

**CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION:  
A MODEL FOR A NEW PATTERN OF RELATING  
AN APPLICATION OF STOPPED PROCESS, LEAFING, AND CROSSING**

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**INTRODUCTION**

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As far back as I can remember I have been drawn to people from “different” cultures. I can recall this rich thick feeling when I was 11 and our Sunday school class participated in a Passover meal at a local synagogue. I still taste that first encounter with the maror — the bitter herb symbolizing the harshness of slavery, and the charoset (chopped walnuts, grated apples, cinnamon, sweet red wine) symbolizing the mortar used by Jewish slaves to build storehouses in Egypt, and the matzo (unleavened bread) a humble remembrance of our freedom. Tasting this new world of meaning brought a sense of awe and wonder.

When I was 19 I lived in Kenya for three months. I was part of a cross-cultural program. Twelve of us lived in a house made of mud in the Kenyan bush and worked with the local people to build a science laboratory for a high school. We mixed the sand, baked the bricks in the sun, and worked with local carpenters to build the walls of the science lab. Through this encounter with people who did not share my cultural assumptions and patterns, something new opened up inside me as I struggled to reach beyond my cultural backdrop to connect with the people of Kenya and try to understand their world. In order to do this, I had to communicate from a ‘feel’ within me that didn’t fit my usual pattern of communication. I discovered that if I could find a sense in my body of how I wanted to be, I could reach from there and experience a touching between people that was extraordinarily alive. I’ve had many more moments like this through my continued travels and cross-cultural encounters.

In his book *Thinking Through Cultures: Expeditions in Cultural Psychology*, the cultural anthropologist Richard Shweder (1991) talks about these kinds of encounters:

p. 1 “If there is a piety in cultural anthropology it is the conviction that astonishment deserves to be a universal emotion. Astonishment and the assortment of

feelings that it brings with it — surprise, curiosity, excitement, enthusiasm, sympathy — are probably the affects most distinctive of the anthropological response to the difference and strangeness of ‘others.’ (p. 1) “...(difference) is not something we need to resolve; it is something we need to seek, so that through astonishment we may stay on the move between different worlds, and in that way become more complete.” (p. 19)

Cultural crossings open possibilities for further development. Perhaps it is a universal desire to be “nomadic”, to seek out different worlds, motivated not just by survival but also by a deep curiosity, the desire for ‘more’, the engagement of potential that is activated in encountering our differences.

Yet it is also true that difference can be threatening, leading to a categorizing of “us and them,” to stereotypes and the tendency towards domination and oppression of those who are of a different skin color, religion, sexual orientation, or cultural practice. We can no longer hide behind these assumed separations and hegemonies. Although we continue to think in terms of “different cultures” they are not static self-contained ways of living. Rather, cultures are alive in their crossings and evolutions.

Diversity lives within us as well. It isn’t accurate to think of each person as from one culture, one race, or one religion. As John McLeod states (2005, p. 50): “Very few of us can claim to be unequivocally a member of a single culture. Our parents, our grandparents, may represent contrasting religious or ethnic communities. The trajectory of our lives may have brought us into contact with different cultural ideas and practices.”

This seeking the ‘more’ through engagement of differences is something we as a Focusing community thrive upon. These cross-cultural openings are occurring all the time at The Focusing Internationals where focusers from many different cultures come together and encounter each other through our common capacity to process felt meaning. I’ve wondered what happens differently in cross-cultural communication as a result of this shared knowing about Focusing. What can happen in a cross-cultural communication when what is felt on an implicit level is symbolized and expressed? In a Focusing exchange something happens between people that carries *each* person’s felt experiencing forward *differently than it may when Focusing with someone from the same culture. Both people are changed through differences becoming a bridge for further symbolization of each person’s felt sense.*

Gendlin’s Philosophy of the Implicit gives us a rich framework for understanding this capacity for development that thrives on the interaffecting of cultures. In “Focusing-oriented” cross-cultural communication we have the ability now to move from the meanings captured in language and culture to the bodily implying of further meaning, felt but not yet symbolized. Perhaps this new pattern of relating will enable meanings to be carried forward through an interaction with a cultural difference — that could not be carried forward otherwise, such that diversity will become something to seek out as an avenue for human development.

The purpose of this paper is to present three examples of cross-cultural Focusing, two from a workshop I conducted last year at The International in The Netherlands, and one that was shared via the discussion list. I hope that they will demonstrate the rich potential for this kind of Focusing that enables new meanings to emerge that could not form without experiences of cultural crossings. To frame these examples I will briefly describe how I have applied Gendlin's concepts of 'stopped process', 'leafing' and 'crossing' to help understand and appreciate why Focusing is an avenue for a special kind of human development that can occur through cross-cultural encounters. It is my hope that this will be seen as one model for a new pattern of relating that moves us beyond fear, polarization, and stereotyping, to a way of experiencing difference, that carries each person forward to greater respect for and openness to all living beings.

### **PHILOSOPHICAL CONCEPTS:**

How should we think about the *relationship* between the person and culture? In Eugene Gendlin's *Philosophy of the Implicit*, culture is defined as "the structure of situations, the patternings of human interactions" (Gendlin, 1997, p. 17). Living is not just instinctual — humans generate symbolic meanings that become objects, rituals, tools, expressions, patterns of relating and living (for example, restaurants, market places, forms of government, songs, etc.). These shared expressions of meaning become our environment. Cultures are creative expressions of meaning shared by groups of people. Human beings live in relation to their own creations. (Grindler Katonah, 2005, p. 66).

Always at the same time, living process is an interaction between the person and the culture. Living processes are fundamentally unfinished. What is felt on an implicit level carries a multiplicity of unfinished "potential patterns for further interactions with our environment." (Gendlin, 1962, p. 25) Thus, it is our ability to further symbolize our fresh living beyond known patterns that forms the basis for this new pattern of relating that thrives on diversity. Felt meaning in interaction with something different in the 'other' carries forward a personal meaning that could not be lived without this engagement.

### **STOPPED PROCESS:**

In Gendlin's *A process model* (1997a) he thinks about how it is that life can carry forward while at the same time, some processes do not carry forward. This is always occurring. You want to communicate with a new person at The International but you don't speak English. You have a sense of 'wanting but can't carry forward through my usual way of communicating.' This process is stopped, but you go on living in other ways, perhaps by talking with others from your own country. Yet this stopped process continues to imply a carrying forward. There is something here between these two people that wants to be lived, even though, as of yet, there is no way forward. What is sensed as a felt sense also goes beyond language. It includes nonverbal meanings and meanings that have never been put into words.

Stopped process may occur for many reasons. Whatever the reason, the implying continues to be there. What wants to carry forward remains even as life goes on. We all can recall

something in ourselves that may have been stopped for years, and then something interacts with that felt sense to carry it forward in a new way. I am thinking of someone who, as a child wanted to become a singer. It wasn't until she was 50 that this stopped process was able to carry forward through her learning to give attention to that sense of 'wanting to sing'. Through a series of action steps she began to perform professionally.

Gendlin reveals something profound about stopped process. He differentiates that exactly at the juncture of a "stopped process" a felt potential for a new development arises. When the usual way a process that is carried forward is stopped, the organism remains sensitized, and has the potential to find new possibilities for carrying this forward that would not have been discovered if this particular process was not stopped. It is also true that as a new development arises, the original process no longer can occur in the same way it did before. For example, perhaps the two people who couldn't speak the language of the other — that evening when the music was playing — began to dance together and laugh, and a new felt sense emerged for each of them, opening a new meaning. Even if the next day a translator helped them communicate verbally, the shared experience of dancing, and what that carried forward in each of them, will have already changed the felt senses from which they originally wanted to communicate.

In the case of cross-cultural interactions, a stopped process happens because the usual cultural patterns cannot be carried forward. It is exactly at the juncture of a stopped process that a further development becomes possible. This is where the aliveness is!

### **LEAFING:**

Leafing describes the complexity of what happens when we have a stopped process. As stated above, in this situation the organism stays under the conditions of the stopped process and the body becomes more sensitized. Now something new in the environment is able to interact with the stopped process, something that would not have been noticed before the stoppage. Leafings are bits of process occurring only just as far as they can while still not yet carried forward so each time again is the first bit.

In these bits of process (or leafing), there is potential for more ways in which the environment could carry forward the stopped process, but differently than before. Felt meaning includes stopped process and includes this increased sensitization. Thus, in a cross-cultural exchange, the number of possible ways to carry forward increases, beyond the known ways within one's own culture. I think of the Dalai Lama and the colonization of the Tibetan people, including the destruction of monasteries and temples and the suppression of religion. This is a tragically significant stopped process in the ongoing living of Buddhism amongst the Tibetan people and the continuation of the Tibetan culture. Now living in India, the Dalai Lama and his community demonstrate leafing. The incredibly various ways in which Buddhism is now being carried forward all over the world may be emerging from this increased sensitization right at the juncture of stopped process. They now bring Buddhism into interaction with various groups of people-around the world. ( For example, see Kamenetz, 1995)

**CROSSING:**

To understand ‘crossing’ it may help to recall that Focusing is the interaction between felt meaning and symbolization. Felt meaning carries an unseparated multiplicity of unfinished, potential meanings. Symbolization is a known or articulated meaning carried in words, images, gestures, objects, etc. ‘Crossing’ describes how symbolization functions in interaction with felt meaning to bring forward a potential meaning that is freshly lived in the new situation. We know that in Focusing there is a discovery of a symbolization (word, phrase, image, gesture, etc.) that resonates with the felt sense and functions to further explicate felt meaning. However, it can sound like the symbol identifies what is there in the experiencing. The idea of ‘crossing’ heightens our awareness that there is a more complicated process going on, involving not only change in the felt meaning, but also change in the meaning of the symbol through this interaction of known symbol with new situation. Once the symbol crosses with the felt sense, it means everything it did before — plus what is revealed about this fresh current situation. Felt meaning carries the current situation as something more than what language had revealed before. “In this situation the word says how new features come — in a crossing of word and situation.” (Gendlin, 1997b, p. 2).

I have found it helpful to apply the concept of ‘crossing’ to cross-cultural interactions. In such an interaction there is first the “new situation” that does not fit within the cultural meanings known by each person in the interaction. What we bring to this interaction can include our stereotypes, prejudices, and fears of the difference. It can also include a ‘something more’ that is evoked by the difference. The felt experience of the other is *already* a fresh symbolization, as each person is something more than the general view of each culture. So the encounter itself is a ‘crossing’ as the usual meanings (both of one’s own culture and of the different culture) cross with the fresh experience of the person before you. The person comes forth through the crossing, which also changes the understanding of the culture. With the introduction of cross-cultural Focusing we create a situation in which Focusing allows the explication of new symbolizations that also furthers human connection.

“We can understand each other, across different experiences and different cultures, because by crossing we create in each other what neither of us was before. Communication and making sense does not rest on pre-existing commonalities, as if we can understand only what we already know. Nor is it misunderstanding and distortion. Rather, when we are precisely and exactly understood, that is when we are most eager to hear how it has crossed in the other person.” (Gendlin: Crossing and Dipping: p. 559.)

Cross-cultural communication has now become a new avenue for human development that is encouraged by the whole Focusing community. The world is searching for new patterns of relating that enable us to engage differences in such a way that difference functions to further our development and contribute to global community and peaceful, creative living.

As you read the following three Focusing stories I invite you to wonder where the ‘stopped process’ is, what might you identify as ‘leafing’, and what is the impact of this capacity we have for ‘crossing’. Notice the forms each process takes for each person. In Edgardo’s story there are two major stopped processes that cross in him: his relationship to his American family, and the end of democracy in his country. In Lucy’s story you can see how our capacity for crossing formed in her a unique bicultural identity that moved into a living in the world that is more than either. In Josine’s story, leafing included her felt sense of the kindness of the Japanese women that was functioning implicitly without any verbal exchange between her and the Japanese focusers.

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## AN EXPERIENCE OF CROSS-CULTURAL LEAFING

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*Edgardo Riveros*

*(Translation: Beatrice Blake and J.A. Briones)*

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In Doralee Grindler Katonah's workshop in the Netherlands, May, 2006, I uncovered an experience that had been hidden and apparently forgotten, which had deeply affected my feelings and my relationship with the North American world. When I was a teenager, I attended a high school as an International exchange student while living with my North American host family. I had received a scholarship to attend this high school in Ohio from 1967-68, and my host family welcomed me into their home. This time that I spent living in America was during the cold war and despite the fondness and admiration that we had for each other, I argued a lot with my American brother Dick (we both were 17 years old) about U.S. politics and foreign policy, especially toward countries of the third world. In spite of the fraternal love I felt for them, I was aware that both Dick and my North American father agreed with and supported the U.S. air espionage on Cuba and the Soviet Union that was going on at the time. They also openly supported the U.S. intervention in Vietnam. They were members of the Republican Party and admired Richard Nixon.

When I left for Chile in August 1968, I sadly said goodbye to my North American family. I was very far from anticipating the historical events that would take place five years later in Chile, and how this would make me even more distant from them emotionally.

In November 1968, the favorite candidate of my North American family, Richard Nixon, won the U.S. presidential elections. We kept on writing to each other and communicating, especially at Christmas, from 1969 until 1973. When Chile suffered the coup d'état on September 11, 1973, I knew, as did many other students and intellectuals, that the North American aid to Allende's opponents had been key to their success in restoring a military tyranny that would last 17 years. Nixon and Kissinger had trained and supported the future *golpistas* (*coup participants*) from 1970 until 1973.

As Harold Pinter indicates in an interview with David Edwards in 2005:

*There is a lot that has been published on Internet recently. The one thing the US has is this Freedom of Information Act — it's not very good really because they black almost everything out, but they can't black everything out — you have to grant that: they have it, it is there, so it can be used, whereas here, as you know, the whole thing is a farce, it's disgraceful. But at least they've got something there and a while ago I obtained state documents about the CIA, about the US government involvement in the military coup in Chile. It's all there!\**

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\* David Edwards. *Unthinkable Thoughts — an Interview with Harold Pinter* Medialens. Traducción de Germán Leyens. Revisión de Déborah Gi

There are documents from the North American Senate that demonstrate that U.S. infiltration in Chilean politics was continuous from the election of Frei Montalva in 1964. When I learned this, I was in a state of emotional shock that extended towards any event that had anything to do with the United States. I watched powerlessly as our state house, La Moneda, the symbol of our traditional democracy, was bombed with the collaboration of the North American Air Force. I remember going to see the debris of what had been the Presidential Palace. I kept a pencil-size piece of burnt wood in my shirt pocket as a memory of the painful morning of September 15, 1973. I was part of a long line of the people that passed in front of the Presidential Palace that day. We were like a crowd of mourners saying our last farewells at the grave of our democracy.

During this personal funeral of our democracy I felt a great silence form about my critical observation against those who destroyed this national building. I started to separate from my real feelings about the North American world and my feeling about my stay in the U.S. a couple of years before this tragedy. I felt so ashamed of being a part of those who believed that something like this would never happen. I suddenly knew about the military Air Force, the connection with the Nixon international policy, and his concern about Chile. I felt at the same time, that a big world of silence started to move as a gigantic sea wave over my sorrows. This mega wave covered my feelings against Nixon, against those who thought like him, my American brother, and the military people who helped to make this horror a real issue. A great distance started to build up between the guards and myself, between the Chilean police and me, and between the Chilean people and the world people who were in agreement with this horror. That's where I was, right at that moment.

I stopped writing to my North American family. I suffered as I watched the political persecution. There were tanks that attacked Santiago's most marginal populations. I went on my bicycle to see with my own eyes how they broke into the houses, provoking fear and panic throughout the area. Something powerful within drove me. I need to see with my own eyes — to become a witness to this violence. I wanted to be sure that this hell was really happening.

During this time, as a therapist in training, I became self-educated and experiential. I was working with a new theory that I had read by a brilliant man called Eugene Gendlin. I helped my friends with the first lessons of experiential psychothera. After long months of subjugation to militaristic propaganda and curfew — that lasted 11 uninterrupted years — I was learning to shut up, to stop thinking truthfully, so that my words would not give me away. I learned how to be quiet at meal-time and to be with my felt sense of suffering, without knowing what really was going on inside the Chilean society. I lived inside with the experience of "being-outside", of "being-no-where". I would disguise my words in order to survive in the concentration camp called Chile. Even the English language bothered me. I only could stand to read English written by Eugene Gendlin, and the followers of Carl Rogers, or large-spirited humanistic thinkers like Sidney Jourard and Rollo May.

I experienced a deep anger and disappointment toward those who had generated this sinister state, towards those that justified what they didn't understand, or preferred not to know: the participation of the United States of America and its government. I silenced myself systematically and stopped writing to my North American family. And thus twenty long years

of silence passed, years of becoming accustomed to and adapting to the facts. I stopped writing poetry, stopped reading the newspapers, and devoted myself to studying Greek and Latin, during the first months of the dictatorship. I walked along the streets of Santiago, a city without life — or without spontaneous life. It was a city abandoned by happiness and authenticity. I watched the leaves of the trees fall slowly for a long time. A deep pain and far-reaching distrust were growing inside me each day, like a wild jungle that became subjugated and then abandoned. Still my life went on. I got married and had two children, and continued to study Gene Gendlin and Viktor Frankl. I really lived as if in a concentration camp.

I was employed at a public clinic as a psychologist diagnosing abandoned children, and at the same time I was applying the new experiential paradigm. I started reading Víctor Frankl along with the first writings of Gendlin published between 1962 and 1970. These authors were for me like secret guardians of life and freedom, of the real feelings within me that were becoming more and more clandestine, both in myself and in my homeland. At that time, I felt I had to create a wall to the inner access of these buried feelings of freedom and life. Gendlin and Frankl gave meaning to my life and to my professional duties, far from the academic environment. I applied them organizationally and educationally, both in my clinical and private practices.

In this way I lived through this bitter experience that reached the depths of content, which had remained frozen in the vast territory of the implicit. I wanted to meet Eugene Gendlin, and thanks to a Chicago workshop on dreams, I decided to travel to the USA in October 1989. One night I dreamt I was with my brother Dick at his Presbyterian Church. Why he invited me, I did not know. In August of that year I decided to write to my North American family to re-establish contact. Twenty years had passed. When I was with my American family again, I asked to go to their church. Dick also was there to support me — together. I knew I was making a dream become real. I did not know that this matter was still unfinished until 2006, in the Netherlands.

## **THE REUNION AND THE HEALING OF THE SUFFERING**

When I embraced them on arrival, time passed very quickly. My ‘parents’ were thrilled and happy to see me. They thought that I had died during the coup d’état. I found out that they had gone to the public information system in the small city of Marietta, Ohio, to see if I appeared in the lists of casualties during the events of 1973. They were very well informed about the repression that had happened in Chile. I felt their love, and was surprised by this concern for me.

There I understood the unfair generalizations I had made when I blamed them for what their government did in Chile. They were, certainly average and very well-intentioned citizens. They would never have believed nor imagined that what happened in Chile had been so serious and so atrocious. They never judged nor analyzed in a critical way what their government had done in the middle of the cold war, and even less in Chile in 1973.

I could not show them all my bad feelings toward Nixon’s government, or what was happening in Latin America. I could not express my protest to anybody. Again, I hid the sor-

row in my heart regarding this perverse Cold War that the superpowers had invented, as they fought for world hegemony. This intimate protest kept on wandering around in my inner universe dressed in autumn colors. Outwardly, it tainted the scenery with indifference or irony, towards all the political topics of the cold war. I was intimately protesting this cold war. I wanted to demand an apology from the U.S. government and the Chilean dictatorship to the people of Chile; to the natural relationship which took place once a upon a time in Marietta, Ohio in 1967 and 1968, between two friends who became brothers of a world fraternal relationship; and to a kind American family who gave their love and their home to a Chilean teenager looking for a World of understanding.

At that time, it seemed to me that my North American family cured me of this suffering with their love and their warm welcome. Nevertheless, my sorrow and its meaning did not end completely until Dr. Doralee Grindler Katonah's innocent workshop on "cross cultural leafing" in Netherlands in 2006.

### **THE MEANING OF SUFFERING**

I had not been able to communicate my real feelings for fear of offending my loved ones. I realized that there was also fear related to self-preservation in Chile that contributed to suppressing these feelings. I had buried my suffering in the soul of the experiential. Intellectually, I believed I had overcome the trauma of 1973. In that workshop with Doralee, I made a beautiful discovery. I found it in a deep well that had been camouflaged as a treasure. As I closed my eyes, I found a deep well and went to a deeper level of the sea where I found a golden box. Then I touched it, and suddenly it opened up. I started to cry as I felt that old sadness, those horror feelings of 1973. As I stayed with this old sadness, inside those feelings was the image of my brother Dick. I saw him crying with me in that long line of the people that passed in front of the Presidential Palace that memorable day at the funeral of our Chilean democracy. Then in the empathic context of the workshop, I realized that all my suffering had stayed without context and without a voice; that is to say, my meaning had remained frozen, like a cry that hoped to be heard and listened to some day — by the right people in the right context. It was a sob that remained suspended in the crossed wires of a transcultural goal to be heard and understood by my American brother. In the intercultural breach, I was left without the appropriate "others", ones that might understand my language and my sensations of pain. My brother was the "other one", and the context was "that long line of people," a sob that remained suspended in the crossed wires of a Transcultural goal.

An arduous but beneficial task awaits us in this intercultural dimension. When we don't find our meanings, we are like immigrants without a definite existence, without identity, and as yet undiscovered. I believe that Focusing can be a bridge to connect the significant others with the *now* right context.

I believe that Eugene Gendlin gave me, without knowing it, a space and an opportunity to visit the United States with an excellent excuse: to finally meet him personally.

The meeting with Gene happened on October 29, 1989; one week before the Berlin Wall fell. My reunion with my dear North American family took place thanks to the fact that

I had discovered Focusing. I would not have known Focusing if I had not been in the USA in 1968, the year that Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King were murdered — and if I had not woken up to my own awareness that we were entering to a new era, an age of political violence and of a carnivorous globalization of humankind.

We lived through a historical process of the Cold War and of deep changes. I think we are now coming to a moment in history where the human experience is stirred to look for a respectful solution and for healthy coexistence between diverse cultures, without thinking about the hegemony of any nation in particular. Focusing helped me to grow into a vision of intercultural relating, that has the potential to break through the current destructive ways where governments try to impose their will on other cultures.

Focusing has been for me — among other things — a bridge to cross the intercultural border, a possibility of understanding a new order of things in futuristic texts like Gene's writings. Focusing is a way to foster PEACE through a real discovery of respect for diversity, so that all people may choose their future and identity in the world with complete harmony and sovereignty. Focusing stimulates the discovery of personal and cultural singularity, the right to be a person, and a right to *be* in a specific unique culture.

In today's world the practice of intercultural respect, the shared experience of diversity, and the understanding of a new implicit order are more urgent than ever. They can give us light in the darkness of violence, discrimination, and manipulation.

Focusing is a viable way to reach that authenticity because it allows us to discover our sorrows, often hidden in the deep well of words not spoken.

— Chile, August 2006

## **SOME THOUGHTS ON MY OWN 'STOPPED PROCESS' AND 'LEAFING'**

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*Lucy Bowers*

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I received a birthday gift on the weekend. The title was *This Is My Country, What's Yours?* I didn't even have to open it to get that twinge of the Felt Sense back, a leftover from my experience last May at the Focusing Conference in Holland. The question of what a country is and my relationship to it seems to have been lurking somewhere in my blood and bones for many decades. Is this about the location? The geography? The society? The language? The culture? What exactly is a country and how do I belong to it?

Most of my life I have been calling myself a Canadian. That is what my passport proves to those who care to know. Others ask for my driver's license to ascertain my iden-

tity. It seems helpful to let it be known where I live. There are many other attributes that I can claim to show I am Canadian for example, I am reminded about getting my income tax completed one of these days. I was just having a conversation with my uncle in Holland on the telephone and he made me aware that the winter there is very mild and benevolent and bicycles are still used by the majority. Compare that to the Arctic winds blowing bitterly cold here all week, making us dress in layers and consider seriously whether or not we really need to leave the warmth of our homes. That huge difference between his experience and mine certainly makes me a Canadian.

I was born in Amsterdam during the war. The city was in the last throes of dying without food, without hope. Basic needs for warmth, shelter and nurturing of any kind, emotional, physical or social was not available to my parents struggling to make sense of that world in which they were having their first child. It cannot be surprising that they and many, many others left the horrors of their memories and their bleak landscape of loss to restart their lives on a fresh new page called Canada a few years later. The word “Canadian” for a little eight year old girl held some mystical, magical qualities that allowed it to be alright to let go of grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, friends, food, language and a landscape that all declared that she was a little Dutch girl.

I was convinced by the deliberate way in which my family flew away by airplane, leaving a tearful family behind never to see again, how fortunate we were to be embarking on this journey of becoming Canadians! The tears of my mother were discounted and completely misunderstood as we posed at the door of the airplane to smile and wave our last goodbye (what we were told) and to ignore the wetness of our own smiling faces.

I especially allowed the idea of being Canadian to consolidate in me while I was teaching overseas for 8 years with N.A.T.O. Here I was driving my French car with license plates that declared I was from Canada, and had the maple leaf in bright red ensconced in the corners to prove it. I traveled into every corner of Europe with a visibility that provided me with a sense of pride and belonging unlike anything I had ever experienced before then. My understanding of being Canadian seemed to grow and bloom as I made memories in so many places that did not have any resemblance to my country called Canada. There was no wilderness to be found and the wildlife was rather tame, add to that the different languages, the variety of foods and drinks, the music and the customs. I was continually reminded in a most wonderful way that I was indeed a foreigner and loving it. Even the country where I had been born and spent the first eight years of my life had no resonance with my identity as a Canadian. I was a Canadian visiting Holland. I did have family there and I did relearn the language; I was drawn to go there often and yet each time I saw myself as a Canadian only.

I was happy to meet the family I had left as a little girl, both pleased and grateful for the opportunities to spend time with aunts, uncles, and cousins but I had after all learned to grow up just fine without their influences on me. I often would try to imagine in some way how it would have been for me had we never moved to Canada. I understood my world view was very different from my cousins and was grateful for how I had experienced my life as a Canadian.

The experience of 8 years in Europe as an adult allowed me to appreciate even more the gift of being Canadian. It amplified for me why I cherished Canada as my country and

appreciated with gratitude the choice my parents had made to move there. Nothing in Europe as beautiful and unique as it was, could compare to what we had in Canada it seemed to me. Each country we had the privilege to become acquainted with, seemed not to encompass all of what we knew we missed in the country I called home.

The souvenirs I came back from Europe with were more than memories, photos and the tangible things that I placed in my home back in Canada. I came back with a husband and two children. My husband (a Canadian teacher like myself) and I met there, were married there, had our family there and then came back with a huge new awareness and sense of privilege to begin our lives back home. Within a few short years we decided to have a Canadian souvenir, so another son was born. There were times when he and his dad enjoyed reminding the rest of us that they were the “real” Canadians because they had been born in Canada. Here was a little bit of my personal history repeating itself. My birth family was born in Holland with the exception of the youngest, my little sister. She too found it important on many occasions to remind the rest of us that she was the “real” Canadian. So what was that about? Did I feel as though I was a “real” Nederlander because I was born there? Not really. Does being born in a country make it yours? I never really thought that.

The first time I began to ponder this was when I returned to Amsterdam as a Focuser. Now I knew how to attend to my felt sense. The sounds, the smells, the sights were having a big impact on me the day I was showing off the city I was born in, to my friend. Happily I was able to do some Focusing around how deep in my tissues there was a connection to this landscape and for the first time I found myself questioning how simple it had been for me to define myself as a Canadian and yet...something vague and undefined was stirring in me.

On the occasion of the International Focusing Conference held in The Netherlands, 2006, something new began to happen within me during this time back in Holland. I was back in the country of my birth once more as a Focuser. It was a weeklong of Focusing with the energy of many (approx. 200) from around the world who were there sharing my passion for Focusing. I was very aware of my felt senses as I was immersed in the language of my childhood, the smells of cheeses and fish, the lushness of the landscape, the windmills, the rich abundance of flowers everywhere, the way the houses looked, the people who seemed to look like relatives, and those birds... they were just not the birds I ever heard back in Canada in the spring. The sounds of those birds seemed bent on taking me back. Those many mating birds singing their love songs back and forth took me back to a time when I had lived there and not been a visitor, to a time when I had a sense of belonging, with my very own grandmother and an abundance of aunts, uncles and cousins that were not pretend, unlike those friends of my parents back in Canada. Those days of my childhood when I was not marked as different or an intruder, days when I did not have an accent when I spoke, were the days reminding me of a time long dead in me but now had an appearance of waking up and offering me a sense of joy and security and mostly, I seem to want to use the words “belonging again.”

Just before the conference, there was a big, festive, celebration day for the Queen. Seeing the orange banners hanging from all the homes flooded me with memories of when I saw the Queen walk by me and my school friends as a little girl. I felt a sense of belonging once more that I found hard to explain. All these many “awarenesses” were gently waking

up in me slowly with each of my daily focusing sessions. There was a rich felt-ness that permeated my whole body, like I was living fresh the “me” that lived here as a child, the “me” that had been buried under “Canadian”.

The little micromoments in time, like the sound of a Dutch conversation, a bird singing, the smell of a particular food, are just examples of the unexpected stirrings in my heart each time. Something in me bit by bit, day by day, was opening me up to the notion that I was not just a Canadian attending this conference.

It was at the Reconciliation Evening that my heart fully opened up. It hurt and it hurt a lot. Something very big began to happen when Erna De Bruin shared her story. While she was talking about her teenage experience during the war I became very hot. I was uncomfortable and could not explain what was happening but I savored a sense of inexplicable connection. The image came to me that both Erna and I were standing in a river together. This felt both exciting but confusing for me because the water felt very hot and uncomfortable. I felt compelled and curious to stay with this uncomfortable bodily sense as the evening unfolded.

The conference included a reconciliation ceremony commemorating the time and place (Wageningen) where on May 5, 1945 the Nazi occupation of Nederland ended and the country was set free. While watching a photograph review of that day, I was riveted by a picture of the Dutch flag blowing in the wind. I felt tightness in my chest at the sight of it. I was aware I was still standing in that river and feeling very hot. Not much had shifted since Erna had spoken and I was feeling vulnerable and open from the other stories that were told. It was a kind of Remembrance Day ceremony such as I had attended every year as a Canadian with my own children as well as with my little students. However this was the wrong flag, I saw the wrong uniforms and the wrong kind of bugle was playing. It was also the wrong feeling. There was not the sense of pride I experienced as a Canadian; the liberators of Holland! I had never experienced this sense of horror, violation, destruction, confusion and sadness before. Tears were streaming down my face and my chest was swelling up with some strange mixture of remorse and loss, much of it was hard to explain. I found myself thinking about my father (he had worn a similar uniform and helmet as a fire fighter in Holland as what we were seeing on the screen) who had died more than 40 years ago and had never spoken of his experience of the war. I thought fondly of one of my uncles, who had been a prison guard during the war in the exact prison shown on the screen, (and died twenty years ago) but had been compelled to share many stories of his experience whenever I had been to visit in the '70's. Then I recalled the two Jewish uncles I had been visiting before the conference. They were the only survivors my mother still had to call family. All the others had been lost in concentration camps. I was so deeply aware suddenly how this affected and changed the lives of my mother and her two Jewish brothers. They had been left very much alone in the world at a very young age by the time that war had ended. All this and more came from within my body into my thinking self. It felt as though water was now inside me not outside of me. The river I was sharing with Erna had moved into me and the temperature from warm was now changed. It had turned to ice. It hurt.

It was the next day at the workshop called Practicing Focusing Within and Between Cultures that I felt something in my chest. The word “ice” resonated and seemed to symbol-

ize this new sharp pain in my chest. The workshop was structured as a “round-robin” so each person was able to share their focusing experience on a cross-cultural felt sense while another group member actively listened. Sharing at the workshop with another person reflecting it all back for me was astounding. It gave a kind of reality to what seemed to be a dream experience. The workshop was giving us some common words and meanings to allow us to resonate together what was happening for us. I tried to give it my fullest attention as the workshop unfolded, and slowly it began to melt into soothing water as I listened to a participant from Holland do some sharing about the night before. It all happened slowly but with meaning. The waters were not only soothing but began to have a nourishing quality. Along with the melting and nourishing, something important had also happened. Something had crystallized and it had some huge meaning, not yet known but a big aha moment was about to unfold in my life. The crystallizing sense had me go back to some life changing memories in a new way.

So leaving behind all my extended family, waving goodbye to everyone I knew in the world, while my mother cried and cried, now had a language to hold it all for me!! “Stopped Process” Doralee was saying and I felt a newness settling into me. A warmth was sinking into me and growing with that phrase... so it had been a real traumatic experience for the little girl I thought...so many years later. What happens when the implying cannot carry forward? Had my body been carrying an ongoing process of implying? These were new words with new meanings but I was captured by the presentation in spite of a confusing language, yet meaning seemed to be lurking right underneath it all. Was I now this week experiencing “Leafing”? Was something new and fresh wanting to be implied? The carrying forward continues to want to be allowed. Leafing suggests that expansion can happen! Something grew warmer inside me. I was both inside something and at the same time outside of it! The hurt left over from the night before was gone. The new way my body was carrying all of this was very big and seemed to have great value.

So words we know when brought into awareness in new situations could have new meaning. “Symbolization” was now moving all that forward. I achieved a sense of conflict solution. There was no either or situation for me now. I could be both Canadian and still claim my roots from Holland. In fact my body truly wanted me to reclaim those roots. The two parts of me seemed to be folding one in to the other as I made the connections. Now I understand that this ‘crossing’ of meanings brought forth a new meaning that expanded my experience of the meaning of my life so far.....I am not really either culture.....I was something richly “more” that connected me between and within cultures and allowed me to dissolve into a new knowing of who I am.

My focusing since has shown me that the trauma of that day has informed and directed who I am now in so many ways and how I behave in the choices I make. I had no real idea how important this reclaiming process was to be for me. It has begun and I love how it feels. I have clarity for example about my resistance to change, my curiosity and need for family, roots, history and the missing pieces, the stories. I am beginning to understand my parents better. I see why my obsession to return to Holland from the day I left in 1951 until I did return in 1964 has led me to a kind of addiction to travel and deep desire to experience other people from other cultures and in their own environment. My sense of loss seems somehow

related to my need for adventure. I seem to be insanely curious about how others live out their experience of being who they are in their own culture. Much of this has shown up as the teacher of children from so many different cultures all thrown together in the city where I live, such as the 48 countries represented in my last school. I admire others who seem to have a clear sense of belonging and knowledge of the generations who came before them. I know I hunger for it.

There are still many more questions than I have answers, but those waters in me are now flowing not frozen. They are nurturing, not stopped. There is an excitement or sense of adventure in all of this. I am neither Canadian nor Dutch. I am both and I am “more.” Just lately what came was a sense of being dissolved into the planet and a true sense of oneness with the universe! Such blessings!!

## **JOSINE’S WARTIME CHILDHOOD**

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*Josine van Noord*

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Dear (traumatized) people,

After writing about this on the Focusing Discussion list, I was invited to write it as an article for the Folio.

Before World War II there was an economic depression in the Netherlands. My father, who was studying to be an engineer at the Technical University, decided to go to Indonesia since it was still a Dutch colony. He spoke Dutch, Indonesian and English so he had no trouble finding a job with the Singer Sewing Company, an American firm.

When the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, an American Base on Hawaii in 1941, all the men in our neighborhood including my father and my mother’s brother were deported to Thailand and Burma to work on the Death Railway. It is a 258 mile railway between Bangkok, Thailand and Rangoon Burma (now Myanmar), built by the Japanese army during World War II to support its forces in the Burma campaign. Forced labor was used in its construction.

About 200,000 Asian laborers and 60,000 Allied Prisoners of War (POWs) worked on the railway through the jungle. The living and working conditions were horrific. About 25 % of the POW workers died because of overwork, malnutrition and diseases like cholera, malaria and dysentery.

I was practically born in a Japanese prison camp in Indonesia. The women, including myself (1 year old), and my mother were deported to prison camp on Sumatra, where we lived at the time. First we lived near the cities then in the middle of the jungle on a deserted

rubber plantation. Many babies died; I think I survived because my mother breast-fed me until I was almost 2 years old. We all had dysentery from the first till the last day of the camp, 3 1/2 years later. The women were also forced to work hard for the Japanese; they had to cut trees or make cotton mattresses with little needles, and they were beaten if they lost a needle. My mother was beaten with a gun by a Korean soldier, because he was ordered to do so by a Japanese officer. My father and my mother's brother stayed in prison camp working for the Japanese on the Death Railway in Burma. We all had many terrible diseases and almost died from hunger.

After the war we were transported from one end of Sumatra to the other, and many Indonesians tried to kill us because they had a freedom war going on. We were protected by Ghurkhas (soldiers from India with white turbans on their heads). It was all very confusing. We ended up in Bangkok where I had the first relaxed year of my life, at 5 years old. Of course we had lost everything from our house with everything in it, including family pictures.

In the bad period after the war we had to go back to Holland without a place to stay of our own. I slept in a room with people I didn't know and my mother, who had started working, slept in a cupboard for 2 years. We didn't even have our own clothes. As soon as we could hire 2 rooms, people that survived would come and visit us, we always ate together and I used to listen to how the traumatized grown-ups would tell each other horrible stories, often in a comic way. Half of my class in basic school in the Netherlands was from Indonesia, but nobody ever paid attention to that, in fact it was best not to talk about it. That was a terrible experience, but since it affected so many people we thought it was normal. The elder generation used to make jokes about the war, but they wouldn't tell us children what had been going on. I survived, but everybody who had lived in Indonesia hated the Japanese, and did not buy Japanese things, etc.

Long ago I heard some Japanese men talking to each other in a restaurant, and all of a sudden I felt so uncomfortable that I had to leave the restaurant.

But I survived with ups and downs. The finishing touch was regression therapy with Marta Stapert that took me back to prison camp. She encouraged me to also start Focusing. But I was still very uncomfortable when I had my first serious encounter with a Japanese lady in a workshop led by Ann Weiser Cornell. After avoiding her for 2 days, I saw how nice she was and felt ashamed. So I invited her home and she came, but I didn't want to tell her about my past so as not to embarrass her. Then I went to the International in Ireland and was put in a home group with two Japanese ladies. They were younger than I, and I liked them very much, but felt so stressed about my past that I decided to shut up.

In the second meeting of my home group, I still didn't want to talk about it. But the feeling that this was somehow unfair to them became so strong during the session, that when we were about to stand up because it was finished, I stood up and said, "There is something I have to tell you". And I told them about the whole situation and ended up crying because they were so sweet. Then they stood up, put their arms around me and we cried together. I cried about the craziness of the world and all the wars going on, now and in the past. Afterwards I felt so happy, like I was floating.

After lunch one of the Japanese ladies came to me and asked me if I would focus with her. I felt very honored that she chose me. While Focusing with me, something very sad for her came up. I stuck to the process, but somehow it felt that she was releasing me, and I did the same for her. The wonderful experience of sharing this awareness, and the feeling that nothing really matters except being kind to people who want to be kind to you, has been with me up to now. It did cost me an old friend who is still traumatized about prison camp and doesn't want to let go of it. She treated me as if I couldn't help being so ignorant, instead of understanding the hard work it took.

At the Focusing International Conference in Costa Rica in 2004, I had a short Focusing session with a Japanese man and during the session I opened one eye and saw his face quite close to me, and I thought of my poor old mother who passed away and wished she could have seen me. I feel grateful to the Japanese Focusers because through their attitude, they made it possible for me to get rid of a burdensome past, a trauma that has been with me for a long time, and a trauma that took a lot of energy.

Through focusing I learned that there is no Truth. Everybody has his/her own truth, I learned that 'the Truth' is not important. What you do with your own truth is important, also for the Japanese people. The bomb on Hiroshima that saved our lives because we were dying, destroyed the lives of the grandparents of the young Japanese that I met.

It took me awhile to realize how very kind and polite the Japanese were that I met through Focusing. I discovered they had a 'tough sort of kindness', that I recognized once I let go of my old ideas. I have pictures of myself at the last conference in Holland with 2 young Japanese psychologists. I see in these pictures what I feel: confidence. Confidence that it is OK, that it doesn't matter where the good-willed people come from. What matters is that they are there, right in front of you.