Grieving Roger Hamilton and Seals & Crofts' "Wayland the Rabbit"

My beloved former family doctor Roger Hamilton has died of cancer.

October 18, 2021 By Robin McGee

He was diagnosed at the same time my own disease recurred—devastating for me, and when I started this blog in earnest. "Paint It Black" was my song then. I learned later that just the day before his cancer surgery, he was advocating with resistant specialists on my behalf – one of his last acts as a physician before his disease forced him to leave medicine. How that touches me.

I had worked with Roger for over a decade in my role as a child psychologist, so I already knew how dedicated, responsive, and patient-centred he was. I also knew him as a neighbour—as a loving husband and devoted family man, as he lived only one door down from me.

One of the most delightful things about Roger was how he spoke. He had such a had a gentle voice, and when he spoke it was often filled with creative allusions. Talking to him was like listening to a jazz artist scat singing, with brilliant flashes that gave glimpses into his marvellous mind.

I have so many memories of him. As described in The Cancer Olympics, I had served on a government committee that tried to standardize the referral process for family doctors when they suspect colorectal cancer. Roger had been actively advocating for improved practice in this area himself for years. I remember him calling me into his office one day, to show me on his screen the new EMR referral form our committee had developed. He enthusiastically told me that he had referred two patients with that very form in the past week. I wept with joy to see it, and Roger had tears in his eyes too.

One of my tenderest memories was of a time when we met by chance at our local post office. He was just finishing his first bout of chemotherapy, and I was just starting mine. We commiserated about how horrible chemo makes everything taste. I turned to my post box, my back to him. As he passed me on his way out the door, he briefly rested his hand between my shoulder blades. Just a touch, but in it he communicated all his compassion, all his empathy, and his full understanding of our mutual suffering.

In another poignant memory, I was with Roger and his cherished wife Wendy-Lee. We were in their backyard sharing a cheese plate with a friend. The friend asked him if he would go back to being a doctor once his treatments were over. Roger replied wistfully, "I just hope to be Roger when my treatments are over." I realized his fear with a pang of recognition—that cancer will destroy our core identity just as it strips away our outward roles.

In Roger's honour, my song choice is Seals and Crofts' gentle "Wayland the Rabbit," from their 1975 album I'll Play for You. Better known for their big hits "Summer Breeze" and "Diamond Girl," that duo wrote many more thoughtful songs. This one was written by Seals for his actual father, whose name was actually Wayland. This ballad shares images of an abundant Paradise. It probes the mystery of suffering and death. It conveys warmth for a sorrowful father. (I listened to this song often after my mother died and my father was grieving her). But the lyric that moves me most is the line, "I love you 'cause you're strong/ and I love you 'cause you're weak." When I think about Roger, I think about loving all of him—the strong wise gentle doctor and also the afflicted debilitated cancer patient. How many of you have loved a person disabled by age, disease, or an accident of birth? Cancer may render us into weakened shadows of our former selves—but we love and are loved regardless. And Roger Hamilton was greatly loved.

As in the song, I wish Roger all the bounty of earth and Heaven.

Oh my Wayland,
there's deer in the forest
and rivers are flowing
just for you.

Oh my father,
look down through the mountains and valleys
the grain's in the silo.
All for you.

One fine morning,
as Dad was walking,
just to see what he could see,
he spied a little white rabbit.
He was frozen as solid as he could be.
And Dad cried,
as he knelt down beside him.
He asked God, "How could you be so cruel?"
And his heart broke for the little white rabbit.
"But you see that the owl

Would never have been so gentle,
And God is so kind."

I love Wayland ’cause he’s strong.
And I love him ’cause he’s weak.
And the rabbit is running within him.

Oh my Wayland,
the children are waiting
and berries are ripe down below the hill.
Oh my father,
the shadows of nighttime can’t touch you.
Immortal, go quickly,
be thankful the water is cool.
Drink your fill.

Today, as I walked ’long beside him,
I said, “Dad why do you look so sad?”
He turned, as he stood by the doorway.
He said, “Things are not like they used to be.”
I smiled, as if I could teach him.
I said, "Dad, it’s mercy in disguise.
Once you told me of a little white rabbit, and
you said that the owl would never have been so gentle,
and God’s been so kind."

And I love you ’cause you’re strong.
And I love you ’cause you’re weak.
And the rabbit is running within me.

This post originally appeared on The Cancer Olympics on October 10, 2021. It is republished with permission.

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.