



Mary Colleen Tomlinson

June 18, 1922 - December 10, 2025

Mary Colleen Tomlinson passed away Wednesday, December 10, 2025 at the Mount Olivet Careview Home in Minneapolis MN. She led a long and adventurous life, living to 103 years old.

Colleen was the oldest of four children born to Evangeline Anne Mathews and Frederick James O'Brien. She grew up in the Holmes Avenue neighborhood near Lake Bde Make Ska (Lake Calhoun) in SW Minneapolis. After graduating from St. Margaret's Academy she worked at Pillsbury Foods where she was one of the first Irish Catholic women they hired.

A patriot, and looking for adventure, during WWII, Colleen enlisted in the Women's Marine Corp where she made history serving as one of the first women drill instructors at Camp Lejeune, NC. It was there that she met and married Richard Tomlinson, a US Navy Corpsman. Colleen enjoyed her time in the Marines but family called and she returned to Minneapolis where she began perhaps her most important role as mother to nine children.

The Tomlinson family lived for many years at 46th and York Avenue in southwest Minneapolis, where she was a typical housewife of the era. It was a large home and Colleen was a creative woman. She tiled the basement floor, painted and wallpapered every room over and over, and refinished furniture pieces, "antiquing" tables, picture frames, chests and more. All while keeping a sharp eye on her brood of kids; keeping them healthy, educated and 'mostly' intact.

Colleen also tried her hand at different part time jobs. She laughed when recalling one of her first days at Donaldson's Department Store. After checking out and wrapping up a customer's purchase, she noticed she had not cut the string on the package and the woman was walking down the escalator trailing a long tail behind her. Colleen just snipped the string.

When her children were older, Colleen went back to school. She earned a Degree in Psychology from Minnesota State University, and worked for many years as a counselor at Hennepin County Medical Center.

She retired in 1992 at the age of 70.

Not ready to settle down, Colleen loved to travel. She especially enjoyed a trip to The Great Wall in China with her sister Shirley. The two sisters had a grand time. State and National Parks, camping and more - she also spent days alone in the wilderness in a program to teach survival skills.

Mexico was a favorite destination, visiting many times with her daughters and sons in law. Paris, and of course Ireland were also favorite places she traveled to.

Colleen believed in continuing education, but not only academics. She took dancing and pottery classes as well as many more. She was a voracious reader. Thanks to an iPad and books downloaded from the library, she was reading nearly to the end of her life. She had recently finished books about JF Kennedy and Bill Clinton, and was just getting into the Reagan presidency when the years finally caught up to her.

By then, Colleen was in Hospice Care where she was visited daily by children and grand children and by the caring staff; especially Roland who she liked to talk to about his family in Africa.

She continued to visit with her family almost to the end.

She is survived by one sister, Donna Forner, her nine children; James, Mary Suzanne, Theresa, Robert, William, Patricia, David, John and Paul. She is also survived by 48 grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Colleen was an extraordinary woman who will be greatly missed, but her legacy will live through the many lives she touched.

A celebration of her life will be held at St Gabrielles Catholic Church in Hopkins on April 23, beginning with a reviewal at 1:00 PM and followed by a Catholic mass and luncheon. Her burial will take place with military honors at Fort Snelling National Cemetery at 10:00 AM on Friday by, April 24th.

In lieu of flowers, donations to Mount Olivet Care Facility Hospice Program will be appreciated.

www.Washburn-McReavy.com

Nokomis Park 612-721-1651

Previous Events

Visitation

APR **23**. 1:00 PM - 2:00 PM (CT)

St. Gabriel the Archangel Catholic Church
1310 Mainstreet
Hopkins, MN 55343

Mass of Christian Burial

APR **23**. 2:00 PM - 3:00 PM (CT)

St. Gabriel the Archangel Catholic Church
1310 Mainstreet
Hopkins, MN 55343

Graveside Service

APR **24**. 10:00 AM - 10:15 AM (CT)

Fort Snelling National Cemetery
7601 34th Avenue South
Minneapolis, MN 55450

Tribute Wall



“ *Florist Choice Bouquet was purchased for the family of Mary Colleen Tomlinson.* ”



April 21 at 10:33 AM