

AGING'S MUSIC: Aging and Co-Aging in a Focusing Marriage

Jane and Dave Young, LCSW

We are never just Aging, that is, Aging individually . . . Aging as *me-ing*. We are always also Co-Aging, that is, Aging-*with* others, especially with those we love . . . Co-Aging as *we-ing*. (We use *me-ing* and *we-ing* to highlight that, as humans, we are not object-bodies, but rather on-going embodying processes.) In our Aging/*me-ing* and in our Co-Aging/*we-ing*, we are dancing to the larger Aging-Process, a natural aspect of Living, which we call Aging's Music. Aging's Music, of course, is universal to all of us who live long enough, in fact, universal to all that is living. And each of us dances to Aging's Music in our own unique, individual and creative ways, guided by ourselves, by others with whom we are bonded, by our circumstances, including our past and our hopes, and perhaps guided by Living itself — all together as one whole.

As a Focusing couple for over 25 years, one of us, Jane, has travelled into her 80's, into what we call Serious-Aging. Serious-Aging is individual Aging or *me-ing* — Aging that can't be ignored, especially where it often seriously impinges on Living. While Dave has lagged behind in his *me-ing* — not quite 60 — he is still Aging, though not yet Serious-Aging. Our differences in Aging have given us, as Aging individuals (*me-ings*) and as a Co-Aging couple (*we-ing*), a greater felt awareness of Aging's Music. (For more on *me-ing* and *we-ing* see Young 2008.) Three years ago, after Jane took a bad fall, we faced the near-prospect of her death — a strain of Aging's Music to which someday we all will dance. So in this paper, we want to *felt-sense* and to think carefully into the many edges of our individual Agings, our couple's Co-Aging, and our experiencing of Aging's Music.

PRELUDE: INTRODUCING A FEW SIMPLE “PHILOSOPHY OF THE IMPLICIT” TUNES

Eugene Gendlin says that nothing alive ever only is, but always *is-and-implies* (Gendlin 2007, p.1). By this odd phrase, Gendlin helps us recognize how living is never finished; it is always implying something more, something further. He uses the term, “implying forward”, to say how living always implies “its” next steps. Aging's Music, now for us, is an increasingly insistent aspect of our Living's music — it is a process with its own implying and with its own often strong felt-directions.

In the opening to *A Process Model*, Gendlin (1997a) says, “Body and environment are one, but of course only in certain respects” (p.1). Further he says, “The main ‘environment’ of any animal is its species members, other animals like it . . . We must not take the physical environment as our basic model of environment” (p.5). As humans, then, our primary “environment” is other people, especially those we love, those with whom we are bonded. (For more on bonding, see Young 2008, esp. pp. 239-44.) So we are continually embodying not only our individual selves, not only *me-ing*. Quite literally, “in certain respects”, we are

also always embodying our living-*with* others, especially loved and bonded others — our *we-ing*.

In fact, we are always a mix of the two: a mix of *me-ing* and *we-ing*, a mix of Aging and Co-Aging. For example, when Jane is tired and needs more sleep, because she's 82, I don't have to go to sleep with her — that is her own Serious-Aging, her *me-ing*. However, while she is sleeping longer, I often try to stay in bed with her, to accompany her and to have her *with-me*, as much as I can — that's our Co-Aging, our *we-ing*. So often Jane and I find ourselves living the truth of Gendlin's complex understanding of "one whole process": "We find a pattern I might call 'many making one,' in which the many and the one mutually determine each other." (1997a; emphasis Gendlin's, p. 35.)

Here "many making one" becomes our one whole process of irreducible *me-ing*/Aging and equally irreducible *we-ing*/Co-Aging, all dancing together to the rhythms of the Aging's Music. All these are "mutually determining each other". All these — both the many and the one — not only "are", but also always "are-and-imply" next steps forward, including not only our individual's and couple's next steps forward, but also the Aging-Process's next steps forward.

Thus to say that all our embodying is also implying us forward into next steps is not so odd after all. But the process is complex and multi-faceted. Together our Aging/Serious-Aging and our Co-Aging are dancing, as it were, to Aging's Music, all set within Life's larger symphony.

In Cicero's *On Aging*, young Laelius asks Cato the Elder (Cicero, 1923), "Unless it is too much trouble to you, Cato, since you have, as it were, travelled the long road upon which we also must set out, we really do wish to see what sort of a place it is . . ." (p. 15)

Jane: *I don't know if anyone wants to know or not.*

Dave: *Why?*

Jane: *I don't think I ever thought about Aging. I didn't think of Aging as related to me. And I had enough of it around me, growing up, so I wasn't anxious to learn more.*

Dave: (grins) *Your live-in grandmother didn't age well. So we keep quiet to protect people?*

Jane: (chuckles, then turns serious) *I don't know why people would want to know.*

Dave: (thinks for a while) *For me, there are two reasons now. Most important, I want to know about your Aging, your Serious-Aging, so I can be a better part of it, a better companion to you. So we can have a better life together, in our Co-Aging. Does that make sense?*

Jane: *Oh, yes.*

Dave: *Some of our readers may want that, too, in their Co-Aging. And. . . it's not exactly that I want to be prepared for my own Serious-Aging. Because I think Serious-Aging is always in some ways a surprise. But. . . I want to live my life, as I'm Aging, so I can have the best Serious-Aging possible. Understanding more and being better at Co-Aging with you might help.*

Next is a snippet from our life — a simple experiencing of Serious-Aging and Co-Aging. Afterwards we introduce ourselves and our expertise, both as Focusers and as a bonded couple, well travelled on Serious-Aging's long road. Then we set forth more carefully Aging, Serious-Aging, Co-Aging and the Aging-Process or Aging's Music as a "Music/dancings" concept.

Jane: *As you read this, I'm still wondering if anyone will be interested.*

Dave: *Kevin, our editor, says it's interesting.*

Jane: *He's not old enough to be worried yet.*

Dave: (laughs)

The Aging-Process as we live it always includes what we are calling 'double-dancings'. One kind of double-dancing we have noticed is our *me-ing*/Aging and Serious-Aging with our *we-ing*/Co-Aging. Double-dancings always involve both what is individual, unique and *me-ing*, as well as what is shared, universal and *we-ing*. In this way, double-dancing expresses Gendlin's "Body and environment are one, but only in certain respects" (Gendlin 1997a, p. 1). Aging's Music, too, is always both universal to us all and unique to each person, time, place. Double-dancings also always include what is explicit, what is actually happening — along with what is implicit, what is implying and *felt-sensing*. Together this double-dancing expresses Gendlin's "is-and-implies".

These double-dancings are always happening together, showing a more intricate and diverse zig-zagging. Gendlin often uses "zig-zagging" to describe Focusing. Zig-zagging is moving back-and-forth between the *felt-sensing* and words, images, music, gestures and other explicit symbolizing. (For more on zig-zagging, see Gendlin 2004a and "Preface", 2nd ed., Gendlin 1997e.) Thus this double-dancings of *me-ing* and *we-ing* create a broadened Focusing that may help with more than just the Aging-Process.

SERIOUS-AGING, CO-AGING AND AGING'S MUSIC: AN EARLY MORNING FOCUSING INTERLUDE

As usual, I get up in the morning before Jane. I give her the pre-breakfast pills, and while she goes back to sleep, I finish some editing. Then as is our pattern, I start breakfast. Most vitally, I get her coffee ready. When I walk into our bedroom, coffee in hand, Jane is awake.

"I was lying here," Jane says, "thinking how nice it is that you're out there in the cabin, and not going to work today."

"And I was thinking," I reply, "how nice it is that you're here, and that we have some time together. And I'm needing you to help write our article — after coffee and breakfast."

I help her up and into her warm moccasins and purple terry-cloth robe. Before coffee and breakfast, Jane is a bit groggy.

Jane says, "I'm a mess."

"My mess," I answer.

We laugh — our standard joke.

Jane frowns. "I'm not sure I'll have anything to say."

I chuckle. "It's always like that in the morning. You'll do better after your coffee and breakfast. And after your wake-up ritalin pill."

I go to the little kitchen in our small cabin at 8,000 feet on Pikes Peak. We are on a north face, so in February, there is not much direct sun. But there is lots of light, even when it is cloudy. We have glass sliding doors in almost every room, with two in our living room. Jane sits on the couch, looking across the way — a glorious mountain view of our valley.

"The snow's gone already," she says.

I'm making our typical breakfast: sausage, eggs, over a variable *salsa fresca* — today avocados, red peppers, tomatoes, red onions and sprouts. From April into November, I pick fresh wild greens and edible flowers. In summer, I pick wild strawberries, gooseberries, currants, and red raspberries.

As we often do, we stop a moment to admire our view. We've talked about moving down-mountain and into the small city. There, Jane could get out more and be closer to stores, maybe be more independent. But we keep coming back to staying here. "Here" is so much a part of our life for the past 15 years. "Here" has so much beauty. "Here" is our home where we've nested and done so many things together. "Here" holds so much of our life as a couple, our *we-ing*. We don't want the loss of our "here" added to Aging's other losses.

Jane: *That happens to older people all the time — losing their home. That's a serious loss.*

Can you glimpse Jane's Serious-Aging and our Co-Aging? These emerge from and interact with each other and with Aging's insistent, sometimes relentless, even brutal music. And all this nestles within our Life's larger process. Jane's Serious-Aging shows up in her being not nearly as active as I am. She is also further limited by her poor eyesight, linked to her Serious-Aging, and by her recent brain injury, which we discuss below. With all that, she is more dependent on me and on her daughter, Leslie, who now lives with us. In another true way, in my Co-Aging, I keenly feel how much of my life is bound up in and how much I am "dependent" on Jane. Simply put, much of my life — both *felt-sensing* and explicit — is our life together, our *we-ing*.

Jane's Serious-Aging has more than a "not nearly as active as me" quality. She, I, and *we* also face impending, implying losses — here specifically, our beautiful cabin home. And with all Serious-Aging, implied throughout are more losses, including, finally, death.

Jane: (nods) *Yes.*

Next, as we introduce ourselves, adding more of our lived richness into our terms — Aging, Serious-Aging, Co-Aging and Aging's Music — you may wish to stop, periodically, to add your own experiences, your own lived richness to these terms, making them more experientially yours.

INTRODUCING JANE AND DAVE: OUR FOCUSING, OUR SERIOUS-AGING, AND OUR CO-AGING.

Jane and I met in August 1983, at my first, her second Gendlin Focusing weekend. Together, we became Focusing partners and Hyde Park Changes leaders, then Focusing trainers at Gene's and at Ed McMahon and Pete Campbell's Focusing workshops. Within a year we were living together, and later we were married in Yosemite Park, with Ed and Pete officiating. A Focusing love story. And like all Focusing and all love stories, there were some unique twists. One unique twist is our ages — Jane is now 82, I'm 59.

Jane: *You need to include that, recently, one of your clients saw me and said, "She can't be in her 80's." I think that's the best compliment I've had in years.*

At differing life stages, Aging's Music for us has heightened awareness and rich crossings, especially in our Co-Aging.

Jane: *What do you mean by Co-Aging? That we're both getting older?*

Dave: *That, too, but more. I'm affected, in many ways, by your Serious-Aging. And you're affected by my being younger.*

Jane: (laughs) *And occasionally I'm affected by your being kind of "poopy". Worrying about you kept me up last night.*

Dave: (chuckles) *Yeah, my activity can get over-active and worrying. In our Co-Aging, I'm much more aware of death. Because your death is a death of part me — my death. Plus with my being younger — I think you work harder to keep up with me.*

Jane: (laughs) *I think mostly I'm lucky to have a strong body, because I grew up on the farm.*

Dave: *True. And because I'm more involved in things like my work, this helps you stay more involved. Though you have your own involvements, which I don't share, such as the news.*

Jane: (thinks for some time) *And we're both involved with our kids and grandkids.*

Dave: *Yes. They keep us involved in life and the future. Their future. Which is kind of our future, too, through them.*

Jane: (nods . . .)

Three years ago, Jane fell some 15 feet off our deck. Over several days she descended into non-responsiveness, nearly dying from traumatic brain injury (TBI). Thus Jane, Dave and our family were brought up against her death. Afterwards, we kept a sense that there is only a certain amount of time left. This fragility has companioned us with its *presencing* — like the 'background feeling' some Focusers encounter, which is always implicitly and often explicitly there.

Jane's eyes, deteriorating from macular degeneration, leave their own '*always there*' mark. This makes reading difficult, driving impossible, and everyday living harder — its own Serious-Aging *presencing*. Jane's remarkable, on-going recovery from her TBI brings gifts, drawing us closer together and showing that even Serious-Aging never means only dying and a hovering sense of time-left. Our Co-Aging also implies more living, especially

more living-together, more *we-ing*. Indeed, Co-Aging, with Jane's Serious-Aging, impels us more into our *we-ing*.

Also from Jane's fall is her expressive aphasia. She understands words, but she often has trouble finding the 'usual' or commonly used word. So she is forced to spontaneously create her own terms. Her spontaneous terms often have expressive power, such as a term you'll meet later in this article, "ungrown-up".

Our experience of Aging, Co-Aging and Aging's Music can become hard, even grim. Yet as you have already read, our life is often playful, loving and more. Being aware, not just of our Aging/Co-Aging, but also of our Living/Co-Living — a process we sense as larger than Aging — gives us a fuller grasp of what is also real and true.

Now we set forth more carefully Aging, Co-Aging and Aging's Music as what we call a Music/dancings concept. Through Music/dancings, we hope to better show the paradoxical tensions, balancing and harmonizing between the one: *we-ing/Co-Aging*, and the many: *me-ings/our Aging* and Serious-Aging . . . all this dancing to Aging's Music.

MUSIC/DANCINGS: BOTH SHARED AND UNIQUE

We define two key aspects (roles, functions, purposes) of Music/dancings:

Interweaving One and Many.

Irreducibly Each, Irreducibly One

These two aspects have much overlapping and inter-affecting. But considering them separately, we can better see roles played by our *me-ings* and *we-ings* in our Agings and Co-Aging.

Interweaving One and Many: *we-ing/Co-Aging* and *me-ings/Agings*

Music/dancings have what Gendlin calls a "string" of two incompatibilities (opposites, contradictions, paradoxes) such as *me-ing* and *we-ing*. Notice the string we've just written: incompatibilities (opposites, contradictions, paradoxes).

In "Thinking Beyond Patterns" (1991), Gendlin sets up "strings" as a concept-and-practice: ". . . a string of different words that could come into (be used in, make, re-make, say) a slot [a or a felt-sense's *implying*]. [*Brackets are Dave's elaboration.] Each word says the whole string [all of the other words], and it says the Each [individual word or phrase] has its own way of saying more of that slot, [that]. The slot continues to function in how we can go on to say more . . . The string of words lets the function as more to think further." (p. 59)

In a string, the words *cross*. Briefly, *crossing* is closely related to several Gendlin concepts: *interacting first*, *unseparated multiplicity*, *evev-ing* and *many making one*. Experientially, I can feel my felt-sensing develop (change, build, grow, synthesize, integrate, create, evolve) as it *crosses* with more terms and their experiences. Notice that, in a

string, there is also a dance between the one (the ...) and the many (the individual words and the unique way they each say the ...). (For more on crossing, see esp. Gendlin 1995, Gendlin 1997b and Gendlin 1991.)

As an experiential exercise, let's use the string, "incompatibilities (opposites, contradictions, paradoxes ...)". Allow a felt-sense to form about "incompatibilities", recalling not only the "word", but also specific times you've experienced "incompatibilities". As your felt-sense settles, one at a time, add each word/experience into that string: first "opposites", then "contradictions", and then "paradoxes." Can you feel how each word expands your felt-sense? Each word/term both affects and is affected by . . . it "inter-affects" the previous individual words *and* carries forward the felt-sense as a whole. Now go back to your felt-sense of "all that" in "contradictions" (...). Allow your own words or short phrases to come. Notice with their coming, how your felt-sense develops (changes, builds, grows, synthesizes, integrates, creates, evolves ...). The more terms and experiences that are *crossing*, especially the more "different" terms and experiences, the richer and the more-opening your felt-sense of "all that" becomes.

Many different terms and many different experiences can express and *cross* in *felt-sensing* the term "One and many". Let us make a string, which you can enlarge:

- one and many
- continuing and changing
- whole and part
- theory and practice
- universal and individual or unique
- common or shared and separate
- cooperation or discussion and conflict or controversy
- perplexingly open, paradoxically rich, productively ambiguous and precise, distinct, clear
- ...

Below is a metaphorical expression of Music/dancing's "Interweaving One and Many" aspect.

We dance to Life's Music, including Aging's Music. We dance together, out of our shared embodying and also in our own unique, ever-transforming, ever-freshly creating ways. Our dancing and the shared music are densely improvisatory. Like the best jazz and free-form dancing, we are inspired by the music. And by our dancing we can inspire not only one another and other dancers, but also even the music itself, now and into the future.

Now Jane gives her own experiencing of "Interweaving of Serious-Aging's One and Many". She struggles, in what she calls "the combination for seeing people", with issues special to her . . . *me-ing*. And she also talks about friends . . . an important *we-ing*. We see/*felt-sense* many threads of what is common, what we all may face as we travel Serious-Aging's road. Interweaving and *crossing* with common threads are still other threads unique to Jane — her problems with talking, her macular degeneration preventing driving which forces her to find friends nearby, and living in a community where we are politically isolated

— politics being one of her major interests. The content of her concerns — politics and religion, also have opposites: agreeing and disagreeing. But these are not a problem for Jane, unless they are dogmatic, excluding opposites. Content opposites need only be, according to Jane, “without fuss”, without struggle and with an easy acceptance.

Jane: *“Without fuss” is the most important part. And you are missing something. My friends, in the past, were mostly through work. I had a lot in common with them and I saw them all the time. So I could disagree with them, and it wasn’t a big deal. It was just the way it was.*

Dave: *So “the combination for seeing people” isn’t just familiarity, acceptance and nearby opportunity. It’s being unable to go out by yourself, to seek friends further away and see them regularly.*

Jane: *Right.*

Jane looks up at me from our couch in the living room, where we have been listening to the radio.

Jane: *I don’t feel I have. . . the combination for seeing people.*

Dave: *The combination for seeing people?*

Jane: *The sense that I could be someone to talk to for an hour. I don’t have that feeling any more.*

Dave: *There’s some way that you no longer feel you could intimately be with friends the way you used to. . . that you’ve lost that part of yourself that wants to just chit-chat for an hour. . .*

Jane: *(pauses, then) I’d rather sleep. So it might be more my tiredness. . . I don’t know. But I remember the last time the woman across the road came. [This neighbor, around 70, recently bought the house, staying only in the summers.] She told me that she was going to set more time next summer to see me. She knew I was really cut off. But it sounded awfully like she was going to help somebody in need. I don’t know what she had in mind, but I don’t want it. (Laughs) I’m afraid she’s got something in mind.*

Dave: *You don’t know quite what she has in mind. . . but your sense is that there’s some agenda. . .*

Jane: *Converting me. And I don’t want to be perturbed. (Jane takes a long pause . . .) With people who I feel are different from me . . . I’m not sure how I want to be with her. I want to talk about what the president is doing, good or bad. I don’t want to talk about how he should never have gotten into office. I’m relieved that I have a president I want to think about. I don’t want fights. I just want interesting discussions.*

Dave: *So you’d like to share with people what you’re thinking about. But not disagreeing.*

Jane: *(shakes her head, no) I don’t want to set anybody off. I don’t feel like I have the energy. I think it’s smarter if older people can stay in a community they know, where they have friends who will agree with them. Or disagree with them. . . that’s equally OK. You don’t stumble into where they are without expecting it. I could just spend easy time, just talking about anything.*

Dave: *So you're feeling pretty isolated here and uncertain. And all that takes too much energy.*

Jane: *Yeah. Dick [our long-time neighbor, also in his 70's.] . . . he comes close to being comfortable for me. If he disagreed with me, he'd let me alone with it. He wouldn't try to convert me. He wouldn't believe, "Poor soul, she can't think any more." We have a lot that we understand about each other. Because we worked together on the town council for six years.*

Dave: *And some of those years were really difficult, which means you worked closely together.*

Jane: *Yes. And I think he's as relieved as I am to have someone easy to talk to.*

Irreducibly "Each": Irreducible *me-ings* and Irreducible Agings

Me-ings remain stubborn, irreducible wholes, not just aspects of "one whole process". *me-ing* — Jane or Dave — can't be just dissolved into "one whole process". Jane and Dave don't get their meanings and purposes, their beings and becomings only out of their bonded *we-ing*. Jane and Dave always bring a lot of "Dave-ness" and "Jane-ness" with them. And from our *we-ing*, Jane and Dave also take (create, build, integrate, evolve) not only shared, but also individual meanings and purposes, beings and becomings. Jane and Dave — maybe better thought of as processes, as Jane-ing and Dave-ing — remain, in certain ways, stubbornly, irreducibly individual, whole, distinct, unique.

Note, below, that *me-ing* and Serious-Aging are never entirely separate from *we-ing*, from bonded loved ones. In certain ways, Jane needs to be solidly herself, her own *me-ing* to best enter *we-ing* with her children, to help them with their changes and challenges.

Jane: *I hope I can do something besides washing the clothes.*

Dave: *You want something of your own, something you can do that you value.*

Jane: *With my mind getting better, I have more hope. My brain damage took so much away. I'm just beginning to get little touches of thinking that remind me of what it used to be like.*

Dave: *You're experiencing both Serious-Aging as well as healing and getting better.*

Jane: *Some Aging people have clear thinking. It's simply that, with Aging, they think about different things.*

Dave: *What different things are you thinking about?*

Jane: (takes a long pause) *I'm most conscious of my children. I'm wondering what I've given them that's going to. . . help them make the kind of moves that they're going to have to make as the country changes. And I'd like to think that my children could be part of that process.*

Dave: *So you're thinking more about what you're leaving behind, what continues after you die.*

Jane: (nods) *I didn't think much about what the kids would do at the end of their lives. One of my children is 50, and one is more than 50. They'd like to be much more successful. But I've just assumed that they would get there, because they're bright and determined.*

Dave: *“Get there”?*

Jane: *They'd be contented with their lives, including what they do each day. Ed is afraid that he's through with his real estate career. I think when he has to change, he'll be able to do it. But I'd like to encourage him in a way that's useful, not just stupid. I don't want to be soaking him with stupidity. (She laughs.)*

Dave: *You want your brain to work well for him.*

Jane: (nodding again) *Yes.*

Note the dense interweaving of *me-ing* and *we-ing*. Individually, Jane wants to be satisfied with what she leaves her children — a very special and on-going *we-ing*. It is a bit of Jane, that bit of her *me-ing* that she has given to them, by her example and through direct help that she hopes will prepare them for their world's changes. She also wants to keep helping and supporting them. Some of this comes from her *me-ing*, from her having a better mind. Some comes from her Serious-Aging, from her long experience with change and her Serious-Aging perspective.

Jane knows a lot about changing personally, and in a world that has repeatedly changed around her. She wants to keep sharing this lifetime of changing experience with her children, preparing them for their own changes in their own changing world.

Jane: *I have several times given Ed help when he asked for it. He still makes a point of being thankful for that. In some ways, that's true of Leslie. But sometimes your children need something that you haven't already done, that you haven't already prepared them for. I want to still be able to give them that. So I hope my mind will be better soon.*

Below is a metaphorical expression of Music/dancing's “Irreducibly *me-ing*, Irreducibly Aging”.

Each Aging and Serious-Aging dancer, each moment of their dance always has its own special unique, sometimes creative, surprising and fresh qualities. For not just the dance, but also the dancer is fluid and changing. We dancers, even Serious-Aging dancers, aren't fixed. We, too, are always continually, uniquely becoming. In certain ways, we're always dancing anew.

Now Jane gives her own experiencing of Irreducibly “Each”, Irreducibly Serious-Aging. Here she senses herself as “ungrown-up”. With Serious-Aging, unique-nesses often include losses. Each loss while sometimes shared by many who travel Serious-Aging's road, is also unique and individual. So each loss needs understanding, appreciating, and responding to its unique qualities.

Marlis Portner, a Swiss psychologist and, with Garry Prouty, a co-developer of Pre-Therapy, has also spent a lifetime working with the elderly. She is, herself, now well into her 70's. She says about aging — hers and others, “Individual experiencing is the key to understanding. Each person's way of experiencing is different.” (Portner 2008, p. 23) Below, we see ways Jane's Serious-Aging differs from my Aging and from Leslie's. This is very much Jane's individual Serious-Aging, part of her irreducible *me-ing*.

On a winter's morning, we are lying together, side-by-side, in bed.

Jane: *I don't feel like me. I feel like I grew-up, and now I'm ungrown-up.*

Dave: *What do you mean?*

Jane: *I don't make decisions as quickly. I'm not sure what they should be. Everything's harder.*

Dave: *Ah. . .*

Jane: *It's. . . (There's a long pause, then Jane sighs.) When Les and I went to where we buy books and have lunch. . . . (Jane frowns, searching for the name.)*

Dave: *Poor Richard's Bookstore and Rico's Café?*

Jane: *Right. Leslie walked in quite a way ahead of me. So I had to figure out where she was, and then make my way. That takes time, and it didn't use to take time. So the business of not feeling as old means making child-break decisions.*

Dave: *Child-break decisions?*

Jane: *Being sure that I make the right turn and that I don't stumble. It feels more like a child than an adult. And doing that, I often lose what I intended to do. We were going to look for something to send with the grandchildren's Valentine cards. I didn't object to looking. But she can look So Much Faster that I gave up trying. If she found something pleasant, I went with it. I wanted to get a couple of books, and I knew what I wanted. But I'd have to ask someone, because I don't remember the author. I went back, first, to see if I could locate the books by their age limit. But there were too many steps, and I just gave up and went home. I can feel the store people waiting on me, and the people who bring me, too. I don't want them to wait. That's a miserable position — I'm always taking into account the people who bring me. So I often don't get done what I want to get done.*

Dave: *It's not only how long it takes, and how much extra thinking and energy. It's also the waiting time for whomever brought you. Because you can't go alone.*

Jane: (gives a sad laugh) *Yeah.*

Dave: *Losing that independence, being able to go where and when you want, and to stay as long as you want, combined with all the extra time it takes for each step — that really stops you from doing many things. Not that you can't. It's just much harder, more tiring, and you're aware that you may be inconveniencing someone.*

Jane: *Yes.*

Dave: *And that's degrading.*

Jane: *Oh, yes. . . it is. It does inspire me to improve. (Jane thinks . . .) Going to a store and buying something — I don't know what to call that. And I don't have the slightest idea how to do that. But I think it's time I get that back. I'm really conscious of that if I'm on my own somewhere.*

Dave: *And you want to work on it, so you can be on your own away from home.*

Jane: (thinks for some time, then she laughs) *More grown up. Again. (Jane frowns . . .) One of the things that annoys me about getting older is that people always want to do things for you. Things you can do for yourself, but it takes more time. But people think they're being 'kind' by doing that for you.*

Dave: *You want to do it yourself, to keep your independence.*

Jane: (nods, then looks seriously at me) *I really can get downstairs by myself.*

Dave: *And you want me to stop fussing with you about it.*

Jane: (laughs) *It's nice when I'm really tired or in a place I'm not used to. Golly, it feels safer. Sometimes it's nice to be helped, and sometimes it's nice to be recognized as reasonably. . . OK. I'm practicing getting down stairs all the time. One of these days, I'm going to get it. I am noticeably better.*

Dave: *I agree.*

The differences in Aging and Serious-Aging — our different *me-ings* — blare throughout Jane's experiences above. If I'm not careful to fully take in her individualities, making them part of our Co-Aging, I miss important aspects of her *me-ing*, maybe making things worse. Our Co-Aging, our *we-ing* isn't something that just "happens". Jane and I have to keep working on it.

Irreducibly "One": Irreducibly *we-ing* and Irreducibly Co-Aging

Our *we-ing* and Co-Aging is more than all the *me-ings* and individual circumstances added up. Like our *me-ing*, our *we-ing* also remains stubbornly, irreducibly one, irreducibly whole. In certain important ways, there is not a separate Jane *me-ing* and a separate Dave *me-ing*, a separate Jane Serious-Aging and a separate Dave Aging, added up to build our *we-ing*. Sometimes stubbornly, irreducibly first is our *we-ing*. And our *we-ing* is often transformed by the Aging-Process into our Co-Aging.

Below is a metaphorical expression of Music/dancing's "Irreducibly *we-ing*, Irreducibly Co-Aging".

Who can truly separate melody from rhythm from harmony from dancing from dancers and musicians, from Aging's and Life's music? Only by doing violence to our bonded, living Whole. Indeed, in our unique and shared ways, we're bonded most with those we love. And in certain ways, we're also bonded with all who dance, with Aging's and Life's music and more.

Just as violent, just as untrue is reducing Aging's Music to our dancing, or reducing us, the dancers, to our dancing. Just as violent and untrue as reducing the unique and individual to the shared and together, is ignoring the shared and together for the individual. And just as violent and untrue is to reify music, dancing, musicians, and dancers — to strip them of their on-going living and changing. Reifying forces what's left into a separate object, a merely repeated dance, a predictable and unchanging, a controllable and dominate-able process. Our dancing to Aging's and Life's music is an ever-opening en-Whole-ing.

Here Jane thinks about our Co-Aging, our *we-ing*, recalling how this showed up in ways satisfying and sad, even scary, at times of dying. Through Jane's eyes and feelings we experience, at the very end of life, how *we-ing* and Co-Aging does and doesn't work.

Jane: *All that about *we-ing* is my idea of being married. But it's also an unusual way to live. I think back to the people I knew well, and they mostly just endured what they didn't like.*

Dave: *Most marriages, most couples you've known aren't a close, mutually-satisfying *we-ing*.*

- Jane:** *Nope. They really let growing older. . . . (Jane stops and thinks for some time.) As they get dim, it takes apart some of the limited togetherness they had.*
- Dave:** *By dim, do you mean as they lose their ability do things?*
- Jane:** *I'm thinking more of their ability to. . . to take in what the other is feeling, or to interact. So the business of getting old, and losing body and mind, is even worse than it needs to be.*
- Dave:** *So a marriage, a we-ing that was only so-so before, becomes even less.*
- Jane:** *Yeah. What reminds me most: I think dad and mother were like that — not close from the beginning. But your parents weren't any better. When your mom was dying, your father was sitting some distance away. And there was no evidence to go around.*
- Dave:** *No evidence to go around?*
- Jane:** *We all sat around the bed. When you and I came in, we were encouraged to sit where we wanted to. I made a point of sitting away, because I wasn't as involved.*
- Dave:** *What did you notice?*
- Jane:** *I noticed that your mom was not fully comfortable with you reaching out to her. She finally accepted a limited amount of it.*
- Dave:** *When I held her hand as she was dying?*
- Jane:** *Yes. And I certainly noticed that everyone was close to tears, and they were trying very hard not to be. Which I don't think is necessary when you're really sad. There wasn't any way for your family to make the good-bye all right.*
- Dave:** *Dad sat at a distance from mom while she was dying, and so did the rest of my siblings.*
- Jane:** *They were very careful not to touch her or to speak to her. I want you to be upfront.*
- Dave:** *When you die, you want me right there and talking.*
- Jane:** *Yep. I remember, when I was a child, after my grandfather died, and he was in the parlor in a coffin. Everybody was acting like they were happy to see each other, and like grandpa wasn't around. It was really weird. I went outside and stayed there.*
- Dave:** *It was as if they were ignoring his death. And that made you really uncomfortable.*
- Jane:** *Yes. The other time I remember — I held my father's hand until he died. It was the only way I could be close to him, because he was in such misery. Once in a while, maybe five times, he asked me a question. He was interested in my family. He really wanted to know what my kids were doing, what they were interested in, what they were feeling. He didn't give me a lecture. This was really different from the kind of church mother and dad attended.*
- Dave:** *At the end, what was important was connecting with him, and he was most interested not in religion and your getting saved, but in you and your family and what they were doing.*
- Jane:** *He accepted me as a real person with real convictions of my own. It was like seeing dad, at the end, the way I remembered him, when he was younger. Like himself. As a child, when he and I walked outside, we noticed the flowers, how things were watered, what else was growing. We were comfortable in a place we felt good about.*

Dave: *And that's how you want to die -- staying comfortably close in a way you feel good about.*

Jane: *Yeah, yeah, yeah. I wish your mother had been able to speak when she was dying. She must have had many thoughts. And she didn't feel comfortable saying a word.*

In an early morning Focusing, Dave gives his experiencing of Irreducibly One, Irreducibly we-ing and Co-Aging.

Jane: *Did you sleep last night?*

Dave: *So-so, not well.*

Jane: *If you keep this up, I will get VERY angry.*

This was said as I gave Jane her early morning medicine. She takes her medicine and, as usual, goes back to sleep. Lying next to her, I pick up my laptop and begin computer-Focusing on Jane and our *we-ing*. Hmmm . . .

Out comes a flood of felt-thoughts: I do push myself. I've always pushed myself — right to the limit and sometimes over. So many things I want to do, so many things I feel it is important to do: presenting, writing, conducting trainings, being part of professional projects. These used to be once-in-a-while bits of fun. Now they often stack up — too many deadlines too close together on too diverse topics.

With my Aging, my *me-ing*, I find 'all this' also takes more a toll on me. I don't recover as quickly. With 'all this' and my acute client load, I often don't sleep well.

But now I'm *felt-sensing* 'all this' less in my Aging than in our Co-Aging, our *we-ing*. On a practical level, I have less time for projects. Care-giving with Jane takes many 'little moments' that I used to squeeze in. Now we are more scheduled — our explicit *we-ing*. On Co-Aging's positive side: because reading is so hard for Jane, when I read for projects, I read more out loud to her. So we are more together in what I am learning, thinking, doing.

I pause and look out our bedroom glass doors and into our forest with its boulders — just outside, mere feet away. Last night we had fresh snow. The sun is shining through the trees, making patches of intense white and sparkles . . . cold-looking and still, no wind . . . only the occasional slow-falling snow-puffs from aspen limbs and pine needles.

I sigh and turn my attention back inside me. There is something *more*, and I *felt-sense* it from our Co-Aging's *we-ing*. . . . Hmm Ah, yes. I chuckle wryly: Our time-left, especially the quality of our time-left. One of our *we-ing's* always-there. Again I sigh. Yes, yes . . .

I turn to look at Jane, and I smile, feeling beauty and warmth, maybe needing our *we-ing's* beauty and warmth to *presence* my felt-sense of our time-left. Yes, that feels right and true. I gently touch Jane, really taking her in, letting myself go into our *we-ing* in ways that, before her fall, were perhaps more rare or maybe less intense. I hear Jane's low purr. Her eyes still closed, she turns toward me, nuzzles my hand, purrs again and drifts back into sleep. Inside me . . . an almost teary, happy-sad. These little *we-ings* are so life-giving, so worth-it-making. Our Co-Aging is often felt-colored by the fragility and the giftedness of our *we-ing's* time-left.

Within our Co-Aging, I am *much more* keenly aware of everything Jane means, everything our *we-ing* means. I know how unusual, how special our bond is. What we have — our *we-ing* — I don't see that much in clients, family or friends, nor in my own pre-Jane history, nor in Jane's pre-Dave history. I am stubbornly, irreducibly living and *felt-sensing* much more, right now, out of our Co-Aging, out of our *we-ing*. And from our *we-ing*, I am enjoying Jane and enjoying us.

Staying mostly within our Co-Aging, memories come, difficult memories. In those awful first days after Jane's fall — when she descended into non-responsiveness and we thought she was dying — with Jane mostly “gone”, I felt how much Dave was gone, too. In that ‘punch-to-the-gut’ emptiness and terror, I experienced how much of my *me-ing* was bound up in our *we-ing*.

And still, even then, I was our *we-ing* only in certain respects. Yes, as I felt Jane dying, I felt inside me a dying. But I could also feel my living and my not wanting to, my just ‘going-through-the-motions’, my hollowness and the poverty of my future — without Jane. I felt, as TS Eliot wrote, in “Murder in the Cathedral”, “living and partly living”. Now with Jane 82 and more fragile, and with our experience of Jane almost dying, our *felt-sensed* Co-Aging *we-ing* has a lot of time-left, even a lot of death in it.

As I Focus further, I automatically put my hand, again, on Jane's shoulder. Again, her eyes still closed, Jane turns a little toward me, and she pats my hand. I'm grounding our *we-ing* in Jane-here, and, yes, still *felt-sensing* afresh our Co-Aging and . . . Hmmm . . . Death, my impending aloneness, Jane-not-here and a thread-bare *we-ing*.

With all that, I *felt-sense* how with my choices and priorities, our *we-ing*-centeredness often becomes more demanding, more urgent and ruthless. I *felt-sense* ‘all that’ maturing and making more complex our *we-ing* with truth, reality and some grieving. But that grieving is not yet poisoning our *we-ing* and Co-Aging. I *felt-sense* that *yet* hovering at the edge. And while I don't shove it or my awareness of it away, that is an edge I am not ready to visit, not right now.

Jane, of course, lives more on that edge of time-left and its fragility. This gives her even greater awareness and intensity about my choices and priorities and their consequences. Small wonder that if I keep this up, if I keep pushing myself, Jane will get VERY angry.

I can *felt-sense*, too, that if I keep this up, I will also get VERY angry.

I sigh. Time to get up and start our breakfast. I notice the sky has clouded over, though there's still a lot of light coming through those glass sliding doors.

Jane: *Last night when I went to sleep, you were reading furiously. The last time you had three things going on, you said you wouldn't do it again. And you promptly signed up for three more. It means something different to you than it means to me.*

Dave: *What's that difference?*

Jane: *What you do in your job — you truly enjoy it and don't look forward to retiring.*

Dave: *Right. I'm not planning on retiring until my 80's.*

Jane: *When I retired, first from family-raising, second from fund-raising, I was ready to stop.*

Dave: So I've got more of a struggle to let go, to have time for our we-ing. That's a bit in our Co-Aging.

Jane: *Yeah, yeah. I'm going to try to do better with this, with understanding you.*

Dave: *Me, too. . . We laugh.*

OUR AGING CODA AND CONCLUSION: IMPLICIT, EXPLICIT, SPIRITUAL AND WE-ING MORE

“It is in our nature to always freshly become, to exceed our forms such that we are ‘fresh beings’ that always already are elaborating the universe endlessly . . . This fresh being that I am (becoming) is a cracking open of orders, bringing an always uniting present existence that is itself a continuing.”

Kevin Krycka (2008), “The Nature of Our Exceeding”, pp. 93, 99.

In music, a coda — from the Italian word for tail — is a new repeated theme or motif that brings the piece to a close. Here our repeated theme, paradoxically, is different kinds of ‘more’, which is a closing that is also opening. In some respects, this theme is a reflexive elaboration of the ... at the end of a string. We say, “reflexive,” because the content of this string is also the ... or the elaboration of the more. So our coda theme is, in a way, the ... of the Fitting, isn't it, for a world that never just *is* but always *is-and-implies*? There is always more, implicitly and explicitly, including spiritual mores and more *we-ings*.

There's always an implicit more. As Focusers know and as we presented when we discussed strings, felt senses always have *more*, they always have No matter how carefully, how fulsomely we explore and carry forward a felt-sense, there's always, on-goingly ...

This implicit more, this ... *presences* us in our Aging and Co-Aging. Our implicit ... is also an on-going aspect of Aging's Music. Again as Focusers know, this means that whatever we are *felt-sensing* about our dancing to Aging's Music, there is always implicitly more — implying more meanings, next steps, further directions, additional and richer purposes As Gendlin says, “The bad feeling [and the good feeling] is the body knowing and pushing toward what [more] good would be. Every bad [and good] feeling is potential energy toward a more right way of being if you give it space to move toward its rightness.” (Gendlin 1981, p. 76)

The ... of our *felt-sensing* and our *presencing* of our felt-sensing leads us toward our own and shared more right way of being. Our embodying ... is always literally (instinctively, on-goingly, creatively, evolvingly ...) opening us toward becoming, in certain ways, more whole with ourselves — our *me-ing* — and with our interacting circumstances, especially our *we-ing*.

So an aspect of our *felt-sensing's* embodying-opening more includes opening to realities and truths in which we find ourselves and with which we interact. This includes our

becoming more whole with the realities and truths of Aging, Co-Aging, Aging's Music, and even death.

There's always an explicit more. By "explicit", we mean what is explicitly going on, what is actually happening, or as Gene often says, what is "occurring". To distinguish this explicit more from our felt sense's ... we call an explicit more "*and*".

This explicit more, this "*and*" means there is more actually happening, more occurring than we can ever implicitly *felt-sense*/know or explicitly think or say or respond to. *And* includes "there's more than one way to understand/make meaning with" whatever is occurring. *And* also includes "there's more than one way to interact/respond with our understanding and meaning with" what is actually happening. *And* further includes what is actually happening in any *me-ing* or *we-ing*, any problem, any situation, any and all aspects of our Living, including Aging's Music. As with a ... or an implicit more, this explicit *and* cannot be reduced to a particular logic or set of logics (concepts, patterns, rules, forms, sayings, distinctions, parts ...).

As a reminder, Gendlin says, the explicit or occurring is never found separate from the implicit: "Implying is always part of some occurring; occurring always includes an implying. They cannot be separated. We have to take all occurring as occurring into implying." (Gendlin 1997a, p. 61) So our ... and our *and* are always found together and interacting.

There's always a spiritual more. Edwin McMahon and Peter Campbell, developing insights from Gendlin and the Jesuit scientist, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, describe the embodying-opening of Focusing's spiritual more.

" . . . our biological connectedness to a vast Process of Unification can gradually reveal itself within our daily lives. . . . an awareness within our bodies . . . leads beyond ourselves. A bio-consciousness. Bio-presence. It does not confine us to what we can figure out and control with our minds, but it turns, instead, toward an openness within bodily knowing."

" . . . each of us is an integral cell within the evolution of some Larger Body Process . . . not . . . by reason of what we *do*, but by virtue of a larger wholeness we *allow* to break through inside ourselves . . . not so much thinking as *resonance*. The tuning fork of evolution strikes an inviting chord within." (Campbell and McMahon 1997, "Preface", p. xxv; emphases theirs.)

So many of these phrases ring true about Aging's Music: "a vast Process of Unification can gradually reveal itself", "turns, instead, toward an openness within bodily knowing", "the evolution of some Larger Body Process", "not by reason of what we *do*, but by virtue of a larger wholeness we *allow* to break through". Sparks of this spiritual more are always beckoning to us and breaking through, occurring into our living. Above, you can perhaps best sense it in the playfulness and giftedness we share in our Co-Aging. This rich spiritual more — explicit and implicit — is indeed, a process of unification and a *presencing* of our *me-ing* and our *we-ing*.

There are always more we-ings. These “more we-ings” include en-culturing *we-ings* and *we-ings* of common needs, virtues and hopes that we share with all fellow humans, sometimes with all that is living.

But perhaps you have enough to be going on with Aging's Music. You can always use this as a starting point to explore more and further.

Jane: *I can see how what we've talked about might help people at the right age.*

Dave: *I hope so.*

We thank you for travelling with us on our Aging and Co-Aging road, for dancing with us to Aging's Music. In a way, we thank you for Co-Aging with us. On your journey in Aging and Co-Aging, and with your dancing to Aging's Music, we wish you *adios* and *bon voyage*.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We are so grateful for the warm support, sharp-eyed critique, and gentle guiding of our article editor, Kevin Krycka, as well as the *Folio* editors, Bala Jaison and Paula Nowick. This article, and indeed, with Bala and Paula, our entire Focusing community is much better, much richer for their labors-of-love. We also thank Gene Gendlin for a comment he made to us last November, which helped us re-think our project more fruitfully. He is not only a genius, but more rare, a generous and kindly genius, always guiding us not into his future, but into our own. May we all, in our smaller and lesser ways, take this as his and Focusing's deepest and most vital message.

REFERENCES

- Campbell, P. A. & McMahon, E. M. (1997). *Bio-spirituality*, 2nd ed. Chicago: Loyola.
- Cicero, M. T. (1923). *De senectute* (On old age). J. Henderson (ed., trans.), Loeb Classical Library, 154, 2–102. Cambridge, MA: Harvard.
- Gendlin, E.T. (1981). *Focusing*, 2nd ed. New York: Bantam.
- Gendlin, E. T. (1991). Thinking beyond patterns: body, language and situations. In B. den Ouden & M. Moen (eds.), *The presence of feeling in thought*, 25–151. New York: Peter Lang.
- Gendlin, E. T. (1993). Words can say how they work. In R.P. Crease (ed.), *Proceedings: Heidegger conference*, 29–35. Stony Brook, NY: State University of New York.
- Gendlin, E. T. (1995). Crossing and dipping. *Minds and machines* 5(4), 547–560.
- Gendlin, E. T. (1997a). *A process model*. New York: The Focusing Institute.
- Gendlin, E. T. (1997b). “Reply to Mark Johnson”, in D. M. Levin (ed.), *Language beyond postmodernism*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern, 168–75.

- Gendlin, E. T. (1997c). What happens when Wittgenstein asks “What happens when . . . ?” *The philosophical forum*, 28(3), 268–281.
- Gendlin, E. T. (1997d). The responsive order. *Man and world*, 30(3), 383–411.
- Gendlin, E. T. (1997e). *Experiencing and the creation of meaning: A philosophical and psychological approach to the subjective*, 2nd ed. Evanston, IL: Northwestern.
- Gendlin, E.T. (2004a). Five philosophical talking points to communicate with colleagues who don't yet know focusing. *Staying in focus. The focusing institute newsletter*, 4(1), 5–8.
- Gendlin, E.T. (2004b). Introduction to ‘Thinking at the Edge’. *The Folio*, 19(1), 1–8.
- Gendlin, E. T. (2007). Focusing: the body speaks from the inside. Transcription, 18th Annual International Trauma Conference, Boston, MA. Gendlin on-line library, www.focusing.org
- Krycka, K. (2008). The nature of our exceeding. *The Folio* 21(1), 93–105.
- Portner, M. (2008). *Being old is different*. Ross-on-Wye, UK: PCCS Books.
- Young, D. C. (2008). Sing focusing and systems!: *we-ing*. *The Folio* 21(1), 238–255.