



THE MAN OF FREEDOM

JOSIP ROGIN

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The Man of Freedom

Hybridizer Josip Rogin from Croatia

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I am a beginning hybridizer from the country of Slovenia in Europe, and a big fan of the most magnificent plant on the Earth—the rose.

This article is about a rose hybridizer from Croatia, part of the former Yugoslavia. I will tell you a bit about him, because this man touched my heart the first time I met him. I don't know why this is so, and as I got to know him better I felt a connection to him, a lot of respect and discipleship. This is why I want to tell you about his work. Who really is Josip Rogin?

Josip Rogin was born on February 1,

1947 in the old mansion of Zrinski in the village of Zrinščina, Croatia. His greatest love was always literature. He has been working with roses for the past 44 years. He has also written eight books and hundreds of articles about horticulture, newspaper articles, feature articles and humorous pieces. He writes with the speed of lightning and his novels are full of historical characters, details and events, written in his unique style.

I read his novel *Angel and Pictures of Time* (1998) and it impressed me. When I read it, I thought that it could be made into a movie script. Why write something new just for a film when this story has already been written so well? It reminds me somewhat of a few scenes from the

Josip Rogin in his field

All photos by Irena Fabjan

film *The Lord of the Rings*, and we all know that this film was extremely successful. But Josip Rogin cannot really be compared to any other storyteller—he is simply unique. To find out what I mean you will just have to read his works yourself. There is a lot of power in his writing. I have mentioned his writing because literature is a great part of his life, and it is impossible to get a true picture of him without acknowledging that aspect of his life.

In the old Zrinski mansion where he spent his childhood, he was surrounded by



SOME OF JOSIP ROGIN'S ROSES



'Moonlight Niagara'

(HT 1987, given the synonym 'Irena Fabjan' in 2012)

'Moonlight Niagara' is a sport of 'Red Queen.' It has a lot of petals and a special lily fragrance of medium strength. The shrub is about 1.5 m high (5 feet) with healthy green leaves. First he wished to call it 'Marilyn Monroe,' but gave up because the procedure was far too complicated and bureaucratic. Instead he ended up naming it after the film *Niagara* in which the famous actress played.



'James Smile'

(HT 1987)

'James Smile' is a mutation of the rose 'Sea Pearl' that grows up to 1.1 m (43"). It serves well as a cut flower and it is constantly in bloom. It was supposed to be named 'James Dean,' but for the same bureaucratic reasons as with 'Moonlight Niagara,' Rogin decided on 'James Smile.'



'Zagreb 900'

(HT 1994)

Rogin raised his rose 'Zagreb 900' from 'Eiffel Tower,' and it has a similar growth pattern. It is about 1.2 m high (4 feet), has a high-centered bloom form, and is good as a cut flower. It is dedicated to Zagreb, the capital of Croatia, which celebrated its 900th anniversary not long ago. It was also the first rose introduced in the independent country of Croatia. The flower looks like a beautiful tulip at first. It is pink with light pink and

highly-scented Bourbon roses. When he was young, roses became his second great love.

Today he has a garden around his house with 366 varieties of roses—mainly for cut flowers, which his companion Ana sells at the market. He usually chooses just fragrant roses. He has introduced 23 varieties of roses which are known as the "Croatian Roses." He was the first rose hybridizer in this part of Europe to register his roses in America. In 1987 he registered 'Moonlight Niagara' and 'James Smile.' Registration information for these roses may be found in *The American Rose Annual* 1987.

In 1995 the American Rose Society listed two of his new varieties, 'Slavoljub Penkala' and 'Zagreb 900.' Surely one of the most beautiful roses of the world, 'Zagreb 900' appeared in the *American Rose*

magazine in 1995.

Josip Rogin is the author of the book *Ruža kraljica cvjeća* (*The Rose: Queen of Flowers*, 1989) and *Knjiga o ružama* (*The Book of Roses*, 1998). In 2013 he completed work on his third rose book, an encyclopedia entitled *Ruže za sva vremena* (*Roses for All Times*). The book has not been published because the situation in Croatia for the past few years has not been favorable to a book about roses. Maybe it's waiting for a better time.

Today Josip Rogin lives in the small village of Dumovec near Zagreb. He lives modestly in a small terraced house with his partner Ana, full of freedom in the highest sense of the word. This means the most to him.

How did I meet him?

In 2012, I was a beginner at hybridizing. At that time I had some open-pollinated seedlings from the previous year. I had made some crosses for the first time in 2011, but sadly the seeds did not germinate. I was still in my first year as a hybridizer, and the time was full of testing, reading, learning from articles on the internet, reading a book (*Makers of Heavenly Roses*), and of course participating on the RHA forum..

I had so many questions, and I started searching for hybridizers in Croatia. I found the name of Josip Rogin, but I could only find one rose by him (registered in 1987) and I thought he was probably out of hybridizing by 2012. Purely by chance, an acquaintance on the forum told me that she had a book by Josip Rogin that includ-



dark pink stripes. It rarely opens up fully like other roses do. It has amazing fragrance right from the beginning, when the flower is still closed. It is also unusual because it blooms almost all year. In autumn it sometimes has more flowers than in the spring. When I found myself standing in front of 'Zagreb 900' it made a deep impression on me because it's a really special rose. Not to mention the fragrance...



'Slavoljub Penkala'

(HT 1991)

Rogin raised this rose from 'Ambassador.' It is named after the famous inventor Slavoljub Penkala, who worked in the field of mechanics, chemistry and physics. It is about 1.2 m high (4 feet) and it is especially interesting because of its vivid colors which vary from deep golden yellow to different shades of orange with some yellow stripes until they are transformed into the color of old gold. Everything about this rose is unusual, and it is a bit of a chameleon—even its leaves have colorful lines. Every flower is unique and much unlike any other.



'Josip Rogin'

(HT 1990)

Rogin obtained this variety by crossing 'Queen of Bermuda' and 'Royal Dane.' The result was a beautiful hybrid with red-purple flowers which have long peduncles. The flowers have a mild fragrance. Against his inclination he called it 'Josip Rogin' and it is still not a patented rose.



continued

ed a chapter about hybridizing.

This made me very happy. The next day, in the spring of 2012, I phoned Josip Rogin because I wished to meet him and learn more about hybridizing.

The phone was answered by a man with a humorous voice who made a proposal of marriage and asked me how old I was. We both laughed and immediately I knew what kind of a man I had on the other end of the wire. We agreed to meet when his roses were in full bloom, in the middle of May. When I finally met him, he was not in good health. I only found out later that he was very ill indeed. I was grateful that he even agreed to my visit. I absorbed his every word like a sponge. We had only a few hours until I had to catch my train. I also visited him in the late spring of 2013, when his health had recovered, but this time I

spent the night at a hotel so I could stay longer and spend more time learning. It was so pleasant to be a guest in their home. Josip and Ana made me feel very welcome. I asked a few questions that were on my mind and got some very useful answers. Of course some answers I must find on my own, because practical work is the thing we learn the most from.

Josip Rogin is an intellectual and a writer, a humorist, a gardener, a satirist and a hybridizer. He says "Don't overestimate me" —but it's hard to write with such limits. How can you talk about someone and say what he wants you to tell others, but leave out what impresses you the most? And how can you describe a person in a way that others who have never met him will understand him? How can I package Josip Rogin into a neat little box? He just

wouldn't fit. I just hope that with this brief introduction to the man you will get to know him a little better.

He told me that he doesn't want to transmit information through the internet. He decided that he would spend his life without electronic devices, without a lot of communication with people, because of old scars from personal disappointments. He had a laptop for a while, but he traded it for other things. I asked him if we could complete the list of his roses on Helpme-find.com, because it is a shame that his work is not recorded and seen, but he was not interested. His dear Ana types out all the text for his books on an old-fashioned typewriter because the computer is not the same. "Typing should make a noise," they say—a habit from the past when she worked on the teleprinter and even won



'Kristov Jubilej 2000'

(HT 2000)

Rogin considers his most important and special rose to be 'Kristov Jubilej 2000.' This is a sport which he found on an abandoned rose growing near a wall. He cut one branch which he grafted onto a rootstock. With good care this rose grew into the most beautiful stippled/striped roses I have ever seen.

He can't be sure what rose this variety sported from because the parent

was in bad condition; he can only guess. This rose bowled me over with its beauty. It has intermittent stripes and stipples. Again, every flower is different. It's incredibly beautiful and different from others, with very rare characteristics. It has medium fragrance and blooms four times a year. In autumn weather the light yellow color becomes more intense and the red stipples more

pronounced. Planted on the lawn as a specimen plant, it shows off the full beauty of the bush and huge flowers, but when the flower opens it seems as if the stipples are drops of blood on the yellow petals. Because of this Ana proposed the name 'Kristov Jubilej 2000' ('Christ's Jubilee 2000'), because that year marked the 2000th anniversary of the birth of Christ. It is the most notable variety originating in Croatia. •

top honors for her work in the former Yugoslavia.

Josip Rogin doesn't like that the media has treated him as a sacred cow and he doesn't want to be presented as the Croatian Phenomenon. He says, "Give to me just one piece of blue sky, one beautiful white cloud and a little piece of green."

He frequently goes to the fields around Dumovec near his house and because he is a great comedian, he sometimes tells Ana: "If the Dalai Lama, Pope Francis or Barack Obama needs me, tell them that I have more important commitments today." He also likes to say that "The electronic world is for younger people, just like jeans are not meant for old men. I often say that I occupy myself with activities avoided by criminals, and all my business smells of sweat and roses."

Excerpts from his unpublished book (2013)

"...From today's perspective it is impossible to objectively grasp the role of rose, but it is intertwined in all segments of human activity, not least in religion. All four monotheistic faiths took the rose for their symbol. Even today, Zen Buddhists claim that by observing and meditating on a blooming rose they can achieve wisdom and merge with the will of Almighty God."

"In the era of Christ, the Prophet Muhammad, in the era of Turkish conquests, the rose was the flower which people associated with good thoughts. Roses in the past, especially the most beautiful and fragrant roses, had a mystical effect on people because they inspired deep emotions. These deep emotions are the same as those found in the pure love between a

man and a woman, bringing the best from every human being."

"At the house of my friend Đure Kiš back then he grew a couple of hundred sorts of roses and that's probably when I lost my head. Instead of turning to drink and women, I started to collect different roses, but this dependence is more powerful than drugs and alcohol together."

"Different hybridizers judge the intensity of fragrances differently. I hold to the old saying that a rose without scent is like a woman without a heart. I have met beautiful ladies wrapped in fur with frizzed hair and a generous layer of lipstick; but they were usually either devoid of character or heart. When I met a woman who was both beautiful and smart, I wanted to worship her down to the black soil. Womanly kindness is better than female beauty, because beauty is intimidating and fleeting like the fading rose bloom."

So now I have written everything my heart had to say. I wanted to share my experience with all of you who love roses so much and know all about them. The question is whether Josip will understand. If you are now reading this, you should know that he allowed this one piece of his life to be shared. I'm writing for all real fans of roses, because such passion lies only inside of us, makers of heavenly new roses that have not yet been seen by a human eye. Every rose we raise is so very special! Even those that aren't as nice are still our own. And nothing will come in our way and disrupt our will to continue creating. I feel like this makes the world better, because nature is from God and what is beautiful must be shared.

No matter what, I hope that Josip Rogin will show me a new rose in the future and tell me her story...

With great love to roses,
Irena Fabjan, Slovenia 