



couple has five children.

Part of banishing the stigma of her own struggles has been giving herself permission to be less of a perfectionist, yet more intentional in terms of response to the chemical and hormonal fluctuations she experiences. “As a writer whenever I sit down to write, it’s to actively produce in a way that works for me. When I teach, everything I do is either to build community, confidence or skills,” she shares. “The idea that we’re ‘supposed’ to be doing other things is actually counter-productive. We have to honor the ways in which our brains naturally function.”

## Kathy Collins had a brush with death, and it changed her life

BY EMILY LEAS

**IT’S RARE TO MEET** a person whose eyes sparkle with light, inviting a connection. But that’s the first impression upon meeting Kathy Collins, a woman who wanted nothing more than to be a nun growing up and now finds herself on a journey as a mystic, a chaplain and a writer.

Raised in Port Washington, Wisconsin, Collins’ father insisted she “live her life” before entering the convent. So she did. She got married, had a son, divorced and put herself through the grind of corporate life. Then breast cancer brought her world to a screeching halt, and a new season of her journey began.

She started chemotherapy but her body weakened so badly after just two treatments she landed in the emergency room teetering between life and death. She recovered just enough to leave the hospital but was bedridden for six months while

continuing chemotherapy.

“During this time, I learned the quietness that was speaking to me. An awareness came in,” Collins says.

That awareness allowed her to evaluate her faith, question the visions she was having of herself in a past life and embrace the connections with her brother who had died as an infant. She began to wonder if these were just coincidences, or if we are all connected somehow.

While she was bedridden in what Collins calls her “cell,” she watched the tree outside her window lose weak branches in winter and spring winds so it could grow new, healthy, strong branches.

“I, too, realized I had to let some weak branches go in my life so I could grow.”

Collins dropped the material things and fast-paced job and moved to Sun Prairie to take care of her aging parents. By slowing down, she says her world opened up.

She began to connect and understand her experiences and visions the universe was showing her and realized that all signs pointed to becoming a chaplain. Trusting her instincts, she applied to the chaplain program at Meriter Hospital in 2015 and was accepted that same year.

This example is something that Liz Awe, Collins’ friend and the wife of her cousin, has learned from Collins over the last few years.

“She trusts her gut feeling. So many of us aren’t in the habit of doing that. That inner sense is very important to believe in. If you feel it’s right for you, go with it,” says Awe.

As Collins started her chaplain training program, her mom had a serious fall. She recalls the 90 minutes at the end when her mother’s eyes cleared. She held her mom’s hand and poured her love, memories and appreciation out. As tears trickled down her mother’s cheeks, Collins kissed them away and watched her pass peacefully to the other side.

Now when she works with families to transition a loved one from life to death, she encourages them to talk directly to their loved one and it becomes a peaceful, joyous occasion.

Wanting to share her story and the lessons she learned, Collins re-read years of journals and started to see how all her experiences fit together. She decided to write a book to share her message of compassion and synchronicity. She published “The Mystic Chaplain” in 2018 and has spent much of the year sharing her story at book signings in the area.

She closes her book by saying her journey is not finished, but instead this is just another season in her life. Her weak branches will continue to break away as the seasons change so she can continue to grow. 🌱

because we had access to resources and education, plus each other to rely on,” she explains. “Addiction is usually a way of suppressing pain and a lot of pain comes out of poverty and unstable beginnings.”

Baker’s spouse, Ryan Ulrich, agrees that his clients often are trapped in desperate cyclical patterns. “Many of the people I represent have broken the law to support their habits or blunt the edge of their anxiety,” he says. “Without drugs and alcohol, I would be practicing a different type of law.”

Baker and Ulrich are candid about the financial struggles they’ve faced over the years while scraping by as undergraduate and grad students, then again in the years that followed as their family rapidly grew. The hormones of pregnancy and the initial postpartum period led Baker to crave more offspring as a way to ward off the undiagnosed, chronic depression she’s been grappling with since adolescence. “I saw it last in myself,” she reveals. The



Kathy Collins