



# Focusing in Ireland

Autumn 2006

ISSUE 22

## MY EXPERIENCE OF THE 18<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE 2006

By Phil Kelly

Initially I was not interested in attending the 2006 International in the Netherlands last May. Being more or less *out of touch* since the 2002 conference in Bunratty, hosted by the Irish Team, I found myself asking myself:

*"Will I be able to catch up? "  
"Able to meet the challenges  
offered there?"  
"and because of my back injury,  
will I be able to cope physically  
with all that the conference  
involves?"*

In early December, the first warnings posted on the website regarding the importance of *early registration*, brought back memories of my first contact with the International Focusing Community at the "Certification Weeklong" held in Chicago in 1995. As part of a TNT group, and travelling with Kathleen, our first focusing teacher, Kevin, Mairead, Larry and myself set out with high hopes for Certification. A further memory of myself and Kathleen wheeling two identical, small, green cases out of O'Hare Airport *touched the right spot!* I was full of energy! I rang Kathleen and said: *"For old time sake, let's join the International Focusing Community in the Netherlands next May!"*

There was a sense of freshness, of new beginnings, about this journey and my feelings around focusing. I felt I was starting again in a new way. "O yes," I owned, *"I have been focusing all the time, but perhaps I sense also a touch of routine creeping in?"* It was indeed time to meet up with the wider com-

munity and attend some of the workshops on offer. True to the theme of the Conference, *"Focusing on the Move,"* both of us were really happy to be *on the move!* again.

The Conference Centre, situated about thirty miles from Amsterdam, and quiet, spacious and beautiful inside as well as outside – was sufficient to meet all our needs for the five days. The weather was glorious from the day of arrival to departure. Each morning, after the General Assembly, the Special Interest Groups worked on specific projects; while in the afternoons the workshops were in full swing as usual.

I'd like to say a few words about two of the workshops I attended. The first one, entitled *"Coping with Pain and Bodily Discomfort,"* was given by Joan Klagsburn Ph.D. Working experientially all the way, this workshop awakened in me a new understanding of the story surrounding my back injury – it was like a *"fresh" awakening* in me. I suffered an injury to my back a year ago and I now felt that it was no coincidence that I had chosen this workshop.

This experience guided me towards choosing the next one, *"Changing The Unchangeable"* by Robert Lee Ph.D, with whom I'd had some previous work experience. It was indeed the right next step for me to take. His unique and genuine approach to Focusing, and the way in which he deals experientially with issues that are deeply set in the psyche, controlling one's behaviour, seemed to fit that moment. This focusing experience – one in which it became clearer to me how to gently hold challenging situations so as to make better choices in my life in the moment and after the event – was very powerful indeed.

Yes, Conference 2006: *"Focusing On The Move"* certainly moved me, both in how I now hold the gift that is Focusing and in the respect and regard I have for the whole Focusing Community.

The Conference ended as it usually does with an evening of celebration, where the Irish Group – as always – excelled themselves with their presentation or *"version"* of *Focusing on the Move* at the Follies.

I now look forward to the next one and to our own National Conference in September.



Irish Participants at the Conference

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## TAE In Dublin With Nada Lou

By Mary Jennings

When Adrian Farrelly heard that Nada Lou was thinking of coming to Ireland, he invited her to give a TAE workshop while she was here. Twenty-two people turned up for the two-day workshop in May. TAE, or Thinking at the Edge, is a practice developed by Eugene Gendlin to enable people to 'think from' their felt sense. Felt sensing is at the heart of the practice, just as in Focusing.

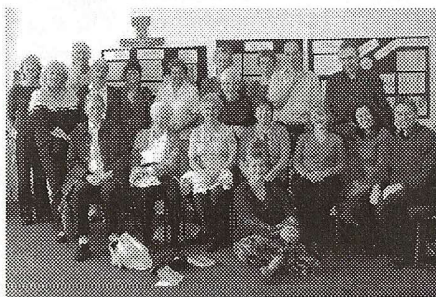
TAE is designed to facilitate people to bring into the world some knowing they have about an area of interest or speciality. Whereas our usual Focusing practice tends to be about issues in our private sphere, TAE practice is about issues of interest in the public sphere. But they have the same root: by being with the fuzzy felt sense of a 'something', it unfolds and shifts. Sounds familiar?

TAE is a structured process with fourteen steps. Nada took us through the first five and touched on the sixth and seventh. What we were aiming to do in the first five steps are to 'break the language barrier'. Our experiencing is more than we can say but all we have are public words in which to say it. That's the dilemma that TAE sets out to help us overcome.

In TAE you work with an active partner, who helps you stay on track by writing down what you say as you stay close to your felt sense. This way nothing gets lost! Starting with a 'rough sentence' about your topic of interest, Nada encouraged us – felt senseingly of course – to underline three words that carried the most meaning. Having looked these up in the dictionary, we became aware that the public meaning did not carry our meaning. So, consulting our felt sense, we came up with other words which might carry aspects of what we wanted to say. This process generates a lot of new material, allowing you to create fresh sentences that have come from the felt sense of

what you want to say. You break the language barrier!

Helped greatly by my partner Monica, I worked on my topic of how Focusing can give us new ways to live in the situations we find ourselves in. By situation, I meant not the dictionary definition, but *interaction, culture, pattern*. I got to use these words by responding to the question: "what would you like situation to mean?" This is a killer question! There was a lot to say about what I meant by these in the context of my topic. Right there, it opened up the felt sense of what I was trying to say by the now too-

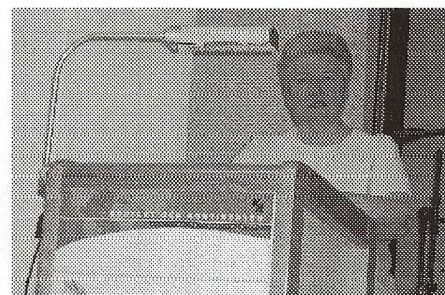


poor word, 'situation'. I generated a paragraph on each of these words. For example, *pattern* for me is 'disparate things that connect'; 'changeable forms'; 'things you see when you look'; 'concepts you can apply'; 'interesting exciting things'; 'seeing it freshly'. Are you getting my drift??? See how new strands of meaning are emerging from one word? Now I have more material to work with, all checked out with the felt sense. But all I can do here is give you a flavour of what TAE is about. You will have to experience it yourself!

Nada is a great teacher and took us through the process in detail. It was an absorbing two days. It was great working in partnership in this way. It's a real collaborative process between people. I learned a lot about the topic I worked on and also about Monica's topic. I am still working on the topic I started in May and hope to be able to present work in progress at a workshop at the national conference in September. See you there.

For information on TAE contact [nadalou@nadalou.com](mailto:nadalou@nadalou.com) or check the Focusing Institute website on [www.focusing.org](http://www.focusing.org).

## FOCUSING - A WAY OF LIFE FOR ME



Sr. Kathleen Savage

Focusing came to me at a time when I had to make important decisions about ministry and career development.

We all know the challenge and pain of trying to discern God's plans for us at various times in our lives and ministry. Focusing for me was the skill that gave me just what I needed and at the right time.

It helped me pay attention to the inside bodily feeling of discerning my future, which at that time was unclear and uncertain. It helped me to stay with my own inner process, to listen from the inside to what was there and yet unclear. It helped me to open that up and allow it to unfold in a way that brought insight, direction and guiding steps towards change, and a sense of connectedness to the larger process that was greater than myself.

It was at that time and still is a way of being present to life's experience through being present to what I experience in my own body as it was happening.

Focusing moved me to a level that was deeper than just thinking about things. It helped me pay attention to my own inner promptings and body sensations'. In doing so it brought me to the edge of awareness between what I was both conscious and what I was yet unconscious of. It taught me how to listen to my own body, which led me to resolution and authentic decision-making.

Focusing for me had many benefits and I could sum them up by saying-Focusing empowered me to make right choices and decisions. It helped me address levels of stress





and burnout and disappointments, which I had to face in my work situation.

It enabled me access and expand my own creative energy and express it in a new and meaningful way, in a new working environment. Focusing helped me manage difficult relationships and build healthier connections that brought an inner freedom, as well as new job satisfaction.

Focusing taught me a way of discerning and making decisions that were right and suited me and my God-given talents and abilities. It helped me to free up space to be present and able to listen to others.

The most significant thing that happened was how it enabled me to connect to the whole spiritual side of my life. Enabling me to experience myself within the larger mystery that holds us all together, which brought a whole new dimension to my prayer life and meaning of Community for me.

Focusing is a natural process not a technique. It is something that we all have the human capacity to manage, as it is an internal act. It is simple and a skill that can be learnt by everyone. In fact I use it very effectively with the children I work with in school one day each week. It is easy to get into, as it is a bodily process rather than using the mind. Paying attention inside to a bodily sense of something that is deeper than thoughts, feelings and body sensations. It's a bodily way of being with an issue, problem, difficult relationship or creative task, which allows it to unfold more fully, tell its story, and move towards the next step or move forward in the right direction.

I have found it an invaluable resource in my daily working with others as well. It is a useful skill to teach people to use in their own situations when overwhelmed with depression, sickness, or inability to cope. It's a most effective skill for people who are stressed out with family problems they have to face in their daily lives. It's a wonderful way of introducing individuals to a Compassionate God when they learn how to be compassionate towards themselves.

If you care to read more about it a good source book to begin with

is "Focusing" by Eugene T. Gendlin. It is simple to read and follow and inexpensive, or visit the website on Focusing at [www.focusing.org](http://www.focusing.org), which gives a very broad perspective on the many, and varying situations where Focusing is widely used.

You can also find out local information by visiting our work website at [www.daneo.org](http://www.daneo.org) where there is a lot of information available on training and learning more about focusing.

Recently I attended the International Conference and this was an opportunity of a lifetime. To be present with so many Focusers from all parts of the world and to share, exchange, mingle and be part of the Focusing Community worldwide was an experience that will stay with me for a very long time.

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## EXPERIENCES WITH FOCUSING AT HOME AND ABROAD

By Larry Cummins

There can be opportunities for informing people about focusing in the most unlikely places, for example in airport lounges where passengers may have hours to spend waiting for their flights.

It was during one of these waits in Singapore Airport that I happened upon a young Swiss man, who like many people are searching for more meaning in their lives. This young man was a natural for focusing and thanks to our annual bulletin I was able to give him the address of a Focusing teacher in Zurich.

Another opportunity presented itself while I was counselling a bereaved woman from Ballymun flats, by telephone. This woman was able to go beyond "being in her head" and intellectualising her husband's death. She was able to express her feelings very well and talk about how and where she carried them in her body. After focusing she felt a lot better.

On one of my earlier visits to Sydney I met Greg Walkerden who happened to be running a weekend workshop near where I was staying with my daughter. Greg invited me along to help out at the workshop and I met a variety of people there, including a Lebanese psychologist who ran a changes group on a Saturday night. One of those present at the workshop was a TV personality. This woman was aware that she was carrying a lot of anger and that her anger could affect the way she presented her program. Fortunately, she was very open to focusing and her enthusiasm encouraged a good number of those present at the workshop to learn more about focusing.

There are always opportunities to focus with my grandson aged 2½ years. One day when he came home from his play school I asked him how he was feeling. He told me that he felt happy and he was able to place his hand on his chest where he felt the happy feeling. A few days later he was crying with a pain in his stomach. I asked him "can you be with that part just like you are with your teddy bear?".....just being there with it. In less than 2 minutes the pain went. Somebody had probably been nasty to him, but I said nothing about that.

During my time in Sydney I learnt about another healing process - Cranio Sacral Therapy, and on my return to Ireland I found a practitioner within 5 minutes of my home. My therapist was interested in learning about focusing and I was able to continue treatment for a hurt knee and at the same time expand my own knowledge of healing.

Focusing is a universal human experience - it crosses borders and disciplines and connects us to others in some very unexpected and exciting ways.

### SUBSCRIPTION TO NEWSLETTER

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