

My Dignity for a Souvenir

An MRI story by a philosopher of science living with brain cancer

January 4, 2024 By [Adam Hayden](#)

You are valuable, simply for being.

You are worthy, no matter what you have accomplished.

You are inherently good and deserving of unconditional love.

You are at your very best when your full humanity is on display.

These words are a sort of go-to declaration when I'm not sure what to say, but I feel compelled to say something. I am someone who talks a lot, and so, the pull to say something is common, and the lack of something to say is rare. When the compulsion to speak meets a scarcity of words, I usually spout out something in the vein of what you've just read. I cannot imagine a scenario that is not appropriate to affirm our individual, and collective, value, worth, goodness, and right to be loved. The truth is suitable in all settings.

Dignity is not a zero sum game.

Recognizing your humanity doesn't take from mine.

Conversely, it may add to it.

When I see your humanity, I am reminded of my own, and that reminder so too reminds me of my inherent value, worth, goodness, and right to be loved. If I have these qualities in infinite supply, why, I could freely offer my humanity to others! Receiving and giving humanity is love, and love is an act of creation.

Howard Thurman, in a recorded interview that has shaped much of my thinking, says that to hate is to wish that the object of that hatred did not exist. If this is correct, then to love is to celebrate the object of that love—to be grateful that the object of love shares in this thing called reality and the human condition.

Exchanging humanity is love.

Love is an act of creation.

We create when we share our humanity.

When we freely give our humanity to others.

The Radiology suite is in the basement of the Professional Building. To navigate there from Parking Garage Level 2 (with the starling illustration to help find your car) proved to be a maze. “We’re looking for Radiology, can you help us?” We ask the scrub-clad woman passing us near the elevator bank, “Main Radiology?” She asks, “Wherever I can get an MRI,” I reply buoyantly. Whitey shrugs. “Keep following this hallway,” she replies unimpressed.

They do scrubs here for MRI subjects, not gowns, which is fine, but, you all know, I’ve perfected the double-gown maneuver. “What size?” I twist my lips. “Mediummmmmmy-large?” The words

stumble out of my mouth like exiting the restroom back to the \$2 wings and \$3 buds. You definitely are not tripping, but you do hit that door frame a little hard. “Let’s just go large,” she decides for me. “Sounds good.” Now I speak softer, tilting my head toward the linoleum floor. The bravado drained, and the stakes of the scan set in.

We talk through my MRI safety form together. “Tattoos?” I extend my arms forward. “Metal in your body? Shrapnel? Metal shavings?” I smile gently—don’t be weird, I think—and slowly turn my head left-to-right in a continuous motion while she continues: “Catheter? “Heart valve?” “Prosthetics?” “You’ve had an MRI before?”

I wish I were there with my techs now, at my hospital. Melody wouldn’t stand for these questions. She’d have the IV placed by now. “I have had MRIs before, actually, I get a lot of these.” I can tell this is a slightly different response than she expected. She looks up, here’s the moment! She makes eye contact, I’m wearing my gentle smile (and large scrubs, cinched at the waistband, pulled as high as my belly button). We recognize each other’s humanity.

The room feels colder, the needle feels bigger, when she flushes the IV, the saline tastes saltier. My new friend hands me off.

“Are you going to scan him?”

Oops, we lost the moment. I can tell he’s down. He’s my people. The curly, disheveled hair, glasses with a certain frame, facial hair that he’s not growing out, but he isn’t much keen on shaving it either. We notice each other. “What kind of music?” he asks, while I scoot my butt toward the machine, inching myself up until I feel my shoulders press against the headrest. I lower my head carefully into the rest, and she places the earphones snug around my ears. “The National,” I say. She steps away, he coils the IV line around my thumb. “Just to make sure we don’t pull at your IV when we slide you in.”

The table growls and the staccato beeps ball-ping hammer my temple. We’ve reached the rumble part of the scan. The sequence finishes. “Adam, we’re going to push that contrast now.” “Thanks for the heads up.” “What’s that in there?” I raise my voice, all diaphragm, I know not to move my body! “Head’s up .. Thanks. Er .. Thanks for the heads up.” “Sure.” He clicks back on the grade school walkie talkie wired into the giant machine that I’m over here casually chilling inside with a three tesla electromagnetic field washing over my body, spinning the protons inside the atoms of my cells. This is fine.

By the way, did you notice what he did? He called me Adam.

“We’re ready for our last set, Adam. Should only be another five minutes or so.”

The long pause after the final sequence—the quiet of the humming machine—tells me that we’ve concluded. The metal detector beeps, and I know this means they’ve come to retrieve me. The scan is done. They pull me from the machine, and she begins to remove my IV, “Do you have anymore appointments today that you’ll need the IV for?” “Nope, but thanks for asking!” “How

was the music?" he asks. "Great, definitely heard some good ones." "I was keeping an eye on it. We first had it on YouTube, but I didn't think the playlist was very good, so I switched it for you."

"Be slow getting up. Do you have your balance? Your cane is there by the door." We're all smiles, now. We're all human. I spin my butt to face the side of the MRI table, and I stand.

My pants drop immediately.

"I thought I'd leave my dignity here for you, as a souvenir," I quip.

We shared a little humanity. A little creation. A little love.

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