

THE FOLIO

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AGING . . .

FOCUSING THROUGH THE TRANSITIONS OF LATER LIFE

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INFORMATION

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<http://www.focusing.org/agingfolio2010>

LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

When we put out the call for papers for this issue on aging, we had no idea what kind of articles we would receive, and truthfully, we really didn't give much thought as to whether the contributions would be funny, touching, poignant, resistant, accepting — we just didn't know. Then the articles started coming in and of course, as is the hallmark of our Focusing community, there was all of the above, with much diversity, humor, sadness, profundity — and everything in between.

As you will see, for some, aging is a process that is gently welcomed, and the responses to the aging process are acceptance, and even joy, for a life well lived. In these articles we see inspiring demonstrations of insight, vision, and wisdom, carrying Focusing into even more ways of *moving the life energy forward*, in spite of age.

For others the process of aging turns out to be a constant struggle — a having to accept the unwelcome transitions into ill-health, memory loss, physical frailties, pain, and taking the journey in into the famous 'unknown' — and not always with the 'attitude' of 'making friends with'. . . !! These articles are also inspiring, because they gently touch into the collective fears that we all have as we see our lives more from the perspective of the 'end' — rather than the 'beginning'.

Then there are the stories of using the gift of Focusing that we all treasure, with other people, to bring some felt healing and peace into the final days of life.

We can say unreservedly, that this issue has been an awakening process for both of us, and we hope it is for you, as well. The range of articles is both varied and fascinating. Here we give you a 'taste' of what lies ahead:

PART 1: PERSONAL STORIES presents highly introspective views of the impact of Focusing on the authors' ongoing experiences of Aging.

Interviews with two of our community's most revered pioneers open this section as Reva Bernstein reflects on how one of Focusing's essential attitudes of *Being With What Is* has guided her through the changes of advancing years, while Bebe Simon looks back on the amazing gifts that Focusing has brought into her life in her delightful retrospective on, *It Needs To Make Sense*.

Jill Drummond in *My Journey With Focusing*, offers a developmental perspective on how Focusing has influenced her life through the decades, as well as how her maturing life experiences has changed the way she views and uses Focusing today.

What starts out as an exploration of Joan Lavender's gradual memory loss and Focusing, in *Some Thoughts about Focusing and Aging: Losses and Gains*, her story unfolds into a profound new understanding of the meaning of her therapeutic relationships with clients.

In *Focusing and Aging, Accompanying A Woman's Aging Journey*, Patricia Manessy courageously presents a poignant but clear-eyed look at the deeply sensed losses felt in the painful transition following the middle years, while Carol Bellin, in *Focusing Happier*,

tells of her decision to deliberately Focus on recognizing opportunities for happiness as she enters her later years.

An abrupt series of crises launched Hadley Fisk into a sudden dread of the losses she might face in old age, but through Focusing and Focusing-Oriented-Therapy she recalled a forgotten trauma that triggered the fear of aging in *Focusing Adventures in Aging: Alone — Crisis and Opportunity*.

Written as a long-flowing, ever-circling Focusing session, Christel Kraft looks with wonder at her life's mystical journey in *Growing up with Felt Sensing and Staying Young Into Aging With Focusing*

Over her many years of Focusing, Erna de Bruijn reflects in *Focusing And Aging*, that one of the most important listening qualities that have evolved for her is the wondrous sense of being alive to 'all of it' — to what is present and what is lacking — which opens her to a profound kind of not knowing.

In *The Golden Years*, Kevin McEvenue poignantly shares a transcription of a Focusing session, in his inimitable Whole-Body sense, of the complex acceptance of his aging process.

With delightful humor, Judy Robbins recounts in *Focusing, Life Coaching and Ageism*, how the support of a coach who is a Focusing trainer helped her to discover that the subject of Ageism excites her baby-boomer heart and starts her on a new career of writing and speaking.

As Dave and Jane Young remind us in *Aging's Music*, aging is always a shared process with others, and co-aging in the intimacy of a marriage between deeply experienced Focusers brings unexpected joys and fears.

PART 2: INSIGHTS: TRANSFORMATIONS USING FOCUSING WITH OTHERS presents a selection of articles by Focusers who not only reflect on their personal development through Focusing, but who have compassionately shared Focusing with others who were struggling with the pain and loss of old age.

In *The Book Of Life: The Final Chapter*, Mary McGuire, one of the icons of our community, integrates her own Focusing experiences of aging and death with a remarkable story about a formidable nun whose dying was transformed by a Focusing image.

In *Attuning To Natural Process Action Steps*, Katerina Halm brings a treasure-chest of her poetry and very special Focusing exercises, first developed to ease her own unremitting pain, to classes of seniors.

In an *Integrated Approach to Processing Aging and Pain*, Elfie Hinterkopf shows us how being with aging and pain in a Focusing way can lead to a spiritual awakening that gives profound meaning to the challenges of advancing age.

Using only the most fundamental Focusing attitudes of compassion, listening, and acceptance, Bala Jaison in *Focusing. . . and he didn't even know it. . .* was able to accompany

her dying father, an adamant thinker and ‘non-feeler’, as he transitioned from anxiety to peace.

PART 3: AGING: CASES, AND RESEARCH presents a case study, a psycho-spiritual treatise, and a TAE-based study — all highlighting the diverse perspectives Focusing can bring to the subject of aging.

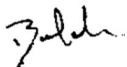
In *One Man’s Life Journey*, Atsmaout Perlstein recalls an aging lawyer who entered therapy complaining about depression and emptiness and how Focusing reconnected him with an essential body-sense of himself as a child with healing hands.

In an adaptation (for this Folio) from their upcoming book, *Rediscovering the Lost Body-Connection Within Christian Spirituality*, Ed McMahon and Peter Campbell continue their lifelong exploration of how a felt organic awareness of being a part of something greater than ourselves can provide an anchor for aging people.

In an effort to more accurately understand the challenges faced by the aging Japanese population, researchers Yoshika Yamaguchi and Satoko Tokumaru use a TAE-based qualitative study to closely examine the subjective life of one retired schoolteacher in *A TAE-Based Qualitative Study of Subjective Well-Being For Aged Japanese Men*.

To our readers of all ages! — we hope you enjoy the meaningful insights, struggles, and eventual epiphanies and understandings that our wonderful authors have provided in this evocative issue on *AGING. . . FOCUSING THROUGH THE TRANSITIONS OF LATER LIFE*.

With regards from your Editors,



Bala Jaison, Ph.D.
Senior Editor



Paula Nowick, Ed.D.
Managing Editor

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The production of *The Folio* has many components, and one of the most important is the work of our Guest Editors, who have given so generously of their time and skills to support their writers.

So it is with heartfelt thanks that we would like to acknowledge: Debbie Belne, Chiara Borello, Ann Weiser Cornell, Robert Foxcroft, Christina Honde, Larry Hurst, Mary Elaine Kiener, Kevin Krycka, Elizabeth Lehmann, Pauline Albers-Mitchell, Carol Nikerson, Pat Oliver, Patricia Sheehy, and Karen Whalen.

Cover Art: There is no one picture that can convey or describe each of our unique visions and responses regarding the process of aging and major life transitions. That said, we chose this photo because it spoke to us of serenity, calm, and peacefulness, with the colors of autumn reminding us of changes ahead. We hope that this image will inspire each of you to personally pause and reflect on Focusing and Aging in your own deeply felt creative ways.

Cover photo: ©iStockphoto.com/Elena Elisseeva. (Elena Elisseeva's work is also available at www.elenaphoto.com)

Layout and Design: Once again it is our pleasure and privilege to work with Carolyn Kasper. We are deeply grateful for your amazing skill (and 'eagle eyes'!) with the layout and design, turning a file of Word documents into a very wonderful treasure for the Focusing Community. Thank you, Carolyn.

Finally, our heart-felt thanks and appreciation to the Focusing Institute for your ongoing help and support in producing *The Folio*.

PART 1

PERSONAL STORIES



THE ESSENCE OF BEING WITH WHAT IS: Thirty-Three Years with Focusing

Reva Bernstein

The essence of what I have learned from Focusing over the years is *all about* being with what is. Just being with. That is the crux of the whole process — the ability to just *be with* what's there.

In my years with Focusing, I took that “being with” into all the aspects of my life. One significant example was my whole relationship with my husband, Irv. That was a difficult process and took many years to get right, but in the end, I finally got to the place of being with and accepting Irv — just exactly how he was. When he passed away suddenly, in 2006, we had just celebrated our 55th anniversary and were in a peaceful, loving place with one another.

Focusing has influenced so many of my life challenges and decisions including all the changes that come with aging. Through all of it, the concept of *being with* . . . has been the guiding principle.

MY PROFESSIONAL HISTORY WITH FOCUSING

I am now 78 years old. I first heard the word Focusing in 1978 when I was 47 years old. I was at the Chicago Counseling Center taking a Practicum in Person-Centered Counseling. I had raised four children, had been a housewife, and at that time was also an office manager for an appliance company — refrigerators, washers and dryers. I was aware of an inner calling for “something” that would engage me in some way that I didn't feel engaged, but I did not know what that was.

That “something” became known through finding the Chicago Counseling Center Practicum — a totally serendipitous occurrence. A young woman in the office where I was working invited me to meet her at a certain bar to hear a jazz pianist. When I arrived, she wasn't there, so I sat down at the bar to wait. There were two men, also at the bar, involved in conversation, and I overheard one of them say that he was a “part-time shrink.” It caught my ear, but I was mainly just looking out for my friend. Then all of a sudden, at the other end of the bar, there was a ruckus. A man and a woman were arguing loudly with each other, and I heard the woman say, “Just take your ring!” She took the engagement ring off her finger and threw it, and it landed on the floor between this man at the bar and me. We both leaned down to pick it up — nearly bumping heads, and because of that encounter, we informally began to chat with each other.

I asked him about that “part-time shrink” remark, and he told me that he was a salesman during the day and doing an evening practicum in Carl Rogers' Person Centered Therapy at the Chicago Counseling and Psychotherapy Center. Something in me was saying, “Yes! I want that!” I took down some information, called the CCPC, went for an inter-

view and knew that if I was accepted, I wanted to do their next counseling practicum. I felt drawn to the training because I had an inner calling for ‘*something*’ — which was not yet clear, but it was ‘*there*’ . . . *waiting*. . . *and this seemed to be a right step toward that unclear “something.”*

If that woman had not broken her engagement that night, my life might have taken a whole different path, because it is very unlikely that I would have spoken to this man otherwise. And as it turned out, my friend never showed up!

At the CCPC, I met Jim Iberg, one of the counselors there and one of the teachers of the Practicum. One night, Jim talked about a process called Focusing. I was perplexed, didn’t comprehend it, and yet, knew that I wanted to know more about it. I was intrigued by the idea of what it was — even though I did not understand it at all.

So I kept asking more about it, and in 1979, Jim Iberg introduced me to Doralee Grindler (later Grindler Katonah) who was looking for somebody to help her set up a training program to teach people how to do Focusing. She was the first Director of what became the Focusing Institute (set up in a corner of Gene Gendlin’s office at the University of Chicago). We made an instant connection. Doralee and I created a three-month training program — the first training program for teaching Focusing. I remember that Akira Ikemi, later one of the first Coordinators in Japan and one of the founders of the Japan Focusing Association, was in that first program. For teachers we had Doralee, Hannah Frisch, Allan Rohlfs, Jim Iberg — and Gene Gendlin, of course. It was an exciting time. After the training program I began to teach Focusing professionally.

In 1980, a large counseling center in Columbia, Indiana invited Doralee and me to come down and teach Focusing. By the end of the weekend, everybody said that Clearing a Space was the most valuable piece that they had gotten from the training, because it gave them the opportunity to put everything aside and just feel this wonderful sense of wholeness, which was so easy to lose when working with all their difficult clients. We came back and talked to Gene about it, and that is how, in his own teaching, as well as our team teaching, we began to put much more emphasis on Clearing a Space.

For the next twenty years I was part of the Focusing Institute teaching staff as well as an associate at the Chicago Counseling Center, teaching Focusing to individuals and groups. I was part of the “Clearing A Space with People with Cancer” research team, taught Dreams and Creativity groups in the Netherlands and Germany, and most importantly, always found myself ‘*being with*’ every new experience in a focusing way.

MY PERSONAL JOURNEY WITH FOCUSING

Focusing has had a great impact on me personally. At the time I came to Focusing, even though I was 47, there was a part of me that was still in my late teenage years — that age where you are really exploring to find who you are. Looking back, I can see how I grew dramatically through knowing Focusing. I grew up and now, at age 78, I am reluctant to say I have “grown old”. I would prefer to say that I have grown up — through the teenage years into the mature years and now, into the elder years.

I see myself now as an elder who strives to keep my childhood adventuresome self present. With Focusing, I was able to make many decisions that took me on adventures; I also gave myself permission to try things that I might not have otherwise done.

A good example is taking up Tae-Kwan-Do at age 62. When I was considering starting Tae-Kwan-Do, I had several Focusing sessions before I made up my mind. And it became clear that I had a 6-year-old in me who wanted to have an experience and an adventure — a 6-year old who loved the idea of getting a free uniform! With Focusing I sensed the rightness of giving myself permission to start Tae-Kwan-Do — and if I didn't like it, it would be OK to quit. That was something I could never do when I was a kid. If you started something, you had to finish it. In my Focusing sessions, I kept getting the memory of how my parents refused to let me have piano lessons, giving me as a reason that my two older sisters had had piano lessons and they both quit. Therefore, I couldn't have piano lessons because I, too, would quit. I never knew whether I could play the piano or not.

So, all those many Focusing sessions helped me to give myself permission to go ahead with Tae-Kwan-Do, (and go through four weeks with the free uniform!) and if I didn't like it, it was OK not to continue. But it turned out that I loved it from the very first move, and wound up staying with it for ten years. When my husband and I decided to move to California in 1997, I first needed to find the right Tae-Kwan-Do school before choosing a neighborhood in which to live.

I know that my doing Tae-Kwan-Do has influenced many people to try things that they either thought they couldn't do or thought they were too old to do. Witnessing my own challenges allowed other people to see that you can be older and still do adventurous things. For several years at the 'Focusing Follies' (a delightful talent show at the annual International Focusing Conference), I would demonstrate my Tae-Kwan-Do form, and would regularly hear from people afterward about how very meaningful it was for them to watch.

Focusing was with me not just when I started Tae-Kwan-Do, but all through the process of being in Tae-Kwan-Do. As it became increasingly harder and ever more challenging, I would often sit with questions like, "*Is this still right for me? Do I still want to do this? Is it time to let it go?*" I was Focusing all the way along, during which time I became a third degree black belt and won the World Tae-Kwan-Do Championship for women over 60.

After ten years, I had another *internal knowing*, again through Focusing, that Tae-Kwan-Do was no longer right for me — it was time to stop. That is when I moved on to yoga, which I am still doing. I took the yoga teacher training program and enjoyed it very much, yet when the training was done, I decided that I actually preferred to be a student.

HEALTH CHALLENGES

Another big area of support from Focusing is what you could call my 'health challenges'. I had breast cancer in 1987 and Focused my way through that, for sure!

I collaborated with Doralee, in the writing of an article on the subject of Focusing and cancer, published in the 1999 Focusing *Folio*. I completely recovered from breast cancer and haven't had any recurrence.

More recently, I have had digestive problems that have been difficult to diagnose.

When I was sick, I was really sick. That sickness would last a couple of days, and then I was fine. Then I was not fine. And I never knew when the change was going to happen. The *not-knowing* gave 'living on the edge' new meaning. I would make plans and then I would have to cancel them, including long-awaited trips to International Focusing Conferences in Canada, Israel and Japan. I missed out on a lot of things. I have been experiencing this condition for seven years. What was especially peculiar was living with these digestive issues for three years before they were finally diagnosed as a rare form of neuro-endocrine tumors.

I have now had four surgeries. I cannot even count how many hospitalizations I have had. I finally did get to Israel, but once I arrived there I had yet another hospitalization and surgery, and my daughter Marcia had to fly out to join me. My dear focusing friends in Israel, Ruth Hirsch, Atsmaout and Haim Perlstein, and Bilha Frolinger took special care of me and Marcia.

I am now in the process of another very major change: having to give up my home and move in with my daughter and her family. It is a very big adjustment. There is a sense of comfort that comes from having family around. At the same time, I am not in *my* home. I am living in somebody else's home, even though my daughter and family have been so open, gracious and loving. So it is the both/and. The "this" and the "that" — another instance of needing to be with what is.

Aging brings about its own set of problems and challenges. My friend Mary Lou and I laugh a lot about the fact that what we talked about 25 years ago, when we became friends, is nothing like what we talk about today. Today, everything seems to be about health. However, with the aging process, there is an attitude of, "*Where's the gift here? What can we learn from it? How do we keep going? How do we maintain our humor, our sense of purpose, our enjoyment of life, our ability to contribute something?*"

One way I find myself contributing comes through talking to fellow students after yoga class. They are all younger than I am. Sometimes I will give them little tidbits of learned wisdom or little stories of my life. And I can see that my enthusiasm sparks something in them connected to the fact that being a person in your late 70's does not necessarily mean that you are *only* ready for the old people's home. While it may be true for some people — there *can* be other ways of growing older.

I really enjoy and appreciate being able to be an inspiration to younger people and helping them to see that they may have more capacity for aging well than they may have thought.

In the Focusing community I see myself more and more taking the role of a mentor. Focusing Professionals will call me, and we will talk about something that they feel kind of

stuck with in their teaching, or their clients, or whatever . . . We do a little Focusing together, and I give them something — whatever I can. I love being a mentor.

I appreciate being able to support the Focusing community through my role as a Board Member of the Focusing Institute. The Focusing Institute has always been close to my heart, and I have supported its growth since the early days in Chicago.

And when I think of all the wonderful people I have met through the Focusing community, I am filled with gratitude, especially toward Gene Gendlin, for having put his work out into the world. My life has been enriched . . . in so many ways.

As I reflect upon how Focusing has been with me (and how I have been with it!) through so many life changes and decisions, including all of the challenges of aging, what stays with me in the end is: *Being with what is, with a focusing attitude of friendly curiosity, brings me life forwarding change.*

REFERENCES

A Journey of Transformation and Focusing When An Illness Threatens. *Doralee Grindler Katonah, M.Div., Psy.D. with Reva Bernstein.* Focusing Folio (Volume 18, Number 1, 1999)

This article was created with the help of Ann Weiser Cornell who interviewed Reva and transcribed the first draft.

IT NEEDS TO MAKE SENSE

Bebe Simon

*Interviewed and transcribed by Rob Foxcroft
Edited by Bebe Simon, Bala Jaison, and Paula Nowick*

ROB: The first Focusing person I ever spoke to was Mary McGuire. This was in January 1988. When Mary encouraged me to come to Chicago for some Focusing courses, she asked Bebe Simon if I might stay with her. In this way, I came to have a home in Chicago, where I have always been made welcome; and there I learned Focusing at all times of the day and night.

So when Bala Jaison asked me to interview Bebe for The Folio about aging, I was delighted to invite her to share her stories, her experience and her wisdom. I listened to Bebe's thoughts and memories for an hour or two during the recent Focusing Conference in Pforzheim. But we never spoke about aging. Does this mean that Bebe's reflections are irrelevant to this Folio?

Of course not. As Bebe looks back over thirty years of Focusing and eighty-five years of living, I invite you to think of her words as a vast Receiving step — the sixth step in Gene Gendlin's Focusing model. Receiving has a peculiar poignancy in late life. But Bebe is not only receiving. There is also forward movement here — carrying forward — something youthful, very much alive and growing, something decidedly forward looking.

What was going forward as we talked was tender and self-directing. I was not about to shape it. Bebe had her own path. Mostly I listened very simply, in the way I like to listen, though with the special tenderness of long friendship. As you read, you will maybe get a sense of deepening process, of emotional levels emerging and shifting as our talk goes on. You will witness a person aging with Focusing, a life more and more fully human, and rich in memory.

In these stories, I hope you will feel the depth of years and experience in a dear friend and colleague; who never, she tells me, thinks about aging, never about getting old, never dwells upon her years of life. And I think Bebe will always be young. When I was watching her dancing with Christian, at the conference in Pforzheim, I was not thinking about aging. He was the most gallant, most graceful man on the floor; and she the most youthful, most radiant woman. So I was thinking of the sixteen year old Natasha at her first ball, in Tolstoy's famous novel. Is this what Bebe is telling us about aging, after thirty Focusing years: that with Focusing, you will always be young?

~~~~~

*Note: Since my words are in italics, I have used underlining for emphasis.*

*ROB: I thought you might like to begin by telling me the bit of the story I don't know at all. How did you first come to be sitting down with somebody learning to do Focusing? And who was it? And all those things.*

BEBE: After many years of therapy, of more than one kind, I was informed by a member of my family that there was a new kind of therapy in the paper that day. When I went home I saw in the *Chicago Tribune* an interview with Gene Gendlin. The article said that there would be two upcoming Saturday afternoon introductory sessions at the university — and Gene would be there. I was about to go away for a vacation, and I thought, “Oh! This is Tuesday, for this Saturday. It's probably all filled up, but I will call, anyway.”

So I call up and they say, “Oh no, that's fine. Come.” And it was only fifteen dollars for the afternoon, so you know how long ago that was! It was something like '79, because the paperback edition of the book, *Focusing*, had just come out. The workshop organizers wanted to get us all to go to bookstores, to get them to stock the paperback.

I had a strong feeling of wanting to go and learn what this was. So I went there on that Saturday, and it was, I think, Ann Weiser Cornell who was doing an introduction for Gene — and then he spoke.

I very often ask questions, and I like to sit up front. And when I asked a question he said to me, “Did I answer your question?” My face hadn't changed. That's how he knew he hadn't answered my question; but I didn't know that. “Wow. He's up there, and he was able to ask that — very interesting!” And so I said, “Well, sort of . . .” and he said, “Ask it again” . . . (Bebe laughs.)

*ROB: So Gene Gendlin said, “Ask it again.”*

BEBE: Yes. So I asked it again, and then he answered. And I was very impressed with that, particularly, that he would have such an open attitude.

They were then talking about a program that they were going to be offering shortly, but since I would be away, I would not be able to be there for that. So I let them know that I would be interested in the future, and by the time I came back in the Spring, they were planning three Saturdays, each one by a different person, and in a different place. One was at Reva Bernstein's house, and that was the only one that Gene Gendlin would attend, and I wanted to be where he was, so I signed up for that one.

There was a woman at that time who knew she was moving out of the state to the west coast. She had taken the program while I was away. Now she wanted to take in as much as she could to get as much as she could; and I wanted to practice. We both worked down town. We were able to arrange to be at a university, maybe Roosevelt, in the cafeteria, where we could have a meeting at five o'clock, and do some of this work. She thought she would be guiding me. She did not expect me to be able to guide her, but I was already able to do that. So we had several exchanges, once or twice a week — and that, so to speak, was my introduction to Focusing.

Then I heard there was a Changes Group, involving Gene. I was interested enough to go, though it wasn't the most convenient location for me. The lady who was hosting was a nurse, and every week we went to her house. But the way Focusing was done in that Changes group was so different from what I was familiar with. First, what they did was guide the whole group, to get them ready for Focusing. And if you got a sense of what you wanted to Focus on, you then picked someone who was just sitting there, to listen to you out of the group.

“Would you listen to me?” — “Yes” — “OK, then I will work with you.”

This was my first experience with Changes. It seems to me that we always stayed in the big group. And as I continued to go there, I may have known then, I'm not sure, that someday I wanted something like that in my area — that I would want to have such a group — but not necessarily the way they did it.

Meanwhile, the weekend workshops had started. And it was quite expensive. It was \$250. And since Focusing was not part of my work life, there was no one else to pay for it. So it was a big decision as to whether or not to spend that much money. But the lady who was hosting the Changes group also wanted to go, and eventually we both went to that weekend.

The weekend was very different from those previous three days we had already done. And they were supposed to give you each one or two new Focusing students to work with, for a research project. You would guide somebody in Focusing, and the researchers would then have some record of this work. And I remember, when Gene was there, I said to him, “How do I know if I'm doing well enough to get a student? You know, am I succeeding in this course?” And being Gene, he was very casual about it. Oh, he's sure it would be fine, yes. (We both laugh.) There was no sense that he was really judging it. He didn't seem to have any questions about it. Why, I don't know. So I did get one person, and showed that person Focusing, to some extent. I don't really remember how well it went, but I did enjoy it.

And then I heard that Gene was going to present to the Illinois Psychological Association. There would be maybe two or three hundred people in a large room, and he asked all the people that were then interested in his work to come and help him. Reva and Ann may have been there. I don't remember everybody, but it was just an informal invitation, you know, “Will you come and help Gene?” — “Sure” — and of course Gene takes a room full of people, lots of chairs, and tells them to move into little groups, breaking up the whole room. He had us going around from group to group. They were supposed to be listening to each other, and we were supposed to be there to help them, if they needed it. So I went around, and if someone needed help, I stopped and saw what the problem was, and how I might help.

Not too long after that I was asked if I would come and help at the regular weekend workshops. Yes, I would — I was delighted that they asked me. Most of the young people there at the time were either psychology students, or had already studied with Gene at the University of Chicago. I felt that Reva and I were probably the only ones who weren't in that advanced category — it seemed to me advanced, you know.

But they did ask me to come. I remember going, and there were some young women from out of town. So since I was available, I asked them: Where they would they like to go for lunch and dinner, during the workshop? So we'd go out, just spending some time together, because I knew the places, and whatever they liked or wanted — I knew where to suggest. So we had a very nice, cosy relationship over the weekend. And at one point this young woman said to me, "Bebe, how long have you been doing this?" and I said, "It's my first time." She looked at me (Bebe is laughing) as if I were crazy. She was quite startled. I think she thought I was more experienced than I was. I said that I loved Focusing. I had such a good time. As it ended, Gene passed by, and I said, "Gene, I want you to know, I gave a lot, but I got much more than I gave." And he said, "That's as it should be."

For me it was an opening that was beyond anything I had ever experienced. It was very exciting that I could work so easily with people like that.

Well, after that I knew that what we were doing at that Changes group was not satisfactory. Unfortunately, you didn't have to have much experience with Focusing to come to the Changes group, and some people were not even interested in what I had just learned at my weekend workshops, such as guiding techniques. I went, and a friend of mine was going with me, and without knowing how to ask, exactly, I just started to guide her — and it worked. But the people there were not interested in what I had just learned. They didn't want to know. They were not impressed with the new developments in Focusing. Well, then I knew that I would not be able to stay in this Changes group very long. It was not what I wanted. I found what I wanted to do — it was exciting — and I wanted more of it.

So, sometime after that, Ruth Arkiss, who was at that time heading up the Focusing office, informed me that there was going to be a workshop in Boston about building community, and that I might be interested because I wanted to have the Changes Group at my home. The workshop was run by Kathy McGuire and her (then) husband, Zack Boukydis. They had rented this whole house for the workshop. We had the kitchen, we made the food; everything took place in this one house — we had the use of it for five or six days.

I had a cousin who lived in Boston, and she met me at the airport. I had gotten all dressed up for the airplane flight. My idea was: "I have to look proper when I'm coming into this group." So I showed up in my dress-up clothes and earrings, but everyone else was in jeans! Of course, they had come in cars because they lived close-by in that area, and I was the only one who looked so formal.

The house had dormitories, small rooms, for maybe three or four. You were supposed to pick a place for yourself, put your things down, and make yourself comfortable. Well, there was a room, and nobody seemed to be there, so I choose that place and I put my things down, and I guess it was at night when someone else — turned out it was Gladys — had also come into that room.

So when she saw me she said, "Praise the Lord!" (We both laugh.) And I thought, "What do you say to a person like that? How am I going to even talk to her? How are we going to be in the same room? We don't talk the same language at all. That's going to be

a problem.” But I did my exercise in the morning, and she did her meditation, her prayer, whatever . . . and it turned out we got along great! Really great!

Now Kathy had written a manual about Building Supportive Community — which also talked about Changes groups. And I kept telling the group — and they were getting somewhat irritated — “That’s really not Focusing like that.” I know my impression (to them) was that I knew better than they did about Focusing. And eventually they asked me to present something or talk about it — to tell them what it was that I knew. Gladys too said, “You’re always saying, ‘Well, that’s not what I know’.” So I did show them, and they liked it. And I was so pleased that it went over well.

By the end of the week, they had us go around, as a parting activity, and say something about each person in the group, that you had noticed or appreciated about them. So when it was Gladys’ turn she went around the circle, and she had really observed everyone, and had lovely things to say about each person — she was really amazing. And then I thought to myself, “She’s not got anything left to say to me. She’s said everything there is you could say to the other people in the circle. What will she say to me?” And when she came to me, she said, “Bebe, I love you.” I was so touched. We were already so deeply connected.

When it was over and I went home, there was someone that I knew, Sandy, who wanted to know more about Focusing, and I liked her, and I said if she would agree to come every Tuesday, we would then be a group. In case anybody wanted to come, we would put out the word that we had a group. Otherwise I would just be Focusing with her. I would show her what I could about Focusing, and she agreed to that. So for quite some time she came every week, and we started what we called ‘a group’, and we made it known that people were welcome to come — but in time she moved away.

Then, after Sandy, there was someone else. She was the best person in the whole world; I loved her so much. You know who it was? It was Lakme. Then Lakme Stanford, later Lakme something else. Yes, yes. Now she’s Lakme Elior.

She was working downtown, and she was going west to her family every Tuesday. So it was not inconvenient for her to come, since I was in that direction. I arranged with her that if she would come every week and make that commitment, we would Focus together; and then we could say we have ‘a group’. And she did that for a very long time. Some people did come, and sometimes they’d come one time and didn’t come again; and sometimes they came more. That was the start of the Changes group. That’s how it all began.

And that was very good for me — much better to have it at home. I didn’t have to go to a church, which is where the Hyde Park group met, and where you had to have keys and so on. It was easy, the whole thing was very easy, to have it in my own home. That’s how it began.

I continued to go to the weekend workshops. Ten months of the year. Unless I was out of town, I was there every single time. We did not get paid. I say it was like having free supervision. And although I learned, I found out that Gene was not doing what Peter Campbell and Ed McMahon were doing with the people that were helping them. They would talk to their trainers after the weekend, you know — to find out how was it for them?

Some of our people were working with Ed and Pete, as well as with us. One was Dave Young. And he would tell us things that he learned from them, that really interested me — and this happened often enough, that I got curious to find out more. Ed and Pete used to assign one person to you for the weekend — each little group would be one person's group. And I said, "Look, I don't want to be with one of the people I know. That's no novelty. I want to be with one of the priests." So Dave said OK, he could arrange it. And when I was going to the first weekend, Gene asked me to take them the book, *Let Your Body Interpret Your Dreams*, which had just come out. I took it to them as a gift from Gene, whom they knew.

In one session with Pete, something was said about 'accepting', and I said to him, "I don't use that word. I don't know why, but . . ." . . . he said (she laughs), "I know why. The church is full of, 'You should accept'." And so I really felt very connected to him — and part of it was that he always talked about the "Judaeo-Christian" background, and I always felt it was like . . . he knew I was there, too.

*He included you, with your Jewish inheritance.*

Yes, that was very, very special to me. And at the end, they conducted a mass. I didn't always sit in. But one time Peter was in his robes, and I said, "Can you hug a priest with robes?" "Oh, absolutely!" He was so warm, so welcoming, and I also learned certain little stories from them that I still use, that I like very much.

*Could you tell one?*

Well, the one that I use the most was about the tapestry. If you picture a tapestry on the wall, and you shrink yourself down to a tiny, tiny ant-sized creature, and you just crawl up the wall and hop on, it doesn't matter where, because the threads are all interconnected, all interwoven, so it doesn't matter where you start. Just hop on and follow the thread. And I always thought that was special. So I use that.

I'm also reminded now, that Gene used to allow for time that he could spend with someone after a workshop, if it was needed, because he never wanted anyone to be left going home in a bad place. There was one woman that I worked with, and evidently she had asked him for time afterward, but at the end, when he spoke to her, she said, "Oh I don't need it. I worked with Bebe." Well, I was a little bit taken aback, you know. But Gene said he got to know, from others' feedback, how it was — working with me.

Another time there was a friend of Gene's at a workshop, who came from far away — Alaska. It was a husband and wife and Gene knew the husband. He was a *big* man, a little too heavy maybe — and he tells me, when we sit down, he wants me to know that he has a problem. He tends to fall asleep when he sits down. He said he had narcolepsy. But that didn't mean anything to me, because I didn't know anything about narcolepsy. So I worked with him for a little bit, and I said something about the quality of his felt sense. So he paid attention, inside, then he said, "Relaxing" — "Oh", I said, "Is that the handle?" And he said, "No".

And suddenly I knew. I said, “Oh, that’s the answer before the question.” And he said, “Yes. That’s right!” (In other words, he had skipped the handle, resonating and asking steps, and jumped straight from the felt sense to the felt shift.)

At some point, his wife spoke up about his being a shallow breather. But I didn’t know any of that. I wasn’t picking up on that. I didn’t see it. I don’t know that I would have known if I saw it. So that was interesting — and the next time, he said he wasn’t falling asleep.

*And that’s even more interesting.*

Yeah, but I didn’t talk to him after that. I don’t know if it lasted. At the end of that session, Gene walked in, and the man said, “She’s good!” — and he said, “Yes I know.” — and I say, “How do you know? You never saw me work.” I was quite annoyed that he never seemed to know what I was doing. He said, “I know. I hear.” And they went off to lunch. We’d had a very good experience that stayed with me forever.

There were some other interesting people that I remember. There was a woman who told me that part of her wants to say it can have everything it wants, and part of her wants to give it everything it wants. And I heard something there: that you’re talking down to it, about it, at it, you’re never listening to it. So then I said to her, “What if you didn’t have to give it everything it wants, and what if you also didn’t have to tell it, it can get everything it wants. What if you just said ‘Hello’ to it?” — “Oh!” — So then she did.

I did some reflection after that — just saying back to her what I had taken in, what I had heard. I didn’t do much guiding. It didn’t seem to be needed. It just kept moving along, and by the end she had found her warrior, and was not going to allow anyone to intrude again without her permission. So it was obvious she had known intrusion at some earlier time — and now it could not happen again to her in that way. And so we learned the value of saying “Hello”.

Then there’s another time I recall so fondly: Ann had set up a Treasure Maps just before the Canadian conference, and I was a participant. On the second day Ann said, “Oh, by the way, ‘Hello’ comes from Bebe” — and this woman is incredulous: “‘Hello’ comes from Bebe!!!????” (Bebe is laughing again.) I just sat there grinning, you know, not saying anything, but tickled pink. That was something I will never forget — the way Ann said that. Total shock. But Ann has always been very gracious about acknowledging other people.

And it seems to me I’m talking too much.

*Well, maybe we’ve finished a piece of the story. That’s the story of your beginnings, to the point where you even began to be recognised as a person who can give some knowledge back.*

Then there was a friend in California. I went there every year to spend time with my friends and relatives there, and I would always arrange to see her. We would have a meal and do a little Focusing together. As I remember, she was talking — nothing very personal — but as something came to her she just said it. And I said, “I have found that sometimes that place inside doesn’t like to say it right away. It’s better to wait and see if *it* would say,

‘It’s OK to tell her’” — “Oh!” — She hadn’t thought about that. Later she said to me, “Do you know what *it* said to me?” — with a pouting mouth — “I didn’t want you to tell her.” So that validated what I had suspected. It’s not OK. I tell people, “Don’t say it. First have it for you; and then see if it’s OK to say it.” It’s OK not to say it. You can always say it later. Sometimes, if you say too much too quickly, it’s gone. You think you’ll never forget it, and five minutes later you can’t remember what it was. So it’s better not to say it.

So that was a very big step for me in learning how to have courage in what I believed and what I saw.

For a very long time, at the weekend workshops, I was very hesitant to say anything. As Gene talked, I would think, “How can I add anything? I don’t think I’m in that category. I’m not a student at university. I’m not anything.” I would wait. I was certain that other people would notice some of the same things that were bothering me. Surely, somebody would say something. And they didn’t!

I would wait and wait till I could no longer stand it; and then I would jump in and say something. Gene never seemed to mind. He always felt comfortable, and said, “You have never said anything wrong, and could never say anything wrong.” It was all fine with him.

One time he was doing dream work, and it was the strangest dream, because in the dream, half of the dreamer’s face was hard and rigid, and the other half was totally different. And as Gene worked on the dream he never said anything about that. When he was completing the dream, he asked if there were any questions. “Oh, I have a question” I said, thinking he must have known why he didn’t say anything about the two halves. So I would just mention it: “How come you . . . ?” — “Oh she’s right”, he said, “I didn’t notice.” That was always Gene: it never bothered him.

*He wasn’t just unbothered, but he was so quick to pick up what you were going to say.*

Yes,

*If you were going to pick one thing that had meaning for you inside yourself — what would come?*

There was a very special man named Jay . . .

He first came for a weeklong. I didn’t happen to work with him during the week, but at the end people could sign up for a half hour with any trainer. Mostly they were people that I knew, that I had worked with. And Jay’s name was on the list, but I didn’t know why, because he didn’t know me and I didn’t know him. So he sits down and he says, with a kind of weariness: “I guess if I want help, I’m going to have to tell the story again.” And I say, “No. You don’t need to tell the story. You know the story. I don’t need the story.” “Oh, really . . . !”

So then I ask him, if he remembers, can sense about whatever that is . . . and could he just spend some time there with it. And suddenly he gasps, as I have never before or since heard anyone gasp: “Aaahhhhhh!” he said, “It’s on my side! It’s not the enemy!!” I never

asked him what he was referring to, and I never needed to know. Twice he gasped like that. It took his breath away, literally.

When the weeklong was over, he came to say goodbye. He said, “You don’t know this, but I’m saying goodbye to you in a new voice.” So of course, that made him very special to me. I still didn’t know him that well. Then he came to the four-week program, the first summer school, and I was there — helping out each week. And that’s when we got to know each other better.

Then, one time, when I couldn’t attend a presentation about dreams I told him I was very interested in finding out what happened in the workshop, and would he tell me about it. So we made a date. We’d go out to brunch, and he would tell me all about what happened with the dream work. He did, and we became very good friends.

*And then, you went to stay with him a few times, didn’t you?*

Yes, he invited me to come. He had a lovely place in North Carolina — it was gorgeous there. He wanted me to teach Focusing. He would get all the people for me to teach. Everything was so comfortable and so lovely — I loved that house — and he wouldn’t accept my wanting to just teach for him — no, he insisted on paying me — I would have been happy to do it for him for free — just for the visit and for being there and enjoying so much, but no . . .

He was really somebody very special. Sadly, he died. And when he did, he left me a sizable amount of money that I now use as scholarship money. I figure it’s there to allow people to come for what they can’t afford. It was a special experience that I had with him, that first time; and (tenderly) we became good friends.

Then . . . I remember . . . there was a man who had a dream that was maybe fourteen years old. Gene always says it’s better to work with a fresh dream, but it was this old one that he wanted to work on. He told me that his father wasn’t comfortable with feelings. There was no talk about feelings in his family. His father very much wanted him to go to school or to college, to get this education. Yet in the dream, his father didn’t come to his graduation, and he had intense feelings about that — he couldn’t understand why his father wouldn’t come, when his father so much wanted him to study.

But I knew why his father would not come. How did I know? Because (in effect) he had just told me. I wasn’t using psychological knowledge. I was just noticing what he had said. So I reminded him of what he had told me: “Maybe it was because he was afraid of what his feelings might be when you graduate” — “Ah-ahhh!” he said, “Now it makes sense.” He has put two and two together. His father’s fear of feelings, and his father’s refusal to go where he would be overcome by feelings: of course they fit together. He said, “I never could make sense before. Now it makes sense.” And I always remember that. (Bebe is speaking very softly.) Yeah . . .

This point about making sense is something I learned from Ray Purdy. We were having breakfast in Madison, Wisconsin; and I was telling him that Gene says, “You can’t

take away the parent. You can't say the parent was not good, because it's like taking away the parent, and you can't do that. It's too upsetting for the person."

And Ray said, "No, I don't think that's what it is. I think there is a need from the beginning to make sense. And if someone is supposed to take care of you when you're little, and they don't treat you right, that doesn't make sense; but if you're naughty, and they mistreat you, Oh! Then it can make sense."

So there was this strong need to make sense: and when he said that, I said (with an edge of tears): "Let's get out of here." I paid the bill, I got in the car, and then I sobbed my heart out. For some reason that went so deep.

*(Slowly and softly — we are both deeply moved) You need to make sense. The child must be able to make sense.*

Yes. The alternative is to go crazy. That's why children blame themselves when something isn't right in their upbringing. See. It's the only thing that can make sense. When Daddy leaves the family: "Well, it must be something I did. It's the only way it makes any sense." And I kept hearing people saying, as I did with that dream, "Oh, now it makes sense." It verified what Ray said to me: that people need to make sense.

*And that made a big shift for you — Yes, yes, yes — in your being, in your feelings, in the moment of all that, all those tears in the car.*

Yes — and it taught me something that has always stayed with me: Inwardly, it needs to make sense . . .

So . . . Oh Rob, there are so many stories . . . I can go on and on like this. I would probably be very embarrassed if I had to hear all this played back.

*(Teasing) And I was going to give you the tape . . .*

*(Now we are both laughing) — Don't you d-*

*You can read it in The Folio!*

*So tell me more. . . who else was important? Gene of course was important — and I guess Mary McGuire?*

Oh, yes. Mary was very important. There was a point when Gene no longer wanted to do weekend workshops, so Mary was running them, and I was still assisting. And she would often say, "Oh, I forgot to ask you ahead of time: will you demonstrate with me before the group?" — "Yeah, I don't mind. Sure . . ." I said.

So then, she'd start with: "Where are you? — What do you want to say?"

One time I remember thinking, "Oh, my God! What if I don't have anything to say? What will I do? What if I don't come up with something?" I was feeling very nervous, and I said to her, "I'm feeling uneasy. What if I don't come up with something?"

And she said (gently): “You don’t have to come up with anything. You don’t need to come up with anything to get attention.” Well, that was it. I wanted to just sob then. I knew we were demonstrating. I didn’t feel that was the place for it. But I just wanted to cry my heart out. (Now Bebe is in tears.)

*You don’t have to do anything to get attention — that touches a very deep place.*

Yes, see . . . (very tenderly, murmuring) a very deep place . . .

Then there came the time when Mary said, “Would you want to do the Level One?” — “Sure. That’s fine with me.” And she said, “Well, there are only three people this time.” And I said, “What difference does it make? What do I care how many there are?” — because I just loved working with the people. So I would do the Level One, and then it became the Level Two that I took on. So I used to do Level One and Two for them.

(With great happiness) And it was the best part of my life, that I had all these wonderful people from all over the world . . .

*It was the best part of your life.*

(Bebe’s voice is soft and intimate.) Yes . . . And I made friends . . . without having to travel. And there was . . . . . the opportunity was like a gift, that they gave me . . .

*(Very softly) — It was a gift that they gave you.*

Yes . . .

Mary McGuire told a story. Mary loved her cats, and one cat died, and it was like a child to her. She was beside herself. So she called Gene to tell him what had happened. And he actually re-scheduled his class with his students at the university, to come and be with her . . . (Now Bebe is a little tearful once more.) I never forgot that . . . yeah . . . that’s what he did . . .

*Gene Gendlin rescheduled his class because the cat died.*

Yes, he did — because he knew how much she needed his support. And so he came over there to be with her.

He is such a wonderful person . . . I remember the day when somebody at a workshop asked him, “How do you avoid being a guru?” Because he is not a guru, could never be a guru. And he said, “A little honesty goes a long way.” That’s Gene. He is so honest about himself — he never has to hide.

And then there is a story I love to tell about partnerships. This couple had a practice together in some sort of therapy, and she came alone to the workshop. She just loved it, so then she brought her husband. They said that was the best thing that had ever happened to the two of them — Focusing together.

Gene said, “If you know these people, you know they are special people. However, if you want to try Focusing with your husband, wife, or significant other, OK. But also be

sure to get another Focusing partner. You don't need one more thing your partner can't do for you!"

Previously they had only been to some other training that some man had developed which got to be very well known — with a lot of pressure on people to bring their friends. It got to be called the Forum, but it was called something different then — and it had all kinds of rules: you don't wear a watch; you don't go to the bathroom until they say you can. And so she's sitting here waiting for the rules (laughing), at a Focusing workshop. We don't have rules! — but she was thinking there have to be rules. We're sitting and talking, she and I, and Gene wasn't really close by. We're sitting at a break, and they always had the nuts and raisins, so she was nibbling nuts and raisins and she dropped one on the floor. I said, "That's the rule. We're not allowed to drop them on the floor!" And Gene gets up there, and he says, "EST!" I couldn't believe he heard what we were saying. (Bebe is laughing again.) Oh, he was so sharp, you know.

*You hadn't seen a lot of Gene since he left Chicago. . .*

No, I hadn't, and I missed seeing him. Then, I had an opportunity to go to New York to the theatre. I had never done that. But my son said to me, "Mother, come to New York. It is worth it." And then I realised that the only thing that would make it worth it to me was if I could see Gene.

So I called him up and I said, "I'm coming to New York. Can I see you?" — "Oh, of course!" — "When?" — "Any time!" When I got into the city, I took a taxi to his place — I was so excited — and I sat with him and we just visited. We spent about two hours together. And at one point, I said, "Did you pay attention to that?" — and he said, "You're trying to get me to focus!" We had such a wonderful visit

And then, a few days later there was a message from Gene. Gene never calls. Never. If I call and he's busy, he says, "Call later." He doesn't call back. But this time there was a message from Gene. He said, "When you left, I realised how much you brought loving — so thank you." (Bebe is crying now . . .)

*That touches you very deeply.*

(Tenderly) — You know that's the way he says goodbye . . . he doesn't say goodbye, he says, "So hello!" — and that was the end of the message. And I told him I would cherish it forever.

*(Softly) It meant a great deal to you, and it still does. . . it still does. You brought him so much loving.*

(With much feeling . . .) Yes. Thank you. Coming from him that was unbelievable. He picked up the phone to call me . . .

The other thing that I'm remembering was when I was given a surprise party for my 70th birthday, and Atsmaout's husband took the pictures for my birthday — and there were

pictures of Gene blowing up the balloons — and I think it was Reva who saw the pictures and said, “He never blew any balloons up for me!”

*OK. Maybe that’s a good place to stop.*

Probably.

*Let’s see. Is there any last thing that feels important about Bebe and Gene and Focusing?*

One time I asked him to listen to me because I had a problem with sleeping and I could not get any resolution for it. And he did. He listened to me and I wanted to pay him and he wouldn’t let me. He said, “You have helped so much.” So I said, “Then I cannot ask you again if you will not take money for this session that I had with you.” I remember that. He would not let me pay him . . . Yep . . .

*A wise and a kind and a generous man — and one whom you’re very much involved with in your feelings and your life . . . However, the biggest feeling, when we were talking, was Ray Purdy saying to you, “It needs to make sense.” Maybe one of the two or three great revelatory moments for you . . .*

Yes. It needs to make sense. There is a need, a basic need to make sense . . .

*A basic need . . .*

It went in so deep and so fast. I just sobbed my heart out. (With much feeling) — I don’t know why it hit me that hard, but it did.

*It absolutely touched the child in you, who could not make sense, and who tied herself in knots to make sense —*

(Softly) — Maybe.

— of what was crazy-making

— Maybe.

*Something like that.*

It could be, but I have little memory of my childhood.

*But something knows, or the tears wouldn’t come.*

Yes . . .

And I wish I could tell you something, but I don’t know if it’s necessarily for this . . .

*(Rob is laughing, but Bebe is serious) — So shall I stop the tape?*

Yes.

## **MY JOURNEY WITH FOCUSING: A Developmental Process**

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*Jill Drummond*

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“Aging” is an interesting word. We’re all doing it, every moment of our lives. And yet at age 62, I sometimes want to reject that word. “I’m not aging, I’m ripening.” Although my skin and joints are surely past their prime, my sense of myself-in-the-world continues to unfold into something fuller and juicier. Focusing has been a major part of that process.

My “aging” as a focuser has included several important shifts in my understanding of Focusing and listening, and has certainly brought shifts in my relationship with myself. I’ve come to see this adventure of learning and living Focusing as a kind of developmental process. When I began, it seemed that there was a body of information and wisdom that I could take in and then practice, in the form in which it was presented to me, until I could use it effectively. I’ve found that it hasn’t worked that way, and thank goodness for that.

The practice of Focusing interacts differently with each unique human being. It evolves and develops. New meanings emerge. Certain learning tools and understandings that are helpful at one stage of development may not be as useful at a later stage. As I’ve grown and changed, what I need and want has also changed.

Several areas of Focusing come to mind where I’ve gone through an evolving process. There is certainly a path of development that is unique to me, unfolding from my own particular experiences. I also suspect that in some cases the path of development is more universal.

I would like to describe a few of these areas of development, in the hopes of opening further discussion. In some places, I will mention the influences which have crossed with my previous understanding to create something richer and more useful. Sometimes this “crossing” influence was another perspective within the Focusing community, and in other cases it came from outside the Focusing world.

### **PRESENCE (THE FOCUSING ATTITUDE)**

My early understanding of Presence, or the Focusing Attitude, felt inwardly like a mental intention to be non-judgmental, caring and allowing. Gene Gendlin invited us to hold a “friendly attitude” toward what we encountered inside. Ann Weiser Cornell suggested we turn toward each thing with a kind of “interested curiosity.” I also learned to use certain language to support me in bringing my larger self into relationship with something I was experiencing inwardly. As I went further with Focusing, my understanding of Presence was felt more as a bodily-sensed experience of caring, interest, and even welcoming. Peter Campbell and Ed McMahon’s description of Caring-Feeling-Presence, and their exercise of feeling our “affection teacher” in our bodies has contributed to this change. I recall a particular exercise which invited me to sense the feeling that might come in my body if I

were asked to tenderly hold a fragile infant who needed my loving care in order to survive. Now the experience of Presence is something I try to find in my body, rather than in my conscious intention.

## **ACTION STEPS**

At first, I thought my life would begin to move forward magically, just because I was Focusing. I know I was not taught to expect that, but somehow I did. I learned about the work of Atsmaout Perlstein and Bilha Frolinger in which they speak of “Step 7” (the taking of Action Steps) at a time when I was also studying Life Coaching. Now I really value conscious action steps that help me live forward into a situation, interact with it, so something new comes both inside myself and in the situation. Action steps are like little reflections we feed back to whatever in us wants to live forward in some way. It is as if we’re saying to this place, with every little action step, “Is this right? Would this feel right for this wanting?” And we wait for a response.

## **JOY AND ALIVENESS**

I recently discovered that what I want from Focusing has shifted somewhat. What drew me to Focusing initially was the longing for more inner peace and calm, a need for relief from distress. But now I am getting more interested in joy, aliveness, excitement, and challenge. Of course, painful or uncomfortable things still come, and Focusing helps them shift. But perhaps as part of my developmental process, I am starting to notice more of my longings toward my future. At those times, I know I am connecting with the forward-reaching energy of my whole organism, leaning toward what it is wanting and guiding me toward a fulfilling life. And I am getting more sensitive to noticing those wantings.

## **STRONG EMOTIONS**

My understanding of strong emotions has changed quite a bit. When I first learned Focusing, I tried to avoid being “identified” with strong feelings. As Gene Gendlin would caution in his writing, I don’t have to “stick my head in the soup to find out how it smells”. Now I can also see that simply allowing the body’s natural expression of a strong feeling, for example crying, can sometimes be a next step forward. Crying doesn’t necessarily mean I am taken over or identified with the feeling.

I realize that in my own process, crying comes in more than one way. Often tears *follow* a felt shift; they come *with or after* some movement that carries forward. Here, they seem to just come as my body’s expression of relief. At other times, the movement of crying itself can actually *be* the next step, *be* the carrying forward that is needed first, in order to *then* experience a felt shift. These instances happen when I have a warm and caring connection with an *It* and am sensing into “what *It* feels or wants from *It’s* point of view” (my deep gratitude to Ann Weiser Cornell for this). Then *It* sometimes lets me know that *It* wants my body’s natural expression of an emotion to be allowed.

Once, while focusing alone, I had been spending time patiently being with something inside. I “heard” *It* say, “Share this body with me.” I deeply understood that *It* was asking me to allow the natural expression of *It’s* feeling through my real, flesh-and-tissue body. In this particular case, *It* just wanted to cry. *It* wanted to have a sort of “equal access” to bodily expression of *It’s* truth.

I began to notice how empowering and integrating it felt to let something in me cry, shout, moan, or speak, out-loud with intensity, to give *It* an actual physical voice. Often something totally eases, as a result. The pure physicality of these expressions through my living body seems to carry them forward in some way. Often I am aware that I’m still quite solidly grounded in my larger self, even as I let myself fully experience something painful. This is unmistakably different from the times when I know I am “taken over” or identified with a strong feeling. As a result, there is a fresh sense of “owning” something in myself that has been cut off and inviting it to be fully there for me to encounter.

When my body’s process is blocked, I feel stuck in a very uncomfortable, sometimes painful way. As Rob Foxcroft has described, the body’s way is for the feeling to rise like a wave, to be experienced, expressed, and to pass. “We are meant to let the wave rise and pass, in order to be freshly with what’s left behind.”

## FUNCTION BEING MORE IMPORTANT THAN FORM

In my early years, I learned the “forms” of the Focusing process as they were taught by various trainers. By “forms” I mean the ways of doing things, the steps, stages, language of Focusing. Sometimes these forms were controversial. One teacher would say, “Do this”, and another would say, “Don’t do that.” Some liked Clearing A Space; some did not. Some waved away The Critic dismissively, while another turned toward it with curiosity and compassion.

As I have gone further in my own explorations, I am starting to see beyond the form to the function. Many different forms may serve the same function. And certain forms may be more or less useful and effective, depending on the function we are asking them to serve.

Clearing a Space, when introduced as a way to experience the content-less state of Presence, may help people, in a sense, “back into” Presence by temporarily moving out anything that isn’t Presence. Things that are noticed, acknowledged and set out may then be attended to from a deeper sense of Presence. But if Clearing a Space is used to remove things from our experiencing bodies, to get rid of them or exile them, then it undermines another important function of Focusing: *being with* our own experiencing.

I’ve been inspired by the work of Herb Benson, who wrote *The Relaxation Response*, describing the essential functions beneath a large variety of different practices (forms). When I learn of various methods and techniques in Focusing, I try now to understand the essential functions they serve within the Focusing process.

## THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN OUTER AND INNER SAFETY

When I first started Focusing, I had a very strained relationship with myself. I had little ability to bring the caring, non-judgmental awareness of Presence to what I was experiencing. Looking back, I think the receptive *listening* of Focusing partners was an essential part of learning to hold that same state of Presence within myself. I had rarely experienced the feeling of unconditional acceptance before.

I began to enjoy this kind of listening so much that I felt disappointed and even annoyed when I didn't get it. Something in me not only wanted it but was demanding it, as if I required this kind of outer safety in order to feel safe within myself. This is the kind of outer safety often talked about within our Focusing community. Over a period of years, a number of experiences related to outer and inner safety left me wondering about the relationship between the two.

It became a little clearer with my exposure to two sources of learning outside the Focusing community. When I started to study Non-Violent Communication, there was a noticeable change in how the issue of safety felt inside me. Later, more clarity came as I encountered the work of Dr. David Schnarch, including his book *Passionate Marriage*. I am deeply grateful to him for his work on the process of growth and development within committed relationships. I especially love his distinction between 'other-validated intimacy' and 'self-validated intimacy'. It helped me see that there was a place beyond where I was, and I wanted to go there.

I recently read a sentence written to a discussion list by Suzanne Noel, who has developed a uniquely facilitative process she calls 'Recovery Focusing' for working with addictions. With her permission, I share it here:

*"When someone can be with me just as I am, I can be with myself just as I am."*

The sentence captured the essence of my earliest feelings about outer safety. And I now see that there is place beyond what this sentence points to, a place that has much more to do with Inner Safety. So, to make the sentence more my own, here's how I would say it now:

*"When someone can be with me just as I am, I can LEARN to be with myself just as I am EVEN when someone else cannot be with me just as I am (because they are afraid, or criticize me, or want to change me). And maybe then I can be with THEM just as they are."*

Outer safety may be an essential foundation for the development of inner safety. What has evolved in me is that outer safety is not the end place I am seeking. It's a developmental step toward *something further*: an inner safety that is not shaken by the lack of outer safety. I even notice that sometimes things that used to feel "unsafe" now feel only very uncomfortable.

I also know that when I am challenged by *not* being received with unconditional positive regard from another person, I stretch my ability to feel safe *inside* and to speak my own truth, even in the face of criticism. In a moment of not being validated, there is an opportunity for growth in the development of my self. My favorite focusing teachers actu-

ally embody this further development of inner safety, although it is not often talked about explicitly. I wish it were.

### **WHAT MORE MAY COME?**

Looking back, I see how I have begun to trade a static view for a developmental perspective. Earlier in my life, each new understanding came with a sense that I had finally arrived at my truth. It has taken an accumulation of remembered changes in my “truth” to finally tip the balance to a more tentative way of holding each new understanding. I delight in knowing that these current places where my thinking rests are only stops along the way. I have a real sense of excitement about what more may come.

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*I want to express my deep gratitude to Pat Oliver for her editing assistance and her close support and encouragement. I had something to say and she helped me say it better.*

## **SOME THOUGHTS ABOUT FOCUSING AND AGING: Losses and Gains**

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*Joan Lavender, Psy.D.*

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### **INTRODUCTION**

It never occurred to me that my practice of Focusing would be subject to an aging process. But why not? Along with changes in my Focusing, listening, and guiding skill have come other aspects of aging that have clearly affected my “fluency and fluidity”. I notice these on a daily basis as they affect my professional and personal life.

The definition of my problem — of memory, fluency and fluidity — seemed simple enough when I began this piece. It would be about the existential fact of how these real losses have affected my practice of Focusing, guiding and listening. But as this theme developed, it underwent its own carrying forward. The way I have held this apparently simple issue has become a doorway into the question of my life as a Focusing Therapist. You are invited to come along as the situation — the problem, my confusions, partial clearings, etc. are transformed. I will start with the “fact” of my memory.

It is an unalterable fact that my ability to be in a Focusing mode, to listen and reflect, and even, in some ways to guide Focusing, has changed over the last fifteen years. My ability to form a felt sense has waned. It is harder to remain suspended in felt sensing while waiting for words to come. Often the right words never come. I miss that moment. And then there is the challenge of holding two evanescent things in my awareness simultaneously. I lose one; it drops out while I am waiting for the other. I notice instead (okay, so focus on this!) the absence of felt sensing, the presence of this absence. I notice the falsity when I try to convince myself that it IS a felt sense. I know better.

My immediate memory is evanescent. It is not a matter of inattention or even of anxiety, although I am definitely worried about all this. I attend to the focuser, yet their words evaporate before I can reflect them. Without the precision of their words and phrases, I quickly lose the pathway to their implicit. So I cannot convey to the focuser that I am “at home in the universe of the other person” (Rogers, et al, p. 104) even when I am. Even careful paraphrasing could keep someone into a shallow pool, or worse — a lead them down a blind alley. Better to stay quiet.

The flow of this paper is as follows: the problem, about me, how I have held Focusing, from Focusing to Focusing Oriented Psychotherapy to Focusing Oriented Relational Psychotherapy, observations on two delicate, passionate processes, and, finally, wanting it all.

### **THE PROBLEM**

What is getting in the way of my Focusing? Is it some deep theoretical disagreement that cuts me off from my experiencing? Is it due to changes in the way that Focusing is being taught? Is it punishment for having written a dissertation that includes a critique of

Focusing? Have I not practiced enough? Is it the low dose of antidepressant I needed to help me through a family crisis? Is this the start of dementia? And/or, am I “holding” Focusing in different ways over time?

I am leading a workshop to teach theory and practice of Focusing to psychotherapists. Some are newcomers; others have a good grasp of Focusing. We have practiced pieces of the process, done listening rounds, etc. The students are enthusiastic and inspired. We are nearing the end, and I notice myself thinking, “Joan, you just might get away without doing a demonstration!” Then someone says, “Could you show us how the process looks when are you teaching a new person?”

I find myself in front of everyone, sitting in an unfriendly chair that rolls on its own volition. All has been going well, but my gut is now saying something quite the opposite. Some part of me realizes the predicament we are in, yet I am too frozen to allow it to be part of our process. My new focuser is a young woman from a distant culture, bravely learning Focusing in English. She has expressed her wish to learn this method. Now I sense her struggle to not let her nerves get the best of her. I want to be gentle and trust that my teaching her the skill of Focusing steps will be enough to help her find herself in this moment. But my voice is hollow, and my suggestions disembodied. And I cannot remember what I have said, even a moment before.

When it is clear that this is not working, my concern for her overrides my paralysis. I say something like, “I am so wanting to help you find a Focusing moment here, but I’m having a hard time following our process and your words, or even my own.” I am leaning toward her and speaking softly about this collapse in my performance. I force myself to peek at the group. Shame flashes through me, and I am readying myself to offer a long list of self-flagellations. I am supposed to be an expert.

The group is quiet. Someone says *sotto voce*, “This is really hard to do, and especially out in front of other people.” One student says that she is touched by the connection we are making about the connection we are not making. This comment about the interplay of relating, technique and context goes to the heart of this piece.

Back to the story. I hold back my urge to confess. That would be my old way of proceeding. But I have learned (through years of Focusing) to stay alive to the process. So I stop cringing, open my eyes and see that this fiasco has created a situation that is . . . interesting. The students are learning MORE from this poignant moment than from a seamless performance.

Fine for them . . . what about me? For now, and maybe forever, I will make every attempt to avoid a repeat of such fiascos. I am not going to offer anyone else a poor experience of Focusing or listening! I am not going to leave anyone stranded mid-stream. I cannot count on myself as a reference to guide others. I’ve lost my sea legs.

## **ABOUT ME**

Some personal background will lend an added perspective to the issue of losing Focusing, memory, etc. My colorful, complicated, poignant family embraced humanistic

psychology the way other families find comfort in religion. My parent's crowd changed (and exchanged) spouses, grew beards, wore love beads. Many mistook my depression for the spiritual manifestation of "an old soul".

My parents threw psychological terms around like confetti. We had more than our share of passions and eccentricities: sadly, some of my family members had real psychiatric problems. We needed help. The humanistic movement, with its emotional and sensual overload, obscured some of the stranger sides of our family life.

While my father was out canoeing with his therapist and my mother befriending the Black Panthers, I became a dance therapist. Then my mother joined a dance therapy group, and my father went into Gestalt therapy. In the meantime, along with some good enough psychotherapy, I learned Focusing. Thank goodness, no one in my family got to Focusing first!

Precious aspects of my personality and professional identity found a safe place when I found Focusing. I had been the family listener: now Focusing gave me a chance to be listened to. Focusing insulated me from the alienating objectification coming from the analytic world back then, and equally from the wild and crazy fringe. The process spoke to my poetic rhapsodic side. And, most of all, it gave hope to my depth.

## **HOW I HAVE HELD FOCUSING**

I see now that I have held Focusing in different ways through the years. In my twenties my memory was impeccable, and my ability to sustain a felt sensing mode was buoyant. Focusing also provided me with professional cache and a prowess I could demonstrate. This worked nicely into the grander image I had of being the special one with magical powers. I smile as I write this; power is not a word that I associate with Focusing. So my early use of Focusing actually ran contrary to Gendlin's democratic non-guru grassroots intent.

I also needed to find a way of getting close to others without losing myself in them. Focusing guidelines provided this balance. The first focusing/listening guidelines did not yet reflect the genius and radical vision of Gendlin's philosophy. Or maybe they did, but I wasn't sophisticated enough to grasp them. The initial advice was cast in old paradigm thinking i.e. "put your own stuff aside, and be prepared to listen to the (separate) focuser." I just went ahead, followed the instructions (including the one that said forget all this if you and your focuser need something different!!), and it all came out beautifully. Decades later some of us now consider: Do you ever put your own stuff aside? Is it your own stuff only? Is the focuser ever a truly separate person? Is the isolated mind a myth?

Yet for me, back then, this iteration of the Focusing world was "flat"; everything and everyone was in their place, and I loved it that way.

## **FROM FOCUSING TO FOCUSING ORIENTED PSYCHOTHERAPY TO FOCUSING ORIENTED RELATIONAL PSYCHOTHERAPY**

In my thirties I had no problems with Focusing, guiding, listening or memory. My mind was opening up to complex questions and discrepant theories about psychotherapy. I had arrived at the view that Focusing was essential, yet not sufficient, to sustain a psychotherapy session. This was no secret, but I had to arrive at it myself — experientially. I allowed myself to question the relationship of skill or technique to authenticity, an issue that remains unanswered.

I struggled with what to do with my awareness of something about my client that did not fit into the structure of the Focusing Therapy. Do we adapt the structure and, if so, how? How do these changes affect the Focuser? What to do with my own reactions to us together? These issues buzzed in my head, affecting my ability to create and sustain a pure Focusing Attitude.

One clinical moment captures the dilemma of this transition well. I had been working with a lovely woman in pure Focusing sessions as psychotherapy. During this time I was involved in psychoanalytic process research, observing with slow motion video how therapists manage their own anxiety in difficult moments in difficult sessions. (Freedman & Lavender, p. 81). I saw that therapists' movement patterns and cognitive processing go hand-in-hand, and that slight changes in movement behavior indicate when the therapist is taking a moment to refer inwardly to his/her own separate awareness. This internal action is usually preceded by a slight postural shift away from the client and a change of facial orientation. In other words, the therapist is having a brief private moment to think about something. But from a Focusing perspective, this slightest of gestures has great implications. It is a clinical faux pas.

I felt uncomfortable entertaining the idea of “thinking about” my client separate from being with her while listening to her in an active listening mode. Yet I did have a distinct need to think about her as well as plenty of thoughts about us. What was I supposed to do with them? In the next session, at a certain point, I found myself shifting my position and drawing my gaze into myself. She was instantly disoriented and . . . shocked. While we weathered this crisis, we never truly resolved it. I didn't have the relational skills at that point to make good therapeutic use of that crucial moment.

This incident signaled a turn toward a different kind of Focusing Oriented Psychotherapy. Pure active listening placed limits on my awareness. I needed my own subjectivity, but did not yet know how to use it.

The greater complexity of our engagement raised my anxiety. I needed more theoretical knowledge of the relational aspects of our work as well as a seasoned ability to improvise. My attention was challenged by the inclusion of more levels. This development temporarily affected my ability to remember details. I missed the flow of a Focusing session. I had learned to trust the intrinsic structure of the process, its rhythms, pregnant pauses and the reconstellating of experience that came with felt shift. I missed knowing what to do.

When I first began to conceive of psychotherapy as including me (and every one and everything else) as embedded in complex relational fields, I could only picture us each separately, but interacting. When I feel us as ‘interaction’, I think of the following quote:

My sense of you, the listener, affects my experiencing as I speak, and your response partly determines my experiencing a moment later. What occurs to me, and how I live as we speak and interact, is vitally affected by every word and motion you make, and by every facial expression and attitude you show . . . .

. . . It is not merely a matter of what I think you feel about me. Much more, I am affected even without stopping to notice it yet, every response you give me, I experience your responses . . . Thus is it not the case that I tell you about me, and then we figure out how I should change, and then somehow, I do it. Rather, I am changing as I talk, and think and feel, for your responses are every moment part of my experiencing, and partly affect, produce, symbolize and interact with it. (Gendlin, p. 38.)

In factoring myself into our shared equation, I can no longer pretend to simply factor myself out. Yet, this does not mean that the sessions are all about me, or us, or that we discuss all this explicitly all the time. Far from it. What emerges as salient moves from moment to moment and my responses are equally contextual. Pure active listening, noticing the quality of our relating in the next moment, taking in the details of an important story, being confused together, disembedding, etc. That’s how it goes.

One thing remains constant — the leaning into moments of incomplete processing that carry forward meaning. This applies not only to the client’s processing, or to my own (privately), but also equally to the implicitly sensed incomplete process that carries forward our implicit force fields, our undertows, and to all manner of relational meanings.

Hypothetically, we should be able to bring our experiencing to whatever beckons. But I notice a big problem here. My capacity to stay present to whatever is occurring actually waxes and wanes. My ability to stay in a Focusing mode is definitely not a steady state. I am exquisitely vulnerable to shifts within, between, among, etc. There are things I can’t fathom, issues I need to tune out, blind angles, densities, as well as the natural obliviousness that comes with the fatigue of being in the labor-intensive role of a therapist.

So perhaps my forgetting and my impaired Focusing, guiding and listening have to do with questions of the meaning I make of the immediate context. So I know that there will be always be aspects of our being together that I do not fathom. Sometimes, if I am lucky, felt sensing informs me of these, like the canary in the mineshaft. Perhaps my inability to even form a felt sense functions like a clue.

Now I’ve got it! My ability focus, guide and listen are themselves contextual and can never be a steady state!

Experiencing brings some difficult moments into emergence, but other perspectives appear only later on, when I “step out” of our context and view them from another angle. I am listening to many levels from many levels, and they are not continuously accessible.

Here is an interesting application of Focusing Oriented Relational Psychotherapy. You can see that we drift from fantasy to reality, from present to past, from I and thou, from my private self to my client, and all back again, in a moment. Any ideas I have formed about Terry’s situation are offered as felt sense hunches. What is unusual here is that Terry **is actually listening to my experiencing.**

Terry is furious with me, yet has agreed to come in for a last session before quitting therapy. She has been involved in this therapeutic adventure beyond her expectations, her symptoms are fading, and we have been hopeful for her. But now I make a mistake, putting our delicate relationship on the rocks. In the midst of a migraine, I made a hasty decision about a serious issue in Terry’s life. Shocked and betrayed, Terry flared up at me. “It’s over!”

On the phone, I am trying hard to remember all the details and to just listen. Damn that migraine, why don’t I just tell her that I wasn’t thinking straight! I actually do trust Terry, but now, well, here we are in this tough place. I am also aware that this specific kind of crisis/betrayal between us has an air of inevitability, but now we are in it, living it.

Terry reluctantly agrees to come in. Sitting across from me, she is watching me very closely as I struggle to follow her. I am in two places at the same time, sensing how she is watching me and trying to stay in touch with my own insides. My felt sense informs me that Terry is watching to see how I am with all of this very real difficulty between us. She is getting ‘something’ out of this mess. She tells me sternly that she expects me to be real with her, as always. This means that I share the impact she is having on me in the moment. She refuses any response that hints of her definition of a staid therapeutic stance; she wants the living substance! Right now I am her therapist facing her imminent departure. I continue in the experiential mode that we have cultivated and both grown to trust:

**J:** (sensing inward) I’m asking myself what I am noticing inside myself, as I sit here with you, knowing you are leaving . . . I understand what you are saying about betrayal . . . if I tell you exactly what I notice, one thing is feeling . . . honored, no . . . relieved . . . that you have come in, but just now I feel more a . . . pathetic feeling . . . like right now . . . (checking words with bodily felt sensing) I am . . . pathetic. (Yes, that really fits.) I note to myself . . . where is this going? I am reaching out to you, as someone who does not want to be here, really. (I can feel the pathetic in my chest, caved in, my arms reaching out, pathetically, hunched over.) . . . And I noticed myself feeling . . . reduced, it’s kind of . . . agonizing . . . helpless, yes, that’s the way it seems to some part of me . . . helpless, agonized, pathetic . . . yes, that seems right.

**T:** (watching and listening closely). You feel pathetic!?! (She smiles slightly, and I can feel a shift in the atmosphere between us. I still don't know where this is going.)

**J:** Yes, that's it . . . like you are dragging your body to be here, but you don't really want to be here with me. And that there is absolutely nothing I can do about it.

**T:** (giggles) You really do look pathetic. Oh, (she moves into her own deeper level) . . . like I am almost . . . (trying out words to felt sensing) enjoying seeing you this way? Like there's a pleasure in seeing you like this (in a dramatic fanciful tone) . . . I'm the one who can leave, but you have to be left! Poor therapist. You have no choice! I could almost feel sorry for you . . . (she is silent, then her mood darkens) . . . take my father . . . he always promised to come . . . I would wait . . . he would never come . . . it made me feel . . . oh! Pathetic.

**J:** Pathetic? You too?

Terry has never spoken from her direct experience about the pain of feeling pathetic around her tantalizing father. She has talked around it, but never been able to speak *from* it. My experiential dimension, our shared dimension, has brought her to this.

Later that day my insides are still wrenching. How awful, if she were to have left just then — awful for each of us, for us together. How fragile all this is . . .

While I failed Terry (in the incident preceding this session) in the session cited, I was able to manage my feelings enough to be able to use Focusing as a way to carry forward my, and then her (our) experiencing. Staying present to the “pathetic”, we made great use of that moment!

Terry's session is a more successful version of the same issue I confronted in the first example I shared with you at the start of this paper. In the first story, in grasping for faltering “technique”, I lost the opportunity to carry forward the meaning of our context. I explained this to myself only as a gaping ‘senior moment’. Yet it is also likely that I ‘spaced out’ in response to the anxiety inherent for each of us in this difficult moment. There was too much going on inside me — too much meaning. What saved us was our wish to stay connected despite the odds. This intent came through in the way we maintained our physical closeness, the way we looked at each other, and how the softness of our voices held each other's feelings. We were right there! I wish I could have taken my time! Yet I see now, with greater compassion for myself, that these gaps exist for a reason.

## **TWO DISTINCT FELT SENSES**

I have described the evolution of my first Focusing practice and my current work. I have emphasized the continuity of philosophy, theory and spirit. But there are also signifi-

cant differences in my life as a therapist then and now. The felt sense of working in different ways — all including Focusing — is different. Working in a purely Focusing mode speaks to my aesthetic sensibilities. The feel of being in the slightly altered realm of the implicit, the alternating rhythms of pause and emergence, has a beauty all its own: Hopeful expectancy amid the uncertainty. The presence of fluency and fluidity. And there is the comfort of knowing what to do.

The felt sense of being a Focusing Oriented Relational Psychotherapist/ Psychoanalyst is distinctly different. The word ‘courage’ jumps up immediately. I do not know what will emerge within, within or between us, but by now I’m pretty sure that it will require emotional courage. Tangle, stuck, cliff, risk, abyss, etc. It fits with my memory of a trip to Costa Rica rafting down a tropical river, discovering snakes along the way, getting snagged on the rocks, resting deeply after a long, exciting, exhausting adventure. Seeing first growth rainforest! Almost going off the deep end!

I am deeply, but not fearlessly, committed to the tangles, precipices, faux pas and moments of grace. This is the felt sense I take into my psychotherapy office these days.

My work — inspired by the process optimism of Gendlin’s philosophy — is enriched by the current developments in psychoanalysis that come closest to the spirit of Gendlin’s contribution. This complex marriage speaks to two sides of my nature — the darkly furrowed psychoanalytic and the luminosity of focusing. The sheer variety of moving parts and shifting levels makes the process more complex.

## **OBSERVATIONS ON TWO DELICATE REALMS OF PASSIONATE EXPRESSIVENESS**

Analogies, like metaphors, are an important part of Focusing. This brings to mind an analogy between two realms of passionate expressiveness i.e. the Focusing process itself and the nature and process of sexual passion. I offer these considerations in a nascent form, as they have been a persistent voice (duet?) in my life as a therapist — and so deserve a chance to be heard.

In both cases, the elements of inner life and the physical seem to need to be poised in particular relation to each other. Slight shifts in the alignment of imagery, the senses, physical urges and the emotional life of the individual are the ingredients of the system. Passionate sexual process relies on the interplay of arousal and physiology, fantasy and psychology, the highly voluble with the palpable ordinary. Orgasm — the manifestation of that tipping point — occurs when psychology becomes physiology, releasing heart, mind, fantasy, passion, love, longing and, some say, soul.

Sexual and Focusing experiencing each occur within a timeless zone that removes us for a brief yet essential moment from the tethers of reality. In sex, desire is the fluid; without desire, orgasm does not take flight. In Focusing, bodily felt sensing is the fluid; felt shift and meaning emerge from the delicate poisoning of felt sensing to language.

Both are experiences of passion which “inaugurates a reversal within the world of expression: it is the breakthrough of another side to things.” (Jager, p. 349) Moments of felt

shift occur in a slightly altered state of consciousness. Felt shift is a distinct phenomenon, a sense of grace, an opening, etc. Both phenomena are famously delicate and require a letting go. In each context, one remembers and cherishes such moments. Both have a touch of the miraculous.

It's fascinating to me that both sexual/sensual process and Focusing process require fine lines of experiential distinction. In both contexts, misfiring, misunderstanding, misusing, mechanization — and even faking — are all possible outcomes.

Like all living systems, despite the tremendous role they have in sustaining human vitality and creativity, these phenomena morph and eventually break down. It's easier to understand how this must happen in sexual passion, with its need for sheer physical effort and a resilient physiology. Is it simply, as a friend with a gift for humor recently said, "When the pilot is off, don't expect the burners to work." Do we just give it up or deny its significance?

Or can we keep the essence of passionate experience while transforming its context? A Focusing process is not subject to the perils of the physical. So why would it wane? Why should it fade? Perhaps there is even a surprising dialectic between frailty of body and strength of spirit as we become older. (Gadow, p. 144) Could I at least consider that the practice (in the literal sense of the word) of Focusing could sustain my precious fluency, fluidity and passion?

## IN CLOSING

This paper is a good example of the Focusing process itself. In true Focusing style, I find myself in a much different place than my original point of departure. I started in a panic — seeing my loss of memory as a sheer function of aging. This explanation carries its own ring of truth and carries with it a real sense of loss. I will do my best to offset this with replenishment of my skills and practice.

But then it occurs to me, through the course of this piece, that my worry about my memory is much more than this existential fact. I start to see how memory itself is a much more complex phenomenon. My developing capacity to hold experiences of greater complexity, to tolerate the attendant anxiety, to stay present to the uncertainty, is the gain. I am listening to more levels from more levels. In fact, now I see that, through the literary device of worrying about memory, I can step back and see what has happened, not only to me, but also for me, as I have become an older person.

The vision of the human capacity for meaning making articulated in Gendlin's philosophy and method have given me glimpses of a different way of being in the world. It has made it possible for me to be involved in life on a more molecular level while simultaneously appreciating its vastness and beauty. I can appreciate the complex unfolding nature of situations, and smile at my futile need to prejudge. It is living in Focusing philosophy (as applied in the method) that has given me the trust and permission to see how this piece develops. I can even trust the unfolding nature of uncertainty. Trusting uncertainty, being curious about uncertainty, having confidence in . . . uncertainty?

## WANTING IT ALL

It seems proper to end this piece with a bit of Focusing. I sit back, notice my breathing, taking time to court uncertainty, and the following comes up: the image of a fist balled into my gut . . . “I want it all”.

“What is the ‘all’ that I am wanting? On one level, I want to keep my perfect Focusing, guiding and listening skill. Give it back!! And I want to always be able to stand back and see the greater context. But since the contexts are ever expanding, there is no spot I can ever find to perch myself on to get that perspective.

I will never have full access to what is occurring while I am participating in it and creating it. There will always be things that emerge later; there will always be shifting contexts that I cannot fathom. I do not want to use Focusing to avoid the facing of an awkward relational moment, but, of course, that will happen. And I don’t ever want to lose Focusing as a way to carry forward experiencing. “Let’s take time to sense what this moment is like . . .”

I continue with my Focusing to close this paper. I am chuckling about the part of me that always wants it all. Yes, I know you are there. Maybe nothing else will happen now.

Then I have an image . . . of Harpo Marx! Hmm, I must be conjuring this up; it just can’t be a real felt sense. Harpo has on his magic overcoat, the shopworn one that looks like nothing special on the outside. To passersby he is a little hobo with a car horn for a voice. But then he opens his coat! Full of zippers, secret pockets, and holes, he produces a red silk scarf, then musical instruments with blooping sounds and finally, a live chicken. Finally, he reaches deep inside and out comes a bouquet of my favorite spring flowers! And all that with his famous cryptic smile. He’s got a lot to give, that silent little guy, in his own crazy way.

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## **FOCUSING AND AGING: Accompanying a Woman's Aging Journey**

—————  
*Patricia Manessy, NHC*  
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I am 59 years old. This year my body began feeling things it never had before. A little something in the knees, a sciatic feeling in the left hip that my chiropractor doesn't seem to be able to 'fix', a little more tired more often, a little more frightened in certain situations, and a painful emptiness around my invisibility as a woman.

There is a wanting to believe that I will age gracefully and that I will model all those wonderful ideals we are currently promoting for the aging process, but somewhere I am going down kicking and screaming.

I have been Focusing on my issues for 22 years and know something about my inner emotional landscape, but being with the physical degenerative process requires a new and kinder attention. The purpose of this paper is to continue the exploration of the inner relationship as it pertains to the bodily felt experiences of aging.

When the idea of sharing my journey emerged, I felt an excitement. I needn't be alone in all of this. Then, nothing happened. Sitting with all of this brought nothing. That's what this phase of life feels like for me. Nothing. And now I am running out of time. With curiosity, I observe the 'nothing' space, and it feels like depression. Staying with the 'nothing'; letting go of the label; yet, the space within holds no life, no wanting, no believing . . . just a flat line.

In truth, I am struggling with aging. I am struggling with letting go of the external, the outside package that reflected my youthfulness, body tone, soft morning skin, fresh face. I feel like a lesser being. I am offended when an 'elderly' gentleman smiles at me and feel like yelling: What are you looking at? What ARE you looking at? Look away. Don't even think about it. You are old and I am not. Go away.

And then, I'm ashamed for thinking this way about someone else who may also be going through the invisibility journey.

I am offended when a young person offers me their seat on the subway. WHAT? I can stand, thank you very much! A friend of mine was outraged when she went into a 'Screaming Eagle' store (you know, everything for the Harley Davidson fan) and was asked by a tattooed young man if she was looking for something for her daughter. Ummmm, NO! Actually I'm looking to buy a leather jacket for myself!

When did all of this happen? And why does it happen? Can I not still be seen as an ordinary human being who has all the wants and desires of a younger person? When do we cross that line from youth to 'old'? What is this line? I'm only 59.

Another of my women friends, who is a little older, 69, was crossing the Canada/US border with her son and daughter-in-law. She was sitting in the front seat with her son, who is about 40. The Customs Officer asked her son what he did for a living, then looked in the

back seat and asked her daughter-in-law the same question, but not for one second did this Officer consider that my friend was a working-woman. She is old and is retired and does nothing. In reality, she is a practicing therapist, a playwright and an actor.

There is a GROWL rumbling within. I want to sit with this outrage. I don't want this article to bring forward boring platitudes about 'aging gracefully'. Yeah, yeah, we know all of that and have been to all the workshops.

What is it? What is the learning? Oh, yes, I know that one too: "radical acceptance of everything" (Cornell, 2005) and accepting the aging process; accepting the non-acceptance of the aging process. Both are true. That is what I want to sit with. Holding both, giving them each space. There is a wanting to be able to just be with my aging, with my aging body, to in fact, yes, "gracefully surrender the things of youth" (Ehrman, 1948). Bah! Humbug! I don't even buy the wanting. A more honest statement would be: Nothing in me, at this moment, is okay with this. And let's have that be okay.

Let's make a space for: *Nothing in me is okay with this whole aging process. Welcome!*

The 'growl' shows itself, allows itself to be seen and observed, and perhaps slightly heard. As soon as there is an inkling of its potential power, it/she recedes. Back to trying to be the nice girl, the one I was raised to be, not making noise, certainly not rocking the boat, not creating a disturbance, and for sure, not showing anger. So, as many women I encounter in my life and in my practice, we suffer from 'depression', the preferred state to growling. (Ah, there is that 'depression' label.) Growling, from time immemorial, has been dangerous for women. This is my ancestral felt knowing. And now, as the time line shows itself, the strength to rebel, the courage needed to stand up and own my power diminishes.

There is something in here about loss of confidence. I create a space to hold this feeling, wishing it to be transitional. The image is like an old tire of mine that had a miniscule puncture and the air was very slowly and almost silently escaping, and inside me something similar is happening: as every year passes, in lieu of increasing and finding its solid foundation, I am punctured and my confidence is slowly escaping my body . . . leaving me more vulnerable and fragile . . . I hold and acknowledge this in its entirety, as it is, right now and at the same time, I hear the 'wish'.

A lost girl shows herself. Hello. She keeps saying: I always thought someone would take care of me. Then, shame emerges around being a woman of today and having such an old thought, such an out-dated belief. Making space for the girl who is repeatedly making that statement with embittered tears, and holding in the other hand, the woman carrying shame. Shame magnifies . . . shame about being a woman, about not being as strong and independent as all our emancipation marches pretended; shame about still being dependent, in emotional turmoil and about being the 'little' woman of my ancestral heritage; shame, now, about an aging, sagging body that no longer pulses wildly; shame about not being financially sound; shame about all the 'incompletes' in my life; shame. And shame permeates cells; shame has a strong handle, an attachment to my very core. I may hold shame, make a space for it, be with it, offer it Presence, and it continues its stronghold. It looks and feels like a web, from the center radiating outward in so many directions, catching me,

holding me prisoner, like glue, with no way out, never, ever letting me go, never giving me permission to taste freedom. As a woman, who is now aging, will I ever be free? I hear it all.

The journey, for the last four months, has been difficult, to put it mildly. I've entered such a dark place around this whole aging thing, realizing that it has really been compounded with the loss of my relationship, two years ago now. The aging issue took a forward leap when the man I believed I would be growing old with ceased to be my partner. Until that moment, I was aging side by side with my man, and I could deal. And suddenly there was aging and aloneness.

With the aloneness came the awareness of my invisibility. Not being seen 'out there' by others, had no importance, was irrelevant, as I was visible right here, in my home, by the person I loved. At least that's what I held to be true. In a flash, everything changed. The impromptu changes came as quite a shock to me, to the fibres of my being. I hadn't realized that I was aging. I hadn't noticed that no one saw me anymore, out there. I wasn't aware of my slow disappearing. Bang! Here it was. All at once. And something in me went into shock. Shock feels just as binding, as immobilizing, as shame. Now, inside me, live two partners, two webs, enmeshed together, enmeshing me. All these lines and circles coming together, knotting me, paralyzing me. I am reminded of the 'Tangle' (Cornell, 2005), and I hold the whole of it, gently reminding myself that "I am the space in which all this can be as it is" (Cornell, 2005).

As these weeks of going within and accompanying all that is my aging self continue to elapse, I look to my mother and her 'oldness'. Ah, poor Mom. She is 88. She is another lost girl; she is needing someone to take care of her. It is her felt truth. My father always took care of her. Today, we call it co-dependency; it was. But that's how it was between them and they loved each other. Yes, co-dependently. Somewhere, perhaps, I absorbed the co-dependent relationship as a model, as THE model. And like her, I know nothing about being alone.

Then, there is also the witnessing of my mother's physical degeneration, certainly more advanced than mine. And there are her fears that make her tremble and her anxiety at the drop of a pin that shortens her breath. I hear it all; I witness it all; I absorb it all. My open sensitivity is a gift; it serves me well in my work, with clients, but it is often without boundaries. I am a chameleon adapting to everyone around me. I have been carrying my mother's inner space.

Coming to this awareness takes me by surprise. Something in me feels that I have no self, so I model others. I allow others to define me; to unload their wounds, their sadness, their depression, their trepidations, their irritability and frustration all over me, and I take it in, making it difficult to sense what belongs to me and, in this case, what belongs to my mother. The enmeshment between my mother's aging process and mine thickens my central web. I imagine lifting, holding all that is my mother and gently putting her at a safe distance from me, allowing more space for the aging me, and yet still cradling her in her lonely, frightening distress. Such is the balancing act for this 'sandwich generation' as I stand somewhere between my old mother and my children and grandchildren.

Another scream is heard within: I am terrified of aging like my mother. No! I don't want to look and sound like my mother at 88. There is 88 like my mother and there is 88 like Betty White, that 'Golden Girl', who just last year made a movie with Sandra Bullock (The Proposal), and who, when interviewed, is alive and vital and coherent and 'all there' and funny, and who in May 2010 hosted, most successfully, Saturday Night Live. Yes! I want to be Betty White Eighty-Eight! I make a huge space for this highest wish for myself.

With friendly curiosity, I gently drop in the question: where does the fear of death sit in all of this? I always prided myself in the fact that I was not afraid of dying, holding somewhere within me this 'not wanting to be here' in the first place. And now, as time (illusion or not) seems to be disappearing, I am clinging to this earth, wanting to plant my two feet solidly for as long as possible. That's on the one hand. On the other hand, I wonder about the advances in science and medicine that seem to keep us here for much longer than expected, or perhaps for much longer than we're supposed to be. The felt truth is: I am less of afraid of death than I am of degenerating into a blubbering older woman; wearing diapers, being spoon-fed, having nobody home inside, and leaving with absolutely no dignity.

There is all of this: the great fear around the gradual degeneration of body and mind, the sadness and emptiness around the aloneness, the fathomless rage around the invisibility, the binding shame around the incapacity to be 'a woman of substance', the seemingly never-ending list of incompletes, and the tick-tock of time running out. I hold all of me in all of this. I make space for the whole of it. I step back and rest into my Greater Self in Presence; I offer all of this kind attention, caring patience; I don't rush the process; I will not push this woman who is *me*. I am, at least, okay with the enmeshed webs and with each thread of emerging awareness.

It would be wonderful to tell you that I am out of the woods, that it is all good now, that I accept my aging process and that I'm about to do that 'aging gracefully' thing. But, no. I am just in this place, and generally I am not happy with it. I am living this journey daily, and I accompany myself in it.

Yes, of course, there are forward moving steps: something in me is slowly, one step at a time, developing a new sense of self. There is a woman in here who is beginning to stand in her own life, on her own two feet; and something in me trusts that as more of my grief heals, the aloneness piece will find its right way of being. I am going to call this Volume I. Perhaps, twenty-five years down the road, when I'll be in my eighties, when the next generation of Focusers revisit the question of Focusing and Aging, I will share how the Betty White in me is doing!

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## GROWING UP WITH FELT SENSING AND STAYING YOUNG INTO AGING WITH FOCUSING

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*Christel Kraft, M.Ed.*

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*“Your physically felt body is, in fact, part of a gigantic system of here and other places, now and other times, you and other people, in fact the whole universe. This sense of being bodily alive in a vast system is the body as it is felt from inside.”*  
(Gendlin, 1978 p. 77)

*“Living is a kind of knowing how to form itself further. Living is always a fresh process/formation, it is forming itself freshly, nothing is fixed.”* (Gendlin, 2007)

Aging is an interesting topic. What do we, what do I associate with aging? Growing, developing, expanding, becoming . . . It feels humbling, knowing that there is no ultimate knowing, only grateful acceptance of the very little that we have learned, experienced and vaguely glimpsed. It is about allowing the grace of not-knowing. It is becoming quiet, still, content, peaceful, thankful, tolerant, full and empty, non-judgmental.

As Gendlin repeatedly points out, a concept such as aging consists of the meaning that we give it. When I focus deeply into my own sense of aging, it becomes *the process of living*, my increasingly conscious living. It is a movement in and out of new experiences, re-lived and expanded insights, a dying of outlived concepts, and a freshly experienced deeper wholeness.

Focusing sensing/feeling into this process of aging adds a uniquely individual flavor to life. There is no need for ending or change just because birthdays are adding up. Every situation continues to become another “leading edge”, a pathway into a new knowing, which can again grow into deeper hidden treasures.

Pages of stories are spread around me as I again focus into what wants to get expressed in this article. It has come slowly as I spent many hours re-living old and newer situations of my life. It wants to become an **illustration of a Focusing process, a process of living in and with my body into the bigger body**. This article will not have a beginning, middle and end, but will rather illustrate a continuous circular Focusing type of living through individual glimpses of some experiences of my life as they bubble up inside of me . . . ‘It’ wants to start with one of my most powerful experiences:

*My whole body seemed like a big lump of paralyzing fear — a fear about everything, a fear that could not be tied to anything specific. A fear beyond fear — the darkest abyss of nothingness pushing me yet deeper into a void of naked terror and separation. My inner struggle and rebellion, my cries for help, were lost in this endless bottomless pit of agony.*

*Finally I gave up — gave up the struggle and inner thrashing around. I allowed myself to let go — let go into wherever this whirling suction was taking me — deeper and deeper, just allowing — being in and with it. Deeper yet. . . falling into . . .*

*Then there was Light. A gentle caressing Light surrounded me — yes — somewhat familiar . . . I had been in this Light filled space before. It was holding, carrying me now. More movement, gentle at first . . . and then the dance. DANCING IN THE LIGHT — what a glorious floating sense of effortless dancing — my body feels light, carried forward in this Light space . . . forever, slowly, gracefully moving . . .*

*A deeper letting go into this space caused another shift into BEING DANCED BY THE LIGHT — yes, this feels complete, whole, full. Can I stay here forever? Can I live my outer life in this awareness of EFFORTLESSLY BEING DANCED BY THE LIGHT?*

I come out of this experience simultaneously exhausted and energized. There is a knowing now present, a deeper trust born out of experience . . . A deep desire of wanting to live my life in and from this place of BEING DANCED BY THE LIGHT.

Has there been a beginning, a step-by-step forward movement towards this fullness of knowing? Highlights of my path seem like shimmering iridescent spheres of Light. It feels as if all my life has been a preparation for this mind-blowing fulfillment of my deepest longing for the unknown, and yet it was always deeply known and remembered. Is this where I came from? Is this what I have longed to be reunited with from as far back as I remember? Is this what poets and saints have tried to express, and upon reading, with which I felt a deep resonating recognition?

Interestingly, the longer I stay with it inside, the more I need to sense MY OWN experience. Eugene Gendlin's "body" is not my experience. It is his sophisticated philosophical contemplation born out of his life, but what I experience is more real/authentic for me.

It's all about CONNECTION, all of it, CONNECTING PRESENCE. And this connecting presence is connecting into THE BODY as I understand Gendlin's writing; and connecting into the BODY OF THE CHRIST in Ed McMahon's terminology, which taken from the biblical phrase "The Body of Christ" from Paul in Ephesians 3:17-19: ". . . that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, my have power to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God." Living and living into and connecting with THE CARING- FEELING-PRESENCE (McMahon (1993) in oneself and with each other, the ACTUAL EXPERIENCE of this mystery.

Any kind of philosophy is searching for words to describe it and the words can only really resonate when we can sense into the experiences we have in our own lives, which we are carrying in our own body, and from there I can hear what Gene and Ed and all the other teachers are saying.

Maybe we are all born with "it", what in this particular community we call "Focusing". I did not call it the "felt sense", but in searching back to where it all began for me, I

went back and then further back . . . and there I was, perhaps 5 years old. I recognized it, a knowing, searching, recognizing resonance — there was that something, that felt sense in me that knew and beheld and connected with the light that shone through the eyes of my first Sunday School teacher. It ignited a “shift” into a “leading edge” from probably my unconscious and yet sensing a longing towards a “life giving more”, more of Life, Love and Light.

“It” acquired many labels throughout the years. I am looking back over almost 80 years of many explorations, learnings, readings, discussions, teachings, searchings . . . always listening inside for a resonance with what could/would fit for me in every situation. It seems to me that I have been Focusing, listening, having felt senses, handles and shifts, leading edges, and big implicit insights since I was born. Of course, I did not have all these terms, but I know that I always knew where/what/how was right for me.

How was I searching inside of myself? How did I know what was the “right” direction for me? It seemed like a kind of outer and inner me that at the same time was not two but one integrated experienced wholeness, a moment-to-moment brutal honesty with what I experienced without hiding from myself. Oh, yes, I was hiding myself from the outer world; who would ever like and love me if they could see how I really was?! And no, I did not act out all my dark feelings; I was just the good little obedient girl was allowed to live in the outer life.

There was, however, a sensing that had to do with a “this” or “that” me. I still hesitate to use labels, but for lack of a better distinction I will say that one part was me, “the ego-self”, and the other a “Higher Self”.

When my “Higher Self” was in charge, I felt content, happy, filled with life, creativity, and loving. The “ego-self” was always searching, longing, never having enough of anything; it felt empty and wanted to be filled. Of course, it does not make sense that I did not always live in the “Higher Self” mode, and yet there did not seem to always be a conscious choice when I reacted with anger, distrust, rebellion, fear, and despair.

Only much later did I gain some more understanding about how ALL of it IS. All of it is part of our living and learning, our challenges in each moment and the ongoing process of growing into a Wholeness that can acknowledge and live with it all, the many shades of Light and Darkness in ourselves and in ALL THAT IS.

*Here I need to pause, letting the image come in as I am re-sensing it now, always fresh and new: the door that recently opened in my inner world. Out of a wide-open space in which I have felt very comfortable and safe, I am again looking through this open door. There is light, lots of light and a web of many millions and billions of “strings”, all interconnected . . . no, I don’t see a pattern, but I know that a pattern exists. In awe I allow myself again to gently step into this interconnected web — I feel myself being held, becoming part of it and yet being all of me. There is nothing that I have to hide or leave behind, all of me belongs in this web — and here I am dancing in the Light again, being danced by the Light . . . ahhh . . . I want to dwell in this forever . . . there is more, much more . . .*

Kind of stepping back into the room, I find some grounding. Yes, I always feel refreshed but nudged to go back into the Light . . . But here I am running ahead of myself, my story.

Could or did I live it all? Of course not. Significant adults in my life tried chipping away at me and adding what I knew was not me. I learned to play the game of needing/wanting to be accepted and loved. It actually worked quite well, even though I knew that what I portrayed was partly fake. At the same time I knew that I wanted to survive — one of me inside, one of me outside.

I did something inside me that I called “Root Knowings”. When I discovered that not everybody seemed to have these “going deeper and deeper explorations”, I dreamed of writing a book some day and sharing this wonderful “something” with the world.

And then a friend gave me the book *Focusing* by Eugene Gendlin. Ahhh — someone had found a way to teach it, and I was relieved. I did not have to write it; I could just follow his outline and enjoy the fruits of his labor!

And so began my long history with Gene. He invited me to Chicago; I met his group of “Focusers”, learned and shared with them. At some point he asked me to become a coordinator, and I was off and running with it all.

At the same time I was in the process of finishing my Masters in Educational Psychology at the University of Manitoba and almost flunked my exam when I brought Focusing into my course work. These were the days when Carl Rogers was just being softly introduced into the holy halls of wisdom. So, I put on my “good little student fake hat” again and got the desired letters behind my name.

After graduation I obtained a full-time position as an “Employment Counselor”. I researched and designed a program for people with physical disabilities, facilitating their entrance into the job market. For nine years I served as the director of that agency.

Although I taught Focusing to my employees, which they then could also use in their work with clients, I did not teach Focusing full-time, which perhaps I would have preferred.

I taught Focusing classes mostly at night: at university continuing education programs, for groups at community centers, to individuals, at the YMCA and at senior centers. Of the hundreds of people I instructed, a few became trainers, others dwindled away and hopefully are still using the skills they learned.

I don’t have many Focusing related accomplishments to show for my efforts, but I still use my skills to assist people as a Focusing Oriented Therapist in my part-time practice in Winnipeg and have no immediate desire to quit that, even though I am beginning to feel tired more often than I want to admit.

At some point I wrote and published *Energy Flow Focusing Explorations — Passageways into Your Hidden Treasures*. I still feel good about having done that. But now, here I am again, almost 10 years later with my added experiences of learning and expanding.

Is there still something more for me to share? What continued for me after finishing *My Book*?

I am thankful to Elizabeth Lehmann for her encouragement and listening presence in what feels like a pregnant “more” wanting to be born and told. She has been my friend, Focusing partner and guest editor for this article.

*Ahhh. . . a deep breath. . . some silence. . . and now it comes from deep inside, an opening, a fullness that wants to overflow, wants to share without words. . . being presence, feeling-caring-presence. Reaching, reaching again into the fullness which the above quotations are pointing towards. There is more, much more. Ahhh. . . there is thanksgiving, thanksgiving for the fullness of almost 80 years of life.*

*Gently, I am embracing the richness that is embedded in the spoken and written words of The Masters who have provided sign posts of recognition on my way, my path towards ever expanding awareness/consciousness.*

Yes, I said “recognition” because for me the written word becomes only alive when my lived experience can authenticate, can recognize some deeper meaning to which the words are pointing, when the freshness of my bubbles of experience are met by a resonating outer confirmation.

With gratitude I want to again acknowledge Eugene Genlin’s “body” as well as Deepak Chopra’s *Buddha Consciousness* and *The Third Jesus*, Lynne McTaggart’s *Field*, Eric Pearl’s *Reconnection*, Michael Singer’s *The Untethered Soul*, Reginald Ray’s *Touching Enlightenment*, and other soul companions. Special recognition again goes to Edwin McMahon’s term, “Body of the Christ” because it provided me with a link to my earliest inner experiences and all that came thereafter. How I love all these connections as I stretch even now into the more of living in and into it.

I’m beginning to sense a nudging awareness in my Focusing reverie reminding me that I cannot expect my non-verbal bubbly joy to communicate itself into the receptivity of an indulgent reader’s welcoming embrace. I need to allow words to flow from that inner place. Where to begin? **What comes freshly** from my here and now living?

She is sitting in front of me, a young woman who is reaching out for “something”. I sense her willingness to open, a wanting, and a hunger for a way out of her recurring drug dependency. I had met her socially, but don’t know much about her world and the extent of her trauma. She has made the appointment. (Over twenty years ago her mother was one of my first Focusing students and had suggested that I might be able to “help”).

After a few preliminaries I suggest some silence and allow myself to sink into a deeper space of presence, inviting her to relax and become aware of just being here. I don’t know yet how the next moment will unfold, I only sense a deeper, fuller emptiness in myself, a trusting born out of years of “being with”, a human being willing to listen, guide and companion where the “leading edge” will evolve. This is a new beginning for both of us; she is a gift to me, and together we will live the adventure into “the more”.

The above just illustrated where my emphasis is now, but my entry point into the mystery of conscious living happened in a Christian context, affiliation and interpretation. I questioned and argued the teachings because the early experiences of “MY INNER CHRIST” is different and has always been different from the Christian Religion. I still have the foundation of my former spiritual insights, but now mainly as part of — or included in — a much more open, wider context/understanding/knowing/living. It all fits into a bigger picture, a bigger space, a bigger and fuller inclusiveness, a bigger Body.

I did not know it at that time, but here is what I have come to see as the **beginning of my Focusing adventures:**

*I want to give tribute to Elisabeth, my early teacher, friend, confidante, who not only showed me the way into a fulfilling and heart-centered life, but who lived it.*

*She left her earthly body a couple of years ago, after much physical pain and suffering. Her long illness was and still is one of the unresolved mysteries in my understanding. It should not have happened to her — of all people! And yet, she accepted her ordeal with only occasional complaints, serving the people around her with unwavering inner strength and faith.*

*I still see her regal presence as I met her about 60 years ago. She was with me when I had my first conscious mystical/spiritual experience that has greatly influenced my life. She was there as a caring understanding support, to hold me as I was swept into an ocean of something that I can only express as “a homecoming”, an “unconditional love sensation”. She put my experience into the context of her own limited wisdom and guided me for most of my formative teen years.*

*Who was this seemingly ageless wise person? She had been called to the ministry as a Deaconess (the equivalent of a nun in the Catholic church). Together with another sister, she was running a children’s nursery, and hosted a small religious group on the premises. Connected to this was a youth group, where I found a nurturing womb for my spiritual growth.*

*Elisabeth conducted Bible studies and provided personal counselling and guidance. I consider her unique approach to counselling as one of the most valuable experiences of my life. She never gave advice or direction; she was totally accepting without any trace of judgment. She was an attentive, listening, loving presence.*

*I can still sense myself sitting in her little, comfortable, quiet living room where we settled after a few moments of chit-chat. Soon, a special stillness surrounded her, and I felt gradually drawn into this emanating presence. I never asked her if it was her silent prayers that created for me a feeling of being on “Holy Ground”. Usually I was too filled with my own problems and upheavals to inquire about her preparation for these sessions. All I knew was that I was totally safe to unpack everything that felt unclear or burdensome in my life. She listened. She listened in a way I have never again encountered. Yes I have and still try to emulate her when I am with one of my clients now, but still feel inadequate when I compare myself to her and the gifts she was able to give.*

*She created a space for me to be all I ever was or could be. No judgment. I was free to express the totality of all my jumbled emotions, no editing or holding back. No thought or feeling was taboo. The whole beautiful and ugly truth of my complete beingness could spill out. Being received in this way, I could begin to accept all of me as an evolving, unfolding human being, perfect in all of its stages of learning and discerning.*

*I still marvel at the unfolding clarity I received every time I visited her. Where did that come from? Why could I not do that for myself? Is it the mystery of “Where two or three are gathered in My Name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matthew 11:20). I felt the Presence of more than the two of us. I experienced the soothing of my own inner conflicts, an often piercing insight, potential for choice. I felt my own power and strength for commitment, but most of all I felt an exhilarating awareness of Oneness with this Presence, and at the same time my own unique separateness and purpose. I always left with a tranquil joy and assurance that my life was unfolding as a marvelous adventure.*

*I painfully missed Elisabeth when my path took me to Canada and an ocean separated us. I know now that there were other learnings for me which she could not have provided and understood. When I visited her a few times during those later years, I had to face up to some of her limitations, particularly the narrowness of her belief system. There was disappointment, and later, loving acceptance of our differences.*

*However, the legacy of her wordless teaching and her “Beingness” compelled me to further pursue the career I had embarked upon. I wanted to become for others what she had been for me. I surpassed her psychological knowledge, but realized throughout my training, that no amount of learning could substitute for the unconditionally loving presence into which she had evolved. She still represents a goal I am attempting to reach.*

During years of learning, teaching and continuous questioning, I developed a yet stronger sense of trust in my inner knowing. While in my teen years and up to my immigration to Canada, where I married my husband Siegfried, I had been living a sheltered life at home with my parents and siblings. During that time I had also found my spiritual home in a small Christian youth group.

In Canada I had my partner/husband/friend. We had met years before while we were both attending the same group, which had an atypical Christian-oriented spirituality. Had he found a similar group in his and now my country? No.

I was still immersed in my strong beliefs and absorbed in living the teachings. It would take a whole book to convey our searching and questioning, innumerable books read, continuous discussions, visits to many churches and other spiritual communities. I could sense some truth in all of them. I could relate deeply to some individuals who “had it”. I trusted more and more in my own sensing/feeling. Yet, I still wanted to find a group of people with whom I could fully identify. Could I find the same or a similar “enough-ness”? Could Focusing lead me towards “the more”? My body sensing into it brought this image:

*I see a high mountain with a huge circumference. I am on a path up the mountain, but it seems that all my life I have been curious about what’s on the path next to mine and from there even further around and around and around. I have been on a circular path around*

*the mountain, but always coming back to my unique own path where I find myself alone but having been enriched by meeting others who are sort of on the same LEVEL, having arrived at their resting point from a different starting place. We are all still moving; I might join someone for a while on their path. Actually now in my professional life I meet and join many and . . . ah, that's the BEING PRESENT, that's the Connecting.*

My Focusing living has always been interwoven with what I call my spiritual understandings and feelings. They cannot be separate; they are who I experience myself, my inner essence, to be. My body, mind and spirit are connected . . . My mind always wanting to move beyond the “leading edges”. Imagery in my Focusing sessions has been very helpful in sensing forward. Imagery assists me in moving out of my intellectual probing towards an inner guiding presence. Two examples will illustrate this point:

*I asked, and one day a clearer answer came. I must have entered into a deep “letting go and yet staying open space”, a space where I could side-step my controlling insistence on knowing, but still allowing my deep hunger for clarity . . .*

*“Come to me . . . and I will give you rest” Matthew 11:25. I heard it, felt it, knew it. The Christ who I had known all along had not deserted me. In my searching, did I concentrate too much on finding some elusive intellectual all-inclusive truth?*

*Who knows? What I know is that I turned to that inner and outer image of the voice that spoke to me. Does it really matter how I refer to “IT”? Perhaps it does, perhaps not. I think “IT” is too big to care for any of the names we give something that I can very comfortably now call “The Christ”, “God”, “Allah”, “The Universe”, “Gendlin’s body”, “The Ocean of Energy” or simply “The Essence”.*

What I did find in those unforgettable days was a deep peace and an ongoing opening up of answers. Answers for me, for my life; I still do, when I listen.

It seems important to clarify my limited understanding of the quality of the names, the mystery of the Universe, that the words stand for. Without going into too much detail, my “God” is mainly a God of love, compassion and understanding, non-judgmental acceptance, caring and harmony. How can I even attempt to know what it might mean for others?

I am moving into a deeper “leading edge”. I climb up the big mountain where I have encountered the old wise man before, but today I am again, desperately wanting to know more. I have been here before and big tables laden with fruit have been offered to me as I was also invited to share freely, which I enjoyed doing.

I remember many dreams where I handed out the bounty of fresh fruit to multitudes of people. We were always together in some joyful, contented, happy way.

But here in these moments I wanted to know. I don’t remember what was going on in my life at the time, but I was desperate to know how everything “hangs together”, what is real, what is truth, what is REALITY.

So I went up to the mountain where the Old Wise Man welcomed me. I called out to him, “I want to KNOW everything!” Did he warn me? I don’t remember, but I know that I

was very insistent. Finally he pointed towards a big board covered with a cloth and indicated that behind that I could find what I desired. Eagerly I pulled off the cover . . . and then pulled away . . . begging him to cover it all up again. I did not want to know. The sensation of a TOO MUCHNESS is still in me, along with a deep thankfulness that I didn't need to look into what I barely glimpsed.

My ongoing life seems to make every glimpse of living in, into, through, and as "The Connectedness" seem more real and "in tune" with Gendlin's "Body" . . . or does that fit for me? . . . maybe it's even more like going back to the image of DANCING IN THE LIGHT, BEING DANCED BY THE LIGHT and finally EFFORTLESSLY BEING DANCED BY THE LIGHT?

I opened again Reginald A. Ray's *Touching Enlightenment* (for me the clearest Buddhist teaching so far) where he talks about three body layers, "three *yanas*", the unfolding process of the "personal body, the interpersonal body and the cosmic body" (Ray, 2008, p. 270).

There is a YES, YES, resonating in my own being. I can feel my own living into it, can recognize where I moved, where I stood still, where I implicitly know that I will go deeper at some right moment; yet, I am not there. I have been there — I have had glimpses and then other glimpses which are never static, always moving, circling — spiraling — the evolving life/body that Gendlin talks about, the LIVING BODY that is forming itself always fresh.

There is my own mixture of experiences — and always the connecting with the BIGGER BODY, THE EVOLVING BODY — my body, The Universal Body — somehow like a drop in the ocean is not the body and yet it is — all of it IS in the body and IS the body, enfolded in it, connected, drops connecting with each other.

The following experience fits here and demonstrates an example of different levels of focusing/listening competencies. It is beyond the scope of this paper to elaborate in depth on my growing awareness of these levels as they can impact on a focuser's depth of trust and inner unfoldment.

*I had waited for years for a Focusing person I felt/sensed safe enough with to go into a deep holding/waiting space in me that I felt/sensed might bring uncontrollable/unquenchable tears. During an International Focusing Conference workshop, the leader, Jane Bell, must have sensed something emerging and selected me for a demonstration. As she gently guided me, my deep well of tears opened. . . it was not scary anymore, and the words I heard were about "BEING THE LIVING WATER". She and I knew the meaning: it was the Christ in me who had left these words for His disciples: ". . . whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst; the water that I shall give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life" (John 4:14). There was a reassuring YES in me, the living Body, the living Spirit, living in us and not in some outdated only partially understood concepts.*

In our beginning Focusing learnings and partnerships we honor the Focuser's process, and as listeners become mainly a caring/feeling/non-judgmental presence and reflection. We might even stress that Focusing is NOT therapy, although it might be therapeutic. In the

above example, however, I required more than that. I had to honor my body's knowing that I needed to be held in a deeper emphatic understanding of that which wanted to surface.

My body knowing has always kept me and my more complex challenges safely hidden, until the right sensitive "Midwife" appeared. It takes years of experience and evolving inner wholeness towards becoming this deeper listening presence.

At this stage in my life I feel a strong desire to cheer all of you on! I am contented and happy that what I have put so much energy into will continue, will grow, will be carried forward. Perhaps I don't need to push anymore; I can rejoice in what is happening, what I see happening.

There is also a feeling of "finishing off" what needs to be done — a softness. Closing my eyes . . . yes, some tears are coming . . . I did not expect that aging might be that way for me. I never wanted to get old . . . and there are parts in me that reject and resist, that still want to . . . want to be young and active and living . . .

Still reaching, questioning for more and more, knowing the never ending excitement . . . reaching into The Universe . . . sensing into "The Body", it is becoming, living in and with and through it. A deeper Breath — yes, also a declining/diminishing physical body.

The world is so beautiful, the sun just came out and millions of snow crystals glitter. I can still breathe all that in and rejoice . . . Letting go gracefully, that is what I want for myself.

Do I still need to write about my past struggles with wanting to be a good wife and mother vs. wanting to be in the world with "glitz and glory"? There was a time when I felt that there could only be an either/or, and in some way I think that's how it is; but does it fully need to be that way?

Through Focusing I was able to hold and consider both options. In each one there was fulfillment and creativity and a *muchness* that I wanted. With four children and a loving husband I should/could have been fulfilled . . . and yet, my longing propelled me towards a University education which I had not been able to pursue in war-torn Germany. I did it! I feel good about the hours I spent away from my housewife duties attending the "Mature Student" program at the University of Winnipeg, and later at the University of Manitoba.

Little by little, one or two courses at a time, I succeeded; and after ten years I was ready to enter the job market with a Masters in Educational Psychology. Gene Gendlin and Focusing entered into this period of my life in the early Eighties. My children did not need my full-time attention anymore, and I started to live my "other me", my "Higher" me, with all my pent up longing for the satisfaction of making a contribution to the outside world.

There is a feeling of accomplishment and also a feeling of failure. Yes, I did a lot — and no, I did not do enough. Starting later in life when others had already reached the summit of a career that began when they were 20 years younger, I did compare myself and felt a loss . . . loss of what? I did too much, too little, nothing complete, nothing perfect. And yet, would I have wanted to give up any of the *muchness* and/or *littleness*?

I wanted and got it all. I always followed what felt right for me even though I did not do full justice to what was expected or what some part of me expected of me. Did I disappoint my children by not being the kind of mother they admired and appreciated in their peers, who baked cookies for church and school functions while their own mother preferred going to the University? Did I not pay enough attention to my beloved husband when he still wanted to fully enjoy my continuing presence and company? Did I fail my colleagues when perhaps too soon I quit a fulfilling career I had established for myself and for them? Yes, perhaps. But I do know I did what was right for me in each instant, and that's what really counts.

I did and had it all, and still feel enriched in the most important relationships I have with my husband, children, friends, and to some extent with a small beloved client group. I am happy to be able to say that as I continue to stay young into aging with Focusing, I feel fulfilled and content.

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## FOCUSING HAPPIER

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*Carol Bellin*

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I wasn't raised to be happy. I was taught that happy people were suspect; they were probably doing something wrong or weren't paying attention to life's realities.

In my twenties I wasn't that happy most of the time, but I had hope that things could still turn out okay. There was all of life ahead of me. However, when I got to my 35th birthday, I began facing the fact that I was not living the life I wanted and thought I should be living. It happened on that birthday that a friend gave me a copy of a Shakti Gawain book, whose title I cannot now remember.

Gawain's book filled me with new purpose. Yes, I *could* create the life I wanted. All I needed to do was think positive thoughts. My problem was those other not-positive thoughts that came creeping in. In fact, the more I tried to think positively, the more desperate I became. I realized that by saying what I wanted, I was bringing up the resistance I had to actually having the conditions I desired. But how to release the resistance was a mystery to me.

At age 41, I discovered Focusing. The book jumped off the shelf of the bookstore into my hand, and I had to take it home and read it late into the night. Now I knew what to do with that resistance! I was at one of the early week-longs given by The Focusing Institute in Chicago in 1986. During that same visit I took a weekend workshop with Gene Gendlin and went to a couple of Changes groups at Bebe Simon's (a long-time Focusing teacher). I went home fired up and moved forward with a passion in this new direction.

For some years I was a regular at Institute events and participated with enthusiasm in whatever way I could. I also went into therapy with a Focusing therapist and did some good work as I started to understand myself better. The change began when I got in touch with some newly discovered traumatic event from my past, and my response was to sigh and think, "Now I'll need to spend the next 6 months working this one out." I realized I was tired of raking up the past, which I hadn't enjoyed the first time I experienced it. There must be another way.

I spent the next several years trying to find out what that way was. I began a Master's in Leisure Studies because the philosophy of play was so much like Focusing. I offered Self-Discovery Playgroups, which people did find helpful, but while those groups provided positive insight for participants, they weren't doing what I wanted, which was to move life forward. I did a lot of reading about manifestation, books I can't remember now. I studied Science of Mind, but for me it was same-old-same-old of just trying to think about the positive. Still, I kept working with whatever I found, wanting to use the felt sense to move forward.

I had been looking forward to age 50. Much of the psychological material I had read talked about women coming into their own lives in their 50's, and I couldn't wait. The year

I turned 50, I began the 12-year midlife journey that finally brought me to the Central Valley of California, a place of traditional values and conservative thought. I came to be near children and grandchildren, but it was not a place that I imagined would welcome anything I had to offer. However, it was here where I got a puzzle piece that began to make sense of a lot of other thoughts and experiencing.

In my early 40's, I was given an introductory cassette to "The Teachings of Abraham" interpreted through Esther Hicks ([www.abraham-hicks.com](http://www.abraham-hicks.com)). I had enjoyed it at the time, but was too busy with Focusing, moving from place to place, and raising my youngest child to follow up on the information. After moving here, I began to attend a Yoga class and found the instructor to be a student of the work. I borrowed some tapes from her and then got a subscription for myself. Finally, I had found an approach to the idea of creative living/manifestation that I could make sense of. Everything else wanted me to *think "as if"* or *act "as if"*; Abraham asked me to *feel as if*. The Abraham work also doesn't create an expectation of a leap into bliss, but rather provides an incremental movement forward in the direction of feeling happier. Gendlin taught me that the felt sense carries in it the present moment *and the next step forward*. We can use the *now felt sense* as a thread into the past. Step by felt step, we can also use it as a thread into the future.

Before I go farther, I would like to say that the definition of Focusing I am using in my Life Creation work is a very basic one — and one that is applicable at any age, but I especially encourage those who are getting on in years to consider the following as a process that can take us from our beginnings of aging, right into our final years.

No matter in what context I use Focusing, I am always being present to a bodily felt sense, listening for *its* reality, using my intellect to find words or symbols that fit how the felt sense feels. This "being with" can come in a Focusing session with a partner or on my own. It can also happen in life as I am hanging out with the felt sense of a new concept or perception in my process, seeing how it plays out in my living. If I look at things from this Focusing point of view, how does that change how I interact with others, do my job, or wash my dishes?

One of the shifts I have made as I integrate Focusing with the Abraham work is to welcome the times when life isn't behaving the way I would like it to. Abraham calls this "contrast", and it is a part of the creative process. To create something different, there must be a preference for something new or more, and the function of contrast is to give rise to the preference. So my general attitude when times get difficult is one of excitement about being right on the edge of something new. Because as soon as I say, "I'd rather . . ." I have started on a new adventure.

Abraham says that desires are what bring creative life energy through us. I am talking about that special energy that is accompanied by a wonderful feeling when the inner being just lights up and you can feel that flow of passion and possibility through your body. Then, of course, you go off to make it happen, and sometimes things get difficult and the passion drifts away. A desire that you think you can't or shouldn't have will cause you a great deal of pain, while desires that you imagine as possible bring a flow of good feeling. The trick is in believing that getting what you want is a viable option. I can activate this process with

Focusing. When that first flush comes through, I connect with the felt sense of it, welcome it, make space for it, and let it know I love it. I mark that felt sense so I can recognize how it lives in my body. I also notice any parts of me that are nervous, scared, tight, doubting. I welcome those, too, also with love. Each of those places is another point for growth and change. I will get to those places in right timing, as they come into my life, which they will. But how do I keep that fabulous flow alive?

Well, here is where the getting happier comes in. When you think of this totally wonderful thing or condition, which you now have in thought/feeling form, remember that the reason you want this is because you believe that you will be happier in the having of it. Part of reaching forward for that preference, which is present in your felt experience but not yet in your life, is to let yourself be happy anyway. You might try inviting the felt sense that is just a little bit happier than you are right now. *What would it feel like if I were just a little happier right now?* There is a certain amount of discipline involved in this process. Most of us have well-developed belief systems that say that other people's actions 'make' us feel certain ways. The truth is that we have choices about how to feel. You will find that being happier becomes a real priority when you genuinely want to change your life.

Many of us have a hard time insisting on happiness for ourselves. "How can I be happy when . . . ?" How can you not? People will do as they do, wars, famines, and natural disasters happen, all out of our control. What we can control is our experience of life. We all know this, yet continue in thinking we cannot be happy with life as it is, only when it changes. However, when we inquire of our despairing or frustrated felt sense, what it needs from us in order to feel happier, the felt sense will tell us; it will give us a little bit of relief, an opening to pleasure. As we become happier, we become an inspiration to others to make changes for themselves, and we can support others from a place of strength.

Being happier also gets easier when we realize that we are usually working the system too hard, whether it be with affirmations, or ambition and hard work. Becoming happier usually means relaxing a bit, opening up to the unknown, taking our finger off the button. I have found that just being happier about a situation seems to resolve it much more easily than if I become intensely motivated to *do something*. I try to take only an action that is lined up with my inner sense of pleasure and rightness in the action. I want to make clear that I do go to work, take care of my home, study, and do whatever else I do in life without waiting for inspiration to strike. However, when I have a particular goal, I take care not to do too much about it, but let the opportunity for right action come to me.

Meanwhile, am I doing nothing? No. I am becoming happier. I am using my felt sense to bring me to the next step in my process, moving slowly and carefully towards my goal of being the person who will have that new thing, condition or situation. I will be somewhat different than the way I am now. I don't know what that will look like, but I do know that I will be happier. I will discover the details as I go along that path.

A Focusing Happier session would probably look like any Focusing session in many ways. The major difference is that we are not looking for the reason why we feel bad, but for a different way to perceive it, to find a way to be happy that includes the feeling bad.

Life is as it is. Choosing to allow life to bring us pleasure, peace and joy is true emotional freedom.

That difference of perspective manifests in several ways. For instance, we are not only looking for the difficult issues. We also want to identify the places that feel wonderful and encourage them to expand their presence in our lives. When you run into one of those warm, open, expansive feelings, milk it, asking, *What is it about right now that feels so good to me? Let me count all the inner and outer triggers for this upwelling of well-being.* Be clear with yourself about what brings you peace and contentment. Make space for new parts of yourself to become active in your process and in your life.

On the other hand, if you are working with something like a wall in your chest, an upset in your gut, then you might ask some different questions. *What is going on here? What is the pattern of resistance I'm feeling?* It is not necessary, in this context, to go back and “deal with” what caused this upset feeling. Misery is not something we want to milk, but to leave it in the past where it belongs. We just want to see the pattern of the resistance and the ways this pattern inhibits our experience of life and what triggers it. Once we understand what those are, we can ask, *Can I be happy in my life with this resistance present?* Asking this question is crucial. Always, you want to be just a little bit happier than you are right now, exactly the way life is.

This does not mean you are stuck in that same place. Actually, you are now really free to make a change because you are no longer a victim of your process. You can now ask, *How would I prefer to feel? How can I be in life differently so that something new happens?*

I can tell you from my experience that Focusing and living in a way that expects new pleasures to continually unfold truly enhances my experience in these “golden years.” There are so many opportunities to create preferences that carry us forward in life. Whatever our situation, there is always something more we are inviting into life as we continue to give our attention to becoming just a little bit happier.

Three years ago I was worried about the lack of passion in my life. Though I deeply love my grandchildren, I had nothing going for myself. A high level of enthusiasm is one of the touchstones of my personality, and I was beginning to feel old and purposeless. Then, at the end of a long-term substitute teaching job, I heard myself saying to the school principal, “I don’t want to leave.” Within weeks I was enrolled in an internship credential program, and am now almost at the end of my second year teaching Special Education as I near Medicare age. Though teaching is likely to be a somewhat short-lived career, my students are teaching me such valuable lessons in unconditional loving that I would not want to be doing anything else, anywhere else, at this point in time. It has been beneficial for me in other ways as well. I look and feel younger than I did when I started this very stressful, yet rejuvenating path. This whole new life came out of working with my preferences, paying attention to becoming happier, and going one step at a time.

I am also beginning to prepare for a return to teaching Focusing. For some years, I was in a process of such intense and rapid change that I had to give my Self my full attention. I worked at jobs that required little consciousness, like selling fabric and mattresses.

For about ten years I did substitute teaching, touching down here and there in the world of education, making no commitments. I have come to new ground here, in the midst of the fields that grow fruit, alfalfa, cotton, nuts, and grapes for wine and raisins that supply the rest of the country. This agricultural environment, so much like my Midwestern birthplace, but with me different within it, has grounded me and even with my very busy life has given me a resting place. Here, Focusing clients and students are appearing here and there, and I have had a chance to reflect on the ways I used the integration of Focusing and the Abraham teachings and to begin to prepare a body of work. I'm excited to see where this takes me!

My mid-life journey has become my aging journey. I plan to keep on wanting things and becoming happier in the expectation of them until I am completely satisfied and am ready to move forward in other dimensions.

## **FOCUSING ADVENTURES IN AGING: Alone — Crisis and Opportunity**

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*Hadley Fisk, LICSW*

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*To see the force of character up close, we must become involved wholeheartedly in the events of aging. This takes both curiosity and courage.*

James Hillman

### **PART 1**

Moving into aging is rarely a chosen or graceful moment. I had been introduced to what I will call “conscious aging” in my fifties through brief insights. One of these happened when I saw a beautiful woman in my waiting room as I was summoning my next patient. Her radiance distracted me for a moment. Finished with my session, I realized I felt unusually sad and my heart was aching. What came to me (before I was Focusing) was a surprise: I would never be a young, beautiful woman again. My thought was that I had given up on that a long time before.

These thought-full moments can hold a new frame for collecting experiences that hold new perspectives on life as we age. Moments that had once been filled with tradition and hope, like the wedding of our last child, new grandbabies, graduations (and on and on . . . ) can now be more bittersweet, as they also signify our own aging process. As one mother told me, “When my son died, I deeply understood that all lives have beginnings, middles and ends.” It was then that I became most aware of my own aging event, even though I was only fifty-five.

However in my early sixties, the deaths of two close friends and my beloved older brother brought home a deeper sense of loss, taking much more time for my heart and soul to heal. But it wasn’t until my sixty-seventh year, when I was dumped into my own aging crisis after experiencing an acute viral episode that resulted in pneumonia.

While many people are able to move back easily into their lives after an illness, I couldn’t. I experienced what my daughter named as “a perfect storm”. Both of my daughters were going through medical crises at the same time, deepening the gut-wrenching felt sense of it all. (One daughter had torn the ACL of her knee and was immobilized, and the other one had started into labor two months early.) In the middle of all this, an exiled traumatic memory . . . of my father’s suicide when I was six . . . was triggered. It pushed me further into a terrible dark place of feeling totally alone.

The astonishing part of this entire scenario is that I had no idea what had hit me. I had always been healthy, active and somewhat arrogant about looking and acting younger than my age. And after all . . . I was an experienced psychotherapist!!! To be immobilized and at the same time the unable to help either daughter was unthinkable. Now I was the one

who needed help!! The pneumonia soon left my body, but the felt sense of aloneness haunted me, at first, viciously. As I slowly re-connected with family and friends, I found the courage to tiptoe closer to the combined forces of the present and early traumas that had left me so vulnerable to my terror. I began to realize that my illness had catapulted me into the soul-chilling fears of my six-year old and my sixty-seven-year old self at the same time.

Thankfully my knowledge of Focusing, a way of tapping into the deeper wisdom of my body and soul, came to my rescue. Central to Focusing is feeling how the body “holds” experience and how that helps us to go deeper into our conscious/unconscious wisdom. Gene Gendlin, the creator of Focusing, calls this bodily-felt experience, a “felt sense”, which he describes as “the holistic, implicit bodily sense of a complex situation. It includes many factors, some of which have never been separated before. Some of those factors are different emotions” (Gendlin, p.58).

Since I had been a Focuser and a Focusing-Oriented Therapist for five years, I survived this crisis by holding tenaciously to what Ann Weiser Cornell calls, “Self-in-Presence”. Self-in-Presence implies not only finding one’s own “felt sense” of what is happening inwardly, but also creating some space for curiosity, respect and compassion for whatever comes up in that process.

For me, both a felt sense and an attitude of acceptance were central to unraveling the confusion around my crisis. Yoga, meditation and Focusing sessions with a wonderful therapist all came to my rescue. My therapist offered a solid and compassionate Focusing connection, holding me steady as I revisited my perfect storm, helping to steer the boat through the troughs of my fear and confusion.

## **PART 2**

Here are some of the moments I was able to remember in the midst of my crises. I will share my “in-the-present” senses of being sick and alone followed by the “whole meaning” in parentheses. Next, in contrast, are the felt senses of my exiled (unconscious) traumatic experience that broke through. The two offered very different levels of sensation and meaning. The “felt senses” of my early trauma were much deeper, and more frightening, taking longer to process. I could not have processed them by myself as they carried very profound feelings of fear, rage, loss and sadness.

During my sickness, the “alone” felt senses were as follows:

1. Being distressed that friends were not visiting because they feared contagion (total abandonment)
2. Not knowing how I got so sick and immobilized so quickly, and why I was not getting better faster (alone, confused and helpless)
3. Not being able to find ways to calm myself followed by moments of self-doubt (overwhelmed and unable to comfort myself, some despair)

4. Feeling increasingly isolated and going deeper into myself, and afraid that this is what aging is really about (realization I was not only alone, but aging and alone)
5. Fearing I would not be able to tolerate my distress and would have an urge to die quickly if it continued (bleak projections about the connections between aging and death)

In the middle of this, the following felt senses of my childhood trauma crashed through (became conscious):

1. Feeling sick and wanting to die and end my misery, accompanied by a deep chill in my core (terrifyingly clear image of being totally alone in the world)
2. Having an image of looking at the center of my own death . . . a black hole in the universe (very clear image of the connection between being alone and dying, mostly void of feeling)
3. The image of my death mutating into the face of my mother, terrified herself and unable to comfort me (surprise connection, less alone, familiar sense of confusion)
4. Fear of feeling out of touch and becoming paranoid . . . losing my sanity . . . not feeling human (pushing away painful connection)
5. Experiencing a change from physical chill to hot rage that neither parent was able to protect me from my father's death . . . I was all alone to deal with their mess!! (A very conscious insight to my dilemma as a six-year-old, followed by deep and painful sadness)
6. Relief and realization (I had felt very alone and helpless then, but now the perfect storm had shown me a way to reclaim my abandoned child . . . 61 years later. This time it featured the fear of my own death. However, I was more connected to the world with a strong support system and not in denial of my own aging.)

Even as I was grappling with all these frightening images accompanied by powerful and unsafe feelings, I began to feel some real mastery. I held each of them at a distance until I could find the compassion and grief for it all. Reconnecting to my six-year-old has been critical for me. She had been overwhelmed and had found a place to hide in a very deep forest . . . splitting off in order to keep some sense of connection and hope until it was safer to come out. Now my aging self feels very connected to her and my compassion gives me more distance from fear and confusion as I begin to create my next/last life stage . . . my "third age," as the French say.

Many of these feelings have stayed with me, mingling, merging, receding, and requiring effort through Focusing to further tease apart the strains, and to bring them more clarity and comfort. What I understand from all this is that aging offers us so many tiers of experience and sensation that integrating them can be a full-time job.

James Hillman suggests that as we age, we lose our short-term memory in order to focus more on the memories and on the long-term meaning of our lives.

The concluding portion of life may be asking us to draw conclusions from prior actions. Could it be that the soul doesn't want to leave this world innocent of the life it has been living for ninety-odd years and wants memoria to turn those years into character values?" (Hillman, p. 92)

There is no doubt in my mind that my perfect storm has offered me a window into aging. I have seen the power and the depth of my fear of being more alone . . . and it's not as frightening. I have felt my confidence return and am grateful for my resilience and the knowledge that I gained from this inner journey to the dark places. No doubt I will probably return to them as I age, but feel I now have a solid foundation to greet them with compassion and understanding. Focusing has become my trusted companion along the way. I am also finding new connections as I share my perfect storm with others who are on the frontiers of aging.

Recently, I was with a group of women who had come together to reflect on aging and their concerns about getting older. As I led them in a brief visualization about what they wanted to take with them into their futures from the present and past, I suggested they might want to take something from their childhood. As they were sharing, I was surprised to hear some of them had been unable to get very far as they had been triggered by their early childhood trauma and felt blocked from going forward.

I shared my story about the Perfect Storm, and we all agreed that coming to terms with trauma was one of the most challenging parts of moving on as we get older. We wondered that as we plan and ponder about our future . . . making "Bucket Lists" of important places, communities, and parts of our character that we want (and don't want) along on our journey, our unconscious and our deeper wisdom are making their own lists. This may be a Bucket List of unfinished business, trauma, life lessons, necessities, help from our angels . . . that is happening in a parallel process to the conscious every-day planning part of our lives.

I felt I had received help from my deepest wisdom as I went through the trauma I described in this article. In fact I remember in an earlier Focusing session, I had had a moment when I realized I was only living in 2/3rds of my body. What was given me . . . or possibly what I gave myself . . . was a Perfect Storm, helping me reconnect to my precious six year old.

Focusing is the perfect tool to help bring these different levels together in order to facilitate this complicated journey. What we need is the curiosity, the courage and trust that we will have most of what we need to help each other pioneer through this important life stage.

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## FOCUSING AND AGING

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*Erna de Bruijn*

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What can I say about the theme of Focusing and aging that isn't already self-evident? Short-term memory decreases — yes! Sometimes I totally forget an appointment. But so far, not one client has come in vain — I just wasn't prepared for the person showing up at that moment. The good thing is that as soon as the person starts her session, we can both be fully present with what is there, and often, relevant memories from earlier sessions come up. Maybe one could name this 'Companioning in Focusing *Despite* Aging'.

So, I would now like to change the subject title to '*Focusing Over The Years*'.

I started Focusing in 1983, at the age of 52. Of course, *over the years* a lot has changed, intensified, and developed in my way of Focusing, listening/guiding and teaching. I can't help wondering . . . Would the changes have been any different if I had, let's say, started Focusing at age 32 instead of 52? I don't know.

What actually increased most over time is *confidence in the process of the Focuser* — a confidence that fosters the practice of simply being with what's there. In turn, this being with what's there brings a reassurance for both the Focuser and the companion.

This confidence has especially had its effect on my way of being with 'obstacles'. I no longer want, expect, or even hope for those obstacles to change. I just want to get further acquainted with them and understand more about their origin.

I also want to acknowledge the hard work of my obstacles, for my own good — especially in the past, when there really was a need for their acting out. Now that I am aware of their worrying for me, I can say, "Thank you for warning me! I will take your message into account." This gives the obstacles and barriers a chance to release. Simply being with them, just the way they are, in an invitational way, appears to be a rich source of acceptance, of caring, and sometimes even loving what (up until that current moment) had been abandoned, suppressed, deformed — despite their good intentions.

In a recent Focusing session about *the whole of my Focusing in 26 years*, two words came up: Love and *Aandacht* (a Dutch word I will explain later on).

**Love:** In 1981, two years before I met Focusing, I participated in a five-day workshop with Elisabeth Kübler Ross on Life, Death and Transition. That training was a great and memorable experience. The workshop brought some big shifts for me that initiated major and lasting changes in my life. I am still feeling deeply grateful for having had the privilege of working with Elisabeth.

She considered 'unconditional love' as the one and only tool for dealing with what keeps you from 'finishing your unfinished business'. This prerequisite of love was a 'standard' that I felt certain I could not meet. In my experience love isn't something I could

provide upon request. For me, love is not just there. It can only sprout and grow from the core of my being, and that takes time . . . and more.

***Aandacht***: What enables love to grow? What, I wondered, was something I could deliberately do in order to make a space where love might grow? That, to me, is *aandacht*. This is a Dutch word, usually translated as ‘Attention’, but so much richer in meaning (especially as an adverb *aandachtig*). *Aandacht* has many layers. Let me try to explain.

In my Dutch-English dictionary I find: (close) attention, noticing, consideration. We also have the word *attentie*, which mostly concerns outer things, like a warning, an announcement, or a friendly gesture. *Aandacht* has to do with listening, sensing something you want to know and understand better, be it something in oneself, in another person, in a text, in nature, or in a spiritual field.

Being with the word *Aandacht* in a Focusing way, made a whole field of related words emerge. Maybe none of them can be translated exactly into English, but I’ll try:

Being there, being present, positive (yet not skipping negative aspects), curious, not expecting anything, an open stillness (rather than the absence of noise), receptive, listening, sensing, being alive to ‘all of it’ — yet at the same time listening for nuances and undertones, for contradictions and untruths, to what is present and what is lacking. It is a kind of not knowing, open to what’s there. It is the way one would be with a sick baby: “Oh . . . what is the matter with you?” without words, and also the way one would listen in awe to something beyond one’s usual field of experience.

The *aandacht of the listener* stretches forth beyond the words, over the tone of voice, over the pace and emotional load, over body language.

*Aandacht* became my main tool in Focusing and listening. Both in my own Focusing, and in companioning a Focuser, I learned not to ask myself what to ‘do’ in an unclear situation, but rather intensify my *aandacht* for what was actually happening, asking quietly inside, “Is there more to it, under the surface, than what can be seen, felt and heard?”

In my experience, tone and intensity in the companion’s voice, as well as pausing and ‘humming’, are way more important than the words they choose. Words, other than the Focuser’s, may be quite helpful, but can also be very disturbing. I was shocked when a beginner in Focusing told me that one has to learn ‘Focusing Language’ before one can learn Focusing and listening. I do assume that her teacher had not meant it that way!

*Aandacht* for where the words come from, for what is there as a bodily process before the words are formed, that, in my experience, is what really matters for both the Focuser and the companion.

Over the years my ability for *aandacht* — and love — has widened and deepened. Is this specific to aging? Let’s say it just takes time.

Maybe an *increase in gentleness* is more specific as one ages. I have the feeling — and people around me confirm this — that I became more gentle and milder in aging.

However, I can still be unexpectedly defensive, reacting rather than responding. This, of course, is a good reason for even more Focusing!

Here I stopped writing this story. A few days later my Focusing partner came, and I focused on my bodily felt experience at the very beginning of a defensive reaction. A sharp flash, like a blow-pipe flame, shot up from deep in my belly and all over my chest and shoulders. It came with the words, "I won't let you overrule me!" (There was a time I had a hard job not getting overruled).

Then a deep laughter came up, together with the word '*Asjemenou?!*' I just couldn't stop laughing, my partner laughed with me, for minutes we handed that word back and forth over and over, laughing all the time. This word (actually it is half a sentence) is slightly slang-ish. It is usually spelled with both a question mark and an exclamation mark, and that shows its very nature: an expression of amazement or wondering, and a questioning or invitation for further information. The word often has a disarming effect. My dictionary says, 'well, I never', a friend translated it into 'Be my guest'. Both are not quite *it*. Just *Asjemenou?!* feels helpful to bring a change in that old pattern of the flame.

This session took about ten minutes. It was enough.

Still, the idea of responding with an *asjemenou?!* brings up a big smile. Each time when I meet the paper at the mirror (where I put it in big letters) and even at this moment that I am writing, that word makes me smile. Probably it won't prevent every flame, but just feeling the possibility of how things could work out is already great! Overcoming a tough habit might be somewhat harder at an older age, but I give it a good chance. Creating a space for an old pattern where it might change is a challenge, and at this time it is fun too.

Truly, Focusing is a lifelong affair!

## THE GOLDEN YEARS

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*Kevin McEvenue*

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*In loving memory of Janet Klein who named this time of life for me*

Here I am in the middle of the last season of my life, reflecting on this invitation to write an article on how it is to be me as an elder in my family and community. How am I now? How has Focusing, and in particular, Wholebody Focusing, helped me be the way I am in this final stage of life? At this very moment I am feeling okay and yet not blind to the challenges of aging that are before me. I am getting older. I am not as good looking as I used to be (actually not true, I think I look better than I ever have, perhaps because I like myself more!) I am slowing down a little, not wanting to do as much — nor feel the need to. Yet I feel confident because I have the resources I need to meet the challenges in this final season of life. More on this later.

When did I begin to notice that I was moving into this last season of my life? When did my body begin to let me know that it is time to become more aware of its limitations? It started earlier than you might think. My 50th birthday was the moment when I realized with a shock that I wasn't 24 or even 35 anymore! A wee voice inside of me said, "You don't have to get it right anymore, Kevin, because no one cares. If you haven't got it right by now, you never will."

My awareness of the aging process began in that moment. Over time, I have received gentle reminders that I am getting older and that I might consider some new strategies that would benefit me in this emerging reality. For example, I undertook some financial planning that would enable me to continue working, but with less effort and with more free time for me. I also looked at health issues to ensure a happy life. My doctor was a great help in guiding me in this direction. I began a program to get healthier in all facets of my life. In short, I woke up and became conscious in a new way. I began to really appreciate the life I have and to look at its possibilities for my own well-being. Now that I am in my 70's I am very grateful for the awareness that came to me in that 50th birthday moment. I am grateful that I was able to listen to the advice that came from deep within me. I could have ignored it. I could have held on to my younger life. Instead, I listened inwardly. Fortunately, I had the inner resources to do so and I used them to my advantage.

### INNER RESOURCES

What are these inner resources? In reality, these resources are partly intuitive and partly learned. They began to come to consciousness when I made the decision to live an inner-directed life. I seem to learn best about life from direct experience. Then, out of my own experience of a situation, I love to learn what other people have discovered. These discoveries support my own knowing. Listening to the experience of others expands and enriches my own experience of a situation.

I would like to cite one example of a skill that has become an essential resource at this time of my life. When I am in Grounded Presence, a primary skill in Wholebody Focusing, I am able to talk to, and be in relationship with, those parts of me that seem to be slowing down or not functioning the way they used to. Such a situation would normally cause me a great deal of anxiety, anger, and resentment towards these parts that seem to be failing me. Instead, I can do something quite different. I can invite these parts to come more into my conscious awareness and ask them what they need or what is possible, given the current situation. It amazes me that these parts respond to my invitation and let me know what is possible and what I can do to facilitate their future possibilities for being. In this manner, I feel empowered. I feel I am participating in my life's challenges based on concrete information that feels right and true and specific to my situation. What amazes me even more is that these parts, which appear to be so dysfunctional, have the wisdom and the energy within themselves to transform themselves, given the opportunity to do so. This moves me to say, "When a part of me feels loved, it awakens to its own healing!"

## **GROUNDED PRESENCE**

When I am in Grounded Presence, I have a sense of myself and at the same time, I feel connected to a larger self that is supported by the environment. I feel part of something — something bigger than I know. When I am aware of my connection to something bigger than I know at this stage of my life, I have the resources to know how to be and what to do beyond what I think I know. The knowing that comes out of Grounded Presence usually feels just right to my situation. As my life changes, so must I find new ways to take care of myself. What has worked so well in the past no longer does, isn't what is needed, nor do I know what will be needed. When I am in Grounded Presence, there is a Body Wisdom that I can access for assistance, because it seems to know what is needed right now in a way that I don't!

This inner resource has helped me enormously through this period of my life. I will speak to it now directly from my bodily felt sense of the aging experience rather than trying to think about something to say. I will be with this question of the aging process as my Wholebody Focusing partner, Karen, listens to me. Karen and I have been listening to each other from Grounded Presence for some time now as we explore subjects of mutual interest.

It is a beautiful winter day in Scotsburn, Nova Scotia. I am sitting at the kitchen table next to a wood burning stove looking out at the mountains that begin at the end of the garden. Karen is sitting on a leather sofa with her dog, Jackie. I take a moment to feel grounded and invite a felt sense of what aging is for me and what I might want to say about that.

I'll talk about aging from where I am living right now in my 70's. I feel there are seasons in life, and this is the final season. There was a season when I was born. Then I grew up, and matured, and became an adult. I married and had children. They too grew up and moved away. Once more, I am on my own in this final season of my life.

I am speaking from the final season of life where I find myself on my own again. I want to describe how Wholebody Focusing has really helped in giving me tools and the empowerment I need to effectively move through this last and final season of my life.

**Karen:** What comes for me is that you are alone again, but in a whole new way with new possibilities.

**Kevin:** Yes, with new possibilities and with a much greater degree of consciousness.

**Karen:** It is not that you are alone and you don't know what that means, it is rather you are alone now, and you are aware of possibilities at the same time.

**Kevin:** That is true, I am alone now. It is a fact of this season whether I like it or not. However, I argue that each season brings its natural gifts as well its challenges and also gives me the tools I need to meet the challenges. This is where Wholebody Focusing can be so helpful as an appropriate resource for this final season.

I want to say more about my experience of what Wholebody Focusing has been for me. It is not a resource that just happened all at once, ready for this final phase of life. In fact, it has been a way for me to grow my life and to develop resources that I needed as I became more conscious of my own empowerment and limitations. The term Wholebody Focusing is really a coming together of a life of learning from many sources including the Alexander technique and Focusing. It has evolved to the point where it is a perfect fit for me in what I need in my life right now. So this resource I have has been developed over a lifetime, based on what was needed in my life. What has worked for me is now available to others who might benefit from my experience.

**Karen:** What you are writing is a story of something that has helped you in your life and offers this life experience as a possible resource for others in this specific season of their lives. So you are putting out an invitation. You are saying this has helped you in your life, and maybe it might help me in mine.

**Kevin:** Yes, this is an integration of many life experiences that have helped me. If they can help you, all the better! And why I mention these disciplines, Focusing and the Alexander technique, is because I am asking myself once again if I really do have the resources needed to face the challenges of my life now.

The reality is that I am slowing down. I am not moving as fast as I used to. I don't think as quickly on my feet as I think I used to. I certainly don't remember as well as I used to, especially names and numbers. I have to admit that there are parts of me that are not living up to my expectations in their functioning. What I am discovering is that the old ways of handling situations just aren't working for me as well as they used to — as though they are just not up to doing the job. So what to do about that? My life is changing and the tools I used when I had boundless energy are just not there anymore. I used to be able to give and give and give and not worry about receiving, but now I can't. I realize my energy is limited in a way that I never thought of it as limited before. How do I deal with the reality that I am not as young as I used to be?

Do I get angry because I'm not as full of energy as I used to be, not as young and handsome as I once looked? People don't look at me like they used to. In fact, young people don't even notice I'm there. My memory can be so bad at times that it's embarrassing! I could tell myself that life is tough, dammit, dammit, and on and on and on. This would be one way to handle the situation of being in this season my life. I could put up a fight, hate it, and pretend it is not even happening!

**Karen:** That's the normal way, that's the familiar, the usual, the expected!

**Kevin:** Yes. At this time of my life, I realize I have tools to help me deal with these challenges. In fact, I've been using these tools to help the lives of others, and now it's time for me to benefit from them, too. These very same resources are now for me!

I refer to these tools as Wholebody Focusing, a collection of my life experiences that I use to help other people in their lives. I have used them for myself over the years, but this time I want to look at these tools again and see what qualities of Wholebody Focusing would be useful for this final season of life. How can Wholebody Focusing work for me now?

Whenever I ask myself a question like this, my first response is that nothing will come and there is nothing I can do. It is a familiar belief I hold. However, as I say that, I notice I have a slight headache and my shoulder feels stiff. I feel drawn to pay attention to my body. I could ignore these signals or I can begin to notice myself, my physical body, and notice how the chair, and floor, and room, support it.

I notice that it is a beautiful day out there. I can see it from in here, yet I don't have to get out into it. I can stay in this warm cozy room and not have to go out there in the snow, knee deep in all its splendour. This reminds me of my childhood in Toronto; we used to have snow just like this. But not now, not these days. Right now I'm enjoying the scenery out there which reminds me of the times past as a child in the snow and what a delight that was. So right now I have an opportunity to let all this good feeling of the room, so warm, and you, and your sense of welcoming, and the view of the forest out there with all the snow coating the trees, all of that I can feel in me now as pleasurable. And when I do that I realize my body likes this, my body likes my awareness of life around me. In fact I find myself actively looking around more and enjoying what I'm seeing. At the same time, I realize it is very difficult to feel unhappy with my life when I am enjoying this moment.

**Karen:** I guess that's why I want to learn how to do that, too. Can you teach me how to do that? That's how I want to live my life, too.

**Kevin:** I'm just sitting here. Rather than stewing about what is wrong with my life, I am actually noticing my physical connection, my awareness of what's around me right now, like the warmth of the room, the lighting, the things I hadn't really noticed until now. Until now I have been preoccupied without even realizing it. Now I seem to have been able to pull myself away from the preoccupation and become more aware of what's going on right here, what is actually here. Being more present to what is actually here seems to change my mood.

Now I'm noticing that a man has come to shovel your walkway, and he looks half my age. I'm so glad that he is shovelling your walk and he probably cleared your driveway, too. He looks so able, and he seems to be enjoying doing the job, and he's being paid for it. I am glad I don't have to do that anymore except occasionally, but this is not my work. I do something else instead that really does suit me, and I get paid for it. Nor do I have to work like I used to. I don't have a family to support anymore, and my life is quite simple with few expenses. I can work just as much as I like, the way that I like to. My needs are not that great, so life is much easier for me in that respect. For example, I don't own a car anymore. I don't have to, as I live in the center of the city. What a relief not to have to own a car and manage its servicing and all that parking business. I used to worry about the car breaking down and not knowing what to do. Now I don't have to worry. I don't have a car, and don't need one — not anymore.

**Karen:** What strikes me is that you don't have as many needs as you used to in this season of your life. And it is a relief.

**Kevin:** Yes, but there are needs too, just different needs. And these needs are important. Like, I am glad I am healthy. My weight is fine, cholesterol and blood pressure are all fine, and I am grateful for having developed a lifestyle that keeps me healthy. That is really important to me now, far more important than it used to be. And I am glad I started developing good eating and exercise habits years ago, so they are just a part of my life now.

Yes, I realize this is normal, this is my normal life now, especially when I hear other people my age complaining about what is happening to them, what medications they are taking, and how these are not working, and all that stuff, in a helpless kind of way. It seems that they become obsessed with their health, and how they feel so let down or left out. I don't think that is very healthy, and certainly not very entertaining — if this is all we can talk about!

Maybe I can say this: I want to stay healthy, I want to be happy, and I want to have a good time! And I want to meet people like me, people who live their lives with consciousness. I am not trying to ignore problems as I get older, but I don't want to drown in them either. I want to use the resources I have to work with them. I am putting this out there, naming what I want.

**Karen:** That's revolutionary. In this stage of life you want to be healthy, happy, and have a good time. What intention. What a plan!

**Kevin:** I have learned this one important thing from the practices of Focusing, the Alexander Technique, Wholebody Focusing, etc. If I put out an intention, for example, from Grounded Presence, and then I step back for a moment and really feel the support of the ground and connection to life around me . . . when I do that . . . and put my worries about all that 'over there', I'm in a good space to ask myself this question: "What do I want?"

## USING WHOLEBODY FOCUSING TO SUPPORT A PHYSICAL AILMENT

I'm reminded of working with clients on a body dysfunction. I make sure that we are both well grounded and connected to ourselves and to each other, and when it feels right I ask, "If this part of you could speak, what would it say that it needs right now?" What is so remarkable is that a response actually comes! I am fascinated by the fact that when we pay attention to something, calling to us from the body in this way, something happens.

To illustrate this point, if I put my attention to how my body is right now, I can sense a lot of things going on, and yet my attention is drawn to my right knee for some reason. There is a little bit of an irritation there, it hurts a little on the inside. I don't panic when I feel something like that in my knee, and now I notice my right toe is also feeling sore.

**Karen:** You don't run to the doctor whenever you feel that something doesn't feel right in your body, like the irritation in your knee or some pain in your toe.

**Kevin:** No I don't, because I actually enjoy noticing the twinge in my knee, particularly if I have someone there to keep me company, which seems to make it easier for me to do so. And I know the more physically present I am with myself, the easier it is for me to be with that knee — exactly how it is. Then my knee seems to begin to be more conscious of itself too!

**Karen:** The knee itself becomes more conscious when you pay attention to it in this way.

**Kevin:** Yes, I like that; it feels like a real connection between me and what is going on in the knee. The knee seems to come more alive when you might think it would become more sore. But no, it doesn't actually, it just feels different. Well, how is the knee exactly? It's a bit sore; the soreness is there, but only in one spot, and then there is also the feeling in my toe, and I realize the knee is a part of a much larger sense of something going on in me. Right now I can feel some activity in my shoulder, and it seems connected to the knee, and I don't know why. Now I'm feeling something in my shoulder and my foot, as though the whole right side wants to expand in some way. It feels like I'm going on some kind of journey when I pay attention to my knee. Now I notice there's a movement happening in my leg right now, and I'm not doing it! The leg itself wants to do this movement, and there seems to be more energy in me to do that than in me trying to stop it. It's powerful!

**Karen:** It seems like your whole body is responding to your awareness of the knee.

**Kevin:** Yes, things are happening; I am really waking up. At least the body is waking up and I'm just observing it. I'm not personally doing anything, and yet there are these funny movements happening in my body — now my hands are moving. Now I'm rubbing my head. I can say something is happening, it feels great, it is not negative, in fact, it's kind of fun. I'm enjoying this. It feels like I'm giving myself a kind of workout. It is effortless; the body is doing it! I don't know what this has to do with the knee. But there it is, and I am enjoying it. As I say that it feels complete, in fact it is complete. The whole thing has just stopped. Now this is funny, and yet it's true, that twinge in the knee isn't there anymore!

**Karen:** The twinge isn't there anymore and that's funny. This is the inner resource. This is how it works.

**Kevin:** I can't explain it, but I do know that I can do this process and I feel good about it. Certainly there will be times when I notice something, and it seems to be saying, "Go to the doctor." At least I am noticing, at least I'm listening, and that makes all the difference. To actually hear what these parts have to say, or feel some kind of response from them is remarkable. Sometimes these body ailments just need my attention. Other times, they need something else. But right now when I gave the knee my attention in a whole body way, it seemed to be able to sort itself out. That seemed to be enough. At other times I remember my body telling me, "You're tired, I'm tired, take a rest."

What I like here is the ability to dialogue with parts of myself about something going on in me that wants my attention. My experience is that the response that comes in the body is life directed, in some way. It always gives me good advice, if I can listen and not try to put up a fight. It gives me something I can do (or even better, *it* can do) to make the situation better or more compatible. That is a wonderful, wonderful skill to have in this last season of my life. I am in my 70's right now, and it isn't going to go the other way!

**Karen:** You said something that really struck me, you said, I don't know why it happens but I know it works, whatever part of the body that comes to my attention when I ask what it needs, it lets me know!

**Kevin:** It does let me know.

## THE INNER RESOURCE OF CONSCIOUSNESS

**Kevin:** It is quite remarkable, and it is a skill. For example, if I were in panic about my knee, if I become really worried about it, my whole body would be in panic mode, contracted and tight. If I ask, "What do you need, what do you need?" in a state of panic that is actually crying out for help, you can imagine the kind of response I would get!

**Karen:** The knee would say, "Yikes! Go away! Go get some help!"

**Kevin:** Yes, I can hear it say, "Go away; come back when you are feeling better! I don't need your panic; I just need you to be open with me. Be friendly towards me. Can't you see I'm doing the best I can and I need your support? What I don't need is your panic."

**Karen:** That is a very powerful thing. This means I don't have to run out the door and ask a doctor what's wrong. I can ask my body directly; it's quite remarkable.

There is also something more subtle here. The knee just knows itself; it doesn't know the other parts until you do. All it knows is that it is in the shock of what it feels like, and when it feels your panic, all it feels is more pain. It doesn't know about the rest of the body because you don't. It doesn't know what's going on in the rest of the body because you're in panic mode.

**Kevin:** Yes. In fact, I'm cut off from my body in that moment. But when I pay attention to the whole of me, the pain in my knee then has the capacity to know *more* than what it knows. It can join me in being aware of the whole. And that gives it possibilities that it would not otherwise have. This is a very different outcome in the knee's experience and my experience

of the knee. This is what consciousness brings to it. Consciousness can open my own eyes to the larger experience and also open the knee's eyes to the larger experience of itself, in the context of the whole body. That opens the door to an awareness of its possibilities because it can feel the larger context of the body as its container, and now it can feel safe enough to explore these possibilities. It makes a huge difference — this is about the power of my consciousness.

**Karen:** It seems like the knee knows something about being a knee, and also about what it is to be in community with the whole body when it is given an opportunity to do so, and the rightness of that because it has always lived in the community of the whole body.

**Kevin:** Yes, the knee wants to come back into that community, but for whatever reasons it can't or has forgotten how. It has felt separated and cut off in some way. It needs the reminder that it is part of the larger community of the body.

Using this inner resource of Wholebody Focusing requires a certain kind of inner attitude. I'm talking about the power of consciousness as a skill and a resource, and how helpful that can be as I experience my aging situation. It is about paying attention and learning how to live in a healthy way. It is also about creating a healthy relationship between me and the parts of me that need my attention in a way that enables these parts to let me know what they need for themselves. This is the power of consciousness, and it is very powerful. To actually know that this kind of change can happen is remarkable, empowering, and it requires skill.

## **BEING OPEN TO NEW POSSIBILITIES FOR LIFE**

If I think more about this season of my life, I realize once again, how much things have changed. The children are grown. I have more free time — at long last! Life is simpler than it used to be — and I have to get used to these new rhythms. I don't need as much. There is less demand on my time. There is time and space to realize that maybe there are things that I would like to do, and I am asking myself questions: What would I like to do now, in this period of my life? What are the possibilities now, for my life?

To ask these kinds of questions I first need to accept the reality that I *am* in this phase of life and not some other phase. For example, if I still think I am a teenager or a younger man of 30 or 40, asking such a question will be confusing when it comes to the bodily response of what is possible. I have to accept the life I have right now as the starting point, in order to ask questions that are grounded in realistic possibilities. I need to ask these questions with the same attitude as I would ask my knee: what it *needs* or what it *wants* . . . ? It is the same skill as in the knee pain context.

## **STEPPING BACK ONCE A QUESTION IS POSED: WORKING WITH LIMITING BELIEFS**

I have learned to step back and not to try to make an answer happen, or try to answer it myself, or expect an immediate response. It often takes time. I have learned to trust that

*it* will respond when it is ready to — and, often in ways I don't expect or haven't even anticipated!

Here is something that came to me, unexpectedly, after asking myself an open question, and then stepping back with an open mind. It is the story about plans for Europe in the Fall. I notice when I begin to think about plans to visit London, Brittany, and then Dublin, I can easily feel overwhelmed by all the details. This is a familiar pattern of feeling overwhelmed, obsessing about every single detail, and then deciding it is all too much for me to take on. Right now, I am noticing this response pattern. I'm stepping back from it, and what comes is a reminder that says, "Kevin, life is much easier than you think it is." Now I have to laugh because it feels true. The overwhelmed feeling has left me. I realize that there is lots of time for the plans to literally fall into place. This habit actually is not about my aging, it is about my habit of anticipating the worst, in thinking about future events. I am simply more aware of my behaviour than I used to be. By becoming more aware of my patterns of behaviour, I am able to step back and laugh a little bit. Life is really not all that serious now! That feels so true!

Suddenly, many examples come to mind of how I tend to anticipate the worst in any situation, only to discover that in doing whatever it is, the outcome turns out to be very different than what I expected, and sometimes even very enjoyable.

To realize that life is not as hard as I think it is, is a major shift for me, and effects the way I live my life. The most immediate benefits of my change of attitude are in regard to my physical well-being. The stress on my body as I approach daily activities is much less than it used to be, and clearly benefit the healthy functioning of the whole — also a benefit of just being conscious. The role of conscious awareness in my life also happened because it needed to. I don't have the same strength, energy, or time to waste what energy I have. I used to waste so much energy just anticipating how hard it would be for me to do something. Then I would prepare myself to do the event as though I was preparing to push a car out of the deep snow!

## **GRATITUDE FOR THE INNER RESOURCE OF WHOLEBODY CONSCIOUSNESS**

From my personal perspective, mindfulness can be a very rewarding activity, especially when it is grounded in the sense of the whole body connected to its environment. This skill requires just *noticing*. It is about becoming aware of what one is doing — while doing it in order to make healthy choices that will benefit one's life — rather than work against it.

I also notice that I cherish my life now more than I ever have. I cherish each day when I can say I am feeling pretty good today, and feel grateful that I can say that. Gratitude is another quality that seems to come with aging — at least mine — for just being alive, maybe because, at some level, I realize my time here is limited. This feeling of gratitude comes to me spontaneously, and it is heart-warming.

## **MAKING FRIENDS WITH THE LIVING BODY**

I hadn't thought of my body being a friend, and as I think about it, I don't think I have been all that friendly to it until now. Growing up I was taught to control my body, make it follow the rules, make it behave and forcing my body to do things that it clearly didn't want to do. I blamed it for being lazy and stupid when, in fact, I was forcing it in ways that perhaps were not natural — or even right for it or me. I would manipulate my body and make it comply with something without reference to its own inner knowing. The word that comes in me now is *betrayal*. I betrayed my own body rather than befriend it. At this stage of my life I have the opportunity to reflect on what my body really needs to maintain health and well-being. When I do this in this skillful way from Grounded Presence that is connected to the whole living body, and connected to its environment, things just come to me. I seem to be informed, often when I least expect it. This information is extremely helpful in guiding my life now.

## **THE POWER OF RECEPTIVITY, ACTIVE CONSCIOUSNESS, AND LISTENING TO OTHERS**

There is something about just being purely receptive — and — being purely receptive is the opposite of being passive. Pure receptivity is about the power of non-doing so that, as Alexander would say, “the thing does itself”. I call this ‘*active consciousness*’. It is an observation that consciousness is actively engaged with life around it naturally, and that things happen directly out of this engagement, all on their own!

Engagement is also related to connection with another. To quote Teilhard de Chardin, “A person grows as a person in connection with another person, and in no other way.” I really enjoy listening to people, and one thing I have learned in Wholebody Focusing is how to listen. Initially, strange as it may sound at this juncture in my life (and this writing), it was not easy for me to feel okay with feeling that natural bodily connection with another. A very strong part of me said I shouldn't enjoy this sense of connecting. I now understand the power and beauty of this interactive space, being in sync with someone else, and allowing body wisdom to move between two people — very much the opposite of being passive. At such times of real connection with someone, thoughts and words seem to flow directly in way that isn't of my own making, yet turns out to be just right!

## **ACTIVE CONSCIOUSNESS AT 70: COMPLETING A FULL LIFE**

Consciousness at 70 is really very different from consciousness at 20. At 20 I was full of life and just living, and not thinking about it very much because I was too busy living it. At 70 I am still living life, but I also have the time and the space to be more aware of how I am doing so. I seem to be able to be more conscious of what it is I am doing as I am doing it. This opens up possibilities for me, this new sense of awareness, and brings in the element of having more spaciousness inside to make choices based on what I want, rather than what I must. When I was 20, I was not aware of my choices and possibilities. My life experience then was limited in ways that it no longer is.

To conclude, I am seeing certain challenges in this specific season of my life — no doubt other challenges will come later. Life is changing — that is something I cannot help — but I can *notice*. Then it becomes a question of what to do about whatever has been presented to me.

This season can show me a way of completing my life if I am open to what naturally comes in me as a way of preparing for completion. It is scary to say that, but it is also real. Whether I like it or not, this is a time to put my life in order so that I can feel complete with it. I can learn to appreciate this season, work with it, and deeply value the naturalness of the process.

Wholebody Focusing has given me a way of being with my life that feels so very empowering. I feel a sense of peace with myself, a sense of completeness, even now. Perhaps I will be able to let go of life when it is time to do so. I have been fortunate to witness some very peaceful endings. The memories of such moments have given me courage to face the possible ending of my own life. Not all endings need be painful.

My body, in its wisdom, is informing me and preparing me for these changes. So be it!

## FOCUSING, LIFE COACHING AND AGEISM

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*Judy Robbins, Psy.D.*

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*The following article is in two parts. Part 1, The Dilemma of Aging, addresses my thoughts about the prejudice against aging, known as 'ageism'. Part 2, The Backstory, tells how a combination of Focusing and life coaching have helped to develop my ideas while at the same time facilitating a considerable spurt of personal growth.*

### PART 1

#### THE DILEMMA OF AGEISM

This year people sang *Happy Birthday* to me as usual. I saw their lips mouthing the words, but I was hearing a different refrain. In my ear, the Beatles were singing, "Will you still need me, will you still feed me, when I'm 64?" Somehow, impossible as it seemed, I had reached that milestone birthday. On my next birthday, the Medicare card will tuck into my wallet right next to the one from AARP. Middle age will be finis. No matter how you slice it, only old people are on Medicare. Sixty-five is old. Officially.

As a Focuser and a therapist, I am doubly curious. So for the past ten years I have been looking at the road ahead with more than a little interest. However, since this last birthday, I have zoomed in for a closer look. And frankly, I am aghast.

#### AGEISM

I asked myself what I thought when I heard the words *old lady*. Images popped up too fast for me to censor them:

- A shrunken blue-haired matron peering through the steering wheel of a Buick, weaving erratically through traffic at 25 mph.
- Bingo at the Senior Center.
- Dial-a-Ride.
- Fumbling at the checkout while the line fumes.
- Widowhood.
- Lots of prescription pill bottles in the bathroom.

That is just the beginning of a long list of negative stereotypes. It is hard to think of myself as prejudiced. I am socially correct. I embrace diversity. I am OK with people of all different colors, religions and sexual orientations. I am nice to old people. Could I really be harboring ageism — prejudice against old people — under a thin veneer of correctness? But if I am now officially old, isn't that prejudice against *myself*? And, if I am indeed ageist, how widespread is ageism?

In the last several months, I have spoken to groups large and small and found that it isn't just me. Ageism is more rampant than the flu. And just as nasty. In fact, it is even nastier because we would never impose the flu on ourselves, but we are drawn into a pervasive cultural climate of revulsion against old age — and we impose it upon ourselves. Here is an example. In an ad for wrinkle cream, a prominent female doctor in her mid-60s looks at her “before” face in the mirror and says, “Yuck.” To say that this is not a proper greeting is an understatement, but this doctor is not alone in rejecting her own older visage.

### **A BRILLIANT PLAN: *DENIAL***

A 44-year old friend whose work brings her into the world of rock and roll confided that she is having a terrible time getting older. She really, really doesn't want it to happen. She is not alone in her concern that aging will make her less credible or relevant. Sometimes there isn't even a specific worry, just a free-floating anxiety that a bad thing will happen if we allow aging to have its way with us.

I know a lot of smart, thoughtful people, many lifelong psychology professionals. So I began asking my Boomer cohorts, “What's your plan for getting old?” Most replied like Sandy, a Ph.D. who is nearing 70. She told me in all seriousness that getting old is not part of her plan. Her plan is to act young until she can't keep it up any longer, and then she'll follow the directions in *Final Exit*, a classic book that describes how to kill yourself. One after another told me that getting old was not something they identified with. A common response was, “I just refuse to think about it.” A friend who is 65 and a seasoned therapist said, “I am not old. When you say *old*, I think: Not Me!” It struck me as incredibly ironic that a perfectly competent therapist would suggest *denial* as a viable way to deal with a significant life stage. That goes against everything we know about healthy psychology.

### **WHAT IS *OLD* ANYWAY?**

In the dictionary, the word *old* has no value judgment associated with it. It means *advanced in years; having lived a long time; experienced*. But in the society in which we live, *old* is laden with value judgments, most of them negative. This puts us — all of us, not just Boomers — in a double bind. Because we do not want people to associate us with the negative stereotypes, we try to wiggle out of getting old. Unfortunately biology has a different scenario for us: aging is what living beings do from conception to death. We can't *not* get old.

As a therapist, I have learned that people often speak in code. In other words, there is frequently a virtual truth even when the literal words don't make much sense. Perhaps what people are implying with their denial of aging is an unmet need. We may need to grow old in a *new* way, a way that avoids the stereotypes. But if we are to chart a new path through old age, we need to get some dialog going, and this won't happen if we don't own the truth: Old age happens, and not just to other people!

## SOCIAL FORCES AT WORK

Let's look at this from some other angles.

*Demographics:* Consider this statistic. In Connecticut, my home state, one-third of the population is Boomers. This is a huge skew in the demographic. Imagine for a minute if one-third of the population were teenagers. The mall would play shamelessly to that group, courting their dollars. Store after store would stock clothing, music and accessories for teens. The piped-in sound track would sound like a 16-year-old's iPod. And we adults, inured as we are to the vagaries of the retail industry, would expect that. But one-third of Connecticut is not teenagers, it is Boomers. Boomers make up an enormous block of consumers, and we have expendable income to boot. Yet, we are all but invisible in the mall. Not one store specializes in older people. Not one store features manikins that look even remotely similar to one-third of its customers. This glaring absence points to the stigma around age. Age doesn't sell because nobody wants it.

*The Media:* Not only are older people unrepresented at the mall; we are nearly invisible in magazine and newspaper ads and on TV. I was startled one day paging through the LLBean catalog. I have been a reasonably good customer for years, but somehow not one person in that catalog looks like me!! When did *that* happen?

TV is famously influential in determining how we perceive ourselves. Yet, on TV, older people rarely have a starring role. Too often we are used as props — the overprotective mother, the problem mother-in-law, the cranky neighbor. The one place where older people consistently appear is in ads for medicine. Want to see a person over 50? Check out the ads for cholesterol, diabetes, erectile dysfunction, osteoporosis and high blood pressure drugs.

A close look at the media will also highlight the places where feminism still has work to do. Men are allowed to age on TV, but women are required to remain youthful if we are to be taken seriously. The few exceptions are soap opera stars or anchor women who have aged in place and have a loyal fan base. Even this group is made to look good (meaning "youthful") with lots of plastic surgery, botox, dye and makeup.

*The Medical Establishment:* Old age is rapidly becoming medicalized. Drug companies have a vested interest in old age being seen as a problem that needs addressing with medication. Advertising for anti-aging products is so commonplace now that it seems normal. Hormone replacement therapy for both women and men is a rapidly growing specialty. As for plastic surgery, we all know ordinary people who have "had a little work done."

*The Beauty Industry:* The beauty industry has a similar pecuniary interest in older people, working with the media to convince us that in order to remain viable, we must remain perpetually youthful. Compression undershirts for men that trim up the paunch and hold in love handles just hit the market. There is a multimillion-dollar market for hair dyes, wrinkle creams, exercise equipment, as well as the foundation garments that promise to deliver a more youthful appearance.

## THE DILEMMA

Where is the public outcry? Where is the protest about medicalization, commercialization and marginalization? The silence is spooky. Boomers have never been silent about anything. We were born, it seems, with a big mouth. We spent our entire youth protesting, picketing and sitting-in. We demanded to be heard. If we were old enough to get killed in Viet Nam, we wanted a voice in how this country was run. We raged against all sorts of stereotypes and isms. In the 60s and 70s, we marched for civil rights and launched feminism, the ecology movement, sexual freedom, and gay rights. We redefined psychology, unceremoniously yanking it out of the hands of the elite medical establishment and positioning it where the masses could use its rapidly developing methods.

The tools that my generation used to combat other isms will work on ageism, too. But in order to use them, we have to let go of our denial and own up to the truth. Age happens. It happens to all of us, even those who have been earnest about diet, exercise, vitamins and face cream. Boomers are partly responsible for the stigma our culture puts on age. We were the ones who vowed never to trust anyone over 30. We sang along with The Who hoping that we'd die before we got old. At the time, it seemed we would never get to be old, but now we are. And we need to make it OK to be old.

Ageism is even more insidious than other social inequalities. Ageism is an ism we have against ourselves. That means we internalize it. It is because of internalized ageism that we negatively judge ourselves and hold ourselves back, saying things like "I'm too old to trek the alps, go traveling by myself, learn Italian." "I've had a lovely career; I should be satisfied; why would I want all the aggravation of starting something new now?" "I can't even find my glasses, what makes me think I could . . . (fill in the blank)?" After a certain age, society encourages us to be quiet and take a comfortable chair, and we unconsciously encourage ourselves and each other to do the same.

What if it were different?

What if, instead of taking a comfortable chair, we were encouraged, even expected, to find new ways to age, to be endlessly adaptive to the setbacks of an aging body, to hold ourselves in unceasing positive regard, to keep our passions alive and find new ones, to live fully all the way to the end? In the words of D. W. Winnicott, the British psychiatrist, "Oh, that I be alive when I die!"

## PART 2

### THE BACKSTORY

The ideas in Part 1 are from a forthcoming book, but six months ago those ideas were lodged unintelligibly far back into the murk of the murky edge that we Focusers are so familiar with. I thought readers of *The Folio* might be interested in the backstory of how a combination of Focusing and life coaching encouraged these ideas forward so they can be shaped into print and a website. The backstory would not be complete without noting that

this process has been a real stimulus to personal growth, chock full of AFGOs. (AFGO is an acronym for Another Frustrating Growth Opportunity).

This whole shebang started when I asked Beverly Shoenberger to coach me. Bev is an occasional Focusing partner, a fellow Focusing trainer and therapist colleague who is also a life coach. For those unfamiliar with the term, ‘coaching’ is a collaboration between a paid coach and a client. Typically, the client sets a goal and works with the coach to come up with a plan; the coach then holds the client accountable to the plan. With a Focusing-oriented coach like Bev, Focusing is the method used to determine goals. Coaching is an action-oriented, strengths-based model. The client is assumed to be whole, creative and resourceful. Focusers will immediately see the similarity to the Focusing Attitude which implies that people, no matter how distressed, do not need fixing. Unlike a Focusing listener, the coach is highly interactive. The coach’s job is to protect and serve the client’s agenda by challenging, supporting and keeping the client on track. Sessions are typically held on the phone. The pace is efficient; there is continuity from session to session, often with agreed upon homework.

Both Focusing and coaching have been fundamental in invoking, incubating, articulating, and bringing my ideas into the world. Focusing gives me a little distance and enables me to look with interested curiosity, not judgment, at my felt sense as if raising the question, *What is going on here?* Once I’ve got a handle on it and have articulated the felt sense, coaching comes in with action-oriented questions like: What does this want to do? What happens next? Where does this want to go? Can we help it along?

## **GRAY MATTERS**

Most clients come to coaching with a specific goal in mind, but I wasn’t sure exactly what I wanted until Bev asked one of the action-oriented questions coaches are known for: *If you could do anything you wanted, and time and money were no object, what would you do?*

Without hesitation I replied that I would turn my full attention to Gray Matters, the catchall name I had for my interest in aging. The speed, clarity and sheer force of my reply made both of us sit up and take notice. Who knew Gray Matters was so very alive in the murk? For many years I have been interested in how Boomers would age differently. It was logical that my generation would be true to form and put its own unique stamp on aging. I had more than a passing interest, enough so that I gave it the Gray Matters name and started a file, but I didn’t have the time to develop it. To complicate things, when I began working with Bev, I had a serious thyroid problem that was wreaking havoc with my body. Turning my attention to Gray Matters, as fulfilling and fun as it might be, seemed nigh but impossible. But Bev, with her coaching background, was undaunted.

## THE TIME MANAGEMENT MATRIX

Coaching has pulled together lots of helpful tips from business management and sociology. One of these is Stephen Covey's Time Management Matrix. Building on Parkinson's Law — the idea that work expands to fill the available time — Covey divided work into four categories, Important and Unimportant, Urgent and Not Urgent. Work that is Urgent and Important always gets done. Work that is Unimportant and Not Urgent never gets done. But what about something like Gray Matters, which is Important but Not Urgent? That is just the kind of thing that turns into a WouldaCouldaShoulda — the kind of thing that I woulda done if only I had the time or the resources. How often have you had an idea only to see it invented or done later by someone else? Covey, and later coaching, says that in order to get something done you need to move it into the Urgent category, and that is what Bev and I did. After careful deliberation, during which I decided that I would have a big regret if I left Gray Matters fallow, I upgraded Gray Matters to both Important and Urgent.

Immediately my felt sense was alive with fear and excitement, always an AFGO alert. Focusing on my own and with my regular partner, I worked on the many ways my psyche felt stirred. What became clear was that the Gray Matters material was close to my core, deep, vital and timely. My passion was aroused and I began to look at the other areas of my life differently. Psychotherapy, which had seemed like a good way to spend my time, now seemed as if it was a second choice, siphoning off time from my main area of interest. I re-labeled my psychotherapy practice as Important but Not Urgent, except for the hours when a client was in front of me. This shift, though it was a radical re-orientation, had that familiar "life forward" feeling. I began to think of myself as "a something to do with Gray Matters" rather than a psychotherapist. But what exactly was that something? And what about the fear?

## WHAT IS BECOMING OF ME?

Bev, with her gentle expectancy of action, (how could she do this without pressuring me?) inspired me to return repeatedly and with interested curiosity to the edge of the unknown. I explored many options for my new identity and slowly, haltingly, it became clear that I am a *commentator*, a person who looks at things the way they are, sees them uniquely, and speaks up with her point of view. I start conversations and get people thinking.

I am (gulp) controversial. The prospect of being such a person struck up a symphony of fear. In my family of origin my differences were most unwelcome, and I have a cache of nasty humiliations that I can recall with little provocation. One of my very best defense mechanisms has been keeping a low profile. Still, as I Focused, I could clearly see a part of me that was yearning to speak out. It was not lost on me that my ailment was a thyroid problem, right at the site of my voice!

I was stuck with lots to say and nothing coming out. Warring inner voices shouted: Speak! No, shut up! Be seen! No, hide! During this time I imagined that I looked like I had been drawn by the bleak Norwegian impressionist Edvard Munch. However, there has been a 180-degree turnaround. I'm currently looking more like a Monet, reclining in a flower

garden in the south of France. I will try to explain as best I can what caused the shift. Like all good epiphanies, it happened in the middle of the night.

## **FINDING MY VOICE**

I had been sleepless, tossing and turning with my mind ajumble. Finally at 3 AM, I turned on the light and declared my bed my bodhi tree. I was not leaving until I figured out how to get out of this bind. I sat up with my journal in my lap, cleared a space and got curious. The first thing that arose was how tired I was. I wanted to put my head in the lap of an unconditionally loving Mother. She would protect me and make everything OK. But as I Focused, I realized that it wasn't exactly protection I wanted; it was the unconditional love. I wanted a place that remained constant and loving, a sanctuary to relax and renew, to recharge my batteries. The ghostly figure of the Mother was pointing me inward, as though the thing I was looking for was inside me.

Following the wisp of a felt sense, I located a place between my heart and solar plexus and when I found my way there, it was as though I had come home. Home is the place where all-is-well, where the love bank is refilled, where wounds are healed and bags are packed for the next foray. It is not so much a place of protection as it is an ever-reliable constant. From this place, it didn't matter if I were laughed at or disagreed with or even humiliated. I would be OK because I started and returned from this home inside of me, the place where love was abundant and unconditional.

Certainly not everyone will like what I have to say; after all, I can be controversial. Some people will hurt my feelings with their remarks, but I carry the antidote just a breath away, close to my heart. One huge deficit in my family of origin had been support. In that family it was every 'man for himself'. From my new point of view, I could see the importance of support and understood finally how to give it to myself. That dark night in my bodhi bed, I found the way to my voice. If nothing else comes of this venture, this priceless gift is enough.

Once I gave myself permission to speak, I was astonished at how much I had to say. Within twelve weeks I had a coherent body of work. Opportunities for action rapidly followed. More AFGOs. I was overcome with bouts of shyness and anxiety that I worked through with Focusing. And coaching offered the salami theory, which says there is only one way to eat a salami: slice it into thin pieces and take your time. So while I was breathing into my anxiety, Bev helped me to cut the opportunities into small slices and take my time with them. Of countless choices, I have picked two stories that illustrate how Focusing and coaching interweave, one involving a positive felt sense, the other just the opposite.

## **40 YEARS LATE FOR WOODSTOCK**

At the time Bev was asking me the powerful question about what I would do if I could, a cadre of old hippies were celebrating the 40th anniversary of the Woodstock music festival. A wealthy Boomer had bought the festival site and, sparing no expense, had turned

Max Yasgur's farm into a modern music theatre and arts complex. The *pièce de résistance* was a large museum that told the story of the 1960s and how that pivotal decade shaped a generation. On a lark, my husband Rick and I took a road trip. It proved to be as close to time travel as I ever expect to come.

The museum is artfully designed so that visitors enter at the beginning of the decade with John F. Kennedy's inaugural speech and exit in 1970 on the road out of Woodstock. It's an experiential immersion. Once you open the door to the museum you are surrounded by the music, sounds, clothing and sights of the era. The ordinary detritus of the decade are displayed all around — transistor radios and Princess phones, parts of cars, fads and fashions; Jackie Kennedy wearing Oleg Cassini, Twiggy in Carnaby Street mod.

I stood dumbstruck in the first exhibit, tears streaming down my cheeks while Rick gave me the “Wha?” look. The felt sense was so complex that it took me some days to sort it out. It goes something like this: When I check inside myself now, I feel very three-dimensional and full of life. But over 40+ years time, I had fallen into the habit of thinking of my young self as rather two-dimensional, like a black-and-white photograph stored away. I thought of young-Judy as a screwed up kid who meant well but somehow wasn't as fully fleshed out as I am now. But standing there in the museum, it was as if time folded back on itself, and I experienced the visceral felt sense of being 20, right there in my 64-year-old body. What brought the tears was the depth and complexity of that felt sense. How very alive and vibrant I had been! Not two-dimensional at all. I was open, engaged and very much a part of that time and place.

The exhibits displayed an old TV with Walter Cronkite intoning the day's body count in Vietnam, the thoop-thoop-thoop of a helicopter rotor as the soundtrack to his report. Another small screen broadcast the familiar cadence of Martin Luther King's oration. There was Bobby Kennedy on a scratchy film and the newsreel of kids getting shot by our own cops at Kent State. A young Stephen Stills sang, “Something's happening here . . . what it is ain't exactly clear. There's a man with a gun over there, telling me I've got to beware.” Once again, I was awash with the crazy painful, hole-in-my-heart sense of helplessness that bonded me so inexorably with my Boomer peers. Many of us turned to activism to try to make something good out of our shared pain. That day in the museum on Max Yasgur's old farm, I embraced my young self, and I vowed to carry forward that which was implicit in her.

Focusing was instrumental in sorting out the complexity of the felt senses surrounding that experience and coaching posed the question: What, if anything, needs to happen? Coaching made the connection between my current interest in ageism and the activism of my past. It enabled me to commit to wherever Gray Matters would lead. I knew young-Judy would be proud to see me carrying on her legacy.

## **DON'T CALL ME OLD**

A month after the trip to the Woodstock museum, I was invited to speak to a support group of nine retired professional women ranging in age from 58 to 78. Little did I know that

this innocuous invitation was to tip off a major AFGO. The ideas in Part 1 were not fully fleshed out yet, and I got off on the wrong foot with this group by inadvertently referring to us as “old.” I knew I was getting the group riled up but I wasn’t sure why. As my talk circled the drain, I felt scared and defensive but somehow was able to pull back into a Focusing stance. I managed to stop and ask them what was so provoking in what I was saying.

In no uncertain terms they let me know that they were not “old.” They made the usual arguments: age is just a number; 60 is the new 40; paying attention to age goes against the power of positive thinking: “I’m young inside” or “Even though I am getting older, I am not actually *old*,” etc. I feebly tried to say that I thought their reaction was proving my point — that we have such a dreadful prejudice against aging that we must avoid it at any cost. But I had lost my audience. No one was listening. It was time to tiptoe out the back door. In fact, I was sorely tempted to keep tiptoeing away from all things Gray in order to avoid any further experiences that aroused my primal fear of public humiliation.

However, if I did that, what would become of all the forward momentum gained in coaching sessions? I balked, but instead of scolding myself or quitting when the going got rough, Focusing helped me go to that *home* place to recharge. Once I settled down, I was able to see that the people at the meeting perceived the word *old* as an insult. And that fact catalyzed an intense month of theorizing. Shifting back and forth between Focusing and coaching, the ideas emerged from the murk, shook themselves off and dried their feathers in the sun.

## COACHING IN A FOCUSING WAY

For me, the combination of Focusing and coaching has been powerful. It feels important to have a coach who is also a Focuser. I can go into Focusing at any time during a coaching session, and it’s OK. Focusing would be very confusing to an ordinary coach; all our hesitations, silences and false starts would be misinterpreted. Coaching, with its emphasis on action, has the potential to be intrusive and aggressive, but that has never been my experience. Instead, I have had a welcoming environment to incubate ideas while honoring my process.

I started this venture without any expectations and now, just over seven months later, I am launched into a new arena, becoming comfortable hearing my own voice speak out on ageism. Even my thyroid has settled down. Not only do I see ageism as a social injustice, I have begun to look at my own aging process very differently. I see more clearly how my own internalized ageism throws clinkers into my present and future happiness, and I look forward to my new role as a commentator, even the AFGOs.

## REFERENCES

Here are a few books I've found helpful and readable. I've included the website for the Bethel Woods Center for the Arts (aka the Woodstock Museum) and contact information for my coach.

Beck, M. 2001. *Finding your own north star*. New York: Three Rivers Press. Though Martha is not a Focuser, this will give you a feel for good coaching.

Cohen, G. 2005. *The mature mind; The positive power of the aging brain*. New York: Basic Books. A well-researched expert delivers some all-too-rare good news.

Dass, R. 2000. *Still here, embracing aging, changing and dying*. New York: Riverhead Books. Irrepressible good humor and resiliency after a near fatal stroke.

[www.bethelwoodscenter.org/museum](http://www.bethelwoodscenter.org/museum). This is the website for the music and arts center at Bethel Woods, NY, otherwise known as the Woodstock museum

Beverly Shoenberger, my coach, can be reached in California at 310-457-0708, PST. She is also located at [www.focusing.org](http://www.focusing.org) under the Learn Focusing tab. Her email is: [openmeadowcoaching@gmail.com](mailto:openmeadowcoaching@gmail.com).

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

Jane and Dave Young, LCSW

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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: "Implied 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*.

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## PART 2

# INSIGHTS: TRANSFORMATIONS USING FOCUSING WITH OTHERS





## THE BOOK OF LIFE The Final Chapter

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### INTRODUCTION:

The aging process is an interesting chapter in the Book of Life, filled with unlimited possibilities and many untold challenges. For some it is a chapter like a long winter's journey; for others it is a chapter filled with joy, like the season of harvest.

Learning to live out one's time well, and with quality, is one of the tasks of this process called 'aging'. For those who are living through the aging process, you already know the struggles and surprises, the vast potential and joys, the sense of loss, the feeling of isolation, issues of health and well-being, and on and on . . .

For this article, I would like to view this process of aging through a much broader lens — a view that includes a series of new beginnings both for me, and for others. Aging can be a process of coming alive in ways not yet experienced. In taking this broader approach, I am, of course, in no way minimizing the tremendous challenges of growing older . . . and old.

Whatever attitudes have conditioned our being throughout our lives helps or hinders our living out the final years well. Helping others embrace what we often refer to as *the Focusing Attitude* is central to my work and my life, and whether we are consciously Focusing or intuitively sensing the attitude of respect, concern, caring, gentleness, and profound regard for the *life* in others, the Focusing Attitude trumps all 'techniques' (at least for me).

Old age is a treasure-house of history. In each person there is a story, and it is a story that needs to be told. Very often listening to life-stories helps people move past places of stuckness and places long neglected, into a new sense of fresh life within; therefore each unique story needs to be received, valued, and cherished. It is such a gift to witness the flowering of a spirit and the growing of a soul. In my life experience I have had this privilege. All I can say is that I stand before this mystery with a sense of AWE.

In reflecting upon this article about aging, I initially had a sense of feeling overwhelmed. There are so many approaches that can be taken in viewing the process of life and death.

As I started to write, the first thing that happened was my inner critic informed me that I really had nothing new to say. After having recovered from that attack, I let it know firmly that, "Yes, I do have something to share and I *will* share my experience." Why? Because I have had the very special privilege of journeying with some very ordinary people, yet they are extraordinary in their quality of life right to the end. Having helped them to experience a nurturing, gentle way of being with pain, grief, letting go, moving into hope

and trust, and finally finding the path that opened them to the Source of all Life, I discovered profound and grace-filled moments for me — and I hope for them, too.

Later in this article I will share one woman's journey during a particularly profound and life-changing experience for her. As you read my account of her story — and my story — I hope you will be able to get a sense of the change process, and the transformation that happened in both of us.

I also felt compelled to write this article, in order to connect again with so many of you who have been such a vital part of the fabric of my being. My heart is filled with love and gratitude as I age. I am now 72 years young, and I cherish all the memories of our celebrations and sharings over many years.

### **WHERE DOES FOCUSING 'FIT' WITH THE APPROACH I TAKE TO AGING?**

For me, Focusing is a *way of being present* to oneself, to others, to God, and to all of creation. Focusing is a way of being that embodies an awareness of my own experiencing and includes every one of my relationships. For me, honesty is the hallmark of whatever situation or relationship I encounter. For example, when I am listening and sensing inside myself and discover that I may need more time and space to process what I've heard, I simply say, "This is not a good time for me. Can we talk later?" I don't pretend to be all okay to listen to another if I am not all OK in myself. This is not only about me. Making room *for me* gives the Focuser (or other person, whether they are consciously Focusing or not) permission to say 'no' when that feels like the correct response *for them*. Being authentic also encourages others to experience my humanness and vulnerabilities. In my position as Congregational Leader, it is common for some people to put me on a pedestal, especially those who grew up in a different culture where authority was so central to their lives.

Touching into my own felt senses is so much more than a 'personal process'. My ongoing felt senses and listening carefully to them are a profound guide in my work, helping me to make the right decisions in most of the situations that I encounter on a daily basis, and (maybe?) how I came to be the Congregational Leader for my Community. The following story will better illustrate what I mean.

Every four years our Congregation assembles a 'Chapter' to elect its Congregational Leader. Any Sister can be a Chapter delegate with voting privileges. In order to be eligible as Congregational Leader, there is a process of 'discernment' to reflect upon whether this is where God is calling you. If so, the Sister puts her name forward. I have never had any desire, nor interest in this election process.

A few months prior to the elections, my sister and soul-mate died suddenly of cancer. I felt devastated, grief-stricken, depressed and angry. I didn't care about anything. I told my friends that I was withdrawing my name as a delegate for the Chapter, and that I would not even be present at the Chapter meeting. It felt inside as if part of me had died, too. I would go to the graveyard daily and cry out to God in anger and emptiness. I was also angry with my sister, Marge, for leaving me. *How could she leave like that?*

After a couple of weeks of this ongoing angst and pain, I was standing by her grave one morning and unexpectedly experienced a powerful shift in my chest and abdomen. I didn't know why it happened, or why it happened at that moment. All I knew was that it was like warm flowing water moving freely in my body, and the feeling was almost indescribable, and so very deeply soothing. A profound peace permeated every fiber of my being. I stood there sensing time and eternity, as one. I was no longer separate, but connected to all that *IS*. I had no concept of time, as hours passed. Then suddenly, a voice from within me said, "*You will be the Congregational Leader.*" For just a moment, time stopped, my breath stopped, my thoughts stopped, and without thinking I simply answered, "*Of course.*" This was a moment of what I call *grace* in its fullest manifestation. The message about my future felt unquestionably *right*. It was just so — and so be it. I have carried the intensity and joy of that experience for the past five years as Congregational Leader, and the profound impact it had on my consciousness has made my journey feel like a pure gift. I have never wavered in that *knowing* the *rightness* of accepting the position in my Congregation, or what I am doing/feeling on a daily basis, as I experience the ongoing evolving of God's creative plan for my life.

Further, the experience at the gravesite helped me to know, unequivocally, that no matter how impossible something may seem, given the right climate in which to move forward, change can and does (miraculously) happen. In my work with others, I am ever aware of trying to help people make a shift in their *attitude*, with a vision toward inwardly-felt-meaning, and trusting the message.

I am also always curious and amazed at the number of people that I encounter who have an astoundingly harsh inner voice, also known in Focusing as a *Critic*. I witness these harsh critic attacks in so many different circumstances, and in particular during a process that I have with the Sisters (at a certain stage) called, 'A Life Review'.

This exercise, of carefully reviewing one's life, is often part of the process in preparing for the last phase of the life journey. Many of the women in our Congregation have spent their entire lives providing service to others, especially with the poor, the weak, and taking a stand, or standing up for the voiceless. How often I have noticed during the review that the place where the person I am talking to gets stuck, over and over again, agonizing about what she 'didn't do' or what she 'should have done'. Guilt gets a free reign and overtakes the process. Helping these wonderful, giving women to be aware of this harsh critic and teaching them strategies for dealing with their internalized negative voices is no easy task. Often they and their critics are one-stuck-together. Of the many and varied approaches and skills that I use in working with people (including *experiential listening*, of course!) I have found that perhaps one of the most powerful tools for assisting the change process is *imagery*.

I hope that the following story of one person's journey in the last stages of her life will illustrate the use of gentle Focusing, listening, imagery, and working with the Critic . . . and the '*more*' that came, for both her and me.

This story is about an 86-year-old Sister who spent most of her life as a teacher and principal of a high school. She was very successful and enjoyed the reputation she acquired as a leader in the field of education. On the positive side, she was very self-contained, extremely

independent, and proud of it. On the ‘other’ side, fostering close and connected relationships was not one of her strengths. It seemed that in her treasured self-sufficiency, there was very little need to rely on others. At the age of 85, she was forced to experience a most unwelcome transition. She had to be moved from the small convent that she loved, and where she was independent and felt free, into our health care unit known as our ‘Motherhouse’. This 12-bed unit is staffed with nurses around the clock. As you might know, many nurses love to ‘nurse’, that is, take constant good care of their patients — even sometimes when the patients don’t need them! In the case of this very independent Sister, you might here start to imagine the innumerable conflicts that arose between her and the very ‘caring’ nurses!

Unfortunately, this elderly and quite feisty teacher had few options regarding being in nursing care. She was no longer able walk on her own. Saying that she was not happy about her new living quarters is an understatement. She fought every attempt on the part of the nurses to help her with the simplest of care. She would yell, *“I can do that for myself, just get out and leave me alone.”*

In frustration by the staff, and during one of these episodes, I was finally called in to mediate. The nurses were fed up and felt that she needed medication to calm her down. Being totally opposed to such an approach, I informed the nurses that I would like to talk with her. As I entered the room, she shouted, *“I don’t want to see you.”* I responded, *“I know, but I want to see you,”* and pulled up a chair by her bed.

As I sat down and collected myself (for I didn’t know what!) I had a very strong feeling/felt sense in that initial moment, and an even stronger sense to share it with her. I said, *“Wow, you are one strong lady, and I like that! You are feisty and you are not going to let anyone tell you what you need. Do you realize that this is one of your greatest strengths. . . ? Can you feel that strength?”*

There was a very long silence then, with some amazement she finally said, *“You are the first person to ever tell me that!”*

And I said, *“Well, I’m glad.”* We sat in silence as I sensed that she was touching something deeply held inside.

Then she said, *“I feel like I’m in prison with no means of escape.”* (Long silence.) Then, inside of me a voice whispered, *“Don’t say a word, you are treading on sacred ground, so just wait.”* She continued, *“I’m like a bird that once could fly freely, but now my wings are clipped. I’m so frustrated and angry.”*

And I said simply, *“You feel like you have lost your freedom.”*

My response was not a complete listening one as I felt that we needed to create a *climate* inside of her and deepen the connection between us before moving to the place of anger — or whatever else might emerge. I said, *“Can you sense how that was for you . . . feeling like a bird flying?”*

There was a long silence, and then she said, *“It is like feeling alive, the wind, the sunrise, it is just gentle and free.”* There was another long silence, in which we both experi-

enced a deep connection, and then she said, “*When I stay with that alive feeling, it changes everything. I don’t feel angry anymore. I can breathe.*”

Before I could respond, she said thoughtfully, “*I know that I shouldn’t be angry. I should be grateful for what I have. . .*” Then, without warning, her critic jumped in, taking her from the deep place she had reached into more anger and criticism of her self, what she’d done, what she hadn’t done (. . . and on and on in typical critic-fashion). I explained to her some of the dynamics of the critic: what it is and how it works, then helped her to return to the place of calm. She was able to recover and with insight said, “*That ‘thing’ makes me feel bad, I don’t like it.*”

“*Yes*”, I nodded. And the expression on her face indicated that she knew she was ‘heard’ and ‘understood’. I left her then, in a peaceful and quiet place. I promised her that I would visit her again the next day to see how she was doing. I also worked gently but firmly with the nurses to help them be more compassionate and gentle with her, and further told them they were not to give her any medication — if there was a problem they were welcome to call me.

As the days passed there were far less outbursts with the nursing staff. I continued to visit with her. I often asked her to go *inside* and find her *bird place*. She loved going *there*, and the pleasure she received from *being in* that place was palpable. From a Focusing perspective, allowing for some positive time created an important balance regarding when to be with what’s *right* and when to be with what’s *wrong*. I feel strongly that it is essential to allow/take the time for a person to experience their *life-energy* first, before going to wounded or angry places — and this she happily did.

Over the weeks our relationship grew exponentially, both deep and strong. She trusted me, and I knew inside myself that I would never betray that trust. Our relationship expanded into one of teasing, laughing, and just enjoying being together. As she revealed more of her life story, I came to appreciate more and more her beautiful zest to live life to the fullest until she drew her last breath.

One morning I came to see her and she said, “*I am going to die soon. I’m looking forward to going Home. I know that God loves me and I’m ready to embrace my new life.*”

I felt shocked! For a long time I just looked at her. I had a sense of awe and also a sense of wonderment: How did this woman get from where she was to where she had now come? I said, “*It is so wonderful to have such deep faith. You know for sure where you are going.*” (*Silence*). Then I added, “*I don’t have that.*”

She responded, “*It is more than faith. I know it in here (pointing to her stomach).*”

I said, “*Have you always known?*”

She responded, “*On some level deep down I did, but I didn’t think about it much.*”

I said, “*Okay, when you get there could you give me a sign so that I know you are okay?*”

She said, laughing, “*Do you want me to come back and pull your ear?*”

I said, “*No, that is too harsh, I’d like something a bit more gentle.*” Six days later she died very peacefully, surrounded by me, the Community, and some assorted family members.

A few weeks later my sister Marge and I (this story precedes my sister’s death) rented a cottage in the woods near a lake. I would go out early in the morning for a walk with my little dog, Molly. I was feeling the beauty of nature and watching the sunrise. It felt like a thrilling experience, and I was joyfully letting my body and spirit take it all in. Then suddenly, seemingly out of nowhere, a little white dove flew onto my right shoulder and quickly disappeared. I *knew* it was the sign that I had asked for. I am unable to find words to express the fullness of the experience, but I could feel my spirit soaring. Suffice to say, I knew in that moment what my friend carried with her as the inspiration for everything she did during her life-time was right there, right now. For her, the central issues that emerged as she aged brought her to the fullness of life to make her new and renewed, again. She was a woman with soul, and I loved her.

#### **CONCLUSION: WHAT I FEEL PASSIONATE ABOUT?**

- \* I feel that there is no greater gift than to be allowed to journey with someone longing for the experience of living this process of aging well.
- \* There is a quote by an unknown author that says:  
*It is a long way home, when someone has to walk alone, so let me take you by the hand and let me walk with you.*
- \* I believe that no one should die alone.
- \* I believe in respecting the dignity and choices that the dying person makes, even if we don’t agree with her or him.
- \* I feel that the greatest asset in the aging process, and all of life for that matter, is a *sense of humor*.
- \* In my experience, growth and change come in an atmosphere of gentleness and compassion.
- \* I feel that death is not the end but only the beginning. This thought helps me to trust the process and embrace the mystery that will at last be revealed.
- \* I consider that the most important part of my work as Congregational Leader is to instill hope and foster gentleness and compassion in all relationships.

All the rest is out of my control.

**ATTUNING TO NATURAL PROCESS ACTION STEPS:  
How does one find the natural action, the unforced next step?  
(*Maybe with a Little Wind from Your Fingertips!*)**

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*Katarina Halm*

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We can prepare for an action by caring for it in the way we care for a felt sense: not doing anything with it, just being with it, and feeling into it. Then a natural way will emerge for us to act in the world when the time is right: this is a *natural process action step*.

## **INTRODUCTION**

This article grew from my own experience of living with ongoing pain from an injury. There are many ways that I find meaning for my life and also contribute creatively to my community, even with daily pain and disabilities. Living with pain has become an adventure: each day, each hour I explore what is possible and learn to befriend whatever limitations arise. As a former ballerina I cherish even the smallest movements! These small movements led me to develop a series of attunements, which cultivate a natural process, and in turn lead me to my best action steps. These attunements are also the cornerstone of the Focusing classes I teach and are central to the theme of this article.

The distinction between “process steps” and “action steps” is especially vital for people in their later years, and also for those learning to live with disabilities from injury, illness, or unfortunate circumstances. I need to maintain a good level of balance so that I will not fall and injure myself; I need to rest and recover from exertions so my thinking can become fresh and resourceful again. Gendlin’s Process Model provides a springboard for recognizing when my impulse to do something is a process step, and how I can trust myself to move with this process step into my next action.

This article is for those who are aging, thinking about aging, or who may be carrying pain — at any age. I introduce a concept of natural process action steps and include examples from Focusing sessions and classes, which bring lightness and balance to the issues of aging. Isolating the problems of aging is almost like ostracizing. I trust that we can find a more community-based approach by honoring the talents and wisdom that come with aging or with disabilities, while at the same time addressing some of the immediate dilemmas.

Included are four sections:

### **1. A LITTLE WIND FROM MY FINGERTIPS**

For people who experience any kind of physical pain, even those with so much pain that their movements, thoughts, and everyday life seems to revolve around their pain, Focusing provides a way to live with pain and return to some favorite activities. In this section I

tell my own story and offer three Focusing exercises for creating a new relationship to pain. You will see how Focusing leads to tangible support in my everyday life with pain, bringing me interesting ways to view our world, and helping me find comfort in what I am able to do. Included are three Focusing poems. Perhaps my Focusing story will be a springboard for you, a glimmer towards your very own Focusing comfort!

## **2. TWO WAYS OF FORMING AN ACTION OR PERCEIVING AN ACTION**

Introducing a simple concept of *natural process action steps*, I describe how process steps and action steps inform the physical, psychological, and social well being of elderly Focusing students. Focusing can help in thinking about living — and dying — in the aging process.

## **3. THREE SKETCHES**

- \* A series of Focusing sessions and tutorials for a man 75 years old.
- \* A weekly Focusing class for five months at an independent living facility for four women 80 to 95 years old.
- \* An eight-week Focusing class at a church for six people 70 to 90 years old.

## **4. ATTUNEMENT — A DEVELOPING SEQUENCE**

In this section I present a long version of a special form of Focusing attunement that includes some patterns from Gendlin's book, *A Process Model*. When I am teaching, I gradually expand the attunement processes over successive lessons so the students can experience a deeper settling into the space where we hold our Focusing. These attunements serve as a bridge to *natural process action steps*.

\* \* \* \* \*

## **A LITTLE WIND FROM MY FINGERTIPS**

*Fingertips send a gentle wind to the door, and it closes softly*

In this example from my own Focusing, you will see how images that arise in Focusing bring me a sense of safety and help me to stay within my limits. As you read, you might place your hand on your heart . . . or your collarbone . . . and imagine how it would be for you to feel this Focusing session as your own.

- \* *Focuser*: Staying on my side of the door and not rushing out after what is on the other side . . . feels like a kind of stillness, a quiet stillness.
- \* *Companion*: You're sensing a quiet stillness, the stillness of staying on your side of the door, not rushing out to the other side.

- \* *Focuser*: The door is . . . the door itself is almost invisible, and there is a kind of . . . pressure in me everywhere in a soft way . . . it is a gentle moment, more gentle than the tears that are sharp and shivery and cold.
- \* *Companion*: You are sensing how the closing of the door is very soft, and more gentle than the sharp shivery tears.
- \* *Focuser*: The moment of closing the door is so complete and so soft and real, it's so warm and a kind of a . . . kind of a whole body, whole body gently pressing the door.  
All of me senses right down to the ground beneath me, as that door closes . . . as if my fingertips were sending a little bit of wind to the door at a distance and the door closes softly on its own!
- \* *Companion*: You are aware of a wind . . . your fingertips are sending a wind to the door, and it closes softly.
- \* *Focuser*: Yes, I am receiving that fully in me . . . that gesture that promises me that I have a place to rest, it promises me that this is my own Place.

During this session I sense into the tears that pain is bringing to me. Those tears turn into tiny flower buds bursting into even smaller clusters of buds. The flower bud clusters become a lovely buffer and container for the intensity of the tears and pain. Then (in the section written above) I become aware of how my fingertips can send a little wind towards a door, and the door will gently close, giving me a sense of safety and comfort. The wind is streaming from my fingertips, and my whole body is in the movement.

The gestures and images from this Focusing session come back to me again and again. When I most need a bit of comfort, I rest my eyes on a real door, and I experience that same sense of safety, a little ease and gentleness. Sometimes when tears are wanting to come, and something in me says that I shouldn't take the time to cry, I look towards a cluster of flower buds or to my tiny Focusing vase. This gesture of looking towards buds or vase (imaginary or real) reminds me to sense my body and let any tears and feelings and thoughts bring me back to life itself in this very moment.

In this Focusing moment I take time to sense the weight of my body . . . and my breathing. Then I am naturally drawn to honoring what is wanting to happen right here and now. My feelings and thoughts grow in ways to support whatever needs doing: perhaps a practical task or some more rest.

I experience a whole body knowing of how to ever so softly close a door, have my own space, just be, and let the world wait for awhile, even two minutes. Letting wind flow from my fingertips . . . I am carried forward by the gesture . . . comforted by the gesture . . . amazed at the gesture, and curious about how it continues to unfold in each day. The gesture, the door, the wind, my fingertips, and the flower buds in the session are my symbols of wholeness. Each of these symbols point to the living whole that is my life, as I live it today. Tomorrow other symbols may come.

***Exercise 1: Finding Your Own Symbols of Wholeness and Creating A Safe Place within Each Day***

You might take some time to sense into your feelings about this Focusing session. Can you recall a time, even a moment, when you experienced a similar feeling of ease, of comfort in your very own movement? Sense where in your body this comes for you? . . . maybe place a gentle hand there . . . and sense what comes for you now . . . perhaps a gesture, a thought, a feeling or another symbol, something like the door or flower buds, but your very own symbols of wholeness.

Maybe you would like to write a few notes about your response. How do you gather your symbols of wholeness to create a safe place for yourself within each day?

In the last parts of section 1, Little Wind, I continue to show you what helps me find my natural process action steps. Included are two more exercises for you to try, if you wish to. After each exercise I give you a short poem, which summarize for me what I feel from the exercise. The poem captures for me some of the spirit of the exercise.

***The Joy of Being Out and About***

Now I will share with you my joy of being out and about for a half hour! There is a feeling of ease, a moment of ease along the time line of a life with pain. When I have rested with the pain and let my spine settle, I can go out in my neighborhood. I enjoy meeting people at the post office and people on the street, some scowling, some returning my smile. With a “radical acceptance of everything” (Ann Weiser Cornell’s apt phrase) I walk with Focusing presence . . . being with all that is there. Walking lightly, I feel the air floating all around me as I move out into the world. The trees are steady and dear. This is a moment to treasure in a Focusing way, letting it be there as fully as it wants to be!

***Exercise 2: Inviting You to Focus on Your Own Joy of Being Out and About***

You could imagine that you are out and about in your neighborhood on a pleasant day, feeling an ease of movement and the soft caressing air, even for just a few moments . . . take some time to truly experience that ease within yourself, that gentle moment of being . . . how does it feel in your arms, your face, your legs . . . your hips, your whole body?

Notice what comes to you. You might like to write a few notes about your joy of being out and about.

***Quality Time***

Included in this section are six verses with commentary which come when I sense the joy of being out and about, a moment to just be with the feeling of ease. This ease is followed by what Gendlin calls a “stoppage” where I encounter a sense of shame that turns into my Focusing and more verses.

Hello, how are you?  
Oh, it's lovely to see you  
Sun shines in the sky

Let's listen with care  
A word, a sigh, and a smile  
Bamboo folds and sways

I mention to a friend that I had not done an errand, that errand I had planned to do several times over several days. But I found myself too tired . . . My friend seems annoyed, and a cloud of shame envelopes me . . . sensing something in me that is wondering if she is annoyed that I had not done the errand . . . or that I had talked about it . . . or that she didn't want to hear about my pain? Well, another chance for Focusing! Perhaps there is some good reason for her to be annoyed . . . if in fact she really is annoyed. I register all this quietly to myself, yes, she just might be annoyed.

Listen to whispers  
Dance between our spoken words  
Wind rustles and flows

Hark the whisper now  
Speak, listen, and wait again  
Leaf is broad and green

That may be enough for now. Quiet moments like this keep our friendship safe. Just walking together for another moment before she catches the bus and I turn to go home.

Time to say good-bye  
Strong and willowy Bamboo  
Sway and dance my friend

Hark the whisper now  
Act, slow down, and stop again  
Leaf is green and still

In the moment of ease and freedom, that half hour out and about in the world, I had talked about the missed errand, only to find that I may have annoyed my friend. Gendlin says that the past goes on in the present, and thus the past becomes changed in the present. Even though I may cause annoyance, impatience, and grouchiness in others, I do not necessarily need to try to make amends. My *natural process action step* is to turn quietly away and gather myself awhile in a Focusing space. Thus the past can soften in this very moment, and the past can soften in times to come.

### ***Healing Time***

Now I am inside the house again, lying down and letting the tears come once more until this round of Focusing is complete and I return to our everyday world. A private time of Focusing alone, as I have already done so many times today.

Goodbye, God bless you  
Sun dips below horizon  
We shall meet again

Time to go inside  
Listen to my own heartbeat  
Rest and breathe Bamboo

Time to be alone  
Mother Earth will keep me safe  
As pain comes and goes

Sometimes I wonder  
Where is the healing power?  
Whispering Bamboo

A quiet prayer  
Gentle Wind cools my body  
Blessed Mystery

Once again I listen  
Time to walk and meet our world  
Earth, Sun, Wind, Bamboo

### ***Being With The Present Moment***

Writing this article, I sit here with my fingers tapping on the keyboard, lighter and lighter, a bit of wind there (just like in my Focusing session). The wind in me flows all around, eases my eyes and the other hurting parts. Something in me lets me know that to sit in this chair is not easy. A pause, and a sigh, a moment of Focusing, sensing my feet on the ground, letting my eyes soften, then typing some more.

Focusing is a big part of living my life with pain as it reminds me to work at a project in small amounts, stopping to rest when the pain calls me to rest. When I acknowledge the pain and sense how IT is feeling, I also sense something in me that feels I am being chased by the pain . . . IT needs me to slow down and rest. I also sense *more*: something in me that finds it so hard to work at a cherished project in small bits! I am sensing something in me that wants to finish this right now! Sensing more into that, IT tells me that IT is afraid I won't ever finish anything on time if I keep stopping to rest. I let IT know I hear that IT wants me to finish on time.

Accepting what is there . . . Being with it . . . Letting it know that it can be the way it is for as long as it needs to be . . . that is the Focusing way. Also, I am sensing something in me that is saying it is not easy living with constant pain and just letting it be . . . Yet a sense of freedom can come during those moments of rest, when I am just being with pain in my body. As I rest, I sense subtle ways of letting the pain itself take me to feelings of more and more acceptance.

When I am with another person, sometimes I race to be as capable as that person, and the pain becomes much worse. Afterwards I must lie quietly for hours, just being there with more pain until eventually I can move about and slowly find my way again. Not so easy at first. Yet the presence of Focusing glimmers in those struggling moments. Trust, hope, and a gentle wind.

### ***Exercise 3 — Accepting All That Is and Finding Your Gentle Movement***

You could take a moment to settle into your body even more than you already are. Inviting a warm flowing energy along the soles of your feet . . . slowly begin to make very small movements, movements so small that someone in the room might not even know that you are moving at all . . . soft movements from within yourself, even from within the pain if there is pain in you today. Then rest a few moments. After awhile let your small movement come again, this time let it come gently from the air all around you as if you were a branch blowing in the wind . . . sensing that warmth along the soles of your feet . . . then lifting your breastbone, ever so slightly . . . feeling the weight of your eyelashes as you slowly open and close your eyes . . . inviting your body to let you know what small movement it would like to make.

Take time to sense that movement, your very own movement, even as you rest awhile. Become aware of how your whole body feels now. Maybe thank your body for what it has brought to you, and write a few notes.

### ***A Gentle Conclusion for now and Time to Dance***

Whether you have pain or not, perhaps you will enjoy your own version of the three exercises in this article. With Focusing and small movements, you too can find your very own life patterns, patterns that carry your whole self forward, patterns which are your own life direction and joy.

### ***Time To Dance***

Gentle sacred dance  
Lifts the pain from my eyes and  
Whispers of Bamboo

Oh, the soft broad leaf  
An old friend touches my hand

Now we wait in peace

Wait for the whispers  
In each corner of my soul  
Hope rustles and grows

The pain in my eyes  
Asks for truth and quiet time  
Bamboo's dance unfolds

Oh, the soft stillness  
Where Earth and sky become one  
Let it be freedom

Freedom to flow with  
Solitude and communion  
Keep the sacred dance

\* \* \* \* \*

## **2. TWO WAYS OF FORMING AN ACTION OR PERCEIVING AN ACTION**

Pain can teach us a great deal. For whenever people have some limitation, physical or otherwise, there is a possibility of a wider way of being and living. This wider way can not only fill in the gaps of the missing talents or abilities, but also bring creative ways of contributing to our world. This is the basis for natural process action steps.

### **A. A NATURAL PROCESS INTO ACTION STEP FROM THE INSIDE (natural process action step)**

A process step is a term referring to the process of developing a sense of something, such as a sense of a situation or a sense of a person. A process step can naturally lead to an appropriate action: a natural process action step. This kind of action step comes from a process inside of us. It comes by sensing what is implied by our whole life situation and the very moment that we are living. This way of acting in the world naturally develops from a process of being aware of, and in tune with, our inner authenticity. We prepare for this action, caring for it in the way we care for a felt sense: not doing anything with it, just being with it, and feeling into it. Then a natural way will emerge for us to act in the world when the time is right: this is the natural process action step.

## B. AN IMPOSED ACTION STEP FROM THE OUTSIDE (imposed action step)

An action step is doing something, performing an action. The action can be physical or mental or even speaking. In contrast to a *natural process action step* described above, there is a kind of action which comes when a person is driven by rules or assumptions that are not in harmony with the person's best interest. I call this an *imposed action step*. We could think of this action step as imposed from the outside, as something we do because of a certain social structure.

\* \* \* \* \*

## 3. THREE SKETCHES

The distinction between *imposed action steps* and *natural process action steps* can be very useful. I often benefit from watching how I get caught up in what I am "supposed" to do rather than what is really needed. In developing Focusing lessons for seniors I find ways for them to become more conscious of which kind of action they are engaged in at any given moment. The following case studies bring examples of these two ways of forming an action, or perceiving an action, and how the students learn to choose their best next steps. The students learn to sense into what is needed and to receive feedback from their environment, or situation, before they act.

### *Bradley The Engineer*

Bradley, a 75 year old engineer, arrived for his biweekly Focusing session at my studio. He came in limping with a very swollen foot. At the end of the one-hour session, Bradley remarked that the pain and swelling were gone; he announced that his foot was okay, and he could get on with his life.

Before he left the studio, I took some time to talk with Bradley about the distinction between an *imposed action step* and a *natural process action step*. He listened intently as I invited him to sense into that in him which welcomed the recovery of his foot; and at the same time to hold a space for the whole of his process, including that in him which might not be ready for leaping back into action immediately. Thus, I encouraged him to welcome all aspects of his experience and sense into the whole of his situation.

Bradley wanted his foot to be well, and as he became more and more in tune with this wanting during his session, he actually experienced what it was like for his foot to be well! He was in touch with the implying, the life forward movement, of his whole self wanting to be well, and in Focusing he experienced himself moving towards that wholeness.

After his Focusing session Bradley felt that his foot was just fine. He walked out the door thinking he would be back at his workshop within minutes. He got into his car and started driving to his workshop.

Until this moment, Bradley seemed to use Focusing like an instrument or an applied medicine to help his foot. But during his Focusing he had expanded his awareness and he became more open to his own process. Although he “thought” he would be driving to his workshop, Bradley was amazed to find himself turning around and going in the opposite direction to the emergency room of the nearby hospital. We see here the exact moment when Bradley chose between the two kinds of action steps. The *imposed action step* of driving to his workshop was transmuted into the *natural process action step* of driving to the hospital instead.

The emergency room staff took one look at Bradley’s foot, and they could tell by the color that it was a serious condition. Bradley was given vital medical treatment that saved his foot and his life! Two days earlier Bradley had stepped on a barnacle, and now he had a deadly barnacle poisoning in his foot.

Bradley’s response to his Focusing session shows how a vital process step developed from his inner sensing, in other words how his process carried forward. Bradley is an engineer, and he is clever at fixing things. He knows about making new arrangements of parts. Right at the end of his Focusing session, Bradley thought he could take the *imposed action step* of going back to work, thinking that his foot was okay. Then following his felt sense, which he had developed during the session, he ended up just where he really needed to be and got the medical help he needed. Thus the wishful *imposed action step* of going back to work immediately was transmuted into his *natural process action step* of driving to the hospital. This occurred because Bradley remembered his inner sensing and followed it. The doctor’s diagnosis that his foot needed treatment was the feedback Bradley needed in order for him to live and carry on with his life.

### ***Alicia and Her Piano***

Over a period of five months I taught a weekly Focusing class for four women, 80 to 95 years old, at an Assisted Living Center. We developed themes from Levels One and Two of Inner Relationship Focusing and included gentle Tai Chi exercises for five minutes at the beginning and end of the forty-five minute meetings. These women had been participants in a Tai Chi class that I taught at the center over the preceding three years. It was a natural development to move into the Focusing lessons at a time when they had become less able to move comfortably for a longer Tai Chi class.

Andrea Koch (2009) writes, “some movements might be less flexible with age and there may also be some processes and abilities which are widening at the same time. There are some things in a Focusing process that will come more naturally for older people. Examples are the slowness of a Focusing process, the-sitting-with-what-comes in Focusing.”

And older people have a special way of sensing. They have to sense carefully to keep enough balance to move from one place to another. The following sketch includes a clear example of *natural process action steps*: how doing things in a brand new way, with a new kind of strength, brings much joy and a new kind of balance!

When we first started meeting for Focusing classes, a petite woman, Alicia, was especially sad and tired. Each day she struggled and tried to keep up with activities that were beyond her physical limits. Even her hearing was not what it had been only two months prior. She strained to catch every word when people talked with her. Alicia's stance had become a kind of cringing contraction, making it all the more difficult for her to even breathe.

Slowly Alicia became more and more interested in how Focusing acknowledged all of her life, and she felt supported by the exercises in our little class. One day when we were engaged in a Round Robin Reflecting Circle, Alicia's eyes suddenly sparkled, and her arms danced in the air above and around her . . . Alicia had found her *natural process action step*! She reached for her walker and slowly rolled her way over to the piano in the corner of her room. That piano had not been played for years because Alicia had been too weak. Now Alicia sat in the tiny seat of her walker, and she played a lovely tune. There were tears of amazement and wonder for each of us in that moment, and a hushed silence after the music. A day to remember always!

We know that something remarkable happened in Alicia's Focusing, but it is not clear precisely what it was. This is the nature of Focusing. Until now Alicia had been living in restricted ways; she felt at the mercy of *imposed action steps*, which had come from outside of her. Then in her Focusing she became more and more able to trust her deeper self; she grew in awareness and started living by sensing her inner process.

When we met for class the following week, each woman spoke of how each day during the week she had found many occasions for letting go of imposed action steps. Each of the women developed natural process action steps inspired by Alicia's music! Alicia had found ways to care better for herself and to live naturally within the joy of her music even within the physical limitations that she encountered each day.

### ***Susan Tries to Sell Her Trinkets***

One summer I gave eight Focusing classes at a local church. Six men and women, 70 to 80 years old, participated. Only a few knew each other before coming to my class. At the beginning of the series, the students seemed unhappy and without much energy. They were hesitant to write on the writing blocks and tablets of paper I provided, and did not look into each other's eyes when talking.

In this group we covered the basic syllabus for Level One of Inner Relationship Focusing. We did lots of Round Robin Focusing. As the lessons developed, I wrote notes in large letters on a big easel and welcomed each person to let me know what they would like me to add to the notes. By the third class they started writing for themselves and enjoyed chatting with each other.

During the first class, Susan, a woman with beautiful flowing garments, very much wanted each of us to buy some small trinkets that she had for sale. Susan felt compelled to use the gathering of the class as a mini market place. There was an air of sadness in this example of an imposed action step.

During the following classes Susan found a growing interest in the Inner Relationship Focusing Level One readings and practice, and she became absorbed in the special attunements and exercises similar to those in Sections 1 and 4 of this article. As soon as Susan relaxed into the ambiance of Focusing, she enjoyed the Round Robin exchanges and found her natural process action steps.

By the end of the eight weeks other small and wonderful natural process action steps developed for each student. The participants were more and more kind to each other, and they genuinely took an interest in each other's Focusing. This was a natural development, a small and lovely change since the beginning of the series.

\* \* \* \* \*

#### **4. ATTUNEMENT — A DEVELOPING SEQUENCE**

A Focusing attunement marks the beginning, middle, and end of the classes and sessions described in this article. Over the weeks I gradually expand the attunement processes so the students can experience a deeper settling into the space where we hold our Focusing. These attunements serve as a bridge to natural process action steps.

Included in the sample attunement below are some patterns from A Process Model and Focusing. Also included are the following touchstones: soles of feet, palms of hands, top of head; breathing along left side and right side, noticing the differences; gentle contra-lateral gestures; mid-line, easy diagonals; moving inside to outside. There is a special emphasis on the middle line of the body, that center of Being — that middle which grows and flows and becomes a place for holding all of our experience. The sample is long to give you an overview of how the attunements flow. In actual practice we may use only one or two sections or an abbreviated version.

#### **SETTLING**

Taking a moment to sense your surroundings  
... sensing if you would like to be more comfortable  
... sensing for a way for that to happen.

Maybe there is a pillow, or a different way of sitting  
... maybe you would rather sit on the floor than on a chair  
... maybe stand up  
... or give your self a soft hug  
... maybe even place your warm hand on your heart or on your forehead  
... or maybe a gentle hand on your belly.

Sensing how you can be that much more comfortable during this time of tuning in to your very own process.

**YOUR RIGHT SIDE**

Becoming aware now of the whole right side of your body  
... your right arm and leg, the right side of your ribs  
... the sole of your right foot, becoming warm and flowing  
... the palm of your right hand  
... the right side of your face and neck  
... even your right ear.

Maybe there is a small movement that wants to come  
... a wave  
... or a circle  
... maybe a shifting into your whole right side  
... the right side of you.

Including the right side of your room  
... maybe a wall with a picture  
... maybe there is a window with a garden  
... maybe a bird with a river  
... or a street with a car  
... something you are aware of on the right side of you.

The right side of what Gendlin calls your “skin envelope” melts into the way you are just now, and where you are just now.

Letting your breathing flow along your right side  
... including the right side of your environment  
... letting it flow  
... maybe in a spiral  
... maybe on a wave  
... sensing your own pattern.

Your very own breathing flowing along your right side.

Maybe there is a color, a texture, a warmth, or a coolness  
along the right side of you.

Now slowly bringing your awareness to the palm of your right hand, sensing the quality,  
maybe a gentleness there  
... and slowly awareness moves to the sole of your right foot  
... and then maybe even the top of your head on your right side.

Resting another gentle moment in awareness of your right side.

## **THE MIDDLE OF YOU**

Gathering your awareness again and slowly coming to the middle of you  
... including your belly, your throat, your heart  
... sensing in the middle of you.

Settling in there now  
... maybe there is a kind of weight, a kind of plumb line  
... or maybe it is soft like a feather.

Being there, finding your very own sense of your middle.

## **YOUR LEFT SIDE**

Just resting, gathering your awareness for a moment  
until it is time to move to  
... your left side, the whole left side of you.

Being aware of your left side  
... sensing how this side might be a little different  
from your right side.

Sensing your left arm  
... your left leg  
... the left side of your ribs and back  
... your left ear.

Maybe there is a smile that comes as your left ear listens for a  
sound, the sound outside or inside the room where you are.

Settling your awareness softly now towards your left eye  
... the left side of your nose  
... and whatever place along your left side that you would  
like to sense into for this moment.

Becoming aware of the breathing on your left side  
... letting your breath be a little more full.  
It can be full and soft at the ... same time.

Or perhaps you want to wake up a little and your breath  
can be a bit more lively. . . even sparkly  
... Sensing for the quality of breath that is wanting to be there now.

Sensing an awareness of your “skin envelope” along the left side of you . . . and then bring-  
ing awareness to your room or wherever you are.

Maybe it is a sunny day and you are outside.

Maybe you want to pretend it is a sunny day and you are outside.

. . . letting your awareness just be there on your left side for another moment.

Maybe there is a movement, a pattern, or some way that your left side is speaking to your awareness

. . . Gently being with whatever you are sensing there on your left side.

### **THE MIDDLE OF YOU**

Then slowly, slowly coming back to your midline, that glowing line in the middle of you that includes your belly, your throat and your heart

. . . sensing for what areas

. . . are calling for your awareness along your midline, the middle of you . . . and then just resting.

### **SETTLING INTO A PROCESS MODEL CIRCLE**

Now including in your awareness your whole body resting into the support of where you are

. . . your whole body being supported by the ground, the earth

. . . and being supported by this Process Model Focusing circle.

We are going to take a little journey for a few more moments before finding that comfortable

. . . stopping place.

### **PLANT SPACE**

Being aware of the breathing in you

. . . just as the plants breath in the garden

. . . your breath comes and goes

. . . sensing the lovely processes that happen with the breath

. . . the exchange of oxygen and other gases in you breathing just like the plant

. . . you in your plant body can rest now in your breathing.

Just like the plant in the sunlight turns toward the sun

. . . you can turn toward the sun just now.

Maybe with a shoulder gently curling, looking in the direction of the sun.

Maybe pointing your nose, sniffing the slight warmth of the air in the winter sunlight

. . . then settling back into your garden bed like the plant which you are.

Now feeling your feet like roots down, down into the ground  
... and  
let your feet push a bit  
... push into the ground!  
... noticing the waves that come into your body  
... one foot pushes  
... the other foot pushes, a kind of trot, trot, trot, a push, push, and another gentle push  
... easily, lightly, finding a small movement there  
... and  
... then letting it go.

Resting a moment,  
... and now the next time you find that small movement  
... there you are, leaping out of the garden bed!

### **ANIMAL BEHAVIOR SPACE**

Now you are running, running as the animal you have become!  
... leaving the plant space just for a moment now, although it always does stay with you.  
Awareness now goes to being in your animal space  
... looking for the nut to bury  
... scurrying up the tree to watch the branch shiver and shake  
... finding your own animal pattern for this moment.

### **DANCE OF THE HOMINID**

Then after a long . . . long while . . . you become a hominid, something between . . . animal  
and human being.  
... One day by the river you find a stick  
... picking up that stick in your paw  
... that is almost a hand.  
You see another hominid on the other side of the river who also  
has a stick  
... suddenly there becomes a dance between the two of you!  
... With the water of the river flowing onwards between you.

### **PROCESS MODEL CONTINUES**

In Process Model, a first movement could be from being a plant to being an animal  
... sensing in you the running and the delight in moving freely, no longer bound to the  
garden bed  
... now you are in the behavior space of purposeful ways of moving in your world, gathering  
and resting, chasing and collecting.

Then comes a new movement, a kind of symbolic dance  
... sensing you with the stick in your paw that is almost a hand  
... hominid gesturing to the other across the flowing river.

## **LANGUAGE SPACE**

After a long while, many weeks and chapters  
... lots of reading and sensing in the Process Model book  
... we come to the symbolic space of  
... language.

Sensing now how that is  
... just sensing in your body now  
... as you rest into your support  
... bringing your awareness again  
to your breathing just as the plant that is you too  
... and the weight of you resting there.

The plants: sensing you as plant.

The animals: being aware of you as animal  
... and your behavior ... sensing how your behavior becomes a space for you to move  
forward in  
... to move forward in so many ways ... behavior space.

Then sensing the space of language. . .

All these ways of being ... mixing together in your own special way.

Resting your awareness a moment as we come even closer to that comfortable stopping  
place  
... there is one more leap to sense, when we come to the  
... Focusing space!

## **THE FOCUSING SPACE**

Sensing the journey of A Process Model, all along to Chapter Eight  
... where everything ties together and we find the ground of Focusing.

Those of you who like to read ahead might enjoy reading there  
... and for now just sensing in you a glowing wonder about  
something more than language  
... a wider way of sensing and being  
... sensing the crispness of your life carrying forward  
... patterns folding one into the other.

## **YOUR COMFORTABLE STOPPING PLACE**

Slowly turning your awareness one more way  
... maybe giving yourself a soft hug  
... or maybe pressing your hand on your thigh  
... a way of welcoming your very own movement  
... towards that gentle stopping place  
... finding you own way  
... to come back.

Attuning to your very own natural process and steps!

\* \* \* \* \*

## **ENDNOTE**

A Round Robin Reflecting Circle in Focusing is a way of pairing people so each person has a turn with someone in the group and does not repeat until each in the group has had a chance to speak. For example:

- Alicia speaks to Betty,
- Betty then reflects back to Alicia what she heard Alicia say, or the sense of what she heard when Alicia spoke,
- Alicia then responds to let us all know how Betty's reflection feels to her:
  - Perhaps one of Betty's words or phrases resonated especially well for Alicia
  - What Betty reflected may have deepened Alicia appreciation of her own process
  - Or perhaps Betty's words sound completely different from what Alicia wanted to say
  - Perhaps something new comes for Alicia,
- Now Betty has a turn to speak about her own process.
- And Cecilia reflects for Betty,
- Who in turn lets us know how Cecilia's reflection resonates for Betty, etc.
- Then Cecilia has a turn to let us know about her process
- And Dianna reflects for Cecilia,
- Then Cecilia has a chance to respond.
- Now Dianna has a turn
- And Alicia reflects for Dianna,
- Who then says how Alicia's reflection was for her.

Each person has a chance to speak about her process and be responded to by the person next to her in the Round Robin. Sometimes several people in the group will become engaged in the reflection process; then the Round Robin pattern still holds, but others in the group can chime in with their responses. After that, the Round resumes again as the next person in the circle takes her/his turn to speak about his/her own process.

\* \* \* \* \*

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*Katarina developed a Community Focusing Project which she has been facilitating since 2007, and has taught a weekly Focusing and Dreams class since April 2009. For further information see <http://happybones.wordpress.com>*

## AN INTEGRATED APPROACH TO PROCESSING AGING AND PAIN

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*Elfe Hinterkopf, Ph.D.*

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This article is written for people who are aging and in pain, and for those who are working with people concerned about aging and pain. I will begin by describing some of my own experiences with aging and pain, then present some practical ways that help people understand, and thus experience aging and pain as processes, rather than as fixed structures. Hopefully, these processes will be seen to have their own beauty and spirituality.

Included in this approach are new experiential ways of being with pain, especially when faced with chronic and severe pain that seems to remain stuck and even overwhelming. Eugene Gendlin's Focusing approach, Marshall Rosenberg's Non-Violent Communication, and Robert Gonzales's Beauty of Needs, will be integrated to show how they may be used to help bring about change, and healing. Case studies will be presented. I believe that Beauty of Needing/Focusing as described by David Young can carry a process forward to bring hope, healing, and wholeness (personal communications, September 5, 2009–February 28, 2010).

### PERSONAL HISTORY

In the last several years I have had six surgical operations. I learned that I was a “slow healer” which means that it takes me a longer than average time to heal from surgeries. The last operation, a hip replacement, left me with a great deal of overall pain and lack of stamina. I often awakened in the morning with “blinding” pain. This meant that I felt overwhelming pain throughout my body without any differentiation. My whole body *was* pain. I was unable to do many things that I did before. Walking became painful. And the pain limited my activities. I have had to grieve these losses and the resulting limitations.

I confused aging and pain. I knew intellectually that aging does not necessarily bring pain. But I did not have a felt experience of the difference. Pain started to overwhelm me in my early sixties. So aging and pain remained intertwined experientially. Aging, as well as pain, became negative concepts for me. Pain has been the one aspect of aging that has remained stuck for me. I have felt hopeless about pain. I thought that it would not improve with age.

The first thing I had to do was to separate aging and pain. Conceptually I knew that aging and pain are not one and the same. But I had to find different felt places for each of them. I let a felt sense of aging form in my body. It felt like a hopeless road going downhill. I used a combination of Clearing a Space and Finding a Certain Distance using an image of some apartments near our home. I put the felt sense of aging in one apartment. Interestingly, aging by itself did not feel so bad. There was more of a sense of curiosity. Then I let a felt sense of my pain form in my body. It felt like an overwhelming, red body of pain that was

larger than myself. I imagined putting that felt sense in another apartment. This brought some easing and felt better than before. But the inside-sense continued to feel hopeless, overwhelming, and painful.

I have used Clearing a Space, Finding a Certain Distance, and Focusing on my relationship to my pain, medication, relaxation, meditation, physical therapy, and exercise. Sometimes I prayed for a gift that would bring even some small step of easing. For example, I have received the memory of a hymn or a verse of poetry that eased my pain for a short time. Each approach brought a step of easing, but not a felt shift, an entirely different way of being with my pain.

Then I received a gift — a wonderful felt shift that brought a different way of *being* with my overwhelming pain. Tears came with this shift. I could see my pain as a process! (I might call it “pain-ing”.) Pain was no longer something negative. It was an ongoing, complex, intricate, changing process. I could see my pain as a mystery — a mystery in the sense of feeling awe for a process that was ever changing — one that I could not control. It was a process that would continually bring new, as yet unknown, feelings and meanings. Now I was more able to accept my pain, less likely to dread it, and more likely to look at it with a newly found curiosity.

In the above experience, I found beauty in the process of pain itself. Something else that I realized I could do was to bring something that already had a feeling of mystery and awe to my feeling of hopelessness about pain. This resulted in my felt sense being more complex, intricate, and whole. And it helped carry my process forward.

For example, I had a red hibiscus bush on my patio. The red flowers brought a felt sense of mystery and awe. I held both my felt sense of a red hibiscus flower and my helpless feeling of blinding pain together and asked, “How does this whole thing feel?” I was then able to breathe more deeply and relax my body more. Because I can easily get stuck in my pain, I found it important to begin with a life giving felt sense and bring it to my felt sense of pain and or aging. I also found that my process was best carried forward if I brought a felt sense of something simple (such as that of a flower) rather than a felt sense of something complex (such as that of a relationship) (Hinterkopf, 2009).

Of course, if something other than pain came up in my process, I would practice Focusing on whatever that was. The basic guideline is to use Focusing on whatever is most present. For example, one day I was Focusing on the beauty of aging. I started feeling edgy, frustrated, and sad. So I used Focusing on these feelings. I noticed that the sensations were generally in my chest. I waited for the next thing to come. The words that came were “too much beauty!” I realized that I had neglected my uncomfortable feelings. I waited again and the words that came were “a house is not a home.” I asked myself, “What is it about my inner self that is not a home?” The answer that came was “my tempo.” I have a slow tempo of living by nature. And I had been rushing and pushing myself. I remembered a recent nightmare about not finding my home. I let myself feel the felt sense of my tempo—both the rushed and the natural tempo. My natural tempo felt like a big relief. I could breathe more deeply. And I could see more clearly. It felt like yet another felt shift. I thought of a few steps I could take to feel my natural tempo more often.

## **SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCING**

The above process was spiritual in that it helped me reach out to and embrace more parts of myself, others, and life (Hinterkopf, 1998). Earlier in this paper the process helped me accept and embrace more of my aging and pain, rather than rejecting them. In the above example I was more able to accept my slower tempo. Before experiencing these felt shifts, I had to stay with my bodily feelings with vague meanings. These subtle bodily feelings brought new, clearer meanings. The spiritual process brought a transcendent growth process. Transcend means to move beyond one's former frame of reference in a direction of higher and broader scope. Spiritual growth or a felt shift may involve a sense of rightness, bodily felt release, more life energy, and/or a feeling of being more present.

A felt shift comes to us as a gift, not as something that we can maintain, create, or control. When a person attends to his or her felt sense and it unfolds into a felt shift in which a transcendent growth process occurs, the Focusing process and the spiritual process become one and the same thing. A process definition of spirituality applies to all human beings and does not judge or exclude anyone. The distinction between a process and a content definition is extremely important for psychotherapy (Hinterkopf, 2004). Each person's content words, in each specific situation, have their own feelings and meanings. When differences in feelings and meanings of a certain word, such as God, are not tolerated, prejudice and intolerance may result. People who do not tolerate these differences are perhaps ignoring a fundamental nature of spirituality — that spirituality is often beyond defining.

The spiritual process is always available to us. But like any aspect of our holistic, intricate, changing processing, we can become alienated from it. Our processing may then become stuck or stopped.

## **SPIRITUAL CONTENT**

Spiritual content may or may not have vague feelings and implicitly felt new meanings. The content of a spiritual experience, such as God, Christ, Allah, and The Way, may be extremely inspiring because it carries such rich, implicit meanings for a particular person in a particular situation. Any definition of spirituality that depends solely on content, and does not carry the experiencing process with it, may run the risk of being judgmental because it might exclude some people.

Under certain circumstances, for example, in a group of like-minded people who accept each other's differences, a content definition may be deeply meaningful. For some years I led a group in which each person would choose a spiritual word or phrase that was deeply meaningful to him or her. The person would focus on the word or phrase. Then the person would share the feelings and meanings that came from his or her process. Each person's experience was respected. That group was deeply valued by those who were able to participate in it.

## UNIVERSAL NEEDS

In my work with aging and pain I also used Marshall Rosenberg's work found in his book, *Nonviolent Communication* (2003). Rosenberg has made a partial list of universal needs that all human beings share. These needs include such things as: physical nurturance, interdependence, and spiritual communion. People who frequently question their needs experience that these needs feel much more validated when they realize that *their* needs are also universal needs.

### Example

A male client of mine retired from a career of thirty years. He moved to another city where he felt quite sure he could find a job. He came to see me because he had been unable to find work. He said that his life felt "meaningless". He said that he felt depressed. He thought that he shouldn't feel depressed because he had a wonderful wife, great grandchildren, and he didn't really need the money from a job. But he felt depressed with a heavy and weighted-down feeling — almost hard to breathe. I asked him what he needed. And as expected he said, "I need meaning in my life." I said, "You know, that is a real and universal need that all human beings have."

He said, "Wow! That feels completely different when I think of it as a universal need. It feels exciting, like energy rushing upward. It gives me more energy to keep looking for meaningful work." Pointing out that his need was universal helped carry his process forward.

## BEAUTY OF NEEDING

Robert Gonzales has taken Rosenberg's universal needs and added the term "Beauty of Needs". David Young has integrated the three approaches of Eugene Gendlin, Marshall Rosenberg, and Robert Gonzales and calls it "Beauty of Needing/Focusing" (personal communications, September 5, 2009 — February 28, 2010). A person who has been critical of his or her own needs and learns that his or her needs are beautiful, often feels a great sense of relief.

### Example

A female client of mine questioned her own need for emotional connection with her husband. She said that she had an intellectual connection with him, but emotionally, her relationship felt painful and empty. She and her husband were having trouble enjoying retirement. I said that I thought her need for emotional connection was a beautiful need. She said that when she heard these words from me, she felt greatly relieved. She was more able to accept her own need for emotional connection with her husband. Thus her process was facilitated. This acceptance of the Beauty of Needing leads to hope that one might find the fulfillment of the need in the future.

## HOW BEAUTY OF NEEDING COMPLEMENTS FOCUSING

The Spiritual/Focusing process can become stopped or stuck. At such times, many Focusing interventions may be used (Gendlin, 1981, 1996). Beauty of Needing may also be used to help move a person's process forward. No complete list of needs exists because the number of needs is limitless. The ways of combining them, experiencing them, and expressing them are countless. Still, it is often helpful for the person to have a partial list of needs as a learning tool. Knowing what the need is (as opposed to not knowing what is needed) often gives the person a sense of hope that the need may be fulfilled. By calling the process Beauty of Needing, and by calling the needs universal, the person tends to feel less alone, more valued, worthy, and appreciated. Often the person feels more grounded in his or her basic and shared humanity.

### *Example*

In psychotherapy, a therapist may tentatively articulate a client's needs in order to help the client's process go deeper. For example, a sixty-six year old woman who was partially disabled felt sad and guilty in her marriage, that she was not able to do half of the housework because of her disabilities. The therapist tentatively stated that the client probably needed to feel safe to the degree in which she contributed to the household. She needed a sense of self worth and a need of connecting to her husband. Each time that the therapist stated a need, he checked if the need that he was stating fit the client's sense of the situation. The client reported that by stating her needs, the therapist helped her go deeper in her process.

## NEEDS VERSUS DEMANDS

The therapist can also help a client go deeper by noticing when the client's so called "needs" are actually demands. A demand is likely to be a strong, desperate, and/or authoritative statement requiring an affirmative response. Interpersonally, saying "no" to a demand is usually not a good option because it will likely be met with punishment or blame (Rosenberg, 2003). A demand may often, but not always, be detected by a demanding tone of voice. (Some people call this "demand energy".) Demands are not felt sensing or experiencing. They often have a thin or sheer quality that we can feel in our bodies. We can hear it in our voices. And we can sense it in our acting and reacting. We often feel alienated from our experiencing. Demands often occur when we are overly focused on goals, objectives, or things. Demands frequently have a nervous, driven, obsessive quality to them.

### *Example*

A woman in her sixties, who made unreasonable demands on herself to dress beautifully, was prone to obsessive shopping. This created a strain on the household budget. She said that she was very uncomfortable and had a nervous and driven energy when shopping. It was different from her usual, calm self. Internally, when a client makes a demand of him — or herself, the psychotherapeutic process becomes stuck and even painful. The session

may continue in a superficial way. Instead, however, the therapist might notice a deeper need, such as a need for love. And she tentatively said this to the client.

In the following example it is difficult to distinguish the client's needs and demands. The client calls her demands "needs." She sounds sophisticated as she realizes that she cannot get her "needs" met by another person. Probably most therapists would not be able to identify her confusion of needs and demands. The second therapist in this example knew that needs do not require a 100% response. Nor do they require perfection.

### ***Example***

A woman who had been abandoned as a child said that she "needed 100% constancy, 100% reliability, and 100 % responsibility from herself or from God." She knew that she could not get these needs met by another human being. The therapist responded to this statement with empathy — and — the process stayed at a somewhat superficial level. A second therapist heard this statement and realized that the client's stated "needs" were actually demands, because they sounded so absolute and had the quality of a demand. He tentatively stated two deeper needs by saying, "It sounds like what you really need is trust and faith." The client replied that these two needs resonated with something inside her. And she went on to using Focusing at a deeper level. She realized that trust and faith are not 100% and do not come as total perfection. She was now able to experience them as changing and evolving qualities.

### ***How Focusing Complements Beauty of Needing***

As a Focusing-Oriented Psychotherapist, I continually see the power of using the felt sense as a touchstone to everything I do. I use many other therapeutic approaches. For example, I use Nonviolent Communication in a Focusing way. This means that I try to check whatever I am doing with the client's felt sense. It is the felt sense, with its ever changing complexity and more holistic quality, that brings new meanings in a way that single emotions, such as sad, angry, happy, usually fail to do. It is the felt shift or the sense of relief, release, more peace, and more life energy that I use as a compass for my work as a therapist and as a guiding force for my own living.

Beauty of Needing and Focusing are part of the same experiential process. In both cases the therapist is trying to facilitate the client's process. At times, when clients are in process, it seems as though I don't even have to facilitate the process. It simply evolves miraculously before my eyes.

In Focusing-Oriented Therapy, the client is taught to be an empowered Focuser, saying what he or she needs from his or her therapist. For example, the client at the beginning, or at any time during a session, might say that he or she needs close reflection, some reflection, or no reflection. The therapist might say, "You can tell me if you would like exact listening only at the beginning of your process or throughout your process. Let me know if you feel stuck and would like a suggestion to help you return to your process."

For a Focusing-Oriented Therapist to tentatively state a universal need, the client has to be sufficiently aware and strong in his or her own process to say, “No, that doesn’t fit.” If a client says, “I feel blank” or “I don’t feel anything any more”, it is important for the therapist to return to the last felt thing that a client said, and say that back to the client. This can help the client return to his or her process. Alternatively, the guide can ask the Focuser if he or she would like to stay with the blank feeling and notice what comes.

Focusing confirms if we have moved closer to, or found the right need, in this or any situation. This inner confirmation is accomplished by checking our felt sense for a sense of rightness, a step, or a felt shift. In the next example, notice how the client uses vague words, such as “like” and “like something underneath it all”. Such words indicate that a client is paying attention to vague feelings with unclear meanings, or a felt sense. The therapist reflects this lack of clarity. The client keeps checking and correcting herself until she finds what her need really is.

### **THE IMPORTANCE OF SAYING BACK WORDS THAT INDICATE A LACK OF CLARITY**

In Focusing-Oriented Psychotherapy, it is crucial that the therapist say back words that indicate a lack of clarity, such as “something”, “I don’t know what it is”, and “more like”. This helps the client stay with a vague, implicit felt sense until it unfolds into something more explicit. The therapist needs to respect the client’s pauses by giving the client time to allow the process to unfold. After some training, a therapist will usually know if the client is Focusing during a silence. For example, the client usually looks straight down and speaks tentatively. The client will pause as he or she is searching for the right word, or words, that describe his or her particular felt sense. Below is an excerpt from a psychotherapy session in which the therapist reflects the client’s words that indicate lack of clarity.

#### ***Example***

A client felt hurt and angry because someone made a prejudicial remark about her age.

C1: I feel hurt and angry . . . no there’s something more underneath it all.

T1: So there’s something more underneath it all.

C2: Yeah, but I don’t know what it is.

T2: But you don’t know what it is. You could try staying with that vague feeling and see what comes.

C3: (Pause.) So it’s sort of like I need respect.

T3: The therapist respects the pause and waits until the client says the next thing. “It’s sort of like you need respect.”

C4: (Pause.) No, it’s more like I need to feel the beauty of my own aging!

T4: The therapist waits. “Ah, so it’s more like you need to feel the beauty of your own aging!”

C5: Yeah, that’s an important piece.

## **FINDING THE PLACE THAT IS *MORE* THAN THE PROBLEM**

When the client is working with something especially painful, the therapist may help the client experience their Center or sense of being “more than” any particular problem. This process may begin by suggesting that the client “ground” him — or herself. The therapist can suggest that the client feel his or her feet on the ground, pay attention to his or her breathing, and notice whatever is around him or her. The client can then notice the problem at some distance. This helps the client let go of demands. It also helps the client be present to the problem rather than being overwhelmed by the problem or pushing the problem aside. The client is then opening up him — or herself to something more than what was previously present.

## **THE FELT SHIFT**

When a felt shift occurs, it is usually helpful if the therapist invites the client to stay with the felt shift. For example, the therapist can say, “You could stay with that sense of your needing to feel the beauty of your aging. You can notice the feelings in your body that come with all of that. If you like, you may say the words or describe images that come.” (Hinterkopf, 2004). The Focusing-Oriented Therapist knows that the felt shift is a gift. It is something that neither the therapist nor the client can control. For this reason the Focusing process often seems miraculous.

## **SUMMARY**

In this article I have described ways in which Experiential Focusing, Nonviolent Communication, and Beauty of Needing may be used as one integrated approach to help move a person’s psychospiritual process forward. Beauty of Needing/Focusing can be especially helpful when a client’s process is stuck in the areas of aging and pain. These areas are especially prone to anxiety and depression, and thus a sense of stuckness, because of the multiple losses involved at this stage in a person’s life. As many interventions as are helpful need consideration. Some suggestions for and examples from psychotherapy have been given. Further exploration needs to be done. As I was writing this article, my pain lessened and became more intermittent. My stamina increased.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

I wish to thank David Young for sharing his insights about the concepts found in this article.

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## FOCUSING . . . AND HE DIDN'T EVEN KNOW IT . . .

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*Bala Jaison, Ph.D.*

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My original plan was to tell you a story then make some relevant comments at the end. However, after reading the first draft I realized that once the story was concluded there really was nothing more to say, and any further explications felt superfluous. Therefore, I would like to start with some comments about Focusing, and particularly Focusing with the elderly, then leave you (the reader) with 'the story'. You will no doubt find your own unique ways of integrating whatever content or information is relevant for you.

To begin, I feel fairly certain that most Focusers would agree that there are many and diverse ways to approach learning the Focusing process. First there is the obvious: Learning Focusing in a class, from a friend or a colleague, reading, listening to a CD — however you learn it — then practicing the process with a partner, on the phone, in a Changes group, or on your own.

Second, are the 'applications' of Focusing, which have a much broader and complex scope. *Applied Focusing* might mean integrating the skills of the Focusing process with other modalities, whether it be therapy, creative endeavors, in a business setting, perhaps in a classroom with children, in spiritual work, body work, couples work — the list is (happily) endless. For this specific article, using Focusing with an elder is the application that I wish to address.

Finally, in terms of 'applications', there is a term I affectionately call "back door Focusing". It simply means integrating bits and parts of Focusing into a situation or dialogue, in a manner that is subtle and unobtrusive enough that the other (or others) have no idea that you are 'doing' or 'using' it, at all. The "back door" method might include: very skilled and attuned listening responses, gentle questions or suggestions, wonderment or bewilderment — but clearly not the obvious, i.e. "Go down into your body" or "Take some time to listen to what your felt-sense has to say."

It seems to me that another and often profound use of "back door Focusing" applies to working with elderly populations, particularly if they are totally unfamiliar with Focusing or various other psychological processes, and don't initially welcome what may be perceived as having something 'done to them'.

Then the process may require *more* than listening. It requires a 'type' of patience that is different than the patience that we have in what we might term a 'regular' or 'standard' Focusing session. The process often requires reflecting back things (words, ideas, concepts) that may not make any sense whatsoever to the listener. In other words, what is being said makes perfect sense to the elder-focuser, who *knows* deep down exactly what she or he is *meaning*, but — given that the elderly person may have gaps in memory, time-line or chronology confusion, etc. what they are saying may not entirely make sense to us — in spite of the fact that we are faithfully attempting to listen with accuracy.

Working in a way where you do not fully understand the content (or even the context) of another person's process takes a particular kind of patience that is sometimes *'more'* than what most of us are used to managing — especially if what the elder person is saying is repetitive. As happens frequently with one who is getting on in years, someone who is aging may say something of meaning for them — yet no matter how well you have reflected it back, the exact same idea, concept, phrase, or actual words are repeated again and again by the elder person — as if it is new, and has not been said before.

In a situation, where the listener is not quite sure about whether or not they have 'got it right', an extra dose of patience, faith, and trust in the process is most definitely needed. And the success of such a process — one that may not have any particular recognizable 'form', in addition to possibly not having any recognizable beginning or end! — requires a *not-wanting-anything* — for yourself or for the elder (easier said than done, at times!)

I have always thought that the greatest joy and beauty of the Focusing process is in its astounding adaptability. The process can be used, applied, and integrated into so many different forms: overt, as we all well know, or in the case of this particular story about working with an elder — covert.

Said another way, as regards the following story, the term 'adaptability' is an understatement. I could easily tweak the term "back door Focusing" to "closed door Focusing", meaning *no resonance whatsoever!*

I would like (in this spot) to dedicate this piece, with deep gratitude and affection, to my mentors/friends, Eugene Gendlin and Mary McGuire, who taught me everything I know about 'adaptability' and genuine 'creative applications' of Focusing.

Next, I feel a need to say here that this article is probably one of the most personal pieces I have ever written, and the first time I have put to paper some very profound and moving memories that are close and dear to my heart. This piece is about Focusing and aging, and it is *all about . . . my dad.*

First, some background: My father was a highly respected lawyer, and the only one of five siblings educated past High School. He was often called "a genius" which — especially as a child — sounded kind of awesome to my young ears, but had no particular meaning or relevance to me in terms of our relationship, or non-relationship, or at least the kind of relationship I had always yearned to have with him. Said another way, his "genius" had nothing to do with *connection, attunement, or understanding* me as a child and developing person.

He also had the distinction of being a Colonel in the Army Reserve where he conducted high-level work in intelligence. This piece I (and my sister) never knew until after he died at the ripe old age of 92 — with, I might add, most of his wits intact. We had no idea (until much later when we sorted through his papers) why, at his funeral, the military showed up in full regalia, marching and playing taps on a bugle, after which they very elaborately folded the flag and handed it to me.

He was also deeply loved and revered by many people: his parents, his siblings, his friends, his wife (our mother), and his two daughters. The love-part always intrigued and

baffled me because while he certainly wasn't cold, he was hardly what we Focusers would term as the 'warm and fuzzy' type. He rarely hugged or showed overt signs of affection, and his praise was sorely limited, embracing a deeply held belief that compliments would 'spoil' a child. Hence, he almost never said, "I love you", and if you told him that you loved him, he would display an indescribable grin and nod his head vigorously, but he rarely said the actual words. His way of showing his love was (most peculiarly) in his smile, which (I realize now with certainty) was most definitely connected directly to his soul. When he smiled in a certain way, you knew, absolutely and without doubt that he loved you, too. It was that simple — and — he wouldn't say it.

If you had asked me in my 'younger' days of Focusing, if the Focusing process could possibly have anything to do with my father, his life, his way of being in the world, I would surely have rolled my eyes and made some sarcastic remark, "Do elephants fly!"

That said, for better or worse, I have always had a penchant to 'transform the world' — for the better, naturally! Thus, I remember well, after my first Focusing weekend (actually two consecutive week-ends) in Chicago, having elaborate fantasies of 'enlightening' my dear father into the world of *feeling and sensing* — because certainly, he would find this process such a welcome addition to his life. ("Do elephants fly!")

So I went to visit him, with mission in mind, armed with new and clever ways to 'help' him make contact with his unknown felt-senses, and of course my superior listening skills — right! I was going to be subtle, of course, not mentioning Focusing outright, but rather engaging him in a 'meaningful' conversation regarding his early tumultuous life, about which he would surely have deep feelings *'there'* just waiting to be expressed. NOT! He gave me some very lucid explanations (something akin to addressing the court) about his early childhood memories, to which I 'cleverly' reflected, "But dad, how did you *feel* about that . . ." Looking at me with obvious concern that his daughter had either been brainwashed, or alternatively, might be some mutant species from another planet, he replied, "I just told you what I *thought!*" So much for Focusing!

As it turned out, shortly after that conversation, my dear mother — the 'glue' that held the family together — died prematurely and very unexpectedly. Her sudden loss was a major trauma for both family and friends alike, and left us all somewhat speechless for weeks. That said, I had no way of knowing at the time, that her departure from this world would provide a most unexpected blessing in disguise: a new and totally different relationship with my father. Her passing gave us an opportunity to connect anew in profound and meaningful ways that I could not have imagined in my wildest dreams (and I mean that quite literally). Over the subsequent twenty plus years (that my dad outlived her), my father and I developed the bond that I had dreamed about all my life. *He talked to me!*

First we talked a lot about my mom, and reminisced . . . about his life, about their life together, about our growing up, about his challenges as a lawyer, and his matter-of-fact acceptance about working two jobs in order to put himself through law school. We talked about politics (one of his favorite subjects), and I made sure that before each visit (more and more frequent as he aged) that I was up-to-date on the news-of-the world, so that he would

view me as well versed and knowledgeable, and be proud of my mental alacrity — yes, I still wanted to impress him and get his approval.

Our conversations were the highlight of my visits. He was funny, clever with words, caustic at times, and always interesting. And over time, treasuring these visits, I came to feel that indeed, (in my ‘language’) that we got a new and fresh *sense* of each other that neither of us had ever had before. I was totally ecstatic. I should also add here that he never once used a *feeling* word — ever! In Focusing terms you might say that we were ‘attuned’, or on ‘the same wave-length’, or ‘in synch’, and over time I finally came to accept his most peculiar and unique way of expressing himself. We were communicating and I was thrilled — and his ‘approval’ was still ‘verbalized’ in his smile.

Then, when he turned 90, *something* happened. We were relaxing on his veranda in Florida having one of our many conversations — probably about the state of the world — when suddenly, he went into some kind of an altered state of consciousness. His eyes glazed over, the tone of his voice changed significantly, and he started (literally) chanting . . . “*I want to go home. . . get me out of here. . . I want to go home.*” This ranting went on for maybe three to four minutes — which seemed like an eternity — not to mention my being horror-struck and speechless. Then he ‘came back’ and continued whatever conversation we were having EXACTLY where we left off, as if nothing untoward had happened. (Ahhh, the wonderful world of psychology — I was sure that *I* was losing my mind!)

Shortly after that first episode (there would be many more to follow), I put him to bed and promptly phoned my sister (with whom I freaked-out-freely), attempting to get a reality check, since I really had no idea what had actually occurred. To make a very long story short, that ‘occurrence’ was the beginning of many more identical ones to follow, always beginning with the exact same words: “*I want to go home. . . get me out of here. . . I want to go home.*”

And so, alas, here is the story of using Focusing with my dad (little did he know!) and the numerous processes that we had together covering a two-year period (condensed for this article) — that allowed him to finally go *home*.

On my next visit (a few weeks later), this time with my wits intact, and during one of these (altered) states, I gently asked him: “*Dad. . . do you have any sense at all about where ‘home’ is. . . ?*” And without missing a beat he said, “*I don’t know, but I want to go there.*” With a bit of wonderment I softly queried, “*Do you have any idea. . . any inkling, at all, about whether there is something. . . anything. . . that is stopping you from going there?*” And with a somewhat agonized expression he said, “*I can’t find it. . . I can’t see through it. . . it’s a fog.*” And so I gently reflected, “*So it’s like a fog. . . and you can’t see through it to get to where you want to go.*” And he said with longing, “*Yes, yes. . . I want to go, but I can’t see through the fog.*”

We had this conversation — or variations of it — so very many more times. Then one time he suddenly said, “*Your mom is there, I know it.*” And I simply said, “*You know that mom is there.*” And he said with emphasis, “*I know she’s there — but not just her. The whole family is there, too. . .*” And I reflected with the same emphasis, “*You have a very*

*strong knowing that mom is there — and it's not just her. The whole family is there. . . your bothers and sisters, your mom and dad. . . they are there, too.*" He nodded, then said with some sadness, *"Yes, but I still can't see them. . . it's the fog. . . I can't see through the fog."* And, I repeated, *"You know they are there, but you can't see them because of the fog."* Then, I added, *"Maybe see. . . if there is anything. . . anything at all. . . that would help to lift the fog. . . or help you get through it. . ."* and to my utter astonishment he bolted upright and said, *"Was I a good boy?"*

Because I understood his complex family history, this question (although a shocking surprise at the particular juncture that he inserted it) was not foreign to me at all, and I said without missing a beat, *"Oh, yes dad, you were a very good boy. . ."* and right then, I knew without doubt what was holding him back and proceeded to elaborate.

*"You were very good. . ."* (and I emphasized the word *good*). *"You were deeply loved by your whole family. Your mother loved you very much and she was so proud of you, and your sisters and brothers — they adored you"* (This was totally true and not an exaggeration. He really was the 'shining star' of his family.) Then, after a pause he said, *"Are you sure . . . ?"* I told him I was very sure, and then, without thinking it through ( . . . talk about a felt-sense having a 'life of its own' . . . !) I heard myself say, *"But your brother Z. was not a good boy — not at all. He gave your mom and your whole family a lot of trouble, but you were a very good boy."*

While his whole body visibly relaxed, the questions about his brother came up over and over again, and I knew why. For reasons that only the two boys knew, my father was profoundly and in complex ways deeply entwined with his brother Z. — and felt totally responsible for him. The deeper reasons are numerous and probably irrelevant here (an overstressed immigrant mother, poverty, five children, a not-very-participatory father — and more — which I will probably never know . . . ) The so-called 'bottom line' is that their mother (my grandmother, who died before I was born), probably lacked the time and maybe the patience (with so much to manage) to devote to her youngest son — who, it turned out, probably needed very much more attention than he got — medically speaking.

(As a parenthetical aside, his brother who was seriously out of control, both as a child and an adult, was diagnosed in his late 40's with severe Bipolar Disorder. Because these specific medical terms were not used or discussed in my father's generation as a child, there was no understanding as to why this brother was so difficult and often unruly and unmanageable. He sadly died by suicide in his mid-50's.)

Noticing my father's responses, it seemed to me that being 'good' was always the most significant and powerful factor in his process for the latter part of our 'sessions', and a topic that he was insistent upon revisiting, over and over and over again. It seemed that he needed (as we say in Focusing) to 'buy' in a bodily felt-way, that he was *good*, and in no way responsible for his brother's tragic death . . . *Could he have helped? Could he have done more? Was he really a 'good' brother?* It was clear that he could not fully relax or let go (of whatever he was holding on to internally) until he was *viscerally certain* about these facts. Consequently, I kept adding to the reflections, *"Yes, you were a good boy, and a good son, and a good brother. The best brother Z. could have had. . . and you helped him consistently,*

*throughout your lives together. You were also a wonderful husband and father, and deeply valued as lawyer, and you helped so many people, including your friends.*

I watched my dad *listening* to my words, hanging on to each one, and I could see by his eye-movements and facial expressions that he was *processing* like wildfire. He was trying to fit together all the pieces of the puzzle of his life. And over time, with both awe and amazement, I came to realize and *know*, in the visceral certainty of my own felt sense, that in a much broader context than I would have ever imagined, indeed, he *was* Focusing — in his own way.

These conversations continued, with ever increasing frequency and depth during our many visits over the last two years, always ending in the same way — with the sweetest and most contented smile on his face.

Then one day, during one of these *process states*, something occurred to me — rather intuitively and out-of-the-blue. There was one bit of territory that we had not yet covered, and I had a strong sense that there was still something ‘more’ that needed to be said.

Very gently, I whispered, “*Dad, I just want you to know that you can go ‘home’ any time you want to*”, and I distinctly remember the most quizzical expression on his face, especially in his eyes, like . . . *really*. . . ?? And I said with some emphasis, “*We are all OK. . . really OK. . .*”

And he looked directly into my eyes, with a wordless query like, *Are you sure?* I nodded affirmatively. Then, making an orderly list starting with our immediate family: his daughters, his grandchildren, then naming every relative and their children — and anyone else who was still alive that he cared about — continued emphasizing that, “*We are all really truly OK. . . and we can manage. We are all going to be alright.*”

And then I hugged and kissed him and said from my heart, “*Thank you for everything.*” And at that moment he got the most beatific smile on his face that I had ever seen on a human being. He was simply radiating.

Then, he said he was tired, and wanted to lie down. I gently tucked him into bed. Still smiling, with that beautiful radiant glow, he closed his eyes and went *home*.

PART 3  
AGING, CASES,  
AND RESEARCH





**EXCERPTS FROM THE INTRODUCTION TO  
“REDISCOVERING THE LOST BODY-CONNECTION  
WITHIN CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY”**

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*Edwin M. McMahon, Ph.D. and Peter A. Campbell, Ph.D.*

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(**From the Editors:** This article has been adapted for *The Folio* from Edwin McMahon and Peter Campbell’s forthcoming book, *Rediscovering the Lost Body-Connection Within Christian Spirituality*. We are delighted that they have agreed to modify the first chapter of their book for this special Folio issue on *Aging: Focusing Through the Transitions of Later Life*.)

**A NOTE FROM THE AUTHORS ON THE BACKGROUND TO THEIR BOOK**

During more than 45 years of our team-research, we have discovered that the ways in which people treat their own bodies and their feelings becomes a reliable predictor of how they will then treat and interact with those around them. This inward experience offers a window on how they will fashion the social and political structures in their societies, their business communities, their systems of economics and education, even how they will design and live out their religious aspirations. In our view, the missing link in our all too human educational efforts for world peace lies in our lack of fully comprehending the structure and functioning of *a more effective pedagogy* which can lead individuals and societies into *their own bodies’ knowing* as an opening doorway along the path of achieving an enduring, global peace. But how can we actually teach this? How do we pass such experience on to the next generation? The overlooked key, of course, is that you cannot teach this as an idea or information in the mind alone. It must somehow be passed on—*within the body and the body’s knowing!* But how?

\* \* \* \* \*

*“When we try to pick out anything by itself,  
we find it hitched to everything else in the Universe.”*

John Muir. (1911). *My First Summer in the Sierra*

*“Religion and science are the two conjugated faces or phases  
of one and the same act of complete knowledge—the only one  
which can embrace the past and future of evolution  
so as to contemplate, measure and fulfill them.”*

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. (1959). *The Phenomenon of Man*

*“A whole school of psychologists now believe that ‘spiritual values’ are in the organism, so much a part of the well-functioning organism as to be sine qua non ‘defining-characteristics’ of it.”*

Abraham H. Maslow. (1964). *Religions, Values, and Peak Experiences*

*“The only security for a growing person is stability in the process of human wholeness itself.”*

Carl R. Rogers. (1970). *Personal Conversation*

*“Your physically felt body is in fact part of a gigantic system of here and other places, now and other times, you and other people—in fact, the whole universe. This sense of being bodily alive in a vast system is the body as it is felt from inside.”*

Eugene T. Gendlin. (1978). *Focusing*

*“The path forward is about becoming more human, not just more clever. It is about transcending our fears of vulnerability, not finding new ways of protecting ourselves. It is about discovering how to act in the service of the whole, not just in the service of our own interests.”*

Peter M. Senge. (2004). Forward in Adam Kahane *Solving Tough Problems*

Six different quotations, from six individuals using six radically diverse perspectives, and yet whose striking conclusions fuse together, less by reason of any overlapping information, but more because some common *body-learning* and perspective has led this distinguished group of researchers to explore distinct, yet complementary facets of one and the same embodied human experience. Each of their statements expresses part of a leap forward in our experience of what it means to be human.

We all know we have bodies — and at this point in time some of us have aging bodies. But how many of us consciously recognize in the very marrow of our bones that we each exist as an integral participant within a much Larger Whole, some Greater Living Organism? And how important it is, throughout the process of growing older, that we recognize and incorporate this Larger Whole, as we begin sensing inside our body’s wisdom about the next steps in our advancing years.

Your own body is the missing link enabling you to mature into just such a *felt organic awareness*. Your mind obviously has a role to play when learning to drive a car, but your

body gives you *a feel for the road*. Each of us needs to develop our own unique body-sense for being part of something greater than ourselves, especially as we encounter the innumerable losses that are inevitable as we age. Without some actual *in-the-body-experience* of this Greater Whole, we're left with nothing more than abstract definitions, ideas and cognitive analyses in our minds. We lack some tangible anchor within our own physical organism that can ground our experience, our wondering and our deepest spiritual longing. In his novel, *Nausea*, Jean-Paul Sartre reminds us, ". . . the world of explanations and reasons is not the world of existence." (Sartre, 1964, pp.170)

A massage therapist who helps in our programs once told us, "I have a client who has *fought* cancer for some years. Last week during treatment I helped him listen to some tears that had leaked from the eye corners. Suddenly, he realized how harshly he had pushed against the cancer when what he most needed was to hold in a loving way *how* his body carried the cancer. In that moment of realization his entire body relaxed, and a pain that had been felt in his shoulder for years lessened dramatically. He can now not only achieve very satisfying treatment results, but continue an inner journey that was blocked because of fighting vs. holding in a loving way *how his body* was carrying the cancer." *The issues are in your tissues*. The answers you seek hide quietly in your own back-yard. The failure to include what your body knows masks the missing link. Our aim in this article is to help bring that neglected piece of awareness back into everyday faith-experience.

## AN HISTORIC INTERCHANGE

Many years ago, during our search for a more embodied approach to helping Christians experience themselves in the Body of the Whole Christ, we found wisdom and learnings in the writings of Joseph Campbell, an American author, scholar and professor of comparative religion, who enabled us to realize how myth and legend brought powerful, *bodily-felt* purpose and meaning into the lives of ancient, preliterate peoples all over the world. Campbell also shared how all of us today need this same *embodied* sense for life-meaning and a felt awareness of purpose in order to have our own lives make any sense, especially as we age, in our heady, informational, wired-up world.

Both of us were fortunate to have been invited during the 1970's to attend a series of summer conferences on Voluntary Control of Internal States of Consciousness sponsored by the Menninger Foundation and led by Elmer and Alyce Greene, well known pioneers in the field of biofeedback research. Like ourselves, Joseph Campbell was an invitee. He spent many long hours sharing with Ed because he was fascinated with our search for a healthy, more transformational body-spirituality that could fill a growing void within first world cultures. As we expand beyond our more familiar tribal, monarchical, ethnic and even beyond national identities and their myths, which have held societies together in the past, the body-experience of being an integral, living membrane of some Larger Body begins to fade. At least in the past, people had a body-sense for the common good of their tribe, and that inwardly-felt experience was integral to their spirituality.

Joseph and Ed often discussed how it seemed that our very survival depends upon an ability to rediscover this Larger Body Experience beyond such limited tribal identities, as

well as their religious, cultural and historical divisions and differences. These divisions still continue to feed most of the senseless and destructive wars as our unbridled technologies clearly outpace our exploration into *a unifying inner process of peace-making* that might instead result in an embodied sense of the global common good.

Walking in the evenings together, Ed and Joseph wondered whether a more interior process of unification, common to all humans, really existed within each person. Furthermore, does the development of this inner process need to *precede*, or at least *accompany*, efforts at peacemaking in the politico-social world, in order to achieve any enduring diminishment of violence?

Joseph thoroughly understood that in our time most of the old myths we have inherited today become, at best, what he called, *artificial*. They no longer provide the meaningful *body-connections* which draw us into a sense of some physically-felt Larger Cosmic Body or Presence at work in our modern-day lives. The leftover residue of such myths tend to support survival of institutions crafted from and for the past, instead of nurturing greater wholeness and a sense for the global common good in people living within those institutions today.

However, the main issue which always surfaced in their discussions invariably came back to the same question: Can some universal, yet personal *inner human process* that lies beyond all the historically conditioned, male dominated, tribal and institutional traditions enable each individual to discover his or her own fresh, new *personal metaphors* and unique body-sense for living within a Larger Presence and its unifying common good?

Such an inner process, while not new in human experience, may be quite new within our ordinary, everyday awareness of it — becoming a puzzle only because we don't know how to access and attend to it. That then leads to the more pointed question: What holds us back from even being able to notice what our bodies already know so we can then act upon what they tell us? Here, finally, we come to grips with the problem:

**. . . recognizing something new does not necessarily lead to acting differently.** For that to happen, we need a deeper level of attention, one that allows people to step outside their traditional experience and truly *feel* beyond the mind. For example, countless businesses have been unable to change in response to changes in their environments even though they recognize those changes intellectually. Why? As Arie de Geus, author and former planning coordinator at Royal Dutch Shell, says, “The signals of a new reality simply could not penetrate the corporate immune system.” Conversely, when people living inside a shifting reality begin to ‘see’ what was previously unseen *and see their own part* in maintaining the old and inhibiting or denying the new, the dam starts to break. This can, happen in a company or a country. (Senge, 2007, pp. xiv — xv).

And, we would add, by necessity within religions and spiritual traditions as well.

If nothing else, in our experience, many Christians today sense some need for developing new eyes to see and ears to hear. Feeling beyond the mind today has become not an idle luxury, but a stark necessity for finding our way forward by learning how to peer over the next horizon. In his Foreword to *Theory U*, a book on the social technology of Presencing, Peter Senge writes of the author, Otto Scharmer's vision that

Virtually all well-known theories of learning focus on learning from the past: how we can learn from what has already happened. Though this type of learning is always important, it is not enough when we are moving into a future that differs profoundly from the past. Then a second, much less well recognized type of learning must come into play. This is what Scharmer calls "learning from the future as it emerges." (Senge, 2007, p. xvi)

Ed shared with Joseph our own personal and professional search for just such a new way of learning by sharing our experience working with an inner process of unification, which the American psychologist Carl Rogers had called *congruence* and which his former graduate student, Eugene Gendlin, was further exploring through a teachable process called *Focusing*. This approach, in our view, offered the best potential for opening up a profound, meaning-filled and readily-experienced process within personal, *human growth itself* as the inner global metaphor opening a new doorway for future psychological exploration as well as discovering ourselves within the Mystery of God-with-us. Perhaps just such a process and metaphor might introduce an enormous breakthrough stretching well beyond tribalism and the *strong man* or *old boys' club* mentality, with its religious, racial, ethnic and social tensions still locked in place on a globe rapidly becoming economically and ecologically interdependent.

For both Rogers and Gendlin, the word *congruence* simply meant being able to feel your feelings physiologically and allowing them to symbolize themselves accurately. While the description may seem relatively easy to grasp theoretically, growing into such an experience as an actual *habit* within your own body, in most self-escaping cultures like our own, becomes quite another matter. It means sailing across uncharted waters within cultures where institutional religion and education generally ignore the body's vital contribution to personal and spiritual meaning.

In the light of Gendlin's research, *meaning* not only expresses itself through the mind; it rises up from within the body as well. Moreover, such *felt-meaning* animates the power of myth, legend and metaphor. Ed told Joseph that if the combination of Rogers' and Gendlin's findings could move out into the global body, especially into any of the world's great religions, it would model an evolutionary step for the rest of humankind. Joseph smiled knowingly and pointedly asked Ed, "Is this what you and Pete are trying to do for Christianity as psychologists of religion?"

Ed answered, "Yes. We've been collecting pieces of this puzzle that we feel may fit together. By trial and error, we are slowly learning how to pass this missing link on to those who find themselves hungry for experience and not just more talk or ideas about God but

rather, in the words of St. Luke, that they would, ‘ . . . *seek, reach out for, and perhaps find the One who is really not far from any of us—the One in whom we live and move and have our very being . . .* ’ ” (Acts 17: 27- 28 TIB—The Inclusive Bible)

One of the important pieces of this search has certainly been Joseph’s research on the central role of *metaphor*. For our purposes here, it can help to recall that metaphor may be defined, in general, as a comparison of two unrelated things without using the words *like* or *as*—which if employed would create a *simile*. The simile would be, “Muriel runs like a deer.” The metaphor: “Muriel is a deer.” This simple description, however, only explains the linguistic *structure* of metaphor, not its more profound *embodied function* in human life and spiritual development. The latter, involving more investigation and research, has challenged the two of us for more than 40 years.

Ancient Hebrew teachers realized that including *the body’s knowing* was integral to effective communication of the Word of God for an illiterate people. Information alone can never successfully convey the total message. Knowledge of God somehow thrusts deeper roots within the human organism itself even beyond the mind’s ability to think and analyze. These teachers, therefore, sought a more efficacious way to enter into the body’s knowing as well as into the mind thinking. This accounts for the *metaphoric* flavor present in so much of Hebrew midrashic teaching. Experiencing this more *embodied function* of metaphor in healthy spiritual growth reaches deep within the human body’s knowing. Symbolic language interacts with the body’s awareness in a way that introduces a *knowing* that reaches well beyond conceptual thinking and information.

Symbols touch and interact with a meaningful sense, felt in the body, even when the content of such experience cannot yet be articulated in concepts and words. The world which Eugene Gendlin has entered into and explored throughout his years of research into Focusing has opened a vast frontier for future exploration which still continues to this day.

Joseph Campbell introduces this deeper world of personal felt-meaning carried within the human body as follows: “Let me begin by explaining the history of my impulse to place metaphor at the center of our exploration of Western spirituality . . . ” (Campbell, 2001, p. 1)

Failure to appreciate the metaphorical nature of religious literature and discourse has led to numerous embarrassing crusades or expeditions to defend the biblical accounts of creation . . . Men mount expensive expeditions to locate the remains of Noah’s ark on Mt. Ararat but, of course, they never find it . . . The ark, however, can be found easily and without travel by those who understand that it is a mythological vessel in an extraordinary story whose point is not historical documentation but spiritual enlightenment. To appreciate Genesis as myth is not to destroy that book but to discover again its spiritual vitality and relevance.

Metaphor comes from the Greek *meta*, a passing over, or a going from one place to another, and *phorein*, to move or to carry. Metaphors carry us from

one place to another; they enable us to cross boundaries that would otherwise be closed to us. (Kennedy, 2001, p. xvi)

Too many people today find themselves in a psycho-spiritual vacuum of purposeless disconnection, where no embodied sense can mature in the awareness of our responsibility and accountability for a common good. Our bodies ache with an inner knowing that boundaries yet lie waiting to be crossed and grown beyond, inside ourselves and our societies. And, as we age, we start to wonder — and sometimes panic — about where the next ‘boundary’ lies and what yet lies beyond this life.

At the same time, media marketing and entertainment still run 24 hours a day, distracting people with products that simply turn us into a mirror image of what we buy—and still this never satisfies. Some missing link fails to connect. Our sense of *interdependence* with all that sustains life on this earth disappears beneath a wave of unsettling and addictive diversion so perceptively identified in Alcoholics Anonymous as—*endless talking the talk without ever walking the walk*.

We have always attempted to fill that void, which Joseph Campbell urged the two of us to pursue. And, our ongoing goal has always been to provide a support structure within which the development of a body-habit of noticing and nurturing our important feelings can become the *doorway* into a life-long metaphoric process through which we become more fully ourselves within this Larger Body we all share in as interconnected, living cells.

A fresh horizon opens out before us within just such faith experiencing. But this challenging new frontier rises up in a form as ancient as the origins of religion itself. Symbol and metaphor offer a transformational key into the human body and heart with profound spiritual significance. When unlocking this inner door, we find ourselves poised at the edge of our own creative human potential, being drawn forward as an integral part of something far greater than ourselves, along with the exciting possibility that such experience introduces an entirely new personal and social order: *The Kingdom of Heaven* truly does lie within each of us. It does not rest buried beneath frozen heights of the windswept Mt. Ararats of this earth. Our generation, those who now come face-to-face with aging, need travel no further than inside ourselves. We are invited to notice and nurture our important feelings and felt-senses, allowing them to unfold not only our often unheard inner stories, but also the melody of a deeper story and song written within our own bodies’ knowing—a story bringing us all together into a greater union than anyone might ever have even begun to imagine.

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## ONE MAN'S LIFE JOURNEY Like the The Ebbs and Flows of the Sea

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*Atsmaout Perlstein, Ph.D.*

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### **ABSTRACT:**

This article is about a life journey of a man named Abe. He is now in his 70's, and married to a woman who is 25 younger than he is. Abe has experienced ebbs and flows in his life and came to therapy during a crossroads connected to a crisis in his marriage. I worked with him using the Focusing Oriented Therapy (FOT) approach, which facilitated deep work, insights, and several shifts within the six, hour-long sessions we had together. I encouraged and coached Abe to integrate into his daily life the principles and 'attitude' of Focusing that we used during our sessions, mainly to make the Focusing process a practical reality, rather than just some 'technique' used in the office. His ability to continue and use Focusing in between sessions brought major changes, not only in his relationship to his wife, but also as a gateway, opening doors for him to connect with his spirituality. Focusing also helped him to address and deal with his physical back pain.

### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION:**

Abe was born in South Africa to a well-known and well-respected Jewish family who emigrated from Poland to South Africa after the Second World War. He expressed that he felt he had "the perfect life" until the age ten, when his parents divorced. He felt ashamed and rejected by his parents who left him with his grandmother, where he stayed until he left for university. Because of the constant emotional pain that he experienced from his parents' divorce, he vowed that once he got married, he would never divorce. His grandmother was a spiritual leader in her community and was known for her gathering of "healing circles". She invited Abe to join these circles that she led. Because of these spiritual experiences, Abe was very bonded and close to his grandmother, and her influence played a big role in his life.

As an adult, Abe put aside the spiritual influence and upbringing of his grandmother and wound up denying the emotional traumas he carried from his childhood, developing "a new me" as he called it. This "me" was a person who did not show or express emotional content, and above all, would not let himself be vulnerable to other people. He was known for his intelligence, high motivation to succeed, and honored for his achievements. After university, he went on to law school and graduated with the highest awards. Soon after graduation, he started a very successful law practice and became known as a skilled and successful courtroom attorney, winning many cases. He was a tough lawyer, highly competitive, and sometimes cynical. He was married with three children when, in the 1976 Soweto Political Riots, his law firm was burned down, and he lost his fortune. At this time he made a decision to move to Israel with his family to start a new life.

Establishing himself as successful and sought after attorney in Israel became his first and only priority. He increased his workload to fulfill job demands and worked long hours, often disregarding his family. He described the situation in those years, “I ignored my wife and my children, and I had no role in their upbringing. In retrospect, I acted more like my parents did to me, and I feel harsh guilt feelings because of it . . .”

At the age of 65 his worst fear became a reality — his wife filed for a divorce. After the divorce was completed, Abe found himself depressed and experienced anxiety attacks. During this difficult emotional time, he also discovered that he had both heart and kidney problems that required several surgeries.

Quite unexpectedly, after four years of being divorced, he met a beautiful woman, with three young children, who fell madly in love with him. She insisted he “allow her to love him”, and he did. They finally married, although she was 25 years his junior. The first couple years of their marriage were full of love, and everything he wanted, yet in time, his new wife eventually started to complain that he had stopped paying attention to her. She said that he withdrew from friends and family members and developed new addictions, such as being on the computer for days at the time and listening to the radio with earphones during the late hours of night. She demanded that if he didn’t immediately enter therapy, she planned to end the relationship.

Although Abe had success and respect as a lawyer, when he retired, he said, “I was stripped of all that I had worked for all my life: my social status as a husband, and image of having a perfect family. He felt that the world he had created for himself and his family in Israel had fallen apart, and he found himself feeling as he did when he was young — parents divorced and feeling like “an ailing child”.

When Abe started therapy, he was depressed and anxious about the future. He asked questions such as: *Why me? What is the meaning of life for me at this age? Who am I, really now?*

In the second FOT session with Abe, the therapist interviewed him about his life story. Toward the middle of the session there was a special moment, during the Focusing/ listening process, that opened up a sensitive and important story that connected Abe to his childhood, and was carried forward with a step toward his healing.

**Abe:** *Since, the divorce from my ex-wife, I feel as if someone has pulled the carpet from under my feet. I do not recognize myself now. I am depressed, anxious, and withdrawn from people . . . all the old ways of relating to myself and others seems to be gone. When I came to Israel, I was in control of my life, but now I am lost. I am me — and not me — at the same time. I don’t know who am I really? Who is the real me? Am I the famous lawyer, or just an unemployed retired old man?*

**Therapist:** *You are really questioning everything in your life, right now. . . who you are, what you’ve done, what you want. . .*

**Abe:** *Yes. . . all of it. . .*

**Therapist:** *And the divorce. . . your worst fear. . . became a reality, along with depression, anxiety and the question of who you really are. . . Now, you've had a very powerful image: as if someone has "pulled the carpet from under your feet" leaving you behind and empty of all that you know about yourself.*

**Abe:** *Yes, that's exactly how it feels. . . the rug has somehow been pulled out from under me. . .*

**Therapist:** *I'd like to ask you if you can just sit quietly. . . for a little while. . . with this experience. . . What it feels like to have this "rug pulled out". . . and maybe what comes inside of you, when you sit with that. . .*

**Abe:** *I feel empty of all the roles and games I played throughout my life. I used those roles to protect and shield me. Now it feels like there is a big dark hole in my chest. (He touched his chest with both of his hands.) I actually remember times when I felt that same dark hole, for a moment, just before my court cases. But I always denied the feeling and moved on.*

**Therapist:** *It sounds like you have been aware of this empty hole place in your chest, before. Maybe. . . see what it would be like to just sit with this big dark hole. . . for just a little while. . . maybe getting to know it. . . or knowing more about it. . . from inside. . .*

**Abe:** (Sits for a long time in silence and then says): *Ummm. . . right now, in this moment, I don't feel the emptiness of the dark hole. . . I'm not sure why it's moved. . .*

**Therapist:** *You don't know quite why it's moved, but just let yourself see what is there now. . .*

**Abe:** *I am remembering my grandmother. . . and thinking about her. . . her presence always brings a feeling of comfort . . . this feeling is familiar. . . it reminds me of the good days of my childhood when I sat around in the healing circle with my grandmother and all of the other people. Everyone is quiet. . . no one is speaking except my grandmother.*

**Therapist:** *This is a wonderful memory that you are having. . . the thoughts . . . feelings that come when you let yourself sit with. . . all about my grandmother. . . It makes you feel. . .*

**Abe:** (Folds his legs, straightens his back and falls into a deep meditative state. After a long while he opens his eyes, having a boyish smile on his face, his eyes are brightened and he says softly): *Those times with my grandmother were the happiest in my life. I feel something moving in the pit of my stomach. . . a yearning. . . as if something is calling me to go back and remember all that I learned there.*

**Therapist:** *Those times with your grandmother were some of the happiest in your life . . . and when you sit with those feelings there is a 'more' there. . . a yearning. . . to remember something. . . Take as much time as you need. . . to see if there is more there, that wants to talk to you about the yearning. . . the learning. . .*

**Abe:** (Waits in silence and then says): *It is saying, "Come back home; it is time to remember all the lessons you learned way back then."*

**Therapist:** *So it is calling you to go back home. . . and it is letting you know that you have a place to go. . . you are not just empty. . . there is so much more there. . .*

Abe started talking with a new and fresh, young energy — as if something in him had been revitalized after a long sleep.

**Abe:** *You know. . . when my grandmother did her last circle, she asked me to sit by her. Then she told me that she felt I was blessed with special healing energy in my hands, and that she wished me to never forget that. She also said that she wanted me to remember these words and help people who experience pain.*

**Therapist:** *Wow. . . that is profound. It sounds like you have really connected with something that is very meaningful and important from your past. . . and something you want and need to remember and hold close to you.*

Abe got up from the sofa, stretched, and said:

**Abe:** *I actually feel that quality of that energy in my hands right now, and I want to remember it. I want to let it be there and remember it.*

*I also want to thank you for your help in encouraging me to remember what I forgot. I have not discussed my time with my grandmother with anyone, for many years, and I am sort of amazed at how it just came out here. This is only my second session with you!*

**Therapist:** *We both want to receive the gift of this important memory . . . and the wonderful energy that goes with it. This is a very special moment.*

### **FOT AS EXPRESSED IN THE ABOVE EXAMPLE:**

One may wonder how it is possible, that in only the second session, the client was able to speak so openly about such a long-standing and meaningful memory of his participation as a child in the healing circles with his grandmother — especially after denying those experiences for some 50 years of his life! The answer lies in the power of *listening empathically* from a felt sense to a felt sense. This type of listening is organic to the body's wisdom — well beyond words.

In addition to listening, there is another aspect that makes the Focusing process so effective and powerful. The first is the 'Focusing Attitude' where we help create (and teach the client how to create) a 'safe space', where the client's body — the organism — feels accepted, respected, non-judged, and gently invited to open up in (in both feelings, thoughts and words) in its own rhythm and time. Once the inner feelings open up, and the client can experience his/her own inner container as safe (as well as the safety of the Therapist's own inner container), the process opens even further.

Then comes the therapist's knowledge regarding how to facilitate the Focusing Movements in carrying forward the 'small steps' hidden in the client's responses. In the above case, the therapist invited the client to 'sit with' and 'be with' the black hole that the client mentioned. The client disregarded the therapist's invitation and went on describing a positive feeling that was just near the big-hole experience. The therapist moved forward with the body wisdom that 'suggested' the new direction, rather than insisting on the dark hole experience (which was not, as it turned out, where the client wanted to go). The outcome was that, for the first time in many years, the client was re-connected, way back to the deep spiritual experiences of his youth. It is as if the body wisdom finds Abe, at age 70, ready to return to and connect with his deeply held spiritual path. For whatever reasons, he had to go through ebbs and flows, and the traumas and dramas, of two divorces (his parents and his own) before he was ready to return "back home to himself — to his real self."

As a FOT therapist, I feel ongoingly privileged to dive into the deep sea of the client's inner self. At the same time, the client's process allows me to shift from the depth of feeling to the connection with the outer space, continuously weaving small steps from inner movements to daily applications in the outer world and external relationships.

### **THE PATTERNS EXPLORED IN FOCUSING-ORIENTED THERAPY:**

A. Identifying a 10-year old inner child state that has been ruling Abe's emotional life, thoughts and behaviors ever since his traumatic experience with his parents' divorce.

B. Focusing on Abe's back pain

Physically, Abe has experienced multiple problems with his back. He explained that he had been able to manage his physical condition and pain because he learned how to disconnect himself from his physical body. All along, Abe reported having a strong hatred toward his body for betraying him after his divorce. "Since I was 10 years old I have experienced a split between my mind and my body, my needs and others' needs, my spirit and my body's pain and limitations."

### **IDENTIFYING THE CHILD WITHIN:**

In one of Abe's therapy sessions he struggled with a big decision as to whether or not he would fly to South Africa to attend a recognition party of his 70th birthday. He experienced anxiety and fear about becoming sick on the trip. Abe walked into my office and approached me with an anxious smile, ready to share his problem: "On the one hand I would like to go with my grandchildren and son and share with them my life story. On the other hand, I am so anxious to visit my hometown where the riots happened when my best friend was killed."

**Therapist:** *So it sounds as if you have some mixed feelings about the trip. I hear you talking about two places in you. One that wants to go on this trip and one that is afraid and anxious.*

**Abe:** *Yes, I have two totally different places: one is about my love for my children, and the other place that is fearful like a little child.*

**Therapist:** *Both, a place that wants and a place that does not want. Can you take a moment to sense that place where you might experience your love for your children*

**Abe:** *My heart, of course. My love for them fills all my heart.*

**Therapist:** *Your heart is filled with love (therapist touches her heart with her hand). And now, can you sense the place where you experience the fear of going.*

**Abe:** *Abe sat quietly for a long while, unable to give any answer.*

**Therapist:** *Be very gentle with yourself, Abe. There is no rush, take your time to notice your breath, one breath after another. You can sense that there is a you sitting on the sofa, looking at me now. We call this part your 'observer' or the manager of your inner space. Then, there is your heart filled with love, and I also hear you saying that there is a place of fear somewhere inside you.*

**Abe:** *I feel lost! I'm not sure what you mean that there is a me and love and fear and some other places.*

**Therapist:** *Let me show you something. (The therapist pulled out a poster of a giant iceberg and put it in front of Abe). For a moment, I am going to use the iceberg as a symbol to represent a human being. The top 1/10th of the iceberg is our conscious and cognitive thinking; underneath it we find 9/10ths of the iceberg representing your inner space. . . where there is a large room for your feelings and your experiences. Now maybe you can take a moment to sense the whole of your experience and locate the place on the iceberg where your fear is situated . . .*

**Abe:** *(He was silent for about a minute, looking intently at the iceberg), then he said, My feeling of love is in this area (pointing to the area on the left side of the iceberg).*

**Therapist:** *This is your heart area (pointing on the iceberg to the area he showed me before), and now can you find the location of your fear?*

**Abe:** *(He took another long silence, coming closer to the iceberg poster as if searching for some hints for where the location of his fear was). Suddenly, Abe said out loud, I can't believe it! For the first time in my life, I can sense in me a feeling of a little boy of about age 10 sitting right there . . . (Abe pointed to a dark, long shaped location at the bottom of the iceberg). This 10 year old boy is really afraid of this trip. He is not sure what will happen to him there: he does not want to be traumatized again. Abe was silent again for a long while and then he said in an assertive voice, I am a 70-year-old man and the traumatic 10-year-old boy cannot rule me anymore. This boy has been managing me for too many years. It's time for me to sit in the driver's seat!*

**Therapist:** *It sounds like you are shocked to discover that the 10-year-old boy has been managing your behavior for so many years. I also heard a longing there, as if you are saying, "It's time for me and not the boy in me to sit in the driver's seat!"*

**Abe:** *I am not young anymore. This is my life, and I want to heal this experience of a 10-year-old traumatized boy. He and I deserve much better.*

**Therapist:** *Maybe you can take some time here to acknowledge this experience you are feeling inside by saying “hello, shalom” to it, right at this very moment.*

Abe took a deep breath and was quiet for a moment with his eyes looking down at the iceberg where he identified symbolically the site of his 10-year-old boy. He then took a deep breath, his body relaxed and his face softened.

**Therapist:** *I can see that something has changed in you. I saw you taking a deep breath and your body relaxing somewhat. . . is that right. . . ?*

**Abe:** *For the first time ever I am filled with warm feelings toward this boy within me. I am hugging him and saying, “Trust me, I am here to listen to your needs; there is no need to fear. You are no longer in a life and death situation, the war is over, we deserve better.”*

Both therapist and Abe sat quietly, honoring the experience without talking for a while. The second half of the session concentrated on identifying Abe's objectives and physical needs on the trip, such as meals, resting times, alone times . . . and more.

Abe ended up going on the trip a week later with his son and his grandchildren, as he hoped he could. He was able to visit his home town and the memorial place for his best friend. He experienced the adult in him rather than a scared, and anxious 10-year-old boy.

Abe reported feeling very proud of himself and excited about the new relationship he was having with his inner self — his inner boy.

## **FOCUSING WITH PHYSICAL BACK PAIN**

**Therapist:** *Is it Ok for us to talk about your physical pain today?*

**Abe:** *I cannot allow my attention to be with the pain all day long and everyday. I tend to resist it, fight it. I try hard not to make it bigger than my own life.*

**Therapist:** *May I ask you. . . are you experiencing any physical pain right now?*

**Abe:** *Yes, I am. I feel it right down in my back and pelvis.*

**Therapist:** *Let's try a process-step here. . . is that OK? (Abe nods, affirmatively.) See if you can bring your attention there and ask yourself if it is possible to accept the pain with no judgment, treating that pain with the same attitude you would treat your best friend who is in trouble.*

**Abe:** *The pain has been part of my life since the back operation. I live with it everyday. It is a part of me. I cannot treat it like I would my best friend! I have to fight it throughout the day in order to be able to do the simplest things on a daily basis.*

**Therapist:** *I hear you saying that fighting the pain is the only resolution to overcoming the pain. Fighting is the only way to do daily things. Maybe you can consider having a dialogue with that pain, rather than a fight. Your body knows what is right, and it wishes to go back to living with no pain. In a way it might be sending you a message through the pain that it might need extra help to deal with it.*

**Abe:** *The pain is my number one enemy. A long time ago I chose to live my life in spite of the pain, and I have done it through fighting it, and using my stubborn spirit. Now, you are suggesting something that is very new and very unfamiliar to me. I am a bit curious and interested to hear more about what you mean — especially about what it means to befriend the pain.*

**Therapist:** *So, let us start by inviting you to go on a short journey. . . in which you try something new to deal with the pain. Is that okay. . . ?*

**Abe:** (Nods affirmatively) *Yes. . .*

**Therapist:** *Take as much time as you need. . . and see if maybe you can describe where exactly you feel and experience this pain?*

**Abe:** *I feel it in my lower back and toward my pelvis. Right now it would be much better if I got up and walked a little, because of the pain that I am experiencing. I have been sitting in this one position for a long time. I prefer though not to get up.*

**Therapist:** *There's a part of you that wants to get up, right now, and there's another part that would rather not move at all. (Abe nods with his head while listening to the therapist's reflection.) Now, taking as long as you need to. . . see if you can describe the pain down there — maybe you can say something about the shape of the pain, any qualities that you can sense there. . . maybe there is an image that comes along with it.*

**Abe:** (takes a long moment with his eyes closed) *I can feel the pain being much stronger in the left side of my body. I can see it right away. It has the shape of an iron that is burning hot.*

**Therapist:** *So the image there is really clear. . . like a burning hot iron, and it is stronger on the left side of your body.*

**Abe:** *Yes, but the center of the pain is in the middle, and its size is smaller than a fist.*

**Therapist:** *Now you have the center of the pain in the middle. . . See if this image fits for you. Maybe you can imagine something like putting around this center of pain, layers of soft, thick pillows that are somehow capable of absorbing the waves of pain. Take some time to create this image around the center of pain.*

**Abe:** (closes his eyes and focuses his attention inwardly) *Yes, it is not easy, but I can focus down there where the pain is (a minute of silence). I can feel the painful spot. I am able to put three layers of soft, thick pillows around the spot of pain.*

**Therapist:** *And now see if you can ask the center of pain if it is willing to release the pain — that is so tight and crunched. Take some time to allow the waves of pain to come out and be released into these soft, thick pillows.*

**Abe:** *It is happening right now, it is quite scary to me to see so much pain being released from this place.*

**Therapist:** *You can identify the scary place in your body now. . . and you can bring the welcoming of the focusing attitude there. . . presence, non-judgment, and acceptance. . .*

**Abe:** *(takes few conscious breaths) I can feel a small space between me and the pain in my back. The pain, there feels less sharp, and less threatening.*

**Therapist:** *(Reflects back) You are aware that the pain, there, inside you is less sharp and less threatening.*

**Abe:** *Yes, I can, and I'm surprised. I was very skeptical when we started. Now I am quite interested in exploring this process on my own. I can experience me, the observer, my organism, and my body that holds this pain, right there in my lower back. I think that maybe I have learned something new. Maybe fighting the body is not necessarily the best way to overcome pain. It seems to me that it takes less time and less energy to just focus in this spot and do some work.*

**Therapist:** *That is true. What we have found over the years in practicing Focusing, is that when we are able to look at the pain inside at eye level, from the right distance, with acceptance and empathy and with no judgment, something incredible happens. It is as if the body is longing for someone to be present, give it acceptance — as it is right now — so that it can move into its next step toward healing. This organic process is natural. The body needs a witness to unlock its own process.*

You might want to just take another moment here to check again. How it feels inside you right now?

**Abe:** *What a miracle this feels like. Whatever you did with me just a moment ago has really helped. The pain is not there now. It is gone. I just found out how much energy and time I spent fighting my own body. Instead, I learned today to pay attention to the pain, empathize with the body, and partner with it — to work with the pain.*

**Therapist:** *I want to thank you, Abe, for your openness. I highly recommend that in the next week you come and visit your lower back and practice your non-judgmental attitude, and your breathing between you and the pain.*

**Abe:** *I will tell you next time what has happened. Thank you!*

## **SUMMARY:**

Abe's life journey is intriguing with its many ebbs and flows. From a very young age Abe experienced difficult events and feelings — and — he also had the gift of his grandmother's healing circles. Those early experiences grounded within him, a safe and special place of truth, caring, wisdom and healing energy. Although for a long period of his life he denied the powerful resource of those times, in favor of social power and charisma, the energy and memory of those times were there — waiting to be rediscovered.

Focusing Oriented Therapists know and experience life energy and the body wisdom in constant interaction with the surroundings, forever searching to find new ways of healing the organism. When the therapist integrates the elements of Focusing Attitude, Focusing Movements, and the profound philosophy that underlies the Focusing process, the therapist is tuned into and can discover those small steps of change that happen unexpectedly, and can then facilitate the carrying forward of these change steps. These changes do not depend upon the time-frame of the meetings, or the age, gender, or the culture of the client.

For me, integrating Focusing into my language, my daily living, and my therapy practice, has allowed me to experience life as a deep ocean that constantly sends forth waves of endless treasures.

## A TAE-BASED QUALITATIVE STUDY OF SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING FOR AGED JAPANESE MEN

Yoshika Yamaguchi, Satoko Tokumaru

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### I. INTRODUCTION

Due to improvements in public health and advancements in medical care, the average life expectancy of Japanese people has dramatically improved in recent years. In 2009, the population of the elderly (65 years and over) was 22.8% of the total population. At this pace of aging of the population, by 2055, 1 out of every 2.5 citizens will be 65 years or older.

“Aging” is generally considered as negative, but it is time for us to address this topic in a more positive perspective. Now the demographic reality poses questions: What is the purpose of our life? How can we strive for fulfillment even in the face of senility and death? This is a challenge, not only for Japan, but also for the aging world.

The present study applied a TAE-based qualitative approach to assess subjective well-being for aged Japanese, with the focus on a retired male high school teacher. The analysis revealed a contrasting picture of a new-type of individualistic elderly person, on one hand, and the conventional mindsets of the Japanese community, on the other. The TAE-based approach contributed to visualizing the inner world of an individual.

This paper demonstrates the effectiveness of a TAE-based approach for qualitative research. It is divided into two parts: the background information and the TAE process.

### BACKGROUND

Postwar Japan has recorded remarkable economic growth and — in materialistic terms — a large number of newly affluent citizens. It is doubtful, however, that the Japanese have become mentally fulfilled, as well. Rather, our society has put material prosperity before mental well-being, and as a result, the situation of the elderly Japanese has become more complicated. Material prosperity does not necessarily guarantee mental well-being. Since a sense of mental well-being is truly subjective, we need a research approach to explore the individual’s inner dimension.

### II. APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF AGING

Among various approaches to assess subjective well-being, researchers have often used the revised PGC Morale Scale (Lawton, 1975). The Scale is useful for getting an overview of a particular phenomenon, but it is not designed to assess the complicated inner landscape of the individual.

According to Erikson’s Psychosocial Stage Inventory (EPSI), Stage 8 is late adulthood, the stage at which the challenge to be met is “ego integrity versus despair” (Erikson

et. al, 1997). Erikson's life stage theory defines "ego integrity" as a positive aspect of aging, but does not deal directly with subjective well-being.

Tornstam's (1997) gerotranscendence theory integrates Erikson's description of Stage 9 with Cumming & Henry's (1961) disengagement theory. However, as with the revised PGC, Tornstam's scale of gerotranscendence depends on dichotomous responses and is not sufficient to address the process of how an individual progresses to gerotranscendence.

Based on Tornstam's model, Oda (2003) studied aged Japanese people and suggested that it is important to discover how elderly people do or do not shift to gerotranscendence in the context of a rapidly aging Japanese society.

Gaining the insights from these prior works, Yamaguchi (2008) conducted a questionnaire survey and interviews to study the subjective sense of well-being in relation to aging. Although the study showed Japanese elderly people follow a common agenda for life-span development, such as integrity and gerotranscendence, more than one interviewee expressed discomfort with some of the questions from Tornstam's Gerotranscendence Scale. Yamaguchi shared a sense of discomfort expressed by those interviewees and realized the importance of designing a research approach to be customized to each Japanese aged subject.

### **III. PURPOSE AND METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION**

Our study was a follow-up to Yamaguchi's. In a pilot study, we tested a questionnaire on 167 respondents, and from that data, identified three factors: "forward-looking", "acceptance of aging", and "role consciousness". We then created a 10-question interview, which included items identified with these factors, along with questions representative of the cosmic transcendence measure, the coherence in life measure, and the solitude measure of Tornstam's gerotranscendence theory, as well as questions to get background information and to smooth the way for asking about delicate topics.

#### **GUIDELINES FOR INTERVIEW**

1. What is the most exciting activity in your daily life? What keeps you going forward? (a forward-looking attitude)
2. Is that activity something you have been doing for many years?  
Is there any activity you used to do but have now quit? (If "yes", Why did you quit?)
3. Do you feel comfortable in Nature? (a sense of connection to or feeling part of Nature, etc.)
4. Do you have feelings of coherence and meaning in life?
5. Do you have time to spend with your family and friends?
6. What role do you think you play in your family and your community?

7. Do you feel your physical strength declining?
8. How do you feel when you are philosophizing alone?
9. Do you believe you eventually come to dust (after death)? Do you have any fear about it?
10. How are you now? What environment do you hope to be in?

To focus on the individual's inner world, the interview was customized for each interviewee.

The following is the profile for the interviewee described in this paper.

Male, Mr. C, age 66  
 Present household composition: self and one son  
 Previous household composition: self, wife, a son, and a daughter  
 Occupation before retirement: high school teacher

This interview was conducted at the interviewee's home for about 1.5 hours. The tape-recorded interview was transcribed. (Researcher A, below, is the interviewer in this interview session.)

#### IV. METHOD OF DATA ANALYSIS

The interview data was qualitatively analyzed in order to get an understanding of the interviewee's subjective well-being. The method employed is a theory building method TAE, "a systematic way to articulate in new terms something which needs to be said but is at first only an inchoate 'bodily sense'." (Thinking At the Edge; Gendlin & Hendricks, 2004). For a researcher engaged in a specific field over a period of years, TAE is useful for interpreting research data by Focusing on a specific issue arising in the course of the research as a research question. TAE Steps help the researcher to articulate some understanding of the data to be analyzed (called a felt sense) while staying with the data. With this 'understanding' in mind, the researcher can address the whole of the data including interviews and observations without losing its intricacies. It is very useful for grasping the subjective dimension of the individual subject. Recently TAE has been applied to qualitative study by Tokumaru et al. (2008).

In the present case, Researcher A, defined a research question to be "subjective well-being among today's Japanese elderly people," a subject theme arising from the research of Yamaguchi (2008). Under this research question, the data from interviews with the subject, Mr. C, was analyzed through 14 TAE Steps.

TAE is able to be implemented by a single researcher alone, but often involves two people, a Researcher and a Guide, working together in analytical process. The Guide creates and holds space for the Researcher to stay with the subject of interest, and facilitates the Researcher's inner dialogue. The Guide is also responsible for taking notes on the analytical

process. In this study, Researcher A was analyzing the data with Researcher B as Guide. The process of analysis of the research data is shown in the Appendix.

## V. DISCUSSION

The TAE-based analysis was helpful for better understanding of the structure of Interviewee C's subjective well-being. The findings are summarized and presented with relevant interview excerpts below:

### **Structure of Mr. C's subjective well-being**

Mr. C formed a new family based on new values after WWII, not a large family, but a nuclear family, and has worked for the family's personal growth. It has given him a sense of responsibility and joy. He has supported the family in an individualistic way of valuing freedom, refraining from over-interdependence. He is still in pursuit of what a new family style should be. He is a new type of father who cooks for his unmarried son.

- *In contrast to the prewar values, my generation was raised in the postwar climate of public opinion opting for European values. I didn't want to obey my parents. I just wanted to be independent, to get married, to form a separate family. Independence must be the ideal life-style. . . everybody believed so. I grew up in such times.*
- *When I'm home, I cook for my son, too.*
- *We take meals at home. My son doesn't like to dine out, either. He also cooks. Simple breakfast, bread, tea, egg and vegetables.*

(Note: It is a "new value" for Mr. C (and his son) to cook for themselves, since traditionally Japanese men do not cook.)

On the other hand, when it comes to being related to the community, his way of thinking is tinged with the influence of the past feudal landlord system. He tends to follow the conventional rules and decisions made by local people, which he has never challenged. He has never tried to develop new relationships with local people. He can be associated with them to the extent that he seeks advice from the landowner of his vegetable garden about how to grow vegetables, but it is not like a landlord-tenant relationship. He has no motivation to take part in or streamline community activities.

- *To tell the truth, it's great to be friends with local people. But for them, I'm just a newcomer. There is no opportunity to socialize with them in daily life. It is difficult to make the first contact. I feel I should take time to develop those kind of relationships.*
- *I have always hated bothering about and being bothered by others. It's stuffy. It's my policy to lead a carefree life.*
- *Neighbors I've been associated with are Mr. E next door, and Mr. H, who has helped me take care of the vegetable garden, I think. Well, Mr. H comes over to my garden to spray insecticide every day [laughter], yes, he does.*

In terms of subjective well-being, Mr. C is happiest when being comfortably alone while feeling connected with his family. He desires to be related to local people. This desire seems to be fulfilled by being taken care of by local people in a remote place on a pilgrimage.

- *Before setting out, I imagined it would be very hard to walk over 1200 km. But once I started, it was incredible. It was exciting to meet with people, to walk with companions, to be in Nature. Great experience.*

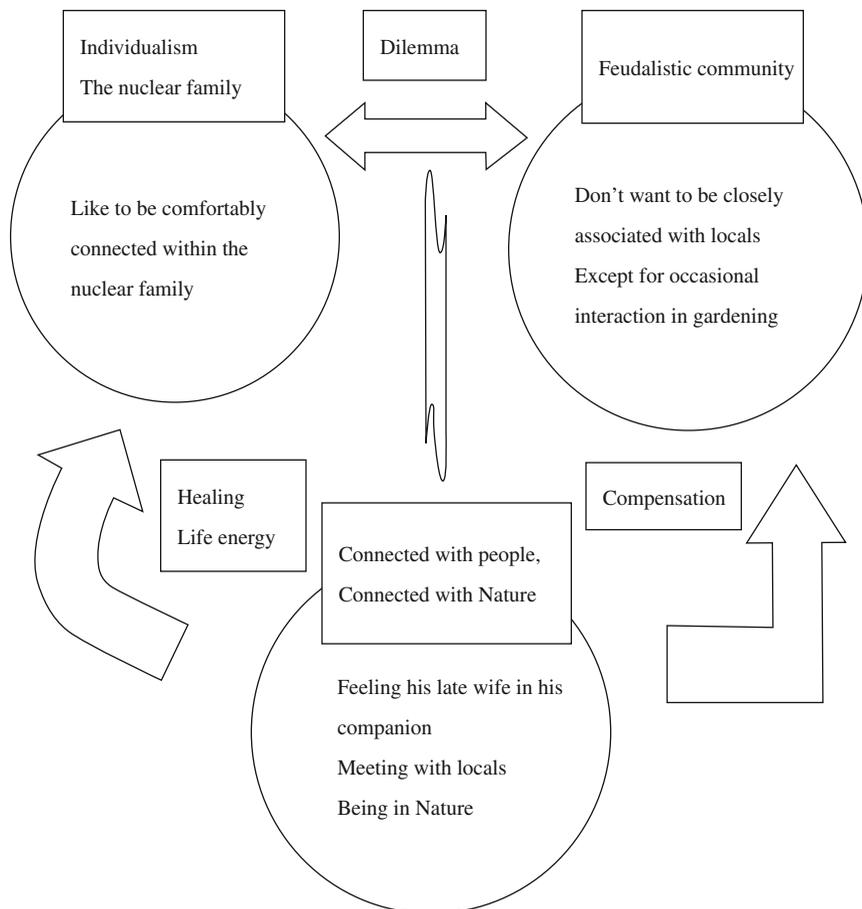
In future, in this direction, he is interested in seeking out what a new family style should be, while in pursuit of his own well-being (feeling connected *and* being comfortably alone). He has no idea of what would happen if he becomes sick, unable to stand on his own two feet.

- *I feel I should be alive. At the same time, I'm afraid of being ill and bed-ridden. My friends have the same feeling. I don't want to become senile [laughter]. I'd rather die than living in senility. . . We are joking with each other.*

## VI. CONCLUSION

This study applied a TAE-based qualitative approach to assess subjective well-being among aged Japanese people, with the focus on a retired male high school teacher.

The analysis revealed the dynamic inner structure of the subject Mr. C: a contrasting picture of the new-type individualistic elderly person caring for his nuclear family, on one hand, and an aged man with the conventional mindsets of the feudalistic community, on the other. His inner dynamism can be explained by two social factors. First, in postwar Japan, individualism was advocated among those seeking freedom from the old values, which spurred a shift from a large-family system to a nuclear family system. Second, in the course of agricultural reconstruction after the war, agricultural land reform was implemented and the tenant farmer system was abolished, but vestiges of the landlord system still remain in people's lives and consciousness, and affect the framework of the community. These two conflicting factors are found to underlie his subjective well-being. Our analysis suggests that a feeling of happiness and gratitude he enjoyed during the pilgrimage worked to mitigate the dilemma he experiences in community life.



An instance of one individual helps visualize the reality in Japan, and our data demonstrates that it is difficult for the community to support elderly people, and for the elderly to be supported by the community while respecting diverse values, such as independence/individualism and traditional mindsets/paternalism.

The results of this study suggest a direction for public policy to tackle with the said challenge in the aging Japanese society, namely, how to create space where every person can feel comfortable being alone *and* connected with family at the same time, affording room for striving toward a new family style. For example, a welfare system that supports elderly people to live next door to their families, keeping a comfortable distance and feeling part of the community might be recommended as a choice. Importantly, such system should prioritize individual needs with the view of enhancing “subjective well-being” for each elderly person.

To visualize the inner dimension of an individual, a method like TAE is useful for assessing subjective well-being. As its further application, the TAE methodology focusing on a single individual might be of significant help to policy makers in identifying and respecting individual needs toward better welfare system. The authors are interested in conducting interviews with more elderly subjects in order to gain a deeper understanding of subjective well-being among aged Japanese people.

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## **APPENDIX: TAE-BASED ANALYSIS OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH DATA**

### **I. PROCESS OF ANALYSIS**

#### **I-1) PREPARATION**

**Step** TAE Step 1: Let a felt sense form (Gendlin & Hendricks, 2004:12)

**Procedure** Researcher A makes a transcript of an interview session with Interviewee C and reads the data in depth. Researcher A gets a felt sense about the topic: subjective well-being for aged Japanese. This felt sense is processed as follows.

#### **I-2) STEPS 1-5: SPEAKING FROM THE FELT SENSE (IBID:12-15)**

**Step** STEPS 1-5 help to “find what is more than logical in your felt sense,” “notice that you don’t mean the standard definitions of the words,” “write a sentence or fresh phrase to say what you wanted each of the three words to mean,” and “expand what you wanted each word to mean by writing fresh, linguistically unusual sentences” (ibid: 13-15).

**Procedure** Researcher A stays with the felt sense and describes the crux of it, with Guide B taking notes of words or phrases. Researcher A writes a short sentence which speaks from the felt sense. By repeating this process, at the end of Step 5 Researcher A comes up with a sentence to express the crux of her felt sense:

*Calm, large, leisurely, fond of history, calm and "just as I am." This is a good thing about Japan. Because it's not flashy, it is more understandable. . .*

#### **I-3) STEPS 6-9: FINDING PATTERNS FROM FACETS (INSTANCES), WRITE FREELY (IBID: 15-17)**

**Step** STEPS 6-9 help to “collect facets,” “allow the facets to contribute detailed structure,” “cross the facets,” and “write freely” (ibid: 15-17).

**Procedure** The researchers returned to the interview data to collect instances that seemed to express the whole felt sense, selecting 14 instances with various aspects of the whole data. Because the data is voluminous, this research extracts the number of instances which seemed necessary for expressing the whole felt sense, more than just the four suggested in the original TAE instructions. Next, patterns were derived from these 14 instances.

**Table 1: Collecting facets and deriving patterns (STEPS 6 & 7)**

| Instance                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Pattern                                     |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| Instance 1. My son has never dined out. Even when I go out, he comes home to cook for himself.<br>Instance 2. Well, when I'm at home, I cook for both of us.                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Pattern 1. The family is important.         |
| Instance 1. I can imagine how a foreigner is inspired by something valuable in the Japanese heritage. On a pilgrimage to temples in Shikoku, I found myself finishing the journey with a foreigner as companion.<br>Instance 2. My generation is known as opposed to the prewar feudal paternalism. (But) the extended family system may be a good aspect of those days. | Pattern 2. I know a good thing about Japan. |

As a unique approach, the authors have invented a “Pattern Form” that allows us to collect all other instances to which the relevant pattern applies. For research purposes, this Pattern Form is helpful for ensuring that all applicable instances are captured. It also allows us to identify any instances of the pattern in reverse. Moreover, it is useful for grouping similar instances efficiently. The Pattern Form is modeled after the M-GTA Analytic Worksheet. For example:

**Table 2: Pattern Form**

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Pg.<br>S.2,<br>L8                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | I have never been involved deeply in the community, because I don't come from this area.                                                                                                                                                                        |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | C: I always hate bothering about and being bothered by others. I like a carefree life. So being a member of a large family is far from my lifestyle. But at the same time, a large family system came from economic or workforce necessity of farmers, I think. |
| Other instances with the same Pattern                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Just next-door [laughs] I've rented a vegetable garden from Mr. E and have grown vegetables for more than ten years. It's not like a hobby, but I have been working in this way to grow organic vegetables without using chemical fertilizers. |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Note: It's natural to do as the local people do.                                                                                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |

Then, all Patterns are crossed with each other, and new findings are written down by checking with the felt sense. Apply Pattern 1 derived from Instance 1 to Pattern 2 derived from Instance 2, Pattern 2 derived from Instance 2 to Pattern 3 derived from Instance 3, and so on. Crossing in 182 combinations is carried out. Then write freely the findings from the preceding analytical steps.

**Table 3: Pattern Form (Crossing)**

|                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                            |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Keeping company with high-school mates                                                                    |                                                                                                                                                                            |
| Pattern                                                                                                      | Findings from crossing                                                                                                                                                     |
| 2. I feel good being ordinary                                                                                | In company with friends, I'm true to myself. I feel carefree, because I don't have to worry too much about others                                                          |
| 3. I used to wish to lead a meaningful life. Now I think differently. I just want to be myself (be as I am). | I can be myself with my high school friends. We became friends in adolescence, and they are lifelong friends. They are not my family, but I can build close relationships. |

I-4) STEPS 10-14: BUILDING THEORY (IBID: 17-24)

**Step** Of STEPS 10-14 for theory-building, STEPS 10-12 help to “choose terms and link them,” “ask into the inherent relations between the terms,” and “choose permanent terms and interlock them” (ibid: 17-22).

**Procedure** Step 10: Three keywords (terms) expressing the whole felt sense are chosen: A: “as I am,” B: “family,” and C: “comfortableness of being alone.” Place the keywords in “A IS B” so as to write a sentence that is true for the felt sense. Do the same with “B IS C,” and “C IS A.”

|     |                                           |
|-----|-------------------------------------------|
| A=B | As I am IS family                         |
| A=C | Family IS comfortableness of being alone  |
| B=C | Comfortableness of being alone IS as I am |

**Step 11:**

Next, from the felt sense, find a term that tells the inherent link in the sentence “A IS inherently B.” Do the same with BC, and CA. Arrows indicate new Terms

- As I am IS inherently (has the very nature of) family → I don't want to be bothered by others
- Family IS inherently (has the very nature of) comfortableness of being alone → resistance to a large family
- Comfortableness of being alone IS inherently (has the very nature of) as I am → local people

**Step 12:**

Choose three Terms that express the whole felt sense. In this case, O: local people, P: my own family, and Q: comfortableness of being alone. These three terms were interlocked and defined into the following sentences:

OPQRS interlocked/defined

O: Local people, whose ways I have to follow, never change, never let me feel comfortable being alone, and never grow along with me because, unlike my own family, they are not what I create of my own will.

P: My own family can be changed, because I can communicate my own will to them; it allows me to be comfortable being alone; is not like local people whose ways I have to follow.

Q: In the company of local people to whom I can't say what I think, and whose ways I have to go along with, I can't feel comfortable being alone; but with my own family, I can say what I want and can feel change.

R: My own will can be felt when I'm with my own family, which is related to the comfortable-ness of being alone, but is not communicable to local people whose ways I have to follow.

S: "Follow" (the verb) has no room for change, because I have to follow the local people's way, but I don't have to "follow" when I'm with my own family; therefore, there is room for change, allowing me to feel comfortable being alone.

Then, R: "my own will," S: "follow," and T: "change" were added, and "comfortable being alone" was substituted for "as I am," "change" for "new." Findings from checking with the felt sense were written down.

Finally, nine main terms were determined: "local people," "my own family," "comfortable being alone," "my own will," "follow," "change," "as I am," "new," and "growth." Through using each term once at least, by addition and substitution, a theory was structured in Step 12:

- My own family, newly created, can be changed by my own will, and has potential for growth. Because I can communicate my own will, I can be as I am and feel comfortable being alone. Local people, whose ways I have to follow, cannot be changed, won't grow. I cannot communicate my own will to local people.

**I-5) ENDING THE ANALYSIS**

**Step** Step 13: is to "apply your theory outside your field," and Step 14 is to "expand and apply your theory in your field" (ibid: 22-24). Step 14 says: Once a theory is developed, further distinctions and implications follow without you inventing them (ibid: 23)

The theory was applied to the data, and findings were written down while returning to the felt sense of "subjective well-being for aged Japanese."

**Analysis** Toward the ending of theory-building, the topic of postwar agricultural land reform spontaneously came up in conversation. Findings from input mainly by Researcher A about the topic were as follows:

In the structure of the theory, “local people” are a remnant of the old landlord system, and even today there remains a traditional way of thinking that the community follows the opinion of those who have owned land since long ago, as in a tenant-farmer-to-landlord relationship.

With those findings in mind, it was possible to compare “relationship with local people” and “relationship with family” in the interviewee’s data. A table was drawn up, showing these two in relation to the topic of “a pilgrimage” which featured prominently in the interviewee’s story.

**Table 4: Comparison with another topic (a pilgrimage)**

| Local people                                                                                                                                                                        | Family                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | Pilgrimage (a journey to 88 temples in Shikoku)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feudalism</li> <li>• Large family</li> <br/> <li>• Landlord</li> <li>• Never grow</li> <li>• Never change (preserve status-quo)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individualism</li> <li>• Nuclear family</li> <br/> <li>• Tenant farmer mentality (even though not in actuality)</li> <li>• Strive for personal growth</li> <li>• In pursuit of a new style</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Independent decision-making</li> <li>• Travel in pairs (Even when traveling alone, a pilgrim is spiritually “accompanied” by Buddhist Sage Kobo; also, in the interviewee’s case, he felt his late wife was his companion)</li> <li>• Self reflection (for personal growth)</li> <li>• In pursuit of something (oneself)</li> </ul> |

Based on the table, “on a pilgrimage” was applied to “the structure of the theory” from this process to produce the following result, which helped clarify the meaning of “on a pilgrimage” for the interviewee and understand better what the interviewee thinks of his relation to the family and the community.

“On a pilgrimage” applied to the theory

I can decide for myself to set out on a pilgrimage. It gives me opportunities for self reflection and personal growth. Although I can't express myself, I have freedom of decision: to set out or not or come back home, etc. Away from daily life, being in Nature, as I am, I can feel comfortable being alone. Local people (in Shikoku) welcome pilgrims caringly. I don't have to follow their ways, although I comply with the rules for pilgrim attire. I can be associated with local people, with other pilgrims, sharing about my late wife and what memorial service I want to hold for her, about illness, about whatever I want to share (personal growth). The attitude of local people looking after pilgrims is the same as in the past.

The analysis revealed the conflict of the new-type individualistic elderly (the nuclear family) and the feudalistic obligation for the community (it's wiser to follow the opinion of those who have owned land).

**Table 5: Summary of Findings**

|                                                                                        |                                              |                                                                                                                            |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Individualism (the bond of an individual (man) and an individual (woman) based on love | Feudalism (The tie of a family and a family) | Challenge to the future of the Japanese society                                                                            |
| The nuclear family                                                                     | Community                                    | To find solutions to how the community should support the elderly and how the elderly should be supported by the community |

The aging society has posed the question of what role a community should play for people who are less and less connected in terms of kinship as well as locality. An instance of one individual helps visualize the situation in Japan, demonstrating that it is difficult for the community to support elderly people and for the elderly to be supported by the community while respecting each other's values.

**NOTE:**

1. Gendlin's original TAE gives instructions of A=B, A=C, B=C in Step 10, and "A is inherently B" and "A is inherently C" in Step 11. In this study, the authors modified the procedures to interrelate ABC in series.

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