

# **POLIO PERSPECTIVE**

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**ZEN CATS (or the Postman Always Rings Twice)**  
*by Richard L. Bruno*

I'M a Soto kind of guy, as far as Zen is concerned. I don't expect knock-me-off-my-

cushion, Rinzai enlightenment experiences (although I have had a few). After 20 plus years of Zazen, I can (at least sometimes) do what the Soto Zen patriarchs taught: Clear the mind by focusing on the breath without mantra, without counting, without koan.

So, in the calm of the morning, I sit quietly. Even my black cat, Gavin -- who likes nothing better than to tear from one end of the apartment to the other -- walks over to me, pads around in my lap for a few moments, and then settles on the floor in front of my left knee, purring his own mantra. My wife Nancy smiles and calls Gavin my "Zen Cat." She says Gavin's sitting with me proves his Buddha nature, that all beings are sentient...and that we Buddhists recruit from all members of the animal kingdom!

Nancy and I would laugh about Gavin doing Zazen with me in the morning. But I've come to realize that she isn't just close to the truth about Gavin being a Zen Cat. She's right on target: Cats...are...Zen.

Think about it. There are only seven things cats do: eat, sleep, snuggle, pee, poop, play and procreate. (Poor Gavin, having had his external apparatus permanently altered, can only do the first six.) Cats only do what their brains' programming tells them to. So Gavin spends his days directed by some internal channel surfing system that selects among the magnificent seven (well, for Gavin, only six) kitty behaviors. But there is one unseen program that is always running in the background, regardless of which of the six behaviors Gavin is performing. And that background program is pure Zen: That program is ATTENTION!

Gavin is always paying attention. So whether he is eating, sleeping, snuggling or playing, when the postman rings the doorbell, Gavin's attention program turns on his survival program -- the fight or flight "stress" response -- and he arches his back up, hisses at the postman, and then runs like hell to hide under the bed.

The fight or flight response, triggered automatically by Gavin's constant attention to the environment, instantly protects him from the clear and present danger of the postman. And, when the evil postman leaves, the fight or flight response turns off, its job done. Gavin, alive and well, comes by for a brief snuggle to confirm that the danger is past, and peacefully trots off to channel surf again but still continuing to pay attention. Gavin doesn't spend his days crouched near the front door, refusing to eat, sleep, snuggle or play, anxiously listening for postman footsteps. He doesn't ruminate about postmen in his past or postmen in his future. In short, Gavin doesn't worry or stress. He "trusts" the fundamental tenet of Zen: ATTENTION!

And that's the lesson of my Zen Cat: If you pay attention in every moment, the suffering caused by memories of a painful past or fear of future danger is gone. Personally, the single biggest cause of suffering for me has been chronic worry. And worry is my patients' biggest problem, too. If that evil postman came once he will come again and when I least expect him. I shouldn't risk my life by eating, sleeping, snuggling or playing. To save my life, I must constantly worry about the next postman who will ring

the doorbell, bearing the envelope that will herald my demise. I must listen for postmen in every hallway and watch for them around every corner. I have absolutely no faith that my own attention will warn me of danger and activate my fight or flight response when it's needed. Nope. I must not only constantly worry, but also I must have my fight or flight response always turned on...just in case. This is the only way I can possibly survive, in a state of constant worry and chronic stress.

Well, if constant worry and chronic stress are the only ways to survive, then why survive at all? Surviving in this way is not living! Actually, this path doesn't even lead to survival. Chronic stress will kill you before the postman does.

So, my Zen Cat has taught me that if you develop attention through Zazen and trust your attention in the world beyond your cushion, you can live without constant worry and even be happy (or at least peaceful), your fight or flight response turning on only when you need to deal with real danger.

So that's Gavin's lesson: Trust your Zen-acquired attention in your daily life, live – really live -- and be at peace.

May we all follow Gavin's example and become Zen Cats.

## Cold Intolerance

Polio Survivors Share First Person Accounts

*I asked twenty-nine polio survivors to share their solutions for warming up those icy cold feet. Here are their responses. I hope some of these tips work for you.*

I use electric heating pads over my knees and at my back when sleeping or in my recliner. If I am chilled, it takes me many hours to warm up again.

Hot baths work for me. After my bath, I put on warm hunter's socks and jump into bed.

I use several layers of flannel blankets and wear long-sleeved pajamas and heavy socks to bed. My side of the bed also has an electric throw.

In winter, I wear long-sleeved, lightweight undershirts called "CuddlDuds" under long-sleeved knit shirts. When it is particularly cold, I add the CuddlDuds long johns.

Electric warming mattress pad heats up my bed much better than an electric blanket. When the heat source is underneath, it works best for me.

Electric heating pads are scattered all around my house. Therefore, wherever I am, I can warm myself up. My hands, neck, and knees give me the most problem with being cold. Applying the hot heating pad to the cold spot for a short time is the most workable and effective for me.

I have blue/purple feet much of the time. My polio leg gets cold from the knee down to the foot, while my other leg is warm.

Small Polarfleece mini-blankets are very helpful. All the major discount stores sell them for about \$10.00. I bought several and even color coordinated them with my rooms, so they fit in with my décor while keeping me warm.

My body heats more rapidly in hot weather; and cools more rapidly in cold weather.

I wear dancers' leg warmers. Because they are loosely knit, they do not restrict my circulation.

I sew the ends of the warmers shut to create long socks and I wear them all night in bed.

The only way I can get warmed up and stay that way is to use electric powered warmth. I use an electric throw and a small portable electric space heater directed right at my feet.

Hot paraffin wax works for me. I dip my foot into the wax and it feels absolutely wonderful.

My Sunbeam heated throw' - model # 71460 - 20% polyester - 80% acrylic – is my best friend.

When it is really cold and snowy, my feet, legs, and hands suffer. I then have trouble with function of my hands and legs with a steady cramping feeling.

Hot showers work for me. I also use herb filled packs on my feet and hands. These are pads filled with rice and various herbs. You toss them in the microwave to heat up and they stay nice and warm for over an hour.

I get cold all-over, but it is much worse from my knees down.

My home is filled with large bath towels, small throws, and knitted ponchos on all the furniture. I use these to toss over my knees and legs.

Since I cannot tolerate any weight on my feet, I use a down-filled comforter to keep me warm while still being lightweight.

In the past few years, my feet and hands get cold even at room temperature. My daily routine is to

bathe in the morning, after which my body is warm for hours. When this effect wears off my left leg and the rest of my body slowly begin to cool down.

I wear knit leg warmers over the top of my jeans.

Since I do not want to turn the furnace up too high, I find that using a rice bag really helps. It is made of cotton material, sewn into a square shape, and filled with rice through an open corner, and then sealed up. After three minutes in the microwave, the bag stays heated for 30 minutes or longer giving soothing warmth.

My left foot turns bluish when it gets cold. An hour after my warm bath, I can feel my left foot starting to cool. It is a very strange feeling because my right foot feels a bit too warm and the left gets ice cold.

I wear socks to bed and place an afghan over my lower legs. In extremely cold weather, I also use an electric blanket.

Velour blankets (name brand Vellux) are great. They are lightweight and very warm and cuddly.

I purchased several Sunbeam heated throws at Wal-Mart for \$15.00 on clearance. Previously I used twin size electric blankets but these were often too big to use sitting in a chair. The throws are a perfect size of 50" x 60". I take these throws on car trips and even to the hospital when I go.

Cold has troubled me all of my life. When my right hand gets too cold, it becomes weak and hard to straighten out my fingers.

Sheet blankets as both the bottom sheet and top sheet keep me warm. They are not as shockingly cold as regular sheets.

I always have cold legs! I wear leggings under my slacks almost all year long. If I can keep my knees warm, I feel better.

Many a night I have actually wished there was a nurse here to wrap my legs in those smelly, steamy, hot packs again!

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## **Some Online Resources for Warm Clothing**

Perhaps you would like to purchase some warm performance clothing but it may be too difficult to get out to a mall. If you have Internet access, a solution to consider is web commerce. Below is a list of some reputable online merchants where you will find good insulating clothing. This merchandise is

geared to climbing, mountaineering, and other outdoor sports, with features and fabrics ready to meet the harshest of winter mountain conditions. *How perfect for polio survivors!*

Campmor	<a href="http://www.campmor.com/">http://www.campmor.com/</a>
Diabetic Sock Shop	<a href="http://www.diabeticsockshop.com">http://www.diabeticsockshop.com</a>
Eastern Mountain Sports	<a href="https://www.ems.com/">https://www.ems.com/</a>
Lands' End	<a href="http://www.landsend.com">http://www.landsend.com</a>
L. L. Bean	<a href="http://www.llbean.com/">http://www.llbean.com/</a>
Recreational Equipment, Inc.	<a href="http://www.rei.com/">http://www.rei.com/</a>
Sierra Trading Post	<a href="http://www.sierratradingpost.com/">http://www.sierratradingpost.com/</a>
Sock Company	<a href="http://www.sockcompany.com/">http://www.sockcompany.com/</a>
Winter Silks	<a href="http://www.wintersilks.com/">http://www.wintersilks.com/</a>

## **Having a Fit** *by Millie Malone Lill*

Last August, I decided I needed a new brace. The one I had was falling apart. The Velcro straps had lost their grip and what little support it had offered when new was long gone. I hate going to doctors, but I felt I had no choice. I called my insurance company to see if a new brace would be covered. I listened to a long rambling account of insurance codes, probabilities, prescriptions, and just plain waffling. It pretty much boiled down to “try it and see, because we have no clue.”

Okay, how much could it cost me? My current brace was relatively inexpensive, lightweight, and fit into my shoes nicely. I made an appointment to talk to the orthopedic doctor who visits our local hospital. It went very quickly due to the fact that the doctor barely raised his head to see if it was animal, vegetable or mineral walking into his office. His receptionist had collected my \$40 co pay before I was allowed in to see him. I was asked what I needed, told him I needed a new brace and was told that Hanger in Council Bluffs would call me with an appointment. That was that.

I got a call the next week with an appointment to see the orthotist. The orthotist did not want to hear anything I had to say. He wanted me to walk across the concrete floor without my brace and when I tried to explain that my heel is deformed due to having no Achilles tendon on the foot and that the calcaneus had rotated as I grew. Now that part of my foot that should be at the back of my foot is underneath and I walk on it. Consequently, I must have padding under it. There is nothing between that bone and the floor but a thin layer of skin. He then made a cast of my foot and sent me on my way.

I got a call from the orthotist's office mid September, saying that Medicare had approved the brace and my share would be \$203 and some odd cents and the brace would be there in about 2 weeks. I'd be called when it came in.

In December, I decided I'd better see what the hold up was. Council Bluffs is about 75 miles from here and I don't like to drive on winter roads. I was told that the brace was there in a tone of voice that led me to believe it had been there for quite awhile. So I made an appointment, got my granddaughter to drive me and we went to pick it up.

I wish I had a picture of the brace I was shown. Bear in mind that I had polio when I was four and that foot did not grow much after that. Consequently, it is a size 2, where my other foot is a 7. The brace was enormous. About 5" wide. It had straps and buckles across the instep, a liner made of a sort of styrofoamesque fabric that wrapped around my foot but was much smaller than the brace. The orthotist told me that my foot had probably lost weight because I'd waited so long to come in and pick up the brace! Really? You are serious? I told him I'd have come in sooner had I been called to inform me the brace was ready.

I should have told him then and there that I could not use that brace. I cannot imagine a shoe smaller than a 12 that it would have fit in and that would give me a shoe so long I'd trip over the toe trying to walk. I was speechless. I'm sure it was just a coincidence that he also sold made to order shoes. The display was right next to the chair his patients sat in to try on their new braces.

His office girl told me they could not find my file, even though she'd gone into the doctor's office and brought out a file under her arm. I stood and seethed while she and the other office girl laughed and looked at the internet and finally came out and said that they had not sent the paperwork to Medicare so didn't know if it was approved or not. This in spite of a paper on the reception desk that looked like an invoice for the exact amount of money I'd been quoted as my share of this fiasco.

I kept my mouth tightly snapped shut as I took the brace and my granddaughter and left. Had I opened my mouth at all, such invective would have flowed out that I'd be ashamed of myself later. When we got home, I called my insurance company and explained what had happened and informed them that I was sending the brace back and if they were billed for it, they should refuse payment.

I got a call from the orthotist about 2 weeks later, asking for another chance. I said I did not want to drive 150 miles round trip on winter roads. I said there was nothing they could do to that brace that would make it workable for me. The orthotist then insisted that this was exactly what "my doctor", apparently the orthopedic doctor who did not even glance in my direction during my appointment with him, had specified. How he could sit there and tell me that when his pants were so obviously on fire just astonished me. The orthopedic doctor did not prescribe anything whatsoever as he didn't even look at me. It could have been a talking mynah bird in his office for all he knew!

Thank goodness I found an old brace in the back of the closet...I never throw anything away...that was in better shape than the brace I was wearing. It will do me for awhile and maybe I can find another brace maker, one who has at least a slight interest in his patients.

## Web Corner

Can coffee slow down the aging process?

<http://www.aarp.org/health/healthy-living/info-2017/can-drinking-coffee-slow-aging-pk.html>

Possible interactions among multiple prescriptions

[http://www.tulsaworld.com/scene/askdrk/ask-the-doctors-multiple-prescriptions-may-have-negative-interactions/article\\_71dab5d2-7b39-5670-9198-94120ccff25e.html](http://www.tulsaworld.com/scene/askdrk/ask-the-doctors-multiple-prescriptions-may-have-negative-interactions/article_71dab5d2-7b39-5670-9198-94120ccff25e.html)

The right way to fall

[https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/24/well/move/the-right-way-to-fall.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/24/well/move/the-right-way-to-fall.html?_r=0)

Post Polio, the Sequel

<http://www.cbc.ca/archives/entry/post-polio-syndrome-the-sequel>

Upscale exam table designed with disabilities in mind

<http://www.newmobility.com/2017/01/upscale-exam-table/>

7 life lessons from a man who can only move his face

<https://unstoppable.me/life-lessons/>

Medic Alert System Reviews

<https://bestcompany.com/medical-alert-systems/>

Chronic illness masquerading as an acute problem

<http://contemporaryclinic.pharmacytimes.com/chronic-care/chronic-illness-masquerading-as-acute-problem-post-polio-syndrome>

Reinvented wheelchair helps user to stand

<https://www.facebook.com/mashable/videos/10154748578984705/>

In search of the perfect brace with the perfect fit

[http://www.papolionetwork.org/uploads/2/7/7/2/27726699/bracing\\_-\\_article\\_3\\_.pdf](http://www.papolionetwork.org/uploads/2/7/7/2/27726699/bracing_-_article_3_.pdf)

## OTHER POLIO NEWSLETTERS

<http://www.papolionetwork.org//>

<http://www.polioaustralia.org.au/>

<http://www.polioplace.org/>

<http://poliosurvivorsnetwork.org.uk/>

## **A LITTLE BIT OF HUMOR**

Assisted Living Story. This is what all of you 70+ year-olds, and yet-to-be kids may have to look forward to!

This is something that happened at an assisted living center.

The people who lived there have small apartments but they all eat at a central cafeteria. One morning one of the residents didn't show up for breakfast so my wife went upstairs and knocked on his door to see if everything was OK. She could hear him through the door and he said that he was running late and would be down shortly so she went back to the dining area.

An hour later he still hadn't arrived so she went back up towards his room and she found him on the stairs. He was coming down the stairs but was having a heckuva of time. He had a death grip on the hand rail and seemed to have trouble getting his legs to work right. She told him she was going to call an ambulance but he told her no, he wasn't in any pain and just wanted to have his breakfast. So she helped him the rest of the way down the stairs and he had his breakfast.

When he tried to return to his room he was completely unable to get up even the first step so they called an ambulance for him.

A couple hours later she called the hospital to see how he was doing. The receptionist there said he was fine, he just had both of his legs in one leg of his boxer shorts!