Caring enough to make a difference

By KEN MERRILL
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Ever ask a kid what they wanted to be when they grew up?
Kristi Caddock knew.

"As a kid, when people would ask, 'what do you want to be?', I always told people 'a nurse,'" Caddock said in a phone interview Tuesday.

Caddock is a nurse practitioner with the Kraemer Cancer Center at the Froedtert & Medical College of Wisconsin St. Joseph's Hospital in the town of Polk.

Caddock was born in Milwaukee and, after her family moved to Manitowoc in 1990, graduated from Manitowoc Lutheran High School. She was an undergraduate pursuing a degree in nursing at Marian College in Fond du Lac — now Marian University when her grandfather's diagnosis of lung cancer gave her further direction for her career.

Experiencing that with my family kind of drove me to go into cancer care," she said. "The caring aspect is what spoke to me."

What family hasn't been touched by cancer? According to the National Cancer Institute, nearly 1.7 million Americans were diagnosed with some form of cancer in 2016 and almost 600,000 people will die from the disease.

Sadly, Caddock and her family have been struck over and over. Her experience only strengthened her resolve.

"I had a mother-in-law pass away with breast cancer way too young, as well, so I think going through it taught me the whole emotional side of things and to try to be a comfort," Caddock said.

After earning a bachelor's degree in nursing at Marian in 2000, Caddock went on to earn a master's in nursing at Marian in 2006. While earning her master's degree, full time work as a registered nurse in a cancer center gave her further insights into her chosen field.

After passing a national board exam to become a nurse practitioner, Caddock worked in family practice and urgent care for a year but, she said, "missed seeing my cancer patients." So she turned to oncology, or cancer care, nine years ago. She's been with the Kraemer Cancer Center for about six years.

"What I've gone through personally with my family members has really shown me that although some days are emotionally difficult — we get very close with our patients — they need strong people to be there, to guide them, to hold their hand and to give them hope," Caddock said. "We definitely have hard days but there are also good stories, too.

The most important thing for me is to be the patient advocate and to give them that sense of hope if they're struggling with something," she said.

It goes without saying that Caddock is bright and dedicated to patient care, so why not take it a step further and become a doctor? "I saw how some family members had been cared for and I felt like nursing was more for me than being a physician," Caddock said.

"I knew that I could take nursing further, to become a nurse practitioner, and do a little bit of both. I'm a nurse and I can also do some other things — prescribing medications and lab work and exams and things like that to take on both roles."

Both roles? How about another?

Caddock also teaches at Concordia University in Mequon, mentoring nursing students as they progress in their careers.

"Teaching or mentoring students is something that's been a part of my career, especially working in a teaching hospital," she said. "It's an adjunct clinical instructor, so I work with nurse practitioner students at their clinical sites, guiding them through their learning experience."

"I have anywhere from three to six students a semester and I visit them at their clinical sites and grade all their clinical notes," Caddock said. "I also take students with me to let them observe how to do exams and evaluate lab work and medications, too."

So, with two jobs and a family — she and her husband, Carl, who works in insurance, have two boys — that's enough to keep her busy right? Nope.

"My step mother was diagnosed with multiple myeloma, which is a blood cancer so I worked with the Leukemia Lymphoma Society in 2015 to raise money for the organization," Caddock said. As part of the group's fundraising, she ran a half marathon in San Francisco in October 2015.

What advice might Caddock give to a young person considering a career in nursing?

"It's a great career field," she said. "You have ample opportunities to take care for patients in so many different ways. The most important thing for me is to be the patient advocate and to give them that sense of hope if they're struggling with something."

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The Chris-word puzzle

An original Washington County-themed crossword puzzle by Daily News copy editor Christopher Becker

ACROSS

1 — Business school subj.
5 — Rock concert venue
10 — On its way
14 — Jason's ship or Affleck film
15 — Regner Park
17 — This village in the southeast part of the county
20 — Directors Ang or
21 — Campus military org.
22 — Room coolers, for
31 — Words from Wordsworth
57 — Mediterranean restaurant that opened in
66 — Ursine animal
77 — He played Ricky on "I..."

3 — Shrek and Fiona
4 — Radiohead's first single
5 — River through Florence
6 — "Norma Rae" director
26 — Noted Washington County landmark that also goes by the longer name of the Basilica of the National... of St. Joseph's Hospital in the town of Polk.
31 — Words from Wordsworth
50 — Disease in 2015's
53 — Divulge
54 — Place where you'd get your face cleaned
55 — Grows weary
57 — Mediterranean
63 — Fraud
66 — Watering hole
68 — Gopher State: Abbr.
71 — Short
74 — Drama set to music
77 — He played Ricky on "I..."

6 — "Norma Rae" director
13 — The most common short-haired breed of dog
18 — "Annie" creator
19 — Ultimate test
24 — Salts used medicinally
26 — Noted Washington County landmark that also goes by the longer name of the Basilica of the National... of St. Joseph's Hospital in the town of Polk.
40 — "Unsafe at Any Speed" author
41 — Lopsided
44 — Common title starter
45 — "Behold... Hamlet"
50 — Disease in 2015's
69 — Gargantuan
70 — The state capital
72 — Adolescent affliction
73 — The most common short-haired breed of dog
74 — Drama set to music
77 — He played Ricky on "I..."

DOWN

1 — Two under par
2 — Radiohead's first single
3 — Shrek and Fiona
4 — Radiohead's first single
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