

# Disappearance

Category: Cancer

written by Pris Campbell | June 6, 2021

She was my head nurse on a treatment unit for psychiatric patients. In the course of our work we became as close as sisters. When she developed breast cancer with heavy spread into the lymph nodes, I was devastated but not surprised. She lit one cigarette from the last one throughout those days before smoking was banned. Her doctor told her to put her affairs in order but she refused. Somehow she beat it, feeling that it was cured by her mind and the continued smoking didn't matter.

When we changed jobs, the nurses at the new hospital formed a stop smoking group centered around helping her. They all quit. She didn't. Her daughter begged her. She promised but couldn't.

She eventually moved three hours away and we communicated less often. Love came and went but the smoking continued. When she didn't reply to my last letter I found that she had moved. Her old nursing teacher said my friend had called when she wasn't home, saying she now lived in another state, leaving no address or phone number.

It was only when my husband ran into an old boyfriend here that we discovered she had gone there to die of esophageal cancer. She told one person who told the boyfriend after her death. She didn't tell her parents. She didn't tell her grown daughter. She didn't tell me. I suspect the shame about the smoking was too great.

No one knows where she is buried or if she was cremated. I suspect the latter and think of the multiple ironies.

*G, I miss you still.*

*Pris Campbell  
Lake Worth, Florida*