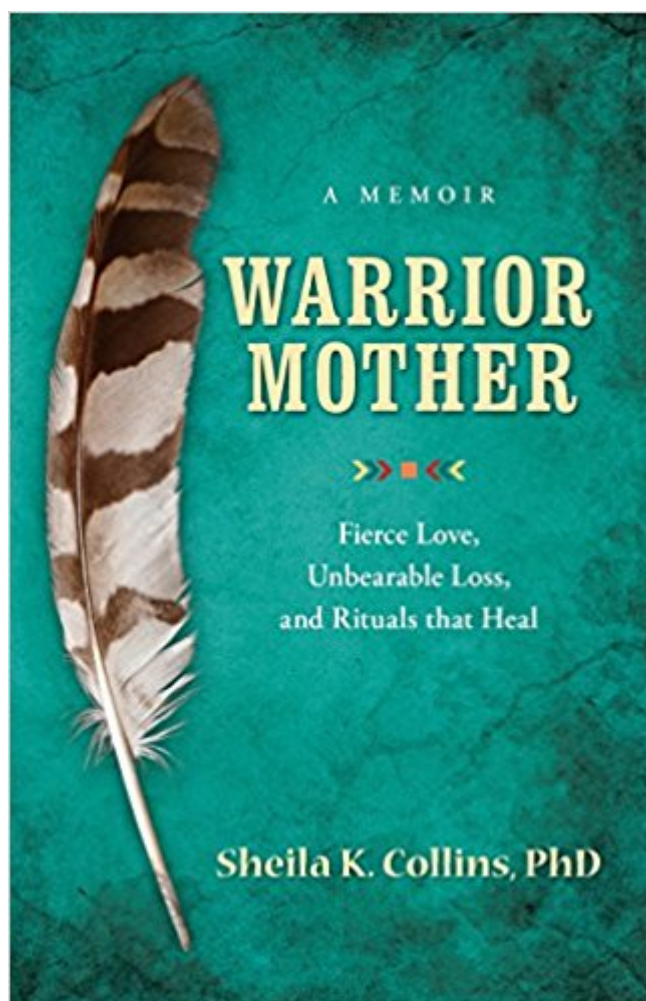


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# Warrior Mother: A Memoir Of Fierce Love, Unbearable Loss, And Rituals That Heal



## Synopsis

Warrior Mother: Fierce Love, Unbearable, Loss, and Rituals that Heal is the true story of a mother's fierce love and determination, and her willingness to go outside the bounds of the ordinary when two of her three adult children are diagnosed with life-threatening disease.

## Book Information

Paperback: 325 pages

Publisher: She Writes Press (August 28, 2013)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1938314468

ISBN-13: 978-1938314469

Product Dimensions: 5.6 x 0.7 x 8.6 inches

Shipping Weight: 12.8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.9 out of 5 stars 25 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #533,530 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #166 in Books > Health, Fitness & Dieting > Diseases & Physical Ailments > Cancer > Breast Cancer #301 in Books > Parenting & Relationships > Family Relationships > Parent & Adult Child #1011 in Books > Parenting & Relationships > Family Relationships > Motherhood

## Customer Reviews

People would often say to me, "This isn't the way it's supposed to be, children dying before their parents." They said it when my 31-year-old son, Kenneth, died of AIDS and again, seven years later, when my 42-year-old-daughter, Corinne, died of breast cancer. When Corinne died, I got a phone call from my cousin, who had lost her own daughter in a car accident twenty years before: "This shouldn't be happening to you," she said in an attempt to comfort me. When I asked who it should be happening to, she said, "Someone who hasn't already lost a child." But I prefer not to think this way. When I am in that place of questioning the circumstances of my own life, I picture the gravestones in the historical cemeteries our history buff father took us to visit as children. We kids would run from stone to stone, doing the math, and discovering children our own ages or younger buried there. I remind myself it's only in recent generations and in a country as fortunate as our own, where parents can expect to raise all their children, and to predecease them. So I set out to write about my experiences as a mother who has lost two adult children to horrific diseases. I wrote partly for my own healing, and partly to share with others what my family and I learned in the process. Many people did not understand my spending so much time writing about this, especially

my husband, Richard, whose style of grieving was entirely different from my own. He and I finally came to an understanding several years into the project, when I returned from a writer's workshop in Iowa City, held a couple of weeks after the town had suffered a significant flood. I brought back two of the thousands of sandbags that had been stacked as barricades against the rising waters. The empty sandbags had been decorated and made into handbags by artists in the community, and sold to raise money to help the local Habitat for Humanity with the cost of the clean-up. Before I'd left for the writers' workshop, Richard had said, "I hope someday you will find something more pleasant to write about." My first night home I laid out the two handbags made from the sandbags alongside a folder that contained some of my writing. "My writings are my sandbags," I told him. "We have to make art, or at least something useful out of what happens to us, and we don't get to pick what that is." People have asked me how I've survived all the tragedy and loss in my life. Perhaps I've written the stories of my journeys with my children, other family members, and my best friend, in order to answer that question for myself. I know my grieving process has been strongly affected by remembering how hard both my children fought to stay alive, and all that they were willing to do to gain more life. I have never wanted to dishonor them by wasting one moment of whatever precious life I am given. Like a prospector panning for gold, with the help of my journal, I have panned and sifted through these experiences: of life, death, and the places in between. I have shaken the sieve in such a way as to uncover the valuable shiny nuggets in these stories, amongst the dirt, pebbles, and other debris. This sifting and sorting has been, like the experiences themselves, tough at times, but also enlightening. Ultimately, I've come to appreciate the many ways that people confront illness, diagnoses and treatment decisions, and yes, even death; the many faces and masks of grief, as well as the precious gifts that come in dreadful-looking packages. (from *Warrior Mother - Fierce Love, Unbearable Loss, and the Rituals that Heal* by Sheila K. Collins PhD.)

At a dance workshop, held to address the threat of the pandemic AIDS, the author admits she doesn't know how to be the mother to her gay son. With the help of women in her spirituality group, she learns to say yes to what life is asking of her son, and of her, as his mother. The author's best friend, dying of breast cancer, asks the author to accompany her through what turns out to be, fourteen days of her dying, ironically preparing this mother for what lie ahead with her own children. Five years later, the author and her family confront again, a life and death circumstance - her 40-year-old daughter's diagnosis of breast cancer. When the customary treatments fail, her daughter decides on a bone marrow transplant and the author visits a healer in Brazil on her behalf.

Experience as a professional social worker and family therapist doesn't always help the author to cope, but her familiarity with improvisational song, dance, and storytelling, and women's spirituality rituals carry her through. The book follows the family through memorials and celebrations of lives well lived, the impact of grief on those left behind, and the rituals that help them heal.

"You gain strength, courage, and confidence by every experience in which you stop to look fear in the face... The danger lies in refusing to face the fear, in not daring to come to grips with it." Eleanor Roosevelt, 1884-1962  
Sheila Collins, author of this remarkable book, shares with the reader the agony and the reward of following this sage advice. In a somehow heart warming voice, *Warrior Mother* gently includes us on her remarkable journey. A journey almost beyond belief. We follow her along the path of a mother who epitomizes fierce love and loyalty to her family while staring fear in the face. With courage and strength, she grapples with her fear and amazingly endures the most improbable of circumstances: deaths of two of her three grown children; deaths brought by entirely different illnesses, completely out of her control and in a breathtakingly short period of time. Through reading and 'listening' to this story, the author gently guides us along a path of wisdom. Intimate, informative, empowering ... this read is most likely like no other you will experience. Crisp, clear and coherent, the author brings hope to all who suffer the pain of loss. A role model for the bereaved. A guide for the harrowing times brought by sorrow. A promise that, at the end of such treacherous journeys, there is joy and strength beyond comprehension. This read is highly recommended to all who marvel at our shared human condition.

I just finished reading a book called, "*Warrior Mother*". I enjoyed it. I have met the woman who wrote it. Sheila K. Collins PhD. She talks about the heartbreaking and soul fulfilling situations she shared with two of her adult children as they died. Her son, Ken died from HIV/AIDS and several years later the death of her adult daughter, Corrine from Breast Cancer. This is not a dark book. . .it certainly has dark moments, but the moments of light and life are much more uplifting to those of us who have suffered similar trials. God has a way and He brings us through to the light of an otherwise desperate situation. I suggest you go to [www.warriormother.com](http://www.warriormother.com) and purchase *Warrior Mother* by Sheila K. Collins. May you be blessed!!!

Sheila Collins speaks heart-to-heart with her readers. She immerses us in her own story of a beautiful family that is forced to face unimaginable cataclysm. It's the powerful drama of a mother accompanying two of her three adult children on their end-of-life journeys. It is also the story of two

young adults who are leaving much behind. But this is no sentimental tear jerker. Sheila has deftly articulated the grimmest moments with humor, dance, and glimmers of stubborn hope. "Warrior Mother" is a loving and fascinating affirmation by a courageous woman who, in spite of devastating loss, chooses life. It is our good fortune that she can share these insights with us.

I don't buy that many books. I usually go to the library. I called my local library and they didn't have it. Later that night I decided to get the sample on my kindle. When I was done reading the sample I wanted more. I could not put the book down. Read it in a day and a half. An amazing book. I would recommend this book to all of my friends.

Sheila Collins has endured what few people have endured - losing two children to remarkably tragic circumstances. Her book not only goes through the events, methodically and emotionally, it reveals her growth through those events.

Warrior Mother is an incredible book that I would recommend for book clubs. It has several universal themes that speak to all of us about grief and loss, courage and healing. I felt like I was given a gift when I read Sheila's amazing journey.

A love only a mother can give, compassion, spirituality, faith, medicine, grief, family bonds... it's all there. Well written and incredibly moving I found this book to open up my sense of presence in the world, to myself and friends and family.

Beautifully written story. Heartbreaking and empowering.

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Warrior Mother: A Memoir of Fierce Love, Unbearable Loss, and Rituals that Heal  
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