

True Tales of Adam and Whitney and Cancer

Storytelling has given me a sense of longevity in my life, writes brain cancer blogger Adam Hayden.

January 24, 2025 By [Adam Hayden](#)

We're the sort of middle class where I'd describe our furnishings as high-end dorm room. A couple side tables from Target that haven't yet broken, and the newest things are from Wayfair and Ikea. I think the couch is from Costco.

Which, by the way, they have a pre-made taco tray, and, friends, let me tell you, don't sleep on the Costco pre-made taco tray. Great, easy weeknight dinner for the family. The crema in there, chef's kiss, make sure you get a drizzle of crema on your tacos. These are portioned family style and sized so that the taco eaters of the family are easily able to fix three tacos on their plate, and the kid that only eats nuggets still has enough tortillas to roll up a couple with only sour cream. I mean, what can you do?

I'm not complaining about our furniture. I love our house. I just need to set up the story.

We've had giant boxes in our garage for a couple of weeks with a new cabinet for the dining room and an entertainment center for the living room that we've been meaning to assemble.

You can tell we're comfortable middle class because we have a dining room. Most of us have had an apartment or a rental where your kitchen is your dining room is your living room. And a lot of us have had somebody crashing on that couch in the living room that is the dining room that is the kitchen.

Having a dining room is not small shit, bro.

Thing about assembling this stuff is that our entire family passed around a terrible stomach virus, then Whitney got pneumonia, sometime in there I got another bad scan, it snowed for a couple days, and the schools closed. That's all to say, in the garage is where those boxes sat.

I mean, mostly sat. I did need some help from my neighbor, a friend, to move one of the boxes so the plumber could access the water heater for annual maintenance.

Now, my friend is younger and stronger than I am, but in my defense, this was a heavy box. Two

steps in, my left leg/foot (the disabled one) caught a bag of salt for the softener, ironically a softener salt bag, since this was to give the plumber access to the utility area, but I drop my half of the heavy box, trip forward, and face plant directly into it. I think I then crumpled to the cement floor and quickly popped back up like a kid at the playground who trips over his own laces.

This is fine. I'm fine.

Long story short (too late), Whitney and I finally had a few hours this week to start assembling. Whitney was off, and on Wednesday, while I worked, she spent a few hours putting pieces together.

Ad!

Addy! I'm ready to move this!

My work from home space is a small desk in the corner of our bedroom—Ikea desk, if I remember correctly; high-end dormitory collection. The perk is the giant window beside me, except between the hours of roughly 9:15 am and 11:45 am, when the sun blasts my face and has me washed out and squinting my eyes on my Teams calls. Or the blinds are drawn, and I look like a film noir detective, which is definitely a joke I've used. The downside is that I work in our bedroom—or I sleep in my office. It's a time of day thing. If I forget to turn off my monitor it blinks when I'm trying to get to sleep.

Addy!

I walk out to see a grid pattern of pieced-together shelves on their side so they're standing up, vertical I mean, but without the sides yet walled in. Like a giant tic-tac-toe board. This assembled part has to be flipped upright and set on top of the bottom half that was assembled in our dining room. Easy enough, right?

Connect the Components [showing a curved arrow rotating upwards]

Is how the instructions put it.

The plan was to move the assembled piece from the living room into the dining room, and flip it as shown (curved rotating arrow) to set the top onto the bottom. Oh, and dowel rods and screws have to line up.

The lift and walk into the dining room? No notes. 5/5 score.

But the pivot and tilt? This is when disaster strikes.

This is almost certainly my fault.

People who are in loving partnerships know this exact feeling that you are the one that totally fucked up, and you know it! But there's just that one thing you need to say, like "maybe we should

have assembled it in the dining room?" But Sshhh! Don't say that! Do you want to get a divorce?!

This is almost certainly my fault.

Remember, I face planted into a heavy box not but two days before.

I catch a corner of the tic-tac-toe board on one of our tall dining room chairs. I wobbled, the shelves wobble, maybe they collapse in, maybe I just drop them, but at the end of it, I was holding one shelf with a jagged, half broken dowel rod sticking out the end, and the rest are on the floor.

In a combination of hundreds of thousands of years of evolutionary tinkers to try and improve our emotional regulation to somehow survive as a social species of great apes, plus about a decade and a half of being married, neither of us spoke.

I hurriedly walked back to my office, er, I mean our bedroom (time of day thing), Whitney, I believe, sat on the couch, hands covering face, but I sure as shit wasn't looking back.

When it felt like the right time, I walked back out exactly the same way you walk when you're in high school, and you're trying to sneak past mom and dad's room after smoking a joint in your friend's car. I started organizing shelves and collecting dowels and screws. I grabbed a rubber mallet from the garage (gutsy move to come armed) and started hammering flat the cracked press board around the screw holes. Whitney grabbed pliers and the screwdriver, and we started dismantling and re-assembling the cabinet. We used wood glue (not originally called for in the instructions).

I had the sense that I could test the waters.

Well, now we've got a story to tell about it at least.

You know those weeks when you hear the same thing repeated in like three totally different settings? Like, why does this keep coming up? Am I listening for this? Is there something going on in the collective unconscious of news and media that has us thinking on this same theme? What gives?

Three different times this week I've heard people say something about Adam and Whitney stories. I think it's what's gotten us this far. We see the world in stories.

Maybe that's called dissociating.

That was a joke.

That's what pulled us out of my total fuck up and her generous patience is that we value that each moment is a memory. This can't be forced. You can't "make memories." But you can understand that the moment you're in is a possible memory and try to remind yourself of this when things get

dicey. You're in a story that you'll tell. A story that may make up who you are.

What else are we but stories? I was a toddler who played air guitar to Bruce Springsteen in my parent's one bedroom apartment. I was a foul ball to the head in little league. I ate the top off the giant Hershey's Kiss Whitney got me when we were 12 and 13 year olds. Some of you are reading a book, chapter by chapter, that is my brain cancer story.

I didn't really know what I wanted to write about when I sat down tonight, but I guess what I want to say is that next time you drop the shelves, be aware of the moment and consider how it'll show up when you tell the story.

Storytelling has given me a sense of longevity in my life despite the uncertainty of how long it will turn out to be.

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