

Winging It

with Dr. Cat



Published by
Heartwings Foundation

www.dr.cat.org

November 12, 2007

Newsletter - Volume 5



Dr. Cat's motto:

"When in doubt, wing it!"

In This Issue:

1. **WHAT'S HOT?** *New interview: "Anorexia and the Brain: The Link Between Neurology and Eating Disorders."*
2. **MEWSINGS: PRONOIA IS THE ANTIDOTE TO PARANOIA: How the Whole World Is Conspiring to Shower You with Blessings.** This wonderful book is by Rob Breznsny, who writes *The Stranger's* "Free Will" astrology column. Check out my review!
3. **COMING ATTRACTIONS! Fate or Free Will: Why Not Both?** It's been nearly ten years since my controversial "Death Series" was first published in *The New Times*. Last year, in December of 2006, I was given new information about a cosmic "wild card" that affects the timing of my *date with destiny*.

After sitting with this information for nearly a year, I'm now ready to write about it publicly in an update about my personal work with Vedic death prediction. For now, this update will only be available to those who request inclusion on my special "Death and Dying" e-mailing list. See below for more details.
4. **COOL NEWS: Heal hunger through words!** Want a fun and easy way to increase your word power and feed the hungry at the same time? Find out how ten grains of rice can turn into 14 metric tons of donated food in just one month through creative word play by people like you.
5. **JUICY QUOTES & CURIOUS FACTS: Thoughts to make you go hmmm....**

1. WHAT'S HOT?

"ANOREXIA AND THE BRAIN: THE LINK BETWEEN NEUROLOGY AND EATING DISORDERS" (An interview with Bette Lamont)

"Feeling 'good enough' is about the fundamental right to be here. If our brains are fully functioning, the feeling of being 'good enough' should be present without effort. We shouldn't have to work at it."

**--Bette Lamont
Founder, Developmental Movement Center**

I had the perfect family to "help" me become anorexic, and I did. But my sister and my brother had the same family, and they did not become anorexic. Why not?

Some people might say that my brother did not become anorexic because he was a male in our culture, so he got different treatment in our family (definitely true, as we both agreed later). Plus, my brother didn't get bombarded every day with the same messages I did about body image and self-worth.

According to Carl Jackson's article in the American Academy of Pediatrics' magazine *Healthy Children* (Fall 2007), 90% of the millions who suffer from eating disorders are women between the ages of 12 and 25.

So why didn't my sister become anorexic? She was female like me, and she struggled with the same family dynamics I struggled with (she finally left the family in 1978 at the age of 34; see "[Requiem for My Sister](#)"). Yet like my brother, my sister didn't develop an eating disorder either. Why not?

As with everything in life, I believe that illness is ultimately mysterious. I also agree with the late M. Scott Peck of *The Road Less Traveled* fame, who taught me that illness is like a tree with many roots.

Despite conventional Western medicine's penchant for finding "the" root cause of any particular malady, I don't think it's possible to say with certainty *what causes what* in any kind of linear way, because there are simply too many factors to consider and there are no control groups in human life.

Besides, I'm just one puny human and I'll never be privy to all the details of "the big picture" as long as I'm looking out through human eyes. Nonetheless, in regard to healing eating disorders, I still think it's important to explore and address whatever *contributing* factors I can discern, even if it's ultimately impossible to isolate one solitary *cause*.

Life is, after all, a dance between fate and free will—a balancing act between accepting the things I can't change and doing something about the things I can change. My personal voyage through anorexia (1971-1985) and bulimia (1972-1980) has been one of my life's most powerful teachers in the dance between what I must accept and what I can change.

If I had to answer the question of why I developed an eating disorder and my siblings did not, here's what I would say now, after nearly 30 years of personal and professional research into it. Aside from the mysteries of karma, I would wager that one of the main reasons I became anorexic and my siblings did not was because of the differences in our neurological functioning.

This doesn't let our family or the culture off the hook, to be sure, because serious eating disorders arise from the complex interplay of a whole host of interrelated and overlapping factors. However, I believe that my siblings did not become anorexic because their brains simply would not allow it.

My brain, on the other hand, had suffered various degrees of "hurt" beginning early childhood, which in turn provided fertile ground for the "seeds" of other physical and emotional conditions to take root and grow over time.

Through my research later in life, I learned that such things as seemingly simple as my chronic allergies and learning disabilities had a neurological component, as did various emotional and hormonal imbalances that affected my physical well-being and my ability to deal effectively with personal and professional relationships.

I also learned that my neurological profile had played a significant role in past problems with anxiety and panic disorder, suicidal behavior, and diagnosed manic-depression (I had three trips to the psych ward in 1975-76 and was on lithium from 1978-1984).

Some people might say there's no connection between these struggles and my level of brain function. But to me, that's like saying there's no connection between the hard drive on a computer and the way its software functions. If you want your software to function properly, you'd better make sure your hard drive is working!

As it happens, I'm one of those people who has sustained a lot of head injuries. They started with a very unusual and difficult birth in the middle of a huge blizzard in the winter of 1954. A few years later, at age three, I flipped on my tricycle going down a hill, landed on my head, and smashed my face in.

I can still remember screaming my head off at the doctor's office as he peered down at me with one of those round-mirror

contraptions strapped around his forehead, while he tried to sew up the mouth of a flailing child.

Later, at age 8, I sustained another head injury when was hit in the face again, this time by the rebounding upward swing of a huge tree branch that my brother and I used to "ride" down to ground from our tree house above.

At age 17, freshly moved to Oregon to attend college at Willamette University, I was riding my new ten-speed bicycle down a long hill going about 20 MPH, when a truck ran a stop sign and hit me.

Yes, I was wearing a helmet, but my helmeted head still collided hard with the concrete when I hit the road. I woke up from unconsciousness on the other side of the street and saw my mangled bicycle wrapped around my contorted body. The first thing I said was, "Oh! Look at my poor bicycle!" It was totaled.

More head injuries followed in later years, including one that nearly killed me in May of 2005 (see "[Back from the Brink of Death](#)"). But for my purposes here, I want to stop and call attention to the head injury that happened during that collision between me and a truck at age 17--because soon after that, I started starving myself and quickly became anorexic.

Here's the thing. I'd actually started dieting at age 14, after an intense emotional experience at mealtime when my father screamed at me for the first--and as it turned out, the only--time in my life. I had just begun dating in the midst of a very controlling parental style. During yet another parent-child conversation about dating rules and curfews, my father suddenly became exasperated and screamed at me that "ALL MEN WILL EVER WANT FROM YOU IS SEX!"

To my credit (and to my subsequent amazement years later when I thought about it again), I calmly replied, "Well, that says a lot about Mom, doesn't it?"

Needless to say, things went from bad to worse in that conversation!

Around the same time, I remember my mother telling me that I "couldn't trust myself" in relation to boys. I also remember my parents making embarrassing (to me) comments about my body and I remember them having strict rules about how I dressed. My mother wouldn't even get me a bra until I shamefully confessed that my breasts were hurting from a lack of support.

These memories are just tiny snippets of a bigger and much more complicated system--an intergenerational family system whose patterns I've explored ad nauseam over the years in my iron-willed efforts to heal. I no longer blame my parents--or the culture or myself--for my eating disorders. Rather, I see my past eating disorders as spiritual teachers that have helped me learn and grow and deepen my compassion for self and others.

As mentioned above, my family of origin set the stage and created the "perfect storm" for spawning a child with an eating disorder. To paraphrase the work of family systems experts Ivan Boszormenyi-Nagy, M.D., and David N. Ulrich, Ph.D., when a family becomes severely out of balance, it may produce either an anorexic or a sociopath.

Basically, what they were saying is that when a family becomes so dysfunctional as to threaten its own demise as a family, then one of its offspring may turn the family pain inward (anorexia) or outward (acting out in the community). Obviously, this isn't a conscious decision on the part of the child. Instead, a child may become anorexic or sociopathic as a result of the complex and mostly unconscious interplay of severely dysfunctional intergenerational family patterns.

Ultimately, an anorexic or a socially aggressive child may provide a way to make the family pain visible to others in a way that (hopefully) cannot be ignored, as if the child is somehow trying to *save the family* by making a last-ditch cry for help.

When I first read Boszormenyi-Nagy's and Ulrich's work in graduate school in 1984, I wept. I wept because it was the first

time anyone had ever shown compassion for me as an anorexic, instead of judgment, derision, and blame.

When I was anorexic and bulimic in the 1970s, I thought I was the only one who had problems like that because no one was talking much about these illnesses, and the media wasn't saturated with information about eating disorders like it is now.

Because no one was talking about eating disorders--and because even the professionals didn't know much about them in the 1970s--it was easy for me to be in denial about my behaviors. A big part of the battle was overcoming my denial. Once I did, another kind of struggle ensued, namely, the quest to find good treatment.

My personal journey with healing anorexia and bulimia was long and arduous. I stopped being bulimic in 1980, and I stopped starving myself in 1985. However, the "crazy thinking" that underlied those conditions persisted until 1989, when I first heard about Developmental Movement Therapy--aka neurological repatterning or "brain work," as I affectionately came to call it.

The gift of neurological repatterning came to me through ***The New Times***, which published many of my articles and interviews over the years. One day I was clipping out one of my articles to send to someone, when I noticed another article right next to it on the same page.

The article was about the connection between physical and psychological function in relation to the brain. It was written by Bette Lamont, who founded the Developmental Movement Center.

When I read Bette's words, it felt like the "missing link" I'd been looking for in regard to healing the underlying behavioral patterns and the internal "crazy thinking" that still persisted despite nearly 20 years of work on myself by then, and despite the fact that I had stopped the most serious behaviors of my eating disorders years before.

I called Bette, set up an appointment for an evaluation, and began what turned out to be three years of neurological repatterning work to heal my brain at the "hard drive" level. The neurological work was a personalized program of specific physical movements and patterns that I did on my own at home, with occasional reevaluations by Bette. I did this work concurrent with other counseling and bodywork to support me as my brain healed.

Working with Bette was my second experience with receiving compassion instead of judgment about my past eating disorders. Understanding the fact that my brain was neurologically *incapable* of sending or receiving the proper signals to foster self-care helped me see that my own or other people's shame or blame for being anorexic was not only ignorant, but downright cruel.

Once I saw the basic neurological connection between eating disorders and the brain, it was only a matter of time before I became a "mouthpiece" for this work. In 1993, after several years of research, I completed my dissertation about this "missing link" relationship between functional neurology and eating disorders.

Since then, I kept hoping that someone with more credentials and clout would introduce this important information into the mix of professional and societal dialogue about eating disorders. However, so far, that hasn't happened.

In the back of my mind for years now, I've had a sense that one day I would have to step up to the plate and make this information available to the public in a bigger way, even though I wish someone else would do it. After all, there is definitely life after eating disorders--and being one of the lucky ones to have healed mine instead of succumbing to them, I'm having a good time now thinking about other things and playing in other arenas!

However, my heart goes out to my sisters and brothers who still struggle with the brutal experience of eating disorders. In

addition, my passionate love for the wisdom of my brain--and for the beauty of my natural animal nature--makes me want to scream when I hear people on talk shows saying that anorexics just need to eat more, or they just need to do more family therapy, or they just need to do more spiritual work or take anti-depressants or stop paying so much attention to the media barrage about women's bodies.

Yes, there are many factors that contribute to these complicated and ultimately mysterious illnesses. Everyone is right about their piece in the puzzle that creates eating disorders! It's just that there's another piece I hope people will consider, and that's the piece I want to tell you more about in my interview with Bette Lamont.

If you want to read the interview, please see "[Anorexia and the Brain: The Link Between Neurology and Eating Disorders](#)." It is being published online for the first time now with the hope that this information will save at least one other person's life, as it has saved mine.

2. MEWSINGS

PRONOIA IS THE ANTIDOTE TO PARANOIA: How the Whole World Is Conspiring to Shower You with Blessings

A book by Rob Brezsny, *The Stranger's* "Free Will" astrology columnist

"I've seen the future of American literature, and its name is Rob Brezsny." --Tom Robbins

Over the last few decades, I've benefited greatly from studying the work of both Western and Eastern astrologers. However, since 1995, I've been forever spoiled by my world-class Vedic astrologer and longtime soul brother, [Robert Koch](#).

Even so, I have a special place in my heart for Western astrology columnist Rob Brezsny of *The Stranger* (<<http://www.thestranger.com/seattle/Home>>). Rob Brezsny has the vision of an eagle, the brilliance of the sun, the humor of a wild man, and the heart of a sage. This guy rocks!

I look forward to and hungrily devour Brezsny's "Free Will" column in *The Stranger* every week. I don't just read the section for my own January 21st birthday. I also read the other signs because Brezsny's writing is so playful, insightful, and wise--and he always peppers his writing with a wide array of juicy quotations. I swear, Brezsny must download *Enclopedia Britannica* in his sleep, or else he has a personal key to the Library of the Collective Unconscious.

In his column, Brezsny has occasionally mentioned his book, **PRONOIA IS THE ANTIDOTE TO PARANOIA: How the Whole World Is Conspiring to Shower You with Blessings**. Since I'm so enamored with Brezsny's column, I was immediately interested in his book. But I never got around to checking it out until a few weeks ago, when I finally ordered it from the [Seattle Public Library](#) (go SPL!).

After glancing through *Pronoia*, I knew instantly that I wanted to own the book, not only because it's so good, but because there's enough material in it to keep me busy until the end of time. The back cover describes the book like this:

"888 Tricks for Becoming a Wildly Disciplined, Fiercely Tender, Ironically Sincere, Scrupulously Curious, Aggressively Sensitive, Blasphemously Reverent, Lyrically Logical, Lustfully Compassionate Master of Rowdy Bliss."

This guy is just my style!

Pronoia is a classic that will forever have an honored place on my bookshelf. It's so full of valuable information and compassionate crazy wisdom that if someone had to choose one resource guide to help them develop as a human being, this would be a good choice. I can't say that about very many books!

In honor of this month's Thanksgiving holiday, I want to acknowledge Rob Breznsny for doing something in his book that I like to do myself, including writing about it in **Dr. Cat's Helping Handbook**. I think Breznsny has done it with much more grace and aplomb, however, so I want to thank him for doing it and tell you about it here.

That is, Breznsny has written a three-page primer called "Glory in the Highest" (pages 4-6 in **Pronoia**) to help people see how much goes **right** on any given day. Many people are so busy focusing on what goes wrong ("wrong" according to them, at least) that they often miss the fact that there is massive support coming their way from many different directions all the time.

This is not about denying your or anyone else's pain, and it's not about "positive thinking" (a term that makes me gag). Rather, it's about expanding focus; it's about recognizing privilege; it's about experiencing gratitude; and it's about truly waking up to the wonder of being alive in *this* body at *this* moment in *this* world right now.

If you want to give yourself--and your friends and family--a treat on Thanksgiving (or any other day), get a copy of Breznsny's book and read "Glory in the Highest" to each other while you hang out. It's a masterpiece of grace!

3. **COMING ATTRACTIONS!**

FATE OR FREE WILL: WHY NOT BOTH?

It's been nearly ten years since my controversial "[Death Series](#)" was first published in **The New Times**. Last year, in December of 2006, I was given new information about a cosmic "wild card" that affects the timing of my personal "date with destiny."

For those of you who aren't familiar with my personal work with death timing, or for those of you who are familiar with it but haven't checked my Web site lately, below is an excerpt from the note I put at the end of "[Death Is My Friend](#)," the first of 11 articles in the original Death Series:

Author's note from late evening, January 31, 2007: *I was recently given an amazing update about my predestined death timing. The longtime master Vedic astrologer I've been working with since 1995 (aka "Rishi" in the Death Series or [Robert Koch](#) in real life) has been studying for years now with the grandson of India's Astrologer of the Century (for the recently ended 20th century).*

As a result of his deepening studies, Robert has learned that some of the so-called "wild cards" I mentioned in "[Death Is My Friend](#)" can actually be discerned in advance (not all of them, mind you--there is always the Great Mystery beyond all knowing!). In any case, I want to give myself time to integrate this updated information about my likely death timing before I write about it publicly.

After sitting with this updated information for nearly a year now, I'm finally ready to write about it publicly. At this point, the update will only be available to those who request inclusion on my special "Death and Dying" e-mailing list (see below to get on the list).

My plan is to tell this select group of people the details of my updated death timing and then turn everyone loose to ask me anything and everything they always wanted to know about Vedic death prediction or my own personal experience with it.

After I consider everyone's questions, I'll craft an article that responds to each concern in the same way I responded years ago to various questions posed by the general public in regard to my original death timing (see "[Sitting in the Fire: Whose Death Is It Anyway?](#)"--another article in the 11-part series).

Once I'm done with the update article, I'll first show it to my "Death and Dying" e-mailing list exclusively. If they have more comments or questions stimulated by the update article, I'll incorporate those concerns into my final article about it and then publish the update online for all to see.

The thing is, when I first learned about my original "date with destiny" in 1995, I sat with the information for three years before I wrote about it publicly. Since then, I've been interviewed on television about my work with death timing, and various articles and interviews from "The Death Series" have been reprinted in publications around the world. I've also received many wonderful letters and messages of support for my controversial work with death.

On the flip side, I've also weathered a lot of personal attacks for this work. It took me a while to understand that people's opinion of me and my work with death--whether pro or con--actually has very little to do with me and everything to do with their own thoughts and feelings about death.

Even so, it was hard to deal with the attacks. You know, that whole "kill the messenger" phrase doesn't arise out of nowhere!

Over time, I've learned to take better care of myself in relation to my decision to go public with my personal work with death. To that end, I came up with the idea of taking this next step--publishing my death timing update--by telling my personal circle of support first, knowing there will always be plenty of opportunities for attack later. *Woo hoo!* I may be slow, but I'm learning! (And by the way, all you New Age fundamentalists out there who'd say that I'm "creating my own reality" and setting myself up for attack by making statements like this, all I can say is, *thanks for sharing and have a nice life!*)

Anyway, if I share my death timing update first with people who already like me and respect my work with death, at least I'll have buddies around me when I go back into the fray for another round with the public at large. I may still be standing alone in my rather unusual position, but I'll have support. And hey, if there's one thing I've learned in life, it's that support really does make a difference!

To request inclusion on my special "Death and Dying" e-mailing list, all you have to do is respond to this online newsletter by hitting the "reply" key, and then type "**Death and Dying**" in the subject line. If you already asked to be on this e-mailing list a while ago, it might be wise to check with me again just to be sure you're still on it.

If you're reading this newsletter in hard copy instead of online, you can call me at **(206) 329-0125** or e-mail me anytime at support@drcat.org to request inclusion on my "Death and Dying" e-mailing list. Either way, once I hear from you, I'll take care of the rest.

4. **COOL NEWS**

WHAT'S THE WORD? WE CAN HELP FEED THE HUNGRY.

Article by Joe Heim published in *The Washington Post*

(11/4/07) (<<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/11/01/AR2007110102111.html?nav=hcmodule>>)

What if just knowing what a word meant could help feed hungry people around the world? Well, at FreeRice (www.freerice.com) it does. Go to the site, which launched last month, and you'll see a word and four definitions. Choose the right meaning and the site's advertisers will donate 10 grains of rice to the [World Food Program](#), a [United Nations](#) agency that is the world's largest humanitarian organization. Keep on guessing (the quiz gets progressively more arduous, not to mention vexatious), and for each correct answer 10 more grains of rice will head to people who need it.

Now, admittedly, 10 grains is a piddling amount. But the totals have grown exponentially. On Oct. 7, the day the site launched, 830 grains of rice were donated. Barely a bowlful. Eight days later, the total was 6,403,920. And when this article went to press, 537,163,380 grains of rice had been donated. That's more than 14 metric tons. Not bad for a month's worth of people figuring out definitions. Want a sample? Okay, does the word "pettifogger" mean a mine entrance, an unscrupulous lawyer, avoidance or potpourri?

The site is the brainchild of John Breen, a 50-year-old computer programmer from

[Bloomington, Ind.](#), who has tackled hunger online before, first with the Hunger Site (www.thehungersite.com) and, earlier this year, with the launch of [Poverty.com](#), a poverty awareness site that he hopes people will visit to learn about helping to get more funding for international poverty relief.

"I wanted to have something fun to do that wasn't just a waste of time and had some vaguely redeeming value," Breen says with a laugh. He decided on the vocabulary quiz -- and entered all 10,000 words and definitions himself -- after watching his son preparing for the SAT.

"It's hard to get people to read about hunger and poverty," Breen says. "It's kind of depressing, so I had to think of an entertaining way to draw people in. Hopefully, they'll also click on to Poverty.com and find out what needs to be done."

Oh, and if in your clicking you come across "pettifogger," it means unscrupulous lawyer. Yeah, it's sort of cheating to tell you, but it's for a good cause.

Update about the Free Rice Program (The Seattle Times 11/10/07):

A food-linked word game put on the Internet a month ago has already generated enough rice to feed 50,000 people, the United Nations World Food Program said Friday.

FreeRice (www.freerice.com) offers participants multiple-choice definitions to the meaning of a word, with each correct click generating 10 grains of rice for the WFP.

5. JUICY QUOTES & FUN FACTS

THOUGHTS TO MAKE YOU GO HMMM....

"Mostly, what I have learned about aging is this--by all means, do it!" --**Maya Angelou**

"The longer I live, the more beautiful life becomes." --**Frank Lloyd Wright**

"Empathy is the most radical of human emotions." --**Gloria Steinem**

"Research from the Titanic shows that the reason so many lifeboats were launched half-full is passengers refused to believe the boat was going down." --**Daneen Skube** (*Seattle Times* columnist)

"War is the lie of civilization. We see ourselves as civilized people. If that's the case, what are we doing having wars all the time?" --**Ken Burns** (PBS documentarian)

"Studies in the 1980s by Stephen Schoenthaler, a profession of criminology and sociology at Cal State, found improvements in prison inmate behavior when highly sugared foods were removed. Violence, vandalism, and attempted escapes dropped sharply." --**Seattle Conscious Choice** (October 2007)

"Research in the *American Journal of Public Health* found that teens who drank the most soda experienced higher rates of mental disorders like hyperactivity. Since 1950, soft-drink consumption has quadrupled to 46 gallons in 2003--that is nearly a gallon a week per person!" --**Seattle Conscious Choice** (October 2007)

"I don't say we ought to misbehave, but we should look as though we could." --**Oscar Wilde**

"Water that is too pure has no fish." --**Zen teacher Ts'ai Ken T'an**

"Never let your sense of morals get in the way of doing what's right." --**Isaac Asimov**

"I am rather like a mosquito in a nudist camp. I know what I want to do, but I don't know where to begin." --**Stephen Bayne**

"I always wanted to be somebody. I should have been more specific." --**Lily Tomlin**

"When you laugh, you cannot think. And that's good for healing."
--Kahuna Harry Uhane Jim (**Wise Secrets of Aloha**)

Postscripts from Dr. Cat

Spread the word! Feel free to forward this newsletter to your friends, family, and colleagues. Or give them my Web site (www.dr.cat.org) and let them sign up to get their goodies straight from the horse's mouth.

Want a hard copy? You're welcome to print out this newsletter to read and/or share with friends in hard copy. Note: To see the logo and my mug shot, you must be online when you view or print this newsletter.

Does this newsletter look weird to you? If you have technical difficulties viewing this newsletter (e.g., inconsistent or oversized fonts, goofed-up graphics, text that runs off the page, or strange apparitions in the margins), please let me

know what kind of computer, operating system, and e-mail program you're using, so I can work to make this newsletter more universally accessible. However this newsletter appears for you, I hope you can at least read it, and I hope you'll forgive any weird glitches that appear due to my limited computer skills!

What to do if it's hopeless: If this newsletter looks like a big mess on your computer, send me your postal address and I'll be happy to mail you a hard copy via Pony Express. One of the best ways I know to deal with computer glitches is to do an end-run around them!

To unsubscribe: Simply hit the "reply" key and type "UNSUBSCRIBE" in the subject line. Your name will be deleted immediately from my newsletter e-mailing list--no hard feelings and no questions asked.



Comments? Feel free to contact me anytime at support@dr.cat.org. Who knows? Maybe something you share will show up later (with your permission, of course) in a future issue of ***"Winging It with Dr. Cat."***

All material in this newsletter is protected by copyright, and cannot be reproduced in any form without written permission. Copyright by Cat Saunders, Ph.D. (www.dr.cat.org). All rights reserved.