

# Eulogy for John Chitty

*By Elizabeth Chitty Sandoval*

John Abercrombie Merritt Chitty, John Chitty, was my father, teacher, boss, sometimes therapist and friend. Never one to abandon his principles, he was an idealist, living life in full pursuit of his values. He saw the best in people and situations, with an abiding trust that “larger forces are at work.” He left us all better for knowing him, with his gentle kindness, wry wit and undying, but understated, loyalty.

John was born on Tax Day in 1949 in Sewanee, Tennessee - a small college town built to resemble Oxford University. He was the second son of Arthur Benjamin Chitty Jr. and Elizabeth Nickinson Chitty. John inherited Arthur Ben’s unending optimism and love of a good story combined with Betty Nick’s shrewd wit and intellect. Like his mother, John could recite poems by heart and like his father, he could hold classrooms of students rapt in attention, holding just true enough to the facts to not get in the way of a good story.

He always described his childhood as growing up in Camelot. Sewanee was a small town where everyone knew everyone, and a boy could leave the house on a bicycle and roam freely with no one to bother him. At the Sewanee Military Academy, he was second in command, graduated third in his class, played every sport he could, and the list of clubs he participated in filled a whole page of his yearbook.

John entered Princeton University in the fall of 1968 and the buzzcut, overachieving military cadet quickly became a long-haired, overachieving hippie affectionately known as “Goldilocks.” He was a varsity wrestler, sports reporter, cafeteria worker, and still found time to attend Grateful Dead concerts, play lacrosse in the quad, and write term papers for his dorm mates for sport.

His 1971 degree in Sociology didn’t give him a clear path forward. As a student, he had tried working in a law office and teaching middle school, but nothing really spoke to him. He later told me that he had felt quite lost about how to be a man in the world; the sociopolitical turmoil of the late 60s had left him distrusting the status quo, with no real sense of how to lead or make the change he wanted.

He met his life partner and ultimate match in Annetta Cruze Baird, a fellow student at Princeton. After dancing together at a party, Anna (then Tisha) received a letter from John, asking if she wanted to participate in “relationship sadhana” with him. In an era of free love, she was intrigued by his request and they met again. She told him she was interested, but she was firm about heading west to Colorado after graduation. To which he replied, “Great. I’ll go with you - but we have to stop in Florida to see my grandmother on the way.” So they did, visiting my great-grandmother at her house at Pensacola Beach. After stops in Pennsylvania, Tennessee and Florida, they headed west to a life of camping and cross-country skiing in Boulder,

Colorado. After six months together, John rolled over one morning in their tent and said, “Hey, wanna get married?” and Anna quickly said, “Sure.” They were married a few months later in a meadow on the Continental Divide on a perfect summer day amid many friends and family, including both grandmothers, who had to be brought up the mountain in a Jeep. The morning of the ceremony, John and Anna threw the I-Ching and got Hexagram 14 - Possession in Great Measure.

And so it was - despite the laissez-faire nature of their union ceremony - that their adventure of Possession in Great Measure began. From the beginning, the two shared a deep interest in mysticism and esoterica. Despite all the changes that unfolded over the years, and all the challenges inherent to navigating life with another person, they remained steadfast in the commitments they made to each other on that day.

Searching for meaning and purpose, the newly married couple soon moved far, far away, to Hornby Island, British Columbia, where they built their own house out of beach wood, grew and foraged their own food and John designed the first no-waste recycling center on the island. John worked as a tree-planter, which he always described as his most difficult job - running up and down the hills of Canada in the pouring rain planting trees in perfect rows. Anna started a stained glass business, which he soon joined-- their first business together. They maintained their interest in wellness and spirituality, practicing yoga and meditation and studying macrobiotics.

The birth of their first child, Haley in 1977, coincided with a dramatic shift in their lifestyle and outlook, as they first discovered Polarity Therapy and deepened their spiritual practice. In their first trials of the “Two Chair Awareness” method, they discovered rich information about their parents and lineage, deepening their relational maturity as partners and parents. It was in the intersection of health care and psychology, of science and spirituality, of work that is service, that my parents found the sense of meaning and integrity that they had been looking for, and they would pursue that path for the rest of their lives.

In 1979, they moved to Orcas Island to do an intensive, 9-month, residential training program in Polarity Therapy. They did extreme cleansing diets, vomited on the beach to open their diaphragms, explored their psychological make-up in dramatic two-chair sessions, and did deep bodywork. They eventually decided to join the Alive Polarity community full-time, and moved from Orcas Island to Calistoga, California, then to the Sierras and finally down to Murrieta, CA. In that time, they worked a number of different jobs, from working in the kitchen to practicing, teaching, and writing about Polarity Therapy.

The dissolution of their community in 1987 was quickly followed by the birth of their second child, me. Suddenly they had to face the “real” world for the first time, after nearly two decades of idealistic, communal living. After it became clear that it would be difficult to thrive in Southern California, they had to make another big decision about another big move. With no savings and no credit, they moved back to Boulder and began teaching classes in Polarity Therapy. While

Anna saw clients and taught weekend workshops, John got a job, using his understanding of Microsoft PowerPoint at the software company StorageTek. After working minimum wage for a few years, his boss hired John for a new start-up technology company, HighGround. For this job, he took over 40 trips between Boston and Colorado in 2 years, doing his best to look the part of a hip, tech-savvy entrepreneur. But in his spare time, John was studying Biodynamic Craniosacral Therapy and serving as the first of five terms as the president of the American Polarity Therapy Association. All the while, he supported Anna in her quest to keep the flame burning at the "Polarity Center of Colorado," so that one day it could grow big enough to let them own and run their own business.

And it did. After HighGround was sold, John moved into managing what became the Colorado School of Energy Studies, teaching courses and practicing as a therapist full-time.

As a teacher, John excelled at wedding the esoteric and the scientific. His innate curiosity, rebelliousness, and care for others made him a unique trailblazer in alternative health care. He loved to study anomalies in science, regularly scanning the latest science journals for interesting new research. He attended meetings of the Society for Scientific Exploration, and loved the outside approaches to science of Nassim Hameiri, Rupert Sheldrake, and Jaap van der Wal. He was comfortable being on the edge; nothing was too far out to pique his interest. He loved reading about UFOs, the Pyramids and crop circles. He used to say, "If it's out there, I'm into it. Just don't make me wear a funny hat." His lectures would often roam "off the reservation" into a myriad fascinating ideas about science, spirituality and the purpose of life.

I remember listening to his lectures for the first time, and they put me so deeply at ease. In a world that could be perceived as utterly chaotic, he resolutely offered a user's guide. He articulated principles and ideals to orient to and live by - and he actually lived by them in ways that at times felt superhuman.

I still remember thinking as a kid that my dad actually knew everything. And I think many of us felt that way - from sport stats, to esoteric physics, to conspiracy theories, he was a wellspring of knowledge. And he was always generous with that knowledge - as a part of his work as a teacher and therapist, he spent hours daily corresponding with people - students, family, friends, who all needed help and insight on various topics, and he willingly, and with great joy, I think, obliged.

Despite his prodigious intellect and natural talents, my dad liked to fly under the radar. He had an inborn humility that he once said might have come from growing up with the initials "JC." He liked to say that his fashion goal was "to be able to get dressed in the dark." And I think we can all remember him with a polo shirt, khaki pants, combed hair and some sort of baseball cap.

He found great joy in the mundane. He loved mowing the lawn and finding typos in the newspaper. He read and edited everything I ever wrote, except this eulogy, always reminding me that in college he had to proofread the newspaper he worked on upside down and

backwards. Before I embarked on a big trip to India, I asked my dad, "Aren't you jealous? I'm going on this big adventure!" He replied, quickly and without hesitation, "No. Going to the office and down to the garden is about all the adventure I need these days."

We can't talk about my dad without mentioning his great love of sports. He grew up on baseball, competed impressively in high school and college wrestling and cross-country, played tennis as an adult, and tried snowboarding once, but golf became his late-life love. He knew all the stats for all the teams, college and pro, and was such a good storyteller that he could even get my mom and me interested. He wrote about the therapeutic value of sports. I think he meant that sports help us find purpose, autonomic nervous system regulation, and fulfillment.

In 2010, John was diagnosed with Stage 4 prostate cancer that had already spread to his lungs and bones. When the doctor looked at him and said "You have incurable prostate cancer, you have about a year to live," he said his first thought was "You're wrong." My dad did what most anyone would do in such a time of stress and fear: he researched, speed-reading over 30 books about cancer and alternative treatments, and devised his own treatment protocol. With his usual willpower, determination and optimism, he began his 9-year, self-described, "health adventure." He cut sugar, carbs and heated oils nearly completely from his diet, and experimented with herbs, exercises, counseling, supplements, visits to healers of all varieties, and (of course) all sorts of gadgets. I have never known anyone to chart their cancer process with graphs and a website, but then there are few people like my dad. With his characteristic generosity, he counseled countless people dealing with new diagnoses, never charging for his time - because he thought cancer patients were taken advantage of enough.

He taught me so much in how he faced the challenges of that time. He both resolutely devoted himself to "outliving his expiration date," and at the same time gracefully, and without fear, accepted his own mortality. In an email to my brother and me shortly after his diagnosis, he said,

*"I am thinking of something that happened just before any of this was known to me. I was driving to play golf in the early morning, about to cross a green light. Suddenly, a car zoomed through its red light and crossed the intersection at very high speed; I swerved just in time to be missed, by just a fraction of space and time. I was stunned but continued on my way, pondering how narrow is the veil between normalcy and disaster, and what forces were at work that spared me in that moment. All the wisdom traditions say that our time is precisely measured and unavoidable."*

And in that way, he carried on. Supported by his iron determination to live, he wrote two books, saw both of his children get married and become parents, taught courses and gave lectures, counseled countless people and continued to fly under the radar - watching sports, playing golf and eating vegetable soup. Quietly doing his part to serve others, in the ways that he could.

Of all the things my father was, I think his strongest attribute was his abiding faith in people and his ceaseless generosity. One winter, when frost came early and the tomatoes were still bearing fruit, my dad dug up all the tomato plants and re-potted them in the garage. When my mom asked him why take so much trouble to care for just a few plants that would die anyway, he responded famously, "I just can't help it. I'm the patron saint of lost causes." I think so many of us here were lucky enough to be one of John Chitty's lost causes, because like the tomato plants that continued to bear fruit long into the winter, many of us found that he added just that little extra jolt of confidence and senseless generosity that helped us find our way after all.

In his absence, I continue to feel the beautiful ease and confidence that radiated from his presence. It had been such a constant in my life that I didn't truly notice it until it was gone. It was his gift to us all. He used to say to his students, "some one has to hold the hope. So many people have lost their sense of hope, and who is going to hold that possibility?" And he did. Effortlessly. And in his loss, I find that same hope beginning to blossom in me. Thank you dear Papa, may we all continue to mature in the gifts you gave us.