

Interview with Selden Illick
Conducted by Andrea Schara

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For the Murray Bowen Archives Project of Leaders for Tomorrow at History of Science
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Schara: So this is Andrea, Schara, I'm here with Selden Illick, and it's June-

Illick: 12th.

Schara: June 12th! Alright, 20- 2014.

Illick: 2014.

Schara: So let's see where we can go in an hour, you've got the questions, and, why don't you just start where you want to?

Illick: Okay. Well, I'll start with this. Um, I had been studying Freudian psychology, and then I went to the Philadelphia Child Guidance Clinic, and I remember saying to people that I knew, "There has got to be somebody that looks at the self of the person in a family system. Freudian looks within the self, and child guidance is all about the system." And, then, a friend of mine, Daphne Hawks, who was studying at Princeton Theological Seminary, found his Anonymous Paper, in the library.

And she called me up, and I remember exactly where I was sitting in my house, and she said, "I have found the man. I have found the man! And it's very, very long, but I'm xeroxing this thing for you."

Schara: What year was that?

Illick: Okay, so that was very, very exciting. That, I'll tell you what that was. Let's see, have to think for a minute. I was in graduate school. It was probably '81, or '82, something like that, but it was before the -maybe it was '79. '79, '80, '81, somewhere in there. That's when I went back to school.

Schara: '79? Mokay. His book came out in '80, I think- no, it was

Illick: '79. And I was-

Schara: '7- I'm sorry, '77, '78. His book came out '78 I think.

Illick: (inaudible)

Schara: And so, '79 a lot of people just had mimeographed copies.

Illick: Right. Yeah, well, and of course this was- this was- yeah, she found it, in the library. She copied it for me, just his Anonymous Paper, and brought it to me. So, then, what happened though, is that I graduated from Bryn Mawr in Social Work School in 1981. And, that was the year of the flowering of family therapy meeting, in New York City. And, oh my God! It was Whittaker, Minuchin, you know, Wynn Lyman. You just name all these people that were in my -in my textbooks, were all sitting there and Dr. Bowen. All, you know, in a panel. And, so I signed up for this conference, and you got to check off who you wanted to have your box lunch with. So I saw Dr. Bowen's name. So I checked off his name. And I thought, "This is so exciting, I can't stand it."

And so I went and took my little box lunch, and I went into the room, that he was assigned to, for that meeting. And, he was very excited, he was you know, he was all pumped up, and he had- I think he had recently had his aneurysm, I think I learned that later, but he spoke in a raspy kinda voice. But his enthusiasm, and his excitement, about this theory and you know, family therapy, and all this stuff. In 1981, anyway, I just thought this is- this is unbelievable. Then, I -I start working, at a little drug and alcohol agency, and I had signed up to get trained in - at the Child Guidance Clinic, and the more I did that stuff there the more I kept thinking about Dr. Bowen. And, but I didn't really know where he was and I wasn't really, you know, just kind of like "That's such a great thing, that there is this way of thinking about this person in the system."

And then, some people in Princeton (Babs Kellogg), saw me one day on the street, and she said, that her daughter just moved to Minneapolis, he daughter Peggy was a friend of mine, and she said, "She's just run into these people that are studying really fascinating theory, and they're gonna start this Bowen thing, in Minneapolis." And, she was giving out scholarships, and did I want to go! And I said, "Well, I've been trying to figure out how to get to Dr. Bowen so I guess this is as good as any!" Never realizing, God, that he was right down the road on the train from Princeton, and I could have gone to Georgetown.

Nevermind. I went to Minneapolis. And I went there for about four years, and during that time Kathy Kerr and Bobby Holt came out to be supervisors and, then after four years of going out there and having several people from Princeton also becoming interested in Bowen Theory, I decided to start a family center in Princeton. But what I have to tell you about my time with Dr. Bowen, in Minneapolis, it was a total ball. I would just go sit right by his right. I, have to tell you this, he'd die, he'd gag, but I absolutely adored this man, I loved him, I loved what he's done for me in my life and my family, and I just- and I think this whole theory is amazing.

And, my whole focus with this is the application to everyday life. I really- that's what I think about. All the time. How can these ideas be translated well enough for people to be able to apply this. And, when I was first learning this, there were a couple little kids in Princeton, that my children were grown and these were children of friends of mine, and I would take them out one by one, to get tea and shrimp. And the little girl, especially, Murray, who now wants to be a social worker, used to talk to me about trouble she was having with her friends. So we would take the knives and forks and spoons and make triangles and talk about, who was on which end, and what was where, and she was kinda intrigued, and I thought, "My God, this kid is ten years old! And I'm talking to her about triangles, this is really great."

Okay, so, the Minneapolis chapter with Dr. Bowen was really, really fun. And I would sit on his right, and I would just ask him a hundred questions. And he was really great, he sort of had a twinkle in his eye, just was fun. And, I remember one day I said to him, "Dr. Bowen, what do you do about anger?" And, he put his hand way up above his head, and he said, I think "It's"- this is my memory of this, "It's-" it went something like this, "It's a problem of not being enough self. So the more you can work on self, the more this cloud will come down. And when you finally get to see over the top, you can manage your anger." I could that was kinda fascinating. I loved it. And, you were talking, earlier, about things that he could see in people, and it is really, really interesting, because one day he just looked at me, and he said, "How lonely are you?"

Schara: [laughter] Wow.

Illick: And I was stunned. And I said, "I think very." And we just left it at that. But it- that was just amazing, you know, to sort of cutting through all this stuff, and I don't know where it came from. But anyway, the other kind of thing, you know I was very sorta spontaneous in the beginning, I really didn't really worry about if I said something right or didn't say it right, or

Schara: Yeah.

Illick: whatever, I just thought, "This was really fun, and interesting, and I like thinking about it in terms of my family." And one night, I remember going out and the people in Minneapolis sat me in between Mary Bourne and Dr. Bowen. And, in one ear Mary was telling me how much Dr. Bowen you know, something about him. In the other ear, he was telling me something about her. Finally, I took both their hands, and grabbed them, and said, "You two oughta hold hands and make up!" And they both went, "Ew!"

Schara: [laughter]

Illick: [laughter] But that is something, as the years went by, I never would've considered doing. Because, things radically changed. When I started the Princeton Family Center. And then it was like, you know, my- this is just not even an interpretation of him, but I wondered if he thought, "Oh my God, this, this? Is starting a Family Center, in my name? I don't know about this." So anyway, then he began to get, um, he began to get more tough. With me. And, it wasn't- it wasn't a barrel of laughs. And I would say something at a meeting, and he would just you know, have something very different to say. And I would- I would listen to this stuff, but it was- and you know, see I just think the bottom line, is I think this theory already had gotten to me, and made so much sense, that I had to sort of figure my way through this, and I also knew, that the things that were getting set off in me were not new. With Dr. Bowen. So I was just, you know, I'd sort of take those things back.

And, you know, I told you the story of when I was out in Minneapolis and this is the first time that I had seen, a number of people from the Bowen Center in one place, all at once. I was just used to seeing either Dr. Bowen, or Dr. Kerr, and that was it. Kind of in Minneapolis. One or the other would come. And they never even came at the same

time. And then, Jack Kellogg organized this AIDS meeting, and paid for everybody to get to Minneapolis and have this AIDS meeting with the anthropologists, and I was fascinated. Because as I sat and listened to people give their presentations, about different aspects of AIDS, I could just see how this theory, the principles of this theory, could apply to anything. And that was very exciting to me. So of course I ran back to Dr. Bowen. At the break, to tell him how excited I was to see that "All you people-" -and I didn't get any farther than that- and I got my head chopped off.

Schara: [laughter]

Illick: And I had to go to my room and cry. And, you know, it was just kind of like, "Holy mackerel!" And I don't know, you asked an interesting question, "Is- did he sense something about me, (my father)-" I have no idea.

Schara: Well, I mean he- you had had a long relationship with him, by this time, and you had- Right? I mean, so this is the AIDS meeting, which- was it-

Illick: Well- Yeah, when was that?

Schara: I-I- I'm wondering if it was '87? Or so like that it seems, '86. (inaudible)

Illick: Yeah, I (had seen-) Or- it may be '86, may be '85. You're right, I did know him

Schara: Yeah, '83 was when it was really bad, the AIDS- that was before they had AZT and all of that.

Illick: but- I don't- I can't remember.

Schara: And, so many people were dying, and it was a very unpopular topic for quite awhile, there.

Illick: Yeah, I started out in Minneapolis in '83, and then, yeah, maybe it was '86. Well, he would've- he would've known me, but I never presented my family to him, or ever really particularly talked to him about that kind of stuff. But anyway, anyway, anyway.

Schara: How do you think you presented yourself, to him, just a- sort of a curious learning person, and then things shifted, so it could have been in the shift, if you started the Princeton Family Center, maybe-

Illick: I do- I hadn't started it then, and most of the time, I, you know, was having fun with him at those meetings, but I'll tell you, this one was different. And, you know, I don't know! I thought it was kind of the same, I didn't

Schara: Okay.

Illick: you know, it was my first- that was my first shift.

Schara: Okay.

Illick: With him. You know, so I don't know. It's sorta took me by surprise, because

Schara: What did you get out of it?

Illick: I had been okay, up until then. As far as I thought he thought I was concerned. Um, what did I get out of it? I -I got out of it that I had to be a lot more serious. That I had to really, you know, I just- the fun was over.

Schara: [laughter] I don't know why that makes me laugh.

Illick: I know, well, it's good, it's very good. So, I'm just trying to think now.

Schara: So that- the way he interacted with you really interests me, that

Illick: How did-

Schara: -that, without hearing your family history, by just looking at the way you are with him and with other people, he takes a reading on you. And then he interacts with you in a way what I would call a status challenge. You know, if you were an animal and these are called status challenges. And then the animal either rises up, to deal, or they go away. They slink away into the bushes and they never come back to any Bowen anything, ever again. And I, I saw him do this you know, more than just a few times with people.

And then he would send letters to people. That also were of this same nature. And he sent some doozies to me. Just to see whether you could interact, and manage yourself with it. So in my mind, it was he was doing research on everyone, that's what I believe. And I've-

Illick: That's- that's pretty good. And, course, I, you know, I think that's very interesting and I think, you know, when you think about the square dancing thing, and he's realizing that he can mix these people up and stuff like that. I mean, it makes a lot of sense to me. But I wasn't thinking like that, then, and I haven't really thought about it in my relationship with him that way. You know, it's interesting. But he did- I got very concerned, you know, and, I mean, you know I'd come down here and when I started coming to Georgetown, was the 25th symposium. I don't know what year that was but Dr. Bonner came. And Dr. Bowen was in Princeton, and he said to us, "Do any of you know John Bonner?" And one person in the class did. And he said, "Well, he's a biologist here, that is very exciting. He does all this stuff on slime molds," and Bowen was excited, it was the 25th, the Levy Center was opening, And I thought, "Well, you know, I've never been to Georgetown, I think I'll go."

And I think I haven't probably ever missed symposiums except when my husband was sick, or maybe I was, but I don't think so. Anyway, came to a whole lot of them, from the 25th on. And, initially I would go sit right in the front row, and I never could get

close enough to Dr. Bonner to meet him, until- so I didn't, and I thought, "Well I'll call him up." I called him on Monday when I got back and I said, "I was at that meeting." He said, "You were?" And I said, "I would love a copy of your paper on slime molds and I would like to meet you." He said, "Come on over." To his office, I did that, he pulled out his file drawer, this is Dr. Bonner, but you know, it was so amazing, because things moved in the drawer. And I thought, "That's the most organized, elegant thing I've ever seen. Anyway, and he and I became friends, and whenever Dr. Kerr or Dan would come, to Princeton, we would get Dr. Bronner. We'd have supper, and so we kept a long nice relationship going with him. Used to have tea with him a lot, in the afternoons. But anyway, that was Dr. Bowen introducing us to him.

And, I'm just trying to think about my train of thought, here. Oh! So, I h- the first person that we had come from Georgetown to talk at Princeton was Mike. And, we got - we had pretty many people, we had about 90 people that came. And, and then, that was maybe in September, or something? I'm really not sure when. And then I was down there for the symposium, and Dr. Bowen said, he would like to come to Princeton with Dr. Bonner. So, we arranged that, and he had just been in New Jersey with Monica McGoldrick. And I think about a thousand people had gone to hear him.

Schara: Do hear Dr. Bowen?

Illick: Yeah, when Monica arranged this thing. And, our meeting was maybe a month or so after that. And, not a lot of people came. Some people came, it was- I thought it was a very good meeting, but we lost money. So, I- I did probably, just a complete no-no with Dr. Bowen. He was coming, he was gonna come back again in the fall, to talk about application of theory. And I had written him an- I - or had called him up, or wrote a letter, I don't know what I did. But I said, "Dr. Bowen, we have to figure out a different way to do this, because we've lost money." Well that did not go over very well. The "we" word? Well no- we, the Princeton Family Center. The family center.

Schara: [laughter] We. Oh, we. Still a "we" word.

Illick: The organization. Has lost money. You know, whatever. No, I think what didn't go over very well was just, you know, "What the hell?" I don't know. Anyway. So, I got a letter from him. Saying, I'm just trying to think. I've had a couple things. One time, when he was coming to Princeton, he was not happy about how things were going. And he said he wasn't coming back. And I called him up, and I said, "Dr. Bowen. I can understand that, you know, you must think that I don't -I can understand, that I don't look like somebody that understands theory. And I probably don't. But, it really is important to me. And, I do not- I cannot imagine, having a family center, and not having you participate in it.

Schara: [laughter]

Illick: And, that won't work." So, then he said, "Okay. I'll come back."

Schara: Yeah.

Illick: Which was pretty cool. I was terrified. To make this call, and I really did think I was gonna give it up, I wasn't gonna do it if he wasn't gonna come. I wasn't giving up Bowen Theory but I wasn't- it just didn't make any sense to me. So he came back. And we had a better kind of a thing. But then, see I can't remember the sequencing of all of this kinda stuff. But anyway, the money thing, I got a pretty scathing letter from him, that I hid in the middle of my file drawer. To a point where I couldn't even find it. Uhh, I was

Schara: [laughter]

Illick: -I turned beet red when I read it, I just was like, "Oh my God!" You know, I'm all by myself, I'm just like, "Ugh!" But, I decided that this was kinda toward the end of his life, somewhere in (this thing). And, that kind of- I didn't stop, I didn't stop doing anything, we still had the family center, we still- Oh I know, I think -I can't remember. I really can't remember. But anyway, this was kind of in the late, late, late '80s. And, whatever this was. And I'd hafta find out. But anyway, it was not a great letter. I was stunned by it. And I was kind of a little scared of him. And I just thought, "Ooh, I don't think I'm going to go 'round him.

When I go to Georgetown I think I'm probably not going to say much, and you know, things like that. But I'm going." And, then I remember getting a second copy of his book. And it was a symposium, and I think it was 1989. And I went up to him and I said, "Dr. Bowen, would you sign my book." And he did. And he said, "From me, to you. Murray Bowen. To Selden." You know. And I just thought, "Oh my God. That is very good. That is just very good!" You know, and I don't know, you know, since you're asking all this stuff, I've never really connected Dr. Bowen to my family. Or what he has triggered in me, what gets stirred up, but it was such - it was such a lovely gesture, and it- and I had been quite terrified! [laughter] And I just thought, "You gotta have guts girl, you've gotta go up there. You gotta ask him! And he might slam the damn book in your face, and if he does, he does!"

Schara: [laughter] Yeah.

Illick: But he didn't. Not at all. And then, when he was dying, when he was staying at home and not coming to the Family Center anymore, I thought long and hard about going to see him. And telling him, you know, my passion for him. And, I decided not to. I decided I was only doing that for me, and I just wanted another, you know, hit, or something like that. And I had to grow up, and just deal, and that he was, you know, that it was not for- I wasn't going completely for him. So I didn't go. And, I was always sort of sorry but I was less, less sorry, than glad. Because I think I made that move for me. I saw something, in there, that- I saw something about me, that I didn't like. And I wasn't gonna push that on him, or you know, sort of foist that on him. I had another thing, that I wanted to tell you,

Schara: Well, one, one part is, this-this self-regulation, of self, in relationship to Bowen, that he challenges what I call the status interaction, (inaudible)

Schara: and then you recover, whatever it- however it takes you, whatever you think about, "I'm gonna manage me, and I'm gonna relate to this human being." Who's important to me. And then your-your- you keep on overcoming an obstacle, now how does that pay off for you in your nuclear family, or in your work situation, or does it have a direct application, what is his training all about for you? He - I'm saying, I'm making an assumption, that he's training you in all these interactions. [laughter]

Illick: Well it's inter- it sure is a workout. [laughter] You know. It just is! It just is. Oh my God! Ugh! Now, remind me, hafta- one time, when you brought him to Princeton, and he hated that Nassau Club, and he hated the stairs. And everything, and I said, "Well you can stay at my house." And he just had a- "I'm not staying at your house!!" And I said, "Okay, okay, take a hotel!" [laughter] "That's better!"

Schara: I remember that.

Illick: Oh my God. Oh my lordie, lordie. Um, Anyway, I think, I think the thing- I think the whole thing is such an interesting process, because there's a theory, that makes a lot of sense, about managing yourself and your own anxiety, and there is the man who created the theory,

Schara: Right.

Illick: who can- you know, who I could get anxious around. So, how- and I remember, when, you know, when I started the training program, it took me about three days before I called him up, and asked him to do it. I mean, I just had to get myself in a really calm place, I was terrified. But I was also wanting to have it. So, I had to get to a place where I was less invested in whether he said yes or no, you know. Could go to other places. But he did say yes. In the beginning.

Schara: That- did that transfer to your relationship with people in your own family? That-that ability, to-

Illick: Well, that's such an inter- well I think, see I never, ever, it's - I thought of the theory as translating, to me. I never thought about any interaction that I had with Dr. Bowen, as translating into understanding something more about myself and my family. And you know what, I'll have to think about this and I'll have to let you know about that, cause the theory, definitely, taught me a ton. And, you know, I was in supervision, or I was being coached, or, you know, still am, just goes on and on. And, I - so I've often- I just always think about what is his theory, that theory, telling me, not so much- not so much about my relationship with Dr. Bowen.

Except what I would think, is that it was so important to stay in contact with him, because his theory was so important to me. That somehow, not to be in contact with him, but being in contact with- that just didn't make sense. But it was a workout. It was a workout, especially when he got mad at me. But I have to tell you, a wonderful [laughter] -so here's how my mother, got to know him. One time, Dr. Bowen was at a meeting, and I was taking my mother to New Hampshire, to see some property that

we had just gotten, and so she and I were flying to New Hampshire, and Dr. Bowen was flying back to Washington.

And, in those days, you know, I had a little more money than I do now, and I called up and- you know, we paid for everything ourselves at the Family Center, and I didn't like to lose money, cause there was- I didn't cause then I'd have to put it in myself. For awhile, and sometimes Jack Kellogg did, and my God. Anyway, that's- that's another thing. So, we get- so I got a limo. So it's Dr. Bowen, my mother, and me. In this limo. And, he's flirting with my mother, you know, I mean, he- he had this merry, cheery, twinkle.

Kind of thing. You know? And it was like shades of what I used to have with him. So, we're talking about my gran- well, first of all, he says it's really fun to be in a limo, cause it reminds

Schara: [laughter]

Illick: him of a hearse! [laughter] And his family business! [laughter] So, that was just- and usually we'd been in my dinky little car, that he couldn't even get in, because the seat was so low, and he hated that, too. So, this was different. So anyway, and then my mom's mother was 100, maybe, maybe she'd already died, but she lived to be 104, and Dr. Bowen looked at my mom and said he'd bet that she was gonna live a long time too, or something like that. And they just had a great time chatting around. But, okay. So, my mom- that was good, she had a lot of fun. With him, in the car. And, I had fun sort of watching them.

But, my mom had also been interested, in this theory. I'd told her things about it. And, and really, basically, on page 383, there is something about in the- in his section on emotional cutoff, something about resolving the emotional- the unresolved emotional attachment. Parents need to do this, for future generations. And, f- and, that sort of jumped out at me and I thought, "There's a lot I gotta do. You know, for future generations in our family system." And, I think that was - I'd start working on cutoff, that was my sort of segue into Bowen Theory. That was the thing that I really kinda worked on. And, that made a lot of sense to me.

That there were a lot of things to resolve. Now. For the future. And, anyway, so, I would talk to my mom about this kind of stuff, and that made a lot of sense to her. And, I gave her Roberta Gilbert's book. I don't know how much of that she read, but you know we'd talk about these different things. But here's the thing. That got my mom. So, my parents are divorced, and

Schara: What age was she then?

Illick: my mother is the one that left. And, she-

Schara: (inaudible)

Illick: She was- I was 30, so she was 50? Something. 1970, She left my dad, he was not- she was interested in somebody else, he said, "Why don't you just you know, have

at it and you'll get over him, and let's stay married." And my mom said no. She wasn't going to do it like that. But, then, I think as time went on, she really- she felt badly about getting a divorce, and she always wanted to repair things with my dad. So we started to have family -grandchildren started getting married, and stuff like that. And my mother would go over to my father, I remember when I graduated from Bryn Mawr, she went up to him and "Hi! How are you?" And he stuck out his hand, and shook her hand, and said "Fine."

And, so every time we would be going to different places, family places, she'd rush up to my dad, and he would ignore her. So, finally she started talking to me about this, and she said, "I don't know what to do." And I said, "Well I think this: I don't think you should go anywhere near him. He really you know, you left him. He's upset, you're now feeling guilty, or better, or whatever I don't know what the hell you're feeling, but whatever it is, don't go after him. And get resolved from him. You hafta live with yourself. And, stay away from him." And the next time we had a family event, my mom did take my advice. She said, "Okay, I'm going to take your advice and I'll see what happens." And she was very calm, and she talked to everybody else in the family, and she never went up to my dad. And the next day, my father said to me, "I never got a chance to talk to your mother, how is she?"

Schara: [laughter]

Illick: I called my mom. I said, "You did it." She said, [claps hands] "That's Bowen!" You know, so, I mean, that's- so it just- and I think there were, you know, there were other incidences of that, so when she was dying, and she'd start on the morphine for pancreatic cancer, she said, "I have to tell you this, I have to tell you before I have too much morphine, for all those people, that don't like the hocus pocus of religion, they've gotta know about Bowen Theory. Because it's a great way of life."

Schara: [laughter]

Illick: And of course it is! It is! It is! You know, so then, you know, Bowen would always get in, "Don't sell this don't- you can't." And I would say, "But I just think, I think that this is just, you know, people need to know about this." "Well, you can't sell it, you can't sell it." So, you know, I wouldn't know what to do.

Schara: Well it's quite a different thing between selling it, and using it. Being it, and, and

Illick: And being it. Yeah.

Schara: That's what you're really talking about, here, is that you were able to see how the emotional system worked, with the distancing, and the pursuing with your mom and dad, and you were able to communicate that dynamic, of how your mom was caught in the emotional system. You gave her some advice,

Illick: And she actually listened.

Schara: She listened, but she also said you know, "I'll see. How it goes." So she, she already knew, that this is like a guessing game.

Illick: Mmhmm.

Schara: You gotta do something different, and weird, according to your interpretation of theory, and then you're gonna see what happens to him. And then, you know, your dad told you, what happened. He got, he got more interested in it, and then

Illick: He got interested.

Schara: you know, and if you could stay out of it than she- they too, would be able to have a relationship with one another that was more genuine, I think.

Illick: Yeah, well, course, then, of course the pendulum swings, and that niece

Schara: Yeah.

Illick: -that thing happened at her engagement party, at her wedding my parents were flirting with each other. [laughter] I know, God Almighty!

Schara: [laughter] S'always there.

Illick: Oh my lordie, lordie! Anyway, but that's okay. It's okay, I mean- You know, it really- the thing is, I mean, it's an absolutely- his observations of emotional process were totally brilliant! And I'm still, you know, just peeling off layers of being able to see stuff! And when you can, it's just so amazing, and amusing, [laughter] you know? It's kinda cool It really is.

Schara: [laughter] Yeah, I think about it, like, you know, there are animals like cockroaches, they don't have to adapt, it doesn't matter to them if it's cold or it's hot, or if comets appear, whatever, they're gonna survive. So they don't have to adapt to the changing environment. But we, unfortunately, you know, have to adapt to the changing environment, and now that we have so many people on the earth, it- it just seems like it's more and more and more important for us to recognize how we're being influenced by relationships. And he could see that!

Illick: Mmhmm. Yeah.

Schara: And he gave you some ways, of detriangling and getting out of these things, and it's just- it is a gift, it's a real gift to observe what happens in the ant colony, the human ant colony. [laughter]

Illick: Mmhmm. Mmhmm. It is! And without this way of thinking, and of course what I'm thinking about, I

mean, you're writing you're asking, you know, about im- this is going to impact society and psychology, I don't know. Ideas to refine theory? No. Evidence to further prove theory? The thing, that I am just really, really interested in, is application of theory. And how do people use it. And how do every- how do people use it in their everyday life?

And now, because my husband died of Alzheimers, I'm really trying to figure out how to sorta translate these ideas for families with dementia. To just- how do you- how do you write about these ideas, without dumbing it down, without oversimplifying, but at the same time, communicating these- these things. Like, you know, saying to mom, "You're on Daddy's back! Get off his back!" You know? I mean, really, that is how do you do that? There's gotta be ways. That's-that's what I keep working on.

Schara: Yeah, I hear ya. I-I think, you know, there's so many- it costs people, to get off somebody's back. You know what I mean? It -it might not have cost your mother, as much say, as somebody else, who tries to get off somebody's back. But I've seen it cost people, you know, serious - when they try to make a move, in the system, so I don't know how you communicate this, the system is all set up, it's wired and it's going to do its thing. And when one person begins to shift, out of that wired position, and to offer people a different way to be, magic can happen, or [laughter] or all hell can break loose. So,

Illick: Yeah, all hell can break loose.

Schara: how do you- how do you have people know that, here's- here's a -here's some principles and ways to manage yourself and

Illick: Good luck! [laughter]

Schara: And there could be some real long-term gains, there could be short-term trouble. How're you going to package that? The cost of change, the cost of change.

Illick: Mmhmm. Well, that's such a good question, you know, yeah. The cost of change. And, you know, are you willing to do it? And I -I really do think, that I got this far, sort of, and I do, when people come to me, to consult, basically what I say, is "Are you willing to change? Are you willing to work on you?"

Schara: Yeah.

Illick: Because, I think if people aren't- and sometimes people can say yes and they don't mean it- even know what you're talking about. But, sounds good. But,

Schara: They have no idea! [laughter]

Illick: sometimes people don't wanna. They said no! The problem is my kid, what are you talking about. But when someone can really hear, that they have a part in what is going on, and if they could do something different, with their part, it could make a difference. It can make a difference. And I, you know, I hear what you're saying, you

know, about I think the intensity, depends on the intensity of what the relationship is, in the family system, as to whether or not you can get a little magical response or its really a wrench in the whole system and there are many, many parts of it depending on you to be a certain way. But I think for my mom, this had been years, years! Of not being able to get anywhere with my dad. So she was ready.

To make a change. You know, was a simple thing, she wasn't living with him, she didn't see him all the time, but she had had it. Her way was not working. And so she was open. To something else. So, and I don't- I don't know, you know, these families with dementia, I think in some ways, when somebody "gets it," they are kinda open to something, because they're up against it. Pretty fast, and pretty quickly. So, I mean these- that's an interesting question. And, but this is what I would like to -this is how I would like to make a contribution, you know, to somehow find ways to make this stuff talkable, and understandable. And you know, Bowen talked about the simple bones of the theory, are work on differentiation, and manage your anxiety, and he said "Those are the simple bones. It's not that simple." And I don't want to be simplistic, but

Schara: [laughter] (inaudible)

Illick: you know, you gotta start somewhere.

Schara: Well I notice in a lot of the letters that I've been reading at the Leaders for Tomorrow, when we're trying to take the staples out, and organize the thing into folders, and you have to read every letter to see if there's anything personal in there. Before its release to the National Library of Medicine. And he often refers- he often says to people, like, "I can't come to your conference, because I'm - I would rather, with the little bit of life I have left, I would rather spend time with people who can really think systems. And they are few and far between."

And so, in a way, you could say that you have a weeding question, here. "Are you ready to change? Do you wanna change?" "Yes, things have happened to your family, now you're in a crisis. But it's gotta be more focused on, "What can I do?" Yeah, what can I do. And how do you make that appealing to people.

Illick: You, on the self. Right.

Schara: And I've thought about it as a guessing game, you wanna play a guessing game? [laughter] In that way you can learn about emotional systems, I don't know.

Illick: [laughter] I don't know either. I don't know. But you know, I talked- I gave a couple talks at the church this year, on grandparents, and one of the things that Dan told me, about somebody asked Bowen one time what's a great parent. And he said, "One, they can take a non-anxious interest. In their children. Their offspring. And that is such a fabulous thing. And of course, we can't take a non-anxious interest, but we can take a less anxious interest. Anyway, so this was sort of something, this was kind of a little theme, that I used, to talk to grandparents. And they seemed to- seemed to be responded to- you know people weren't sitting there going, "What are you talking

about?" And but I don't know. There's- there's- my work's cut out for me. For lotsa years to come.

Schara: Well that's probably true, but it's- it's something that you've been

Illick: What prompted me to learn? I had to know about me and my family. In my family. And I really- you know, what's interesting to me, is my first -the first person that I studied was Freud, and I think that was true of Bowen too. And one of the things that fascinated me, was that the fa- the people that Freud analyzed were friends of the family. For a- to a large degree. Now, that has to be fact-checked. But that is something, that's an impression that I had. I mean, there was little Hans, who was scared of the white rabbit, I think it was little Hans, I can't you know? But anyway, there were- some kid's scared of a white rabbit, and he had to approach the white rabbit 252 times, in order not to be scared of it anymore.

But what- I did a sort of thesis on Freud, for my graduate school work, and I was very, very interested in how well he knew the families. Of the people he was treating. And I thought, "Now isn't that interesting? It's not- he's not looking at the family system, but he knows stuff about the family." And then Bowen started doing this internal stuff, Freudian analysis, and then moves out of that into the family, and started with one, and then went to two, and then went to three. You know, he started- it was the mother and the kid, and then it was the mother, the father, and the kid, and then, in all those interlocking triangles, so, I, you know, just interesting building of his theory and then being able to observe what he observed, was- it still astonishes me.

Schara: It does, it really-

Illick: You know? How could one man, all by himself, without anybody to really talk to about this, without anybody that really understood, he- what? What an amazing, amazing life effort.

Schara: Well, I-I think he had people that understood some of what he was doing, when he was at NIH, I mean, he had the -he had-

Illick: Yeah, well people had to respond.

Schara: Yeah, they had- but they could see it, under their own view. And Catherine Rakow's interviewed the head of NIH, Cohen, who didn't seem to have a view at all of the importance of Bowen's work, and almost pretended that he hadn't even been there, or done anything important, and was amazed he had a center named after him.

Illick: Been there? Wow. Wow.

Schara: And then, but Brodey, she re- she interviewed Brodey too, and Brodie was

Illick: Wasn't Brodey there when Bowen was there? Was this other- the other man, was-

Schara: Yes. Cohen was head of NIH. And he hired Bowen.

Illick: At the time? He did. But he- he's not acknowledging him.

Schara: Right and didn't. Didn't really.

Illick: Interesting.

Schara: Understand what he was up to. But Brodey said "Yeah, I worked with Bowen, with the families of schizophrenics, and then I went to work with mothers of blind children. And there was the same problem, that there was in the family with the schizophrenics. In which, some mothers could deal more realistically with their children, and other mothers thought that their children ought to be able to see." [laughter]

Illick: Fascinating! He got it.

Schara: Yeah. And so he could see the emotional process, but he didn't, again, do much with it. You know, it wasn't a (inaudible) long thing like you have

Illick: What is that? Why do you think

Schara: you know, to, you're working on it your whole life.

Illick: What do you think that is? What do you think engages a person or doesn't engage a person?

Schara: Well that's why I started doing these interviews, but no, I basically think that he found a way to interact with people that could get a certain number of people willing to spend their life on these problems. And his- his brother said at his funeral, he said, "You know, I used to stay up late at night, work- you know, arguing with Murray and only after he died did I realize that what we were doing was talking about the theory. That our family is the theory. Just like all of your families are the theory."

So it takes a long, long time, for people to be able to see. What the theory is pointing towards. But he could engage with people, in a way that -you know, if you got half the people interested, that he got, you'd think "Wow, I'm doing great!" You know what I mean?

Illick: So, are you thinking it's his engagement with people,

Schara: In the beginning, yes, because

Illick: that furthered the theory?

Schara: as you said, you know, he -he had this way of engaging with you, with Mary Bourne, you know, with all the people that you know, Dan Paparo, Mike Kerr, all these

people had a personal relationship with him. That some-something happened, in that relationship, where they -their eyes were opened, and they could see the emotional system, they could see how theory worked, for them, in their own families. And they had amazing results, compared to any other form of therapy, that-that's been known to humans. And so I think he, just start- he as he said in his letters, it's more important for me to spend time with people- serious people who can think systems. And that's what I need to spend my life doing.

Illick: This end of my life.

Schara: Yeah, the end of his life. And everything is written in the book, and people can read it, and they can understand it as best they can, but it's so much more powerful to have someone interact with you.

Illick: Okay, so then, do you think that this interaction gets carried on, by you know, Bowen consultants that go through the training program? Do you think that this is a way to- that theory's gonna

Schara: I don't know the answer to that. I think that he did things that he didn't write about -that he couldn't- you know he was very intuitive, he was very- a research-oriented, thinking head. And I think he was doing things that he didn't write about. And so that if you collect the information from all these interviews, maybe, you know, maybe you will find out more. About the purposeful nature of interacting to increase the opportunity for a person to think, and to become more integrated.

Illick: So, um, yeah. But then without him, there's still is a theory. And there still is a body of knowledge, that really can be- is- extraordinarily useful. So then, how does that get communicated without the other layer of having a one-to-one relationship with this man? You know-

Schara: Well some- some people live theory. And because they live theory, they interact with you in a way that makes you think. And I just think that is true. And, I'm not sure who can read even my book, or Dr. Bowen's book, or you know, Robbie Gilbert's book, or Dan Paparo's- you can read these books, but it just goes in and out. Goes in and out. It has to be-

Illick: And that might be why you need coach, or you need- but then, you know, you had such a long life of, you know, really seeing that man a lot. In a lot of different- in a lot of different sort of venues.

Schara: Yeah, so that- that's probably why I wanted to do these- this interviewing process, to make it- it's not just my take on it, this is people testifying to what happened to them. And their relationship with Bowen. And what was important about it, and then what could you do, after - in other words, after he interacts with you, then you interact with your mother, then you interact with your father, it goes into your family the way in which- that's how I see it.

Illick: Well, but also, the training program, the coaching, all of that stuff, I mean that's where I- that's where I would have put the application of the theory. That's where it sorta got played out. This is such an interesting thought, to think about what happened to me, as a result of knowing Dr. Bowen. And interacting with him. And what level did that- you know, what did that -how did that change my life? And that is just something I've never thought about like that. I mean, you think I would've. But I haven't

Schara: [laughter]

Illick: You know? I've just thought about- I've been so thankful, that I knew him, that I lived at a time when I could know him, that I could talk to him about all these things, that he was writing about, and that I was writing about.

Schara: Yeah.

Illick: You know? I just thought it was just such a gift, to go to the source.

Schara: Well definitely. I mean, one way you could- one way you could- Okay, you

Illick: Oh! I know a story I wanna tell you

Schara: -one way you could look at it, just to finish this thought, it would be that after Dr. Bowen died in 1990, people only had other coaches. And they only had the training program. And then, how far have they gone? Let's say compared to the other people. Are there any centers that have been formed by people who didn't have a direct relationship with Dr. Bowen?

Illick: I mean, that's an interesting question, but I think, you know, that woman in Hong Kong?

Schara: Mmhmm.

Illick: Has a center, she didn't know him. A Jenny Brown didn't know him, right?

Schara: So- Yeah, so- So that's two.

Illick: So people are- So there might be lots, what do I know? I don't know, but I mean, those are two that pop in my mind right away.

Schara: [laughter] Yeah. Yeah. So that's what you'd have to see. To say that it's the traini- the other training programs, other coaches, could make the kinda difference that he made in people's lives.

Illick: Maybe not as dramatically, or whatever, but you know, def- but I think, I think what he wanted -what he would tell me, when he would get out of Georgetown, and be

in Princeton, that it was very, very important for there to be a place, as sort of a citadel. Where- that would be sort of, the nucleus, of this theory. And I think he also, as much as he was a person and a personality and a everything else under the sun, he also wanted he also, my take on him, is he wanted people to understand theory and be able to use it. And I think he also said, differentiation for everybody is going to be different.

Schara: Yeah.

Illick: Which I think is so true, and so when people saying, "This is how you have to do it, or this is the way," that is very worrisome to me. Because I think that really, his theory is very, very open and gives an awful lot of room. For anybody that wants to use it, to find their way with it. I like that. I hear you. So what else is on your mind? Yeah, But I just want to tell you something very funny. I did- I had one consultation with Dr. Bowen. And I was separated, at the time, and I was just really, really interested, in being with somebody that really loved me. [laughter] So I was talking to him about this, and he said, "I know just what you can do. You can get a good schizophrenic and he can keep his arms around your neck, and his leg around your waist." And, that was wonderful. That was an- that just shocked the shit out of me, and I

Schara: [laughter]

Illick: changed my direction right then and there. [laughter] And that was really, really

Schara: Oh, that's a beauty. [laughter]

Illick: brilliant, on his part. [laughter] Oh God. Oh, have you ever- okay,

Schara: Well let's see where we are, 57 minutes, so that's pretty good. I love that story.

Illick: That's pretty good. Isn't that great? Oh. Well, he was remarkable. And, I really appreciate his family. And, you know when we had our tenth celebration, the Princeton Family Center? Mrs. Bowen and Kathleen, and Joanne, came. To that- to our celebration. Was really, really nice. Really meant a lot. Was nice, but I get into those things, that mean a lot. But it did. It was good.

Schara: Yeah, absolutely. That's what you call living theory. [laughter] Well Selden, thank you so much for your time and your great energy, and being able to let other people know what you know.

Illick: Well, thank you for the opportunity, and heavens to (Murcantroid) we'll see.

Schara: We'll see what happens.

Illick: Exactly.