



Focusing in Ireland

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Reflections on the Focusing International Conference in Shannon

Focusing Conference a Great Success

It's nearly three months later and the memories of that week, and indeed the months leading up to it, are still fresh. Exciting, companionship and I-can't-believe-we-did it are the words and phrases that come to mind. I remember going down to Shannon on the first evening, wandering around the Conference Centre and wondering would anyone turn up? It seemed unreal that people from all over the world would descend on Bunratty just at this time - but they did! 109 people attended. We had about 25 workshops during the four days and two focusing sessions a day. There was time for socialising as well and the Bunratty Banquet was a big hit, especially, it seems, with the Irish!

Genuine warmth

But what the overseas delegates seemed to have most appreciated was the genuine warmth of the welcome they received. That's down to the hosts and volunteers who worked with Phil, Kevin and myself. It is my privilege to say a heart-felt 'thank you' to everyone - you made it the success it was. All the hard work and preparation put into devising and organising the opening and closing ceremonies was worth while. The efforts to be clear about the role of the group hosts during our pre-conference workshops at the Marist Centre in Dundrum (thanks to Pat Byrne for use of the lovely premises) were also important. Mary Gendlin, Director of the Institute said that it was the most successful opening ceremony she had experienced, so take a bow everyone! I know that Kevin also appreciated

the early feedback on the Hero's Journey material which he presented every morning to all the delegates at the Conference. It worked very well. I still see e-mails flying back and forth on the Focusing Institute's Internet discussion list entitled, 'the hero's journey', a journey people started in Shannon.



Reflections

In order to give those who were not there a flavour of what the Conference was about, we asked a few of the Irish delegates to give their reflections on what they enjoyed and learned. These are given below. Thanks to everyone again and maybe we will do this again some day!

Mary Jennings

Nurturing the spirit

"I felt privileged to share with the

group I was hosting. I recall in particular the stories of two women whose spirit and spirituality is a living thing. One was a Canadian Indian, who had suffered much as a child. The second was another woman, of Dutch origin, who had lived in a prisoner of war camp for a number of years in the Far East during World War Two. Both were able to relate to their situations and held no bitterness because their own sense of spirit was so alive. It reminded me that I must give time to nurturing my spirit, to give time to that. I carry that experience with me from the week. On a lighter note, I also enjoyed the Focusing Follies on the Saturday night when people got to show their talents on the stage!"

Larry Cummins

Working with the 'background feeling'

"Marine de Fremenville's workshop on working with the background feeling has been very powerful for me. Marine, who is a French Canadian, and a psychologist, invited us to clear a space and to become aware of what she, and Gene Gendlin, calls 'the background feeling'. That 'always there' feeling that colours how we see the world - always sad, angry, watching etc were some of the examples she gave. While noticing and paying attention in a focusing way, she then invited us to ask, "How would my life be without this background feeling? How would my life be if it were not there? Feel what comes ". Another question she suggested was, "Who am I beyond that feeling always there?" I

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have been working with what I learned at Marine's workshop since the International and it has been very beneficial for me.

I suppose I felt connected with Marine since she was my Anam Chara - everyone was 'paired off' at the opening night as part of the welcoming and getting-to-know-you ceremony and we have remained in touch.

Another aspect of the International that I enjoyed was seeing and meeting some of the people I had heard of and read about."

Anne O Byrnes

Thinking at the edge

"I enjoyed the international dimension to the whole thing. Meeting people from all over the world was very interesting. I enjoyed being involved in the preparations beforehand too - preparing the opening ceremony and working out the details of our role as hosts - it was fun in itself. The preparations paid off as everything went really well. I loved the banquet at Bunratty too. It was highly entertaining and a great evening.

The new piece around focusing for me was Thinking at the Edge. I am attracted to that; the idea that you can listen for something that you don't know yet and by following the TAE structure, new ideas can be brought to life.

All in all, a great week, I enjoyed everything about it."

Angela Campion

Common ground

"The highlight for me was meeting people from all different cultures and religious backgrounds and being able, through using focusing language, to connect with them at a deep level. Through focusing, we could talk about spirituality in a way that was relevant and clear, a way of finding common ground, whereas if we had been using "religious" language, the

same connection might not have been possible. That has been really powerful for me."

Pat Duffy

Focusing and thinking

"Applying Focusing to thinking - that was new for me. Focusing has taught me to be accepting of my feeling and emotions. I probably however would have been critical of my thinking, dismissing it and being judgemental about it. Now there is a way to work with all of that in a focusing way - that's exciting.

I liked the whole atmosphere of the Conference. It was free and easy and people were free to come and go and drift to things as they felt like it. Yet, there was also a sense that everything was highly organised but that did not intrude on the atmosphere; there was a sense that everything 'just happened' which made the whole week enjoyable."

Jim Bagnell

If you would like to share your thoughts on what the International Focusing Conference meant to you, we would like to hear from you. In particular we think people would like to hear about how their focusing was enhanced by workshops you attended or experiences you had so that we can learn from each other.

Mairead and Mary

Dream Journey

Anne Kelly, Coordinator with the Focusing Institute recently published her second book of poems, *Dream Journey*. The main theme of the collection centres on Anne's journey with cancer. It tells a story of courage, compassion and a strong spirit.

Anne's wry sense of humour comes through as she invites us to smile at how she dealt with 'hair everywhere/falling out like snow' or her 'banjaxed knee', all the time believing that 'the world is my friendly home'.

Anne's interest in dreams has been greatly enriched by her recent work with Dr. Michael Kearney, Medical

Director of the Hospice. Prior to that she had studied dreamwork with Eugene Gendlin. With Mary McGuire, she gave an excellent presentation on Dream Incubation at the International in Shannon in May of this year. She gives Dream Incubation workshops regularly.

All proceeds from the sale of the book go towards Our Lady's Hospice in Harold's Cross. To obtain a copy, please send a donation of £5.00 plus postage to Margaret Costigan at Our Lady's Hospice, Harold's Cross, Dublin 6W. Telephone 01-4911072

Encouragement

An ordinary day!

My banjaxed knee made it awkward to get into the car.

You appeared

like a young god out of nowhere "Dylan" you said

"Don't you remember? You taught me".

We were caught

by the light from your face and the shadow of my memory.

It was a warm evening

With a gentle May breeze carrying the scent of lilac

Everywhere.

Yes. As you recalled faces names, events I crumbled into recognition. Your concern about my cancer. My delight in your achievements.

"You always encouraged me".

I still hold the moment.

Anne Kelly

Everyday care of our Health - A Focusing

Approach by Mairead O'Brien

"A Focusing Approach to Life-Changing Illness" was the title of one of the workshops I attended at the International. It was given by Joan Klagsburn and it contained much that would be of great benefit to people coping with serious illness, and indeed to focusers generally. The full text of it is in "The Folio", Volume 18 Number 1, 1999. One of the

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things that that workshop and the input on "Thinking at the Edge", sparked off in me was some ideas on what I will term "Everyday care of our Health - A Focusing Approach." It is these I now want to share.

The first one is that focusing sees the body as self-regulating, continually balancing itself. It acknowledges that the body knows what its own right state feels like, and is constantly checking and adjusting its processes to stay as close to that state as possible. 'Your body knows the direction of healing and life', Gendlin tells us. "If you take the time to listen to it through focusing, it will give you the steps in the right direction". These steps include bringing into awareness meanings connected to our physical state and these meanings, when explicit, can greatly enhance our level of health.

In the everyday care of our health, we all are aware that there are so called ordinary ailments that we are familiar with, the common cold, a tummy upset, an episode of hay fever etc. These can be "once offs", or chronic conditions that tend to recur. The first step in the focusing approach when anything is out of balance at whatever level, is to come into relationship with it. This step is indispensable and without it no movement can happen. So when the first whiff of a cold arrives or the beginnings of a headache or a tummy upset or an episode of hay fever, a few moments spent just being with it, observing it will be of great benefit. When I say, being with "it", I'm including both the condition itself and the emotional surround to it. You may not have thought of an emotional surround to such a simple thing as a headache, but when a headache arrives as you're leaving the house for an important meeting, there will usually be disappointment there, or irritation or frustration. Acknowledging these feelings, letting them have space, bringing the focusing attitude to them, will bring an easing not only of the feelings but of the pain itself. Then we can spend a few moments with the pain, now that we have cleared the space around it. I find it helpful to explore the pain, noticing

for example, where it is, whether in one place or spread out, whether it's moving or stationary, what its quality is, whether acute, sharp or dull.

As I listen to my body and to my pain in this open, gentle way, I find that I learn more about the pain, e.g. whether it's a new pain or a familiar one. If it's a "golden oldie", memories of how it has been on other occasions may come, and may bring reassurance and a sense of it not being serious. If it's a new pain or condition, I may have to listen further to the added anxiety it may evoke, and be gentle with that fear of the unknown that can also be there. The focusing questions, - "What's the worst of it?", and "What does it need?", are always helpful, bringing a sense of how to move forward, -whether to see the doctor or complementary therapist, or simply to rest or take an already prescribed medicine. Taking time on one occasion with a troublesome gastric upset, I had a clear sense that just giving it my attention with that special focusing attitude was all it needed, was itself healing. On another occasion, as I listened inside to a head cold, I sensed that what would help was to gargle. On both occasions, the guidance from my body proved right and brought healing.

For focusers, the simple steps I have described are familiar, and yet, we all know that we have many ways of skipping them especially with regard to our everyday aches and pains. We can trivialise or even dismiss our ailments, telling ourselves we'll be fine. We can rationalize and analyse, relating to ourselves and to others all the information we have gathered about them over the years. Or we can, almost without stopping, reach for the medicine bottle. We can easily collude with those around us who tell us not to worry, they had exactly that complaint, or with the alarmists, like Norris in Coronation Street, who inform us of the last person to die of just that ailment! etc. All of these are ways of not taking that essential step of coming into relationship with what in our bodies is needing our attention, before looking to others for help. Taking that step ensures that we will not too easily hand over to others re-

sponsibility for our health, or expect healing to come only from a source outside of ourselves.

Many of us are aware of what I will call "areas of weakness" in our bodies, where pain or malfunction tends to recur. It may be a recurring headache or backache or malfunction of an internal organ. These body parts, where we experience dis-ease, are particularly deserving of attention, the kind of gentle, loving attention that focusing brings. We attend to them trusting the healing that our body holds, and the power of focusing to release tensions we may have held in these body areas for many years. Since our bodies are intimately connected within that web of relationships that is life, Focusing can also bring insight into the connection between our illness and our life-style or behaviour patterns, and, with it, the energy to begin to change if necessary.

EXERCISE

- Allow your awareness to drop down inside your body, and take time to notice how you feel just now.
- Now I invite you to bring your awareness to an area of your body where you often experience pain or disfunction.
- Notice how that area feels now, and see if you can be with it in a gentle compassionate way without wanting to change or fix anything.
- Receive what comes - memories, awareness etc.
- You might sense what that part of your body needs just now.
- Before finishing, notice if anything there needs further attention at a later time
- When you feel ready, gently allow your awareness to come back to the surface and into the room.