

# Winging It

with Dr. Cat



Published by  
Heartwings Foundation

January 29, 2006

Newsletter - Volume 1



Dr. Cat's motto:

**"When in doubt, wing it!"**

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## 1. **WHAT'S HOT?**

### THIS NEWSLETTER!

Yes, I know it's been many months (years, actually) since I said I was going to do an online newsletter. But hey, the long wait merely proves that I'm making progress in my ongoing efforts to learn how to procrastinate.

Besides, as many of you know, I have a love-hate relationship with computers, and it never ceases to amaze me how something as simple as a newsletter can turn into a nightmare of epic proportions, once digital technology is engaged.

The thing is, no matter how good this newsletter looks on my computer, it might look like an explosion in a print factory on yours. Such is the uncontrollable reality of digital communications!

After numerous hair-pulling attempts to get everything just right, I realized it would take until the end of time for perfection to happen. Since I don't plan to be here until the end of time, I figured I'd better do what I can with what I know and call it good.

Without further ado, in honor of the 2006 Lunar New Year on January 29th, I hereby present the premier issue of **"Winging It with Dr. Cat."** From now on, unless you ask me to stop sending it, this newsletter will arrive in your online mailbox in what may appear to be a random and unpredictable manner.

In other words, **"Winging It with Dr. Cat"** will be an *occasional* newsletter, prompted by the

whisperings of my heart and the rhythms of my soul, which don't operate according to anyone else's schedule. Whenever it comes your way, I hope you enjoy it!

**Glitches?** If you experience technical difficulties viewing this, please see "[Postscripts from Dr. Cat](#)" at the end of this newsletter for options.

**Comments?** Feel free to contact me anytime at [support@dr.cat.org](mailto:support@dr.cat.org) or call me at (206) 329-0125. Who knows? Maybe something you share with me will show up in a future issue of "[Winging It with Dr. Cat.](#)"

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## 2. **MEWSINGS**

### **BACK FROM THE BRINK OF DEATH**

On the afternoon of May 2, 2005, I was doing something in my studio closet when I slipped and fell backwards against a door jam, splitting the back of my head open. I collapsed unconscious in a heap on the floor, fracturing my spine and bleeding out through a head wound for several minutes.

My longtime partner, John Giovine, saved my life that day by calling 911 when he came home and found me. A half-dozen emergency personnel arrived within two minutes and stabilized me for transport to the emergency room at nearby Harborview Hospital in Seattle. Over the next several hours, various doctors, nurses, and technicians treated my injuries and performed many different tests and scans.

Next I spent about a week in Harborview's Orthotics Trauma Unit, where I saw more people that week than I usually see in a year! I joked with John that I didn't even have time to pull my socks up or chew a piece of gum, because every moment was filled with one caregiver after another requiring my attention.

I didn't get any sleep that week, either, because my roommate (bless her heart) was psychotic in ways her doctors were unable to treat, due to her concomitant physical injuries. As a result, she was unable to control her loud verbalizations of every thought, feeling, fear, and anxiety--24 hours a day, nonstop, the entire week. She also insisted that the TV be on constantly, day and night, so it was quite a wild experience for me—the silence-loving "monk"—to room with her.

I tried valiantly to change the situation by asking for what I needed and suggesting compromises, but alas, change was not in the cards. As a result, I did a lot of interesting work on myself that week, trying to stay sane without sleep—with a severe head injury and a fractured spine—while rooming with a psychotic woman.

John said he didn't know how I did it, because he was pushed to his limits being in the room with her for an hour at a time when he came to see me each day. The hospital staff commiserated and tried to transfer her to a single room, but unfortunately, no single rooms were available.

By the end of the week, I was begging the staff to let me sleep in the waiting room or in the hallway or on top of their heads—anywhere but in my room! Of course, they couldn't allow that, so I was left to my own devices.

The whole situation was so surreal that I knew I had to work with it in a very creative way. Therefore, I decided to treat my roommate as my teacher and my ally. This saved me, because it helped me keep my "witness" engaged during her nonstop outbursts. In addition, this approach helped me find meaning in her incoherent ramblings, because I trusted that for her, everything she was doing and saying made sense.

In this context, I experimented with changing my own consciousness to see if it helped to reduce my roommate's anxiety levels. I can't say this was fun work, but it was good work, and I learned a lot.

The truth is, I realized during the course of the week that it was hard for my roommate to have me there, just as it was hard for me to have her there. This wasn't so much about me personally, but rather, I think my roommate suffered from my presence because she was so "permeable" at an emotional level. I contributed an additional energetic impact on her, even in my silence, and this increased her suffering.

I empathized with her emotional sensitivity, because I, too, was adversely impacted by the constant overload of energies in the Trauma Unit. It was like Grand Central Station in our room that week, with literally dozens of caregivers coming and going at all hours of the day and night. Also, we were both in such critical condition that we had to have a "sitter" watching us 24/7 for the first half of the week.

Thanks to my roommate, I did a ton of forgiveness work that week. When it came time for her to

leave, I saw even more how her presence had been "choreographed" for my benefit by the powers-that-be, because just as I was finally making peace with the situation, she was transferred to a single room minutes before I was discharged from the hospital. Such timing!

As they wheeled her out of the room, I pulled myself out of my bed and hobbled over to her in my spinal brace, extending my hands to her with a big smile on my face. She took my hands warmly and looked at me with the innocence of a child. We both apologized and asked forgiveness for contributing to each other's hardship that week, however unwittingly.

We completed this sweet exchange in just a few words. As a longtime counselor and as a human being, I was deeply moved by the way love can penetrate even the thickest veils of psychosis and pain.

This experience was only one of countless experiences that changed me that week in Harborview. It was definitely one of the worst weeks of my life—both physically and emotionally—and it tested me down to the core of my being. Even so, that week brought extraordinary gifts of growth unlike any I've ever known before. I wouldn't wish my accident or that week in Harborview on my worst enemy, but I also wouldn't trade the learning for anything.

Since then, I'm happy to say that I have recovered completely from my brain injury as well as the spinal fracture. The doctors at Harborview said my spine is actually stronger, in terms of bone density. Woo hoo! They asked me what I did to make this happen, because they said most people's spines become more porous during the three months they have to wear a brace (I wore a full-torso, high-tech, aluminum Jewett brace 24/7 for three months, which is a whole other story in itself).

I told the spine doctors the things I knew they'd understand from the standpoint of conventional Western medicine, and I left the rest out. Allopathic medicine has saved my life more than once over the years. However, as most of you know, I'm not exactly what you'd call "conventional," so I save the full story of my recovery for those who are open to holistic healing practices.

Speaking of which, I want to mention one invaluable form of healing work, without which I would not have recovered full brain and motor function following my head injury. It's called neurodevelopmental repatterning work--or "brain work," as I affectionately call it.

I first learned about this work in 1989, and it has changed my life in a million ways since then. Many times I have said that neurodevelopmental repatterning work is the single most important

work I have done on myself in more than 30 years. I still feel the same way.

Other than my partner, John, very few people knew how much physical and mental functioning I lost after that near-fatal accident—or how far I came back in recovery during the weeks and months following. The head injury affected my memory and speech; it affected my ability to think and write clearly; it affected my sleep and hormonal balance; and it affected my motor skills.

The brain injury was especially scary because I didn't know if I'd ever be able to work again as a counselor, consultant, or writer. After the accident, it was difficult for me to follow a simple conversation, I could barely type a simple e-mail message, and it was hard for me to stay focused on even the simplest of tasks.

For weeks after I got home from the hospital, I'd find myself walking around the house without any pants, not only because it took so long to get dressed while wearing a full-torso spinal brace, but also because I'd get distracted by one thing after another until it was 3 in the afternoon. This was rather amusing, but it wasn't something I wanted to go on forever. There were other things I wanted to do in life, and most of them depended on my remembering to get fully dressed before going outside!

The ramifications of my head injury, on top of the spinal fracture, meant that I had to relearn how to stand, sit, walk, move, and navigate the world in general. The first time I tried to take a bath after coming home from Harborview, it took me three hours!

I hope I will never again take for granted the blessing of being able to feed and dress myself, or the simple joy of being able to jump in and out of the the shower in five minutes, or the wonder of being able to walk without being terrified of falling. I hope I will never take for granted the gift of being able to remember what someone told me ten seconds before, or the privilege of being able to continue my work as a counselor and writer who helps others navigate the challenges of life.

The accident and its aftermath taught me a lot about being physically dependent on other people, and it taught me a lot about being in the "receiving" position. For someone who has spent much of my life in the "giving position"—which of course is the control position—this was an invaluable lesson in humility. Being physically dependent on John and others forced me to walk my talk about the beauty and importance of being willing to receive, so others can have the opportunity to give, too.

As a result of these experiences, my already bountiful gratitude for life has increased

exponentially. Even with all the work I've done around death and dying, I must admit that it was still quite intense to come a hair's breadth away from a one-way trip to the other side.

On the subject of gratitude, I want to express my appreciation for Seattle's awesome 911 emergency response teams, especially the guys at Fire Station #9 who saved my life the day of the accident. After I'd recovered enough to be able to walk with the help of my back brace, John and I went to Station #9 to say thanks and give them a cake John had baked for them.

When we drove up, we laughed when we saw the metal sign over the door of their station. It was a beautiful reproduction of their station's mascot. Apparently, fire stations in Seattle can choose a mascot, and Station #9's mascot is the famous Eveready Cat, with its nine lives. How's that for a playful cosmic touch?

In addition to Seattle's awesome emergency response teams, I also salute Harborview Medical Center, its awesome ER staff and Orthotics Trauma Unit, and the University of Washington Physicians en masse. In addition, I am forever indebted to my longtime personal physician and holistic medical consultant, Dr. Steve Hall (<<http://dr.cat.org/death/html/hall.html>>), for his soul-level support and his compassionate medical expertise.

Although it may seem mundane, I must also express my gratitude to Washington State's Basic Health Plan, and to Molina Healthcare in particular, for covering 80% of my astronomical medical bills. It cost more than \$9,000 just for my emergency room care on May 2nd, before I was hospitalized for the week. I deeply appreciate the privilege of good health insurance and skillful medical care, and I wish everyone had affordable access to both. May that day come soon.

Most of all, I am overcome with gratitude for my partner, John Giovine, who nursed me back to health and stood by me steadfastly even when I was afraid I would not recover. In the depths of despair one night in the hospital, I told John that even though we've been together since 1987, I was still scared he might leave me if I did not recover.

To my amazement then and now, John held me close and said that he considered the situation to be a "bonding experience" and he wasn't going anywhere. I honestly believe that John's love and his belief in me was one of the most important factors—if not the most important factor—in the grace that brought me back from the brink of death.

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### 3. **COMING ATTRACTIONS!**

**"DEATH FOR DUMMIES" CLASS AT SEATTLE'S DISCOVER U (May 20, 2006, 1:30-4:30 p.m.)**

I'm really excited that Discover U's Director, Erin Brandon, and its Program Director, Cheri Jessup, have both given me an enthusiastic "thumbs up" to do a new class called **"Death for Dummies."** It's something I've been thinking about for years, and Discover U is the perfect place for me to do it!

As many of you know, since September of 2003 I've been teaching a class at Seattle's Discover U called "[Healing Addiction Simply and Gently: The Five-Minute Switch System](#)." This class, which will continue to be offered at Discover U, is based on principles outlined in the first section of *Dr. Cat's Helping Handbook* (<<http://dr.cat.org/dchh/index.html>>). I've been teaching variations of this class in Washington and California for more than 20 years.

In case you're not already familiar with Discover U, you can learn more about it by visiting their Web site at:

<<http://discoveru.org/>>

As more details become available for my new **"Death for Dummies"** class, I'll keep you posted. For now, if you're curious and think you might want to attend, be sure to save **Saturday afternoon, May 20th, 2006, from 1:30 to 4:30 p.m.** The class will take place at Discover U's campus west of Northgate in Seattle.

**"Death for Dummies"** is an informative, interactive, *user-friendly* class appropriate for anyone of any age who knows that death is inevitable--and who therefore wants to be prepared and have the best experience possible.

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### 4. **COOL NEWS**

**NEW "211" HELP LINE FOR DISASTERS.**

An article in the **Seattle Post Intelligencer** (1/26/06) announced the expansion of a free "211" telephone help line that will cover 60 percent of Washington State's population, including King County. The system will go live in

February this year, and coverage for additional counties will expand throughout 2006.

According to the article, more than 267,000 calls came in to the "211" system in Texas following Hurricane Katrina. The "211" help line assisted people in many ways, including finding loved ones, locating temporary shelter and/or relocation services, and determining opportunities for employment.

For Washingtonians, hurricanes aren't likely, but natural disasters such as earthquakes or flooding, and human disasters such as chemical leaks or terrorist attacks, could leave people without access to food, water, shelter, clothing, heat, or medical care.

The "211" system is designed to provide help not only during a disaster, but also during times when people need assistance and don't know where else to turn. In addition, the service is intended to provide financial donors and volunteers with whatever information or resources they need to do their work.

The free "211" help line is a public-private endeavor, with ongoing financial support from United Way, city and county governments, existing crisis line providers, and private businesses. Supporters are also seeking additional funding from the State Legislature to expand coverage, connect call centers, and increase infrastructure.

Special thanks to Jim Montgomery, Chief of Police in Bellevue and a United Way board member, as well as John Fine, Chief Executive Officer for United Way of King County, for writing the **Seattle Post Intelligencer** article from which this information was gleaned. And kudos to all the local businesses who are helping to spread the "211" system throughout our state!

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## 5. JUICY QUOTES & FUN FACTS

### THOUGHTS TO MAKE YOU GO HMMM....

"Work is the refuge of people who have nothing better to do." --**Oscar Wilde**

"Life is a spiritual detective novel." --**Caroline Casey**

"Today's gas-powered lawnmower emits as much pollution in one hour as driving a newer car 140 miles. A older mower may belch four times as much pollution." --**Puget Sound Clean Air Agency**

"A man who is afraid will do anything." --**Nehru**

"I'm not very keen for doves or hawks. I think we need more owls." --**George Aiken**

"In the U.S., 100 billion plastic bags are thrown away each year. Where is *away*?" --**Patch Adams**

"Wisdom begins with wonder." --**Socrates**

"There is more to life than increasing its speed." --**Gandhi**

"Don't worry about people stealing an idea. If it's original, you will have to ram it down their throats."  
--Howard Aiken

"If your ship doesn't come in, swim out to it." --Jonathan Winters

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## Postscripts from Dr. Cat

**Spread the word!** Feel free to forward this newsletter to your friends, family, and colleagues. Or give them my e-mail address and let them sign up to receive their own copy 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 appears on your computer, I hope you can at least read it, and I hope you'll forgive me for 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](mailto:support@dr.cat.org) or call me at (206) 329-0125. Thanks!

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