

Storied Stuff

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Remember “Suicide Is Painless,” the theme song from M*A*S*H?

Its lyrics played in my head as I found myself in a helicopter bound for the Grand Canyon. Why had I consented to a helicopter ride when I was terrified of flying? I wanted to bolt, but the chopper was airborne, ascending rapidly, the heliport shrinking from view.

Before we boarded, my family and I posed for a group photo. My sister, brother-in-law, and two nephews are all smiles, eager to embark on our Grand Canyon sightseeing tour while I look tense, worried, a real party pooper. I figured I’d toss the photo once I got home.

The poor pilot knew he had a “nervous Nellie” onboard. He kept reciting his credentials, which included tours in Viet Nam plus years of flying tourists around the Canyon. Fixating on my imminent death, I paid him no mind as we flew over endless treetops to the huge gaping hole ... The Grand Canyon!

I closed my eyes in anticipation...until curiosity trumped terror and I dared to look down. As we glided our way along the rim, surreal vistas unfolded below, map-like. Bearing witness to such indescribable vastness and natural beauty touched my spirit—and jangled nerves. I felt like a fearless bird in flight!

“Wow! Look at those rock formations!” I shouted. “There’s the Colorado River!” I exclaimed. I totally relaxed into the experience, trying to hang on to every awesome moment. I didn’t want the flight to end.

I never did trash our family photo. Instead, I framed and prominently displayed it on a bookshelf in my office as a reminder that, despite my needless anxiety and catastrophizing, I had faced down and flown over my fear. For me, that was no small feat.

Fredricka R. Maister is a freelance writer based in Philadelphia whose articles and essays have appeared in a variety of print and online publications.