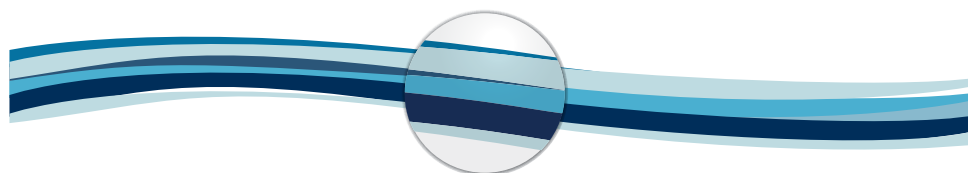


# British Focusing Association



## NEWSLETTER

Supporting Your Focusing Journey

Issue 5: April 2015

[www.focusing.org.uk](http://www.focusing.org.uk)

### Editor's note

This edition of the newsletter has come out of the second UK Focusing School, which took place at Belsey Bridge Conference Centre in Ditchingham, Norfolk, in October 2014. We are very pleased to have contributions from teachers, workshop leaders and participants, as well as from Catherine Torpey, the Executive Director of the Focusing Institute in New York, who was fortunately able to join us. The contributions are as varied and individual as the contributors themselves, and I hope some of them will inspire further thoughts and sensings. Some of our contributors have also sent photographs, which are a reminder of the School – both the participants and the surroundings. For me and many others it was a heartfelt and enriching time and an opportunity to connect with other Focusers from around the world. Participants came from as far away as Japan, the United States and Israel, as well as several European countries and the British Isles.

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# Second UK Focusing School, October 2014

Some of the articles here have arisen from courses or shorter workshops run at the School: *Being Seriously Playful* with Rene Veugelers, *Spark to Beacon* with Barbara McGavin, *Focusing and Business* with Sally Tadmor, and *Focusing and Writing* with me. Other pieces describe people's experiences of the School or ask questions arising from it, or simply say things that people sensed they had a need to say. It's been a privilege to welcome all these different strands into the Newsletter as well as news from BFA itself.

I've very much enjoyed guest-editing this edition and receiving all the contributions, and I'm grateful to Locana for giving me the opportunity while she takes a break as editor – though she is still making sure that the Newsletter keeps up its high standard of production. Our thanks go to her and to everyone who has contributed, as well as thanks and appreciation to our technical team for their generosity: Ivo our designer and Shani, our proofreader and administrator.

Susan Jordan, [susanjord@gmail.com](mailto:susanjord@gmail.com)



Nico Verschoor, Greg Madison, Sally Tadmor and Barbara McGavin

Jerry Conway, Peter Afford and Jessica Delooz

Sally Tadmor and Catherine Torpey

Ulla-Stina Johansson, Sally Tadmor, Irene Farmer and Celia Dawson

Thanks for the photographs to Christiane Geiser, Rene Veugelers and Sally Tadmor

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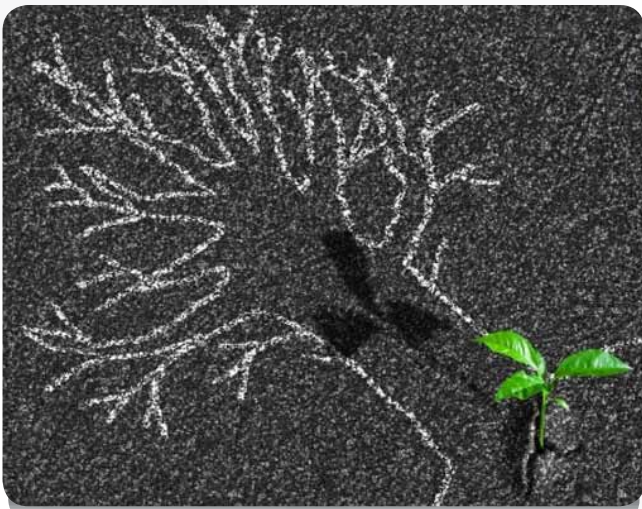


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# A Message from Catherine Torpey, Executive Director of The Focusing Institute

Dearest British Focusing friends

As your new-ish Executive Director of The Focusing Institute, I'm grateful for the opportunity to send you greetings from across the pond and to express my admiration for the British Focusing Association and all you are doing. I have had the privilege of getting to know a few of you quite well so far, and I hope that over time I will get to know all of you. Many people have remarked to me that the way that the BFA works can provide an excellent model for Focusing worldwide, and so I look forward to more and more sharing of our collective wisdom so that we might spread Felt Sense literacy to the wider world and to deepen its practice within ourselves.



I was absolutely delighted to attend the British Focusing School this fall and to meet so many of you. It was difficult to choose which morning workshop to attend, but I settled on Peter Afford's course on Thinking at the Edge, where I was able to begin exploring my felt sense around the idea of forgiveness. Peter did such a nice job of opening up the space for us in a gently inviting manner. We engaged with one another actively, encouraged and challenged each other, and paired up to listen deeply and be listened to. Though months have gone by, I still actively feel in my body what is emerging and emergent in me around this. Of course, a week wasn't enough to fully explore it, and so I eagerly await another opportunity to spend some concentrated time midwifing whatever is wanting to be born.

The spirit of the British Focusing School was so inviting that I somehow found myself lured into singing a Cab Calloway song at the Follies, to a very warm and (speaking of forgiveness) forgiving audience. It seems important that Focusing be something that brings us more ease with each other, so that we can risk being less than perfect: more honest, more silly, more ourselves. Something about that freedom allows me to be more patient, forgiving, and encouraging to others. Somehow, I find that the more I learn to honor all that is within me, the more generosity of spirit I have toward those around me. This was in evidence at the Follies but also all week long with all the participants, in our every interaction.

The international character of Focusing is another of its great strengths, and so I hope that while you are active in the BFA, you will also continue to foster your commitment to reaching out to Focusers in cultures and languages other than your own. This is one of the major goals of the Advanced and Certification Weeklong (I hope I'll see you there!) and of The Focusing Institute as a whole. As I write this, I am in Mexico, looking forward to connecting with some fellow Focusers. I hope that The Focusing Institute and all of us will help every country where there are people disconnected from their inner wisdom to learn to plumb the depths of the Felt Sense.

With affection and admiration,  
Catherine Torpey

*Catherine Torpey became Executive Director of The Focusing Institute in March 2014. She learned Bio-Spiritual Focusing in 1994 and began teaching it soon thereafter so that she could share the gifts Focusing brought to her life. Prior to being hired by the Institute, she worked in business, teaching and as a Unitarian Universalist minister. She is grateful that her role at the Institute allows her to combine her leadership skills with her love of Focusing.*





# Diversity in the Focusing Community

By Suzi Mackenzie

I really valued experiencing the UK Focusing School. However, although different countries were represented and there were people from different ethnic backgrounds, it stood out for me that there were no black people there. In years of Focusing in various contexts I've hardly ever met a black person, and I wonder why. Something in me feels deeply uncomfortable about the possibility that the Focusing community could be another place that is dominated by white middle-class people.

I asked Catherine Torpey, Executive Director of the Focusing Institute, in her open questions forum why she thought there weren't more black or ethnic minority people present in Focusing circles. She responded that this may be to do with links between ethnicity and income, and suggested that introducing bursaries to attend conferences could help increase access for people from minority communities. Several people said they were glad this issue had been raised and I'm aware that some feel that we need to make Focusing more accessible to *many* different groups. I also noticed my own 'inner marginalised person' feeling fearful of raising this. I imagine if I was a black person raising this it could feel much harder.



I feel it would be great to do more. What can we do as an organisation, and as individuals, to make the Focusing community more accessible to people from different social groups and ethnic backgrounds? I'm not new to Focusing but I am relatively new to considering myself part of the wider/international Focusing community. So I now feel some responsibility for what goes on in this community – especially after

the Focusing School when I felt how good it is to be a part of it. I have some thoughts but I don't profess to have all the answers. First steps might be looking at the BFA website and trainers' marketing materials. Could they be made more actively welcoming to people from a diversity of backgrounds? Including a section on diversity on the website or using images representing different cultural groups may make black and ethnic minority people feel that this is also a place for them.

I'm also interested in the concept of white privilege. There are many ways in which it's easier for me, as a white person, to exist in this society – and therefore in the Focusing community. I have wondered about under-representation of ethnic minorities in Focusing before, but then forgotten about it. As a white person I have the privilege of forgetting about the marginalisation of minority ethnic groups, whereas people from these groups may not have the luxury of forgetting. Are we even aware of the ways in which it might be more difficult for black and ethnic minority people to get involved in Focusing? What are the unconscious ways in which we might make a black or ethnic minority person less welcome in the Focusing community? Diversity and prejudice are not particular to Focusing, but perhaps the very fact that Focusing is such an accepting thing could lead us to forget that we may need actively to do more to extend this outwards. In Focusing we strive to accept all parts of our inner experience. Do we extend this same open-mindedness and acceptance to those in society? Do we exile certain groups from our consciousness because we don't understand them or are fearful of them? As with exiled parts, I believe the answer is to turn towards.

There may be a view that Focusing is a self-selecting activity and we can't make people come forward to do it who don't anyway. But is there anything about Focusing that would make it less relevant *in its essence* to people from black and ethnic minority groups? Focusing has been found to be useful in a variety of cultures, so why not to a range of ethnicities in the UK? Perhaps diversity and inclusivity have been discussed before in the UK Focusing scene, but it would be great to discuss this more. It is a really complex subject. It feels messy and hard to

talk about. And sometimes things that are hard to talk about don't get talked about. Things can get in the way of talking about diversity issues: feeling we don't have the authority to talk about this question if we are not a member of a minority group, worrying about inadvertently sounding prejudiced, feeling powerless to come up with solutions, anticipating a lack of support in response.

Things that are hard to talk about are often the things that need talking about the most. And Focusing is good for things that are messy and unclear. I don't have all the answers, but I want to be a little challenging as I wonder if we are doing enough. I include myself in this. Making our Focusing world more diverse and inclusive may seem a big task. It doesn't just mean trying to make changes in the

Focusing community but probably in our whole lives. Maybe if we spend some time with it something will unfold. And I also feel an urgency in me, for some action as well as some 'being with'.



*Suzi Mackenzie is a Focuser based in Sussex. She is a Person Centred Counsellor working with a Focusing integration and will be offering guided Focusing sessions in the future.*

## Being Seriously Playful

By Rene Veugelers

### The Course



Working and being with each other in a Focusing course is always special and unique, as if the activity has to attune towards the group, the individuals and the whole atmosphere. It is an interactive process. In this course I offered a special non-verbal training in which we worked with our own safe place, inside and

outside, and our boundaries (vague, unclear and clear), using symbols and authentic movement to get more support and connection as we discovered our vague inner Felt Senses and, of course, doing a lot of Focusing.

My way of teaching is based on my experience. My understanding is informed by the fact that the body carries all the important information and answers for us. It's all in there but can remain not connected yet. So when I work with children of all ages, through listening, I stay connected with my own Felt Sense: I build safety, clear boundaries and interest in whatever is there inside the child, and reflect the new and unexpected feelings, movements or non-verbal language that are shown by the child's behaviour



and posture. The more I can be with this subtle step-by-step process, the more a child can build up their own inner and outer connections. I never know the next step. My basic attitude is always to step gently and consciously into this unknown and unexpected territory. This brings always a fresh experience, subtlety and joy to every connection with children and with adults.



## Feedback from participants

“Powerful, deep, touched at every level of my being.”

“Fab! Just gets better!!!”

“Excellent” and “Absolutely wonderful in every respect.”

“Many things to say to you, first of all a deeply felt ‘thank you’ for creating and holding so well and so lightly the space of being seriously playful. I felt as if I’d come home. It seems like there’s been a deep (and very slow) felt shift in me since then, a kind of ‘aha!’ of recognition and permission. I’ve been exploring aspects of this way of working for years now and finally feel as if it’s all come together in those four mornings.”

*So, to think of words you can use to promote this work, what did you do that made the difference? (I know I was more receptive to working with fewer words).*

“First, the attention given to creating our own space, over time, in small steps. Maybe that was it. Really recognizing and honouring that settling into a space with others and with a process takes time. Your congruence, playfulness and embodied empathy.”

Someone else: “I loved the fun elements which you brought into the teaching, the tender, respectful way you held the space for the whole group, and the depth and timing of the exercises. Also the way you led us through the different phases of our own gradual deepening into process and then coming back out was absolutely masterful!”

*Rene Veugelers*

*I live in the Netherlands and work daily in a Focusing way with children of any age, specialising in non-verbal communication: Emerging Body Language (EBL). As a Focusing Trainer and Co-ordinator for Children Focusing, I teach parents, therapists, teachers and others how to be with and work with children in a Focusing way and how to get more in contact with our own aliveness, playfulness and flexibility. I do this internationally. I am also an art therapist, psychiatric nurse and group social worker. There are many possibilities of following a training with me in your own country or somewhere in Europe: a six-day summer training in July in the Netherlands or at the Focusing Institute Summer School in New York in August: [www.focusingn.org/fiss](http://www.focusingn.org/fiss)*

*If you have any questions about Children Focusing or training, please contact me or look at my website: [www.ftcz.nl](http://www.ftcz.nl) (Also in English: click on the UK flag in the corner).*




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## Working with Clients on Business Success using Focusing

*By Sally Tadmor*

Each country has its unique style with Focusing, and this is what was interesting for me in the UK Focusing School. I was excited to meet the people who bring Focusing into schools, business and social work, and the group of people who combine Buddhism with Focusing. Thanks to all for a great experience!

My personal passion is how to use Focusing and

Presence for business success, especially a business like ours, the success of which means success for others, and then others in turn... Here is some of the material from my workshop at the Focusing School, and more:

Clients want to move their business forward (and so do we...). What they need in order to succeed is:



1. A clear understanding of their business:
  - their market
  - their passion
  - what would be profitable and otherwise good for them to be offering
2. An action plan:
  - pricing
  - marketing ways
  - how to manage their time and budget
3. A good emotional state. To be:
  - relaxed and confident
  - emotionally available for people, able to communicate
  - able to concentrate on their marketing and professional tasks
4. Ongoing support to maintain all of these.

### What can we do for them?

The third part is the easiest for us. We can support them emotionally using Focusing, coaching, bodywork or therapy. We need to make sure our support is deep enough to be effective, but not so deep as to be disturbing and bring up huge childhood issues that will overwhelm them and hinder them in maintaining their work.

The first and second parts, understanding their market and building action plans, require study, reading, consulting with colleagues, trial and error and persistence in all of these. We can:

- Support them emotionally with these
- Share our knowledge and experience, if we have some
- Make sure they have action plans for this learning process
- Support them in checking, updating and carrying forward of their plans

And I wouldn't underestimate the importance of just talking over what their plans are. What will they do this week? What worked last week? What didn't? What are the challenges? Sometimes going over details helps create clarity, which is important.

The fourth part – creating support – may be the most overlooked of all. Support is not only emotional; it is not only Focusing. Support is also:

- Habits (writing, reading, meeting people)
- Obligations (promises made to others push us forward)
- Regular professional talks, meetings or courses
- Physical habits such as physical activity,

nutrition and sleep

- Emotional environment (relationships, personal activities)

So our job with support is to support them to create enough support in their lives :).

### What can we do for ourselves?

I suggest setting up one or two weekly Focusing partnerships that are dedicated to your business. In them you can work on everything that comes up, according to these guidelines. You can Focus on:

- What you plan to do. Imagine yourself doing it, and see what comes.
- Successes: What worked well, and worked out, and how does that feel?
- Challenges: What don't you know how to do? What are you avoiding? What don't you like?
- Ideas: What words are coming? How do they feel?
- Your professional material. Courses you build. Clients and how they are doing. Marketing material. What are the words for these and how does that feel, and what new words come?

Maybe your Focusing sessions will sometimes be more talkative. Maybe you would like to use something that is not exactly Focusing but close to it, such as:

- Thinking at the Edge (or some simplified version of it)
- Peter Afford's Dialoguing on the Felt Sense, which is a combination of Focusing and conversation
- Robert Lee's Macroshifting
- my Tiger Focusing, which is Focusing with actively finding feelings of lightness, wanting and power
- some other technique that you like and that helps you
- or even just a conversation with your Focusing partner

Hope this helps! Good luck :).



*Sally Tadmor is a Focusing Coordinator-in-Training. She has been a life coach and business coach for seventeen years. She has an MSc in Computer Science and a BSc in Physics. She teaches Focusing, time management and marketing online and in the US, Europe and Israel.*

# An Experience of the Focusing School

By Carolann Samuels

The UK Focusing School was, I found, an unfolding as well as instructive (as you might anticipate a 'school' to be!).

We were invited to choose one course to follow each morning, and dip into others for the afternoons. Not easy, with such a broad selection.

I chose Barbara McGavin's From Spark to Beacon as my morning course, and she led us sensitively through five mornings of exploration of how to unfold our own creativity, making the process unique for each of us. Sometimes we touched areas that were sensitive, elusive or emotional, and as well there were joyous revelations.

Barbara said, "There's a moment when something shifts and gets a life of its own". And that's how it is with Focusing and me. As soon as I heard about the Focusing School something in me (...) knew that I wanted to be there, even though I'd been Focusing for only a couple of months then.



I've come late to Focusing, and again, using Barbara's words, I'm finding it's "giving things a voice that haven't had a voice", and oh, how happy these things are for that gift. I was struck by an article by Sandy Gee in an earlier BFA newsletter, where she talks about "knowing that you are needed, just as you are". As a newcomer to Focusing, I was unaware of what to expect at the School. I expected to feel a novice, and maybe a bit of an outsider. However, I am very pleased to report that I did feel that my presence was needed 'just as I was': inexperienced, naïve and curious. And I came away a little more experienced

and less naïve, and still just as curious.

The list of participants included people from fourteen countries. Fourteen! Impressive for any organisation especially for one so little known, and for the distance some people travelled – from Europe, Scandinavia, the United States and even Japan.

And of course, one of the joys of any gathering like this is the other people you encounter; meeting up again with some, forging new friendships with others – all interested in Focusing, and with a wide variety of other backgrounds and interests.

After one of our mornings with Barbara, she invited us to spot something before the next session that would be a spark for each of us. Mine was a flash of blue above the nearby stream – a kingfisher. I felt the kingfisher, a symbol of peace and abundance, will be my symbol of the 2014 Focusing School – I wonder what yours is.

Thank you to all organisers and course leaders – many of you gave your time and resources for modest remuneration, or even for free. And thank you to everyone who Focused and Listened with me. What a generous bunch you are! See you all at the next School.

Carolann Samuels

*I'm working with Kay Hoffmann on the very interesting journey towards becoming a Focusing Practitioner. Yoga has long been part of my life, and I teach classes and workshops, and have trained lots of the yoga teachers in my area. In contrast, I'm also a Business Manager for a local GP surgery, setting up clinics and writing bids for more funds for more services whenever money becomes available! And I like to write.*

*c.samuels@cooptel.net www.carolannsamuels.co.uk*





# From Spark to Beacon

By Nico Verschoor

I participated in Barbara McGavin's course From Spark to Beacon. Right now I am at home remodelling my house and therefore I could not find the handout from Barbara to serve as a guide for this writing. I would, however, like to share with you my experience because that experience for me was a special one.

Overall it is about small moments that can pass by before you even know. You can have a sensation, an experience, a feeling or a 'not knowing yet'. It is often the case that you recognize this moment later on as: Oh, yes... I had this feeling in my stomach when I encountered that person, or what kind of flowers would fit best in my garden, or is there something with this sentence...? If you think/sense about it afterwards... or Focus on it... then it often becomes brighter. This is called a 'Spark' by Barbara. This Spark can lead to a 'Beacon' from which you can have other experiences; it is an ongoing process. It can fit with its own creative process, such as painting or poetry, but also with experiences with others.

I had already been confused for a day or two about how to fit this all together... How could I recognize the experience of a Spark in my own life? I'm creative, I like to sing and I like to work on further designs for my garden, but where was that Spark that could lead to a Beacon???

I went to England with sad feelings and noticed that those sad feelings were always there during those days. We had had our dog, Yalla (Arabic for 'hurry up'), put to sleep after twelve-and-a-half years of being with us. Her condition was getting worse and we had known for a long time that we would lose her as our companion. Our experience was that when the time came, this time would be self-evident.

One morning we (Rene and I) walked Yalla at the Oosterschelde. We live on a peninsula and the Oosterschelde is a protected area. Yalla always found it very pleasant to be with us there; she was always happy. She loved the water and the smells of an unspoilt, quiet area. Yalla was already short of breath and there was no treatment for it. That morning she was suddenly so short of breath that she was very anxious. Her eyes were very anxious and she looked at us for assistance. On the way

home we were crying in the car and decided to put her to sleep on the same day. That sleep was good; it was emotional and confrontational for us... she could no longer bear her life and we wanted to spare her further pain and anxiety. After her 'falling asleep', we had her cremated and her ashes were with us at the table in our living room, along with a picture of her. Every day we burned a candle for her until we knew the time had come when it was no longer needed.

During the course with Barbara my feelings were determined by the loss of Yalla. It became clear to me that a Spark is not always a creative process and doesn't have to be active, like adjusting a sentence in a poem or putting more paint on a painting, but it can also be an experience. In this case, a very sad experience of the loss of someone you love. My experience deepened even more because I got clear, by sharing my loss with other participants, that we would scatter Yalla in the water of the Oosterschelde. That was my Beacon! Strangely enough, the experience of loss can also be a creative process. The loss was my Spark feeling and the scattering of Yalla is a Beacon.

On December 31, just before New Year, we scattered the remains of Yalla in the water of the Oosterschelde. It was a beautiful sunny day and Yalla has found her final resting place. It has become her and my Beacon.

*Nico Verschoor*

*I live in the Netherlands and work with people who are mentally and physical ill. I love my job as a Social Worker and Social Medical Nurse and love to work with people I can support, in an everyday way, to shift their perspective on their situation. I combine life-experience and Focusing to make something that is greater than the sum of its parts.*



*This photo was taken on our last holiday with Yalla in Drente in the North East of the Netherlands.*

# Focusing and Walking, Writing and Enjoying Wayside Flowers

By Pamela Carr

The 2014 Focusing School at Belsey Bridge, Ditchingham in Norfolk offered many opportunities to explore Focusing with others and to enjoy activities and sharing, indoors and out. Here are just some of my remembrances...

One afternoon I set out with a Focusing partner and for the first time I experienced Focusing and Walking. We agreed on timings and that one of us would Focus on the way out, then be a listener to the other on the way back. I remember the uncertainty about how it might work and the excitement and joy that came with the empowerment I was feeling. As the Focuser I was being present with my inner experience AND I could choose which direction to walk, how fast or slow, I could stop, turn around, listen to sounds, look at the views and have the attentive and caring company from my partner too. I was moving and living into my process. There seemed to be so much space and air and light, so much support and freedom that my awareness could zigzag easily from my theme, to inner experience, to outer and back again. And some natural pauses arose when my body stopped and stood still and I just sensed into my experience of the moment. This was very different to how I've usually done Focusing and I'm appreciating my partner for his willingness to explore and share another way.

In the past I've been interested in creative writing, so I jumped at the group opportunity Susan Jordan was offering: to explore Focusing and Writing. She led us through a process with spaces to pause, to settle and to sense, to write, read, reflect, to share... This was another rich experience, of the beauty of my own creative process and the diversity and depth of others' sharing. 'The Names of Things' was the theme we were given for a free-writing exercise. It helped me make contact with two parts, a fast one, which was feeling excited and wanting to start writing, and a slow one that was feeling unsure. After a while these words tumbled onto my page:

*...it can play all day with names and things, and things  
and names  
and call things things and call names names –  
and have fun.*



*It's a game, playing with words, kicking them like a ball around a grassy field, football – wordball, yes, there's one in the goal.*

*It wants to make its own names for things – wordball*

*A lovely feeling of making a new word,  
a new thing now, a new word for a new thing.  
Just writing and enjoying the process...*

Thanks again to Susan and the others for creating and holding the Focusing space for our writing and sharing.

On another walk I was amazed to discover several species of wild flowers growing beside the road. They were huddled in hedges, peeping through tall grasses and balancing between seed heads and red berries – continuing to bloom into the late autumn and just doing what flowers do. I had fun Focusing and focusing and recorded their colourful faces, and recently had more fun creating a collage with my pictures.

My heartfelt thanks go to the organisers, teachers and everyone who shared and contributed in so many ways to my experience of a stimulating, nourishing and enjoyable gathering.

*Pamela Carr: I trained with Ann Weiser Cornell and Barbara McGavin. As a Certified Focusing Practitioner and Teacher*



*I offer one-to-one and group Focusing opportunities for people who are interested in Creativity, Wellbeing and Personal Growth. I love to work in person and online to help others access Focusing sessions and Focusing training. You can contact me at [focusingforall@aol.com](mailto:focusingforall@aol.com) and read more at [www.focusingforall.com](http://www.focusingforall.com).*

# Out of the Woods

By Sarah Bean

For months before the Focusing School I had been feeling a long way away and not fully present. Every time I Focused, in the weeks before and at the School, two parts of me needed attention, one desperate to be seen, heard and understood and another terrified of being seen and almost invisible. I couldn't give them what they needed when I was alone but there were Focusers there who could be with those parts and, on the last day, accompanied by others in the Meditative Listening group, those previously exiled parts (actually one very young part) spoke and were understood.

Since the Focusing School three of us who met in the Meditative Listening group, all with very young parts who need attention, have continued to meet. Today, with them, I Focused on finding the words to express my journey out of exile. I started by remembering that years ago, about the same time as I learned to Focus, I began to get to know two parts of me, one I called the Quiet Child and the other the Caged Animal (an angry teenager). When I read Ann Weiser Cornell's *The Radical Acceptance of Everything*, I realised I had an exiled part (then a dog). Shortly afterwards, during a Treasure Maps to the Soul retreat, I met my exiled part, actually a frightened baby. That baby was both Quiet Child and Caged Animal.

When I Focused today I started with the dog in exile in the woods. It was dark and cold deep in the coniferous woods, and the dog was completely lost and unable to see herself or move. Even breathing was difficult. When I asked what she needed the answer came, with a smile, that she needed another dog to come into the woods and find her and accompany her out

into the sunshine. With this image came one of me, as a small child, sitting on the floor with the dog by the window in the sun. I find it difficult to see myself, as a child, without the dog, and wonder if I could only be present with her there and retreated into the woods whenever I was alone. The woods were like a cage; I couldn't leave unless I was accompanied by the dog or a person who could be with me. The dog seems to go out in front of me and knows, before I am aware of it, whether she feels welcome and safe and can stay with me and be seen or, if she is afraid, disappear back into the woods, where the rest of me follows. At the end of my Focusing I said (with a smile), "my baby is whole when she's a dog". No wonder I am fearless when in the company of a baby or a dog!

My two new Focusing partners and other people at the Focusing School met me where I was and have stayed with me enabling me to stay out of the woods for longer and to grow more whole.

Sarah Bean

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# A View from the Nineties

By Carmel Heaney

When I was asked to contribute to the BFA Newsletter my first reaction was that I had nothing special to say, except that I had found the Focusing School supportive generally and the workshops helpful. On reflection it occurred to me that, at ninety years of age, I could share my experience of extreme old age

with younger folk, some of whom may be privileged to reach that state in the future.

While I cannot claim to have had any Damascus moment of revelation during the School, I did experience an overall affirmation of my direction in



what remains of life and a sense of being brought forward, especially during the one-to-one sessions with my Focusing partner, Ulla-Stina Johansson.

In my working life I had a demanding career, at one time in radio broadcasting, later in international affairs. It was a happy and fulfilling existence, in tandem with marriage to a loving husband, who died thirty-five years ago.

I first turned to Focusing a few years later at a time when I was experiencing difficulties in relationships within my extended family. The process taught me a new self-knowledge and, in hindsight, revealed aspects of my personality that had given rise to conflicts during my working life.

In recent years such problems have arisen only infrequently. This is partly because, in retirement and with a disability (I am legally blind), I no longer find myself in contact with others in situations which breed disagreement and personality conflicts. King Lear in his prison expressed this:

*...so we'll live  
...and hear poor rogues  
Talk of court news; and we'll talk with them too, -  
Who loses and who wins; who's in, who's out; - ...*

That I am far from the sublime self-acceptance of the dying Lear is shown in the following extract from the personal journal in which I record my search for meaning and wellbeing:

*I have a continual nagging sense that I should be 'doing something' leading to some achievement. I have no function in the 'real' world. I am conscious of how dependent I am - even though I live an independent life - on all the competent people around me who are running the affairs of daily life.  
What should I do? Should I - can I - do anything?*

As an antidote to the above, recently I have been gifted from time to time with an insight into my worth as a unique human being, separate from any effort or achievement. This is the fruit of the practice of meditation and mindfulness, and the guidance of wise spiritual teachers of many traditions, both in person and through their writings. I feel supported in this understanding by the findings of contemporary DNA science.

In abandoning dream fancies of desired achievements, I at the same time experience

authentic living. To wake in the morning and share the breath of life with the ash tree outside my window; to follow the sun's progress and be aware of the lives it touches; to make myself a cup of tea: such experiences are now significant in a way they never were in the days when I thought everything depended on me.

The American jurist-philosopher Richard Dworkin relates immortality to the creative element in doing ordinary things well. Those who never reach high achievement can still experience "the song within". Life itself is art.

What I would like to convey to others is the emphasis in 'growing' into old age. Yes, there is decline but what the poet George Herbert calls "the mother-root" is still there.

*...and now in age I bud again.*

The good news for all is that you don't necessarily have to wait to be old to reach an accommodation with life. Shakespeare, who died in middle age, showed a profound understanding of old age in *King Lear*. And how mysterious that Byron, who died young, could leave us the poem *So We'll Go No More a-Roving*.

I sometimes think that I was gifted with long life because I am a slow learner!

*Carmel Heaney lives in Dublin and enjoys reading, writing, hill-walking, travel and the company of friends. She is retired from the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs and served as a diplomat in the United States and at the United Nations in New York and Geneva.*



## BFA News

### From the New Sofa

By Susan Jordan and Rob Foxcroft

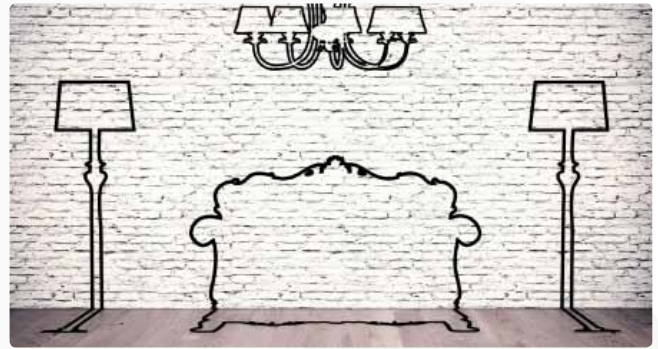
At the AGM in November 2014 Jerry Conway and Fiona Parr, our much-appreciated Sofapersons, stood down (or should that be stood up?) from the Sofa, having taken care of BFA matters for the past two years and ensured that the decisions made at the AGM were carried forward. They have both in their different ways been a great support to BFA members and have seen through a number of projects, including the transformation of the old BFTA from an unincorporated association into the new BFA Community Interest Company. Thanks particularly to Jerry for all his hard work on this, and to both Jerry and Fiona for all that they have contributed to BFA.

As Fiona and Jerry hand over their work, we as new Sofapersons are seeing BFA move on in a number of ways. A working group has been looking into the possibility of widening the membership, another group has been considering updating the website and a working party, led by Peter Afford, is busy planning the first International Focusing Conference to be held in the UK. See Peter's update below for more details.

We hope very much that members of BFA will continue to be involved as actively as possible and to express their views. Thanks to our colour-coded response system (green for yes, red for no, and much more), people don't immediately have to vote for or against a proposal but, in a Focusing way, can ask for clarification or listening or simply a pause. We will listen as openly as we can and bring things together when that is needed. We look forward to hearing from you all and supporting BFA as it grows and develops.

You are very welcome to contact the Sofa about anything you wish to bring to our notice. Our email addresses are [susanjord@gmail.com](mailto:susanjord@gmail.com) and [rob@robfoxcroft.com](mailto:rob@robfoxcroft.com).

Susan Jordan and Rob Foxcroft



And now you have it in verse from Rob:

### A Word from the New Sofa

*Although we are sat on a Sofa,  
Neither Susan nor Rob is a lofa,  
For our hearts are ablaze  
As our minds get to graze  
On the hundreds of tasks we must gofa.*

*And first thing we have to thank Jerry  
For being exceedingly merry,  
And to thank dear Fiona  
Whose shining persona  
Has kept us unfailingly cheery.*

*We hope that you'll feel no disquiet  
If we seem to be less of a riet  
Than the outgoing pair  
With their CIC flair  
And the sales talk that got us to biet.*

*We hope you will all come to Purley  
And will send your deposits quite urley,  
For we all need to meet  
Where the meadows are sweet,  
To converse where there's no hurley-burley.*

*And it may be you'd just like to natter,  
Or to whisper a serious matter  
In the ears of the two  
Who are waiting for you  
And will happily welcome your chatter.*

*Now this is the end of our singing,  
An electrical miracle winging  
Its way to your screen,  
And we're really quite keen  
To hear both of our telephones ringing.*

Rob Foxcroft

# 2016 International Focusing Conference Update

By Peter Afford

It's under 18 months to go till we host the International Conference at Robinson College, Cambridge! The organising committee (Manjudeva Gill, Kay Hoffmann, Jerry Conway, Locana English and myself) are starting to plan what needs to be done, and beginning to feel a little excited. The main task just now is to get a website together in time for this year's conference in Seattle in July, so we can tempt focusers from around the world to make plans to come to England a year later – and appear well-organised. We are thinking of a conference theme, and collecting good ideas such as Focusing-oriented punting trips, and having some Shakespeare and some Gilbert and Sullivan in the entertainment time.

Some of you have booked in advance so that we have a pot of money to fund our early expenses,

before the conference fees start to roll in next year – many thanks. There's some budgeting to be done if you want to attend, but there will be ways of attending at reduced rates: by joining the army of helpers that will be needed, by coming as a 'day delegate' and staying with a friend in Cambridge or nearby, or by bringing your tent and camping! More details in due course...



Peter Afford

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## Members' Corner

### Jutika Healy

I got involved in Buddhism when I was in my early twenties and threw myself into living and working with other Buddhists, having found a context where I could live out the values that were most important to me with other people. However, with my enthusiasm there was also a highly critical part that didn't trust or value my own experience and had a strong idea of what I should be thinking or feeling, so meditation often became a battleground.

My sister died of cancer when I was in my mid-thirties, and her death was a catalyst for my Buddhist practice as I knew it to fall apart. Every time I meditated I got a headache. I couldn't carry on in the usual way. Meeting Barbara McGavin in 2004 and learning Focusing with

her brought about the change that was needed. It was as simple (and as difficult) as learning to be interested in what my actual experience is without fixing it. This learning to listen to myself has had a huge impact on my life, allowing change to come from below rather than trying to impose it from above, so to speak.

Manju took a chance on me and asked me to support a Focusing retreat with him. We have worked well together for the last eight years, weaving Focusing, meditation, art and ritual in a retreat context. I've had moments of wonder and deep connection where I've really felt like this is exactly what I'm on earth to do.

I moved back to Ireland nearly three years ago



after twenty-five years in the UK. It has been a very turbulent time, much more than I anticipated, and yet I know it's the right move. Already a lot of riches have been revealed by the move. There is a sense of more to come, if I can stay with the emotional turbulence. I recently launched my website to promote myself as a teacher and practitioner and almost instantly had the desire to withdraw into my shell and never teach Focusing again! I'm sure that will change in time and I will find my feet in my home country and begin to share this beautiful, natural, deep, life-enhancing practice with others.

*Jutika Siobhan Healy lives in the beautiful Beara Peninsula in West Cork. She does one-to-one Focusing on Skype and is available to travel in Ireland to teach Focusing or have small groups come to Beara to learn there. Her web site is [www.focusingupport.com](http://www.focusingupport.com)*



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Thank you for reading our fifth issue.