

Dwight Childers Remembers Jonathan Goldberg

Jonathan Goldberg was my treasured friend for forty-seven years. I owe him, beyond telling briefly, for much that has been positive in my adult life. Here I will describe selected moments and events to provide glimpses of the man I knew.

We met in 1975, became lovers, and began living together in Jonathan's apartment at 340 Cabrini Boulevard in upper Manhattan's Fort Tryon Park neighborhood. When I arrived in New York, the small city of Asheville, North Carolina (with a population then of some eighty thousand) was the largest town I had ever called home. My adjustment to living in a large city was exhausting, but Jonathan patiently tutored me in the ways of urban life, and before too long I came to revel in the freedom of walking, riding public transportation, and visiting little hardware stores that were generations old in the same locations.

Shopping at green grocer Schwartz's, at the corner just south, delighted me (perhaps because I had clerked a small country store the summer I turned fifteen); the proprietors -- both men of a certain age and of unfailing courtesy -- insisted on selecting each best piece of fruit for us, and Jonathan often took a moment or two to ask about their families.



Schwartz's Green Grocery, 187th Street & Cabrini Boulevard, Manhattan, New York City, c1975

From the earliest days of our relationship, Jonathan was the most caring, steady friend that I had ever known. He embraced my parents in rural western North Carolina and encouraged them to visit New York.



Home of Gerald & Linda Childers, Weaverville, NC, c1976. L-R: Linda (sister-in-law), Hoyt Childers (brother), Jonathan Goldberg, Dwight Childers, Inez Childers (mother), Michelle Childers (niece), Roy Childers (father). Not shown: Gerald Childers (brother & camera man), Mark Childers (nephew).



Vacation Cabin, Madison County, NC, c1976.
L-R: Jonathan Goldberg, Inez Childers, Dwight Childers

Indeed, they came to New York by train in 1977. We put them up in a hotel (the Essex House, as I recall) on Central Park South, with a view of the park from a high floor.

We took them to Jones Beach, on a lovely misty day with the place mostly to ourselves, and wandered the sand looking for shells. Another day we went to the Zoo and on another, Jonathan's sister Irene and her husband Joe Friedman hosted us all for lunch at a nice Hungarian restaurant on Manhattan's Upper East Side, where even at mid-day with few tables occupied, an attractive chanteuse entertained with traditional songs; she had my father's full attention, even with a rare glass of wine in his hand.



L-R: Roy Childers, Dwight Childers, Inez Childers;
340 Cabrini Blvd, New York, NY 1977. Photo by
Jonathan Goldberg.



L-R: Jonathan Goldberg, Dwight Childers,
340 Cabrini Blvd, New York, NY, 1977;
photo by Roy Childers



Roy and Inez Childers at Jones Beach, Long Island, NY, 1977

During that time, give or take a year, Jonathan was having piano lessons and I, having studied piano as a child, was attempting to learn the guitar on my own; so we tried a few times to play simple piano/guitar duets. Then Alice Angermann, Jonathan's older family friend from Chicago (and a classical piano professor at the American Conservatory of Music) happened to visit us. As they were catching up on family news, their conversation soon came around to her work and they discussed the pianist Alfred Brendel, who was an acquaintance of hers and a favorite pianist of Jonathan's. Alice may have asked, by the way, who played the little piano in the back room by the entry door. Before long, much to our chagrin, she insisted (with quiet professional authority) that we play together. We were stuck; we tried "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star" or something similar. Surely her patience was strained to the utmost by the awful sounds we produced, but she was perfectly gracious (*without* urging us onward). Our little musical project did not survive much longer.

In comfortable weather we often enjoyed weekend day trips to Harriman State Park. As we walked the trails, we seemed to take equal pleasure in the woodland beauty, perhaps as I recalled my rural beginnings and Jonathan savored new fresh scenes of rural nature.

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Pidertupo Village

The most exotic travel I ever experienced was arranged by Jonathan, to Pidertupo Village, in a Kuna indigenous people's reserve of the San Blas Islands of Panama. We flew to Panama City, transferred to a small propeller plane piloted by a very young man with a cigarette dangling from his lips, and flew, rather nervously, to a bouncy landing at a dirt strip on the north coast. There we boarded the launch which took us to the small island where the American couple Joan ["Jo-Anne"] and Tom Moody had created a rustic scuba-diving resort with a few thatch-roofed cabins and a commons. We were drawn to the peaceful tropical ambiance (a word Jonathan favored) rather than the diving (for which we were qualified by neither ability nor interest); the place was utterly beautiful with clear water, white sand, and palm fronds fluttering in balmy breezes.



Pidertupo Village, a rustic Scuba-Diving Resort in the San Blas Islands, Panama
Late 1970's



A view of sand and water at Pidertupo Village. Jonathan is at lower right near a leaning palm tree.



Our bohio at Pidertupo Village. The rustling of the palm-frond thatch in the frequent breezes was at once soothing and delightful.

Out wading in the surf one morning, Jonathan happened to put his hand directly on a spiny sea urchin, with sudden terrible pain from multiple stings. We went directly to Joan, who was busy at work in the kitchen with her staff of local Kuna women. She took one look, advised not to worry, it happened all the time, and wait just a moment. She went away, returned with a big canister of meat tenderizer, sprinkled it generously on his hand – amusing even Jonathan – and indeed his pain soon subsided.

Near the end of our stay, host Tom led all of us visitors on a mainland excursion for a jungle walk. When the trail brought us to a deep, dark pond (**not** mentioned in the invitation) with no convenient way around, Tom said follow me and dove in, assuming I suppose that visitors to a scuba resort could manage. I was stymied; I did not like the look of that pond. Fortunately a young man who had been friendly to us offered to tow me with my hands on his shoulders. I accepted, and we plunged in to cross the pond, by whatever means, and resume the walk. (Remarkably to me, the pond had presented no particular obstacle to Jonathan; I had not known that he could swim.)

Afterward, as we made our way back to the launch, I was surprised by a young Kuna man (who assisted Tom with the outing) when he came up beside me and silently handed me a beautiful bird feather which he had found. That is among my most vivid memories of the trip, along with the dark pond (which I now believe was powerful for psychological reasons more important than my unease with water).

A few years later, Jonathan learned, somehow, the sad news that the resort had been attacked by people who burned the buildings and seriously injured Tom. (There was suspicion that the existence of the tiny island resort had interfered with drug trafficking planned by powerful people who instigated the attack to rid themselves of watchful eyes.)

60 Park Terrace West
New York, N.Y. 10034

4 October/81

Dear Tom and Joan,

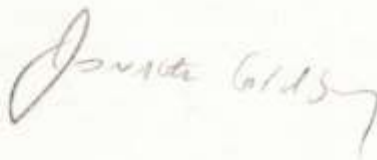
For a number of reasons, the news of the hideous tragedy at Pidentupo came to my attention only most recently. I do not remember ever feeling as total a sense of simple outrage as at reading the account of the nightmare you and your loved ones were subjected to.

It is so rare in this time of mass-mindedness and timid conformity to find two people with the courage you showed in not just following a dream but in bringing it to reality, and allowing a few fortunate people--among whom Dwight Childers and I were numbered--share it with you. You had both succeeded so completely in making that distant outpost seem like home to your guests, and had done so in a manner that absolutely respected the environment and those who let you use their land. To think that that village nursed by your loving care should have come to such an end and you be so brutalized is to see yet again how the forces of darkness always wait for their chance to extinguish the light.

For those who came to know you even briefly the image of what you made will linger throughout our lives. If any two people will find the inner strength to go on to what comes next, surely the Moodys will.

Please let it be known if there is any way either Dwight or I can be of any assistance beyond writing to the Panama Tourist Board. Do know that you are both in my thoughts, as is Mary Jo.

In sincere caring,



After we moved from Cabrini Boulevard to the Park Terrace co-op in Inwood (a larger and nicer space than the previous home), we invited Jonathan's extended family for a Hanukkah celebration. We poached a salmon, and Jonathan's Uncle Werner Engel lit the first-day candles. I think this may have been the first time that Jonathan had invited his family to his home.

Jonathan and I separated in 1979, but he remained the same caring friend. We continued in close touch during the several years when both he and I were in and out of various other relationships. Once, when I was having an episode of back pain which had troubled me occasionally since college days, Jonathan suggested that I try studying T'ai-chi Ch'uan with the teacher Sophia Delza, whom his friend Maurice Kasten liked. I did so, liked her and the practice, and indeed never again had a bout of that affliction. I continue playing her Wu-style T'ai-chi forms to this day.

In 1987, I met Baek-Kyu ("Ben"), the man who became the love of my life, and, around then also, Jonathan met Michael, who became his devoted mate and brought, among many fine qualities, the artistic and craft skills to make their homes the special places which Jonathan enjoyed proudly.

We four clicked and thus began our expanded friendship.

In 2000, Ben and I left New York to live in a succession of other cities, but returned often and connected with Jonathan and Michael, for a meal at their home or in a restaurant, or for a visit with them to the Metropolitan Museum. Michael visited Ben and me in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, when he was engaged for a decorative painting commission in Chicago.

In between visits, we regularly spoke by phone to chat and share our news. For a few winters early in the 2000's, our paths crossed when we all were snowbirds in Miami Beach, Florida. Once when they decided to vacate their South Beach apartment at the end of the season, they offered us the furnishings, including beautiful paintings by Michael. We took them gladly and they grace our current home still.

On 18 September 2013, Jonathan and Michael witnessed my marriage to Ben at the Manhattan Marriage Bureau and afterward we celebrated that, and Jonathan's birthday, one day late, at the Grano Trattoria on Greenwich Avenue in the West Village.

Jonathan cherished birthdays, and knew the birth dates of more people than anyone I had ever known. He sent annual birthday wishes to friends and kin routinely. On 27 April 2014, he hosted a decadal birthday party, especially for Michael, who had a decadal birthday around then, but he also included his cousins, and Ben and me, several of us with such birthdays near that date. We met for lunch as arranged by Jonathan and Michael in the large back room at Le Zie Trattoria, on 7th Avenue below 23rd Street. It was a joyous occasion, and I was pleased to see Jonathan's kin who had welcomed me warmly in the 1970's but whom I had not seen in decades.

We saw Jonathan and Michael last in September 2018. We met them (they appeared in identical stylish wide-brimmed straw hats) at the Metropolitan Museum on Sunday the 16th. We had lunch in the cafeteria, and then at their suggestion Ben and I saw the Delacroix show. The next day, which was Jonathan's 80th birthday, we four met for dinner at Mezzogiorno in Morningside Heights. While some of us did our trenchermanly best for the occasion, birthday-boy Jonathan -- who never ate copiously -- mostly savored his red wine and waited for dessert.

Until his very last years, Jonathan always sent me a little birthday note, inscribed caringly in his nearly illegible hand, and I did likewise for him, in my only slightly more legible left-handed lines, which wobbled across the page as ever.

-- Dwight Morris Childers, San Diego, California, 5 February 2023