



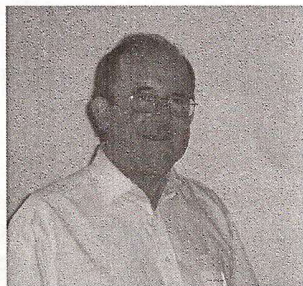
Focusing in Ireland

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The National Focusing Conference '06

By Jim Bagnell



This article is my response to a request from the Editor of the Newsletter. When I set out to write the article I considered looking up summaries of the workshops and writing a general account of the proceedings. Then I thought "I have been focusing over the last twenty or so years. Why don't I just pay attention in a focusing way to how the Conference was for me? So here goes.

I remembered a glorious sunny morning driving across the M50, putting up the signs along the driveway in the sunshine, feeling a sense of anticipation as people began to gather in the foyer, recognizing some faces from last year. I remember spilling a vase of water over Joan's notes as we moved the top table to a better position. I remembered a sense of warmth, of resonance and of inclusion as Joan spoke, marveling at her honesty and at her ability to put words to the amazing growth and healing that can happen through focusing. I recalled the smiling faces at my workshop and the image of a proud man walking

with his young child along a street in the West of Ireland from Mary's presentation. I thought of the brightness and of the buzz in the dining room over dinner. The sense I had in my body was of being present at a very special event.

What is so special about focusing? Why am I drawn to gatherings of people who focus? An image of a young chuckling child came to my consciousness. He was sitting on the floor playing with a soft toy. He was totally engrossed in what he was doing and was unconsciously chuckling to himself. Even as I type these words I can see his round laughing face, his sparkling eyes, the shock of blonde hair above his forehead. I can hear his chuckling laughter softly in my ear.

In my imagination I can see the face of that laughing child in the faces of those at the gathering. In focusing we attempt to strip away some of the facades and layers of pretence we have built up to protect us from the trials and tribulations of daily living. We dare to go beneath these fronts and to touch the reality of the self. We attempt to get in touch with the unconscious laughing child that lies at the center of our selves. At a gathering of focusers we are privileged to be in the company of those who are engaged in this struggle. We try to be more real and are privileged to see the reality of another. I think it is that more than anything else that makes the gathering so special.



Excerpt from guest speaker, Joan Klagsbrun's afternoon talk.

"Perhaps because I had a grandmother, an artist a feminist and free thinker, whom I considered very wise, I have always believed that simply with aging would come some wisdom: that I would live in a way that allowed me to see through the surface of life on a more regular basis the way she did. That does happen to some extent simply through accruing experiences with aging.

However, of course, aging alone does not make for wisdom! I have found that it helps to stop and reflect on my lived experience to see what knowledge has been gained, an exercise which we will do in a little while. Living gives us the information, but not necessarily the understanding; it supplies the experience, but to become wise we have to mine the experience and unearth the diamond in the rough and then polish it to reveal the jewel.

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Many of us say, "If I knew then what I now know." When we say that, we're making reference to the accrued wisdom that has come with living.... We each have in us, things that have become over time, more distilled, formed, specific and precious. When we were younger, we had a kind of knowing, we knew whether we had an artistic sense, or were insightful, or were good with animals or mathematics, but the knowing was mostly vague and inchoate. Over time, the knowing becomes more distilled and less cluttered – it becomes a nugget of wisdom.

Ira Progroff said, "Our past cannot only help us to discover the lost opportunities of our lives, but it can also help to revive them. In addition, knowledge from our past contains portals to possibly finding and understanding the deeper-than-conscious goals towards which the movement of our lives is taking us".

"He who knows others is learned; he who knows himself is wise". Lao Tsu

Let's take a moment to find our own definition of wisdom. Make a space for all the intricacy that the word holds for you, to let it emerge. You might ask "What is wisdom for me today" or "What do I want the word wisdom to mean?" What do I mean by this word?" Take your time and see what strands are revealed to you. Then your partner will write down what you say, encourage you to say more about different aspects, and then read your personal definition back to you.

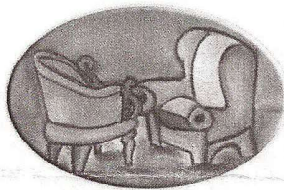
There are many ways we can access wisdom. Today we are going to take the time to reflect on some important life experiences we have had and then to reflect on our experiences at this conference today.

Exercise: Reflecting from your experience: Think of a time that in retrospect you consider a big learning experience—; a period that was a real trial for you. Choose one such time. Try to get a felt sense of what that time was like for you. Just let

yourself acknowledge how hard this was or make a space for that. What is the essence of that experience? See if you can find what you came to know from that experience. When words come to capture that knowing, resonate them, and see if they're the right words. If they don't feel right, let them go, and see if there are better words or images that capture that knowing. Find words that fit that learning—of what you now know on account of that experience or that came out of that experience. Notice how that learning has informed your life or how can it now..."

A Few Thoughts On My Focusing Partnership

By Gwennelle Correge



My focusing partnership began three years ago at a Level 2 workshop in Crossgar. My partner and I arranged to continue our focusing after the workshop and we have met about once a week for the past 3 years. A precious friendship has developed from our experience

From the start the partnership provided a safe and effective space for Focusing, a quietly supportive and reliable environment, a space held for each person's process, without advice or interfering of any kind. Occasionally the listener may offer a suggestion to the Focuser after checking that it is welcome. We have met about once a week for the last three years, usually with some time for chatting and dinner. The weekly meetings helped to keep a regular practice of Focusing more easily and enjoyably than would be possible alone. I don't think I would be so regular in my process without the partnership. I also occasionally Focus on my own and it is different. It is good too but often does not unfold as easily and deeply as with a listener. I experience a greater sense of

freedom in the process within the partnership. I notice I engage faster in my process. Meaningful words, images and memories emerge more readily and spontaneously. The partner's very presence, in some way, makes it easier for me to deal with my Critic. I also value the flexibility of the meetings, which are arranged each week for the next and are usually not limited by time constraints.

For a while we were not applying the rule of equal Focusing time. We usually proceeded on the basis that each Focuser took whatever time felt right for the process that day (equal in opportunity). I often had a longer session and eventually wondered if the partnership was getting unbalanced. We teased that out and now tend to take no more than twenty minutes each, although we remain flexible and occasionally agree to Focus as long as we want to.

For a long time I would have felt nearly guilty if I thought that I had a deeper Focusing session than my partner. I eventually realised that our processes are different and that she might prefer to talk on a given day.

I found the partnership precious both in rough times and in happy ones. Exactly one year ago an important transformation that I had hoped for, for some months, more as a remote dream than as something that could actually happen in my life, unexpectedly happened. The realisation that focusing made this possible came later during a focusing session with my partner.

Frequently Asked Questions about Focusing Partnerships

Are there rules or guidelines that help a Focusing partnership feel safe for both parties?

Safety Rule Number One: *Never never never* mention the content of the Focusing session, even after the session is over, unless the Focuser brings it up. This includes not chatting about similar things that happened to you, and not giving advice



about what the Focuser can do about their "problem." This is **EXTREMELY** important. Just after a session has ended is a particularly vulnerable time, and needs to be treated with the same sensitivity as the Focusing time. Any kind of comment on content from a Focusing partner can seriously compromise the safety of your partnership. Even a seemingly innocent comment like "I hope your back is feeling better" can violate the safety the Focuser feels to explore what they need to explore.

Safety Rule Number Two:

Privacy. It's important that the Focuser feels that they have the right to be as private or as open as they want to be. They are in charge of revealing or keeping private the content of their Focusing. Sometimes the things that come may need time to be known by just the Focuser before being shared. Sometimes they need to be kept private forever. It is not necessary for the Companion to know what the Focuser is Focusing on. If you're Focusing, you can say to the Companion "I can sense what this is connected to," or "I can sense what this is about," without revealing the details. If you're the Companion, never ask "questions for clarification," never let your curiosity about the content interfere with your ability to hold the space for the process.

Safety Rule Number Three:

Confidentiality. Unless you have specific permission, never share anything from your partner's Focusing session with another person. No exceptions.

What if the Listener gets triggered by the Focuser's material?

First answer: Good! What a great opportunity!

Second answer: As the Listener, you are responsible for your own feelings and reactions, of course. You are a real person, not impervious to being moved or touched or shaken or stirred by what the Focuser is working on. But they are yours. We'd recommend acknowledging silently any feelings of your own that come up while you're listening to the Focuser. You might say something like "Hello, I know you're there," to them. That may be enough. There is no need to share them. In fact, better not, not even after the session is over. They're too likely to infringe on your partner's content.

If your turn is next, there may be a way to Focus on your issues that were triggered by your partner's work. If you can really own them as yours, not in any way "about" your partner, it should be OK. Remember that you can always Focus on something without saying what the content is. If you're in doubt, you can check with your partner by briefly describing what you want to work on and asking if that would or wouldn't violate their space. This sort of mutually inspired work can actually be rewarding for both people.

The most dangerous type of "being triggered" is when you don't realize it, so that instead of you taking responsibility for your reactions, they emerge as advice, rescuing behavior, criticisms, or judgments (of the Focuser or others in the Focuser's life). The urge to give advice, rescue, help, or judge may well be coming from a place in you that is having a hard time just being with the Focuser's process. Be alert for the urge to help, fix, or rescue. These urges can be golden signposts that there is something in you that needs some company.

This FAQ is written and updated by Ann Weiser Cornell and Barbara McGavin. (Parts of it were adapted from their *Focusing Student's Manual and Workbook Part 1* and *Focusing Student's Manual and Workbook Part 2* which are both available from The Focusing Institute store.)



Things We Can Learn from a Dog:

- Never pass up the opportunity to go for a joy ride.
- Allow the experience of fresh air and the wind in your face to be pure ecstasy.
- When loved ones come home, always run to greet them.
- Let others know when they've invaded your territory.
- Take naps and stretch before rising.
- Eat with gusto and enthusiasm.
- Be loyal.
- Never pretend to be something you're not.
- If what you want lies buried, dig until you find it.
- When someone is having a bad day, be silent, sit close by and nuzzle them gently.
- Avoid biting when a simple growl will do.
- When you're happy, dance around and wag your entire body.

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