

When It's Not the Cancer News You Want to Hear

There is power in 30 seconds of silence, writes brain cancer blogger Adam Hayden.

March 3, 2025 By [Adam Hayden](#)

Well, the tumor grew more.

I know.

Not the news you want.

I don't mean to break the news to some of you in such an impersonal way—via blog post. But scrolling through iMessages to let people know finds you opening a text conversation that you hadn't attended to since October when you texted

Hey thx for tonight I needed to get out

Those tacaos were fire, right?

And here I come

Hey, the tumor is in my corpus callosum now, and it's pretty deep, and there's some midline shift, and we're thinking surgery, but the risk is vision loss and further mobility issues on my left side

From tacos to tumor is a weird blue bubble iMessage break.

But yeah, the tumor is in my corpus callosum now, and it's pretty deep, and there's some midline shift, and we're thinking surgery, but the risk is vision loss and further mobility issues on my left side.

Now, first of all: don't worry.

I mean, do absolutely worry. Tumor traveling through the white matter tracts and crossing hemispheres is like bad news territory.

But don't worry.

Spring is teasing us, and soon we'll be bathed in sun and stepping in lush grass. Take your shoes off. Feel that it's cold and itchy around your ankles as you walk through the grass. Listen to the kids playing kickball in the cul-de-sac. A dog barks, and the mail carrier drives by. You give a wave.

The clouds aren't so low, and the sky is washed in pale blue. You wished you had your sunglasses, and you didn't need the hoodie when you left, but in the shade, it's chilly.

I don't really want to talk to anyone.

But I want to talk to the people who are around. I like to clink a bottle after work and share any gossip that anyone's got when the neighbors are out between work and dinner. Maybe we'll put in a fence for the dog, but that's sort of an eyesore. He's worn down the path where he usually goes, and he walks in with muddy paws.

The people who get it—you know who "get it"—can stand with me in 30 seconds of silence. In the silence is where the caring shows up. That's a line from a paper on palliative care I read years ago. That line tucked itself neatly inside my brain for ready access. Lots of useful things in my brain, but not the tumor.

I've stood in front of driveways in silence. An unlikely but very, very good friend is my partner in this thirty second silent standing.

I've been on phone calls in silence.

At bars in silence.

Hugs in silence.

Silence is where the caring shows up.

Whitney's step dad wears boots and has an NRA sticker on his car, and he sat with me in the hospital in silence some eight plus years ago, and his presence was a gift.

There is power in silence.

Vulnerability in silence.

Learning to live in silence takes effort. I'm not your coach, boo. You're gonna have to work that out on your own. It'll take time. Years, even. You'll have to develop a moral imagination and see yourself in the lives of others. You'll need to cry.

They're saying surgery. Did I say that yet? I guess "they" aren't saying that—really, I'm saying that. Get in there and lay eyes on the goddamn thing. These radiographic findings are ghosts in the machine. I need to see the tumor with my own eyes to prove all this impairment, fear, and

dread have a material source.

Cancer will fuck you all the way up where normal shit is a symptom and symptoms are normal and everyone wants you better and you need them all to realize that with some cancers better only means coping with the worst.

I want awake surgery again.

Drill the screws in my head and bone saw my skull so I can see you cut and burn that tumor out. Keep me awake. Hold my hand. Let's clown and joke and laugh. The tumor wants my identity, and it won't get it. I told Whitney, I want a t-shirt gun at my funeral. You'll have to be there to know what the t-shirt says.

I told Whitney I wanted to make a guest list, and she told me that you don't send invitations for funerals. I don't want to turn a good post sour, but some of you motherfuckers better think about your behavior when you catch your t-shirt. My circle is tight, and you get a couple of degrees from Kevin Bacon, and some of you fools better check yourself.

But like I say, don't worry.

I'm not dying.

Yet.

I don't think that's naive. I'm not getting the spidey sense that I'm dying. Peter Parker of the hospice unit. It feels like I have more tiny ball jars of whiskey to sip while blogging. But I did just run out of whiskey, so if anyone wants to drop by with a bottle, shoot me a heads up text, and we can sit on the front porch rockers.

Some of the time, in silence.

My doc was supposed to call me before the end of the week but didn't. He was going to talk to neurosurg and rad onc. Another doc is taking a peek at scans in the PST time zone. No shade, but no word from either.

Again.

No shade.

I let emails slip on the regular at work, and I bet you do, too. Or let the phone ring. Or switch off the lights 5 minutes before closing, so don't get judgy with somebody else. A lot of people need care, and we're getting low on healers.

Ain't that the truth?!

I imagine the radiation oncologist thinking, "I knew you'd be back," after I waved him off a year

ago, and we went with chemo only. Turns out, that was a good call. Of course, it was a year of vomiting and fatigue, but I didn't also have to be in a waiting room full of people 20-30 years older than me.

The tumor grew more.

It's in the corpus callosum now, and it's pretty deep.

Just wanted to let you know, and sorry it's sort of impersonal.

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