

Time Traveler's Illusion: Eight Years After My First Radiation Therapy

Returning for another round of radiation after several years, brain cancer blogger Adam Hayden wonders: Am I more or less still me?

April 15, 2025 By [Adam Hayden](#)

"I'm just so happy to see that you're the same Adam!"

I smiled through it. And in just the same way, I'm also happy that I'm the same Adam; the same me. And I'm happy to see him! We really did become friends during the six week course of radiation therapy in 2016.

But behind the smile are the conflicting emotions. Yes, thrilled that after eight years this is the same radiation tech who I got to know when I was first diagnosed, and I'm still more or less me, the same Adam who he still remembers all these years later.

On the other hand, he's just seen the time traveler jump eight years and turn up much the same. An amazing thing! Especially in brain cancer. Most patients wouldn't come back at all, being either dead or, in the rare case, graduated to the coveted annual scan surveillance. This is more common in some tumors than others, and not common at all in the one I got.

The patients who do come back for a second round of radiation mean other stuff stopped working, and the patients are the worse for it. Hence, "I'm just so happy to see you're so much the same!"

But the amazing feat of time traveling is a trick that only works one way. As for me, I'm the one who's had to weather the spacetime continuum. The eight-year Adam that flashed before his eyes was an optical illusion. While I'm presenting as so much the same, I'm battered behind the smile. My resilience is despite it all. I have a preoccupation with pleasing other people and showing them my best. Whitney gets what's left over. This is never fair to her, and she's had to deal with that part of me for a decade plus. I'd travel to speak at an event and call her fatigued from the airport. I'll go out to dinner or a concert, then crash for the next 24 hours.

The tech, surprised by my similarity to who he treated before is also the harbinger of what all this treatment does to you; what this disease does to you. My long-term survival is an evasion of normal disease progression, but it's not an evasion from the disease. Outrunning the law doesn't mean my tumor won't snitch.

I guess so much being the same is all I can think about. The scans, the diagnosis, the mask fitting, the chemo, all demonstrated so perfectly by editing the posts and chapters I wrote many years ago. The dress rehearsal for this act of the play.

And while so much is the same, everything is different, too. I remember writing the line that went something like: you have terminal brain cancer, but you still have to fold the laundry.

All of this is terrifying, but it's also familiar. I'm scared to go in the basement that I've been to a hundred times. This time it feels like the murderer really is lurking in the shadows.

Anyway, I'm pretty sure it's not the same Adam. This Adam is tired. I rallied to meet the energy of the radiation tech, but it's harder to fake nice. Really, it's harder to fake joy.

I suppose we should admit that the technology of time travel does not exist, and nothing about this is the same.

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