

THE STORY OF PLANTS: 'PEACE' HYBRID TEA ROSE

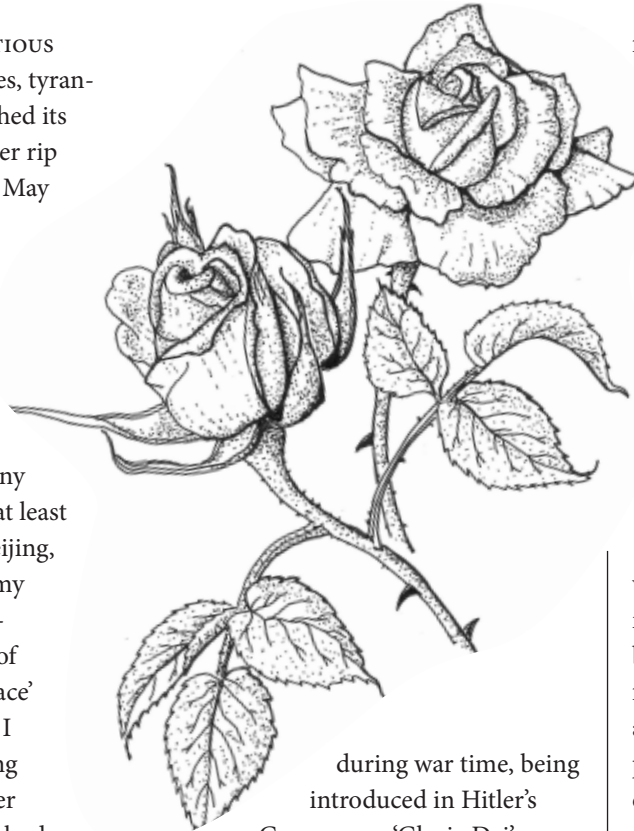
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ILLUSTRATION BY SYLVIA PORTILLO

MY FIFTY-YEAR-LONG CONTENTIOUS relationship with hybrid tea roses, tyrannical at best, seems to have reached its end. Five years ago I would rather rip one out than fuss with it. But in May I buried my hatchet and bought 'Peace', the "World's Most Popular Rose," a title given to it by the World Federation of Rose Societies in 1976.

It is estimated there are over fifty million 'Peace' rose plants world-wide, nearly as many as dandelions in my garden, or at least the combined populations of Beijing, Moscow, and Mexico City. But my choice was based more on sentiment than on a need to be part of the crowd. My mother grew 'Peace' in the Milwaukee garden where I was raised. Her seasonal covering and uncovering of the crown, her patience in "waiting for the first buds to show up" were some of my first lessons in becoming a gardener. Unlike my mother, and the French rose hybridizer, François Meilland, creator of 'Peace', I was more taken with garish zinnias than pretty roses at the time.

In 1935, François, a young man already deeply involved in rose hybridizing, had selected no. 3-35-40, along with 50 other promising seedlings among thousands, to be grown in his family's nursery in Provence. When the first flowers appeared on it in 1936, François knew he had created his masterpiece so he named it after his beloved mother, 'Mme A. Meilland'. By the time it was ready for distribution World War II had started. Yet 'Peace' was unstoppable even



during war time, being introduced in Hitler's

Germany as 'Gloria Dei'

('Gloria of God') and in Mussolini's Italy as 'Gioia' ('Joy'). François saw an exceptional future in 'Mme A. Meilland' and made great efforts to make sure a package of buds made it on the last American plane out of occupied France. These buds were delivered to his friend and fellow rose breeder Robert Pyle in Pennsylvania. On April 29, 1945, Pyle introduced it, with the blessings of François, at the Pacific Rose Society's Exhibition with the new name 'Peace'. It was the same day Berlin fell to allied troops. Later that year, in one of the most successful rose promotions of all time, a flower was presented to each of the fifty delegates at the inaugural session of the United Nations in San Francisco. The

future of 'Peace' was secured. Fortunately for the Meilland family, Pyle had taken out a patent in François's name. The royalties from the sales of 'Peace' made the Meilland family rich enough to build one of the premier rose nurseries in the world.

From the 1945 All-American Rose Selection Gold Medal, the first time for a new rose, to the more recent RHS Award of Garden Merit in 1993, 'Peace' remains a success.

What makes 'Peace' so exceptional among hybrid teas is its vigor. It can be a large bush up to four feet tall and wide with glossy dark green foliage, making it beautiful even when not in bloom. But it is the large round mildly fragrant flowers, which Pyle described as having "pale gold, cream, and ivory petals blending to a slightly ruffled edge of delicate carmine," which endears it to the world.

A friend once told me he didn't know if he thought roses were beautiful because their publicity was so good or if they were truly beautiful. I can say I am susceptible to the same skepticism. But I've decided to lay down my sword, or my loppers as the case might be. Starting with 'Peace' I'm giving hybrid teas a chance. 🌹

Read more of Daniel's thoughts on plants and gardening on his blog www.danielmountgardens.blogspot.com.

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