

IN MEMORIAM



Brian Iwata as Mentor, Colleague, Father

On October 7, 2023, the behavior analysis community lost one of its giants. Dr. Brian Iwata passed peacefully in his home surrounded by family. The world became a lesser place, but what it lost had been prepaid many times over by his immense and lasting influence.

The final few weeks of Brian's life were filled with planning, visiting, organizing, and reminiscing. Brian was as intellectually clear as ever, but his ability to speak was reduced and slower. Over those weeks, many of his family members and former students came to visit. He scheduled and spent time with individual local visitors. On one weekend, about 20 of his former students all came to the house and mingled while taking turns sharing time with Brian. To all, he shared thoughts and emotional memories. He shared manuscripts, graphs, and other items. For example, on one visit he asked Tim to prepare a eulogy and he shared the original type-written manuscript and reviews of *Toward a Functional Analysis of Self-Injury*. Through tears, Tim agreed to prepare a eulogy, and he clutched the folder of the manuscript tightly.

Following his passing, a large group of students, family, friends, and colleagues gathered at his house on October 26, 2023, to grieve together and to celebrate Brian's life on the day before his funeral. Among those attending were his mentor Jon Bailey, long-time colleague Marc Branch, students from as far back as the 1970s (e.g., Terry Page and Mary Riordan), and many others. The funeral was held on the next day, October 27. Subsequent gatherings took place at a postfuneral reception hosted by Brian's family and a gathering of former graduate students and colleagues at a local establishment that evening. Our love and admiration for Brian was readily revealed in our collective unwillingness to separate at this landmark point in our lives.

Others in this issue of *JABA* will remark upon Brian's achievements and the profound influence of his work. Our intention is to convey the personal Brian Iwata, a glimpse into what Brian meant to those in his biological and academic families as his student, colleague, and child.

Brian as mentor and colleague

Being an Iwata student, or an "Iwat" as we were collegially nicknamed in the department, was very much like joining a family. Like other families, you laughed

together. Those who saw only the professional side of Brian may not have realized how funny he could be or how readily he could break out into a childish giggle. Like other families, you took trips together, often to exotic places and always armed with a set of sight-seeing suggestions that Brian had meticulously researched in advance. You had meals together in Brian's home and in numerous restaurants around town. You played sports together, although unlike some fathers, he never "let you win." You even babysat your younger siblings (well, OK, Brian and Peg's cats). Like a model father, Brian would fight ferociously in defense of his children, both biological and academic. And like a model father, he did not hesitate to point out your errors and provide gentle corrections.

Despite a wealth of scholarly accomplishments, Brian considered the success of his students his proudest achievement. His mentorship activity was his most important work, and he took immense pride in his graduate students' professional triumphs. Of course, these achievements stemmed from his continuous demands that we emit behavior to be shaped and his exemplary modeling of professional behavior. This guidance often began at the undergraduate level, before one was formally an Iwata student. Many behavior analysts report having an "aha" moment, the moment that it "clicked" that behavior analysis made more sense than other perspectives you had encountered, the moment one realized they were a behavior analyst and would pursue it professionally. For an astounding number of people, that moment happened in a Brian Iwata undergraduate course.

Once you entered his academic family, your professional repertoire could rapidly advance simply by watching and emulating what Brian did. He modeled integrity. He modeled excellence. He saw promise in students who doubted their ability to successfully survive his mentorship. He wrote copious notes on common writing errors and suggestions for improving one's writing. These were distributed in all his classes, including undergraduate courses. His presentations were errorless, yet natural and unrehearsed. He would spend hours meticulously editing the work of his graduate students, often resulting, in the words of one student (Michele Wallace, see the Supporting Information file that accompanies the Lerman and Fritz paper in this issue) "like it had been dipped in a can of red paint." Oh, that ubiquitous red pen! It would have been much less effortful for Brian to rewrite portions of the manuscript himself, but this never happened. That would have meant missing an important learning opportunity for his students.

Brian showed his students how to be precise and goal oriented. As one example, we offer an anecdote recounted at a recent conference by Iwata student Juliet Connors Blevins: “Many years ago I attended ABAI in San Francisco with Brian and a group of his graduate students. Brian graciously arranged for us to take part in some nonconference activities including a trip to the Redwood Forest, home of the tallest trees on Earth. We were walking into the forest, and I was thinking to myself how amazing and beautiful it was. We continued to walk, and chat, and enjoy the day. Just as I was thinking to myself that I could happily spend all day there, walking for hours and hours, I heard Brian start to say something as he gestured toward a plaque at the base of a magnificent tree. Essentially, he said, ‘Look, this is the biggest one. Let’s go.’ Mission accomplished.” Brian modeled mentorship. In other tributes in this issue, you will read how regularly his students won awards, like the American Psychological Association’s B. F. Skinner New Research Award. Less apparent, but no less significant, is the large number of his academic “grandchildren,” students of his students, who are now receiving these awards. Perhaps most critically, Brian modeled how to change lives for the better.

The supporting information that accompanies the tribute by Lerman and Fritz (this issue) contains passages written by former students about what Brian meant in their lives. Willie’s contribution was deliberately omitted because he wanted to place it here. It read as follows: “Brian is the reason that I started doing applied work, the reason I returned to Florida for graduate school, and the reason that I now work at the University of Florida. When I was a 19-year-old psychology undergrad, I decided that my dream job was to be a University of Florida professor. I am literally living my dream because of Brian Iwata. He was my mentor for nearly 40 years, my colleague, my friend, my biggest critic, and my most enthusiastic cheerleader. I am immensely grateful for the ways he enriched my life.”

One never really stopped being Brian’s student. All his students, decades after receiving PhDs, relied on his continued guidance. Being an Iwat is a life-long commitment. As such, it might seem awkward to be hired into the same department as one’s mentor, as happened to Tim and Willie. It might seem that one would never be more than “the junior partner” under such circumstances. On the surface, it is perhaps a bit like moving into your parent’s basement after college. In fact, this was never the case. Brian was as graceful and helpful as a colleague as he was as a mentor, but he never conveyed any sense that we were anything but colleagues in equal standing. His work within the department was as precise and goal oriented as his work as a researcher and educator. In shared tasks, he would do not only his share, but often yours. During admissions season, he read not only the applications of students who applied to work with him but also the application of students that applied to work with all members of the behavior analysis program. He

came prepared to offer suggestions about the merits of all applicants and insight into why you might want to take a chance on a student whose portfolio was perhaps not on a par with others. His work on department documents was as exact and comprehensive as his work on scholarly documents. When asked, he would generously comment on what his colleagues had written, either for publication or administrative purposes. To be clear, the red ink didn’t stop flowing, it had simply turned to red type in the editing feature.

Below are the written versions of the eulogies prepared by Christina (Iwata) Schneider and Tim Vollmer for Brian’s funeral. These eulogies were presented at Brian’s request. Absent from the written versions are the emotions felt and expressed by Christina and Tim as they read theirs, respectively. In the case of both eulogies, we have left some words in italics and in all caps to reflect points of emphasis that Chrissy and Tim relayed in their voices. We have asked the editors to leave those indicators as expressed here.

Eulogy for Dad (by Christina Iwata Schneider)

Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer. In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Good morning. For those of you who don’t know me, I am Christina Iwata Schneider, Brian’s oldest. My mother, Peg, sister, Mary, and I are very grateful for all of you who have come to remember Dad today.

Brian Anthony Iwata was born on August 20, 1948, to Harry and Margaret Iwata in Scotch Plains, NJ. He was the middle of three children, sandwiched between Carol and Mary Ellen. In 1953, the family moved to Baltimore where the kids attended Catholic school, and it was this education that helped Dad become the excellent writer he was. A great athlete, Dad competed on both the swim and lacrosse teams and was voted “Best Dressed” senior year at Calvert Hall High School. Grandpa required Dad to earn the rank of Eagle Scout, which shaped his commitment to hard work and drive for excellence. Grandpa also instilled Dad’s love for travel. In 1962, they took their ‘57 Chevy across the country to visit Mt. Rushmore, the Painted Desert, and the Grand Canyon as they headed to visit Grandpa’s family along the west coast. That was the big trip, but Grandpa took them somewhere every summer, including visiting all five of the Great Lakes.

Both of Dad’s sisters mentioned his “juvenile delinquent” phase, which I surmised lasted from about 5th grade until about halfway through his time at Loyola College. A priest at Loyola questioned why Dad was even in college, when his real calling appeared to be running the table at the local pool hall. This was a wake-up call to Dad, who focused on success and never looked

back. Loyola was also where he met and fell in love with Peggy Moore. They were married in May of 1970 and he started graduate school at Florida State University in the fall. I came along soon after and Mary about 3 years later. Upon completing his PhD, Dad took an assistant professorship at Western Michigan University. He instituted Sunday night meetings, where his students would gather at our townhouse to present their data and conclusions. Dad and Mom created a sense of hospitality and community for his students, a habit they carried on for almost 50 years.

In 1978 he took an associate professor position at Johns Hopkins University Medical School. This was a formative period in our lives as Mary and I went through elementary and middle school, and we spent a lot of time with our grandparents who lived just a few minutes away. Dad continued mentoring his students and had an excellent team at Johns Hopkins.

In 1986, he took a professor of psychology position at the University of Florida. He quickly set up a lab. Shortly after this move, Dad was invited to take B. F. Skinner's position at Harvard. The week before he died, I asked him to remind me why he didn't accept such a prestigious invitation; I had assumed he didn't want to trade the Florida sun for winters in Cambridge. He laughed and said, "no," it was the fact that Harvard wanted him but didn't want him to bring the lab and his students. That was the deal breaker. Although he was a renowned researcher, he was also an educator and was not going to give up working with and training the next generation of psychologists.

Dad's work was important, and Mom wanted us to try to understand what he did. When I was little Mom rehearsed with me all day so that we could show him that I understood his vocation: Daddy is a psychologist; he helps people with problems. He came home from FSU that night and Mom asked, "Chrissy, what does Daddy do?" I dutifully responded, "He's a psychologist and HE HAS PROBLEMS!" For a few of the Baltimore years, we lived across the street from Doug DeCinces who was the 3rd baseman for the Orioles. Mom explained Dad was like the Doug DeCinces of psychology! Right after Dad passed, I reached out to his first defended PhD student, Mike Dorsey, to ask if, at the end of his career, it was more appropriate to compare Dad to say, Michael Jordan: dominant, superlative, someone who literally changed the way the game was played. Mike's response was that the analogy was inappropriate. He said, How he measures up on a 1:1 comparison with other luminaries is unimportant. Jordan, Bird, and Brady were all part of a team others built and paid them to join. They did not pick their teammates, act as the coach, train the players, etc. As great as they were, they participated as someone else's team member. Their success was dependent, in large part, on the performance of others—in combination with their own. On the other hand, Brian built his own team (with his own hands), trained the members,

reinforced/shaped the behaviors of his students and peers, etc. His team was, and remains today, built with members who remain committed to following his training, ethics, and guidance. But even more, his team is now being built with his original students' generational guidance and support of the productivity of their students and the future generation of each successive group of students to come.

I always thought only Mary and I understood what it meant to be Brian Iwata's kid, but I have realized that his students know a lot about what it was like. Dad wanted everyone to do their best. He saw the potential in each of us, and it didn't matter how my best compared to your best, just that each of us should be working to achieve our personal best. Dad could always tell when something was done half-assed, and felt if something was meaningful to you, it was worth doing well. One of the things that attracted Mom to Dad, was his complete confidence that she could do and achieve whatever she wanted. He had high expectations for everyone and pushed, sometimes aggressively. But it was because he wanted great things for all of us, he saw that we could be more and do more than we ourselves thought. If you were close to him, you knew there were two different modes of operation. The one was the refined and somewhat intimidating intellectual. The other was the softie, who loved fluffy animals, the chaos of little ones running rampant, being silly and retelling hilarious stories, and rooting for the underdogs in life.

Dad was one of the most generous people I have ever known. He has blessed our family with countless trips and vacations! He worked hard to put not just Mary and me through college but has provided for all four of his grandchildren as well, for which they are all extremely grateful. He routinely picked up tabs for dinners for large groups. We had multiple "grad student orphans" join us for a holiday meal because they couldn't travel home that year. But he was generous with time as well. Long after students graduated, he would follow their careers and be available for continued consultation and mentoring.

One of these generous trips was just this past summer. St. Augustine was a favorite destination and Dad wanted one last trip with the entire family at the beach. Though he was suffering and tired and in decline, we were so happy to get him out on the beach and even in the water! Every night we had dinners together sharing stories and belly-aching laughter. The last night we were there, Dad regaled the granddaughters with stories about his first few jobs. His initial motivator was to buy Christmas presents for his family. He described his work at Woolworth's, Continental Can and surveying in Ocean City, MD. If you remember, this was during his "juvenile delinquency" days, and so the granddaughters were hysterical as he told how he schemed to get breaks and paid to retrieve equipment that had been "inadvertently" left behind at the beach.

Family was incredibly important to Dad. He was deeply influenced by the childhood trip out west to meet

his cousins. In 1985, the Iwata family began having large family reunions every four years or so. We only missed one. He enjoyed spending time with the extended family, and it also gave him an opportunity to take us to various cities up and down the West Coast or to make a stop in the Southwest en route to a reunion. While in Kalamazoo, we would take trips to visit Dad's maternal grandparents and Uncle and cousins in Michigan. As Mary and I established our lives on opposite coasts, Dad organized summer vacations together, wanting us to all be together at least once a year, if not during Christmas time as well. After his father passed, Dad had his mother move into the house in Gainesville where he and Mom took care of her until she passed. And his students are an extended family. In over 45 years of training grad students, Dad has effectively sent out three generations of behavioral analysts. I've only recently contemplated and been awed by his influence on the field based on his student progeny alone. But when you consider how many of those students have educated their own students, the numbers are astounding.

Dad was unrivaled in his work ethic. His prolific research and publications speak for themselves. But he was disciplined in his personal life as well. He remained active his whole life, but as health issues arose, he would continue to fight hard and work to recuperate. He was very private about the difficulties of the past several years, and so out of respect I won't go into details here. But he always approached life with a can-do attitude. He didn't complain and he didn't wallow. In his last 2 weeks of life, he was confined to a hospital bed and would have to shift positions. He'd say, "My butt hurts" and shrug and say, "That's life." Even at the end, he was enduring and dealing with whatever life brought.

Dad enjoyed adventures and culture and sharing them with others. When we were little, he planned something almost every weekend: a trip to the Big Wheeler Ice cream shop, the park, the zoo, tennis. Mom said he planned all our adventures. As we grew, it turned into museums, the symphony, great restaurants, famous hotels, and the aforementioned travel. He enjoyed glass, fine art, and music of a variety of genres. From Motown, to Dylan, to Steely Dan, to Vivaldi. He loved it all and incorporated them into the house he built with Mom in Gainesville, including the glass blocks in the garage symbolizing the notes of Handel's Water Music. And again, he shared these loves with his students, always taking time to enjoy local sights when out of town for a conference.

At the end of September, Dad was fading quickly. Carol, Mary Ellen, Mary, and I all rushed to Gainesville to say goodbye. But so did 20 of his former students. Actually, three Zoom called, so 23 total, another testament to the sense of family Dad and Mom had created with his students. At the beginning of the week, Mom was concerned Dad wouldn't even make it to Saturday. She asked the nurse if he would still be with us. Dad

responded, "I'll be here!" The nurse gently said, "He may not be very lucid." Dad replied, "I'll be here and I'll be lucid!" And he was. He spent almost 6 hours that day visiting with students two by two, reminiscing and doling out thoughtful and intentional gifts to many. We had planned to cycle students in and out to keep the place serene, but Dad put a stop to that and wanted everyone to hang out in the living room, one last student party! It was that fight and fortitude we will all remember so well. There were so many things he persevered to do in the last 2 years: visit Maggie at college, travel to Europe with Mom, watch Eva graduate high school, the last family trip to St. Augustine. He was the epitome of determination and grit.

Brian Iwata leaves an enormous legacy. He was a giant in his field who was highly respected and regarded. He was a loving husband, devoted father, and doting grandfather. His family is grateful for the values he instilled in us: generosity, commitment to family, diligent work ethic, pursuit of excellence, attention to detail, consideration of others, and a tradition of hospitality. His presence will be missed, but we will continue his adventurous spirit. We will miss his hearty and genuine laugh. We are eternally grateful for all that he gave us and seek to honor his legacy by paying it forward. Thank you for everything, Daddy. We love you and will miss you very much.

Figure 1 shows an early photo of Christina Iwata, already reading *JABA*!

Brian in the present tense (by Tim Vollmer)

On behalf of Brian's students and colleagues, we thank you Peg, Chrissy, Mary, Carol, and Mary Ellen for allowing us to share Brian's time and energy over the years, for always opening your doors to us, and for allowing us to participate in this remembrance. All of you have been so courageous, strong, and kind. We notice and admire that.



FIGURE 1 Christina Iwata as a child, perusing Brian's copy of *JABA*.

For those of us who were Brian's students and professional colleagues, it is as if he looks over our shoulder whenever we write. Brian is a stickler for grammar and style. It has been over 30 years since he was my major professor, but even as I write THESE words, I ask myself: would he approve? Writing ABOUT Brian created its own challenges. I am certain he wants me to be more concise, use less hyperbole, and he would check my "tense."

I am describing Brian in the present tense today. Brian, keep your red pen in your pocket, I am grammatically correct this time, and I will prove why.

Brian Iwata is a world-renowned scientist of the first order. He is quite simply the most influential applied behavior analyst of our time. No matter where you go in the behavior analysis community across the world, nearly everyone knows they were influenced by Brian and his work. And if they do not know it, it is easy to show them how they have been influenced. I was recently in Iceland, giving a talk prior to his passing. I wanted to send Brian a video postcard, so I asked the audience to stand if they knew Brian personally, several did. I asked them to stand if they were taught by Brian or one of his students. More stood. I then went on to ask people to stand if they had implemented a functional assessment. Nearly all were now standing. Last, while one person remained seated, I said, "stand if you've conducted a stimulus preference or reinforcer assessment?" Then the final person stood (I knew I could get them). Anyone could have done this exercise in Italy, Russia, China, Japan, California, Canada. It did not matter where. Everyone in behavior analysis is influenced by Brian in profound and meaningful ways.

Brian is *somewhat(?)* of a perfectionist at work. He demands good writing, good science, and good presenting skills from his students and colleagues. None of us is perfect or even close to it, but his goals for us brought us closer to excellence than we ever dreamed possible. Brian did not seek out high achievers to bring into his lab, instead he collected a *hodge-podge* of characters into his lab, who he then went on to shape into world-class scientists, teachers, or practitioners. He saw potential in us, and (frankly) he saw a challenge for himself. He changed, he IS changing, our lives.

Brian has a knack for altering practices, pushing the envelope away from complacency. His primary professional journal, the *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, is forever influenced by his insistence on clear writing and clear methodology. He was guiding that journal long before he was editor in chief and he is guiding that journal long after he was editor in chief. Everyone knows it is in large part Brian's journal. Our professional conferences have better presentations because Brian insisted on better presentations. Our seminars at the University of Florida are stronger. In the past year, even after he retired, Brian meticulously filed lectures and assignments to share with his

teaching colleagues to use in graduate and undergraduate courses.

Many of you present today who are friends and family, at some level know of Brian's professional influence. Imagine it: a highly skilled and influential contributor. You might suppose—here we are, near the University of Florida, it must be common to celebrate a person of such stature and influence. Now magnify what you are imagining about his influence by a thousandfold. Having a single scientific paper cited more than 50 or 100 times is a career achievement for a select few scholars. But, to date, Brian has had 96 papers cited 100 or more times (and this is growing daily). That represents about two extraordinarily influential papers *per year* of his academic career. Are you kidding me? His seminal article on functional analysis has been cited over 4,700 times, it is a science-citation classic that has changed laws, policies, and lives around the world. I could go on and on about his statistics, but our tribute to him today is more personal than that.

On the Monday following his passing, we UF behavior analysts assembled as we always do on Mondays in our seminar, as Brian did (as a matter of fact) up until just a few weeks ago. Many of us shared stories about Brian's influence on us. It is interesting to me that in that group, his scientific influence was not mentioned, it was understood. Instead, all who spoke described what he meant to us and how he guided us AS A TEACHER AND MENTOR. As much as anything, that is his professional legacy.

Now let me defend my use of the present tense. Brian is a behavior analyst in every way, in his life, in his work, and in his guidance. Behavior analysts believe that experiences, including experiences with other people, quite literally *change* you as an organism, in a physical sense. Indeed, experiences make you a different *person*. It is not an exaggeration to say that hundreds of thousands of human beings have been changed by Brian, and they in turn are changing others, in that very physical sense of the word "change." According to Brian's own philosophy, he is therefore present within and among us in this room and throughout the world. Perhaps that knowledge allowed him to part with such grace. I will store that as another lesson from him.

In one of my final chats with Brian at his house, a few weeks ago when he was very ill, he reminded me of our first meeting, sitting on boxes in an apartment having coffee in 1986. At that time, I was begging him to let me into his lab as a postbac student. I was 23 years old. After hearing that story, and pausing to reflect, I told Brian: it has been one long cup of coffee. Now, I strike that with MY red pen. I should have said: it IS a very long cup of coffee, an eternal one. While there are people on earth, Brian is here, having changed those people or people before them who in turn changed others. It is a permanently changed universe, and for the better by far, by a thousandfold (one might say).

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