



BIO & BACKGROUND

Sheila K. Collins believes that life's toughest challenges call us out to discover our better selves. In facing such challenges as grief, loss, illness, and death of a loved one, we become who we truly are. Her writing, keynote speaking, and improvisational artist performances, contain thought-provoking discoveries of ways to deal with the tough challenges life asks of us so that we become stronger and more resilient from having met them.

Her award-winning book, *Warrior Mother: Fierce Love, Unbearable Loss and the Rituals that Heal* tells of her journeys with two of her three adult children and her best friend through their life-threatening illnesses and deaths and of the rituals that helped her family to heal.

Using her background as a social work professor, therapist, and performance artist, Dr. Collins demonstrates in her presentations and workshops how art-based tools have helped her and can help others get through life's toughest challenges. The audio version of *Warrior Mother*, narrated by the author is available wherever you get your podcasts.

Her engaging 2016 TEDx talk, *When Death Threatens* demonstrates the challenge of being a caregiver to a loved one dealing with a death-defying illness including gifts present in that circumstance. The revised edition of her book for professional and family caregivers with co-author Christine was released in 2018. *Stillpoint: A Self Care Playbook for Caregivers to Find Ease, Time to Breathe, and Reclaim Joy* contains art-based tools, stories, and skills providing encouragement and support for caregivers to take care of themselves while taking care of others.

BACKGROUND AND EDUCATION

Dr. Collins has a bachelor of philosophy from Monteith College, Wayne State University in Detroit, a Masters in Social Work from the Wayne State University School of Social Work in Detroit and a PhD in Adult and Continuing Education from the University of Nebraska, Lincoln.

In her social work career, Dr. Collins co-founded and directed the Center for Co-Equal Education at the University of Nebraska, training and consulting with school districts across Nebraska on their implementation of Title 9. As a social work professor at the University of Nebraska Dr. Collins headed an NIMH funded grant to work with agencies to improve services to Native American and Mexican American clients in the panhandle of Nebraska. She taught at Texas Christian University in Fort Worth and at the University of Texas at Arlington where, inspired by research from her dissertation, *The Career Development of Women Administrators in Social Work, Nursing and Education*, she co-founded and directed the Women and Work Research and Resource Center working with corporations to better utilize their female employees. After leaving the university,

Dr. Collins co-founded and directed with her husband, the largest outpatient behavioral health care clinic in North Texas, Iatreia Institute for the Healing Arts.

Even to the present day, Sheila considers herself a dancer. Having performed in a regional ballet company while still in high school, and later in summer stock, in nightclub productions in Las Vegas, in an award-winning film, in the national company of a Broadway show, as a founding member of a contemporary dance company Festival Dancers, out of the Jewish Community Center in Detroit, and now as an improvisational performance artist, she calls on lessons learned in her dancing life. She is passionate about empowering others to trust the wisdom of their own bodies and use improvisational singing, dancing, storytelling tools to access creativity and find support and ease when traversing through tough times.

Sheila currently directs the Wing & A Prayer Pittsburgh Players, an InterPlay-based improvisational performance troupe whose mission is to assist arts and human service organizations in achieving their noble purposes. In collaboration with community nonprofits, the group has developed programs and performances to address such tough topics as ending the stigma of mental illness, changing the race dance, and saying No More to gender violence. She travels nationally and internationally assisting individuals and organizations to tell their stories in transforming ways. Her blog Dancing With Everything is on her website. <http://www.sheilakcollins.com>