



**Kathy:** The three of us have spent upwards of, what, 120, 130 years of studying Bowen family systems theory and trying to understand the human and its family. And the three of us are sitting here, having heard and experienced over the last couple of weeks all kinds of family challenges from arrests, a death, to neighbors dying, to problems in family members. So what's been the good of it, is the question. We've worked a ... I've worked. I'll speak for myself.

**Andrea:** Well, no one had a heart attack.

**Kathy:** Well, I've worked hard to try and understand myself and my own family-

**Andrea:** You could have a heart attack.

**Kathy:** ... and my own family, but it's not been a guarantee that unusual things and often unpleasant things don't happen in a family. I guess the question is why bother?

**Andrea:** If you don't want to have a heart attack, it's kind of a good idea to bother. Yeah.

**Kathy:** What do you mean? What does that mean?

**Andrea:** When the bad news rolls in, and you pick up the phone and they say, "Oh by the way, blah, blah, blah just happened to your granddaughter or grandson," or your dog dies that you've had for many years, the attachment to other people is so profound, and that can create a heart attack when something bad ... I think Bowen called it, "The emotional shockwave." You get a shockwave after an event, and then it's like a house of cards. All the dominoes go in one direction, but if you have some perspective, and I'm not saying it's more than a teeny-tiny sliver of perspective of about maybe that big, you know? It doesn't have to be a lot in order to stop the reactivity from getting worse, piling on.

**Priscilla:** Yeah, I think it ... the way it works for me is when I have an emotional state of mind, and my one that I am kind of rolling with right at the moment and kind of holding a little bit of a space outside of it is that, "I can't do anything right. I'm not doing what I could do. Why am I not ..." A lot of negative thinking, mindset, which is a very familiar mindset to me, by the way. This is nothing new, and I think the only difference ... the difference I think the years has done in kind of developing some ability to put a context to a state of being. To put a context to it so that this state of mind ... I think, in fact, it's somewhat even like through what I do with biofeedback, that you know your body has a certain level of reactivity to it, and these are the things that your organism is in the middle of adapting to. Things are happening in the social group, which is really the definer of your individual reactivity. That's the way I think about it. So, at a time like this for me, where I have a familiar mind state, that long ago I would lived as if it was so, that I couldn't do anything. That I was pathetic. Any of the things that go into that negative kind of mindset. Lack of energy. The feeling, "I can't do it." All those things I think were what ran my life at a certain period of time, and I think now it's more ... I can kind of joke about it, and we were joking earlier, I can kind of joke about it. It doesn't feel any better. It doesn't feel like the reality of things that are going on around me are still demanding, but I can see that they're demanding and they would be things that are worthy to react to, and correlate that with this state of mind that would be ... that I'd be inclined to just act on. You know, sequester myself. Kind of withdraw more. All the things that are kind of a part of this. That's what I think is ... I've needed every 41 of those years to be able to sit here and talk about it, frankly, without kind of ... and not just being you can just belly up, and just go home and take another nap or something that would be, you know, I just don't want any more death. I don't want any more changes. Just enough. It's enough, but they're going to be more. They're going to be more, and that's okay.

**Andrea:** Any other confessions? We're all kind of sitting in the pot of soup.

**Kathy:** Well, I think that the years have given me a way to not awfulize what I would have immediately gone to is, "This is the worst thing that could happen. We'll never recover from this. The family is going down." I mean, it would have been the worst of the worst, and now it just feels like it's a thing to relate to in the best way I can. I don't know what's the best way to do it yet, but I know that in a little bit of time I'll know how to relate to it and all the people around this kind of uncomfortable situation. It is true that I think there are any number of uncomfortable situations that are presenting themselves right now as I sit here in all relationships: in work, in family, in ex-family, and in children and grandchildren. I feel like, and this is maybe where all these years have moved me, I might not know the answer yet but it'll come if I just stay here, and if I pay attention the answers will come. I think that's what all these years have made it possible that I can deal okay. Not right way, but eventually I'll be able to. So, what have the years given you?

**Andrea:** I think that's a good ... the way you put it. You know, just pay attention. I do think strategy, so I don't wait as long I don't think, but I start playing with ideas and then talking to, like, my son about his daughter and seeing whether or not he can loosen up if I'm loose. Then whatever it is, it doesn't matter what the X is, the little box that came unwanted to your front porch and you open it and there the jack-in-the-box jumps out at you, but you get through these things when you've spent 40 years looking at what your life looked like. What did my life look like when I met Dr. Bowen in 1976. One of the things that I think about is that why didn't God give me more common sense? In 1976, if I'd had more common sense, is Bowen theory just sort of a development of common sense? I read this quote, "Common sense is so rare it should be a super power." If you have common sense, you have a super power because hardly anybody has any common sense about what can happen next. What can happen next? So, because I like strategy, I think about that a lot, what can happen next? If I can get the anxiety down, and then there are 100 ways that I might think of to get the anxiety in me down, and then it should reverberate with somebody else's anxiety that I'm talking to. My son just happens to be just a call five minutes ago, so I'm fresh. He was laughing toward the end, and it's a serious event, but why get more serious and make everybody more and more uptight? So, that's how I think about it, "What can I do to take the anxiety down and loosen up, get a little common sense?" It's not the worst of all possible worlds here.

**Priscilla:** I think there's ... what I hear in both of yours's, and knowing you both for a long time, how there are patterns that are built in to how you metabolize difficulties. I was thinking about the differences in humans, and the three of us would be very different in that, and I was thinking of my version. Yours would be Andrea. You get in and you kind of mess with it until you find your way through it or something. I think mine would be more ... it's more of an internal reckoning I guess I was thinking. For example, right now, the feeling state I have right now is familiar. It was a more intense feeling state at an earlier period of time, but it's similar, so what is the nature of that difference? To me, how I think about it is the earlier state was as unreality-based as it is now. How was it unreality-based then? Just as an example, I happened to find a stack of letters from '72, kind of that earlier period of time, and I was really interested to read those letters. These were letters I had written to my parents, and it was interesting to read those letters because what I could see was capabilities that I know are mine but I don't remember having them. I remember only experiencing those 10 years later when I was introduced to Bowen theory, but I had them earlier as you could see based in those letters. Now, to me, that's an example of kind of reorganizing your present feeling state to what is more of a reality-based understanding of who you are and how you can adjust. How you can be in your emotional state and adjust a reality to it. Not just live in the emotion, which I thought ... that was, to me, was a really useful kind of counterpoint that has made a difference in terms of even where I sit today. This sense this is such a familiar state to be able to know that there's a reference point to it that is in me, that was there before I was introduced to Bowen theory, or before my mother died, or these things that are all pre-learning.

**Andrea:** Pre-learning. Pre-Bowen theory.

**Priscilla:** Pre-Bowen theory learning.

**Kathy:** And my response would be to not think about the trouble because it would have felt just too hard to figure out, let alone develop a strategy. I don't know where I would get the energy cells to do that, but just to completely cutoff my mind from even thinking about it because I can't do anything with it, and I think if you walk around in that state, I think you become more vulnerable to all kinds of other problems. If you are fearful of engaging in things that are troublesome, you're walking always around looking for the trouble and backing out the door. So, at least with these series of events that have happened lately in the family, I feel like, "Well, I can listen to it. I can be a resource here." I don't quite have the strategy yet, and it's almost like a part of my brain's missing. When things get difficult I can't get my creative juices, but I know that I could develop that even at this time in my life. When I perceive trouble -- relationship, family trouble -- I kind of figure going to sleep is the best way to deal with it. Now I know that isn't, but I haven't figured out what to say when I'm awake yet, and that will be the next step in this process. Another 30 or 40 years ought to do it. You know, ought to.

**Andrea:** What's getting develop in the 30 or 40 years? What part of your brain? I refer to it as common sense. Common sense, it's so hard because the emotional forces are so great and they push at you. Then, like, I can think about, "Oh, this is what I should have done. If only I had done this this morning things would have turned out differently." So, you can do retrospective thinking, but does that really help you in the future to consider, "What is my overall goal?" I remember the first time when I heard Dr. Bowen speak, he was talking about alcoholism. He basically said, "Look, if you want the short answer go over there to A.A. They have the short answer for you, and if you want to come over here, then this is lifelong learning. This is learning to detwitch rats." I could hear a gasp in the audience like, "Detwitch rats? What is he talking about? Life-long learning?" Everybody was kind of cool with that, but the whole detwitching of rat was like, "No, we can't be doing that. What's that? What does it mean that your brain thinks over what you would do if you were a rat?" You know?

**Priscilla:** Well, I did neurofeedback this morning, and I've been kind of reading a lot about the neurofeedback in the last couple days as they're kind of translating this new system, and I think when I look back, again, in this way in which people ... conceptually, the way the neurofeedback operates is very similar operates is very similar to what you're talking about, detwitching rats, to me. I think that what I experience with the neurofeedback as a tool in this developing more capacity I would say, and capacity includes that ability to be in an emotional state and not take it as seriously. It doesn't go away, but you don't take it quite as seriously and it doesn't involve your physiology quite in the same way, and it doesn't involve your long-term worry system in the same way. So, I was thinking about I think one of the important kind of parallel, conceptually consistent and parallel methods to me that has been useful in developing this kind of increased capacity, not only within one's self that is a ... it assists in reorganizing relationship reactivity, so it has an impact on relationships in that way. I was thinking of that as when I look back on my experience with my dad a couple weeks ago as he's 98 and becoming more frail. Still very much having a capacity, but myself having the ability to be that close up, and not run away, and not cry, and really be interested and have fun with this aging, pre-death time. I mean, it's stunning to me that that's possible given 40 years ago of an early death of a mother let's say. Something that was so disorienting that you wouldn't ever think that this was possible. I guess, to me, I was thinking about, "How do you get there?" And, again, with this kind of internal way of dealing with things, to putting a relationship context around your internal experience, I think neurofeedback has been kind of a natural for me in being able to negotiate that.

**Kathy:** You know what I'm curious about? You haven't said anything about physical symptoms at all during this time that's been a challenge. Are you just not mentioning them, or are they not happening?



**Priscilla:** There are things I watch, but I wouldn't call them symptoms. There are things that are ... stiffness I can feel, but it's not at the level of being down with back pain. No, it's true, it's not a-

**Kathy:** That's different.

**Priscilla:** That would be different, in the hospital with an asthma attack or something.

**Kathy:** Right. With the level of stuff that's going on, that's not present anymore. That's something.

**Priscilla:** Difference. That would be a difference. Yeah.

**Andrea:** Well, is it that also when you're in a system and you feel kind of ... the way you've described it to me was there's something about being ill at ease that's going on? You're not quite sure what it is, but you're in a place ... like, if I have a client who comes in they're very depressed, I can feel that, you know? But it's not personal, and then I'm trying to figure out with them what is it that created this state? So, that people don't even have an awareness of the state they're in, but that it's transmitting all the time to other people. I think the hardest thing is to realize that an emotional state is contagious to other people-

**Priscilla:** That's a good point.

**Andrea:** ... and that if you don't pick up on where the contagion is coming from you're more and more vulnerable to it. Some people can manage to stay, let's call it, in the common-sense arena. They don't get emotional. I'm thinking my son-in-law is a very contained guy, and he works out a lot. He seems to find a way to get release that isn't in the relationships, but the younger kids, the "children", quote, unquote, seem like they're more vulnerable to the anxiety in the system, and they express it more than the adults do. So, you have this other problem where what the adults are dealing with gets expressed in the kids, and then how do you take that back? If you're part of the ... so, there're are two things. One is that you unconsciously pick up stuff from other people and express it, and then the other problem is that you leak some out and express it and other people get caught with it, and you don't even know that's happening either way. So, this whole detwitching yourself and you're detwitching the other people who are important to you so they can think better. Man, I'm sort of a failure at it today to tell the truth. Yeah.

**Priscilla:** I think you're saying something really interesting.

**Kathy:** Three failures on a couch.

**Priscilla:** Just three failures on a couch. That's the name of this tape.

**Andrea:** Oh my. I keep saying I don't really enjoy being a failure.

**Priscilla:** I don't.

**Andrea:** I don't like learning like this, but whatever.

**Kathy:** It's familiar.

**Andrea:** Yeah, whatever it is. It's come my way and I'm going to have to deal with it.