

Radiology After Hours

The CT sanner warms up like the turning turbines of a jet engine, and I sense the large x-ray detectors whirling around me.

January 12, 2024 By [Adam Hayden](#)

If you grow up as a pastor's [kid](#), a PK, your sense of sacred space diverges from the norm. This is true in ways large and small. The familiarity and comfort of these spaces is the most innocuous—I know, strange word, but we're on to something here. You develop a sense of ownership, for example, in the sanctuary.

Whereas parishioners would never carry in some snacks or wear their ballcap into such a holy place, these spaces are the playgrounds for PKs when their parents practice their sermons or arrange the seats for a special ceremony.

You learn which doors to prop open when you sneak out to the playground.

Whose green beans are the best at the potluck.

You learn how to wait patiently in the hospital parking garage while your parent visits an ill member of the congregation.

You know to be wary of the home phone (this is more relevant pre-1998) because you could unsuspectingly pick up the phone to a member in distress eager to speak with the pastor.

You learn many life lessons, like confidentiality, trust, respect, conflict mediation, and the week-in, week-out grind of serving as a member of the clergy. Few people understand how hard it is to be a clergy member. Many people think that Sunday morning is the most work for Christian clergy, but from what I've seen, shaking hands and delivering the sermon is the easy part.

If these are the innocuous extensions of growing up as the child of a clergy member, what are the more insidious facets? The contrast I am drawing is between the innocuous and the insidious, and neither are direct and straightforward. These are the unspoken markers of intimacy with the vocation of sacred service.

The insidious dimensions include drawing back the Holy curtain and peering upon the inner workings of theology in action.

You see the holy water of the communion basin drawn from a tap, you see the opened bottles of

communion grape juice littering the kitchen counters and the crumbs from the bread dusting the linoleum floor.

When the rites and rituals of sacred service are the checklists and tasks of a vocation, the holy must be renegotiated as a boot-strapping project that you embark on with the Divine at your side. The greatest gift of being the child of a clergy member is also the most insidious: You cannot rely on the spaces and ceremonies for your sacred traditions to encounter the Divine because you can't short circuit holiness by showy spaces. This is your playground. For the parishioners, there is still the sense of the sacred in the sanctuary because the mind's expectation effect is oriented toward some holy shit happening, but if this is your dad's office, to sing in the chorus of holy, holy, holy, it takes personal work and desire to truly connect.

To have some communion with the Divine means that you've got to recover it somewhere in the pile of discarded bulletins and angry members who didn't think you should have closed for covid.

Courtesy of Adam Hayden/@glioblastology

The start time of 6:30pm was late to get the imaging done, but that's when we were scheduled, and whatever, we'll show up when it says to show up. We're at my wife's hospital, where I've had most of my imaging done for the past seven years. Being a cancer patient, I'm a frequent flier; a radiology rat. At my wife's Level One trauma center hospital, the radiology suite is near the "shock rooms," hospital rooms to handle incoming emergency patients who will be admitted to intensive care. Down the other hallway are the holding rooms where detainees from the nearby prison arrive for treatment or incoming patients who are under guard during their stay for either protection or arrest or both.

I see the inner workings of the hospital as a spouse to a healthcare worker and patient in need of treatment.

The tech asked if I had ever received contrast dye.

“Oh yeah, many, many, many MRIs.”

“Cool, I’ll have you lay right here, CTs don’t take nearly as long.”

“Do you need me to change?”

“Can you roll up your hoodie sleeve?”

I yank up my sleeves, tattered around the cuffs, a rip on the right cuff where it sews onto the sleeve.

“This good?”

“Yeah, we’re good, which arm for the IV?”

“Take your pick, you’re the one doing the stick.”

The CT warms up like the turning turbines of a jet engine, and I sense the large x-ray detectors whirling around me. From the booth in the adjacent room, “I’m pushing that contrast now.” The cool saline floods my veins, up my arm, then a warm sensation like I’m actually pissing myself. “I hope I’m not,” I think to myself. That’s a good way to ruin the hoodie and jeans after hours scan! The machine slows and comes to a stop. He enters, “That’s it.”

I’m reminded of playing in the sanctuary. The radiology suite is mostly empty, I’m in my sneakers, jeans, and hoodie. I have a sense of being where I am not supposed to be, out of compliance in my sneakers.

We hop on the staff elevator with my wife’s badge and join a couple of others wrapping up their shift. I tell one healthcare worker to enjoy her evening as we pass heading to the garage. “Don’t flirt, I’m right here!” Whitney scolds me with a usual jab.

CTs and MRIs, gowns and IVs, after visit summaries and radiology reports are my hymnal and worship bulletins. Imaging is innocuous. What is insidious is the new tumor that has upended our lives. Like seeing the hidden organ pipes behind the 40 foot screen in the sanctuary, to see that this space is sacred, too, radiology after hours, is a boot-strapping exercise with the Divine at your side. Me and that tech were in some sort of Holy communion with images of my brain and my life in the balance.

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