

# *The Peace Rose*



In 1935, the French rose breeder, Francis Meilland, the third generation in a family of rose growers near Lyon, selected 50 'promising' seedlings from his seedbeds. One was tagged 3 – 35 – 40 and over the next four years Francis and his father, Papa Meilland, watched its development with interest. In spite of war clouds gathering, the unnamed rose was introduced to friends and professional rose growers who gave it an enthusiastic 'thumbs up'. But three months later Hitler invaded France and, with the nursery under threat of destruction, three parcels of budwood were hastily sent out of France, one of which was smuggled out in the diplomatic bag to America.

For the duration of the war the Meilland family had no idea whether any of the budwood had survived. In America their agent planted the

rose in his own trial beds and gave it to other rose growers for testing in all the climatic zones throughout the United States. The rose did so well that it was decided to release it in the United States and thousands of plants were propagated. Although the war was still raging in Europe, the launch date was set for 29 April 1945, in Pasadena, California.

On the same day that two doves were released into the American sky to symbolize the naming of the rose, Berlin fell and a truce was declared. It was sheer coincidence. In naming the rose, this simple statement was read: "We are persuaded that this greatest new rose of our time should be named for the world's greatest desire: 'PEACE'."

'Peace' went on to receive the All-American Award for roses on the day that the war in Japan came to an end. On May 8, 1945, when Germany signed its surrender, the 49 delegates who met to form the United Nations were each presented with a bloom of 'Peace' and a message of peace from the Secretary of the American Rose Society.

What is so touching about the story of 'Peace' is that back in France, the rose had been named 'Madame Antoine Meilland' in memory of Claudia Dubreuil, the wife of Antoine Meilland and mother of Francis. She had been the heart and mainstay of the Meilland family and died tragically young from cancer. At the same time news coming back from Germany and Italy where other budwood had been sent, revealed that in Italy the rose was called 'Gioia' (Joy) and in Germany, 'Gloria Dei' (Glory of God). For the family, all the names captured the qualities that they loved in Claudia.

The name 'Peace' seems to have outlasted all the others. The timing of its launch was perfect, and it struck such a chord that within nine years some 30 million 'Peace' rose bushes were flowering around the world.