

Interview with Priscilla Friesen
Conducted by Andrea Schara

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

Schara Well, this is Andrea Schara. April 25th, 2014. And I'm talking to Priscilla Friesen, and we're here in-in your home office, which is really nice. And, we spent a little bit of time, talking before the interview just sort of warming up, thinking about all these ideas. And, the experience that you've had with Dr. Bowen and with theory.

And usually we just start with, "Who are you and how did you get to know Dr. Bowen?" How did he influence your life, where have you taken theory, and just go from there. But if you want to start somewhere else, that's completely up to you. [laughter]

Friesen [laughter] Let's see if we can get kinda (creative) about wherever we can go. I was introduced to Dr. Bowen's theory in my second week at graduate school at University of Kansas School of Social Work.

Schara Second week?

Friesen Second week. So, part of the program there, I think, encouraged people to enter into some kind of psychotherapy, I think, is what they talked about at the time. And I came into graduate school in 1976, which was five years after my mother had died. 1971. And, when I got the picture- when I got a clear picture of going to graduate school, it-it kind of happened effortlessly.

And, when I got to graduate school, what was also clear was that I lived- I didn't notice this at- I didn't know this, I have to say, at the time, my level of awareness was really low, but I was- I entered graduate school with a lot of emotion. And it included two different kinda ways of manifesting. One was, I could cry at the drop of a hat. Had a lot of feeling. And sadness, and emotionality, I would basically say. And, back pain. And, I- the person that I was fortunate enough to be, to start consultation with, was Don Schulberg. Who was in the transition year, between bec- being a Jungian analyst, and shifting to Bowen Theory.

And so there- this transition year was an interesting year for him, as I came to know over time, because I got to be quite -a good colleague of his. He became a good friend. But the first day I met with him, he did a family diagram. And, he said something about my mother's death being a part of my feeling state. I got something- I don't know, he didn't say it, necessarily, but I got that my feeling state was related to my mother's death.

Schara [laughter]

Friesen And I have to tell you, it never crossed my mind. Now how much of a dingbat was I?

Schara That seems amazing. [laughter]

Friesen I (-it was) just mind-blowing to me how- how it works, that I wouldn't get that. At a cognitive level, it's just mind-blowing. Anyway, so that-that became kind of an "ooh." So I read everything I could read. In the first couple months of consultation. And really could see it was like- it was like a framework to understand what I knew exploded in my family.

And I had no idea what had happened. And, my father- so, my mother had been sick since I was 12, and she died when I was 21. Thirteen years. During basically my whole formative life. I'd gotten married in there to kinda help me out. And by the time I had got to graduate school I was separated, and had lived a kind of a spin of a life, I would say. Of a lot of emotion. So getting graduate school was really grounding. And Dr. Bowen's theory became -Bowen Theory became- I just ate it up. I read everything I could read. And, it was very- and-and the intensity in that year, just included a lot of integrating the -my mother's death, and ending a relationship, and kinda getting a life.

Getting a direction. That was more concrete. Second year, I wrote to Dr. Bowen, and I said, you know, I was interested in more training, what was possible, and he wrote me back a page and a half letter, which I totally personalized.

Schara [laughter]

Friesen As I read it now, it's not personal, it's pretty pragmatic and you know, "Yeah, we have a program here, and you know, I used to live in Kansas, and-" Somehow it was a - it was a concrete kind of connection, first connection, with him, that really promoted my interest in moving to Ka- moving to Washington. And, pursuing in much more significant way, they had a four times a year program at the time, but I just knew I wanted to go there. So I came to Washington, and it was at a time where there were no jobs. And, for social workers. And I tried a lot of things, but it was really tough.

And the first -so in '78, I had an interview, I guess, with Bobby Holt. To be in the training program. And she reported later that she definitely wanted to have me in the training program, because she was interested in my Mennonite background, and she had a Mennonite caretaker when she was young. So somehow she was on my side! [laughter] And, Ruth Sagar, decided -er, invited me, to come and, since I was typing, and doing clerical work anyway, for- on a temporary basis until I could find a job, she invited me to come and do that there at the Bowen Center. In about November, so they in- they took -they took me into the training program, even though they never do with- at that time, they never did without having a clinical practice.

And, then Ruth Sagar asked if I would begin by doing -be a receptionist and do the typing, a lot of the typing for Dr. Bowen's personal stuff, and correspondence, that kind of thing. And, in November the position came up to kinda support Lillian Rosenbaum's work at- in the Biofeedback Lab. Um, and it was within that next month that it shifted, and Lillian's- Dr. Rosenbaum's program was expanding, at a level that was pretty quick. And I began seeing people in Biofeedback, and then working with Lillian, Rosenbaum, for development of the Biofeedback Lab.

Interestingly, I really didn't have much personal interest in the biofeedback, really. It didn't get my attention. At that point, other than it was a great job. To have at the Bowen Center. I wasn't gonna complain! What that gave me, obviously, is walking up and down the halls with the people that I had read about, and certainly Dr. Bowen. So my initial work there was really in- in the Biofeedback and Dr. Bowen was a bit of an intimidating figure to me, and was not somebody I was really naturally inclined to get to know. As a person. [phone rings]

But I did [phone rings] participate and you know, like when I first began, I would say, [phone rings] my-my constitution was really challenged. To be able to hold as much integration and as much that was coming at me. From theory. Like an example to me, would be, that when I went to clinical conferences, when I first went to clinical conferences, I could stay awake about fifteen minutes, before I went to sleep. And I was asleep the entire clinical day. In and out. But I just couldn't- I couldn't- my constitution didn't have the stamina to be able to manage the energy there. To manage the ideas, and manage what it was challenging me.

And, but- and over time, I got less and less -I had more and more energy, and more and more capability. This probably included what was clear in the initial stages, was how disconnected I was from my family. And, in those early years, I would say getting back in contact with my family and spending any resources I had in contacting family was just really basic. First ten years I would say, was probably -fifteen years, maybe. Was that effort. I think Dr. Bowen- I get kinda, link in here some of the beginning connections to Dr. Bowen, my first kinda more personal contact with Dr. Bowen, was when he- think it was probably '82 or '83 when he had his surgery? And I think, Andrea, you were one that kinda challenged me to go visit him in the hospital, or something I think. And, so I did go visit him,

Schara Yeah, I remember that.

Friesen visit him while he was in the hospital, and he was watching I Love Lucy, and laughing, and I came in -I didn't -we didn't say anything, and he and I just held hands, watching I Love Lucy, and laughing, and

Schara [laughter]

Friesen so it was kinda just a personal contact, that I- I was pretty nonverbal, and -but connected. And I could tell he appreciated it, and I certainly -something happened, that was -made it a little bit more comfortable to be around him. So, his illness was interesting because it really -meanwhile, I was working in the Biofeedback Labs, and was really helping teach medical students and you know, was really kinda the professional training developer, and we did a program that was for people around the country, and all different kinds of things that I assisted Lillian to-to manifest her ideas, some of mine, more of hers probably.

The-the factors in there I think that were key to me in terms of the field of Biofeedback was when I had another back attack, in there, in the '80s. Maybe not that far away from when I actually connected more with Dr. Bowen personally. I started to begin to use biofeedback for myself. And- related to the back pain. And, that- I began

then to see more clearly, for myself and for others that I was working with, the -the dance of the emotional system and one's physiology. So you could see it in the equipment, you could see it -I could see it in my own body, and observing it. And developing more ability in the awareness of the physiology. And what it was related to. Was the important link. What would- how it was related to the triangles. Like I always thought about my back attack being my tail caught in the triangles.

You know- it- that it's- the physiology was a part of the system. And there was- it wasn't just the anxiety's high and then you have a symptom, it's that it had a dance to it that could be observed. And I think one of the real tricky things at the Bowen Center then, was that there was this -for whatever reason- for many levels of reason this kind of assumption that the biofeedback was a technique, and was not grounded in theory per se. It was more something just to do, to fix, too symptom-focused kind of thing. And, and I never thought about it that way, and I know Dr. Rosenbaum didn't think about it that way. And my-my effort was- the polarization was around biofeedback and mostly Dr. Rosenbaum and theory. And, I was kind of in the middle of that, I would say, trying to represent more biofeedback as a -a tool, a research tool, a- an ability to see the emotional process at the level of the physiology, the nature of it, how it worked.

That was really what my interest was, and studying-one avenue to that, that really got my attention, to understand physiology more as a relationship thing, was to really learn more about development and how different things came online, as a function of the relationship with the adapting to the family processes. So, the-these are examples I think of the physiology becoming more mine. I was more interested in it for myself genuinely. But right along with this in terms of Dr. Bowen, in hi -somewhere along here, I don't really have the exact date of when he asked if I would assist him in using the biofeedback for himself. In, more, recovering from his- his own hospitalizations and his efforts at regulating himself at more of a physiological level.

So that- I have a big huge file, it's probably like three inches thick, of the number of sessions that he did, so these sessions occur- you know, and I would ask him, so what does he get out of these sessions? Cause in some ways, it- they were different than other sessions that I did. They weren't long conversations, but I heard him thinking along the way, and I would ask questions about how he thought about how he was using the biofeedback technology, to assist him in his self-regulation. And he would describe, the way he would talk about it was, that the process for him was the technology and me.

Schara I remember that [laughter]

Friesen And I couldn't quite figure out what that meant. I always thought about it as what I represented to a client, was theory and the technology as a triangle, in some ways, where there was some, but it was between the person and the technology and theory. And I was kind of allow- introducing them to that, to their information. The factualness of their information. And adding theory to it, the contents of theory. So, he thought of it as what he did with himself, with the technology, and what I contributed to it. Which was, I'm not certain what all he thought about that. He never explained it, more than my being present.

Schara He didn't say you were a healer? [laughter]

Friesen He didn't say I was a healer. No, he didn't say anything like that, it wasn't- cause I wasn't the same kind of teacher of theory, with him as I was with clients. But he- but

Schara But he's putting in the importance of relationships.

Friesen Relationships.

Schara No matter how you want to characterize it, the fact that you represent a relationship and the machine doesn't really represent

Friesen Yeah.

Schara a relationship, it gives feedback about your physiology. And you, somehow,

Friesen Right.

Schara represent a relationship that's important in that room, with the equipment.

Friesen Then whatever that- however that works, That-that lived then, into his future for surgeries and some of the things that I participated with him in his hospitalization, where the technology in the room of let's say, the ICU, or his hospital rooms, became a part of our conversation when I would visit him in the hospital. Particularly in the more ICU areas. Where the technology was up in the back, behind him, and I would relate to him around what was going on, and he would- we would use that as part of our (relating), in the hospital. What the technology was, I'd try to pull it around so he could see it, you know, ways in which he could regulate himself. When him- when he was more - more physically challenged. I was-

Schara Did you- did you ever bring the biofeedback -the -into the room? The technology.

Friesen The technology? No, uh uh.

Schara So you just made the room, into the technology? To give him feedback.

Friesen Well, the technology was there, the heart rate, the, you know, blood pressure, the, you know, the peak

Schara Okay. Ok, alright, yeah.

Friesen -his oxygen flow, his respiration rates, his, all that stuff, was a part of the room technology. And, and I would move it around, so he could see it, or tell him, what was going on. If I couldn't move it. And we'd sit there, and you know, I might hold his hand or

something and he might- you know, I might coach him a little bit on just kinda letting his system settle down. Or he would do the -(you) would ask to do the [phone rings] he would ask to do- tell him certain things. What was going on in the physiology. I was gonna bring this up, about the hospital thing, because I think this is to me one of the - there were a lot of kind of personal examples I probably could kinda communicate about this and maybe there'd be more in the future, but I think his -one of them, that I think really epitomized what I think was the up-close and personal experience of use of relationships in managing self.

He had -it was around these hospitalizations, so you know, I got to be pretty active during these hospitalizations, and was present mostly on a daily basis and kinda, you know, there were some hospitalizations where we took turns, and people- faculty each kinda took their turn, and when he was really in a compromised situation. So one of em, included you know some really interesting -well, let me tell two stories. One of em was, when he was intubated.

And, it was really- there was a question whether he was really gonna ever get off that intubation again. Which would be, you know, towards the end of his life, and he would be -it was hard to know. What would happen. So, one day I came in and he was you know, kinda really struggling. Couldn't speak, cause the intubation, and I said, you know it seemed to me that he was going to -that he was -could die, or it was ending. Towards the end of his life.

It wasn't, but it seemed like it could've been. And, I talked to him a little bit about dying, and about if he, you know, if he -fun little story was, that if he - just asked him, I know this is kind of an odd question, but if you

Schara [laughter]

Friesen can come back after you're dead, I'd be willing. [laughter] I'm interested! And he kind of smiled through his intubation, and then, you know, I left. So, the next day I came back. And he was off the tube. He was off the tube. And he reported that he had had this dream, or had it- had this image, where he was looking at planet Earth, from way out there. He had this big huge grin on his face, and he said, "I could see planet Earth." And he could end up breathing. And he got off the intubation.

Schara Very cool.

Friesen Which I thought was a cool thing. Very cool thing. So, then he ended up going to his, his room, they moved him, to a new room. And, I came in to his new room, which was, you know, out of ICU, and something happened in the exchange between us. That totally threw me off. And I swear to this day, I cannot -I don't know what it was. I related to him you know, we were whatever. But I could not go back. I couldn't go back! And it was easily three or four days before I went back to his room. And I went back, when I actually did go back, he said, he looked at me, kinda smiled at me, said "I wondered when you were coming back."

Schara [laughter]

Friesen And, I said, "You know, I'm not sure exactly why I didn't come back!." And he said, "You didn't think I was going to stay dependent on you."

Schara [laughter] Aw, that's so beautiful.

Friesen I swear, I don't know what he did. That indicated he was not dependent on me.

Schara Yeah. Yeah.

Friesen This was not words. This was not words. I didn't feel the disruption, he didn't say anything to me. It wasn't at that level. It was, I could not come back. And then he smiled.

Schara Yeah, that's so beautiful.

Friesen "You don't think I wanna be -I'd wanna be dependent on you." So, you know, that kind of -that is the subtlety, that I experienced, with -I get how subtle this is. And it is an action an internal action, that is experienced by another. Now, it was disturbing to me, at some level, but not it was very it was a gracious interruption. On his part. I understood it, when he said it, and- but he wasn't slamming me against the door, you know, somet- I didn't feel it, at the level of

Schara Yeah.

Friesen -it was subtle, but it was [phone rings] very precise, and my- that to me is the level of relationship influencing, that I think he was capable of, or and that he -that I experienced with him. That to me is what the crux of what differentiation is about.

Schara So in some way what I hear is, he released you, from your epigenetic past, in a way, [laughter] you know, he says, "You don't think

Friesen [laughter]

Schara I want to be dependent on you," which you may have thought your mother wanted you to be dependent on her, who knows, but that was his

Friesen (inaudible)

Schara Yeah, he-he-he interrupted something that made sense to you, about your own history. And how you were caught with him, in terms of your own history, and couldn't go back for three or four days. It didn't-

Friesen I don't think about it that way. I-I don't think it went that far. I think about it more- I didn't think of it as interrupting my own history. I didn't translate it into that yet. I think that his -what I do - and the other thing I do remember, in-in being around when Dr. Bowen died, or when he was sick, is what I found really fascinating, is I would go in, and

spend the day, let's say with Dr. Bowen, and doing all these things, in a pragmatic, factual kind of way. And then I would go home, and have these unbelievable dreams about my mother.

Schara [laughter]

Friesen Horrible nightmares. Just really harsh, terrible hard, hard things! And then I would go back, the next day, and it would be not that. It would be somehow I didn't get my mother and Dr. Bowen mixed up, and he played a part in that. He played a bit part in that. So, whatever was going on when I was really there, with him, even though it was influenced by my experience, of being present, I couldn't do that with my mother. To be there, like I could do that with Dr. Bowen. I couldn't do that with my mother.

Schara Yeah.

Friesen At-at the level I could do it with Dr. Bowen. But when I went home, it was very disturbing, very tumultuous, and a lot about my mother dying. A lot about her illness, a lot, a lot, a lot, a lot of stuff. But when Dr. Bowen died, it like wasn't disruptive. It wasn't hard. The death was not like, and that was really mind-boggling to me, because he was so important. But then I thought, "Maybe this is the way death works." Maybe this is the way death can work if you're more mature, or something. [laughter]

Schara [laughter]

Friesen Rather than get into the slog, that I was in, with my mother and just this kind of mother -it seemed like my mother at the time, but it was really the multigenerational history, that this death thing that lived through Mom and Dad, was like related. So, I think that the [silence] (Rob's here).

Schara Yeah, (let's just-) [tape cut]

Friesen (inaudible) reorganizing basic emotional history. In the relationship with Dr. Bowen. The person. And, that's the way I in some ways thought about being able to walk alongside of him and up close and personal. As he was dying. In the hospital. It gave- it was an opportunity really, to do an illness, and caretaking, or caregiving, or participating, let's say, in th- in an illness and a dying process that was different from my experience with my mother.

And, being able to be frank, open, about Dr. Bowen talking about when he would die, how he would die, what my reaction to his death would be, what I thought about him dying, you know, things that were very personal, to me. That were- I would say, Dr. Bowen's death, and my mother's death, would be the two deaths that had the most profound impact on me, the person. Those two. And they were so different. So I think in some ways, the -you know, my -outside of perhaps my own family, I think Dr. Bowen-my relationship with him was probably one of the most influential in affecting my ability to be more- less reactive and more genuinely myself. And he played the biggest part in it.

That was not [laughter] -I was -I say that more in response to him, than generated by me. I imagine it's a synergy, but I think it really- he even at that- even as he was dying, and as those last months- I think his ability, to relate as a self, even as he was dying, to me was the -was freeing. And a real contribution to my, my life.

Schara It's a very interesting- in terms of whatever differentiation of self is -that the bottom line would be, "you're setting the other free." You freer yourself, because you're able to be less reactive and more genuine yourself. And you somehow in telling the story, you certainly get the idea across, that he's able to see you, in a way that is extremely solid. Like a real -the way he sees you as a person, frees you, but it's -but it's this -I-whatever, I think we talked about it before, looking at the other.

Friesen Right, seeing the other.

Schara Really seeing the other, really seeing the other. And appreciating them. And that sets people free. From the bondage of the epigenetic history! [laughter] That is the slog. And, and once that happens, you- it can stay with you. It doesn't disappear because they disappear. Because it's, it's become integrated into who you are.

Friesen Yeah.

Schara This seeing the other. Is in yourselves. Like stress would be. So stress might provoke something, cortisol or whatever, and this seeing provokes something, at a, at a cellular level, where you- the evidence is, maybe just less, less reactivity, in terms of your psychology, and your body.

Friesen Your body! I mean, your whole -maybe that's a good segue, into this whole thing about what I think the last -so since Dr. Bowen died, he died in '90, so in '94 is where I got my own kind of exposure to neurofeedback. Or brain wave training. And, you know, this is an extension somewhat, of the biofeedback, but it to me it was another world. And what it- what it kind of showed a light on, was the linkage between the very biological, chemical signaling, that had its own patterns in the individual, in its relationship system, and how it was linked to how people- how people's emotion manifested.

How people thought. People's psychology. And the nature of how they were all connected together. That was the beginning of where I could see it. How it worked. That was my first experience actually being (on) neurofeedback equipment, with you, when we were doing that, is I said, "This is how the mind works." I could see it. And that reference point has been the rest- since that professional moment- has been there rest of my life up until now, of explicating that. Putting language to it. Experiencing it with other people, being able to describe it, kinda walking alongside of the diff- the different expansions of technology, that have given more and more capability to demonstrate that.

It- I think the -the contribution, one of the questions you had, was what really has -where have you gone, kind of, with Bowen Theory, and where is it going? Or what have you contributed to it, or whatever. I think that what I see Dr. Bowen talked about working

on differentiation at the level of the psychology. You know, changing the way you perceive would be fundamental to altering the relationship system. And indeed it is.

I think what biofeedback, neurofeedback, and these many links that include development, epigenetics, multigenerational process, applied kinesiology, the way the body works, all the years of yoga that I've done, all the years of acupuncture, all the years of these different methodologies that integrate the biology, the emotion, the belief systems, the psychology, and the relationship patterns, that Dr. Bowen talked about, I think has expanded an understanding of differentiation of self.

First of all, understanding of how you might, how you really see it, much deeper, it- Dr. Bowen talked about these all different levels, of the system being affected- were related, to differentiation. But he didn't have the technology, he didn't spend his life energy on it. He inferred it. He directed your attention to it that this is also related to all levels. It's about your entire organism. What I think these last twenty, almost twenty five years, has expanded, both in the field of science itself, And in the work that I've done, or Victoria Harrison's done, or you've done, or people that have been working with technology, biofeedback and neurofeedback technology, has been to get- to expand, maybe, a methodology, that people- that work on self-regulation, at the level of becoming aware of processes that are -that coincide, with relationship processes and triangles.

Processes that are deeper in the organism, itself, how to use that knowledge and consciousness, of those physiological, psychological, mind states, cognition states, emotional states, how to leverage those, towards being more of a self. And the impact- I've talked about it as being from the inside out. Not as much as what I think Dr. Bowen really contributed, which is how to change your functioning in the relationship system and it affecting your physiology. And your emotion. And your -your deeper states. Of course they affect both ways. But I think what biofeedback, neurofeedback, all this way of looking from the inside out has given, is a more complete understanding, of how differentiation operates.

I-I think Dr. Bowen was aiming towards it, but he spoke about it in one of the tapes I did with him, where I was trying to link the physiology, in the development of the child, to the intensity of the patterns between mother and child. And his comment in that tape was in his way, he said that he was relating to the psychology of the mother-infant relationship. So, I thought that was really- it was helpful to kinda go back and then look at -this helped me, you know, this was one of the times when- I think one of the things I had a problem with, with Dr. Bowen, is really separating -separating what he could actually get at in his lifetime.

What he was able to put into language. What he did think. And there were things he didn't think! That I have thought! You know, almost as if to really appreciate, that there

Schara [laughter]

Friesen -that there are -you know, that his -what he contributed, and the remarkable thing that he expanded, given the context and time, what he was- what he was describing, was so much beyond what other people were even seeing. And I keep- I always kept thinking, well you know, he sees things I don't see. So I'm going to assume

if I see something, he saw it already. But he just didn't say it, because-you know, that kind of thing. And, to more- to see more realistically, what his scope of knowledge -how far he got, and how far he headed it, his- the -the being that he headed, shows far away, shows a long way. The beam of light that he directed it. But it diffuses. And it isn't as clear as it was when he was- what he was describing.

And I think psychology is one of these examples, so science in the last twenty five years, has led to much more seeing the psychology and the physiology as interrelated and concentric. You know, they're all- they're all related and not concentric, synchronous. And that that ability to -you know, science is catching up with what he saw and is filling in the gaps. You know, I was thinking, one of the questions you asked, I was thinking about this at the epigenetics conference, where you know, the -where you see this epigenetic science coming out, as linking the adapting to the environment, to the changes, of the genetic material and its expression.

So, it's like- it's like describing the mechanisms of how emotional process is transmitted generation to generation. So, what I was thinking is, these people, these scientists, don't care about Bowen Theory. It doesn't matter to them. They're just charting what is. And, what is- will the theory really be relevant? You know, in some ways it's kinda this little window in time, where people can kinda maybe use it a little bit. But is it really gonna -it's not- science is going to go ahead and see what is. And maybe corroborate, what Dr. Bowen saw, but theory's not going to be leading it.

You know? It's not- I don't think it's going to go that way. And, in fact, Bowen Theory will probably never have kind of its own day in the sun. Except, you know, let's say historically, well this guy kinda had this idea. And maybe saw it ahead of time. Like when we were in Greece this summer, this guy who did the first - Escepaes, who was the first one who kind of saw the mind-body back before the Greeks- you know, early, in the Greeks. He's not -you know, people kinda did it for a generation and then it was gone.

Schara Right.

Friesen You know- it didn't- he's not attributed to mind-body. So, it's not -it's like this little moment in time, where history has there was like somebody who saw this, and then it's gone. You know. My guess is that's probably what'll happen with Bowen Theory. But science is gonna continue to kinda expand on what he saw, so I was- So, that -that was one thought. And it was kinda freeing, in a way? Like I don't hafta make sure Bowen Theory lives, or, I'm not responsible to make Bowen Theory live. It happens to be, you know, what I am doing, in my professional life is somehow you know seeing where the ideas might leverage the human experience.

To be able to be more productive and really increased kind of a consciousness, if you will, of -of greater group, or have more influence on larger group. I think, I had a conversation with my cousin, who's talking about evolution of consciousness, and he was describing that -that factually, during the Renaissance, there was only, I think he said 10% of the people that were thinking, it wasn't everybody. It only takes 10% or something, to kinda shift the conceptual framework, of the group. And I think in some ways, that may be what Bowen Theory is about. Is shifting this consciousness time period, where it's one of many things that are at the same time that there's more chaos,

seemingly chaos, there's also more ability to see the dilemma that the human is in. Our own personal human dilemma. Our very personal- mine, Priscillas, multigenerational human dilemma, and how to rise out of that, enough to be able to relate it to my experience, in a way that's outside of it and appreciating it.

And being able to contribute to other people's being able to do that. That place, I think, of getting is part of what -you know, Dr.- Bowen Theory contributes to that. In this notion of differentiation of self. I've been- you know, my own personal interest also includes kinda this consciousness, spirituality, or -or a way of understanding that's in a much bigger way than the human. And I think this linkage, that people run-run into as they become more factual about themselves, is there- is this interesting ability to kind of expand -expand the perspective, could call it consciousness, or something but it's to expand your perspective, so -and the perspective is deeper than the psychological one. It is a physiological perspective.

That really you are more outside of the human evolutionary trajectory. Of reactivity, survival reactivity and adapting to coercions of the group. And to see it and paradoxically, by being able to see it, you can also experience the commonality, between people. And I think to be at that state, is promoting- from a Bowen Theory perspective, may be promoting higher lev- maybe a higher level of differentiation, than is perhaps occurring? With this capability? I think he talked about you know people at higher levels of differentiation being able to act on their own self-interest, and for the self-interest -and for the interest of the group, without getting people all rankled up about it. It didn't produce the level of group reactivity, that at differ- lower levels of differentiation.

Now, I- I would think about that, also. I've been thinking a lot about differentiation as cooperation, as I work with these larger multigenerational family groupings, and family enterprise, that -this isn't about symptoms, here, it's about people being able to represent their own self-interest, simultaneous to cooperating in the group. For the benefit of everybody. For the benefit of each member, in the group. At the individual level but also at the group level. Now that to me smacks of spirituality. You know? It gets into that domain. That I think others in the wisdom, knowledge frames, frameworks are getting at, in a way. So I think you know, these -I guess what I, you know, been thinking about, is I've spent so long, Bowen Theory's been such an important- is such an important -part, of my whole life, and has been such an important part of being able- it's a methodology, and a framework and an explanation and a language, that has taken my own emotional functioning so far. From where I started.

And has had an impact on my family, it's had an impact on my work, but another thread you know, we were talking about this earlier, I think is as people have done this for a long time, the real genuine if you will, multigenerational or epigenetic tracks, that are all, everybody's got their own, on this, how differentiation plays out through those different tracks begins to -what emerges, is just a -a really multifaceted appreciation for what differentiation is. Conceptually. As well as how it manifests, it's so- it's just such a remarkable range, of this earth, this world, this consciousness, it's so many -like I come at this from my own background my multigenerational history includes pacifism, it includes physical symptoms, it includes you know, these ways that are not aimed at disturbing the group. You know, it's not- I'm not built in that way.

There's -it's not that the group doesn't change, it's that it's not built to get in and to you know- like you've talked about your own family as much more of a scrappy, that's not my family. But that doesn't mean differentiation doesn't help, doesn't come. And the different ways in which differentiation can manifest come through people working at it through their epigenetic line. And finding the way it works there. And I think contributing to all that, I mean that'd be an interesting book, you know, a differentiation of self book, which is having many epigenetic lines describing the nature of differentiation from that line.

And, really expanding the way in which differentiation is really experienced, thought, opened, the door opened, to what could be a much broader way of thinking about the methodology, of differentiation I guess [laughter]. Just as there are many spiritual practices, there are many differentiation of self practices. That are addressing this remarkable variability, that's a part of the system. They all get at the same thing. Consciousness or differentiation (inaudible).

Schara Yeah. Do you have an example of a pacifist way of -Mennonite way, of differentiation, that- that might be useful to people who listen to this? I-I think I'm clear about what you're talking about, of how -although, you may have had experience with reactivity, and not to say that you don't experience reactivity in your family, but

Friesen No, I think- I think -let's say the good side, of pacifism. There would be an underbelly. So, let's focus for a second on just what it does promote. So I think at the basic pacifism has to do with addressing aggression. As -addressing aggression as a way- there's something more than aggression. There's another way. To do this, than to kill people. So, it's relating to a societal assumption that the way in which you solve problems is to kill your neighbor. So, as a- as a consequence of kind of the religious belief, Jesus belief, so Jesus said this too, he said you know, you take- you focus on yourself, here. Before you do something out there against your neighbor, you take care of yourself. You focus on yourself. He said, "Don't kill other people." You know, he did! But what this is requiring is for you to address your automatic nature.

That is, to automatically fight. So, I had a great example of this. We were watching a movie, my husband and I were watching a movie, and the automatic- there-something came up, where this total bind occurred, and a character ended up killing Friesen her former partner, lover, person. And, he had betrayed her, and she killed him. My reaction, no. My husband's reaction was "Kill him!" Right? My reaction, was

Schara [laughter]

Friesen "Oh my God, the consequences of that, don't do it!" And it's automatic. It's automatic. I don't get aggressive, automatically. Like others get. That's genetic. That's epigenetic, pacifist background. I do not get aggressive. Now, that doesn't mean I don't get reactive. I'm not saying that. [phone rings] But I think that the- to me that's an example, of "Okay, you're not going to do that. You're not gonna take a life of another. So what alternative is there?" So, what of course happened, in pacifism, is that they pay a cost. They can get killed.

Schara Absolutely.

Friesen So there's two sides to it. But, -and I think that's a reality. So, you might say that there's some kind of a middle ground, that there's a way in which, you know, let's say Mahatma Gandhi, said, "This is the way that society's going, I'm not going to do it that way, I'm going to do it this way. I'm going to have compassion. I'm going to love. You know, that there's a different way to manage your own emotional reactivity, that allows you to relate to it differently than it is, would be, let's say, at a societal level, would be typical. Automatic. So that might be- and I -and for me, to some extent, that comes out in day-to-day relationships, for me. It's not automatic for me to get mad! It's not auto- I may get upset, but it's inside me, it's not going to come out automatically in aggressing with the other.

Schara Yeah.

Friesen The cost of that can be physical symptoms. And I think that transaction is what I've spent my life trying to do something different where you have some alternatives to your reactivity. That really aim towards getting out of the automatic reacting, and being different. Than is automatic. Be it aggressing, or shutting down, or

Schara So to use- to use my language, I guess, the role that the family had for you, in an epigenetic way, would have been to become a compassionate pacifist with physical symptoms. [laughter] And-

Friesen Well, that would be where it would cost you.

Schara Yeah, that- and so you're in differentiation, you're moving away from the cost, to living a freer life.

Friesen Yeah.

Schara Through integrating these methodologies, differentiation and I think you could say differentiation of self is a methodology. And, just like neurofeedback is a methodology. (But)- putting two together and getting self out, detriangling is a methodology, I think he described it that way. And, by using these various methodologies, you're no longer controlled by the emotional system. And that's really what differentiation allows, or shines the light or pathways. And there are many other pathways too. Not being controlled by the emotional system, but Bowen may have been the first one to describe exactly how the family operates as an emotional system. To control your life.

Although he said governs, instead of controls. But that's kind of the way that I hear what you're doing- I don't- I don't know if you have a good story, about managing yourself differently with your dad about this, because he -after your mother died, your dad would have assumed, you know, a lot- a lot of importance. And your stepmother, and they probably have their desire for you, for what they want you to be, or something like this. And I -I was thinking about you know, one example that I was thinking about,

was that they didn't really -maybe, the family didn't really want you to get married, let's say. You know, that might be one. And what- what it took for you to get free of that either worry that they had about you, or that you were to be the- a Bowen nun, or [laughter]

Friesen Well, I was a Bowen nun. [laughter]

Schara I don't know if you want to speak to that a little bit, but it's an example of separating out

Friesen Yeah, yeah.

Schara from the role the family had assigned to you. And how do you do that, in a way that makes sense of your own direction.

Friesen Well, I think -I think- Let me see if I can speak to that. I think that my function in my family, was to provide support for its in- to keep it together. So, when my dad remarried, his effort to assist my stepmother and her children, his major energies seemed to go in that direction, which makes sense, given how males are oriented. His children were a little more automatically on the outside of the pivot points of the family. And when my father first married, I oriented to help him out with her. And her children.

I spent a lot of energy keeping up with my stepsiblings, and that kind of thing. And, in this- and it's all kind of coincided, actually, with Dr. Bowen dying, where I ended up marrying and I could see more clearly, my function in this. And if I didn't do this, how was my functioning in this to support my dad? To help my dad out with my stepfamily, stepmother. How much did that compromise, let's say, my brothers and me? Or, how much was it too much energy going, to keep the unit stable. And my stepfamily was a little more disruptive. In some ways. So, the facts are is, as I moved to marry and get out of that position, it was the first time that the stepfamily went towards their own father. Who they had- who had died.

And was part of their orienting. So, to the extent that I helped my dad help them, what was coincident to this, was when I kinda ended up marrying and putting less of my energy there. That group of siblings, my stepsiblings, moved towards their father. Their biological father. Which is the way it should be. So, I think that's an example of just kind of the teeter totter here, of when I pulled out, that [uncertain noise] was more likely to happen. So, the way it-it's become much more- and my dad's effort, and dad and (Lola's) effort was to kinda make a togetherness, out of the family. I supported that togetherness. In my relationship with my dad.

And, as I did that less, I think the clarity about whose family is whose, became clear. You know, that there's a stepfamily, and there are children, which is a very basic unit, in and of itself. And there's my brothers and me. So, more and more happened separately. Which may not be the best, in the long run, but it is the way it happened. But I think that my brothers and I, and perhaps my stepsiblings too, have more of a life. Particularly my brothers and I.

Schara Yeah. More- more of a root system, definitely.

Friesen And the- and my stepfamily is a part of it. So, but I don't spend a lot of energy.

Schara Yeah.

Friesen They are not my preferential relationships. My brothers are. And my dad. And actually, in this last year, or so, I've been much more appreciative of my stepmother. And the interdependence between my dad, and her, and how appreciated- appreciative I am that she existed, to kind of ha- hold my dad's life, you know, to be an interdependence, the two of them have done really well. Into their you know, in their, they're in their- my dad's 94 and my stepmom's 88.

Schara That's amazing.

Friesen And they have been as healthy as could be until the last couple years. So I think it's -it's served them, it's served all of us, I think.

Schara So you're- in- in getting married, and to go back to that, that step, that other step, of independence, there- was there, was it hard for your dad, at all, for you to get married, or how did you deal with that? I kind of remember something about the- a wedding dress, and the attic, I'm not quite sure exactly what-

Friesen No, that wasn't that, as - that was my mom's wedding dress.

Schara what was it?

Friesen There was a lot of conversation, with my dad, he wrote, you know, he's a writer, and he wrote a song that was about the relationship between him and me that he read at the wedding. That was about the difficulty in kind of letting me go. Is what I heard. And I think -I think that interdependence with my dad certainly goes back a long ways. In -in my supporting my dad. Him -you know, him in the triangle of my mom and dad, my dad- my relying on my dad, in the -in the intensity with my mother. That's how it worked. So, the over the- over -my sensitivity, to my mother, profound sensitivity to her, played out in distance, and my dad was the one that was more accessible to me. And he was very- and I, I preferred him, I'm more like him in some ways, I think, although I'm probably a lot like my mother too. As I see now, after she's dead, for all these forty years.

Schara How did you make it easier for your dad, if you did, to let go of you which he spoke to in the -at your wedding? Was there anything that you had on your mind, that would be important, in allowing him, to proceed on without you, and

Friesen I-I don't know. I don't really know, even thinking back, I think I made a lot of effort for them, to know my husband and to know my husband's family. You know, and they put effort into my hu- my stepdaughters, and you know, you know I remember conversations with him, that's kind of how it worked, for him and me, it would be

Schara Yeah.

Friesen personal conversations, about the changes and the- you know, and I think he - he does a lot of this on his own, kinda praying and things like that, that I think are his way, of kind of managing.

Schara (That's) a pretty good description of a Mennonite

Friesen Mennonite adaptation! [laughter]

Schara separation. [laughter] Through letters and songs, and prayer, and then one is able to

Friesen That's right.

Schara let go. And to be less enmeshed, fused, whatever you want to call it, less caught. In, in some kind of worry, about the other. And,

Friesen Right, right. Right.

Schara And so that gets processed, and then the- the two organisms are a bit more interdependent instead of dependent. I-I remember Bowen used to talk about, this is maybe off the track and we should end soon, but that there was a family oneness, the inner, the oneness in the family, and then there was dependency. And then there's, so there's this family oneness, in which beliefs- individual beliefs, are not looked at or thought about, or individual differences are not thought about, or and if you don't go along with us, the way we believe, then, you know, all hell could break loose! And most families run on that.

That's kind of a primitive thing. And it- it probably informs the need for greater dependency, among the members of the family, to all go along with this way of believing and seeing and thinking. And, then as more- or as greater -I don't know whether the dependency lessens, but it- in listening to you, that's what it sounds like. It just sounds like, even -your story with Dr. Bowen, your story about your own family, it's like the dependency for one another lessens. And then, people are freer.

Friesen Right, right.

Schara To not have to have this oneness thing, which then you can write letters, and talk about your different ways of perceiving things, and the other one can hear.

Unknown Speaker I (inaudible). I did knock. So, there were people, three people waiting to do (inaudible)

Schara So, I don't know if there's anything else you want to put in, Priscilla? How long have we gone for here? One hour and eleven minutes, not too bad. Pretty good. (That's) a lot, wow.

Friesen That's pretty good. I think it was everything that I was -had written down.

Schara So you're, you're kind of representing physiology in differentiation, through a physiological lens, I guess, too, in the -in the field. And, to some extent that's made you a focused, you are more focused, as a technique person, instead of a methodology person. [laughter]

Friesen Focused on as a technique person, yeah.

Schara Yeah, you were focused on as a technology person, rather than a method

Friesen Even though it's not what I was.

Schara Yeah, exactly. And, so that there's some oneness, if I could call it that, there's some emotional oneness. Within every group, within every family, within the Bowen group. Where people don't see each other as unique, they -they see you as you're not doing it right. And you're a technique person. And the fact that you don't react to that very much, and that you just go on defining and talking to people, maybe as though they could actually listen to you! [laughter] Is,

Friesen [laughter] Heaven forbid!

Schara -is very unique, and I think very inspiring, to -to have these differences expressed, without a lot of emotionality.

Friesen Mmhm. It's taken a long time! [laughter] That is not an intellectual process! [laughter] I'll tell you that.

Schara It's taken a long time, okay. [laughter]

Friesen I think being able to really see differences, I think one of the things I really - when I could see, that Dr. Bowen's theory was developed as a psychological theory, and what I had been experiencing all these years was at a different level than what he was talking about, it was like, how can I not see this? How could I -it was like -it was like a separation from him, and the theory, in some ways, cause I really could not- I could not -I was blind. To that these were different ideas,

Schara So you were, you were exploring. Yeah, you were exploring a different space, and you're

Friesen And, I was blind.

Schara blind to the fact that you're creating this different space. Until people start nattering on you. And then you're like, "Wait, wait!" [laughter]

Friesen But it's explained. From the perspective of the psychological framework. Like, "This is technique." It's dismissive, of -of it being, of what it was describing. But that's because you can't see it. If you're not there. If -if you're- if you don't -if you're operating from the framework of psychology. You don't see that it's different. It's "I don't see you as a separate person."

Schara Mmhmm.

Friesen "I don't see Kathy." And I've been friends with you for forty years! Thirty five years. You don't see it. It's an emotional seeing. And it's experiencing it differently. I just can- you know- and that's the way our world is built! You know, people don't see the differences between ideas, and what they contribute to each other.

Schara Yeah, exactly.

Friesen They either just react/dismiss, or (glump).

Schara I had a little example, in which you know my daughter got upset with me, because I posted some pictures on Facebook that she didn't want me to post, and, and then so I said, you know, "I- I think this is how I misunderstood, I saw the pictures up on your site, and I thought that was okay to put on my site, but they weren't exactly the same, they were the same kids, but they- one was at the beach, and one was at the church, so I got confused. And she said, like, "Why don't you just say you're sorry?"

Friesen Mmm.

Schara And then I said, "Well, how would you understand anything if I just said I was sorry?" [laughter] Yeah, so explaining your different way of thinking can be extremely annoying to people.

Friesen Right.

Schara So, it's- it's not- differences are not embraced as a good thing. A good thing is "Just go along with me." And that's what you're up against, in society, I don't know whether Bowen- I think Bowen Theory does offer an extremely amazing look at control mechanisms in the family unit, and I -I think it could become extremely useful, for people to be able to see that as more- in a more neutral way, which would then promote the differences, allow the differences. Yeah.

Friesen You could see em. Rather than just react to em.

Schara Right, so I'm not sure how science is ever going to come along with anything as good as Bowen Theory. For producing more neutrality and objectivity. In seeing the control mechanisms that everybody's born into. But, and that's why-

Friesen Well I- I guess what I wonder, is do you think science is going to come along and

Schara Yeah, I don't know, it's

Friesen te- and reflect it?

Schara -it's hard to know. Because -like, I could hear what you're saying, like Galileo, for instance, he had the telescope and he was sure everyone could see it. "Step up to the telescope!" But they couldn't

Friesen But they-

Schara see it, cause their head wasn't there, so I'm still saying, Bowen Theory is looking at where your head is. And that is going to allow you to see it, and I don't think science can get there, cause it doesn't have a head. How's it going to see, to test, or to look at, the control mechanisms in the unit? I just think they're- listening to the epigenetic people, it's like, they've got all these pieces of a puzzle, and they're spread out on the beach, and there's no way to connect them. Except for Bowen Theory, and I think that's why that guy, Patrick McGowan? Said, "I wanna work with you people."

Friesen Mmhmm.

Schara And I think Barbara Smutts would be another one, that -that saw it. "You understand triangles, and you could help me form research questions." So, I still think maybe it'll- it'll come to that powerful way of thinking, that informs research. And without, without a conceptualization of the family as a unit, there's no research that's gonna put that together. Cause they're looking at the pieces.

Friesen Well, maybe, maybe I could say it another way. Those pieces came to be. People are studying those pieces. Because it is the way it is. What I was wondering is, is systems are the way it is. So, systems are beginning to be studied. So, something like Val Brown's thing. Or, you know. It's happening.

Schara Yeah, it's happening.

Friesen So, that's what I'm saying. Is, is that, if in fact, this is hap- this is the direction it's going, it may turn out different, but there- it's clear there are adapting, governing things that they're describing.

Schara Mmhmm.

Friesen S'not described in this much more complex theory, but they're describing governing systems here. Adapting, systems adapting through methylation.

Schara Mmhmm.

Friesen I mean, methylation being an outcome of adapting, or whatever you want to say. It's an interactional

Schara Yeah, (I hear you), yeah.

Friesen thing, that is a part of a system. So, but that wasn't there! Twenty years ago, when Bowen was talking.

Schara Right. Yeah.

Friesen So, I guess that's where I- that's - I was thinking in that way, that I get, you know, just to be able to entertain to me, [laughter] expansion for me is to entertain that Bowen Theory isn't everything.

Schara [laughter]

Friesen You know, that Bowen Theory is not the end all, be all. It was something that happened, that is a very important thing I think. But it's not, it is what it is. You know, it - time goes on, you know? It doesn't

Schara [laughter] Yeah. Yeah.

Friesen -how it fits into history is just how it fits into history. It's a bleep, likely.

Schara And people will write history, in their own way, and one of the reasons I had for doing this, is to make sure that history is recorded, in the right way, from individuals' points of view.. To show the importance of theory. And, in different lives, in different ways.

Friesen Mmhmm.

Schara So, thank you for today!

Friesen That's (going to be) a good book!

Schara Yeah! [laughter] Appreciate it, thanks so much.

Friesen Yeah. How long- [tape ends]