



Roger Herschel Herzig: younger half of the dynamic duo which advanced leukaemia therapy and transplants: January 4, 1946 to July 18, 2020

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Roger Herschel Herzig, a pioneer in leukaemia therapy and younger brother of Geoffrey M. Herzig (Bone Marrow Transplantation 2014; 49:597–8) died on July 18, 2020, age 74 years. His death is a loss to the haematopoietic cell transplant and leukaemia communities, his patients to whom he was extraordinarily dedicated and his family. He left a legacy of loyalty, commitment, courage and love.

Roger was born in Cincinnati. His undergraduate studies were at the University of Cincinnati and his medical training in Cleveland at Case Western Reserve University.

Curiously, his internship was in obstetrics and gynecology and his residency, general surgery. During the Korean and Vietnam Wars (1953–1973) the brightest young physicians inducted into the military under the Doctors Draft had the option to go to the National Institutes of Health in an Associate Training Programme. They called themselves *Yellow Berets*. Interestingly, graduates of the programme were 1.5 times as likely as non-associates to become full professors, twice as likely to become department chairs and three times as likely to become deans. Associates were also more likely to hold positions at top-ranked medical schools, fill leadership roles at the NIH and win prestigious awards and honorary society memberships [1].

The condition of acceptance was you had to go to the NIH Institute which chose you. Imperfect, but better than being sent to Ho Chi Minh City (*nee* Saigon). Fortunately for us and people with leukaemia and lymphoma, Roger was vetted to the Oncology Branch of the National Cancer Institute, not the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. There he worked with early leukaemia and haematopoietic cell transplant pioneers including Robert Graw Jr, Malcolm and Jane Bull, David Poplack, Brigid Leventhal, Ronald Yankee, Archie Bleyer, Edward Henderson and Geoff where he helped design therapies to treat people with leukaemias and lymphomas. In 1975 Roger returned to University Hospitals Cleveland Medical Center for a haematology/oncology fellowship, like taking classes after receiving your graduate degree. In 1976 Roger founded the Bone Marrow Transplant Programme at University Hospitals. On medical rounds Roger and Hillard Lazarus were referred to as the *Broviac Brothers* after the in-dwelling venous catheters many acutely ill patients needed. In 1984 Roger moved to *the competition*, the Cleveland Clinic and in 1988 to Louisville to direct the University of Louisville James Graham Brown Cancer Centre. In 2014 he moved to the University of Kentucky Markey Cancer Centre in

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Lexington but returned to the University of Louisville recently.

Through nearly 50 years of medical practice he touched countless lives, educated several generations of physicians and helped establish bone marrow transplant programmes internationally. He was a member of many learned societies such as the American Society of Hematology, the American Society of Clinical Oncology, the International Society of Experimental Hematology and an Honorary Professor of the Chinese Academy of Medical Sciences and Peking Union Medical College.

Roger published more than 100 typescripts including 34 with Geoff. Interestingly, his 1st publication was with Prof. Oscar Ratnoff, widely credited with unravelling the blood coagulation cascade. Their study was on the procoagulant activity of southern copperhead snake venom. This may have been good preparation for a career in academic medicine; poisonous snakes are everywhere. Prof. James Armitage, Roger's colleague and friend and noted herpetologist and snake bite expert would be proud he knew Roger.

Roger formed close collaborations for clinical trials with Geoff and with Hillard Lazarus, Gordon Phillips, David Hurd, Steven Wolff, Joseph Fay and others in the North American Marrow Transplant Group, a small but highly productive clinical trials consortium. Several of their outstanding contributions were studies of high-dose cytarabine for acute leukaemia for relapse and later for consolidation, bone marrow autotransplants for advanced lymphomas and high-dose melphalan in haematopoietic cell transplants. We use these therapies today.

Prof. Herzig rotated between three sites; (1) home with his wife Donna and four sons; (2) the hospital and clinic; and (3) the racetrack, notably Churchill Downs (home of the Kentucky Derby) and Keeneland. In the hospital he was known as the *Louisville Slugger*. Whether Roger left Cleveland for Kentucky because of his interest in horse racing or developed it there is unclear. He could be found at the track with a pitcher of Diet Coke and a basket of pretzels; he indulged in a mint julip on special occasions such as the Derby. Roger was considered a racetrack sage. His advice (we provide a guide for the rare reader unfamiliar with the nuances of racetrack betting): (1) *not a man alive made a dime at 4–5*; (2) *never bet a trifecta; bet the exacta* (a bet on which horses will finish 1st and 2nd in the exact order rather than 1st, 2nd and 3rd); (3) *wheel the favourite* (some statistics: in a 8 horse race there are 56

possible combinations for 1st and 2nd place. In a wheel you pick a horse to win and four other horses to potentially come in 2nd); and (4) *when in doubt, bet on Pat Day* (Day, a jockey, won 8803 races and is the all-time leader in monies earned winning nine Triple Crowns). The last advice is beyond its sell buy date. Day retired in 2005, but Roger's other tips will stand you in good stead and likely make you rich. Disclaimer: RPG lost \$50 at Churchill Downs on a tip he received from Roger over several Kentucky bourbons (Blanton's Single Barrel of course) at the Seelbach Hotel. (More information on how to become rich at <https://www.thesportsgeek.com/sports-betting/strategy/horse-racing/>).

A Man for All Seasons, Roger was part-owner of Northern Emerald, a horse which raced at Belmont park. One of his dogs won *Best in Show* at the Westminster Dog Show. He had a cameo role in the TV show *One Life to Live*. He loved to say: *I'm a doctor playing one*. A gracious person, he never had a Cromwell or a Henry VIII. Although Roger and Geoff were not genetically identical or even fraternal twins, Roger was never really the same after Geoff died. They were terribly close.

Roger Herzig made important contributions to our current therapies of leukaemias, lymphomas and other cancers. He is survived by his wife, his sons David, Daniel, Robert and Brian and nine grandchildren. He will be greatly missed but his legacy lives on. Gordon Philips adds an Oklahoma farewell: *ya done good*. You could always bet on Roger and win; forget the ponies.

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Compliance with ethical standards

Conflict of interest The authors declare they have no conflict of interest.

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