

Interview with Jan Kuhn, PhD:  
Conducted by Andrea Schara at Dr. Kuhn's home  
April 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2014

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

**Andrea:** So today is April, 23<sup>rd</sup>, Wednesday, and I'm Andrea Schara with Jan Kuhn and I had a very nice lunch, which I appreciate so much and it's good to be here with you again. So I explained that we were doing this for the Leaders for Tomorrow and it might go to National Library of Medicine and what have you. I think it's been such a fascinating project to hear what different people have made out of their relationship with Dr. Bowen and what a difference systems theory has made in people's lives. So I started thinking, well maybe I'll write a book about this (laughs). But he certainly had an amazing impact on a great many people's lives and you were one of the early ones, I can't remember exactly...

**Jan:** Not the earliest but I did get involved in 1971...

**Andrea:** 1971, ok, I was '76, so you were five years ahead of me and I guess he came to Georgetown in 1960 so that kind of sets the stage a little bit. I don't know where you want to start, who are you, what's your profession, and how did you meet Dr. Bowen is usually the first question.

**Jan:** Well I have a PhD in social work but I got that PhD later, I had a masters degree when I started practicing at a mental health center in Prince George's country and then I had a private practice here at home in family therapy.

**Andrea:** What year did you do the private practice?

**Jan:** I started that probably just a couple years after...maybe '73, something like that. I came into it as an older person...I was trying to figure out walking in here...the years ...because I was born in '27 and I started practicing in '71. My husband died early, we were both 39 when he died. I went back to school, I had two years of college, I went back, finished my bachelor's degree, and then got my masters. When I was in graduate school I was taking this course on therapy, I don't think they called it family therapy but I was listening to a series of tapes of the different therapists. I'm trying to think now who... they were the top therapists, I can't even think now who they were...and I could always figure out what the others were doing but when they showed the tape of Bowen I couldn't figure out what he was doing, he was just talking to people. He was just asking...

**Andrea:** Was it Don Jackson? And that group?

**Jan:** Well I don't know if it was Don Jackson...

**Andrea:** And Whitaker? They did a tape called the normal family in which everyone interviewed the same family.

**Jan:** Oh that was the Gloria tapes I think.

**Andrea:** But you could understand the others but Bowen was...

Jan Kuhn

**Jan:** I knew what they were doing. I knew what they were trying to get at but when I listened to Bowen, he was just asking questions and just talking in a friendly manner to the family. One of the young men in the course, he talked about the undifferentiated family ego mass and everyone laughed at that big mouthful (laughs) and that was my first introduction to Bowen. A year later when I went to work at the mental health center in Prince George's country, there was a man there who had studied under Bowen, Lynn Adams. Do you remember him?

**Andrea:** Yes, I do remember Lynn Adams.

**Jan:** And he talked about Bowen and I got to know about the conferences that Bowen had and I went to my first symposium. My first symposium was the last one that was held at Gaston hall and Bowen did his thing of... and it was so crowded, people were sitting on the steps and hanging off the rafters, and he said 'of all the people here only 5% are going to hear what I have to say, and of those 5% only 5% will do anything about it, and of those 5% only 5% will stick to it'. I had always been a person that would be, if I was enthused about something, I would be all gung-ho, but I sat back there very reflectively and I said to myself, 'I wonder if I'll be among any of those 5%'s'. And here I am, what 40 years later...

**Andrea:** Having stuck to it.

**Jan:** Having stuck to it (laughs). Someone (that I knew) did a paper on triangles and I heard that paper on triangles, and I knew that was what was going on in my family. I could understand that immediately then. Phil Lorio did his paper on his family and I was so impressed with the whole thing so I started going to weekly conferences at St. Mary's Hall in Georgetown and also monthly conferences at Richmond, at Medical College of Virginia. One of the interesting things about the weekly conferences is that the way that Bowen talked about togetherness, that everyone thought that this togetherness was just a big no-no. We were all afraid to speak to each other (laughs) or sit beside anyone that we knew, or even talk much to each other because we would get into this big togetherness. We sort of got over that after a while and a group of us would meet at Springfield every month to carpool down to Richmond and attend those conferences there. I can't remember what year that stopped but it was getting to be too big of a trip for Bowen and so it was decided that they would rent a room in a hotel and start having those clinical conferences there. That was the first time he started charging because he had to pay for the room. It was the first time he started charging for the clinical conferences so you can't imagine what it was for me, a widow with four dependent sons, just starting work at a very low salary, to have all of this free training, which I never could have afforded to pay for until I started making a little more money. I just got so much out of it.

**Andrea:** Yeah, I remember the thing about... I think Harry Lederer, you remember him? He wanted Bowen to come to MCV, they were going to start a mental health program in the state of Virginia. He was very excited about that and wanted everybody to move down there. Caroline Monahan was saying that Bowen wanted her to move but she said 'what about my husband?' (Laughs) Anyway, I think that then the state assembly turned the program down and so then Bowen was more or less extruded from MCV and that was the reason that they then started up with the hotel...

**Jan:** Ok, well then I got it wrong...

**Andrea:** It might have been hard for him too to go down there every month, but I think they had a big party and gave him a plaque. But the grand plans that they had, which would have made a tremendous difference in the future of family therapy... well, I won't digress into the history of that, but that was a big moment where family therapy could have gone in one direction and had a practical application throughout a whole state. It would have been amazing. But instead it became a 'please pay the tuition to come and hear Dr. Bowen speak' training program, the clinical conferences...

**Jan:** And you don't think that is as powerful?

**Andrea:** No. So few people had come to hear... it dwindled down. A practical application at a state-wide level where, I remember him talking about this, where everybody would learn from the psychiatrist to every mental health worker would learn how to do a family diagram, would learn not to diagnose people as schizophrenic or depressed, which he hated. But instead would learn what were they up against in their family, and as you say, enter into a useful conversation, in plain English, with people, that was kind of friendly (laughs). So that would have been a whole different thing from just one or two therapists telling you about one of two clinical families. It's a small drop in the bucket, the clinical conferences. The great thing about the clinical conference is for history- that he compiled 15 years with two of the same families, the [W.'s] and the [B.'s], and 11 years with the Wiseman family. So as far as history is concerned, the clinical conference was an amazing event. But now you get 10 or 15 people to come to the clinical conference. So it never really influenced either psychiatry or society. So that's what I think. But certainly I hear your point because I too was in that same boat, being divorced not widowed but, trying to figure out how to get an education, so I traded photography to go to the 'you must pay series' so I'd drive up and go to those conferences and take pictures and get free admission.

**Jan:** That's wonderful.

**Andrea:** Yeah, I think he was looking for people in that 5%, whatever 5% you went into but you were definitely in the 5% (laughs).

**Jan:** I was definitely in the 5%, I definitely was. At that time there was nothing to read, there was a copy of a paper of Bowen's, of his family paper...

**Andrea:** The anonymous one?

**Jan:** His work in his own family that had been Xeroxed, copied, so many times so that the copy that I got was so vague that I had to sit down and word by word go over every word with a pen to make it legible so that I could read it. I couldn't read it just the way it was. So that's all I had to go on and the others also, that's all we had to go on. But what we did, Andrea, we followed Bowen around wherever he was presenting a paper and if it was in New York, we went to New York, if it was in Chicago we went to Chicago, wherever he was presenting a paper. We went to hear what he had to say because that was all we had to go on. We had a list of what his concepts were, which I think was probably about five at the time, then he added more concepts to it. Had heard his description of what they were and what they meant and he would talk about them and it was a struggle to learn. You just didn't have everything handed to you, like with all the books that are written and with his own book which Mike wrote with him. We didn't have any of that or any of the tapes we didn't have. We had to work very hard to learn the theory. When I was going to the weekly conferences that's what it was: people would present their own families, then everybody would take pot shots at what they thought was going on, then everyone would

Jan Kuhn

get silent, and then Bowen would speak. And he would cut through. It was amazing that he could cut through all the detail of what was going on and get right to the process and that was such a learning experience to do that. I presented my family and what I had to deal with in my family and after I presented it, Bowen said, "It would take you..." I can't remember how many years... "at least three years of working" he said I was so locked in; I was so locked into it. I think he told me this afterwards, I'm trying to remember that. I can sort of remember running after him almost tugging at his coattails asking for more clarification of what he said, but he thought I was so locked in to my family that he wasn't sure how long it would take for me to get out. And I don't know whether thinking over that if it was his way of prodding me on or whether I was pretty locked in.

**Andrea:** What does it mean...what do you mean that Bowen could get to the process? What does that have to do with being locked in, if anything?

**Jan:** Well Bowen would see the processes going on in a family...

**Andrea:** What is this process going on in a family?

**Jan:** The process of...that's a wonderful question because I know in my head what I mean, I'm trying to express that. He wouldn't see what would be going on between two people, he would see the family system as a whole and what the relationships were and who would be getting done in and who was doing what, that's sort of what he would see. He would be able to point out the triangles and he wouldn't look at behavior as a one-on-one, a two person thing, he would look at it in a different way and then he would express that as to how he saw that happening or what he would see happening.

**Andrea:** I know on the cover of Mike Kerr's book he said 'the family as a unit that controls the development and behavior of the individuals'.

And I remember he insisted on this title even though the publisher hated it and he said they made me change the title of my other book, *Family Therapy and Clinical Practices* and I'm not going to change my mind about this title.

**Jan:** And if by what Bowen said and it just really upset me, I was desperate (laughs), and I have often said that it takes two things to put the effort into learning Bowen Theory and doing anything about it. One is that you have to be hurting an awful lot and the second is you have to see a way out. If you're not hurting enough what are you going to do, you're going to put all this effort into learning and doing something in the family? And if you don't see a way out then there's no where to go so you need those two things. Well, I took what I knew home for a visit and I had figured out I had two roles in my family. One was to be the good child and the other was to do everything right. That's what I'm saying now but I used to have it a bit clearer, I knew I had two roles.

**Andrea:** They seem like the same role: to be the good child and to do everything right.

**Jan:** They seem like the same role that's why I'm thinking I had another role. So much time has passed and I've changed myself so much in these years, I'm not the same person, I am not the same person. But I'll tell you how I decided to get out of the role in the family that...oh I know what the two roles were, one was being the lady, I was the lady in the family...

And the other was to do everything right. So I had that mother told me all along, from the time I was a small child sitting in a highchair, that I didn't want a paper napkin. I wanted a napkin from the drawer, which was a cloth napkin. I didn't like a rough paper napkin to wipe my face. But can you imagine a mother giving a baby in a highchair a napkin anyway (laughs).

**Andrea:** Yes, I can.

**Jan:** So I had a little help along the way. But anyway, I wanted to get out of those roles, I thought that's what I had to do, get out of those roles, that roles I was in in my family. So I decided on my way up what I would do is I would take along a bottle of gin. I thought gin was the most unladylike drink that one could have so I got myself one of these half-gallon bottles of gin, poured about half of it out so it looked like I had been drinking it and traveled that way. You're not supposed to travel with it. I visited everyone in the family in Altoona which was a no-no to begin with because mother was not on good terms with dad's family. So I started visiting everyone in the family and the first thing people would say is, "can I get you something to drink?" and I would say, "well yes but you know gin's my drink and I happen to have some in the car" and I'd go out to the car and bring in this half-gallon bottle of gin (laughs). And I'll tell you no one knew what to do with me! (Laughs) It was just so unlike me, to drink to begin with, so I would have them give me something to put the gin in and then I'd have to figure out, because I was not a drinker, what I was going to do with it going from place to place. And I remember one place I poured the gin in someone's plant (laughs). I don't know what it did to the plant.

**Andrea:** Probably nothing good (laughs).

**Jan:** But anyway, I first went to dad's older sister, Aunt Mary, and I think I told you earlier, I may have mentioned my older sister was hyperactive and no one really had a name for that. But she would walk into a room and everyone would pay attention to her because she was so vibrant. So I was there drinking, and I ask Aunt Mary, she was a drinker, so I ask her if she would like the drink too, so we sat there with our drinking gin and she said to me, "you know Janet, when you were little, I didn't like you". She said, "You were so namby-pamby" but your sister, she waves her hands like this, "but you're turning out real nice" (Laughs), and I led on with something. Oh, I know what she said to me, she said, "Janet your mother is such a lovely person" and that is something that I had figured out before, what pulled me into the family process. There was tension between mother and dad's family. Dad wasn't supposed to marry he was supposed to stay home and take care of his parents, the oldest son in a German family that's what they did. So they all resented mother. So of course they would never say they resented her, they say, "she's such a wonderful women". I said to her, and I had planned this beforehand, I knew that that was what people were going to say, they were going to pull my mother into it, that's why I understood triangles right away. They were going to pull my mother into it, so I said, "that's very nice of you to say that Aunt Mary in spite of all that's gone on between the two of you" but that was my standard response that I was going to say. I didn't care who said that to me, that was what I was going to say. On my first visit, that's what she said, and then she said, "Janet you could never get me to say anything negative about your mother but I have a lot to tell you". But she didn't tell me anything about my mother she told me a story about my older sister. Now that is fusion if you ever understood fusion, that is fusion. My older sister, to backtrack here a little bit, as an hyperactive child, was always getting into trouble, not that she did bad things but she was always getting into trouble by her antics. And I had to make up for that by being the good child so then my sister was always trying to somehow put me into the wrong so that I wouldn't be this example that I think my mother probably held up to her. And she would always tell things about me and there would be an element of truth in it but she'd tell it at a slant. So at a family party

Jan Kuhn

she told a story about me at a slant. Now I learned then you always go to family parties (laughs) but I was working on my masters degree then...no...by this time I was through working on it...no it was probably at that time that I was working on it that I didn't go to it. I was now not only the lady in the family, the child who did everything right, I had been widowed with four dependent sons, and I had held my family together and I was going to college and I was sort of looked at like... they had me on a pedestal. If I wasn't before they now had me (on a pedestal), I was still doing everything right. My aunt was so angry with her (my sister) she threw her out of the house and that caused a split. There was tension between the families before, that caused a split, my mother's sister and my dad's sisters used to travel together, and now they weren't even talking to each other. This terrible split.

**Andrea:** What was the split again I didn't quite get why?

**Jan:** The one aunt, my dad's younger sister, kicking my sister out of the house because she said something negative about me.

So you can imagine how everyone was thinking about me. Can you imagine trying to live up to a role like that?

**Andrea:** I can (laughs)

**Jan:** I was so boxed in and Bowen saw that from my talking about the family. He saw that I was totally boxed in, I couldn't move, which I why I left home at 18 because I couldn't move one way or another in that family. You asked me what Bowen theory did for me...I think you're beginning to see. I lived in a box, I couldn't move a half-inch either way, I had this rigid way that I had to live. So I got away from it and I promised myself growing up as soon as you're old enough you'll leave and I did, once I finished high school I left.

**Andrea:** Where did you go when you finished?

**Jan:** I came down to Washington. It was wartime Washington and I was a small town girl, never been away from home, never been on my own. I got on a train and came to wartime Washington. Can you imagine?

**Andrea:** With no money?

**Jan:** I had a job.

**Andrea:** Oh you got a job before you left?

**Jan:** Yes, well, I'll tell you they needed workers so in Washington, scouts were going out to all the high schools and recruiting and they recruited me for this stenographic position with the Treasury Department before I went down there. I had no place to live. When I got to Union Station I went up to the desk and I said, "I need a place to live" and she gave me an address and I went out and hailed a cab, I had never ridden in a cab in my life and went to this address. That takes a lot of guts but I'm telling you: you have got to be hurting a lot, when you're a small town gal with no experience, to go out on your own like. You have to be running away from something. Anyway, to get back to Aunt Mary, she tells me this story and now I had ammunition, now I had something to work with. I remember and I don't know whether it

Jan Kuhn

was before or after this experience with Aunt Mary. It must have been after, when I was sleeping at mom's and I woke up at five in the morning and I laid there in bed for three hours and I worked through every triangle in my family so that no matter who I met I knew what I was going to do with whomever I met. None of the rest of them were as dramatic as that one with my aunt. I would do the same thing with the gin bottle and I did this with my older sister and no one knew what to do with me. They were so shocked. On subsequent visits I'd go and they'd have an alcoholic beverage there for me and I'd say "oh I don't drink" and I wouldn't have anything so then I was always throwing them off course, off balance, and that's really what I wanted to do, I didn't want them to pigeonhole me, which they had.

**Andrea:** So that's the emotional process in your family.

**Jan:** That's the emotional process. Because I knew what got me into being the good child was for someone to say something about my mother because I had to make up in dad's family. I had to make up with my good behavior for the fact that they didn't approve of mother. Now I had no idea that's what was going on, I had no idea, all I did was I knew I responded to, 'your mother is such a good wonderful woman'. That's how those things are, they're disguised, they're underneath, but the emotional system recognizes that, the brain doesn't recognize that, the emotional system recognizes that and responds to it. I went back home and I wrote to everyone in the family and blamed everyone for their part in that story. I blamed my aunt for telling me, I blamed my other aunt for not telling me, but my mother I didn't blame her for any of it I don't think. I blamed my sister for doing it, for saying it. I can't remember what I blamed dad's younger sister for but I started getting replies. I got a reply from my Aunt Mary that said "I'm going to go to hell for telling you about that story" ...(phone rings, unrelated conversation)...where was I?

**Andrea:** You said one aunt was blamed for telling, one aunt for not telling, your sister for doing it...

**Jan:** Well, ok, Aunt Mary wrote back she was going to go to hell. Well this would be another thing: if someone got upset about anything that I did, I would have to rectify that 'oh I'm sorry, I shouldn't have said that, I shouldn't have done that'. But I didn't. I dealt with what she said, and I said, "well I'm very sorry that you're going to hell but I wonder who you'll meet there that we both know." So then, her younger sister, dad's younger sister, didn't write to me but her daughter did and her daughter...steam was coming out of her letter... "How dare you talk to my mother like that" and I wrote back, "I don't know how I dared do that" and the two of us became very close friends after that. That was the interesting thing about it that everyone in the family now found me as someone they could talk to and confide in and that's the strange thing about it. I became the one that everyone could confide personal things to but my sister who had started this, she wrote and she said "my husband tells me never to get into anything about the things she said" so I wrote back to her and said, "well I think he's perfectly right but you know she said this and he said that" whatever they did I just wrote back and just had a ball. I was about ready to present again at the meeting, the weekly meeting, so I told Bowen I'd like to present again so I started to present my family just what I'm telling you here. This was beautiful, he sat there with his mouth open telling me it was going to be years before I'd ever get ahead and here it was months! I mean for me to get out of that box, it was really something. If it hadn't been for that story I couldn't have gotten out of it, or my bottle of gin (laughs).

**Andrea:** (Laughs) But yeah you had a lot of guts, wow.

**Jan:** Anyway, he sat there and when I was in the middle of this, when I was telling Bowen about this, I said, "at one point I thought maybe I might not do anything until I went back and read the theory again"  
Jan Kuhn

(laughs). Everyone laughed. But I knew triangles and that's what I heard the first time, the first time I went to a conference I heard triangles. I knew, absolutely, that I was locked into triangles in my home. So you asked me what kind of (effect Bowen theory had)... it had changed my entire life. It changed my entire personality, my whole way of dealing with every member of my family. I just think I handled things differently with everyone. I didn't buy in to what everyone was saying. And then I tell you, when I went home the next visit, my dad was lying on the sofa, he was having some psychical problems and he was lying on the sofa but when I walked in the door he got up and came forward and shook my hand. My dad! I mean this was the most... it was like I was an acquaintance so that was the change. I would do things, my sister had left the Catholic church years before and joined Jehovah's witnesses, well now were talking about the 1940's, ok? So you can imagine what this was to my family for my sister to become a Jehovah's Witness in the 1940's from a Catholic family. There was that going on there. And one time when I was home and as a Jehovah's Witness they didn't celebrate Christmas or birthdays, and I had a birthday party for her, at home, without her being there. We were all celebrating my sister's birthday. I did things like that. I wasn't honoring the craziness in other people. I was going to do my thing. When my sister was at dinner one time, family dinner, I asked her, "what kind of worship do people do when you go to your temple?" Do they call it a temple? What do they call it? No, they don't call it a temple...what is it?

**Andrea:** I don't know because I'm not familiar with that religion.

**Jan:** Well I knew at the time, I've sort of forgotten about it.

**Andrea:** Sanctuary? It's not a church.

**Jan:** It's not a church. But I had asked how they worship there. And she's thrilled to be able to tell this family about herself and of course they're all sitting there tense. Do you know what it ended up in consequent weeks and months? My mother went with her to one of those sessions or her places of worships. You asked me about the impact of Bowen theory on a family. I opened up the whole family, I opened it up.

**Andrea:** To be more real with one another.

**Jan:** People to be more real with one another and not to be afraid.

**Andrea:** They weren't playing these games.

**Jan:** But do you see that time that I went home and went to visit everyone in the family my mother became so ill that I thought she was going to die. She went to bed so ill. Except I knew, because Bowen had said, when you make a differentiating move in your family, that everyone is going to react. There are three responses: the first is you're wrong, the second is change back, and the third is if you don't change back then... so I got all those things. With my mother lying ill and I'll tell I had to steel myself, I had to put a shield around me to ignore that she might be doing herself in and I wasn't going to change. I had to get out of this box, I couldn't live inside this box. I'm sort of exhausted talking about it (laughs).

**Andrea:** It's quite something to go back and relive that but by you putting yourself in the box, that was to you that was based on theory to not react and change back when the other one yells or screams or gets sick and you just let that play out and have confidence.



**Jan:** And that was what people respected in me then. And that I was the one who people would tell secrets to then.

**Andrea:** Because they knew you would tell the secrets to the right people in the right way (laughs).

**Jan:** No. I think that they knew that I could be trusted. But you know, I did such a marvelous job with that and I would like to say that I continued on that level for the rest of my life but that's not true (laughs).

**Andrea:** It's very hard.

**Jan:** It's very hard. I've seen people who've never really understood the theory and used the concepts in the theory as tools or...what else do I want to say besides tools... techniques, used them as techniques and I fell into that at one time, I mean I really got into a cutoff in my own family and it took me a while to get that resolved. When you make a differentiating move like that and get out of your box you can get into another box if you're not careful.

**Andrea:** I hear that.

**Jan:** You have to be working at it all the time. It isn't something that's just there. I remember Dr. Bowen saying about his research at NIH that he had his theory and he wanted to test out and he had whole families living on a ward at the hospital and he was trying to understand these families with this theory as a way of looking at them and he would get so sucked into it. He said that when he got home, he could get his head clear and when he started, went back to work, and started up the steps of the hospital he'd get pulled back in. Now here's Bowen who can say that. So what about the rest of us. It is hard work, you have to work at it all the time and you get sucked in all the time. But the thing is that once you know how to get out of it or that once you know that you're in, or that you can become aware that you're in. In fact, Bowen said one time if you think you're in you're really out (laughs).

**Andrea:** Just to acknowledge that you're in this to get out. That's a good one, I like that. That's quite a story.

**Jan:** Oh my goodness I've gotten really wound up telling it, too.

**Andrea:** Well yeah, I'm sure that it must take you right back there but it's a good example of understanding the emotional process as a guidance system. It's a guidance system that works in every single family that there ever is and the pressuring people into roles is just no different than what happens with ants. They all get together in the interior part of the ant colony and they feel the antenna of the other ants and they know that they should go out and do the garbage detail or they should go and seek food or they know that they should go and guard the ant colony or whatever their role is. And the fascinating thing is that the roles when you don't know about the roles, they're impinging on you and then you're impinging on other people so that when you start letting people see the emotional process, that's what I get out of it. By separating out you really let people see what's going on. And when they can see, like your mother could go back and go with your sister to the different religion that she never could have gone to before if you hadn't allowed your sister to speak to that in a way that was calm.

**Jan:** Right, right.

Jan Kuhn

**Andrea:** But yeah, your being good would automatically form this reciprocal thing with her being bad and hyper or whatever she was. By your breaking out of that mold it gave her freedom. It's kind of like a domino thing, not everyone can do it all the time, and as you say it's a persistent effort.

**Jan:** Actually a lot of people reading Bowen's paper on how he differentiated himself in his own family of origin, a lot of people tried to copy that and failed... not saying a lot of people, some people did...and got into permanent cutoff in their family and he was such a thoughtful person. He could observe what was going on with all of us and then he would rethink things and he got so that he didn't put as much emphasis on family papers. He got moving in towards studying natural systems, which moves it one step away, where you can see processes and you're not hooked into your own stuff as much because I think getting so intent and working on your own stuff you can...I think there's so many sand traps. There are so many traps around that you can get hooked in. I was fortunate that I didn't, I was fortunate. Well what happened was that I maintained contact with everybody, even when I got all these letters, I didn't let those turn me off, I kept contact. So that's what you have to do, you have to keep your contact with everyone and that was one of the things that I sort of...I don't know whether Bowen said it but I sort of somehow picked it up... that you should make personal one-to-one contact with everyone in the family. And that's what I worked at: one-to-one contact with every member of the family. And that's really...

**Andrea:** You have to be very sure of yourself to know that what you're doing... You're presenting the case that people can read that paper and go off in a cockamamie way to do things which may result in real challenges and difficulty, more trouble for the person and if you get into it and you have some kickback and then you're just able to stay in contact or maybe if you come from a more flexible family too (laughs). But I think it brings up why part of the reason why psychiatry itself would have problems with Bowen theory, that first the psychiatrist has to work on themselves in their own family, which doesn't guarantee you a good result and which is a lot of work and why should somebody...somebody once said, 'I just want to be the guy that changes the spark plugs in the other people's car' like I don't want to be working on myself because I've chosen psychiatry. That's not part of the deal.

**Jan:** I know people who practice Freudian...

**Andrea:** Psychoanalysis.

**Jan:** Freudian Psychoanalysis, don't they have to be psychoanalyzing themselves?

**Andrea:** Yes they do, but that's a small percentage of people practicing psychoanalysis but yes I think Bowen went twelve years but he went for some amount of time. When we were going through the Leaders for Tomorrow archive's of Bowen's papers I found his dream book in one of the boxes where he had kept a recording of all his dreams and letters that he wrote to his analyst who had moved to New York. But that's still a completely different way of working on yourself, you lie on the sofa and you talk. It's not you saying things that might upset your mother or your aunts (laughs) stir up the bees nest so to speak.

**Jan:** Well you know, I knew I was locked into these roles and being called a lady from the time I was in a highchair (laughs) and I had no idea of my importance in the family. And also another thing that I had wondered about many times were the stories that my older sister was a little more timid than I was, I never would have thought that as a baby. Mother told a story of when someone was being nasty to my older sister in the neighborhood, and I said, "I'll hit her with a stone for you baby". I'm calling her baby,  
Jan Kuhn

“I’ll hit her with a stone for you” and here I am like a two year old or whenever I could talk. And I’ve often thought about that story in relation to the child I was when I got back into the family. How timid I was. That I had changed, I became very timid and I wondered what happened to that spunky little kid. Well she’s back (laughs)

**Andrea:** (Laughs) She got out of the box.

**Jan:** She got out of the box. And my older sister one time said to me, “I’ve always admired you that you could leave home, I’ve always wanted to leave home”. And I said, “Well why didn’t you?” and she said, “I couldn’t leave mother”. And I said, “What do you mean you couldn’t leave mother?” She said, “I couldn’t bear to be away from her”. And yet she would do whatever. She didn’t care if she hurt mother’s feelings or not, she did what she wanted to do. She would do really cruel things but I don’t think she thought of them as cruel but that was her way of dealing with mother. She thought this was being a self to do whatever you wanted to do. She says, “Well I always did what I wanted to do” ...

**Andrea:** Without thinking about the impact.

**Jan:** Without thinking about the impact on mother.

**Andrea:** But you would think about the impact on mother and decide ‘I have to build a shield so that I’m not manipulated by the impact on her and that I have confidence somehow that she’ll rise up in the middle of all this stuff that’s going on here’. But it’s a different thing when you’re blind, it sounds like your sister was blind to the emotional process.

**Jan:** Yes, she is. She’s still blind.

**Andrea:** And you could see it. By separating out and having confidence in the other people that gave you some kind of freedom that your sister hasn’t been able to get. She hasn’t been able to see the emotional process and how this all goes.

**Jan:** No, no, no. She doesn’t, to this day. She’ll be 89 her next birthday, she doesn’t see it. So I think that...

**Andrea:** You go back to psychiatry again, the impact of Bowen theory on psychiatry. You could do a family diagram on people and they could begin to see the emotional system pressuring them to form some kind of a role and not be able to be themselves and indulge in some kind of conflict with others that was not really real, it was based on the emotional system rather than the reality of the situation.

**Jan:** That’s why Bowen was so, he got hooked into a paper of mine, I don’t know whether you remember that paper, I’m trying to think of the title of it... *Interlocking Triangles Church Family Issues*.

**Andrea:** I do remember that. I’m not sure of all the details.

**Jan:** Well Bowen said to me at the time, now this was early on, there’s so many creative papers that have come out of Georgetown but this one talking about way back in the 70’s, he said that’s the most creative paper that’s come out of Georgetown.

**Andrea:** So it was called Church...

Jan Kuhn

**Jan:** *Interlocking Triangles Church Family Issues*. When I talked about how I got into the church system and worked out in the church system what...I can't even...you'd have to read the paper.

And he got so...he wanted me to expand on that and his praise... what word do I want...it blocked me. His praise blocked me from ever being able to do anything more with that paper, I tried and tried. He even talked with his wife about it to see... I remember him telling me that he talked it over with LeRoy and I just got so blocked. I couldn't move any further with that paper and he figured out that you don't praise Jan. So whatever paper I presented, didn't matter where, I was part of the original group for what has now become, Joe Carolyn's Wisdom...

**Andrea:** Wisdom of the Ages.

**Jan:** Wisdom of the Ages, I was part of that original group that presented papers to each other and Bowen. He never criticized me or the content of my paper but he'd have something to say negative and I knew what he was doing and he knew that I knew what he was doing. Any paper I presented he would have something... he wouldn't touch the paper at all, he'd say, "Well now Jan there she read her paper, she should get up there and talk her paper" and he with this tone that he had and it didn't bother me at all but he kept accepting all my papers so I knew he liked what I was doing. But that was his way, that he would never praise what I was doing. Do you remember when I picked you two up at the airport? I was so shocked when I saw him. It was probably the last conference he did...

**Andrea:** Yeah Chicago.

**Jan:** And I picked you two up at the airport and I got out of the car, I was there waiting for you and you were pushing him in the wheelchair and there he was with his briefcase and I was so shocked to see him that way. We got him into the car and he was in the front seat besides me and I turned to him (laughs) you know this is undifferentiated self, I said to Bowen "you've got to put your seatbelt on" (laughs) "I haven't got to do anything" in this raspy voice of his.

**Andrea:** That's so perfect.

**Jan:** And I said, "well it's the law and I'm not going to move unless you do it" (laughs)... "Why don't you say what you mean".

**Andrea:** (laughs)

**Jan:** So then the whole way home he kept talking to me and he was talking straight ahead and I was having a hard time listening to what he was saying because his voice was so raspy. I tried to get control of the conversation so I'd know what was going on. So anyway, I took him home and I don't know where I dropped you off, maybe there. And he just said thank you but the next day I got a letter thanking me for it (laughs). That he was so much himself. But also in writing the letter as sick as that man was to sit down and write a note and he said in the note he said, "lest I forgot what's important" or something like that. And it wasn't an apology but it was...(laughs) he was being Bowen.

**Andrea:** He was being Bowen, yeah. He was a principled man.

Jan Kuhn

**Jan:** “Why don’t you just say what you mean”.

**Andrea:** And you said exactly what you meant but yeah. He was very alert to any invasion of the ego boundaries if you tell somebody what to do.

**Jan:** Well you know it is so natural to do that!

**Andrea:** Yes it is. It is natural to be in the emotional process.

**Jan:** And what I’m saying is you can’t change everything about yourself but if you’re around Bowen long enough you learn more quickly (laughs).

**Andrea:** Yes, that’s so true.

**Jan:** Oh my goodness, he was a marvelous teacher, he was a marvelous teacher. I often thought what it was for him the man with his brain and his talent to have to deal with all of us at so many different levels and some of us struggling and some people at those conferences probably not as invested in doing as much as the rest of us. I mean, he had to deal with all of us. And I thought that was remarkable that he was able to devote his life to that.

**Andrea:** It’s so true, to the 5% of the 5% of the 5%.

**Jan:** Right, right, right.

**Andrea:** It was like a discipline master who constantly sees the emotional process that other people don’t see and he’s always speaking to it and for most of us it’s too hard to do that all the time, sometimes you just want to be in the emotional process and be in your life and be with your family and not be taking them on if they say, ‘well you should be doing this, or you should be doing that’ but he is so alert to triangles and to pressure and he calls it out.

**Jan:** What I still do not do that I should do is before I go to any family gathering or even go out where I’m going to be with people, I should think out carefully the situation and what my relationship is with that person or that system and figure out how I want to be there. I should do that and I don’t. I tell myself over and over again after the fact (laughs). That I should do that, maybe if I were out a little more. What’s happening with me now is that it’s very easy for me to get isolated.

As I can’t go anywhere and do much. I don’t want Sye to have to become as isolated as I am so we’ve gotten, Life Station, I don’t think I need it but Sye thinks I need it so we get it.

**Andrea:** What is Life Station? You’re being awfully nice to Sye but go ahead. Maybe he deserves it.

**Jan:** He does. I don’t want him to worry about me and it’s not fair for him to worry about me. Now of course Bowen would say about not fair...

**Andrea:** What’s not fair about that, he’s your husband, he took you for better or worse.

**Jan:** If he doesn't know I'm going to be ok...see, you do it for self. If he doesn't know I'm going to be ok, he won't go. And then I'm going to feel guilty for keeping him at home.

**Andrea:** So you're doing it for you?

**Jan:** I'm doing it for me.

**Andrea:** You're not being nice to him?

**Jan:** I'm not being nice to him, I'm being nice to myself (laughs).

**Andrea:** I hear you, it's hard to untangle these things, isn't it? And really find the basic motivation. But to go back to the world of psychiatry, the world itself, what good would it do if everyone could do this? How different would society be? How is it helping us, leading question. Differentiation of self, how would it help us to cope with ten billion people on the planet, instead of seven. When you were born in 1927 there were less than two billion on the earth, when I was born less than three billion I guess.

**Jan:** Well all you have to do is look at the paper every day and you wonder where in the world we're going.

**Andrea:** So this ability to be your own unique self and to ward off the emotional forces, how's that going to help?

**Jan:** How would it help the world?

**Andrea:** By being more differentiated? You don't have to answer the question, it's a totally theoretical question. How does differentiation of self enable people to tolerate the confusion and complexity in today's world with an increasing population.

**Jan:** I'll have to print out something for you. As long as I could work, I worked with Red Cross and went out on disasters or whatever. I worked down at the Family Center doing a lot of gut work of listening to tapes and then I'd bring them home and I'm not sure they knew I was doing that, I couldn't do them all there and listen to them and write synopsis. Bowen had in one of his tapes, I had to listen to it over and over again to make sure I was getting it right because of his voice, that I got it down. I really should read it to you, it is so beautiful. I have it in my computer and I have it marked, and I have copies of it and I've sent copies of it to the Bowen family and evidently you didn't get a copy of it. Someone once asked him (Bowen) what do we do about the rest of society... shall I go get that paper?

**Andrea:** Maybe I could take it with me when I go. How long have we got here?

**Jan:** It's a very short paper but he says...see, he didn't answer that right away but he would go back and think about it and he didn't answer it that first time but the next time someone asked that he had an answer for them. Because I was listening to all these tapes and I knew they'd asked him before and he said, something about, this is paraphrasing, 'that you brighten your own backyard' and you don't know with whoever you meet if they will do it or not. But you just do what you can do and someone will hear that and whoever hears that might do that themselves. You're going to have to read it because what I'm telling you is so nothing to what he had, the way that he presented it. He said you don't know whether Jan Kuhn

other people are going to do it or not but if you keep doing it, if you keep doing it, then that's all you can do. That's the only answer I have with what to do with all of society and that paper should be in there with what you're doing here now. It should. And what I've written at the top, it was the tale end of another tape and so I have a program in my computer that my son developed. I couldn't get it down there at Georgetown, I couldn't get it in there, but I'll tell you who did get it in to his computer was Bill...

**Andrea:** Dwyer?

**Jan:** Bill Dwyer. I have to give him all of the copies that I did, and I did most of them. Loretta did an awful lot, she was the one who started the project and she got ill and Lee Kelly did a couple of them. We were paraphrasing **or** we were doing a synopsis of these papers of Bowen's so they're somewhere and I have them all on my computer.

**Andrea:** Wow, that's great.

**Jan:** I'd be glad to get them to you somehow. I don't know how I would, I'll have to see if you can get into that program.

**Andrea:** You could ask your son what's the best way. Usually now you can send files, there's a program called Drop Box and you can put them in Drop box, huge files. So that it's not a problem to send files over the internet now, they've figured out how to compress tremendous amounts of information. But I'm sure he knows all about that.

**Jan:** I'm sure he does. I think I have it all on a....

**Andrea:** A disk?

**Jan:** Not a disk. What do you call it...what do you call these...

**Andrea:** A drive? A USB drive?

**Jan:** USB.

**Andrea:** So that's up-to-date. Anybody can...I have a computer out in my car, put the USB in and transfer.

**Jan:** I have a personal computer and most of them down there were Macs and what do you have?

**Andrea:** I have a Mac.

**Jan:** See. And I don't think it would go in. And he came here one time, he was going to go down to Georgetown and do it at that time, there was a lot of tension down there at Georgetown at that time and I didn't think it was a good time to go in there. There were fractions.

**Andrea:** (Laughs) I was part of a fraction, I'm sure.

**Jan:** I didn't want to go in there and say this is what you should do. I didn't want to take sides, I didn't have the energy. I didn't have the energy to take him down there and fix their computers. Can you  
Jan Kuhn

imagine my going down there and saying, 'My son is going to work on your computers and get this program in there?'

**Andrea:** It's like saying you should put your seatbelt on (laughs) It's not going to work out well.

**Jan:** So he sort of was annoyed with me, he said, "I came home to do that" and I said, 'well I'm sorry, you can't do that'.

**Andrea:** Well I'm pretty sure now... in the old days they didn't have a Word program that would transfer from a Mac to a ....there wasn't a Word program for a Mac that could recognize the IBM Word program but now you can do it. It's so simple, it's not at all hard.

**Jan:** I'll tell you what Bill Dwyer liked about Bill's program is that you could go in and work on what was already there if you wanted to. He told me one time he liked this program, in fact, you might even be able to get it from him.

**Andrea:** Yeah, so I'll ask Bill about that, I can always get this from you I'm sure. Well what else should we...

**Jan:** Let me give you that...

**Andrea:** I can bring my computer up and see if it will work on the computer right when we get done. So one of the things that I wanted to put in was a bit about learning in the group and a bit about Bobby Holt since you had such a good story to tell about Bobby and she was one of the original faculty people and so important to so many people. She had her own unique way of teaching and learning and being a part of the group without getting totally incorporated by the group. But I think the differentiation of self, in my opinion, again enables people to be with others and just have less of this control by the emotional system so people can be a self in a group better than they could without Bowen theory.

**Jan:** That's very difficult to do.

**Andrea:** It's very difficult to do but it's a guide at least to give you some idea because people are trying to invade my ego boundaries. They're trying to manipulate me and I'm wanting to go along with it so I can be the good person. 'Well, wait a minute, stop, I don't want to do that anymore. I don't want to play my role as the lady'. Or whatever the role happens to be. So somehow or another people becoming aware is the first step. That there is this emotional process and I think...

**Jan:** Yeah, but I think we can go in the opposite direction too. Actually it's pretty natural if you want to change you just take the opposite end of the stick and I think I have done that a number of times in not wanting to be this nice person who does everything right. That I'd go to the opposite end of the stick instead of working it out like I did, that was an awful lot of work I put into that effort. You can't imagine, even before I went there for me to do the work to figure out that I had the two roles. The role of being the lady and the role of doing everything right and that was thinking over years and years of what was said about me. Of what my aunt would say, 'you can always depend on Janet because she does everything right or she will always do everything right'. Well I didn't always but that was the role. Mother would always say, "every family should always have one lady and were glad we have you" or something like that. It was always detrimental; it was always meant...it wasn't a compliment.

Jan Kuhn



**Andrea:** Well you can see how you might get allergic to praise with all of that going on.

But my point is just that you gave a beautiful example of emotional process and discovering what it is and how to unwind yourself from the seriousness of it. And it's something a lot of people have never heard of, they don't know anything about it, they wouldn't know what you were talking about if you told the story (laughs).

**Jan:** Probably not.

**Andrea:** And so it's still a small group of people who the 5% rule might still hold.

**Jan:** See that's why I think about what you're saying, to get that into a college, or university, everyone, not everyone is going to buy into that.

And not only that, there's so much going on in a university or a college that there's always going to be those who are going to try to put down someone else's thinking, you've always going to have that, because that's life.

**Andrea:** Absolutely.

**Jan:** I'm not sure that that would be accurate that more is done there than here. DC is sort of a core here and you have the people going out and talking and giving talks different places. People are picking up pieces of it and getting I think I said to you that they don't even know if some of it has been picked up by society, they don't know where it has come from. And I think the thing of triangles, people talk about triangles now and I don't know....

**Andrea:** It's a straw dog. I mean, basically this is the way that the theory evolved and Bowen wanted and I can see why he would have wanted a...he was always thinking research and talking about research. If he had had the ability to have a giant research project, like turning the state of Virginia into a giant research project for mental health where people, not that everyone would go about trying to differentiate as self. It's basically if you go in and see a psychiatrist, you come out and you've been told that you've anxious and depressed and why don't you take X, Y and Z drug. That's a completely different thing than if you just went in and someone took your three-generation family diagram and you looked at what the forces were that were going on in your family. That's why I really like this book, Sonia Sotomayor, the Supreme Court Justice, she has an amazing ability to be totally objective in a way about her family and curious and such an amazing observer of family process, without ever being told anything about Bowen Theory. So I think that gave her a way of going for herself to know the people in her family, to know so much about what had gone on in her father's and mother's lives, etc. that probably helped her brain develop. So that's what I'm thinking more about, that Bowen theory has a way of enabling people to learn about emotional process. It's still very few are going to take it so seriously that they're going to go all the way to defining a self, in terms of the basic triangles in their own family. They can define a self in other ways but not maybe taking on mother; putting mom and dad together Bowen used to say and getting self out.

**Jan:** Oh that's one of the things I did with my parents, put them together. Do you know their wedding picture was with my mother's older sister was her maid of honor and my dad's younger brother was his best man and their wedding picture, the only wedding picture they had, was mother sitting down and I think her sister standing behind her and my dad...I'd have to get that picture out and look but they were  
Jan Kuhn

separated completely so what I did was I took their picture to a photographer, I took that picture to a photographer and I said, “would you see what you can do to put these two together”. You’ll see that he had to work pretty hard at it and it didn’t actually look right so I put my parents together in their wedding picture. And you see sort of how the way that she’s tilted and that’s the best he could do with it which I think he did a really good job and I had copies made for everyone in the family.

**Andrea:** Wow, that’s so beautiful.

**Jan:** So I put them together. I put my parents together and her older sister and his younger brother were in between them! And that’s exactly probably what fueled their relationship, the way it went.

**Andrea:** (Laughs) That is so beautiful.

**Jan:** So I put them together.

**Andrea:** And you got yourself out. Now you have a life that’s more yours and perhaps a lot less reactive than it would have been had you not ever met Murray Bowen.

**Jan:** You know there are friends of mine who have studied the theory, we discuss things with each other, not as much now, but Loretta and I used to talk a lot. She could see what was going on in my family where I couldn’t see, I could see what was going on in hers. We would be able to stimulate each other or get a point in that would be helpful to each other and many times we would talk about “thank God for Bowen Theory” and the same with my friend in Florida and I don’t know how well you know her, Kathleen Yanks, used to be Kathleen Keaton.

**Andrea:** I know Kathleen Yanks.

**Jan:** A really wonderful person and very thankful. Everyone I know who’s studied is very thankful having had Bowen Theory and seeing it has changed their lives and an ongoing thing of being able to deal with life as it is and what we have to deal with in all our relationships. Because it is ongoing, you’re always going to have everything that you deal with.

I have a thing with my optometrist, who I’m thinking of, the next time I see him I need to present to him. I’m not sure how I’m going to present it, he’s giving an A1 care and I’m not getting A1 care because there’s a concept in philosophy that things are received according to the mode of the receiver not to the mode of the giver but that his office is one that I can’t receive things well. There’s too much chaos in that office. He can give in a chaotic situation but I’m the kind of person I can’t receive in that kind of chaotic situation. I need to get it across to him that I don’t want to go as frequently. I’d like to have my eyes examined for glasses somewhere else, less than a mile away. I have to go all the way up to Leisure World; do you know where that is?

**Andrea:** I sure do.

**Jan:** ...to see him and his office is so chaotic and he’s very, very good but he performs in a way that I can’t receive good care there. He has people popping in and out of the office. Did you know he did laser surgery on me with people coming in and out of the office? Could you imagine?

Jan Kuhn

**Andrea:** No, I can't.

**Jan:** You're supposed to be in a room where there is no air stirring.

**Andrea:** I think that would be difficult, a challenge. But I reckon you're up to these kind of challenges.

**Jan:** Well, I'm up to them, we'll see how...

**Andrea:** As soon as you see it you can figure out what you're going to, it might not be the perfect thing but I think the real question is, can you see it? And if you can see it, then whatever you're going to do is better than when you were blind and couldn't see (laughs) and just went along.

**Jan:** Yeah, I've been going along with it so I won't do it anymore but the thing is I might have to end up getting another doctor and if I have to do that...because I have a lot of things wrong with my eyes, I have macular degeneration. I've had laser surgery for glaucoma, and so you know it's really hard to find someone as competent as this man is.

**Andrea:** Well he'll probably be glad to hear that part of the story anyway (laughs).

**Jan:** (Laughs) But his office is like a...he's so popular, his office is like...what did Ford have...an assembly line.

**Andrea:** That is what happened to medicine.

**Jan:** I guess it's all medicine.

**Andrea:** Whatever you decide to do will be interesting I'm sure and you and the doctor and the chaos, I can see it now. But I'll probably put my money on you to emerge from the ordeal. Well let's end for today and see what else comes up upon reflection.

**Jan:** Ok, I want to get you that copy of Bowen's comments.

**Andrea:** I would appreciate it. That would be great.

**Jan:** They're so wonderful. Of what you can do in all society, you can only do what you can do, that's all.

**Andrea:** That sounds good to me.

**Jan:** You can't change anyone else!

**Andrea:** I'm happy to hear it.