



Focusing in Ireland

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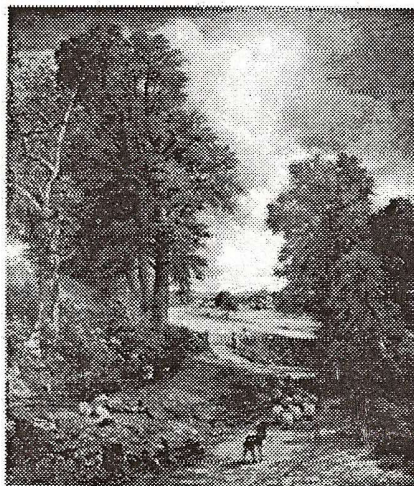
Learning Together at the Edge

Some years ago, I became interested in the philosophy behind Gendlin's work in developing focusing. For the past two years I have attended the *Focusing on Philosophy* weeks run by Rob Foxcroft in Scotland. These sessions are dedicated to reading and studying Gendlin's philosophical works (*Experiencing and the Creation of Meaning; A Process Model*). Challenging stuff, and while I am still a bit out of my depth, I'm hooked!

A little learning can be an encouraging as well as a dangerous thing however. I decided to start a study group with Dublin-based focusers who would read and reflect on these fairly dense tomes together (perhaps I just wanted others to share the pain!). The first year we started on *A Process Model*, Gendlin's latest work. The Kerryman's advice immediately comes to mind: 'If I were you, I wouldn't start from here!' Reading it is like wading through dense undergrowth using a scissors to clear your way. (Hang on, I hear the editors say, isn't this supposed to be encouraging people to get reading...). Anyway, we lived to tell the tale.

Undaunted, the following year we

decided to approach Gendlin's work through the articles he has written for a more general, rather than a purely philosophical, audience. We also decided that we would have a go at using Gendlin's focusing-based process he calls Thinking at the Edge (TAE). This 14-step process on how to 'think from the felt sense' is a practical application of his philosophical reflections. We were in business!



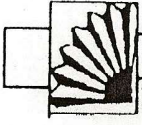
From November to June, a group of around 8 of us met once a fortnight. We decided from the start to take things slowly. And to keep it short – an hour and a half is a long time in philosophy. That was important. There was no rush and no sense that we had to get through a particular course of study. To help us, we used video

tapes on TAE produced by Nada Lou, a Canadian focusing teacher and video maker. These feature Gendlin and others using the TAE process on subjects of interest to them. When we felt we had grasped some of the essential points, members of our group decided to use the 14-step process on their own 'edge' places; topics or areas of interest where they felt they had 'something' to say (their felt sense let them know that) but, as yet, no clear way to say it. That's what TAE is essentially about; helping you, in a very structured way, to develop and then to communicate something you know, but have not been able to quite articulate, from your experience. In this sense I suppose you might say that TAE is the more public side of Focusing. It's about you adding to the store of knowledge of the wider community, rather than, as in focusing per se, helping you to clarify some issue for yourself alone.

I think I can speak for our group when I say that we enjoyed our 'study time' (with time for tea and chat built in). It deepened our understanding of focusing and how we can use this great insight and gift in different ways. Something must be right; we're back for more punishment in the autumn.

Mary Jennings
June 2004

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GLENCOMERAGH 2004

This year's Week Long event took place in Glencomeragh, Co. Tipperary from 11th -16th July. It involved 19 participants, all at different stages in the focusing journey and training. Eight of us were Trainees who were completing our training and being presented for certification after this year's week-long event.

Format for the week

Our week began with a healthy meal followed by brief introductions and an outline of the week ahead, which followed much the same format each day. Those of us completing our training were given the task of doing the morning opening or evening closure exercise. As with all aspects of focusing, this proved to be a gentle yet affirming experience.

The general task for the week was to explore Gendlin's article "A Theory of Personality Change". We divided into three groups for this and, personally, I found the experience a source of inspiration. We engaged with the article and each other in a way that was creative, challenging and informative.

Personal aspects

Focusing came into my life at a time when I was feeling broken and hurt, and searching for something to help me find meaning in all that I had just come through. It gave me a way of working with myself and my issues in a more gentle and compassionate way. It helped me to further my own growth and deepen my spirituality. My Focusing journey has provided just what I needed, and in the last two years my Week Long experiences at Glencomeragh have given me time and space to be with that journey and feel supported and strengthened by "Fellow Pilgrims".

In Focusing I have found a skill, which enhances my own inner process, and acts as a liberating experience for others to whom I

have introduced Focusing in my counselling practice. I would like to name some aspects of the process which I find particularly beneficial; the discovery of a way of being separate from the issues of my life and working with these by means of that first movement of Focusing, "The Clearing of a Space"; being enabled to recognise the force of the Critic that operates in my life; and the discovery of Focusing as a way of working with it, which has been so freeing and lifegiving.

When struggling with the issues one "carries in the tissues," it was such a gift to find oneself in a place as beautiful as Glencomeragh and to feel oneself to be amongst like-minded people offering a safe group setting into which one could openly and trustingly speak and be totally accepted.

To mark the closure of the Week Long, those of us completing our training took time aside to reflect together and form a ritual that would capture the essence of the week's experience for each of us. We decided to integrate the inner journey of our week with the symbols of the natural environment.

We draped the floor with peach material to symbolise each of us as we arrived there to face the unknown yet carrying within us our own inner beauty. The edges we surrounded with a deeper shade of pink rose petals from the grounds, symbolic of the delicate transformation that took place as we focused, pondered and shared during the course of the week. At one end of the drape we placed a pile of stones along with some beautiful greenery. We covered this with a piece of peach chiffon, reflecting the fuzzy, unclear place we all began with on the Sunday evening. In the course of the ritual this was unveiled to reflect the "Felt Shift" as we processed, shared and interacted with Gendlin's article in our small groups.

Time was given for each participant to pick a stone and place it as part of the kern formation at the other end of the drape, reflecting their inner journey, movement and

integration as the week unfolded. Stones were also included for those who had to leave early due to unforeseen circumstances. A single red rose was placed to remember especially one participant, who had to leave our group due to his mother's illness.

The highlight of the closing moments was the individual presentation to each trainer of the application form which is to be presented to Eugene Gendlin for Certification. This was both a touching and endorsing moment for all eight of us.

The final stage of closure, the lighting of the candles from one to another, captured in essence what we had accomplished together over the week both personally and collectively. Then, to the recording of "This little light of mine", the group burst into a joyful movement of Song and Dance.

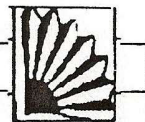
After closure, we moved to the gate lodge to enjoy an evening of celebration, fun and laughter as well as delicacies which had been prepared by another hard working group.

In conclusion, I say thanks to all the organisers, to our wonderful facilitators and to all our keen Focusing participants who gave so much in order that all of us could gain so much from our week together, a week that had been not just wonderful but superb.

Kathleen Savage R.S. M. Belfast.

Gendlin's article, "A Theory of Personality Change" can be accessed on the Focusing Institute's website at www.focusing.org. When you have accessed the website:

Click on *focusing and...* then click on *Psychotherapy* then click on *articles on this site*.



Two snippets into a 5 year old's world

By Nada Lou, Coordinator,
Canada

Some of you might remember stories about Finn my grandson (now 5) and his brother Dwight (now 10) from before. This story is not about a formal focusing session with Finn, but about being with him in a "noticing and nurturing" way. I think that grandparents have a great opportunity and privilege to indulge in a felt sensing relationship - disciplining is done elsewhere!

The first snippet is about just simple acknowledgment of how he feels! With Finn it is easy, because he certainly lets you know loud and clear and direct! He has always been a child whose first reaction to something he doesn't want to do or to be exposed to is to protest vehemently by crying and insisting on his way. Even as a baby for instance, he would not want to have his apple cut in smaller bites and would persist screaming "no cut, no cut" - it would be a whole circus around what seem to be unimportant issues. Finn always knows exactly what he wants and how he wants it. As you can imagine it doesn't go that way and with other kids around him his lamentation gets him more trouble than sympathy. In "parenting" language this is called tantrums.

It came to me almost instinctively to reflect back to him his refusal to go home after he spent a day with me. In his uncompromising manner, he did not want to go home when his dad came to pick him up. He wanted to stay "forever" here. I took him on my lap and just said back to him in a similar voice (minus screaming) "you really don't want to go home, you would really, really like to stay here with nana forever" and added, "but daddy wants to take

you home now". And as sobs subsided, I repeated the same line once or twice more - and he hopped off my lap, went to the car and got interested in what comes next!!!

Now every time he gets into one of these - tantrums - I do the same; acknowledge what he says, and add what he is asked to do - and it turns into a smooth transition. Notice that only his WISH was valued and acknowledged. He didn't GET what he wanted. It actually amazes me that it WORKS every time this happens - as if HE hears that his demand was heard, he can let go of it. He is in charge! As simple as that!

The other snippet is again an interesting interaction of his personality and the way he goes about implementing it. Finn is a kid that tries to figure out how to do things "all by myself" - since he was a little baby. He doesn't ask questions, but will engineer a way to do things as he makes sense of. As creative as it is, these are often unconventional ways that get him in trouble with adults around him. Since he could move on his own, for instance, he would not ask for food, but will go into the fridge by himself and take what seems to be attractive to eat. When I ask him how did he do something - who showed it to you, he proudly declares - "all by myself".

However, he is also always very curious and open to be shown new and different ways.

He got a nice new toy in a fairly big box. I found him a few days later "stabbing" the box mercilessly with one of the toy "guys" (Spiderman or something). So with this trait of his in the back of my mind, I stopped myself from a strong reaction to his attack on the box and asked a question first .. What is it that you are doing? (.. meaning, why are you destroying this beautiful big box in such a

forceful way .. said in as subtle a way as I could hatch)

The answer was simple. "I am going to make a puppet show - I want to make a stage!" (..meaning .. didn't you know that nana?)

Creativity saved. But also a more constructive way to make a puppet stage was welcomed to explore!

Nada Lou is Focusing Coordinator in Canada. She has produced several videos on focusing. They are available on her website www.nadalou@nadalou.com or on the focusing institute's website.

The following poem appeared on the focusing discussion list in June 04, when the subject of "Being friendly to whatever is there" was being discussed. The list is an email discussion list devoted to Focusing and facilitates the discussion of focusing related topics. Check out the Focusing Institutes website at www.focusing.org. Click on Felt community and then click on Discussion list to get information on this.

A POEM BY WILLIAM BARRY

I go among the trees and sit still,
All my stirrings become quiet
around me
Like circles on water.
My tasks lie in their places where
I left them,
Asleep like cattle...

Then what I am afraid of comes.
I live for a while in its sight.
What I fear in it leaves it;
And the fear of it leaves me.

It sings ...
And I hear its song.