

# How Not to Fly Away

Category: Cancer

written by Carol Coven Grannick | June 2, 2021

It's 1971 and we are in a green-tinted hospital waiting room, half-sterile, half-filled with sawhorses, wood planks, a drill, sitting in attached sickness-colored plastic chairs. My aunt—my father's sister, whose ability to exclude herself from experiences by analyzing everyone else has diminished during this mutual terror—is at my right. Her long and elegant fingers cover my own. My younger sister, then brother, mother and older sister are to my left. We wait. It is the eternity of waiting for bad news while hoping for good.

The surgeon enters, scrubs matching walls. He lifts a hand and motions my mother to come to him. My mother grabs my older sister's hand and moves with the surgeon behind a five-foot high flimsy room divider. Maybe it's ten feet away from us. Maybe the surgeon really thinks it's a separate room, closed off ceiling to floor, wall to wall. *Asshole*, I think to myself. My rage replaces the nausea of waiting. We are invisible to him.

The surgeon's hand reaches up and pulls off his surgical cap. He's bald. He's stooping. He speaks as if we can't hear. "Your husband has a tumor on his pancreas as big as a grapefruit. It's inoperable and incurable."

My aunt's hand crushes mine. I squeeze my sister's. I know she grabs my brother's. We say nothing because we are supposed to be invisible. But I'm plummeting somewhere into blurred voices and hot swirls, and if I let go of either hand I'll explode or fly away. To somewhere even lonelier than this.

*Carol Coven Grannick  
Evanston, Illinois*