

An Interview with Nancy Falls: Ambassador and Connector **by Tara Renee Breitenbucher**

My interview with the newest Board member, Nancy Falls, felt like more like chatting with an old friend than meeting someone new. I was delighted she was able to Skype from her home near Toronto, Canada, so that I could get a sense of how she embodies Focusing. I could also record the interview, though unfortunately I forgot to close the application correctly and lost the recording entirely! Thankfully, I did take some notes. Somehow, the tragedy of having lost a lot of the details made sense. It was really the feel of her perspective, direction, and momentum that seemed the most compelling and important to get across.

Nancy, said Focusing “just felt right,” when she was introduced to it in 1990 by Glennith Grierson. She trained with Mary Armstrong and was certified in 1993 and has attended numerous International Conferences including those held in Chicago, California, Germany, Costa Rica, Netherlands and Canada.

A significant contribution was her having chaired the 1999 International Focusing Conference, held in Kempentfelt Bay, where she used Focusing as an integral part of the way they approached the organization of the committee. While it increased the time to process information in meetings, Nancy believed that the process brought them closer and made the Conference more meaningful for participants.

Having worked in children’s mental health for 18 years, Nancy has supported hundreds of children and youth who have experienced some kind of trauma or maltreatment. Teaching new clinicians Focusing as one of the approaches to doing assessments and treatment, she sees Focusing as “a way in to connect them with their body,” which she notes is crucial because trauma happens in the body. When I asked her about barriers to teaching and using Focusing in working with kids with trauma, she wisely indicated that actually, kids often have an easier time accessing their felt sense than adults. She uses the felt sense experiencing model created by Jan Winhall to determine how disconnected they are and notes “they have way less maladaptive behaviors and defenses that would otherwise keep them disembodied.”

So far, her most memorable moment Focusing was when she was training with Mary Armstrong and working with a student who was terminally ill with cancer. Instead of using Clearing A Space, as it didn’t seem appropriate to be “clearing out cancer,” she had her look for a place inside that was separate from the cancer. The patient’s profound experience of finding such a place has stuck with her for years. Since this interview, I’ve used the same suggestion in a Focusing session with a terminally ill patient that I’m currently seeing and who found it to be an enormous relief, to contact that part of her that is okay. With connecting with what is working and healthy, she was able to begin to repair her broken relationship with her body. This interview, as we might see is the definition of experiencing Focusing, has already freely unfolded within the interactions that exist between Nancy and I and all those with which we are interrelated.

When asked if Focusing has had much of an effect on her personal life, without hesitation, she stated “I’ve been doing it so long, it’s become who I am.” She explained, “I’m now mindful to be aware of what’s happening physically in a particular instance, and Focusing helps me to get to a deeper level of understanding.” She even convinced her husband to learn Focusing so that they could Focus together, and they now find that it’s helpful in being aware of “what’s really happening at times.”

Nancy is particularly interested in integrating Focusing with spirituality and sees prayer as “a way to get to a quiet place inside.” For her as a Catholic, it’s connecting to the light of Christ, but she emphasizes, “you don’t have to be religious to find a place inside that’s connected to something larger in us.”

Nancy was so light and joyful during the whole interview, but it was when she talked of her experience of Focusing with Gene around a dream she had had, that it seemed something in her sparked even more alive, open, and expansive. As someone who unfortunately never had the chance to meet him, I was delighted to experience her description of him. “He was so present. I don’t know if I’ve ever known someone so present.” She explained that during their session he would tell her to hold on to that and then turn to the crowd and make a point about something, and then he’d turn back to her and “it was like he never lost a connection.” She was so impressed by his ability to hold such a space, and she has always used that experience as an example of staying really present with others.

I don’t for an instance doubt that Nancy is capable of holding the sacred space of real presence with others. I experienced it during the interview, and I heard it in her intentions for her part on the Board and with the Institute. She talked of the power of Focusing being in relationships, that there are many examples of where there have been ruptures, and how she envisions a way to begin to create a space where we can repair and resolve these ruptures in order to move forward. She quoted Gene’s intentions that “had a fairly anarchist bent to them, whenever someone suggested formalizing or having a structure that was Focusing related, he’d blow it up.” She very much appreciated his reasoning for doing this; that he wanted to make room for differences. She finds it crucial that we keep the essential element of Gene’s vision alive. And within this space for difference, she wants most importantly to build relationships. She’d like to see the Board have a physical presence on the international stage so that people can relate to the Institute and the Institute can keep space for all of the different variations of the same theme.

Nancy clearly believes in the strength of having an international Institute that provides so many free resources, whether round table discussions, online Focusing partnerships, and hosting great events where people have an opportunity to meet others throughout the world while culminating their skills and connecting. For her, being part of such an international Focusing community, and her local Focusing community, such as the one that Mary Armstrong created in Toronto, had a profound impact on her Focusing work and life.

Nancy has a very positive outlook when it comes to the future of Focusing. She points to how the mindfulness movement has primed people for being more embodied and able to direct their personal investigations inward. She described us as being in a very important time in the history of Focusing. With the transitioning after Gene’s passing and Focusing organizations forming around the world, she highlights the importance of us all staying connected through the Board and the Institute. She indicated that she’s coming to the end of her career, and that the field of Focusing is so young. She feels it’s important to identify and acknowledge the contribution of so many people who have had such deep impacts on the further development of Focusing across the world. We brainstormed a little as to how that acknowledgement could be achieved, wondering about the Institute creating a family tree of sorts that listed everyone who has been a Trainer or Coordinator, written articles or books, hosted workshops, served on the board, or been instrumental in the Institute’s business. Who knows what will happen with the idea, but the experience of it unfolding in front of us while we witnessed it was a wonderful way to end such an alive and present interview.

I am a Focusing-Oriented psychotherapist and a trainer, trained by Kevin Krycka in Seattle in 2007. Having not been able to get to any of the Weeklong or gatherings, I’ve felt fairly disconnected and in the

dark when it comes to who is involved in the Institute and with what others are doing all over the world with Focusing. In truth, the moments I've spent thinking about the Board has been next to zero. But now, having spent just this hour with Nancy, I have a huge appreciation for those who are involved in trying to direct all of these separate islands into a larger community, and I am elated that Nancy is one of those involved. Nancy is a model and ambassador for what she wants for Focusing and the community it inspires; for it to be a bridge to connect and build relationships. I'm excited to see the influence that Nancy will have on the Institute and on our keeping the essential elements of Gene's vision alive.

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