

It was the December following my father's death the previous March. My siblings and I were all pleased at my mother's adjustment to widowhood. She missed and mourned my dad a great deal, but she was keeping busy with multiple activities and was surrounded by a large group of very caring friends. A young widow (67), she had absolutely no interest in meeting another man. When asked by anyone she was quick to respond, "Why would I want to take the chance? I had a great one."

She arrived mid-December for her winter visit to California. It had already snowed in Massachusetts and she was glad to leave the white stuff and cold behind. My younger brother Gerry arrived from Chicago several days later. One day Gerry, my mom, Meaghan and I departed for our usual power-shop trip through a local mall. We parked in the lower level of Nordstrom's and headed up the escalator to begin our shopping marathon.

As she exited the escalator, my mom's face puckered up in pain. "What's wrong?" I asked. "My groan", she replied. "Your groin", I corrected. "What's wrong with your GROIN?" "I don't know", she said ever so faintly. Gerry looked at me with panic spreading across his face. Meaghan looked half concerned-half amused. I took on the role of inquisitor: "did you shovel your driveway?" ---Nod of assent. "I knew it. Can't you just hire someone to shovel for you like everyone else?" I asked, as we all huddled at the top of the escalator. "There's nothing wrong with me-I can shovel if I want to", she responded in a bit more of a defiant tone. Knowing quite well that I had lost that portion of the argument/discussion, I suggested we return to the house so she could rest her pulled GROIN muscle, and three of the shoppers could return to the mall.

On the way to the car I noticed for the first time in several days that my mother was stepping ever so gingerly, limping even, and grimacing each step of the way. Had I not noticed or did this impairment just occur suddenly? Whatever...I needed to get her back to the house and ensure she would stay put and not further strain her injured muscle.

We arrived back home much to Barry's surprise within a half hour of our departure. I explained that my mom had strained her groin shoveling and that we were dropping her off to rest. Meaghan, Gerry and I began to gather our things to head out again, and I noticed the pained and worried expression on my mother's face. "Oh God, c'mon Mom, it's a pulled muscle, it IS NOT CANCER". Cancer was the place she went with every ache and pain. Fortunately she didn't have many (aches and pains) and she'd never had cancer. BUT, this is the place she inevitably went. "Mom, you shoveled heavy snow and you strained a muscle. There is nothing to worry about I AM a nurse you know, and I am sure that's all it is. You do not have cancer!" I was exasperated for sure and made no impression whatsoever.

"Okay, do you want to go to a doctor who can check you out"? I asked. I was not totally shocked when she said, "well--- I'd feel better if I really knew what it was?" *We **know** what it is*, I thought. Useless point.

I pulled a few strings at the hospital where I was employed and got my mom an appointment with one of the internists. Gerry begged out of going, so Meaghan and I accompanied the limping, sad-looking glasses, so Meaghan retrieved the questionnaire and began to ask the questions in the office waiting room. My Mom was somewhat hard of hearing at the time, so as the questions progressed, Meaghan

needed to speak a little louder. By the time she got to the questions about bladder issues, I noticed the girls behind the desk chuckling softly. "Of course I don't have any problems *there*, move on to the next one!" the patient said impatiently. Meaghan began to giggle. The next section was reproductive history--questions about childbirth, answers about C-sections, FOUR of them. Uh-oh---then sex questions. My mother's initial discomfort at being questioned so publicly about such private matters turned into matter-of-fact responses re not "having any since Grampie was gone, of course" and suddenly Meaghan and I were wiggling and uncomfortable. I glanced into the office where the listening staff was now openly amused. I started to giggle, then laugh, and Meaghan and my Mom did too and soon we were all crying and laughing at the same time." Then, the female doctor appeared in the doorway, summoning the jolly, laughing patient into the exam room to determine the origin of her intense (not currently present) pain.

My mother emerged a half hour later. "Groan said. pull", she "GROIN", I corrected.

patient to the outpatient clinic. My mother hadn't YET been treated at the facility, so it was required she complete a lengthy health questionnaire prior to being seen by the doctor. Ooops, she forgot her