

Joe just 'one of the gang' at university

EDITOR'S NOTE: For many Canadians in their mid-60s, retirement means an end to the working world and a time for private relaxation. But others continue an active life. This story describes one of these "super seniors."

By Jeff Adams
Canadian Press

CALGARY — When Joe Chase applied to study music at the University of Calgary two years ago, the computer couldn't cope with his age and rejected the admission documents.

"The computer wouldn't go back that far (to 1887)" and his documents had to be hand-processed, says Chase, now 96 years old.

The university's oldest student, Chase stopped driving his own car only six years ago. Now he "jumps on a bus and rides up there twice a week" for his sight-reading class, learning to sing the notes he sees on paper.

During an interview, after hurriedly combing his hair and putting on a natty tie and jacket to greet his guest, Chase noted his final music exam was only a week away.

"I've studied and I'm prepared," he said solemnly, sounding like any schoolboy.

Before enrolling last year for a university course in musical composition and theory — it led to publication of one of his songs in the United States — Chase felt "it was a big risk for me to get mixed up with these young people."

"I wondered how they'd receive me. But they found out I knew something about music and then I was one of them."

Indeed, Chase was learning to play piano and organ — and beginning an 82-year choir-singing career — before the grandparents of most of his fellow music students were born.

In a tribute to Chase's enthusiasm for life and willingness to learn, his classmates organized a surprise birthday party for him Feb. 10.

In 1929, at the age of 42, Chase, his wife Catherine and their two children left Birmingham, England, for Calgary. Although they came at the start of the Depression, Chase found work the day after arriving.

Chase retired from his job of delivering auto parts at 75. He turned his attention to other activities that he shared with his wife until her death three years ago.

Chase now lives in a nursing home, but refuses to take it easy like most of his neighbors.

He said there are lots of activities scheduled each day at the centre but some seniors would "rather sit up in their room and look at television."

For them life is little more than "waiting for the grim reaper to come, but my idea is to be active and interest yourself in different things."

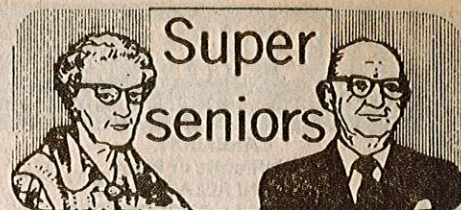
Besides music classes at the university, Chase goes swimming two or three times a week, attends arts and crafts classes and collects classical records.

"I occasionally take a nice nurse out for dinner or something," he added with a wink.

Should anyone assume Chase was kidding, a woman half his age arrived moments later to confirm they'd still be attending a travel lecture that evening at the university. After setting a time and giving him a hug, she departed.

Chase's daughter and her husband, who have given him six grandchildren, live nearby and he visits them often. There are also trips to Vancouver to see his son and daughter-in-law.

While he is lonely sometimes since his



wife's death, Chase reasoned: "We lived a very happy life together for 63 years. There's no use sitting around and pining for her."

Living in a home in which 120 of his neighbors died during the last year, it would be impossible for Chase to ignore his own mortality.

"Dying? I've thought of it. But I'm an old soldier, so I know there's a bullet out there somewhere with my name on it. It doesn't matter to me when my time comes."

