

**The First Time Is Always the Worst**  
**2003 Erma Bombeck Humor Writing Award Winning Piece**  
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The first mammogram is the worst. Especially when the machine catches on fire. That's what happened to me.

The technician, Gail, positioned me exactly as she wanted me (think a really complicated game of Twister – right hand on the blue, left shoulder on the yellow, right breast as far away as humanly possible from the rest of your body). Then she clamped the machine down so tight, I think my breast actually turned inside out. I'm pretty sure Victoria's Secret doesn't have a bra for that.

Suddenly, there was a loud popping noise. I looked down at my right breast to make sure it hadn't exploded. Nope, it was still flat as a pancake and still attached to my body.

“Oh no!” Gail said loudly. These are, perhaps, the words you least want to hear from any health professional. Suddenly, she came flying past me, her lab coat whipping behind her, on her way out the door. She yelled over her shoulder, “The machine's on fire, I'm going to get help!”

Okay, I was wrong, “The machine's on fire,” are the worst words you can hear from a health professional. Especially if you're all alone and semi-permanently attached to A MACHINE and don't know if it's THE MACHINE in question.

I struggled for a few seconds trying to get free, but even Houdini couldn't have escaped. I decided to go to plan B: yelling at the top of my lung (the one that was still working).

I hadn't seen anything on fire, so my panic hadn't quite reached epic proportions. But then I started to smell smoke coming from behind the partition. This is ridiculous, I thought. I can't die like this. What would they put in my obituary? Cause of death: Breast entrapment?

I may have inhaled some fumes because I started to hallucinate. An imaginary fireman rushed in with a fire hose and a hatchet. "Howdy ma'am," he said. "What happened here?" he asked, averting his eyes.

"My breasts were too hot for the machine," I quipped, as my imaginary fireman ran out of the room again. "This is gonna take the Jaws of Life!"

In reality, Gail returned with a fire extinguisher and put out the fire. She gave me a big smile and released me from the machine, "That's the first time that's ever happened. Why don't you take a few minutes to relax before we finish up?"

At least I think that's what she said. I was running across the parking lot in my backless paper gown at the time. After I'd relaxed for a few years, I figured I might go back. But I was bringing my own fire extinguisher.