe the last country to get rid of slavery might have been in the 80s, 1980s. But so African countries and Muslim countries, I think, might have still had slavery until like in the 90s, like five different countries. I can't remember which they were.

Ferrera: Well, I think we have different forms of it going on right now.

Schara: But, not legalized slavery, is a different thing of course. To regard other humans as-

Ferrera: Well, I don't know, some of the factories, some of the indentured servitude that I think goes on with totally unfair labor practices.

Schara: Right, so now it's under the table, but in the South, it was legal. And, this guy makes a sort of an interesting thing of where you had in the North more reliance on- what did Hobbes call the government? The Leviathan. Leviathan. The government. The controlling emperor, the controlling person who said, "You know what? We're not going to war anymore, because I don't want to lose all my slaves." [Laughter] So that he kind of documents- I was kind of relating to the- why the fathers were still controlling people and then control has been seen over the centuries as a good thing, because not as much violence erupts between your children if the father comes in a whips them. [Laughter] And,

Ferrera: Right, right, right. Yes.

Schara: but my -I think my point really here is that what Bowen could see was that emotional process, whether you're a Southern family or a Northern family, you inherit and you agree to, certain ways of doing others in through triangling, mostly. And that we are all climbing up on the backs of the schizophrenics. His point is there's less violence in the way we do it. But not that it's not any more or less done, it's just not as approved of and like the great Tower of London, if you've ever been there. We exploit others, but not on the wheel.

Ferrera: Exploiting others but not

Schara: We don't burn women on the stake anymore. And we don't think highly of that. And, so that our morals have changed but our ways of doing people in are more subtle.

Now which, Steven Pinker might not see. That emotional process is still driving scapegoating.

Ferrera: His thesis is that the overall level of violence is down.

Schara: -is decreased. Measurably. I mean, the homicide rate would be, like .003 instead of

Ferrera: Is decreased. Yes.

Schara: like 17th and 38% in some of these countries where aggression was legal. Or, take the Aztec empire, or stuff like that, where you have legalized giving to the gods.

Ferrera: Yes, so, but he's not looking at it in terms of the damage done through the emotional process.

Schara: He thinks about emotional process, this is just my thesis, is that he thinks about emotional process as the way society legitimizes violence. Okay, whether you're an Aztec or whether you're an Englishman, there are ways in which the violence against people and women and factory workers is legitimized. And that has become less and less and less as we have increased respect for human life. So that, you can measure it like you get more room in jail cells, things like that he measured. So he doesn't understand anything about triangles. But like you're saying, like Pat Comella and other people who might try to bring Bowen Theory to the Western scientific world, then they could make some really impressive (inaudible). But to do that, I think and I don't know what you think about it, the leader to me, has to take on more anxiety. Like Abraham Lincoln. The suffering servant leadership.

I think Darwin proposed the observer, and he said at the end of his life, "I went along the road of life and I saw differentiation and sometimes I wish I hadn't, because it cost me a few years off my life." And I think what he saw and what he did, I would call kind of suffering leaders -suffering leadership, in which you don't climb up on the backs of others, you take that anxiety back yourself. And you redirect the way the anxiety goes, through interrupting.

Ferrera: Yes. Or you somehow reduce the quantity of it. I mean, that's another thing that Bowen did, he actually talked in quantitative language. He talked about the amount of undifferentiation that has to be managed in the family. And that if more of it is in one place there will be less of it in an- he actually gets into that kind of thinking. That if you could reduce the overall amount, if you can just -people can get - I say to people "Try not to take it personally, and don't take it so seriously, don't take it so personally."

Let it be less intense all the way around." Drain off some of that intensity and then everybody does better. That to me is one of the central issues that keeps coming around and around. How do you work it out so that anybody can gain?

Schara: Well, I-I don't know exactly- I still say, as far as I can see it, the leader takes on more of the anxiety. By redirecting it. I don't think it's a cost-free thing. That somehow the -because the person who doesn't take it so personally, it- -you could say, "Well, what can we put you on- you're taking it personally, we'll put you on the neurofeedback thing, and we'll just drain off all that anxiety and we'll integrate, okay, it's not personal, it's not personal. And then you'll come out of that chair less sensitive when they insult you."

[Laughter] "When you go home, you won't take it on full; you'll just turn yourself to the side and kind of laugh and giggle when they start attacking you." But it takes a lot for people to be able to change in the relationship system when people come after you. And that's not risk-free. [laughter] (inaudible)

Ferrera: Yes, right. I often refer back to Louise Rauseo on that, standing alone for the common good. That you do take it on. And you tolerate the outsider position; you do tolerate the rejection and the attacks, and the different ways that the system can torment you for being a little differentiated! [laughter]

Schara: Exactly, it's just horrible! So I really, honestly don't know any way that that can be altered. I think neurofeedback comes about as close as anything I've ever seen, which it would be, I have a conversation with people, some of which is upsetting to them, and then they lie down and the brain gives them feedback about where the anxiety is in the brain, and then it beeps you out. So when the music stops you come to attention, and when you come to attention you're in the now, there's no lion, no tiger, nothing to be afraid of. It's just the thought process that you had a few minutes ago that got you upset. [laughter] And so then the brain automatically seeks comfort.

And then it settles itself down to a different level. And I think that it will be -if it's to be -if the quantitative amount of anxiety is to be decreased, it'll probably happen -like now, Apple's going to come out with an iWatch, it'll measure what probably, maybe, your blood pressure, it'll say how well you're sleeping at night, it'll give you your heart rate, it'll give you a lot of all the physiological monitors you want, probably, on an iWatch of the future. So that you can regulate how you're being tormented, yeah.

Ferrera: Really, what a- what a great idea [laughter].

Schara: And the relationships- but where does the anxiety go, when the person can't project it onto you? They get infuriated. Can you get sick? Can get -so, that's why I think maybe Bowen Theory offers people an explanation of the importance of seeing these things impersonally, so that they don't react to the shifts in functioning.

Ferrera: Yes, well, he'd say, "Don't get mad at the system, the system is just doing what

Schara: I don't know, that's how I see it.

Ferrera: what it's naturally designed to do!" [laughter] Yes.

Schara: Exactly, it will incorporate you into it! Get you to behave the right way. Even if it's not in the best interests of the-

Ferrera: Let them get mad at you and don't get mad back at them, that's a nice little assignment! [Laughter]

Schara: Tell your truth, as best you can, and see what happens and see how long you can maintain yourself. In the middle of all the hoop-la-la. [laughter] Did we get all the questions here, let's go through it and see. The,

Ferrera: Should we- did we? It is-

Schara: well the -the nature of your relationship with Bowen, I think you put him in a lot more of the insights about Bowen theory and the main characteristics of his research, and-

Ferrera: Well, I think Dr. Bowen was one you could be with him only very briefly, but he'd be with you all the time! [Laughter] And he could have probably forgotten about you when you walked in the door. [Overlapping conversations]

Schara: Oh, we're just finishing up here. We're having a good-

Ferrera: It's time to help with dinner I think. Sydney probably needs help. [tape ends]