

# SENIOR LIFESTYLES

## Rochesterian lives her 80s with youthful zest and vigor

By Rob Cullivan  
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — As she sat on a couch in the airy, sunshine-filled living room of her city home, 86-year-old Ione Taber Collins looked through a window that opened up to the house's back yard where lilacs grew.

"That's why I like Rochester," Collins said as she talked about the flowers. "Its blooming season is so full."

Life seems to be a perpetual spring for Collins, who participated in a conference May 23 at Nazareth College titled "Golden Opportunities: Growing Older with Independence, Opportunity and Dignity."

The conference was co-sponsored by the college and Rochester Friendly Senior Services, a housing, health-care and community programs agency.

Collins spoke as part of a panel that examined how senior citizens can make the most of their lives. Following the conference, she agreed to be interviewed at her home last week to elaborate on her perspectives on staying active in her 80s.

First off, she gave advice on how to reach her age.

"My considered opinion is that if you want to live a long time, pick out long-lived ancestors and be born into a family that enjoys each other," she said.

Having grown up near her cousins in Dallas, Texas, Collins remembered how all her relatives loved to get together on



Judy Sánchez

Ione Collins, who is 86 years old, enjoys creatively decorating chairs with freehand painting in addition to other activities.

a regular basis.

"The cousins were just as much at home with us as cousins can be," she said.

Collins still keeps in touch with her nieces, nephews and grandchildren, and she relocates to Texas each winter to be close to a granddaughter who lives in San Antonio.

"I'm an endangered species when there's ice on the steps," Collins said jokingly.

Up until recently, Collins also regularly rented out part of her house to such young people as area medical students, she said, and their presence has kept her mind active.

She also belongs to the board of directors of the YMCA on Arnett Boulevard, and served on the city's zoning board in the 1970s and early 1980s.

She has taken classes at the Memorial Art Gallery, the Strong Museum and at Colgate Rochester Divinity School, and during her interview, she promoted education on a permanent basis for all cit-



Ione Collins

izens, whether they are 8 or 80. Collins said that over the years she has devoted a serious amount of time to learning everything from arts and crafts to photography and theology.

"School is never out," Collins said. "I think if you're going to be happy in life, have curiosity rather than talent. That makes life much more interesting."

She has also raised two daughters — Claire, who died of cancer at age 35, and Mitzie, a Rochester resident and well-known musician and recording artist in the area.

Collins' husband, Warren John Collins, died in 1961, and she remembered him as a man with a mind as lively as hers. She recalled, for example, that he became a churchgoer after studying the Epistles of St. Paul with great care. Collins said that her husband had a knack for making the apostle's words come alive by the way he spoke them.

"It was almost as if Paul was out there on the porch," she said.

As for her own Christian beliefs, Collins mused that her belief in God — and in particular, the Trinity — has also kept her healthy and active for years in a manner similar to the way taking classes and volunteering has.

"I have a very strong feeling of the awesomeness of God through what I understand about Christ," said Collins, an Episcopalian.

She added with a smile: "I don't believe in guardian angels, but I have one."

Life is simply too complex to have happened without the guidance of a creator, she said, and believing that has made her get up each day for eight decades.

"It's just too big to be an accident," she said of life. "Maybe that has something to do with not drying up and blowing away."

Indeed, Collins stressed she had no desire to be taken up by the winds of time just yet. For example, she said, had she not lived as long as she has, she would not have been able to hear her daughter's Mitzie's latest album, a selection of Christmas music.

"It is a lovely thing," she said. "What if I'd missed that? There's so much still around the corner and over the hill."

### Thoughts to Consider



EDWIN SULEWSKI  
Funeral Director

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First it is important to make sure the child is honestly included in all the information and planning. This means being honest about the death and answering the child's questions. It also means allowing but not forcing children to go to the funeral or visitation as they wish. Secondly, a child needs love and security. Let a child know they will be cared for, take an interest in schoolwork and include them in play. Some children resent being pressured to accept burdens beyond their reach. "Taking over for Dad or Mom" may be too much responsibility. Naturally, changes will occur but a child needs time and help in adjusting to them.

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