



all photos Sam Jones

THE GIFT OF SPIRITUALITY

WAVING FRONDS OF HEAVEN

Sam Jones • Nashville, TN • gsamj@bellsouth.net

By their nature, roses are spiritually uplifting, whether in mundane ways, as in cheering our moods on dreary days, or in bringing smiles and warm feelings of love to one who is ill, or in comforting aching hearts upon losing companions who were deeply and long enjoyed. There is no better way to express the gratitude parents feel upon the birth of a child than with roses, and no more appropriate way of honoring one who has lived fruitful years than with roses at the end. It is no accident that those who often find meaningful pleasure in retirement transfer the intensity of their working years into growing and sharing roses.

Roses not only brighten our spirits, but also, placed on the altars of our churches, synagogues and mosques, they turn our thoughts heavenward. Roses symbolize the solemnity and spirituality of life's important milestones from birth to marriage, achievement, maturity and completion. They celebrate our entrance into time and our departure into eternity.

By their nature, roses speak of character. One cannot grow roses without an exercise in patience, whether for a season, a year or a lifetime. From planting to pruning, feeding and grooming during daily rounds through the garden, to cutting

blooms and joyously enjoying them, one must be patient. But one finds the enjoyment worth the waiting in nature's mysterious timing. With our efforts to predict and plan, nothing is certain in the end. Roses defy our longing for instant gratification. But with patience, they bring us deeper pleasure, while training our character, rather than potential momentary cravings.

Roses reward endurance and faithfulness. When we set our schedules to their needs and faithfully keep our commitments, they flourish and faithfully endure the stresses of heat and cold, floods and drought, blooming in our gardens for months, longer than any woody plant that grows in our climate. When we fail to meet our goals, they suffer from our neglect and poorly live up to their potential.

Roses do more than coach us in character building. They enlarge our inner spirits. Who can gaze into the face of a beautifully formed rose without contemplating the deeper beauty of nature's dazzling red skies at dusk, starry nights and fleeting, melting snowflakes that for an instant assume perfectly symmetrical beauty unrepeated in the universe? Who can walk in a peaceful garden of roses in the cool of a summer's evening without having one's anxieties calmed

from daily stresses and returned into harmony with the rhythm of life?

Far more than speaking to our spirits within, however, roses lift us beyond ourselves and prepare in us eternal qualities. Roses speak of gratitude, not only for the beauty they offer and the fragrance with which they capture us, but also for the pleasure we receive when we share their gifts. The more we are thankful for what they offer, the more generous we become in offering ourselves to others. The rewards are multiplied.

With generosity, one discovers a connection with love at the core of our existence. Whatever our religious heritage names or refuses to name as the origin and essence of love, once we experience life's boundless love, our response is to worship. Roses rightfully have their place in our simple houses and majestic cathedrals of worship, because finally they point us upward, to the Source of their beauty, fragrance and pleasure. As fragile as they are for a moment or a day, they speak of eternity. Who can look into the face of a rose without seeing the face of God?

Fortunate are rosarians of 10, 20, even 50 years, who learn spiritual lessons from gardening. Recently coming to terms with the unexpected death of her mother and gardening



Opposite page, l-r: 'Awakening', 'Blueberry Hill'. Above, l-r: 'Playgirl', 'Fourth of July'. Below, Leann Barron and her mother, Joyce Grubbs.

friend, *Nashville Rose Leaf* writer Leann Barron returned to her mother's now empty garden and wrote: "My spirit felt peaceful, vibrant and alive again, and I sensed something Mother must've known for years: that faith is the one absolute of gardeners — faith in the future, faith in 'things hoped for,' faith in resurrection and grace."

Upon contemplating her experience of loss and sadness, and yet renewal that comes with gardening, she summed up her thoughts: "The garden is man's futile attempt to imitate and improve upon nature, and that alone requires tremendous faith. It is a metaphor for life in communion with all its seasons: birth and death, illness and health, youth and old age. Mother often went to the garden to 'piddle around.' I believe her faith increased as she puttered around that yard, yearning for God and praying for her children. Her blooming rose calls us to remembrance, and for her life I give thanks." (*Nashville Rose Leaf*, September 2009, p. 4)

Louis Seymour Jones' lines speak well of gardening's spirituality:



*Who loves a garden
Finds within his soul
Life's whole;
He hears the anthem of the soil
While ingrates toil;
And sees beyond his little sphere
The waving fronds of heaven, clear.*

Rosarians who toil with labors of love are fortunate to see beyond their garden's "little sphere" — "The waving fronds of heaven, clear."



About Sam Jones

Sam Jones is the national ARS Chaplain as well as the guest editor of the 2009 *American Rose Annual*. He is a retired Methodist minister and counseling psychologist. He is Director of the ARS Tenarky District and is an accredited arrangement judge and horticulture judge. He has been National Chairman of the ARS Prizes and Awards Committee for the past three years. He is co-editor of the *Nashville Rose Leaf* newsletter of the Nashville Rose Society. He and his wife, Nancy, live in Nashville, Tennessee and have three daughters and 10 grandchildren.

