

The WOBBLY POT

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The Wobbly Pot is a forum in which ZGWA Sangha members can share Dharma and creativity.

All Sangha members are invited to contribute essays, articles, poetry, fiction, photography or visual art.

Email submissions to wobblypot@zgwa.org.au.

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Thank you to all of those who have contributed to this current issue.

Crows Fly Backwards

A Dharma talk

BY ROSS BOLLETER ROSHI



The **Australian raven** (*Corvus coronoides*) C. c. perplexus –more familiarly wardong (Nyoongar), “crow” (English).

*A crow cries: and the world unrolls like a blanket;
like a worn bush blanket, charred at the horizons.*

-Randolph Stow

Crows are my constant companions. I can hear their *caaaark* even as I write this line. I stare out my study window, and there they are in my huge Cape Lilac tree – big, black, sleek. Whenever I take myself too seriously, I hear their call and am brought back to earth. Crows are scavengers, and they are also highly intelligent, for instance they work in pairs: one will fly down and lift the lid off the garbage bin and then the other will go in and help herself to whatever may be inside. Then they fly off and share the spoils.

This is crow country where Nyoongar people, for whom crows have powerful spiritual significance, have lived for more than forty thousand years. Nyoongar people adopt animal totems, which they regard as spiritual siblings and for whom they take responsibility. If you are born a Nyoongar person, you’ll be either *wardong* the crow, or *manach* the white cockatoo.

The following story gives us a sense of how strongly Nyoongar people identify with the crow. It was told by a Nyoongar elder in 1989, during the year-long Aboriginal protest against the redevelopment of the former Swan Brewery on a sacred site of powerful significance to the Nyoongar people – *Goonininup* – a place where the Waugal, a snakelike Dreamtime creature who was responsible for the creation of the Swan and Canning Rivers, went in:

That building there, there was hundreds of crows. They all flew there and they all sat crying wicked. That’s the first time in my life I seen hundreds of crows in one spot, especially on a building ... any Nyungah can tell you ... even a Wajella (“white feller”) ... you usually only see 5 or 4 only ... I heard them. I seen them. I couldn’t believe so many crows in one group. Black Cockatoos yes, but not crows.

Another Nyoongar elder said: “That’s the black-fellas coming.”

Nyoongar language is the sound of country. A striking instance of this is the Nyoongar word for “crow” – *wardong*. You can hear the call of the crow in that word – *waaaaaaardong*. I am honored to have been able to learn this, and other aspects of

Nyoongar culture, from Michael Wright, a Nyoongar man who sits with us, welcomes us to country, and is encouraging us all to sit on country as a way of bearing witness to the Nyoongar people and their suffering that was brought about by the white invasion of their country. Sitting together on country with Michael as our guide is a way to healing that suffering.

The crows are keepers of country here, and the crow's *caaark* is a reminder to come home to what is our true home in all its vastness. When you hear a crow call, who is hearing that sound?

The origin of the expression "The land where the crow flies backwards"

In Australia, the expression "the land where the crow flies backwards" refers to the remote outback, or more generally to any strange place. It derives from the cattle country of southwest Queensland, or the country "back of Bourke" in northern New South Wales, in Eastern Australia. The expression may be of Aboriginal origin, for many of the drovers and stockmen were Aboriginal men.

The saying "crows fly backwards" was popularised by Aboriginal country-singer Dougie Young, a singer and songwriter from South West Queensland, in his song 'The Land Where The Crows Fly Backwards', which he recorded in 1963. In 1963 or '64 Jeremy Beckett, an anthropologist, made field recordings of Young, many of which were released in 1965 as an EP called *The Land Where The Crows Fly Backwards* (Wattle). Here is the stanza that refers to "the land where the crows fly backwards":

*When it comes to ridin' horses
or workin' cattle, I've mixed with the very best,
in the land where the crows fly backwards
and the pelican builds his nest.¹*

"The land where the crow flies backwards" is a fine example of traditional Australian argot, which is backwards, upside-down, and often mocking. Although such speech is grounded in commonsense culture, it can be wildly imaginative: "mad as a cut snake" means very angry and upset, or just plain insane; "flat out like a lizard drinking" means working hard, under pressure; "a dog's breakfast" means a complete mess. "Stone the crows!" is an expression of shock and annoyance, because crows were unwelcome guests on sheep stations, where, given the chance, they kill and eat newborn lambs. "The sheep

are out in the long paddock" means "the sheep are out on the road; "the sheep are in the sky paddock" means they're dead.

The story of June Rose

I will now tell the true story of June Rose and how "the land where the crow flies backwards" got her expelled from school. June Rose was born in Rangoon, Burma, in 1932. Her mother, Ma Lat, was Burmese royalty; her father, Herbert Bellamy, was an Australian businessman with interests in horseracing, who told June Rose yarns about his time in the Australian bush and read her Henry Lawson's poems. June Rose would tell her friends: "I can tell you everything about Kalgoorlie and the Southern Cross; I can tell you about the half-bald cockatoo in the pub in whose cup people would pour beer, and when the parrot was sloshed he'd say: "Give me another feather and I'll fly."

In February 1942, when June Rose was nine, the family's idyll ended. Japanese bombers raided Rangoon as the prelude to occupation, and the family was evacuated to India. This is where our story picks up:

At eleven, June Rose was sent to a convent school at Kalimpong, in West Bengal, where her father's influence was her downfall. A nun who clearly looked down on mixed-race children was giving a geography lesson about Australia and sarcastically asked June Rose if she'd left anything off the map on the blackboard. June Rose put a dot in the centre. "Baragarawindy," she told the class, "is dream country; it is the land of opposites, the rivers flow inland instead of out, the leaves grow upwards instead of down, the snakes have feathers and the crows fly backwards to keep the dust out of their eyes." She was expelled.

"Baragarawindy" would seem to be straight out of June's imagination – in a literal sense, there seems to be no such place – and her language is the language of emptiness, where opposites unite in a realm of neither forwards nor backwards, nor north or south; a realm where contradictions thrive.

How do you inhabit that dimensionless space where crows fly backwards?

(This Dharma talk is the title chapter to Ross Bolleter's new book, *The crow flies backwards: Western koans with commentaries* to be published by Wisdom Publications, Boston, in Autumn 2018).

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¹ The details of the recording are: Dougie Young – 'The Land Where The Crow Flies Backwards'. *Dougie Young Sings Songs from the Aborigines Camp*. Released on the WATTLE label. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WsvAHzDbW1E>



Transforming anguish and distress

A Dharma talk given at Spring Sesshin 2016

BY MARI RHYDWEN ROSHI

Photographs by Dotsi Burnazova

Imagine you are in a boat in the fog and another boat emerges from the fog and does nothing to avoid a collision. Despite your efforts, it bumps into your boat and you're really angry with the people on the boat for not looking where they were going and not being more careful but, eventually, you find that the boat is empty, there is no crew, and suddenly you aren't angry anymore. It was just an accident.

Isn't that how it is? How quick we are to think we know, to jump to conclusions, to blame. And what a relief to find the boat was just drifting. No one was trying to ram us. No pirates!

There may be some damage but, really, no-one can be angry at a boat. Or maybe they can! There is a wonderful episode of *Fawlty Towers* where John Cleese is furiously thwacking a car—but that's why it is so funny—a grown man having a three-year-old's tantrum!

This boat analogy, which I originally heard from Joko Beck, reminds me of a day I'd arranged to meet a friend for breakfast at a café, but the plan was a little vague. Were we meeting at 7.30 or 8.00? We'd agreed to meet when it opened and she hadn't called me to confirm the time, as we'd agreed. So I decided to wait until 8.00 to walk up to the café. I tried to call her but she didn't answer. Well, the stories started running about the way she was 'always' changing our plans at the last moment and that led on to me dredging up past wrongs from way back when... and then the doorbell rang. "I lost my phone and I

couldn't remember your address. I've been walking up and down the street. Thank goodness I found you!"

She was just an empty boat! The ill-mannered crew had all been in my imagination.

So really what I want to talk about today is the way that we make-up the world, or rather, add made-up bits to the world—and how this wreaks havoc.

Form is exactly emptiness, emptiness exactly form. On the one hand everything is empty. On the other there are the myriad things, and we interact with them, boats and friends and theories and wars.

The problem is that we often don't just interact with them, we add to them; we add to our story of ourselves by adding to the story we attribute to someone else. So, in this example, my friend had done nothing wrong, but I had made a story in which she was wrong, ('wrong' often being nothing more than shorthand for 'doing something I don't like or disagree with'), to account for my feelings of anxiety and disappointment. I don't want to make a mountain out of this little episode, it was just a momentary glitch, but if we become stuck in a story like this, it can seem huge. Yet it is just us making up things.

And we do this all the time.

It's like climate change. Yes, it is real. Yes, it is something we need to respond to. But at the mo-

ment a lot of what we do is plan what we want the people in the boat to do, or what we are going to do to them, or fantasise about what they will do to us after they've rammed us. Rather, we need to play close attention to what's actually happening, but be careful not to waste energy on getting angry about people who are not actually in the boat, or who are not able to steer it.

Of course, I'm not suggesting that we do not take whatever action we can, but sometimes there are huge events going on that we, as individuals, feel unable to do much to alter but must simply bear.

Jane Goodall was on ABC radio saying that what she had learned over the decades since the 1960s, when she first started her chimpanzee research, is that everything is interconnected. (Haven't we heard that before somewhere?) In this case, loss of chimpanzee habitat is one of the consequences of conflict, since people can't worry about animal conservation when trying to stay alive and feed and house their families safely, which is in turn, a consequence of overpopulation, and so on. She has been doing what she can since the 1960s to protect chimpanzees but, despite that, their population has declined by 80% since then.

Here is a quotation from the English novelist Iris Murdoch in a letter written in 1938 about the imminent war:

We are storing food, my father is helping the man next door to build an air raid shelter in his garden, and tonight we all get our gas masks—'Oh brave new world'

(This is probably referring to Aldous Huxley's book of that name, not the quotation from Shakespeare's *Tempest*, from which the title was taken. This was published in 1932 and Iris Murdoch would surely have read this novel about a dystopic globalized world.)

Singularly enough I feel happier now, in spite of my sadness, than I have ever felt for years. This isn't real you know—the real things will go on, whether we are blown to pieces or not—I am very close to reality now—something infinitely calm and still and beautiful.

Here we have a very imminent threat which was real. The war did happen. Interestingly when we face the reality of our own death, which is going to happen too, something changes.

On the same day I read this letter by Iris Murdoch I also stumbled upon an article about Bhutan which is about the same issue, but from a different angle:

On a visit to Thimphu, the capital of Bhutan, I found myself sitting across from a man named Karma Ura, spilling my guts. Maybe it was the fact that he was named Karma, or the thin air, or the way travel melts my defences, but I decided to confess something very personal. Not that long before, seemingly out of the blue, I had experienced some disturbing symptoms: shortness of breath, dizziness, numbness in my hands and feet. At first, I feared I was having a heart attack, or going crazy. Maybe both. So I went to the doctor, who ran a series of tests and found...

"Nothing," said Ura. Even before I could complete my sentence, he knew that my fears were unfounded. I was not dying, at least not as quickly as I feared. I was having a panic attack.

What I wanted to know was: why now – my life was going uncharacteristically well – and what could I do about it?

"You need to think about death for five minutes every day," Ura replied. "It will cure you."

"How?" I said, dumbfounded.

"It is this thing, this fear of death, this fear of dying before we have accomplished what we want or seen our children grow. This is what is troubling you."

"But why would I want to think about something so depressing?"

"Rich people in the West, they have not touched dead bodies, fresh wounds, rotten things. This is a problem. This is the human condition. We have to be ready for the moment we cease to exist."

Meditation on death is a well-established Buddhist tradition, but it is challenging for many Westerners. I remember when I did a course on Buddhism and psychotherapy with people who mostly were psychologists and psychotherapists. When one of the leaders came in with a bag of human bones and invited us to handle them, many of the therapists were very squeamish and went into a hand-flailing 'I can't touch a human bone' mode, though I suspect many of them would have happily gnawed on a chop!

It's not just death, there are traditional Buddhist contemplations on sickness and old age too, all three of which are the afflictions that so troubled Shakyamuni Buddha. Recently I accidentally found myself in a beginner's meditation class at a Bangkok temple,

but I stayed, out of curiosity. There was an introduction by a senior monk and then a younger monk ascended the high seat and took over, telling us how we will all become old and die and that we need to contemplate this.

The older monk had already spoken to some of the students attending, a young woman from Mexico whom he addressed as Miss Mexico, another as Miss Germany and so on. I was by far the oldest person in the room. “You start off like Miss Mexico,” said the young monk, indicating the skimpily-dressed, beautiful young woman in the front row. “And end up like..... that!” He was pointing at me! I wanted to say that I wasn’t actually suffering but that would

think...” followed by opinions, theories and arguments. But the questioner would persist, “Yes, but how does this make you feel?” We need to acknowledge our grief, anger, despair, fear for our children, numbness, a desire to pretend it is not happening and to escape into watching TV or having another beer—which are forms of aversion (to the proposed action) or attachment (to ourselves) or ignorance (ignoring the problem). Then, from awareness of our feelings, and the reactions they tend to provoke, a more appropriate response emerges.

The Heart Sutra starts, “Avalokitesvara (Bodhisattva of Compassion) clearly saw that all five skandhas are empty transforming anguish and distress.”



have spoiled his message, so I kept quiet.

It is not just old age, sickness and death, but anything that frightens us, that is a threat to the self. Joanna Macy, the well-known Buddhist, systems theorist and peace activist, says how we need to acknowledge our feelings of fear, recognise and acknowledge them, rather than escape from them, in order to take appropriate action. I remember at a workshop I did with her, someone spoke about an interesting exercise in which activists talk to people in areas where, for example, a nuclear power station is proposed...these days it might be fracking... something that is worrying to the local population and ask them how they feel about the proposed development. Very often the answer would come, “I

The five skandhas are form, sensation (feelings of like, dislike or indifference), perception, mental reaction and consciousness, which together constitute what we experience as our identity. Yet the skandhas are always changing and unfixed, but progressive in the sense that we start with form, our body, which has feelings that are pleasant or unpleasant (I don’t like that boat heading towards us) through to perception (the boat is going to hit my boat) and mental reaction (What do the people in the boat think they are doing? I’m going to....) and before we know it we have a whole story and a reaction to it. With attention we notice the feelings of aversion early on and stop the story from ever gaining traction. This is what we do when we are meditation

on our cushions: we cut off the mind road and return to our koan, our breath-counting or whatever our current practice is. There is no need to analyse it — Where would this aversion lead to if I follow the thought-train? — that's just putting folks in the boat.

Returning to suffering, sickness, old age and death: who dies?

This is the question that we need to address, and is no different from the question 'Who lives?' or 'Who am I?' When we delve deeply and reveal our own true nature, then we may even find ourselves laughing at our fears of ceasing to exist. That's not to say that we may not feel other emotions too, but, once we know who we really are and realize our true nature, recognising the Self that does not die, everything changes.

Now you may well think that you don't need to worry about death right now. You may have plenty of far more urgent things on your mind to think about: finding a new job, deciding whether to move house, get married, get unmarried. But here's the thing: letting go of the small self, realising it isn't there, killing it off completely, not only changes our relationship to the physical death of the body, but to everything else that threatens the self, transforming anguish and distress. And notice the word here is transforming. Not eliminating; transforming.

So, try it and see. Just breathe. Just allow things to unfold as they do, without interfering. Without adding anything, without trying to hold on or to push away, without, heaven help us, jumping to conclusions (putting people in the boat), just welcoming whatever appears. No need to give them all a hug, just welcoming them by graciously allowing their presence, as you would welcome any guest who turned up at your show, just because they are there.

Haiku

Sesshin haiku written in the bush

BY LIZZIE FINN

Listening

A crow cry fills the silence

Looking up

A bird dives through the stillness

Sitting in the sunlight

Birdcall bouncing off the trees

Distant voices

A bird glides above the trees

Black hen

Pecking elegantly

Disappears behind the hutch

Cicadas stirring

Waking up the silent trees

One With the Footy

A personal journey towards Zen through playing Aussie Rules Football

Part three of three of a talk given at St Paul's Dojo

BY PHIL McNAMARA

From Part Two:

As already suggested with right focus everything plays in slow motion and you can see the arising game patterns and their waves. Indeed game play often looks like it happens in slow motion weeping waves. At one level this is because teams have their set plays and players learn where to stand or which space to run into. To an outsider looking in, when these work they appear to build or get driven by passion. As a spectator sitting in a stand you often have a better overview and can see them developing or see the possible variations. As one gains momentum many coaches, players and spectators ride the pattern but also get swept up in the rising tensions and excitements of expectation. Without doubt learnt patterns and passion concurrently aid the momentum of some waves. Even so players taken over by emotion are very sensitive to the opposing tendency. They may look invincible when in a positive state, but are always vulnerable to their own duality. Here lies their strength but also their weakness. Duality is a relative existence but appears absolute. That is it is only real in one moment of space-time. Accordingly if the perceiver believes it is real as a continuum, this delusion can be used against them. A perceptive enough opposition can block or deflate it and bring it back to just a possible pattern. At that point their consciousness and confidence gets tripped up by its own net.

Part Three:

Seeing the game as a series of rolling and rising waves and noticing who is caught up in passion, who is distracted or who is really focused brings about a deeper awareness. It all arises because, as we chant every evening, “we ourselves come forth in perfect harmony”, and to this end also because, as Hakuin Zenji states in his *Song of Zazen*, “effect and cause are the same”. Hence the game is an extension or manifestation of our own mind.

It is beautiful when you are the ball in its movement across the field. You feel the beauty of the conditions, the context, the timelessness of each moment within the movement. You feel joy. You feel free. You are not split into subject and object as it is all one fabric. After a play, when you come back into a more binary style of consciousness, you feel gratitude that the ball came your way and that you were able to be it and, as its consciousness, assist it on.

Sometimes, if you are a back-man or forward, the ball doesn't come your way. But that is ok too. You look and wait and feel the energy of your focus. You are ready for whatever happens. That readiness is also timeless. Similarly you note how you expend and project your energy and so do this knowingly. Indeed you can appear exhausted but still have vast reserves, or you can appear strong and buoyant yet be exhausted. You learn to calmly stretch or collapse time to your benefit. It's interesting that if an opposition player is running within time – desperate and distracted by your calmness – they give up. They can also be deceived by the conceptual world they create around their expectations of what you will do. If you stand outside this, while their perceptions adjust, to them you momentarily disappear. There is the skill of ‘reading the play’, but those players just conceptualising time lose. Often they just stand and watch your back as you stride away. The truer skill is to shift into *seeing*.

The best players exist almost outside of time and are not predictable in their actions; they weave trackless paths. Thus as a back man I needed to develop not just peripheral vision, but a sort of intuitive empathy with my opponents and an overarching view of the play. At the time that I was developing this wider, witnessing-yet-kinaesthetic sixth sense, my parents took me along to the museum to see Brett Whiteley's large installation painting ‘The American Dream’. It's a painting about many things, including energy, time and memory. In various panels there are echoing hypnotic loops that appealed to my growing sense that we were all loops in a wider web, but it was the panel where the flight of a bird is traced by dashes and dots that captured my imagination and what I had realised about how I

could “read” a footy game. That image was a confirmation that although flying birds and footballs leave no tracks, you can see their paths like a slow-motion film and virtually catch hold of the fading echoes or traces and know where to be or not to be. Knowing where not to be - and timing around energies - is an important skill. For example I have stepped aside and let two opponents crash into each other instead of sandwiching me in a bump, I’ve twisted one way knowing that my opponent expects me to twist the other, I’ve hung back the necessary second to be propelled up by the other players to take a mark by hanging in air above the pack. Use of timing and of the energy around you to expand or ease your own output brings a sense of centeredness and calm joy.

This is not a dissociative joy or calmness. In a game you are in distress and pain. This can be physical, mental or both. Pain can be insignificant, minor, a signal you should pay attention to, or imaginary. So every player has to work with the suffering of pain. However the only one worthwhile considering is the signal that something serious might be about to occur. The rest are not useful and some are downright distracting. To focus correctly and “enter” the game one has to learn to dis-engage from them as emotions. For example without the right mind-set jostling in a pack for the ball, or running at someone to tackle them, or having someone run at you, can cause aversion or fear. *The Great Prajna Paramita Heart Sutra* shows the way through this: “With no hindrance in the mind; no hindrance and therefore no fear”. The right mental state is, in the midst of life, to forget or lay aside and not attach to subjective thoughts. A useful image is that your thoughts flow like snow melted on the stove or ice melted under the sun. Therefore it can also be said of Zen that it is a state of mind that allows us to keep going, to push our limits, to drive us forward when we are in a world of pain and suffering. This suffering includes the mundane ones such as having to sit in our car and drive through peak hour traffic, or to wash up after a pleasurable meal.

At the same time, you can’t be foolhardy or overly bold. Carelessness or arrogance will get you injured. Nevertheless, total focus will see you either do what others think is miraculous and emerge unscathed, or consciously put yourself on the line for your team and accept the outcome. The latter once saw me, in an end of season final, run about 40 metres straight at an opposition player who I could see was about to seal the game by kicking a goal that my team wouldn’t have then had the heart to rally against. Players from my team had been sucked into our forward line in an attempt to score, leaving three

of their players free, plus the full forward I was on. He was one of their best, but also a most-arrogant player, who had marked the ball at the far end of the wing after it had been kicked to him out of their defence. I was watching from full back, standing in the square on my man. He had a number of loose team mates to kick it to around the centre or their forward flank, but I saw him look up, assess the meagre defence and decide that he wanted glory (with focus distance sometimes telescopes and it was like I was standing in front of him). Once he had run on from his mark and taken a bounce I knew for certain that he had decided to continue bouncing it down and kick what he thought would be the winning goal. I somehow also knew that he was going to run towards centre half forward to open up the face of the goals for himself and I also saw that without any opposition around him he was looking more down than up; focused on bouncing the ball, visualizing the kick and glory, and ignoring his calling team mates. I realised that if I sprinted straight to where I knew he was heading I would intercept him about 45 metres straight out from the goals. From where I was it was a 40 metre sprint, which gave enough time for him to kick over my head to the man I’d leave in the goal square but, if he was going to make certain that he personally kicked the goal, a little short of where he’d want to kick from. If he didn’t kick to my abandoned man I knew that he would run a little further on to take his shot and I’d have him.

I ran at the intercepting spot as fast as I could. There were plenty of his own team players for him to kick the ball to, including the full forward who I left to make my charge, but I knew he wanted to literally and metaphorically sink the boot in. We arrived at the spot almost at the same time. He had slightly slowed to drop the ball into his kick and saw me about half a step before we collided. As he had started to raise his arms to angle the ball he managed to twist and lift an elbow a bit higher; after the game I found that, in the impact of the tackle, this had fractured my sternum. As we fell I gathered him in a tackle and he spilt the ball. I was rewarded a free kick which took the ball back down our end and to a winning a goal. We both limped off the ground. Afterwards, working with my resulting injury (on the field and for a number of months), I learnt that I could just watch my breath and the edges of pain. From the collision I also learnt that some people just don’t want to see what is happening.

Were my actions foolhardy or careless? In the context of the game they were necessary actions. However the injury which occurred in the above

incident was painful and took a long time to heal (not breathing is not an option for humans). Yet during that time of healing and discomfort I learnt, as it suggests in our orientation notes on zazen and breath count, each breath is best experienced just as it is. Allowed to be some breaths are long, some are short, some are deep, and some are shallow; when healing it hurt the most when I got too conscious of my breathing and in response it became too rhythmic.

Pain is inevitable in sport, as it is in zazen. Whilst it is not sought after (neither footballers or Zen students are masochists), it needs to be worked with. Consequently, my Zen teachers, Ross Bolleter and Mari Rhydwen, advise that if we are experiencing pain and discomfort when sitting zazen, we should either use kneepads to support our knees or use a chair (they empathise and emphasise that there is no shame in using a chair and that we can do perfectly fine zazen sitting on one). They also recommend that it's also good to find a posture that we can alternate with our current one, for instance *seiza* with half lotus, or Burmese with *seiza*. But sometimes we have injuries and these also need to be worked with. As we age we all have constellations of pain, injuries or medical conditions that jostle for attention. If we give them too much attention they prevent us from entering fully into zazen. Currently I have arthritis in my hands, rheumatism (since childhood) in my knees, sciatica (left hip), two protruding discs that sometimes press on my spinal nerves causing interesting pain combinations or lack of limb movement, and I suffer from heart arrhythmia which occurs at random times and can require, if it doesn't resolve itself within a certain time frame, a hospital emergency visit (distracting if it occurs, as it has, when one is Eno and leading chants, sitting in the role as Jisha at the front of the line, or at a Sesshin a little far from a major hospital). I learnt from football to be unwavering and persistent in my efforts. Unwavering resolve has subsequently helped me in my Zen practice. I also strongly believe that learning about being committed to my role in a football team has helped me learn not to be overly concerned and thus distracted by these various ailments. It encouraged me when I read in Robert Aitken's *Taking The Path of Zen* that we should not lapse into coasting in zazen but sit towards the edge of pain; that is know that we will sometimes be uncomfortable yet stay with it until the bell. Similarly the breath counting of Zen, similar to what I found I had to do to deal with my injured sternum, is a fundamental means for us to drop beneath distracted thinking. Indeed, the pres-

ent moment, in its fullness, is always there as our breath.

Anyway, back to my earliest lessons in the suffering of pain. In football injuries are not sought out, but they *are* part of the game. Footy is a contact sport. It hurts and during or afterwards your body suffers. Even without physical contact with other players, just contact with the ball can hurt: rain has made the leather heavy; it's been kicked harder than you expected; the smother with your hand is miscalculated and it's your face that blocks it; your foot or hand or knee or back or finger is at the wrong angle to smoothly receive or dispose of the ball so it jars; you slip or fumble or stagger. But most of this is just passing pain. During the game you shake it out or run it off. If it comes back after the game you can take an ice-bath, go for a wade or swim, get a massage. You learn to focus on playing full tilt for each quarter; knowing that the quarter, half time and three-quarter time breaks will come. It's not that you rest and recover then, it's just that the tempo shifts. Slotting into letting others control the time brings an expanded sense of honouring the process. You learn to trust that the umpire whistles and ground sirens will tell you what to do. Similarly, in Zen we rely and trust on the bells to guide us and, although while sitting for prolonged periods our buttocks and legs, back and neck ache, we also learn that most pain or discomfort is just passing and that we can put up with a lot more of this than we think.

These were my teenage years, so concurrent with all this were many moments of existential crisis and deep questioning. I was playing football, going to school and doing University entry courses, dating girls, listening to music (Dylan, Bowie, Donavon, Waits, Stevens) and writing my own songs and poems. Bubbling along underneath all my activities was the big question – why am I doing this, where does all this lead? What roads are we on and why?

During this period I had learnt from footy - and my Biology "Web of Life" course - that all activities are seeds and it is repetition and immersion which builds a dynamic or creative interconnectivity that lays the fertile ground for something else to come to life. Bob Dylan, in his MusiCares Speech, described the same process in relation to his music. He said:

If you sang "John Henry" as many times as me - "John Henry was a steel-driving man / Died with a hammer in his hand / John Henry said a man ain't nothin' but a man / Before I let that steam drill drive me down / I'll die with that hammer in my hand." If you had sung that song as many times as I did, you'd have

written “How many roads must a man walk down?” too.

Indra’s net is alive! By Year Twelve I could see that anyone can use their life to give birth to new life. There was nothing secret about it. It’s partly like an amoeba splitting. This both scared me and energised me: we are the bridges between experiences, the warps and wefts that know the pattern and keep it going. Again Dylan, about this in relation to his song writing, says:

Don’t be fooled. I just opened up a different door in a different kind of way. It’s just different, saying the same thing. ...I was just writing them. I didn’t think I was doing anything different. I thought I was just extending the line.

Dylan has devoted his life to music, some devote their lives to football. When I was younger I wondered who extends the football line and why. I had met some greats (such as Cable and Sheedy) and wondered: would it also be me? I looked around at my team mates and also wondered if it might be them.

In deciding for myself about my own road I observed some interesting traits in those around me and saw why the greats were always somewhat humble. Those who resolve to keep practicing regardless of what arises, and who also see that they practice for the “team” so that what arises benefits the whole, are usually unassuming. For instance, I found in football that the very top players are usually quiet. Not shy, just observant and self-contained. They radiate a certain elegance of style in the way they apply themselves to training, their warm up to the game, their role and position on game day, the after-game reflection and then the repeating of the process. It is lesser players who either want to stick out in the crowd, or complain; who require constant reassurance or acknowledgement. This type is usually naturally talented but is also, because of this, often less motivated. They have nothing to strive for and their spirit of trying to improve becomes dull. They often suddenly find themselves amongst talented peers, want some of the glory but are unwilling to give any extra effort. They get by, but they are often selfish and carried by others (they imagine on shoulders, but it is usually by others’ shoelaces). The former have both dedication and persistence.

It is similar to Zen: many different types of people come and go, but who perseveres and who becomes dull, who contributes and who avoids helping? I think I go through both periods of great diligence and great dullness! Hopefully the rolling

momentum of the diligent periods keeps me going through the dull. During the dull I ask lots of questions and wonder why I have taken up a lifelong practice. Why do some people, once they know that the practice and teachers are available here, not come along? I have met many who say they are interested - who read about Zen and know our sitting times - but never come. Others come to practice but only for a short while. Some come and go and come and go. Some come on short sits but not to extended. Why do we make a determined effort or not? Why do some endure the pain and doubting whilst others let difficulties stop them? I don’t know except that we ultimately do everything to prove something for ourselves.

So in playing football what was I proving? Where did my years of dedication to football lead? Well initially it started because my dad wanted me to be a “real man” and to have male friends. It quickly became about learning new skills and then a way to find out about how my mind and body worked. Then it was about duty (to my dad and my team) and doing a role as best I could. However it always remained something that gave me the ability to explore my consciousness and grow. Nevertheless I also realised it was just a game and not necessarily what life - what I had come here for - was about.

Yet, having grown up playing football, I had thought I would play sport professionally. It was a major part of my life (any training taken seriously becomes that) for almost a decade. But I gave away playing footy three-quarters of the way through my first year at university. It was 1980 and Ken Armstrong, who had followed my football development as coach of Perth Football Club, had been appointed coach at Subiaco. Pre-season he asked me up for a meeting at Subiaco Oval. Ken showed me around the training facilities and then asked me for a private meeting in his new office.

Once there, Ken told me that he had taken on the coaching role at Subiaco because Western Australia wanted to field a team in a national competition and that Subiaco Oval would be that team’s headquarters and training facility. He said he hoped to be the first coach of that team and that their development players would play for Subiaco, so being the coach of Subiaco was a strategy to put himself in the box seat. I found it interesting that he confided all this to me. But it explained why he had left the Perth club after a number of successful seasons, and showed me that he was forward thinking and a goal setter. We got a bit side-tracked talking about whether what he wanted would happen. He said: “The future is never certain; there are many, many powerful

people behind the scenes in football; and all that we can at best do is to try and influence the outcomes in our favour.” He was very serious and the conversation made me sad that the politics of junior football were clearly repeated at the league level.

He then gestured around and asked what I thought about the weight room and training facilities. I said I found them impressive. Ken paused and then said I was most welcome to use the training facilities at Subiaco Oval and to train with his league team “Just as a guest”. The location of Perth Football club’s ground – who my junior clubs were affiliated with – didn’t suit where I was now studying or the routes of the public transport system I was using, so I took up Ken’s suggestion and began training with Subiaco.

The next step, after Ken saw that I was comfortable training there, was a transfer from Perth Football Club to Subiaco Club. Ken thought, as an untested league player, it would be a quick and easy negotiation, but it dragged on. In the second half of the 1980 season Ken again asked me to a meeting in his office. At that meeting he said that he had tried to get a transfer for me but that Perth were asking for a \$25 000 transfer fee. He said it was exorbitant and clearly aimed at ensuring that I would play for no-one else, as “no team will ever pay anywhere near that for an untried player.” At the time, you could buy a small city flat or a house in some of the outer suburbs for that amount.

Perth’s tactic fully put me off wanting to play for them. Intermittently I had gone to their training sessions (along with a friend Rhett Baines who later played for Richmond), but some of their trainers had put a lot of pressure on us to take steroids and growth hormones which had also put me off the club. In my discussion with Ken I said I didn’t like being treated like a commodity, nor having pressure put on me to change my body shape. Ken contemplated this for a while then suggested some country teams I could go play for which would side step the clearance and transfer issues. He said after a couple of years Subiaco would then pick me up as a draft from them. He reiterated that Subiaco would be a great club to launch a professional national playing career from. However, back in 1980 I didn’t have a car and I didn’t want to drop out of University just to go play for a country club. Ken shrugged and said, given that Perth now knew where I was training, the Subiaco Club could no longer offer me their facilities to train at. He said that if I didn’t want to play for Perth, or a country team, the only avenue was to suspend my playing for a number of years. I asked how long. He said three years.

After that meeting I stopped training. Ken Armstrong coached Subiaco until 1982. The vision of having a West Australian team in a National Competition didn’t eventuate until September 1986 when Ron Alexander was appointed as the first coach of the team to be called the West Coast Eagles. 1987 was the inaugural playing year. It was seven years after my first meeting with Ken Armstrong. He was right about Subiaco being the home ground and the affiliated local league club. I was disappointed for him that his desire to be their first coach hadn’t eventuated.

I did go back to play, in my last year of Uni, in an amateur side. But that comeback lasted only one game. In 1985, I also played a season as a backline player for the country town I was first posted to as a high-school teacher. I didn’t tell them my background as a player, but after one game in their seconds was promoted to their league team. However, I consider 1980 as my last year of serious training and desire to play.

In what I consider was my last game I had a very peculiar experience where I was one not just with the ball but the very grass and dirt of the football field, the blue sky and the weave of cloth in every jumper. I now see how all my previous years and states had been leading up to this moment, and thirty six years on I can still recall the vividness of that moment. As I ran on to the field I saw that the world was vital, alive, and brilliant. Everything was vividly coloured and intrinsically itself, yet one shimmering part of a whole. I ran to my position but felt that I was running underwater. I looked around and was amazed at how interconnected everything was. Then the whistle went, the ball went up and everything just shattered and went very calm and still. Time seemed frozen and everything bright. In the light people ran and chased the ball, yet they did not. I tried shaking my head, my arms, my legs to get pumped up and into the game but I just felt very content with everything just as it was. It was very hard to do anything but look at everything with great satisfaction. Every colour was so vivid, every expression so nuanced and timeless. I could still read the game perfectly, but saw no reason to run after something that was intimately me anyway. It was unimpeded and beautiful without my intervention.

I spent the rest of the game alternating between laughing, smiling and barely being able to move. Everything was perfect so why chase a leather ball and run into others?

I came away from that game strangely calm, yet blissful and content. I didn’t need to play footy to know that this is how the world is!

When it came time to get ready to go to the next training session I reflected that a heart at peace in all conditions and all situations had no need to chase a leather ball.

My disposition had changed. I had the freedom to make myself a tough and determined footballer, but I much preferred going with the flow of sunshine, blue skies and grass. With that thought the

mindset entailed in making myself a competitive player suddenly seemed inconsequential; just one of numerous possibilities.

So began my journey towards taking the path of Zen. By the way, I went back to football, for a short time, as a coach of Under Ten's (before I had children). I also continue to enjoy watching it played; where I can still be one with the ball.



Morning Haiku

BY GERARD MAZZA

Woken by the crash
Of council bin collection -
Did I put mine out?

Window propped
By wooden rod -
Incense twists and rises.

Kettle calls,
Whistling loud -
I'm still ironing my trousers.

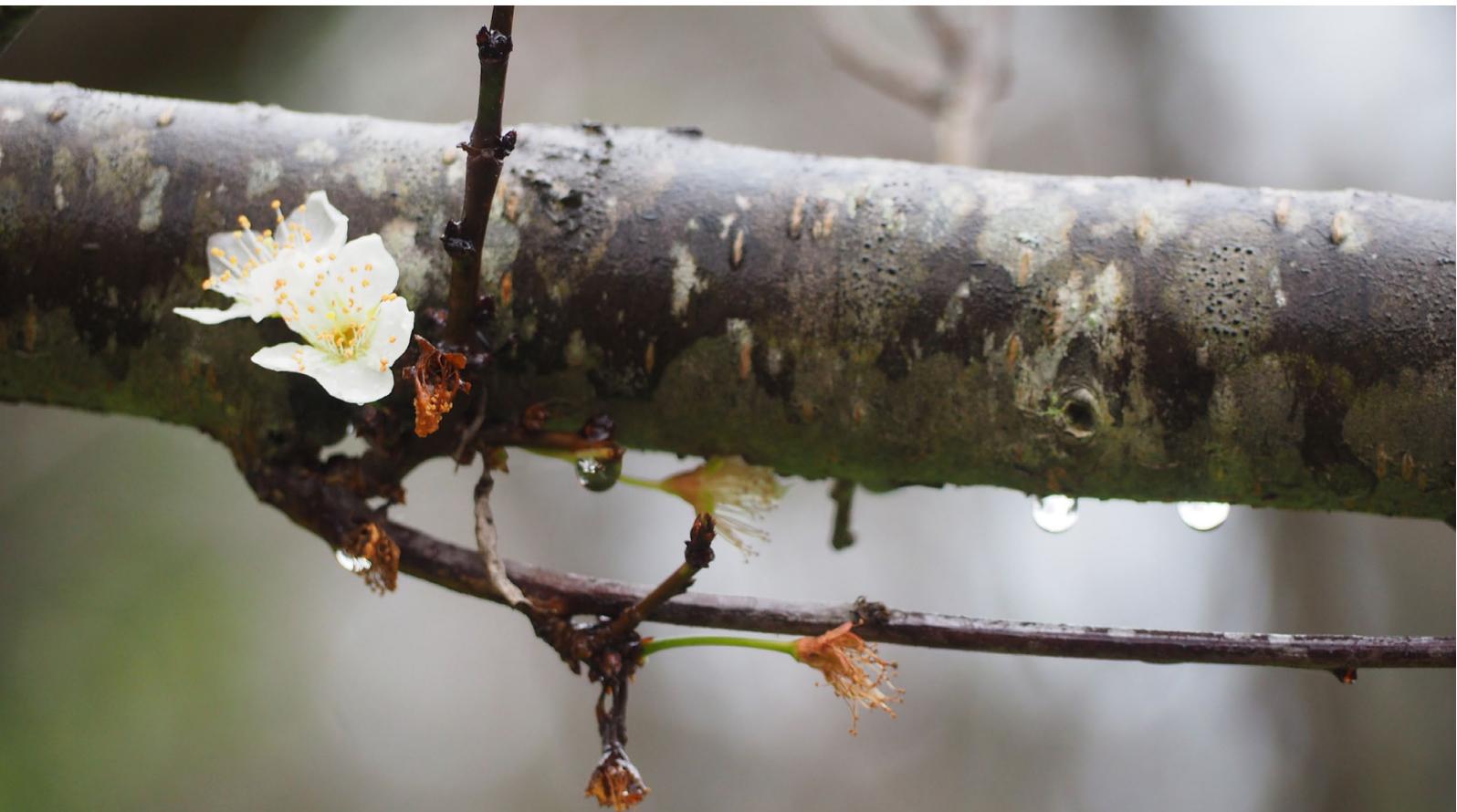
Morning light
On lino floor -
Refrigerator hums

House-guest sits
On shower curtain:
Still and silent moth.

My Life with Pain and Zen

A talk at St Paul's Dojo

BY DOTSI BURNAZOVA



All photographs taken at the Origins Centre, Balingup, by Dotsi Burnazova.

There was a time when I used to say: that man's a Turk, or a Bulgar, or a Greek. I've done things for my country that would make your hair stand on end, boss. I've cut people's throats, burned villages, robbed and raped women, wiped out entire families. Why? Because they were Bulgars, or Turks. Bah! To hell with you, you swine? I say to myself sometimes. To hell with you right away, you ass. Nowadays I say, this man is a good fellow, that one's a bastard. They can be Greeks or Bulgars or Turks, it doesn't matter. Is he good? Or is he bad? That's the only thing I ask nowadays. And as I grow older – I'd swear this on the last crust I eat – I feel I shan't even go on asking that! Whether a man's good or bad, I'm sorry for him, for all of them. The sight of a man just rends my insides, even if I act as though I don't care a damn! There he is, poor devil,

I think, he also eats and drinks and makes love and is frightened, whoever he is: he has his God and his devil just the same, and he'll peg out and lie as stiff as a board beneath the ground and be food for worms, just the same. Poor devil! We're all brothers! All worm-meat!

This passage is from *Zorba the Greek* by Nikos Kazantzakis. If you haven't read the book, I recommend it. If you already have, you probably know that the Buddha is referred to throughout. I only read this book in high school because it was compulsory, and all I remembered was the few words that I just read to you. I could not recall any mentions of the Buddha at all. How did I miss that? I'm sure it was because my mind was occupied with other problems. Big problems. Was I liked by the cute boy I saw the night before? What were those boys

at school whispering to each other while looking at me? Were they saying that I was too skinny and not beautiful enough to ask out? Were they saying that I had a big nose? Or was one of them thinking about asking me out? (They never did by the way.) Was I good enough for anyone? Would I ever find love? Was I smart enough for anyone? I thought I must go to university and study; finish a degree so people won't think I am stupid. I thought the dress I'd worn that day didn't look very good on me. I worried about what I'd wear that night.

One thing that used to worry me a lot was whether anyone would love me like I was: often sick, most of the time in pain, and with no energy. Pain was, and still is, a huge part of my life. I cannot remember a time when I was completely free of it.

Officially, I started coming to the Zen Group in 2002, and this is how the story goes. I was nearing a breaking point with my obsessions. They were so bad that I could not cope on a daily basis, and I had to find a solution. I was looking for some literature on obsessions without any success. I'd almost given up when I came across a book about Buddhism. To my surprise, after just a few lines I thought, "Ah, this makes sense." It was filling a hole in my lonely world of nobody understanding me. But as I read the book at home, I didn't expect to come across a line that I will remember for the rest of my life. It said, "Meditation is an antidote to obsessions." Wow! I'd found the cure for my sick mind. The very next day, when I was picking up my children from school, one of the mothers mentioned that Mr Stein, who was my daughter's teacher at the time, was a Buddhist. I ran into his classroom and said, "Hi, I'm Barbara's mum, and I just heard that you are a Buddhist and I want to learn meditation."

He gave me a CD to listen to. I found the only type of meditation I could do was to observe my thoughts. It made sense to me, as it was my thinking that I wanted to fix. For two years, I was observing my thoughts, day and night. My whole world started crumbling: concepts and beliefs dropping, friendships ending, new ones forming, excitements, disappointments. I had millions of questions. Mr Stein with his priceless support also introduced to me Joko Beck's book *Nothing Special, Living Zen*, which was answering all those questions. I read then for the first time about retreats, and 'strange' people sitting on cushions for hours with aching knees, practising Zen. I thought, "These people are masochists, they enjoy pain and I will never do it." But, after two years of all this, I woke up one day and realised I needed more. So, there I was with Paul Stein, signing up for a two-day Sesshin at Rottneest. This is

when I officially started practising Zen.

But when I think about it, I started practising Zen long before I got to know Zen and the ZGWA.

As I mentioned before, pain was a huge part of my life. My legs were hurting since I've known of myself. My mother said that the moment I started walking I started complaining about sore legs. And I am speaking here about physical pain. So, if it wasn't my legs, it was my tummy, if not the tummy, my legs again, or my headache, then later my sinus headache, or earache, or feeling nauseous, or my neck, and on and on goes the list. It was very debilitating and frustrating, as I could never do what everyone else did. I could never walk as much as others did, I could never swim as much as others did, or dance or run. To add to my frustration, I was constantly criticised by my parents for it. They used to say how embarrassing it was to take me anywhere. Very often they called me lazy and rotten, or told me nobody would want to marry me.

Most frustrating of all was that nobody believed me. Even my parents would look at each other and smile secretly, as if they were saying, "Here we go again; we are complaining." I didn't have any swelling or redness to prove that I was in pain. I didn't have any bruises or bleeding; no cuts, no stitches, just my plea for help for something that was invisible. Growing up in that environment, the belief that something was very wrong with me became deeply embedded in me for a very long time. It was a dark and lonely place.

But one day, when I was in Uni in Skopje, the capital of Macedonia, away from my parents, I decided to stop running away from it. I realised no matter which way I positioned my legs, they would still hurt. One night I decided to keep them still and let the pain do what it was meant to do, even if it wanted to kill me. After only a few seconds of not moving, the pain became worse, but I was determined. I remained still and focused on the pain, and after some intense discomfort the pain became burning. Then, the burning started melting, and then it was gone. I fell asleep.

Joko Beck says:

Christians call this realization the "dark night of the soul." We've worn out everything we can do, and we don't see what to do next. And so we suffer. Though it feels miserable at the time, that suffering is the turning point. Practice brings us to such fruitful suffering, and helps us to stay with it. When we do, at some point the suffering begins to transform itself, and the water begins to flow.

I had no idea what Zen was then. I had no idea who Joko Beck was then. But this 'exercise' became a regular practice during those cold evenings in Skopje. One day I said to my mother, "I think I have some special healing powers." I described to her what I did, and how much pain-relief the exercise gave me. Later, when I was reading Joko Beck's book, I realised I was nothing special. I was simply practicing Zen, just like the title of her book, *Nothing Special, Living Zen*. I was devastated, but I continued practicing. At least it gave me so much pain relief.

According to the traditional neurological view of pain, when we are hurt, our pain receptors send a one-way signal to the brain's pain centre. The intensity of pain perceived is proportional to the seriousness of the injury. All that makes sense, but what about when there is no injury? Why do we experience pain then? Doctors gave me an explanation: sometimes the receptors are sending wrong signals to the brain that there is tissue damage, when in actual fact there isn't. This was confusing.

Recently, I came across the book *The Brain That Changes Itself* by Norman Doidge, and I learnt that the traditional view of the pain receptors sending a one-way signal to the brain's pain centre is no longer valid. The neurons which are the nerve paths from the receptors to the brain are much more plastic than that. They not only can send signals to the pain centre in the brain even though there is no tissue damage, but they can also change, and those pathways can be rewired. I am not a big reader, and Ross keeps encouraging me to read. I will have to do some reading now in order to find out how I might be able to rewire my pathways.

Joko Beck says:

Practice brings us to such fruitful suffering, and helps us to stay with it. When we do, at some point the suffering begins to transform itself, and the water begins to flow... In order for that to happen, however, all of our pretty dreams about life and practice have to go, including the belief that good practice - or indeed, anything at all - should make us happy.

I would like to share with you my experience of my first seven-day Sesshin.

I was getting very excited about it. People had told me how, after the third day, suddenly you have so much energy. They said the tiredness would be gone, and I'd feel great. Others said, "by the end of it, you will have so much energy that you will think, 'I want more of this drug.'" As someone who'd struggled with exhaustion and pain for most of my life, you can imagine my excitement and expectation.

After the third day, I was more exhausted than ever, and I also began to feel emotional and teary. On the top of my existing pain, there were additional pains and aches throughout the body. I said to myself, "Oh everyone is different, maybe all that high energy and feeling great will happen to me on the fourth day."

The fourth day was even worse. I was miserable. By the fifth day I began to think, "Why am I doing this? I could be home in a nice warm bed, cosy and comfortable on my lounge, watching a nice movie with a friend."

Then on the last night, I just thought, "Oh well, perhaps it was not meant to happen to me, and I just have to be tired for the rest of my life." It was devastating.

I was working on the koan, "Who am I?" I had dokusan that night. The dokusan finished, and I asked Ross while he rang his bell, "Why are we doing this?"

He quickly replied while ringing the bell, "So you can find out who you truly are."

I was running up the steps to the dojo at the top of the hill and I could still hear the bell and his words.

"Who you truly are."

"Who I truly am."

The word "truly" somehow stuck to my mind and I became absorbed by it. "Truly... truly... truly." Suddenly, all my thoughts about who I was dropped. Even my feelings about who I was dropped. Everything dropped. It was empty. I realized that I just am.

Thoughts about myself: Am I beautiful? Am I ugly? Am I smart? Am I stupid? Am I good? Am I bad? All gone. Because I just am – nothing else, just that. I am not beautiful or ugly, I am not smart or stupid, I am not good or bad, I am not anything, I just am. And suddenly I could see. I realized I was blind for 49 years. How could I be blind for so long?

Tears were rolling down my face. All I wanted was to run back to Ross, bow very low, tell him what I was seeing and cry to him, "how could I be so blind for so long?"

I saw someone else run down to the dokusan room while I was thinking about it, and realized the moment had passed and it was too late. Then I remembered the story Ross told us about the head monk Ming who had great realization and was in tears. I couldn't understand why he was weeping then. Now I understood.

And everything around me had a different

dimension. It looked as if I were in a living, three-dimensional painting. The trees were connected to the sky. They were suddenly so close to me: the trees, the sky, the building, the walls, the sounds of the birds. There was no distance between us at all. The leaves were touching my face, and the breeze was dancing with me. I could see the air particles forming part of that three-dimensional moving picture and I was part of it. I was no different than anything else around me. I was just part of it; we were all connected in one existence. And we were all the same. The trees were no different from me, the grass and the sky were no different from me, the chair I was sitting on that night was no different from me.

I was relating to everything and I was not alone anymore. How arrogant I was until then, to think that I was something more than grass, sand and pebbles on the ground. Suddenly I had so much energy, I felt I could run across the planet Earth and more without stopping. I was on the top of the world. Just like Joko Beck says, "All of our pretty dreams about life and practice have to go, including the belief that good practice, or indeed, anything at all, should make you happy." So I dropped my hope and expectation about gaining energy, and energy started flowing.

I remember my arms and legs were hurting, but it didn't matter anymore. There was nothing wrong with me. It was magic. The truth is though, I can talk about it all night long, but I don't really have the words to describe the exact experience.

Ross asked me, about a year and a half afterwards, if that experience at Sesshin had changed my life.

The main reason that I started formal meditation was to quieten my hyperactive, obsessive mind. Right up until my experience I was still obsessing about things, although not as much as before I began to practice. Since my experience, on occasions where I would once have headed down the path of obsessing, I can simply move on.

The way I see the world has changed. I am finding beauty in everything: day and night, cold and hot weather, quiet and loud, outdoors and indoors, socializing and quiet times alone. I have so much joy in each moment: in the cold misty mornings and the warmth of my small cosy home, when the sun is shining and when the storm is wild,

joy in each drop of rain and every sound around me.

The way I feel about myself has changed. I'm not worried about what people say or think about me. When I hear people whispering, instead of automatically thinking they were talking about me as I used to, I just don't even entertain the thought.

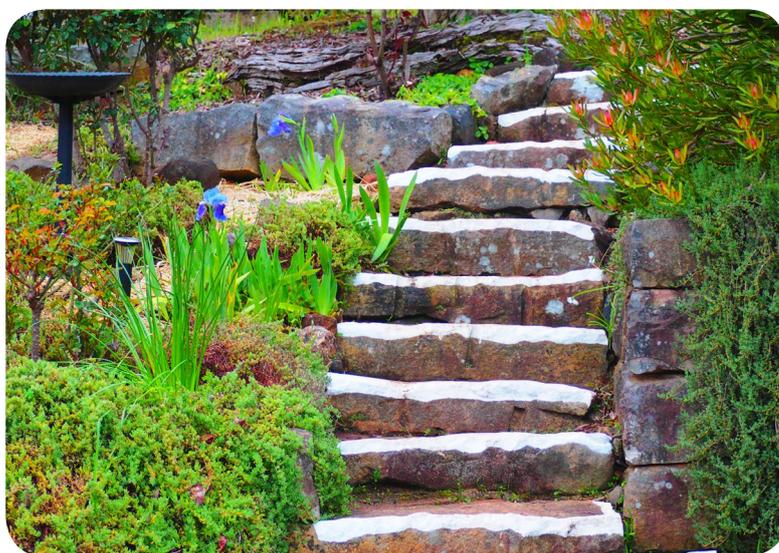
I'm not feeling lonely anymore. Wherever I go, there I am; whoever I am with, that is who I am with. I walk alone, but I am not alone.

My idea of what friendship should be has shifted. Now there is more spontaneity, rather than strict rules and conditions. My friends are the pelicans when I am kayaking and the dirty dishes that I wash every day.

Attachments to people, places and things have become weaker and I have become so much more forgiving, yet stronger within. A sense of awareness that my opinion is just one aspect of the picture follows me at all times, even when I make strong statements.

Liberated. That would be the word I would use to describe it if I had to use one word.

Before I went to the last Sesshin someone said to me, "You will come back, and you will be the same." I don't really want to change anymore, as I realise there is absolutely nothing wrong with me. But it's not about me anymore. I still cry, I still get upset and anxious and sad, but it's not about me anymore. It's about a mistreated friend and colleague. It's about the lost cubby bear who couldn't keep up the pace with its mother and siblings. It's about my homeless friend. It's about all those who live in extreme poverty because of government failures in Macedonia and other countries. It's about refugees and their mistreatment in detention centres and around the



world. I feel their pain and their anxieties. It's not about me and my pain anymore. It's about the lady at the supermarket whose face shows her pain in her knees. It's not about the things I can't do because of my limited mobility; it's about what I can do with what I have. And I'm not saying I am more positive. This has nothing to do with being positive or negative. It's about being present, and what can I do in this moment. This doesn't mean I don't care about myself anymore. On the contrary, I have never taken better care of myself in my life.

And all these changes didn't happen overnight. There were lots of ups and downs, but it was an obvious change. It was not linear, and painful at times, but as Jocko Beck says, very "fruitful".

I like Zen because of its austerity and hard work. There is no hocus-pocus or magic promises of anything. In fact, Jocko Beck says that there is no guarantee that your life will become better with practice; it may actually become worse.

I used to hate teishos. I didn't want to hear any preaching or waste precious time that I wanted to use to practice. I could not concentrate long enough to hear the stories, and they didn't make any sense anyway. Now, I understand them, I hear them, they are food for my soul.

And if anyone asked me if I would change my current life for a life where I had lots of clothes and looked absolutely gorgeous, had a PhD degree, no pain at all, and had climbed Mount Everest, but did not have Zen in my life and the experiences I've had with my Zen practice, I would say no. If any of those things came to me I would certainly not refuse, but embrace them with excitement and joy. But none of these things can give me what Zen has given me. I started meditation in order to find peace, and I can tell you it is definitely not what I found. I joined Zen practice in the hope that I would fix my mind and body, and I would become a more serene, good person. I did not fix my mind, it still thinks and over-thinks, and I am definitely not serene in the way I hoped to be. What I found, though is a treasure, a jewel that comes with me at all times. It makes me rich beyond money and words. Just as in the Shodoka's lines:

*In their poverty, they always wear ragged clothing,
But they have the jewel of no price treasured within.
This jewel of no price can never be used up
Though they spend it freely to help people they meet.*

And if there is any, any ambition left in me, it is to

give that jewel to you, if I could.

I never have words to express myself, so I will read you my favourite poem to finish:

THE LAW THAT MARRIES ALL THINGS.

By Wendell Berry.

1.
*The cloud is free only
to go with the wind.*

*The rain is free
only in falling.*

*The water is free only
in its gathering together,*

*in its downward courses,
in its rising into the air.*

2.
*In law is rest
if you love the law,
if you enter, singing, into it
as water in its descent.*

3.
*Or song is truest law,
and you must enter singing;
it has no other entrance.*

*It is the great chorus
of parts. The only outlawry
is in division.*

4.
*Whatever is singing
is found, awaiting the return
of whatever is lost.*

5.
*Meet us in the air
over the water,
sing the swallows.
Meet me, meet me,
the redbird sings,
here here here here.*

Prajna

BY BRIGID LOWRY

No matter how hard you try
you can't wriggle out of it.
The suffering of this floating world
will continue to present itself.
Just keep on being Buddha,
white flowers in your open arms.

Letter to Myself

BY BRIGID LOWRY

Stop trying to please.
Clean the cupboards at midnight,
throw away the clothes you were saving
until you became more glamorous,
dance to sad old blues.
Regarding food: if it tastes good, eat it.
Give yourself to your messy life,
wholeheartedly, unstintingly.
What else in this world is more difficult
or more necessary to love?
Remember it's now, not never, baby.



Photograph by Dotsi Burnazova.

Purpose, Perfection, Permanence: Zen, Cats and Me

A talk at St Paul's Dojo

BY NICK ARNOLD



Cat photographs by Nick Arnold.

My name is Nicholas Jon Arnold. That's "Nicholas" like Saint Nick, "Jon" with no H, like Jon Stewart, and "Arnold" as in Schwarzenegger. My dad told me "Arnold" means "Brave Eagle". My confirmation name I chose for myself is Francis, after St Francis of Assisi, the Patron Saint of Ecology. He wrote the Canticle of Brother Sun, that goes in part:

*Be praised, my Lord, through all your creatures,
especially through my lord Brother Sun,
who brings the day; and you give light
through him.
And he is beautiful and radiant in all
his splendour!
Praise be You, my Lord, through Sister
Moon
and the stars, in heaven you formed
them
clear and precious and beautiful.
Praised be You, my Lord, through
Brother Wind,
and through the air, cloudy and serene,
and every kind of weather through
which
You give sustenance to Your creatures.
Praised be You, my Lord, through
Sister Water,
which is very useful and humble and
precious and chaste.
Praised be You, my Lord, through
Brother Fire,
through whom you light the night and
he is beautiful
and playful and robust and strong.
Praised be You, my Lord, through Sis-
ter Mother Earth,
who sustains us and governs us and
who produces
varied fruits with coloured flowers and
herbs.*

My parents are both Queenslanders; my dad born in Tara in the Darling Downs region, about 300km west of Brisbane, where my mother was born. My dad is now retired but he worked as an Exploration Geologist for many years, bringing the family with him as he moved, for a time in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, where I was born; then Parks, New South Wales, where my first sister was born; then in Brisbane where my younger sister was born; then in Canberra where we lived for about seven years; and then over to Perth.

I live with my girlfriend and de facto, Jess,

of eleven years. We have three ducks, two rabbits, some koi and goldfish, and five cats. How did we end up with five cats? Well actually it happened twice. I'll get to that in a minute.

The title of my talk tonight is 'Purpose, Perfection, Permanence: Zen, Cats, and Me'. Jess helped with the title and the talk itself. When I was having trouble with topics she suggested cats and myself, and reminded me of some of my long-time fixations. So "Purpose, Perfection and Permanence". And those in particular because they start with "pur-" and make "purr, purr, purr".

Trying to find purpose, trying to reach some sort of perfection with no mistakes, trying to reach a point where I've figured it out and got to some place of stability. I wonder how I went with that?

In wanting to tell my story I have been tracing back how I came to Zen. I think a kind of beginning was in watching television. I recall sitting on the floor in front of Saturday morning TV with my sisters and my mum: moving pictures, music, and lyrics I could try to learn and sing along with.

Every now and again a video would be truly strange and it would stand out and make itself unforgettable. One such was Talking Heads' 'Once in a Lifetime', featuring the tuxedoed and bespectacled David Byrne, shot close in so we can just see his chest up, behind him a shimmering wavy blue background simulating the surface of water. He's miming diving in and coming up, gyrating, convulsing weirdly, and sweating more and more until finally by the end of the video he really is wet.

*And you may find yourself
Living in a shotgun shack
And you may find yourself
In another part of the world
And you may find yourself
Behind the wheel of a large automobile
And you may find yourself in a beautiful
house
With a beautiful wife
And you may ask yourself, well
How did I get here?*

*Letting the days go by, let the water hold me
down
Letting the days go by, water flowing under-
ground
Into the blue again after the money's gone
Once in a lifetime, water flowing underground*

Water dissolving and water removing

*There is water at the bottom of the ocean
Under the water, carry the water
Remove the water at the bottom of the ocean!*

*And you may ask yourself
What is that beautiful house?
And you may ask yourself
Where does that highway go to?
And you may ask yourself
Am I right? Am I wrong?
And you may say to yourself, "My God! What
have I done?"*

*Same as it ever was
Look where my hand was
Time isn't holding up
Time isn't after us
Same as it ever was*

So what was that about? I'm not sure, but I know it kind of shook me up. It seemed to be saying "Pay attention, don't miss it!" Miss what? Miss my life? And it was about mistakes, about being wrong. Then there's 'Road to Nowhere':

*Well we know where we're going
But we don't know where we've been
And we know what we're knowing
But we can't say what we've seen
And we're not little children
And we know what we want
And the future is certain
Give us time to work it out*

Yeah

*We're on a road to nowhere
Come on inside
Taking that ride to nowhere
We'll take that ride
I'm feeling okay this morning
And you know
We're on the road to paradise
Here we go, here we go*

And *Monkey Magic*, a Japanese production, dubbed over in English, re-telling the old Chinese story *Journey to the West*, about a Tang dynasty monk travelling to India to bring Buddhist scriptures back to China, and a monkey born from a stone egg who gains a little taste of enlightenment and proclaims himself "Great sage, equal of heaven".

*In the worlds before monkey,
Primal chaos reigned.*

*Heaven sought order,
But the phoenix can fly only when its feathers
are grown.*

*The four worlds formed again and yet again,
As endless aeons wheeled and past.
Time and the pure essences of Heaven,
The moistures of the Earth,
And the powers of the sun and the moon,
All worked upon a certain rock, old as cre-
ation.*

*And it became magically fertile.
That first egg was named "Thought"
Tathagata Buddha, the Father Buddha said,
"With our thoughts, we make the world."
Elemental forces caused the egg to hatch.
From it then came a stone monkey.
The nature of monkey was irrepressible!
MONKEY!!!*

Pain from bad posture in front of computers sent me to my first yoga class. At the end of the class we did Savasana, the Corpse Pose, for ten minutes in a darkened room with quiet music. Lying on my back, stretched out and unwound in ways I had never experienced, the floorboards underneath me softened and gave way, admitting me into them. As I sunk into the floor the ceiling above felt intimately close, close enough to touch, and I thought, "No wonder people like yoga!" I returned to class many times expecting and looking forward to that feeling of sinking into the floorboards. It didn't happen again.

I read some Herman Hesse, went to a beginner's meditation class, heard about Zen and koans, and started trying to sit at home. I wanted a "good" practice: everyday, without fail, sit more, sit full lotus! I was always getting disappointed with myself; why am I angry? Why can't I concentrate? Why aren't I getting any better? Giving up, feeling ashamed, feeling a failure, and then starting again. I heard about the three treasurers – Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha – on a podcast of a Canadian Zen group. Eventually I wondered: "Maybe I could do with a little help?"

The first time I came to the Zen Group of WA was roughly October of 2012, about four years ago. I have written journals on and off for years. This is a fragment from that time:

I've been to this zen place twice now, twice I have been to an actual zendo. This is something I once thought was completely impossible and infeasible given my personality and my introverted self and traits and a desire to be alone and shame and guilt and feelings of not being worthwhile, so I wonder yes I do I wonder I wonder am I an ass at this thing?

And the very next thing I wrote down in my book were the first words of Ross Bolleter Roshi I ever recorded:

*Sitting alone makes you strong.
Sitting with others opens you up.*

So I now I was in a Sangha, I knew I had to try a Sesshin just to see, even though I was petrified. And then, more than one, just to see. And they weren't what I had expected. Coming home from my second seven day Sesshin, I wrote:

My Dear Beloved and Noble Nick,

Yes, you want to go to Sesshin. Yes. You really do.

No, it won't be fun to say goodbye to Jess. So don't. Instead smile a big smile and say "I love you" and say "Have a beautiful day!" It will be sad to say goodbye to the bunnies, and the ducks, and chickens, and the cats. So don't. Instead smile and scratch their ears and say "Hello there Bugsie. Hello lovely bunnies. Hello ducks. Hello chickens." Pack your bag days early, take the train down to Fremantle, get a lift with someone else.

*You will be tired and scared and anxious.
There will be familiar faces and new ones.
There will be a few moments sometime half way or so that will be still and beautiful. Maybe there might be one day with several of these moments. You will have pieces of yourself drop away. You will see at least one person with you in a new light. You'll see yourself in a new light. You will be different. Something that you thought impossible will happen. A bird will come to see you. A green fly will walk on your forearm and tell you you are beautiful. An ant will explore your foot but not bite you. A tree will give you a gift. Your eyes will shine back at you from the mirror differently. Sleep will be deep and righteous. You will cry sadness and joy. Several pairs of clean dark clothes will turn into several pairs of dirty ones. You will have not brought enough tissues. It will be over too soon. If it is Spring there will be delicious cold mornings in bare feet. If it is summer there will be constant sweat.*

You will be reminded of your Nobility. Of your dignity. You will find yourself revolting. You will be ashamed. You will not be able to stop thinking and daydreaming. You will feel you are wasting your time. You will feel your posture is no good. You will do others wrong and feel awful about it. Your selfishness will

stink at you like an open sewer. It will seem too hard. It will feel impossible. You will be convinced this path is not for you.

Suddenly there will be kindness when you need it. You will see a species of bird you have not seen before, or an old familiar one evoking lost memories.

Coming home will be hard and strange but then easier and more familiar and gentler. In the days after there will be peaks and troughs of sadness. Reverberations. Normality, normalcy, and powerful surges of peculiarity. Forgetfulness. A tiredness that allows little sleep.

The next year it was not at all the same:

*coming home
the spell is broken
the world is glazed over with corruption and dirt
disappointment
the sacred and beautiful world that was touched
(or worse, into which we were immersed,
a part of, not separate from)
is now buried and gone
bereft and grieving
wondering if it was all an illusion, a lie, a fabrication
its gone, finished
the beautiful thing that was is lost*

*and now just left again adrift awash washed up on the shoreline
dirty and cold and there is no love no beauty no sacredness
we are not all one, we are all alone.*

But writing has many times been a tool for me to work through confusion and depression, to gaze at it obsessively until another perspective finally comes to light. After the disillusionment, I wrote:

*but, we are still there sitting in that hall
the wooden floor under our feet and under our mats
the sunshine is still streaming in slanting in through those windows
the birds are still crazy in their joy
the chainsaw still cries out
the flowers still open to spring sunshine and rain
the little lakes are still full of their collected waters.*

*the pathway up the hillside is still marked with its sign
where it joins up with the larger walking trail beside the fence line
underneath the trees.
the ground still is covered by that unexpected grass
that confused your feet
on the way back down*



This year's Sesshin was different again. So, is it safe to expect I will continue to not get what I expect?

Okay, so: how did we end up with five cats?

Before I met Jess, I had Sootie, a sleek black cat, my first cat all of my own, and Beldin, black and white, inherited from my housemate when he moved away. I raised Sootie from a little kitten, keeping him in doors and trying to keep him safe and happy in a rented house on Arundle St in Fremantle, just down from the hospital. The first night he convinced me to let him outside I wrote:

7/5/2005

*last night the sky to my right above the building was purple
then after it was not*

*the rain comes heavier and heavier now
the cat chases a paper ball frantically like a mouse*

the gutters overflow into little floods in the garden

*the rain stops the gutters keep dripping
now i look at the sky through rain drops
everything is wet and shiny now*

*the kitten still plays
as Bob sings to me and the cat meows and
tries to climb the screen door.*

my little kitten whom i have never let out the front before

because i was afraid he would vanish or be killed

*wanted to explore the wet world outside
so i have let him go*

now he runs about with his elder brother in wet grasses

and in puddles and to the left and right of the front porch where i sit

if he is killed or runs away forever that will just be

i'd rather that than me hitting his paws as he tries to climb the screen

door searching for freedom

right or wrong or irresponsible or whatever a cat kept indoors gets mighty angry

who would not want to explore drips and puddles and sparkling leaves with your

big brother?

*Robert tells me not to "worry about a thing"
the cats chase each other around the pineapple tree*

I moved to a cheap place on Indle St in Willagee, met Jess and was out of the house a lot, and there

were some seriously mean tomcats across the road. One day Sootie didn't come home. Jess and I canvassed the neighbourhood asking for him. We found no trace, and had to accept that he was gone.

When Jess moved in we got Porridge, a tabby, together from the Cat Haven, to be Our First Cat. Beldin had a bit of a traumatic early life but we looked after him well and he was happy in our rented house in Shenton Park where he made friends with a fluffy girl cat across the road, and for some time was very close to a young Porridge kitten too. When he was killed by a car we buried him in the rain in the backyard under some trees, and shortly afterwards got Mimsy, a sleek grey part Russian Blue, who worshipped the old and wise Porridge, her big sister, when Porridge allowed it.

We got our own place in Bayswater, and on that Christmas visited Jess' sister's for Christmas lunch. They had just got two new kittens that were having a great time playing together. Thoroughly infected with kitten jealousy, on Boxing Day we went straight to the Cat Haven for a pair: getting two meant they could play with each other while we were at work.

We saw a beautiful ginger boy in the middle of a cage, surrounded by adoring brothers and sisters. He looked up straight at us and we were immediately his, and his beautiful long haired black and white sister too: Henry and Eliza. As we hoped they had a fantastic time growing up together and an easier introduction to the household.

Henry had a pink nose and a hugemongous fluffy tail and, as boy cats have a tendency to be, was extremely cuddly and needy and sooky. He used eye contact to draw us to him for cuddles and kisses on top of the head, and so we had a closer bond to him than any we'd had before. Unfortunately, he decided to go out on the big road and was killed outright, still so young. We buried him in our new back garden, under our own trees.

Well we had no choice really, the only cure was to get more kittens, and it had to be two, and it had to be boys, because they had some very big, fluffy, cuddly, shoes to fill. We found two more long-haired louts, this time a pink-nosed, huge-pawed, black-and-white lad, and his brother, long-haired and all-black, like a shaggy panther. They became Pretty Boy Floyd and Bugsie Malone. "Pretty" because of the pink nose, and gangsters because I suppose we knew what trouble we were getting ourselves into. So now the wise, stately, and sensible Porridge, Mimsy, and Eliza had to adjust to two new rough, foolish, boys in the house. We had five cats.

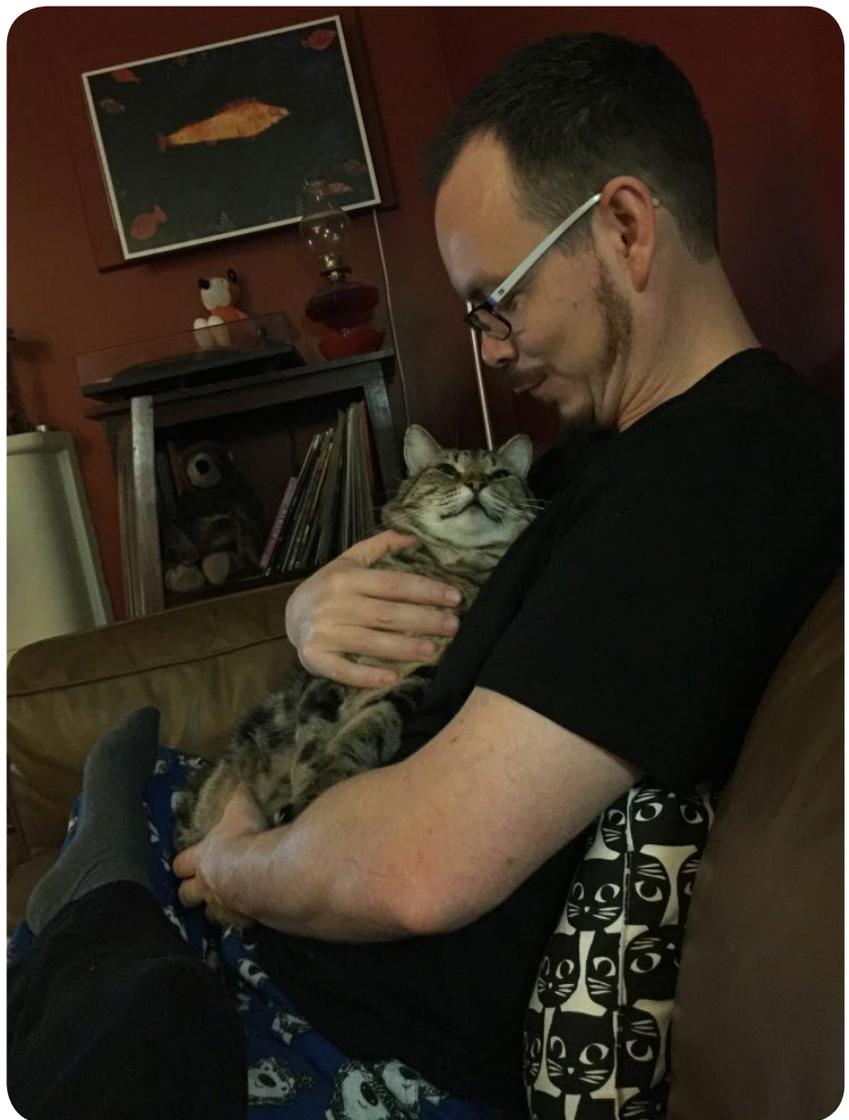
Floyd knocked a heavy mirror over on top of

Bugsie and dislocating his pelvis, which meant surgery and long weeks in a cage at home, not allowed out to play with his brother. Floyd then achieved the impossible by injuring himself falling out of a tree and took his own turn in the cage.

Floyd was a gloriously cuddly and happy cat, and would gaze up into your eyes when you came into the room and start purring loudly knowing that a scratch on the head was imminent. He then decided one night to go out onto the big road too, and was hit and injured by a car. His right back leg was badly hurt and he was put into an oxygen tent at the emergency pet hospital, and within twenty-four hours had his leg amputated.

When he came home the top of his head was shaved where he had a scrape cleaned, and while he recuperated we learned that he liked to be kissed on the top of his head, on that bald patch. He quickly learnt to walk with a bit of a hobble-step, and then one day he took off running and went straight up a tree! Walking he was awkward, but running you could not even tell that he had a leg missing.

Then a stray started visiting the garden. At first we tried to shoo him off to protect our cats, but he was persistent, and obviously in fairly bad shape: smelly, dishevelled and couldn't move his tail. We couldn't tell if he was a boy or a girl so we started calling him Robin, which also worked because he was "robbin" our food! We relented and put out food just for him, and gradually he



came closer to the house, and soon he was sleeping on a chair in the kitchen. And we had six cats.

Then Floyd, healed and strong and confident, running around climbing trees, decided to go out onto the big road again, and this time he didn't make it back at all. We buried him on his favourite cushion, covered in a much-loved red towel, under the trees in our back yard a meter or so from Henry. So, we have five cats for a second time.

Living with cats has had many effects upon me. For one thing, if I was cross about something and stomping about the floorboards, it really spooked them. "Gee, stupid cats!" I'd think, "it's not like I'm going to do anything to you, I'm just in a hurry!", as they scattered out of the house, or under beds.

After quite a while of this, I became aware that when I didn't stomp my feet on the floorboards, they wouldn't go racing out of the cat flap in a panic. But when I did stomp, then they did panic. Maybe it was Jess patiently telling me: "Nick the cats don't like it when you stomp about!" about a hundred times that finally clued me in. In other words: I was doing it. I was responsible. Of course, I didn't want to accept that – surely I've got a right to be grumpy and angry in my own house once in a while? But once I did finally start to notice it got harder and harder to continue: stomp stomp, oh there's Mimsy cowering again like she's afraid I'm about to attack her! No I don't mean it, I'm sorry, look – I'll step more gently, more slowly. There's time. I'll try not to do it again.

After a shower, sometimes Bugsie appears and he wants me to pat him with wet hands: he gets wetter and wetter, his fur comes off in bunches and I collect it, wet my hands again, and turn around to pat him some more. In the hot weather this goes on and on until he is a happy bedraggled wet cat. Or sometimes Mimsy will meow, sounding angry and irritated (and irritating) but she just wants attention and if you pick her up she'll start purring right away. Or sometimes Eliza wants a brush but she won't sit still and you need to chase her around the garden with the brush, but that's what she wants. Or sometimes Robin just wants you to sit down on the couch so he can sit on your lap and have a snooze. Or sometimes Porridge wants you to be outside in the garden in a chair so she can sleep on you. And her claws piercing your skin are her involuntary reaction to just being so happy and contented.

Watching the cats, I notice they are a lot like me: we share many of the same moods and feelings. So I have learnt about myself by watching them. Sometimes they like to be with each other, sometimes friendly, sometimes wary, sometimes playful.

Sometimes timid, sometimes confident. Sometimes appreciating each other's company and proximity, sometimes rushing off to be alone. Zen practice has helped me be aware enough to notice these things happening in front of me, and has helped me learn to appreciate them.

Part of our shared Zen practice here at ZGWA is the monthly discussion or Dharma sharing nights. Last month one of our sangha, Andrea, spoke up about simply wanting to speak up and just say anything, in order to contribute. That really summed up how I've felt many times. Actually, I often find Dharma sharing nights difficult. By the time I've processed the last comment and have a thought to speak, the conversation has often already moved on. Or I will come with a thought prepared but the conversation will simply begin in a completely different place. Preparing this talk has given me time to process some of my own thoughts, and perhaps a chance to speak some of those thoughts I couldn't say before.

One time I did speak up was to read a part of *Each Moment is the Universe: Zen and the Way of Being Time*, an edited collection of talks by Dainin Katagiri. I read a section from one chapter, and I stopped right in the middle of a paragraph. I stopped because it was too harsh for me to face, and I could barely read it to myself, let alone to others. It is from a chapter entitled "Taking Care of Expectation". I'd like to read it to the end tonight, and I'll point out the point where I stopped last time:

When you practice zazen, no matter how you feel, just concentrate on breathing, without thinking, "My concentration is good" or "My concentration is poor." Whatever you feel, don't worry about it. Please just sit. Take care of your breathing with wholeheartedness. That's enough. Just to follow this practice is to live a significant life. Maybe you don't think so, but it's true. After you understand this point, if you are willing to practice zazen, that's good; I recommend that you practice. At that time you can settle on yourself with dignity, like a big mountain, and start to walk, step-by-step.

This is where I stopped reading the first time.

But if you don't understand the fundamental nature of impermanence, and think there is something you can get from the practice of zazen, you will find despair.

Zazen doesn't give you something – it's the complete opposite! In Zazen you will find



many things about yourself that you never noticed before, things you did not want to see, so you hid them under many layers of decoration. When you start to practice zazen, something leads you to gradually take those layers off. What leads you to take off your layers day in and day out? Impermanence takes them off. Whether you like it or dislike it, the more you practice, the more layers of decoration you remove, without any reservation.

Sometimes you feel sad or pensive when you remove decorations and see zazen in its naked nature, because you realise the gap between your mind, which wants or expects something, and zazen itself. But that's all right. Just try to take one step forward without blinking, without falling to the ground. If you plunge into zazen and experience something unexpected, don't attach yourself to what you feel from that experience. All you have to do is take care of your posture and breathing with a kind, considerate, and thoughtful spirit. If you practice hard, and one by one remove the layers that cover you, finally there is nothing left to take off and nothing that separates you from other beings.

Without your layers of decoration you are a person which is completely transparent, like Casper the Ghost on television. Actually you are more invisible than Casper, because you have no form. You cannot say who you are, because there is nothing there: no concept of you, no concept of zazen. When there is no

concept of you or zazen, there is just transiency, just time. So you are not you, you are time. That's all! You may be surprised or upset. But if you just watch yourself with a calm mind, you can see the truth that everything changes moment after moment. At that time, you can realise yourself as a human being who exists in the domain of impermanence, attain enlightenment, and save yourself from suffering

So perhaps this talk ended up being more about expectations: about them not being met, about them being exceeded, about how a talk might not go how we expect, about how we do not necessarily get what we want, or think we want, but maybe that it turns out to be alright, because it is our life.

I'd like to end with the end of Shitou Xiquan's 'Song of the Grass Roof Hut':

*Turn around the light to shine within, then
just return.
The vast inconceivable source can't be faced or
turned away from.
Meet the ancestral teachers, be familiar with
their instruction,
Bing grasses to build a hut, and don't give up.
Let go of hundreds of years and relax completely,
Open your hands and walk, innocent.
Thousands of words, myriad interpretations,
Are only to free you from obstructions.
If you want to know the undying person in the
hut,
Don't separate from this skin bag here and
now.*

Sitting on Country

BY DAVID MAZZA

There could be no better start to the new year than feeling Nyoongar country all around: in the earth beneath us, the karri tree above us, the kookaburra perched inquisitively on its branches and the odd fly buzzing around our faces. We met in Kings Park on the first morning of 2017 and made our way down to a grassy bank overlooking the river. We faced the river, sitting in semi-circle formation. Michael Wright provided us all with a beautiful insight into the significance of this peaceful location, near where Nyoongar women used to come to give birth. After Michael elaborated on the significance of country and the reciprocity between Aboriginal Australians and the earth, we experienced this reciprocal relationship for ourselves in twenty-five minutes of *zazen*. *Kinhin*, during which we were encouraged to feel the land supporting our bodies and the grass between our toes, was followed by another round of meditation. After some closing words from Michael and open discussion, we made our way to the Kings Park café.

The experience touched me deeply and furthered my understanding of Aboriginal Australians' connection with their land. I have been living and teaching in Mulan Community throughout 2016. This East Kimberley community is 300 km south of Halls Creek, and has a population of 100, most of them Walmajarri people. I also lived and worked

on the Tiwi Islands in 2015. Seeing the inseparable bond between the people and their land has been the most striking insight gained from these experiences. I've watched as elders, given a chair, would choose to fall gracefully and cross-legged to the earth, becoming one with it. I've been out on country with Mulan community elders to see 50 000-year-old stone artifacts. They were made of the land, used in reciprocity with the land, and lay still today on Walmajarri country, where they belong. I've heard stories about thieving bilbies and falling stars, so intricately entwined with the land that I could only begin to understand when told at a specific location. It is the highest of honors to have had these experiences. 'Sitting on country' has become another such experience, bringing a little more understanding and appreciation.

I feel privileged and extremely grateful to have had Michael share such intimate knowledge of this and surrounding areas of Nyoongar country. While sharing wonderful company, conversation and coffee afterwards, Michael hinted that 'Sitting on Country' may become a monthly occurrence. The opportunity to understand and engage with Nyoongar culture is precious, and one which should not be missed.



Kings Park. Photograph by Gerard Mazza.

A koan

BY KATHY SHIELS

At Christmas some in the west
Look to the star in the east
Which way do you look?



“Zazen is not a difficult
task. It is a way to lead you
to your long-lost home.”

- Shaku Soen Zenji (1859-1919)