

LOUISVILLE, Ky. — Sharon Joann Kenney Baker died in a hospital with only a nurse by her side, a victim of the coronavirus. She was 56.

“As hard as it is to lose a sister, it was 1,000 times harder because we couldn’t be there with her,” said Angela Kenney Myers. “Can you imagine having to say goodbye to a loved one via Zoom?”

She was one of three sisters and three brothers who grew up in a close family in Louisville's Portland neighborhood.

“My sister ended every phone conversation and every get-together we had with 'I love you to the moon and back,’” Myers, who lives in Panama City Beach, Fla., wrote Sunday in an email.



Sharon Joann Kenney Baker died of COVID-19. *(Photo: Special to the Courier Journal)*
Baker was a sister, mother, grandmother, cousin and aunt.

She attended Ahrens High School before going to and graduating from Shawnee High School in 1981. She enlisted in the Army and received an honorable discharge. She worked in the office of a pediatric cardiologist and at KingFish restaurant.

She was an avid Pittsburgh Steelers and Louisville Cardinals fan. And she loved anything and everything related to the Wizard of Oz.

She already had known extreme hardship.

She was forced to stop working when she was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. And her only son overdosed on New Year’s Eve.

She buried him Jan. 8.

Joann, as her family called her, got sick in early March and was diagnosed with pneumonia at Norton Audubon Hospital.

Myers said the hospital told them Joann tested negative for coronavirus and sent her home. But a little more than a week later, she had to go back by ambulance to the hospital and never returned.

The family posted nothing on social media about the cause of her hospitalization, Myers said.

"We chose not to because we didn't want the negative feedback/comments from those who were saying 'this is all a hoax,' or as one lady put it, 'hogwash.'"

Baker was placed on a ventilator, then in a medically induced coma, but her Delivery: Varies

She had to be resuscitated twice, and on Wednesday, the day before she died, the doctor said she had developed a staph infection in both lungs, Myers said.

The medical team could no longer perform CPR on her because it would cause her excruciating pain.

She was never going to recover, the family was advised. It was time to remove her from the ventilator.

So, on Thursday afternoon, the nurses at Norton Audubon set up an iPad by her bed so that her daughter and her brothers and sisters could see her and say goodbye.

"You cannot imagine how painful it is to watch a loved one die alone with no family there to hold their hands, tell them that you love them, let them know that it's OK to rest, the fight is over, go in peace.

"As a family, we couldn't even be together to hug and support each other," Myers said.

She died April 2, one of 11 Kentuckians to lose their battle with the virus that day. Baker was cremated.

In her obituary, the family announced that “due to the COVID-19 restrictions the family is unable to have any funeral services at this time.”

Myers reached out to a reporter Sunday morning, asking that her sister’s story be told “so that other families who are or will go through the same thing know that they are not alone. I know there is some comfort in that.”

She also said she hoped that those who still don’t think this virus will affect them — who don’t comply with the “healthy at home” initiative and who continue to gather and hang with their friends — might realize how devastatingly real this is.”

Announcing her sister’s death on Facebook, she said she had read “all the posts with political blaming and finger-pointing. I can tell you none of that matters” — that “who did what when doesn’t matter.

“What matters now more than anything is that we stay home, keep physical distance, wear masks and gloves when we have to go out, and wash your hands. This virus is going to get much worse. I beg you all to do your part.”

Andrew Wolfson: