

Wade Hemsworth on Wade Hemsworth

Editor: Wade Hemsworth's great-nephew is also called Wade Hemsworth. The bearer of this famous name gave an evocative and fitting eulogy at his great-uncle's funeral in Trinity Anglican Church in Morin Heights, Quebec. He has kindly allowed me permission to reprint it for our readers.

My name is Wade Hemsworth. Wade was my great-uncle, so some call me Little Wade.

Thank you all for coming today.

Wade Hemsworth was a man of many times and many places. He was the boy with the spiked helmet playing army with his buddies in the Indian Woods of Brantford in the 1920s. He was the big brother with the tenor guitar and a group of singing pals whose parlour performances provided early indications of his destiny. He was the dashing military man who dazzled his brother's young bride when he breezed through the door in his air force uniform. He was the Bohemian art student in Toronto. He was the bearded man busting through the brush of the wild north with a surveyor's transit over his shoulder, his imagination filling with thoughts both joyful and sombre, developing the sense of what he would later describe as the "grand contrariety." He was the reluctant ad man who chucked it all because he couldn't sell things he would never buy. Going back to the old drawing board, he was a draftsman happy and proud to be part of Canada's national railway, and pleased to have a lifetime pass to ride it from coast to coast. He was a singer, a writer, a painter, a husband, and a caregiver, with an open and fertile mind. He was a raconteur whose vast vocabulary also made him a crossword king. To his friends and neighbours here in the village, he was a menace in his little red Fiesta but a welcome sight on his bicycle, the old man who did Tai Chi on the lawn.

In some senses, Wade seemed like a man out of the past. His diction and language recalled a time when speakers were more deliberate and chose their words carefully. He said "hurrah," instead of "hurray," and "one" instead of "you." The flourishes in his handwriting suggested that penmanship was important to him, too, an art that has lately been diminished by the keyboard. He wore a cravat rather than a long necktie and, in an age of denim and microfibre, remained at home in tweed.

My great-uncle Wade, whose name I am deeply proud to share, was a difficult man to know, even to his family and friends. He was pensive and occasionally moody. Those who cared to penetrate his thin crust were richly rewarded, and came to know that Wade was mirthful, observant, deeply sensitive and very generous.

Beyond Wade's circle of family and friends, history will remember him best as a composer and

performer of music. Wade drew from the past, and present to shape the music of his time, and will be remembered long into the future for the songs he wrote.

Wade was also a man of the future. The ideas he expressed decades ago about ecology, about divining Canada's culture from its many backgrounds, even about the scourge of light pollution, were well ahead of their time. More recently, he and Shirley had paused to consider the future well beyond their own lifetimes. They have created the foundation for a scholarship fund that will help musicians continue to tell Canadian stories for years to come.

Wade was a man who mined life's riches with great zeal, and dispatched its dross with sometimes-breathtaking efficiency. Those of us who have been scolded by him or have seen him scolding other deserving targets, sometimes with a word or less, know what I mean. I am confident that all of us experienced his grace. Because he chose his words and actions so deliberately, they meant all the more.

There was a day not long after his first stroke when Wade and I had gone for a long autumn drive in the Laurentians. Wade drank in the beauty like a parched man, and his enthusiasm made it all the more vivid. Later, we stopped at a store, where a man who had apparently suffered a worse stroke was working up the momentum to mount the single stair. Wade stopped, hunched and thin as he was, and raised his fist in the air. He yelled, "Go, man! Go!" These small scenes are among the rich memories I will savour.

So are the big ones.

We will never forget seeing Wade on the night he married Shirley, having found love again after his long and dedicated care for Irene. What a lesson they gave to all of us. A lesson in exuberance, in hope and determination, and in love.

A lesson that lasted beyond the night they danced so dreamily in Westmount, one that has carried on for more than a decade, through sickness and the separation it caused. It is a lesson that will, I am sure, outlast death itself.

For Aviva and me, seeing Wade and Shirley together at our wedding, having made what Wade knew would be his last journey to Ontario with considerable difficulty, was one of the incredible moments of our lives. We will always be grateful to have been able to watch Shirley and Wade sing along with the Log Driver's Waltz that day.

Shirley is the woman who always found a way to get herself to that distant hospital where Wade spent his last months, so she could caress her husband's face and sing to him so sweetly, there in the open ward at St. Anne de Bellevue. He was the man who wrote to her on what would be his last

Valentine's Day with a hand that could barely hold a pen. He wrote, "My dear Shirley, It is Valentine's, and I thought it apt to tell to express my love and gratitude to you." In typical style, he signed the note, "Your young and handsome husband."

Wade's life experiences were fascinating, but it was his insight, talent and passion - the way he lived those experiences - that set him apart. It was not his accomplishments, nor his stories from some of our country's most romantic times and places that attracted and held attention on Wade throughout his life. It was his love for nature, for language and music, for Morin Heights and Brantford, for Newfoundland and Calgary, for Canada, for his many kind and fascinating friends, for his proud family, and his dear Shirley - our dear Shirley. This is what made us all love him so willingly. We shall miss Big Wade, but we shall continue to find him in all that he loved.

Wild Goose

Wade Hemsworth

*On Pukaskwa river so early this morning,
While mending my tumpline I hear the geese
calling.
Over the brule, long clamoring cry,
Flying formation against the grey sky*

*Comes the wild goose,
The wild goose,
High over the north shore
And I'm going home.*

*The river is open but the lake's frozen over;
It's time to pack out when so late in October.
Winter's a-coming, the wild geese know,
We've had a long fall and its time to go*

*With the wild goose,
The wild goose,
High over the north shore
And I'm going home.*

*I've made lots of money, got money to burn
And when I have spent it I know I'll return
After the freeze-up, when snow is dry,
For to work in the tall woods— I wish that I*

*Were a wild goose,
A wild goose,
High over the north shore
And I'm going home.*

*I've worked in the bush and spent money in
town;
I'd like to get married but I can't settle down.
At the last portage, when I'll pack no more
Let me fly with the wild goose high over north
shore*

*With the wild goose,
The wild goose,
High over the north shore
And I'm going home.*

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