

Leading Through Illness

“Dad, have you ever been to Olive Garden?” asks the son of brain cancer blogger Adam Hayden.

November 6, 2025 By [Adam Hayden](#)

“Dad, have you ever been to Olive Garden?”

‘Yes, Noah,” I chuckled, revealing a slightly sarcastic tone before catching myself.

I centered.

“Yeah, bud!” I recovered. “Dad’s been to Olive Garden, and I’m excited to be going with you!”

When we started our kids in therapy, not too long after diagnosis, Whitney and I did our best to select age-appropriate settings that would best fit our kids’ needs.

For Noah, we selected play therapy where the therapist helped us interpret the games he invented for us, which were all centered on his desire to care for me. He’d latch onto the toy kitchen and make me food or bury the evil “Dr. Octopus” with the oversized head beneath the sand.

Of course, Gideon was only eight months old, so we weren’t sure exactly where to place him; though, he did sleep in his crib in a walk-in closet at my parents’ house after I had to step away from work (reason one), and a second floor walk up was not compatible with my exceedingly increasing motor impairment that found me as a full-time wheelchair user (reason two); a status I have since returned to in the past few months, and so we moved in with my folks. No doubt that will make its way out in Gid’s therapy one day.

As it turns out, this is another status I may return to for safety, posting up at mom and dad’s, given our home has been uninhabitable after water damage and ongoing repair.

Considering my pronounced deficits, I’m no longer safe to be left alone for very long—fall risk and whatnot. A working spouse and three kids with school and activities, me not having driven in several years, it’s the “takes a village” thing.

The cruel, beautiful, strange irony of life is that my little sister is disabled with a genetic chromosomal condition, and she is a near-lifelong wheelchair user, and so, my folks’ house is already ADA accessible, including the bathroom.

Back to Olive Garden.

Oh no.

Oddly enough, with whatever disease progression or pseudo-progression the upcoming FET PET reveals on November 4, a new symptom includes lack of bladder control and a little fast and loose in the bowels.

“Check please!”

Poor Whit had to race me and the three boys home from the Garden, as we all made immature poop and fart jokes. “They do say, ‘When you’re here, you’re family.’”

I attempted to bail out of the car, grasping for my walker, and fell immediately to the cold garage cement-ass out.

The boys and I roared with laughter.

Well, not the 14-year-old.

He was mortified.

These accidents are becoming more commonplace, and tonight I disclosed to good friends who we’ll see on Halloween that this is my latest issue.

I was sure to include a still of Billy Madison: “You’re not cool unless you pee your pants.”

As far as my therapist, they could kick your therapist’s ass!

The very best, I tell you—at least, the best for me. As we’ve navigated these recent rounds of chemo failures and tumor growth, my therapist asked during our last meeting something like how my ideas or approach to the end of life are developing. Something like that.

I paused.

“I’m going to lead through death as I’ve led through illness.”

I guess I’ll start by letting you know that I’m wearing adult pull-ups now, but who cares? You’re not cool unless you pee your pants.

If you think I’ve got some leadership left, let’s keep moving together. When you’re here, you’re family.

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