

Interview with Kathy Wiseman  
Conducted by Andrea Schara

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For the Murray Bowen Archives Project of Leaders for Tomorrow at History of Science  
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**Schara:** So this is Andrea Schara, and I have the privilege of interviewing Kathy Wiseman. It is Thursday, the 25th of April, 2014. It's a beautiful spring day, and I appreciate your taking the time out of your busy schedule, to just reflect a little bit on your relationship with Dr. Bowen, and all that you learned. So maybe, Kathy, if you would start with who are you, and when did you meet Dr. Bowen?

**Wiseman:** Okeedokie! I met Dr. Bowen in 1974. After the death of my father. Who was my mother had predeceased him ten years earlier. And my dad died, nine months after my second child was born. And, I was really adrift. And adrift because the changes, in my life, with the second child, and my father having passed away, and me being the oldest member of my family. And-

**Schara:** At what age were you the oldest member of your family?

**Wiseman:** Thirty.

**Schara:** You were thirty years old when all this happened?

**Wiseman:** Right, and the oldest member of my immediate family, not- certainly not the extended family, because I had aunts and uncles alive. But I, um, I did- I didn't have the capacity to deal with the amount of change that was going on. And my husband at the time, was experiencing really hard business reversals. And, I think the birth of my son, my dad's death, and my husband's business reversals, made life really difficult. And I couldn't tell you what my symptoms were, but I can only imagine what I was like. I went back to work right away, and

**Schara:** What kind of work did you do? We skipped over the part, "who are you."

**Wiseman:** Oh! I'm Kathy Wiseman, and I am the oldest of four girls. Born to (Mortin) and (Roselyn). Both youngest and- not youngest, but one, my mother was the middle, my father was the youngest. And I was the oldest in my family. And, since early on I've had a curiosity about how people make decisions. Especially at work. And that extends to myself. How people make career choices, how do they make business decisions, how do they make decisions when they're related to people. About shared assets. Always been intrigued by it.

And, coming out of college, I- one of my jobs, was working a labor management firm, where I worked with labor management after major strikes, to try and get them to

cooperate around job performance. They had collective bargaining in place, the work itself. So, I was working in that field, when all this was happening. And, while I went to work, I'm not sure that my productivity was very high. And I have- I remember going back and looking at notes I would have taken at that time. That were unreadable and made no sense. I would take notes that didn't make sense. So, it was a difficult time for me.

And, I'm not sure what you would say my symptoms would be, and I can't even remember, but I remember that life was very challenging. And it motivated me to find somebody to talk to. And, up until that time, being now thirty years old, I'd never talked to anyone and I'm not sure what my process was. I went to talk to a couple of traditional therapists, and was kind of bothered, by the way they talked at me. And-and remember thinking, "Oh, I'm not going to be able to listen to them for very long." And then,

**Schara:** [laughter]

**Wiseman:** my brother in law, who was a psychiatrist, had been studying with Murray Bowen, and-and raised his name, and didn't make a suggestion, he just raised his name. And I read about him, and the notion of this kind of neutrality came through. And, I connected with the family as a system, and the sense of neutrality. And the way we talked, there was a different kind of respect in what I was facing. Dr. Bowen demonstrated a different kind of respect for what I was facing. And for the challenges that I was in the middle of. Than the earlier therapist. So I met him after a -it was a difficult time, subsequently my brother in law and my sister in law who had been seeing Dr. Bowen, stopped. But, I had the real fortune of being able to continue with him.

And, I was intrigued by this theory. And found that he gave me some way to think about the challenges. And of course, over the last thirty years, my experience, my knowledge, has expanded dramatically. But, I just knew, when I heard him talk, and of course he invited me, to come to learn about this theory, which I did. And spent time doing it. And I knew that this made sense to me, in a different way. So, I went to the training programs. And while I didn't go to the postgraduate programs, I definitely went to whatever kind of Thursday night programs, or the clinical conference, and I went for myself. Um, at the same time, it became clear to me, in the way things become clear, that this theory had a great deal to add to the workplace.

**Schara:** Mmhmm.

**Wiseman:** And, I would go into labor management situations, and I could see triangles as a way to explain them. Or I could see the way anxiety moved through a system. When you tried to fix the top layers of labor in management, and you see problems on the shop floor. Or you'd see shop floor problems get resolved, and you'd see problems pop up in mid-management. So, it was the extraordinary experience of being- having a theory, and having opportunity to apply it both at home and at work. So that's become my life's work.

**Schara:** [laughter]

**Wiseman:** Really. A theory that explains human behavior, continues to try and explain it, and make sense of it, applied to both myself and my family, and my workplace. And that-that's been my work. And I-I assume it'll be my work until the day I close my eyes.

**Schara:** [laughter] You don't expect a new theory to come along and, and do a better job of explaining -what is it about the explanation of Bowen Theory that made it possible for you to see it as so much more useful? Can you capture the difference? Or the distinct edge you get, in seeing the workplace, for instance, through Bowen Theory? What-what do you see?

**Wiseman:** Well, I think the fact that it tends to be- it tends to move toward looking at facts. Looking at what is. And not making judgments about it. Is such a different approach, that it caught my attention. And so, and-and the other part was, that you know, you see a labor management strike, and you try- and you can look at it as an event, or you can look- you know, with demands, and- or you could look at (it) as a series of relationship interactions. That led up to something that was too- that the system couldn't handle. When you begin to pull focus, on any event, at work. And understand what predis- pre- what's the word?

**Schara:** Predisposed?

**Wiseman:** No. Pre- dis- I don't know why I can't think! Whatever the word is. Preceded it! There's the word. [laughter] There's -there's the very complicated word. Preceded it, you have a completely different view of a strike. You can solve for it. In much more significant ways. When you look at the res- relationship disruptions, that might have occurred five, ten, years before it. That are in the fabric of the current dispute. So, looking at any event with a wider focus was extremely valuable. Things just made sense to me! Triangles made sense to me, especially labor management. And where the tension would pop out. So, it served me well.

And, you know when something makes sense to you, it just makes sense. The idea of trying to make a science of human behavior made sense to me. And, another thing that I don't know that this is a good thing to say, but I watched a number of my family members, over many, many, many years of psychoanalysis, have no expanded repertoire to deal with their problems. And I thought that was a remarkable thing. That you could spend that much time, and that much money, in a process that accrued no benefits in your own life. It just didn't make sense to me.

And I saw, cause one of the first things Dr. Bowen suggested to me, was kind of a the- was a return to my family, my mother's family, my father's family. And make meaningful contact. And I got -I got a huge bang for my buck in that. I was- I was welcomed home, my family on both sides became a resource to me. And, my life improved. So, this theory kind of proved itself early on, over and against kind of a psychoanalytic process, which I just couldn't figure out.

**Schara:** [laughter]

**Wiseman:** You know, days and days of analysis, with no, with absolutely, which seemed to me to be no inroads in managing one's problems. Or in expanded capacity to manage one's problems. And I really- I- I also realized early on, that I had a- I had a big part, in these problems. And, I needed to do something about it. I didn't know what or how. But, so I knew that it was- that I owed a big part of this.

**Schara:** So when you first met Bowen, and he sort of began to say, in a more neutral way, here's- here's the family situation, was he very direct with you, and just said, "Kathy, what about your extended family, why don't you go-" how did he -how did he point you in the direction, for instance, of the- it sounds like he was direct, that he told you it would be useful for you to take some courses, and learn the theory, it would be useful for you to go back and see your family, is that correct, am I getting that right? It was direct.

**Wiseman:** Yeah, he was direct, without pressure. I mean, he - I mean, in a way, he was talking to me straight up as a peer, and said, "The way I see it, this might this- this would be a good thing to do. For these reasons theoretically." But he never in my opinion, made a judgment that [silence] there was no pressure to do it. [phone rings]

**Schara:** That's pretty good. I'm gonna- yeah- [tape ends]

[The rest of this interview is in a second audio file, so there are two ELAN files, Wiseman Pt1 and Wiseman Pt 2]

**Schara:** Well, we had a, like, thirty minute

**Wiseman:** I have fifteen minutes (in the)

**Schara:** interruption, there. So, coming back, and looking over my notes, I was just saying to you, Kathy, that you abstracted the process between you and Dr Bowen, in which he was non-judgmental in listening to you, and allowed-allowed you to see the facts of your family functioning in a different way. And I'm thinking to myself, well, what-what is the emotional process that Kathy is dealing with? That Bowen is helping her with, what is this emotional process, what is this unresolved emotional attachment to the past? That somehow Bowen is helping you with and that you grapple with it to figure out, "I'm going to go visit my family?" What the heck do family visits have to do with

**Wiseman:** Okay.

**Schara:** being able to make better decisions? Why can't you make better decisions in your little nuclear family, with your nice husband and your kids? What is there about the nuclear family, trying to straighten out your husband, trying to fix the problems in the nuclear family, why doesn't that work? Why do you have to go and visit your extended family? Why did he tell you that?

**Wiseman:** Well, I think that- I think that at the core of this, is -is the lesson that Dr. Bowen communicated to me, was that I could be a member of this family, and in fact I wasn't, in fact a member of a very large and important extended family, that while that would provide me support, that in the final analysis, I could manage my life as a self. Within this context of relationships, and that I didn't need to focus on changing the other people that are important around me, i.e. my husband, to make my life better. That in fact, a much more important way, to change my life, was for me to be a self in the context of these relationships.

And that since the ones closest to me were the hardest, that I could start with the ones that were a little easier, which were the ones that were further away, in this large extended family. At least that's the way I think of it now, but -but I think Dr. Bowen's lesson was that I had capacity, I could work on improving it, that relationships would always give me a run for my money, but that I could learn enough about them, so, I could fare pretty well most of the time. So that no matter who died, or who went down in their functioning, that I could, after a period of time, pull up my own functioning. Irrespective of what other people did. And that's been my lifelong effort. Is to stay in good contact with the people that are so important to me and so vital to me. But to have a focus on my own wellbeing. And that certainly I can, and do, react to those relationships that are important to me.

But that I can gain a little bit of mastery over the reactive- this automatic nature of reactivity. So, he gave me a way to think about it, gave me a way to operationalize those thoughts which were in his theory, and I was able and creative enough to make them work in my own life. So, I was able to take the principle of cutoff, which is easy, and when you get busy and you work hard, to disconnect from people where you have more tenuous relationships. And, purposely move against that. And maintain connection. So, I maintained connection with my immediate- with my larger extended family, to the point that they became a real support system for me.

I think I wouldn't have even known what that was about, without studying this theory. So that, I've worked for now thirty years, of trying to get better and better, holding myself responsible for my own life. And staying connected to other people. And when something goes amiss, kind of the first question I ask myself is, "What's my part in this?"

**Schara:** So that's a major shift.

**Wiseman:** Not "How can I fix the other person?" It's a huge shift, that's a huge - and that's made all the difference. What's my part in it. And, it changes everything. It changes your sense of being present in the world, it changes your sense of responsibility, and it requires you to observe your own behavior. Which I think is really important for living a more examined life. And, I think taking these ideas to my work, has underlined them in my family, that became clear to me that they both move back and forth, between my work and my family life.

**Schara:** So your, your sense of being, in is your sense of being in your family, corrupted by some kind of emotional process, and -in the family? I, you know, I'm struggling to understand what you were up against in being yourself.

**Schara:** What is this- this sense-

**Wiseman:** Well, I have a- I had a pretty good, you know, I was kind of in a great position. I was born into a family, I was the firstborn daughter, my dad was in the Army. I was a wanted child, and I filled an emotional void, as I've now come to see it. My dad was away, so I became extremely important to my mother. And to my grandmother and grandfather, with whom I lived. So, life was good. There was a I- I was important to them, and I had a mission, which was to kind of fill up a hole. And, I think it's no surprise to me that when I end up doing work I end up doing labor management work.

Which fills up a hole, between kind of different parties, I think that was my automatic functioning in my family. My nuclear family. So, I had a position of a kind a "fix-it" in that family, and I was pretty good at it, until I reached a point in my life where I no longer knew enough to fix the level of problem that was coming at me. And, that's when I- that's when I went to Dr. Bowen. And realized that my fixing it was an automatic response. And that in fact there was- there were other more successful ways, to do things. So, for example my father passes away, and I am Executor of the estate, which would be the position that you would assume the oldest daughter to have, and it was the time when I was seeing Dr. Bowen and I made a decision to give up that role, and give it to my younger sister, because I wanted to get out of that position, of being the fixer. So, it allowed me to make choices, in ways that spread around my functioning. Which served me really well.

**Schara:** So the emotional process, in a family,

**Wiseman:** I could try out new things. But-

**Schara:** positions people to function in ways that, that might not be good for them. For their whole life. Like you- you could accept your role in the family and it functioned alright for awhile, to be the fixer, and let's say that's your emotional posture, that the family system- the family system has governed?

**Wiseman:** To the world. Right.

**Schara:** your behavior, and you have accepted that mantle of the fixer. [laughter] And- and you did it well.

**Wiseman:** And did it well.

**Schara:** And then something comes up, where you begin to question whether or not this functional position is really working for you. And your- your husband's business goes down, you can't fix him, you can't fix the business, and-and then you begin to change this automatic functioning, and you find out that it- it frees you up. Whatever that means. So that, you step down, your sister steps up. And the emotion- what was the emotional- was there kickback in this, when you began, I want to get out? Of a posture the family has assigned you to? Do people rise up and call you silly?

**Wiseman:** Well, I think- I think, you know, my sisters have a way of categorizing me as being a person who always goes to funerals, and shows up to all family events. They do that, laughingly, and lovingly, you know, but I never got pushback from my family. My immediate family. The real pushback, came, as I see it, from my husband's family. Who- and I would not- I would not have suspected that. But my own family as I got, as I got a clearer sense of self, I think, you know, treated me with kind of amusement, for awhile.

**Schara:** They didn't get mad at you, they didn't think Bowen Theory

**Wiseman:** But- No.

**Schara:** stunk, and -and think you should go to a different therapist, or [laughter]

**Wiseman:** Well, they think, they think you know- no, they didn't. You know, they would make comments of like "Oh my God, she's at it again," but no, they never and we don't tend to think like that as a family. But, the pushback, and it was significant, was from Steve's family, who threw me the heck out, in no uncertain terms. And that was a family that I was very dependent on, and-and was- and is, still, very important to me, because they were the ones who, after my mother died, they-they kind of filled the emotional void for a family.

And the intensity was, from my mother's death, was replaced by having Steve's mother, and sister, and brother, and dad in my life. So they were very important to me, and I never was able to figure that out. And, the pushback was intense. And personal. And disruptive.

**Schara:** How do you understand that? Now? Did they have a role for me, like your family had? "We want you to be Miss. Fix'-it?" Did your- did Steve's family have a role for you that they needed you to function in? And you refused?

**Wiseman:** For sure they had- I think they were reacting to me shifting my functioning. And its effect on their son. And, therefore his effect on them. But, it's way, still way too subtle for me to see it. But I know that the pushback came there. And I think it was a huge part of our eventual divorce. They, they came to not be able to tolerate me, you know, and I'd send them letters, and they wouldn't open them and they would send them back. Um, and-and that trickled down to my kids.

**Schara:** What-what was the position you were in, and what did you move out of? To activate this rejection?

**Wiseman:** Well I think I was a person who supported her husband to allow him to kind of function, irresponsibly, because I was always there function- now, this is a guess. Functioning responsibly. So, irresponsible functioning had a place in his family of origin. It was -it was kind of an entrepreneurial irresponsibility in business, that by me working and me being a good earner, at the time, supported his adventures. Which supported something in that family. And then I decided that that wasn't such a good idea for me.

And probably I didn't do the self-defining very well. But, it became very personal. But something- when I shifted, something in that family shifted. Because of what it did to their son. And, as you can hear, I'm not terribly clear about it, but I also know that I probably didn't do a good job of defining a self. And dealing with the pushback, but I knew what I - I knew that I had to be a self. And that was more important than fitting in. I-I- was a suffering being, in being a self. I did not want to lose the marriage, but I was not -I could not live with the compromises to myself.

That being in that family required- or at least, I perceived that it did. You know, it was a tough -and it wasn't so conscious, it was just small things, it was what was required of you. Signing documents, supporting financing for a business, and I had, after much soul-searching, had decided that I wouldn't do that, because it made me too, too nervous, to sign over my house to support his business ventures. For this other family, and my husband. And that was really the end- that really was one of the things - the straw that broke the camel's back. For, you know, I understand them. My mother-in-law, and father-in-law was -his family was in the Holocaust and the survivors' mentality is you do everything to support your family. And I made a choice that said, "I can't sign this document to get a bank loan for the business. Cause it'll make me crazy. And I don't want to feel crazy."

And that decision, set in motion years of upset with me. Years. You know, with all the labels of selfish, and self-centered. Money-grubbing. You know, all the kinds of things. And, over time you learn how to deal with it but I was a novice in the beginning.

**Schara:** Yeah, I hear you.

**Wiseman:** You know, I wouldn't get invited to things, if I would they would be all kinds of comments said to me. And I wasn't- I wasn't easy enough to say, "Oh well. That's the way it is."

**Schara:** So, when you imagine a marriage, where you get up and say, "What are the values that you want me to believe in, in order to be married to you?" [laughter] And your husband says, you know, "You do everything to support your family. And every penny you earn, you know, would go to me." [laughter]

And you would say, "I do." [laughter] But in a way that's- that's the underground agreement that you made in joining Steve's family, in that you agreed and you practice that belief for some number of years, in which everything that you owned, belonged to them. The price of admission.

**Wiseman:** Well, and you know, as I say this to you,

**Schara:** [laughter]

**Wiseman:** I don't know what they thought, because I was not smart enough, wise enough, calmed down enough, to be able to talk about this directly. We never talked about it directly, we never shared our thinking about it. And, I was just sitting here thinking, we never talked about it.

It was through third parties. My thinking was shared through Steve, and it was never me directly saying, "This is what I think. What do you think, how is this a problem". It was no- it wasn't direct. It was all in the marriage, through the marriage.

**Schara:** So, did-

**Wiseman:** And, what a mistake that was. It was completely indirect.

**Schara:** So, to clarify, your saying you would talk to Steve about it, and Steve would then talk to his mother about it, or his father, and you never talked to them directly about it yourself.

**Wiseman:** Right.

**Schara:** So then, when Steve talked to his mother and said, "Well, Kathy can't sign the documents," and the mother would probably feel some kind of pressure and anger, and then she would put that back into Steve, and then Steve would come home with it. And,

**Wiseman:** I never stood up, for my- I mean, I stood up for myself, through- in the marriage, but I never came to them directly, I never -I thought I had a relationship with them direct- indirectly, but I didn't. I was in the twosome of the marriage. And, I don't think it served me well. I wasn't smart enough. So, while I- all to say, that as I was gaining capacity in learning how to think systems and kind of find a way in my own life that was different.

Oh, I made many mistakes, and it's just years later that you realize how slippery this- these relationship processes are. And, I don't- you know, to this day, I don't think my in-laws were bad people, I mean, I get it! I get where they got their beliefs from. And I had a different set of beliefs.

**Schara:** What's the emotional process? One ant colony, merges with another ant colony. And their values are different, but they're never clarified.

**Wiseman:** And they're never clarified in the relationship. Straight-on, one-to-one, they are clarified in the triangles. Which can make them less clear, and ignite all kinds of things. So, me not doing that, my sister-in-law then hates me for what I'm doing to her parents. I mean, her husband doesn't like me for what I'm doing to her parents. So, all of this stuff instead of me going to each person, trying to understand what they're thinking.

And, at the time I would have said to you, "**Oh, I have a one-to-one relationship with everyone,**" but obviously, you can have a- you can spend time with people, and they still do not know you. So, I was kind of hidden through all that. As I was making my decisions. I was not the world's most -what's the word? Straight thinker. I muddled through, I knew what I had to do, did I do it as well as I could? Probably not.

**Schara:** Well, I think- I think you're making the point that the emotional system is hard to see. And it's hard to have a way to function in it, without creating anxiety. So even though you might see some of what's going on in the emotional system. When you tried to be yourself, in relationship to your spouse. The anxiety spread out throughout the extended family, and came back- directly back at you.

**Wiseman:** Directly back.

**Schara:** Now you're putting out a thesis, which I don't know if it's so or not, which would be that maybe a family, or an organization, would have more capacity to- to change if you had been able to have a direct relationship with each one of these people.

I myself have never seen that happen. I could hold it out as a possibility, that could decrease the anxiety so that people- but I mean, if you could imagine in your mind's eye going back and saying to your mother-in-law, "Well, I want to talk to you about the decision that I made with Steve, and see where you stand and what you think about it, and then you would go to - I mean, I don't know. If you think-

**Wiseman:** Well, she'd be furious. Cause she was a fury on wheels when she was- I mean, she was angry, and angry, and very smart, and used very mean words. But imagine the difference, if I had been able to walk in that room, tell her that, talk to her, listen to her, watch her fury, and then, do something like, "Well, I'll see you for coffee, at, you know, tomorrow." I would be a better person for that. I do things, though. I do things though.

**Schara:** I-I hear ya. I-I don't know how much you can move an emotional system. I have a tremendous respect for this ant colony, that governs the behavior of the individual. And I don't know how much would Dr. Bowen used to talk about -you know, you might be able to raise your solid self up a point or two. You know, and people would pooh-pah that, and say, "Oh! I could go ten points or twenty points, I'm sure. There's no problem."

And then he would put out for you to be -if you were over 65, you could say things to people, and they wouldn't be upset. And, and you just- you don't know many people that can say the kind of things that you needed to say. Or, in my life, that I needed to say. And have people not be upset. Because the emotional system is so incredibly strong.

**Wiseman:** And be able to-

**Schara:** And, so that brings me to, you know, and I don't know what else you might want to put in there about it, but it's being able to separate out a self, at some- at some cost. This can provide a better footing for your own children, to some extent. Not to be caught up or as blindsided. Maybe, as you were. I don't know what you think about that, but a number of people have mentioned this, that they have used the theory, and as difficult as it is, they've been able to change themselves and that they see that this has benefitted their children. It's not that you make the emotional system behave. [laughter]

But it's that somehow, by being a little bit more of a self and being able to take the reactivity in the system, and not capitulate, that your children have a bit better change of -of doing that in their own lives. What do you think of that?

**Wiseman:** Well, I don't- I don't ever think like that.

**Schara:** Yeah.

**Wiseman:** I think much more about building my own capacity for life. And how do I do better in my own life? My kids are really capable. You know? I get worried for one, or two of them. All of them. But I don't worry. I don't think about that a lot. I think about building my own capacity. I am so good at observing myself. I mean, not 100% for sure, but I see where I fall short. And then I've got the workplace, you know, to think about, and-and my personal and my own personal life. So, that's where I'm focused. I don't know what the effect has been on my kids.

I do know, though, you know, the Bowen language, has popped up in each of their lives. And, we don't talk about it. We don't- I mean, the principles of kind of taking a stand for self, and -and being able to live with anxiety and manage it at increasing levels, is something that's part of their vocabulary. But, I

**Schara:** Mmhmm.

**Wiseman:** -you know, I just- I don't worry about them. I don't.

**Schara:** Yeah. Are you thinking, I can- whatever I can do to increase my capacity, for me, in my life right here, can make the world a better place. Or something

**Wiseman:** Well, I don't go to world. I go to make me a better person.

**Schara:** like that? [laughter]

**Wiseman:** This world is way too big for me to think about. You know? I-I don't think about that. I don't- I really, it's very self-centered.

**Schara:** So you've-

**Wiseman:** You know, no, I don't think about that. I am always, I am always amazing when people [silence]... I think there's something special in the way I think. I think there is something special, for myself, but I'm amazed that other people can see it. Amazed. I'm really focused on my own functioning.

**Schara:** And the- what is the purpose, of focusing on your own functioning? So, I've tried to give you a few "I do it for the world," "I do it for the- my children," "I do it for the-" but you just do it because? I like that. [laughter]

**Wiseman:** It's the only thing I have any control over! It is so- it's so simple. You know? I have- I have a habit, that when I go to movies, when it's scary, or upsetting, my nervous system can't take it. So, I close my eyes. And put my hands over my ears. I've done this since I was a kid, and I'm no longer a kid. And, you know, I watch this, and I think, "Kathy! It's just up on the screen. What-what are you so responsive to that for?" And, so I go into a movie and I say, "Alright, let's see if I can do it for- keep my hands away from my ears- for one minute- two minutes- three minutes. It's the way I think now. It's not about anything else but me.

**Schara:** So you just don't want to be a sissy?

**Wiseman:** No, I just want - I am so aware of my own reactivity. To relationships. That I just want to get better at it. That's-that's it.

**Schara:** So, I'm not sure what else as to what Bowen Theory? It has enabled you to work on your own reactivity and your ability to be more present in relationship with others. And it's- it's enabled you to see your reactivity in terms of running away from others, or trying to fix them, or other such things, and you've been able to modify that- that automatic reactivity.

**Wiseman:** And-and the automatic activity. So, I see something that's upsetting about my daughter-in-law and my son, and I know that I'm in it. I'm thinking about it. But I don't say anything. And sometimes it'll take me four months, to think about what I want to say. So that I say it in a way that makes sense. And gets the judgment out. Now that is a direct result of studying Bowen Theory.

And, has had, I think, a benefit. I know that lots of people wouldn't say the stuff I would say. But the fact that I take so long to think about how to do it, has served me well. Because, people are willing to hear it. I'm not saying anybody does anything with it, particularly, but I feel like I am a more present person in those relations, (when) I can say what's on my mind, but it just takes me a long time to do it. That's a direct result of theory. I would've swallowed that.

**Schara:** Mmmm. But it's more like, "I need to integrate this, I need to reflect on it, I will get back to you. But I'm not going to sign right now, I'm going to get back to you and be cool.

**Wiseman:** Right, right.

**Schara:** As direct as I can be. When I've removed- some judgment that has a large flavor here of unintegrated information,

**Wiseman:** Right.

**Schara:** Judgment has a lot of emotionality to it, and maybe evidence that you're still caught in the emotional system. And for you to crawl out of the emotional system, that- all that subjectivity, reactivity..

**Wiseman:** Right. Right.

**Schara:** The emotional stuff, has to somehow be combed through and you find- you find a few pearls or a few diamonds along the way. That you could put back in as real information, and not as some kind of manipulation.

**Wiseman:** And, what Bowen Theory has given me, over these years of study, and observing, and thinking, is that it has required me to be a better observer of myself. And the relationship systems. And it's required me to acknowledge the soup that I- the swampy waters that I live in. Relationship-wise. And that they're my swampy waters. They're not good or bad swampy waters, they're just my swampy waters.

And that if I want to lead a life the way I'd like to lead it, I'd better understand the way my swamp works. Sometimes, the swamp's going to get me. But sometimes, I'm going to get a little further along. With knowing that I'm in the swamp. By having known that I was in the swamp. I -I get the force, of the emotional soup that we were all born into. And, I just am grateful that Dr. Bowen had a way to describe it, that I could pick up a portion of that, and use it, to think through my own life. Definitely. And I can tell you this really interesting- just a short vignette. I was consulting on a family business, that had all kinds of permutations of an upset family, where, you know, fathers are suing daughters, they are suing fathers for ownership, and brothers have got court cases, and it's just all- people don't like one another, and it's- it's bled into the courts.

And, I could see that. And I could see that family over the last three generations, they had started a business, in a remote part of the country, and I had a way to see it that all these things that were going on, were one organism's way of adapting to change. The changes that were - and the changes could be good, and there were many. And I just saw this entity as being swamped. Swamped seems to be a big word but they were being overwhelmed by the amount of change they had to adapt to, and their capacity was somewhat limited.

And it came out, in fighting and court cases. But it was just the system, trying to evolve. And it was messier, than you would like. But it was an evolutionary process. To get it to another level. Now, when you can see that kind of upset, in a system, and not (awfulize) it, or not trying to psychologize it, I think you can be a help to a person.

This is a system that's trying to find its way through a lot of complexity. And a isolated environment, isolated from known support systems. You know, when you think of it that way, all these court cases make sense. So, I'm able to talk to them without-without this sense of terror. I mean, you don't want to go through lawsuits but, you know, if that's the way you want to spend your time, that's okay. You know, it's a different approach. And I couldn't have gotten that without this theory. No way.

**Schara:** So that's- the ability to observe the family, at a personal level, but at a, you know, a very, very, very objective- very neutral, very objective, very neutral level. So that you're not infected by the emotion that they're living with. And so you're not taking sides, and you're not "awfulizing," as you said, which I think is a really good word, if it isn't a word it should be a word. But awfulizing the situation, which is -I think when you're called in as a consultant, everyone wants you to be on their side, and they want

you to say they're okay, and fix the other ones. And then you'd be right back into that original role that you had in your family, so now you've been able to alter the role you've had in your family so you can relate to people who are still stuck in the situation that- that you were stuck in! [laughter]

**Wiseman:** Right! Right, right. I mean, and it takes different families different amounts of complexity to swamp their capacity to do stuff. So, how do you give them the sense that, "You can figure this out"?

**Schara:** Yeah.

**Wiseman:** -You are able to figure this out." Um, in-in alternative ways. You can figure it out through the legal system.

**Schara:** Yeah.

**Wiseman:** I mean, that is a way to figure it out. So, I don't know, you know, when you talk about what this theory has given me, it's given me a life, that's been worth living. It has given me a career of enormous satisfaction and challenge. I mean, the challenges I'm thinking about these days are just like never-ending, you know, just never-ending.

**Schara:** So maybe this takes us to the final part of this interview. If you thought about systems theory, and what-what would you say might should (be) thrown out, is there's anything, or do you want to keep it all? is it all important, to look at all these concepts that- that Dr. Bowen offered us as a way to understand human behavior? Will Bowen Theory ever be useful, as a way to understand human problems, and understand human behavior.

If it takes so long to get a handle on your own life, is that what Bowen Theory is really good for? Is it useful, to enable people to get a handle on their own life, by becoming more objective about it?

**Wiseman:** Yeah.

**Schara:** -Where do you see the theory going? Long way to get there.

**Wiseman:** Oh, I don't know. it's so valuable, and it's so different. I just keep doing my thing, and getting better at it, trying to learn more, getting better at it, challenging myself, with harder situations. But I'll be darned if I know why this is going to take so long to change. I mean, this is a different way to see things, but I will tell you that it makes sense, I don't know why it doesn't make sense to other people. So I'm just going to keep doing my thing.

**Schara:** Yeah. Do you -you think there's anything that

**Wiseman:** As best I know how.

**Schara:** -If Dr. Bowen were alive today, what-what would you say to him that needs to be worked on, or fleshed out, about his theory? Is there -somebody was saying to me, you know, "What would you do, for the ninth concept?" [laughter]

**Wiseman:** No

**Schara:** Yeah, is there an area that needs improvement in Bowen Theory, or

**Wiseman:** I-I, you know, I don't know, I'm not so good at that kind of stuff. I am good – at the thing I am good at, which is taking the ideas or, let's say, I'm getting better, at taking the ideas, and making them accessible to different audiences that aren't clinical.

**Schara:** Yeah.

**Wiseman:** I'm good at that. And I'm committed to keep doing that.

**Schara:** I hear that.

**Wiseman:** But beyond that I don't know. That's my goal, is to take it to audiences, because knowing families is so fundamental, to life. It's not to be a clinician, but knowing about families is so fundamental. And I think what Dr. Bowen has given me is the chance to know families. That has added immeasurably to my own family life, and to the work that I do with other families. That are, you know, that share assets together.

**Schara:** [laughter]

**Wiseman:** [yawn] And now I have to go to bed.

**Schara:** Well I really appreciate you staying up late and- and going through this, the thinking. It is so important, to get your thinking clarified, so that other people can hear. You've had many, many years, of being with Dr. Bowen, having your family videotaped, and you know, your life- your life has a legacy all of its own, beyond your own life. So, thank you very much.

**Wiseman:** Yeah. Well, thank you dear.

**Schara:** [laughter] You're welcome, Kathy. Goodnight.

**Wiseman:** Goodnight.