

Thank You to Bill Silverman – Barbara Dickinson

When the International Focusing Institute asked me if I would write a "thank you note" to Bill Silverman for his years of service as Webmaster, I was delighted. It gave me an opportunity to reflect on my working friendship with Bill and on his wonderful work for all of us in the worldwide focusing community. Bill, it turns out, is the kind of webmaster who is always doing some sort of pro bono work, so in 2000 when he was looking at ads for open positions, he found one that sounded like a really interesting group. This was the early days of the partnership program and it was Mary Hendricks Gendlin who contracted with him to do the work of upgrading the website and Partnership Program.

There was a web page at the time with a list of names of people who wanted Partners, but Mary wanted a lot more. Bill described her as a visionary (not surprisingly). And so, in the partnership between Mary and Bill, they developed the website for the Partnership Program and he did it pro bono.

The partnership site that exists to this day began with Bill's work. A lot of people don't realize what goes into creating something like the partnership application. People who work in technology like me have an inkling what it takes to create something like that. "Out of the horse's mouth" so to speak, Bill described for me the database structure that was created from a list of names. Then membership information was included. It wasn't a simple web page anymore! It was an application, and a fairly complex one at that. It included preferences for a partner, description of skills, languages, work, and experience with focusing; then it had to search, match, send a request, and all the while maintain anonymity. Bill really enjoyed doing it, but Mary's first comment was "I don't like that green color!" His new client reacted to what she saw! For Bill it was a great lesson about how people often react to what they see, not how an application works.

Mary was very protective of Gene and especially concerned about his legacy being preserved on the website. Later on, Bill would design a webpage. Gene would take a look at it and want to totally change it. And even if the language Gene wanted to use would be hard for the average web page reader to understand, Mary knew how important it was to have this expression of Gene's thinking. And Bill knew how important it was to make that happen in website terms.

Bill makes this "webmaster stuff" look easy. He created pages and applications, and executed so professionally, yet always with receptivity to the concerns of focusing customers ... like color! He describes Mary as incredible and the main reason he worked for the Institute for as many years as he did. He said she was much more than a client - a good friend for whom he has the greatest admiration and respect, for her intellect, compassion, and intuition - something he says "blew me away." They had many many long talks and meetings -- a real, meaningful working relationship.

Bill participated in more than one overhaul of the Institute's website. The first one he remembers was in the early 2000s. The structure of the website at that time was pyramidal - or what Gene referred to as the ant hill. In that early version Bill turned the ant hill into drop down menus with the left hemisphere concentrating on philosophy while the right hemisphere concentrated on focusing (and all you neuroscientists out there can think about that one for a while.) The next major redesign was the Gendlin Online Library in 2007. There were also redesigns of the homepage and other main pages in 2012 and 2016.

Although it's hard to say which of the many things Bill did for us was the major thing -- and we'll talk about the Gendlin Online Library a little later, certainly one of his crowning achievements was the work he did making sure that The Folio was presented online in the best possible light. In order to make the value of this work clear I asked Bala Jason if she might say a word about Bill and here is what she said:

Dear Miracle Man - that's what I call you behind your back, albeit I 'must' have said that to you in several of our correspondences.

So... it's really time to step down. I was looking at some of our past notes/correspondences. In each of them I was thanking you profusely for being such a techy-genius AND having so much patience with my non-techy skills. HOW would we ever have done the Folio without you! Can't imagine...

So, are you retiring completely? - as in having time to play and travel? Or are you putting your supercalifragilisticexpialidocious skills somewhere else? Whatever it is, I wish you all the best and ENJOY!

Anyway, for now, thinking of you with smiles, fond memories, and so much gratitude and respect for your patience and kindness.

Wishing you well in all ways and HAPPY EVERYTHING!! From you biggest fan :) Bala

After Mary passed away, Bill realized it was time to move on. But he wanted to stay long enough to make sure that the Institute website was left in good shape for the new hands that would uphold it.

In January 2017 Bill decided it was time to lend more of his talents to other nonprofits. When you consider that The International Focusing Institute has benefited from Bill's gifts for 17 years, this is nothing short of a miracle, both in the world of webmasters and nonprofits. How lucky we have been!

Across a wide range of nonprofits, and even some private for-profit organizations, Bill now turns his talents to e-mentoring, storytelling, school nutrition, artists and filmmakers in need of websites. You may not know this, but for 18 years before he became a full time website programmer, he worked in a corporate environment in programming, physics, and electronics before becoming an entrepreneur.

And now, we must talk about the Gendlin Online Library. This genius piece of public service is the creation of Josiah Hincks, long-time friend of the Gendlins, who conceived the Gendlin Online Library and executed it in collaboration with Bill. Mary Hendricks Gendlin lent occasional guidance, but the Gendlin Online Library would not exist without the close relationship Bill and Josiah formed, as Josiah explained to me recently.

Josiah says, "Given the intense complexity of creating that project, the 18 months of struggle, the fact that it was run totally by a blog on three continents, that project was held together by my and Bill's skins. Bill handled the whole tech thing ensuring it kept going, leaving me free to focus on the objective: getting Gendlin online." As Josiah put it "He and me agree we did alright!"

For Bill, working on the library was a great experience. He says he learned a huge amount and remains very grateful to Josiah and Mary for the opportunity. "Josiah was the most brilliant creative and fun project manager" that he has ever worked with!

We cannot close without saying something about the years of working together Bill enjoyed with Melinda, Elizabeth, and Rita in The Focusing Institute office. Working with them for years, he notes they were always kind and thoughtful. I know from my association with them that they all thought the world of Bill, his talent, dedication, and generosity.

As a footnote to this thank you note, it is worth saying that the Gendlin Online Library is not only part of Gene Gendlin's Legacy, and Josiah Hincks' legacy, but also part of Bill Silverman's legacy. We are all the beneficiaries of the many and varied efforts these men contributed to preserve Gene's writing for all of us, freely available.

According to Josiah this is a vision that few in the wider focusing community shared at that time, but we all know now that it is emphatically the way Mary and Gene saw the necessity of free access to focusing for everyone. Luckily, at the time there were a few wealthy individuals who saw a need to establish focusing as rooted in broad philosophy rather than only specific applications. Bill and Josiah emphasized to me the need they see to keep the Gendlin Online Library updated and maintained. Wouldn't it be wonderful if the legacy of all this hard work could contribute to the realization of Gene and Mary's vision of focusing for the masses?

In closing, I will miss Bill's presence "behind the curtain" of the Institute's website. And I will miss the opportunities I had to check in with him, collaborate with him, and enjoy his quick wit, huge talent and keen observations. I know that I am not alone.