

**A REMEMBERING AND REMINISCENT  
REVIEW OF MY LAST FIFTY YEARS**

**1944 - 1994**

*by Beatrice Helen Collins*

*Beatrice Helen Collins*

(written for the November 15th Celebration of the Founding of  
S.B.T.S. School of Church Music, Fifty Years ago.)

## A REMEMBERING AND REMINISCENT REVIEW OF MY LAST FIFTY YEARS

1944 - 1994

by Beatrice Helen Collins

(Written for the November 15th Celebration of the Founding of S.B.T.S. School of Church Music, Fifty Years ago. Greetings from a Charter Member, Class of 1949)

Those days on the edge of Cherokee Park, first in Cook Hall and then in Barnard Hall still remain the most cherished years of my life. The gorgeous buildings were a fantasy --- I'd never dreamed of living in so grand a place --- and the friendships stemming from those first, history-making days are almost as vivid in memory today as they were exciting then. What a privilege to be in on the beginning of such an outstanding school as our Alma Mater, recognizing the excellence of our original curriculum and faculty. We couldn't have had finer! I shall always remember the day Dr. Ellis Fuller convened us in the little classroom in Cook Hall and inspired us to pledge commitment to a life of Christian music as our obligation to Southern Baptists who were giving us this specialized education. It was Claude Almand (for whom I worked as both secretary and accompanist) who was responsible for my going into teaching. When I expressed doubt of my ability, he said, "But Beatrice, you can always read faster than any student you'll ever have. Of course you can do it!" I actually adored him. He was a genius in my eyes, and a kind friend who opened his home to us. How I suffered on learning of his tragic death.

Of course our "house mother", Frances Winters filled me with awe. I still have my assigned work papers from Choir Methods which bear her high marks and choice comments, another source of inspiration and encouragement in teaching and performing. When Donald Winters came home from the war it was an absolute shock, for they were complete opposites! She was the intellect, quiet and reserved; he the performer, bursting with laughter and exuberance, double jointed like a rag doll when he conducted. What gloriously mad days we had learning how to conduct without arms! --- hysterically funny at the time but the skill which later propelled me into being an organist-director for all the years since then. And those choir tours! Singing under Don's direction was magic and traveling with such a jolly personality was a constant 'party.' Audrey Nossaman was almost too glamorous to be believed, a gorgeous lady with an exquisite voice. She and Frances had the chore of teaching me voice. Lawrence Cook gave me first lessons in organ and later Kenneth Pool took me on and coached me through a graduate recital. Those were the years! ... (Note: Four years later I took graduate music courses at Eastman and studied organ with Catharine Crozier. It was she under whom I learned the Gleason technique which polished my playing.)

I went from Seminary to teach organ, piano, and assorted music courses. at Mississippi Woman's College, later renamed William Carey, for a year I detested, but fortunately was called for an interview with Dr. Roland Q. Leavell, president of New

Orleans Seminary. He wanted me for their faculty and it took only a moment before I accepted. The next four years were on the old campus on Washington Avenue in the Garden District before the campus was moved way out in the sticks of Gentilly. A new campus was built from scratch and today is an impressive outlay of stately buildings and marvelous trees. I served as a professor on the N.O.B.T.S. faculty from 1949 to 1981, thirty-two years, witnessing its growth from a fledgling school (newly reorganized into a Seminary from the Old Baptist Bible Institute shortly before my arrival) to a fully grown, highly recognized, and accredited institution of higher learning. Again, I feel honored to have been a part of the origin of such a fine school as the School of Church Music at New Orleans.

Those thirty-two years had their highs and lows of course. I began teaching on a tiny Möller, built in 1953, to one of the last Aeolian Skinners which Catharine Crozier, Harold Gleason and I designed. It was built in 1967 and installed in the 2,000 seat Leavell Chapel, at that time the largest organ in New Orleans. I've spent many a midnight hour practicing there, not bearing to tear myself away from such a thrilling instrument. My only regret is not being able to see it finally completed, a project which I understand is in progress today.

In 1950 I applied for the newly vacated post of Organist-Director at Christ Church (Episcopal) Cathedral, a lovely edifice on the famous St. Charles Avenue, and remained there for sixteen years. I was only thirty-one when I became cathedral musician, and this was my first full-time church music post. I felt unduly favored. There was a marvelous choir of voices to work with, including four paid soloists, all outstanding New Orleans musicians. We performed most of the major oratorios, including the Bach "B Minor Mass", which was my 'swan song'. I brought in guest organists and used New Orleans Symphony Orchestra members for many of these programs. Those days of working with a choir and other instruments began my keen interest in directing. I'd rather direct than perform at the organ, though I've loved doing both at various times in my career.

In 1966 I resigned from Christ Church Cathedral to give full-time to organ performance and spent the next eight years perfecting my skills and concertizing. I went to St. Anna's in 1974 to fill in for a three-month sabbatical absence and stayed eight years, till I left New Orleans in '81.

The position of Director of Music Ministries and Organist at Trinity Episcopal Church in Pass Christian (six miles from my Gulf Coast home) was waiting for me when I retired. I continue to enjoy this exciting work. Our choir is small but excellent and the membership have become my very best friends. We party a lot together. Challenging music and enthusiasm make hard work extremely gratifying. It's actually what "makes my world go 'round" --- my *raison d'être*. I'm constantly revitalized by the joy of making music with such an erudite and loving group. I

can't imagine life without my choir. Music and gardens are what keep me 'young' though I'll be seventy-six on December 1st.

Living in New Orleans was very exciting. I loved it all except for the filthy condition of the city. My first year was in a grand old private residence, then three years in a basement apartment on St Charles Avenue, three in an upper floor Garden District home, six above a barber shop in the famous French Quarter and all the rest in my own place on campus, immediately across the street from the music building and chapel; convenience personified. There were frequent pleasant surprises, visits from friends and professionals whom I was always anxious and willing to show around the city. My home was the gathering place and I became and acknowledged party giver. Following in the steps of my hospitable parents, I loved to open my home. And though I had never been taught to cook I learned on my own and added gourmet entertaining to my interests. Of course this demanded all the elements of decorating and party planning and it wasn't unusual for me to do a luncheon or dinner every month or two with the elegance of a House Beautiful layout, designing my own invitations, place cards, party favors, flower decorations, et al. I've collected and used beautiful china, crystal, silver and linens for such affairs. Would still love to do this but I'm afraid I no longer have such energy! I do it rarely, on special occasions. It's exhausting and expensive, but what fun!

Highlights of those teaching years were three foreign travel episodes. On my first sabbatical in 1962-'63, I studied organ with Jean Langlais and oratorio analysis and conducting with Nadia Boulanger in Paris where I lived a block from the Arc d'Triomphe with a French family, being required to speak nothing but French at dinner. I went daily for a while to L'Alliance Française to get a quick start, and managed, but barely, that year, for languages are not 'up my alley', so to speak. I could use all the superlatives and still not fully describe this unbelievable, exciting, adventurous year. It was also memorable for being the coldest winter in fifty years. I still feel the blizzard-like cold in my bedroom where ice formed on the insides of french doors to a balcony overlooking the patio, seven floors below. In Paris I learned to walk ... everywhere! I wanted to see the city and parking places were difficult to find. Practice organs were scattered from one end of the city to the other in churches, cathedrals, libraries, studios and schools. Time was at a premium with one person sliding off the organ bench as another slid on. No second was lost. Rarely heated, icy keyboards, dreadfully awkward, ancient instruments, and sometimes the choice ones of famous performers; one took whatever one could find for rent, and was happy to have it. Some day I might write a book about the tragic, funny, disastrous, frightening, lovely episodes of this remarkable year. I was forty-five at the time, old enough to appreciate everything, daring enough to attempt anything, brave enough to travel anywhere, alone, and young enough to have the energy to cope. Looking back, I wonder how I survived! I bought an Italian Fiat and took delivery on All Saints Day, a recognized holiday (though Hallowe'en was

ignored the day before) and was given no instructions before being 'pushed down' the ramp by an over-zealous sales clerk with only the car manual in my hand; no instructions about car, signs, or regulations. I landed on a one-way street, with heavy traffic lined up behind and furious horn blowing as my car stopped. I had to resort to the manual to see how to get it started. I finally got it running and then dared turn no way but right so I got lost and went miles and miles and miles out of my way. Hours later I wound up at the home of a blind friend who offered to drive me home when he learned of my harrowing experience. He said All Saints is the heaviest traffic day of the year in Paris. Of course I refused his offer! Can you imagine letting a blind man get control of my new car ... and me ... at night in Paris? I learned how to drive my Fiat the hard way, also learned the traffic signs, after that heart-stopping experience and eventually left Paris on a twenty-three country sight-seeing trip for four months before sailing back home on the S.S. FRANCE, in August, a full year after my story-book-like crossing on the brand new S.S. FRANCE (on her second crossing) the year before. My little Fiat followed me home weeks later on a Lykes freighter.

Three years later in 1966, on my next trip abroad, I picked up a new, custom designed Mercedes as it left the assembly line in Frankfort, Germany. This four month excursion included a flight to Greece where I took an Aegean cruise, hippity-hopping to several of the iridescent Grecian islands. This experience added even more elements to my visual collectibles for it was full-blown, sun-drenched exoticism at its most intoxicating. I enjoyed wading the cerulean blue waters and white beaches, riding a donkey up the mountainous terrain of Lindos, winding through the cobblestone alleys of white-washed windmills in Mykonos daily coming back to the luxury of spotless and pampered cruise ship service, and earlier walking through centuries-old Mycenaean ruins on the mainland --- all the while enjoying the companionship of extremely interesting and cordial fellow 'tourists' who seemed to adopt me in their efforts to show me the sights; they, the world travelers, I, the novice. A special memory was the day and evening we spent in Istanbul; temples, minarets, casbah et al, later sailing through the Bosphorus Straits to the edge of the Iron Curtain with a close up look at the banks of Russia from the Black Sea.

Being frugal-minded as well as having luxurious taste, I planned my travels to include both penny pinching scrimping and 'throw it to the winds' extravagance. Every day was an adventure. I cooked on an oil stove in the woods, slept in a Swedish hotel bathroom on a moved-in daybed and grandly registered in the finest hotels on occasion. Once was four days in Portofino, Italy in the same hotel in which the Duke and Duchess of Windsor honeymooned. It was here I met New Yorkers who invited me to join them at dinner the first evening. I had the Mercedes and they had the wherewithal to plan outings of delight. They became good friends, meeting my ship in New York several months later.

My third and last overseas journey was on the occasion of my second sabbatical in '72-'73. I spent the first four months at home doing research and the last eight months abroad, renting a villa on the Spanish Mediterranean, writing. Needless to say, I was forced to add Spanish to my repertoire of foreign shopping and travel dialogue. Again, in my Mercedes which traveled with me on a Lykes freighter, I traveled extensively, seeing new territory each trip, but always including time in Paris which had become 'home' to me. This time the freighter got stuck at a port in northern Africa and I had a fabulous week in Casablanca, which along with Istanbul added just another story-book chapter to my dream-like days abroad. Twenty-four-months in all in Europe, Asia and Africa, all at my own expense, but certainly worth every hard earned penny! I still feel I've been unusually fortunate to have seen so much.

Romance? Of course! I've been in and out of love for most of my life, but only four times rather seriously when I considered marriage. But none had ever measured up to my first true love ... whom I lost. He's kept re-appearing in my life every few years, still as charming and lovable as ever, still the 'perfect creature' to satisfy my dreams, making all others less than acceptable, but still attached to another. And so I've maintained a single life: happy, busy, satisfying and fulfilling. It has only been in the last several years I've had any regrets and that has to do with reaching old age with no family of my own. Holidays are such dreaded times. The pre-holidays are busy and exciting but the day itself is usually a lonely one. Everyone is with family. Friends are with their own and the extended family of my brother are too far away, especially since I'm tied down with music responsibilities on Christmas Eve. ... But I doubt I could have ever lived with anyone , anyway.

I'm in the third phase of my life, called "Retirement" a misnomer in reality for I've never quit working. The first was "Education" the second "Experience" and there's been a lot of overlapping. I retired from the Seminary in 1981 and every phase of my life-style was changed in a moment! I went from a big city to a sleepy small town; from a small apartment to a brand new house (which I built) from a rather tight schedule to one of my own making; from mostly indoor living to an outdoor life of gardening. Landscaping design has become my major interest and activity during the past decade. I've built gardens from scratch, purposely keeping my grass plot to a minimum. There are seventeen flower beds, my first being a rose garden in memory of my parents, to grow and share flowers; azalea beds with amaryllis lilies, birds of paradise bordering the solarium, mammoth hydrangeas, along with literally hundreds of tropical delights. Wisteria covers my house, crepe myrtles enclose the borders. My prize efforts, hand-laid, personally, are a serpentine brick patio and terrace, and eleagnus covered tree-house (my garden workshop) and a uniquely designed enclosed patio for Jasmine, my cocker spaniel, ... my constant companion, my protector and the love of my life. One of my biggest problems and greatest joys is a drainage ditch through my property, causing severe erosion, but allowing me to

create my own "babbling brook," used as a backdrop for a wall of concrete chunks. A large waterfall pierces the wall, the centerpiece of an intriguing grotto edging my brook. I've built curving steps leading down to the water, and pots of plants are everywhere. The wall becomes a bulkhead and will eventually edge the entire stream on both sides. A Japanese bridge over this brook leads to a small Oriental Garden on the south, a long, narrow strip of moss-covered earth edged with an all-white flower bed, a serenely quiet and peaceful place. A huge granite bench is at one end where I go for tea and contemplation, especially lovely in the still of the morning with sun-light streaming through. Satsumas and oranges are ready to eat; weeping willows, ash, river birch, redbud, Japanese magnolias, Australian fern trees and dogwood are some of my choice specimens, all personally planted and tended. Yes, it requires a lot of work and nothing is ever finished but my goal has been to create beauty and I have great pride in the accomplishment. Come and enjoy it with me.

My home was built on piers (for hurricane protection) and over the past six months I've worked on enclosing most of the ground floor. An all-glass solarium and buffet are for casual living and entertaining. Just last week the finishing touches were done on a newly built studio apartment and bath, completely private and furnished, a project to bring in more income but for live-in help if I should ever need it. I never want to leave my home. My place overlooks the Gulf and is set in a grove of thirty-four live oaks. I can't imagine a lovelier place to live out my life. We are a thriving Gulf Coast geared around tourism: water sports, sailing, yachting, fishing and the like with a new batch of the infamous casinos in Gulfport and Biloxi, but as yet kept out of Long Beach and Pass Christian. The atmosphere is still that of a small community with none of the hassle of big city life. I'm ever so content here and thank God for giving me my dreams-come-true "place in the sun." Even a bout with unsuccessful eye surgeries in July and August resulting in double vision, constantly changing from day to day, has not unduly discouraged me.

How exciting to know that I shall soon be seeing many of you lovely friends from those wonderful days of our beginning music study together. My love and prayers to each of you with thanks to God for making you a part of my richly blessed life. Come for a visit and share my home and gardens. Much love,

*Beatrice*  
*Collinwood II*  
*563 Frantman Ave.*  
*Long Beach, MS. 39560*  
*601-868-8316*