

## BECOMING OK WITH THE NOT-YET-OK

### Living a Focusing Life in the Midst of Community Conflict

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Authenticity requires...bringing oneself before how one already is, how one is being-here...[disclosing] how we are thrown into the situations in which we find ourselves (into which we have lived ourselves) (Gendlin, 1978).

Since first encountering Gendlin's work nearly a decade ago, I have pondered a number of questions. For example,

- Is Focusing something I “do” only periodically or can it provide a model of how I might “be” in my life?
- How can I integrate Focusing skills into the daily unfolding of my life?
- How might my experience of everyday life shift as I am able to be with others in a Focusing way?

As the sages caution: *Be careful about what you invite into your life. You never know what you will be living into.*

In the Spring, 2012, I found myself “thrown into” an unprecedented conflict among a growing local business, its residential neighbors and city government. My regular Focusing Partnership practice certainly helped me navigate the personal anxiety about the situation into which I had lived myself. However, I increasingly found myself “already with” an implicitly understood new way of being-in the situation as it would play itself out over the next 18 months. Over time, others also began to notice (although not fully understand) how important the ability to bring myself into the unfolding “being-here” would become.

My goal in sharing the unfolding of my story is not about presenting historical facts, figures and details. These elements (while instructional and fascinating in their own right) lie beyond the scope of this article. Nor do I offer a well-defined, polished model for conflict resolution. Rather, I invite you to experience the shared bits and pieces of the unfolding story (with its interweavings of felt-sensing process). Perhaps you will be able to notice relevant patterns and crossings that can apply to your own life journey.

### WHAT WAS...

I own a beautiful century-old house in a downtown residential neighborhood, with many houses between 100-150 years old. I have lived here now for over 20 years, the longest period of time I've ever spent in a single house. My late husband, Alex, and I spent our

married life together here. We had such a special bond with the house that we honored it with a name that also included our initials: “ASK ME House”.

In 2006, a high-tech start-up company purchased a former neighborhood elementary school building situated right behind my house. Initially, neighbors welcomed the company’s plan to use the school building as a “research and development laboratory”. After all, they were “rescuing” a then-vacant school property. They also promised new, well-paying jobs in a growing industry to our community, which had been struggling with the loss of more traditional manufacturing jobs.

### ...NOT OK...

In late winter of 2012, I began to notice wooden surveyor stakes surrounding the grassy field on a section of the former school’s property. Once the school’s baseball field, this welcome bit of green space had often served as a neighborhood gathering place for play-time with dogs and children as well as pick-up ball games.

I requested information from both the company and the City Planning Department and eventually learned that the company planned to construct (in their words) “a simple building—a shed, actually.” Initially, I felt a something-sad inside about the anticipated loss of green space on our block, while other parts criticized the sadness as sentimental and selfish.

Shortly after, as construction started, I became intrigued watching the deep foundations of concrete begin offering support to towering ribs of steel. Until one day, my sense of fascinated wonderment quickly shifted to disbelief. Reality set in: “Oh my God, that building is really HUGE!”

A few weeks later, I watched, aghast, as bright blue and white steel walls rolled up to become the sides of the now 14,000 square foot, industrial-looking building. Within a few days, I read in a local newspaper that the company was planning a celebratory dedication of their new “research facility.” They also wanted an extended tax abatement from City Council.

### BEING WITH “ALL THAT”

One morning, I had a visual sense that my own spacious 3-story house had been swallowed up by the “pole-barn” (as we had started to call it). I also sensed something inside (that felt like my late husband’s voice) repeating its never-ending litany: “It’s YOUR fault we bought this house. It’s YOUR fault the house is losing its value. It’s YOUR fault. It’s YOUR fault.”

Not only did I have a gut-wrenching *ugh* about the building’s appearance, I felt sad about the changes in our neighborhood’s look and feel. I was angry the company could receive a tax break by jeopardizing the property values of our homes. I also had all these warring factions inside: “I feel helpless. It’s my fault. I’m to blame. What am I going to do? Is there ANY way to fix this? It’s hopeless.” All of that was churning inside, threatening my very wellbeing.

The new building's negative impact on our neighborhood had also begun to sink into the neighborhood's collective consciousness. One neighbor's house (situated barely 12 feet from the building's 140-foot-long north wall) became totally shaded from the sun. Other neighbors faced intense glare as sunlight bounced off the building's new metal roof. Passers-by began to resonate their own powerful visceral *ugh* (especially when seeing the building for the first time).

When a neighbor reached out to a local alternative weekly newspaper, I was invited to share my story with the reporter as we sat together on my front porch, barely 100 feet from the blue and white pole-barn. I felt a shift inside with a realization that "something" was calling me to step forward. And, I was there "alone", since a number of neighbors had left town for the 4th of July holiday week.

My newly-found resolve translated into presenting comments at that evening's City Council meeting (in spite of the shakiness permeating my whole being). The shaky feeling (and the trembling in my voice as I offered my prepared remarks) was not because I was afraid of speaking in public. After all, I teach, perform and sing in public. It wasn't a "simple" case of stage fright. Rather, I began to understand, it had more to do with holding the "*ugh*, it's my fault, what did I do wrong" aspects of my experience along with my disbelief and anger.

I was surprised by City Council members' lack of knowledge of the size and scope of the building project—even though they had been invited by the company to attend a grand reception at the new building site being held only two days later. Just as there had been no notification to neighbors about the site plan review, neither had City Council been notified as part of the process. Their puzzled looks of dismay lent a brief respite *inside* from my background feeling of shame-filled *ugh*...

## WHAT WOULD/COULD BE "OK"?

Our concerns now public, I convened a small group of neighbors on my front porch. We began by going around the circle, allowing each to speak about how the pole-barn situation was affecting them personally. Then, as a group, we arrived rather quickly and smoothly at a general consensus surrounding two broad-stroke goals:

1. **Fix the façade.** All of us clearly wanted to make the pole-barn literally "disappear"—yet we realistically knew it was not likely to be torn down. We didn't have specifics yet about what could be OK, but our budding clarity about what was NOT OK began to set the stage for suggesting a broad range of alternative solutions. We were, however, unanimous in our determination to postpone approval of the company's tax abatement request pending a successful resolution of our concerns with the façade.
2. **Fix the ordinance.** We also sought assurance that this type of situation could never happen again. We believed no other neighborhood should have to undergo what we were experiencing.

A few days following our first neighborhood gathering, a company representative joined us for a second meeting at my home. During that meeting, participants restated their concerns. We offered both preliminary ideas for alternative facades and our willingness to work together for a positive solution. In return, the company representative offered an apologetic statement of “We never thought it would cause a problem”, along with a list of all the good things they were doing for our community.

It quickly became clear that the company and its neighbors held completely different views of what the “problem” even was, let alone what could eventually become OK. This impasse would result in multiple failed attempts to engage the company in any kind of meaningful conversation. We had found ourselves in the midst of an unprecedented situation in the absence of scripted solutions. Our “adaptive challenge” (Heifetz, Linsky & Grashow, 2009) was to find a way to gain a new façade while also constructively dealing with our anger, frustration, fears and concerns related to the addition of a pole-barn in our midst.

## DISCOVERING PATTERNS AND CROSSINGS

While I struggled to better understand the company’s continuing lack of response to our ongoing concerns, I also became an easy target for various members of the press to approach me for comments. I began to emerge as the public face (and voice) of the neighborhood’s concerns, partly due to becoming the most consistent attendee from the neighborhood at City Council and Committee meetings related to the “pole-barn” issue.

I had earlier learned from Gendlin how metaphor can provide a helpful means of *being-with* a situation in its murky ongoingness. I would soon discover that metaphor is also useful for creating media-friendly sound bites and shared understandings in moving the situation forward.

In this instance, this company was still youthful in terms of corporate age. Its founder—while entrepreneurial in nature—had come from an academic science background. The company’s minimal level of corporate business experience was well acknowledged, although often overlooked by politicians and corporate development folks because of the potential to bring jobs and economic prosperity to the region.

At one point, I found myself reminded of a typical parental conversation with an adolescent who is yet to acknowledge the extent or responsibility of their recent behavior. For example:

*P: How could you do such a thing?*

*C: Nobody told me it was wrong...*

*P: That doesn’t always mean it’s “right.”*

*C: I never thought that there would be a problem...*

*P: You’re right—You never thought...!*

*C: Gee, I’m sorry...*

*P: Being sorry isn’t enough. How are you going to fix it?*

The metaphor itself would also continue to expand in both scope and meaning throughout the duration of this experience. For instance, there came a time when the company was finally beginning to explore potential solutions. By then, City Council members had joined neighbors in voicing concerns about a lack of accountability measures to assure that the company would actually carry out any eventual, agreed-upon façade changes.

The expanded metaphoric pattern now had the company playing the role of the handsome, charismatic high school senior football jock. At this point, we (neighbors) were feeling somewhat like the young man's girlfriend in the back seat of his car. As he's trying to romance her, he's also saying, "Sweetheart, you KNOW I love you, and...of course...I'll respect you in the morning!"

Much to my surprise, I soon discovered additional benefits to the use of the "corporate adolescent" metaphor to describe the company's behavior. It added a much-needed dose of humor to an understandably stressful situation and also helped me identify a source of inner compassion that would then become a turning point in my *living-forward* of the situation. I began to envision and share a long-term scenario of a successful grown-up, a successful company in right relationship with its surrounding community.

While never quite envisioning the neighbors (or the City) as having a parental role, I did begin to view the whole situation as somewhat similar to the concept of "it takes a village to raise a child." In this case, I began to think that, perhaps it might take an entire community to help a company "grow up." Within such a scenario, this current situation could eventually be viewed, discussed (and even chuckled about) as within any loving family that has survived the challenges brought on by adolescence.

## BEING WITH "IT" FRESHLY

As weeks turned into months, my original sense of...*ugh*...offered a benchmark against which to measure the potential success of proposed solutions. For example, during a trip to Italy in early fall a few months into the situation, I experienced a serendipitous sense of...*ahh*...in stark contrast to the...*ugh*...back home.

I had arrived in Florence the evening before, travelling alone before meeting up with a tour group. Tentatively making my way by foot through town, I turned left at a corner and suddenly beheld the magnificently beautiful Duomo (the fourth largest Cathedral in the world). Although still a few blocks ahead of me, its massive structure dominated the surroundings. "*Ahh*...what a luscious contrast to the pole-barn back home", I thought, while also wondering what it might be to live next to something so visually appealing.

Standing on the street corner, I grabbed my camera. Just as I snapped the first photo, I heard a gasp of...*ahh*...that resonated perfectly with my own just a moment before; except this time it came from a pair of young Japanese women who had just turned the corner in front of me to unexpectedly encounter the same wondrous sight.

Back home again, about a month later in the process, the company offered a landscape architectural plan to a trio of neighbors (myself and two others) with whom they had eventually agreed to meet.

At (my) first glance, the plan was brilliantly conceived. It would use landscaping to draw the viewer's eye away from the building and partially shield the building from view. I remember thinking, "Wow, here's a unique way to help the building disappear."

However, when invited to offer a response, I lacked words to describe my overall sense of the plan. I had begun to develop a deep respect for the landscape architect and was beguiled by his conception of using nature to help the building "disappear." A part of me longed for a workable solution, while another did not trust the company to implement the plan as presented. I sensed a vague, unnamed inner unease with the plan's overall viability. I also sensed that many neighbors would not be accepting of the plan.

I sat, agape and speechless, pausing to find words to express some of all I was experiencing. One of my neighbors blurted out, "Just say it, Mary. You don't need to be polite!" The second neighbor quickly added, "Oh, I know just what you're trying to say..." as she then offered her own (negative) reaction to the plan. I stopped to re-group and ground myself enough to keep from reacting to their emotional comments. I was then able to calmly request a moment to allow my own response to emerge.

In that moment, I noticed yet another layer of "fresh" experiencing, within the context of the overall situation. It's one thing to feel one's own self-in-presence within the safe container of a Focusing partnership. It's quite another to sustain it while communicating with others, especially when they are not already conversant with a *Focusing attitude*. Yet, by being "present" and trusting the "pause", I was able to momentarily continue in dialogue with the company representatives while my frustrated neighbors simply vanished from the room.

In a Focusing session several months later, I unexpectedly sat with an experience that seemed to resonate and solidify a bit of what I had learned that day. The session had started with noticing an almost echo-like pattern of spaciousness and quiet, even as all my life and its circumstances swirled around me. As I sat in the chair, it felt like "a whole new world" in the room around me—or OUT here, on the outside of me. Through the open window, I noticed the quiet in the wind, even amidst some blustery wind outside. And, noticed a whole new world inside me, that seemed to hold gratitude.

And then, I noticed a new "something" in the area of my throat that felt tense. On the outside, coming up the back of my neck and (somewhere between the roof of my mouth and top of my throat) a sort of forward overhang that felt "external". And, there was something on the inside that seemed less clear.

An image came—like a plastic pitcher with a plastic lid, with the handle part in my back and its pouring part by my mouth. Something was keeping the lid clamped. There seemed to be something inside that wanted to be poured out, yet it seemed as though there was a tension between *it* and the clamped top. I could feel that tension in the back of my throat. It didn't seem as though what was IN the pitcher was actually pushing, nor was it

causing the tension. Instead, it felt as if the bottom container part of the pitcher and its lid were somehow stuck—and it was their stuckness that was causing the tension.

As my attention was drawn from the pouring-out-part to the back part of the hinged area, a phrase came: “it all hinges upon...” From back there in the hinged area, where the feeling of tension was, something was saying: “Describe me. See me for who and how I am.” As the session came to a close, I then also heard: “Whatever comes out in speech and behavior, hinges upon a listening and understanding of what’s here freshly in the moment.”

## **“BEING” BECOMES THE TEACHER**

Over time, I gradually began to discern a sort of helpful, rhythmic way of being-in the situation. It involved a gentle, continuing awareness of both my own fresh experiencing of the whole situation and my ongoing process. As a result, I was able to continually shift between the current sense of “this is what is not yet ok” and “this is what might possibly become ok”.

In addition to regularly-scheduled Focusing partnership sessions, frequent walks with one of my neighbors offered almost daily opportunities for being-with all-of-it freshly in an even more direct manner. Although not an experienced Focuser, my neighbor was able to be a caring witness and listener to my process. Over the months, she would become a strong (and trusted) sounding-board and supportive cheerleader, even during inevitable times of disagreement and conflict.

My neighbor’s preferred way of being-in the world is strikingly different than mine. As a self-described “elderly-lesbian-activist”, she would often use “naive, polite and nice” in describing me, and my approach, to the ongoing conflict. Over the months, we would frequently find ourselves exploring the sometimes risky borders and edges of our friendship.

Several months into the process, we had been discussing a tangential issue, not directly related to the neighborhood conflict. At one point, she made a statement that I knew to be factually incorrect. When I pointed out her error, she complained, “You always do that. You always have to be right.”

While something in me wanted to justify my behavior as a simple desire for accurate reporting, another part inside cautioned, “Don’t argue. Don’t defend. Just let it be.” We continued walking in silence for quite a distance, until turning a corner closer to home. As I continued walking forward, she suddenly stopped. From a few feet behind me, I heard her softly say, “You know, I’m jealous. I realize now that I’m jealous of what you have been able to achieve.”

Taking in her words, I felt pleased that she was validating the minor successes we were beginning to experience at that point of the community conflict. Yet, I felt most moved that she had allowed herself to recognize and give voice to her own fresh experiencing. And, that she had felt safe enough to say it out loud to me.

Over time, my neighbor would continue to have similar sorts of insights as we intuitively began to insert quiet moments, as needed, into our walking sessions. She came to

trust that she had my support and acceptance to be however she needed to be. And though she would frequently tell me, “You are being too damn polite” or “You’re being too...” I was able to hear it in a less critical way, knowing that I also had her permission to be how I needed to be.

While my neighbor and I occasionally discuss my Focusing work, I’ve never done anything to formally teach her how to Focus. Yet, as seen above, our walks frequently resulted in shining moments of serendipitous learnings for us both. A few months later, we would experience an even deeper moment of shared learning—one that would test the strength of our friendship.

## LETTING AND ALLOWING

It was a Monday afternoon in early spring, 2013. There had been months of tense, stalemated silence between the company and its neighbors. After previously putting their tax abatement request on hold, the company had recently decided to bypass the neighbors in hopes that the City Council would grant their request in spite of the continuing conflict. That evening, the City Council was scheduled to hold a Public Hearing concerning the company’s tax abatement request.

The day before (on Sunday), I offered a last-ditch, olive-branch-like opportunity by sending an email to the company to see if we might re-open negotiations. By mid-morning on Monday, the company founder/president walked around the corner from his office and was seated in my dining room.

Initially, we spent an hour in deep listening to each of our concerns. For the first time in months, I was beginning to feel hopeful—that perhaps we both felt heard and might begin to find a way forward. It felt as though we were two professional colleagues sitting together, drafting something that we could take with us, later that evening, to jointly present at the start of the public hearing.

On the face of it, the joint statement was fairly non-specific. It laid out the fact that we were at least talking to each other again. It also included the company’s written agreement (for the first time!) to put forward a minimum amount of dollars to “fix” the façade.

We both knew the document was more symbolic than substantive or legally binding. Yet, as we sat together carefully choosing our language, I also knew that I was beginning to step into a new, separate role that felt a bit like walking the plank or venturing out onto a fragile tree limb. The initial draft’s final “if...then...” bullet point was to include my future agreement (in my role as a neighbor—but not as neighborhood spokesperson) to subsequently speak in support of their tax abatement request.

I had agreed to type up the statement and then walk it back around to his office for our joint signatures. On my way, I chose to stop at my neighbor’s house to share the morning’s unfolding developments. Her initial reaction was “You traitor! Are you for us or against us? What’s happening with you? You’ve been our champion and suddenly you’re giving in to the enemy.”



I knew it was my turn to listen as I offered her a safe space and opportunity to speak about what was happening inside of her. After reflecting what I'd heard, I then shared what had come inside me as I had listened. We continued to share back and forth this way for quite some time, reflecting not only what was *inside* each of us, but also *inside the space* we shared together. We gently invited what was not ok—and what would be needed—so that it might be ok.

We both distinctly remember a period of about five minutes, during that nearly hour-long conversation, when each of us wondered whether we would be able to emerge from the interaction as friends. Yet, we were eventually able to realize that all we needed was to eliminate the last statement from the agreement. We both recognized that even though I wasn't giving in, it would feel to the rest of the neighbors as though I was. We could live with everything else.

A few moments later, sitting in the company's conference room with the top three management people, I was able to speak from my heart, "I included all the statements except for that last thing. I realize I couldn't do it, partly because my neighbors aren't ready to hear it. I live in this neighborhood. You may work here and own the company in this neighborhood, but I live here." To which they simply responded, "Oh, yeah, we can appreciate that," as we each proceeded to sign the amended statement.

Later that evening, at the end of the Public Hearing at the City Council meeting, I was approached by one of the city's economic development people. Although we had spent months at opposite sides of the table, we had never really been formally introduced, or had any substantive conversations. However, that evening's meeting had marked a major turning point in the process. It was the economic development staff who would ultimately become our champions in eventually finding a tenable solution.

## **WHEN LIVING FORWARD MEANS STEPPING AWAY**

As a Focuser, I'm well aware of how *life-forward energy* often moves us ahead in unpredictable ways. Over the months of this process, I began to notice a continued shifting of how I was within the overall situation.

On one level, I had begun to shed the sense of personal shame that had initially propelled me into action. As it began to fade, it was replaced by a sense of feeling trapped. I wanted to be away from the situation and felt drained by the efforts to continually fight a battle that felt increasingly un-winnable. I still loved my house, but had lost the joy of living here. At the same time, I did not want to leave my house or my neighbors.

However, I also knew I would be unable to stay in the house and remain uninvolved in searching for a solution. I felt a longing to escape, partly as a form of respite from being swallowed-up-in-the-soup of it all. I also wanted to gain some distance and perspective, in order to find a way out.

One day, during a Focusing session, I sensed a dizzy, swirly feeling inside. It seemed to have the energetic feel of a caterpillar dissolving into chyme in the midst of transforming

into a butterfly. I noticed my left hand, gently stroking the area over my heart as if to say, “All will be well...there’s no rush...” while sitting with *all that* which was in the midst of change. And yet, sensing something else inside me that was at once both peaceful and also “not-quite-settled”...Sensing something along the back wall of my throat, as it searched for a word to explain what it IS, not what it’s NOT...It seemed NOT connected to my voice...rather more connected to a movement that felt stiff and not quite ready...I felt a kind of pattern inside...in which there’s a *NOT something*, which then opens up into a *something* and back again to a *NOT something*. As if there’s the “not quite ready”, followed by an invitation for what the “not quite ready” IS...Also, sensing a little bit of “auditioning” about “is it something that WILL be ready?” Finally, as the session concluded, accepting that something is BECOMING and I’m content to let it be THAT for now...as long and as much as it needs.

In another Focusing session, I envisioned what seemed like a very tired bird on a perch, as if observing a cat fight. I had been sitting with a ball of tight, hurting disappointment in my left temple, while recalling recent instances of mud-slinging, blaming and shaming that had been occurring around me. While none of it involved me directly, it was related to and impacting the overall neighborhood situation. I could sense that others’ behavior came from their own places of being wounded. I was also beginning to sense that I could choose which path I wished to walk...without needing to tell others what path they should be walking, for it wasn’t mine to say...while also knowing that people might not always understand...and might even think poorly of me...Remembering a time when I couldn’t handle thinking I would somehow not measure up to their expectations...while feeling more certain that being true to myself and my choices was more important.

The day following my pivotal meeting with the company president, I began my Focusing session with a feeling of nausea on the left side of the base of my throat...and a sense of wanting to cry—not from sadness, but from the nausea...With that, an image came of me, standing in a deep river of muck. I was unsure whether it was different muck or fresh muck or the same muck, or whether muck had ever been there before. I DID know that it was now muck and had a differentness about it...for I had chosen to stand in it because of the decisions I had made the day before...And yet, it had been a stepping-into that still felt like it had been the right thing for me to do...with a knowing that the nausea was coming from having to smell the muck and that I would have to stand here in it for awhile...I heard, “I think I can bear to stand here—just don’t make me eat it or inhale it. Just don’t make me have to take it in.” I was also looking for a way to “rise above the muck”...As the session came to an end, I noticed a quick flash of an image on the inside of my left eyelid, like a snapshot of half of a face...All I could catch—it was female, sort of smiling—an approval kind of smile!

## **STOPPING OR QUITTING...OR PASSING THE BATON**

By late spring, 2013, I had spent more than 12 months engrossed in the ongoing saga. We had won a number of significant victories. We had gained unlikely allies from all sectors of the community and had established friendships with more of our nearest neighbors. The

ordinance change had been accomplished and the economic development folks continued to negotiate the façade-fix on our behalf.

One weekend morning, I awakened with a sense of, “This big thing is coming to an end...working its way to an end.” Knowing also there were still a few things for me to do, in order to “Finish what you started.” Yet, also something about setting down, letting go, and walking away from...ways of being that no longer serve me.

The day came when we were presented with a proposed solution that was less-than-perfect-but-better-than what-currently-is. I was exhausted and hoarse from a nagging cough. I yearned to not have to talk about the issue anymore.

Dipping inside, I sensed something that felt like NOTHING...alongside that huge part that really wanted to stop my involvement in the issue and to have the issue stop. And something in between the issue stopping and the energy of my involvement (or engagement)...something about “fuzzy new boundaries” about the level, type and scope of my engagement with this particular situation and/or other situations...Sensing the place that had felt like nothing, becoming more like a dark space I couldn’t see into yet...and then something just wanting to hide, to be alone...wanting to just withdraw...”Ah, maybe that’s what the dark space is for...” to use as a source of shelter, where I can just hang out a little bit”...And now, a shifting to a sense of relief and enrichment...It’s not just about not knowing what it is or what’s next...But right now, there’s a sense of relief in imagining that dark place as a place of refuge...before new problems come.

I had taken the pole-barn process as far as I could. I was feeling invited to other, new endeavors where I could apply my newly-tested skills and capacity for being-in challenging situations.

In the days and weeks that followed, I still felt myself an active, involved neighbor with a continuing vision of a vibrant, collaborative, caring community. I was simply no longer leading the charge.

Some neighbors chose to interpret my “stopping” as “quitting” as two of them stepped forward to continue pressing for a more acceptable façade-fix solution. I then began to realize perhaps I had merely “passed the baton” in what had now become a neighborhood relay.

## **LIVING A FOCUSING LIFE**

A fresh smile comes inside, with a paraphrase of Gendlin’s response to a question posed by an audience member during my first time at the Focusing Institute Summer School (FISS): *The goal of Focusing is not about having NO problems. It’s about an ability to experience NEW problems.*

As I look back freshly over the past 18 months, I discover that I have indeed learned a great deal about what it means to live a Focusing life. On an embodied level, I can more easily hold onto that which is wanted, without squelching all the not-wanting. I can invite the not-wanting to help inform the way forward, rather than blocking it or hijacking the process.

And, I can discern when it is time to set down that which no longer serves me, while also letting-and-allowing those around me to be who they are and as they need to be.

Or, in an adaptation of a prayer by Swami Vivekananda:

When I asked God for...[community] He gave me...[a pole-barn]...God gave me nothing I wanted. He gave me everything I needed.

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