

Interview with Priscilla Friesen – *Edited for readability*
Conducted by Andrea Schara

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

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 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 encouraged people to enter into some kind of psychotherapy. I came into graduate school in 1976, which was five years after my mother had died in 1971.

When I got to graduate school, what was clear was that (I didn't know this at the time) my level of awareness was really low. I entered graduate school with a lot of emotion. It manifested in two ways. One was, I cried at the drop of a hat. I carried a lot of feeling, sadness, and emotionality. The second way it manifested was in back pain. I was fortunate to enter consultation with Dr. Don Shoulberg. He was in a transition year, between being a Jungian analyst, and shifting to Bowen Theory.

This transition year was an interesting year for him, as I came to know later. We got to be colleagues and good friends. The first day I met with him, he did a family diagram. He said something about my mother's death being related to my feeling and physical state. I understood something. I am not certain, 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: It was just mind-blowing to me how it works, that I wouldn't get that. At a cognitive level, it's just mind-blowing. Anyway, so that became kind of an "ooh." I read

everything I could read in the first couple months of consultation and graduate school. I could see it was a framework to understand what I knew had experienced in my family.

I had no idea what had happened. My mother had been sick since I was 12, and she died when I was 21. Nine years of her illness were during my very formative years. I'd gotten married at 18 to help me out. By the time, I got to graduate school I was separated and was living a kind of a spin of a life with a lot of emotion. So getting to graduate school was really grounding. Bowen Theory became central. I just ate it up. I read everything I could read. That first year was a very intense year that included a lot of integrating of my mother's death, ending a relationship, and getting a life.

I got a direction that was more concrete. In the second year of graduate school, I wrote to Dr. Bowen, and I said I was interested in more training and what was possible. 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. "Yes, we have a program here, and you know, I used to live in Kansas, and..." Somehow it was a concrete kind of connection, my first connection with him, that really promoted my interest in moving to Washington. I was interested in pursuing Bowen theory in a more significant way than the four times a year program for those at a distance. I just knew I wanted to go and be there. So I came to Washington. It was at a time when there were no social work jobs. And I tried a lot of things, but they were like dead ends.

So in August '78, I had an interview with Roberta Holt, a faculty member, to be in the local weekly post graduate Bowen training program. She reported later that she definitely wanted to have me in the training program, because she was interested in my Mennonite background. She had a Mennonite caretaker when she was young. [laughter] I was accepted into the training program without a clinical practice, which typically was a criterion for acceptance at the time. In October, Ruth Sagar, the administrator, invited me to come and do clerical work on a temporary basis at the Family Center until I could find a job, (since I was doing temp secretarial work to support myself already, this seemed great).

Ruth Sagar asked if I would begin by being a receptionist and typing Dr. Bowen's correspondence. In November, the position came up to support Lillian Rosenbaum's work in the biofeedback lab. It was within that next month that my employment shifted. Dr. Rosenbaum's program was quickly expanding. I began seeing people incorporating biofeedback and working with Lillian Rosenbaum to develop of the biofeedback programs.

Interestingly, I really didn't have a personal interest in the biofeedback. It didn't get my attention. At that point, it was a great job to be at the Bowen Center. I wasn't going to complain! What that gave me, obviously, was walking up and down the halls with the people that I had read about including Dr. Bowen. So my initial work there was really in biofeedback. Dr. Bowen was a bit of an intimidating figure to me. He was not somebody I was naturally inclined to get to know as a person.

When I first began, I would say my constitution was really challenged. To be able to hold the integration and all that was coming at me from theory was difficult. An example to me is that when I went to clinical conferences conferences, I could only stay

awake about fifteen minutes before I went to sleep. I was lightly asleep most of that clinical day, in and out. My constitution didn't have the stamina to be able to manage the energy requirement to manage the ideas, and manage what it was challenging to me.

Over time, I had more and more energy, and more and more capability. What was clear in the initial stages was how disconnected I was from my family. In those early years, I would say getting back in contact with my family and spending all the resources I had contacting family was basic to my life. That was the first ten years, fifteen years, maybe. My first more personal contact with Dr. Bowen was probably '82 or '83 when he had one of his surgeries. And I think, Andrea, you were the one who challenged me to go visit him in the hospital.

Schara: Yeah, I remember that.

Friesen: And, so I did go visit him while he was in the hospital. He was watching "I Love Lucy," and laughing, when I came in. We didn't say much. I just held his hand, watching "I Love Lucy," and laughing.

Schara: [laughter]

Friesen: It was a personal contact. It was pretty nonverbal but connected. And I could tell he appreciated it. Something happened for me that made it a little bit more comfortable to be around him. His illness was interesting. I was also working in the biofeedback labs and was working with people with physical symptoms and anxiety. I was teaching medical students and other professionals. We did a program that was for people around the country as well as all different kinds of things that I assisted Dr. Rosenbaum to do to manifest her ideas, some of mine, more of hers.

The factors I think that were key to me in terms of the field of biofeedback was when I had another back attack in the '80s, I started to begin to use biofeedback for myself relating to the back pain. I began to see more clearly, for myself and for others that I was working with, the dance of the emotional system and one's individual physiology. So I could see it on the equipment. I could see it in my own body, and was observing it, developing more ability to be aware of the physiology and what it was related to. That was the important link for me. How is the back pain related to the relationship triangles. I thought about my back attack as my tail being caught in the triangles.

The physiology was a part of the system. It wasn't just the anxiety being high and then you have a symptom. It's that it had a dance to it that could be observed. One of the real tricky things at the Bowen Center then, was that there was this assumption that biofeedback was a technique, and was not about theory. Biofeedback was seen more as something to do or to fix, "too symptom-focused." I never thought about it that way, and I know Dr. Rosenbaum didn't think about it that way. My effort was with the polarization around biofeedback, Dr. Rosenbaum and theory. I was in the middle of that, trying to represent more biofeedback as a research tool, an ability to see the emotional process at the level of the physiology, the nature of it, and how it worked.

That was really what my interest was. Understanding physiology more as a relationship thing really got my attention. So I was motivated to really learn more about

development and how different physiological processes came online, as a function of the relationship adapting to the family processes. These are examples of the study of physiology becoming more mine. I was more interested in it genuinely for myself.

Somewhere along in this time period of the mid 80's Dr. Bowen asked me if I would assist him in using the biofeedback for himself, recovering from his hospitalizations and his efforts at regulating himself at a physiological level. I have a large file probably three inches thick of the number of sessions that he did. I would ask him, what does he get out of these sessions? They were different than other clinical 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. He would describe it all the while hooked up and watching, regulating his physiology. The way he would talk about it was that the process for him was the technology and me.

Schara: I remember that. [laughter]

Friesen: I couldn't quite figure out what that meant. I thought about it as what I represented to a client was theory and the technology was a triangle in some ways. It was between the person and the technology and theory. I was introducing them to that, to the information about their physiology and translating through theory. So, Bowen thought of it as what he did with himself, with the technology, and what I contributed to it. 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. I wasn't the same kind of teacher of theory with him as I was with clients.

Schara: But he put in the importance of relationships.

Friesen: Yes, relationships.

Schara: No matter how you want to characterize it, the fact that you represent a relationship and the machine doesn't really represent a relationship, it gives feedback about your physiology. You represent a relationship that's important in that room, with the equipment.

Friesen: However that works. That process was incorporated into his future hospitalizations in ICU, where there is technology in the room. It became a part of our conversation when I would visit him in the hospital. I would relate to him around what was going on in his physiology as was reflected in the technology. Sometime I would pull the equipment around so he could see it in ways in which he could use the

information to regulate himself. When he was more physically challenged, I gave him the feedback verbally.

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

Friesen: The technology? No.

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

Friesen: Well, the technology was there, the heart rate, the, blood pressure, peak flow.

Schara: Okay.

Friesen: His oxygen flow, his respiration rates, all that was a part of the room technology. I would move it around, so he could see it, or tell him what was going on. If I couldn't move it, we'd sit there. I might hold his hand. I might coach him a little bit on just letting his system settle down.

I was going bring this up, about the hospital, because I think this is to me one of the personal examples that I think really epitomized what was the up-close and personal experience use of relationships in managing self I had with Dr. Bowen.

I got to be pretty active during these hospitalizations, and was present mostly on a daily basis . There were some hospitalizations where we (faculty, staff) took turns when he was really in a compromised situation. I'll tell you two stories. One of them was when he was intubated.

There was a question whether he was really going to ever get off that intubation. It was hard to know what would happen. He seemed to be at the end of his life. So, one day I came in and he was really struggling. He couldn't speak because of the intubation. I said, it seemed to me that he could die and it could be the end of his life. It turns out it wasn't but it seemed like it could've been. I talked to him a little bit about dying, and then I got up the nerve to ask him a question. I said, I know this is kind of an odd question, but if you can come back after you're dead, I'd be interested. He kind of smiled through his intubation and I left for the day.

So, the next day when I came back, he was off the intubation. He reported that he had had a dream, or a dreamlike image during the night, 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." That next morning he got off the intubation. He could breathe on his own steam.

Schara: Very cool.

Friesen: I thought it was a cool thing too. So the next story was the next day when, he was moved out of ICU and into his regular hospital room. Later, I came in to his new room. 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 what I thought was "as usual." But I could not go back. I couldn't go back! It was easily three or four days

before I went back to his room. I had been visiting on a daily basis for a week or more and then couldn't go back and I did not know why. When I actually did go back, he looked at me and kind of smiled, and said "I wondered when you were coming back."

Schara [laughter]

Friesen: 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 in words. This was not in words. I didn't feel a disruption at the time. He didn't say anything to me. It wasn't at that level. It was communicated at a level that I could not come back. He just smiled.

Schara: Yeah, that's so beautiful.

Friesen: "You didn't think I wanted to stay dependent on you." You know, that is the subtlety that I experienced. I get how subtle this is and what a big reaction I had. It was an internal action, that is experienced by another. Now, it was disturbing to me, at some level. 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.

Schara: Yeah.

Friesen: It was subtle, and it was very precise. That to me is the level of relationship influencing that I think he was capable of and 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, [laughter] 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: 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 you couldn't go back for three or four days.

Friesen: I don't think it went that far. I didn't think of it as interrupting my own history. I didn't translate it into that yet. What I do remember, in being around when Dr. Bowen died, or when he was sick, is that I would go in and spend the day, let's say with Dr. Bowen in the hospital or at his home, doing all these things, in a pragmatic, factual kind of way. Then I would go home and have these unbelievable dreams about my mother.

Schara; [laughter]

Friesen: Horrible nightmares. Really harsh, terrible hard, hard things! Then I would go back the next day, and it would not be that. Somehow I didn't get my mother and Dr. Bowen mixed up, and he played his part in that. He played a big 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 one level I could be with Dr. Bowen. When I went home, it was very disturbing, tumultuous, and a lot of experiencing my mother dying. There was a focus on her illness, a lot of hard stuff. When Dr. Bowen died, it wasn't disruptive. It wasn't hard. The death was not like my mother's death, and that was really mind-boggling to me, because he was so important. 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, it seemed like my mother at the time, but it was really the entire multigenerational history, that this death theme lived through my Mom and Dad. This experience with Dr. Bowen personally seemed to be reorganizing my basic emotional history. In the relationship with Dr. Bowen, the person I was able to walk alongside of him, up close and personal as he was dying. It was an opportunity for me to do an illness, caretaking, or participating, let's say, in the illness and a dying process that was different from my experience with my mother.

Being able to be frank, open, with 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 --- things that were very personal to me. Dr. Bowen's death and my mother's death would be the two deaths that had the most profound impact on me. And they were so different.

I think my relationship with Dr. Bowen was probably the most influential in affecting my ability to be less reactive and more genuinely myself. The impact was more in response to him, than generated by me, I imagine it's a synergy. I think it even as he was dying and as those last months, it was his ability to relate as a self, even as he was dying, that was freeing and a real contribution to 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 are freer yourself, because you're able to be less reactive and more genuinely 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. The way he sees you as a person frees you, but it's like I think we talked about it before, looking at the other.

Friesen: Right, seeing the other.

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

Friesen: Yes.

Schara: This is seeing the other in yourself, like stress would be. So stress might provoke something, cortisol or whatever, and this seeing the other provokes something at a cellular level. The evidence is, maybe less reactivity of your psychology and your body.

Friesen: Your body! I mean, your whole being. Perhaps this is a good segue into the other question you asked; where have you gone with Bowen Theory, and where is it going? Or what have you contributed to it.

After Dr. Bowen died in '90, it was in '94 where I developed my own kind of direction with exposure to Neurofeedback or brain wave training. It is an extension of the biofeedback, but to me it was another world. It shined a light on the link between the biological, chemical signaling in an individual brain and its own patterns in the individual, and in its relationship system. It highlighted how people's emotionality manifested.

I could understand how people thought; how people's psychology was a relationship experience; and the nature of how we were all connected. That was the beginning of where I could see it. My first experience actually being on neurofeedback equipment was with you. I said, "Now I see how the mind works." I could see how the psychology and brain function was a relationship experience. That reference point has been there since. I have spent my professional life since putting language to it, experiencing it with other people, being able to describe it, walking alongside of the different expansions of technology that have given more and more capability to demonstrate the systems nature of the brain/mind/body.

This is back to the question of where have you gone since Dr. Bowen's death. I think that now I see what Dr. Bowen was talking about working on differentiation at the level of the psychology. It is changing the way you perceive something and how it fundamentally alters the relationship system.

I think what biofeedback, neurofeedback, and these many links that include development, epigenetics, multigenerational process, applied kinesiology, reflex

integration, the way the body works, all the years of yoga that I've done, 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, has expanded my understanding of differentiation of self.

First of all, understanding how you really see it at these much deeper levels. Dr. Bowen talked about how all different levels of the system were related to differentiation. But he didn't have the technology. He didn't spend his life energy on it as I have had the opportunity to do. He inferred it. He directed your attention to the fact that it is also related to all levels of your organism and the relationships around you. What I think these last twenty, almost twenty five years, has expanded, both to 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 -- has been to expand the methodology of defining a self which includes self-regulation. This includes becoming aware of biological and psychological processes that coincide with relationship processes and triangles.

Learning about these processes that are deeper and out of awareness within the organism; and learning how to use that knowledge and consciousness, of those physiological, psychological, mind states, cognition states, emotional states; learning how to leverage those observations towards being more of a self. The impact is then from the inside out. I think Dr. Bowen's methodology focuses on changing your functioning in the relationship system and that impacts your physiology, your emotion, and your deeper states. They of course affect both ways. I think what biofeedback, neurofeedback contributes looking from the inside out has given, more substantial understanding of how differentiation operates in all levels of the individual and family.

Dr. Bowen was aiming towards it. He spoke about it in one of the tapes I did with him. I was trying to link the physiology in the development of the child to the intensity of the patterns between mother and child. His comment was that he was focusing on the psychology of the mother-infant relationship.

It was helpful to go back and look at this. One of the things I noticed since Dr. Bowen's death is separating what he actually got at in his lifetime. What he did put into language. What he did think. There were things that he didn't think! Things that I have thought that he may or may not have thought!

Schara: [laughter]

Friesen: What he contributed given the context and time and what he was describing was so beyond what other people were even seeing. I always think, he sees things I don't see. I'm going to assume if I see something, he saw it already. He just didn't say it, I try to see more realistically what his scope of knowledge was and how far he got. What was the beam of light that he directed. And it diffuses. It isn't as clear as it was when he was describing what he was seeing.

Psychology is one of these examples. Science in the last twenty five years, has led to seeing the psychology and the physiology as interrelated and synchronous. Science is catching up with what he saw and is filling in the details. An example was at the conference at the Bowen Center on epigenetics. Epigenetics is linking the adaptation to the environment to the changes in the genetic material and its expression.

It describes the biological mechanisms of how emotional process is transmitted generation to generation. So these scientists don't care about Bowen Theory. It doesn't matter to them. They are simply charting what is. Will theory really be relevant? Science is going to go ahead and see what is. And maybe corroborate what Dr. Bowen saw, but I don't think Bowen theory is not going to be leading it.

Bowen Theory may never have a kind of its own day in the sun, except historically. This person had this idea and history may see it as ahead of its time. When we were in Greece this summer, we saw a tomb of an early Greek physician, who was the first person who treated the mind/body long before modern times. He was identified with the idea for a generation and then it was gone.

Schara: Right.

Friesen: I think that Science will continue to move towards systems. It was freeing to see that Greek physician wasn't known. I'm not responsible to make Bowen Theory live! (laugh) It happens to be what I am doing in my professional life. I am spending my life putting energy into the ideas that can leverage the human experience.

To be able to be more productive and really increase consciousness, or have more influence on a larger group would be great. I had a conversation with my cousin about evolution of consciousness. He was describing during the Renaissance, there were only 10% of the people that were involved in the thinking and the conceptual shifts. It wasn't everybody. Perhaps that may be what Bowen theory is about. Is this one of those shifting periods of knowledge and human consciousness? Perhaps it's one of many things that are a part of more seeming chaos when there is also more ability to see the dilemma that the human is in. I am thinking of each of our very personal dilemmas. Mine, my personal multigenerational human trajectory, and how to rise out of that, enough to be able to relate it to my personal experience in a way that's a bit more "outside" of it and appreciating it.

It is also being able to contribute to other people being able to get more outside of the emotionality. Bowen Theory contributes to doing that. I think that as people become more factual about themselves, there is an ability to expand perspective "consciousness" or whatever you want to call it. The perspective is deeper than the psychological one. It is a physiological perspective. It can sound "spiritual."

Can you be more outside of the human evolutionary trajectory -- of reactivity, survival reactivity and adapting to group coercion? Paradoxically, by being able to see it, you can also experience the commonality between people. Perhaps that is promoting a higher level of differentiation. I think Dr. Bowen talked about people at higher levels of differentiation being able to act on their own self-interest, and for the interest of the group, without getting people all rankled up about it. It didn't produce the same level of group reactivity than at lower levels of differentiation.

I've been thinking a lot about differentiation as cooperation as I work with larger multigenerational family groupings and family enterprise. This isn't about symptoms, as in my clinical work rather it is about people being able to represent their self-interest, simultaneous to cooperating in the group. Now that seems to me to be another aspect of spirituality. There are other wisdom and knowledge traditions that are getting at that. Bowen Theory's been such an important part of my whole life. It's a methodology, a

framework, an explanation and a language, has taken my own emotional functioning so far from where I started.

It has had an impact on my family and in other people and families who have pursued multigenerational or epigenetic tracks and Bowen's methodologies. Everyone has their own example of how differentiation plays out through those many different human family tracks. What begins to emerge is a multifaceted appreciation for the breadth of human adaptation and differentiation. There are so many variations. I come at this from my own multigenerational history which includes pacifism and physical symptoms.

It would be an interesting book having many epigenetic lines describing the nature of differentiation from that line. What does the process of differentiation of self look like in different multigenerational paths with different mechanisms for adapting. Just as there are many spiritual practices, there are many differentiation of self practices or mechanisms addressing this remarkable variability.

Schara: Yeah. Do you have an example of a Mennonite pacifist way of differentiation that might be useful to people who listen to this? I think I'm clear about what you're talking about of how your experience with reactivity worked in your family

Friesen: So at the basic level, pacifism has to do with addressing aggression as a solution to conflict or differences. You can solve conflict by killing people for the country or national group. It's related to the societal assumption that the way in which you solve problems at the national level is to go to war. Pacifism takes a stand and says that individuals will not participate in war and its outcome. So the Bible says, Thou shalt not kill. Pacifists would say that that includes not killing for any reason including national coercion. Before you do something out there against your neighbor, you "turn the other cheek." You interrupt the automatic meeting of aggression with aggression. It requires you to address your automatic human nature to fight.

I have a great example of this. My husband and I were watching a movie where this character was in a double bind and she ended up threatened and killed her former partner and lover. He had betrayed her and she killed him. My automatic reaction was "no." My husband's automatic reaction was "Kill him!" My reaction, was "Oh my God, the consequences of that, don't do it!" It's automatic. I don't get aggressive, automatically. That's my epigenetic, pacifist background. I do not get aggressive. That doesn't mean I don't get reactive. But you're not going to take the life of another. So what alternative is there? So, what can happen where you do not fight is that there may be a cost...they can be jailed or get killed. There is a cost that a pacifist position expects.

Schara: Absolutely.

Friesen: There is reactivity when you take a stand. 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.

Schara Yeah.

Friesen: I'm going to have compassion. I'm going to love." There's a different way to manage your own emotional reactivity than an aggressive polarized antagonism at the societal level. So for me, that comes out in day-to-day relationships. It's not automatic for me to get mad! I may get upset, but it's inside me. It's not going to come out automatically in aggressing against the other.

Friesen: The emotionality goes somewhere! For me it is physical symptoms. That transaction is what I've spent my life trying to do something different where you have some alternatives to my patterned reactivity. Be it aggressing, or to internalize or shut down. There must be another way.

Schara: So to use my language, the role that the family had for you, in an epigenetic way, would have been to become a compassionate pacifist with physical symptoms. [laughter] so you're in differentiation, you're moving away from the cost, to living a freer life.

Through integrating these methodologies, I think you could say differentiation of self is a methodology, like neurofeedback is a methodology. Putting two together and getting self out or detriangling is a methodology. By using these various methodologies, you're not as controlled by the emotional system. That is really what differentiation allows, or shines the light on. There are many other pathways or not being as controlled by the emotional system. 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. That's that I hear you're doing. I don't know if you have a good story about managing yourself differently with your dad about this. After your mother died, your dad and your step mother assumed a lot of importance to you. They may have their desire for you. One example that I was thinking about was that maybe the family didn't really want you to get married. And what it took for you to get free of that worry that they had about you. Or that you were to be a Bowen nun. [laughter]

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

Schara: I don't know if you want to speak to that a little bit. It's an example of separating out from the role the family assigned you. And how do you separate yourself in a way that makes sense of your own direction.

Friesen: Let me see if I can speak to that. I think that my function in my family was to provide support to keep it together. When my dad remarried, his major energies seemed to go in the direction of orienting towards my stepmother and her children. It makes sense given how males are oriented to females. His children were a little more automatically on the outside of the pivot points of the new family. So when my father first married, I oriented to help him out with life that was oriented to his wife and her children. I spent energy getting to know and keep up with my stepsiblings as well as my father and stepmother. A lot of energy went into that family.

Around the time Dr. Bowen was dying, I got interested in challenging myself to be in a partnership or marriage. So there was a question of how much of my energy was

expended to keep my family unit stable. My stepfamily seemed to be a little more disrupted. However, as I moved to marry and get out of that position of putting energy into stabilizing my family of origin, it was the first time that the stepfamily went towards their own father's family. They had also lost a parent (father) but had no contact with them.

So when I married and put less of my energy into my father and stepfamily, my stepsiblings moved towards their biological father's family, which is the way it should be. Initially I supported the togetherness in my relationship with my dad. As I did that less, I think the clarity about whose family is whose, became clear. There is a stepfamily, and there is a combination of two basic family units which is now the basic unit. I think that my brothers and I, and perhaps my stepsiblings too, have more of a life.

Schara: Yeah. More of a root system, definitely.

Friesen: My stepfamily is a part of it. So, but I don't spend as much of my energy there.

Schara: Yeah.

Friesen: My brothers and my dad are my preferential relationships. This last year or so, I've been much more appreciative of my stepmother. I have appreciated the interdependence between my dad and stepmother. I appreciate that she exists, to provide the stability in my father's life. The two of them have done really well for the 40 plus years together. My dad is 94 and my stepmom is 88.

Schara: That's amazing.

Friesen: They have been as healthy as could be until the last couple years. So I think it has served them. It has served all of us.

Schara: To go back to getting married, was it hard for your dad for you to get married, or how did you deal with that?

Friesen: We talked a lot about it. He's a writer, and he wrote a psalm that was about the relationship between him and me that he read at the wedding. It was about the difficulty in letting me go. At least that is what I heard. The interdependence between my dad and me certainly goes back a long way. He was a modulator in the intensity between my mother and me. I "supported" him in the triangle with my mother. I was more naturally like him and experienced an affinity for him. My sensitivity to my mother played out in distance, with my dad being more accessible to me. I'm more like him in some ways, although I'm similar to my mother too. As I see better now after she has been dead for over forty years.

Schara: How did you make it easier for your Dad, if you did, to let go of you which he spoke about at your wedding? Was there anything that you had on your mind to proceed on without you?

Friesen: I think I made an effort for them, to know my husband and to know his family. They welcomed my stepdaughters personally. There were conversations with him about the changes. He has his ways of managing that include his spiritual orientation, like prayer. .

Schara: That's a pretty good description of a Mennonite

Friesen: Mennonite adaptation! [laughter]

Schara: [laughter] Through letters and songs, and prayer then one is able to let go, to be less enmeshed, fused, or whatever you want to call it, less caught in the worry about the other.

Friesen: Right..

Schara: So that gets processed, and the two organisms are a bit more interdependent instead of dependent. Bowen used to talk about a family oneness and then there was dependency. In this family oneness, beliefs are not looked at or thought about or individual differences are not thought about. If you don't go along with the way we believe, then all hell could break loose! Most families run on that.

It's a primitive thing. It likely 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. Then the dependency lessens. That's what it sounds like in listening to you. It just sounds like in your story with Dr. Bowen and in your story about your own family, like dependency for one another lessens. And then, people are freer.

Friesen: I think so.

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

Friesen: That's pretty good. I think it was everything that I had prepared for this interview.

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

Friesen: Focused on as a technique person, yeah.

Schara: Yes, you were focused on as a technology person, rather than methodology.

Friesen: Even though it's not what I was.

Schara: Exactly. And, so 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 see you as not doing it right. 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]

Friesen [laughter] Heaven forbid!

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

Friesen: Mmhmm. 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 is important. I think one of the things I really could see was that Dr. Bowen's theory was developed as a psychological theory. What I had been experiencing all these years was at a different level than what he was talking about. How can I not see this? It was like a separation from him, and the theory in some ways because I really could not see that these were different ideas.

Schara: So 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. Then you're like, "Wait, wait!" [laughter]

Friesen: It can be explained from the perspective of the psychological framework. "This is technique." It's dismissive of what it was describing. But that's because you can't see it. If you're operating from the framework of psychology, you don't see that it's different.

Schara: Mmhmm.

Friesen: People don't seem to see 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. My daughter got upset with me because I posted some pictures on Facebook that she didn't want me to post. I said, "I think this is how I misunderstood. I saw the pictures up on your site and I thought that was okay to put them on my site. They weren't exactly the same but they were the same kids - one was at the beach, and one was at the church, so I got confused." She said, "Why don't you just say you're sorry?"

Friesen: Mmm.

Schara: 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: Differences are not embraced as a good thing. "Just go along with me," is a good thing. I think Bowen theory does offer an amazing look at control mechanisms in the family unit. It could become extremely useful for people to be able to see mechanisms in a more neutral way which would then promote allowing the differences.

Friesen: You could see them rather than just react to them.

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.

Friesen: I wonder, is do you think science is going to come along and reflect it?

Schara: It's hard to know. I can hear what you're saying. Galileo, for instance, had the telescope and he was sure everyone could see what he saw. "Step up to the telescope!" People couldn't or wouldn't see it because their head wasn't there.

Friesen: But they-

Schara:, Bowen Theory is looking at where your head is. That is going to allow you to see it. I don't think science can get there because 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've got all these pieces of a puzzle. They are 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: I think Barbara Smutts would be another one that saw it. "You understand triangles, and you could help me form research questions." So, I still think maybe it'll come to that powerful way of thinking that informs research. Without a conceptualization of the family as a unit, there's no research that's going to put that together. They are looking at the pieces, not how they connect.

Friesen: Well, maybe I could say it another way. Those pieces came to be. People are studying those pieces, because it is the way it is. Systems are the way it is. So, systems

are beginning to be studied, something like Val Brown's work developing Zengar Neurofeedback based upon systems theory. It's happening.

Schara: Yeah, it's happening.

Friesen; That is what I'm saying. Systems is the direction science is going. Expansion for me is to entertain that Bowen theory isn't everything.

Schara [laughter]

Friesen: Bowen Theory is not the end. It is a very important contribution that has had a significant impact on my personal life. It is a very important to me... It is what it is.

Schara [laughter] Yeah. Yeah.

Friesen: How it fits into history is just how it fits into history. It may just be a bleep.

Schara: People will write history, in their own way, and one of the reasons I had for doing these oral history interviews is to make sure that history is recorded from the individual's points of view to show the importance of theory in different lives, in different ways.

So, thank you for today!