

# The Aging Radiologist's wisdom, part I: The circle of life

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*"The curse of mortality. You spend the first portion of your life learning, growing stronger, more capable. And then, through no fault of your own, your body begins to fail."*

—Brandon Mull

Well, Brandon nailed it. I've got a few things on my mind, and, as retirement becomes not just a distant entity, but more a real vision on the horizon, I am thinking more about the process. And, don't get me wrong — I am **NOT** complaining. I am actually enjoying the thought of doing nothing except what **I** want to do on awakening each day. And, I'd like to get to retirement without everything failing.

Well, not *utterly* failing.

How many of you still remember your first day of reading — and not as a resident or fellow? As a real, honest-to-God, attending. Responsible for that last line on the paper: **YOUR** signature. I do.

That day was a comedy of errors. I was in the angio suite. In those days, radiologists did all the cerebral angiograms. Yes, **all** of them. We also watched over trainees doing myelograms and other procedures. Anyway, I had an angiogram going in one room, and a myelogram going in the other. The myelogram was being performed by a good 4th year. I was confident. *I was wrong.*

While the resident was busy placing the spinal needle in the spinal cord (maybe if they had different names, they wouldn't find one another, eh? No harm done, as it turned

out.) I was helping with a diagnostic angiogram on an SAH patient. Found two aneurysms. Called the attending neurosurgeon.

His words to me: "Call me back when you've checked out with your attending."

"**I AM** my attending now."

His words, "Hmm. Well, as they say, it's tough to be a prophet in your own land."

Or how about this one? Clinical staff comes into the reading room. Lots of people reading. They look around and go to the gray hairs — they never go to the young attending. They're looking for wisdom. (In this regard you may actually do better going prematurely gray. I'm not sure how baldness plays into it.) If you're alone, they sigh impassively and come up to ask you a question. Better have a sturdy ego during this time of life. I was asked when my attending would look at the study for the first four years I wore big boy panties. Huge confidence builder.

With time (and experience) you come to know what happens: The services come into the reading room, see an old, grumpy radiologist, and promptly find someone else younger. Less grizzled. And likely happier.

At this point, my friends, you have come full circle of life. Hakuna matata. Perhaps you like that. No one interrupting your reading. On the other hand, maybe you get your nose out of joint because they are going elsewhere.

Keep doing that good work. Mahalo.

*Next month: Advice for the youngsters.*



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