

(Mostly Inappropriate) Inside Jokes on Handling Brain Cancer

Blogger Adam Hayden knows the absolute best way to describe a long-term survivor of brain cancer and its recurrence.

March 5, 2024 By [Adam Hayden](#)

“With a good response I could see us getting another couple of years. I’m not sure about another eight years, but you know, you had a good response before.”

“I don’t know about another eight years.” Imagine that we just tuned up your 2003 22-inch Toro walk behind. Damn those things are workhorses, right? You thank the dude with the big garage, empty flatbed in his yard, and used golf carts for sale. He brought your mower back to life!

“Thanks, man!” “I could see us getting another couple of years,” he says, “I’m not sure about another eight years.” Say that about brain cancer. Go ahead, Whitney and I have been for a couple weeks.

This line is the latest entry in our running list of quotes-turned-inside-jokes. The list includes the following bangers:

- “I saw you limping around,” said to me by a doctor who observed us walking into radiation therapy from the parking lot. For context, I walk with a cane and noticeable gait instability
- “Bring towels,” something I said to the nurse after I shit the bed while inpatient after surgery. “What were you going to do with towels?!” Whitney often tacks on
- “All we can do is hope,” a doctor replied to me when I said, “Hope to see you again in six months,” when we were on six month follow ups after completing a therapy regimen. “Hope? What about actual medicine?” I muttered to Whitney
- “You know you’re going to die from this?” is how one doc broke the diagnosis news to me

- “You should’ve gotten the eye drops,” is one that Whitney says pretty often, taken from an email I received a few years ago from someone who claimed they designed eye drops that, if taken multiple times each day, would cure my brain cancer
- To these amazing quotes, we add the latest, “Well, I don’t know about another eight more years!”

We’ve gathered this collection of phrases during my nearly eight-year *gestures wildly* whatever the fuck this is, with brain cancer. Our endless laughter (mostly at inappropriate times, which you know if you’ve ever hung out with us) suggests two insights: First, communication skills turn out to be pretty important in clinical care. And second, that I could crank out this list off the top of my head is a window into how Whitney and I have handled brain cancer since 2016 and how we’re handling its recurrence now. Namely, with humor, but also honesty, because if you re-read that list, behind each quote is a pretty matter of fact reflection on the state of things, from “you do know you’re going to die from this” to “I don’t know about another eight years.”

And I do sort of limp around.

We’ve taken these remarks as the raw material of our experience and rendered for ourselves our own narrative to make meaning of this experience that can be so easily consumed by the vacuum of no meaning at all.

A while ago I quoted Brooke Ellison in a [post](#). Prof. Ellison is a bioethicist who became paralyzed in a car accident. Ellison reflected, “My life has been one of deep meaning and purpose brought about by circumstances that, at the time, seemed meaningless and purposeless.” This is one of my favorite quotes. Not a quote but a rally cry; a challenge. Give me something meaningless, and I’ll show you that a lot of things in this world are not inherently good or bad but their goodness and badness are the values we place on them. We call this perspective, and on the short list of things that turn your perspective on its head is a life-limiting illness.

We choose to lean all the way into the meaning making, and the tools we’ve developed are those of humor. I’m a 21-year-old push mower that shit himself and should’ve bought the eye drops. See how this is the absolute best way to describe a long-term survivor of brain cancer?!

If you do, you’re cool with us. Maybe we’ll let you in on some more of our inside jokes. Show up with towels and you’ve secured your spot.

[This blog post](#) was published by [Glioblastology](#) on February 29, 2024. It is republished with permission.

