

## An Interview With The Most Interesting Jonathan Goldsmith

Contributed by The Editors, Photos by Keese Lane

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Backcountry: We heard you used to ski but that you haven't in a long time.

JG: Yeah I used to ski a lot; I had a cabin on June Mountain. And I had a dear friend who had a place in Vail. I used to go up there and ski as well. I loved skiing, but now I have two bulging discs, and a little Coronary Artery Disease, which I don't mind talking about. I was in great shape, I work out at the gym every single day, and I did a lot of cardiovascular exercise. Because my back was bad, I couldn't ski anymore, I couldn't hike, I couldn't go to high elevations with any kind of load and walk. I had a little one-room apartment, and I would walk up the steps and be out of breath. I said "what in the hell is that?" Then it would keep going and I'd think "jeez I'm having a heart attack" and then it passed. I didn't go to the hospital but I did have the brains - thank god or I wouldn't be here talking to you - to get an EKG from my GP. He said, "Get a thallium stress test." They inject radioactive dyes inside of you so they can trace and see where blockage is.

And sure enough there came up with two little spots of blockage. So here I am half-conscious on the table at the hospital, and he says, "you have your choice: either you can have open heart surgery right now, or we can put in stents. What do you want to do?" "I'm an actor," I said, "You're a doctor, I don't know, I'm half asleep, what would you do?" He said, "Well, I'd go for the stents."

After it was over with he said, "You are so lucky to be alive." I'd had a 100% blockage in the main coronary artery, and 87% in the other. He said, "If it hadn't been for exercise, you would never, EVER have made it. You could've dropped at any time."

Backcountry: Obviously we are an adventure sports magazine. How were you introduced to the outdoors?

JG: I've been an outdoorsman all my life. My parents separated when I was very young and I spent as much time as I could with my father, who was a magnificent fly fisherman. He fished with famous people; with Ray Bergman- famous author, Ernie Maltz- fantastic fisherman and fly tyer, and Old Man Hewitt. These are all legends in the fishing world. My father was an extremely skilled fly fisherman. So I grew up sharing my father's time and his love. Just about everything he loved I grew to love: his tremendous reverence for nature, and the backcountry, hiking, solitude, and...I miss him.

Backcountry: How long has he been gone?

JG: 10 years, and it's like yesterday. It's amazing; he was in his nineties when he passed. He took up golf when he was in his seventies and he excelled. He was just an incredible athlete, and he had a tremendous affinity for physical things. He was also a track coach. We shared so many good times and it all had to do with being out and about.

Backcountry: Tell us more about your father.

JG: My father and I built a cabin together on his property, which was in Chatham, New York. We used to go up all the time to fish. In fact, when he passed I scattered his ashes on a tributary, a place called the green river. Years later I moved to a town in Vermont that happened to be about 10 miles from where I spread his ashes. His name was Milton Goldsmith. And he was one of those old-time coach types. My god, if he could see this Penn State thing, it would have turned his stomach. But he taught in the Bronx. Very, very rough neighborhood. He adored kids and he adored athleticism and people who would try and reach out and go beyond. And he helped so many of those slum kids, by donating some of his lunch money or whatever he put aside to help them get uniforms. He wanted to be a doctor so he got into sports medicine. Treatment for athletes was becoming a big field. He was one of the early trainers. He managed a couple of fighters. When he retired 15 years after, they gave him a dinner on the lower east side, and one by one these kids from the slums got up and thanked my father for changing their lives. He was amazing- gentle, very, very honest, except he did steal a newspaper whenever he could.

Backcountry: What do you see of your father in yourself?

JG: I love to see people exert themselves and accomplish something. I don't like quitters, that's for sure. I like to see people that are willing to put in sweat and will strive to think outside of the box. One of the things I love most about the backcountry is the fact that people rarely experience it. It's an experience reserved for those who try hard. Whether because of discomfort, or the exertion required to get into a backcountry setting, the average person simply isn't willing to go there. I've always enjoyed reaching out, stretching out, growing, and attempting. The "no pain, no gain" thing means a lot to me.

Backcountry: Apparently you saved someone on Mount Whitney?

JG: I was about 33 or 34 at the time and I wanted to climb Mount Whitney. It's a very simple climb, even though it's high. At the time it was supposedly the highest mountain outside of Mount McKinley in Alaska. So I was working as a laborer at the time, digging a sewer trench and I was so damn tired of that. The guy that I was working for had a younger brother by the name of Larry Miller, and he was a big strapping kid. In fact he was either in the marines or just out or taking a break. I said, "Jeez he'd be the ideal guy to go with." I remember he had these big coke bottle glasses, but he was strong as a house.

Years before I had carried a kid on the railroad tracks who was an epileptic; I had to get him back to camp, and the railroad ties were just so spaced that my toe would hit the top of one and my instep would go down into the gravel. Anyway, the next day I was in the hospital. My whole foot was the size of a grapefruit. Don't worry; this has something to do with the story.

So anyway, I decided Larry and I were gonna go and take on Mount Whitney. We camped halfway up at Mirror Lake, which is where you usually acclimatize. We left our packs there to go up to the summit the next day. Because of the old injury that I had on my toe, we were very slow going up. It was in late September, which is about the last time it's kinda safe to go up there. As we're going up, an elderly man was coming down with a camera over his shoulder on a tripod, wearing a denim jacket and a t-shirt. I said, excuse my language, "He's fucking crazy." We got up to the top and it was beautiful. We wanted to stay and linger but I knew that we had to get down because darkness was coming and a storm was brewing. Well, sure enough, it hit us. It was like a whiteout. And I said, "Larry, we gotta get our gear, and we've gotta find that idiot not much ahead of us, cause he'll never survive." So we start making our way down the trail. Sure enough, not too long after that we hear some moaning and here is this guy in a crevice hiding under the snow. We got him up. I don't remember how. So we got this guy between us. We took our socks off and put them on his hands, 'cause he was fighting us. And all of a sudden, the wind blew off Larry's glasses. No matter how strong he was, he was useless. So we switched positions and looked for our equipment. Not too far away we found it. So we got the stuff, and put the guy in the mummy bag. We had some light nylon rope for our tarps and he was thrashing about so we tied his ass to a rock. Then Larry and I got in the remaining sleeping bag (we could only get in halfway because this kid was big), and we just held each other.

Morning comes and the sun's out and we're ten feet away from the trail. Everything was fine, and the guy came to as much as he could. He was a little bit out of it. He was kinda dehydrated and we weren't far from where the ranger station. Guy never even said thank you.

Backcountry: How did you and your wife meet?

Barbara: I'm Jonathan's agent

JG: I'll tell you how we met. I realized my then-marriage was about to come to an untimely demise. I was up in the mountains in Nevada City, CA. I had bought a beautiful large piece of acreage and I was gonna retire, just go fishing. Then I decided I wanted to go back, I had taken a leave of absence from the entertainment industry, started up with a network marketing company and I became very successful. But then I always wanted to go back to acting. And I came down to LA in an old 1965 Ford diesel 5 or 6 speed truck and slept in the back of it in a campground. I met some loony-tune woman who wanted to be my manager. She was the only one that would because I had been out of the business for 10 years. She said I need an agent, and I said 'I know'. She said 'well I know somebody who's really a firecracker.' And I said, 'well, fine'. So we took a drive and Barbara was working in Costa Mesa, and I met the little firecracker. And the rest is history.

Backcountry: I've seen a number of the commercials; do you have any input into that? Do you do any of the writing?

JG: In the first year, they let the camera go and we did a lot of wild stuff and a lot of wild lines and after that they kind of knew what they wanted. I did make some contributions in the very beginning, but very briefly, very minor. They've got the best writers- a group of young kids! They are incredible.

Backcountry: How many takes would there be say, for one of your commercials.

JG: Well it depends. If there were snakes, dancers and a camel in it and five chickens, it can be a half a day shoot. It can be many takes, sometimes it's one.

Backcountry: What are the perks of being a celebrity?

JG: I like being able to bring attention to those things that are important to me. And what is important to me is the wellbeing of abused children. And that's why this Sandusky thing just infuriated me. To think that those bastards thought more about their goddamn football program than those children infuriates me.

Backcountry: How did you get involved in prison work?

JG: I was in a violent youth ward. 35 years ago, I joined a company called Free Arts for Abused Children, [www.freearts.org](http://www.freearts.org). We were artists and dancers that provided, in various mediums, art programs for kids who are in prison or under lock and key protection from themselves or their parents. The mission was to provide a non-threatening environment for children to express themselves through art. And then their art therapists and counselors could look at it and if they were discerning enough, could understand certain insights that they couldn't get without this cathartic experience of a creative outlook. I became a big fundraiser for them

Backcountry: What other projects are you working on these days?

JG: All kinds of avenues have opened up. Everybody is trying to take advantage and ride the coat tails of "the most interesting man" character. I don't own it. They own it. I can't do that. So, recently, six months ago, there was a pre sold show that was supposed to be 102 episodes long. I flew out to California and I turned it down. I didn't want it to be my legacy. It was just tawdry; reality television garbage. I didn't want to do it. However, there is something brewing for a huge new show. But I can't talk about it. Very big, with worldwide implications.

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