

Using Gendlin's Focusing In SoulCollage® by Dr. Kathy McGuire March, 2021

I have been a teacher of self-help skills of Gendlin's Focusing and Carl Rogers' Empathic Listening for over 50 years. I want to describe how I use those skills and knowledge in my own SoulCollage® (Frost, Seena B., SoulCollage Evolving, 2010, www.soulcollage.com) process. Most people make one SoulCollage® card at a time, capturing a specific meaning or aspect of themselves. I make many in this session, expressing an evolving and changing Focusing process.

Gendlin's Focusing (*Focusing*, Bantam, 1981) is at its most formal a six-step process for going back and forth between 'present felt experiencing' and the symbols we create to express it. The steps are

1. Clearing a Space
2. Getting a Felt Sense
3. Finding a "Handle" word or other symbol
4. Resonating and Checking the handle against the felt sense
5. Asking Open Ended Questions of the felt sensing
6. Receiving whatever has come in our body, being aware of new possible action steps.

When we find just the right symbols for felt experiencing, something changes inside. We have a 'felt shift,' an "Ahah!" experience. The kaleidoscope turns and we see the world in a different way. New solutions and action steps become possible.

Gendlin observed this natural process being used by clients who were most successful in psychotherapy. They made new words and images for their present felt experiencing. Gendlin tried to articulate this healing process so that everyone could use it more purposefully for their own personal growth work.

You can try Focusing out in this YouTube video of mine: Gendlin's Six Step Focusing Process https://youtu.be/Dswp0_WpMuA

Carl Rogers' Empathic Reflective Listening is the skill to use to accompany someone as they look for words/images/gestures that are "just right" during Focusing. I will set that peer counseling interaction aside as a separate topic. Here I talk about how one can use Focusing alone when doing SoulCollage®. Our cards/images can be the symbols, the 'listeners' we create which then 'reflect back' to us so we can 'check' and 'resonate': "Is this exactly it?"

I think that everyone intuitively and naturally uses a form of Gendlin's Focusing when making and reading or otherwise interacting with images and their SoulCollage® cards. He just made it clearer.

When we sit down to make a card, we have a back-and-forth between a subtle intuitive knowing (Gendlin calls it a 'bodily felt sense') and images/cards and other symbols (can be art, music, a poem...) that we find to express that vague knowing. Or sometimes a symbol calls to us and then we look for the 'bodily feel' of "that whole thing." In either case, the symbols we create interact with and 'reflect' back to us our intuitive knowing --- and we learn something new ("Oh, that exactly captures it"), or we make adjustments ("That is not quite right...it's more like this...")

Some people can spend several hours just making one card that exactly captures some aspect of their 'felt experiencing.' Or they may know, checking with their intuitive knowing, that a card is not quite finished. Or they may say "I haven't the slightest idea what this card means," but their body-wisdom knows. They can learn more through a Reading, letting the body-knowing speak and reflect back to them. Hearing another read our words back to us can be a powerful empathic reflection.

Sometimes there can be a specific instruction or task when we make cards: "I am going to make a card to represent Anger" or "Today we are making cards for the gifts we bring..."

Most often, though, when I sit down at a 3-hour open studio, I go through Gendlin's Focusing process for problem solving and healing. This often means making six or more cards that tell a story. They seem to have a beginning, a middle, and an end to some issue I am working on and trying to resolve.

I start with a vague knowing about what I want to "work on". Or sometimes I know specifically what life issue I want to work with. I walk around and start collecting images in piles which have "something" to do with whatever-it-is, that "whole thing" most present for me that day.

Sometimes I sit in a more meditative way, eyes closed, asking myself "What is there today?" or "What is the feel of all of this?..." And then I collect images/create cards out of this intuitive knowing.

The cards are representations of a changing, ongoing, problem solving process in me which comes from Gendlin's Focusing... I experience subtle or sometimes major new insights. Gendlin calls it a 'felt shift,' when our interaction between our present 'felt experiencing' and the words/images/gestures we create out of it (and 'check' and 'resonate' against it) opens and 'shifts' and is carried forward into some kind of new insights.

Here is an example of a process I went through in one three-hour SoulCollage® studio. The issue was "Many temptations to leave my mainly retired life style and take up new opportunities vs. Resting/being free." Suddenly, I had offers of new clients, students wanting training, offers to write articles, new YouTube and other material being sent my way. I think this explosion was caused by Covid isolation combined with Zoom ---everyone at home AND connecting throughout the world.

I didn't want to turn down these great offers to 'spread the word' and yet a big part of me also did not want to do them, did not want to go back to full -time work...I couldn't sleep at night.

I sensed into "This whole thing about retiring vs. new opportunities..." I began collecting images that 'resonated' with 'that whole thing.' For about two hours, I collected images by going through my existing boxes.

I started making piles for different 'aspects' (I prefer not to say 'parts' because I want to keep them fluid, aspects or facets which arise...and can change). The issue started to change and move through steps as different facets arose or as I made new piles of images for new aspects

that arose. I would say that, by the end, I had come to a new place... I did then start pasting images onto backings....

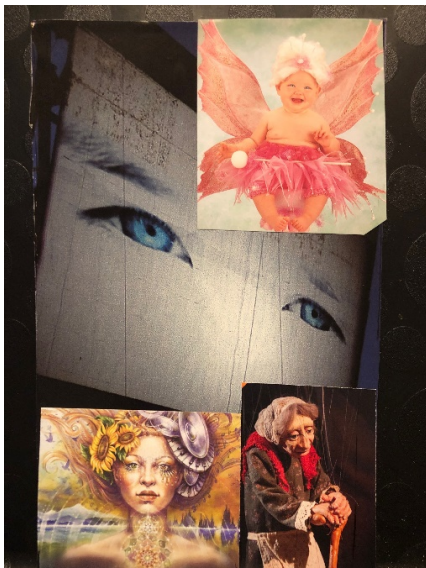
I arranged them as the ‘story’ demanded. I also know these are real SoulCollage® cards that can take up various places in my deck in the future. But, for now, they tell and reflect back to me the story (In SoulCollage®, we often let our cards “speak to us” by using the phrase “I Am One Who...” (I Am One Who ... below):

Card One: My Awkward Spawned Children



I Am One Who...has birthed these children, these off spring... I Am One Who ... is worried about them, their naked vulnerability... I Am One Who ... is trying to clothe them, protect them... I Am One Who ... doesn't really like them, thinks they are 'ugly misfits.'...

Card Two: “Wise AND Old Woman”



I Am One Who ... has been wise and charismatic from birth. I Am One Who ... has real wisdom to share. I Am One Who ... is also old and feeble. I Am One Who ... does not want to/does not have to share just because I have wisdom.

Card Three: “Peer Counseling/Supportive Community”



I Am One Who ... holds peer counseling/supportive community close to my heart (a teariness comes even now from my love for this). I Am One Who ... does not want this message to be forgotten. I Am One Who ... writes about building community. This is my treasure.

Card Four: “Do It Yourself!”



I Am One Who ... resents people who do not trust themselves or do not want to do the work themselves. I Am One Who ... says, “Don’t ask me! Figure it out yourself!” I Am One Who ... says the kernel of wisdom is inside of yourself. You can do it!

Card Five: “Walking Away is Not Defeat!”



I Am One Who ... can walk away with glory. I Am One Who ... can walk away at the height of her power. I Am One Who ... does not see stopping as being beaten or defeated or diminished.

Card Six: “I Deserve Beautiful Sunsets”



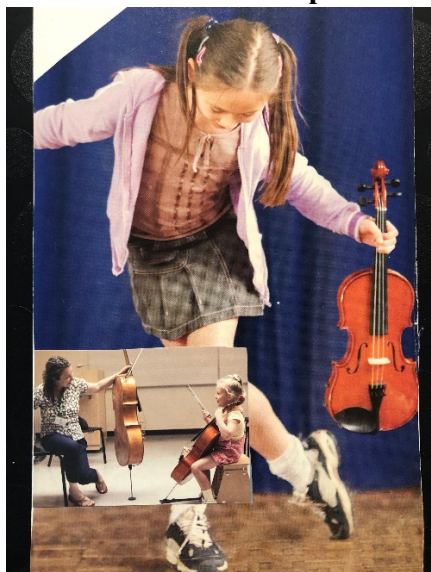
(a teariness comes here right now also) I Am One Who ... deserves to rest. I Am One Who ... deserves beautiful sunsets. I Am One Who ... can row away with serenity.

I shared these cards with my group at the time. I read one of them then. Next I put them all out in order on my table and left them there for weeks. I looked at them, ‘sensed into’ them several times a day, noticing what was changing, noticing what happened with them as they interacted with each other. I Read one more formally once in a while. I could have done one of the Readings where you invite various cards to interact/dialogue.

I did formal Listening/Focusing turns on this issue with my peer counseling partner. I noticed what made me anxious, what allowed me to sleep. I said “No” to a lot of very rich opportunities. I grieved that these new technologies like Zoom for sharing had not existed even ten years ago when I had that kind of energy. I still struggle as I find my way through this huge life issue.

Eventually, this next card in the story arose out of my existing deck when I was looking for other things. It seems like the perfect next step:

Card Seven: “It Is Important To Take A Bow”



(a teariness comes here now as well...) I Am One Who ... takes a bow. I Am One Who ... has created all this. I Am One Who ... has also been the teacher. I Am One Who ... knows it is important to celebrate my herstory, my life time of creation.

And that is where I am now. Thank you for following me on this journey. In a Focusing way, I could also ‘sit with’ especially the moments where I got teary even now...there is something more there, some more important meaning in those places of tears...but that is for another day!

Again, you can try Focusing out in this YouTube video of mine: Gendlin's Six Step Focusing Process, <https://youtu.be/Dswp0WpMuA>

Dr. Kathy McGuire is a retired Clinical Psychologist with a huge website for Creative Edge Focusing™, www.cefocusing.com, where you can find descriptions of Listening and Focusing, many applications to all aspects of living, free articles on the meaning of tears, building supportive community, Experiential Focusing Therapy, and much more. In the totally Free Store, you can find manuals, MP3 audio files, and an E-Course to download. You can also find over 20 videos teaching Listening and Focusing at Dr. Kathy McGuire’s You Tube Channel.

Please visit www.kaleidosoul.com for an introduction to SoulCollage®, a free e-newsletter, and much more.

*Here I am just sharing my personal process. I am not presently a certified Focusing trainer or a certified SoulCollage® facilitator. Please follow the appropriate links to find more training.