



'Peggy Martin' is loaded with pretty blooms, disease free, thornless and vigorous as shown on this three-year old bush. Billie Flynn

THE ROSE THAT SURVIVED HURRICANE KATRINA

by Marilyn Wellan • roseusa@suddenlink.net

This is the story of Peggy Rose Martin and the 'Peggy Martin' rose. It is a story of tragedy, restoration and the power of a rose to help bring about renewal and recovery.

Plaquemines Parish, LA, is about as far south as you can go before the roads, which run parallel to the Mississippi River, end up at the Gulf of Mexico. Peggy Martin and her husband M.J. lived on Louisiana Highway 15 near the tiny historic town of Phoenix. Founded as Fort Mississippi in 1699, it later became known as St. Sophie in

the 1880s when James Livingston built his plantation home there; and when that plantation burned, he rebuilt and renamed the place Phoenix — out of the ashes.

Peggy's 82-year-old parents Rosalie and Pivon Dupuy lived nearby in the home they built in 1951. The family property was part of a narrow strip of land between Highways 15 and 39 that was enclosed by two strong and reliable levees — the river levee and the "back" levee, which kept the watery marshland in its place. The family

compound was thought to be well-protected from hurricanes, always a threat to those who live near the Gulf Coast. M.J., whose direct ancestor Pierre Chauvin de Lery was the first explorer and settler of the parish, was among many who regularly took their shrimp boats out for the day's catch. Fishing, shrimping, hunting and large family gatherings were a way of life for the Dupuy and Martin families. Peggy and M.J. established a lovely home and raised two sons in "God's country." Peggy created a very personal garden

of oaks, azaleas, camellias, roses, day lilies and every color of iris, all of which she planted during the 32 years they lived there.

Peggy's love of gardens — and roses — began in her grandmother's garden, where she remembers as a child skipping down the rose-lined path as far as the gate. If a love of gardening was a gift from her grandmother, Peggy's immense personal strength likely came from her mother, Rosalie who gave her the name Peggy Rose. "Mother was a career woman, stern, determined, strong. Daddy was a John Wayne type and knew no fear." He served in the legendary Hell on Wheels Armored Division during World War II and received a Purple Heart, having been wounded at Omaha Beach. After the war, Rosalie and Pivon worked side by side in forming and operating a lumber company in New Orleans.

Peggy gardens organically, as did her grandmother. She is a devoted fan of greensand and its effect on roses. She uses organics including fish meal

which is plentiful in the area. She was fortunate to have excellent alluvial soil, and used compost made from grass clippings and the fallen leaves of live oak trees which add nitrogen to the soil over time (and they act as a natural herbicide, she says). She became an early advocate of sustainable rose gardening before it became the garden word *du jour*.

Among her prized plants were several appealing old roses passed along from family members and friends. But the rose that pleased her most and caused every garden visitor to stop short was a thornless, slightly fragrant, pink rambling rose given to her in 1989 by New Orleans friend Ellen Dupriest. Ellen got the rose from her mother-in-law, Faye Dupriest, who got her start from another relative's New Orleans rose garden — this rose is truly a "pass-a-long" plant. Peggy noted, "When I first saw this rose it was in full bloom and smothered the eight-foot wooden fence in Ellen's back yard. It took my breath away! I had never seen a rose so

lushly beautiful with thornless, bright green foliage that was disease free. All along the canes there were clusters of roses that resembled perfect nosegays of blooms."

On reading an article on old garden roses by New Orleans Old Garden Rose Society founder Maureen Detweiler in 1997, Peggy decided to attend the very next meeting of the group. "It was like someone gave me a treasure box, to see all the colors and sizes of roses that were exhibited at the meeting," Peggy said. "A whole new world was opened up to me when I joined the society, and I put my heart and soul into learning everything I could about heritage roses. Like a sponge, I wanted to soak up everything." Soon she was asked to give presentations about her own garden and her growing methods, and tours of her garden were in demand. Within two years, Peggy was president of the society and has been a leader ever since. Her home garden grew to 450 roses. She became known as an avid collector of roses with his-

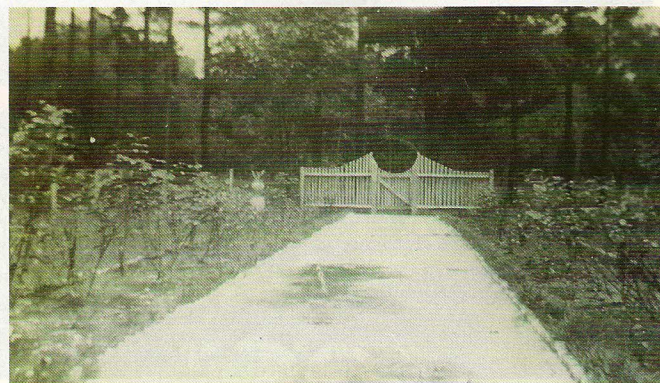
Below, left: Peggy Martin; right, her garden before the storm; bottom, her grandmother's garden c. 1942.



Marilyn Wellan



These photos courtesy Peggy Martin



ories, and her knowledge expanded as her list of rosarian contacts grew.

Through her talks and garden tours, many rosarians came to know and to covet the unidentified pink Rambler that scrambled and almost covered the tractor shed on the homeplace. Among the admirers of the rose was Dr. William C. Welch, well known old rose advocate, writer, speaker, Professor and Landscape Horticulturist at Texas A&M University. In 2003, he was a guest speaker for the New Orleans Old Garden Rose Society and the Martin's houseguest. He admired many of the roses in their garden but was taken with the vigorous Rambler from which he took cuttings to plant at his weekend home at Washington, TX. Welch later wrote, "I had already been convinced that this rose deserved to be widely available and enjoyed by gardeners in other locations. Its disease resistance, thornless stems and colorful displays of bright pink flowers along with a graceful vining form make it a logical choice for creating beautiful

garden pictures. My specimen is literally covered with clusters of dark pink flowers each spring from mid-March through May. It starts blooming again in late summer and repeats until a hard frost slows it down for the winter."

Life Interrupted

To say that life changed forever for Peggy Martin early that fateful Monday, August 29, 2005, may sound like a dramatic declaration, yet it is an understatement. Hurricane Katrina took the lives of so many people. It destroyed the homes and disrupted the lives of residents of the Gulf coast for months, even years. It is safe to say that five years later, some have not recovered at all.

Katrina made landfall at 5:10 a.m. at the towns of Triumph and Buras, just a few miles south of the Martin and Dupuy homes. The levees held. But the winds of the Category 3 to 4 storm and the 30-foot surge of water topped the levees with a force that cracked houses and pushed them off their foundations

and, in some cases, moved them some distance from their original settings. What followed the storm surge was equally devastating. The "bowl" created by the levees trapped the water in place. Mr. and Mrs. Dupuy, who had faith in the levees, refused again and again to heed the evacuation warnings and steeled themselves to ride out the storm as they had many times before. Two days after Katrina passed, Sheriff's deputies found their bodies floating close together in the front yard of their home that no longer was. Two weeks after the storm, bulldozers released the 20-foot deep brackish water that had been contained within the levees.

Three weeks after Katrina, Peggy and M.J. were finally able to return to Phoenix. Sadly, they surveyed the ruins of her parents' home and their own. Everything was gone — a large oak had fallen on their house, the shrimp boat was no more and vehicles were rendered useless. Nothing was salvageable from the house but a few pieces of

Three year old 'Peggy Martin' rose at the Cottage Garden at the Fort Bend County Master Gardener Demonstration Garden in Rosenberg, Texas.

Becky Smith





Vigorous, graceful and healthy canes make 'Peggy Martin' a good choice for many landscape situations.

Marilyn Wellan

china. The once-beautiful garden was gone; any trees that were still standing were denuded. Everything was covered with a thick, sickening black sludge.

On that day, a miracle happened. Peggy discovered one small bit of greenery on the tractor shed. Yes, it was the pink rambler, surviving in the sunlight amidst the acres of blackened ruin. Peggy didn't know it at the time, but that rose was to play a big role in the long healing process that lay ahead.

The homeless Martins lived with relatives for a time after Katrina. Peggy confessed that she cried for months, unable to make decisions, but one thing was certain — they would not try to return to the homeplace at Phoenix to live. Peggy and M.J. soon settled in Gonzales near Baton Rouge and planted roses around their new home, including 'Peggy Martin'. The Phoenix property was subsequently sold.

Gardens and gardeners were not overlooked in the outpouring of public support that followed the storm. The Garden Club of Houston began a fundraising project to help rebuild parks,

gardens and green spaces in New Orleans. When Dr. Welch learned about the restoration project, "An idea came to me in the middle of the night about growing the 'Peggy Martin' rose as a fund raiser for (Houston's) Zone IX Horticulture Restoration Fund. First, I checked with Peggy to see if she would be in agreement, then I went to Mike Shoup, owner of the Antique Rose Emporium of Brenham, TX. Mike was enthusiastic — the first small crop of cuttings we provided quickly increased into a good supply." He also knew this remarkable and as-yet-unidentified rose needed a name. He named it 'Peggy Martin'.

With Dr. Welch's help, other nurseries began to propagate the rose and make it available for sale. Dr. Welch delivered cuttings from his own bush to Texas nurseries including Kings Nursery at Tenaha, Naconiche Nursery at Nacogdoches and Treeseach Farms at Houston and Petals of the Past in Alabama. In January 2006, Mark Chamblee, owner of Chamblee's Rose Nursery of Tyler, TX, traveled to Phoenix to

take cuttings directly from the rose that was once again thriving on the tractor shed. These growers generously donated \$1 per plant to the Greater Houston Community Foundation, with the purpose of assisting in the task of garden restoration projects in New Orleans, Beaumont and other Gulf Coast locations. The program was responsible for distributing hundreds or even thousands of 'Peggy Martin' roses all over the south and beyond.

Peter Kukielski, curator of the Peggy Rockefeller Rose Garden at the New York Botanical Garden grows the rose and he is an admirer. He remarked, "This is a rose worthy of a novel of its own." As the dramatic story of the "rose that survived Katrina" began to spread, friends who had visited her garden brought photos to replace those priceless images that were lost. Invitations came from far and wide for Peggy to speak to various groups about the rose. She addressed Master Gardener groups and civic organizations, Rose Societies and Garden Clubs across the south, in Manhattan and Bermuda. She remains



*'Peggy Martin'
at the Antique
Rose Emporium
Gardens in Brenham,
TX.*

Mike Shoup 2010/Antique Rose Emporium Gardens

a favorite speaker among those groups, and never tires of talking about her former garden and her love for roses. She granted numerous interviews with major publications including Southern Living, Houston Chronicle and Dallas Morning News. As evidence of the amount of interest in the rose and the rosarian, a Yahoo search for "peggy martin rose" has grown to 11 million hits.

Peggy has experienced a personal renewal through the emergence of her rose. By making sure it is available to gardens across the country, by speaking of her experiences and the joy she feels when she is in her rose garden, by encouraging others to get to know old roses and to work for their preserva-

tion, she has been revived. Apparently her audiences have also been lifted up on hearing of the miracle of 'Peggy Martin'.

Peggy credits her escape from deep depression to several events. 1) Dr. Bill Welch gave the found rose a name, 'Peggy Martin', and helped to create a market for it. 2) Stephen Scanniello invited her to serve as a board member for the Heritage Rose Foundation which she now serves as Vice President for Membership. 3) Peggy was named to the ARS Old Garden Rose Committee and Chairman of OGRs for the ARS Gulf District. These events created an opportunity for her to give back. "Next to family, my roses, my garden and my rose experiences

have been among the great highlights of my life," she said.

Last fall, on the fifth anniversary of Katrina, Michelle Miller of CBS scheduled an interview and a return to Phoenix with Peggy. "It was sad, really sad. The new owners had bulldozed the tractor shed and the 'Peggy Martin' rose. Only the massive trunk remained."

"What's this?" Ms. Miller asked.

"What, those weeds?" Peggy replied.

The CBS news correspondent pointed to two beautiful new canes emerging from the base of the rose-bush. "'Peggy Martin' is determined to live!" she exclaimed.



TO PURCHASE 'PEGGY MARTIN'...

The Garden Club of Houston's Restoration Fund was established to run through 2010. Out of a desire to keep the work alive, Peggy Martin has trademarked the rose and established the Peggy Martin Rose, LLC. The purpose of the organization will be to continue to make 'Peggy Martin' available to gardeners and public gardens, and to use the proceeds to support her favorite rose organizations. Visit www.peggymartinrose.com for more information, and to locate 'Peggy Martin' from nurseries that will donate \$1 per rose bush sold to benefit the American Rose Society and the Heritage Rose Foundation.