

Belonging and Crossing in Community Advanced and Certification Focusing Weeklong 2017

By Sue Burrell

Attending the Weeklong at Mercy by the Sea, Connecticut was the culmination of several things for me. It was the high point of two years of training with Jane Quayle to become a Focusing Trainer; it was after ten years of learning and studying Focusing with different Focusing teachers – Ann Weiser Cornell, Robert Lee, phone classes with Gene and Ann and their many CDs, Jocelyn Jacks Kahn, Karen Whalen, Glenn Fleisch, Katarina Halm, and many books and papers. It was also the fifth week of a six week trip to the USA, and the third of three conferences I attended while there. The Weeklong was a wonderful way to end a wonderful trip.

The first delightful experience I had was finding that the conference centre was set in the most amazingly beautiful surroundings, right on the ocean, with its own private beach. I swam in that rather chilly water one day – my first time swimming in the Atlantic. One intrepid Focuser swam every day! The second delightful experience was opening the door to the room I was to share with my Australian friend and Focusing partner, Marilyn Mayhew, and seeing that our room looked out onto this wonderful view, through great big windows, wow! Mercy by the Sea was a serene and embracing place to snuggle into for a cornucopia of Focusing experiences. Meeting fellow Focusers from all round the world was the next delight. Certification Weeklongs have such a rich and interesting mix of Focusers with varied Focusing backgrounds and interesting jobs and careers, not only therapists. Those who spoke English as a second language added an important dimension to the experience. I was very impressed by their fluency and courage to listen to mostly English presentations, and for some of the Coordinators to give their presentations in English.

As the week progressed, and I learnt more about the people attending, I was also impressed with the depth of their life experience and the different ways they were using Focusing. On our first night we divided ourselves up into home groups, by choosing a stone, a shell, or a stick that spoke to us. This was a wonderful idea, and allowed for deeper sharing and Focusing practice and partnerships in the home group sessions that were held every afternoon. It was so interesting to learn which Focusing methods people were drawn to and were passionate about. I think it would be helpful to include options for sampling different Focusing methods at future Weeklongs. The diversity of attendees, as well as Focusing styles and presentations, highlighted for me that each person's Focusing process is unique to them, and that exposure to the breadth of different Focusing methods or styles could really enhance the teaching skills of Trainers.

A wonderful exercise we tried, which emerged from the multilingual nature of the Weeklongs, was reflecting key words or phrases to the Focuser, in their native language. It seemed very powerful for the Focuser to hear the reflection in their own language, and spoke to the power of listening and reflection, even when the listener doesn't understand what they are reflecting. This exercise also taught me something else, about choosing a *condensed* sentence or phrase for the listener to reflect, which required *me* to felt sense

into the essence or crux of what I was sharing. I was reminded of learning something similar with Robert Lee, in Domain Focusing.

My first conference in the USA, on archetypal patterns, with the Assisi Institute in Mystic, Connecticut was more cerebral; the second, with Dr Clarissa Pinkola Estes on blockages to creativity, was experiential but not body focused. So I looked forward to the Focusing Weeklong, and my body did too! I am used to my body anticipating the wonderful ambience of an extended group Focusing experience, and being able to sit/stand/whole body move with stuck places as the life forward movement is found – I was not disappointed at the Weeklong. Whatever is wanting attention in my inner world, having the extended time, space and multiple available Focusing partners has been a real boon for this inner work.

The lectures by the Facilitating Coordinators Jan Winhall, Jeffrey Morrison, and Edgardo Riveros were very informative and stimulating. Jan and Jeffrey talked about Focusing and Trauma, from a Focusing Oriented Therapy and neurological point of view. Jeffrey's exercise to find the gift, or resilient skill which enabled us to survive our traumas, was very illuminating for many of us. Jan's explanation of the neurology of trauma, and how explaining this, including diagrams, was very helpful for her clients, was useful information, both personally and for my counselling work. Edgardo's lecture, well supported by a very creative PowerPoint and an adept translator, shed new light on the process of Focusing. It was on why and how Focusing works, based on his deep understanding of Gene Gendlin's writing, including *A Process Model* (which Edgardo has translated into Spanish, something I didn't know – a formidable achievement).

The Contributing Coordinators Beth Mahler, Ifat Eckstein, and Marine de Freminville shared unique insights into various Focusing processes and skills. They shared about things that tether or tie us to some aspects of our past, things that connect us, and the solid "ground" from which we bring presence and curiosity to our inner world. Once again, the opportunity to try out these ideas experientially and in small groups facilitated, for me, at least one very transformational experience. I also loved experiencing the differing Focusing styles of my Focusing partners. This encouraged flexibility, as well as strengthening my own process by checking, inwardly, whatever was offered by my partner, to sense for the rightness, for me, and everything in me, in that moment. This will help in my Focusing teaching, as I endeavour to assist my students to find the Focusing style that best fits them.

This reminds me of the word that came to mind as we shared in a circle, on the last day, a word or phrase that summed up the Weeklong for us. For me, it was **smorgasbord**. The offerings of the Weeklong had been very rich, varied and abundant. There were conversations, new friends, new and/or deeper understanding of many aspects of Focusing, a deepening and broadening of my understanding of the Focusing world, the wonderful work being done in various countries to share Focusing, as well as the insights gained from Focusing with different partners. Many people return to the Focusing Weeklongs and I can understand why – it is a wonderful opportunity for Focusing with skilled Focusers, sharing rich and tasty meals and conversations, learning, laughing, sometimes crying, for growing and changing. I hope to return myself.