

## GENE GENDLIN'S GIFT FOR CHILDREN

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*Lucy Bowers*

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*“Turn, turn, turn this world around for the children, turn this world around.”*

— Raffi's song

### THE EARLY LANDSCAPE

It is the early '60's and I am walking into my very first classroom on the first day of school to begin my career as school teacher. I greet the children, full of expectation as they quietly take their seats. “Hello boys and girls my name is...” and a young boy in the front seat interrupts me with an expletive. The class starts to laugh, and I leave the room. I pause in the hallway outside the door I have just closed behind me. I need to gather my composure while the children are becoming louder and rowdier. I have been rattled and am not certain about how to deal with the situation so soon upon the opening bell. I am about to enter with some new vague plan as to what to do and just then the principal walks up and into the room ahead of me. No questions asked, she walks directly to that boy and pulls him out of his seat, marches him with a firm grip by the arm into the office and commands me to follow. How did she know it was him?

I am instructed to observe how she does what she is about to do. I am to sign the book as the necessary witness to the punishment being dealt. A strap is pulled from her desk drawer. It is a flat, flexible black rubber strip, about 1 to 2 inches wide, perhaps a little more than a foot long and one side, roughly textured. I can still recall how it felt to hold it in my hand as I write this description.

The boy is given some serious smacks on each open hand, and they turn red. He has tears and winces, but does not make a sound. I am to take him back to the classroom, and my first day of teaching can now begin. The class is quiet and cooperative for the remainder of the day. I, in the meantime, am struggling with something going on inside me for which I do not yet have words. I know I had anxiety about coming into my first class that morning and even during the previous nights and days. But now I am totally uncomfortable and saddened with the surprise of all this unexpectedness, and there is tightness in my chest.

As the months go by this scenario is played out often for reasons that seem much smaller than the punishment suggests. This class is a grade two class. English is the second language for nearly 80 percent of the children, and there are 32 boys and 4 girls. The average age is 10 because each of these children had been held back at least twice since they began in Kindergarten at the age of 5. Many arrive at school with welts and bruises from a father's or an uncle's belt used for punishments at home for reasons I cannot begin to guess. The class is not doing well with the expectations in each of the subject areas, and these children are lacking in a broad range of experiences other than their lack of English.

By the end of the first month into my career, I am taught to give the strap. I am told it is my job to keep control over this problem class. Without having control over them they won't learn anything. I must cover the wrist so as not to cause damage. It is suggested I switch from hand to hand so that the time between the strapping allows the feeling back in, in this way each whack is more effective. At the end of October, I realize I am not meant for this type of work. I write my letter of resignation, to take effect by Christmas break and hand it in. I am ready to seek out what it is I am to do with the rest of my life.

During the month of November, I am spoken to at length to reconsider my request. At the same time, I am becoming attached to these children. I like them at a deep level. They are my very first class, and my sense of belonging there is growing in spite of me. I feel they need much in the way of patient, gentle, loving kindness, and I want so much for them to have an experience of that. My need to give it grows in proportion to the need I see. I realize that there is not one teacher with experience in that school who wants anything to do with these children. I become possessive and protective of them.

At one of those discussions around my impending resignation, I find myself making a deal. I would stay on for the year, but I am to be allowed to work with those children in the best way I know how. Most importantly no strap would be given by me or anyone else no matter what. The powers that be agree to these terms, and my letter of resignation is ripped up. I begin my teaching career in earnest.

By the end of that school year, I had bonded with these children and celebrated every little forward movement in their learning with them for six months. They became motivated and wonderfully cooperative. We were a tight group together against a confused and cruel world. I sobbed on the last day as we said goodbye, and my sadness was not mine alone. No expletives were heard, but instead a great improvement in English allowed the children to express their gratitude for our year together. They were also capable of communicating their sadness around our separation. I wished to continue on with this first class of mine the following year, but this was not encouraged, and I was made an offer at another school that was difficult to refuse.

## A CHANGING LANDSCAPE

In those early days of teaching young and vulnerable children, I was often heard to complain about the circumstance in which I found myself. "It shouldn't hurt to be a child" was my mantra whenever someone would listen to my stories of distress. "Children are resilient" was the response of the day. How much resilience would a child need to compensate for the gap in their development compared to other children who were loved, secure, well fed, nurtured and wanted? Learning much later from Eugene Gendlin about how lack of bodily awareness can allow situations or events to linger for a very long time, one needs to ask how that would affect resilience.

*"In Western countries, we have witnessed a tenfold increase in the incidence of depression across two generations in the twentieth century. And the disorder is*

*striking at younger and younger ages. When we were undergraduate students, our professors taught us that 10 percent of Americans experienced clinical depression at least once in their lives and that the first bout usually strikes in the late twenties or early thirties. And now we stand at the podium and regrettably report to our undergraduates that 20 percent of Americans will fall to clinical depression and that the epidemic is striking school-age children.”*

— Reivich and Shatte

This need led to some studies that attempted to address the lack of resilience which seemed to be a consequence of what was the experience of children both at home and at school. The early 90's saw the work of Dr. Martin Seligman and his students develop some programs to avoid depression in school children. In fact, overcoming the vulnerable childhood experienced by so many, who then use up the resilience with which they were born, can be successful in my opinion by adding Focusing to the educational experience.

My first class was an example of many painful lives being lived at a young age. The need for change was clear to many, yet was slow to be addressed. Children suffering from neglect, abandonment, physical, emotional and sexual abuse, continued to be in my classes as my career covered many decades of change. The family behaviour patterns were also ingrained and passed on from decade to decade. One sense of awareness changing was that the strap was deemed harmful as a manner of punishment in the schools of Ontario. With relief I can report that corporal punishment to keep control over children is no longer lawful. In 1968 a report on education in Ontario recommended this legal use of corporal punishment be ended. Yet it was not until 2005 that the Supreme Court of Canada ruled on it and outlawed this practice across Canada. What a long time between awareness and action!

If we look only at that one aspect of using a tool for discipline that was being condoned and encouraged, the question that lingers is, how much suffering is still being physically carried in the body long after the body healed the physical scars? This is just one small example of what was wrong in our understanding of how to relate to one another; one small indicator of how little we understood, and how great the lack of our awareness. The list of other types of abuses is lengthy and has permeated our culture for an extended period of time. During the seventies and eighties we saw a brief glimpse of possibilities appear, as education became more child centered and made attempts to meet glaring needs and deficiencies. Research was happening to teach us how children learn and how they fail. Happily, psychology was a young and fast growing field of science and study in the twentieth century. By the middle of it Carl Rogers, Abraham Maslow, and the work of Jean Piaget began to have direct influence on the field of education.

What are the scars these children from my first class might still bear now that they are in their 50's? I often wonder, especially when listening to someone in their 50's during a Focusing session. It often happens that some childhood experience comes forward painfully, with the awareness that it has been held in the body all these decades. I watch tears that have aged for decades flow; tears that might have been allowed or acknowledged in the moment. How did that memory, held there, influence or even change the choices, the relationships

and the paths taken along the way? How could the relationship with parents have been more loving?

What is it that teachers needed to help build a non-threatening and nurturing learning environment? How could children find a safe place to learn if the school reflects all these painful and anxious experiences children often have in their very own homes? Should schools not be havens and a refuge from those societal ills being passed on from generation to generation? From where could the role modeling come? How could anyone affect change even if it was needed? Would change be from administration or teachers?

About the same time that I began questioning what I was experiencing as a teacher, Eugene Gendlin as a philosophy student at the University of Chicago was becoming curious about what constitutes healthy therapy and asking the questions that needed to be explored.

*“Why doesn’t therapy succeed more often? Why does it so often fail to make a difference in people’s lives? In the rarer cases when it does succeed, what is it that those patients and therapists do? What is it that the majority fail to do?”*

— E.T. Gendlin

Thanks to his explorations at the University of Chicago, Focusing became a gift to a world that was desperate for a fresh new way of seeing, feeling, and doing. I have come to believe that with those shifts from felt sensing that Focusing offers, it is never too late to have that elusive “happy childhood” so few of us had.

In my early teaching years, my philosophy of education at that time, was forming under the influence of Rachel Carson. Back in 1956 she had written the following words that captured my heart.

*“A child’s world is fresh and new and beautiful, full of wonder and excitement. It is our misfortune that for most of us that clear-eyed vision, that true instinct for what is beautiful and awe inspiring, is dimmed and lost before we even reach adulthood. If I had influence with the good fairy who is supposed to preside over the christening of all children I should ask that her gift to each child in the world be a sense of wonder so indestructible that it would last throughout life, as an unfailing antidote against the boredom and disenchantment of later years, the sterile preoccupation with things that are artificial, the alienation from the sources of our strength.”*

— Rachel Carson

How I longed to find ways to make Rachel Carson’s wish come true! It seemed so important for the many underprivileged, abused, and hurting students that I was becoming closely bonded with throughout the years. There were countless stumbling blocks to their learning. How could I make a difference in their lives to offer them more success in their

social lives, more growth in their intellectual development, stability in their emotional landscapes, and some controls over their behavioural impulses? Twenty years after I began my career as a classroom teacher and had become the mother of three children, I was introduced to Focusing. Here is where my philosophy of education collided with a new practice and found a way to merge into something new, exciting, and wonder-filled. Focusing was “beautiful and awe-inspiring!” Focusing nurtured my “sense of wonder!” What a paradigm shift in the way I began to experience my world! I was captivated and became totally involved in learning everything I could about Focusing, practicing it passionately, and by invitation from my two teachers, I also began to teach it.

The old adage, “We teach best what we need to know most”, exactly fits my experience. I learned much from my classroom students over the years, and now my Focusing students are teaching me how to deepen into the practice. The trust I felt connecting to my body just grew and grew. Yes indeed there was a wisdom inside, and I loved the discovery of it bit by bit. It was inevitable that this practice in my life would leak out of me and into my work. I describe how easily and fluidly that happened in an article published in the *Staying In Focus* newsletter in 2001 September.

## **MORE INFLUENCES FOR MOMENTUM**

At about the same time, Jack Miller in Toronto was researching and writing about the desperate need for the body mind connection that was missing in the classroom. He cited a large body of research that showed the consequences of an educational system that emphasized those body mind divisions. For example he used the work of James Lynch (1985) who was discovering how little people were aware of the bodily changes they were undergoing during various moments of anxiety, anger, sadness, etc. Miller proposed using visualizations and meditation as a way to have students improve creativity. These were among many proposals for teaching the whole child.

Meanwhile I was using Focusing in the classroom with my students and noticing an increase in creative writing and a rise in interest for learning. Inquisitive parents began to come to my Focusing workshops. The reverse is happening today. I am retired from the classroom. Now I offer workshops to parents who begin to find ways to use Focusing with their children at home. I give workshops to teachers who are finding many creative ways to use Focusing in the classroom. In my opinion, the key to using Focusing as an adult who is interacting with a child in any capacity is to have a deep understanding of Focusing and making it a practice in their personal lives. The all important *Felt Sense* is the best guide for the next step in any given situation. The *Focusing Attitude* and the practice of “presence” create the climate for a child to feel heard, valued, and for shifts to take place and indeed they do.

*“I sometimes think the primary deed of the parent is to see the beauty and grace of children. Children are magnificent, gorgeous beyond telling. They themselves have no idea of what beauty they embody. Can you see the tragedy*

*of a child with no one to feel and cherish its beauty? No one to fall in love with this magnificent creature? No one to celebrate its splendor?"*

— Brian Swimme

“Elevator Rides”, a specific method to teach children a way to connect to their physical bodies, was for me a successful, simple, child-friendly (and fun) way to allow children a safe way to go inside, observe, experience, and come to know their own stories from within. This worked well from about age 5 to 9. It came from the joy that all children exhibit when stories are read to them. They are enchanted by the flow of a story that holds them gently and finds resonance with places that live inside them, touching these at the level of their own short life experiences and deeper.

The art of learning involves three all-important components, skills, knowledge, and affect. All the affect needed for learning and providing the “glue” to make the skills and knowledge “stick” can be found in a good story. When children connect to stories outside of themselves, the effects are profound. When children design their very own elevators, they can go inside themselves and explore the stories that are their very own stories, then we actually can observe change in behavior; stumbling blocks to learning also seem to dissipate over time. The Elevator is safe because the child is in control of the process. They design it in the way they want it to look and the control panel becomes very important. Each child can make the elevator go up or down or sideways or in fact, anywhere in their bodies that they would like to visit and spend some time.

However they know the two most important buttons in the elevator are marked STORY and STOP. When they decide to push the STORY button, they know that the elevator will just go where it wants, and they sit back to notice what happens. After years of observing children and having them share their stories, I know from experience that *a lot happens*. When they feel overwhelmed, they stop. One little boy, whose mother was undergoing chemotherapy and thinking she would die, shared, “If I don’t like the story going on, I sometimes flip the story button like a remote and go to another channel in my body to watch that for a while.” The stories in there are always about the body. “Then I can go back to the first one when I get curious about it again.” (The mechanics of doing such an activity as Elevator Rides with children, can be found in the newsletter *Staying in Focus*, and is referenced below.)

By age ten, children seem to need new ways to be introduced to Focusing, and happily there are many people experimenting with those ways. Marta Stapert’s book *Focusing With Children*, just translated into English, provides many such wonderful examples. (See bookstore at [www.focusing.org](http://www.focusing.org))

One important aspect I have learned from Focusing with children is how valuable the follow-up activity is. The importance of symbolizing their felt sense experiences in some ways with a variety of materials such as clay, paint, pastels, crayons, cutting and pasting collages, etc. allows the process to continue unfolding where words fail to fit or are lacking. I now use it for ages 5 to adult as a way to allow the felt sense to unfold with or without explicit meaning. Also as another follow-up activity, the use of journaling entices children, tentative

in their ability to write and read to take more risks, an important quality to enhance learning. Children noticed quickly without needing to say anything that there was an intrinsic reward for them in these practices, and their increased motivation verified it.

The community aspect of the classroom also begins to grow as social interactions seem to be much less troubled by conflict. Self regulation lacking in some children seems to improve. Cooperation and understanding are becoming an important part of the “community feel” of the classroom as a result of children not only connecting to their own bodies and the “stories” lying in wait for them to explore, but also a softening towards each other in the sharing. In preparation for a challenging or stressful activity, such as a spelling or math test, a quick check in beforehand often helps find a place where the confidence was hiding and the anxiety could disappear. Self-esteem seems to be enhanced in a variety of ways when we observed the confidence growing.

### **CONNECTING THREADS OF EXPLORATION**

When I was beginning to find ways to have Focusing spread throughout classrooms based on the rewards of my own experience, I was not yet connected to the Focusing Institute. I was a regional coordinator for the Bio Spiritual Institute and being encouraged to move forward and continue with my own explorations with children by Ed McMahon and Peter Campbell. Marianne Thompson, a mother in California, was certainly inspiring me as she had been walking that path with her own children, using Focusing with them from an early age. *The Little Bird*, written by Ed for Mary Ann’s daughter, has recently been published and is a marvelous tool to use with children. It is also available from the Focusing Institute’s bookstore online.

It was many years later when I connected with the Institute and found Marta Stapert, who was doing so much work with her husband, Ynse, to further this vision of having Focusing available for children in schools and at home. Little did I know that Mary McGuire, just up the road in my own country, was attempting to get into the schools and teach Focusing as a valuable tool for elementary classrooms. I am not certain, but had I had these contacts when I was just beginning to tentatively set foot on new ground, would the support of those others have been helpful to me to further and deepen my search in how to move Focusing further in schools? I do know that my experiences over the years, and those shared by other teachers and parents daring to use Focusing with children, would agree with me about some outcomes that I have learned to identify. It feels crucial that the sharing of our experience with others doing similar work is observed and acted upon.

### **OUTCOMES AND POSSIBILITIES**

On one occasion, an incident in a classroom I was visiting demonstrates an outcome of using Focusing with a child. It was the second day of a new class; the children were 8 and 9 years old. It was recess time, and they were playing outside when I spied a boy with a very pointed stick and an angry look, threaten another child near the face. These children knew nothing about the “Elevator Rides” I had used regularly in my classroom, and I had no idea

what I planned to do. However, I asked the teacher to join me and decided my very strong felt sense would guide me. I had a major concern that the little boy could do harm from the look on his face. She took the one child out of harm's way as she told me that the day before there had been three incidents of conflict, each one escalating, with this particular child (whom I'll call Jason).

Jason turned to me and threatened to stab me. He was angry, hot, and sweaty. I reflected back to him what I was seeing. "My my, Jason, you are so hot and sweaty. It looks like you are very angry about something." He continued holding the stick and snarling at me, not wanting to back down. I stayed within three feet or so and gently worked towards standing beside him instead of in front. He was not letting that happen. He wanted to be in front of me, holding up his very pointed stick towards my face. I kept repeating over and over what I saw. "You are so hot and sweaty, Jason, and so angry."

I did have a compassionate tone of voice, although he did not know me at all.

As we were doing this little dance-like movement to alter positions, I told him I wanted to stay with him to keep him safe while he needed to be angry. He must have felt surprise that I never once asked for the stick. I knew I did not want to change anything — just to keep him company so that he could make the necessary change.

I repeated over and over what I saw. The importance of reflecting this back showed, as I began to sense the intensity of the situation slowly decreasing. Suddenly, he broke down sobbing.

The teacher who had kept the other children far from the scene saw this and went inside to retrieve Jason's teddy bear. (It had been a special day for all the children to bring in their favourite toy from when they were little.)

As soon as he saw his bear, he grabbed it angrily, buried his face into it and sat on the ground. The stick was lying beside him, and I sat down opposite him reflecting back to him how sad he seemed. He spent nearly two minutes crying loudly into this large well worn bear. With much anguish in his voice, he blurted out to me that the boy made him mad because he had touched his bear in the classroom. By now the rest of the class had been brought inside by the teacher. I sensed Jason was relieved not to be there with them. I asked if we could just sit quietly with his bear for a little while, and he nodded his agreement.

He moaned quietly, rocking back and forth and then his teacher came out. She reported to him in a frustrated voice, that his mother had been called because of the threat he had made to the other boy. She wanted him to know how serious his actions had been.

Jason's anger came back in an instant as he held his bear in one hand and grabbed the stick once more in the other. I signaled the teacher to stay and observe us.

Lucy: *Jason I see your anger came back.*

Jason: *Yes! He said angrily.*

Lucy: *Where is that anger living in your body?*

No response but his face was once again buried into the bear as he put the stick down.

Lucy: *Is your bear angry too?*

No response

Lucy: *Do you think the anger might be coming from inside your feet?*

No response

Lucy: *I wonder if it is in your tummy?*

No response

Lucy: *Well I wondered because sometimes when I get angry I feel it in my tummy.*

Jason: [His head shot up with all the anger he could muster, and he retorted loudly] ***It's in my hands!***

At this point I invited him to let me feel how his hands felt. He willingly reached them out to me with a gesture that did not show anger. I held them gently and told him I noticed how hot they were. We sat like that for quite some time as his hands became hotter and hotter. Then I decided to ask if he could let the anger go into my hands?

(I recalled two little boys in my kindergarten class had concluded their conflict one time by sitting face-to-face and holding hands. After a few minutes, the perpetrator announced he had let his new friend have his anger and the other boy had given him his sadness. "It went right out of our hands!" he had said with surprise and delight in his voice. They were the best of friends after that.)

Jason continued holding hands with me and nodded yes to my invitation. His face looked more sad than angry at this point. I reassured him that I could hold his anger and keep it for him so no one would get hurt. While we sat holding hands, they felt less hot, and Jason looked calmer. I continued reflecting back to him what I saw and what I felt.

Lucy: *Your hands do not seem so hot any more...*

Lucy: *Jason, you don't have that sweat dripping down your face any more.*

[He nodded his agreement.]

Lucy: *Jason, your hands don't feel so hot anymore. Is the anger all in my hands now?*

Jason: *Almost!*

I told him I would keep his anger for a while, and if he needed it back when he was going home, I could possibly give it back. He smiled gently while still holding my hands and said, "No thank you." That was when he released my hands. Jason announced in a composed manner that he wanted to go inside now, and so his teacher took him back in.

I spent the day visiting, and there were no more incidents. I was told the remainder of that week was also calm for Jason. I later learned he had struggled all that summer and much

of the first 5 months of school because of his parents separating and having a custody battle over him and his baby brother. The teacher was excited to learn something about the Focusing Attitude and listening to the felt sense. It became a support for her through subsequent situations in her class.

No matter the age of the child, it has been my observation that Focusing and experiencing the Felt Sense have offerings of forward movement even when the content or the issues are not obvious. There appears to be more self control over emotions that have potential to overwhelm children. There is a trust building that connecting to the body offers a child, desperate for some control, over a world of dependency, with few choices. The listening to their own bodies in this process seems also to allow for more independence as their trust grows. More respect for others and enhanced self worth become evident in the climate of the classroom. Problem solving also becomes less challenging because that in the framework of curriculum based issues or at a personal level as their confidence increases.

Children develop in ways that are physical, intellectual, emotional, social, and spiritual. Focusing appears to affect some movement in their development in each of these areas. One teacher tells about a little boy who would ask on occasion, "I want to stay in with you at recess to do an Elevator Ride. Can I?"

He was 6 years old and inevitably would sit quietly for less than a minute and suddenly smack his hand rather loudly up against his forehead or his temple or sometimes at the back of his head. Then, he would sit and hold it where it landed. One could see him ease up bit by bit over the next 3, possibly 4 minutes. Then almost as suddenly he might say, "It's ok now, can I go out to play?" and all seemed to be well. Off he would go and that would be the end of it. The teacher's felt sense kept her from asking questions, but she was certainly curious.

One beautiful spring day the teacher was moved to ask him if he really needed to stay in. She told him she had some concerns with the way he smacked his head every time, and after all it was such a lovely day. He looked at her carefully and said, "But that is where my elevator takes me!" No more needed to be said.

As the school year came to a close the mother came in to tell the teacher that the little boy would not be able to finish out the year. She had moved into a shelter with her two children because of serious repeated physical abuse and traumas. She had grown brave enough after too many hits across the head, especially in front of the children. It was interesting that this little boy had never disclosed that part of his home life experience.

I share this story with a sense of mystery about how all that had happened affected change for this little boy. As long as he was in the class, there was never a situation involving his acting out with anger, bullying, or using physical violence. Could it be that those few minutes, whenever he needed to sit with someone who cared, was enough to process whatever emotions were being carried in his little body? My wish is to have some evidence-based projects. There is just so much potential here to study and create forward movement. That is my hope for our educational systems. However hope is not a strategy and that is what is called for today.

There have been many programs in schools helping to meet the needs of children that are so obviously calling out to be addressed. One such program is called Roots of Empathy that began here in Toronto. Begun by Mary Gordon, a kindergarten teacher with a vision to make a difference, the program now has international status. Coming out of her belief for making sustainable change happen for children, she felt that the schools were the right place to begin. Roots of Empathy involves visits to classrooms from kindergarten to Grade 8 for children to interact with an infant from the neighborhood. Over the course of the school year, the students get to know the baby and observe the changes that are visible between the ages of 2 or 4 months until they become 1 year old or more. The visits are an important catalyst for the program and the curriculum in which each of the grades is immersed. The program fits beautifully into the busy schedule of teachers and enhances all aspects of learning. The children learn something about different rates of development for individuals and are able to relate to the various stages. They can respect unique and individual differences and celebrate accomplishments. Through their observations and discussions they are learning and experiencing empathy. This is a wonderful template for finding a way to have Focusing enter into the elementary schools.

One teacher I know is using the felt sense within the program to take it further or to deepen the growing awareness and resonance to the child's own life. "How does it feel in your body when you are holding this baby? When the baby comes into the room where do you feel something inside you? When the baby leaves? When the baby cries?" What a grand way to introduce Focusing and then have it available for other times in the life of the classroom. How hopeful it would be if programs such as this one, successful and growing around the world, and those programs still waiting to be developed that involve Focusing, could become standard components of the educational setting globally.

Roots of Empathy has moved forward in this enterprise because there was a need and the need was addressed quite simply. Focusing can do the same if enough people want to share the vision and make it happen. It too, is simple and easy to incorporate into existing programs. I am encouraging those who have been doing Focusing, be it in the classroom or at home to begin sharing their experiences. Please go on to the discussion list and let us have the conversations we need to have world wide, so that our common vision can grow. (To post to the discussion list, send an email to: [Focusing-Children@lists.focusinglists.org](mailto:Focusing-Children@lists.focusinglists.org))

Now at this time with so many resources we are coming to a place of holistic learning where the whole child is being considered. Imagine how that could change the outcomes both during school life and after a student leaves school?

## **THE VERY YOUNG AS A GOOD PLACE TO START**

Children younger than five and those who are preverbal need to experience the *Focusing Attitude* so that shifts can take place for them as early as possible. In some ways the child/toddler/baby is experienced by the adult as a felt sense is experienced, compassionately, empathically and lovingly without a quality of looking for a fix-it solution. The following is from Zach Boukydis who has done years of research and Focusing in particular with infants.

*“The Focusing-Oriented approach is based on twenty-five years of clinical work and consultation on the parent-infant relationship, and extensive research on parent-infant interaction and the meaning system which develops between parents and infants. The approach is based on a model of empathic relations between parents and infants (Boukydis, 1982) which includes parents’ direct reference to their “felt sense” or bodily felt intuition in interactions with their infants; recovering the capacity to use bodily felt meaning in the relationship; and the importance of preverbal sensory and emotional communication between infant and parent. A whole method of practice for the Focusing-Oriented approach has been developed (Boukydis, 1990).”*

This approach is worth reading about at [www.focusing.org](http://www.focusing.org) in the Children’s Corner for those who are interested to find out more.

The following is a story from a grandmother who learned Focusing and demonstrates here the “preverbal and sensory communication between infant and grandparent”. Here is the story in her own words as she shared it with me.

“My Focusing experience was with my little granddaughter around 18 months old and not yet speaking more than 4 to 6 words. She had been left with me on a Thursday morning as I usually looked after her during the day. However this time she was being left until Sunday evening. Nothing seemed to be a problem until bath time Saturday night. Suddenly, this naked little toddler did not wish to get into the bath tub. She leapt out and began to scream and throw around everything she could get her hands on. She attacked me with the toilet brush and tried to throw the plunger. I was flabbergasted and began to experience my own heartache, a physical tightness uncomfortably increasing as I was there trying to keep this little one safe from her own temper tantrum. She was wet and slippery and not wanting to be held. She struggled fiercely to get out of the confines of the bathroom.

I sat on the floor in front of the door and attended quietly to the heartache I was having. Immediately upon checking inside my body, the image of a large heavy sewer grate that had been lifted from its position came into my awareness. There was a sense that it was the symbol for anger that had been keeping some huge sadness from coming up and out. The size and the substance of this grate just seemed to match the size and substance of the temper tantrum unfolding. The meaning of the image came so suddenly that it surprised me to hear my voice say out loud, “You miss Mommy don’t you?”

The change was immediate as the toddler stopped the anger and dissolved into sobs and tears across my chest while I was sitting on the floor. I held her and cried with her for what seemed like a good ten minutes before there was a second shift. When the crying was over, she went into the bath without a word, to play with the toys there. She was even singing after a few minutes. There were no more incidents after that. The lack of language ability did not allow for any verbal follow up or explanations. It was enough to have been present and to state the problem out loud as it came from my Felt Sense. The response from the child affirmed that the correct words had been found even though they were not available to the child.”

## FROM HOPE TO STRATEGY

“What the mind can conceive and what the mind can believe, the mind can achieve.” I do not know who first said those words but my felt sense fully agrees with them.

If and when our children have the benefits of Focusing, the world will be a different place from generation to generation. It may well be that what the world needs is to experience a paradigm shift, so hope for survival as a species and as a planet can be nurtured. Global peace can easily be conceived with the help of Focusing. It is with deep gratitude for the development of Focusing by Dr. Eugene Gendlin that this hope can be imagined within our grasp today. Please join me in finding some strategies in moving forward what has begun and with such momentum. I leave you to ponder my plea with some words from *The Prisoner* by Christopher Fry.

“...our time has come,  
When wrong comes up to meet us everywhere.  
Never to leave us,  
till we take the greatest strides of soul we ever took...  
...But what are we waiting for?  
It takes a thousand years to wake.  
But will you wake...for pity's sake?

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