

(John) Roger Ridewood Wheelock

Roger Wheelock lived a few lifetimes in his 78 years before leaving us last week, passing away peacefully at home following a battle with leukemia.

Roger lived his life as if it ought to be measured by the stories one could tell at the end of it. And, oh, what stories he had to tell! And what an incredible storyteller he was!



Born to Betty Ann “Anya” (Ridewood) and Sid, and raised in part by his treasured grandmother, Gaga, Roger grew up in Victoria, BC. Victoria was also where he finished his journey, but the destinations and escapades in between are numerous. He met his first wife, Marta, while backpacking through South America, and married her the next year in Tanzania. They returned to Victoria and had two sons: Joshua (b. 1972) and Noah (b. 1975). In Zihuatanejo, Mexico, he met his adored second wife, Susi, with whom he spent the last 33 years of his life. Susi was born in Regensburg, Bavaria, a city they visited often and which Roger considered a second home (and where he always claimed was home to the world’s best sausages, his one self-permitted indulgence from the vegetarianism of his later years).

A world-class adventurer, his appetite for travel and his curiosity about new places and languages was always central to

his life. He visited over 90 countries, from Albania to Rhodesia, and from Singapore to unnamed Caribbean islands not yet touched by technology. He met heads of state and celebrities, drunken Ugandan soldiers and one South American woman so removed from the rest of the world, she swore Roger was making up English when he spoke it to a friend. He slept in mansions and on boat decks, on bales of hay and Saharan sand dunes, on first class airliners and on bedbug-ridden, ramshackle beds. For many years, he slept on his famed and custom-made houseboat, "The Pink Dishrack". He touched every corner of the globe and savoured every experience the world had to offer.



His working life was no less fascinating. His jobs included, but were not even close to limited to: COO of the Canadian Tourism Commission. Carhop. Consultant to the Government of Malaysia. Bowling Pin Setter in Kamloops. Safari Lodge Manager in the Congo. Most famously, more than two decades as General Manager of the Butchart Gardens, where his incredible memory was on full display: Roger remembered every single employee's name – of which there were hundreds – no matter their position, a skill that awed many staff members. Even "retirement" couldn't hold Roger down: he volunteered in locations ranging from Guyana to Tuktoyaktuk. He took on contract work in Hong Kong and China. He owned and ran a hot dog cart.

He was a person like no other: he had his own way of dressing (a lifetime of never wearing a single t-shirt, sunglasses or

hat of any kind); his own way of speaking (he could safely lay claim to 98% of world's usage of the words "sockdollager" and "skrillions"); and his own inimitable, instantly recognizable handwriting.

When a pandemic and his illness conspired to limit his traveling, his mind was still always on the road: during COVID he wrote and self-published a set of travel memoirs, "The Lost Art of Being Lost", which spoke of just a few of his most incredible expeditions and experiences from throughout his lifetime.

And through all the journeys and adventures, nothing would ever top an early evening summer swim at his beloved Coles Bay, in North Saanich.



He loved crossword puzzles, wordplay, quotations, elephants, and putting wrapping paper on his head at Christmastime. He adored his family and one of his great joys in life was to be "Grappa" to his grandkids, Ayelet and Levi.

Roger leaves behind his wahnsinn-est Susi, two sons – Josh and Noah (Stephanie), two grandkids, five siblings (Susan, Lenox, Tom, Tony and BB), his dear dog Folly, and far, far too many friends and loved ones to count.

A truly huge thank you to all the nurses at the Cancer Clinic in Victoria, for everything over the past few years. You are all amazing.

One of his favourite phrases was “Ain’t Life Grand!” and he lived every day of his life like he meant it, right up until the very end, sharing his exuberance and joy of life with everyone he saw. He believed the heart had an infinite capacity for love, and could never run out. A consummate host, he was still entertaining visitors on his last night.

His beloved Mum once told him, “You should always leave the party when you’re having the best time, darling!” Both he and his mum would be very pleased to know that’s exactly what he did.

A Celebration of Life will take place Saturday, June 24, 2023, at 2:00pm, outside of his home, in the circle at Swallows Landing, 849 Dunsmuir Road, Esquimalt, BC.

Please note that there will be no parking at the location and parking nearby is very limited; guests should prepare for a potential 5-10 minute walk from their car.

Condolences may be offered to the family below.

McCall Gardens

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