



Constance Collins Cain

November 12, 2020

Constance Sullivan Collins Cain, 96, beloved wife of James Francis Collins (1919-1974), and George Harvey Cain (1919-2012), mother, grandmother, great-grandmother, sister and aunt, died November 12 at the age of 96 in Connecticut. She lived a life as rich and varied as the 10 decades of American history she took part in and helped shape.

Born on January 29, 1924 in Holyoke, MA, the second of nine children of George and Elizabeth (O'Neill) Sullivan, she was raised during the Great Depression in Pawtucket, Rhode Island, and West Springfield, Massachusetts, where her parents founded the Sullivan Paper Company.

In 1944, Constance left for Washington, D.C. to serve as a Petty Officer First Class in the W.A.V.E.S (Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service). She intentionally failed the secretary's exam to get a more interesting job, a ploy that worked: she drafted maps for pilots serving in the Pacific Arena. She always remained a proud veteran and often marched in Memorial Day parades and hung an American flag outside her front door every day.

When the war ended in 1946, Constance used the G.I. bill to pay for her education at Sargent College (now part of Boston University) where she earned a BS in Physical Therapy and Physical Education. She met the love of her life, Jim Collins, a World War II veteran (Captain, Army Air Force), who

was attending Harvard Law School. They lived in the same building in Cambridge where he was clearly smitten by the petite, green-eyed, auburn-haired "Sullivan girl." They wed in West Springfield on January 22, 1949.

The best years of her life were by her husband's side as they built a political career together in Connecticut. Born and raised in Hartford, Jim ran as a Republican candidate for Congress in Hartford County in 1962 and 1964. A tremendous fund-raiser and campaigner for both her husband and for the Republican Party, Constance served as President of the Republican Women's Association of Connecticut and as an Alternate Delegate to the Republican Convention in 1964 and again in 1968. Throughout that decade she also served as a beloved and much respected kindergarten teacher at Noah Webster School in Hartford.

In 1973, Governor Thomas Meskill appointed Jim Collins to a judgeship, a fitting reward for all the years of community service both Constance and Jim had contributed as a couple for decades in the state. Jim loved the bench, but died of cancer in 1975, age 56, a devastating loss to his wife and children. In her mind's eye and heart, he never truly left her.

Constance found a way to sustain her family, with her two youngest daughters, Patricia and Mary, still teenagers in high school. All of her life she provided endless amounts of emotional and financial support to her children, their children and her great grandchildren, a level of giving that fundamentally improved the lives of all them.

Devoted to family and friends to the last, in the halls of political power in the 1960s but never tainted by it, athletic and irreverent when women were told to be neither, Constance Sullivan Collins Cain lived a full, generous, spirited life.

She leaves behind her four children, James Barry Collins (Arlington, VA),

Elizabeth Frances Collins (West Hartford, CT), Patricia Alice Collins (McLean, VA) and Mary Ellen Collins (West Hartford, CT) and her husband Scott Franklin, as well as seven grandchildren, Domenic Scarano of Apex, NC, Jimmy Scarano of Arlington, VA, Kathleen Limbaugh of Virginia Beach, VA, Anna Collins of Virginia Beach, VA, Liz Foley of College Park, MD, Margaret Collins of Reston, VA, and Donald Collins of Los Angeles, CA. She leaves four great-grandchildren: London Collins, Bryn Foley, and Ryan and Claire Scarano. She outlived her sisters Shirley and Sylvia and brothers Robert, Terry, David; her brothers Richard, Tommy, and Roger survive her.

She will be buried beside her beloved Jim, and down the hill from her second husband George Cain, in Fairview Cemetery in West Hartford, CT. Due to COVID restrictions the family will have a private funeral. Online expressions of sympathy may be made at www.molloyfuneralhome.com

Tribute Wall



“ *Bountiful Rose Basket was purchased for the family of Constance Collins Cain.* ”



November 23, 2020 at 04:26 PM



“ *1 file added to the tribute wall* ”



Patricia Gardner - November 23, 2020 at 03:20 PM



“ *4 files added to the tribute wall* ”



Patricia Gardner - November 23, 2020 at 03:19 PM

PG

“ Dear family of Aunt Connie, I was so sorry to learn of her passing. She was a tiny spitfire and such a lovely woman. Such good memories! All my love, Pat Sullivan Gardner

Patricia Gardner - November 23, 2020 at 03:15 PM

MM

“ Dear Betty, Mary, Jim, and Patricia,

Phil and I are so sorry for your loss. We treasured the times spent with your mom, whether in West Hartford or on Cape Cod. She always shared wonderful stories and exclaimed interest in our lives.

We wish we could be with you and promise to keep close.

Will take a walk on the Bay side today to celebrate her life.

Love, Mary and Phil

Mary O'Connor & Phil Muisener - November 16, 2020 at 12:10 PM

BC

Thank you so much for you loving support. Love Betty

Betty Collins - November 16, 2020 at 04:27 PM

SO

“ Dear Betty and Family,
We are so very sorry to hear of the loss of your dear and wonderful mother. Sending caring thoughts and lots of love for the coming days.

~Your friends at Hill-Stead

Susan Orred - November 16, 2020 at 10:31 AM

BC

What a lovely message. Thank you all, very loving and thoughtful. Love Betty

Betty Collins - November 16, 2020 at 04:30 PM



“ *Peaceful White Lilies Basket was purchased for the family of Constance Collins Cain.*



November 15, 2020 at 07:20 PM

K(

“ *It's hard to put into words how Gran made an impact on my life. Gran always supported me, loved me, pushed me to be better, and showed me how to be resilient. I will cherish our memories - whether it be Christmas in NY, summer in Cape Cod, losing at scrabble, celebrating birthdays/holidays, or just enjoying family time together. I am grateful to have known her and to have spent so much time with her. She will be missed by many and I will think of her often.*

Kathleen Limbaugh (Scarano) - November 15, 2020 at 02:44 PM

JS

“ *Gran was a force of nature. It was a great joy to share some of life's simple pleasures with her—like a Turkey sandwich slathered with Coleman's mustard or a marathon Scrabble game (she taught me how to play the game the right way). I'll never forget her advice to “do at least one thing you enjoy every day.” Truly a one of a kind human being and a world class grandmother.*

Jimmy Scarano - November 15, 2020 at 02:24 PM

VS

“ To the Collins family,
I was so privileged to have known your mom and gram. What an inspiring woman. She was caring and a fierce advocate for her family and for causes dear to her heart. What a pioneer in all parts of her life. I relished hearing stories about her life from Mary and being able to visit with her and hear her endearing New England accent. My heart breaks for you. You were so very blessed to have her so many years. Your dad will now have her by his side again.



Vivian Spathopoulos - November 15, 2020 at 09:23 AM

MC

My mom always loved your spirit and drive!

Mary Collins - November 15, 2020 at 09:14 PM

JO

“ Judith Sullivan, Chris Sullivan and Kate O'Neil purchased the Enchanted Cottage for the family of Constance Collins Cain.



Judith Sullivan, Chris Sullivan and Kate O'Neil - November 14, 2020 at 05:01 PM

JC

“ Mrs. Collins was my Kindergarten teacher, my mom's best friend and a true confidant. As a little girl I was the ball girl for my mom and Mrs. Collin's tennis matches at Elizabeth Park. They would hit some, then chat some and had a friendship my mom cherished until the end. Mrs. Collins helped guide me, towards a career as a physical therapist and was there for me several times with the loss of my father and mother. I will miss that gleam in her eyes and the amazing strength of those hugs. To Mary, Betty, Tricia, Jim and all of your families, I am so sorry for your loss. Your mom will be truly missed by all of us Sheas.

Julie Shea Crocker - November 13, 2020 at 08:47 PM

MC

Julie--I can't believe my mom had several of you as students in her kindergarten class! She loved your parents so much; they were remarkable friends.

Mary Collins - November 13, 2020 at 08:56 PM

RS

“ Dear Collins Family,
What a wonderful person your mother was! She was my mom's best friend to the end and I know my mom cherished her friendship so much. I especially remember how helpful and kind she was to us all after we lost my father. My heart goes out to you all and I know all of us Sheas wish we could be there with you to celebrate her life and give you lots of hugs. I posted a few pictures of her & mom for you!

-Rosemary Shea-Cobb

Rosemary Shea-Cobb - November 13, 2020 at 07:22 PM

MC

Rosemary--Thank you so much for taking the time to remember my mom here. The last time I saw your mom, I went with my mom to Boston and we met Kathleen at the assisted care place your mom was living in. They sat outside on a bench and held hands. Friends to the end. So appreciate these photos.

Mary Collins - November 13, 2020 at 08:56 PM

RS

“ 3 files added to the album Memories Album



Rosemary Shea-Cobb - November 13, 2020 at 07:10 PM

KS

“ *To all the Collins family I write with great sadness and sorrow your mom was an amazing person and we were so lucky to live across the street I feel fortunate to have spent so much time with your family all those trips to the cape all the Chicken dinners your mom just never gave up so gutsy and positive to the end may you all have her strength in your grief with great love to all of you Kathleen*

Kathleen Shea - November 13, 2020 at 06:42 PM

MC

Kathleen--What a magical childhood I had with you and your family on Westerly Terrace and how much our parents so loved and appreciated each other. My mother loved you like a daughter. Remember about three years ago we met in York, Maine and had those amazing lobster roll, my mom laughing while you and I chowed down like little kids! Thank you for your friendship and love.

Mary Collins - November 13, 2020 at 08:56 PM

CS

“ *Such an awesome woman! My mother's best friend to the end. I'm sorry we can't all be together right now remembering the days on Westerly Terrace. She meant so much to the Sheas. Sending my warmest condolences to all the Collins'. much love and hugs, Chris Shea*

Christina Shea - November 13, 2020 at 05:19 PM

MC

My mom was so comforted by the fact that you took your mom into your home during those hard final years. She remarked on it many times and so admired your devotion and love. As an avid reader, she was also so taken with your career as a writer and your fine novels. She always took the time to read them and we'd talk about them.

Mary Collins - November 13, 2020 at 08:57 PM

MT

“ *The Collins' who lived across the street from us on Westerly Terrace in Hartford- were our great family friends. Connie was my Mom's best friend. I remember when I was in elementary school eating over the Collins' where Mrs. Collins always made me feel part of the conversation. When I grew older, Connie and my Mom always walked at the reservoir together and talked. At Christmas shortly after I got married, my husband Lyle and I stayed at Connie and George's house (because there was not enough room in the Shea house), and we talked many hours, all four of us, until late into the night. We had so much fun staying there. Later on when we adopted my first two children, I took them over to see Connie several times with my mom. I always felt like Mrs. Collins was one of my personal cheerleaders- she encouraged me in all of my endeavors, and she was so positive and enthusiastic. I admired Connie as she grew older- she was a great friend to my Mom throughout her life, but most especially after my Dad died, and she was strong, confident and as sharp as they come. The Collins' have been our great family friends for many years, being there for us at weddings, funerals and other family celebrations. My greatest sympathy to Jimmy, Betty, Tricia, Mary and all of Mrs. Collins' grandchildren upon your loss, Your Mom and Grandma was a great lady. We will all miss her.*

HUGS,

Margie Shea-Turner

Margaret M Shea Turner - November 13, 2020 at 03:27 PM

MC

Margie--You are such an exceptional teacher yourself, something my mom admired, since she worked in kindergarten for many years in Hartford and always felt the first few years of school made all the difference, especially for at-risk children. Thank you so much for this heartfelt comment. My parents loved your parents so much--every time I saw them, I thought of my dear father, and knew they loved him, and that made him feel more present to me during the first few years after he died. I will never forget how much they cared for me, took me under their wing, as I grieved as a teen. One year my mom and your mom drove all the way to Baltimore to visit me and slept on the floor in sleeping bags (can you imagine, my mom?!). They came to support me as I faced raising a child on my own. Remarkable people.

Mary Collins - November 13, 2020 at 09:01 PM

SS

“ *We grew up across Westerly Terrace in Hartford from the Collins family, and Connie became my mother's life-long best friend. In their later years, they enjoyed walking together at the West Hartford Reservoir with my Mom's collie. My parents frequently got together for dinner with Connie and her second husband, George Cain. We've always had a lot of respect for Connie's strength, intelligence, and accomplishment in raising her four children on her own after her first husband, Jim, died young. My family really appreciates that Connie continued to write to my Mom regularly after she moved to the Boston area and eventually into an assisted living facility. I loved visiting with Connie in her later years while in Connecticut to visit my dear friend Betty. Her mind was still sharp into advanced age, and she told great stories about growing up during the Depression, her experience in the WAVES, and my parents.*

My heart goes out to Betty, Mary, Tricia , Jim, and the rest of the Collins family for your loss.

- Susan Shea

Susan Shea - November 13, 2020 at 12:24 PM

MC

Thank you for this lovely note and your continued friendship with Betty!

Mary Collins - November 13, 2020 at 09:01 PM

MC

“*Mrs. Collins was my kindergarten teacher, my neighbor, and my mother's best friend. She was a lifelong confidante and advisor to the entire Shea family. She was also the life of the party! That gleam in her eye only hinted at the incredible life force that ran through her. Her energy, enthusiasm, and humor were infectious, and to be around her made everyone feel special. To Mary, Betty, Tricia, Jimmy, grandchildren, and great grandchildren, I am so sorry for your loss. I look forward to the time when we can be together to celebrate her amazing life!*

Love and affection, Maura Shea Crowley

Maura Shea Crowley - November 13, 2020 at 10:11 AM

MS

Mrs. Collins was a close friend to my parents and a critical support to my Mom after my father passed away. I also greatly enjoyed getting to know her, first as a child, when I was sometimes in her afternoon kindergarten class and while I watched her and her husband, Jim, take on my parents in intensely competitive doubles tennis matches. But I have most enjoyed her company as an adult, when we would discuss politics, her memories of the WAVES, and her raising a family across the street from us on Westerly Terrace. I never met a more astute observer of the political scene than Mrs. Collins. She did not need to rely on conventional wisdom or pundits to inform her views, because he had participated in the political world herself and understood it thoroughly. In addition to being highly intelligent and an interesting conversationalist, she was an optimist, whose smile lifted your spirits whenever she walked into the room. I will miss her, and my heart goes out to Mary, Tricia, Betty, Jim and their families.

Michael Shea - November 13, 2020 at 01:51 PM

MC

I forgot how many of you had my mom as a kindergarten teacher. Can you believe she used to handle 60 kids a day! Amazing. Of course she never had any trouble keeping everyone in line! I want to thank you, Michael, for visiting my mom these last few years--always so attentive when she spoke to you. You were literally a GREAT highlight for her at my wedding with Scott two years ago. Thank you so much for performing that wedding service and joining us at the meal afterwards. You had her laughing. It was the fullest moment she had before her decline, the last day of being fully herself, so happy, with those she loved, and you were a huge part of it. Thank you.

Mary Collins - November 13, 2020 at 09:04 PM

BF

It was a joy to get to know Connie after Scott and Mary met. To hear her stories about Hartford politics and her time in the Navy was facinating. Spending thanksgiving with her a couple of years ago was a highlight! She had such a sparkling personality. We know you will miss her greatly. What a lovely lady. Our deepest sympathies to Jim, Betty, Tricia, Mary, Donald and all the Collins family.

Bruce and Karen Franklin - November 15, 2020 at 04:22 PM

MC

We were so grateful you embraced my mom and Betty for the holidays. She had so much fun and so appreciated how much attention everyone paid her.

Mary Collins - November 15, 2020 at 09:15 PM