

Carolyn Moynihan Interview 1 hour and 15 minutes (June, 9 2013)

Andrea: This is Andrea Schara and this is June 9th, 2013 and I'm with Carolyn Moynihan who's going to at least give us a first go around and we might do more in the morning of: who are you and how did you meet Murray Bowen and what was your relationship with him like.

Carolyn: Who am I or who was I when I met Murray Bowen? (laughs)

Andrea: Who are you and how did you come to know Dr. Bowen?

Carolyn: I am seventy years old and have practiced clinical social work for forty-seven years now. I met Murray Bowen in 1966 during my graduate training in Washington, D.C. My field work placement was in the department of child psychiatry at Georgetown Medical School. It was a teaching hospital and the child psychiatry clinic was a training center for residents and medical students. Bowen was part of the department of psychiatry staff but not the child psychiatry staff. That was Macy and Gimbles from the department. If you were going to be a good learner of child psychiatry in those days the model was for the social workers to learn to do good family evaluations and to learn all the psychiatric stuff to be able to do family history and then proceed to diagnosis and treatment. This was an adjunct to the psychiatric expert about the child who was seen in play therapy by the resident and tested by psychologists. So that model was in opposition to the emerging vision that Bowen was teaching to residents that we would join to learn. He had families come in and he would interview them. His first article, published in October of 1966. I had already heard about in very good undergraduate training in sociology and psychology in California. The big thing was that he had been hospitalizing total families to study schizophrenia at NIH and he was beginning to formulate changes in theoretical perceptions and behavior based on the inpatient study of family processes. I was always more interested in family than in individual psychiatry. I was more interested in social psychology than in psychology. I actually wanted to go get a PhD in social psychology but ended up going to the school of social work and meeting Bowen. He was right on the path of where my thinking and searching for non-individual models for bigger, more systemic views because sociology is an approach to understanding systemic behavior in the interrelationship and patterns and how we create institutions and how those form our behavior and then are formed by us.

I was only 23 years old when I met Bowen and I was finishing my master's thesis for an MSW. I not only had the privilege of being trained at Georgetown and being able to be part of all the workshops for residents. Bowen did a lot of informal training, by that I mean that he'd have workshops that people could drop into and he always welcomed you. He was very generous educationally - the nurses could come, you could attend his resident meetings if you could find out when they were, and his teachings every Wednesday at 1 o'clock and he might have a family that he was going to interview, and he might teach theory and 'sit in the bullpen' kind of thing and those meetings were in the school of nursing.

I figured out pretty quickly that what I learned in Bowen's workshops and the questions that were being raised which were very exciting to me and very interesting should not be discussed and brought into my supervision inquiries on the other side of the street in the child psychology department. The (child psychology) theory that they were expecting me to learn and regurgitate and practice was different - individual, developmental, intrapsychological. I had a very good social work supervisor. She wrote a very good family history and she taught the residents and she taught the social workers and it's not that I didn't have good social work supervision, I really did. But the rest of the department was very psychoanalytically oriented and they thought that it was a broader orientation to talk to parents as well as children as long as they weren't in the same room, as long as the doctor was analyzing and instructing the parents, basically. They didn't see it in such an interactive way. My first interaction with Bowen personally is kind of interesting...not because other people where I was educated really had this attitude but in me I was very authority oriented about education, I would never have called my professors by their first name or dropped in to the president of the college and told her what to do as she told me later. It was much more formal relationship to mentors for me. I was humbled to be around him. When I was in line in the cafeteria and he was behind me and he had noticed me asking questions

or whatever or being in his workshops and he would mostly pretend he didn't notice you or weren't important or something but then he might just zero in on you. He wasn't straight so he'd say to me things like, "have you saved the world yet, you going to go out there and save the world Carolyn? Is that what you came here for? You're going to go save the world?" and I'd say to him...I mean, I didn't know what to say to him (laughs), and so he'd say, "does she have you going to those marches down at the Pentagon yet?" and of course we'd come from a college where sitting in and going to Selma is like what you should be doing. Being an activist was not a bad thing where I came from. But Bowen was like, "yeah, well, you know, that's pretty deep-seated that need to go out and rescue the world" and you know he was doing like that. And then he'd come across and he'd say, "I've just met Carolyn here and she knows everything and she's going to save the world" or stuff like that and finally he would do these kind of messages that were all off center and not really have a conversation with you. Finally, I decided I didn't really want to have lunch with this man, he's just irritating me and he's not taking me seriously and he's mocking me and so I stood up and I said, "would the real Murray Bowen please stand up?" and I left. I was like: either you talk to me straight or don't talk to me (laughs) and he thought that was very funny that I could tell that he was coming at me at every direction. It was very common for him to have a sparring relationship with people, it was very common for him, especially if he liked you, not if he thought you were vulnerable and broken down. We used to have a joke if Bowen's being nice to you, you better watch out because he thinks you're wounded or something (laughs). Because if he thinks you're strong or wants something out of you he's likely to be bugging the hell out of you (laughs).

Years later I was at a conference where they asked us to talk about our mentors and at first I felt a little grief that I hadn't had any of that huggy kind of mentoring, that kind of 'I believe in you' kind of mentoring. But Bowen helped me acknowledge that he, who is very much like Dr. Bluth- my sociology mentor-, mentored by challenge and provocation. He would invite you and you would think 'oh I'm important enough for him to remember my name and invite me to something, why would he want me to come?' He right away invited me to the Thursday night research meetings, which I thought only the big kids went to and he invited me.

The most meaningful training I was invited to take part in was being part of a group researching families. You could come and sit, every week or every other week, in a multiple family group. He had three couples and a back row which included Ed Friedman, Bud Andres, Jack Bradt, Gary Singleton, Blanch Ingraham, Dave Shiebel, and Bob Ballentine. We were invited to be his research team which I thought, 'jeez, really, that's great' but the challenge was that there was a research question which is, 'what is change?' and you had to be observing in some kind of organized fashion to find a way to discern whether change was happening or not. You had to try to create a model and you had to come up with a paper, a professional paper. So I wrote my first three professional papers because I was hanging around Bowen and he was challenging me. First, he challenged me to give a paper at the Thursday night meeting and so he didn't say "come and pick up all my paper clips", he said, "what use can you make of this". From the very beginning he challenged us to. I don't believe that he never knew when people really heard him or didn't because he immediately challenged them to open their mouths, and he could see whether you got it or didn't and in those days he didn't go very far down the road with you if you didn't. It was easy for him to shed people, you know. Or to bring them in.

Andrea: Do you think that when you talk about the way he teased you... about the fact that you were going to save the world...

Carolyn:...Do-gooders

Andrea:...That would be that you knew how to change the world, wouldn't it? And so he challenges you about maybe being an over-functioning kind of phantasmagoric way to change the world vs. what's your really basic level of knowledge about what is change if you think you want to change the world. Maybe those things fit together, I don't know if he was actually...maybe he was looking for someone who had enough energy and then he...what I've noticed in many interviews is that he hooks people with their emotional system, he identifies the emotional system that they're operating out of and then he challenges that. He has some ability to see, as you said when people open their mouth, he sees what they're talking about and then he plays with it, so to speak,

and then in that way, I don't know if you experienced this, where's he coming from in a way. What you said was: will the real Murray Bowen stand up? (laughs).

Carolyn: I mean he'd make one statement and go on the other side, stand on the other side and I thought "does he think that people don't follow him, that they just say yes to everything he says" which he does, actually, it's a test. Are you actually hearing that he just contradicted himself or are you stupid and just nod your head to everything (laughs)?

Andrea: (laughs) Yeah, exactly.

Carolyn: But I had a very fond relationship with Bowen over the years and very respectful, I listened to him, I didn't believe everything he said. I didn't believe that he had... that because he had thought about things that I didn't have an obligation to think about things, to challenge things, and maybe come up with something better or different. I always thought that and I always gave him feedback. He was not a person to ever acknowledge if you had stimulated his thought beyond his own but you would know if you paid close attention because it would come back out of his mouth. You were saying something about people saying "oh you stole that from [her or him]" but I know why people might have that process because he wasn't one to say... like in conversation, I might say to Dee, I've never thought of it that way before, I mean you put this and this and it might mean that. I might add that to my thinking or realize that that was a way I've never turned it over before or that was a good thing to wonder about or something but I might acknowledge that if she brought it up. Bowen would not do that. He was very good listener but he did not give straight feedback, he was not a biofeedback kind of teacher, he didn't say "very good" or "you got that right". He always suspected people didn't know where to get it but he never told them if they did or didn't or never listened about what was different or new that he might reformulate or that that might stimulate his question. He didn't have that kind of a conversation with people.

Andrea: Well that would have been maybe some kind of fusion in his mind, that if you agree with people and pat them on the back, that now that authority has agreed with you that now you don't need to think on your own, you just figure out what the authority wants.

Carolyn: Well he managed to make a lot of people make him the authority and not think on their own without doing that. I agree that he might have been doing it for that reason...

Andrea: (laughs) But he didn't get rid of the problem.

Carolyn: He didn't get rid of his own need to...

Andrea: The question of what was research to him, he wanted you to identify change, he asked questions from what I'm listening to you that seem to point to how people function in relationship to each other and the family vs. put the kids over here into play therapy and teach the parents whatever it is that parents need to know, to learn.

Carolyn: He was much more interested in the larger process of how the emotional contagion of behavior, the transmission of emotional and social patterns of behavior. When I went to Tennessee and met his sister, which was when I gave a workshop in Tennessee before the funerals that I went to with Bowen, he wasn't there when I first met his sister and his father in the little town and all that that we'd heard about.

Andrea: His sister Frances, the youngest?

Carolyn: His sister Frances and I had lunch with her and his father was still alive and as she left the house, she said, "now you don't die while I'm gone, papa". They talked so freely about death in that family, it was so obvious. She was such a wonderful caretaker or her father, but one of the things that I learned either in the descriptions of him there, partly from his self descriptions over the years of knowing him, and other people

knew him well, and early descriptions of him, and maybe even LeRoy's descriptions of him. He described his own father, I think this way, "he was a naturalist, he was an observer from the time he was a small child, I'm sure, of natural phenomenon". Maybe all geniuses are that way in terms of discovering new things because you don't just have the world as your backdrop, you really, and Jack Bradt was like that too, you really notice whether that hawk always has a tiny bird following it when it crosses at that time of the day. That's the kind of thing I mean. His wife described him as a puzzle solver and he described himself that way too. Even when he was in medical school he'd be going down in the alleys in the middle of the night and find the rats and see what they were doing. He'd cook up these things that he was curious about and then he would go and figure them out and so the fact that he spent years at trying to become excellent at learning from the inside and from the outside this psychoanalytic theory at Menninger and then had the courage to get up and say "but the emperor has no clothes" because he was honestly, naturally, observing and trying to fit the theory and the behavior and the practice and if X happens why doesn't Y come out. And so he said it's all great and I've done the best I can at it but you know the guy is still schizophrenic, using psychoanalysis isn't curing schizophrenia, so what does it have to do with that and how do we find a better answer and how do we get a bigger picture. He had that intellectual honesty and integrity of a naturalist. An observer of phenomena and that really is science. Science isn't only about measuring things, especially in that reductionist way. To lose that part of science that asks bigger question or put smaller things in bigger contexts and of course that was right up my alley as a sociologist.

I wasn't interested any more in the kind of science that I learned, the kind of research: if you count how many months accumulate in the left corner or the back porch between twelve and two on January 23rd...you know I wasn't interested in research so reductionist that you could find out nothing that was interesting. He must have dealt with that in his own way somehow his getting in practice didn't get contaminated by his own messianic kind of "save the world, I'm a big important psychiatrist, oh by the way it doesn't work". That didn't work for him and actually he said he was going to be a surgeon, he wanted to be a surgeon. But after World War II and this is historic in the development of the field: after World War II there was absolutely a rush of really important questions both about the brainwashing in society that can lead to the whole rise of the Nazis and the Holocaust and all the meanings of things and intercultural questions that came up in World War II. Those big questions must have been on his mind but also shell shock and mental health issues, the rise of psychiatry was after World War II in what happened when people came back and the experiences that they had. And which ones did better and which ones did worse and I think those questions from being a leader, in a war situation, and the opportunities in psychiatry emerging, because I think he was a pioneer and an inventor, and a seeker, and a question asker. I think the intellectual honesty led him to say, these are important questions and I'm going to figure out something new and being part of his group as family therapy emerged, I felt that same excitement: we are going to change the simple nonsense that we can transmit and we can keep teaching it and saying we know something but we're missing learning something much bigger, do you know what I mean? I had that same kind of feeling, that's why when I heard that about him, I understood that, because for me there's nothing there. In undergraduate sociology we had Professor Betty Jean Bluth who would give us a C if we understood a really, really complicated theory and wrote a really fabulous paper about it and she'd say, "C minus- it was good summary" so for her "good summary" was an insult. An A paper for her was: you not only understood the theory, you compared it to four others and then you asked a good question and then you might even answer a question somebody hadn't thought of...that was an A! I had a very rigorous training in questioning and so that got me in good and bad with Bowen. I mean it got me in good because he really was himself a questioner and it got me in bad because he didn't like to be questioned and he didn't like his thoughts to be thrown into the dirty wash of human thought. I was coming with social theory, Dirckheim and Cooley before we studied Spencer. We had to talk Parsons down to the ground even though he was God at the time. So for him to be working in theory at the time and not have this- we had a passionate training in critical thinking and most Catholic colleges are known for: this is what I'm going to teach you, you learn it and then you're going to throw it up back. We had a wonderful education in intellectual honesty and so going to a Catholic university- CUA-NCSS- where they were going to teach you not only what to think but not how to think was like "oh my God" and the only thing that kept me alive in the graduate school of social work was not the content of the coursework but was the field. I kind of imagine Bowen out looking for the rats in the back streets of Kansas City or something, you know like me, I don't know what they're teaching there but I sure want to know why this happens this way and how this

comes to collect there. I haven't imagined yet what he was studying, but LeRoy used to tell me these stories. And he would ride on the back of an ambulance and he would be doing these puzzles in his mind about how things worked together so I heard these stories about him as a young man that helped me kind of understand him. Over time I came to see him and his anti-intellectualism as not only his clay feet maybe, we all wanted to make him god because he had ideas so far ahead of us. We wanted him to answer all the other unanswered questions that he'd gotten ahead on but I came to decide that I can't do that, and all those people at Georgetown shouldn't be doing that: of not contextualizing, of not interweaving what has been thought in human thinking and how this fits into it and how other people's thinking fits into this. Where all thought is going.

But as a genius and inventor he has the right to not listen or bother that. That's our job. For him to stay on one track about the most he can think about his thing and keep his mind clear about how things fit into it with his vision. I think that's ok for him, I'm not a critic of him for that anti-intellectualism. I'm a critic for everybody who allows that, for the theory to be used in that way, who defend that: his theory, the way he wanted it to be understood, it should be put under glass at the National Institute of Science and never touched again. That is not how human learning works. That's why the last thing I said to Murray Bowen was, "rest," I said "rest, the theory has a life of its own, it has truth of its own, give it to the world, trust that there are people who can understand it, and they can carry it forward in new ways and the people who get it wrong will just go off the road." That's what I said to him.

Andrea: What did he say back?

Carolyn: Well he sure didn't stop lecturing until the last gasp came out of his raspy voice and left him sounding much less sane than he did ten years before. And if that's what people are going to learn, as if that was Bowen, that's tragic to me. Really tragic.

Andrea: What do you think the important parts of his theory are for people to learn? What is it that makes a profound difference, let me put it that way, from psychodynamic, cognitive theory and all these other things that have cropped up along the way?

Carolyn: If you do research in a linear way, you are never going to find a way to understand the complexity of systemic thinking. Unless we find new ways of research that include some kind of factor analysis, some kind of systemically cybernetic understanding, unless we operate only with thoughts about human behavior that are not individual, not dyadic but are triangular. The triangle as the basis, the basic relationship model...

Andrea: That's the most important thing of his?

Carolyn: The most important theory.

Andrea: Theory? The triangle?

Carolyn: Well you can't separate it out because that is like in Chardin radio energy, the triangle is also the movement, it's the verb in his theory, which is that the triangle is the way that the emotional transmission process moves down the generations and it's the way in therapy that you intervene and rearrange and restructure the emotional flow of energy. I see the triangle as both the conceptual still photograph of what's happening in a piece of behavior or context of behavior but also as a process that the process of the triangle, the moving behavior through the generations and through the social system. The idea that the job of the therapist is not to know or understand everything about that, although competent at reading x-rays and reading genograms is part of it, but that your role of controlling your own participation in that same human process is to be self aware enough of your own emotional triggers and your own emotional triangulating capacities that you can relate to another human being and choose not to impose that on them or not get pulled into theirs. And so that to be a backboard and he called it a 'non-anxious presence' I can't think of a better description for how therapy works than...so when I train therapists I say, "sit on your hands" it's not about what you do it's about who you are in that room with that anxiety with those triangles. It's about what you do not do and what you do.

Andrea: That was one of the big differences in his method of research, I think Sullivan might have been the first person to describe being a participant observer and Bowen really refined that concept of not joining with the system, staying outside the system.

Carolyn: Right, to be an observing participant.

Andrea: To be an observing participant and to put the responsibility for the problems he used to say...

Carolyn: for the change...

Andrea: Put Schizophrenia back in the family and enable the family to solve the problem.

Carolyn: Right. And he believed in the power of the family to heal and in that way he was much more holistic. It's like Jack's choice about his cancer. Jack believed and I think Bowen believed that our job is to support health and to encourage health and to try to get the anxiety calm enough that the health in the family and the love in the family and the good intentions in the family can connect and heal; that the family healing itself. He used to say for every psychotic in a family there's a social worker and then he'd say "go be a social worker in your own family". Don't go take the problems in your own family and go out there and try to save the rest of the world.

Andrea: So that at the bottom of that there's this under-reciprocal functioning. I know many times when I saw very anxious people they would work so hard to get me to agree with them, to join with them, they would almost get to the point of threatening you if you didn't agree with them, to have a different posture and relationship to people and allow them to think for themselves without them feeling that you're rejecting them because you're not agreeing with them.

Carolyn: Right.

Andrea: And your ability to allow that person to look at the way they were relating so I'm thinking when you put Jack into it, Jack your husband who just died a couple of months ago, and was also very involved with Bowen in the early years, and mostly when people have a cancer and they go to a doctor they're looking for the doctor to give them that answer. And so Jack is saying like you don't want to be giving the answer to the client. In medicine you don't want to take what the doctor says, you want to work on your own health. Is that what you're kind of getting to?

Carolyn: No what I'm saying is that even if having terminal cancer means the only thing that the medical establishment can think of is to take an eighty-year old body that already has asthma and some heart fibrillations and other things but pretty healthy, and solve the problem of cancer in both kidneys by cutting out one kidney, and giving you a month and then cutting out the other kidney and then putting you on dialysis. That made no sense to him since assaulting the body to make it better didn't make sense to him so to do only acupuncture and take only Chinese herbs, which are designed to support: breath support, heart support, leg support, to build the body up and then the body can cure or carry on its healthy functioning for as long as possible. He lasted five and a half years with two kidneys filled with cancer that he should have been dead in three months and if he had had the two surgeries he would have been dead in six months, no longer. Because that would have killed his body and so instead he said, I'm eighty years old, I've lived a good life and we're all going to die but I choose a quality of life about healing and living and surviving. That's not to say that if there were some pretty well researched cure, he was a doctor after all, that he wouldn't have tried a cure that was named for something he had. But basically he knew that bilateral kidney cancer is a terminal disease, it is going to kill you, not to have your kidneys and when you're eighty years old a terminal disease killing you is...

Andrea: ...not that big a deal....

Carolyn: Well it's what likely to happen and if you treat it conservatively you're likely to die from something else. If you treat it radically you're sure to die from it because you're going to die from the assault on your body to assault the cancer. So to be able to stay calm enough to think about those options instead of 'oh do something doctor, take it out'.

Andrea: So there are a couple of things in there: one would be the ability for Jack to be able to define himself to the doctor rather than look for agreement or look for the doctor to save him or the doctor to do the work and the patient goes along with the doctor...but he chose...

Carolyn: To take responsibly for your own health.

Andrea: He chose to take more responsibility and to separate out a self from medicine but as you said if medicine had had more to offer he would have run back into it without any big deal.

Carolyn: Well I mean he had asthma; he took a breather to make his asthma better all of his life. He lived doing athletic things and people hardly knowing or even seeing him gasp for breath and or even take the breathalyzer. I mean, a lot of people didn't know he had asthma, but he did treat his asthma all his life in the ways the asthma can be treated. The other thing I was going to say is that it isn't as if Bowen really said that you don't intervene or you don't save people or all of that, he said that it is your very presence of being able to define yourself as a tool in your own emotional growth that is what you have to offer someone else. That's why everyone had to do their work on their own family of origin, their own emotional functioning in their own family, in their part in the system or what they carried on or what they hadn't healed from or whatever. And his way in therapy of being active, like you say, an anxious person who wants you to agree with them is to take an "I position". It is fine to say I believe, that wouldn't be in the value of human life in my book, it wasn't that you couldn't state a position about something because you certainly could and you could be an expert on process but not on your family. "Some families might have this process running but I don't know if it's in your family, I don't know if that's true or not because you have to be the expert on your family."-An invitation to the client to reflect.

Andrea: One of the things that you're saying then is that he's teaching you to be an observer, an objective observer, if you will, in your own family in order to then that process that went between the coach and the family member then goes between the family member that's been, so to speak, trained with their own family.

Carolyn: Well he used to say and I've often said to people the reason for you to figure out your emotional reactivity to your mother and be able to be in the same room with her and have a person to person relationship to her from who you are to who she is, no matter what that is, is because if you can do that with your mother you can do it with anyone on the planet. You can take the easy way of which may not be as effective of trying to do that with your therapist or with a group, trying to take some information and do communications theory and behave better, but if you go home to your family and do the same thing: where you can't talk or say who you are, or be who you are with them, then you aren't free. If you want to be free, you have to be able to be who you are and know what you believe in the face of differing beliefs and differing loyalties and wanting to be with someone while being different. But you can apply it to... I can remember in the early days of AFTA of being in a meeting, and you could see the difference between a meeting that was run from feeling theory and one that was run from Bowen theory because you'd get in there and instead of going around and each person saying, 'this is my experience' or 'this is what I believe' or 'this is how I see that phenomenon' it would be ...there would be a subject on the table and the leader would be saying something like, 'can we all agree on one thing' and that's when I would know, oh my gosh I don't think this is going to be a real productive exchange of thinking. But if you think about the process of Georgetown, I think the declining emotional functioning of the creativity of the Georgetown Family Systems faculty existed in the fact that there was an undercurrent if not an overstatement of the sacred cows and what you must agree and the politically correct thing to say or not say just to reflect on what Bowen would have said. Also, he might have been saying things backwards and jesting not to say: will the real Murray Bowen please stand up or this is what I believe. Open system has to have the vitality of every different input coming to it and working together in some way so as

soon as you deaden out diversity and the positive and negative electric charge you have this fusion that immobilizes the system.

Andrea: So the fusion and the confusion between people became more important than your sexuality and your repression and the unconscious and so forth. It's a different thing if you grow up in world that really believes that repression causes everything and that more or less the human has got all these motives that have gone astray because of trauma that has happened to them and how in the heck do you ever get to that world, this psychodynamic world over into an observing of behavior, a toning down of reactions in relationship to one another and some kind of an understanding of the importance of your extended family. It just seems so many miles away so that gets us to this question of the impact; what was the main contribution that Bowen made to the western science view. I don't know if you want to tackle that one. but it just seems like studying theory leads you in such a completely different way from cause and effect and the problem is repression or the problem is trauma.

Carolyn: Well. He didn't like at first for people to talk about the biological implications of the words he chose for his theory: fusion and differentiation of self are basically biological terms. They're cell terms and in some ways emotionally, not just physiologically but emotionally he meant that, he really meant fusion and differentiation, I think.

Andrea: Absolutely.

Carolyn: Starting with biology although he would often say you don't get it if you say that. And then you were not supposed to say that but as a matter of fact if you think about the process of fusion in biology, from that process through differentiation, you have to create two separate people and even if you think about cancer, if the cells walls are not distinct and permeable and living and breathing, but they start invading each other, you have disease....He was a physician, there's a lot that's very physiologically metaphored or literal. There's a lot of physiological base in his theory. And for me, who had very deep layers of philosophical thinking training and interest and very deep layers of spiritual interest and training, and very deep layers of sociological training; to hear him talk about scientific ways and ways that included the whole of what my reality is, all the ways in which we experience the world from the concrete and material to the what...we don't know as much about to mystery, and spirituality and that emotional contagion that we might well come to understand much better as electrical processes in the brain at some point in 2090 or something but what we don't know now includes all that mystery inside us, and between us, and bigger than us. The zeitgeist and the spirit of the times. For me, he had a big enough reality of inquiry and enough of a discipline in his thinking and his pursuing thinking about something all except the discipline which was what I was taught which is to sift out other theories. One by one he would get interested in Calhoun and sibling research, not that he didn't at all but he didn't really want to contaminate a really broad academic thinking of where his theory fit in. But I think that's our job, I'm not criticizing because I don't think he could do that. He really followed his strength of vision and inquiry and the tools that he had and tried to make new tools because he really was the first emperor's new clothes to say the tools that we are using in psychiatry do not work. And they are fine to describe but they aren't really tools... they're not figments but they're constructs and he provided some new constructs like if you had a range of human functioning then you could explain why if you impact with a little down here the thing crumbles but if you impact a whole lot up here...

Andrea: We're back to what is change.

Carolyn: What is change, but you know that is one of the early questions that we chewed on in sociology in my undergraduate training that was a fascinating question to me, what is social change, what is change. Of course, and the philosophers: what is change, you step in the river and it's a different river. He did deal with the philosophers' basic human questions: the one in the many, what is change. For me it was both the philosopher and sociology part and the spiritual part of my soul that responded to the scientific focus and application of his theory to something that I was very interested in: how people work. I was fascinated with how people work and

what makes things happen and how does somebody turn out to be a criminal. And how do families produce both different kinds of directions of the best of life and the worst of life.

Andrea: You have an answer for that now?

Carolyn: Oh, sure, now I know everything (laughs), but you know it's not like he gave us the answers he taught us as Goethe did that it's the questions. The important thing is the questions but also to remain true to the fact that maybe we don't answer them maybe we don't even get new questions, maybe we work on the same questions over and over at deeper levels.

Andrea: Well he did give you a couple...

Carolyn: He gave a framework.

Andrea: He did give you triangles do lead to stratification and the energy does go to into the vulnerable one of social control if you want to call it that. But I was thinking...

Carolyn: Well but you could also say energy goes into the blossoming of the tree and the fruit bearing of fruit so energy also goes into the creation of genius, do you know what I mean? I don't believe in the energy flow that evolution is all positive or all negative, I just believe it's energy flowing.

Andrea: But when you observe a family you can...

Carolyn: Some plants die and some plants thrive

Andrea: You can kind of see... you listen to them for a half an hour, or twenty minutes, or five minutes and you can kind of see which way the positive energy is going and which way the negative energy is going or who gets reasonable or reality-based attention and who gets kind of woo – woo attention. But in observing....

Carolyn: I don't know if it's attention though, it's who gets caught.

Andrea: Who gets caught in observing the family you can see this, who gets caught, or however you want to name the process, where the emotional system is driving the behavior of people.

Carolyn: Well he really did emphasize that whatever your questions are that it's important to wonder and it's important to find a way to observe that to the point where you have some tentative answers to that. That wondering was important and that hypothesizing and trying to validate that which led me very young to take on a study of fifty families. I was working with families of clobbered kids, really seriously emotionally disturbed kids and so to create to a model to study families that had a kid that clobbered. That was the child focused study in which we defined the technique of making the poster sized genogram drawing, and the factors promoting a child focus in the history and process- which by the way Bowen did not necessary use. Bowen taught with fragments of genogram drawing and triangles but when he saw a family he didn't make a chart with them like we did at the Groom Center and many people do today because they hear us talking about our cases in that way. But he didn't actually say: sit down and make a family genogram with the family but when we wrote up the child focused research, there are several things that we found, and some of them validated speculations that or theories that Toman had about loss being one of the effects that changes sibling position. What we found from a careful look at family histories, was that almost all of the families focused so intensely on a child in the next generation, had one of both parents who had experienced a severe loss in the age range of 7-12 or before 12. That lack of father, let's say your father died when you were five, made you more likely to be an adult whose major focus was on protecting and holding on to a child. It's like the things that you look for and then you find things that you might not have expected that there are certain patterns of behavior that were common in these families, which would be tracking the triangles in a way, and that process of cutoff from extended family would also increase that intensity to create...but you look through a different lens if you're looking for the

triangles and the process, and the history, and the nodal events, and so when we wrote up that research that's what we did. We looked for the position of change in the family and where the vulnerability exists and then we asked the questions: why, why this kid and not the other kid. Then we found that the position of which kid was born after the loss of three children or after the death of the grandmother and the uncle in a tragic fire. The child is born into a position that makes them more vulnerable to be that focused child so it's that kind of thing that we learn to use the history and data and relationship vectors of attachment, we call it today, but between the different points of the triangle; who was in the alliance position who was in the outside position of the triangle, where did the conflict go. Those kind of things.

Andrea: Was there anything in your family that helped you to see better, to be a better observer?

Carolyn: I think I had a position in my family that was more observing than absorbing. I think I had a fortunately neglected position in my child-focused family growing up and that I never particularly felt, oh woe is me, nobody is paying attention to me. I thought, oh when you go to school and you learn things you get so much...this is so great because I'm not just the gray invisible one over there in the corner somehow the whole world is there and available and I can do this, I can do this as good as anyone else and I'm no better or worse than anyone is. I don't know but for me my position in the family allowed me to be an observer but it also allowed me not to absorb the energy to have to draw the fire or be the conflictual one. I turned to a lot of interiority whether it was spiritual or reading every book in the library. My parents gave me a lot of interest in going to the library instead of something else. My parents had a lot of activities, like working activities, being together activities and reading and stuff. But I wasn't the one who made trouble I wasn't the one who had to do all the achievement to make somebody feel good or something I was kind of the...I was born closer to...

Andrea: You were born freer...

Carolyn: Yeah and I came to see it as crippling that my older sister by one year was so ill as a baby that my mother could hardly leave her to go to the hospital to have me. I consider that a fortunate position for me the older I get because my sister was a little clobbered by being the very favorite protected...I mean in a family of six children, I'm not saying that I protested this or poor me when it happened, but observing I would say that in a family of six children with a three bedroom house, for the oldest daughter to have her own room next to the parents room for the other five children to share what was left, so she could have her own room before she went to college, that's not necessary a privilege to learn your place in life, do you know? As much as being one of the five that better have to figure out where they're going to sleep (laughs). Do you know what I mean? My parents really saw themselves as being very fair and they were totally blind to when they were being...and then queen Mary but we learned that if we all wanted to go to the swimming pool after lunch and we wanted to walk down a mile to Citrus to go to the swimming pool that if Mary would ask mom would say yes, if I would ask, go away. I gotta weed the garden. But if Mary would ask we could all go. And then people just learned this.

Andrea: People who can observe.

Carolyn: But I was always an observer and I think partly I learned it from my mother. My mother was a great listener and a great observer and a very intuitive person because she had a lot of loss in her life which I think is...I think sometimes the things we have are born into us, they're partly imprinted and they're partly in the social thing but my earliest memories of my grandmother in a coffin in our living room because she died when I was only three. She was only 46. My mother as an oldest daughter had her there until my uncle came home from the Navy in ten days. So no wonder I remember it but when you are very little girl and you see your mom crying, your beloved mommy crying, I think it prepares you to have a great deal of compassion, even as a child, for people who have pain. I remember also being mystified, why is everyone crying? My aunts and uncles, who were children, being left without a mother because they were close to my age because my grandmother had twelve children. My mother was one of the oldest so I have an uncle the same age as me. So when you see these people, what is wrong, why aren't they here to play with me. Because there's a coffin in the living room and that's my grandmother but I didn't understand death but I understood my mother's tears or my aunt Margie's

tears at seven years older than me. So I think there's a lot about our own family live experience that we identify that make us who we are or make us available to hear things.

Andrea: Do you think that it's helped you to think there are parts of theory that I would like to enlarge on or maybe this one about loss or death. Are there things that you feel like you want to add to the theory that are not as well known or as well fleshed out?

Carolyn: I think I have spent my whole life... I have done a lot of clinical work and just my life, in my life, I think I never...I mean Bowen used to say this and it's really true, if you buy in, it's not something you put on, it's not a technique that you think...it's a worldview, if you are seeing your whole life trying to understand things in terms of process, in terms of a larger process than what someone ate for dinner, or what they want, or what race they come from. If you have a deeper penetrating question about life it goes with you everywhere. You observe everything, everywhere, always. You can't not do it. And when we taught in Pittsburgh there was somebody said, "yeah and then Paulina McCullough was one of the early social workers trained with Bowen and then she just pushed us off the bridge and it's not like analysis where you can go in and get finished, I've been analyzed, you get pushed off of the bridge into that cold water of doing your own family of origin work and trying to figure out the world in terms of your experience and the phenomenon of all peoples' life experience then you're swimming for your life and you're swimming for the rest of your life" (laughs). Damn somebody pushes you off that bridge. I've often told students, are you sure you want to do this? If you start asking these questions about trying to understand the human phenomenon in terms of your own history and other people's history but you know in the zeitgeist we now have a television program where these famous people go back and find their slave...

Andrea: Through their hair follicles they look at the trail of their genes...

Carolyn: Have you ever watched those root things on television? Where they go over to Ireland and see the poor house that their great grandfather was in before he came and all this kind of stuff. So the idea of understanding both history and your own self through the experience of your ancestors has come of age, that it's not a new idea anymore. But it was very new for Bowen to say: you want to know your daughter? Know your grandmother. You know what I mean? And yet it makes imminent sense and so that's why I trusted the theory when people hear it and then they do it, they understand it, they grow.

Andrea: Well we've come about to the end of an hour, maybe a little over the end of the hour.

Carolyn: I told you I couldn't answer all those question in a short time.

Andrea: Well actually you did pretty well. It's 58 minutes and I think we got to the...have you evidence that would further prove the theory, and I guess you answered that in talking about your...

Carolyn: Actually, I spent my whole life. I haven't written it all down but I've lived it.

Andrea: Do you want to write it?

Carolyn: I do. I've always wanted to write it. I've written a few things, they're good (laughs).

Andrea: Well what are you waiting for? Somebody has got to change the world (laughs).

Carolyn: I don't write to change the world. Except that I've always refused to... "I've got to get this book out". Why do you got to? It says the same thing ten other books say. I don't have that kind of wish to write a book. I only have an interest to write a book that's why when I go to meetings these days I'm more often to have the response of...hmmm I think I'd be interested in writing about that because that ain't it...somebody needs a clue here (laughs). We left that road twenty years ago and then twenty years before that, like that pop speaker.

Andrea: Well that's one of the advantages of having a broad theoretical education that you understand...

Carolyn: And getting old! (laughs)

Andrea: But you understand the stream of thought through the ages.

Carolyn: And the circularity of thought.

Andrea: And the circularity and where it is and where it's not.

Carolyn: Old things with new names.

Andrea: And you might want to put out what you've observed and what you've thought about, what you've seen. It might actually be useful, maybe you're not going to change the world but maybe it would be useful (laughs) that's how I think about it anyway. Well thank you very much.

Carolyn: One thing Bowen said to me about my own skills, I was very young, but he said "you know Carolyn you could abstract anything to its tiniest particle, like you could extract the essence out of anything" and I think that's true, I do sometimes feel that I can see through things more than other people. Other people don't always see the bones of it like I see it. And that is a gift and it's something I've practiced all my life so it's kind of a honed gift and that I do have an interest in. I mean it's really not saving the world but it's like sharing what you had the gift of experiencing. I often say to all these people who come into my office and many of them get better, that's good, or have better lives, or do better in life or other people do better and I think what a gift it is for them to trust all of us with all of their stories and all of their information and all of their pain and all that we both share and walk with them but also out of that we glean this parade of information about people's lives and what they deal with and how they deal with it and we do have an obligation I think to summarize it not because of the marketing thing and all the commercializing of our field and I really hate those kind of books being written, what's the next adult child of practically everything, I call it. So I don't get on those bandwagons and Bowen was really against those bandwagons and he wrote one great book. He didn't get around to his writing. I used to bug him about that. He didn't want anyone to write with him except Mike Kerr.

Andrea: No, he never wanted to write with him, he wanted Mike Kerr to write his own view of family evaluation which we had talked about at Monday night meetings for many years and then Bowen never read a thing he said and wrote his own odyssey and Kerr didn't read anything that he said so that book was an example of differentiation of self: you're responsible to do your part, you do your part and I'm not going to approve or disapprove and I'm going to do mine.

Carolyn: I was talking about his other book.

Andrea: Which one?

Carolyn: The second the theory book, the family psychotherapy.

Andrea: *Family Therapy and Clinical Practice*?

Carolyn: Yup, that's the book.

Andrea: That's the one he did all by himself though.

Carolyn: Right, right. And it's a compilation of a lot of articles including, I think, the one we put in Systems Therapy. That was like the circularity of somebody ought to write up all the papers presented including those ones on change from his research group and there should be...and then so one day Ackerman was going to die

in early '70 and we had seven years of papers from the symposium and I looked at Jack and Jack looked at me and we sent out a letter that said, "Ackerman challenged us to...when he was here... Ackerman's death challenges us to summarize the thinking we've been doing and will you send your papers in" and that's how Systems Therapy was born (1972). We summarized all the papers from the research group. And we edited some of them very heavily, rewritten and edited, including Ed Freeman's was like written from scratch practically, from his notes, because he was a speaker more than a writer at that time. So Systems Therapy represented really the first effort of somebody doing instead of talking about doing for ten years a collection of symposium papers. Not much was written in family therapy especially Bowen thinking at that time. So I think that early thinking is important so I guess I've made a little contribution in summarizing some of what we were about in the kind of research we were doing in those early days.

Andrea: You could probably synthesize that systems therapy book as to what... I actually read some of the articles because I knew I was coming here to see you and I started reading some of the articles in there and I wondered what you would think about them today.

Carolyn: Which ones did you read?

Andrea: Well I read Bowen's one and there was people who I didn't really know...

Carolyn: Bob Ballentine?

Andrea: Yeah.

Carolyn: David...

Andrea: I didn't know them at all.

Carolyn: He was a former priest and psychologist, he did a wonderful research model for that group and I wrote 'Changes in Observational Theory' and I had written down every sentence that Bowen said to a client as my way of researching was to classify the kind of questions and interventions he did and I had boxes of notebooks and he asked only certain types of questions and you could classify them.

Andrea: Having to do with how people functioned in relationship to each other?

Carolyn: He asked clarifying questions, he asked interpretation questions: what do you make of that? Anyway the paper that I wrote out of that is not the paper I would write about that observation today. I think I would be interested in talking more about observing Bowen work and the classifications of what he was doing that I made at that time.

Andrea: That's sort of one of the reasons for the interviews is what to make of the way he interacted with people who carried his theory forward into the world, what do you make of this...

Carolyn: The other thing I did want to say about that is that this reputation of Bowen as a cold fish. The first time I got interested in knowing more about Bowen was when he brought a family in, what he did and the quality of his listening was like something I had never seen in my clinical time in psychiatry before. The quality of his presence and the purity of his questions were a revelation. They brought in an old man that they wanted to talk about in the family; that he wasn't sane or didn't make sense anymore. They were talking about this guy going demented or something like that. Bowen sat with that family and talked directly to this man about himself and he answered him directly and calmly and cogently. What he said about what he did and about people and what he did in relationship to people were two different things. First of all, he probably listened more carefully to people than anyone I've almost ever met. And his questions were totally informed by totally hearing somebody and there's no greater compassion in life than to hear somebody else and to see them as they are. And that was the purity of his work for me.

Andrea: Well said. Alright, we'll end on that very clear note.

Carolyn: The only thing I really wanted to say in case nobody said it, that if you saw Bowen work you would never question his depth of humanity, his integrity or his caring for his fellow man. You would never question that because of the quality of his presence with another person. He had a lot of restraint in how reactive or emotive. He also was a very connected person. He was not a disconnected person in therapy.

Andrea: Even though he was outside the system, so to speak, there was a tremendous connection that he made with people and with people like you and with people like me.

Carolyn: Because there's no greater connection that you can have than to be differentiated, than to be exactly yourself, heard as how you are, not as how you want to hear me and to be heard and seen and appreciated for how you are and not have to be a lie. That differentiated quality that's what I use to explain the difference between distancing and differentiation because if you distort somebody else, cut them off, or distance from them, you can't have a real connection. That's why if people don't work out the issues between them what's got to come together here, I say this to couples all the time too: if you're not interested in conflict then you probably are just going to have to leave the garbage in the kitchen and go into two different rooms. Then you can't get very close. So what about the garbage? Are you willing to face it, look at it, and carry it out whatever? You can only be close if you're willing to really see and hear other people as they are, not just the good stuff. All of it. Anyway, he was a remarkable human being.

Andrea: He was a remarkable human being.

Carolyn: It was a great privilege in life to meet him and he was very generous with his time and with his interest and with his....I haven't cried for Bowen in a long time...very generous in his willingness to discuss something with you...I think that's what hurts me about seeing what happens at The Family Place about not being discussed, and ideas not being valued and things not being said, that's so not the best of Bowen.

Andrea: Right.

Carolyn: The best of Bowen was really that open, free, exploration. Kick over a few sacred cows, turn them over and orthodoxy isn't that great. But it seems like orthodoxy really came back in the backdoor like a dragon and ate the system to me. That what it looks like to me what went on back at home. After I kind of said, I think I can carry the faith and go out in the desert and keep it alive. I think I could be a remnant. So I never felt like I left the thinking but that is real belief of the system if you don't come back to mecca somehow you've lost your faith, you can't be really counted to be a true...

Andrea: It's a pretty good observation about the emotional system. The emotional system is extremely powerful and in every family and in every organization you can watch it and try not to let it strangle you and operate as freely as you're able to but the emotional system is twisting and shifting and manipulating and controlling you as long as you're not careful. So thank you very much.

Carolyn: As long as you don't have one foot outside of the quagmire.

Andrea: Or whatever it is that makes...

Carolyn: Bowen used to say if you've got one foot in the quicksand and one foot on solid ground and you can't get your foot out of the quicksand try putting both feet into the quicksand (laughs). That will get you out of there, he said.

Andrea: Just the thought might.

Carolyn: The other thing was that he was a storyteller before narrative therapists haunted us. There are a lot of things that have been reinvented. Listening, storytelling, talking in circles. He had it all. And you know, if you heard if describe a reversal or write about it or you saw him do one, his use of humor was so kind and so delicate that he generally was not being hard on people and they didn't feel that he was mocking them or being hard on them. He was kind of teasing, I'll never forget that consultation once with me, he said, "well Carolyn, I think you just need to keep working harder for that A." I said to him once that if my parents hadn't moved to California and if I hadn't gotten a scholarship and I hadn't gone to college... he said, "Carolyn, you could have found your way out of any cornfield" (laughs). His way of giving feedback to your emotional... I don't know it was a very liberating and maturing thing for me intellectually, personally and emotionally to know Murray Bowen. That's the only thing I would say. I don't know anyone who knew him well or understood the theory well or actually tried to apply it to their own life work ever would talk only about the ornery, gossipy images of Bowen kind of stuff. That's why I rarely want to talk about him with people because it's more like someone you know and love and understand and how to do explain that to somebody who wasn't in the relationship, like I've got him encapsulated, he stimulated the growth of my thinking and if anybody told me he didn't think I understand his theory I wouldn't believe them.

Andrea: (Laughs) well that's good cause...

Carolyn: And if he said it I wouldn't believe he really believed it.

Andrea: Yeah, it's gossip and he was fond of throwing curve balls to people. Well thanks, I appreciate it. Enjoyable.