

# Introduction

During her life, Bobbie Frances Collen wrote and self-published three books of poetry under the name B. Frances Collen: *A Gift To Share* (1983), *Around And About* (1986), and *What's It Like To Be* (1986). She was a prolific poet, writing hundreds of poems, I recall, especially in the 1970s and 1980s. Each volume is consequentially hundreds of pages. Personally, I have always liked and enjoyed reading from the first volume best, *A Gift To Share*. To me, its a poignant title, given her enduring selflessness and self-sacrifice, often to her own detriment. But I have been careful to draw upon all three volumes to include what in my judgment is the best of her poetry. For the modest publication that this book can only be, for the time being, the small collection of poems chosen will have to stand as representative of her best, until someone else comes along with the desire to better it. The selected poems are presented in chronological order as they appeared in these publications.

She was also a prolific oil painter rendering many a canvas from 12 x 12 inches to 36 x 48 inches. It is a blessing that my brother Barry Collen took up the time consuming task of cataloging, framing, and distributing as much of her artworks as one can reasonably expect of anyone to family and friends. It is due to his persistent efforts that the images included in this book happened, and for which I am eternally grateful.

Bobbie Frances Collen was my mother. As such, naturally this presentation is mine, seen and recollected through my eyes and memories of her. If this book had been written by any of her other offspring, spouse, or a close friend, it surely would be different, in that likely a different selection of poems, artwork, photos, and recollections would fill these pages. As we traverse the marvelous terrain of her life's work, keep in mind, the bias of presentation is mine.

Much to my chagrin, I spent most of my life feeling her tremendous warmth and loving support at arms length, being caught up and living in my own world of youth, life, career, and self-centeredness. It was only later in her life when she was diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease with dementia that I was shaken to realize my loss, and thereby turned my attention more concertedly to know and appreciate who she was and what she had given me and so many others through her life. However, by that time, there were few years left to me before she lost all recognition of us. This book suffers in actualizing its potential as a result.

Therefore, I have had to rely on what some will view as an unusual approach to biography. In drawing heavily upon my experiences of and with her, as well as select and like accounts from others among family and friends, the biography becomes to a

very personal and reflective one. In other words, it is written from recalled lived experiences of her, rather a careful piecing together of found fragments about and pertaining to her that one might imagine coming from the pen of a more traditional and scientifically oriented biographer. Given the very personalized nature of this project, a labor of love, this approach to biography has fit nicely with the spirit of rendering into print what I have done, enabling me to give back something of myself, as impoverished as it may be, in comparison to what I have received from her.

My decision to write a brief biography and illustrate it with photographs, artwork, and memorabilia came late in conceptualizing this project. Originally, I thought to publish only a selection of her poetry. However, the farther I went into her poetry and reflected upon what I could recollect of her and ways her poems brought to life my relationship with her, the closer it brought me to everything else connected with her. It soon became obvious that my endeavor to honor her would fall even shorter should I neglect including them as they present equally important sides of her.

Moreover, the focus of this project has always been her poetry. I am, and we can be, very appreciative that she was driven to have her three volumes made, because her single pages of writings have not remained. Bound in these volumes, and now this smaller one, we can at any time enjoy and feel her presence reading her lines.

My hope is that despite limitations and shortcomings, when you come to the end of this book you will agree there is a richness captured through these pages that shall do justice and honor to her, and memorialize the wonderful person she was.

Arne Collen  
November 2010  
Walnut Creek, California