



A Rose Named Peace

by Susan Wroble

BARBARA CARROLL ROBERTS was sitting with fellow students at Hamline University during a break between classes. "You know how you can never visit one of your old homes," one student remarked. "The new people have always changed something."

"I know," Barbara said. "At my old house, they dug up the 'Peace' roses."

"What are 'Peace' roses?" another asked. Barbara knew the basic facts – that the 'Peace' rose had been created in France just before World War II. That the plant was saved by being mailed out just before the country was invaded, and that this rose had become one of the world's most beloved flowers. That was enough for the other students. They were all part of Hamline's Master of Fine Arts in Writing for Children and Young Adults program. They knew a great story when they heard it, and they convinced Barbara to write it.

Barbara started researching. She quickly learned that the hybridizer was Francis Meilland. She reached out to his grandson, Matthias Meilland, at Meilland International in France who recommended a book about the history of the family. Beth Smiley, the Publications Director at ARS, gave her several articles that helped Barbara get started with information she could trust.

Barbara found that Francis Meilland was a teenager when he first saw a brand-new rose in a neighboring town, and he was hooked. It took years of hybridizing before he began having success. In 1939, he invited rose growers to look at his new offerings, and there was one they all loved. But their meeting was tinged with worry, as they knew that war was looming.

Before the Germans invaded, Francis sent cuttings of that incredible rose, then named 3-35-40 (the third cross of 1935 and the 40th plant to grow from seeds of that cross), to his rose growing friends around the world. The Meilland family knew that their land would be needed to grow food



for the French soldiers. They dug up their 20 thousand rosebushes – and burned them.

In the U.S., Francis had sent 3-35-40 to Robert Pyle. Robert grew cuttings of the rose at his planting beds in Pennsylvania, then shipped it to friends around the country, where it continued to thrive. With mail service to France cut off during the war, Robert didn't even know whether his friend Francis was alive. But he filed a U.S. Patent on the rose in Francis's name. And in April of 1945, in a ceremony in California marking the German surrender, he named the rose after the world's greatest desire: Peace.

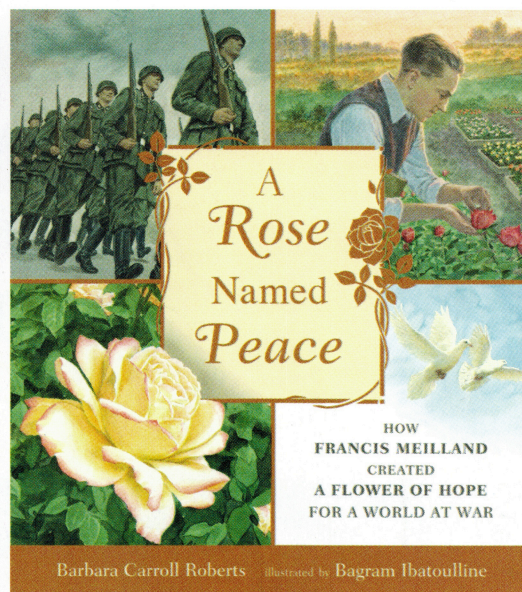
For Barbara, the research was the hard part. The book, a nonfiction picture book, almost wrote itself. She workshopped it during her final semester at Hamline, then sent it to her agent. When the agent submitted the book to publishers, rejections poured in. The problem for publishers was simple: how do you sell a book on plant propagation to children?

But the business of writing is filled with serendipity, and Barbara's manuscript landed on the desk of Hilary Van Dusen, Senior Executive Editor at Candlewick Press. Hilary's mother had grown and loved roses, and Hilary fell in love with the manuscript. In the publishing industry, it is the publisher, not the author, who selects and works with the illustrator, and Candlewick knew just the right illustrator to ask about illustrating Barbara's story.

Born in Omsk, Russia, Bagram Ibatoulline never remembered a time when he wasn't sculpting. By age 10, he was attending the Children's Art School, and from there to an intensive classic art training at the Art College of Kazan. He studied at the State Academic Institute of Arts in Moscow. Bagram's highly acclaimed style varies with each book he illustrates, and he is usually asked to illustrate works by some of the most beloved authors in children's literature. Presented with the manuscript, Bagram was thrilled by the story of Francis Meilland, his passion to roses, and his devotion through the hardest times.

In a stroke of good fortune, Barbara had discovered that the Pyle archives were held at the University of Delaware, close enough to her home in northern Virginia to be able to visit. Robert Pyle, Roberts learned, had had a close working relationship with Francis Meilland. In fact, he had visited the Meilland's home before the war, and the archives contained photographs he had taken. Barbara was granted permission to take pictures of those photos, and Candlewick sent those onto Bagram. Bagram used those photos to aid in his creation of realistic watercolors of the farm, the countryside in southern France, the Meilland family, and even their dog!

Picture books are limited by length, and need to maintain a story arc that children can follow. Barbara noted there was one piece of the story she had to leave out. Before Francis Meilland's time, the Meilland family had hybridized roses. But when the First World War



swept across France, the Meillands had been forced to destroy their roses to grow crops. When armistice was announced in November of 1918, they had nothing left but their land. They began growing roses again, but without money, they only grew roses they knew would sell. Francis hadn't seen brand-new roses because his family no longer grew them. Then history repeated itself, and the Meilland's hybridized roses were destroyed a second time during WWII. It was in part due to the money from the patent that Robert Pyle had taken out in Francis's name that the Meilland family was able to resume their hybridizing operations when the war ended.

For Barbara, the process of creating new plants is an art, in a form that takes dedication and time to create. Picture books are much the same. With an artist as renowned as Bagram Ibatoulline, a project takes its place in line. It was four years from the sale of the manuscript in 2018 to publication. *A ROSE NAMED PEACE: HOW FRANCIS MEILLAND CREATED A FLOWER OF HOPE FOR A WORLD AT WAR* was released in May 2022. The wait was worth it. As Barbara noted, during the war Francis Meilland had had no idea what had happened to his rose, even whether or not it had survived. "This is a story of perseverance," she said, "and of joy in that work."

And reading this book? That's another joy.

A ROSE NAMED PEACE is available through Bookshop: <https://bookshop.org/books/a-rose-named-peace-how-francis-meilland-created-a-flower-of-hope-for-a-world-at-war/9781536208436>. If you are interested in signed copies, contact: Bards Alley in Vienna, Virginia: 571-459-2653.

PHOTOS IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE: 'Peace', photo Gordon Holmes; Author Barbara Roberts and companion, photo Craig Vitter; Author Barbara Roberts' husband and infant son in the early 1990s, in front of 'Peace' roses at their home in CA that were planted just after WWII, photo Barbara Roberts.