

IN THE PRESENCE OF INNOCENCE



A place for Innocence

I shall never forget the day *Innocence* returned to my life. Her (re-)birthing came on Friday, 23rd March 2018 in the hamlet of Caux, Switzerland. She came in service to a small group of people gathered to prepare and plan for the Caux Forum, due to take place in The Caux Palace, 28 June – 5 August 2018. The [Caux Forum](#) consists of a series of themed, conference gatherings destined to bring people from across the globe to grapple with and respond to some of the most troubling challenges and issues of our time.

I was first invited to Caux as a conference contributor in 2010. I have volunteered every year since then, supporting the creation and delivery of conferences ranging from

CAUX PALACE

[Caux Palace](#) has been the global summer gathering place for a trust-building fellowship called *Initiatives of Change*¹ since 1946. It has been a source and resource for personal and global change. Since the Second World War, it has been witness to hugely significant acts of trust-building and political diplomacy, resulting in previously unimaginable healing and reconciliation.

This place is held in the hearts of countless individuals across generations, communities, faiths, sectors, contexts and cultures – individuals who have given freely of their personal, emotional, spiritual, practical and financial resources to help ‘Change the world; starting with themselves’. This, our shared mission in IofC, is as grandiose as it is personal. Through it, we are called to deal with troubling, tragic, traumatic situations, offering support to individuals and communities across continents. We find ourselves galvanised variously by faith, conscience and/or inspiration from the divine (whatever that means to each of us).

All of us, in our own unique ways, support people within and beyond the fellowship. We follow what calls us into action, flowing to where need arises and to where we are invited. Every contribution matters and is valued for what it brings to the combined effort, even though we often never know nor fully comprehend what or how it makes a difference.

Our mission is aspirational... and we recognise we are imperfect, fallible human beings. Yet we are committed to working on ourselves and to safeguard our own trustworthiness, so that our efforts in the world may be wholesome and generative.

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‘Leading Change for a Sustainable World’; ‘Trust and Integrity in a Global Economy’; ‘Living Peace’ and ‘Seeds of Inspiration’. It was in this place that I found my tribe, ‘Initiatives of Change’ (IofC). My connection is fulfilling, passionate, earnest, joyful, expansive and humbling.

Imagine, though, my very great surprise, in this context of worthy serious endeavour, when someone new showed up to play her part. She came to invite a roomful of grown-ups (some open-minded and some moderately resistant) to play with her.

Coming to nose

I had been invited to deliver a session to hopefully inspire the people present to better understand and engage with the spirit and essence of IofC. I was to introduce them to IofC’s eight [Seed Behaviours](#) whilst at the same time encouraging them to incorporate and share these through the design, organisation and delivery of their conferences. I had two hours. It seemed like the conditions were set for a deadly dull afternoon, so it was unsurprising to me that several people absented themselves even before the session began. Little did any of us know what was to come!

Now, four years ago in 2015, I attended a short Clowning workshop in the [Seeds of Inspiration](#) conference in Caux. In the 1.5hr session, I was given a Red Nose. As participants, we were invited to open ourselves to what came alive in us when we wore our Red Nose. We then were invited to walk on to a mini stage between two pillars donned in our Red Nose. Our brief was simple: Be, behold and be held by the gaze of our audience. I still recall with utter childlike delight, their response to me and the laughter and joyous exclamation “C’est juste!” from Kjersti Webb, our trainer, as I left the stage. I recognise now, that the wee child in me absorbed this spontaneous affirmation and was utterly, imperceptibly changed by it.



Although my exposure to the art/essence of clowning was but a nanosecond, this virtually undetectable spark ignited in me. I took my Red Nose home and kept it in a drawer by my bedside. Occasionally, when alone I would put it in on and playfully engage with the character who showed up in the mirror before me.

Then in December 2017, a few weeks before Christmas, Kjersti shared an amazing, potentially life-threatening experience on facebook which I happened to read. I was deeply touched and wanted to respond. Words escaped me. Instead, I felt the urge to reach for my Red Nose and for a cuddly toy cheetah called ‘Eddie’. I took a selfie of us both and posted this as my response to Kjersti. It was my simple, heartfelt, empathic, word-free, acknowledgement of relief and gratitude that she and her dog were safe. She got my message!



Roll on to 22 March 2018. Just as I was about to leave for the airport to travel to Caux, I thought about my Red Nose. Without knowing why I wanted it, or how I might make use of it, I grabbed it and put it in my bag. Over the next 36 hours I found myself flirting with many ideas about what I might usefully do to help everyone grasp the importance and potency of IofC’s Seed Behaviours as a way to access, experience and pass on the spirit of Caux and the essence of IofC. I wanted to help them understand what they were, how they had come about, and how they had come to be expressed in words. I did not know how to do this but there was one thing I knew for certain: I was not going to do a Powerpoint presentation!

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Fragments lay the way

As the time for the session got closer, more and more fragments presented themselves to me: A quote by Walter Freeman; a 'Ps' model shared by a colleague earlier in the week; an idea to illuminate different paradigms of thinking that affect 'what we do' and 'how we do it'; the image of the Seed Behaviours; two possible youtube clips; a note to myself to help people recognise that the words we use and the approaches we take reveal the paradigms driving our thinking and actions; coloured paper that matched the eight different colours of each of the Seed Behaviours; small numbered signs used in a previous session of which, amazingly, there were the exact number I needed; a 'sticky wall', again used in a previous session; the participants; the context of 'preparing conferences'; myself and my Red Nose!

Turning scarcity into creativity

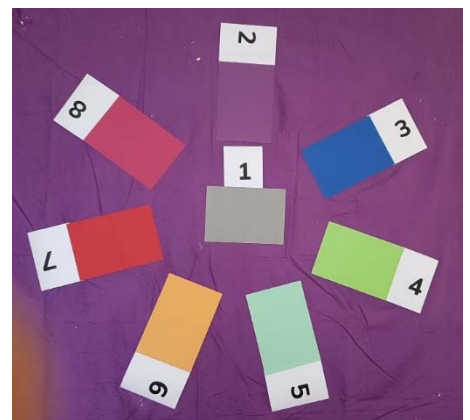
Engage in the practice of Quiet Time

In the lunch-break before my session, I took myself away from everyone to find silence, so that what was forming in me could find its way out. I quietly set about preparing my fragments still having no clear idea if/how I was going to use them. I wrote the quote and drew the 'Ps' model on one flip-chart stand at the entrance to the room.

On the flip-chart at the front of the room, I drew representations of three 'paradigms' and prepared another sheet to introduce 'the meaning of words'. I collected three sheets of each coloured card ready to lay on the floor at 'some point'. I asked someone to project an image of the Seed Behaviours on the projection screen. And using the sticky wall, I created an image with coloured cards matching the layout of the Seed Behaviours, giving each colour a number.



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And still I had no idea how all this was going to come together, nor what role my Red Nose would play. Only as the session began did *She-with-the-Red-Nose-who-had-no-name* arrive to take charge of the proceedings.

She-with-the-Red-Nose

I was the first to surrender to her undeniable presence and child-like charm. She took hold of me. Through me, *She-with-the-Red-Nose* came out to play and slowly, one-by-one each of us in the room entered into the spirit of the game that began to unfold step-by-step between us.

She-with-the-Red-Nose was utterly present to each unfolding moment. She had no end in mind; this was a game of discovery in which, with each incremental step, the rules of this game co-evolved through the relational exchanges between the people and the materials we had available to us. No one in the room knew where we were going, not even she.

Turn judgement into curiosity

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Her whole-hearted, presence-ful state enabled her to meet two points of resistance with simple, child-like confusion and sadness. First one character, then another, did not follow the pattern we had been co-creating in the room. In the emotional reverberations of her silent, yet evident sadness, finally each resistor acquiesced. When they re-joined, the game once again flowed, and *She-with-the-Red-Nose* blissfully regained her joyful disposition.

Use honesty, unselfishness, purity and love to guide my decisions

As the Seed Behaviour game slowly evolved, the screen projector blanked out at crucial moments, hiding the image from view. *She-with-the-Red-Nose* turned to the group, puzzled and confused, gesturing helplessly. At each point, someone leapt up, showing her first how to ‘wiggle the mouse’ to bring the screen to life again, and then later to take charge of re-starting the projector. These acts of spontaneous care, freely given, enabled *She-with-the-Red-Nose* to resume playing, and in so doing, she was able to continue serving the entire group virtually without interruption.

Care for the others, the planet and myself

Follow my calling and follow through with others

She-with-the-Red-Nose, through her improvisational, moment-to-moment discoveries accessed ways to communicate beyond words. Everyone attended to her silent exchanges following her lead as she helped them make sense of the connections between colour, pattern, numbers, gestures and percussive sound. Her receptive-responsive presence evoked the same in others enabling an exquisite reciprocal dance of emergence.

Finally, through the coming together of colour and number matching, her playmates found themselves in pairs or trios. They were invited into quietly reflecting, with paper and pen, for ten minutes on their colour-coded Seed Behaviour. Almost without exception, individuals

Engage in the practice of Quiet Time

Safeguarding my own trustworthiness

in the small groups continued engaging in silent, presence-ful reflection until *She-with-the-Red-Nose* bounded through the meeting rooms ringing the bell she had seen someone else use earlier in the day.

Being becomes Innocence

For an amazing 45 minutes, we found ourselves in the (almost) irresistible Presence of *She-with-the-Red-Nose*. She showed up wholeheartedly and open-heartedly, with no judgement and no pretence. She followed the urge that called her into Being and in so doing, opened a space in which every one of us eventually joined in. We played and learned together, and along the way, she (and perhaps all of us) had a ball!

Her contribution came to a natural close. Removing her Red Nose was the mark of handing responsibility back to me. In the remainder of the session, I played my more usual role, encouraging everyone to recall what had happened, what they had experienced and what they made of it all. We had far too little time to illuminate, explore, reflect on and truly mine the depth and breadth of insights and learning we each might have gained from what transpired in that shared time together. I feel sad about this and yet also hopeful that we each will continue reflecting, integrating and sharing what we discovered about ourselves.

Rather than leaving that as a wistful wish, I decided to act upon it – to turn my hope into an action. I felt the urge to write as a way of catching the insights and reflections bubbling through me... and have extended an invitation to others to add their reflections of their experience of this time with *She-with-the-Red-Nose*. It was only in my reflecting on my experience that I realised that between us, all IofC’s Seed Behaviours had come alive. It was also only in the aftermath of the session that the name for *She-with-the-Red-Nose* came to me: “Innocence”. I had - been in the Presence of *Innocence*.

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Over these past few days, I have found myself repeatedly returning to that time - reflecting and pondering on what happened with *Innocence* and why this had come to be her name. I cannot speak for anyone else in that room. What I do know is that something extraordinary happened to me. *Innocence* showed up and I flowed responsively into the receptive space she opened for us all – a space which I can only describe as Grace. As I recall incidents and moments in that session, I find myself subjected to a whirl of emotions. I realise that *Innocence* gave me access to a childlike purity that had her completely untouched by the critical, categorising mind which is evident in my Adult Self. And as I remember the moments of resistance in the room, I can feel my Adult Self wanting to judge and blame. I feel the edges of anger creep into me... and yet when I return to *Innocence*, all I can access is sadness and confusion at the two playmates who, for those moments, were not keeping our exciting game of discovery alive and flowing!

And today, in a moment of synchronicity, five days after the (re-)birth of *Innocence*, I stumbled across a reflection from Richard Rohr, from the Centre for Action and Contemplation, posted on 4th January 2018:

“In the beginning, in our original unwoundedness (“innocence”), we lived in an unconscious state of full connection with the divine, like Adam and Eve walking naked in the garden with God. But it didn’t take long for us to think of ourselves as separate, and from that position outside the garden, we grabbed for an autonomous identity. This is the “false self.” Many people live most of their lives under this delusion and confuse this concocted persona as the real deal.”



Whilst this quotation comes from the Christian tradition, the quality of unwoundedness is universal. We see it in babies and wee ones before their adult-influenced, rational and categorising minds begin to clip and constrain their connection to themselves, each other and all of life.

What a gift! Suddenly I understood why *She-with-the-Red-Nose* could have no other name, than *Innocence*. She had to show up and Be wholly present in her unwoundedness; she had to Be her essence before her name could find her. Through her, I experienced from the inside, a reconnection with the pure essence and transformative potential of *Innocence*. In this space and time together in Caux, no matter what anyone did, she bore no blame, felt no shame, experienced no rage. She felt pure and simple joy; pure and simple sadness; pure and simple puzzlement! Her unwounded essence had no access to what it was not; and what it could never be.

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Receptive-responsive Presence



I am utterly amazed and awed by this presence of *Innocence*. I am bemused and full of wonder that she chose me; came through me; took advantage of me in such a clean, joyful, improvisational way. And yet, I also realise I have been in her presence many times before but only when momentary bubbles of delight have burst through in laughter, tears, singing, dancing, jumping and bounding around. Never before has she taken over the 'serious job-in-hand'; nor stayed around so long and handled so important and public a role. Page | 6

I am left wondering when she will next grace me with her presence. I feel excited and full of anticipation... and then for a moment feel bereft. I catch the edge of despair as I find myself suddenly believing I have no power to invoke her comings and goings.

But wait. I am in danger of missing what she has revealed to me. I see her in the mirror reflecting back at me. She is the wee girl in me, still vibrant and accessible, ready to serve and play, **when** I open up, inviting all of me in. This is, I think, what Alan Rayner (2004; 2011; 2017; 2018) means by "receptive-responsive presence". We can only start by centering on ourselves... I can only start by centering on me. If I shut myself down; if I choose to close down my receptivity even to myself, then I simply will be unable to open up the space for others to show up in flow in relation to me.

Another level of recognition reverberates. I see now that I have inordinate capacity to influence – to generate responsive flow, not by thrusting forward with countless decisive actions but simply by opening, by becoming receptivity and by responding to what shows up in the spaces within, between and beyond us. This **is** what *Innocence* revealed to and through me.

I feel at ease now. I also feel hopeful about tickling my Adult Self into letting go more often and more freely into ever more joyful, playful flow... perhaps, next time with **you!**

© Louie J N Gardiner, 28th March 2018

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