

Louise Rauseo

Interviewed by Andrea Schara

June 26, 2014

**Andrea-** Louise Rauseo and Andrea Schara and today is June 26<sup>th</sup> and the year is 2014.

**Louise-** Let`s stay with 14.

**Andrea-** (laughs) Yes, let`s stay with `14, that`s sort of my fun way of loosening things up.

**Louise-** (laughs) It`s not a test for Alzheimer`s?

**Andrea-** (laughs) Could be, but I don`t want to be that serious. I`m sure a test for Alzheimer`s would be a lot more serious. So we were just going to start out today...you`ve looked over the questions, so then let`s see how far we get. We might do another one in an hour or two, just on question nine (laughs). But just to start the interview, Louise, you want to tell a little about who you are and how you got to meet Dr. Bowen.

**Louise-** Well I was so lucky, we moved to the Annapolis area in `65...no `66, I think, and I was busy raising four small children and I didn`t have much professional involvement, as I was also working part time as a nurse. I found it less and less fitting for me.

**Andrea-** Nursing?

**Louise-** Yes, so about 1970 I decided to try to go back to school to find something that would fit. I discovered psychiatric nursing programs in Maryland. At that time they had community mental health and that sounded interesting to me. I thought I was much better working in the community than at the bedside. So I looked into it and started there. And I discovered there were two people on the faculty who had studied with Dr. Bowen.

**Andrea-** How did you discover that?

**Louise-** Well it was very, very practical, we had two courses offered in family. Anne Kane was not there the year that I started but she and ...Alice Slater were the two who had studied with Bowen. I had the very good fortune of having Alice for my family course, which was my introduction to family theories but then she took it and made a special course in Bowen Theory. So we had a semester and she was very encouraging for people to keep studying.

Plus she said, "if you don`t do something about the mess that you`re in, and especially getting to know your mother who you want to get far away from, you are just going to keep having the same problem." Also she encouraged people, who were interested, to get in touch with Dr. Bowen directly and that was fairly easy to do. He was very receptive. Then I contacted him about the mess in my family.

**Andrea-** So you just called up and asked for an appointment?

**Louise-** Well I called him first to say I was thinking about writing something for my master`s thesis and I did have some ideas that related to family. I pursued some of those but he said, “Oh, you can` t do much with those ideas, just get your union card and then get to work and then you can do something.”

Getting my union card was getting my masters which allowed me to practice independently as a clinical specialist. Did that make a change? I don` t know. But then I talked to him and said more seriously. “I want to arrange to see you to talk about this miserable family.” It was easy then to meet him at that professional level and for him to function as a coach. So that was my first introduction. Trying for him to give me an idea on my paper for my thesis he said...”Get your union card.” But then very quickly seeing him and recognizing my intense focus on our kids.

We had our two born to us and two adopted and I had more concern about number one I suppose, and she was acting kind of like a teenager, didn` t have much purpose in life and all that stuff. But it was pretty soon that I was able to connect the fact that I was cut off from my mother and her acting out.

Really didn` t know what to do about that. Dad was my hero. And he was everyone`s hero. Everybody loved dad. He was the 7<sup>th</sup> child of eight. Actually, one child died before he was born. So he was adored by his mother, after his dad died when he was young, he was adored by everybody in the family. He was easy.

Mother was an oldest female with a sister from a very uptight family. I did not know her and that was what became clear to me, that I simply did not know my mother. I didn` t want to at first.

**Andrea-** (Laughs) She was an oldest with a younger sister and you were an oldest yourself...

**Louise-** ...with a younger brother.

**Andrea-** With a younger brother and so maybe not enough room for two oldest, I don` t know.

**Louise-** Well, eventually I discovered that it`s so interesting to me that knowing someone`s life deeply made all the difference but it took a lot to get to that point.

**Andrea-** What do you mean by really knowing someone`s life?

**Louise-** To really understand what mother faced in her life, growing up in the family that she was in, and the choices that she made, and beginning to see the courage that I couldn` t see when I was struggling with her. But seeing her and getting to know the reality in her life allowed me to appreciate her as her own person.

I think Bowen was really good, he could stay focused on that issue which was so key to me even though there were all these little storm going on, all these little things would pop up... and I would focus on them, not mother.

**Andrea-** With your daughter your focus went there?

**Louise-** Yes, kids, and different things. All these different things would pop up when they were young. So Bowen was able to keep a focus on how do you get to know who you are in the context of these of these family people. It took years to get to know the family of my mother's. Because mother did not remember, until we got way deep into it and then she started to remember. I had to go on all kinds of end runs to meet people, and that would give me a clue as to what it was like.

**Andrea-** And she would be upset with you making these end runs to meet people?

**Louise-** I was trying to talk to her sister about things.

**Andrea-** On the phone? Or you went to visit this sister?

**Louise-** I went to visit her and she would say things like, "well I don't know why I should tell you because your mother will tell you the opposite." And I said, well maybe I'd be interested in hearing both. But that was the kind of thing, and my mother thought I was spending a lot of ridiculous time and money because I was traveling from Annapolis to wherever. Wyoming, to see my mother. Kansas City, to see my aunt, Illinois to see the larger family. So I was doing a lot of travel. And it made sense to me at some point as it was filling in and as I got more aware and more desensitized to the symptoms in the family. Then my mother started to remember. We had one session with her sister and me and mother. And this was a great contribution to what it was they remembered when they talked together.

**Andrea-** So you brought them both together?

**Louise-** As often as I could.

**Andrea-** So you'd get your sister to visit your mother or...your mother to visit...

**Louise-** No, it was her sister from Kansas City. And we would drive by and pick her up on the way to Wyoming. Sometimes. They were cordial to each other.

**Andrea-** Was that a suggestion from Bowen that you bring them together or did you think of these things yourself? How direct was he with you?

**Louise-** With that kind of thing he was real direct about suggesting that I go without all my appendages. All of them. But beyond that it was more an exploration that I could figure out on my own. And I think his effort was to say that it's worth it. Hang in.

That was the biggest... that was in 1975 or so when I started that inquiry. Then it was in 1985 that I was able to invite her and my father to go to Germany to find the family that was still there. She was almost 85 then. Things had moved enough then to make that trip possible. That was really powerful and she lived until 90. She died the same week that Bowen died. A week, almost exactly.

So as a coach, Bowen was really present with his ideas but mostly in just saying what is worth the effort I think he would see the work on the extended family as the primary effort, even though what I was living with was a lot of difficulty in the marriage and with the kids.

And I think that was helpful.

**Andrea-** How do you explain that? I guess I'm skipping ahead a little bit into the basis of theory and I know you've done a lot of work with people in Mexico who've had a lot of cutoff. Theoretically, when you're trying to explain how does this working on your family of origin enable people to do better in the here and now of our lives, it seems so challenging.

**Louise-** I've had a lot of resistance to that, I imagine you have too. When people just say "what? Are you crazy? Leave the past alone."

It has been helpful in the family, in the individuals, where that resistance is not too huge. Then there are some who will not engage the family. The thing that I think makes it workable is that in doing it you do know who the people are that have been the most profound influences in your life.

I couldn't have told you who my mother was before this. I could tell you a little bit about my father, but I know a lot more now. Who was this person, who had such a profound effect on me? I think it's in getting that clear about the important people that has been pretty useful.

**Andrea-** So there's one thing- which is the perception that you have of other people, which is a distorted perception. Then you make the effort to come into better contact with the reality of the person's life and who they really are and some deeper appreciation of them. Plus, you're meeting all these other people in your family. You're going all the way back to Germany to see the remnants of a root system- what's that about?

**Louise-** It's pretty funny. I'll tell you my father was a dedicated biologist, botanist and gardener. We get to Germany, oh and a teacher, and I have three offspring who became teachers and we get to Germany and these people we just connected with, just like that (snaps fingers) gardeners and teachers. What is that about? How do you make sense of this branching off of the family?

**Andrea-** That's fascinating. Your subterranean system. I mean one way of thinking about it is that family goes back to something that you wrote about in the article you did for the family system forum, (Volume sixteen Number one). There you talk about Calhoun's work

in social velocity and the animals who were more competent had more competent relationships with a broader variety of other animals. And so by going back you're increasing your social velocity. You're having more relationships with family people who you connect with immediately.

**Louise-** That was the astonishing thing, it was amazing. The funny thing is that my brother and I are products of this youngest in the King family. My father was Jennings King. He was the youngest. So the cousins pretty much put us all into the category of...well, he was the youngest, and he didn't amount to much. He was just a teacher, he was just this or that. Nobody expected anything from John or me either. They didn't expected much from him, and nobody expected anything from me. And it has been an uphill climb to be somebody in that family.

In the very competent bunch of people, as oppose to my mother's family that struggled much more. And I could happily take the backseat. And that was one where I would happily disappear into the woodwork but I have hung in with it and it has paid off I think.

**Andrea-** So you're altering perceptions, expectations, and social velocity?

**Louise-** Could be, yes.

**Andrea-** In this move back towards your own family. Those are the reasons that it may impact you in such a way as to make you a stronger, more mature person.

**Louise-** Within limits, within limits (laughs).

**Andrea-** I mean, yes of course, we start out within limits, but you're building a better operating base for yourself through this coaching with Dr. Bowen. That what it sounds like and your understanding more about who you are in relationship to your mother, your father, and who they are. You're altering your perception and you're creating a broader network of sustainable relationships.

**Louise-** That makes sense, however, I would put in my caveat that is- after 40 some years of getting to see this, there are still some pieces of that early experience that are hidden from view. The early experience in my family are humbling. I could get caught in the expectations as to learning Bowen theory, expectations that I perceive in the people that study Bowen Theory of arriving at a certain place. Getting there. Getting there.

**Andrea-** Getting to heaven (laughs).

**Louise-** And I can still get really thrown off by what I think is even more... I don't know what it would be like without the work on the cutoff. But I think I am still programmed to be the creature that was born to my mother after two miscarriages in a cutoff with her family. I was to provide for my mother a new way - this is the one who will lead the way in the cutoff. Bullshit (laughs). But believing it all the way. For me that did not go away, with broadening

the base and being more realistic about the family people, and me. I have kept a certain amount of the pattern. Talk about patterns. It's interesting to me that that pattern has persisted in spite of a lot of breaking the pattern. But I think, Bowen died when my mother died, he had given me a solid, solid way. I talked to him the day we were burying mother, and it was just before he died and, boy, I can't remember exactly what he said...

**Andrea-** You were saying "Bowen had given me" a solid...relationship with him? Was that what I was hearing? Or was it a solid way of thinking?

**Louise-** A solid way of moving. Of directing my life toward building new relationships. Some things changed forever, some of my old feeling states about myself and family are gone, but I'm just saying that still there are some of the old pattern that perhaps if he had lived and been around after my mother's deaths, it may have been a chance to work on some of the other stuff. Then I supposedly could see differently. But I don't know.

The piece that I'm talking about is the piece about the pseudo self, and it is silent in my family. To be something for the family, and that's a little different, I mean that's my word for it. That's a little different than the process of going out to get to know the family and building relationships. That's something even more deep.

**Andrea-** It's like the reason for being. Some people will say that you'll know what your passion is somewhere between the age of 14 to 27. Then they have all these formulas, you're going to know your true passion if you follow "X" way. But you're putting in the point that it's hard to determine what your true passion is from what you're assigned to be by the family.

**Louise-** Exactly. I couldn't tell you what my true passion was in that period of time. I went with the assignment.

**Andrea-** You don't know what your true passion was?

**Louise-** Oh yes.

**Andrea-** Oh yes? What was it?

**Louise-** Well, I think in those years there are two things, one is the thing of reproduction. That's pretty basic. That was there. The other thing was, from very early on, and I'll talk more about it today, I borrowed some of what I saw in my mother's lighting up about the passions in her life. I had a passion for the world in New Mexico, the connection to that culture. I wrote about this in junior high, but it got side tracked, in terms of get busy and have babies and do that. And it came back alive later.

**Andrea-** Yes, definitely.

**Louise-** And it's so interesting because before Bowen died at one point, "when are you going to get around to doing what you really ought to do?" I said, "I know when." I mean it was one of those...in public...

**Andrea-** In public? (Laughs)

**Louise-** In public, yes. I knew that I was sort of set free after mother's death from the time involved from being back and forth and being with her. I knew that there was something else that I was going to be doing. But the work with the Indians was a little bit of a taste of that. The Winnebago Indians. But I knew there was something else. It was very pointed, some pieces of it were. But it was there, it has been there all along, but it can get lost to the others... what do you call it?

**Andrea-** You can call it the "love and approval problem."

**Louise-** The very basic.

**Andrea-** Very basic thing, but they (the parents) really do see something in you, or often and they project that, "You're going to lead the way, you're going to discover, you're a healer..." They see something in you and then they foster that. Some of it can be their own ego, if you want to call it that. That I can't make it to the boarder, but you could, I can't make it to the top of the mountain but you could.

**Louise-** Their lives being sort of constrained at the time of the depression, or at the time of the dust bowl where we lived. Very constrained lives and then two miscarriages and the birth of a fairly bright young one, kind of lighted their life. Gave mother a reason to be, but that was not her passion. Her other passion was evident in other ways. But I think those things get mixed. I don't know how other people have worked that out with Bowen theory, I think Bowen worked it out for himself. (How much for them, how much for me?)

**Andrea-** I was thinking when you were talking about the Winnebago Indians that I remember going there and meeting you. Dr. Bowen was in a wheelchair at the time. And the women who was pushing him had turned the wheelchair around and he was sitting like a little elf in his wheelchair looking at us. Remember that? Walking through the airport and laughing as to the way that people treated him. He was a wizard and they treated him like a helpless person when he wasn't in the least bit helpless. And he smiled and we laugh at it all.

When we got to the meeting, supposedly on alcoholism, Bowen got up there before the community of Winnebago Indians and talked about how they might be a nation. The women were complaining about their alcoholic husbands. "Well, Dr. Bowen you came here to talk about alcoholism and you're not really talking about alcoholism and you're not telling us what we should do about our husbands." and he looked at her and said something about, "I notice that a few of you women have gained a bit of weight and if you lost some weight your husbands might not drink as much" (laughs).

**Louise-** Another classic.

**Andrea-** And I thought here's a guy who sees his own theory and he has the courage to say it to people, right to their face. You're focusing on what is wrong with others rather than working on yourself. But he didn't even say it in a removed theoretical way (laugh) he goes right for the sensitive part. He did talk about how everyone is involved theoretically...and then the women goes further: "well what about children who have sexual abuse, their young victims, they are children. She maintains that it's not always that both parties are involved. There are some innocents." And he refused to go along with that and he just stands there while the audience gets kind of upset.

**Louise-** Well, I think that was hard for me to see the discomfort in the way that this played out, I got my ego involved in that, wishing for it to go better... for people to hear. It's hard.

**Andrea-** So there's the example, he's got a little bit of life left, so he's going to say a few things that might seem mean, but he stands there and that is something to see for you or me. Maybe it doesn't mean that much to the rest of the people. But for me he was always aiming for that 1% or 2% of the people who would really take it up and go forward with it instead of trying to aim towards the middle where it would become more acceptable and maybe dilute it so that it was mush. But at the end of the day Bowen was Bowen.

**Louise-** It would be really interesting to have his take on the efforts that each of us has made. But he would be working on his own stuff and leave us alone.

**Andrea-** He would certainly give you his best shot on his thinking. And then you're going to do what you're going to do. I'm going to do what I'm going to do.

I think he tried to live this difference between what the family wants and what do I want. And that was one of his gifts. Live your life with less fear of saying your truth. Looking at his professional life he was really giving new ideas to the world. Which is the opposite of what should I say that would make people more comfortable. If he gave people what they wanted, to give up his truth, or to fold it here or there, then this pseudo self that you were talking about lives. I think that's a crucial part too... and never probably ends because it is a very muddy thing, to how much of your life is for others and how much is your own truth. And it has to be that way.

**Louise-** Yes, we are social beings.

**Andrea-** And yet, if we are to give too much to others, we can become symptomatic and if you can keep going with that part of you that you want to see flower, you might make a real deep contribution.

**Louise-** Yes, and I think this was after the thing with Winnebago, I think Dr. Bowen was waiting to see, "wake up! What are going to do?" In the meantime, I could get sidetracked by the symptoms in our family. First Steve had Hodgkin's and then the alcohol and drug stuff



with the other son. I could get real thrown off. Steve really threw me back on my path...saying "I'm taking care of this now." He did his version of saying, "this is my life" and he managed it. And then it took a while for me to separate some from Joe's things. And I don't know how much that got mixed in with trying to have a purpose and move in my own direction, and the pull from my husband was, "get back here. Take care of these little jerks."

**Andrea-** (laughs) get back here and take care of these little jerks.

**Louise-** He would have his own way of doing it, but he would not interfere with my things that I was doing, but there would be a noise saying I was doing it wrong. Basically. And I have had minimal success filtering out the noise. Sometimes better than others. Because he could be right (laughs).

**Andrea-** That's true, so you have to listen to him. Filtering out the noise, what kind of noise is this noisemaker making here?

**Louise-** So I think that was part of the challenge for me in going forward with something that Dr. Bowen knew I was going to move forward with. Maybe. When. Someday. Maybe not. That was kind of the message I was getting from him.

**Andrea-** And that you thought was pretty accurate between the noise. And the kids and the things that you were working on. And if you had been free of all that, you would have gone to Mexico to work sooner? Did that turn out to be the push you wanted to make? To go and work with the Mexican people?

**Louise-** Well it was that and my interest in cutoff and the migration piece. It's changed a lot in the last few of years. I knew that something along that line, the passion for the culture and the people and an understanding of how Bowen Theory might contribute and for the work there. That was always in my head for a long, long time. But I couldn't see a way to do it until after mother's death, and then it took a little while and then Nick retired, and then he was sort of willing to go. And I didn't realize, no, I didn't know, or believe, that I could have done it without him and have a distant marriage, well it was already distant in its own way, but to have a long distance marriage, no, that never occurred to me. But I think it could have been.

**Andrea-** So maybe that was the noise that held you back a little bit. And you eventually got free of that, and were able to go ahead and go down there and do what you wanted to do and you created an amazing program down there.

**Louise-** That was not the purpose at all. But that just came. I think it's what happens when there's something that's reasonably alive. It's had its good days, and lousy days. But I think it has to do with if there is something there that people can grab hold of- then there's a reason. So my goal was to learn. I really went there to learn. And I would go back there to continue that- to learn.

**Andrea-** So you are going back there?

**Louise-** Sure. Up to a point.

**Andrea-** So your project is still ongoing?

**Louise-** Yes, yes. But I think that the liveliness of it was different when I was living down there and that was... that's a long story. I am going to talk about it a little today. Bowen was standing and waiting, and pushing, and ever so often he would give me a little kick in the rear.....To get on with what you're about, enough focus on this, there were people in the program that thought it was a big mistake that he did not get me to focus on AA, Al-Anon, treatment for our son. Right or wrong I did not. But I didn't realize how much and I think only in the last 5 year I have been able to appreciate how much I blocked out the symptoms in my mother's family. I just look at the things that worked, just the things that looked good. I was almost saying, "No, that can't be part of me." But it is. Big time. But that was something that I don't think I ever talked to Bowen directly about, about the symptomatic level of my mother's extended family. Because my father's family looked so good.

**Andrea-** So you focused more on that one?

**Louise-** Yes, and the good parts.

**Andrea-** ...of your mom's family.

**Louise-** Yes, and her cutoff was partly a cutting off of the craziness that was pretty rampant, the alcoholism, and the suicide, all kinds of stuff. Come to find out that it's still with me. That's an awakening that's a big surprise.

I don't know how much Dr. Bowen knew, how much I was even able to spell out about the craziness in my mother's family. But his focus was on knowing her. But one of my colleagues said once upon a time that if a relationship changes deeply then all of the feelings that went with that relationship before that were very painful, they're unimportant, they're almost gone. I have found that to be true.

I can hardly bring back all the negativity that used to be around me now. Nick can remember very well about getting as far away as possible from my mother, but the feeling states that went with that are gone.

**Andrea-** (laughs) isn't that amazing.

**Louise-** I think that's fascinating. I don't remember anybody writing about that. This is colleague who you know well, Anne Bunting, said something about how this feeling thing has completely changed, and it's true.

**Andrea-** I've heard similar things from those long-term people who have been using the principles of Bowen theory. In Freud's world the idea was that you have repression and to

deal with their feelings so they free associated. People could gradually become more coherent with what they had experienced and could make sense and gradually be more integrated. But it took them twelve years, four times a month. I was thinking about Freud and Bowen as your talking about that these emotional states and how they resolve.

So here you're actually doing it in real relationships with people rather than in the therapist's office. I think is a huge advantage and a much more powerful outcome. As you're talking I'm not going to try to pull this all together. But what I hear is that there are perceptions that we have of our families that we're particularly blind to. And it's just not our brains concern to look at relationships and try to understand them. Our brain is not competent at doing that. We really have to force our brain to try to do it.

**Louise-** And the body (laughs).

**Andrea-** We need to force the brain to understand self in relationships and that Bowen had a way of saying things that we could hear and this which was extremely helpful. It doesn't solve the whole problem, as you're still going to be blind-sided to some things.

And there are some things which even if Bowen were here today he might not know the answer to, because there's so much we don't know. He used to say that we're barely scratching the surface and I think that's a good thing to hold in mind that we're slowing discovering things.

I think for the people who get into treatment for alcoholism, AA can be useful for some but not all. I worked for five years in an alcoholism hospital, I think about 90% of people who came in would have a re-occurrence and there were very few people who don't have re-occurrences. It's kind of a life-long burden for people who happen to have this sensitivity, stress, short serotonin, the genetics that make alcohol a perfect drug...

**Louise-** All that stuff plays into it.

**Andrea-** And you do your best to be present to others with what I would call a positive relationship within the family that can enable people to be. AA can say to some, "the family can't do it. And here, we've got a better relationship for you."

**Louise-** We give you these relationships.

**Andrea-** And here are some principals and family can't give you those either. And so who's to say...and when you really look at the statistics AA works for some and misses with others. Like Bowen's ideas.

**Louise-** Have you read much on spiritual evolution?

**Andrea-** I have not.

**Louise-** There will be a lot of ideas at the Wisdom of the Ages. There is a chapter that looks at the research, it looks good.

**Andrea-** I'll have to check that out.

**Louise-** It does come at it from a very different way.

**Andrea-** And it may be that some people can't deal with the relationships in the family. And the family can't deal with the alcoholic.

**Louise-** Yes, indeed.

**Andrea-** But anyway, we will perhaps continue this. Are there any other last thoughts that you have that you wanted to put it?

**Louise-** I think it's pretty clear the reason for studying Bowen Theory in my family (laughs).

**Andrea-** I think you clarified that very well.

**Louise-** So we can do eight or nine on impact of Bowen theory on society. I think this theory can impact medicine in a powerful way.

**Andrea-** And that would be one sentence to sum up, or two?

**Louise-** That we are not nomads, we are not isolated creatures. And unless medicine can begin to see the huge interconnection in family (and important relationships) it misses ways to move towards health. That's where I think medicine could gain knowledge.

**Andrea-** So you still have some life energy for medicine?

**Louise-** A little bit. (Laughs) I left my nursing life but I still think about medicine.

**Andrea-** You started the interview with nursing and ended the interview with nursing. That's good. Thanks Louise.