



British Focusing Association NEWSLETTER

Issue 24: Spring 2024



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From the Editor

Gordon Adam



This newsletter contains two much longer than usual features. The first is a 'photo-retrospective' of the International Focusing Conference in Cambridge in 2016, and the second is the first part of the edited transcript of Gendlin's plenary address at the first international 'Client-centred and Experiential Psychotherapy' conference in Leuven (Belgium) in 1988, titled 'The Small Steps of the Therapy Process'.

The first of these, the conference retrospective, I offer as a testament to the power of Focusing community—something that is very close to my heart—and this conference has been the most powerful manifestation of Focusing community which I've experienced to date! I also wanted some of the hundreds of photos from that event to reach the light of day.

The second major inclusion, Gendlin's 'Small Steps', I decided to publish (in two parts), when I realised that many Focusers, although they know some of the quotes from it, have never actually read it! This is a serious omission, I think, as this piece more wonderfully conveys the practical essence of Focusing than any other text that I know of. It is less 'dense' and more practical and accessible than the 'A Process Model'.

Other features in this issue include: an article on 'felt-sensing' with big issues such as climate change by Peter Afford; the first account I've read of Focusing as a navigational aid through the 'messy terrain of menopause' by Marion Stumpe; a reminder that our 'physical body' will let us know what it needs if we listen to it, by Peter Gill; a practitioner profile by super-mum Harriet Brown; and finally a review by Amona Buechler of Peter Gill's about to be published book 'The Way of Curiosity'.

I have enjoyed putting this newsletter together, and I hope that you enjoy reading it and looking at the photos!

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Listening to What My 'Physical Body' Needs

By Peter Gill

Usually when we talk about 'the body' in Focusing, we don't mean it in a very literal way, it more indicates or points to the whole of our being – to all of our knowing below our usual conscious awareness. But there are times when the actual physical body speaks – how then might we enquire and ask it what it needs?

I've tried this many times over the months and years, when I have been ill or struggling with some kind of ailment. I've tuned into my physical body and enquired in a Focusing way. What often came back was a very clear and direct answer. It seems to have a matter-of-fact quality. I'll share a recent example: over the last nine months I've stopped eating gluten for health reasons, but occasionally I've been in situations where that hasn't been easy to maintain. On this occasion, I was travelling and everything available was wheat-based... so when I checked with my body there was a very clear but kind "no." What struck me most was how non-judgmental it was. There were no should or shouldn't words around it, it was just a simple "no," or "that's not what I need" (It doesn't have literal words by the way). On other occasions, it might show me what it needs, through images.

In the example above, I was so hungry, I chose to eat what was available, kind of overriding the no, but my body let me know that it was glad I listened. Sometimes I override it when I'm identified with a part! My body says no to the huge bag of popcorn, but something in me keeps eating it! For me the first important step is just to notice the message – that is already a big step. If we do hear some harsh messages about what we are eating or doing with our body, my experience has taught me that these messages come from parts. Parts that might be scared, or ashamed or longing.

Here is what I know... **deeper wisdom speaks with kindness.**

Our human bodies are extraordinary in how they can sense what brings us health and well-being, after all, we have inherited millions of years worth of evolution of doing just this. Even our skin can sense environments that are health giving. So why not check in with it around our physical well-being?

***Peter Gill** became a Focusing teacher in 2005 and is fully qualified with the British Focusing Association (BFA) and the Focusing Institute in New York. He has trained with Ann Weiser Cornell in Inner Relationship Focusing in the USA, and Peter Afford in the UK. Peter is a BFA mentor and Focusing Institute Coordinator offering practitioner and teacher training. He is also qualified in Somatic Experiencing (SE). More recently he has been offering workshops in nature connection. Peter lives in Stroud, Gloucestershire.*

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The Felt Sense: a Compass for Navigating Climate Change

By Peter Afford



Arctic Burning (Photo by Daryl Pederson)

How do you feel about climate change? Anxious, overwhelmed, or frustratingly powerless to do anything about it?

It's a perplexing issue. Flying less, eating less meat, putting solar panels on the roof may ease our conscience, but makes no difference to atmospheric CO₂ levels. Abandoning fossil fuels is essential but our world is built around them and causing chaos is unwise. And even if CO₂ emissions were stopped, there would be methane emissions to worry about...

So, do we make radical changes to how we live? Become climate activists? Or stop worrying because we'll be dead before things get really bad? And why do many discussions about climate change deteriorate into arguments about what to do – “we must do X”, “no, Y is more important”?

The felt sense has been a reliable guide for me in all sorts of situations, from trusting my feelings in my therapy room to making judgement calls when skippering yachts. Why not my guide with climate change then? Staying anchored to it, which often means returning to it when I've lost touch, keeps my head above water. It helps me find a path through an endless stream of thoughts about the subject, and all the feelings they generate. I can stay at least a little bit sane.

The longer I've lived with Focusing, the more I've come to value the felt sense. Not everyone is going to learn Focusing, but they *can* learn about the felt sense. It's a potential reference point for anyone about anything, both for *what* is talked about and *how* the talking happens. By this I mean natural focusing, also called felt sensing or pausing. Anyone can do it, especially when we listen and talk to them from our own felt sense. It enables people to step back and weigh up the whole of a complex topic such as climate change.

A Workshop on the Felt Sense of Climate Change

Motivated to do something, I created a new workshop which I've now run twice. I worried that I was stretching the felt sense idea so far that I would lose people. I needn't have worried. The two small groups both became enthusiastically engaged, reflecting on their understanding of the felt sense and on their own engagement with climate change.

I've called it 'Facing the Future with the Felt Sense', and it could be about any issue in the public domain. But I've made climate change the theme – it's the big one.

Felt Sense Refresh

We begin the workshop by reflecting on our experience of the felt sense – a lively discussion always follows. As people voice their thoughts, I weave in some particular points.

The felt sense is an inner place where we can listen to each other, absorb new information, and allow a feeling for the whole of a situation, however complex, to emerge. On topics in the public domain, we need to feed our felt sense with facts.

The felt sense can have *depth*, as happens in Focusing sessions when there's time and eyes may be closed. And it can have *breadth*, as in the range of topics we can reflect on, even briefly, including ones in the public domain.

Felt senses connect us not only with ourselves but also with others: listening to ourselves implies listen-

ing to others. And with the natural world: notice what's happening in nature around you and you can feel yourself changing.

The felt sense can be explained philosophically and poetically, but neuroscience brings extra clarity. It's a natural function of our right hemisphere: the brain's perception of something as a whole, as distinct from its grasping of one aspect of it which our left hemisphere does. Our right hemisphere has a feeling for what we're discussing because its job is to keep our body – heart, breathing, and so forth – aligned with what we're doing (talking or listening, for example), and because it maps the dynamic changes in the body. We lean into it to find our felt sense.

Recognising this helps us to see that the felt sense is *potentially* available to anyone at any moment – without having to learn steps, a technique, even bodily attention. Then we can really go places with the idea.

Also... most people seem to have heard of polyvagal theory these days. Listening to the felt sense means staying in the safety state of social engagement, and keeping other right hemisphere functions, such as empathy and sensitivity, available. Otherwise, safety gives way to danger as this hemisphere goes into fight-flight arousal, squashing the felt sense, and leading to heated arguments. When a group starts to feel unsafe, social engagement breaks down, people argue or walk out, and the hemispheric balance which enables natural focusing shifts into a left hemisphere bias towards anger.

Felt Sense Approaches to Group Discussion

In the workshop, we try some felt-sense-friendly ways to run group discussions on public topics like climate change.

Appreciative enquiry

Similar to a small group Focusing round, but with a given topic. People take turns to be the speaker, the listener, and the observer who writes down what the speaker says. Group discussion afterwards allows points to be shared with everyone, and key ones are written up.

Felt sense dialogue

An approach that borrows from 'Bohm dialogue' started by the British physicist David Bohm, which he described as "an enquiry into the movement of feeling and of thought". The dialogue has a starting point but no specific goal, and members build on each other's ideas. A speaking stick maintains the discipline of one person speaking at a time; it can be in the centre of the circle to be picked up so as to encourage movement and pauses. The discussion can start with everyone speaking in turn, then individuals can speak when they feel moved to.

This approach is good for topics that evoke strong feelings. I tried it at last year's EFA meeting in Bassano around geopolitics and the Israel/Palestine conflict. Each person spoke reflectively and no one reacted impulsively. This political elephant in the room was aired rather than ignored.

Dynamic facilitation

This embraces a number of practices, but the one I've experienced involves group discussion where key points are separated into four categories and written up on different flipcharts or whiteboards. The website suggests data, concerns, problems, and solutions, but the headings I prefer are feelings, facts, disagreements, and action steps. It helps avoid the discussion becoming entangled and bogged down.

No doubt there are many other ways to 'felt-sensitise' (hah! new word!) group discussions.

The Felt Sense Zone

We can also think about the sort of space which supports people to check in with their felt sense. A space where we can float ideas, negotiate, compromise, and laugh together. A space where people can manage strong emotions, resolve disagreements, and avoid personal criticism. Focusers used to participating in Focusing meetings get good at staying in the felt sense zone.

Some behaviours encourage the felt sense, others block it. For example, friendliness instead of hostility. Social engagement instead of anxiety. Pausing rather than rushing. Reflecting rather than reacting. Allowing solutions to problems to emerge rather than *trying* to solve them. Being willing to be wrong instead of having to be right. Making your case rather than just saying what you feel is right, or chanting slogans. Being succinct rather than rambling on and on.

Other things help when discussing climate change. Not shaming others for doing things you think they shouldn't, such as flying. Not allowing arguments over relatively minor points to get so heated that you fall out. Not pressuring everyone in the group to join in a course of action that individuals can carry out independently. I recently attended a climate change discussion with Greta Thunberg and other young activists which ended with the audience being corralled into chanting about an oilfield – it felt completely mindless!

Conclusion

The felt sense may not save us from the perils of climate change, but it can help us to respond sensibly to them: to feel our feelings while thinking straight; to avoid drowning in overwhelm without burying our heads in the sand; to find a balance amidst the moral dilemmas of putting the heating on, driving a car, travelling abroad, and so forth. And to make a creative space for adaptations to the unwelcome changes heading our way to emerge.

And a final, simple thing: let's talk about climate change. The more we avoid the subject, the less the felt sense can work on it.



***Peter Afford** has been practicing and teaching Focusing for many years. He is a coordinator for the International Focusing Institute and a founder member of the British Focusing Association. A now-retired therapist after 30 years in private practice, he is the author of 'Therapy in the Age of Neuroscience' (Routledge 2020). Discombobulated and aghast at what we are doing to our planet, he is exploring how the felt sense can be a reference point for everyone in addressing climate change.*

More at focusing.co.uk/felt-sense-notes

Focusing Camp 2024

Noah's Ark Children's Venture,
Macaroni Wood, Eastleach,
Cirencester GL7 3NF
14th - 18th August



A wonderful opportunity for Focusers and their families to get together to focus, have fun and socialise in a relaxed and natural setting. Everyone is welcome to join the 'Focusing Camp Tribe'!

On offer are two Focusing sessions each day, along with workshops, group sharing, yoga, qigong, meditation, walking, playing games, singing, music, dancing, and more. You decide what activities you take part in!

Activities will be mainly outdoors or under canvas. Folk can gather round a camp fire each evening, weather permitting.

Indoor facilities include a variety of meeting spaces, a dining room, lounges, a kitchen, bedrooms and bathrooms. Campers have access to indoor facilities. Self-serve breakfasts, a vegetarian lunch and dinner are provided.

This is a peer-led community camp for up to 40 people. All participants co-create content that fills the daily structure of activities. Bring along your ideas, decorations, and any useful campsite accessories, and be prepared to help with collecting wood, carrying water, washing up and other fun campsite jobs.

For any enquiries about the camp, please contact us at:

focusingcamp@gmail.com

One of the organising team will get back to you: Helen, Gordon, Claire, Ann, Harriet, Paula and Anna.

For tickets, visit or scan the QR code:

<https://forms.gle/JWZkijEeW4F6p1W7A>

We kick off with a pre-dinner gathering on Wed 14th, closing camp after lunch on Sunday 18th August.

Costs (per person, fully catered):

Camping/Campervans: **£210**

Shared bedroom: **£270**

Single bedroom: **£330**

Child/Teenager: **£60 (cost of food)**

Self catering: **£50 off**

Bookings accepted on completion of booking form and fee payment. Concessionary places, and two-part instalment payments available on application.



Focusing as the Guiding Star through the Messy Terrain of the Menopausal Transition

By Marion Stumpe

This article is partly a personal account, partly an application of in a particular context, and partly an idea for a themed Focusing workshop/course.

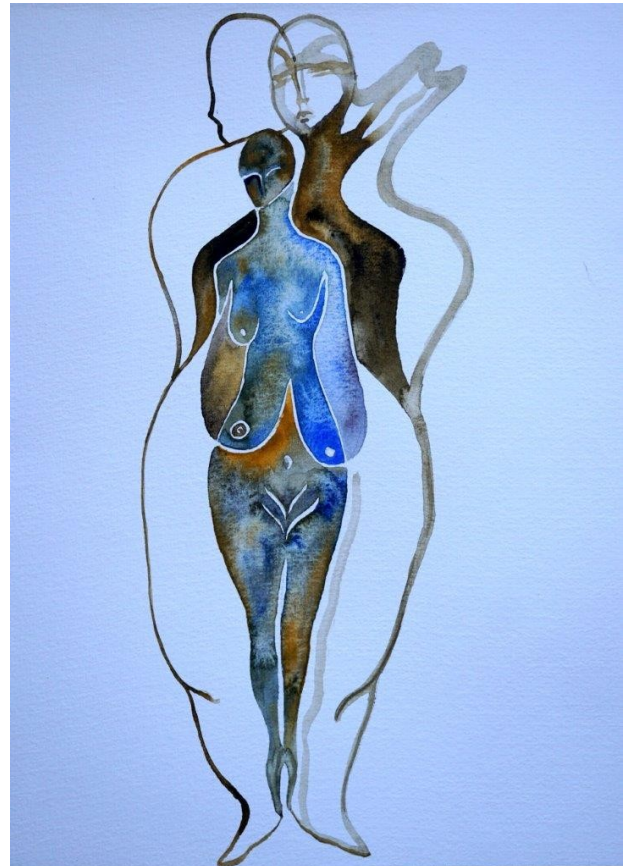
As I was naviFocusing gating this menopause transition over the past few years, I found myself at times in immensely dark and messy places; and I have no idea how I could have made it through to the other side without the **unwavering support of my Focusing practice** and the Presence of my Focusing companions.

When I talk about *menopause transition*, I mean the years around a woman's last bleed and the psycho-spiritual changes that women (people of female biological gender) experience as part of this transition. In my experience, it resembled an inner and outer death/rebirth process. Everything that had defined me and given stability, security and meaning to my life, fell away. It was a dismantling of all I had known and taken for granted, which left me in **a scary, empty in-between place of unknowing**. The old was gone – there was no going back – and the new was not yet in sight. Then slowly the reassembly began. The light returned, things felt more stable again and a new, humbler, softer, yet stronger and more self-assured version of me was born.

This transition is not for the faint-hearted; yet all women must face it on their life's journey. It presents us with the challenge to negotiate this **enormous inner dismantling/reassembling process** and its outer fallouts, whilst having to get on with our mundane everyday life and its responsibilities. Too often it is a juggling act that creates a crazy-making conflict.

Focusing, as a practice, an inner way of relating, and a guidance system, lends itself beautifully to navigate and negotiate the complexity of these challenges:

- Focusing, for me, was the **key to sanity** amid something that seemingly threatened to pull me into madness.
- As I had so little outer signs and markers to navigate this menopausal terrain, I came to rely on **inner guidance**.
- The inner space of grounded Presence gave me **respite** from the relentless nature of this dismantling/reassembling process and provided the fertile soil for this process to unfold. It brought gentleness and **spaciousness** to something that otherwise felt rather brutal.
- The Presence of my Focusing Companions enveloped me like a **warm cocoon**, where I felt **safely held** in all my messiness.
- The capacity to **trust the unknown** and the unfolding of such inner processes, which I had developed over years of Focusing, slowly, but surely delivered me to the other side of this dark, scary terrain.



Ageing (Painting by Ziva Zena) @ziva.zena

Focusing was my core pillar of guidance and support during this process, which first threw me into the darkest places and then delivered me sweetly home to myself and to a never known freedom and peace. The second, not less important, pillar, was the work/ teachings of Red School.

Red School,^[1] co-founded by Alexandra Pope and Sjanie Hugo Wurlitzer, is a community of women, which values Menstrual Cycle Awareness and *Conscious Menopause* as **a spiritual practice and way to awaken us to great power and wisdom**. Their work gives menopause meaning and dignity and illuminates its power and potential. It invites us to consciously undergo this 'rite of passage' and offers us a kind of roadmap. The five stages of menopause and the challenges and gifts of each stage, which Red School identified, can be **another steadfast guiding star** through this otherwise blurry terrain. In their menopause book 'Wise Power'^[2] they state a clear wish about the kind of support they hope to offer menopausal women:

"May this book be a kind guide; a loving witness inviting discernment and spaciousness and fiercely holding you to the dignity of your process. And instilling in you a deep trust in the Divine order of menopause."

Apart from the book, their work on menopause is delivered through their podcast^[3] and a six-week course.^[4]

Feeling beautifully held by the wider Red School community and by individual listening partnerships within this group of remarkable women, I suddenly had the strong impulse to share Focusing with that community and their work/teachings with the Focusing community. Focusing, I think, enhances the support that Red School offers to menopausal women and vice versa.

I have been sensing into what kind of offering I might want to bring to our Focusing community:

"Wouldn't it be wonderful if we had a Focusing space, where we can safely gather with other menopausal women, bring all our messiness, and together lean into this crazy-making transition?"

I am inspired to provide such a space for us: A six-week course "*Focusing and Menopause*". The course may be of interest to any woman who is in menopause, considers herself perimenopausal or is through it, but wanting to make sense of it. To guarantee a safe Focusing space, basic knowledge/ experience of the Focusing process and Companioning is desirable. During the six weeks we will come together in community to co-create a womb-like holding, witness our individual and collective story and explore the menopausal terrain together. Red School's menopause book 'Wise Power' will provide us with an outer container and guide. I won't be teaching a certified/ authorized version of their work; - instead, anything I'll be sharing comes from my personal experience of menopause and my deeply embodied understanding of the wisdom imparted in this book.

I would love to hear from anyone who has a resonance with what I am sharing here and/or has an interest in attending such a course. The course will run in September 2024.

References:

[1] Red School's [Website](#)

[2] Menopause Book "[Wise Power](#)"

[3] Red School's [Podcast](#)

[4] Menopause Course "[The Great Awakener](#)"

Artwork by Ziva Zena zivaazena@gmail.com

Marion Stumpe is a Focusing practitioner and trauma-informed wellbeing coach, who offers a Focusing-oriented healing space, where people can move beyond their challenges with ME/CFS, burnout, menopause, and womb twin loss. She has been teaching Focusing 1:1 for 10 years and now feels inspired to offer workshops and courses in English and German. Her current course 'Somatic Practices in support of ME/CFS recovery' is an extension of Wholebody Focusing. In Autumn 2024 she will run a six-week course 'Focusing and Menopause'. After almost 30 years in Scotland, Marion is about to relocate to her native Germany. She feels embedded in British Focusing and desires to continue nurturing these connections.

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The Cambridge International Focusing Conference (2016): A Photo Retrospective



Gordon Adam (editor)

I've wanted to do this for some years, as a sort of 'showcase' for the wonderful Cambridge Conference of eight years ago. There are two reasons for this: the first is that many of the lovely photos taken at the conference have never had public exposure; and the second is as a celebration of what has undoubtedly been the best Focusing event I've ever attended!

I have asked the five organisers of the conference if they would write their own 'retrospective' of what it was like to co-organise the biggest Focusing event that the UK has ever seen—with nearly 300 participants from around the world. I already wrote about my own experience of the conference in the post-conference ([November 2016](#)) issue of this newsletter. Here is a quote from what I wrote then:

"My various roles made me more visible, and that visibility somehow helped me to take on a new shape during the days of the conference – a bigger, more expansive, more open shape – and this change of shape was my own authentic response to being within this field of Focusers. The feeling of a change of shape corresponds with a sense of my heart also changing shape and becoming bigger and more open – there was a lot of love generated in our coming together and sharing of ourselves and our experiences."

Finally, it feels important to acknowledge that a number of people appearing in the these photos from eight years ago are no longer with us. This includes Bebe Simon, Bala Jaison, Vajrasara Rankin and perhaps others too.



Peter Afford

The fates, or the gods, or whoever runs things, smiled upon us the whole way. In 2013 the Swiss Focusers had a sell-out conference despite the Swiss franc, so the economics looked feasible. A dream team of Kay, Peter G (Manju as he then was), Locana, Jerry and myself got together to form the organising committee. Maymay discovered Focusing at just the right time to pitch for the role of administrator. Robinson College was probably the ideal venue in the whole of the UK, they took the bookings and payments which saved us a ton of hassle. Robinson was in Cambridge, so appealing to our international Focusing friends. And when it came to putting the programme together, the number of workshop proposals equalled the number of time slots available exactly!



From the first day, the weather was warm and sunny. The Cambridge Shakespeare festival players came to play for us in the college gardens one lunchtime. The Great Eastern Ceilidh Band came to get us dancing. Locana got her group of Cambridge singers to sing for us. We processed to Kings College hall for dinner one evening and the international guests felt like they were in a Harry Potter movie. And the Queen (of course!) came to open the opening ceremony, thanks to Susan Jordan's initiative.

It was months of stress, but stress can be very enjoyable when you work together in a happy team. There's no more friendly or responsive group of people than the worldwide Focusing community. A tidal wave of good energy carried us along – after all, Focusing is an open-minded, heart-centred practice, not a system of thought or an ideology. We got good at 'fast focusing on complex felt senses about complicated situations'!

I wouldn't have missed the stress of it for all the tea in China. It took me a long time to come down from the high of it.







Kay Hoffmann

When I recall the 2016 Cambridge Conference I am instantly flooded with rich imagery. Sunshine, heat, bright colours and colourful characters, and a time so busy that each day ran into the next with not much sleep in between. I don't think I've ever experienced a week of such varied activity and emotions – from the delight of watching pop-up Shakespeare performances in the gardens and the moving richness of a spectacular evening at Kings College, to hours spent wading through humdrum tasks like photocopying, locating lost property and moving chairs, all permeated with a great deal of laughter and wonderful camaraderie. It still astonishes me that BFA managed to pull off such a hugely successful event. It entailed three years of planning, a shed-load of work and

many a nail-biting moment but the outcome was well worth the effort. I feel deeply grateful for the experience and the friendships forged at the heart of it all.

My own main task was to recruit and allocate roles to an amazing crew of helpers, without whom the conference would've been mayhem. During the event there was precious little time each day for us to check in as a team, and yet everyone did the most astonishing job of keeping all the plates spinning with grace and good humour. Many of those helpers will be reading this newsletter so, once again, thank you!

Otherwise my time was largely spent striding purposefully around the venue in the role I love best – general dogsbody and ninja trouble-shooter. Oh and somehow, on the last evening, I appeared on stage as a very serious Focusing Practitioner together with her new student, Darth Vader. Peter Gill and I only had a few snatched moments during the event to plan our sketch and very nearly chickened -out several times. Little was I to know that this would be my three minutes of fame!





Peter Gill

The 2016 International Focusing Conference was one of the highlights of my Focusing life... one that still brings a warm glow when I remember it. The team was amazing, both our core team—Locana, Maymay, Jerry, Kay and our most excellent captain Peter Afford—and the broader team of Kay’s volunteers.

The whole thing was an experience of the essence of Focusing: listening; empathy; sensing for what feels right with complex decisions, as Peter A said. I would even say it was an experience of collective love, of belonging and community. We truly were blessed by good fortune in so many ways.

My own highs, aside from the above, were: the Shakespearian actors on the lawn; nearly fainting from heat exhaustion in a bear costume; and embodying Darth Vader on the last night... who finally learnt some Focusing after all these years being consumed by the dark side! Those and many, many moments of simply meeting people from the heart... in a way that only Focusing gatherings seems to make possible. I would do it all over again in a heartbeat.







Locana

Queen Elizabeth II, still in her heyday, attended our Focusing Conference. She arrived in great style as our final night's celebration began. It was an 'everybody welcome' show – but perhaps the audience of international Focusers had not quite expected her majesty the Queen to descend from her throne for the occasion? Granted, some people may have spotted her in disguise as a Focuser during the conference – but how lovely that she was able to get away from her royal duties to attend our conference, only revealing her presence on the final night. Perhaps her gracious appearance was not out of keeping with a conference where events were announced by a medieval Town Crier (and goodness, was it hot in that costume!)

We were blessed by wonderful sunshine, just as Peter had promised when he offered to host the event. The sunshine of the College gardens on our picnic day was one of my highlights. Not just because people could lounge warm and dry on the grass with their picnics. My delight was for wonderful groups of Shakespearean actors (drafted in from the Cambridge Shakespeare Festival) that appeared in the gardens here and there – scenes from the favourite plays enacted in little groves and glades. I raced around with bottled water for the actors, concerned about the heat. My most treasured memory is the moment I neared a little bridge over a stream, to see Henry V himself crying "Once more unto the breach...!" with such dramatic fervour and intensity.

My reminiscences show what a creative crew our team turned out to be. Speaking as someone used to being told "Oh dear, not *another* idea!" I felt more at home with my teammates than I have in any other setting: "Another crazy idea? Do tell!" Following Peter's suggestion of a Town Crier, it seemed only natural to suggest that a random bear should wander through our midst every now and then. "Did I just see... a *bear* go past?" "Yes you did!" (No doubt even hotter than the Town Crier!)

So thank you to everyone who came, and who joined in the spirit of craziness and fun which pervaded the event. We were so happy to open the Cambridge landscape up to you all – as the backdrop for the precious and inevitably moving journey of Focusing.



Maymay Knight

When I think back to the Focusing Conference in Cambridge, the overall sense that rings in me is of kindness. Focusing itself feels to me as a practice of deep kindness, and in the gathering of so many Focusers, it felt like that rippled out, connecting and flowing between all. I knew very few people in the community before the opportunity to be part of the organising team, but I felt no gap – just the joy of connection, sharing a place, time and experiences with like-minded others, and the enthusiastic happiness of being part of helping something lovely come into being.

While I'm here I'd like to sing out three cheers for Peter Afford. I wasn't there for the beginning of the idea or for the full journey and its growth, or the work of all the team, but at least while I was part of it all, Peter's commitment to the conference and the community felt like a steady foundation upon which so much could grow.

I might be remembering things through a fuzzy, warm filter – I'm sure we all must have had moments of tension or worry, but if so, for me they've all faded with time and the memory that stays is one I'm grateful for. Thank you to everyone who helped make it happen, and to all who came for the generosity of spirit that created so much magic!



Photo credits: Blanca Ruiz, Peter Gill, Gordon Adam, and others

The Most Important Thing

I am making a home inside myself. A shelter
of kindness where everything
is forgiven, everything allowed—a quiet patch
of sunlight to stretch out without hurry,
where all that has been banished
and buried is welcomed, spoken, listened to—released.

A fiercely friendly place I can claim as my very own.

I am throwing arms open
to the whole of myself—especially the fearful,
fault-finding, falling apart, unfinished parts, knowing
every seed and weed, every drop
of rain, has made the soil richer.

I will light a candle, pour a hot cup of tea, gather
around the warmth of my own blazing fire. I will howl
if I want to, knowing this flame can burn through
any perceived problem, any prescribed perfectionism,
any lying limitation, every heavy thing.

I am making a home inside myself
where grace blooms in grand and glorious
abundance, a shelter of kindness that grows
all the truest things.

I whisper hallelujah to the friendly
sky. Watch now as I burst into blossom.

Julia Fehrenbacher

The Small Steps of the Therapy Process: How They Come And How To Help Them Come (Part One*)

By Eugene Gendlin

The Primacy of Human Presence

I want to start with the most important thing I have to say: The essence of working with another person is to be present as a living being. And that is lucky, because if we had to be smart, or good, or mature, or wise, then we would probably be in trouble. But, what matters is not that. What matters is to be a human being with another human being, to recognize the other person as another being in there. Even if it is a cat or a bird, if you are trying to help a wounded bird, the first thing you have to know is that there is somebody in there, and that you have to wait for that "person," that being in there, to be in contact with you. That seems to me to be the most important thing.

So, when I sit down with someone, I take my troubles and feelings and I put them over here, on one side, close, because I might need them. I might want to go in there and see something. And I take all the things that I have learnt—client-centered therapy, reflection, Focusing, Gestalt, psychoanalytic concepts and everything else (I wish I had even more)—and I put them over here, on my other side, close. Then I am just here, with my eyes, and there is this other being. If they happen to look into my eyes, they will see that I am just a shaky being. I have to tolerate that. They may not look. But if they do, they will see that. They will see the slightly shy, slightly withdrawing, insecure existence that I am, I have learnt that that is ok. I don't need to be emotionally secure and firmly present. I just need to be present. There are no qualifications for the kind of person I must be. What is wanted for the big therapy process, the big development process, is a person who will be present. And so I have gradually become convinced that even I can be that. Even though I have my doubts when I am by myself, in some objective sense I know I am a person.

And then it is true that I reach in for a lot of different things. But when it gets murky and I am not sure I am connected to the other person, then I do not reach in for these things, then I must reflect that person's meanings and stay very close, so that the connection re-establishes. When the client is going around in circles and does not touch down inside, then I might offer a bit of how to do 'Focusing.' And if I see that there is too much Focusing, and a sort of 'internality' without enough energy coming out, then I might do something like 'Gestalt,' or I might just express myself, or I might do any number of things. I may express my feeling, but I always know that it is just my feeling. I do not know yet what is coming from that person. The minute something goes wrong I go right back to trying to sense this person; to what is happening, because this is another being, a different being.

When I think back to the struggle that Carl (Rogers) had with non-directive reflecting, always trying to drop whatever it was he had written, to re-establish the reality of the contact, I feel I am following in his footsteps. He dropped non-directive and he made it client-centered, he dropped client-centered and made it person-centered. First he had the method of reflecting, then he said: "No that's not it, it's the attitudes..." But we could take his three attitudes and get very technical about them. He would say: "No, no, it is person-centered."

So this is my way of saying that: Do not let Focusing, or reflecting, or anything else get in between. Do not use it as an in-between. Do not say: "I can stay here because I have my reflecting method, I have my ping-pong-paddle, so you cannot get me. You say something? You get it back." There is a sense that we are armed, you see. We have methods; we know Focusing; we have credentials; we have doctors. We have all this stuff and so it's easy for us to sit there with stuff in between. Do not let it be in between; put it out of the way. You can have at least as much courage as the client has. If not, I would be ashamed of

myself, with all the stuff that I have, if I still cannot really look when this person can. So I want to be there in that same way.

That—I think—is the first job we have. And on the question what we client-centered people need to do now – I think the first thing we need to do is to communicate that attitude. That is so necessary in a field that is becoming more and more 'professional,' which is to say useless and expensive.

Client-Centered Reflecting As A Baseline For Using Any Other Method

The second thing we need is to communicate the 'empathic response,' to communicate client-centered reflecting to those who use other methods, and we need to add many other methods to our own. I have always said that client-centered reflecting is a necessary baseline, for using other things. If you do not have that, then you cannot stay in touch with the person. If you do not constantly ask "Oh you did not like that?" or "Oh something funny happened now"; if you do not constantly stop and check, then using any other method is going to be bad. Certainly that includes Focusing. I mean, the minute it clouds up and the person looks like: "What are you doing to me?" you have to stop whatever you are doing and you have to say: "You did not like that?" "Something went wrong?" "What just happened?" And then you must listen. Also, as soon as something works, or the moment a step comes in the client, we must stop and listen responsively, just to that. The client-centered reflecting method is the central thing *with which* to use everything else.

But what I want to tell that you have not heard is that we must add client-centered listening to the other methods. It is unbelievable that after all these years, we have totally failed to communicate client-centered listening in such a way that the *other* practitioners could have it. How can they go so long without it? How can they be so stupid? But then, I realize, that is largely our fault. We have told them that if one does client-centered listening, then one does nothing else, so, of course, they cannot have it, because they are already doing something else and they know that that is helpful. They are not going to give that up. They cannot 'unknow' what they know. It is important to communicate the client-centered reflection method as something that one can *add* to whatever one is doing. We can tell them that *some* of us do nothing else; that is how powerful this thing is. *Some* of us prefer to do nothing but that. Others among us combine many things. So they can add *this* thing to whatever they are doing. *That* is the way to communicate the reflection-method. And if the others try it even a few times, then they will discover what we know.

Human Nature: Imposed Form vs. An Order Of Steps

The third job we have, is to communicate how very different our philosophical assumptions are, compared to everything else in the field. I have recently gone into this more and more. Some of the theories I thought I respected, make assumptions that I never realized they did. I see now that this has been the difficulty in communicating with a lot of people, not just *my* difficulty but all of our difficulty.

1) Psychoanalytic Model

The psychoanalytic concepts assume that the body has no behavioral order at all; that it has a fixed biological machinery, but no behavioral organization. To put it in Freud's terms: The 'Id' consists of unorganized drive energies. In order for that 'cauldron' (he also calls it) of drive energies to discharge—that is his term for doing something—the body requires the social patterns. Every human action—he assumes—is patterned by patterns which are imposed from the outside, on the body. We have been arguing with them for years about imposing things on clients, but look deeper. There is nothing but imposed organization in that theory! That is the only kind of order there is. The body is assumed to have no order for behavior, and no interaction from itself.

As most of you know, I am also in philosophy.^[1] In the last ten years or so, my philosophical colleagues have discovered psychotherapy; but the psychotherapy they have discovered is of course psychoanalytic psychotherapy. They love Freud because he comes from the same assumptions that they know. All order—as they think about it—is imposed order. All order consists of patterns which are put on the body. The only kind of order they conceive of is some sort of forms. It used to be relational forms, now it has become social forms. That also makes cultural relativism pervasive. Sometimes it is not even mentioned

because it seems so obvious. Obviously, people are different in different cultures. There is no bodily organization of behavior. There is only what the different cultures impose. There are only different forms of 'human.' There is no 'human nature.' If we do not think that, then we are not only silly, but unconscious of our own cultural programming. We are unconscious of how controlled we are. We have internalized the social patterns so deeply that we then discover them inside, and think we are free. This is a serious question. If we say that persons and bodies have an internal self-organizing, they will have pity for us. How can we show, how can we even know, when we are externally programmed, and when not?

From Descartes to Heidegger (whom I like a lot) there are only cultural humans; there is no human. Heidegger talks with a Japanese scholar. He tells him: We cannot talk with each other. We have to be very careful because nothing we say is the same. Everything is totally different. It would be all right to say that cultures differ, but he thinks that everything is *totally* different because there is nothing under that: No body, and no person.

Now, the only order is imposed forms. But now, my philosophical colleagues are questioning forms, which for them means that they are questioning everything. Now, they have nothing. They are all saying that there is no human subject. What they are really saying is: They do not know how to think about human subjects. But there are people who can, and that is you. I would like you to take that job on. The philosophical community has not discovered psychotherapy other than psychoanalysis yet. They have not heard from you yet. I think they should. I think you should know that right now they are in a very 'open' position to hear you because they have exhausted what they have, and they cannot think about themselves and each other. It is an interesting juncture and I urge you to find some philosophers and talk to them. With Carl Rogers we have been pioneers for thirty years. Now people have caught up almost to the point where they might be able to hear us.

2) My Philosophical Model – An Order of Steps

Now I want to tell you of my philosophical model. I want to talk about a kind of order that is not 'forms.' There is another kind of order; persons and bodies have that other kind. It is not forms stamped on, not patterns, shapes, distinct, fixed laws. Instead, it is an 'order of steps.' Let me say what kind of steps I mean.

There is this rhythm in client-centered therapy: First, the client says something. You say it back and get it wrong. Then they correct it. You accept the correction and they say: "Yes, that is right... but, not completely..." They give you the next tightening. You take that in, too. Then they say, "Yes," with a breath of relief.

And then there is a *characteristic* silence there. And in that silence, the next thing comes. Usually that next thing is deeper, perhaps not every time. You reflect that, again they correct it, you include the correction, they add a specification, you include that too. Again there is a breath, a sigh—and that silence.

That silence is very characteristic. When I teach listening in a round, in class, I point it out. Each student is listened to by the one on the right. Each one talks until—that silence comes. After a very few silent moments, the student says "I am finished, go on to the next person." I tell the class: "Notice the silence that comes there. It is part of what listening is for. What you had ready to say has been heard and responded to. Now you have nothing to say, and yet you sense the problem. It is not all resolved, of course. You have an unclear sense of it—right there — an unclear edge. You sense it physically, without more words.

Here, in class, you do not want to let the others wait, so you say "Go on to the next person." But when you are alone with your therapist-partner, then I hope you will stay in that silence, with that unclear sense, right there, until the next thing comes, *from it*.

Focusing

The word 'Focusing' means to spend time, attending to that inwardly sensed edge. When that happens in the silence, the next thing and the next come gradually from deeper and deeper. Some clients talk all the time, and skip that silence. Some use the silence only to think of something to say. Some feel only the same emotions, over and over. Just talking and expressing does help, and change-steps can come in conversation, and in other ways, inadvertently—but often they do not. When the client passes by all the

meaningful spots, you might slow the pace, just by reflecting more slowly, perhaps one spot several times. You might sometimes ask clients what they sense, directly, here, in the middle of the body. Also, it is not intrusive to say that we can stay with that unclear edge, there, where the whole thing feels not ok. I often say: "It's all right to stay here a while, just to sense that." These are bits of Focusing instructions given *during* therapy interviews.

In Belgium I learned that some therapists arrange to teach Focusing to each other's clients, *outside* therapy.^[2] In Chicago, too, we have taught Focusing to clients in weekend workshops. We found it extremely helpful to the ongoing therapy. There are many ways to teach Focusing. I use every method I ever learned on a client-centered baseline. I give bits of Focusing instruction during the sessions. But I can understand that you might be opposed to doing that. On the other hand, I know that you are not against people attending to the sensed edge, where these steps arise. In that sense no one is opposed to Focusing. Whether and how to teach it is an issue.

We also need to train our therapists to recognize and respond to Focusing, since it often happens naturally. Some therapists do not understand when a client refers to a felt edge. Instead of pointing the response there, these therapists miss that sensed intricacy, which cannot yet be said. They bring everything back only to round, closed, common notions and named feelings. It gets in the way.^[3]

Carrying Forward

Now I want to turn to the philosophical question about which I am urging you to communicate with philosophers.^[4] They think that when a client says something pathological, seemingly irrational, or exhibits some deficit, you must impose some better pattern. The philosophers think that such steps can only be imposed on experience, by the therapist. You have all listened to such steps. What comes has a characteristic novelty and intricacy. You can tell that neither you nor the client could have invented them. The philosophers think that aside from the socially imposed rationality there is nothing else in people but irrationality. You have often noticed something else: Such steps do not follow by logic, and yet they make sense—we can follow them. They have a certain kind of order, different from logic and from irrationality, something deeper, more exact, more specific, more intricate; maybe not every time but often.

We are well acquainted with that 'order of steps.' I call it 'carrying forward.' It changes as it moves forward. 'An order of steps,' or you can say: 'An order of carrying forward.' When you look back from the fourth or the fifth or the seventeenth step, back to where that began, that seemingly silly, wrong or pathological thing or deficit, you will not remember all the turns it took. But, on a tape you can see the steps I am talking about. Those steps have a continuity, but it is not a logical continuity. It is not a continuity of form. If it were a continuity of form, it would be a logical continuity. It would remain silly or pathological or a deficit. If that thing kept its form, we would not get anywhere. Our therapy method would not work, and I think therapy as a whole would not work.

This content, which has an exact form that we reflect, and strain until we get it exactly, that exact form in some way is also not *just* that exact form, since it gives rise to these steps. That is the order I want to talk about – an order that has very exact forms and yet it is not just those exact forms. It can give rise to a progression, which, when looking back, shows that it was more than just those forms, even though it seemed to take those forms. To get the steps, we have to reflect exactly; I am not saying those forms are not there. I am not saying those forms do not matter. I am saying: Something here which is very, very exact and formed, is also not just formed but gives rise to steps. That is the kind of order and model I want to talk about.

You have argued with other people. They will say that these steps come from the fact that you as the therapist are in some ways biased. They used to say that Carl Rogers smiled at certain times and that is what made the client go this way or that way. Remember that literature? That he gave unconscious reinforcement. They also say that reflecting exactly is impossible. Nobody can be neutral, as if the words we say brought some new thing to the client. But, the steps do not come from us. They surprise us all the time. We cannot derive the next step.

These people only know an order of forms. So, they say: "If something new happens, you must be sneaking it in somehow, because it can only come from the outside, because there is nothing in there that

could make something. And of course the only thing that you could be imposing is some kind of socialization, something that you got from the outside also." That is the only way they can think about it. And, if one thinks about it only in terms of form, then they would be right. In forms there is no human nature, only late twentieth century Dutch nature, or whatever you happen to be. Nobody can come up with a set of forms that are what human beings are. But if you look at the step-process, if you look at the carrying forward, if you are talking about an order where something more keeps happening, then I think we are all the same. And that kind of order is not so silly. And they have not thought of that. But we see that in client-centered therapy all the time.

The Steps are an Interactional Process

These steps come in interaction. But interaction, when *they* think about it, is "imposing some kind of pattern." Interaction when we think about it is "carrying forward," picking up on where the person is, making contact with where the person really is. And the very contact changes the form. Now, with Focusing, you can prove the point (I am being cute now). When you reflect verbally in a client-centered way, they can go on forever saying: "You are bringing in something new." But we find in Focusing that when somebody is sitting with you *in total silence*, you can Focus much more deeply and much more easily than you can alone. I have conducted thousands of trials on this particular thing with one subject, namely me: I Focus by myself. Then I ask the next kind person to keep me company while I Focus on the same thing. I always get further. Almost always – if I do not have any trouble with that person. The interaction is a different variable than the content. The interaction continues in silence, the very silence I was talking about. The steps come in an interactional process.

Now I am going to say: The steps *are* an interactional process.

When I worked with Carl Rogers: either he took on my theoretical things or I took on his and of course I took more of his than he took of mine, but the one wrinkle that I do not remember succeeding in selling him was my argument that the three conditions are sufficient without the proviso that the client has to *perceive* them. He said: genuineness, empathy and positive regard, *and* that the client perceives those. I do not think that is necessary; I know that perception is not necessary, because many clients are convinced for a year or two that nobody could possibly like them or understand them, and the process works anyway and eventually changes their perception. How would they ever get around to perceiving that the therapist *did* actually understand? That is a change. I know, because I was that kind of client. I always knew that this nice man could not possibly understand my stuff. It took me a long time before I noticed that when I walked into the room, I was already different. The interaction affects you, long before you can think about it. At least sometimes. It is in the interaction or as an interaction, that these steps come.

There is also a special case of interaction, when we respond to ourselves. That is also an interaction. You do not just find out: you are not just a kind of a light that does not change anything. When you give your awareness to something, it is carried forward. That is why it is so powerful to attend inside. It seems like you are doing nothing. Just as the presence of another human being looks like nothing. To be aware directly inside, is a carrying forward process. But the interaction with another person remains more powerful, and I have always said that.

The carrying forward order is not always understood. For example, now there is a new theory about 'narrative' – people are said to bring meaning into their lives by construing life as a certain story. I think they are perfectly silly writing like that, as if you could put any story on any set of events in your life. I think it *is* true, what they are *trying* to say: That we look back and try to construe the life we had. But the meaning we try to give to it has to carry forward. It has to connect with our bodily experiences, so that we say: "Oh, yes (breath, physical relief), it *can* mean that..." They do not have the concept of carrying forward, so they write about it as if people were their own fiction writers, as if, with inventiveness, you could make anything out of anything. That is not so.

And that is true also about 'cognitive restructuring.' You have to ask: "When does it work and when not?" You try to think in a different way. We do this all the time. When we feel bad about something, we tell ourselves: "Look at it another way, then it is not so hard." But you must not forget to come here to the

middle of your body, to see if it made you feel any different. If it did not, you have not "restructured" anything. Then you have to try still another way and another way.

Now what is it actually that is capable of being carried forward? I started by mentioning the common assumption that the body is a fixed piece of biological machinery. The body is like your automobile, they think: fixed and obeying certain laws.

But, your mind is creative, they think. They do not explain how. Well, let me turn that upside down. How you think and formulate an event, *that* form is fixed. But, the *body-sense* of that form is capable of being carried forward. I want to change the concept of the body altogether. The body is not just a machine. The body is exactly that which is capable of these steps. The content itself, the form alone, is not going to go anywhere. It is going to have certain logical implications but it is not going to change. It is the 'body sense' of the form that is capable of being carried forward. Our bodies are such that they absorb all the training, all the language, all the social forms, all the culture, everything we read and then they still imply more... Especially when you have a problem it is like that. You think all the formed facts and still it says: "Aarrgghh." It is looking for a solution, or a next step that will intricately take account of all the stuff you think and still go further. It is the body sense, that can go further.

From what someone says, you can go in two different ways: you can take it logically – they said *this*. So this follows, and this follows, and this follows. You can say: "Look, what you are saying implies this and this and this." The other way you can go, the way client-centered therapists will go, is to respond to that which gives steps. We call it 'feeling' but that is not a good word. I am saying that the steps come from the 'body-sense.' Any event, anything anyone says, can be taken in these two ways: only as formed, or as the body-sense of that formed. I want to argue that the body-sense has all those forms and then it is still always again there, implying more, implying further.

Sometimes we want to respond to the logical form, the event as it happened as form. But as therapists, of course we want to respond to that which will produce the steps.

Now I have to bring that home a little. Every sentence that we utter, prepares the listener for 'something.' It begins, and then, it unrolls and... Now you do not know how I am going to finish it, but you sense what comes there. The same thing is true of my talk, up to now. You have taken it in with everything you know, and have experienced and read. Now... you are sitting there ready for... and I hope I have that.

We Live Every Situation with the Body

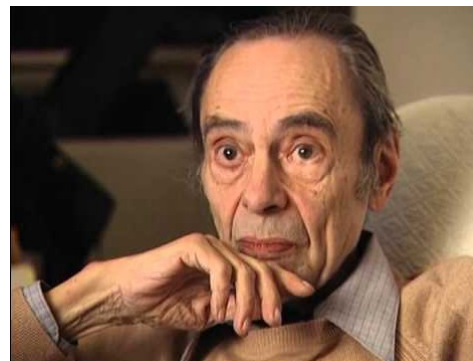
The body-sense has all the forms in it, all your culture and life. And yet it implies further. It is not just a product of the events and the culture. You can see that in the silences, when therapy works. You can see it even more dramatically when clients say: "I am feeling something, but there are no words for it." They are saying that there are no social forms for it. Words are social forms. We have to wait a while until the language rearranges itself to say it oddly because there are no common phrases for it. You can help this happen if it has not happened. One way you can do that is just by slowing down; by sitting and feeling the client's feeling when they are not doing so. You can say: "Now wait a minute, I want to feel what you told me." That makes an opportunity for them to come there too. I call that the 'body-sense' because to find it, I have to attend to the literal body, here, between the podium and the wall. I have to come in here, into the middle of this body; I have to let go my attention here. I cannot do it too well while I am talking, though I can do it in short pauses. That is the body I am talking about. Now once we get in there, then it is more than what we customarily call 'the body.' I would want to change that concept so that it would include that.

Any time you talk, unless you are reading or have memorized things in advance, how do you find the words? It is your body that talks. I have this prepared, but even so, I open my mouth and I hope the right words come out. It is all I can do. If they do not, I keep talking, hoping they will still come. That which talks is my body. I want the concept of 'body' to get much wider than physiology. I am glad they have physiology, when I get sick. I am glad they know what they know. But the concept of body is wider than that, much wider than that. We live every situation with the body. If you try to do it by explicit instructions, you probably trip. Your body has to sense many things at the same time: the floor, the chair, the people, the situation, what happened to you years earlier, and what you are trying to do. You live with

what I am calling 'your body.' The body makes and takes the next step, it wants a solution, a healing, something better, now, than it has had. There are often no words for that, because that has not happened yet. My body is capable of producing steps that have never happened in the history of the world. Isn't that glorious?! Or else you can say that I am in a worse mess than anybody knows how to help me with.

Eugene Gendlin (1926—2017)

Eugene Gendlin's work was notable for how he bridged the fields of philosophy and psychology, as well as bridging serious academic work with popular self-help. He studied and taught philosophy at the University of Chicago, one of the world's top academic institutions. While engaged in the study of philosophy, he became a student and colleague of one of the great minds in psychology, Dr. Carl Rogers, who was revolutionizing the study of psychotherapy at the University of Chicago.



Eugene Gendlin (2007)

*Gendlin's extraordinary intellectual gifts were matched by his extraordinary compassion for people. When he saw that the research he was conducting at the university could have profound meaning for the ordinary person, he wrote *Focusing* (1978) as a popular self-help book so that his discovery would not languish in academic circles. Perhaps his experience as a Jew escaping the Nazi occupation of Austria explains some piece of this great compassion.*

Editor's Note

The text presented here is an edited transcript of Gendlin's plenary address at the first international 'Client-centred and Experiential Psychotherapy' conference in Leuven (Belgium) in 1988.

A transcript of the audio recording of the talk was made by Lieve de Wachter. Gendlin adapted this and provided some additional comments and clarifications. The adapted transcript was further edited by Germain Lietaer for inclusion in the book '*Client-centered and Experiential Psychotherapy in the Nineties*' Leuven: Leuven University Press (1990), which he co-authored (with J. Rombauts and R. Van Balen).

It is the final edited, edited version of the talk, as it appears in the above mentioned book that appears here. Given the history of edits, I felt free to make some minor edits myself (by way of adding a few additional headings) to 'punctuate' the large sections of text.

Germain Lietaer also selected some of the original dialogue of Gendlin's response to questions with the audience at the conference and this is also included in the text of the book.

*** Part Two of the full text will be published in the next (Summer 2024) issue of this newsletter. This includes dialogue from two client/therapist interactions offered by Gendlin to illustrate his exposition, as well as dialogue with the audience.**

The Way of Curiosity

By Peter Gill

A Book Review by Amona Buechler

In his new book, *The Way of Curiosity*, Peter tells the story of how he got into Focusing and how he immediately knew that this was a missing piece in his life. Offering many examples, he shares how the practice of Focusing has gradually transformed his life toward being more compassionate with himself and with others. He lets the reader into his world, into a journey with many ups and downs, on his path toward living life from a deeper place of wisdom. Peter invites the spirit of adventure and curiosity in the reader, for us to again and again open up to what we don't yet know.

The Way of Curiosity offers a beautiful, clear, and poetic step-by-step manual for all things Focusing. It is a treasure both for those wanting to get the first taste of the practice, and for experienced practitioners. There's a feel to this book as if you are sitting face to face with the author and being engaged in a conversation. Every sentence is filled with a wealth of experience in living and teaching the Focusing attitude.

In the first part of the book, newcomers to Focusing are guided through exercises to discover their inner body sense of the multifaceted felt experiences in everyday life situations and relationships. Knowing of the struggles when trying to understand and learn the possibly unfamiliar language of our bodily intelligence, Peter offers a remarkable mix of supportive real-life examples. He assumes that every reader is likely already naturally familiar with this body wisdom when they passionately do whatever they treasure most in their lives. He invites the reader to remember such moments to recognize what the felt sensing, accessing the body's intelligence is for them. This makes it easy and interesting to get started with this practice.

Key qualities that are emphasized include pausing, meeting and welcoming whatever shows up with curiosity. He says: "Everything begins and ends with curiosity." And: "When we get curious, we step out of the story and into reality. We stop living in the map and enter the living landscape." He invites turning toward familiar issues, but with fresh eyes, and encourages the reader to find ways to describe what comes as if for the first time.

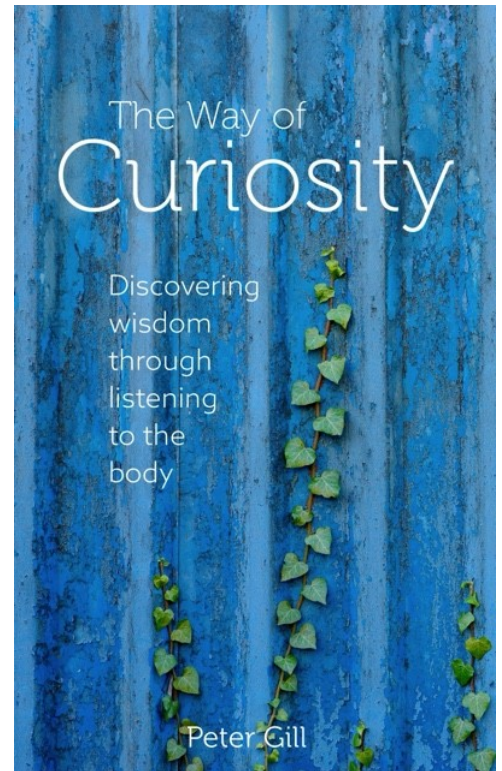
The author also delves deeply into his own story, tells of his journey of longing, failing, and finding... He describes Focusing as a way of living, a practice through which we can become deeply honest with ourselves and with others:

"Through being curious about myself, I have made a place of belonging for the parts of me that were pushed away and exiled. I found inner belonging. Through listening to and being listened to by others, I found another kind of belonging. ... Every time I welcomed something in me, or was welcomed by another, a small but significant step occurred."

Peter doesn't offer a heroic story. He doesn't promise that one day we will suddenly feel clear and resolved, or that making decisions and navigating through life will become easy. Instead, he invites us to keep the spirit of adventure alive and to keep going where we have never been before. He says:

"When going to a new country our senses are open and alive. We know we don't know and we enjoy this, we even take delight in new discoveries. Believe it or not, we can both cultivate that attitude and take it towards the most tricky places in our lives and find something profound there."

In this way of living, our navigation system becomes a fresh inner listening for a deeper knowing. This can replace the reliance on knowledge and our clinging to fixed points of view, both so common in our conflicted and often violent times.



Peter also doesn't keep it a secret that living a life of curiosity is a journey in which we allow ourselves to feel everything, including past traumas, and all the pains and sorrows that they contain. But when we stop trying to change ourselves, when we stop trying to get rid of the feelings that are often labeled as negative, we can turn towards our experience with a soft and curious wondering. We can do this without the intention of fixing or solving anything. We just let a little light in, some fresh air, and allow this to let the process of change begin.

Finally, Peter opens up an even broader perspective on the impact of Focusing on a societal and planetary level. He talks about the lost village and the sense of belonging that used to exist and is now missing. He suggests that we need to find a new way of living together in our modern societies. A way of living where we develop a deeper connection with others and weave this way of curiosity into all of our relationships with others. There is a quote by Eugene Gendlin that Peter refers to several times: "Remember there's always a person in there."

We are invited to remember that there is always more happening for someone beneath their presenting behavior that we don't fully know. And that, perhaps we can step into a welcoming attitude and inquire into how it is for the other, trying to see beyond our position. Sure, it can happen that we relate to others as a means to get what we want, what we would like, or we might see them as obstacles that are in the way of what we want. But when this happens, we tend to forget that they too have feelings. So, time, and again he suggests we pause and remember for a moment that there is a real person in there, a living being.

He also suggests using Focusing as a way to ask ourselves: "Who and what is driving my life?" inquiring both in the moment and the long term. In this way, we can more and more become the creators of our own lives, shaped by our most important values. Then we can act with awareness of our needs and the needs of others and we can listen to others as a way to say "You belong here" and "You're sacred." This, he suggests, offers the potential to break through polarities and argument on a societal level. Peter considers the Focusing way as a sacred way of living in a world where there seems very little sacredness. He finds it to be a beautiful way for facing all aspects of our humanness such as grief, death, and wonder.

As Peter tells his story, it might bring tears to your eyes at times, as it did mine. You might also feel a deep resonance of what he so beautifully describes: "Yes, that's how it is in this mysterious thing called life." Perhaps, by taking the risk of sharing his own vulnerability and truth with a large, unknown audience, he encourages us to feel more compassionate toward our own vulnerabilities, too. As Peter opens up in this way, I fully resonated with this: "Listening feels like an honour, or a privilege to be let into someone's world." Reading about someone's world feels the same.

This beautiful book always remains true to its title, *The Way of Curiosity*. I am deeply grateful for its addition to the wider Focusing library.

Peter Gill became a Focusing teacher in 2005 and is fully qualified with the British Focusing Association (BFA) and the Focusing Institute in New York. He has trained with Ann Weiser Cornell in Inner Relationship Focusing in the USA, and Peter Afford in the UK. Peter is a BFA mentor and Focusing Institute Coordinator offering practitioner and teacher training. He is also qualified in Somatic Experiencing (SE). More recently he has been offering workshops in nature connection. Peter lives in Stroud, Gloucestershire.
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Amona Buechler is a Certified Focusing Professional and Coordinator in Training. She is also a Certified Feldenkrais Practitioner and Assistant Trainer and is trained in Systemic Constellation. She has offered courses, workshops and sessions internationally since 1998, in German and English. Currently, she offers the Focusing Skills Certificate Level 1-5 online, live Focusing retreats in Germany, and professional Focusing Training. Amona lives in Leipzig, Germany, but loves being connected beyond the borders of her birth country.

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Practitioner Profile: Harriet Brown



I'm currently sitting penned in by a child's den beside my workspace, with an under-the-weather toddler asleep next door.

My Focusing life in the last 5 years has been contained into small pockets of time without children around. Occasionally, with added patience, I Focus with a child present, weaving their needs into meeting my own.

Focusing supports my parenting and is a valuable window into my inner world. In the sleep-deprived and baby-absorbed early months of motherhood I struggled to attend to my inner life. Without a nurturing practice for my spirit and my deeper needs, life started to feel drab and more of a slog, less peaceful and certainly not much joy.

Having Focusing in my toolkit has made all the difference. I have been able to make decisions about life, parenting choices and priorities that are guided by a bodily sense of 'rightness'. That includes a deep knowing that I am a better parent for having some time away from my children, investing in myself and relationships where I am known, seen and heard and where I can reciprocate this. As a sensitive person, challenged by the demands and noise of daily life, Focusing provides me with some respite and a time to tend to myself.

At a time of life that requires a steady stream of giving, Focusing has been nourishing and life-giving. The support to attend to oneself is invaluable, as is the reciprocity of a Focusing partnership. To quote Simone Weil:

"Attention is the rarest and purest form of generosity."^[1]

And in the same vein, another quote by Katherine Martinko:

"There is no greater gift you can give another human than your full and undivided attention. It tells them that no-one and nothing is more important in that moment than they are."^[2]

I am teaching an experimental Focusing Introductory course with two mums and their small babies in the group. I had attended a retreat with my daughter aged 3 months, so I knew it was possible. I also sensed it might touch raw edges for some and hold potential for richness and growth. I nevertheless felt nervous at the prospect of teaching with babies present – 'What if the babies howl throughout?'

Bringing this fear to a Focusing partnership, an image came: concentric domes, glowing – layers and layers of Focusing moments, from the shaky start, the 'wow' moments, the growing edges layered up and expanding. The domes took on a quality of a pearl. And in that moment, my body knew that this pearl of Focusing life wouldn't be here without the grit that started it. Many pieces of grit in fact. Tricky moments and challenges that found change, the felt shift of Focusing.

So the babies might howl – bring it on! This could be a wonderful piece of grit – for me, perhaps for the participants, too. This might not even be their grit, that's out of my control. And with this my body found a new ease – not just accepting what is, but welcoming it, inviting it – the tricky stuff that needs our warm, open presence. Without this grit the pearl wouldn't form. Can I start to welcome the many frustrations and dilemmas of family life, knowing they might be the beginning of new pearls?

Despite my fears about the unpredictability they could bring into the group, the babies' quiet snuffling have so far been soothing, grounding and heart-warming – quite the opposite of my imaginings. Following this growing edge has brought gifts and surprises, often with the same issues where I felt fear or anxiety before.

Dawn, a week later.

I realise I delight in my kids' vivid and visceral living through their 'animal bodies' when it suits me. That's in daylight hours, when I'm rested enough. I can celebrate the ease with which they play like puppies and test their physical limits. In the pre-dawn I want to fight it, suppress it: I want sleep more than I want to enjoy their animal humanness.

This is where my 'radical acceptance of everything' is put to the test: accepting the child who simply doesn't need to sleep any longer. I let go of my preferred wake up time, my resistance to a child's body clock and the pretence of control. With it, I let go of my frustration and feel some relief. I accept the early start and receive the quiet, the slow; the time with my thoughts while she explores her toys. I have re-connected with the pleasure of early morning quiet, softly changing light, activity slow and gentle while the world has not yet emerged.

If you're reading this in the soft grey of dawn, I hope that you can radically accept being awake at this hour. I offer you my solidarity and my company, from a distance.

May this new day enrich you, bring you grit to transform and surprise you, may you find connection and peace.

References

- 1] From a letter to Joë Bousquet (April 1942). *Simone Weil: A Life (1976) (tr. Raymond Rosenthal)*
- 2] Katherine Johnson Martinko (2023) *Childhood Unplugged: Practical Advice to Get Kids Off Screens and Find Balance (Ch.2)*

Harriet Brown is a BFA Certified Focusing Practitioner and is currently training as a Focusing Teacher with Kay Hoffman. She offers one-to-one Focusing sessions and is teaching the BFA Skills Course in small groups, in person in North Somerset and Bristol. She is happy to teach and practice Focusing with children present – preferably with pre-crawling babies. She is also a practicing Podiatrist and member of the Royal College of Podiatry, and can combine these modalities for those with prior Focusing experience. Harriet is mother to a five year old and a toddler and enjoys physical play and letting nature take over her garden.

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Local and Online Focusing Groups

Brighton and Sussex Focusing Circle. Meets monthly in Brighton, usually on the fourth Saturday of the month from 2–4pm. Contact: Anna anna@workpsychologyhub.co.uk

Bristol Insight Focusing Group. Meets once a month on Sunday mornings. Open to anyone interested in Focusing, regardless of experience. Contact: Gordon gordonadam@blueyonder.co.uk

Focusing with Poetry Group. Meets online every 6 weeks on a Saturday or Sunday morning. Contact: Gordon gordonadam@blueyonder.co.uk

London Focusing Circle. A list of people in the London area who are available for Focusing partnership. £5 joining fee. <http://www.focusing.co.uk/circle.html>

Online Focusing Group. Open to those who have done the Focusing Skills Certificate training. Meets once a month on Wednesday evenings. Contact Paula paulanewman930@hotmail.com

Manchester Focusing Practice Group. Meets in Manchester for a morning once a month from 10.30am to 1pm usually on a Sunday. Contact Wendy wendy.brocklehurst@btinternet.com

Sheffield Focusing Group. Meets weekly at Sheffield Central Library on a Saturday morning/afternoon or Wednesday evening. www.solar-active.com/focusing_group Contact: david@solar-active.com

South Yorkshire Focusing Group. Open group which meets monthly. Contact: Hugh hughknopf@rocketmail.com

Stroud Focusing Circle. Meets monthly in Stroud on the first Wednesday or Thursday of the month from 7.30–9.45pm. Contact: Peter livingfocusing@fastmail.com

WhatsApp Groups

UK 'Find a Focusing Partner' WhatsApp Group

For finding a Focusing partner—either at short notice for a swap, or for an ongoing Focusing partnership. Send an email to Sarah sparula@gmail.com for further information.

Bristol Area 'Find a Focusing Partner' WhatsApp Group

For finding a Focusing partner in the Bristol area—either at short notice for a swap, or for an ongoing Focusing partnership. Send a message to Isla 07876 645566 or Catherine 07726 536960

Bristol Area Focusing Community WhatsApp Group

For sharing information about local or online Focusing or Focusing-related events or courses. Send a message to Isla 07876 645566 or Catherine 07726 536960

Workshops

Full details of workshops by BFA members can be viewed [here](#) on the BFA website

Resources and Further Information

British Focusing Association (BFA) www.focusing.org.uk

For further information about all matters relating to Focusing in the UK, including a list of practitioners, articles, events, training, resources, etc.

To see past issues of this newsletter click on 'Menu' on the home page, then 'Useful Resources' or click www.focusing.org.uk/useful-resources

You can sign up to receive this newsletter regularly and freely by using the link above, entering your name and email address, then hitting the 'Subscribe' button .

BFA Facebook Forum www.facebook.com/groups/206601209671323/

An easy way to quickly connect with other UK Focusers and to see and post events.

The International Focusing Institute www.focusing.org

The International Focusing Institute (formerly The Focusing Institute) is the 'world HQ' of Focusing and is a source of all sorts of information about Focusing. The website gives access to the Gendlin Online Library as well as lots of articles on a wide range of subjects by other Focusing teachers. The website also carries over one hundred (30-50min) audio interviews conducted by Serge Prengel with a wide variety of Focusing teachers that have been recorded since 2008. These can be streamed or downloaded from the website.

The European Focusing Association (EFA) efa-focusing.eu

The Irish Focusing Network <https://www.focusing.ie/>

Newsletter Involvement & Contributions

Contributions to the newsletter are welcome and invited. This includes articles, poems, book reviews, photographs, news, event & group details, etc.

Articles should generally be in the range of 500—1500 words. Inclusion of articles will be at the discretion of the editors. Some contributions may be held over for inclusion in a future issue.

Please feel free to contact us if you would like to discuss an idea you have for an article.

Help in producing the newsletter is also welcome and anyone who would like to be involved is invited to get in touch—this could be editing, design & layout, proof-reading, distribution, etc.

Feedback & Ideas

Your feedback is invited! We would really like to know what you think of the newsletter and if you have any suggestions or ideas for its development. Please send an email with feedback to Gordon. We hope to add extra features in forthcoming issues.

Forthcoming Issues of the Newsletter:

The newsletter is normally published three times a year. Submissions for the next issue in **Summer 2024** are welcome anytime.

The deadline for receiving contributions for this issue is **30th June 2024**.