



MEMBER GARDEN: *HALLAM'S* WAR AND MINE

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'Gertrude Jekyll' with 'Just Joey' in background and 'Penelope' on fence.

On the day we moved into our charming fixer-upper in Marin County, I walked straight through the house and into the back yard, heading for the shade of a tree in the hot afternoon sun. It was a smallish lot — shaped like the state of Nevada and crowded with dozens of “orphan” plants and trees the previous owner had brought home from the nursery where he worked. That first afternoon, while the children ran up and down the stairs exploring, I sat barefoot on the patchy lawn, just happy to be connected to the earth.

Across from me, in a modest bed a few feet deep, a half a dozen rose-bushes luxuriated in the heat — old

standards from the sixties: 'Tropicana', 'Granada' and 'Fragrant Cloud'. Why should I pay any notice to the 20-foot redwood sapling growing just over the fence in my neighbors' yard? The live and white oaks I remembered from my Louisiana childhood had grown too slowly to measure, and the sum total of my gardening experience during the 11 years we'd just spent in London consisted of planting 'Paul Crampel' geraniums in our window boxes and watching Percy Thrower espalier fruit trees on the BBC.

So for the first 10 years in our new/old house in San Francisco's North Bay, things went beautifully. It was

true the fence behind the roses blocked out those desirable early morning rays, and the late afternoon sun that did hit that side of the yard was fierce. But during those midday hours — five or six at least — my beautiful, fragrant roses bloomed their hearts out. Gradually, over the years, I replaced those first neon colors with the pinks, deep pinks and pale yellows of the hybrid teas I loved, then the butter yellows, creams and apricots of the David Austins as they arrived on the scene. Later, I would intersperse them with fox-gloves, salvia and lavender, and cover their feet with variegated groundcovers, green and white. I knew I was

breaking all the rules, crowding the roses that way, but there was only that small patch of reliable sunlight to work with and too many irresistible cultivars to leave out. A policy of ruthless hygiene — along with hose-end watering to alert me to trouble before it gets out of hand, and generous doses of coffee grounds and alfalfa tea — has enabled them not only to survive but to prosper. Until now.

Today, 30 years on, the whole garden, front and back, has filled in and grown lush with camellias and fruit trees, maytens and Japanese maples — layer on layer of green stretching off past the “borrowed landscapes” of our neighbors’ backyards towards the low hills of the Coastal Range. Now, on a perfect May morning I stand next to the bed of 32 roses and look up, shading my eyes against the sun. 10:15, I note, frowning at my watch; already a half an hour’s less sunlight hitting the front row than when I recorded it last year. “New Zealand’, ‘Elle’, ‘Just Joey’ in full sunlight,” I jot down in my notebook, “Gertrude Jekyll’, ‘Lyda Rose’ and ‘Marchesa Boccella’ still in deep shade.”

Scratching my arm on the thorns of a gigantic ‘Peter Mayle’, I wedge my way into the middle of the bed and squint upwards again, gauging the position of the sun as it travels slowly through what is now the small grove of redwoods over the fence. In another twenty minutes it will pass beyond the last dark branches towards a narrow path of clear sky on our side: one perfect hour of light and heat, just enough to dry the last of the dew on the roses, before it disappears again, winking through the branches of the Chinese elm for another 45 minutes to emerge, at last, for three uninterrupted hours before it begins to disappear behind the shade of the house.

Six hours of sunlight when we first moved in, reduced now to barely four. True, the dozen or so bushes not yet in bloom are covered with buds—set while the sun was low in the early spring sky, before the semi-deciduous elm grew thick again — but will they have enough light to open? I ask myself whether this will be my swan song after 30 years of backbreaking digging,



Above: 'Paul Shirville' in front, 'Evelyn' behind, in front of 'Penelope' To the right are, from bottom, 'Gertrude Jekyll', 'Lyda Rose' and 'Penelope' (mixed with 'Clair Matin'). Below: 'New Zealand', 'Just Joey', 'Gertrude Jekyll' and 'Jacques Cartier' at the far end.



all photos by Elisabeth Payne Rosen



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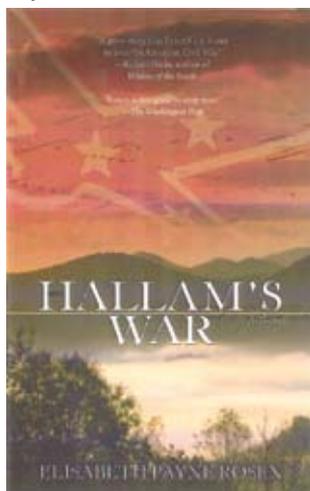
Above, left: 'New Zealand' in foreground with buds of 'Elle' on right, in front of 'Graham Thomas'. Above, right: mostly 'Lyda Rose' (great for bees!), with 'Penelope' behind.

soil-amending, pruning, pinching and generally obsessing over the tiniest thing; the last year to enjoy the luxury of a house filled with roses — the hybrid teas in tall vases, the old roses and English roses spilling over the edges of cream-colored pitchers; the last year of giving away armloads to my friends. I heave a deep sigh. In my never-ending battle with the shade, this may be the year when I am finally forced to call retreat.

Battle metaphors come easily to mind these days, since my novel, *Hallam's War*, was published a year ago and was reissued in paperback this August. In 1859 in West Tennessee, my fictional family, the Hallams, struggle as I do to make something beautiful and useful out of the land, something that will give pleasure and repay their effort. For Hugh Hallam, the goal is success in raising the best cotton in the lower South. To this end he carefully selects and improves his cottonseed,

working in the fields alongside the men and women “he had in his blindness thought to own.” For Serena, isolated from the cultured world of her Charleston childhood and struggling with her own emerging moral consciousness, that same satisfaction comes from cre-

Hallam's War by **Elisabeth Payne Rosen** is now in paperback and available at your local bookstore.



ating and tending her garden. Roses — along with her three children and her great love for Hugh — are her challenge and her consolation; this is the thread of joy and beauty that softens the harsh reality of the battles that lie ahead.

Where did my own love of flowers come from? Looking back, I suppose it was the memory of my grandmother's garden, filled with child-pleasing favorites like tiger lilies and bearded iris. The roses came later, in walks around our Shreveport neighborhood as a child with my father. If I admired, say, a beautiful red rose growing over a fence — probably a 'Paul's Scarlet Climber' — he wouldn't hesitate to ask the owner if I could have one, and he or she would always be happy to oblige. As my passion for roses grew along with my passion for the American Civil War, so the garden I created for Serena Hallam began to grow — and become overgrown — with roses. Here's how

the reader is introduced to the theme:

“She got out of bed and put on her yellow day dress, fastening it loosely at the waist, then opened the door into the wide hallway that split the house. Finding her pruning shears in the basket on the back porch where she’d left them, she walked down the short flight of steps into the gravel paths beyond. Already, at half past six, the garden around her was alive with bees. Standing there, feeling the rough pebbles under her feet, surrounded by the roses of every color and size that clambered up the arbors and weighed down the trellises, she breathed in a deep breath and held it: nothing was more pleasurable, more sweet: the perfume of the roses mingling with the rank smell of the earth below.”

Though I have lived mostly in cities, large and small, I know in my bones, from a lifetime of visits to the Mississippi Delta where my father and his six brothers grew up, what it means to be a farmer. It was the memory of accompanying my uncle in his pickup before breakfast, checking out the inevitable changes the night had brought, that I imagined Hugh Hallam on his horse, riding those same boundaries as he “watched the skies, calculating whether one, last, short rain might still do him any good.”

Wasn’t that what all gardening was about? An unending vigilance, a constant battle against the weather, disease, insects, drought — all the common enemies that keep us at our picket posts, keep us riding the boundaries? Yes, but as Serena’s simple pleasure pushes back at me from that earlier time, the militant images begin to recede. Ten days later, I am standing on our rear deck, looking with astonishment at the same garden I was bemoaning such a short time before: though the hours of sunlight have increased by only a fraction, all the roses have come into full bloom. All the struggles have resulted in victory, as they always do, every rose a banner on the breeze, gloriously reproaching me for my gloominess, my lack of faith.

It’s true, the shade has been allowed to advance for far too long.

We will have to approach our neighbors next spring and ask nicely to have their redwoods trimmed at our expense—though I still mutter to myself at their helpful (to me, lunatic) suggestion, years ago: “Have you thought of planting rhododendrons instead?” And to be fair, I admit that we ourselves are partly to blame: the magnolia grandiflora I love has grown back with its usual vengeance after the last, vigorous pruning, and as for the loquats with their beautiful elongated

leaves and mild, pale yellow fruit, we planted those ourselves.

The miracle has happened, as it always does. What was controllable has been controlled, a thought I acknowledge with deep humility at how little falls within that concept. Everything that could have been helped along was helped — or if it wasn’t, it’s too late now. The months of pleasure loom ahead, right into the fall.

It’s time to sit back, relax and give thanks for it all.



‘Fair Bianca’ on left, bud of ‘First Prize’ near trellis, with ‘Penelope’ going up left of trellis and ‘Clair Matin’ on top and right. To right is ‘New Zealand’, followed by buds of ‘Elle’ (they look strangely dark, but that’s what it is), then ‘Just Joey’ in middle on right.

